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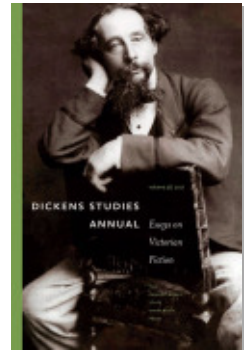
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## Finding Form in *David Copperfield* : The Architectural Installment

Daniel Siegel

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# Finding Form in *David Copperfield*: The Architectural Installment

*Daniel Siegel*

*Almost every formal study of the serial installments of Victorian novels has emphasized their textual condition, linking the installment's formal aspects to the circumstances of its publication and the experience of its readers. This essay takes a different approach, arguing that many Victorian novels use their serial structure to express and shape their meanings in an architectural sense, irrespective of the experience of reading or the mediations of print culture. Considering the example of David Copperfield, the essay shows that the shape of the numbers has a significant bearing on issues central to the novel, including the failures of patriarchy, David's erotic development, the politics of homelessness, and the equivocal character of Daniel Peggotty's rescue efforts. Indeed, the numbers of Copperfield stage intricate formal operations that are not revealed, and are in some way obscured, by a focus on the book's number plans, its publication history, or the temporalities of serial reading. The essay therefore proposes that we approach the serial installment with the same double-vision we train on other narrative forms, viewing the numbers as both registering their textual condition and expressing a self-contained narrative logic.*

## The Vanishing Installment

I would venture a guess: if Dickens scholars were asked to identify our favorite serial installment of a Dickens novel, most of us couldn't do it. Furthermore, I would bet that few of us could summon up an image of a single installment with

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any distinctness: or, to put it differently, we could not say confidently what happens in any given number of any novel. This is not to say that we are unaware of the part-structure of Dickens's serial fiction. To the contrary, we understand its historical determinants and have ideas about its material and aesthetic implications. Modern critical editions make efforts to set the numbers apart from one another, whether by identifying them in notes on the text or indicating the breaks with asterisks. Some editions separate serial installments in the table of contents. We have taken or taught courses, or participated in reading groups, in which novels were read serially. But when the reading is over, the individual installments lose definition. It's as though they were the materials of historical reenactment, returning a novel to the months of its first publication and allowing modern readers to share in the experience of the book's earliest audience. We see the serial numbers as relics of the novel's becoming, rather than as parts of its permanent structure.

Accordingly, almost every formal study of the serial installment has emphasized its textual condition, linking its formal aspects to the circumstances of its publication and the experience of its readers. Scholars see in the numbers an opportunity to dispel the modernist fantasy of the autonomous literary work, unified in its effects and present all at once. The serial returns us to a specific moment in the historical development of print culture, a moment with its own paradigms of textual production and its own cultures of reading. We try to read the serial novel with a Victorian mindset and to recognize its distinctive character as the site of a rich and polyphonic engagement with the material world from which it emerged. The numbers then become important because they confound our tendency to think abstractly about narrative form—the serial seems both to require and to authorize a more situated approach. Serial publication interests us insofar as it disrupts conventional narrative economies, invites intertextual connections, opens onto a vast array of technological and cultural currents, and allows us to explore the dynamic complexity of Victorian reading. By the same token, scholarship that does not focus on print culture often ignores the serial structure of the novel altogether.

I mean to offer an alternative approach to the serial installment, beginning with a hypothetical question. What if we were to bracket the textual condition of the serial novel—put aside both its cultural situation and the conditions it imposes on the reading experience—and view the numbers as static architectural elements, shaping the narrative just as chapters do? Would the numbers have any relevance at all? To look into the question even briefly undermines many of our presumptions about serial fiction. Form abounds in Dickens's numbers, often exactly the aspects of form that critics claim serial narratives resist: coherence, balance, wholeness, closure. The numbers face not just outward but inward. They disclose the material conditions that produced them, but they equally express a logic internal to the narrative. They govern the manner in which they are read, but they suggest patterns, ironies, and meanings that have nothing to do with

the experience of reading. Perhaps these dichotomies seem false: studying the serial in relation to the mediations of print culture need hardly close off other kinds of analysis. But in practice, as we have tried to define the characteristics that reflected the serial's status as a new type of mass cultural product, we have greatly underrated the discursive function of the numbers to draw story elements into relation, elaborate thematic ideas, deepen the connotative dimensions of the narrative, and suggest meanings through formal recursion and variation. We leave the structural intricacies of the numbers unexplored and forego the interpretive paths they open up.

This essay presents a counterpoint to, and not a rejection of, the investigations of print culture that have dominated our study of the serial novel. After briefly reviewing the major approaches to serial form, I will offer a detailed discussion of the numbers of *David Copperfield*, treating them as self-organizing discursive structures. I will show that the architecture of the numbers has a significant bearing on issues central to the novel, including the failures of patriarchy, David's erotic development, the politics of homelessness, and the equivocal character of Daniel Peggotty's rescue efforts. My agenda with respect to *David Copperfield* is fairly modest; I simply wish to show that in this best known of Dickens's novels, the numbers carry out elaborate formal operations that have gone virtually unnoticed, and that have implications for the novel's thematic concerns. But more broadly, I hope to demonstrate that the partitioned structure of the serial narrative has an architectural dimension that is not disclosed, and is often obscured, by discussions of its periodical publication.

### The Numbers and the Novel

We can watch the numbers vanish as formal elements in the final review of *Dombey and Son* to appear in the *Sun*, a London paper. The *Sun* had already reviewed thirteen of the monthly numbers to date, discussing each separate installment as a literary production in its own right.<sup>1</sup> One earlier review states that "The indifference of the eleventh number is more than compensated by the extraordinary brilliance of the twelfth" (Collins 227). And in the opening paragraphs of the final review, Charles Kent continues to consider the novel in its periodical aspect. He hails *Dombey* as a "true English story-book, which has appeared from month to month," and which has "imparted so much zest to every successive interval in the course of its publication, has scattered, as it were, such sweet flowers upon the dusty path of life, while Time has been rolling us all onward to eternity, that we should be ungrateful were we not to lament its termination" (Collins 228). The word "termination"—as opposed, say, to "completion"—is important here; Kent describes *Dombey* not as a work of art that has finally been achieved, but as

a program of amusement that has been cancelled. He goes on to emphasize the story's iterative character:

Those, and there are thousands of them, who have, like ourselves, devoured the work bit by bit—familiarising themselves by long association with the every characteristic of the ideal personages depicted in the narrative—and coming at last to regard with a sort of tenderness even the green covers of the monthly instalment, as being connected in some fashion with the joys and sorrows of the story, and by consequence with their own tears and laughter, will comprehend our regret at the dispersion of this imaginary multitude.

At the end of its serial publication, he implies, *Dombey* is nowhere to be found; it is gone, dispersed.

But, having reconciled himself to the demise of the serial, Kent suddenly begins to speak of the novel without respect to the monthly numbers. He no longer mentions the green covers or the successive intervals; *Dombey* is now a single, unified whole. Kent's statements become monumental: "*Dombey and Son* is assuredly the masterpiece of Charles Dickens." He continues to anatomize the novel, but not in relation to its serial parts. Instead he evokes the brilliance of a "solitary passage," the genius of an "exquisite chapter," the "threads of an ingenious plot," and the slight flatness of the "separate paragraphs" when compared to certain paragraphs in *Barnaby Rudge* (228–29). The discourse of plot, chapters, paragraphs, and passages—entirely absent from the opening reverie on the abundance and zest of the monthly numbers—has taken hold already. These, for Kent as for us, become the parts that matter.

In Kent's account, the novel gains its composure precisely as it leaves its serial origins behind. The parade has gone by, and in its place stands a literary work with form and design. Kent never considers that the installments might be elements of the design; they are a feature of its becoming. There's nothing—in a figural, rhetorical, or narrative sense—that holds them together. We might say that for Kent, the serial parts vanish because, as discursive objects, they never existed to begin with. Recent scholarship generally concurs with Kent's view, seeing in the contingent nature of the parts an alternative to the schematic structures one might find in the all-at-once narratives of Austen or Scott.

Focusing on composition and artistic creation, much of the most intricate analysis of serial narrative can be found in studies of the careers of Victorian novelists and in a number of revelatory works on Victorian publishing practices.<sup>2</sup> Such studies often see the serial text as a window onto the author's writing life, interpreting the numbers by way of other texts produced by the author: number plans, notes, letters, and publishing agreements. Following John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens critics frequently discuss the serial numbers in relation to Dickens's number plans (his working notes), a practice that foregrounds authorial intention by implying that the creative process that produced the numbers constitutes an

important part of their interpretive horizon. Alongside these examinations of the author's craft, the serial has occasioned broader analyses of literary production and mass culture. Among the latter, several compelling studies have considered the symbolic function of the serial part as a commodity form, a signature of new technologies of production within the increasingly sacralized realms of art and culture.<sup>3</sup> In these accounts, the serial part draws its discursive power precisely from the way in which it manifests the conditions of its production and use.

Many scholars have examined what the form of the serial reveals about the experience of reading. Although it is two decades old, Linda Hughes and Michael Lund's *The Victorian Serial* remains the most involved and profound examination of the structure of particular serial works. In Hughes and Lund's account, form is inextricable from "the dynamics of serial reading" (1), and their most bracing claims have to do with the way the experience of reading fiction serially relates to and in some ways allegorizes the values of Victorian culture.<sup>4</sup> Hughes and Lund return to the experience of serial reading in *Victorian Publishing and Mrs. Gaskell's Work*, in one chapter considering the effect of reading the number in relation to other contiguous materials,<sup>5</sup> and in another associating the form of the serial with female sexual experience (96–123). Jennifer Hayward discusses the intersecting subplots and narrative modes of *Our Mutual Friend* in relation to the needs of readers and the responses of reviewers. Laurel Brake, Mark Turner, Emily Steinlight, Katie Lanning, Maria Damkjaer, and Catherine Delafield have analyzed the character of serial reading within a media-saturated environment, considering such issues as the periodicities and temporal rhythms of installment issue, the heteroglossia of the periodical text, and the semiotic bearing of "paratextual" material like advertisements, wrappers, and letterpress. Hughes has recently described such studies as moving "sideways" within the world of Victorian print (1).

This turn in Victorian studies to material reading practices parallels a turn in narrative theory toward cognitive theories of reading and an increased attention to the experience of real readers. One such study, Robyn Warhol's *Having a Good Cry*, makes incisive narratological claims about serial form, all grounded in readers' experience. For instance, Warhol argues that serials include systematic recapitulations of past events in order to catch readers up, and that they rely on formulaic situations in order to accommodate readers who enter mid-story. Sean O'Sullivan has written extensively on serial form; his analysis, too, links the formal features of the serial—for instance, its fragmentary character, its proliferation of possibilities, and its alternation between "the new, the old, and the gap" (par. 14)—to the experience of readers. O'Sullivan argues that serials are formed so as to produce dissatisfaction, even as Warhol argues that they produce boredom. Both Warhol and O'Sullivan offer compelling models of the serial as a "system of narrative" (O'Sullivan par. 6) with its own formal imperatives; for both, the formal features of the serial are designed to provoke and contain different kinds of readerly affect.<sup>6</sup>

The insights we gain when we pursue new readerly narratologies, or when we read sideways across the archive, are manifest. Nevertheless, our pursuit of the intertextual dimension, the affective experience, and the cultural resonance of the serial is authorized by a denial—implicit or explicit—that the numbers have their own formal integrity or that they function as a narrative regime that orders the serial novel.<sup>7</sup>

The following pages will examine some numbers of *David Copperfield*, taking for granted their thematic, figural, and narrative integrity. I choose *Copperfield* primarily because it is so widely read and discussed, and the nuanced operations of the numbers are noteworthy insofar as they offer an unfamiliar view of a text that is so familiar to us. I also wish, in my analysis, to draw a contrast with the approach of Butt and Tillotson, who put *David Copperfield* at the center of their pioneering study of Dickens's serial method. In their month-to-month analysis of *Copperfield*'s numbers, Butt and Tillotson emphasized the number plans in a critical act of reverse engineering intended to reveal Dickens's creative process. I will do the opposite, regarding the numbers as static structures that open up inroads to the novel's thematic purposes. In my discussion of the serial parts, I will not consider Dickens's number plans, or his correspondence during the period of the novel's composition, or the advertisements on the wrappers, or the periodical reviews of the novel. I will not mention *Pendennis*, published at the same time as *Copperfield* by the same publisher in precisely the same format. I will not discuss *Household Words*, Dickens's own weekly serial launched during *Copperfield*'s publication and tackling issues central to the novel. I will make no claims about the aesthetics of serial narrative. And, maybe perversely, I will say nothing about reading. These are all salient matters for a critical treatment of *David Copperfield*, but they exist in relation to—not in default of—the intricately ordered and ordering forms of the serial numbers.

### Number 13: Fathers

Number 13 is a highly integrated installment focusing on the novel's fathers. Each of the three principal fathers featured in these pages—Mr. Spenlow, Mr. Wickfield, and Mr. Peggotty—faces the loss of his daughter to an undesirable suitor. The number is built around three similar scenes which are essentially refractions of one another:

- I A father (Mr. Spenlow) confronts his daughter's suitor, while the daughter's guardian looks on threateningly (ch. 38);
- II A father (Mr. Wickfield) confronts his daughter's suitor, while the daughter's friend looks on helplessly (ch. 39);

III A father (Mr. Peggotty) confides in the friend of his daughter's suitor/abductor, while the daughter's rescuer looks on secretly (ch. 40).

Various dramatic elements bind these three scenes together. The first is set in a coffee-house adjacent to St. Paul's churchyard, while the third is set in a pub off of St. Martin's Lane; both of these scenes (I and III) center on the exchange of letters. Scenes I and II involve a betrayal of trust between business associates (the first chapter being called "A Dissolution of Partnership," the second "Wickfield and Heep"). And scenes II and III offer a before-and-after portrait of a stricken father: Wickfield's wild reaction to Uriah's announcement may evoke Mr. Peggotty's earlier reaction to Emily's departure, but it stands in contrast to the Mr. Peggotty of this installment, who is a picture of calm resolve.

This installment is without question the novel's most concentrated examination of the failures of patriarchy. Led by men like Spenlow, Wickfield, and Peggotty, the fathers come streaming in, fast and feckless. Uriah reveals that his father taught him to turn the screw of humility; Mr. Peggotty speculates that Emily's desire to cross the sea stems from a wish to reunite with her drowned father; and, through the mediation of Miss Murdstone, the father who would protect Dora is allied with the father who tried to destroy David. The fathers carry on great internal struggles; Mr. Spenlow and Mr. Wickfield worry that their own conduct has made them responsible for their daughters' prospective ruin, while Mr. Peggotty fears that Emily doesn't trust in his forgiveness. And each of these fathers is embarrassed by his present economic ties to the suitor. Mr. Spenlow has taken David into his firm; Mr. Wickfield is in partnership with Uriah; Mr. Peggotty cannot find a way to return Steerforth's money that Emily has sent.

Interestingly, the novel itself does not seem to suggest that a father's failures are adequate to destroy his daughter. In *David Copperfield* the consequences of a father's failure are not primarily social or even familial; they wound the father, not the daughter. Dora and Agnes go right where their fathers went wrong, and Emily's fall is not the result of Mr. Peggotty's mistakes (though his ability to correct them becomes so important to bringing her back). These fathers are chastened and corrected at the cost of their own pride, not at the expense of their daughters' survival. This explains the thirteenth number's fascination with the physical aspects of these three men, for even as each one bemoans his daughter's fate, it is really his own composure—whether he bears up, or collapses, or goes wild, or makes himself ridiculous—that is of interest. Mr. Spenlow has "a serenity, a tranquillity, a calm-sunset air about him, which quite affected me. He was so peaceful and resigned—clearly had his affairs in such perfect train, and so systematically wound up—that he was a man to feel touched in the contemplation of" (391; ch. 38). His composure is fraudulent, though, unlike the weather-beaten sturdiness of Mr. Peggotty. The descriptions of Mr. Wickfield are wrenching and tragic, and the histrionic scene of his despair might convince us that Agnes had been quite annihilated, except that she shows up a moment later to remind us that she is just fine.



No. 13 may be uncertain about the father's power to help or hurt his daughter, but it is definite about the struggle between fathers and suitors: this struggle is inevitable, intractable, and sometimes even productive. The clearest case is of course that of Wickfield and Heep, who are bound to one another. But Mr. Peggotty cannot let go of Steerforth either. In one breath he says "*He* was nowt to me now" (414; ch. 40), but in another he says "I'd go till I dropped dead, to lay that money down afore him" (416; ch. 40). Finally, as David trades words with Mr. Spenlow, both men acknowledge that they have become locked in rivalry, each one trying to be the better suitor. Spenlow complains that David has undermined "the confidence that should subsist between my daughter and myself" (389; ch. 38); then, when Spenlow dies, David is jealous of Death, envious of Dora's grief for her father (393; ch. 38). There is no unease in the novel's representation of this conflict, no sense of mutually assured destruction (as one finds in Richardson's *Clarissa*, for instance). Dickens casts the battle between Mr. Spenlow and David as a natural and salutary patriarchal transition. In this respect, Mr. Spenlow is not James Harlowe but Squire Western, solicitous of his daughter's interests but uncomprehending of what they are; and David is not Lovelace but "a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature" (41; ch. 4).

#### Number 14: A Door

Even in a novel fixated on the subject of marriage, this number—the only one to include scenes with Dora in every chapter—could be called the marriage installment, featuring Traddles's proposal to Sophy, the romantic career of Lavinia Spenlow, Uriah's allegations against Annie, Mrs. Micawber's lament for the state of her marriage, and David's wedding. The first and last chapter of the issue chart David's path from courtship to marriage, and the middle chapter brings the trouble in the Strong marriage to a crisis. In this number, the solidity of marriage is thrown radically into question, as some marriages fail to take hold and others collapse in an instant. Tommy Traddles, having witnessed the horrified reactions of the Crewlers to the news of Sophy's engagement, predicts that the festivities "will be much more like a funeral, than a wedding" (419; ch. 41). Aunt Lavinia, though a proponent of Dora and David's romance, seems to believe that the most ideal marriage is the one that always stands in prospect and never takes place. This view is implicitly supported by Aunt Clarissa, who sees Mr. Spenlow's marriage as a low point in her family history. As the number proceeds, Doctor Strong is persuaded that a marriage he had taken pride in has actually been a source of misery for Annie. Uriah presents his findings as the logical culmination of the same suspicions that Mr. Wickfield has harbored over the years, and as Wickfield recoils from the materialization of his own

conviction, Mr. Dick replaces him as a marriage detective, bent on getting to the bottom of the trouble in the Strong relationship. David is drawn into this same realm of cloak-and-dagger marriage counseling when Mrs. Micawber's letter arrives, detailing Mr. Micawber's unaccountable behavior and imploring David to save her marriage.<sup>8</sup>

David's connubial outlook would seem to be far rosier. With Mr. Spewlow out of the picture, Dora is within David's reach, and when the Misses Lavina and Clarissa give their consent to the engagement, David's complacency is absolute. However, the installment's second chapter unsettles the first by calling such assurances into question. By forcing David to bear witness against Annie Strong, Uriah casts a shadow over David's own drama of courtship and marriage and suggests that the new beginning of marriage may not, after all, mean an end to David's troubles. The nuptial dream of the Retrospect chapter can therefore be seen as an answer to the crisis in the middle chapter, brushing away David's doubts about marriage, brushing away Uriah, and even brushing away the troubling Doctor and Mrs. Strong, who are absent from David's fairly well-attended wedding. And yet in the euphoric mist of the wedding day, the doubts remain—expressed, surprisingly, by Dora herself, who closes the Retrospect chapter with the question, "Are you happy now, you foolish boy? . . . and sure you don't repent?" (448; ch. 43).<sup>9</sup>

Dora's question is a reminder that, for better or worse, David has just taken a step to change his condition, to pass into a new sort of life. The fourteenth number emphasizes this idea by associating Dora in each chapter with the image of a door, the door to a distant room in her aunts' house. In the first chapter, Dora is hiding from David, unwilling to come through the door in the role of his fiancée (her refusal is supported by Jip, who is shut up in a plate-warmer); in the second, at the point of meeting Agnes, Dora renews her reluctance, "stopping her ears again, behind the same dull old door" (431; ch. 42). But the third time around, David finds the room vacant; he waits behind the door and Dora eventually knocks for him. It's a meaningful reversal: Dora is ultimately the secure one in the marriage, and her shyness is more easily resolved than the regret that David begins to recognize in himself. Aesthetically, the figural repetition of the door lends Dora's appearances throughout the number the composition and balance of a triptych, as a courtship that had subsisted on fantasy and deferral is now given form. In this novel full of windows, the door privileges passage over vision, encounter over perspective. The door evokes a sexual other that stands apart from the self: Miss Murdstone fears men lurking behind the doors of cupboards, David cannot pass through the door to rescue Emily from the punishing Rosa, and the novel often makes reference to the tale of Bluebeard, with its fatal door. If Agnes is a window, Dora is (anagrammatically) a door, an exciting and uncomfortable other who reminds David that living a life is more than a matter of learning one's own mind.

### Number 6: A New Boy

Unlike numbers 13 and 14, in which diverse situations are paradigmatically linked by a central theme, number 6 seems constructed along a syntagmatic line. It contains the whole account of David's childhood in Canterbury, and scene leads to scene in a natural sequence, ordered chronologically and bound by proximity. But this newfound consistency is itself thematized, as the very idea of a kind of routinized progress—of one foot falling in front of the other—becomes an image to be examined, especially for its contrast with the catastrophic reversals of numbers 1-5. The sixth number interrogates the possibility of this sort of progress and of the new beginnings it depends on.

As the first installment to be set entirely in one place, the sixth number gives a sense of having settled in. But David's settledness is exactly what's at stake, for the equanimity he finds in Canterbury is challenged as quickly as it is established. This begins in the first chapter, "I am a New Boy in more senses than one." Dickens is punning on the phrase "new boy": David is the new boy at Doctor Strong's school and he is also a new boy altogether, as he attempts to distance himself from his past and build a different sort of life. The two senses of David's newness are at odds with one another. When a school enrolls a new boy, the boy himself is exactly not new; he is the same person he was the day before, and it's this fact—the fact that he enters as an outsider—that makes a new boy a person of interest. David does not want to be the new boy in that sense. He wants to be veritably new, to become a person he can no longer recognize. In particular, he tries to forget the hard lessons of his working life in London. This desire sets the stage for the crisis of the installment's middle chapter, "Somebody turns up." The somebody is Mr. Micawber, and his "turning up" unsettles David's newfound complacency; he asks if David is still in the wine trade, makes a friend of Uriah, and gives David the sickening feeling that his London days are not far behind. Micawber's appearance drives home a sense of fatality, a sense that past and future cannot be pried apart. Every success that David has will be measured against the sufferings of his childhood, so that his progress (we might recall Benjamin's Angel of History) will further fixate the novel on the irreducible catastrophe of his origins.

This explains the strangeness of the installment's final chapter, "A Retrospect," which addresses the problem of origins in a curious way: it not only narrates David's movement into the future, but it creates a new past for him. In contrast to the chapter that precedes it, the Retrospect could be called "*Nobody* turns up," since, with the exception of a couple passing references to characters we know, it centers entirely on characters who are entirely new to us. Even as it ushers in the future, the Retrospect chapter summons up a new past. It turns its back on the people and places we've come to know well, and it does so in the service of creating a second, innocent history, one in which guilt and anguish are replaced by foibles and small embarrassments.

That's why everything happens twice in this chapter—the Canterbury life offers David not just the scope to grow up, but the chance to create a new ordinary state to grow up from. David's sense of inferiority to the head boy, his embarrassing episode with Miss Shepherd, his defeat at the hands of the butcher, his immoderate use of bear's grease: these become the new signifiers of David's challenged childhood. These new obstacles are intractable in their own way, and the boy who graduates Doctor Strong's school is in many ways the same boy who entered it: still fighting the butcher, still falling in love, somewhat more confident in his studies, somewhat more measured in his application of bear's grease. But the struggles of growing up in Canterbury provide cover for the profound loneliness and deep deprivations of David's first childhood, deprivations that were glimpsed in the previous chapter. The Retrospect chapter thus makes an end run around "Somebody turns up," giving David a new set of frustrations that can be properly acknowledged and endured. It allows the embarrassments of a second childhood—we could call it Trotwood's childhood—to supplant, at least temporarily, the trauma of the first.<sup>10</sup>

### Number 5: Houseless

Number 5 tests the claim that each installment has a discrete shape, since it seems to be a transitional installment, one that links parts of the story together rather than telling a story of its own. The events in this number—David's journey to Dover, Aunt Betsey's decision to adopt and educate David, and David's arrival in the Wickfield home—look backwards and forwards. The four days on the road are a culmination of the neglect that David experienced throughout the fourth number, while the scenes in Dover and Canterbury look ahead to the sixth. What is gained by thinking about this installment separately, as a composed text? What story is this number trying to tell?

A clue can be found in the final moments of the number, in which David takes leave of Uriah. David has been walking in the street, recollecting the day when, earlier in the installment, he passed through Canterbury in a more desperate and unsettled condition. When he returns to Mr. Wickfield's house, "feeling friendly towards everybody," he shakes Uriah's hand and then instantly regrets the gesture. As he leans out the window, David imagines Uriah's face on the end of a roof-beam "and shut him out in a hurry" (160; ch. 15).

It's telling that the number should end with the image of David shutting someone out, since the pages before have so emphasized the pains of exclusion and houselessness. On the road, David compares himself with "other outcasts, among whom house-doors were locked, and house-dogs barked" (130; ch. 13). When he arrives in Dover, David prays "that I never might be houseless any more, and never might forget the houseless" (143; ch. 13). These two prayers go together;

David's is a desire for belonging, for incorporation. In his first houseless nights on the road, David covets the company of others: he sleeps on the grounds of Salem House so that he might be near the boys, and in Chatham he lies down unseen by a battery wall where he can be "happy in the society of the sentry's footsteps" (131; ch. 13). The ending of the number, then, is both a fulfillment of his prayer and a significant disappointment, as he finds he cannot maintain a friendly feeling toward Uriah and is glad to see him leave. To be housed is not enough; David can only rest contented after performing a symbolic act of eviction.

Throughout the number, in fact, it has become increasingly clear that David's safety will require that others be excluded. Aunt Betsey specializes in keeping people out, and it is a relief that she takes David in precisely because she is, by nature, so very inhospitable. Aunt Betsey chooses winners and losers. She harbors Mr. Dick but wages a ferocious campaign against trespassers, and in a wonderfully ambiguous passage that evokes both David's safety and his vulnerability, Aunt Betsey, by turns, feeds David spoonfuls of broth and chases the neighborhood boys off of her grass (140; ch. 13). The fate of the boys reminds David how tenuous his own situation is, and yet he is one of the chosen, and Aunt Betsey's goodwill towards him is made all the more evident by the violence with which she chases other boys away. David's aunt most clearly affirms his safety not with any speech of acceptance and welcome, but with another act of inhospitality: namely, when she routs the boy leading Miss Murdstone's donkey and then routs the Murdstones themselves.

David is never for a minute the target of Aunt Betsey's exclusions; everything she does in the fifth number makes it clear that she has chosen to take David in, not to send him away. She is constantly planting him one place or another. She collars him and drags him into her parlor; she locks the door to his room to prevent his running away; she fences him in behind a chair for the Murdstone interview; and, having deposited him with Mr. Wickfield, she orders him, "Stay here" (137, 142, 149, 160; chs. 13–15). Aunt Betsey's attempts to secure David provide ample evidence that he has found a refuge, yet by the same token they are reminders that he is a refugee. Aunt Betsey makes this point by contrasting David with his imaginary sister, who, says Aunt Betsey, "would never have run away":

"Oh! you think she wouldn't have run away?" said Mr. Dick.

"Bless and Save the man," exclaimed my aunt, sharply, "how he talks! Don't I know she wouldn't? She would have lived with her god-mother, and we should have been devoted to one another. Where, in the name of wonder, should his sister, Betsey Trotwood, have run from, or to?"

(138; ch. 13)

There would be no occasion, in other words, for fencing the young Betsey Trotwood in—she would have been there in the first place. Finding a refuge is different from belonging. And as someone who does not belong, David is required

to seek signs of his inclusion in the rejection of others. Disappointed though he is in the failure of his handshake with Uriah, David has at least displaced him, shut him out. He can and must take some comfort in that.

Other Installments

In each of the four installments we’ve looked at, elements of the story are brought into relation in a way that creates ideas and effects particular to that number. Likewise, other installments of *David Copperfield* use their form to spin out their own intensities and ironies. No. 4 is a study of neglect, with its pains and its compensations. No. 11 ticks off the multiple fronts along which the narrative will move forward in the wake of the Yarmouth crisis. No. 1 dwells on images of burial, drowning, ghosts, mourning, and hauntedness—images that, despite their centrality to the novel as a whole, disappear in the second number and never coalesce to dominate another installment.

Sometimes a later installment echoes an earlier one, asking us to consider the two in relation to one another. This is the case with numbers 10 and 18, the numbers that narrate Steerforth’s betrayal and his death:

Number 10	Number 18
i. The Micawbers make plans.	i. The Micawbers and the Peggotty group make plans.
ii. David visits the Steerforth home.	ii. Steerforth and Ham wash up on the beach.
iii. Barkis goes out with the tide.	iii. David visits the Steerforth home.
iv. Emily and Steerforth leave England.	iv. The Peggotty group and others leave England.

The degree of repetition is unmistakable, as both numbers present the same characters and the same settings, though the later number effects major substitutions: the death of Steerforth and Ham for the death of Barkis; Emily’s emigration with her uncle for Emily’s emigration with her lover. In no. 18, the second and third chapters of no. 10 are recapitulated in a reverse order, and this change reflects a difference in the role played by Mrs. Steerforth’s home in the two numbers. In no. 10, the scene in Highgate precedes the scenes in Yarmouth; in a sense, the

rupture in the Steerforth household symbolically infects the Peggotty home and predicts the breach between Emily and her foster family. In no. 18, by contrast, the visit to Highgate comes *after* the installment's tragic climax. The Steerforth home no longer poses a threat; it is an outcome, a casualty. The regeneration of the Peggotty group, showcased at the beginning and the end of the installment, sweeps over the destruction of Steerforth and the torment of those who love him. So while number 10 winds the two families together into a single tragic movement, number 18 unwinds them, creating a bifurcated landscape in which the first and last chapters tell a story of the survivors and the middle two chapters tell a story of the casualties. David's place in this landscape is unclear; he is caught between the paths of renewal and destruction. He too will leave England in the following number, but in the tableau given at the end of no. 18, David is no emigrant; he is separated from the Peggotty group and transfixed in place alongside the ruined occupants of the Steerforth home.

Numbers 9 and 12 are also a pair, both located within the boundaries of London but each imagining a different kind of relationship between David and his new-found home. No. 9 is the novel's London idyll, following David from his chambers in the Adelphi, to Doctors' Commons, to a dinner party in Holborn, to the Spenlow home in Norwood, to the lodging of Tommy Traddles in Camden Town. Every new setting is a place of surprise and discovery: the Waterbrooks speak in code; Traddles calls out mysteriously from his place of concealment at the end of a passage; Dora haunts the perspective walks and trellis-work of Mr. Spenlow's suburban manor. No. 12 returns to the London settings of no. 9 but renders them in a different key; the city has been demystified. It is no longer a labyrinth but a background for grief and coping, and this shift is reflected in the chapter titles, which all refer to states of feeling.

Some numbers seem less clearly ordered than the ones we've looked at, bringing together scenes and passages that appear unrelated. And yet, once we take the possibility of order for granted, a disorderly number suggests meanings precisely in the juxtaposition of its diverse elements. No. 17, more than any other installment in the novel, strains the argument for coherence: it features Mr. Peggotty's account of Emily's journey back to England, the demolition of Uriah, and, in the Retrospect chapter, Dora's death. It's the final episode that enters most jarringly, for the first two could be said to be concerned with the settling of accounts. In the first chapter, Mr. Peggotty describes how he plans to dispose of his affairs, and in the second, Micawber exposes Uriah's frauds. Such business matters would seem to have little to do with Dora, as she herself reminds David and Aunt Betsey as she packs them off to their appointment with Micawber: "*I know I sha'n't understand, for a length of time, if there's any business in it. And there's sure to be some business in it!*" (525; ch. 52). But in the context of this number, we are made to consider whether Dora's death, too, might be seen as the settling of an account. And indeed, in what are nearly her last words to David, Dora lays out a cost-benefit analysis of her death: "I was very happy, very. But, as years went on, my dear boy

would have wearied of his child-wife. She would have been less and less a companion for him. He would have been more and more sensible of what was wanting in his home. She wouldn't have improved. It is better as it is" (543; ch. 53). In this moment before her death, the actuarially challenged Dora has suddenly become a good accountant: "very happy, very"; "less and less a companion"; "more and more sensible"; "better as it is." Dora makes the argument that her marriage with David ought to end while the gains outpace the losses, and we're reminded that Dora's demise, like Uriah's fall, puts David in a position to advance.

### The Peggotty Numbers

As we begin to attend to the structure of *David Copperfield's* separate numbers, we become aware of the way the successive numbers recapitulate or diverge from the patterns established in the previous ones. For instance, in all four Retrospect installments of the novel (no. 6, no. 14, no. 17, and no. 19/20)—the numbers that most explicitly chart David's growth and development—Uriah Heep dominates the middle chapter, while Steerforth is entirely absent. There is clearly an act of segregation here; David chooses to see the elimination of Heep as belonging to his own story, whereas he wishes to dissociate himself from the tragedy of Steerforth and the Yarmouth group.

Or consider this remarkable pattern: Daniel Peggotty never appears between pages 14 and 22 of any installment of *David Copperfield*. He is entirely absent from roughly the middle third of each serial part, showing up only around the edges (see Fig. 1). This is true even in no. 16, a number in which Mr. Peggotty appears twice. Given that Mr. Peggotty is featured in thirteen installments—appearing more frequently than all but a few other characters—and that he is present for an average of six and a half pages at a time, the odds of his accidental exclusion from pages 14–22 are astronomically low, about one in fifty thousand. This pattern is very clearly an element of the novel's design, and a mysterious one: Mr. Peggotty's exile from the middle seems almost to be a denial of his narrative centrality, a push toward the margins reminiscent of the moment when Mr. Peggotty and Ham present themselves sheepishly at Salem House, "squeezing one another against the wall" (74; ch. 7).

Mr. Peggotty's life on the margins becomes comprehensible when we realize that his chief action within the novel is to show up. When we first enter his black barge, Mr. Peggotty is not there, but he soon comes home, joyfully and magnificently, as though coming home is what he does best (he comes home twice in the first number). Mr. Peggotty surprises David several times in the novel: as a visitor to David's school, as the determined and ghostly figure who walks the streets in all weathers looking for news of his niece, and as the contented colonist returning to England for a final farewell. The novel seems cheered by the mariner's comings



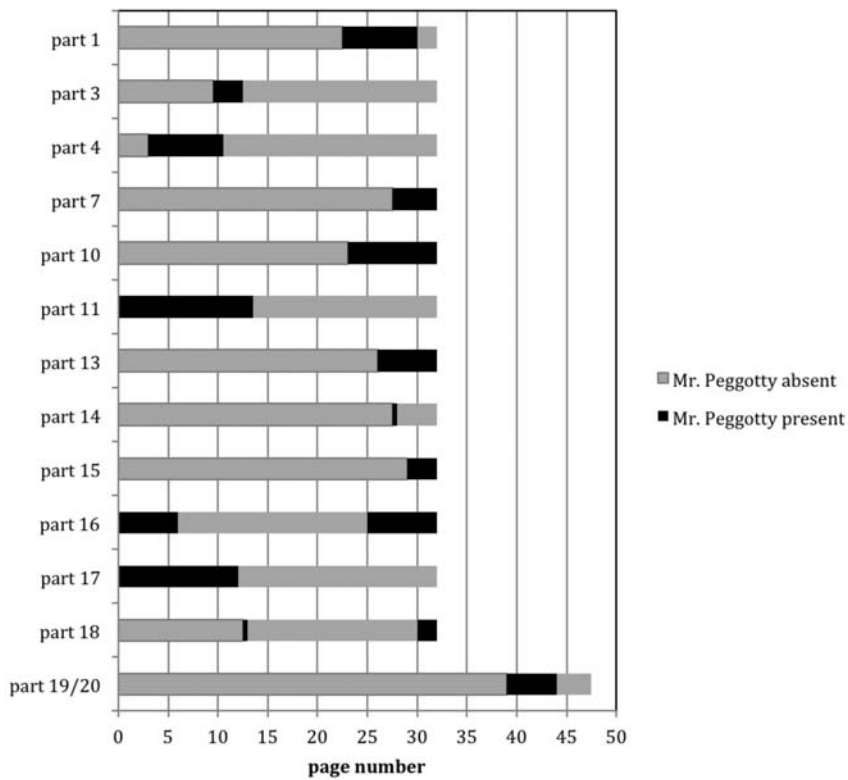


Fig. 1. Mr. Peggotty's absence or presence in installments of *David Copperfield*.

and goings, which combine the freedom of escape with the reassurance of return. Unlike Jack Maldon's, Mr. Peggotty's banishments are a game of Fort-Da; he is sent to the fringe just so he can leap deliciously back into view. Mr. Peggotty trots the globe with wonderful ease. Getting to France is a trifle: "I went across-channel to France, and landed theer, as if I'd fell down from the sky" (413; ch. 40). Even the voyage from Australia seems like a kind of effortless magic: "It's a mort of water . . . fur to come across . . . But water ('specially when 'tis salt) comes nat'ral to me; and friends is dear, and I am heer" (616; ch. 63). The pleasure of Mr. Peggotty's presence comes from the fact that he wasn't there a moment ago and won't be there long. He acknowledges this enticing truth to David, calling himself "a reg'lar Dodman . . . by which he meant snail, and this was an allusion to his being slow to go, for he had attempted to go after every sentence, and had somehow or other come back again" (77; ch. 7). To find him one must look to the borderlands of the serial part, the narrative's staging posts and vanishing points.

But Mr. Peggotty's transience is not simply a narrative expedient; it defines who he is. The novel gives Mr. Peggotty's wanderings a mythical resonance. In many of Dickens's works, a chapter title will render an ordinary character as an allegorical figure: for instance, "The Fugitives," "The Young Man," "The Whelp," "Little Mother," "The Jackal," "Tracking the Bird of Prey." In *David Copperfield*, there are only three such chapter titles, and they all refer to Mr. Peggotty: "The Wanderer," "The Emigrants," and "A Visitor." The fact that Dickens mythologizes this character as a man on the move might seem paradoxical, given that, as the proprietor of one of the few happy homes in the novel, he is such a force for stability. His settledness finds an emblem in the lamp he places nightly in his window for Emily, a light which, Mr. Peggotty explains, "meets two objects. She says, says Em'ly, 'Theer's home!' she says. And likewise, says Em'ly, 'My uncle's theer!'" (317; ch. 31). Yet unlike the lamp in the window, Mr. Peggotty is here today and gone tomorrow, always headed off and always prone to turn up.

The tension between Mr. Peggotty's presence and his absence dominates even the happy scenes of David's childhood visits to Yarmouth. Clara Peggotty informs David that if Daniel's generosity is ever referred to, he "struck the table a heavy blow with his right hand (had split it on one such occasion), and swore a dreadful oath that he would be 'Gormed' if he didn't cut and run for good, if it was ever mentioned again" (25; ch. 3). We feel the absurdity of this, but the joke—or rather the image—does not go away. Just pages later, Mrs. Gummidge is lamenting Mr. Peggotty's abandonment of the home. He has gone from work to a public house, and Mrs. Gummidge complains that "she had known in the morning he would go there" (28; ch. 3). When he returns, she confronts him:

"You've come from The Willing Mind, Dan'l?"

"Why yes, I've took a short spell at The Willing Mind to-night," said Mr. Peggotty.

"I'm sorry I should drive you there," said Mrs. Gummidge.

"Drive! I don't want no driving," returned Mr. Peggotty with an honest laugh. "I only go too ready."

"Very ready," said Mrs. Gummidge, shaking her head, and wiping her eyes. "Yes, yes, very ready. I am sorry it should be along of me that you're so ready."

(29; ch. 3)

Mrs. Gummidge reinforces the image of Mr. Peggotty as a flight risk, a man ready to cut and run if his domestic experiment turns out to be a failure. There are other moments, too, when characters feel they must keep Mr. Peggotty from leaving. When he first wants to follow Emily, Ham blocks the door while Mrs. Gummidge reminds him of the history of the home he has built, a home that, with Emily's defection, he seems ready to give up. Later, when Mr. Peggotty announces he will

take Emily to Australia, Mrs. Gummidge's hysterical reaction reveals that, for her, this rescue plan confirms a long-standing terror that he will leave her high and dry on the beaches of Yarmouth. David himself fears Mr. Peggotty's abandonment; as he listens to Rosa's assault on Emily, David asks repeatedly, "Would he never come?" (509; ch. 50). In none of these cases does Mr. Peggotty disappoint: he maintains the Yarmouth home in his absence, he brings Mrs. Gummidge with him across the sea, and he rescues Emily from the avenging Rosa when David cannot. At the same time, these actions are always a relief, as though Daniel Peggotty's domestic improvisations and supreme acts of loving self-sacrifice must be tested and reaffirmed time after time.<sup>11</sup>

The implication is that, despite the saving power of Daniel Peggotty's generosity, his improvised domesticity cannot offer the stability of another kind of home (presumably, a middle-class home with a woman at the helm). The centrifugal pattern of his serial appearances suggests that, if Mr. Peggotty is going to come through when he is driven to extremities, he must live at the extremes to begin with, and in this sense the serial structure of the novel tells a very different story than the lamp in the window does. Even before Emily runs away, Mr. Peggotty imagines living with her in extremity: "If her uncle was turned out of house and home, and forced to lay down in a dyke, Mas'r Davy, . . . it's my belief she'd go along with him, now!" (313; ch. 30). After she leaves, Mr. Peggotty inaugurates his rescue mission with the following statement: "My dooty here, sir, . . . is done" (322; ch. 32). He wants to dispel the fantasy that he will go after her and, in some sense, stay put as well; to the contrary, Mr. Peggotty insists that his own break with the old life is as absolute as hers. When he dreams of recovering her, his reverie has them together not at home but on the road:

"I bought a country dress to put upon her; and I know'd that, once found, she would walk beside me over them stony roads, go where I would, and never, never, leave me more. To put that dress upon her, and to cast off what she wore—to take her on my arm again, and wander towards home—to stop sometimes upon the road, and heal her bruised feet and her worse-bruised heart—was all that I thowt of now."

(414; ch. 40)

In this dream, home is present only as a place one wanders towards; the place of reunion and healing is the stony road, "go where I would." Mr. Peggotty reiterates this point to Martha: "I know, both as she would go to the wureld's furdest end with me, if she could once see me again; and that she would fly to the wureld's furdest end to keep off seeing me" (485; ch. 47). It is notable that, for Mr. Peggotty, the choice is between going to the world's end *with* him and going there *without* him; there is no question of being together in Yarmouth, though this has been the official plan all along. No doubt this escape fantasy has a social dimension; it is a

desire to leave shame behind, a desire that may itself be produced by shame. But the fantasy is not new, not predicated on shame. As I've argued, Mr. Peggotty's voyages with Emily are the consummation of his character and of the disposition of the narrative, which implies from the outset that a rescue artist such as he must, by nature, be unsettled.

## Conclusion

Seriality is not only a textual feature but a narrative one, and the serial installment, in one way or another, must always answer the question of form. In other words, a novel's narrative structure is fundamentally inflected by its serial form, and many Victorian novels use their serial structure to express and shape their meanings in an architectural sense, irrespective of the experience of reading. This proposition requires little more (or less) than a leap of faith, for as soon as we consent to apply interpretive pressure to a serial installment of a novel, clear patterns emerge and the installment starts to take on the character of a composed work.<sup>12</sup>

Its design then becomes fertile ground for interpretation, not only in its patterns and unities but in its fissures and dissonances. A glance at the installment structure of any Victorian serial novel raises questions with interpretive consequences. Why does *Cranford* establish a male scapegoat motif in the first three numbers, abandon it in the fourth, and return to it in the fifth? What, in the fourth number, takes the place of the male scapegoat? Why does the seventh number of *Bleak House* exclusively employ the third-person narrator, after the novel has alternated points-of-view within every previous installment? Does this relate to the entrance (in no. 7) of Mr. Bucket? Why do three numbers of *Middlemarch* (1, 3, and 8) end with the same two-chapter configuration: a first in which people debate the merits of Fred Vincy's claim on Stone Court, and a second in which Mary Garth passes a verdict on Fred? In a book famously stymied by the problem of closure, why does Eliot repeatedly finish things off with this particular one-two punch?

To give such questions scope requires a different disposition toward the serial than we have normally taken, a decision to interrogate the narrative purpose served by its shape. This approach in no way excludes broader questions about serial narrative as a whole. We can still, as we have done up to this point, read the serial number's formal operations as signs of its textual condition, its status as a hypermediated artifact—resisting narrative incorporation, testifying to the fractures of mass culture, and engineering different sorts of readerly affect. The formal effects of the serial novel are overdetermined, inviting us to see them at once as the epiphenomena of external ideological forces and as the organic expression of an internal logic. This double-vision is essential to the way that we approach other literary forms. Why not the serial?

## NOTES

- 1 The tendency to comment on the merits or faults of each particular number is everywhere present in the newspapers and magazines that reviewed novels in the course of their serial publication. For some instances, see Linda Hughes and Michael Lund's discussion of the *Dombey* reviews (*Victorian Serial* 37).
- 2 For the vicissitudes of serial publishing practice, see Richard Altick (279, 346, 356–57), John Sutherland (20–24, 37–40, 40–98), and Graham Law. Significant studies of the serial practice of individual novelists can be found in John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Sean Grass, Mary Hamer, Hughes and Lund, Carol Martin, Robert Patten, Peter Shillingsburg, and Michael Slater.
- 3 For Norman Feltes, the serial text marks a phase in which authors largely surrendered control over the conditions of their labor and publishers increased profits through an increasingly supple manipulation of the mass audience (5–13). Kevin McLaughlin and David Payne have seen the serial text as a site of ideological contest, in which the artist appropriates the mechanisms of the marketplace as a way of reflecting on and counter-acting a sense of loss associated with commodity culture.
- 4 For instance, they observe that *A Tale of Two Cities* alternates between dramatic and uneventful numbers in order to give readers the experience of living in history, contrasting the perspective of the moment with the “rush of time”; they note, too, that *Dombey and Son* uses the month-long publication interval to allow readers to appreciate the pause between different stages of Florence's life (74; 40–41).
- 5 For instance, they compare the openings of Gaskell's installments of *Wives and Daughters* to the openings of other novels serialized in the *Cornhill*, and they look at the themes of Gaskell's numbers in light of the topical essays that readers would have encountered as they proceeded through the magazine.
- 6 Concurrently, several scholarly projects have emerged—such as the Reading Experiences Database, the *Tale of Two Cities* Reading Project, and the *Our Mutual Friend* Reading Project—that attempt to trace or replicate the experience of serial reading. In support of such reading projects, Ben Winyard explains that “Following a Dickens novel according to its original format and rhythms of publication brings us closer to the work's initial modes, cadences, and temporalities” (par. 3). Some scholars have celebrated the transgressive possibilities of reading serially, seeing in the serial text a release from the imperatives of plot (Garcha 4) and literary canonicity (Cale 11), a release into a “digressive or wandering literary activity that has value in and of itself” (Chavez 792). Addressing not just serial fiction but the Victorian novel generally, Nicholas Dames has argued that, for an influential group of Victorian scholars and essayists, the literary form of the novel was inseparable from the reading practices it engendered.
- 7 I don't mean to imply that there have been no studies of the serial parts that comment on their narrative function independent of reading and print culture. Carol Martin, for instance, offers an extensive analysis of the formal complexity of George Eliot's installments. While she views some formal choices as occasioned by the contingencies of serial publication, she sees others as expressions of ideas or patterns intrinsic to the narrative. Among Dickens critics, William Axton finds that the central numbers of

- Dickens's novels often serve an analogous structural role, though he doesn't investigate the structural complexities of individual numbers. And Robert Patten nicely summarizes the structural characteristics of Dickens's serial novels in a way that momentarily brackets questions of composition and reading ("Publishing in Parts" 29–30).
- 8 Kelly Hager discusses these and other marriage troubles in *David Copperfield*, which she reads as a "novel of divorce" offering "a view of marriage as an institution that does not solve problems of identity and selfhood, but rather creates such problems" (132).
  - 9 Hager notes Dora's prescience here, and explains further that "wisdom in the guise of foolishness seems to be Dora's chief characteristic throughout her married life" (138).
  - 10 Rosemarie Bodenheimer ascribes a related function to the town of Canterbury itself: "It's as if Dickens were seeking a geographical bedrock of memory in a place that long precedes David's existence. Many images from *Blunderstone* are transported to Canterbury . . . Canterbury takes its place as David's home site; thus the relocation from Suffolk to Kent underlies the wish expressed in the title of chapter 16: 'I am a New Boy in More Senses than One'" (182–83).
  - 11 Valerie Sanders explores the emotional complexities of family partings and reunions in Dickens. The happy reunion between parent and child, she argues, is itself a dangerous moment, fraught with "self-blame and recrimination," as the parent is confronted by the emotional toll his or absence has taken on the child. As an example of the emotional intensity of reunion, she cites David's tears as Mr. Peggotty and Ham visit him at Salem House (pars. 3–4, I.3, III.1).
  - 12 In a similar way, Anglea Leighton and Lisa Surridge have argued that the illustrations of serial fiction have a narrative function, as opposed (simply) to a paratextual one.

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