Rereading Dickens's Fiction: Narrative Form and Self-Reflexivity

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Rereading Dickens's Fiction:

Narrative Form and Self-Reflexivity

(ディケンズ文学の再読: 語りの形式と自己言及性)

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Narrative Form and Self-Reflexivity

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DECLARATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Versions of some chapters of this thesis have been published or will be published, specifically, Chapter 1 in *Dickens and the Anatomy of Evil: Sesquicentennial Essays* (forthcoming, 2020), Chapter 2 in *Dickens Studies Annual* vol. 51, no. 1 (2020), Chapter 3 in *The Dickensian* (forthcoming, 2021), and Chapter 4 in *The Japan Branch Bulletin of the Dickens Fellowship* vol. 43 (forthcoming, 2020). This thesis was supported by JSPS KAKANHI Grant Number 20J10967.

ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

All references to the following books in the thesis are to these editions.

BH	*Bleak House*, edited by Nicola Bradbury, Penguin, 2003.
BR	*Barnaby Rudge*, edited by Gordon Spence, Penguin, 1986.
DC	*David Copperfield*, edited by Trevor Blount, Penguin, 1986.
*DJ*1-4	*The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens' Journalism*, edited by Michael Slater, et al., 4 vols. J M. Dent, 1994-2000.
HT	*Hard Times*, edited by David Craig. Penguin, 1985.
LD	*Little Dorrit*, edited by Harvey Peter Sucksmith, Oxford UP, 2008.
L1-12	*The Pilgrim Edition of the Letters of Charles Dickens*, edited by Graham Storey, et al., 12 vols, Clarendon Press, 1965-2002.
MJG	*Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi*, edited by Charles Whitehead., new ed., London, G. Routledge & Co., 1853.
NN	*Nicholas Nickleby* edited by Mark Ford, Penguin, 2003.
OMF	*Our Mutual Friend*, edited by Stephen Gill, Penguin, 1986.
OT	*Oliver Twist*, J. M. Dent, 1907.
S	*The Speeches of Charles Dickens*, edited by K. J. Fielding, Clarendon Press, 1960.
SSF	*Selected Short Fiction*, edited by Deborah A. Thomas, Penguin, 1986.
TTC	*A Tale of Two Cities*, edited by George Woodcock, Penguin, 1985.

Full references to other works are given in the Works Cited.

INTRODUCTION

In a critical essay entitled "The Art of Fiction" (1884), Henry James complains about Victorian fiction:

> It had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it—of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison. I do not say it was necessarily the worse for that; it would take much more courage than I possess to intimate that the form of the novel, as Dickens and Thackeray (for instance) saw it had any taint of incompleteness. It was, however, *naïf* (if I may help myself out with another French word); and, evidently, if it is destined to suffer in any way for having lost its *naïveté* it has now an idea of making sure of the corresponding advantages. (3)

His criticism that the Victorian novels lack "a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it" probably means that the novelists of this era, including Dickens and Thackeray, did not pay much attention to literary forms.[1] James's essay is a response to Walter Besant's lecture, also named "The Art of Fiction", which had been published as a pamphlet in 1884. In this lecture, Besant argued that "the modern English novel, *whatever form it takes*, almost always starts with a conscious moral purpose" (57, italics mine), and thus gave the ethical aspect priority over the aesthetic concerns. Here the issue of fictional "form" appears to be put aside as being of secondary importance. Indeed, as David Cecil recollects in the preface of *Victorian Novelists; Essays in Revaluation*, this "formlessness" (ix) was often considered to be a general characteristic of Victorian novels,[2] and one of the reasons why they were underrated by literary scholars in the early twentieth century:

> Now the literary taste prevalent in 1934, among young people with intellectual and artistic aspirations, was set by the so-called Bloomsbury school. Who were in violent reaction against the moralistic, insular, and philistine aspects of Victorianism. They held that art had nothing to do with morals, they declaimed against their sexual prudery, they set great store by form and style, and they preferred French fiction to English. (viii)

In this sense, one may be tempted to call Charles Dickens a representative Victorian novelist. In his prolific career, Dickens wrote fifteen novels (one is unfinished, but many of them are quite voluminous), many short stories, several plays, and various articles and essays—in short, one might as well doubt that his works were so numerous as to render careful and deliberate composition impossible. Furthermore, he often opted for the reader's reception or response over his own inclination. For instance, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens, given the initial disappointment in sales, showed no hesitation to add an extensive episode in which the protagonist goes to America. Likewise, he altered the original ending of *Great Expectations* to a happier one, following the advice of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, the famous novelist and his personal friend. Such flexibility might be partly responsible for the reactionary disrepute in the twentieth century, as most harshly illustrated by the assessment made by Leslie Stephen in *The Dictionary of National Biography*: "If literary fame could safely be measured by popularity with the half-educated, Dickens must claim the highest position among English novelists" (30).

It is true that Dickens occasionally alluded to his creative activity in his letters to his friends, fellow writers, or editors, and it is possible to catch a glimpse of what might be called his "philosophy of composition" from them. From his correspondence and occasional statements in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* (weekly magazines founded by Dickens), Monroe Engel concludes that "moral seriousness, purpose, truth, realism, tenderness, vivid characterization, dramatic treatment, originality, and craft or competence" are "the matters he emphasizes when talking of art, and particularly of the art of fiction" (38). In addition to this, these journals contain various articles on art and fiction. These articles were not written by Dickens himself, but it is safe to assume that they represent his personal view because he played an autocratic role as the conductor in these magazines. He himself admits this in "Note" in *All the Year Round*, Volume X (26 December 1863): "The statements and opinions of this Journal generally, are, of course, to be received as the statements and opinions

of its Conductor" (419). For example, "the Spirit of Fiction", an essay from *All the Year Round* on 27 July 1867, was not written by Dickens (though once it had been considered to be so[3]), but is still helpful in understanding his aesthetic perception of art:

> Greater differences still exist between the common observer and the writer of genius. The former accuses the latter of intentional exaggeration, substitution, addition, and has never been able in society to see the startling phenomena which he condemns in the romance as melodramatic and unnatural. The reason is, that such an individual has never developed the sense required for the seeing such things; and, because he is partially blind, he accuses his informant of wilful invention. (120)

According to the author of this article, "the writer of genius" is often condemned for distortion of reality, but actually is endowed with an ability to perceive the extraordinary events in society, which ordinary people cannot see. It inevitably reminds us of the famous preface of *Bleak House* in 1853, in which Dickens observes that "In *Bleak House*, I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things" (*BH* 7).

However, on the whole, Dickens made little or no comments on the subject of novel-writing, unlike other novelists such as E. A. Poe, Henry James, or E. M. Forster. As Goldie Morgentaler points out, Dickens was "remarkably reticent on the subject of aesthetics. In the whole of Dickens's work, there is very little philosophizing about the nature of art or beauty, although there are numerous allusions in his correspondence to novel-writing as a craft" (45). Such deliberate reluctance can be found in some of his letters and even in his novels. In his letter to Richard Henry Horne on 6 April 1852, he observed that "[a] man makes a weak case when he tries to explain his writing. His writing should explain itself; rest manfully and calmly on its knowledge of itself; and express whatever intention and purpose are in him. If it cannot do this, it is held (I think not unreasonably) to be a shortcoming" (*L6*: 636). In *David Copperfield*, Dickens makes a similar comment through the voice of his authorial persona, David: "If the books I have written be of any worth, they will supply the rest. I shall otherwise have written to poor purpose, and the rest will be of interest to no one" (*DC* 917). Such

reticence may be another possible reason why the artistic value of Dickens's works had been slighted.

Therefore, as Morgentaler rightly observes, "what Dickens understood by art must be inferred from his fiction" (46). In his pioneering work, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (1958), J. Hillis Miller, one of the most influential critics of Victorian and Modernist literature, attempts to reevaluate Dickens's novels through the analysis of the literary form: "At the heart of a writer's successive works, revealed in glimpses through each event and image, is an impalpable organizing form, constantly presiding over the choice of words. This form, if we can discover it, will be a better clue than any biographical data to the writer's intimate relation to the material world, to other human beings, and to himself" (ix). Graham Daldry also analyses Dickens's novels "in relation to their development of the form of the novel" (1). Although the definition of the term "form" differs from author to author,[4] it might be safe to say that the formal aspects of Dickens's novels began to attract critical attention in the latter half of the twentieth century.

In reconsidering the formal unity or complexity of Dickens's fiction, it is particularly interesting that his novels are full of self-parodies and self-references which turn our attention to their process of artful composition or the specific fictional mode of the individual text. In this sense, his novels have certain elements of metafiction, which Patricia Waugh defines as "a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (40). There is no doubt that the concept of "metafiction" became common in the twentieth century and the term itself is relatively new, but it is "a tendency or function inherent in all novels" (Waugh 42). Indeed, Dickens experimented with self-referential narrative in some of his short stories. For instance, "The Poor Relation's Story" (1852), one of Dickens's many Christmas stories, deserves to be called metafiction, though it is a lesser known work. The

narrator tells a story of his life to his family members and relatives, but at the end of the tale, in a way anticipating Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), he reveals that his story is nothing but fiction: "My Castle is in the Air! I have done. Will you be so good as to pass the story?" (*CS* 38). In Dickens's last complete work of fiction, "George Silverman's Explanation" (1868), the protagonist reflects on the act and process of composition of his narrative itself, and in this sense this novella has a metafictional quality, too:

> FIRST CHAPTER
>
> It happened in this wise:
>
> –But, sitting with my pen in my hand looking at those words again, without descrying any hint in them of the words that should follow, it comes into my mind that they have an abrupt appearance. They may serve, however, if I let them remain, to suggest how very difficult I find it to begin to explain my Explanation. An uncouth phrase: and yet I do not see my way to a better.
>
> SECOND CHAPTER
>
> It happened in *this* wise—
>
> —But, looking at those words, and comparing them with my former opening, I find they are the self-same words repeated. This is the more surprising to me, because I employ them in quite a new connection. For indeed I declare that my intention was to discard the commencement I first had in my thoughts, and to give the preference to another of an entirely different nature, dating my explanation from an anterior period of my life. I will make a third trial, without erasing this second failure, protesting that it is not my design to conceal any of my infirmities, whether they be of head or heart. (*SSF* 379)

Of course, it must be admitted that it would be going too far to contend that the principal concern of Dickens's fiction is to highlight their own constructed nature or textuality like postmodern fiction in the twentieth century,[5] and in fact none of his full-length novels are as experimental as these shorter pieces of fiction. However, certainly there is a considerable number of self-references in Dickens's novels which raise questions about their own status as a fictional text. Since the latter half of the twentieth century, a number of critics have found particular interest in metafictional or self-reflexive nature as a distinctive feature of Dickens's fiction. Before explaining the purpose and approach of this thesis in detail, let us look back to the critical history and examine how the theme of self-reflexivity has been discussed by Dickens scholars.

An early example of this approach can be found in deconstructive criticism. In his seminal introduction to the Penguin edition of *Bleak House*, J. Hillis Miller discusses that the prevailing motif of legal documents in *Bleak House* is the metaphor of the text itself, and it establishes an analogous relationship between the characters and its reader or author: "*Bleak House* is a document about the interpretation of documents. Like many great works of literature it raises questions about its own status as a text. The novel doubles back on itself or turns itself inside out. The situation of characters within the novel corresponds to the situation of its reader or author" (Introduction 11).

Such method, namely, focusing on the very act of reading a literary text and discovering analogous phenomena in the novel, is also used by critics of New Historicism, which was developed in the 1980s and became prosperous in the 1990s. For instance, in *The Novel and the Police* (1988), D. A. Miller argues that the court of Chancery and the police in *Bleak House* function as an analogue to the novel itself, which generates delays and holds the reader in suspense before bringing the solution. His argument appears to be under the strong influence of J Hillis Miller's above-cited analysis, but D. A. Miller emphasises the importance of recognising what differentiates the novel from its analogues. For this reason, he criticises earlier studies including J. Hillis Miller and Terry Eagleton, observing that "[t]he current critical fondness for assimilating form and content [. . .] becomes no more than a facile sleight-of-hand if it does not face the complication it in fact encounters in the question of the difference between the two that the novel regularly raises" (74). According to D. A. Miller's Foucauldian reading, this very difference allows the novel to work as a disciplinary system for Victorian readers.

Catherine Gallagher uses a similar approach in her influential essay, "The Duplicity of Doubling in *A Tale of Two Cities*" (1983), whose introductory paragraph offers a useful perspective on our study:

> For the past several years readers have been discovering that Victorian novels can be as ironically self-reflective as any novels. Now that they are expected to, Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot reveal the fictitiousness of their fictions, the constructed nature of their constructions, the wordiness of their worlds, as regularly as do Proust, Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. One of the primary techniques of Victorian self-reflectiveness that has lately attracted attention is the insertion into the novel of analogous for novelistic narration, analogues that expose the constructing operations of the narrator even as he or she pretends to be passively mirroring an objective reality. (125)

In her analysis of Victorian self-referentiality, Gallagher discusses that three social phenomena represented in *A Tale of Two Cities*—English public execution, the French revolution, and the crime of resurrection—resemble the novel itself in the sense that they all are "monstrous violators of the realm of the private" (126). However, Gallagher, like D. A. Miller, goes further than pointing out the similarity between the novel and its analogous doubles. She points out that by representing that latter as something "clearly destructive, preferably murderous or ghoulish" (127), the omniscient narrator's exposing activities relatively seem "restrained and salutary" (127) and become more acceptable to its readers.

Thus, New Historicism shed new light on the interpretation of Dickens's novels and revealed hidden aspects of the Victorian novel, but its critical stance is not unproblematic, since aesthetics or literary values are not within the scope of its analysis. Therefore, while D. A. Miller and Gallagher focused on the self-reflexivity of Dickens's novels, it might be argued that their criticism did not substantially contribute to the revaluation of the artistic or formal perfection of Dickens's fiction. It must be noted that in the above cited passage, Gallagher states that Victorian novels are only "ironically" (125) self-reflective. In fact, her essay does not analyse this subject as a deliberate strategy of the novelist. In other words, there is still room for further investigation of self-referential nature of Dickens's novels as an approach for reconsidering their narrative forms, because metafiction "situates its resistance *within* the form of the novel itself" (Waugh 47). Although Dickens preserved strict silence on the subject of his fiction or fiction-making in general, self-referential elements scattered throughout his novels

will be effective clues to the writer's artistic principles.

After New Historicism, not a few critics have attempted to analyse Dickens's novels as "metafiction", demonstrating that the novelist occasionally makes comments on the ethical connection between text and reader, or the meaning of the act of creating, writing, or reading fiction. For instance, Kenneth M. Sroka views Dickens's novels as examples of "Victorian metafiction, fiction whose matter is the nature of fiction, the phenomenon of reading and writing, and the interrelationship of writer, text, and reader" ("Dickens's Metafiction" 36). More recently, Mark Brian Sabey focuses on Dickens's strong yet ambivalent interests in the ethics of fiction, noting that they "regularly animate his fiction, creating an ethical meta-commentary that runs through the whole Dickensian corpus", and further argues that almost all Dickensian novels "can profitably be read for its metafictional content" (124). These critics have persuasively shown that regardless of one's critical stance, it is possible to bring some unique aspects of Dickens's fiction through an analysis of self-reflexivity.

The purpose of this thesis is, then, to assess the narrative form of Dickens's novels through a close investigation of each individual text, with a particular focus on self-reflexivity. In this study, by the term "form" we mean a particular genre or style by which a work of fiction is organised and constructed.[6] As we shall see, Dickens's novels are highly self-conscious of their own narrative techniques or genres they adopt—that is, their own literary forms. For instance, while *Oliver Twist* is frequently categorised as a "Newgate novel", which depicts and often romanticises criminal life, it contains many self-critiques of this literary genre.[7] In Chapter 43, Charley Bates, a young pickpocket, worries lest his fellow gang member will not be recorded in the Newgate Calendar: "How will he stand in the Newgate Calendar? P'raps not be there at all. Oh, my eye, my eye, wot a blow it is!" (*OT* 336). Such self-reflexive comment calls into question the morally contaminating influence of Newgate fiction including *Oliver Twist* itself, and at the same time demonstrates how Dickens was keenly conscious of

his narrative form. In our exploration of the formal complexity and self-referential elements in Dickens's novels, we will discuss a wide range of his fiction, not only the highly acclaimed later novels but also the earlier novels which have been considered artistically less perfect and still are neglected.

Chapter 1 of the thesis will discuss *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), a novel produced in the earliest years in his career. This chapter focuses on the novel's profound debt to the tradition of melodrama, one of the most popular theatrical form in the Victorian era. As many critics have already noted, this theatrical genre, in which good and bad are typified in stark contrast, has a dominant influence on this novel both in terms of form and content. The novel is full of typical stock characters (the young, sanguine hero, the damsel in distress, the aristocratic villain, the old miser, the faithful servant, and so forth), and the plot is equally melodramatic. However, this does not mean that Dickens accepted and relied on the dramatic convention uncritically. As the minor episode concerning a theatrical troupe indicates, the novel contains multiple self-reflexive parodies which mimic and sometimes even ridicule the prevailing melodramatic elements in the novel. This chapter will argue that while *Nicholas Nickleby* ostensibly endorses the melodramatic moral scheme, it also problematises the manichaeistic good/bad binary. Against the typical melodramatic hero Nicholas, Dickens contraposes anti-melodramatic characters such as Ralph Nickleby, Smike, and Mrs Nickleby, resisting to the novel's dominant mode, even at the risk of threatening its framework.

Generic ambiguity is also a key to the understanding of the uniqueness of the fifth full-length novel, *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), one of the most underestimated works of Dickens. Chapter 2 of the thesis will shed light upon its aspect as a mixture of detective novel and historical novel. The first half of the novel concentrates on a murder mystery, and the narrative is carefully calculated to arouse the reader's curiosity. On the other hand, in the latter half, the novel shifts its focus drastically to another concern, the Gordon Riots—an anti-Catholic

movement and one of the largest civil commotions in the history of England. In portraying this historical event, Dickens emphasises its irrationality and abruptness, refusing to provide any logical explanation or cause-and-effect relationships between events, which are the very essential elements that constitute detective fiction. Indeed, the role of the evil plotters who plan and instigate the Riots are described as analogous to that of the novelist himself, who creates mystery and takes control of people's minds. Dickens self-consciously calls into question his own compositional method in the first half of the novel, intentionally making the latter part serve as an antithesis. Furthermore, Chapter 2 will argue that the novel's structural disparity is also reflected in the central ethical theme of identity. In *Barnaby Rudge*, virtually all characters are caught in discrepancies between how one sees oneself and how one is seen by others. The main concern of the novel, the Gordon Riots, also throws into relief the same issue of identity discordance, in that the rioters' selfish and vile motivation is deliberately concealed by the outward religious cause. Dickens's elaborate handling of the theme of double identity both in the plot and the form will be an example of the novelist's acute self-reflexive consciousness about his own creative activity.

Chapter 3 will focus on *David Copperfield* (1850), which was written in the middle of Dickens's career as a novelist, and the first novel written in first-person point of view. The novel takes a form of autobiography or memoir of a successful novelist, David, who is generally considered to be an authorial persona of Dickens himself. The chapter will analyse the theme of self-creation through language as the principle concern of the novel and explore how the protagonist attempts to develop and represent his identity in his first-person narrative. This chapter will pay special attention to the fact that in *David Copperfield* there are many characters who attempt to explain or express themselves in language. Some of them commit themselves to the various forms of writing such as dictionary, memorial, and epistle. Other characters are not necessarily writers, but at some points in the novel also tell their personal

history, background, experiences, and inner sentiments in their own words, and thus try to recreate their identity. By recording such moments, David the narrator appears to define and justify the value of his own first-person autobiographical narrative. In this sense, these characters' dramatic monologues can be regarded as analogies of David's autobiographical self-presentation, and therefore are essential for comprehending the self-reflexive narrative strategy of the novel. This chapter will further argue that these "autobiographers" help the reader recognise and comprehend David's contradictory consciousness about the reader of his autobiography. While David denies his intention to publish his manuscript, he occasionally becomes keenly conscious of how his manuscript is read by readers, and this paradox inherent in the novel's narrative form provides a crucial clue for interpreting the novel's central theme of identity.

Chapter 4 will investigate Dickens's second historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), a story of the French Revolution. The novel has often been labeled a failure as a historical novel because of its one-dimensional apprehension of the historical events and its over-emphasis on the moral aspects. However, an analysis of self-reflexivity of the novel will lead to reconsideration of its status as a historical novel. This chapter will discuss the representation of the motif of "resurrection" in the text as well as its context. As shown by the famous preface of *Ivanhoe* (1820) by Walter Scott, the genre of historical fiction is frequently associated with the metaphor of resurrection, an act of bringing the dead into life. Interestingly, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the central concern of the plot itself is also resurrection. From the psychological rebirth of the hero, Sydney Carton, to the minor plot concerning the body-snatching business, the motif of regeneration permeates every corner of the novel, providing it with the thematic and structural unity. This chapter will further claim that the motif of resurrection in the novel also turns our attention to Dickens's role as a historical novelist, the resurrectionist of the past. The novel repeatedly raises questions about how to confront one's past, and the characters are

obsessed with the act of uncovering, exposing and reconstructing the past. Thus, the novel inevitably reminds the reader of the job of the historical novelist himself, and in this sense, *A Tale of Two Cities* can be defined as a historical novel about interpreting history. Such self-referential nature amply demonstrates Dickens's keen consciousness as a historical novelist, and serves as an indispensable clue for reevaluating the novel's peculiar position as a historical fiction.

In Chapter 5, our discussion will center on *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), Dickens's last complete novel and arguably the most controversial work in his oeuvres. This chapter does not focus on one particular genre of fiction since its multiplot form and complicated structure make it difficult to categorise the novel into a single genre. Instead, we will examine the motif of "fiction" in general in this final chapter of the thesis. None of his full-length novels are as self-conscious about the act of fiction-making as *Our Mutual Friend*. Many characters in the novel engage in acts of inventing fictitious tales or playing imaginative roles in order to escape or distort reality. Some even end up believing the fabricated pretence they themselves have created. Dickens actually has once dealt with a similar theme in *Hard Times* (1854), in which "fact" and "fancy" are opposed to each other and the power of the latter is commended. On the other hand, in *Our Mutual Friend* the relationship between the two is much more complex and intricate, and Dickens appears to examine the ethical significance of enjoying and creating fiction. The novelist's metafictional interest is apparently mirrored in the most problematic plot device of the novel, Nicodemus Boffin's feigned corruption and the subsequent moral conversion of Bella Wilfer. By examining the narrator's references to fiction and fiction-making which can be found everywhere in the novel, we can elucidate Dickens's narrative strategy, by which the reader is deceived and morally edified. This chapter aims to show how the self-reflexive nature is masterly interwoven into his lifelong study of society and human nature in *Our Mutual Friend*. This will also help us catch a glimpse into Dickens's

understanding of fiction and novel-making in his final years.

It must be acknowledged that of fifteen novels, this thesis discusses only five in detail, and in order to appreciate the narrative form of Dickens's novels, the theme needs to be more fully explored. Yet, an analysis of these five novels will amply demonstrate that "form" occupies a much more significant place in his novel-writing than has previously been thought. Each novel's particular structure, genre, and style are inseparably connected with its content—in other words, both aesthetical form and ethical theme are combined in an organic way, and constitute an integral part of his novels. The prevailing self-reflexive nature allows the reader to have insight into the compositional method or strategy which were never explained explicitly by the novelist. As Philip Davis observes, "there are still perhaps readers who suppose Dickens to be a less conscious or less formally intelligent writer than, say, George Eliot" (65). Such stereotypical, prejudiced understanding of the novelist has been modified owing to the current studies on the relationship between the novelist and contemporary Victorian readers. Davis, for example, has shown that Dickens's consideration of the "imagined reception" (65) of his contemporary reader resulted in the "conscious, sensitive artistry" (65). Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton similarly addresses this issue, observing that "Dickens's awareness of his readers' imaginative response in turn permeates the construction of his own literary texts" (9). This study might be regarded as one such attempt, since Dickens's self-referential awareness of his narrative form also seems to indicate how he expected his readers to interpret and understand his texts. Dickens's belief that "[h]is writing should explain itself" (*L6*: 636) can be read as his expression of deep reliance upon the reader's ability to comprehend such textual subtleties. The examination of these five novels will eventually enable us to highlight some remarkable characteristics of Dickens's fiction, and underlying compositional principles which have hitherto been unnoticed.

Notes

[1.] Louis James also considers that Henry James's criticism is directed towards the formal deficiency of the Victorian novels. See Louis James 2. At the same time, it must be noted that the novel is a literary genre which is relatively freer from formal restrictions than drama and poetry. G. K. Chesterton, in his introduction of *Dombey and Son*, observes that "[i]t must first be remembered that the novel is the most typical of modern forms. It is typical of modern forms especially in this, that it is essentially formless" (vii).

[2.] Some Victorian novelists, however, showed a keen interest in the issue of formal aesthetic of literary works. For instance, George Eliot wrote an essay entitled "Note on Form in Art" in 1868. Although her essay is almost exclusively about verse rather than prose fiction, it certainly proves her profound interest in this theme:

> In Poetry—which has this superiority over all the other arts, that its medium, language, is the least imitative, & is in the most complex relation with what it expresses—Form begins in the choice of rhythm & images as signs of a mental state, for this is a process of grouping or association of a less spontaneous & more conscious order than the grouping or association which constitutes the very growth & natural history of mind. (435)

[3.] See Richard Stang 27. K. J. Fielding later pointed out that "the author was someone in Dickens' close literary circle, and was probably Henry Morley, Dickens' collaborator, assistant editor, regular contributor, frequent reviewer in the *Examiner*" (233). However, Fielding still regards this essay as "a finger post to one way of understanding his last and perhaps most puzzling complete novel, *Our Mutual Friend*" (236).

[4.] George Eliot's essay suggests that the term "form" was frequently used in literary criticism, but with only vague understanding:

> For example, to any but those who are under the dire necessity of using the word & cannot afford to wait for a meaning, it must be more fruitful to ask, what relations of things can be properly included under the word Form as applied to artistic composition, than to decide without any such previous inquiry that a particular work is wanting in form, or to take it for granted that the works of any one period or people are the examples of all that is admissible artistic form. (432)

In *The Form of Victorian Fiction*, J. Hillis Miller defines the term as "the inner structuring principles of a work rather than for its external shape" (xi). In *Charles Dickens and the Form of the Novel*, Graham Daldry employs two concepts, "narrative" and "fiction", in order to locate the "form" of the novel as "a product both of an internal, individual and structuring imagination, and at the same time of an externally 'received', social, cultural and historical imagination, which has the generic, rather than the structural, as its priority" (1).

[5.] According to Waugh, the concern of metafiction may be "particular conventions of the novel, to display the process of their construction" or "often in the form of parody, comment on a specific work or fictional mode" (42). John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) is an example of the former type of metafiction, and John Hawkes's *The Lime Twig* (1961) and John Gardner's *Grendel* (1971) are examples of the latter. Comparing these novels, it cannot be said that Dickens's novels feature metafictional traits as their central concern.

[6.] For this reason, the issue of serial publication is not within the scope of this study, although it had undoubtedly a significant influence on Dickens and many Victorian novelists. Nicola Bradbury points out that "Dickens effectively determined the shape, pace, structure, and texture of his own novel form", and he was able to do so "not despite the constraints of part-publication, but actually by exploiting serial form" (152). In the postscript of *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens himself dwells upon the advantages and disadvantages of serial publication:

> To keep for a long time unsuspected, yet always working itself out, another purpose originating in that leading incident, and turning it to a pleasant and useful account at last, was at once the most interesting and the most difficult part of my design. Its difficulty was much enhanced by the mode of publication; for, it would be very unreasonable to expect that many readers, pursuing a story in portions from month to month through nineteen months, will, until they have it before them complete, perceive the relations of its finer threads to the whole pattern which is always before the eyes of the story-weaver at his loom. Yet, that I hold the advantages of the mode of publication to outweigh its disadvantages, may be easily believed of one who revived it in the Pickwick Papers after long disuse, and has pursued it ever since. (*OMF* 893)

For a meticulous discussion on Dickens as a serial novelist, see Archibald C. Coolidge, Jr.

Also, *Dickens at Work* by John Butt and Catherine Tillotison elucidates Dickens's serial method of composition.

[7.] A number of critics have mentioned the self-reflexive elements of *Oliver Twist*. For example, Robert Tracy points out that Dickens was aware of "contemporary modes of fiction" and he simultaneously tried to "imitate, parody, and transcend those modes" ("Old Story" 8).

CHAPTER 1

ANTI-MELODRAMATIC STRTEGY IN *NICHOLAS NICKLEBY*

It is a well-known fact that Charles Dickens had wanted to be a professional actor before he succeeded as a newspaper reporter and a novelist. In 1832, he sent a letter to the stage manager of Covent Garden, telling him how he believed himself to be a talented, promising actor: "I had a strong perception of character and oddity, and a natural power of reproducing in my own person what I observed in others" (Forster 1: 50). He successfully obtained an appointment for an audition; however, on the very morning of that day, Dickens found himself with "a terrible bad cold and an inflammation of the face" (Forster 1: 50), and missed the opportunity to demonstrate his theatrical skills. Though his ambition to pursue a theatrical career was abandoned on that occasion, his zeal in acting did not diminish. He later organised an amateur acting troupe with his literary friends such as Douglas Jerrold, Mark Lemon, John Leech, John Forster, Wilkie Collins, and G. H. Lewis. In 1855, his lively rendering of the leading role of Collins's melodrama, *The Lighthouse*, was applauded as a huge success, and Elizabeth Yates, a professional actress, famously praised that "O Mr Dickens what a pity it is you can do anything else!" (Johnson 843). According to Forster, Dickens surely deserved to be called "a born comedian", and his performance was distinguished by "the vividness and variety of his assumptions" (Forster 1: 376), admitting that it was neither complete nor ideal. What was even more astonishing was his contribution as a manager, as Forster further recollects: "He was the life and soul of the entire affair. [. . .] He took everything on himself, and did the whole of it without an effort. He was stage-director, very often stage-carpenter, scene-arranger, property-man, prompter, and bandmaster" (Forster 1: 377). The stage was thus an indispensable part of his life. Though he was indignant at unauthorised stage adaptations of his novels, he often went to theatres to see these plays, sometimes praising the performances of the characters of his own creation or even giving his approval to the dramatisations.[1]

It comes as no surprise, then, that theatre was not a temporary diversion but a great source of inspiration for his principal occupation—novel writing. In a speech given to the

Royal General Theatrical Fund on 29 March 1858, Dickens noted the close affinity between prose fiction and drama: "Every good actor plays direct to every good author, and every writer of fiction, though he may not adopt the dramatic form, writes in effect for the stage" (*S* 262). As Juliet John points out, the public readings the novelist gave in his later career can also be regarded as "further evidence of his vision of the novel as theatre, and of the author as performer" (103). Indeed, during the process of writing, Dickens, as if on stage, actually played the roles of his fictional characters. Mary "Mamie" Dickens, the eldest daughter of the novelist, testified this in her memoir *My Father As I Recall Him*:

> On one of these mornings, I was lying on the sofa endeavouring to keep perfectly quiet, while my father wrote busily and rapidly at his desk, when he suddenly jumped from his chair and rushed to a mirror which hung near, and in which I could see the reflection of some extraordinary facial contortions which he was making. He returned rapidly to his desk, wrote furiously for a few moments, and then went again to the mirror. The facial pantomime was resumed, and then turning toward, but evidently not seeing, me, he began talking rapidly in a low voice. Ceasing this soon, however, he returned once more to his desk, where he remained silently writing until luncheon time. It was a most curious experience for me, and one of which, I did not until later years, fully appreciate the purport. Then I knew that with his natural intensity he had thrown himself completely into the character that he was creating, and that for the time being he had not only lost sight of his surroundings, but had actually become in action, as in imagination, the creature of his pen. (48-49)

However, even without knowing this peculiar creative habit with Dickens, one can easily perceive that theatricality is at the core of our understanding of Dickensian novels.[2] It is no exaggeration to say that Dickens is "by every standard account the most theatrical of Victorian novelists" (Glavin "Dickens and Theatre" 188). In delineating a character, for instance, Dickens usually focuses on external features such as outward appearances, gestures, clothing, and habits. Many characters are, like stage actors or actresses, eager to express their inner emotion verbally (often in a sentimentalised or melodramatic way) and pantomimically. Such characteristics sometimes incurred severe criticism that Dickens is merely a superficial artist. In his review of *Our Mutual Friend*, for example, Henry James attacks the confrontation scene of Eugene Wrayburn and Bradley Headstone, noting that "the moment, dramatically, is great,

while the author's conception is weak. The friction of two *men*, of two characters, of two passions, produces stronger sparks than Wrayburn's boyish repartees and Headstone's melodramatic commonplaces" ("The Limitations" 52). Apart from the question whether Dickens is really "the greatest of superficial novelists" ("The Limitations" 52) as James calls him, it leaves no room for doubt as to Dickens's significant debt to the theatre.

Among Dickens's novels, *Nicholas Nickleby* is, beyond dispute, most theatrical "both in theme and in technique" (Monod 151), partly because Dickens had not completely given up his theatrical ambitions when he wrote the novel (Monod 151). First and foremost, the novel is famous for the Crummles troupe, in which the protagonist participates and experiences a professional theatrical life. (In the playbill of *the Lighthouse*, Dickens himself was advertised as Mr Crummles the manager.) Crummles's oft-quoted comment upon the looks of the hero seems to be applicable to the form of the entire novel, which is made up of various theatrical genres: "There's genteel comedy in your walk and manner, juvenile tragedy in your eye, and touch-and-go farce in your laugh" (*NN* 277). Actually, *Nicholas Nickleby* is under the dominant influence of one specific theatrical genre—melodrama. As George J. Worth points out, the novel is undeniably "the most melodramatic of Dickens' novels" (64). For example, the novel contains many stock characters such as the sanguine hero, the beautiful and virtuous heroine, the aristocratic villain, the faithful servant, and the old miser, in which good and bad are typified in stark contrast. These characters give pompous, hyperbolic speeches, and the plot is full of sensational events like duel, eavesdropping, secret parentage, and seduction, followed by absurd coincidences and a poetic justice. These characteristics precisely correspond to the general notion of melodrama. "The connotations of the word [melodrama] are probably similar for us all" (11), Peter Brooks observes in his seminal work, *The Melodramatic Imagination*: "They include: the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final

reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety" (11-12). Thus, the novel obviously owes a profound debt to contemporary melodrama, and for this reason, theatricality has consistently been the main concern of the criticism.[3]

In addition, many critics have revealed that the novel is full of self-conscious parodies of melodrama. Tore Rem, for example, argues that the Crummles episodes "parody melodramatic episodes in the main plot of *Nicholas Nickleby* and elements of melodrama in general" ("Playing Around" 280). However, it must be noted that self-parody "does not destroy or undermine the other parts of the novel" ("Playing Around" 280-81), and therefore melodrama and mock-melodrama can coexist in the same novel without difficulty. On the other hand, the aim of this chapter is to show that *Nicholas Nickleby* also contains anti-melodramatic elements directly opposing to the novel's dominant principle, and hence threatening its framework. A careful scrutiny of the text will reveal that, while the novel upholds the melodramatic moral scheme on the surface, it also calls into question the good/bad dichotomy. As the following discussion will demonstrate, the aesthetic conflict between melodrama and anti-melodrama can be revealed by focusing on the invariability of central characters—that is, their inability or impossibility to change themselves. It may seem obvious, even self-evident, that characters of *Nicholas Nickleby* show little to no moral growth: Nicholas, Kate, and Mrs Nickleby remain the same throughout the novel; Smike is consistently a pathetic, feeble creature from birth to death; Ralph Nickleby chooses to destroy himself rather than start his life anew. Although one may be tempted to ascribe this to the "rigid moral distinctions" (Booth 15) of melodrama, it actually provides us with an insight into the generic ambiguity of the novel, as we shall discuss in more detail in the following sections.

The first section will examine the character of the protagonist, Nicholas Nickleby, and analyse how the problem of his maturation (or his inability to grow up) is closely involved

with the mode of melodrama which prevails throughout the novel. The second section will explore Ralph Nickleby, the main antagonist of the novel, who shows signs of moral reformation but eventually fails to change himself. The third section will focus on Smike's unsuccessful maturation, and then elucidate the unifying moral framework in the novel, with a concluding discussion of Mrs Nickleby. The fates of these central characters are subtly parodied in melodramatic plays performed by the Crummles troupe, which appear to reflect Dickens's ambivalent attitude towards this theatrical genre. The final aim of this chapter is to assess the complex interrelationships among melodrama, anti-melodrama and mock-melodrama elements in *Nicholas Nickleby*, and this will help us take a new look at self-reflexivity in Dickens's earlier novel.

I. Maturation of the "Melodramatic" Hero

Before investigating Dickens's anti-melodramatic strategy in *Nicholas Nickleby*, it is necessary to reexamine how the theme of the hero's psychological development is dealt with in order to confirm how the melodramatic mode plays a dominant role in the novel. Carol Hanbery Mackay argues that "in effect, we can discover in *Nicholas Nickleby* a potential *Bildungsroman* in which melodrama proves the catalyst for growth and change" (285-86). However, though *Nicholas Nickleby* has often been categorised as a *Bildungsroman*, this genre is, as we shall see, incompatible, if not totally contradictory, with the novel's predominant melodramatic tone. According to Patrick Parrinder, at least five of Dickens's novels—*Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*, "formally belong to the category of the male *Bildungsroman* or novel of education, typically the story of a young man from the provinces growing up and finding his way in society" (217). Among these five protagonists, Nicholas is Dickens's first adolescent hero. The protagonist Nicholas is neither a child like Oliver Twist nor an old man like Pickwick, and who is also, to

some extent, “an idealized portrait of the artist” (Slater, Introduction 26). At the same time, however, one may assume that *Nicholas Nickleby* is not so much a *Bildungsroman* as a picaresque novel, which deals with the hero’s episodic adventure and generally does not put much emphasis on his maturation.[4]

However, we must not overlook the fact that Dickens appeared to intentionally create a hero with moral flaws, so that there was room for further inner development of him: “If Nicholas be not always found to be blameless or agreeable,” Dickens states in the preface to the first cheap edition in 1848, “he is not always intended to appear so. He is a young man of an impetuous temper and of little or no experience; and I saw no reason why such a hero should be lifted out of nature” (*NN* 9). Indisputably, the immaturity of the hero is an essential element in *Bildungsroman* literature, since it is the transition from childhood to adolescence, innocence to experience, and greenness to ripeness on which this genre generally focuses. Furthermore, a typical *Bildungsroman* plot as described by Jerome Buckley in his influential work, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, is largely applicable to the synopsis of *Nicholas Nickleby*. The following is the latter half of Buckley’s summary:[5]

> He therefore, sometimes at a quite early age, leaves the repressive atmosphere of home (and also the relative innocence), to make his way independently in the city (in the English novels, usually London). There his real “education” begins, not only his preparation for a career but also—and often more importantly—his direct experience of urban life. [. . .] By the time he has decided, after painful soul-searching, the sort of accommodation to the modern world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. (17-18)

Thus, the *Bildungsroman* typically handles the process of the psychological and moral growth of a protagonist who is immature and in need of education. In this sense, *Nicholas Nickleby* seems to have certain qualities reminiscent of the novel of formation.

Nevertheless, one crucial problem arises. As a *Bildungsroman*, the novel must (and is expected to) delineate the gradual inner development of the protagonist. However, presenting such a psychological transition in a convincing way is virtually impossible in the world of

melodrama. As Brooks points out, in melodrama, "the characters have no interior depth, there is no psychological conflict" (35), and what we see instead is just "a drama of pure psychic signs" (35)—in other words, each character embodies a certain moral concept, and is often reduced to almost an allegorical simplicity:

> What we most retain from any consideration of melodramatic structures is the sense of fundamental bipolar contrast and clash. The world according to melodrama is built on an irreducible manichaeism, the conflict of good and evil as opposites not subject to compromise. Melodramatic dilemmas and choices are constructed on the either/or in its extreme form as the all-or-nothing. Polarization is both horizontal and vertical: characters represent extremes, and they undergo extremes, passing from heights to depths, or the reverse, almost instantaneously. The middle ground and the middle condition are excluded. (36)

Therefore, these two modes of the novel are in a fundamental conflict. Whereas a *Bildungsroman* concentrates on the protagonist's transitional period, melodramatic characters "represent extremes, and they undergo extremes, passing from heights to depths, or the reverse, almost instantaneously", and "[t]he middle ground and the middle condition" are radically excluded. To call this novel a melodramatic *Bildungsroman* is, for this reason, actually somewhat oxymoronic. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, this discordance between the two incompatible genres is solved at the cost of the hero's psychological development. Following the traditional *Bildungsroman* pattern, Nicholas must go through various ordeals, but each time his inner growth is prevented by melodramatic interventions such as inflexible, one-dimensional personality of characters, and abrupt, often coincidental denouements. This probably explains why the character of the protagonist has hardly attracted critical attention.[6] However, as we shall see, the problem of Nicholas's failure or incapability to develop deserves a serious consideration, since an analysis of this theme will possibly reveal a unifying pattern of the novel which has been overlooked, and more importantly, lead us to reconsider the significance of melodrama and theatricality in the whole novel.

Firstly, we will examine Nicholas's mistaken judgement of others, a notable characteristic of the hero's immaturity. At the beginning of the story, Nicholas is nineteen years old. After his

father's death, he and the rest of his family (Mrs Nickleby and his sister, Kate) come up to London, in hope of getting some assistance from Ralph Nickleby, the brother of the deceased father. However, no sooner do they meet face-to-face than the nephew and the uncle hate each other. Nicholas gets indignant at the coldhearted indifference of Ralph, and Ralph, in turn, bears him a hatred, due to his sense of inferiority and envy towards his nephew's youthfulness. However, when Ralph helps him find a job as an assistant teacher at Dotheboys Hall in Yorkshire, Nicholas immediately forgets his initial dislike of his uncle and fervently thanks him, "firmly persuading himself that he had done his relative great injustice in disliking him at first sight" (*NN* 42). Likewise, the outward appearance of Wackford Squeers, the schoolmaster, gives Nicholas an unfavourable impression, but he discards his prejudice at once, when he is officially appointed as the position of the first assistant master at Dotheboys Hall: "Nicholas, overjoyed at his success, shook his uncle's hand warmly, and could almost have worshipped Squeers upon the spot. 'He is an odd-looking man,' thought Nicholas. 'What of that? Porson was an odd-looking man, and so was Doctor Johnson; all these bookworms are'" (*NN* 52-53). During the journey to Yorkshire with Squeers, Nicholas witnesses multiple behaviours which demonstrate Squeers's brutality and cruelty, and consequently "[a] host of unpleasant misgivings, [. . .] thronged into his mind with redoubled force when he was left alone" (*NN* 88) in Dotheboys Hall. Nevertheless, at the end of the same chapter, he cheers himself up and begins to have an optimistic prospect again: "He grew less desponding, and—so sanguine and buoyant is youth—even hoped that affairs at Dotheboys Hall might yet prove better than they promised" (*NN* 93). Thus, in the earlier parts of the novel, the immaturity of Nicholas takes the form of rashness—in particular, hasty judgement on others.

It does not take long for him, however, to realise that to cherish such anticipation is quite useless. His "last faint traces of hope, the remotest glimmering of any good to be derived from his efforts in this den" (*NN* 97) fades away as he looks at the miserable, wretched condition of

the pupils abused and maltreated by the Squeers family. Nicholas now feels certain that the schoolmaster is after all a ruffian whose villainy is beyond redemption, and that his uncle has also taken advantage of his ignorance and deceived him. In this sense, one may be inclined to think that the lesson of Nicholas is quite similar to that of David Copperfield, whose processes of correcting his misjudgements of others constitute integral parts of his discipline.[7] David is "confronted with appearances that belie reality, with characters and events that seem to be what they are not" (Mundhenk "Dickens's Manipulation" 6), and has to change repeatedly and often drastically his views of people such as Aunt Betsey, Annie Strong, Rosa Dartle, James Steerforth, and even the antagonistic Uriah Heep.

By contrast, in the case of Nicholas, the processes of correcting his view mean nothing more than a reconfirmation of his first impression. This is because whereas in *David Copperfield* appearances frequently deceive, appearances *do* tell the truth in the world of *Nicholas Nickleby*. This is, of course, one of the notable characteristics of melodrama, a genre in which "surfaces are synonymous with depths" (John 111). Brooks explains this definition in more detail: "Melodramatic good and evil are highly personalized: they are assigned to, they inhabit persons who indeed have no psychological complexity but who are strongly characterized. [. . .] Good and evil can be named as persons are named—and melodramas tend in fact to move toward a clear nomination of the moral universe" (16-17). Similarly, in *Nicholas Nickleby*, good and evil are basically so clearly and unmistakably distinguished that even inexperienced, ignorant young people like Nicholas and Kate have no difficulty in telling instinctively one from the other. Such melodramatic binary characterisation can be seen, for instance, in the contrast between Ralph and Nicholas in their first confrontation scene:

> The face of the old man was stern, hard-featured and forbidding; that of the young one, open, handsome, and ingenuous. The old man's eye was keen with the twinklings of avarice and cunning; the young man's, bright with the light of intelligence and spirit. His figure was somewhat slight, but manly and well-formed; and apart from all the grace of youth and comeliness, there was an emanation from the warm young heart in his look and bearing which kept the old

man down. (*NN* 37)

The facial features and figure are thus externalised signs of the callousness and avariciousness of this villain, and readers can see—supposing they have not realised yet—Ralph's nature distinctly. In the same way, Nicholas is able to perceive the coarseness and wickedness of Squeers from the very first moment the schoolmaster is introduced to him:

> Mr Squeers's appearance was not prepossessing. He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two. [. . .] The blank side of his face was much wrinkled and puckered up, which gave him a very sinister appearance, especially when he smiled, at which times his expression bordered closely on the villainous. His hair was very flat and shiny, save at the ends, where it was brushed stiffly up from a low protruding forehead, which assorted well with his harsh voice and coarse manner. [. . .] [H]is coat sleeves being a great deal too long, and his trousers a great deal too short, he appeared ill at ease in his clothes, and as if he were in a perpetual state of astonishment at finding himself so respectable. (*NN* 44)

Even good-natured, naïve Kate Nickleby asks "who is that vulgar man?" (*NN* 59) when she sees Squeers for the first time, and anxiously expresses her apprehension: "What kind of place can it be that you are going to?" (*NN* 60). The subsequent events prove that Nicholas and Kate's first impressions of Squeers are perfectly correct. They have been deceived not because they are incompetent observers but because their judgements were blurred only temporarily. It is quite doubtful whether such a process really deserves to be called maturity. In this way, the melodramatic, explicit characterisation of the novel made it difficult for Dickens to depict the protagonist's inner development persuasively, in terms of his judgement of others.

The same thing can be said about the hero's other precipitant behaviours. Nicholas's days at Dotheboys Hall abruptly end when he no longer can be an indifferent bystander, especially when he witnesses Squeers's cruel treatment of Smike, a pathetic, half-witted boy of eighteen or nineteen. He openly accuses the schoolmaster, and being stricken by him, Nicholas forgets himself in his fury, knocking Squeers down harshly, without considering the consequences: "Smarting with the agony of the blow, and concentrating into that one moment all his feelings of rage, scorn, and indignation, Nicholas sprang upon him, wrested the weapon from his hand,

and, pinning him by the throat, beat the ruffian till he roared for mercy" (*NN* 158). When Dickens refers to "an impetuous temper" (*NN* 9) of Nicholas in the preface of the 1848 edition, he probably bore in mind the hero's impulsive assault on Squeers—an act that is perfectly understandable but brings about no realistic solution to the present problem.[8] If the novelist had seriously intended to develop the protagonist morally, Nicholas would have reflected on his reckless conduct as an indispensable part of his education. Nevertheless, after returning to London, Nicholas repeatedly emphasises that he has nothing to regret or repent, and he would do it again without the slightest hesitation if the circumstances require. In Chapter 15, Nicholas professes this belief to Newman Noggs, who is Ralph's clerk and secretly takes side of the Nickleby family:

> '[. . .] [I]f the scene were acted over again, I could take no other part than I have taken; and whatever consequences may accrue to myself from it, I shall never regret doing as I have done—never, if I starve or beg in consequence. What is a little poverty or suffering, to the disgrace of the basest and most inhuman cowardice! I tell you, if I had stood by, tamely and passively, I should have hated myself, and merited the contempt of every man in existence. The black-hearted scoundrel!' (*NN* 175)

In Chapter 20, the hero delivers a similar speech again, in front of Kate, Mrs Nickleby, and Ralph:

> 'I interfered,' said Nicholas, 'to save a miserable creature from the vilest and most degrading cruelty. In so doing I inflicted such punishment upon a wretch as he will not readily forget, though far less than he deserved from me. If the same scene were renewed before me now, I would take the same part; but I would strike harder and heavier, and brand him with such marks as he should carry to his grave, go to it when he would.' (*NN* 247)

What is most significant about these passages is that Nicholas uses theatrical imagery, such as "scene", "act", and "part," in expressing his readiness to repeat the same conduct, as if self-aware of his role as a melodramatic hero. Nicholas is convinced that like an actor on the stage, he will say the same lines and repeat the same behaviours, without the smallest change to his state of mind.

Interestingly, such theatrical activity is precisely what Nicholas gets involved in soon

after these scenes. In Chapter 22, Nicholas leaves London again with Smike to seek their fortune, and meets Vincent Crummles, the actor-manager of an itinerant theatrical company. As many critics point out, the whole episode of the Crummles troupe functions as a self-reflexive parody of this theatrical novel.[9] For instance, one of the cheap dramas performed by the company (with Nicholas in the leading role) can be read as an ironic parody of several scenes in other parts of the novel:

> But when Nicholas came on for his crack scene with Mrs Crummles, what a clapping of hands there was! When Mrs Crummles (who was his unworthy mother), sneered, and called him 'presumptuous boy,' and he defied her, what a tumult of applause came on! When he quarrelled with the other gentleman about the young lady, and producing a case of pistols, said, that if he *was* a gentleman, he would fight him in that drawing-room, till the furniture was sprinkled with the blood of one, if not of two—how boxes, pit, and gallery joined in one most vigorous cheer! (*NN* 304-06)

The first half of the passage appears to be a reference to the scene we have already examined, that is, Nicholas's explanation of his conduct in front of Kate, Mrs Nickleby, and Ralph in Chapter 20. It is true that the rage of Nicholas is solely directed towards his uncle in this scene, but his mother, like Mrs Crummles in the play, expostulates about his presumptuousness: "'I don't know what to think, one way or other, my dear,' said Mrs Nickleby; 'Nicholas is so violent, and your uncle has so much composure, that I can only hear what he says, and not what Nicholas does'" (*NN* 249). On the other hand, the second half of the passage clearly anticipates what is going to happen in the novel. In Chapter 32, Nicholas, who comes back to London again, confronts and challenges Sir Mulberry Hawk, the ruthless, licentious seducer of Kate Nickleby, and his hangers-on: "'If there is a gentleman in this party,' said Nicholas, looking round and scarcely able to make his white lips form the words, 'he will acquaint me with the name and residence of this man'" (*NN* 396-97).

Thus, as Rem suggests, the novel—especially the Crummles section—is "permeated by an attitude of self-reflexivity and play-acting" ("Playing Around" 268), and more than just a few times it mocks the histrionic, melodramatic manner of the hero. According to *Victorian*

Britain: An Encyclopedia, a typical melodrama hero is "brave but inept" (Kaplan 497), and in this respect Nicholas surely resembles a stock melodramatic character, like the protagonist in Douglas Jerrold's popular nautical melodrama, *Black-Eyed Susan* which Dickens highly praised.[10] Protagonist William is a young, handsome, and jovial sailor, but imprudently strikes his captain (who tries to seduce his wife) with his cutlass, mistaking him for a pirate. Indeed, his vindication of his conduct at the court-martial is strikingly similar to the speeches of Nicholas in Chapter 18 and 20 we have already discussed: "you would have done as I did; and what did I; why, I cut him down like a piece of old junk—had he been the first lord of the Admiralty, I had done it" (31; 2.1). Since melodrama has to assure "the triumph of virtue" (Brooks 15) over vice, the protagonist's violent act against villains tends to go unquestioned or is eventually justified as a kind of necessary moral purgation (William in *Black-Eyed Susan* is, in the end, found innocent and acquitted). Nicholas is similarly best understood as an agent of justice, which explains his behaviors; impetuous as they may seem, they are generally passed over in silence. In fact, although Sir Mulberry Hawk (a typical aristocratic villain in melodrama) receives a serious injury in his scuffle with Nicholas, nobody in the novel accuses the hero, neither legally nor morally. As a natural result of this, Nicholas is seldom required to look back upon his earlier conduct, nor does he undergo a change of heart, and hence his inner development is rendered unnecessary.

In addition to his precipitateness, Nicholas's foolishly optimistic outlook on life does not discernibly change during the novel. In Chapter 2, Nicholas innocently fancies "some young nobleman" (*NN* 41) at Dotheboys Hall may appoint Nicholas as his travelling tutor, help him to find a good job and fall in love with Kate—in short, reveals his egregious ignorance of the world: "poor Nicholas, delighted with a thousand visionary ideas, that his good spirits and his inexperience were conjuring up before him" (*NN* 41). As we have seen, he is bitterly disappointed to learn the real condition of the Yorkshire school, and after returning to London,

Nicholas has to ponder seriously his obscure future prospects for the first time. His ruminative act in Chapter 16 at first may seem to be a symptom of maturity: "he sat himself down to ruminate upon his prospects, which, like the prospect outside his window, were sufficiently confined and dingy" (*NN* 185). Here, Nicholas begins to recognise his earlier optimistic view as naïve, and is forced to confront the harsh reality, but then he abruptly chooses to abandon contemplation entirely for a physical exercise: "As they by no means improved on better acquaintance, and as familiarity breeds contempt, he resolved to banish them from his thoughts by dint of hard walking" (*NN* 185). He visits an employment agency seeking work in vain, and then, after the fatal quarrel with his uncle in Chapter 20, goes to Portsmouth where he and Smike join the Crummles troupe for a short period of time.

Again, for all these experiences, the natural disposition of Nicholas remains the same. Coming back to London for the second time, Nicholas proudly shows off his immutable buoyancy to Smike: "I shall rise to the surface many thousand times yet, and the harder the thrust that pushes me down, the more quickly I shall rebound" (*NN* 422). Several paragraphs later the narrator even diminishes the importance of the adventures he has gone through: "With no greater experience of the world than he had acquired for himself in his short trials; with a sufficient share of headlong rashness and precipitation (qualities not altogether unnatural at his time of life) [. . .], what could he do?" (*NN* 427). However, surprisingly, every time some rosy-coloured prospect of future enters Nicholas's mind, it somehow comes true sooner or later. For instance, in the same chapter, Nicholas resolves to visit the Register Office again with no specific motive but a vague, sanguine expectation:

> He smiled at himself as he walked away with a quick step; for, an instant before, he had been internally blaming his own precipitation. He did not laugh himself out of the intention, however, for on he went; picturing to himself, as he approached the place, all kinds of splendid possibilities, and impossibilities too, for that matter, and thinking himself, perhaps with good reason, very fortunate to be endowed with so buoyant and sanguine a temperament. (*NN* 427)

Immediately after this, Nicholas has a fortunate encounter with the Cheeryble brothers,

unbelievably benevolent, philanthropic, and wealthy merchants. They virtually solve all of Nicholas's problems, by hiring him as a clerk at a magnanimous salary, offering his family a country cottage, and introducing him to Madeline Bray, whom Nicholas has fallen in love at first sight but at a loss how to get acquainted with. They thus affirm the simple-minded optimism of the protagonist, and, in a sense, deprives him of a growth opportunity. Margaret Ganz criticises that from the moment of his second return to London, Nicholas becomes "merely the embodiment of abstract qualities—chivalry, devotion, manliness" (137), and this weakness in the novel may partly be attributable to the lack of the hero's predicament, conflict, or serious struggle to get out of difficulties.

In the latter half of the story, Nicholas's major concern is to save Madeline Bray from Ralph and Arthur Gride, her wealthy, old, and grasping suitor. Nicholas struggles to extricate her from falling a victim to this miserable marriage, but she stubbornly refuses to accede to his entreaty out of unshaken loyalty to her selfish father. On hearing that Madeline's enforced marriage will take place tomorrow, Nicholas attempts once more to persuade her, but as usual, without a concrete plan. At first he is full of groundless hope: "the sacrifice of a young, affectionate, and beautiful creature to such a wretch and in such a cause, had seemed a thing too monstrous to succeed, and the warmer he grew the more confident he felt that some interposition must save her from his clutches" (*NN* 653). However, he gradually becomes despondent and aware that things do not always go as expected or desired:

> But now, when he thought how regularly things went on from day to day in the same unvarying round—how youth and beauty died, and ugly griping age lived tottering on—how crafty avarice grew rich, and manly honest hearts were poor and sad—[. . .] how much injustice, and misery, and wrong there was, and yet how the world rolled on from year to year, alike careless and indifferent, and no man seeking to remedy or redress it: —when he thought of all this, and selected from the mass the one slight case on which his thoughts were bent, he felt indeed that there was little ground for hope, and little cause or reason why it should not form an atom in the huge aggregate of distress and sorrow, and add one small and unimportant unit to swell the great amount. (*NN* 653)

Joseph Gold claims that Nicholas is no longer a passive puppet, manipulated by some external

force, and "look[s] squarely at the world in which he is placed" (83). However, Gold's argument appears to be only partly and momentarily appropriate. After all, Nicholas's initial baseless conviction that "some interposition must save her from his clutches" (*NN* 653) finally turns out to be true. At the critical juncture, Madeline is liberated from her plight thanks to a most remarkable coincidence in the novel—the sudden, timely death of her father: "At that moment, a heavy body fell with great violence on the floor above, and in an instant afterwards was heard a most appalling and terrific scream. [. . .] Scream succeeded scream; a heavy pattering of feet succeeded; and many shrill voices clamouring together were heard to cry, 'He is dead!'" (*NN* 674). As Rem points out, "[e]xcessive use of coincidence characterizes the mode of melodrama" (*Dickens* 60). This melodramatic intervention brings an abrupt solution to Nicholas's problem. Consequently, his realistic, mature view of the world cited above ultimately proves utterly superfluous. As Miss La Creevy says to Kate, Nicholas is "always the same affectionate good-natured clever creature, with a spice of the—I won't say who—in him when there's any occasion, that he was when I first knew you" (*NN* 462). Nicholas lacks, or is deprived of, the ability to develop precisely because he must play the role of a melodramatic hero. As G. K. Chesterton rightly observes, "He has no psychology; he has not even any particular character [. . .]. He is, in short, the hero" (introduction to *NN* ix).

The final chapter of the novel even appears to praise the invariability of the Nickleby family. After succeeding as a merchant and becoming rich, Nicholas purchases his father's old house in Devonshire, and thus the story comes full circle, emphasising the sameness of their surrounding environment: "As time crept on, and there came gradually about him a group of lovely children, it was altered and enlarged, but none of the old rooms were ever pulled down, no old tree was ever rooted up, nothing with which there was any association of bygone times was ever removed or changed" (*NN* 775-77). Now Kate has many new children and many new occupations, but she still is "the same true gentle creature, the same fond sister, the same in the

love of all about her, as in her girlish days" (*NN* 777). One of her daughters so closely resembles Kate that, for Mrs Nickleby "she seemed a child again" (*NN* 777).

In the end, Nicholas marries Madeline, and Kate marries Frank, nephew of Cheeryble brothers, who has recently come home from Germany and become a good friend of Nicholas. In this way, the earliest optimistic prospect of the protagonist in Chapter 3 is eventually fulfilled—Frank, like Nicholas's imaginary "some young nobleman" (*NN* 41), returns "from the continent" and "fall[s] in love with Kate" (*NN* 41), and Nicholas himself also acquires "some handsome appointment" (*NN* 41) without much effort. According to Jerome Meckier, the novel is "a series of circles through which either Nicholas or Kate must pass" (131) and "[i]n passing from one circle to another, Nicholas and Kate exchange their ignorance for knowledge of the world" (142). But such a view, considering Nicholas's invulnerable personality and how he is proof against external influence, is not so convincing as it may seem. It appears that for the innately good characters such as Nicholas and Kate, changing oneself is not as important as remaining the same—keeping untainted by the outer evil, corrupted world. Their innocence should be retained even at the cost of their psychological development. In fact, the Cheeryble brothers, the novel's embodiment of benevolence and goodness, are, as Aldous Huxley famously observed, "gruesome old Peter Pans" (153), and have nothing to do with inner growth or development. Apparently, since they were "two poor boys" (*NN* 453), they have grown up without the slightest change in their personality: "the face of each lighted up by beaming looks of affection, which would have been most delightful to behold in infants, and which, in men so old, was inexpressibly touching" (*NN* 432). Since the Cheerybles' innocent and simple goodness is thus presented as the most desirable model in the novel's moral scheme (these childlike old men show remarkable contrast with the exploited children like the pupils at Dotheboys Hall or Ninetta Crummles, "the infant phenomenon" (*NN* 282), who look disproportionately old for their real age), it is scarcely surprising that the problem of the

protagonist's maturity is laid aside as of secondary importance. We will continue to explore the theme of self-(re)formation in the next section, shifting our focus to villains in the novel—Ralph Nickleby in particular—with an aim to show the generic complexity of *Nicholas Nickleby*, which is not just a melodramatic novel, but also contains elements of anti-melodrama.

II. An Anti-Melodramatic Villain

Nicholas is not the only one in the novel who is unable to develop mentally. There are other central characters that show similar patterns to Nicholas's incomplete maturity in certain respects but result quite differently. The most interesting example is Ralph Nickleby, the novel's major villain. However, before analysing this character, it would be useful to take a brief look at the methods by which villains are presented in early nineteenth-century melodrama before *Nicholas Nickleby*. Surprisingly many critics have neglected the significance of the villains of nineteenth-century melodrama,[11] but they actually deserve special attention because, as Michael Slater points out, in melodrama "it is the devil who generally has all the best tunes" (Introduction 25).

In the melodrama of this period, there are two types of villain—one who feels no sense of guilt at all, and one who repents his villainy at the end of the play. The former type of villain is, to use John's phrase, "an out-and-outer" (52) malefactor, whose intense passion and villainy are "innate and predetermined" (53) and beyond control. Luke in *Luke the Labourer* (1826) by John Baldwin Buckstone, Grindoff in Isaac Pocock's *The Miller and His Men* (1813), Dyrkile in *The Innkeeper of Abbeville, or the Ostler and the Robber* (1820) by Edward Fitzball, Glanville in Jerrold's *Fifteen Years of a Drunkard's Life* (1828), or Crumbs in Jerrold's *The Rent Day* (1832) can be categorised as remorseless villains, whose crimes or sinful deeds are triggered by their passionate motivations of vengeance or the insatiable greed for wealth. For

instance, Old Crumbs in *The Rent Day* has a lasting grudge against an old squire, so he exploits and oppresses his tenants in retaliation as the estate manager of his son, Robert. At the end of the play, his villainy is revealed and Robert still generously offers his pardon and future protection, but Crumbs flatly refuses by saying, "Never. I scorn and spit at you" (40; 2.4) and rushes off the stage. In Edward Stirling's unauthorised stage adaptation, *Nicholas Nickleby: A Farce in Two Acts* (which Dickens himself watched while still working on the novel), Ralph is also reduced to this form of melodramatic villain. As Deborah Vlock argues, Stirling "employs a conventional theatrical stereotype" (28) with Ralph. He shows no mercy to Kate, and slinks off the stage in a manner similar to Crumbs, by swearing vengeance: "Wretch! you show your teeth, do you? Beware! I'll be revenged! The law—the law will protect me against your plot. I'll indite you for a conspiracy. I'll—I'll transport you all" (32; 2.5). In this way, many melodramatic villains do not show contrition from their first appearances to the last moment of the play, and are exiled, executed, or accidently killed in the end.

On the other hand, certain villains somewhat unbelievably change their hearts in the midst of play, and often die penitently. Typical examples include Count Romaldi in Thomas Holcroft's *A Tale of Mystery* (1802), Captain Crosstree in *Black-Eyed Susan*, and Macraisy in *Jonathan Bradford, or Murder at the Roadside Inn* (1833) by Fitzball, and Walter Hatherleigh in *Simon Lee: Or The Murder of the Five Fields Copse* (1839) by George Dibdin Pitt. In *A Tale of Mystery*, which is generally regarded as the first English melodrama, Count Romaldi attempted to murder his brother Francisco years ago, and his pang of conscience eventually leads him to surrender himself to his brother, urging him to take revenge: "No! Too much of your blood is upon my head! Be justly revenged: take mine!" (49; 2). In many cases, the villain's change of heart is nothing more than a convenient plot device. Captain Crosstree in *Black-Eyed Susan* abruptly shows himself at court-marital and proves the hero's innocence in the very final moment of the play. Likewise, Macraisy in *Jonathan Bradford* penitently

confesses his murder in the last few moments before his death and saves the falsely accused protagonist. Hatherleigh in *Simon Lee* discards his hatred for his criminal son-in-law and obtains a free pardon for him, only to heighten the tragic effect of the death of his daughter, who has already poisoned herself in despair.

Thus, melodramatic villains usually live up to the principle of the theatrical genre suggested by Brooks: "Melodramatic dilemmas and choices are constructed on the either/or in its extreme form as the all-or-nothing" (36). In other words, melodramatic villains are either invariably evil, or rapidly leap from evil to good without a proper transition, and again, there can be no "middle condition" (36). This tendency applies to the three minor villains in *Nicholas Nickleby*, namely Arthur Gride, Sir Mulberry Hawk, and Wackford Squeers. Arthur Gride is an old miser like Ralph Nickleby, but is far less complex than the latter, and undoubtedly a stock melodramatic character such as Doggrass in *Black-Eyed Susan*, who "has no heart than a bagpipe" (7; 1.1) or Hatherleigh in *Simon Lee*, "one of the most miserly, cruel, unforgiving old rogues in Christendom!" (8; 1.1). Gride, in conspiracy with Ralph, attempts to marry Madeline Bray, with a secret intention to exploit her inheritance. In the end, he receives retribution for his greed, and is murdered without showing the slightest remorse: "some years afterwards his house was broken open in the night by robbers, tempted by the rumours of his great wealth, and he was found horribly murdered in his bed" (*NN* 775). Sir Mulberry Hawk is also a typical aristocratic seducer and follows the same pattern. After murdering his friend and dupe Lord Verisopht in a duel, he takes flight abroad and continues his debauchery, but eventually dies in a wretched condition: "ultimately, returning to this country, he was thrown into jail for debt, and there perished miserably, as such high, noble spirits generally do" (*NN* 775). Unlike these two rogues, Squeers is an exceptionally funny and powerful character, and can hardly be classified as a stock melodramatic villain, yet his personality is equally inflexible and he is ultimately duly punished.

From this perspective, Dickens's Ralph Nickleby can be defined as an exceptionally unmelodramatic villain, since what makes him an interesting character (probably more so than Nicholas[12]) is his moral instability—his oscillation between good and evil, the conflict between his conscience and his callousness. Such ethical ambiguity cannot be seen in conventional melodramatic villains.

In his first appearance, Ralph is "a forceful representation of villainy" (Brooks 33), as was customary with the melodramatic malefactor: "there was something in its very wrinkles, and in his cold restless eye, which seemed to tell of cunning that would announce itself in spite of him" (*NN* 23). In fact, as we have already seen, his strong hatred towards his nephew remains constant from first to last. However, he occasionally betrays humane weakness towards his niece, Kate. His cruelty relents in the face of his innocent niece, and he even shows unusual kindness to her:

> He thought of what his home might be if Kate were there; he placed her in the empty chair, looked upon her, heard her speak; he felt again upon his arm the gentle pressure of the trembling hand; he strewed his costly rooms with the hundred silent tokens of feminine presence and occupation; he came back again to the cold fireside and the silent dreary splendour; and in that one glimpse of a better nature, born as it was in selfish thoughts, the rich man felt himself friendless, childless, and alone. (*NN* 384)

Robyn Warhol-Down calls this scene an "extremely rare moment of sentimental reflection," and points out that Ralph "falls into a subjunctive reverie that briefly adds a depth-effect to his characterization" (56). Such representation of psychological complexity is created by the narrative voice, which is, as Vlock points out, "impossible—or at least extremely difficult to pull off—in melodrama, even for the rare playwright interested in psychological realism" (29). Thus, Dickens attempts to portray Ralph in an unmelodramatic manner, and deliberately creates a morally ambivalent character.[13] Therefore, we cannot simply dismiss him as the most stereotypical "melodramatic villain" (Worth 62) in the novel.

Indeed, Dickens's narrative subtly manipulates the reader's impression of Ralph to expect

his reformation. In Chapter 19, Ralph introduces Kate to Sir Mulberry Hawk and his fellow libertines, allowing her to be subjected to insult. However, he feels "awkward and nervous" (*NN* 239) at seeing her distress, and what little conscience left in him awakes at the end of the chapter: "Ralph Nickleby, who was proof against all appeals of blood and kindred—who was steeled against every tale of sorrow and distress—staggered while he looked, and reeled back into his house, as a man who had seen a spirit from some world beyond the grave" (*NN* 240). The last phrase—"a man who had seen a spirit from some world beyond the grave"—is particularly important, because it reminds the reader not only of his "dead brother" (*NN* 240), but of an early episode in the novel, the tale of "The Baron of Grogzwig", which is, "a comic fable about the need to choose life and live" (Lucas 70) told in Chapter 6. In this interpolated story, the Baron Von Koeldwethout of Grogzwig in Germany despairs of life and decides to kill himself. When he smokes a last pipe, he suddenly finds himself not alone, but "a wrinkled hideous figure" (*NN* 83) is sitting opposite to him. The unearthly figure introduces himself as "the Genius of Despair and Suicide" (*NN* 83), and after a dialogue with this apparition, the Baron of Grogzwig withdraws his resolution of committing suicide and lives happily ever after. Thus, the apparition functions as an agent of change in this tale, and therefore, when Ralph Nickleby is likened to "a man who had seen a spirit from some world beyond the grave" (*NN* 240), the reader is naturally led to anticipate a dramatic moral conversion from the character—perhaps a transformation from a misanthropic, coldhearted miser to a penitent, benevolent uncle.

In fact, near the end of the novel, Ralph, like Baron of Grogzwig, resolves to destroy himself, after learning too late that Smike, who has recently perished, is his son, whom he abandoned many years ago and has thought long dead. After returning home, he imagines that if he had known his son to be alive, he might have led a very different life: "the thought would come that he might have been otherwise, and that his son might have been a comfort to him,

and they two happy together" (*NN* 751). However, the mutual attachment between Smike and Nicholas causes him to face an unbearable agony, and Ralph eventually decides to put an end to his miserable life as a means of vengeance against those whom he hates, declaring that he would willingly sell his soul to the devil: "Oh! if men by selling their own souls could ride rampant for a term, for how short a term would I barter mine tonight" (*NN* 753). Ralph's failed moral reformation is thus starkly set against the fantastic transfiguration of Baron of Grogzwig, and consequently gives the reader the impression of being more plausible (although admitting that Ralph's final soliloquy is delivered in an overly histrionic manner).

There is another unignorable moment in the Crummles episode which can be read as a self-referential parody of Ralph's suicide in the later chapter of the novel. In Chapter 23, Nicholas is asked to translate a French melodrama into English and puts his name on the title-page. In the following chapter, its plot line is given in detail by Nicholas to his fellow actors, Lenville and Folair, fully satisfying the former:

> 'You turn your wife and child out of doors,' said Nicholas; 'and in a fit of rage and jealousy stab your eldest son in the library.'
>
> 'Do I though!' exclaimed Mr Lenville. 'That's very good business.'
>
> 'After which,' said Nicholas, 'you are troubled with remorse till the last act, and then you make up your mind to destroy yourself. But just as you are raising the pistol to your head, a clock strikes—ten.'
>
> 'I see,' cried Mr Lenville. 'Very good.'
>
> 'You pause,' said Nicholas; 'you recollect to have heard a clock strike ten in your infancy. The pistol falls from your hand—you are overcome—you burst into tears, and become a virtuous and exemplary character for ever afterwards.'
>
> 'Capital!' said Mr Lenville: 'that's a sure card, a sure card. Get the curtain down with a touch of nature like that, and it'll be a triumphant success.' (*NN* 291-92)

As Rem points out, many elements in the play are apparently "an exaggerated version" ("Playing Around" 273) of what is going to occur in the novel: like the character in the play who hears a clock strike ten, Ralph wishes to get rid of his wards, has an implacable hatred towards the eldest son, and has to face his own past at the end of the novel. Interestingly, in his very first appearance in the novel, Ralph also mentions the clock in his office: "Was that half-past twelve, Noggs?" (*NN* 24).

However, it is not the similarity but the differences between these two characters that really matter here. Instead of becoming "a virtuous and exemplary character for ever afterwards" (*NN* 292), Ralph chooses not to change his way of life and hangs himself. In this way, while both the supernatural tale of Baron of Grogzwig and the Crummles's melodramatic play-within-a-play might at first appear to foreshadow what will happen later on in the novel, they actually are ironic parodies of the theme of self-reformation in the novel. Dickens seemed to be well aware that a dramatic change of mind may be "a sure card" (*NN* 292) and bring "a triumphant success" (*NN* 292), but he refused to adopt such a method, opting for an anti-melodramatic (and anti-fantastic) solution. Thus, Ralph can be placed precisely on the middle ground between the two types of melodramatic villains—he is not determinedly evil, but neither is he flexible enough to take sides with the righteous. Consequently, he refuses to turn over a new leaf, and his fate resembles the "crippled tree" (*NN* 23) in his garden (Gold 80), which "makes a show of putting forth a few leaves late in autumn [. . .], and drooping in the effort, lingers on all crackled and smoke-dried" (*NN* 23).

If we suppose a villain's moral conversion as a variation on the theme of inner growth, there are several other minor characters that seem to be relevant to this subject. In the latter part of the novel, an old gentleman who lives next to the Nickleby family falls in love with Mrs Nickleby, and he uniquely expresses his love for her by throwing vegetables over the wall. In Chapter 42, however, the neighbour turns out to be an escaped madman (which Mrs Nickleby does not believe), and his keeper reveals that before going insane, the gentleman was "the cruelest, wickedest, out-and-outerest old flint that ever drawed breath" (*NN* 512). The personal history of this gentleman corresponds not only to that of Ralph but also to the play performed by the Crummles troupe we have already discussed: like the fictional character in the play who turns his "wife and child out of doors" (*NN* 291), this old gentleman "[b]roke his poor wife's heart, turned his daughters out of doors, drove his sons into the streets" (*NN* 512). And while

the former becomes “a virtuous and exemplary character” (*NN* 292), there is no hope for the latter’s repentance: “There isn’t too much hope going, but I’ll bet a crown that what there is, is saved for more deserving chaps than him, any how” (*NN* 512), as the keeper says. Once again, Dickens rejects an idea of melodramatic change of heart as an implausible plot device, and provides the reader with another example of frustrated emotional growth.

Lord Frederick Verisopht, a frivolous, young debauchee, is not strictly a villain, but a similar fate to Ralph’s befalls him. He is, as his ridiculous family name suggests, “weak and silly” (*NN* 233), and preyed upon by Sir Mulberry Hawk and his company. Still, the narrator observes that he is “by far the least vicious of the party” (*NN* 233), and thus suggests the possibility of his later moral change. Indeed, as he recognises the virtue of Kate and Nicholas, he becomes increasingly dissatisfied with his friends, and begins to feel ashamed of his own conduct. However, his change of heart comes too late to start a new life. Shortly after his repentance, Lord Frederick Verisopht is killed in a duel with Sir Mulberry Hawk, “but for whom and others like him he might have lived a happy man, and died with children’s faces round his bed” (*NN* 629). It is true that, as Sylvère Monod criticises, his “ridiculous name” (148) severely undermines the persuasiveness of his sudden transfiguration in Chapter 15, but this does not necessarily mean that Dickens just “becomes fonder of his creations” (162). Though this character may lack psychological verisimilitude, he is at least in line with the moral scheme of the novel as we begin to see—an inability, or rather impossibility to change oneself. Many characters remain the same throughout the novel, and those who attempt to change themselves or show signs of transfiguration are destined to die sooner or later. This dilemma also plays an important part in the plot concerning another central character of the novel, Smike. This point will be examined in the next section, where we will discuss the complex relationship between melodrama and social realism in the novel.

III. Beyond the Melodramatic Dichotomy

Smike, Ralph's son by a secret marriage, who has nothing to do with villainy or wickedness, also suffers from his inability to change himself. In his case, we can find another formal conflict of the novel—melodrama and social realism. Being half-witted and constantly abused by the Squeers family, Smike is, in a sense, doomed as incapable of growing up from the earliest stage of life: "God knows how long he had been there, but he still wore the same linen which he had first taken down; for round his neck was a tattered child's frill, only half concealed by a coarse man's neckerchief" (*NN* 90). From the moment Nicholas encounters him, his situation seems to begin to change drastically. Under Nicholas's protection, Smike becomes "an altered being" (*NN* 147), and has a new object to "show his attachment" (*NN* 147) to his only friend. After escaping from Dotheboys Hall with Nicholas, he gets acquainted with Kate and Mrs Nickleby, and eventually starts to live with them. He now finds it necessary to adapt himself to his new environment. However, like Ralph Nickleby, Smike completely lacks the ability to change himself, and he himself is acutely aware of this painful fact:

> '[. . .] I shall never be an old man; and if your hand placed me in the grave, and I could think before I died that you would come and look upon it sometimes with one of your kind smiles, and in the summer weather, when everything was alive—not dead like me—I could go to that home almost without a tear.'
>
> 'Why do you talk thus, poor boy, if your life is a happy one with me?' said Nicholas.
>
> 'Because *I* should change; not those about me. And if they forgot me, *I* should never know it,' replied Smike. 'In the churchyard we are all alike, but here there are none like me. I am a poor creature, but I know that well.' (*NN* 423)

He falls in love with Kate, but the more he loves her, the more he grows conscious of his weak intellect, which makes him despondent, and eventually despairs of life. He dies of "a dread disease" (*NN* 601)—probably tuberculosis—and confesses to Nicholas his secret love for Kate in his last moment. As Stanley Friedman observes, "Smike has been damaged too much in his early years to recover" ("*Nicholas Nickleby*" 322). It is true that, as Dickens himself observes in *Oliver Twist*, "to present the tragic and the comic scenes" in "regular alternation" is "the

custom on the stage, in all good murderous melodramas" (*OT* 121), but Smike's death still seems to be an exceptional moment in the novel. In spite of his innocent goodness, Smike's pain and suffering go utterly unrewarded, and it evidently goes against the principle of melodrama, for, as Michael R. Booth points out, the audience of melodrama "could enjoy crime and villainy and horror in the full knowledge that the bright sword of justice would always fall in the right place, and that the bags of gold would always be awarded to the right people" (14). Smike's pitiful death casts a dark shadow over the Nickleby family, and causes a slight but sure undermining of the novel's otherwise melodramatic happy ending:

> The grass was green above the dead boy's grave, and trodden by feet so small and light, that not a daisy drooped its head beneath their pressure. Through all the spring and summer-time, garlands of fresh flowers wreathed by infant hands rested upon the stone, and when the children came to change them lest they should wither and be pleasant to him no longer, their eyes filled with tears, and they spoke low and softly of their poor dead cousin" (*NN* 777).

Dickens's inclination towards anti-melodramatic denouement becomes all the more evident when we compare the novel with Stirling's stage adaptation, which, although subtitled as "a farce," evidently obeys the principles of melodrama (Vlock 28). Smike is also greatly altered in this version, as he is not so much a pathetic victim as a sentimental hero. His long speech in the fourth scene of the first act, for instance, gives us quite a different impression:

> *Smi*. He spoke kindly to me. I—I—can't bear it. (*Sighs*.) When—when shall I hear from home—from some one that loves me? To remain longer in this dreadful place will drive me mad. If I was a little bird, then I could fly far, far away, to live happily all the summer days among the green fields and wild flowers. Yes, yes, I'll go at once. (*Runs to window*.) But there are no flowers now. The cold, glistering snow is on the ground, and the green fields are buried under a large white shroud. If I left the house now I might be starved, and drop helpless and frozen, like the poor birds! (*Pauses*.) I've heard that good people, that live away from this place, feed the pretty, harmless robins when the cold days and dark nights are on—perhaps they would feed me too, for I am very harmless—very. I'll run to them at once, and ask them. (13; 1.4)

The end of the play is also significantly different from the novel. Smike remains alive, and his property is restored by the aid of Noggs. Kate shows her sympathy towards him, and he kisses her hand in return, which may be a subtle inkling of their future romantic relationship. Dickens

saw the play in November of 1838, and though he praised the performance of Mrs Keeley (who played the role of Smike), he harshly criticised "sundry choice sentiments and rubbish regarding the little robins in the fields" (*L1*: 460). Indeed, in the novel Smike is (at least while in Dotheboys Hall) not gifted with the talent of eloquence: "The boy put his hand to his head as if he were making an effort to recollect something, and then, looking vacantly at his questioner, gradually broke into a smile and limped away" (*NN* 90). Smike passes away before his secret identity is revealed; moreover, he is too timid and unassertive to kiss Kate's hand.

Since the original readers of the novel received the text as "part of a larger *Nickleby* experience, a novel plus adaptations" (Vlock 30), those who saw Stirling's dramatic version in 1838 probably anticipated a similar happy ending for Smike in the novel, which was to be completed in 1839. More possibly, Stirling's portrayal of Smike reflected the readers' general expectation (especially considering that Smike's initial circumstances resemble those of Oliver Twist, whose identity is finally discovered and who lives with his family happily ever after). In either case, it is not hard to imagine that many readers of the novel had not foreseen a catastrophic ending for Smike. Dickens's eventual preference for Smike's tragic death can be attributable to one of the chief designs of the novel—the attack on the Yorkshire schools. In the preface to the original edition, Dickens observes that Squeers and his school are "faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality" (*NN* 3), and then refers to "lasting agonies and disfigurements inflicted upon children by the treatment of the master" (*NN* 3-4) in many cheap Yorkshire schools. Indeed, Smike's incapability of mental development can be regarded as a sign of his lasting aftereffects from the cruel abuse suffered in childhood, and therefore it should be an indispensable part of the novelist's social criticism, for otherwise it would undermine the entire episode in Dotheboys Hall. Smike's failed maturation and pathetic death can therefore be seen as a "realistic" (as opposed to "melodramatic") solution.

In this respect, it is also worth noting the parodic contrast between the Smike-Kate plot

and the small ballet interlude of the Crummles troupe, which depicts a romantic affair between "the Indian Savage and the Maiden" (*NN* 281). Here, Dickens appears to be making fun of the idea of an ill-matched couple and ridicules the theatrical, unrealistic plot, as opposed to Smike's pathetic ending in the novel:

> Acting upon the impulse of this passion, he (the savage) began to hit himself severe thumps in the chest, and to exhibit other indications of being desperately in love [. . .]. Being left to himself, the savage had a dance, all alone, and just as he left off the maiden woke up, rubbed her eyes, got off the bank, and had a dance all alone too—such a dance that the savage looked on in ecstasy all the while, and when it was done, plucked from a neighbouring tree some botanical curiosity, resembling a small pickled cabbage, and offered it to the maiden, who at first wouldn't have it, but on the savage shedding tears relented. Then the savage jumped for joy; then the maiden jumped for rapture at the sweet smell of the pickled cabbage. Then the savage and the maiden danced violently together, and, finally, the savage dropped down on one knee, and the maiden stood on one leg upon his other knee; thus concluding the ballet, and leaving the spectators in a state of pleasing uncertainty, whether she would ultimately marry the savage, or return to her friends. (*NN* 282)

Although its links to the main plot of the novel may not be as explicit as the other Crummles's play we have already examined in the discussion of Ralph, there are various intriguing similarities between the ballet and the Smike-Kate plot. The Indian Savage's outward appearance, which is described as that of "a shabby gentleman in an old pair of buff slippers" (*NN* 281), corresponds to the seedy attire of Smike in his first appearance. He is also associated with the image of racial otherness, since Squeers likens the relationship between the schoolmaster and his pupils to "[a] slave driver in the West Indies" and "his blacks" (*NN* 108). The savage's silent "indications of being desperately in love" resemble Smike's untold passion for Kate. Just as the savage offers the maiden "some botanical curiosity," Smike gives Kate "a couple of roots" (*NN* 503) of her favorite flowers. Quite coincidentally,[14] the "pleasing uncertainty" of the ballet ending may remind us of the final speech of Smike in Stirling's adaptation: "I hope that we have been fortunate enough to secure the good wishes and approbation of a numerous circle of kind friends, (*Pointing to audience,*) who, by their generous sympathy and support, will insure the future career of Smike and NICHOLAS

NICKLEBY" (32; 2.5). Thus, this ballet interlude appears to problematise its excessive theatricality, which can weaken the theme Smike embodies—"the sort of unjust reality that Dickens sought to expose in schools like Dotheboys Hall" (Mangham 72). It is true that Smike's death scene is presented sentimentally (such maudlin tone is counterbalanced by Mrs Nickleby, as will be discussed later), but at least Dickens's decision to dismiss a happy ending for him seems to indicate his disinclination for indulging much in the unrealistically simple morality of melodrama.

As we have repeatedly stressed, virtually all the main characters in *Nicholas Nickleby* remain unchanged or are foiled in their attempts to change themselves.[15] However, there is one extraordinary exception to the theme of changing oneself—Mrs Nickleby, the greatest comic character of the novel,[16] who recreates not only her ideal self-image but also the outer world according to her own understanding. By distorting or misinterpreting her old memories, she can make them conform to her present perception of reality. For example, while she is largely responsible for her family's financial ruin, she convinces herself that "of all her late husband's creditors she was the worst used and the most to be pitied" (*NN* 126), and her recognition of Mr Nickleby is revised accordingly: "If it hadn't been for me, I don't know what would have become of him" (*NN* 126). Instead of reforming her personality, she thus redefines her surrounding reality in a convenient way. As Steven Marcus puts it, she "plays fast and loose with reality itself, shaping it to conform to her fantasies" (99). Her absurd reconstruction of the outer world can be interpreted as a radical variation of the theme of self-change; that is, her distortion of reality is her personal way of dealing with the world, where attempts at self-creation through maturation or reformation are all rendered impossible or frustrated.

In so doing, she resists the novel's melodramatic binary between good and evil, since, according to her perception of the world, there is no such thing as evil at all. While Mrs Varden

in *Barnaby Rudge* turns virtually everyone around her into a tormentor or an agent of evil, Mrs Nickleby is characterised by her flagrant lack of ability to comprehend wickedness, and often unconsciously reveals how she is unaware of the malice and cruelty of the world:

> '[. . .] Mr Watkins said, when you were only two years and a half old, that you were one of the most astonishing children he ever saw. He did indeed, Miss Knag, and he wasn't at all fond of children, and couldn't have had the slightest motive for doing it. I know it was he who said so, because I recollect, as well as if it was only yesterday, his borrowing twenty pounds of her poor dear papa the very moment afterwards.' (*NN* 217)

Similarly, she laments the loss of Smike from the bottom of her heart in Chapter 61, but her absurd association with the memory of a treacherous nurse makes the scene hilarious, thus contrasting her intention:

> 'I am sure,' said Mrs Nickleby, wiping her eyes, and sobbing bitterly, 'I have lost the best, the most zealous, and most attentive creature that has ever been a companion to me in my life—putting you, my dear Nicholas, and Kate, and your poor papa, and that well-behaved nurse who ran away with the linen and the twelve small forks, out of the question of course.' (*NN* 740)

Due to her incapability to perceive vice, Mrs Nickleby often refuses to submit to the dominant melodramatic morality of the novel. In Chapter 20, where a typical melodramatic confrontation arises between Nicholas and Ralph, she becomes utterly devoid of the power of moral judgement: "'Oh dear me!' cried Mrs Nickleby, 'I don't know what to think, I really don't'" (*NN* 247). Under the melodramatic moral dichotomy, Nicholas is an embodiment of goodness and Ralph is an agent of evil, so the audience will have no difficulty in choosing which side to uphold. Nevertheless, she obstinately suspends her ethical judgement, which causes irritation on both sides. She repeats this at almost every crucial juncture within the plot: when Nicholas reveals the villainy of Sir Mulberry Hawk and Ralph in Chapter 33, she falls into "a state of singular bewilderment and confusion" (*NN* 403-04); in Chapter 55, she is trapped once again in "an unsatisfactory and profoundly mystified state, from which no explanations or arguments could relieve her" (*NN* 678), as to the necessity of protecting Madeline Bray, a typical damsel in distress.

According to Mrs Nickleby, the moral value is not *bi*polar but *uni*polar. Therefore, she is able to resolve (or rather escape) the issue of the melodramatic either/or dilemmas and choices. Thus, she functions as an extreme antithesis to the melodramatic oversimplification of morality, unintentionally raising doubts as to the controlling principle of the novel.

* * * * *

Unlike the preceding two novels (*Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist*), *Nicholas Nickleby* was planned as a novel from the very beginning, and it is worth noting that, even in his earliest career, Dickens did not depend on one particular literary form uncritically. The above discussion has shown that the theme of change and self-(re)formation on one hand constitutes a unifying characteristic of *Nicholas Nickleby*, but on the other hand it throws into relief the generic ambiguity of the novel. Against the melodramatic protagonist, Nicholas, Dickens contraposes anti-melodramatic characters such as Ralph Nickleby, Smike, and Mrs Nickleby, blurring the boundaries between good and evil, and resisting, or sometimes ridiculing, excessive moral simplification. Despite his fascination with melodrama, Dickens carefully abstains from relying much on the moral simplicity or binary schematisation of good/evil, and occasionally adopts the opposite narrative mode. Ralph's psychological complexity, Smike's unrewarding death, and Mrs Nickleby's malfunctioning moral compass allow the reader to receive the dominant melodramatic mode, as represented by Nicholas, from a detached perspective. The parodic use of the Crummles episodes also draws our attention to the contrast between the melodramatic elements and anti-melodramatic elements of the novel by exaggerating the theatrical elements of the novel and evoking the reader's melodramatic expectations, which are later to be unrealised. Such artistic self-restraint ensures that the readers can enjoy the melodramatic morality without necessarily having to approve of it

unconditionally. In short, it makes the novel acceptable to the readers, who want something more than what melodrama promises to the audience, something richer than the mere idealised vision of the world.

In the fifth novel *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens further explores his study of narrative form, by juxtaposing two apparently irreconcilable narrative modes, historical novel and detective fiction.

Notes

[1.] For instance, when Charles Selby and Charles Melville dramatised *Barnaby Rudge* as *Barnaby Rudge: A Domestic Drama in Three Acts* without permission before the completion of the novel and spoiled the murder mystery, Dickens's reaction was curiously tolerant:

> "It would be ridiculous for me to deny that I am always most intensely mortified and very much aggravated by having my stories anticipated in their course; and that I think the state of the law which permits such things, is disgraceful to England. At the same time, I am so far from blaming you in the matter, that if I could give you a patent for dramatizing my productions I would gladly to do so; inasmuch as if they must be done at all, I would rather have them done by gentlemanly hands, and by those who really desire to act fairly and honourably as I am sure you do." (*L1*: 333)

[2.] *The Dickens Theatre: A Reassessment of the Novels* by Robert Garis is probably the most extensive study on the theatricality in the works of Dickens.

[3.] Steven Marcus points out that "almost everyone in the novel is consciously engaged in appropriating certain manners of behaviour, everyone is engaged in a perpetual activity of self-creation through imitation, emulation or acting" (100-01). Bernard Bergonzi also argues that "there can be no doubt that the whole novel is pervaded with theatricality" (69). Despite the fact that Nicholas's active period as a professional actor in the Crummles troupe is relatively short, many critics agree that acting, role-playing, and imitating constitute the central theme of the novel. Other early important contributions to this theme include *Charles Dickens: The*

World of His Novels by J. Hillis Miller, and *Dickens and Popular Entertainment* by Paul Schlicke.

[4.] Mary Cleopha Cipar, for instance, points out that "general characteristics of the Spanish picaresque novel" (43) can be found in the novel. Monod also notes the possible influence of Smollett's *Roderick Random* and *Peregrine Pickle* on the choice of the hero's name. See Monod 140. Schlicke similarly observes that "[o]f all Dickens's novels *Nicholas Nickleby* is closest in structure to the works of Smollett, combining seriousness and entertainment in broadly contrasting episodes" (74). However, contrary to the critical consensus about the strong influence of melodrama on this novel, there is a disagreement as to whether *Nicholas Nickleby* belongs to the tradition of picaresque novel or *Bildungsroman*. Florian Schewizer notes that the early novels like *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* "lack the distinct characteristics of the *Bildungsroman*" (143). Timothy Gilmore classifies the novel as neither of them, because the hero is, unlike a typical picaro, "not a rogue and, arguably, not even particularly likeable" (86), and "his lack of depth and development as a character rules out categorizing the novel as a bildungsroman" (86).

[5.] The first half of the paragraph does not correspond to the plot of *Nicholas Nickleby*. According to Buckley, the hero is "[a] child of some sensibility grows up in the country", and his father "proves doggedly hostile to his creative instincts of flights of fancy" (*Season of Youth* 17). However, *David Copperfield*, written about a decade later, generally traces this pattern.

[6.] For example, Mark Ford calls Nicholas "the first, and least interesting, of Dickens's self-projections, an almost generic leading man, whose actions and ideals are rarely complicated by the kinds of anxiety that motivate the development of David Copperfield or Pip" (xvi). Cipar, as we have seen, takes a similar stance: "Certainly we witness particular phases of his maturing and the self-respect he reestablishes in his family. However, this does not counteract the fact

that we have seen no organized substantial development of his character but rather random encounters and events in an episodic plot" (44). John Lucas compares *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and observes that in *Nickleby* "the novelist is fully identified with Nicholas's aggressive self-confidence, whereas Martin has to learn that he cannot put the world to rights by a few well-aimed blows, let alone a belief in his own worth" (58). A rare exception is Gold, who sees a similarity between Nicholas and Hamlet, arguing that they both "must undergo a period of maturation and suffering before he can act as a reforming agent" (75).

[7.] The psychological growth of David Copperfield will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

[8.] John Lucas makes the same point, noting that "[t]he trouble is that no matter how many schoolmasters received the thrashings they undoubtedly deserved, such punishments were not likely to make the schools disappear [. . .]. Momentarily satisfying though the thrashing may be, it solves nothing" (59).

[9.] See Sylvia Manning 73-92; Rem, "Playing Around" 267-85; and Slater, Introduction 13-31.

[10.] Dickens writes in *The Examiner* (12 May 1849) that "the audience laughed and wept with all their hearts, and which is a remarkable illustration of what a man of genius may do with a common-enough thing, and how what he does will remain a thing apart from all imitation" (*DJ2* 159).

[11.] See John 48.

[12.] Many critics agree that unlike many characters in the novel, Ralph has a certain complexity. See Carolyn Dever 3; Malcolm Andrews, *Dickensian Laughter* 48; and Slater, Introduction 24 (though he does not praise this character conditionally, on the ground that he is too theatrical).

[13.] Meckier points out that Ralph is "a forerunner of Scrooge, Dombey, and Gradgrind" (145), who introspect themselves and finally change their hearts.

[14.] This episode had been written as a part of Number VII of the novel before Dickens saw Stirling's play in November 1838.

[15.] Taking this fact into consideration, prevailing play-acting characters such as Mantalini, Miss Knag, Mrs Wititterly, Fanny Squeers, and the members of the Crummles troupe, begin to assume a different significance. That is, by pretending to be someone else or by assuming a certain role, these characters appear to achieve what Nicholas, Kate, Ralph or Smike cannot do—in short, transformation of personality.

[16.] Ganz observes that "[o]nly Mrs. Nickleby remains an overarching humorous creation, resisting not only the demands of reality in the universe of the novel but the intrusion of facile moral judgements and superficial sentiment in the mind of her author" (136). Slater similarly states that "Mrs Nickleby alone, I think, who keeps us reading through many such stretches of the novel. Uniquely among all the characters in the book, she is just as entertaining when being herself as when she is, more or less unconsciously, acting out a leading role in one of her own dramas" (Introduction 24). Natalie McKnight also praises her as "one of Dickens's most successful idiots mostly because of her absurd memory associations and her garrulous idiolect" (77).

CHAPTER 2

DISGUISE AND DECEPTION IN *BARNABY RUDGE*

It is impossible to ignore the significance of *Barnaby Rudge* when we fully trace Dickens's development as a novelist. This novel is both ambitious and monumental for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it is his first attempt to write a historical novel (*A Tale of Two Cities* is its only successor). Secondly, it contains certain elements of detective fiction. The first weekly number was published in February 1841, a several months earlier than Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", which is generally regarded as the first modern detective story.

Besides, unlike his earlier novels such as *Pickwick Papers* and *Old Curiosity Shop*, Dickens had spent five years—unusually long length of time for him—on elaborating the novel's planning before embarking upon its serialisation[1]. In 1836, Dickens originally made a contract with John Macrone, his first publisher, to write a novel entitled *Gabriel Vardon, the Locksmith of London*, at a price of £200, which was never fulfilled. After the cancellation of this contract (the young writer might well find it unsatisfying, especially after the immense success of *Pickwick Papers*), Dickens then came to an agreement for the publication of the projected novel (its title was now altered to *Barnaby Rudge, a Tale of the Riots of '80*) with Richard Bentley. However, again this proved incompatible with the ongoing serial writing, and further postponement ensued, during which *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *The Old Curiosity Shop* were published. It was not until 1841 that the first weekly instalment of *Barnaby Rudge* was issued in *Master Humphrey's Clock*, a miscellaneous periodical edited and written solely by Dickens, with the backing of Chapman and Hall. Under such circumstances, *Barnaby Rudge* became Dickens's fifth published full-length novel, instead of first.

Presumably the five-year delay contributed greatly to the development of the plot and provided the author with ample opportunities to read many historical sources and other preceding literary works which might give him inspirations to his forthcoming novel. For instance, Jack Lindsay points out that the delay in writing allowed Dickens to read Thomas

Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837) and *Chartism* (1838), from which Dickens must have learned much about the general idea of revolt of the oppressed and mob violence, the central themes of *Barnaby Rudge*.[2] Thus, it is fairly reasonable to assume that Dickens had had sufficient time to make meticulous preparation before serialisation began. Nevertheless, *Barnaby Rudge*, as Catherine Robson points out, "remains perhaps the least read of his [Dickens's] works today" (239). Although many critics have attempted to prove the organic unity of this seemingly incoherent novel and they have contributed to the revival of *Barnaby Rudge*'s critical reputation to no small extent,[3] such lingering unpopularity seems to indicate that the artistic value of this work is not yet fully appreciated, and there is still room for further study.

This chapter of the thesis will pursue the same traditional aim of finding a cohering unity of the novel, but our main argument is that the work owes its unique status in Dickens's oeuvre to its elaborate handling of the themes of identity confusion, disguise, and deception—a point which is crucial to our understanding of the novel, yet not fully addressed. In the first section we will focus on the structural discrepancy of the novel and argue that behind such seemingly incoherent framing, there exists Dickens's narrative strategy which is closely related with the novel's central concern of manipulation and deceit. (As will be discussed later, a possible source of the novel is James Hogg's short story, "The Bridal of Polmood", with which *Barnaby Rudge* shares several distinct features.) We then extend our discussion to the plot of the novel, and demonstrate how this theme is explored both in the domestic sphere and in the public sphere. The second section mainly focuses on the various father-son relationships including the Rudges, the Willets, the Chesters, as well as the Varden family. In the third section we will examine the Gordon Riots plot, discussing the central figures of the Riots—Lord Gordon, Gashford, Simon Tappertit, Dennis the hangman, and Hugh. The aim of this section is to elucidate how Dickens relates this historical event with the ethical subject of

identity confusion. These discussions will ultimately reveal the novel's organic connection between form and theme, which is masterly achieved through the motif of disguise and deception.

I. The Structural Duality

According to the preface of the novel, from the very beginning, Dickens's intention was to write a novel about the infamous no-Popery agitation in the eighteenth century: "No account of the Gordon Riots having been to my knowledge introduced into any Work of Fiction, and the subject presenting very extraordinary and remarkable features, I was led to project this Tale" (*BR* 40). In writing his first historical novel, Dickens could not help being conscious of his great predecessor, Sir Walter Scott. In fact, as John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson argue, the description of the attack on Newgate prison is strongly inspired by the opening chapters of *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), in which the Porteous Mob storms the old Tolbooth prison in Edinburgh (78). In this sense, *Barnaby Rudge* might be understood as Dickens's attempt to gain fame as a historical novelist, an attempt to set himself up against Scott, and possibly also William Harrison Ainsworth or Edward Bulwer Lytton.

Nevertheless, the preoccupation of the first half of *Barnaby Rudge* is not the Gordon Riots, but the Haredale murder, which can be defined as a detective story. Of course, by the time Dickens wrote *Barnaby Rudge*, detective fiction had not yet established itself as a literary genre, for, as we have mentioned, the publication date of Poe's pioneering work, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", was in April 1841, two months after the initial weekly number of Dickens's novel was published. Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1861), which is one of the most famous and finest examples of early detective novel, appeared even twenty years later. Nevertheless, as the following discussion will demonstrate, Dickens raises several significant issues inherent in this literary genre as early as in 1840's. Thus, while in *Nicholas Nickleby*,

"all manner of different kinds of writing—melodrama, political satire, class comedy, social criticism, domestic farce" (Ford xvi) coexist, *Barnaby Rudge* consists of two dominant literary genres, detective fiction and historical novel, and the conflict of these two opposing literary forms constitute the core of the novel.

Dickens's manner of merging these two plots has often been considered unsuccessful, and even criticised as the crucial weak point of the novel. The most typical and influential assessment of *Barnaby Rudge* is John Forster's following statement: "The interest with which the tale begins has ceased to be its interest before the close; and what has chiefly taken the reader's fancy at the outset, almost wholly disappears in the power and passion with which, in the later chapters, the great riots are described" (Forster 1: 144). Though Forster highly praises the powerful description of the riots, for him the work is, on the whole, a failure "in singleness of purpose, unity of idea, or harmony of treatment" (Forster 1: 144). In contrast to Forster, Edgar Allan Poe thinks much of the murder plot, but he treats the Gordon Riots as if it is a mere superfluous subplot: "It is evident that they have no necessary connection with the story. [. . .] The whole event of the drama would have proceeded as well without as with them. They have even the appearance of being forcibly introduced" (214). Nevertheless, Forster and Poe share the same decisive opinion: the novel is structurally flawed, and this had long been the critics' consensus. It is certainly true that the narrative presentations of these two plots are acutely different, or, one might even say, opposed to each other. However, it appears that Dickens himself was well-aware of the structural incoherence of the novel, and even made it deliberately. More concretely, as will be shown in the following discussion, the former part of the novel attracts the reader by a sensational mystery plot, and the latter makes a caricature of such compositional device itself.

In the first chapter of the novel, we are informed that on the night of the nineteenth of March, 1753, Reuben Haredale at the Warren and his steward Rudge were murdered—the latter only recognisable by his clothes and personal belongings—and a gardener was found missing and consequently accused as the murderer:

> A bureau was found opened, and a cash-box, which Mr Haredale had brought down that day, and was supposed to contain a large sum of money, was gone. The steward and gardener were both missing and both suspected for a long time, but they were never found, though hunted far and wide. And far enough they might have looked for poor Mr Rudge the steward, whose body—scarcely to be recognised by his clothes and the watch and ring he wore—was found, months afterwards, at the bottom of a piece of water in the grounds, with a deep gash in the breast where he had been stabbed with a knife. He was only partly dressed; and people all agreed that he had been sitting up reading in his own room, where there were many traces of blood, and was suddenly fallen upon and killed before his master. (*BR* 57-58)

Later it turns out that Rudge was not actually dead, but that in fact he himself was the real murderer, who faked his death by dressing the body of the gardener in his own clothes and then shifted the blame onto the innocent victim. Thus, in the earlier parts of the novel, Dickens focuses his efforts on generating curiosity, an important motivation of the reader to keep turning the pages; in other words, the first half of the novel heavily relies on the creation of mystery. In his second review of *Barnaby Rudge*, Poe claims that Dickens's design was to "maintain the secret of the murder, and the consequent mystery which encircles Rudge, and the actions of his wife, until the catastrophe of his discovery by Haredale. The thesis of the novel may thus be regarded as based upon curiosity. Every point is so arranged as to perplex the reader, and whet his desire for elucidation" (208-09), and continues that these traces of the design can be found everywhere in the novel. For instance, the reader is required to gather the fragmented pieces of information little by little and seek out the hidden history of Mary Rudge, the murderer's wife, who apparently has something to do with the murder committed twenty-two years ago:

> One thing about this face was very strange and startling. You could not look upon it in its most cheerful mood without feeling that it had some extraordinary capacity

> of expressing terror. It was not on the surface. [. . .] It was the faintest, palest shadow of some look, to which an instant of intense and most unutterable horror only could have given birth; but indistinct and feeble as it was, it did suggest what that look must have been, and fixed it in the mind as if it had had existence in a dream. (*BR* 87)

The mystifying statements she occasionally drops are likewise calculated to arouse the reader's expectation of the solution: "'In this world, sir,' she replied, 'they may, perhaps, never be explained. In another, the Truth will be discovered in its own good time. And may that time,' she added in a low voice, 'be far distant!'" (*BR* 255). Thus, it seems that the murder plot is intended to evoke the reader's curiosity, and make the work more appealing and captivating to the general public.

However, it must be noted that such heavy reliance upon curiosity calculated to "perplex the reader, and whet his desire for elucidation" (Poe 208-09) diminishes as the novel proceeds. In fact, Poe's argument cited above is solely limited to the murder plot. He almost entirely ignores the other main plot concerning the riots of 'eighty, and this is presumably because the way it is introduced to the book is quite incompatible with Poe's philosophy. This does not necessarily mean that the Gordon Riots fails to arouse the reader's curiosity in its general sense, but at least it does not provide any source of curiosity in the sense used by Poe. As we have seen, in the murder plot the reader is anticipated to be perplexed with the mysterious situation, then gradually find out its cause—the key to satisfy the desire for elucidation. On the other hand, in the Riots part, such chain of causes-and-effects is totally cut apart, and the reader is utterly unable to expect any logical explanation for the anarchic upheaval. We are given no sufficient background history, and nowhere in the novel do we find a justifiable reason for this anti-Catholic movement, which so suddenly breaks out that it seems as if driven by an utterly inexplicable, malicious force. In the same way, the abrupt appearance of the central figures of the Riots—Lord Gordon, Gashford, and John Grueby—at the end of Chapter 34 rather baffles the reader, for there is no context nor foreshadowing in the earlier part of the novel. However,

such abruptness and incomprehensibility (as opposed to the compositional principle of the murder mystery plot) are exactly what the novelist intended:

> Just as he [Lord Gordon] has come upon the reader, he had come, from time to time, upon the public, and been forgotten in a day; as suddenly as he appears in these pages, after a blank of five long years, did he and his proceedings begin to force themselves, about this period, upon the notice of thousands of people, who had mingled in active life during the whole interval, and who, without being deaf or blind to passing events, had scarcely ever thought of him before. (*BR* 348-49)

It is very likely that Dickens makes the later part of the novel function as an antithesis to the former part quite consciously. Indeed, Dickens's attacks on the deceptive manoeuvre of the conspirators of the riots at the beginning of Chapter 37 can be regarded as an ironic self-reference to the fictional form of *Barnaby Rudge* itself:

> To surround anything, however monstrous or ridiculous, with an air of mystery, is to invest it with a secret charm, and power of attraction which to the crowd is irresistible. False priests, false prophets, false doctors, false patriots, false prodigies of every kind, veiling their proceedings in mystery, have always addressed themselves at an immense advantage to the popular credulity, and have been, perhaps, more indebted to that resource in gaining and keeping for a time the upper hand of Truth and Common Sense, than to any half-dozen items in the whole catalogue of imposture. Curiosity is, and has been from the creation of the world, a master-passion. To awaken it, to gratify it by slight degrees, and yet leave something always in suspense, is to establish the surest hold that can be had, in wrong, on the unthinking portion of mankind. (*BR* 347)

The metafictional nature of this passage has attracted the attention of many critics. As John Bowen points out, "This novel is, of course, constructed through just such forces. Airs of mystery, monstrous and ridiculous events and characters, prodigies, secret powers and things veiled in mystery drive forward its plot and action" (Introduction xxvii). Similarly, Robert Tracy recognises the self-awareness of the novelist, noting the remarkable similarity between the novelist himself and the evil plotters in his own novel: "Dickens incorporates into his plot the concocting and shaping of that plot: that is, while Dickens is manipulating his characters and their adventures as a novelist must do, he incorporates into his story manipulative plotters who are trying to control the story, are bringing people together or putting them apart just as the novelist himself is doing" ("Clock Work" 41). John P. McGowan further claims that here

"Dickens condemns the creation of a mystery solely to attract the attention and devotion of an audience" ("Mystery and History" 43), and interprets this passage as an attempt to "establish a distinction between the novelist and the novel's master villain" (43). In this way, the Gordon riots plot can be read as Dickens's ironic self-parody, and in the condemnation of those who invent mystery as a means of attracting public attention, the strategic structural duality of *Barnaby Rudge* becomes apparent. To put it another way, the novel at first disguises itself in the form of a detective fiction, but later thus reveals its true concern as a historical novel in which the novelist attempts to anatomise the mechanism of deception itself.

Therefore, the formal inconsistency of *Barnaby Rudge* is not necessarily a fundamental flaw of the novel; rather, it can be said that the very structure itself reflects an essential ethical theme of the novel—disguise and deception. Indeed, as we shall discuss, the prevailing concern of *Barnaby Rudge* is the duality of identity; that is, the discrepancy between the perception of one's own identity and the perception of others. Dickens amplifies and offers variations on this theme, one he had explored in previous works, and emphasises the gap between self-image and public image, one's idealised self and real self, or fabricated self and revealed self. In *Barnaby Rudge*, such discordance is so rampant that one's identity is easily manipulated by crafty evil forces, which inevitably brings about much misunderstanding and confusion—most conspicuously, the victim is often falsely recognised as the victimiser, and the guilty are mistakenly acquitted as innocent—rendering appropriate ethical judgement almost impossible.[4] Taking this into consideration, the dual structure of the novel can be understood as a self-reflexive narrative device, which is in fact closely and effectively related with the novel's central theme of disguise and deception of identity, which we will discuss in detail in the following two sections.

II. A Plot Analysis (1): The Private Sphere

The murder mystery at the beginning of the book again serves as a perfect starting point for our discussion, for it represents most obviously the theme of identity disorder and deception, an important organising theme of the novel.[5] As we have already seen, Rudge switches identities with the gardener, as a means of confusing investigation and evading immediate punishment. As attested to by Harold F. Folland's comments that it is "still a workable device in current detective fiction" (416) more than half a century ago, the switching of the roles of murderer and victim is one of the most commonly used tricks in the history of detective fiction. To the best of my knowledge, the earliest example of this device can be found in James Hogg's long short story "The Bridal of Polmood". It is Hogg's one of the earliest prose works, and was come out along with other tales, poems, and sketches as *Winter Evening Tales* in 1820, about twenty years before the publication of the first instalment of *Barnaby Rudge*. The existence of a possible new source of *Barnaby Rudge* would lead to a reconsideration of the place of Rudge's murder plot in the whole novel. The following is a summary of the complicated plot of "The Bridal of Polmood".

The story is a sort of historical romance set in Polmood in the Scottish Borders, under the reign of James IV of Scotland. Norman Hunter of Polmood, "a gentleman of high courage and benevolence" (261) falls desperately in love with one of the queen's maidens named Elizabeth Manners, and she, having no reason to refuse, acquiesces in his proposal, though Polmood is "considerably past the bloom of youth" (263). As one can easily expect, soon after the marriage, it proves to be a failure, on account of their huge age gap, and of Elizabeth being a flirt, not to say a wanton. Taking advantage of this circumstance, her former admirers, the duke of Rosay and the young baron Carmichael make approaches to Elizabeth on various occasions. Polmood becomes so mad with jealousy that he plans to inflict vengeance and punishment upon Rosay.

One day King James and his nobles visit the castle of Polmood, for the purpose of the rural sports. After the hunt, three knights, namely the laird of Lamington, Sir Patrick Hepburn (these two men have apparently no concern in the plot), and Polmood go missing. At length, after much searching, they find two dead bodies lying side by side under very suspicious situation: “but the heads were severed from them, and carried away, or so disposed of, that they could not be found. Both their swords were drawn, and one was grasped so firm in a cold bloody hand, that it could scarcely be forced from it; and from the appearance of the blood upon that sword, it was evident almost to a certainty, that some deadly wounds had been given with it” (333). One of the bodies is judged to be that of Sir Patrick Hepburn, then a long debate ensues as to the identity of the other body, and eventually Polmood’s page swears to “the identity of his master's sword, and likewise his sandals, or hunting brogues” (333) and settles the matter. Initially the laird of Lamington is blamed for the murderer, but since he has no motive for the murder, the suspicion then falls on a gardener named Connel, who actually is Carmichael in disguise, one of Elizabeth’s assumed adulterer.

However, at the end of the story, it is revealed that Polmood is not dead. After his supposed dead body’s burial, he suddenly makes his appearance in Elizabeth and her lovers’ presence, and strangles Rosay to death. On receiving a fatal stab by Carmichael after a long desperate scuffle, Polmood makes a full disclosure about his crime: on the day of the hunt, he lay in ambush for Rosay at the ford of Gameshope, and on appearance of two men on horseback, he cut them down without a second thought. However, Polmood soon realised that due to a thick mist and his blind fury, he had mistakenly murdered two innocent gentlemen in place of Rosay and his friend Hamilton. He soon came up with the idea of concealment:

> Desperate cases suggest desperate remedies.—As the only means of averting instant punishment, and accomplishing dire revenge on the real incendiaries, which swayed him much more than the love of life, he put his own sword in Lamington’s hand, which he closed firm upon it, and his own sandals upon his feet: he then cut off the heads from the bodies, and hid them, being certain that no one could distinguish the trunks; and, as he deemed, so it fell out. (355)

Polmood dies after making confession of his murder, and the story ends with the marriage between Elizabeth and Carmichael.

The motif of disguise and mistaken identity is dominant throughout this seemingly discursive story, which also holds a very important place in *Barnaby Rudge*, as will be shown soon: in his inebriety and utter darkness, the lord chamberlain Hume mistakes the king's favourite lady Ann Grey for his wife; the king James conceals his identity and fools a young shepherd William into making some disrespectful remarks upon the king; later they decide to take a journey over the realm under the disguise of travelling minstrels; Carmichael, after the banishment, dresses up as a gardener, then a shepherd; Polmood remains in his territory after the murder in the guise of a pilgrim monk. Furthermore, besides its seemingly inconsistent structure, there are three striking similarities between *Barnaby Rudge* and "the Bridal of Polmood": firstly, the murderer disguises the identity of the victim by changing the personal belongings to his; secondly, after the crime, the murderer, namely the supposed victim is witnessed around the scene of the crime and is rumoured to be the ghost; thirdly, the gardener is suspected of the murder.

Since there are no works of Hogg in the 1844 inventory of Dickens's library at Devonshire Terrace (though numerous books are left unidentified as "divers books" (*L4*: 722, 723)), we have no definitive evidence of Hogg's possible influence on Dickens. However, it is still probable that Dickens had read this story during the period in which he prepared to write *Barnaby Rudge*. We find the six volumes of *Tales and Sketches, by the Ettrick Shepherd*, including "The Bridal of Polmood" in the volume two, in the catalogue of Dickens's library in Gadshill, where he lived until his death. They are from the posthumous edition published in six volumes from December 1836 to November 1837 by the Glasgow firm Blackie & Son; the second volume in question was issued on the first of February 1837.[6] It is a fact worth noting that on 14 July the very same year, Dickens for the first time mentioned the new title *Barnaby*

Rudge in his letter to Bentley,[7] for, as Lindsay notes, the transition from the original title *Gabriel Vardon* to *Barnaby Rudge* suggests "a personal tale of murder, guilt, and discovery is woven into the epical tale of the riots" ("*Barnaby Rudge*" 93). Surely the locksmith, who is "at peace with himself, and evidently disposed to be so with all the world" (*BR* 63), can be considered as an ethical beacon of the novel, but it is likely that the author, while forming the outline of the book, found him unfit for the title character. Indeed, it is the Rudge plot—the double murder of the father and the imbecility of his son as its consequence—that raises the central problem of identity confusion, which penetrates to every corner of the novel in various forms such as disguise, deception, or falsification. Rudge's response to the inquiry by the locksmith in Chapter 2 epitomises the circumstances of almost all characters in *Barnaby Rudge*: "I am not what you take me for, Gabriel Varden" (*BR* 64). As will be shown, they are nearly unexceptionally caught in inconsistencies between how one sees oneself and how one is seen by others: some deliberately conceal their true self by pretence or disguise; others suffer false definition of their personalities imposed from outside by libel or malicious plot; there is also a group of people whose madness or blind vanity prevent them from seeing themselves as they really are.

First of all, because of his double murder, Rudge loses his former identity and is forced to live a desolate, outcast life. His "constant restlessness" (*BR* 181) is an index of his agony of being nobody, of being doomed to roam the earth forever, from place to place, without any hope of settlement. In this sense, Rudge is, as John Willet observes in regard to Reuben Haredale, "not alive, and he is not dead" (*BR* 53). The repercussions of Rudge's deception spread to other innocent people. Particularly, Rudge's wife and son cannot remain detached from the consequence of the murder. Mary Rudge has to refuse to reveal the real culprit of the murder by promising to keep her husband's abominable secret, which becomes a source of

immense moral torture.[8] She is placed in the dilemma of being caught between her conscience and the matrimonial fetter: publicly she is treated with sympathy as the victim's wife, but she only knows she actually is the murderer's wife, and in harbouring the criminal, virtually she is the conspirator of the crime. Her contradictory identity reveals itself in her mystifying confession: "I am guilty, and yet innocent; wrong, yet right; good in intention, though constrained to shield and aid the bad" (*BR* 256).

However, it is in his imbecile son Barnaby, who was born on the very day the murder was discovered, that Rudge's murder leaves the deepest and the most inerasable trace. The consequence of Rudge's deed takes the form of the weakness of intellect in his son, which produces an incompatible discrepancy between the ideal and real self. Barnaby is susceptible to external evil influences, and during the Riots, he is imbued with a delusion and false belief that he is worthier than what he actually is: while honest John Grueby plainly observes that he is "[s]tark, staring, raving, roaring mad" (*BR* 520), Barnaby firmly believes himself to be a brave, trustworthy, loyal man who is engaged in "a just cause" (*BR* 458). It is worth noting that the sinful deed of Rudge thus disturbs the identity formation of his own innocent son, because this is applicable to other father-son relationships in the novel. In this sense, Rudge is, as Sally Ledger points out, "a gothically symbolic figure in Dickens's panoply of troubled father-son relationships" (*Dickens* 137).

The first father-son relationship introduced in the novel is the one between John Willet, the landlord of the Maypole Inn, and his son Joe. Old John is a tyrant in the domestic sphere, who is "always sure that what he thought or said or did was right" (*BR* 45). John Willet is thus described as an absolute blockhead whose obstinacy and slow-wittedness make him incapable of seeing himself as he really is. His chief victim is his son Joe, whose maturity and manhood Old John obdurately denies.[9] Though Joe is a "young fellow of twenty" (*BR* 49), his father is inclined to consider him "a little boy" (*BR* 49), and such disproportionate treatment provides

the former with sufficient reason to escape out of his father's tyrannical dominance. Indeed, even after the lapse of five years since his son's runaway, John still sticks to his principle of fixing his son in eternal childhood, in one sense, like Barnaby. In the advertisement he persists in describing his son as a "young boy" (*BR* 317) and as "being from eighteen inches to a couple of feet shorter than he really was" (*BR* 317). Predictably, while his son, returning from the American War of Independence, successfully proves his manhood in the Riots and finally gets what he deserves, Old John is never able to discard the distorted view of self, nor actualise his idealised self. Far from that, his dullness turns into utter stupefaction when he has to face the destruction of the Maypole Inn: "John saw this desolation, and yet saw it not" (*BR* 500). This is a harsh, nightmarish reality, much more unbearable than his son's growth and subsequent replacement. He never recovers from this shock, and even after the retirement, he still considers himself "a landlord by profession" (*BR* 736). Thus, in Old John's case, the fundamental disparity between the fabricated self-image and the real self remains unsolved.

In Sir John Chester, a patriarchal attempt to justify his authority and retain dominance takes form of the more wilful, deliberate, and malicious defamation of his legitimate son's character. Just as Rudge dressed the gardener in his clothes and shifted responsibility for the crime onto him, John Chester, "an actor by nature" (John 162), degrades the reputation of his son and he himself plays the part of an innocent sufferer. His main preoccupation in the first half of the novel is to separate his son Edward from his lover Emma Haredale, the niece of his mortal enemy, Geoffrey Haredale, and he achieves this aim by slandering and spreading misleading information. Through such means, Emma becomes "a changed person" (*BR* 311), and Edward is led to realise that he has unconsciously played "the villain's part" (*BR* 176). In each case, Chester makes others appear like himself by attributing his own nature to them, a propensity upon which the narrator comments at one point: "It is curious to imagine these people of the world, busy in thought, turning their eyes towards the countless spheres that

shine above us, and making them reflect the only images their minds contain" (*BR* 280-81). Indeed, though Chester persuades other people into believing that his son is an extravagant libertine with "no heart at all" (*BR* 272), and ascribes Emma's sudden breach of the engagement to her mercenary purpose, it is Chester himself who married for money and has exhausted his fortune thereafter. Thus in *Barnaby Rudge*, when a deceptive villain assumes a false identity—often the role of an innocent victim—he does so at the expense of someone else's, or, in other words, he always needs someone to play "the villain's part" in his stead.[10] Consequently when Edward is banished from home, his father is the one who receives sympathy and admiration:

> So, it soon got whispered about, that Mr Chester was very unfortunate in his son, who had occasioned him great grief and sorrow. And the good people who heard this and told it again, marvelled the more at his equanimity and even temper, and said what an amiable nature that man must have, who, having undergone so much, could be so placid and so calm. And when Edward's name was spoken, Society shook its head, and laid its finger on its lip, and sighed, and looked very grave; and those who had sons about his age, waxed wrathful and indignant, and hoped, for Virtue's sake, that he was dead. And the world went on turning round, as usual, for five years, concerning which this Narrative is silent. (*BR* 313-14)

Thus, Chester is considered as the "unfortunate" sufferer of his ungrateful son, and people even go so far as to hope Edward is "dead." In this sense Edward is socially murdered by his father, and the malefactor, like Rudge, eludes responsibility by bringing a false charge against the victim. After this final passage of Chapter 32, a five-year interval follows. It appears quite meaningful that the first act of the novel which begins with a murder covered up by the transposition of the perpetrator's guilt upon his victim, ends with another metaphorical murder covered up by a very similar rhetorical device (it is no exaggeration to say Chester's act is filicide, also implied by the original illustration in Chapter 32 that shows a picture of Abraham sacrificing Isaac behind Chester and Edward). In this way, the thematic significance of mistaken identity and reversal of roles is underscored by the repetitive use of the same strategy of deception.

A comic variation on the same theme can be seen in a subplot concerning the Varden family. The peace of Varden's home is constantly disturbed by its family members. The capricious nature of Mrs Varden is much encouraged and incited by her malicious servant Miggs, whose guise of servility shows close affinity to other two-faced hypocrites in the novel. When the two combine their efforts against Varden, his patriarchal authority loses its strength. Yet, again, they present themselves as victims of domestic tyranny rather than the disturbers of the household peace, and justify their deeds by emphasising their own suffering. Miggs, when she is rebuked for her obsequious eloquence by her master, cries that "if I give offence by having consideration for my mistress, I do not ask your pardon, but am content to get myself into trouble and to be in suffering" (*BR* 104), and groans as if her cry is wrung from her by "the dreadful brutality of that monster master" (*BR* 105). Likewise, Mrs Varden blames her husband, stating that he cannot understand "what a woman suffers when she is waiting at home under such circumstances" (*BR* 158). Their "talent of assault under the mask of sympathy" (*BR* 230) is of such a refined character that even when Dolly falls into a swoon, it is "rendered clear to the meanest capacity, that Mrs Varden was the sufferer" (*BR* 229). She preaches fortitude and forbearance to her daughter by proclaiming her own virtue, and Miggs talks volubly to the same effect. The narrative continues as follows: "When Miggs finished her solo, her mistress struck in again, and the two together performed a duet to the same purpose; the burden being, that Mrs Varden was persecuted perfection, and Mr Varden, as the representative of mankind in that apartment, a creature of vicious and brutal habits, utterly insensible to the blessings he enjoyed" (*BR* 230). Thus, their evasion of responsibility for throwing the family into a chaotic disorder again takes the shape of the same kind of fabrication as seen in Rudge's murder and Chester's plot—a reversal in the victim-perpetrator relationship, an evil so prevalent in the novel that it seems as if society as a whole is undermined by it.

However, the analogy between these two women and Chester goes much further than this, for they both are self-professed Protestants. This common feature should not be overlooked, because without it, there is virtually nothing in the novel that directly connects the first part of the novel with the dominant subject of the latter part, the religious fanaticism of Protestantism. The narrator observes that Mrs Varden, whose favourite book is the Protestant Manual, is "most devout when most ill-tempered" (*BR* 85), and Miggs too is, according to Mrs Varden's opinion, a "sound" (*BR* 384) Protestant; Chester opposes the marriage of his son to a Catholic girl, on the ground of their being Protestants: "You ought to be so very Protestant, coming of such a Protestant family as you do" (*BR* 176). As one can easily note, their faith is only skin-deep, and it is through their analogy with Rudge that we can recognise their religious deception most infallibly. Rudge can be regarded as the most daring atheistic character, since he never repents his sin, and his last words in the novel are "I curse the hour that I was born, the man I slew, and all the living world!" (*BR* 661). And as we have seen, Rudge, Mrs Varden, Miggs, and Chester all similarly use the same strategy of shifting responsibility to victims. The close affinity between the novel's most blasphemous villain and the outwardly zealous Christians inevitably reveals the moral vanity of the latter, and similarly indicates that the following explosion of the religious revolt is hardly motivated by the Protestant cause in substance, but instigated and manipulated solely by self-interest purposes of the deceptive villains.

III. A Plot Analysis (2): The Public Sphere

In the second half of the novel, the same theme of deception and disguise, which had been observed throughout the private sphere reappears in the larger public event, the Gordon Riots.[11] The riots were ostensibly an anti-Catholic protest, but in the narrator's view, the religious aspect was merely a pretence. Like other villains in the novel, the Great Protestant

Association brings a false charge against its victims the Catholics, and by doing so rapidly gains popularity.

> But when vague rumours got abroad, that in this Protestant association a secret power was mustering against the government for undefined and mighty purposes; when the air was filled with whispers of a confederacy among the Popish powers to degrade and enslave England, establish an inquisition in London, and turn the pens of Smithfield market into stakes and cauldrons; when terrors and alarms which no man understood were perpetually broached, both in and out of Parliament, by one enthusiast who did not understand himself, and bygone bugbears which had lain quietly in their graves for centuries, were raised again to haunt the ignorant and credulous; when all this was done, as it were, in the dark, [. . .] then the mania spread indeed, and the body, still increasing every day, grew forty thousand strong. (*BR* 347-48)

As a consequence, Protestant believers are led to look on Catholics "as wolves and beasts of prey" (*BR* 403) by Gashford, the chief instigator of the Riots, as Haredale denounces. However, Dickens resorts to the very same bestial imagery when he describes the uncontrollable Protestant rioters in the later chapters: when the door of the House of Commons opens, the crowd thronged outside grows "more wild and savage, like beasts at the sight of prey" (*BR* 454), and at the gates of Newgate Prison, the mob "howled like wolves" (*BR* 576) in the whirl of frenzied indignation. Dickens's application of the same metaphor in the totally opposite context again exposes the reversal of the relation between oppressor and victim, and ultimately the hollowness and falseness of the rioters' self-proclaimed sublime cause. After all, the Gordon Riots too suffers from the same issue of identity discordance in the sense that its true nature is obfuscated by its outward religious pretext. And none of the central figures of the riots themselves remain unaffected by such duplicity of identity.

Ostensibly the head of the rioters is Lord Gordon, but he is only an imbecile, weak-minded puppet. His madness and conceit prevent him from seeing and understanding himself objectively, and because of this nature he is easily deluded into believing himself to be "[t]he saviour of his country and his country's religion, the friend of his poor countrymen, the enemy of the proud and harsh; beloved of the rejected and oppressed, adored by forty thousand bold

and loyal English hearts" (*BR* 343)—in short, he accepts this ridiculously idolised self-image as real. Still, as Dickens explains in his letter to Forster that "he must have been at heart a kind man, and lover of the despised and rejected, after his own fashion" (*L2*: 294-95), in *Barnaby Rudge*, the portrayal of this historical figure is quite sympathetic:

> This lord was sincere in his violence and in his wavering. A nature prone to false enthusiasm, and the vanity of being a leader, were the worst qualities apparent in his composition. All the rest was weakness—sheer weakness; and it is the unhappy lot of thoroughly weak men, that their very sympathies, affections, confidences—all the qualities which in better constituted minds are virtues—dwindle into foibles, or turn into downright vices. (*BR* 346)

It is his secretary Gashford who pulls strings behind the scenes. Like Chester, his counterpart in the first half of the novel, there is "a remarkable contrast" (*BR* 342) between his outward attitude and his treacherous, cunning nature. On the surface he is very obsequious and never spares flattery, but again like Chester, his duplicity becomes most conspicuous when he attempts to conceal his mean spirit by projecting it on others: he gets rid of John Grueby, a truly loyal servant of Gordon, by implanting in his master's mind the false impressions that this man is a "most ungrateful fellow" and "a spy" (*BR* 521), neither of which is applicable to Grueby; on the contrary, it is Gashford himself who deserves such disgrace, considering his past betrayal of his benefactor, and later desertion of his master and subsequent wretched career as a governmental eavesdropper. Thus, as elsewhere in the novel, the false accusation made against his opponent turns out to be nothing but a reflection of the corrupted nature of the informant himself.

The ludicrous nature of Gordon is exaggerated in the delineation of the character of Simon Tappertit, the leader of a secret society named 'Prentice Knights (later renamed as The United Bulldog), and the frustrated apprentice of Gabriel Varden, who waits eagerly for the chance to give vent to his discontent and desire for vengeance. In the case of Sim, it is his blind vanity, rather than pure insanity, that blurs the perception of his own identity, as demonstrated by his absurd self-admiration of his legs, which are, according to the narrator, nothing but the

"perfect curiosities of littleness" (*BR* 79). His conceit is encouraged and developed by the members of the 'Prentice Knights, especially Stagg, the shrewd blind man who later becomes the conspirator of Rudge. Comparable relationships can be found anywhere in the novel: Gashford and Lord Gordon, Miggs and Mrs Varden, or, in a more spiteless form, the regular customers at the Maypole Inn and John Willet. Stagg openly praises Sim as the possessor of "twin invaders of domestic peace" (*BR* 111), but, in truth, he has no difficulty in perceiving that his captain is mere a "conceited, bragging, empty-headed, duck-legged idiot" (*BR* 118). After all, the secret society sets up Sim as the captain not because he is morally or physically superior to the rest of them, but only because he is able to forge the door-keys for the whole society. And Sim's identity as "the leader of a great people, the captain of a noble band" (*BR* 543) is, like his forged "clumsy large-sized key" (*BR* 108), not authentic, and can be easily broken.

The inconsistent and self-contradictory nature of the Gordon Riots is also symbolically represented in the character of Dennis the hangman. He takes a major part in the no-popery movement in order to preserve the old social system that enables him to serve as a hangman, which he calls "sound, Protestant, constitutional, English work" (*BR* 354). However, he tries to conceal his identity as a public executioner so as to avoid suspicion of his fellow rioters, because there are "popular prejudices" (*BR* 360) against his profession. For this reason, while he assists the rioters in attacking Newgate Prison, he is bound to turn down the mob's request for the release of the condemned criminals. With the underlying consciousness that he partakes in the riots solely for the purpose of protecting and preserving his country, Dennis does not have the smallest doubt as to his acquittal and discharge even after his arrest. Such incompatible double-sidedness, however, is the cause of the hangman himself finally being hanged for breaking the law, even though he has done so with the intention of upholding the established social order.

However ardently Dennis protests his patriotism, the motives behind his action are revealed to derive from his sadistic nature, whether in the case of the executions he performs or his participation in the rebellion. Being a public executioner, Dennis is, unlike Rudge, a sanctioned murderer; yet, they both elude the responsibilities for their deeds through the same process of making their innocent victims appear guilty. His loquacious speech about Mary Jones appears to suggest that not a few of the condemned criminals he has executed were nothing more than petty criminals, who were more sinned against than sinning:

> 'Well, say fifty. Parliament says, "If any man, woman, or child, does anything again any one of them fifty acts, that man, woman, or child, shall be worked off by Dennis." [. . .] and sometimes he [George the Third] throws me in one over that I don't expect, as he did three year ago, when I got Mary Jones, a young woman of nineteen who come up to Tyburn with a infant at her breast, and was worked off for taking a piece of cloth off the counter of a shop in Ludgate Hill, and putting it down again when the shopman see her; and who had never done any harm before, and only tried to do that, in consequence of her husband having been pressed three weeks previous, and she being left to beg, with two young children—as was proved upon the trial. Ha ha!—Well! That being the law and the practice of England, is the glory of England, an't it, Muster Gashford?' (*BR* 354-55)

Dickens seems to confer a specific importance to the episode of Mary Jones. In the preface he emphatically states that Dennis's allusions to the condition of his business in England in eighteenth century is authentic, and asserts that the case of Mary Jones too is not an invention. Then Dickens further gives a full account of the case of Mary Jones, quoting the speech of Sir William Meredith in Parliament. Considering her episode occupies only a minor, trivial position in the novel, Dickens's obsession with this detail at first may appear nothing but superfluous. However, when we recall how many characters in *Barnaby Rudge* are falsely accused like her, it begins to form an important part of the subject of the novel. Dennis, "an emblem of corruption" (Hollingsworth 179), enjoys prosperity at the sacrifice of his unjustly accused victims, which ultimately means that Rudge's murder and the social condition of England, that is, the violation of law and the very law system itself are substantively the same, however paradoxical it may sound. Indeed, Sir William Meredith, a Whig politician,

denounced this social injustice in his parliament speech in 1877, juxtaposing the two *murders*: "Take all the circumstances together, I do not believe that a fouler murder was ever committed against law, than the murder of this woman by law" (238).

While the lack of consistent identity makes Dennis a macabre, yet comic character, the same problem makes Hugh of the Maypole in a way the most tragic figure in the novel, despite the fact that he is, as Steve Marcus observes, "ultimately indifferent to his own existence" (198). In his case, the father-son relationship is again at the core of his identity issue. Throughout the novel, he bluntly denies his father, insisting that "I have no other name" (*BR* 241) but the name of Hugh. However, when his secret of birth comes to light, there is no room for doubt that the whole life of Hugh has pivoted upon his identity as the illegitimate son of Chester, which is imposed upon him regardless of his own will. All misery and wretchedness in his life are attributable to the irresponsible fatherhood of Chester—his orphanhood, instinctive submission to Chester (upon which he significantly remarks that Hugh carries "two faces" (*BR* 378)), and participation in the Riot—these are directly or indirectly determined almost solely under the influence of his father, whose family name otherwise might have been his "other name". Finally, Hugh is enlightened as to his true identity, but only when his death on the scaffold becomes inevitable.

The uncertainty of identity seen in the rioters and its instigators appears to be a reflection of the characteristic of the Riots itself, which, as we have discussed, also suffers from the discrepancy between appearance and reality, or "base instincts and their religious disguise" (Walder 96). In the preface, Dickens states the Gordon Riots teaches an important lesson that "*what we falsely call a religious cry* is easily raised by men who have no religion, and who in their daily practice set at nought the commonest principles of right and wrong" (*BR* 40, italics mine). The same phrase can be found in the execution scene, the novel's satiric climax: "In a word, those who suffered as rioters were, for the most part, the weakest, meanest, and most

miserable among them. It was a most exquisite satire upon *the false religious cry* which had led to so much misery, that some of these people owned themselves to be Catholics, and begged to be attended by their own priests" (*BR* 698, italics mine). It is a sheer irony that Catholics are executed for participating in anti-Catholic riots, a fact which discloses the falsity of mob violence in the name of religion. At the same time, it is the most absurd case in the novel of the deceptive reversal of the positions of victim and victimiser, the theme raised by the initial murder plot.

Thus, the problem of identity confusion introduced at the beginning permeates throughout the book in various forms, and those who lack the ability to penetrate the villainous disguise can be deceived with ease, and set up as scapegoats or some fit instruments for the evil purposes. The villainous deceptions are effectively represented through the metaphorical and literal use of clothes: the false accusation against the gardener is misled by the exchange of clothes with the true murderer; Chester beguiles others by means of his "masked" (*BR* 144) gentility; the Gordon Riots is described as "the mantle of religion, assumed to cover the ugliest deformities" (*BR* 415); even the beloved daughter of the locksmith appears to deceive young men with her beautiful attire—at least in the eyes of Miggs, whose face is expressive of "knowing how all this loveliness was got up, and of being in the secret of every string and pin and hook and eye, and of saying it ain't half as real as you think, and I could look quite as well myself if I took the pains!" (*BR* 160). That probably explains why Barnaby, who, despite his madness, is endowed with an ability to see beneath the surface and instinctively grasps the true nature of things,[12] links clothes with the act of deception: to him the animated garments are dancing and leaping, "to make believe they are in sport" (*BR* 133), or rolling and gambolling, "delighted with the mischief they've been plotting" (*BR* 133). Thus, Barnaby's vision can be read as a subtle, unintentional warning against the prevailing malice and evil designs.[13]

However, it is equally true that Barnaby himself is quite passive and even submissive to the controlling influence of the evil in the real world, as we have already seen. When his mother admonishes him that in seeking gold, people often find too late that "it glitters brightest at a distance, and turns quite dim and dull when handled" (*BR* 420), he cannot understand what it really means. Here we can find a subtle reverberation of Chester's philosophy of life, through an association with the motif of counterfeit money, another symbol of disguised identity of the novel:[14]

> The world is a lively place enough, in which we must accommodate ourselves to circumstances, sail with the stream as glibly as we can, be content to take froth for substance, the surface for the depth, the counterfeit for the real coin. I wonder no philosopher has ever established that our globe itself is hollow. It should be, if Nature is consistent in her works. (*BR* 145)

Such an attitude embodies the moral obfuscation of the world of *Barnaby Rudge*. The counterfeit prospers at the cost of the genuine, seducing, by false radiance, those who can be easily dazzled—like Barnaby, who is taken advantage of his childish desire for gold "shining at our feet" (*BR* 428), or Lord Gordon, who is led to believe that his anti-Catholic movement will bring "the light and glory" (*BR* 338) to the people. They are deceived in spite of, or rather because of their innocence.

In such a disjointed world where confusion prevails and no fixed, stable sense of identity is guaranteed, essentially social order can be restored only by those who are capable of acting on the basis of firm principles of morality and righteousness, such as Edward Chester and Joe Willet: "Times are changed, Mr Haredale, and times have come when we ought to know friends from enemies, and make no confusion of names" (*BR* 612). Thus the important moral lesson of the novel is presented: to know others, and, no less importantly, to know oneself.[15] This is exactly the reason Dolly Varden thanks Joe: "You have taught me," she says, "to know myself, and your worth; to be something better than I was; to be more deserving of your true and manly nature. In years to come, dear Joe, you shall find that you have done so" (*BR* 703).

Thus, as the book deals with the question of identity confusion as the crucial conflict, it comes as no surprise that the poetic justice of *Barnaby Rudge* is achieved by the deprivation and loss of identity on the part of the murderous villains and the rioters.[16]

Again, Rudge is a typical example of this. His feigned death results in the deconstructing and dissolving of his identity, hinted by the fact that nowhere in the novel do we find Rudge called by his name in the narrator's description: while the murder mystery is unsolved, he is only referred to as "the stranger" (*BR* 48) or "the traveller" (*BR* 64), but after the truth becomes known to the reader, he is still called "the prisoner (*BR* 563), "the murderer" (*BR* 584), or "his [Barnaby's] father" (*BR* 613), and remains unnamed. His accomplice Stagg calls him "Rudge" but hastily adds that "but I'll not call you that again" (*BR* 562). It is as if the deprivation of identity, which Rudge has imposed upon the gardener, eventually falls upon the murderer himself. In fact, the last moment of Rudge curiously echoes that of the gardener, a scene burned deeply into the murderer's consciousness:

> 'Fancy! Do I fancy that I killed him? Do I fancy that as I left the chamber where he lay, I saw the face of a man peeping from a dark door, who plainly showed me by his fearful looks that he suspected what I had done? Do I remember that I spoke fairly to him—that I drew nearer—nearer yet—with the hot knife in my sleeve? Do I fancy how *he* died? Did he stagger back into the angle of the wall into which I had hemmed him, and, bleeding inwardly, stand, not fall, a corpse before me? Did I see him, for an instant, as I see you now, erect and on his feet—but dead!' (*BR* 560-61)

While he repeatedly emphasises the erect posture of the dead victim, later the murderer himself becomes an upright corpse on the gallows, which is presumably "erect" *but not* "on his feet". Thus, the tableaux-like death scene of the unnamed gardener appears to predict the inevitable fate of the murderer himself.

Whether it is mere instruments of the greater evil, or those who manipulate them behind the scenes—most of the rioters and the plotters trace the same footsteps: they are deprived of their identities, and each of them dies, as it were, a nobody. Sylvère Monod criticises the final chapters after the riots as superfluous, complaining that Dickens's propensity to give

meticulously detailed accounts of what has become of every character results in "tiresome passages" (191), but these villains' fates deserve careful observation in that their deaths and what follows curiously exhibit the similar pattern. Most lucidly, Hugh, who previously said "I have no other name" (*BR* 241), ends up being buried as a "nameless man" (*BR* 713); Gashford takes poison at an obscure inn in the Borough where he is unknown, and it is reported that there is "no clue to his name" (*BR* 733) when his body is found. Like the double murderer, these two characters literally die nameless.

The punishment inflicted upon Sim Tappertit is also in a sense the deprivation of his identity—in his case, the very foundation of his existence is irrevocably lost: "his legs—his perfect legs, the pride and glory of his life, the comfort of his existence—crushed into shapeless ugliness" (*BR* 647). Although he is at last discharged by proclamation—it is noteworthy that a nameless boy "with a leg of wood" (*BR* 698) is hanged in Bloomsbury Square, as if executed in his stead—his renewed life is far from enviable. There is no room for self-deception or delusion, since his "two wooden legs" (*BR* 734) are now in the constant danger of being taken off, as a means of ultimate retaliation by his wife.

Dennis, who has put many criminals to death, in the end falls victim to the Tyburn tree. For him, the only way left to explain his predicament is to separate his identity as Dennis the hangman from Dennis the rioter, or, to be more precise, his execution does not totally make sense to him unless others do not see him as he sees himself: "The King and Government can't know it's me; I'm sure they can't know it's me; or they never would bring me to this dreadful slaughterhouse. They know my name, but they don't know it's the same man" (*BR* 693-94). By then he is well aware that he will be worked off at the hands of another hangman, who should find great pleasure in execution, as Dennis himself used to. He had often talked of his job "as if it was a treat" (*BR* 685), and this makes his agony all the worse: "'I an't unconsistent,' screamed the miserable creature; 'I'd talk so again, if I was hangman. Some other man has got

my old opinions at this minute. That makes it worse. Somebody's longing to work me off. I know by myself that somebody must be!'" (*BR* 685). Just as Rudge has taken the place of the gardener by changing clothes, now another hangman is about to fill Dennis's shoes. After a desperate but useless petition, Dennis is so horrified that he calls his execution "murder" (*BR* 694), and eventually sinks down as "a mere heap of clothes" (*BR* 694) between the two attendants. In *Oliver Twist*, condemned criminals are similarly changed "from strong and vigorous men to dangling heaps of clothes" (*OT* 414) by execution, but what makes Dennis's last moment in the novel particularly ironic is, that his clothes are no more than booty and loot that used to belong to other people. His wardrobes, handkerchief, smalls, coat, shoes, and hat are all taken from his executed victims, which again indicates that Dennis's identity is formed through the sacrifice of others.[17] Therefore, the moment he ceases to be a hangman, he no longer has a distinct identity, but becomes "a mere heap of clothes," each item of which is not his own, but in fact belonged to others. Although the historical Edward Dennis was reprieved and pardoned, "so that he could hang his fellow rioters" (Bleackley 130), Dickens chose to alter this historical fact in *Barnaby Rudge*, in order to make him reap what he has sown.

Even in his last moment, Chester tries to keep a tight hold on his facade gentility, but this time he definitely fails to present himself as he wants to be seen. The grotesque disparity between his mask and the real face behind it creates a monstrous vision:

> Raising himself upon his hands, he gazed at him for an instant, with scorn and hatred in his look; but, seeming to remember, even then, that this expression would distort his features after death, he tried to smile, and, faintly moving his right hand, as if to hide his bloody linen in his vest, fell back dead—the phantom of last night. (*BR* 731)

Two days elapse before his dead body is discovered, and as soon as it is recognised and carried home, his valet Peak, "true to his master's creed, eloped with all the cash and movables he could lay his hands on, and started as a finished gentleman upon his own account" (*BR* 731), and when he almost succeeds in marrying an heiress, he dies of "the jail fever" (*BR* 731).

Although the account of Peak's renewed life is only briefly given, it is enough to know that he goes the way of his master: in his first appearance, he is introduced as a servant who is "to the full as cool and negligent in his way as his master" (*BR* 234); apparently he is a "mere fortune-hunter" (*BR* 174) like his master; and his death by the jail fever is what Chester had feared (when he is informed that Gabriel Varden comes from Newgate, he hastily orders Peak to sprinkle his dressing-gown and the bedding with camphor). Thus, it can be concluded that Peak, "the faithful valet" (*BR* 731) supplants the identity of his master as "a finished gentleman" (*BR* 731), while Chester, the principal villain of the novel, in the end falls a real victim, a target for exploitation, and his fortune, the sole purpose of his life is taken away by his servant. In this sense, this final episode again seems to be another variation of Rudge's murder. Indeed, considering the duel takes place at "the end of August" (*BR* 722) and the subsequent lapse of two days, it is not unlikely that the body of Chester, like that of the murdered gardener, begins to decompose to the extent that it is "scarcely to be recognised by his clothes" (*BR* 58). Peak's betrayal of Chester has scarcely attracted critical attraction up to now, but it should be noted that the juxtaposition of these two servants (Peak/ Rudge) who rebel against their masters (Chester/ Reuben Haredale) gives the novel a cyclical structure, which begins with one case of disguised identity and ends with another. Thus, in *Barnaby Rudge*, as John Bowen points out, "history is a repetitive and strangely doubled business. Instead of safely progressing, here things repeat and repeat. Character, names, events, all return or are in danger of returning" (Introduction xiv).

Such consciousness is further emphasised by Barnaby's pet raven, Grip, the most mystifying character of the novel.[18] Critics have often tended to put too much emphasis on his repeated self-introduction "I'm a devil" (*BR* 99), but we should also note that his self-styled identity actually becomes much more diversified and inconsistent as the novel proceeds:[19] for instance, during the Riots, Grip cries, as he sidles up to his master, that "I'm a devil, I'm a

Polly, I'm a kettle, I'm a Protestant, No Popery!" (*BR* 518). Thus, he, who is "inassimilable to rational or coherent explanation" (Bowen, Introduction xxviii), appears to assume an important symbolic role that stands for a confused, unfixed sense of identity. Barnaby himself seems to admit this: "you had good reason to ask me what he is, for sometimes it puzzles me" (*BR* 520). Then it should not go unnoticed that the book ends with the narrator's prophetic statement that "he has very probably gone on talking to the present time" (*BR* 738). Instead of assuring a genuinely optimistic future prospect, the concluding paragraph of *Barnaby Rudge* continues to cast doubt upon the notion of immutable, unshakable sense of identity through the voice of Grip. The murder mystery is solved, the Gordon Riots are put down, and the villains who have brought chaos and disorder to the world are all unmasked and punished, yet still there is no promise of an ultimate solution to the issue raised early in the novel; on the contrary, as its circular, repetitive structure implies, uncertainty about one's identity is presented as a fundamental condition of our existence, which is always vulnerable and ready to be exploited by the evil in disguise for their own selfish aims.[20] If one uncritically continues to accept a delusive, fabricated identity as real, and allow them to go unquestioned, the established social order will eventually be overthrown again. And even worse, where there is no order, law, justice or righteousness, there is no need for villains to hide their vile motives or feign civility at all: once the rebellious mob loses its control, giving free rein to anarchic destruction, there is, as the narrator observes, "not the least disguise or concealment" (*BR* 482), while an honest man like Joe Willet or Edward Chester has to throw himself into the frenzied crowd, disguising himself as "one of them" (*BR* 612).

* * * * *

Thomas Jackson Rice regards *Barnaby Rudge* as the end of Dickens's apprenticeship.[21] Indeed, Dickens's handling of the central theme distinctly provides a certain indication of

maturity as a novelist. It is true that, the novel, both in terms of form and content, may appear inconsistent and even disjointed, as many critics criticise. However, the above discussion has shown that the multiple characters and the plots otherwise quite disconnected are carefully integrated with the prevailing concern of disguise, deception, and confusion of identity. Supposing the murder mystery was created under the influence of Hogg's "The Bridal of Polmood", the basic idea introduced in that tale is much furthered by a richer amplification and variation in Dickens's work. And this thematic interest is also closely related with the structure of the novel itself, in which the latter part (the Gordon Riots) functions as a self-reflexive caricature of the former part (the murder mystery).

And this probably provides an explanation of Dickens's curiously generous reaction when an unauthorised stage adaptation *Barnaby Rudge: A Domestic Drama in Three Acts* by Charles Selby and Charles Melville spoiled the murder mystery, by making it clear to the audience that Rudge was the true murderer. As we can see in Dickens's letter to Selby (which is quoted in Chapter 1 of this thesis),[22] his response to this matter is, to use McGowan's phrase, "oddly temperate" ("Mystery and History" 41): "It would be ridiculous for me to deny that I am always most intensely mortified and very much aggravated by having my stories anticipated in their course [. . .]. At the same time, I am far from blaming you in the matter, that if I could give you a patent for dramatising my productions I would gladly do so" (*L2*: 332-33). The murder plot is important so long as it raises the question concerning identity, and a mere prediction of the outcome would not undermine the value of his work significantly. In his later social novel *Bleak House* (1852-1853), Dickens again uses a mystery plot, the murder of Tulkinghorn and the criminal investigation by Inspector Bucket, and this time the detective sub-plot is more ingeniously interwoven into the satiric plot about the law's delay, without depending too much on sensational curiosity of the reader. Even Edmund Wilson, a self-professed hater of detective-fiction, praised the work, for the reason that "Dickens had invested

his plots with a social moral significance that made the final solution of the mystery a revelatory symbol of something that the author wanted seriously to say" (236).

Furthermore, Dickens's interest in historical fiction continued as well. In his later years, Dickens wrote his second historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). As we shall see in Chapter 4 of this thesis, in this novel Dickens deepened his investigation into the motif of resurrection, a subject which Dickens had already dealt with in the Rudge plot. What differentiates *A Tale of Two Cities* from *Barnaby Rudge* is that while the motif of feigning death in the latter novel rather reminds the reader of the deceptive act of the manipulative novelist, the resurrection theme in the former novel is metaphorically associated with the act of recalling, retelling, or reconstructing the past, and thus reflects Dickens's self-reflexive consciousness as the historical novelist. Thus, *Barnaby Rudge* is, besides the fact that is has an artistic value of its own, impossible to ignore as a preparatory work of the novelist's greatest achievements in the later career.

Notes

[1.] See Butt and Tillotson 76-89.

[2.] See Lindsay, "*Barnaby Rudge*" 94.

[3.] Among the earlier important critical contributions, see Harold F. Folland 407-08, Steven Marcus 169-212, James K. Gottshall 133-46, and Thomas Jackson Rice 172-84.

[4.] A similar point is made by Folland, who argues in his seminal essay that the organising ethical theme of the novel is "the evil of action divorced from responsibility" (408). While he emphasises on the complicated relationships between "the doer and his deed, deeds and their consequences, and the doer's responsibility for them" (407), this chapter will concentrate on the theme of confusion/ loss of identity.

[5.] Many critics have attempted to discover the unifying element that connects Rudge's murder plot and the main concern of the novel, the Gordon Riots. Some simply regard Rudge's murder as one of many examples of rebellion of servant against master: Marcus calls it "the ultimate act of rebellion" (178); John Lucas claims that the murder of Reuben Haredale suggests "the old system of society as much threatened from without as from within" (100); Rice also argues that "[t]he violent attacks of Sim and Hugh against their masters and the all-encompassing riots parallel the murderous revolt of Rudge that, in effect, opens the novel" (177). Others contend Rudge's crime is an embodiment of motiveless evil: according to Tracy, both Rudge and Gashford represent "motiveless malice and wickedness", and the murder case is "one more irrational element" ("Clock Work" 37) of the novel. McGowan makes a similar point, noting that "both examples seem to deny the existence of any previous generating moment or motive" ("Mystery and History" 40).

[6.] For Dickens's Gadshill library, see Stonehouse 59. The date of publication of the second volume of *Tales and Sketches* can be confirmed by *Bent's Monthly Literary Advertiser*, No. 138, issued on November, 1836, 129.

[7.] See Dickens, *Letters 1* 283.

[8.] Albert D. Pionke is one of the few critics to pay attention to Mary Rudge. He asserts that because she keeps her secret solely out of "a sense of wifely duty and fear" (40), the reader does not lose sympathy for her, in spite of her otherwise sinful secrecy.

[9.] Marcus argues that "somewhere amid his unregenerate perceptions is an instinct fear—that his son's manhood will someday bring about the loss of his own" (188).

[10.] An interesting point is made by John Bowen: he states that "[i]dentity, whether national or personal, constitutes itself largely through what it desires and what it rejects or expels" (Introduction xx), and further claims that the British national identity in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century was formed through the scapegoating and attack on Catholics.

[11.] Bowen makes reference to the motif of disguise as one of the thematic and figurative continuities across the two halves of the novel, noting that it contributes the establishment of "relations of analogy between private and public events" (*Other Dickens* 168).

[12.] For discussions of the title character, see Earle Davis 98, Natalie McKnight 81-91, and Juliet McMaster 1-17.

[13.] McKnight, in her discussion of Barnaby, points out that "Dickens' emblematic use of clothes in *Barnaby Rudge* seems to have been influenced by Carlyle, who, in *Sartor Resartus*, extensively develops the metaphor of clothes as surface, proclaiming the need to see beyond clothes, past surfaces in order to see a truer, more enduring reality" (82).

[14.] For instance, John Willet's lack of ability to perceive one's identity is exemplified by his extreme tardiness in examining "the goodness of any piece of coin that was proffered to him, by the application of his teeth or his tongue, or some other test, or in doubtful cases, by a long series of tests terminating in its rejection" (*BR* 59). In addition to this, Chester's reference to counterfeit coin subtly echoes the fate of Hugh's mother, who was executed "for passing bad notes" (*BR* 140), and thus appears to suggest a hidden relationship between them, as will be revealed later in the novel.

[15.] On this point, see Joseph Gold 124.

[16.] Concealing one's identity inevitably involves acting. In this sense, John Glavin also seems to associate disguising and decomposition of one's identity in *Barnaby Rudge*: "the self compelled to perform in a form not only other than its own, but distorting, and, if sustained, destructive of the self" ("Politics" 99).

[17.] As Goldie Morgentaler suggests, in Dennis's case, these clothes "do not so much stand for the human being who wears them; they obliterate them. The human is by definition expendable in this context, because he may be executed, whereas the clothing lives on after the man" (54).

[18.] Another interesting relationship between James Hogg and *Barnaby Rudge* can be found in

No. XIX (March 1829) of John Wilson's *Noctes Ambrosianae* (*Blackwood's Magazine*, 1822-1835), which contains dialogues between the quasi-fictional character "the Ettrick Shepherd" (based on Hogg) and loquacious birds:

> *Shepherd*. True enough, sir. If it wad but keep a gude tongue in its head—its's really a bonny cretur. What plumage! What'ill you hae, Polly, for sooper?
> *Parrot*.—
> Molly put the kettle on,
> Molly put the kettle on,
> Molly put the kettle on,
> And I shall have some punch.
> *Shepherd*. That's fearsome—Yet, whisht! What ither vice was that speakin? A gruff vice. There again! Whisht!
> *Voice*.— The devil he came to our town,
> And rode away wi' the exciseman!
> *Shepherd*. This room's no canny. I'm aff (rising to go). Mercy me! A raven hoppin aneath the sideboard! Look at him, how he turns his great big broad head to the ae side, and keeps regardin me wi' an evil eye! Satan!
> *North*. My familiar, James.
> *Shepherd*. Whence cam he?
> *North*. One gloomy night I heard him croaking in the garden.
> *Shepherd*. You did wrang, sir, –it was rash to let him in; wha ever heard o' a real raven in a suburban garden! It's some demon pretendin to be a raven. Only look at him wi' the silver ladle in his bill. Noo, he draps it, and is ruggin at the Turkey carpet, as if he were collecktin lining for his nest. Let alane the carpet, you ugly villain.
> *Raven*. The devil would a wooin go—ho—ho! the wooin, ho! (178-79)

The devilish raven and the parrot's refrain "Moly put the kettle on" remind us of Grip. James Frederick Ferrier, Wilson's son-in-law and the editor of *The Works of John Wilson*, comments that "Dickens' incomparable raven in *Barnaby Rudge* would have been quite at home in this party; and appears, indeed, to have taken a lesson in household economy from North's parrot" (179).

[19.] Most typically, Gottshall regards Grip as "a clear symbol of evil" (141). For similar arguments, see Harry Stone *Dicken*, 88, and Gordon Spence 16. However, as Jerome H. Buckley notes, actually the Grip is "neither truly diabolic nor effectively benevolent" and "remains throughout most of the narrative enigmatic and ambiguous" ("Quoth the Raven" 139). Recently critics try to explain his role from different perspectives: George Scott Christian

contends that the real significance of Grip is "as a mediator and projector of Dickens's comic perception of history in *Barnaby Rudge*" (54); Carolyn Williams claims that Grip functions as "an emblem of the Riots" (365), because he issues repetitive scraps of sound and speech which even he himself cannot understand, like the "No Popery" slogan in the Gordon Riot.

[20.] In fact, Dickens is so persistently obsessed with this theme in *Barnaby Rudge* that one may be tempted to seek its origin in the author's biographical context. As often pointed out, in describing the Gordon Riots, Dickens draws parallel between the historical and the contemporary events such as "Chartism and trade union of 1836-1841" (Brantlinger 84). Though it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the validity of this supposition, a lesser known personal affair of Dickens should be noted, for it might have an unignorable influence on the novel. In 1840, a year before the publication of the first serial of *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens wrote as following:

> A few days later (the 15th) he wrote: "I have been rather surprised of late to have applications from Roman Catholic clergymen, demanding (rather pastorally, and with a kind of grave authority) assistance, literary employment, and so forth. At length it struck me, that, through some channel or other, I must have been represented as belonging to that religion. Would you believe, that in a letter from Lamert, at Cork, to my mother, which I saw last night, he says, 'What do the papers mean by saying that Charles is demented, and, further, that he has turned Roman Catholic?'—!" (Forster 1: 134)

It is astonishing that in this short letter, there are almost all of major concerns of the novel: Catholic, madness, and fabrication of false identity. However, this is not the first time that Dickens was made the subject of the similar rumours. According to Forster, when his sister-in-law Mary Hogarth perished, his mental suffering was so intense that he was said to be "killed outright" (Forster 1: 134), "driven mad" (Forster 1: 134) and so on. It is no wonder such personal experiences made the subject matter of "The Bridal of Polmood" particularly interesting and inspiring for him. The experiences of distorted account of his personality being circulated in his absence inevitably remind us of the various corresponding instances in the novel: Edward Chester, who is rumoured to have "no heart at all" (*BR* 272), the gardener who

is considered the murderer after his death, or Barnaby, who, in spite of his insanity, is treated as a "sensible and self-possessed" (*BR* 446) person—a quite contrary situation to that of Dickens.

[21.] See Rice 184.

[22.] See page 55 of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3

ASPECTS OF SELF-PRESENTATION IN *DAVID COPPERFEILD*

Among Dickens's full-length novels, Harold Folland calls *Barnaby Rudge* "the awkward stepchild, impossible to ignore and difficult to love" (406). On the other hand, no one would deny that *David Copperfield* is arguably the most beloved child for the general readers. In the preface to the Charles Dickens Edition of *David Copperfield* published in 1869, a year before his death, the author himself expresses his particular fondness for his eighth full-length novel: "Of all my books, I like this the best. [. . .] [L]ike many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child. And his name is DAVID COPPERFIELD" (*DC* 47). The choice is scarcely surprising, especially considering that it brought him the highest literary reputation in his career,[1] and above all, it is Dickens's most autobiographical novel. Indeed, although he did not realise until Forster pointed out, the initial of the protagonist is the reversed version of the author's own.[2] In fact, *David Copperfield* contains more autobiographical elements than any other novels by Dickens. Famously, for instance, David's degrading experience as a worker at Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse is based almost entirely upon Dickens's real experience at Warren's blacking factory. A juxtaposition of two passages will testify how much this chapter in the novel owes to the author's childhood hardship. The former is Dickens's autobiographical fragment recorded in *The Life of Charles Dickens* by John Forster, and the latter is an extract from Chapter 11 of *David Copperfield*:

> The blacking warehouse was the last house on the left-hand side of the way, at old Hungerford Stairs. It was a crazy, tumble-down old house, abutting of course on the river, and literally overrun with rats. Its wainscoted rooms, and its rotten floors and staircase, and the old grey rats swarming down in the cellars, and the sound of their squeaking and scuffling coming up the stairs at all times, and the dirt and decay of the place, rise up visibly before me, as if I were there again. (Forster 1: 21)

> Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse was at the waterside. It was down in Blackfriars. [. . .] It was a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the tide was in, and on the mud when the tide was out, and literally overrun with rats. Its panelled rooms, discoloured with the dirt and smoke of a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant. (*DC* 208-09)

David's subsequent career also reflects Dickens's early work experiences. Dickens was employed as a shorthand reporter at Doctor's Commons, and similarly, although slight differently, David is at first apprenticed as a law clerk there, and then after his aunt's financial ruin, starts to learn stenography, which is, "about equal in difficulty to the mastery of six languages" (*DC* 590).

Moreover, David, like Dickens, eventually becomes a successful professional novelist. Such being the case, we may well be tempted to seek Dickens's direct comments on his own philosophy of composition or aesthetics of the novel in *David Copperfield*. Such attempts, however, are doomed to disappointment. This is because like Dickens in his real life, the novelist David is quite reticent on his own creative activity. In Chapter 48, David makes it clear that "[i]t is not my purpose, in this record, though in all other essentials it is my written memory, to pursue the history of my own fictions. They express themselves, and I leave them to themselves. When I refer to them, incidentally, it is only as a part of my progress" (*DC* 758). Near the end of the novel, he repeats his resolution: "In pursuance of my intention of referring to my own fictions only when their course should incidentally connect itself with the progress of my story, I do not enter on the aspirations, the delights, anxieties, and triumphs of my art" (*DC* 917). Then he gets rid of the subject by concluding that "[i]f the books I have written be of any worth, they will supply the rest. I shall otherwise have written to poor purpose, and the rest will be of interest to no one" (*DC* 917). As Dianne F Sadoff notes, whenever other characters refer to David's job, they remark "not on the significance or content of those novels but on their author's growing fame" (42). One of the rare comments upon the contents of David's fictional works is made by Mr Omer the undertaker, but sounds somewhat contrived: "What a lovely work that was of yours! What expressions in it! I read it every word—every word. And as to feeling sleepy! Not at all!" (*DC* 801). With this minor exception, the only clue or proof of David's talent and ability as a novelist may perhaps be *David Copperfield* itself, his

"written memory" (*DC* 758), which, according to the full title, "he never meant to be published on any account".

However, we must also attend to the fact that, after all, David Copperfield and Charles Dickens cannot be completely identical, and the author of the novel himself should have been aware of it. This partly explains why as David's narrative moves closer to the present moment of his life, Dickens appears to become much more reluctant to describe the detail of David's domestic and professional life (in fact, all we learn from the penultimate two chapters is that David has been married "ten happy years" and blessed with three children, and "advanced in fame and fortune" (*DC* 939). The rest of the chapters are wholly devoted to recording the fates of other characters). Then, it is important to note that as if to fill this fundamental gap between David and himself, Dickens creates diverse kinds of authorial doubles in the novel, so that he can express what he is unable to convey through the voice of David. For this reason, although the first-person protagonist offers little commentary directly on the subject of art or novel-writing, it is still possible for the reader to get a glimpse of what it means in this novel to express oneself—especially to write about his own life, as David does in *David Copperfield*, and as Dickens once tried to do in his autobiographical fragment.

First and foremost, the novel introduces various types of writers, and the reader can understand indirectly David's attitude towards self-expression through language, by his opinions and responses (which are sometimes critical) to them. Such writers include Mr Dick, whose attempt to write his Memorial is constantly hindered by his obsession with the head of King Charles the First. Dr Strong also devotes himself to an interminable attempt to write a Greek Dictionary (perhaps in vain, since at the end of the novel he is still "somewhere about the letter D" (*DC* 948)). Similarly, Mr Micawber seizes every opportunity to express himself in the form of loquacious, pompous letter. Many critics regard these three writers as crucial for grasping David's silence upon the subject of novel-writing. Alexander Welsh observes that in

the novel "every writer but the hero—or his muse—writes wildly or hopelessly" (116) and suggests that "[t]he very refusal of the narrator to tell his professional writing bespeaks confidence" (116). Baumgarten Murray argues that "[e]specially for the three central writers in this novel, what counts is not the content but the act. That is one reason David does not dwell on the subjects of his tales. What is important is the rite of writing itself" ("Writing and *David*" 44). Furthermore, Kenneth M. Sroka points out that these minor authors "emphasize by contrast the value of David's authorship. David's completed pages define his heroism, the courageous and meticulous sorting out of his own life" ("Dickens's Metafiction" 50). Sadoff claims that these writers "all identify through metaphor the doubleness of language, its insufficiency as a vehicle of the self-made man and the failure of the writer to father himself" (45), but David, on the other hand, in writing the story of his life, succeeds in "creat[ing] himself, giv[ing] birth to himself, engender[ing] and so father[ing] himself in language" (41). Thus, the silence of David upon his own writing is actually counterbalanced by these minor writers, and by comparing or contrasting them with the narrator, the reader is able to get insight into the meaning of self-expression for David Copperfield.

Furthermore, if we shift our focus from the act of writing to the act of self-expression in a broad sense, we can expand our scope of discussion to include many other minor characters in the novel, for in *David Copperfield* there are many who do not necessarily commit themselves to writing, but do explain or express themselves in language—a fact which has received less critical attention than deserved. As Robert M. DeGraaff exceptionally and rightly points out, "Almost every character in *Copperfield*, at some point in the story, explains him or herself. In so doing the character reveals a level of awareness beneath the external eccentricity, and to the extent that this self-articulation seems natural and convincing, becomes more realistically human for us" (215). Aunt Betsy, Annie Strong, Dora Spenlow, Miss Mowcher, Rosa Dartle, and Uriah Heep can be counted as such self-articulating characters, and their moments of self-

presentation not only add emotional depths to these characters, but also offer us various examples of, as it were, autobiography. Therefore, it can be said that in the similar way as the minor writers in the novel serve as foils to David the novelist, these minor "autobiographers" also have potential for contributing to a more thorough comprehension of David's act of writing about his own life.

This chapter of the thesis will analyse the characters' various attempts of self-expression depicted in the novel as self-referential narrative techniques adopted by the novelist David Copperfield.[3] We will begin our discussion with an investigation into the character of David, especially concentrating on his unstable identity and his role as an incapable observer. The rest of the first section will examine his processes of correcting his misjudgements of others, such as Aunt Betsey, Annie Strong, Rosa Dartle, and Uriah Heep with a focus on their acts of self-explanation. It will be then demonstrated that by recording these dramatic monologues, David indirectly tries to emphasise and justify the value of his own first-person autobiographical narrative. Taking into account the significance of these characters' self-explanation, we will turn our attention back to David's autobiographical narrative in the second section. A distinguished but overlooked feature of David's memoir is that David the narrator occasionally becomes keenly anxious about how he is seen (or read) by others besides himself. An analysis of this paradox will help us penetrate to the essence of David's first-person narrative. The third section will further investigate several dilemmas which David the narrator faces in his autobiographical enterprise. In addition to this, our discussion will refer to the authorial doubles of David (Micawber, Dr Strong, and Mr Dick), attempting to reveal that each of them casts light upon some distinctive features of David's self-expression. These arguments should help us understand the strategy of the whole novel, the fictional autobiography of David Copperfield.

I. An Analysis of Self-Articulating Characters

From the very beginning of the book, David himself somewhat anxiously questions the centrality of his role in his own autobiography: "WHETHER I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show" (*DC* 49). It does not take long before the reader learns that there is a sufficient ground for this apprehension of his own personal identity. Indeed, David's identity is as unstable as Barnaby Rudge, who, as we have seen in Chapter 2 of the thesis, suffers from an incompatible discrepancy between the real self and ideal or false self created by evil forces of the outer world.[4] The life of David Copperfield is a constant struggle against the external world which threatens the stability of his identity by imposing false, inauthentic ones upon him. It is a fact universally admitted by critics that, David's vulnerable identity is most apparent from his diverse names which his friends, acquaintances, and enemies bestow upon him.[5] As Sylvère Monod points out, almost every character has his or her own way of addressing the title character (302). His mother calls him "Davy" (*DC* 67), his kind, faithful housekeeper Clara Peggotty calls him "Master Davy" (*DC* 65), and to her family he is always "Mas'r Davy" (*DC* 78). Mr Murdstone, his cruel stepfather, is one of the few characters who calls him "David" (*DC* 95). Murdstone's friend, Mr Quinion, sneeringly nicknames him "Brooks of Sheffield" (*DC* 205). Aunt Betsey renames him "Trotwood Copperfield" (*DC* 271), which is soon abbreviated to "Trot" (*DC* 273). His friends like Mr Micawber and Tommy Traddles address him as "Copperfield" (*DC* 230, 463), while his elder schoolmate Steerforth patronisingly calls him "young Copperfield" (*DC* 137) at Salem House, and later "Daisy" (*DC* 349). Uriah Heep, Mr Wickfield's obsequious law clerk, irritates David by persistently calling him "Master Copperfield" even after he is grown up. His first wife, Dora Spenlow affectionately addresses him as "Doady", which is "a corruption of David" (*DC* 667). His landlady Mrs Crupp's peculiar way of addressing him is "Mr Copperful", presumably "in some indistinct association

with a washing-day" (*DC* 459). As Harry Stone suggests, names had special significance for Dickens: "The name was part of the thing itself: change the name and you change the thing, change the thing and you must change the name" ("What's in a Name" 194). In David's case, his various names signify uncertainty about his own gender, social status, and maturity, and as long as he allows other people to call him by these various, inconsistent names, the achievement of a stable, fixed identity appears to be out of his reach.

In addition to this, David has another good reason for doubting whether he is really the hero of his own life. As the narrative proceeds, the passivity of David becomes so conspicuous that the reader may be inclined to cast a doubt on whether he is truly the protagonist of this novel. In fact, at some points David curiously keeps himself from intervening in the affairs of his close friends and acquaintances, and seems to be just content with his role as a bystander. For example, David does not ask any question when Aunt Betsey is haunted and frightened by a mysterious man, who later turns out to be her former husband. Likewise, although he is vaguely suspicious of Annie Strong's adultery against her husband, he never meddles with their domestic discordance until he feels that "it would be mistaken faith and delicacy to conceal it any longer" (*DC* 726). He ignores Mrs Micawber's impending but somewhat incomprehensible solicitation for help, because of his absorption in his own affairs and his "hearing nothing more" (*DC* 773). Even when Uriah Heep confides to him his secret ambition to marry Agnes Wickfield, he restrains himself from giving her any warning, lest it should injure her feelings. The elopement of Em'ly, his childhood sweetheart, with Steerforth wounds him deeply, but he does not take much effort to seek her, except bringing together her surrogate father Mr Peggotty and Martha Endell, the penitent prostitute who is eager to help him. Probably the most puzzling behaviour of the hero is his reluctance to rescue Em'ly when at last he finds her in Chapter 50. While Rosa Dartle is savagely insulting and tormenting her, all that David can do is to hide behind the door and overhear their conversation, for the reason

that he feels he has no right to present himself, but "it was for Mr Peggotty alone to see her and recover her" (*DC* 786).[6] As if to confirm the hero's helplessness, an interesting point is made by Jerome H. Buckley, that "'I' and 'My' dominate the early chapter headings, and in the first half of the novel the narrator is indeed usually at the center of the action; but in the last half, where the first person rarely enters the titles, David sometimes seems to have become simply the recessive spectator" ("Identity" 35). In fact, in the latter half of the book, there are only three chapter titles with "I"—"I am Involved in Mystery" (Chapter 49), "I assist at an Explosion" (Chapter 52), and "I am shown Two Interesting Penitents" (Chapter 61)—and they all indicate the protagonist's passiveness or subordinate role in his narrative. It is no wonder that Q. D. Leavis complained that "[w]hile Dickens was a colourful personality David is colourless and intentionally uninteresting in himself—only a type" (46).

Thus, throughout his life, David oscillates between his role as the protagonist—the hero of his own life—and his role as a passive, helpless bystander, and at the beginning of his narrative he still does not know to which he ultimately belongs. He is, in other words, "unsure whether he is the agent that drives the narrative of his own life story, or whether he is merely an observer at the window" (Wilson-Bates 91). Therefore, for him, writing an autobiography does not simply mean recalling or recording the events of the past, but by doing so, he recreates the past, and more importantly, reconstructs himself. And this probably explains why he initially declares that "these pages must show" (*DC* 49) whether he shall turn out to be the hero of his own life or not. As Sadoff points out, "the account of David's past will cause the past, not simply recollect it. In writing the story of his life, David will thus create himself, give birth to himself, engender and so father himself in language" (41). Then, the very lack of stability of identity forms his central motivation for telling his personal history, rather than dissuades him from it—he needs to write his autobiography in order to achieve it. In this way,

in this *Bildungsroman*, the issue of self-presentation—how to present himself in language—is, inseparably connected with the protagonist's identity formation.

It is significant to note, then, that even when David appears to be "the recessive spectator" (Buckley "Identity" 35), this theme of self-presentation does not lose its importance. To put it more concretely, while the various sub-plots and episodes involving other characters may seem to decentre the hero, they in fact indirectly reinforce and emphasise the need to express oneself in language. The individual histories of the minor characters such as Betsey Trotwood, Annie Strong, Dora Spenlow, Miss Mowcher, Uriah Heep, and Rosa Dartle may not be themselves important in the progress of the story of David's life, but they repeatedly and consistently teach him an essential lesson: one's identity can be easily misunderstood or misconstrued, unless one's personal history, background, experiences, and opinions are lucidly expressed in his or her own words. Their acts of self-articulation offer David opportunities to get deeper insight into their inner worlds which otherwise might remain inscrutable. They thus appear to highlight the necessity for David to do the same thing, if he wishes to present a distinct, unmistakable identity to others, which is, as we have seen, exactly what he tries to achieve through writing his autobiography. The following argument will examine the attempts of self-presentation by various characters surrounding the protagonist, probing what they will reveal about David's own writing about his own life.

The first character in the novel whose personal history is introduced to the reader is not David, but Betsey Trotwood, his great-aunt, who offered protection of the expected baby, but on hearing that the newborn was a boy, not a girl as she had anticipated, she left Blunderstone Rookery indignantly, never to return. In the first chapter "I am Born", David gives a brief account of her life before he enters into the detail of the event of his own birth. She had been married to a husband younger than herself, but divorced on the ground of ill-treatment by him.

According to "a wild legend" (*DC* 51) in the Copperfield family, her husband then went to India, and was "once seen riding on an elephant, in company with a Baboon" (*DC* 51), but dead within ten years. Upon the separation, Aunt Betsey took her maiden name again, and since then has lived a secluded life in "a cottage in a hamlet on the sea-coast a long way off" (*DC* 51).

What is important about Aunt Betsey is that David's impression (and probably also the reader's) of her gradually changes over the course of the novel. At first, David knows her only from hearsay. Aunt Betsey as described in Chapter 1 is, as Tobias Wilson-Bates points out, "not the narrator's memory, but is rather a borrowed memory from a subjectivity outside of the fictional author" (91). Significantly, despite the fact that later she becomes David's surrogate mother, Aunt Betsey's viewpoint is carefully excluded from the narrative of the first chapter. Accordingly, the reader, like young David, has to infer her personality from the fragmented accounts of Clara Copperfield, Peggotty, Ham, and Mr Chillip, each of whom she overpowered and frightened tremendously. In fact, during the short stay, she made Clara Copperfield cry, attacked Peggotty's name because it sounded unchristian, "pounced upon" (*DC* 59) Ham Peggotty, perturbed Mr Chillip by her alarming conduct, and finally left them all "like a discontented fairy; or like one of those supernatural beings" (*DC* 60). Understandably, young David's judgement of her is biased and not very favourable—he recognised her as "a dread and awful personage" (*DC* 232). At the same time, one trivial detail in his mother's tale leaves a different, lasting impression on him, too: "she had a fancy that she felt Miss Betsey touch her hair, and that with no ungentle hand" (*DC* 53). And this gives him "some faint shadow of encouragement" (*DC* 232) when he determines to run away from Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse and seek shelter in her house at Dover. As a result of this resolution, he makes another beginning under her protection, and gradually learns that in spite of her many

eccentricities, Aunt Betsey is actually an affectionate, benevolent person "to be honoured and trusted in" (*DC* 262).

Still, David's comprehension of her personality is not completed until her past life is revealed through her own words. There are a couple of occasions when Aunt Betsey tells David the story of her life. In Chapter 23, she describes herself as "an old woman whose prime of life was not so happy or conciliating as it might have been" (*DC* 407). Although at this point she is apparently reluctant to give him a detailed explanation of what happened in her "prime of life", David comments that "[i]t was the first time I had heard my aunt refer to her past history. There was a magnanimity in her quiet way of doing so, and of dismissing it, which would have exalted her in my respect and affection, if anything could" (*DC* 407). It is much later in the novel that she confides the whole story of her unfortunate marriage to David. In Chapter 47, she further confesses that her husband has not been dead, and her love for him has not entirely ceased, a fact which refutes the "wild legend" (*DC* 51) in the Copperfield family given in the first chapter of the novel:

> 'Betsey Trotwood don't look a likely subject for the tender passion,' said my aunt, composedly, 'but the time was, Trot, when she believed in that man most entirely. When she loved him, Trot, right well. When there was no proof of attachment and affection that she would not have given him. He repaid her by breaking her fortune, and nearly breaking her heart. So she put all that sort of sentiment, once and for ever, in a grave, and filled it up, and flattened it down.'
> [. . .]
> 'He is nothing to me now, Trot—less than nothing. But, sooner than have him punished for his offences (as he would be if he prowled about in this country), I give him more money than I can afford, at intervals when he reappears, to go away. I was a fool when I married him; and I am so far an incurable fool on that subject, that, for the sake of what I once believed him to be, I wouldn't have even this shadow of my idle fancy hardly dealt with. For I was in earnest, Trot, if ever a woman was.' (*DC* 757)

She concludes her autobiographical narrative by saying that "[t]his is my grumpy, frumpy story, and we'll keep it to ourselves, Trot!' (*DC* 757). As DeGraaff suggests, through Aunt Betsey's moments of self-articulation, Dickens engages his readers "in a collaborative process of filling in the depth of character which he has suggested but not directly expressed" (220).

Thus, we learn that she is "not simply the ogre or fairly godmother perceivable by a child" (DeGraaff 220), but a sensitive old woman whose disappointment in her own domestic life is responsible for her initial, seemingly cold behaviour towards the Copperfield family. No matter how close their relationship appears to be, it would be hardly possible for David to achieve full understanding of the inner depth and emotional richness of his great aunt, but for her self-explanation.

The reason why Aunt Betsey hesitates in telling her personal history is that she thinks "[i]t's in vain [. . .] to recall the past, unless it works some influence upon the present" (*DC* 407); that is, as Kerry McSweeney paraphrases, "if it is to benefit one, recollection must be a moral exercise with self-improvement as its goal" (104). As we have seen, David's act of writing his life is an attempt to (re)create himself and develop an identity of his own. Then, Aunt Betsey's observation above cited appears to teach and remind David that his autobiography should not merely be a record of his discipline, but an indispensable part of his discipline itself. And that probably explains why he is unsure whether he is the hero of his own life, until he completes his autobiography. In this way, Aunt Betsey plays a crucial role in David's writing of his personal history, because she not only stresses the need for disclosing one's history in one's own words, but also defines its value.

In this way, David's mistake in judging others is often exposed by self-explanation by the very person concerned. To take another instance, it is not until the dying moment of Dora Spenlow, that David realises almost painfully acute self-recognition of his "child-wife" (*DC* 711): "Oh, Doady, after more years, you never could have loved your child-wife better than you do; and, after more years, she would so have tried and disappointed you, that you might not have been able to love her half so well! I know I was too young and foolish. It is much better as it is!" (*DC* 838). Although Dora has been depicted as an infantine and ignorant girl, in the last moment of her life, she reveals a self-awareness that "a young and silly person would

not have" (DeGraaff 217), while David can only feel a vague, incomplete sense of frustration and disappointment in his married life.[7]

Miss Mowcher also contributes to the novel's theme of mistaken assumption of others. Although not entirely successful, the delineation of her character deserves a brief discussion. She is Steerforth's hairdresser, "a pursy dwarf, of about forty or forty-five" (*DC* 386). In her first appearance in Chapter 22, the reader cannot help suspecting that she is an evil accomplice of Steerforth, and indeed that was evidently Dickens's initial plan. She had been supposed to help Steerforth arrange his elopement with Em'ly, and thus "intended as a typically grotesque, paradoxical comment on false appearances" (Blount 23). However, Mrs Seymour Hills, a neighbour of Dickens and on whom he modelled Miss Mowcher, made a protest against the malicious and offensive portrait, and he had to change his design. Accordingly, when she appears next time in Chapter 32, it is somewhat artificially revealed that, like David, Miss Mowcher was deceived by Steerforth. Like many other characters in the novel, she begins to explain herself, which totally changes David's view of her: "They are all surprised, these inconsiderate young people, fairly and full grown, to see any natural feeling in a little thing like me! They make a plaything of me, use me for their amusement, throw me away when they are tired, and wonder that I feel more than a toy horse or a wooden soldier! Yes, yes, that's the way. The old way!" (*DC* 523). This abrupt change in personality may appear awkward and even contrived,[8] but it at least is in line with the novel's total effect—her episode too exemplifies the protagonist's blind perception, and underlines the theme of self-explanation.

The need for self-explanation is also underscored by Annie Strong, the young wife of Dr Strong, the schoolmaster of David and who is old enough to be her father. In spite of Dr Strong's innocent, unconditional trust in her, partly due to the considerable difference in age between them, Annie is suspected of having an affair with her cousin Jack Maldon, by other people such as Wickfield, Uriah Heep, and even David himself. In Chapter 45, perceiving that

their marriage is at a crisis point, she professes fidelity to her husband and dispels the suspicion, in front of Dr Strong, David, Aunt Betsey, Mr Dick, and her mother Mrs Markleham: "All that has ever been in my mind, since I was married, [. . .] I will lay bare before you. I could not live and have one reservation, knowing what I know now" (*DC* 727). In her confession, Annie expresses her gratitude to her husband, who has saved her from "the first mistaken impulse of my undisciplined heart" (*DC* 730), namely her immature affection for her cousin. She states that if she had married Jack Maldon, she would be "most wretched" (*DC* 729), because "[t]here can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose" (*DC* 729). David applies these words to his own unfortunate marriage, and gradually begins to realise his own heart was similarly "undisciplined" when he first loved Dora. Although the reader may find the tone of Annie's declaration of affection and gratitude too melodramatic, critics agree that this episode has an important function in the hero's emotional development, and is an indispensable part of his discipline.[9]

Since the Strongs' marriage is apparently unsuitable, and partly also due to David the narrator's careful and deliberate postponement in disclosing the truth,[10] the reader is easily deceived into believing Annie's infidelity. This narrative method should not be discarded as a mere superficial strategy to create sensational suspense and to retain the readership,[11] because young David's (and the reader's) misplaced suspicion can be regarded as "an analogue to the novel's themes of blindness and mistaken assumptions" (Mundhenk "Dickens's Manipulation" 8). Throughout the novel, as Mundhenk points out, the reader and the protagonist David are "confronted with appearances that belie reality, with characters and events that seem to be what they are not" (5-6), and in the Strongs plot, the reader is supposed to realise how easily one can be deceived by appearances. And, no less significantly, as a consequence of Annie's confession, the reader also becomes convinced of the power of self-explanation. As John P. McGowan suggests, the whole episode of the Strong family underscores the significance of

language—the truth that "open statements of one's feelings form the basis of love and community" ("*David Copperfield*" 14). In fact, without the aid of words, David would be totally at a loss to interpret Annie's mysterious expression: "Distinctly as I recollect her look, I cannot say of what it was expressive, I cannot even say of what it is expressive to me now, rising again before my older judgement. Penitence, humiliation, shame, pride, love, and trustfulness—I see them all; and in them all, I see that horror of I don't know what" (*DC* 304). Thus, like many cases in the novel, the only means of correcting the hero's mistaken judgement is self-explanation by the person in question.

Moreover, the act of self-explanation through language is essential for Annie's maturation into an independent woman, just as David seeks to establish his identity through his autobiographical narrative. Until this point of the novel, Annie has been presented as a taciturn character, who has seldom spoken, and if any, only to be silenced by her talkative mother, Mrs Markleham, whom Aunt Betsey calls "Marplot" (*DC* 727): "I must really beg that you will not interfere with me, unless it is to confirm what I say" (*DC* 336). Unless Annie asserts herself by expressing her feeling in her own words, she continues to be subjected to exploitation by her selfish, presumptuous mother who claims her dominance over her daughter even after her marriage. Mrs Markleham, pretending to be the spokesperson for Annie, persuades Doctor Strong into believing that her daughter is an unfortunate victim of the ill-matched marriage and therefore needs "a great deal of amusement" (*DC* 716), ignoring Annie's real personality and feelings. And that is why she so indignantly tries to intervene to stop her daughter's speech, by such statements as "I must be permitted to observe that it cannot be requisite to enter into these details" (*DC* 727) and "I have mentioned the fact, fifty times at least, to everybody here" (*DC* 728). To allow her daughter to speak means losing control over her. To put it another way, the attempt of Mrs Markleham to silence her daughter—to abort her daughter's self-disclosure—is no other than an attempt to deny the value of autobiography, and ultimately threatens the

narrative frame of *David Copperfield* itself. Thus, the whole scene of Annie's self-articulation—Annie's triumph over her meddling mother and the following reconciliation with her husband—can be read as an indirect defence of David's own autobiographical writing.

David repeatedly uses this method in his portrayals of seemingly antagonistic characters. Indeed, our discussion of self-articulating characters will not be completed without Rosa Dartle and Uriah Heep, two major rivals of the protagonist.[12] Rosa Dartle is the female companion to Mrs Steerforth, and is in intense love with her son, even though deserted by him long ago. Rosa deserves special attention, firstly because she is by far the more competent observer than David. While David commits a terrible mistake in his judgement and perception of Steerforth, Rosa is clearly conscious of Steerforth's dark underside, and subtly yet repeatedly lures him into revealing his true nature in the presence of his blind admirer, David. It is in this sense that Lauren N. Hoffer regards Rosa's function as "a subtle narrative method that reaches beyond what David as narrator can comfortably 'tell'" (194), and points out that "[h]er knowledge and power to convey that knowledge place her in direct narrative competition with David, but also, ultimately, work to assist him in telling his own story" (196). Rosa, however, does not remain a mere passive observer, but later begins to express her long-suppressed emotions, and even discloses her life story. In other words, in this sense too, she partly plays a role similar to David—an autobiographical speaker.

Her malicious nature comes to the surface during her venomous attack on Em'ly in Chapter 50, and when she is informed of Steerforth's death by David in Chapter 56, she pours out her long suppressed feelings to Mrs Steerforth. Her long speech in the latter scene seems to be especially important, because here David for the first time learns what happened between Rosa and Steerforth, which has been suggested occasionally but never told explicitly. Rosa launches into her speech like Annie Strong in Chapter 45: "I *will* speak to her. No power on earth should stop me, while I was standing here! Have I been silent all these years, and shall I

not speak now? I loved him better than you ever loved him!" (*DC* 871). In her fervent profession of love and hate towards the deceased Steerforth, Rosa's personal history and sentiments are dramatically disclosed:

> 'I descended−as I might have known I should, but that he fascinated me with his boyish courtship−into a doll, a trifle for the occupation of an idle hour, to be dropped, and taken up, and trifled with, as the inconstant humour took him. When he grew weary, I grew weary. As his fancy died out, I would no more have tried to strengthen any power I had, than I would have married him on his being forced to take me for his wife. We fell away from one another without a word. Perhaps you saw it, and were not sorry. Since then, I have been a mere disfigured piece of furniture between you both; having no eyes, no ears, no feelings, no remembrances. Moan? Moan for what you made him; not for your love. I tell you that the time was, when I loved him better than you ever did!' (*DC* 872)

Rosa's recognition of herself as "a mere disfigured piece of furniture" is curiously not far apart from David's initial observation of her: "She was a little dilapidated—like a house—with having been so long to let" (*DC* 350). However, David's other judgements on her all prove to be fatally wrong. It is clear that, as Hoffer suggests,[13] at their first meeting David tries to squeeze her into the conventional stereotype of the single woman: he recklessly concludes that "she wished to be married" (*DC* 350), and at the same time he thinks that she loves Steerforth "like a brother" (*DC* 353). However, in reality, as her confession reveals, she has no wish or intention to marry her former lover, and her passionate love for him is anything but a sisterly affection.

Her confession also makes her earlier conducts in the novel less inexcusable. Until this moment, David's sympathy has been almost wholly with Mrs Steerforth, with whom he shares the tender affection towards her son. However, Rosa's indignant speech reminds the reader and David that it is actually Mrs Steerforth that is responsible for his son's moral spoilage, and Rosa is the victim who deserves compassion. When David remonstrates Rosa's obduracy and callousness, she sharply retorts: "Who feels for me? [. . .] She has sown this. Let her moan for the harvest that she reaps today!" (*DC* 872). One must see not only the harvest but also its seed,

if one wishes to gain a thorough and fair judgement of other people—as we shall see, David learns the very same lesson from Uriah Heep, the other major rival of David.

Uriah Heep, the main antagonist of the novel is not only the rival of the protagonist, but also his double. As Welsh points out, Uriah Heep is "a Doppelgänger, like Rigaud in *Little Dorrit* and Orlick in *Great Expectations*, in whom the aggressive and sexual demands of the hero are strangely absorbed and whose criminal doings, as eventually exposed, clear the hero of blame" (143). The reader can easily find multiple similarities between them. Uriah, like David, is fatherless and has a doting mother. They share the same social ambition and both aspire to marry his employer's daughter—Uriah has a strong desire for Agnes Wickfield and David falls in love with Dora Spenlow. Then it can be said that David's intense abhorrence and repulsion towards Uriah is derived from this very striking resemblance. "Heep's real threat in the moral scheme of the novel", as Mary Poovey observes, is "not that he is fundamentally different from David Copperfield, but that he is, in some important respects, the same" (117).[14]

Therefore, if David wishes to present himself as an innocent, blameless hero in his autobiography, it is necessary for him to differentiate himself from his dark double. Figuratively speaking, he needs to disinfect himself, just like his first reaction to Uriah in Chapter 15: David, after shaking hands with him, finds his hand so clammy and ghostly that he afterwards rubs his, to warm it and "*to rub his off*" (*DC* 281). The narrator-David draws a sharp line between Uriah and himself, by manipulating the reader's impression of Uriah Heep, as John O. Jordan points out: "everything we know about Uriah is filtered through the consciousness of a narrator steadfastly committed to the values and moral superiority of the middle class" ("Social Sub-Text" 79).[15] Throughout the novel, David stresses Heep's disgusting humility, and very frequently associates him with the various animal images: "snail" (*DC* 290), "fish" (*DC* 293), "a frog" (*DC* 437), "snaky" (*DC* 437), "a great vulture" (*DC* 444), "an Ape" (*DC* 578), "eel" (*DC* 579), "red fox" (*DC* 580), "two great bats" (*DC* 636)—which

also refers to Mrs Heep—"a malevolent baboon" (*DC* 637), "a Conger-eel" (*DC* 682), "a mongrel cur" (*DC* 828), and so forth.[16] It is as if David, by his constant use of animal imagery, attempts to portray Uriah as a biologically repugnant character, and make him an innately different creature from himself. David wants to reassure himself that Uriah is by nature a servile, sycophantic, treacherous hypocrite, so that he can believe that they are, after all, totally different.

However, David's such strategy is undermined by Uriah's autobiographical narrative in Chapter 39. When David says that "I am not fond of professions of humility, [. . .] or professions of anything else" (*DC* 638) and refuses to form a confidential relationship with him, Heep rather abruptly makes a humble remonstrance with David against his deep-rooted, obstinate contempt for him:

> 'Didn't I know it! But how little you think of the rightful umbleness of a person in my station, Master Copperfield! Father and me was both brought up at a foundation school for boys; and mother, she was likewise brought up at a public, sort of charitable, establishment. They taught us all a deal of umbleness—not much else that I know of, from morning to night. We was to be umble to this person, and umble to that; and to pull off our caps here, and to make bows there; and always to know our place, and abase ourselves before our betters. And we had such a lot of betters! Father got the monitor-medal by being umble. So did I. Father got made a sexton by being umble. He had the character, among the gentlefolks, of being such a well-behaved man, that they were determined to bring him in. "Be umble, Uriah," says father to me, "and you'll get on. It was what was always being dinned into you and me at school; it's what goes down best. Be umble," says father, "and you'll do!" And really it ain't done bad!' (*DC* 639)

This moment enlightens David and the reader as to the true cause of Uriah's mock-humility. As Trevor Blount points out, this scene is "the only point at which Heep is rendered from within", and "as a result it modifies our view of him" (30). David also fully comprehends that "for the first time, what a base, unrelenting, and revengeful spirit, must have been engendered by this early, and this long, suppression" (*DC* 639), and admits that he has judged Uriah too hasty: "It was the first time it had ever occurred to me, that this detestable cant of false humility might have originated out of the Heep family. I had seen the harvest, but had never

thought of the seed" (*DC* 639). Now David has to accept the fact that Uriah is not a born hypocrite, and therefore, perhaps David himself might have been like him, if circumstances had so required. From that point, David's view of him appears to suffer a slight modification. After Chapter 39, Uriah's dominance over Mr Wickfield grows stronger, and so does David's antipathy towards him, yet nevertheless his description of Uriah subtly changes. David still occasionally applies the metaphors of animals, but its frequency apparently decreases—in spite of Uriah's constant appearances, David uses them only three times.[17] Having understood his background, David seems to be less inclined to animalise him, and at least tries to treat him more fairly. Also, at the time David writes his memoir, he is able to recognise plainly how his young self wronged him. In Chapter 25, David recollects his old statement critically: "I said he was a hound, which, at the moment, was a great satisfaction to me" (*DC* 429). By interposing the phrase "at the moment", he distances himself from his previous self, who found consolation in degrading his enemy to the level of an animal. It is interesting to note that, later David's good-natured friend Traddles reaches the same conclusion without much difficulty. When Aunt Betsey observes that Uriah is "a monster of meanness" (*DC* 849), he thoughtfully replies: "Really I don't know about that [. . .]. Many people can be very mean, when they give their minds to it" (*DC* 849).

Thus, these subordinate characters' autobiographical speeches teach David the importance of paying attention not to the surface of personality but deep down below, in order to understand others accurately.[18] And as we shall see, this lesson seems to affect David's own writing of his life. The following two sections will centre on the issue of David's self-presentation with a particular focus on his seemingly contradictory relationship with the reader of his autobiography.

II. The Absent Reader of David's Manuscript

The episode concerning Uriah Heep reminds us of David's own way of self-presentation in his autobiography. In his childhood David also faces a serious danger of being degraded to the status of animal, under the dominance of his cruel step-father, Edward Murdstone, "the first external force against which David must act as an individual in order to prove himself worthy of such a label" (Pennington 79). Chapter 4 entitled "I fall into Disgrace" focuses on David's newly formed relationship with Mr Murdstone and his sister Miss Murdstone after his mother's second marriage. Once being left alone with David, Murdstone commands filial submission, likening the relationship between a father and his son to a master and a quadruped beast, instead of giving "a kind word" (*DC* 96) which might have made him respect his step-father:

> 'David,' he said, making his lips thin, by pressing them together, 'if I have an obstinate horse or dog to deal with, what do you think I do?'
> 'I don't know.'
> 'I beat him.'
> I had answered in a kind of breathless whisper, but I felt, in my silence, that my breath was shorter now.
> 'I make him wince, and smart. I say to myself, "I'll conquer that fellow"; and if it were to cost him all the blood he had, I should do it. [. . .]' (*DC* 95-96)

Since then, under Murdstone's merciless treatment, David occasionally feels the same sense of degradation: "the gloomy theology of the Murdstones made all children out to be a swarm of little vipers" (*DC* 105). His fear reaches its peak when Murdstone puts his threat of violence into practice, and in desperate defence of himself, David bites his hand. As a consequence of this behaviour, David is beaten until his face become "so swollen, red, and ugly" (*DC* 108) that it almost frightens himself. After the five days of confinement, he is sent to Salem House, a boarding school, where he is forced to put a pasteboard placard with the words "*Take care of him. He bites*" (*DC* 130) on his back.

Thus, while David repeatedly exaggerates the bestial aspect of his enemy Uriah Heep in his narrative, he himself is acutely aware of what it is like to be treated inhumanly. At the same time, he knows from his experience that if one wishes to avoid such degradation, he is required

to give some proper explanation of his own conduct, as Uriah did. And this explains the fact that the sequence involving the discordant stepfather-son relationship in Chapter 4 is written in a somewhat excusatory tone. As a narrator, David attempts to make his brutal act of biting Murdstone's hand appear more justifiable, by providing a full account of what has driven him to that behaviour in as much detail as possible, which was beyond his capacity when he was a child. For this reason, David strongly emphasises the negative influence of Murdstone's teaching method. Just as the basic principle of Heep's father is "umbleness" (*DC* 639), Murdstone's creed is "firmness" (*DC* 99), which is actually nothing but "another name for tyranny" (*DC* 99). The doctrine of David's education at home is founded on this creed, and Murdstone's lessons is "the death-blow" (*DC* 103) of David's peace, as he recollects: "The natural result of this treatment, continued, I suppose, for some six months or more, was to make me sullen, dull, and dogged. I was not made the less so by my sense of being daily more and more shut out and alienated from my mother" (*DC* 105). Such harsh treatment surely makes David's subsequent conduct more pardonable and understandable, especially considering the etymology of the term "dogged".

His explanation still goes on. In order to escape from the harsh reality, David gets deeply involved in reading books his late father left, such as *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Humphrey Clinker*, *Tom Jones*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Arabian Nights*, and *The Tales of the Genii*. David consoles himself by impersonating his favourite characters, and "by putting Mr and Miss Murdstone into all the bad ones" (*DC* 106). It should not go unnoticed that there are a couple of memorable "biting" scenes in Smollett's novels: in *Roderick Random*, a lady lays hold of Dr Wagtail's cheek "with her teeth, and held fast, while he roared with anguish, to the unspeakable diversion of all present" (276); in *Peregrine Pickle*, a satirist has "almost bit off the ear of a lyric bard" (642) in the midst of the uproar of the college of authors in Chapter 101; Tunley, the publican,

similarly bites the curate, the suspected lover of his wife, "so unmercifully, that the curate was found almost intranced with pain" (158) in Chapter 32. The third example is particularly interesting, since it is possible that young and innocent David finds this relationship between the cuckold, his wife, and her lover analogous to his own oedipal triangle of David-Mrs Copperfield-Murdstone. Of course, Tunley is not the novel's hero, but it seems totally natural for David to put himself in the place of the publican, who takes revenge against this hypocrite tutor of the Pickle family. The adult David himself intimates that when reading these books, he interpreted morally (probably sexually) inappropriate parts in his own way: "They [. . .] did me no harm; for whatever harm was in some of them was not there for me; *I* knew nothing of it" (*DC* 105). Thus, the grown-up David does his best to convey his childhood hardship and escapism so as to justify his subsequent behaviour—an act of self-explanation which he was not able to do in his childhood.

Having fully explained his miserable circumstance, the first-person narrator returns to the subject of his childhood education, and begins to tell the particulars of his rebellious act of biting Murdstone. However, just before that, David inserts a curious—though apparently very natural—sentence: "The reader now understands, as well as I do, what I was when I came to that point of my youthful history to which I am now coming again" (*DC* 106). This is the only point in the novel where David the narrator uses the word "the reader", from whom David even deliberately differentiates himself by adding the phrase "as well as I do" (*DC* 106). It is as if Murdstone's tyrannical education and ruthless punishment have inflicted David such a lifelong psychological injury that he still deems it necessary to give some explanation of his rebellious conduct to others. What makes this phrase all the more peculiar is that David consistently denies the intention to publish his writing, a fact indicated by the full title of the novel, as we have mentioned before—*The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences, & Observations of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery (Which He Never Meant to be*

Published on Any Account).[19] David himself recognises his work as "my written memory" (*DC* 758), and later remarks that "this manuscript is intended for no eyes but mine" (*DC* 671), so virtually he has no reason to expect other people to read his memorial. Nevertheless, the passage cited above certainly does show that David the narrator is keenly anxious about how he is seen by the readers. Surely it may be reasonable to attribute this to Dickens's carelessness, but it can also be read as a betrayal of David's inerasable apprehension—his unstable sense of identity. The fact that David is keenly conscious of the presence of the reader who is never supposed to exist appears to reveal his fundamental fear of being misjudged or misunderstood by others. The narrator's inerasable apprehension of being unreasonably blamed by others is surely well founded, since his young self is sent to Salem House without the least opportunity of self-vindication, and is forced to put a pasteboard placard with the words "*Take care of him. He bites*" (*DC* 130) on his back. If he fails to present himself properly, other people may have the wrong idea of his character—in short, they may do what David did to Uriah. David may not feel sorry for him, but at least he learns some important lesson from Uriah.

David's paradoxical relationship with his reader deserves further investigation. Edward Hurley is one of the rare critics to pay attention to this issue,[20] but he concludes that "Dickens himself does not seem aware of the obvious contradiction" (3), and denies the possibility of a deliberate strategy on the part of the author. However, such narrative "errors" are worth examining in depth because they consistently expose David's deep-rooted anxiety about his identity, and shed light upon the complex nature of his self-presentation. David's narrative contradictions all follow one particular pattern: he grows nervous at the gaze of the non-existent reader when he has to write about memories of traumatic events. They are mostly inexplicit or subtle, but still deserve serious consideration.

In Chapter 7, "My 'First Half' at Salem House", David records the maltreatment of the tyrannical, savage schoolmaster, Creakle, by whom he and other pupils are inhumanly abused

from the very first day of school: “Half the establishment was writhing and crying, before the day’s work began; and how much of it had writhed and cried before the day’s work was over, I am really afraid to recollect, lest I should seem to exaggerate” (*DC* 141). Here David appears to care about the objective impression his narrative conveys to the reader, but his reluctance to record the brutal conduct of the schoolmaster “lest I should seem to exaggerate” is quite inexplicable if his manuscript is intended for no eyes but his. A similar kind of anxiety occurs in Chapter 11, in which David writes about his degrading work experience at the counting-house of Murdstone and Grinby: “I know I do not exaggerate, unconsciously and unintentionally, the scantiness of my resources or the difficulties of my life” (*DC* 216). In this sentence, however, being over-eager to allege his narrative authenticity, David protests too much and falls into self-contradiction, for one can never “know” nor take responsibility for one’s unconscious behaviour. Exaggeration is certainly a common temptation for many autobiographers who are sometimes prone to present their ideal self-image rather than their actual self to the public,[21] but these explanatory words make less sense since David’s manuscript is exclusively private. The next moment he becomes concerned about his possible readers comes at the beginning of Chapter 32, when he recollects his initial reaction to the betrayal of Steerforth: “What is natural in me, is natural in many other men, I infer, and so I am not afraid to write that I never had loved Steerforth better than when the ties that bound me to him were broken” (*DC* 516). Again, the very statement that he is “not afraid to write” his attachment to the villainous seducer unintentionally and ironically betrays his harbouring fear of being misjudged by others.

These examples throw into relief David’s obsession with the unknown reader of his manuscript, and this tendency becomes apparent especially when his narrative needs to go into details about his traumatic experiences or painful memories, in a somewhat similar way as Mr Dick gets distracted with the decapitated head of King Charles the First whenever he writes

about his mental illness in his Memorial. Significantly, David's vague apprehension that someone might read his autobiography parallels the psychological torture by the placard at Salem House. Being labelled as a beast and in the constant fear of being observed, David ends up being obsessed with the idea that someone is always reading it, even when no one is supposed to see it:

> What I suffered from that placard, nobody can imagine. Whether it was possible for people to see me or not, I always fancied that somebody was reading it. It was no relief to turn round and find nobody; for wherever my back was, there I imagined somebody always to be. That cruel man with the wooden leg aggravated my sufferings. He was in authority; and if he ever saw me leaning against a tree, or a wall, or the house, he roared out from his lodge door in a stupendous voice, 'Hallo, you sir! You Copperfield! Show that badge conspicuous, or I'll report you!' The playground was a bare gravelled yard, open to all the back of the house and the offices; and I knew that the servants read it, and the butcher read it, and the baker read it; that everybody, in a word, who came backwards and forwards to the house, of a morning when I was ordered to walk there, read that I was to be taken care of, for I bit. (*DC* 130-31)

Young David, like his adult self, is thus haunted by the reader of his own creation—the fictitious reader who peruses his personal history. This childhood experience may be responsible for the narrator David's sensitive consciousness about his reader, for, as Gareth Cordery observes, "David's hypersensitivity triggers memories so intensely that past becomes present" (372).

Heidi L. Pennington points out that "David's experience of wearing publicly the sign that proclaims his devolved form of authorship may be indicative of how audience and readership are to be conceived in his later role as published author" (83). Indeed, we should note that the disgraceful placard symbolises the exact opposite of autobiographical self-expression, in a sense that this is a history written not by David but by someone else—a malicious biography, as it were. David's whole life is a constant struggle against such external forces that try to impose false or inauthentic labels upon him. Especially throughout his childhood, he is frequently forbidden to express himself in his own words and even his perception of himself is fundamentally shaken by others. At Salem House, he gradually comes to believe that he is

really a beast and treated deservedly: “I recollect that I positively began to have a dread of myself, as a kind of wild boy who did bite” (*DC* 131). At home, David is placed under constant surveillance of the Murdstones, and their ruthless neglect again results in a change in his self-image: “In short, I was not a favourite there with anybody, not even with myself; for those who did like me could not show it, and those who did not, showed it so plainly that I had a sensitive consciousness of always appearing constrained, boorish, and dull” (*DC* 170). At Murdstone and Grinby’s, David holds “some station” (*DC* 216) and is treated with a little respect, but this very sense of social superiority makes him maintain a strict reticence about his personal history: “I never said, to man or boy, how it was that I came to be there, or gave the least indication of being sorry that I was there. That I suffered in secret, and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew but I. How much I suffered, it is, as I have said already, utterly beyond my power to tell. But I kept my own counsel, and I did my work” (*DC* 218). However, his silence does not serve to extricate him from the difficulty; unless he asserts himself in his own words, David continues to be subjected to exploitation by others and has to suffer his degrading status.

III. The Autobiographer’s Dilemma

In order to create a solid and stable identity, therefore, David needs to reconstruct himself through the use of language, and this is precisely what he attempts to do at his turning point of life—the meeting with Aunt Betsey after a long, miserable journey from London. In Chapter 13, David, in his desperate resolution, begins to introduce himself and tells his personal history to her:

> ‘I am David Copperfield, of Blunderstone, in Suffolk—where you came, on the night when I was born, and saw my dear mama. I have been very unhappy since she died. I have been slighted, and taught nothing, and thrown upon myself, and put to work not fit for me. It made me run away to you. I was robbed at first setting out, and have walked all the way, and have never slept in a bed since I began the journey.’ (*DC* 247)

Although David loses his self-support and is unable to continue his narrative, it does not substantially impede his purpose. Aunt Betsey finally decides to take charge of David, and under her protection he entirely renews his identity: "Thus I began my new life, in a new name, and with everything new about me" (*DC* 271). It is interesting to note that in his first observation of Aunt Betsey, she "marched to a corner of her garden, and stooped to dig up some little root there" (*DC* 247), the very moment before David explains his own "roots" to her. Aunt Betsey's role in the life of David is clearly foreshadowed by this garden scene—she metaphorically digs up David's old roots, and sets new seeds.

Such plant motif we should not ignore, for it associates David's memoirs with another important autobiographical analogy in *David Copperfield*—the dictionary of Dr Strong, who bears comparison with David as a writer. His hopeless attempt to compile a Greek dictionary has been generally understood as an instance of "obsessive and futile writing" (Welsh 119), but his writing also seems to indicate a significant aspect of David's autobiography—its emphasis on "roots":

> Also, how the Doctor's cogitating manner was attributable to his being always engaged in looking out for Greek roots; which, in my innocence and ignorance, I supposed to be a botanical furor on the Doctor's part, especially as he always looked at the ground when he walked about, until I understood that they were roots of words, with a view to a new Dictionary which he had in contemplation. (*DC* 294)

Thus, curiously both Dr Strong and David share the same concern about "roots", the former is obsessed with lexical morphemes and the latter is occupied with his own personal origins. Indeed, David's autobiography is, in a sense like Dr Strong's dictionary (as if to highlight their analogous relation, the dictionary is stuck "somewhere about the letter D" (*DC* 948),[22] the hero's initial letter, in the final chapter of the novel), an effort to fix his identity by redefining himself in language. Without dictionaries, as Mrs Markleham half-mockingly remarks, "we might have been at this present moment calling an Italian-iron, a bedstead" (*DC* 717). Such

name confusion is of course an epitome of David's identity problem. (To take just one example, the boys at Salem House cannot resist the temptation of calling him "Towzer" (*DC* 136) when seeing David's placard.) In fact, throughout his life, David learns the same lesson over and over again: one's identity can be easily misunderstood or deliberately distorted, unless one's personal history, background, experiences and opinions are lucidly expressed in his or her own words. As we have already discussed in the previous section, Annie Strong dispels the false accusation of adultery by openly declaring that her love for her husband is "founded on a rock, and it endures" (*DC* 732) in Chapter 45. Cruel as she is, it is wrong to lay the blame on Rosa Dartle, who is in fact the victim of the Steerforth family, because, as her confession makes it clear, it is Mrs Steerforth who has "sown" (*DC* 872) the seed, and therefore she is to blame for "the harvest that she reaps" (*DC* 872). David commits the same mistake in judging the feigned humility of Uriah Heep, for he realises that he has only seen "the harvest" (*DC* 639), and has never thought of "the seed" (*DC* 639), that is, the contaminating influence of the Heep family (these plant metaphors again associate autobiographical self-disclosure with Dr Strong's Dictionary). Thus, by revealing their personal roots, many characters in the novel significantly modify the earlier impressions of David, who later attempts to do the very same thing as an autobiographer. His act of biting Murdstone's hand might mean a heroic or brave conduct for his young self, but unless the story is told from his point of view, it can be interpreted or "read" quite differently by others. The question of "[whether] I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life" (*DC* 49) is, in the first place, essentially connected with the question whether he can gain the position of the author of his own life.

However, one crucial dilemma arises here: David's central motivation to recreate himself is thus inseparable from the recognition of others, but his autobiography inevitably includes the record of his social degradation, the secret which should never be revealed to the public: "a curtain had for ever fallen on my life at Murdstone and Grinby's. No one has ever raised that

curtain since. I have lifted it for a moment, even in this narrative, with a reluctant hand, and dropped it gladly" (*DC* 272).[23] Presumably this dilemma is also applicable to Dickens himself, who had once attempted to reveal his own ignominious past in his abortive autobiographical fragment. Through the narrative voice of his authorial persona, however, Dickens could at least partially satisfy his desire for disclosure without fully sharing his innermost secret with the public. Mr Dick also faces the same difficulty in his Memorial of his wrongs, which he wants to address to "the Lord Chancellor, or the Lord Somebody or other" (*DC* 261). However, since retelling his past suffering to others causes him unbearable agony, he chooses to refer to King Charles the First as an "allegorical way" (*DC* 261) of expressing his affairs. David, like these two authors, needs to find some vent for his conflicting impulse of exposure and concealment, and this dilemma probably explains his contradictory consciousness about the reader, who is never supposed to exist, but somehow may read his manuscript.

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In *David Copperfield* Dickens provided not only David but also many other characters with opportunities to openly express their feelings in language. The dramatic monologues of these characters can be regarded as self-referential devices which turn our attention to the form of the novel itself, the first-person autobiographical narrative. Not only major authorial doubles, Dr Strong, Mr Dick, and Micawber, but also non-writer characters such as Annie Strong or Uriah Heep enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the protagonist's autobiographical attempt.

It is also worth noting that David's peculiar and inconsistent consciousness about his reader becomes more apparent by comparison with Esther Summerson, Dickens's next first-person narrator. Their attitudes towards their reader are in fact starkly opposite to each other. Despite the impression that Esther's narrative appears not to be written voluntarily (she calls

her manuscript "my portion of these pages" (*BH* 27), which probably suggests that her role as the writer is an allotted one),[24] she nevertheless addresses the reader affectionately at the beginning of the final chapter: "The few words that I have to add to what I have written, are soon penned; then I, and the unknown friend to whom I write, will part for ever. Not without much dear remembrance on my side. Not without some, I hope, on his or hers" (*BH* 985).[25] On the other hand, David is a successful professional writer and pens his memoirs of his own will, yet his attitude towards his unknown reader, judging from what little evidence we have, seems to be unconfident and even timid. As a novelist, he is confident enough to remain silent on the subject of his fictional works because he believes that their value will be determined solely by the reader's responses: "If the books I have written be of any worth, they will supply the rest. I shall otherwise have written to poor purpose, and the rest will be of interest to no one" (*DC* 917). However, when it comes to his exclusively private autobiography, David appears to become perplexed, not knowing how to evaluate his capacity for self-presentation without the general reader.

This might mean that Dickens himself was also anxious about the new fictional form he had chosen—a story told by a first-person narrator. And this anxiety may be the key to understanding the self-referential "autobiographical" narratives that are so omnipresent in *David Copperfield*. As we have discussed, the characters in the novel are generally (with the important exception of Agnes Wickfield, and James Steerforth), quite expressive. This is all the more conspicuous when compared to the later Dickensian novels, in which the protagonists, as well as some important characters, are often introverted, and even taciturn—in short, characterised by their reluctance to express themselves. Unlike Arthur Clennam in *Little Dorrit*, Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*, or Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House*, many characters in *David Copperfield* are not unwilling to disclose their inner feelings or past histories to the reader. It is as if Dickens, in his first attempt to write a first-person narrative in his full-length

novels, tries to experiment or explore different modes of first-person narrative. For example, the warped and twisted confession of Rosa Dartle undoubtedly anticipates the interpolated story in *Little Dorrit*, "The History of a Self-Tormentor", a "Browningesque monologue" (Pykett 152) told by Miss Wade, another hard-hearted single woman character.

Likewise, Uriah Heep's pitiful narrative about his background reminds us of Dickens's last completed work of fiction, "George Silverman's Explanation", a confession told by an unreliable first-person narrator, whose conduct is always reproached as "worldly" (*SSF* 380) by others. More interestingly, another instance of complicated relation between narrative voice and reader can be found in this novella. The fact that Silverman pens his explanation "for the relief of my own mind, not foreseeing whether or no it will ever have a reader" (*SSF* 406) but is also conscious of his unknown readers may suggest his kinship with David: "do not deride or misconstrue the expression, unknown reader of this writing; for I have suffered!" (*SSF* 402). Their affinity is further strengthened by the similarities of their names; that is, they both have a connotation with metal in their family name (silver and copper). It is uncertain whether Dickens was actually aware of the narrative inconsistency of his "favourite son" (*DC* 47), but he undoubtedly showed a deep interest in the similar kind of self-deceptive author-reader relationship in his last completed work of fiction.

Lastly, if autobiography is a record of one's personal history, it might be argued that *A Tale of Two Cities: A Story of the French Revolution* (1859) is also closely connected with *David Copperfield*, for the former is preoccupied with, as the title indicates, public history. At the same time, there appears what might be called an autobiographical writing at the most crucial juncture of the plot—Dr Manette's prison memoir. Unlike David's autobiography, Manette's memoir is just a record of a short period of his life, but Manette is also to some extent a self-deceptive autobiographer. While David struggles to write his traumatic past, Manette, being unable to bear the weight of his painful past, eventually recedes into madness

and forgets the fact that he penned the memoir. In this sense, these two authors show an intriguing contrast: David denies the existence of the reader, whereas Manette denies his own authorship. In the following chapter, we will further discuss how Dickens addresses the issue of telling the traumatic past in his second historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Notes

[1.] See Forster vol. 2, 98.

[2.] According to Forster, Dickens thought it a fatal coincidence: "but he was much startled when I pointed this out, and protested it was just in keeping with the fates and chances which were always befalling him. 'Why else,' he said, 'should I so obstinately have kept to that name when once it turned up?'" (Forster 2: 78).

[3.] It must be admitted that since the novel is written in the first person perspective, the only way for Dickens to describe other characters' inner selves clearly is to present them orally—that is, the novelist inevitably needs to rely on the method of dramatic monologue. Still, *David Copperfield*'s emphasis on the theme of self-presentation is so prevalent that it seems to play an unignorably important part in the novel.

[4.] See Chapter 2 of this thesis, especially 71 and 81-82.

[5.] Jerome H. Buckley observes that "David's names and nicknames are so various as to signal perhaps a problem in identity" ("Identity" 226), and Joseph Bottum also points out that "[a]s he grows David must overcome every attempt to name him" (437). Richard Lettis similarly notes in his essay "The Names of David Copperfield" that "it is uncertain not only whether DC is a hero, but whether he possesses, at least to those who know him, any consistent identity" (70). S. D. Powell states that David's reluctance to "assert his own identity by insisting on proper forms of address" reveals "David's continuing uncertainty about the stability of his

personhood" (49). Although Donald Hawes regards some modes of address as merely conventional and insignificant, he still admits that "[i]nterpretation of the different names and styles can be an in interpretation of the stages in the development of his character, his social status, his emotions (particularly anxiety and love), and his personal relationships" (87).

[6.] Karen E. Laird also appears to be dissatisfied with "the novel's awkward positioning of David as a silent and frozen interloper" (104). According to John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens made an "unusually large number of corrections in the manuscript" (164) in adjusting the scene. Nevertheless, though he cancelled the several details in the original manuscript and altered the timing of Mr Peggotty's arrival, this awkward situation of David remained unsolved.

[7.] Maria Ioannou, in her discussion of Dora, suggests that "the female narrative of David Copperfield shows that David cannot be anything but an inadequate narrator, because he is being conditioned, as a young man and head of a family, to think in a specific way. Women are better narrators than men when it comes to the woman's story, and this is precisely the point" (148). Regarding David's inadequacy, Michael Slater interestingly points out that "[a]n important aspect of Dora, one that gives her weight as a character, is Dickens's dramatization through her of the traditional belief, which he fully endorsed, that women tend to be instinctively wiser, more perceptive and sensitive about human relations, especially love relations, than men are" (*Dickens and Women* 248).

[8.] See Butt and Tillotson 141-42. Although Dickens promised to make amends, he had to wait until Number X, because, as he stated in his letter, the change could "only be made in the natural progress and current of the story" (*L5*: 677). However, the result is not fully successful, as Q. D. Leavis complains that "Miss Mowcher is disappointing" (86).

[9.] In her seminal essay "The Undisciplined Heart of David Copperfield.", Gwendolyn B. Needham emphasises the importance of the Strong plot, noting that "[t]aken alone, this scene might well be termed melodramatic; placed in the context of the novel its high dramatic tone is

justified by its direct statement of theme, by its resolution of the tense Strong episode, by its marking the climax of the hero's emotional development" (101). Kelly Hager also admits its thematic significance, but takes the very opposite view: "the morals of Annie Strong, as well as the plot in which they are found, are actually a kind of red herring, directing the reader toward a happy ending that seeks to escape the consequences of the rebellious plots contained in the novel" (148). Mary Poovey further finds "an uncanny similarity" (93) between the Strongs and David's parents which underscores the "implicit link between Annie Strong and Clara Copperfield" (94). Such skilful handling of the discipline theme makes the novel much more successful than *Nicholas Nickleby* as a *Bildungsroman*. As we have discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Nicholas shows no discernible change throughout the novel. See 27-40.

[10.] Mundhenk points out that *David Copperfield* "combines the adult's perspective with the youth's perceptions in startlingly varied and dramatic ways, and thus modulates the reader's degree of understanding and participation in the novel" ("Dickens's Manipulation" 8). John Reed also observes that "[t]his withholding of information is a normal narrative device for creating suspense, and thus a desire on the reader's part to pursue the story. But there is a distinctly manipulative quality to David's approach" (*Dickens and Thackeray* 196).

[11.] Q. D. Leavis complains the way Dickens presents this episode to the reader: "A less forgivable thing, is to have kept the reader on edge throughout most of the novel by intimations that Annie is going to elope with, or will be found to have been seduced by, her cousin Jack Maldon, merely as a means of retaining the readership [. . .]" (86).

[12.] A. E. Dyson points out some important similarities between these two characters: "Both Rosa and Uriah create continual unease under the cloak of deference, finding some outlet in speech for their chafed souls. Both hate David and wish him harm [. . .]. David is, after all, their rival, Uriah's rival for Agnes, Rosa's rival for Steerforth; and *they* know it well enough, whatever he does" (128).

[13.] See Hoffer 196.

[14.] A similar point is made by many critics. Harry Stone, for example, notes that Uriah is "what David himself might have become without money, good birth, Miss Betsey's ministrations, and the like [. . .]. Uriah, unfortunately, is not only the devil, but the devil in David. David hates him as the principle of evil, but also (unconsciously) as the mirror of his own dark desires and aggressions" (*Dickens* 222). Oliver S. Buckton intriguingly suggests that the first three letters of the name Uriah are "homonymic with 'You are I'" (211).

[15.] The same point is made by Tara Macdonald, who in particular focuses on the race and sexuality of Uriah Heep: "David's narrative is certainly one of social ambition, and it is because David recognises the similarities in their motives that he attempts to move Uriah down by drawing upon a racial discourse which figures Uriah as physically and sexually abnormal, as well as economically grasping" (50). Likewise, Trevor Blount states that "[w]e are left [. . .] in no doubt as to David's dislike of Heep. His reactions are meant to guide the response of the reader, and a run of reptilian, fishy imagery makes Uriah in his wily insinuation the Serpent in the Wickfield's Eden" (30).

[16.] MacDonald suggests that "[t]his multiplicity of animal references suggests not only that David sees Uriah as a degenerate man, with the clear associations of race that this implies, but that Uriah cannot be sufficiently cast within any one taxonomy" (52).

[17.] In the concrete, "his fish-like hand" (673), "like a Conger-eel" (682), and "a mongrel cur" (828). After Uriah is incarcerated, David completely cease to associate him with animals. This may be partly because at this point Uriah is no longer a threat to David.

[18.] While many characters repeatedly teach him the value of self-presentation, there is an important antithetic character, who on the surface appears to uphold the value of self-expression in language, but simultaneously calls it into question—Wilkins Micawber, "the most important of David's author-counterparts in the novel" (Stewart *Dickens* 138). In the case

of Micawber, what David learns is not so much the importance of self-expression in language as what might be termed the danger of abusing language. Tyranny over words can take various forms: while Micawber's style can result in sheer meaninglessness, Murdstone's arbitrary use of the word "firmness" (*DC* 99) causes a severe psychological injury to David. Micawber's use of language is not so oppressive as Murdstone's, but still it can be threatening to David, so he must reject both as inappropriate. In this sense, the process of David's maturation is, "in part, the process of developing his own style" (McGowan "*David Copperfield*" 9).

[19.] In Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens*, we find six trial titles for *David Copperfield*, all of which were eventually discarded on the ground that they were "not strictly personal from the name given to it" (2: 79), but nevertheless help us understand an important backdrop of the novel. The suggested titles include "*The Last Living Speech and Confession of David Copperfield, Junior,* of Blunderstone Lodge, who was never executed at the Old Bailey. being his personal history found among his papers' and '*The Last Will and Testament of Mr. David Copperfield.* Being his personal history left as a legacy" (Forster 2: 78). Both of them clearly indicate that David's memoir was published posthumously, probably against his will. Though the fact that David's autobiography was "[n]ot meant to be published, but yet published" (Hurley 3) itself is an important issue, this question is relatively easy to answer: Jordan suggests that David overcomes his initial reluctance to publish his memoir because of some "worldly motives" ("Social Sub-Text" 66); Stanley Friedman pays attention to "the use of the third person in the parenthetical clause" and points out that "the title as printed may have been prepared by someone other than David" ("Dickens' Mid-Victorian Theodicy" 129); Edward Hurley also attributes the publication to "[h]is legatees, not himself"(3).

[20.] Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton also notes that "the narrator of *David Copperfield* claims to be writing for his own exclusive perusal, but [. . .] he repeatedly reminds his readers of the physical act of writing, in ways that suggest the status of the published author" (95). However,

she at the same time admits that "[i]mplicitly this demonstration of David's public identity is also a reminder that texts are finally unreadable except by the writer" (95).

[21.] Dickens himself must have been familiar with this fact. In *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi* which Dickens edited and rewrote, for example, the account of Joe's demanding, tight schedule is apparently "over-stated" (*MJG* 89) by the author himself (though this comment itself was made by Charles Whitehead, who revised and annotated the book).

[22.] The letter "D" has invoked various interpretations. Welsh observes that "it is fair to take the hint that 'D' may also stands for Dickens, the novelist having wryly admitted in this fashion the ultimate unlikelihood of transcending the self by writing" (116). Garrett Stewart further points out that the letter "D" may represent reflexively "dictionary" (*Death Sentences* 80) as well as "'David,' 'Dickens,' 'Dick,' and perhaps 'death' itself" (*Death Sentences* 80).

[23.] Jordan observes that David's reluctance to publish his autobiography can be attributable to his "sense of social shame" ("Social Sub-Text" 66).

[24.] Shale Preston also assumes that someone "asked the protagonist, Esther Summerson, to write her first-person narrative" (36), and infers that John Jarndyce asked her to write it, with a view to bequeath it to the son of Richard Carstone.

[25.] Jordan suggests that "the unknown friend" (*BH* 985) possibly means "ourselves—that is, the reader of *Bleak House*, who if properly sympathetic and attuned to Esther [. . .], may provide her with the understanding and compassion she needs and deserves", while it may also refer to "Esther's mother" or even "Esther herself" (*Supposing* 75).

CHAPTER 4

HISTOTICAL NOVEL AS RESURRECTION:

REPRESENTATION OF THR PAST IN *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*

In *Charles Dickens: The Story of His Life*, J. C. Hotten introduced an interesting anecdote which John Forster did not take the trouble to record in his authoritative biography. In 1835, young Dickens, whose unprecedented success as a novelist was yet to come, sent a business card to Vincent Dowling (the editor of *Bell's Life in London*), apparently written in a jocular vein: "CHARLES DICKENS, *Resurrectionist*, *In Search of a Subject*" (17). Resurrectionists, or body-snatchers, who rob graves and sell corpses to medical schools for dissection or anatomy lectures, were then "a general topic for public discussion" (Hotten 17).[1] As Peter Ackroyd states, Dickens was still fascinated by this profession when he wrote *A Tale of Two Cities* twenty-four years later,[2] in which the novelist's obsession is incarnated in the character of Jerry Cruncher, "a Resurrection-Man" (*TTC* 194).

Such being the case, it is natural that many critics have been tempted to regard Jerry Cruncher or resurrectionists in general in the same light as the novelist himself.[3] For example, Catherine Gallagher argues that the crime of resurrection is "the clearest and the most elaborate of the narrative's dark doubles for itself" (137), and the job of the novelist bears a close resemblance to the crime of resurrection in that they both "expose the private place" (137). Albert D. Hutter makes a similar point by arguing that the novelists "are inevitably engaged in violating such memorials [personal history of each individual], probing and exploring them" ("Novelist as Resurrectionist" 11). It is surely true that the act of writing fiction and body-snatching can be regarded as analogous, considering the fact that novelists are, live grave robbers, "violators of the realm of the private" (Gallagher 126). Since the reader's interest is to some extent based on the desire to catch a glimpse of other people's inner sentiments or secrets,[4] a novelist is inevitably expected to unearth and bring to light what is hidden in the innermost private sphere.

However, there seems to be another important connection between resurrectionist and Dickens as the author of *A Tale of Two Cities*. According to the second edition of the *OED*, the

term “resurrectionist” is not only defined as “[a]n exhumer and stealer of corpses” (“resurrectionist,” def. 1) but also figuratively as “[o]ne who revives or brings to light again” (“resurrectionist,” def. 2), and in the latter sense those who write history have been traditionally identified with resurrectionists. For instance, in his pioneering work *The Historical Novel*, Georg Lukács states:

> Without a felt relationship to the present, a portrayal of history is impossible. But this relationship, in the case of really great historical art, does not consist in alluding to contemporary events, a practice which Pushkin cruelly ridiculed in the work of Scott’s incompetent imitators, but in *bringing the past to life* as the prehistory of the present, in giving poetic life to those historical, social and human forces which, in the course of a long evolution, have made our present-day life what it is and as we experience it. (53, italics mine)

Lukács is not the first who associated the job of a historical novelist with resurrection. Actually, when Lukács wrote “bringing the past to life”, it is likely that the famous “Dedicatory Epistle” to the Rev. Dr Dryasdust in Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* was in his mind: “The Scottish magician, you said, was, like Lucan’s witch, at liberty to walk over the recent field of battle, and to select for the subject of resuscitation by his sorceries, a body whose limbs had recently quivered with existence, and whose throat had but just uttered the last note of agony” (15). In this passage, the supposed editor of the manuscript Laurence Templeton (the narrative persona of Scott himself) likens the “Scottish magician” (Scott as the Scottish historical novelist) to Erichtho (“Lucan’s witch”) in search of “the subject of resuscitation”. His son-in-law John Gibson Lockhart uses the same metaphorical comparison in *Peter’s Letters to His Kinsfolk* in admiration of Scott’s great achievement:

> The heroes of the old times spring from their graves in panoply, and “drink the red wine through the helmet barred” before us; or,
> “Shred their foemen’s limbs away,
> As lops the woodman’s knife the spray”—
> —But they are honoured, not privileged—the humblest retainers quit the dust as full of life as they do—nay, their dogs and horses are partakers in the resurrection, like those of the Teutonic warriors in the Valhalla of Odin. (313)

Not only historical novelists but also historiographers—it is sometimes difficult to draw a line between these two professions[5]—are often metaphorically linked to resurrection. In his review of *The Life of Samuel Johnson* by James Boswell Thomas Carlyle, whose *The French Revolution* Dickens claimed to have read five hundred times,[6] compares the task of the historian to the art of reviving the dead:

> Now this Book of Boswell's, this is precisely a revocation of the edict of Destiny; so that Time shall not utterly, not so soon by several centuries, have dominion over us. A little row of Naphtha-lamps, with its line of Naphtha-light, burns clearly and holy through the dead Night of the Past: they who are gone are still here; though hidden they are revealed, though dead they yet speak. (16)

Here Carlyle apparently regards the purpose of historiography as "palingenesis" (White *Metahistory* 146) of things passed.[7] Regardless of whether it is fiction or non-fiction, writing history necessarily entails the reconstruction of the past and the art of bringing the dead back to life, and therefore has something in common with the act of resurrection. In this context, "Charles Dickens, Resurrectionist" can be a synonym for "Charles Dickens, Historical Novelist".[8] Curiously, the following passage from the preface of *A Tale of Two Cities* indicates that the novelist himself experienced what might be called a resurrection while working on the novel: "As the idea became familiar to me, it gradually shaped itself into its present form. Throughout its execution, it has had complete possession of me; *I have so far verified what is done and suffered in these pages, as that I have certainly done and suffered it all myself*" (*TTC* 29, italics mine).

The parallel between the historical novelist and resurrectionist becomes all the more striking when we turn our attention to the content of *A Tale of Two Cities*, for the resurrection is the novel's vital theme as well as the most prominent image. Book the First is named "Recalled to Life", in which French Doctor Alexandre Manette, who has been imprisoned in the Bastille for eighteen years (Dickens once suggested *Buried Alive* as a possible title of the novel[9]) is dug "out of a grave" (*TTC* 46) by Mr Lorry of Tellson's Bank. His messenger Jerry

Cruncher also secretly engages in grave-robbing business as a "Resurrection-Man" (*TTC* 194). Charles Darnay is accused of treason in England and once considered "as good as dead and gone" (*TTC* 97), but saved by Sydney Carton, and is brought back to the "terrestrial scheme again" (*TTC* 114). The Controller-General of Finances, Foulon, one of the few historical figures in the novel, pretends to be dead and has "a grand mock-funeral" (*TTC* 251) for fear of vengeance of the French people, but later is found "[n]ot dead" (*TTC* 251) and lynched. Likewise, the English spy Roger Cly feigns his death but is revealed that he is "come to life again" (*TTC* 334) as a turnkey in the Conciergerie in Paris after the Revolution. Above all, the novel ends with Sydney Carton's ultimate self-sacrifice, and just before the execution he calls to mind the biblical phrase "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (*TTC* 403).

Thus, *A Tale of Two Cities* is preoccupied with the theme of resurrection—both in form and content. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that in the handling of the resurrection theme in the plot we can detect the self-reflective nature of *A Tale of Two Cities* as a historical novel. The critics have often attributed the novel's failure to the lack of Dickens's historical perspective: famously, George Bernard Shaw wrote that the novel is a "pure sensational drama from beginning to end, and shockingly wanting in any philosophy of history" (46); in a similar manner, Angus Wilson states that "the French Revolution remained unrealized in Dickens's book" (264). Lukács also appears to dismiss the book as an unsatisfying work: "Dickens, by giving pre-eminence to the purely moral aspects of causes and effects, weakens the connection between the problems of the characters' lives and the events of the French Revolution. The latter becomes a romantic background" (243). Such weakness may be partly attributable to the fact that the direct source of inspiration of this novel is not the history itself, but a romantic melodrama in which Dickens himself played the principle part. *The Frozen Deep* was written in corroboration with Wilkie Collins, and the self-sacrifice, noble character of Richard Wardour (Dickens's role) is apparently the original form of Sydney Carton:

> WHEN I was acting, with my children and friends, in Mr Wilkie Collins's drama of The Frozen Deep, I first conceived the main idea of this story. A strong desire was upon me then to embody it in my own person; and I traced out in my fancy the state of mind which it would necessitate the presentation to an observant spectator, with particular care and interest. (*TTC* 29)

Thus, Dickens's initial concern was to write about, to use Lukács's phrase, "the problems of the characters' lives", rather than "the events of the French Revolution" (243). Therefore, it is to some extent understandable that many critics have concluded *A Tale of Two Cities* does not deserve serious consideration as a historical fiction.

However, such traditional argument must be modified if Dickens consciously and carefully investigated various aspects of historical fiction in this novel. Considering the historical context in which resurrection has been associated with the act of writing history, the resurrection motif in the novel—whether the term is used literally or metaphorically—can be understood as a phenomenon somewhat resembling historical fiction itself, and the resurrectionists in the novel (such as Jerry Cruncher or Jarvis Lorry) can also be regarded as doubles of the historical novelist. When they disinter the dead and make them come to life again, their acts are analogous to that of the historical novelist himself, who uncovers and exhibits the buried past. In the following sections, we will focus on three types of "resurrection"—retelling the past, repeating the past, and restoring the dead to life—and reconsider the status of *A Tale of Two Cities* as a historical novel.

I. Retelling the Past

Among the various types of resurrection, the act of retelling the past most closely resembles the activity of a historical novelist. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, many characters are urged to give evidence about events of the past as witnesses. In other words, what they are required to do is to "[r]ecal[l]" (*TTC* 100) memories, which is apparently related with the novel's central theme of resurrection. This probably explains why the novel contains so many

trial scenes. In fact, unlike *Barnaby Rudge*, in which the account of the rioters' trial is only briefly and indirectly given, the novel is filled with court scenes—in England, there is Charles Darnay's trial for the treason at the Old Bailey; in France, the secret meeting held in Defarge's wine shop has "the air of rough tribunal" (*TTC* 199), and Darnay has three trials before the revolutionary court, and in the last time is sentenced to death. We should note that the court of justice and historiography are often considered equivalent: most famously, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel observed that "[w]orld history is a court of judgement" (216); Carlo Ginzburg also stated that the roles of the both professions are to reconstruct and reinterpret past events on the basis of "evidence, proof and testimony" (4). Therefore, the trial scenes in the novel can be considered as one of the internal analogies of the historical novel itself.

This sort of resurrection, first and foremost, relies heavily on the authenticity of the account given by witnesses. To put it another way, when a witness is malicious, biased, deceived, or has a deficient memory, his or her testimony is no longer trustworthy, and the reconstructed past loses its very foundation. Retelling the past thus always involves the risk of telling false history, and the trial scenes in *A Tale of Two Cities* are full of such unreliable witnesses. They exaggerate, and sometimes dare to perjure themselves when they are asked to relate the past events. The most typical examples are John Barsad and Roger Cly, the English spies. They make their first appearance at the trial scene in Old Bailey, where they are commissioned by the English government to give false evidence against Charles Darnay, a French aristocrat. John Barsad is introduced by Mr Attorney-General as a "patriot" (*TTC* 95) who once was a friend of Darnay, but on detecting his traitorous correspondence with the French government, resolved to inform against him to his Majesty's Chief Secretary of State and Privy Council. The narrator casts doubt on the authenticity of Barsad's statement in a tongue-in-cheek way: "Mr Solicitor-General then, following his leader's lead, examined the patriot: John Barsad, gentleman, by name. The story of his pure soul was exactly what Mr

Attorney-General had described it to be—perhaps, if it had a fault, a little too exactly" (*TTC* 97). When Stryver, the prisoner's counsel, cross-examines the witness, his strategy focuses on not so much the content of the testimony as the content of the witness's personality, and consequently John Barsad is revealed to be of somewhat doubtful character: he cannot explain how he makes his way of living; he has been in a debtor's prison several times; he once has got into trouble on account of cheating at dice; he has borrowed money from the prisoner but never returned. Even though Barsad firmly denies any involvement in espionage and exaggeratedly declares that he has no motives but of "sheer patriotism" (*TTC* 98), by this time his influence is not a little diminished. The testimony given by the other witness Roger Cly, the "virtuous servant" (*TTC* 98) of Darnay is described as equally suspicious: "He had known the last witness [Barsad] seven or eight years; that was merely a coincidence. He didn't call it a particularly curious coincidence; most coincidences were curious. Neither did he call it a curious coincidence that true patriotism was *his* only motive too. He was a true Briton, and hoped there were many like him" (*TTC* 98).

Thus, in the trial scene at the Old Bailey, the jury's verdict totally depends upon whether or not these witnesses are trustworthy—that is, whether they are qualified to talk about history: Stryver concludes that Barsad is "one of the greatest scoundrels upon earth since accursed Judas" (*TTC* 104) and these two witnesses are the "forgers and false swearers" (*TTC* 104); on the other hand, Mr Attorney-General attempts to show "how Barsad and Cly were even a hundred times better than he had thought them" (*TTC* 106). Fortunately for the prisoner, at the critical moment Sydney Carton draws attention of the jury to his own striking resemblance to Darnay, which "smash this witness [Barsad] like a crockery vessel, and shiver his part of the case to useless lumber" (*TTC* 104), and Darnay is finally acquitted. However, the trial leaves an impression on the reader that but for Carton's timely tact, the jury would be prevailed upon to decide against the innocent prisoner. After all, the trial is "the most theatrical arena of the

law" (Ledger "From the Old" 76), and the spectators do not seek justice or righteousness but starve for an amusement: "For people then paid to see the play at the Old Bailey, just as they paid to see the play in Bedlam—only the former entertainment was much the dearer" (*TTC* 91).

Defarge's wine shop in Saint Antoine functions as a private counterpart of the Old Bailey in London. Many secret meetings take place there, among Defarge, his wife, and the multiple "Jacques" (*TTC* 64), in front of whom witnesses are summoned to report crimes and infamies committed by the French aristocrats. These revolutionaries judge whether the perpetrator of the crime should be "registered" (*TTC* 201) or not, and according to the verdict (which is seldom given in favour of the accused), Madame Defarge knits the names of the condemned in cipher as the death list for future use. Under such circumstances, in their "rough tribunal" (*TTC* 109), those who have witnessed atrocities committed by the upper class are particularly useful as instigators of vindictive motivation of the sans-culottes.

The significance of the role of the mender of roads (later known as the wood-sawyer, or Jacque Five) in the novel lies mainly in his competence as a witness. In other words, his ability to tell what he has seen or heard can directly serve the revolutionaries' purpose. This simple-minded workman firstly saw Gaspard, whose son had been killed by Marquis St. Evrémonde, swinging by the chain underneath the Marquis's carriage. After many months, he again witnessed Gaspard caught and executed for murdering the Marquis. He then comes to Paris, and by the request of Defarge gives a full account of what he has seen, in a secret assemblage held at a garret adjacent to the wine-shop:

> 'I saw him then, messieurs,' began the mender of roads, 'a year ago this running summer, underneath the carriage of the Marquis, hanging by the chain. Behold the manner of it. I leaving my work on the road, the sun going to bed, the carriage of the Marquis slowly ascending the hill, he hanging by the chain—like this.'
>
> Again the mender of roads went through the whole performance; in which he ought to have been perfect by that time, seeing that it had been the infallible resource and indispensable entertainment of his village during a whole year. (*TTC* 196-97)

Although his narrative is described as a sort of popular entertainment rather than a solemn testimony, on the whole he appears to be a tolerably reliable witness, which is shown by the fact that in Chapter 8 of Book II, he tells exactly the same story to the Marquis himself. Indeed, his verbal portrayal is so true to life that the narrator observes that "[h]e described it as if he were there, and it was evident that he saw it vividly" (*TTC* 198). At such points, it might be safe to say that the mender of roads metaphorically resurrects the past, in a sense like Dickens himself. Also, given that his narrative is the "indispensable entertainment" (*TTC* 197) of the village, the similarity between this character and a historical novelist appears to become more prominent.

However, his reliability as a witness is shaken in the Reign of Terror. The mender of roads, who is now referred to as the wood-sawyer, serves as a spy for the Revolutionary Tribunal under the control of the Defarges. He keeps watch on Lucie, who comes and keeps standing for two hours every day in a spot where her husband Darnay occasionally has a chance to see her from his prison window (without any hope of seeing her husband on her part). The wood-sawyer closely observes her every move so that in due time he can testify against her on pretence of her "making signs and signals to prisoners" (*TTC* 373). This time, however, his account is not faithful anymore, since it is evident that he, overwhelmed by terror, is ready to give a false statement in accordance with Madame Defarge's wish:

> 'Touching those signals, little citizen,' said Madame Defarge, sternly, 'that she made to the prisoners; you are ready to bear witness to them this very day?'
>
> 'Ay, ay, why not!' cried the sawyer. 'Every day, in all weathers, from two to four, always signalling, sometimes with the little one, sometimes without. I know what I know. I have seen with my eyes.'
>
> He made all manner of gestures while he spoke, as if in incidental imitation of some few of the great diversity of signals that he had never seen.
>
> 'Clearly plots,' said Jacques Three. 'Transparently!' (*TTC* 388-89)

The wood-sawyer seems to represent a typical situation of ordinary citizens in Revolutionary Paris: everyone is in constant fear of being suspected, and therefore has no choice but to behave as expected by the Republic. When one has to bear witness, he or she is supposed to be

faithful to the Republic, not necessarily to the historical truth. Just as his blue cap "without which he was nothing" (*TTC* 148) turns into a red cap after the establishment of the new government, black is easily proved to be white and vice versa, under the Reign of Terror.

Such an alarming aspect of the French Revolution, namely the disregard for the history is most distinctly represented by none other than Madame Defarge, one of the central figures in the Revolution. Since her sole purpose in life is to take revenge on the Evrémonde family for the wrong they had committed against her family, she has no hesitation in resorting to every sort of perjury to gain her end. During his stay in Defarge's wine shop, the mender of roads gets the impression that "if she should take it into her brightly ornamented head to pretend that she had seen him do a murder and afterwards flay the victim, she would infallibly go through with it until the play was played out" (*TTC* 203). Indeed, when she finds the wood-sawyer to be a weak witness as an instrument of accusing Lucie and her father, she resolves to put her principle into practice for herself:

> 'He was signalling with her when I saw her,' argued Madame Defarge; 'I cannot speak of one without the other; and I must not be silent, and trust the case wholly to him, this little citizen here. For, I am not a bad witness.'
>
> The Vengeance and Jacques Three vied with each other in their fervent protestations that she was the most admirable and marvellous of witnesses. The little citizen, not to be outdone, declared her to be a celestial witness. (*TTC* 389)

As can be seen from this passage, faithfulness to the historical fact does not make one "a celestial witness". Instead, a citizen, such as Madame Defarge, "[o]f a strong and fearless character, of shrewd sense and readiness, of great determination" (*TTC* 390) gains authority as "the most admirable and marvellous of witnesses".

Thus, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, most of the trials, whether at the Old Bailey in London or at the revolutionary court in Paris, do not function properly, largely owing to the unreliability of these witnesses. Their concern is not in the reconstruction or resurrection of the past as it really happened, but the fabrication of false history which can serve their own selfish purposes. It must be noted that the significance of these unreliable witnesses goes beyond the mere attack

against the political injustice of the French Revolution or the aristocratic government in eighteenth-century England. These fictional witnesses' jobs can be construed as metafictional references to that of a historian and, by extension, the historical novelist himself, in that they all engage in (re)telling the past. Therefore, it is possible to regard their violations of the factual fidelity as euphemistic, distorted parodies of historical writing. By way of contrast with these violators, the author of the novel, who claims to be faithful to the historical fact down to every minute detail, can convincingly demonstrate his ability to keep himself from committing such faults, and consequently, establish superiority as a historical novelist. Like a court of justice, a commitment to tell the truth is the minimum prerequisite for a historical fiction, without which it is impossible to reinterpret or reconstruct past events correctly. Dickens himself was apparently well aware of this when he wrote the two historical novels. In the preface of *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens assures the reader, as if it is a sworn testimony, that every account of the Gordon Riots is based on historical evidence: "In the description of the principal outrages, reference has been had to the best authorities of that time, such as they are; the account given in this Tale, of all the main features of the Riots, is substantially correct" (*BR* 41). In the same way, in the preface of *A Tale of Two Cities*, he manifestly professes the historical faithfulness, and even openly avows his debt to Carlyle's *The French Revolution: A History*:

> Whenever any reference (however slight) is made here to the condition of the French people before or during the Revolution, it is truly made, on the faith of the most trustworthy witnesses. It has been one of my hopes to add something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding that terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to the philosophy of Mr Carlyle's wonderful book. (*TTC* 29)

By the words "the most trustworthy witnesses" Dickens probably meant the historical documents and other primary source materials that he had read in preparation for *A Tale of Two Cities*. According to Ackroyd, these works include Bulwer-Lytton's *Zanoni*, Matthew Lewis's *The Castle Spectre*, Arthur Young's *Travels in France*, Louis-Sébastien Mercier's

Tableau de Paris, Beaumarchais's account of his imprisonment during the Terror, and an account of the trial of the French spy in *The Annual Register* of 1781.[10] However, for Dickens none of these works were as influential as Carlyle's *The French Revolution*. Michael Goldberg even observes that "if *Barnaby Rudge* owes little to Carlyle, *A Tale of Two Cities*, both in its form and content, owes almost everything" (101). Goldberg's detailed examination of the extent of influence of Carlyle on Dickens has proved that Dickens directly borrowed some passages from *The French Revolution* to depict the famous historical moments such as the Storming of the Bastille, the September Massacre of the La Force, and the subsequent Reign of Terror, as well as the memorable Carmagnole scene (Goldberg 100-28). For example, in the death scene of Foulon, Dickens closely follows the description of Carlyle's work:

> With wild yells, Sansculottism clutches him, in its hundred hands: he is whirled across the Place de Gréve, to the '*Lanterne*,' Lamp-iron which there is at the corner of the *Rue de la Vannerie*; pleading bitterly for life,—to the deaf winds. Only with the third rope (for two ropes broke, and the quavering voice still pleaded), can he be so much as got hanged! His Body is dragged through the streets; his Head goes aloft on a pike, the mouth filled with grass: amid sounds as of Tophet, from a grass-eating people. (Carlyle, *French Revolution* 226-27)

> Down, and up, and head foremost on the steps of the building; now, on his knees; now, on his feet; now, on his back; dragged, and struck at, and stifled by the bunches of grass and straw that were thrust into his face by hundreds of hands; torn, bruised, panting, bleeding, yet always entreating and beseeching for mercy; [. . .] he was hauled to the nearest street corner where one of the fatal lamps swung [. . .]. Once, he went aloft, and the rope broke, and they caught him shrieking; twice, he went aloft, and the rope broke, and they caught him shrieking; then, the rope was merciful, and held him, and his head was soon upon a pike, with grass enough in the mouth for all Saint Antoine to dance at the sight of. (*TTC* 254)

These two narratives are "exactly parallel" (Goldberg 108), and Dickens's debt to Carlyle is undeniably clear. To give concrete examples (which Goldberg does not), the bunches of grass and straw are thrust into Foulon's face by "hundreds of hands"; he entreats and beseeches for mercy but to no avail; the first two ropes are broken, and for the third time he is hanged from a lamp-post; his head is exposed to public view with his mouth filled with grass. Though Dickens depicts it more picturesquely and dramatically (the prolonged fear and anguish of the

victim is more vividly expressed by the repetition of "he went aloft, and the rope broke, and they caught him shrieking"), on the whole the degree of dependence on Carlyle is so high that it is no wonder one would suppose that *A Tale of Two Cities* is "Dickens's revered Carlyle in story form" (Angus Wilson 262).

Then, it is especially suggestive that in the preface Dickens calls *The French Revolution* a "wonderful book" (*TTC* 29) and places full confidence in Carlyle as one of the "most trustworthy witnesses" (*TTC* 29), in the same way as Jacques Three, the Vengeance, and the wood-sawyer vehemently insist that Madame Defarge is "the most admirable and marvellous of witnesses", and "a celestial witness" (*TTC* 389). Given that the trial scenes can be regarded as a self-referential device, the unreliable witnesses in the novel (Barsad, Cly, the mender of roads, and Madame Defarge) are open to constant comparison with the "most trustworthy witnesses" whom Dickens has consulted. As a consequence, by contrast, the historical novelist can mitigate the reader's concern for historical accuracy and make his activities appear more credible and reliable.

Of course, it does not mean that all witnesses in the novel are depicted as unreliable. Credible characters such as Lorry, Lucie, and Dr Manette are equally ordered to appear in court as witnesses. However, the reliability of their testimonies only exposes the arbitrary nature of those who interpret their words. For instance, in the trial at the Old Bailey of Charles Darnay, Mr Attorney-General attempts to lead Lorry to make a disadvantageous statement against the prisoner, by putting too much emphasis on an apparently trivial coincidence:

> '[. . .] Was he the only passenger who came on board at that untimely hour?"
> 'He happened to be the only one.'
> 'Never mind about "happening," Mr Lorry. He was the only passenger who came on board in the dead of the night?'
> 'He was.' (*TTC* 99-100)

This scene shows another pitfall of retelling of the past: evidences can easily be exploited to make an arbitrary judgement at the interpreter's discretion, regardless of the witnesses' will.

The most dramatic example of this can be found in Chapter 10 of Book the Third in which the prison memoir of Manette is read publicly in the Revolutionary Tribunal.[11] In his memoir, Manette accuses and denounces Marquis St. Evrémonde and his family, who had sent him to the Bastille and imprisoned him for eighteen years. And when this memoir is read in the trial, Manette realises he unwittingly denounced his own innocent son-in-law, Charles Darnay, who turns out to be Marquis St. Evrémonde's nephew. In his document, Manette repeatedly emphasises that he, although on the verge of mental collapse, is still in his right mind and able to tell what has befallen him correctly:

> I know from terrible warnings I have noted in myself that my reason will not long remain unimpaired, but I solemnly declare that I am at this time in the possession of my right mind—that my memory is exact and circumstantial—and that I write the truth as I shall answer for these my last recorded words, whether they be ever read by men or not, at the Eternal Judgment-seat. (*TTC* 348-49)

The more Manette stresses the authenticity of his testimony, the more power the document gains as a definite evidence against Darnay, which, quite ironically, conflicts with the writer's intention at the present moment. The jurymen and the judges of the Revolutionary Tribunal are solely motivated by the desire for vengeance upon the aristocracy, and for that reason they deliberately ignore the inconvenient fact that later Manette has accepted Darnay as his son-in-law after his confession on the morning of his marriage. Thus, before the unjust Tribunal, as the narrator comments, "there was little or no order of procedure, ensuring to any accused person any reasonable hearing" (*TTC* 344). Even the trustworthy witnesses cannot prevent these unjust tribunals from passing iniquitous judgements, since they always find ways to fabricate or distort history to achieve the desired goals. As Kenneth M. Sroka points out, Madame Defarge, the leading role of the Revolution, can be regarded as a "negative-historian" ("A Tale" 152), who is set up as an antithesis of Dickens the historical novelist. In a similar way as the unreliable witnesses throw into relief the risk involved in retelling the past, these biased judges appear to call into question the danger of arbitrariness in interpreting the past.

The capability of criticising them objectively demonstrates the writer's own aptitude for interpreting history, and establishes him as an eligible "resurrectionist" of the past.

In this way, *A Tale of Two Cities* contains a number of parodies or analogous phenomena of historiography, and incessantly asks itself about the novel's status as a historical novel. In the following section, we will analyse the second type of "resurrection" in the novel—the repetition of the past, and examine how Dickens's self-consciousness as a historical novelist is reflected, especially by focusing on the content of Dr Manette's document.

II. Repeating the Past

The buried prison memoir of Manette and its later excavation at the outbreak of the Revolution in 1789 can be seen as a variation on the resurrection theme, or one might even say that his writing is a historical novel within a historical novel.[12] Indeed, it is a curious coincidence that his document, which was written so secretly as to elude the vigilance of the prison guard, suffers constant interruptions, exactly like *A Tale of Two Cities* itself, which was written and published in weekly instalments, and followed by a series of interruptions:

> 'I repeat this conversation exactly as it occurred. I have no doubt that it is, word for word, the same. I describe everything exactly as it took place, constraining my mind not to wander from the task. Where I make the broken marks that follow here, I leave off for the time, and put my paper in its hiding-place.
> * * * * (*TTC* 350)

Therefore, it is safe to assume that the self-referential nature of the novel is most obviously reflected in the writing of Dr Manette.

The purpose of this section is to show that the embedded text of Manette contains multiple echoes with the outer narrative; in other words, some events, situations, and scenes in the year of 1757 recorded in Manette's narrative are repeated—that is, figuratively "resurrected"—in the present moment of the novel, a fact which seems to have been overlooked by critics. Surely repetition is an omnipresent phenomenon throughout *A Tale of*

Two Cities,[13] but actually nowhere so conspicuous as here. These repetitions are too numerous to ignore, and, as will be shown, appear to be derived from the novelist's fear of recurrence of the traumatic historical event depicted in his novel.

The form of his narrative itself seems to suggest a corresponding relationship with the outside frame of the story. At the beginning of the document, Manette explains how he is writing his memoir where he is not permitted to have pen or ink: "These words are formed by the rusty iron point with which I write with difficulty in scrapings of soot and charcoal from the chimney, mixed with blood, in the last month of the tenth year of my captivity" (*TTC* 348). The motif of letters written in blood is crucial, since it links the writing of Manette with no less significant one, which is scrawled by Gaspard, another tragic victim of oppression in pre-Revolutionary France. Chapter 5 of the Book 1, which is set in 1775, depicts the wine-shop of Defarge in the suburb of Saint Antoine, and how a large cask of wine is dropped and broken in the street, and people swarm around the spot to drink it. Gaspard is one among them, and scrawls upon the wall "BLOOD" (*TTC* 61) with his finger dipped in the red wine. The narrator ominously comments that "[t]he time was to come, when that wine too would be spilled on the street-stones, and when the stain of it would be red upon many there" (*TTC* 61). Thus, Manette's bloody letters remind us of "the writing on the wall" scrawled by Gaspard, and underscores its character as a representative voice of the oppressed French people whose long suppressed anger eventually results in the revolution.

The first scene of the retrospection is one cloudy night in December 1757: "I was walking on a retired part of the quay by the Seine for the refreshment of the frosty air, at an hour's distance from my place of residence in the Street of the School of Medicine, when a carriage came along behind me, driven very fast" (*TTC* 349). The carriage stops and a voice from within calls to Manette by his name, and two gentlemen—later Doctor identifies them as Marquis St Evrémonde and his brother—open the door and alight. Manette observes that "they

were both wrapped in cloaks, and appeared to conceal themselves" (*TTC* 349). What is notable about this opening sequence of his narrative is that the novel itself also begins with a very similar setting—a carriage and passengers wrapped up in coats, who are anxious to conceal their identities. Chapter 2 of Book the First "The Mail" which immediately follows the introductory chapter "The Period", starts with the following passage: "It was the Dover road that lay, on a Friday night late in November, before the first of the persons with whom this history has business. The Dover road lay, as to him, beyond the Dover mail, as it lumbered up Shooter's Hill. He walked up-hill in the mire by the side of the mail, as the rest of the passengers did" (*TTC* 37). This is because the road is so muddy and the coach is so heavy that the horses have come to stop several times, and once drawn the coach across the road with "the mutinous intent" (*TTC* 38) of retracing their path. All the three passengers are "wrapped to the cheek-bones and over the ears" (*TTC* 38), and each is "hidden under almost as many wrappers from the eyes of the mind, as from the eyes of the body, of his two companions" (*TTC* 38). They are quite reluctant to lay themselves open to the others, being unsure of each other's true identities: "In those days," the narrator explains, "travellers were very shy of being confidential on a short notice, for anybody on the road might be a robber or in league with robbers" (*TTC* 38). Geoffrey Thurley analyses this scene and states that "[t]he atmosphere of the entire novel is thus created—suspicion, distrust, repression, an uphill struggle" (255). Although some of the details are altered in Manette's story—a sequestered part of the wharf by the Seine on a cloudy moonlight night instead of a misty and muddy uphill path, for example—the repetitive use of the symbolically significant scene undeniably indicates that the echoing relationship between these two narratives is no coincidence: it appears to establish that Dickens, as we shall see, was obsessed with the notion that history repeats itself.

The repetitive use of "twins" motif in each narrative also supports this supposition. Manette in 1757 at the first glance perceives that the St Evrémonde brothers are "greatly alike,

in stature, manner, voice, and (as far as I could see) face too" (*TTC* 349), and when the carriage arrives at a solitary house and they all three alight, Manette realises that they are unmistakably "twin brothers" (*TTC* 350). Although their roles in Manette's document are significant as embodiments of aristocratic brutality, as far as the plot is concerned, there is no necessity that the brothers should be twins. On the contrary, due to this close resemblance, they rather become indiscernible and almost interchangeable characters. The significance of this "twins" motif in the memoir cannot be properly understood unless we take account of the other protagonist "twins" in the outer narrative, Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton.[14] They are not blood relatives, but nevertheless their likeness is so striking that other people are easily deceived into misrecognition. Besides this, it is worth pointing out that since Darnay is the descendent of the Evrémonde family, the outward appearances of these two pairs of "twins" must be similar too, even though Manette does not make any comments about this point. Still, Manette's instinctive aversion to Darnay is apparently triggered by this family resemblance: when he casts a glance at Darnay, his face suddenly becomes frozen, "deepening into a frown of dislike and distrust, not even unmixed with fear" (*TTC* 112). Therefore, the pair of Darnay and Carton appears as a distorted mirror image of the Evrémonde twins, the very people responsible for Manette's imprisonment and subsequent mental collapse, and as a consequence, again the novel seems to express an unconscious fear of recurrence of the past suffering.

Inside the house of the Marquis, the brothers make Manette examine two patients: the one is a beautiful young peasant woman, who was raped by Marquis St Evrémonde and became delirious; the other is her brother, mentioned as "a handsome peasant-boy" (*TTC* 353), who was stabbed in his unconsummated revenge. They both turn out to be the siblings of Madame Defarge, and their unatoned deaths motivate her to drive forward the Revolution. Thus, these two characters are symbols of those who are oppressed, and the violence inflicted upon them are also repeated in subtle ways in other parts of the novel. The story of the peasant

boy is one such example. He tells Manette how his sister's husband was abused by the Evrémonde brothers: "it is among the Rights of these Nobles to harness us common dogs to carts, and drive us. They so harnessed him and drove him" (*TTC* 355). At this point, we learn that the horses drawing the Dover mail in the opening scene of the novel are a more than appropriate metaphor for the oppressed French people—they were literally harnessed and driven by the nobles.

The symptom of delirium of the sister provides another instance. She shrieks that "[m]y husband, my father, and my brother! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. Hush!" (*TTC* 356-57) at even intervals, and Doctor observes that "no pendulum could be more regular" (*TTC* 352). The act of counting is a common feature that can be seen in other characters who are, like her, imprisoned. In the Bastille, Doctor Manette sometimes thought of nothing but the numbers of lines he could draw across the face of the moon. Likewise, when Darnay is confined in La Force Prison, he walks "obstinately counting and counting" (*TTC* 287) the number of steps: "[f]ive paces by four and a half, five paces by four and a half, five paces by four and a half" (*TTC* 286). Thus, in spite of the different regimes and epochs, the psychological conditions of these prisoners are curiously identical.

Several other remarkable elements in the sequence also reappear after many years outside of the Manette's narrative. Let us look at Manette's minute description of the young woman:

> 'The patient was a woman of great beauty, and young; assuredly not much past twenty. Her hair was torn and ragged, and her arms were bound to her sides with sashes and handkerchiefs. I noticed that these bonds were all portions of a gentleman's dress. On one of them, which was a fringed scarf for a dress of ceremony, I saw the armorial bearings of a Noble, and the letter E.
>
> 'I saw this, within the first minute of my contemplation of the patient; for, in her restless strivings she had turned over on her face on the edge of the bed, had drawn the end of the scarf into her mouth, and was in danger of suffocation. My first act was to put out my hand to relieve her breathing; and in moving the scarf aside, the embroidery in the corner caught my sight. (*TTC* 350-51)

The fringed scarf with the initial letter E functions as a crucial clue as to the identity of the twins, from which Manette later associates it with the name of St Evrémonde: "I connected the

title by which the boy had addressed the elder brother, with the initial letter embroidered on the scarf, and had no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that I had seen that nobleman very lately" (*TTC* 359-60). This piece of information eventually enables him to condemn the whole race of the Evrémonde at the end of his document. In this sense, the scarf appears to play a role comparable to that of the knitting of Madame Defarge.[15] Into her "knitted register" (*TTC* 202) she weaves the names of her victims and their crimes, so that they can be recalled in due time. Both the embroidery on the scarf and the knitted register of Madame Defarge are, in a way, encoded records that must be deciphered with the aid of one's memory when used as instruments of vengeance: the former is mere initial letter, so Manette has to connect it with his own recollection; the latter is knitted "in her [Madame Defarge's] own stitches and her own symbols" (*TTC* 202) and she keeps it "in her memory alone" (*TTC* 202).

The following circumstance concerning the same scarf corresponds to another scene in the outer narrative, the brutal murder of Foulon by the citizens of Paris led by Madame Defarge. The sister of Madame Defarge has "drawn the end of the scarf into her mouth" and is "in danger of suffocation" (*TTC* 351). A similar moment can be found in the death scene of Foulon in 1789. Foulon, who has told that "they might eat grass" (*TTC* 251) in regard to the famished people, is made to pay a big price for it, as we have already examined. What must be stressed here is that the dying moment of Foulon appears to bear some resemblance to that of Madame's sister. She too is driven to the verge of suffocation, being "stifled by the bunches of grass and straw that were thrust into his face by hundreds of hands" (*TTC* 254). Somewhat expectedly, it is relentless Madame Defarge that instigates the mob to this act of brutality: "See the old villain bound with ropes. That was well done to tie a bunch of grass upon his back. Ha, ha! That was well done. Let him eat it now!" (*TTC* 253), she cries. Such implacability must be considered in relation to her sister's death scene recorded in the document. The murder of Foulon occurs one week after the fall of the Bastille. On the very same day Defarge discovered

the document in the North Tower of the prison and brought it home, and Madame Defarge confesses that she read it on that night, and presumably for the first time knew the full details of her sister's fate. Therefore, it is very likely that when she chokes Foulon with the bunches of grass and straw, and makes him reap what he has sown, the picture of her dying sister in danger of suffocation is also in her mind. She does not want to prevent the repetition of the past; rather, in retaliating him, the opposite desire of Madame Defarge takes shape—the desire for deliberately reproducing the history of violence, turning the former power relationship topsy-turvy. This type of repetition again suggests an underlying sameness between the aristocratic brutality and the republican cruelty.

Yet the most conspicuous example of the reappearance of the past directly concerns the behaviours of Manette himself. His reaction to witnessing the plight of the plebeian and the atrocity of the aristocrat curiously coincides with that of Darnay. In spite of many differences between their personal circumstances—Manette has, unlike an aristocrat Darnay, no sin to atone for—there does exist an inexplicable similarity in their courses of action. The encounter with the peasant boy enlightens Manette as to the true state of the poor people of France: "I had never before seen the sense of being oppressed, bursting forth like a fire. I had supposed that it must be latent in the people somewhere; but, I had never seen it break out, until I saw it in the dying boy" (*TTC* 354). Nevertheless, he is not able to take concrete action to improve such distorted social condition. All he can do is to refuse the promised reward, and make an incomplete gesture of compensation, so as to deceive his own conscience. After the two patients die, he firmly declines to accept the money Marquis St. Evrémonde offers: "He had before offered me money, which I had postponed taking. He now gave me a rouleau of gold. I took it from his hand, but laid it on the table. I had considered the question, and had resolved to accept nothing" (*TTC* 359). Manette is strictly forbidden to mention the matter, but he decides to write privately to the Minister and reports the whole matter, knowing it is all useless: "I

knew what Court influence was, and what the immunities of the Nobles were, and I expected that the matter would never be heard of; but, I wished to relieve my own mind" (*TTC* 359). However, even this nominal act of atonement remains unfulfilled: before posting the letter, Manette is again called for under pretence of emergency duty, and then arrested on the spot and brought to the Bastille, his "living grave" (*TTC* 361).

His son-in-law Darnay, after the lapse of a generation, closely but quite unconsciously traces this fate. Darnay, as a descendant of the Evrémonde, is well aware that his family has done wrong, and is "reaping the fruits of wrong" (*TTC* 154). His first procedure of atonement is, like Manette, to turn down the offered fortune: "This property and France are lost to me," he says, "I renounce them." (*TTC* 155). He hopes, when the time has come, to put his fortune into "some hands better qualified to free it slowly (if such a thing is possible) from the weight that drags it down, so that the miserable people who cannot leave it and who have been long wrung to the last point of endurance, may, in another generation, suffer less" (*TTC* 155). However, his plan is abandoned halfway, and he again re-enacts the conduct of Manette, without being conscious of it:

> He knew very well, that in his horror of the deed which had culminated the bad deeds and bad reputation of the old family house, in his resentful suspicions of his uncle, and in the aversion with which his conscience regarded the crumbling fabric that he was supposed to uphold, he had acted imperfectly. He knew very well, that in his love for Lucie, his renunciation of his social place, though by no means new to his own mind, had been hurried and incomplete. He knew that he ought to have systematically worked it out and supervised it, and that he had meant to do it, and that it had never been done. (*TTC* 271)

As Frank Lawrence points out, in his renunciation of his fortune, "Darnay reveals a tendency to self-deception. He wants to obliterate the past, to elude the responsibility he has acknowledged as his alone" (130). And it must be noted that such tendency to self-deception can also be found in the behaviour of young Manette. In fact, the Marquis confesses that if he were not in disgrace with the Court, his nephew Darnay, for the honour of the family, would have been sent to "some fortress indefinitely" (*TTC* 152), exactly as he threw Manette into

prison about two decades ago. Thus, both in refusal of fortune and half-hearted compensation, these two characters appear to follow similar fates, both resulting in dire consequences—Manette loses his senses in the prison, and Darnay is condemned to death as "an enemy of the Republic, a notorious oppressor of the People" (*TTC* 362), for whose sake he has suffered and striven not a little.

In such a way, many elements recorded in Manette's prison memoir recur again, most of which quite inexplicably, without fully persuading us that they are the natural consequences or the results of necessity. It should be noted, furthermore, that they are not mere meaningless, coincidental repetitions but revivals of traumatic memory of its author. Hutter regards Manette's story as "the narrative equivalent of a trauma", stating that "within the structure of the *Tale* it acts like a traumatic memory, reliving the significant antecedent events of the entire plot at the climax of Darnay's second trial" ("Nation and Generation" 449). Indeed, when the document is read publicly and the abominable past is resurrected, its writer relapses into the former state of insanity, and becomes frenetically absorbed in the activity of shoe-making. Manette's document is a record of "the 'primary scene' of the text itself" (Hutter "Nation and Generation" 449), and being forced to face it can be a source of immense suffering, even accompanying mental distraction. Taking this into account, another important aspect of the document comes to light: the outer framework of this inner historical novel also deals with a large traumatic event, the French Revolution.[16] The contemporary European world at first found this great landmark in the history immensely shocking and disturbing, and especially with the excesses of the Reign of Terror, it even came to be regarded as an abominable barbarism. In surveying the contemporary narrative responses to the French Revolution, Katherine Astbury adapts the concept of "collective trauma" and suggests that "[t]his sense of trauma affecting a community and not just an individual can usefully be adapted to the French Revolution, when there was a collective sense that the world had been turned upside down and

previous certainties about family and the structure of society seemed no longer to apply" (7). Dickens is no exception to this. While he admits the historical inevitability of the Revolution, he does not conceal his aversion for its boundless violence and mass madness, as can be seen in the gruesome grindstone scene in Book 3 Chapter 2, or the frenzied dancing of Carmagnole in Chapter 5. *A Tale of Two Cities* is, like its inner narrative, a vivid record of a past traumatic experience, and as many critics have shown, the main thesis of the novel is that what he calls in the preface "that terrible time" (*TTC* 29) can be repeated again in nineteenth century England, if only circumstances allow it:[17] "Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. Sow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind" (*TTC* 399). For this reason, it can be assumed that the novelist's imminent fear of the Revolution happening again is reflected in the story within the novel, with the result that it contains various sorts of uncanny repetitions and recurrences of the traumatic memory of its author.

What makes Manette's story all the more tragic is that all the characters in the novel eventually fail to derive due lessons from it, since it is not shared properly. For instance, Darnay's unconscious imitation of the act of young Manette is likely to be preventable if he were able to gain knowledge about the content of the document, but due to their tendencies to avoid confronting their past (Manette represses his own memory, and Darnay renounces his previous identity), the incomplete action of his father-in-law is repeated; likewise, no matter how hard Lucie tries to build a new life in London—a life untainted by any contact with the external world—it only proves to be fragile and weak one, since, as Chris Brooks rightly points out, it solely depends on "an inability—however innocent—to confront one's own history" (87);[18] and for the exact same reason, the efforts of Mr Lorry and Miss Pross, "two of the most virtuous characters in the novel" (Pionke 44), to prevent Manette from relapsing into his

former state do not obtain satisfying result. The destruction of his shoemaking tools does not suffice for the treatment, since it is mere the effect of his mental derangement, not the cause of it; the Defarges are the first to read the document, but, as we have seen in the former section, for them its only use is as a definite evidence to ensure the ruin of their old enemy. Their attitude towards the past corresponds with what Edmund Burke criticised as "the perversion of history" (250) in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*: "We do not draw the moral lessons we might from history. On the contrary, without care, it may be used to vitiate our minds and to destroy our happiness" (247). Manette's painful personal history teaches them nothing; it only serves as an instrument of vengeance. Predictably enough, As Brooks points out, beyond a certain point, the Revolution progresses no further, since it does not create anything at all (88).

Thus, it now becomes clear that the prison memoir of Manette as a historical writing in miniature is highly self-referential: first, it reflects the novelist's fear of resurrection of the traumatic past, which takes the shape of the repetitive occurrences of the events recorded in the document; second, it ironically presents itself as a historical writing that fails to deliver moral lessons to the reader, and by that means gives a warning that without dealing with one's history appropriately, one's present and future life becomes nothing more than a house built on sand. Both Manette and Darnay wish to separate themselves from their former self, and their eventual failure appears to convey the same lesson as *David Copperfield*—every individual must confront one's own personal history and traumatic past at some point in one's life, and that is the only way to establish a distinct, unshakeable identity.[19] This theme is also mirrored in the third type of the resurrection theme, the resuscitation of the dead, which will be the topic of the next section.

III. Raising the Dead

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, certain characters are "recalled to life", though, of course, only in a figurative sense: Foulon and Cly are found alive after their mock funerals; Manette and Sydney Carton are come back to life again from their states of psychological death. In the preceding section we have suggested that Dickens's dread of revolution expresses itself in the resurrection theme of the novel, in the form of multiple recurrences of the traumatic past. Thus, whenever the author of the novel brings up the resurrection theme, his serious apprehension also raises its head. This anxious feeling also appears to be revealed in the third type of resurrection. The aim of this section is to make clear the extent to which Dickens's self-awareness as a historical novelist is reflected in the theme of reviving the dead.

Since, as we have already discussed, the act of resuscitation of the dead has traditionally been identified with the job of a historical novelist, it is worth noting that this historical novel begins with a metaphorical resurrection of a dead person, which may suggest that the novel is quite indicative of its complex self-reflexive nature from the very beginning. Book the First entitled "Recalled to Life" is fully devoted to the exhumation of Dr Manette, who has been incarcerated in the Bastille for eighteen years and has long been assumed dead. When he is found alive, Mr Jarvis Lorry of Tellson's Bank is ordered to travel across the Channel with his daughter Lucie Manette, and take him back to England. His business in the early chapters is apparently connected with the act of resurrection or body-snatching: the password used by him is "Recalled to Life" (*TTC* 58), and more blatantly, in the Dover mail coach, Lorry dreams that he is "on his way to dig some one out of a grave" (*TTC* 46). In this respect, the creditable banker ironically bears a close affinity to his coarse, underhand messenger Jerry Cruncher, who literally engages in grave robbing as a side job (Wood 54). This similarity also allows us to draw a parallel between Lorry the resurrectionist and Dickens the historical novelist.

Indeed, it is through the dialogue between Lorry and Lucie in Chapter 4 of Book the First that Dickens's ambivalent depiction of the resurrection theme betrays itself subtly but unmistakably. At their first meeting in this chapter entitled "The Preparation", Lucie knows nothing more than that some discovery respecting the small property of her deceased father has rendered it necessary for her to go to Paris, and she is only told to prepare herself to find it of "a surprising nature" (*TTC* 53). Therefore, Lorry has to relate the whole circumstances of the case, revealing information gradually so that her mental shock might be mitigated. After some hesitation and circumlocutory introduction, Lorry confides the discovery of her father by pretending to present a series of assumptions:

> 'So far, miss (as you have remarked), this is the story of your regretted father. Now comes the difference. If your father had not died when he did—Don't be frightened! How you start!'
>
> She did, indeed, start. And she caught his wrist with both her hands.
>
> 'Pray,' said Mr Lorry, in a soothing tone, bringing his left hand from the back of the chair to lay it on the supplicatory fingers that clasped him in so violent a tremble: 'pray control your agitation—a matter of business. As I was saying—'
>
> Her look so discomposed him that he stopped, wandered, and began anew:
>
> 'As I was saying; if Monsieur Manette had not died; if he had suddenly and silently disappeared; if he had been spirited away; if it had not been difficult to guess to what dreadful place, though no art could trace him; if he had an enemy in some compatriot [. . .]; if his wife had implored the king, the queen, the court, the clergy, for any tidings of him, and all quite in vain;—then the history of your father would have been the history of this unfortunate gentleman, the Doctor of Beauvais.' (*TTC* 55-56)

Thus, Lorry carefully brings up the matter of her father's resurrection, knowing that it can cause an emotional disturbance to the listener. Despite such precautions, this piece of information frightens Lucie out of her wits. As Lorry gives an additional explanation, her expression gradually deepens into "one of pain and horror" (*TTC* 57), then a shiver runs through her frame, and she eventually faints away, like a typical Victorian lady: "Perfectly still and silent, and not even fallen back in her chair, she sat under his hand, utterly insensible; with her eyes open and fixed upon him, and with that last expression looking as if it were carved or branded into her forehead" (*TTC* 58). Even though her response is rather expected, still it

seems baffling that the news of her father's survival causes her more agitation than the death sentence of her husband which is given long afterward in the novel.

In examining the meaning of this scene, Lorry's suppositions ("what if he had not died?", etc.) should not go unnoticed because of its parallel relation with the anxious assumption of Dickens when he wrote the novel—that is, what if revolution is not the dead past? Given such obsession of the novelist, Lorry's disclosure can be read as a subtle inkling of what this novel is about: the reader, like Lucie, will be forced to confront the resurrected "Ghost" (*TTC* 57) of the past, and haunted by the idea of the repetition of the traumatic history. Therefore, one must, as the title of this chapter indicates, make preparations for it. Through the speech of Lorry as a double of the historical novelist, it implicatively supplies the reader with a preliminary knowledge as to the preoccupying concern of the novel itself. And that makes Lorry's repetitive admonitions in this scene such as "[d]on't be frightened" or "pray control your agitation" much more meaningful than they appear on the surface, because such terrible perturbation is what the reader of *A Tale of Two Cities* is supposed to confront, as demonstrated most vividly by George Orwell's critical response to the novel: "Dickens is very sure that revolution *is* a monster. That is why everyone remembers the revolutionary scenes in *A Tale of Two Cities*; they have the quality of nightmare, and it is Dickens's own nightmare" (27). And, as we have repeatedly emphasised, what renders these nightmarish visions of the Revolution so horrible is, the author's deeply-rooted fear that it is not the dead, distant past, but may happen again in the present society—in short, the fear of the resurrection of the past. Thus, Dickens's treatment of the resurrection theme is frequently mixed with fear, and that explains why so much emphasis is put on the disclosure of the information of Manette's coming back to life, and the great disturbance of the listener.

In addition to the horrible and ominous connotation, it must be also noted that this act is described as something that compels one to gather scattered memories and reconstruct history,

which is again symbolically equivalent to what the reader of this historical novel is required to do. As we have already cited before, in perusing a historical novel, the reader is inevitably involved in the act of redefining the past as "the prehistory of the present" (Lukács 53). Through the conversation with Lorry, Lucie struggles to gather up her fragmented memories and attempts to reorganise her own history little by little, as symbolically shown by her act of raising her hand, "as if with an involuntary action she caught at, or stayed some passing shadow" (*TTC* 53). She finally succeeds in her work of reconstruction, and accepts Manette as her father with all her heart: she becomes "the golden thread that united him to a Past beyond his misery, and to a Present beyond his misery" (*TTC* 110). After all, for Lucie, the survival of her father is not an unbearable event at all. Her panic is provoked simply because she does not remember him, not because she is afraid of him: "I have been free, I have been happy, yet his Ghost has never haunted me!" (*TTC* 57). The memory of her father is not a terrible, painful past like the Revolution, but just an unknown, long forgotten past. At this point, Lucie does not know, and nor seek to know about her father's hidden, untold past, which, as we have seen in the earlier section, makes the resurrection of Manette so incomplete and transient. Still, by focusing on the resurrection of the past and the reconstruction of history, the Book the First of the novel seems to reveal its self-referential nature very keenly: it is a historical novel about confronting and interpreting history.

As the novel proceeds, it is gradually revealed that facing history can invoke not only memories of forgotten, buried past, but also memories of one's unforgettable past suffering. In this sense, the "resurrection" of Foulon illustrates more directly how the revival of the traumatic past can be a disturbing event. On hearing that Foulon is "[n]ot dead" (*TTC* 251), the Paris people exhibit no less agitated reaction than Lucie:

> Foulon who told the starving people they might eat grass. Foulon who told my old father that he might eat grass, when I had no bread to give him. Foulon who told my baby it might suck grass, when these breasts were dry with want. O mother of God, this Foulon. O Heaven, our suffering. Hear me, my dead baby and my

> withered father: I swear on my knees, on these stones, to avenge you on Foulon! Husbands, and brothers, and young men, Give us the blood of Foulon, Give us the head of Foulon, Give us the heart of Foulon, Give us the body and soul of Foulon, Rend Foulon to pieces, and dig him into the ground, that grass may grow from him. With these cries, numbers of the women, lashed into blind frenzy, whirled about, striking and tearing at their own friends until they dropped into a passionate swoon, and were only saved by the men belonging to them from being trampled under foot. (*TTC* 252).

In the same way as the reader of the novel confronts the horrible history of the Revolution through the metaphorical act of "resurrection" by the historical novelist, the resuscitation of the abominable memory of the old oppressor makes the Paris people unavoidably face their own history, though in this case, their failure to deal with it is apparent from their subsequent excessive revenge.

Thus, it is to some extent due to the association with Dickens's apprehension of the Revolution, that the revival of the dead is often described as something horrible and macabre, something to be avoided if possible. Certainly resurrection, despite its outward impression, has an ominous implication in *A Tale of Two Cities*.[20] In this context, Jerry Cruncher's honest feelings towards resurrection can be interpreted as a reflection of the novelist's own personal opinion: "Much of that wouldn't do for you, Jerry! I say, Jerry! You'd be in a Blazing bad way, if recalling to life was to come into fashion, Jerry!" (*TTC* 44). Resurrection of the past, like Jerry's crime of "resurrection" of dead bodies, should be available only to the privileged "resurrection-man". It is acceptable or tolerable as long as it belongs to the imaginary act of the historical novelist, and resurrection in reality, that is, the actual recurrence of the Revolution is far from desirable.

It is Sydney Carton's spiritual revival at the end of the book that sweeps away the negative connotations of the resurrection theme in the novel. Like Manette and Darnay, he appears to be a man who wants to renounce his own past, but the crucial difference lies in the way he actually deals with it: while the former two are inclined to suppress or forget their

unpleasant memories, Carton is unable to evade his own history, and this drives him to lead a forlorn, wretched life and makes him always feel estranged from the world: "As to me, the greatest desire I have, is to forget that I belong to it" (*TTC* 114), Carton says. However, as his strange nickname "Memory" (*TTC* 118) indicates, such escape is utterly impossible for him: "Mr Darnay, oblivion is not so easy to me, as you represent it to be to you" (*TTC* 236). His way of treating memory is sharply contrasted with that of his counterpart, Darnay, and also his business partner, Stryver, who distorts his memory and eventually believes it himself. Carton's past, though the reader is not informed of the details of it, constantly torments him, and casts a long shadow over many years of his later life. He even professes that "I am like one who died young." (*TTC* 180), and it is in this sense that he can be regarded as one of the many characters who are "buried alive" in the novel.

Carton's resurrection is achieved through his hopeless, disinterested love for Lucie. For her and her child's sake, Carton determines to save Darnay's life at the cost of his own. His self-sacrifice is not only a gratuitous act of love, but also a redemption of his old sins. In abandoning jealousy and rivalry towards Darnay, he inevitably confronts his own history, because of their close resemblance: "What a change you have made in yourself! A good reason for taking to a man, that he shows you what you have fallen away from, and what you might have been!" (*TTC* 116). For Carton, Darnay appears, as it were, as a ghost of his youth, or rather, his resurrected past itself. Therefore, the question of how to deal with his double is, to a certain degree, inseparable from the question of how to deal with his own past, his former identity which he does not wish to recall. In this respect, we can find a significant thematic connection between the martyrdom of Carton and its historical background, the French Revolution:[21] while the French people return violence for violence, and thus merely repeat the history of oppression in a different political form, Carton's Christ-like death prevents Darnay from dying prematurely, and in doing so, he manages to stave off the repetition of his own

history, when we take into consideration that Carton himself is a man who "died young" (*TTC* 180). Furthermore, this act ultimately enables his own spiritual resurrection. The novel ends with Carton's famous prophetic vision, in which he foresees that in years to come his past sins will be purged away and he will be sacred in other people's memory forever:

> 'I see that I hold a sanctuary in their hearts, and in the hearts of their descendants, generations hence. I see her, an old woman, weeping for me on the anniversary of this day. I see her and her husband, their course done, lying side by side in their last earthly bed, and I know that each was not more honoured and held sacred in the other's soul, than I was in the souls of both.
>
> 'I see that child who lay upon her bosom and who bore my name, a man winning his way up in that path of life which once was mine. I see him winning it so well, that my name is made illustrious there by the light of his. I see the blots I threw upon it, faded away. I see him, foremost of just judges and honoured men, bringing a boy of my name, with a forehead that I know and golden hair, to this place—then fair to look upon, with not a trace of this day's disfigurement—and I hear him tell the child my story, with a tender and a faltering voice. (*TTC* 404)

In this passage, there is a thematic reverberation of the two types of "resurrection" we have discussed in this chapter, namely the retelling of the past and the repetition of the past: Carton's story is handed down from one generation to the next; and at the same time his dishonour is wiped out by a boy who bears his name, and who will trace the path that Carton himself has once treaded. In other words, his life is repeated again, but this time, repeated with a modification which allows his spiritual descendant to become what Carton might have been. Thus, Carton's name is immortalised through the two kinds of resurrection, and they are, despite the fact that they have the opposite, ominous connotations in many other parts of the novel, used in a purely positive sense here. There is not the slightest reflection of the author's fear or apprehension in Carton's hopeful vision of the future. As J. M. Rignall suggests, this prophesy is "a moment of resistance to the grimly terminal linearity and historical determinism of the proceeding narrative" (576).

However, it is true that his death also has an aspect of self-destruction.[22] Resigning his own life means that he no longer has to be bothered with his own past. To use Barton R. Friedman's words, Carton's act ultimately allows him "an escape from history" (486), for he

goes to the place where "there is no Time there, and no trouble there" (*TTC* 403). Even so, his act can still have a significant impact on the ways other people deal with their own history: the Darnay family, once they realise what they owe to Carton, appears to be unable to escape from their own past, since their "sacred" (*TTC* 404) memory of Carton and their boy of the same name will become their incessant reminders of the horrible past.[23] Their fatal defect as we have seen before, the unconscious propensity to avoid confronting history, is now rendered impossible, and they are forced to live with the memory of Carton, which, unlike the narrative of Manette, is never likely to be buried away. And in this way, what Carton sees in his final speech—the regeneration of the whole nation and the whole human race—can be finally realised: "I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and, in their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats, through long years to come, I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out" (*TTC* 404). It is also worth noting that Carton sees the boy of his name "foremost of just judges" (*TTC* 404)—a profession, as we have already seen, analogous to a historian. Carton's act, therefore, is not necessarily an escape from history nor self-torment, but an embodiment of Dickens's idea of history, which is also an ultimate solution for his personal fear of revolution. Even the famous final speech of Carton can be attributable to his acute consciousness of his own personal history: "It is a far, far better thing that I do, *than I have ever done*; it is a far, far better rest that I go to *than I have ever known*." (*TTC* 404, italics mine).

* * * * *

According to Edgar Johnson, *A Tale of Two Cities* has been "hailed as the best of Dickens's books and damned as the worst. It is neither, but it is certainly in some ways the least characteristic" (979). Let us now review the criticism of Lukács: "Dickens, by giving pre-

eminence to the purely moral aspects of causes and effects, weakens the connection between the problems of the characters' lives and the events of the French Revolution. The latter becomes a romantic background" (243). However, foregrounding "moral aspects" does not necessarily mean that the historical events are dismissed as of secondary importance; on the contrary, these two are deeply connected in *A Tale of Two Cities*. This is because, as we have discussed, the principle characters in the novel—Carton, Manette, Darnay, the Defarges—all reveal their true ethical personality through their attitude towards the past or the history. Dickens understands the causes and effects of the French Revolution in relation to the issue of how one should interpret and deal with the history. Dickens's elaborate but often ambiguous handling of the theme of resurrection shows how *A Tale of Two Cities* is self-reflexive and how it incessantly poses questions about its own position as a historical novel.

All three types of resurrection in the novel—the retelling of the past, the repetition of the past, and the resuscitation of the dead—display the novelist's self-consciousness about writing the Revolution. The tribunal scenes and Manette's prison memoir function as internal analogies of historiography or historical fiction, raising questions about authenticity of historical evidence and arbitrary interpretation of the past. In addition to this, the various repetitions of the traumatic past recorded in Manette's document also reveal Dickens's fear of the recurrence of the Revolution. The same fear explains why the phenomena of resurrection in the novel are often described as dreadful, terrible events, as can be seen in the scenes about the revival of Manette and Foulon. However, the darker aspect of resurrection is eradicated through the act of heroism of Sydney Carton at the end of the novel. Even after his death at the guillotine, it is predicted that he will be recalled to life again, so long as his story echoes through the ages and the boy of his name re-treads the path of life from which Carton has strayed and become irrecoverably lost. Thus, his self-sacrifice highlights the importance of confronting the past—not only a public history but also one's private memories, without which

one can never keep one's identity solid or stable. Carton's optimistic future vision in the final scene appears to suggest that the repetition of traumatic history is not necessarily inevitable, but one can make a decision to prevent a chain of violence and hatred by sharing history and learning moral lessons from it. Thus, the resurrection motif of the novel is transformed into the symbol of the utopian future, and in this sense it might be assumed that Dickens also tries to affirm his own job in *A Tale of Two Cities*—the job as a historical novelist, a resurrectionist of the past. The same resurrection motif reappears, but with another thematic significance, in Dickens's last complete novel, *Our Mutual Friend*.

Notes

[1.] As Albert D. Hutter points out, for a long time, due to the legal restrictions it had been "virtually impossible for a corpse to be obtained for British medical schools without recourse to body snatching" ("Novelist as Resurrectionist" 4), and this led to prosperity of this shady business. The notorious Burke and Hare murders were committed in 1828. They delivered as many as sixteen dead bodies to Edinburgh Medical School, and in the end Burke himself was hanged and dissected. In 1831, John Bishop and Thomas Williams in London were accused for the murder of an Italian boy whose body they sold to the King's College School of Anatomy. These cases resulted in the passage of the Anatomy Act of 1832, which made it easier for medical schools to procure bodies legally.

[2.] See Ackroyd 180.

[3.] Other important studies may include the work of Andrew Sanders, but, though his book is entitled *Charles Dickens: Resurrectionist*, his interest is actually in "[t]he importance of Christian, as opposed to the body-snatcher's" (x). For the most recent study on the subject, see Chad May 262-76. May compares Dickens's use of the trope of resurrection in *A Tale of Two*

Cities to Walter Scott's, arguing that "while Scott emphasises a gothic conception of resurrection to trouble and disturb the linear progression of his historical narratives, Dickens shifts the metaphor, activating a Christian model to redeem and grant meaning to the suffering of history" (262). On the other hand, our focus is, as will be demonstrated, on the self-reflective aspect of this historical novel.

[4.] The reader's desire to pry into personal secret and private lives is inseparable from the rise of the novel itself. What lies at the root of the sudden rise of popularity of the novel is the emergence of individualism. In his discussion of *Pamela*, for example, Ian Watt observes that individualism "provided an audience deeply enough interested in all the processes that occur in the individual consciousness to find *Pamela* absorbing" (177).

[5.] Hayden White has made it obvious that the process of historiography inevitably involves the process of fiction writing: "*How* a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind. This is essentially a literary, that is to say, fiction-making, operation" ("Historical Text" 85)

[6.] See Forster vol. 2, 57.

[7.] Michael Goldberg points out that "[t]o write the history Carlyle sought total immersion in the historical event rather neo-classical detachment from it. He sought, in Herder's phrase, to become a 'regenerated contemporary' of the historic personages whose lives he recorded" (105), and such theory might also be seen in Dickens.

[8.] Eleanor Salotto makes a similar point, noting that "[i]n the place of history, Dickens replaces the words of someone who can resurrect materials from the dead fragments of history and make them immemorial" (154).

[9.] See Forster vol. 2, 280. Dickens appeared to abandon this idea because it sounds "too grim" (2: 280).

[10.] See Ackroyd 910. In his letter to Edward Bulwer Lytton, Dickens insisted upon the historical accuracy of the novel, and asserted that he wrote the condition of pre-Revolutionary Paris on the authority of Mercier's *Tableau de Paris* and works of Rousseau. See *Letters 9*, 258-59.

[11.] See Yatsuigi 23-25.

[12.] Many critics stress the important position of Manette's testimony in the novel. Toshikatsu Murayama argues that both Manette's document and Madame Defarge's knitting are "representative accounts of the past", and therefore "analogous to *A Tale of Two Cities* as a historical novel" (70). Murray Baumgarten also regards the document as "a novel in miniature", observing that "it provides a model of mis-reading, in which writing is taken absolutely, and becomes an imprisoning code. [. . .] [I]t forces us to confront the meaning of writing in this novel" ("Writing the Revolution" 162). John Reed even contends that "Dr. Manette's narrative is itself an analogue of the larger history of France—the suppression ("burying") of truth by the aristocracy to ensure to continuance of its own privileges" (267).

[13.] Repetition in *A Tale of Two Cities* is so notable that G. Robert Stange even complains that "[r]epetition was an endemic Victorian rhetorical device of which Dickens was always fond, but in no other novel is it so obtrusive" (388).

[14.] Hutter argues that "[f]rom the title through the rhetorically balanced opening paragraphs, Dickens establishes the "twoness" of everything to follow" ("Nation and Generation" 455) and notes that "characters are twinned and doubled and paired" ("Nation and Generation" 455). However, he places little emphasis on the corresponding relationship between Darnay/Carton and the Evrémonde twins.

[15.] Indeed, as John Kucich points out, by condemning Darnay to death, Manette is "transformed from repressed victim to violent oppressor; he is identified with Madame Defarge and the rebels in their progress from one stage to the other" (132).

[16.] May also connects the private trauma of Manette with the social trauma of revolution. See May 271.

[17.] See Earle Davis 253. George Orwell states that "Dickens sees clearly enough that the French Revolution was bound to happen and that many of the people who were executed deserved what they got. If, he says, you behave as the French aristocracy had behaved, vengeance will follow. He repeats this over and over again" (26).

[18.] John B. Lamb also points out that the domestic realm in *A Tale of Two Cities* is "an atemporal space, a timeless utopia where Lucie follows Lucie in endless series of occupations" (234), and reads "Victorian society's desire not to master memory, but to master forgetfulness, to make absent the political and sexual desires that threaten hegemony" (234).

[19.] See Chapter 3 of this thesis, particularly 116-25.

[20.] The darker aspect of the resurrection theme can be detected in the way the word "regeneration" is used. Unlike Carlyle's *French Revolution*, where the whole process of the Revolution is portrayed as "the regeneration of France" (*French Revolution* 292), Dickens's usage of it is often ironic: the guillotine is described as "the sign of the regeneration of the human race" (*TTC* 302) or Marquis St. Evrémonde regards himself as the "great means of regeneration" (*TTC* 153).

[21.] The lack of necessary correlation between these two themes has long been the subject of criticism. Edgar Johnson observes that "the two themes of love and revolution are not successfully fused" (981), and Carton's martyrdom "blurs the social criticism of the story, and, for all its power, half destroys its revolutionary meaning" (982). Hutter also calls Carton's self-sacrifice "unrealistic solution" ("Nation and Generation" 451). On the other hand, Masayo Hasegawa argues that there is a contrasting relationship between Carton and the French citizens. See Hasegawa 31-39.

[22.] For a convincing argument in favour of Carton's act, see Kucich 119-35. According to Kucich, the "pure" self-violence of Sydney Carton changes the meaning of self-destruction in the novel, translating the "the revolutionaries' problematical desires for freedom" (120) into more acceptable terms.

[23.] According to a Christian interpretation of Chris Brooks, *A Tale of Two Cities* can be read as a fable in which "a secret Christ [. . .] eventually pays the forfeit for Citizen Everyman and, redeeming him from the consequences of the Original Sin of his race, offers him resurrection and the chance of future life" (95). It is not within the scope of this chapter to fully address this point, but it remains somewhat doubtful whether Carton's sacrifice really is a pure salvation for Darnay and Lucie. In fact, it is possible that the martyrdom of Carton will cast another dark shadow on them, and make their future matrimonial life less innocent than it used to. For the rest of their lives, they will always be conscious of the enormous debt they owe him, and have to live for the sake of Carton, just like he died for the sake of them. In a sense, by preserving Darnay's life at the sacrifice of Carton's, Lucie and her husband incur another "original sin" when they begin their life anew, and this again inevitably reminds us of the ambiguous nature of the resurrection theme of the novel.

CHAPTER 5

FICTION-MAKING IN *OUR MUTUAL FRIEND*

On 29 March 1864, Dickens wrote to John Forster, that "I have grown hard to satisfy, and write very slowly. And I have so much—not fiction—that will be thought of, when I don't want to think of it, that I am forced to take more care than I once took" (Forster 2: 293). According to Forster, Dickens had already conceived several ideas for *Our Mutual Friend*—which was destined to be his last completed novel—in 1861, but, as he planned and prepared *Barnaby Rudge*, he had to wait a few years before the actual publication.[1] In his letter to Forster on 29 July 1864, he again complained about his compositional difficulty: "Although I have not been wanting in industry, I have been wanting in invention, and have fallen back with the book. [. . .] This week I have been very unwell; am still out of sorts; and, as I know from two days' slow experience, have a very mountain to climb before I shall see the open country of my work" (Forster 2: 293). In fact, there were a couple of incidents that rendered it difficult for him to concentrate on his work during the serial publication—his intermittent illness, the death of John Leech (October 1864), his friend and illustrator, and most famously the Staplehurst rail crash (June 1865) in which he was involved and injured mentally rather than physically. At the beginning of July 1865, he committed a mistake which had been unthinkable before: "fancy my having under-written number sixteen by two and a half pages—a thing I have not done since Pickwick!" (Forster 2: 294).[2] In short, at this point in his life, the task of writing a novel required much more effort and energy than before.

The result is that *Our Mutual Friend* remains somewhat a controversial work in Dickens's oeuvres. Not a few critics have found the novel quite satisfactory. G. K. Chesterton, for example, regards the work as "a happy return to the earlier manner of Dickens at the end of Dickens's life" (Introduction to *OMF* v). Edgar Johnson praises it as "one of the supreme works of English fiction" (1042), calling it "*The Waste Land* of Dickens's work" (1043). Jack Lindsay even goes so far as to claim that *Our Mutual Friend* is not only Dickens's "supreme work" but also "one of the greatest works of prose ever written" (*Dickens* 380). At the same

time, however, many critics have considered that when Dickens wrote *Our Mutual Friend*, his creative energy was already on the wane. Even Foster, Dickens's friend and who probably understood him best, did not praise the novel unconditionally: "It has not the creative power which crowded his earlier page, and transformed into popular realities the shadows of his fancy" (2: 295). Samuel C. Chew states that "[t]he decline in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) is obvious to most readers. The plot is [. . .] a tissue of crossed motives scarce worth the unraveling. [. . .] The satire on snobbery and social ambitions is even more heavy-handed than it had been in *Little Dorrit*" (1350-51). Robert Garis argues that the refined tone of *Our Mutual Friend* is gained "at the expense of inventiveness and creative vitality", which "may mean simply that Dickens's enormous energy was at last beginning to fail" (226). Dennis Walder considers that the novel is not necessarily a failure, but still is "evidently a seriously flawed novel" (208). The harshest criticism of the novel is undoubtedly Henry James's review in which he calls the novel "the poorest" (48) of Dickens's works: "And it is poor with the poverty not of momentary embarrassment, but of permanent exhaustion. It is wanting in inspiration. For the last ten years it has seemed to us that Mr. Dickens has been unmistakably forcing himself" (48). Near the end of his review, James notoriously observes that "[i]t were, in our opinion, an offence against humanity to place Mr. Dickens among the greatest novelists" ("The Limitations" 52).

It may certainly be true that Dickens had a hard time writing it, but this does not necessarily mean that *Our Mutual Friend* is an utter failure. On the contrary, presumably because of the very compositional suffering the novelist underwent, the novel has one peculiar idiosyncrasy which makes it worthwhile to discuss in detail—it constantly raises questions about the nature of fiction itself. Considering his circumstances, it is no wonder that Dickens is more self-conscious about the act of fiction-making in *Our Mutual Friend* than in any of his previous novels. It is as if in the process of struggle to give birth to his last completed novel,

Dickens was forced to be acutely reflective about his own creative activity itself—activity of developing plots, keeping readers in suspense (which is often done by means of deceiving or misleading them), and inventing fictional characters, names, and places. Interestingly, these acts are precisely what many characters in the novel are engaged in. Indeed, one may define *Our Mutual Friend* as a fiction preoccupied with fiction-making. From the minor characters with relatively trivial roles to the leading characters that are essential to the story, many in the novel are obsessed with inventing fictitious tales, or playing imaginative roles through which they escape or distort reality. Some even end up believing the fabricated pretence they themselves have created. Unlike *Hard Times* (1854), where "fact" and "fancy" are opposed to each other and the power of the latter is commended, in *Our Mutual Friend* the relationship between the two is much more complex and intricate, and Dickens appears to foreground the issue of ethical significance of enjoyment and creation of fiction itself.[3]

There are several critics who have already pointed out the importance of the motif of fiction in *Our Mutual Friend*. The earliest and perhaps most influential criticism on this subject can be found in J Hillis Miller's *Charles Dickens: The Word of His Novels*, in which he has observed that "there is a characteristic of the style of *Our Mutual Friend* which reminds us constantly of its fictious character" (304). This theme has been further explored by such critics as U. C. Knoepflmacher, who has claimed that throughout the novel "runs the recurrent motif of characters who clings to a fiction" (145) and Robert S. Baker, who has stated that "Dickens' last complete novel is a vast anthology of texts and fictions, of books, stories, histories, documents, riddles and fragments of poems, all of which compete for the reader's attention and constantly threaten to overwhelm him in a torrent of linguistic confusion" (57). Robert Kiely notes that what is most striking and modern about the novel is "the number and richness of the fictional designs that emanate not from the authorial voice but from various characters" and in this respect, "Dickens looks ahead more to Nabokov than to Conrad because he appears to be

calling into question the possibility of disentangling truth from even the most outrageous fictions" (270). Kenneth M. Sroka places the novel among the "examples of Victorian metafiction, fiction, whose matter is the nature of fiction, the phenomenon of reading and writing, and the interrelationship of writer, text, and reader" ("Dickens's Metafiction" 36), and Daniel Pollack-Pelzner has relatively recently suggested that "[j]ust as *Our Mutual Friend* abounds with fiction(al) authors, so it bursts with readers [. . .] of its own story" (271).

Our aim in this chapter is to discuss more comprehensively diverse aspects of the same motif than the foregoing critics, and contribute to the understanding of the novel as a whole. More concretely, this chapter of the thesis focuses on the ambivalent representation of fiction-making in the novel, exploring how this self-referential device is combined with the novel's ethical themes of identity, moral corruption and regeneration of individuals. In these concerns we can see recurrences of the main subject matters from the previous novels, such as disguise and deception (*Barnaby Rudge*), (re)formation of identity (*Nicholas Nickleby* and *David Copperfield*), and resurrection (*A Tale of Two Cities*).[4] In dealing with these themes in *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens gives a twist by interweaving them with his metafictional interests, showing deeper insight into his lifelong study of society and human nature.

According to the second edition of the *OED*, the definition of the term "fiction" includes "[t]he action of 'feigning' or inventing imaginary incidents, existences, states of things, etc., whether for the purpose of deception or otherwise" (872), and this is exactly what many characters do in *Our Mutual Friend*. However, we should note that they do so for diverse purposes. As the first section of this chapter will show, the Veneerings, Lady Tippins, The Lammles, Fledgeby, Bradley Headstone, and Podsnap use fiction with selfish, deceptive motives. On the other hand, for other characters such as Twemlow, Miss Peecher, Lizzie Hexam, Jenny Wren, and Young Blight, fiction serves other purposes like moral reformation,

which will be explored in the second section. Taking these discussions into account, in the third section we will focus on the novel's most controversial plot device, namely, Boffin's "pious fraud" (*OMF* 841)—his feigned corruption by money. The deliberate deception and concealment of the truth on the part of the author has brought about a long ensuing critical debate, and, as will be discussed later, has often been considered as the novel's crucial flaw. What we should not overlook is that Boffin's playing the role of a miser can be regarded as another variation of the motif of fiction-making which is so prevalent throughout the book. Accordingly, in this section we will re-examine Dickens's narrative strategy from this point of view, and attempt to offer a new interpretation concerning the Boffin plot. These discussions will help us reconsider the whole structure of this controversial novel, as well as the creative attitude of Dickens himself in his last years.

I. The Motif of Fiction (1): Deception and Self-Destruction

Chapter 1 of Book the First "On the Look Out" opens with a scene in which a predatory waterman Gaffer Hexam and his daughter Lizzie find a dead body in the Thames. Initially, the corpse is identified as that of John Harmon, the heir to an enormous fortune made by his father, old Mr Harmon, who grew rich as a dust contractor. However, it is revealed gradually through the course of the novel that the body is not John Harmon's, but that of a seaman named George Radfoot, who had changed clothes with Harmon and subsequently been murdered. This served a perfect opportunity for John Harmon to conceal his true identity and assume pseudonyms (such as Julius Handford and John Rokesmith), so that he can get to know his fiancée Bella Wilfer, whom he had never seen before. The initial sensational event concerning the unidentified body that occurs in *Our Mutual Friend* thus foreshadows and underscores the controlling theme of identity and disguise,[5] exactly like the Haredale murder mystery in *Barnaby Rudge*. Indeed, both novels are full of false names, mistaken recognitions, and

incapability of understanding self and others, and many characters suffer unstable or hollow identities. However, what distinguishes *Our Mutual Friend* from *Barnaby Rudge* is the way they use "fiction" as a means to cope with their situations. Firstly, this section will concentrate on selfish, deceptive, or destructive fictions which especially thrive in the fashionable society.

Our Mutual Friend is comparable to *Little Dorrit* in its harsh attack on the world of fashionable society of the Victorian era. Chapter 2 of Book the First introduces a nouveau riche family, the Veneerings and its social circle including Twemlow, Lady Tippins, the Podsnaps, Alfred Lammle, Sophronia Akershem, Boots, Brewer, Eugene Wrayburn, and Mortimer Lightwood. The portrayal of the Veneerings is especially important, since it epitomises what Dickens despised and has fought against throughout his career as a novelist. Before looking into their description, let us briefly turn to that of Mr Merdle, a counterpart in *Little Dorrit*. Merdle is initially presented as a conspicuous banker, investor, and presumably a Member of Parliament. All people know about him is that "Mr. Merdle was immensely rich; a man of prodigious enterprise" (*LD* 206-07), and nothing more. Predictably, in the end he turns out to be "simply the greatest Forger and the greatest Thief that ever cheated the gallows" (*LD* 594), but only after his financial ruin and suicide. However, Merdle is not necessarily portrayed as an utterly despicable person; rather, the narrator's first description of him in the novel makes the reader feel pity, if not totally sympathetic, for him:

> He did not shine in company; he had not very much to say for himself; he was a reserved man, with a broad, overhanging, watchful head, that particular kind of dull red color in his cheeks which is rather stale than fresh, and a somewhat uneasy expression about his coat-cuffs, as if they were in his confidence, and had reasons for being anxious to hide his hands. In the little he said, he was a pleasant man enough; plain, emphatic about public and private confidence, and tenacious of the utmost deference being shown by every one, in all things, to Society. In this same Society (if that were it which came to his dinners, and to Mrs. Merdle's receptions and concerts), he hardly seemed to enjoy himself much, and was mostly to be found against walls and behind doors. (*LD* 207)

In this passage, Dickens rather appears to criticise Merdle's mammonism by emphasising his anxiety, solitude, and sense of emptiness that ceaselessly torture him. In short, the narrator does not treat him as a mere object, which is exactly the way Dickens deals with Veneering in *Our Mutual Friend*.

Veneering virtually follows the same footsteps of Merdle. He is lionised by society but at the same time always neglected and ignored at the very dinners he presides. He becomes a M. P. in the middle of the novel, and his upcoming bankruptcy is foretold in the last chapter. In spite of these similarities, the delineation of the Veneerings is crucially different from that of Merdle:

> MR AND MRS VENEERING were bran-new people in a bran-new house in a bran-new quarter of London. Everything about the Veneerings was spick and span new. All their furniture was new, all their friends were new, all their servants were new, their plate was new, their carriage was new, their harness was new, their horses were new, their pictures were new, they themselves were new, they were as newly married as was lawfully compatible with their having a bran-new baby, and if they had set up a great-grandfather, he would have come home in matting from the Pantechnicon, without a scratch upon him, French polished to the crown of his head. (*OMF* 48)

As James R. Kincaid puts it, Dickens "introduces the Veneerings and instantly reduces them. There is no trickery in the humour and no effort is made to identify Veneering with us" (232). Indeed, in the passage above cited, no sooner do they make their appearance than the narrator degrades them to the status of mere material, by juxtaposing Mr and Mrs Veneering with their bran-new house, carriage, plate, and pictures. Their hollow identities are thus exposed from the first moment in the novel. Ultimately, the Veneerings "exist principally as an idea summed up by a name; they are thus more abstract than physical representations of surface human beings" (John 167).

Naturally, it is substantially impossible for a man like Veneering, "very literally a man of surfaces, without depth or self-consciousness" (Kincaid 232), to form any proper or close relationships with other people in "Society" (*OMF* 886), relationships based on such things as

mutual understanding or reliance. Instead, Veneering constructs social relationships founded upon a convenient fiction that everyone in the society is, or should be, supposed to be his oldest friend. Only Twemlow, a timid, but good-natured gentleman, appears to be sensible of the absurdity of his situation: "The abyss to which he could find no bottom, and from which started forth the engrossing and ever-swelling difficulty of his life, was the insoluble question whether he was Veneering's oldest friend, or newest friend" (*OMF* 49). Every time Twemlow dines with Veneering, he finds those who were utter strangers to Veneering a few days ago now somehow become "the most intimate friends" (*OMF* 49) he has in the world. This circumstance is so confounding that Twemlow is "stunned by the unvanquishable difficulty of his existence" (*OMF* 52). This "Veneering fiction" (*OMF* 161) thus inevitably brings ridiculous identity confusion to his dinner: Veneering has clearly no distinct idea which is Mr Boots and which is Mr Brewer; Twemlow is mistaken for Veneering by Podsnap; and even Mrs Veneering is misrecognised as the wife of Twemlow. As to the Veneerings, fiction-making does not provide a meaningful solution to their identity issue; it only conceals the problem temporarily. Therefore, when they are no longer financially influential, the Veneering fiction immediately dissolves and loses its effect. In the final chapter of the novel, the narrator foretells what will come to pass after their bankruptcy: "Society will discover that it always did despise Veneering, and distrust Veneering, and that when it went to Veneering's to dinner it always had misgivings—though very secretly at the time, it would seem, and in a perfectly private and confidential manner" (*OMF* 887).

Although Lady Tippins occupies only a minor position in the plot, she too links the motif of fiction with the novel's vital theme of identity. She, "the oldest friend" (*OMF* 53) of Veneering and the central dominating figure in his social circle, is the only character in the novel with a title, but this is because her late husband Sir Thomas Tippins was knighted "in mistake for somebody else" (*OMF* 164) by King George the Third, who, "while performing

the ceremony, was graciously pleased to observe, 'What, what, what? Who, who, who? Why, why, why?'" (*OMF* 164).

In a sense, she too habitually disguises herself, for she undeservedly behaves like a skittish, beautiful young girl—a fact underscored by the narrator's tongue-in-cheek words of praise such as "winning" (*OMF* 55), "captivating" (*OMF* 167), "fascinating" (*OMF* 167), "enchanting" (*OMF* 258), and "bewitching" (*OMF* 301). At the same time, the narrator frequently reminds the reader of what this "fresh fairy" (*OMF* 301) really is, by drawing our attention to grotesquely minute details of her body, such as "a certain yellow play in Lady Tippins's throat, like the legs of scratching poultry" (*OMF* 54).

Another significant characteristic of old Lady Tippins is that, partly due to her heavy reliance upon ostensible appearance like makeup and ornamental dress, she is even described as physically insubstantial—she is, in other words, literally presented as hollow by the narrator: "Whereabout in the bonnet and drapery announced by her name, any fragment of the real woman may be concealed, is perhaps known to her maid; but you could easily buy all you see of her, in Bond Street; or you might scalp her, and peel her, and scrape her, and make two Lady Tippinses out of her, and yet not penetrate to the genuine article" (*OMF* 164). Similarly, when Twemlow politely hands her out of the carriage, the narrator interposes the phrase "as if she were anything real" (*OMF* 467). Thus, the reader cannot help perceiving that like the Veneerings, nothing lies behind the façade of Lady Tippins.[6]

It is not astonishing, then, that her peculiar way of amusing herself is, again like the Veneerings, a fictive invention that camouflages her real self, though in her case it takes the form of a frivolous jest which no one has to take seriously:

> A grisly little fiction concerning her lovers is Lady Tippins's point. She is always attended by a lover or two, and she keeps a little list of her lovers, and she is always booking a new lover, or striking out an old lover, or putting a lover in her black list, or promoting a lover to her blue list, or adding up her lovers, or otherwise posting her book. (*OMF* 54)

This hollow, "grisly fiction" inevitably highlights the grotesque discrepancy between her fancy and reality, her imagined self and bare self, and throws into relief the emptiness of her identity.

In such a society where people show only their surfaces and deceive each other, mercenary exploitation can be a sufficient motivation for marriage, and that is exactly the case of the Lammles. Both Alfred Lammle and Sophronia Akershem pretend to be wealthy, and marry under a false impression—given by Veneering—that the other is satisfyingly rich. Two weeks after their marriage, their true character is revealed to each other, and they realise for the first time that they both have been deceiving and both have been deceived. In fact, in the Veneering circle, people scarcely know each other, as Alfred Lammle observes to his wife: "Veneering knew as much of me as he knew of you, or as anybody knows of him" (*OMF* 170). By mutual agreement, they decide to continue their disguise, and work together to swindle other people out of money, as a way of inflicting vengeance upon the Veneerings and their friends. It necessarily follows that they now have to create and maintain a cooperative fiction that they are quite affluent, and strongly attached to each other. For instance, they pretend to consider building "a palatial residence" (*OMF* 307) suitable to their wealth, and consequently they make a shining reputation out of it: "many persons of their acquaintance becoming by anticipation dissatisfied with their own houses, and envious of the non-existent Lammle structure" (*OMF* 307). They also have to make pretence of having a happy married life, but in fact their household is anything but harmonious or peaceful: "Was it the speciality of Mr and Mrs Lammle, or does it ever obtain with other loving couples? In these matrimonial dialogues they never addressed each other, but always some invisible presence that appeared to take a station about midway between them" (*OMF* 619). Thus it can be said that the matrimonial life of the Lammles is supported, both from inside and outside, by empty fictions: outwardly, they maintain their social influence by feigning to seek for "the non-existent palatial residence"

(*OMF* 466); at the same time, their domestic life too is barely sustainable without the intermediation of "some invisible presence" (*OMF* 619).

Their first design is to ensnare Georgiana Podsnap, an innocent, guileless daughter of the Podsnaps, into a marriage with their co-conspirator, young Fledgeby, with a view to exploit her fortune. However, since "Fascination Fledgeby" (*OMF* 314) is utterly a clumsy simpleton except for money matters, the Lammles must set the stage for their marriage. Indeed, the whole sequence of their plot in Chapter 4 of Book 2, "Cupid Prompted", is presented to the reader as a sort of theatrical performance. When both Georgiana and Fledgeby strike each other speechless at their first meeting, the Lammles find it necessary to "prompt" (*OMF* 315). Similarly, when Mr Lammle gives his wife a cue, it is tacitly understood that now it is her turn to take "the prompt-book" (*OMF* 315). No matter how unfit Fledgeby appears to be for the role of handsome, enthusiastic suitor, they have to continue their scheme, because "[t]he manager had put him down in the bill for the part, and he must play it" (*OMF* 316). Their mischievous plot is thus described as a theatrical fiction, a story which is, like the Veneering fiction, fabricated in order to hide their true selves and take advantage of those who are naïve and careless.

Even the above-mentioned Fascination Fledgeby is one of the many fiction-makers in the novel. Although he is usually a stiff gawk, he turns into a shrewd, crafty, manipulative man when it comes to money, and his fiction is even more cunning and malicious than Veneering's or Lady Tippins's.[7] Fledgeby secretly runs an unscrupulous money-lending business and squeezes money out of his acquaintances such as Alfred Lammle and Twemlow, but he shirks blame by making a scapegoat of Riah, his Jewish servant. Of course, this kind of scapegoat method can be seen in Dickens's earlier works,[8] but what is conspicuous about Fledgeby in *Our Mutual Friend* is that he takes advantage of a popular racial prejudice. He forces his Jewish servant to play the role of merciless, greedy moneylender—in a word, stereotypical

Shylockian character. People are so deeply permeated by the racial bias that nobody believes Riah even when he dares to tell the truth: "Were I to say 'This little fancy business is not mine' [. . .] 'it is the little business of a Christian young gentleman who places me, his servant, in trust and charge here, and to whom I am accountable for every single bead,' they would laugh" (*OMF* 330). It is obvious that Fledgeby's deceptive manipulation of Riah's identity is supported and strengthened by the existing racial prejudice, which itself is, as it were, a deep-rooted traditional, collective fiction.[9]

A curious aspect of Fledgeby's deception is that he, the very inventor of this fiction, appears to half believe what he has fabricated in order to deceive others. In spite of his long exploitation of Riah, Fledgeby cannot believe that there really exists a poor Jew on the face of the earth, and he too seems to adhere to the stereotypical notion of Jews, which he must know to be false:

> 'Your people need speak the truth sometimes, for they lie enough,' remarked Fascination Fledgeby.
> [. . .]
> 'For instance,' he resumed, as though it were he who had spoken last, 'who but you and I ever heard of a poor Jew?'
> 'The Jews,' said the old man, raising his eyes from the ground with his former smile. 'They hear of poor Jews often, and are very good to them.'
> 'Bother that!' returned Fledgeby. 'You know what I mean. You'd persuade me if you could, that you are a poor Jew. I wish you'd confess how much you really did make out of my late governor. I should have a better opinion of you.' (*OMF* 329)

As Robert Newsome states, "Fledgeby is himself so immersed in the ways of a pretending world that [. . .] Fledgeby persists in believing that Riah must be in fact a rich man after all" (48). Such self-deception serves as "a very convenient fiction" (*OMF* 331) for the master, since he can persuade himself that after all he does the right thing in treating his grasping Jewish servant just as he deserves.

In a sense, Fledgeby's manipulative fiction parallels with Bradley Headstone's failed attempt to scapegoat Rogue Riderhood, as a means to cover up his murderous crime. Even though Dickens does not use the word "fiction" in this plot, the deceptive relationship between

the two also raises fundamental questions about identity. Just as Fledgeby takes advantage of racial prejudice from his selfish motive, so Headstone uses social distinction in order to elude suspicion. Bradley Headstone, a frustrated working-class schoolmaster, has a strong hatred for Eugene Wrayburn, an idle upper-class barrister, mainly because of their rivalry over Lizzie Hexam, and also because of his sense of social inferiority and Eugene's indifferent contempt. Near the end of the novel, he attacks Eugene with murderous intent in disguise of a bargeman, so that the suspicion will fall on Rogue Riderhood, Gaffer Hexam's former partner.

Paradoxically, however, it is through his attempt to conceal his identity, that Headstone unintentionally reveals his true self. (Reed, *Victorian Conventions* 311). Headstone has risen from "a pauper lad" (*OMF* 267) to a "respectable" (*OMF* 342) schoolmaster by his continuous diligence and endeavor. Nevertheless, due to the "[s]uppression of so much to make room for so much" (*OMF* 267), there is always something stiff and unnatural in his manner, and the narrator turns the reader's attention to an inerasable trace of his old self:

> Bradley Headstone, in his decent black coat and waistcoat, and decent white shirt, and decent formal black tie, and decent pantaloons of pepper and salt, with his decent silver watch in his pocket and its decent hair-guard round his neck, looked a thoroughly decent young man of six-and-twenty. He was never seen in any other dress, and yet there was a certain stiffness in his manner of wearing this, as if there were a want of adaptation between him and it, recalling some mechanics in their holiday clothes. (*OMF* 266)

The narrator further hints that "if young Bradley Headstone, when a pauper lad, had chanced to be told off for the sea, he would not have been the last man in a ship's crew" (*OMF* 267). As Rebecca Richardson notes, "despite all his self-improvement, Bradley has not changed his essential nature, but merely suppressed it" (272). Therefore, Headstone's selection of a bargeman's cloth as disguise is the natural consequence. Essentially, it is not a disguise but a return to his innate nature, an instinctive urge which he has so long struggled to suppress and erase: "And whereas, in his own schoolmaster clothes, he usually looked as if they were the clothes of some other man, he now looked, in the clothes of some other man or men, as if they

were his own" (*OMF* 697). After his failed attempt to murder Eugene, Headstone's plot is detected by Riderhood, his blackmailer and also his "symbolic external double" (Lane, "Dickens" 51). In the end, they both fall into the River Thames by Headstone's suicidal attack, and are drowned together. Thus, finally Headstone is irresistibly restored to his old identity. He and his other self (Riderhood) are literally combined into one—when their bodies are found, Riderhood is "girdled still with Bradley's iron ring, and the rivets of the iron ring held tight" (*OMF* 874).

It can therefore be said that Headstone's life itself is "an unconscious disguise" (Reed *Victorian Conventions* 310), and his identity as a respectable schoolmaster which he has so desperately pursued and strived for turns out to be nothing more than a castle in the air—a mere fiction. According to Richard T. Gaughan, this tenacious clinging to his own imaginary invention is Headstone's tragic flaw: "He is evil because he chooses to make his life into a fiction and because he denies anything outside that fiction" (239).

In the end, none of these characters are successful in maintaining their fictions, and their falsified selves reveal themselves. As we have seen, the prosperity of the Veneerings will not last long; the Lammles likewise go bankrupt and find it necessary to flee abroad; Fascination Fledgeby's scapegoat strategy is finally uncovered and he is violently retaliated by Alfred Lammle and Jenny Wren; the disguise of Bradley Headstone is penetrated by Riderhood and results in his suicidal death. An exception may be Lady Tippins, whose fiction is simply a jest, but her situation too is far from enviable. It is most likely that her present life will drag on, without the slightest change to her empty identity.

However, there is another character in the fashionable society whose self-deceptive fiction remains totally unshaken even at the very end of the novel. The truly menacing figure in the world of *Our Mutual Friend* is not Lady Tippins nor the Veneerings, but John Podsnap, a

pompous marine insurer whose name eventually became a byword for a snobbish, self-complacent person. His obsessive, self-deceptive fiction, for instance, takes the form of a "certain institution [. . .] which he called 'the young person'" (*OMF* 175). According to Podsnap, the question about everything is, whether it would "bring a blush into the cheek of the young person" (*OMF* 175), and if there is anything inconvenient or uncomfortable, Podsnap denies its existence:

> Thus happily acquainted with his own merit and importance, Mr Podsnap settled that whatever he put behind him he put out of existence. There was a dignified conclusiveness—not to add a grand convenience—in this way of getting rid of disagreeables which had done much towards establishing Mr Podsnap in his lofty place in Mr Podsnap's satisfaction. 'I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!' Mr Podsnap had even acquired a peculiar flourish of his right arm in often clearing the world of its most difficult problems, by sweeping them behind him (and consequently sheer away) with those words and a flushed face. For they affronted him. (*OMF* 174)

Podsnap's "young person" is nothing but "a selfish and somewhat filthy invention of the aged, without relation to the truly young" (Kincaid 234), or "a ridiculous autobiographical fancy that serves only Mr. Podsnap" (Hornback, "Mortimer Lightwood" 256). This fiction thus easily leads him to egoistic escapism. For example, "a reference to the circumstance that some half-dozen people had lately died in the streets, of starvation" (*OMF* 186-87) is a subject that must not to broached on any account, because it is "not adapted to the cheek of the young person" (*OMF* 187). And Podsnap continues to believe that "there is not a country in the world [. . .] where so noble a provision is made for the poor as in this country" (*OMF* 187).

In this sense, Podsnap's invention is, somewhat paradoxically, closely related to his lack of imagination, his incapacity for sympathy for others. And this is the crucial reason why his attitude towards the world remains totally unchanged in the final chapter entitled "The Voice of Society". Far from being moved by Eugene's marriage to Lizzie Hexam, Podsnap gets indignant at this socially ill-matched couple, waving the matter away "with a speechless wave" (*OMF* 891). According to Dierdre David, Podsnap is immovable because "he stands for an

immovable structure of society" (111). H. M. Daleski similarly observes that the fact that "Podsnappery bulks so large in the final pages places the stories of individual regeneration in perspective", and further concludes that "what is required is nothing less than the death and rebirth of a whole society" (336).

Podsnap's absence of sympathy is especially important, because Dickens directly attacks the same kind of people in the real world in the postscript of the novel: "There is sometimes an odd disposition in this country to dispute as improbable in fiction, what are the commonest experiences in fact" (*OMF* 893). In the following paragraph he refutes the criticisms leveled against his view of the Poor Law in *Our Mutual Friend*. In his rebuttal, Dickens asserts that there are two parties in the champions of the Poor Law: "the one, contending that there are no deserving Poor who prefer death by slow starvation and bitter weather, to the mercies of some Relieving Officers and some Union Houses; the other, admitting that there are such Poor, but denying that they have any cause or reason for what they do" (*OMF* 894). Evidently these sorts of people are kin to Podsnap, who refuses to confront the unpleasant realities, and this explains why Podsnap, despite his actual function in the plot (he virtually does nothing), appears so threatening in the novel—to use Johnson's words, in Podsnap "Dickens exemplifies all the forces he has spent a life-time fighting" (1028).

It is true that in a sense Podsnap may be a fiction-creator like Dickens the novelist. However, his principal occupation is not to create, but to deny the existence of anything which is beyond his comprehension (Hornback, *Noah's Arkitecture* 152-53). Thus, Podsnap's moral stance is directly opposite to Dickens's: the former dismisses an inconvenient truth as a mere fiction, while the latter, as the postscript shows, attempts to convey truth, however inconvenient or unpleasant, in the form of fiction. In Chapter 11, Dickens emphatically stresses Podsnap's absurd notion about arts and literature, implicitly suggesting a fundamental limit of Podsnap's fiction-making:

> Mr Podsnap's notions of the Arts in their integrity might have been stated thus. Literature; large print, respectfully descriptive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven. [. . .] Nothing else to be permitted to those same vagrants the Arts, on pain of excommunication. Nothing else To Be—anywhere! (*OMF* 174-75)

Undoubtedly Podsnap's ridiculous definition is totally different from Dickens's own primary creative motive to write "a pleasant and useful" (*OMF* 893) novel. The novelist's view of fiction (as opposed to the deceptive fictions of the Veneerings, the Lammles, Fledgeby, or the self-complacent fictions of Lady Tippins, Headstone, and Podsnap) can be examined through an analysis of the other category—morally regenerative fiction, as will be shown in the next section.

II. The Motif of Fiction (2): Imagination and Resurrection

For certain characters such as Twemlow, Miss Peecher, Lizzie Hexam, Young Blight, and Jenny Wren, fiction serves as a temporary escape from the real world, though not so excessive nor obsessive as Podsnap. With exception of Lizzie and Jenny Wren, their roles in the novel are rather trivial in terms of plot, but they offer some significant insights into the fiction-reality theme of the novel, and will help us reconsider the Harmon plot in the wider context of the novel as a whole.

Twemlow is a typical escapist in the novel. In the final chapter of the novel, Twemlow is the only person in the Veneering circle who dares to make a stand for Eugene's socially provocative marriage and argue back against raging Podsnap. He thus turns out to be the exact opposite of the self-complacent, narrow-minded marine insurer,[10] but nevertheless he too has a subtle inclination of self-deception. The narrator modestly criticises his fanciful disposition when he regretfully recollects his past disappointed love:

> For, the poor little harmless gentleman once had his fancy, like the rest of us, and she didn't answer (as she often does not), and he thinks the adorable bridesmaid is like the fancy as she was then (which she is not at all), and that if the fancy had

> not married some one else for money, but had married him for love, he and she would have been happy (which they wouldn't have been), and that she has a tenderness for him still (whereas her toughness is a proverb). (*OMF* 164)

The fundamental difference between Podsnap and Twemlow is that while Podsnap's self-centered deception narrows his view of the world and makes him intolerant, Twemlow's self-pitying delusion does not significantly undermine his way of life nor contaminate his mind. Twemlow may be poor and destitute, but he can maintain "the soul of a gentleman" (*OMF* 474), as Mrs Lammle observes. Unlike Fledgeby or Podsnap, Twemlow's fiction is a harmless, temporary one, and therefore is represented as excusable and guiltless.

Miss Peecher, a school teacher who secretly loves Bradley Headstone, provides a similar instance. In spite of the total unawareness or indifference on Headstone's part, Miss Peecher shows keen interest in his every move, and even uses a "transparent fiction" (*OMF* 394) of examining her pupil in order to openly discuss the matter. In her leisure hours, she often writes a fictional description of their romantic relationship on her slate:

> For, oftentimes when school was not, and her calm leisure and calm little house were her own, Miss Peecher would commit to the confidential slate an imaginary description of how, upon a balmy evening at dusk, two figures might have been observed in the market-garden ground round the corner, of whom one, being a manly form, bent over the other, being a womanly form of short stature and some compactness, and breathed in a low voice the words, 'Emma Peecher, wilt thou be my own?' after which the womanly form's head reposed upon the manly form's shoulder, and the nightingales tuned up. (*OMF* 393)

Like Twemlow's, Miss Peecher's fiction is innocent and harmless. It rather appears to be a sort of safety-valve which enables her to escape the frustrating reality and live hopefully, even though it actually brings no solution to her problem.

In fact, in *Our Mutual Friend* fiction is often presented as an effective way to deal with the harsh reality of life. Lizzie Hexam's imaginary act of reading "pictures in the fire" (*OMF* 592) illustrates how the power of imagination functions as one's emotional support. She often sees fictitious pictures in the fire in order to please her brother Charley, recalling the past and foretelling the ideal future of her family: "There are you, Charley, working your way, in secret

from father, at the school; and you get prizes; and you go on better and better" (*OMF* 72). The narrator notes, without the slightest touch of blame, that her story-telling is closely related with a desire to escape reality: "Lizzie, with a drooping head, glanced down at the glow in the fire where her first fancies had been nursed, and her first escape made from the grim life out of which she had plucked her brother, foreseeing her reward" (*OMF* 589). A distinguishing feature of Lizzie's story-telling is its selfless character; that is, it is almost wholly devoted to her family or friends. More importantly, the aim of her fiction is not only pleasure but also enlightenment. By telling an ideal blueprint, for instance, Lizzie tries to make Charley prepare for a decision about the future course he should take: she foretells that "[y]ou come to be a pupil-teacher, and you still go on better and better, and you rise to be a master full of learning and respect. But the secret has come to father's knowledge long before, and it has divided you from father, and from me" (*OMF* 72), and teaches her brother that "your way is not ours" (*OMF* 72). Charley follows Lizzie's advice and leaves his family in order to pursue a career as a pupil-teacher, though he later cruelly breaks her heart by severing his connection with Lizzie unilaterally.

Despite the disappointment at her brother's egoism, Lizzie does not abandon her story-telling, and it works more successfully the next time. In Chapter 9 of Book the Third, Lizzie meets for the first time the other heroine of the novel, Bella Wilfer. At her initial appearance, Bella is a spoiled, mercenary young woman whose primary purpose in life is to "marry money" (*OMF* 375). Throughout the interview, Lizzie tries to awake Bella's innate good nature and show her the way to improve herself to be worthy of the love of John Harmon, her admirer. In doing this, Lizzie again proffers to read an imaginary picture in the fire to her: "A heart well worth winning, and well won. A heart that, once won, goes through fire and water for the winner, and never changes, and is never daunted" (*OMF* 592). To be sure, the direct cause of Bella's moral conversion is Boffin's performance of a hard-hearted miser as will be discussed

later, but it is similarly important that the first phase of her transformation takes place after Lizzie's story-telling. Bella feels "as if whole years had passed" (*OMF* 593) since she met Lizzie, and as if much had happened "[f]or good" (*OMF* 593). Their brief encounter suggests, though not explicitly, how fiction can influence one's way of life, and even lead to a moral rebirth—in other words, its power to bring spiritual or ethical resurrection.

Lizzie's friend, Jenny Wren the doll's dressmaker is also one of the "imaginative tale-tellers" (Baker 72) in the novel. She is described as "[c]hild in years", but "woman in self-reliance and trial" (*OMF* 498), and her circumstance is even worse than Lizzie's—her mother is dead, her father is a wretched drunkard who needs to be watched carefully, and her legs and back are disabled. It is natural that she is "the most serious escapist in the novel" (Sroka "Dickens's Metafiction" 55), and tries to transcend the cruel reality of life by using the power of imagination. For instance, she habitually addresses her benevolent friend, Riah as "godmother" (*OMF* 492) because he is "so like the fairy godmother in the bright little books" (*OMF* 493), and Riah in turn calls her "Cinderella" (*OMF* 493). G. W. Kennedy states that their fairy-tale play is "essentially a protective device of the imagination against the eroding force of the public world" (174). Jenny's recurrent references to fairy-tales remind the reader of the form of *Our Mutual Friend*, which itself is often defined as a fairy tale (DeMarcus 17, Baker 70), as can be seen from the Wrayburn plot, in which the upper-class gentleman marries the working-class heroine.[11]

Jenny Wren distorts her surrounding reality in other ways too, so that she can cope with her problems more comfortably. She treats her delinquent father Mr Dolls as if he were a prodigal son: "'You wicked old boy,' Miss Wren would say to him, with a menacing forefinger, 'you'll force me to run away from you, after all, you will; and then you'll shake to bits, and there'll be nobody to pick up the pieces!'" (*OMF* 782). She says she "can't bear children" (*OMF* 274), and "always did like grown-ups" (*OMF* 274). There are numerous flawed,

irresponsible parents in Dickens's fiction, and family disruption often takes the form of parent-child role reversal, such as Amy and William Dorrit in *Little Dorrit* and Lucy and Alexander Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities*. However, while in other novels such reversal occurs only metaphorically—for instance, Lucy rocks her father on her breast "*like* a child" (*TTC* 76, italics mine)—Jenny Wren, as we have seen, literally treats her father as her child, and behaves as her parent. This fiction appears to make her circumstance less intolerable, and at least provides her a reason why she has to work hard to support her family and take care of her "bad boy" (*OMF* 597). Likewise, another fiction also supports her emotionally. She gives vent to her suppressed anger and frustration by inventing an imaginative suitor and ordering him around: "Jenny Wren had her personal vanities—happily for her—and no intentions were stronger in her breast than the various trials and torments that were, in the fulness of time, to be inflicted upon 'him.'" (*OMF* 284).

Thus, she creates fictional roles and situations as a means of compensation for the unrewarding reality. As David points out, she embodies "a recognition of dispiriting reality and a transformation of that recognition into a new vision of the world" (122), and in that sense, she is "the visionary of the novel" (122). Furthermore, her power of imagination underscores the relationship between fiction and spiritual rebirth more directly than Lizzie's fortune-telling. When she is in Riah's little garden on the roof, her fancy allows her to experience an imaginary death and rebirth:

> 'Ah!' said Jenny. 'But it's so high. And you see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and you feel as if you were dead.'
>
> The little creature looked above her, holding up her slight transparent hand.
>
> 'How do you feel when you are dead?' asked Fledgeby, much perplexed.
>
> 'Oh, so tranquil!' cried the little creature, smiling. 'Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets, and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange good sorrowful happiness comes upon you!' (*OMF* 334)

As we have mentioned earlier, resurrection is one of the central themes of *Our Mutual Friend*. The two main male protagonists both go through a near-death experience, and are figuratively born again and spiritually renewed. On returning to England, John Harmon is poisoned and thrown into the Thames, but recovers consciousness, hearing himself cry: "This is John Harmon drowning! John Harmon, struggle for your life. John Harmon, call on Heaven and save yourself!" (*OMF* 426). Having thus narrowly escaped death, Harmon finds himself presumed dead, and consequently decides to live a new life under an alias of John Rokesmith. Similarly, Eugene Wrayburn is attacked by Headstone, plunged into the river, and rescued by Lizzie Hexam, under whose influence he reforms himself and becomes a changed man. These characters are allowed to regenerate only after real physical dangers; on the other hand, Jenny can experience a pseudo-resurrection by means of imagination. As we have discussed, Podsnap's obsessive adherence to his delusion suggests that "what is required is nothing less than the death and rebirth of a whole society" (Daleski 336). In contrast, Jenny's imaginative power seems to evince a regenerative ability of fiction. However, before discussing this point further, we need to turn to another example of the motif of fiction in the novel—a brief description of the character of Young Blight.

Compared to Lizzie Hexam or Jenny Wren, Young Blight has only a trivial role in the novel, but nevertheless he can be regarded as "one of the most important as an expression of Dickens' theoretical and self-conscious musings on fictional design" (Kiely 271). Young Blight is a clerk of Mortimer Lightwood, but he has so few clients that he pretends to be busy with appointments, by inventing fictional clients such as "Mr Aggs, Mr Baggs, Mr Caggs, Mr Daggs, Mr Faggs, Mr Gaggs" (*OMF* 131) or "Mr Alley, Mr Balley, Mr Calley, Mr Dalley, Mr Falley, Mr Galley, Mr Halley, Mr Lalley, Mr Malley" (*OMF* 131), so that he can sustain himself and keep his sanity:

> By which he probably meant that his mind would have been shattered to pieces without this fiction of an occupation. Wearing in his solitary confinement no

> fetters that he could polish, and being provided with no drinking-cup that he could carve, he had fallen on the device of ringing alphabetical changes into the two volumes in question, or of entering vast numbers of persons out of the Directory as transacting business with Mr Lightwood. It was the more necessary for his spirits, because, being of a sensitive temperament, he was apt to consider it personally disgraceful to himself that his master had no clients. (*OMF* 131)

As Keith Hale points out, Young Blight seems to illustrate "in nutshell the pervasiveness of the identity problem" (317) in that he establishes "an identity for himself simply by insisting he have one" (317), or in other words, by telling his own story—like Lizzie Hexam and Jenny Wren.

Through the act of fiction-making, Blight is able to prevent himself from being "shattered to pieces" (*OMF* 131). We should pay special attention to this phrase, since the images of fragmentation, dismemberment, and separation prevail throughout the book, and constitute the central theme of the novel.[12] Though often neglected, it is worth giving specific examples of these images: the comic villain Silas Wegg has suffered "[h]ospital amputation" (*OMF* 122) and wishes to recover his lost leg in order to "collect myself like a genteel person" (*OMF* 127); the dead body of George Radfoot is found "mutilated" (*OMF* 428) in the Thames, and Mr Inspector is engrossed in "putting this and that together" (*OMF* 74) to solve the mystery, but with no success; later in the novel Eugene's body similarly becomes "mutilated" (*OMF* 769) by Headstone's assault, after which "some broken splintered pieces of wood and some torn fragments of clothes" (*OMF* 767) are scattered around the scene of the crime; Headstone looks hard at his blackmailer, Riderhood, "as if he would have torn him to pieces" (*OMF* 867) when he invades his classroom; Mr Dolls is "unnerved and disjointed from head to foot" (*OMF* 291) and drops "half a dozen pieces of himself while he tried in vain to pick up one" (*OMF* 603); after their financial ruin, the Lammles are mockingly referred to as "what's-their-names who have gone to pieces" (*OMF* 690) by Lady Tippins. These prevailing images of bodily dismemberment appear to produce a sense of alienation, and by analogy underscore the theme

of fragmentation of society and isolation of individuals—it may be also worth calling to mind that the central concern of the novel is the *division* of Old Harmon's estate.

This probably explains why a particular symbolical significance is attached to the role of Mr Venus, a taxidermist and "[a]rticulator of human bones" (*OMF* 128), whose job is to "fit together on wires the whole framework of society" (*OMF* 540), or to put it another way, "the artful reconstitution of the human frame and the lifelike resurrection of all forms of animal life" (Hutter "Dismemberment and Articulation" 152). By putting broken pieces together into one complete body, Venus figuratively brings the dead back to life—when he shows a stuffed canary to his customer, Venus proudly states: "There's animation! On a twig, making up his mind to hop! Take care of him; he's a lovely specimen" (*OMF* 125).

Thus, given the thematic significance of bodily fragmentation as a metaphor for alienation and divided human relationships, we should not dismiss Young Blight's episode as unworthy of serious notice; rather, it allows Dickens to comment on the theme of fiction and fiction-making relatively freely "precisely because he has no importance in the plot" (Kiely 271). While the "Veneering fiction" (*OMF* 161) only brings reciprocal alienation to their acquaintances, Blight's fiction, like Mr Venus's art of articulation, serves to prevent him from being "shattered to pieces" (*OMF* 131), and functions as an effective measure against psychological dismemberment. And this brings our discussion back to Jenny Wren's role in the novel. As we have discussed, she embodies the regenerative power of fiction, and her symbolical role is often described through images of articulation—most notably, at her first appearance, she is busy "gumming or gluing together with a camel's-hair brush certain pieces of cardboard and thin wood, previously cut into various shapes" (*OMF* 272). And this is essentially what she does in the climax of the novel, in which she actually plays a central part in bringing the dying Eugene back to life. In his sickbed, Eugene becomes delirious and his spirit is about to "glide away again and be lost" (*OMF* 810); that is, his body and soul are on

the verge of separation. He needs "a leading word" (*OMF* 811) that prevents his spirit from wandering away, and it is Jenny that acts as "an interpreter between this sentient world and the insensible man" (*OMF* 809). She eventually manages to find the right word "[w]ife" (*OMF* 811), and helps Eugene's matrimonial union with Lizzie. Garret Stewart calls this scene "the climax of perhaps Dickens's greatest novel and of his career-long interest in the mending power of imagination" (*Dickens* 198). The benefit of Jenny's restorative ability to unite broken fragments is apparent: at his final appearance, Eugene is so lively that "he looked, for the time, as though he had never been mutilated" (*OMF* 886).

It is suggestive that both Jenny Wren and Mr Venus—two major characters who have the ability to put broken fragments together—are closer to professional artists than any other characters in the novel. For instance, Jenny states that the most difficult part of dolls' dressmaking is "the trying-on by the great ladies" (*OMF* 495), namely, observing and imitating people, exactly like a novelist in search of material. Indeed, as many critics point out, the doll's dressmaker and the articulator of human bones seem to reflect the function of Charles Dickens the novelist.[13] Just as Venus articulates pieces of human bones and rearranges them into anatomical order, the novelist himself organises apparently separated fragments (because of the multiplicity of plot lines as well as the part-publication form) into one complete novel. In the postscript of *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens refers to the difficulty that resides in the mode of publication: "it would be very unreasonable to expect that many readers, pursuing a story in portions from month to month through nineteen months, will, until they have it before them complete, perceive the relations of its finer threads to the whole pattern which is always before the eyes of the story-weaver at his loom" (*OMF* 893). We should recall here a comic episode which occurred in 1847 and later Forster recorded in the biography. An old charwoman who took care of Dickens's eldest son was astonished to find that the father of this young gentleman

is “the man that put together *Dombey*” (Forster 1: 453), because she “never thought there was a man that could have put together *Dombey*” (1: 453-54), and believed that “three or four men must have put together *Dombey*” (1: 454). Forster comments that “Dickens thought there was something of a compliment in this, and was not ungrateful” (1: 454).

Thus, the act of putting scattered pieces together is doubly important: firstly, it symbolically represents the job of a novelist; secondly, in this novel of separation and fragmentation, the art of articulation can mean moral or spiritual resurrection. And this necessarily explains the close relationship between fiction-making and the resurrection theme in *Our Mutual Friend*—Young Blight’s fictive occupation prevents himself from being shattered into pieces, Lizzie’s story-telling helps Bella’s moral conversion, and Jenny’s power of imagination allows her to simulatively experience death and rebirth. Thus, in *Our Mutual Friend* the use of fiction is not limited to egoistic deception and manipulation as we have seen in the first section—it has a regenerative function as well. This point is indispensable for appreciating the Harmon-Boffin plot, which will be explored in the following section.

III. Boffin’s “Pious Fraud” Reconsidered

As we have mentioned earlier, Boffin’s feigned corruption is indisputably the most controversial plot device in *Our Mutual Friend*. Nicodemus Boffin is an old servant and a sole executor of the late deceased Old Harmon, and when his son John Harmon is declared dead, the whole estate is transferred to Mr and Mrs Boffin. The newly-rich Boffins hire John Rokesmith as a secretary, and then take in Bella Wilfer to live with them, as a compensation for her recent disappointment caused by the news of her intended husband’s death. She rejects the proposal of marriage by Rokesmith, who is later revealed to be John Harmon in disguise, on the ground that her dream is to “marry money” (*OMF* 375), not to marry a poor secretary. On hearing this, Boffin begins to play a role of a miser, so that Bella can learn the corrupting

influence of wealth and reform her mercenary inclination. Boffin's performance successfully brings about a significant moral change in Bella, and in the end she recognises Harmon's true worth and marries him. While Arnold Kettle calls it "one of Dickens's happiest inspirations" (215), the critics' reactions to Boffin's deception have been generally negative: it has been regarded as "[o]ne of the biggest disappointments in literature" (Smith 182), "the major blemish" (Daleski 328), "over-worked" (Angus Wilson 280), "totally unconvincing" (Cockshut 181), "one of the oddest things in the novel" (Garis 253), and "a major tactical error" (Calder 23). It seems that Boffin's feigned corruption, as James R. Kincaid summarises, "has pleased almost no one" (245).

This is partly because Dickens so carefully manipulates the reader's impression of the feigned transformation of Boffin that no one can doubt its authenticity, as Daleski complains: "is there a reader of the novel who is *not* taken in by Boffin?" (329).[14] Indeed, Dickens's elaborate misleading strategy becomes clear when compared to his presentation of the Harmon plot, another variation on the theme of identity disguise. As early as Chapter 4 of Book the First, the narrator insinuates the close, almost identical relationship between John Rokesmith and John Harmon: "On the last grievance as her climax, she [Bella] laid great stress—and might have laid greater, had she known that if Mr Julius Handford had a twin brother upon earth, Mr John Rokesmith was the man" (*OMF* 86-87). Nearly halfway through the novel, Harmon's disguise is revealed in his own soliloquy in Chapter 13 of Book the Second, "A Solo and A Duet". Through the voice of Harmon, the reader learns what has happened to him on his way back to England, what are his motives to disguise his true identity, and even what future course he intends to pursue: "What course for me then? This. To live the same quiet Secretary life, carefully avoiding chances of recognition, until they [the Boffins] shall have become more accustomed to their altered state, and until the great swarm of swindlers under many names shall have found newer prey" (*OMF* 430).

It is clear that, as Dickens himself observes in the postscript, the novelist does not try to conceal the true identity of John Rokesmith nor intends to keep the reader in protracted suspense: "When I devised this story, I foresaw the likelihood that a class of readers and commentators would suppose that I was at great pains to conceal exactly what I was at great pains to suggest: namely, that Mr John Harmon was not slain, and that Mr John Rokesmith was he" (*OMF* 893). On the other hand, as to Boffin's disguise, Dickens explains that his original design was to deceive readers: "To keep for a long time unsuspected, yet always working itself out, another purpose originating in that leading incident, and turning it to a pleasant and useful account at last, was at once the most interesting and the most difficult part of my design." (*OMF* 893). This challenging composition resulted in G. K. Chesterton's famous misunderstanding:[15] "He originally meant Boffin really to be corrupted by wealth, slowly to degenerate as slowly to repent. But the story went too quickly for this long, double, and difficult process; therefore Dickens at the last moment made a sudden recovery possible by representing that the whole business had been a trick" (Introduction to *OMF* x).

Then it is worth investigating why Dickens had to deceive, or at least mislead, his readers at the risk of disappointing them. As Rosemary Mundhenk suggests, it appears that Dickens deliberately manipulates the reader's perception and knowledge "in an attempt to shock the reader with his own misjudgment, thereby to educate him" ("Education" 42). In short, "Dickens does for the reader what Boffin does for Bella" (42). Being kept uninformed as to Boffin's performance, the reader is put in the same position as Bella, and the psychological distance between the reader and her is hence significantly shortened. For instance, when she begins to notice Boffin's corruption and gradually comes to recognise her own defect, the reader would have less sympathy towards her, if he or she were already aware that it is merely a deceit by Bella's benefactor:

> If ever a good man were ruined by good fortune, it is my benefactor. And yet, Pa, think how terrible the fascination of money is! I see this, and hate this, and dread

> this, and don't know but that money might make a much worse change in me. And yet I have money always in my thoughts and my desires; and the whole life I place before myself is money, money, money, and what money can make of life! (*OMF* 521)

Dickens thus took great pains to make the reader recognise Boffin's gradual deterioration through Bella's point of view. In the memorandum for this chapter, he writes: "Work up to Bella's account of the change in Mr Boffin—broken to the reader through her", and also "[l]ay the ground very carefully all through" (Cotsell 195). It may hardly be an exaggeration to say that for Dickens, the effect of Boffin's performance solely depends on how much the reader can feel empathy for Bella.

A self-referential episode in the novel also appears to suggest the necessity to reduce the psychological distance between reader and fictional characters. In the first chapter of Book the Second in which Bradley Headstone's malfunctioning school system is described, the narrator mockingly recounts the plots of two moralistic tales which are wrongly supposed to be favoured by the pupils:

> But, all the place was pervaded by a grimly ludicrous pretence that every pupil was childish and innocent. This pretence, much favoured by the lady-visitors, led to the ghastliest absurdities. Young women old in the vices of the commonest and worst life, were expected to profess themselves enthralled by the good child's book, the Adventures of Little Margery, who resided in the village cottage by the mill; severely reproved and morally squashed the miller, when she was five and he was fifty; divided her porridge with singing birds; denied herself a new nankeen bonnet, on the ground that the turnips did not wear nankeen bonnets, neither did the sheep who ate them; who plaited straw and delivered the dreariest orations to all comers, at all sorts of unseasonable times. So, unwieldy young dredgers and hulking mudlarks were referred to the experiences of Thomas Twopence, who, having resolved not to rob (under circumstances of uncommon atrocity) his particular friend and benefactor, of eighteenpence, presently came into supernatural possession of three and sixpence, and lived a shining light ever afterwards. (Note, that the benefactor came to no good.) (*OMF* 263-64)

Curiously, the central concern of these ludicrous books, the Adventures of Little Margery and the Experiences of Thomas Twopence, is not greatly different from that of the Boffin plot and even *Our Mutual Friend* itself—the moral conversion of a protagonist. However, while Dickens, as we have seen, manages to make the reader feel close to and sympathise with Bella

Wilfer, the authors of these fictions are apparently incapable of doing the same. It is quite natural that "[y]oung women old in the vices of the commonest and worst life" should be emotionally estranged from Little Margery, or "unwieldy young dredgers and hulking mudlarks" should feel an insurmountable difference from Thomas Twopence. Of course, Dickens's primary point of this passage is to satirise the contemporary education system, but at the same time he indirectly makes a comment on the relationship between text and reader, and thus gives us a clue to comprehending his own narrative strategy in *Our Mutual Friend*.

Interestingly, at certain points, Dickens appears to give the reader a warning, or at least anticipate the possibility of misreading, for there are several memorable examples of mistaken interpretation of a text in the novel.[16] For instance, when Mortimer Lightwood receives a hasty note from Charley Hexam in Chapter 2 of Book the First, he is unable to decipher it on the first try, and has to reread it a couple of times: "Mortimer stares at him, and unfolds the paper. Reads it, reads it twice, turns it over to look at the blank outside, reads it a third time" (*OMF* 59). This is not necessarily because Mortimer is a bad reader, but the author of the note has made it deliberately illegible, so that he can pretend to be illiterate and elude reproach of his uneducated and obstinate father: "Ah! But I made believe I wrote so badly, as that it was odds if any one could read it. And when I wrote slowest and smeared but with my finger most, father was best pleased, as he stood looking over me" (*OMF* 70). Thus, the first "author" introduced in the novel, like Dickens himself, is quite manipulative and eager to deceive his readers.

Silas Wegg, the wooden-legged ballad-seller, is not an author of literary texts, but he also draws our attention to the way a text can be easily misread and misinterpreted. Boffin hires him to read "Decline-And-Fall-Off-The-Rooshan-Empire" (*OMF* 96)—that is, Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*—in the evenings.

However, Wegg, "a literary man" (*OMF* 97) is a critically flawed reader, and makes multiple mistakes during his reading. For example, Wegg mispronounces Polybius as "Polly Beeious" (*OMF* 103), which is erroneously supposed by Boffin to be "a Roman virgin" (*OMF* 103), and also causes him to misrecognise Vitellius as "Vittle-us" (*OMF* 104). After finishing Gibbon, Wegg launches into Rollin's *Ancient History*, Josephus's *The Wars of the Jews*, and then Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. Though Boffin finds Plutarch extremely entertaining, he at the same time cannot help hoping that "Plutarch might not expect him to believe them all" (*OMF* 538). Then Boffin raises the question of whether and to what extent he should trust the author: "What to believe, in the course of his reading, was Mr Boffin's chief literary difficulty indeed; for some time he was divided in his mind between half, all, or none; at length, when he decided, as a moderate man, to compound with half, the question still remained, which half? And that stumbling-block he never got over" (*OMF* 538). As Pollack-Pelzner points out, the very same question has puzzled the readers of *Our Mutual Friend*.[17] Surely our reliance on the author is, to some extent, shaken when we find that we have been fooled about Boffin's performance from beginning to end. Here Dickens appears to draw a parallel between Boffin's enjoyment of literary texts and the reader's expected response to the novel, and anticipates the reader's possible confusion caused by his own provoking plot device.

These motifs of reading and misinterpretation are ultimately comparable to Bella Wilfer's inability to recognise the fictionality of Boffin's playacting. Indeed, the text itself seems to allow, or even encourage, the reader to juxtapose and compare the author's various uses of the word "reading" in different contexts. In Chapter 10 of Book the Third, Eugene Wrayburn casually mentions "the figurative senses of acting and interpreting" (Friedman "Motif of Reading" 60) of the word "reading":

> 'You charm me, Mortimer, with your reading of my weaknesses. (By-the-by, that very word, Reading, in its critical use, always charms me. An actress's Reading of a chambermaid, a dancer's Reading of a hornpipe, a singer's Reading

> of a song, a marine painter's Reading of the sea, the kettle-drum's Reading of an instrumental passage, are phrases ever youthful and delightful.) (*OMF* 605)

Significantly, later in the novel Dickens occasionally likens the relationship between Boffin and Bella to the relationship between a literary text and its reader in presenting the pivotal pious fraud in Book the Third. As Boffin changes for the worse every day, Bella gradually finds it difficult to peruse his face: "A kind of illegibility, though a different kind, stole over Mr Boffin's face. Its old simplicity of expression got masked by a certain craftiness that assimilated even his good-humour to itself. His very smile was cunning, as if he had been studying smiles among the portraits of his misers" (*OMF* 534). Similarly, when Boffins shows a sudden bad temper in one morning, Bella looks to Mrs Boffin's face in seeking an explanation, but "[a]n anxious and a distressed observation of her own face was all she could read in it." (*OMF* 652). Boffin has once flatteringly praised Bella's reading ability: "you can read at sight, and your eyes are as sharp as they're bright" (*OMF* 528), but, as these passages show, Bella proves herself to be an incompetent observer, who is not able to see through Boffin's (and Mrs Boffin's) performance. In this sense, she is, like many of us, a deceived "reader". In this way, Bella and the reader are similarly situated by the novelist, with the result that the effect of Boffin's make-believe is much heightened.

Actually, Bella's misreading is not so much a proof of her incompetence as an essential part of her moral trial. Boffin's fake corruption can be considered another variation of the fiction-making theme of the novel, and particularly akin to that of Lizzie Hexam, Jenny Wren, or Young Blight. As we have discussed in the preceding section, for these characters, fiction can be endowed with a regenerative or mending power, and so is Boffin's benevolent deception. It prevents Bella from becoming a mercenary person like the Lammles, brings her inner good nature, and enables her to be morally born again. Boffin's cruel and disdainful treatment of Rokesmith awakes Bella's sympathy and respect for the slighted secretary, and

urges her to take sides with him openly. Immediately after the dismissal of Rokesmith, she too leaves Boffin's house in her old dress, resolving to start life afresh: "'I'll leave all the presents behind, and begin again entirely on my own account.' That the resolution might be thoroughly carried into practice, she even changed the dress she wore, for that in which she had come to the grand mansion" (*OMF* 666).

It is safe to say that Dickens aimed to exert the similar moral influence over the reader, for his intention was to turn the Boffin plot "to a pleasant and useful account at last" (*OMF* 893). In fact, again Dickens uses a self-referential device in order to raise our consciousness about the ethical aspect of his fiction. In "The Man from Somewhere", Chapter 2 of Book the First, Mortimer Lightwood, "the novel's designated storyteller" (Hornback, "Mortimer Lightwood" 256), relates the story of John Harmon to the people present at the Veneering party, and his highly self-conscious narration "links his story to the novel we are reading" (Pollack-Pelzner 271). Mortimer deliberately assumes "a tone of deliberate mock-melodrama" (Kiely 272), and gives an account of "the man from Somewhere" (*OMF* 54) in the same manner as a novelist tells a story—typically in such passages as "the poor girl respectfully intimated that she was secretly engaged to that popular character whom the novelists and versifiers call Another" (*OMF* 56)[18] or "[w]e must now return, as novelists say, and as we all wish they wouldn't, to the man from Somewhere" (*OMF* 57). Thus, Mortimer deliberately fictionalises the story of John Harmon, and importantly, his narrative functions as a touchstone, a test through which one's true character or moral stance is revealed. When Mortimer recounts the premature and piteous death of Old Harmon's daughter and the subsequent decease of her husband, the narrator portrays how this story affects its audience:

> There is that in the indolent Mortimer, which seems to hint that if good society might on any account allow itself to be impressible, he, one of good society, might have the weakness to be impressed by what he here relates. It is hidden with great pains, but it is in him. The gloomy Eugene too, is not without some kindred touch; for, when that appalling Lady Tippins declares that if Another had survived, he should have gone down at the head of her list of lovers—and also when the mature

> young lady shrugs her epaulettes, and laughs at some private and confidential comment from the mature young gentleman—his gloom deepens to that degree that he trifles quite ferociously with his dessert-knife. (*OMF* 57)

Although Mortimer reduces the story to a banal melodrama in order to adjust himself to the Veneering circle, this reaction to his own story suggests that he does not lack sympathy. His indolent friend Eugene Wrayburn also shows some touch of humanity. Although he is "buried alive in the back of his chair" (*OMF* 53) at his first appearance in the novel, at this point we learn that Eugene's innate goodness is not dead but only temporarily inanimate, and there is still a possibility of ethical or spiritual regeneration. On the other hand, the rest of the members of the Veneering circle show the totally opposite reaction. Lady Tippins even dares to interrupt the story by her "grisly little fiction" (*OMF* 54) about her list of lovers. Here Dickens subtly contrasts the two types of fiction that we have hitherto discussed—one which conceals one's selfish, vain, or empty identity, and the other one which offers emotional support and provides moral edification.

It is in the Boffin plot that the confrontation between these two sorts of fiction becomes apparent. In fact, the feigned corruption of Boffin has another purpose than the education of Bella: it punishes Silas Wegg, who is, like Veneering and Podsnap, possessed with a self-satisfying fiction (we should not dismiss the fact that his wooden leg is once referred to as the "timber fiction" (*OMF* 357) by the narrator). No sooner does he make his first appearance in the novel than his selfish and self-deluding propensity is introduced to the reader. As a ballad-seller, Wegg has sat over against a corner house near Cavendish Square for some years, and in course of time he has somehow come to believe that he is not only the "errand-goer by appointment to the house at the corner" (*OMF* 88) but also "one of the house's retainers and owed vassalage to it" (*OMF* 88). This fancy results in the further invention of fictional family members and the arrangement of the rooms according to his own plan:

> For this reason, he always spoke of it as 'Our House,' and, though his knowledge of its affairs was mostly speculative and all wrong, claimed to be in its confidence.

> On similar grounds he never beheld an inmate at any one of its windows but he touched his hat. Yet, he knew so little about the inmates that he gave them names of his own invention: as 'Miss Elizabeth', 'Master George', 'Aunt Jane', 'Uncle Parker '—having no authority whatever for any such designations, but particularly the last—to which, as a natural consequence, he stuck with great obstinacy. (*OMF* 88)

Due to this delusion, Wegg is disturbed to find that this house has become the property of Boffin, and that all particulars about the house are different from "his mental plans of it" (*OMF* 350). As Gaughan points out, such "disastrous habit of believing in his own fictions [. . .] parodies society's and Headstone's belief in their own fictions" (241), and indeed Wegg's obsession with his own fabrication apparently echoes what we have already discussed in the first section of this chapter—selfish and self-destructive fiction, which undermines the whole society. Wegg is significant not only as a comic scoundrel but also as a representative figure of the darker side of fiction.[19]

Believing himself to have a claim to "Our House", Wegg begins to conceive a plot to exploit Boffin, "the upstart who had trampled on those eminent creatures, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker" (*OMF* 537). Wegg happens to find Old Harmon's second will, and decides to blackmail Boffin on the ground that according to it, nearly the whole of the property and estate should be bequeathed to the Crown, not to Boffin. Wegg is, however, totally unaware that Boffin has the third will which makes the former one invalid. His secretary perceives Wegg's design, but persuades Boffin to deliberately overlook it and keep him deluded to the last moment, so that his "disappointment might be the heaviest possible disappointment" (*OMF* 860). Meanwhile, Boffin plays the role of a miser, and asks Wegg to read books about misers. From these books Wegg learns that Daniel Dancer, a notorious miser, hid a large quantity of money in a dungheap in the cowhouse, a lady named Wilcocks stowed away "gold and silver in a pickle-pot in a clock-case" (*OMF* 545), and the like. Boffin thus intentionally misleads his hired reader into cherishing a vain expectation that Old Harmon too saved up his money somewhere in his house or dust mounds (which is another

example of "misreading" in the novel). As a consequence, Wegg thinks it necessary to be vigilant and attentive to every process of levelling the Mounds, lest something valuable should be turned up in his absence, regardless of the fact that Old Harmon "had coined every waif and stray into money, long before" (*OMF* 850). This constant watch eventually wears Wegg down to skin and bone, in precisely the same way as Bradley Headstone's meaningless night chase after Eugene around all over London makes him "baffled, worn, with the exhaustion of deferred hope" (*OMF* 608). Indeed, the similar fate awaits these two monomaniac fiction-makers. They both are severely disappointed in their expectations (Wegg gets no fortune and Headstone loses Lizzie), and are in the end "drowned"—it is safe to say so, since after the revelation of Boffin's deception, Wegg is thrown into a scavenger's cart "with a prodigious splash" (*OMF* 862) by his faithful servant.[20] With regard to this plot, Knoepflmacher observes: "It is tempting to identify Boffin with Dickens himself: the old man's ability to throw dust in the eyes of his readers. Boffin triumphs over Wegg the maker of fictions through a fiction of his own devising" (164). In other words, Boffin's victory over Wegg suggests that one can use the power of fiction and fiction-making for good purposes, and such ability is effective in curing the moral corruption of the society—in combating the self-righteous or self-centred fictions as represented by Podsnap, Veneering and their likes. Only by defeating and destroying them, "the death and rebirth of a whole society" (Daleski 336) becomes possible. In this sense, it is worth recalling that Boffin's first name is Nicodemus—the same name of a Pharisee in the Gospel of John, who talked with Jesus about a spiritual rebirth, and later brought myrrh and aloes to embalm the dead body of Jesus.

* * * * *

We have shown that Boffin's pious fraud makes more sense if we consider this plot in the context of the motif of fiction and fiction-making. Like Lizzie Hexam's story-telling or Jenny

Wren's creative imagination, Boffin's benevolent deception brings about the moral regeneration: it edifies Bella Wilfer and helps her establish a new identity. At the same time, it punishes Silas Wegg, the self-deceptive, mercenary literary man, and in so doing, symbolically suggests the possibility of overcoming the corrupted society full of inventors of selfish fictions, such as Veneering, Lady Tippins, the Lammles and Podsnap.

Dickens's eager concern for fiction's emotional impact in *Our Mutual Friend* may have something to do with his enthusiasm about public reading which he began in 1850s and continued until his death (Also, in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), there is a memorable scene of the "public reading" of Dr Manette's prison memoir before the Revolutionary Tribunal). Besides this, we must take into account that the 1860's was "the decade of Dickens's greatest successes as a public Reader" (Andrews, *Dickens* 52). Indisputably Dickens was always keen to know the readers' reactions to his novels, but presumably the public reading experiences enabled the novelist to observe the responses of the audience more directly and closely, and consequently made his last finished novel highly self-conscious about the nature of his creative activity itself.

The above discussion reveals Dickens's somewhat ambivalent attitude towards fiction and fiction-making. On one hand, they serve selfish, destructive purposes, and on the other hand, they can be useful means of symbolical regeneration or restoration of the fragmented, scattered pieces of one's mind and even the whole society. Of course, it is the latter sort of fiction that Dickens upholds. After all, as Kiely concludes, the craving for fiction-making is an essential part of human nature: "the need to author one's own designs is associated with the most universal and fundamental human instinct, the urge to live. We invent to survive" (281). While Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times* claims "[f]acts alone are wanted in life" (*HT* 47), *Our Mutual Friend* declares that the power of imagination and creation is no less important, and a

novelist's job is, like Nicodemus Boffin, to use its ambiguous power in order to achieve a better society and a better life for everyone.

Notes

[1.] For the delay of the publication of *Barnaby Rudge*, see Chapter 1 of this thesis, especially 59-60. According to Michael Slater's recent survey, Dickens tried to begin *Our Mutual Friend* throughout the spring and summer of 1862, but unable to do so because of his unsettled physical and mental condition. See Slater, *Charles Dickens* 506-07.

[2.] Dickens, however, made the same mistake with *Dombey and Son*. See Forster vol. 2, 293.

[3.] Robert Newsome compares *Our Mutual Friend* to *Hard Times* in terms of the theme of fancy, and observes that in the world of *Our Mutual Friend*, "Fancy is not always to be highly valued nor uncritically regarded, even though Fancy and fantasizing to a large extent retain their high value for Dickens" (46).

[4.] Joseph Gold also observes that "If Dickens had known for certain that *Our Mutual friend* was to be his last completed novel he could not have more systematically collected all his major themes and metaphors and more precisely focused all his moral conclusions than he did" (256).

[5.] H. M. Daleski, for instance, argues that "what the circulation of the mistaken identities suggests is the need (among the dust-mounds) for the discovery of a true identity, one that will sustain life in the city of death" (275). Similarly, Rosemarie Bodenheimer states that "the novel is all about men who are, and men who arrange to be, mistaken for others" (160). Masao Miyoshi persuasively associates the identity theme with the novel's dominating symbol—the dust piles: "in their constant presence, they point to other notions than class struggle and the

myth of money: nothing less than the whole problem of identity in a world where things—and men—are not always what they appear to be" (265).

[6.] Albert D. Hutter praises that Lady Tippins is "[t]he most wonderfully grotesque figure" in the Veneering circle, and calls her "a comic triumph of the artificial over life itself" ("Dismemberment and Articulation" 153).

[7.] Dierdre David emphasises the underlying relationship between money and fiction-making: "Dickens' complex juxtaposition of façade and content, of unnatural fiction and natural actuality in the relationship between Fledgeby and Riah shows how money has the power to create fictions" (102).

[8.] In *David Copperfield*, David's employer, Mr Spenlow frequently uses the name of his "obdurate and ruthless" (*DC* 411) business partner, Mr Jorkins, so that he can avoid troublesome situations by shifting responsibility to him. Likewise, Mr Pancks in *Little Dorrit*, a rent collector of Bleeding Heart Yard, is made a scapegoat for Christopher Casby, the outwardly "philanthropic" (*LD* 240) patriarch of the Yard.

[9.] We cannot discuss Fledgeby's "fiction" without referring to Dickens's another work of fiction. It is generally understood that the portrayal of Riah in *Our Mutual Friend* is Dickens's compensation of the prejudiced representation of an infamous Jewish character in his early work, namely, Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, an "avaricious, in-sa-ti-a-ble old fence" (*OT* 89). Although Dickens did not intend to generalise about Jews, he decided to create good Jewish characters in *Our Mutual Friend*, in response to the letter of protest by Eliza David, his Jewish acquaintance. The following line by Riah can be read as the most direct reference to this problem:

> Men say, 'This is a bad Greek, but there are good Greeks. This is a bad Turk, but there are good Turks.' Not so with the Jews. Men find the bad among us easily enough—among what peoples are the bad not easily found?—but they take the worst of us as samples of the best; they take the lowest of us as presentations of the highest; and they say "All Jews are alike." (*OMF* 795)

The result is, however, not without fault—Riah is too good to be true. Lauriat Lane Jr., for instance, regards the character of Riah as "an artistic failure which serves mainly to prove the strength of Dickens' allegiance to the tradition he was trying to refute" ("Dickens' Archetypal Jew" 98). Efraim Sicher also criticises "Riah, of course, is no more a real Jew than was Fagin" (148). Jonathan H. Grossman, however, comments that "[p]aradoxically, Rich's failure to be convincing can be seen as something of a success in terms of Dickens' attempt not to depict a Jew, but rather to represent the impossibility of doing so" (49).

[10.] Humphry House famously criticises Twemlow's speech in the final chapter as an "obvious sophistry" (163). According to House, in this scene Twemlow appears to be satisfied with the fact that "Eugene is really doing a very generous thing in marrying Lizzie, and that she is doing very well for herself by marrying him", but this satisfaction is actually "based on the acceptance of existing class distinctions in general" (163).

[11.] See Linda M. Lewis 243.

[12.] Hutter, for instance, observes that "*Our Mutual Friend* is not simply a novel about the river as a symbol of death, [. . .] it details instead, in a variety of ways, a process of death-into-life, a process of resurrection or animation from a world which is chaotic and mutilated and, in several important ways, dismembered" ("Dismemberment and Articulation" 148).

[13.] Hutter notes that "Venus is in effect a comic version of Dickens the novelist" ("Dismemberment and Articulation" 157). Malcolm Andrews also points out that "improbably resembles his novelist creator" (*Dickensian Laughter* 128). According to Goldie Morgentaler, Venus is one of the few characters in the Dickensian canon who are "self-proclaimed artists" (46), through whom Dickens expresses a "unholy alliance between life, death, and artistry" (54). As for Jenny Wren, David states that "she is very much like Charles Dickens" (122), because of her ability to transform the recognition of dispiriting reality into a new vision of the world.

[14.] Bodenheimer points out that in the novel, "numerous plots and deceptions are conducted in the present and managed by the characters in full view of the reader" (159), and Boffin's deception is the only exception.

[15.] Through a meticulous survey, F. X. Shea proved that Boffin's pious fraud is Dickens's original intention, not a haphazard change. See Shea 37-40.

[16.] Hutter makes the same point, noting that "[t]hroughout *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens was concerned with various kinds of misreadings and the fatal consequences of such activity" ("Dismemberment and Articulation" 156). Similarly, Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton observes that "[s]ome of the most absurd incidents in the novel hinge on the inappropriateness of writing and interpretation" (149).

[17.] See Pollack-Pelzner 263. In his essay he explores "how the historical drama of the Boffin plot's critical reception repeats the representations of its development and interpretation within the novel" (263).

[18.] John Romano suggests that this "Another" may be a reference to *Martin Chuzzlewit*, where "the most famous appearances of "Another" in English literature" (38) occurs.

[19.] Some critics consider that through Wegg, Dickens expresses anxiety about his own position as a novelist: David points out that "Wegg's obsessive transformation of reality into fiction [. . .] suggest, perhaps, Dickens' conscious or unconscious uneasiness about the ambivalent position of the fiction-maker" (97); Gaughan similarly observes that Wegg's obsession with his own fiction "serves as a constant reminder of what the novel must not do" (241).

[20.] See Hornback, *Noah's Arkitecture* 141.

CONCLUSION

When W. M. Thackeray passed away in 1863, Dickens contributed an obituary titled "In Memoriam" (1864) to *Cornhill Magazine*. In this article, he wrote the remembrance of his great literary rival in a warm, sympathetic tone, but at the same time could not refrain from mentioning their disparity of opinion about literature: "We had our differences of opinion. I thought that he too much feigned a want of earnestness, and that he made a pretense of under-valuing his art, which was not good for the art that he held in trust" (*DJ4* 328). Such "moral seriousness" (Engel 25) reveals itself at various points in his writings. In a letter to his friend Angela Burdett-Coutts, Dickens highly praised Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* because of its edifying effect upon the reader: "it has perhaps done more good in the world, and instructed more kinds of people in virtue, than any other fiction ever written" (*L5*: 817). For Dickens, the essential duty of a novelist is to lead readers towards virtue, and as we have discussed in the preceding chapters, his novels deal with various ethical themes, such as personal development and maturation, identity formation and crisis, or historical awareness. However, in order to achieve this purpose effectively, the novelist, first of all, had to engross and entertain the reader—or, to use the words of G. K. Chesterton, he had to "make the flesh creep and make the sides ache" (*Charles Dickens* 109). To put it another way, to convey these subjects to the reader successfully, he essentially needed to sophisticate narrative techniques and choose the most appropriate narrative form for each novel. The relationship between ethics and aesthetics is of course not simple. By rereading Dickens with a particular focus on narrative form and self-reflexivity, we have shown that his novels subtly reveal various creative anxieties, ambivalences, and dilemmas which the novelist faced throughout his career.

Pickwick Papers (1836) is not so much a novel with a consistent plot as a series of

discursive episodes, and similarly *Oliver Twist* (1838) was not originally intended as a novel, either. Then, the third novel, *Nicholas Nickleby* is an important turning point for Dickens the novelist, since it was planned as a novel from the beginning. It is notable that even in his earliest career, Dickens did not rely on one particular literary form uncritically. *Nicholas Nickleby* is both a tribute and critique of melodrama, and especially the Crummles episode underscores the self-reflexive characteristics of the novel. In the novel the reader can see Dickens's ambivalent response to the theatrical tradition in the early nineteenth century, which results in a unique mixture of melodrama, anti-melodrama, and meta-melodrama. Such acute awareness of literary form can be found in the fifth novel, *Barnaby Rudge*, with which Dickens ends his "apprenticeship" (Rice 184). *Barnaby Rudge* has often been criticised for its apparently clumsy combination of detective fiction and historical novel, but in this peculiar structure we can find a self-critique of the novelist, who evokes the reader's attention by the sensational murder plot, but at the same time recognises the problematic aspect of such narrative device. As a consequence, the evil plotters who are morally responsible for the Gordon Riots are described as analogous to the novelist himself, who is similarly involved in creating "plot" and catching the attention of the public. The inherent formal disparity of the novel thus becomes a variation on the ethical theme of disguise, deception, and duality of identity.

From *Dombey and Son* (1848), his novels became more sophisticated both structurally and thematically, and Dickens paid more attention to unifying and organising motifs such as the fog in *Bleak House* (1853) or the prison in *Little Dorrit* (1857). Furthermore, Dickens explored the strategic use of narrative form and adopted new compositional methods which he had never tried before. And these experiments were frequently followed by self-reflection or metafictional comments in each novel. In *David Copperfield*, an autobiographical novel told by the first-person narrator, not only Mr Dick's memorial, Dr Strong's Dictionary, and

Micawber's letters but also other characters' self-disclosing narratives can be regarded as analogies of autobiography, and they are clues to understand some important aspects of the self-presentation of David, whose memoir is full of dilemmas and puzzles. Dickens appears to conduct experiments of the first-person narrative in various forms in one novel, highlighting several issues that often arise in any autobiographical writing, such as authenticity, reliability, and self-deception—themes which Dickens had shown profound interest and continued to explore until the very end of his career. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens adopted a new aesthetical principle that "the story itself should express, more than they [characters] should express themselves, by dialogue" (*L9*: 112). In Dickens's second historical novel, the crucial concern of the story is how to interpret or confront the past. Dickens's choice of "resurrection" as the central theme of the novel is highly self-referential and scarcely coincidental, given the fact that historical fiction is a literary genre which is frequently associated with the metaphor of bringing the past into life. The novel contains numerous analogies of historiography (such as Dr Manette's prison memoirs), by which Dickens tries to convey to the reader how one should reconstruct or retell the past. In doing so, the novelist demonstrates his own aptitude for interpreting history, and presents himself as an eligible "resurrectionist" of the past to the reader.

Since 1850s, Dickens gradually got absorbed in public reading, which became an enormous physical burden and to some extent responsible for his premature death. However, such activity allowed Dickens to observe the emotional and often enthusiastic reaction of the audience directly, and possibly gave him a new insight into the power of fiction. In his last complete novel *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens faced the unpreceded compositional difficulties, but the novel is also notable for its prevailing self-reflexive nature. Dickens explores the issue of ethical significance of fiction or fiction-making, which have the potential to lead people to the moral regeneration or the recovery of humanity, but at the same time contain certain risks

of egoistic escapism or self-deception. However, as Bella Wilfer's moral transformation triggered by Nicodemus Boffin's pious fraud suggests, Dickens ultimately upholds the power of fiction, and indicates that by creating appropriate psychological distance between readers and the characters, a novelist can generate some positive, edifying effects on them. Although *Our Mutual Friend* is Dickens's last complete novel, in his next and unfinished novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), he had an ambition to try a new narrative technique. According to John Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens*, the intended originality of this detective novel is "the originality of which was to consist in the review of the murderer's career by himself at the close, when its temptations were to be dwelt upon as if, not he the culprit, but some other man, were the tempted" (Forster 2: 366). In spite of his declining creative energy in the last years, Dickens never contented himself with a repetition of his past achievement; he always kept seeking new, innovative narrative methods that most appropriately fit the theme of each novel—in a somewhat similar way as he always pursued the social reform and improvement.

As to the reticence on the subject of art, Phillip Collins points out that "he was in this respect more like Shakespeare (so silent on his art) than like Ben Johnson, always busily telling his audiences the why and wherefore of the play they were seeing or reading" (22). Dickens certainly was not a theorist of fiction, but within his novels he shows an acute self-reflection about his own creative activity, and even appears to tell the reader how to read and interpret them. In this sense, it might be argued that these narrative strategies amply compensate for Dickens's obstinate silence upon the theme of art, aesthetics or compositional principle. Collins points out that Dickens was "not his own severest critic" (27) and "certainly much admired his work" (29), but this does not mean that he was blindly confident in his creative capacity. As we have repeatedly emphasised throughout this thesis, he self-critically reflects on his own narrative form, and, though inexplicitly, even expresses his compositional

dilemmas, paradoxes, or conflicts to his readers.

Moreover, this discussion can be developed further by considering Dickens's relationship with his readers—one of the major themes in the current study. In the Preface to the 1857 edition of *Little Dorrit*, he expresses firm trust in his readers: "Deeply sensible of the affection and confidence that have grown up between us, I add to this Preface, as I added to that, May we meet again!" (*LD* xxii). His self-referential narrative methods might partly explain the unusually strong bond Dickens felt with his readers, since he not only put full confidence in their ability to appreciate his works but also tacitly disclosed to them his creative struggles, ambiguities, and anxieties. In this sense, Dickens's relationship with his readers can certainly be described as *confidential* in that he shared with them the very essence of his novel-writing—something that was never mentioned explicitly.

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