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FROM QUEEN CAROLINE TO LADY DEDLOCK: DICKENS AND THE POPULAR RADICAL IMAGINATION

By Sally Ledger

ON AN AUTUMN DAY IN 1842, William Hone lay dying. He was by now an obscure figure, but through the services of an old friend, George Cruikshank, he sent a request to Charles Dickens that he might shake his hand before he died. The famous novelist agreed to the request, and for a brief moment Dickens, Cruikshank, and William Hone came together in Hone's shabby London home. The meeting apparently meant little to Dickens who, subsequently attending Hone's funeral, recounted with comic viciousness Cruikshank's histrionics as his old friend was laid to rest. Writing to an American friend, Cornelius Felton, Dickens described how he found himself "almost sobbing with laughter at the funereal absurdities of George Cruikshank and others" (Ackroyd 407). The encounter between Dickens, Cruikshank, and Hone in 1842 is a little-known but with hindsight a significant convergence; for despite Dickens's seeming disregard for the ailing and rather threadbare old bookseller, the deathbed tableau crystallizes an important and much overlooked connection between Dickens's writings and an earlier popular radical tradition.¹

Who was this man whose death Dickens exploited as good comic matter? And what was the exact nature of his relationship to Dickens and his work? Born in 1780, in the early nineteenth century William Hone, a radical pamphleteer and bookseller, had for a brief spell wreaked political havoc with his satirical attacks on George the Fourth, his government, the clerisy, and the corrupt legislature that he saw all around him in Regency England.² Hone's satires form an important part of a tradition of popular radical culture in the nineteenth century to which Dickens's novels and journalism owe a more considerable debt than has yet been recognised.³ From the nineteenth- through to the twenty-first century much has been made of Dickens's debt to Smollett and Fielding, his boyhood heroes. The *London and Westminster Review's* reflection in 1837 that "The renown of Fielding and of Smollett is that to which [Dickens] should aspire, and labour to emulate, and, if possible, to surpass" ("The Works of Charles Dickens" 213) has been echoed by a succession of critics across two centuries, with Lyn Pykett, most recently, once more identifying Smollett and Fielding as perhaps Dickens's most important antecedents.⁴ Nods have even been made towards Juvenal and the Augustans in creating a satirical genealogy for Dickens's writings, with Sylvia Manning claiming that "there is good evidence for Dickens's knowledge of Juvenal" (Manning 234). Dickens's classical and middle-class novelistic satirical antecedents have been much documented, and

doubtless he would have approved of this. Far too little, by contrast, has been made of the relationship between Dickens and the popular radical culture of the early nineteenth century. My aim here is to begin to reveal the extent of this hitherto more or less occluded relationship.

In establishing a more popular and radical genealogy for Dickens this essay seeks also to retrieve from the twentieth-century poststructuralist legacy a more materialist political account of his fiction than has generally been attempted in the last twenty years.⁵ That Dickens was a radical political writer on the side of the poor and the dispossessed was blazingly clear to his contemporaries and to many critics in the first half of the twentieth century.⁶ Most subsequent critics, though, have followed Humphry House's 1941 evaluation of Dickens as an essentially middle-class writer committed to middle-class values. Even John Lucas, one of the few recent critics to have considered the contemporary political status of Dickens's fiction and journalism, places him firmly within a *middle-class* tradition of radical writers and publishers, positioning W. J. Fox, William Howitt, and Percy Bysshe Shelley as Dickens's radical antecedents. My project in this essay is to propose an altogether less respectable, more truly disruptive, more *popular* radical genealogy.

Dickens, like Hone and Cruikshank before him, was able to negotiate and frequently to transcend the boundaries between popular and radical culture in a way that virtually no other mid-nineteenth century writer was able to do; it is to his less acclaimed popular radical forbears that he owes this achievement. As an inheritor of the popular radical cultural networks of the early nineteenth century Dickens acted as a cultural bridge between, on the one hand, an older, eighteenth-century political conception of the People; and, on the other hand, a distinctly mid-nineteenth century, modern conception of a mass-market "populace" that had been created by the rise of the commercial newspaper press during Dickens's formative years as a journalist and a novelist. Moving between these twin conceptions of the People (a political entity) and the (mass-market) populace (a commercial entity), Dickens was able to politicize the latter to an extent unrivalled in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷

Dickens's project as a writer needs to be understood as the culminating point of a network of popular and radical cultural traditions that stretched from the late eighteenth century through to the last throes of Chartism in 1858. His fiction draws on a tradition of radical satire that began with Thomas Spence and John Wilkes in the late eighteenth century and which flourished in the 1810s in the popular radical pamphlets produced and circulated by William Hone and George Cruikshank. The Prince Regent's perceived marital outrages against Queen Caroline once he was crowned King, and the massacre of peacefully demonstrating men, women, and children in Manchester's St. Peter's Fields, were the two main political flashpoints of the Regency years, giving rise to what E. P. Thompson has described as the "heroic age of popular radicalism" (693). William Hone and George Cruikshank's republican, anti-government, and anti-clerical satires were the most widely circulated and influential radical pamphlets of the period 1815–1821 (Wood 3). During these six years Hone produced 175 radical pamphlets, his satires both supported and shaped by Cruikshank's striking political caricatures. Hone and Cruikshank's pamphlets grew out of eighteenth-century popular almanacs, press advertisements, children's books, chapbooks, nursery rhymes, showman's notices, and playbills (Wood 2–3), a heterogeneous popular cultural tradition to which Dickens would later owe a substantial debt.

If Dickens's synthesis of popular and radical cultural traditions had its roots in early nineteenth-century popular radicalism, then so too did his ability to transcend the high culture/low culture divide. For in the Regency years the demarcation between high and

low culture had not yet been set in stone, with satire and parody in particular equally the tools of both.

The dominant rhetorical strategy of Hone and Cruikshank's radical pamphlets was satirical. Equally, though, radical pamphleteers, essayists, and writers of ballads in the Regency period deployed a melodramatic mode of writing in their responses to the "Queen Caroline Affair" and to "Peterloo."⁸ The satirical vein of Hone's *The Political House that Jack Built* (1819), "*Non Mi Ricordo!*" or *Cross-Examination Extraordinary* (1820), *The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder* (1820), and *The Political Showman – At Home!* (1821), contrasts with the melodramatic coloring of other popular pamphlets of the period such as Hone's own *The Green Bag: A Dainty Dish to Set Before a King: A Ballad of the Nineteenth Century* (1820), James Catnach's *The Woes of Caroline* (1820), and "A Wild Irishwoman's" *The Magic Lantern, or, Green Bag Plot Laid Open* (1820), all of which cast Caroline as a melodramatic heroine, wrongly accused of adultery and bravely crossing the English Channel to face her accusers and prove her innocence in a show trial. Texts such as these are the product of a melodramatic mode of writing which, borne of the French revolutionary years, would eventually dominate the aesthetic vocabularies of the first half of the nineteenth century. Early nineteenth-century radical melodrama is, without doubt, as important an influence on Dickens as the radical satirical trajectory in his writings: both will be examined in this essay.

In December 1817, William Hone was tried and cleared for seditious blasphemy following the publication of his political parodies on the Catechism and the Litany. The trials themselves, which Hone published in full, became the early nineteenth-century equivalent of a best seller. But Hone achieved even greater fame and notoriety two years later with his political pamphlet, *The Political House that Jack Built*, published in December 1819 and illustrated by the young George Cruikshank. The pamphlet reached a large popular audience, running to at least 18 editions, and setting the tone for a huge number of equally republican and politically subversive imitations. Following hard on the Peterloo Massacre of August 1819, Hone and Cruikshank's pamphlet attacks the ageing Dandy, the Prince Regent; it criticizes the Yeoman Cavalry that murdered men, women and children in St. Peter's Fields in Manchester; and, not least, it reserves especial scorn for the so-called clerical magistrate who, ordained as a minister of the church, doubles up as a civil magistrate, belying the clerisy's declared disinterest in worldly affairs.

Hone's repeated satirical attacks on the legislature in his popular pamphlets are echoed a generation later in Dickens's lampooning of the law and its functionaries: the Serjeants-at-Law, Buzfuz and Snubbin, and Magistrate Nupkins in *The Pickwick Papers*; the "renowned Mr. Fang," the Magistrate in *Oliver Twist*; the pompous and deaf Justice Stareleigh in *Pickwick*; Alderman Cute in *The Chimes*; and Mr. Stryver, the Barrister, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, to name but a few. Dickens's satirical assault on legal institutions reaches its apotheosis in *Bleak House* with the all-consuming rottenness and waste of Chancery and its parasitic hangers-on. Less numerous but no less hard-hitting are Dickens's clerical satires: Stiggins, the venial and hypocritical nonconformist minister in *Pickwick*, or Chadband, the overfed and pompous man of the church in *Bleak House*.

Less interested than William Hone in the monarchy as a satirical object, Dickens none the less shared his republicanism. His *A Child's History of England*, serialized in *Household Words* between January 1851 and December 1853, is, as John Lucas has noted, essentially a republican account of England, peopled with cruel and tyrannical monarchs and ending in 1688 in praise of Cromwell. And although republican satire is rare in Dickens's fiction, he

nonetheless takes an effective side-swipe at the Regency in the figure of Old Turveydrop, the dancing master in *Bleak House* who christens his son “Prince” as an act of homage to his hero, the Prince Regent, whom he adulates on account of his “Department.”

The influence of William Hone and early nineteenth-century popular and radical culture is strongly present in Dickens’s first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, not least in the central comic episode, the set piece trial scene, Bardell *versus* Pickwick. A longstanding popular literary tradition of Mock Trials, established in the seventeenth century, reached a high watermark in the Regency period, and was widely deployed by radicals such as William Hone and Thomas Wooler.⁹ Whilst it is undoubtedly true that Dickens was partly inspired in his treatment of Bardell and Pickwick by the farcical proceedings of the Caroline Norton and Lord Melbourne adultery case, which he had reported for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1836, it seems likely, too, that this longer tradition of mock trials also echoes significantly in this, Dickens’s first novel. One of William Hone’s most popular and successful trial parodies was, like the Bardell *versus* Pickwick case, concerned with the perfidities of the marriage relationship. Hone’s massively popular “*Non Mi Ricordo!*” or, *Cross-Examination Extraordinary*, a trial parody that ran to at least 26 editions in its first year, was written at the height of the so-called “Queen Caroline Affair.”¹⁰ Cast off by her husband, the Prince Regent, and sent into exile in 1814, Queen Caroline had returned to England in June 1820 to “demand her rights as Queen and to contest George [IV]’s demands for divorce, and accusations of adultery” (Wood 149). Her cause was enthusiastically espoused by the entire popular radical front in England, which delightedly defended Caroline in a series of mock trials. George IV had refused to appear in court, so pamphleteers such as Hone themselves put the King in the dock. In Hone’s “*Non Mi Ricordo!*”, both the notoriously unreliable Italian witness, Signor Majocchi, who claimed to have knowledge of Caroline’s love affairs, and King George himself, merge in the figure of a shifty and evidently dishonest prosecution witness. In Hone’s mock trial, the witness, like the Italian witness in the actual court case against Queen Caroline, answers “*Non mi ricordo!*” (“I don’t recollect”) to any question that he would prefer not to answer. The witness’s frequent and increasingly blustering repetition of the phrase leads to a comic revelation of truths that the King had rather kept secret:

How many wives does *your* Church allow you?

Non mi ricordo.

How many have you had since you separated from your own?

Non mi ricordo.

Are you a member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice? Yes (*with great energy*)

The Cross-examining Counsel said that the Interpreter had materially altered the sense of the last question; he had in fact asked, if the Witness was a Member of the Society for the suppression of *Wives* (*a loud laugh*) which Witness had eagerly answered in the affirmative. (Hone, “*Non Mi Ricordo!*” 199–200)

The semantic obfuscations and the occlusion of truth in a court of law that Hone’s and other mock trials of the Regency period attack are vividly re-written in *The Pickwick Papers* in Serjeant Buzfuz’s deliberate muddying of the water in his cross-examination of the hapless Mr. Winkle, Mr. Pickwick’s friend and fellow Pickwickian. Buzfuz’s interrogation of the well-meaning but hapless Mr. Winkle sets out deliberately to obscure rather than to reveal the truth, the serjeant-at-law skillfully deploying legal jargon to maneuver the unpractised Winkle into implicating Mr. Pickwick with the lovelorn Mrs. Bardell. In recounting the scene where he

had come across Mrs. Bardell swooning in Mr. Pickwick's arms, poor Winkle recounts that:

"I heard him call Mrs. Bardell a good creature, and I heard him ask her to compose herself, for what a situation it was, if any body should come, or words to that effect."

Serjeant Buzfuz legalistically re-scripts Winkle's testimony:

"Now Mr. Winkle. . . Will you undertake to swear that Mr. Pickwick, the defendant, did not say on the occasion in question, 'My dear Mrs. Bardell, you're a good creature; compose yourself to this situation, for to this situation you must come', or words to *that* effect?"

"I – I didn't understand him so, certainly," said Mr. Winkle, astounded at this ingenious dove tailing of the few words he had heard. . . .

". . . you will not swear that Pickwick did not make use of the expressions I have quoted? I understand that?" (*Pickwick* 470; ch. 34)

The ingenuous Mr. Winkle is by now completely defeated by Buzfuz's double negatives.

Hone's "*Non Mi Ricordo!*" also prefigures Dickens's trial set piece in its use of nicknames, a literary device favored by both writers: Dickens's Buzfuz, Phunky, Dodson, and Fogg are anticipated in Hone's legal parody by Twister, Lord Bathos, Lord Ratstail, the hungry Lord Le Cuisinier, and sleazy Marquis Boudoir.

It is Sam Weller's carnivalesque disruption of the legal process that is central to, and the most memorable part of, the Bardell *versus* Pickwick trial in chapter 34 of *The Pickwick Papers*. Sam comically mirrors and hurls back at Serjeant Buzfuz the Barrister's insolent interrogations, thereby radically undermining the authority of the court. As the cross-examination of Sam Weller proceeds, Sam gradually reduces the court to laughter, raising a smile even from the pompous and deaf Justice Stareleigh. Buzfuz hectoringly demands of Sam why, whilst standing in the passage, he did not see what was going on between Mr. Pickwick and Mrs. Bardell:

"Now attend . . . You were in the passage, and yet saw nothing of what was going forward. Have you a pair of eyes?"

"Yes, I have a pair of eyes," replied Sam, "and that's just it. If they wos a pair o' patent double million magnifyin' gas microscopes of extra power, p'raps I might be able to see through a flight o' stairs and a deal door, but bein' only eyes, you see, my wisions's limited."

. . . the spectators tittered, the little judge smiled, and Serjeant Buzfuz looked particularly foolish. (474–75)

The disruption of the court and the legal process that Dickens elaborates with comic delight in 1837 uncannily echoes the very funniest of all the trial parodies to have been published in the Regency period, the actual transcriptions of the *Three Trials of William Hone* in December 1817, published by Hone himself. Hone had, earlier in 1817, published three biblical parodies that viciously and hilariously attacked what he regarded as a corrupt and heartless government and its church. The three parodies were called, respectively, *The Late John Wilkes's Catechism*, *The Political Litany*, and *The Sinecurist's Creed*. Their publication and circulation led to Hone's arrest for seditious blasphemy, and the small-time bookseller, like the fictional Mr. Pickwick after him, was tried at London's Guildhall. The actual trials were even more popular than Hone's trial parodies, with twenty thousand people attending (Marsh 32).¹¹ At each of the three trials the attorney-general found it necessary, in presenting

the evidence against Hone, to read out extracts from the biblical parodies, and the result was that the court repeatedly erupted with mirth. In the second of the trials the Attorney-General turned solemnly to the jury and read out, firstly, an extract from the Litany and, secondly, an extract from Hone's parody of it:

It was not necessary to remind the Jury that the Litany was a most solemn prayer to the Almighty, to the Redeemer of the world, and to the Holy Ghost . . . : "Son of God, we beseech thee to hear us! Oh Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the World, have mercy upon us!" He would not proceed; it seemed too solemn even for the solemnity of a court of justice; yet (would the Jury believe it?) the defendant had turned it into ridicule by making an impious parody of it. It began, "O Prince, Ruler of the people, have mercy upon us, miserable subjects. House of Lords, hereditary Legislators, have mercy upon us, pension-paying subjects. O House of Commons, proceeding from corrupt borough-managers, have mercy upon us, miserable subjects." It was too disgusting to read the whole. . . .

(These parts of the parody produced an involuntary burst of laughter from the auditory. . . .)

Lord Ellenborough [the judge] – Where are the Sherriffs? I desired their attendance and they shall attend.

The Under-Sherriff. – My Lord, I have sent for them; but they live a great distance from this, and they have not yet arrived. (*Three Trials of William Hone*, Second Trial 4)

In all three of Hone's trials the judge has to threaten the public gallery with arrest for contempt in an attempt to quell the eruption of carnivalesque laughter that undermines the dignity and self-importance of the legal process. This scenario is exactly replicated twenty years later when Magistrate Nupkins, in *The Pickwick Papers*, threatens the mirthful onlookers with contempt when they burst into laughter as they listen to the proceedings against Pickwick, who on this occasion has been arrested on suspicion of planning to fight a duel. Dickens even borrows from Hone's second trial the judge's coercing of a common-juryman, Hone's hapless shoemaker replaced in *The Pickwick Papers* with a poverty-stricken apothecary.

William Hone, a humble bookseller, was acquitted on all three charges of seditious blasphemy: it was the triumph of the little man against the overweening power of church and state. Hone was the melodramatic hero of his own narrative: the virtuous man of the lower orders overcoming the corruption of the aristocratic state. Pickwick fares less well at the hands of the British judiciary; but Dickens's debt to Hone is, I think, quite clear. The linking of Hone and Dickens is by no means fanciful: Dickens – not a particularly voracious devourer of literature – owned a large, bound copy of Hone's and Cobbett's *Political Tracts*. As Joss Marsh has remarked, "the fact that he acquired and kept these books is meaningful" (53).¹²

Dickens not only owned William Hone's political tracts; he also had in his library bound copies of Hone's three highly successful ventures into the popular magazine market: the *Every-Day Book* (1825), the *Table Book* (1827) and the *Year Book* (1832). For if Dickens inherited from William Hone a radical satirical aesthetic, he also shared with him a commitment to a broader, politically non-aligned popular culture. Hone's *Every-Day Book* was "a hybrid of almanac and encyclopaedia, popular antiquarian miscellany and literary treasury" (Marsh 51) with a "homely or vernacular character," as one reviewer described it (Timbs 470). This description would seem equally to apply to Dickens's project a generation later in *Master Humphry's Clock* (1840–41), *Household Words* (1850–59), and *All the Year Round* (1859–70), and it seems likely that Dickens would have revelled in Hone's rich compendiums of popular amusements. Like Dickens's popular journalism, Hone's popular magazines from the 1820s reached a cross-class audience, breaching the gulf – which has only ever been a manufactured gulf – between high and low culture. Hone's *Every-Day Book*



Figure 14. Robert Seymour, detail from “Heaven and Earth.” Engraving, 1830. © The British Museum.

and its successors were serially published in cheap weekly numbers, a method adopted twenty five years later by Dickens and his publishers when they launched *Household Words*.

The first illustrator to work with Dickens on *The Pickwick Papers* – indeed the project originally belonged to him – was Robert Seymour, who took his own life after contributing just eight illustrations for the first five chapters of the novel. Seymour is as important as Hone in understanding the popular cultural traditions out of which *The Pickwick Papers* grew, for he, like both Hone and Dickens, engaged with both radical and more broadly popular cultural markets, as of course did George Cruikshank, a pivotal figure in the Hone-Dickens nexus. It is in his *Humorous Sketches*, published between 1834 and 1836, that Seymour’s influence on early Dickens is initially in evidence, the sketches featuring cricketing and shooting scenes that Dickens borrows and reformulates in *The Pickwick Papers*.

Generally engaging with the broad popular market, Robert Seymour can also be identified as the artist who produced a memorable piece of anti-poor law propaganda, in an 1830 engraving entitled “Heaven and Earth.” Seymour’s cartoon (Figure 14) prominently features an overweight, pompous figure of a parish beadle, immediately recognizable as a Bumble prototype. Seymour’s Beadle is descending from heaven on a cloud, and faces a huddled crowd of emaciated paupers: women, children, and the elderly prominent amongst them. The Beadle chides a starving woman and her baby in the foreground of the crowd of desperate parishioners: “My good Voman, vot should you have Children for – don’t you know, there’s no

THE POOR LAWS IN BRADFORD.



First Soldier. What d'ye say ye wont swallow 'em? How dare you presume to think that the Whigs don't know what is good for the welfare of the Bradford Paupers.

Second Soldier. It's plain we must force it down their throats with *Steel Lozenges*, and *Lead Pills*.

Third Soldier. The ignorant Boor has no idea of an independence of "Parochial Relief," or he'd never offer such resistance.

Figure 15. C. J. Grant, "The Poor Laws in Bradford." Woodcut, from *Cleave's Gazette of Variety* 1 (9 September 1837): 3.

more hoperatives never wanted."¹³ Seymour's is a satirical attack on the language of political economy that would, four years after his cartoon was published, inform the provisions made in, and the general tenor of, the infamous New Poor Law of 1834.

There is considerable continuity between anti-poor law satire of the 1830s and the earlier graphic satire of the Regency period.¹⁴ Such continuity is vividly captured in an anti-poor law cartoon produced by C. J. Grant for *Cleave's Gazette of Variety* in 1837, in which a gang of soldiers forces the New Poor Law down the throat of a pauper with their swords (Figure 15). This image strikingly echoes George Cruikshank's "Steel Lozenges" illustration



STEEL LOZENGES

Figure 16. George Cruikshank, “Steel Lozenges.” Woodcut, from William Hone, *The Man in the Moon*. London: W. Hone, 1820. 9.

for William Hone’s radical pamphlet from 1820, *The Man in the Moon*, in which yeomanry soldiers “feed” the starving poor in St. Peter’s Fields with their swords (Figure 16). There is, then, a direct line of influence between Hone and Cruikshank in the Regency period, and Grant and other radical cartoonists and writers of the 1830s, the anti-poor law satirists owing a particularly strong debt to their early nineteenth-century forbears. It is in this context that Dickens’s anti-poor law satire in *Oliver Twist* needs to be understood.

The hated figure of the parish beadle, much derided by anti-poor law campaigners in the 1830s, originally derived from popular eighteenth-century representations, long predating Dickens’s Bumble in *Oliver Twist* (1837–39) or his prototype in *Sketches by Boz* (1836). Up until the 1820s, though, the Beadle had been represented textually and pictorially simply as a figure of chastisement. Hogarth’s is the best known popular eighteenth-century

THE GENTLEMAN'S POCKET MAGAZINE.



PARISH BEADLES.

Figure 17. After William Hogarth, "Idle 'Prentice at Play in the Church Yard," 1847. Woodcut, from *Gentleman's Pocket Magazine* 1 (18 January 1827): facing 1.

example of the Beadle as an agent of punishment: in the second woodcut from his *Industry and Idleness* series, the "Idle 'Prentice at Play in the Churchyard," the Parish Beadle is just about to chastize an idle apprentice as he plays with his fellows on a tombstone. It was in the 1820s that the figure of the beadle first became a satirical target. An 1827 article on "The Parish Beadle" in the *Gentleman's Pocket Magazine* is accompanied by two illustrations: the first is a reproduction of Hogarth's woodcut (Figure 17), and the second is an engraving by Cruikshank (Figure 18): in this second illustration Cruikshank became the first illustrator to represent the lowly parish officer satirically, as a figure of both hate and fun (Sutherland 107). It was this image of the Beadle as a pompously attired, self-important petty official that established a satirical genealogy upon which Dickens and Cruikshank would together build a few years later in *Sketches by Boz* and *Oliver Twist*.



Figure 18. George Cruikshank, "Parish Beadle." Woodcut, from *Gentleman's Pocket Magazine* 1 (18 January 1827): 1.



Figure 19. "The Fruits of the New Poor Law Bill." Wood engraving, from *Figaro in London* 249 (10 September 1836): 149.

A gentle lampoon of the Parish Beadle is to be found in John Poole's *Little Peddlington and the Peddlingtonians* (1839), a picaresque species of travelogue and close relative of Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*. Much harsher is C. J. Grant's and other cartoons from the 1830s that attack the Beadle's role in the implementation of the New Poor Law. In these cartoons the illustrators draw not only on a radical satirical genealogy but also on the powerful melodramatic vocabulary that informed much of the literature and culture of the anti-poor-law movement in the 1830s and 1840s, including Dickens's *Oliver Twist*.¹⁵ An 1836 wood engraving published in *Figaro in London* has at its center a Beadle overseeing the brutal separation of a pauper family as they enter the workhouse (Figure 19). As workhouse officers beat the distressed parents, the Beadle looks on self-importantly, oblivious both to the weeping child, who pleads with him for mercy, and to the crying infant who has been left on the stone floor as its mother is dragged away. The Beadle as child-snatcher and as a brutal surrogate parent also features in an 1839 wood engraving from *Odd Fellow*, where the Beadle is shown forcibly removing terrified-looking children to



POOR LAW SKETCHES.—“A DOG IN OFFICE.”

Figure 20. “Poor Law Sketches – ‘A Dog in Office.’” Wood engraving, from *Odd Fellow* 1 (8 June 1839): 5.

the workhouse, with barely a glance over his shoulder at the church in the background (Figure 20). The effect of the New Poor Law on children is subjected to powerful criticism in an undated woodcut by C. J. Grant, called “Effects of the New Bastardy Law,” in which the Beadle oversees the removal of cartloads of parentless infants to the workhouse (Figure 21).



Figure 21. C. J. Grant, “Effects of the New Bastardy Law.” Woodcut, from *Political Drama*. London: G. Drake, c. 1834. Plate 60.

Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* both draws on and substantially develops the iconography of the anti-poor law movement. He responds to and develops the figure of the Beadle in the laughably self-important, venial and mean figure of Mr. Bumble, who is one of a series of surrogate parents to Oliver in the novel. And, like the cartoonists of the period, Dickens emphasizes the effects of the New Poor Law on children in particular. He also shared with popular radical illustrators of the 1830s a willingness to embrace commercialism. C. J. Grant is an interesting figure in this respect: firmly rooted, in his anti-poor law cartoons, in a popular radical tradition of protest, he at the same time was not averse to more purely commercial work, providing, for example, the illustrations for Edward Lloyd’s and Thomas Peckett Prest’s massively successful plagiarisms of *The Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist*, the *Penny Pickwick* and *Oliver Twiss* “By Pos,” respectively (James 59). Grant drew on early nineteenth-century popular radical political caricature, but was also able to take advantage of the rise of commercial populism towards the mid-century in the work he did for Edward Lloyd. Dickens, too, was quick to exploit the possibility of a mass readership. In Dickens’s case, though, the coupling of popular radical cultural traditions to commercial populism was on a much grander scale than Grant or others could have dreamt of.

In the first part of the nineteenth century the boundaries between popular and radical culture had been highly permeable, with “popular” as an epithet embracing both the political entity of the People *and* the idea of a popular marketplace. But the popular and the

radical became increasingly distinct categories as the second half of the century approached. Extraordinary, then, is Dickens's ability to negotiate and even to disregard these gradually encroaching boundaries, and with quite phenomenal success. Dickens's genius was such that he could build on and promote popular radical cultural traditions at the same time as commercially exploiting them and becoming a very rich man: by the end of 1837 part sales of *The Pickwick Papers* had reached 40,000 (Schlicke, *Oxford Reader's Companion* 449); *Oliver Twist*, too, was a huge commercial success (Gill vii). George Cruikshank's position in the popular radical and commercial nexus is fascinating in this regard, for he too had never been averse to commercial work, happily producing anti-radical cartoons for the royalists in the Regency period at the same time as working in partnership with William Hone.¹⁶ That Dickens made so much more money than Cruikshank did from his commercialization of popular radical culture partly explains Cruikshank's bitterness concerning *Oliver Twist*, which after Dickens's death he claimed had been very much his own creation.¹⁷

Whatever its success as a commercial text, *Oliver Twist* was apprehended in the 1830s as part of a popular front of protest against the New Poor Law: the episode in the novel where Oliver is first brought before the Poor Law Guardians was published in *The Times* as part of its own Anti-Poor Law campaign (Ackroyd 231). Dickens's novel was clearly read by his contemporaries as much as a social document as a work of imaginative literature. His focus on the New Poor Law's effects on children specifically is characteristic of anti-poor law literature of the 1830s and 1840s, and like other opponents of the 1834 Act, Dickens responds to the so-called Bastardy clauses in the New Poor Law. Under the provisions of the New Poor Law, families entering the workhouse were separated, with men and women eating, working and sleeping separately, a good Malthusian practice to keep the pauper population down. Children were separated from their parents, often being sent out either to a "baby farm" (a practice common to both the "old" and the "new" poor laws) or to a workhouse school (an invention of the "new" law). The idea was that the only way of preventing hereditary pauperism was to remove the children of paupers from their parents so as to protect them from moral contamination. This effectively left workhouse children parentless, or rather, the new poor law and its functionaries became the institutional parents of a newly created orphan class. The Bastardy clauses in the New Poor Law removed the necessity for fathers to be pursued for maintenance payments: women were now to be held totally responsible for the birth of children outside marriage.¹⁸ Dickens, who had reported on the parliamentary debates in the run up to the passing of the 1834 Act, was familiar with these provisions, and in *Oliver Twist* the desperate plight of the unmarried mother who stumbles into the workhouse to give birth and then die resonated strongly with a popular readership whose protests would be so vehement against this particular clause in the New Poor Law Act that it would eventually be repealed in 1844.

Oliver Twist has since its first publication often been considered as a novel of two halves, the workhouse scenes in which Dickens attacks both the new and the old Poor Laws generally discussed separately from the criminal elements in the "London" phases of the story, the latter usually understood in relation to "Newgate Fiction."¹⁹ The two halves of the novel are, though, clearly linked by its critique of the New Poor Law as an at best inadequate and at worst a malevolent institutional surrogate parent for the thousands of children that it forcibly removed from their mothers and fathers. *Oliver Twist* and *Little Dick* are sentimentalized in their purity and untainted affections in contrast to the corrupted urban youth of Jack Dawkins, Master Bates, and Nancy. But they are all alike in their parentless status, and Dickens's sympathy

clearly extends to the children of London's streets. The biggest question that the novel asks is whether the Poor Law, be it in its old or its new incarnation, is really a better "parent" than Fagin and his criminal gang. I, for one, am unsurprised that Oliver prefers Fagin and his sausages to the starvation regime of the workhouse and its baby farm.

Clearly Dickens draws on a tradition of radical satire in his assaults on Bumble the Beadle, on the venial Poor Law Guardians, and on "Fang" the Magistrate, and more generally in his attack on the workhouse system. But he also, like the anti-poor law cartoonists of the 1830s and 1840s, responds to a tradition of radical melodrama. Melodrama had long been established as an aesthetic of protest when Dickens began to negotiate its conventions, firstly in the interpolated melodramatic "tales" in *The Pickwick Papers* and more full-bloodedly in *Oliver Twist*.²⁰ *The Pickwick Papers*'s less obvious debt to melodrama is obliquely acknowledged through its nod, in the Bardell *versus* Pickwick trial, towards the Norton-Melbourne case, the latter a melodramatic show trial in which the mother accused of adultery was separated from her children.²¹ Melodrama, with its roots in the theatrical semiotics of gesture, is a bodily aesthetic, prioritizing non-verbal languages over dialogue. Anti-Poor Law protesters had readily seized upon this bodiliness in the 1830s and 1840s, their propaganda, as illustrated earlier in this essay, graphically representing the dragging apart of husbands and wives, and of helpless mothers and their babies, in the segregated environment of the workhouse. The melodramatic iconography of the destruction of the working-class family is most memorably figured in Kenny Meadows's illustration in *Punch* of "The 'Milk' of Poor-Law 'Kindness,'" which dramatically depicts the wrenching asunder of the workhouse mother and her child (Figure 22). Typical of the melodramatic mode, Meadows's illustration sets Good and Evil in clear opposition one to the other, and, equally typically, the critique of the poor law is founded on a rhetoric of working-class domestic suffering and maternal anguish.

Almost all of the ingredients of popular melodrama can be detected in *Oliver Twist*: the narrative of dispersal and reunion, the representation of bodily violence and physical suffering, the criminal elements, the providential plotting, wild coincidences, the Manichean structure of good and evil, the narratives of domestic suffering, the deathbed revelation, the happy ending – all would, in the 1830s, have immediately aligned the novel with the melodrama, at once a hugely popular and potentially subversive genre.

Dickens was not merely seeking popularity through his adherence to melodramatic conventions: he considered his novel writing to be instrumental as well as entertaining. Later in his career, in a letter from December 1852, he urged his correspondent:

Pray do not suppose that I ever write merely to amuse, or without an object. I wish I were as clear of every offence before Heaven, as I am of that. I may try to insinuate it into people's hearts sometimes, in preference to knocking them down and breaking their heads with it . . . but I always have it. Without it, my pursuit – and the steadiness, patience, seclusion, regularity, hard work, and self-concentration, it demands – would be utterly worthless to me. (qtd. in Schlicke, *Companion* 51)

It was his desire to change the world in his writings, as well as to describe it, that drew Dickens to radical melodrama. All nineteenth-century melodramas suggest a need for radical change in the lives of the powerless and the oppressed, and in this they are inherently radical. In the 1830s and 1840s the legislature coded melodrama as a problematic, disruptive genre: the British government was sufficiently troubled by the ascendancy of melodrama in English culture to address it as an issue of public concern. The House of Commons 1832 Select Committee on

PUNCH'S PENCILLINGS.—N^o. LXII.



THE "MILK" OF POOR-LAW "KINDNESS."

Figure 22. Kenny Meadows, "The 'Milk' of Poor Law 'Kindness.'" Illustration from *Punch* 4 (4 January 1843): 46.

Dramatic Literature, chaired by Bulwer Lytton, centrally addressed the “decline of the drama” as an urgent issue, hauling in witnesses such as Douglas Jerrold to help them identify the precise nature of the melodramatic beast. In 1832, then, the popular and the radical were still regarded as subversive partners: it was the rise of the commercial newspaper press in the 1840s that, with surprising rapidity, set these two cultural formations upon divergent pathways.

Dickens’s debt to William Hone is evinced in his deployment of melodrama as well as in his radical satire. For Hone was just as adept at producing popular melodramatic pamphlets as radical satirical ones. Hone’s sensational pamphlet from 1815, *The Power of Conscience, Exemplified in the Genuine and Extraordinary Confession of Thomas Bedworth*, graphically describes one Thomas Bedworth’s frenzied knife attack on his mistress, a murder that powerfully anticipates Sikes’s brutal attack on Nancy in *Oliver Twist*. Both murders are inspired by a sense of betrayal, and both are heavily sexualized. Hone’s Bedworth, suspecting his lover, one Elizabeth Beesmore, of betrayal, stabs her to death in an uncontrolled alcoholic rage. He then, like Dickens’s Sikes, takes flight, full of guilt and despair, fleeing to Coventry before returning to London to be hanged. In the account of Bedworth’s conviction and hanging, Hone characteristically (and like Dickens) emphasizes the banal inefficacy of the forces of law and order. It is not known whether Dickens was familiar with Hone’s melodramatic *Confession of Thomas Bedworth*, but the resonance between the two texts is quite remarkable.

Dickens’s debt to early nineteenth-century popular and radical culture did not end with his early fiction: the satirical and melodramatic traditions on which he draws can readily be identified in his novels of the 1850s, not least in *Bleak House* (1853). Here, though, the mood has changed. The satirical attack on Chancery has none of the hilarity and good humour of Sam Weller’s encounters with the law; lacking too is the carnivalesque disruption of Hone’s trial parodies in the late 1810s. But the popular radical inheritance is none the less clear. Hone and Cruikshank had, in the Regency period, relentlessly lampooned and ridiculed parliament and corrupt government ministers in such pamphlets as *The Political House that Jack Built* (1819), *The Political Showman – at Home!* (1821) and *A Slap at Slop and the Bridge Street Gang* (1821), as well as in Hone’s *Reformists’ Register and Weekly Commentary* (1817), the latter very much in the style of Cobbett.²² In *Bleak House* as in *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens shares Hone’s penchant for satirical “nicknaming” in his attack on the corruption and inefficiency of a parliament which he configures as profoundly undemocratic. One member of parliament, Lord Boodle, tells Sir Leicester Dedlock “with some astonishment,” that:

Supposing the present Government to be overthrown, the limited choice of the Crown, in the formation of a new ministry, would lie between Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle – supposing it to be impossible for the Duke of Foodle to act with Goodle, which may be assumed to be the case in consequence of the breach arising out of that affair with Hoodle. Then, giving the Home Department and the Leadership of the House of Commons to Joodle, the Exchequer to Koodle, the Colonies to Loodle, and the Foreign Office to Moodle, what are you to do with Noodle? You can’t offer him the Presidency of the Council; that is reserved for Poodle. You can’t put him in the Woods and forests; that is hardly good enough for Quoodle. What follows? That the country is shipwrecked, lost, and gone to pieces (as is made manifest to the patriotism of Sir Leicester Dedlock), because you can’t provide for Noodle! (*Bleak House* 211; ch. 12)

It is, remember, a post-1832 parliament which Dickens attacks here, one that is shown to be unrepresentative, hereditarily constituted, and in general smelling as strongly of old

corruption as any of the earlier, unreformed parliaments could ever have done: Dickens must have wondered how far political reform had come since Hone's attacks on George the Fourth's corrupt government regime. Reminiscent of Hone, too, is Dickens's attack on the hypocrisy of organized religion, his satirical assault on the oily and worldly Chadband worthy of Hone's anti-clerical satire a generation earlier. The Tory commentator, James Fitzjames Stephen, was alert to the reverberations between Dickens's novels of the 1850s and the popular radical tradition of which Cobbett, as well as Hone, was a part. He complained in 1858 that:

. . . the position of Mr. Dickens with respect to fiction is precisely analogous to that of Cobbett with respect to political discussion. The object of the arguments of the one was to drive his opinion into the dullest understanding – the object of the narrative of the other is to paint a picture that will catch the eye of the most ignorant and the least attentive observer. Mr. Dickens's writings are the apotheosis of what has been called newspaper English. He makes points everywhere. (Stephen, Unsigned Review 475)

Stephen thought, furthermore, that it was politically irresponsible of Dickens to convey the idea to his huge and ill-informed readership that “their Legislature is a stupid and inefficient debating club, their courts of law foul haunts of chicanery, pedantry and fraud, and their system of administration an odious compound of stupidity and corruption” (Stephen, “Relation of the Novel to Life” 94).

Where Dickens's later works of fiction most differ from the popular radicalism of William Hone and George Cruikshank a generation earlier is the *structural* nature of Dickens's political critique in the 1850s. Dickens and Hone were alike in that they attacked existing evils rather than suggest solutions to social and economic ills. But whereas Hone, for example, tended to attack identifiable corrupt individual representatives of Church and State, such as Sidmouth, Canning, and Castlereagh, Dickens's novels of the 1850s propose a more thoroughgoing critique, less concerned with culpable individuals than with the entire fabric of a diseased and paralyzed political State: the whole edifice of Government and its institutions is mercilessly scrutinized in both *Bleak House* and, subsequently, in *Little Dorrit*.

In *Bleak House* Dickens succeeds in adapting a by now well-worn radical melodramatic vocabulary to his structural account of society and its ills. A secret birth, family mysteries, a contested will, strongly virtuous and downright malevolent characters, a strong sense of the forces of good set against the forces of evil, a domestic “happy ending”: the ingredients of popular melodrama are as evident in this novel from 1853 as they were in *Oliver Twist* fourteen years before. In this mature political novel, though, Dickens does not simply reproduce the ingredients and the structures of feeling of popular melodrama. The aesthetic contours of melodrama are deftly manipulated in *Bleak House*, in that the main source of evil in this novel is not a bad individual character but a government institution. Whereas in earlier novels such as *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* good and bad individuals shape the moral parameters of the novel, in *Bleak House* the villain of the piece is Chancery, a mechanism of the State. The result is unsettling, for the focus on good and evil individuals in earlier popular radical melodrama meant that evil could be overcome by good through the plucky endeavor of heroic individuals. In *Bleak House*, though, Gridley, Miss Flite, Richard Carstone, and John Jarndyce, are all powerless in the face of the (faceless) power of Chancery.

Dickens's mediation of political ideas through the novel caused considerable consternation amongst Tory commentators such as Fitzjames Stephen. For whilst the majority

of Dickens's readers would not have considered subscribing to a radical periodical or newspaper, or of reading political pamphlets, they were very happy to read novels, and were now getting most of their political opinions from that source. The relative decline of the radical press as the 1850s wore on meant that the potential political power of the novel was immense. Chartist writers had spotted this potential from the late 1840s, at which point the popular melodramatic novel superseded poetry as the main literary vehicle for political expression in Chartist newspapers such as the *Northern Star*.²³

At the level of plot, all that Dickens is able to posit against Chancery and its hangers on is an ideal of domesticity, and it is in his representation of domesticity that Dickens can all too readily be cast – in gender terms at least – as an incorrigibly conservative writer. Domesticity as a panacea and cross-class emollient is deeply embedded in the melodramatic aesthetic; in his deployment of the domestic trope Dickens is writing within a firmly established cultural tradition. But Dickens's configuration of domesticity is more disruptive and generally more troubled than at first perhaps meets the eye. *Bleak House* begins and ends with domestic harmony: the touching domestic scene at the entrance to the lodge keeper's cottage at Chesney Wold and the domestic harmony of the Bagnets and soldier George at the close. The domestic bliss of the second Bleak House is the other closing set piece of the novel. But these domestic scenes *are* very staged and self-conscious, as is the whole of Esther Summerson's narrative. Esther's self-sacrificing, self-effacing femininity is archly *performed* in the novel, drawing attention to itself through its confinement to Esther's part of the narrative. The new Bleak House at the novel's close is presented to us almost as a stage set, it is painstakingly crafted (by Mr. Jarndyce, as a proxy for Dickens), and thereby draws attention to itself as a constructed object rather than a naturally occurring phenomenon. It is, in Esther's words, "a cottage, quite a rustic cottage of doll's rooms" – almost literally a doll's house (912; ch. 64).

Undoubtedly, domesticity is presented to the reader as a refuge from the madness, disease and death of the rest of the novel. It is, though, emphatically revealed as a fragile refuge. For beyond the walls of Bleak House sheer domestic hell reigns virtually supreme: in the coldly unloving environment of Esther's childhood home; in the squalor and brutality of Tom-All-Along's; in the mistrust and discomfort of the Snagsby home; in the tight-lipped, childless sang froid of the Dedlock residences; in the chaos and neglect of the Jellyby house; in the straitened circumstances and self-delusion of the Carstone apartments; and in the sad, crazy solitude of Miss Flite's room.

If Dickens's deployment of the domestic trope serves to highlight by contrast the madness and misery of the world beyond it, rather than shut it out, then his account of femininity at the mid-century is also more interrogative, more enquiring than many critics have allowed for. The publication of *Bleak House* in 1853 coincided with the rise of first-wave feminism in Victorian England, and as long ago as 1973 the feminist critic Ellen Moers referred to this novel as "the single 'Woman Question' novel in the Dickens canon," because of its strong cast of female characters. John Stuart Mill strongly disparaged the novel because, as he thought, "It is done in the very vulgarest way – just the style in which vulgar men used to ridicule 'learned ladies' as neglecting their children and household" (qtd. in Collins 297–98). It is Dickens's satirical account of Mrs. Jellyby to which Mill objects, the champion of "Telescopic Philanthropy" later dropping this project in favor of agitating for women's political rights. Dickens's satire is harsh, and yet it could be argued that Mrs. Jellyby's endless writing of letters (she seems to spend most of her time opening her mail), her setting up of committees and societies and other such institutional paraphernalia, simply mimic the

(patriarchal) mechanisms of Chancery which are shown in the novel to be so pointless and destructive.

Mill, though, had a point. Mrs. Jellyby is a satirical portrait, another political lampoon, and one that is not sympathetic to the early claims of women's rights activists. But it is in his deployment of *melodramatic* female types that Dickens is more interesting. Esther Summerson's angel in the house is a near relation to the heroine of domestic melodrama, and many of the other female figures in the novel have melodramatic antecedents: the imperious Lady Dedlock echoes the archetypal fallen woman; the French maid, Hortense, is the deadly *femme fatale*; Caddy Jellyby the domestic drudge; Jenny the bricklayer's wife the victim of domestic brutality; young Charley the orphan mother. These types, though, are not fixed in the novel. Lady Dedlock, the Lady of the Manor, merges, towards the novel's close, with the archetypal figure of the prostitute who drowns herself in the Thames: the "doubling" of aristocratic lady and forsaken prostitute is carefully staged. As Esther and Inspector Bucket search London for Lady Dedlock, Esther spots a poster, on a "mouldering wall" by the Thames, on which she can discern the words "FOUND DROWNED," which fills her with "an awful suspicion shadowed forth in our visit to that place":

A man yet dark and muddy in long, swollen sodden boots and a hat like them, was called out of a boat, and whispered with Mr. Bucket, who went away with him down some slippery steps – as if to look at something secret that he had to show. They came back, wiping their hands upon their coats, after turning over something wet; but thank God it was not what I feared! (827; ch. 57)

There is a whole series of mistaken female identities in the novel. Mistaken identity is of course a staple ingredient of melodrama, but it has a profound implication for Dickens's account of femininity in *Bleak House*. Lady Dedlock is mistaken – designedly so – for Hortense, her maid; Jo mistakes Esther for Lady Dedlock, and Esther mistakes her own dead mother for Jenny, the brutal bricklayer's wife:

On the step at the gate, drenched in a fearful wet of such a place, which oozed and splashed down everything, I saw, with a cry of pity and horror, a woman lying – Jenny, the mother of the dead child. . . . She lay there, who had so lately spoken to my mother. She lay there, a distressed, unsheltered, senseless creature. . . . I passed on to the gate, and stooped down. I lifted the heavy head, put the long dank hair aside, and turned the face. And it was my mother, cold and dead. (868–69; ch. 59)

The drowned prostitute, the brutalized bricklayer's wife, the dead Lady of the Manor: all converge in Esther's long night of the soul. Both Jenny, the bricklayers' wife, and Lady Dedlock, the wife of a Baronet, have lost their babies: the one to poverty and disease, the other to the moral codes of social propriety. Their equality in victimhood is dramatically expressed in the above scene, Dickens engaging here and throughout the novel in a cross-class account of women's oppression.

In a narrow political sense *Bleak House* is no more a radical novel than is *Oliver Twist*: it is not a call to arms, and doesn't present its readers with a political program. But Dickens's yoking together of popular fictional modes with radical satire and social protest in his novels from the 1830s through to the 1850s enables him to speak to a huge readership and, potentially, to shape its social and political views. *Bleak House*, like *Oliver Twist*, brilliantly embodies Dickens's simultaneous commitment both to popular culture and to radical social change.

Drawing on the traditions of popular radical satire and popular melodrama, he at once pays homage to, and spectacularly re-writes, the popular cultural traditions that were his life's blood. *Bleak House* was an immensely popular novel, with the serialized parts averaging sales of 34,000 for each monthly number, its circulation "half as large again as *Copperfield!*" as Dickens himself put it (To the Hon Mrs. Richard Watson, qtd. in Schlicke, *Companion* 51). His cultural and political influence was, then, as strong as ever in the 1850s. *Bleak House* was not a novel that was generally well received by critical commentators, its uncompromising attack on social institutions that were largely stewarded by the middle and upper ranks of society proving too uncomfortable for middle-class reviewers.

William Hone had been dead for thirteen years when *Bleak House* was serialized: his admiration for the younger writer had been based on Dickens's earliest fictional and journalistic projects. Dickens's debt to Hone's satirical attacks on law and government, and more generally his debt to early nineteenth-century popular radical culture, is, though, as pronounced in his novels from the 1850s as in the stories that Hone had so much enjoyed reading before his death in 1842.

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NOTES

My thanks to Michael Slater for reading and commenting generously on this paper, and for sharing his unrivalled knowledge of Dickens with me. Thanks too to my PhD student, Holly Furneaux, whose acute critical eye also helped me to sharpen my argument.

1. Dickens was not in fact as dismissive of Hone as he may have liked his friends to believe. He arranged a gift of fifty pounds from the Royal Literary Fund for "the Destitute widow and children of the late Mr. Hone. . . They are very poor and he was not a common man" (qtd. in Marsh 59).
2. The fullest accounts to date of Hone and his work are in Bowden, Hackwood, Marsh (ch. 1), and Wood.
3. Marsh is one of only two critics to recognize the affinity between Hone and Dickens, casting the latter as "the rich relation of the 'seedy' bookseller" (51). Hers is an excellent but tantalizingly brief comparison. Sen alludes to Hone amongst others as one of Dickens's radical forbears in "*Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*" 946–47.
4. "*Pickwick* is perhaps a belated version of the those picaresque novels by Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett, which Dickens read so avidly in his childhood and youth" (Pykett 39). Pykett also identifies the "criminal" elements in *Oliver Twist* as having their source in Defoe, Smollett, and Fielding (45).
5. In recent years the politics of Dickens's writings, where they have been considered at all, have usually been examined through a modern (and very often essentially a formalist) critical lens. Bowen's attractive and sharp-witted blend of Chesterton and Derrida finds for example that *The Pickwick Papers* is "for the most part . . . indifferent to politics, concerned to create a discursive space above and beyond them" (76); Pykett convincingly posits a Bakhtinian account of the fiction against D. A. Miller's Foucauldian reading. An excellent recent study that addresses Dickens's politics is John's *Dickens's Villains: Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture*. John's position is that "Dickens's most radical contribution to cultural politics is his aesthetic practice" (116). Accounts of the sexual politics, specifically, of Dickens's novels are led by Sedgwick's reading of *Our Mutual Friend* in her seminal study *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, although Schor's more historicist *Dickens and the Daughter of the House* provides a useful counterpoint to Sedgwick's psychoanalytical approach.

6. On the occasion of Dickens's death Anthony Trollope reflected that "he was a radical at heart, believing entirely in the people, writing for them, speaking for them, and always desirous to take their part" (qtd. in Wall 182); a little later, Louis Cazamian characterized Dickens as a Christian Socialist (qtd. in Wall 240–43), whilst George Bernard Shaw averred *Little Dorrit* to be "a more seditious book than *Das Kapital*" (qtd. in Laurence and Quinn 51). Jackson's Marxist reading of Dickens appeared in the same year that Shaw celebrated Dickens's radicalism.
7. For a full discussion of the force and significance of "the People" as a political concept in the nineteenth century, see Joyce.
8. For an account of such popular cultural responses to the Queen Caroline Affair, see Laqueur, "The Queen Caroline Affair." Laqueur laments the radicals' resort to melodrama, regarding it as a disabling mode for radical politics. I will propose a more upbeat account of melodrama's potential as a radical aesthetic.
9. For further details see Wood, ch. 3. Other Regency trial parodies include: Thomas Wooler's "Trial Extraordinary" and "The State Trials contrasted with the Manchester no Trials,;" William Hone's *Official Account of the Noble Lord's Bite!, Another Ministerial Defeat!, and "Non Mi Ricordo!"*
10. The British Library catalogue lists 26 editions in the first year of publication.
11. Marsh gives a full account of the trials.
12. For Dickens's ownership of Hone's work see Stonehouse (60).
13. My thanks to Paul Schlicke, whose essay, "Bumble and the Poor Law Satire of *Oliver Twist*," first drew my attention to Seymour's Beadle; Paul's generosity with his research materials also put me on the track of several more of Bumble's antecedents.
14. As Wood remarks: "Hone's pamphlets were still widely used as models for anti-government and anti-clerical satire in the revival of radical agitation during the two years preceding the passage of the Great Reform Act" (5). I would contend that the continuities persisted much further into the 1830s than this.
15. For a full account of the melodramatic literature and culture of the anti-poor law movement see Hadley.
16. See for example Cruikshank's illustration for the Royalist parody of Hone's *The Queen's Matrimonial Ladder*: Cruikshank's cartoon was "Printed at the Expense of the Loyal Association" as part of their *The Radical Ladder; or, Hone's Political Ladder and his Non Mi Ricordo explained and applied, the designs of the radicals developed, and their plans traced, A Satirical Poem, with copious notes*. The cartoon shows a line of Radicals, including Hone himself, climbing a "Radical Ladder" that leads up to the royal crown, which they try to set on fire with a burning torch.
17. Cruikshank made this claim in a letter to *The Times*, 30 December 1871. For a detailed and admirably even-handed account of Cruikshank's role in the conception of *Oliver Twist* see Patten, 2: 50–94.
18. For the making and implementation of the New Poor Law, see Brundage and Driver. For the anti-poor law movement see Edsall. On the Bastardy Clauses in the New Poor Law see Cody.
19. In 1840 Thackeray praised the workhouse scenes whilst attacking the "Newgate" half of the novel: see his "Catherine" 211 in Wall (52–53). One hundred years later Humphry House reflected that "We tend . . . to think of the first part as a detached tract, preliminary to the novel that matters" (92). The most popular of the contemporary dramatic plagiarisms of the novel more or less ignored the workhouse scenes in favor of the lurid excitements of London's criminal underworld. See Fulkerson, "*Oliver Twist* in the Victorian Theatre." One recent influential reading of the novel similarly concerns itself with the "London," "criminal" section of the novel: see John, "Twisting the Newgate Tale." Not all readers have treated the two parts of the novel discretely, though. Fielding, for example, identifies resonances between Fagin's philosophy of "number one," which he elaborates in chapter 43 of the novel, and the individualistic vocabulary of early Victorian political economy. See Fielding, "Benthamite Utilitarianism and *Oliver Twist*."
20. There is a growing body of scholarship pertaining to Melodrama. I have found the following particularly helpful: Brook, Clark, Hadley, Hay and Nikolopolon, Meisel, Shepherd and Womack, Vicinus, and Walkowitz.

21. My thanks to Hilary Fraser for pointing this out to me.
22. Hone's *Reformist's Register* was designed to fill the gap created by Cobbett's flight to America (Wood 8).
23. For Chartist writers' experimentation with the novel as a vehicle of political expression see my essay, "Chartist Aesthetics at the Mid-Century."

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