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Dining with Savages and the Laws of Hostility: Performing Civilisation in *Andersen's English*

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Abstract:
In its staging of Hans Christian Andersen's 1857 visit to Charles Dickens's Gad's Hill home, Sebastian Barry's play *Andersen's English* (2010) draws attention to the performative status of civilised 'Englishness'. With his limited grasp of the English language and of English cultural conventions, Andersen denaturalises and exposes the assumptions that inform the enactment of national identity. In particular, this essay argues, the hostile reactions elicited by his repeated misreadings and misunderstandings of the Dickens family's performances belie the narratives of hospitality and civilisation integral to Victorian constructions of Englishness. The references to barbarity and violence that accrete around the play's representations of eating further destabilise the binary oppositions between 'self' and 'other', 'savagery' and 'civilisation' on which Victorian narratives of identity depend. Yet there are also limitations to the play's critique of Victorian values. Although *Andersen's English* invites its audience to draw parallels between nineteenth-century and neo-conservative attempts to (re)order (and thus civilise) ideologically troubling histories, in doing so, it fails to acknowledge its own interest in fictionalising and (re)constructing the past.

Keywords: Hans Christian Andersen, cannibalism, civilisation, Charles Dickens, Englishness, family, hospitality, marital conflict, performance, savagery.

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Recalling his extended stay at Dickens's Gad's Hill home in the summer of 1857, the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen wrote in his autobiography, "My visit to Dickens was and will remain a highlight in my life" (Andersen qtd. in Bredsdorff 1956: 48). The Dickens family's remembrances of this event were rather less celebratory, however. Dickens's daughter, Kate, described Andersen as "a bony bore" who "stayed on and on", while Dickens himself is alleged to have marked his guest's departure by posting a notice in his room: "Hans Andersen slept in this room for five weeks – which seemed to the family AGES!" (Storey 1971:

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21-22; original emphasis).[1] The fractured perspectives evident in these discordant reminiscences shape the events of Sebastian Barry's play, *Andersen's English* (2010), in which a fictionalised Andersen is positioned as the uncomprehending witness to the Dickens family's inexorable fragmentation. Whereas the naïve and idealistic Dane assumes Gad's Hill Place to be "a paradise of human hearts" (Barry 2010: 10), the other participants in Barry's domestic drama – together with the audience – perceive it to be the locus of a family in turmoil and a marriage on the brink of collapse.[2]

As Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben note, the "failed, abusive, or disintegrating" family is a recurrent motif in neo-Victorian writing, offering fertile imaginative ground for the rethinking of nineteenth-century narratives of 'hearth and home', as well as for the exploration and interrogation of modern-day anxieties about dysfunctional kinship patterns and degenerating domestic values (Kohlke and Gutleben 2011: 2). Within neo-Victorian (re)writings of the family, the figure of Dickens invariably looms large, not only because, as Catherine Waters points out, he continues to be understood as the quintessential "purveyor of cosy domestic bliss" within the Western cultural imaginary, but also because of a burgeoning literary interest in the apparently "ironic discrepancy between his fiction and his lived experience" (Waters 1997: 15, 3).[3] Biographical revelations about Dickens's private life – his difficult relationships with his children (in particular, with his sons); his callous, public castigation of his wife, Catherine, following the breakdown of their marriage in 1858; his controversial preferment of her sister, Georgina, as his household manager; and his secret, twelve-year-long affair with the young actress, Ellen Ternan – have provided a rich seam of material for writers of neo-Victorian biofiction, including Richard Flanagan in *Wanting* (2009) and Gaynor Arnold in *Girl in a Blue Dress* (2008).[4] In this essay, I argue that Sebastian Barry's dramatic re-imagining of the Dickens family is concerned with something more than charting its troubled relations or puncturing Dickens's reputation as a benevolent patriarch. Through its intertextual and historical references, along with its repeated representations of inhospitality, *Andersen's English* challenges the assumptions about 'civilisation' that buttressed Victorian constructions of Englishness, calling into question the foundational distinction between savagery and civility posited in Dickens's fiction and journalism.[5]

Within Barry's play, Andersen's unexpected and unsolicited arrival at Gad's Hill represents a troubling encounter with 'foreignness' that destabilises the tenuous ground on which civilised English identities, both national and individual, are founded. As Angela Poon, following Judith Butler's theory of performativity, persuasively suggests, far from being innate, Victorian "Englishness" (like gender) demands to be understood as something that is enacted, "a function of the normalizing effect of discursive performances multiply reiterated" (Poon 2008: 2).[6] Importantly, this reiterative performativity takes place not only within the symbolic domain but also at the level of the material: it encompasses the bodies, activities and rituals that make up everyday lived experience. It thus demands "a shared frame" of reference in order to function effectively; the gestures, practices and somatic processes enacted must be recognisable to all participants for the performance of Englishness to "mean anything at all" (Poon 2008: 4). With his limited understanding of the English language, Andersen does not fit comfortably into the normative cultural framework established in Barry's play. By failing to read the Dickens family's performances, or to perform his own role as guest in the 'proper' way, Andersen exposes the constructed, contingent nature of English national identity. The hostile responses elicited by his perceptual and performative inadequacies, meanwhile, signal the inherent fragility of English civility, its inability to curb the instinctive aggression that Freud famously identifies as "the greatest obstacle to civilization" (Freud 2004: 74).

One of the most perceptible ways in which 'everyday' Englishness is enacted in *Andersen's English* is through eating. As I demonstrate in the second section of this essay, the play's characters simulate civility through the practice of commensality and their participation in the shared rituals of the dinner table. Margaret Visser notes that "table manners are social agreements" designed to inhibit "natural instinct and inclination" and "to keep the lid on the violence which the meal being eaten presupposes" (Visser 1991: xii; 4).[7] In Barry's play, however, the inherent animality of eating is consistently exposed, first, through Andersen's disruptive presence at the Dickenses' dinner table and, second, through the implicit but insistent references to savagery and anthropophagy that are threaded through the play's two acts. In particular, in Act Two, the self-conscious re-staging of *The Frozen Deep* (1856) – Dickens's and Wilkie Collins's theatrical rebuttal to rumours that Sir John Franklin's doomed Arctic explorers resorted to

cannibalism in their final days – denotes the uncanny return of repudiated Victorian fears regarding eating, Englishness and barbarism.

The knowing inclusion of this fragment of a play within a play is indicative of the reflexive enactment of national identity that demarcates *Andersen's English* as a neo-Victorian drama. Although, as Benjamin Poore points out, "there is much work to be done" in theorising this incipient genre (Poore 2011: 7), Barry's play exhibits the "self-consciousness" that Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn argue is integral to neo-Victorianism and "distinguishes [it] from other aspects of contemporary culture which embrace historical settings" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 5).[8] The play's self-awareness is not confined, however, to the performance (or meta-performance) of civilised Englishness; it emerges also in its reflections on the (re)ordering of history. As Poon suggests, Victorian ideologies of Englishness mobilised "a linear narrative of imperial growth by inscribing and ordering power and progress" in "temporal" as well as "spatial" terms (Poon 2008: 2). The characters in *Andersen's English* betray a clear interest in such temporal restructuring, seeking to order and arrange the events of British and Irish history, as well as their own personal pasts, into self-justificatory, psychically palatable narratives. Thus, Barry's play can be seen to engage in the kind of ontological and epistemological investigation "of the *now* through an historical awareness of *then*" that Heilmann and Llewellyn associate with the neo-Victorian project (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4, original emphases). Significantly, Barry's play was first performed in 2010, at the end of a decade that saw a revived interest in recuperating and rehabilitating Britain's imperial past (for example, in popular histories, such as Niall Ferguson's 2003 study *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*). Among neo-conservatives, that interest often involved a concomitant appropriation of the kinds of polarising discourses of civilisation and barbarism deployed by Victorian imperialists. In particular, narratives of 'civilisation' were frequently co-opted by Western politicians in order to justify military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this light, *Andersen's English* can be interpreted as a comment on contemporary, as well as nineteenth-century, cultural values. Yet, as I argue in the final section of this essay, Barry's work adopts a more subtle position on the restructuring of history than out-and-out condemnation. Its own denouement attests to the seductive appeal of temporal ordering while,

nevertheless, revealing the problems inherent in the process of (re)constructing and revising the past.

1. Accommodating the Other: Hospitality and Civilisation

When, during the first act of *Andersen's English*, the play's eponymous guest finds his request to be taken to a barber frustrated by Dickens's sister-in-law, Georgie, he tells her that she is failing to comply with the "law of hostility" (Barry 2010: 36). Though comical, his malapropism is, in fact, very apt for, as Jacques Derrida has demonstrated, "hospitality" – the word Andersen intended to use – "carries its own contradiction incorporated into it": deriving from the same root as "hostility", "hospitality" is a "word which allows itself to be parasitized by its opposite, […] the undesirable guest [*hôte*] which it harbors as the self-contradiction in its own body" (Derrida 2000: 3). This etymological paradox carries over into lived experience: signifying the unconditional welcome of strangers, hospitality nevertheless imposes inimical conditions, Derrida suggests, owing to the paternalistic logic by which it is governed:

> it is precisely the *patron* of the house – he who receives, who is master in his house, in his household, in his state, in his nation, in his city, in his town, who remains master in his house – who defines the conditions of hospitality or welcome […]. [T]he formalization of a law of hospitality […] violently imposes a contradiction on the very concept of hospitality in fixing a limit to it, in de-termining it: hospitality is certainly, […] the *greeting* of the foreign other [*l'autre étranger*] as a friend but on the condition that the host […] maintains his own authority *in his own home*. (Derrida 2000: 4; original emphases)

This problem of 'maintaining authority' while providing a welcome is one of the key concerns of *Andersen's English*. By refusing to name a date for his departure and, in this way, to 'fix a limit' to his visit, Andersen confuses the distinction between 'guest' and 'resident' and disrupts Dickens's mastery of the domestic sphere. Such a challenge to the *patron*'s authority inevitably generates hostility. As Karima Laachir summarises, "hospitality lives on the paradox of presupposing a nation, a home, a door for it to

happen but once one establishes a threshold, a door or a nation, hospitality ceases to happen and becomes hostility", as the host family/nation seeks to preserve the reassuring boundaries of identity by securing the fundamental distinction between 'self' and 'other' (Laachir 2007: 182).

Owing to its exposure of the proximity and interrelatedness of hostility and hospitality, *Andersen's English* troubles many of the prevailing cultural assumptions surrounding Charles Dickens and his hospitable propensities. In the accounts of Victorian reminiscencers, Dickens is invariably celebrated as a "kind, genial, and attentive host" (Compton 1981: 191), and this reputation for "conviviality" is "crowned", as Claire Tomalin points out, in his fiction (Tomalin 1991: 4). His Christmas books, in particular, are popularly associated with scenes of commensality, festivity and cordial welcome, but in other works, too, representations of hospitality abound, albeit in less ostentatious forms. In *Little Dorrit* (1855-1857), for instance, the impoverished residents of Bleeding Heart Yard put aside their prejudices about "foreigners" and welcome the injured Italian John Baptist into their community (Dickens 2003: 332). In *Great Expectations* (1860-1861), meanwhile, hospitality functions as a subtle but significant register of moral feeling. As Barbara Hardy suggests, the genuine hospitality that the young Pip demonstrates towards the escaped felon, Magwitch, in the early chapters of the novel contrasts sharply with the false hospitality that the adult Pip displays to him on his return from the colonies: in the former case, Pip "treats [Magwitch] as a guest" even though he "is eating like a beast", while, in the latter, Pip is shown to be a "bad host", grudging and self-conscious, who goes through the motions of performing civility while inwardly wishing his uninvited visitor far away (Hardy 1970: 142, 151).

The value attached to 'true' hospitality in Dickens's fiction, and in Victorian culture more generally, derives in large part from its status as a signifier of civilised/civilising Christianity (which, in turn, was understood as an index of 'Englishness'). After assessing the hospitable practices associated with different tribes and peoples, an 1855 article in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* concludes "that if hospitality has been called the virtue of rude and savage nations, it may also with justice be said to constitute one of the best-loved attributes of civilised and Christian England" (Madeline [1855]: 135). Interestingly, this formulation acknowledges that hospitality is not a uniquely English trait, and thus destabilises the opposition between England and "rude and savage nations".

An 1860 article in *The London Review*, however, is less equivocal in its reading of hospitality as proof of English superiority:

> among nations, this country is prominently, perhaps supremely, hospitable in the best sense of the term 'hospitality'. The kindly reception of strangers is a great point […] and the English host seems, possibly by grace, but certainly by nature, to obey the Christian injunction. (Anon. 1860: 622)

Yet, while figuring hospitality as something instinctive and innate to Englishness, these articles also betray a concern that it may, in certain circumstances, be aped or performed. *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, for instance, frets about the modern tendency for homely welcome to be replaced by "ostentatious display" (Madeline [1855]: 135). Meanwhile *The London Review* complains that "the great parties of London society […] are notoriously shams", more concerned with keeping up appearances than affording guests a genuine welcome; indeed, "if hospitality is ever mentioned in connection with them at all, it is known to be a convenient falsehood; – a 'term' merely employed for the sake of decency, or to secure an agreeable delusion" (Anon. 1860: 622).

That the Dickens family, as imagined by Barry, invests in such "agreeable delusions" of hospitality – not only in relation to outsiders but to each other – is signalled early in *Andersen's English* in an exchange between Charles and Catherine. When the former asks his wife how she is, she tells him that she is well, in spite of her manifest unhappiness regarding her sister's usurpation of her position in the household. His purported gladness at her response indicates an overriding concern with outward forms of behaviour, with maintaining the *semblance*, rather than the reality, of cordial domestic relations (see Barry 2010: 12). Shortly after this stilted performance of civility takes place, the flimsy illusion of familial affability is shattered by Andersen's untimely and unruly arrival. If "in hospitality I must welcome the other while retaining mastery of the house" (Caputo 1997: 113), then Andersen poses a radical challenge to the very possibility of such mastery by failing to comply with the rules of polite English society. Arriving without invitation – Catherine makes clear that no guests are expected – and unable to make himself understood, Andersen inadvertently

confounds the formalities and ceremonies usually associated with the reception of guests. Aggie, the maid, is obliged to announce that there is a gentleman at the door, but that he doesn't appear to know his own name and doesn't have a calling card. Owing to this failure to present himself according to the dictates of custom, Andersen initially assumes the form of the hostile stranger for his bewildered hosts; a puzzled Dickens speculates that this unknown visitor might be a "prowler" or a "poor vagabond" (Barry 2010: 13). Andersen's sudden appearance in the doorway of the Dickenses' parlour, and subsequent unsolicited crossing of its threshold, further disrupts the rituals of introduction expected in Victorian middle-class households, for, as Laachir points out, the hospitality traditionally enacted in Western cultures is "a conditional hospitality, a hospitality of *invitation* and not visitation" (Laachir 2007: 178; added emphasis).

In the face of this assault on the norms of 'civilised' behaviour, the Dickenses revert to a standardised performance of English politeness. In contrast with Andersen's incoherent effusions about his journey and its effect on his stomach, their language is calm and measured: Catherine informs him that he is "most welcome" and Dickens suggests that the family is "profoundly glad" to see him (Barry 2010: 14). However, the apparent ease with which the Dickenses assume their roles as hosts fails to mask entirely the threat of hostility that Andersen's arrival has exposed – not just against external intruders but amongst family members also. When Georgie tells Aggie which room should be allocated to Andersen, Catherine issues a pointed rejoinder: "Let me do the work of directing where he will sleep" (Barry 2010: 14). And when Dickens later chastises his wife for failing to have ensured that Andersen's bed was warmed, she once more draws attention to the conflict that festers, barely concealed, beneath the veneer of equanimity the family has adopted, wondering aloud why she is blamed for all that goes wrong while Georgie is praised for all that goes right (see Barry 2010: 20).

The successful performance of civilised Englishness is, then, repeatedly derailed in Barry's play by Andersen's disruptive presence. In particular, his apparent inability to read and comprehend the gestures, actions and words of others, or to act out the role of 'guest' in the expected way, gives rise to eruptions of anger and frustration in those around him that threaten to undermine the construction of the hospitable English 'self'. In Act One, for instance, the Dickenses' sixteen year-old son, Walter, practises

the conventions of civility when he courteously invites Andersen to accompany him outside after dinner. A day later, however, his careful performance is undercut by his violent reaction to Andersen's request that he shave him; first describing the Dane as an "idiot", Walter goes on to declare that, if importuned again, he will "slit his throat […] like Sweeney Todd" (Barry 2010: 34-35). Andersen's 'foreignness' arouses similarly hostile (though less overtly menacing) responses from Georgie. When the troublesome guest tells Dickens that he looks tired, Georgie's sharp retort indicates that such observations do not conform to English standards of propriety, and when Catherine rebukes her sister for her openly contemptuous attitude towards their visitor, Georgie responds dismissively that he is impossible to insult because he does not understand what she is saying (see Barry 2010: 66, 36).

The foreign outsider is not the only focal point for such enmity in the play, however. By disrupting the smooth performance of conventional hospitality, Andersen draws attention to the Dickenses' inability to accommodate *one another*, as well as the 'other'. Far from being welcoming and inclusive, the family unit is revealed to be inhospitable and divisive, the site of a destabilising antagonism that repeatedly threatens to spill over into physical or psychological violence. At one point, Dickens compares his children to intruders within his home, telling Andersen that there is "so great a crowd of them […] that I meet them in the corridors in the night, and think I have prowlers. One night I may shoot one" (Barry 2010: 24). Adding to the pervasive discourse of domestic violence, Kate describes her father's treatment of her mother as "brutal" (Barry 2010: 49), while Catherine herself deploys the language of excruciation in response to Dickens's claim that their separation has been arranged with "perfect propriety": "If you had devised a series of tortures for me, if you had hanged me at Tyburn and drawn out my entrails […] you could not hurt me more" (Barry 2010: 79).

Andersen's arrival at Gad's Hill serves, then, as a catalyst for the exposure of the 'unhomeliness' at the heart of the Dickens family home. As Rachel Hollander suggests, "the obligation to offer hospitality always calls into question the status of the home, as it entails both the opening of the private space to outside others and, simultaneously, the host's ownership and control of that space" (Hollander 2013: 19). Hospitality elicits a blurring of boundaries, a fundamental confusion of categories, as Dickens indicates in his reflections on Andersen's uncanny incursion into his home

in Act One. Describing the Dane's presence as unreal and ghostly, Dickens reflects that everything in the house has become "strange" since his arrival (Barry 2010: 32). This conceptual uncertainty contrasts sharply with Dickens's glibly assured pontification on the value of domesticity earlier in the play. The encounter with the other has destabilised and defamiliarised his idealised understanding of home and nation – formerly précised as "a man, a woman and their offspring, gathered in a peaceful group in this eternal England" (Barry 2010: 21) – while simultaneously estranging himself *from himself*.

According to Julia Kristeva, such psychical confusion is typical of the "encounter with the other", in which

> I lose my boundaries […] I lose my composure. I feel "lost", "indistinct", "hazy". The uncanny strangeness allows for many variations: they all repeat the difficulty I have in situating myself with respect to the other. (Kristeva 1991: 187)

The inability to comprehend and assimilate the other leads to a concomitant abrading of confidence in the self. This unsettling sense of self-estrangement is experienced in Barry's play not only by Dickens, but by the Dickens family as a whole. As Kate perceptively notes in Act Two, following Andersen's arrival, there is something "amiss with everyone" (Barry 2010: 58). For Catherine, in particular, the sense of ontological uncertainty triggered by Andersen's visit is intense and profound. At various points during the play, she expresses her inability to understand herself, let alone make herself understood, finally questioning, "who is this 'I'? [....] I feel as if I have left my body, and am looking down on myself" (Barry 2010: 60). Her spectralisation and loss of self-assurance are accompanied by a debilitating loss of language, so that she cannot even find appropriate words, "in English, or any other language", with which adequately to describe Georgie's "grievous" offence in displacing her within her own home (Barry 2010: 60).

Significantly, Catherine's inarticulacy, here, links her to Andersen – the foreigner, the outsider, the other – thus destabilising the essential structural opposition necessary to the maintenance of a coherent national and self identity. If, as Poon suggests, Englishness is enacted "in irrevocably

relational rather than autochthonous terms" (Poon 2008: 2), then the slippage between Catherine and Andersen in the play indicates that the performance of identity may be interrupted, dislocated or even subverted by unexpected affinities or interactions.[9] Indeed, at one point Catherine appears ready to embrace the liberating potential of 'otherness' by casting off the role of dutiful wife and mother necessitated by her marriage to Victorian England's most celebrated sponsor of hearth, home and nation. Resolving on "a transformation", she declares, "I intend henceforth to be forthright, active, living" (Barry 2010: 67). Dickens, though, assumes that his wife will continue to perform her designated role following their separation, telling Georgie that when he invites friends to dinner "of course she must preside, to present a united face to the world" (Barry 2010: 63). His blithe conviction that the dinner table might serve as an appropriate stage for the convincing performance of idealised English family life is ultimately undermined, however, by the outright representations of and implicit references to eating which appear in the play, for these invariably call further into question the possibility of a stable distinction between the 'civilised' English self and the foreign other.

2. Eating the Other: Savage Dining and Cannibalistic Appetites

Three-quarters of the way through her *Book of Household Management* (1861) – perhaps *the* canonical guide to the successful performance of Victorian middle-class domesticity – Isabella Beeton pauses to reflect on the relationship between eating and civilisation:

> Man, it has been said, is a dining animal. Creatures of the inferior races eat and drink; man only dines. […] It is […] true that some races of men do not dine any more than the tiger or the vulture. It is not a *dinner* at which sits the aboriginal Australian, who gnaws his bone half bare and then flings it behind to his squaw. And the native of Terra-del-Fuego does not dine when he gets his morsel of red clay. Dining is the privilege of civilization. The rank which a people occupy in the grand scale may be measured by their way of taking their meals […]. The nation which knows how to dine has learnt the leading lesson of progress. It implies both the will and the skill to reduce to order, and surround

> with idealisms and graces, the more material conditions of human existence; and wherever that will and that skill exist, life cannot be wholly ignoble. (Beeton 2000: 363, original emphasis)

Although it does not refer explicitly to 'Englishness', this fascinating disquisition testifies to the sense of inherent cultural superiority in circulation in Victorian England, as well as to the on-going anxieties about eating that troubled that collective self-belief. Beeton at once acknowledges and attempts to annul the violent animality associated with acts of consumption, suggesting that by ordering, regulating and systematising the ingestion of food humans can reclassify eating as "dining", transforming it into an operation of culture rather than of nature. Crucially, though, this ability to cultivate and refine bestial appetite is not universal; for Beeton, the rituals of dining enacted by 'progressive' and 'civilised' peoples (such as – implicitly – the English) demarcate not only their ascendency over other forms of animal life, but also over other forms of humanity: the 'savage' races of the world.

In a provocative article on 'The Noble Savage', published in *Household Words* in 1853, Dickens, too, suggests that eating behaviours serve to differentiate savage from civilised subjects. Characterising the savage as "a wild animal" with "a fish-bone through his visage", who "rubs his body with fat", Dickens goes on to claim that, in terms of diet, this figure is "addicted more or less to grease, entrails, and beastly customs", such as cannibalism: "O how he tears the flesh of his enemy and crunches the bones!" (Dickens 1853: 337, 339). As Poon points out, in these comments the savage is "distinguished from modern, civilized Englishmen like Dickens's disembodied persona" by his "apparent disregard for the border between body and world" (Poon 2008: 107). By piercing his face with animal bones and ingesting the flesh of his enemies, the imagined savage makes manifest the vulnerability of the body's boundaries, troubling the integrity of the individual 'self'.

What Dickens's fulmination against 'The Noble Savage' fails to recognise, however, is that any act of eating – be it 'savage' or 'civilised' – involves the transgression of bodily borders, the somatic incorporation of external matter. Noting that "it is through the act of eating that the ego

establishes its own domain, distinguishing its inside from its outside", Maud Ellmann goes on to argue that

> it is also in this act that the frontiers of subjectivity are most precarious. Food, like language, is originally vested in the other, and traces of that otherness remain in every mouthful that one speaks – or chews. From the beginning one eats for the other, from the other, with the other: and for this reason eating comes to represent the prototype of all transactions with the other. (Ellmann 1993: 53)

In Barry's play, the kinds of anxieties of otherly incorporation outlined by Ellmann are brought into sharp relief by Andersen's presence at the Dickenses' dinner table. Although Andersen's status as a white European distinguishes him from the colonial 'savage' decried by Dickens, his discernible 'foreignness' nevertheless draws attention to the alterity inherent in acts of consumption. Inevitably, his presence exposes the failure of refined table manners and polite dining rituals to police successfully the boundaries of the body and disguise the essential animality of eating.

The sharing of food and drink has long been recognised as a central component of hospitality and so it is unsurprising that, soon after his arrival at Gad's Hill, Andersen is invited to sit down and dine with the Dickenses. At first, this scene appears to be one of happy, domestic sociability; the stage directions refer to "*a thrum and hum of family*", as the Dickens children converse cheerfully with Andersen and each other (Barry 2010: 19, original italics). As the meal progresses, however, it becomes clear that the scene offers only a simulacrum of civilised, familial dining. Predictably, Andersen fails to read accurately the conventions of the dinner table, mistakenly assuming that when the Dickenses raise their glasses to the memory of their friend, the recently deceased Douglas Jerrold, they are in fact toasting his arrival. His comical faux pas is merely the prelude to a more significant collapse of the forms and ceremonies associated with English middle-class dining. An agitated Dickens indecorously leaves the table mid-meal to go and play cricket in the garden with his sons and despite Catherine's best efforts to restore order the gathering quickly fragments. The residual illusion of civilised dining is finally shattered when Andersen experiences a "surge" in his stomach and retreats hurriedly to his bedroom

in order to defecate (Barry 2010: 27). His audible groans indicate that, for all the Victorians' efforts to domesticate and refine the process of consumption, eating remains a primitive and visceral activity: one that inevitably confounds the somatic integrity of the self.

The issue of corporeal permeability was of particular concern to the Victorians, owing to their persistent freighting of the human form with symbolic meaning. As Poon notes, in Dickens's own work, "[t]he body – its conduct, practices, and desires – is fundamental to the enactment of the English nation […], serving alternately and sometimes simultaneously in relation to it, as metaphor, metonym and synecdoche" (Poon 2008: 100). Barry's play, too, locates the consuming body in a metaphorical, metonymic and synecdochical relationship to the wider nation. However, whereas Dickens's work typically employs "rigorous strategies of denial, elision and repression" in order to uphold the fantasy of bodily totality and obscure the crossings and connections between the English and other peoples (Poon 2008: 101), Barry's neo-Victorian drama brings these parallels and intersections to the fore. Anxieties about the potential blurring of boundaries between 'self' and 'other' tend to accrete around the character of Kate, in particular, as she is repeatedly aligned with the repudiated figure of the savage. During the play's dinner scene, for instance, Dickens – initially keen to uphold the rules of table etiquette – attempts to correct the way his daughter is holding her fork, telling her, "You will thank me when you are dining with princes" (Barry 2010: 20). Kate's humorous response – "I will dine only with savages if ever I leave here" (Barry 2010: 20) – indicates her disregard for conventional forms of Englishness and concomitant openness to the possibility of encounters with the other. Her mother's later suggestion that Kate paints "fiercely, savagely", meanwhile, suggests that something of the 'other' exists already within her, unsettling the dichotomising logic on which Victorian ideas of 'Englishness' were predicated (Barry 2010: 45).

Further evidence of Kate's propensity to destabilise ontological binaries comes at the beginning of Act Two when, while making pork pies with Aggie and her aunt, she muses on what they would eat if the end of the world were to come (see Barry 2010: 51). Her eschatological pondering conjures the prospect of a post-apocalyptic society in which humans are compelled to revert to a feral state, rendering meaningless the Victorian distinction between 'civilisation' and 'savagery'. Aggie's response – that the likely absence of pigs at the end of the world would rule out the

possibility of eating pork pies – evokes further troubling potentialities, tacitly suggesting that, in the final extremity, humans might be forced to seek out alternative, taboo sources of animal-protein for their diet. Aggie's Irishness lends added potency to this implied scenario, for rumours of cannibalism persistently coalesced around Victorian histories of the Great Famine, the event in which, we learn, all other members of her family perished.[10]

The disquieting prospect of cannibalism is, significantly, returned to and given more concrete form in the play's repeated references to the failed Franklin mission to the Northwest Passage, an historical event that mobilised unspoken Victorian fears about the potential for ostensibly 'civilised' subjects to degenerate into cannibalistic 'savages'.[11] In 1845, the explorer and Royal Navy officer Sir John Franklin had led an expedition comprising two ships, the *Erebus* and the *Terror*, to the Canadian Arctic in hopes of navigating a route through its frozen waterways, from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean. After the ships became icebound, the entire party was lost; however, their fate remained unknown in Britain until 1854, when it was reported by Dr John Rae, a Scottish explorer who had learnt of the explorers' tragic end from the local Inuit population. Controversially, Rae suggested in his Report to the Secretary of the Admiralty that "[f]rom the mutilated state of many of the corpses and the contents of the[ir] kettles, it is evident that our wretched countrymen had been driven to the last resource – cannibalism – as a means of prolonging existence" (qtd. in Anon. 1854: 421). This claim sparked outrage and disbelief among large sections of the Victorian population, who wished to celebrate Franklin and his men as paradigms of noble, stoical Englishness. Dickens, in particular, was incensed by the suggestion that "the officers and crews of the two lost ships would, or could, in any extremity of hunger, alleviate the pains of starvation by this horrible means" (Dickens 1854a: 361), penning three articles in *Household Words* to refute the allegations and later constructing, with Wilkie Collins, a counter-narrative celebrating English honour and forbearance *in extremis* in the drama *The Frozen Deep.*

A number of critics have noted that the fascination with human predation that Dickens betrays in these writings in fact preceded the Franklin controversy (see Marlow 1983: 647-648; Stone 1994: 15; Guest 2001c: 111; Ho Lai-Ming 2012: 24). Harry Stone, for instance, suggests that Dickens's obsession with the topic was "lifelong" and that, from early

childhood, he understood cannibalism as the "quintessential emblem of all that is depraved and predatory in man" (Stone 1994: 267, 10). Certainly, it is a theme that emerges time and again in his fiction, in both comic and more threatening incarnations (see Marlow 1983: 648; Stone 1994: 9, 267).[12] In his tripartite essay on 'The Lost Arctic Voyagers', though, the threat of cannibalism takes on a new potency for, here, Dickens is obliged to undertake the urgent ideological work of restoring the now precarious-looking distinction between savage and civilised bodies. He does so, first, by calling into question the reliability of the "covetous, treacherous, and cruel" Inuit people on whose testimony Rae's account was based and, second, by asserting the Englishness of "Franklin's gallant band" (Dickens 1854a: 362). National identity is co-opted as an infallible, incontrovertible guarantor of the men's endurance, fortitude and self-control; tellingly, Dickens details a series of calamitous circumstances in which Englishmen – including Franklin himself on a previous Polar expedition – enacted these 'national' characteristics, arguing that such examples provide "strong presumptive evidence […] against the wild tales of a herd of savages" (Dickens 1854a: 362-363). He reminds his readers that when "weighing the probabilities and improbabilities of the 'last resource,' the foremost question is – not the nature of the extremity; but, the nature of the men" (Dickens 1854b: 392). The fact that Franklin's companions were "English seamen of the first class" places them, irrefutably, "high above the taint" of having succumbed to cannibalistic urges (Dickens 1854a: 363; 1854b: 392).

The fictionalised Dickens of *Andersen's English* expresses similarly intractable sentiments on the incompatibility of anthropophagy and Englishness in Act Two of the play, when he reflects on the "scandalous" report disseminated by Rae. He projects – and deflects – the imputed crime of cannibalism onto the Inuits, imagining "an Esquimaux" lying to the credulous Rae with Franklin's men's "meat" still "in his belly" (Barry 2010: 58). Conveniently, this allows him to account for the physical evidence of the expeditionary party's "gnawed bones", while exonerating the explorers themselves:

> I say it was not Englishmen that did such a deed. There is something noble and essential in the English character, in the English soul, that cannot drop to such depths. Even forced into the very pit of suffering, like my character Wardour,

> something at last rises up, and forbids dark conduct, and so such a man is redeemed by his – Englishness. (Barry 2010: 58-59)

It is significant that Barry's Dickens's evidence for the irreconcilability of Englishness and cannibalism in this speech comes not from fact, but from fiction. To 'prove' the innate nobility of the "English soul", he evokes not historical exempla but his own *enactment* of self-sacrificing gallantry while playing Richard Wardour, the protagonist of *The Frozen Deep*, who sustains rather than consumes his rival, Frank Aldersley, while the two are lost in the Arctic wastes. The elision of performance and reality implied here recalls Dickens's earlier avowal that *The Frozen Deep* "is as real as real life" – in fact, "more real" (Barry 2010: 46). Enactment and essence are again conflated in Act Two when Dickens stages a command recital of the play before Queen Victoria. As Dickens, in character as Wardour, performs his climactic, melodramatic death-scene, the Queen murmurs to Andersen, "[s]uch a beautiful illustration of the English character", once more fusing (and confusing) lived and dramatised forms of Englishness (Barry 2010: 69).

Of course, by highlighting the performative status of national identity in this self-conscious way, *Andersen's English* encourages its own, twenty-first-century audience to recognise the contingency, and hence instability, of 'Englishness': its susceptibility to alternative or inconsistently iterated performances. Indeed, the actions of the Dickens family in the play frequently fail to conform to the national ideal constructed for them in literary productions such as *The Frozen Deep*, instead overlapping with the behaviours and desires attributed to the 'other'. The notion that enacted Englishness might serve as an effective defence against charges of cannibalism is, in particular, undermined by Barry's play. Although Dickens assumes that cannibalism relies upon and reinforces the defining boundary between 'self' and 'other', it also, as Maggie Kilgour points out, "dissolv[es] the structure it appears to produce" (Kilgour 1990: 4). As Kirsten Guest argues,

> the cannibal, long a figure associated with absolute alterity and used to enforce boundaries between a civilized 'us' and savage 'them,' may in fact be more productively read as a

> symbol of the permeability, or instability, of such boundaries. (Guest 2001b: 2)

Like the encounter with the 'other' described by Kristeva earlier in this essay, the figurative engagement with the cannibal has the uncanny capacity to disturb the grounds of knowledge and unsettle the coherence of the subject's self-understanding.

Certainly, members of the Dickens family in *Andersen's English* can be seen to disrupt binary divisions through their participation in what Kilgour calls "cultural cannibalism" (Kilgour 1990: 148). Taking psychological succour from the ideologies of difference used to sustain and uphold Victorian imperialism, the Dickenses fail to recognise that their self-constructions involve an anthropophagic dependence on the 'other'.[13] For instance, fretting about her son Walter's impending departure for Bengal, Catherine imputes a quasi-cannibalistic tendency to the Indian people, figuring Walter as a kind of human sacrifice who is to "be thrown to the wolves of Empire" (Barry 2010: 31).[14] Her metaphor overlooks and obfuscates, however, the Dickenses' own physical ingestion and metaphorical assimilation of the 'other' in the form of an Indian-produced commodity: tea. Apparently innocuous references to tea-drinking occur throughout *Andersen's English* (see Barry 2010: 28, 27, 53, 71), and their very unremarkability indicates that this foreign product had, by the Victorian period, been arrogated and naturalised as a signifier of 'Englishness'. As Julie E. Fromer points out, in Victorian representation,

> [t]he physical responses of the body to the ingestion of tea, such as calming the nerves, soothing the stomach, and refreshing the system, directly engender the ideal English society […]. The body of the tea drinker thus becomes the body of the nation, and the consumption of tea enhances both bodies simultaneously. (Fromer 2008: 30)

This doubly invigorating quality is recognised by Dickens in *Andersen's English* when he tells Aggie that her tea has fortifying effects and speculates that, had the Franklin expedition benefited from this beverage, they would have managed to avert destruction (see Barry 2010: 28-29). His words imply that consumables have the power to enhance the innate qualities of

national identity and that tea, owing to its close affiliation with 'Englishness', would not only have restored the bodies but also sustained the souls of Franklin's men at the Pole.

The irony of this suggestion is, of course, that tea, as exemplary symbol of Englishness, "has nothing indigenous about it"; as Neil MacGregor points out, it is "made from plants grown in India, China or Africa, and is usually sweetened by sugar from the Caribbean" (MacGregor 2010). Far from reinforcing the strict boundaries of identity, then, tea-drinking emphasises the points of connection (and parasitic relations) between Victorian England and other nations. As Linda Colley notes,

> If, in the nineteenth century, you are sitting at a mahogany table, drinking tea with sugar, you are linked to […] this great tentacular capital machinery, through which the British control so many parts of the world and ransack them for commodities. (Colley qtd. in MacGregor 2010)

The language of rapacious appropriation and consumption used by Colley indicates that colonial enterprise was governed by a cannibalistic logic – a logic that was recognised and denounced by the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century abolitionists who warned that "in every pound of sugar used, (the produce of slaves imported from Africa) we may be considered as consuming two ounces of human flesh" (qtd. in Plasa 2009: 41). In this light, the neo-Victorian "evocation of cannibalism to describe British imperialism" proves a productive political strategy (Ho Lai-Ming 2012: 14). While, for the Dickenses in *Andersen's English*, tea-drinking nourishes ideological constructions of Englishness, it becomes clear that it does so at expense of those ostensibly uncivilised 'others' whose occluded labour feeds into the drink's constituent components.

Owing to this metaphorical cannibalism of the 'other', the Dickenses' enactment of English 'selfhood' is radically compromised; the determining ground between 'savagery' and 'civilisation' collapses under the weight of the ontological and epistemological inconsistencies their performances of civility have attempted to veil. The fundamentally flawed nature of their self-construction is signalled not only in their discourse but also in the play's stage directions; when the Dickenses gather around the dinner table, we are told it is "as if the fact of family was swallowing

everything" (Barry 2010: 19). The insinuation of autophagy reveals that, in a reversal of Victorian stereotype, the ostensibly 'civilised' members of the Dickens family ultimately consume not only the 'other' but also *each other* – cannibalising, in doing so, the ideal of Englishness that they are supposed to uphold.

3. "I Order It": Civilising the Past

Although, over the course of its two acts, *Andersen's English* lays bare to its audience the intrinsically conflicted infrastructure supporting Victorian understandings of Englishness, its revelations do not result in greater self-knowledge for its protagonists. Tellingly, towards the end of the play, Dickens returns to the kind of naive fantasy of national and domestic bliss that he espoused at its beginning: "[o]nly splendid things" will happen from now on, he announces to his family; "[w]e will be English folk in England – the happiest people on earth in the happiest country" (Barry 2010: 83). His attempt to author the future, here, is mirrored by his efforts to author the past, disclosed elsewhere in the play. At one point he confides to Andersen that, as a young boy, he took pleasure in "order[ing] things" about him as if he were "the stage manager of [his] own fate" (Barry 2010: 66). This desire to order events is also evident in his adult life; sharing in his wife Catherine's reminiscences about the early days of their marriage, Dickens expresses a nostalgic yearning to revisit that idealised, extemporised past:

> I long, I long for that. Do I reject the present? I reject it, I revolt against it. Intolerable. A sort of torment, all the more horrible for being commonly endured. I would go back. Wind back the clocks, I order it. (Barry 2010: 45).

The final demand, "I order it", is suggestive of Dickens's on-going desire not only to command the past but to *rearrange* it, to transform it into the kind of palliative fiction he constructed around himself as a child and, in this way, to absolve himself of responsibility for the disintegration of his marriage in the present.

Andersen, too, is shown to have an interest in fictionalising and reordering the events of the past. The main action of the play, set in 1857, is framed by a conversation that takes place between Andersen and his young friend, Stefan, in Copenhagen in 1870, in which, prompted by the news of

Dickens's death, Andersen reflects on his previous visit to Gad's Hill. Notably, the Dane formulates his reminiscences in terms of the fairy-tales for which he was famous, telling Stefan, "[l]ong long ago, it seems, like in an old story" (Barry 2010: 9). Of course, Andersen is forced to acknowledge that the "enchanted" narrative he formerly constructed around the Dickenses has since been invalidated by the news of Charles and Catherine's separation. Stefan, however, helps Andersen to reinsert the couple into the reassuring realm of the fictive by figuring their break-up as a kind of literary twist, "a *bouleversement*" in the story of their lives (Barry 2010: 10). This overt narrativisation of the past invites the audience to question the authenticity of Andersen's presentation of events. Although he suggests that, over time, he has revised and refined his impression of his sojourn with the Dickenses, having come to a better understanding of the family's actual dynamics, doubts continue to emerge regarding his perceptions. In particular, the 'happy ending' that he constructs for himself at the end of play – a vision of Dickens "faithfully, faithfully waving" goodbye from the dockside at Gravesend (Barry 2010: 86) – carries strong suggestions of revisionary wish-fulfilment.

Yet, it is not only personal histories that are subject to reconfiguration in Barry's play. Its protagonists also engage in the re-imagining and reordering of England's national past. In Dickens's excited description of the Siege of Sebastapol, for instance, the Crimean War is figured as a kind of boys' own adventure, obfuscating the administrative incompetence, logistical blunders and large-scale losses that marked the campaign as a whole (see Barry 2010: 22-23).[15] Similarly, in conversation with his Irish maid, Aggie, Dickens minimises the events of the Great Famine of the 1840s. His blithe suggestion that Ireland now furnishes England with a stream of happy maidservants glosses over the suffering that led to Aggie's emigration from her homeland as an eleven year-old, having witnessed her parents' and four siblings' deaths and mass burial in a ditch, and wholly ignores the possibility of English culpability in that suffering (see Barry 2010: 28, 57). Meanwhile, his decision to cast Aggie out of his home after discovering that she is pregnant (in all likelihood with the child of his son, Walter) tacitly recalls the evictions that exacerbated Irish distress during the Famine, suggesting a disquieting continuity between past and present.

The uncovering and exploration of historical resonances is, of course, one of the defining concerns of neo-Victorianism. In particular, as Elizabeth Ho points out, neo-Victorian narratives work to make manifest the affinities between nineteenth-century imperialism and "its reappearance in the process of [modern] globalization" (Ho 2012: 5). Certainly, the temporal re-imagining and reordering represented in *Andersen's English* gestures towards and invites comparison with the strategies adopted in the neo-histories of Englishness and empire currently in circulation. Postmillennial culture has seen a discernible growth in rehabilitative narratives regarding Britain's imperial past. Texts such as Niall Ferguson's *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (2003) have sought to position British imperialism (or "Anglobalization") as a broadly beneficial undertaking that helped to disseminate Anglophone ideals of law and order around the world and mitigated its own worst excesses through its investment in progressive notions of "liberty" (Ferguson 2003: xxi-xxiii). In the political sphere, meanwhile, recent years have seen a perceptible return to the language of 'savagery' versus 'civilisation' that underpinned Victorian colonial enterprise; since 9/11, in particular, politicians have deployed this dichotomising discourse in order to justify efforts to reorder the contemporary geopolitical landscape by military and economic means.[16] As Colley shrewdly notes in her review of Ferguson's study, "Empire, it seems, is coming out of the closet" (Colley 2003).

Owing to its self-conscious engagement with the (imperial) past, neo-Victorianism is well placed to "[disrupt] the totalizing narratives of historical teleology", while drawing attention to the continuation of "neo-imperial and neo-colonial arrangements in a globalized present", as Ho points out (Ho 2012: 7, 9). In the case of *Andersen's English*, the play's representation of fictionalised and reconfigured personal and collective histories invites us to perceive and critique the shared conceptual strategies by which Victorian and contemporary cultures seek to author and manage their pasts. Yet, while highlighting the problems inherent in temporal (re)ordering – its tendency to narrativise and 'neaten', thus closing down alternative rememberings – *Andersen's English* also testifies to the epistemological appeal of this operation. At the end of the play, the stage is given over to four of the women who have featured in its story – Aggie, Catherine, Georgie and Ellen Ternan – each of whom summarises her future life story in soliloquy (see Barry 2010: 84-86). On the one hand, this

arrangement is in keeping with neo-Victorian efforts to uncover lost voices (the lives of nineteenth-century servants, such as the fictional Aggie, went largely unrecorded, while Catherine, Georgie and Ellen are often ignored in traditional Dickensian biography), as well as Barry's own imaginative investment in exploring "history's leftovers" (O'Toole 1997: vii). On the other hand, though, this process appears to replicate the 'ordering' of history critiqued elsewhere in the play; by tying up the loose ends of the women's lives and presenting their stories in capsule form, the play inevitably simplifies and constrains their individual histories. As Christian Gutleben makes clear in *Nostalgic Postmodernism*, in spite of their liberal intentions, the rectificatory tactics of neo-Victorian literature can sometimes generate conservative effects (see Gutleben 2001: 167-172). In this light, *Andersen's English* can be seen to adopt a complex and sometimes contradictory relationship to the themes and issues it represents: at once reflecting on and participating in the ordering of history, it is both critical of and hospitable towards the Victorian past.

Notes

1. For the history of relations between Dickens and Andersen, and for a detailed account of the latter's visit to Gad's Hill in 1857, see Bredsdorff 1956 and Spink 1972.
2. This essay follows Barry's play in referring to 'Dickens' and 'Andersen' by their last names and the other characters – 'Catherine', 'Georgie', 'Kate', 'Aggie' and 'Walter' – by their first names.
3. In fact, Waters points out, there are relatively few "happy and harmonious families" in Dickens's fiction; much like a close reading of Anderson's play, "any close examination of [Dickens's] novels reveals a remarkable disjunction between his image as the quintessential celebrant of the hearth, and his fictional interest in fractured families" (Waters 1997: 15).
4. For recent biographies that have uncovered this 'Other Dickens', see Tomalin 1991, Nayder 2011 and Tomalin 2011.
5. This essay follows Poon in referring specifically to 'Englishness' rather than 'Britishness', as the latter, composite identity signifies in ways different from the former in the Victorian colonial context (see Poon 2008: 5).
6. For Poon's discussion of her indebtedness to Judith Butler's theories of gender performance, see Poon 2008: 13-15.

7. For further discussion of the relationship between eating and violence, see Visser 1991: 3-4.
8. Poore discusses some of the "difficulties in applying the neo-Victorian classification to theatre" and notes that, though many stage productions/adaptations dealing with Victorian characters, texts, persons and themes have appeared in Britain in the past decade, not all of these can be described as "neo-Victorian", as they lack the "self-analytic drive" argued for by Heilmann and Llewellyn (Poore 2011: 6).
9. Dickens draws attention to the affinity between Catherine and Andersen when he jokingly refers to them as "Mr and Mrs Andersen" (Barry 2010: 44).
10. For a recent assessment of the likelihood that Irish Famine victims resorted, in certain cases, to cannibalism, see Ó Gráda 2013.
11. Perhaps because it is so fundamentally imbricated in the construction and deconstruction of Victorian forms of self-knowledge, the story of the Franklin expedition seems to hold a particular appeal for writers of neo-Victorian literature. See, for instance, Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008) and Helen Humphreys's *Afterimage* (2000).
12. It is also a theme that repeatedly emerges in neo-Victorian fiction dealing with Dickens: in Dan Simmons's *Drood*, Dickens tells Wilkie Collins that he feels his enemies are eating him alive (see Simmons 2009: 37), while, as Tammy Ho Lai-Ming suggests, in Richard Flanagan's *Wanting*, Dickens's relationship with Ellen Ternan is figured in cannibalistic terms (see Ho Lai-Ming 2012: 23-28).
13. The political, economic and ideological motives informing imperialistic constructions of the 'other'-as-cannibal are explored at length in William Arens's pioneering study, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (1979).
14. Significantly, the play is set at the time of the 1857 'Indian Mutiny', when, as Elleke Boehmer points out, cannibal-/animalistic motifs (such as that of the 'man-eating tiger') were commonly used to describe the Sepoy rebels (Boehmer 1998: 448, n. 149).
15. In fact, Dickens was a vocal critic of the mismanagement that characterised Britain's campaign in the Crimea, suggesting that it was a matter of national shame (see Moore 2004: 75-90).
16. In 2006, for instance, the then British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, gave a speech in which he suggested that the main factor driving postmillennial British foreign policy interventions had been "a clash about civilization. It is the age-old battle between progress and reaction, between those who embrace

and see opportunity in the modern world and those who reject its existence" (Blair 2006).

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