London, Radical Culture, and the Making of the Dickensian Aesthetic

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Introduction

1. See Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 1045. The Charles Dickens Edition might, as Peter Ackroyd puts it, “be seen as encompassing and defining a lifetime’s work. It was truly [Dickens’s] memorial. His last edition.”


10. See Meisel, *Realizations*, 277–78. In what is, in my opinion, the best account of the afterlife of Hogarth’s prints, Martin Meisel reprints the playbill.

11. Pierce Egan, *Life in London, or, the Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq. and his Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom . . . in their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis* (London: Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1822), 4. All subsequent references to *Life in London* are to this edition, and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text following quotations from it.

12. The following announcement with which Dickens launched the first cheap edition of his novels is fairly typical: “It had been intended that this CHEAP EDITION, now
announced, should not be undertaken until the books were much older, or the Author was dead—To become, in his new guise a permanent inmate of many English homes, where, in his old shape he was only known as a guest, or hardly known at all; to be well thumbed and soiled in a plain suit that will be read a great deal by children, and grown people, at the fireside and on the journey; to be hoarded on the humble shelf where there are a few books, and to lie about in libraries like any familiar piece of household stuff—must obviously be among the hopes of a living author venturing on such an enterprise” (quoted in Sutherland, Victorian Novelists, 35).

14. Ibid., 466.
17. There are numerous occasions where Thackeray makes this complaint. For an extended example, see his letter to Edward Fitzgerald, October 7, 1836, in Ray, Letters, vol. 1, 322–23.
19. See Kathryn Chittick, Dickens and the 1830s, 67–91.
23. See Collins, Dickens: Critical Heritage, 126. The Edinburgh Review, for example, wrote that Dickens’s “desultory” education was not “likely to train him to habits of grave and solid speculation” and that as a “comic satirist,” he had made it his business “to observe society in its irregularities and incongruities, not in the sum and total of its operations.”
25. Epstein, Radical Expression.
Chapter 1

8. Ibid., 421.
10. Ibid., 417.
15. For instance, Richard Carlile, whose early work as an editor and publisher represented the hard-line, austere, rationalist strand within radical journalism, found himself forced to move, by the 1830s, to the sort of entertainment-oriented proreform political satire that would attract not just the older plebeian audience that had grown around radical newspapers but middle-class readers as well. In fact, in his *Humorous Sketches*—a journal that he ran with some degree of commercial success between 1833 and 1836—Carlile had already begun the process of relocating radical expression within the moral universe of respectability that Dickens was to complete. Remarkably, when Chapman and Hall sought to repeat the commercial success of *Humorous Sketches,* they hired not only Carlile’s illustrator Robert Seymour but also a young and relatively unknown Dickens as a junior collaborator. See Louis James, *Fiction for the Working Man, 1830–1850,* 27–29.
19. See Ledger, *Dickens,* 114, 142.
23. As I move from Cruikshank to Doyle and Leech, I am indebted to Richard Altick’s point about a certain softening of graphic caricature. See Altick, *Punch,* esp. 122–35.
24. As Ledger shows, Dickens contributed squibs to the *Examiner* during the 1840s. See Ledger, *Dickens*, 142.


29. The comparison between Jerrold and Dickens was, in Philip Collins’s words, a “critical commonplace of the period.” See Collins, *Dickens: Critical Heritage*, 271. Collins’s anthology contains many nineteenth-century essays that make this comparison.

30. Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 294. All subsequent references to *Little Dorrit* are to this edition, and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text following quotations from it.


38. For a more extended description of the “enactment, combined with various circumstances which made the real ‘news’-papers expensive luxuries” and the consequent rise of “periodicals devoted to dealing with affairs in a humourous fashion [that] did not rank with news journals and so, avoiding taxation, could be sold at a price below that which had to be demanded for taxed papers” see Jerrold, *Douglas Jerrold*, 4.


42. See Bourdieu, *Symbolic Power*, 85.


46. William Hone, *The Every-Day Book; or, Everlasting Calendar of Popular Amusements Sports, Past times, Ceremonies, Manners, Customs and Events*, vol. 2, 130.


49. *Hone, The Every-Day Book*, 130

50. Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*, 19, 144, 149, 150.

51. Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 152. All subsequent references to *Sketches by Boz* are to this edition, and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text following quotations from it.
53. Quoted in Wilson, Laughter of Triumph, 340.
56. Quoted in Ledger, Dickens, 49.
57. See Baudelaire, Selected Writings on Art, esp. 231.
58. E. H. Gombrich, Meditations on Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art, 122.
59. Epstein, Radical Expression, 71.

Chapter 2

1. William Makepeace Thackeray, “Going to See a Man Hanged,” in A Shabby Gentle Story and Other Writings, 114.
2. William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1980), 483. All subsequent references to Vanity Fair are to this edition, and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text following quotations from it.
3. On the way Paine uses the present tense and the pronoun “we” in order to constitute his readers into a community of participants, see Smith, Politics of Language, esp. 53–54. On Cobbett’s habitual use of the language of “us” and “them,” see Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, esp. 820–24, where Thompson makes brilliant stylistic distinctions between the writing of Hazlitt and that of Cobbett.
4. “This typical (generic) expression can be regarded as the word’s ‘stylistic aura,’ but this aura belongs not to the word of the language as such but to that genre in which the given word usually functions. It is an echo of the generic whole that resounds in the word.” See M. M. Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” in Speech Genres, 87–88.
10. As Trey Philpotts has shown, variations of “How not do it” circulated in many forms of writing, not all of which were satiric or radical. For example, Carlyle in Past and Present refers to the “Donothingism” of “the non working aristocracy” and he exhorts them to “Descend, O do nothing Pomp; quit thy down cushion.” But Carlyle’s style suggests a social location very different from that of Dickens: it suggests the isolation of the prophetic intellectual rather than embedding him among the excluded majority. See Trey Philpotts, The Companion to Little Dorrit, 134. Michael Cotsell suggests an extremely interesting contemporary source for Dickens’s satire on the Circumlocution Office. This is a satiric piece by Charles Buller entitled “Mr. Mothercountry of the Colonial Office” which appeared in 1840 and was reprinted in 1849. Mr. Mothercountry is modeled on Sir James Stephen, who served as the prototype for Tite Barnacle as well, and he has perfected “a complete art of irrelevant and apparently purposeless correspondence, by which he


12. See endnote 3, but also Philpotts, *Companion*, 141–44.


15. On the emergence of the upper-class “salon” as a major “chronotope” in the nineteenth-century European novel, see Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination*, esp. 246–47.


21. Ibid.


23. See, for example, Walter Bagehot who claimed that while describing the aristocracy, Thackeray’s “thoughts were never long away from the close proximate scene,” in Walter Bagehot, “Sterne and Thackeray,” *National Review* 18 (April 1864): 524.


26. Ibid., 194, 196, 197.

27. Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 245. All subsequent references to *Great Expectations* are to this edition, and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text following quotations from it.

28. See Wood, 182.


30. See Baudelaire, “Some Foreign Caricaturists.”


35. Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Collins, 1953), 320, 243, 41, 320. All subsequent references to *Bleak House* are to this edition, and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text following quotations from it.

36. As Henry Maine wrote, “It does not seem to me a fantastic assertion that the ideas of one of the great novelists of the last generation may be traced to Bentham.” Humphrey House, who quotes this in what was in 1941 a major revisionary book on Dickens, demonstrates the strong presence of ideas from philosophical radicalism in the content of Dickens’s criticism of the state’s institutions. See House, *Dickens World*, esp. 36–40.


38. Thus, the very cover illustration for the monthly parts of *Little Dorrit* featured a
political cartoon that stretched across the top and depicted Britannia in a bath chair, drawn by a set of effete idiots, and followed by a retinue of fools and toadies. This caricatural fragment in conjunction with the extended written text that follows it may be said to implicitly acknowledge the debt that *Little Dorrit* owed to the radical publicists.


40. In itself, Krook’s death cannot be thought of as a serious social intervention. More specifically, it could be argued that the sensational and fantastic nature of Krook’s death seriously compromises its effectiveness as an intervention for reform by sublimating whatever popular discontentment there might actually have existed about Chancery practice—providing the means of its release rather than channeling it for direct action. In an influential essay Jonathan Arac has, indeed, asserted that although Krook is “totally consumed he takes nothing with him.” What Arac does not take into account is that Krook’s death becomes an occasion for the author to step out of the domain of fiction and directly address his audience about the mess that incompetent administrators, arbitrarily catapulted to positions of power, make of England’s key institutions. See Jonathan Arac, “Narrative Form and Social Sense in Bleak House and The French Revolution,” *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 32, no. 1 (1977): 69.


42. Ledger, *Dickens*, 41.

43. Wilson, *Laughter of Triumph*, 240. For an extended description of Hone’s trial, see also 223–59.

44. Ibid., 232, 237.


46. See Chittick, *Dickens and the 1930s*.


50. In his *Life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen*, Leslie Stephen suggested a personal angle that motivated Fitzjames Stephen’s attacks on Dickens’s later novels: “The attack on the ‘Circumlocution Office’ was, I doubt not, especially offensive because ‘Barnacle Tite’ and the effete aristocrats who are satirized in ‘Little Dorrit,’ stood for Sir James Stephen and his friends.” This personal angle only throws into sharper focus the political and cultural threat that Dickens’s fiction posed to social circles inhabited by the Stephens. The passage from Leslie Stephen is quoted in Cotsell, “The Stephen Family.”


53. On the use that Hone made of Sterne’s character Dr. Slop, in his prolonged and innovative engagement with the influential conservative journalist, Dr. John Stoddart, see Wilson, *Laughter of Triumph*, esp. 136–42.

54. Thus, Stephen sought to pin the novel down to the subjectivity of an individual destiny and to those “ordinary domestic relations” within which such subjectivity could be constituted. In these circumstances it is not surprising that Stephen should argue that “using the novel to ventilate opinions” was to step outside its “legitimate province.” These
Notes to Chapter 3

and similar ideas, scattered through the many articles on the novel that Stephen published in the Saturday and the Edinburgh Reviews between 1855 and 1858, suggest that the emphasis on “character” and on familiar domestic experiences that were to become key components of what was later to be designated the “realistic” aesthetic, developed in the course of the polemics that the quarterlies spearheaded against not only “idealism” and “sensationalism,” but also against the radical heritage of the popular Dickensian novel. The phrases quoted from Stephen appear in “Relation of Novels,” 95, “License of Modern Novelists,” 125, and “Relation of Novels,” 113.


Chapter 3

2. John Wright, Mornings at Bow Street, 49, 51.
7. The political ramifications of the crowd have, of course, been extensively and insightfully discussed. What I am looking at is the significance of the crowd in popular representations of the city. On the politics of the “Tyburn crowd” see Peter Linebaugh, The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century.
9. In one of his early works on Hogarth, Ronald Paulson locates the source of this paradox in the artist’s subjectivity. Hogarth, Paulson argues, “gave Goodchild his successful career (and, originally, his own name)—and Idle his face and probably his secret proclivities.” See Ronald Paulson, Popular and Polite Art in the Age of Hogarth and Fielding, 21.
10. In the second volume of his biography of Hogarth Paulson demonstrates that the tension between Hogarth’s fascination with the life on the streets and his moral condemnation of it was very much in evidence in the reception of Industry and Idleness as well. See Paulson, Hogarth, 290–91.
13. David Henkin, City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York, 12. As will be quickly evident to anyone who has read Henkin’s fine book, I am here merely redeploying a distinction that he first made.
15. Ibid., 102.
17. Quoted in Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism, 47.
19. Ibid., xxiii.
23. Quoted in ibid., 137.
35. Quoted in ibid., 251.
39. Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, 37. As Kate Flint has shown, Dickens was familiar with the figure of Asmodeus. See Kate Flint, *Dickens*, 71.
42. Ibid., 26.
44. Ibid., 115. As de Certeau argues, “Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice.”
45. Ibid., 115.

Chapter 4

13. Ibid., 125.
17. An important exception is Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working Class Culture in America*. As will become quickly evident, Denning’s work has influenced my own reading of Lady Dedlock.
19. The privileging of the psychologically authentic character had begun in the pages of the great Victorian quarterlies themselves and it was Lewes himself who, in an article devoted significantly to Thackeray, made the distinction that was to remain normative at least for the next hundred and twenty years, between artists who drew their characters from “Life” and those who found their inspiration in “the phantasmagoria of the stage and circulating library.” About twenty years later, the young Henry James was articulating the assumptions of what was now a fairly well-developed critical tradition when, while launching a full-blown realistic critique against Dickens, he repeated Lewes’s distinction in his own terms. For James, since what Dickens offered was not human beings at all but “a community of eccentrics,” it would be appropriate to speak of him as a writer who produced not characters, but “simply figures.” The phrases from Lewes’s writing appear in G. H. Lewes, “Recent Novels: French and English,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 36 (December 1847): 687, and G. H. Lewes, Untitled, *Morning Chronicle*, March 6, 1848: 440.
21. Ibid., 150.
22. Ibid., 151.

Chapter 5

5. For detailed accounts of this celebratory discourse as it unfolded during the late 1850s and ’60s, see Fielden, “Samuel Smiles,” and Harrison, “Victorian Gospel.”
7. I am aware, of course, that the articulation of social difference in *Great Expectations*—as in *Little Dorrit*—is ultimately contained within the work-oriented, self-improving ideology of the entrepreneurial middle class. This is, moreover, consistent with the long tradition of scholarship that, following the seminal work of Humphrey House, embeds the
“radicalism” that informs Dickens’s fiction as a whole to the ideological universe of the middle class. Thus the story of Pip’s improvement—his recognition of gentlemanliness as both emotionally impoverishing and economically parasitic—is consistent with the ideological impulse that produced a whole line of Dickensian heroes: David Copperfield, George Rouncewell, Daniel Doyce. However, like Little Dorrit, whose political orientation unfolds across two registers—on the one hand, as the entrepreneurial Daniel Doyce’s deeply critical but patient and reasonable response to the workings of an aristocracy-dominated bureaucracy and, on the other, as the more strident, fundamentally oppositional language of radicalism reactivated in the authorial comments on the Circumlocution Office—Great Expectations sustains a radical articulation of class divisions even as it seeks, through a range of discursive maneuvers, to reconcile Pip to Joe and to complete the story of the former’s growth into a humane, hardworking, productive, and reasonable member of official society. Joe may help to facilitate Pip’s rehabilitation but his function, through most of the novel, is to expose the limits of Pip’s gentlemanly personality. For an account of Great Expectations along the lines outlined above see Robin Gilmour, The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel; on Little Dorrit see William Myers “The Radicalism of Little Dorrit” in Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century, ed. John Lucas, pp. 75–105.

8. As Gallagher puts it, “Pip’s metropolitan environment not only fails to resemble the realized societies of Balzac’s Paris or Eliot’s Middlemarch, but also bears little likeness to Dickens’s normal London. Sparsely populated, with a higher-than-usual proportion of eccentrics, this is a milieu of the margins . . . .” See Gallagher and Greenblatt, Practicing New Historicism, 180.

10. Ibid., 103.
13. On the chronotope, see Bakhtin, Dialogical Imagination, 84.
15. De Certeau, Practice of Everyday Life, 103.
16. Ibid., 103.
17. On the significance of the mésalliance as an expressive resource within the novel, see Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics, esp. 123–24.
18. As James Wheatly suggests, “Thackeray is at his best making this period of adjustment not only dramatically believable but very nearly the proper response to the life presented in the novel. A brief infatuation with the lower-class Fanny is presented as being in part an unconscious revulsion from so passionless a life . . . .” See James H. Wheatly, Patterns in Thackeray’s Fiction, 111. See also Anna Monsarrat, An Uneasy Victorian: Thackeray the Man, 233.
22. In an essay entitled significantly “Sexuality and Solitude” where he declares his intention to move from his study of “asylums, prisons and so on” to that of power relations as they unfold in the domain of subjectivity, Foucault is explicit in linking “technologies of the self” to sexuality. See Michel Foucault, in On Signs: A Semiotic Reader, ed. Marshall Blonsky, 367.
23. De Certeau, Practice of Everyday Life, 63.
25. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 272. As will be quickly evident, I have drawn heavily on Foucault’s work for my analysis of criminality in *Great Expectations*.

**Chapter 6**

2. Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), 542. All subsequent references to *Our Mutual Friend* are to this edition, and page numbers appear parenthetically in the text following quotations from it.
15. For a fuller discussion see my introduction.
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