AN ANALYTICAL SURVEY OF THE CRITICAL APPROACHES TO DICKENS' FICTION

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

---

by

Arthur David Kerby Eaton

June 1965

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With the possible exception of Shakespeare, no English literary figure has elicited the critical response that Dickens has. The tide began in 1836 and has continued in a virtually uninterrupted stream ever since. Even during those periods when highbrow critics looked askance at his novels and consequently wrote few critiques upon them, his fantastically loyal followers took up the slack with the result that there was hardly any appreciable diminution in the literature written about him. The purpose of my thesis is to examine a representative selection of this mass of material and to show that running through it there are discernible patterns.

The earliest critical responses to Dickens' fiction were coloured by the fact that in the early eighteen-hundreds the novel had not yet been accepted as an art form. Furthermore, the Victorians' concern with the various shades of propriety tended to make the early criticism very concerned with morals. Beginning in 1850 Dickens began to show in his novels a most overt hostility to both Church and State. This, combined with the growth of realistic theories of fiction that were inimical to his own imaginative style of writing, tended to lower his stature amongst critics.

Criticism of the moral content of Dickens' novels

only began to disappear in the 1880's; the probable reason for its disappearance was that the novels of Moore and Hardy being published at that time were considered to be much worse than Dickens', and hence they attracted the displeasure that had hitherto been directed at him. Also accounting for the dearth of moral criticism was the Aesthetic Movement. With their insistence on the right of the novelist to depict whatsoever he wished in his work, the Aesthetes did much to banish the moral approach to Dickens' fiction.

One important feature of the Dickensian criticism written between 1880 and 1940 was the scholars' continued concern with realism in fiction. With few exceptions, most critics of the period preferred the down-to-earth characters of Thackeray to Dickens' more imaginative creations. Yet at the same time these readers were also aware that somehow or other Dickens' characters were just as "real" as were Thackeray's. All of the critics of this period tried to discover why his work had the undeniable power that it did. Prior to 1940, the only aspect of his work that was unanimously and unequivocally praised was his humour. This was Dickens' passport to fame in these years.

Starting with John Forster, all biographers up to

1934 depicted only one facet of the novelist in their studies, the cheery, good natured extrovert who was primarily noted for his humanitarian concerns. The first scholar to depart from this lionizing approach was Thomas Wright, whose work appeared in 1934. The general tendency of all biographies subsequent to Wright's has been to correct the notoriously one-sided portrait painted by the earlier scholars. Modern biographies such as that by Edgar Johnson stress both aspects of the novelist's character and life; his triumph and his tragedy.

The disclosure about Ellen Ternan is probably the most important fact about Dickens that has come to light in the ninety-five years since his death. His own mania for privacy, coupled with the family's desire to see his wishes carried out, prevented publication of the details about Ellen until 1934. Readers who were not inclined to accept the proof that Wright offered to link Dickens and Ellen changed their minds when in 1939 appeared the posthumous memoirs of Dickens' second daughter, Kate Perugini. These corroborated Wright's earlier statements and with few exceptions most critics regard the Ellen Ternan affair as a closed book.

During his lifetime and up to approximately 1940,

Dickens' post-Copperfield novels were largely treated as works of his decadence. Because critics continued to think of him primarily as a humorist (a conception that gained credence by the similar picture of him in the pre-1934 biographies) and as a good natured social reformer, they were unable to understand the bitterness, the satire and the symbolic structure of his later novels. In 1940 Edmund Wilson, in what is probably the most important essay on Dickens in the present century, showed that Dickens had good reason to display the bitterness against society that he did in his post-Copperfield novels. He felt that society was responsible for his stunted childhood. Wilson further showed that Dickens was a first-rate artist and that many of his works could be rated among the best in the English language.

With his emphasis on Dickens' subjective development, Wilson's criticism was predominantly Freudian, and following his lead, scholars have written a considerable body of criticism in this vein. Much modern emphasis, however, has also been placed on a Jungian interpretation of Dickens' works. These critics insist that the most evocative passages in his novels and the general atmosphere that permeates his latter novels cannot be accounted for by Dickens' personal experiences. Instead, said these

critics, the experience that gave rise to his better works was a collective one. The vision that he had was really a glimpse into what Jung had called the collective unconscious of man's mind. We respond to Dickens' works because we directly participate in the same vision that he saw.

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CHAPTER I

A survey of the critical approaches to Dickens' fiction during the period ca. 1836-ca. 1880 may be divided into two more or less well defined periods. The first of these covers the interval between the publication of Dickens' first novel, The Pickwick Papers (1836), and the publication of the last of his picaresque novels, David Copperfield (1850). The second period begins with the first of what are now commonly called Dickens' "dark" novels, Bleak House (1852), and extends beyond the author's lifetime to the 1880's.

A survey of the first of these two intervals indicates that the Dickens' criticism written between 1836 and 1850 was characterized by a conspicuous absence of any theories of fiction. Instead, the criticism emphasized the "moral" aspects of the author's fiction, and it was only during the second period (1850-ca. 1880) that critics began to busy themselves with the actual form of the novel and technique of novel-writing. This second period also witnessed an ever increasing concern with politico-social questions in Dickens' later novels. The solutions propounded by the author, and indeed the very questioning of the established laws and institutions of society did not find a wholly sympathetic audience among his critics.

For this reason, the criticism written after the publication of David Copperfield (1850) was decidedly more caustic and virulent than was the criticism that preceded that novel.

This, in brief, was the thesis set forth by George H. Ford in his book Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel-Criticism Since 1836.[1] Because of the relative inaccessibility of primary source material even remotely equivalent to that available to Dr. Ford, I have used his argument as the basis for this first chapter of my own thesis. Nevertheless, in order to observe some semblance of independence, I have endeavoured wherever possible to use examples drawn from the limited source material at my disposal. The reader can easily determine by glancing at the format of the footnotes what material has been drawn from my own researches, and what has been taken from Dr. Ford's work.

The conspicuous absence of any theories of fiction during the first phase of Dickens' literary career can partially be explained by the general nonchalance with which early Victorian critics tended to treat fiction.

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[1]George H. Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel-Criticism Since 1836 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1965). Referred to afterwards as Ford.

Not recognizing the parity of the novel with such time-hallowed genres as poetry and the drama, they expended no effort in formulating laws governing the art of fiction. A critique such as Hugh Blair's Rhetoric abruptly dismissed the novel in a scant three pages. He considered it as a form of writing more conducive "to dissipation and idleness, than to any good purpose." Blair even apologized for mentioning such an "insignificant class of writings" in a serious discussion.[2] The opinion of De Quincey in 1848 was also similar to that expressed by many educated readers. He spoke disparagingly of the "story teller . . . a function of literature neither very noble in itself, nor, secondly, tending to permanence." His opinion was that:

> . . . all novels . . . have faded with the generation that produced them. . . . How coarse are the ideals of Fielding! -his odious Squire Westerns, his odious Tom Jones.[3]

John Stuart Mill, writing in 1833, was just as disdainful about fiction as was De Quincey. According to Mill one would never confuse the respective intelligences of

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[2]Hugh Blair, Rhetoric, (1833), pp. 417-420, cited by Ford, p. 24.

[3]De Quincey, "Oliver Goldsmith," North British Review, IX (1848), 193-194, cited by Ford, p. 24.

readers of poetry and novels. He claimed that

> the minds and hearts of greatest depth and elevation are commonly those which take greatest delight in poetry; the shallowest and emptiest, on the contrary, are, at all events, not those least addicted to novel-reading.[4]

With these opinions in mind, one can better understand the rather frivolous tone with which John Wilson Croker introduced a discussion of Dickens' American Notes. "Mr. Dickens is, as everybody knows, the author of some popular stories, published originally in periodical parts."[5] The critic Francis Jeffrey, writing in 1846 and reminiscing on his youth, said:

> It may be worth while to inform the present generation that, in my youth, writings of this sort /novels/ were rated very low with us . . . and generally deemed altogether unworthy of any grave critical notice . . .[6]

The immediate result, then, of this casual attitude towards fiction was apparent in the "critical anarchy" of the reviewers of the thirties and the forties. This was especially true with regard to the aesthetic aspects

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[4]John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties," English Critical Essays: Nineteenth Century (in The World's Classics Series, ed. Edmund D. Jones, London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 401.

[5]J. W. Croker, Quarterly Review, LXXI (1843), 504, cited by Ford, pp. 24-25.

[6]Francis Jeffrey, Contributions to the Edinburgh Review, (1846) III, p. 2., cited by Ford, p. 27.

of the novel. Reviewers of those decades spoke of "critical laws" for plot and character, but they were feeling their way with uncertainty.[7] The predominant mood of the early Victorian novel critics was that expressed by the Edinburgh Review in 1837. It was too much to hope for good plotting, said that magazine, "If the incidents be separately good, and tend to develop character, it seems all that we are . . . entitled to expect."[8]

Although there might have been uncertainty about the aesthetic aspects of fiction, the early Victorian reviewers were unanimous about the moral content of the novel. Very definite laws and conventions were established, all of them emphasizing the necessity for "purity in the genre."[9] The net result was that the novel came to be defined, not in terms of technical considerations, but in terms of moral considerations. To ascertain if any particular novel was suitable, one merely had to ask the question--could it be read aloud to all members of the family? A very represent-

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[7]"D'Israelis's Novels," Edinburgh Review, LXVI (1837), 62, cited by Ford, p. 28.

[8]"Recent English Romances," Edinburgh Review, LXV (April, 1837), 186, cited by Ford, p. 28.

[9]This convention was peculiar not only to the period now under discussion (1836-1850), but extended through until at least the end of the century.

ative definition of good fiction was that which appeared in the Athenaeum in 1850:

> [The novel is] a work of polite literature, to be read aloud in the family circle while the members are pursuing some graceful or fanciful work after the severer duties and studies of the day are closed.[10]

With such a definition in mind, one can at least partially account for the sentiments expressed in the following excerpt from an essay in Blackwood's in 1867:

> English novels have for a long time--from the days of Sir Walter Scott at least--held a very high reputation in the world, not so much perhaps for what critics would call the highest development of art, as for a certain sanity, wholesomeness, and cleanliness unknown to other literature of the same class . . . . The novel . . . has been kept . . . pure from all noxious topics . . . . Men did not snatch the guilty volume out of sight when any innocent creature drew nigh, or mature women lock up the book with which they condescended to amuse themselves, as they do in France. Our novels were family reading.[11]

The insistence of the Victorian critics that the novel be kept free from sexual allusions is too well known to be examined here, but what is perhaps not as well known

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[10] Athenaeum, VII (September, 1850), cited by J. D. Jump, "Weekly Reviewing in the Eighteen-fifties," Review of English Studies, XXIV (January, 1948), 51.

[11] Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, CII (1867), 257-258, cited by Ford, p. 29.

is that the same reviewers also insisted that the characters of the novels be "elevating." In other words, characters should never be drawn from the lower echelons of society. In numerous reviews, one finds that Dickens was taken to task for the proliferation of low personages in his fiction. For example, despite the almost unbelievably triumphant reception of Pickwick, many critics said disdainfully of that novel: "His [Dickens'] class of subjects are such as to expose him at the outset to the fatal objections of vulgarity."[12] The Examiner, of September 4th, 1836, similarly noted that:

> Where this author places himself under the imputation of coarseness, it is only by that amount of sympathy with some portion of his subject, without which he could not enter into, or describe, as he does so thoroughly, the ludicrous eccentricities of life.[13]

In a rather avant garde manner, quite unlike most of the criticism of the day, the reviewer concluded: "Humour cannot always be refined."[14]

Nicholas Nickleby (1838-39), a novel that (except for Arthur Gride and Peg Sliderskew) the modern reader

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[12] J. W. Croker, "Pickwick Papers," Quarterly Review, LIX (July, 1837), 484.

[13] Examiner, (September 4, 1836), cited by J. W. T. Ley, "Some Early Reviews of Pickwick," The Dickensian, XXXII (1936), p. 282.

[14] Ibid.

would consider relatively free from "coarse" characters, also received its share of criticism. Living Age, in 1845, complained:

> There is sometimes, however, a little prolixity, and the mere dull vulgarity of the Kenwigs family, Miss Petowker, and Mr. Lillyvick, . . . are blemishes on the work.[15]

Needless to say, Sairey Gamp (Martin Chuzzlewit, 1843-45), was also greeted with sniffs of disdain from highbrow readers.

> Revolting as Jonas is, he is not so offensive and intolerable a personage as Sarah Gamp, a midwife . . . She seems such a favourite of the author that we meet her at every turn, even in the preface, till we are almost provoked to laugh in spite of our disgust.[16]

Sometimes the reluctance of the reviewer to wholeheartedly accept Dickens' "low life" led to silly extremes. Two such examples will suffice to show what is meant. In Living Age in 1848, a reviewer, speaking of the marriage of Mr. Toots and Susan Nipper (the reader will recall that blood flowing in Mr. Toots' veins was an aristocratic blue) pontificated that "his [Toots'] union with 'Miss Susan Nipper,' despite her comparatively low origin, [italics not in the original], is highly satisfactory."[17] The next

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[15] "Charles Dickens," Living Age, V (June, 1845), 602.

[16] Ibid.

[17] "Humorists--Dickens and Thackeray," Living Age, XXI (May, 1849), 231.

example comes from a review of Oliver Twist that appeared in the Dublin University Magazine in 1838. In recapitulating a portion of the novel, the critic noted how Mrs. Maylie accepted into her house "the housebreakers' boy, the confessed comrade of thieves and pickpockets" and even induced the servants to call him "Master Oliver." The critic then breaks into the discussion and demands: "Is not this rather an overstepping of the legitimate licence of novel-writers, Mr. Dickens?"[18]

When one reads the essays and reviews written by those critics who unreservedly accepted those of Dickens' characters that were drawn from the lower socio-economic class, one gets the impression that the acceptance of the characters was, in many cases, conditioned by the fact that the characters were new; that they were replacing a character-type that the reviewers found tedious.[19] The North American Review for 1849 noted:

> The immediate and almost unprecedented popularity he [Dickens] attained was owing not more to his own genius than to the general contempt for the school he supplanted. After ten years of

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[18] "Oliver Twist," Dublin University Magazine, XII (December, 1838), 708.

[19] I.e., the aristocratic characters depicted in the "Silver Fork" or "Society" novels.

> conventional frippery and foppery, it was a relief to have once more a view of the earth and firmament. . . . Here was a man, at last, with none of the daintiness of genteel society in his manner, belonging to no clique or sect, with sympathies embracing widely varying conditions of humanity . . .[20]

On the other side of the Atlantic, the British Quarterly Review for 1862 said substantially the same thing. This review claimed that Dickens appeared on the literary scene

> . . . just at the time when even professed novel readers were beginning to weary of the silly, fashionable novels, when Mayfair had done duty so long that even Saffron Hill /italics not in the original/ was welcomed as a change, and even Fagin, with his rusty toasting-fork and frying-pan, was considered as a relief.[21]

Obviously, not all critics shared the opinion that the social status of the Gamps and Petowkers or even the Fagins was a blemish on Dickens' work. In many instances those characters were accepted unreservedly. Nevertheless, up to and past the novelist's death there was a very vocal section of his critics who echoed the

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[20]"Novels and Novelists; Charles Dickens," North American Review, LXIX (October, 1849), 392.

[21]"Works of Dickens," British Quarterly Review, XXXV (January, 1862), 137. See also "Modern Novelists: Charles Dickens," The Westminster Review, LXXXI (October, 1864), 195.

following thoughts expressed by Blackwood's in 1871:

> It is a curious fact that this most influential writer [Dickens] has brought his readers into a great deal of very indifferent company, and has not left to us to neutralize it a single potential image of the elevated or the great.[22]

The critic then went on to wonder if Dickens himself might not have been at least partially responsible for the apparent lowering of taste in society:

> If, as people say, society in many of its circles has taken a lower and coarser tone, may not the indifferent company we have all been keeping in books have something to do with it?[23]

A related aspect of the critics' reception of Dickens' low but nevertheless genteel characters was their reaction to those of his characters who bore the stigma of being not merely low, but criminals to boot. Critics who had claimed that even such a harmless novel as Pickwick contained "some jokes, incidents and allusions which could hardly be read by a modest woman without blushing,[24] were horrified when they examined the succeeding novel, Oliver Twist. The general objection raised against this novel was that it depicted in print character-types who the readers considered had no business

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[22] Margaret Oliphant, "Charles Dickens," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, CIX (June, 1871), 677.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Eclectic Review, (April, 1837), cited by Ford, p. 270.

appearing in print. This type of reader assumed a haughty indifference to criminal life. Lady Carlisle echoed many spoken and unspoken opinions when she said:

> I know there are such unfortunate beings as pick-pockets and street-walkers but I own I do not much wish to hear what they say to one another.[25]

A broader statement of this point was that which appeared in Fraser's Magazine for 1850. Referring to that passage in David Copperfield where Rosa Dartle "lords" it over the distraught and penitent Emily, the reviewer exclaimed: "Whatever conveys to the reader's mind unmingled pain and horror, should be dispatched as quickly and as lightly as possible, not dwelt upon."[26]

Characteristically, however, the loudest objections to Oliver were raised against the potential harm inherent in such a novel. In this respect, Lord Melbourne's comment was quite representative. "I don't like," said Melbourne, "that low, debasing style. . . . I shouldn't think it would tend to raise morals."[27] Most

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[25] The Earl of Ilchester, Chronicles of Holland House, (1937), p. 245, cited by Ford, p. 41.

[26] "David Copperfield," Fraser's Magazine, XLII (December, 1850), 707.

[27] P. W. Wilson (ed.), The Greville Diary, (1927) I, p. 567, cited by Ford, p. 40.

citizens felt that respectable women and children should not be given even a literary acquaintance with thieves, prostitutes and murderers.[28] The Quarterly Review in 1839 was most emphatic about this matter.

> But we object in toto to the staple of Oliver Twist--a series of representations which must familiarize the rising generation with the haunts, deeds, language and characters of the very dregs of the community. . . . It is a hazardous experiment to exhibit to the young these enormities, even on the Helot principle of inspiring disgust. This perversion of education deadens and extinguishes those pure feelings which form the best guides through life; this early initiation into an acquaintance with the deepest details of crime reverses the order of nature; it strips youth of its happy, confiding credulity--the imputation of no wrong, the heart pure as a pearl.[29]

The reviewer of the Quarterly was by no means the only voice raised against the depiction of the criminal in literature. In 1845 an essay in Living Age also fulminated against such perversions of taste. The critic

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[28]Contemporary readers can accept the Victorian injunction that the literary diet of children ought to be supervised; nevertheless that century's surveillance of the reading-matter of women does seem quaint. The reader should be aware of the Victorians' almost pathological insistence on the purity of women. "A woman," said Blackwood's in 1850, "has one duty of invaluable importance to her country and race . . . and that is the duty of being pure." Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, CII (1867), 275, cited by Ford, p. 30.

[29]"Oliver Twist," Quarterly Review, LXIV (January, 1839), 97.

solemnly warned that the result of an acquaintance with crime and criminals

> . . . is that the perceptions of moral purity are blunted, exactly as when we mix in company with profligate persons of wit and agreeable manners, the delicate sense of right and wrong, and the instinctive feeling of honor and propriety are lost; the blush ceases to rise spontaneous on the female cheek at a coarse jest or depraved allusion; and vice can be made a subject of merriment in place of causing sorrow and indignation. The voice of true wisdom will tell us to be averse to all such objects of contemplation as abound in these volumes. . . .[30]

The metaphor "voice in the wilderness" seems quite *à propos* in describing this critic. In some portions of his review he seems to envision *Oliver Twist* as the progenitor of a vast swarm of penny-dreadfuls and Newgate Novels that will transform London into a literary wasteland.

> The main interest [of *Oliver*] is made to depend on the most debased and villainous agents; and the work has done much towards creating in the public a morbid relish in such heroes and their mode of life. A relish for such writing speedily becomes a craving, and the public learn to demand an insight into the haunts of crime, and to desire a familiarity with the habits and adventures of the profligate and brutal.[31]

Furthermore, said *Living Age*:

> Our moral health is dependent on the moral atmosphere we breathe. The novels are just an arti-

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[30] "Charles Dickens," *Living Age*, V (June, 1845), 607.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 602.

> ficial experience, and the well-drawn character becomes a kind of companion. With whom, then, does Mr. Dickens bring us into close and familiar contact? Lackeys, stable boys, thieves, swindlers, drunkards, gamblers, and murderers: and where is his scene most frequently laid, but in their haunts of vulgar revelry or dens of profligacy and crime? Such scenes and characters he dwells upon, until we are intimate with all the details.[32]

Dickens, no doubt after reading these or similar comments, had tried to justify his scenes of "low life" by stating in the preface to the third edition of Oliver Twist that at the time of writing that novel he had tried to leave all coarse language out of the work. In this preface, he had stated:

> No less consulting my own taste, than the manners of the age, I endeavoured, while I painted it [vice] in all its fallen and degraded aspect, to banish from the lips of the lowest character I introduced, any expression that could by possibility offend. . . .[33]

Those critics who unreservedly supported the representations of crime and criminals in Dickens' second novel based much of their acclaim upon this fact; the novel did indeed avoid crudity of expression.[34] Such a defence did not find favour

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Charles Dickens, "Preface to the Third Edition 1841," Oliver Twist.

[34] A critic writing in the Athenaeum in 1833 was, unbeknownst to himself, quite humorous when he made the observation that "the present century is the most decorous, at least in speech, of any of the nineteen." Athenaeum, (Nov. 16, 1833) p. 810, cited by Ford, p. 29.

with at least one reviewer, and the unfortunate Dickens was castigated for his very attempt to adhere to the wishes of the reviewers. The critic in question said:

> It has been attempted as an apology by his admirers, that, besides the ability with which he writes, and the witty humour of his characters, he paints very delicately, and withdraws what is offensive, so that the most sensitive cheek need not blush over his writings. We do not accept this apology. Are not the gross language and revolting manners of the vicious, one of the most useful safeguards to virtue? . . . Is it not rather our daily experience that we more easily catch the tone and tolerate the vices of those with whom we associate, if they are refined and polite as well as witty and entertaining? Shall we then applaud him who takes away our safeguard, and leads us habitually to think of vice without the repulsiveness that should ever belong to it?[35]

The third and final example of the general attitude towards the lowest of Dickens' low characters is the following excerpt taken from an essay in Blackwoods in 1846:

> . . . it seems difficult to imagine what kind of pleasure can be derived from the description of a scene, which, if actually contemplated by the reader would inspire him with loathing and disgust, or from conversations in which the brutal alternates with the positively obscene. The fetid den of the Jew, the stinking cellar of the thief, the squalid attic of the prostitute, are not haunts for honest men, and the less that we know of them, the better. . . . the man who willingly and deliberately dwells upon such subjects, is, notwithstanding all pretext, in heart and soul a nightman. Don't tell me about close painting after Nature. Nature is not always to be painted as she really is. Would you hang up such paintings in your drawing-room? If not, why suffer them in

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[35] "Charles Dickens," Living Age, V (June, 1845) 602.

print to lie upon your drawing-room tables?[36]

Thus far, as has been noted, the critical approaches to Dickens' fiction were prompted not by predominantly aesthetic standards, but by moral standards. Reading the reviews of Dickens' early novels, one has the distinct impression that Dickens would have been an unqualified success had the Petowkers and Lillyvicks and Kenwigs all been the poor relations of Counts and Dukes and if even Fagin could somehow have been an exiled member of the French aristocracy.

Beginning, however, in the 1850's, reviewers soon found that a second element was appearing more and more frequently in Dickens' novels. This was didacticism, and characteristic of the general uncertainty of novel-criticism during most of Dickens' literary career was the fact that the pros and cons of didacticism were frequently debated. The Spectator, on July 4th, 1857, contained an article in which the following definition of a novel was proposed:

> A series of probable events presented in the form of an interesting story, carried on by action dramatically developed, and containing broad views of life from which some lesson may be gathered.[37]

In 1864 the Westminster Review had recognized the value of the novel as a teacher:

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[36] S. Warren, "Advice to an Intending Serialist," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LX (November, 1846), 594-595.

[37] Spectator, (July 4, 1857), cited by Ford, p. 32.

> But authors must be perfectly well aware that novels are now something more than the means of passing away an idle hour. They supply thousands of readers with a philosophy of life, and are at this moment almost the only form of poetry which is really popular. . . . The novelist has taken rank as a recognized public instructor.[38]

In his work on the history of the novel, J. C. Jeaffreson noted that; "It would seem indeed that society was tired of being amused, and thirsted for instruction even in its moments of relaxation."[39] Even as early as 1844, a contributor to the New Spirit of the Age had noted that the novel was

> no longer a mere fantasy of the imagination, a dreamy pageant of unintelligible sentiments and impossible incidents; but a sensible book, insinuating in an exceedingly agreeable form--just as cunning physicians insinuate nauseous drugs in sweet disguises--a great deal of useful knowledge, historical, social, and moral.[40]

As previously mentioned, however, there was no unanimous agreement as to the novel's right to teach. Indeed, many critics denied the necessity of didacticism. Jeaffreson quoted one such critic as having said:

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[38] "Modern Novelists: Charles Dickens," The Westminster Review, LXXXI (October, 1864), 194.

[39] J. Cordy Jeaffreson, Novels and Novelists from Elizabeth to Victoria (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1858), II, 320-321.

[40] R. H. Horne, A New Spirit of the Age, II, 215, cited by Ford, p. 32.

> These fictions [novels with a purpose] afflict us with their sickening cant and affectation of religious zeal. The pert argumentativeness of the logic school and the drawl of the conventicle flavour every chapter of them. Why don't their writers exert themselves to amuse us with tales in the style of the old masters, and leave preaching to the clergy, and moralizing to the occupants of professional chairs? Why, when we want a love story such as Smollet delighted to paint, must we be condemned to hear a sermon, or a political pamphlet, or an essay on morals?[41]

Some reviewers, like the one writing in the North British Review of 1851, seemed to have accepted in principle the fact that a novelist's personal view must of necessity appear in his novel; nevertheless, the critic seemed to have felt that Dickens went too far in the presentation of that view:

> . . . few men dominated so decidedly by the artistic temperament have shewn so obvious an inclination as Mr. Dickens to step beyond the province of the artist, and exercise the functions of the social and moral critic.[42]

After praising Dickens' genius, the reviewer went on to say:

> We cannot, however, assent so easily to his habit of interspersing controversial remarks, and direct passages of social criticism and remonstrance, through his fiction. Clearly as these works belong to the department of artistic writing, there is not one of them that does not contain matter

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[41] Jeaffreson, op. cit., p. 319.

[42] "Dickens and Thackeray," North British Review, XIV (May, 1851), 34.

> that is purely dogmatic in its import . . . Now, of course, a man must have his views on these subjects, and these views must break out in his works, however artistic their form; but it is a dangerous thing thus openly and professedly to blend the functions of the artist with those of the declaimer.[43]

Those critics who thought that the novel should be free from any didactic material were in the minority and it became increasingly apparent that it was well within the province of the novelist to be didactic.

Although there eventually was general agreement as to the right of the novel to teach, there was general disagreement as to what it should teach. This was the issue that in conjunction with the development of artistic theories inimical to Dickens, precipitated the gradual overclouding of his reputation. At the time, however, few reviewers would have objected to the subject matter that one critic proposed that Dickens should teach. At the end of a long essay on Thackeray and Dickens that appeared in Living Age in 1849, the critic proposed the following:

> We do not call on "Dickens" and "Thackeray" to plunge into the fray of politics; but we do charge them as men and as Christians, to promote the spirit of reverence, both for church and state, whilst they earnestly labour for the correction of abuses . . .[44]

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[43] Ibid.

[44] "Humorists--Dickens and Thackeray," Living Age, XXI (May, 1849), 232.

Most critics were sadly aware that the content of Dickens' novels did very little if anything to promote reverence for either church or state, a fact that the same reviewer noted with regret.

> Unless correct principles, moral and intellectual, religious and political, broaden and deepen within his mind and soul, he will, in our opinion, retrograde in future works.[45]

Since religio-political considerations played a most important part in the critics' reception of Dickens' later novels, I will discuss in turn both aspects of this criticism.

Throughout Dickens' literary career, it was recognized that his novels gave scant support to any religious denomination or to any but the broadest Christian tenets. The Dublin Review of 1843, in a review of A Christmas Carol, lamented the fact that the Spirits in the story thought too much on material things, and not enough on the religious significance of Christmas.[46] Twenty-eight years later, this periodical was just as hostile, again claiming that the Deity had received no place in that author's novels.

> He vaunted the quack nostrums of good fellowship and sentimental tenderness, of human institutions, and the natural virtues as remedies for sin, sorrow, and the weariness of life. There are not

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[45] Ibid., p. 231.

[46] "A Christmas Carol," Dublin Review, XV (December, 1843), 510-529.

> many conversions among his personages more gravely and reasonably set forth than that of Ebenezer Scrooge,--whose conversion is mischievously false in principle, because it has no compunction in it; it is repentance towards man, but not towards God.[47]

Similar sentiments were expressed by Living Age in 1845. "When our hearts are touched," said that magazine, referring to Dickens' deathbed scenes,

> . . . it is not right, and to a well constituted mind it is painful, to leave us with a few vague sentiments scarcely even of natural religion, and a picturesque sketch perhaps of a Bible in the background, but with no reference to the revelation it contains, and to those truths which furnish the only true ground of hope to the dying, and of consolation to the bereaved.[48]

Dickens' failure to give his characters religious motives or his settings religious significance aroused considerable clerical and secular antagonism towards his novels. As one critic noted:

> He displays the fair fruits of the tree, without indicating the soil that nourishes the wide-spreading roots . . . It is this failure to connect effect with cause, to refer virtue to its proper source, that constitutes a grave defect, a positive disfiguration, in this writer's otherwise charming volumes . . .[49]

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[47] "Two English Novelists: Dickens and Thackeray," Dublin Review, LXVIII (April, 1871), 318.

[48] "Charles Dickens," Living Age, V (June, 1845), 608-609.

[49] C. Van Santvoord, Discourses on Special Occasions and Miscellaneous Papers (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1856), p.353.

Another feature of the religious criticism of the era was the appearance of essays that solemnly queried whether or not Dickens was an unqualified asset to public morality. With surprising frequency the answer was no, and on these grounds one finds that Dickens was often castigated, not for what he included in his novels, but for what he excluded.

> Mr. Dickens, we fear, is either blind even to the poetry of the Gospel, or else so bitterly opposed to its scheme of doctrine that he will rather ruin a masterpiece [the reference is to the sufferings of Florence in Dombey and Son] than be indebted to Christianity for an embellishment. Be this as it may, the public taste is equally in danger. Nor can we pass on without reminding his admirers that poetry and sentiment are not religion, and most miserable substitutes for it.[50]

Living Age, in 1845, lamented the lack of "a wholesome moral tendency"[51] in Dickens' novels. This critic felt that the author's characters were either good or bad from temperament alone. Such characters, said this magazine:

> . . . . are uninstructive, because the absence of high principle, as the spring of action, prevents the reader, especially the young, from scanning and analyzing motives, duties and passions, and instead of being in that way stimulated to earnest thought and self-examination he is lulled into a pleasing indifference and frivolity of mind.[52]

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[50] "Charles Dickens," North British Review, VII (May, 1847), 62.

[51] "Charles Dickens," Living Age, V (June, 1845), 608.

[52] Ibid.

A brief essay that appeared in Old and New in 1871 likewise discussed Dickens as a moralist. This review also concluded that Dickens could not be classed as a great moral teacher. The reason given in this instance was that in his novels Dickens had condoned drunkenness.[53] One might note in passing that the question of temperance loomed very prominently in reviews of Dickens' novels. The Dublin Review of 1871 found the "pothouse flavour"[54] of Pickwick distressing:

> Sam Weller's best sayings would be much better if they were not always an accompaniment to pipes and beer; his father could have been made as amusing without being perpetually represented ordering, consuming and dispensing liquor . . .[55]

One of the curious phenomena of the reviewers' reception of the religious aspects of Dickens' novels was the almost pathetic insistence on the part of some critics on finding something laudable in that author's treatment of religion. At times this becomes almost humorous. In

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[53] "Dickens as a Moralist," Old and New, III (April, 1871), 480-483.

[54] "Two English Novelists: Dickens and Thackeray," Dublin Review, LXVIII (April, 1871), 349.

[55] Ibid. Another periodical that deplored the lack of sobriety in Dickens' works was Living Age. "Humorists--Dickens and Thackeray," Living Age, XXI (May, 1849), 229.

Living Age in 1848, one reviewer was sure that better things lay ahead, for he saw an improvement in Dickens' religious sentiments:

> There is an improvement, and we are happy to record the fact, in this respect. Its first perceptible mark was the sympathetic bodying forth of the county clergyman who buries Little Nell . . . And in this writer's latest work . . . /Dombey and Son/ we have remarked, with much pleasure, a reverential tone as to the holy mystery of Baptism, and a general recognition of the practical value of religion, which leads us to hope for yet clearer, and better, and higher things.[56]

Mercifully, time has drawn a veil obscuring the anguish that this reviewer must have felt upon reading (assuming that he did) Dickens' harsh portrayal of religion in Little Dorrit.

Truly indicative of the desperate attempts made by some critics to give their favourite author a respectable religious background was the attempt made in the magazine Temple Bar in 1869. To reassure readers that Dickens was quite conversant with the Bible and that he was not really the enfant terrible of religion that some had reputed him to be, the magazine enumerated all of Dickens' characters who were either in the habit of reading the Bible regularly or having someone else read it to them. Next were given four instances of Dickens' use of something with a biblical

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[56]"Humorists--Dickens and Thackeray," Living Age, XXI (May, 1849), 228-229.

connotation. As the pièce de resistance, the critic mentioned eighteen uses of similes in which the author had made some sort of reference to the Bible. Among the examples given were such gems as "as old as Adam," "as strong as Sampson." Among the other many examples given to vindicate Dickens' knowledge of religion was the fact that in Little Dorrit, Arthur Clennam's mother owned a wall-plaque upon which was depicted the plagues of Egypt.[57] This more than anything else shows how eager critics were to garb the popular author in garments of respectability. They seemed to have either missed, or deliberately overlooked, the fact that the plaque in question was a magnificant symbol of the grim theology that like a plague itself permeated the Clennam's home. In a similar manner, the glowing reference to the previously mentioned baptism scene in Dombey and Son overlooked the fact that the imagery used throughout that episode was that of coldness and freezing--quite appropriate for the depiction of a religious ceremony that seemed to aid in fostering the growth of a cold and crass materialism. In passing, one might mention that the very fact that Dickens' use of symbolic technique in these two novels was so fantastically misunderstood is in itself a measure of the extent

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[57]"Charles Dickens' Use of the Bible," Temple Bar, XXVII (November, 1869), 225-234.

to which his novels were evaluated not in artistic, but in moral terms.

Before ending the discussion of the moral or religious criticism of Dickens, one may briefly examine an instance of the ridiculous extremes to which moral criticism could lead. Among the many facets of Dickens' genius, one that had been particularly praised was the very sharp line that the author drew in his novels between good and evil.[58] Putnam's in 1855 likewise praised Dickens for his wholesomeness; however, in doing so the magazine made some rather strange comparisons. In an essay which revolved around a discussion of the relative merits of Dickens and Shakespeare, the magazine noted that Dickens was really a better writer than was Shakespeare. Among the reasons given for this statement was that "the novelist never toys with his victims, nor patches their unmixed depravity with an incongruous goodness, to perplex our moral perceptions."[59] Examples given of such characters were Quilp and Carker,

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[58]"Dickens' Tales," Edinburgh Review, LXVIII (October, 1838), 77-78. This magazine had been happy to note that Dickens "never endeavours to mislead our sympathies--to pervert plain notions of right and wrong . . ."; "Dickens and his Works," Fraser's Magazine, XXI (April, 1840), 400. This magazine said substantially the same thing. ". . . he has not lent his pen to anything that can give countenance to vice or degradation . . ."

[59]G. F. Talbot, "The Genius of Charles Dickens," Putnam's Monthly Magazine, V (March, 1855), 265.

both of whom were wholly evil, having no redeeming qualities. Such characters, claimed Putnam's, were better than either Macbeth or Richard, both of whom had redeeming qualities and hence presumably perplex our moral perceptions.

Although Dickens' obvious lack of proper religious sentiments was painful to many of his critics, they never made a really wholehearted attack on this aspect of his novels.[60] This was not the case, however, when the same reviewers noted the increasingly astringent politico-social tone adopted by the author's later novels. In this instance, they vehemently objected, and the objections were so numerous and had such far-reaching consequences that they deserve consideration as another critical approach to Dickens' fiction.

The social content of the pre-Copperfield novels was primarily distinguished by its preoccupation with incidental abuses. In Pickwick, there was the satire on the Debtors' Prisons; in Oliver Twist there was the attack on

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[60]A probable reason for the milder tone (in comparison with the vigorous objections raised against the political and social content of the post-Copperfield novels) is that in the former case the critics were deploring a lack of what they considered was edifying material, whereas in the latter case they objected to inclusion of objectionable material.

the new Poor Law, and in Nicholas Nickleby there was the exposure of the Yorkshire schools. The impression left upon reading these works is that all abuses would be speedily remedied if men would only love their brothers as they loved themselves. As long as Dickens contented himself with writing in this fashion, the vast majority of his critics lavished praise upon him. A typical review of his early social criticism was that which appeared in the Edinburgh Review in 1838:

> One of the qualities we the most admire in him is his comprehensive spirit of humanity. The tendency of his writings is to make us practically benevolent--to excite our sympathy in behalf of the aggrieved and suffering in all classes.[61]

However, beginning with Bleak House,[62] (1852) and continuing through to his last completed novel Our Mutual

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[61] "Dickens' Tales," Edinburgh Review, LXVIII (October, 1838), 77.

[62] It may plausibly be argued that in Martin Chuzzlewit, Dickens was attacking society as a whole. In part, the novel was intended as a satire on hypocrisy and selfishness, and Dickens had intended to affix the following motto to the title page: "Your homes the scene, yourselves the actors here." Although Forster vetoed the idea, some reviewers were quick enough to note the broadness of the satire contained in the novel. The North American Review noted that: "If there be any character in which Dickens has seized on a national trait, that character is Pecksniff, and that national trait is English." "Novels and Novelists: Charles Dickens," North American Review, LXIX (October,1849, 394. It may be that Dickens' acidic satire, coming as it did in the midst of the general cheerfulness of his early works, was at least partly responsible for the low sales of that novel.

Friend (1864-65), Dickens began to assail not specific abuses, but nothing less than the entire politico-social structure. Fortunately for the author, his reputation for cheery good spirits persisted throughout the latter part of his career; this did much to mitigate or at least to partially soften the increasingly bitter reviews occasioned by the post-Copperfield novels. The tone of a good many of these reviews was that of a stern parent rebuking a child who had somehow gone astray. In Blackwoods in 1857 appeared an article entitled "Remonstrance with Dickens." The review stated in part:

> As humourist we prefer Dickens to all living men . . . But gradually his old characteristics have slipped from him. . . . A booby . . . assures him that his great strength lies in "going to the heart of our deepest social problems"; and straightway Dickens, the genial Dickens, overflowing by nature with the most rampant hearty fun, addresses himself to the melancholy task, setting to work to illustrate some enigma which Thomas Carlyle perhaps, or some such congenial dreary spirit . . . has left rather darker than before. Another luminary tells him that it is the duty of a great popular writer to be a great moral teacher, and straightway a piece of staring morality is embroidered into the motley pattern . . . Lastly comes the worst tempter of all . . . at whose instigation are elaborated some plebian specimens of all the virtues . . . The result of some such guidance . . . appears in Bleak House and Little Dorrit, as well as in great parts of both Dombey and Copperfield.[63]

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[63] "Remonstrance with Dickens," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXI (April, 1857), 495-496.

A similar view was expressed by The Saturday Review in July, 1857:

> We admit that Mr. Dickens has a mission, but it is to make the world grin, not to recreate and rehabilitate society. Sam Weller, Dick Swiveller, and Sairey Gamp are his successes . . .[64]

Although Dickens' name as a humorist did help to lighten the tone of the criticism, it was not altogether proof against the reviews that became increasingly astringent as the novelist's bitterness showed itself more and more in his novels. Some examples representative of the growing animosity of the critics are the following. The Edinburgh Review noted in 1857 that

> ... in truth we cannot recall any single character in his novels, intended to belong to the higher ranks of English life, who is drawn with the slightest approach to truth or probability. His injustice to the institutions of English society is, however, even more flagrant than his animosity to particular classes in that society. The rich and the great are commonly held up to ridicule for their folly, or to hatred for their selfishness. But the institutions of the country, the laws, the administration, in a word the government under which we live, are regarded and described by Mr. Dickens as all that is most odious and absurd in despotism or in oligarchy.[65]

The reviewer then went on to indicate how unfounded

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[64] Saturday Review, IV (July, 1857), 15, cited by Ford, p. 101.

[65] "The Licence of Modern Novelists," Edinburgh Review, CVI (July, 1857), 127.

and unfair were Dickens' charges, and how the author had dealt in half-truths and distortion.

A further example of the hostile reviews of this period is the following exserpt taken from a retrospective essay that appeared in the Dublin Review in 1871.

> Only the cheerfulness of an uneducated mind could inspire the complacent self-glorification of his tone when he ridicules and reproves the institutions of his own country. . . . It does not readily occur to uneducated people, unless they have the grace of humility, that more exists in what they are looking at than they can see, and that things which puzzle them may possibly be above their comprehension, instead of being beneath their notice.[66]

One of the typical objections raised against the politico-social criticism of Dickens' later novels was that it was too facile; it ignored the harsh realities and offered only platitudes. Blackwood's noted this as early as 1846.

> There may be inequalities in this world, and there may also be injustice; but it is a very great mistake [on Dickens' part] to hold that one-half of the population of these islands is living in profligate ease upon the compulsory labour of the other.[67]

Living Age, in 1849, while agreeing that Dickens' condemnation of Malthusian and anti-Christian theories was not "a

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[66] "Two English Novelists: Dickens and Thackeray," Dublin Review, LXVIII (April, 1871), 336-337.

[67] S. Warren, "Advice to an Intending Serialist," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LX (November, 1846), 596.

whit too savage,"[68] did question the general accuracy of Dickens' social criticism. According to this magazine,

> The picture there drawn [in the Chimes] was one-sided. . . . we heard much of the heroic virtues of the labouring classes, and the vile selfishness of the rich, but saw nothing of the reverse side of the medal which nevertheless also exists.[69]

As evidenced above, reviewers were quite emphatic that Dickens' later fiction was quite inferior to such earlier novels as Pickwick. Writing in 1873, the critic Frederick A. Laing included in his article on Dickens a brief précis of most of the author's novels. It is quite amusing to note that the précis of the novel in question became shorter and shorter the further that the novel was removed from Pickwick. The post-Copperfield novels, Laing dismissed in two sentences.

> Bleak House describes the miseries of a law-suit; Hard Times, the tale of a strike; Little Dorrit gives pictures of life in a debtor's prison; and A Tale of Two Cities is a story of the French Revolution. Dickens' other and later works are

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[68] "Humorists--Dickens and Thackeray," Living Age, XXI (May, 1849), 229.

[69] Ibid. For a discussion of the one-sided nature of Dickens' presentation of the French nobility in A Tale of Two Cities, see Living Age, 1860. "It is a shameful thing for a popular writer to exaggerate the faults of the French aristocracy in a book which will naturally find its way to readers who know very little of the subject except what he chooses to tell them . . ." "A Tale of Two Cities," Living Age, LXIV (February, 1860), 368.

scarcely so important as to demand special notice.[70]

Among the many hypotheses put forth to partially explain the serious resistance with which the author's later novels were met, are two that deserve separate mention. The first of these postulated that Dickens' far-ranging criticism did not merely alienate one specific group or segment of society, but many. The American critic E. P. Whipple, writing in the Atlantic Monthly in 1877, noted that whereas such characters as Vholes and Sir Leicester Dedlock might warm the hearts of the liberals and anger the conservatives, Mrs. Jellyby would have exactly the opposite effect. As a small example of the ambivalence of Dickens' criticism, one may note that in Bleak House Dickens has given us an entirely sympathetic portrayal of Rouncewell, an ironmaster. Nevertheless, in the immediately succeeding novel Hard Times, the benevolent Rouncewell has

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[70] Frederick A. Laing, A History of English Literature (in the Collins' School Series, London: William Collins, Sons and Company, 1873), pp. 195-196. A further example of the general disdain with which Dickens' later novels were met may be seen in James Rowley's A Smaller History of English Literature. James Rowley, A Smaller History of English Literature, (London: John Murray, 1885), p. 249. Rowley claimed that "David Copperfield (1849) is usually regarded as marking the culmination of his [Dickens'] genius . . ." Henry J. Nicoll speaks of Bleak House, as a novel "which marks the beginning of the decadence of his genius . . ." Henry J. Nicoll, Landmarks of English Literature (London: John Hogg, 1883), p. 382.

been superseded by the cold, self-made factory-owner Bounderby. One can follow the effect of this ambivalent sort of social criticism in the responses made to it by Ruskin. In Unto This Last he had written:

> He [Dickens] is entirely right in his main draft and purpose in every book he has written; and all of them, but especially Hard Times, should be studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions.[71]

However, when Ruskin recognized in Dickens' novels social criticism that was contrary to his own taste, he was not at all hesitant in reproving that author.

> Dickens was a pure modernist--a leader of the steam whistle party par excellence . . . His hero is essentially the ironmaster; in spite of Hard Times, he has advanced by his influence every principle that makes them harder--the love of excitement . . . the distrust both of nobility and clergy.[72]

The second hypothesis put forth to explain the bitter reviews of this period was that especially in the realm of economic theory, Dickens was far behind the times. E. P. Whipple noted, in the Atlantic Monthly in 1877, that Dickens' readers were "vexed with an author who deviated from the course of amusing them, . . . only to emphasize notions which were behind the knowledge of

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[71] The Works of Ruskin, XVII (1903-1912), 31n., cited by Ford, p. 94.

[72] Ibid., XXXVII, 7, cited by Ford, pp. 94-95.

the time."[73] Whipple went on to say that the laws of political economy were as inexorable as the laws of gravitation. He indicated that:

> The time will come when it will be as intellectually discreditable for an educated person to engage in a crusade against the political economy as in a crusade against the established laws of the physical universe.[74]

Especially in the general prosperity of the 1850's, the contemporary laws of political economy seemed so self-evident that Dickens and Ruskin were in many quarters regarded as madmen for championing contrary opinions.[75]

As was indicated earlier in this chapter, the criticism of the first half of the nineteenth century was characterized by a conspicuous absence of aesthetic theories of fiction. Such was not the case, however, with the latter half, for it was during this period that the novel was first beginning to be seriously considered as a work of art. In a retrospective essay of 1864, Justin McCarthy noted this

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[73] E. P. Whipple," Dickens's Hard Times," Atlantic Monthly, XXXIX (1877), 357, cited by Ford, p. 102.

[74] Ibid., p. 353, cited by Ford, pp. 102-103.

[75] On two separate occasions Ruskin tried to put forth his politico-social opinions in contemporary magazines but on both occasions public pressure forced the editors to request him to discontinue.

essential difference between the two periods.

> It is only of recent days that critics have begun seriously to occupy themselves in the consideration of prose fiction. It forced itself on them by its popularity and its influence. When it became utterly impossible to ignore it any longer, . . . it was then . . . too late to set about laying down laws, and forming schools, and prescribing this and proscribing that, and attempting all the freaks of pedantic power in which criticism delighted to indulge from the days of Zoilus to those of Rymer . . . One result is that the novelist's art is by far the most fresh, vigorous, and flourishing of all the literary professions of the day . . . Macaulay's influence over the average English mind was narrow compared with that of Dickens.[76]

Henry James, as evidenced in his essay The Art of Fiction (1884), quite realized that in earlier days the novel had frequently been treated as the poor relation of drama and poetry. Previously, said James,

> there was a comfortable, good-humoured feeling abroad that a novel is a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and that our only business with it could be to swallow it. But within a year or two [of 1884], for some reason or other, there have been signs of returning animation--the era of discussion would appear to have been to a certain extent opened.[77]

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[76] [Justin McCarthy] "Novels with a Purpose," Westminster Review, XXVI (1864), 25-26, cited by Ford, pp.27-28.

[77] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," American Poetry and Prose, Norman Foerster and Robert Falk, editors (new shorter edition; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 804. In this same essay, note James' other comments. "It [the novel] had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it--of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison." p. 803.

The era of discussion had indeed opened, and in 1891, seven years after the appearance of James's work, W. D. Howells published his Criticism and Fiction, an essay devoted to the premise that "the stone age of fiction and criticism"[78] was now over.

The natural result of this increased concern with the form and technique of the novel was the development of specific theories of fiction; theories that all pointed in the direction of realism. An Athenaeum reviewer noted this as early as 1841:

> Is it not that a novel is, or aims at being, a picture of daily life,--a reflex of human nature under the modification of an actual state of society? . . . A romance, on the contrary, pretends to no such fidelity of delineation. It strives to paint man as a being of passion alone; its view of life is taken by the flare of torches . . . dazzling brilliancy and fathomless gloom . . . . If this definition be correct, a romance is at variance with the spirit of the present age. The nineteenth century is distinguished by a craving for the positive and real--it is essentially an age of analysis and criticism.[79]

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[78] W. D. Howells, Criticism and Fiction, (1891), pp. 174-176, cited by Ford, p. 202. Although James and Howells both claimed that critics began to accept the novel as an art form only in the 1880's and 1890's, there did exist before that time a considerable amount of interest in the aesthetic aspects of the genre.

[79] Athenaeum, (September 25, 1841), p. 740, cited by Ford, pp. 131-132. See also W. D. Howells' comment in Criticism and Fiction, (1891). Howells refers to the beginning of the nineteenth century when "romance was making the same

Even earlier than the above excerpt from the Athenaeum, John Stuart Mill emphatically declared that "the truth of fiction is to give a true picture of life."[80]

One of the most popular of the Victorian novelists, Thackeray, was similarly aware of the currents of the age. He was echoing the opinions of a most vocal group of critics when he said: "The Art of Novels is to represent Nature: to convey as strongly as possible the sentiment of reality."[81] With these sentiments in mind, one may readily understand his objections to Dickens' fiction.[82]

> I quarrel with his Art in many respects: w^h [sic] I don't think represents nature duly, for instance Micawber appears to me an exaggeration of a man, as his name is of a name. It is delightful and makes me laugh, but it is no more a real man than my friend Punch is.[83]

During the latter half of the nineteenth century,

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fight against effete classicism which realism is making today against effete romanticism . . ." William Dean Howells, "Criticism and Fiction," American Poetry and Prose, op.cit., pp.751-752.

[80] John Stuart Mill, op.cit., p. 402.

[81] Gordon N. Ray (ed.) The Letters of Thackeray (Cambridge, U.S.A., 1945), II, 772-773, cited by Ford, p.118.

[82] Thackeray's popularity among "highbrow" readers vis a vis Dickens was in no small way the result of his perception of and adherence to the canons of this "realistic movement" in mid-Victorian fiction.

[83] Gordon N. Ray (ed.), The Letters of Thackeray, loc. cit.

Thackeray's opinion was echoed and re-echoed by the reviewers. Living Age, in 1858, noted the following:

> He [Dickens] can only conceive of virtues and vices in their very simplest forms. The goodness of his good men is always running over their beards, like Aaron's ointment--the wickedness of his villains is always flaming and blazing like a house on fire. The mixed characters, the confusion, the incompleteness, which meet us at every stage in real life, never occur in his pages.[84]

In a subsequent review in 1860, Living Age said substantially the same thing:

> The higher pleasures which novels are capable of giving are those which are derived from the development of a skilfully constructed plot, or the careful and moderate delineation of character; and neither of these are to be found in Mr. Dickens' works . . . The two main sources of his popularity are his power of working upon the feelings by the coarsest stimulants, and his power of setting common occurrences in a grotesque and unexpected light.[85]

Further evidence of the emphasis on realism among the critics may be found in Dickens' letters. In a letter dated 1859 the author defended his own imaginative style of writing against the realistic style then in vogue.

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[84] "Mr. Dickens," Living Age, LVIII (July, 1858), 265.

[85] "A Tale of Two Cities," Living Age, LXIV (February, 1860), 367.

> It does not seem to me to be enough to say of any description that it is the exact truth. The exact truth must be there; but the merit or art in the narrator, is the manner of stating the truth. As to which thing in literature, it always seems to me that there is a world to be done. And in these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like, to make the thing, in short, a sort of sum in reduction that any miserable creature can do in that way--I have an idea (really founded on the love of what I profess), that the very holding of popular literature through a kind of popular dark age, may depend on such fanciful treatment.[86]

Despite Dickens' dislike of "catalogue-like" realism, most critics of the post-1850's thought it infinitely superior to his own imaginative style. In Blackwood's for 1857 one critic noted in a somewhat humorous vein the deficiencies in Dickens' art of fiction. The critic imagined Dickens explaining the process whereby he created one of his characters. Although written humorously, the reviewer's objection was typical of the criticism of the day.

> See here, ladies and gentlemen, I take this abstract quality, which is one of the characteristics of the present day, . . . I select this individual trait from the heap you see lying by me--I add a bit of virtue, . . . I dress the combination in these garments, which I got off a man in the street. Observe now, when I pull the strings (and I don't mind letting you see me pulling the strings all through the exhibition--

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[86] John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, ed. J. W. T. Ley (1928), cited by Ford, pp. 134-135.

> no deception, ladies and gentlemen, none), how natural the action! how effective the character![87]

As was noted, the objections raised against the author's fiction were twofold. First, the characters were not drawn from real life; they were types. Second, there was no interaction between incident and character; the characters acted in certain situations only because Dickens nudged them. In an earlier passage of the above review, the reviewer elaborated on this last point. "In a great novel the incidents and characters work together for good, characters producing incident, incident calling forth traits of character. . . ."[88] Judged by this standard, Dickens' novel under review (Little Dorrit) was a poor work. The reviewer claimed that one of the glaring faults of the novel was that the fortunes of the Clennam family were not "so interwoven that the opposing or blending interests should have elicited character . . ."[89]

Respected critics such as Walter Bagehot and G. H.

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[87]"Remonstrance with Dickens," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXI (April, 1857), 502.

[88]Ibid., p. 500.

[89]Ibid., p. 497.

Lewes also complained about the same deficiency in Dickens. The former lamented the fact that some contemporary critics could possibly find pleasure in contemplating the author's "disconnected world" and "exaggerated caricature." Bagehot's obvious distaste was carried to the extent that he even refused to discuss any of the novels that succeeded Copperfield.[90] G. H. Lewes likewise based his principles of criticism upon realism. According to this critic, realism in literature meant probability in action and character. Hence the sequence of events in the novel must unfold in such a way that they appear to have been brought about by the interaction of character and circumstance, something that Lewes thought was strangely absent from Dickens' works.

> Unreal and impossible as these types [Dickens' characters] were, speaking a language never heard in life, moving like pieces of simple mechanism always in one way (instead of moving with the infinite fluctuations of organisms . . .) these unreal figures affected the uncritical reader with the force of reality. . .[91]

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[90] Walter Bagehot, "Charles Dickens," The Works and Life of Walter Bagehot, Mrs. Russell Barrington, editor (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1915), III, 106-107.

[91] George Henry Lewes, "Dickens in Relation to Criticism," The Dickens Critics, George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane Jr., editors (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), pp. 61-62.

Lewes readily admitted that to the "uncritical reader" the Dickensian characters might appear real, but he felt that to the discerning reader such as himself, the characters were painfully inadequate. The main drift of his criticism is shown in the following analogy:

> Give a child a wooden horse, with hair for mane and tail, and wafer-spots for colouring, he will never be disturbed by the fact that this horse does not move its legs, but runs on wheels--the general suggestion suffices for his belief; and this wooden horse . . . is believed in more than a pictured horse by a Wouvermanns or an Ansdell. It may be said of Dickens' human figures that they too are wooden, and run on wheels; but these are details which scarcely disturb the belief of admirers.[92]

It should be noted that none of the preceding realistic critics were willing to grant to Dickens' world any sort of probability. Adhering as they did to literary canons that emphasized the necessity of a close connection between the real world and the novelist's fictitious one, the reader can see that they could hardly have been expected to react to Dickens' work in any other way.

One of the few critics who did realize that Dickens' world might have its own laws of probability separate from those of nature was David Masson. His essay originally appeared in the North British Review in 1851 and it con-

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92 Ibid., p. 62.

sisted of a long discussion on the relative merits of the styles of Dickens and Thackeray.[93]

The essence of Masson's discussion is in his differentiation between the "real" and the "ideal" in art. Masson extends the term "ideal" to include any type of imaginative distortion. Hence, in the analogy that he made, Dickens' writings would be akin to the paintings of Reynolds and Raphael rather than Hogarth. Using a similar analogy, Thackeray's fiction would be closer to Hogarth than to Raphael. Masson said:

> It is Thackeray's aim to represent life as it is actually and historically--men and women, as they are, in those situations in which they are usually placed, with that mixture of good and evil and of strength and foible which is to be found in their characters, and liable only to those incidents which are of ordinary occurrence.[94]

According to Masson, Dickens' fiction did not pretend to this kind of reality.

> The Ideal or Romantic artist must be true to nature, as well as the Real artist; but he may be true in a different fashion. He may take

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[93] The essay is particularly noteworthy inasmuch as after the publication of Vanity Fair in 1847-48, the novels of Thackeray were considered to be the touchstone of the realists. Seen in this light, Masson's essay becomes a debate not just about two novelists, but about two schools of thought.

[94] David Masson, "Dickens and Thackeray," The Dickens Critics, George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane Jr., editors (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), pp. 34-35.

> hints from Nature in her extremest moods, and make these hints the gems of creations fitted for a world projected imaginatively beyond the real one, or inserted into the midst of the real one, and yet imaginatively moated round from it.[95]

The real merit of Masson's essay lies in the fact that unlike either G. H. Lewes or Walter Bagehot, he recognised that just because Dickens' world was an "imaginative" one, it was not necessarily an inferior one. "Now, both kinds of art are legitimate," said Masson, "and each writer is to be tried within his own kind by the success he has attained in it."[96]

Masson's comments cannot be taken, however, as being at all representative of the criticism of his era, for until the 1880's critics still rigidly adhered to realistic standards of novel criticism. As will be indicated in the immediately succeeding chapter, however, the post-1880's witnessed a gradual change from the realism advocated by such critics as G. H. Lewes, to the more flexible approach such as that propounded by Masson.

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[95] Ibid., pp. 35-36.

[96] Ibid., p. 35.

CHAPTER II

Two of the features of the Dickens' criticism written between ca. 1880 and ca. 1940 were first of all a conspicuous absence of moral criticism and secondly a heightened interest in the technique of novel writing. The reader will recall that in the preceding period (1836-1880) the critical approaches to Dickens' fiction were exactly the opposite. During that interval, the author's work tended to be criticized in predominantly moral terms, and it was only at the close of the period that the critics really began to examine the form and technique of his novels. In this chapter I will endeavour to indicate the reasons why moral criticism disappeared as one of the critical approaches to Dickens' fiction, and secondly, try to account for the reasons for the continued and heightened interest in the form and technique of the author's novels.

Generally speaking, there were two reasons for the absence of moral criticism. The first of these was that in the period under consideration, the novel was undergoing a fundamental change. Starting with George Moore, the English novelists were gradually wresting from their critics the right to extend the subject matter that might legitimately be included in the novel. As might well be expected, sex was the subject matter that authors deemed

most worthy of inclusion. The aspirations of Moore and Hardy in this respect attracted the fire that had hitherto been directed at Dickens. As the century drew to a close, those of Dickens' "indiscretions" that had pained an earlier generation of critics faded into insignificance when compared to what modern critics considered to be the far grosser obscenities of Moore and Hardy. Because this modification of the novel was of major importance, I shall briefly outline the steps whereby it came about, indicating from time to time the differences between the novel of Dickens' era and that of the late nineteenth century.

The best place to begin a brief survey of the changing attitude of the nineteenth century novelists is with the disciple of the hearth and home, Dickens himself. Although this author never seriously deviated from the narrow path marked out by respectable society, he was far more antagonistic to the conventions of the age than is usually suspected. One can trace in his writings a gradual progression from an early and avowed acceptance of moral criticism, through a middle period of doubt, to his final attitude of all but open rejection of those standards.

In the preface to his early novel Oliver Twist (1838) Dickens had boasted that even the most delicate ear would not find the slightest offence in the speech employed by any of the denizens of Saffron Hill. Nevertheless, by the

time of the publication of Dombey and Son (1848) the author was evidently aware that having to take into consideration the moral preferences of his critics was going to somewhat cramp his style. That Dickens was beginning to entertain opinions contrary to those of the then accepted maxims of art may be deduced from the fact that in Dombey and Son his original intention had been to let Edith Dombey become Carkers' mistress.[1] With the publication of his last complete novel, Our Mutual Friend (1865), he came right out and indicated that such standards were ridiculous. Using Podsnap and his daughter as examples of middle-class respectability, Dickens was unmerciful in his satire. In the following excerpt from that novel, the author said in his own voice:

> A certain institution in Mr. Podsnap's mind which he called "the young person" may be considered to have been embodied in Miss Podsnap, his daughter. It was an inconvenient and exacting institution, as requiring everything in the universe to be filed down and fitted to it. The question about everything was, would it bring a blush into the cheek of the young person? And the inconvenience of the young person was that, according to Mr. Podsnap, she seemed always liable to burst into blushes when there was no need at all. There appeared to be no line of demarcation between the young person's

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[1] Jeffrey, and presumably Forster, were adamant in their insistence that Dickens abandon the idea, and Edith's virtue consequently remained intact.

> excessive innocence, and another person's guiltiest knowledge. Take Mr. Podsnap's word for it, and the soberest tints of drab, white, lilac, and grey, were all flaming red to this troublesome Bull of a young person.[2]

Furthermore, keeping in mind the fact that Podsnap's gorge had risen at the mere mention of London's starving poor, it requires very little imagination to comprehend the horror and disgust that a real Podsnap must have felt upon seeing Boffin scrambling all over and digging in the vast mountains of refuse (including human waste) euphemistically called "dust heaps."

Dickens, however, was not the only author who decried the moral criteria used for judging novels. His great rival and contemporary, Thackeray, was likewise very much aware of the irksome limitations under which he had to write. He continually chafed under these restraints, and although he submitted, it was with little grace, as his preface to Pendennis indicated. He had said:

> Even the gentlemen of our age-- . . . even these we cannot show as they are, with the notorious foibles and selfishness of their lives and their education. Since the author of Tom Jones was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN. We must drape him, and give him a certain con-

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[2] Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, [n.d.]), p. 147.

> ventional simper. Society will not tolerate the Natural in our Art.[3]

The grumbling of Dickens and Thackeray was also echoed by some of their contemporary critics. One of these critics, writing in the Saturday Review, had openly questioned the wisdom of ensuring that all fiction should be suitable for young ladies. The reviewer had said:

> . . . light literature is pure enough. That is, it is written upon the principle that it is never to contain anything which a modest man might not, with satisfaction to himself, read aloud to a young lady. But surely it is very questionable whether it is desirable that no novels should be written except those which are fit for young ladies to read. Is it not so with any other branch of literature. Theology, history, philosophy, morality, law, and physical science are all studied at the reader's peril . . . Are works of imagination, then, such mere toys that they ought always to be calculated for girlish ignorance? . . . /Many of/ our most popular writers of fiction . . . seem to think that the highest function of a poet is the amusement of children, but we are by no means prepared to say that in literature, emasculation produces purity.[4]

Although the early Victorian novelists might have adhered (however reluctantly) to the canons of moral crit-

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[3] W. M. Thackeray, "Preface to Pendennis," 1850. This author did, of course, transgress the critic's dictums, for unless Lord Steyne (Vanity Fair) accepted "deferred payment," (a most unlikely occurrence), Becky was an adulteress.

[4] Saturday Review, (July 11, 1857), cited by J. D. Jump, "Weekly Reviewing in the Eighteen Fifties," Review of English Studies, XXIV (January, 1948), p. 55.

icism, later novelists were adamant in their refusal to pay even lip service. The novelist largely responsible for inaugurating this revolt was George Moore, and because Moore received his impetus from France, it is to that country that we must now turn.

Across the channel, the French authors, chief among them being Balzac (1799-1850), Flaubert (1821-1880) and Zola (1840-1902), had won from their public the right to include sexual immorality as an integral part of the novel. The adulteries of Eugene de Rastignac and Madame de Nuncingen in Père Goriot, and Emma Bovary and Leon in Madame Bovary were integral parts of each of the respective novels. The advance that this represented over the English novel may readily be seen if one contrasts this freedom with that enjoyed by Dickens. The reader will recall that Dickens had, in deference to the mores of society, cancelled the projected adultery between Edith Dombey and Carker in Dombey and Son. Another case in point was the manner in which Dickens depicted those few prostitutes that appeared in his novels. They were (with the exception of Nancy) never allowed to take a direct part in the action and instead wandered around the periphery of the novel like a bizarre Greek Chorus, lamenting (usually in low "moans" and with a "wild" look in the eye) the loss of that physical quality supposedly deemed most precious by the nineteenth century

maiden.

Having seen and appreciated the freedom enjoyed by the French novelists, Moore returned to England in 1880 and with the publication of A Modern Lover (1883) he fired the opening shot of his battle with the circulating libraries. Dealing as it did with the adulterous conduct of the hero, Lewis Seymour, the novel was promptly banned by Smith's, one of the largest of the circulating libraries. The second of Moore's novels, A Mummer's Wife (1885), did not have the dubious honour of being banned; however, the majority of the critics did condemn it as disgusting. Like its predecessor it had also dealt with immorality, only this time adultery was shown amongst slum dwellers rather than amongst the fashionable middle classes that had been depicted in A Modern Lover.

Moore waged a long and bitter combat with the circulating libraries and the contempt that he felt for their standards may be seen in the following passage taken from his Confessions:

> English fiction became pure, and the garlic and assafoetida with which Byron, Fielding, and Ben Jonson so liberally seasoned their works . . . have disappeared from our literature. English fiction became pure, dirty stories were to be heard no more, were no longer procurable. But at this point human nature intervened; poor human nature! when you pinch it in in one place it bulges out in another, after the fashion of a lady's figure. Human nature has from the earliest

> time shown a liking for dirty stories; dirty stories have formed a substantial part of every literature (I employ the words "dirty stories" in the circulating library sense); therefore a taste for dirty stories may be said to be inherent in the human animal. Call it a disease if you will--an incurable disease--which, if it is driven inwards, will break out in an unexpected quarter in a new form and with redoubled virulence. This is exactly what has happened. Actuated by the most laudable motives, Mudie cut off our rations of dirty stories, and for forty years we were apparently the most moral people on the face of the earth.[5]

As can be seen in the above quotation, Moore laid the blame for the narrow-mindedness of English fiction right at the door of the circulating libraries. This type of argument leaves much to be desired because it completely ignores the fact that bad fiction is just as much the fault of the novelist as it is the fault of the critic. George Gissing had recognized this and in a letter to the Pall Mall he had suggested that the English authors were far more to blame than were Smith's or Mudie's. Gissing said:

> English novels are miserable stuff for a very miserable reason, simply because English novelists fear to do their best lest they should damage their popularity, and consequently their income.[6]

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[5]George Moore, Confessions of a Young Man (New York: Carlton House, 1917), pp. 151-152.

[6]George Gissing, "The New Censorship of Literature," Pall Mall Budget, XXXII, 12-13, cited by M. Donnelly, George Gissing--Grave Comedian (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 81.

In a later passage he amplified this statement by adding: "Let novelists be true to their artistic conscience, and the public taste will come round. In that day there will be no complaint of the circulating libraries."[7] Although Gissing and Moore did differ on the question of where to place the preponderance of blame for the puritanical strait-jacket that enveloped English fiction, both were in complete agreement that the conventions surrounding the novel were utterly ridiculous.

While it is generally recognized that the specific influences of the French writers never did extend much past Moore (Zola's naturalism prompted Moore to write A Mummer's Wife but Moore in turn did not pass on this naturalistic influence), his career was most important because he was largely responsible for the opening of the battle to include in the novel matters other than domestic bliss. Thus it was with a certain amount of justification that Moore could say in his later years: "I invented adultery, which didn't exist in the English novel till I began writing."[8]

Once Moore had made the initial breach in the wall,

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[7] Ibid., p. 82.

[8] George Moore, [no source given], cited by Granville Hicks, Figures of Transition (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), p. 205.

other writers followed. It is beyond the limits of my paper to discuss all or many of these authors; however, an exception may be made with Thomas Hardy. Writing in the New Review in 1890, Hardy had been sadly aware of the restrictions placed upon the novelist. In that magazine he had lamented:

> If the true artist ever weeps it probably is then, when he first discovers the fearful price that he has to pay for the privilege of writing in the English language--no less a price than the complete extinction in the mind of every mature and penetrating reader, of sympathetic belief in his personages.[9]

Nevertheless, in the following year he published Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891), a novel with the subtitle "A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented." This novel had as its heroine an innocent country girl who had been seduced by a young dilettante. To comprehend the great change that had taken place in the subject matter of the novel, one may contrast Tess with an earlier novel having a similar theme. This novel was Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth (1853). Like Hardy's Tess, Mrs. Gaskell considered her heroine, Ruth, to be a pure girl, more sinned against than sinning. Here, however, the similarity ends. The earlier author was very much a product of her time, and bowing to the

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[9]Thomas Hardy, New Review, (1890), 124-125, cited by Granville Hicks, Figures of Transition (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1939), p. 127.

conventions of the day, she ensured that Ruth did die at the end of the novel.[10] In Mrs. Gaskell's day, the wages of sin were death, and significantly enough, Ruth's death was the penalty decreed by the Almighty and not by man.

Examining Hardy's novel, one can now see the strides that that novelist had taken. Tess, like Ruth, did die at the end of the novel. However, her death was the result of the bigotry and stupidity of contemporary society and not, as was the case with Ruth, the just retribution meted out by a wrathful God.[11]

As has been noted, the extension of the subject matter of the novel, as well as that of other genres, was a matter of bitter controversy. The poet Tennyson is probably the best representative of those who opposed the work of writers such as Moore. In Locksley Hall Sixty Years After (1886) Tennyson showed himself to be horrified at the licence taken by modern writers.

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[10] Despite the fact that Ruth does pay for her mistake, Mrs. Gaskell was considered by many of her contemporary critics to be dangerously ahead of her time.

[11] The other of Hardy's most controversial novels, Jude the Obscure, was likewise condemned; the title being commonly paraphrased as "Jude the Obscene." The torrents of abuse showered upon this author, who was by no means as thick-skinned as George Moore, were responsible for his abandoning novel-writing and returning to his first love, poetry.

Authors--atheist, essayist, novelist, realist,
rhymester, play your part,
Paint the mortal shame of nature with the living
hues of Art.

Rip your brothers' vices open, strip your own
foul passions bare;
Down with Reticence, down with Reverence--
forward--naked--let them stare.

Feed the budding rose of boyhood with the drainage
of your sewer;
Send the drain into the fountain, lest the stream
should issue pure.

Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs
of Zolaism--
Forward, forward, ay and backward, downward too
into the abysm.

Do your best to charm the worst, to lower the
rising race of men;
Have we risen from out the beast, then back into
the beast again?
(139-148)

Arthur Waugh, writing in, of all places, The Yellow Book,[12] in 1894, also cried out for "Reticence in Literature." In a rather calm and reasoned tone, quite unlike Tennyson's hysteria, Waugh sadly noted that modern literature had

> permeated marriage with the ardours of promiscuous intercourse. In fiction it infects its heroines with acquired diseases of names unmentionable, and has debased the beauty of maternity by analysis of the process of gestation. Surely the inartistic

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[12] The two periodicals The Yellow Book and the Savoy were commonly considered to be the "bible" of the Aesthetes. Waugh's opinion, albeit expressed in such a periodical, was quite contrary to the opinion of the Aesthetes.

> temperament can scarcely abuse literature further. I own I can conceive nothing less beautiful.[13]

On the other side of the Atlantic in 1891, W. D. Howells was also busily fighting a rearguard action in defence of "purity." This critic, recognized as the Dean of American Letters, rhetorically asked:

> In what fatal hour did the Young Girl arise and seal the lips of Fiction, with a touch of her finger, to some of the most vital interests of life?[14]

Howells answered that the "Young Girl" had done no such thing. According to this critic, (he specifically referred to Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot), English authors had indeed treated sex in its proper perspective. Howells was quite happy with the way in which Dickens had handled "relations of men and women"[15] in David Copperfield.

> It is quite false or quite mistaken to suppose that our novels have left untouched these most important realities of life. They have only not made them their stock in trade; they have kept a true perspective in regard to them; they have relegated them in their pictures of life to the space and place they occupy in life itself . . .[16]

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[13] Arthur Waugh, "Reticence in Literature," The Yellow Book, I (April, 1894), 218.

[14] W. D. Howells, "Criticism and Fiction," American Poetry and Prose, Norman Foerster and Robert Falk, editors (new shorter edition; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 755.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

Speaking of the great change that came over the English novel, the critic Hugh Walpole very wittily and, in my opinion, quite correctly, said:

> But it is the sense of Morality that has yielded the greatest changes. In the 'seventies the Novelists took it for granted that once you were married you were happy for ever after. In the 'nineties the novelists took it for granted that once you were married you were done for. In the modern novel, as none of the characters are married at all, the old question scarcely arises.[17]

The change in subject matter of the novel was by this time so great that George Gissing, writing in 1897, was moved to note that:

> So great a change has come over the theory and practice of fiction in the England of our times that we must needs treat of Dickens as, in many respects, antiquated.[18]

The second reason for the absence of Moral Criticism may be found in a consideration of the Aesthetic Movement. It is beyond the bounds of this paper to embark upon an extended discussion of this most turbulent of all periods in English literary history; however, one may note a few of those features of the movement that were in some way

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[17] Hugh Walpole, "Novelists of the Seventies," The Eighteen-Seventies: Essays by Fellows of the Royal Society of Literature, Harley Granville-Barker, editor (Cambridge: University Press, 1929), p. 44.

[18] George Gissing, Charles Dickens: A Critical Study (in The Victorian Era Series; London: Blackie and Son Limited, 1903), p. 63.

connected with morality. Among the most prominent of these was the insistence that the subject matter of the artist was unlimited.

> A world of sensation. Forms, colours, feelings were meant to provide the refined pleasure and enjoyment of the man for whom it existed and he must turn them into art without restraint, scruple or concern as to whether this satisfied the policemen, pleased the minister of religion or elevated the shopkeeper.[19]

A critic such as George Gissing, writing as he did at the height of the Movement, was being quite fair when he indicated what aesthetic critics found distasteful in Dickens:

> Here is the contradiction so irritating to Dickens' severer critics, the artistic generation of today. What!--they exclaim--a great writer, inspired with a thoroughly fine idea, is to stay his hand until he has made grave inquiry whether Messrs. Mudie's subscribers will approve it or not! The mere suggestion is infuriating. And this--they vociferate--is what Dickens was always doing. It may be true that he worked like a Trojan; but what is the use of work, meant to be artistic, carried on in the hourly fear of Mrs. Grundy? Fingers are pointed to this, that, and the other Continental novelist; can you imagine <u>him</u> in such sorry plight? Why, nothing would have pleased him better than to know he was outraging public sentiment! In fact, it is only when one <u>does</u> so that one's work has a chance of being good.[20]

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[19] William Gaunt, <u>The Aesthetic Adventure</u> (London: J. Cape, 1945), p. 13.

[20] George Gissing, <u>Charles Dickens: A Critical Study</u>, <u>op. cit.</u>, pp. 66-67.

Another of the more salient characteristics of the Aesthetic Movement was the insistence that an artist's work should be an end in itself. True art, be it poetry, prose or painting, should never attempt to further a moral purpose. Thus this school of criticism altogether removed the question of morality from a consideration of the novel. As I have indicated, one convention of the Aesthetic Movement had emphasized that the novelist was at liberty to include whatsoever he wished in his work; now, another convention stated that the novelist should not "preach." The net result of these two conventions was to push all considerations of morality into the background.

Such a line of criticism would be inimical to Dickens' art, and we have it on the authority of Gissing that Dickens' novels were indeed adversely criticized because of their didacticism.

> Hard words are spoken of him [Dickens] by young writers whose zeal outruns their discretion, and far outstrips their knowledge; from the advanced posts of modern criticism any stone is good enough to throw at a novelist who avows and glories in his moral purpose.[21]

Among the most eminent of those critics who were

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[21] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

busily throwing stones was George Saintsbury. This critic was indeed a disciple of the Aesthetic Movement,[22] and hence it should come as no surprise to note the rather depreciating tone that he adopted when discussing this aspect of Dickens. In his English Novel, after cataloguing Dickens' exaggeration, melodrama and grotesquerie, Saintsbury said: "He was, moreover, a 'novelist of purpose' in the highest degree . . ."[23] A better indication of Saintsbury's close ties with L'Art pour L'Art may be found in the remarks that he made about William Blake. Blake, said Saintsbury, was in his later years "overcome by the detestable heresy of instruction." Such an affliction was disastrous because

> when a man is once affected, whether the instruction he gives be moral or immoral, orthodox or unorthodox, it is almost hopeless thenceforward to expect perfect work to be produced by him. He becomes careful of what he says, instead of being careful how he says it; anxious to say something in any manner, rather than anxious to say everything (or it may be nothing) in the best manner possible.[24]

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[22]For the close relationship between Saintsbury and the Aesthetic Movement, see Dorothy Richardson, "Saintsbury and Art for Art's Sake in England," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LIX (March, 1944), 243-260.

[23]George Saintsbury, The English Novel (in The Channels of English Literature Series, ed. Oliphant Smeaton. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1913), p. 228.

[24]Dorothy Richardson, "Saintsbury and Art for Art's Sake in England," op. cit., p. 248.

Saintsbury's opinion was not shared, however, by all or even by many of his fellow critics, and it never became the fashion to ridicule Dickens' "purpose" to the same extent, let us say, that it became the fashion to ridicule his exaggerated characters.[25] In their evaluation of didacticism, critics seemed to be guided more by their own personal feelings than by their adherence to any particular school of criticism. One critic who took the exactly opposite view to Saintsbury was Oliver Elton. Writing in 1920, he noted that "good and delightful art may quite well be the result of an express moral aim. To think otherwise is mere late-Victorian art-cant . . ."[26] Not all critics were as decisive as were Saintsbury and Elton in their condemnation or approbation of moral purpose in novels. Hugh Walker, for instance, couldn't seem to make up his mind one way or the other. Writing in 1921, he noted that:

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[25]The reason for this probably lies in the fact that the aesthetes' ridicule of purpose was counteracted by the overt didacticism of the works of Shaw and Ibsen that began to appear contemporaneously with the aesthetic criticism. See W. Crotch, "Dickens Renaissance," Living Age, CCCII (August, 1919), 492-497.

[26]Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature (the fourth edition; London: Edward Arnold, 1920), II, 196.

> It was when he [Dickens] took upon him to be a reformer of schools, of legal systems, of government offices and of morals and society in general, that he committed his worst mistakes. Prior to this stage his humour was the guide. He used what was humorously effective, and rejected what was not. Afterwards, his canon of inclusion or exclusion was serviceableness to the purpose, or the reverse; and as it was not a canon of art it naturally led to error in art.[27]

Nevertheless, despite the rejection of "purpose" implied in the above quotation, Walker, thirteen pages later, in his essay, said:

> The abstract question whether purpose is or is not prejudicial to art is not worth discussing. There is no reason in the nature of things why it should be prejudicial, and the true question is whether in a particular instance it has or has not led the author astray . . .[28]

Walker did feel that "purpose" had indeed led Dickens astray; however, the general drift of his criticism does show a strange sort of dualism as regards this aspect of Dickens' work.

A good example of the fact that critics tended to evaluate didacticism in the novel by their personal preferences rather than their strict adherence to one particular school of criticism was furnished by the writings of W. J. Dawson. This critic had nothing but praise for the moral

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[27] Hugh Walker, Literature of the Victorian Era (third edition; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), p.672.

[28] Ibid., p. 685.

purpose that animated Dickens' novels; nevertheless, he wouldn't accept that same quality in George Eliot's novels. Referring to Dickens, Dawson rhapsodized: "It stands to the eternal honour of Dickens that he did much to infuse a more humane spirit into the general life of the people."[29] However, when discussing the work of George Eliot, Dawson found that "purpose" was in her case a liability. The novel Romola, said Dawson, first marked the decadence of Eliot.

> The reason of this decadence is plain . . . It is that George Eliot took herself too seriously as a teacher to maintain for any long period the true freshness and spontaneity of the artist.[30]

It should be apparent by this point that at least two of the precepts of novel-writing advocated by the aesthetes were diametrically opposed to the ones professed by Dickens. The concept of "purity" and "purpose" that had pleased virtually all of Dickens' contemporaries had become by the end of the century an object of ridicule for aesthetic critics. In an essay entitled "Dickens as Artist, or Genius and the Cry of 'Art for Art's Sake'" that appeared in 1906, R. Brimley Johnson pointed out the depths to which

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[29] W. J. Dawson, Makers of English Fiction (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905), pp. 117-118.

[30] Ibid., p. 146.

Dickens' reputation had fallen:

> It can scarcely be questioned . . . that Charles Dickens has suffered more than any other eminent English writer from the arrogance of aesthetic criticism. His work has not merely been complacently dismissed as "bad art"; it has been cited again and again as a conspicuous example of degraded popular taste.[31]

By this point, the reader has in all probability wondered if the Aesthetic Movement itself was not responsible for the extension of the subject matter of the novel.

Surely the School of L'Art pour L'Art must have had something to do with it, because if we assign to the Aesthetic Movement the dates 1870-1900,[32] we can see that these dates parallel fairly closely the period during which the novelists were demanding an expansion of subject matter, i.e., from the publication of George Moore's A Modern Lover in 1883 to the publication of Hardy's Jude the Obscure in 1896. Nevertheless, it is an unresolved question as to what extent the aesthetic critics' de-emphasis

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[31]R. Brimley Johnson, "Dickens as Artist, or Genius and the Cry of 'Art for Art's Sake'," The Book Monthly III (1906), 235, cited by Ford, p. 201. For an essay expressing somewhat similar views, see W. Crotch, "The Dickens Renaissance," Living Age CCCII (August, 1919), 492-497.

[32]See Dorothy Richardson, "Saintsbury and Art for Art's Sake in England," op. cit., p. 243.

of morality contributed to the decline of the novel of the pre-1880's. As was indicated, there must have been at least a correlation between the two events. Critics, however, seem reluctant to say much more than this. Hugh Walpole, writing in 1929, was conveniently vague about the matter. He merely said:

> The old novel [i.e., the novel ca. 1870] was killed by three destructive forces--the sense of Form that came with the aid of Mr. Vizetelly, Mr. George Moore and others from France, the sense of Reality given to us by Thomas Hardy and George Gissing, the New Morality introduced to us by the New Woman.[33]

The word "form" as used in the above quotation is synonymous with "technique." Hence it would appear, from this one example at least, that there was a causal relationship between the Aesthetic Movement and the decline of the old novel. This, however, is not necessarily so, for the mere fact that a critic emphasized "form" in his criticism did not make him an aesthete. Henry James is a good example of this. In his Art of Fiction, he had laid much emphasis on the form of a novel, claiming that this was the only facet of the novel that was open to criticism. But despite this similarity with the Aesthetic Movement,

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[33]Hugh Walpole, "Novelists of the Seventies," op. cit., p. 43.

few persons would claim that James was an aesthete. Indeed, the whole question of the relationship between the aesthetes' glorification of form and the increased concern of novel critics with form is one area of literature that has, to the best of my knowledge, received little, if any, attention. As was the case with the Aesthetic Movement and the decline of the old novel, there must have been some influence, but to define the exact limits of that influence is another matter. With this thought in mind, we can turn to the next important critical approach to Dickens' fiction. This approach takes into consideration the critics' reaction to the novelist's depiction of reality.

As has been indicated in the initial chapter of my thesis, the criticism of the period extending from ca. 1850 to ca. 1880 was characterized by the growth of realistic standards in novel criticism. Such criticism was of course inimical to Dickens' theory of fiction, and the critical essays and books representative of that period were liberally sprinkled with such epithets as "caricature," "unreal," "improbable" and "strained."

When one examines the criticism written during the years ca. 1880-ca. 1940, one notes that this same controversy over "probability" was very much alive. There was, however, a very important difference between the two periods.

Whereas the first of them was characterized by a predominant acceptance of the realistic theories of G. H. Lewes and Walter Bagehot and a corresponding reluctance to admit to the possibility of other theories of fiction, the second period witnessed the reversal of this situation. From approximately 1880 onwards, one finds many critics, such as George Gissing, G. K. Chesterton, George Saintsbury, Oliver Elton and Hugh Walker, all making at least a token attempt to evaluate Dickens' world, not in realistic, but in some other terms. The critic who stands out and roundly condemns that author's art as being wholly inferior is conspicuous in this period in much the same fashion that Masson was conspicuous in the first period.[34]

A considerable amount of my material for the study of this aspect of Dickens' criticism has been taken from the numerous histories of English literature that seem to have been so prevalent at the turn of the century. The advantage of using such works as these lies in the fact that their authors, because of the limitations of space, must of necessity dispense with superfluous material and deal only with what they consider to be the salient char-

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[34]The reader will recall that in 1857 David Masson did indeed make a very lucid defence of Dickens' prose methods; however, Masson was at that time very much a lone voice in a realistic wilderness.

acteristics of each literary figure. On examining these histories, one is truly impressed with the frequency with which references to Dickens' reality or unreality appear.

Few readers would question the assertion that George Saintsbury was one of the most influential and important of the critics writing in the late eighteen-nineties and early nineteen-hundreds. Besides being the author of the article on Dickens in the Cambridge History of English Literature, he was also the sole author of at least four other histories.[35] Although the aforementioned works were not initially published in the same year, their subsequent history of publication made each one almost contemporary with the next. Because of this and because Saintsbury's lifelong conception of Dickens seemed to have undergone few if any modifications, the writings of this critic may be considered in their entirety, rather than as units, each to be discussed individually.

Saintsbury's considered opinion was that Dickens' novels were a sort of mélange. In 1914, he noted:

> But his usual form, apart from The Pickwick Papers which stands alone, is a sort of cross between the novel of ordinary life and the fantastic tale, the humours and eccentricities of individuals being

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[35] These four latter histories will be referred to individually in the following pages.

> enlarged sometimes, especially in his later books, to the point of exaggeration and even of caricature.[36]

It was this admixture to which this critic violently objected. He considered that the "novel of ordinary life," with its well-drawn characters, was indeed superior to the "totally unreal style of character exemplified in the Bagstocks, the Carkers, and so forth."[37] As might well be expected, Thackeray was most representative of Saintsbury's conception of a good novelist. After making a very favorable comparison between Thackeray and Shakespeare, the critic went on to say of the former:

> Every act, every scene, every person in these three books /Pendennis, Esmond and The Newcomes/ is real with a reality which has been idealized just up to and not beyond the necessities of literature. It does not matter what the acts, the scenes, the personages may be. Whether we are at the height of romantic passion with Esmond's devotion to Beatrix . . . , whether the note is that of the simplest human pathos, as in Colonel Newcome's death-bed; whether we are indulged with society at Baymouth and Oxbridge . . . we are in the House of Life, a mansion not too frequently opened to us by the

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[36] George Saintsbury, A First Book of English Literature (third edition; London: MacMillan and Company, 1919), p. 221.

[37] George Saintsbury, A History of Nineteenth Century Literature (eighth edition; New York: The MacMillan Company, 1913), p. 149.

writers of prose fiction.[38]

Saintsbury obviously wished that in Dickens' case the novelist had opened the door of the mansion more frequently, for with the exception of those avowedly comic characters such as Pickwick, Dick Swiveller, Mantalini and a few of the more realistic personages such as Pip and Joe Gargery, the author's characters received scant praise from this critic.

The reason for Saintsbury's rather obvious dislike of Dickens can best be seen in the previously quoted passage. Thackeray's novels, said Saintsbury, were "real with a reality which has been idealized just up to and not beyond the necessities of literature."[39] In other words, Thackeray's imagination had kept pace with that author's observing faculties. However, such was not the case with Dickens. His

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[38] Ibid., p. 155. The reader may notice in this quotation the implied contrast between Dickens and Thackeray as to "pathos" and "society." A feature of the Dickens criticism during this period was the assertion, reiterated ad nauseum, that Dickens' pathos was maudlin and that he never could depict a gentleman. Regarding Dickens' characters of aristocratic or upper class background, Saintsbury called them: "Monsters not suited to any conceivable scheme." See George Saintsbury, A Short History of English Literature (seventh edition; London: MacMillan and Company, 1913), p. 743.

[39] George Saintsbury, A History of Nineteenth Century Literature, loc. cit.

imagination

> so far outran the strictly critical knowledge of mankind as mankind . . . that it has invested Dickens' books and characters with a peculiarity found nowhere else . . .[40]

Such a fertile imagination, capable as it was of turning an ordinary army officer into a Major Bagstock, was an idealization of life far past the legitimate (as Saintsbury conceived them) boundaries of art. Life as Dickens depicted it was not, according to this critic, human life.

> Yet it has been questioned whether the life with which his scenes and characters are provided is altogether human life--whether his world is not rather a huge phantasmagoria of his own creation.[41]

So far, it would appear as if there was little to choose between Saintsbury's theory of fiction and the realistic theories of the eighteen-fifties. In matters of preference there was no difference. However, there was a very important difference as regards the exclusiveness of their respective hypotheses. Lewes had been so blinded by realism that he refused to even consider the possibility of the existence of theories of fiction equal or superior to realism. Saintsbury did not have that attitude. He

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[40] Ibid., p. 147.

[41] Saintsbury, A Short History of English Literature, op. cit., p. 742.

pointed rather disdainfully to the unreality of Dickens' characters but at the same time he admitted that they did harmonize with their settings.

> They are never quite real: we never experience or meet anything or anybody quite like them in the actual world. And yet in their own world they hold their position and play their parts quite perfectly and completely: they obey their own laws, they are consistent with their own surroundings.[42]

Saintsbury never really elaborated upon this most significant (to us) point, and one has the impression that like many of his contemporaries he was puzzled as to the nature of Dickens' world. He therefore included this observation so as at least partially to account for the undeniable forcefulness and vividness of Dickens' creations. He had never denied this author's "arresting power"[43] but he seemed unable to account for it. This perplexity of Saintsbury (a trait that he held in common with many of his contemporaries) is best seen in the comment he made in The English Novel. Speaking about Dickens, he said:

> His idiosyncracy . . . is so marked that everybody acknowledges its presence: but its exact character and nature are matter not so much of debate (though they are that also in the highest

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[42] George Saintsbury, A History of Nineteenth Century Literature, op. cit., p. 147.

[43] George Saintsbury, A Short History of English Literature, loc. cit.

> degree) as matter of more or less questing, often of a rather blindman's buff kind. There is probably no author of whom really critical estimates are so rare.[44]

One might also mention at this point (albeit at a slight expense to the continuity of my paper), Elton's very lucid remark about those critics who "wonder why Dickens should be so hard to judge when he is so easy to enjoy."[45] However, because Saintsbury had made at least a token attempt to explain Dickens' world in terms other than realistic ones, he deserves to be classed in the school of Masson rather than Lewes.

Another critic who sided with Masson rather than with Lewes was George Gissing. His criticism of Dickens was written in 1897 and was contemporary with much of Saintsbury's work. The first thing that Gissing did was what Henry James had done thirteen years before. Gissing indicated that each author had a certain way of looking at life. Some authors had a "realistic" way and some, as Saintsbury would say, a "fantastic" way: they all had their individual conceptions of the world. A critic reading a

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[44] George Saintsbury, The English Novel (in The Channels of English Literature Series, ed. Oliphant Smeaton; London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1913), p. 226.

[45] Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature, op.cit., p. 194.

novel must be willing to temporarily suspend his disbelief. He must grant to the author a world of his own choosing. Gissing said:

> As soon as a writer sits down to construct a narrative, to imagine human beings, or adapt those he knows to changed circumstances, he enters a world distinct from the actual, and, call himself what he may, he obeys certain laws, certain conventions, without which the art of fiction could not exist. Be he a true artist, he gives us pictures which represent his own favourite way of looking at life; each is the world in little, and the world as he prefers it. So that, whereas execution may be rightly criticized from the common point of view, a master's general conception of the human tragedy or comedy must be accepted as that without which his work could not take form.[46]

In the above quotation, one can see that the emphasis of the criticism has been shifted from the manner in which the author conceives of his world to how that world has been transferred to paper. The emphasis was no longer on the author's point of view, but on his technique, and hence rather than asking if a character is true to life, the critic must ask if he is consistent with the world in which he is depicted. Saintsbury seemed to have been aware of this, for, as previously mentioned, he had spoken of Dickens' characters obeying their own laws and being consistent in their own way. Nevertheless he had not attempted

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[46] George Gissing, Charles Dickens: A Critical Study, op. cit., p. 217.

to expand the idea. The most important part of Gissing's criticism was the part which elaborated upon this idea.

Gissing said that in the case of Dickens' best characters, the author did make sure that they were consistent. Mrs. Gamp furnishes a good example of Dickens' technique at its best, and Alice Marlow (Dombey and Son) is an example of this technique at its worst. In the former case, said Gissing, Dickens took a thoroughly vulgar and disreputable old woman and expurgated her. In deference to the moral conventions of his age, he omitted from his portrait the coarseness with which a real London nurse would be wont to speak. This admittedly idealistic technique merely omits a portion of the real Mrs. Gamp. The analogy that Gissing used to explain it was that of Platonic Ideas. Mrs. Gamp as she appeared in the pages of Martin Chuzzlewit is the Platonic Idea of London's monthly nurse. Dickens' portrait shows her to us as she appeared before the shades of the prison house closed about her. With Alice Marlow, however, Dickens struck a false note. Like Mrs. Gamp, he idealized her, but in the process of idealization he introduced something false. She "represents a total impossibility, the combination of base origin and squalid life with striking mental power, strikingly developed."[47] Here,

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[47] Ibid., p. 77.

then, one can see the inconsistency in the two figures. Both of them have been bowdlerized, for it is inconceivable that two women drawn as they were from the lowest rung of society would speak a language so free from expletives and epithets. But Mrs. Gamp is quite consistent with her position. Aside from the deletion of crudeness, she speaks and acts as one would expect a monthly nurse to speak and act. Alice Marlow, on the other hand, speaks impeccable English and despite her poverty runs barefoot across London to hurl money and defiance into the teeth of Carker's sister. Such an action is not consistent with her character. Gissing said:

> In Mrs. Gamp a portion of truth is omitted, in Alice Marlow there is substitution of falsity. By the former process, true idealism may be reached; by the latter, one arrives at nothing but attitude and sham.[48]

Because he looked further into Dickens and saw more than many of his contemporaries, Gissing has been numbered among the most astute of the Dickens' critics, an assessment with which few persons would disagree. Nevertheless, many critics fail to comprehend how the author of such

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[48] Ibid., p. 92. Gissing's discussion of Dickens' technique of idealizing Mrs. Gamp also revolves around "humour"; a quality that Gissing conceives of as "a solvent" that aids in washing away the "gross adherents" of Mrs. Gamp.

realistic novels as New Grub Street and Workers in the Dawn could have written a criticism of Dickens that so ably defends idealism in literature. Many critics, of course, evade the problem by assuming that since Gissing was a realist he must inevitably have had a rather contemptuous attitude towards an idealistic technique such as that used by Dickens. One critic who did think exactly this was Hugh Walker. He claimed that Gissing wrote his Dickens' criticism with almost "a touch of condescension in the contrast with the sternness and unswerving truth of modern realism."[49] This is indeed what one would expect to find in Gissing's work; however, we don't find "condescension" in Gissing's criticism. The reason we don't find it has already been suggested. Gissing claimed that the business of the critic was to examine the manner in which the novelist executed his art. In an article entitled "Realism in Fiction" that appeared in the Humanitarian for July 1895, Gissing said:

> Thus it comes about that every novelist beholds a world of his own, and the supreme endeavour of his art must be to body forth that world as it exists for him. The novelist works, and must work subjectively. A demand for objectivity in fiction is worse than meaningless, for apart from the personality of the workman no literary art can exist . . . There is no science of fiction.
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> Process belongs to the workshop; the critic of the completed work has only to decide as to

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[49] Hugh Walker, The Literature of the Victorian Era, op. cit., p. 673.

> its truth, that is to say, to judge the spirit in which it was conceived, and the technical merit of its execution.[50]

The reader can now see that those critics who have attributed to Gissing a sneering attitude towards idealism have completely misunderstood the whole point of his criticism. Gissing's criticism did indeed represent a slight advance over that of Saintsbury, for whereas the latter had asserted that the House of Life could only be entered via the doorway of faithful description, Gissing had shown that by omitting part of the truth, one could still arrive at the same end.

So far I have dwelt on those aspects of Dickens' criticism in which Gissing showed himself to be somewhat ahead of his time. However, one should realize that in many respects this same critic was also a part of his era. This is particularly evident when he came to discuss Dickens and his plots. Unlike Chesterton, (the next of the critics to be discussed), Gissing did not seem to grasp the idea that "fantastic" characters must be accompanied by equally "fantastic" plotting. Hence he severely

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[50]George Gissing, "Realism in Fiction," The Humanitarian (July, 1895), cited by M. Donnelly, George Gissing: Grave Comedian (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 208-209. Donnelly also refers to another of Gissing's essays in which he discussed his concepts of fiction. See: "Why I Don't Write Plays," Pall Mall Gazette (Septem-10, 1892).

criticized Dickens for the innumerable coincidences upon which the novelist had relied. Here he is guilty of judging Dickens' characters by one standard and his plots by another. Ideally, both should be judged by the same criterion. It was in his conception of the function of the plot of a novel that Gissing showed that he was very much influenced by the currents of his time. Contemporary critics thought of the plot as being inseparable from the characters in the novel. The reality of the characters depended to a very large extent upon the twists and turns taken by the plot, and the ideal to be striven for was a close interplay between the two; the development of the characters being dictated by the exigencies of the plot and the unravelling of the plot being dependent upon the characters themselves.

Gissing was quite astonished at the crudity exhibited by Dickens in this respect. He felt that the author did not rely on the material offered by life itself. A typical comment of his was:

> In his plots, unfortunately, he is seldom concerned with the plain motives of human life . . . Too often he prefers some far-fetched eccentricity, some piece of knavishness, some unlikely occurrence, about which to weave his tale.[51]

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[51] George Gissing, Charles Dickens: A Critical Study, op.cit., p. 45.

As to the actual interplay of plot and character, Gissing noted that: "A great situation must be led up to by careful and skilful foresight in character and event--precisely where his [Dickens'] resources always failed him."[52]

Dickens' plotting has always proved to be a stumbling block to even the most enthusiastic of his admirers. Many critics quickly admitted that in this one respect Dickens' genius was not evident, and after having stated this unpleasant fact went on to rhapsodize over his better qualities. Such was not the case, however, with G. K. Chesterton. Unlike Gissing, who had abandoned Dickens' plots to the maw of the critics in much the same fashion that modern critics have abandoned Little Nell, Chesterton put up a lucid defense. His defense looms even more important in view of the direction taken by modern criticism.[53] The core of Chesterton's criticism concerns the traditional conception of Dickens as a "novelist."

What Chesterton did was to deny emphatically that Dickens' work did indeed belong to the category of those persons who wrote novels.

Dickens' work is not to be reckoned in novels

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[52] Ibid., p. 47.

[53] Vide Chap. VI. Archetypes.

> at all. Dickens' work is to be reckoned always by characters, sometimes by groups, oftener by episodes, but never by novels.[54]

Chesterton further said that, strictly speaking, Dickens never wrote such things as individual novels.

> They [the novels] are simply lengths cut from the flowing and mixed substance called Dickens --a substance of which any given length will be certain to contain a given proportion of brilliant and of bad stuff.[55]

Now that he had suggested that Dickens' work belonged to a genre other than the novel, Chesterton went on to indicate the nature of that genre. Dickens' art, he claimed, had a certain air of eternity around it. No one could imagine any of his characters such as Mantalini or Pickwick ever dying. On the other hand, no one would doubt the corporeality of such realistic characters as Becky Sharp or Archdeacon Grantly. The reason for these disparate opinions was of course that Thackeray's and Trollope's characters belonged to fiction. Fiction, Chesterton said, ". . . imitates not only life, but the limitations of life; it not only reproduces life, it reproduces death."[56] Char-

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[54] G. K. Chesterton, Charles Dickens (eighth edition; London: Methuen and Company Limited, 1913), p. 80.

[55] Ibid., p. 81.

[56] Ibid., p. 83.

acters such as those of Dickens belonged to another genre, a genre that dealt with men greater than they really were. Such a genre was folklore.

> So we find ourselves faced with a fundamental contrast between what is called fiction and what is called folklore. The one exhibits an abnormal degree of dexterity operating within ordinary limitations; the other exhibits quite normal desires extended beyond those limitations.[57]

According to Chesterton, folklore, originally very popular and prominent in the early stages of literature, had by the nineteenth century been superseded by fiction. Nevertheless, there still remained traces of this genre in contemporary literature. Among the most important vestiges, and one that appeared most prominently in Dickens' works, was

> . . . a certain air of endlessness in the episides, even in the shortest episodes--a sense that, although we leave them, they still go on.[58]

Thus, he said, one must examine Dickens not as a writer of fiction, but as a creator of folklore. Consequently, his characters cannot in any sense be thought of as realistic.

> Dickens was a mythologist rather than a novelist; he was the last of the mythologists, and

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[57] Ibid., p. 84.

[58] Ibid., p. 85.

> perhaps the greatest. He did not always manage to make his characters men, but he always managed, at the least, to make them gods . . . They [his characters] live statically in a perpetual summer of being themselves.[59]

Now that he had removed Dickens from the usual classification of "novelist," Chesterton was then able to make exceedingly plausible rebuttals to many of the time-honoured charges that had been directed towards that author's work. Among the hoariest of these was the claim that Dickens' characters never "grew." The critics who espoused such a view claimed that the vast majority of his characters were not real because they exhibited exactly the same philosophy and the same attitudes at the end of the novel as they did on the opening page. Seen in the light of realism, such a charge was quite legitimate, for with the exception of a few characters such as Pip and Bella Wilfer, most of Dickens' creations did indeed remain quite static throughout the various novels. Chesterton's answer to this charge was:

> It was not the aim of Dickens to show the effect of time and circumstance upon a character; it was not even his aim to show the effect of a character on time and circumstance.[60]

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[59] Ibid., p. 87.

[60] Ibid.

This critic then went on to further bolster his argument by pointing out that such characters as Mrs. Gamp, Pickwick, Mantalini and Micawber neither exerted much influence on the novel nor did the novel exert much influence on them. It was only when Dickens tried to interweave plot and character that he failed miserably. Chief among these failures was the repentance of Dombey, who overnight was changed from the coldest of businessmen to the most loving of fathers.

Chesterton realized that his hypothesis did indeed explain the great comic characters of Dickens' early novels, but he was also aware that after the appearance of Dombey and Son and David Copperfield, Dickens' novels were strangely bare of characters like Mrs. Gamp or Pickwick. Instead, there was a corresponding increase in the number of what we would call realistic characters, characters whose movement and growth were dictated by the demands of the plot.

This critic attributed the change in Dickens' technique to the literary climate of the novelist's era. Readers of the 1850's, their appetites sharpened by the publication of Vanity Fair in 1847-48, were clamouring for more realism. Dickens bowed to popular demand, and from David Copperfield onward he introduced more realistic characters into his novels. If one examined two characters, one from his first novel and one from his last, one could

see Dickens' two approaches:

> The glory of Mr. Crisparkle /Edwin Drood/ partly consists in the fact that he might exist anywhere, in any country town into which we may happen to stray. The glory of Mr. Stiggins /Dombey and Son/ wholly consists in the fact that he could not possibly exist anywhere except in the head of Dickens . . .[61]

Chesterton definitely felt that Dickens' abandonment of his first genre was a mistake.

> Had he lost or gained by the growth of technique and probability in his later work? His later characters were more like men; but were not his earlier characters more like immortals? . . . Where is that young poet who created such majors and architects as Nature will never dare to create?[62]

The writings of Hugh Walker furnish a good example of the gradual shift in criticism from an outright avowal of the unreality of Dickens' characters towards a willingness (albeit a reluctant willingness) to try to account for those figures in terms other than realistic. In 1897, while admitting the genius of Dickens as a humorist, Walker had summarily dismissed that author's characters as mere types:

> The characters of Dickens, then, are personified humours, his method is the method not of Shakes-

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[61] Ibid., p. 180.

[62] Ibid., p. 238.

> peare, but of Ben Jonson. Pecksniff is just another name for hypocrisy, Jonas Chuzzlewit for avarice, Quilp for cruelty.[63]

By 1910, however, the year in which his Literature of the Victorian Era was published, Walker was not quite so adamant in his insistence on the unreality of Dickens. In this latter work, he still claimed that Dickens' characters were indeed personified humours. Exaggeration, said Walker, was the keystone of his art.

> The strongest colours are laid on with the largest brush. From beginning to end his characters rarely, if ever, impress the reader as all-round, normal men and women . . . To the tribe of Ben /Jonson/, not to the school of Shakespeare, Dickens belongs: he is a delineator of humours rather than a painter of men. There is usually some label attached to his characters--a habitual phrase, a gesture, a physical peculiarity--like a trade-mark to goods.[64]

Nevertheless, as I shall indicate, Walker did qualify this statement and hence it cannot be considered truly indicative of his final opinion of Dickens.

Like Saintsbury and the realist critics in general,

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[63] Hugh Walker, The Age of Tennyson (in Handbooks of English Literature Series, ed. Professor Hales. fourth edition; London: George Bell and Sons, 1904), p. 87. Such an assertion does have a very limited amount of credibility. We are aware that Dickens was familiar with Jonson, having acted the part of Bobadil in Jonson's comedy Every Man in His Humour.

[64] Hugh Walker, Literature of the Victorian Era (third edition; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), p. 682.

Walker did feel that realism in fiction was the goal toward which a novelist should strive. On this basis he would exclude Dickens from the ranks of the great novelists. He noted that:

> He [Dickens] is not one of the small band of great artists who have been able to represent men exactly as they lived.[65]

This aspect of Dickens' work Walker called "the weakest part of his books." He also indicated that "in many cases the crudities and improbabilities are astonishing, and but for the exuberant wealth of humour they would be offensive."[66] Since he considered both the characters and the plotting of Dickens' novels to be unreal, we are not surprised to read that Dickens' novels were "a collection of oddities."[67] It was this fact, said Walker,

> that gives them [the novels] an air of unreality. As we are aware that abnormal beings do exist, the presence of a few such in fiction seems natural enough and even gives zest; but a world peopled by eccentrics and faddists is not the world we know. Dickens, of course, has his ordin-

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., p. 665. The reader may also note in passing that critics have always thought of Dickens' humour as atoning for many of what they thought to be his literary sins. Vide Chap. I.

[67] Ibid., p. 684.

> ary men and women too; but the misfortune is that they are as a rule uninteresting, and the whole flavour of his work is drawn from the abnormal.[68]

A critic such as Chesterton had been astute enough to realize that Dickens' characters were, as Walker called them, "a collection of oddities," only when viewed from the standpoint of realism. In effect, what Chesterton said was that when judged by realistic standards, Dickens' characters were inadequate, and when judged by those same standards his plots were even worse. However, taking the plots and the characters together, and forgetting about whether they were true to life or not, one could see that the unreal plot complemented the unreal character. There is no dissonance here because both plot and character are delineated on the same level; a level of unreality rather than reality. Where dissonance will occur is when Dickens shows a real character moving according to the demands of an unreal plot. Chesterton was too much a critic of his own time to have accepted this technique as a legitimate one for novelists and for that reason had classed Dickens as a mythologist rather than a novelist. However, Walker apparently refuses to do even this. He can't or won't see that a world peopled with "eccentrics and faddists"

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[68] Ibid.

and moving according to the dictates of an "improbable plot" can be just as meaningful as a world peopled by "real" characters and moving according to the demands of a "probable" plot.

What makes Walker's criticism so interesting (and indeed the criticism of all of this period) is that one can observe the struggle going on in his mind. As has been indicated, he was much more attracted to Thackeray's world than he was to Dickens', yet on the other hand he was also aware that Dickens' world did possess something (he wasn't sure what it was) that made it convincing. The reader will recall that Saintsbury found himself in somewhat the same quandary, and had extricated himself by noting in an offhand manner that Dickens' characters were consistent in their own way. Walker was obviously just as puzzled as was Saintsbury and hence he carefully noted in the beginning of his essay that although Dickens' techniques owed more to idealism than realism, the idealist could come just as close to the truth as could the realist. Walker said:

> But now when the solid atom itself seems to be dissolving, some doubt is permissible as to the degree of reality of the "real" and the "ideal." It is certain that Dickens "idealized"; but it is not so certain that in doing so he wandered father from the truth than the realist.[69]

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[69] Ibid., p. 673.

As justification for this statement, Walker went on to indicate that the realist merely describes, whereas the idealist is his characters.

> The realist is usually a spectator of that which he describes, whether it be animate or inanimate. His characters are to him something external; he believes that he understands them, but he does not identify himself with them . . . But Dickens, according to those who knew him, absolutely was for the time the character he was shaping.[70]

These last two quotations splendidly illustrate the dilemma faced by Walker, and indeed by many of the critics of this period. On the one hand, his personal preference was towards realism, yet on the other, his training as a scholar told him that there was a strange consistency in Dickens. One notes this literary tug-of-war continually in effect in his writings. At one moment he could say that exaggeration, the mainstay of Dickens' work, was "often successful, but it is never in the highest style of art . . ."[71] The implication here surely is that truth in fiction must be obtained through realism.[72] However,

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., p. 683. Walker did say that Sam Weller was an exception to this rule.

[72] In all fairness to Walker, it should be noted that he did feel that the realists were going a bit too far in the pursuit of realism. He felt this way in particular about the slum-novel. "Of late years 'tales of mean streets'

he clearly contradicted himself when he noted that the idealist did not wander farther from the truth than did the realist. This literary dilemma, already noted in Saintsbury, and appearing here again in Walker, was an integral part of the critical approaches to Dickens' fiction during this period.

Another critic who loomed very large in this realistic-idealistic controversy was Oliver Elton. Writing in 1920, this critic realized that in his novels Dickens had represented many worlds, some realistic and some fantastic. Unlike Saintsbury or Walker, who because of personal preferences for realism were frankly puzzled by the fantasy, Elton did try to get to the heart of the matter and to find out just what the fantasy was. With this purpose in mind he opened his essay with the following question, and having asked it, answered it:

> Yet, in facing the world of his novels, we have to ask first of all the question, what is it, and where is it? Is it a world of observed reality or one of droll unreason, or of marionettes

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and revelations of the Ghetto have poured from the press, and whiffs from all sorts of heaps [garbage] . . . have been blown to the nostrils." p. 670. This reference was probably made to such novels as George Moore's Esther Waters (1894), Arthur Morrison's Tales of Mean Streets 1894) and A Child of the Jago (1896); W. Somerset Maugham's Liza of Lambeth (1897) and Richard Whiteing's No. 5 John Street (1899).

> and caricatures, or of creative fantasy rooted in life? It is all of these at once, or in turn . . .[73]

In conjunction with this, Elton noted that the multiplicity of worlds was paralleled by a multiplicity of character-types. He did not go as far as to say that Dickens was always careful to ensure that he placed those of his real characters in a real world and those of his fantastic ones in a fantastic world. Instead, he noted:

> The same man [character] is often vigorously real, nobly fantastic, and chimerical, in a single chapter convincing and repelling the imagination.[74]

Elton, unfortunately, had read Taine[75] too closely, and hence instead of emphasizing such points as the fact that Quilp and his environment are both evoked on an identical level, or that Pecksniff and Todgers are also both evoked on the same level, he said that not even Dickens knew when he was moving from one level to the next: "The author does not know it when he shifts from the one [world] to the

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[73] Oliver Elton, A survey of English Literature, op. cit., p. 194.

[74] Ibid., p. 207.

[75] H. A. Taine, History of English Literature, trans. H. Van Laun (new edition; New York: Frank F. Lovell and Company, 1873). Taine's thesis was that Dickens' imagination was essentially hallucinatory.

other, so that we must take the bearings ourselves."[76]

According to Elton, the reader fortunately did have a landmark that would guide him through the maze of realistic and fantastic worlds. Such a landmark was the nature of the prose with which the novel was written. Elton observed that "the confusion of worlds that Dickens presents was only marked by the differing levels of the prose itself."[77] It is quite interesting to note that for an explanation of the captivating quality of the prose that accompanied descriptions of Dickens' highest world (the world rooted in "creative fantasy"), Elton compared that author to the Romantic writers, and in particular to De Quincey. Such a comparison could have been most informative for if carried to its logical conclusion it would have involved Elton in a discussion of Dickens' imagination. However, he did little more than to indicate that this "lyrical heightened prose" was a common denominator of Dickens and the Romantics. He said:

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[76] Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature, op. cit., p. 194. Elton did note in a footnote that those of Dickens' critics which he found of most use were Taine and Gissing.

[77] Ibid., p. 206.

> But the habit of inventive fantasy, along with the lyrical heightened prose begotten of it, came down from the last age, being one of the achievements, as we know, of romance. De Quincey and the essayists had justified it by success, and so had a few of the novelists. But it has its risks when applied in the fiction that also professes to give, and does give, the comedy of ascertained life and manners.[78]

The final sentence of the above quotation does seem to indicate that Elton was not quite wholehearted in his approval of fantasy; nevertheless he was at least trying to account for the undeniable effect occasioned by Dickens' "lyrical heightened prose." The reader will recall that Saintsbury had also praised Dickens' "arresting power,"[79] but had been somewhat at a loss to explain it.

What differentiated Dickens from the realist authors was, according to Elton, the prose that the novelist used. He claimed that Dickens' characters were not intended to be studies of "character." The business of that novelist's plots was not to assist in the development and delineation of character but to provide opportunities for his characters to exhibit their own peculiar qualities.

> The best of his creatures . . . are triumphs of style rather than of character-drawing. They

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[78] Ibid., pp. 205-206.

[79] Cf. p. 75.

> are there in order to speak; they have no real interplay with the other characters, or, if they have, it is in order to throw their own speech into relief. Nor do they truly touch the action, which is often insignificant or unreal; or again, when they do touch it . . . there is a dissonance.[80]

The similarity here between this critic and Chesterton is obvious.[81] Both were alike inasmuch as they insisted that for a full appreciation of Dickens' genius, critics must not examine the novels (if indeed they were novels) for something that the author had never intended to place in them. The realist novel might demand the interaction of character and plot; Dickens' best novels did not.

One of the most influential writers, E. M. Forster, was also just as puzzled about Dickens' work as were his contemporaries. Forster's discussion on flat and round characters is probably too well known to merit discussion in this thesis. But it is informative to note that after building up his long case on the implied superiority of round characters to flat characters, Forster felt compelled to make an exception in the case of Dickens.

> Part of the genius of Dickens is that he does use types and caricatures, people whom we recognize

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[80] Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature, op. cit., p. 217.

[81] Cf. p. 86.

> the instant they re-enter, and yet achieves effects that are not mechanical and a vision of humanity that is not shallow. Those who dislike Dickens have an excellent case. He ought to be bad. He is actually one of our big writers, and his immense success with types suggests that there may be more in flatness than the severer critics admit.[82]

So far in the discussion of the "reality" of Dickens, one may notice that all of the critics agreed that Dickens' characters were, in one way or another, "odd." Since the majority of these critics were avowedly realists in their literary tastes, but at the same time were admirers of Dickens, their criticism was centred about the need (as they conceived of it) somehow or other to justify Dickens' use of exaggeration. As has been indicated, their explanations ran all the way from Gissing's concept of Platonic Ideas to Chesterton's concept of Mythology. Note, however, that common to all of these arguments was the assumption that Dickens took for a model a "real" person and then, in the process of transcribing that person's traits on paper, he changed them. Such a change might have been the conscious result of "expurgation," as was Gissing's idea, or the unconscious result of Dickens' imagination that

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[82] E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1954), pp. 71-72.

"outran the strictly critical knowledge of mankind as mankind . . ." as was Saintsbury's idea. Nevertheless, they all agreed that there had been a change. Elton suggested that to a certain extent (he is very vague in indicating just how far) Dickens was merely faithfully picturing life as he, or for that matter, anyone, saw it. His vision was not hallucinatory as Saintsbury had implied. Elton said:

> The real difficulty is to see the oddity of life, which can hardly be exaggerated. Look out, if only for a day, for persons who might walk out of or into his books, and you will find them.[83]

While such an apology was by no means exhaustive, it did have the credibility of being similar to the opinion expressed by Dickens himself. In his Preface to Martin Chuzzlewit he had replied to those critics who continually taunted him as to the improbability of his characters by saying:

> What is exaggeration to one class of minds . . . is plain truth to another . . . I sometimes ask myself whether there may occasionally be a difference of this kind between some writers and some readers; whether it is always the writer who colours highly, or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for colour is a little dull?[84]

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[83] Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature, op. cit., p. 207.

[84] Charles Dickens, "Preface," Martin Chuzzlewit.

Thus far, as we have seen, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century critics had had grave doubts and serious misgivings when it came to recognizing Dickens as an artist. His plots had been ridiculed as "contrived," his characters frequently dismissed as "caricatures," and the pathos that had wrung tears from Jeffrey and admiration from Thackeray was now deemed "maudlin." There yet remained, however, one aspect of Dickens' work that was received with unanimous praise. Regardless of the harshness and ridicule with which his plots and characters might have been greeted, it was always acknowledged that Dickens was a great humorist. Few were the critics, indeed, who did not place Mr. Micawber and Mrs. Gamp on a par with Falstaff and Mistress Quickly.

Since this approach to Dickens' fiction underwent no significant change between 1836 (the date at which Dickens was first hailed as a great humorist) and 1940 (the date of the appearance of Edmund Wilson's essay _Dickens: The Two Scrooges_,[85] an essay that wholly modified the traditional picture of Dickens as a humorist), it would serve no purpose to examine in detail all or even many of the essays that illustrated such an approach. Hence, I will

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[85] For a discussion of Wilson's essay and the part it played in Dickens' criticism, _vide_ Chap. VI.

postpone the discussion until Chapter VI. Before leaving Dickens' humour, there are two concomitants of this approach that deserve attention.

The first of these was that the universal acclamation of Dickens as a comic genius completely conditioned the critics' response to the author's later works. Thus one finds critics examining the post-Copperfield novels with a view towards finding in those novels the same kind of character and cheery tone that they had found in the pre-Copperfield novels. Rather than endeavouring to understand and to criticize Dickens' later works on their own merits, the critics were continually comparing them to Pickwick and finding them wanting.[86] A typical comment was that which appeared in Blackwood's for 1857. In a comparison between Pickwick and Little Dor-

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[86] The social and political criticism inherent in the post-Copperfield novels was in itself most distasteful to contemporary critics, and because of this, Dickens' later novels were deemed inferior to his earlier ones. However, there is little doubt that even if there had never been a Pickwick, and instead if Dombey and Son had been Dickens' first novel, he would still have been enshrined amongst his contemporaries as one of the greatest of authors. It was not solely didacticism that lowered his reputation; rather it was the unfavourable contrast between his early and late novels.

rit, the reviewer was moved to say that "we sit down and weep when we remember thee, O Pickwick."[87] Because the vast majority of Dickens' critics insisted on seeing only Carlyle's version of "the good, the gentle, high-gifted, ever friendly, noble Dickens, every inch of him an honest man," an otherwise perceptive critic such as George Gissing could make the ghastly mistake of saying that the description of the fog in the opening portion of Bleak House was "rather more cheery than otherwise."[88] Writing in 1923, John Buchan also saw nothing but Dickens the humorist. According to this critic, Bleak House was a "humorous chronicle of an interminable lawsuit [and] is an example of his [Dickens'] amusing but not always effective satire on current abuses."[89] A fourth and final example of the insistence of the pre-1940 critics to see only the humour of the novels may be found in Moody and Lovett's History, published in 1935. The authors admitted that Dickens' late novels were perhaps a bit gloomy; however, this was

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[87] "Remonstrance with Dickens," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXI (April, 1857), 497.

[88] George Gissing, Charles Dickens: A Critical Study (in The Victorian Era Series; London: Blackie and Son Limited, 1903), p. 190.

[89] John Buchan (ed.), A History of English Literature ([n. p.]: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1933), p. 494.

not their final opinion. Instead, they concluded: "We have laughter, and horror and tears; but the prevailing atmosphere is one of cheerfulness, as befits a great Christmas pantomime."[90]

The second adjunct to a consideration of Dickens as a humorist was that although virtually everybody insisted that his humour was inferior only to that of Shakespeare,[91] very few critics ever attempted to analyze Dickens' humour. The vast majority of critics acknowledged his genius in this respect and having done so, proceeded to give us copious illustrations of it. The complete reason for the lack of the appearance of anything even approaching a definitive study of humour is open to conjecture. However, I believe that one possible explanation has already been hinted at. It was the very unanimity of the critics' opinions as regards Dickens the humorist. From the very beginning of his literary career, he had been labelled a comic genius, and in time the label stuck. It became gradually accepted that Dickens was to be ranked with Shakespeare and as time

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[90] William Vaughn Moody and Robert Morss Lovett, A History of English Literature (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 408.

[91] There were, of course, numerous critics who did not make even this reservation.

wore on, later critics merely repeated the assertions of the earlier ones without bothering to do much investigation of their own.[92] Dickens' humour will be further discussed in Chapter VI when I examine some of the broader points of difference between early and present twentieth century criticism.

As I have already mentioned, Dickens' reputation as a great humorist lasted until ca. 1940, at which date (insofar as one can exactly date such an occurrence) this reputation was dislodged. Since the critical studies that emphasized the "non-humorous" Dickens mostly originated in Dickensian biographical studies, and since the "non-humorous" or gloomy Dickens is the picture that has persisted to the present day, one should next examine those biographical studies that wrought such a revolution.

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[92]Lest the reader think this a far-fetched hypothesis, one may cite the Ellen Ternan affair as an example of a similar occurrence in modern times. The first revelations of Ellen Ternan being Dickens' mistress appeared in Thomas Wright's Life of Charles Dickens (1935). This evidence was accepted without question by all subsequent biographers, none of whom offered evidence of their own. See Hugh Kingsmill's The Sentimental Journey: A Life of Charles Dickens (1935); Una Pope-Hennessy's Charles Dickens (1946); Hesketh Pearson's Dickens: His Character, Comedy and Career (1949); and Jack Lindsay's Charles Dickens (1950). The evidence was likewise accepted by most of the critics; chief among them being Edmund Wilson in his "Dickens: The Two Scrooges" (1940) and Lionel Stevenson in his essay "Dickens' Dark Novels" (1943). Conclusive proof of the Ellen Ternan affair was never offered until 1952 when Ada Nisbet published her Dickens and Ellen Ternan. This whole episode is an excellent example of how the same old facts can be reiterated ad nauseam with few people bothering to question them.

CHAPTER III

In this chapter I will trace the development of biographical studies of Dickens from 1872 until the mid-1930's. However, before examining the biographies written in this period, I will first discuss the chronological limits of this chapter and the general content of the various biographies that lie within these limits. Of the earlier date, 1872, not much more need be said than that it marked the publication of the first volume of the first of Dickens' biographers, John Forster. Aside from the fact that he was the first in the field, Forster's work deserves close attention because his Life set the tone taken by all biographical studies made in the succeeding sixty years.

As one of the closest, if not the closest of Dickens' many friends, Forster possibly knew more about the author than anyone else alive. Nevertheless, the picture of Dickens that emerged from his pen was a curiously one-sided portrait. As a matter of fact, it was a portrait that exactly coincided with what literary critics had been saying about Dickens ever since 1836. Just as the criticism of the day had depicted a genial author full of the highest of high spirits, so too did Forster emphasize what Carlyle called "the good, the gentle, high-gifted, ever friendly,

noble Dickens--every inch of him an Honest man."[1]

As the two executors and chief beneficiaries of Dickens' estate, Forster and Georgina Hogarth were the recipients of and also guardians of Dickens' correspondence and private papers. The result of this was that they were in the position of being able to release to future biographers only those papers that would reinforce the traditional idea of a smiling and benign author. As an example of their suppression of evidence that would suggest that Dickens was not what Forster had depicted him to be, one may cite the case of the Maria Beadnell letters. In his letters to Maria Winter (née Beadnell) in 1855, Dickens had revealed his attachment to her quite unashamedly. Indeed, the tone of the letters and the secretive arrangements that he made with Maria for a clandestine meeting strongly suggested that the disciple of wedded bliss was on the verge of having an affair. In 1908 these letters were published for the first time in America by the Boston Bibliophile Society. Georgina was horrified, for the letters were not at all in accord with

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[1] John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens (Everyman's Library edition; London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1950), II, 396. Hereafter this work is referred to in the footnotes as Forster's Life.

the image of the man that had been so laboriously built up by Forster and succeeding biographers. Therefore, exercising her legal right as executrix,[2] she forbade entry of the publication into England, with the result that these letters were not published in that country until 1934, seventeen years after her death.

As indicated, the result of this suppression was the appearance of various biographies of Dickens, each of which said almost exactly the same thing as its predecessor. With monotonous regularity, one sees Dickens being hailed as the benefactor of mankind and as the greatest humorist on the English scene. Scarcely any mention was ever made of any of his less attractive attributes. In 1934, however, the traditional picture was rudely shattered when Thomas Wright revealed that the author whom everyone thought to be too much of a god to do such a thing, had really been quite human after all and had taken the obscure young actress Ellen Teman as his mistress. Wright and the bio-

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[2]Forster had died in 1876. This account of the Maria Beadnell letters is taken from: Arthur Adrian, Georgina Hogarth and the Dickens Circle (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 238-239. Hereafter this work is referred to in the footnotes as Adrian. For further examples of Georgina's endeavours to keep before the public only the one facet of Dickens, see Adrian, Chapter XIV entitled "Guardian of the Beloved Memory," pp. 228-240.

graphers that followed him will be discussed in the following chapter, and I have mentioned him here merely to indicate my reasons for choosing the date 1934 as the terminal date for the biographies considered in this chapter.

Upon the death of Dickens, John Forster must have considered himself to be in an unenviable position. He was faced with having to choose between two equally disagreeable alternatives. On the one hand, he could lend credence to the popular conception of Dickens as a congenial soul, free from faults or frailties. On the other, he could give a true picture of the novelist, albeit a picture that would sharply contradict the one already in the minds of millions of readers on both sides of the Atlantic. As a scholar of some repute,[3] Forster must have felt some repugnance at the hoodwinking of the public that an acceptance of the first alternative would entail. Nevertheless, if he adopted the second, he would be obliged to reveal to the public some of the more private details of Dickens' life, something that Dickens with his mania for privacy

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[3]Forster was the author of the following studies: Life of Landor, Life of Goldsmith and Lives of Eminent Statesmen. While there is no specific evidence to prove that Forster did actually consider whether or not he should tell Dickens' true history, I think that it can be inferred that he did. Certainly, as a scholar, he must have thought about it.

would have been loath to see him do. Fortunately, or unfortunately as the case may be, Forster chose the first of the alternatives, and in doing so he set the pattern that Dickensian biography would follow during the next sixty years.

The general impression one gets from a reading of Forster's Life is that which Forster himself claimed he received from reading Dickens' letters. "The sunny health of nature in them is manifest; its largeness, spontaneity, and manliness . . ."[4] To depict Dickens in this light it was necessary for Forster to give as few details as possible about the author's private life, thus anyone reading this biography to discover Dickens' personal business will be sadly disappointed. "The story of his books . . ." said Forster, "at all stages of their progress, and of the hopes or designs connected with them, was my first care."[5]

This intention, although expressed in the third and last of Forster's volumes, was adhered to throughout the biography. The story of Dickens' frustrated love for Maria Beadnell was mentioned only very briefly (Maria's name was not mentioned at all), and in a serio-comic vein.

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[4] Forster's Life, II, p. 378.

[5] Ibid., p. 377.

Readers were merely told that "he too [Dickens] had his Dora, at apparently the same hopeless elevation . . ."[6] Since the Maria Beadnell episode set the stage for Dickens' subsequent marriage to Catherine Hogarth, (Catherine caught him on the rebound, as it were), without a complete knowledge of the Beadnell affair, contemporary readers were at a loss to discover why Dickens had embarked upon such a marriage.

Matters, of course, were not helped by the biographer's extreme reluctance to discuss Catherine Dickens at all. Throughout the whole biography, references to her were so few and couched in such brief and vague terms that the uninitiated might well think Dickens a bachelor. No details at all were given about his in-laws, the Hogarths, other than the fact that for a brief period Dickens and Catherine's father had worked together. Also receiving abbreviated notice was Dickens' courtship of and eventual marriage to Catherine Hogarth. Readers were merely told that "on 2 April Mr. Charles Dickens had married Catherine, the eldest daughter of Mr. George Hogarth . . ."[7]

When he came to deal with the separation between

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[6] Ibid., I, p. 47.

[7] Ibid., I, p. 57.

Dickens and his wife, Forster was just as secretive. "I give only what is strictly necessary . . ." he said, "and even this with deep reluctance."[8] Furthermore, before discussing the separation he warned that it would be "sufficiently explained; and with anything else the public [will] have nothing to do."[9] In all fairness to the biographer, one might note that he was in a difficult position. Since Catherine Dickens was alive, he could hardly have given the real reasons for the estrangement. Thus he chose instead to ignore it as far as possible. In this decision, Georgina Hogarth concurred, noting that Forster had taken "the wisest course . . . , and indeed the only course possible to him while my sister lives."[10] Indeed, Forster's entire treat-

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[8] Ibid., II, p. 198.

[9] Ibid., II, p. 206. See also his statement on the same page. "It was thus far an arrangement of a strictly private nature, and no decent person could have had excuse for regarding it in any other light if public attention had not been unexpectedly invited to it by a printed statement in Household Words."

[10] Letter from Georgina Hogarth to Mrs. Fields, February 20, 1874, cited by Adrian, p. 184. Forster's handling of the separation apparently offended some members of the Dickens family. Ford claims that "there was talk of Charles Dickens the younger [the only child to take up residence with Catherine after the separation] publishing a rejoinder to vindicate his mother's role, which, it was felt, Forster had distorted. The Forster collection [in the Victoria and Albert Museum] includes several accounts

ment of the last twelve years of Dickens' life was, in Georgina's eyes at least, quite well done. To her way of thinking, Forster had told "just as much and as little [italics in the original] as must be said."[11]

There is no doubt that Georgina heartily approved of Forster's suppression of Dickens' friendship with other women and in particular with Mrs. de la Rue and Christiana Weller. The former lady was mentioned only once and that notice was innocuous enough as it merely indicated that she was in attendance at a certain dinner party.[12] Christiana Weller was not mentioned at all, either under her

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for the newspapers describing the family's dissatisfaction." George H. Ford, Dickens and his Readers: Aspects of Novel-Criticism Since 1836 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1965), p. 161.

[11] Letter from Georgina Hogarth to Mrs. Fields, March 28, 1874, cited by Adrian, p. 184.

[12] Forster's Life, I, p. 351. For the benefit of those not conversant with Dickensian biography, Mrs. de la Rue, the wife of a prominent Swiss banker, had some sort of nervous condition, (probably either faked or psychosomatic in origin), that could only be "cured" by Dickens hypnotizing her. Since these hypnotic sessions sometimes occurred in the middle of the night with the lady in her nightdress, Catherine Dickens was somewhat uneasy, despite the fact that M. de la Rue was also in Dickens' company.

maiden name or her married name of Thompson.[13] Dickens' long friendship with Mary Boyle was also suppressed by the biographer and her name was mentioned merely as a guest at the wedding of Dickens' daughter Katie to Charles Collins.[14]

Another example of the extent to which Forster played down the novelist's affectionate nature with women is seen in the way in which Georgina Hogarth was treated. Despite the fact that she devoted her life to the service of Dickens, she was mentioned very briefly albeit very favourably.[15] The reasons for the minuscule attention given to Georgina are twofold. First and foremost, Forster would have been most reluctant to take a chance on having a renewed flare-up of the gossip that had surrounded Dickens' separation. The reader will recall that on that occasion there had been a considerable amount of speculation as to the exact part that Georgina had played in the separation. Repeating one of these rumours, The Court Circular, a weekly periodical,

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[13] Dickens first met Christiana in 1844 in Manchester. He was immediately captivated by her. He introduced her to his friend T. J. Thompson, a rather bashful type who fell in love with her. Since he had grown very fond of Christiana, Dickens was astounded at the prospect of losing her; however, he recovered and in a manner reminiscent of Cyrano de Bergerac, he successfully wooed her for Thompson.

[14] Forster's Life, II, p. 236.

[15] Forster's Life, I, p. 276.

had noted:

> The story in circulation is that his wife has left his roof--according to the mildest form of the narrative, "on account of incompatability of temper"--according to the worst form, "on account of that talented gentleman's preference of his wife's sister to herself, a preference which has assumed a very definite and tangible shape."[16]

A second reason for Forster's very brief mention of Georgina was that he and Dickens' sister-in-law frequently did not see eye to eye. In a letter to Ouvry, Dickens' solicitor, she grumbled, "I think, between ourselves, that he sometimes forgets that any one ought to have a voice in any of the business [of Dickens' estate], except himself."[17]

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[16] The Court Circular, cited by K. J. Fielding, "Dickens and the Hogarth Scandal," Nineteenth Century Fiction, X (1955), 71. See also K. J. Fielding, "Charles Dickens and Colin Rae Brown," Nineteenth Century Fiction, VII (September, 1952), 103-110. Brown was the Director of the Bulletin Newspaper Co., and it was alleged that he had said in public that Georgina had given birth to three children, of whom Dickens was the father. Dickens instituted legal proceedings against Brown. However, the latter denied the allegation and the matter was dropped. As late as 1908 similar gossip flared up again when in India one Hector Charles Bulwer Lytton Dickens claimed to be the illegitimate child of Dickens and Georgina. According to him, his untimely appearance on the domestic scene had been the reason for Dickens' separation from Catherine.

[17] Letter from Georgina Hogarth to Frederic Ouvry, August 24, 1870, cited by Adrian, p. 194.

This tendency of Forster to place himself in the limelight to the exclusion of others was very apparent in his Life, and indeed it was that aspect of the biography that was most harshly criticized by his contemporaries. The Leeds Mercury of November 15, 1872 gave the biography an alternate title. It was: "The Autobiography of John Forster with Recollections of Charles Dickens."[18] Such criticism was richly deserved, for any reader soon wearies of seeing reprinted over and over again Dickens' tributes to his biographer's wisdom and sagacity, no matter how deserving they may have been. A typical example of this is the following excerpt from a letter of Dickens:

> How can I thank you [Forster]? Can I do better than by saying that the sense of poor Oliver's reality, which I know you have had from the first, has been the highest of all praise to me. None that has been lavished upon me have I felt half so much as that appreciation of my intent and meaning.[19]

Since Dickens was often in the habit of sending his manuscripts to Forster to read prior to sending them to the publishers, there was naturally considerable correspondence between the two men. Many of these letters would

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[18] Leeds Mercury, November 15, 1872, cited by George Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel-Criticism since 1836, op. cit., p. 161.

[19] Forster's Life, I, pp. 70-71.

have included such matters as Dickens' opinion of Forster's comments on the manuscripts. One would imagine that there must have been at least some acrimonious discussion between the two. However, judging by those of Dickens' letters on the subject that Forster reprinted, the novelist was always overjoyed at the comments offered by his future biographer. "I have received your letter today," wrote Dickens, "with the greatest delight and am overjoyed to find that you think so well of the number."[20]

Forster's pompousness was also exhibited by the manner in which he treated Dickens' relationship with other literary figures and in particular Thackeray and Wilkie Collins. Jealous of the influence that they exercised over Dickens, he rather petulantly overlooked them in his volumes.[21] In all fairness to the biographer, one might add that he did reprint in part Dickens' very generous tribute to Thackeray that appeared in the Cornhill Magazine

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[20] Ibid., II, p. 22.

[21] The friendship of Dickens and Thackeray never did become a very close one, no doubt because their rivalry was, as Chapman said, "FO(R)STER'D." Gordon S. Haight, George Eliot and John Chapman (New Haven, 1940), pp. 178-179, cited by George Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel Criticism Since 1836, op. cit., p. 119.

(February 1864) upon the death of that novelist.[22] Although Wilkie Collins became, as the years rolled on, one of Dickens' closest, if not the closest of his friends,[23] Forster virtually neglected him in his Life. The only times that he was mentioned were to indicate the part that he played in such trivial affairs as the production of The Frozen Deep. As was also the case with Thackeray, his literary influence (if any) on Dickens was not discussed at all.

By the time that he was writing the third volume of the Life, Forster was aware that his undeniable and frequently unnecessary presence in the biography was somewhat dampening the enthusiasm of readers for that work. Typically, however, he chose to deny the charge, somewhat lamely, in my opinion.

> Of the charge of obtruding myself to which their publication has exposed me, I can only say that I studied nothing so hard as to suppress my own personality, and have to regret my ill success where I supposed I had even too perfectly succeeded.[24]

Although Forster was most reticent about revealing

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[22] Forster's Life, II, pp. 247-248.

[23] A fact recognized by the biographer himself, who referred to Collins as: "for all the rest of the life of Dickens, one of his dearest and most valued friends." Ibid., p. 73.

[24] Forster's Life, II, p. 377.

anything at all about most aspects of Dickens' personal life, he was most liberal in giving to posterity accounts of the novelist's infatuation with young Mary Hogarth. Even Dickens' Heathcliffian wish to be buried beside Mary (thoughts of Catherine were entirely absent) was given full publicity. Mary was, lamented Dickens,

> my dear young friend and companion; for whom my love and attachment will never diminish, and by whose side, if it please God to leave me in possession of sense to signify my wishes, my bones, whenever or wherever I die, will one day be laid.[25]

Also given in full was Dickens' inordinate grief upon learning several years later that the only available space in the grave (the space he had thought to reserve for himself) was to be given to Mary's grandmother, who had recently died. Dickens, upon hearing this news, was almost prostrate with grief, and various thoughts, including that of moving Mary's coffin to another site, flashed across his mind. Writing to Forster, the novelist unburdened himself:

> It is a great trial for me to give up Mary's grave; greater than I can possibly express. I thought of moving her to the catacombs, and saying nothing about it . . . The desire to be buried next her is as strong upon me now, as it was five years ago; and I <u>know</u> (for I don't think there ever was love <u>like</u> that I bear her) that it will never diminish. I fear I can do

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[25] <u>Ibid</u>., I, p. 82.

> nothing. Do you think I can? They would move her on Wednesday, if I resolved to have it done. I cannot bear the thought of being excluded from her dust . . .[26]

Dickens made a special visit to Kensal Green (the cemetery) to see if space could be had on either side of his deceased sister-in-law; however, his visit was fruitless. He wrote back to Forster, who had apparently suggested the idea, saying:

> No, I tried that. No, there is no ground on either side to be had. I must give it up. I shall drive over there, please God, on Thursday morning, before they get there [to bury the grandmother]; and look at her [Mary's] coffin.[27]

Forster also told in detail about the strange dream that Dickens had about Mary in which she appeared to him clothed in "a blue drapery, as the Madonna might in a picture by Raphael . . ."[28]

Possibly the most important part of Forster's biography was the details about Dickens' youth and childhood that the biographer revealed to an astonished literary world. Since the blacking-warehouse episode had been known by scarcely anyone else besides Forster, critics were, to

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[26] *Ibid.*, p. 174.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 336.

say the least, surprised. "All is so different from what we had anticipated," said Saint Paul's Magazine. That review continued:

> The tree which bore fruit as golden as that of the Hesperides was rooted in a wretched soil, and watered with the bitterest possible tears of self-compassion.[29]

In conjunction with the biographer's treatment of the blacking-warehouse episode and also the manner in which he discussed Mary Hogarth, the reader should note the complete absence of "psychology." Dickens' almost pathological grief over the death of his young and pretty sister-in-law was detailed by Forster because the latter thought, as did many of his contemporaries, that it was good evidence of Dickens' kind nature and the strong and firm friendships that the novelist valued.[30] In a similar manner, the only connotation that most Victorian (and later) critics attached to the blacking-warehouse episode was that it revealed Dickens' intestinal fortitude.

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[29] Robert Buchanan, "The Good Genie of Fiction," Saint Paul's Magazine, X (February, 1872), 134. For a brief discussion of other reviews of Forster's Life, see George Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel Criticism since 1836, op. cit., pp. 160-163.

[30] Vide the discussion of Robert Langton's The Childhood and Youth of Dickens, on p. 135.

> The story of his childish misery has itself sufficiently shown that he never throughout it lost his precious gift of animal spirits, or his native capacity for humorous enjoyment . . .[31]

In concluding the discussion of Forster's Life, one might note that as regards technical information, such as Dickens' many arguments with his publishers, the history of the making of each of his novels, his reading tours and visits to America, Forster will not be superseded simply because as Dickens' personal friend he had access to information that has now been lost. As source material for these aspects of Dickens' life, Forster will always be read, but as an accurate account of the life of the novelist, the biography is sadly lacking.

The next important contribution to Dickens' biography was the selection of his letters that was jointly edited by Georgina Hogarth and Dickens' eldest daughter Mamie.[32] First published in November 1879, the Mamie-Georgie edition as it is commonly called, was never inten-

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[31] Forster's Life, I, p. 35. Could Forster have foreseen the use that modern psychological criticism has made of the two above-mentioned events in Dickens' life, there is no doubt that he would have rigorously suppressed them.

[32] [Georgina Hogarth amd Mamie Dickens] (eds.), The Letters of Charles Dickens: 1833-1870 (London: MacMillan and Company, 1893). Hereafter this work is referred to in the footnotes as Letters.

ded to be a complete collection of Dickens' letters. Writing to her close friend, Annie Fields, Georgina outlined the scope of the proposed edition.

> It will be a sort of supplement to Mr. Forster's "Life" . . . That was exhaustive as a Biography, leaving nothing to be said ever more, in my opinion. But I believe it was universally felt to be incomplete as a Portrait, because the scheme of the Book, as Mr. Forster wrote it, prevented his making use of any letters--or scarcely any, besides those addressed to himself.[33]

As was the case with Forster's Life, Georgina and Mamie draw a sharp line between those letters which they considered to have a public interest and those which were private. Letters containing material considered by the editors to be of a private nature were either entirely omitted from the collection, or else the personal passages were deleted, frequently, however, without ellipsis periods to indicate the deletion.

Again, as in Forster's Life, there was no mention whatever of Ellen Ternan in the letters, and Dickens' separation was quite ignored. Unlike Forster, who had made no reference by name to Maria Winter (née Beadnell), Mamie and Georgina did print two of Dickens' less private

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[33] Letter from Georgina Hogarth to Mrs. Fields, March 22, 1878, cited by Adrian, p. 206. For a comprehensive outline of the editorial practices followed in the compilation of this series of letters, see Adrian, pp. 206-227.

letters to that lady. However, in the narrative section of the Letters, Mrs. Winter was referred to in such an oblique way that only the initiated (and at that date there were few such persons) would have had any idea that she was at one time Dickens' beloved. "Mrs. Winter . . . ," said the editors, "was a very dear friend and companion of Charles Dickens in his youth."[34] Of the two letters written to Maria, the first was the most revealing. Upon reading it, the casual observer might well marvel at the steadfastness and purpose with which Dickens pursued his profession, and indeed it was probably for this very reason that the letter was included in the collection. "Whoever is devoted to an art," wrote Dickens,

> must be content to deliver himself wholly up to it, and to find his recompense in it. I am grieved if you suspect me of not wanting to see you, but I can't help it; I must go my way whether or no.[35]

Read in the light of a knowledge of the Beadnell affair, this letter assumes a new significance. When Dickens had discovered that Maria Winter in the flesh was not the Maria Beadnell of his fancy, he was bitterly disappointed and did all that he could to evade the lady's attentions.

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[34] Letters, p. 350.

[35] Ibid., p. 365, October 6, 1855.

Thus the letter in question, while it undoubtedly was a true testimonial to Dickens and his art, was also the record of a man who all too humanly was trying to evade the attentions that he had previously and illicitly encouraged.

The editors handled the correspondence of Mary Boyle differently than Forster had done. Whereas the latter had only mentioned her name once, Georgina and Mamie printed eighteen of Dickens' letters to her. The letters printed are for the most part quite straightforward; however, one can note in them evidence of the ripening friendship between the two correspondents as the salutation progresses from "My Dear Miss Boyle"[36] to "My Dear Mary"[37] and later "Dearest Meery."[38] The tone in the majority of the letters was one of good-natured bantering and flirtation between the two, and no doubt the reason for the inclusion of the letters was to indicate just that. "It is all very well to pretend to love me as you do," sighed Dickens. "Ah, if you loved as I love, Mary!"[39] In another

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[36] Ibid., p. 219, September 16, 1850.

[37] Ibid., p. 270, July 22, 1852.

[38] Ibid., p. 462, September 10, 1858.

[39] Ibid., p. 325, January 16, 1854.

letter he wrote: "Enclosing a kiss, if you will have the kindness to return it when done with"; and in the same letter he said: "I should have lost my heart to the beautiful young landlady of my hotel . . . if it had not been safe in your possession."[40] These letters, if examined with the idea in mind that Dickens was merely a cheery, good-natured extrovert with none of the foibles of his contemporaries such as Wilkie Collins, would merely tend to support that view. But, when viewed in the light of the Ellen Ternan affair, Mary Boyle and Dickens' letters to her assume a new interest.

As was the case with Forster, no reference, except for a brief footnote, was made of Dickens and the de la Rues. The editors merely mentioned them in very brief fashion.

> M. de la Rue and his wife (an English lady), were the dearest friends, in Genoa, of Charles Dickens.[41]

The closeness of Dickens and the de la Rues, although by no means underlined in the Letters, could have been inferred from the comment made by Dickens (and printed in the Letters) to his friend T. J. Thompson. Dickens referred

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[40] Ibid., p. 354, January 3, 1855.

[41] Ibid., p. 476.

to the de la Rues as "those who would die to serve me."[42] It seems strange that Georgina could have dismissed in a single footnote a couple who were close enough to Dickens to "die for him." Nevertheless, to the best of my knowledge, this point was never queried by any of her contemporaries.

The editors also made sure to rigorously suppress any reference to Christiana Weller. The uninformed reader would in all probability have found nothing of great interest in the few of Dickens' letters to his friend Thompson that said in part: "Think of Italy! Don't give that up!"[43] or "What are you doing??? When are you coming away???? Why are you stopping there?????"[44] The ordinary reaction on reading this would have been to assume that Dickens, for some reason or other, was endeavouring to persuade Thompson to take a trip to Italy. Only if the reader had been aware of Dickens' friendship with Christiana Weller would he have realized the significance of these letters. Realizing that he could not have Christiana for himself, the novelist introduced her to Thompson who

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[42] Ibid., p. 145, October 17, 1845.

[43] Ibid., p. 109, March 13, 1844.

[44] Ibid., p. 110, March 24, 1844.

soon fell in love with her. Since Thompson proved to be somewhat a bashful lover, Dickens did the wooing for him, writing him from time to time to bolster his flagging spirits. The excerpts printed above were Dickens' impassioned pleas to Thompson, urging the latter to propose to Christiana, marry her and take her to Genoa, where the climate would be more suitable for her delicate health.

Another feature of the Mamie-Georgie edition of Dickens' letters was that although relatively few of the novelist's letters to his wife were printed, those letters that were used were not edited in such a way as to give the reader a poor impression of Catherine. Indeed, as Professor Adrian has indicated, the editors adopted just the opposite policy. Many parts of Dickens' letters to Catherine that were suppressed were those very parts that if printed would have shown Catherine to be something of a shrew.[45]

Although the large amount of suppressed material lessens the value of the Letters as a comprehensive reference work, the unindicated absence of material reduces

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[45] Adrian, p. 222. Catherine was most jealous of Dickens' work. She felt that he spent more time on it than he did on her. This was particularly true of the days of their courtship.

even further the value of this edition. Since it would be beyond the scope of my thesis to do much more than indicate that the editors frequently omitted material without indicating the omission, I will give in full one example of this technique and refer to other examples only in footnotes. The following letter is copied verbatim from the Letters and as it stands it appears to be complete.

Station Hotel, York,
Friday, Tenth September, 1858

Dearest Meery,

First let me tell you that all the magicians and spirits in your employ have fulfilled the instructions of their wondrous mistress to admiration. Flowers have fallen in my path wherever I have trod; and when they rained upon me at Cork I was more amazed than you ever saw me.

Secondly, receive my hearty and loving thanks for that same. (Excuse a little Irish in the turn of that sentence, but I can't help it.)

I really cannot tell you how truly and tenderly I feel your letter, and how gratified I am by its contents. Your truth and attachment are always so precious to me that I cannot get my heart out of my sleeve to show it to you. It is like a child, and at the sound of some familiar voices, "goes and hides."

You know what an affection I have for Mrs. Watson, and how happy it made me to see her again

--younger, much, than when I first knew her in Switzerland.

God bless you always!

Ever affectionately yours,[46]

If one refers back to the manuscript of the letter as Professor Johnson did when compiling material for his Life,[47] one notes that Georgina and Mamie had not revealed the more important portion of the letter. However, as the letter appeared in the Mamie-Georgie edition, no one could have told that it was not a complete letter. The suppressed material would have shed further light on Dickens, inasmuch as it showed that the novelist's friendship with Mary Boyle was closer than Georgina and Mamie wanted the world to know. Had the two not been close, why would Dickens have discussed the separation with Mary? The omitted portion clearly indicates that they did indeed discuss it. The text of this material is given below. Its proper place in the preceding letter is after the end of the first paragraph.

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[46] Letters, p. 462. "Meery" was Dickens' pet name for Mary Boyle.

[47] Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), 2 Vols.

> . . . Touching that other matter on which you wrote me tenderly and with a delicacy of regard and interest that I deeply feel, I hope I may report that I am calming down again. I have been exquisitely distressed. It is no comfort to me to know that any man who wants to sell anything in print, has but to anatomize my finest nerves, and he is sure to do it--It is no comfort to me to know (as of course those dissectors do), that when I spoke in my own person it was not for myself but for the innocent and good, on whom I had unwittingly brought the foulest lies--Sometimes I cannot bear it. I had one of these fits yesterday, and was utterly desolate and lost. But it is gone, thank God, and the sky has brightened before me once more.[48]

The chief criticism of the Mamie-Georgie Letters is that they showed only one side of Dickens' character. Furthermore, the letters were frequently unreliable for they abounded in composite material and unindicated omissions.

The next of the Dickens' biographies to be examined is that by A. W. Ward.[49] This biography was first published in 1882 when the immediate members of Dickens' family were still alive, and still reluctant for the public to see the novelist as anything but a replica of the

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[48]Cited by Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Triumph and Tragedy, op. cit., II, 939. For examples that show how Mamie and Georgina printed letters that were made up of paragraphs from several letters, see Adrian, pp. 223-224.

[49]A. W. Ward, Dickens (in English Men of Letters Series, pocket edition. London: MacMillan and Company, Ltd., 1909).

Cheeryble brothers. Ward apparently received no new information from either the Dickens family or his own investigations, for his Life is essentially a carbon copy of Forster's earlier work. The only substantial difference between the two biographers is that Ward discussed Dickens' individual novels to a greater length than did Forster, who offered no literary criticism at all.

Looking at Ward's biography in a little more detail, we see that the Maria Beadnell episode was dismissed in a few paragraphs and that what discussion there was differed little from Forster's account.[50] In a similar manner, Dickens' courtship and marriage of Catherine was dismissed in one sentence.[51] Although Ward was most reticent in discussing the part played by Catherine in Dickens' life, he was not averse, again like Forster, to giving a great deal of prominence to Dickens' relationship with Mary Hogarth. She was, according to Ward, "the object of the one great imaginative passion of his life."[52]

As an example of the tendency of the early bio-

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[50] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[51] Ibid., p. 17.

[52] Ibid., p. 40.

graphers to keep before the public a "cheerful" Dickens, one might point to the way in which Ward handled the separation. He outdid Forster himself when he naively observed that "after an amicable [italics not in the original] arrangement, Mrs. Dickens left her husband . . ."[53] Modern scholars, conversant with the vicious gossip that surrounded the separation and Dickens' infuriation with his mother-in-law whom he considered to have been responsible for the gossip, can well be excused a smile.[54] Ward's whole attitude to the affair can best be summed up in the words with which he described Dickens' "Address" and the "Violated Letter." They were, said Ward, "Printed words which may be left forgotten."[55]

Also indicative of the late nineteenth century's opinion of Dickens as a cheery genius, was Ward's horror at Dickens' preoccupation with pounds, shillings and pence. Forster had spent much time detailing Dickens' jubilation

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[53] Ibid., pp. 144-145.

[54] A brief but informative account of the behind-the-scenes arrangement of the separation is found in K. J. Fielding, "Dickens and the Hogarth Scandal," Nineteenth Century Fiction, X (1955), 64-74.

[55] A. W. Ward, Dickens, op. cit., p. 145.

when his coffers were full, and corresponding disappointment when they were empty; nevertheless, Forster had done this without passing comment. Ward, on the other hand, seemed to be hard pressed to reconcile this more mercenary aspect of Dickens' character with the generosity of that same author who stuffed the Cratchits with roast goose. "To me, at least," said Ward, "it is painful to find Dickens jubilantly recording how at Dublin 'eleven banknotes were thrust into the pay-box . . .'."[56]

The next of Dickens' biographers was Robert Langton, whose biography was first published in 1883.[57] As the title implied, the book was not meant to be a full length study of Dickens. Since the volume was dedicated to Georgina Hogarth and Mamie Dickens and since the biographer was most desirous of offending nobody,[58] the reader is well forewarned not to expect any new or startling revelations. All that Langton really did was to chronicle meticulously the events of Dickens' early youth. A reader who is bent upon knowing at what desk at a certain school Dickens was accus-

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[56] Ibid., pp. 149-150.

[57] Robert Langton, The Childhood and Youth of Charles Dickens (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1912).

[58] Langton hoped that "the narrative of these early days may interest many and offend NOBODY." Ibid., p. 8.

tomed to sit, will find this Life invaluable.

One should not condemn the work outright, for the biographer did make at least one very accurate observation. This was concerned with the blacking-warehouse episode. Referring to that episode, Langton said:

> It is a curious fact, and one to reflect on, that, knowing as the reading world does from Mr. Forster's book, how strongly and enduringly Dickens was affected by these sad times, we yet find him, in nearly all his books, from the very first to the last, continually recurring to the subject of the blacking business.
>
> This topic seems constantly to have forced itself upon him, and to have had a certain fascination for him, which he could not resist.[59]

This observation (which anticipates much of the modern biographical approach) coming as it did in an era during which the blacking-warehouse episode was used solely to underline Dickens' tenaciousness, is a welcome change. Nevertheless, Langton never developed the idea and his final picture of the novelist was still the same as that painted by earlier biographers.

Because of the already mentioned limits of his biography, this author made no reference to the separation or to any of the events surrounding it. As was the case with the earlier biographers, Langton was quite free in his discussion of Mary Hogarth. Dickens' attachment to

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[59] Ibid., p. 79.

his sister-in-law, concluded Langton, "might be instanced as a proof of the deeply affectionate nature of the man."[60]

In 1902, twenty-nine years after the publication of the last volume of Forster's Life, an article appeared in the April edition of Harper's New Monthly Magazine entitled "Dickens in His Books."[61] Apparently, Dickens' infatuation with his younger sister-in-law had at last caught someone's eye, for the article dealt in part with the relations between the two. The author of the article, Percy Fitzgerald, openly wondered why Mary's "charms--she was more attractive and had always secretly loved him /italics in the original/--did not appeal"[62] to Dickens prior to the novelist's marriage to Catherine. Fitzgerald hypothesized that perhaps Mary, aware of Dickens' love for Catherine, had repressed her own affections. Fitzgerald concluded that this hypothesis would "rationally account /italics in the original/ for Dickens not marrying the girl he loved."[63]

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[60] Ibid., p. 204.

[61] My account of the actual content of the article is based upon Adrian, p. 236. The conclusions I draw from the article are my own.

[62] Percy Fitzgerald, "Dickens in His Books," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, April, 1902, cited by Adrian, p. 236.

[63] Ibid.

This article drew down a storm of protest from the Dickens family. The novelist's son Henry Fielding Dickens wrote a letter to Harper's in which he pointed out several careless errors in Fitzgerald's work. This did much to discredit his case. The chief rebuttal to the argument, however, seems to have been the fact that at the time of Dickens' marriage, Mary was a mere girl of fifteen and still in school. The editors of the magazine readily accepted the rebuttal and subsequently published the letter and their apology.

This article never did have any influence on any future biographical studies; nevertheless, it is important, for it shows that people were beginning to wonder whether there may not have been a bit more than fraternal "affection" in Dickens' preoccupation with Mary. It also shows how unwilling were the majority of people to contemplate any change in the novelist's character. Today, with the word "nymphet" enshrined in the common usage, and with our knowledge of Freudian psychology, the story of a man having a desire for a young girl (even for his sister-in-law) is passé, but to cultivated readers at the turn of the century, such a thing would have been unthinkable. Fitzgerald's article, grumbled Henry Fielding Dickens, was "obviously calculated to give an entirely false impression"[64] of Dick-

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[64] Ibid.

ens and Mary.

The next noteworthy biography was that by F. G. Kitton.[65] It was first published in 1902, and despite its impressive bulk and title, it tells us comparatively few things about Dickens as a person that were not told by Forster thirty years earlier. The predominant tone that echoes throughout this work is that of hero-worship. One gets a hint of this in the preface where Dickens is hailed as "that mighty Magician who so effectively wielded his pen in the great cause of Humanity."[66]

Despite Kitton's inability[67] to chip away the successive layers of unadulterated praise heaped upon Dickens by preceding biographers, his work did offer something new. For one thing, Kitton seems to have been the first to ferret out the identity of Dickens' Dora. In a footnote he said:

> The identity of the living prototype of Dora has never been divulged. It is, however, fair to

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[65] Frederic G. Kitton, Charles Dickens: His Life, Writings, and Personality (London: T. C. and E. C. Jack, [n. d.]).

[66] Ibid., p. viii.

[67] Professor Adrian claims that Georgina "stood guard like a dragon over the treasure of Dickens' honour" when Kitton was collecting material for an earlier biography, Dickens by Pen and Pencil (Adrian, p. 237). Therefore, I think it is fair to conclude that she would have been equally as careful when Kitton was preparing his second work.

> surmise that she was one of the two sisters named Beadnell, whom Dickens met at the house of a mutual friend, a Mr. W. H. Kolle, then engaged in a banking-house in the city of London.[68]

Nevertheless, there was no discussion at all about the fact that Dickens had been at one time hopelessly in love with her.[69]

Kitton's biography also gave Wilkie Collins at least some of the recognition that he justly deserved as one of Dickens' closest friends. However, since Kitton was still blinded by hero worship, he failed to see the significance of the Dickens-Collins friendship, coming as it did after Dickens' close association with Forster. The result was that when Kitton printed excerpts from Dickens' letters to Collins in which Dickens suggested that they indulge "in a career of amiable dissipation and unbounded licence . . .,"[70] the biographer thought it all a joke; another example, let us say, of Dickens' humour. On the other hand, the reader

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[68] Frederick G. Kitton, Charles Dickens: His Life, Writings, and Personality, op. cit., p. 191.

[69] Again, this omission is almost certainly owing to the fact that Georgina Hogarth was opposed to it. Professor Adrian notes that Georgina had always opposed even the mere mention of Maria's name in The Dickensian. (Adrian, p. 238.) Hence it seems quite reasonable to conclude that she would have opposed the inclusion of any details of the relationship in Kitton's work.

[70] [no source given], cited by Frederick G. Kitton, Charles Dickens: His Life, Writings and Personality, op.cit., p. 231.

may briefly glance at how a modern biographer has handled the Dickens-Collins-Forster relationship. Hesketh Pearson quoted a letter similar to the one used by Kitton. Pearson's letter said:

> if the mind can devise anything sufficiently in the style of sybarite Rome in the days of its culminating voluptuousness, I am your man . . . If you can think of any tremendous way of passing the night . . . do. I don't care what it is. I give (for that night only) restraint to the Winds![71]

Although this letter may be similar in content to the one used by Kitton, the conclusion that Pearson drew from a reading of it was quite different.

> Forster stood for restriction, respectability, and pretentiousness; Collins for liberation, disreputableness, and licentiousness; and Dickens had reached a stage in his development when the world, the flesh and the devil meant more to him than the Ten Commandments, of which he had had more than enough.[72]

Like all of the other biographers discussed to date, Kitton was very cautious in discussing the separation. It is a noteworthy point that in the interests of family privacy, all biographers were more than willing to skip lightly

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[71] [no source given], cited by Hesketh Pearson, Dickens: His Character, Comedy, and Career (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1949), p. 221.

[72] Hesketh Pearson, Dickens: His Character, Comedy, and Career, op. cit., p. 220.

over the entire affair. Kitton was no exception, although when reading his account of it, one has the impression that if it had not been for Georgina Hogarth hovering in the background, he might have been willing to tell more than he did. Indeed, he did go as far as to say:

> No biographer of Dickens can entirely avoid referring to the cause of the unhappiness which overshadowed the last few years of his marvellous career . . .[73]

Kitton did not attempt to exonerate Dickens to the extent, let us say, that Forster did. Instead, he noted quite acutely that "the fact that some of Dickens' friends remained loyal to him, while others considered his wife the aggrieved party"[74] was indicative that the blame for the separation lay with both parties.

As a good example of Kitton's reluctance to investigate the causes of the separation, one may cite the way in which he used evidence supplied by Edmund Yates. In his biography, Kitton cited the following passage from Edmund Yates: His Recollections and Experiences (1885):

> The two leading personages in this little drama /the separation/ are dead, and I fail

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[73] Frederick G. Kitton, Charles Dickens: His Life, Writings and Personality, op. cit., p. 270.

[74] Ibid., p. 272. Forster did admit that there were faults on both sides; however, the general tone of his Life is pro-Dickens.

> to see the necessity or expediency of recalling various details.[75]

The above quotation adequately summarizes Kitton's attitude about the separation, and he completely ignored the rather broad hints that Yates had given in his other book, Fifty Years of London Life. In that work, Yates had suggested that there was more to the separation than met the eye. He had said:

> It is not for me to apportion blame or to mete out criticism. My intimacy with Dickens, his kindness to me, my devotion to him, were such that my lips are sealed and my pen is paralyzed as regards circumstances which, if I felt less responsibility and less delicacy, I might be at liberty to state.[76]

The final impression gained from Kitton's biography is essentially the same as that received from Forster's. The picture of Dickens that emerged from Kitton's pen may best be summarized in the words of Tom Trollope, whom Kitton quoted as saying:

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[75] Edmund Yates, His Recollections and Experiences, (1885), cited by Frederick G. Kitton, Charles Dickens: His Life, Writings and Personality, op. cit., p. 273.

[76] Edmund Yates, Fifty Years of London Life, (1885), cited by Ada Nisbett, Dickens and Ellen Ternan (Berkely, Cal.: University of California Press, 1952), p. 28. It is inconceivable that Kitton would have been unfamiliar with this other book of Yates'.

> His benevolence, his active, energising desire for good to all God's creatures, and restless anxiety to be in some way active for the achieving of it, were necessary and busy in his heart ever and always . . . Dickens hated a mean action or a mean sentiment as one hates something that is physically loathsome to the sight and touch.[77]

The next biography of Dickens to be examined appeared in 1933. It was written by Bernard Darwin and entitled Dickens.[78] In this biography one begins to see a more composite picture of Dickens appear. For the first time, the

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[77] T. A. Trollope, What I Remember (Bentley, 1887), cited by Frederick G. Kitton, Charles Dickens: His Life, Writings and Personality, op. cit., p. 461.

[78] Bernard Darwin, Dickens (in Great Lives Series, London: Duckworth, 1933). Between the publication of the biographies of Kitton (1902) and Darwin (1933) occurred several important events. The first of these was the publication in 1906 of the correspondence between Dickens and Miss Weller. I have not been able to examine this correspondence at first hand. According to Jack Lindsay, /"Charles Dickens and Women," Twentieth Century, CLIV (November, 1953), 378/ the letters caused a scandal amongst Dickensians when first published because they suggested that Dickens' intentions towards her were not honourable. Upon checking the files of The Dickensian, I could find only very vague references to the letters. One of these was on p. 53, Vol. I of The Dickensian for 1905. In a list of books and articles was one article entitled "Dickens as a Matchmaker." A brief abstract of this article stated, "The Master as the friend of Wayward lovers." So it seems that rather than causing a scandal, as Lindsay says, the letters were used to indicate how jolly and helpful Dickens was with "wayward lovers"!

Another important event occurred in 1908 when the Maria Beadnell letters were first published. Here again, I have been unable to examine them at first hand, although one can

Maria Beadnell story was told in full and the biographer offered a suggestion as to why Dickens made the horrible blunder that he did in marrying Catherine Hogarth. The reason given was that Dickens was overwhelmed by the "abstract femininity"[79] of the Hogarth girls, coming especially as it did after the Beadnell affair.

This biographer also indicated that Dickens was in many respects disenchanted with his children. Darwin quoted a letter from the author in which he lamented that he "brought up the largest family ever known, with the smallest disposition to do anything for themselves."[80] This piece of information would have gone a long way to explain Dickens' continual worry about money. He was not overly mercenary, as Ward had suggested, but he had to provide for children that were not showing much inclination to fend for themselves.

Darwin's biography was also the first one in which Ellen Ternan's name was mentioned.[81] After quoting the

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see their influence in the way in which Darwin treats the episode in his biography.

In 1928 appeared Ralph Strauss's biography, but here again I have been unable to read it at first hand.

[79] Bernard Darwin, Dickens, op. cit., p. 33.

[80] Ibid., p. 126.

[81] Forster, of course, had printed Dickens' Will in which Ellen's name was mentioned as a legatee.

"Violated" letter, Darwin noted that the young lady referred to therein was Ellen Ternan. The only comment this biographer made was that "there is no scrap of evidence to show that Dickens's words about her were not absolutely true."[82] These words would, of course, be challenged in the next year (1934) when Thomas Wright published his Life. Thomas Wright and the change in Dickensian biography occasioned by his Life are discussed in the following chapter.

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[82] Bernard Darwin, Dickens, op. cit., p. 114.

CHAPTER IV

In this chapter I will examine those biographical studies of Dickens that have been published between 1934 and 1952. I have already indicated, in the previous chapter, why I chose 1934 as the year that separates my two chapters on Dickensian biography. Briefly, the principal reason was that the pre-1934 biographies were all characterized by hero-worship. The authors of these works had refused to judge Dickens' life by ordinary standards. Their opinion of the novelist was similar to that of Georgina Hogarth who, referring to Dickens, had claimed: "A man of genius ought not to be judged with the common herd of men."[1] In contrast, the general tendency of the post-1934 biographies was to make us very much aware of the novelist's failures and frustrations. This new approach had a mixed reception from the critics, many of whom were reluctant to accept a change in the status quo of their idol. The terminal date of this chapter, 1952, represents the year in which the last biography on Dickens has been published.

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[1]This remark appeared in the Thompson-Stark letter. The letter is reproduced in K. J. Fielding, "Charles Dickens and His Wife: Fact or Forgery," Études Anglaises, Juillet-Septembre, 1955, pp. 212-222.

Thomas Wright[2] was the first of the biographers to seriously challenge the hallowed Forsterian picture of Dickens. He pointed out that the Victorian Tower of Respectability indeed had a somewhat shaky foundation. Dickens had kept as his mistress the actress Ellen Ternan. Since Wright's biography offered little else besides the revelation about Ellen Ternan, I will discuss it at length in the succeeding chapter, rather than in this one.

The reader should note, however, that in their reviews of Wright's Life, most of the magazines felt that the disclosures about Ellen Ternan were not important enough to warrant the publication of a new biography. The Times Literary Supplement in 1935 complained:

> We cannot . . . help feeling a doubt whether there was really room for yet another substantial Life of Dickens after Mr. J. W. T. Ley's elaborately annotated reprint of Forster, . . . and Mr. Bernard Darwin's miniature masterpiece.[3]

This was a rather naive statement. Ley's work was, after all, annotation and not biography,[4] and to call Bernard

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[2]Thomas Wright, Life of Charles Dickens (London: Herbert Jenkins, Ltd., 1935). I have been unable to examine this work at first hand.

[3]"Biography," Times Literary Supplement, November 30, 1935, p. 816. Ley's reprint was first published in 1934.

[4]I have not been able to examine Ley's reprint; however, judging by the way that this critic handled the Ellen Ternan affair (vide. Chap. V), displaying as he did a singular lack of scholarly impartiality, one wonders if his annotations might not be similarly prejudiced.

Darwin's work (which was little more than a chronological outline) a "miniature masterpiece" was rather preposterous.

Another review claiming that the Ellen Ternan affair was of little consequence, appeared in the Spectator for 1935. "This biography," said the Spectator, "will not supersede Ley's annotated reprint . . . , and can indeed hardly be preferred to any of the other competent lives of Dickens that have been published."[5] Modern Philology noted substantially the same thing. That magazine called Wright's Life "the results of a lifetime of labour, but adding little to our knowledge of Dickens. . . . will not supersede Ley's annotated reprint of Forster's biography."[6] Critics' adoption of this casual attitude towards such important events in Dickens' life quite rightly prompted the dean of American critics, Edmund Wilson, to complain of the "ineptitude and the amiable superficiality which have in general been characteristic of the race of Dickens' scholars, biographers and critics."[7] This "amiable

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[5]A Review of Life of Charles Dickens by Thomas Wright, Spectator, December 6, 1935, p. 962.

[6]Charles Frederick Harrold, A Review of Charles Dickens by Thomas Wright, Modern Philology, XXXIII (May, 1936), 427.

[7]Edmund Wilson, "The Nonesuch Dickens," The New Republic, October 4, 1939, p. 247.

superficiality" will appear time and again in the reviews discussed in this chapter.

The first biographer to push his way through the door opened by Wright was Hugh Kingsmill. Writing in the tradition of the Stracheyan school of biography, Kingsmill's work was emphatically deflationary and anti-Dickens in its scope.[8] Before examining the thesis of his biography, one may first glance at the general "debunking" approach that he advocated. This was particularly evident in his consideration of Dickens and women.

> The physical appeal of women to Dickens is obvious in all his work. In his youth, travelling round England, there were probably times when, like Mr. Pickwick in the inn at Ipswich, he "softly turned the handle of some bedroom door."[9]

Such an assertion, coming as it did when the nerves of loyal Dickensians were still raw from Thomas Wright's disclosures, was greeted with anguished howls, and such is the power of

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[8]M. D. Zabel, "Dickens: The Reputation Revised," The Nation, CLXIX (September 17, 1949), 279-281. Zabel identifies Kingsmill as writing in the tradition of the Stracheyan school. Two other of Dickens' biographers also identified by Zabel as Stracheyans were Ralph Strauss with his biography Charles Dickens (1928), and Bechofer Roberts with his biography This Side Idolatry (1928). I have been unable to obtain either Strauss's or Bechofer Roberts' works and hence must use Kingsmill as my only representative of the school of biography popularized by Lytton Strachey.

[9]Hugh Kingsmill, The Sentimental Journey: A Life of Charles Dickens ([n.p.] : Wishart and Company, 1934), p. 162.

the Dickens legend that as recently as 1961 one critic disdainfully sniffed that Kingsmill had stooped to "sniggering innuendo."[10]

Needless to say, Kingsmill greeted the revelations about Ellen Ternan with obvious relish. Dickens, said Kingsmill, was

> a Steerforth honoured throughout England for the conviction with which he had enforced the purity of married love and the shame of passion indulged outside the marriage tie. . . . Dickens must have felt, if only for an instant, that to a third person he would appear as a monster of hypocrisy and cruelty, who, while preaching all the virtues, had thrown aside the mother of his ten children, and immediately followed this outrage up by seducing a virgin who had placed herself under his protection.[11]

Kingsmill's Dickens had indeed come a long way from Carlyle's Dickens, "every inch of him an Honest Man."[12]

The thesis of Kingsmill's Life was that Dickens was engrossed in self-pity. According to this biographer, Dickens' short story, George Silverman's Explanation,"is in fact simply an allegory of his own life, written in an

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[10] C. G. DuCann, The Love Lives of Charles Dickens (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1961), p. 12.

[11] Hugh Kingsmill, The Sentimental Journey: A Life of Charles Dickens, op. cit., p. 194.

[12] [no source given], cited by John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens (Everyman's Library edition; London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1950), II, 396.

auto-intoxication of self-pity, his most constant and his strongest emotion."[13] Kingsmill's Life was (as far as my own researches have indicated) the first to adopt the psychological approach.[14] He examined all of the significant episodes in Dickens' life and novels, and then attempted to interpret these same incidents, showing how they revealed the novelist's psychological make-up, and in particular his self-pity. Some examples of his technique follow.

In the novel David Copperfield, there had been an estrangement between David and his mother. This, according to Kingsmill, mirrored a comparable situation in Dickens' real life. Dickens, as his parents' oldest child, had received from them their undivided attention. This changed, however, when siblings appeared.

> Throughout his life Dickens had to be the centre of attention, and one may assume that the estrangement between David and his mother reflects the jealousy Charles felt when he was compelled to share Mrs. Dickens' love with the younger children.[15]

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[13] Hugh Kingsmill, The Sentimental Journey: A Life of Charles Dickens, op. cit., p. 4.

[14] As an example of the difference between Kingsmill's psychological approach and that of the earlier biographers, note that Kingsmill took George Silverman's Explanation as an allegory of Dickens' life, whereas Ward, writing in 1882, referred to the same short story as "dreary." A. W. Ward, Dickens (in English Men of Letters Series, pocket edition, London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1909), p. 159.

[15] Hugh Kingsmill, The Sentimental Journey: A Life of Charles Dickens, op. cit., p. 21.

As had been known ever since Forster's Life, Dickens had resented his mother's attempts to get him back to work at the blacking warehouse. Subsequent biographers have all reiterated Forster's account of the incident and have also implied that Mrs. Dickens' actions were quite wrong. That precocious little Charles should have had to work rather than go to school was unthinkable. Kingsmill dispelled this bit of hero-worship with good reasoning:

> To her [Mrs. Dickens], submerged in problems she could not solve, Charles was a boy with a living to earn, not a gentleman's son entitled to a university education, and when he was offered a job by her cousin, she must have felt that he was very lucky to be started on a business career which would be made easy by family influence.[16]

Seen in this light, Dickens' later preoccupation with the blacking warehouse did not show the fortitude and other assorted virtues that the earlier biographers had claimed. Instead, said Kingsmill, it revealed a successful novelist wallowing in self-pity.

> What is astonishing is that in later years, at the height of a renown founded on his experience of poverty, he should still have been stuck fast in his adolescent self-pity and lack of detachment, should still have nursed his old rage and resentment.[17]

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[16] Ibid., p. 22.

[17] Ibid., p. 16.

Another aspect of Kingsmill's biography worth noting was that he interpreted rather than merely presented the Maria Beadnell episode. Had it not been for Maria's rejection of Dickens, he claimed that there was little possibility that the novelist would ever have married Catherine Hogarth.

> The Hogarths were his first audience, and the difference between the way they received him, and the way the Beadnells used to receive him, must have been one of the chief impulses behind his proposal to Kate.[18]

Since this was one of the first biographies of Dickens to depart from the traditional "lionizing" approach, it is perhaps not too surprising to find that the critics exhibited mixed emotions upon reading it. Arthur Waugh, writing in The Fortnightly, showed little sympathy for the Life, referring to its "fanciful excesses."[19] Waugh's main objection, and one quite well taken, was that "it is absurd to sum up a complicated nature like that of Dickens in a single catchword."[20] S. C. Chew, writing in the

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[18] Ibid., p. 44.

[19] Arthur Waugh, "The Inimitable Boz," The Fortnightly, CXXXVII (January, 1935), 120.

[20] Ibid.

Saturday Review of Literature, was just as harsh in his review as was Waugh. Nevertheless, Chew's harshness was in some respects unjustified. Kingsmill had interpreted the energetic efforts made by Dickens during his early literary years as being an attempt to make up for the arrears of attention due to him. Chew, however, disagreed. "It may be so: but I strongly suspect that such analysis is rubbish."[21] As the reader can see, critics were not yet ready for a psychological interpretation of Dickens' life. N. Arvin, in The New Republic, took exactly the opposite view. Kingsmill, he said "builds up perhaps the most coherent case yet sustained against Dickens as a man and as an artist."[22] This reviewer did admit that Kingsmill's indictment was indeed "heavy," and he hoped that it would modify the "ideally reasonable estimate of Dickens."[23] He at least saw that a new approach, free from

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[21] S. C. Chew, "Charles Dickens and Respectability," Saturday Review of Literature, February 23, 1935, p. 506.

[22] N. Arvin, "Dickens in the Dock," The New Republic, April 10, 1935, p. 258.

[23] Ibid. Another critic having high praise for Kingsmill's Life was George Orwell. In a review of Hesketh Pearson's Life, Orwell referred to Kingsmill's biography as "perhaps the most brilliant ever written on Dickens, but it is so unremittingly 'against' that it might give a misleading impression to anyone not acquainted with Dickens' work." George Orwell, "Mr. Dickens Sits for his Portrait," New York Times Book Review, May 15, 1949, p. 17.

the hero worship of the past, was needed.

Characteristically, the Dickensians were up in arms about the book, and in their reviews of it such adjectives as "rubbish" and "valueless" were liberally employed.[24] Kingsmill's approach, said the reviewer J. W. T. Ley, was quite wrong because he had started out having no sympathy whatever for his subject.

> No man can write a detached, dispassionate study of any author by such methods, for the simple reason that, however, honest he may wish to be, he will see only that which he is predisposed to see. The result must be utterly valueless, and this book is a monumental illustration of that truth.[25]

To a certain extent, Ley was quite right in his criticism because Kingsmill was only interested in presenting one side of Dickens' character. Ideally, the title of his work should have been "An Important Aspect of Dickens' Life" rather than "A Life of Charles Dickens." Nevertheless, at the slight expense of using the unscholarly _tu quoque_, one might note that the biographical approach that Ley condemned was essentially the same one that had characterized half a century of Dickens' biography.

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[24] J. W. T. Ley, "Biography: How _Not_ to Do It," _The Dickensian_, XXI (Spring, 1935), 104.

[25] _Ibid_.

Despite the fact that he praised Ley's review as "masterly,"[26] Walter Dexter, the editor of The Dickensian, noted in an editorial comment that

> there are certain points in Mr. Kingsmill's analysis that give food for serious thought, and for that reason this book should not be lightly put aside with a Podsnapian wave of the hand.[27]

The next important milestone in the history of Dickens' biography was the publication of the Nonesuch edition of Dickens' letters in 1938. To date, this edition is the most complete, containing almost 9,000 of the novelist's letters; nevertheless it is not a definitive one, and in a preface to the three volumes of letters, the editor, Walter Dexter, noted that the Nonesuch edition probably represented only about one-third to one-half of the total number of Dickens' letters.[28] In 1941, Professor Franklin P. Rolfe

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[26]Walter Dexter, "When Found," The Dickensian, XXI (Spring, 1935), 82.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Since the Nonesuch edition was limited to 877 copies, an action that represents an instance of editorial imbecility, very few libraries possess this most important collection. Regretfully our library is among the "have-nots." The editors of the Nonesuch compounded their folly in limiting the edition, by giving away to each of the subscribers one of the original wood-cuts used by Dickens' illustrators. My account of Dexter's preface is taken from a review of the Nonesuch letters. Herbert Gorman, "The Huge and Vital Correspondence of Dickens," New York Times Book Review, January 29, 1939, p. 3.

indicated just how much of Dickens' correspondence this edition had missed. Among the unpublished Dickens' letters in the Huntington Library were seventy miscellaneous letters; thirty-one to Mr. and Mrs. Watson; one hundred and twenty-five to Wills; nearly all of Dickens' correspondence with Frederic Ouvry; and ninety-six letters to Georgina Hogarth. Nearly all of "these additions to the Nonesuch volumes are worthy of publication,"[29] said Professor Rolfe.

One of the great drawbacks to the Nonesuch collection was the lack of care taken by the editors in their compilation. Frequently they did not go back to the original manuscripts of the letters. They would transcribe a letter as it appeared in the Mamie-Georgie edition into the Nonesuch edition, without first checking to see if the letter had originally appeared in its correct form in the earlier collection. Hence, those letters with which Georgina Hogarth had tampered (by omitting a portion of the letter without the use of ellipsis periods)[30] appeared in their tampered form in the Nonesuch edition. Also, in many cases, letters that had appeared in their correct form in the Mamie-Georgie edition were copied wrongly into the Nonesuch edi-

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[29] Franklin P. Rolfe, "Additions to the Nonesuch Edition of Dickens' Letters," Huntington Library Quarterly, V (October, 1941), 140.

[30] Vide, p. 128.

tion.[31]

These letters undoubtedly added a great deal of information to our knowledge of Dickens; however, one would not be able to tell this by glancing at the reviews that the letters received. Stephen Leacock, writing in the Saturday Review of Literature, was quite emphatic about it.

> It cannot be said that these letters shed much, if any, new light on the career or character of Charles Dickens. Such light, on a ground so long illuminated and so carefully searched, is scarcely to be expected.[32]

The New Statesman and Nation, reviewing the first volume of letters, said little more than that they were astounded by the fantastic energy shown by Dickens in writing so many letters in addition to his other duties as author, editor, etc. This article also quite rightly took the Nonesuch editors to task for their acts of "vandalism" in giving away the original wood-cuts.[33]

Also indicative of the fact that the critics seemed

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[31] Ada Nisbet, after giving instances of errors in the Nonesuch letters, refers to "innumerable other examples of garblings that could be cited [in that edition] . . ." Ada Nisbet, Dickens and Ellen Ternan (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1952), p. 86.

[32] Stephen Leacock, "Dickens: A Self-Portrait," Saturday Review of Literature, XIX (December 24, 1938), 3.

[33] David Garnett, "Books in General," The New Statesman and Nation, XV (June 4, 1938), 954.

to find little of new interest in the Nonesuch volumes were the following reviews, both of which were quite ecstatic at finding a genial and jovial author depicted in the letters. The Times Literary Supplement gushed:

> Even in the gloomiest circumstances, when harassed and hard-driven. [sic] Dickens cannot refrain from delightful and spontaneous bubbling.[34]

Noting also the absence of much of Dickens' correspondence with his wife, the reviewer gallantly conceded that the collection would have been more complete with them; however, in the next breath he rather airily commented:

> . . . the topic of Dickens's domestic relations is so little attractive and has already been the subject of such "frightful mess, muddle, complication and botheration," that many readers may be rather relieved than otherwise.[35]

The New York Times Book Review was also quite delighted with the Dickens that it perceived in the Nonesuch edition. The letters revealed "the man's amazing humanity and delight in life itself. He had what is called gusto . . ."[36]

The most important review of the letters was written

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[34]"Dickens Revealed in his Letters: By-Products of Genius," Times Literary Supplement, August 27, 1938, p. 551.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Herbert Gorman, "The Huge and Vital Correspondence of Dickens," loc. cit.

by Edmund Wilson. The significance of this critique was that it gave us an indication of Wilson's real source for his justly famous essay.[37] His evaluation was a fairly long one, covering all aspects of the edition: the size of the books, their weight and their colour. However, after dealing with these trivia in such detail, Wilson spent a mere two paragraphs in considering the letters. Although he did refer to these as "the most valuable feature of the set,"[38] he obviously felt that there was not too much to be gained therein. "Yet it is still in general true," said Wilson, "that we get the real story of Dickens --and that perhaps incompletely--only in his novels."[39]

The first biography to be published subsequent to the appearance of the Nonesuch letters was that by Dame Una Pope-Hennessy. It was published in 1946.[40] Although

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[37]Edmund Wilson's essay, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges" (1941), was instrumental in prompting a re-evaluation of Dickens' work. This essay, which is discussed in the following chapter, was based almost wholly on Dickens' novels rather than on his letters.

[38]Edmund Wilson, "The Nonesuch Dickens," The New Republic, October 4, 1939, p. 247. Besides containing Dickens' letters, the Nonesuch edition also included reprints of all of his novels.

[39]Ibid., p. 248.

[40]Una Pope-Hennessy, Charles Dickens (New York: Howell, Soskin, Inc., 1946).

Dame Una was the first to explore some portions of the hitherto unpublished correspondence, her book did not offer any startling details about Dickens. Indeed, in a review of her work, Ralph Strauss complained that "there is nothing of any great importance in the new book which has not already been set down in print."[41] This comment, while essentially quite true, was rather harsh, because it ignored the corrective effect of this Life. Dame Una's work, coming as it did after Kingsmill's, gave the literary world a more balanced picture of Dickens.

The author spent a great deal of time in detailing Dickens' early years as a political reporter,[42] and throughout the work she emphasized to a greater extent than did other biographers, Dickens' social relationships. The most interesting portion of her work, however, and the portion least explained by earlier biographers, was her account of the years leading up to and past the separation. The villain of that household drama, according to Pope-Hennessy,

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[41] Ralph Strauss, "The New Life of Dickens," The Dickensian, XLII (December, 1946), 21. Strauss's review was quite typical of the poor calibre of criticism directed at works about Dickens. Five-sixths of the review had little to do with Dame Una's biography, for Strauss wandered off on a tangent to discuss Ellen Ternan.

[42] Una Pope-Hennessy, Charles Dickens, op. cit., pp. 22-42.

was Georgina Hogarth. Although Dame Una did not suggest that there was any impropriety in the conduct of either Dickens or Georgina, she did feel that Georgina had a strong influence on the separation.

> Who but Georgina could have contrived the circumstances that levered the mother of her nephews and nieces out of the house of which she remained the permanent and apparently satisfied inmate?[43]

According to Dame Una's novel interpretation of the facts, Georgina and Dickens were both instrumental in Dickens' boys leaving home at the early age that they did and migrating to the various corners of the world. The biographer referred to "plans . . . maturing in his [Dickens'] brain . . . for shipping Edward Bulwer Lytton [Dickens' youngest child] overseas to join Alfred Tennyson [another of his sons] in Australia."[44] Prior biographers took the view that Dickens' partings from his children were (far from being welcomed by him) sources of great pain and anxiety to the novelist. Dame Una, however, without giving any reasons for her particular interpretation, called Dickens' separation from his youngest son "cold-blooded."[45] The actual part that Georgina played

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[43] Ibid., p. 392.

[44] Ibid., p. 456.

[45] Ibid., p. 457.

in moving the children out of the house as soon as they came of age was rather undefined in the Life, the reader merely being told of her "resolve to get the young nephews out of the country. . . ."[46]

A most interesting point brought out by Pope-Hennessy was Dickens' opinion of male chastity. This opinion, to the best of my knowledge, had never been published before. On May 4, 1848, Carlyle, Forster, Emerson and Dickens were discussing among other things "the shameful lewdness of the London streets." Carlyle's opinion was that such a condition as male chastity was almost a thing of the past. Emerson replied that in America, men of good breeding shunned pre-marital intercourse. Dickens sided with Carlyle, saying that if his [Dickens'] own son was particularly chaste he would be quite alarmed and would worry about his health. Such a piece of information, which would never have been allowed to see the light of day had Forster or Georgina been alive, does make one wonder about the creator of Steerforth.[47]

The indirect influence of the young Wilkie Collins on Dickens' separation was also very well brought out in this

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., pp. 267-268.

Life. Dame Una painted a very pathetic and convincing picture of the rapidly aging Dickens trying to put his past behind him and regain his lost youth:

> The close companionship of Wilkie Collins and his levity on sex-relationships combined with his own passion for Ellen [Ternan] made Dickens feel as if he had renewed his youth, almost as if he belonged to another generation. Kate might look her part of mater-familias; it was hard for him to believe himself the father of ten children, when he felt more like their elder brother than their parent.[48]

He surrounded himself with a host of new friends, all of them young men such as Wilkie Collins, George Sala, Percy Fitzgerald and Edmund Yates. Now, he no longer cared for illustrations by "Phiz;" he wanted "modern designs by very young Marcus Stone or Luke Fildes."[49] To match the fashions of these friends, Dickens dyed his hair and beard, and in 1860 he made the final break with his past by burning a lifetime of accumulated correspondence.

Another important feature of this Life was that it accepted without question the Thompson-Stark letter. This very long piece of correspondence was purportedly written on August 20, 1858 by Mrs. Helen Thompson (Mrs. Dickens' aunt) to her friend Mrs. Stark. Its purpose was to inform

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[48] Ibid., p. 384.

[49] Ibid., p. 411.

Mrs. Stark of the "behind the scenes" details of the separation. Since its author was related to Catherine Dickens the missive was most partisan, denouncing the novelist for his outrageous treatment of his wife.[50]

This letter first came to light in the nineteen-twenties when Ralph Strauss was collecting material for his biography of Dickens.[51] This evidence was subsequently accepted as genuine by Thomas Wright and Hugh Kingsmill, both of whom used it in their biographies. The validity of the letter was vigorously and apparently successfully challenged by J. W. T. Ley, in The Dickensian in 1937.[52] In his article Ley showed that the events of which this piece of correspondence spoke had not yet occurred at the date at which it was supposed to have been written. By this time it was impossible to go back to the original donor of the letter because Strauss had forgotten his name. He had also forgotten whether the manuscript he first saw

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[50] To the best of my knowledge, the only complete reproduction of the letter is to be found in K. J. Fielding, "Charles Dickens and His Wife: Fact or Forgery?" Études Anglaises, Juillet-Septembre, 1955, pp. 212-222.

[51] We do not possess a copy of this biography.

[52] Walter Dexter, "When Found," The Dickensian, XXXIII (Winter, 1936), 1-4.

was the original or just a copy.[53] This wild circle of events was given a new twist when in 1955 K. J. Fielding demonstrated that if the letter was a forgery, it was forged by someone who was privy to the movement of the Dickens household. Events were accurately described that were not known until after the letter appeared.[54]

The maddening casualness and breezy tones with which most critics tended to discuss Dickens was nowhere better exemplified than in the reviews that I have read of Pope-Hennessy's Life. In one review, for example, Frederic Babcock first said a few brief words about the Life to the effect that he would be evaluating it for its "human interest," and then having done his duty by mentioning the book that he was supposed to review, he went off on a long, rambling discussion as to why Dickens avoided going to Chicago on his second visit to the United States.[55] Another review was written by Rose Macaulay, and despite her learned

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[53] Ralph Strauss, "The New Life of Dickens," The Dickensian, XLII (December, 1946), 21-33.

[54] K. J. Fielding, "Charles Dickens and His Wife: Fact or Forgery?" op. cit., pp. 218-222. Further evidence corroborating the validity of this letter appeared in J. W. Carlton, "Mr. and Mrs. Dickens: The Thompson-Stark Letter," Notes and Queries, VII (April, 1960), 145-147.

[55] Frederic Babcock, "Why Dickens Avoided Chicago," Saturday Review of Literature, XXIX (April 13, 1946), 18.

plaudits of the book as a "scholarly, careful study,"[56] Macaulay showed that she had really given it only the most perfunctory attention when she referred to Dickens as being "dominated by Georgy, his intriguing sister-in-law . . ."[57] While one may be able to make a good case for Georgina's "intriguing," it is hard to conceive of anyone, much less Georgina, "dominating" Dickens. This was most certainly neither the intention of Dame Una's Life, nor was it the impression that one received from reading the book. The most scholarly of the reviews that I have read came from the pen of V. S. Pritchett. This critic mercifully left undiscussed such topics as Dickens' visit to Chicago, and instead dealt with the business at hand. He did not have a very high opinion of Dame Una's work and he complained that her volume was both dull to read and devoid of organization. The Life, said Pritchett, was a "drifting sea of facts."[58]

Undoubtedly the most entertaining biography of Dickens was that published by Hesketh Pearson in 1949.[59] Pear-

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[56]Rose Macaulay, "Dickens," The Spectator, CLXXV (September 7, 1945), 224.

[57]Ibid.

[58]V. S. Pritchett, "Books in General," The New Statesman and Nation, XXX (September 15, 1945), 179.

[59]Hesketh Pearson, Dickens: His Character, Comedy and Career (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1949).

son was the author of popular rather than scholarly biographies, and prior to his work on Dickens he had written about such notable literary figures as Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, Shakespeare, William Hazlitt and several others. The reader should not conclude, however, that because his biography of Dickens was a "popular" one, it was an inferior one. Such was by no means the case, for while one often wishes that Pearson had availed himself of such scholarly trappings as footnotes and an adequate bibliography, this deficiency was more than made up by his extraordinarily vivid and engrossing portrait of the novelist.

A clue to Pearson's ability to make his subject come alive may be found in his conception of what a biography should be, and what material it should include. In the preface to his last book, Extraordinary People, he gave such a clue:

> I have found that human nature at its least amiable is far more interesting than human glory at its most spectacular and that biography thrives, not on great feats, exceptional valor, epic endurance . . . but on eccentricity, idiosyncrasy, comicality, the stuff of gossip and scandal. Singularity of character is the flesh and bones of enduring biography, anything that differentiates a man from those about him, that makes him peculiar, not typical . . .[60]

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[60] Hesketh Pearson, Extraordinary People, 1965, cited by Christopher Dafoe, "Master of Popular Biography," Winnipeg Free Press, Magazine Section, May 8, 1965, p. 6.

Generally speaking, in his Life, Pearson adhered to these canons; consequently his biography was written in a rather racy style. For example, after relating such factual details as the relish with which Dickens had described Carker's death under the wheels of a train, Pearson's inclination was to add some embellishment such as, "Carker must have been a publisher in disguise."[61] In keeping with his concept of biography, he tended to bring to one's attention such arresting examples as Jane Carlyle's experiences at the dinner party which she claimed (no doubt facetiously) was "rising into something not unlike the rape of the Sabines [italics in the original]."[62] Also given prominence was the episode at the seashore at Broadstairs. There, Dickens, in one of his "Quilpish" moods, seized the young girl Eleanor Christian, and despite the fact that the tide was coming in and that she begged to be released, held her until both of them were soaked to the waist.[63] Later, on going for a drive with Eleanor and other persons, Dickens persisted in singing vulgar songs

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[61] Hesketh Pearson, Dickens: His Character, Comedy, and Career, op. cit., p. 154.

[62] Ibid., p. 135.

[63] Ibid., p. 53.

all the way.[64] Such incidents, while interesting and entertaining in their own right, were given by Pearson in order to show the strange restlessness and moods to which the novelist was frequently subject.

Pearson also quoted with glee, and solely for their own sake, some of the more witty extracts from Dickens' letters. One of these was written while the author was in France. He was considering, said Dickens, returning to England because of "the immense extent to which the French nation makes a water-closet of my wall."[65] Also reproduced by Pearson was Dickens' rather unflattering description of George Sand: "Just the kind of woman in appearance whom you might suppose to be the Queen's monthly nurse."[66]

The book was not wholly concerned with such witticisms as these and much serious consideration was given to Forster and Wilkie Collins and their respective influences on Dickens. To the best of my knowledge, Pearson was the only biographer to have devoted so much space to John Forster. Fortser's relations with Dickens were given a chapter to themselves.[67] Wilkie Collins was also discussed in detail,

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., p. 156.

[66] Ibid., p. 222.

[67] Ibid., pp. 59-67.

especially the significance of the Collins friendship succeeding as it did Dickens' close relationship with Forster.[68] Thackeray and Dickens and their estrangement were also given prominent attention.[69]

Pearson's Life obviously owed much to its predecessors, and in particular to Kingsmill's. For example, Pearson interpreted Dickens' low spirits over the failure of his marriage in much the same way that Kingsmill had done:

> There was a good deal of self-pity in Dickens, and it came out especially in his complaints that his marriage had been a failure. It takes two to make a success or a failure of matrimony; and when Dickens said that, in low spirits, he experienced a crushing sense of having been denied one friend and companion, he forgot that his wife could have said the same.[70]

In a similar manner, Pearson adopted Kingsmill's psychological approach when discussing Dickens' relations with his mother. Both biographers agreed that this relationship affected the novelist's life in a particular way:

> The chief need of Dickens' nature was to be loved, and perhaps his tragedy was that he asked more than he could give. Having missed, as he thought, the love of his mother, he was

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[68] Ibid., pp. 214-232. I have previously discussed Pearson's interpretation of the Dickens-Collins friendship. Vide. p. 140.

[69] Ibid., pp. 263-280.

[70] Ibid., p. 249.

always looking for it in other women, but never found the supply equal to the demand.[71]

All of the reviews of Pearson's Life that I have read were extremely favourable. John T. Winterich jubilantly noted that "Dickens the person has never been more graphically presented . . ."[72] Another reviewer, Derek Hudson, praised the book as "balanced and sensible" and noted that Pearson had given us a fresh appraisal of Dickens.[73] In his evaluation, George Orwell was a little more reserved, observing that Pearson had a tendency to present Dickens in too rosy a light. Nevertheless, he claimed that on the whole the Life was creditable.[74]

Prior to 1951, none of Dickens' biographers had really considered Dickens' life in view of the wealth of material collected by psychologists. Happily or unhappily as the case may be, this situation was rectified in 1951

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[71] Ibid., p. 30.

[72] John T. Winterich, "Once an Author, Always an Actor," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXII (May 21, 1949), 14.

[73] Derek Hudson, "Dickens Once More," The Spectator, CLXXXIII (August 19, 1949), 240.

[74] George Orwell, "Mr. Dickens Sits for His Portrait," New York Times Book Review, May 15, 1949, p. 17.

when Julian Symons' small book appeared.[75] Symons enthusiastically made up for the dearth of psychological information about Dickens by devoting the major portion of his Life to this approach. According to this biographer, "the picture of him [Dickens] which has importance for us must relate his character to the discoveries of modern psychology, and his work to the social atmosphere and development of his own age."[76]

Dickens' personality, he said, bore a very marked resemblance to that of a manic-depressive. Having made the comparison, Symons then spent a few pages in detailing it. He concluded that while an extreme case of manic-depression would preclude the creation of art, the milder forms of the illness were in some ways an asset. Such a disorder, said Symons,

> permits the existence of the split-artist, the man struggling to make a rational world from his own passionate, and apparently cause-

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[75] Julian Symons, Charles Dickens (in The English Novelists' Series, ed. Herbert Van Thal. New York: Roy Publishers, 1951.) I am making a distinction between the psychological approach of biographers such as Symons and the Freudian critics. (These are discussed in Chapter VI.) Those biographers who advocate "psychology" extend the use of this tool to all aspects of Dickens' life, whereas the Freudian critics concentrate on those portions of his life that are revealed in his novels.

[76] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

less, exaltation and depression: of Charles Dickens.[77]

Dickens, the rebel against society, was also given a prominent position in Symons' Life, and the biographer interpreted such things as Dickens' mob scenes and the characters associated with them (Dennis the hangman and Mm. Defarge) as "pathological distortions of human egoism, in which a thwarted radical enacts scenes of violence through the mouths and bodies of characters labelled wicked."[78]

The most entertaining, though not necessarily the most credible part of Symons' portrayal of the rebellious Dickens, was his very brief discussion of the novelist's revolt against the accepted sexual mores of his age. One has the impression that this biographer thinks of Dickens as sitting in his chalet up amongst the birds, and butterflies, and green branches, and desperately thinking of ways in which he could describe sexual relations. For example, Miss Wade in Little Dorrit was, according to Symons, a Lesbian. His conclusion to this effect was based in part

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[77] Ibid., p. 29. When Symons refers to the "split-artist," the term has connotations of schizophrenia rather than manic-depression.

[78] Ibid., p. 40.

upon the following excerpt from that novel. Miss Wade is speaking about a woman with whom she had been friendly earlier in her life.

> When we were left alone in our bedroom at night, I would reproach her . . . and then she would cry and cry and say I was cruel, and then I would hold her in my arms till morning.[79]

Symons claimed that the descriptions of such characters as Rosa Dartle, Hortense the French maid, Mr. Creakle with his insatiable appetite for caning boys, and Miss Wade, "reveal the urgent need Dickens felt to describe sexual relations in some other terms than those demanded by his public."[80]

This Life, being as overtly psychological in its approach as it was, was either extravagantly praised or summarily damned by the critics. The New Statesman and Nation was quite ecstatic in its review of the book:

> All in all, this little book must be considered the best short introduction to the greatest of English novelists that exists; indeed it is so good that one hopes Mr. Symons will one day give us a full-length study.[81]

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[79] Ibid., p. 65.

[80] Ibid.

[81] A Review of Charles Dickens by Julian Symons, The New Statesman and Nation, October 27, 1951, p. 472.

One review that devoutly hoped that Symons would not ever attempt a full-length study appeared in Notes and Queries. In that magazine, a critic complained that the Life was a

> pathological study of the man, finding in him what is false and weak and silly in the books. The honest reader will rejoice to realize how little Mr. Symons' criticism matters.[82]

Also sharing this critic's opinion was J. M. Cohen. In a review having the very pungent title "Body Snatching", that appeared in The Spectator, Cohen claimed that the evidence Symons presented to substantiate his claims was "highly selective" and that the book was scarcely "worth a critic's indignant attention . . ."[83] Furthermore, said Cohen, "anyone turning to this book for serious judgments on the novels will do so in vain."[84]

The evaluations of this biography followed a pattern similar to those of Kingsmill's work. They were either wholeheartedly for or against the respective biographies. The reason for this can probably be found in the parallel approach to Dickens that both biographers had advocated.

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[82] A Review of Charles Dickens by Julian Symons; Notes and Queries, October 27, 1951, p. 484.

[83] J. M. Cohen, "Body Snatching," The Spectator, CLXXXVII (October 26, 1951), 550.

[84] Ibid.

In each instance they had concentrated upon one specific characteristic of the novelist. In the case of Kingsmill, it was Dickens' "self-pity", and in the case of Symons it was his "psychology." Both of them had, as it were, put all their eggs in one basket, and had ignored any other aspects of the novelist. If the reviewer in question happened to agree with the limited facts presented by either biographer, then the Life in question was favourably received. If on the other hand the critic was hostile to or disagreed with the facts presented, there was nothing else in the Life that could redeem it, hence it received a wholly unfavourable mention.

To date, the most recent biography to be written on Dickens was that by Edgar Johnson in 1952.[85] As well as having recourse to the Nonesuch letters, Johnson supplemented this information by an examination of "thirty-five hundred unpublished documents--including contracts and memoranda and letters written to Dickens, but mostly letters written by him."[86] With research carried out on a scale such as this, it is not surprising to note that the salient

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[85] Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), 2 Vols.

[86] Ibid., I, p. ix.

characteristic of this Life was its sheer bulk, both in size and in content. The size of this work is indeed impressive, for the biography ran to two volumes and covered over one thousand pages. But no less impressive was the content. V. S. Pritchett, in a review of the work, felt that the amount of material compressed between its four covers warranted the work being called a "triumph of biographical technology."[87]

It cannot be said that Johnson's Life really brought forth any new or earth-shaking details of Dickens' life. His biography, let us say, did not give any new information on a par with that offered by Thomas Wright in 1935. Equally important though, Johnson's work tended to fill in all the gaps and to sharpen up all of the fuzzy details left by previous biographers. For example, Dickens' quarrels with the publisher Bentley were given a detailed treatment, and concurrently the reader was shown the part that these altercations played in Dickens' future life. His victory over Bentley so steeled Dickens to having his own way that later in life he was able to ride rough shod over persons who opposed him. One can see this facet of

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[87] V. S. Pritchett, "Books in General," The New Statesman and Nation, XLVI (September 26, 1953), 349.

his nature exhibited in the way that he treated his parents. When he learned that his father was again getting into debt, Dickens, without considering their opinion on the matter and much against their will, bought them a cottage in the country and summarily shipped them there. In a like manner, the Maria Beadnell episode was used to partially explain Dickens' singular lack of affection for Catherine even when they were first married. Since Maria had earlier trampled all over his proffered heart, he had no intention of ever holding it out on a platter again - to anybody.

The most impressive and by far the best feature of Johnson's Life was that he tried to synthesize all of the existing studies of the novelist; he attempted to show us the complete man. In this respect the title of his work (Charles Dickens: His Triumph and Tragedy) was informative. There were two sides to the man, said Johnson; a triumphant as well as a tragical aspect. His triumph lay in the fact "that his inward misery stimulated his powers to that culminating achievement of his work."[88] His tragedy grew "out of the way in which the powers that enabled him to overcome the obstacles before him contained also the seeds of his unhappiness."[89]

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[88] Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, op. cit., I, p. 5.

[89] Ibid.

Studies such as Kingsmill's and Symons' had only given us a half of the novelist. They had emphasized solely the less savoury aspects of his character. According to them he was a mentally ill individual wallowing in self-pity. The earlier biographers, starting with Forster, had been just as much at fault, only they had erred in the opposite direction. They assumed that Dickens was free from foibles, and that his life had been as happy and complete as had been that of Mr. Pickwick. Now, for the first time we were given a Life that took both sides of his character into consideration.

This paean of praise, however, is not to say that the work was without fault. As I hinted at the beginning of the discussion, this Life was possibly too large in that it contained an excessive amount of factual rather than interpretive material. Furthermore, the long passages of literary criticism in the Life frequently destroy the continuity of the narrative.

This biography was almost universally praised; the only objection that was commonly raised was that the passages of criticism were superfluous. Peter Quennell was enthusiastic about the work, exulting that "the character

of Dickens himself is drawn with real insight."[90] Delancey Ferguson called it "the completest and most objective life of Dickens which has yet appeared."[91] The Times Literary Supplement was also of the opinion that it was the best biography since Forster.[92]

Thus far in my examination of the biographical studies of Dickens I have ignored the most important piece of evidence about the novelist that has been yet unearthed. This was of course the Ellen Ternan affair and it is discussed in the following chapter.

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[90] Peter Quennell, "A Great Heart and Restless Soul," New York Times Book Review, January 11, 1953, pp. 1 and 23.

[91] Delancey Ferguson, "Superman and the Blacking Works," Saturday Review of Literature, XXXVI (1953), 11.

[92] "Dickens Since Forster," Times Literary Supplement, October 9, 1953, pp. 637-638.

CHAPTER V

Undoubtedly, one of the most startling developments in Dickensian biography was the disclosure by Thomas Wright in 1934[1] that the obscure young actress Ellen Ternan had been Dickens' mistress for a period of approximately twelve years (ca. 1858-1870). Since the results of Wright's investigations have had such far-reaching effects (inasmuch as they challenged and indeed changed the traditional picture of Dickens), the Ellen Ternan affair is important enough to be considered separate from the other biographical studies. In this chapter I will first of all suggest reasons why this most important episode in Dickens' life remained hidden for the length of time that it did. I will then go on to review the actual evidence as it was revealed.

The reasons why scholars have taken so many years to establish the connection between Dickens and Ellen Ternan may be found in a consideration of two interrelated facts. The first of these was Dickens' mania for privacy. During his lifetime he was distressed at the prospect of his private life being exposed to prying eyes after his death. In

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[1]Thomas Wright, "Charles Dickens Began His Honeymoon," London Daily Express, April 3, 1934. I have been unable to examine this article at first hand.

this respect, his comments on Shakespeare were quite informative.

> It is a great comfort, to my thinking, that so little is known concerning the poet. It is a fine mystery, and I tremble every day lest something should come out. If he had had a Boswell, society wouldn't have respected his grave, but would calmly have had his skull in the phrenological shop windows.[2]

Readers may also note Dickens' harsh comments about Harriet Beecher Stowe when in 1869 she published some details of Byron's incestuous relationship with Augusta Leigh.[3] Upon learning of Mrs. Stowe's publication, Dickens wrote to Macready, heatedly exclaiming: "May you be as disgusted with Mrs. Stowe as I am."[4]

To ensure that his own personal business would never be divulged to the public, Dickens began, in September of 1860, to burn all of his private correspondence. This was a practice in which he persisted until his death. Since

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[2] [Neither date nor addressee given], cited by Robert Langton, The Childhood and Youth of Charles Dickens (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1912), p.7.

[3] This would have been particularly repugnant to Dickens because among the many rumours that surrounded the novelist's separation from his wife, one of the most prominent was that he was guilty of indiscretions with his sister-in-law Georgina Hogarth.

[4] A letter from Charles Dickens to Macready, October 18, 1869, cited by Harry Stone, "Charles Dickens and Harriet Beecher Stowe," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XII (December, 1957), 202.

he began to destroy his letters as early as 1860, his reason for doing so could not have been uneasiness engendered by Mrs. Stowe's publication. Nevertheless, both incidents were indicative of first of all Dickens' fear that his private life would become a subject for public gossip, and secondly the extent to which he went to prevent such an occurrence.[5] Thus, it is extremely unlikely that any of Ellen's letters to Dickens would have survived the holocaust.

However, assuming that by some miracle they did escape the conflagration, they would undoubtedly have been

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[5]Although proof is lacking, there would seem to be more than a mere coincidence in the fact that it was only after he met Ellen Ternan (1858) that he began to burn his letters. The story of Dickens' letters to Ellen makes a bit more exciting reading. In his Life, Wright stated that in 1893 these letters were privately offered for sale in London. Wright obtained this information from a W. R. Hughes to whom the letters were offered. Wright quotes Hughes as having said to the vendor (whose name was not given): "Do you know you are doing a very dangerous thing? These letters cannot have been got honestly. If you'll take my advice, you'll go home and burn them." /Cited by C. G. L. DuCann, The Love Lives of Charles Dickens (London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1961), p. 243./ No more has been heard of the letters, and Hughes' story could not be verified because at the time of the publication of Wright's Life, he had been dead for forty years.

destroyed by the surviving members of Dickens' family, all of whom, and in particular Georgina, respected his wishes for privacy. She zealously hid from the public most of the details of the novelist's personal life and hence the actress's name was never once mentioned until 1933.[6] In this connection it is informative to note that when Georgina learned that Thomas Wright was collecting material for his forthcoming biography, she wrote to him asking him to respect the wishes of Dickens' family for privacy.[7] With the aforementioned details in mind, it is perhaps not difficult to see why the facts of the case lay buried under innuendoes and rumours for almost eighty years.

In 1858, the year in which Dickens severed connections with his wife, literary London was buzzing with rumours as to possible reasons for it. The separation of a noted literary personage from his wife of twenty-two years

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[6]In the last volume of his Life, Forster had printed the text of Dickens' will. The first item in the will was a bequest of £1,000 to Ellen, but there was no subsequent mention of her name.

[7]The exact content of the correspondence between Wright and Georgina is not known, however Professor Adrian suggests that "she apparently asked him not to divulge a story Canon Benham had told him of Ellen's confessing to intimacies with Dickens." Arthur Adrian, Georgina Hogarth and the Dickens Circle (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 239.

standing would have elicited comment enough, but when that person was Dickens, the Victorian equivalent of the Roman Lares and Penates, the swell of rumour rose to a roar, especially after Dickens had unwisely given further publicity to his domestic troubles by printing his "Address" in Household Words. Amid the rumours, the name that was most frequently heard was that of Ellen Teman. Benjamin Moran noted in his journal for June 12, 1858:

> Rumour says this great novelist of the domestic hearth ran away with an actress; and his separation from his wife, altho' it does not prove this story, does show that he really was not happy at home, altho' he wrote so well about that kind of thing.[8]

The novelist Thackeray, in a letter to his mother, also spoke of the gossip that had reached his ears:

> Here is sad news in the literary world--no less than a separation between Mr. and Mrs. Dickens--with all sorts of horrible stories buzzing about. The worst is that Im in a manner dragged in for one--Last week going into the Garrick I heard that D is separated from his wife on account of an intrigue with his sister-in-law. No says I no such thing--its with an actress--and the other story has not got to Dickens' ears but this has--and he fancies that I am going about abusing him! We shall never be allowed to be friends that's clear. I had mine from a man at Epsom the first I ever heard of the matter, and should have said

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[8]Sarah A. Wallace and Francis E. Gillespie (eds.), The Journal of Benjamin Moran, 1857-1865, cited by Ada Nisbet, Dickens and Ellen Teman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), p. 26.

> nothing about it but that I heard the other much worse story whereupon I told mine to counteract it. There is some row about an actress in the case & he denies with the utmost infuriation any charge against her or himself.[9]

Several of the smaller, and less savory newspapers eagerly and openly speculated upon the separation, gleefully pointing out at the same time the rather obvious discrepancy between the author's personal life and the harmony and bliss that he had depicted in his novels. One of these magazines, Reynolds' Weekly Newspaper, printed Dickens' "Address" and then commented upon it. The editor, G. W. M. Reynolds, said:

> The rumours alluded to by Mr. Dickens have, indeed, been widely circulated, and generally credited in literary and artistic circles. We trust they are, as he alleges, nothing but calumnies. The names of a female relative /Georgina Hogarth/, and of a professional young lady /Ellen Ternan/, have both been, of late, so intimately associated with that of Mr. Dickens, as to excite suspicion and surprise in the minds of those who had hitherto looked upon the popular novelist as a very Joseph in all that regards morality, chastity, and decorum.[10]

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[9] W. M. Thackeray, "Letters," IV, 86-87, cited by Ada Nisbet, Dickens and Ellen Ternan, op. cit., p. 18. For an excellent account of the gossip and rumour about the Ellen Ternan affair, see Nisbet, op. cit., Chapter III, "A Half Century of Rumour," pp. 22-47.

[10] G. W. M. Reynolds (ed.), Reynolds' Weekly Newspaper, cited by K. J. Fielding, "Dickens and the Hogarth Scandal," Nineteenth Century Fiction, X (1955), 72.

In the immediately succeeding edition of his newspaper, in the column headed "Gossip of the Week," Reynolds had more fun at the expense of the hapless Dickens. The editor noted:

> As one of the mildest and least malicious pleasantries to which Mr. Dickens's misfortune has given birth, we publish the following very harmless, but not altogether pointless impromptu, which we heard repeated a few evenings since:--
>
> With tongue and pen, none can like Dickens fudge;
> But now, in vain, in virtue's cause he pleads:
> Henceforth the public will his virtues judge,
> Not by his "Household Words" but household deeds.[11]

These rumours were of course quickly and vehemently denied by both the responsible press and by Dickens. The reader should note, however, the grounds upon which most people refused to believe the gossip. The paramount reason was, of course, that no proof had ever been offered to support the allegations, but equally important was the fact that the public earnestly believed that Dickens of all people could not possibly have been guilty of such indiscretions. Critics refused to believe that an author (as they conceived of him) who had so shunned vice that he had thought it necessary to rehabilitate the prostitute Martha (David Copperfield) in faraway Australia (not just anywhere in Australia but in the "out-back" "fower hundred

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[11] Ibid.

mile away from any voices but . . . the singing birds"[12]) could possibly have been guilty of adultery. The general consensus of opinion was that of the New York Times. Commenting upon the rumour about Ellen Ternan, the Times called it a

> lying scandal which should be scotched or the many whose faith in the wholesome lessons of Pickwick, Master Humphrey's Clock, and the Christmas Stories /sic/ might also be shaken in the author's failure to achieve in his own life the ideas of peace and harmony which he has painted.[13]

The implication contained in the above quotation was surely that the novelist was inseparable from his work. People appear to have believed that the creator of such "pure" women as Agnes Wickfield and Esther Summerson must of necessity be "pure" himself. Indeed this was one aspect of Dickens that had always been praised. Blanchard Jerrold's comment in The Gentleman's Magazine in 1870 was quite representative. In Dickens' writing, said Jerrold, "every sentiment /was/ pure, every emotional opinion instinctively right--like a woman's."[14] Walter Bagehot, writing in 1858,

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[12] Charles Dickens, David Copperfield (New York:P. F. Collier and Sons, /n.d./), II, 963.

[13] New York Times, June 8, 1858, cited by Ada Nisbet, Dickens and Ellen Ternan, op. cit., p. 20.

[14] Blanchard Jerrold, "Charles Dickens: In Memoriam," The Gentleman's Magazine, V (1870), 228, cited by George Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel-Criticism Since 1836 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1965), p.164.

went as far as to say that the evidence presented by Dickens' "delicacy of imagination and purity of spirit" proved that the novelist had never even experienced worldly temptations."[15]

This opinion of Dickens was also shared by the readers in the first third of the twentieth century. For example, Marie Corelli, in The Book Monthly for 1920, noted that she enjoyed Dickens

> because he is sane, pure and wholesome. Because he never soiled his pen with degrading "sex problems," and because . . . in his healthy brain there were no deceptive subterfuges.[16]

Judging from this comment, one would strongly suspect that she would have thought Dickens incapable of having an extramarital affair. Although the majority of early twentieth-century readers did consider Dickens to be as pure as the driven snow, they were not all as appreciative of this quality as was Mrs. Corelli. Virginia Woolf, for example, disliked Dickens because he had "to perfection the virtues

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[15]Mrs. Russel Barrington (ed.), Works and Life of Walter Bagehot (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1915), III, 94.

[16]Marie Corelli, "Why Dickens is Popular," The Book Monthly, February, 1920, p. 87, cited by George Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel Criticism Since 1836, op. cit., p. 164.

conventionally ascribed to the male; he is self-assertive, self-reliant, self-assured, energetic in the extreme." Furthermore, said Mrs. Woolf, he lacked an "idiosyncracy."[17]

Whether or not individual readers personally cared for Dickens' "wholesomeness," this was the single aspect of both his looks and his character that was constantly before the public. From time to time, there were veiled hints as to Dickens' impropriety; hints in which Ellen Ternan prominently figured, but since for years on end the public had been conditioned to believe otherwise, the hints and allusions were ignored.[18] It was not until 1934 that

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[17] Virginia Woolf, "David Copperfield," The Moment and Other Essays (London: The Hogarth Press, 1947), p. 66.

[18] As examples of the small pieces of evidence that were being put forward, one may cite T. P. O'Connor's magazine T. P.'s Weekly. On September 29, 1928, the journalist, who was a close friend of the Dickens family, wrote in part: "Of course, Dickens sinned . . . Unhappy at home, he sought relief abroad. The story of Ellen Terman /sic/ may one day be told . . ." Cited by Ada Nisbet, Dickens and Ellen Ternan, op. cit., p. 30. An inquiry as to the identity of Ellen Ternan, /"Miss Ellen Lawless Ternan," Notes and Queries, CLXIV (July 1, 1933), 459/ drew several replies. One reply directed the seeker to the already mentioned column in T. P.'s Weekly. "/Ellen Ternan/," Notes and Queries, CLXV (July 15, 1933), 35. Another reply referred the reader to an article in the Sunday Times for June 8, 1930, that dealt with the stage histories of Ellen, her sister Fanny, and Mrs. Ternan. Notes and Queries, CLXV (July 22, 1933), 51. The third answer, written by Andrew de Ternant, stated that Francesco Berger (the musical director of The Frozen Deep, the play in which Dickens first met Ellen) had informed him that in the 1860's

this state of equanimity was rudely shaken.

In the London Daily Express for April 3 of that year appeared an article by Thomas Wright entitled "Charles Dickens Began His Honeymoon." The article was followed in the next year by Wright's biography of Dickens.[19] According to this biographer, Ellen Ternan had been Dickens' mistress from shortly after the separation until his death. Unlike the previously mentioned rumours and allusions, Wright offered proof to substantiate his thesis. Although there is no evidence to support such a conclusion, one is strongly tempted to suspect that the vilification to which Wright was subject was at least partly occasioned by the fact that the proof he offered was too close to the truth for comfort.[20] Be that as it may, his biography was the opening shot in the long battle that was to be waged between those who accepted Wright's thesis and those (whose

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Dickens, Ellen, Mrs. Ternan and himself were quite often together at the Ternans' home on Sunday afternoons. After dinner, Dickens and Ellen would sing duets to Berger's accompaniment. "/Ellen Ternan/," Notes and Queries, CLXV (August 5, 1933), 87.

[19] Thomas Wright, Life of Charles Dickens (London: Herbert Jenkins, Ltd., 1935).

[20] See Mrs. Wright's comments in Notes and Queries, CLXXXV (August 14, 1943), 115. "They /the Dickens family/ knew the facts /about Ellen/, as I am convinced some leading members of the Dickens Fellowship did also."

leading members were drawn from the Dickens' Fellowship) who rejected the evidence as a blot on their idol.

The case that Wright produced to support his allegation was slim indeed, resting as it did upon the word of a long since deceased cleric. In 1876, six years after Dickens' death, Ellen had married George Robinson, an Anglican priest and later on a schoolmaster. She subsequently became acquainted with a friend of her husband, Canon Benham. At some point in her married life, Ellen, filled with remorse at the thought of her earlier intimacies with Dickens, told the whole story to Canon Benham, who in turn told it to Wright. However, since Benham had died many years before the publication of Wright's Life, the validity of the cleric's evidence could not be ascertained.

In the more responsible reviews of Wright's Life,[21] this was exactly what the reviewers said. Since Wright's revelations about Ellen Ternan depended upon Canon Benham, said The Spectator, "not everyone will be inclined to accept them blindly."[22] The Times Literary Supplement said sub-

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[21] As distinct from the special pleading and ad hominem arguments that clutter the pages of The Dickensian.

[22] A Review of Charles Dickens by Thomas Wright, The Spectator, December 6, 1935, p. 962.

stantially the same thing, observing that "opinions may differ upon the solidity of such evidence."[23] The only review that I have been able to locate that unreservedly accepted Wright's account was Hugh Kingsmill's. This reviewer claimed that Wright "deals in an honest businesslike way with the breakdown of Dickens's marriage and his affair with Ellen Lawless Ternan."[24]

Although most critics were loath to accept the evidence upon which Wright based his case, they accepted the revelation itself quite calmly. The Times Literary Supplement noted rather casually that Dickens' and Ellen's liaison "as has been long known, played a part in the differences between Dickens and his wife that culminated in their separation."[25] The reviewer went on to note:

> Mr. Wright is rather a carping critic of Dickens's relations with women in general, and feels called to comment on acts that seem to us as trivial as they are innocuous.[26]

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[23]"Biography," Times Literary Supplement, November 30, 1935, p. 816.

[24]Hugh Kingsmill, "Charles Dickens," The New Statesman and Nation, X (October 12, 1935), 498. The reader may note that Kingsmill was the first of the succeeding biographers to incorporate Wright's revelations in his own biography in 1935.

[25]"Biography," Times Literary Supplement, loc. cit.

[26]Ibid.

The already quoted review in The Spectator scarcely bothered to mention the Ellen Ternan affair.

Led by J. W. T. Ley, the Dickensians indignantly repudiated Wright's assertions. Although they quite rightly questioned the validity of the biographer's thesis, they were really more interested in protecting Dickens' good name than they were in finding out the truth. In a long review having the very unscholarly title: "What the Soldier Said: Scandal Articulate at Last: Mr. Thomas Wright's 'Life' of Dickens," J. W. T. Ley leaped to the defence of the Dickens' legend. In the very first sentence of his review, Ley proceeded to vilify the scholar[27] who had dared to question Dickens' integrity.

> If there be any satisfaction in blackening the characters of dead people, without being able to produce any evidence at all, then Mr. Thomas Wright is entitled to its full enjoyment.[28]

Ley's reviews bristled with such epithets as "shocking"[29] and "dreadful."[30] Although he discredited Wright's evidence,

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[27] Wright was the author of fourteen biographies, editor of the letters of Cowper and other artists; compiler of early ballads; founder of the Cowper Society, the John Payne Society and the Blake Society.

[28] J. W. T. Ley, "What the Soldier Said," The Dickensian, XXXII (Winter, 1936), 15.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., p. 19.

a good portion of the reviewer's objections rested on the grounds that the biographer's thesis contradicted everything that was known about both Dickens and Ellen. The reader will note that Forster and Georgina had done their work well. "I have before me," said Ley,

> a letter from one who was a boy in the school kept by Ellen's husband, who writes of his memories of a sweet and gracious lady, happy in her husband and children; whose every memory of her tells him that this story of Mr. Wright's is impossible.[31]

Further on in the article, the reviewer made a brief attempt to be impartial, by saying that he really did not care if Dickens was incontinent; however, in the next sentence he indicated how partisan he really was.

> But when we are told with the utmost deliberation that he was the seducer of a girl of twenty, the friend of his own dear daughters, then surely . . . such a charge must be faced. For if it be true, the world must revise its estimate of the character of "the good, the gentle, high-gifted, ever friendly, noble Dickens."[32]

Shortly after the appearance of the above review, Wright addressed a letter to the offices of <u>The Dickensian</u> expressing disbelief that Ley, or for that matter, anyone, would question either his (Wright's) or Canon Benham's story.

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[31] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 19.

[32] <u>Ibid</u>.

> It seems equally strange to me, that he [Ley] should suppose Canon Benham capable of lying to me or that I could be capable myself of lying unblushingly. I remember the occasion to which I refer as if it were yesterday. I was careful at the time, that is just after our conversation, to note down Canon Benham's precise words, which are before me at this moment.[33]

Unfortunately, while he was in the process of gathering additional proof, the biographer died. What new evidence that he did manage to collect was posthumously published in The Autobiography of Thomas Wright of Olney in 1937. The new material was even more suspect than had been the earlier. In part, the proof offered was that about 1880 a Mrs. John Summerville employed as a domestic one Maria Goldring who had worked for Dickens when the author had established Ellen as his mistress at Linden Grove. Mrs. Goldring told this to Mrs. Summerville, who repeated it to her daughter, who in turn reported it to Wright. Mrs. Summerville's daughter also claimed that Dickens' unofficial "wife" was related in some way to Anthony Trollope. Since Ellen's sister Fanny was married to Tom Trollope, brother of the famous novelist, Wright accepted the

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[33] Walter Dexter, "Ellen Ternan," The Dickensian, XXXII (Spring, 1936), 98. To my way of thinking, this is the portion of Wright's argument that I find hardest to accept. As a scholar, surely Wright must have realized that his evidence would not be accepted without question. How then can he say that "it seems . . . strange" that readers would question him?

story. The biographer also thought that he had additional proof when he examined the rate books and found that in July 1867 the house in which Dickens was supposed to have kept Ellen was registered in the name of Frances Turnham. In six-month intervals the name of the occupant was changed to Thomas Turnham then to Thomas Tringham and finally to Charles Tringham until, shortly after Dickens' death, the house was vacated.[34]

As might be expected, Ley summarily rejected all of this new evidence. The actual fact that he did reject it was not surprising because it was questionable, to say the least. However, as before, Ley indicated that his prime concern was to protect Dickens' and Ellen's names. Accordingly, his review of Wright's Autobiography (in which this new information appeared) was replete with such phrases as:

> I have wondered all the time what was the motive that induced a man like Wright to go to such

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[34] Writing in 1961, C. G. DuCann rejected this evidence. "Unfortunately for Wright's delving into rate-books, it is now established that there was in 1857 a real person named Frances Charles Tringham who was married to a servant Elizabeth Stanley. So that the name was not a pure invention by Dickens to disguise his identity." C. G. L. DuCann, The Love Lives of Charles Dickens (London: Frederick Muller, Limited, 1961), p. 254. DuCann, however, did not give the source of his information.

> lengths to blacken the characters of a man and a woman who are long since dead.[35]

On the same page there was another indication of Ley's special pleading. "But the raison d'etre for that book was a bit of scandal; let there be no mincing of words." Also:

> Does such "evidence" give to Thomas Wright of Olney, or Thomas Wrong of Anywhere, the right to tell a lady /Ellen's daughter, who at this date was alive/ that her mother of precious memory was unchaste? To me it is simply dreadful.[36]

The next significant event in the unravelling of the Ternan affair was the publication of the much-heralded Nonesuch letters, the first volume of which appeared in 1938. Although this collection included many hitherto unpublished letters of Dickens, nowhere in the correspondence was there any specific evidence supporting Wright's hypothesis. This fact drew a sigh of relief from the Dickensians. Upon reading the first volume of the letters, the indefatigable Ley exuberantly noted:

> These volumes emphatically give the lie to the detractors of Dickens. It is impossible for an honest man to read these letters and doubt

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[35] J. W. T. Ley, "More of What the Soldier Said: Further 'Disclosures' of Mr. Thomas Wright," The Dickensian, XXXIII (December, 1936), 50.

[36] Ibid.

the essential warmth and goodness of his heart.[37]

In the following year, 1939, when the remaining volumes of the letters were published, Ley reviewed the whole collection in The Dickensian. In this particular review, he completely ignored any canons of good taste when referring to those readers who had thought that the Nonesuch letters would have proved that Ellen was Dickens' mistress.

> At every turn the ghouls are thwarted. They waited long, and when Dickens's last child died they smacked their lips in anticipation of the garbage that they were so sure would soon be thrown to them. And they hunger yet. Only Thomas Wright offered them any sort of food and that wholly lacked nourishment. His childish story, based on nothing, is already forgotten.[38]

Unfortunately for the upholders of the Dickens's legend, Wright's hypothesis was not soon forgotten. Indeed, in 1939 it received fresh support. This came in the form of a book entitled Dickens and Daughter. The author of the work, Gladys Storey, had written it at the specific request of Kate Perugini, Dickens' second daughter. Mrs. Perugini, filled with remorse at the way her mother had been treated

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[37] J. W. T. Ley, "Of First Class Importance: The Nonesuch Edition of Dickens's Letters," The Dickensian, XXXIV (Summer, 1938), 208.

[38] J. W. T. Ley, "Dickens' Letters," The Dickensian, XXXV (Winter, 1939), 30.

after the separation, told to Miss Storey the true details surrounding that event. Ellen Ternan had indeed been the precipitating cause and she had subsequently become Dickens' mistress.

Mrs. Perugini had arrived at her final decision to make known the true facts only after a period of agonizing doubt. She had previously written, in her own hand, a biography of her father and had placed it in the British Museum, intending it to be published at an opportune time. Later on, however, not satisfied with what she had written, she had withdrawn the manuscript from the Museum and burned it, because, as she said,

> I told only half the truth about my father, and a half-truth is worse than a lie, for this reason I destroyed what I had written. But the truth <u>must be told</u> when the time comes--after my death.[39]

Thus, she arranged with Mrs. Storey to have the true details about Dickens published posthumously.

Since this new proof came from Dickens' daughter it should have silenced most critics. Indeed, the editor of <u>The Dickensian</u> at that date, Walter Dexter, accepted the evidence, and while Dexter was editor, the magazine no

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[39] [An account given in a letter by Miss Storey to Ada Nisbet], cited by Ada Nisbet, <u>Dickens and Ellen Ternan</u>, <u>op. cit.</u>, p. 36.

longer denied the truth of the Ellen Ternan affair.[40] Dickens' lovers, however, were far from being happy, even if the "truth" had been told. True Dickensians shook their heads in sorrow, observing that Mrs. Perugini had really not played cricket at all. "My immediate reaction [upon reading the book],"said Ley, "was that the book showed Mrs. Perugini in a not very worthy light. Upon reflection it still is my reaction."[41]

Other reviews of Miss Storey's book were more scholarly. One of these, appearing in the Times Literary Supplement, suggested that Mrs. Perugini was in her dotage when she dictated the book, and hence it should be taken with a grain of salt.

> It seems that when Mrs. Perugini was a very old lady, with diminishing strength and living much in the past, she became uneasy in her mind about her mother.[42]

The fact that Kate Perugini's mental alertness should be questioned was quite understandable, because at the time

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[40] Ada Nisbet, Dickens and Ellen Ternan, op. cit., p.34.

[41] J. W. T. Ley, "Father and Daughter," The Dickensian XXXV (Autumn, 1939), 250. According to Miss Nisbet, Walter Dexter, the editor of The Dickensian, although he had refused to accept Wright's evidence, was convinced of the validity of the evidence presented in Miss Storey's book. See p. 34 of Dickens and Ellen Ternan.

[42] "Dickens and His Family," Times Literary Supplement, July 22, 1939, p. 440.

of her death she was eighty-eight. Nevertheless, testimony as to her clear-mindedness came from no less a figure than George Bernard Shaw. Writing to the editor of the Times Literary Supplement and in response to the previously mentioned review, Shaw stated that Mrs. Perugini's mind was not clouded at all. The letter ran as follows:

> Sir, - Your reviewer of "Dickens and Daughter" bases a strong disapproval of its publication to some extent on a conjecture that Mrs. Perugini's mind, giving way at the end of her long life, upset her judgment as to her mother's wishes.
>
> I had a very serious conversation with Mrs. Perugini on the subject about forty years ago. My last conversation with her took place shortly before her death. Her mind was not in the least enfeebled. It was in the same condition as at the end of the last century.
>
> I have no doubt that Miss Storey has carried out the wishes, early and late, of Mrs. Perugini in publishing her book. And I have the best reason for believing that Mrs. Perugini first took up the matter at her mother's request.
>
> The facts of the case may be in bad taste. Facts often are. But either way your reviewer will be glad to have them put right.
>
> Faithfully,
>
> G. Bernard Shaw[43]

Therefore, anyone wishing to dismiss Miss Storey's account on the grounds that Kate Perugini was merely a garrulous old woman in her second childhood, would first have to

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[43] George B. Shaw, "Letter to the Editor," Times Literary Supplement, July 29, 1939, p. 453.

explain Shaw's letter.

Another important fact came to light in 1949 when Professor Franklin R. Rolfe published for the first time a letter from Dickens to his close friend and business associate W. H. Wills, Dated October 1858, the letter showed that Dickens had been on close enough terms with the Ternans to pay for the musical education of their eldest daughter. "You are to understand," wrote Dickens to Wills,

> between you and me, that I have sent the eldest sister [Fanny Ternan] to Italy, to complete a musical education--That Mrs. Ternan is gone with her, to see her comfortably established at Florence; and that our two little friends are left together [Ellen and Maria Ternan], in the meantime, in the family lodgings. Observe that they don't live about in furnished lodgings, but have their own furniture. They have not been many weeks in their present address, and I strongly advised Mrs. Ternan to move from their last one, which I thought unwholesome.[44]

This same letter also led Professor Rolfe to "hazard" the remark that Mrs. Ternan "apparently was not averse to having him [Dickens] support her daughters."[45] While I do not think that sufficient evidence had been put forth to enable Professor Rolfe to question outright Mrs. Ternan's

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[44] A letter from Charles Dickens to W. H. Wills, October, 1858, cited by Franklin R. Rolfe, "Dickens and the Ternans," Nineteenth Century Fiction, IV (December, 1949), 243-244.

[45] Ibid., p. 244.

morals, I do feel that they deserve further clarification. For example, C. G. L. DuCann, in 1961, took just the opposite view of this lady. "Although actresses, the Ternan women were emphatically 'ladies' in the exclusive contemporary sense of that word; that is to say gentlewomen."[46] If DuCann's assertion was correct and Mrs. Ternan was indeed a "gentlewoman" then the previously mentioned evidence of Francesco Berger was suspect. Edward Wagenknecht brought out this point.

> If Thomas Wright's report is to be trusted, we have Mrs. Ternan and the young Francesco Berger . . . spending their evenings in an establishment where Mrs. Ternan's daughter was a "kept" woman. Is it likely that all these persons have been thus shameless about the matter?[47]

If one knew Mrs. Ternan's real character, many hitherto unanswered questions could be at least partially answered.

The first scholar[48] to dispute the Wright-Perugini evidence was the above-mentioned Edward Wagenknecht. Quite correctly, he questioned Wright's statements, claiming that

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[46] C. G. L. DuCann, The Love Lives of Charles Dickens, op. cit., p. 238.

[47] Edward Wagenknecht, "Dickens and the Scandalmongers," College English, XI (April, 1950), 380.

[48] As distinct from the pseudo-scholarly writing that characterizes much of The Dickensian.

many of them were based on hearsay. He was especially harsh in dismissing Mrs. Goldring's testimony as mere "Gilbert and Sullivan."[49] However, when he attempted to refute the proof offered by Mrs. Perugini he showed himself to be on shaky ground. It is inconceivable to my way of thinking that Mrs. Perugini could have been mistaken, as Wagenknecht suggested, about her father's real relations with Ellen. Furthermore, to say that "when she [Kate] approached the end of her long life, she remembered only the things that had never happened,"[50] indicated that Wagenknecht had not read the previously quoted letter by Shaw. This critic further suggested that Mrs. Storey had been so influenced by Wright's disclosures that she interpreted Kate's evidence in the light of Wright's life.[51] Again this hypothesis is upset by Shaw's letter.

Wagenknecht received support for his essay from Richard B. Hudson, who in a brief review of Wagenknecht's essay called it an "excellent analysis of the alleged evidence presented by Wright and Storey of the liaison between Char-

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[49] Edward Wagenknecht, "Dickens and the Scandalmongers," op. cit., p. 377.

[50] Ibid., p. 379.

[51] Ibid.

les Dickens and Ellen Ternan . . ."[52] In the same note he observed that Wagenknecht was not altogether scholarly in the way in which he rejected the allegations. In a subsequent article appearing in 1951 he said substantially the same thing.

> This kind of ad hominem argument merely clouds the issue. It is quite clear that Professor Wagenknecht prefers to believe that there was no such liaison. I do not question his right to that belief, but this broadside scattering of epithets--even in his title--suggests that he is more interested in preserving the good name of Charles Dickens than in examining the evidence with a cold, scholarly eye.[53]

Despite Hudson's judicious comment, the dispute continued in a singularly unscholarly vein. The Dickensian, freed from the moratorium imposed by the late Walter Dexter, renewed its attack on Wright and Mrs. Storey. The former was described by T. W. Hill as a man who "abandoned common standards of decency and the canons of genuine biography to pander to the desires of those who relish sensationalism."[54] Similarly, Hill completely ignored the letter

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[52]Richard B. Hudson, A Review of "Dickens and the Scandalmongers," by Edward Wagenknecht. Bibliographies of Studies in Victorian Literature for the Ten Years 1945-1954, ed. Austin Wright (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 141.

[53]Richard Hudson, "The Dickens Affair Again," College English, XIII (November, 1951), 112.

[54]T. W. Hill, "Dickensian Biography from Forster to the Present Day," The Dickensian, XLVII (December, 1950), 73.

from Shaw attesting to the soundness of Mrs. Perugini's mind, and referred to Kate as "a very elderly lady sitting in her chair musing on the past and . . . uttering her thoughts in a dreamy sort of way."[55] This ability to ignore unpalatable evidence has been one of the characteristics of both the Dickensians and the anti-Dickensians.

Complete and incontrovertible evidence linking Dickens and Ellen Ternan did not appear until 1952. In Dickens and Ellen Ternan, the author Ada Nisbet proved that Dickens was completely infatuated with Ellen and was deeply in love with her. The account that Miss Nisbet offered was not hearsay but from Dickens' own pen. I will briefly outline some of the more interesting items.

Just prior to his second visit to the United States, Dickens wrote the following memorandum to his friend and partner of All the Year Round, W. H. Wills:

> NELLY /Dickens' pet name for Ellen/
> If she needs any help will come to you, or if she changes her address, you will immediately let me know if she changes.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> On the day after my arrival out I will send you a short Telegram at the office. Please copy its exact words, (as they will have a special meaning for her), and post them to her . . . And also

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[55] Ibid., p. 74.

> let Gad's Hill [Dickens' residence where Georgina lived]--and let Forster know--what the telegram is.[56]

True to his word, upon his arrival in the United States, Dickens did send a telegram to Wills. It read: "Safe and well expect good letter full of hope."[57] Examining a small diary of Dickens', Miss Nisbet found the "special meaning" that the telegram had for Ellen. Amongst some blank pages in the diary, was the following entry:

> Tel: all well means
> you come
> Tel: safe and well, means
> you don't come[58]

Miss Nisbet quite naturally concluded that Dickens had wanted to bring Ellen to America but, probably because of public opinion, had decided against such a step at the last moment.[59] Other evidence published by Miss Nisbet was as follows. In many of the letters that Dickens wrote to Wills from America, there were heavily inked out passages. How-

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[56] [Letter from Charles Dickens to W. H. Wills], cited by Ada Nisbet, Dickens and Ellen Ternan, op. cit., p. 53.

[57] Ibid., pp. 53-54.

[58] Ibid., p. 54.

[59] The New York Times Book Review of December 21, 1952 suggested that Dickens' dislike of America stemmed from the fact that the American public was responsible for Dickens not being able to bring his Nelly with him on his second visit. Such an explanation, while admittedly ingenious, ignores the fact that it was only on Dickens' first visit (1846) that he expressed his dislike for the United States. On his second visit (1867) he had nothing but praise for the Americans.

ever, with the aid of infrared photography, Professor Franklin Rolfe was able to read them. The suppressed portions, published for the first time by Miss Nisbet, proved to have been instructions to Wills to forward Dickens' letters to Ellen.

> (November 21, 1867) Will you specially observe my dear fellow what I am going to add. After this present mail, I shall address Nelly's letters to your care, for I do not quite know where she will be. But she will write to you, and instruct you where to forward them. In any interval between your receipt of one or more, and my Dear Girl's so writing to you, keep them by you.[60]
>
> (December 10) Enclosed is another letter for my dear girl . . . I am in capital health and voice --but my spirits flutter woefully towards a certain place at which you dined one day not long before I left, with the present writer and a third (most drearily missed) person.[61]
>
> (Xmas Eve) Enclosed, another letter as before . . . I would give £3,000 down (and think it cheap) if you could forward me, for four and twenty hours only, instead of the letter.[62]
>
> (December 30) Another letter for my Darling, enclosed.[63]

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[60] [Letter from Charles Dickens to W. H. Wills], cited by Ada Nisbet, Charles Dickens and Ellen Ternan, op. cit., p. 55.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., p. 56.

[63] Ibid.

In my opinion, this evidence offered by Miss Nisbet is all but conclusive. It indicates that there was an extensive correspondence, and judging by the instructions to Wills, an ardent one, between the two. From the fact that Dickens wished to bring Ellen to America, I think one can conclude that they must have been on intimate terms. This, however, was not and indeed is not accepted as proof by many persons.[64] They feel that while Dickens was undoubtedly in love with Ellen, there is still no proof that she was his mistress. It is difficult to see exactly what sort of proof will satisfy such persons; presumably only a letter from Dickens or Ellen specifically stating that they were intimate or else some record of a child having been born.

In 1959, the actor Felix Aylmer attempted to prove that Dickens did indeed father a son by Ellen Ternan.[65] According to Aylmer, Dickens and Ellen lived together at such places as Slough and Peckham, and in 1867 Ellen Ternan gave birth to his son. The son was subsequently named Francis Charles, and in order to give him a surname, Dickens

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[64] C. G. L. DuCann, The Love Lives of Charles Dickens, op.cit. His book will be further discussed in this chapter. Vide p. 212.

[65] My account of Aylmer's book Dickens Incognito is taken from a brief résumé of it that appeared in the London Sunday Times, November 22, 1959, pp. 5 and 23.

and Ellen made an agreement with a couple, Francis Tringham and Elizabeth Stanley, to adopt the boy. After the boy had been brought up by his adopted parents, he became a house painter.

Aylmer received widespread acclaim for his work; the Sunday Times hailed it as an "extraordinary feat of literary detection."[66] Unfortunately for the actor, his glory lasted just a little over three weeks. On December 13, 1959, again in the Sunday Times appeared an article entitled "'Dickens Incognito': New Evidence."[67] In this article, the author Graham Storey conclusively proved that Aylmer's hypothesis was false. Francis Tringham and Elizabeth Stanley did indeed have a child, their own, and not one adopted from Dickens and Ellen, as Aylmer had suggested. Storey said:

> Mr. Aylmer's chief evidence for the elaborate plan of deception supposedly practiced by Dickens therefore collapses. There is in fact no connection between Dickens and the house-painter and his wife . . .[68]

To date, the final word on the Ellen Ternan affair seems to have been that of the lawyer C. G. L. DuCann. In his book The Love Lives of Charles Dickens, DuCann regarded

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[66] Ibid., p. 5.

[67] Graham Storey, "'Dickens Incognito': New Evidence," Sunday Times, December 13, 1959, p. 6.

[68] Ibid., p.

the whole episode as an unproven allegation. Many of his objections have been inherited from J. W. T. Ley and T. W. Hill of The Dickensian. The book was rife with special pleading and use of the ad hominem argument.

> But it can be said with truth that Dickens was too conventional to keep a mistress and a double-establishment, and that the idea would have been alien to his outlook on life. Nor was he the sort who would have seduced any of the Ternan girls to whom he stood in loco parentis.
>
> Still more emphatically can it be stated that Ellen Ternan was "not that sort of person." Her strong personal pride, her status as "a lady," her intellectuality, would have caused her to reject any such devaluation of herself with scorn.[69]

To illustrate the supposedly true character of Ellen Ternan, DuCann published a letter that she had written to her son Geoffrey after her marriage to Robinson. The letter was couched in terms such as "My own darlingest Geoffrey"[70] and revealed such startling bits of information as "My cough is really much better now. Almost well and I have had two very good nights."[71] The letter made no reference to anything but small family and household details, and yet DuCann rhapsodized over it as "a delightful letter . . .

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[69] C. G. L. DuCann, The Love Lives of Charles Dickens, op. cit., p. 268.

[70] Ibid., p. 262.

[71] Ibid.

the importance of which lies in the fact that it is illustrative of her true character . . ."[72]

When DuCann came to examine what to my mind was the conclusive evidence offered by Miss Nisbet, his book became utterly ridiculous. Regarding the telegram in code that Dickens had sent to Wills, DuCann said:

> From this Miss Nisbet not unreasonably deduces that Dickens had hoped to bring Nelly to America. It may be so. But would he have contemplated bringing her if she were his mistress as his mistress? Hardly, one thinks.[73]

Neither did DuCann endear himself to the academic community when he endeavoured to shrug off unpalatable evidence by suggesting, as he did in the succeeding quotations, that Miss Nisbet had been unwittingly duped by forged documents.

> And all this rests on the assumption that these documents are genuinely Dickens' documents and not forgeries. These academic writers never face that question of authenticity. For them it is enough to say: "There is in the ----- Library a book or document."[74]

Despite the violent objections of DuCann and the Dick-

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[72] Ibid., p. 261.

[73] Ibid., p. 271.

[74] Ibid., p. 272. This critic seemed somewhat fascinated by the word "forgery." In his section on Ellen Ternan, the word was used numerous times, yet not once did he give us an example of a forged document relating to the Ellen Ternan affair.

ensians in general, most scholars now regard the Ellen Ternan affair as a closed book, and have interpreted Dickens' later novels in terms of it. This was the importance of Wright's disclosures; they pointed out to the literary world what nobody had earlier believed. The bitterness in Dickens' last novels could partially be accounted for by an examination of his life. This is exactly what the modern critics have done, and their work will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER VI

I have showed in Chapter II that the early critics were loud in their acclamation of Dickens, not as a great novelist, but as a great comic novelist. They almost unanimously agreed that in the kingdom of comedy Dickens reigned all but supreme and that here even Shakespeare sometimes waited upon Boz.

This reputation, which was soundly established by the mid-1840's, followed Dickens throughout his career and persisted well into the nineteen-thirties. Significantly, all biographical studies of the novelist made prior to the 1940's reinforced the critics' conception of Dickens as a humorist. Such studies as those by Forster and Kitton seemed to bear out the fact that the novelist was indeed a mixture of, as one reviewer irreverently stated, "Santa Claus and his own Mark Tapley."

Because the critics refused to see Dickens in any other light, they were reluctant to pay much serious attention to his later works. These contained, comparatively speaking, very little comedy and hence they were usually dismissed as examples of the author's decadence. Such an attitude is quite understandable, for the critic who reads either Bleak House or Our Mutual Friend with the idea in mind that the author was a great humorist, will be, to say

the least, puzzled.

It was not until the late nineteen-thirties that attention began to be focused on these novels. In this chapter I intend to discuss both the interest aroused in them and the probable reasons why they had been consigned to a literary limbo for such a length of time. Since the shift in the critics' taste from an appreciation of the early to the later novels was prompted primarily by a re-evaluation of Dickens' social theories, I will just outline the developments in this area of Dickens' criticism.

Dickens' early social satire, centering as it did about such incidental abuses as Yorkshire Schools and the New Poor Law, was received with acclaim by his contemporaries. When, in Bleak House, he began to attack the matrix of society itself, his satire was met with a good deal of abuse. The reader should note, however, that none of this abuse originated in the critics' fear that the novelist was a dangerous radical. This was not the case. In general, reviewers considered that his handling of the complex social questions of the day showed Dickens to be a well-meaning but singularly inept reformer, having neither the education nor the ability to comprehend how society should ideally be regulated. His ideal of reform, the critics claimed, was that of the Brownlows and Cheerybles. Carlyle's comment in this respect is quite informa-

tive.

> Dickens . . . is a good little fellow [; but] his theory of life is entirely wrong. He thinks men ought to be buttered up, and the world made soft and accommodating for them, and all sorts of fellows have turkey for their Christmas dinner. Commanding and controlling and punishing them he would give up without any misgivings, in order to coax and soothe and delude them into doing right. [italics in the original][1]

After his death, and continuing up to the late nineteen thirties, this opinion of Dickens as a rather mild social reformer (a conception quite in keeping with the picture of Dickens as a humorist), remained the predominant one. While all critics might have been emphatic in observing that the novelist had indeed exhibited a good deal of resentment at the social conditions that surrounded him, they were equally emphatic in noting that the only tools of reform that Dickens had advocated were benevolence, persuasion and cajolery. Furthermore, critics of the period tended to emphasize that Dickens' middle class upbringing and his life spent among that class precluded the novelist from having too much sympathy for the lower classes. Those who examined Dickens' work would have been taken aback at any proposal that the novelist would ever have

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[1] [A comment by Thomas Carlyle to C. Gavin Duffy], cited by Mildred G. Christian, "Carlyle's Influence Upon the Social Theory of Dickens: Their Personal Relationship," The Trollopian, I (1947), 31.

advocated or even considered violence as a means to attain his social ideals. One of the reasons why they would have rejected such a suggestion would have been because it did not fit in with the preconceived picture of Dickens as a humorist.

Albert S. G. Canning, for example, was quite emphatic (and naive) about Dickens and his benevolent social-criticism.

> He knew the calm justice of the English character sufficiently to be convinced that the public mind of the country only required enlightenment about the wants and sufferings of its poorest inhabitants, to grant the requisite attention and consequent relief. His object was evidently never to induce the most wronged and suffering to desire revolution or even encourage discontent . . .[2]

George Gissing also emphasized Dickens' technique of persuasion as a means of changing the social climate. Indeed, this critic went to considerable pains to outline the close ties between Dickens and the public. According to Gissing, Dickens' criticism was of the kind that persuaded persons to adopt a pattern of behaviour which, although they might not be practising at the present moment, they at least accepted in principle.

> Among the rarest of things is this thorough understanding between author and public, permitting

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[2]Hon. Albert S. G. Canning, Philosophy of Charles Dickens (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1880), p. 13.

> a man of genius to say aloud with impunity that which all his hearers say within themselves dumbly, inarticulately. Dickens never went too far; never struck at a genuine conviction of the multitude.[3]

As shown above, the emphasis was decidedly not on Dickens as a radical of any sort; indeed just the opposite was implied. Gissing went on to indicate that since Dickens was a member of the ruling middle class, we could have hardly expected him to be in complete sympathy with the lower classes.

> Dickens, for all his sympathy, could not look with entire approval on the poor grown articulate about their wrongs. He would not have used the phrase, but he thought the thought, that humble folk must know "their station." He was a member of the middle class, and as far from preaching "equality" in its social sense as any man that ever wrote.[4]

In connection with this latter point, Gissing interpreted, in a very convincing manner, the relationships in the novel Bleak House between Sir Leicester, his wife, Mr. Rouncewell, and Mrs. Rouncewell, servant to the Dedlocks and also mother of George Rouncewell.

> Old and new meet here quite amicably. Mrs. Rouncewell would never consent to quit Chesney Wold, where she regards her duties as a high

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[3]George Gissing, Charles Dickens: A Critical Study (in The Victorian Era Series. London: Blackie and Son Limited, 1903), p. 112.

[4]Ibid., p. 214.

> privilege; she "knows her place," and her son, anything but an intentional revolutionist, is quite content that this should be so.[5]

Such an explanation quite banishes any thoughts one might have about Dickens advocating violence as a means for the betterment of the lower classes. Like Carlyle before him, Gissing fell back on the old "Cheeryble theory" to explain the means by which Dickens would bring about social changes.

> Dickens' remedy for the evils left behind by the bad old times was, for the most part, private benevolence . . . His saviour of society was a man of heavy purse and large heart, who did the utmost possible good in his own particular sphere.[6]

Writing in 1913, Walter Crotch[7] did not share Gissing's opinions as regards Dickens' middle class attitudes. According to Crotch, Dickens was a democrat in the full sense of the word.

> He [Dickens] believed not as Gissing would have us to think he did, that "the vast majority of men are unfit to form sound views on what is best for them," and that "though the voice of the people must be heard, it cannot always be allowed to rule," but that the people should be represented by themselves . . .[8]

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[5] Ibid., pp. 203-204.

[6] Ibid., p. 209.

[7] Walter Crotch, Charles Dickens, Social Reformer (London: Chapman and Hall Limited, 1913).

[8] Ibid., p. 32.

Nevertheless, Crotch was in complete agreement with Gissing insofar as he insisted that Dickens' opinion was that Utopia would be brought about solely as a result of peaceful means.

> The only ground the critics have for their contempt of Dickens' middle-class leanings is that he was largely a mediator in our social life. Whilst he was the unflinching champion of the poor, whilst he exposed evils with an undaunted courage and suffered continually abuse for his pains, he yet believed that progress would be won more by general concensus of faith and desire than by class uprising. . . .[9]

Another critic to discuss Dickens and his social predilections was Stefan Zweig. Writing in 1923,[10] Zweig affirmed, in perhaps too emphatic a manner, that Dickens was very much a product of his time and that he was in complete accord with all of the demands of middle class society. During his life, said Zweig, "he never once overstepped the artistic, moral, or aesthetic limitations of his country. He was not a revolutionary."[11] Similarly, in analysing the characters that appeared in Dickens' novels, Zweig claimed that they too mirrored Dickens'

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[9] Ibid., p. 33.

[10] Stefan Zweig, "Charles Dickens," Trans. Kenneth Burke, The Dial, LXXIV (January, 1923), 1-24.

[11] Ibid., p. 4.

happy complacency.

> All of his people are set against any change of world-order, desiring neither riches nor poverty; they want rather that comfortable average which is so admirable a rule of conduct for shop-keepers and dray-men . . . Behind the words [of Dickens] there stands as creator, as the binder of chaos, not an angry God, gigantic and super-human, but simply a contented observer, a loyal citizen. This is the complexion of all Dickens' novels.[12]

Despite the fact that Zweig's interpretation is somewhat questionable, it is still valuable inasmuch as it vividly shows the direction taken by critics of this period in assessing Dickens as a social reformer. Those who were firmly convinced by both tradition and biographical evidence that Dickens was a great humorist, were reluctant to see him as "an angry God." Such a picture would not be compatible with the creator of Dick Swiveller, Mrs. Gamp and Mantalini.

In 1937 appeared another essay concerned with Dickens' social criticism, and in particular with his attitude towards Christmas.[13] This essay brought out the fact that Dickens' social criticism, far from being directed in one white hot stream at specific aspects of society,

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[12] Ibid., p. 9.

[13] "Christmas Books: The Submerged Dickens," Times Literary Supplement, December 25, 1937, pp. 969-970.

really exhibited a sort of dualism.[14] While on the one hand Dickens was quite ready to stand up for Trotty Veck in defence of his right to eat all the tripe that he wanted, the novelist was by no means suggesting that a return to the old and early traditions of Christmas and benevolence was the answer for the ills of the nineteenth century. This paradox led the critic to claim that Dickens was "equally ready to denounce on the grounds of humanity all who left things alone, and on the grounds of liberty all who tried to make them better."[15] According to this writer, the only theory in which Dickens believed, and one that was conspicuously present in the Christmas Stories was that a person must accept life.

> We are always brought back to it that whereas Dickens is currently taunted with preaching, especially in these Christmas Books, a philosophy of sugar-plums and draughts of punch, with recommending the panacea of comfort and the plaster of sentimentality, what he really believed was that salvation could be found only in realistic acceptance of life as a whole with an unembittered spirit.[16]

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[14] Vide Ruskin's opinion of Dickens, p. 35.

[15] "Christmas Books: The Submerged Dickens," op. cit., p. 969.

[16] Ibid., p. 970.

As was the case with the other essays written within this period, the author of the preceding article had interpreted the novelist's social criticism in such a way as not to conflict with his conception of Dickens as a great humorist.

This accepted picture of Dickens was first challenged by T. A. Jackson. Writing in 1938,[17] Jackson claimed that Dickens did not lean toward the middle class, as the majority of the early critics had asserted; instead, he hypothesized that Dickens was all but a Marxist revolutionary bent upon forcibly overthrowing the existing system of government. Since such an interpretation would not have been compatible with the traditional picture of the novelist as a humorist, Jackson altogether jettisoned Dickens' humour. In doing so, appropriately enough, he started something of a revolution, for after the publication of his critique, few indeed were the scholars who studied Dickens as a humorist. They instead shifted their emphasis to the far more interesting consideration of Dickens as a rebel. Since Jackson was the first critic to examine the novelist in this light, his work merits further attention.

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[17] T. A. Jackson, Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical (New York: International Publishers, 1938).

This writer divided Dickens' works into three groups. The first group contained those novels up to and including Martin Chuzzlewit; the next group consisted of Dombey and Son and David Copperfield; and the third included those novels between and including Bleak House and Our Mutual Friend. Such a progression as existed in these groups showed that

> . . . a period of youthful optimism leads to a period of excitement and irritation from which emerges in turn a period of steadily intensifying pessimism.[18]

He explained the social teachings of Dickens' first group of novels in much the same way that the earlier reviewers had explained them, and in this period the resultant picture of Dickens that emerged differed little from that depicted by Carlyle or Gissing.

> All the preventable ills of the world would be remedied if only men behaved to each other with kindliness, justice, and sympathetic understanding. There were, of course, rich people and poor; but these were casual, accidental, and transitory divisions whose ill effects would disappear if only the rich used their power and wealth sympathetically to assist the poor to escape from poverty, and the poor took example from the manly and intelligent self-reliance of the deserving rich.[19]

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[18] Ibid., p. 8.

[19] Ibid., p. 109.

Here, of course, Jackson was saying that men should emulate such individuals as Messrs. Cheeryble, Pickwick and Garland.

Where this critic differed from his predecessors was in his interpretation of the social teaching of Dickens' middle-period novels. Generations of earlier writers had explained these novels with the idea of Cheeryble in mind. On the other hand, according to Jackson, the middle-period novels reflected Dickens' growing realization that private benevolence was not working as he expected that it would.

> Dickens saw, to his horror, that instead of expanding trade and commerce leading, via a growth of Cheerybleism, to a new, benevolent-equalitarian harmony, it was leading to the creation of "Great" commercial houses whose heads wielded a power as great as that of Roman emperors.[20]

One could trace the novelist's growing dissatisfaction with the middle class manufacturers in the two novels Bleak House and Hard Times. In the former novel, Dickens showed himself to be entirely in sympathy with the capitalists as represented by the character Rouncewell. In the following novel, however, this sympathetic likeness had been superseded by the portrait of Bounderby, also a capitalist, but who was as greedy and grasping as Rouncewell was under-

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[20] Ibid., p. 112.

standing and kind. Jackson's explanation for the transformation in characters was that the "Cheeryble illusion" had turned sour; the wealthy middle class was not willing to help its less fortunate compatriots. Dickens had by now realized that social justice could only be obtained by a vast upheaval of society.

> Another revolution is needed--as drastic and far-reaching as the great French Revolution--and Dickens' harshness [as shown in his later novels] arises basically from his intense disappointment and baffled rage at finding no such revolution anywhere in sight.[21]

Thus, as Jackson saw it, by the end of his life Dickens had completely shed his "Cheeryble illusion" and had almost reached the conclusion that the only hope for the working classes was that they emancipate themselves. Dickens' tragedy, according to Jackson, was that

> although he went as near to its attainment as a man can go without actually achieving it--he never quite acquired a faith in the proletariat and its historical future.[22]

While one might well wonder if Jackson was entirely successful in his interpretation of Dickens specifically as a Marxist, he nevertheless had pointed out to the literary world that Dickens was not the complacent social reformer that earlier generations of critics had reputed

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[21] Ibid., pp. 146-147.

[22] Ibid., p. 273.

him to be. He was antagonistic to the currents of his age, and if his later novels were not brimming over with the jollity and good camaraderie that had characterized Pickwick, it was not because "the higher fount of humour . . . was dry."[23] The novelist had realized that humour and good spirits, as a means of cajoling the middle-class into an acceptance of their responsibilities, had failed. The realization that the evils of society were not being redressed by those who had both the political influence and the money to do so had turned the creator of Pickwick into the creator of Podsnap.[24]

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[23]"Charles Dickens," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, CIX (June, 1871), 691-692.

[24]In 1940, two years after the publication of Jackson's work, George Orwell published a long essay on Dickens. [George Orwell, "Charles Dickens," Inside the Whale and Other Essays (London: Victor Gollancz Limited, 1940)]. This essay is generally considered as being written in the new tradition of Edmund Wilson, [See Morton D. Zabel, "Dickens: the Reputation Revised," The Nation, CLXIX (September 17, 1949), 279] a contention for which I can find little justification. In the first portion of his essay, Orwell claimed that "he [Dickens] was certainly a subversive writer, a radical, one might truthfully say a rebel." Nevertheless the remainder of Orwell's essay is a refutation of this very statement. He went to considerable pains both to refute Jackson's hypothesis and at the same time to show that Dickens had a great deal in common with the ruling middle class. One is inclined to classify Orwell's Dickens along with Gissing's, rather than with Jackson's or Wilson's.

The next important piece of criticism to appear was Edmund Wilson's fine essay "Dickens: The Two Scrooges."[25] This work owed much to Jackson's investigations, and at several places in his essay Wilson acknowledged the debt. The earlier writer had shown that Dickens, starting out with a good deal of resentment at the conditions about him, had become increasingly bitter until in the final analysis he had become a rebel, overtly hostile to the governing class of society. Wilson accepted this part of Jackson's thesis; however, he carried it one step farther. Whereas Jackson had only stressed Dickens' objective development and had maintained that the changes in the novelist's attitude were dictated solely by external causes, Wilson contended that the changes owed just as much if not more to Dickens' subjective or psychological development.

His criticism was primarily based on a Freudian interpretation of certain important events in the novelist's life. Wilson asserted that Dickens' unhappy childhood, and specifically the months spent in the blacking warehouse, had left an indelible imprint on his mind. "These experiences," said the critic,"produced in Charles

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[25] Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," The Wound and the Bow (Boston: Hougnton Mifflin Company, 1941).

Dickens a trauma from which he suffered all his life."[26] The specific result of these childhood deprivations was that they coloured Dickens' view of contemporary England.

> For the man of spirit whose childhood has been crushed by the cruelty of organized society, one of two attitudes is natural: that of the criminal or that of the rebel. Charles Dickens, in imagination, was to play the rôles of both, and to contrive up to his death to put into them all that was most passionate in his feeling.[27]

Also tending to place Dickens outside the pale of recognized society was the fact that his position in that group was a curiously anomalous one. He really didn't have a niche; he

> had grown up in an uncomfortable position between the upper and the lower middle classes, with a dip into the proleteriat and a glimpse of the aristocracy through their trusted upper servants. But this position . . . was to leave him rather isolated in English society.[28]

On the one hand the traumatic experiences of childhood prevented him from identifying himself with the lower classes, and on the other, even when his sudden fame catapulted him into the upper middle class, the realization that this class had been responsible for his miserable childhood prevented him from identifying himself with it.

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[26] Ibid., p. 6.

[27] Ibid., p. 15.

[28] Ibid., p. 51.

According to Wilson, one could trace this conflict throughout all of Dickens' works. In the novel Barnaby Rudge, for example, Dickens had identified himself with the hangman Dennis. This character was a rebel against society inasmuch as he actively assisted in the burning of the prison. (It was a prison that had so warped Dickens' youth.) On the other hand, Dennis was also the representative of a harsh law that condemned people to death for the most trivial crimes. "Either way he /Dennis/ represents on Dickens' part a blow at those institutions which the writer is pretending to endorse."[29] In a somewhat similar manner the novel Little Dorrit reproduced Dickens' anomalous position in Victorian England. Although the Father of the Marshalsea may have mixed with the elite of society, his subsequent relapse showed that his "rise can be only a mockery: the Dorrits will always be what the Marshalsea has made them."[30] The Ellen Ternan affair, representing as it did a most significant period in Dickens' life, was also given a conspicuous place in Wilson's essay.

> For Dickens, the public he addressed in this statement about his marriage /the "Address"

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[29] Ibid., p. 21.

[30] Ibid., p. 59.

> in Household Words] was probably closer than the wife by whom he had had ten children; and now that he had fallen in love with Ellen, instead of finding in her a real escape from the eternal masquerade of his fiction, his first impulse was to transport her to dwell with him in that imaginary world itself, to make her a character in a novel or play, and to pay court to her in the presence of his public.[31]

Accordingly he wooed her in his later novels, where she appeared under the names Estella, Bella and Helena in the novels Great Expectations, Our Mutual Friend and The Mystery of Edwin Drood.

Wilson's essay, coming especially as it did after Jackson's work, had an important and to date a lasting effect on Dickensian criticism.[32] If Jackson's essay represented the death knell for humour as a critical approach to Dickens' fiction, Wilson's critique represented the coup de grâce. The cheery Forsterian Dickens

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[31] Ibid., p. 71.

[32] In an excellent study of Dickens, Lionel Stevenson ["Dickens' Dark Novels," Sewanee Review, LI (Summer 1943) 398-409] accepted Wilson's hypothesis that Dickens' "emotional crisis" must be taken into account in order to understand his novels. But Stevenson suggested that besides the personal element one might do well to examine some other probable causes for the sombreness of his later novels. Among these causes were the influence of such psychological novels as Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights and the influence of Mrs. Gaskell's and Kingsley's "proletarian" novels.

hallowed by generations of Dickensian critics now seemed quite inconsistent with the modern conception of an artist who was morbidly peering into his own soul. In emphasizing psychology as a tool to enable scholars to comprehend Dickens' novels, Wilson widened the scope of Dickensian criticism in as dramatic a fashion as Thomas Wright and Gladys Storey had altered the direction of Dickensian biographical studies. This can be seen in the attention that many critics of the post-1940's have given to the "psychological" approach to Dickens' fiction, one of the critical approaches currently in vogue.

Before dealing in detail with this kind of criticism I will briefly outline the considerable divergence of opinion that existed between the modern and the early (pre-1940) critics as regards their respective interpretations of the significance of Dickens' unhappy childhood; and in particular the blacking warehouse episode. I will indicate that although the majority of the early critics saw Dickens' unhappy childhood merely as a sort of testing period through which his natural jollity emerged unscathed, there were a few readers who, noting just the opposite, were surprisingly modern in their approach.

Forster, the first to make the blacking warehouse incident known to the world, maintained:

> The story of his childish misery has itself sufficiently shown that he never throughout it lost his precious gift of animal spirits, or his native capacity for humorous enjoyment.[33]

Also sharing Forster's opinion was George Gissing. Writing in 1898, even Gissing, one of the most perceptive Dickensian critics, observed that the episode "did not last long enough to corrupt the natural sweetness of his [Dickens'] mind."[34] Other critics who quite understandably[35] did not grasp the significance of the episode were W. J. Dawson and G. K. Chesterton. Writing in 1905 the former noted:

> It [Dickens' great humour as opposed to his unhappy childhood] is another illustration of that curious paradox which may be observed so frequently in human life, that the people most acquainted with grief are the optimists, and the people who know least about it are the pessimists.[36]

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[33] John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens (everyman's library edition; London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1950), I, 35.

[34] George Gissing, Charles Dickens: A Critical Study, op. cit., p. 21.

[35] I say "quite understandably" because widespread interest in psychoanalysis did not begin until after 1909 when Freud published his Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis.

[36] W. J. Dawson, The Makers of English Fiction (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905), p. 102.

In 1906, Chesterton, while admitting that Dickens was indeed wretched in his youth, emphatically denied that this ever coloured the novelist's adult life. "As a fact, there is no shred of evidence to show that those who have had sad experiences tend to have a sad philosophy."[37] Even more emphatically he reiterated:

> Charles Dickens, who was most miserable at the receptive age when most people are most happy, is afterwards happy . . . Circumstances break men's bones; it has never been shown that they break men's optimism.[38]

Walter Crotch, in 1913, said substantially the same thing.

> After all, such sadness and depression was but a part of Dickens's great nature, which refused, not only to be soured, but even permanently saddened by the grey and dreadful morning of his days--a morning that did not rob him of his spirits, his gaiety, his quick eye for contrast and his immense appreciation of the colour side of life.[39]

Nevertheless, amongst these paeans of praise to the recuperative power of Dickens' nature, there were sounded a few discordant and strangely modern notes. In a review of Edwin Drood the magazine Old and New sagaciously com-

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[37] G. K. Chesterton, Charles Dickens (eighth edition; London: Methuen and Company, Limited, 1913), p. 40.

[38] Ibid., p. 41.

[39] Walter Crotch, Charles Dickens, Social Reformer, op.cit., p. 58.

mented:

> We cannot help entertaining a suspicion that the great writer, like so many of his fellow-men, found it less natural to be gay and funny as he grew older. Time and trouble leave their marks; and the same growing gravity which may be traced through the portraits from Maclise's down, might, perhaps, be followed in the novels.[40]

This is the kind of apercu that one finds all too infrequently in nineteenth-century novel reviews.

Saint Paul's Magazine in 1872 was also quite perceptive in its interpretation of the blacking warehouse incident.

> So intense were the sensations of those days, so vivid were the impressions, that they remained with the author for ever [sic] fascinating him, as it were, into one child-like way of looking at the world. Indeed, the sense of oddity deepened as he grew older in years--till it became almost ghastly, brooding specially on ghastly things in his last unfinished fragment.[41]

Thomas Carlyle, after reading Forster's Life, also seemed to have caught a glimpse of the tears that lurked behind Dickens' smile. Writing in 1874 he contended:

> and, deeper than all, if one has the eye to see deep enough, dark, fateful, silent elements, tragical to look upon, and hiding, amid dazzling

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[40] Old and New, II (November, 1870), 532.

[41] Saint Paul's Magazine, X (February, 1872), 140.

> radiances as of the sun, the elements of death itself.[42]

In many respects the aforementioned critics had anticipated a good deal of what modern reviewers have been saying about Dickens, nevertheless their opinions were far from being representative of their times.

As I have intimated earlier, Wilson's hypothesis has undoubtedly been the most important contribution to Dickensian criticism.during the present century. He suggested that if Dickens' novels were read with one eye on his life, so to speak, much that might have been puzzling in his later novels would become clearer. This is exactly what the majority of post-1940 critics have done, and the result has been a great deal of fresh and imaginative criticism. Unfortunately, however, the temptation posed by Dickens' fascinating life has proven irresistible to some scholars. Such critics have read the novels and then interpreted each and every significant incident in them in terms of the novelist's psyche. The outcome of this has been to turn Dickens' novels into a Freudian playground.

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[42] F. G. Kitton, Dickensiana: A Bibliography of the Literature Relating to Charles Dickens and His Writings (1886), p. 408, cited by George H. Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel-Criticism Since 1836 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1965), p. 88.

To be able to comprehend much of the modern criticism one must have a more than passing acquaintance with Freudian psychology. Such terminology as "psychic-masochism," "oedipal conflict" and "Thamatos-impulse" are today met far more frequently than are the now passé references "plot structure" or "probable characters." This intense investigation into Dickens' life has no doubt given him the dubious distinction of being the most thoroughly psychoanalyzed novelist in the history of English literature, however it cannot be said to have added much to literary criticism. Nevertheless, the volume of material written in this vein is so great that it does deserve to be classified as a separate approach to Dickens' fiction. For that reason, I will give several examples of this type of criticism.

The most avid of the Freudian scholars has undoubtedly been Jack Lindsay. Besides being the author of a long biography on Dickens,[43] Lindsay was also the author of at least two essays. One of them was devoted to an analysis

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[43] Jack Lindsay, Charles Dickens; A Biographical and Critical Study (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950). I have been unable to read this work at first hand. However its content might be judged by the fact that one reviewer called it "a non-stop flight through the inane."

of A Tale of Two Cities. Rather than give a running commentary on this essay, I will quote an excerpt from it, which I feel is representative of the whole. After noting the very careful way in which Dickens had stressed the similarity in appearance between the two characters Sydney Carton and Charles Darnay, Lindsay said:

> Thus, in the story, Dickens gets the satisfaction of nobly giving up the girl [Lucie = Ellen Ternan] and yet mating with her. He splits himself in the moment of choice, dies, and yet lives to marry the beloved. . . . And at the same time he is Manette, the man breaking out of a long prison-misery . . .[44]

In his other essay, "Charles Dickens and Women," Lindsay used a similar kind of analysis. For example, a reading of The Haunted Man and The Child's Dream of a Star convinced him of Dickens' "desire to engross the affections of Fanny [his sister] in place of his more evasive mother ...."[45] The point to be made about this type of criticism is that while Lindsay may have been quite correct in interpreting the novels in the way that he did, his interpretation has told us very little about the novel in question.

Another critic writing this type of criticism was

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[44] Jack Lindsay, "A Tale of Two Cities," Life and Letters and the London Mercury, LXII (September, 1949), 194.

[45] Jack Lindsay, "Charles Dickens and Women," Twentieth Century, CLIV (November, 1953), 377.

Robert Hamilton. In his essay entitled, appropriately enough, "Dickens in his Characters," Hamilton discussed those aspects of the novelist that were revealed in several of the prominent Dickensian characters. Such an analysis revealed that Pickwick represented Dickens' amiability, Dick Swiveller his sentimental kindness, Pecksniff his hypocrisy, Quilp his impish humour and Rosa Dartle his brooding and bitter spirit.[46] The same objections apply to Hamilton's work that were applicable to Lindsay's.

As another indication of the new-found friendship between Dickens and the Freudians, one may point to the rash of articles on Dickens that have appeared in the psychoanalytic journals, and in particular in the American Imago. Since they are psychoanalytic journals, one would suspect that the articles on Dickens contained therein would tend more to explain Dickens rather than his works. This is indeed the case. One such essay, "The Personal History of David Copperfield," was devoted to the premise that in that novel Dickens was attempting an analysis of himself:

> And yet there can be no doubt that Dickens in this novel was trying to penetrate into

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[46] Robert Hamilton, "Dickens in his Characters," Nineteenth Century and After, CLXII (July, 1947), 40-49.

> the mysteries of his leading character. The trouble was that he could find nothing there because he had placed nothing there, and he had placed nothing there because he could not do so without coming directly to grips with those portions of Charles Dickens that he would not and could not bear to meet.[47]

Since Dickens' unconscious apparently proved too recalcitrant for the author to put all of his experiences into any one character, he obviated this problem by scattering bits and pieces of his psyche throughout the novel. He was not then confronted with his id, so to speak, in one terrifying mass. The result of this approach was, of course, that everybody in the novel was, to some degree or other, Dickens.

> Can it, oh, can it be that there is something fascinating about Steerforth's failure to apotheosize the glories of virginity, something that David-Dickens longs for, but can never hope to attain? Or is it conceivable that David sees in Steerforth a means of satisfying the cravings of Eros without the necessity of soiling <u>any</u> /italics in the original/ virgins?[48]

In another essay, Manheim tried to account for Dickens' hostility to the law, as was shown in <u>Bleak House</u> and <u>Little Dorrit</u>. The law, according to this critic,

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[47] Leonard F. Manheim, "The Personal History of David Copperfield: A Study in Psychoanalytic Criticism," <u>American Imago</u>, IX (1952), 32.

[48] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 33.

was Dickens' father image, and his attacks upon it were in part "oedipal aggression and reprisal."[49]

In 1957 Edmund Bergler published an essay in which he psychoanalyzed both Miss Wade and Amy Dorrit. Bergler contended that both of them were psychic masochists. In Miss Wade, there was an unconscious wish to be unloved; a wish from which she derived pleasure. Amy Dorrit, according to Bergler, was an example of the "nice masochist."

> Amy Dorrit is, superficially, the most unbelievable character: so much goodness, sacrifice, devotion, meekness, is usually not encountered on earth. Stripping off the exaggerations, however, one discovers that Dickens is describing a real type: the "nice masochist."[50]

The subject of Dickens and masochism has proved to be an interesting one for Freudian critics. Besides Bergler's essay there are at least two others that deal extensively with this subject. In 1947, Jared Wenger examined Dickens' novels to search for "types [of characters] which exist not for a particular novel but for the novelist's whole work."[51] He came to the conclusion that

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[49]Leonard F. Manheim, "The Law as 'Father'," American Imago, XII (1955), 17-23.

[50]Edmund Bergler, "Little Dorrit and Dickens' Intuitive Knowledge of Psychic Masochism," American Imago, XIV (1957), 381.

[51]Jared Wenger, "Character-Types of Scott, Balzac, Dickens, Zola," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXII (March, 1947), 220.

Dickens' typical male character was a sadist, whereas the typical female character was a sado-masochist. Among the masochists Wenger included "the tearful Mrs. Micawber and Mrs. Gummidge, Mrs. Wilfer, Mrs. Kenwigs, Miss Miggs, and Mrs. Varden."[52]

Lionel Trilling, whom Bergler called "the most brilliant and psychologically the most astute literary critic in this country today,"[53] also discussed Dickens and his masochistic characters; however this critic's analysis was subordinated to the main purpose of his essay which was to show the prison-image and its relationship to the characters in Little Dorrit.[54]

As a final example of Freudian criticism, one may cite two of Mark Spilka's essays. In one of them he claimed that in Copperfield, David's ideal was "sexless love with Em'ly or his mother . . ."[55] This was thwarted

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[52] Ibid., p. 224.

[53] Edmund Bergler, "Little Dorrit and Dickens' Intuitive Knowledge of Psychic Masochism," op. cit., p. 371.

[54] Lionel Trilling, "Little Dorrit," The Dickens Critics, George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane Jr., editors (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), pp. 279-293.

[55] Mark Spilka, "David Copperfield as Psychological Fiction," Critical Quarterly, I (Winter, 1959), 294.

by Murdstone, who was the incarnation of David's real father, and who presumably competed with David for his mother's love.

> His name is Murdstone, which David's aunt compares with Murderer, to fit his surface rôle; but Murdstone also means murdered man beneath his gravestone, who has risen now to assert his rights--and Dickens makes the tie with conscious skill.[56]

The next essay of Spilka's was devoted to an exposé of Little Nell. This critic claimed that she was merely a means by which Dickens was able to rid himself of his incestuous desires for both his sister Fanny and his sister-in-law Mary Hogarth. According to Spilka, Nell's death represented a "delicious atonement" for his own guilt-ridden desires.[57]

As I have already hinted, the Freudian critics have tended to take Wilson's hypothesis a bit too literally. They try to treat Dickens as a patient, and see his novels only as symptoms of various psychological disturbances. This was not what Wilson meant when he said: "It is neces-

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[56] Ibid., p. 293. Not being a psychologist, I would hesitate to contradict the validity of this "evidence." It nevertheless strongly resembles the evidence presented by one wit who in a parody of the Baconian theory attempted to prove that Gladstone was the author of Dickens' novels. The evidence produced to substantiate this charge was that in Pickwick, Mr. Pickwick was glad that he found the stone. See "Who Wrote Dickens's Novels?", Cornhill Magazine, XI n.s. (August, 1888), 113-121.

[57] Robert A. Donovan, A Review of "Little Nell Revisited," by Mark Spilka, Victorian Studies, IV (June, 1961), 396.

sary to see him as a man in order to appreciate him as an artist . . ."[58] He meant that an examination of Dickens' life was necessary only to clarify parts of his work. He had never suggested that such an examination was an end in itself.

Freudian criticism has not, however, had a wholly negative effect. Literary criticism is indebted to it in some important instances. The Freudians have totally demolished the old shibboleth that Dickens could never get "inside" his characters. For example, the young Henry James, in a review of Our Mutual Friend in 1865, was most articulate in his denunciation of Dickens' lack of "psychology."

> It were, in our opinion, an offense against humanity to place Mr. Dickens among the greatest novelists. For . . . he has created nothing but figure. He has added nothing to our understanding of human character.[59]

George Gissing was similarly quite certain that psychology was a closed door to Dickens. "Of psychology--a word unknown to Dickens--we, of course, have nothing; to

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[58] Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," op. cit., p. 9.

[59] Henry James, "The Limitations of Dickens," The Dickens Critics, George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane Jr., editors (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), 52.

ask for it is out of place."[60] Ernest Baker, a critic most representative of his era, also complained that Dickens "vouchsafes not a glimpse of what goes on below the surface. . ."[61]

According to the Freudian critics, however, Dickens was "inside" his characters (not just in the sense that he was his characters, but also in the sense that he consciously planned the way in which they would psychologically behave) to a far greater extent than most of the pre-1940 critics were aware. As an indication of the emphasis that Freudian criticism has placed upon the remarkable ability of the novelist to penetrate the minds of his characters, one may mention the criticism of the modern critic Lionel Trilling. An analysis of a portion of Little Dorrit convinced Trilling that in that novel "Dickens anticipates one of Freud's ideas, and not one of the simplest but nothing less bold and inclusive than the essential theory of the neurosis."[62]

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[60] George Gissing, Charles Dickens: A Critical Study, op. cit., p. 109.

[61] Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel: The Age of Dickens and Thackeray (Vol. VII of History of the English Novel. 10 vols., London: H. F. and G. Witherby Ltd., 1936), p. 249.

[62] Lionel Trilling, "Little Dorrit," op. cit., p. 283.

Another critic who pointed out that Dickens was really quite modern in his approach to psychology, was Warrington Winters. He was not as loud in his praise as was Trilling and instead concluded that whereas Dickens might not have been able to present a psychological analysis of a character, he was very adept at delineating psychological conditions.

> It is true that his psychological writing contributes to theatrical effectiveness rather than to the development of character. Nevertheless, in his description of psychological conditions, the tone of conviction which he achieves is incomparably superior to anything else which was written in the same tradition . . .[63]

Also as a result of the Freudians' emphasis, Dickens' technique as a novelist has been re-examined, particularly with regard to his use of the "stream of consciousness." Harry Stone, the writer who has investigated this aspect of Dickens, traced the development of this technique from its first beginnings (the staccato speech of Jingles) to Dickens' ultimate achievements in some of the various short stories in Household Words and All the Year Round.[64]

So far I have only dwelt upon the importance of Wil-

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[63] Warrington Winters, "Dickens and the Psychology of Dreams," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXIII (September, 1948), 1006.

[64] Harry Stone, "Dickens and Interior Monologue," Philological Quarterly, XXXVIII (January, 1959), 52-65.

son's essay insofar as it prompted a type of criticism that evaluated Dickens' novels in terms of his own experiences. Had this been the only feature of Wilson's critique it would hardly have received the acclaim that it did, because the psychological approach had severe limitations. His work was also important for another reason; he was the first of the critics to examine Dickens' novels as pieces of literature in their own right. He was instrumental in starting the trend to examine Dickens' novels in a more "intensive" manner. Briefly, this means that present-day critics tend to examine each novel as a novel and separate from such other considerations as the place of that work in the history of literature. I will discuss this trend in Dickens' criticism by examining in turn the differences between the early and later critiques in this respect and the limitations of the former; the parallel "intensive" movement in the criticism of poetry, and finally the "intensive" criticism itself.

The reader will recall that earlier, when discussing the Dickens' criticism of the period ca. 1880-ca. 1940, many of the examples that I used were taken from such works as Walker's Literature of the Victorian Era, Elton's Survey

of English Literature and George Saintsbury's Histories. The decision to use these works was prompted by necessity. In the pre-1940's this was the type of evaluation that was most prevalent, for scholars then seemed to have been most interested in "placing" Dickens in literature. This was surely the one common denominator of those Histories.

Early scholarship appeared to have been primarily concerned with such topics as Dickens in relation to realism or Dickens in relation to didacticism. They were not concerned with the novels as individual works. The general tendency of the critics of this period was to think of Pickwick as an example of the picaresque novel, or of Bleak House as an example of the Gothic novel, or of Our Mutual Friend as an example of the novel of plot. The most cursory glance at the mere titles of the pre-1940 Dickens' criticism listed in any bibliography will show the reader what I mean. There he will find criticism that discusses the theatrical element in Dickens' works, criticism that discloses the social content of his novels, and a great deal of criticism that deals with his work in comparison with that of other novelists. But only very rarely does one come across an essay that discusses a particular book not as a social document or as a literary milestone but as a novel.

Such a "broad" type of analysis had severe limitations, the most apparent of which was that it never did tell one very much about the novel. If we accept the premise that the business of criticism is to explain a novel, then that type of "broad" criticism advocated by such people as Saintsbury, Walker and E. M. Forster was inadequate, and not only was it inadequate but these scholars also realized its limitations. For example, Saintsbury, proceeding according to his concept of criticism, had discussed Dickens' plots and characters in relation to realism, and his didacticism in relation to the Aesthetic Movement. Then, on the basis of these and other similar comparisons, he decided that Dickens was not a really first rate novelist. This was the conclusion to which his kind of analysis had led him. But this was not Saintsbury's final opinion. He felt compelled to admit that there was a quality about Dickens' works that his critique had somehow missed. Surely this is what one must infer from his following remarks:

> They [Dickens' characters] are never quite real; we never experience or meet anything or anybody quite like them in the actual world. And yet in their own world they hold their position and play their parts quite perfectly and completely; they obey their own laws, they are consistent with

their own surroundings.[65]

This literary dilemma may be observed in much of the scholarship of the early part of the century. E. M. Forster, for example, realized even more acutely than did Saintsbury the limitations of this "broad" evaluation. By all the canons of criticism that Forster professed, Dickens' novels should have been scarcely worth reading. Look at what he said about the technique of novel writing, and note particularly the reservation that he made in his last sentence.

> The "whole intricate question of method resolves itself not into formulae /the reference is to Percy Lubbock's The Craft of Fiction/ but into the power of the writer to bounce the reader into accepting what he says--a power which Mr. Lubbock admits and admires, but locates at the edge of the problem instead of at the centre. I should put it plumb in the centre. Look how Dickens bounces us in Bleak House . . . Logically, Bleak House is all to pieces, but Dickens bounces us, so that we do not mind . . .[66]

Elsewhere in his discussion Forster had to make yet another reservation. "Those who dislike Dickens," he said, "have an excellent case. He ought to be bad. He is actu-

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[65] George Saintsbury, A History of Nineteenth Century Literature (eighth edition; New York: The MacMillan Company, 1913), p. 147.

[66] E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1954), pp. 78-79.

ually one of our biggest writers . . ."[67] This statement, in conjunction with those of Saintsbury already mentioned, surely indicates not only the fact that the early twentieth century novel analyses were inadequate, but also that the scholars who wrote them were aware of their limitations. It would appear that looking at Dickens with a wide-angle lens, as it were, was inadequate; the "something" that made his novels good (and almost everyone admitted that somehow or other they were good) was being overlooked by this approach. What was needed was a more "intensive," or to keep the analogy, a microscopic examination of his novels.

The shift away from an extensive towards a more "intensive" scrutiny of the material at hand was not confined solely to the novel. There was also a similar movement in poetry. I do not wish to embark on a discussion of the criticism of poetry, and I have mentioned it here merely to indicate that this development towards a more intensive reading of literature was widespread.

Writing in 1938 in their most influential text, Understanding Poetry, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Warren complained that all too frequently the study of a poem

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[67] Ibid., pp. 71-72.

as an entity in itself was being displaced by other considerations. The authors stated:

> The temptation to make a substitute for the poem as the object of study is usually overpowering. The substitutes are various, but the most common ones are:
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> 1. Paraphrase of logical and narrative content;
> 2. Study of biographical and historical materials;
> 3. Inspirational and didactic interpretation.[68]

The plight of the novel in the early part of the present century was definitely analogous to this, and in order to show the marked extent to which it was true, I will discuss the pre-1940 novel-criticism in terms of Brooks' and Warren's remarks.

With regard to the first of their comments, paraphrase of logical and narrative content, this is true of Dickens' criticism as a whole and particularly true of discussions of his humour. Prior to 1940, Dickens was regarded primarily as a humorist. This fact was repeated by virtually everyone who ever wrote a line about him, but to the best of my knowledge not one of those critics ever really looked at Dickens' humour and said, as it were, "This is what makes Dickens' humour effective." The most that one ever received from the early writers was an elaborate <u>précis</u> of his most humorous passages. Of course there were some

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[68] Cleanth Brooks and Robert Warren, <u>Understanding Poetry</u> (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1938), p. iv.

scholars who did not even bother to try to analyse his humour. G. K. Chesterton, one of Dickens' stoutest (both figuratively and literally) defenders, claimed that it was impossible to describe the wealth of humour in Dickens.

> Dickens has greatly suffered with the critics precisely through this stunning simplicity in his best work [his humorous characters]. The critic is called upon to describe his sensations while enjoying Mantalini and Micawber, and he can no more describe them than he can describe a blow in the face.[69]

A critic who devoted a considerable amount of time to a discussion of Dickens' humour was J. B. Priestley. His intention was to discuss four of Dickens' comic characters; the two Wellers, Dick Swiveller and Mr. Micawber.[70] If the reader ever had any hope of discovering the mechanics of the humour that animated any of these four characters, such hopes would be immediately discarded upon reading Priestley's criticism. He took eighty pages to give us the same amount of information that Chesterton had given us in two sentences. In other words, we learned absolutely nothing of real importance. Priestley's work

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[69] G. K. Chesterton, Charles Dickens, op. cit., p. 117.

[70] J. B. Priestley, The English Comic Characters (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1925), pp. 198-276.

was little better than a glorified précis. The essay on Dick Swiveller, for example, was sixteen pages long, and most of the sixteen pages recounted those instances where Dick Swiveller had been particularly humorous.

Although it is not concerned with humour, Helen MacMurchey's book The Almosts: A Study of the Feeble-Minded furnishes another excellent example of the tendency to use paraphrasing as criticism. As the title implies, this work was supposed to be a study of feeble-minded characters in literature; nevertheless there was not one word of criticism in the long (seventy pages) chapter that "discussed" mental defectives in Dickens' novels. The entire chapter was either a paraphrase of sections of the individual novels or else long quotations from them.[71] These last two mentioned works admittedly represented extreme instances of novels or parts of novels being criticized almost wholly by the use of paraphrase. One does not usually meet with such flagrant examples, nevertheless I have included them here as an example of this kind of criticism (which was the current coin in the early part of this century) reduced to the absurd. These attempts to explain a work by use of paraphrase were just as unsatisfactory as had been Saintsbury's comparisons of Dickensian with realistic literature. Neither of these techniques told us much about the novel.

The other outstanding feature of early Dickensian

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[71]Helen MacMurchey, The Almosts: A Study of the Feeble-Minded (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), pp. 31-100.

studies was the tendency to evaluate Dickens' novels in terms of biographical or historical knowledge. This meant that critics were interested in the novels not as an end in themselves but only insofar as they revealed biographical or historical details about either the novelist or his characters. Historical evaluation seeks for the originals of the various Dickensian characters, buildings, episodes, etc. Critics espousing such an approach travelled (and still travel) the length and breadth of England trying to identify the prototypes of the various inns and taverns that Dickens had depicted in his novels. This sort of evaluation, most but by no means all of it coming from The Dickensian, has had a great effect on Dickens' scholarship far out of proportion to the worth of the criticism itself. Since the following chapter is devoted to a study of this approach, I will not at this point discuss it any further. The biographical approach to Dickens' fiction has of course persisted right up to the present day and has just been discussed with particular reference to the Freudian critics.[72]

The limitations of the historico-biographical approach are substantially the same as those noted in the previous discussions on "placing Dickens" and on paraphrasing. To be told, for example, that the financial crash of the Irish

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[72] Vide. pp.238 to 248.

financier Michael Sadlier was the model for the Merdle debacle in Little Dorrit is not to tell us very much about the novel Little Dorrit.

Despite the glaring inadequacies revealed by the above mentioned critical approaches, nowhere are the limitations of the early scholarship shown to better advantage than in the method in which those critics handled Dickens' didacticism. Few indeed were the Dickensian critics who have not in one way or another examined the "purpose" that animated most of his novels. This was how Hugh Walker (1909) discussed it.

> Even in Pickwick we see in the scenes in the Fleet prison the intrusion of purpose, and in most of the later novels it is very prominent. Oliver Twist deals with the administration of the poor law and the making of criminals . . . The obvious purpose of Nicholas Nickleby is the reform of schools. Hard Times is an attack upon the orthodox political economy . . . Other novels deal with the Court of Chancery, or the government offices, or with specific vices, such as selfishness, or the modern English worship of wealth.[73]

Here then was a completely factual account of Dickens' social criticism. It told us exactly what aspects of Victorian life Dickens satirized. But, and this is a

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[73] Hugh Walker, The Literature of the Victorian Era (third edition; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), p. 685. At this point I am not concerned whether or not critics agreed with "purpose" in a novel; I am interested only in how they explained it.

significant point, Walker has not attempted to make any sort of connection between the total content of Dickens' novels and the social criticism. This was precisely what all of the early scholars failed to do with the other facets of the novels. Saintsbury, for instance, was very concerned with the realism of Dickens' characters and plots, but to the exclusion of any other aspect of the novelist's work. Conversely, Walter Crotch was most conscious of the social content of the novels; to the extant that he completely closed his eyes to either the plots or the characters.[74] Both critics were so preoccupied with the individual parts of the novels that they seemed to have forgotten that characters and social criticism were only two parts of a greater whole--the novel.

Characters, plot, and social criticism were all component parts of any novel, and to do a novel justice, they all ought to be considered in relation to that whole.[75] Using Dickens' didacticism as an example, I

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[74] Walter Crotch, Charles Dickens, Social Reformer (London: Chapman and Hall Limited, 1913).

[75] Note Brooks' and Warren's comment regarding this point. " . . . the structure of a piece of fiction, insofar as that piece of fiction is successful, must involve a vital and functional relationship between the idea and the other elements in that structure--plot, style, character, and the like." Cleanth Brooks and Robert Warren, Understanding Fiction (New York: F. S. Crofts and Company, 1943), p. xv.

will outline the gradual development in criticism as scholars slowly began to realize that the "purpose" in his novels was indeed an integral rather than an isolated part of them.

In 1920, ten years after the publication of Walker's criticism, Oliver Elton's A Survey of English Literature appeared. Like Walker, Elton also discussed the social criticism of Dickens' novels, but there was a difference between these two writers in the way in which they analyzed it. Whereas Walker had discussed didacticism almost as if it were incidental to the novels, Elton seemed vaguely aware that the "purpose" was somehow or other closely associated with other parts of the novel. For example, he referred to "the unity of tone, supplied by the blighting Court of Chancery, which tells directly or otherwise on every one in the book more or less."[76] Nevertheless, although he saw the relationship between the content and form of the novel in that one instance, he didn't see it existing (as indeed it does) in either Oliver Twist or Little Dorrit. Referring to Dickens' descriptions of Fagin's hovel and Mrs. Clenham's house, both of which were portrayed in perfect keeping with the general tone of the

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[76]Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature (fourth edition; London: Edward Arnold, 1920), II, 212-213.

novels, Elton called them "theatre scenes, adroit and telling, that have strayed into a book where they ring false."[77]

Ernest Baker's opinion (1936) was in many respects similar to that of Walker and Elton. Baker was very much aware of the imagery used in Bleak House, but like his predecessors he did not wholly connect the imagery with the social criticism. Instead, he associated it with the Gothic novel. Nevertheless, his realization and appreciation of this aspect of Dickens' work showed him to be somewhat ahead of most critics of his day. This is what Baker said about the mood Dickens created in Bleak House:

> In this novel perhaps better than in any other, Dickens displays his power of evoking an emotional and moral atmosphere out of physical objects: ruined and degraded old houses, seamed with memories of ancient crimes; obscene courts and alleys, haunted by criminals and records of sudden death. Their gruesome visages intensify the fear of horrors to come. Things seem to grow sentient: doors, windows, chimneys, carved figures, the very paving-stones, take on a physiognomy. The boundary between the quick and the dead, the human and non-human, fades away; the background ceases to be mere scenery, it comes alive to join in the ghostly drama, or to grin and sneer and triumph over the victim of evil passion or of fate.[78]

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[77] Ibid., pp. 200-201.

[78] Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel: The Age of Dickens and Thackeray, op. cit., p. 296.

Despite this perceptive analysis, Baker's final opinion was that this aspect of the novel merely represented a "modernization, much abler than Harrison Ainsworth's of the Radcliffian abbeys and castles, dungeons and medieval furniture . . ."[79] Neither did this critic see that Dickens' last complete novel also contained a very similar kind of imagery, for in this respect he had not one word to say about Our Mutual Friend.

The first scholar to grasp fully the significant relationship between Dickens' social criticism and the other particulars of his novels was Edmund Wilson. Wilson showed that the "purpose" was not as earlier reviewers had seen it, an isolated portion of the novels, but that it was merely a part of a greater whole. What Wilson did was to emphasize what Gestalt psychology had emphasized for years. That school of psychology had postulated that the whole of anything was greater than any of its component parts. "The precise meaning of a sentence or paragraph . . . cannot be found in their constituent parts as such."[80] In other words, even the minutest examination

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[79] Ibid.

[80] Harry Helson, "Gestalt," Collier's Encyclopedia (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1959), IX, 78.

of each of the various parts of speech that make up a sentence will not reveal the meaning of that sentence. The parts of speech first have to be seen together as a whole before they become meaningful. By analogy, this is what had happened to Dickens' criticism. Early scholars had closely and separately examined Dickens' plots, characters, imagery and social criticism. But because they had seen each part as an end in itself and not as part of a greater whole, they had been unable to perceive the relationship between them.[81] They obviously had had some inkling that there was more to Dickens' work than met the eye because despite their frequently harsh criticism of his characters, plots, etc., they were always forced to admit that his novels were somehow or other good. Saintsbury's and E. M. Forster's puzzlement is evidence enough on this point.

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[81] An example of the shift (from seeing each of the parts of the novel as being almost autonomous to a realization that they were closely interwoven) in criticism, see David Cecil's comments. He originally wrote his Early Victorian Novelists in 1935. The work was reprinted in 1958. In part the preface said: "That symbolic and imaginative strain in his genius . . . permeates his work to a degree I had not realized when I wrote this essay [1935] on him, appearing not just in an occasional episode or phrase but often in the basic conception of his tale. The river in Our Mutual Friend, the fog in Bleak House, the Marshalsea in Little Dorrit--these interweave themselves into the whole fabric of the books as images of their basic themes, metaphors of their pervading sentiment." David Cecil, Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. vi.

In his authoritative essay, Edmund Wilson very adeptly analyzed each of the components of Dickens' novels; he then showed how each of them fitted in perfectly with the next to produce the undeniably effective whole. In other words, Wilson perceived the overall pattern of the novels. Especially in his later works,[82] said Wilson, Dickens was "to organize his stories as wholes, to plan all the characters as symbols, and to invest all the details with significance."[83] Seen in this light, his plots were not the excrescences that earlier critics had thought them to be. They were carefully planned so as to add to the effect of the whole novel. "Henceforth," said Wilson, "the solution of the mystery is to be also the moral of the story and the last word of Dickens' social 'message'."[84]

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[82] Wilson did attempt to show that this kind of "dovetailing," as it were, was also an integral part of his early novels. However, by almost universal acclaim this is thought to be the weakest part of his essay. For example, he emphasized the interpolated short stories in Pickwick almost to the exclusion of the rest of that novel.

[83] Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," The Wound and the Bow, op. cit., p. 35.

[84] Ibid., p. 36.

In a like manner, the imagery used in such a novel as Bleak House could not be dismissed merely as incidental pathetic fallacy,[85] for it also served to tie the whole novel together. In their discussion of this facet of the novel, earlier reviewers had made a sharp distinction between the gloomy parts of the novels, in which the imagery was concentrated, and the humorous parts. As has been previously mentioned, Ernest Baker discussed the gloomy portion of that novel and the imagery associated with it; then, under a marginal heading of "Humorous Characters," Baker went on to examine those characters whom he considered humorous. Among these were Miss Flite, Mr. Turveydrop and Mr. Vholes. When discussing these, he made no reference whatever to imagery. Because he saw these characters primarily as "comic relief,"[86] apart as it

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[85]This is precisely what early critics did note, although the term "pathetic fallacy" was not coined until 1856 by Ruskin. In 1846, Blackwood's noted: "What I admire most . . . is your fine feeling of humanity--the instinct, as it were, and dumb life which you manage to extract from inanimate objects . . . Your very furniture has a kind of automatonic life . . ." S. Warren, "Advice to an Intending Serialist," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LX (November, 1846), 600. Putnam's, in 1855, said: "His descriptions, like paintings or music, help the expression of his subject. The surroundings are all relevant and in sympathy with the persons, a portion of whose nature they borrow, while they help to express a class of feelings beyond the reach of words." Putnam's Monthly Magazine, V (March, 1855), 267. See also Kate Anderson, "Scenery and the Weather in Dickens," The Dial, LII (February, 1912), 115-116.

[86]Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel: The Age of Dickens and Thackeray, loc. cit.

were from the mainstream of the novel, he did not notice that there was just as significant imagery connected with them. This is what was most ingenious about Wilson's work. He was able to see the various patterns emerging in Dickens' later novels. Each of them, according to Wilson, was a vast symbolic edifice in which plot, character and symbol all combined to reinforce the theme. The reader should note, however, that he was not wholly discussing the novels as autonomous works of art. As far as he was concerned, Dickens' work was to be understood in terms of the social and political currents of his age. Later in this chapter I will have reason to refer back to this point.

Just as Wilson's emphasis on Dickens' traumatic experiences had prompted one group of critics to examine his novels in the light of those disclosures, (a development that ultimately led to the wholly Freudian approach that I have already discussed), his work also encouraged another group of scholars who, while accepting the basic Freudian hypothesis (that the vision in his novels came into being because of Dickens' trauma), were primarily interested in evaluating the highly unified structure of his later novels. In my opinion, the essay that best exemplified this approach was that written by Dorothy Van Ghent in 1950.[87]

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[87] Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's," The Dickens Critics, George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane Jr., editors (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), pp. 213-232.

The basic theme of most, if not all, of Dickens' works was his abhorrence of and dissatisfaction with contemporary society. The novelist was enraged to see that the ties of brotherhood and friendship that had bound people together in the good old days of Merry England were fast disappearing. People in the higher strata of society disowned any connection whatever with people in the lower. Those with means frequently treated those less fortunate individuals as animals or even as things. This, in brief, was the society whose anatomy Dickens was to trace in the post-Chuzzlewit novels. To accomplish this purpose he made each of the individual facets of the novel (plot, imagery, symbol, characters) subservient to his total intention.

Throughout the novels Van Ghent noted that inanimate objects were always being given a life of their own. Previously this had been dismissed as incidental pathetic fallacy;[88] however, this critic pointed out that the descriptions of things being given the attributes of people were everywhere complemented by the descriptions of people being given the attributes of things. In other words, said Van Ghent, those who have consistently treated

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[88] Vide p. 229.

their fellows as things, have themselves developed the attributes of things. "It is as if the life absorbed by things had been drained out of people who have become incapable of their humanity."[89] The characters, Grandfather Smallweed (Bleak House) and Miss Havisham (Great Expectations) were illustrative of this phenomenon. Because the former was as rapacious a money-lender as could possibly have existed, his humanity had completely left him, leaving him an empty shell that must be continually beaten and fluffed up much as one beats up a pillow to prevent it from collapsing. The same was true of Miss Havisham. She was guilty of aggression against humanity for she treated both Pip and Estella as things. Hence she herself became a thing, a fungus.

The life that had passed out of Grandfather Smallweed and Miss Havisham had passed into the environment that surrounded them. Dickens' environments were permeated with this antagonistic life that had been drained out of such figures. In Bleak House the slum district of Tom-All-Alone's had a malevolent life all of its own. In other words, "the atoms of the physical world have been impreg-

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[89] Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's," op. cit., p. 214.

nated with moral aptitude . . ."[90] Therefore, it was not inconsistent and it was not merely coincidence that galvanized the giant beam in Mrs. Clenham's house (Little Dorrit) into action so that it crushed Rigaud beneath it. Neither was it inconsistent that Krook (Bleak House) should have died of spontaneous combustion. His thing attributes had totally displaced the humanity that he had previously possessed. He was now like a piece of the waste paper in which he dealt, and the demonic atmosphere of Tom-All-Alone's had reached out and devoured him. Steerforth's (David Copperfield) drowning was not solely a fortuitous circumstance. The very ocean, as part of the physical world, had not remained neutral. Like other of Dickens' environments "its mode of existence is altered by the human purposes and deeds it circumscribes, and its animation is antagonistic . . ."[91]

> Considered in this way, Dickens' use of physical coincidence in his plots is consistent with his imagination of a thoroughly nervous universe, whose ganglia spread through things and people alike, so that moral contagion, from its breeding center in the human, transforms also the non-human and gives it the aptitude of the diabolic.[92]

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[90] Ibid., pp. 221-222.

[91] Ibid., p. 218.

[92] Ibid., p. 222.

The reader can now see how Van Ghent's criticism differed from those earlier critics previously discussed. She attempted neither to "place" Dickens in relation to various schools of literature nor to examine one or two aspects of his novels. Instead, following the lead of Wilson, she examined the novels more as novels, seeing how every facet of the work was bent to serve the needs of the theme. Plot and Character were both directed towards one goal with an artistic excellence that earlier critics had not even suspected.

Even such a fine study as that of Dorothy Van Ghent's was not really looking at the novels in their own right. Her essay and the numerous ones written in a similar vein revealed that critics were not wholly interested in the study of novels as autonomous works of Art, but instead considered the political and social atmosphere of the novelist's age. Dickens' characters and the imagery associated with them all had their roots in the appalling social conditions of nineteenth century England.

The Freudian approach to Dickens' criticism had still had a healthy effect on scholarship inasmuch as it raised Dickens' studies from exercises in comparison (Dickens with realism, etc.) toward a more intimate look at the piece of literature itself. But this kind of criticism was not the final answer because it also studied the novels with par-

ticular emphasis on events outside of them.

For the many critics who wished to see the various novels as autonomous works of art, to be discussed without reference to any other considerations, Jungian psychology offered an opportunity. In the remainder of this chapter I will outline the Jungian approach to Dickens' fiction with particular emphasis on the manner in which this school of criticism differed from the Freudians'.

Carl Gustave Jung had made a sharp differentiation between what he called two modes of artistic creation.

> In order to emphasize the distinction, I will call the one mode of artistic creation psychological, and the other visionary. The psychological mode deals with materials drawn from the realm of human consciousness--for instance, with the lessons of life, with emotional shocks, the experience of passion and the crises of human destiny in general--all of which go to make up the conscious life of man, and his feeling life in particular.[93]

Jung further went on to indicate that the art produced by psychological creation was wholly explicable and quite rational. There was nothing puzzling about it, for it

> nowhere transcends the bounds of psychological intelligibility. Everything that it embraces--the experience [that gives rise to the expression]

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[93]Carl Gustave Jung, "Psychology and Literature," Modern Man in Search of a Soul, W. S. Dell and Cary Baynes, translators (fifth edition; London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1936), p. 179.

> as well as the artistic expression--belongs to the realm of the understandable. Even the basic experiences themselves, though non-rational, have nothing strange about them; on the contrary, they are that which has been known from the beginning of time--passion and its fated outcome, man's subjection to the turns of destiny, eternal nature with its beauty and its honor.[94]

This is exactly what the Freudian critics had claimed about Dickens. Critics like Leonard Manheim and Mark Spilka had maintained that such characters as Little Nell and Quilp were quite rational and could be explained in terms of Dickens' psyche. Jung had no doubt had a situation like this in mind when he complained that "Freudian psychology encourages us to ... [think] that some highly personal experience underlies this grotesque darkness [of the artist's world]."[95]

This is, of course, the point that separates the two schools of criticism. The Jungians maintain that the experience that gives rise to the act of creation is not personal. For example, many of the seemingly grotesque characters in Dickens did not come into being because Dickens had suffered the traumatic experience in the blacking warehouse. Jungian critics explained them by using Jung's concept of the "visionary" mode of creation. Here,

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[94] Ibid., p. 180.

[95] Ibid., p. 183.

the experience that preceded the moment of creation was neither personal nor wholly explicable.

> The experience that furnishes the material for artistic expression is no longer familiar. It is a strange something that derives its existence from the hinterland of man's mind--that suggests the abyss of time separating us from pre-human ages, or evokes a super-human world of contrasting light and darkness.[96]

This experience represented a glimpse into the collective unconscious; that deepest of all layers of the human mind where lie the collected primordial experiences of the race of man.

> However dark this nocturnal world may be, it is not wholly unfamiliar. Man has known of it from time immemorial--here, there, and everywhere; for primitive man today it is an unquestionable part of his picture of the cosmos. It is only we who have repudiated it because of our fear of superstitution and metaphysics . . . Yet, even in our midst, the poet now and then catches sight of the figures that people the night-world--the spirits, demons and gods . . . In short, he sees something of that psychic world that strikes terror into the savage and the barbarian.[97]

Here then is literature wholly separated from political, social or economic conditions, and precisely because it is removed from these common referents it is puzzling.

> We are astonished, taken aback, confused, put on our guard or even disgusted--and we demand

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[96] Ibid., p. 180.

[97] Ibid., p. 188.

> commentaries and explanations. We are reminded in nothing of everyday, human life, but rather of dreams, night-time fears and the dark recesses of the mind that we sometimes sense with misgiving.[98]

What the Jungian critics of Dickens have done has been to interpret the lowering atmosphere and nightmare figures of Dickens' work in terms of his vision into the collective unconscious. In a study such as Graham Greene's, the vision that Dickens had depicted in Oliver Twist was that of a Manichean universe, where evil reigned supreme.

> As for the truth, is it too fantastic to imagine that in this novel, as in many of his later books, creeps in, unrecognized by the author, the eternal and alluring taint of the Manichee, with its simple and terrible explanation of our plight, how the world was made by Satan and not by God, lulling us with the music of despair?[99]

Another fine study that exemplified a Jungian reading was that by Robert Morse in 1949. Morse saw Dickens' world as "the imaginative projection of an inner world underlying actuality."[100] Speaking of the monstrous and grotesque characters that peopled Our Mutual Friend, Morse asserted that they held our attention because they were part and

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[98] Ibid., p. 182.

[99] Graham Greene, "The Young Dickens," The Dickens Critics, George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane Jr., editors (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 252

[100] Robert Morse, "Our Mutual Friend," The Dickens Critics, op. cit., p. 203.

parcel of ourselves. Our own unconscious recognized and responded to the shadowy figures.

> Why do these monsters of purity and evil, these ridiculous eccentrics and grotesques, hold our attention? What field of experience does Dickens draw on to make us feel their truth? Do they not live under our own skins, waiting to be given the externalized form of myth and art? Dickens has gone underground to that region where the mists of unnameable anxieties and the smoke of infantile terrors prevail. There, at the edge of the sea of sleep, he has built his London. On the opposite shore dwell the Gorgons, Andromeda and Perseus, the Minotaur in the Cretan maze. The Harpies call across the separating waters to Miss Flite's birds . . .[101]

Angus Wilson in 1960 wrote a short essay in which he discussed the "haunting" quality of Dickens' work. He claimed that

> there are certain situations, images, and symbols that recur throughout his work. These, it is, that account to me for the haunting quality of his world; their obsessive power over him finds an equally obsessive need in that large numbers of serious contemporary readers who are so possessed by him.[102]

In 1949 Clifton Fadiman used the Jungian approach to explain the Pickwick Papers. We responded to that novel, said Fadiman, because of the "primal symbols" in it.

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[101] Ibid., pp. 199-200.

[102] Angus Wilson, "Charles Dickens: A Haunting," The Dickens Critics, op. cit., p. 380.

> The warm Cave and the open Road--to these primal symbols the simplest and deepest parts of us respond. And co-primal with the Cave and the Road is Food--and--Drink. Take the Cave . . . and the Road out of Pickwick and you remove its heart and arteries. Take out Food--and--Drink and you remove its very guts.[103]

So far the examples that I have given have been "pure" Jungian criticism. These critics have been primarily interested in showing how Dickens had embodied the glimpses of his vision into his novels and in telling us why we responded to them in the way that we did. Most Jungian criticism has not, however, appeared in such an unadulterated form, for many critics, while they claimed that Dickens' social criticism originated in the blacking warehouse (the Freudian view) also claimed that the reason that we enjoyed the novels was because they were written in mythical terms and thus appealed to our unconscious.

These critics were using Jung's concepts in a broader sense than Jung intended. They were not concerned with the source of the vision (which is the real point of difference between the two schools). The following was the way in which this group of critics had defined Archetypes:

> An archetype is a literary element or construct which may bring certain especially powerful

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[103] Clifton Fadiman, "Pickwick Lives Forever," Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXIV (December, 1949), 26.

> meanings, implications, and overtones to the literary work in which it is used and hence to the reader's response to that work.[104]

With this sort of definition in mind, critics like Robert Stange have analyzed Dickens' novels in much the same way that Edmund Wilson or Dorothy Van Ghent had done, only Stange (somewhat incongruously, in my opinion) dragged folklore into the discussion. For example, he claimed that the basic plot of Great Expectations belonged to folklore. This kind of novel was an example of the "development" novel.

> The recurrent themes of the genre [the development novel] are all there: city is posed against country, experience against innocence; there is a search for the true father; there is the exposure to crime and the acceptance of guilt and expiation.[105]

This, however, is hardly evidence enough to equate the plot of Great Expectations with myth. Many modern essays show the same fault. They are imaginative and illuminating, but sprinkled throughout these critiques are words such as myth, fable, and folklore. One has the distinct impression that they are there for "effect" more than for any really useful purpose. Be that as it may, the Dickens' criticism written from 1940 to the present has drawn almost exclusively upon these two schools of psychology--the Freudians and the Jungians.

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[104] Lauriat Lane, "Dickens' Archetypal Jew," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXXIII (March,1958), 96.

[105] Robert Stange, "Expectations Well Lost: Dickens' Fable for His Time," The Dickens Critics, George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane Jr., editors (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963), p. 296.

CHAPTER VII

In this final chapter I will discuss those items of Dickens' criticism that did not readily lend themselves to the classifications in the previous chapter. The items with which I will be concerned are those that appear in The Dickensian.

There are few literary persons who have had the popular acclaim granted to Dickens and there is certainly no novelist who for a period of sixty-four years has had a magazine named after him that contains articles devoted solely to his own works. This very large following has had its disadvantages, the most important of which was that until 1940 no critic really took Dickens seriously as an artist. In the present chapter I will review some of the typical "non-scholarly" criticism that has appeared in The Dickensian.

The true Dickens' lover has always shown a passionate and insatiable curiosity for the topography associated with the novelist. He wants to know anything and everything about the offices, the inns, the houses and the very countryside with which Dickens was associated. No bloodhound hot on the trail of a convict ever followed his quarry as eagerly as did this segment of the novelist's reading public. One article written in this spirit rousingly exclaimed:

> In a sense I was on a tramp: that is to say, I was following the track of David Copperfield and looking for the place where he slept on the second night of his flight from London to Dover.[1]

If the reader wants some "inside" information as to the exact location of Dingley Dell, such information is readily available.[2] The fantastic exuberance of the Dickensians and the extent to which they are devoted to any and every facet of Dickens may be seen in the minute attention they give to what we would call the incidental details of his novels. For example,

> The Dickensian in 1927 boasted that "the well of Dickens has not yet run dry, for at the Winnipeg Branch during the winter such subjects as "Animals and Birds in Dickens" and "The Picnic Menus of Pickwick" formed the subject of interesting papers . . .[3]

The Dickensians' curiosity about their literary hero has also extended to his characters, and a favourite pastime has been to bring them back (from wherever characters go when a book ends) and to have them talk about their experiences since the reader had last met them. This in itself

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[1]"A Dream of Chalk and Mastless Ships in a Muddy River," The Dickensian, XXXIV (1938), 203.

[2]S. J. Rust, "The Real Dingley Dell," The Dickensian, XXIV (Summer, 1928), 225-231.

[3]"Here There and Everywhere," The Dickensian, XXIII (Summer, 1927), 212.

speaks volumes for the vitality and reality of his characters. Thus we see Lizzie Wrayburn making an appearance in one of these essays, and observing ecstatically (with a baby in her arms) how wonderful it had been to see how much Eugene had needed her "as his poor broken body gradually mended . . ."[4] In a like manner, Mark Tapley was resurrected from the literary limbo in which he had rested.[5]

For Dickens' admirers, the novelist has been the touchstone of literary and moral excellence.[6] Writing in 1914, Edwin Pugh was not altogether jesting when he claimed that "in English literature 'B. C.' stands for 'Before Charles,' and 'A. D.' for 'After Dickens'."[7] Poems, very sincere but also very bad ones, have been regularly written in praise of this excellence.

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[4] "Ten Years Married," The Dickensian, XXXIV (1938), 165.

[5] A. D. Peters, "Mark Tapley Joins the Army," The Dickensian, XI (April, 1915), 89-91

[6] The Dickensians' vigorous denials of the Ellen Ternan affair have already been considered. Vide Chap. II.

[7] Edwin Pugh, "Dickens as a Social and Literary Force," The Dickensian, X (March, 1914), 63.

Let Fezziwig, with "winking" calves,
And his good lady take the floor;
And let changed Scrooge the turkey send,
With lightened heart, to Cratchit's door.[8]

A different kind of panegyric appeared during the war in 1915. An article in The Dickensian proudly noted that more German soldiers in the trenches read Dickens than any other book. The article concluded that "perhaps their literary taste is not so remarkable after all."[9]

One facet of Dickens' literature that has provoked an enormous amount of attention has been the unfinished Mystery of Edwin Drood. Generations of readers have attempted to solve the mystery and the effort that has gone into this pastime has been truly amazing. A collection of Droodiana was reported to have filled every shelf on every side of the great exhibition hall used by the Grolier Club in New York.[10]

Fortunately, some of the material in The Dickensian is of a higher calibre than that which I have just dis-

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[8]Ethel Kidson, "The Dickens Christmas," The Dickensian, X (December, 1914), 328. See also Theodore Watts-Dunton, "Dickens and Father Christmas," Nineteenth Century, LXII (December, 1907), 1014-1029.

[9]"When Found," The Dickensian, XI (April, 1915), 87.

[10]Calhoun and Heaney, "Dickensiana in the Rough," Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, XLI (1947), p. 293, cited by George H. Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel Criticism Since 1836 (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1965), p. 175.

cussed. Especially as regards primary sources, the magazine has run some most informative articles. A good example of this was a reprint from contemporary sources of the details surrounding the "Shaw Trials" that gave rise to Nicholas Nickleby.[11] The magazine has also reprinted numerous contemporary reviews of Dickens' novels. One of these, an American review of Martin Chuzzlewit, appeared in 1914.[12] Another article appearing in 1936 gave some of the early reviews of Pickwick.[13] Also tending to increase the appeal of the magazine was the series by T. W. Hill that annotated the majority of Dickens' novels. Thus, while The Dickensian is undoubtedly cluttered with much irrelevant material, the academician may still find worthwhile articles in the pages of that magazine.

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[11] John Suddaby, "The Shaw Academy Trials," The Dickensian, XI (October, 1915), 260-263.

[12] "Martin Chuzzlewit: An American Contemporary Review," The Dickensian, X (April, 1914), 79-99.

[13] J. W. T. Ley, "Some Early Reviews of Pickwick," The Dickensian, XXXII (1936), 281-285.

CONCLUSION

The overall conclusion that one draws from a survey such as mine is that the whole body of Dickensian criticism may be divided into two separate and distinct halves, the essay of Edmund Wilson (1940) representing the point of division. The early critics failed to see Dickens as a first-rate novelist. Because they used the more prosaic and factual novels of Thackeray as the touchstone of literary excellence, they often could not appreciate Dickens' fantastic and hyperbolic structures. The only instances in which they unreservedly welcomed his grotesque and wildly exaggerated characters were when those characters were obviously meant to be humorous. During this period Dickens' humour was his only passport to fame.

Almost wholly as a result of his splendid essay, Edmund Wilson dramatically changed the complexion of affairs in 1940. He demonstrated that Dickens was not, at least in his later novels, the bouncing optimist that generations of earlier critics had claimed he was. He further showed that running throughout all of the novelist's work were parallel themes in which a bitter and frustrated rebel gave vent to his anger against the society that had warped his childhood.

In a like manner all the biographical studies of

Dickens may be divided into two groups. In this case, Thomas Wright's sensational disclosures in 1934 mark the dividing point. The early biographies were all motivated by hero-worship. In some cases, as in that of Forster (who certainly knew most if not all of the pertinent facts about Dickens) biographers deliberately pulled the wool over the readers' eyes. In other instances, though, the lack of any real information was owing to the fact that members of the Dickens family exercised a vigilant and effective censorship over some details of the novelist's life. An interesting point to note is that the biography and the criticism of this early period complemented one another.

The biographies written after 1934 have attempted, with few exceptions, to be quite fair in their discussion of the novelist. They have tried to show both sides of Dickens' character rather than just the "Christmas" Dickens loudly extolled by earlier scholars. Unlike the earlier period, however, the impartiality of modern biographers has not been matched by their counterparts in the field of criticism.

Present day criticism has to its own detriment completely ignored the "Dickens, the genial Dickens, overflowing by nature with the most rampant hearty fun . . ."[1] and

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[1]"Remonstrance with Dickens," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXI (April, 1857), 495.

for twenty-five years has shown us only the brooding and bitter side to his nature. But Dickens is too great a figure to be summed up by a consideration of one facet of his personality. If, as all critics since Wilson have been saying, Dickens was a manic-depressive, then surely it is not right to dwell exclusively on those of his novels that were prompted by his depression. Shouldn't one also consider the works of his mania? Novels like Pickwick, Nickleby and Chuzzlewit are sheer unadulterated fun to read, but modern criticism has largely ignored them. The indignities suffered by Mr. Pickwick in the Fleet prison are as nothing (figuratively speaking) to the indignities nowadays heaped upon the book bearing his name. The only time that modern criticism condescends to notice this novel is when it is desperately trying to find in that volume the foundation upon which it can raise the modern and much heralded "gloomy Dickens."[2]

In my opinion, criticism such as this has completely ignored the fact that novels like Pickwick and Nickleby are meant to be humorous novels and should be studied as

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[2] For an example of this, see H. N. MacLean, "Mr. Pickwick and the Seven Deadly Sins," Nineteenth Century Fiction, VIII (December, 1953), 198.

such. However, as long as critics keep trying to "find something" in them, I shall not be surprised to someday read that Messrs. Winkle, Tupman and Snodgrass were really Mr. Pickwick's illegitimate sons and that the real reason that the old gentleman went to the girls' boarding school in the dead of night was that he was a voyeur. Maybe Blackwood's was not being so stuffy and mid-Victorian when it cried out: "we sit down and weep when we remember thee, O Pickwick!"[3]

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[3] "Remonstrance with Dickens," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, op. cit., p. 496.

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