



5-2002

Dickens and his intrusive first-person "authors"

Arthur L. Rogers
University of Tennessee

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss

Recommended Citation

Rogers, Arthur L., "Dickens and his intrusive first-person "authors". " PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2002.
https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/6297

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact trace@utk.edu.

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Arthur L. Rogers entitled "Dickens and his intrusive first-person "authors"." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Don Richard Cox, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Richard Kelly, David Goslee, Natalia Pervukhin

Accepted for the Council:

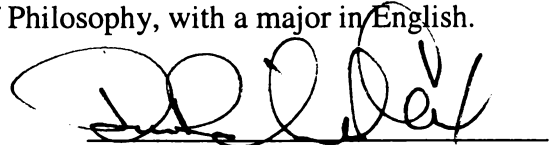
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

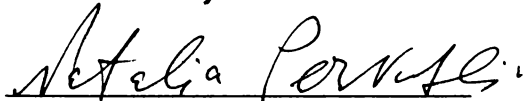
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Arthur L. Rogers II entitled "Dickens and His Intrusive First-Person 'Authors.'" I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.



Don Richard Cox, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Vice Provost and Dean of
Graduate Studies

**DICKENS AND HIS INTRUSIVE
FIRST-PERSON “AUTHORS”**

**A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Arthur L. Rogers II
May 2002**

Thesis
2002b
.R64

Copyright © Arthur L. Rogers II, 2002

All rights reserved

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the many friends I have made among the graduate students, faculty, and staff in the English Department at the University of Tennessee. The wisdom, experience, and encouragement of all the faculty with whom I have had the pleasure of working and studying have made the last eight years invaluable to me both as a scholar and a teacher. I owe large thanks to Michael Lofaro and Linda Bensel-Meyers for their thoughtful guidance and support, and to Dinah Brock, Lisa Lance, and Leanne Hinkle for their friendly help with administrative matters large and small. I am especially grateful to Richard Kelly, David Goslee, Natalia Pervukhin, and John Zomchick for their encouragement and advice as members of my Dissertation Committee. Above all, I appreciate the patience, the support, and the unwavering frankness of my committee's directing professor, Don Richard Cox.

I would also like to thank my colleagues of the last three years at the College of Charleston for their encouragement and interest in my project. Mary Sadler deserves particular notice for her careful reading of several chapters in draft. The gratitude I owe my parents and siblings for their support, financial, moral, and emotional, throughout my graduate school career is immeasurable. Last, and certainly not least, I thank the staff at the West Ashley Books-a-Million for the gallons of coffee and the friendly interest in my progress during countless hours of reading and editing at my unofficial second office, the Joe Muggs Café.

Abstract

This study explores the intrusive authorial presence of the fictive autobiographer in Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, and *Great Expectations* and traces the biographical implications in these three thinly veiled "rewritings" of Dickens's own life's story, the story of the abandoned, neglected child. After defining "intrusive authorial presence" more precisely according to the Structuralist conception of "narrative discourse," the discourse tendencies in Dickens's third-person fiction are examined for context and comparison, and then the discourse tendencies establishing David Copperfield, Esther Summerson, and Philip Pirrip as unique "writers" and fictive personalities are explored in depth. Almost certainly more than Dickens intended, David Copperfield's narrative discourse suggests that he emerges from his traumatic childhood with enduring scars or minor character flaws that belonged to Dickens as well: defensiveness, insecurity, irrational guilt, class snobbery, lingering self-pity, and an inability to escape the past that impinges so vividly upon the "narrating present." In the Esther Summerson revealed in her discourse lies Dickens's deeper exploration of the more debilitating consequences of abandonment and neglect in childhood: most evidently, the denial of painful emotions that reveal themselves despite their intended suppression, a compulsive need for praise and admiration that cannot be satisfied, and grossly distorted feelings of guilt and worthlessness. Philip Pirrip's narrative discourse indicates that he achieves a healthy maturity and independence from his traumatic past, recognizing and accepting his shortcomings as his own responsibility and not the product

of abandonment, neglect, and abuse in childhood. Ultimately, this study traces the progress of Dickens's attitude toward himself and his past from self-pity in his thirties and early forties to a healthier acceptance of responsibility for his own failings in his late forties. In effect, the examination of the narrating persona in these three novels suggests that through the therapy of rewriting his own life under the cover of fiction, Dickens explored the haunting demons of his childhood experience in forced drudgery at Warren's blacking warehouse and was able at last to lay these horrors to rest in *Great Expectations*.

Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
1.	The Author Speaks. 1
	Precept versus Practice. 1
	Fictive Authors, Fictional Autobiography. 10
2.	Authorial Intrusion; or, Narrative Discourse. 18
	The Tradition of Authorial Intrusion. 19
	Temporal Aspects of Narration: Narrative Discourse. 27
3.	The Intrusive Third-Person Dickens Narrator. 39
	Intrusions of Explicit Self-Consciousness. 41
	Transitional Intrusions. 44
	Didactic Intrusions. 48
	Descriptive Intrusions 51
	Generalizations. 53
	Commentary on Characters and Events. 57
	Questions. 65
	Speculative Intrusions 71
	Allusions 77
	Figurative Language 82
	Miscellaneous Matters of Style 88
4.	The Intrusive David Copperfield 93
	The Inimitable Copperfield 98
	David's Own Discourse. 106
	Dickens, David, and the Quest for Identity. 125
	Into the Mind of David Copperfield: Social Demons and Denial 133
5.	The Intrusive Esther Summerson. 155
	The Esther Problem(s) 155
	The Inimitable Esther? 160
	Esther Copperfield?. 162
	Esther's "Womanly" Discourse. 170
	Esther, Dickens, David, and the Quest for Identity. 183
	Into the Mind of Esther Summerson: Maternal Demons and Disfigurement. . 189
6.	The Intrusive Philip Pirrip 221
	Philip, David, and Esther: Discourse Similarities 227
	The "Inimitable" Philip Pirrip. 234
	Distinctively Philip Pirrip 246
	Philip Pirrip's Confession: Vanquishing Dickens's Demons 262
7.	Postscript 297

Works Cited	308
Appendix	322
Vita	326

Chapter One: The Author Speaks

Precept versus Practice

The correspondence of Charles Dickens the editor offers valuable insight into the artistic principles of Charles Dickens the novelist. As proprietor and editor of *Household Words* from 1850-1859 and *All the Year Round* from 1859-1870, Dickens was tactfully candid in criticizing fiction submitted by writers of all levels of talent and experience. One frequent theme of Dickens's editorial advice involves the "disappearance of the author from the text." In some respects, it seems that Dickens anticipated Henry James and Percy Lubbock in formulating the golden rule of modern fiction, the rule that authors must *show* and not *tell* readers what to make of their stories. A brief glance at Dickens the editor's correspondence will demonstrate, perhaps surprisingly, that like James and Lubbock, and Flaubert before them, Dickens felt authors should avoid self-conscious intrusion into their texts in *propria persona*.

In rejecting the novel *Only George* for publication in *All the Year Round*, Dickens cautioned Jane Brookfield against a tendency to inject herself, plainly as author, into her text: "you constantly hurry your narrative . . . by *telling* . . . in your own person, when the people should tell it and act it for themselves. My notion always is, that when I have made the people to play out the play, it is, as it were, their own business to do it, and not

mine.” He added, “I don’t want you, in a novel, to present *yourself* to tell such things, but I want the things to be there” (*Letters* 11: 160-61). Or, as he explained in initial rejection of Louisa King’s “Mother and Step-Mother,” “The people do not sufficiently work out their own purposes in dialogue and dramatic action. You are too much their exponent; what you do for them, they ought to do for themselves” (*Letters* 7: 529-30). In the same vein Dickens said of Charles Collins’s *The Eye-Witness and His Evidence about Many Wonderful Things*, “there is too much of the narrator in it—the narrator not being an actor. The result is, that I can not *see* the people, or the place, or believe in the fiction” (*Letters* 9: 164-65). *Showing*, through dialogue and dramatic scene, Dickens the editor says, is more effective in bringing fiction to life than intrusive authorial *telling*.

Dickens’s prejudice against *telling* extended even to such extra-narrative vehicles of explanation and commentary as prefaces and footnotes. In response to *Basil: a Story of Modern Life*, Dickens told Wilkie Collins, “I have no doubt that the Prefatory letter would have been better away; on the ground that a book (of all things) should speak for, and explain, itself” (*Letters* 6: 823-24). Dickens held that a book should speak for and explain itself because he believed that authors impose upon and even risk offending readers with direct explanation of their works. As he told Edward Bulwer-Lytton, after reading chapters from *A Strange Story*:

That the audience is good enough for any thing that is well presented to it, I am quite sure. Where you can avoid *notes*, however, and get their substance into the text, it is highly desirable in the case of so large an audience. . . . [T]he difficulty of getting numbers of people to read notes (which they invariably regard as interruptions of the text—not as strengtheners or elucidators of it), is wonderful. (*Letters* 9: 509-10).

A later installment of *A Strange Story* prompted further comment on the importance of novels explaining themselves:

I counsel you *not* to append the proposed dialogue between Fenwick and Faber, and *not* to enter upon any explanation beyond the title page and the motto, unless it be in some very brief preface. Decidedly I would not help the reader, if it were only for the reason that that anticipates his being in need of help, and his feeling objections and difficulties that require solution. Let the book explain itself. It speaks *for* itself with a noble eloquence. (*Letters* 9: 543)

Dickens reiterated the same theme more pointedly in responding to Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*: “you know that I always contest your disposition to give an audience credit for nothing—which necessarily involves the forcing of points on their attention—and which I have always observed them to resent when they find it out—as they always will and do” (*Letters* 9: 194). On the practical grounds of avoiding the reader's resentment, Dickens apparently felt that readers must be trusted to understand a work of fiction without overtly intrusive, heavy-handed authorial guidance.

Clearly, Dickens the editor valued showing over authorial telling. So today we might consider Dickens's critical admonitions against explanatory authorial intrusion with some amusement, since from our perspective Dickens is himself notoriously guilty of intruding into his novels with authorial commentary telling the reader what to make of his stories. Perhaps like many editors who are also writers, Dickens sometimes had trouble following his stated editorial precepts in his own writing. For the Dickens narrator does indeed present himself frequently before the reader to “tell, in his own person,” instead of leaving his characters to “play out the play” for themselves. When Jo the crossing-sweeper dies in *Bleak House*, the author clearly intrudes in *propria persona*

to say: “Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day” (649). It is similarly the author himself who is moved to address the reader after *Oliver Twist* recounts for the Maylies, the “weary catalogue of evils and calamities which hard men had brought upon him”:

Oh! if, when we oppress and grind our fellow-creatures, we bestowed but one thought on the dark evidences of human error, which, like dense and heavy clouds, are rising, slowly it is true, but not less surely, to Heaven, to pour their after-vengeance on our heads; if we heard but one instant, in imagination, the deep testimony of dead men’s voices, which no power can stifle, and no pride shut out; where would be the injury and injustice: the suffering, misery, cruelty, and wrong: that each day’s life brings with it! (193)

Further, and much to Dickens’s embarrassment, Richard Horne noted in 1844 that many of his intrusions wax poetic to the extent that they appear to be written in irregular blank verse. Among the passages Horne translates into verse is the narrator’s comment following Little Nell’s funeral in *The Old Curiosity Shop*:

Oh! it is hard to take to heart
The lesson that such deaths will teach,
 But let no man reject it,
 For it is one that all must learn,
And is a mighty, universal Truth.
When Death strikes down the innocent and young,
For every fragile form from which he lets
 The panting spirit free,
 A hundred virtues rise,
In shapes of mercy, charity, and love,
 To walk the world, and bless it.
 Of every tear
That sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves,
Some good is born, some gentler nature comes. (Horne 46 [OCS 563])

Dickens admitted he could not restrain himself from entering into his stories and writing in verse at crucial moments: “It is not an affectation in me, nor have I the least desire to write . . . in that metre; but I run into it, involuntarily and unconsciously, when I am very much in earnest” (*Letters* 4: 112-13). When he sent John Forster the final draft of *The Battle of Life*, he asked his friend and editor to help minimize this involuntary versification: “If in going over the proofs you find the tendency to blank verse (I *cannot* help it, when I am very much in earnest) too strong, knock out a word’s brains here and there” (*Letters* 4: 656).

In fairness, Dickens intrudes into his novels “as author” less frequently and with less obtrusiveness than many other Victorian writers. “Certainly,” says Sylvère Monod, “Dickens digresses into apostrophizing the reader less often than writers like Thackeray or George Eliot” (68), and George Gissing is certain that “Dickens could never have been guilty of that capital crime against art so light-heartedly committed by Anthony Trollope, who will begin a paragraph in his novels with some such words as these: ‘Now, if this were fact, and not a story. . .’” (76). Still, eminent critics have pointed to self-conscious authorial intrusion as one of Dickens’s greatest weaknesses. George Ford says that when “the author steps forward to comment in his own person . . . Dickens is almost always at a disadvantage”; “at his worst,” Ford says, Dickens is guilty of offering a “crude, direct sermon of personal indignation” (*Readers* 70, 82). Frederick Boege writes that when Dickens “turned psychologist or commentator . . . he was likely to fail most often and most lamentably” (94). Earle Davis points out Dickens’s “hazardous practice” of

“explaining his effects. . . . making a point and [then] explaining it” (34-35), of “explaining the point of his moral purpose” (146), of lapsing into “the rhetorical, exclamatory manner of Carlyle” when he felt strongly about something (220). It appears that despite his stated aversion to “helping the reader too much,” Dickens did not trust readers to grasp his polemical “message” at times, that he felt compelled to “force points upon their attention” by telling them how to respond after his characters had already shown their various “lessons.” This apparent underestimation of his readers results in explanatory intrusions that, according to Davis, “either ruin the irony or insult the reader’s intelligence” (34). Surely Victorian readers of *Bleak House* got the point without being told directly that real-life unfortunates like Jo were dying from horrible conditions in slums such as Tom-All-Alone’s. All readers of *Oliver Twist* certainly understand the wrongness of the world’s “grinding oppression” of young Oliver without Dickens telling them, “this is wrong.” It is likely, too, that many readers of *The Old Curiosity Shop* believe there is some divine purpose in the deaths of innocent children even before Dickens tells them to believe it as a “mighty, universal Truth.” In any event, readers who disagree with these contentions would hardly be swayed by Dickens saying so pointedly, “it is so.”

Irrepressible earnestness or mistrust of the reader’s ability to comprehend his most salient points does not fully explain, however, why Dickens imposes his authorial presence so frequently and intrusively into his novels to do so much *telling*. Dickens often seems to inject himself, plainly as author, into his fiction for the sheer fun of it, as though his energetic and exuberant personality could not or would not be kept out of it.

In the tradition of Henry Fielding, an acknowledged favorite of his youth, Dickens often playfully calls attention to his all-seeing omnipotence as the author of his work. As he writes in *Barnaby Rudge*,

Chroniclers are privileged to enter where they list, to come and go through keyholes, to ride upon the wind, to overcome, in their soarings up and down, all obstacles of distance, time, and place. Thrice blessed be this last consideration, since it enables us to follow the disdainful Miggs even into the sanctity of her chamber, and to hold her in sweet companionship through the dreary watches of the night! (69)

He intrudes even upon his own authorial commentary in the opening sentence of *The Chimes* with a facetious remark on the special relationship between writers and readers:

There are not many people—and as it is desirable that a story-teller and a story-reader should establish a mutual understanding as soon as possible, I beg it to be noticed that I confine this observation neither to young people nor to little people, but extend it to all conditions of people: little and big, young and old: yet growing up, or already growing down again—there are not, I say, many people who would care to sleep in a church. (81)

In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, when he realized that the pretense of Master Humphrey's role as narrating "historian" was too cumbersome to continue, Dickens had Master Humphrey bow out of the novel abruptly at the end of the third chapter: "And now that I have carried this history so far in my own character and introduced these personages to the reader, I shall for the convenience of the narrative detach myself from its further course, and leave those who have prominent and necessary parts in it to speak and act for themselves" (33). The characters are not in fact left to speak and act for themselves. Commenting on this passage, S. J. Schad points out that "as any reader of the ensuing 'history' knows, it is not long before a most pronounced narratorial voice resurfaces; and with that voice employing all the usual devices of Dickensian rhetoric, the historical narrative is soon

compromised by a tone so very conversational that ‘the historian,’ we are told, ‘takes the friendly reader by the hand’” (433).¹ Far from striving to keep the author behind the scenes in the illusion that novels describe actual persons and events as modern writers do, Dickens seems instead to impose his authorial presence deliberately between the reader and the scenes he describes so that the reader always remembers an *author* is entertaining an *audience* with a *story*.

Robert Garis suggests that Dickens purposely drew attention to himself as a sort of virtuoso verbal performer in his fiction: “There is the constant and overt intention to dazzle us with verbal devices, leading us through our impulse to applaud to a continual awareness of the artificer responsible, a self-exhibiting master of language” (24). Garis argues that Dickens novels are patently “theatrical” in presenting both author and characters as objects to be seen as dramatic performers (and performances). With the release of each new book, the “self-exhibiting master” grew in contemporary public stature as “the Inimitable Dickens”; at the same time, the highly personal nature of the authorial “performer” fostered a growing intimacy between author and audience. As George Ford observes, “Dickens contrived to make his readers feel that they were listening to a speaking voice whose tones were familiar and dear to them” (*Readers* 159-

¹ The full text of the passage Schad cites is even more emphatically intrusive than he suggests: “As the course of this tale requires that we should become acquainted, somewhere hereabouts, with a few particulars connected with the domestic economy of Mr. Sampson Brass, and as a more convenient place than the present is not likely to occur for that purpose, the historian takes the friendly reader by the hand, and springing with him into the air, and cleaving the same at a greater rate than ever Don Cleophas Leandro Perez Zambullo and his familiar travelled through that pleasant region in company, alights with him upon the pavement of Bevis Marks” (253-54).

60). “The Inimitable” would doubtless have been pleased to hear Geoffrey Ellis say nearly seven decades after his death, “It was not mere rhetoric that made *The Times* liken [Dickens] to a personal friend. In every book we meet him, swinging along at our side . . . till, with a sort of infection, we catch his mood. . . . When afterwards, in soberer mood, we find his world largely fantasy, his own vivid presence remains with us, as someone we are personally fond of” (121).

Garis’s fundamental assessment of Dickens as “theatrical” seems fitting. Dickens’s lifelong fascination with the stage is well known, and it has been firmly established that from the theater Dickens got much of the inspiration and technique that informed his phenomenal popular success as a novelist. We know that Dickens relished performing onstage as an actor in amateur productions, and in later years the obsessive drive to perform dramatic readings from the novels hastened his early death. Following Edmund Wilson’s “The Two Scrooges” in *The Wound and the Bow*, which opened up for the world the “darker side of Dickens,” there has been much speculation that Dickens drew attention to himself onstage and in his works from an urgent desire for public approval and admiration. Monod suggests that the sales numbers for each of his novels were always important to Dickens not merely for financial reasons, but because of his “need of mutual sympathy and his desire to be loved” (257). Or as Kathleen Tillotson puts it more emphatically, “the sense of a sympathetic, applauding public seems to have been profoundly necessary to him” (35). That this craving for public attention and applause indicates deep-rooted insecurities resulting from Dickens’s famously traumatic childhood is now a virtually foregone conclusion. If Dickens did indeed have the

insecurity of a “verbal exhibitionist” bent upon drawing attention to himself, there is no doubt that whatever his editorial ideas about showing versus telling, self-conscious authorial intrusions were an effective means for “the Inimitable” to keep himself persistently before his reading audience in *propria persona*.

Fictive Authors, Fictional Autobiography

Strictly speaking, the author who intrudes so pervasively in Dickens novels is not Charles Dickens the man himself, but an idealized version of “the Inimitable” that Dickens chose to present to the world. The author who speaks in the novels is more accurately a textual projection of what Wayne Booth calls the “implied author,” or the “author’s second self,” a superior version of the author that lives only in the text as “an ideal, literary, created version of the real man” (74-75). But in *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, and the portions of *Bleak House* narrated by Esther Summerson, it is neither himself nor a projected ideal image of himself that Dickens interposes between his characters and his audience through authorial intrusion. Instead, it is David, Pip, and Esther who intrude self-consciously into their texts as authors writing stories addressed to readers. These three fictive characters insert themselves into their stories plainly as authors far more frequently than any of Dickens’s third-person narrators, literally hundreds of times in each of their respective narratives, and the intrusions are often as overtly self-conscious as David Copperfield’s saying, “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” (49), or Pip’s asking the reader, “Why did you who read this, commit

that not dissimilar inconsistency of your own, last year, last month, last week?" (379). If in the third-person novels Dickens injects some version of himself into the narratives because he could not keep himself out of them, or because he felt he must guide his readers' interpretation and response, why does he have his fictive first-person "authors" impose themselves so much more pointedly into "their" texts?

To an extent, self-conscious intrusions of the narrator are fundamental to all first-person narratives. In the broadest sense of "self-consciousness," first-person narrators intrude every time they say "I" or "me." In the more limited sense of current narratological usage, however, self-consciousness refers specifically to a narrator's open acknowledgement of himself or herself as writer, author or storyteller. In *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, and *Great Expectations*, David, Esther, and Pip are not merely characters who tell their stories in the first person, they are clearly authors—writers penning their stories on paper in ink. David Copperfield self-consciously indicates his status as author with such remarks as, "I have set all this down, in my present blissful chapter, because here it comes into its natural place" (410); "A dread falls on me here. . . . It is no worse, because I write of it. It would be no better, if I stopped my most unwilling hand" (382); and "now my written story ends. I look back, once more—for the last time—before I close these leaves" (748). Dickens obviously intends the reader to perceive David as the self-conscious author of his own-story, just as he does with Esther when she says in *Bleak House*, "It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself!" (26), and with Pip in *Great Expectations* when he says, "A great event in my life, the turning point of my life, now opens on my view. But, before I proceed to

narrate it, and before I pass on to all the changes it involved, I must give one chapter to Estella” (297).

In contrast, while the memorable opening of *Huckleberry Finn* makes self-conscious reference to Mark Twain as the author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Huck hardly acknowledges “authorship” of his own tale at all, he simply tells it. Aside from occasional misspellings and his comment in novel’s last paragraph, that “there ain’t nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I’d a knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn’t a tackled it and ain’t agoing to no more,” Huck hardly appears to be the novel’s literal “writer” at all (912). If Twain were to have him acknowledge or explain his perseverance in putting ink on reams of paper more than he does, Huck would lose essential credibility: beyond scratching awkward letters on slate when forced to the “sivilized” task of attending school, one cannot seriously imagine Huck as much of a writer in any sense. It is a different matter, though, when Dostoevsky’s *Underground Man* says, “I, however, am writing for myself, and I should like to make it clear once for all that if I address myself in my writings to a reader, I’m doing it simply as a matter of form, because I find it much easier to write like that” (296). It is apparently important to Dostoevsky’s rhetorical purposes that the reader see the *Underground Man* as not simply a narrating character, but an author ostensibly writing his own text. Because it is apparently also important to Dickens’s rhetorical purposes that David, Esther, and Pip be perceived as the ostensible authors of their stories, one primary function of their authorial intrusions is of course to establish and maintain the illusion that they are the ones doing the writing. The sheer abundance and variety of their

authorial intrusions, however, suggest that Dickens does much more with the intrusions of David, Esther, and Pip than simply establish and maintain their status as fictive authors.

The reader's astute perception of the narrator's personality is essential for a proper understanding of any narrative where the first-person narrator plays an active and central role in the story itself. Regardless of whether the narrator is presented as a literal writer or author, the most critical challenge readers of an "I as Protagonist" narrative face is evaluating the narrator's personality and assessing his or her reliability, which is naturally more suspect than a third-person narrator's since the reader knows *a priori* that the first-person narrator is a fictional construct. For an obvious instance, it is crucial that the reader of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" recognize early on that the narrator is mad, despite his protesting, "why *will* you say that I am mad?" (657). The (unimaginably) obtuse reader who believes the defensive assurances of sanity at face value altogether misses the "effect" Poe was striving for of illuminating the psychotic criminal mind. Just as obviously, Twain's reader must appreciate Huck Finn's naiveté in order to be amused, and not alarmed, at his response to Miss Watson's description of hell: "I said I wished I was there. [Miss Watson] got mad, then, but I didn't mean no harm. All I wanted was to go somewheres; all I wanted was a change, I warn't particular" (626). As Poe and Twain illustrate in stark relief, readers must see through and beyond the narrator's limited perspective in order to comprehend the full richness and depth of the first-person narrative.

It is even more imperative that the reader judge the narrator's character

perceptively when the work presents itself as fictive autobiography, when a fictional character tells his or her own life's story. In *Moll Flanders*, for example, the reader's ultimate understanding of the book depends very much upon that reader's judgment of Moll's personality as the ostensible autobiographer. Defoe's reader must decide most importantly whether or not to accept Moll as sincerely repentant, for it is the reader's perception of the *narrator's* character that determines his or her understanding of Moll's life as either consistent or inconsistent with Defoe's stated intention of "instructing" and not titillating. In fact, the motivation and reliability of autobiographers both fictive and actual alike are always somewhat suspect. Readers of autobiography understand implicitly that they are getting only one side of the story, that the autobiographer's perspective is unavoidably biased. In the case of actual autobiography, readers may have knowledge beyond the text which operates as a corrective of the author's inevitable bias. Any reader of *Mein Kampf*, for example, will certainly temper Hitler's view of his own life with more objective knowledge of history. With fictive autobiography, the only corrective evidence regarding the autobiographer's motivation and reliability resides in the text itself. As I believe this study will demonstrate, the best corrective evidence resides more precisely in the self-conscious intrusions revealing the fictive autobiographer as the *writer* of the narrative—the *re-writer* of the life the fictional character is supposed to have lived.

In some respects, authorial intrusion is appropriate and even expected in *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, and *Great Expectations* simply because they are first-person narratives in the autobiographical mode. As Gérard Genette explains, "the

‘autobiographical’ type of narrator, whether we are dealing with a real or a fictive autobiography, is—by the very fact of his oneness with the hero—more ‘naturally’ authorized to speak in his own name than is the narrator of a ‘third-person’ narrative” (*Narrative Discourse* 198). In other words, intrusions of the autobiographer seem not so jarringly “intrusive.” Authorial intrusion may indeed be an expected and natural feature of autobiography, but again, the abundance and variety of the autobiographers’ self-conscious intrusions in these three Dickens novels suggest that they do more than simply uphold the pretense of fictive autobiography. In fact, as this study will show, close examination of the authorial intrusions of his fictive autobiographers reveals that Dickens’s use of the first person is far more sophisticated than has been generally recognized—particularly when these fictive intrusions are compared against the typical authorial intrusions in Dickens’s third-person novels. By culling out and analyzing the self-conscious authorial utterances of David, Esther, and Pip, either acknowledging the act of writing, or offering commentary upon the “story” or “narrative proper,” we will discover hidden psychological depths in each of the narrators that aid and improve our understanding of the novels. Ultimately, it is through their intrusions that Dickens ensures the reader’s full and essential appreciation of these ostensible autobiographers, David, Esther, and Pip.

In the process of analyzing the technical development of these subtler rhetorical strategies in the fictive autobiographies in *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, and *Great Expectations* we will also achieve glimpses of significant insight into the psychological depths of their actual author, Charles Dickens the man. For the first-person narratives in

these three novels are effectively progressive versions of the same fundamental story, Dickens's own life's narrative, in many respects: the story of the abandoned child. While there are important autobiographical elements in every Dickens novel, in each of the fictive autobiographies the points of connection between Dickens the man and the narrating protagonist are especially evident and hold particular significance. It is generally assumed that Dickens revisited the trauma of his childhood experience at Warren's blacking warehouse in *David Copperfield* with the intention of confronting and laying to rest the haunting demons of his own past. As we shall see, the persona established through David's authorial intrusions is not so unscathed by his traumatic past as Dickens might have hoped he would be, and many of the minor weaknesses of character that David's intrusive commentary reveals are evident in Dickens the man as well. In *Bleak House*, Dickens gets more at the heart of his own childhood trauma, exploring the scarring pain of abandonment in greater depth under the deeper cover of Esther Summerson. The more extensive damage to her psyche indicated in Esther's authorial intrusions is also apparent in lesser extremes in Dickens's own personality. In *Great Expectations*, the final version of this evolving story of the abandoned child, we will see that Dickens was able in large part to come to terms with the demons of his past and to accept responsibility for the most significant character flaws he shares with the intrusive narrating Pip. Ultimately, the implicit psychological progression in the three first-person narrators reveals the evolution of Dickens's attitude towards his own childhood and suggests that he did a great deal of "growing up" between *David Copperfield* in 1850 and *Great Expectations* in 1861.

After exploring these novels individually, we will consider how the major events of Dickens's life between 1850 and 1861 account for the changing attitude towards himself and his past in these three "rewritings" of his own life's story. But before investigating the authorial persona of the first of these fictive autobiographers, the intrusive David Copperfield, two important preparatory matters require attention: arriving at a more precise definition of the slippery and imprecise term "authorial intrusion," and providing a context for comparing and differentiating the personas of the intrusive David, Esther, and Pip through a brief survey of the common tendencies of "intrusion" in the typical third-person Dickens narrator.

Chapter Two: Authorial Intrusion; or, Narrative Discourse

While narratology has been among the most productive areas of recent literary exploration, it has also been one of the more confusing fields of study, partly because the vocabulary used to describe the elements and techniques that constitute and produce narratives remains entirely unsettled. As Susan Lanser notes, narrative theories often “overlap and conflict, yielding language that is often inconsistent or ambiguous.” And while a “reasonable desire for order has engendered a multitude of classificatory frameworks . . . the resulting body of scholarship is both cluttered and rich, as uneven and sometimes misleading as many of its components are helpful and precise” (13). Different narratologists use the same terms to describe subtly but critically distinct narrative phenomena, and different theorists often seem intent upon establishing their own systems of terminology as more precise or more comprehensive than any other. Such clarifications as “her ‘psycho-narration’ is my ‘narratized speech,’ her ‘quoted monology’ is my ‘reported speech,’ and her ‘narrated monologue’ is my ‘transposed speech’” are standard in narratological texts (Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* 58-59). The confusion is compounded by difficulties of translation between the French, Russian, and English languages, for modern narratology was born in Russian formalism and brought to maturity by the French Structuralists. The problems in terminology are

exacerbated still more in a study like this one, which examines intrusions not of the actual or “implied” Charles Dickens, but of purely fictive authors in fictive autobiographies.

While I hope to avoid the confusion of the competing vocabularies and “classificatory frameworks” as much as possible, it is of course imperative that the precise meaning of “authorial intrusion” be clarified at the outset. For as Wayne Booth affirms in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and Susan Lanser reiterates in *The Narrative Act*, intrusive authorial presence is often far more covert than those conspicuous instances in Fielding and Thackeray where the narrator addresses the reader openly as “the Reader” in blatant digressions. In the interest of precision, and in order to situate my discussion in the context of recent narratological thinking, this chapter first glances briefly at the history of critical discussion of authorial intrusion and then defines authorial intrusion according to the structuralist conception of “narrative discourse.”

The Tradition of Authorial Intrusion

Essentially, authorial intrusion occurs when a narrator stops narrating *per se* and reveals his or her self-conscious presence in the narrative as author, writer, or storyteller. When a narrator simply recounts “what happens,” he or she is *narrating* in the strictest sense of the word. When Hemingway’s narrator in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* says, “Robert Jordan went over to the packs and opening one, felt inside an inner pocket and brought out one of the flat boxes of Russian cigarettes he had gotten at Golz’s headquarters,” he is simply relating “what happens” (20). Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* narrator is just as clearly *not* recounting story-events when he says (perhaps with pointed

reference to Dickens), “Sick-bed homilies and pious reflections are, to be sure, out of place in mere story-books, and we are not going (after the fashion of some novelists of the present day) to cajole the public into a sermon, when it is only a comedy that the reader pays his money to witness” (184-85). Nor is Thackeray’s narrator strictly *narrating* when he says, “The different conduct of [Mrs. Bute and Rawdon Crawley] is pointed out respectfully to the attention of persons commencing the world. Praise everybody, I say to such: never be squeamish, but speak out your compliment both point-blank in a man’s face, and behind his back, when you know there is a reasonable chance of his hearing it again” (183). Unfortunately, the difference between straightforward narration and authorial intrusion is not always so evident. A thumbnail review of the history of critical thought regarding the author’s “presence” in the text will help clarify some of the problems in distinguishing between straightforward narration and more surreptitious forms of authorial intrusion.

Critical discussion of authorial intrusion dates as far back as Plato and Aristotle: Plato’s *Republic* distinguishes between imitation, or *mimesis*, and authorial discourse, or *diegesis* (225-35), and Aristotle’s *Poetics* praises Homer for favoring *mimesis* over *diegesis*. To Aristotle, Homer is “admirable in all respects,” but he has the

special merit of being the only poet who rightly appreciates the part he should take himself. The poet should speak as little as possible in his own person, for it is not this that makes him an imitator. Other poets appear themselves upon the scene throughout, and imitate but little and rarely. Homer, after a few prefatory words, at once brings in a man, or woman, or other personage; none of them wanting in characteristic qualities, but each with a character of his own. (109)

Despite the influence of the *Poetics* in the British neoclassicism of the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries, Aristotelian admiration for the author retreating behind the scene in epic poetry apparently did not apply to eighteenth-century prose fiction. Fielding's and Sterne's narrators so thoroughly dominate their texts with self-announced authorial intrusions that the "stories" they are telling seem at times altogether forgotten. The narrator proclaims early in *Tom Jones*, "Reader, I think proper, before we proceed any farther, to acquaint thee, that I intend to digress, through his whole History, as often as I see Occasion" (37). Fielding's "historian" is true to his word and finds occasion to digress or intrude on virtually every page of the novel, even for entire chapters. The fictive autobiographer in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is even more strikingly intrusive, with frequent asides as overtly self-conscious as when he says,

Upon looking back from the end of the last chapter and surveying the texture of what has been wrote, it is necessary, that upon this page and the five following, a good quantity of heterogeneous matter be inserted, to keep up that just balance betwixt wisdom and folly, without which a book would not hold together a single year: nor is it a poor creeping digression (which but for the name of, a man might continue as well going on in the king's highway) which will do the business—no; if it is to be a digression, it must be a good frisky one, and upon a frisky subject too, where neither the horse or his rider are to be caught, but by rebound. (472)

As Fielding and Sterne demonstrate in the extreme, authorial intrusion was the established norm in the eighteenth-century English novel.

In the novel's early years, authorial intrusion often supported a work's pretensions to realism, as in *Don Quixote* and *Moll Flanders*, where the "authors" present themselves as editors of "real" manuscripts. The guise of historical authenticity in works such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* was especially important because in Defoe's era fiction was not entirely "respectable." Prose fiction was not considered art, as poetry

was, and in the Puritanical early eighteenth century, novels, or “romances,” were deemed frivolous entertainment. This taint of disreputability followed the novel well into the nineteenth century, when the Utilitarians also considered fiction frivolous. But from Defoe’s time to Dickens’s, novels could pretend to some respectability if they were explicit in delivering morally, socially, or politically relevant didactic messages. Just as with a novel’s pretensions of historical authenticity, here, too, authorial intrusion helped: even patently fictional novels assumed more redeeming value when the author stepped in to condemn what was wicked or wrong and praise what was good or right. Dickens’s novels, for instance, could be considered more “important” for their attacks upon various social ills of Victorian England, which he not only illustrates through the characters and events of his stories but emphasizes in direct address from the narrating “author” to the reader. As Joseph Warren Beach says, the obvious didactic attention to social problems of the day in Dickens’s novels “must have given him and his reader the sense that they were serious people combining artistic gratification with the betterment of the world, and not mere children at a puppet show” (127).

Following the tradition of Fielding, Sterne, Smollett, and other eighteenth-century novelists, self-conscious authorial intrusion remained an accepted convention through much of the nineteenth century, as the works of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Anthony Trollope fully attest. But as the nineteenth century progressed, the respectability of fiction became less an issue, the novel began to achieve recognition as legitimate artistic expression, and the established techniques of the eighteenth century became increasingly dated. While the historical “reality” of the

fictional text itself no longer mattered, realism within the text became a predominant concern. In the movements of realism and naturalism of the later nineteenth century, writers sought to make fiction “true to life” in subject, theme and narrative technique. As both writers and readers became more sophisticated and the novel became more an accepted form of art, intrusions of an author delivering didactic “points” came to seem superfluous and heavy-handed. The Aesthetic movement in the closing years of the nineteenth century went even further, declaring that literature should be entirely apolitical and amoral, thus condemning didacticism as “alien to the province of art” regardless of how overt or covert or relevant the “message” might be.

The British Aesthetic movement of the 1880s and 1890s adapted its credo, “art for art’s sake,” from the expression *l’art pour l’art*, current in France decades earlier, and the preeminent *artiste* in French fiction of the mid-nineteenth century was Gustave Flaubert. Flaubert’s response to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852 typifies the attitude towards didactic authorial commentary that would become standard by the century’s end: “The author’s comments irritated me continually. Does one have to make observations about slavery? Depict it: that’s enough. . . . Look at *The Merchant of Venice* and see whether anyone declaims against usury” (*Letters* 173). In his painstaking pursuit of stylistic perfection, in his realistic treatment of mundane subjects, and in his refinement of narrative technique to *show* more and *tell* less, Flaubert probably had greater impact on the modern novel than any other writer of his century. Flaubert went against the mid-century grain by attempting a purely “dramatic” work when he set out to write *Madame Bovary* with “No lyricism, no comments, the author’s personality absent” (*Selected Letters* 128), working

on the principle that “An author in his book must be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere” (*Letters* 173). Flaubert hoped to portray the “reality” of the narrated world objectively, without the author’s subjective presence evident anywhere in the text. He did not entirely succeed in keeping “the author’s personality absent,” for there are indeed such occasional authorial “comments” as in the chapter following Emma’s death: “Someone’s death always causes a kind of stupefaction; so difficult it is to grasp this advent of nothingness and to resign ourselves to the fact that it has actually taken place” (238). Ultimately, though, Flaubert did indeed signal the beginning of the end for the tradition of overtly self-conscious authorial intrusion in the novel.

As nineteenth-century concerns with realism extended into the twentieth century, the death-knell of old-fashioned authorial intrusion was formally sounded in the essays and prefaces of Henry James and in *The Craft of Fiction*, where Percy Lubbock championed James’s method of impersonal, “dramatic” narration. James, in “The Art of Fiction,” suggests that the most crucial requirement of good fiction is that it present an intense illusion of reality, “a direct impression of life” conveyed in such a manner as to seem historically “true” (350). As James points out, gratuitous authorial intrusions often puncture the illusion of a novel’s verisimilitude: highly intrusive authors such as Thackeray and Trollope “give themselves away” in digressions, asides, and parenthetical comments that remind the reader that both author and reader are only “making believe.” Noting what he calls a lack of discretion in the constant intrusiveness of Trollope, James says that Trollope’s narrator “admits that the events he narrates have not really happened,

and that he can give his narrative any turn the reader may like best. Such a betrayal of a sacred office seems to me, I confess, a terrible crime” (347). If the sacred office of fiction is to convey the impression of a story’s “really having happened,” self-conscious intrusions of the authorial persona are objectionable for lessening the intensity of the illusion and reminding the reader that the story is in fact an authorial construct. In practice, James eliminated authorial intrusion in his fiction even less completely than Flaubert. There are self-conscious indications of the authorial persona in *The Ambassadors*, for instance, in the narrator’s references to Strether as “our hero” and “our friend.” There are even more striking intrusions when the narrator makes such overtly self-conscious remarks as, “If we should go into all that occupied our friend in the watches of the night we should have to mend our pen; but an instance or two may mark for us the vividness with which he could remember. . .” (91). Apparently, even for James the old habit of authorial intrusion died hard.

But die the old habit would at last as the twentieth century unfolded in the wake of Flaubert and James, and the attitude that authorial intrusion is a “terrible crime” still remains current. Most third-person fiction after James has aimed at the illusion that a story is “telling itself,” without any apparent authorial mediation, so flagrant digressions and overt authorial commentary in recent fiction have become increasingly rare. However, even while pointedly self-conscious fiction of the order that Robert Alter describes as “systematically flaunt[ing] its own condition of artifice” has all but disappeared, close examination of texts that appear to “tell themselves” reveals that authors *are* still intruding into their narratives, albeit more subtly and covertly than their

predecessors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Alter x). Wayne Booth and Susan Lanser, among others, contest the notion that fiction can ever be as impersonal and objective as some might have it be, because as Booth argues, “the author’s voice is never really silenced” (60). According to Booth, even the most objective and unself-conscious fiction involves the author’s intrusive subjective encouragement of specific norms, beliefs, and value judgments. Authors cannot keep themselves entirely out of their works, “refined out of existence, indifferent, paring [their] nails,” as Stephen Dedalus puts it, and leave the judgment of characters and events entirely up to the reader or they risk being misread (Joyce 215). As Booth says, “To pass judgment where the author intends neutrality is to misread. But to be neutral or objective where the author requires commitment is equally to misread” (144). Whereas standard practice before James was for authors to ensure the reader’s proper judgment of their stories with overtly intrusive commentary, Booth suggests modern writers have simply become more surreptitious in their value-engendering intrusions. And indeed, even in Hemingway, the most eminently reticent and “dramatic” author of all, we see that the authorial voice has not been wholly silenced. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, when he describes a “great island of Sargasso weed that heaved and swung in the light sea *as though the ocean were making love with something under a yellow blanket*,” or “white cumulus *built like friendly piles of ice cream* and high above were the *thin feathers* of the cirrus against the high September sky,” the narrator’s presence as “author” is manifest in the descriptive comparisons (53, 45 emphasis added). In truth, intrusive authorial presence is far more pervasive than we might think in all but the most radically “reticent” fiction, such as Hemingway’s “Hills

Like *White Elephants*,” which is nearly all dialogue.

Temporal Aspects of Narration: Narrative Discourse

One problem in arriving at a precise and comprehensive definition of authorial intrusion involves the word “authorial.” Despite universal agreement that we must distinguish carefully between the author of a work and its narrator, there is still some confusion between the terms “author” and “authorial,” and “narrator” and “narratorial.” Strictly speaking, the author is the actual, historical writer of a written text, or, with the qualification that they are fictive authors, characters such as David, Esther, and Pip may be considered the authors of their own fictive texts. But as it applies to a specific type of narrator or mode of narration, the term “authorial narration” usually describes fiction in which “[a]n implied author who refers to himself as ‘I’ tells a fictional story in which he does not appear, though personal knowledge of the characters may be implied” (Martin 135). Here “authorial” refers not to the actual author but to the typically omniscient self-conscious narrator in works that are essentially third-person. This definition of authorial narration clearly applies to all of Dickens’s third-person fiction, and indeed, to the conventional Victorian novel more generally. In Franz Stanzel’s purely “figural narration,” where the narrator never refers to himself or herself as “I,” a more accurate term to describe intrusions of the speaking narrative voice would probably be “narratorial intrusion.”

A second problem involving the term “authorial intrusion” is that it has been used traditionally to describe only those most egregious digressions and self-conscious

interruptions of the narrative proper now so long out of fashion. Thus, the term authorial intrusion in common usage may not comprehend the more surreptitious insinuations of authorial voice not only in recent fiction but also in older, more self-conscious works as well. Furthermore, authorial intrusion—interventions of the speaking author, writer, or storyteller as narrator of the narrative text—must be distinguished from a variety of other manifestations of surreptitious authorial *presence* that recent theorists have noted in structural and textual elements not related to the author's or narrator's intrusive speaking *voice*. For instance, the author's *presence* may be seen in the names of characters, particularly in the works of writers like Dickens, whose characters often have wildly eccentric and improbable names (Boldwig, Buzfuz, Clubber, Fizkin, Jingle, and Snuphanuph in *The Pickwick Papers*, e.g.). The names Murdstone, Creakle, and Mowcher clearly indicate the hand of Dickens himself in the text of *David Copperfield* and not that of David Copperfield the speaking narrator.

Authorial *presence* can be seen, as David Hayman suggests, simply in the organization of the narrative by the “nameless creative persona” he calls a “narrator-arranger” (70). Booth detects authorial presence in patterns of myth and symbol, in shifts of point of view, in unannounced spatial and temporal narrative shifts and elisions, and even in the selection of the dialogue, events and details included in the narrative. Susan Lanser notes that authorial presence may be found in choices of vocabulary and syntax, as Twain, Scott, Faulkner and Hemingway illustrate in different extremes. Distinctive “style” such as that of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* can be said to indicate authorial presence, or in Joyce's *Ulysses*, the succession of different styles in each chapter may do

the same. Lanser describes “extrafictional” authorial presence in titles, chapter titles, epigraphs, dedications and prefaces, and often in a book’s “packaging,” which includes promotional quotations, blurbs and “teasers,” jacket and cover illustrations, and a number of other details that confront the reader before the actual text begins. The most precise definition of authorial intrusion in all its overt and covert manifestations, and one limited specifically to the intrusive authorial *voice* and exclusive of other forms of authorial *presence*, lies in the structuralist concept of “narrative discourse.”

The Russian Formalists first distinguished between *fabula*, or “story,” the “preliterary” events described in strict narration, and the aesthetic construction of the *syuzhet*, or plot, “the narrative as told or written” (Martin 108). But it was Emile Benveniste, in *Problems in General Linguistics*, who first distinguished with precision between the “story” of unadorned, straightforward narration and the discourse that surrounds and delivers that story in the written text. Benveniste demonstrated that two distinct, complementary systems of the past tense in French verbs indicate different planes of utterance, one operative in spoken language, which Benveniste labels *discours*, and one operative only in written language, which he calls *histoire*. Significantly, *histoire* translates into English as both “history” and “story,” and Benveniste observes that in works of both history and fiction alike the *historical* utterance presents only the straightforward narration of past events, with no signs of the narrator beyond third-person pronouns. When *histoire* is pure, using only the aorist, imperfect, and pluperfect tenses, it is strictly limited to the third person and appears to have no narrator: “Events that took place at a certain moment of time are presented without any intervention of the speaker in

the narration. . . . The events are set forth chronologically, as they occurred. No one speaks here: the events seem to narrate themselves” (206-8). In other words, the *historical* utterance that Benveniste describes is unmediated simple, strict, or straightforward narration.¹

Discours utterances, on the other hand, may use the first and second person as well as the third, and all tenses but the French aorist are possible in *discours*. The plane of *discours* encompasses every utterance that assumes a speaker and a hearer where the speaker intends to influence the hearer in some way; Benveniste’s *discours* is, essentially, “every variety of oral discourse of every nature and every level, from trivial conversation to the most elaborate oration” (209). But the distinction between *histoire* and *discours* is not simply a matter of written language versus spoken. As Benveniste points out, the *discours* systems of person and tense are used in writing as well as in speech, for *discours* includes “the mass of writing that reproduces oral discourse or that borrows its manner of expression and its purposes: correspondence, memoirs, plays, didactic works, in short, all the genres in which someone addresses himself to someone, proclaims himself as the speaker, and organizes what he says in the category of person” (209). In practice, Benveniste says, writers pass freely between the planes of *discours* and *histoire*: strict narration is often interrupted by various forms of discourse that may use the first or

¹ The two systems of past-tense verbs in French that Benveniste identifies have no parallel in English. The two forms of simple past in French are the aorist—*il fit* as the third-person *historical* past of *faire* (to make or do), e.g.—and the compound simple (and perfect) past of *discours*—*il a fait*. The distinctions Benveniste makes regarding “personal” forms of verbs also have more significance in French because verbs change form in conjugation by “person” in French more than in English. For example, in English, we conjugate the simple past of “to do”: I did, you did, he/she/it did, we did, you did, they did. The French conjugation of *faire* in the compound simple past is: *j’ai fait, tu as fait, il/elle/on a fait, nous avons fait, vous avez fait, ils/elles ont fait*, but the aorist past conjugation of *faire* is: *je fis, tu fis, il fit, nous fîmes, vous fîtes, ils/elles firent*.

second person and do use verb tenses other than the aorist, imperfect, and pluperfect. That is, strict narration is often interrupted by utterances that are readily identifiable as intruding upon the *historical* narration of events, not only when the narrator announces himself or herself in the first person or addresses the reader in the second person, but any time the tense system of *historical* narration is violated. In written narratives in French, then, authorial discourse—authorial intrusion—is evident whenever the presence of *discours* verb forms implicitly indicates the “I” narrator and the “you” reader, whether the “I” and “you” are stated explicitly or not.

As the two planes of *histoire* and *discours* are so clearly distinguished by the French language’s unique systems of tense, one can see that instances of authorial intrusion are simpler to isolate in narratives in French than in narratives in languages that have no specific tense systems operative only in the written narration of past events. Despite the differences in language, though, Benveniste’s distinctions between *historical* narration and narrative discourse do still apply to narratives in English. While English does not have a specific tense limited only to *historical* utterances, it is a long-standing convention of storytellers in all languages to tell stories in the past tense, and first-person narratives, autobiographies in particular, are almost exclusively retrospective. There are of course narratives presented partly or wholly in the present or future tenses—the third-person narrative in *Bleak House*, for one, is delivered mainly in the present—but the overwhelming mass of traditional fiction, including most of Dickens’s, presents the scenes and actions of the “story proper” as having occurred in the past. This being the case, we may still consider the proper tenses of traditional *historical* narration in English

the definite past and imperfect tenses. So even in English, any of the narrator's utterances in the present, conditional, and future tense systems—or any combination of tense and mood other than the indicative past—may be considered narrative discourse in works that follow convention in relating story-events as having occurred in the past. And indeed, as Victor Brombert and Georges Blin attest in their book-length studies of “authorial intervention” in the novels of Stendhal, the most readily identifiable forms of authorial intrusion all use either the present tense or the conditional subjunctive mood.

Traditionally, we have identified authorial intrusion by content—“digressions,” “generalizations,” “commentary,” “self-conscious remarks about the writing process.” Following Benveniste's distinctions between *discours* and *histoire*, most authorial intrusions effectively identify themselves as narrative discourse by their grammatical form. When Tristram Shandy writes, “it is necessary, that upon this page and the five following, a good quantity of heterogeneous matter be inserted,” even if we disregard the content of the intrusion we still recognize the passage as narrative discourse simply because it departs from the past tense of *historical* narration and uses the present tense in “it is necessary that . . . heterogeneous matter *be inserted*” (472). When Henry James's narrator says of Strether, in *The Ambassadors*, “If we should go into all that occupied our friend in the watches of the night we should have to mend our pen,” the subjunctive *should* and *should have to mend* similarly indicate narrative discourse (91). Thus, with more surreptitious intrusions, when the narrator does not “give himself away” by using the first or second person or openly acknowledging the work as an authorial construct, Benveniste's tense distinctions allow us to recognize the intrusions as narrative discourse

with relative ease. When the narrator of *The Old Man and the Sea* says an island of Sargasso weed “heaved and swung in the light sea as though the ocean were making love with something under a yellow blanket,” the conditional “as though they were making love” reveals the comparison as narrative discourse (53). When Joyce’s narrator in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* says, “It was that windless hour of dawn when madness wakes and strange plants open to the light and the moth flies forth silently,” we see the present tense in *wakes*, *open*, and *flies* and recognize intrusive narrative discourse and not *historical* narration (217). Joyce’s *Portrait* offers intrusions more surreptitious still:

The figure of woman as she appears in the liturgy of the church passed silently through the darkness: a whiterobed figure, small and slender as a boy and with a falling girdle. Her voice, frail and high as a boy’s, was heard intoning from a distant choir the first words of a woman which pierce the gloom and clamour of the first chanting of the passion. (244)

Here we see *appears* and *pierce* in present tense and recognize that Joyce’s narrator is very subtly mixing intrusive narrative discourse with *historical* narration. Clearly, Benveniste’s distinction between the *discours* and *historical* planes of utterance enables fairly precise identification of authorial intrusion in more covert as well as overt forms.

Roland Barthes and Tzvetan Todorov built upon and enlarged Benveniste’s distinctions between *historical* narration and narrative discourse, and Gérard Genette has elaborated and refined them with greater precision still. In “Structural Analysis of Narratives,” Barthes considers the text in its entirety as “discourse,” inasmuch as the narrative text is a “point of communication” between the donor and receiver of the narrative (109). But in Barthes’s conception of the “narrational level” of the narrative-as-

discourse, there are immanent “signs of narrativity” coded into the two distinct narrational systems he labels the personal and the apersonal, which correspond loosely to Benveniste’s *discours* and *historical* narration. The signs of personal narration are any elements of the narrative indicating the “persons” of the sending narrator and the receiving reader, including but not limited to the *discours* system of tense and person that indicate narrative discourse. In “The Categories of Literary Narrative,” Tzvetan Todorov, too, considers the narrative text itself as discourse, but he makes an important distinction between 1) the “time of the narrative,” or plot time; 2) the “time of the enunciation,” or the time of the writing, “which becomes a literary element from the moment when it is introduced into the story”; and 3) the “time of the reading,” the time of the reader’s visualization of the story while reading the narrative (23). Following the notion that all speech acts are in varying degrees simultaneously objective, or “constative” statement (*énoncé*) and subjective, or “performative,” enunciation (*énonciation*), Todorov suggests that speech acts such as rhetorical or figurative comparisons and “reflections about human nature” indicate the time of the enunciation and reveal the speaker engaged in acts that are clearly more subjective enunciation than objective statement. Effectively, when the narrator engages in speech acts such as rhetorical or figurative comparisons and “general reflections about human nature,” acts that are primarily subjective enunciation, “the subject [speaker] of the enunciation becomes visible, and the narrator then approximates one of the characters” (29). The narrator’s figurative language and general reflections are certainly among Barthes’s “signs of narrativity”: they indicate the time of the writing and reveal the image of the

“person” that Barthes calls the “paper author.” Barthes and Todorov thus expand narrative discourse to include figurative language, which may not always be evident in *discours* verb forms. So when Hemingway’s narrator compares cumulus clouds to “friendly piles of ice cream” and describes “thin feathers” of cirrus clouds he is clearly intruding into the otherwise strictly *historical* narration in making the figurative comparisons. Joyce’s *Portrait* narrator does the same in calling the whiterobed figure “small and slender as a boy,” with a voice “frail and high as a boy’s.”

G rard Genette’s exploration of narrative discourse is the most precise and systematic by far, and though other narratologists have developed certain of his primary notions, much of his work in the structuralist analysis of narrative discourse is still essentially definitive. In *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Genette suggests that all narratives involve three primary elements, the first of which he calls *histoire* or “story,” the “signified narrative content,” the real or fictive events that the narrative relates, in chronological and causal order that may or may not be followed in the written text (27). (Genette’s *histoire* is not the plane of utterance that Benveniste describes; rather, Genette’s *histoire* is “pre-literary” or “extra-narrative” in that *histoire* events exist in an extratextual realm before or beyond the narrative that relates them. The actual historical events in the life of a person would be the *histoire* of that person’s written biography, for example.) *R cit*, the second of Genette’s primary elements of narrative, is usually translated as “narrative,” though a more exact rendering of the French *r cit* is “recital” or “account.” Genette describes *r cit* as “the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself,” the physical text that presents a rendered account of *histoire* events

on the written page. The third of Genette's elements of narrative is the French *narration*, translated best as "the narrating," by which Genette means "the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional situation in which that action takes place" (27). Genette's *narration* thus encompasses the self-conscious performance of the narrating action itself and includes any textual markings of the narrative as an authorial or narratorial construct. Genette's *narration* is indicated by any of Barthes's "signs of narrativity," where the persons of both teller and listener are revealed either explicitly or implicitly in narrative discourse. Instances in the narrative that acknowledge or suggest the "producing narrative action," "the narrating"—instances where, as Genette says, the "activity of writing leaves in [the narrative] traces, signs, or indices that we can pick up and interpret"—these are the most precise indications of "authorial intrusion" in the most comprehensive sense: discernable indications that an author or narrator is telling a reader or narratee a story (28).

Another distinction that Genette makes, one that is perhaps even more pertinent than the *histoire/récit/narration* divisions, involves the temporal relations of narrative. The two distinct temporal sequences implicit within all conventional narratives where events are related in the past tense that Todorov labels "time of the narrative" and "time of the enunciation," Genette calls *histoire*-time, the "time of the thing told" (33), and *narration*-time, the time frame of the narrating act itself, which might be called "the narrator's present" (69). As Seymour Chatman explains,

Narratives establish a sense of the present moment, narrative NOW, so to speak. If the narrative is overt [i.e. self-conscious], there are perforce two NOWs, that of the discourse, the moment occupied by the narrator in the present tense ("I'm going to tell you the following story"), and that of the

story, the moment that the action began to transpire, usually in the preterite. (62)

Another way of defining authorial intrusion would be to say that intrusion occurs whenever the narrator speaks in the “narrator’s present” or suggests the “discourse NOW” in any extra-*historical* communications between narrator and narratee. Genette notes that this intrusion of the narrator’s present into the past of the conventional or “classical” *récit* in effect brings about “narrative *stasis*, when the narrative discourse continues while historical [story] time is at a standstill” (“Time and Narrative” 101). The key factor, then, in determining authorial intrusion in Genette’s terms is that the strict relation of *histoire* is momentarily suspended and overt indications of *narration* are evident in the *récit*, which is mainly a matter of the “narrator’s now” impinging or intruding upon the *historical* “story now.”

In Genette’s analysis of the temporal aspects of narrative more precisely, authorial intrusion is evident in *narrative metalepsis*, crossings of the threshold between different narrative levels (*Narrative Discourse* 235). Events and elements inside the recounted world of a given narrative reside on what Genette calls an intradiegetic level, and the situation and elements of the narrating act on an extradiegetic level, outside the *histoire* world the narrative describes as story. At the extradiegetic level, the author-narrator of the conventional narrative exists on the same level with his or her reading public in the sense that all extradiegetic remarks are directed to us, the readers, even if the author-narrator is purely fictive. Even though there are the implied and actual “Daniel Defoes” behind them, Moll Flanders and Robinson Crusoe speak to the public directly on the same narrative plane, outside the worlds of the life stories they describe as having taken

place in the past. With the greatest exactness, it is the extradiegetic narrative discourse, the self-conscious indications of David Copperfield's, Esther Summerson's, and Philip Pirrip's "narrator's now" that this study is fundamentally concerned with.

Exact and authoritative as it is, I have elected not to adopt Genette's terminology exclusively because Genette's terms can be confusing even for those quite familiar with his work. The confusion between the extra- and intradiegetic opposition of levels and the hetero- and homodiegetic opposition of relations of the narrating persona to his or her story is especially problematic, as Genette himself has acknowledged in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (84). Pip in *Great Expectations* is a homodiegetic narrator because he is a character in his own story—Pip is also an autodiegetic narrator because he is the hero of the story he tells. At the same time, Pip the young boy who is frightened by the convict Magwitch on the marsh is an intradiegetic character in the narrative delivered by the mature Philip Pirrip, who is an extradiegetic narrator. Various other terms that Genette uses to identify specific types of metalepsis and temporal distortion in narrative discourse are even more confusing. As Susan Lanser points out, it can be difficult indeed to remember the differences between the "unfamiliar and similar-sounding terms" analepsis, prolepsis, metalepsis, and paralepsis (not to be confused with paralipsis) (38). To avoid the potential confusion in Genette's terminology, I shall forego *absolute* precision and instead use the broader terms "narrative discourse" and "authorial intrusion" almost interchangeably to identify metaleptical extradiegetic utterances that indicate the "narrator's now," with some care to use "authorial intrusion" to indicate only the more flagrant sorts of intrusive discourse associated with the term traditionally.

Chapter Three: The Intrusive Third-Person Dickens Narrator

As we shall see in the following chapters, the similarities and differences between the typical third-person Dickens narrator and each of the first-person narrators are important both in establishing significant points of connection between Dickens and the fictive autobiographers and in establishing David's, Esther's, and Pip's unique individual authorial personas. To develop a context for comparison between the third-person Dickens narrator and the three fictive autobiographers, this chapter examines the common varieties of narrative discourse in Dickens's third-person fiction. While various narratologists have offered frameworks outlining distinct orders of authorial intrusion or narrative discourse, each with its own merits, none of these frameworks delineates all the significant finer differences between the various sorts of intrusive discourse most common in Dickens. In order to arrive at a system that is precise and more comprehensive, I have merged and distilled the complementary and redundant frameworks of Georges Blin, Victor Brombert, Gérard Genette, and Seymour Chatman under the following, occasionally overlapping headings¹:

- *intrusions of explicit self-consciousness*—intrusions making the most overt reference to the situation of the *narrating*, addressing the reader by name and/or

¹See the appendix for an overview of Blin's, Brombert's, Genette's and Chatman's classificatory methods.

making the most explicit self-mention of the narrator as author or acknowledging the narrative as an authorial construct.

- *transitional intrusions*—intrusions effecting transition when narrative concentration shifts from one group of characters to another or smoothing or explaining narrative movement backward and forward in time.
- *didactic intrusions*—pointedly polemical comments addressed to the reader.
- *descriptive intrusions*—self-conscious descriptions, especially of actual locales.
- *generalizations*—philosophical observations on life or human nature.
- *overt commentary on story elements*—direct authorial comment upon and interpretation of characters or story events, including *apostrophe* and *exclamation*, where the narrator interjects especially passionate comments addressed either to specific characters or to the reader.
- *questions*, stated questions the narrator addresses either to himself, ostensibly, or directly to the reader.
- *speculative intrusions*—where the narrator offers speculation either for rhetorical purposes (usually a specialized form of commentary) or to suggest the narrator's limited knowledge of characters or events, indicated most obviously by the modalizing words “maybe,” “perhaps,” “if,” “had,” and “whether.”
- *allusions* to persons or events from history or legend, and to other literary works.
- *figurative language*—intrusions in which the narrator makes figurative descriptions or comparisons.
- *miscellaneous matters of style*—stylistic tendencies that foreground the narrator's

intrusive authorial voice.

While these general categories are neither exhaustive nor absolutely comprehensive, they do enable fairly rigorous classification of the most frequent types of narrative discourse in Dickens's third-person fiction.

Intrusions of Explicit Self-Consciousness: Acknowledgement of the Narrative As Text

The most obvious intrusions occur when the Dickens narrator addresses the reader openly as “the Reader” or makes explicit reference either to himself as author, writer, or storyteller, or to the narrative itself as an authorial construct, something he is in the process of constructing or has already constructed. The most striking of these overtly self-conscious intrusions are the digressive asides that Brombert labels “flagrant digressions” or “outspoken interventions” (*interventions brutales*) (13). In their baldest form, these flagrant intrusions present candid and unabashed acknowledgement of the author's role as creator of the narrative text. Grossly flagrant intrusions abound in Dickens's early novels, where the influence of his primary models in comic fiction, Fielding and Smollett, is most apparent. We see this influence in *Oliver Twist* in the lengthy digression on the arrangement of tragic and comic scenes in “all good, murderous melodramas . . . in as regular alternation, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky, Well-cured bacon” (105). Here the authorial narrator is not describing *histoire* matters but is self-consciously discussing narrative strategies of actual writers outside the world of the *Oliver Twist* story. Later in the same novel the narrator intrudes *à la*

Fielding to have fun with the lofty dignity of parochial beadles:

As it would be, by no means, seemly in a humble author to keep so mighty a personage as a beadle waiting, . . . the historian whose pen traces these words: trusting that he knows his place, and that he entertains a becoming reverence for those upon earth to whom high and important authority is delegated: hastens to pay them that respect which their position demands, and to treat them with all that duteous ceremony which their exalted rank, and (by consequence) great virtues, imperatively claim at his hands. Towards this end, indeed, he had purposed to introduce, in this place, a dissertation touching the divine right of beadles, and elucidative of the position, that a beadle can do no wrong; which could not fail to have been both pleasurable and profitable to the right-minded reader, but which he is unfortunately compelled, by want of time and space, to postpone to some more convenient and fitting opportunity. (172-73)

Clearly, the “historian” is not *narrating* in this passage but is addressing the reader on an extradiegetic plane of communication above the world of the story with emphatic acknowledgement of his role as creator of the text.

Typically, though, the intrusions of the third-person Dickens narrator openly acknowledging the text as an authorial construct are less ostentatious and much less patently digressive. There are fleeting intrusive references in Dickens novels early and late to the narrative as “this history” or “this chronicle,” or to specific units of the text as “this chapter.” Chapter 21 of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, for example, opens with such self-conscious references in the narrator’s insistence that the knocking on Mr. Pecksniff’s door that closes the twentieth chapter not be confused with the roar of an American train: “It may be well to begin the present chapter with this frank admission, lest the reader should imagine that the sounds now deafening this history’s ears have any connexion with the knocker on Mr. Pecksniff’s door” (341). Or in the opening chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities*, after describing the high-handed behavior of French and English monarchs in

the eighteenth century, the narrator concludes, “Thus did the year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five conduct their Greatnesses, and myriads of small creatures—the creatures of this chronicle among the rest—along the road that lay before them” (3). Then in the following chapter, “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” (4). Naturally, any reference to “this history,” the chronicle that the fictional text purports to relate, is an explicitly self-conscious reminder that the text is a created authorial construct.

Just as obviously, too, any direct reference to the reader is an explicit reminder that an author or narrator is addressing a reader through the narrative text. In *Dombey and Son* the narrator speaks with obvious self-consciousness when he says, “It is half-past five o’clock, and an autumn afternoon, when the reader and Solomon Gills become acquainted” (38). Even without addressing the reader openly or referring to the narrative so pointedly as a created text, the *Old Curiosity Shop* narrator reveals his intrusive authorial presence when he describes Daniel Quilp’s chastisement of Tom Scott for standing on his head: Tom is “speedily brought on his heels by the sound of his master’s voice, and as soon as his head was in its right position, Mr. Quilp, to speak expressively in the absence of a better verb, ‘punched it’ for him” (47). The narrative becomes self-conscious here as the narrator acknowledges that he is “speaking” and choosing one verb over any other to describe the action.

One specialized form of explicitly self-conscious intrusion is that in which an “editor” attests to the authenticity of a text that he or she “presents” to the public. This

type of “editor’s intrusion” occurs perhaps most famously in *Don Quixote*, where the “author” reportedly collects, translates, and edits various documents from the fictitious archives of La Mancha and from the “accidentally discovered manuscripts” of the fictitious Arabic historian, Cid Hamete Benegeli. These editor’s intrusions are relatively scarce in Dickens’s fiction. Dickens uses this technique only in *The Pickwick Papers*, where the “papers” are presented as an edited version of the “posthumous Transactions of the Pickwick Club,” and where the “editor” intrudes with such comments substantiating the narrative’s authenticity as, “We have no official statement of the facts, which the reader will find recorded in the next chapter, but they have been carefully collated from letters and other MS. authorities, so unquestionably genuine, as to justify their narration in a connected form” (7). As we shall see, these testimonial intrusions which are relatively rare in third-person Dickens are more frequent in the fictive autobiographies. “Editor’s intrusions” aside, though, flagrant or explicitly self-conscious intrusions in which the narrator addresses the reader directly or openly acknowledges his authorship of the narrative text are standard features of the third-person Dickens novel.

Transitional Intrusions

Another specialized type of flagrant intrusion is that in which the narrator enters the text in his authorial capacity to effect or smooth transition from one scene to another or from one time frame to another. As they indicate plainly that an author is consciously ordering and organizing different strands of “pre-literary” spatial and temporal *histoire* in the narrative text, these transitional intrusions tend to be highly self-conscious.

As with the more flagrant explicit intrusions, heavy-handed transitional intrusions are probably attributable to the influence of Dickens's eighteenth-century models. When Bumble informs the undertaker of an old woman's death in *Oliver Twist*, the chapter closes with a passage reminiscent of many transitions in *Tom Jones*: "And now that we have accompanied [Bumble] so far on his road home, and have made all necessary preparations for the old woman's funeral, let us set on foot a few inquiries after young Oliver Twist; and ascertain whether he be still lying in the ditch where Toby Crackit left him" (178). In the same vein but even more explicitly self-conscious is the opening of Chapter 38 in *The Old Curiosity Shop*:

Kit—for it happens at this juncture, not only that we have breathing time to follow his fortunes, but that the necessities of these adventures so adapt themselves to our ease and inclination as to call upon us imperatively to pursue the track we most desire to take—Kit, while the matters treated of in the last fifteen chapters were yet in progress, was, as the reader may suppose, gradually familiarising himself more, and more with Mr. and Mrs. Garland, Mr. Abel, the pony, and Barbara, and gradually coming to consider them one and all as his particular private friends, and Abel Cottage Finchley as his own proper home. (292)

This intrusion transports the reader from one narrative strand centered mainly upon Little Nell to a temporally parallel strand dealing with Kit Nubbles. The intrusion brings Kit up to date temporally and jogs the reader's memory by recalling the circumstances of Kit's last appearance in the text, where he had left his mother's home and arrived at Abel Cottage to begin working for the Garlands. Dickens doubtless considered such reminders of matters held in suspension for long stretches of the narrative especially helpful for readers of the original serial publication: the fifteen chapter span of *The Old Curiosity Shop* indicated in this transitional intrusion covered nine weekly installments between

August 1st and October 3rd, 1840 (Vann 64).

From *Hard Times* (1854) forward, Dickens tended to avoid such obvious transitional intrusions, but as late as the third-person narrative in *Bleak House* in 1852-53, highly self-conscious transitional intrusions are still quite evident. Chapter 2 of *Bleak House* provides transition from the first chapter's description of the foggy world of Chancery to the "fashionable world" of the Dedlocks: "It is but a glimpse of the world of fashion that we want on this same miry afternoon. It is not so unlike the Court of Chancery, but that we may pass from the one scene to the other, as the crow flies" (8). The transition from Chancery to the "world of fashion" is relatively uncomplicated, and it is convenient moreover because it affords Dickens the opportunity to suggest similarities between the world of fashion and the Chancery court he has described harshly in the opening chapter. More complicated is when the *Bleak House* narrative shifts from concentration on Inspector Bucket and Sir Leicester Dedlock in Chapter 59 to the temporally earlier matter of Lady Dedlock's flight in Chapter 60. Chapter 60 opens with this transitional intrusion: "Inspector Bucket of the Detective has not yet struck his great blow, as just now chronicled, but is yet refreshing himself with sleep preparatory to his field-day, when, through the night and along the freezing wintry roads, a chaise and pair comes out of Lincolnshire, making its way towards London" (745). Driving the chaise and pair is Lady Dedlock, in flight from Chesney Wold, knowing that Bucket's "great blow"—the revelation of her past—is about to fall. In his later novels, Dickens manages these transitions with greater delicacy. In *Little Dorrit*, for instance, after several chapters of the Dorrits' adventures on the continent, the opening of Book 2, Chapter 8

announces a shift in narrative concentration to the Clennam family in England with less self-conscious fanfare:

While the waters of Venice and the ruins of Rome were sunning themselves for the pleasure of the Dorrit family, and were daily being sketched out of all earthly proportion, lineament, and likeness, by travelling pencils innumerable, the firm of Doyce and Clennam hammered away in Bleeding Heart Yard, and the vigorous clink of iron upon iron was heard there through the working hours. (499)

It appears that Dickens learned to tone down the self-conscious fragrance of these intrusions binding the seams of separate strands of *histoire* narrative, and indeed, many transitions in the later novels are not announced or acknowledged at all.

The narrator's overt acknowledgment that certain matters or periods of *histoire* time are passed over or excluded from the narrative indicates another type of transitional intrusion in what Genette calls explicit narrative ellipsis—a gap in *histoire*-time which the discourse acknowledges directly (*Narrative Discourse* 106). We find an instance of explicit narrative ellipsis in the opening of Chapter 75 of *Barnaby Rudge*: “A month has elapsed,—and we stand in the bed-chamber of Sir John Chester” (573). Or earlier in the same novel: “And the world went on turning round, as usual, for five years, concerning which this Narrative is silent” (246). Ellipsis of a different stripe is indicated when the narrator acknowledges the exclusion of insignificant or uninteresting matters of *histoire* detail. The *Old Curiosity Shop* narrator says that he will summarize instead of relating the full particulars of the conversation in which Fred Trent persuades Dick Swiveller to consider marrying Little Nell:

It would be tedious to pursue the conversation through all its artful windings, or to develop the gradual approaches by which the heart of Richard Swiveller was gained. It is sufficient to know that vanity, interest,

poverty, and every spendthrift consideration urged him to look upon the proposal with favor, and that where all other inducements were wanting, the habitual carelessness of his disposition stepped in and still weighed down the scale on the same side. . . . The motives on the other side were something deeper than any which Richard Swiveller entertained or understood, but these being left to their own development, require no present elucidation. (64-65)

While the gaps this sort of intrusions bridge are smaller than those between segments of discrete *histoire* periods of time separated by days, months, or years, they do nonetheless indicate intrusive authorial presence in the narrator's acknowledgement that *histoire* particulars are summarized or passed over.

Didactic Intrusions

Less frequent than the transitional and the other common types of explicit intrusion are instances where the Dickens narrator is moved to didactic preaching or diatribe in *propria persona*. Often these intrusions take the form of apostrophes addressed to the reader, or to certain classes of readers, and it is these didactic intrusions that Earle Davis calls "infestations of . . . the rhetorical, exclamatory manner of Carlyle" (220). Although Davis sees pointedly didactic intrusions as most frequent in Dickens's early novels, reaching their height in *Dombey and Son* (146), Sylvère Monod points out that Carlyle's influence is more appreciable in the later novels, and the later novels are clearly more insistent in their didacticism overall (391-92). Emphatic didactic intrusions are certainly prominent in all of the later third-person novels except *Edwin Drood*.

In *Martin Chuzzlewit* it was the coarseness and hypocrisy of Americans that raised the "inimitable" ire. Before he visited America, the idealistic young Dickens considered the United States the enlightened bastion of liberty and egalitarian justice for

all. Dickens's indignation at the disappointing reality he discovered during his first American tour is reflected in the narrator's comments in *Chuzzlewit* after an elided explanation of universal U. S. supremacy by Mrs. Hominy, an outspoken American "philosopher and authoress":

It is no great matter what Mrs. Hominy said, save that she had learned it from the cant of a class, and a large class, of her fellow-countrymen, who, in their every word, avow themselves to be as senseless to the high principles on which America sprang, a nation, into life, as any Orson in her legislative halls. Who are no more capable of feeling, or of caring if they did feel, that by reducing their own country to the ebb of honest men's contempt, they put in hazard the rights of nations yet unborn, and very progress of the human race, than are the swine who wallow in their streets. Who think that crying out to other nations, old in their iniquity, "We are no worse than you!" (No worse!) is high defence and 'vantage-ground enough for that Republic, but yesterday let loose upon her noble course, and but to-day so maimed and lame, so full of sores and ulcers, foul to the eye and almost hopeless to the sense, that her best friends turn from the loathsome creature with disgust. (369)

That this passage is narrative discourse, and not simply an explanation of purported *histoire* "fact," is evident in the tense shift in the opening sentence from the past of straightforward narration to the present of narrative discourse: what Mrs. Hominy *said*, she *had learnt* from one class of her countrymen, who "*avow* themselves" and "*are* no more capable of feeling, or of caring," who *feel* and *think* and so on in present tense throughout the remainder of the diatribe.

In *Dombey and Son* there is an even more impassioned speech of some 900 words on "unnatural" vices such as Mr. Dombey's excessive pride being paradoxically "natural" given his circumstances. The narrator moves quickly from Dombey's specific situation to ponder the natural tendency of the poor to engage in "unnatural" vices their poverty often forces upon them. At one point the narrator tells the reader to "Hear the magistrate

or judge admonish the unnatural outcasts of society; unnatural in brutal habits, unnatural in want of decency, unnatural in losing and confounding all distinctions between good and evil; unnatural in ignorance, in vice, in recklessness, in contumacy, in mind, in looks, in everything.” Then he challenges the reader to visit the slums, and to

Breathe the polluted air, foul with every impurity that is poisonous to health and life; and have every sense, conferred upon our race for its delight and happiness, offended, sickened and disgusted, and made a channel by which misery and death alone can enter. Vainly attempt to think of any simple plant, or flower, or wholesome weed, that, set in this foetid bed, could have its natural growth, or put its little leaves forth to the sun as GOD designed it. (619)

The *Tale of Two Cities* narrator preaches the fundamental moral that Dickens draws from the French Revolution as the tumbrels carry Sidney Carton to his execution: “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” (353). After Bounderby fires Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times* for speaking out against the harsh treatment of the Hands in Bounderby’s factory, the narrator intrudes to inveigh:

Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of Fact, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog’s-eared creeds, the poor you will have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections, to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament; or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you. (162-63)

Strikingly similar is an apostrophe addressed to “the powers that be” in *Our Mutual Friend*: “My lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, when you in the course of your dust-shovelling and cinder-raking have piled up a mountain of pretentious failure, you

must off with your honourable coats for the removal of it, and fall to the work with the power of all the queen's horses and all the queen's men, or it will come rushing down and bury us alive" (503).

While these didactic mini-sermons are relatively infrequent, coming only in outbursts when it seems the Dickens narrator cannot restrain himself, they are among the most bold-faced of the various types of intrusive discourse. Considering that they typically convey Dickens's own outspoken sentiments on matters closely related to the novels' central themes, they are perhaps the most truly "authorial" intrusions of all, as they do plainly express the opinions of Charles Dickens the man himself.

Descriptive Intrusions

Chatman notes that set descriptions are a relatively unobtrusive form of narrative discourse, but he asserts that "a narrator's overt presence *is* marked by explicit description, direct communications to a narratee about the setting that he needs to know" (219). According to Genette, like most overt forms of intrusion, descriptions force a pause in story time while the "discourse now" moves forward, serving to accentuate the presence of the narrator doing the describing. Typically, though, even lengthy and pronounced descriptions of story elements, "as constituents of the spatio-temporal universe of the story, are *diegetic*, and thus when we deal with them we are involved in the [properly] *narrative* discourse" (*Narrative Discourse* 94n). Since most straightforward descriptions of setting and character belong more to the *histoire* world, I do not here consider passages of straightforward description as intrusive discourse. The

Dickens narrator does, however, occasionally intrude in recognizable narrative discourse for descriptions of actual places—locations that exist in fact, outside the world of the story. When describing actually existing places, the Dickens narrator sometimes addresses the reader directly on the *discours* plane, effectively announcing, “This place, this street, or this building is one that you or I might visit in actuality.” In *Nicholas Nickleby* there is a three-paragraph present-tense description of a London street that would fit comfortably in the predominantly non-fictional *Sketches by Boz*. It begins:

In that quarter of London in which Golden Square is situated, there is a bygone, faded, tumble-down street, with two irregular rows of tall meagre houses, which seem to have stared each other out of countenance years ago. The very chimneys appear to have grown dismal and melancholy, from having had nothing better to look at than the chimneys over the way. Their tops are battered, and broken, and blackened with smoke; and, here and there, some taller stack than the rest, inclining heavily to one side, and toppling over the roof, seems to meditate taking revenge for half a century’s neglect, by crushing the inhabitants of the garrets beneath. (160)

This description of an actual locale gives this point in the narrative a sense of immediacy and lends authenticity to the narrative as a whole. But the tense-shift to the present marks the passage as narrative discourse, and the intrusion clearly serves Genette’s “communicating function,” as the narrator speaks to the reader on the extradiegetic level where Golden Square actually exists.

The third-person Dickens narrator also interrupts straightforward narration to speak self-consciously in the present tense when describing places that existed at the time in which a story is set but that have disappeared or been altered by the time of the narration. We find a glaring instance of this sort of descriptive intrusion in *Barnaby Rudge*:

In the venerable suburb—it was a suburb once—of Clerkenwell, towards that part of its confines which is nearest to the Charter House, and in one of those cool, shady streets, of which a few, widely scattered and dispersed, yet remain in such old parts of the metropolis . . . —in this quarter, and in a street of this description, the business of the present chapter lies.

At the time of which it treats, though only six-and-sixty years ago, a very large part of what is London now had no existence. . . . Although this part of town was then, as now, parcelled out in streets, and plentifully peopled, it wore a different aspect. There were gardens to many of the houses, and trees by the pavement side; with an air of freshness breathing up and down, which in these days would be sought in vain. Fields were nigh at hand, through which the New River took its winding course, and where there was merry haymaking in the summer time. Nature was not so far removed, or hard to get at, as in these days. . . . (30)

Here the present tense and the references to the “narrator’s now” in “these days” and in “this age” give the description obvious self-consciousness. We will see below that the self-consciously retrospective nature of this sort of descriptive intrusion has parallels in the fictive autobiographies, in *David Copperfield* especially.

Generalizations

Among the least obtrusive intrusions are those for “general commentary,” where the narrator interrupts strict narration to present observations on life or human nature in general. As Chatman puts it, authorial generalizations are “‘general truths,’ . . . philosophical observations that reach beyond the world of the fictional work into the real universe” (243). These generalizing comments are usually marked as *discours* utterances by the present tense, and their reference to the narrator’s and reader’s world beyond the narrative clearly places them on the extradiegetic level above the world of the story. Chatman distinguishes between factual generalizations, typically aphoristic observations

not likely to be disputed, such as Fielding's comment in *Tom Jones* that "Patience is a Virtue which is very apt to be fatigued by Exercise" (50), and quasi-proverbial "rhetorical generalizations," which present a "broad 'philosophical' kind of observation, one that relates to truth-conditions in a more contingent way. . . . Such assertions are arguable; they inhabit the universe of rhetoric rather than science" (244). Jane Austen's famous opening sentence in *Pride and Prejudice*, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife," is a prime example of "rhetorical" generalization (13). Factual or arguable, all authorial generalizations are effectively rhetorical in that authors usually present these "universal truths" with the intention that readers apply them to the specific characters or situations the narrator has in hand when making the generalization.

Authorial generalizations are plentiful in all of Dickens's third-person novels. Sometimes the generalizing intrusions are relatively discreet, woven into the narrative proper with little self-conscious to do, and very often they have the pithy, familiar ring of proverbial sayings. (Indeed, the Dickens narrator frequently incorporates common proverbs into his commentary on characters and events—see p. 78-79 below.) In describing James Harthouse's rapid success in party politics, the *Hard Times* narrator says that because Harthouse possessed a "tolerable management of the assumed honesty in dishonesty, *most effective and most patronized of the deadly sins*, he speedily came to be considered of much promise" (166 emphasis added). The generalization is inserted unobtrusively, parenthetically, in the middle of a sentence that is more or less straightforward narration. Chatman describes one particular form of discreet generalizing

comment as “supremely typical” of generalizations, that which “consists of a noun specified by a deictic (often ‘that’ as demonstrative pronoun) followed by a restrictive clause which clarifies the deixis” (246). For illustration Chatman quotes Balzac’s “Sarrasine”: “I was deep in one of those daydreams that overtake even the shallowest of men, in the midst of the most tumultuous parties.” Chatman explains, ““One of those daydreams; you know which kind I mean”” (246). Dickens is much given to this sort of generalizing intrusion, one instance of which we find in the narrator’s description of John Grueby in *Barnaby Rudge* as “one of those self-possessed, hard-headed, imperturbable fellows, who, if they are ever beaten at fisticuffs, or other kind of warfare, never know it, and go on coolly till they win” (265).

The Dickens narrator is also prone to more extensive, and thus more conspicuous generalizing intrusions. The *Barnaby Rudge* narrator intrudes at some length to generalize on the irresistible attraction of the mysterious:

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. (277)

Equally intrusive, albeit with tongue more in cheek, the *Edwin Drood* narrator generalizes in the more “rhetorical” sense when he says:

It has been often enough remarked that women have a curious power of

divining the characters of men, which would seem to be innate and instinctive; seeing that it is arrived at through no patient process of reasoning, that it can give no satisfactory or sufficient account of itself, and that it pronounces in the most confident manner even against accumulated observation on the part of the other sex. But it has not been quite so often remarked that this power (fallible, like every other human attribute), is for the most part absolutely incapable of self-revision; and that when it has delivered an adverse opinion which by all human lights is subsequently proved to have failed, it is undistinguishable from prejudice, in respect of its determination not to be corrected. Nay, the very possibility of contradiction or disproof, however remote, communicates to this feminine judgment from the first, in nine cases out of ten, the weakness attendant on the testimony of an interested witness: so personally and strongly does the fair diviner connect herself with her divination. (76)

The third-person *Bleak House* narrator offers a generalizing comment to round off his description of the shady characters Inspector Bucket searches out in Leicester Square: “howsoever bad the devil can be in fustian or smock-frock (and he can be very bad in both), he is a more designing, callous, and intolerable devil when he sticks a pin in his shirt-front, calls himself a gentleman, backs a card or colour, plays a game or so of billiards, and knows a little about bills and promissory notes, than in any other form he wears” (363). Here the narrator interjects one generalizing comment, “he can be very bad in both,” parenthetically into the larger generalization about the “designing, callous, and intolerable devil” in the guise of a gentleman.

Authorial generalizations are among the most common of all types of intrusion in third-person Dickens novels. In fact, intrusive generalizations are a stock feature of most novels with omniscient third-person narrators in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These intrusions presenting “general truths” are the one type of authorial intrusion still relatively common in fiction today as well, which is certainly a reflection of their

typically low level of self-consciousness.

Commentary on Characters and Events

One of the broadest categories of intrusion is overt authorial commentary on the primary story elements—places, characters and events. Overt commentary on *histoire* matters is one of the characteristic features of the Victorian novel: typical Victorian narrators, in the words of Joseph Warren Beach, have a “fondness for talking the characters over with the reader, taking sides, and letting the reader know what attitude he should take” (20). The Dickens narrator “talks over his characters” regularly with such intrusive comments as those on Mr. Dombey’s apparent unconcern after Florence runs away: “But this is sure; he does *not* think that he has lost her. He has no suspicion of the truth. He has lived too long shut up in his towering supremacy, seeing her, a patient gentle creature, in the path below it, to have any fear of that. Shaken as he is by his disgrace, he is not yet humbled to the level earth” (682). Although comments on story elements are often not marked as *discours* utterances by shifts in tense or by the first or second person, they tend to be recognizably intrusive all the same. In Milton Friedman’s landmark article on point of view, he suggests that in “editorial omniscience,” the point of view in all third-person Dickens novels, the narrator “will not only *report* what goes on in the minds of his characters, but he will also *criticize* it,” with the consequence that “the author’s voice . . . dominates the material” (1168-70). Or as E. M. Forster expresses it more colorfully, a narrator’s commenting on the characters in his or her narrative “beckon[s] the reader away from the people to an examination of the novelist’s mind.”

“Intimacy is gained but at the expense of illusion and nobility. It is like standing a man a drink so that he may not criticize your opinions” (57). Intrusive commentary upon characters and other elements of the *histoire* world in its baldest forms is considered today one of the most “criminal” forms of *telling*.

Chatman differentiates between two types of explicit commentary on story elements: interpretation, or “open explanation of the gist, relevance, or significance of a story element,” and judgment, which “expresses moral or other value opinions” (228). The third-person Dickens narrator intrudes with great frequency to offer both interpretive and judgmental commentary. At times the interpretive discourse simply translates or explains the language of the characters. When the *Dombey* narrator says that Captain Cuttle “left off biting his nails, and said, ‘Now, Wal’r, my boy, you may help me on with them slops,’” the narrator explains, “By which the Captain meant his coat and waistcoat” (214). In the same vein is when Mrs. Pipchin responds to an inquiry from Mr. Dombey about her health: “‘Thank you, Sir,’ said Mrs. Pipchin, ‘I am pretty well, considering.’ Mrs. Pipchin always used that form of words. It meant, considering her virtues, sacrifices, and so forth” (139). Less literally interpretive are intrusions where the narrator explains the behavior of the characters more generally. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, after establishing Mrs. Quilp “pining in her bower” with a half-dozen female visitors while her husband is away, the narrator explains how natural it is that the ladies should in these circumstances discuss the tendency of men to “tyrannize over the weaker sex, and the duty that developed upon the weaker sex to resist that tyranny and assert their rights and dignity”:

It was natural for four reasons; firstly because Mrs. Quilp being a young woman and notoriously under the dominion of her husband ought to be excited to rebel, secondly because Mrs. Quilp's parent was known to be laudably shrewish in her disposition and inclined to resist male authority, thirdly because each visitor wished to show for herself how superior she was in this respect to the generality of her sex, and fourthly because the company being accustomed to scandalise each other in pairs were deprived of their usual subject of conversation now that they were all assembled in close friendship, and had consequently no better employment than to attack the common enemy. (35)

This humorous four-part explanation certainly brings the presence of the omniscient narrator to the fore as he ticks off the different reasons for the conversation taking the course it does.

One common type of interpretative commentary involves the narrator's description of a character or other story element in a form of authorial summarizing that "epitomizes the quality of an existent [story element] or event." Chatman explains,

Any kind of direct characterization calls attention to a narrator's voice, but to encapsulate a character or setting in a word or brief phrase implies still greater powers, hence greater audibility. "What they were like," dispersed by hints throughout the text, becomes "explicitly what they are like—in a word," a word that the narrator, in synoptic mastery, presumes to apply. (225)

We find this type of summarizing commentary in *Oliver Twist* when the narrator says that Mr. Losberne "had grown fat: more from good-humour than from good living: and was as kind and hearty, and withal [an] eccentric . . . old bachelor" (189), or when he says of Bumble, "He had a decided propensity for bullying; derived no inconsiderable pleasure from the exercise of petty cruelty; and, consequently, was (it is needless to say) a coward" (242). This type of authorial summary can be difficult to distinguish from purely descriptive *historical* narration, and it is often as judgmental as it is "interpretive."

Unself-conscious as these intrusions tend to be, though, intrusive authorial presence is clearly indicated whenever the narrator encapsulates or summarizes the fundamental quality of any character or other story element in a word or phrase, for as Chatman points out, the narrator's voice becomes appreciably audible in its presumption of "synoptic mastery" in what amounts to pure *telling*.

Another form of interpretive commentary occurs when the narrator describes what characters or actions or other story elements *seem like*, often in mildly speculative "as if" and "as though" comparisons. In *Chuzzlewit*, Mr. Pecksniff's throat is long and "moral," rising "between two jutting heights of collar, serene and whiskerless before you. It seemed to say, on the part of Mr. Pecksniff, 'There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen, all is peace: a holy calm pervades me.' So did his hair. . ." (11-12). Or in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Mr. Quilp startles Nell by shouting "Halloa here!" loudly, and "with a suddenness, which made the child start as though a gun had been fired off at her ear" (52). At another point, Kit stares at Quilp "in a threatening manner as if he doubted whether he might not have been the cause of Nelly shedding tears, and felt more than half disposed to revenge the fact upon him on the mere suspicion" (59). Obviously, such interpretive comments emphasize the narrator's own perceptions. Interpretation of what *seems* to be relates not *histoire* fact, but the narrator's subjective opinion, and authorial opining in any form inevitably foregrounds the narrator's intrusive presence in the text.

Wayne Booth suggests that authors of all periods encourage their readers' proper judgment of characters and events through "direct authorial judgment," which ranges from "descriptive, evaluative adjectives" to extended commentary (183). Intrusive

pronouncements of authorial judgment of all stripes are abundant throughout the Dickens canon. We find evaluative descriptions when the *Chuzzlewit* narrator calls Jonas a “base-souled villain” (457), and in *Dombey*, where both Paul and Florence are “poor” and “little,” and where Walter Gay is “the generous, handsome, gallant-hearted youth” (439). The *Bleak House* narrator describes Sir Leicester Dedlock as “an honourable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man” (9). In *Dorrit* Casby is a “blundering old booby” (776), while Pet is “A lovely girl, with a frank face, and wonderful eyes; so large, so soft, so bright, set to such perfection in her kind good head. She was round and fresh and dimpled and spoilt” (16). The *Edwin Drood* narrator introduces Mr. Sapsea, “Accepting the Jackass as the type of self-sufficient stupidity and conceit . . . then the purest jackass in Cloisterham is Mr. Thomas Sapsea, Auctioneer” (23), and later describes him as a “solemn idiot” (101). The courtroom crowd in *A Tale of Two Cities* stare at the accused in a fascination which the narrator calls “Ogreish” (59). The madness of the mob sharpening hatchets, knives, and swords later in *A Tale of Two Cities* is described with evident judgment indeed: “as the frantic wielders of these weapons snatched them from the stream of sparks and tore away into the streets, the same red hue was red in their frenzied eyes;—eyes which any unbrutalised beholder would have given twenty years of life, to petrify with a well-directed gun” (249). The narrator’s intrusive opining presence is plain in all such instances of editorial judgment, whether in brief evaluative descriptions or in more extended commentary.

One special form of judgmental comment occurs when the narrator apologizes, usually with irony, for the “regrettable” actions or circumstances of the characters, a

tendency which Brombert notes as marked by confessional or apologetic phrases such as “It must be confessed . . .” or “It must be admitted. . . .” These and similarly apologetic phrases abound especially in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. When Pecksniff respectfully admonishes old Mr. Chuzzlewit for his neglect of Martin, the narrator says with (ironic) regret, “It is a lamentable fact, that as Mr. Pecksniff stood erect beside the bed, in all the dignity of Goodness, and addressed him thus, the old man cast an angry glance towards the candlestick, as if he were possessed by a strong inclination to launch it at his cousin’s head” (40-41). At another point the *Chuzzlewit* narrator says, “It is a melancholy fact; but it must be related, that Mr. Pinch’s sister was not at all ugly” (136). The judgmental commentary these apologetic intrusions deliver is of course ironic: it is generally safe for the reader to assume that any information the narrator prefaces with these telltale apologies is not to be “lamented” at all, but read with a smile.

Interpretive or judgmental authorial commentary is more patently self-conscious when the narrator’s comments are exclamations, a common tendency of the third-person Dickens narrator that George Brook attributes to the influence of Carlyle (17, 48). When Martin Chuzzlewit observes an American orator at a meeting of the Watertoast Sympathisers, speaking indignantly about British tyranny before the American Revolution, the narrator exclaims, “Oh but it was a clincher for the British Lion, it was!” indicating interpretively that the speaker thoroughly “vanquished” the English in his eloquence (359). The excitement in this explanatory comment belongs to the narrator himself, rendering his voice, and thus his authorial presence, very prominent indeed. The *Dombey* narrator reveals his intrusive authorial presence in like fashion when he offers

judgment on Florence's awkwardness when alone with her father: "She yearned towards him, and yet shrunk from his approach. Unnatural emotion in a child, innocent of wrong! Unnatural the hand that had directed the sharp plough, which furrowed up her gentle nature for the sowing of its seeds!" (482). Any time the narrator presents a judgmental opinion the intrusion is obvious—the intrusion becomes all the more obvious when the narrator's passion is indicated through exclamation.

Even more self-conscious are exclamatory apostrophes. As noted above, apostrophes addressed directly to the reader tend to be didactic. The intrusion after the death of Jo in *Bleak House*, where the narrator says, "Dead! Dead, your Majesty. Dead my lords and gentlemen . . ." is an apostrophe addressed to the reader, and so are the speeches cited above as didactic intrusions from *Dombey and Son* on "unnatural vices," from *A Tale of Two Cities* on the dangers of "crushing humanity out of shape," and from *Hard Times* on the dangers facing "Utilitarian economists" (pp. 48-49 above).

Apostrophes addressed to *histoire* characters are often didactic as well, but they are typically less "shrill" in delivering Dickens's primary themes than those addressed to the reader and tend, naturally, to present commentary focused more on the story world itself. In *Hard Times*, for instance, after describing the training that led M'Choakumchild to view pupils as empty vessels he should cram full of Facts, the narrator says the schoolmaster went to work "looking into all the vessels ranged before him, one after another to see what they contained." The narrator apostrophizes: "Say, good M'Choakumchild. When from thy boiling store, thou shalt fill each jar brim full by-and-by, dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within—or

sometimes only maim him and distort him!” (8). Or in *Bleak House*, when the clerk Mr. Guppy has the temerity to tell Lady Dedlock that she bears a striking resemblance to Esther Summerson, the third-person narrator interrupts the dialogue to exclaim, “Young man of the name of Guppy! There have been times, when ladies lived in stronghold, and had unscrupulous attendants within call, when that poor life of yours would not have been worth a minute’s purchase, with those beautiful eyes looking at you as they look at this moment” (406).

Monod notes that the tendency to apostrophizing characters becomes habitual from *Chuzzlewit* and *Dombey* forward. Speaking of *Chuzzlewit*, Monod says that “Tom Pinch becomes for the author a traveling companion to whom he imparts his own thoughts as they go along together, and whom he occasionally cheers by a word of comfort or friendship” (237). In *Bleak House* it is Jo that the narrator “befriends” and addresses regularly, and though the focus of each apostrophe centers on Jo’s specific *histoire* situation, the commentary is only one rung lower on the scale of “shrill didacticism” than apostrophes addressed to the reader. Reinforcing the narrative’s illustration of the mistreatment of homeless children such as Jo, a constable explains to Mr. Snagsby that it is his duty to see that Jo “moves on,” and the narrator says,

Do you hear, Jo? It is nothing to you or to any one else, that the great lights of the parliamentary sky have failed for some few years, in this business, to set you the example of moving on. The one grand recipe remains for you—the profound philosophical prescription—the be-all and the end-all of your strange existence upon earth. Move on! You are by no means to move off, Jo, for the great lights can’t at all agree about that. Move on! (265)

The Dickens narrator also apostrophizes Time and elements of nature or of the narrative’s

setting. The third-person narrative in *Bleak House* provides illustration of these apostrophes as well. After Nemo/Captain Hawdon is buried:

Come night, come darkness, for you cannot come too soon, or stay too long, by such a place as this! Come, straggling lights into the windows of the ugly houses; and you who do iniquity therein, do it at least with this dread scene shut out! Come, flame of gas, burning so sullenly above the iron gate, on which the poisoned air deposits its witch-ointment slimy to the touch! It is well that you should call to every passer-by, "Look here!" (151)

It goes without saying that any apostrophe highlights the presence of the author intruding upon his story to address the reader, one of the characters, or any element of the *histoire* world or the "real world" beyond the story.

While the less ostentatious intrusions offering comments of interpretation or judgment may not be so objectionable to readers today, from our modern perspective intrusions of exclamation and apostrophe are indeed among the most "regrettable" of all the authorial intrusions in Dickens: they are obvious, they are plainly rhetorical, they are at times grossly sentimental, and they are now long out of fashion. Still, the passion and the earnestness of these intrusions of the third-person authorial persona may make them the most characteristically "Dickensian" of all the various types of intrusions.

Questions

Just as evidently as with exclamations and apostrophes, the narrator intrudes self-consciously whenever he poses a stated question in the text (literally, in an interrogative statement). The third-person Dickens narrator raises a variety of questions: some addressed ostensibly to himself, some addressed to the reader, some rhetorical, some

answered as soon as they are asked in hypophora, some that appear truly speculative and remain unanswered, some that facilitate commentary, some that heighten suspense, and some that structure specific units of the narrative. In Dickens's early fiction there are comparatively few literal questions raised by the narrator, but from *Martin Chuzzlewit* forward the Dickens narrator intrudes to ask questions with great regularity.

The Dickens narrator's rhetorical questions, questions to which no answers are expected or needed, are often rhetorical also in that they make suasive points closely tied to the work's primary themes. In *Oliver Twist*, for example, one obvious theme is that "the system's" treatment of orphans in the 1830s was deplorable. When Oliver has outgrown the juvenile workhouse and appears before the parish board, one of the board members asks Oliver if he knows that he has no parents and was brought up "by the parish." Oliver "weeps bitterly" and the board member asks, "What are you crying for?" The narrator intrudes to add, "And to be sure it was very extraordinary. What *could* the boy be crying for?" (9). The answer is obvious, of course, and thus the question is heavily ironic and plainly rhetorical. In *Hard Times* the didactic agenda is evident in a series of facetious questions raised after Gradgrind and Bounderby condemn the Coketown Hands as "a bad lot," spoiled, ungrateful, "eternally dissatisfied and unmanageable":

Is it possible, I wonder, that there was any analogy between the case of the Coketown population and the case of the little Gradgrinds? Surely none of us in our sober senses and acquainted with figures are to be told at this time of day that one of the foremost elements in the existence of the Coketown working-people had been for scores of years deliberately set at nought? That there was any Fancy in them demanding to be brought into healthy existence instead of struggling on in convulsions? (24-25)

The answers to these questions are the fundamental theme of the novel: all people, children, laborers and others alike, need relief from the grind of their duties and an outlet for exercising their imaginations.

Many of the narrator's questions serve the apparent purpose of heightening the drama of the narrative moment. These highly gratuitous intrusions afford particular illustration of the narrator putting himself on stage as the theatrical performer that Robert Garis describes. Questions intensify an air of mystery in the curious behavior of the choirmaster, Jasper, in *Edwin Drood* when he meets Durdles at the Cloisterham graveyard late at night: "Why does he move so softly to-night? No outward reason is apparent for it. Can there be any sympathetic reason crouching darkly within him?" (103). The narrator asks and answers questions to heighten the drama in relating Tulkinghorn's murder in *Bleak House*: "What's that? Who fired a gun or pistol? Where was it? . . . Has Mr. Tulkinghorn been disturbed?" And after people look into the lawyer's chambers and "shriek and fly" and raise an alarm in the street: "What does it mean?" (663-64). Though it is not made clear at this point who fired the pistol, "what it means," of course, is that Tulkinghorn has been shot. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, after depicting the villagers near the Evremonde estate milling about the fountain in "grim curiosity and surprise," the narrator intrudes to ask (and answer),

What did all this portend, and what portended the swift hoisting-up of Monsieur Gabelle behind a servant on horseback, and the conveying away of the said Gabelle (double-laden though the horse was), at a gallop, like a new version of the German ballad of Leonora?

It portended that there was one stone face too many, up at the château. (122)

He then explains that in addition to the faces chiseled into the chateau's stone facade,

there is now also the lifeless face of its master on his pillow, the marquis having been stabbed in the heart by an assassin. Clearly, asking and answering questions in this fashion is a heavy-handed means of giving the information related in the answers greater dramatic intensity.

Intrusions for questions asked and answered are also sometimes vehicles for commentary on characters and other story elements. In *Little Dorrit*, the narrator tells the reader that Henry Gowan has difficulty deciding whether to disdain or encourage friendship with the scoundrel Blandois (Rigaud). Upon learning that his wife dislikes Blandois, Gowan befriends him and praises his exaggerated manners as fashionably elegant. The narrator asks, “Why this perversity, if it were not in a generous fit?—which it was not. Why should Gowan, very much the superior of Blandois of Paris, and very well able to pull that prepossessing gentleman to pieces and find out the stuff he was made of, take up with such a man?” The question is answered with interpretive commentary: “In the first place,” says the narrator, Gowan is asserting his independence before his wife, a matter of some doubt because her father has just paid his debts. “In the second place, he opposed the prevalent feeling, because . . . he was an ill-conditioned man,” a disgruntled unsuccessful artist who enjoys encouraging Blandois’s “elegancies” as a means of ridiculing his genteel companions (473). In *Little Dorrit*, too, the narrator asks and answers questions as a vehicle for didactic pronouncements. After describing the crowded and unsanitary streets and homes in working class London on one Sunday morning, the narrator asks, “What secular want could the million or so of human beings whose daily labor, six days in the week, lay among these Arcadian objects, from the

sweet sameness of which they had no escape between the cradle and the grave—what secular want could they possibly have upon their seventh day? Clearly they could want nothing but a stringent policeman” (29). The answer here is ironic, but the effect of both question and answer is of course to emphasize Dickens’s compassion for the working class.

Some questions the narrator poses appear to be truly speculative—that is, they remain unanswered, and it would seem that neither the narrator nor the reader is capable of ever answering them. In truth, seemingly speculative questions often reveal their own implicit answers, as is the case in *Dombey* when Edith shies away from Carker’s congratulatory kiss after her wedding and the narrator asks, “But, does Edith feel still . . . that Carker knows her thoroughly, and reads her right, and that she is more degraded by his knowledge of her, than by aught else? Is it for this reason that her haughtiness shrinks beneath his smile, like snow within the hand that grasps it firmly, and that her imperious glance droops in meeting his, and seeks the ground?” (428). The knowledge Carker possesses is that Edith detests Dombey and is secretly pained and ashamed that she has sacrificed herself in a loveless marriage contrived by her mother. The reader’s familiarity with Carker’s and Edith’s history ensures that this question suggests its own affirmative answer. More truly speculative are the sort of question that the *Dombey* narrator asks regarding Mr. Dombey after Florence runs away to Captain Cuttle’s: “What is the proud man doing, while the days go by? Does he ever think of his daughter, or wonder where she is gone? Does he suppose she has come home, and is leading her old life in the weary house? No one can answer for him. He has never uttered her name, since” (681).

While the reader might hope that Dombey thinks about his absent daughter often, these questions remain unanswered, and considering his previous history with Florence, they certainly invite widely different possible answers.

Occasionally the Dickens narrator's questions help with matters of structure. Questions sometimes aid in smoothing gaps between different installments of the narrative. The March 1865 number of *Our Mutual Friend* ends with Bella Wilfer's confession of the fear that newly acquired wealth has made Mr. Boffin "suspicious, capricious, hard, tyrannical, unjust." The April installment opens with a question recalling the close of the preceding chapter: "Were Bella Wilfer's bright and ready little wits at fault, or was the Golden Dustman [Boffin] passing through the furnace of proof and coming out dross? Ill news travels fast. We shall know full soon" (460-61). And frequently, abrupt narrative shifts are effected with questions, especially as a novel approaches closure in its final pages. In the last chapter of *Dombey* the narrator describes the now-penitent Dombey's happy outcome and then changes the scene by asking about Captain Cuttle's shop, the Wooden Midshipman, "And how goes the Wooden Midshipman in these changed days?" (830). Followed, of course, by a brief description of Cuttle's "happy ending" as well. On a larger scale in the same vein, the final chapter of *Hard Times* is organized around questions projecting the futures of the principal characters in that novel, asking what each sees "in futurity" and answering what is and is not to be.

Through all their varied uses in the text locally, most of the questions raised by the third-person Dickens narrator reinforce the narrator's intimacy with the characters

and the world of the narrative. When the narrator weighs in to ask, what, indeed, could make Oliver Twist cry, or when he appears to wonder about Edith Dombey's thoughts when Carker kisses her on her wedding day, it is as though the author sees the events unfolding before his mind's eye as he writes, and while he observes and describes them he is moved to ponder the curiosities his characters suggest to him as they occur.

Questions heighten the intimacy even more between narrator and reader. When the narrator asks who it is that sits in tears with Mrs. Pipchin or what it is that causes such grim curiosity in Evremonde's neighbors, the effect is as if the narrator is turning bodily to face the reader directly as he asks each question. And of course, as the person raising the question necessarily reveals his or her intrusive presence as the speaking authorial persona, all the narrator's questions clearly belong to the plane of *discours* utterance indicated by the implicit "I" of the questioning narrator, and for most questions, the "you" reader as well.

Speculative Intrusions

Easily the most common intrusions of the third-person Dickens narrator are those offering speculation on characters' thoughts or motivations or on events that might have happened but did not. Speculative intrusions, a standard feature of "editorial omniscience," are often marked by such modalizing words as "maybe," "perhaps," "whether," "if," "if only," "possibly," and "probably," and by conditional constructions and subjunctive verb forms—"could," "were," "had," "had not," "would have," etc. We see these typical markings in an intrusion during the description of one *Pickwick* hunting

episode: “On they crept, and very quietly they *would have* advanced, *if* Mr. Winkle, in the performance of some very intricate evolutions with his gun, *had not* accidentally fired, at the most critical moment, over the boy’s head, exactly in the very spot where the tall man’s brain *would have been, had he been* there instead” (275 emphasis added).

Speculative intrusions often seem less obtrusive than other, more pointedly self-conscious types of intrusion, but as they are typically presented in conditional expressions, they tend to identify themselves plainly as narrative discourse.

Some speculative intrusions support the illusion of the narrator as “historian” or mere observer by suggesting limits to the narrator’s range of knowledge. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, Newman Noggs is said to have an unusual facial expression when his boss, Ralph Nickleby, learns of his brother’s death. As the narrator relates,

Newman fell a little behind his master, and his face was curiously twisted as by a spasm; but whether of paralysis, or grief, or inward laughter, nobody but himself could possibly explain. The expression of a man’s face is commonly a help to his thoughts, or glossary on his speech; but the countenance of Newman Noggs, in his ordinary moods, was a problem which no stretch of ingenuity could solve. (19)

The implication is that the narrator is not privy to the inner workings of Newman Noggs and thus is reduced to speculation. The narrator’s limited knowledge is certainly understandable when the *Old Curiosity Shop* narrator speculates on why Mr. Garland’s pony stops six houses short of his intended destination and refuses to move. After urging the pony forward to no avail, Mr. Garland, “having exhausted his powers of persuasion, alighted to lead him, whereupon the pony, perhaps because he held this to be a sufficient concession, perhaps because he happened to catch sight of the [correct] brass-plate, or perhaps because he was in a spiteful humour, darted off with the old lady and stopped at

the right house, leaving the old gentleman to come panting on behind” (162-63). As they are here, “perhaps” conjectures and speculative intrusions more generally are often vehicles for the Dickens narrator’s characteristic tongue-in-cheek humor.

Quite frequently, though, the narrator’s speculations are less truly speculative than they first appear, and in many cases speculative discourse offers a specialized form of interpretive or judgmental commentary. When Jasper calls on Rosa Bud in *Edwin Drood* at a time he is sure to find her alone, the narrator says, “If he had chosen his time for finding her at a disadvantage, he could have done no better. Perhaps he has chosen it” (168). The first sentence offers speculation on the propitious timing of Jasper’s visit; the second presents what appears to be legitimate conjecture about Jasper’s care in planning his visit. Given the reader’s prior knowledge of Jasper’s devious nature and his designs on Rosa, however, this second speculation seems more a suggestive hint that Jasper has indeed carefully timed his visit so that Rosa cannot escape seeing him. Of the same order is the intrusion in *Our Mutual Friend* speculating that Eugene Wrayburn volunteers to scout out his meeting-place with the police inspector in their watch for Jesse Hexam so he can spy on Lizzie Hexam. As Eugene passes Lizzie’s window, through which he has been told she can be seen, “He could see the light of the fire shining through the window. Perhaps it drew him on to look in. Perhaps he had come out with the express intention” (163). Also in *Our Mutual Friend*, the narrator says that Boffin “took his stick from the arm on which he nursed it, and hit a straight sharp rap at the air with its head. Possibly the wooden countenance of Mr. Silas Wegg was incorporeally before him at those moments, for he hit with intense satisfaction” (586). In each case the speculation seems

highly suggestive. Even more suggestive are speculations such as that offered when Nicholas Nickleby becomes uncharacteristically loquacious with Mr. Crummles at a public house, “stimulated perhaps, not only by his natural disposition, but by the spirits and water he sipped very plentifully, or the snuff he took in large quantities from a piece of whitey-brown paper in his waistcoat pocket. He laid open his affairs without the smallest reserve, and descanted at some length upon the merits of his company. . .” (280). This intrusion insinuates very plainly that alcohol and snuff have loosened Nicholas’s tongue, making the speculation far more suggestive than truly speculative.

Whereas some speculative intrusions imply limits in the narrator’s range of knowledge about his characters, others suggest the narrator’s complete omniscience. The Dickens narrator intrudes very often with conjecture about what might have happened had circumstances been contrary to their actual state. After Martin Chuzzlewit tells Mary Graham that she has not changed during their time apart unless it is “only to be more beautiful than ever,” the narrator speculates,

Had she been of the common metal of love-worn young ladies, she would have denied this in her most interesting manner; and would have told him that she knew she had become a perfect fright; or that she had wasted away with weeping and anxiety; or that she was dwindling gently into an early grave; or that her mental sufferings were unspeakable; or would either by tears or words, or a mixture of both, have furnished him with some other information to that effect, and made him as miserable as possible. But she had been reared up in a sterner school than the minds of most young girls are formed in. . . . (235)

As the narrator indicates, Mary is not of the “common metal of love-worn young ladies,” and this intrusion speculating on what Mary might have said were she a different kind of girl essentially provides the narrator a vehicle for humorous commentary on young

women more generally.

Just as often the Dickens narrator intrudes to explain what would have happened had unforeseen circumstances not altered the pending course of events, indicating true omniscience indeed, as in the following passage from *Barnaby Rudge*:

If Joseph Willet, the denounced and proscribed of 'prentices, had happened to be at home when his father's courtly guest [Mr. Chester] presented himself before the Maypole door—that is, if it had not perversely chanced to be one of the half-dozen days in the whole year on which he was at liberty to absent himself for as many hours without question or reproach—he would have contrived, by hook or crook, to dive to the very bottom of Mr. Chester's mystery, and to come at his purpose with as much certainty as though he had been his confidential adviser.
(98)

By explaining so confidently and thoroughly what Joe Willet would have done had he been home—the speculation continues for another 200 words—the intrusion indicates the narrator's absolute omniscience: he knows exactly what Joe's thoughts, motives, and actions *would have been*. And as Chatman notes, when “narrators assume the power to report what a character did *not* in fact [do,] think or say, the mention of possible but un consummated events calls attention . . . to the artifice of the narrative process itself” (225). In other words, whenever the narrator speculates on what *might have been*, the narrator's intrusive authorial presence is highly evident indeed.

Some speculative intrusions foreground the narrator's omniscience still more and provide a vehicle of authorial commentary going beyond mere suggestiveness. One such intrusion occurs when the *Little Dorrit* narrator speculates on the prospect of Young John Chivery writing a satire about family pride:

If Young John Chivery had had the inclination and the power to write a satire on family pride, he would have had no need to go for an avenging

illustration out of the family of his beloved [Little Dorrit]. He would have found it amply in that gallant brother and that dainty sister, so steeped in mean experiences, and so loftily conscious of the family name; so ready to beg or borrow from the poorest, to eat of anybody's bread, spend anybody's money, drink from anybody's cup and break it afterwards. To have painted the sordid facts of their lives, and they throughout invoking the death's head apparition of the family gentility to come and scare their benefactors, would have made Young John a satirist of the first water. (225)

Or in *Hard Times*, Tom Gradgrind shares with James Harthouse his pride in manipulating Louisa into marrying Josiah Bounderby for his own selfish purposes. Calling Tom a “whelp,” the narrator says, “The whelp went home and went to bed. If he had had any sense of what he had done that night, and had been less of a whelp and more of a brother, he might have turned short on the road, might have gone down to the ill-smelling river that was dyed black, might have gone to bed in it for good and all, and have curtained his head forever with its filthy waters” (137). Both of these intrusions very plainly use authorial speculation as a means of presenting judgmental commentary. Young John Chivery will not and would not write such a satire on family pride, Tom Gradgrind does not and would not recognize how despicably selfish and “utilitarian” he is. The rhetoric is plain, and the narrator's intrusive voice is supremely evident in this sort of speculation presenting what the narrator apparently feels *should* happen.

While the Dickens narrator does present some legitimately speculative intrusive conjectures, most of these most frequent intrusions are vehicles of rhetoric more than true speculation. Most speculative intrusions reinforce the reader's appreciation of the narrator's omniscient understanding of his characters and their world, and most are rhetorical in that they are clearly intended to suggest or to indicate outright the author's

interpretive or judgmental knowledge and opinions of his characters and their motivations.

Allusions

Narrative discourse is also evident whenever the narrator refers or alludes to literary works or to persons or events from history, legend, or folklore that do not figure actively in the *histoire* narrative. When the *Little Dorrit* narrator says that Mr. Tinkler finds Mrs. General “on a little square of carpet, so extremely diminutive in reference to the size of her stone and marble floor, that she looked . . . as if she had come into possession of the enchanted piece of carpet, bought for forty purses by one of the three princes in the Arabian Nights, and had that moment been transported on it, at a wish, into a palatial saloon with which it had no connexion” the reference to *The Arabian Nights* is obviously an extradiegetic communication between the “I” narrator and the “you” reader invoking a well-known text from the “real world” to aid description (458).

Especially in the early novels, the Dickens narrator makes topical references and allusions to actual persons and events, a habit that Monod considers a regrettable lingering effect of Dickens’s training as a journalist (28). Without the aid of footnotes, the modern reader is likely to miss the full implications, if not the central point, of such allusions as the *Chuzzlewit* narrator’s description of Bailey, after Mrs. Todgers has angrily “paid him a manual compliment on the head,” “guarding his head, on a principle invented by Mr. Thomas Cribb” (144). Few readers today would know that Tom Cribb was the British bare knuckle boxing champion from 1809-1822, famous for legitimizing

the defensive technique of “milling [fighting] on the retreat” (Cyber Boxing). There are of course references and allusions to better-known historical figures as well. In *Little Dorrit* Merdle welcomes Mrs. Sparkler with his hand retreating into his sleeve until he gives her “such a superfluity of coat-cuff that it was like being received by the popular conception of Guy Fawkes” (592). In *Hard Times*, coarse, homespun Stephen Blackpool thanks Rachael for a loan of two pounds in a manner that “had a grace in it that Lord Chesterfield could not have taught his son in a century” (160). In *Martin Chuzzlewit* there is allusion to Thomas Jefferson as “him—oh noble patriot, with many followers!—who dreamed of Freedom in a slave’s embrace, and waking sold her offspring and his own in public markets” (341). There are references to figures from Greek antiquity in *Dombey and Son*: the narrator describes Captain Cuttle’s nautical goods shop as a “callous, obdurate, conceited Midshipman, intent on his own discoveries, and caring as little for what went on about him, terrestrially, as Archimedes at the taking of Syracuse” (254), and Sir Barnet Skettles, fond of appearing intimate with the famous and mighty, is said to offer acquaintances introductions to famous persons, “of whom Sir Barnet had no more personal knowledge than of Ptolemy the Great” (333).²

There are also what amount to allusions in references to common proverbs. Often, standard aphorisms are introduced as proverbial, as when the *Barnaby Rudge* narrator says, “Misfortunes, saith the adage, never come singly” (242). Even more often Dickens manipulates and plays with the language and even the logic of standard

² The most complete catalogue of references and allusions of all sorts is in Vol. 3 of George Newlin’s *Everyone in Dickens*: Index IX lists historical figures (464-524), and Index XI covers “Biblical, Literary, Musical and Mythological References” (539-90). Monod offers a workable survey of the range of Dickens’s literary allusions in the chapter on “Dickens’ Culture” in *Dickens the Novelist* (30-46).

proverbs, as Bryan and Mieder demonstrate in *The Proverbial Charles Dickens* (3-4, 30-33). One instance of this play occurs when the *Chuzzlewit* narrator alludes to the proverb usually attributed to Ben Franklin, “Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise”: “At length it became high time to remember the first clause of that great discovery made by the ancient philosopher, for securing health, riches, and wisdom; the infallibility of which has been for generations verified by the enormous fortunes, constantly amassed by chimney-sweepers and other persons who get up early and go to bed betimes” (83). As with topical allusions to now-forgotten historical figures, there are many references and allusions to proverbial sayings that are now equally obscure, so the allusions are lost on the modern readers when the proverbs are not introduced as “adages” (in which case the unannounced and unrecognized proverbs would still be readily identifiable as intrusive generalizations). When the narrator’s references or allusions to proverbial sayings are recognizable, though, they do indicate the narrator’s direct communication with the reader on an extradiegetic level where both are familiar with the proverbial sayings in the world beyond the text.

Literary allusions are abundant in all Dickens novels, and following the Victorian norm, the references are typically to works nineteenth-century English readers would know well (Wheeler 25). After the Bible and *The Book of Common Prayer*, easily his two favorite mines for allusions, Dickens refers or alludes most often to Shakespeare (*Hamlet* and *Macbeth* especially), *The Arabian Nights*, *Punch*, fairy tales and nursery rhymes, and literary works such as *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Paradise Lost*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and the poetry of Byron, Robert Burns, and Thomas Moore—all of which typical

Victorian readers would find familiar. Far from serving to establish his “authority” or erudition in “allusions as display,” erudition that he did not possess and never seemed really to desire, Dickens fully intended his readers to recognize and understand the implications of his allusions from their “shared culture” in fulfillment of the “reader-narrator contract” that Michael Wheeler describes in *The Art of Allusion in Victorian Fiction* (25).

The Dickens narrator’s allusions serve a variety of rhetorical functions. Often they simply enhance description of characters and other story elements, as in the passage cited above describing Mrs. General on her “Arabian” carpet. A descriptive literary reference more freighted with structural significance occurs when the Dombey party enters the church for Paul’s baptism and the narrator says, “Little Paul might have asked with Hamlet ‘into my grave?’ so chill and earthy was the place,” clearly foreshadowing the grave awaiting Paul eleven chapters later (58). More interpretive is the nursery-rhyme reference summarizing Gradgrind’s and Bounderby’s indignation at the working class’s “having plenty” and always complaining:

In short, it was the moral of the old nursery fable:

There was an old woman, and what do you think?
 She lived upon nothing but victuals and drink;
 Victuals and drink were the whole of her diet,
 And yet this old woman would NEVER be quiet” (*Hard Times* 24).

Judgmental commentary is offered through allusion in *Edwin Drood* after the “immoveable waiter” serves at table with supercilious dignity and scorns his fellow, the “flying waiter”: “It was like a highly-finished miniature painting representing My Lords of the Circumlocutional Department, Commandership-in-Chief of any sort, Government.

It was quite an edifying little picture to be hung on the line in the National Gallery” (93). The allusion here is to the Circumlocution Office, the model of bureaucratic officiousness and ineptitude in Dickens’s own *Little Dorrit*. More plainly didactic is the apostrophe combining references to the Bible and to Arabian tales when the death-carts bear Sydney Carton and fifty-one others to the guillotine in *A Tale of Two Cities*:

Six tumbrils roll along the streets. Change these back again to what they were, thou powerful enchanter, Time, and they shall be seen to be the carriages of absolute monarchs, the equipages of feudal nobles, the toilettes of flaring Jezebels, the churches that are not my father’s house but dens of thieves, the huts of millions of starving peasants! No; the great magician who majestically works out the appointed order of the Creator, never reverses his transformations. “If thou be changed into this shape by the will of God,” say the seers to the enchanted, in the wise Arabian stories, “then remain so! But, if thou wear this form through mere passing conjuration, then resume thy former aspect!” (353)

“Churches that are not my father’s house but dens of thieves” alludes, of course, to the temple Jesus clears of traders in *John 2: 13-16*, and the wise Arabian stories are, of course, too, *The Arabian Nights* or *The Tales of the Genii*. In the novels of Dickens’s maturity, biblical allusions especially play an integral role in the rhetoric supporting and conveying the novels’ central themes. *Hard Times*, for instance, is essentially structured around the biblical implications of the three book titles, “Sowing,” “Reaping,” and “Garnering”: what Gradgrind and the Utilitarians sow in their attention to Facts and statistics at the expense of the humanity of the less fortunate, so shall they reap. As Wheeler suggests, fire imagery and apocalyptic symbolism combine with an abundance of biblical allusions to hint that what the Utilitarians sow leads to “hell on earth” (65-66).

It is evident that Dickens never cared to impress with an abundance of erudite allusions, nor was he bashful about making the most simple and obvious allusions.

Nursery rhymes and fairy tales were among his favorite sources for allusion right up to the end of his career. The gap between two chapters in the final installment of the unfinished *Edwin Drood* is bridged by references to Mr. Tartar's upstairs "garden in the air" as "a marvellous country that came into sudden bloom like the country on the summit of the magic bean-stalk" (187-88, 189). Sophisticated or simple, obvious or obscure, all allusions necessarily reveal the intrusive presence of the narrator making the references to matters beyond the world of the narrative, references belonging to the extradiegetic "real world," or at least the real libraries, of the author and the Victorian reader.

Figurative Language

One feature that makes Dickens's prose so "inimitable" is his imaginative and playful use of language. Along with his genius for creating wonderfully eccentric characters, it is the sheer creative exuberance of his playful narrative voice that makes Dickens so "Dickensian." In response to criticism of his imaginative excesses by one M. Tame, Dickens once stated his theory on the importance of an author's "fanciful treatment" of his *histoire* materials:

It does not seem to me to be enough to say of any description that it is the exact truth. The exact truth must be there; but the merit or art in the narrator, is the manner of stating the truth. . . . And in these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like—to make the thing, in short, a sort of sum in reduction that any miserable creature can do in that way—I have an idea (really founded on the love of what I profess), that the very holding of popular literature through a kind of popular dark age, may depend on such fanciful treatment" (qtd. in John Forster 2: 349-50)

It is in large part this “fanciful treatment” and persistent verbal playfulness—the apparent pleasure that Dickens found in manipulating language in his own distinctively droll fashion—that makes his novels so “theatrical” in Garis’s estimation.

One of the most common avenues for the Dickens narrator’s linguistic play is figurative language: almost all of Dickens’s writings, fiction and non-fiction alike, are thoroughly saturated with striking and original figures. Naturally, the most common of Dickens’s figurative tropes are similes and metaphors. The Dickens narrator often presents a short, concise simile or metaphor for purposes of description or characterization, or as a means of offering interpretive or judgmental commentary. In *Barnaby Rudge*, John Willet sometimes experiences mild difficulty in breathing while he sleeps, “such as a carpenter meets with when he is planing and comes to a knot” (249). In *Dombey and Son* Carker grins “like a shark” (296); later, Florence is “tossed on an uneasy sea of doubt and hope; and Mr. Carker, like a scaly monster of the deep, swam down below, and kept his shining eye upon her” (385). Twemlow, in *Our Mutual Friend*, is “an innocent piece of dinner furniture” (6), and Mrs. Crisparkle and her sister are matching pieces of Dresden china in *Edwin Drood* (42). In *A Tale of Two Cities* the death-carts carry “the day’s wine to La Guillotine” (353), which the narrator calls elsewhere “the National Razor” (260, 279).

There are also more extended figurative comparisons, such as the description of Mr. Pickwick succumbing to the somniferous influence of wine after dinner:

He had undergone the ordinary transitions from the height of conviviality to the depth of misery, and from the depth of misery, to the height of conviviality. Like a gas lamp in the street, with the wind in the pipe, he had exhibited for a moment an unnatural brilliancy: then sank so low as to

be scarcely discernible: after a short interval, he had burst out again, to enlighten for a moment, then flickered with an uncertain, staggering sort of light, and then gone out altogether. His head was sunk upon his bosom; and perpetual snoring, with a partial choke, occasionally, were the only audible indications of the great man's presence. (23)

In *Little Dorrit* Mrs. General is carefully insulated from anything disturbing, passionate, or surprising in any way, and the narrator says that she covers everything before her with varnish:

she dipped the smallest of brushes into the largest of pots, and varnished the surface of every object that came under consideration. The more cracked it was, the more Mrs. General varnished it. There was varnish in Mrs. General's voice, varnish in Mrs. General's touch, an atmosphere of varnish round Mrs. General's figure. Mrs. General's dreams ought to have been varnished. . . . (438-39)

Following simile and metaphor, personification is the most frequent figure of the third-person Dickens narrator. In *Martin Chuzzlewit* leaves blow "scared" before an "angry" and "malicious" wind: "they fled away, pell-mell, some here, some there, rolling over each other, whirling round and round upon their thin edges, taking frantic flights into the air, and playing all manner of extraordinary gambols in the extremity of their distress" (8). In *Our Mutual Friend*, "Some despairing gingerbread that had been vainly trying to dispose of itself all over the country, and had cast a quantity of dust upon its head in its mortification, again appealed to the public from an infirm booth. So did a heap of nuts, long, long exiled from Barcelona, and yet speaking English so indifferently as to call fourteen of themselves a pint" (689-90). The Coketown factories are "Fairy palaces" that create "monstrous serpents of smoke" outside, while inside great machines, "melancholy mad elephants, polished and oiled up for the day's monotony, were at their heavy exercise again" (*Hard Times* 69). The scattered buildings at the outskirts of

London are “the furthest outposts of the invading army of bricks and mortar” in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (125). In the London the *Nickleby* narrator describes, “Life and death went hand in hand; wealth and poverty stood side by side; repletion and starvation laid them down together” (409). The *Tale of Two Cities* narrator mixes metaphor and personification in his figuring of the hunger that presses the French masses into “the mill that grinds young people old”:

Hunger was pushed out of the tall houses, in the wretched clothing that hung upon poles and lines; Hunger was patched into them with straw and rag and wood and paper; Hunger was repeated in every fragment of the small modicum of firewood that the man sawed off; Hunger stared down from the smokeless chimneys, and started up from the filthy street that had no offal, among its refuse, of anything to eat. Hunger was the inscription on the baker’s shelves, written in every small loaf of his scanty stock of bad bread; at the sausage-shop, in every dead-dog preparation that was offered for sale. Hunger rattled its dry bones among the roasting chestnuts in the turned cylinder; Hunger was shred into atomics in every farthing porringer of husky chips of potato, fried with some reluctant drops of oil. (26)

There is synecdoche in *Bleak House* when attendants in Chancery are “maces, or petty-bags, or privy-purses, or whatever they may be, in legal court suits. These are all yawning. . .” (3). *Little Dorrit*’s Mrs. Merdle has “large unfeeling handsome eyes, and dark unfeeling handsome hair, and a broad unfeeling handsome bosom”; later she is reduced synecdochically to the “unfeeling bosom” (233): Mr. Merdle is said to have

provided that extensive bosom which required so much room to be unfeeling enough in, with a nest of crimson and gold some fifteen years before. It was not a bosom to repose upon, but it was a capital bosom to hang jewels upon. Mr. Merdle wanted something to hang jewels upon, and he bought it for the purpose.

Like all his other speculations, it was sound and successful. The jewels showed to the richest advantage. The bosom moving in Society with the jewels displayed upon it, attracted general admiration. (241)

With his oft-noted tendency to superlative, it is no surprise that the Dickens narrator frequently engages in hyperbole. In *Oliver Twist* Mr. Brownlow's heart is "large enough for any six ordinary old gentlemen of humane disposition" (71). The *Barnaby Rudge* narrator says that "Sam Tappertit laid aside his cautious manner, and assuming in its stead that of a ruffling, swaggering, roving blade, who would rather kill a man than otherwise, and eat him too if needful" (60). The *Nickleby* narrator offers ironic understatement when he alludes to a tale of a man forgetting his wedding day and berating his servant for setting out his finest clothes, and another of a man conceiving a great passion for his grandmother. He pronounces it "doubtful whether either can be considered as a precedent likely to be extensively followed by succeeding generations" (709). There is obvious verbal irony in the *Old Curiosity Shop* narrator calling Quilp, who has been thoroughly established before as malicious, grotesque, and physically hideous, an "agreeable figure" when he intrudes unnoticed upon Nell and her grandfather in private conversation. Quilp is careful not to announce his presence, "actuated, no doubt," says the narrator with obvious irony, "by motives of the purest delicacy" (81).

George Brook calls one of the Dickens narrator's favorite types of figurative comparison the "fanciful 'as if,'" which "generally takes the form of the invention of some improbable but amusing explanation of the appearance or behavior of one of the characters in a novel" (33). Among Brook's illustrations of "fanciful 'as if' comparison" are three passages from *Little Dorrit*:

Mr. Merdle stands up suddenly "as if he had been waiting in the interval for his legs, and they had just come" (618 [596]). A woman at the theatre where Fanny Dorrit was employed "was in such a tumbled condition altogether, that it seemed as it would be an act of kindness to iron her"

(233 [227]). The Sparklers' house was "at all times stuffed and close as if it had an incurable cold in its head" (693 [673]). (Brook 34)

This sort of fanciful "as if" comparison occurs also in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, where the narrator says, "It would be no description of Mr. Pecksniff's gentleness of manner, to adopt the common parlance, and say that he looked at this moment as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. He rather looked as if any quantity of butter might have been made out of him, by churning the milk of human kindness, as it spouted upwards from his heart" (38). Here we see the Dickens narrator in characteristic play with a "common parlance," a dead metaphor.

The Dickens narrator does frequently use clichéd or dead metaphors, which relatively speaking, do not seem so intrusive. When the third-person narrator in *Bleak House* says that it may be Lady's Dedlock's "heart's desire" not to have Tulkinghorn present in her chambers, the figure of a heart having desires is hardly a glaring indication of intrusive narrative discourse (653). But the overwhelming abundance of fresh, striking and creative figures the Dickens narrator employs more characteristically suggests that figurative language provided one of the most fruitful outlets for Dickens's fanciful linguistic play. The more striking the figurative comparison, naturally, the more plain is the intrusive presence of the narrator doing the comparing. So when the *Dombey* narrator says that Mrs. Skewton tumbles into bed "like a house of painted cards," the intrusive presence of the narrator comparing Mrs. Skewton's "tumbling" to the collapse of a house of cards is all the more evident (417).

Miscellaneous Matters of Style

Before turning at last to *David Copperfield* in the next chapter, we should glance at a few other, only variably intrusive stylistic habits of the third-person Dickens narrator: obvious verbal repetitions of several sorts, non-figurative rhetorical tropes or devices not included in the classifications above, and shifts from the historical past to the present tense in straightforward *histoire* narration.

At times the Dickens narrator seems intrusively present in the intentional repetition of words, phrases, or other syntactical units. In *Our Mutual Friend*, the overdone repetitions of “new” and “bran-new” in the narrator’s introduction of the Veneerings makes his intrusive presence readily apparent:

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. . . . (6)

In *Little Dorrit* repetition of the word “imprisoned” makes the narrator’s speaking presence fairly prominent in the initial description of the Marseilles prison: “A prison taint was on everything there. The imprisoned air, the imprisoned light, the imprisoned damp, the imprisoned men, were all deteriorated by confinement.” In the next sentence is syntactical parallelism effecting repetition of a different sort: “As the captive men were faded and haggard, so the iron was rusty, the stone was slimy, the wood was rotten, the air was faint, the light was dim.” In the next sentence again there is anaphora, a third type of repetition: “Like a well, like a vault, like a tomb, the prison had no knowledge of

the brightness outside” (4-5). The heavy-handedness of these various repetitions in the opening chapter of *Little Dorrit*, especially in such close proximity, does make the narrator’s speaking presence fairly evident.

Another type of repetition, the reiteration of key phrases or refrains over several paragraphs or even chapters is one feature of a “new style” for Dickens that Monod sees beginning in *Dombey* (244). There are repeated references to what the waves are (or were) saying to Paul running throughout this novel, for instance. And when Dombey coldly rebukes Florence for disturbing him one evening after Paul’s funeral, she utters a “prolonged low cry,” and the narrator interjects, “Let him remember it in that room, years to come,” which is then repeated three times in the space of a single page (252-53). Forty-one chapters later, the narrator wonders how the now forlorn Mr. Dombey passes his time alone, and this same phrase, “Let him remember it in that room, years to come!” is repeated twice in two short paragraphs, and “He did remember it” is repeated three times in five paragraphs (795-96). Three times in the “Retribution” chapter the narrator makes slight variations of the theme, “the house is a ruin, and the rats fly from it,” and then finally, “The house is such a ruin that the rats have fled, and there is not one left” (786-94). Of course, these refrains are intrusive discourse even in their first iterations—the waves are figurative and so are the rats; “let him remember” is direct narratorial commentary. In the repetition for obvious emphasis, though, these refrains become doubly intrusive.

There are specific rhetorical figures the Dickens narrator employs occasionally that suggest the narrator’s intrusive presence—like the figurative language noted above,

many non-figurative rhetorical tropes give the strong impression of “a voice manipulating language with pleasure and pride in its own skill” (Garis 16). The famous antithesis in the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities* is one example: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity. . .” (1). The full passage is all the more suggestive of intrusion as the trope is carried on to the point of being “overdone”—the full series of antitheses in the novel’s first sentence totals seven sets of oppositions (1). As it presents judgmental authorial summary and is not strict *histoire* narration, the passage is unquestionably intrusive, but here again the emphasis given to the extended antitheses highlights the narrator’s intrusive presence even more.

“Overdoing it” is characteristic of the Dickens narrator’s style in a number of other rhetorical devices that are variably intrusive as well. The voice of the narrator grows slightly more audible when long lists are recited in *enumeratio*, as in the catalogue of different nationalities trading at Marseilles in *Little Dorrit*: “Hindoos, Russians, Chinese, Spaniards, Portuguese, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Genoese, Neapolitans, Venetians, Greeks, Turks, descendants from all the builders of Babel” (1). The Dickens narrator overdoes it, too, in periphrasis, or circumlocution. Two brief examples of periphrasis are the euphemism the *Oliver Twist* narrator offers in calling Saffron Hill “the emporium of petty larceny” (162), and the *Nickleby* narrator’s description of “the twain Saracens’ heads guarding the entrance to the hostelry of whose name and sign they are the duplicate presentiments” (541). Syllepsis is another mildly intrusive rhetorical figure, one which Sucksmith singles out as illustrating of the surface wit in Dickens’s early

novels. We find syllepsis in *Pickwick* when the narrator says that “Miss Bolo rose from the table considerably agitated, and went straight home, in a flood of tears, and a sedan chair” (553), and in *Oliver Twist* when the narrator describes Mr. Gamfield “alternately cudgelling his brains and his donkey” (13). These additional sorts of rhetorical figures do indeed make the voice of the narrator more audible, though whether they always and necessarily constitute momentary suspension of strict narration in narrative discourse is not so clear in every instance. And excepting periphrasis, most of these additional rhetorical figures are appreciably less frequent than any of the less self-conscious types of narrative discourse described above.

Less obviously intrusive, but worthy of particular note since it is a prominent stylistic feature in *David Copperfield*, are the shifts of tense from the historical past to the present for periods of straightforward narration ranging in length from a few paragraphs to entire chapters. Typically, these shifts to present tense narration heighten the immediacy or the emotional impact of the events described. Dickens uses this technique as early as *Oliver Twist*, where the narrator drops the past tense and assumes the present in four paragraphs describing the chase through crowded London streets that ends in Oliver’s arrest (59). In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the present tense is assumed for the dramatic description of Martin’s ship sailing through dangerous seas to America (246-47). *Dombey* has more than a dozen of these episodes of present-tense *histoire* narration, five of them of chapter length—the thirty-first chapter, describing Mr. Dombey’s second wedding, and the forty-first, which culminates in Mrs. Skewton’s death, most notably. In *A Tale of Two Cities* two highly dramatic episodes are given in the present tense, the

flight of the Darnays' coach from Paris, and Carton's execution (337-40, 353-57). These large scale shifts of tense for dramatic effect are less intrusive than the more pronounced occasional rhetorical figures and the various types of repetition, certainly, and if they are momentarily jarring or at least noticeable to the reader, once the transition from past to present is made, the intrusiveness of these tense-shifts is relatively slight.

* * *

In sum, these primary categories of intrusion outlined above form a framework that is admittedly less than one hundred percent comprehensive, and as a number of the examples above indicate, the Dickens narrator's intrusions cannot always be neatly classified as belonging only to a single one of these divisions. To borrow the words Genette applies to his classifications of the five functions of the narrator, my divisions of types of intrusive narrative discourse in third-person Dickens are not "watertight compartments" (*Narrative Discourse* 257). But while there are some gaps, redundancies, and ambiguities in this (yet another) "classificatory framework," it does indeed accommodate the most typical forms of narrative discourse in the third-person Dickens novels. It is assuredly complete and functional enough to serve its purpose of offering context for comparison between the characteristic discourse habits of the third-person Dickens narrator with those of the fictive autobiographers in *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, and *Great Expectations*.

Chapter Four: The Intrusive David Copperfield

To set the stage for the discussion of *David Copperfield*, we will first consider some of the broader connections between Dickens the man and the narrating hero of this novel that is so clearly “autobiographical” in its inclusion of significant elements of Dickens’s own experiences—the trauma of the blacking factory, most notably. Then we will narrow the discussion to examine the most evident resemblances between David’s intrusive discourse and the typical narrative discourse of the third-person Dickens narrator as outlined in the chapter above. Following the resemblances, we will consider how David’s discourse differs dramatically from the typical third-person Dickens narrator’s and establishes David Copperfield as a distinct, independent “writer” in his own right. We will also consider David’s ostensible purpose in writing his “secret” memoir and Dickens’s apparent motives in writing the autobiography of a character who shares important elements of his own actual history. In the final segment of the chapter, we will explore the subtleties of David’s personality indicated through his narrative discourse. Ultimately, we will see that David’s discourse reveals significant similarities between his personality and Dickens’s own.

When he was working on the final pages of *David Copperfield*, Dickens paused to write John Forster, “Oh, my dear Forster, if I were to say half of what *Copperfield* makes

me feel to-night, how strangely, even to you, I should be turned inside out! I seem to be sending some part of myself into the shadowy world” (*Letters* 6: 195). That Dickens was sending some part of himself into the world in *Copperfield* was apparent to others as early as December 1850, when a *Fraser’s Magazine* reviewer suspected that “here and there, under the name of David Copperfield, we have been favoured with passages from the personal history, adventures and experiences of Charles Dickens” (*Dickensiana* 105). Two decades later, in 1872, Forster warned against too close an identification between actual and fictional authors in David Copperfield:

too much has been assumed . . . of a full identity of Dickens with his hero, and of a supposed intention that his own character as well as parts of his career should be expressed in the narrative. . . . [I]t would be the greatest mistake to imagine anything like a complete identity of the fictitious novelist with the real one, beyond the Hungerford scenes; or to suppose that the youth, who then received his first harsh schooling in life, came out of it as little harmed or hardened as David did. (2: 128-29)

More than a century later still, Jerome Buckley reiterated the same theme: “no one at all familiar with Dickens’s temperament and career could mistake the characterization of David as a full and accurate self-portrait of David’s creator” (“Identity” 225); “David is his creator’s counterpart rather than his double; he is as quiet, serene, gentle, and self-effacing as Dickens was passionate, excitable, and aggressive” (*Season of Youth* 33). There is no mistaking that David is not the aggressive, domineering person that Dickens was.

Still, that David Copperfield *is* in many respects Charles Dickens is a settled conclusion among *Copperfield* scholars, with disagreement only over how much Dickens the man is reflected in the novel. As Forster’s biography illustrates thoroughly, the

aspects of Dickens's life that found their way into David's are plentiful. The most certain feature of Dickens's life recorded in the novel is the blacking factory episode, much of which is transcribed verbatim in *Copperfield's* eleventh chapter from the autobiographical fragment Dickens gave Forster. Dickens described this part of the novel as "a very complicated interweaving of truth and fiction" (*Letters* 5: 569). Equally certain is that both Dickens and David learned shorthand and became reporters in Commons, and later, professional novelists. And as Dickens's letters to Maria herself establish, David's passion for Dora is a faithful representation of Dickens's youthful love of Maria Beadnell (*Letters* 7: 538-39). Dickens and Forster both attest, too, that Micawber, in his grandiloquent speech and his constant harassments of debt, is an intentional portrait of Dickens's father (Forster 2: 126-28). Forster notes further that Dickens pawned his family's possessions as a boy just as David does for the Micawbers, the most prized possession in actuality being John Dickens's library, which included the same books David finds comfort in during troubled times at Blunderstone Rookery (Forster 1: 21). Following Forster's lead, the most conservative approach has been to accept that David in his time at Murdstone and Grinby's may be closely identified with Dickens, but to insist that from the point of David's running away to Dover, the connections between Dickens and David are merely coincidental—excepting of course the acknowledged basis of Dora in Maria Beadnell.

While David's love for Dora certainly reflects Dickens's youthful infatuation with Maria Beadnell, it has also been suggested that David's dissatisfaction with Dora's housekeeping reflects Dickens's similar dissatisfaction with his own wife, Kate (Johnson

689, Welsh 127, e.g.). There are curious connections, too, between Mary Hogarth, Kate's sister who lived with the Dickens family until her death in Dickens's arms at age seventeen, and the novel's heroine, Agnes Wickfield. We know the impact of Mary's death on Dickens was profound: he dreamed of her daily for more than a year and asked to be buried beside her. Years before conceiving *Copperfield*, Dickens wrote Forster about being feted on his arrival in Boston in 1842, with evident reference to Mary Hogarth: "I feel, in the best aspects of this welcome, something of the presence and influence of that spirit which directs my life, and through a heavy sorrow has pointed upwards with unchanging finger for more than four years past" (*Letters* 3: 35). In *Copperfield*, Agnes is surrounded with religious imagery throughout. She is David's "better Angel," and she announces Dora's death with a "solemn hand upraised towards Heaven" (322, 658). When he returns from his exile on the continent, David thinks of Agnes "pointing upward, . . . pointing to that sky above me, where, in the mystery to come, I might yet love her with a love unknown on earth" (723). The final sentence of the novel is an apostrophe to Agnes, where David prays that on his deathbed he will find Agnes still beside him, "pointing upward!" (751).

A number of characters are suggestive of Dickens's ironic reflection in the novel as well, particularly among the several "writers"—Micawber, Dr. Strong, Mr. Dick, and Copperfield himself. Persuasive cases have been made for consciously ironic doubles for Dickens in Dr. Strong, whose dictionary will never get past the letter "D," and Mr. *Dick*, whose autobiographical memorial is an impossible task because he cannot keep out the severed head of King *Charles* I (Welsh 116-19). The ties between Dickens and Mr. Dick

are reinforced by Dickens himself using the name Mr. Dick in letters as early as February 1844 (See *Letters* 4: 56, 70-71, 528). Forster reports that the seemingly obvious transposition of Dickens's initials, C. D., in David's, D. C., was accidental, and that Dickens was astonished when it was pointed out to him. The more striking similarity between his own name and one option he jotted down while brainstorming for the hero's name before settling on David could not have escaped Dickens's notice: "*Charles Copperfield*" (Monod 278).

Notable among more speculative claims for connections between Dickens and David are those focusing on the various sets of David's surrogate parents that suggest different aspects of John and Elizabeth Dickens: Clara Copperfield, Peggotty, the Murdstones, Betsey Trotwood, Mr. Dick, and the Micawbers, especially (Johnson 679-86, e.g.). There is speculation, too, that Dickens wrote his own life in *Copperfield* as he wished it could have been. In the words of George Saintsbury, "Copperfield is not only partly what Dickens was, but, to a much larger extent, what Dickens could not be and would have liked to be" (326). Dickens surely wished he could have been rescued from the blacking factory by a fairy godmother like Betsey Trotwood and sent to a good school like Dr. Strong's. He wished he could have married Maria Beadnell, and so in the novel Dora's father conveniently dies after rejecting David's suit, as Maria's did not in life (Johnson 678, 687-89). Once married, Dickens might have wished to escape Kate and find a "better angel"—thus Dora dies as Kate did not, and David is joined at last with his angelic Agnes (Pettersson 71). More tenuous is the speculation that the wish fulfillment extends to "forbidden desires" in the projection of Dickens into Steerforth, who boldly

seduces Little Em'ly, and Dr. Strong, who marries Annie, a beautiful woman several decades younger than himself. It has even been suggested that David's unshakeable worship of Steerforth is "forbidden homoeroticism" reflecting Dickens's unacknowledged homosexual feelings for John Forster (Buckton 214-17).

The more exotic speculations notwithstanding, the legitimate points of connection between Dickens and David are many, and many of these are clearly intentional on Dickens's part. But while much attention has been given to the points of connection between Dickens and David, there has been relatively little consideration of how the two "authors" are similar as *writers*. There are remarkable stylistic differences between the typical third-person Dickens narrator and the first-person narrator in *David Copperfield*, particularly in their habits of authorial intrusion, and the *Copperfield* narrator is in turn remarkably different from the first-person narrators in *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*. There are indeed, though, as we might expect, notable similarities as well between David the intrusive author and the typical intrusive "Dickens" of the third-person novels.

The Inimitable Copperfield

Among the different types of intrusive narrative discourse outlined in the chapter above, the most immediate similarities between the third-person Dickens narrator and the *Copperfield* narrator are in the narrating David's allusions. The same standard mines are plundered for allusions in *Copperfield* in roughly the same proportions found in most other Dickens novels. There are the usual sprinklings of biblical references and allusions

to Shakespeare, Defoe, Smollett, Punch, *The Arabian Nights*, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, proverbs, and familiar topical events and history. Creakle's prison office David describes as worthy of the "ground-floor of the Tower of Babel" (727). Mr. Chillup walks "as softly as the Ghost in Hamlet," and the antagonistic young butcher of his adolescence arises in David's memory "like the apparition of an armed head in Macbeth" (8, 228). Upon possession of his first apartment, David's satisfaction is compared to Robinson Crusoe's, "when he had got into his fortification, and pulled his ladder up after him" (303). Mr. Spenlow is "so stiff, that he could hardly bend himself; being obliged . . . to move his whole body, from the bottom of his spine, like Punch" (299). Jack Maldon strikes David "as a modern Sinbad, . . . the bosom friend of all the Rajah's in the east, sitting under canopies, smoking curly golden pipes" (208). In the first pangs of infatuation with Dora, David takes "a night-walk to Norwood, and, like the subject of a venerable riddle of [his] childhood, [goes] 'round and round the house, without ever touching the house,' thinking about Dora" (404). David feels like "a sort of Monster who had got into a Fairy's bower" when he makes Dora cry (464). The cunning machinations it takes for Peggotty to extract money from her husband, Barkis, David calls "a very Gunpowder Plot," and the page that David and Dora hire as newlyweds is "a perfect Whittington, without his cat, or the remotest chance of being made Lord Mayor" (129, 589). It is hardly surprising that Dickens's and David's allusive tendencies are so similar. Indeed, it would be more surprising if their knowledge of literature, current events and history differed so much that David's allusions were appreciably unlike those in other Dickens novels.

Dickens once said, “I think it is my infirmity to fancy or perceive relations in things which are not apparent generally” (*Letters* 11: 113). David clearly shares the same “infirmity,” and while David’s figurative language is generally tamer than the third-person Dickens narrator’s, there are still many very “Dickensian” figurative comparisons. Describing the blustery storm on the night of his birth, for instance, David says, “the elms bent to one another, like giants who were whispering secrets, and after a few seconds of such repose, fell into a violent flurry, tossing their wild arms about, as if their late confidences were really too wicked for their peace of mind” (5). The pigeon pie Mrs. Crupp prepares when David hosts the Micawbers for dinner “was not bad, but it was a delusive pie: the crust being like a disappointing head, phrenologically speaking: full of lumps and bumps, with nothing particular underneath” (352). The love-smitten David sees Dora’s father as possessing “a reflected radiance” that seemed to “beam when he sat erect in Court among his papers, like a little light-house in a sea of stationery” (405). When Mr. Dick copies legal documents after Aunt Betsey’s financial ruin, he flourishes “his ten fingers in the air, as if they were ten banks” (452).

Uriah Heep occasions the most consistently Dickensian figurative language. At one point Heep hovers over David and Agnes “like a great vulture: gorging himself on every syllable that I said to Agnes, or Agnes said to me,” and when reading, Heep’s “lank forefinger followed up every line as he read, and made clammy tracks along the page (or so I fully believed) like a snail” (329, 200). When he visits Uriah and his mother, they ply him for information with such success that

A tender young cork . . . would have had no more chance against a pair of corkscrews, or a tender young tooth against a pair of dentists, or a little

shuttlecock against two battledores, than I had against Uriah and Mrs. Heep. . . . Uriah threw the ball to Mrs. Heep, Mrs. Heep caught it and threw it back to Uriah, Uriah kept it up a little while, then sent it back to Mrs. Heep, and so they went on tossing it about until I had no idea who had got it, and was quite bewildered. The ball itself was always changing too. Now it was Mr. Wickfield, now Agnes, now the excellence of Mr. Wickfield, now my admiration of Agnes; now the extent of Mr. Wickfield's business and resources, now our domestic life. . . . (219)

The two Heeps are later “like two great bats hanging over the whole house, and darkening it with their ugly forms” (488). David's authorial judgment of the Heeps is evident indeed in the Dickensian figurative language that describes them.

It is hardly surprising, too, that David uses many of the third-person Dickens narrator's usual techniques in intruding for purposes of narrative transition and elision of superfluous detail. There are no “Fieldingesque” transitions between different strands of *histoire*, as the first-person retrospective perspective necessarily limits the narration to the largely chronological recounting of events surrounding David himself. But there are occasional transitional intrusions, as we see when the “narrative proceeds to Agnes, with a thankful love” (518). The more personal tone that “with a thankful love” indicates here is also characteristic of most of the few acknowledged narrative ellipses, as when David says after Dora has died, “It is not in my power to retrace, one by one, all the weary phases of distress of mind through which I passed” (696-97).

There are occasional rhetorical tropes and matters of style indicating that the Inimitable Boz was guiding David's pen with his own hand as well. There is recognizably Dickensian verbal irony in David's saying of his first night aboard the Peggotty boat during a stormy night, “nothing happened, however, worse than morning” (29). There is synecdoche in David's calling his rival at Dora's birthday picnic only

“Red Whisker” (413). There is enumeratio in the description of David’s first visit to Yarmouth, where he is carried on Ham’s back “past gas-works, rope-walks, boat-builders’ yards, ship-wrights’ yards, ship-breakers’ yards, caulkers’ yards, riggers’ lofts, smiths’ forges, and a great litter of such places” (25). The most frequent Dickensian stylistic tendency that creeps into David’s prose is heavy-handed repetition of different sorts. David describes his wedding with Dora as “a more or less incoherent dream.” The first paragraph of his description of the wedding begins, “A dream of their coming in with Dora,” and each of the succeeding thirteen paragraphs opens with an “of” phrase indicating the other occurrences in this dream: “Of the clergyman and clerk appearing,” “Of our kneeling down together, side by side,” “Of their whispering, as we pass, what a youthful couple we are,” etc. In all, there are forty-five of these “of” phrases describing the wedding ceremony and its aftermath in the space of fourteen short paragraphs (539-41). Equally heavy-handed is the repetition of the words “respectable” and “respectability” in David’s initial description of Mr. Littimer: “If his nose had been upside-down, he would have made that respectable. He surrounded himself with an atmosphere of respectability, and walked secure in it. It would have been next to impossible to suspect him of anything wrong, he was so thoroughly respectable” (255). In the three paragraphs devoted to the introduction of Littimer these words occur fourteen times, nine times in the first paragraph alone.

While David’s tone and style are generally more sober and less exuberant than the typical third-person Dickens narrator’s, the restraints are off in the four “Retrospect” chapters, for here David writes most recognizably in the Dickensian mode. These four

chapters are narrated entirely in the present tense and contain the most highly stylized writing in the novel. The retrospects summarize events of especial emotional importance to David: Chapter 18 telescopes the years at Dr. Strong's school up to age seventeen with great humor—relating his youthful infatuations with Miss Shepherd and the eldest Miss Larkins, his fights with the butcher's boy, and his rise to the head of his class at Dr. Strong's; Chapter 43 summarizes David's progress as a shorthand reporter and a fledgling professional author and describes the excitement surrounding the wedding with Dora; Chapter 53 relates Dora's death; and Chapter 64 closes the novel with David's happy married life with Agnes. Sylvère Monod notes that the retrospects “interrupt the continuous progress of the narrative, and both accelerate and slow it down” (304). They interrupt the continuous progress of the narrative because each effects a pause while David the narrator intrudes to announce self-consciously that he will linger over especially vivid memories, as he does in the opening of Chapter 43: “Once again, let me pause upon a memorable period of my life. Let me stand aside, to see the phantoms of those days go by me, accompanying the shadow of myself, in dim procession” (534). The chapter closes, “I have stood aside to see the phantoms of those days go by me. They are gone, and I resume the journey of my story” (541). On the other hand, the narrative pace is accelerated in that days, months, and years are condensed in summaries and transitional ellipses: “Time has stolen on unobserved, for Adams is not the head-boy in the days that are come now, nor has he been this many and many a day. . . . A blank, through which the warriors of poetry and history march on in stately hosts that seem to have no end—and what comes next! *I am the head-boy, now*” (229). Or again in

Chapter 43: “Weeks, months, seasons, pass along. They seem little more than a summer day and a winter evening” (534).

In addition to including a number of the novel’s most prominent narrative ellipses and transitions, the retrospects have a relatively greater density of exclamation, apostrophe, and figurative language, and a clear preponderance of the narrator’s direct questions, usually asked and answered in hypophora. The first retrospect begins, “My school-days! The silent gliding on of my existence—the unseen, unfelt progress of my life—from childhood up to youth! Let me think, as I look back upon that flowing water, now a dry channel overgrown with leaves, whether there are any marks along its course, by which I can remember how it ran” (226). David glances at moments in the cathedral and at school and then asks, “But who is this that breaks upon me? This is Miss Shepherd, whom I love” (227). He asks, “Why do I secretly give Miss Shepherd twelve Brazil nuts for a present, I wonder? They are not expressive of affection, they are difficult to pack into a parcel of any regular shape, they are hard to crack, even in room doors, and they are oily when cracked; yet I feel that they are appropriate to Miss Shepherd” (227). In the second retrospect, after relating his move from the Buckingham Street apartment to a cozy cottage, David asks, “What does this portend? My marriage? Yes!” and “Why does Traddles look so important when he calls upon me this afternoon in the Commons—where I still occasionally attend, for form’s sake, when I have time? The realization of my boyish day-dreams is at hand. I am going to take out the [marriage] licence” (535, 536). The fourth retrospect prefigures the final chapter of *Hard Times* in being structured mainly around hypophoric questions asked and answered.

Before wrapping up the final outcomes for the characters whose ultimate fates have not yet been related, David asks such questions as “What faces are the most distinct to me in the fleeting crowd? Lo, these; all turning to me as I ask my thoughts the question!” and “Who is this bent lady, supporting herself by a stick, and showing me a countenance in which there are some traces of old pride and beauty, feebly contending with a querulous, imbecile, fretful wandering of the mind? She is in a garden; and near her stands a sharp, dark, withered woman, with a white scar on her lip” (748-49). The bent lady is, of course, Mrs. Steerforth, and the dark, withered woman Rosa Dartle.

The four “Retrospect” chapters are effectively extended authorial intrusions, plainly indicated as narrative discourse through the present tense which highlights the mature David in the present moment of nostalgic reverie, the ellipses and narrative summaries telescoping *histoire* time into compact narrative units, the greater frequency of figurative language, and the consistent raising and answering of questions. Especially given the comparative general restraint of the novel’s sixty other chapters, it seems that in these four chapters the greater exuberance that characterizes the typical third-person Dickens narrator effectively bursts free. The powerful impact of these four highly Dickensian retrospects on the reader is in no small part a product of their standing out so dramatically from the rest of the novel’s “calmness.” Throughout the novel as a whole, there are indeed discourse tendencies that resemble those of “the Inimitable,” especially in the allusions, the figurative language and in some of the stylistic excesses we find in Dickens’s third-person fiction. Overall, though, the resemblances between the intrusive discourse of David the “writer” and his creator are less abundant and less apparent than

we might expect.

David's Own Discourse

In the novel as a whole the tone and style of *Copperfield* are a clear departure from the norm established in the eight Dickens books that preceded it. As has been often noted, compared with those earlier books (the later ones as well), *Copperfield* is much more sober, much more calm and restrained. Garrett Stewart calls the prose of *Copperfield*, “as in no other Dickens novel, at times almost reticent,” and he notes that even the figurative language is relatively mild, and often delivered with self-conscious apology: “Verbal play on the narrator’s part is rarely willful or assertive, and even quite unexceptionable metaphors are hedged, kept tentative by means of recurring apologetic asides like ‘as I may say’ (chaps. 20, 38), or ‘if I may call it so’ (chaps. 28, 42) or ‘If I may so express it’ (chaps. 33, 57)” (136). Albert Guerard suggests that the restraint is partly a matter of the novel’s autobiographical form: “The personal autobiographical prose, or prose of pretended autobiography . . . invites the pleasing rhythms of a calm speaking voice. Calm: for it also tends to limit eccentricities [and] melodramatic excesses of rhetoric”—eccentricities and excesses that certainly characterize the third-person Dickens narrator (141). Thackeray noticed the new restraint in the first numbers of *Copperfield* and thought Dickens was “copying” him, “greatly simplifying his style, and overcoming the use of fine words. By this the public will be the gainer and *David Copperfield* will be improved by taking a lesson from *Vanity Fair*” (*Works* 32: 74). More legitimate credit for the “new style” belongs probably to David Copperfield himself. The

reticence and uncharacteristic sobriety maintained throughout most of the novel are in large part a result of Dickens's great care in this, his first book-length work in the first person, to speak at all times with *David's* tongue, through David's lips, with David's language, and with David's greater earnestness, sobriety, and calmness.

The first and most essential difference in the narrative discourse is that David's most flagrant intrusions serve the obvious aim of establishing and maintaining the fiction of David as the author of his own narrative. David establishes himself as the book's author in its opening sentence: "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. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night" (1). He reminds the reader that he is writing his own life repeatedly throughout the novel, much more frequently than Esther or Pip do in their turn. For instance, when he tells of Uriah Heep humiliating Mr. Wickfield by plying him with drink, David pointedly reminds the reader that he is recording what he is describing on paper: "It made me sick at heart to see, and my hand recoils from writing it" (492). Before describing the earnestness and diligence to which he attributes his early success in life, David says, "I feel as if it were not for me to record, even though this manuscript is intended for no eyes but mine, how hard I worked at that tremendous short-hand" (517). He attests to his narrative's veracity when he says, "I search my breast, and I commit its secrets, if I know them, without any reservation to this paper. . . . I write the exact truth. It would avail me nothing to extenuate it now" (551-52). He calls "this record" "my written memory," and says his intention is "to reflect my

mind on this paper” (588-89, 594-95).

It is curious that Dickens has David remind the reader so frequently that the novel is David’s “written memory.” One explanation may be that Dickens was concerned in this, his first full novel in the first person, to keep the point of view consistent and credible at all points. Another possibility is that the excessive self-consciousness of David’s narrative is simply another manifestation of Dickens’s characteristic “excess.” Janet Brown suggests that *Copperfield* satisfies “one of the most widely acknowledged of Dickens’ own wishes as a novelist: the wish to be present to his audience while he tells his story” (199). The presence the constant intrusions establish satisfies another of Dickens’s most felt wishes, too, *acting*, assuming a persona other than his own. As Brown also notes, “David’s remembering mind presides over every inch of the *Copperfield* canvas: among the consequences of this absolute vigilance is the sound of a voice whose cadences never recede—not the voice of Charles Dickens as an individual . . . but the fully imagined voice of David, recording in secret what he has come to be” (199). Whether or not they are “theatrical” in the sense that Garis intends, the flagrantly self-conscious intrusions keep the presence of the authorial narrator before the reader far more so in *Copperfield* than in other Dickens novel.

There are a plethora of intrusions reinforcing David’s role as author in less flagrant fashion. There are conspicuously gratuitous intrusions that serve the dual purposes of providing glimpses of mildly Dickensian humor and reinforcing the narratorial persona. After he and Emily move stranded starfish back into the sea during his first visit to Yarmouth, David says, “I hardly know enough of the race at this moment

to be quite certain whether they had reason to feel obliged to us for doing so, or the reverse” (31-32). When he describes forgetting his lessons while being grilled by Mr. Murdstone and feeling the words he has memorized “all sliding away, and going I don’t know where,” he asks, “I wonder where they *do* go, by-the-by?” (46). When Mr. Spewlow explains the importance of Commons by claiming that “when the price of wheat per bushel had been highest, the Commons had been busiest,” David says,

I have never, to this hour, got the better of that bushel of wheat. It has re-appeared to annihilate me, all through my life, in connexion with all kinds of subjects. I don’t know now, exactly, what it has to do with me, or what right it has to crush me, on an infinite variety of occasions; but whenever I see my old friend the bushel brought in by the head and shoulders (as he always is, I observe), I give up a subject for lost.

This is a digression. (333)

The passage is a gratuitous digression, but it does serve to keep David-the-author’s presence vividly before the reader.

There are frequent self-conscious and gratuitous discourse intrusions, too, that aid the verisimilitude of David telling his own story when he speculates or acknowledges information that he is unsure about or has forgotten. While the third-person Dickens narrator’s speculations are often less truly speculative than they appear, many of David’s conjectures seem more legitimately and appropriately speculative from the limitations in knowledge necessitated by the first person. The speculation is quite natural when David describes Annie Strong’s recovery from a swoon occasioned by her farewell interview with Jack Maldon: “she arose with assistance: turning her head, as she did so, to lay it on the Doctor’s shoulder—or to hide it, I don’t know which” (210). David’s uncertainty about matters which escape his recollection also reinforces the verisimilitude of an author

trying to recall elusive details long after the fact, as when he says, “Whether it was the following Sunday when I saw the gentleman [Murdstone] again, or whether there was any greater lapse of time before he reappeared, I cannot recall. I don’t profess to be clear about dates” (18). The narrating David cannot recall the name of the inn he visits upon his first arrival in London: “I forget whether it was the Blue Bull, or the Blue Boar; but I know it was the Blue Something, and that its likeness was painted up on the back of the coach” (61-62). In the same vein, when David recalls his rate of pay at Murdstone and Grinby’s, he says he was hired “at a salary, I think, of six shillings a week. I am not clear whether it was six or seven. I am inclined to believe, from my uncertainty on this head, that it was six at first and seven afterwards” (135). The verisimilitude here is all the more “real” because this is one of the passages copied verbatim from the autobiographical fragment given to Forster (Cf. Forster 1: 25).

David’s narrative gains verisimilitude also from intrusions imparting information he “forgot” to mention before. As he says after recording that Dora misses the melancholy Miss Mills, “I have omitted to mention it, by-the-by. Miss Mills had sailed, and Dora and I had gone aboard a great East Indiaman at Gravesend to see her. . .” (521). Or as he says of Mr. Mell, after relating that the two are company for one another at Creakle’s school before the other students arrive, “I forgot to mention that he would talk to himself sometimes, and grin, and clench his fist, and grind his teeth, and pull his hair in an unaccountable manner” (69). Often more than offering essential information that should have been related earlier, these intrusions, too, tend to be gratuitous and serve mainly to reinforce David’s persona as narrating author.

There are also a notably large proportion of “descriptive” intrusions, calling attention to changes in specific locales between the *histoire* time of the narrative and the time of the narrating, or rather, accentuating that time has passed since the *histoire* events took place. The effect is again that the intrusions reinforce the illusion of David the narrator in the act of recalling events from his past. One instance of David’s intrusion in this mode is when he says, “The church with the slender spire, that stands on the top of the hill now, was not there then to tell me the time. An old red-brick mansion, used as a school, was in its place; and a fine old house it must have been to go to school at, as I recollect it” (445). Not strictly “descriptive,” but serving the same end of showing the passage of time is David’s inserted comment on a divorce suit “under an ingenious little statute (repealed now, I believe, but in virtue of which I have seen several marriages annulled)” (408).

More conspicuously intrusive, and more conspicuously self-conscious in reinforcing the verisimilitude of David the narrator recalling his own past are the scores of iterations of “I recall,” “I recollect,” and “I remember.” In describing his having to wear the placard announcing “He bites,” for instance, David says, “I recollect that I positively began to have a dread of myself, as a kind of wild boy who did bite,” and during the same period, “I remember dreaming night after night, of being with my mother as she used to be” (68). One step further from these ubiquitous “recollecting” intrusions are the also highly frequent intrusions announcing “I remember it well.” Dozens of times David intrudes to protest how well he recalls a specific matter, as when he says, “It was not on that evening; but, as I well remember, on the next evening but one, which was a

Saturday; that I took Agnes to see Dora” (520). These intrusions are often the more self-conscious for being exclamatory. In describing a memorable birthday, for example, David exclaims, “How well I recollect what kind of day it was!” and when he recalls his pride in introducing Steerforth as his friend to Mr. Peggotty, David intrudes in mid-sentence to cry, “Good Heaven, how it all comes back to me this long time afterwards!” (105, 89). In this pointedly retrospective fictive autobiography, Dickens takes great pains through the great frequency of these sorts of gratuitous recollective intrusions to remind the reader always that David the narrator is *recalling* and *remembering* in the present moment of the “narrator’s now.”

The emphasis Dickens places upon the process of David’s recalling and remembering as he narrates his life’s story goes far beyond the frequent verisimilitudinous iterations of “I recollect” and “How well I remember.” Janet Brown observes that David the narrator is a fully dramatized character because “he is always *in action*: in the act, that is, of recollection. . . . And he is highly self-conscious about it, intensely aware of himself as telling over his memories. . . . He never forgets what he is doing or lets us forget it” (198). One of the more pointed intrusive tactics that David employs in his recollective *action* is hyperbolic exaggeration, emphasizing the powerful impact his memories have upon him in the present moment of narration. In recollection of the second visit to Yarmouth, for example, David says, “It seems to me, at this hour, that I have never seen such sunlight as on those bright April afternoons; . . . that I have never beheld such sky, such water, such glorified ships sailing away into golden air” (124). David attests to the intensity of his memory with frequent intrusions such as the

one on his recollection of a chance meeting with Dora in her father's garden: "I tingle again from head to foot as my recollection turns that corner, and my pen shakes in my hand" (337). The power of his memories in the present moment of narration is often conveyed, too, in specific associations that David holds with events from the past that extend into the "narrator's now." One vivid example is David's mention of a ring he bought for Dora, a "pretty little toy, with its blue stones—so associated in my remembrance with Dora's hand, that yesterday, when I saw such another, by chance, on the finger of my own daughter, there was a momentary stirring in my heart, like pain!" (417-18). This persistent blending of past memory and present moment of recollection is one of the most distinctive characteristic features of *Copperfield*, one that makes this novel much more truly a novel of *memory* than either of his other fictive autobiographies in *Bleak House* or *Great Expectations*.

Robin Gilmour notes that "for David, as for Dickens himself, the past has a reality all of its own, a reality which can at any one moment challenge the authority of the present" (32). In David's most powerful memories, there is a literal blending of past and present as he "sees" persons and events from his past as if they are resurrected literally before his mind's eye in the present moment of narration. In describing his meeting Emily at Peggotty's when Barkis is dying, David says, "There was a trembling upon her, that I can see now. The coldness of her hand when I touched it, I can feel yet" (378). The poignant scene of Mr. Dick's reconciling Dr. and Mrs. Strong, David says, "I see and hear, rather than remember, as I write about it" (561). Of the tempest in which Steerforth and Ham die, David says, "As plainly as I behold what happened, I will try to write it

down. I do not recall it, but see it done; for it happens again before me” (672). In effect, these intrusions, which in their great frequency and intensity are peculiar to David alone among Dickens narrators, reflect the power of David’s memories upon him in the present moment by their blurring the lines between *histoire* time and the time of the narrating. The lines between *histoire* and narrating times are fully obliterated in several extended passages of past events narrated wholly in the present tense. In addition to the four “Retrospect” chapters, descriptions of the idyllic time with his mother and Peggotty before Murdstone, the misery of his lessons with the Murdstones, a typical day in the classroom at Salem house, and his mother’s funeral are narrated entirely in the present tense (11-13, 46-47, 77-78, 112-13).

The interpretive and judgmental observations David makes on characters and other story elements are appreciably more frequent than the third-person Dickens narrator’s, as is natural in first-person narration, and they also tend to be highly self-conscious in reinforcing David in the present moment of recollection. The novel’s original title in full was *The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger, which he never meant to be published on any account*, (Forster 2: 96). In his commentary on characters and other *histoire* elements there is decided emphasis on David’s self-conscious *observations*. David says early on that “The gloomy taint that was in the Murdstone blood, darkened the Murdstone religion, which was austere and wrathful.” He then observes more intrusively, “I have thought, since, that its assuming that character was a necessary consequence of Mr. Murdstone’s firmness, which wouldn’t allow him to let anybody off the utmost weight of the severest

penalties he could find any excuse for" (44-45). Or after relating that he waited with Emily outside the church while Peggotty and Barkis were married, David remarks, "I have often thought, since, what an odd, innocent, out-of-the-way kind of wedding it must have been. . . . I am glad to think there were two such guileless hearts at Peggotty's marriage as little Em'ly's and mine" (126-27). More self-consciously intrusive still are observations such as one David makes on Mr. Micawber's response to his proposed emigration to Australia. Micawber says, "it was the dream of my youth, and the fallacious aspiration of my riper years," and David adds, "I am thoroughly persuaded, by-the-by, that he had never thought of it in his life" (652-53). Just as with the pointedly recollective intrusions, the interpretive and judgmental commentary consistently reveals David in the present moment of the "discourse now."

Naturally, whereas the typical third-person Dickens novel is narrated in editorial omniscience, with the narrator intruding obtrusively and often with clear authority to "talk over" his characters and their actions, David's editorial commentary is more personal and more tentative, as dictated by the first-person narrator's limitations in knowledge. In David's commentary upon *histoire* elements, "I believe," "I think," and "I suppose" are as omnipresent as "I recollect," "I recall," and "I remember" are in the more straightforward narration of events. For example, in reporting the first time he sees Uriah Heep after slapping his face, David says, "I had struck him hard enough to give him the toothache, I suppose. At all events his face was tied up in a black silk handkerchief" (531). Or when David describes the Micawbers leaving London after Mr. Micawber's imprisonment, he says,

I think, as Mrs. Micawber sat at the back of the coach, with the children, and I stood in the road looking wistfully at them, a mist cleared from her eyes, and she saw what a little creature I really was. I think so, because she beckoned to me to climb up, with quite a new and motherly expression in her face, and put her arm round my neck, and gave me just such a kiss as she might have given to her own boy. (150)

The speculative “seems” and “as if” comparisons that are more strikingly intrusive in third-person narration are also more natural in the first person. In describing the great impression of Steerforth’s storytelling upon Emily, for instance, David says that Steerforth’s story was as vivid “as if he saw it all before him—and little Em’ly’s eyes were fastened on him all the time, as if she saw it too” (269). Obviously, as David’s knowledge is limited only to his own perceptions, the frequent speculative and interpretive “as if” comparisons are essential to the vividness of his own storytelling.

David offers more straightforward judgmental commentary on *histoire* elements as well. He makes directly judgmental observations when he declares Creakle the schoolmaster an “incapable brute, who had no more right to be possessed of the great trust he held, than to be Lord High Admiral, or Commander-in-chief” (77). David says that Miss Murdstone is eager to display “the whole diabolical catalogue of her unamiable qualities,” and that Uriah Heep is a “crawling impersonation of meanness” (111, 440). Heep and Littimer, prisoners Twenty Seven and Twenty Eight in Creakle’s prison, David calls “hypocritical knaves,” and he judges their phony protestations of being reformed “a rotten, hollow, painfully-suggestive piece of business” (733). The judgmental commentary is also evident in doubly intrusive exclamations and apostrophes, which are not the less intrusive than their counterparts in the third-person fiction for their more personal tone in *Copperfield*. “Poor Traddles!” David cries when describing that “most

unfortunate boy in the world” breaking a window at Salem House (78). After revealing Heep’s ambition to marry Agnes, David cries, “Dear Agnes! So much too loving and too good for any one that I could think of, was it possible that she was reserved to be the wife of such a wretch as this!” (327). Or of the period of his engagement with Dora: “What an idle time it was! What an unsubstantial, happy, foolish time it was!” (417). There are apostrophes addressed to Dora, Jip, Agnes, Emily, Julia Mills, and David’s “undisciplined heart,” but perhaps the most memorable are addressed to Steerforth. Upon narration of their parting on the eve of the elopement, David says that he left, “Never more, oh God forgive you, Steerforth! to touch that passive hand in love and friendship. Never, never more!” (373). After learning about Steerforth’s seduction of Emily, David is moved to cry, “Yes, Steerforth, long removed from the scenes of this poor history! My sorrow may bear involuntary witness against you at the Judgment Throne; but my angry thoughts or my reproaches never will, I know!” (388).

One of the stock features of the third-person Dickens narrator is generalizing commentary on human nature, and while David does occasionally make philosophical general observations, his generalizations tend to lack the assertiveness characteristic of the third-person Dickens narrator’s. There are a few straightforward generalizations, such as David’s Wordsworthian declaration that when mourning Dora’s loss, he “sought out Nature, never sought in vain,” or his observation that young Master Micawber was “very subject to that restlessness of limb which is not an infrequent phenomenon in youths of his age” (699, 453). And there is one instance of David’s generalizing at length in what approaches the standard Dickensian mode. David notes that Mr. Micawber’s

enjoyment of impressive words and heightened rhetoric, “however ludicrously displayed in his case, was, I must say, not at all peculiar to him.” He then launches into generalizing on the love of heightened verbiage more thoroughly, though he is careful to qualify that he is presenting his own personal observation:

I have observed it, in the course of my life, in numbers of men. It seems to me to be a general rule. In the taking of legal oaths, for instance, deponents seem to enjoy themselves mightily when they come to several good words in succession, for the expression of one idea; as, that they utterly detest, abominate, and abjure, or so forth; and the old anathemas were made relishing on the same principle. We talk about the tyranny of words, but we like to tyrannise over them too; we are fond of having a large superfluous establishment of words to wait upon us on great occasions; we think it looks important, and sounds well. . . . (645)

As the passage continues, David slides from Dickensian generalization even more uncharacteristically into the sort of didactic commentary we see from the third-person Dickens narrator.

Much more the norm in *Copperfield* is that David not only clarifies that his generalizations are his own private musings, but offers them with an almost diffident tentativeness. David says at one point, “I don’t know why one slight set of impressions should be more particularly associated with a place than another, though I believe this obtains with most people, in reference especially to the associations of their childhood” (35). He qualifies the observation here with “I believe” and limits the generalization to “most people.” The generalization is even more diffidently submerged in a parenthetical aside when David says, “I have often remarked—I suppose everybody has—that one’s going away from a familiar place, would seem to be the signal for change in it” (701). Or when he refers to the phenomenon of déjà vu in the scene of Heep’s revealing his

intentions with Agnes, David says he had “the strange feeling (to which, perhaps, no one is quite a stranger) that all this had occurred before, at some indefinite time, and that I knew what he was going to say next, took possession of me” (326). Here the generalization is qualified with a “perhaps” and buried almost apologetically in parentheses.

A standard feature of third-person Dickens narration that is almost entirely absent from *Copperfield* is the narrator’s heavy-handed didactic “preaching.” The generalization sparked by Mr. Micawber’s verbosity noted above leads to one instance of creeping Dickensian didacticism, but whether from the more personal nature of the novel’s themes on love and one man’s recollection of his past, or whether from David’s more sober restraint as a narrator, the outbreaks of didacticism are rare. The most obvious hints of Dickensian didacticism in *Copperfield* are in David’s condemnation of the “parliamentary bagpipes”: “Britannia, that unfortunate female, is always before me, like a trussed fowl: skewered through and through with office-pens, and bound hand and foot with red tape” (535). Even here, though, the comment arises naturally from David’s experience reporting Commons debates, and the observation is clearly personal to David, not a dramatic aside between “Dickens” and “My lords and gentlemen” or “Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, [and] Commissioners of Fact” (*Hard Times* 162).

The one type of frequent authorial intrusion in *Copperfield* which for obvious reasons cannot occur in the third-person fiction is David the narrator’s judgmental commentary on himself, David the homodiegetic protagonist of the novel. As fully realized a character as a self-conscious third-person narrator can be (Fielding’s in *Tom*

Jones or *Joseph Andrews*, e.g.), and as often as he may talk about himself and his trials as an author, the third-person narrator by definition is heterodiegetic, standing outside the *histoire* world. But the “I as protagonist” first-person narrator, particularly the autodiegetic writer of his or her own biography, obviously can and must comment upon himself or herself as an *histoire* character.

That David’s overt commentary upon himself as a child is often filled with pathos is understandable. He lost his father before birth, his mother dies when he is still a young boy, his step-parents are the hard-hearted monsters of fairy tale, and he is forced scared and alone into living “on his own account” at the unthinkable age of ten. He deserves and gets the reader’s sympathy, and it is only natural that the adult David pity the younger self of the first fourteen chapters, before his “new beginning” at Dr. Strong’s. We certainly understand when David says after relating his mother’s death, “I fell into a state of neglect, which I cannot look back upon without compassion. I fell at once into a solitary condition . . . which seems to cast its gloom upon this paper as I write. What would I have given, to have been sent to the hardest school that ever was kept!—to have been taught something, anyhow, anywhere! No such hope dawned upon me” (128). It is interesting, though, that the most heavy-handed pathos is found in many of the passages borrowed from the autobiographical fragment.

Chapter 11 opens with a passage which actually tones down the self-pity in the autobiographical fragment:

I know enough of the world now, to have almost lost the capacity of being much surprised by anything; but it is a matter of some surprise to me, even now, that I can have been so easily thrown away at such an age. A child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager,

delicate, and soon hurt bodily or mentally, it seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf. (132; cf. Forster 1: 25)

In a passage taken virtually word for word from the fragment, Dickens's own pain is transferred to David more directly:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these henceforth every-day associates with those of my happier childhood . . . and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom. The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day by day what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. (133; cf. Forster 1: 26)

Here in fact, Dickens has David increase the pathos by adding at the end of the paragraph, "As often as Mick Walker went away in the course of that [first] forenoon, I mingled my tears with the water in which I was washing the bottles; and sobbed as if there were a flaw in my own breast, and it were in danger of bursting" (133-34). In one other passage of taken directly from the autobiographical fragment David says,

I know I do not exaggerate, unconsciously and unintentionally, the scantiness of my resources or the difficulties of my life. . . . I know that I worked, from morning until night, with common men and boys, a shabby child. I know that I lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond. (139; cf. Forster 1: 29-30)

Many of David's intrusions for commentary upon his younger self are plainly critical. David shoulders the blame for making himself and Dora unhappy in the period of his "instruction" of Dora in household management. He buys her pretty earrings and tells her, "the fault was mine." David the narrator adds, "Which I sincerely felt, and

which indeed it was" (593). When he describes returning from his three years on the continent, David says he purposely kept his return a secret so that he might enjoy surprising his friends. But he observes that he was "perverse enough to feel a chill and disappointment in receiving no welcome" (702). After learning of his aunt's financial ruin, David thinks only of the new obstacles in his pursuit of Dora, with no regard for his aunt's and Mr. Dick's graver difficulties, and David the narrator comments, "Sordid and selfish as I knew it was, and as I tortured myself by knowing that it was, to let my mind run on my own distress so much, I was so devoted to Dora that I could not help it" (431).

Very often when David relates actions and thoughts of which he is ashamed, he intrudes in the apologetic or confessional mode, with evident sincerity in place of the usual irony of the third-person narrator's apologetic intrusions. For example, when Mr. Dick appears contented and complacent after the news of Aunt Betsey's ruin, David says, "I am sorry to say I was provoked into explaining to him that ruin meant distress, want, and starvation; but, I was soon bitterly reprov'd for this harshness, by seeing his face turn pale, and tears course down his lengthened cheeks" (427). Most often the matters for which he apologizes are minor transgressions the reader is likely to understand and forgive. After reporting Aunt Betsey's indignation at the brother who wanted to institutionalize Mr. Dick as a madman, David confesses, "I am afraid it was hypocritical in me, but seeing that my aunt felt strongly on the subject, I tried to look as if I felt strongly too" (174). Or when David's mother takes offense at Peggotty's suggestion that Mr. Murdstone might not be a good husband, Peggotty, David, and his mother all cry, and the narrating David says, "I . . . am afraid that in the first transports of wounded

tenderness I called Peggotty a ‘Beast’” (17). Many of these intrusions are effectively ironic, in that David’s transgressions are hardly worthy of censure and often mildly comic, but David’s apparent sincerity is a far cry from the obvious irony in the third-person Dickens narrator’s apologetic intrusions.

David’s self-criticism is often more plainly humorous as well. He laughs at himself for the absurdities of his infatuation with Dora in particular, and the readers smile along with him. For such folly as his circling the Spewlow house for two hours in the night, “blowing kisses at the lights in the windows, and romantically calling on the night, at intervals, to shield my Dora—I don’t exactly know what from, I suppose from fire. Perhaps from mice, to which she had a great objection,” David calls himself “as enraptured a young noodle as ever was carried out of his five wits by love” (405, 415). On the same theme David judges, “There is no doubt whatever that I was a lackadaisical young spooney; but there was a purity of heart in all this still, that prevents my having quite a contemptuous recollection of it, let me laugh as I may” (336). The genial self-mockery in such passages, especially in the first two retrospects, establishes distance between the mature narrating David and the young “spooney” of his early infatuations and loves and gives the book its frequent tone of fond nostalgia.

Many of David’s intrusions for commentary upon himself are more meditative and interpretive, as he speculates and ruminates on his younger self with pronounced emphasis on this distance between his present narrating self and his intradiegetic self in the *histoire* narrative. Speaking of his finding comfort in books in the period before being sent to Salem House, David muses,

It is astonishing to me now, how I found time, in the midst of my porings and blunderings over heavier themes, to read those books as I did. It is curious to me how I could ever have consoled myself under my small troubles (which were great troubles to me), by impersonating my favourite characters in them—as I did—and by putting Mr. and Miss Murdstone into all the bad ones—which I did too. (48)

Or of his excitement at the prospect of being “at his own disposal” when leaving Dr.

Strong’s, David says more speculatively,

So powerful were these visionary considerations in my boyish mind, that I seem, according to my present way of thinking, to have left school without natural regret. The separation has not made the impression on me, that other separations have. I try in vain to recall how I felt about it, and what its circumstances were; but it is not momentous in my recollection. I suppose the opening prospect confused me. (233)

Likely the most noted instance of David’s interpretive analysis of his own character, an analysis that is often thought to apply to Dickens as well, is the opening passage of Chapter 42, which begins:

I feel as if it were not for me to record, even though this manuscript is intended for no eyes but mine, how hard I worked at that tremendous short-hand, and all improvement appertaining to it, in my sense of responsibility to Dora and her aunts. I will only add, to what I have already written of my perseverance at this time of my life, and of a patient and continuous energy which then began to be matured with me, and which I know to be the strong part of my character, if it have any strength at all, that there, on looking back, I find the source of my success. . . . I never could have done what I have done, without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one object at a time, no matter how quickly its successor should come upon its heels, which I then formed. . . . (517-18)

One final illustration of David’s more thoughtful commentary upon himself lies in his recognition of his faults as a husband to Dora. The “vague unhappy loss or want of something” first acknowledged when Aunt Betsey calls him blind in his love for Dora, David feels growing within him throughout his marriage with Dora and beyond (430).

Of his not sharing with Dora his disappointments, anxieties and fears, David says, "I am far from sure, now, that it was right to do this, but I did it for my child-wife's sake. I search my breast, and I commit its secrets, if I know them, without any reservation to this paper." He concludes, "I was a boyish husband as to years. I had known the softening influence of no other sorrows or experiences than those recorded in these leaves. If I did any wrong, as I may have done much, I did it in mistaken love, and in my want of wisdom. I write the exact truth. It would avail me nothing to extenuate it now" (551-52).

The "exact truth" as David sees it is indeed offered in his commentary upon himself, but whether the exact truth according to David is the *whole* truth is open to question. David's inevitable closeness to his subject as his own biographer, and the closeness in so many respects between David and his creator, the Charles Dickens of his late thirties, may obscure some of the hidden truths that David never sees about himself, and that Dickens himself may have come to recognize only in the decade after *Copperfield* was completed. The first step in our uncovering of these "hidden truths" is to turn now to consider David's—and Dickens's—motivation in writing the autobiography "which he never meant to be published on any account."

Dickens, David, and the Quest for Identity

With all the novel's relentless emphasis on David in the present moment of recollection, one of Betsey Trotwood's remarks seems peculiarly relevant to the whole purpose of the novel, for David and for Dickens: "It's in vain, Trot, to recall the past, unless it works some influence upon the present" (296). David never explains his motive

in revisiting his past at such length and in such vivid detail that time and again he *relives* so many memories, especially so many painful memories. At one point David says, “In fulfillment of the compact I have made with myself, to reflect my mind on this paper, I again examine it, closely, and bring its secrets to the light” (594-95). As Rosemary Mundhenk observes, David is “curiously vague” on his reasons for making this compact with himself (331). The predominant assumption is that David, and Dickens too, revisits the trauma and the disappointments of a painful past in order to come to terms with that past, to face it, master it, and accept it, as a form of self-administered therapy. Audrey Jaffe asserts that “David returns to his past in order to fix it and to experience it as fixed, thereby establishing his present distance from it” (123). At the time of the writing, certainly, past and present are thoroughly interfused for the narrating David Copperfield. It may be that David hopes to relegate the past truly into the past by making it “written history.”

In the period at Salem House David is rescued from humiliation by the protection of the older, much respected Steerforth. To earn this continuing protection, David is commanded by Steerforth to tell him all the stories he remembers from his lonely reading at Blunderstone Rookery. Steerforth says, “We’ll go over ’em one after another. We’ll make some regular Arabian Nights of it.” Arabian Nights and Mornings, too, for David was routinely “roused, like the Sultana Scheherazade, and forced into a long story before the getting-up bell rang” (79-80). Sylvia Manning points out, “Just as the Sultana Scheherazada, whose image presides over this episode, told stories for her very life, her young successor David told them to secure his sheltered niche—to save his boy’s life—in

the isolated world of Salem House.” Manning adds, “The adult David Copperfield tells his story under a similar, less comic, compulsion” (331-32). The mature narrating David tells his story—to himself—to save his own life by confronting and exorcising the demons of his past that haunt him so relentlessly.

The impact of past trauma upon one’s personality was clearly in Dickens’s mind when he started *Copperfield*. He wrote the autobiographical fragment between 1846-1848, which Forster says enabled him to reveal the secret of his time at Warren’s and thereby lighten “the weight upon his memory as a painful burthen . . . by sharing it with a friend” (1.17). The 1848 Christmas book, *The Haunted Man*, planned soon after the attempt at autobiography and immediately before *Copperfield*, is the story of Professor Redlaw, who is granted a wish to forget his painful losses and disappointments in the past and given the magical power to make all those he meets forget their own past troubles. What Redlaw learns is that forgetting past woes makes people lose their compassion and ultimately their humanity. Milly, the angelic heroine of *The Haunted Man* delivers the story’s moral in saying, “it seems to me a good thing for us, to remember wrong that has been done us. . . . That we may forgive it” (393). The theme applies in *Copperfield* as well, for as Mundhenk suggests, the example of Aunt Betsey, who cannot escape her own painful past but channels her energies into caring for Mr. Dick, for David, and for her husband, the man who wronged her, suggests that “remembered pain fosters moral sympathy” (337). The importance of acknowledging and confronting past ills in healthy fashion is emphasized in *Copperfield*, too, by the negative examples in Mr. Wickfield, who deals with the loss of his wife by drowning himself in wine, and in Mr. Dick, whose

abandonment by his family drives him mad. Gordon Hirsch posits that Mr. Dick's madness reflects Dickens's painful awareness that the failure to deal with past traumas leads to "debilitating compulsions or other neuroses" (4). Other characters are damaged by not dealing with past trauma well, too: Julia Mills, Dora's Aunt Lavinia, Rosa Dartle, and Mrs. Gummidge are all harmed in degrees by lost love.

Dickens was strikingly secretive about his own past trauma, the Warren's episode in particular. It was only when Forster innocently asked if Dickens recalled a man named Dilke, who had said he once gave Dickens a half-crown when he was employed as a child in a warehouse near the Strand, that Dickens unburdened himself to Forster (Forster 1: 23). Speaking of his time at Warren's in the autobiographical fragment, Dickens confessed, "From that hour until this at which I write, no word of that part of my childhood which I have now gladly brought to a close, has passed my lips to any human being. . . . I have never, until I now impart it to this paper, in any burst of confidence with anyone, my own wife not excepted, raised the curtain I then dropped, thank God" (Forster 1: 38). But as Jean Ferguson Carr notes, Dickens did have a "pressing autobiographical urge": "He turned much of this preoccupation with his own past into material for his novels, by funneling autobiographical details into his fiction. Versions of his own travels, school experiences, friendships, loves, and parents appear regularly in his novels, emerging in especially direct and important ways in *David Copperfield*" (452). That autobiographical urge he attempted to satisfy directly through the abortive memoir, but dealing with the woes of his past so directly was apparently too painful. As Dickens told Maria Beadnell Winter, it was specifically when he neared the period of his love

with Maria that he “lost courage and burned the rest” (*Letters* 7: 544). Thus Dickens faced his past covertly and indirectly through the fiction of *Copperfield*.

That Dickens was indeed attempting to exorcise his own demons in writing *Copperfield* is an established assumption among Dickens scholars. Irene Simon believes that “In writing this novel Dickens was no doubt seeking to come to terms with his own experience and, through conscious and unconscious projection of his own self, to discover a pattern in his own development and to define his identity” (41). Edgar Johnson suggests that

The decision to fuse some of his own youthful experiences with those of his hero, and to make the story of David Copperfield at least in part his own story, would enable him at the same time to reveal and conceal the dark unhealed wounds that he could not expose without disguise, to analyze, to assess, and to assuage. Surely if in his own heart he confronted it all, the burden would fall from him and leave him free. (661)

Johnson observes also that in the “intermingled strands of fact and fantasy” in *Copperfield*, Dickens made a “profound and tremendous effort to come to grips with himself, to evaluate the influences that had made him what he was, to understand himself and the meaning of his own experience” (686-87). Alexander Welsh notes that Dickens’s motive in exploring his past in *Copperfield* was also prideful, saying that at the time of writing *Copperfield* Dickens felt secure enough of his position in the world that “he could take satisfaction in contemplating such wrongs and misfortunes that he had overcome—as a hero overcomes his enemies. The more bitterly he could taste the memory of wrongs, the more credit, at this distance, he could extract from them” (158). It seems unquestionable that Dickens’s motive in the autobiographical elements of the novel was

to explore the painful past as a means of arriving at a better understanding of himself, to justify himself in some respects, to write away the guilt, shame, and sense of unworthiness he felt from the traumas he was burdened with. Whether Dickens succeeded in these aims is questionable. Whether David succeeds in his parallel exploratory and purgative aims is questionable, too, despite his having his true heart's desire and apparently living securely and happily ever after at the novel's end.

David does appear to come to terms with his painful past in many respects. In essence, in his autobiography David rewrites his life so that with due acknowledgement to Agnes's guiding influence, he is indeed the "hero" of his life's story and can *see* himself, in the good and the bad, as a mature and successful man who has survived a painful past and thrived without being crippled by it as Mr. Wickfield and Mr. Dick have. As K. J. Fielding says, *Copperfield* shows with "self-assurance that by self-mastery a man may live down what might have harmed him" (110). David's journey into the past in his autobiography is exactly what Barry Westburg claims Dickens hoped the vicarious journey would be for him, a "self-remaking" (60). That David succeeds is evident to many. Irene Simon, for one, concludes that at the novel's end, "he has become emotionally mature and can now see the truth about himself" (52). Part of David's maturation comes simply from his forcing himself to recall and acknowledge the painful time at Murdstone and Grinby's—to write it down. For just as Dickens kept the memory of Warren's hidden until circumstances forced him to share it with Forster, David keeps his secrets to himself. As David says, with some borrowing from the autobiographical fragment,

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. The remembrance of that life is fraught with so much pain to me, with so much mental suffering and want of hope, that I have never had the courage even to examine how long I was doomed to lead it. Whether it lasted for a year, or more, or less, I do not know. I only know that it was, and ceased to be; and that I have written, and there I leave it. (184)

“Leaving” the experience on the written page as he does, purging himself of the pain and shame of this awful memory and others simply by voicing them, presumably, as Forster says of Dickens, David learns to recognize the “the explanation of himself in those early trials” (1: 40). Curiously, David does not ever profess to find any such “explanation” of himself in his early trials at Murdstone and Grinby's, and he does not consciously draw any glimmers of good from that time as Dickens did in the autobiographical fragment when he acknowledged that “I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am” (Forster 1: 38).

David's narrative does clearly demonstrate the solidification of his identity in his acquisition of greater wisdom and maturity, particularly in his recognition of the unflattering truth about himself when he recognizes it, as indicated in the critical commentary upon himself, and especially in his relationship with Dora. The novel's most apparent theme is David's recognition that his youthful heart was “undisciplined.” As he says when describing the “old unhappy loss or want of something never to be realized,” and the vague shadow he felt come between himself and Dora which prompted his occasional wondering what his life would have been like had he not married Dora, “I knew, now, that my own heart was undisciplined when it first loved Dora; and that if it had been disciplined, it never could have felt, when we were married, what it had felt in

its secret experience” (595). David’s progression from youth to maturity is nowhere more apparent than in his recognition that there are more important ideals in women than dimples and curls and cuteness, ideals such as those in Agnes: intelligence, maturity, perceptiveness, quiet fidelity, and perhaps above all, selflessness. Mark Spilka describes the recurrent progression in Dickens’s young male protagonists from “‘sinful innocence’ to acknowledged guilt,” and he judges that “In later life . . . David comes to see his own culpability” (142). It would appear that David’s greatest sin, committed in innocence as it is, lies in his marriage to Dora, and his most pronounced recognition of his own culpability is his realization that he should never have married Dora.

The connection between Dora and Maria Beadnell suggests that David’s marriage to Dora is a sort of wish fulfillment, certainly. Morris Golden suggests that Dickens began the purgation of his painful memories with the revelation of the Warren’s episode in the autobiographical fragment, and speaking of the painful memories of his failure in love with Maria, Golden says, “*David Copperfield* helped free Dickens of the pain in the memory, allowing him the emotions of the affair strained into nostalgia” (99). But David’s realization that Dora does not suit him well as a wife implies that Dickens was telling himself in the novel that despite his great passion for Maria in his youth, he really was better off not having married her. Golden poses that the fictional marriage is in “its deficiencies a judgment of probabilities and perhaps a revenge” (99). Through the fiction of *Copperfield*, Dickens may in effect be rationalizing to himself and exacting revenge against the woman who rejected him after he was so passionately devoted to her, but as Robin Gilmour argues, the very power of David’s memories of bliss with Dora in the

present moment of his writing serves to undercut the theme of David's learning to discipline his heart. As Gilmour claims, "the intensity of real feeling keeps breaking through, and the interesting point about David's attitude to Dora is that, like his attitude to his mother, it leaves the impression of an experience which has *not* been mastered or ever fully outgrown" (36-37). The implication is that David's intense nostalgia for his time with Dora, even as he writes with Agnes at his side, reveals a great love still for the object of his undisciplined heart. The further implication is that Dickens may not have successfully laid the demon of rejection by Maria to rest in *Copperfield*, and as her depiction in *Little Dorrit* suggests, this demon would not be exorcised until several years later, after he met Mrs. Maria Beadnell Winter and found her middle-aged, fat, still childish, and dull. As we shall see presently, David's intrusive discourse reveals that there were a number of other demons neither he nor his creator was so successful in exorcizing as well.

Into the Mind of David Copperfield: Social Demons and Denial

As we have seen, the differences between David's narrative discourse and the typical third-person Dickens narrator's serve the obvious purpose of putting distance between David Copperfield and Charles Dickens as "authors." David's intrusions also establish his identity as a credible survivor of a traumatic childhood who has gone on to live a productive life, blessed in the end with fame and fortune as a novelist and a worthy and devoted wife in Agnes. Particularly in his self-conscious comments acknowledging the writing process, in his commentary upon others, and most especially in his

commentary on his younger self, David offers a wealth of insights into the psyche of the mature, narrating David Copperfield, and as we shall see, many of these insights apply to Dickens the man as well. In “The Identity of David Copperfield,” Jerome Buckley notes that *Copperfield* “differs from the work of the earlier Dickens not only in its emphasis on the hero but also in its mode of ‘subjective’ presentation as a well sustained first person narrative and so in effect as an extended dramatic monologue” (227). In many respects *Copperfield* is indeed an extended dramatic monologue, and as with any dramatic monologue, the fundamental point is to offer defining insight into the character of the speaker, the mature David Copperfield. Because he was so close to his subject—because he and David shared so much history—Dickens may offer significant insights into the mind of David the narrator of which he himself was unaware, and the mature David Copperfield may not be as unscathed by the past that haunts him as Dickens intended. David’s narrative discourse considered collectively shows him not to have mastered all the demons of his past so successfully. In fact, David may share many of the same flaws and weaknesses that Dickens himself had, Forster’s claim that David is not so “harmed or hardened” as Dickens was by his own traumatic past notwithstanding (2: 129).

Copperfield certainly is the story of David’s “progress,” but the corrective evidence in the authorial discourse suggests that David does not see and acknowledge his failings so well as the careful reader does. Dickens’s closeness to David may have prevented even the actual author from recognizing or acknowledging many of David’s less than admirable qualities. As noted above, the autobiographer’s perspective is inevitably suspect. We hear only the autobiographer’s side of things, and we know there

is more than one side to every story. Robin Gilmour notes that the persistent rhythm of the “music of memory” in the modulations between *histoire* past and the present moment of David’s narration provides “a source of subtle and ambivalent effects within the novel” (30). One of the subtle and ambivalent effects is that David the mature narrator is clearly not as noble and “heroic” as seems to appear to himself. As Janet Brown urges,

David Copperfield does not . . . require *us* to see David only as he sees himself. We submit to David’s view of things because that is at last the subject of the novel. But nowhere is the fact hidden that his view is a purely personal one (indeed, the novel glories in it); nowhere are we asked to adopt David’s perspective as the only conceivable one. The imperfections of David’s self-knowledge are not disallowed, if we choose to look for them, and the next step in a study of this sort might well be the scrutiny of his various evasions. (207)

An objective examination of the self that David reveals in his narrative discourse provides just the sort of scrutiny that Brown proposes.

The first and most evident truth that David’s discourse reveals is the depth of his self-pity. While the self-pity is understandable, it is excessive at times, to the point that Harvey Sucksmith calls it “offensive” (189). The scenes of the greatest pathos, when the younger David is at his most pathetic vulnerability, are consistently the ones that move David to “see himself” before his mind’s eye in the present moment of narration. David the narrator “sees himself” during his twenty-three mile trudge one Sunday during his flight to Dover, “coming over the bridge at Rochester, footsore and tired” (156). Later he says, “It is not in my power to retrace, one by one, all the weary phases of distress of mind through which I passed” during his mourning on the continent, but David the narrator “sees himself” passing wondrous sights in his travels from town to town “as a dreamer might; bearing my painful load through all, and hardly conscious of the objects

as they fade before me” (696-97). In describing a scene lifted from the autobiographical fragment, of a special occasion during his time at Murdstone and Grinby’s (his birthday, David thinks), when a tavern-keeper and his wife smile at the strange little figure he makes ordering a glass of the house’s “*very best ale*,” David says, “Here we stand, all three, before me now. The landlord in his shirt-sleeves, leaning against the bar window-frame; his wife looking over the little half-door; and I, in some confusion, looking up at them from outside the partition” (138; cf. Forster 1: 34). The rottenness and filth of the Murdstone and Grinby warehouse, the squeaking of the rats that infested it, David says, “are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant. They are all before me, just as they were in the evil hour when I went among them for the first time, with my trembling hand in Mr. Quinion’s” (132-33; cf. Forster 1: 25).

When the past infringes on the present more thoroughly, when the narration of *histoire* events shifts from past tense to present and David *relives* particular episodes, these also tend to be memories which fill him with the most pain and self-pity. Aside from the nostalgic first two “Retrospect” chapters and the novel’s final chapter, each of the full-scale intrusions of the past into the present moment of narration shows the younger David at times of particular pathos or vulnerability: the lost loving home with his mother and Peggotty, lessons with the Murdstones, being struck by Creakle at Salem House, his mother’s funeral, Dora’s funeral. The experiences that David relives with greatest vividness in the present moment of narration are those in which he is at his most pathetic.

The excess of David’s self-pity is suggested particularly in the emphatic repetition

of negative phrases and the protestation to God at the end of one of the passages taken nearly verbatim from the autobiographical fragment: “From Monday morning until Saturday night, I had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no assistance, no support of any kind, from any one, that I can call to mind, as I hope to go to heaven!” (137; cf. Forster 1: 28). Excess is evident, too, when David the narrator sounds more like a child himself than a mature adult when he comments on his harsh treatment by the Murdstones after his mother’s death, speaking clearly in the “narrator’s now,” “Day after day, week after week, month after month, I was coldly neglected. I wonder sometimes, when I think of it, what they would have done if I had been taken with an illness; whether I should have lain down in my lonely room, and languished through it in my usual solitary way, or whether anybody would have helped me out” (128-29). David here sounds almost like a child who wishes to be stricken with an illness to force those around him or her to give their attention. Suggesting that Dickens’ own self-pity is evident in this sort of childish comment, self-pity that he attributes directly to the secret memory of Warren’s, Alexander Welsh observes that Dickens’s self-pity over Warren’s “explains the vein of self-pity that crops up again and again in the novels, and particularly the childlike sentiment that if he had died or turned bad, it would have served the grown-ups right” (4). That David’s self-pity is a reflection of Dickens’s own seems evident. The connection between Dickens’s feelings of pity for himself, particularly for the blacking-warehouse experience, and the often excessive sentimentality and self-pity in Dickens’s fiction beyond *Copperfield* has been well noted. As Peter Coveney says, “It needs only half an eye to detect the sentimentalities, especially towards children, to

discern the poor little drudge of the blacking factory, corroding his feelings in torments of self-pity. He is there on almost every other page” (112). Coveney suggests further that the tendency to “squandering emotion in self-pity and social recrimination” in Dickens’s fiction came from Dickens’s “inability to exorcise, perhaps to forgive the past” (113).

In one of the pieces in *Sketches by Boz*, “The Couple Who Dote upon their Children,” Dickens wrote that “Self-love and egotism are bad qualities, of which the unrestrained exhibition, though it may be sometimes amusing, never fails to be wearisome and unpleasant” (576). David seems careful to be modest in *Copperfield*, and as he observes in one generalizing comment, “It has always been in my observation of human nature, that a man who has any good reason to believe in himself never flourishes himself before the faces of other people in order that they may believe in him.” At this point in the novel he is describing the successful reception of his first book, where David records, “I was not stunned by the praise which sounded in my ears, notwithstanding that I was keenly alive to it, and thought better of my own performance, I have little doubt, than anybody else did” (588). As he is ostensibly addressing only himself in his “written memory,” David is hardly flourishing himself before others, but it is interesting that he is sure now that he thought better of his performance than anyone else.

Egotism is one of the qualities that David the narrator criticizes when he recognizes it. He has a laugh at himself on this score when he relates his thought that Jack Maldon was “not at all improved” by his years in India, for instance: “I was in a state of ferocious virtue, however, as to young men who were not cutting down trees in the forest of difficulty; and my impression must be received with due allowance” (447-

48). Many of David's self-praising comments are thoroughly understandable in a private and honest review of his life: when he deserves praise, he should recognize what is admirable in him, certainly. When he says that his learning of shorthand reporting was "one of the irons I began to heat immediately, and one of the irons I kept hot, and hammered at, with a perseverance I may honestly admire," we can hardly fault David's "discourse now" admiration of his perseverance as being egotistical (465). Small glimpses of egotism do show themselves in the authorial discourse at times, however. David reveals a hint of egotism in the comment that Mr. Micawber comes to tell Quinion of his departure from London, necessitating David's finding new lodging, "and to give me a high character, which I am sure I deserved" (149). (In the autobiographical fragment, Dickens is "very sure" he deserved a "high character" from his employers at Warren's [Forster 1: 38].) The added "which I am sure I deserved" seems somewhat gratuitous: it is as if David could not resist saying, "and I *did* deserve a good recommendation." Of his visit to Yarmouth after Emily has been restored to Mr. Peggotty, David shows some mild condescension in saying, "I hope they were all the better for my being there" (629). When relating that he danced with Miss Larkins, David cannot resist adding that he danced "pretty well, too, as it happens" (231).

There is more serious egotism in David's attitude towards his companions in the time at Murdstone and Grinby's. It is perhaps hard for us today, Americans particularly, to appreciate or sympathize fully with the vanity of social class in Victorian England, but it is clear that David considers his companions "beneath him." David records, "All this time I was working at Murdstone and Grinby's in the same common way, and with the

same common companions, and with the same ceaseless sense of unmerited degradation as at first.” And he adds, “But I never, happily for me no doubt, made a single acquaintance, or spoke to any of the many boys whom I saw daily in going to the warehouse, in coming from it, and in prowling about the streets at meal-times” (143).

The intrusive “happily for me no doubt,” reinforces the superiority felt by both David the boy and David the narrator. If he had made acquaintances among the other boys, the implication is, he would have risked lowering himself to their level, perhaps in ways that would have altered his circumstances so that he could not keep himself so apart from that degrading common world in times after. This same sense of social superiority on Dickens’s part is more pronounced in the autobiographical fragment, though in truth, as the grandson of a servant and the son of a navy pay clerk, Dickens was less definitely in the “gentleman” class than David. It appears that much of what made the Warren’s episode so traumatic for Dickens was the humiliation and degradation he felt at being put to “common work” with “common boys.” In the fragment, Dickens notes that he “held some station” among the other boys as “the young gentleman.” “Though perfectly familiar with them,” Dickens says, “my conduct and manners were different enough from theirs to place a space between us” (Forster 1: 30). While the mature narrating David is generally modest throughout *Copperfield*, the narrative discourse does offer occasional hints of vanity.

David’s discourse also suggests that he is defensive at times, particularly regarding his shortcomings as he sees them. The quality in himself David criticizes most directly is selfishness. He is critical of himself for thinking mainly of himself in the

description of his reaction to Aunt Betsey losing her property, as noted above, and in his being “jealous of Death itself” during Dora’s mourning for her father, when he felt “a grasping, avaricious wish to shut out everybody from her but myself, and to be all in all to her, at that unseasonable time of all times” (475). As noted above, too, he is also critical of some of his failings as a husband to Dora, and through gentle humorous self-mockery, he criticizes himself for being a silly fool in his youthful amours. Very often, however, David appears to attempt mitigation of his acknowledged shortcomings by diffusing or deflecting the blame away from himself. In the critical commentary on his selfishness at the news of Aunt Betsey’s ruin, for instance, “Sordid and selfish as I knew it was, and as I tortured myself by knowing that it was, to let my mind run on my own distress so much, I was so devoted to Dora that I could not help it,” David seems almost to say, “I was selfish not because it is my nature, but only because my love for Dora was so great I could not help it” (431). Or regarding his initial reaction to the disclosure of this distressing news, David says, “I was roused from my amazement, and concern for her—I am sure, for her—by her falling on my neck, for a moment, and crying that she only grieved for me” (425-26). As Monod observes of this passage, “He is distressed by Miss Betsey’s loss of her fortune, but there is something clearly defensive in his insistence on the non-selfish motives of his feelings” (325). When he condemns his avaricious desire for Dora’s attention while she grieves for her father, David seems to deflect some of the heat away from himself by saying that “the trouble of this state of mind” is “not exclusively my own, I hope, but known to others” (475). In effect, David appears to hope that his egocentric selfishness is not specific to him, but a general

tendency in human nature. In one of comments on his silliness in his early love of Dora, David says, “I suppose that when I saw Dora in the garden and pretended not to see her, and rode past the house pretending to be anxiously looking for it, I committed two small fooleries which other young gentlemen in my circumstances might have committed” (411).

Monod calls these intrusions in which David attempts to lessen or mitigate his faults by extending them to others “defensive little assaults against mankind,” and he suggests that David’s defensiveness is a direct consequence of David’s being a clear projection of Dickens himself. Monod believes that *Copperfield* is a

study in psychological autobiography, in which Dickens has not spared himself, since, together with many amiable or even admirable qualities, he has also imparted to his hero and representative many weaknesses painted equally from the living model. Yet, in spite of the regard for truth with which Dickens has endeavored to depict the least flattering aspects of his hero, he seems frequently to feel the urge to justify, or at least excuse, such weaknesses by generalizing them. (325)

If the shortcomings David recognizes in himself are indeed qualities he shares with his creator as Monod suggests, “It is as though Dickens had so closely associated himself with David that he was ashamed of appearing to the reader in such an unflattering aspect and attempted to extenuate the impression produced” (Monod 326). Whether or not the weaknesses David sees himself belong to Dickens too, David does appear defensively sensitive to criticism, even from himself—sensitivity to criticism is another quality we know that Dickens himself possessed.

David is perhaps most thoroughly defensive about his blindness to the truth about Steerforth, and though he does not remark upon them, he has been given signs of

Steerforth's true nature all along: Steerforth's part in Mr. Mell's dismissal, the assault of Rosa Dartle with a hammer, and immediately before the elopement with Emily, Steerforth's naming his yacht "The Little Em'ly" and asking, strangely, that David remember him kindly "no matter what happens" on the eve of the disaster. David offers one of his apologetic deflecting generalizations when he acknowledges that he cannot love Steerforth less even after he has brought misery upon the Peggotty clan: "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" (388). In fact, David has given an advance explanation of his failure to apprehend the truth about Steerforth. On the occasion of his first introducing Steerforth to Ham and Mr. Peggotty at school, David's comments on his friend imply that Steerforth's charm is so powerful that anyone would be taken in by him:

There was an ease in his manner—a gay and light manner it was, but not swaggering—which I still believe to have borne a kind of enchantment with it. I still believe him, in virtue of this carriage, his animal spirits, his delightful voice, his handsome face and figure, and, for aught I know, of some inborn power of attraction besides (which I think a few people possess), to have carried a spell with him to which it was a natural weakness to yield, and which not many persons could withstand. (89-90)

Not *many* people would fail to have been fooled by him, David says and *still* believes in the "discourse now": in other words, not just *me*.

Beneath defensiveness often lies insecurity, and his intrusive commentary definitely shows David's insecurity. One of the most delightful comic threads running throughout the novel is the repeated emphasis on the intradiegetic David's self-consciousness about his youth, especially in the presence of the eminently "respectable"

Mr. Littimer. In describing his first meeting with Littimer, David says, "It was occasioned, I suppose, by the reverend nature of respectability in the abstract, but I felt particularly young in this man's presence" (255). This recurrent strain of David's feeling so young in the presence of Littimer is repeated almost to excess, from the time of his early manhood into his maturity. When David narrates that during his first visit to Steerforth's, his old friend taught him the arts of horseback riding, fencing, and boxing, he says, "I had no reason to believe that Littimer understood such arts himself; he never led me to suppose anything of the kind, by so much as the vibration of one of his respectable eyelashes; yet whenever he was by, while we were practising, I felt myself the greenest and most inexperienced of mortals" (256). When Littimer accompanies Steerforth on a visit to Yarmouth, David reports, "When I said to him that I hoped Mrs. Steerforth and Miss Dartle were well, he answered respectfully (and of course respectably), that they were tolerably well, he thanked me, and had sent their compliments." David intrudes to comment interpretively, "This was all, and yet he seemed to me to say as plainly as a man could say: 'You are very young, sir; you are exceedingly young.'" (278). When recording the occasion of Steerforth's dining at David's apartment accompanied by Littimer, David comments, "I was a mere infant at the head of my own table; and hardly ventured to glance at the respectable phenomenon, who had come from Heaven knows where, to put my establishment to rights. . . . [His] very elbows, when he had his back towards me, seemed to teem with the expression of his fixed opinion that I was extremely young" (354). Much later, when the "emblem of respectability" reveals that Steerforth and Emily had parted, and that he himself had quite

“unrespectably” offered his hand to Emily, David says, “Mr. Littimer bent his head, as much as to say, ‘Indeed, sir? But you’re young!’ and resumed his narrative” (571).

This theme of David’s feeling so youthful in the presence of someone so “eminently respectable” is indeed comic, and in some respects it resembles the “tags” that Dickens assigns to various minor characters who reappear at infrequent intervals in the third-person novels. At a glance these feelings of self-consciousness seem merely one laughable aspect of growing up that all of us feel as we move from youth into early adulthood, insecure about our belonging as “proper” adults in the adult world. But the persistence of this theme over time hints that David has misgivings about himself as an adult. There is a sort of guilty, insecure feeling David reveals in the encounters with respectable Mr. Littimer, suggesting that he thinks he is perhaps somehow *not* respectable himself.

Along similar lines, there is comedy in David’s commentary upon his inability to manage Mrs. Crupp, the landlady who takes shameless advantage of him. Mrs. Crupp abuses her tenant by giving him shoddy service and stealing his provisions for her own use. In humorous Dickensian commentary on Mrs. Crupp’s drinking, David says that he made two discoveries about her: “first, that Mrs. Crupp was a martyr to a curious disorder called ‘the spazzums,’ which was generally accompanied with inflammation of the nose, and required to be constantly treated with peppermint; secondly, that something peculiar in the temperature of my pantry, made the brandy-bottles burst” (330). Mrs. Crupp insists on calling him “David Copperfull,” and young David apparently does not have the temerity to correct her, and if ever he does protest his poor treatment, Mrs. Crupp is

always able to put him in his place immediately. As David recalls, “If I objected to having my bed made at five o’clock in the afternoon—which I *do* still think an uncomfortable arrangement—one motion of her hand towards the same nankeen region of wounded sensibility was enough to make me falter an apology” (351). David is indulgent in the recollection of Mrs. Crupp’s abuse of his youthful insecurity as a fledgling adult in his first apartment.

The youthful insecurities continue through the period of his courtship and marriage with Dora. Miss Murdstone, in her capacity as Dora’s companion, is a witness to the scene—indeed she is its cause—when Mr. Spenlow tells David that he may not consider himself an eligible suitor to Dora. As David describes his leaving after this painful interview, he records,

Miss Murdstone’s heavy eyebrows followed me to the door . . . and she looked so exactly as she used to look, at about that hour of the morning, in our parlor at Blunderstone, that I could have fancied I had been breaking down in my lessons again, and that the dead weight on my mind was that horrible old spelling-book, with oval woodcuts, shaped, to my youthful fancy, like the glasses out of spectacles. (472)

Chastened by Spenlow’s having put him in his place in his pretensions to his daughter’s hand, David is, significantly, transported back to one of his worst moments in childhood, when he was a helpless and persecuted little boy. This rejection of David’s pretensions to marry into the class of his social betters clearly parallels Dickens’s experiences with Maria Beadnell. David fights his way through the “forest of difficulty” to establish himself as worthy of Dora in the same way that Dickens did with Maria. In fact, Dickens credited Maria for his own determination and industry in the “forest of difficulty” that lay between the two of them. As he wrote Maria in 1855, “Whatever of fancy, romance,

energy, passion, aspiration and determination belong to me, I never have separated and never shall separate from the hard hearted little women—you. . . . It is a matter of perfect certainty to me that I began to fight my way out of poverty and obscurity, with one perpetual idea of you” (*Letters* 7: 538-39). David and Dickens both were driven to “prove themselves” socially worthy of their loves, and David’s figurative description of himself wielding a “woodman’s axe” with a determination to “clear my own way through the forest of difficulty, by cutting down the trees until I came to Dora” clearly applies to Dickens’s feelings about his not being “good enough” for Maria (444).

After David succeeds in proving himself acceptable to Dora’s aunts and marries her, he confesses that it does not seem possible that he is the master of his own home. When he and Dora first take possession of their cottage, he says, “I am quite unable to regard myself as its master. I seem to be there, by permission of somebody else. I half expect the real master to come home presently, and say he is glad to see me” (537). Instead of taking pride in his being a “real” adult now, a married man with his own home, David describes himself as an imposter. Continuing the theme begun with Mrs. Crupp, their servants take such advantage of the newly married Copperfields that it makes David ashamed. In one of his Dickensian fanciful “as if” comparisons, the recollecting David observes humorously that according to their accounts it would appear “as if we might have kept the basement story paved with butter, such was the extensive scale of our consumption of that article.” He wonders whether their apparent consumption of pepper had serious impact on the excise returns or the markets of the period. “And the most wonderful fact of all was, that we never had anything in the house,” he says. In a

speculative comment that closely resembles the deflecting generalizations Monod labels “defensive little assaults on mankind,” David says, “As to the washerwoman pawning the clothes, and coming in a state of penitent intoxication to apologize, I suppose that might have happened several times to anybody. Also the chimney on fire, the parish engine, and perjury on the part of the Beadle” (547). In this case, of course, the “deflection” is plainly ironic, serving mainly to heighten the gentle mockery. David is greatly embarrassed when the servant he has arrested for theft hopes to ease either his conscience or his sentence by confessing all the crimes he knows done against the Copperfields by their servants. Of this public airing of the Copperfields’ being “had” by their servants, David comments speculatively, “I got to be so ashamed of being such a victim, that I would have given him any money to hold his tongue, or would have offered a round bribe for his being permitted to run away” (590). We do not hear that David ever learns to assert himself with his servants and demand their honesty and respect, presumably the very capable manager, Agnes, manages their affairs and servants after their marriage.

In a very revealing comment upon himself, given almost in passing, David acknowledges “A distrust of myself, which has often beset me in life on small occasions, when it would have been better away” (243). David’s distrust of himself, his insecurity about himself, is plain to see in the many instances in which his intrusive commentary reveals his extreme and persistent feelings of youthfulness. Though these feelings are often understandable, especially when he is on the threshold between youth and manhood, David’s lingering feelings of youthfulness in the presence of such emblems of respectability as Littimer and his inability to assert himself with Mrs. Crupp, first, and the

parade of servants who take advantage of him once he is married to Dora suggest that he has some difficulty seeing himself as a legitimate, “respectable” adult. Gwendolyn Needham remarks that David’s “modesty often sinks into lack of self-confidence, his judgment into self-distrust,” and his timidity and self-distrust result in a “lack of self-assertion makes him an easy victim to the tyranny of waiters, coachmen, and landladies” (85, 87). The intrusive commentary shows that David attempts to laugh away a painful truth about himself: he is not secure enough to stand up for himself when he is intimidated or wronged by his social inferiors. As Alan Shelston claims, that distrust of himself on small occasions, “which so inhibits David in his dealings with waiters, coachmen and gentlemen’s gentlemen—a beautifully observed mark of his social insecurity—indexes a much deeper misgiving about his capacity to confront the world on its own terms” (24). It may be that David laughs indulgently at these small indications of deeper misgivings rather than examining them more fully and directly because he is not fully aware of or able to face those deeper insecurities.

Powerful feelings of shame and guilt lie beneath David’s defensiveness and insecurity, and it is these feelings that explain David’s more serious misgivings about himself. In his candid critical commentary of himself, David acknowledges feelings of guilt when, by rights, he should feel guilty. He expresses guilt for his part in Mr. Mell’s dismissal from Salem House, for being selfish with Aunt Betsey, for introducing Steerforth to the Peggotty circle, for believing the insinuations about Annie Strong and Jack Maldon, and especially for his failings in marriage with Dora. One instance of his guilt regarding Dora is when he has to rush away from home to work after they have had

a fight, occasioned by his criticizing her housekeeping: “I had the conscience of an assassin, and was haunted by a vague sense of enormous wickedness” (544). David feels guilt when by rights he should not, too, and it is a deep sense of unmerited guilt and shame that haunts him throughout his life and best explains his need to rewrite himself as the hero of his own life. David’s intrusive discourse reveals this sense of unmerited guilt or shame, the feeling of having done something wrong when he has not, on a number of small occasions—after he bites Mr. Murdstone, for example: “How well I remember, when my smart and passion began to cool, how wicked I began to feel!” It is understandable that the younger David felt wicked in this instance, for it is wrong for children to defy parental authority. It is interesting that David remembers the feeling so well, for from another perspective what he did was assert himself rightly, even heroically, in standing up to the cruel man who has been beating him “as if he would have beaten me to death” (50). David’s feelings of guilt when he knows for certain he is innocent are seen unequivocally when he describes his reaction to Rosa Dartle on his second visit to Steerforth’s: “Blameless as I was, and knew that I was, in reference to any wrong she could possibly suspect me of, I shrunk before her strange eyes, quite unable to endure their hungry lustre” (368). This feeling of “guilt in innocence” is most pronounced with Mr. Littimer, whom David thinks knows some dreadful secret about him. As the narrating David asks himself, “How was it, having so little in reality to conceal, that I always *did* feel as if this man were finding me out?” (355). This irrational fear, of being “found out,” lies at the very center of David Copperfield, and perhaps of Dickens as well.

It is deep feelings of fear and shame that explain David’s, and even more,

Dickens's, urgent secrecy regarding his abandonment to the keenly felt degradation of common labor as a child. David has great fears of others thinking him "not good enough" if they knew the whole truth about him, that he has been tainted by living and working with "common boys" at Murdstone and Grinby's in particular. This fear of being "found out" torments David when he is first established at Dr. Strong's. He says he felt himself almost an imposter being among the other, more fortunate boys:

It seemed to me so long, however, since I had been among such boys, or among any companions of my own age, except Mick Walker and Mealy Potatoes, that I felt as strange as ever I have done in my life. I was so conscious of having passed through scenes of which they could have no knowledge, and of having acquired experiences foreign to my age, appearance, and condition, as one of them, that I half believed it was an imposture to come there as an ordinary little schoolboy. (195)

David recalls worrying about what the other boys would think if they knew the truth about his familiarity with the King's Bench Prison and such people as the Micawbers, and "all those pawnings, and sellings." "What would they say, who made so light of money," he wonders, "if they could know how I had scraped my halfpence together, for the purchase of my daily saveloy and beer, or my slices of pudding? How would it affect them, who were so innocent of London life, and London streets, to discover how knowing I was (and was ashamed to be) in some of the meanest phases of both?" (195-96). As the parenthetical comment suggests, it appears that David's shame itself is no small part of his guilty secret.

The guilty fear of discovery of the "truth about him" is just as great when David learns that Uriah Heep knows the Micawbers, for now the secret might be exposed to Agnes and her father. Of his meeting Mr. Micawber unexpectedly at Uriah Heep's home,

David admits, “I cannot say—I really *cannot* say—that I was glad to see Mr. Micawber there” (220). The pain and shame in the truth about David’s time at Murdstone and Grinby’s live on to the present moment of the narrating David’s life. David says he will never lose remembrance of this time so long as he remembers anything, and he says that his recollection of this time has repeatedly “without my invocation, come before me like a ghost, and haunted happier times” (129). Just as Dickens wrote in the autobiographical fragment of his subconscious fixation on the Warren’s period: “My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation . . . that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life” (Forster 1: 26-27). It is telling indeed that David—and Dickens to an even greater extent—guards the haunting secret of humiliation and “social degradation” above all others, when he must know rationally that his being “tainted” by the degradation is through absolutely no fault of his own. David’s, and Dickens’s, shame and guilt are like those of a rape victim or a Holocaust survival: irrational, but deep, abiding, and scarring. It does not matter that the victim is wholly aware of his or her innocence on a conscious level, the guilt and shame persist regardless. As we will see below, this theme of unmerited guilt and shame is revisited in dramatically different ways in *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*.

If David’s motives in committing his secret memories to paper are not immediately evident, given what we know of Charles Dickens the man, his motives in writing *Copperfield* seem transparent in comparison. He hoped to confront and master the two great traumas of his youth, the Warren’s episode and rejection by Maria. That

David successfully exorcises his demons is suggested by his happy ending: fame, fortune, and family with a worthy, loving wife. David acknowledges the lengths he has progressed at the moment his hopes in loving Agnes are realized. As he and Agnes stand together looking up at the moon, united at last, David says, “Long miles of road then opened out before my mind; and, toiling on, I saw a ragged way-worn boy, forsaken and neglected, who should come to call even the heart now beating against mine, his own” (739). The implication is that now, the old unhappy sense of loss will disappear—what was missing has finally been found: Agnes. In subtle ways, the less than admirable qualities David’s narrative discourse reveals, particularly the defensiveness, insecurity, and feelings of unwarranted guilt and shame, suggest with great psychological realism that he has not been entirely unscathed by this journey from neglect and abandonment to security and happiness.

It is significant that David sees the image of his ragged, neglected younger self at the moment his dreams with Agnes are realized, for this image is a demon that lives on, vividly so and in the present moment of David’s recollection as he writes years after he and Agnes are married and have children of their own. Whether writing down and *reliving* his past will exorcise David’s demons once the task is done is of course impossible to say. It seems clear that Dickens hoped it would. That Dickens was less successful than he might have hoped in exorcising his own demons in writing *Copperfield* is suggested in the case of Dora/Maria, as Robin Gilmour argues, by the power her memory still holds over David, so evident in her living before the narrating David’s mind’s eye. That Dickens was less successful than he might have hoped in

regard to the novel's other primary theme, the facing down of the trauma of abandonment and feelings of irrational shame and guilt, is suggested by his revisiting many of these same issues in his next novel, *Bleak House*, where Dickens "rewrites himself" at an even greater remove in the more thoroughly damaged psyche of Esther Summerson. In *Copperfield*, the narrative discourse reveals relatively minor character flaws that Dickens and David both have as a result of the trauma that apparently still haunts them both. In *Bleak House*, the connections between Dickens and Esther are more covert than those between Dickens and David, but they are nonetheless discernible, in even deeper, more profound ways. And whereas David's narrative discourse reveals relatively minor character flaws in *Copperfield*, Esther's discourse suggests that the impact of the trauma of abandonment in childhood runs much deeper in both Esther and in Dickens.

Chapter Five: The Intrusive Esther Summerson

The Esther Problem(s)

From the time *Bleak House* was published in 1852-1853, Esther Summerson has been considered a “problem,” a “monstrous failure” even, both as heroine and narrator (Ford *Dickens Critics* 65). The most common complaint about Esther is that she is too sickeningly sweet, too selfless, modest, and virtuous to be credible. Along with Agnes in *David Copperfield*, Esther is often held up as evidence of Dickens’s inability to understand or sympathize with women, for many believe that Dickens was “incapable of creating ‘real’ or ‘fully complex’ female figures” (Hopkins 112). After reading the first monthly installment of *Bleak House* in March 1852, Charlotte Brontë had seen enough to deem Esther “weak and twaddling; an amiable nature is caricatured, not faithfully rendered” (578n). In a September 1853 *Spectator* review, George Brimley thought Esther “only coarse portraiture, . . . utterly untrue and inconsistent. Such a girl would not write her own memoirs, and certainly would not bore one with her goodness till a wicked wish arises that she would either do something very ‘spicy’ or confine herself to superintending the jam-pots at Bleak House” (935). More recently, Monod has concluded that Esther is “by no means a satisfactory creation,” and he considers her an illustration of Dickens’s consistent inability to “create artistically satisfactory heroines, because he wished them to

be possessed of every moral perfection” (414-15). Rose Maylie, Nell Trent, Florence Dombey, and Agnes Wickfield are all “too morally perfect,” but as Dickens’s only female narrator/heroine on a large scale, Esther Summerson’s overdone “perfection” reveals itself more extensively and more dramatically than is the case with any of the other Dickens “angels.”

Regarding Esther as a narrator more specifically, exception has been taken to her reporting a scene that she does not witness between Allan Woodcourt and Mr. Vholes in Chapter 51, and commentators from George Gissing to Philip Collins have felt that Esther is merely a thin mask through which Dickens often speaks too clearly in his own characteristic manner (Gissing 58, Leacock 162, Garis 108-9, Collins 135-37). Bert Hornback finds it a “serious problem” that Esther is so “unknowing” about why or what she is supposed to be writing: “If ever in the history of fiction we have seen an incompetent narrator, Esther is it” (“Other Portion” 183). Most often lamented about Esther’s narration are her frequent professions of modesty when recording other characters’ praises of herself. Esther’s self-deprecation is often considered “cloying” false modesty. The ever-loyal Forster judged the blending of so many admirable qualities with Esther’s appearance of naïve unawareness of them “a difficult enterprise, full of hazard in any case, not worth success, and certainly not successful” (2: 138). W. J. Harvey sees the difficulties of making Esther so passive and modest and yet so good as “so immense that we should wonder not that Dickens fails, but that his failure is so slight. Still, he does fail. The exigencies of the narrative force him to reveal Esther’s goodness in a coy and repellent manner” (94).

Esther's competence as a narrator—or Dickens's competence in creating Esther-the-narrator—has been reexamined in recent years, however, and she has been “rehabilitated” in many respects. For one thing, recent criticism shows an increasing appreciation of how the thirty-three chapters of Esther's first-person narrative combine with the thirty-four chapters of third-person narrative to provide an effective “double vision” of the foggy, gloomy England the novel depicts, ravaged by oppressive ills born of the worlds of Fashion, Philanthropy, and Chancery. Esther's narrative presents a personal, sentimental, hopeful view, and the third-person narrative an impersonal, ironic, and satirical view. J. Hillis Miller suggests that the novel's ultimate meaning lies in the “interpretive dance” the reader must perform in negotiating the apparent irresolution of the two “ways of seeing,” public and private, in the parallel narratives (“Dance” 34-35). Carol Senf suggests that the two “ways of seeing” are an accurate demonstration of the separate gendered spheres in Victorian culture, the third-person narrative the male, public, intellectual perspective, and Esther's the female, domestic, “governed by the heart” perspective. Senf also argues that Esther is a faithful representation of the Victorian ideal of femininity, not a regrettable parody as some have claimed.

Many of the most outspoken of Esther's “rehabilitators” have been feminist critics of the last twenty years. As Dickens told Grace Greenwood, a young American author, the effort of writing “as a woman” “cost him no little labor and anxiety,” and his anxiety about Esther's voice is evident in his asking Greenwood, “Is it quite natural? . . . quite girlish?” (6). Lynette Felber, Suzanne Graver, Chiara Briganti, and Anny Sadrin each argue that Esther is not only credible as a female writer, but that Dickens shows keen

perception of “womanly writing” in making Esther’s so self-effacing and self-deprecating, so equivocal in judgments, and filled with such awkward reticence in the narrative omissions and obliquities surrounding Allan Woodcourt. Sadrin believes that Dickens’s effort to write as a woman was “remarkable,” and the end result “a triumph.” She suggests that none of the most frequent objections would have been raised against Esther if her creator had been “Charlotte” Dickens instead of Charles: “We would interpret Esther’s stylistic awkwardness as the predicament of an authoress trying to assert herself in ‘an overwhelmingly male-dominated society,’ trapped, as Gilbert and Gubar would say, ‘in the specifically literary constructs of . . . “patriarchal poetry”’” (“Charlotte Dickens” 49). Suzanne Graver goes even further, suggesting that Dickens was “nothing short of brilliant” in making Esther’s narrative strategies so oblique and filled with subterfuge, claiming that Esther is a “remarkably insightful portrait” of a woman in Esther’s time and circumstances, and concluding that Dickens was a “brilliant strategist . . . in having chosen for Esther a mode of narration that has since come to be recognized as often characteristic of writing by women” (3, 10-11).

William Axton and Alex Zwerdling have “rehabilitated” Esther also as an accurate portrayal of a person suffering emotional trauma from a loveless childhood. Axton says that “Dickens designed the inconsistencies in Esther’s character to illustrate an inner conflict between her sense of an inherited moral taint and personal worthlessness, prompted by the circumstance of her illegitimate birth, and a contrary awareness that she is a free moral agent, responsible for her quality and identity through her own acts” (546). Zwerdling believes that Dickens’s attitude towards Esther was

“essentially clinical,” and he reverses W. J. Harvey’s judgment and says we are intended to look “very much *at* Esther rather than *through* her,” which leads us to see Esther as “one of the triumphs of [Dickens’s] art, a subtle psychological portrait clear in its outlines and convincing in its details” (429). Following Erik Erikson’s definition of trauma, Zwerdling demonstrates convincingly that Esther’s oft-lamented “coyness” in self-deprecation even as she records praise of herself is a genuine and natural tendency in someone suffering from permanently and severely damaged self-esteem as the result of a childhood wound that “never fully heals” (432, 430).

Building on Zwerdling’s analysis in particular, I believe a close examination of Esther’s discourse will reveal that her creation was a next step in Dickens confronting his own demons of abandonment or rejection and “guilty innocence.” Esther’s narrative does obviously reinforce the novel’s central condemnation of the ills of “the system” in this book that initiates Dickens’s so-called “dark period.” But beneath the deeper cover of Esther Summerson presenting the personal, sentimental view of “the system’s” damaging impact on the lives of her circle, the complexities of the persona revealed in Esther’s “discourse now” utterances suggest that Dickens was still haunted by many of the same demons in *Bleak House* that he might have hoped to exorcise in *David Copperfield*. Our procedure in this chapter will be to consider first how Esther’s narrative discourse resembles and differs from both the typical third-person Dickens narrator’s and David Copperfield’s, and then to consider the personality Esther’s discourse reveals and to note how Esther functions as Dickens’s alter-ego, haunted and scarred by the demons they share.

The Inimitable Esther?

Despite such claims as Garis's, that "'Esther Summerson' is an extremely thin verbal mask over the powerful, assured, self-confident, and energetic voice of the theatrical artist himself [i.e. Dickens]," Esther's discourse is a radical departure from the exuberant excesses that characterize that of the typical third-person Dickens narrator, and it is hard to see how Esther's voice can be considered "assured" and "confident" (108). Esther does speak *for* Dickens at many points in the novel—in her condemnation of the self-serving "telescopic" philanthropy of Mrs. Jellyby, for example, or in her judgment of Skimpole as a selfish, sponging hypocrite. But only rarely does Esther speak *like* Dickens in the manner that David's license as an accomplished professional novelist permits more naturally in *Copperfield*.

There are lapses, certainly, as Philip Collins observes, "where we surely have indeed, as [one] reviewer said, 'Dickens disguised in a sisterly form'—not heavily disguised either, and with his skirts well tucked up" (136). There are a number of occasions where Esther exhibits the Dickensian tendency to heavy-handed repetition, as in her description of Mrs. Badger being surrounded in her drawing room by "various objects, indicative of her painting a little, playing the piano a little, playing the guitar a little, playing the harp a little, singing a little, working a little, reading a little, writing poetry a little, and botanizing a little" (173). Esther approaches Dickensian *enumeratio* in her listing of titles of women's philanthropical organizations: "the Women of England, the Daughters of Britain, the Sisters of all the Cardinal Virtues separately, the Females of

America, the Ladies of a hundred denominations” (100). Esther’s figurative descriptions and “as if” comparisons are suspiciously Dickensian at times, too. It would seem more in “Boz’s” character than Esther’s to describe Krook’s Rag and Bottle Warehouse as having “the air of being in a legal neighbourhood, and of being, as it were, a dirty hanger-on and disowned relation of the law,” or to describe Krook’s breath “issuing in visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire within. His throat, chin, and eyebrows were so frosted with white hairs, and so gnarled with veins and puckered skin, that he looked from his breast upward, like some old root in a fall of snow” (50). It seems Dickensian indeed when Esther observes that a gang of Deal ropemakers, “with the yarn twisted round their bodies, looked as if, tired of their present state of existence, they were spinning themselves into cordage” (618). As W. J. Harvey says of these apparent “slip-ups,” Dickens seems at times to be “chafing at his self-imposed discipline” in writing “as Esther” (92).

That Dickens tried to mitigate these “slips” is evident in his having Esther apologize for some of her more audacious observations. She asks pardon, for instance, for her presumption in claiming that Mrs. Pardiggle is distinguished in her “rapacious benevolence” by adding “(if I may use the expression)” (100). Often, too, Esther attributes strikingly Dickensian language in her discourse to other characters, for example when she says, “the fire, which had left off roaring, winked its red eyes at us—as Richard said—like a drowsy old Chancery lion” (30). She describes Mrs. Jellyby’s eyes having a “curious habit of seeming to look a long way off. . . . As if—I am quoting Richard again—they could see nothing nearer than Africa!” (36). In similar fashion, Esther

attributes to Richard her description of Boythorn's fiery language as being delivered in "volleys" and "broadships of denunciation" (119, 123). She says that Boythorn's "furious superlatives" "seemed to go off like blank cannons and hurt nothing," and that Boythorn "showed himself exactly as he was—incapable (as Richard said) of anything on a limited scale, and firing away with those blank great guns, because he carried no small arms whatever" (117).

Qualified through diffident apology or deflected to other characters or not, these Dickensian "slips" are relatively infrequent, and if they do stand out, it is partly because Dickens is so consistent generally in making Esther's "feminine" discourse much less vociferous and ostentatious than the discourse of his typically ultra-masculine third-person narrators. We shall see below that Esther and Dickens have similarities in character and shared experiences, but aside from the occasional tendency to Dickensian repetition and a few glimpses of Dickens's own gift for apt and striking figurative comparisons, Esther's discourse is appreciably less "Dickensian" than David Copperfield's.

Esther Copperfield?

The resemblance between Esther's and David's narrative discourse overall is slight. Many of the same basic sorts of intrusive discourse are evident, but in almost every case of similarity in kind, Esther's discourse is dramatically scaled back in quantity or frequency. The most obvious similarities lie, as we might expect, in the intrusions establishing and maintaining Esther as the writer of her own story. In her first words

Esther says, "I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever," and at infrequent intervals she acknowledges that she is penning her story in ink and telling the "exact truth" in the same testimonial way that David does, as when she says, "I write down these opinions, not because I believe that this or any other thing was so, because I thought so; but only because I did think so, and I want to be quite candid about all I thought and did" (15, 227). She emphasizes that she is writing her narrative and not simply telling it when she records a compliment given to her and intrudes to say, "I must write it, even if I rub it out again, because it gives me so much pleasure," or when she says that Charley has married a miller, "and even now, looking up from my desk as I write early in the morning at my summer window, I see the very mill beginning to go round (426, 877-78). Reminiscent of Fielding, Esther says at the end of the novel, "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" (877). There are no more than a dozen of these most flagrant acknowledgements of herself as author in this vein, though, as having pen in hand as she narrates, a number that David matches in his first hundred pages.

Sparingly, too, as compared to David's narrative, there are the same less flagrant intrusions reinforcing Esther's verisimilitude in the present moment of narrating events long past. Like David, Esther is at times uncertain about particular *histoire* matters, as we see when she says, "I don't know what I said, or even that I spoke" after describing her impulsive kissing of Mr. Jarndyce's hand upon her first arrival at Bleak House (94). Or

when reporting a visit to Mrs. Jellyby's, Esther says that she heard Peepy falling down a flight of stairs, "I think into the back kitchen, where somebody seemed to stifle him" (37). When she records that she spent less time with Ada and more with Caddy during Caddy Jellyby's illness, she thinks this illness lasted for "some weeks—eight or nine as I remember" (682). As in *Copperfield*, these only mildly intrusive discourse comments are essentially gratuitous "point of view reminders."

Esther's discourse occasionally reveals the lingering power of certain memories, and there is one instance where Esther "sees" what she describes in the manner so habitual with David, albeit with much less intrusive fanfare. When she narrates the scene in which her godmother tells her that her birth was her mother's disgrace, Esther says, "She raised me, sat in her chair, and standing me before her, said, slowly, in a cold, low voice—I see her knitted brow, and pointed finger: 'Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers'" (17 emphasis added). Crucial as this scene is in establishing the trauma Esther suffers and the guilt she feels simply for being born, it is noteworthy that this image of her godmother frowning and pointing at her is the only one she "sees" before her mind's eye at the moment of narration. In a handful of places Esther resembles David in declaring that she will always remember certain occasions, such as her arrival as a boarding student at Greenleaf: "I never shall forget the uncertain and the unreal air of everything at Greenleaf (Miss Donny's house), that afternoon!" or the sorrow of Miss Donny's girls when the letter compelling her departure arrives six years later: "O, never, never, never shall I forget the emotion this letter caused in the house!" (25, 27). In relating her first encounter with Lady Dedlock, Esther cries, "Shall I ever forget the rapid

beating at my heart, occasioned by the look I met, as I stood up! Shall I ever forget the manner in which those handsome proud eyes seemed to spring out of their languor, and to hold mine!” (249-50). While Esther offers a few of these David-like suggestions of the power of certain memories in the present moment of narration, her portion of *Bleak House* is clearly no “novel of memory” in the way that *Copperfield* is. Esther’s “recollecting presence” is minimal in comparison to David’s: her dozen or so “I recollects” are nowhere near the scores of David’s which keep his remembering presence presiding so insistently over his narrative.

With greater frequency, Esther also has David’s habits of exclamation and apostrophe. In describing the scene when she first meets Charley, the orphan girl who “does washing” and cares for her younger siblings, Esther is moved to exclaim that Charley speaks “O! in such a motherly, womanly way!” (211). Esther says of the newlywed Caddy Jellyby when she becomes a mother, “what a good creature Caddy was!” (683). Most of Esther’s few apostrophes are directed towards Richard and Ada. She apostrophizes Ada as “my pretty one,” “My dear, dear girl!” and “O, my sweet girl” (176, 824, 825), and Richard as “Poor dear Richard!” and “my poor, dear, sanguine Richard” (526, 321). As she reports Richard’s warm welcome of her in Deal, where she urges him to forget about the Chancery case and mend his differences with Mr. Jarndyce, Esther cries, “Dear Richard! He was ever the same to me. Down to—ah, poor poor fellow!—to the end, he never received me but with something of his old merry boyish manner” (619). Esther’s exclamations also tend to highlight the self-deprecating modesty that many have found tiresome or cloyingly false. On recording that the new girls at

Greenleaf always became her friends and charges, especially those who were “a little downcast and unhappy,” Esther says, “They said I was so gentle; but I am sure *they* were!” (25). Or when Mr. Jarndyce says he appreciates Esther’s wisdom, she interjects, “(The idea of my wisdom!)” (97). When he asks her advice on what future he might encourage for Richard, Esther cries, “O my goodness, the idea of asking my advice on such a point!” (98). If Esther’s modesty is irritating, it is probably most irritating in these little exclamatory outbursts.

As we would expect in any first-person narrative, there are similarities in David’s and Esther’s commentary upon *histoire* elements more generally as well, though Esther’s interpretive and judgmental discourse comments are noticeably less frequent and decidedly less confident and emphatic than David’s. Especially early in the novel, Esther’s commentary tends to be more interpretive or explanatory than judgmental. Like David (and Dickens), Esther is fond of interpretive “as if” comparisons, though hers are rarely “fanciful.” Esther describes Mr. Jellyby sitting in a corner with his head against a wall “as if he were subject to low spirits,” and after observing that Mr. Skimpole has “a certain vivacious candour,” Esther says he speaks of himself “as if he were not at all his own affair, as if Skimpole were a third person” (41, 70). Very occasionally, too, Esther resembles David in being speculative in her commentary, as when she says of the large number of philanthropists seeking contributions from Mr. Jarndyce, “The ladies were as desperate as the gentlemen; indeed, I think they were even more so” (99). Or when she describes Richard silencing her when he tells her he has quit the military because he could not bear to be sent abroad, where he would be unable oversee his Chancery

interests: “I suppose he knew by my face what I was about to say, but he caught the hand I had laid upon his arm, and touched my own lips with it to prevent me from going on” (620).

One of the contradictions frequently noted in Esther is that while she professes at the outset not to be “clever” and says, “I have not by any means a quick understanding,” she proves herself very perceptive as the novel progresses. Early on, she often seems tentative in offering discourse commentary. When she witnesses Mr. Skimpole’s arrest for debt, for instance, she records that she and Richard looked at one another, and says, “It was a most singular thing that the arrest was our embarrassment, and not Mr. Skimpole’s.” Then she notes interpretively that Mr. Skimpole “observed us with a genial interest; but there seemed, if I may venture on such a contradiction, nothing selfish in it. He had entirely washed his hands of the difficulty, and it had become ours” (74). Esther is relatively diffident or apologetic in many of her judgments, too, as in her somewhat Dickensian remark about Mrs. Pardiggle’s perfunctory visits to the cottages of the poor: “I hope it is not unkind in me to say that she certainly did make, in this, as in everything else, a show that was not conciliatory, of doing charity by wholesale, and of dealing in it to a large extent” (108). Esther’s commentary on *histoire* elements becomes appreciably more judgmental and more confident as her narrative proceeds, though it never approaches David’s certainty in calling Creakle an “incapable brute” or Uriah Heep “a crawling impersonation of meanness” (77, 440). Near the end of her narrative, Esther’s judgments are “quick” and sound indeed, superior to Mr. Jarndyce’s even, in her recognition that Skimpole is not so innocently “child-like” as he appears but is a

consciously manipulative and self-serving man. In the scene in which Mr. Smallweed turns over the deciding will in *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* to the living Mr. Jarndyce, Inspector Bucket asks Smallweed to confirm that he confides in the detective regularly, and Esther observes, "I think it would be impossible to make an admission with more ill will and a worse grace than Mr. Smallweed displayed" (840). Or of the excited crowd rushing out of the courtroom when the Jarndyce case is finally dismissed, Esther reports and comments, "they were all exceedingly amused, and were more like people coming out from a Farce or a Juggler than from a court of Justice" (865).

In her commentary upon herself, Esther has two other similarities with David: she has moments of self-pity, and she is candidly critical of her perceived faults. To be sure, Esther appears to pity her younger, intradiegetic self only rarely. But self-pity is evident when she recalls how lonely and shy she was as a child, daring to confide only in her "dear old doll," and says, "It almost makes me cry to think what a relief it used to be to me, when I came home from school of a day, to run up-stairs to my room, and say, 'O, you dear faithful Dolly, I knew you would be expecting me!' and then to sit down on the floor, leaning on the elbow of her great chair, and tell her all I had noticed since we parted" (15). Self-pity is apparent, too, when Esther recalls telling her doll how she would try to "repair the fault [she] had been born with . . . and win some love to [herself] if [she] could" (18). The recollection of this time moves the narrating Esther to tears, and she says, "I hope it is not self-indulgent to shed these tears as I think of it. I am very thankful, I am very cheerful, but I cannot quite help their coming to my eyes" (18). Typically, however, when she starts to express pity for her younger self, Esther "bucks

herself up” by telling herself she is being vain or selfish in dwelling on sorrows instead of counting her blessings. Her quick recovery of herself after shedding tears in the last-mentioned instance is characteristic: “There! I have wiped them away now, and can go on again properly” (18).

Esther sounds very much like David when she says, “I shall not conceal, as I go on, the weaknesses I could not quite conquer,” and she is unsparing in pointing out her faults when she sees them (505). Just as David does, the narrating Esther occasionally criticizes the intradiegetic Esther for being selfish. When she realizes that the distance she felt growing between herself and Ada is a consequence of Ada’s secret marriage, and not some fault of her own, Esther cries, “How selfish I must have been, not to have thought of this before!” (697). Like David, too, Esther is prone to “confessional” intrusions, and sometimes like David, her “sins” are hardly blameworthy. For one instance, Esther says, “I must confess that I could not help feeling rather angry with Mrs. Jellyby” after reporting Caddy’s anger at her mother for neglecting her and pressing her to marry the “philanthropical” Mr. Quale (186). Esther’s most consistent criticism of herself centers on the suspicion that she may be vain at times. Early on, Esther acknowledges that she “may be very vain, without suspecting it,” and especially after her face is scarred by smallpox, the narrating Esther fears she is vain about her appearance on a regular basis (16). On her prolonging the time of separation from Ada after her illness, Esther says, “I hope it was not a poor thing in me to wish to be a little more used to my altered self, before I met the eyes of the dear girl I longed so ardently to see; but it is the truth. I did” (494). And when she describes revealing her face to Ada at last, she says, “I

must confess I was nervously anxious about my altered looks” (516). The narrating Esther also takes herself to task for her weakness in crying so much in moments of *histoire* self-pity. She considers it a weakness that on the night she receives Mr. Jarndyce’s proposal, she looks in on the sleeping Ada and cannot hold back her tears: “It was weak in me, I know, and I could have had no reason for crying; but I dropped a tear upon her face, and another, and another.” “Weaker than that,” Esther judges, is her pressing the faded flowers Allan Woodcourt gave her before going abroad to Ada’s lips and then burning them (613).

In short, there are similarities between Esther’s and David’s habits of narrative discourse, but many of these similarities are to be expected as standard if not necessary features of the autobiographical mode: intrusions establishing and maintaining the “I as protagonist” first-person point of view, personal commentary upon *histoire* characters, and the autodiegetic narrator’s comments on his or her intradiegetic self. That both David and Esther share Dickens’s propensity to exclamation and apostrophe is no surprise either, and of course, their status as first-person narrators makes the exclamations and apostrophes naturally less “intrusive” than they would be in a third-person narrative. Considering Esther’s discourse and David’s as separate wholes, the primary difference in their similar habits of intrusion is, again, that Esther’s intrusions are markedly less frequent and abundant than David’s.

Esther’s “Womanly” Discourse

If David Copperfield is restrained and subdued in comparison to the typical third-

person Dickens narrator, the narrating Esther Summerson is downright austere. W. J. Harvey suggests that Dickens “deliberately suppress[ed] his natural exuberance in order to create a flat Esther,” who acts as “a brake, controlling the runaway tendency of Dickens’s imagination” so that her narration is “plain, matter-of-fact, conscientiously plodding” (91). Anny Sadrin notes that Dickens, “the master of hyperbolic language,” makes Esther “a mistress of negation, understatement and equivocation. Esther’s rhetoric is not only un-Dickensian but spectacularly anti-Dickensian. Her mode of expression—subtle, toned down, unassuming—is a sort of negative image, almost an inverted parody of Dickens’s style” (“Charlotte Dickens” 51). Esther’s discourse appears all the more subdued because her narrative is delivered alongside that of the thoroughly ostentatious third-person *Bleak House* narrator. The third-person narrator in *Bleak House* is as flamboyantly “Dickensian” as can be, and the authorial intrusions are in full glory in all their characteristic modes: didactic preaching, apostrophes to characters, heavy-handed narrative transitions, ironic or suggestive speculations, pointed rhetorical questions, and more. As Chiara Briganti puts it, “unbridled anger and flamboyant rhetoric explode in the third person narrative” (206). Hochman and Wachs say the third-person narrator speaks with “thundering outrage,” in a voice “in which a stunning array of literary artifice is put in the service of unrestrained expressiveness,” effectively making the narrator a “‘character,’ . . . probably the most vividly colored and urgently insistent presence in the novel” (114, 86, 101). Reading Esther’s narrative as a complete novel in itself, one might find her discourse not so flat and colorless, but in its context in alternation with the narrative of her stridently vociferous companion narrator, Esther’s narrative voice seems

altogether tame and demure.

Much of Esther's relative tameness lies in what is missing from her discourse, the appreciable absence of many intrusive tendencies characteristic of David Copperfield and Dickens's third-person narrators. There is certainly no heavy-handed didacticism, none of the "preaching" we usually find in the third-person novels or even the subtler glimpses of didacticism we see in *Copperfield*. Esther makes only a small handful of philosophical generalizations, and these few are offered with diffidence, as when she describes the rugged exterior of the Abbey Church and then comments, "But so from rough outsides (I hope I have learnt), serene and gentle influences often proceed" (92). There is little intentional humor in Esther's discourse, if any, and no genial or nostalgic self-mockery à la David Copperfield whatsoever. Although some commentators have tried to read irony into Esther's calling her godmother a "good, good woman!" Esther is almost never knowingly ironic in her authorial discourse, and typical Dickensian irony seems altogether foreign to her established character (15). While there are a number of biblical references in Esther's reported speech and she once calls the Chancery suit a "dead sea" casting ashore "ashy fruit," there are virtually no allusions to literary characters or topical history from the standard Dickens sources (535). The closest Esther comes to a "Dickensian" literary allusion is saying, "I was brought up, from my earliest remembrance—like some of the princesses in the fairy stories, only I was not charming—by my godmother" (15).

There is only one notable "descriptive intrusion" highlighting the gap between narrating time and *histoire* time, and virtually none of the rhetorical tropes on the order of

syllepsis or heavy-handed antithesis or any of the third-person Dickens narrator's other characteristic stylistic excesses beyond the occasional repetitions of words and phrases as noted above. Esther raises very few questions in her discourse, and even these tend to be meditative and natural to her calm narrative style; rarely are Esther's questions pointedly rhetorical, and never are they in the playful hypophoric mode of David's retrospects or Dickens's third-person narrator more generally. The occasional Dickensian "slips" in Esther's figurative comparisons notwithstanding, her figurative language on the whole is considerably tamer than either David's or Dickens's. Esther avoids personification almost entirely, and as Hochman and Wachs point out, in stark contrast to the "rampant use of metaphor" in the third-person *Bleak House* narrative, Esther generally avoids metaphor, apologizing for or attributing the few she indulges in to others and largely keeping her figurative comparisons "carefully controlled as simile rather than metaphor" (103, 91). The shifts into present-tense *histoire* narration so frequent in scenes of emotional intensity in *Dombey* and *Copperfield* are completely absent from Esther's narrative. Only in the brief closing chapter does Esther narrate *histoire* events in the present tense, and here the tense-shift is a fairly traditional means of providing closure as she brings her *histoire* narrative temporally up to the present moment of the "narrating now."

While some have condemned David Copperfield as too bland and passive a hero, more valuable really as a reporter and observer of the other, more interesting characters around him, David's life is clearly the central subject of his narrative. In contrast, Esther tries to keep herself as far as she can from being the central subject of her

story. Early in the novel, Esther summarizes her years at Greenleaf and intrudes to remark, "It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself! As if this narrative were the narrative of *my* life! But my little body will soon fall into the background now" (26). Esther's adolescent "little body" fades into the background only to be replaced by her fully grown "little body," and her role as protagonist becomes increasingly apparent as the novel unfolds. In fact, the story of Esther's life becomes the central vehicle of the novel's forward narrative momentum. The secret of Esther's relationship to Lady Dedlock is the primary question driving the plot in the latter portion of the third-person narrative as well as her own, and the novel's ultimate climax hinges on the conflict between Esther's love for Woodcourt and her duty to her benefactor and fiancé, Mr. Jarndyce. As much as she can, though, Esther tries in her discourse to remove herself from the center of the action throughout her narrative. Esther's studied self-effacement is evident when she says such things as:

I don't know how it is, I seem to be always writing about myself. I mean all the time to write about other people, and I try to think about myself as little as possible, and I am sure, when I find myself coming into the story again, I am really vexed and say, "Dear, dear, you tiresome little creature, I wish you wouldn't!" but it is all of no use. I hope any one who may read what I write, will understand that if these pages contain a great deal about me, I can only suppose it must be because I have really something to do with them, and can't be kept out. (112).

The obvious implication is that even when she narrates events centering upon herself, Esther would prefer not to speak of herself and only does so from regrettable and unavoidable necessity.

Esther's self-effacement is also evident when she justifies the narration of parts of

her life with some apology. After describing her fevered state during her bout with smallpox, Esther says, “Perhaps the less I say of these sick experiences, the less tedious and the more intelligible I shall be. I do not recall them to make others unhappy, or because I am now the least unhappy in remembering them. It may be that if we knew more of such strange afflictions, we might be the better able to alleviate their intensity” (489). The intradiegetic Esther has another illness following her pursuit of Lady Dedlock through the snowy night with Inspector Bucket that ends in the discovery of her mother’s death, but here the narrating Esther touches only glancingly on her woes. Esther reveals in the closing words of Chapter 59 that she has found her mother “cold and dead” (812).

Chapter 60 opens:

I proceed to other passages of my narrative. From the goodness of all about me I derived such consolation as I can never think of unmoved. I have already said so much of myself, and so much still remains, that I will not dwell upon my sorrow. I had an illness, but it was not a long one; and I would avoid even this mention of it if I could quite keep down the recollection of their sympathy.

I proceed to other passages of my narrative. (813)

In a subtle way, self-effacement is indicated also in Esther’s syntactical submersion of significant discourse comments about herself in parentheses and sets of parenthesizing dashes. As seen in places above, Esther modestly qualifies that striking figures of speech are not her own in parentheses, and parentheses often surround her more emphatic judgmental comments on *histoire* matters. Esther’s discourse commentary is delivered parenthetically to such an extent that in her discussion of “confusion and ‘knowing’” in *Bleak House*, Judith Wilt observes, “Put to the task of narrative, . . . [Esther’s] personal syntactic shape is the parenthetical sentence; and the closer her

knowing comes to herself, the thicker become the parentheses, which signal the strain and confusion of knowing her knowing” (289). Much of Esther’s most important “knowing” of herself is indeed delivered parenthetically: even her conflicting feelings of being “guilty and yet innocent” for the “fault” of her illegitimate birth are delivered in parentheses (18). In one oft-noted passage, Esther reports that her doll “used to sit propped up in a great arm-chair, with her beautiful complexion and rosy lips, staring at me—or not so much at me, I think, as at nothing—while I busily stitched away, and told her every one of my secrets” (15). The assumption of most critics remarking on this passage is that in the interpolated discourse comment Esther is not referring to the vacant, inanimate stare of the doll, but to the ultimately self-effaced void she sees as herself.

Esther’s discourse is most distinctively different from David’s and from the typical third-person Dickens narrator’s in its “womanly” qualities that have not been fully appreciated until recent feminist critics have brought them to light. If in fact Dickens had trouble understanding women, and if his female characters do tend to follow stereotypes, there is no doubt that he had a good understanding of “womanly writing.” As the very much hands-on editor of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, Dickens had much close experience with women’s writing, and he was encouraging and influential in the success of a number of women authors, Elizabeth Gaskell most notably. That Dickens appreciated the nuances of feminine writing is suggested in his suspecting right away that George Eliot was a woman. A considerable majority of her contemporary audience were initially taken in by the masculine pseudonym for Marian Evans, but when Dickens received a complimentary copy of her first book of fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, he

responded with praise of its “exquisite truth and delicacy.” In his note of thanks Dickens wrote, “I have observed what seem to me to be such womanly touches, in those moving fictions, that the assurance on the title-page is insufficient to satisfy me, even now. If they originated with no woman, I believe that no man ever before had the art of making himself, mentally, so like a woman, since the world began” (*Letters* 8: 506).

Irritating as it has been to some, Esther’s self-effacement, her not having “too strong a sense of self,” is now recognized as one of the integral qualities in the stereotypical Victorian ideal of femininity (Senf 24). Chiara Briganti suggests that Esther’s speaking about herself only obliquely and her determination to “remain at the periphery of her narrative,” her feeling of “usurping her space in the narrative,” contribute to a faithful “allegorization of female exclusion from patriarchal discourse” (213). Her narrative is also recognizably “feminine” along the lines of “ideal Victorian womanhood” when her discourse moves beyond polite self-effacement into self-deprecation, or more precisely, self-depreciation. Valerie Kennedy claims that along with her “obsession with being ‘busy,’ and her renunciation of Woodcourt,” Esther’s lack of confidence in herself and her tendency to “self-denigration” follow “conventional [Victorian] notions of how young women should behave.” As Kennedy adds, “Esther may not create a new stereotype, but she shows with extreme clarity what is wrong with the old one” (345). A number of Esther’s discourse passages cited above indicate depreciation of herself, including the confession in her opening paragraphs that she is “not clever,” and that she has “rather a noticing way—not a quick way, oh, no!—a silent way of noticing what passed before me and thinking I should like to understand it better” (15). Esther sounds

this theme of self-depreciation at regular intervals, often in such explicit narrative ellipses as when she says, "I will not repeat what I said to Richard. I know it was tiresome, and nobody is to suppose for a moment that it was at all wise. It only came from my heart" (622). If what she said "only came from her heart," the "woman's province," then of course it could not be "at all wise," Esther suggests. Her announced narrative ellipses differ from David's and the third-person Dickens narrator's very often in presenting just this sort of "feminine" self-denigration. "It matters little now" is almost a catch-phrase of Esther's when she refers to her own thoughts and feelings, and she uses it frequently in reference to such obviously important matters as what she thinks and feels about her mother when Lady Dedlock reveals her identity and then tells Esther to forget her: "It matters little now, how much I thought of my living mother who had told me evermore to consider her dead" (591). We can only imagine how powerful the emotions of a child raised as an orphan would be upon discovering that he or she has a living mother and then being told to "forget" that mother and never speak to her again. But according to Carol Senf, Esther's "repeated attempts to repress emotional responses when her own life is concerned help her fit the Victorian stereotype of femininity" (24).

Esther shows conventional feminine denigration of her own powers in the "male province" of critical thought and judgment in similar fashion when she reports having misgivings about Richard's quitting his medical studies to pursue a career in the law so he can watch over his Chancery interests. She relates that she could not sleep after hearing Richard's announcement of this change of careers, saying, "It would not be worth mentioning for its own sake, but I was wakeful and rather low-spirited. I don't know

why. At least, I don't think I know why. At least, perhaps I do, but I don't think it matters" (235). Even after time has proven her right, speaking in the "discourse now" Esther seems to have trouble acknowledging that she had such critical, judgmental thoughts in the first place. But the chief implication is that what troubled the intradiegetic Esther, what disturbed her about Richard and kept her from sleeping, does not matter now to the extradiegetic narrating Esther because "her little womanly thoughts" are unimportant and "don't matter."

As we have seen, Esther's depreciation of her judgment is also evident in exclamations such as the one that follows her reporting of Mr. Jarndyce asking her opinion of his advice that Richard rely on his own diligence instead of trusting in Fortune: "He who was so good and wise, to ask *me* whether he was right!" (181). "I declare!" Esther says in effect, "The very idea that *my* opinion is worth hearing!" Esther's depreciation of her own judgment is evident, as we have seen, too, in the apologetic diffidence that characterizes so much of her commentary on *histoire* elements—her uncertainty in "venturing on such a contradiction" as noting that Skimpole seemed unselfish, or her adding "if I may say such a thing" after observing that Jo seemed "strangely unconcerned about himself" (74, 433). Suzanne Graver notes that Esther's apologetic and self-deprecating uncertainty about her judgments are particularly "feminine" because Esther's "self-mistrust" is "a trait that . . . she shares with many women who undervalue the authority of what they know, in part because their experience is limited to the private sphere and because the dominant culture undervalues the cognitive power of women's experience" (5). We will address the issue of whether

Esther's self-deprecation is uniquely her own peculiarity or merely a feature of the stereotypical Victorian ideal of femininity shortly below, but it is certainly worthy of note that Esther's exaggerated self-effacement and her uncertainties about her powers of judgment, whether genuine, "cardboard," or "coy," fall very much in line with recognizable Victorian norms in feminine behavior.

One of the narrative strategies highlighted in Esther's intrusive discourse that has been recognized as particularly characteristic of feminine writing is her suppression of specifically romantic feelings and desires and her "feminine" subterfuge and obliquity in conveying these feelings and desires "subversively." In her discussion of Esther's narrative as an anticipation of post-modern *écriture féminine*, or "feminine prose," Lynette Felber notes that Esther violates the norm of "conventional (male) linear trajectory" when she departs from the chronological order so carefully observed throughout most of her narrative. Esther's announced departures from chronology invariably involve her "maddeningly evasive" habit of withholding and imparting belated *histoire* information about Allan Woodcourt (Felber 15). In the closing paragraph of Chapter 13, Esther says in coy, halting, and only gradual disclosure, "I have omitted to mention in its place, that there was some one else at the family dinner party. It was not a lady. It was a gentleman. It was a gentleman of a dark complexion—a young surgeon. He was rather reserved, but I thought him very sensible and agreeable. At least, Ada asked me if I did not, and I said yes" (181). The second time Esther violates chronology with mention of Woodcourt, this time at the close of Chapter 14, the syntax and delivery are more halting, and the coyness even more pronounced:

I have forgotten to mention—at least I have not mentioned—that Mr. Woodcourt was the same dark young surgeon whom we had met at Mr. Badger’s. Or, that Mr. Jarndyce invited him to dinner that day. Or, that he came. Or, that when they were all gone, and I said to Ada, “Now, my darling, let us have a little talk about Richard!” Ada laughed and said—
 But I don’t think it matters what my darling said. She was always merry. (202)

Here Esther admits that the belated information has been consciously suppressed, not forgotten, and the modesty or coyness in the self-deprecating “it doesn’t matter what Ada said” clearly prompts the attentive reader to suspect that what Ada said involved some teasing insinuations about Woodcourt and the attraction between Esther and Woodcourt that ultimately leads to their marriage.

As Felber observes, “Esther’s narrative, filled with gaps of explanations unuttered, appears to comply with prohibitions against certain kinds of female speech” (16). Part of the Victorian feminine “code” was that “good women” did not acknowledge their desires—particularly their sexual desires. Certainly, according to code “good women” did not *act* on those desires, at least not without such punishment in despair and ruin as Lady Dedlock receives. To express her desires at all, as Anny Sadrin says, Esther is reduced to a “rhetoric of omission and negation” (“Charlotte Dickens” 52). Felber argues that Dickens is brilliant in using one of the “duplicitous techniques often attributed to women writers” in making such gaps in Esther’s narration suggest a kind of “double discourse” that “complies with patriarchal restrictions by not explicitly naming her desires at the same time the series of qualifications reveal her desire, covertly disobeying through strategic revelation and the creation of revealing gaps.” These revealing gaps, according to Felber, “inscribe the feminine and reveal strategies for undermining and

overcoming oppression” (16). In other words, in her discourse coyness and obliquity surrounding Allan Woodcourt in particular, Dickens succeeds in having Esther write very much “as a woman.”

That Esther has been consciously suppressing frank acknowledgement of her feelings about Woodcourt is made quite plain after she reports her recovery from smallpox and says, again at the end of a chapter, “And now I must part with the little secret I have thus far tried to keep” (501). Her “little secret” is that the intradiegetic Esther suspects that Woodcourt loves her and would have professed his love if he had been more financially secure, and that she would have been glad had he done so, but is gladder still he did not, because now that her face is scarred she would be honor-bound to release him from any obligations. Part of the subversive nature of the “feminine” subterfuge in Esther’s “rejecting chronology” by withholding these disclosures is that their delivery at the ends of chapters elevates to a position of prominence the covert development of Esther’s “unspoken,” and indeed “unspeakable,” desire for Woodcourt.

Timothy Peltason writes, “What an act of ventriloquism and art it is for the burstingly vital Dickens to have impersonated Esther Summerson for dozens of chapters and twenty months” (689). The few lapses into Dickensian moments in Esther’s discourse notwithstanding, Dickens’s impersonation of Esther Summerson is indeed remarkable. And the absence of so many of the third-person Dickens’s characteristic tendencies, and the ways that Esther’s self-deprecation, her hesitations and suppressions, and her “subversive” methods of revealing forbidden feelings establish her femininity in convincing fashion are surely a testament to Dickens’s “art.” In Esther’s case, at least,

Dickens must be exonerated of the charge that he could not create convincing female characters, for he does indeed succeed in thinking and writing “as a woman” in Esther’s narrative.

Esther, Dickens, David, and the Quest for Identity

Just as he does with David Copperfield, Dickens establishes Esther’s independent identity both as a narrator and as a survivor of childhood trauma through her narrative discourse. As much as Sylvère Monod’s analysis of Dickens’s works is keenly insightful, he is surely wrong when he says of Esther, “it would be a sheer waste of time to attempt a psychological portrait of such an insignificant personality” (414). Esther’s is clearly not an “insignificant personality” because in many respects she is a psychological portrait of Dickens himself. Far from being merely a cardboard Victorian stereotype, Esther’s discourse very faithfully projects “the image of a real person,” as Martha Rosso says, largely because she is “the alter ego of Charles Dickens” (94). The remainder of this chapter will explore the personality that Esther’s discourse reveals with two primary interwoven aims: demonstrating that Esther is entirely credible as a survivor of trauma, and showing that Dickens does indeed revisit his own traumatic past again in *Bleak House*. As Rosso observes, “it was only in an elaborately fabricated disguise that the sensitive Dickens could reveal his deepest thoughts and emotions,” and we will see that under the deeper cover of Esther’s feminine persona Dickens was able to get at the root of his “demons” in greater depth than he did in *Copperfield* (92).

But before focusing more narrowly on what Esther’s discourse reveals about her

personality, we should note a few broader points about Esther's identity as both narrator and *histoire* character and Dickens's surreptitious autobiographical "presence" in *Bleak House*. With the careful attention we know Dickens devoted to the naming of characters, especially protagonists, it is interesting that like David Copperfield, Esther is called by many different names in her narrative. David's various monikers include Brooks of Sheffield, Daisy, Doady, and Trotwood, or sometimes simply "Trot"; Esther's include Dame Durden, Little Old Woman, Cobweb, Mother Hubbard, and Dame *Trot*. While this sharing of nicknames between David and Esther may be coincidental, it certainly is curious. It is interesting, too, that Dickens's own name is given to a female character in *Bleak House*, the orphan girl *Charley* "Coavinses." If we agree with Claudette Kemper Columbus that "No author accidentally inscribes his own name in a novel," it is interesting indeed that the boyish familiar version of his own name is bestowed upon this thirteen-year-old child who, like David, and Dickens before him, is forced to enter the world prematurely "on her own account" to provide for her family as a little working "drudge" (618). It is almost as if Dickens is signaling that the reader should be on the lookout for "Charles" in female form in this novel.

It seems clear that Esther Summerson is named for an actual orphan Dickens greatly admired, Esther Elton. He chaired a committee to raise funds for her education, and as he wrote of this Esther to Angela Burdett Coutts, "I never in my life saw such gentle perserverance [sic] and steady goodness as this girl has displayed." Speaking of her success at the Normal School, Dickens said that she had embraced her new situation with discipline and diligence: "her resignation of all her old society—her self-denial in a

hundred ways. . . . I regard it really as an instance of patient womanly devotion; a little piece of quiet, unpretending, domestic heroism; of a most affecting and interesting kind” (*Letters* 4: 374-75). Esther Summerson obviously shares the original Esther’s “steady goodness” and self-denial in “domestic heroism.” But as Morris Golden urges, Esther Summerson is also “a female version of [Dickens’s] own underlying character with some qualities of his congenial sister-in-law Georgina” (130). (Georgina Hogarth herself acknowledged the possibility of there being “something of me in Esther Summerson” [qtd. in Staples 134].) Michael Slater contends that the unusual relationship between Jarndyce and Esther mirrors the unusual relationship between Dickens and Georgina, who took her sister’s place with the Dickens family after Mary Hogarth died, as spinster worshipper of “the Inimitable” and superintendent of the large Dickens household with cheerful, Esther-like efficiency. Like Esther, too, Dickens was himself “generally preoccupied with household efficiency,” going so far as leaving notes in the children’s drawers “complimenting their tidiness or remarking their need of attention” (Goodman 166n). As Gwen Watkins says, Dickens “regulated” his household “in an almost military manner, down to its smallest detail. His children’s rooms were inspected every day . . . ; each boy must use his own hatpeg and no other; a boy brushing his coat in the dining room instead of outside ‘never by any chance committed that offence afterwards’” (77; Watkins is quoting Alfred Dickens in a 1911 *Nash’s Magazine* article, “My Father and his Friends”). Esther is no martinet, but her “gift” for household order at times seems to belie a compulsion or obsession that is very like Dickens’s own compulsive need for order. Dickens regularly rearranged furniture in hotel rooms to suit his very particular

taste, and his need for order was so great that he was unable to write until assuring that the chairs and tables in the room were in “*precisely* the right position” and the knickknacks on his desk were arranged “just so” (Ackroyd 222, 505).

More importantly, Esther resembles both Dickens and David Copperfield in having a driving need to tell stories—*her* story in particular. Barbara Hardy suggests that like David, Esther has a “narrative urge” which is established as an “early need, impulse and habit” through the *histoire* Esther’s telling the story of her birthday over and over to her doll, who “like the reader of *Bleak House* . . . can’t interrupt the story that has to be told” (173). Just as David resembles Scheherazade in telling Steerforth stories “for his very life,” Esther’s intradiegetic storytelling with her doll seems a matter of survival for her too. Shy, lonely and despised by her godmother as she is, Esther the child has no other friend or outlet for unburdening herself of the pain she feels as a neglected, orphaned, “guilty yet innocent” little girl, and she is apparently under some compulsion to keep telling and retelling the painful story of her birth. Marcia Goodman suggests that Esther’s storytelling is, as David’s is with Steerforth, “a method of establishing human connection. . . . For both Esther and David, storytelling creates intimacy without overwhelming the self; a narrative about somebody else’s life creates the illusion that the writer is not talking about the self, even as we may know that she or he is” (163). On occasion the *histoire* Esther tells stories to soothe the Jellyby children, and Goodman argues that Esther’s entire narrative is intended to soothe and effectively “mother herself” through the writing of what she comes to acknowledge later in the novel as “my story” (508, 877). Ultimately, Goodman suggests that through her narrative as a whole, Esther

asks the reader to be her friend and “take care of her.” Like her doll, Goodman says, “We will listen in the right way; we will read between the lines and understand. We will interpret her; she invites us to do so” (164). Thus, Goodman says, it is not merely novelistic convention when Esther intrusively bids farewell to the reader in her closing 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” (877).

Esther is far more evasive than David in her discourse reticence about why she is writing her narrative or what her portion of the novel is intended to be or to accomplish. She says she is “obliged to write all this” about herself, and she appears to know that her “portion of these pages” is part of a larger whole (15, 26). But Esther never explains why she is “obliged” to tell her life’s story. Taking her reticence as an invitation for speculation, critics have offered a number of theories, ranging from Esther’s narrative being compelled by the third-person narrator as a subordinate, “interpolated narrative,” to Esther’s narrative being “prescribed” as therapy by her husband, Woodcourt the doctor, to Esther being the author not only of her own narrative, but the third-person narrative as well (Moseley 41ff, Kearns 128, Hornback “Narrator” 10). Whether or not we believe Esther’s narrative is prescribed by her husband the doctor, it does seem that like David’s, Esther’s narrative enables her to establish and renew her identity by *re-writing* her life in therapeutic fashion. As Michael Kearns observes, Esther can be seen as “defining a more healthy self in the writing of [her life]” and “being shaped by the already written words even as she writes new ones” (127). Esther is clearly in need of a new, healthier identity,

for the intradiegetic Esther is a non-entity in more dramatic respects than is suggested by her self-effacing discourse alone. As noted above, she sees herself as “nothing” in the eyes of her doll, and Carolyn Dever notes that Esther loses her identity and becomes an “absent presence” when her name gets, in Esther’s words, “quite lost” among the many matronly, fairy-tale nicknames she has, Mrs. Shipton, Mother Hubbard, Dame Durden, etc. (Dever 45, *BH* 98). As Mr. Guppy discovers in the third-person narrative, Esther’s true name is Esther Hawdon, not Esther Summerson, and in some respects her illegitimate birth makes Esther just as much “no one” as her father, Hawdon, who adopts the name “Nemo” as a law-writer.

Esther is a non-entity of sorts, too, in that her mother thought she died at birth. As Dever puts it, Esther “has been the unwitting participant in a fiction in which she played the role of a corpse, a dead baby,” a role that is ironically echoed by Esther’s burial of her doll after her godmother’s death and also by the dead infant, the child of Jenny, the brickmaker’s wife, whom Esther covers with her handkerchief (45). When she reports learning that her mother thought she was stillborn, Esther says she felt her place in the world “strange”: “I had never, to my own mother’s knowledge, breathed—had been buried—had never been endowed with life—had never borne a name” (513). According to Dever, “Language is the vehicle by which Esther can create something—herself—out of nothing,” and she suggests that Esther’s narrative is “a fight for her life, an attempt to replace her death with her birth, to rewrite the biography of an animated corpse” (49, 46). Esther’s success in *re*-writing the story of her life and establishing a healthy, legitimate identity, overcoming the burdens of her illegitimate birth and the cruel treatment of her

godmother, is suggested by her story's happy ending, which like *David Copperfield's*, involves a worthy marriage, children, and a presumably bright future. As we shall see presently, her narrative discourse suggests not quite such a "happily-ever-after" ending for Esther. She does establish a legitimate identity for herself, but if her autobiography is "therapeutic," her narrative discourse proves it not to be a "final cure."

Into the Mind of Esther Summerson: Maternal Demons and Disfigurement

Audrey Jaffe writes that "One of the peculiarities of Esther Summerson's narratorial role . . . is that her narrative always knows more than she does. Readers are provided with clues enabling them to understand more than they could from the information she provides, or professes to be aware of" (151). These clues are found almost exclusively in Esther's narrative discourse. What Esther's discourse reveals most immediately about her personality at the time of writing is the almost debilitating continuing impact of the trauma that she experienced—like Dickens—at the age of twelve. As noted above, the one scene that Esther effectively relives by "seeing" it before her mind's eye in the present moment of narration is the occasion of her twelfth birthday, when the so aptly named Miss Barbary tells her about her birth. In a highly suggestive observation before relating what her godmother says, Esther intrudes to speculate, "perhaps I might still feel such a wound, if such a wound could be received more than once with the quickness of that birthday" (16). What Miss Barbary tells Esther on this fateful birthday, which Esther says was always "the most melancholy day at home, in the whole year," is as follows:

Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers. The time will come—and soon enough—when you will understand this better, and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can. . . . For yourself, unfortunate girl, orphaned and degraded from the first of these evil anniversaries, pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written. Forget your mother, and leave all other people to forget her who will do her unhappy child that greatest kindness. Now, go! (16-17)

But before Esther can “go!” Miss Barbary stops her and adds a few more words which do much in determining Esther’s lifelong character: “Submission, self-denial, diligent work, are the preparations for a life begun with such a shadow on it. You are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born, like them, in common sinfulness and wrath. You are set apart” (17-18). Esther reports reading the expression of her godmother’s face in this crucial scene as if it said, “It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday; that you had never been born!” (17).

The trauma of this episode is tremendous. Esther’s unwitting abandonment by her mother first, and then her rejection by Miss Barbary, whom Esther knows only as “godmother” when in truth she is Esther’s aunt, is even greater than the abandonment and rejection that David experiences in being sentenced to Murdstone and Grinby’s. Esther’s “guilt in innocence” is more exaggerated as well: the anniversary of her birth is “evil,” and through no fault of her own but simply by being born, Esther is set apart in “uncommon sin.” As Hochman and Wachs see it, the moral abuse Miss Barbary inflicts upon Esther is “unprecedented” in the Dickens canon: “It is as though Dickens is giving us as extreme an instance of abandonment possible” (86). The centrality of the concern with neglect and abandonment in *Bleak House* as a whole is suggested by the proliferation of other abused, neglected, or abandoned children in the novel: Ada and

Richard, Charley and her siblings, Jo, Guster, Prince Turveydrop, Caddy Jellyby and her siblings, and the Pardiggle children. As Hochman and Wachs point out, throughout both narratives, “there is the resonance of an insistent, keenly orchestrated sympathy for all the victimized children in the novel. No Dickens text—not even *Oliver Twist*—pivots so largely on the image of the abused, abandoned, and doomed child. . . . all these figures embody the intrinsic exposedness of the infant Esther, whose initial abandonment . . . resonates richly in the representation of others” (98-99).

Hochman and Wachs describe Esther’s life as an “incipient nightmare,” and her narrative discourse suggests that the nightmare that begins in earnest on her twelfth birthday continues long after Jarndyce rescues her when Miss Barbary dies and Mrs. Rachael, Miss Barbary’s servant and confederate in cruelty, is adamantly unwilling to take charge of her (86). At key moments of distress, Esther’s mind returns to her twelfth birthday, and the intradiegetic Esther is haunted by her godmother in dreams that are surely literal nightmares. The narrating Esther’s “unknowing” diffidence is evident when she says of these recurring dreams of her time with Miss Barbary, “I am not sufficiently acquainted with such subjects to know whether it is at all remarkable that I almost always dreamed of that period of my life” (121). Esther evidently suspects in the “discourse now” that it might be remarkable that she dreams of this painful time so much, and with characteristic obliquity or “feminine subterfuge” she suggests indirectly that it is indeed significant that these dreams recur. And to be sure, her dreams are significant in the same way they are when veteran soldiers have recurring dreams of battle from which they wake covered in sweat. Here we see another point of connection between Dickens and Esther,

one clearly tied to the trauma they both suffered as children. As Dickens indicates in the autobiographical fragment when he records his feelings of despair at the hopeless prospects he thought his future held at the time, “My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life” (Forster 1: 26-27). Both Dickens and Esther are haunted in their dreams by their traumatic experiences, and if the narrating Esther is “uncertain” about the significance of these dreams, Dickens knew their meaning quite well from personal experience: the painful past cannot be forgotten.

Esther is haunted by her past in waking moments too, and very often the narrating Esther’s discourse highlights or reinforces the relentless persistence of the traumatic past in the mind of the intradiegetic Esther. In what stands out on a second reading as obvious foreshadowing, Esther reports feeling some strange association between Lady Dedlock and “the lonely days at my godmother’s” even before she knows her mother’s identity (250). In one interpretive simile describing her first glimpse of Lady Dedlock, Esther says this haughty woman’s face was “like a broken glass to me, in which I saw scraps of old remembrances,” and sitting in church with Lady Dedlock on the occasion of this first sight of her, the scripture reader’s voice sounds in her ears as “the well-remembered voice of my godmother” (250). Of the influence that the sight of Lady Dedlock’s face holds over the intradiegetic Esther every time she sees it, the extradiegetic Esther says, “I do not quite know, even now, whether it was painful or pleasurable; whether it drew me towards her, or made me shrink from her. I think I admired her with a kind of fear; and I know

that in her presence my thoughts always wandered back, as they had done at first, to that old time of my life” (318). It is interesting how nearly Esther here repeats Dickens’s words in the passage from the autobiographical fragment cited just above: Dickens, in his dreams “wander[s] desolately back to that time of [his] life,” the Warren’s period; Esther’s waking mind also “wanders back,” to “that old time of [her] life” with Miss Barbary. Another suggestive simile occurs some chapters later, when after recording the full truth about her birth as she learns it from Lady Dedlock, Esther says, “I was more than ever frightened of myself,” and reports “thinking anew . . . of the terrible meaning of the old words, now moaning in my ear like a surge upon the shore, ‘Your mother, Esther, was your disgrace, and you are hers’” (514). Esther’s discourse simile here very subtly suggests the relentless force of these words, perpetually washing over her with the never-ceasing inevitability of the surf.

The continuing impact of Esther’s trauma is also evident in her discourse when she suppresses or tries to suppress her feelings regarding her mother. The suppressions and announced narrative omissions, and her characteristic dismissal of important information that she thinks “matters little,” are not limited to her feelings about Allan Woodcourt. As William Axton notes, Esther’s reticence about her illegitimacy is a “fundamental part of her character in which there are psychological sores, disfigurements, and tender places that she cannot bring herself to look at or touch directly” (552). As it happens, there are more explicit narrative ellipses suppressing and dismissing her feelings about her mother than there are with any other subject, Woodcourt included. It may be that Esther’s suppression of feelings about her mother, her past, Woodcourt, and other

matters close to her heart is not merely coyness or modest self-deprecation, but an indication that she is at times simply unable to voice her deepest feelings. Of her undying gratitude for Mr. Jarndyce's offer to place her at Greenleaf after Miss Barbary's death, Esther says, "What the destitute subject of such an offer tried to say, I need not repeat. What she did say, I could more easily tell if it were worth the telling. What she felt, and will feel to her dying hour, I could never relate" (22). When Lady Dedlock looks at Esther strangely and says that she was very concerned to hear about her illness, the narrating Esther says, "I cannot say what was in my whirling thoughts," and when Lady Dedlock sits beside Esther to tell her, "I am your wicked and unhappy mother!" the narrating Esther says, "I cannot tell in any words what the state of my mind was, when I saw in her hand my handkerchief, with which I had covered the dead baby" (509).

Martha Rosso claims that Dickens was fully aware that "like himself, [Esther] feels many things too deeply for words. Esther never openly reveals all that is locked inside her, and it is in this respect that she bears a striking resemblance to her creator" (92). We have seen in the preceding chapter that Dickens himself felt some things too deeply for words, as he indicates in the autobiographical fragment when he says, "No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship [at Warren's]," and when he says that the depth of his shame and misery "cannot be written" (Forster 1: 26). "How much I suffered," Dickens writes also in the autobiographical fragment, "it is . . . utterly beyond my power to tell" (Forster 1: 30). The habit of suppressing feelings even when they might be expressed is another characteristic that Esther shares with her creator. Dickens acknowledged this tendency in himself when he told Maria Beadnell Winter that

it arose from the pain he experienced in her rejection of him: “My entire devotion to you, and the wasted tenderness of those hard years . . . made so deep an impression on me that refer to it a habit of suppression which now belongs to me, which I know is no part of my original nature, but which makes me chary of shewing my affections, even to my children, except when they are very young” (*Letters* 7: 543).

But almost despite herself, Esther does succeed at times in telling the deep feelings she downplays in her discourse by saying that they “matter little.” In the opening of Chapter 43, Esther says it “doesn’t matter” how much her mother dominated her thoughts as she worried about their secret being a danger to Lady Dedlock, though in this case she certainly does reveal what those thoughts were:

It matters little now, how much I thought of my living mother who had told me evermore to consider her dead. I could not venture to approach her or to communicate with her in writing, for my sense of the peril in which her life was passed was only to be equalled by my fears of increasing it. Knowing that my mere existence as a living creature was an unforeseen danger in her way, I could not always conquer that terror of myself which had seized me when I first knew the secret. At no time did I dare to utter her name. I felt as if I did not even dare to hear it. . . .

It matters little now how often I recalled the tones of my mother’s voice, wondered whether I should ever hear it again as I so longed to do and thought how strange and desolate it was that it should be so new to me. *It matters little* that I watched for every public mention of my mother’s name; that I passed and repassed the door of her house in town, loving it, but afraid to look at it; that I once sat in the theatre when my mother was there and saw me, and when we were so wide asunder before the great company of all degrees that any link or confidence between us seemed a dream. It is all, all over. My lot has been so blest that I can relate little of myself which is not a story of goodness and generosity in others. I may well pass that little, and go on. (591 emphasis added)

The feelings conveyed here are certainly powerful. The narrating Esther indicates directly how the intradiegetic Esther longs for contact with her mother, “strange and desolate” as

it is that she knows her so little, and the extradiegetic Esther insinuates quite plainly that by denying her this contact, her mother is lacking in “goodness and generosity.” Marcia Goodman suggests that the repetition of “it matters little” in this passage which makes the narrating Esther’s voice as narrator appreciably more audible indicates the extradiegetic Esther’s “extreme disappointment and anger” about her mother’s abandoning her a second time, “as well as her discomfort possessing such aggressive feelings” (156). The reiterations of “it matters little” here approach being a repeated refrain of the sort we find so often in Dickens’s third-person fiction. If there is indeed a hint of the “Dickensian” narrator in the repetitions in this passage, also suggested by the three “that” clauses following the last “it matters little,” it may be that with the powerful feelings he had in hand at this point, Esther’s longing for contact with her mother even as she knows that public knowledge of their relationship would *again* make Esther her mother’s “disgrace,” Dickens permitted Esther, in moderation, to use one of his most characteristic devices for intensifying the impact of his rhetoric.

Another notable instance of somewhat toned-down Dickensian repetition occurs when Esther succeeds in conveying powerful feelings about her mother without any “covering” apparatus of self-deprecation in the chapter in which Lady Dedlock acknowledges their relationship. (It is significant that this chapter containing the revelation of her mother’s identity is when Esther first calls her narrative “my story” without apology.) After the secret is revealed and the danger of their situation to Lady Dedlock is established, Esther proposes that they share their dilemma with Mr. Jarndyce:

I explained, as nearly as I could then, or can recall now—for my agitation

and distress throughout were so great that I scarcely understood myself, though every word that was uttered in the mother's voice, so unfamiliar and so melancholy to me; which in my childhood I *had never learned to love and recognize, had never been sung to sleep with, had never heard a blessing from, had never had a hope inspired by*; made an enduring impression on my memory—I say I explained, or tried to do it, how I had only hoped that Mr. Jarndyce, who had been the best of fathers to me, might be able to afford some counsel and support to her. (512 emphasis added)

Through the repeated phrases indicating what the narrating Esther realizes she missed in her childhood, a mother's love, she expresses anger or self-pity at her abandonment by her mother in fairly direct fashion here as well, and she does not chasten herself with a reminder to be thankful for her blessings or a call to "duty" with a jingle of her keys as the intradiegetic Esther so often does when she pities herself in her reported narrative.

The fact that Esther struggles with powerful feelings about her mother, suppressing them, deprecating them, and revealing them almost despite herself, is of crucial significance. Cruel and abusive as Miss Barbary is and as damaging a surrogate mother as she turns out to be, it is Esther's biological mother who has truly abandoned her. Esther's mother is herself "guilty and yet innocent": she is guilty of abandoning her daughter and not raising and nurturing her in love, but innocent because she honestly believes her child never lived and remains unaware of her mistake until Esther is an adult. But the fact is that the younger Miss Barbary, the ironically named Honoria Barbary, is indeed the one who abandons her own daughter to the cruel fate that leaves the lasting scars upon her psyche that are so evident in her narrative discourse. As Carolyn Dever points out, the intradiegetic Esther is abandoned by her mother not once, but three times in the novel: first at birth; then when she reveals herself to Esther only to insist that she be

considered “evermore dead”; and again in her actual death. Esther’s trebly amplified abandonment by her actual mother is where the covert connection between Esther and her creator is most significant, because the abandonment Dickens felt at the hands of his own mother in his childhood, “guilty and yet innocent” as Elizabeth Dickens surely was, is the primary demon of his own that Dickens faces most squarely under the cover of Esther in *Bleak House*.

In *Copperfield* David’s mother is loving, and as he recalls it, his time with her before Murdstone appears is an idyll of closeness and warmth between mother and son. David’s mother is not responsible for his trauma unless it is through her poor choice of a second husband and her death. The father is the target of Dickens’s veiled hostility and ridicule in *Copperfield*, in the melodramatically cruel Mr. Murdstone and in the impecunious and absurd but still lovable and ultimately redeemed Mr. Micawber, whom we know is based on Dickens’s own father. It was, of course, John Dickens’s impecunious nature that landed him in debtors prison and forced the trauma of abandonment and degradation his son suffered at the blacking factory. But in *Bleak House* there is relatively little attention to the father where Esther is concerned. She wonders at one point if Jarndyce might be her father, but she never dwells on her father’s identity or thinks much about him at all so far as we can tell. Her father is “Nemo,” or “no one,” after all, and he dies before Esther knows of her relation to him. But throughout *Bleak House* mothers are treated, in Dever’s words, “with venom,” especially Mrs. Pardiggle and Mrs. Jellyby, who are the “clearest instances of misplaced priorities and malign neglect” (43). If surrogate mothers are taken into account as well, Miss

Barbary is of course an even clearer instance of “misplaced priorities and malign neglect.”

If Dickens still felt animosity regarding his father’s responsibility for the Warren’s experience, we know that despite the continuing financial problems and embarrassment his father caused him, Dickens came to regard his father in a mostly positive light. After his father’s death in March 1851, a year before the first installment of *Bleak House* appeared, Dickens frequently referred to John Dickens as “my poor dear father” in his letters, and as Peter Ackroyd says, “all his resentment and anger seemed to have been dissipated, leaving only the pity of circumstances behind. Circumstances to which John Dickens had been as much a victim as his son” (624). Even in the autobiographical fragment Dickens expresses gratitude and credits his father’s “kind nature” for getting him a room closer to the Marshalsea so that he would not be so cut off from the family as he was in his Camdentown lodgings (Forster 1: 30-31). And in the end it was John Dickens who insisted that his son’s employment at Warren’s be terminated. It may not be entirely coincidental that in the first novel after his father’s death, the benevolent “savior” Mr. Jarndyce bears John Dickens’s first name. But Dickens’s feelings about his mother’s culpability in the Warren’s experience seem never to have been so successfully worked out. It is perhaps a small thing that it was through her family connection with James Lamert, Elizabeth Dickens’s cousin by marriage, that work was found for Charles at Warren’s, where Lamert was chief manager. Of clearer importance is that when John Dickens quarreled with Lamert over an unknown matter relating to Charles’s work, his mother wanted him to continue working there. As Dickens records in the

autobiographical fragment, Lamert felt deeply insulted by a letter from John Dickens and responded by dismissing Charles from his employment. Elizabeth Dickens took it upon herself to smooth over the rift, and she succeeded in arranging for her son to return to work. But Dickens's father insisted that he not return to Warren's, determining that he should instead go to school, which is indeed what happened.

Michael Slater points out that Dickens's mother was actually very solicitous in her concern for her son during the Warren's period and probably thought that she was entering him on a promising career in a family business. Apparently, she either did not know her son's aspirations to something much greater, or given the family's straitened circumstances, could not take them seriously. Slater also demonstrates that Dickens always treated his mother with kindness and respect, and on a conscious level, it seems certain that Dickens never thought she had purposely wanted to harm him by prolonging what she must not have known was so traumatic to him—Dickens admits in the fragment that he kept his true feelings about his employment at Warren's entirely to himself. Surely Dickens knew that his mother was “innocent,” but in his heart, it appears that he considered her quite “guilty” as well. For his mother's desire that the degradation of the blacking factory continue was forever stamped upon Dickens's memory. As he says in the autobiographical fragment, “I do not write resentfully or angrily: for I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am: but-I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back” (Forster 1: 38). Here we see “Dickensian” repetition heightening the rhetorical impact in the delivery of very powerful feelings of his own.

Slater asserts that “No reader of [the autobiographical fragment] can fail to notice, as Dickens’s wife noticed, his greater harshness towards Elizabeth than towards John Dickens” (10). Commenting on Dickens’s statement that “I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back,”

Slater elaborates:

“Resentment” and “anger” are indeed terms too mild for the emotions that must lie behind such rhetoric as this. An enduring sense of horrified dismay and ultimate betrayal—such feelings as these must, at the deepest level, have been those of Dickens towards his mother for the rest of his life. They surface in the characterization of the almost criminally irresponsible Mrs. Nickleby and a whole subsequent line of “bad mother” figures in his novels like Mrs. Joe in *Great Expectations* with the bib of her apron symbolically bristling with pins and needles, culminating in the horrific virago-mother of “George Silverman’s Explanation” (1867). (11)

Whether Lady Dedlock belongs in this line of “‘bad mother’ figures” is debatable, for it is mainly her ignorance of Esther’s survival at birth that makes her a bad mother. But the unwitting abandonment by her mother and the influence of the truly “‘bad mother’ figure” of Miss Barbary produce devastating, scarring consequences in Esther’s character that are evident still at the time of her writing. The narrating Esther Summerson is in many respects, I believe, Dickens’s thoroughly insightful exploration of the scarring effects of the less dramatic maternal abandonment he felt himself, and many of the scars Esther bears Dickens must surely have recognized in himself in less extreme forms.

Through a somewhat convoluted chain of circumstance, Lady Dedlock can be seen as the cause of the literal scars her daughter bears, which seem clearly symbolic of the scars left on her psyche by her abandonment at birth to the cruel “mothering” of Miss Barbary. One of the prominent themes of *Bleak House* is the interconnectedness of all

members of English society, high and low, and through their interconnection they all suffer the ills of “the system” together. Dickens does not make the point directly, but as John Frazee notes, he “broadly hints” that the fever that kills Jo originates in the paupers’ graveyard where Captain Hawdon is buried (231). The third-person *Bleak House* narrator describes this final resting place of “our dear brother here departed,” Nemo/Hawdon, as a “hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed” (151). Jo visits this churchyard because Lady Dedlock asks him to direct her to Nemo’s grave, and the broad hint is that it is apparently in compliance with this request that Jo contracts the fever that kills him and that he passes on to Charley and ultimately to Esther. In a roundabout way, Esther’s mother “innocently” sets in motion the chain of events that nearly kill her daughter and leave her “altered” with disfiguring scars on her face.

Esther’s authorial commentary reveals that she is very self-conscious about these physical scars on her face. Her first reaction on seeing her altered face in a mirror is to find herself “very much changed—O very, very much” (504). The added discourse intensification suggests that the recollection is still powerful in the mind of the narrating Esther. When she reports steeling herself for her first meeting with Ada after the illness, Esther says, as noted above, “I must confess I was nervously anxious about my altered looks,” and she adds, “I loved my darling so well that I was more concerned for their effect on her than on any one. I was not in this slight distress because I at all repined—I am quite certain I did not, that day” (516). Here she characteristically deflects her anxiety

away from herself, but the added discourse comment that as she is writing she is “quite certain” she did not “at all repine” on her own account “that day” seems uncharacteristically defensive and indicates that there were in fact days when she did herself feel the loss of her looks. When she says that Ada found her “what I used to be—except, of course, in that particular of which I have said enough, and which I have no intention of mentioning any more, just now, if I can help it,” the narrating Esther reveals that she is consciously trying to suppress her feelings on this matter of her appearance as she does with other important matters. She will *try*, in the present moment of narration, not to mention her lost beauty, “any more, just now,” *if* she can “help it” (518). This passage would seem to contradict her claim near the end of the novel to have fully revealed all her feelings about her lost beauty as they arose during the course of her narration: “I have suppressed none of my many weaknesses on that subject, but have written them as faithfully as my memory has recalled them. And I hope to do, and mean to do, the same down to the last words of these pages” (831). And indeed, the novel ends with a tantalizingly suggestive sentence fragment that keeps Esther’s concern with her looks suspended forever in her unfinished closing remark. She reports that her husband says she is prettier after seven years of marriage than she ever has been, and her response is, “I did not know that; I am not certain that I know it now.” She says that her children are pretty, Ada is beautiful, her husband handsome, and that they all “can very well do without much beauty in me—even supposing—” (880). Even supposing she ever had any beauty? Supposing that there is some little beauty in her now? Supposing that Allan is right and she is prettier now than ever? Esther’s evident concern for her appearance may

be one of the “feminine touches” that Dickens instilled in her character. But it may be, too, that Esther’s looks are so important to her because she has a particular need for people to find her attractive. For as William Axton observes, Esther has a “neurotic suspicion that she is plain-looking if not ugly, and hence debarred from winning any love to herself” (553). Esther believes that her appearance is integral to her ability to “win love,” and she appears to suspect that her scars make her “damaged goods” as an object of male desire.

Esther’s anxiety about her looks and uncertainty about the self-worth that she ties to her appearance are merely the tip of the iceberg of Esther’s compulsive anxieties and uncertainties about her ability to “win love.” If David Copperfield is insecure or “distrusts himself on small occasions,” Esther’s insecurity is rampant, almost crippling to her. The self-effacing modesty, the tentativeness, and the apologetic nature that so much of her discourse indicates may not be merely a product of Esther’s “ideal Victorian femininity”; they can be read as genuine feelings peculiar to Esther as an individual, suggesting that she very *seriously* mistrusts herself on occasions large and small. When she says, “I know I am not clever” and that she has “not a quick way, O no!” and then proves herself highly perceptive and clever throughout her narrative, it may be that Dickens is not “unsuccessful” in meeting the separate demands of Esther’s roles as narrator and heroine, as Forster and Harvey assume, but that Esther is truly blind to her own abilities (15). It may be that Esther is not being coy or ironic or simply “not quick” when she judges her church-going, bible-quoting godmother “a good, good woman!” and Miss Barbary’s only slightly less cruel servant, Mrs. Rachael “another very good woman”

(15, 16). Esther might really believe Mrs. Rachael “was too good to feel any emotion” when she and Esther part, and that she herself “was not so good” when she “wept bitterly” (22).

If we realize, as Zwerdling suggests, that Dickens’s attitude towards Esther was “fundamentally clinical,” and see that his interest in Esther’s personality went deeper than simply fleshing her out to meet the strictly narrative needs of her conflicting roles as “good” heroine and “womanly” narrator, because he was covertly exploring aspects of his own personality in Esther, we see that many of the “flaws” or “weaknesses” in Esther’s character are not failings in Dickens’s ability to create a satisfying female narrator/protagonist. Rather, they are built into Esther’s character by conscious design. And if we read her self-deprecation as entirely “straight,” which would seem much more consistent with her character than either intentional irony or the affected, flirtatious shyness we usually mean by “coyness,” we see that Esther’s discourse indicates the carefully imagined results of her being conditioned by the trauma of her childhood to see herself truly as having no intrinsic value. As Thomas Linehan suggests, Esther’s childhood teaches her “to accept Miss Barbary’s estimate of her own worth. She assumes a false sense of guilt and shame and builds a large part of her adult life on a belief in her own unworthiness, even worthlessness” (136). Linehan supports this claim convincingly by demonstrating *Bleak House*’s thematic preoccupation with feelings of unworthiness in a host of other characters who punish themselves or think poorly of themselves through a similar inability to bury their pasts and “move on”: George Rouncewell, Lady Dedlock, the Bayham Badgers, Gridley, Charley Neckett, Prince Turveydrop, and Jo. But of

course, Esther is squarely at the head of the list.

For Esther is in fact not merely uncertain of herself or insecure in small ways as David professes to be: the result of her traumatic childhood as we see it in the narrating Esther's discourse is entirely consistent with an acute inferiority complex. Indeed, if we read her discourse as "straight," the narrating Esther does not have low self-esteem so much as she has virtually none at all. And she is not just politely or "femininely" self-deprecating in her self-effacement and modesty, she disparages herself thoroughly because at heart she does appear to accept Miss Barbary's estimate that she is a worthless person, a burden to others, and a disgrace to herself and her mother. When Esther records Ada's calling her a "quiet, dear, good creature, . . . so thoughtful . . . and yet so cheerful!" and Ada's saying that Esther could make a home even out of the appalling mess of the Jellyby household, the narrating Esther cries, "My simple darling! She was quite unconscious that she only praised herself, and that it was in the goodness of her own heart that she made so much of me!" (42). Esther feels Ada was only praising herself because she seems really to think that it takes a great deal of "goodness of heart" to see admirable qualities in one such as herself, one whom Esther is still certain does not truly deserve such praise. After reporting Ada's expression of confidence in Esther's abilities when she is given the basket of keys for the Bleak House housekeeping, Esther says that she "knew, to be sure, that it was the dear girl's kindness" to encourage her so, and she adds, "I liked to be so pleasantly cheated" (68). The implication is that the narrating Esther thinks she is "cheated" because the confidence and encouragement are not legitimate—they are only reflections of Ada's kindness to one so lowly and undeserving as herself.

Or when she reports teaching her housekeeping methods to Caddy Jellyby, Esther says in direct address to her “unknown friend” the reader, “if you had seen her, whenever I jingled my housekeeping keys, get up and attend me, certainly you might have thought that there never was a greater imposter than I, with a blinder follower than Caddy Jellyby” (418). This is not merely modest self-deprecation. Esther is clearly one of the most capable housekeepers in the history of fiction, but even in this area of her most obvious strength, she feels she is “an imposter,” not the genuine article, and that anyone who would follow her would necessarily be “in the dark.” The deeply ingrained lesson of her childhood, that she is worthless, that it would have been better if she had never been born, prevents the narrating Esther from taking even the smallest credit where it is most obviously, legitimately deserved.

Along these same lines is the recurring refrain of “The old conspiracy to make me happy! Everybody seemed to be in it!” (495). People can of course conspire to do good deeds, but the usual connotation of the word “conspiracy” is that the conspiring is illegal or improper. The first definition of this word in the dictionary closest to my hand is “An agreement to perform together an illegal, wrongful, or subversive act,” and the other three definitions contain such words as “criminal,” “illegal,” and “sinister” (*American Heritage*). The implication of this refrain of the “old conspiracy” to make Esther happy is that people who care for Esther and show her kindness and affection are doing something “wrongful” and subverting the truth, which according to the narrating Esther is that she is not worthy of praise, kindness and affection. And though some have claimed that Esther’s narrative charts a progression of growth or psychic healing of the scars she bears

from her childhood, we should remember that these discourse comments that go beyond mere self-deprecation are made in the present moment of narration and continue to the novel's last page, where Esther says, "The people even praise Me as the doctor's wife. The people even like Me as I go about, and make so much of me that I am quite abashed. I owe it all to him, my love, my pride! They like me for his sake" (880). In contrast to the apparent security that *David Copperfield* presents in his final chapter, where he thanks Agnes, the angel who "saved" him and made him what he is, Esther's closing paragraphs express grateful surprise that anyone could actually like Her! Even at the end of her story, Esther is certain that she is not liked for her own qualities, sterling as they clearly are, but only because people are kind and think well of her husband: they like Esther only "for Allan's sake," as if they are having to force themselves to like her in spite of their "true" feelings.

Esther's sense of unworthiness is also apparent in her discourse insinuations that she does not deserve the romantic love she so (discreetly) desires. When the unsavory Mr. Guppy's proposal takes the intradiegetic Esther by surprise, she shows that she does esteem herself well enough to reject him out of hand. But she reports that afterwards she is moved to laugh and then cry. "In short," she comments, "I was in a flutter for a little while; and felt as if an old chord had been more coarsely touched than it ever had been since the days of the dear old doll, long buried in the garden" (126). The notion of her being romantically attractive to someone, the idea that she might marry and perhaps even start a family, puts her "in a flutter" and takes her back to the only companion she has ever felt truly comfortable with, her dear old doll, buried long ago when she

unconsciously echoed her own mother's action by giving up her "motherhood." While Guppy is not a serious option for the Esther, Woodcourt certainly is, and through the obliquity of her "feminine" narrative technique, we know that Esther does truly desire him. Zwerdling observes that whenever she mentions Woodcourt, Esther becomes a "grammatical cripple," which he interprets as "an expression of her anxiety" (434). We have seen Esther's halting and awkward grammar in the belated admissions of Woodcourt's presence at the ends of the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters (pp. 180-81 above). We see her grammatical difficulties also when she says in one of her early discourse comments about Woodcourt, "I believe—at least I know—that he was not rich. . . . He was seven years older than I. Not that I need mention it, for it hardly seems to belong to anything. I think—I mean, he told us—that he had been in practice three or four years" (238).

What is most interesting about Esther being a grammatical cripple and having anxieties when it comes to Woodcourt is that the halting syntax and grammar suggest anxieties not in the intradiegetic Esther, but in the extradiegetic narrating Esther who has been Mrs. Woodcourt for seven years at the time she is writing. To Michael Kearns, the difficulties Esther has in writing about Woodcourt, the grammatical troubles and the omissions and "lapses" surrounding Woodcourt in her otherwise very "competent" narrative, "reveal an Esther who even from her apparently secure and happy vantage point still lacks self-confidence and awareness of her own deserving nature" (126). Or as Zwerdling observes, "she is never sure that she is worthy of love and respect," even at the time of writing (430). Part of Esther's problem is that she feels she is not deserving of

love or affection on her own merits but must “win some love” to herself if she can (18), a notion that Rosso calls a “painfully stunted . . . conception of love,” but one that Rosso demonstrates fits a pattern of actual living persons who are made to feel unwanted in childhood and who grow up, like Esther, thinking that love is earned by serving others selflessly and working so hard at it that love is given to them as a “reward for a job well done” (91). So far as her discourse suggests, Esther will never feel comfortable enough with herself on her own merits or be able to work hard and selflessly enough to deserve such a reward.

But despite her continuing feelings that she does not deserve kindness, praise, affection, and love, Esther obviously does crave these important things she was deprived of in her formative years, largely, of course, *because* she was deprived of them. In a position of prominence at the end of Chapter 30, Esther records the “conspirators,” Richard, Ada, and Mr. Jarndyce, saying that the East wind that symbolizes Mr. Jarndyce’s unhappiness or unease could never be where “Somebody was; they said that wherever Dame Durden went, there was sunshine and summer air.” Esther’s discourse comment is, “Well! It was only their love for me, I know very well, and it is a long time ago. I must write it, even if I rub it out again” (426). She *must* write it, is under compulsion to write down their praise of her, even as she dismisses it as being “only their love for me” and even as she compulsively wants to erase it, because her need of praise is so urgent. In this novel in which the power of the written word is given such emphasis in the simultaneously meaningless and vitally important documents in Chancery and the host of letters and other documents of more unequivocal importance, Esther must substantiate

praise of herself or give it some authority by putting it down in black and white, even if only for a moment.¹

It is not Esther's exaggerated modesty or coyness that makes her record praise of herself and then deny her worthiness of such praise, nor is it Dickens's ineptitude in "pulling off" Esther as narrator and heroine: it is her severely damaged self-esteem that compels Esther to record praises of herself and then to erase them figuratively by suggesting that they are "false." As Zwerdling puts it, "The innumerable compliments on her wisdom, shrewdness, affectionate nature, and beauty she compulsively records and compulsively dismisses as absurd. She has an insatiable hunger for them, yet they are never the right food, for the damage to her sense of self-esteem has been permanent" (430). Just how much Esther needs approval and affection is suggested in her comment on Ada's immediate acceptance of her on their first meeting, when they were "talking together, as free and happy as could be": "What a load off my mind! It was so delightful to know that she could confide in me, and like me! it was so good of her, and so encouraging to me!" (30). The fear that she might not be liked and confided in by her companion has been a burden to the intradiegetic Esther that is now thankfully lifted, and which the narrating Esther still apparently appreciates with some feeling. Esther's need for kindness and love is even greater after her disfiguring illness, as she indicates when she describes Ada's daily visits to the garden beneath her window in her time of

¹ A full list of all the significant written documents in *Bleak House* would make a considerable document in itself: among the more notable are the scraps of handwriting that link Nemo and Captain Hawdon; the will that would end Jarndyce v. Jarndyce if costs did not end it first; the written pledge to Smallweed that threatens to be George Rouncewell's and the Bagnets' undoing; and the letters between Honoria Barbary and Captain Hawdon, Lady Dedlock and Esther, and Jarndyce and Esther.

sequestration: “if I had learnt to love her dear sweet voice before when we were hardly ever apart, how did I learn to love it then, when I stood behind the window-curtain listening and replying, but not so much as looking out! How did I learn to love it afterwards, when the harder time came!” (438).

We know that Dickens, too, had an apparently urgent need for praise and admiration, which he found in an affectionate audience, an arm’s length away from him through the green covers of his monthly parts or beyond the stage lights at the readings he felt compelled to keep giving until they wrecked his health. As mentioned in the first chapter above, Dickens’s sales were always important to him because his popularity satisfied his “need of mutual sympathy and his desire to be loved” (Monod 257). And to repeat Kathleen Tillotson’s observation, “the sense of a sympathetic, applauding public seems to have been profoundly necessary to him” (35). This need for approval in Dickens and in Esther obviously arises in both cases from insecurity, the insecurity that Garis uncovers in the ever-performing “theatrical Dickens” who was effectively “showing off” his verbal virtuosity. The penchant for extravagantly colorful clothes that made so many of his contemporaries describe Dickens as a “dandy” suggests that even in his appearance Dickens was trying to call attention to himself, which is of course another sign of insecurity. His great sensitivity to insults and criticism and his perpetual restlessness also suggest that Dickens was insecure and uncomfortable with himself, as does his reserve with those closest to him, his being “chary” of showing his affections even to his children. Ackroyd quotes an unnamed acquaintance of Dickens’s as saying that “with all his sagacity, Dickens is eternally afraid of being *slighted*. He never seems

to be at ease—not even in his own house. . . . He has always seemed to me as if he had something *on* his mind as well as *in* it.” And as Ackroyd observes, “There is always to be found within Dickens that inner person—hurt, watchful, afraid—who looked out through the eyes of the successful writer and the famous man . . . [with] the susceptibility of the anxious child” (828). Despite his star-status as the most popular and famous writer of his time, it would seem that Dickens’s own self-esteem required the constant reinforcement he received from his public, because in his innermost heart he was, like Esther, uncomfortable with himself and afraid—afraid of being abandoned, rejected, and unloved.

In the case of David, Esther, and Dickens all three, the root of the self-esteem issues and the insecurity and the different manifestations of that insecurity which distinguish the three is the sense of “guilt in innocence” caused by their childhood trauma. The guilty secret that David harbors so close to his breast, the “truth about himself” that he so fears other will discover, is that he was tainted by having been a common “drudge,” a “little labouring hind” (154). In *Bleak House*, though, Esther’s trauma is not so much a matter of social degradation, illegitimate child though she is, as it is the trauma that I believe hits closer to the heart of Dickens himself and shows a more understandable and more sympathetic sense of the haunting unwarranted guilt underpinning his own apparent insecurity. The guilty secret that Esther holds so tightly to her breast is the terrible suspicion that she is not deserving of her mother’s love, that she should never have been born, that she is her mother’s “disgrace.” Purely irrational as it is, the guilt that Esther suffers from her abandonment at birth resembles very closely the

irrational guilt that some living adults feel who were given up at birth by their mothers for adoption. What Dickens may have realized between *Copperfield* and *Bleak House* is that what hurt him worse than the social degradation is that betrayal and rejection Slater suggests Dickens felt in his mother's wanting his time at Warren's to continue after his father thought it should end. Clearly, Dickens never felt he was his mother's "disgrace," but it is not unreasonable to think that he covertly magnified in his fiction the perception that his mother did not love him well enough to be "warm" for his immediate and permanent removal from Warren's at the earliest possible moment. And beyond what resentment and anger Dickens reveals towards his mother in the autobiographical fragment, one must wonder if the forced separation of the twelve-year-old boy from his mother during the time he lived apart from the family, alone every night in the "miserable blank" of his lodgings, affected his feelings about her in ways he could never be aware of consciously. Dickens was "set apart" from his family during the Warren's period in a very literal sense. It is speculation, certainly, but it may well be that wholly innocent as he knew he was, there was still a deep unacknowledged feeling that his mother did not care enough about him to rescue him from the shameful degradation at Warren's, and that it was somehow his own fault that he had been unworthy of his mother's love.

The "fault" that Esther was born with, "of which [she] confessedly felt guilty and yet innocent," is the source of her compulsive determination to "win some love" to herself if she can (18). The most revealing acknowledgement of Esther's feelings of guilt comes immediately after she learns the truth about her birth from Lady Dedlock. Yet again with "Dickensian" repetition heightening the impact of her rhetoric, she apologizes,

suspecting it is a grave weakness to feel this guilt:

I hope it may not appear very unnatural or bad in me, that I then became heavily sorrowful to think I had ever been reared. That I felt as if I knew it would have been better and happier for many people, if indeed I had never breathed. That I had a terror of myself, as the danger and the possible disgrace of my own mother, and of a proud family name. That I was so confused and shaken, as to be possessed by a belief that it was right, and had been intended, that I should die in my birth; and that it was wrong, and not intended, that I should be then alive.

These are the real feelings that I had. (514)

These real feelings of it being “wrong” that she is alive are reinforced by the realization that her birth prevented Boythorn’s marriage to Miss Barbary (whom we must assume was a different woman altogether before she “sacrificed” herself to raise her sister’s child in secret). Despite her telling herself at one point that “I could not have been intended to die, or I should never have lived; not to say should never have been reserved for such a happy life. . . . I knew I was as innocent of my birth as a queen of hers; and that before my Heavenly Father I should not be punished for birth, nor a queen rewarded for it,” the persistent and compulsive self-deprecation which escalates into the paralyzing insecurity and feelings of worthlessness evident in her writing-time discourse, long after she reassures herself of her innocence here, suggests that she is not so successful in convincing herself (515-16).

William Axton says that Esther “stands condemned before the tribunal of her own conscience while at the same time she is pleading her case” (548). Esther’s standing condemned before the tribunal of her own conscience though she knows consciously she is wholly without sin in her birth resembles the dilemma of most of Kafka’s protagonists—that Kafka admired Dickens so much is no wonder. Dickens is not, as

Philip Rahv says of Kafka, an “artist of neurosis,” at least not of same order as Kafka, but in characters such as the Esther Summerson revealed in her narrative discourse, Dickens demonstrates a clear understanding of what we now recognize as neurosis, a mental or emotional disorder with no physiological basis but manifest in such symptoms as gross insecurity, anxiety, and irrational fears (ix). Esther’s discourse reveals at every turn that she is compulsively anxious and grossly insecure, and her greatest irrational fear is this guilty, barely conscious suspicion that she is not worthy of life. And indeed, at her worst moments the intradiegetic Esther actually becomes suicidal. When she describes the delirium at the height of her illness, Esther says, “I suppose that few who have not been in such a condition can quite understand what I mean, or what painful unrest arose from this source.” The suspicion that few who have not experienced it themselves can understand makes Esther “almost afraid to hint at that time in my disorder” when she felt she was laboring up an eternal staircase and never making progress (488). In one of her very few discourse questions Esther asks, “Dare I hint at that worse time when, strung together somewhere in great black space, there was a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which *I* was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the rest, and when it was such inexplicable agony and misery to be a part of the dreadful thing?” (489). It comes out in the fevered dreamlike state she experiences at the peak of her illness, but the guilt and insecurity that her discourse reveals at the most conscious level have their deepest root in the subconscious thought at which she can only “dare” cautiously to “hint”: that she is so “set apart” from the rest of humanity she wishes she could be “taken off” because it is “inexplicable agony and misery to be a part of the

dreadful thing”—the “dreadful thing” being the chain of humanity itself.

Michael Slater is certain that Dickens wanted Esther to “end happily, to take leave of the reader as a fulfilled, emotionally well-balanced woman who has been, as she tells us, for ‘full seven happy years’ the mistress of Bleak House. . . . we are surely intended to see her as finally released from the psychological and emotional straitjacket into which her early experience had forced her” (256). Slater notes, however, that the reader does not ever get the sense that she is “writing from such a standpoint of serenity. . . . Rather, . . . the impression built up is one of a woman with a distinctly compulsive personality whose gushes of confidence are mixed with strange hesitancies and reticences, making us feel a constant need to interpret or gloss her narration” (257). This need on the reader’s part to interpret Esther’s narration has been noted by many. J. Hillis Miller, for instance, says that “*Bleak House* does not easily yield its meaning. Its significance is by no means transparent. Both narrators hide as much as they reveal. . . . The reader is invited in various ways to read the signs, to decipher the mystery” (Dickens’s *Bleak House* 60). Or as Marcia Goodman suggests, Esther’s narrative is “a record of her struggle to disguise painful feelings, and an invitation to the reader to interpret them” (162). Hochman and Wachs argue that “repression of the pain, rage, and desperation that her infancy and childhood must have generated” is Esther’s “life project,” and they say the reader must look beyond Esther’s own narrative to the third-person narrative to see “the repressed contents of the Esther narrative” (99, 100). As we have seen, the evidence the reader is invited to interpret, and indeed must interpret to appreciate Esther’s character fully, lies mainly in her narrative discourse. And in reading and understanding the potent meanings

of the hesitations, suppressions, omissions, and misdirections that characterize Esther's discourse, we learn the truth that Esther is so unwilling or perhaps unable to acknowledge directly.

In sum, Esther's discourse shows her in the present time of her narrating to be an anxious, compulsively self-effacing and grossly insecure woman whose self-esteem is so damaged by her childhood that she is almost paralyzed with a guilty sense of worthlessness. She craves the affection and approval she was denied in childhood but cannot accept praise and affection as her legitimate due. In what is surely a testament to Dickens's keen insight into the sort of damaged psyche that Esther reveals, much of what has been so irritating about Esther to many is not Dickens's failure to reconcile Esther's divergent functions as narrator and character, but is his thoroughly perceptive understanding that childhood trauma leads to neurotic adult behavior. Writing decades before the advent of the science of modern psychology, Dickens captures in Esther the very essence of a damaged survivor of childhood trauma. As Rosso puts it, "[W]ith what penetration, what understanding, [Dickens] has portrayed Esther as the classic example of the humble adult who is the metamorphosis of the unwanted child!" (91). The reason Dickens is able to imagine and portray the effects of childhood trauma so accurately in Esther is that under the cover of her convincingly feminine façade, he is writing about himself. In the small ways and the large, the similarities between Dickens and Esther take on significant weight as they accumulate: their shared "gift" (if not compulsion or obsession) for household order; their compulsion to tell *their* stories though they present those stories as not being about themselves; their tendency to reticence and suppression of

their deepest feelings; the insecurity and self-esteem problems that make them both crave reinforcing praise and affection; their secret feelings of being “guilty and yet innocent”; and most importantly, the fact that many of these similarities indicate scars they bear from traumatic experiences at the hands of their mothers, who are themselves “innocent and yet guilty.”

Edgar Johnson suggests that “Through *David Copperfield*, for all the evasions and omissions in its public self-revelation, [Dickens] had achieved some inner catharsis, some coming to terms with himself, that left him more at peace” (452). The course of Dickens’s fiction after *Copperfield* would seem to suggest otherwise, as his next novel, *Bleak House*, is generally considered to initiate Dickens’s “dark period,” where the humor becomes less buoyant and genial, and more satirical and harder-edged, and his themes become more harshly critical of “the system”—Chancery in *Bleak House*, Utilitarianism in *Hard Times*, and governmental indifference and inefficiency in *Little Dorrit*. In Esther’s narrative, Dickens explores the darkest demon of his own childhood trauma, his complicated feelings about his mother. He may have hoped to confront and lay to rest his demons in *Copperfield*, but under greater cover he clearly explores them again in *Bleak House* in much deeper and “darker” ways through the more crippling effects worked out in greater extremes in Esther Summerson.

There are certainly important autobiographical elements in the fiction Dickens produced in the years immediately following *Bleak House*—the central image of *Little Dorrit*, for instance, is the debtors prison that separated him from his family during the Warren’s period. But Dickens would not plumb the depths of his own character in his

fiction so closely as he does in *Bleak House* for another seven years, when he would essentially rewrite David's and Esther's stories in Philip Pirrip's fictive autobiography. As we will see, the hidden story that lies in the narrating Pip's discourse and what it reveals about Dickens's confrontation with the demons of his own past in *Great Expectations* suggest that in the intervening years, Dickens's own emotional scars faded substantially, and that in his last first-person novel he was able not only to face his demons, but in large part to face them down.

Chapter Six: The Intrusive Philip Pirrip

Taking exception only to the altered, “happy” ending of the novel, Edgar Johnson thought *Great Expectations* “the most perfectly constructed and perfectly written of all Dickens’s works” (993). George Gissing’s estimate of *Great Expectations* was even higher: “one can hardly overpraise the workmanship. No story in the first person was ever better told” (60). Opinions are subjective, of course, and different commentators consider other Dickens novels superior to *Great Expectations* in different respects, largely according to taste. But in all probability, *Great Expectations* has received more unqualified praise and been called Dickens’s “masterpiece” more often than any of his other novels. Dickens’s absolute mastery of the first person is indeed evident in this, his third and final attempt at novel-length fictive autobiography. Seasoned by his experience in *Copperfield* and *Bleak House* and in many shorter works in the first person, including all six 1854-1859 Christmas stories, Dickens was able to achieve in *Great Expectations* a first-person narrative with none of the minor lapses, inconsistencies, and improbabilities that occasionally surface in David Copperfield’s and Esther Summerson’s narratives.

Beyond the advance in technique, *Great Expectations* also reveals significant development in Dickens’s attitude towards himself and his past, for in this novel we have Dickens’s final full-scale revision of the same fundamental tale elaborated first in *Oliver Twist* and again in David’s and Esther’s narratives—*his* story, the story of the abandoned

and abused child. As we shall see, the revisions in Dickens's attitude towards himself and his past indicated in the mature Philip Pirrip's narrative discourse are dramatic, and they suggest that by and perhaps through the writing of *Great Expectations*, Dickens was also able to achieve a substantially greater mastery of the demons he was unable to vanquish in *Copperfield* and *Bleak House*.

We begin this chapter with a glance at the most obvious points of connection between *Great Expectations* and the two earlier fictive autobiographies, and a quick review of the most commonly accepted elements of actual autobiography in Pip's story. When he sent Forster the first five chapters of *Great Expectations* in October 1860, Dickens acknowledged that there were potential pitfalls in working again in the vein he had mined so successfully in *Copperfield*, having a male protagonist tell his own story from boyhood into maturity. As he told Forster, "To be quite sure I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions, I read *David Copperfield* again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe" (*Letters* 9: 325). Conscious or unconscious, the repetitions in *Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* have been well noted. Harry Stone's summation of the most immediate resemblances between David's and Pip's *histoire* circumstances is among the most succinct: "they are both orphaned, they are both rescued from deadening childhood drudgery, they are both 'sponsored' by eccentric 'single' ladies, they are both given unexpected fortunes, they are both wounded by masochistic loves, they are both bereft of their expectations, and they are both forced to make their own chastened ways in life" (299; also see Pearlman).

The most obvious conscious *histoire* repetition in all three fictive autobiographies

is the traumatic childhood each protagonist is forced to endure: like David and Esther, Pip is an unwanted orphan raised by surrogate parents in harsh circumstances. Pip is a “posthumous child” that his sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, “brings up by hand.” As their first reported exchange establishes, Mrs. Joe encourages in Pip the same “guilt in innocence” for being born and surviving that plagues and scars Esther so deeply:

“If it warn’t for me you’d have been to the churchyard long ago, and stayed there. Who brought you up by hand?”

“You did,” said I.

“And why did I do it, I should like to know!” exclaimed my sister.

I whimpered, “I don’t know.”

“I don’t!” said my sister. “I’d never do it again! I know that. I may truly say I’ve never had this apron of mine off, since born you were. It’s bad enough to be a blacksmith’s wife (and him a Gargery) without being your mother.” (9-10)

There is obvious wordplay in the oft-repeated phrase “brought up by hand.” In Victorian times the expression “brought up by hand” meant that an infant was bottle-fed instead of nursed by breast. Typically, Victorian children “brought up by hand” were unwanted orphans like Oliver Twist, wards of the parish, and it was relatively unusual for bottle-fed children to survive (Thurin 28-29, Houston 18). But the obvious implication is that Pip frequently felt the hard hand of his sister in her brutal wielding of the wax-tipped “Tickler” she administers in punitive alternation with Tar-water. Clearly, the unfeeling harshness of the Murdstones in *Copperfield* and Miss Barbary in *Bleak House* is echoed in Mrs. Joe’s harsh treatment of Pip.

The elements of Dickens’s own life incorporated into Pip’s story have also been well noted. The time frame of the *histoire* action in the novel corresponds roughly with the period of Dickens’s childhood and early maturity, and the marshes where Pip meets Magwitch are those in Chatham that Dickens lived near first in childhood and later when

he bought Gad's Hill in 1856—he walked these marshes daily while he was writing *Great Expectations* (Meckier, Johnson 982). There is consensus among Dickens scholars that Estella, Miss Havisham's heartless ward, has the most definite basis in Dickens's actual life, though there is some disagreement over whether she embodies the Maria Beadnell of Dickens's youth or the Ellen Ternan of Dickens's present when writing the novel in 1860-1861. Among others, Michael Slater and Fred Kaplan see Estella's torture of the enamored Pip a reflection of Dickens's less extreme torture at the hands of Maria Beadnell (Slater 75, Kaplan 436). On the other side, Morris Golden and Gwen Watkins are among the larger number who believe that Pip's painful yearning for Estella reflects Dickens's powerful yearning for Ellen Ternan, the teenaged actress with whom he became infatuated in 1857 when they acted together in Wilkie Collins's *The Frozen Deep* (Golden 184-88, Watkins 56-58).

Beyond the accepted basis of Estella in either Maria Beadnell or Ellen Ternan (or both), the autobiographical parallels between Dickens and Pip in *Great Expectations* are not as obviously explicit as in *Copperfield*, but they are apparent nonetheless in “subterranean form” (Stone 299). As Jack Rawlins says, “It has been recognized by most critics that Pip is Dickens, in a way that's striking even in terms of Dickens's habitually autobiographical art” (668n). But as Stone suggests,

the autobiography of *Great Expectations*, sometimes hidden, sometimes cunningly altered, is frequently all the more revealing because of its displacements. Protected by those displacements, Dickens can plumb the most intricate mysteries of his secret life. To mention only the most central and most obvious autobiographical parallels, Pip, like Dickens, came from lowly origins, felt himself an outcast, yearned to rise, attained wealth, entered polite society, failed to find happiness, and all the while hid what he considered his shaming taint: the formative episode of his

childhood. Magwitch, starting up from the graves, is, in many ways, the personification of that taint. . . . (299-300)

Joe's forge and Pip's shame in his "commonness" are often held to represent Warren's blacking warehouse and Dickens's shame regarding his "common" employment there (Welsh 176-77, Buckley *Seasons* 44). (Significantly, Warren's makes a cameo appearance in the novel when Dickens has Joe mention gratuitously that he and Wopsle "went off straight to look at the Blacking Ware'us. But we didn't find that it come up to its likeness in the red bills at the shop doors" [222].) Many have seen the taint that Pip feels from his recurrent and essentially innocent involvement with criminals as an exaggeration of the taint Dickens felt from his own childhood experiences, with the Newgate criminal prison standing in for the Marshalsea, the debtors prison that loomed so large in his past (Johnson 983-84). Morris Golden makes what are perhaps the most thoroughgoing suggestions of autobiographical elements in the *histoire* world of *Great Expectations*. To mention just a few of the autobiographical features he identifies beyond Warren's having its correlative in Joe's forge and Ellen Ternan hers in Estella, Golden suggests that Dickens's relationship with his father, moving from embarrassment to acceptance, is reflected in Pip's relationship with Magwitch; that Mrs. Pocket, with her horde of children "tumbling up" in neglect and even danger, suggests Dickens's feelings about his wife as an inadequate mother; and that Wemmick is a projection of Dickens's own division between "work" and "home," and in his relationship with the Aged Parent, of Dickens's relationship with his dependent parents (169-84).

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, *David Copperfield* and Esther's narrative in *Bleak House* were Dickens's attempts to explore and understand himself, to

probe, explain, and justify important aspects of his own identity as being rooted in his childhood woes. As we shall see below, the intrusive discourse in Philip Pirrip's narrative suggests that in *Great Expectations*, Dickens was able at last to come to terms with his past and to accept responsibility for himself "as he was," no longer a victim, but merely an imperfect man with the same flawed nature that is the essence of the human condition. One of the most prominent themes in *Great Expectations* is guilt, and we find this theme in a host of different manifestations at the *histoire* level in the novel. Pip feels guilt for stealing on Magwitch's compulsion and then keeping his "crime" a secret, for his inadvertently providing the weapon Orlick uses in the attack on Mrs. Joe, and most especially for turning his back on his childhood friend and protector, Joe—these are a small few of many glaring instances. *Great Expectations* is similar to *Copperfield* and Esther's narrative in *Bleak House* in charting the formation of the narrating protagonist's identity, but as we shall see, the primary impetus indicated in the narrative discourse for *this* autobiography is not so much a "quest for identity" as in the earlier fictive autobiographies as it is a quest for confession and atonement—for Dickens as much as for the narrating Philip Pirrip.

The inherent differences between Philip Pirrip's discourse tendencies and David's and Esther's dictate some deviation from the pattern of the two previous chapters. We will first consider the few notable similarities between the discourse tendencies of the narrating Philip Pirrip and his two predecessors, David and Esther, and then the greater resemblances between Philip Pirrip's discourse and the typical third-person Dickens narrator's. Following consideration of Philip Pirrip's authorial discourse as distinctively

“his own,” we will of course explore the persona of the narrating Mr. Pirrip that emerges from his intrusive discourse. Lastly, and most importantly, we will consider the issue of Dickens’s own motivation in “rewriting” his life one final time in *Great Expectations* and see that Dickens was indeed able at last to lay the demons of his traumatic childhood to rest.

Philip, David, and Esther: Discourse Similarities¹

The most obvious similarities between Philip Pirrip’s narrative discourse and David’s and Esther’s lie in the expected and necessary intrusions establishing and maintaining the narrator’s perspective as fictive autobiographer. In general, the resemblances are few, and Philip Pirrip the narrator has more in common with David than Esther. There is a great abundance of intrusive discourse throughout Philip Pirrip’s narrative, but there are markedly fewer instances of “flagrant authorial intrusion” of the most highly self-conscious sort, where the narrator tells us he sits literally with pen in hand at his desk as both David and Esther do. I note only two such occasions, and on both Philip Pirrip sounds very much like David Copperfield. One Newgate prisoner Wemmick shows him, Philip Pirrip says, “I can see now, as I write,” and when he describes Magwitch being sentenced to death, he says, “But for the indelible picture that my remembrance now holds before me, I could scarcely believe, even as I write these words, that I saw two-and-thirty men and women put before the Judge to receive that

¹ I distinguish between Pip the character and Pip the mature narrator by calling the latter “Philip Pirrip,” in hopes of keeping the distinction between the narrating persona and intradiegetic protagonist as clear as possible, a distinction that has been difficult to maintain at times in the discussion of David and Esther above.

sentence together” (261, 453). Still, Philip Pirrip does clearly acknowledge that he is an author engaged in the business of constructing a narrative with intrusions of evident self-consciousness in such passages as when he says, “A great event in my life, the turning point of my life, now opens on my view. But, before I proceed to narrate it, and before I pass on to all the changes it involved, I must give one chapter to Estella. It is not much to give to the theme that so long filled my heart” (297), or when he closes that chapter given to Estella with obvious foreshadowing:

And now that I have given the one chapter to the theme that so filled my heart, and so often made it ache and ache again, I pass on, unhindered, to the event that had impended over me longer yet; the event that had begun to be prepared for, before I knew that the world held Estella, and in the days when her baby intelligence was receiving its first distortions from Miss Havisham’s wasting hands. (309)

The impending event is Magwitch’s revelation that he is responsible for Pip’s “expectations,” and the intrusiveness of the foreshadowing is heightened by a lengthy allusion to “The Enchanters, or, Misnar the Sultan of India,” one of James Ridley’s *Tales of the Genii* in which two sorcerers lie unsuspecting beneath a massive slab elaborately rigged to crush them in retribution for plotting the sultan’s death.

There are also a few highly self-conscious direct addresses to the reader, though Philip Pirrip never goes so far as Esther does in addressing her reader as an “unknown friend.” After describing the memorable day of his first visit to Satis House, which he says “made great changes in me,” he intrudes to remark, “But, it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first

link on one memorable day” (73). Authorial self-consciousness is also evident when Philip Pirrip summarizes periods of *histoire* time, as both David and Esther do on occasion. He says of his continuing visits to Satis House, “I insensibly fall into a general mention of these journeys as numerous, because it was at once settled that I should return every alternate day at noon for these purposes, and because I am now going to sum up a period of at least eight or ten months” (94-95). Or when describing the time of his and Herbert’s residence in London: “As I am now generalising a period of my life with the object of clearing my way before me, I can scarcely do so better than by at once completing the description of our usual manners and customs at Barnard’s Inn” (273). And in a number of explicit narrative ellipses Philip Pirrip resembles Esther in asserting that certain omitted *histoire* matters “matter little.” For one example, in relating his first visit to Miss Havisham’s after she has paid for his indenture at the forge and stopped his weekly visits at Satis House, Philip Pirrip says, “With what absurd emotions . . . I found myself again going to Miss Havisham’s, matters little here. Nor, how I passed and repassed the gate many times before I could make up my mind to ring. Nor, how I debated whether I should go away without ringing; nor, how I should undoubtedly have gone, if my time had been my own, to come back” (115). As Esther does so often, Philip Pirrip manages to convey a clear sense of his emotional turmoil even as he claims his feelings are not worth relating.

There are less flagrantly self-conscious intrusions reinforcing the verisimilitude of the recollecting autobiographer in Philip Pirrip’s discourse as well. Dickens carefully maintains the limitations in Philip Pirrip’s knowledge necessitated by the first-person

point of view with mildly speculative intrusions. When he reports that two convicts are brought out of an inn and put in a coach with Pip, Philip Pirrip says, “They had been treating their guard, I suppose, for they had a gaoler with them, and all three came out wiping their mouths on their hands” (226-27). Philip Pirrip “supposes” that Jaggers and Wemmick become suddenly contentious and inflexible after Pip has forced them to discuss personal matters because they are uncomfortable and wish to restore their usual, “official” demeanor with one another at once (412). He speculates that “perhaps” Orlick thinks Pip’s apprenticeship at the forge will lead to his eventual dismissal (112). And like David and Esther both, Philip Pirrip is often realistically uncertain about particular *histoire* matters in the distant past. As he says in recalling Wopsle’s plans for success in the London theater, for instance, “I forget in detail what they were, but I have a general recollection that he was to begin with reviving the Drama, and to end with crushing it; inasmuch as his decease would leave it utterly bereft and without a chance or hope” (258). Or when he describes Magwitch making Herbert take an oath of secrecy on a pocket bible, he says, “To state that my terrible patron carried this little black book about the world solely to swear people on in cases of emergency, would be to state what I never quite established—but this I can say, that I never knew him put it to any other use” (332). As is the case with David’s and Esther’s intrusions in this mildly self-conscious vein, the primary effect is to reinforce the realism of the fictive “author” engaged in describing events from his past.

The most striking resemblance in discourse habits is shared only between Philip Pirrip and David Copperfield: intrusive narrative discourse highlighting the persistence of

certain powerful memories over time. Though certainly not to extent that David does, and never with full-scale shifts to present-tense *histoire* narration, Philip Pirrip does “relive” and “see again” scenes of especial importance as he narrates them. As noted above, the image of one Newgate prisoner is etched upon his memory so clearly that he “sees” him again as he writes. In like fashion, in reporting Joe’s refusal of Mr. Jaggers’s offer of payment for the loss of Pip’s services at the forge, when Joe says that no amount of money could compensate the loss of his “best of friends,” Philip Pirrip is moved to a rare apostrophe: “O dear good Joe, whom I was so ready to leave and so unthankful to, I see you again, with your muscular blacksmith’s arm before your eyes, and your broad chest heaving, and your voice dying away. O dear good faithful tender Joe, I feel the loving tremble of your hand upon my arm, as solemnly this day as if it had been the rustle of an angel’s wing!” (140). Philip Pirrip resembles David also when he says he “never shall forget” such things as Herbert’s beaming face when announcing that he has landed a job at Clarriker’s (297). There are Copperfieldian discourse moments, too, when Philip Pirrip professes to hold lingering particular associations with specific moments of *histoire* past. He describes Biddy rubbing a black currant leaf in her hand when Pip asks that she teach Joe to be more cultured, and the narrating Philip Pirrip says, “the smell of a black currant bush has ever since recalled to me that evening in the little garden by the side of the lane” (147). After reporting Pip’s restless wandering of the streets where he has submitted petitions for Magwitch’s sentence to be commuted, he says that “To the present hour, the weary western streets of London on a cold dusty spring night, with their ranges of stern shut-up mansions and their long rows of lamps, are melancholy to me

from this association” (455).

Great Expectations is not a “novel of memory” of the same order that *Copperfield* is, but the narrator’s constant emphasis on the passage of time as he recalls his past is just as prominent in Philip Pirrip’s narrative as in David Copperfield’s, perhaps even more so. As Robert Partlow has noted, Dickens is thoroughly convincing in conveying the real feeling in *Great Expectations* of “an older man trying, not always with complete success,” to recall his remote past. The *Great Expectations* narrator, Partlow says, “reminds the reader, especially in the early chapters, that the view is down a long corridor only fitfully lighted” (124). One of the ways the narrator highlights the length of that corridor is through the sort of “descriptive” intrusions we find in *Copperfield* and in third-person Dickens that emphasize the distance between the narrator’s present and the intradiegetic Pip’s *histoire* present. When describing Pip’s making himself a familiar sight rowing on the Thames, for instance, the narrating Philip Pirrip reports, “At first, I kept above Blackfriars Bridge; but as the hours of the tide changed, I took towards London Bridge.” Then he adds, “It was Old London Bridge in those days, and at certain states of the tide there was a race and a fall of water there which gave it a bad reputation” (378). Later, he says in the same descriptive mode:

At that time, the steam-traffic on the Thames was far below its present extent, and watermen’s boats were far more numerous. Of barges, sailing colliers, and coasting traders, there were perhaps as many as now; but, of steam-ships, great and small, not a tithe or a twentieth part so many. . . . [T]he navigation of the river between bridges, in an open boat, was a much easier and commoner matter in those days than it is in these; and we went ahead among many skiffs and wherries, briskly. (431)

We are often thus reminded that “those days” and “that time” are clearly distant from “these days” and “now.”

There are frequent discourse remarks that are not strictly “descriptive,” but that are similar in emphasizing the gap between the time frames of the narrating and *histoire* events in David-like fashion. In describing the police investigation into the attack on Mrs. Joe, for instance, Philip Pirrip says that there were “Bow-street men from London” in addition to the local Constables, for “this happened in the days of the extinct red waistcoated police” (121). Or after relating that Pip accompanied Estella to an Assembly Ball at Richmond, he adds parenthetically, “there used to be Assembly Balls at most places then” (307). In reporting his first visit to Newgate, Philip Pirrip intrudes with a somewhat Dickensian air of didacticism to comment:

At that time, jails were much neglected, and the period of exaggerated reaction consequent on all public wrong-doing—and which is always its heaviest and longest punishment—was still far off. So, felons were not lodged and fed better than soldiers (to say nothing of paupers), and seldom set fire to their prisons with the excusable object of improving the flavour of their soup. (259-60)

All the discourse emphasis on the passage of time gives *Great Expectations* a highly retrospective feel that is nearly as pronounced in this novel as in *David Copperfield*.

With the possible exception of the frequent discourse reminders of the passage of time, the few appreciable similarities between Philip Pirrip’s intrusive discourse and David’s and Esther’s are hardly exceptional; rather, they address the relatively pedestrian necessities of establishing and maintaining the pretense of fictive autobiography. We shall see presently that compared to David and Esther, there are a greater number of more striking similarities between Philip Pirrip and his creator in their discourse habits, and

ultimately that Philip/Pip has more in common with Dickens in other important respects than either of his predecessors does as well.

The “Inimitable” Philip Pirrip

There is no mistaking that Philip Pirrip’s narrative discourse differs dramatically from the discourse of the typical third-person Dickens narrator. Philip Pirrip avoids the scorching sarcasm and the strident didacticism of the third-person Dickens narrator, and he is given to none of the greatest excesses in facetiousness or style—the pomp and bombast—that are so prominent in Dickens’s third-person fiction. But especially in comparison with the sober David Copperfield and the “austere” Esther Summerson, Philip Pirrip does indeed have many “Dickensian” discourse tendencies. Philip Pirrip is clearly endowed with Dickens’s own wisdom, confidence, and wit, and although his voice is generally calm, Philip Pirrip speaks more with Dickens’s usual verve and vitality. It would appear that in *Great Expectations* Dickens was much less concerned with restraining or “covering” his instinctive verbal exuberance than he was in the two earlier fictive autobiographies. As Hochman and Wachs put it, Philip Pirrip has a “virtually magical command of language” because “Dickens gives him a curtailed version of the full range of his own extravagant verbal resources” (189). Philip Pirrip’s narrative discourse resembles the typical third-person Dickens narrator’s most appreciably in the certainty of his generalizing commentary, his truly “inimitable” figurative language, his abundant humor, and his evident and unchecked pleasure in imaginative linguistic play.

There are smaller resemblances between the narrating Philip Pirrip and the typical third-person Dickens narrator, to be sure. Philip Pirrip is more sparing in his use of allusions, but as is the case with *David Copperfield*, he draws them from the standard Dickens sources, with the Bible, Shakespeare, Arabian tales, fairy tales, and nursery rhymes figuring most prominently. We have already noted an extended reference to one of the *Tales of the Genii* heightening the dramatic tension before Magwitch is revealed as Pip's benefactor (309-10). There are several references to *Frankenstein*, the most obvious the comment on Pip's reaction when Magwitch returns to see the gentleman he has "made": "The imaginary student pursued by the misshapen creature he had impiously made, was not more wretched than I, pursued by the creature who had made me" (337). The convict ship from which Magwitch escapes at the beginning of the novel lies near the muddy shore "like a wicked Noah's ark," and Orlick is described as always "slouching about" "like Cain or the Wandering Jew" (41, 112). As he recalls Wopsle saying grace at Christmas dinner, Philip Pirrip says that Wopsle spoke with "theatrical declamation—as it now appears to me, something like a religious cross of the Ghost in Hamlet with Richard the Third" (26). One of Jagers's clients tugs at a lock of his hair "like the Bull in Cock Robin pulling at the bell-rope," and Pip is said to be "rather like Mother Hubbard's dog whose outfit required the services of so many trades" when he is being newly fitted out as a young gentleman (167, 150).

We also find some of Dickens's most deeply ingrained stylistic tendencies in Philip Pirrip's discourse. There is Dickensian *enumeratio* in the report of Pip's taking tea with Estella in London:

I rang for the tea, and the waiter . . . brought in by degrees some fifty adjuncts to that refreshment, but of tea not a glimpse. A teaboard, cups and saucers, plates, knives and forks (including carvers), spoons (various), salt-cellars, a meek little muffin confined with the utmost precaution under a strong iron cover, Moses in the bulrushes typified by a soft bit of butter in a quantity of parsley, a pale loaf with a powdered head, two proof impressions of the bars of the kitchen fire-place on triangular bits of bread, and ultimately a fat family urn. (267)

There is playful mild periphrasis when Philip Pirrip says that Bidley was able to join the Gargery household only after Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt "conquered a confirmed habit of living into which she had fallen," a habit he later observes is "so highly desirable to be got rid of by some people" (122, 125). The heavy-handed repetitions that creep so often even into Esther's narration are frequent in Philip Pirrip's as well. In reporting Mrs. Joe's response to Mrs. Hubble's comment that Pip "was a world of trouble to you, ma'am," Philip Pirrip emphasizes *all* the trouble he had been with anaphora:

"Trouble?" echoed my sister; "trouble?" And then entered on a fearful catalogue of all the illnesses I had been guilty of, and all the acts of sleeplessness I had committed, and all the high places I had tumbled from, and all the low places I had tumbled into, and all the injuries I had done myself, and all the times she had wished me in my grave, and I had contumaciously refused to go there. (28)

Another instance of characteristically Dickensian anaphora occurs when Philip Pirrip reports his difficulty finding Magwitch's hiding place near the Old Green Copper Rope-Walk:

It matters not what stranded ships repairing in dry docks I lost myself among, what old hulls of ships in course of being knocked to pieces, what ooze and slime and other dregs of tide, what yards of ship-builders and ship-breakers, what rusty anchors blindly biting into the ground though for years off duty, what mountainous country of accumulated casks and timber, how many rope-walks that were not the Old Green Copper. (371-72)

As these eminently Dickensian repetitions of words and phrases are frequent in both David's narrative and Esther's, it is no surprise that they are also quite common in Philip Pirrip's.

One respect in which Philip Pirrip's discourse clearly differs from David's and Esther's in its resemblance to the third-person Dickens narrator's is the greater confidence we see in his intrusive commentary. David—and Esther, especially—tend to be diffident and apologetic when offering particularly assertive discourse comments, but Philip Pirrip speaks with Dickens's usual confidence and irony in such discourse observations as that on Pip's first entry into London, where he says, "We Britons had at that time particularly settled that it was treasonable to doubt our having and our being the best of everything: otherwise, while I was scared by the immensity of London, I think I might have had some faint doubts whether it was not rather ugly, crooked, narrow, and dirty" (161). Philip Pirrip's greater confidence in his judgment and the seasoned air of worldly wisdom he shares with his creator, the Charles Dickens of his late forties, is especially evident in his generalizing commentary, which is typically delivered with a simple sureness that neither David nor Esther possesses in consistent measure. Rather than presenting them with tentative diffidence or qualifying them as observations arising from his individual experience, Philip Pirrip simply states his generalizations, as when he observes that "Conscience is a dreadful thing when it accuses man or boy," or "It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home" (12, 106). It is more with Dickens's own characteristic certainty that Philip Pirrip offers such generalizations as his comment on children's sensitivity to being treated unfairly:

In the little world in which children have their existence whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice. It may be only small injustice that the child can be exposed to; but the child is small, and its world is small, and its rocking-horse stands as many hands high, according to scale, as a big-boned Irish hunter. (64)

Such philosophical observations as “All other swindlers upon earth are nothing to the self-swindlers” and “So, throughout life, our worst weaknesses and meannesses are usually committed for the sake of the people whom we most despise” would be at home in any of Dickens’s third-person novels (225, 218).

Philip Pirrip’s discourse closely resembles the third-person Dickens narrator’s also in the unrestrained proliferation of striking and original figurative language throughout *Great Expectations*. It is largely the “slip-ups” of distinctly Dickensian figurative language in David’s and Esther’s discourse that lead some to consider those two narrators “thinly veiled masks” through which Dickens speaks too obviously in his own voice. But as we have seen, Dickens did indeed make an effort to keep David and Esther in character by having them appear tentative or apologetic in offering their more extravagant figurative comparisons. To repeat one of Garrett Stewart’s comments on *Copperfield* noted above, “Verbal play on [David’s] part is rarely willful or assertive, and even quite unexceptionable metaphors are hedged, kept tentative by means of recurring apologetic asides” such as “as I may say,” “if I may call it so,” or “If I may so express it” (136). Esther, of course, is even more diffident and apologetic when making figurative comparisons, and she often attributes her most striking figures to other characters. But as with his generalizations, Philip Pirrip offers distinctly Dickensian figurative comparisons directly and confidently, with no apology and no covering or deflecting discourse

apparatus. Philip Pirrip is neither tentative nor apologetic in making such striking, one-of-a-kind figurative comparisons as when he describes a mysterious row of wooden frames in the ground looking “like superannuated haymaking-rakes which had grown old and lost most of their teeth,” or in the observation that during Mrs. Joe’s “Rampages,” he often “served her as a connubial missile” (372, 9). Philip Pirrip sounds very much like “Dickens” in such remarks as his comment on his state of dejection and confusion after Magwitch has stunned him with the truth about his “expectations”: “As to forming any plan for the future, I could as soon have formed an elephant” (327). In his first detailed description of Wemmick, Philip Pirrip clearly resembles the third-person Dickens narrator in playfully combining and extending the common metaphors of “chiseled features” and a “wooden face”:

I found him to be a dry man, rather short in stature, with a square wooden face, whose expression seemed to have been imperfectly chipped out with a dull-edged chisel. There were some marks in it that might have been dimples, if the material had been softer and the instrument finer, but which, as it was, were only dints. The chisel had made three or four of these attempts at embellishment over his nose, but had given them up without an effort to smooth them off. (169)

When he recalls Joe’s gentle hand upon his shoulder even as he is stirred to anger by Jagers’s offer of money for the loss of Pip’s services at the forge, Philip Pirrip says that Joe “laid his hand upon my shoulder with the touch of a woman. I have often thought him since, like the steam-hammer, that can crush a man or tap an eggshell, in his combination of strength with gentleness” (140). Who but the “Inimitable” Dickens would think of such a comparison?

Philip Pirrip definitely shares Dickens’s penchant for personification. The room

that Pip rents after receiving Wemmick's "Don't go home" message is described as "a sort of vault . . . with a despotic monster of a four-post bedstead in it, straddling over the whole place, putting one of his arbitrary legs into the fireplace and another into the doorway, and squeezing the wretched little washing-stand in quite a Divinely Righteous manner" (364). The chamberlain of this establishment gives Pip a tin lantern with perforations that project a "staringly wide-awake pattern on the walls," making the lantern have as many eyes as a "foolish Argus." And as Philip Pirrip says,

When I had lain awake a little while, those extraordinary voices with which silence teems, began to make themselves audible. The closet whispered, the fireplace sighed, the little washing-stand ticked, and one guitar-string played occasionally in the chest of drawers. At about the same time, the eyes on the wall acquired a new expression, and in every one of those staring rounds I saw written, DON'T GO HOME. (365)

In the description of Pip's first impression of Barnard's Inn, Philip Pirrip says that signs of "To Let To Let To Let, glared at [him] from empty rooms, as if no new wretches ever came there, and the vengeance of the soul of Barnard were being slowly appeased by the gradual suicide of the present occupants and their unholy interment under the gravel."

Personifications build and multiply as the passage continues:

A frouzy mourning of soot and smoke attired this forlorn creation of Barnard, and it had strewn ashes on its head, and was undergoing penance and humiliation as a mere dust-hole. Thus far my sense of sight; while dry rot and wet rot and all the silent rots that rot in neglected roof and cellar—rot of rat and mouse and bug and coaching-stables near at hand besides—addressed themselves faintly to my sense of smell, and moaned, "Try Barnard's Mixture." (171)

In the space of half a paragraph of no inordinate length, "to let" signs, Barnard's Inn, and a number of various "rots" are all animated here in characteristically Dickensian fashion.

Patrice Hannon is one of several critics who have taken special notice of the

abundance of “fanciful ‘as if’” constructions in *Great Expectations*. Hannon notes that the “as if” comparisons reinforce the distance between the extradiegetic narrator and the intradiegetic world of the characters by constantly drawing the reader’s attention to the fertile imagination of the narrator. What Philip Pirrip describes, says Hannon, “recedes in importance as [his] style, his way of describing[,] takes centre stage” (102). Philip Pirrip’s—or Dickens’s—fertile imagination takes center stage in this fashion when he describes Startop “reading and holding his head, as if he thought himself in danger of exploding it with too strong a charge of knowledge,” or when he says that Mrs. Joe “spoke of me as if she were morally wrenching one of my teeth out at every reference” (189, 97). On the morning he takes Magwitch the stolen food as a boy, Pip’s window is covered in moisture “as if some goblin had been crying there all night, and using the window for a pocket-handkerchief” (16-17). In describing Miss Havisham’s gruesomely preserved bridal feast, Philip Pirrip says that at the center of the long table was an “epergne or center-piece of some kind” covered in cobwebs, and as he reports,

I saw speckled-legged spiders with blotchy bodies running home to it, and running out from it, as if some circumstance of the greatest public importance had just transpired in the spider community.

I heard the mice too, rattling behind the panels, as if the same occurrence were important to their interests. But, the blackbeetles took no notice of the agitation, and groped about the hearth in a ponderous elderly way, as if they were short-sighted and hard of hearing, and not on terms with one another. (84-85)

Commenting on this passage in particular, Hannon notes that the “as if” comparisons draw the reader’s attention away from the immediate *histoire* scene and direct it towards a scenario that exists only in Philip Pirrip’s imagination. As Hannon observes, Philip Pirrip “continually imagines alternative realities, spins stories alongside the

autobiographical reportage in a voice that is not only charming but indispensably unique in its cadences and its imaginings, in narrating not what is but what is not truly there” (98-99). In the preponderance of striking figurative comparisons that so often make the narrator’s imagination more prominent than what he describes, Philip Pirrip is clearly and without apology or constraint endowed with one of Dickens’s own most distinguishing traits—his thoroughly unique power of imagination, his self-acknowledged “infirmity” of fancying or perceiving “relations in things which are not apparent generally” (*Letters* 11: 113).

Even more than in the unchecked flow of distinctive figurative language, it may be in Philip Pirrip’s abundant humor that he most resembles the typical third-person Dickens narrator. Recognizably Dickensian humor is often evident in Philip Pirrip’s linguistic play of various sorts, a number of instances of which we have seen already in passing: the observation that it was treasonable for Brits to doubt their national superiority in every respect, and Mr. Wopsle’s aunt overcoming her “bad habit” of living, for example, or Pip’s being described as a “connubial missile.” In Esther’s discourse there is no consciously intentional humor at all and very little linguistic play, and there are only sporadic glimpses of playful humor in David’s generally subdued narration in *Copperfield*, concentrated mainly in David’s indulgent self-mockery during the first two “retrospect” chapters. Relatively little humor appears in the last third of *Great Expectations*, where the narrative pace intensifies with Magwitch’s attempted flight and its denouement, and the novel’s tone becomes generally serious—even tinged with sadness, as some think. But in the first two-thirds of *Great Expectations*, the linguistic

play and the humor so patently characteristic of Dickens's third-person narrator's discourse are altogether pervasive.

Philip Pirrip never gets carried away in high facetiousness as the third-person narrator does—in elucidating the family history in the opening chapter of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, for example—but Dickens's own recognizable voice is plainly discernable in the playful, genial good humor of such discourse passages as Philip Pirrip's description of his struggles in learning the rudiments of reading, writing, and "ciphering":

I struggled through the alphabet as if it had been a bramble-bush; getting considerably worried and scratched by every letter. After that, I fell among those thieves, the nine figures, who seemed every evening to do something new to disguise themselves and baffle recognition. But, at last I began, in a purblind groping way, to read, write, and cipher, on the very smallest scale. (45)

On a smaller scale in Philip Pirrip's discourse, there is playful wit in his comment on Mrs. Joe's being so busy preparing the Christmas feast that she "was going to church vicariously; that is to say, Joe and I were going" (23). There is similar play in the understated observation that follows his reporting of Mrs. Pocket pacifying her infant with a needle case: "more needles were missing, than it could be regarded as quite wholesome for a patient of such tender years either to apply externally or to take as a tonic" (270). After describing Wemmick's keenly glittering eyes and thin, wide lips, Philip Pirrip says playfully, "He had had them, to the best of my belief, from forty to fifty years" (170). In all the many instances of humorous verbal play, Philip Pirrip is clearly "theatrical" in Garis's sense of the word: he is a self-exhibiting master of language who "overtly and audibly performs before us some brilliant routines and contrivances in order to command attention and applause" (191). Humor, wit, and "theatricality" are of course

among the defining characteristics of the third-person Dickens narrator.

In a lower register on the scale of theatricality, Philip Pirrip indulges regularly in the playful verbal irony that is so generally pervasive in third-person Dickens. Pip's first schooling is an hour each evening in the home of Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt, who invariably sleeps the full hour, and Phillip Pirrip says that he was one of the "society of youth who paid twopence per week each, for the improving opportunity of seeing her do it" (44). When Joe is astonished at Pip's appearing to have "bolted" his entire portion of bread in one gulp, Mrs. Joe doses him with a pint of Tar-water, which, Philip Pirrip says, "was poured down my throat, for my greater comfort, while Mrs. Joe held my head under her arm, as a boot would be held in a boot-jack" (13). Very much resembling the plainly ironic "confessional" intrusions of the third-person Dickens narrator, Philip Pirrip "grieve[s] to add that peals of laughter greeted Mr. Wopsle" each time he is heckled during his performance of *Hamlet* (254). Philip Pirrip indulges also in the third-person Dickens narrator's habit of humorously hyperbolic exaggeration. For one instance, Philip Pirrip relates that in her militant preparations for Christmas dinner, Mrs. Joe serves Pip and Joe their breakfast with irritation and haste, "as if we were two thousand troops on a forced march instead of a man and boy at home" (23). Or for another instance, Philip Pirrip says of Pumblechook's leading everyone to believe that he is responsible for Pip's "expectations," "I entertain a conviction, based upon large experience, that if in the days of my prosperity I had gone to the North Pole, I should have met somebody there, wandering Esquimaux or civilised man, who would have told me that Pumblechook was my earliest patron and the founder of my fortunes" (231). Verbal irony and exaggeration,

as has been well noted, are among the third-person Dickens narrator's most characteristic tendencies indeed.

In what is not exactly wordplay, Philip Pirrip slips in gratuitous discourse comments for the obvious purpose of humor as when he reports feeling a pain in his heart after running into the "other convict" on the marsh (the man Pip believes is hungry for his heart and liver): "I dare say I should have felt a pain in my liver, too, if I had known where it was" (18). Similarly gratuitous humor is found in the interpolated comments in Philip Pirrip's description of Mr. Pumblechook congratulating Pip on his expectations as he prepares to leave for London: "Mr. Pumblechook pledged himself over and over again to keep Joseph up to the mark (I don't know what mark), and to render me efficient and constant service (I don't know what service)" (153-54). Equally gratuitous is the extraneous remark on the ancient Romans when Philip Pirrip records his irritation with Mr. Wopsle's "Roman nose": "I think the Romans must have aggravated one another very much, with their noses. Perhaps, they became the restless people they were, in consequence. Anyhow, Mr. Wopsle's Roman nose so aggravated me, during the recital of my misdemeanours, that I should have liked to pull it until he howled" (28). In the same gratuitous vein is the speculative comment in the reporting of Pip's initial reticence when Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe grill him about Miss Havisham, bumping him from behind and pressing him against the kitchen wall: "Whitewash on the forehead hardens the brain into a state of obstinacy perhaps. Anyhow, with whitewash from the wall on my forehead, my obstinacy was adamantine" (67). Gratuitous as they are, these intrusions for the purpose of gentle humor do serve the narrative function of keeping the

persona of the narrating, recollecting Philip Pirrip before the reader. The droll humor they convey certainly belongs to the “Dickens” we know in his third-person fiction.

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, there are hints of third-person “Dickens” in the discourse habits of both Esther and David. It is certainly curious that in *Great Expectations*, the novel many consider the most truly autobiographical of the three fictive autobiographies, Dickens takes the least pains to maintain some distance between himself and the fictitious autobiographer as *writers*, as he so obviously does in *David Copperfield* and even more in Esther’s narrative in *Bleak House*. We will return to the issue of *Great Expectations* being the most autobiographical of these three novels later, but it is worth noting here that the discourse affinities between “Dickens” and Philip Pirrip—from the allusions and the minor stylistic excesses, to the masterful facility and fun in linguistic play, the often startling and truly inimitable figurative language, and of course, the characteristically Dickensian humor—do suggest a greater obvious closeness between Dickens and Philip Pirrip than is the case with either Esther or David. But before focusing on the persona revealed in Philip Pirrip’s narrative discourse and the closeness between this persona and Charles Dickens the man, we must first consider how Philip Pirrip’s discourse is distinctively his own.

Distinctively Philip Pirrip

While Philip Pirrip’s narrative discourse does have some few resemblances with David’s and Esther’s and is recognizably “Dickensian” in the several respects outlined above, a number of discourse tendencies establish the distinct individuality of Philip

Pirrip's narrative voice. The most notable qualities that distinguish Philip Pirrip's voice from the typical third-person Dickens narrator's and from David's and Esther's are his calmness and quiet self-assurance, his relative unobtrusiveness, his greater objectivity and brutal honesty in self-criticism, and his evident unwillingness to dwell on the painful trauma of his childhood.

Most Dickens narrators seem possessed of great energy. There is always vigor and passion in the third-person Dickens narrator's discourse—deeply stirred passion in the rhetoric, and vigor and exuberance in the playful humor and flamboyant theatricality. David Copperfield's discourse is generally sober, but there is a powerful driving intensity in his recollection of specific moments of pain and bliss that makes the past come to life for him in the present moment of the narrating. There is intensity in Esther's discourse in her very earnestness, and a nervous energy even in her timidity and her compulsion to self-effacement and suppression of her deepest feelings. But Philip Pirrip's discourse, in contrast to all other Dickens narrators, is eminently calm: composed, assured, and comfortably natural in measured evenness. The Dickensian humor and verbal play notwithstanding—plentiful as it is, but never escalating into lavish excess or facetiousness—Philip Pirrip's discourse as a whole conveys, as David Gervais says, a “gravely lyrical tone” which gives the novel an air of “meditative lassitude” (87). Gervais suggests that “The cadenced quietness of the novel's prose . . . is peculiarly fitted to express a placed and governed emotion. Much tension seems to have been resolved before Pip's feelings find utterance.” There is an evident gravity in Philip Pirrip's narration that Gervais believes “makes his tone too constant to generate anything like the

intense emotional crescendos of the earlier Dickens novels.” Comparing Philip Pirrip and David Copperfield more narrowly, Gervais suggests that Philip Pirrip “lacks the emotional energy to suffer as much as David does,” and he sees Philip Pirrip’s tone as melancholy, to the point that for him, “sadness is a kind of native element” (108).

Especially in the last third of the novel, as Pip loses all his expectations and realizes the extent of his betrayal of Joe, the novel’s predominant tone is indeed muted and chastened sadness.

Samuel Sipe sees the general calmness of Philip Pirrip’s narration as a product of his “unmistakably self-sufficient and mature sensibility,” conveyed largely in Philip Pirrip’s “unpretentious wisdom and unpretentious prose, a prose that is generally more subdued than the energetic and consciously rhetorical language of Dickens’s third person narrators” (63). For Monod, this unpretentiousness and the “lack of any grandiloquence” give the narration an air of “simple seriousness” which makes *Great Expectations* Dickens’s highest achievement in the “new style” that Monod detects first in *Dombey and Copperfield*. As Monod observes, compared to the earlier novels *Great Expectations* “has a more delicate flavor, a tone of restraint, soberness, and subtlety” (485-86). Monod illustrates Philip Pirrip’s greater restraint and subtlety by citing several of his discourse comments, one of them a confessional intrusion during the description of the eve of Pip’s departure for London:

I was to leave our village at five in the morning, carrying my little hand-portmanteau, and I had told Joe that I wished to walk away all alone. I am afraid—sore afraid—that this purpose originated in my sense of the contrast there would be between me and Joe, if we went to the coach together. I had pretended with myself that there was nothing of this taint in the arrangement; but when I went up to my little room on this last night,

I felt compelled to admit that it might be so, and had an impulse upon me to go down again and entreat Joe to walk with me in the morning. I did not. (157)

The restraint and the simple seriousness are especially evident here in the closing remark, “I did not,” which is at once subtle and to the point, revealing, as Monod says, in “neat and spare” fashion, “the sincerity of Pip’s confession and self-examination” (486).

Monod also illustrates this sober, simple seriousness with another of Philip Pirrip’s confessional intrusions, this one occurring when he relates his attempt to educate and improve Joe: “Whatever [instruction] I acquired, I tried to impart to Joe. This statement sounds so well, that I cannot in my conscience let it pass unexplained. I wanted to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society and less open to Estella’s reproach” (109). There is certainly no hint of grandiloquence or pretentiousness in these passages, and Philip Pirrip’s voice is indeed calm and sober in “simple seriousness.”

Philip Pirrip’s greater calmness is in part a product of the clear emotional distance maintained throughout the novel between the extradiegetic Philip Pirrip and the intradiegetic Pip. There is never any danger that Philip Pirrip’s past might “come to life” and overwhelm him in the present moment of narration as is the case with David, and he certainly never has to wipe away tears and steel himself to continue his narration as Esther does. Mary Galbraith points out that Philip Pirrip often behaves more as a heterodiegetic narrator or “witness narrator rather than as a memoirist” (138). Or as Robert Partlow suggests, there is such a large gap between the narrating Philip Pirrip and the intradiegetic Pip that they can almost be considered different people, and the novel’s

point of view can be seen as a combination of “the first person protagonist method with third person selective omniscient” (124-25). Philip Pirrip’s habits of exclamation and apostrophe are one small way this greater distance between extra- and intradiegetic worlds is maintained. Philip Pirrip is not without passion entirely, of course, and he is moved enough in the narrating present to have such emotional outbursts as when he records his first meeting with Estella after she returns from France and exclaims, “O the sense of distance and disparity that came upon me, and the inaccessibility that came about her!” (235). While David and Esther and most of the third-person narrators apostrophize *histoire* characters with some frequency, the number of apostrophes in *Great Expectations* can be counted on the fingers of one hand. In one of these few instances Philip Pirrip apostrophizes “dear good Joe” as he recalls Joe’s simple goodness and fidelity, and he cries “O Estella, Estella!” when reporting his realization that Estella has never been intended as his future bride (140, 318). Far more typically, however, Philip Pirrip’s exclamations tend not to indicate the powerful feelings of the narrating Philip Pirrip but rather of Pip the intradiegetic character, and thus many of these exclamations resemble a third-person narrator’s more impersonal indication that events or circumstances are a shock or surprise to the intradiegetic characters. We find this sort of exclamation when Pip first recognizes that Provis is Magwitch, for instance: “I knew him! Even yet, I could not recall a single feature, but I knew him!” or during his rescue at the limekiln when Pip is amazed to see “The face of Trabb’s boy!” (313, 426). Generally, Philip Pirrip’s exclamations do not indicate *his* excitement so much as they indicate moments of purely *histoire* excitement or surprise.

The frequent discourse reminders that much time has passed since the *histoire* events ostensibly took place are another, more substantial way that Dickens maintains the greater distance between the separate extradiegetic and intradiegetic worlds of Philip Pirrip and Pip. We never learn the narrating Philip Pirrip's precise age, but it is generally assumed that he is middle aged, roughly the same age as Dickens at the time he wrote *Great Expectations*. Philip Pirrip's seeming some years older and evidently more mature than David or Esther certainly contributes to the greater distance between extradiegetic narrator and intradiegetic character in *Great Expectations*. And naturally, the more self-conscious authorial intrusions that remind us that an author is telling the reader a story serve to reinforce this distance as well. Naturally, too, any of the variety of less flagrant, gratuitous or verisimilitudinous intrusions also reinforce the gap between the extra- and intradiegetic time frames—the gratuitous intrusions as mild as when the narrator says “I dare say” or when he professes uncertainty about *histoire* matters from the distant past, for example.

But while intrusions of both flagrant and less flagrant sorts abound also in David's and Esther's narratives, the greater sense of distance between the extradiegetic and intradiegetic levels in *Great Expectations* is maintained in part simply through the great volume or frequency of narrative discourse. It is remarkable that despite there being approximately the same relative abundance of discourse in *Great Expectations* as in *Copperfield*, Philip Pirrip seems far less obtrusive a narrator than either David or Esther, or of course, any of the third-person Dickens narrators. Barry Westburg is certainly right when he compares the narrators in *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and

Great Expectations and concludes that Philip Pirrip “is less obtrusive with his own personality than the speakers in the other two novels” (121). Part of Philip Pirrip’s being less obtrusive despite the large volume of discourse lies in the fact that he intrudes only rarely with the most flagrant and highly self-conscious sort of authorial intrusion—i.e. with Philip Pirrip at his desk with pen in hand. As Samuel Sipe observes, “the reader of *Great Expectations* does not actually see the mature Pip living and acting in the present,” and as Gervais says, Philip Pirrip generally prefers to “drop into the background, to eavesdrop and whisper asides” (63, 101). The asides are most evidently “whispered” when Philip Pirrip’s comments are set aside literally in parentheses, as when he says that “Miss Havisham sat listening (or it seemed so, for I could not see her face)” or “I told [Magwitch] how Wemmick had heard, in Newgate prison (whether from officers or prisoners I could not say), that he was under some suspicion” (304, 375). There are even “whispered” asides within purely discourse comments, which are often essentially asides themselves, as we see when Philip Pirrip says of Magwitch’s composure during the foiled escape on the Thames, “It was remarkable (but perhaps the wretched life he had led, accounted for it), that he was the least anxious of any of us” (433). Or in the report of Pip’s irritation at Pumblechook’s continual discussions with Mrs. Joe about his “expectations”: “I really do believe (to this hour with less penitence than I ought to feel), that if these hands could have taken a linchpin out of his chaise-cart, they would have done it” (96).

Another leading quality that makes Philip Pirrip’s discourse distinctly “his own” is the quiet assurance of his judgmental commentary on other characters. As noted in the

discussion of the distinctive features of David Copperfield's discourse in Chapter 4, commentary on characters and *histoire* events and circumstances is necessarily more personal in first-person narration than in third-person. The first-person narrator usually has personal acquaintance with most of the characters and events he or she describes and is naturally more licensed and even expected to comment on and muse over *histoire* characters and events. We see this more personal nature of Philip Pirrip's *histoire* commentary when he reports that Mrs. Joe considered her constant wearing of an apron "a powerful merit in herself, and a strong reproach against Joe" and then intrudes to add, "I really see no reason why she should have worn it at all: or why, if she did wear it at all, she should not have taken it off, every day of her life" (8). There is an obvious personal quality in the description of Herbert when Pip takes lodgings with him in Barnard's Inn:

Herbert Pocket had a frank and easy way with him that was very taking. I had never seen any one then, and I have never seen any one since, who more strongly expressed to me, in every look and tone, a natural incapacity to do anything secret and mean. There was something wonderfully hopeful about his general air, and something that at the same time whispered to me he would never be very successful or rich. I don't know how this was. (176)

We have seen that Philip Pirrip resembles the typical third-person Dickens narrator in the confidence of his generalizing commentary, and though Philip Pirrip's direct commentary on *histoire* matters is necessarily more personal than the third-person narrator's, he is as confident and certain as the typical third-person Dickens narrator in many of his judgments about other intradiegetic characters as well. The confidence in Philip Pirrip's judgmental commentary is evident in such places as when he says that Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt "was a ridiculous old woman of limited means and unlimited infirmity" or

when he later calls her “that preposterous female” (44, 108). He confidently declares Sarah Pocket “a blandly vicious personage,” and without apology or qualification relates that Mrs. Matthew Pocket “had grown up highly ornamental, but perfectly helpless and useless” (88, 188). Philip Pirrip’s calm assurance in his judgmental commentary clearly distinguishes him from David, whose *histoire* commentary is sometimes rather passionate and at other times tentative or defensive, and from Esther, who “learns” to venture strong judgments with conviction only in the latter stages of her narrative.

Philip Pirrip’s judgmental commentary can at times become more passionate, but even in passion he remains calmer and more aloof than David Copperfield does in his most impassioned judgments—of the Murdstones, and of Mr. Creakle and Uriah Heep, for example. The object of Philip Pirrip’s harshest judgment on a consistent basis is Pumblechook, who is described at various points as “That ass,” “a spectacle of imbecility,” and a “Windy donkey” (96, 97, 472). In one scene Pumblechook is “That fearful Impostor,” “That abject hypocrite,” “that basest of swindlers,” and “that diabolical corn-chandler” (103-4). Rather than being truly indignant or impassioned, his judgmental commentary on Pumblechook seems to provide Philip Pirrip an outlet for Dickensian verbal play and theatricality. Bentley Drummle, Pip’s rival for Estella’s affections (such as they are), also receives fairly harsh judgment: Philip Pirrip says that Drummle “was idle, proud, niggardly, reserved, and suspicious. . . . he was a head taller than that gentleman [Mr. Pocket], and half a dozen heads thicker than most gentlemen” (202). Perhaps surprisingly, Orlick, Pip’s obvious enemy, receives hardly any discourse judgment at all, despite his attack of Mrs. Joe and his attempted murder of Pip himself.

The near absence of discourse judgment of Orlick, the relatively measured condemnation of Drummle, and the fact that Pumblechook is the primary target for Philip Pirrip's harshest judgment provide an interesting contrast with David Copperfield, whose discourse reveals a passionate hatred of his rival for Agnes's affections, Uriah Heep, and of his childhood tormentors, Creakle and the Murdstones. Where David is impassioned and apparently still jealous or indignantly angry, his discourse effects a sort of retribution against his erstwhile enemies—Philip Pirrip is obviously calmer even in his most critical judgments, and he never seems bent upon seeking any sort of vengeance against his tormentors or rivals in his discourse commentary.

There is assurance and clearly pronounced distance between the extradiegetic Philip Pirrip and the intradiegetic Pip, too, in the humor and irony that are so pervasive throughout much of the discourse. Whereas David Copperfield's occasional humor collapses this distance in his narrative, as he gently mocks himself in highly nostalgic recollections of folly from his youth, Philip Pirrip's humor characteristically suggests wry, ironic amusement, and his laughter is directed at other characters as often as it is aimed at the younger version of himself. The fact that Philip Pirrip can laugh at both himself and others, even his tormentors (namely Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook), indicates that he has achieved a perspective based on his distance from the events he describes that enables him to find amusement in what was hardly amusing when it occurred. Neither David nor Esther can see humor in their tormentors (unless Dora is counted among David's tormentors). But Philip Pirrip is indeed able to appreciate the irony and humor even in his suffering as a child: for instance, when he has a wry chuckle at his

misunderstanding the expression that he was “brought up by hand” so that he thought Mrs. Joe also “brought up” Joe and forced him into marriage “by hand” (8). He can appreciate the irony and humor in his confusing Mrs. Joe’s meaning that she nursed him by bottle and the notion that she raised him by laying her hard hand on him in violence. He can see humor in the terror of his encounter with Magwitch on the marsh—as we see in his certainty that he would have felt pain in his liver if he had known where his liver was (18). He appreciates the irony and has a laugh at himself for the orderly way he “settled his accounts,” not by paying them, but by tallying them up neatly and “leaving himself a Margin” so that he might with a feeling of businesslike responsibility still increase his debts. As he says of this “business habit” which he proudly shared with Herbert, “I had the highest opinion of the wisdom of this same Margin, but I am bound to acknowledge that on looking back, I deem it to have been an expensive device. For, we always ran into new debt immediately, to the full extent of the margin, and sometimes in the sense of freedom and solvency it imparted, got pretty far on into another margin” (276). David Copperfield laughs at his follies at times, but when he does he often says defensively that others in similar circumstances have surely committed the same follies. Philip Pirrip is able to laugh at himself without deflecting or foisting his foolishness upon others.

The humor and irony, the evident calmness, maturity and assurance, and the constant discourse emphasis on the greater distance between the extradiegetic narrator and the intradiegetic protagonist work together to establish Philip Pirrip as a far more objective narrator than either David or Esther, particularly in his judgmental commentary

upon himself. David's obvious closeness with his past and his defensiveness at times when relating what he perceives or fears are weaknesses in his character keep him from clear impartiality in judging himself. Esther's gross and debilitating insecurity certainly impedes her ability to appreciate her own worth objectively. But Philip Pirrip is indeed able to view his younger self with cold and even ruthless objectivity. There are occasional moments of defensiveness in Philip Pirrip's discourse, most often indicated through questions addressed to the reader. For instance, speaking of the influence the visits to Miss Havisham's had on his character, Philip Pirrip asks defensively, "What could I become with these surroundings? How could my character fail to be influenced by them? Is it to be so wondered at if my thoughts were dazed, as my eyes were, when I came out into the natural light from the misty yellow rooms?" (96). Or later, when Pip suspects that Estella has married Drummle but purposely avoids newspapers or any conversation that might confirm his suspicion, he asks, "Why I hoarded up this last wretched little rag of the robe of hope that was rent and given to the winds, how do I know! Why did you who read this, commit that not dissimilar inconsistency of your own, last year, last month, last week?" (379). These outbreaks of defensiveness are rare, however, and on the whole there is substantial discourse emphasis on Philip Pirrip's brutal honesty regarding his own perceived failings.

In sharp contrast to all other Dickens narrators, first- and third-person, Philip Pirrip's apologetic or confessional intrusions usually convey sincere apology for matters he recognizes rightly as deserving apology. He is clearly sincere in reporting with apology that the "pale young gentleman," Herbert, was heavily bruised in his strange

boxing match with Pip at Miss Havisham's: "for I am sorry to record that the more I hit him, the harder I hit him" (92). There is evident sincerity when Philip Pirrip says in one of his "whispered" asides, "I beg to observe that I think of myself with amazement, when I recal [sic] the lies I told on this occasion," the lies being the fantastic tales about dogs eating veal cutlets from a silver basket, the coach in Miss Havisham's room, and playing with flags and swords in his first visit to Satis House (69). There is obvious sincerity in his confession of being ashamed of Joe when he comes to Miss Havisham's to finalize Pip's indentures, when Joe is too cowed to address Miss Havisham directly and speaks only to Pip: "I am afraid I was ashamed of the dear good fellow—I *know* I was ashamed of him—when I saw that Estella stood at the back of Miss Havisham's chair, and that her eyes laughed mischievously" (101).

Philip Pirrip's objectivity and his insistence on full and honest disclosure are emphasized in his pointed refusal to cover up or pass over acknowledgement of his own culpability. In the confession noted above of his wanting to educate Joe so that he would not be embarrassed by him, for instance, after he reports that he wanted to share his learning with Joe, he says, "This statement sounds so well, that I cannot in my conscience let it pass unexplained" (109). The same commitment to the whole truth is evident when he summarizes his career with Clarriker and Co. at the end of the novel: "I must not leave it to be supposed that we were ever a great House, or that we made mints of money. We were not in a grand way of business, but we had a good name, and worked for our profits" (476). Philip Pirrip is fair and scrupulously honest in giving Mr. Pocket full credit for the quality of his education: he says that his tutor "was always so zealous and

honourable in fulfilling his compact with me, that he made me zealous and honourable in fulfilling mine with him. If he had shown indifference as a master, I have no doubt I should have returned the compliment as a pupil; he gave me no such excuse, and each of us did the other justice” (197). The objective harshness and frankness of his self-criticism is evident when Philip Pirrip acknowledges his responsibility for Joe’s awkwardness and discomfort during his first visit with Pip in London: “I had neither the good sense nor the good feeling to know that this was all my fault, and that if I had been easier with Joe, Joe would have been easier with me” (223). We see the ruthlessness of Philip Pirrip’s honesty in his judgment of himself for not telling Joe about the theft of the file and the provisions for Magwitch: “In a word, I was too cowardly to do what I knew to be right, as I had been too cowardly to avoid doing what I knew to be wrong” (42). Joseph Gold notes that Philip Pirrip is “tougher with himself than most people can be”: he is clearly unflinching and at times even brutal in self-judgment (249).

Philip Pirrip’s objectivity is especially plain, and he is perhaps most notably distanced from both David and Esther in his attitude toward his traumatic past. As indicated above, the trauma of Pip’s childhood has obvious parallels with the traumas that David and Esther endure. Like both of his predecessors, Pip is an orphan abandoned to a surrogate parent who resents the burden of raising him and treats him with unfeeling cruelty. Like Esther in particular, Pip suffers under harsh treatment from a relative who appears to think it would have been better had he never been born. Mrs. Joe tells Pip she does not know why she put herself to the trouble of raising him by hand and says, “I’d never do it again! I know that” (10). And as Philip Pirrip observes,

I think my sister must have had some general idea that I was a young offender whom an Accoucheur Policeman had taken up (on my birthday) and delivered over to her, to be dealt with according to the outraged majesty of the law. I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born, in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and morality, and against the dissuading arguments of my best friends. Even when I was taken to have a new suit of clothes, the tailor had orders to make them like a kind of Reformatory, and on no account to let me have the free use of my limbs. (23)

From the first Pip is treated as a guilty criminal, and throughout the *histoire* narrative he is highly susceptible to an overly guilty conscience. At least initially, and even in the “crime” Magwitch compels him to commit, Pip surely has the same “guilt in innocence” that plagues David and Esther. There is also trauma of sorts in Pip’s feelings of social degradation that echoes Esther’s being tainted by illegitimacy and David’s traumatic horror—or Dickens’s—at being a “common labouring hind.” Pip is born into the laboring class, but it is obviously a life-altering event when Estella teaches him to be ashamed of his coarse hands and his common ways. When he reports that Estella fed him on his first day at Miss Havisham’s, “as insolently as if I were a dog in disgrace,” Philip Pirrip says, “I was so humiliated, hurt, spurned, offended, angry, sorry—I cannot hit upon the right name for the smart—God knows what its name was—that tears started to my eyes” (63). That Philip Pirrip still feels this smart is evident in his difficulty finding the right words to describe it.

But Philip Pirrip’s discourse on the whole suggests an attitude toward his childhood that differs greatly from David’s and Esther’s. Despite her best attempts at suppressing them beneath her willed cheerfulness and devotion to “duty,” the depths of Esther’s pain at her abandonment in childhood are evident in those feelings about her

mother she *cannot* suppress when she reports her interaction with Lady Dedlock. David recalls his childhood with indignation against his tormentors and a great deal of self-pity. Philip Pirrip clearly feels no self-pity for his childhood circumstances, and the harshness of his criticism of himself for his youthful failings is a clear departure from the norm established in *Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, and so many other Dickens novels that treat the abused, abandoned, neglected child with outrage or gross sentimentality—*Oliver Twist*, *Nell Trent*, and *Paul and Florence Dombey* come most immediately to mind. As Barry Westburg observes, in *Great Expectations* “childhood is not dwelt upon for its own sake,” and “No longer is childhood sacred simply because it is childhood; no longer is there an overflow of sympathy for children as such” (118, 121). Rather than dwelling on childhood with sentimentality and on childhood trauma with pity or indignation or anguish, Philip Pirrip is able to see what was surely traumatic for his younger self with irony and amusement. At other times he seems simply to realize that “what is done is done,” and that dwelling on the pain of the past or holding on to bitter feelings against those responsible for the trauma serves no good purpose. Miss Havisham, with her stopped clocks and her withered bridal gown, provides a vivid example of this danger that Philip Pirrip avoids. When he records that he became ashamed of his home, the home he says was sanctified by Joe’s kindness and love, Philip Pirrip says with supreme calmness and “simple seriousness,” “How much of my ungracious condition of mind may have been my own fault, how much Miss Havisham’s, how much my sister’s, is now of no moment to me or to any one. The change was made in me; the thing was done. Well or ill done, excusably or inexcusably, it was done” (106-7). Gervais notes that Philip

Pirrip's attitude toward the terrors and trials of his childhood reveals an insensitive lack of compassion for his younger self, and in Gervais's estimation Philip Pirrip often seems to "dilute the traumas of his younger self" (101). In diffusing or diluting the traumas of his youth, viewing his childhood with amusement, dispassion, and even insensitivity, Philip Pirrip definitely offers a radical departure from David's and Esther's sympathetic and emotional discourse responses to the harshness of their childhood circumstances.

Calmness, assurance, distanced objectivity, the relative unobtrusiveness despite the high relative volume of narrative discourse, an unwillingness to linger over childhood and childhood trauma with sentimentality, pity, or impassioned indignation—these qualities all establish Philip Pirrip's uniqueness among Dickens narrators. In examining the discourse qualities that make Philip Pirrip's narrating voice unique, we have considered a number of qualities that belong more properly to the fictive persona the discourse establishes. It is Philip Pirrip the fictive man who is calm, assured, objective, and unwilling to indulge in sentimentality or indignation about his childhood. What remains is to consider how Philip Pirrip's dramatically different attitude towards his past motivates him to write his autobiography for reasons dramatically different from David's and Esther's, and ultimately, to consider how the discourse in Philip Pirrip's autobiography reveals Dickens's coming to terms with the demons of *his* past.

Philip Pirrip's Confession: Vanquishing Dickens's Demons

The two primary aims in the remainder of this chapter are to complete the portrait of the recollecting Philip Pirrip established in his narrative discourse and to demonstrate

that the fictive autobiographer recording and commenting on his past is very much Charles Dickens reviewing and commenting on significant aspects of his own life. To accomplish the first of these aims, we will explore Philip Pirrip's attitude toward his past as it is suggested mainly in the harshly critical moral judgments he makes upon his younger self, for in many respects, as Moshe Ron observes, "the identity of the narrating Pip consists in the repudiation of the actions of the narrated Pip" (42). Philip Pirrip's repudiation of the actions of the narrated Pip is, as we shall see, the primary impetus for his narrative, and the novel as a whole is essentially Philip Pirrip's confession of past sins. To accomplish the second aim, of establishing that Philip Pirrip's confession is a vehicle for Dickens's confession of his own sins through the veil of fiction, we shall consider the points of connection between Dickens and Philip Pirrip as we encounter them in Philip Pirrip's self-criticism. But before focusing exclusively on Philip Pirrip's discourse judgments on his younger self, a few more general remarks on points of connection between Dickens and the intradiegetic Pip are in order.

In the opening chapters of *Great Expectations* Pip is established as the sort of child-hero we find in so many other Dickens novels, the abused, neglected, and often orphaned child generally recognized as embodying Dickens's feelings about his own traumatic past. The pathos of Pip's initial circumstances is intensified through his terrifying confrontation with Magwitch in the very graveyard where Pip's parents and deceased siblings are buried. But Pip differs radically from all the other Dickens child-heroes in that throughout most of the novel, the intradiegetic Pip is clearly not a sympathetic character. The rhetoric in *Great Expectations* and the *histoire* events

themselves do not encourage the reader's unqualified compassion for Pip as they so obviously do with any of Dickens's other child protagonists, and in fact, Pip's reported behavior is at times simply reprehensible. Once he is smitten with Estella, Pip becomes an unmitigated snob who turns his back on his only true friend, Joe, because he thinks himself above the life of "commonness" to which he was born. Significantly, as Irwin Weiser notes, "In rejecting Joe, Pip has done what no other Dickens hero has done; he has rejected a good parent (or specifically, a good surrogate father)" (143). He compounds his betrayal of Joe seemingly at every turn throughout the narrative. He is ashamed to be seen with Joe in public, he is ashamed of Joe's manners and lack of education, and he hopes that none of his "genteel" London acquaintances, especially Drummle, will meet Joe and see how coarse and "common" he is. As Biddy predicts, Pip does not "come down" from London to visit Joe regularly as he promises, and when he does return, he sneaks into the Blue Boar and carefully avoids Joe's side of town. Pip is condescending to Biddy, he is a bad influence on Herbert, and at least initially, he repays Magwitch's generosity in funding his "expectations" by recoiling from him with repugnance and horror.

It is something of a wonder that the reader can like or care about Pip after that fateful first visit to Satis House makes such unhappy changes in him. It was Dickens's most immediate challenge in the novel to ensure that the reader does sympathize with Pip, however, and after establishing Pip's pitiable circumstances under the terrifying threats of Magwitch, the cruel hand of Mrs. Joe, and the accusing eye of Mr. Pumblechook, Dickens meets this challenge primarily through Philip Pirrip's narrative

discourse. He guides and manages our sympathetic perception of Pip through the filtering persona the discourse creates, the Philip Pirrip whose maturity and wisdom assure us from the start that Pip will indeed grow into a better man. As Wayne Booth says, the “voice of the mature Pip heighten[s], on the one hand, our sense of the younger Pip’s moral decline and preserve[s], on the other, our sympathy for him as he goes down and our certainty that he will again rise” (176). The great success Dickens achieves in meeting the challenge of getting his readers to sympathize with Pip is partly a product of his making Philip Pirrip, the fictive man, a likeable and sympathetic character in his own right, and here his “Dickensian” qualities come very much into play in the formation of the persona his discourse establishes: his humor, his sense of irony, and his magical and “theatrical” facility with language. The impact of the narrative as a whole depends ultimately, as Henri Talon suggests, “on the scope of intelligence and largeness of heart he evinces at the time he is writing; in other words, on the wealth of his present as an autobiographer” (122). Naturally, the “wealth of his present,” his intelligence and “largeness of heart,” is indicated only in his narrative discourse.

If we accept Jack Rawlins’s claim that most Dickens critics believe this novel is even more autobiographical than *David Copperfield*, despite that novel’s direct incorporation of passages from the fragment of Dickens’s actual autobiography, Pip’s being such an unsympathetic character throughout much of the novel is an interesting matter. If indeed “Pip is Dickens, in a way that’s striking even in terms of Dickens’s habitually autobiographical art,” then many of the flaws and failings that make Pip so unsympathetic must also belong to Dickens (Rawlins 668n). The most obvious of these

flaws are selfishness and snobbery, but as Jerome Buckley notes, Pip's failings are also reflections of other qualities he shares with his creator, namely "several obsessive drives and passions, which as narrator he describes with cogency and candor." Buckley explains that Pip is like Dickens in having "an excessive respect for the power of money, a naïve confidence that he can somehow buy real security and peace of mind," and in loving "against all reason a proud beauty who never can or will adequately reciprocate his affection: Estella, clearly modeled on the actress Ellen Ternan, whom the mature Dickens could neither acknowledge nor relinquish" (*Season 45-46*). As we shall see, Dickens's passion for Ellen Ternan is of crucial significance in his motivation for re-examining and "rewriting" his life for a third time under the cover of fictive autobiography.

Pip's being something of a despicable character at times is interesting, too, because compared to other of Dickens's abused and neglected child protagonists, his circumstances are far less harsh, and in some respects, Pip's childhood situation is much closer to that of Dickens himself. Pip is not abandoned to monstrous stepparents of fairytale proportions as David is, and for all Mrs. Joe's brutality and her complaining about Pip, she is no inhumanly cruel villainess on the order of Esther's Miss Barbary. And unlike David and Esther, Pip is blessed with one very loving surrogate parent in Joe, who stands by him unconditionally from first to last. Dickens's separation from his family while they were in the Marshalsea was never so complete or absolute as is the case in the abandonment of either David or Esther. And despite their traumatizing the young Dickens during the Warren's period more than they ever knew, there is no suggestion in

Dickens's letters or in any of his contemporaries' writings that Dickens ever consciously thought his parents did not love him. From all the indications we have in the letters and biographies, and as Michael Slater establishes particularly, there was indeed love in the John and Elizabeth Dickens household. But Pip, even with a loving Joe Gargery to lessen the more extreme abandonment that David and Esther must endure, has far more serious character flaws than either David or Esther does. And inasmuch as the traumas of his childhood are diffused and diluted by the narrating Philip Pirrip, it would seem that Pip must bear much of the weight of responsibility for his shortcomings on his own shoulders, especially if we believe the evident sincerity in his assertion that it is pointless to assign and measure blame for his becoming ashamed of his home, where Philip Pirrip concludes, "The change was made in me; the thing was done. Well or ill done, excusably or inexcusably, it was done" (106-7).

In taking responsibility for his own failings, it seems plain that Philip Pirrip does not *rewrite* his life to forge a healthier new identity as David does, certainly, and as many believe Esther does as well. Through his evident maturity and the clear distance he maintains from his intradiegetic self, it does indeed seem that Philip Pirrip's identity has already been formed by the events he narrates and that he thoroughly understands who he is before he sits down to write. As we examine Philip Pirrip's discourse judgments on himself more narrowly, we see that Philip Pirrip's quest is indeed not a quest for identity, but for expiation: as Philip Allingham suggests, Philip Pirrip "writes his life's story as an act of expiation. Making a book for him is cathartic, an act of purification" (469). Philip Pirrip writes his life to purge himself of guilt, to confess his sins and achieve atonement.

Like the Ancient Mariner, Philip Pirrip is a sadder, wiser man, and his penance is telling us his story.

The specifically confessional nature of *Great Expectations* has been noted by many—perhaps most thoroughly by Barry Westburg, who sees *Great Expectations* as the third novel in Dickens’s “confessional trilogy,” after *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* (159-77). James Crowley suggests that *Great Expectations* is a pointedly spiritual exercise in the mode of meditative religious contemplation and confession for the aim of atonement, and Crowley concludes that Philip Pirrip’s confession leads to his rebirth as a “new Pip confirmed in the desire to live generously and compassionately,” able to move into the future as a better man with his soul at ease (141). Samuel Sipe considers Philip Pirrip’s narrative “an unmistakable example” of the English tradition of confessional fiction that dates back to *Moll Flanders* (60). Sipe detects in Pip/Philip Pirrip a “lifelong preoccupation with the idea of confession,” which he illustrates as dating from Pip’s first urge to confess his theft from the forge to Joe and being reinforced periodically throughout the *histoire* narrative (59-60). As Sipe notes, however, Pip always resists confession in the *histoire* world of the story—the confessional urge is only fulfilled in the mature Philip Pirrip’s narrative in its entirety.

We have seen in passing a number of Philip Pirrip’s “confessional intrusions” and noted that unlike the apologetic or confessional intrusions of all the other Dickens narrators, Philip Pirrip’s are typically straightforward and sincerely apologetic. As Sipe observes, Philip Pirrip’s frequent use of these truly apologetic intrusions makes his “confessional impulse explicit” (60). Even in small matters, Philip Pirrip seems always

intent on confessing when his reported thoughts or actions are less than admirable. When he reports the scene of the first interview between the injured, demented Mrs. Joe and Orlick, for example, he says, “I confess that I expected to see my sister denounce him, and that I was disappointed by the different result” (123). When reporting his misunderstanding of Joe’s comment that Mrs. Joe was “given to government,” Philip Pirrip says, “I had some shadowy idea (and I am afraid I must add, hope), that Joe had divorced her in favour of the Lords of the Admiralty, or Treasury” (49). The language here suggests the compulsive nature of Philip Pirrip’s confessional urge—he *must* confess. Of course, his larger confession centers mainly on graver sins: most of all, it is his shameful behavior to Joe that Philip Pirrip must confess.

We have noted several instances of confessional intrusions in which Philip Pirrip admits that his treatment of Joe was deplorable. He says he is “afraid—sore afraid” that he did not want Joe to accompany him to the coaching office when he first departed for London because of the contrast the two of them would have presented (157). He “cannot in [his] conscience” neglect to explain his motives in wanting to educate Joe (109). When reporting Estella’s comment in her first meeting with Pip at Miss Havisham’s after he has become a gentleman, that with his improved fortunes she was sure his former companions would not be “fit company” for him anymore, Philip Pirrip is compelled to say, “In my conscience, I doubt very much whether I had any lingering intention left, of going to see Joe; but if I had, this observation put it to flight” (237). Shortly after, when relating the pangs of love he felt for Estella in his certainty that Miss Havisham intended her for him, he says, “Ah me! I thought those were high and great emotions. But I never

thought there was anything low and small in my keeping away from Joe, because I knew she would be contemptuous of him. It was but a day gone, and Joe had brought the tears into my eyes; they had soon dried, God forgive me! soon dried” (244). The tears too soon dried, for which Philip Pirrip asks God’s forgiveness, had come when Joe told Pip with simple dignity that they should not meet together in London or anywhere else “but what is private, and beknown, and understood among friends” (225). When he records his anticipation of Joe’s first visit to him in London, he says, “Let me confess exactly, with what feelings I looked forward to Joe’s coming. Not with pleasure, though I was bound to him by so many ties; no; with considerable disturbance, some mortification, and a keen sense of incongruity. If I could have kept him away by paying money, I certainly would have paid money” (218). As Joseph Gold observes with reference to this passage, the whole novel is Philip Pirrip’s attempt to confess “exactly” (250).

Obviously, the urge to confess is the product of a guilty conscience, and in the words of Julian Moynahan, “Pip has certainly one of the guiltiest consciences in literature” (126-27). From his birth Pip is, like Esther, guilty and yet innocent simply for being born—initially, as Gwen Watkins says, “he is guilty of nothing more than being unwanted” (119). As his story unfolds, Pip gets caught in a self-perpetuating cycle of increasing shame and guilt as his shame over his origins leads to behavior which makes him feel guilty and even more ashamed (Hochman and Wachs 175).² But throughout the *histoire* narrative and into the time frame of the narrating, the guilt that haunts Pip/Philip

² Among the many insightful discussions of the intradiegetic Pip’s inordinate sense of guilt are Julian Moynahan’s “The Hero’s Guilt: The Case of *Great Expectations*,” the chapter on *Great Expectations* in the Leavises’ *Dickens the Novelist*, and Lawrence Jay Dessner’s “*Great Expectations*: ‘the ghost of a man’s own father.’”

Pirrip and apparently prompts the confessional narrative in its entirety has struck many commentators as excessive. L. R. Leavis believes that Philip Pirrip's "self-minimization and self-accusation is compulsive," and so extensive that he seems truly to "suspect himself of having been a monstrosity" (240). "If David Copperfield sees too little personal responsibility in his history," Leavis observes, "Pip sees too much" (242). Henri Talon suggests that Philip Pirrip's "scrupulous conscience" makes him tend, "if not to exaggerate his weaknesses and faults, at least to underline them. . . . [W]e feel that the fountainhead of his retrospect is to be found in the question: 'Why, on this or that occasion, did I behave so ill?'" (122). The overriding, defining quality we see in Philip Pirrip throughout his narrative discourse is guilt, and in confessing his sins and criticizing his younger self for his sometimes deplorable behavior, the relentless, ruthless, brutal honesty does seem at times to go beyond mere objectivity. It is of pivotal significance that Philip Pirrip feels that his younger self is so deserving of censure—not because of his cruel abandonment to the harsh Mrs. Joe or his sense of degradation being bred to the forge, but because he himself was the author of his own reprehensible behavior.

One instance where Philip Pirrip's self-criticism may be unduly harsh, and where he takes full responsibility for his own behavior, occurs when he says of his keeping from Joe the secret of his theft of the file and food for Magwitch, "I was too cowardly to do what I knew to be right, as I had been too cowardly to avoid doing what I knew to be wrong. I had had no intercourse with the world at that time, and I imitated none of its many inhabitants who act in this manner. Quite an untaught genius, I made the discovery of the line of action for myself" (42). L. R. Leavis feels the "bitter sarcasm" here is

unjust, and Gervais says that given the “strange and fierce duress” under which Pip acts when he steals from the forge and then keeps the secret to himself, Philip Pirrip is overly insensitive in calling himself a coward and offering “copybook sermonizing” on his being “untaught” (Leavis 200, Gervais 100). We see Philip Pirrip’s emphatic acceptance of responsibility for his culpable behavior in making excuses to himself for staying at the Blue Boar when he knows by rights he should stay at Joe’s on his first visit home from London. After reporting his rationalizing that he would be an inconvenience to Joe because he was not expected, and that Miss Havisham might think it important that he be as near Satis House as possible, Philip Pirrip says,

All other swindlers upon earth are nothing to the self-swindlers, and with such pretences did I cheat myself. Surely a curious thing. That I should innocently take a bad half-crown of somebody else’s manufacture, is reasonable enough; but that I should knowingly reckon the spurious coin of my own make, as good money! An obliging stranger, under pretence of compactly folding up my bank-notes for security’s sake, abstracts the notes and gives me nutshells; but what is his sleight of hand to mine, when I fold up my own nutshells and pass them on myself as notes! (225-26)

Philip Pirrip’s harsh judgment of himself here is a long way from David Copperfield’s defensive protestations that *anyone* would have been taken in by Steerforth’s winning manner, or that he was selfish in thinking of himself first when Aunt Betsey lost her income *only* because he loved Dora *so much*.

Philip Pirrip is also hard on himself when he reports feeling only gloomy satisfaction and guilt in his victory over the “pale young gentleman” in their bizarre boxing match. He says, “I go so far as to hope that I regarded myself while dressing, as a species of savage young wolf, or other wild beast” (92). What Philip Pirrip appears to have expected of himself in this situation seems unreasonable: the boxing match was

entirely Herbert's idea, after all, and the doggedness he reports finding so admirable in Herbert left Pip little alternative but to fight with doggedness of his own—surely he cannot have expected himself as a truly “untaught” child to have pulled his punches or to have capitulated, which one presumes would have been the most truly “gentlemanly” thing to do. Where Philip Pirrip seems fair and objective in crediting Mr. Pocket for his earnestness in his studies, he may go too far in berating himself and crediting Joe with all the merit for his apparently rare good behavior during his apprenticeship at the forge:

It was not because I was faithful, but because Joe was faithful, that I never ran away and went for a soldier or a sailor. It was not because I had a strong sense of the virtue of industry, but because Joe had a strong sense of the virtue of industry, that I worked with tolerable zeal against the grain. . . . I know right well, that any good that intermixed itself with my apprenticeship came of plain contented Joe, and not of restlessly aspiring discontented me. (107)

Not to minimize Joe's exaggerated goodness, but Philip Pirrip gives himself small credit here indeed for not running away to the sea or the barracks and in assuring us that *any* good that “intermixed itself with his apprenticeship” came from Joe and Joe alone. Philip Pirrip is certainly just in his condemnation of himself for being so ashamed of Joe, but as much as the intradiegetic Pip does treat Joe shamefully, he is surely hard upon himself indeed when he says, “I had the meanness to feign that I was under a binding promise to go down to Joe; but I was capable of almost any meanness towards Joe or his name” (352). Esther is constitutionally incapable of selfishness, and David is uneasily defensive when he recognizes selfishness in himself—Philip Pirrip appears convinced that he was so far gone in following his own selfish desires that his meanness to Joe was virtually boundless.

L. R. Leavis believes that Philip Pirrip's self-criticism is at times unduly harsh because in the time of the narrating he feels that no matter how hard he may try, he "can never atone to Joe and Biddy" (242). We see the full depth of this feeling in Philip Pirrip's speculative explanation of why he did not return to Joe and Biddy once he realized the truth about his "expectations" and knew that "it was for the convict, guilty of I knew not what crimes, and liable to be taken out of those rooms where I sat thinking, and hanged at the Old Bailey door, that I had deserted Joe":

I would not have gone back to Joe now, I would not have gone back to Biddy now, for any consideration: simply, I suppose, because my sense of my own worthless conduct to them was greater than every consideration. No wisdom on earth could have given me the comfort that I should have derived from their simplicity and fidelity; but I could never, never, undo what I had done. (320-21)

Philip Pirrip knows now, in the time of the narrating, that he would have been comforted by Joe's and Biddy's simple faithfulness, but he is so hard upon himself still as to think, apparently even now, that it was impossible that he could ever "undo what he had done."

Jack Rawlins offers perhaps the most thorough discussion of Philip Pirrip's being too harshly critical of his younger self. Rawlins says that through the narrator's commentary Philip Pirrip "becomes his own Jaggers, his own prosecuting adult, convicting himself of imaginary crimes. . . . and his lectures to himself in the second half of the book are exactly the texts of Mrs. Joe's sermons: you're congenitally bad, you're always in the way, everything you do makes trouble for your betters" (676). Rawlins feels that "Pip's lifelong guilt is finally justified by his own apparent badness," and that Philip Pirrip is "saved" through the "cultivated self-loathing" we see in his discourse (674). Ultimately, Rawlins suggests, Philip Pirrip exonerates Jaggers, Miss Havisham,

and even Trabb's boy of responsibility for their cruelty and takes responsibility for them himself. Rawlins concludes that Pip becomes a scapegoat in the eyes of Philip Pirrip, "but Dickens seems to think the goat literally committed the sin in the first place. Thus Pip must do more than Christ: he must not only suffer for the sins of the world, he must believe he caused them. Christ is free of guilt, but Pip isn't, so, while Christ is willing to be crucified, Pip crucifies himself" (627).

The obvious discourse emphasis on confession, the relentless emphasis on guilt on both the intradiegetic and extradiegetic levels of the narrative, and the narrator's castigation of his younger self and acceptance of responsibility for his shortcomings in *Great Expectations* indicate a radical new direction in the course of Dickens's always eminently autobiographical writing. In all three of the fictive autobiographies, the crucial elements of Dickens's traumatic past are evident in the *histoire* circumstances of the protagonists, and Dickens's attitude toward his own past is plainly suggested in the narrator's attitude toward that past as it is revealed in the discourse. David's discourse, almost certainly more than Dickens intended, reveals an attitude of defensive self-pity. Esther's discourse suggests at a more subtle remove even greater self-pity in the exaggeration of the debilitating consequences of her abandonment, the feelings of compulsive insecurity that lay hidden beneath the overbearing, exceedingly sure and confident persona that Dickens the man presented to the world. But the inescapable sense of guilt that lies beneath David's defensiveness and insecurity "on small occasions" and the greater sense of guilt that underpins Esther's severely damaged self-esteem are balanced in *Copperfield* and *Bleak House* by the narrator's certainty in both cases that the

protagonist is “guilty and yet innocent” because David and Esther both were abandoned, neglected, and cruelly persecuted in childhood. Pip is abandoned, neglected, and persecuted in childhood, but his “innocence” seems of little concern to the narrating Philip Pirrip: he seems intent neither on mitigating, hiding, or defending his failings, nor on foisting blame for them on cruel surrogate parents, but rather on facing them squarely, highlighting them, and taking *himself* to task for them.

As indicated above, the most commonly acknowledged autobiographical connections between Dickens and the intradiegetic Pip are that Pip’s agonizing pursuit of Estella reflects Dickens’s own powerful yearning either for Ellen Ternan or for Maria Beadnell; that Pip’s shame over his place at Joe’s forge represents Dickens’s shame in being a “labouring hind” during the Warren’s period; and that the criminal taint that haunts Pip through his association with Magwitch and Newgate is a reflection of the taint that Dickens felt in his father’s history with the Marshalsea. If we accept these premises and agree with the commonly held view that Dickens essentially revisits in *Great Expectations* the same traumas of his own childhood explored with less obfuscation in *Copperfield*, the guilty conscience that prompts Philip Pirrip to confess and condemn his own failings with such ruthless harshness necessarily indicates a dramatic change in Dickens’s feelings about his own past (983).

The crucial question is, what brought about this change in attitude? How can we account for Dickens’s apparently thinking himself less an innocent victim and more the author of his own sins as Philip Pirrip so clearly does? It may be that Philip Pirrip’s evident maturity reflects the naturally more mature perspective of Dickens nearing the

end of his forties as compared to his perspective at thirty-seven, when he started writing *Copperfield*, and forty, when he started *Bleak House*. But why the relentless emphasis on guilt and confession? And indeed, why the return to highly autobiographical fictive autobiography in *Great Expectations* in the first place?

Ewald Mengel notes that “autobiographical writing is especially popular in times of crisis,” for the autobiographical endeavor, “which spans both reality and text, is particularly suitable for coping with that crisis and working out solutions” (187). The years immediately preceding *Great Expectations* were certainly a time of crisis for Dickens. As his forties progressed, Dickens became increasingly restless. In September 1854 he told Forster that he felt a powerful urge to travel: “*Restlessness*, you will say. Whatever it is, it is always driving me, and I cannot help it. . . . If I couldn’t walk fast and far, I should just explode and perish” (*Letters* 7: 428-29). Early in 1855 he wrote Forster in a state of depression: “Am altogether in a disheveled state of mind—motes of new books in the dirty air, miseries of older growth threatening to close upon me. Why is it, that as with poor David, a sense comes always crushing on me now, when I fall into low spirits, as of one happiness I have missed in life, and one friend and companion I have never made?” (*Letters* 7: 523). Mounting dissatisfaction with Catherine, now his wife of more than twenty years, made it increasingly apparent that she was not this ideal “friend and companion,” as he confided also to Forster, in September 1857:

Poor Catherine and I are not made for each other, and there is no help for it. It is not only that she makes me uneasy and unhappy, but that I make her so too—and much more so. She is . . . amiable and complying; but we are strangely ill-assorted for the bond there is between us. . . . [N]othing on earth could make her understand me, or suit us to each other. Her temperament will not go with mine. (*Letters* 8: 430)

Soon after Dickens was confessing to Forster the extent of his unhappiness with Catherine, he was deeply infatuated with Ellen Ternan, whom he first met in October 1857. He wrote Lavinia Watson two months after meeting Ellen that he felt himself “the most restless of Beings”:

I am the modern embodiment of the old Enchanters, whose Familiars tore them to pieces. I weary of rest, and have no satisfaction but in fatigue. Realities and idealities are always comparing themselves together before me, and I don't like the Realities except when they are unattainable—*then*, I like them of all things. I wish I had been born in the days of Ogres and Dragon-guarded Castles. I wish an Ogre with seven heads . . . had taken the Princess whom I adore—you have no idea how intensely I love her!—to his stronghold on the top of a high series of mountains, and there tied her up by the hair. Nothing would suit me half so well this day, as climbing after her, sword in hand, and either winning her or being killed. (*Letters* 8: 488).

Unquestionably, as their clandestine relationship over the next dozen years would bear out, Ellen Ternan was the unattainable fairy-tale princess Dickens wished for in and loved so intensely. And as we know, the emotional turmoil of Dickens's mid-forties reached the flashpoint in his separation from Catherine in May 1858, and what had been merely a building personal crisis became a highly public matter.

This public separation after twenty-two years of marriage generated rumors that would linger for years of a scandalous liaison between Dickens and Catherine's sister, Georgina Hogarth, in some quarters, and almost equally scandalous gossip about Dickens and Ellen Ternan in others. Against the urging of many friends, Dickens insisted on responding publicly to the rumors circulating in the press. Part of Dickens's insistence on a public defense of himself in *The Times* and in *Household Words*, and in the indignant letter he shared with many privately and called “the ‘violated’ letter,” came

from his famous certainty that he was “always in the right.” Peter Ackroyd suggests that Dickens was only “half-joking” when he told the artist William Powell Frith, “nobody in the world is readier to acknowledge himself in the wrong than I, only—I am never wrong” (829). Dickens was self-righteous to the end in professing his blamelessness in the separation from Catherine, going so far as to claim that she had wanted the separation for years and that she was a terrible mother, as he told Angela Burdett Coutts: “She does not—and she never did—care for the children; and the children do not—and they never did—care for her” (*Letters* 8: 632). The testimony of the children themselves denies the validity of these claims, but it appears that it was of such importance to Dickens that his public, his children, and his and Catherine’s mutual friends all “side” with him that he was compelled to distort the truth, and perhaps, as Slater suggests, even to believe the distortions as fact (146).

In anger and in fear that prying eyes might find more fuel for malicious gossip in his correspondence, Dickens burned “the accumulated letters and papers of twenty years” in the Gad’s Hill field in September 1860, the same month he began writing *Great Expectations* (*Letters* 9: 304). He told William Macready five years later that he burned these papers because of the “improper uses made of confidential letters in the addressing of them to a public audience that have no business with them” (*Letters* 11: 21). As Grahame Smith observes, in burning these documents, Dickens “was, surely, ridding himself of evidence of a life with which he had become dissatisfied,” and Smith is one among many who suggest that the end of his marriage and his burgeoning secret relationship with Ellen Ternan prompted the return to “rewriting his life” in the

“fictionalized self-examination” we find in *Great Expectations* (44; see also Golden 163). Having destroyed the “evidence” of his life with Catherine, it might seem that Dickens may have wished to justify himself to his public and posterity in his fiction as he had in the press. It has been suggested that Dickens shared Pip’s great fear of being “misremembered after death,” a fate Philip Pirrip says he felt would be “far more terrible than death” when it appeared that Orlick would kill him (442). But rather than justifying himself anew, Edgar Johnson suggests that after the events of the mid- to late-forties, Dickens had a deep and profound need to explore again his “formative years and the bent they had given him, to weigh the nature of his response to them.” And as Johnson observes, in *Great Expectations* there is none of the self-pity Dickens revealed in reviewing his formative years in *Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations* “pierces fathoms down in self-understanding. It is relentless in self-judgment” (982).

Dickens attests himself in the autobiographical fragment to his remarkable capacity, or perhaps painful need, for keeping his deepest, darkest secrets entirely to himself, “fathoms down.” But we also know that Dickens had a “pressing autobiographical urge,” and that this urge explains his bringing so much of his own life into so much of his fiction, both in the first person and in the third (Carr 452). Constitutionally unable to share the deepest secrets of his soul, yet still needing to disburden himself of these secrets, fiction was, as Mengel observes, “the vehicle which Dickens trusted to convey the tenor of his life. . . . [O]nly in fictional form could Dickens reveal the secrets of his soul” (186). However vehemently he protested his innocence and tried to shift the blame for their failed relationship onto Catherine, it may be that in

Great Expectations, with all its relentless discourse emphasis on confession, guilt, and criticism of the protagonist's moral failings, Dickens acknowledged painful "secrets of his soul" regarding his behavior with Catherine, and perhaps Ellen Ternan too, that he could not admit more directly in any other way. It may be that Philip Pirrip's recognition and condemnation of Pip's shameful behavior reveals Dickens's recognition that in casting Catherine aside and breaking up his family, he himself had behaved badly—that he was for once not wholly "innocent," that he was indeed guilty of abandoning someone who loved and depended upon him, just as he had loved and depended upon the parents who failed him by forcing him into the drudgery of the blacking factory. If Dickens's return to highly autobiographical fictive autobiography in *Great Expectations* was in fact prompted by a profound need to examine himself anew after the greatest crisis of his *adult* life, the pointedly confessional nature of Philip Pirrip's narration may be of the utmost significance.

We have seen that Dickens did always have strong feelings of guilt lurking beneath the surface of his own sense of innocence. Like Pip, Dickens seems to have had irrational feelings of criminal guilt, making him feel "irretrievably tainted" to the point that he once said "he felt always as if he were wanted by the police" (Stange 17). It is suggestive indeed that when he took a walk on the day he began drafting the public letter of justification for his separation from Catherine, he felt "great dread and anxiety" upon seeing a policeman lying in wait for someone in a stand of lilac trees near his home (Ackroyd 817). Harry Stone offers convincing evidence for Dickens's strong feelings of guilt in the period of his early infatuation with Ellen Ternan and rising dissatisfaction

with Catherine in his discussion of the story he calls “The Bride’s Chamber,” an interpolated ghost tale in one of Dickens’s portions of *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, the series of travel articles he coauthored with Wilkie Collins recounting their 1857 tour of Cumberland and the English Midlands—a tour which Dickens arranged such that he could see Ellen Ternan perform in Doncaster. The bride in this story is none too subtly named Ellen, and as Stone argues, “The Bride’s Chamber” prefigures *Great Expectations* in a number of ways and presents a complex melding of autobiographical concerns pressing on Dickens with his rising fascination with Ellen Ternan and the increasingly untenable situation with his wife. The protagonist of this story is a man who marries a woman whose ego and will he has destroyed and whom he effectively murders by commanding her to die. The bride, Ellen, who marries her tormentor at age twenty-one, also has a secret admirer who adores her hopelessly, and when the lover accuses the husband of murdering his wife, the husband kills him with a billhook. Stone suggests that Dickens is embodied here as both the husband who destroys his wife and the lover who pursues the beautiful young Ellen in vain. After the husband is hanged for the murder of Ellen and the lover, he is haunted every night by his victims and periodically appears to travelers as a ghost seeking peace by confessing his guilt and telling them his story (288-92). This story was written months before Dickens separated from Catherine, and though we have no direct evidence that Dickens was haunted by a sense of guilt after the separation, the “massive externalized guilt” that the cruel husband suffers, punishment by law and beyond death, is, as Stone argues, highly suggestive (291).

We know that Catherine was jealous of Ellen Ternan and that the Dickenses

argued about her, but we will almost certainly never know if Ellen factored directly into their separation. It is likely we will never know with certainty, too, whether the relationship between Dickens and Ellen was sexual, though as Morris Golden notes, scholars generally assume that this was the case (166). David Holbrook is of the opinion that at the time he wrote *Great Expectations* Dickens and Ellen were indeed engaged in “a secret romantic sexual relationship,” and Holbrook asserts that “inevitably in Victorian society, this must have provoked in him much anxiety and guilt” (127). Even if their affair never was sexual, it seems hard to conceive, especially given the rumors surrounding them at the time of his breakup with Catherine, that Dickens would not have felt some anxiety and guilt as he was more or less “sneaking around” to spend time with her abroad in France and in various places in England. It is at the very least not unreasonable to imagine that in his innermost soul Dickens, famously the Victorian champion of home, hearth, family, and Christian morality in his fiction, would feel occasional pangs of guilt regarding Ellen.

Whether or not Ellen was an immediate cause for the separation of Dickens and his wife, and whether or not the pervasive guilt throughout Philip Pirrip’s narrative is partly attributable to Dickens’s situation with Ellen, it is certain that the tantalizingly similarly named Estella is the primary cause of the most significant sins that Philip Pirrip feels compelled to confess in *Great Expectations*. It is the unattainable Estella who leads Pip to turn his back on Joe, and it is his fervent desire to be socially worthy of her that makes Pip so eager to become a gentleman that he effectively breaks up the Gargery household without a backward glance when his expectations take him to London. If

Pip's yearning for Estella is indeed a reflection of Dickens's longing for the unattainable Ellen Ternan, unattainable for Dickens openly, at least, in Victorian times, then there is perhaps a great deal of latent significance in Estella being the primal cause of Pip's shameful, guilt-inducing behavior. Edgar Johnson is one of the camp convinced that Pip's love for Estella is based more on the mature Dickens's love for Ellen than on his youthful passion for Maria Beadnell, and Johnson is persuasive in suggesting that Pip's misery in his hopeless pursuit of Estella seems much more the misery of a grown man in love than that of a boy: "Never before," writes Johnson, had Dickens

portrayed a man's love for a woman with such emotional depth or revealed its desperation of compulsive suffering. . . . The unhappiness that breathes in Dickens's youthful letters to Maria Beadnell is the suffering of a boy, whereas Pip's is the stark misery of a man. David Copperfield's heartache for Dora Spenlow is an iridescent dream-grief to this agonized nightmare-reality. (992)

The stark misery of Pip's love is clearly conveyed in Philip Pirrip's narrative discourse. As with all other aspects of his past, Philip Pirrip is brutally honest in his discourse commentary on his feelings for Estella. When he relates that his love for her lasted beyond infatuation with her in childhood and into his adult years, he says that on the morning of his first meeting with Estella after her return from France he held no illusions about her character, that he "did not, even that romantic morning, invest her with any attributes save those she possessed." As he explains,

I mention this in this place, of a fixed purpose, because it is the clue by which I am to be followed into my poor labyrinth. According to my experience, the conventional notion of a lover cannot be always true. The unqualified truth is, that when I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. Once for all; I knew to my sorrow, often and often, if not always, that I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all

discouragement that could be. Once for all; I loved her none the less because I knew it, and it had no more influence in restraining me, than if I had devoutly believed her to be human perfection. (232)

That these sentiments might easily apply to Ellen Ternan is obvious: Dickens clearly found her irresistible, and it seems quite evident that Dickens loved Ellen against reason, promise, peace, hope, and “all discouragement that could be.” That the intensity of these feelings is powerful for Philip Pirrip still in the time of the narrating is suggested by the “Dickensian” anaphora in the most crucial sentence, which as we have seen, occurs especially at moments of powerful emotion for the fictive Dickens narrator or for Dickens himself. This same present-moment intensity is evident also when Philip Pirrip records his jealousy of Bentley Drummle: “I tell this lightly, but it was no light thing to me. For, I cannot adequately express what pain it gave me to think that Estella should show any favour to a contemptible, clumsy, sulky booby, so very far below the average” (307). As happens with David, Esther, and Dickens himself, words fail Philip Pirrip when his most powerful feelings are in hand, and he cannot “adequately express them.” Mild Dickensian *enumeratio* also reinforcing the intensity of emotion in the “discourse now” occurs when Philip Pirrip says in one speculative intrusion, “If I had been her secretary, steward, half-brother, poor relation—if I had been a younger brother of her appointed husband—I could not have seemed to myself, further from my hopes when I was nearest to her” (298). As Johnson says, “Pip’s love is without tenderness, without illusion; it reveals no desire to confer happiness upon the beloved; it is all self-absorbed need. Where in all his past career as a novelist had Dickens painted such passions and in what abyss of personal agony had he learned them?” (992). It would seem that these

feelings were fresh for Dickens indeed, and that as Golden says, *Great Expectations* offers “the first woman in his fiction to elicit sexually impassioned writing” because Dickens was experiencing the passion even as he was sharing it with Philip Pirrip (185).

* * * *

Knowing what we do of Dickens’s inability to share his deepest secrets directly with friends or family and his counterbalancing tendency to disguise those secrets in his fiction, it seems a reasonable conclusion that the emphasis on confession, guilt, and relentless self-criticism in Philip Pirrip’s narrative discourse is indeed the product of his secret sense of guilt—guilt perhaps not fully acknowledged consciously—for abandoning Catherine and for pursuing Ellen Ternan in hopes of finding the “one happiness” he had “missed in life,” the “one friend and companion [he had] never made.” And from the evidence we find in Philip Pirrip’s narrative discourse, it seems also reasonable to conclude that the sense of culpability he was feeling at the time of writing *Great Expectations* also made Dickens realize in his heart of hearts that he could not blame *these* failings and weaknesses on anyone or anything but himself—not his wife, whatever sort of parent he knew her to be truly, not his father, not his mother, and not the shameful degradation of his time at Warren’s blacking warehouse. This recognition that he himself could be guilty and *not* innocent, that he could be selfish enough to abandon Catherine, who had never truly wronged him, I believe, forced Dickens to see not just himself, but also those he had held most accountable for traumatizing him in his childhood, in an entirely new and more objective light. Ultimately, by recognizing that he had to accept responsibility for his guilt, Dickens was largely able to absolve his parents, previously his

“tormentors,” and thus he was largely able to vanquish at last the most haunting demons of his traumatic childhood.

In *Copperfield*, Dickens reveals that what seemed most traumatic to him in his thirties about the Warren’s episode was the social degradation he felt in being forced to labor and mingle with “common” people. David says, as does Dickens in the autobiographical fragment, “No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sank into this companionship” (*Copperfield* 133; Forster 1: 26). Clearly, though, in the revised thinking of his late forties as we find it in *Great Expectations*, Dickens seems to have recognized the falseness in his having been from childhood guilty of enormous class snobbery. In this respect, as Edgar Johnson observes, “*Great Expectations* is Dickens’s penance for his subservience to false values” (988). Perhaps in his newfound objectivity he recognized the irony in the fact that he, the outraged defender of the poor and humble in such novels as *Oliver Twist*, *Bleak House*, and *Hard Times*, had felt it so utterly shameful and degrading to have been forced to mingle with the working class himself in his employment at Warren’s. For the primary sin that Philip Pirrip condemns and seeks atonement for is snobbery—class snobbery is the root of all of Pip’s more specific sins in his treatment of Joe, in particular, which as we have seen is the primary target for Philip Pirrip’s harshest condemnation. At least at the time of writing *Copperfield*, Dickens appears not to have found it troubling that the narrating David sees no apparent wrong in his being, like Dickens himself, so horrified at the taint he felt from his forced experience in the working class. As Kay Puttock observes, “there is no indication that either David or Dickens perceives that David is a snob, or that there is anything amiss with his attitude

towards his humble fellow workers in the warehouse” (20). But in *Great Expectations*, Philip Pirrip is harshly critical of Pip’s social snobbery indeed, and as George Bernard Shaw put it so colorfully, “The reappearance of Mr. Dickens in the character of a blacksmith’s boy may be regarded as an apology to Mealy Potatoes” (David Copperfield’s snubbed companion at Murdstone and Grinby’s, the one boy who questions David’s position as a “little gentleman”). Shaw suggests that in *Great Expectations* Dickens appears to have come to see that “sticking labels on blacking bottles and rubbing shoulders with boys who were not gentlemen, was as little shameful as being the genteel apprentice in the office of Mr. Spenlow, or the shorthand writer recording the unending twaddle of the House of commons” (632).

Philip Pirrip criticizes obliquely the sort of social pretensions that grip Pip so powerfully in one of his humorous discourse comments on the much-emphasized importance that the useless Mrs. Pocket places on her having descended from an ancestor knighted “for storming the English grammar at the point of the pen, in a desperate address engrossed on vellum, on the occasion of the laying of the first stone of some building or other, and for handing some Royal Personage either the trowel or the mortar” (188). He has a good Dickensian laugh, too, at Pip’s pretensions in joining a gentlemen’s club, when he reports that “At Startup’s suggestion, we put ourselves down for election into a club called The Finches of the Grove: the object of which institution I have never divined, if it were not that the members should dine expensively once a fortnight, to quarrel among themselves as much as possible after dinner, and to cause six waiters to get drunk on the stairs” (271-72).

Of course, Philip Pirrip frequently criticizes Pip's snobbery more directly, too, and it is specifically Pip's social snobbery in being so ashamed of Joe that warrants the most heartfelt apology and confession in so many of the passages we have noted above—when Philip Pirrip regrets being ashamed to be seen with Joe, when he is ashamed now of having wanted to make Joe more educated so that he would not be an embarrassment before Estella, and when he confesses his lack of enthusiasm about Joe visiting him in London, for example. The specifically social snobbery is highlighted too in Philip Pirrip's reporting that during the days before his departure from the forge he was irritated when Joe or Biddy happened to look at him: "I felt offended: as if they were expressing some mistrust in me. Though Heaven knows they never did by word or sign." He says that at these moments of irritation he would go to the door and look out into the summer night, and as he records apologetically, "The very stars to which I then raised my eyes, I am afraid I took to be but poor and humble stars for glittering on the rustic objects among which I had passed my life" (143). Or when he reports his last stroll through the marshes leaving for London, he says:

As I passed the church, I felt (as I had felt during service in the morning) a sublime compassion for the poor creatures who were destined to go there, Sunday after Sunday, all their lives through, and to lie obscurely at last among the low green mounds. I promised myself that I would do something for them one of these days, and formed a plan in outline for bestowing a dinner of roast beef and plum-pudding, a pint of ale, and a gallon of condescension, upon everybody in the village. (145)

As Samuel Sipe notes, the extradiegetic "gallon of condescension" in this passage of mostly straightforward narration is the sort of "biting remark" that Philip Pirrip habitually offers to "place his mistakes in perspective" whenever Pip "begins to behave

pretentiously or ungratefully” (56). It seems evident that in all Philip Pirrip’s “setting himself straight” for his superior attitude, his snobbishness toward the common and humble but eminently good Joe, and Bidly, and even the criminally tainted Magwitch, whom he comes to recognize as “a much better man than I had been to Joe,” Dickens is recognizing and condemning the sense of social superiority in himself that had made the blacking warehouse experience seem so utterly humiliating and degrading (443).

Much attention has been paid to the autobiographical basis of David’s surrogate parents in *Copperfield* and to Esther’s two “bad mothers” in *Bleak House*, and so, too, have Pip’s surrogate parents in *Great Expectations* received a good deal of attention. In Mrs. Joe’s being a “‘bad mother’ figure” rooted in Dickens’s feelings about his mother’s having wished that his abandonment to the drudgery at Warren’s continue longer than it had to, the feelings explored in such depth in Esther’s narrative, it seems clear that the deeply held bitterness against his mother continued undiminished. Gwen Watkins goes so far as to say that the only emotion Dickens felt for his mother throughout his adult life was a “cold dislike” that never abated (24). Mrs. Joe certainly is a virago of a mother, neglectful, cruel, brutal, and hardly nurturing. But it is highly significant that Philip Pirrip minimizes assigning her blame for the faults that make Pip so morally culpable as to require Philip Pirrip’s “great confessions.” Philip Pirrip does say at one point, “My sister’s bringing up had made me sensitive,” and he attributes his being “morally timid and very sensitive” to his constant awareness in his childhood of his sister’s unjust treatment of him in “bringing him up by jerks” (64). But his later comment, after he has begun to relate Pip’s moral decline, is of supreme importance: “How much of my

ungracious condition of mind may have been my own fault, how much Miss Havisham's, how much my sister's, is now of no moment to me or to any one" (106). In focusing so much discourse emphasis on his own culpability instead of blaming others, as David and Esther do in their different ways, it seems apparent in Philip Pirrip's case that while Dickens may not have forgiven his mother, he was in *Great Expectations* much less concerned with venting feelings of bitterness against her.

And indeed, Philip Pirrip's discourse reveals a softening of his attitude toward Mrs. Joe. After he reports her death, he comments:

Whatever my fortunes might have been, I could scarcely have recalled my sister with much tenderness. But I suppose there is a shock of regret which may exist without much tenderness. Under its influence (and perhaps to make up for the want of the softer feeling) I was seized with a violent indignation against the assailant from whom she had suffered so much" (277).

Here he voices in the time of the narrating a "shock of regret" and acknowledges that perhaps he *should* have felt some tenderness towards Mrs. Joe. As he reports arriving at the Blue Boar on the day of her funeral, the figurative language highlights his softened feelings:

It was fine summer weather again, and, as I walked along, the times when I was a little helpless creature, and my sister did not spare me, vividly returned. But they returned with a gentle tone upon them that softened even the edge of Tickler. For now, the very breath of the beans and clover whispered to my heart that the day must come when it would be well for my memory that others walking in the sunshine should be softened as they thought of me. (277)

Insofar as Mrs. Joe is indeed a fictional representation of Dickens's own mother, it would appear that part of Dickens's revised thinking in his late forties was the realization that he should now look not to his traumatic past, but to his present and his future—that rather

than fretting over those who had wronged him, he had better attend to his own failings and his own treatment of others.

Dickens's attitude towards his father is unambiguously at the very heart of Philip Pirrip's confession in *Great Expectations*. While he may not have been able to forgive his mother fully in his revised view of himself and his past after the climactic personal events of his mid-forties, Philip Pirrip's relentless judgment of himself for turning his back on Joe suggests that Dickens revised his thinking about his own father quite radically. Philip Pirrip's confession of his sin in being ashamed of both his surrogate father figures, Joe and Magwitch, suggests that Dickens is not apologizing just to Mealy Potatoes, but also to John Dickens. Dickens depicted his father in *Copperfield* with mild unkindness, perhaps, as the lovable but ineffectual, impecunious, and prison-tainted Micawber on the one hand, but on the other, he effectively demonized John Dickens as the tyrannically cruel Mr. Murdstone, the sole author of his abandonment to the horrors of life "on his own account" and the degradation of Murdstone and Grinby's. The self-castigation in Philip Pirrip's discourse for his snobbish rejection of "dear good faithful tender Joe" suggests that one of the greatest sins Dickens had to confess was his long-held resentment of his father for sending him to Warren's and also for the shame and embarrassment he felt in his twenties and thirties as his father's continuing financial difficulties led to insolvency and another arrest for debt, attempts to borrow from Dickens's publishers and begging from his friends, and even forgery of Charles's name on bills of credit.

With all the emphasis on Philip Pirrip's condemnation of his younger self for

being ashamed of both Joe and Magwitch, his two surrogate fathers, it seems exceedingly clear that Dickens in *Great Expectations* was expressing deeply felt contrition for his feelings of resentment and embarrassment at his own father. From the time of his death shortly after *Copperfield* was completed, Dickens's opinion of his father grew, by his own admission to Forster, as the years passed. Forster says that during the composition of *Copperfield*, all of John Dickens's best qualities "came more and more vividly back to its author's memory; as time wore on, nothing else was remembered; and five years before his own death, after using in one of his letters to me a phrase rather out of the common with him, this was added: 'I find this looks like my poor father, whom I regard as a better man the longer I live'" (2: 114). In Philip Pirrip's taking responsibility for his shortcomings upon himself, and by making the gravest of Pip's sins, the one that requires Philip Pirrip's most emphatic apology and self-condemnation, his shame over his surrogate father(s) and his shameful abandonment of "dear good Joe," it seems evident that Philip Pirrip's confession is fundamentally an ode to the memory of John Dickens. Forster records Dickens's summation of his father's character as follows: "I know my father to be as kindhearted and generous a man as ever lived in the world. Everything that I can remember of his conduct to his wife, or children, or friends, in sickness or affliction, is beyond all praise. By me, as a sick child, he has watched night and day, unweariedly and patiently, many nights and days" (1:16). Dickens's father sounds here very much like the humble blacksmith that Philip Pirrip is so deeply sorry to have betrayed.

Mengel points out that "Although the autobiographer claims to be telling us

something about his past, he tells us even more about his present” (187). What Philip Pirrip’s discourse tells us about his present is mainly that especially in comparison with the two other of Dickens’s fictive autobiographers, in accepting responsibility for his own failings he has freed himself from bitter feelings about his past. As Samuel Sipe suggests, “it is in the sum of Pip’s past experiences and his present attitudes towards them that the reader of *Great Expectations* discover Pip the whole man. . . . In the process of telling about himself, Pip completes himself and reveals himself as a mature and secure individual” (54). Philip Pirrip reveals himself through his discourse as mature and secure in the narrating present through his calmness, his insistent acknowledgement of his own failings, and his ability to see his younger self, even in times that might be scarringly traumatic, with irony and humor. As Hochman and Wachs observe, “The felicity of his language, the humor of his narrative, and the brilliant use of metaphor Dickens bestows on him suggest that he has indeed mastered the direst nightmares of his life and reached a point of insight and repose” (167-68). This sense of insight and repose indicates that Philip Pirrip has indeed freed himself from the nightmares of his past in ways that David and Esther never could, David being too close emotionally to his past, and Esther being too thoroughly damaged by hers. Along with the rigorous honesty in critical self-judgment, the eminently Dickensian humor in Philip Pirrip’s discourse, which as Johnson says “never undermine[s] the predominant seriousness of *Great Expectations*,” is vitally important to the image of Philip Pirrip that emerges from his narration, the secure and mature man who has come to accept responsibility for himself, warts, flaws, and all (993). For as Q. D. Leavis notes,

The frequent humour or amusement in the narrator's tone . . . guarantees the narrator's detachment for us and underplays (very notably if we think of David's) the exposed self's sufferings, so that there is no bitterness about others' treatment of him, only a clear insight into the causes of his mistakes. We thus grasp, without being told, that the narrator is now truly a free man, freed from the compulsions of childhood guilt and from shame imposed by the class distinctions that close round him in his boyhood. (290)

It seems apparent that given the highly autobiographical nature of *Great Expectations*, the clear insight into the causes of his mistakes and freedom from childhood guilt and shame obtain for Dickens in this novel as well.

In developing Philip Pirrip, the narrator who passes hard judgment on himself, confessing his guilt and thereby coming to a mature understanding and acceptance of himself that is obviously denied David and Esther, Dickens's third and final rewriting of his own life under cover of fictive autobiography enabled him also to confess his sins and achieve self-acceptance, not as the pitiable victim of a traumatic childhood, but as a man confronting and accepting his imperfections as his own responsibility. That Dickens's evident revision in his view of himself in *Great Expectations* was prompted by feelings of guilt for effectively abandoning his wife for Ellen Ternan, after the fact, at least, is certainly conjecture. But given the lack of other evidence to account for this radical rethinking of himself, and given the evidence latent in Philip Pirrip's narrative discourse, this explanation seems entirely reasonable. The question of what prompted it aside, the reexamination of himself and of his past in *Great Expectations* makes it abundantly clear that in Philip Pirrip's recognition of his simply human imperfection, Dickens revised his feelings about his parents and his childhood. Philip Pirrip's discourse emphasis on his mistreatment of his surrogate fathers Joe and Magwitch clearly suggests that Dickens

forgave his father for subjecting him to shame and humiliation in his childhood and in his adult years. Dickens appears to have realized his father may have been ineffectual as a parent in some respects, as Joe certainly is, but also that he was as well-intentioned as Magwitch certainly is, despite being tainted by the prison that loomed so large in his past and in John Dickens's. Philip Pirrip's softening attitude to Mrs. Joe and his recognition that truly, "it matters little" in the time of his narrating how much she had failed him as a mother suggest Dickens's similar recognition that in the now of his late forties, it was fruitless to dwell on her sins and more to the point to consider his own. In her analysis of Dickens's evolving attitude towards the abused child, Kay Puttock suggests that in *Great Expectations* Dickens achieved "a working through of his own childhood trauma to a mature acceptance of his and his parents' failings" (19). Through endowing Pip with gross moral failings and having Philip Pirrip confess and condemn them, Dickens was at last able to succeed in working through "his childhood feelings of rage, helplessness, and shame to a mature acceptance and sympathy for human weakness—his own as well as that of his parents" (Puttock 21). Indeed, it seems evident that in writing Pip's *bildungsroman*, charting his course from innocence, through guilt, to mature acceptance of himself as merely a flawed human being—neither the "hero" of his own story like David Copperfield, nor a pitiable victim like Esther Summerson—Dickens himself was able finally to escape the demons of his past. Just as Pip does, Dickens came into maturity in important emotional and psychological respects through Philip Pirrip's "great confession" in *Great Expectations*.

Chapter Seven: Postscript

This study has combined critical approaches to fiction that are rarely brought together: structuralist analysis of narrative discourse and interpretive psychological and autobiographical criticism. Generally, the gulf between structuralist analysis and psychological interpretation is deep and wide, and any bridge between the two might seem precarious. The distance between fictional character—or fictive autobiographer—and actual author is often no small leap as well. But bridging these gaps and joining these three often disparate concerns is both appropriate and fruitful with Dickens, and most especially with first-person Dickens.

Typically, the interest of a literary text for structuralists is carefully limited as a somewhat self-serving matter of narrative theory: structuralists tend to be concerned less with illuminating depths of meaning or expanding our understanding of a given text's "message," and more with analyzing the different component parts or standard features of the narrative mode itself. In *Narrative Discourse*, for example, Genette does not aim to offer significant insights into what Proust wrote about in *A la recherche du temps perdu* so much as he uses Proust's work as an appropriate proving ground for his analysis of the complex interplay of different time frames and "levels" of narrative in the various relations between *histoire* "story," *récit* or narrative text, and *the narrating* as revealed in

the narrative discourse. Structuralist analysis of narrative discourse so often, as an end in itself, stops at the point of differentiating the “story proper” from *the narrating*, or the inscribed indications of the presence of what Barthes calls the “paper author.” But the narrative discourse in Dickens’s fiction evokes such a vividly present “paper author,” that—to recall Geoffrey Ellis’s comment—the “paper Dickens” becomes almost a personal friend of the reader, “swinging along at our side” so that when we finish a Dickens novel, even though “we find his world largely fantasy, his own vivid presence remains with us, as someone we are personally fond of” (121). As much as the “paper Dickens” is a vivid personality in his third-person fiction, in the fictive autobiographies, the discourse works of necessity mandated by the first-person mode to establish the persona of the fictional first-person narrator in convincing detail. Thus it seems all the more appropriate to consider the personality of the fictive autobiographer as holding as much interest as the personality of the narrated protagonist, if not more, especially if we agree with Mengel’s belief that autobiographers reveal more about themselves in their narrating present than they do about themselves in their narrated pasts (187).

Obviously, it is through the narrative discourse that we learn about the autobiographer in the present time of his or her narration: it is the narrative discourse that builds and shapes the persona of the autobiographer, or of any first-person narrator, and makes him or her come to life as an individual “paper person.” One of the important contributions this study offers to our appreciation of Dickens’s fiction lies in the closer, more thorough and precise analysis of the “inimitable” voice established in the narrative discourse than has been developed previously, in the third-person fiction as outlined in

Chapter Three above, and especially in the first-person novels. By scrutinizing the discourse tendencies of each of the fictive autobiographers, noting both the resemblances and the differences from third-person “Dickens” that distinguish the voice of each of the first-person narrators as a unique “paper author” in his or her own right, we have achieved significant insights into the psychological depths of the narrating, recollecting David, Esther, and Philip Pirrip that enlarge and improve our understanding of these three imaginary “minds” that Dickens brought to life and inhabited for more than five years in three of his most important novels.

From the evidence in the narrative discourse we have gleaned finer shades of the mature David Copperfield’s character than may be evident to the reader more attentive to David’s *histoire* circumstances than to his persona in narrating present: the egotism and apparently unrecognized snobbery, the defensiveness born of insecurity, the still-evident shame and secret sense of unwarranted guilt, the excessive self-pity, and above all the pain from his traumatic past which he still feels so vividly in the narrating present. In examining Esther Summerson’s discourse we have seen that the irritating “coyness” and seemingly false modesty that many have considered indications of Dickens’s inability to create a successful female heroine and narrator are not weaknesses in Dickens’s capacity to imagine a credible female narrator/protagonist after all, and neither are they strictly a matter of Dickens’s newly recognized brilliance at imitating “womanly writing.” Rather, we have seen that the perceived failings in Esther’s narratorial persona are remarkably faithful to the psychology of someone bearing deep and abiding scars from traumatic abandonment in childhood. The narrating Esther craves praise and approval but is

thoroughly convinced that she is undeserving of praise or admiration; she is afraid to voice her deepest feelings but unable to suppress them despite her rigid control of her emotions; and she is haunted by a such a greater sense of neurotic “guilt in innocence” than David feels that she is almost paralyzed by her terribly low self-esteem. The evidence in Philip Pirrip’s narrative discourse suggests that he is neither haunted nor damaged by his traumatic past as David and Esther are in different degrees, but instead that he accepts responsibility for his own failings from a perspective of greater objectivity, wisdom, and healthy maturity than was possible for either David or Esther.

Of course, the ultimate contention of this study is that the narrative discourse in the three fictive autobiographies offers significant insights into the mind of their creator, Charles Dickens the man, for the narrating David, Esther, and Philip Pirrip are indeed progressive versions of Dickens himself. The gap between his three fictive autobiographers and the actual Charles Dickens is actually a rather small one, most evidently in *Copperfield* since we know that segments of actual autobiography were incorporated into the novel verbatim, and as Dickens’s letters himself establish, so were Micawber and Dora imported more or less directly from the living models of John Dickens and Maria Beadnell. Ever since Forster published his biography of Dickens, the incorporation of the autobiographical fragment into *Copperfield* has had ramifications reaching far beyond that one novel. For one thing, it established for a certainty that Dickens would and did in fact incorporate aspects of his own life into his fiction. More importantly, the revelation that David’s painful experience as a common laborer in childhood was Dickens’s experience as well is generally seen as the key that explains

why Dickens wrote so much of what he did. Especially since Michael Allen's investigation of rent receipts and other documents has established conclusively that Dickens's employment at Warren's lasted at least twelve or thirteen months, not the four or five that some earlier commentators believed, we know that the Warren's episode was indeed substantial enough to have been profoundly traumatic for Dickens. As Allen observes, "The revised length of Charles Dickens' employment at Warren's Blacking demands serious reassessment of this period of his life and the consequential reactions to it. To a twelve-year-old child a period of a year is an eternity; particularly if the end of that time cannot be seen, particularly if it is believed that there may be no end" (103-4). With absolute confidence, we trace what was at the time an unprecedented focus on children in Dickens's fiction, neglected children in particular, to the influence of the Warren's experience. As Peter Coveney points out, Dickens's preoccupation with the sentimentalized image of the pathetic, neglected child was rooted in strongly felt pity for himself in his own childhood, such that "his children become sometimes no more than the accumulated presence of his own self-pity, idealizing the happiness and security he had lost, proving to himself and world at large his subsequent 'victimization.' In his sentimentalized children there seems no doubt that he was creating an image, at once pathetic and idealized, of himself" (159). Edgar Johnson notes that the list of "rejected children, fatherless or motherless, neglected or abandoned, who move through almost of all of Dickens's stories" is long: the most prominent cases besides David, Esther, and Pip are Oliver Twist; Kit Nubbles and Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*; Barnaby Rudge; Smike and the eponymous hero in *Nicholas Nickleby*; Martin Chuzzlewit; Florence and

Paul Dombey; Jo the crossing sweeper and the Jellyby and Pardiggle children in *Bleak House*; Arthur Clennam and the heroine of *Little Dorrit*; the Gradgrind children in *Hard Times*; Magwitch and Estella in *Great Expectations*; and John Harmon, Jenny Wren, and little Johnny in *Our Mutual Friend* (Johnson 684-85). And as Forster was the first to suggest, even Dickens's frequent championing of the poor in his fiction can be traced back to his painful childhood circumstances. Forster says of Dickens's preoccupation with "the very poor and unprosperous" in "their sufferings and strugglings": "They were not his clients whose cause he pleaded with such pathos and humour, and on whose side he got the laughter and tears of all the world, but in some sort his very self" (1: 41). One can only wonder what critics over the years might have made of Dickens's fiction had Forster not written his friend's biography and included the crucial autobiographical fragment. Without knowledge of the Warren's experience, how would we account for the proliferation of orphans and neglected children and of terrible parents; the fascination with crime, criminals, and prisons; and the characters haunted by or frozen in the past?

Knowing what we do about Dickens's life, though, autobiographical interpretations of Dickens's work are on firmer ground than with many, or perhaps most other writers. Dickens did clearly write about *himself* in his fiction. Forster noted that Dickens "seemed to be always the more himself for being somebody else," and as Forster quotes Dickens himself: "Assumption has such charms for me so delightful—I hardly know for how many wild reasons—that I feel a loss of Oh I can't say what exquisite foolery, when I lose a chance of being some one not in the remotest degree like myself" (2: 494-95). Forster and Dickens were speaking specifically of his acting, but the same

sense of being “more himself” when being somebody else certainly applies to his assumption of so many different roles, from small parts—the splendidly comic especially—to large ones in his novels. But while Dickens clearly had a strong “negative capability” in his ability to breathe life into such comic gems as Sairey Gamp, Micawber, Mrs. Jellyby, and Wopsle, the apparent fixation on himself is undeniably strong in the host of abandoned, neglected, and frequently orphaned central characters in his novels, with David, Esther, and Pip clearly at the top of the list.

While the abortive attempt at actual biography is important to our full understanding of Dickens and his fiction, actual autobiography was, as Dickens told Maria Beadnell Winter, too painful for him to continue once he reached the point of his thwarted relationship with her in his youth—at this point in his life’s story he “lost courage and burned the rest” (*Letters 7*: 543-44). In concluding the portion of the actual autobiography that was given to Forster, Dickens said that for many years he would cross the street to avoid the smell of Robert Warren’s warehouse on the Strand and that he could not bear following his old route home down Chandos Street because the memories made him cry even some years after he was married. Dickens closes the fragment, “In my walks at night I have walked there often, since then, and by degrees I have come to write this. It does not seem a tithe of what I might have written, or of what I meant to write” (Forster 1: 39). It is evident that famously reticent as he was even with his own family, Dickens did indeed try to get at what he “meant to write” about his childhood more fully in his fiction, and with most concentrated effort in the three fictive autobiographies. As Anny Sadrin suggests, there is so much autobiography in Dickens’s fiction because even

if he did indeed “lose courage” in the abortive actual autobiography, he seems to have “realized that writing fiction was a better form of therapy than a mere recording of facts and might get him closer to the truth” (“Trappings of Romance” 71). Writing under cover of fiction, Dickens could reveal painful truths and express and explore his deepest fears, thoughts, and feelings without restraint, with no fear of being rejected or viewed as “tainted” by his audience. That Dickens knew quite consciously that he was exploring painful feelings of his own in the tales of trauma in the fictive autobiographies is suggested in the sly author’s inside jokes acknowledging his covert presence in each novel: the manipulation of names and initials resembling his own in *Copperfield*, his suggestive presence in female form under the name Charley in *Bleak House*, and the seemingly gratuitous reference to Warren’s in *Great Expectations* when Joe visits the “Blacking Ware’us” and finds that it did not measure up to his expectations from “its likeness in the red bills at the shop doors” (222).

D. H. Lawrence once said that “One sheds one’s sicknesses in books—repeats and presents again one’s emotions, to be master of them” (90). It is a virtually foregone conclusion that under the protective cover of fiction, Dickens had David tell his own story of neglect and abandonment as an attempt, either conscious or unconscious, at “shedding his sickness” and mastering his feelings about his traumatic past as a form of self-administered therapy. It seems clear that Dickens hoped that by sharing his secret in the only way he could, through his fiction, he would be able to confront his past and work through its problems and thus be able to move forward the better for having unburdened himself. That Dickens recognized the therapeutic value of exorcizing secretly haunting

demons from the past by speaking of them, committing them to paper, is evident in the experience he had dreaming nightly of Mary Hogarth for a full year after she died. As he wrote to Dr. Thomas Stone in 1851:

Recurring dreams which come back almost as certain as the night—unhealthy and morbid species of these visions—should be particularly noticed. Secrecy on the part of the dreamer, as to these illusions, has a remarkable tendency to perpetuate them. I once underwent great affliction in the loss of a very dear young friend. For a year, I dreamed of her, every night—sometimes as living, sometimes as dead, never in any terrible or shocking aspect. As she had been my wife's sister, and had died suddenly in our house, I forebore to allude to these dreams—kept them wholly to myself. At the end of the year, I lay down to sleep, in an inn on a wild Yorkshire moor, covered with snow. As I looked out of the window on the bleak winter prospect before I undressed, I wondered within myself whether the subject would follow me here. It did. Writing home next morning, I mentioned the circumstance, cheerfully, as being curious. The subject immediately departed out of my dreams, and years passed before it returned. (*Letters* 6: 277).

What this intensive study of the narrative discourse in Dickens's three fictive autobiographies offers most importantly is a charting of the progress of Dickens's therapeutic attempts to work through his problems with the demons from his past. By examining the narrative discourse in each of the three fictive autobiographies and drawing reasonable inferences about the personalities of the narrators that their discourse reveals, we are able to trace the progression of Dickens's thinking about himself and his traumatic past in the prime of his maturity, from the mid-point of his career in his mid-thirties to his late forties. I believe the in-depth analysis of the personalities of the three fictive autobiographers, each so obviously a different fictional projection of Dickens himself, offers evidence as substantial and conclusive as we are ever likely to have of Dickens's evolving attitude towards himself and his past at the height of his career.

If Dickens was indeed hopeful of banishing the demons of his past in *Copperfield*, the David Copperfield revealed through his narrative discourse suggests that this first round of therapy was not a final cure. The narrating David's defensiveness, insecurity, and excessive self-pity—and most of all the way his past comes to life so that he effectively *relives* painful experiences as he writes them—suggest that while Dickens may have relieved himself of the burden of the past he and David share by committing it to paper, he was far from achieving cathartic freedom from all the demons that haunted him. Almost certainly more than Dickens intended, the narrating David's discourse suggests that he and Dickens were both still prisoners chained to a traumatic past, mildly scarred by it and definitely still haunted by it. In Esther's narrative in *Bleak House*, the novel that initiates Dickens's so-called "dark period," it appears that Dickens gave vent to the deepest darkness of his own feelings of abandonment and insecurity, transferring the bitterness felt against the father whose failings forced him to common labor to the mother who "betrayed" him by wanting his painful degradation to continue. By exaggerating the feelings of insecurity and guilt that he recognized in himself in the narrating Esther's persona, Dickens seems to have gotten past defensiveness and denial and surrendered to the very depths of the hurt and self-pity that envelope so many of the abandoned and neglected children in his fiction. The clearly different attitude towards his past indicated in Philip Pirrip's discourse—the acceptance of responsibility for his weaknesses and his revised attitude towards his parents—suggests that in *Great Expectations* Dickens was at last able to escape the grip of his traumatic past and to recognize that his parents were not "demons," that the degradation of Warren's was not so terrible after all, and that he

himself was guilty of human weakness and imperfection purely on his own account.

From outrage and self-pity in *Copperfield*, to devastation and debilitation in Esther's narrative in *Bleak House*, and finally to acceptance, confession, and forgiveness in *Great Expectations*, the story of Dickens's life as told in the narrative discourse in these three most autobiographical Dickens novels is in itself a tale of growth and maturation. Dickens did indeed in large measure overcome the trauma of his past between 1850 and 1861, and the evolution of his own character suggested through David's, Esther's, and Philip Pirrip's narrative discourse proves that for the time, at least, in 1860-1861, the therapy of writing the fictive autobiographies was in fact successful.

Works Cited

Works Cited

Works by Charles Dickens:

All citations from letters by Charles Dickens are taken from the Pilgrim edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, general editors Madeline House, Graham Storey, and Kathleen Tillotson. Oxford: Clarendon, 1965-1999.

Barnaby Rudge. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. New York: Oxford UP, 1954 (1841).

Bleak House. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. New York: Oxford UP, 1948 (1853).

“The Couple Who Dote upon their Children.” *Sketches by Boz*. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. New York: Oxford UP, 1957 (1836-1837). 572-76.

The Chimes. In *Christmas Books*. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. New York: Oxford UP, 1954 (1844). 77-154.

David Copperfield. The Clarendon Dickens. Ed. by Nina Burgis. New York: Oxford UP, 1981 (1850).

Dombey and Son. The Clarendon Dickens. Ed. by Alan Horsman. New York: Oxford UP, 1974 (1848).

Great Expectations. The Clarendon Dickens. Ed. by Margaret Cardwell. New York: Oxford UP, 1993 (1861).

Hard Times. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. New York: Oxford UP, 1955 (1854).

The Haunted Man. In *Christmas Books*. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. New York: Oxford UP, 1954 (1848). 314-99.

Little Dorrit. The Clarendon Dickens. Ed. by Harvey Peter Sucksmith. New York: Oxford UP, 1979 (1857).

Martin Chuzzlewit. The Clarendon Dickens. Ed. by Margaret Cardwell. New York: Oxford UP, 1982 (1844).

The Mystery of Edwin Drood. The Clarendon Dickens. Ed. by Margaret Cardwell. London: Oxford UP, 1972 (1870).

Nicholas Nickleby. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. New York: Oxford UP, 1950 (1839).

The Old Curiosity Shop. The Clarendon Dickens. Ed. by Elizabeth M. Brennan. New York: Oxford UP, 1997 (1841).

Oliver Twist. The Clarendon Dickens. Ed. by Kathleen Tillotson. London: Oxford UP, 1966 (1838).

Our Mutual Friend. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. New York: Oxford UP, 1952 (1865).

The Pickwick Papers. The Clarendon Dickens. Ed. by James Kinsley. New York: Oxford UP, 1986 (1837).

A Tale of Two Cities. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. New York: Oxford UP, 1949 (1859).

* * *

Works by Others:

Ackroyd, Peter. *Dickens*. New York: HarperCollins, 1990.

Allen, Michael. *Charles Dickens' Childhood*. New York: St. Martin's, 1988.

Allingham, Philip. "Patterns of Deception in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Great Expectations*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 46.4 (1992): 447-72.

Alter, Robert. *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of California P, 1975.

The American Heritage Dictionary. 3rd ed. CD-ROM. Version 3.6. SoftKey International, 1994.

Anon. "Charles Dickens and *David Copperfield*." Review. *Fraser's Magazine* December 1850. Rpt. in *Dickensiana: A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to Charles Dickens and His Writings*. Ed. by Fred. G. Kitton. London: George Redway, 1886. 104-5.

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated by S. H. Butcher. New York: Hill and Wang, 1961.

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. Treasury of World Masterpieces. London: Octopus Books, 1982 (1813).

- Axton, William. "The Trouble with Esther." *Modern Language Quarterly* 26 (1965): 545-57.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.
- Barthes, Roland. "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives." *Image—Music—Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. 79-124.
- Beach, Joseph Warren. *The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960 (1932).
- Benveniste, Emile. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek. Coral Gables, Florida: U of Miami P, 1971.
- Blin, Georges. *Stendhal at les problèmes du roman*. Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1954.
- Boege, Frederick W. "Point of View in Dickens." *PMLA* 65 (1950): 90-105.
- Booth, Wayne. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961.
- Briganti, Chiara. "The Monstrous Actress: Esther Summerson's Spectral Name." *Dickens Studies Annual* 19 (1990): 205-30.
- Brimley, George. "[Review of *Bleak House*]." *Spectator* September 24, 1853: 923-25. Rpt. in *Bleak House*. Norton Critical Edition. Ed. by George Ford and Sylvère Monod. New York: Norton, 1977. 933-37.
- Brombert, Victor. *Stendhal et la voie oblique: l'auteur devant son monde romanesque*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1954.
- Brontë, Charlotte. "To Mr. George Smith." March 11, 1852. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. By Elizabeth Gaskell. *The Life and Works of the Sisters Brontë*. Vol. 7. New York: AMS Press, 1973. 577-78n.
- Brook, George L. *The Language of Dickens*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1970.
- Brown, Janet H. "The Narrator's Role in *David Copperfield*." *Dickens Studies Annual* 2 (1972): 197-207.

- Bryan, George B. and Wolfgang Mieder. *The Proverbial Charles Dickens: An Index to Proverbs in the Works of Charles Dickens*. Vol. 4 in Dickens' Universe. New York: Peter Lang, 1997.
- Buckley, Jerome. "Dickens, David and Pip." *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1974. 28-62.
- . "The Identity of David Copperfield." *Victorian Literature and Society: Essays Presented to Richard D. Altick*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1984. 225-39.
- Buckton, Oliver S. "'The Reader Whom I Love': Homoerotic Secrets in *DC*." *ELH* 64.1 (1997): 189-222.
- Carr, Jean Ferguson. "Dickens and Autobiography: A Wild Beast and his Keeper." *ELH* 52.2 (1985): 447-69.
- Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. Trans. by Samuel Putnam. New York: Random House, 1949.
- "'Champion of England'"—Tom Cribb." *The Cyber Boxing Zone*. August 1, 2000. <<http://www.cyberboxingzone.com/boxing/cribb.htm>>
- Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978.
- Collins, Philip. "Some Narrative Devices in *Bleak House*." *Dickens Studies Annual* 19 (1990): 125-46.
- Columbus, Claudette Kemper. "The (Un)Lettered Ensemble: What Charley Does Not Learn about Writing in *Bleak House*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 28.4 (1988): 609-23.
- Coveney, Peter. *The Image of Childhood: The Individual and society: a Study of the Theme in English Literature*. Baltimore: Penguin, 1967.
- Crowley, James P. "Pip's Spiritual Exercise: The Meditative Mode in Dickens' *Great Expectations*." *Renascence: Essays on Value in Literature* 46.2 (1994): 133-43.
- Davis, Earle R. *The Flint and the Flame: The Artistry of Charles Dickens*. Columbia, Missouri: U of Missouri P, 1963.
- Dessner, Lawrence Jay. "*Great Expectations*: 'the ghost of a man's own father.'" *PMLA* 91 (1976): 436-49.

- Dever, Carolyn. "Broken Mirror, Broken Words: Autobiography, Prosopopeia, and the Dead Mother in *Bleak House*." *Studies in the Novel* 27.1 (1995): 42-62.
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *Notes from the Underground. Great Short Works of Fyodor Dostoevsky*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968 (1864). 261-377.
- Ellis, Geoffrey U. *Twilight on Parnassus: A Survey of Post-War Fiction and Pre-War Criticism*. London: M. Joseph, 1939.
- Felber, Lynette. "'Delightfully Irregular': Esther's Nascent *écriture féminine* in *Bleak House*." *Victorian Newsletter* 85 (1994): 13-20.
- Fielding, Henry. *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*. Ed. by Martin Battestin and Fredson Bowers. Wesleyan UP, 1975.
- Fielding, K. J. "Dickens and the Past: The Novelist of Memory." *Experience in the Novel*. Ed. by Roy H. Pearce. New York: Columbia UP, 1968. 107-31.
- Fields, James T. "Dickens." *Yesterdays with Authors*. Boston: James R. Osgood, 1872. 207-8, 224-26, 234-35. Rpt. in the Norton Critical Edition of *Great Expectations*. Ed. by Edgar Rosenberg. New York: Norton, 1999. 567-69.
- Flaubert, Gustave. *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, 1830-1857*. Selected, edited, and translated by Francis Steegmuller. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1980.
- . *Madame Bovary*. Norton Critical edition. Trans. by Paul De Man. New York: Norton, 1965.
- . *The Selected Letters of Gustave Flaubert*. Trans. and ed., Francis Steegmuller. Freeport, New York: Books for Library Presses, 1971.
- Ford, George H. *Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel-Criticism Since 1836*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1955.
- . *The Dickens Critics*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1972.
- Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel [and Related Writings]*. The Abinger Edition of E. M. Forster 12. Ed by Oliver Stallybrass. London: Edward Arnold, 1974 (1927).
- Forster, John. *The Life of Charles Dickens*. 2 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900 (1874).

- Frazer, John. "The Character of Esther and the Narrative Structure of *Bleak House*." *Studies in the Novel* 17.3 (1985): 227-40.
- Friedman, Norman. "Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept." *PMLA* 70 (1955): 1160-84.
- Galbraith, Mary. "Pip as 'Infant Tongue' and as Adult Narrator in Chapter One of *Great Expectations*." *Infant Tongues: The Voice of the Child in Literature*. Ed. by Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A. Heberle, and Naomi Sokoloff. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1994. 123-41.
- Garis, Robert. *The Dickens Theatre: A Reassessment of the Novels*. London: Oxford UP, 1965.
- Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. New York: Cornell UP, 1980.
- . *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1988.
- . "Time and Narrative in *A la recherche du temps perdu*." Translated by Paul de Man. *Aspects of Narrative: Selected papers from the English Institute*. Ed. by J. Hillis Miller. New York: Columbia UP, 1971. 93-118.
- Gervais, David. "The Prose and Poetry of *Great Expectations*." *Dickens Studies Annual* 13 (1984): 85-114.
- Gilmour, Robin. "Memory in *David Copperfield*." *The Dickensian* 71 (1972): 30-42.
- Gissing, George. *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*. New York: Haskell House, 1974 (1903).
- Gold, Joseph. *Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1972.
- Golden, Morris. *Dickens Imagining Himself: Six Novel Encounters with a Changing World*. Lanham, MD, New York and London: UP of America, 1992.
- Goodman, Marcia Renee. "'I'll Follow the Other': Tracing the (M)other in *Bleak House*." *Dickens Studies Annual* 19 (1990): 147-67.

- Graver, Suzanne. "Writing in a 'Womanly' Way and the Double Vision of *Bleak House*." *Dickens Quarterly* 4 (1987): 3-15.
- Greenwood, Grace. "n.t." *The New York Daily Tribune*. July 5, 1870. 6.
- Guerard, Albert J. *Triumph of the Novel: Dickens, Dostoevsky, Faulkner*. New York: Oxford UP, 1976.
- Hannon, Patrice. "The Aesthetics of Humour in *Great Expectations*." *The Dickensian* 9.2. (1996): 91-105.
- Hardy, Barbara. *Tellers and Listeners: The Narrative Imagination*. London: Athlone P (U of London), 1975.
- Harvey, W. J. *Character and the Novel*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1965.
- Hayman, David. *Ulysses: The Mechanics of Meaning*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968 (1940).
- . *The Old Man and the Sea*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952.
- Hirsch, Gordon D. "A Psychoanalytic Rereading of *David Copperfield*." *The Victorian Newsletter* 58 (1980): 1-5.
- Hochman, Baruch, and Ilja Wachs. *Dickens: The Orphan Condition*. London: Associated University Presses, 1999.
- Holbrook, David. *Charles Dickens and the Image of Woman*. New York: New York UP, 1993.
- Hopkins, Sandra. "'Wooman, Lovely Wooman': Four Dickens Heroines and the Critics." *Problems for Feminist Criticism*. Ed. by Sally Minogue. London: Routledge, 1990. 109-44.
- Hornback, Bert. "The Narrator of *Bleak House*." *Dickens Quarterly* 16.1 (1999): 3-12.
- . "The Other Portion of *Bleak House*." *The Changing World of Charles Dickens*. Ed. by Robert Giddings. London; Totowa, NJ : Vision; Barnes & Noble, 1983. 180-95.

- Horne, Richard H. *A New Spirit of the Age*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844.
- Houston, Gail Turley. "'Pip' and 'Property': The (Re)Production of the Self in *Great Expectations*." *Studies in the Novel* 24.1 (1992): 13-25.
- Jaffe, Audrey. *Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and the Subject of Omniscience*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1991.
- James, Henry. *The Ambassadors*. Second Norton Critical Edition. Ed. by S. P. Rosenbaum. New York: W. W. Norton, 1994.
- . "The Art of Fiction." *Tales of Henry James*. Norton Critical Edition. Ed. by Christoff Wegelin. New York: Norton, 1984. 345-62.
- Johnson, Edgar. *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*. 2 vols. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952.
- Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Ed. by Chester G. Anderson. New York: Viking, 1968.
- Kaplan, Fred. *Dickens: A Biography*. New York, William Morrow, 1988.
- Kearns, Michael. "'But I Cried Very Much': Esther Summerson as Narrator." *Dickens Quarterly* 1.4 (1984): 121-29.
- Kennedy, Valerie. "Bleak House: More Trouble with Esther?" *Journal of Women's Studies in Literature* 1 (1979): 330-47.
- Lanser, Susan. *The Narrative Act*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1981.
- Lawrence, D. H. *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*. Vol. 2 (1913-1916). Ed. by George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton. London: Cambridge UP, 1981.
- Leacock, Stephen. *Charles Dickens: His Life and Work*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Doran, 1934.
- Leavis, L. R. "The Dramatic Narrator in *Great Expectations*." *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 68.3 (1987): 236-48.
- Linehan, Thomas. "Parallel Lives: The Past and Self-Retribution in *Bleak House*." *Studies in the Novel* 20.2 (1988): 131-50.
- Lubbock, Percy. *The Craft of Fiction*. New York: Viking, 1957 (1921).

- Manning, Sylvia. "David Copperfield and Scheherazada: The Necessity of Narrative." *Studies in the Novel* 14.4 (1982): 327-36.
- Martin, Wallace. *Recent Theories of Narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986.
- Meckier, Jerome. "Dating the Action in *Great Expectations*: A New Chronology." *Dickens Studies Annual* 21 (1992): 157-94.
- Miller, J. Hillis. "Dickens's *Bleak House*." *Charles Dickens*. Ed. by Steven Connor. London and New York: Longman, 1996. 59-75.
- . "The Interpretive Dance in *Bleak House*." *Modern Critical Interpretations: Charles Dickens's Bleak House*. Ed. by Harold Bloom. New York: Cheasea House, 1987. 13-36.
- Monod, Sylvère. *Dickens the Novelist*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1968.
- Moseley, Merritt. "The Ontology of Esther's Narrative in *Bleak House*." *South Atlantic Review* 50.2 (1985): 35-46.
- Moynahan, Julian. "The Hero's Guilt: The Case of *Great Expectations*." *Victorian Literature: Selected Essays*. Ed. by Robert O. Preyer. New York: Harper and Row, 1967. 126-45.
- Mundhenk, Rosemary. "*David Copperfield* and 'The Oppression of Remembrance.'" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 29.3 (1987): 323-41.
- Needham, Gwendolyn B. "The Undisciplined Heart of David Copperfield." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 9.2 (1954): 81-107.
- Newlin, George. *Everyone in Dickens*. 3 vols. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1995.
- Partlow, Robert B., Jr. "The Moving I: A Study of Point of View in *Great Expectations*." *College English* 23 (1961): 122-31.
- Pearlman, E[lihu]. "Inversion in *Great Expectations*." *Dickens Studies Annual* 7 (1980): 190-202.
- Peltason, Timothy. "Esther's Will." *ELH* 59.3 (1992): 671-91.
- Pettersson, Torsten. "The Maturity of David Copperfield." *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 70.1 (1989): 63-74.

- Plato. *The Republic*. Vol. 1. Translated by Paul Shorey. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1963.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Tell-Tale Heart." *Edgar Allan Poe: The Complete Stories*. New York: Knopf, 1992. 657-61.
- Rahv, Philip. "Introduction." *Selected Stories of Franz Kafka*. By Franz Kafka. Modern Library Edition. Trans. by Willa and Edwin Muir. New York: Random House, 1952. vii-xxii.
- Rawlins, Jack. "Great Expiations: Dickens and the Betrayal of the Child." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 23.4 (1983): 667-683.
- Ron, Moshe. "Autobiographical Narration and Formal Closure in *Great Expectations*." *Hebrew University Studies in Literature* 5 (1977): 37-66.
- Rosso, Martha. "Dickens and Esther." *The Dickensian* 65 (1969): 90-94.
- Sadoff, Dianne F. "The Dead Father: *Barnaby Rudge*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*." *Papers on Language and Literature* 18.1 (1982): 36-57.
- Sadrin, Anny. "Charlotte Dickens: The Female Narrator of *Bleak House*." *Dickens Quarterly* 9.2 (1992): 47-57.
- . "The Trappings of Romance in *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*." *Dickens Quarterly* 14.2 (1997): 69-91.
- Saintsbury, George. "Dickens." *The Cambridge History of English Literature*. Vol. 13. Ed. by Sir A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller. London: Cambridge UP, 1932. 303-39.
- Schad, S. J. "The I and You of Time: Rhetoric and History in Dickens." *ELH* 56.2 (Summer 1989): 423-38.
- Senf, Carol. "*Bleak House*: Dickens, Esther, and the Androgynous Mind." *Victorian Newsletter* 64 (1983): 21-27.
- Shaw, George Bernard. "Introduction to *Great Expectations*." *Great Expectations*. Norton Critical Edition. Ed. by Edgar Rosenberg. New York and London: Norton, 1999. 631-41.
- Shelston, Alan. "Past and Present in *David Copperfield*." *Critical Quarterly* 27.3 (1985): 17-33.

- Shucksburgh, Sir John. Introduction. *A Tale of Two Cities*. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens. New York: Oxford UP, 1949 (1859). v-xii.
- Simon, Irene. "David Copperfield: A Kunstlerroman?" *Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and the English Language (New Series)* 43.169 (1992): 40-56.
- Sipe, Samuel. "Memory and Confession in *Great Expectations*." *Essays in Literature* 2 (1975): 53-64.
- Slater, Michael. *Dickens and Women*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1983.
- Smith, Grahame. "Suppressing Narratives: Childhood and Empire in *The Uncommercial Traveller* and *Great Expectations*." *Dickens and the Children of Empire*. Ed. by Wendy S. Jacobson. New York: Palgrave, 2000. 43-53.
- Spilka, Mark. *Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation*. London: Dennis Dobson, 1963.
- Stange, G. Robert "Expectations Well Lost: Dickens' Fable for His Time." *College English* 16 (1954): 9-17.
- Stanzel, Franz. *A Theory of Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.
- Staples, Leslie C. "Some Early Memories of the Dickens Fellowship." *The Dickensian* 73 (1977): 132-37.
- Sterne, Laurence. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*. Ed. by Ian Watt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.
- Stewart, Garrett. *Dickens and the Trials of Imagination*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1974.
- Stone, Harry. *Dickens and the Invisible World*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana UP, 1979.
- Sucksmith, Harvey Peter. *The Narrative Art of Charles Dickens*. Clarendon: Oxford UP, 1970.
- Sweeney, Patricia Runk. "Mr. House, Mr. Thackeray & Mr. Pirrip: The Question of Snobbery in *Great Expectations*." *The Dickensian* 64 (1968): 55-63.

- Talon, Henri. "Space, Time, and Memory in *Great Expectations*." *Dickens Studies Annual* 3 (1974): 122-33.
- Thackeray, William Makepeace. *Vanity Fair*. Modern Library College Edition. New York: Random House, 1950 (1848).
- . *Letters of Thackeray to Mrs. Brookfield. The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*. Vol. 32. Kensington ed. New York: Scribner, 1903-4. 72-75.
- Thurin, Susan Schoenbauer. "To Be Brought Up 'By Hand.'" *Victorian Newsletter* 64 (fall 1983): 27-29.
- Tillotson, Kathleen. *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*. London: Oxford UP, 1954.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. "The Categories of Literary Narrative." Translated by Joseph Kestner. *Papers on Language and Literature* 16 (1980): 3-36.
- Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Mississippi Writings*. New York: Viking, 1982 (1885). 617-912.
- Vann, J. Don. *Victorian Novels in Serial*. New York: MLA, 1985.
- Watkins, Gwen. *Dickens in Search of Himself: Recurrent Themes and Characters in the Works of Charles Dickens*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1987.
- Weiser, Irwin. "Reformed, But Unrewarded: Pip's Progress." *Dickens Studies Newsletter* 14.4 (1983): 143-145.
- Welsh, Alexander. *From Copyright to Copperfield: The Identity of Dickens*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1987.
- Westburg, Barry. *The Confessional Fictions of Charles Dickens*. Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois UP, 1977.
- Wheeler, Michael. *The Art of Allusion in Victorian Fiction*. New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979.
- Wilson, Edmund. "The Two Scrooges." *The Wound and the Bow*. London: Methuen, 1941. 1-93.
- Wilt, Judith. "Confusion and Consciousness in Dickens's Esther." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 32 (1977): 285-309.

Zwerdling, Alex. "Esther Summerson Rehabilitated." *PMLA* 88 (1973): 429-39.

Appendix

Appendix

Blin and Brombert, in independent studies of the “author’s interventions” in the works of Stendhal, offered the first and in many respects still the most thorough analysis of easily recognizable forms of authorial intrusion. In *Stendhal et les problèmes du roman*, Blin describes three primary orders of authorial intervention: 1) those supporting the ostensible realism of fictional texts through the pretense that the author/narrator is the editor of “real” texts; 2) those providing “stage management,” facilitating transition between different strands of the narrative across space and time and indicating omissions or suppressions of superfluous detail; and 3) those in which the authorial narrator “chats” with the reader and offers commentary upon the characters and their actions (217). While Blin’s first two categories are limited in scope, the third, “chatty” commentary, encompasses a great variety of different types of intrusive discourse. In this respect, Blin signals the general trend of many critics to lump together widely different sorts of intrusion in the “catchall category often called ‘commentary’” (Martin 131).

Brombert identifies authorial intrusions less by narrative function and more by grammatical and syntactical markings. For Brombert, the surest signs of intrusion are shifts of tense from the past of *historical* narration to the present or conditional. (Brombert’s *Stendhal et la voie oblique: l’auteur devant son monde romanesque* predates Benveniste’s description of *discours* in *Problems in General Linguistics* by nearly two decades.) Brombert also notes specific types of telltale phrasing that indicate authorial intrusion: exclamatory phrases, interrogative phrases, and certain demonstrative phrases

conveying authorial judgment of the characters and their actions; “confessional” or apologetic phrases which condition the reader’s view of the characters’ actions as either sincerely or ironically regrettable; and “syntactically submerged” parenthetical digressions of commentary within lengthy sentences (13-49). Brombert distinguishes between a number of different types of “chatty commentary” that Blin identifies broadly, but Blin and Brombert’s classifications together are still far from comprehensive—the more so, naturally, since their studies focus primarily on Stendhal.

Genette considers authorial intrusions more generally when he classifies narratorial speech according to five primary functions of the narrator. The first of these functions, the only one of the five that does not involve authorial intrusion, is the “properly *narrative function*” of delivering the fundamental *histoire* story in simple or straightforward narration. The second of the narrator’s functions Genette calls the “*directing function*,” indicated by the narrator’s “metanarrative” marking of the text’s internal organization with “stage directions” facilitating transitions and temporal ellipses in the narrative (Blin’s “directing indications”). The third function, the *function of communication*, involves the *narrating situation* itself, making and maintaining direct, self-conscious contact between narrator and narratee. The last two functions Genette labels *testimonial* and *ideological*, the former referring to the narrator’s attestations of the “truth” of the information imparted, and the latter to didactic commentary on the action related in the narrative (*Narrative Discourse* 255-56). Genette’s division of the narrator’s functions provides a fairly comprehensive framework, certainly, but his system still makes only broad distinctions between the different types of discourse serving the

“communicating” and “testimonial” functions, and especially the wide variety of “ideological” functions.

In *Story and Discourse* Chatman refines a number of the broader distinctions made by Blin and Genette. Chatman considers “set descriptions” and “temporal and spatial summaries” signs of “overt narration,” or indications of the self-conscious narrator’s intrusion into the narrative. He also identifies intrusion in authorial summary of the “quality of an existent [character or element of setting] or event” and “reports of what characters did not think or say” (219-25). Chatman is particularly helpful in distinguishing between different types of explicit authorial commentary. The four primary types of explicit comments Chatman outlines are 1) interpretation or explanation of story elements, 2) judgment conveyed in “moral or other value opinions,” 3) generalizations making reference to ““universal truths’ or actual historical facts,” and 4) self-conscious comments on the narrative process or discourse itself (228). Admittedly, much of Chatman’s analysis reiterates and expands upon distinctions made first by Barthes, Todorov, and Genette, but the focus of Chatman’s discussion of “overt versus covert narrators” is more pointedly and exhaustively classificatory than Genette’s, and he does indeed make a number of important and original fine distinctions which I follow.

Vita

Arthur Larry Rogers II, also known as “Chip,” was born in Durham, North Carolina July 21, 1962. In childhood he lived in Spartanburg, South Carolina; Beltsville, Maryland; Dallas, Texas; and Claygate, Surrey, England before his family settled in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1974, where he attended Charlotte Country Day School until he graduated in 1980. In 1981 Chip matriculated at Duke University, where he received a B.A. in English in 1985. He began taking graduate courses at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, in 1988 and received an M.A. in English from UNCC in 1992. Chip entered into doctoral studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1993 and received the Ph.D. in May 2002. He currently resides in Charleston, South Carolina and teaches in the English Department at the College of Charleston.