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THE GROTESQUE IN TRANSITION:
TWO KINDS OF LAUGHTER IN *THE PICKWICK PAPERS*

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Although the grotesque in Victorian literature—as in other literatures—is often evoked through representations of extraordinary human bodies, its effect in the Victorian novel is more often one of horror than of humour. Examples of grotesque bodies in Victorian literature that elicit laughter thus merit particular attention; this paper examines such bodies as they appear in particular in *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836-37) by Charles Dickens (1812-70). Locating Dickens's quintessentially Victorian characterizations of extraordinary bodies within the larger literary tradition of the grotesque will serve to clarify a historical transition that characterization underwent in the novels of the Victorian period.

Grotesque bodies in *The Pickwick Papers* have long been subjects of critical attention, particularly the emaciated, sick, tortured, and dying bodies that are found in the short stories that are interpolated amid the main frame of the novel; these include 'The Strollers Tale', and 'The Old Man's Tale about the Queer Client'. In the early days of Dickens criticism, George Gissing noted 'the contrast between the prisoner's life and that which was going on in the free world only a few yards away'.⁽¹⁾ Expanding upon Gissing's sense of this boundary, Edmund Wilson distinguished between comic and the horrific aspects of the novel—corresponding to the main frame of the novel and the interpolated short

stories, respectively—observing in the latter elements of the Gothic tradition, ‘themes which were to dominate his later work’.⁽²⁾ Along similar lines, Barbara Hardy contended that ‘[a]ll recent accounts of the novel also pay proper attention to the way in which the comic surface of the action is deeply furrowed by the macabre and violent inset stories of madness, suffering, poverty, and crime’, though she herself ultimately did not agree with such accounts.⁽³⁾

The interpolated stories in *The Pickwick Papers* evoke a horror that is none other than the effect of the grotesque as defined by Wolfgang Kayser,⁽⁴⁾ an effect similar to that evoked in Gothic fiction as observed by Kelly Hurley.⁽⁵⁾ Applying this view to Dickens’s grotesque characters, Michael Hollington, for instance, seems to regard them something horrifying.⁽⁶⁾ Given that the first reaction of readers to Dickens’s grotesque characters is horror, it is unsurprising that discussion of the grotesque in Dickens has chiefly concerned his later works.⁽⁷⁾

Yet if the darker aspect of Dickens’s later works is characterized by the grotesque, it is worth considering Mikhail Bakhtin’s understanding of the horrifically grotesque as only a recent phase of historical transition in the representation of the grotesque, which Bakhtin identified specifically as the Romantic grotesque or the grotesque ‘in modernist form’. The grotesque that Bakhtin found significant in pre-modern literature contrasts sharply with the horrifically grotesque of Kayser’s conception.⁽⁸⁾ Bakhtin’s idea of the pre-modern grotesque is defined by its comic aspect. In his account of the history of the grotesque, the grotesque was made into ‘a private “chamber” character’, in the Romantic period and ‘the laughter was cut down to cold humour, irony, sarcasm’.⁽⁹⁾ As a successor of Romanticism, Dickens naturally included elements of this horrific grotesque in his works. In view of the terrifying Gothic bodies that Dickens describes, critics might indeed consider

abandoning hope of relating Dickens's grotesque representation to laughter, even taking into account that Bakhtin emphasizes the comic aspect the grotesque.⁽¹⁰⁾

Yet, grotesque representation in *The Pickwick Papers* may not be limited to the horrific Gothic bodies in the interpolated stories; the pre-Romantic Bakhtinian grotesque informs another kind of extraordinary physique in the novel as well: fat bodies. Although Bakhtin himself characterized the Victorian period as a time of primacy for the Romantic grotesque, Victorian literature did not entirely exclude the folk grotesque that flourished in the medieval period.⁽¹¹⁾ Many characters in *The Pickwick Papers* are fat, including Mr Samuel Pickwick, the protagonist:

'There an't a better spot o' ground in all Kent, sir,' said the hard-headed man with the pippin-face. [. . .]

'Cept Mullins's Meadows,' observed the fat man solemnly.

'Mullins's Meadows!' ejaculated the other, with profound contempt.

'Ah, Mullins's Meadows,' repeated the fat man.

'Reg'lar good land that,' interposed another fat man.

'And so it is, sure-ly,' said a third fat man.

'Everybody knows that,' said the corpulent host [Mr Wardle].⁽¹²⁾

Although there are clearly four fat men in this scene, it is not clear in what order three of them speak, for Dickens portrays Pickwick, Snodgrass, and Tupman as all being fat. As if to equate fat men, the author constructs the dialogue here such that it still make sense regardless of the order of the unnamed fat men's lines. Fat physiques are prevalent in *The Pickwick Papers*, and this gives the novel a comic,

pastoral tone.

Even in a novel thus peopled with the fat, one character stands out for his corpulence: Mr Wardle's servant, Joe, whose nickname is 'the fat boy'. Joe is described as 'unctuous', a concrete epithet more often associated with fatty substances such as whale blubber than with obese human bodies.⁽¹³⁾ The fatness of Joe's body is accompanied by personal characteristics such as sleepiness, dullness, imbecility, idleness, insensitivity, and a gluttonous appetite for food. Joe's abnormality, is clear even in the context of this novel of the fat⁽¹⁴⁾—and is sufficiently pronounced to have engendered the medical term 'Pickwickian syndrome'.⁽¹⁵⁾

Although Joe's fatness, like that of other fat characters, is a source of laughter for the reader, the laughter it engenders differs from that evoked by other fat characters not only in degree but also in kind. A comparison of the comic effects of Joe and Pickwick's fatness will serve to illustrate this difference,⁽¹⁶⁾ as well as to clarify the nature of the grotesque in *The Pickwick Papers*.

To differentiate between the two types of representation by which Dickens portrays the fat bodies of these two characters—as well as the two sorts of laughter these bodies evoke—let us consider Charles Baudelaire's understanding of the grotesque:

Setting aside the question of utility, there is the same difference between these two sorts of laughter as there is the *implicated* school of writing and the school of art for art's sake. [. . .]

I shall call the grotesque 'the absolute comic' in antithesis to the ordinary comic, which I shall call 'the significative comic.'⁽¹⁷⁾

That is, first, Pickwick has a 'significative comic' function. What

Baudelaire regards as the 'ordinary comic'—a quality that Henri Bergson repeatedly emphasizes as the chief object of laughter⁽¹⁸⁾—is constituted primarily of caricature, the deformed imitation of a serious original model. Pickwick provokes laughter by being lowered in the process of copying from and comparison with an original; the laughter his character provokes is premised upon the relationship assumed between the comic object and its original. Parody, satire, and irony all depend on the same relationship, even if they do not always function to elicit laughter. On every page of *The Pickwick Papers*, Pickwick makes funny blunders that bring to mind an original image of a typical serious, competent retired businessman; Pickwick's blunders lower him in relation to this original. Furthermore, the close relationship between Pickwick and Sam Weller establishes Pickwick's character from the outset by this same method of lowering: with his fat body, Pickwick is a parody of a picaresque hero, and hence the novel can be understood as a Victorian version of *Don Quixote* (1605, 15). The parodic quality of Pickwick's character depends on the gap between his sense of justice, which is suitable for a picaresque hero, and his body, which manifestly is not. To the reader, this gap appears funny, and thus, being fat is Pickwick's first successful blunder—his first failure to relate to the world competently.

Eventually, the reader sympathizes with Pickwick for his blunders, and the final aim of Dickens is to expose and decry both public abuses of the sort that Pickwick suffers and the values of the picaresque novel. That is, most readers ultimately are more taken with Pickwick than with the society into which he cannot fit, and therein lies the function of his character. Pickwick's rotundity is the weapon Dickens uses to satirize the foibles abuses of society. Yet for this weapon to function, it cannot be denied that by being laughed at, Pickwick has been lowered

in society, however undeserved his lowering may morally be.

In contrast to Pickwick, Joe exemplifies the 'absolute comic', that is, the comic that has neither social meaning or purposive function, nor reference to any comic model of comparison; it is this form of comedy that defines the grotesque. Joe's character is eccentric in its entirety; the reason for—or purpose of—his sleepiness, dullness, or gluttony is indeterminable, for an original model cannot be identified for Joe.

The oddness of both Joe's personality and behaviour, as reflected in his habit of spying, distinguishes him from the other characters in *The Pickwick Papers*. When Joe witnesses Tracy Tupman trying to kiss Wardle's unmarried sister Rachel, he stands gazing at them 'perfectly motionless, with his large, circular eyes staring into the arbour, but without the slightest expression on his face that the most expert physiognomist could have referred to astonishment, curiosity, or any other known passion that agitates the human breast'.⁽¹⁹⁾ Violating Tupman's expectation that he would keep what he has seen secret, Joe goes to Rachel's mother, his employer, to tell her about the affair. While he is speaking with her, Joe unintentionally makes odd motions of 'closing up', shouts, and seems 'about to do her [his employer] bodily harm'. So threatening are his actions that they 'deprive her of the power of screaming'. Joe intended to report what he had seen, saying 'I want to make your flesh creep', but his speech is not understood—nonetheless, his actions do indeed make his employer's flesh creep.⁽²⁰⁾ Joe's conflation of unusual mannerisms and pure intentions bewilder those around him in much the fashion of Gothic fiction. His unhealthy personality stands in sharp contrast to Pickwick's healthiness, despite both characters' fatness. In contrast to the gap between the external and internal characteristics of Pickwick, Joe exhibits a unity of abnormality in both his external and internal characteristics that amounts to

an integral unhealthiness. Joe's unity of internal and external deviance is at the heart of the laughter he provokes; it calls for the absolute laughter that is evoked only by the grotesque. In contrast to one's laughter at Pickwick, one laughs at Joe because he is asocial, unknowable, which can also be the source of the Gothic terror.

The insistent violent knocking with which Joe intrudes into an important scene of the novel serves to illustrate how his character elicits such laughter. Dickens creates suspense by cutting a chapter that occurs after the knock, and when the chapter opens, the reader discovers along with those who are involved in the scene that the knocker is fat boy:

The object that presented itself to the eyes of the astonished clerk [Perker], was a boy—a wonderfully fat boy—habited as a serving lad, standing upright on the mat, with his eyes closed as if in sleep. He had never seen such a fat boy, in or out of a travelling caravan; and this, coupled with the calmness and repose of his appearance, so very different from what was reasonably to have been expected of the inflicter of such knocks, smote him with wonder.

'What's the matter?' inquired the clerk.

The extraordinary boy replied not a word; but he nodded once, and seemed, to the clerk's imagination, to snore feebly. [. . .]

'What the devil do you knock in that way for?' inquired the clerk, angrily.

'Which way?' said the boy, in a slow and sleepy voice.

'Why, like forty hackney-coachmen,' replied the clerk.

'Because master said, I wasn't to leave off knocking till they opened the door, for fear I should go to sleep,' said the boy.

'Well,' said the clerk, 'what message have you brought?'⁽²¹⁾

Joe subsequently answers Perker in a straightforward fashion, completing his errand for Wardle, but his dazzling knocking is nonetheless in keeping with his 'absolute comic' qualities. The reader wonders why this knocking is inserted into the tense scene in which it occurs; rather than facilitating, Joe's knocking is rather an impediment to its progress. The only explanation is that Joe's nonsensical performance and appearance is intended to elicit laughter. The surprise of the reader's finding nothing is made stronger by the suspense of narrative and of the chapter division, which appears meaningful.

It is significant that Joe does not elicit laughter through any process of being lowered; Joe possesses no social status from which he might be understood to descend. As it is the nonsensical in Joe's behaviour and characteristics that evoke laughter, this laughter is ultimately beyond inquiry: it has no social meaning; it is independent of any model of comparison; and it is devoid of connotation or inference. Joe's existence itself is humorous; it is a direct source of horror and laughter, and as such it exemplifies what Baudelaire referred to as the 'absolute comic'.

An illustration from an early edition of the novel (Figure 1) clearly reflects this contrast between the comic functions of Pickwick and Joe.⁽²²⁾ In this illustration, Pickwick is depicted chasing his hat, which the wind has carried away; the viewer thus considers Pickwick in one of the most characteristic of humorous situations—as Dickens observed, 'There are very few moments in a man's existence when he experiences so much ludicrous distress, or meets with so little charitable commiseration, as when he is in pursuit of his own hat.'⁽²³⁾ Hair trembling at his temples, Pickwick's solemn expression is funny primarily as a parody of the picaro, a heroic figure unlikely to be seen thus pursuing his hat with such grim determination. The attention of the other figures in this illustration is indispensable to defining the social



Figure 1: Robert Seymour, 'Mr. Pickwick in Chase of his Hat' (1836), in *The Pickwick Papers* (facing p. 58).

relationships that make Pickwick's solemnity laughable: they are all, indispensably, looking at him. Pickwick, whose role is to satirize the picaresque hero by being laughed at, is thus dependent on these observers for the meaning of his existence.

In contrast, Joe's meaning is independent of any observer. He sits alone, sleeping in the carriage box at the upper right-hand corner of the frame as Pickwick chases after his hat. Nobody is laughing at Joe; he has nothing to do with others, but rather exists autonomously. Neglected by those around him, Joe indulges himself in his role of being fat and

sleepy. The illustration captures Joe's autonomy, his detachment from the dynamics of the outer world and any social chain of cause and effect. Joe's lack of awareness of social contexts is a hallmark of both the absolute comic and the grotesque.

Indeed, Joe is no less asocial than the horrific bodies that appear in the interpolated stories. His comical features are his primary characteristics, though he also represents an element of horror. His particular grotesqueness embodies the qualities of 'light', 'spring', and 'sunrise' by which Bakhtin differentiated between the worlds of the pre-modern folk grotesque and the Romantic grotesque.⁽²⁴⁾ Thus, even in Victorian literature, instances of the Bakhtinian grotesque can be observed.

Moreover, although representations of the Bakhtinian grotesque were uncommon in the Victorian period, this form of the grotesque informs Dickens's approach to characterization and is essential to the world of his fiction. Taking Joe into account, the boundaries of the non-grotesque and grotesque, the healthy and unhealthy, and the bright and dark are not clearly drawn in *The Pickwick Papers* between the main frame of the novel and the interpolated stories, though Wilson and others have long argued to the contrary.⁽²⁵⁾

The grotesque in *The Pickwick Papers*, quite unique among Victorian novels, provides an open space in which the forms of laughter directed at Pickwick and Joe mix. Apart from the number of fat bodies, autonomous characteristics like those of Joe are found in Sam Weller, Alfred Jingle, and others, and these characters, though peripheral, play essential roles. Though Hollington maintained that '[t]he fantastic invades the everyday run of the Pickwickians' adventures',⁽²⁶⁾ it seems more accurate to say that the Pickwickian world of the fantastic and chaotic—whether horrific or comic in nature—is invaded by Pickwick's rationalism.⁽²⁷⁾

The world of the novel might thus be taken to be one invested with Bakhtin's medieval grotesque, but two problems arise in discussing *The Pickwick Papers* in the terms in which Bakhtin analysed Rabelais, both caused by the great gap between the Renaissance period and the Victorian period. First, *The Pickwick Papers* does not evoke 'the laughter of all the people' that is 'universal in scope', because in the Victorian period, the medieval folk grotesque of carnival, wherein 'the entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its relativity',⁽²⁸⁾ no longer invited such laughter. Dickens wrote his novels many years after, in Bakhtin's words, 'the feast ceased almost entirely to be the people's second life, their temporary renaissance and renewal'.⁽²⁹⁾

Secondly, the grotesque functions differently in Dickens than in the pre-modern cultural system of carnival, a phenomenon Bakhtin describes as entailing 'degradation and debasement'. Abusive language, profanity, excessive food and drink, and scatological humour, among other deviations from the social norm played the role in the medieval carnivalesque of connecting the sacred to the 'bodily lower stratum'. Yet the ambivalence of such deviance was lost with the passing of the pre-modern world, and the grotesque no longer served a carnivalesque function in the Victorian period. For this reason, there is no need for Joe, the Victorian embodiment of the grotesque, to be lowered in order to provoke laughter. Rather, as discussed above, caricature and the grotesque are severed in *The Pickwick Papers*, with the former the exclusive medium of social degradation and debasement, and the latter a sublime value unlinked to the lower stratum.

Differentiating between the two kinds of laughter evoked by the significative and the absolute comic in *The Pickwick Papers* also facilitates the mapping of the literary historical context of characterization in the Victorian novel, revealing a transition in characterization that

corresponded to the shift towards representation based on the cultural background of modernity. More specifically, Pickwick inherits only one of the folk grotesque forms of lowering—degradation and debasement; his fatness invokes no sacred power of renewal. Laughter directed at the comic form that Pickwick embodies not only lowers but also harms the caricatured object in proportion to its strength, however comical the effect and minor the harm. In this regard, the parodic effect of caricature is precisely that of irony, sarcasm, and satire. The reader is assigned the role of extricating an implicit text from the characterization, an assignment that entails many complexities, and demands the comparison of the lowered caricature and its supposed model in context. In this indirect method, the success of the comic depends almost entirely on the skill of the writer to explain the caricatured object, and therefore it may be appropriate to rename this form of comedy the 'explicative comic'. To effect the explicative comic, an author must describe the caricatured object in as complex and interwoven a fashion as possible, creating detailed descriptions of the caricature with the expectation that the readers will perceive them as enigmatic, and will undertake to decipher them so as to prove their being sensible readers. The need to accumulate details is reflected in the expansiveness of the explicative comic method. In view of the centrality of transformative lowering to this comic form, it is hardly coincidental that the flourishing of the explicative comic accompanied the rise of widespread interest in the idea of evolution. Moreover, the significative comic relies upon the notion that quality of laughter can be graded and can evolve; the eloquence is believed to lead the author and the reader to an intellectually higher phase of comic. As a result of the growing hold of evolution on the popular imagination, the explicative significative method came to dominate comic characterization in the Victorian

novel. Among the ironic writers of the Victorian period, Dickens was distinguished as an explicative comic, and can perhaps also be understood as an inheritor of the great tradition of eighteenth-century satirical writing.

Central to the explicative comic is an awareness of the social hierarchy. Though Pickwick is supposedly one of the most innocent of people, he is frequently caught up in sins against the social order despite his attempts to behave correctly. Through no fault of his own, Pickwick's behaviour brings him to the pillory, provoking the reader's laughter. In Dickens's hands, Pickwick is a skilful comedian who never misses a risible moment, yet never deviates from his social position. Only by maintaining this balance can he maintain his innocence while opposing society, and his character thus comprises a high resolution though negative reflection of society.

Yet ironically, such an indirect and complex mode of representation, though humorous, is not in the long run compatible with Pickwick's naïve nature. The explicative significant comic, even if does not always render the characters it informs as cynical, cannot always safeguard their innocence. On the contrary, they can be well aware of and well versed in the ways of the world, though they may not always appear to be so. Indeed, as James Kincaid and others have pointed out, Pickwick becomes increasingly less naïve and innocent as the novel progresses.⁽³⁰⁾ In spite of the manner in which he is characterized at first, he gradually learns how to walk through life, and by the end of the novel is sufficiently astute to function in society; for instance, although Pickwick refused to bribe his way out of the Fleet Prison, he later accepts money from Tony Weller to use for this purpose. Dickens himself acknowledges Pickwick's transformation in his preface to a later edition of the novel.⁽³¹⁾

In relationship to the social hierarchy, the significance of fat in particular is clearer in Pickwick's descendants than in the character himself. Whenever Pickwick's corpulence is brought to the reader's attention, it is cast as socially negative. Likewise, the negative connotations of Pickwick's fatness has come to lower an entire group of people in the social order. As reflected in the medical term 'the Pickwickian syndrome', society has come to treat fat as a problem. As the attribute of fatness has come to define a minority status in the social hierarchy, fat people have increasingly found reason to subvert the negative social value of fat through social struggle and the interrogation of the ideological connotations of being fat.⁽³²⁾ The more or less ideological nature of characters in many modern novels follows from the Victorian mode of characterization that Pickwick typifies, which was inherently dependent upon social ideology in both positive and negative senses.

In comparison to Pickwick, characters like Joe are less common in Victorian novels, as are many Dickensian characters that appear in the author's later works. In the laughter it evokes, the absolute comic aspect of Joe's character has a directness that contrasts with the knowing laughter elicited by Pickwick. Joe's fatness is informed by different connotations than Pickwick's: severed from the lower bodily stratum, his grotesqueness would have effected a renewal of the world in pre-modern period. Joe embodies the freakish sublime, yet unlinked to the lower stratum any more; his fatness functions not to debase what is familiar but to amaze the reader with what is unknown.

The skill demanded of the author in creating a character like Joe is more limited than skills required to create a character like Pickwick; the characterization of Joe demanded straightforward mimesis, because his effect is one of simple and direct surprise. This mode of characterization might be termed the 'ventriloquial comic', as opposed

to the explicative comic. The author is constrained to imitating autonomous characters, like a ventriloquist, rather than weaving complex connections between characters and society. Such characters as Joe do not evolve, but rather function to disrupt the incessant interweaving of connotations around the objects of novelistic focus.

The ventriloquial comic invokes the nostalgic past rather than the open, evolving future. In this regard, it is significant that *The Pickwick Papers* was narrated to Victorians as a reminiscence of 'the old coaching days', as has often been noted.⁽³³⁾ Furthermore, although it addresses contemporary topics, the narrative form of the novel is predominantly that of a set of posthumous papers: the world of the story comprises a vision of the old days, though the reader understands well that it was written later. The naïve past world thus presented affords room for Joe's appearance. Returning from an imaginary past, grotesque characters such as Joe embodied the pre-modern in the Victorian period.

Yet the folk grotesque of earlier centuries does not appear unchanged in the Victorian grotesque represented by Joe, for such characters as Joe must support the Victorian world in the story. Real changes to peoples and worlds do not transpire all at once like the changes in the medieval carnival, and thus grotesque characters in the novel are not necessarily informed by the same worldview as other characters. Much as in the medieval carnival, shifting contexts are themselves significant in Dickens, but in contrast to carnival, they do not draw others in; rather, they are instantiated autonomously in grotesque, freakish forms. In the Victorian novel, distinct forms of the grotesque exist independently of one other, and this is reflected in the asocial and lonely conditions of their representations. After writing *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens continued to create figures of the absolute comic, including Sarah Gamp, Scrooge, Micawber, and many others; all are autonomous

but also destined to be lonely, and the solitude of these characters reinforces their essential asocialness.

In *The Pickwick Papers* and throughout Dickens's works, solitary, absolutely comic characters appear besieged by significantly comic characters, representing in miniature the transition of characterization that the novel underwent in the Victorian period. Appearing after the debasing and sacred functions of the grotesque were sundered, the Victorian novel replaced Joe with Pickwick on a larger scale. *The Pickwick Papers* in particular not only illustrates how the meaning and function of the Victorian grotesque was different from that of earlier days, but also offers a landmark in the transition of characterization in the novel into a modern, society-centred, indirect, expansive mode that assumes the evolutionary development of future art.

Notes

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- (1) George Gissing, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (1898; New York: Haskell, 1974), p. 179.
- (2) Edmund Wilson, 'Dickens: The Two Scrooges', in *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature*, rev. edn (1941; London: Allen, 1952), pp. 1-93 (p. 9).
- (3) Barbara Hardy, *The Moral Art of Dickens* (1970; London: Athlone, 1985), p. 85.
- (4) After providing an interpretation of the grotesque, Kayser offers a

definition of the grotesque as 'AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECT OF THE WORLD'. Emphasis original; Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. by Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 188.

- (5) Hurley offers observations on a variety of extraordinary bodies, listing various forms of the horror of being 'abhuman'. Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the fin de siècle*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, 8, gen. ed. by Gillian Beer and Catherine Gallagher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 3-20.
- (6) Michael Hollington, *Dickens and the Grottesque* (London: Croom Helm; Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1984).
- (7) For example, Richard J. Dunn emphasizes the importance of 'the grotesque aesthetic [. . .] in Dickens' later works', and in so doing introduces an idea of the grotesque similar to Kayser's. Annette R. Federico also focuses upon Dickens's later works in discussing the nature of horror in Dickens's novels. Dunn's discussion is valid to the extent that horror is assumed to be essential to the grotesque as Kayser suggests. Richard J. Dunn, 'Dickens and the Tragi-Comic Grottesque', *Studies in the Novel*, 1.2 (Summer 1969), 147-56 (p. 147); Annette R. Federico, 'Dickens and Disgust', *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction*, 29 (2000), 145-61.
- (8) Bakhtin argues that Kayser's book 'offers the theory of the Romantic and modernist forms only. [. . .] Kayser's definitions [of the grotesque] first of all strike us by the gloomy, terrifying tone of the grotesque world'. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky, Midland Books, MB341, (1968; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 46-47.
- (9) Bakhtin, pp. 37-38.
- (10) It is problematic that critics arguing from this point of view such as Hollington and Kay Hetherly Wright address only the dark and horrific aspects of the grotesque in Dickens, though they introduce Bakhtinian ideas in their arguments. Contending that 'Bakhtin's approach suffers from exaggeration and limitation', Hollington almost completely excludes the comic from his investigation of the grotesque in Dickens. Hollington, p. 6; Kay Hetherly Wright, 'The

- Grotesque and Urban Chaos in *Bleak House*', *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction*, 21 (1992), 97-112.
- (11) Of the period when Rabelais worked, Bakhtin wrote, 'The literature of these later centuries was not directly subject to the popular festive culture. The carnival spirit and grotesque imagery continued to live and was transmitted as a now purely literary tradition, especially as a tradition of the Renaissance.' From this viewpoint, it is possible to find imagery of the folk grotesque in Dickens's works as well, imagery that descended to the Victorian period through the medium of literature. Bakhtin, p. 34.
 - (12) Charles Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1837; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), in *The Oxford Illustrated Dickens*, 21 vols (1966-68), p. 68 (Chapter 6).
 - (13) Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, p. 52 (Chapter 4).
 - (14) When Joe appears in the story, the narrator invariably introduces him in an amazed tone appropriate to something extraordinary.
 - (15) The term 'Pickwickian syndrome' refers not to Pickwick but to Joe, and has been used to describe a group of cases of obesity accompanied by sleepiness, dyspnea, or an excess of red corpuscles. Historically, one way of categorizing the unusual bodies in society has been to regard them as diseased, and the term 'Pickwickian syndrome' reflects this tendency. Due to the influence of the habit of categorization introduced in the Enlightenment and reinforced by science, this approach to understanding unusual bodies became dominant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Herzlich and Pierret convincingly relate this to the contemporary tendency toward eye-centred sensation and diagnosis; diseases in general tend to produce symptoms in the body that they can be sensed and interpreted visually. See Claudine Herzlich, and Janine Pierret, *Illness and Self in Society*, trans. by Elborg Forster (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 69-81.
 - (16) Joe has often been viewed as a double of Wardle, rather than of Pickwick, a mapping of the story that has afforded substantial insight. However, this investigation compares Joe to Pickwick, due to the effect these characters have of evoking laughter.
 - (17) Emphasis original; Charles Baudelaire, 'On the Essence of Laughter: And, in General, on the Comic in the Plastic Arts', in *The Painter of*

- Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. by Jonathan Mayne, 2nd edn (1964; London: Phaidon, 1995), pp. 147-65 (p. 157).
- (18) Henri Bergson, 'On the Essence of Laughter', in *Comedy*, ed. and trans. by Wylie Sypher (1956; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 61-190.
- (19) Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, p. 98 (Chapter 8).
- (20) Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, p. 102 (Chapter 8).
- (21) Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, p. 753 (Chapter 54). Clearly, Dickens presents Joe as unusually fat; the phrase 'a travelling caravan' (of freak show) defines Joe's fatness as grotesque. See Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 253-55.
- (22) Dickens is well known to have been unusually particular about the illustrations of his books. He gave precise instructions to his illustrators on the contents of illustrations, and was sufficiently controlling that he experienced problems with several of them. Indeed, Robert Seymour, the first engraver of *The Pickwick Papers*, committed suicide soon after the novel began to appear in serial form, and although Dickens denied the possibility, this suicide has been thought to be a result of the struggle for control over the illustrations for this work.
- (23) Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, p. 49 (Chapter 4).
- (24) Bakhtin, p. 41.
- (25) Christopher Herbert notes the importance of the rising sun in *The Pickwick Papers*, but like Wilson, strongly assumes that a clear boundary can be drawn between the main frame of the novel and the interpolated stories, and that the grotesque is confined to the latter. As for the main frame, Herbert argues it as the negative projection of the interpolated stories as well as their 'comic mask'. Christopher Herbert, 'Converging Worlds in *Pickwick Papers*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 27.1 (June 1972), 1-20 (pp. 3 and 15).
- (26) Hollington, p. 45.
- (27) Leslie Fiedler offers a related idea concerning the intrusion of the grotesque into the ordinary world. Although Fiedler's idea concerns freaks rather than the grotesque, it nonetheless affords insight into Joe's asocial character.
- (28) Bakhtin, p. 33.

- (29) Bakhtin, p. 33.
- (30) Kincaid and Philip Rogers offer descriptions of the processes of Pickwick's Bildung and of his loss of innocence. Rogers maintains that '[t]he apparent change in Pickwick results not from his education [. . .] but rather from a change in Dickens' estimation of Pickwick's innocence'. Dickens seems to find Pickwick's innocence limiting—and indeed to give up on maintaining his innocence—out of narrative necessity, rather than any intrinsic concern for Pickwick's character. James Kincaid, 'The Education of Mr. Pickwick', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 24.2 (September 1969), 127-41; Philip Rogers, 'Mr. Pickwick's Innocence', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 27.1 (June 1972), 21-37 (p. 23).
- (31) In the 1847 Preface, Dickens wrote, 'It has been observed of Mr. Pickwick, that there is a decided change in his character, as these pages proceed, and that he becomes more good and sensible'. Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, p. xii (Preface).
- (32) At the forefront of this struggle is fat feminism, an ideological and social movement given clear form in a manifesto by Debbie Notkin entitled 'Fat, Feminism, and Discarding the Unattainable Ideal', in *Women En Large: Images of Fat Nudes*, ed. by Laurie Toby Edison (San Francisco: Books in Focus, 1994), pp. 210-16.
- (33) Kincaid, p. 140. Grass observes that 'Dickens drops the pretense of the novel as truth'. Even after abandoning the conceit of the posthumous document, the narrative does not move forward to contemporary times. Sean C. Grass, 'Pickwick, the Past, and the Prison', *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction*, 29 (2000), 17-39.

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