DICKENS'S SKETCHES BY BOZ, EXERCISES IN THE CRAFT OF FICTION

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DICKENS'S SKETCHES BY BOZ, EXERCISES IN THE CRAFT OF FICTION

By

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AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

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by Duane Kenneth DeVries

The purpose of this study is to prove that, just as the development of Dickens's imagination during childhood and his goals and interests as a young man were somehow necessary steps in his development into a writer, so the fifty-nine sketches and tales that he published between 1833 and 1836, and collected as Sketches by Boz, comprise--as exercises in the craft of fiction--a series of steps in Dickens's development into a novelist, a goal he virtually achieved with Pickwick Papers.

The first chapter begins with a review of Dickens's childhood reading, play-going, and other amusements that resulted in the lonely boy's imaginative daydreaming, pretending, play-acting, and, ultimately, juvenile writing, all clear indications, in retrospect, of the direction Dickens's life would take. As a young man, determinedly advancing from lawyer's clerk to legal shorthand recorder to actor to newspaper reporter, Dickens acquired an education for himself in literature and in reality. And he continued writing. His letters, poems, and plays of this

time, though crude, reveal his interest in writing and give occasional glimpses of some talent on his part as an author.

The second chapter deals with Dickens's first tales, which appeared in the Monthly Magazine between late 1833 and early 1835. Too strongly influenced by contemporary theatrical farces, they afford sufficient evidence that Dickens was not then capable of writing Pickwick Papers. Yet they do show him improving slightly over the faulty character conception, distorted plot emphasis, inadequately conceived scenes, stilted dialogue, awkward narrative progression, and other flaws that mar the earliest of these tales.

Chapter three investigates the essays Dickens wrote between late 1834 and early 1836 for various publications. He did not abandon his exercises in the craft of fiction, however, for he continued to practice the techniques of fiction in paragraphs of description, in brief characterizations, in narrative illustrations, in comic, satiric, and sentimental approaches to his subject--all parts of these descriptive "sketches." The fact that he was writing essays rather than fiction produced a greater stress on reality and, partly as a result, on more precisely detailed characters, scenes, and settings. Most important, he thus practiced the various aspects of fiction virtually in isolation from one another. When he returned to writing tales for Bell's Life in London, Dickens was much better

equipped to do so. Although these tales show little improvement in plot development, they are far richer in characterization, scenic fullness, description, tone, and style than were the Monthly Magazine pieces.

As the last chapter shows, by late 1835 Dickens had developed into a conscious--though not always adept--craftsman. "The Great Winglebury Duel," "The Tuggses at Ramsgate," and particularly "The Black Veil" reveal his new concern with structure--the unification of plot, characters, setting, tone, and the mixture of dramatic and pictorial scenes to support a predetermined theme or effect. Basic flaws are still evident, but Dickens is obviously ready to write not only Pickwick Papers but "connected works of fiction of a higher grade."

Studying the Sketches in a relatively chronological sequence thus reveals an important series of steps in Dickens's early development as a craftsman, a change from a young man with a desire to write stories and sketches that will amuse people, but not knowing quite how to go about it, into an author fairly well practiced in the techniques of fiction writing, increasingly conscious of the effects he can attain with such techniques, and rather proficient in combining them to produce a fairly unified, relatively effective comic or serious story.

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PREFACE

What began as a study to be entitled "Charles Dickens and the Craft of Fiction," an examination of Dickens's development as a conscious literary artist from Sketches by Boz through Edwin Drood, has somehow dwindled into the present study, "Dickens's Sketches by Boz, Exercises in the Craft of Fiction." I have not abandoned my larger project, hoping to produce, within the next few years, a rather thick volume, of which the present study will comprise a part. I do not feel, however, that in thus limiting my subject I have proportionally restricted its significance. As I read and re-read the essays and tales that make up the Sketches in the order of their publication, studied the important revisions that Dickens made in some of them, examined Dickens's comments on these early writings, accumulated the bits and pieces of commentary that modern scholars have devoted to them, and closely investigated their contents and techniques, it soon became apparent to me that the Sketches by Boz played a more important role in Dickens's early development as a craftsman of the novel than most scholars have indicated.

As I plan to show in the following chapters, the interests and activities of Dickens's childhood, youth, and young manhood helped to develop his imagination and gave

him needed practice in acting and writing, thus preparing him for his career as an author. And the tales and essays that he wrote between 1833 and 1836 show him developing from a relatively unconscious to a fairly conscious--though not always adept--craftsman in the art of fiction. In the Sketches one can see the young author working with the ideas and the techniques that will later blossom, with typical Dickensian richness, into the superb artistry of the later novels. The surprising qualities of such a youthful work as Pickwick Papers (Dickens was only twenty-four when he began it) become more understandable in the light of a closer look at Dickens's even earlier Sketches by Boz. The later work no doubt deserves the praise given to it, but some of the Sketches, particularly those written in 1835 and 1836, are of equally high quality. If this is predominantly a study of Dickens's early development as a writer of fiction, culminating in Pickwick Papers, it is also, in no small part, a study of the Sketches by Boz themselves, particularly of their gradually increasing quality as literature.

I wish to express an indebtedness that may not always be obvious in the footnotes to the biographies of Dickens by John Forster and Edgar Johnson and to John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson's pioneering study, Dickens at Work. Certain suggestions made in Butt and Tillotson's chapter on Sketches by Boz had much to do with the direction portions of this study have taken.

I wish to express my gratitude for various kindnesses to the librarians of the libraries of Michigan State University, Ohio University, Ohio State University, Harvard University, and Smith College.

Finally, I wish particularly to acknowledge the help and encouragement given to me by Dr. James D. Rust, who directed the writing of this dissertation; by Drs. C. David Mead and Bernard J. Paris, the other members of my dissertation committee; and by my wife, who postponed her graduate education in order that I might complete mine.

All references to Dickens's works, unless otherwise noted, are to the National Library Edition (New York: Bigelow, Brown and Company, n.d.), which is consistently abbreviated in the text and footnotes as NLE. Individual works in this edition are abbreviated in the footnotes as follows:

BR	Barnaby Rudge
Chr. St.	Christmas Stories
DC	David Copperfield
GE	Great Expectations
Misc. P.	Miscellaneous Papers
NN	Nicholas Nickleby
OT	Oliver Twist
PP	Pickwick Papers
Repr. P.	Reprinted Pieces
SB	Sketches by Boz
TTC	A Tale of Two Cities
UT	The Uncommercial Traveller.

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CHAPTER I

BEGINNINGS AND PREPARATIONS

Beginnings

Nearly everyone knows about the boy named Charles Dickens who had a limited education, whose father's debts forced him to work in a blacking factory for months while his father forcibly resided in debtors' prison, and who at fifteen entered the adult world as a lawyer's office boy. Many people know, too, that this office boy learned shorthand, became a Parliamentary reporter, a newspaper reporter, and, around August, 1836, with the fifth installment of Pickwick Papers, the sensation of the literary world. Not so widely known, however, is that the most popular--some say the greatest--novelist of the nineteenth century had published the first series of his Sketches by Boz in February of that year, with a second series following in December. Together, these two series make up a group of fifty-nine tales and essays written between 1833 and 1836 that twentieth century scholars usually pass lightly over in their studies of Dickens's artistic achievements, and that few people read these days. As Dickens's first published writings, these "sketches" are important in themselves, for they show Dickens's early struggles with matters of

craftsmanship and his early attempts to write something of literary value. More significantly, however, in the light of the novels he was later to write, these early works were also exercises for Dickens in the craft of fiction. When read in the order of their writing, they not only show Dickens practicing the various aspects of fiction at relatively simple levels but also show his growing awareness of his craft and the increasing effectiveness with which he utilized its techniques. If most of the contemporary critics were pleasantly surprised by the wit, the richness of detail, and the sheer exuberance of Pickwick Papers, those who had reviewed the first series of Sketches by Boz a few months earlier had praised it for similar virtues and seen it as the first work of a promising young author.[1] Dickens's writing of the pieces that comprise the Sketches certainly enabled him to make Pickwick Papers as good as critics still claim it to be and no doubt prepared him to advance more rapidly than he might otherwise have as a writer of "connected works of fiction of a higher grade."[2]

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[1]For a collection of contemporary criticism of SB, see W[alter] D[exter]'s "The Reception of Dickens's First Book," Dickn, XXXII (1936), 43-50. For excerpts from early reviews of the parts of PP, see Walter Dexter's "How Press and Public Received 'The Pickwick Papers,'" Nineteenth Century and After, CXIX (1936), 318-329, or Walter Dexter and J. W. T. Ley's The Origin of Pickwick (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1936), pp. 67-83. The abbreviations used for Dickens's works are explained in the preface.

[2]"Preface to the Second Edition of the First Series" of SB, in NLE, I, i, xii.

The story of Dickens's development as a writer has its beginnings much farther back than 1833, however, as it is the purpose of this introductory chapter to show. In a way, it is not until one familiarizes himself with the imaginative, creative side of Dickens's early life that he can adequately understand the ease with which Dickens did become a professional writer, once he realized that he had somehow been preparing himself for such an occupation for years. The period to 1827, the year that Dickens completed the slight formal education he had managed to acquire, is particularly significant for what it shows of the development of Dickens's imagination. The period between 1827 and 1833, the year that Dickens became a published author, is correspondingly important not only for what it reveals of Dickens's search for a profession that would somehow satisfy desires and dreams evoked by his imaginative life but also for the additional education it supplied him in literature, reality, and writing itself.

To those who knew Dickens as a child in Chatham and London, the birth and development of the imagination necessary for his later achievements in literature must have seemed significant only in retrospect. To Dickens himself, his reading, his visits to the theater, his participation in other forms of entertainment, his daydreaming, his pretending, his acting in plays, and his juvenile attempts at writing must have seemed more childhood prerogatives and efforts to bring amusement into an often lonely and

frustrating life than any preparation for a literary future. Nevertheless, the activities of his childhood were an important part of just such a preparation.

His loneliness was partly the result of frequent illnesses, attacks of violent spasms, that prevented him from engaging in active childhood sports; while other children played, he read nearby. Dickens always believed, John Forster, his friend and first biographer, states, that "this early sickness had brought to himself one inestimable advantage in the circumstance of his weak health having strongly inclined him to reading."[3] But, in addition, his father's financial troubles, which came to a head in 1824 but had been forming several years, deepened his loneliness and frustrated his embryonic social pretensions and his more valuable desire to acquire a decent education. In later years, he wrote of his early experiences in the blacking factory and in the frightening and inhospitable city: "I do not write resentfully or angrily: for I know all these things have worked together to make me what I am."[4] Even if one recognizes the validity of this insight, he may also detect a note of bitterness. In the autobiographical fragment that Dickens wrote for Forster in the late 1840's, he certainly held his parents responsible for

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[3]John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, ed. J. W. T. Ley (London: Cecil Palmer, 1928), p. 3. This work was originally published in three volumes, London, 1872-1874.

[4]Forster, p. 35.

the experiences that, Edmund Wilson states, "produced in Charles Dickens a trauma from which he suffered all his life."[5]

The youthful Dickens no doubt was, as he later described himself, "a lonely boy" and "a very small and not-over-particularly-taken-care-of boy,"[6] but, like David Copperfield, he was also "a child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager, delicate," and "an innocent romantic boy, making his imaginative world out of . . . strange experiences and sordid things."[7] If his parents were responsible for the lasting hurt on his psyche, they, and others also, permitted and frequently encouraged the life of fancy that the Dickens who wrote Hard Times would strongly advocate.

One must give some credit to Dickens's schoolmasters[8] for the education he received, but his parents also

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[5]Forster, pp. 25-26, 29, 34-35; Edmund Wilson, The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 6.

[6]"Railway Dreaming," Misc. P., in NLE, XVIII, ii, 114; The Letters of Charles Dickens (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1938 [The Nonesuch Dickens, ed. Arthur Waugh, et al.]), I, 315, to Washington Irving, 4/21/41. Hereafter cited as Nonesuch Let.

[7]DC, in NLE, IX, i, 204 and 225. The first quotation is a slight variant of Dickens's description of himself as a child, to be found in his autobiographical fragment. See Forster, p. 25.

[8]An elderly woman who conducted a dame school over a Chatham dyer's shop; William Giles, an Oxford graduate, who ran a day school in Chatham which Dickens attended probably between 1820 and 1822; and Mr. Jones and the teachers at Wellington House Academy, which Dickens attended between late 1824 and early 1827.

contributed much. Forster reports Dickens as having "frequently been heard to say that his first desire for knowledge, and his earliest passion for reading, were awakened by his mother, from whom he learned the rudiments not only of English, but also, a little later, of Latin. She taught him, he was convinced, thoroughly well."[9] His mother and his maternal grandmother, then still housekeeper to Lord Crewe, introduced him to Little Red Riding-Hood, Jack the Giantkiller, Robin Hood, Valentine and Orson, Bluebeard, the Yellow Dwarf and "all Mother Bunch's wonders," and a multitude of sultans and Scheherazades, princes and princesses, dwarfs and fairies who filled the pages of "the most astonishing picture-books."[10] There was also Dr. Faustus, "going down to a very red and yellow perdition, under the superintendance of three green personages of a scaly humour, with excrescential serpents growing out of their blade-bones"; the Golden Dreamer and the Norwich Fortune Teller with their instructions "for making the dumb cake, and reading destinies in tea-cups"; song books, such as the Little Warblers and Fairburn's Comic Songsters; and ballads "on the old ballad paper and in the old confusion of types" with gaudy symbolic illustrations. These samples of his early books he years later discovered

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[9]Forster, pp. 3-4.

[10]"A Christmas Tree" and "The Child's Story," Chr. St., in NLE, XIII, i, 8-10, 52.

in the window of a French bookshop: "All these as of yore, when they were infinite delights to me!"[11] He also listened avidly to his grandmother's stories from the pages of history and to her personal reminiscences.[12]

Storytelling was also an accomplishment of Mary Weller, the nurse of the Dickens children during their years in Chatham (1817-1822), who told them horrifying tales of murder and supernatural wonders. Her stories of Captain Murderer, a Bluebeardian villain of the worst sort; of Chips, the ship's carpenter who was fatally plagued by rats of all kinds and shapes; of ghastly child-craving Black Cats; of gigantic animals; and of ghostly apparitions, Dickens relates at length in "Nurse's Stories."[13] Apparently his Aunt Mary, who lived in Chatham with the family until her marriage, told stories of a similar nature, for, in "The Holly-Tree," Dickens recalls sitting "at the knee of a sallow woman with a fishy eye, an aquiline nose, and a green gown," listening not only to stories about a landlord who lost his customers because he put them into pies and about a servant girl who married and then murdered an infamous housebreaker but also about a brother-in-law who was everything that Dickens's father was not, who had everything

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[11] "Out of the Season," Repr. P., in NLE, XVII, ii, 295.

[12] Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), p. 8.

[13] UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 193-204.

that his father did not, and whose escapades, he later discovered, were strongly reminiscent of Raymond and Agnes, or The Bleeding Nun.[14] Such storytelling apparently was as much a tradition in the Dickens's family as were John Dickens's financial troubles. In another essay Dickens writes of ghost stories told around his family's annual Christmas tree.[15]

To his father, too, Dickens owed much of his imaginative life. J. W. T. Ley, partly contradicting Forster's harsh picture of John Dickens, believes that Charles "owed the awakening of his imagination to his picturesque and lovable, if happy-go-lucky father," citing as evidence Charles's walks with his father about the Chatham dockyard, their boating trips on the Medway, and their tramps along the Dover Road.[16] John Dickens's love of "the oratorical gesture and the display of hospitality," resulting in "friends about the festal board--as he would have called it--a glowing hearth, songs and toasts,"[17] often included calling in his young son and daughter to recite comic songs and stories he had taught them. Much later Dickens told Forster that he never remembered such entertainment but that "his

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[14]"The Holly Tree," Chr. St., in NLE, XIII, i, 130-132.

[15]"A Christmas Tree," Chr. St., in NLE, XIII, i, 15.

[16]Ley's note, in Forster, p. 19, n. 10.

[17]Johnson, p. 8.

own shrill little voice of childhood did not again tingle in his ears, and he blushed to think what a horrible little nuisance he must have been to unoffending grown-up people who were called upon to admire him."[18] But if the recollections of some of these very people are accurate, his solo performances and those in company with his sister were indeed enjoyable.[19] "He was proud of me, in his way," Dickens himself recollected of his father, "and had a great admiration of the comic singing."[20]

According to Forster, the hardships of Dickens's childhood gave rise to that energy and determination to succeed that later helped to advance his career as a writer.[21] Obviously, such ambition in itself could not have made Dickens even an adequate writer. It needed to be strongly reinforced by a highly developed fancy, by what one might call a "producing" or a "creating" imagination--that is, one that constantly manifests itself in some form of overt creativity. The development of just such an imagination was

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[18]Forster, p. 6.

[19]Robert Langton, The Childhood and Youth of Charles Dickens, rev. and enl. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), p. 39; Forster, pp. 12, 19; Johnson, pp. 14-15. Langton quotes Mary Weller as telling him that "a rather favourite piece for recitation by Charles at this time was 'The Voice of the Sluggard' from Dr. Watts, and the little boy used to give it with great effect, and with such action and such attitudes" (Langton, p. 26).

[20]Forster, p. 10.

[21]Forster, pp. 38-39.

an important part of Dickens's youth. To begin with, Dickens was early provided with the basic materials necessary for the development of the imagination itself. They came to him from the reading, the theater-going, and the other entertaining diversions of his youth and, as will be seen in Chapters II, III, and IV, frequently furnished the subject matter and the models for his first published writings.

The books Dickens read as a child were, in Forster's words, "the birthplace of his fancy,"[22] as they were of David Copperfield's. Many of the books Dickens himself read were those he later included in David's little library: Smollett's Roderick Random, Humphrey Clinker, and Peregrine Pickle, Fielding's Tom Jones, Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield, Cervante's Don Quixote, Le Sage's Gil Blas, Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, the Arabian Nights and Tales of the Genii, and several volumes of voyages and travels.[23] To this list Forster adds the Tatler and Spectator, Johnson's Idler, Goldsmith's Citizen of the World, Mrs. Inchbald's Collection of Farces and Other Afterpieces (published in seven volumes in 1809), and a cheap series of novels then in the course of publication, which probably included most of the fiction listed above.[24] Other works that should also be included are the essays of Benjamin Franklin (at least

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[22]Forster, p. 8.

[23]DC, in NLE, IX, i, 73-74.

[24]Forster, p. 8.

his paper, "The Art of Procuring Pleasant Dreams")[25] a life of Lord Nelson,[26] Sterne's Sentimental Journey[27] and probably Tristram Shandy,[28] the Life or Memoirs of Baron Trenck,[29] Ruy Blas,[30] Philip Quarll,[31] Gulliver's Travels,[32] and many of Washington Irving's works.[33] There are others, no doubt--books that Dickens never mentioned elsewhere or that he referred to in such a context that one cannot clearly associate them with "the two bedroom shelves"[34] of books that he read and reread and that were at times his only pleasure.[35] Reflecting Dickens's recollections of his own childhood, David Copperfield exclaims of his youthful reading: "This reading was my only and my constant comfort.

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[25]"Lying Awake," Repr. P., in NLE, XVII, ii, 210.

[26]"Nurse's Stories," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 193.

[27]"Where We Stopped Growing," Misc. P., in NLE, XVIII, i, 339.

[28]Forster, p. 464.

[29]"Where We Stopped Growing," Misc. P., in NLE, XVIII, i, 342.

[30]"Nurse's Stories," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 192.

[31]"A Christmas Tree," Chr. St., in NLE, XIII, i, 11.

[32]"Nurse's Stories," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 193.

[33]Nonesuch Let., I, 316, to Washington Irving, 4/21/41.

[34]"Where We Stopped Growing," Misc. P., in NLE, XVIII, i, 339.

[35]Forster, p. 8.

When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life. Every barn in the neighbourhood, and every foot of the churchyard has some association of its own, in my mind, connected with these books, and stood for some locality made famous in them."[36] Dickens was, Mary Weller recalled much later, "a terrible boy to read, and his custom was to sit with his book in his left hand, holding his wrist with his right hand, and constantly moving it up and down, and at the same time sucking his tongue."[37]

Dickens also read other books during his childhood. Very little record remains of those he read at the schools he attended, but, given the typical school curriculum of the early nineteenth century, he probably encountered little in the way of literature.[38] It is known that he recited a piece about a Dr. Bolus from the Humourist's Miscellany while at William Giles's school, but such entertainment (though scarcely literary) was certainly not common.[39] Dickens did have Latin instructors and quite likely read selections from Ovid, Virgil, Terrence, Plautus, Cicero,

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[36] NLE, IX, i, 74.

[37] Langton, p. 25.

[38] Richard D. Altick, The English Common Reader (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 141-187, passim.

[39] Forster, p. 7.

and Horace, but little more.[40] Elsewhere, however, his literary education continued. Jane Porter's Scottish Chiefs, Holbein's Dance of Death, George Colman the Elder's Broad Grins, and undoubtedly other works were loaned to him by the people in the bookshop under the Soho lodgings of his Uncle Thomas Barrow, whom the Dickens family frequently visited.[41] Goldsmith's Bee was presented to him by William Giles when Dickens left Chatham.[42] Dickens was also familiar with Thomas Day's Sandford and Merton, whose Mr. Barlow, tutor to Harry Sandford and Tommy Merton, he was later to castigate as an "instructive monomaniac," and to accuse of an insensibility that "not only cast its own gloom over my childhood, but blighted even the sixpenny jest-books of the time; for, groaning under a moral spell constraining me to refer all things to Mr. Barlow, I could not choose but ask myself in a whisper when tickled by a printed jest, 'What would he think of it? What would he see in it?'"[43] One such jest-book Dickens occasionally purchased on his way home from a day's work at Warren's Blacking whenever he had the necessary twopence, saved by skipping meals.

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[40]"A Christmas Tree," Chr. St., in NLE, XIII, i, 14; "Our School," Repr. P., in NLE, XVII, ii, 162; Forster, p. 42; Johnson, p. 51.

[41]Forster, p. 12.

[42]Forster, p. 9.

[43]"Mr. Barlow," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 435, 436.

This, the Portfolio of Entertaining and Instructive Varieties in History, Science, Literature, the Fine Arts, etc., despite its pretentious title consisted mainly of literary parodies.[44] A year or so later, he and the other boys at Wellington House Academy voraciously downed all the cheap penny and Saturday magazines they could afford. Of one of these, the Terrific Register; or, Record of Crimes, Judgments, Providences, and Calamities, Dickens later wrote: "I used, when I was at school, to take in the Terrific Register, making myself unspeakably miserable, and frightening my very wits out of my head for the small charge of a penny weekly; which considering that there was an illustration to every number, in which there was always a pool of blood, and at least one body, was cheap."[45] The boys also read their share of pamphlet romances.[46]

Besides books, the theater played a large part in the imaginative life of the young Dickens. As a child in Chatham, he was frequently taken to performances at the Theatre Royal in Rochester by his father, by Mathew Lamert,

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[44]Forster, p. 27.

[45]Forster, pp. 43-44.

[46]Forster, p. 42. Dickens had also, apparently, read such romances much earlier. In the "Preface to the First Cheap Edition" of Pickwick Papers (1847) he speaks of "a dim recollection of certain interminable novels in [shilling numbers], which used, some five-and-twenty years ago, to be carried about the country by pedlars, and over some of which I remember to have shed innumberable tears, before I served my apprenticeship to Life." (in NLE, II, i, xvi-xvii).

an army surgeon with the Chatham Ordnance Hospital, and soon to become Charles's uncle by marriage, and a little later by James Lamert, Matthew's son.[47] Unfortunately, Dickens seldom mentioned the names of plays seen at this theater. The only references in his later writings were to performances of Shakespeare's Richard III and Macbeth, William Barrymore's version of Pixérécourt's Dog of Montargis, Rowe's tragedy of Jane Shore, Lillo's George Barnwell, and, though not by name, other typical farces and melodramas.[48] He no doubt saw many of the plays popular in the early nineteenth century and a number of great performers--Edmund Kean, Charles Mathews, Joseph Grimaldi--more often, one presumes, at the London theaters than at the theater in Rochester.[49] In a Household Words paper, "Gone Astray," Dickens describes a performance at a London theater, typical of those he must also have seen at Rochester's Theatre Royal, that opened with a donkey being auctioned off by a clown (and won, obviously, by a confederate in the audience); these antics were followed by an elaborately staged melodrama involving a shipwreck, which was followed in turn by a piece somewhat reminiscent of the Dog of Montargis.[50] He was also an awed

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[47]Forster, p. 7.

[48]"Dullborough Town," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 154-155; "A Christmas Tree," Chr. St., in NLE, XIII, i, 12; Johnson, p. 23.

[49]Langton, p. 29; Johnson, p. 23; Forster, pp. 104-105.

[50]"Gone Astray," Misc. P., in NLE, XVIII, i, 388-391.

spectator at pantomimes at the Theatre Royal and those "which came lumbering down in Richardson's waggons at fair time to the dull little town in which we had the honour to be brought up."[51] One December, when he was seven, his father even took him to London to see the Christmas pantomimes at the great theaters there.[52] In addition, James Lamert occasionally got up private theatricals, in which even Dr. Lamert sometimes acted, in the empty rooms of the Ordnance Hospital.[53] Young Dickens saw these, too, but their names have gone unrecorded. Mary Weller told Robert Langton, some sixty years later, that in the happy Chatham days the Dickens children and their friends sometimes "would sing, recite, and perform parts of plays" at home. No doubt some of these plays came from Mrs. Inchbald's collection of farces.[54]

Dickens was also an enthusiastic manager of toy theaters. One such, built for him by James Lamert, kept him amused during the bad days in London,[55] and another, built by his fellow students at Wellington House Academy, occupied

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[51]"Introductory Chapter to 'Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi,'" Repr. P., in NLE, XVII, ii, 345. Also see the description in "Greenwich Fair," SB, in NLE, I, i, 143-146.

[52]Forster, p. 104.

[53]Forster, pp. 6-7.

[54]Langton, p. 25.

[55]Forster, p. 10.

him in mounting performances of the Dog of Montargis (in which a white mouse played the title role), the crusty Miller and His Men, Cherry and Fair Star, and Elizabeth, Exile of Siberia, all standard items in the toy theater repertoire.[56] Dickens, one of his schoolfellows recalled for John Forster, "was always a leader at these plays, which were occasionally presented with much solemnity before an audience of boys, and in the presence of the ushers."[57]

The world of young Charles Dickens was indeed one to stimulate the fancy of a child. In addition to his voracious reading, certainly unusual for a boy of eight or nine, and his early acquaintance with the theater, he later recalled other childhood interests. There were toys that both fascinated and frightened him: a roly-poly tumbler with horrible lobster eyes; a jack-in-the-box "in a black gown, with an obnoxious head of hair, and a red-cloth mouth, wide open," who reappeared in his childhood nightmares; drummer boys, toy soldiers, toy animals, miniature garden tools, doll houses, and a harlequin's wand.[58] There were several magic lanterns, some that worked and one, unfortunately intended for the climax of a youthful

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[56]"Our School," Repr. P., in NLE, XVII, ii, 166; "A Christmas Tree," Chr. St., in NLE, XIII, i, 13; Johnson, pp. 49-50.

[57]Forster, p. 44.

[58]"A Christmas Tree," Chr. St., in NLE, XIII, i, 4-8; "New Year's Day," Misc. P., in NLE, XVIII, ii, 188.

birthday party, that did not.[59] In Chatham he was accompanied to an "Orrery," a kind of motheaten travelling planetarium, stared open-mouthed at Indian sword swallowers, and was regaled at fairs and circuses.[60] In London, he acquainted himself with Punch and Judy shows, conjurors; strong men; show vans with fat pigs, wild Indians, and lady midgets; and Stabbers's Band, which came around the neighborhood on Monday mornings and for three-quarters of an hour played such tunes as "Begone, Dull Care!" and "I'd Rather Have a Guinea than a One-pound Note."[61] If some of his early experiences with religion, such as sitting through the dull sermons in the church his family attended in Chatham, were not memorable, others were: his nurse singing the "Evening Hymn," his mother telling stories from the Bible, and the Christmas "Waits" singing as they moved from house to house while Charles in bed envisioned the singers acting out scenes from the Christmas story.[62] His schooldays he

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[59]"Birthday Celebrations," UT in NLE, XVI, ii, 262; Forster, p. 16; Langton, p. 25.

[60]"Birthday Celebrations," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 257; "Dullborough Town," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 154; "Introductory Chapter to 'Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi,'" Repr. P., in NLE, XVII, ii, 345-347.

[61]"An Unsettled Neighbourhood," Misc. P., in NLE, XVIII, i, 451-452; Forster, p. 31.

[62]"City of London Churches," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 106-107; Forster, p. 2n; Langton, p. 29; "A Christmas Tree," Chr. St., in NLE, XIII, i, 13-14.

also lovingly remembered in later years although the picture he painted of Wellington House Academy had its darker colors.[63] Nevertheless, as he wrote in 1838, "I won prizes at school; and great fame; . . . I am positively assured that I was a very clever boy."[64] Finally, the glamour, excitement, and adventure implicit in the physical world in which the young Dickens moved impressed itself upon his imagination: in Chatham, longing examinations of colorful displays in booksellers' windows, and an environment of "barracks and soldiers, and ships and sailors" and of "all sorts of parties, junketings, and birthday celebrations and . . . Fifth of November festivities round the bonfire"; in London, an atmosphere of prison, pawnshops, dark and twisted alleys, Covent Garden, inns and taverns, and mad women in black and white flitting through the streets.[65]

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[63] "Our School," Repr. P., in NLE, XVII, ii, 160-170.

[64] Nonesuch Let., I, 169, to Dr. Kuenzel, [July, 1838]. This statement apparently refers to Dickens's days at Wellington House Academy, but, according to Langton (p. 57), William Giles, Dickens's Chatham schoolmaster, also "seems to have been much struck . . . with the bright appearance . . . of his little pupil, and, giving him every encouragement in his power, even to making a companion of him of an evening, he was soon rewarded by the marked improvement that followed. Charles made rapid progress, and there is no doubt whatever that his wonderful knowledge and felicitous use of the English language in after life was, in a great measure, due to the careful training of Mr. Giles, who was widely known as a cultivated reader and elocutionist." Langton apparently received this information from Mrs. Godfrey, the elder sister of Giles, whom he interviewed in connection with his book.

[65] "Dullborough Town," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 158; Langton, p. 58; "Where We Stopped Growing," Misc. P., in NLE, XVIII, i, 337-343.

A reader familiar with Dickens's works, early and late, has probably already recognized the books the boy read, the plays he witnessed, and the other entertainment he indulged in as influences upon his published writings in subject matter, form, or style. While the extent of such activities is perhaps not astonishing to a person familiar with Dickens's background, it may very likely surprise those critics who still occasionally insist upon the paucity of Dickens's "education." Yet a listing of the activities that were available to Dickens affords merely a starting point for a discussion of the child's imaginative life. Of more significance is the influence that such entertainment had upon his imagination, an influence of which he, in later life, was well aware. In "Dullborough Town," referring to his Chatham years, he wrote, "All of my early readings and early imaginations dated from this place. . . ."[66] Elsewhere he described himself at this time as "a very odd little child with the first faint shadows of all my books in my head--I suppose."[67] He conceived of the books in his library, according to Forster, as "a host of friends when he had no single friend; and in leaving Chatham, he has often been heard to say, he seemed to be leaving them too, and everything that had given his ailing little life its picturesqueness and sunshine."[68] He no doubt believed, as

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[66]"Dullborough Town," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 162.

[67]Nonesuch Let., II, 743, to Baroness Burdett-Coutts, 2/9/56.

[68]Forster, p. 8.

he later had David Copperfield express it, that the books of his youth "kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time. . . ."[69]

Whatever the impetus, the developing of Dickens's imagination is certainly to be seen in the impressions that his listening to stories, his reading, his theater-going, and his other activities made upon him. In a way, the world in which the boy lived is perhaps more adequately pictured through his frequently fanciful impressions of the realities around him than through the realities themselves. For example, one of his earliest memories of childhood was of "the sensation of being carried downstairs in a woman's arms, and holding tight to her, in the terror of seeing the steep perspective below." Downstairs, several people were seated in a row along a wall. The reality of the party that was apparently in progress became lost somehow in the workings of the child's imagination. What he saw (as recollected, at least, by the man) was "very like my first idea of the good people in Heaven, as I derived in from a wretched picture in a Prayer-book. . . ."[70] Though one may question the accuracy of this recollection and of other memories like it, he must admit that the trait of seeing common events and ordinary people in the light of a fancy

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[69] DC, in NLE, IX, i, 73.

[70] "New Year's Day," Misc. P., in NLE, XVIII, ii, 189.

created by imaginative activities is characteristic of Dickens both as a child and as a man. Besides, the recollection may very likely be accurate, for Dickens always claimed to have a remarkable facility for a detailed remembrance of his early childhood experiences.[71]

The intensity with which he participated in stories he read or listened to may possibly explain his frequent painting of life with the colors of his imagination:

> Hundreds of times did I hear this legend of Captain Murderer, in my early youth, and added hundreds of times was there a mental compulsion upon me in bed, to peep in at his window as the dark twin peeped, and to revisit his horrible house, and look at him in his blue and spotty and screaming stage, as he reached from floor to ceiling and from wall to wall. The young woman who brought me acquainted with Captain Murderer had a fiendish enjoyment of my terrors, and used to begin, I remember--as a sort of introductory overture--by clawing the air with both hands, and uttering a long low hollow groan. So acutely did I suffer from this ceremony in combination with this infernal Captain, that I sometimes used to plead I thought I was hardly strong enough and old enough to hear the story again just yet. But she never spared me one word of it, and indeed commended the awful chalice to my lips as the only preservative known to science against "The Black Cat"--a weird and glaring-eyed supernatural Tom, who was reputed to prowl about the world by night, sucking the breath of infancy, and who was endowed with a special thirst (as I was given to understand) for mine.[72]

In this passage from "Nurse's Stories," Dickens recreates the terror he felt as a child but also the fascination that such tales held for him, not only then as a child but later, too, as an adult. Yet the child's mind could not

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[71] Forster, pp. 1-2.

[72] "Nurse's Stories," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 197.

easily differentiate between reality and illusion; we find on another occasion the young boy terrorized by a stick-figure chalked upon a church door, seen just after dark. It had "a mouth from ear to ear, a pair of goggle eyes, and hands like two bunches of carrots, five in each." He still remembered, he told his Household Words readers, "the running home, the looking after, the horror, of its following me. . . ."[73]

He created a large portion of his child's world from the books he liked best. As a particularly young boy he lived in a world of fairy tales, where Little Red Riding-Hood was his first love.[74] But he was also involved with "the real original roaring giants":

> We have never outgrown the putting to ourselves of this supposititious case: Whether, if we, with a large company of brothers and sisters, had been put in his (by which we mean, of course, in Jack's) trying situation, we should have had at once the courage and the presence of mind to take the golden crowns (which it seems they always wore as nightcaps) off the heads of the giant's children as they lay a-bed, and put them on our family; thus causing our treacherous host to batter his own offspring and spare us. We have never outgrown a want of confidence in ourselves, in this particular.[75]

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[73]"Lying Awake," Repr. P., in NLE, XVII, ii, 213. Warrington Winters, in "Charles Dickens: The Pursuers and the Pursued," Victorian Newsletter, No. 23 (Spring, 1963), 23-24, traces the recurrence of this chalked figure in a number of Dickens's novels: PP (Ch. 42), NN (Ch. 62), OT (Ch. 48), BR (Ch. 6), TTC (Ch. 14), GE (Ch. 1).

[74]"A Christmas Tree," Chr. St., in NLE, XIII, i, 9.

[75]"Where We Stopped Growing," Misc. P., in NLE, XVIII, i, 339.

Or, when he did not see life as it is pictured in fairy tales, he imbued it with Eastern magic from the pages of the Arabian Nights:

> Oh, now all common things become uncommon and enchanted to me. All lamps are wonderful; all rings are talismans. Common flower-pots are full of treasures, with a little earth scattered on the top; trees are for Ali Baba to hide in; beef-steaks are to be thrown down into the Valley of Diamonds, that the precious stones may stick to them, and be carried by the eagles to their nests, whence the traders, with loud cries, will scare them. Tarts are made, according to the recipe of the Vizier's son of Bussorah, who turned pastrycook after he was set down in his drawers at the gate of Damascus; cobblers are all Mustaphas, and in the habit of sewing up people cut into four pieces, to whom they are taken blindfold. . . . My very rocking-horse--there he is, with his nostrils turned completely inside-out, indicative of Blood!--should have a peg in his neck, by virtue thereof to fly away with me, as the wooden horse did with the Prince of Persia, in the sight of all his father's Court.[76]

In Chatham, the impressively structured town hall satisfied him as the model used by the Genie of the Lamp to construct Aladdin's palace,[77] and a dockyard car that, moving on a tramroad, fished logs from the water reservoir and stacked them in piles filled him with a longing "to play at Chinese Enchanter, and to have that apparatus placed at my disposal for the purpose by a beneficent country."[78] At other times, as he grew in years, Dickens created a world derived from

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[76]"A Christmas Tree," Chr. St., in NLE, XIII, i, 10-11.

[77]"Dullborough Town," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 154.

[78]"Chatham Dockyard," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 344.

the picaresque novel, recalling many years later "a not very robust child, sitting in bye-places, near Rochester Castle, with a head full of Partridge, Strap, Tom Pipes, and Sancho Panza."[79] Or, at another time, intoxicated with reading "The Elder Brother" in Colman's Broad Grins, he hurried to Covent Garden to compare it with the poem's description. "He remembered," Forster stated, "as he said in telling me this, snuffing up the flavour of the faded cabbage-leaves as if it were the very breath of comic fiction."[80]

The boy's imagination also worked upon the raw material that the theater furnished him. Richard the Third, backed against the stage box in which sat young Dickens and "struggling for life against the virtuous Richmond," was terrifyingly real. On the other hand, the financial limitations of a provincial theater frequently requiring an actor to play more than one role, were seen through his imagination: "Many wondrous secrets of Nature had I come to the knowledge of in that sanctuary: of which not the least terrific were, that the witches in Macbeth bore an awful resemblance to the Thanes and other proper

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[79]"Preface to the First Cheap Edition," NN, in NLE, IV, i, xvi.

[80]Forster, p. 12. The description of Covent Garden in Colman's poem occupies four lines. To anyone familiar with the poem, Dickens must have, at least initially, been more interested in searching out the disreputable if comic characters whom Colman described than sniffing the market odors.

inhabitants of Scotland; and that the good King Duncan couldn't rest in his grave, but was constantly coming out of it and calling himself somebody else."[81] The atmosphere of the pantomime also strongly affected Dickens; he wanted "to live forever in the bright atmosphere," and longed for "a Fairy immortality" with the pretty little fairy with "the wand like a celestial Barber's Pole." After such glorious moments, he found it difficult to return to "the dull, settled world."[82] Pantomime clowns, too, evoked an imaginative response from the child:

> As a child, we were accustomed to pester our relations and friends with questions out of number concerning these gentry;--whether their appetite for sausages and such-like wares was always the same, and if so, at whose expense they were maintained; whether they were ever taken up for pilfering other people's goods, or were forgiven by everybody because it was only done in fun; how it was they got such beautiful complexions, and where they lived; and whether they were born Clowns, or gradually turned into Clowns as they grew up. On these and a thousand other points our curiosity was insatiable. Nor were our speculations confined to Clowns alone; they extended to Harlequins, Pantaloons, and Columbines, all of whom we believed to be real and veritable personages, existing in the same forms and characters all the year round. How often we wished that the Pantaloon were our godfather! and how often thought that to marry a Columbine would be to attain the highest pitch of human felicity.[83]

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[81] "Dullborough Town," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 154-155.

[82] "A Christmas Tree," Chr. St., in NLE, XIII, i, 13.

[83] "Introductory Chapter to 'Memoirs of Grimaldi,'" Repr. P., in NLE, XVII, ii, 344-345.

Finally, in "Gone Astray," a Household Words paper, the adult Dickens presented, in greatly abbreviated form, an imaginative reconstruction of his mind as a child when he was lost one day in London.[84] At the age of eight or nine, apparently on a visit to the city, he was taken to see the outside of St. Giles's Church, of which he wrote:

> I had romantic ideas in connection with that religious edifice; firmly believing that all the beggers who pretended through the week to be blind, lame, one-armed, deaf and dumb, and otherwise physically afflicted, laid aside their pretenses every Sunday, dressed themselves in holiday clothes, and attended divine service in the temple of their patron saint. I had a general idea that the reigning successor of Bamfylde Moore Carew acted as a sort of church-warden on these occasions, and sat in a high pew with red curtains.

Somehow the boy lost his guide. Having passed through his first fright of "unreasoning terror," he decided to seek his fortune "on the Whittington Plan." He first did some sightseeing: Temple Bar ("I had read about heads being exposed on the top of Temple Bar, and it seemed a wicked old place. . . ."); St. Dunstan's, where he watched the clock figures striking the bells; a toy shop, from which "enchanted spot" he escaped after an hour or so; St. Paul's; and finally Guildhall and its Giants. Of the large statues, he recalled: "While I knew them to be images made of something that was not flesh and blood, I still invested them

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[84] Misc. P., in NLE, XVIII, i, 380-92. Though the details and images used in the essay may not be specifically those from his childhood experience, and may have been selected to maintain a certain unity and to point the criticism implicit in the essay, the essence of the original experience is surely there. "This is literally and exactly how I went astray," Dickens wrote toward the end of the essay; if so, the essay is a magnificent illustration of the working of the boy's imagination.

with attributes of life--with consciousness of my being there, for example, and the power of keeping a sly eye upon me." Following a short nap, he was somehow surprised upon waking to find "no beanstalk, no fairy, no princess, no dragon, no opening in life of any kind."

Later, he continued his impressionistic wandering:

> The city was to me a vast emporium of precious stones and metals, casks and bales, honour and generosity, foreign fruits and spices. Every merchant and banker was a compound of Mr. FitzWarren and Sinbad the Sailor. . . .
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> Thus I wandered about the City, like a child in a dream, staring at the British merchants, and inspired by a mighty faith in the marvellousness of everything. . . . In such stories as I made, to account for the different places, I believed as devoutly as in the City itself. I particularly remembered that when I found myself on 'Change, and saw the shabby people sitting under the placards about ships, I settled that they were Misers, who had embarked all their wealth to go and buy golddust or something of that sort, and were waiting for their respective captains to come and tell them that they were ready to set sail. I observed that they all munched dry biscuits, and I thought it was to keep off seasickness.

Finally, after visiting Mansion House and India House, being chased by boys, and attending a theater in the vicinity of Goodman's Fields, he sought out the Watch, reported his name and address, and was shortly reunited with his family. "They used to say I was an odd child," he concluded, "and I suppose I was. I am an odd man perhaps."

The "odd" child is a highly imaginative one treating each new experience in life in the light of the vicarious experience derived from books read, stories heard, and plays seen. The persistence of this process will almost

inevitably propel him toward some field of creative activity. In addition, the child who can see such wonders in commonplaces will later, as an adult, have little difficulty creating Mr. Pickwick, Sam Weller, and Jingle, Quilp, Sairey Gamp, Mr. Pecksniff, and the hundreds of other memorable characters who fill his novels. Nor will he find it difficult to design such places as Mr. Pickwick's Fleet Prison, Barnaby Rudge's London, Martin Chuzzlewit's America, the Chancery Court and environs of Bleak House, and the Circumlocution Office of Little Dorrit. These are all, as Edgar Johnson states, "realities in which the commonplace, the comic, the pathetic, and the grotesque are inseparably blended."[85]

Even more important to Dickens's future as a writer than his use of his imagination to color reality is the more overt manifestation of his imagination at work that is to be seen in his making up games usually related to his reading, in his retelling tales he had read or heard, and in his creating his own stories about real people and places. Like David Copperfield, he no doubt pretended being Tom Jones ("a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature," he added) or Roderick Random for "a week together." Or, "armed with the centre-piece out of an old set of boot-trees," he stalked the region of his house for days, "the perfect realisation of Captain Somebody, of the Royal British Navy,

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[85]Johnson, p. 22.

in danger of being beset by savages, and resolved to sell his life at a great price."[86] At another time, at the ripe age of ten, a duel seemed the only way out of a rivalry between him and another young man for the affection of "the youngest Miss Clickett but one." He arranged his affairs the evening before, perfectly in keeping with the procedures culled from his reading: he wrote a letter to his beloved and a will in a letter to his mother disposing of some childhood engravings and a choice collection of marbles. If the duel was to be fought with fists and somehow or other did not quite come about, ending with the rivals walking off arm in arm, that is beside the point.[87] We also see the young Dickens being delivered from the dungeons of Seringapatam (a haycock),[88] or, while waiting to seek his fortune with a companion "in the neighbourhood of the Spanish Main, as soon as we should have accumulated forty shillings each and a rifle," looking in a field near London for the forty footsteps made there, according to legend, by a man who had murdered his brother.[89]

Dickens's imaginative activity was further increased by his experiences in London. A lonely, neglected child, he

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[86] DC, in NLE, IX, i, 73.

[87] "New Year's Day," Misc. P., in NLE, XVIII, ii, 191.

[88] "Dullborough Town," UT, in NLE, XVI, ii, 150.

[89] The Speeches of Charles Dickens, ed. K. J. Fielding (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 326-327--hereafter cited as Speeches.

frequently escaped from the depressing reality of his family's misfortunes into the world of his fancy. To entertain both himself and his fellow workers at Warren's Blacking, he retold the stories he had earlier read but "which were fast perishing out of my mind."[90] While waiting in the early morning outside the Marshalsea for the gates to open, Dickens told the orphanage servant whom the family still maintained "some astonishing fictions respecting the wharves and the Tower; of which I can say no more than that I hope I believed them myself."[91] Another incident from about this time that, like the preceding incident, also reappeared in David Copperfield, gives a clear picture of the creative, imaginative bent of the child's mind. His release from the Marshalsea being imminent, John Dickens drew up a petition for a bounty to be paid the prisoners to drink the king's health on the monarch's forthcoming birthday.[92] Young Charles established himself in a corner near the petition, watching. As each prisoner filed in to sign his name, a Captain Porter read the petition to the assemblage in his most rhetorically sonorous tones. Dickens added:

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[90] Forster, p. 29.

[91] DC, in NLE, IX, i, 222. Forster (p. 30) strongly implies that this incident had earlier appeared in Dickens's autobiographical fragment.

[92] Forster, p. 32. In DC (NLE, IX, i, 223-225) Mr. Micawber draws up a far more significant social document calling for the abolition of imprisonment for debt.

> Whatever was comical in this scene, and whatever was pathetic, I sincerely believe I perceived in my corner, whether I demonstrated it or not, quite as well as I should perceive it now. I made out my own little character and story for every man who put his name to the sheet of paper. I might be able to do that now, more truly: not merely earnestly, or with a closer interest. Their different peculiarities of dress, of face, of gait, of manner, were written indelibly upon my memory. I would rather have seen it than the best play ever played; and I thought about it afterwards, over the pots of paste-blacking, often and often. When I looked, with my mind's eye, into the Fleet-prison during Mr. Pickwick's incarceration, I wonder whether half-a-dozen men were wanting from the Marshalsea crowd that came filing in again, to the sound of Captain Porter's voice![93]

Describing essentially the same scene in David Copperfield, Dickens, through his narrator-hero, stated: "I set down this remembrance here, because it is an instance to myself of the manner in which I fitted my old books to my altered life, and made stories for myself, out of the streets, and out of men and women; and how some main points to the character I shall unconsciously develop, I suppose, in writing my life, were gradually forming all this while."[94] Here, certainly, is Dickens's own interpretation of the sources of his genius as a writer. Though his development into a literary artist was obviously a complex process, his molding of reality to suit himself, most frequently into some form deriving from his intimacy with literature, was an important part of the procedure.

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[93] Forster, p. 33.

[94] in NLE, IX, i, 223.

Similar behavior continued during Dickens's years at Wellington House Academy. Mr. Owen P. Thomas, one of Dickens's schoolmates, wrote Forster that Dickens "invented what we termed a 'lingo', produced by the addition of a few letters of the same sound to every word; and it was our ambition, walking and talking thus along the street, to be considered foreigners."[95] Apparently, Dickens used the streets of London for other performances, too. Henry Danson, another classmate, remembers Dickens "on one occasion heading us in Drummond-street in pretending to be poor boys, and asking the passers-by for charity--especially old ladies; one of whom told us she 'had no money for beggar boys.' On these adventures, when the old ladies were quite staggered by the impudence of the demand, Dickens would explode with laughter and take to his heels."[96] Owen Thomas remembered at other times himself "extemporising tales of some sort, and reciting them offhand, with Dickens and Danson or Tobin walking on either side of him."[97] It is most likely that Dickens, too, had his turn at telling stories.

Finally, in addition to the above mentioned overt forms of creativity in which Dickens's interest in literature

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[95]Forster, p. 42. Another schoolfellow denies that Dickens invented this "lingo," it being already in use when he entered the school (Forster, p. 51, n. 52--Ley's note). Whatever the case, the use Dickens put it to is significant.

[96]Forster, p. 44.

[97]Forster, p. 42.

and the theater manifests itself, and perhaps most significantly in the light of his future, the young Dickens also wrote much, his first attempts at authorship being "certain tragedies achieved at the mature age of eight or ten" in which he got other children to act and which were "represented with great applause to overflowing nurseries."[98] He had certainly been influenced by his reading, by the performances he had witnessed at the Theatre Royal, perhaps by compositions he may have written as scholarly assignments, and more immediately, one suspects, by the theatrical ventures of James Lamert. The name of only one of these plays has been preserved, "Misnar, the Sultan of India," which, Forster states, "was founded (and very literally founded, no doubt) on one of the Tales of the Genii."[99] Forster also records that around 1823 or 1824 Dickens wrote at least two sketches. The first depicted a very old barber who shaved Dickens's uncle, Thomas Barrow, and who "was never tired of reviewing the events of the last war, and especially of detecting Napoleon's mistakes, and re-arranging his whole life for him on a plan of his own." The second, modeled on a description of the canon's housekeeper in Gil Blas, portrayed "a deaf old woman who waited on them in Bayham-street, and who made delicate hashes with walnut ketchup."

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[98]"Preface to the First Cheap Edition," SB, in NLE, I, i, xv; Nonesuch Let., I, 169, to Dr. Kuenzel, [July, 1838].

[99]Forster, p. 6.

Dickens never had the courage to show either of these sketches to anyone, Forster relates, though he was apparently quite proud of them.[100]

Dickens's "career" as an amateur writer expanded during his years at Wellington House Academy. The influence of the cheap penny and Saturday magazines, the pamphlet romances, the toy theater performances, also his earlier reading and theater-going, and no doubt the admiration of the other boys easily led to much creative writing. Mr. Danson, one of Dickens's classmates, wrote to Forester, "I think at that time Dickens took to writing small tales, and we had a sort of club for lending and circulating them."[101] This is substantiated by another classmate, John W. Bowden, who wrote elsewhere, "He and I, in conjunction with one or two others, used to write short tales on scraps of paper, pin them together so as to form books with a few leaves, and lend them to the other boys to read for the small charge of a piece of slate pencil, etc."[102] They also occasionally issued what Bowden referred to as "a

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[100]Forster, pp. 12-13. Forster does not reveal his source for this information. Although his descriptions show he had some idea of the contents of these sketches, it seems unlikely that he actually had read them. Perhaps Dickens had included this information in his autobiographical fragment.

[101]Forster, p. 44.

[102]Frederic G. Kitton, Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil (London: Frank T. Sabin, 1889-1890), p. 128. This information originally appeared in the London Daily News, Dec. 21, 1871.

small morning newspaper containing comic advertisements and scraps of news. . . ."[103] Langton, who corresponded with him, reprinted two of the advertisements Bowden could recollect:

> Lost. Out of a gentleman's waistcoat pocket, an acre of land; the finder shall be rewarded on restoring the same.
>
> Lost. By a boy with a long red nose, and grey eyes, a very bad temper. Whoever has found the same may keep it, as the owner is better without it.[104]

Dickens's father, who had learned shorthand, was a Parliamentary reporter at this time for a newspaper called the British Press. Charles occasionally contributed to the paper brief "penny-a-line" notices of accidents, fires, and the like that the regular reporters had no time to cover.[105]

Dickens's intense interest in acting and playwriting continued to be stimulated during the Academy years. Another former Academy pupil, a Mr. Walsh, recalled for Forster that Dickens "was very fond of theatricals. I have some recollection of his getting up a play at Dan Tobin's house, in the back kitchen--but not a written play. We made a plot, and each had his part; but the speeches everyone was to make for himself. When we had finished, we were quite sure that if there had only been an audience

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[103]Kitton, p. 128.

[104]Langton, pp. 88-89.

[105]Johnson, p. 53, quoting Samuel Carter Hall, Retrospect of a Long Life (London, 1883), p. 111.

they would all have cried, so deep we made the tragedy."[106] Dickens himself, in "Our School," describes another play that he wrote based partly on his reading and partly on his imaginative impression of yet another schoolfellow, a rich but rather idiotic boy who, like Steerforth in David Copperfield, had extra privileges as a "parlour-boarder":

> . . . there was a belief among us that . . . he was too wealthy to be "taken down." His special treatment, and our vague association of him with the sea, and with storms, and sharks, and Coral Reefs occasioned the wildest legends to be circulated as his history. A tragedy in blank verse was written on the subject--if our memory does not deceive us, by the hand that now chronicles these recollections--in which his father figured as a Pirate, and was shot for a voluminous catalogue of atrocities: first imparting to his wife the secret of the cave in which his wealth was stored, and from which his only son's half crowns now issued. Dumbledon (the boy's name) was represented as "yet unborn" when his brave father met his fate; and the despair and grief of Mrs. Dumbledon at that calamity was movingly shadowed forth as having weakened the parlour-boarder's mind. This production was received with great favour, and was twice performed with closed doors in the dining-room. But it got wind, and was seized as libellous, and brought the unlucky poet into severe affliction.[107]

If at a much later period in his life Dickens wrote to Forster, "Assumption has charms for me so delightful--I hardly know for how many wild reasons--that I feel a loss of Oh I can't say what exquisite foolery, when I lose a chance of being someone not in the remotest degree like myself,"[108] obviously this attitude was present in the

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[106] Forster, p. 835n.

[107] "Our School," Repr. P., in NLE, XVII, ii, 163-164.

[108] Forster, p. 839.

young Charles Dickens as well. Not only did it make reading, play-going, and other varieties of youthful entertainment most attractive to him and give him at least vicarious experience far beyond the range of most children of his time and place, it also enabled him to escape from the dreary and at times terrifying realities of his childhood. And it resulted in actual writing, much more tangible evidence of the direction his life was likely to take--given the right opportunities. The reading and the theater-going are the raw materials, the sources, from which his imagination developed. As such, they largely determined the form and content of his imaginative dreams, his fanciful play, his early creative writing, and in certain respects his later writing, too. But if these sources are important, even more so is the imagination, early formed, that used these sources to create a world in which a lonely, frustrated, and frequently frightened boy could live happily and securely, engaging in the make-believe that was to be a life-long habit. Observed from the vantage point of the future, the play-acting, the pretending based on the books he had read, the early writing--all clearly moved Charles Dickens slowly but almost inevitably toward the occupation in which he would enchant generations of readers.

Preparations, 1827-1833

Although Dickens's imagination continued to develop and to manifest itself in various creative activities after 1827 as well as before, the period of his life between 1827 and 1833 is particularly characterized by his search for some vocation that would enable him to use his creative ability. In the course of his search, he not only continued to prepare himself unconsciously for a future as a writer but conscientiously procured a more thorough education for himself, particularly in literature, and, most importantly, continued to write.

The beginning of his "adult" life was by no means promising. Shortly after leaving Wellington House Academy in 1827, fifteen year old Charles Dickens became a minor clerk (more office boy than anything else) with Ellis and Blackmore, solicitors, a position that his mother had obtained for him. However, he soon discovered that he was not temperamentally suited to office work and began casting about for a more felicitous, remunerative, and challenging vocation, a task that would occupy him for the next six years or so.

As his father was a Parliamentary reporter (by 1828 he had moved from the British Press to the Morning Herald) and his uncle John Barrow a reporter for the Times, Dickens's first tentative movements were toward a similar career. He had heard, apparently as David Copperfield had, that many wealthy and influential men had begun as members of the

Parliamentary press gallery.[109] Accordingly, as David Copperfield was later to do, he labored over Gurney's Brachygraphy until he had mastered that popular system of shorthand. But he found no employment as a Parliamentary reporter (he was, after all, a novice and just turned sixteen). Instead, leaving Ellis and Blackmore, he set himself up as a free-lance shorthand writer for the proctors in the Consistory Court of Doctors' Commons.[110] He soon tired of this, too. "It wasn't," he was much later to write Forster, "a very good living (though not a very bad one), and was wearily uncertain."[111] He had fallen in love with Maria Beadnell and so was more acutely conscious of his financial position. "I went at it," he wrote of his courtship, "with a determination to overcome all the obstacles, which fairly lifted me up into that newspaper life, and floated me away over a hundred men's heads. . . ."[112] By that time, in late 1832, Maria was in Paris, where her parents apparently hoped she would forget the eager young man who was desperately in love with her. Shortly after her

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[109] DC, in NLE, IX, ii, 120.

[110] Among the archives of St. Bartholomew's is a transcript of two cases of 1830 in Dickens's handwriting. These are the originals on which the law suit in "Doctors' Commons," one of the Sketches by Boz, is based. For an account of this document, see William J. Carlton, Charles Dickens, Shorthand Writer: The 'Prentice Days of a Master Craftsman (London: Cecil Palmer, 1926), pp. 57-67.

[111] Forster, p. 380.

[112] Forster, p. 49.

return, and following "coldnesses, quarrels, caprices, reproaches," she rewarded their hopes.[113]

In the meantime, Dickens had been attracted to acting as a possible profession. His avid interest in the theater had been virtually suspended after his family had left Chatham but was reactivated when he became a clerk with regular pay. Dickens's taste for theatricals, Edward Blackmore recalled later for Forster, "was much promoted by a fellow-clerk named Potter. . . . They took every opportunity, then unknown to me, of going together to a minor theatre, where (I afterwards heard) they not unfrequently engaged in parts."[114] Between 1828 and 1832, while Dickens was a shorthand reporter in Doctors' Commons, his play-going continued unabated and with increased purpose: he was seriously considering acting as a career. He explained later to Forster: "I went to some theatre every night, with a very few exceptions, for at least three years; really studying the bills first, and going to where there was

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[113]Johnson, p. 72. See pp. 67-83 for the course of the affair between Dickens and Miss Beadnell.

[114]Forster, p. 46. George Lear, a fellow clerk at Ellis and Blackmore's, said that Potter, not Dickens, was stage-struck: "The theatre he [Potter] became attached to was a poor place called the Minor Theatre in Catherine Street, Strand. I went two or three times with Dickens to see Potter act, but he had no talent whatever in that direction. I do not for a moment think that Dickens ever acted at this theatre, and I know that his opinion agreed with mine, that the sooner Potter quitted the boards of 'The Minor,' the better" (in Kitton, p. 132). For Dickens's impressions see "Private Theatres," SB, in NLE, I, i, 148-157.

the best acting: and always to see Mathews whenever he played. I practised immensely (even such things as walking in and out, and sitting down in a chair); often four, five, six hours a day: shut up in my own room, or walking about in the fields. I prescribed to myself, too, a sort of Hamiltonian system for learning parts; and learnt a great number."[115] In addition, he took lessons from Robert Keeley, a well-known actor.[116]

That Dickens had ability as an actor, particularly as a comic one, is verified by some of the people who knew him then. George Lear much later wrote:

> Going back for a moment to the old chamber in Holborn Court, I have the most perfect recollection of the laundress as she was called,--the old woman who used to sweep out the offices, light the fires in winter, etc.--though why she was thus called I never could make out, for she never washed anything that I could see, certainly not herself. . . . Dickens took great interest in her, and would mimic her manner of speech, her ways, her excuses, etc., to the very life. He could imitate in a manner that I have never heard equalled, the low population of the streets of London in all their varieties, whether mere loafers or sellers of fruit, vegetables, or anything else. He could also excel in mimicking the popular singers of that day, whether comic or patriotic; as to his acting, he could give us Shakespeare by the ten minutes, and imitate all the leading actors of that time. His father, he said, was intimate with many of them, among whom I particularly recollect Young Macready, J. P. Harley, etc. He told me he had often taken parts in amateur theatricals before he came to us.

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[115] Forster, p. 380.

[116] Nonesuch Let., I, 681, to John Forster, [June, 1845].

Lear adds that Dickens also delighted in imitating and describing the old clerks who presided over the public offices.[117]

Through his father apparently but also through his sister Fanny, Dickens became more closely associated with the world of actors and singers than one might have expected from his earlier background. Fanny, following her graduation from the Royal Academy of Music in January, 1827, had begun to move on the fringes of the theatrical crowd; for example, in 1827 and 1828 she sang at benefits for the actor, John Pritt Harley. Often she and Charles gathered around the piano with these new friends for an evenings of songs and fun.[118] Charles was no doubt frequently the bright light of the evening. Henry Burnett, who later married Fanny, reported that Dickens occasionally sang serio-comic songs that were "highly successful, and gave great pleasure even to the most sedate among his friends, for it was his habit to give very amusing, droll, and clever sketches of character between the verses, comic and quaint, but never vulgar."[119] Some of these sketches were no doubt based on similar material in Charles Mathews's "At Homes."[120]

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[117]Kitton, pp. 131-132.

[118]Johnson, pp. 54-55.

[119]Kitton, p. 137.

[120]For a description of Mathews's "At Homes," see The Memoirs of Charles Mathews, Comedian, ed. Mrs. Charles Mathews (London: R. Bentley, 1838-1839), II-IV, passim.

Early in 1832, believing himself ready for a theatrical career, Dickens wrote to George Bartley, the stage manager at Covent Garden:

> I . . . told him how young I was, and exactly what I thought I could do; and that I believed I had a strong perception of character and oddity, and a natural power for reproducing in my own person what I observed in others. . . . There must have been something in my letter that struck the authorities, for Bartley wrote to me almost immediately to say that they were busy getting up the Hunchback (so they were), but that they would communicate with me again, in a fortnight. Punctual to the time another letter came, with an appointment to do anything of Mathews's I pleased, before him and Charles Kemble, on a certain day at the theatre. My sister Fanny was in the secret, and was to go with me to play the songs. I was laid up when the day came, with a terrible bad cold and an inflammation of the face. . . . I wrote to say so, and added that I would renew my application next season. . . . See how near I may have been to another sort of life?[121]

Dickens also told Forster, in the same letter as the one just quoted from, that he never thought of the stage but as a means of getting money; knowing of his intense interest in the theater, one can scarcely accept such an explanation.

Although he abandoned his projected career as an actor, Dickens did not lose interest in the theater. In 1833, a year after his only attempt to join a professional acting company, he was the moving spirit behind two evenings of amateur theatricals involving his family and some friends. The first, which took place on April 27, consisted of John

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[121] Forster, pp. 59-60.

Howard Payne's opera, Clari, the Maid of Milan (with music by Henry R. Bishop), P. P. O'Callaghan's The Married Bachelor, and R. Brinsley Peake's Amateurs and Actors. Dickens, Edgar Johnson relates, "made himself producer, director, and stage manager, designed scenery, worried with the stage carpenter about how to produce moonlight, played an accordian in the band, wrote the prologue to the performance, rehearsed the actors--everything."[122] A bit later in the year he repeated the process for another evening of theatrical entertainment, of whose feature attraction, a burlesque extravaganza entitled The O'Thello, he was the proud author.

But after 1832 acting ceased to interest him as a possible profession. In that year his earlier preparation for a career as a Parliamentary reporter bore results; he accepted positions with both the Mirror of Parliament, a serious rival to Hansard, and the True Sun. He worked for the latter only a few months but continued with the Mirror of Parliament for at least two years, spending a good portion of his time in the cramped quarters reserved for reporters in the two Houses, his pad balanced on his knee as he strained to hear the orators below.[123] As his biographers indicate, these years were a liberal education. He joined the reportorial corps in the historical final moments of debate on the Reform Bill of 1832. In the following years he undoubtedly reported debates on the bills for abolishing

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[122] Johnson, p. 76.

[123] Speeches, p. 347.

slavery in the colonies and abolishing the East India Company's long-held monopoly, on Sadler's Ten Hours Bill, or the Irish Coercion Bill, and on Lord Ashley's bill to limit the working hours of adults. He must also have been present for some of the debate leading to the new Poor Law, to Lord Althrop's Factory Act of 1834, and to other legislation of lesser importance. He heard Stanley and O'Connell oppose each other over the Irish Coercion Bill (he re-recorded Stanley's entire speech, but was, according to tradition, so deeply moved by O'Connell's reply that he was momentarily unable to continue his note-taking). He was probably present for Gladstone's maiden speech, for Bulwer's address on keeping faith with the Negro, for Brougham's famous speech at Edinburgh after he resigned the Chancellorship, and for many other speeches by such well-known political figures as Grey, Peel, Denman, Lyndhurst, Ellenborough, Hume, Melbourne, Grote, Russell, Cobbett, and Macaulay.[124] "Even a casual glance at Hansard for those years, or a brief examination of one of those ponderous three-volumed Victorian biographies, say the biography of Henry Brougham, would reveal a galaxy of powerful personalities and a solid amount of epoch-making legislation," concludes one of Dickens's biographers. "Where is the college

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[124] Forster, p. 63, and (Ley's note), p. 66, n. 72; Johnson, pp. 63-66, 87-88.

graduate who would not envy such an opportunity?"[125]

In August, 1834, having risen to the top of his profession, "not merely for accuracy in reporting, but for marvellous quickness in transcript" (the considered opinion of one of his gallery colleagues),[126] Dickens finally joined the staff of the Morning Chronicle, a Liberal paper with which he had earlier sought work. But this reward for his industriousness and persistence really came too late. Sometime during the second half of 1833 he had written his first work of fiction, a short, rather crudely conceived tale about a London bachelor imposed upon by country cousins. Its publication in the December, 1833, issue of the Monthly Magazine turned him more sharply toward the writing career for which he had somehow seemed destined from childhood. Dickens himself may have felt at this time that his earliest published stories and sketches were only "side issues" of his journalistic career, as F. J. H. Darton believes.[127] Yet it is also true that his position on the Morning Chronicle offered the security that the budding literary artist needed, for the Monthly Magazine could not afford to pay Dickens for his contributions. Even Darton

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[125]John Manning, Dickens on Education (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), pp. 40-41.

[126]James Grant, The Newspaper Press (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1871), I, 295. In the 1830's Grant was a reporter for the Morning Advertiser.

[127]F. J. H. Darton, "Dickens the Beginner: 1833-1836," Quarterly Review, CCLXII (1934), 61.

concedes that there is "an odd mixture of sanguine confidence and caution" in certain letters Dickens wrote to Henry Kolle at this time about his plans for additional sketches and a novel.[128] But one can only speculate about what ambitions and dreams for financial security and literary prestige may have been running through Dickens's mind in 1834 and 1835. His future must have challenged him as one of virtually infinite possibilities. He certainly knew by this time that he had the capacity for work, the initiative to advance in whatever field he entered, and the imaginative resources and the technical knowledge necessary to at least attempt to write works of fiction, even three-volume novels. That he accepted the challenge the future held for him, and met it, is a matter of record.

But Dickens's occupations between 1827 and 1833 did more than move him gradually, if haphazardly, in the direction of his vocation as an author; they played a considerable part, in one way or another, in preparing him for this career. To start with, all obviously furnished subject matter for his writings. But his work as a short-hand reporter in Doctors' Commons and in Parliament was also valuable in other respects. In going through the process of recording in shorthand and then recopying in longhand whatever was said, Dickens constantly reproduced, in Doctors' Commons, the speech patterns of people of

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[128]Darton, "Dickens the Beginner: 1833-1836," p. 62.

various classes and, in Parliament, the rhetorical nuances of educated and sometimes pompous gentlemen. Such practice was to be invaluable when he came to write fiction. He may also have implemented an early fluency with English while recording Parliamentary debate. He was responsible not only for making sense out of incompletely heard sentences but also for revising inaccurately constructed ones. As a colleague later stated it, a Parliamentary reporter's task was to make "at least tolerable English for even the worst speaker; otherwise the inaccuracies and slovenliness of the style would be ascribed to the reporter, not to the speaker." He was also expected to correct any errors the speaker made in quoting dates, names, and other facts.[129]

Dickens's preparation for a career as actor also helped to prepare him as writer. His wide reading of plays with an eye to acting in them greatly increased the models at his disposal when he did begin to write for publication. This early, and thorough, familiarity with the ingredients and forms of tragedy, comedy (particularly farce), and melodrama gave him a certain facility from the start: he knew what effects the various forms were capable of producing and, no doubt, from memorization of parts if from nothing else, had some idea of how to achieve such effects. As an actor, he had become adept at projecting himself into the

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[129]Grant, II, 201, 203.

characters of real people, both with accuracy and with exaggeration, and had mastered the roles of certain theatrical types--for example, those that were the specialties of Charles Mathews. It was not a terribly long step to what the literary artist needs--the ability to create original characters who, while maintaining an easily recognizable resemblance to one or more real people, still manage to have lives of their own within the stories for which they have been conceived. In addition, his leadership in the production of the amateur theatricals in 1833 gave him some experience in the manipulation of all the parts of a creative performance, an ability that he would find useful when he sat down to write.

Finally, between 1827 and 1833 Charles Dickens prepared himself in a more direct, though apparently still unconscious, way as a writer. First, the plays he saw, read, and acted in provided him with a fairly thorough survey of eighteenth and nineteenth century drama.[130] He no doubt continued to reread, as he did the rest of his life, the novels and essays familiar to him from boyhood. He also must have devoured the contents of many magazines and newspapers now that he did not have to go without dinner

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[130]For listings (undoubtedly incomplete) see J. B. Van Amerongen, The Actor in Dickens (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927), passim, and Earle R. Davis, "Literary Influences upon the Early Art of Charles Dickens" (unpubl. diss., Princeton, 1935), pp. 114-116 and passim.

to purchase them, as he had had to earlier--the True Sun, Mirror of Parliament, Morning Chronicle, and Times, undoubtedly; the British Press and the Morning Herald for which his father had worked; and also, from the nature of his early allusions to them, the New Monthly Magazine, Thief, Metropolitan, Athenaeum, Literary Gazette, Court Journal, Morning Post, Fraser's, and the Examiner.[131] There were no doubt others, among them (some then and others a bit later) the magazines in which Dickens's tales and sketches were first published: the Monthly Magazine, the Evening Chronicle, Bell's Life in London, the Carlton Chronicle, and the Library of Fiction.

On his eighteenth birthday Dickens became eligible to use the British Museum library. Here, old request slips show, he at least glanced at such works as Goldsmith's History of England, Addison's Miscellaneous Works, Shakespeare's Dramatic Works with a Life by Symond, Holbein's Dance of Death, Berges's A Short Account of the Roman Senate, and Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life (Anon.).[132] These records are not complete. In a letter of July, 1838, Dickens wrote "[I] devoted myself for some time to the acquirement of such general literature as I could pick up at the Library

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[131] Nonesuch Let., I, 25, to Henry Kolle, [Dec., 1833]; 29, to Kolle, [1834]; 40, to Thomas Beard, 1/9/35; 67, to John Macrone, [Feb.-Apr., 1836]; 69, to Macrone, [Apr., 1836]; 72, to Chapman and Hall, [May-Jun., 1836]; "The Boarding House--No. II," Monthly Magazine, n.s. XVIII (August, 1834), 131 (in a later version Dickens cancelled the allusion to the Examiner).

[132] William Miller, "Dickens Reads at the British Museum," Dickensian, XLIII (1947), 83-84.

of the British Museum."[133] At other times he haunted a circulating library at No. 24, Fetter Lane, in company with a friend named Wiffin, who was apprenticed to a gold-and-silver-smith. Mr. Haines, the print and curio-dealer who kept the shop, later recalled Dickens's "passion for sensational novels which he would carry away by the pile," and a violent argument between Dickens and Wiffin over the merits of Fenimore Cooper's Red Rover, an argument which Dickens, who championed Cooper's abuse of the English, strengthened by flinging the volume at Wiffin's head.[134]

A list of other works Dickens read about this time would comprise a catalogue of early nineteenth century authors, major and minor, with the possible exception of Jane Austen. In addition to numerous sensational novels, and those of Cooper, Dickens read the novels of Sir Walter Scott, Bulwer-Lytton, Mrs. Radcliffe and other Gothic novelists, Ainsworth's Rookwood, and from the preceding century Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison and Godwin's Caleb Williams. He probably read Miss Mitford's Our Village, Pierce Egan's Tom and Jerry, Robert Surtees's Jorrocks' Jaunts and Jollities, and some of Theodore Hook's works. Long attracted to the essayists, Dickens read during this

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[133] Nonesuch Let., I, 168, to Dr. Kuenzel.

[134] Thomas Wright, The Life of Charles Dickens (London: Herbert Jenkins, Ltd., 1935), pp. 64-65. Wright believes Haines's shop may have served as the model for the Old Curiosity Shop.

time, if not earlier, writings of Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Walter Savage Landor, Thomas DeQuincey, and no doubt others,[135] including works by two now forgotten authors, who, some scholars hold, greatly influenced Dickens's early writings: John Poole's Sketches and Recollections (collected in 1835), which had been irregularly serialized between 1826 and 1834 in the New Monthly Magazine,[136] and J. Wight's popular police reports for the Morning Herald, collected as Mornings at Bow Street (1824) and More Mornings at Bow Street (1827).[137] Now, or possibly earlier, Dickens read Boswell's Life of Johnson and also Johnson's own works, at least his Life of Savage.[138] Finally, Dickens read such diverse publications as Belzoni's Observations and Discoveries, within Pyramids, Tombs, etc. in Egypt and Nubia (1820), the Newgate Calendar, and Scott's Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft, Addressed to J. G. Lockhart, Esqr. (1830).[139] He also read much poetry. Of his contemporaries he

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[135]See Earle R. Davis, "Literary Influences upon the Early Art of Charles Dickens," and Harry Stone, "Dickens's Reading" (unpublished dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1955), passim.

[136]John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1957), p. 37n.

[137]Nonesuch Let., I, 702, to Miss Coutts, 9/17/45; Wilhelm Dibelius, Charles Dickens, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1926), p. 80.

[138]Nonesuch Let., I, 48, to Catherine Hogarth, 10/29/35.

[139]Allusions in "Seven Dials," "The Last Cab-Driver, and the First Omnibus Cad," and "Shabby-Genteel People," SB, in NLE, I, i, 87, 187, 330.

particularly enjoyed the comic writings of Thomas Hood and, from a slightly earlier period, the poems of Byron, Thomas Moore, and George Colman the Elder.[140]

The roles played by Dickens's career as a shorthand reporter, by his great interest in acting, and by his considerably expanded literary education were certainly important to his preparation as a writer. But most significant, in this as in the earlier period of his life, was the writing he continued to do. Interestingly enough, with all the literary models he had to work with, the future novelist mainly wrote poetry between 1827 and 1833: "Acrostic," "The Devil's Walk," "The Churchyard," and "Lodgings to Let" in Maria Beadnell's album; "A Fable (Not a Gay One)" in Ellen Beard's; "The Bill of Fare," a fairly long and rather poor imitation of Goldsmith's "Retaliation," for a dinner given by the Beadnells; and "The Ivy Green," which Dickens put in The Pickwick Papers but wrote in this earlier period. Even The O'Thello, his "travestie" on Shakespeare's play, was in verse. These early poems are marred by tritely poetic ideas, awkward syntax, and crude rhythm, as these lines from "The Churchyard" illustrate:

> How many tales these Tombstones tell
> Of life's e'er changing scene,
> Of bygone days spent ill or well
> By those who gay have been;
> Who have been happy, rich, and vain,

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[140] See footnote 135.

> Who now are dead, and cold,
> Who've gone alike to dust again,
> The rich, poor, young, and old,[141]

or these from "The Bill of Fare":

> Last, here's Charles Dickens, who's now gone forever;
> It's clear that he thought himself very clever;
> To all his friends' faults--it almost makes me weep,
> He was wide awake--to his own fast asleep!
> Though blame he deserved for such wilful blindness
> He had one merit,--he ne'er forgot kindness.
> His faults--and they were not in number few,
> As all his acquaintance extremely well knew,
> Emanated--to speak of him in good part,
> I think rather more from his head than his heart,
> No mortal means could this young man save,
> And a sweet pair of eyes sent him home to his grave.[142]

Yet one finds an occasional felicitous line or so as in this passage from the conclusion of "The Devil's Walk," a wittier and generally better written poem than the others. The Devil, having satirically commented on various London people and events, glances in Maria Beadnell's album at the verses of the very poem about his walk:

> And he said with glee "they're worthy of me,
> For I'm sure they're devilish bad."[143]

The poem had been building up to these concluding lines, and the intended effect comes off rather well. Even so, this poem, like the others, is amateurish at best. The same unkind criticism can be applied to the extant fragments of The O'Thello. One must respect the raw talent of the

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[141] Collected Papers (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1938 [The Nonesuch Dickens, ed. Arthur Waugh, et al.]), II, 281.

[142] Collected Papers, II, 292-293.

[143] Collected Papers, II, 281.

young man who can carry out a project to write a comic verse travesty (including song lyrics) of a Shakespearean tragedy, but the achievement was scarcely prophetic of the later career, as the following short scene, taken from the acting sides for the part of The Great Unpaid (played appropriately enough by John Dickens) and concluding Act I, Scene ii, illustrates:

CHORUS
Air: "Gold's but Dross"--Robert le Diable

G.U. [GREAT UNPAID].
Bring the porter in the Pewter
And be sure they draw it mild.

E. ARGO. If he suspects his wife he'll shoot her,
And I am for vengeance wild.

CASS. Let's be happy,
Lots of baccy,
Let the cheerful smoke abound.
Dancing lightly,
Gaily, sprightly
Let the merry song go round.

G.U. Right fal la ral la ral lide

E. ARGO. Right fal la ral liddle dol de

CASS. Right fal la ral la ral lide

DESD. Right fal la ral liddle dol de

CHORUS:
Right fal la ral, etc.

(at end of chorus go out with the rest).[144]

If the poetry is bad, the prose Dickens wrote between 1827 and 1833 is somewhat more promising and certainly more significant for the future of a novelist. He apparently

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[144]Collected Papers, II, 62-63.

wrote a "monypolylogue" similar to the one-man, quick-change playlets of Charles Mathews and scribbled certain rough sketches of people and things in a notebook,[145] but these writings have not survived. Only the letters that Dickens wrote before 1834 still remain. Fortunately, they illustrate that even this early in his writing career Dickens had some control over the English language and some ability to express himself formally, colloquially, seriously, humorously. For example, he could write the following to Maria Beadnell:

> Your own feelings will enable you to imagine far better than any attempt of mine to describe the painful struggle it has cost me to make up my mind to adopt the course which I now take--a course than which nothing can be so directly opposed to my wishes and feelings, but the necessity of which becomes daily more apparent to me. Our meetings of late have been little more than so many displays of heartless indifference on the one hand, while on the other they have never failed to prove a fertile source of wretchedness and misery; and seeing, as I cannot fail to do, that I have engaged in a pursuit which has long since been worse than hopeless and a further perseverance in which can only expose me to deserved ridicule, I have made up my mind to return the little present I received from you some time since (which I have always prized, as I still do, far beyond anything I ever possessed) and the other enclosed mementos of our past correspondence which I am sure it must be gratifying to you to receive, as after our recent situations they are certainly better adapted for your custody than mine.
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> Need I say that I have not the most remote idea of hurting your feelings by the few lines which I think it necessary to write with the accompanying little parcel? I must be the last person in the world who could entertain such an intention, but

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[145] See Johnson, pp. 90-91 (quoting from John Payne Collier's An Old Man's Diary, Forty Years Ago [London, 1872, pp. 13-14]) and p. 76; F. G. Kitton, The Minor Writings of Charles Dickens (London: Elliot Stock, 1900), pp. 221-222; Ralph Straus, Charles Dickens, A Biography from New Sources (New York: Cosmopolitan, 1928), p. 68.

> I feel that this is neither a matter nor a time for cold, deliberate, calculating trifling. My feelings upon any subject more especially upon this, must be to you a matter of very little moment, still I have feelings in common with other people--perhaps so far as they relate to you they have been as strong and as good as ever warmed the human heart--and I do feel that it is mean and contemptible of me to keep by me one gift of yours or to preserve one single line or word of remembrance, or affection from you. I therefore return them, and I can only wish that I could as easily forget that I ever received them.[146]

The language is obviously stilted and the sentence structure unnecessarily complex, but the cruelty of the cold tone, however much disclaimed by Dickens at the beginning of the second paragraph, is clearly intentional, as the irony at the close of the first paragraph illustrates.

If the above excerpt is formal and serious, passages from other letters are more light-hearted in tone and more colloquial in style:

> In reply to your inquiry respecting a sizable pony, I have great satisfaction in being able to say that I have procured you an "'oss" which I have had once or twice since I have been here. I am a poor judge of distance, but I should certainly say that your legs would be off the ground when you are on his back. To look at the animal in question you would think (with the exception of dog's meat) there was no earthly purpose to which he could be applied. But when you try him, joking apart, I will pledge you my veracity, he will beat any horse, hired or private, that you would see in a morning's ride. I am his especial patron, but on this occasion I will procure something smaller for myself.[147]

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[146] Nonesuch Let., I, 16, to Maria Beadnell, 3/18/33.

[147] Nonesuch Let., I, 7-8, to Henry Kolle, [1832].

> By the by, if I had many friends in the habit of marrying, which friends had brothers who possessed an extensive assortment of choice hock, I should be dead in no time. Yesterday I felt like a maniac, today my interior resembles a lime basket.[148]

The humor here is obvious, relying on some exaggeration and on highly pictorial images, but it is not exorbitant and, probably because of its spontaneity, is superior to much of the humor Dickens attempted in his earliest published tales.

By 1833, then, though he had much to learn about certain basic techniques of writing and, for that matter, may have just become conscious of professional ambitions in the authorial line, Charles Dickens was about ready to launch his literary career. His preparation for it, if largely unconscious, was extensive. His reading, theater-going, acting, and other youthful activities, particularly his daydreaming and imaginative games, contributed greatly to the development of his creative imagination, as perhaps, in their way, did his many days of loneliness and frustration. A few years later the assiduity with which Dickens acquired an education for himself in the British Museum reading room and consciously prepared himself as a Parliamentary reporter and as an actor suggests the care he must likewise have taken a short time later to ready himself as a writer. More significantly, these activities themselves were important influences on his writing. He was intimately

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[148] Nonesuch Let., I, 23, to Henry Kolle, [5/19/33].

familiar with two Londons--the dark, frightening city of his boyhood and the fascinating playground of his young manhood, a London of theaters and inns, Parliament, Doctors' Commons, criminal courts, Seven Dials and Monmouth Street, Vauxhall Gardens and Astley's Circus.[149] He also read armloads of novels, plays, poems, and essays. Thus, by the time he stealthily dropped his first manuscript "with fear and trembling, into a dark letter-box, in a dark office, up a dark court in Fleet Street" one evening in 1833,[150] he not only had a head full of possible subjects for future papers, he had numerous literary models available to aid him in giving form to his experiences and observations. Moreover, he had been acting and writing for years. "Do you care to know," he wrote to a friend in 1859, "that I was a great writer at eight years old or so--was an actor and speaker from a baby?"[151] Crude though his early poems, plays, and sketches may have been (though the letters show some promise), the act of imitation and creation was an important first step in his training as a writer. Bolstered by Dickens's determination to gain eminence and financial

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[149]"Having been in London two years," wrote George Lear, a fellow clerk of Dickens at Ellis and Blackmore's, "I thought I knew something of town, but after a little talk with Dickens I found that I knew nothing. He knew it all from Bow to Brentford" (in Kitton, Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil, p. 131).

[150]"Preface to the First Cheap Edition," PP, in NLE, II, i, xv.

[151]Nonesuch Let., III, 122, to Mrs. Howitt, 9/7/59.

success in some field, his extensive though mainly unconscious preparation for a writing career made his resolution to become an author more easily attainable than otherwise, and his rapid advancement in this new profession more understandable.

CHAPTER II

SKETCHES BY BOZ--THE EARLY "TALES"

Since it was predominantly as a novelist that Charles Dickens carved out his literary career, critics have quite naturally devoted little attention to the large number of miscellaneous writings that spanned his years of productivity, from the first tale in the Monthly Magazine, two and one-half years before Pickwick Papers, to the last article in his own All the Year Round, late in 1869. Certainly not deserving of this critical neglect, as the following three chapters will show, are the fifty-nine tales, character studies, and descriptive essays that Dickens wrote between 1833 and 1836 and collected in a total of three volumes as the first and second series of Sketches by Boz in February and December of 1836.[1]

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[1]Most of the tales and sketches had originally appeared in the Monthly Magazine, Bell's Weekly Magazine, Morning Chronicle, Evening Chronicle, Bell's Life in London, Library of Fiction, and Carlton Chronicle. A detailed listing of their original publication is to be found in Thomas Hatton and Arthur H. Cleaver, A Bibliography of the Periodical Works of Charles Dickens: Bibliographical, Analytical, and Statistical (London: Chapman & Hall, Ltd., 1933), pp. 91-103. Since 1933 two changes in this list have been noted. The publication of "Brokers' and Marine-Store Shops" in the Morning Chronicle for December 15, 1834, was first discovered by William J. Carlton--see his "'The Story without a Beginning': An Unrecorded Contribution by Boz to the Morning Chronicle," Dickn, XLVII (1951), 67-70. "Sentiment" was first published in Bell's Weekly Magazine on June 7, 1834, as indicated by

Whenever a scholar devotes a few paragraphs or even a few pages to the Sketches by Boz, he generally points, as does Edgar Johnson in his biography of Dickens, to the young author's detailed, realistic, and frequently humorous observations of the life he then knew; to his early sympathy with those oppressed by society and its institutions; and to the anticipation not only of the style and characters of his later works but also of the "incredible fecundity that was to be."[2] Although Johnson concludes that this early work "is full of the flaws and shortcomings that disclose it to be the work of an apprentice," he adds, as would other critics, that "it is also full of something more than promise: of a kind of not entirely ripe fulfillment. Apprentice work indicating an apprentice so enormously gifted and even here so precociously skilled might well banish all surprise if its author, in his very next effort, leaped into

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Hilmer Nielsen in his "Some Observations on Sketches by Boz," Dickn, XXXIV (1938), 243-245. This last discovery has generally been ignored by later scholars.

[2]Johnson, pp. 110-114. For example, Forster speaks of "the first sprightly runnings" of Dickens's genius (Forster, p. 76); Ernest Boll finds "the closest organic membership" of SB to the whole body of Dickens's writings relative to characters, situations, style, form, and authorial comment ("The Sketches by 'Boz,'" Dickn, XXXVI [1939], 72); C. B. Cox believes that in SB "the comic viewpoints which are implied in his later works can be seen in the process of development" ("Comic Viewpoints in Sketches by Boz," English, XII [Spring, 1959], 132); Lionel Stevenson claims that in SB Dickens "unconsciously wrote for future generations a 'Handbook to Early Victorian England'" ("An Introduction to Young Mr. Dickens," Dickn, XXIX [Spring, 1933], 114); and Humphry House sees the work as "a prospectus of what he was to do for the next thirty years" (The Dickens World, 2nd ed. [London: Oxford University Press, 1942], p. 21).

the circle of the masters."[3]

A more detailed study of the Sketches than Johnson and other scholars with different objectives could justifiably make should reveal the exact nature of the shortcomings and virtues of the work. In addition, an examination of these early magazine pieces in approximately the order of their writing--an approach that has not before been taken--will reinforce Johnson's conclusions and chronicle the early stages of Dickens's development as a writer of fiction. There is little likelihood that the young author who had thus far written "Misnar, the Sultan of India," The O'Thello, and "A Bill of Fare" could have "leaped into the circle of the masters" with Pickwick Papers in 1833, whatever raw talent he may have possessed. As a result, the years between 1833 and 1836, during which Dickens wrote and published the tales and essays he collected as Sketches by Boz, provide fertile ground for an investigation of his early development as a craftsman.

Dickens began his professional writing career with eight farcical tales, the subjects of this chapter, all but one of which appeared in the Monthly Magazine, a liberal publication of small circulation and declining reputation.[4] As one might expect, the tales are ineffective

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[3]Johnson, p. 114.

[4]See F. J. Harvey Darton, Dickens, Positively the First Appearance: A Centenary Review (London: The Argonaut Press, 1933), p. 10, for a fuller description of the

for the most part, poorly conceived and crudely written. Yet they are not without occasional virtues, and the last two or three show some improvement over the first. A study of these tales will reveal a young writer's early, generally unsuccessful struggle with the complex intermixture of techniques that make up the craft of fiction. He wants to write, to amuse people, to make a name and, one supposes, a fortune for himself, but the precise means by which he should proceed are not yet known to him. One can see Dickens making tentative movements in the direction of what would later (as illustrated by reference to Pickwick Papers) prove to be effective techniques for his particular genius. But more often than not he pulls back, content to return to the security of imitating what he does not realize are flawed models; or he fails to follow through in the next tale he writes with a technique that had been particularly effective in the preceding one. What one would like to think of as conscious experimentation on Dickens's part may be this to some slight extent, but the virtues these tales

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Monthly Magazine. The tales that appeared in it were "A Dinner at Poplar Walk" (retitled "Mr. Minns and His Cousin" for the collected edition), December, 1833; "Mrs. Joseph Porter, 'over the way,'" ("Mrs. Joseph Porter" in the collected edition), January, 1834; "Horatio Sparkins," February, 1834; The Bloomsbury Christening," April, 1834; "The Boarding House," May and August, 1834; "The Steam Excursion," October, 1834; and "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle," January and February, 1835. In addition, "Sentiment" appeared in Bell's Weekly Magazine, June 7, 1834. In referring to these tales and later to the other essays and tales of SB I shall, unless otherwise noted, use the titles which appear in modern editions, for the sake of the reader.

possess were largely unconsciously achieved. Yet the richness of detail, character, and incident that would be representative of the later Dickens can be observed beginning to unfold in these early tales.

Dickens's efforts in writing as a boy and very young man had to some extent prepared him for the career he embarked upon in 1833. If he had had little practice in the writing of fiction itself, he was certainly familiar with the more obvious techniques of fiction writing from his own voracious reading. But equally important, his early dramatic efforts, evoked no doubt by his intense interest in viewing plays, had given him some practice in at least the rudimentary techniques of plot manipulation and character development that he would need in writing stories. In addition, he had quite likely selected certain models from the literature and drama of his acquaintance to serve as guides for his own writing, though if he selected specific works or even authors, these are for the most part unavailable to modern scholars.[5] One can point, at

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[5]Perhaps the closest influences were the "At Homes" of Charles Mathews and the Sketches and Recollections in two volumes (London: Published for Henry Colburn by Richard Bentley, 1835) of John Poole. Though no scripts of Mathews's performances exist, descriptions of his various one-man shows found in Mrs. Mathews's The Memoirs of Charles Mathews, mainly in volume IV, suggest that Dickens, who was a devout admirer of the elder Mathews, may very likely have consciously imitated in his early writing, as he had earlier in his amateur entertainments, characters and situations created by Mathews (with the initial authorial aid of his son and R. B. Peake). Wilhelm Dibelius, in his Charles Dickens, pp. 68ff., discusses the theatrical influence, particularly that of

least, to certain types of literature, predominantly popular, upon which Dickens must surely have modelled his earliest published writings. Of some influence would be the eighteenth and early nineteenth century novels, in which Dickens was well-read, and those essays or parts of essays from the same years that contain character studies of one kind or another (Addison and Steele's, Goldsmith's, Lamb's, Irving's). However, the most important influences were the one-act farces then extremely popular as afterpieces in the early nineteenth century theater and the great number of short fictional pieces (some even in verse, such as the story poems of Hood, Coombes, and George Colman) in the popular magazines of the 1820's and 1830's. From these sources in particular, Dickens must have picked up the farcical situations, the lower and middle class characters, and the punning, obtrusively clever style of writing that all too frequently characterize his early tales.[6]

Mathews, on Dickens's early writings. Butt and Tillotson, p. 48, allude to Poole's influence. As they suggest, Poole's "Preparations for Pleasure," which originally appeared in the New Monthly Magazine, October, 1829, bears a strong resemblance to parts of Dickens's "The Steam Excursion," which was written about five years later. One and possibly two of the other essays in Poole's collection also bear striking similarities to some of Dickens's later Sketches.

[6]It is not my intention to do a study of the influences upon Dickens's earliest writings, though in later pages of this chapter and the following chapters I may occasionally concentrate upon a particularly close influence. Rather, I wish merely to suggest what is no doubt obvious to the reader, that Dickens did not write in vacuo, that he was at every turn confronted by the flood of theatrical and magazine literature produced for early nineteenth century

At any rate, when Dickens sat down to write his first story, probably in the summer of 1833, he must have been reasonably conscious of what he was about to do. Even so, it is best that, except among his friends and relatives, this first story went virtually unnoticed. Although it was not below the quality of much of the fiction published by the Monthly Magazine, it was, nevertheless, noticeably inferior to the tales Dickens would be writing but a few months later. In 1836 (and later), when Dickens revised "Mr. Minns and His Cousin," he himself furnished, through his revisions, a detailed criticism of his earliest professional writing.[7] An examination of these revisions

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audiences. For the theatrical influence on Dickens, see footnote 5; for the influence of magazine fiction, see Nielsen, "Some Observations on Sketches by Boz," pp. 243-245; for contemporary criticism, whose authors frequently allude to influences on SB, see W[alter] D[exter], "The Reception of Dickens's First Book," Dickn, XXXII (1936), 43-50, and W. Miller and E. H. Stange, A Centenary Bibliography of the Pickwick Papers (London: The Argonaut Press, 1936), passim. Also see Earle Rosco Davis, "Literary Influences upon the Early Art of Charles Dickens," passim; David Cowden, "The Structure of Dickens's Novels," (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1959); Harry Stone, "Dickens's Reading," Ernest Boll, "Charles Dickens and Washington Irving," MLQ, V (December, 1944), 453-467; Christof Wegelin, "Dickens and Irving: the Problem of Influence," MLQ, VII (March, 1946), 83-91.

[7]For a history of the revisions Dickens made in the various editions of SB between 1836 and 1867, see Butt and Tillotson, pp. 35-61. According to them, most of the changes in "Mr. Minns and His Cousin" were made for the first edition of the second series of SB (published December, 1836, although dated "1837"). Thus, though I contrast the Monthly Magazine version of December, 1833, to that of the NLE modern version, which follows the 1867 edition of Dickens's works, for all practical purposes one sees the conscious craftsman of 1836 at work. My purpose, however, in making the contrast is more to shed light on the Dickens of 1833

will reveal not only what Dickens knew about writing by 1836 but what he did and did not know about it in 1833, and should thus be a start toward setting up the criteria by which Dickens's gradual development as a craftsman must be measured.

To begin with, the earliest published version of Dickens's tale of Mr. Minns's visit to his suburban cousins contained a number of stylistic peculiarities, literary affectations, that call unnecessary attention to themselves. One example is the overuse of italics and quotation marks, such as those used to emphasize the author's "wit" in the opening paragraph of the story:

> Mr. Minns was a bachelor of *about* forty, as he said--of about eight and forty, as his friends said. He was always exceedingly clean, precise, and *tidy*, perhaps somewhat priggish, and the most "retiring man in the world." (*MM*, p. 617)[8]

In the later version of this passage Dickens had quietly excised such affectations and further cleared up the passage:

> Mr. Augustus Minns was a bachelor, of about forty as he said--of about eight-and-forty, as his friends said. He was always exceedingly clean, precise, and tidy; perhaps somewhat priggish, and the most retiring man in the world. (*NLE*, I, i, 393)

But the most noticeable stylistic affectations in "Mr. Minns

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than the one of 1836. For a complete text of the original edition, see Darton, *Dickens, Positively the First Appearance*, pp. 51-68, or "In All the Glory of Print," *Dickn*, XXX (1934), 1-10.

[8]On this and the next few pages "*MM*" refers to the *Monthly Magazine*, XVI (December, 1833). *NLE*, as mentioned in the Preface, refers to the National Library Edition of Dickens's works.

and His Cousin" are a number of extravagant figures of speech, most of which Dickens removed in later revisions: "Minns . . . looked as merry as a farthing rushlight in a fog"; he had "a face as red as a flamingo"; "his boots were like pump-suckers"; "Had Minns been struck by an electric eel, he could not have made a more hysterical spring through the door-way"; "Minns leaped from his seat as though he had received the discharge from a galvanic battery"; Minns was "looking forward to his visit of the following Sunday with the feelings of a pennyless poet to the weekly visit of his Scotch landlady"; and he was "as happy as a tom-tit upon bird-lime." Only the last three, for no apparent reason, remain in all published versions. A figure of speech that Dickens added in revision, though less colorful and original, is more suitable: "the first gleam of pleasure he had experienced that morning shone like a meteor through his wretchedness." That such extravagant figures of speech appear with decreasing frequency in his writing of the next few months is at least a small sign of Dickens's growing maturity as a writer.

Other relatively minor revisions Dickens made give additional insight into the faults of the 1833 version of "Mr. Minns and His Cousin." These revisions at least clarify somewhat confused meanings, eliminate some wordiness, and more adequately point up the humor, as in the following:

> 1. Original: He [Mr. Minns] had but two particular horrors in the world, and those were dogs and children. His prejudice arose from no unamiability of disposition, but that the habits of the animals were continually at

variance with his love of order, which might be said to be equally as powerful as his love of life. (MM, p. 617)

Revision: There were two classes of created objects which he held in the deepest and unmingled horror: these were dogs, and children. He was not unamiable, but he could, at any time, have viewed the execution of a dog, or the assassination of an infant, with the liveliest satisfaction. Their habits were at variance with his love of order; and his love of order was as powerful as his love of life. (NLE, I, i, 393-394)

2. When asked by his cousin how he is, Minns replies:
Original: "Uncommonly well, thank ye," said Minns, casting a diabolical look at the dog, who, with his hind-legs on the floor, and his fore-paws resting on the table, was dragging a bit of bread-and-butter out of a plate, which, in the ordinary course of things, it was natural to suppose he would eat with the buttered side next to the carpet. (MM, p. 618)

Revision: "Uncommonly well, thank you," said Minns, casting a diabolical look at the dog, who, with his hind-legs on the floor, and his fore-paws resting on the table, was dragging a bit of bread-and-butter out of a plate, preparatory to devouring it, with the buttered side next the carpet. (NLE, I, i, 396)

In addition to these and many other minor revisions, Dickens found time in 1836 to make major changes in two parts of this first tale that show he was capable of creating an effective minor scene by then and had a greater comprehension of the plot structure for the entire story. The 1833 version thus reveals his difficulties in creating a full, though minor, scene and his less than adequate conception of plot structure.

The minor scene that Dickens expanded in 1836 occurs in the coach that takes Mr. Minns to dinner at Poplar Walk. Having waited an excessively long time for the coach to get underway (the coachman is attempting to find additional passengers), Minns voices his complaints. The original

version then proceeds as follows:

> "Going this minute, Sir," was the reply;--and accordingly the coach trundled on for a couple of hundred yards, and then stopped again. Minns doubled himself up into a corner of the coach, and abandoned himself to his fate.
>
> "Tell your missis to make haste my dear--'cause here's a gentleman inside vich is in a desperate hurry." In about five minutes more missis appeared, with a child and two band-boxes, and then they set off.
>
> "Be quiet, love," said the mother--who saw the agony of Minns, as the child rubbed its shoes on the new drab trousers--"be quiet, dear! Here, play with this parasol--don't kick the gentleman."
>
> The interesting infant, however, with its agreeable plaything, contrived to tax Mr. Minns's ingenuity, in the "art of self-defense," during the ride; and amidst these infantile assaults, and the mother's apologies, the distracted gentleman arrived at the Swan, when, on referring to his watch, to his great dismay he discovered that it was a quarter past five.
>
> (MM, p. 620)

The revision not only clarifies the progression of the action but creates a more effective portrait of the child and turns a rather awkwardly related scene into a more than adequately humorous episode. Here we have the Dickens who, at the time of revision, was well into Pickwick Papers:

> "Going this minute, sir," was the reply;--and, accordingly, the machine trundled on for a couple of hundred yards, and then stopped again. Minns doubled himself up in a corner of the coach, and abandoned himself to his fate, as a child, a mother, a bandbox, and a parasol, became his fellow-passengers.
>
> The child was an affectionate and an amiable infant; the little dear mistook Minns for his other parent, and screamed to embrace him.
>
> "Be quiet, dear," said the mama, restraining the impetuosity of the darling, whose little fat legs were kicking, and stamping, and twining themselves into the most complicated forms, in an ecstasy of impatience. "Be quiet, dear, that's not your papa."
>
> "Thank Heaven I am not!" thought Minns, as the first gleam of pleasure he had experienced that morning shone like a meteor through his wretchedness.

> Playfulness was agreeably mingled with affection in the disposition of the boy. When satisfied that Mr. Minns was not his parent, he endeavoured to attract his notice, by scraping his drab trousers with his dirty shoes, poking his chest with his mama's parasol, and other nameless endearments peculiar to infancy, with which he beguiled the tediousness of the ride, apparently very much to his own satisfaction.
>
> When the unfortunate gentleman arrived at the Swan, he found to his great dismay, that it was a quarter-past five. (NLE, I, i, 399-400)

Although limited by Dickens's original construction of his first tale, the revised scene is not noticeably inferior to the following passage from the second chapter of Pickwick Papers. The excerpt below does, however, have the advantage of being part of a much more fully developed scene in a much longer work. Mr. Pickwick's character, for example, has already been partly established, and the business with his notebook is funnier in the light of the first chapter.

> "Cab!" said Mr. Pickwick.
>
> "Here you are, sir," shouted a strange specimen of the human race, in a sackcloth coat, and apron of the same, who with a brass label and number round his neck, looked as if he were catalogued in some collection of rarities. This was the waterman. "Here you are, sir. Now, then, fust cab!" And the first cab having been fetched from the public-house, where he had been smoking his first pipe, Mr. Pickwick and his portmanteau were thrown into the vehicle.
>
> "Golden Cross," said Mr. Pickwick.
>
> "Only a bob's vorth, Tommy," cried the driver, sulkily, for the information of his friend the waterman, as the cab drove off.
>
> "How old is that horse, my friend?" inquired Mr. Pickwick, rubbing his nose with the shilling he had reserved for the fare.
>
> "Forty-two," replied the driver, eying him askant.
>
> "What!" ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, laying his hand upon his note-book. The driver reiterated his former statement. Mr. Pickwick looked very hard at the man's face, but his features were immovable, so he noted down the fact forthwith.

> "And how long do you keep him out at a time?" inquired Mr. Pickwick, searching for further information.
> "Two or three veeks," replied the man.
> "Weeks!" said Mr. Pickwick, in astonishment--and out came the note-book again.
> "He lives at Pentonwil when he's at home," observed the driver cooly, "but we seldom takes him home on account of his veakness."
> "On account of his weakness!" reiterated the perplexed Mr. Pickwick.
> "He always falls down when he's took out o' the cab," continued the driver, "but when he's in it, we bears him up werry tight, and takes him in werry short, so as he can't werry well fall down; and we've got a pair o' precious large wheels on, so ven he does move, they run after him, and he must go on--he can't help it." (NLE, II, i, 8-9)

The second major revision is a complete overhaul of the conclusion of the story. There are numerous changes here that correspond to revisions already discussed, but the more important changes are those that give the story, though somewhat belatedly, the focus that the original version lacks. The conflict in the tale, as we know from the brief opening scene between Mr. and Mrs. Budden (they were the Bagshaws in the first version), revolves around their plan to persuade Mr. Minns, who detests dogs, children, and the Buddens, that their little son will make a fine heir for Minns. Yet, in the story as Dickens originally wrote it, this plot line tends to get lost while Dickens occupies himself with deriving as much humor as possible from Mr. Minns's harassment by Budden and his dog, by the cabman and the child in the coach, and by the adults and Minns's young nephew at the Budden's Sunday dinner.[9]

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[9]C. B. Cox, in his "Comic Viewpoints in Sketches by Boz, 133-134, sees the story as "first of all a simple satire on Minns's ambition to impose order on all his actions." Thus

This false emphasis is not completely avoided even in the final version of the story. But Dickens does make an attempt in the concluding paragraphs of the later version to regain the focus lost in the major portion of the story. He had partly regained it in the original version. Amid the confusion resulting from Minns's hasty departure from the dinner party, Dickens had Master Alexander fix the print of his raspberry-jam-and-custard-covered "paws" on Minns's trousers and cry out, "Do stop, godpa'--I like you--Ma' says I'm to coax you to leave me all your money!" (MM, p. 624). Not only is this technique crude, but Dickens failed to continue the emphasis in the concluding paragraph:

> It was half-past three in the morning ere Mr. Augustus Minns knocked faintly at No. 11, Tavistock Street, Covent Garden. He had footed it every step of the way from Poplar Walk:--he had not a dry thread about him, and his boots were like pump-suckers. Never from that day could Mr. Minns endure the name of Bagshaw or Poplar Walk. It was to him as the writing on the wall was to Belshazzar. Mr. Minns has removed from Tavistock Street. His residence is at present a secret, as he is determined not to risk another assault from his cousin and his pink-eyed poodle. (MM, p. 624)

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the plot becomes "a series of jokes about man's inability to impose his sense of order and propriety on the raw material of life, "and the theme is seen implicit in the contrast Dickens draws between the coldness and drabness of Minns's "ordered existence" and the "exhuberant joy in life" of Budden. The contrast is obviously not as clear-cut as Cox suggests, for Budden, his family, his friends, and his poodle are as humorously brought low as is Minns. In addition, though Dickens is obviously utilizing what Stephen Leacock (in his "Two Humorists: Charles Dickens and Mark Twain," Yale Review, n.s. XXIV [September, 1934], 120) calls "the humor of discomfiture," it is scarcely for as serious a purpose as Cox states.

The revision, however, does bring the point of the plot back into focus. Minns is not now so much defeated as he is somewhat victorious, having dashed the hopes of the elder Buddens:

> It was somewhere about three o'clock in the morning, when Mr. Augustus Minns knocked feebly at the street-door of his lodgings in Tavistock Street, cold, wet, cross, and miserable. He made his will next morning, and his professional man informs us, in that strict confidence in which we inform the public, that neither the name of Mr. Octavius Budden, nor of Mrs. Amelia Budden, nor of Master Alexander Augustus Budden appears therein. (NLE, I, i, 406)

This brief study of the revisions Dickens made in "Mr. Minns and His Cousin," mainly in 1836, show that by then the author himself was aware of the tale's rather awkward and frequently affected style, of its occasionally confusing narrative, of its lack of descriptive fullness, and of its formlessness, even though he did not completely rid the revised versions of these faults. To have done so, and also to have raised the quality of the characterizations of Minns, Budden, and other figures, would have called for a thorough replanning and a complete rewriting of the tale, a task that in 1836 Dickens scarcely had the time or inclination to carry out. Even in its revised form--and "Mr. Minns and His Cousin" received considerably more reworking than the other early tales--it is not noticeably inferior to the others. Yet in December, 1833, and early 1834, the twenty-one year old author would scarcely have acknowledged the validity of such criticism if it had been offered. A week

after the story appeared in the Monthly Magazine, as Dickens rather proudly wrote his friend, Henry Kolle, it was pirated for publication in the London Weekly Magazine (still known to Dickens by its former title of The Thief); he had received "a polite and flattering communication from the Monthly people requesting more papers"; and he was in the midst of planning or writing two short tales, a series of papers to be called "The Parish," and a "proposed novel," which he was considering cutting up into magazine sketches, "as publishing is hazardous."[10] A few months later, the Weekly Dispatch listed his "The Bloomsbury Christening" as "among the amusing papers" in the April, 1834, issue of the Monthly Magazine and the following month indicated that the first part of "The Boarding House" was excellent in [its] way."[11]

While the study of the revisions that Dickens made in his first stories reveals his inadequacies as a writer in 1833, an investigation of the various aspects of the craft of fiction in the other Monthly Magazine tales should afford not only a more particularized itemization of the faults but, more importantly, of the virtues of these early tales. It should also show Dickens slowly, and with

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[10] Nonesuch Let., I, 29, to Henry Kolle, [1834]. For a note on the London Weekly Magazine, see Walter Dexter's "When Found: The Pirates," Dickn, XXX (1934), 239.

[11] Quoted in Dexter's "Contemporary Opinion of Dickens's Earliest Work," Dickn, XXXI (1935), 106. There is no way of knowing whether or not Dickens read these brief evaluations of his early tales.

difficulty, making progress in his handling of the techniques of fiction. In addition, such a study of what Dickens does and does not do with plot, scene development, characterization, setting, description, narration, and critical intent or purpose should virtually though not entirely complete the setting up of the criteria by which his development as a craftsman can be evaluated.

Although Dickens grouped these early stories under the heading of "Tales" in the first combined edition of the two series of Sketches by Boz,[12] they are essentially "small fictional sketches,"[13] or "episodes," lively scenes rather than stories with developed plots and characters.[14] As sketches, episodes, or scenes, then, they lack, except in a superficial sense, what R. S. Crane requires a plot to be: a "completed change, gradual or sudden," in the situation, in the character, or in the thought, and consequently in the feelings, of the protagonist.[15] But if one grants that, for the sake of the comedy, the cleverness, the flashes of wit, even the pure exuberance of good spirits, such farcical sketches need not be tied down to rigid conventions of

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[12]Butt and Tillotson, pp. 56-57. This was the edition issued in monthly parts, November, 1837-June, 1839.

[13]Johnson, p. 91.

[14]Darton, Dickens, Positively the First Appearance, p. 71.

[15]R. S. Crane, "The Concept of Plot and the Plot of Tom Jones," in Critics and Criticisms, ed. R. S. Crane (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 66-67.

story-telling, some of these early tales are not entirely unsatisfactory. From such a point of view one might, for example, appreciate "The Bloomsbury Christening" (April, 1834), which, while similar in plot to "Mr. Minns and His Cousin," is more fully and more convincingly developed (it may even have prepared the way for Dickens's revisions in 1836 of "Mr. Minns and His Cousin"), or "The Steam Excursion" (October, 1834), which, while containing characters who walk through a kind of plot, is really, after all, a charming, frequently humorous sketch of an outing on the Thames that ends somewhat disastrously in rough water and seasickness. "Dickens," writes Lionel Stevenson, commenting upon the Sketches by Boz in general, "naively shows himself so fascinated by every detail of the human life around him, so unaffectedly entertained by the commonplace, that he prattles about them in the full assurance that his reader will be equally thrilled. He does not feel the need of any plot or continuity of suspense, and so great is his zest that the reader actually does respond to it."[16]

Nevertheless, despite redeeming virtues, these early tales are noticeably marred by inconclusive, unconvincing, and inadequately conceived plots. Sometimes, as in "Horatio Sparkins" (February, 1834), Dickens becomes confused about the direction in which his story should be moving.[17] Although

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[16]Lionel Stevenson, "An Introduction to Young Mr. Dickens," p. 113.

[17]See my discussion earlier in this chapter of "Mr. Minns and His Cousin," which in its original version also had a misdirected plot.

the Maldertons are concerned throughout the story with the social connections of Horatio Sparkins, the "discovery" that he is really Mr. Samuel Smith, a clerk and junior partner in a "cheap" store, is too abrupt--not because it is unexpected but because it is made too soon. In the preceding scenes Dickens was so busy satirizing the social pretentions of all the characters that the reader has forgotten that he had been suspicious of the identity of Mr. Sparkins from the beginning of the tale. He is surprised to recall that Horatio was originally meant to be the scapegoat of the piece. Another fault of "Horatio Sparkins" and also of "Mrs. Joseph Porter" (as well as of "Mr. Minns and His Cousin") lies in Dickens's failure in these very early tales to create scenes that are essential to the adequate development of his plots. In "Horatio Sparkins" Mrs. Malderton and her daughters no sooner recognize Mr. Sparkins as the clerk than Dickens states, "'We will draw a veil,' as novel-writers say, over the scene that ensued" (NLE, I, ii, 46). This should be, after all, the climactic scene of the story. We should be allowed to witness reactions when women who feel guilty about frequenting a "cheap" shop discover that their "eligible" young man works there: what price snobbery now? Dickens makes the same mistake with "Mrs. Joseph Porter" (January, 1834), where, with the additional flaw of a plot so slight that it is virtually nonexistent, he prepares the reader for a

climactic amateur performance of Othello, certain to be a comic tour de force, but then fails to describe it at any length. "It would be useless and tiresome," he states, "to quote the number of instances in which Uncle Tom, now completely in his element, and instigated by the mischievous Mrs. Porter, corrected the mistakes of the performers. . ." (NLE, I, ii, 123). As with "Mrs. Joseph Porter," "Sentiment" (June 7, 1834) is virtually plotless. Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M.P. sends his daughter to the "finishing establishment" of the female Crumptons to rid her of a sentimental attachment to an unacceptable young man. Unknown to all, he is the nephew of the Misses Crumpton and, having thus easily discovered his beloved in their establishment, promptly elopes with her. Dickens does not even describe the elopement; instead, he puts in a lengthy closing scene in which Miss Maria Crumpton hesitantly tells Mr. Dingwall about it.

Although almost any scene from Pickwick Papers will do, the Bardell vs. Pickwick trial clearly illustrates what, approximately three years later, Dickens would be capable of doing with plot. He has the obvious advantage of having earlier in the novel established the characters of important personages in the trial scene, but the story can still be looked at as a tale complete in itself. Through the testimony of the witnesses and the behavior of all the participants in the trial, a conflict is quickly

set up, developed at some length, and finally resolved in just the way one knew from the beginning was inevitable. Yet, even as he loses the trial, Mr. Pickwick has his moment of triumph over Dodson and Fogg, Mrs. Bardell's attorneys. However, Dickens gives the story a further (though expected) twist. It ends with Tony Weller's outwardly absurd but somehow perceptive lament that, in ironic fashion, sums up the picture of the English legal system that Dickens painted in the chapter:

> "Do you find for the plaintiff, gentlemen, or for the defendent?"
>
> "For the plaintiff."
>
> "With what damages, gentlemen?"
>
> "Seven hundred and fifty pounds."
>
> Mr. Pickwick took off his spectacles, carefully wiped the glasses, folded them into their case, and put them in his pocket; then having drawn on his gloves with great nicety, and stared at the foreman all the while, he mechanically followed Mr. Perker and the blue bag out of court.
>
> They stopped in a side room while Perker paid the court fees; and here, Mr. Pickwick was joined by his friends. Here, too, he encountered Messrs. Dodson and Fogg, rubbing their hands with every token of outward satisfaction.
>
> "Well, gentlemen," said Mr. Pickwick.
>
> "Well, sir," said Dodson: for self and partner.
>
> "You imagine you'll get your costs, don't you, gentlemen?" said Mr. Pickwick.
>
> Fogg said they thought it rather probable. Dodson smiled, and said they'd try.
>
> "You may try, and try, and try again, Messrs. Dodson and Fogg," said Mr. Pickwick vehemently, "but not one farthing of costs or damages do you ever get from me, if I spend the rest of my existence in a debtors' prison."
>
> "Ha, ha!" laughed Dodson. "You'll think better of that, before next term, Mr. Pickwick."
>
> "He, he, he! We'll soon see about that, Mr. Pickwick," grinned Fogg.
>
> Speechless with indignation, Mr. Pickwick allowed himself to be led by his solicitor and friends to the door, and there assisted into a hackney coach, which

> had been fetched for the purpose, by the ever-watchful Sam Weller.
>
> Sam had put up the steps, and was preparing to jump upon the box, when he felt himself gently touched upon the shoulder; and looking round, his father stood before him. The old gentleman's countenance wore a mournful expression, as he shook his head gravely, and said, in warning accents--
>
> "I know'd what 'ud come o' this here mode o' doin' bis'ness. Oh Sammy, Sammy, vy worn't there a alleybi!" (NLE, II, ii, 110-111)

Much of the blame for the inadequacies of his early plots lies with the similarities these tales bear to the theatrical farces. As a type, Dickens's tale is a "sort of narrative farce," a "disguised" farce, or even--as one critic called "Mr. Minns and His Cousin"--a "rattling farce."[18] The early tales, as well as some of the other tales in the first series of Sketches by Boz, were strongly reminiscent of the theatrical farce to the contemporary reviewers, among them George Hogarth, soon to become Dickens's father-in-law, who wrote in the obviously partisan Morning Chronicle:

> These tales are in general very interesting and entertaining; and several of them are so ingenious in their plot, so full of ris comica, and told in so dramatic a manner, that they want little more than a division into scenes to become excellent theatrical pieces. To one of them "The Bloomsbury Christening," Mr. Buckstone is indebted for his very popular piece of "The Christening," and the admirable tales, "The Great Winglebury Duel," "The Boarding House," "Horatio Sparkins," and the "Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle," are equally rich in dramatic materials.[19]

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[18] Nielsen, p. 244; Percy Fitzgerald, Memories of Charles Dickens (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, Ltd., 1913), pp. 337 and 337n.

[19] Quoted in D[exter], "The Reception of Dickens's First Book," p. 44.

Even Dickens himself was aware of the "dramatic materials" in his early tales. In the letter published in the Monthly Magazine, November, 1834, he complained of John Buckstone's unauthorized dramatic version of "The Bloomsbury Christening" because, as he states, "I contemplated a dramatic destination for my off-spring." In a note appended to the letter, the editor corroborated Dickens's statement with "we know that he [Boz] had already prepared a farce on the subject."[20] Buckstone's version of Dickens's tale is typical of many of the farcical afterpieces performed at that time and actually does not bear a very close resemblance to Dickens's story except in a few speeches, a few characters, and the fact that it has something to do with a baby's christening. Buckstone made drastic changes in the plot, which in turn changed the relationships of the characters to one another and necessitated the addition of some new characters.

Interestingly enough, Dickens himself reviewed "The Christening" for the Morning Chronicle; a portion of his generally favorable review is significant:

> A new trifle, in one act, by Mr. Buckstone, was produced here last night [October 13, 1834], and met with complete success. It would be hardly fair to detail the plot of an amusing interlude, which is principally made up of unlooked-for situations,

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[20] Quoted in W[alter] D[exter], "A New Contribution to 'The Monthly Magazine' and an Early Dramatic Criticism in 'The Morning Chronicle,'" Dickn, XXX (1934), 224. J. B. Buckstone's "The Christening" was published in 1834 and in "John Jones," and "The Christening" (London: John Dicks, n.d. [Dicks' Standard Plays, No. 816]). If such a script actually existed, it is apparently no longer extant.

> and humorous equivoques. We will, therefore, only say that the principal features of the peace [sic] are the distresses of Grum (Mr. Wilkinson), a surly misanthrope, who is entrapped into becoming sponsor for the first child of Mr. Hopkins Twiddle (Mr. Buckstone), and the confusion arising from certain mistakes occasioned by a changing of children, and confounding of people, which frequently takes place on the stage, and never occur elsewhere.[21]

Dickens certainly seemed to be aware of the unreal, ephemeral nature of a farce when he referred to Buckstone's effort as a "trifle" and an "interlude" and stated that the plot contrivances which fill "The Christening" could happen only on the stage. Perhaps one can apply these remarks to "The Bloomsbury Christening" as well, though it is true that the concluding statement of the paragraph quoted suggests that Dickens may have thought that his version came closer to realism than Buckstone's. It does indeed avoid some of the worst excesses of Buckstone's script. In addition the review shows that Dickens realized that the effectiveness of a farce depends upon the manipulation of the basic plot to produce a series of typical farcical situations and upon the creation of exaggerated characters, clever stage business (one can see Buckstone, always the actor, working such business into his script), and witty dialogue not urgently related to the plot. In the delight of the moment, the audience scarcely has time to recognize the weakness of the plot, or, as in Dickens's case with

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[21] Quoted in Dexter, "A New Contribution," pp. 223-224. Grum was Dickens's Mr. Dumps and Twiddle was his Kitterbell.

Buckstone's play, if it does, it is willing to concede the unimportance of the plot. Yet, in a printed tale that one may study at leisure, plot deficiencies that in one way or another mar the plan of the story soon make themselves known to the critical reader.

In placing emphasis on the comic scene rather than concerning himself much about plot motivation and consistency, Dickens certainly followed in the tradition of the farce. Even so, he had to write a number of tales before he at all mastered the more effective techniques of scene development. As I have already indicated in my study of the differences between the original and revised versions of the scene in the coach in "Mr. Minns and His Cousin," the early version is flawed by the general awkwardness of Dickens's presentation--by the too abrupt jumps in time, the omission of certain necessary details, the crudity of the humor, and the inadequately developed characterizations. These faults and others carry over into the rest of the tales also. For example, in the following scene from "The Boarding House," awkward dialogue and pretentious humor spoil what might have become a fairly effective comic scene:

> "Soup for Mrs. Maplesone, my dear," said the bustling Mrs. Tibbs. She always called her husband "my dear" before company. Tibbs, who had been eating his bread, and calculating how long it would be before he should get any fish, helped the soup in a hurry, made a small island on the table-cloth, and put his glass upon it, to hide it from his wife.
>
> "Miss Julia, shall I assist you to some fish?"

> "If you please--very little--oh! plenty, thank you" (a bit about the size of a walnut put upon the plate).
>
> "Julia is a very little eater," said Mrs. Maplesone to Mr. Calton.
>
> The knocker gave a single rap. He was busy eating the fish with his eyes: so he only ejaculated, "Ah!"
>
> "My dear," said Mrs. Tibbs to her spouse after everyone else had been helped, "what do you take?" The inquiry was accompanied with a look intimating that he mustn't say fish, because there was not much left. Tibbs thought the frown referred to the island on the table-cloth; he therefore cooly replied, "Why--I'll take a little--fish, I think."
>
> "Did you say fish, my dear?" (another frown).
>
> "Yes, dear," replied the villain, with an expression of acute hunger depicted in his countenance. The tears almost started to Mrs. Tibbs's eyes, as she helped her "wretch of a husband," as she inwardly called him, to the last eatable bit of salmon on the dish.
>
> "James, take this to your master, and take away your master's knife." This was deliberate revenge, as Tibbs never could eat fish without one. He was, however, constrained to chase small particles of salmon around and round his plate with a piece of bread and a fork, the number of successful attempts being about one in seventeen. (NLE, I, i, 354)

Completed by an inocuous conversation between Mrs. Tibbs's ill-informed boarders about modern poets (Byron and Thomas Moore)[22] the entire dinner scene joins with other equally poorly constructed scenes to form, as Dickens might have put it at this time, a "ditto ditto" tale. As is the case with this scene from "The Boarding House," one too often

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[22]Here is a sample of the conversation:

> "'Ah,' said Mr. Calton, filling his glass. 'Tom Moore is my poet.'
>
> "'And mine,' said Mrs. Maplesone.
>
> "'And mine,' said Miss Julia.
>
> "'And mine,' added Mr. Simpson.
>
> "Look at his compositions,' resumed the knocker.
>
> "'To be sure,' said Simpson, with confidence." (NLE, I, i, 355)

finds that characters carry on conversations (thereby creating scenes) because Dickens knows that he should not merely tell the story, that he must, as do his dramatic models, show his characters in action by creating a series of scenes in relatively chronological order occupying a certain amount of space and time, even though there may be no obvious structural necessity for some of the scenes.

The following scene from Pickwick Papers, in which Sam Weller tries to discover Mrs. Bardell's plans in regard to her threatened breach of promise suit, should instantly point up the flaws of the scene from "The Boarding House":

> Sam . . . said at once, that he never could drink before supper, unless a lady drank with him. A great deal of laughing ensued, and Mrs. Sanders volunteered to humor him, so she took a slight sip out of her glass. Then, Sam said it must go all round, so they all took a slight sip. Then, little Mrs. Cluppins proposed as a toast, "Success to Bardell agin Pickwick"; and then the ladies emptied their glasses in honour of the sentiment, and got very talkative directly.
>
> "I suppose you've heard what's going forward, Mr. Weller?" said Mrs. Bardell.
>
> "I've heerd somethin' on it," replied Sam.
>
> "It's a terrible thing to be dragged before the public, in that way, Mr. Weller," said Mrs. Bardell; "but I see now, that it's the only thing I ought to do, and my lawyers, Mr. Dodson and Mr. Fogg, tell me, that with the evidence as we shall call, we must succeed. I don't know what I should do, Mr. Weller, if I didn't."
>
> The mere idea of Mrs. Bardell's failing in her action, affected Mrs. Sanders so deeply, that she was under the necessity of re-filling and re-emptying her glass immediately; feeling, as she said afterwards, that if she hadn't had the presence of mind to do so, she must have dropped.
>
> "Ven is it expected to come on?" inquired Sam.
>
> "Either in February or March," replied Mrs. Bardell.
>
> "What a number of witnesses there'll be, won't there?" said Mrs. Cluppins.

"Ah, won't there!" replied Mrs. Sanders.

"And won't Mr. Dodson and Fogg be wild if the plaintiff shouldn't get it?" added Mrs. Cluppins, "when they do it all on speculation!"

"Ah! won't they!" said Mrs. Sanders.

"But the plaintiff must get it," resumed Mrs. Cluppins.

"I hope so," said Mrs. Bardell.

"Oh, there can't be any doubt about it," rejoined Mrs. Sanders.

"Vell," said Sam, rising and setting down his glass, "all I can say is, that I wish you may get it."

"Thank'ee, Mr. Weller," said Mrs. Bardell, fervently.

"And of them Dodson and Foggs, as does these sort o' things on spec," continued Mr. Weller, "as well as for the other kind and gen'rous people o' the same purfession, as sets people by the ears, free gratis for nothin', and sets their clerks to work to find out little disputes among their neighbours and acquaintances as vants settlin' by means o' law-suits--all I can say o' them is, that I vish they had the revard I'd give 'em."

"Ah, I wish they had the reward that every kind and generous heart would be inclined to bestow upon them!" said the gratified Mrs. Bardell.

"Amen to that," replied Sam, "and a fat and happy livin' they'd get out of it! Wish you good night, ladies." (NLE, II, i, 476-477)

Even the last of these farcical tales, "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle," contains in one place or another the faults that marred Dickens's scenes from the beginning. Yet it, along with some of the other tales, also contains more than one scene equal to that between Sam Weller, Mrs. Bardell, and her cronies. Unfortunately, such effective episodes are all too rare in the early tales. However, as early as "The Bloomsbury Christening" Dickens creates a scene--another one in a coach--that compares favorably even to the revised version of the somewhat similar scene in "Mr. Minns and His Cousin." In it a

combination of effective characterization, humor, and action more than compensates for occasional crudities in the style (see NLE, I, ii, 180-182). The revelation scene in part two of "The Boarding House" (see NLE, I, ii, 382-392) is not without merit although it unquestionably imitates many such scenes in inferior farces. "The Steam Excursion," too, contains two or three nicely developed scenes in which the dialogue is relatively effective in forwarding the story or at least furnishing humor of sufficient quality to make the scene entertaining in itself. One such scene takes place in order to get Percy Noakes from shore to The Endeavour, the excursion boat:

> "Boat, sir?" cried one of the three watermen who were mopping out their boats, and all whistling. "Boat, sir?"
>
> "No," replied Mr. Percy Noakes, rather sharply; for the inquiry was not made in a manner at all suitable to his dignity.
>
> "Would you prefer a wessel, sir?" inquired another, to the infinite delight of the "Jack-in-the water."
>
> Mr. Percy Noakes replied with a look of supreme contempt.
>
> "Did you want to be put on board a steamer, sir?" inquired an old fireman-waterman, very confidentially. He was dressed in a faded red suit, just the colour of the cover of a very old Court-guide.
>
> "Yes, make haste--the Endeavour--off the Custom House."
>
> "Endeavour!" cried the man who had convulsed the "Jack" before. "Vy, I see the Endeavour go up half an hour ago."
>
> "So did I," said another; "and I should think she'd gone down by this time, for she's a precious sight too full of ladies and gen'lemen."
>
> Mr. Percy Noakes affected to disregard these representations, and stepped into the boat, which the old man, by dint of scrambling, and shoving, and grating, had brought up to the causeway. "Shove her off!" cried Mr. Percy Noakes, and away the boat glided down the river; Mr. Percy Noakes seated on the

> recently mopped seat, and the watermen at the stairs offering to bet him any reasonable sum that he'd never reach the "Custom-us."[23]

Most successful, however, and most reminiscent of the later Dickens is the excellently done scene in part two of "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle" that takes place in the "social room" of the sponging house to which

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[23] NLE, I, ii, 73. John Poole's "Preparations for Pleasure; or, A Pic-nic," in his Sketches and Recollections, Vol. I (London: Published for Henry Colburn by Richard Bentley, 1835), which Dickens must have read in its first appearance in the New Monthly Magazine (October, 1829), apparently served Dickens as a specific model for "The Steam Excursion," though his purpose was no doubt to write a superior imitation than to indulge in plagiarism. While both tales contain a number of virtually identical scenes, the basic plots, the characters, the specific details, and the styles differ considerably. A comparison of the scene in Poole's story parallel to the one from Dickens's quoted above will show not only the obvious connection between the two tales but the frequent superiority of Dickens's over Poole's: "Mr. Bagshaw, who had been appointed to hire a boat, and make the most economical arrangements he could about the fare, went down to Westminster Bridge. He was instantly surrounded by a dozen of the gentlemen who habitually congregate at that place.

"'Boat, your honour--all ready, your honour.'

"Mr. Bagshaw explained.

"He came 'to engage a boat, barge or other aquatic vehicle, of sufficient capacity to convey a party of fourteen to Twickenham and back:--what would be the remuneration required?'

"A stout, impudent, half-drunken, fellow thrust himself forward, shouting, 'I'm your man for five guineas.'

"Mr. Bagshaw's only reply to this was, 'You are an extortionate scoundrel.'

"Hereupon, the 'jolly young waterman' struck Mr. Bagshaw a violent blow on the right eye. Mr. Bagshaw proceeded to the nearest police-office, and stated his complaint; in consequence of which a warrant was issued to bring up the offender on the following morning." (Sketches and Recollections, I, 283-284).

Mr. Budden of "Mr. Minns and His Cousin" was named Octavius Bagshaw in the original version. Another character in Poole's tale, Mr. Frederick Snodgrass, also loaned Dickens his name.

Mr. Tottle's debts have brought him. Mr. Gabriel Parsons has come, somewhat unwillingly, to furnish the money for Mr. Tottle's release in order that their greater purpose, trapping Miss Lillerton (and her money) into marrying Tottle, may be accomplished. While he is not part of the scene, it is viewed largely through Mr. Parson's eyes. The scene has apparently no function in forwarding the story, for Mr. Parsons is merely waiting for Mr. Tottle to come down, but it may have some value as background against which one is to see the pathetic figure Tottle will cut later in the story. Because the conversation and action occur between minor characters who appear only in this scene, Dickens was forced to make quick and clear distinctions between the characters. Speech, mannerisms, gestures, descriptions, and actions combine to create individual characters who in turn create the finest scene in these early farcical tales. A portion follows:

> In one of the boxes two men were playing at cribbage with a very dirty pack of cards, some with blue, some with green, and some with red backs--selections from decayed packs. The cribbage-board had been long ago formed on the table by some ingenious visitor with the assistance of a pocket-knife and a two-pronged fork, with which the necessary number of holes had been made in the table at proper distances for the reception of the wooden pegs. In another box a stout, hearty-looking man, of about forty, was eating some dinner which his wife--an equally comfortable-looking personage--had brought him in a basket: and in a third, a genteel-looking young man was talking earnestly, and in a low tone, to a young female, whose face was concealed by a thick veil, but whom Mr. Gabriel Parsons immediately set down in his own mind as the debtor's wife. A young fellow of vulgar manners dressed in the very extreme of the prevailing

fashion, was pacing up and down the room, with a lighted cigar in his mouth and his hands in his pockets, ever and anon puffing forth volumes of smoke, and occasionally applying, with much apparent relish, to a pint pot, the contents of which were "chilling" on the hob.

"Fourpence more, by gum!" exclaimed one of the cribbage-players, lighting a pipe, and addressing his adversary at the close of the game; "one 'ud think you'd got luck in a pepper-cruet, and shook it out when you wanted it."

"Well, that a'n't a bad 'un," replied the other, who was a horse-dealer from Islington.

"No; I'm blessed if it is," interposed the jolly-looking fellow, who, having finished his dinner, was drinking out of the same glass as his wife, in truly conjugal harmony, some hot gin-and-water. The faithful partner of his cares had brought a plentiful supply of the anti-temperance fluid in a large flat stone bottle, which looked like a half-gallon jar that had been successfully tapped for the dropsy. You're a rum chap, you are, Mr. Walker--will you dip your beak into this, sir?"

"Thank 'ee, sir," replied Mr. Walker, leaving his box, and advancing to the other to accept the proffered glass. "Here's your health, sir, and your good 'ooman's here. Gentlemen all--yours, and better luck still. Well, Mr. Willis," continued the facetious prisoner, addressing the young man with the cigar, "you seem to rather down to-day--floored, as one may say. What's the matter, sir? Never say die, you know.

"Oh! I'm all right," replied the smoker. "I shall be bailed out to-morrow."

"Shall you, though?" inquired the other. "Damme, I wish I could say the same. I am as regularly over head-and-ears as the Royal George, and stand about as much chance of being <u>bailed out</u>. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Why," said the young man, stopping short, and speaking in a very loud key, "look at me. What d'ye think I've stopped here two days for?"

"'Cause you couldn't get out, I suppose," interrupted Mr. Walker, winking to the company. "Not that you're exactly obliged to stop here, only you can't help it. No compulsion, you know, only you must--eh?"

"A'n't he a rum un?" inquired the delighted individual, who had offered the gin-and-water, of his wife.

"Oh, he just is!" replied the lady, who was quite overcome by these flashes of imagination.

(<u>NLE</u>, I, ii, 148-149)

One finds in this scene (of which the portion quoted comprises approximately one-fourth) what F. J. H. Darton, while briefly alluding to the "half-mechanical" nature of Dickens's early tales, calls their chief virtue, a "freshness and an insatiable gusto which Dickens only lost when he was physically worn out."[24] One can certainly point to several such bright spots in some of these early tales, though not with the frequency Darton seems to indicate, spots where Dickens's developing ability strikes a few sparks before dying out, but he must also modify any enthusiasm these flashes of genius may evoke with a remembrance of long, dull stretches of awkward, irrelevant dialogue; extraneous and too obvious witticisms; and the descriptions of flat, fatuous characters that dominate these tales.

The characterizations in the lengthy scene quoted from "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle" are, considering the age and limited experience of the author, admirably done. Unfortunately, although the level of ability shows what Dickens was capable of by the end of 1834, he hit such peaks of achievement in characterization only rarely during this early period. The fault lies partly in the nature of the short tale, which has to contain a great amount of narrated action in order to get itself told; as a result, the characters are more likely to be

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[24]Darton, Dickens, Positively the First Appearance, p. 125.

easily recognizable types than strong, original creations. Yet the fault also lies in Dickens's apparent inability to compensate in one way or another for just such a deficiency in the form with which he was working. To speak in terms of the influence of the one-act farce on these early tales, one might say that Dickens imitates the script but not the performance. Most of the farces of the period, Allardyce Nicoll states, "were written for low-comedy actors who could 'put across' almost anything, and consequently there is generally evident a carelessness on the part of the authors both as regards plot and form."[25] These playwrights were also lax in regard to characterization, relying upon the actors to furnish many of the details of speech, appearance, mannerism, and stage movement for them. The actors themselves were not slow to accept such flattering challenges to their abilities. After examining scripts by such turn-of-the-century writers of farces as Frederick Reynolds and Charles Dibdin, Leigh Hunt discovered not what truly comic writers they were but "what excellent actors we possessed. The phrases, the sentiments, the fancies will appear very monotonous and inefficient when separated from the grins of [Joseph] Munden and the chatterings of [John] Fawcett. . . ."[26]

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[25]Allardyce Nicoll, A History of the English Drama, 1660-1900. Vol. IV. Early Nineteenth Century Drama, 1800-1850, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 133.

[26]Quoted in Ernest Bradlee Watson's Sheridan to Robertson: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century London Stage (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), p. 315.

In another article, to illustrate the "great power" Munden had of "filling up the paltriest sketches," Hunt describes Munden's actions in connection with a single line in a scene from Thomas Knight's The Turnpike Gate, a musical farce first performed at Covent Garden, November 14, 1799:

> [He] comes in and hovers about a pot of ale which he sees standing on a table, looking about him with a ludicrous caution as he makes his advances, half-afraid and half-simpering when he has got near it, and then after circumventing it with his eyes and feelings over and over again, with some more cautious lookings about, heaving a sudden look into it in the most ludicrous manner imaginable and exclaiming, in an under voice of affected indifference and real chuckling, "Some gentleman has left his ale."[27]

It is precisely the comic mannerisms, gestures, and actions used by Munden to give body to the role described above that the characters in Dickens's early tales do not have. They lack the life, even the artificial life of good comic caricature, that the actors could give to the frequently stiff, typed characters the playwright had "created." Dickens's early stories abound with characters so flat that they scarcely come within the scope of E. M. Forster's definition of "flat" characters.[28] The tales

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[27]Leigh Hunt's Dramatic Criticism, 1808-1831, ed. Lawrence Huston Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn Houtchens (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), pp. 101-102 (originally an essay on comic actors published in the Examiner, January 29, 1815). If Dickens's early tales lacked such "characterizing" action, his later sketches did not (see chapter three), nor did Pickwick Papers, as this description of Mr. Pickwick on the ice slide at Dingley Dell illustrates: "Mr. Pickwick paused, considered, pulled off his gloves and put them in his hat: took two or three short runs, baulked himself as often, and at last took another run, and went slowly and gravely down the slide, with his feet about a yard and a quarter apart, amidst the gratified shouts of all the spectators." (NLE, II, ii, 11)

[28]E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1927), pp. 103-111.

contain, for example, a superfluity of bachelors: old (Mr. Tottle, of course, Mr. Calton and Mr. Gobler from "The Boarding House," Mr. Minns, and Mr. Dumps of "The Bloomsbury Christening"), young (Horatio Sparkins, Percy Noakes and his friends from "The Steam Excursion," and Mr. Septimus Hicks and others in "The Boarding House"), romantic (Sparkins, and Theodosius Butler of "Sentiment"), and misanthropic (Minns and Dumps). These and others can also be fit into a number of the categories covered by Dickens in his Sketches of Young Gentlemen (1838): the Out-and-Out Young Gentleman, the Very Friendly Young Gentleman, the Funny Young Gentleman, the Theatrical Young Gentleman, the Poetical Young Gentleman, and the Young Ladies' Young Gentleman. Dickens's young ladies are generally silly and romantic, and painted in the best tradition of the sentimental novels they seem to dote upon (see particularly the Maldertons of "Horatio Sparkins," the Maplesones of "The Boarding House," the young ladies of Minerva House and particularly Miss Brook Dingwall of "Sentiment," and the Briggses and Tauntons of "The Steam Excursion"). Couples, young and old, usually follow the patterns of those in Dickens's Sketches of Young Couples (1840). Families tend strongly toward social climbing (the Maldertons of "Horatio Sparkins" are particularly notorious for this), but they are generally limited by the inadequacies of the family members, the mothers being tediously restricted to backbiting and gossip, the brothers to stupid remarks, the daughters to romantic

insipidities, the fathers to thoughts of their clubs and of stolid, Sanctity-of-the-Home security, and the relatives to embarrassing eccentricities (in addition to the Maldertons, one might include the Porters and Gattletons of "Mrs. Joseph Porter" and the Briggses and Tauntons of "The Steam Excursion"). Sarcastic cabmen, servants, naughty children, and foolish old men and women virtually complete the gallery of Dickens's early characters. As F. J. H. Darton has stated, the characters who inhabit Dickens's early tales are the stock figures of the minor fiction and drama of the period, which were in turn drawn from the essays, dramas, and novels of the eighteenth century but tarnished from long usage by inferior authors and "seasoned with the crude humour which thinks any social difference laughable." Dickens, he states, "laughed immoderately" at such stock characters, "but he used them without the least hesitation, believing, it seems likely, that his earnest humanity, if it were only tense and pitiful enough, turned their theatrical rant and posturing into the talk and deeds of ordinary human beings in an exalted state of emotion. It was a delusion shared by many of his readers during his lifetime."[29]

The fact that most of Dickens's characters in these tales can be so glibly dismissed reveals, I believe, the

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[29]Darton, Dickens, Positively the First Appearance, pp. 71-72. Darton is obviously also referring to the melodramatic creations which do not appear in these early farces. Certainly his remarks apply to the farcical tales as well.

shallow concept of characterization underlying them. It is no wonder Dickens also had trouble with his plots; such characters can only engage in limited and predetermined actions, carry on stilted conversations, and have superficial thoughts. An author can scarcely make a good story from such matter or indulge in any but the most obvious and superficial social satire or literary parody. For example, in "The Steam Excursion," actually one of the better of these early tales, the jealous rivalry between the Mrs. and the two Misses Taunton on one side and the Mrs. and the three Misses Briggs on the other is seriously handicapped not only by the similarity of the one group of females to the other (the main difference: the Taunton girls are a duet of singers, the Briggses a trio of guitarists) but by their lack of originality in carrying on the rivalry. Because the competition, led by the ambitious mothers, dominates the entire story, it accordingly weakens the movement (I hesitate to call it "plot") of the story and directs the social satire at female jealousies more than anything else. One segment of the duel will, I believe, serve as an adequate illustration of the story's occasional dullness. Miss Emily Taunton has just been asked to sing a duet with Captain Helves, the social lion of the excursion:

> "Shall I accompany you, dear?" inquired one of the Miss Briggses, with the bland intention of spoiling the effect.
>
> "Very much obliged to you, Miss Briggs," sharply retorted Mrs. Taunton, who saw through the manoeuvre; "my daughters always sing without accompaniments."

"And without voices," tittered Mrs. Briggs, in a low tone.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Taunton, reddening, for she guessed the tenor of the observation, though she had not heard it clearly--"Perhaps it would be as well for some people, if their voices were not quite so audible as they are to other people."

"And, perhaps, if gentlemen who are kidnapped to pay attention to some persons' daughters, had not sufficient discernment to pay attention to other persons' daughters," returned Mrs. Briggs, "some persons would not be ready to display that ill-temper which, thank God, distinguishes them from other persons."

"Persons!" ejaculated Mrs. Taunton.

"Persons," replied Mrs. Briggs.

"Insolence!"

"Creature!"

"Hush! hush!" interrupted Mr. Percy Noakes, who was one of the very few by whom this dialogue had been overheard. "Hush!--pray, silence for the duet."

(NLE, I, ii, 79-80)

By way of contrast, the following altercation between Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Tupman, relative to an invitation to a costume ball, strikingly reveals how subtleties of characterization transpose a type of scene similar to that above from "The Steam Excursion" into one reflecting the great comic inventiveness of Dickens:

"I shall go as a Bandit," interposed Mr. Tupman.

"What!" said Mr. Pickwick, with a sudden start.

"As a bandit," repeated Mr. Tupman, mildly.

"You don't mean to say," said Mr. Pickwick, gazing with solemn sternness at his friend, "you don't mean to say, Mr. Tupman, that it is your intention to put yourself into a green velvet jacket, with a two-inch tail?"

"Such is my intention, sir," replied Mr. Tupman, warmly. "And why not, sir?"

"Because, sir," said Mr. Pickwick, considerably excited--"because you are too old, sir."

"Too old!" exclaimed Mr. Tupman.

"And if any further ground of objection be wanting," continued Mr. Pickwick, "you are too fat, sir."

"Sir," said Mr. Tupman, his face suffused with a crimson glow. "This is an insult."

"Sir," replied Mr. Pickwick in the same tone, "it is not half the insult to you, that your appearance in my presence in a green velvet jacket, with a two-inch tail, would be to me."

"Sir," said Mr. Tupman, "you're a fellow."

"Sir," said Mr. Pickwick, "you're another."

Mr. Tupman advanced a step or two, and glared at Mr. Pickwick. Mr. Pickwick returned the glare, concentrated into a focus by means of his spectacles, and breathed a bold defiance. Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle looked on, petrified at beholding such a scene between two such men.

"Sir," said Mr. Tupman, after a short pause, speaking in a low, deep voice, "you have called me old."

"I have," said Mr. Pickwick.

"And fat."

"I reiterate the charge."

"And a fellow."

"So you are!"

There was a fearful pause.

"My attachment to your person, sir," said Mr. Tupman, speaking in a voice tremulous with emotion, and tucking up his wristbands meanwhile, "is great--very great--but upon that person, I must take summary vengeance."

"Come on, sir," replied Mr. Pickwick. Stimulated by the exciting nature of the dialogue, the heroic man actually threw himself into a paralytic attitude, confidently supposed by the two by-standers to have been intended as a posture of defence.

(NLE, II, i, 259-261)

Besides dealing too solely with general, commonplace types, Dickens also fails with his early characters because the devices of characterization that he uses, while basic and necessary, are, when not used in connection with other, subtler techniques, crude to the point of obviousness. The reader, that is, is more aware of the device than of the character, which in turn makes him all too aware of the frequently stiff, limited, and unbelievable character. For one thing, Dickens too often tells about his characters

rather than reveals or presents them through physical descriptions, speech, mannerisms, and actions. Or, if he does to some extent present his characters, he often first explains them to his readers. This summarized characterization may be an aid to the swift movement needed in a short tale, but when it is not effectively done, the story falters. As a novice writer, Dickens quite naturally had his share of failures. For example, in "Horatio Sparkins," a page before Mr. Jacob Barton, the Malderton's undesirable relative, appears, Dickens has Mr. Malderton say of his wife's "vulgar brother," that insufferable "tradesman": "I wouldn't care if he had the good sense to conceal the disgrace he is to the family; but he's so fond of his horrible business, that he <u>will</u> let people know what he is." Then, in case the reader is not willing to accept Mr. Malderton's estimation of his brother-in-law, Dickens, the omniscient author, immediately adds: "Mr. Jacob Barton, the individual alluded to, was a large grocer; so vulgar, and so lost to all sense of feeling, that he actually never scrupled to avow that he wasn't above his business: 'he'd made his money by it, and he didn't care who know'd it'" (<u>NLE</u>, I, ii, 36). Although there is undoubtedly some criticism of Malderton's snobbery implied in Dickens's evaluation of Barton, the grocer also comes in for his share of satire, for, when he does arrive at the dinner party, virtually every speech he makes contains at least one

reference to his having made his money in business "and he didn't care who know'd it." Also, as with Mr. Barton, Dickens sometimes uses speech peculiarities or dialects to distinguish certain characters (Mr. Budden of "Mr. Minns and His Cousin," the cab driver in "The Bloomsbury Christening," and "Edward M'Neville Walter," the assumed name of the romantic, linguistically flowery Mr. Theodosius Butler of "Sentiment."). Many of his characters, major as well as minor, are really so inadequately developed--not even, in a number of instances, distinguished from other characters in any way--that Dickens finds it necessary to include elaborate "stage directions" in the form of passages descriptive of actions that should be conveyed by the speeches themselves or made a part of the characterizations by other, less directly summarized descriptions. The following passage, also from Horatio Sparkins," shows Dickens in the passages I have italicized continuously having to stress the behavior and the reactions of his characters by means of direct statement:

> The first object that met the anxious eyes of the <u>expectant</u> family on their entrance into the ball-room, was the <u>interesting</u> Horatio, with his hair brushed off his forehead, and his eyes fixed on the ceiling, reclining in a <u>contemplative</u> <u>attitude</u> on one of the seats.
>
> "There he is, my dear," whispered Mrs. Malderton to Mr. Malderton.
>
> "How like Lord Byron!" murmured Miss Teresa.
>
> "Or Montgomery!" whispered Miss Marianne.
>
> "Or the portraits of Captain Cook!" suggested Tom.

> "Tom--don't be an ass!" said his father, who checked him on all occasions, probably with a view to prevent him becoming "sharp"--which was very unnecessary.
>
> The elegant Sparkins attitudinised with admirable effect until the family had crossed the room. He then started up, with the most natural appearance of surprise and delight; accosted Mrs. Malderton with the utmost cordiality; saluted the young ladies in the most enchanting manner; bowed to, and shook hands with, Mr. Malderton, with a degree of respect amounting almost to veneration; and returned the greetings of the two young men in a half-gratified, half-patronising manner, which fully convinced them that he must be an important, and at the same time, condescending personage. (NLE, I, ii, 31-32)

Although all authors occasionally use such simple short-cuts to characterization, Dickens's reliance upon them gradually lessens until, by the time he is about one-third into Pickwick Papers, he virtually stops using them. The following scene between Sam Weller and Job Trotter, Mr. Jingle's servant, illustrates some of the subtler, cleverer substitutes that Dickens had discovered by late 1836 for the blunt crudity of the techniques of characterization found in the above example--straight-forward descriptions of actions, suggestions of what certain actions mean (for humor rather than clarification), and characters' interpretations of each other's actions:

> "And what sort of a place have you got?" inquired Sam, as he filled his companion's glass for the second time.
>
> "Bad," said Job, smacking his lips, "very bad."
>
> "You don't mean that?" said Sam.
>
> "I do, indeed. Worse than that, my master's going to be married."
>
> "No."
>
> "Yes; and worse than that, too, he's going to run away with an immense rich heiress, from boarding-school."

"What a dragon!" said Sam, refilling his companion's glass. "It's some boarding-school in this town, I suppose, an't it?"

Now, although this question was put in the most careless tone imaginable, Mr. Job Trotter plainly showed by gestures, that he perceived his new friend's anxiety to draw forth an answer to it. He emptied his glass, looked mysteriously at his companion, winked both of his small eyes, one after the other, and finally made a motion with his arm, as if he were working an imaginary pump-handle: thereby intimating that he (Mr. Trotter) considered himself as undergoing the process of being pumped, by Mr. Samuel Weller.

"No, no," said Mr. Trotter, in conclusion, "that's not to be told to everybody. That is a secret--a great secret, Mr. Walker [Sam's temporarily assumed name]."

As the mulberry man said this, he turned his glass upside down, as a means of reminding his companion that he had nothing left wherewith to slake his thirst. Sam observed the hint; and feeling the delicate manner in which it was conveyed, ordered the pewter vessel to be refilled, whereat the small eyes of the mulberry man glistened.

"And so it's a secret?" said Sam.

"I should rather suspect it was," said the mulberry man, sipping his liquor, with a complacent face.

"I suppose your mas'r's wery rich?" said Sam.

Mr. Trotter smiled, and holding his glass in his left hand, gave four distinct slaps on the pocket of his mulberry indescribables with his right, as if to intimate that his master might have done the same without alarming anybody much, by the chinking of coins.

"Ah," said Sam, "that's his game, is it?"

The mulberry man nodded significantly.

"Well, and don't you think, old feller," remonstrated Mr. Weller, "that if you let your master take in this here young lady, you're a precious rascal?"

"I know that," said Job Trotter, turning upon his companion a countenance of deep contrition, and groaning slightly. "I know that, and that's what it is that preys upon my mind. But what am I to do?"

(NLE, II, i, 281-283)

Such a passage as this clearly reveals the richness of the characterizations (as well as of the humor, style, and scene development) that Dickens was able to achieve by the time he wrote Pickwick Papers. The characters that he

created for his early farcical tales, however, are general types that need to be constantly surrounded by stage directions or defined by other rather crude (though basic) devices of characterization. A few characters, however, whether the result of accident or of conscious, if hesitant, artistic experimentation, stand out as exceptions to the general practice and forecast some of the virtues of the later Dickens. Mr. Nicodemus Dumps, for example, of "The Bloomsbury Christening," is a noticeable improvement over Mr. Minns of "Mr. Minns and His Cousin" (though inferior, certainly, to Mr. Pickwick or his fellow Pickwickians). Not only does Dickens give a fuller opening description of Dumps than of Minns and, as a result, a more specific characterization, he is also more consistent in his use of this initially established character to set the plot of Mr. Dumps's revenge on the Kitterbells in motion and to enliven the humor of at least one minor scene in the story, Dumps's omnibus ride to his nephew's. The reader was earlier prepared in the opening paragraph of the story; there Dickens told him that Dumps was ill-natured, surly, wretched, that he disliked everything in general but particularly children, cabs, old women, banging doors, musical amateurs, and omnibus cads, all of whom Dumps will encounter in the course of the tale, some in the scene quoted below. Having decided because of the rain to take the omnibus to the Kitterbell's, Dumps finds himself

unceremoniously thrust by the cad into the midst of a crowded omnibus:

> "For Heaven's sake, where am I to sit?" inquired the miserable man of an old gentleman, into whose stomach he had just fallen for the fourth time.
>
> "Anywhere but on my chest, sir," replied the old gentleman in a surly tone.
>
> "Perhaps the box would suit the gentleman better," suggested a very damp young lawyer's clerk, in a pink shirt, and a smirking countenance.
>
> After a good deal of struggling and falling about, Dumps at last managed to squeeze himself into a seat, which, in addition to the slight disadvantage of being between a window that would not shut, and a door that must be open, placed him in close contact with a passenger, who had been walking about all the morning without an umbrella, and who looked as if he had spent the day in a full water-butt--only wetter.
>
> "Don't bang the door so," said Dumps to the conductor, as he shut it after letting out four of the passengers; "I am very nervous--it destroys me."
>
> "Did any gen'lm'n say anythink?" replied the cad, thrusting in his head, and trying to look as if he didn't understand the request.
>
> "I told you not to bang the door so!" repeated Dumps, with an expression of countenance like the knave of clubs, in convulsions.
>
> "Oh! vy, it's rather a sing'ler circumstance about this here door, sir, that it von't shut without banging," replied the conductor; and he opened the door very wide, and shut it again with a terrific bang, in proof of the assertion.
>
> "I beg your pardon, sir," said a little prim, wheezing old gentleman, sitting opposite Dumps, "I beg your pardon; but have you ever observed, when you have been in an omnibus on a wet day, that four people out of five always come in with large cotton umbrellas, without a handle at the top, or the brass spike at the bottom?"
>
> "Why, sir," returned Dumps, as he heard the clock strike twelve, "it never struck me before; but now you mention it, I -- Hollo! hollo!" shouted the persecuted individual, as the omnibus dashed past Drury Lane, where he had directed to be set down--"Where is the cad?"
>
> "I think he's on the box, sir," said the young gentleman before noticed in the pink shirt, which looked like a white one ruled with red ink.

"I want to be set down!" said Dumps, in a faint voice, overcome by his previous efforts.

"I think these cads want to be set down," returned the attorney's clerk, chuckling at his sally.

"Hollo!" cried Dumps again.

"Hollo!" echoed the passengers. The omnibus passed Saint Giles's Church.

"Hold hard!" said the conductor; "I'm blowed if we ha'n't forgot the gen'lm'n as vas to be set down at Doory Lane. --Now, sir, make haste, if you please," he added, opening the door, and assisting Dumps out with as much coolness as if it was "all right." Dumps's indignation was for once getting the better of his cynical equanimity. "Drury Lane!" he gasped, with the voice of a boy in a cold bath for the first time.

"Doory Lane, sir? --yes, sir--third turning on the righthand side, sir."

Dumps's passion was paramount: he clutched his umbrella, and was striding off with the firm determination of not paying the fare. The cad, by a remarkable coincidence, happened to entertain a directly contrary opinion, and Heaven knows how far the altercation would have proceeded, if it had not been most ably and satisfactorily brought to a close by the driver.

"Hollo!" said that respectable person, standing up on the box, and leaning with one hand on the roof of the omnibus. "Hollo, Tom! tell the gentleman if so be as he feels aggrieved, we will take him up to the Edge-er (Edgeware) Road for nothing, and set him down at Doory Lane when we comes back. He can't reject that, anyhow."

The argument was irresistible: Dumps paid the disputed sixpense, and in a quarter of an hour was on the staircase of No. 14, Great Russell Street.

(NLE, I, ii, 180-182)

In this scene one sees Dumps, as a result of being treated as miserably as he generally treats others, degenerating from arrogance to ineptitude and then from anger to complete submission at the hands of the cad. Even as the reader rejoices in Dumps's come-uppance, he feels, perhaps, a slight touch of pity for a man whose misfortunes are clearly produced by his own miserable personality. Dickens does not, unfortunately, follow through in the rest of the

tale with this ambiguous characterization of Dumps, one that, for a few moments in this scene, tends toward roundness of character.[30]

But just as interesting as Dumps are the other characters in this short scene. Here we see Dickens, as early as "The Bloomsbury Christening," doing a more than adequate job with the truly minor characters in his tale, those who appear only for a brief moment. The technique is simple--a descriptive touch, a suggestion of dialect, a mannerism, a gesture, an action, achieved in one swift stroke, sometimes in as short a space as a sentence.[31] The lawyer's clerk, for example, is depicted through a few

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[30]Despite his moment of slight roundness, Dumps is ultimately little advanced in characterization beyond Minns, his earlier prototype. Mr. Watkins Tottle, who also belongs to this group of aging bachelors, is the product of certain advances in technique; he exhibits, for example, a greater variety of emotion than his predecessors, he has more to say than they do, and the humor of his situation is more effectively handled. But, then, he is in love, a subject more susceptible to humorous variety than misanthropism. Besides, any roundness of character with which he is endowed is largely the result of an inconsistency of purpose on Dickens's part, as I shall explain later in this chapter. Tottle, along with Gabriel Parsons and Miss Lillerton, his fellow "performers," is, after all, a stock comedy character, and most of the incidents in his two-part story are stock farcical episodes.

[31]From a later scene in "The Bloomsbury Christening," one recalls the nurse carrying the infant Kitterbell who, at hearing Dumps's description of the baby as like "one of those little carved representations that one sometimes sees blowing a trumpet on a tombstone." "stooped down over the child, and with great difficulty prevented an explosion of mirth," while the proud parents become terribly upset by Dumps's remark (NLE, I, ii, 185; the italics are mine). The nurse obviously understands Dumps and the Kitterbells.

descriptive words: he is damp, is wearing a pink shirt, and seems to be constantly smirking. When he speaks, he makes atrocious puns. There is practically nothing here from which to create a character, but the clerk somehow assumes a certain shape and a definite personality. The sketchy description in combination with the comic tone in which he delivers and reacts to his own puns, blithely oblivious to Dumps's apparent discomfort, produce a young man bursting with self-satisfaction and joie de vivre. The omnibus driver appears in one short paragraph, but his speech, apparently an accurate reproduction, and the brief description of his nonchalant stance on the box that belies, at the same time that it reinforces, the determination of his remarks reveal more than one would expect. The cad, a major character within the scene, is obviously a trouble-maker. Dickens does not need to explain this fact, and doesn't, for he reveals it through the Cockney's actions (reinforced by the comic dialect): slamming the door after he knows it bothers Dumps and deliberately allowing the omnibus to dash past Dumps's stop. After each incident he appears all innocence, and all arrogance. Such minor characters as these will fill the pages of Dickens's later writings, either in considerably enlarged forms or as minute but essential pieces of the backdrop against which other, more important characters will perform. It is important to note that they are already making their appearances in these

early tales.[32]

I have so far indicated where Dickens did and did not show improvement in his handling of plot, scene development, and characterization in these early tales. The later Dickens is also often memorable for the settings of his novels, for the artistry with which they are described, and the significance with which they are inbued. One recalls not only the memorable slums of Oliver Twist and other novels, the street settings for the Gordon Riots in Barnaby Rudge, the storm and sea in David Copperfield, Krook's shop and the oppressive fog of Bleak House, but earlier the idyllic country "sets," the inns and law offices, and the interior of the Fleet in Pickwick Papers. Thus, one is surprised to find so little description of this kind in the Monthly Magazine tales. Yet what there is does show Dickens's slowly developing concern for colorfully detailed settings and his increasing need to give such "incidental" settings at least some minor significance. The opening description of the preparations for the amateur performance of Othello in "Mrs. Joseph Porter" is at its most descriptive

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[32]Others that should be mentioned are the members of the amateur orchestra in "Mrs. Joseph Porter," particularly the deaf flute player who loses the race through the overture (NLE, I, ii, 120-121); the guests and musicians ("the harp, in a state of intoxication," for example. NLE, I, i, 414-415); various minor members of the excursion party in "The Steam Excursion" (NLE, I, ii, 78, 81-82, 83-85, 87-89); and in particular the inhabitants of the sponging house social room, already referred to, in "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle" (NLE, I, ii, 147-154).

in rather generally referring to "a strange jumble of flats, flies, wings, lamps, bridges, clouds, thunder and lightning, festoons and flowers, daggers and foil, and various other messes in theatrical slang included under the comprehensive name of 'properties'" (NLE, I, ii, 113). But later descriptions of setting, such as the following passage from "The Bloomsbury Christening," are somewhat more detailed than this and perhaps somewhat more suggestive of Dickens's later work:

> Everything indicated that preparations were making for the reception of "a few friends" in the evening. Two dozen extra tumblers, and four ditto wineglasses--looking anything but transparent, with little bits of straw in them--were on the slab in the passage, just arrived. There was a great smell of nutmeg, port wine, and almonds, on the staircase; the covers were taken off the stair-carpet, and the figure of Venus on the first landing looked as if she were ashamed of the composition-candle in her right hand, which contrasted beautifully with the lamp-blacked drapery of the goddess of love. The female servant (who looked very warm and bustling) ushered Dumps into a front drawing-room, very prettily furnished, with a plentiful sprinkling of little baskets, paper table-mats, china watchmen, pink and gold albums, and rainbow-bound little books on the different tables. (NLE, I, ii, 182-183)

In addition to creating a specific setting for the scene to follow, the details also serve briefly to characterize the social status of the Kitterbells and to imply the narrator's somewhat satiric view of the furnishings and, by association, of the Kitterbells. In similar fashion, one gets a brief but promising glimpse of the Misses Crumpton's school, Minerva House, in "Sentiment":

> The house was a white one, a little removed from the roadside, with close palings in front. The bedroom windows were always left partly open, to afford a bird's-eye view of numerous little bedsteads with very white dimity furniture, and thereby impress the passer-by with a due sense of the luxuries of the establishment; and there was a front-parlour hung round with highly varnished maps which nobody ever looked at, and filled with books which no one ever read, appropriated exclusively to the reception of parents, who, whenever they called, could not fail to be struck with the very deep appearance of the place. (NLE, I, i, 407)

By giving the reasons for the open windows and for the books and maps no one ever touches, Dickens proves what one only suspected about the setting in "The Bloomsbury Christening," that he is consciously using his brief description of certain physical characteristics of Minerva House to supply information about his characters and perhaps to suggest his attitude toward them. Certainly the reader wonders about the intellectual achievements and interests of students, parents, and teachers in the story.

It is, however, in "The Steam Excursion" that one begins to find somewhat more positive evidence of Dickens's developing powers of description, though passages describing the places in which action will take place are still relatively scarce. One gets only a glimpse of Mr. Percy Noakes's chambers, none whatsoever of the Tauntons' apartment, and very little of the excursion boat upon which much of the action takes place. However, a description of London streets, early morning, is quite well done, the details of the setting furnished mainly by people rather

than by buildings and other inanimate objects:

> The streets looked as lonely and deserted as if they had been crowded, overnight, for the last time. Here and there, an early apprentice, with quenched-looking, sleepy eyes, was taking down the shutters of a shop; and a policeman or milkwoman might occasionally be seen pacing slowly along; but the servants had not yet begun to clean the doors, or light the kitchen fires, and London looked the picture of desolation. At the corner of a by-street, near Temple Bar, was stationed a "street-breakfast." The coffee was boiling over a charcoal fire, and large slices of bread-and-butter were piled oneupon the other, like deals in a timberyard. The company were seated on a form, which, with a view both to security and comfort, was placed against a neighbouring wall. Two young men, whose uproarious mirth and disordered dress bespoke the conviviality of the preceding evening, were treating three "ladies" and an Irish labourer. A little sweep was standing at a short distance, casting a longing eye at the tempting delicacies; and a policeman was watching the group from the opposite side of the street. The wan looks, and gaudy finery of the thinly-clad women contrasted as strangely with the gay sunlight, as did their forced merriment with the boisterous hilarity of the two young men, who, now and then, varied their amusements by "bonneting" the proprietor of this itinerant coffee-house. (NLE, I, ii, 72)

Unfortunately, although Dickens does exhibit here his ability to create a momentary atmosphere, the setting is extraneous to the action and characters of the tale, and in calling attention to itself, magnifies the importance of a mere transitional scene. In addition, its rather serious tone detracts from the comic emphasis of the story.

On the other hand, Dickens's description of the storm that arises on the steamboat's return trip contributes greatly to the effectiveness of the tale's final scene. In the following passage the storm outside and the effect of the storm on the excursion party are reflected in the

description of the interior of the cabin and of the articles on the banquet table:

> The throbbing motion of the engine was but too perceptible. There was a large, substantial, cold boiled leg of mutton, at the bottom of the table, shaking like blanc-mange; a previously hearty sirloin of beef looked as if it had been suddenly seized with the palsy; and some tongues, which were placed on dishes rather too large for them, went through the most surprising evolutions; darting from side to side, and from end to end, like a fly in an inverted wineglass. Then, the sweets shook and trembled, till it was quite impossible to help them, and people gave up the attempt in despair; and the pigeon-pies looked as if the birds, whose legs were stuck outside, were trying to get them in. The table vibrated and started like a feverish pulse, and the very legs were convulsed--everything was shaking and jarring. The beams in the roof of the cabin seemed as if they were put there for the sole purpose of giving people headaches, and several elderly gentlemen became ill-tempered in consequence. As fast as the steward put the fire-irons up, they would fall down again; and the more the ladies and gentlemen tried to sit comfortably on their seats, the more the seats seemed to slide away from the ladies and gentlemen. Several ominous demands were made for small glasses of brandy; the countenances of the company gradually underwent most extraordinary changes; one gentleman was observed suddenly to rush from table without the slightest ostensible reason, and dart up the steps with incredible swiftness; thereby greatly damaging both himself, and the steward, who happened to be coming down at the same moment. (NLE, I, ii, 86-87)

In certain respects this passage contains virtues of the later Dickens: the animation of inanimate objects, here for the purpose of humor; the pseudo-innocence of the narrator, who presumably cannot for the life of him imagine why the gentleman should dash madly from the cabin; the inconsequential, unreasonable, and therefore humorous action of the steward's constant putting up of the fire-irons; and the realism lying directly behind the colorfully exaggerated

descriptions. This description is by no means inferior to the following fairly typical description from Pickwick Papers:

> The portmanteaus and carpet-bags have been stowed away and Mr. Weller and the guard are endeavouring to insinuate into the fore-boot a huge cod-fish several sizes too large for it--which is snugly packed up, in a long brown basket, with a layer of straw over the top, and which has been left to the last, in order that he may repose in safety on the half-dozen barrels of real live native oysters, all the property of Mr. Pickwick, which have been arranged in regular order at the bottom of the receptacle. The interest displayed in Mr. Pickwick's countenance is most intense, as Mr. Weller and the guard try to squeeze the cod-fish into the boot, first head first, and then tail first, and then top upward, and then bottom upward, and then sideways, and thenlong-ways, all of which artifices the implacable cod-fish sturdily resists, until the guard accidentally hits him in the very middle of the basket, whereupon he suddenly disappears into the boot, and with him, the head and shoulders of the guard himself, who, not calculating upon so sudden a cessation of the passive resistance of the cod-fish, experiences a very unexpected shock, to the unsmotherable delight of all the porters and bystanders. Upon this, Mr. Pickwick smiles with great good-humour, and drawing a shilling from his waistcoat pocket begs the guard, as he picks himself out of the boot, to drink his health in a glass of hot brandy-and-water. . . .
> (NLE, II, i, 493)

If the descriptions in Pickwick Papers are superior to those in the early tales it is precisely because the longer work is so abundantly rich in everything. The passage above, for example, comes merely at the beginning of the section that Dickens devotes to the Christmas festivities at Dingley Dell.

A description of an action--a summary of a scene rather than the dramatization of it through dialogue and accompanying action--is another extremely important

technique used by Dickens in his early tales. He usually develops a story as a series of scenes presented chronologically. The scenes by themselves would scarcely move the story to its desired end, however; the dialogue and characters being static, the individual scenes would fail to flow smoothly and almost imperceptibly into one another. Hence, of necessity, the connecting narrative paragraphs serve to move characters from one scene to another in view of the audience or to allow for an essential passage of time, the characters regrouping themselves for the following scene while the audience's attention is temporarily diverted in one way or another. At other times, Dickens uses narrative somewhat more subtly within a single scene, particularly when dialogue will not fulfill his purpose, when the scene must skip over dull but necessary moments in the action, when telling rather than showing will produce better humor, and when the farcical action must proceed at a faster rate than a detailed presentation of action and conversation can produce.

Although Dickens naturally used narrative for such normal purposes from the beginning, his ability to use it unobtrusively developed considerably during 1834, from the awkward descriptive passages before, during, and after the dinner scene in "Mr. Minns and His Cousin" to the following fairly successful passage in "The Steam Excursion'" where the summarizing narrative is probably not necessary, except

that Dickens must have thought he could derive greater comic effect by using it. Mr. Noakes has just asked the three Miss Briggses to play their guitars before dinner:

> One of those hums of admiration followed the suggestion, which one frequently hears in society, when nobody has the most distant notion what he is expressing his approval of. The three Misses Briggs looked modestly at their mamma, and the mamma looked approvingly at her daughters, and Mrs. Taunton looked scornfully at all of them. The Misses Briggs asked for their guitars, and several gentlemen seriously damaged the cases in their anxiety to present them. Then, there was a very interesting production of three little keys for the aforesaid cases, and a melo-dramatic expression of horror at finding a string broken; and a vast deal of screwing and tightening, and winding, and tuning, during which Mrs. Briggs expatiated to those near her on the immense difficulty of playing a guitar, and hinted at the wondrous proficiency of her daughters in that mystic art. Mrs. Taunton whispered to a neighbour that it was "quite sickening!" and the Misses Taunton looked as if they knew how to play, but disdained to do it.
>
> At length the Misses Briggs began in real earnest. It was a new Spanish composition, for three voices and three guitars. The effect was electrical. All eyes were turned upon the captain, who was reported to have once passed through Spain with his regiment, and who must be well acquainted with the national music. He was in raptures. This was sufficient; the trio was encored; the applause was universal; and never had the Tauntons suffered such a complete defeat. (NLE, I, ii, 82-83)

However much one may be able to separate such a passage from the dramatic scene in which it occurs, it is still an essential part of the complex interplay of description, narration, and dialogue out of which all authors compose effective scenes and, of course, entire tales and novels. The best example of Dickens's early ability with pure narrative occurs at the end of the first chapter of "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle" in Mr.

Gabriel Parsons's tale of his courting and marrying of the present Mrs. Parsons. It has little purpose in the story, perhaps none beyond Dickens's need to fill out the first installment of the two-part story. Yet it is virtually the only worthwhile and truly amusing part of the first chapter. Mr. Parsons's narrative is actually part of a dialogue between Tottle and his host, but Tottle's part in the conversation is only to break up the long narrative speeches of Parsons. Beginning with the statement, "I spent my wedding-night in a back-kitchen chimney," Parsons describes his courtship of Fanny--their secret morning meetings in Kensington Park, the four letters a day that they wrote to each other, the evening interviews in the kitchen or cellar, and finally their secret marriage. On their wedding night, not wanting to tell Fanny's father of their marriage until her mother should return from Ramsgate, they are saying their good-byes in the kitchen, when the maid suddenly enters to tell them that Fanny's father is coming to the kitchen to draw his own supper beer. The narrative continues as follows:

> If he discovered me there, explanation would have been out of the question; for he was so outrageously violent, when at all excited, that he never would have listened to me. There was only one thing to be done. The chimney was a very wide one; it had been originally built for an oven; went up perpendicularly for a few feet, and then shot backward and formed a sort of small cavern. My hopes and fortune--the means of our joint existence almost--were at stake. I scrambled in like a squirrel; coiled myself up in this recess; and, as Fanny and the girl replaced the deal chimney-board, I could

> see the light of the candle which my unconscious father-in-law carried in his hand. I heard him draw the beer; and I never heard beer run so slowly. He was just leaving the kitchen, and I was preparing to descend, when down came the infernal chinmey-board with a tremendous crash. He stopped and put down the candle and the jug of beer on the dresser; he was a nervous old fellow, and any unexpected noise annoyed him. He cooly observed that the fireplace was never used, and sending the frightened servant into the next kitchen for a hammer and nails, actually nailed up the board, and locked the door on the outside. So, there was I, on my wedding-night, in the light kerseymere trousers, fancy waistcoat, and blue coat, that I had been married in in the morning, in a back-kitchen chimney, the bottom of which was nailed up, and the top of which had been formerly raised some fifteen feet, to prevent the smoke from annoying the neighbours. And there . . . I remained till half-past seven the next morning, when the housemaid's sweetheart, who was a carpenter, unshelled me. The old dog had nailed me up so securely, that, to this very hour, I firmly believe that no one but a carpenter could ever have got me out.
>
> (NLE, I, ii, 140-141)

One should compare this passage (in which Dickens never made a single revision) with some of the narrative passages from the original version of "Mr. Minns and His Cousin" quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Dickens's success with Mr. Parsons's tale lies somewhere in the felicity of its phrasing, in the tension and humor that lie in sentence structure and word choice, and in his more mature avoidance of affected, extravagant imagery, puns, and word play. In addition to these stylistic merits, the narrative is noteworthy for its simplicity, for the clever touches that at least temporarily characterize Mr. Parsons, and for the wild absurdity of the comic premise behind the episode. The interplay between the actions Mr. Parsons describes and

his comments upon them certainly points to Dickens's developing ability to interweave effectively the several techniques and purposes required for the complex craft of narration. He is at least ready, at this early stage in his career, to write the descriptive essays that will follow "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle," if not, perhaps to write the more brilliant episodes with which Pickwick Papers abounds.

Mr. Parsons's narrative is well conceived and well written, and in itself the incident related by Parsons is superior in comic inventiveness to that told in the following passage. But Tony Weller's narrative of his encounter with "the shepherd" is vividly reinforced by the brilliance of Dickens's characterization of Sam's father and by the additional humor the cockney dialect adds to the telling:

> Well, what with your mother-in-law a worrying me to go, and what with my looking for'ard to seein' some queer starts if I did, I put my name down for a ticket; at six o'clock on the Friday evenin' I dresses myself out wery smart, and off I goes with the old 'ooman, and up we walks into a fust floor where there was tea things for thirty, and a whole lot o' women as begins whisperin' to one another, and lookin' at me, as if they'd never seen a rayther stout gen'l'm'n of eight-and fifty afore. By and bye, there comes a great bustle downstairs, and a lanky chap with a red nose and a white neckcloth rushes up and sings out, "Here's the shepherd a coming to wisit his faithful flock"; and in comes a fat chap in black, vith a great white face, a smilin' avay like a clockwork. Such goin's on, Sammy! "The kiss of peace," says the shepherd; and then he kissed the women all round, and ven he'd done, the man vith the red nose began. I was just a thinkin' whether I hadn't better begin too--'specially as there was a wery nice lady a sittin' next me--ven in comes the tea, and your mother-in-law, as had been makin' the

> kettle bile downstairs. At it they went, tooth and nail. Such a precious loud hymn, Sammy, while the tea was a brewing; such a grace, such eatin' and drinkin'! I wish you could ha' seen the shepherd walkin' into the ham and muffins. I never see such a chap to eat and drink; never. The red-nosed man warn't by no means the sort of person you'd like to grub by contract, but he was nothin' to the shepherd. Well; arter the tea was over, they sang another hymn, and then the shepherd began to preach: and wery well he did it, considerin' how heavy them muffins must have lied on his chest. Presently he pulls up, all of a sudden, and hollers out, "Where is the sinner; where is the mis'rable sinner?" Upon which, all the women looked at me, and began to groan as if they was a dying. I thought it was rather sing'ler, but hows'ever, I says nothing. Presently he pulls up again, and lookin' wery hard at me, says, "Where is the sinner; where is the mis'rable sinner?" and all the women groans again, ten times louder than afore. I got rather wild at this, so I takes a step or two for'ard and says, "My friend," says I, "did you apply that 'ere observation to me?" 'Stead of beggin my pardon as any gen'l'm'n would ha' done, he got more abusive than ever: called me a wessel, Sammy--a wessel of wrath--and all sorts o' names. So my blood being reg'larly up, I first give him two or three for himself, and then two or three more to hand over to the man with the red nose, and walked off. I wish you could ha' heard how the women screamed, Sammy, ven they picked up the shepherd from under the table. . . .
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> (NLE, II, i, 390-392)

Having examined the various techniques of plot, scene development, characterization, description (including setting), and narration to be found in the Monthly Magazine tales, one must finally inquire as to Dickens's purpose in writing these stories. The answer is not immediately evident, however, quite possibly because Dickens himself may not have known why he wrote them. Certainly he intended to amuse his readers; his use of the theatrical farce as one of his models would indicate this. The multitude of farcical situations and characters and the abundance of puns and

other verbal witticisms that fill the pages of these early stories are there for the purpose of keeping the reader laughing.

And yet, while the stories are amusing to the reader, they at times also satirize him, his fellow human beings, and his society. Sometimes Dickens is concerned with little more than parody, as in his humorous imitations of sentimental novels in "Sentiment," of after-dinner speakers in "Mr. Minns and His Cousin" and in "The Bloomsbury Christening," and of political oratory in "Sentiment." At other times, however, he seems to be developing a relatively dark view of human nature and its institutions. Despite the humor and gaiety which pervade the greater part of any one story, the plot of more than one of these tales has a rather bitter, ironic ending. In part one of "The Boarding House," Dickens concludes one of the three love affairs with a breach of promise suit, but he allows the two remaining couples to marry. A farce might have ended at this point with some effect. However, Dickens does not stop here. Mr. Hicks deserts his wife, and Mrs. Simpson elopes with an army officer while her husband of six weeks is residing in debtors' prison. Even Mrs. Tibbs, the manageress of the boarding house, banishes her husband to the kitchen for the part he played in losing her boarders for her. In the second part of "The Boarding House" the Tibbses finally separate. Mr. Tottle brings "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle"

to an unexpected end by committing suicide. The characters, too, are frequently treated satirically by Dickens. Few are those with whom the reader can establish any sort of sympathetic identification. In "The Bloomsbury Christening," for example, the opening description of Mr. Nicodemus Dumps is scarcely conducive to impressing the reader with the human qualities of that misanthropic bachelor. But, in addition, neither is the reader sympathetic to the characters of Mr. and Mrs. Kitterbell, though they are more humorously and more kindly satirized than the Buddens of "Mr. Minns and His Cousin."

Only in the second chapter of "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle" does Dickens come close to achieving anything like sympathy for one of his characters. The young, unfortunate couple who play a minor part in the sponging house scene are, indeed, typical creations of the sentimental melodrama, but Mr. Tottle himself is the prime example of Dickens's accomplishment. The sympathy Tottle attracts is not initially a result of a change in his character so much as it is of a noticeable change in the character of Mr. Gabriel Parsons, who becomes unexpectedly mercenary in chapter two. The unpleasant reality of the sponging house setting also contributes to the change in the reader's reaction to Tottle. Seeing Tottle in the clutches of the sponging house proprietor, as well as in those of Parsons, the reader realizes the seriousness of Tottle's poverty and sees that beneath his farcical search for a

wife lies a financial necessity that guides his actions. The reader immediately extends the required sympathy to him. The author, one suspects, is aware of what he has accomplished, for from this point to the end of the story, Mr. Tottle is likeable, as Dickens's earlier comic characters had not been. Tottle now acts valorously, resolutely, intelligently, bashfully, and mildly (NLE, I, ii, 157-158). He indulges in genuinely noble emotions: "Mr. Watkins Tottle expressed a hope that the Parsons family never would make a stranger of him, and wished internally that his bashfulness would allow him to feel a little less like a stranger himself" (NLE, I, ii, 159). Moreover, Dickens reveals many of Mr. Tottle's thoughts and motives. He shows us the lover's embarrassment when he spills and breaks a water tumbler, he exhibits his bashfulness when he awkwardly proposes to Miss Lillerton, he portrays his feelings of foolishness when he discovers that Miss Lillerton loves the Reverend Mr. Timson. Here in Tottle is at least a suggestion of the greater comic figures who will romp through the pages of Dickens's novels, beginning with the immortal Pickwick, who bears a sometimes striking resemblance to Tottle.[33] Yet Tottle

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[33]A passage that Dickens excised from the orignal version of "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle" when he collected the story in the first series of SB suggests that plans he may have had for further stories about Tottle may likely have been incorporated into PP: "[Mr. Tottle, upon his death,] left a variety of papers in the hands of his landlady--the materials collected in his wanderings among different classes of society--which that lady has determined to publish, to defray the unpaid

is an exception to Dickens's practice of treating his characters in these early tales with unsympathetic satire.

Another purpose that Dickens had in writing these tales is closely connected to their satiric aspect. He apparently wanted to do more than write highly imaginative but totally unreal farces whose clever, beautiful, and comic characters belonged to a century and a class different from his own. He occasionally injected a certain amount of reality into these tales by dealing with people, places, and events familiar to him from his daily life, sometimes for satiric effect. Scholars believe, for example, that Mrs. Joseph Porter bears Mrs. Leigh's "malicious tongue" and that Mr. Budden (of "Mr. Minns and His Cousin") is really Mr. Leigh.[34] The theatrical entertainment in "Mrs. Joseph Porter" is obviously modelled upon similar amateurish performances in John Dickens's home. Charles Dickens also served as godfather to Henry Kolle's son, a fact he alludes to in a letter to the father that closes with the apparently

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expenses of his board and lodging. They will be carefully arranged, and presented to the public from time to time, with all due humility, by BOZ" (Monthly Magazine, n.s., XIX [February, 1835], 137). One should remember, too, that Mr. Tottle's appearance bore at least a general resemblance to that of Pickwick; he was fifty years old, stood four feet six inches in his stocking feet, and was "plump, clean, and rosy" (NLE, I, ii, 126).

[34]John Harrison Stonehouse, Green Leaves: New Chapters in the Life of Charles Dickens, revised and enlarged edn. (London: Piccadilly Fountain Press, 1931), pp. 12-13. Johnson, pp. 91-93, accepts these identification. The Leighs were the parents of Marianne Leigh, Maria Beadnell's closest friend.

related remark, "Have you seen the Bloomsbury Christening, if not, I'll send it to you,"[35] a suggestion perhaps of the source of certain settings, satirical incidents, or comic characters in the story. In another letter to Kolle, Dickens takes care to point out that "as neither you nor yours have the most remote connection with The Boarding House of which I am proprietor, I cannot have the least objection to (indeed I shall be flattered by) your perusing it."[36] The implication is that he was not averse to including an occasional cutting sketch of some of his friends and acquaintances in his tales. One familiar with the available details of Dickens's life in London in the early and mid-thirties also occasionally senses the realistic bases of other scenes and characters as well. Although such bits of real places, people, and events are hidden among the dull, flaccid stretches of bad eighteenth century theatricality, one can still see the touches that will characterize the later Dickens beginning to show through, most particularly when these realistic elements are tinted with satire.

At times the satire becomes bitter; Dickens may, as Monroe Engel seems to suggest, have been consciously attempting to delineate "the striving pretensions of the insecure middle class; and the brutalization of those just

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[35] Nonesuch Let., I, 30-31, to Henry Kolle, [April, 1834].

[36] Nonesuch Let., I, 31, to Henry Kolle, [April, 1834].

beneath them; and the callousness of those above."[37] "Horatio Sparkins" contains the elements of such satire, as do several of the other tales; yet the crudity of Dickens's techniques is more than adequately illustrated when one compares these early examples of snobbery to those examples depicted in the scenes connected with Mr. Pickwick's visit to Bath, particularly in Sam's attendance of the footmen's "swarry" (see NLE, II, ii, 147-163). The closing paragraphs of a number of these early stories, with their deliberate inversions of typically happy endings, would reinforce the belief that Dickens saw the representation of an unpleasant rather than a comic reality as one of his purposes as a serious writer. In a way these endings give a satiric twist to the stories, but they are generally far less effective than the more comic, yet equally satiric ending to the Bardell vs. Pickwick trial, for example, quoted earlier in this chapter. Unfortunately, in order to shock the reader with the unexpected ending to what seemed originally to be a farce, Dickens had to distort the structure of his stories and this failed to achieve an effective farcical, realistic, or satiric effect. In reading the first part of "The Boarding House," for example, one has no reason to believe

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[37] Monroe Engel, The Maturity of Dickens (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 78. In fairness, one should add that Engel is speaking of the collected SB rather than just the early farcical tales and that he adds that Dickens at this time lacked "the literary force to make much of it."

that any one of the three couples is the least incompatible; Dickens has not characterized them in that direction. Yet no couple remains long in happy union. Mr. Tottle's suicide is also unexpected; until well into the second chapter of "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle," he is purely a farcical figure. Even when Dickens forces the reader to become sympathetic toward Mr. Tottle, the change in the poor gentleman's character makes him a more genuinely comic character, along the lines of Mr. Pickwick, rather than a pathetic one; only the latter type could have committed suicide. In certain respects, then, the realistic twist, the satiric ending, is in conflict with the predominantly farcical tone of these early tales. The endings are not necessarily false to life, but they are inconsistent with what has gone before, and they most ungraciously, and inartistically, force the reader to reappraise what he has read with little success of resolving the conficts in tone and purpose inherent in the stories.

Whether Dickens's purpose in these early tales was to amuse the reader with farcical characters and situations or to paint a bitterly satirical picture of human nature or perhaps to do both, and maybe even more, cannot be clearly ascertained. If one critic might see the endings as reinforcing, though somewhat belatedly, a cynical view of life, another could just as well see the use of unexpectedly unhappy endings as a clever technique of literary parody--that is, Dickens may be bringing his stories to such

conclusions not because the conclusions are what he would expect to happen in real life but because typically happy endings are so grossly unreal. A critic might also, as C. B. Cox does, work out an explanation for the apparent conflict of purpose. Cox sees Dickens as already working with a comic view of life as a paradox of human existence: man is a fool (Cox uses Percy Noakes of "The Steam Excursion" and Mr. Watkins Tottle as examples), "a creature whose attempts to take himself seriously are worthy only of ridicule; yet, on the other hand, the vigour with which such characters pursue their activities redeems them from futility."[38] However, these tales come too early in Dickens's life, as well as too early in his literary career, to admit of such an interpretation of their purpose; or, perhaps, one should say that if such an interpretation can be made to explain the seeming irregularities in their structures, it is not one that Dickens consciously made and utilized.

One must in the end agree with Charles Dickens's own estimation of his early tales: "I am conscious of their often being extremely crude and ill-considered, and bearing obvious marks of haste and inexperience. . . ."[39] While one can see Dickens making slight progress in his use of the techniques of characterization, dramatic scene

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[38]C. B. Cox, "Comic Viewpoints in Sketches by Boz," p. 135.

[39]Preface to the First Cheap Edition of SB (1850), in NLE, I, i, xv.

construction, description, and narration, though practically none in plot creation and structure, the tales are still failures. Yet, so far as his career as a writer is concerned, Dickens was not moving backwards. By the beginning of 1835, he had at least written a number of tales; he had had to be a stage manager of sorts, concerned with movements of people from one place to another, with characterizations, with sets, with lighting, with making necessary connections between scenes, and with establishing a dominant mood related somehow to the purposes behind all these activities. Although in places, he approaches a quality of writing characteristic of that of Pickwick Papers, such places are rare; for the most part, the tales are dull, ineffective, and relatively unimaginative. The learning process was naturally a slow one, fraught with failures of various kinds, but it was a learning process, after all; even in these eight tales Dickens shows some improvement. If one is still surprised, upon the publication of the first few installments of Pickwick Papers, to see the amazing progress in the quality of Dickens's writing, he will have to turn to the next pieces that Dickens wrote (which would also be collected in Sketches by Boz), the essays in the Morning Chronicle, the Evening Chronicle, and Bell's Life in London, for the explanation of his important progress between the writing of the Monthly Magazine tales and of the comic novel that made him world famous virtually overnight.

CHAPTER III

SKETCHES BY BOZ--SKETCHES, SCENES, CHARACTERS

The Morning Chronicle "Street Sketches"

Between late 1834 and early 1836, Dickens almost completely abandoned the writing of tales, producing instead three series of descriptive essays: five "Street Sketches" for the Morning Chronicle, twenty "Sketches of London" for the Evening Chronicle, and twelve "Scenes and Characters" for Bell's Life in London. Despite the fact that only five of these (all in Bell's Life in London) are tales, Dickens nevertheless improved considerably during this period as a writer of fiction. As will be shown in this chapter, the essays, or rather the parts of essays, were little exercises in the various techniques of fiction. Indeed, a number of the important characteristics of Dickens as a writer, those touches that, in reference to his novels, are frequently referred to as peculiarly "Dickensian," have their beginnings here. In this chapter, each of the series is examined in turn. Coming at the beginning, the "Street Sketches" are used to illustrate the various influences that affected the form, substance, and tone of these and the later descriptive essays. The "Sketches of London," mainly because of their number, are used to show Dickens working separately with

the various elements of fiction to be found in these writings. Coming at the end of the period covered by this chapter, the "Scenes and Characters" afford proof, both in Dickens's first use of certain advanced techniques in the seven essays and in his uniting of the various elements of fiction in the five tales, of the value of Dickens's "exercises" in advancing him as a writer of fiction and moving him closer to the time when he would be ready to write longer and more complex works of fiction.

Even before "The Steam Excursion" and the two parts of "A Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle" made their appearance in the Monthly Magazine, Charles Dickens had written Henry Kolle that he might need to find a new place for his sketches as the "Monthly people" were "rather backward in coming forward with the needful."[1] He was then considering the Metropolitan Magazine as a possibility. Several months later, however, in August, 1834, he was hired as a Parliamentary reporter by the Morning Chronicle, and it was here during the last three months of 1834 that Dickens's first five essays appeared under the heading "Street Sketches," signed as by "Boz," his recently acquired pseudonym.[2]

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[1] Nonesuch Let., I, 29, to Henry Kolle, [1834].

[2] "Omnibuses," September 26; "Shops and Their Tenants," October 10; "The Old Bailey" (retitled "Criminal Courts" in the Second Series of SB, the title by which I shall refer to it), October 23; "Shabby-Genteel People," November 5; and "Brokers' and Marine-Store Shops," December 15. Dickens first used "Boz" as his pseudonym at the end of the second part of "The Boarding House," in the Monthly Magazine, August, 1834.

In writing what he referred to as his "light papers,"[3] Dickens naturally accepted certain conventional techniques, procedures, and subjects that one expects to find in essays. Fortunately, he seems generally to have selected the best characteristics of the periodical essay of the eighteenth century, the familiar essay of the early nineteenth century, and the periodical article of the popular press of his own period (exemplified by one of his closest sources, the New Monthly Magazine papers of John Poole). As indicated in Chapter I of this study, he was thoroughly familiar with all of these from his voluminous reading.[4] Dickens sometimes utilizes the eighteenth century essayist's realistic and objective approach, achieved largely through detailed descriptions of daily life and of typical figures of society (usually treated satirically), and sets as his purpose the reform of manners and morals. Elsewhere, even within the

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[3] Nonesuch Let., I, 41, to George Hogarth, 1/20/35.

[4] See Marie Hamilton Law, The English Familiar Essay in the Early Nineteenth Century: The Elements Old and New Which Went into Its Making as Exemplified in the Writings of Hunt, Hazlitt, and Lamb (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1934); George S. Marr, The Periodical Essayists of the Eighteenth Century (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1924); Melvin R. Watson, "The Spectator Tradition and the Development of the Familiar Essay," ELH, XIII (1946), 189-215; Charles E. Whitmore, "The Field of the Essay," PMLA, XXXVI (1921), 551-564. For a study and its rejoinder of the influence of Washington Irving upon Dickens, see Boll, "Charles Dickens and Washington Irving," pp. 453-467, and Wegelin, "Dickens and Irving: the Problem of Influence," pp. 83-91. For brief discussions of the influence of Poole on Dickens, see Chapter Two and also Section ii of this chapter.

same essay, he finds use for the digressive, conversational, and imaginative charm of the nineteenth century essayists, as well as for their sympathetic portrayal of humble life, their melancholy sentiment, and their greater freedom of length, fancy, subject matter, and form.[5] The fact that his essays embody characteristics of both traditions should be thus noted, for it is the conflict and the juncture of these traditions, modified by the requirements of the popular press, where "variety, simplicity, and brevity were the rule,"[6] that characterize, that give form, substance, and tone to Dickens's essays, and that in various ways helped to prepare him to write good fiction.

The form of these early essays is, generally speaking, pretty much determined by Dickens's purpose to amuse his readers rather than to attempt to reform their manners and

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[5]These characteristics are selected from those discussed by Marie Hamilton Law, pp. 8-13, and do not include those characteristics of both traditions that are not common to Dickens's essays. I have not taken into consideration some differences of opinion among scholars as to the exact characteristics of each, nor do I intend to compare and contrast Dickens with his predecessors and contemporaries, for it is an easy enough task to do either. Leigh Hunt, for example, has occasionally been mentioned as an essayist whom Dickens imitated. A few of Hunt's essays do bear a resemblance of one kind or another to Dickens's (see, for example, "Of the Sight of Shops," "Walks Home by Night: Watchmen," "The Old Gentleman," "The Old Lady," "Coaches," "The Waiter," and "Getting Up on Cold Mornings," in Essays by Leigh Hunt, ed. Arthur Symons [London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., Ltd., n.d.]), but they also bear many dissimilarities, and others show no similarities at all. If one reads a different selection of Hunt's essays, he might justifiably conclude that Hunt had virtually no influence upon Dickens.

[6]Richard D. Altick, The English Common Reader, p. 369.

morals. In this respect he is closer to his nineteenth century compeers than to his eighteenth century models, though even in amusing he usually works with a somewhat serious theme. "It is very generally allowed that public conveyances afford an extensive field for amusement and observation," Dickens begins in "Omnibuses" (NLE, I, i, 171), thereby setting in his opening sentence the form that the sketch will take. He will present his observations in a more or less organized fashion with an occasional, clearly indicated digression, attempting in the process to amuse his readers. His purpose to amuse will determine the tone as well as the subjects of his essays and, more importantly, will virtually require him to fill them with descriptive passages, with narrative and dramatic scenes, with plotted anecdotes, and with colorful characterizations. While "Omnibuses" consists mainly of a lengthy scene, "Shops and Their Tenants" is developed by a series of descriptions to support Dickens's general and more specific themes: "What inexhaustible food for speculation do the streets of London afford!" and "One of our principal amusements is to watch the gradual progress--the rise and fall--of particular shops" (NLE, I, i, 75, 76). "Criminal Courts" progresses by a series of scenes, "Brokers' and Marine-Store Shops" by a series of descriptions, and "Shabby-Genteel People," in supporting the statement, "There are certain descriptions of people who, oddly enough, appear to appertain exclusively to the metropolis" (NLE, I, i, 328),

by a series of descriptive characterizations followed by a detailed portrait of a certain shabby-genteel man whom Dickens apparently knew from the Reading Room of the British Museum. The form, then, of these "Street Sketches" forces Dickens to continue working, though in an incidental way, with the elements of fiction.

Another important general characteristic of Dickens's essays is the air of reality given to them by the descriptions, narratives, and character studies they contain, even though some of the details may actually be fictional. It is this air of veracity that George Gissing sees as the greatest merit of Dickens's sketches. Dickens, he states, "has not as yet developed his liking for the grotesque, the extravagant; he pictures the commonplace, with no striving for effect, and admirably succeeds."[7] What Gissing does not point out is that the substance of a descriptive essay virtually demands the emphasis on reality. Reinforcing this emphasis in Dickens's sketches is the noticeable absence of lengthy philosophical ruminations, elaborate analogies, scholarly allusions, and literary quotations, predominantly classical, that decorate the essays of Addison and Steele, of Hunt and Lamb, and even of John Poole. As a result, Dickens's descriptions, narratives, and character studies

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[7]George Gissing, Charles Dickens, A Critical Study (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898), p. 47. Gissing, as do most critics, is speaking generally of the collected Sketches by Boz, but his remark is apropos to the five Morning Chronicle essays.

are presented directly, concisely, and with great effect. Most important of all, however, is that one does frequently recognize the people, places, and scenes in these essays as those of Dickens's own life. As John Forster states:

> Things are painted literally as they are; and, whatever the picture, whether of every-day vulgar, shabby genteel, or downright low, with neither the condescending air which is affectation, nor the too familiar one which is slang. . . . Of course, there are inequalities in it, and some things that would have been better away: but it is a book that might have stood its ground, even if it had stood alone, as containing unusually truthful observation of a sort of life between the middle class and the low, which, having few attractions for bookish observers, was quite unhacknied ground. It had otherwise also the very special merit of being in no respect bookish or commonplace in its descriptions of the old city with which its writer was so familiar. It was a picture of every-day London at its best and worst, in its humours and enjoyments as well as its sufferings and sins. . . .[8]

Dickens's occupation as a reporter for the Morning Chronicle between 1834 and 1836 must surely have been an important influence upon the realistic substance of his essays. Dickens himself concluded in later life: "To the wholesome training of severe newspaper work, when I was a young man, I constantly refer my first successes,"[9] and Forster, analyzing this statement, concluded that it opened for Dickens "a wide and varied range of experience, which his wonderful observation, exact as it was humorous,

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[8]Forster, pp. 76-77. Like Gissing, he is speaking of SB in general, but his comments, too, are appropriate to the Morning Chronicle "Street Sketches."

[9]Stated by Dickens at a banquet in his honor given by the New York press, April 18, 1868. In Speeches, p. 379.

made entirely his own."[10] But the influence of Dickens's journalistic career upon his writing is not merely the tenuous one of making new experiences available to him. Chesterton saw Dickens's novels as "outgrowths of the original notion of taking notes, splendid and inspired notes, of what happens in the street."[11] In a way, this is literally true. Taking notes in the street is almost exactly what Dickens as a newspaper reporter was sometimes called upon to do. His reportorial tasks were mainly devoted to recording Parliamentary debates, but occasionally he was sent on out-of-town assignments that involved some original reporting in addition to the recording of speeches. The substance of such writing is very close to that of his descriptive essays, as witness the following report of a "promenade" for the benefit of the Blind Asylum, the Deaf and Dumb Institution, and the House of Refuge in Edinburgh, apparently Dickens's first piece of descriptive reporting:

> [This promenade] was most respectably attended, but a lamentably dull affair. A marquee was erected in the centre of a parched bit of ground, without a tree or shrub to intercept the rays of a burning sun. Under it was a military band, and around it were the company. The band played and the company walked about; and when the band were tired, a piper played by way of variation, and then the company walked about again, and when the piper was tired,

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[10] Forster, p. 61.

[11] G. K. Chesterton, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1911), pp. 117-118.

> such of the visitors as could find seats sat down, and those who could not looked as if they wished they had not come; and the poor blind-school pupils, who occupied the warmest seats in the enclosure, were very hot and uncomfortable, and appeared very glad to be filed off from a scene in which they could take little interest, and with which their pensive careworn faces painfully contrasted.[12]

A few days later, Dickens wrote the introductory paragraph to a lengthy report by himself and Charles Beard, his colleague and friend, of the Edinburgh banquet honoring Lord Grey on his retirement from the office of Prime Minister:

> It had been announced that the dinner would take place at five o'clock precisely; but Earl Grey, and the other principal visitors, as might have been expected, did not arrive until shortly after six. Previous to their arrival, some slight confusion, and much merriment, was excited by the following circumstance:-- A gentleman who, we presume, had entered with one of the first sections, having sat with exemplary patience for some time in the immediate vicinity of cold fowls, roast beef, lobsters, and other tempting delicacies (for the dinner was a cold one), appeared to think that the best thing he could possibly do, would be to eat his dinner, while there was anything to eat. He accordingly laid about him with right good-will, the example was contagious, and the clatter of knives and forks became general. Hereupon, several gentlemen, who were not hungry, cried out "Shame!" and looked very indignant; and several gentlemen who were hungry, cried "Shame!" too, eating nevertheless, all the while, as fast as they possibly could. In this dilemma, one of the stewards mounted a bench, and feelingly represented to the delinquents the enormity of their conduct, imploring them, for decency's sake, to defer the process of mastication until the arrival of Lord Grey. This address was loudly cheered, but totally unheeded; and this is, perhaps, one of the few instances on record of a

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[12]Walter Dexter, "Charles Dickens: Journalist," Nineteenth Century and After, CXV (1934), 709. The article appeared in the Morning Chronicle on September 17, 1834, datelined September 13.

> dinner having been virtually concluded before it began.[13]

One recognizes in these two early samples of Dickens's reportorial writing what would later be called characteristic "Dickensian" touches--the absurd situation, the contrast between what one professes and what one does, the conflict between natural behavior and social mannerisms, the verbal cleverness, and even the touch of sentiment in the earlier piece. Yet one also knows that the substance of these two paragraphs (the scenes, the people, the places described) is factual. There is perhaps even a possibility that Dickens's success with such colorful reporting may have led to his suggestion or to the suggestion of his editor that he write a series of descriptive sketches for the newspaper. At any rate, the source of the unadorned, factual substance of his essays undoubtedly must be attributed to his newspaper writing. Despite Dickens's later attraction to comic and pathetic exaggeration, his characters, scenic descriptions, and narrative episodes will always have the touch of reality at their core; the realistic bent of Dickens's later writing seems to be in the process of formation at this early moment in his literary career.

Finally, the tone of Dickens's essays is the result of a combination of influences. The detached superior

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[13] Carlton, Charles Dickens, Shorthand Writer, pp. 107-108. The article covered eleven closely-printed columns in the September 18, 1834, issue of the Morning Chronicle, Carlton reports (p. 106).

narrator and the frequently satirical tone of his observations mark the eighteenth century influence but may also be due, as Chesterton suggests, to Dickens's personal background. The critic saw in the Sketches by Boz "all the peculiar hardness of youth; a hardness which in those who have in any way been unfairly treated reaches even to impudence. It is a terrible thing for any man to find out that his elders are wrong. And this almost unkindly courage of youth must partly be held responsible for the smartness of Dickens, that almost offensive smartness which . . . sometimes irritates us like the showy gibes in the tall talk of a schoolboy."[14] The following passages from "Shops and Their Tenants" reflects the tone that may be an eighteenth-century influence or one from Dickens's personal life, perhaps both:

> One of our principal amusements is to watch the gradual progress--the rise or fall--of particular shops. We have formed an intimate acquaintance with several, in different parts of town, and we are perfectly acquainted with their whole history. We could name offhand, twenty at least, which we are quite sure have paid no taxes for the last six years. They are never inhabited for more than two months consecutively, and, we verily believe, have witnessed every retail trade in the directory.
>
> There is one, whose history is a sample of the rest, in whose fate we have taken especial interest, having had the pleasure of knowing it ever since it has been a shop. . . . It was originally a substantial, good-looking private house enough; the landlord got into difficulties, the house got into Chancery, the tenant went away, and the house went to ruin. At this period, our acquaintance with it commenced. . . . (NLE, I, i, 76)

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[14]Chesterton, Appreciations and Criticisms, pp. 6-7.

On the other hand, Dickens's occasional melancholic reflections on the effects of time passing, on the pathos of the human condition, and on the picturesque though dirty sights of London more closely mirror the influence of the Pre-Romantics and Romantics than of the early eighteenth century essayists, an influence that can be felt even in the flippant tone of the passage quoted above. The journalistic influence may be present in the rapidity with which the prose moves, the verbal economy with which Dickens presents his ideas and illustrations, and the vividness produced by the rapidity, the economy, and (in passages more descriptive than the ones above) the color of the writing.

The five "Street Sketches" may be Dickens's earliest published essays, but they are by no means amateurish. On the contrary, they reveal the happy influence of the eighteenth and nineteenth century essay traditions and the nineteenth century journalistic tradition upon the form, substance, and tone of the essays Dickens was writing for the popular press. They also show Dickens ready to use the techniques he had learned from his models to produce essays that, in moments of high creativity, could compete with those of his more famous predecessors. But my concern is not so much with Dickens's essays as <u>essays</u> but as writings in which, through his descriptions, examples, and illustrations, he continued to practice the various techniques associated with the writing of fiction and to improve in

his use of them. The series of twenty essays Dickens wrote for the Evening Chronicle should present a clear picture of Dickens's progress during 1835 in the craft of fiction.

The Evening Chronicle "Sketches of London"

By mid-January of 1835 Dickens's reputation as an essayist had apparently been made with the five "Street Sketches" he had just published in the Morning Chronicle, for George Hogarth, the editor of the forthcoming Evening Chronicle, had proposed that Dickens write a sketch for the first issue. In this issue, published January 31, of this thrice-weekly offshoot of the Morning Chronicle, Dickens published the first of twenty essays under the running title "Sketches of London."[15] Despite the young reporter's growing reputation, the essays are by no means consistently brilliant. Although Dickens later revised them more than

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[15]"Hackney-Coach Stands," January 31; "Gin Shops," February 7; "Early Coaches," February 19; "The Parish" (later subtitled "The Beadle--The Parish Engine--The Schoolmaster"), February 28; "The House" (reprinted in the Second Series of SB in combination with "Bellamy's" as "A Parliamentary Sketch--with a few Portraits," considerably revised), March 7; "London Recreations," March 17; "Public Dinners," April 7; "Bellamy's" (see comment on "The House"), April 11; "Greenwich Fair," April 16; "Thoughts about People," April 23; "Astley's," May 9; "Our Parish" (later subtitled "The Curate--The Old Lady--The Captain"), May 19; "The River," June 6; "Our Parish" (later subtitled "The Four Sisters,"), June 18; "The Pawnbroker's Shop," June 30; "Our Parish" (later subtitled "The Election for Beadle"), July 14; "The Streets--Morning," July 21; "Our Parish" (later subtitled "The Broker's Man"), July 28; "Private Theatres," August 11; and "Our Parish" (later subtitled "The Ladies' Societies"), August 20.

once, mainly for style, even in their revised forms the sketches exhibit at times what Edgar Johnson refers to as "polysyllabic turgidness," "showy and cocksure jibing," "flip puns," and "knowing word-plays."[16] Yet sometimes theme, tone, illustrations, and style merge in imaginative, vivid, exciting sketches that contemporary reviewers praised and that, according to one recent scholar, "stood out conspicuously among the writings of 1834-35."[17] More importantly, for the purposes of this study of Dickens's advancement as a writer of fiction, in the process of writing these essays, Dickens developed some of those characteristics that critics and readers in general recognize in his novels as peculiarly his. And in writing descriptive essays rather than tales, Dickens was also able to practice certain techniques of fiction at a relatively simple level.

The first "Dickensian" touch, the reality of his subject matter, as already mentioned, grew out of his career as a reporter. The "Sketches of London," like the "Street Sketches," are notable for their obviously greater reliance on the realities of the city that Dickens observed around him. "It was no coincidence," Johnson writes, "that the reviews [of Sketches by Boz] all emphasized Dickens's

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[16]Johnson, p. 112. Nevertheless, one suspects that the confidence underlying such pretentious stylistic infelicities may very likely explain Dickens's rapid and certain rise as a creative writer as much as do the years of practice, experimentation, and polish.

[17]Stevenson, "An Introduction to Young Mr. Dickens," p. 112.

knowledge of his subjects and his closeness of observation. The subtitles of the Sketches proclaimed them 'illustrative of Everyday Life and Everyday People,' and more than half the contents strictly deserved that description. They are facts--of street and shop and tavern and jail--reported with extraordinary precision and vivacity."[18] One encounters in these sketches the various circles in which Dickens moved, socially and professionally, the middle class world of the Beadnell family, the virtually classless world of his financially impoverished parents, and the world of law clerks, reporters, and musicians with whom he and his family were acquainted, a world of Parliament, law courts, public dinners, theaters, and concert halls. In addition, what Lionel Stevenson refers to as Dickens's "sociable and energetic" activities reveal another world of people and places that Dickens saw and sometimes became involved with in what students of Dickensian topography love to call his "rambles" about London: Greenwich Fair, Astley's, private theaters, public gardens, inns, gin shops, pawn shops, public dinners, coach stands, the streets--morning, noon, and night. These, Stevenson states, "were his favorite haunts and topics, for these were the places of crowds and gaiety and an inexhaustible display of human types. 'Somehow, we never can resist joining a crowd,' he remarks in one of his Sketches, but the admission is not necessary,

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[18]Johnson, p. 110.

for the fact is revealed in almost every page of the book. . . ."[19]

F. J. H. Darton states that in his writing of the sketches for the Morning Chronicle and the Evening Chronicle Dickens really began "drawing upon his unconsciously absorbed experience, so exuberant when released, of the truer realities of London life."[20] Certainly it is this reality of subject matter that elevated Dickens's writing above that of such other authors of lower and middle class London life as Pierce Egan, Robert Surtees, and Theodore Hook. "One is completely convinced," Stevenson states, "that [Dickens] delineated the people he actually encountered in his daily work, whereas the other writers were obviously following stilted old conventions. . . ."[21]

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[19]Stevenson, p. 113.

[20]Darton, Dickens, Positively the First Appearance, p. 81.

[21]Stevenson, p. 112. One notable exception was J. Wight, a police court reporter for the Morning Herald, whose reports were immensely popular in the 1820's. He grossly but cleverly exaggerated "whatever grotesque or unusual cases came before the magistrate." A selection of these reports, whose exaggerations and inaccuracies were eventually outlawed by the court, was first published in 1824 as Mornings at Bow Street with illustrations by Cruikshank (see Grant, The Newspaper Press, I, 318-319). Dickens was familiar with the selection, perhaps even with the reports as they appeared in the Morning Herald (See Nonesuch Let., I, 702, to Miss Coutts, 9/17/45). Butt and Tillotson (p. 40, n. 6) and Dibelius (p. 80) see some influence of Wight upon Dickens, particularly, according to Dibelius, in both authors' emphasis upon a quite specific London milieu. In the "Advertisement" to the fourth edition

Perhaps even more significant to Dickens's development as a creative artist than his restriction of the subjects of his essays to the world he knew is the increasingly consistent way in which he approached his subjects. His frequent return to the same topics, the same situations, shows, Ernest Boll states, that these situations "represent a habit of mind, that they are the repeated expressions of the same personality."[22] That is, Dickens not only reported what he saw, he had an individual way of looking at it. Here lies the germ of his later fictional treatment of essentially the same subjects. Note, for example, what Dickens does with his topic in the following passage from a letter he wrote to a friend while covering a provincial election:

> Yesterday I had to start at 8 o'clock for Braintree--a place 12 miles off: and being unable to get a saddlehorse, I actually ventured on a gig,--and what is more, I actually did the four and twenty miles without upsetting it. I wish to God you could have seen me tooling in and out of the banners, drums, conservative emblems, horsemen, and go-carts with which every little green was filled as the processions were waiting for Sir John Tyrell and Baring. Every time the horse heard a drum he bounced into the hedge, or to the left side of the road; and every time I got him out of that, he bounded into the hedge at the right side. When he <u>did</u> go, however, he

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of his work (London: Thomas Tegg & Son, 1838), Wight echoes what one suspects was frequently Dickens's practice: ". . . the dramatis personae are actual existences, and the scenes real occurrences; affording specimens of our national humour which is perhaps to be found genuine only among the uncultivated classes of society. In copying these the author's chief aim has been to preserve the character and spirit of the originals" (p. vi).

[22] Boll, "The Sketches by 'Boz,'" p. 71.

> went along admirably. The road was clear when I returned, and with the trifling exception of breaking my whip, I flatter myself I did the whole thing in something like style.[23]

It is not so much the ride itself that makes this passage exciting description as it is the coloring, verbal and descriptive, the exaggeration of the horse's movements, the unexpected detail of the broken whip, and the partly comic and partly egotistical portrait that Dickens paints of himself. The result, in this letter, in his essays, and ultimately in his fiction, is a heightened picture of reality, a detailed impression, perhaps, rather than a statistical record. "To treat the fictions as a hidden hunting ground of mere fact is of course a distortion of Dickens's true genius," states Edgar Johnson, alluding to the numerous studies of the "originals" of people and places in Dickens's works, "and yet it is rooted in a significant feature of his way of working. No writer takes more pains to seize upon the most striking characteristics of actual places and people and incorporate them into the creatures of his imagination."[24]

Strongly contributing to the molding of the "Dickensian" approach during this period of essay writing for the Evening Chronicle is Dickens's development of a more definite point

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[23] Nonesuch Let., I, 39, to Thomas Beard, 1/9/35. This letter was written from the Black Boy Hotel, Chelmsford, where Dickens had been sent to cover the election for the Morning Chronicle.

[24] Johnson, pp. 110-111.

of view toward people, situations, and social conditions, particularly as found in direct statements of his themes and, somewhat more subtly, in the mood or tone of the essays. Occasionally, as in the concluding paragraph from "Gin Shops," Dickens's attitude is clearly and rather crudely stated, justifying Stevenson's comment that in the Sketches by Boz he "adjusted his sights for the forthcoming sniping" in the novels[25]:

> We have sketched this subject very slightly, not only because our limits compel us to do so, but because, if it were pursued farther, it would be painful and repulsive. Well-disposed gentlemen, and charitable ladies, would alike turn with coldness and disgust from a description of drunken besotted men, and wretched broken-down miserable women, who form no inconsiderable portion of the frequenters of these haunts; forgetting, in the pleasant consciousness of their own rectitude, the poverty of the one, and the temptation of the other. Gin-drinking is a great vice in England, but wretchedness and dirt are a greater; and until you improve the homes of the poor, or persuade a half-famished wretch not to seek relief in the temporary oblivion of his own misery, with the pittance which, divided among his family, would furnish a morsel of bread for each, gin-shops will increase in number and splendour. If Temperance Societies would suggest an antidote against hunger, filth, and foul air, or could establish dispensaries for the gratuitous distribution of bottles of Lethe-water, gin-palaces would be numbered among the things that were. (NLE, I, 232-233)

Here, obviously, is a manifestation of the "flickering flame-tongues of wrath" that Edgar Johnson sees as an animating force in Dickens's work even as early as Sketches by Boz.[26]

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[25]Stevenson, p. 114.

[26]Johnson, p. 317. Also see pp. 111-112.

Most of the "Street Sketches" and the "Sketches of London," however, are not so dependent upon the bitterness of irony and invective as is the conclusion of "Gin Shops." As mentioned earlier, "amusement" is a key word in understanding Dickens's purpose in most of these essays. The effect he achieves lies closer to humor than to satire or irony. As defined by Frances Russell, humor is "the comic sense which is amused by things as they are," which is "allied to the actual more than to the fanciful," and which "uses the method of simple disclosure rather than caricature." Its function is that of "showing wherein lurks the spirit of the laughable, however grave and solemn the appearance to the unseeing eye."[27] This definition would seem to characterize Dickens's intentions in such a fine sketch as "Hackney-Coach Stands." The assumed superiority with which the narrator (presumably "Boz") views the passing scene dominates the tone of the early portions of the essay:

> Take a regular, ponderous, rickety, London hackney-coach of the old school, and let any man have the boldness to assert, if he can, that he ever beheld any object on the face of the earth which at all resembles it, unless, indeed, it were another hackney-coach of the same date. We have recently observed on certain stands, and we say it with deep regret, rather dapper green chariots, and coaches of polished yellow, with four wheels of the same colour as the coach, whereas it is perfectly notorious to every one who has studied

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[27]Frances Theresa Russell, Satire in the Victorian Novel (New York: Macmillan Company, 1920), p. 86.

> the subject, that every wheel ought to be of a different colour, and a different size. These are innovations, and, like other miscalled improvements, awful signs of the restlessness of the public mind, and the little respect paid to our time-honoured institutions. Why should hackney-coaches be clean? Our ancestors found them dirty, and left them so. Why should we, with a feverish wish to "keep moving," desire to roll along at the rate of six miles an hour, while they were content to rumble over the stones at four? These are solemn considerations. Hackney-coaches are part and parcel of the law of the land; they were settled by the Legislature; plated and numbered by the wisdom of Parliament. (NLE, I, i, 101-102)

The note of satire in this passage is partly dependent upon the pseudo-patriotic tone with which Dickens invests the paragraph and partly dependent upon the obvious eccentricity of his support of run-down, dirty, slow hackney-coaches. The essay consists of three parts. In the first, Dickens speaks of his own extensive acquaintance with hackney-coaches; in the second, he describes one such coach standing beneath the window at which he is writing, into which a daughter, four grandchildren, and a servant-girl put a grandmother and her baggage; in the third, he describes a wedding-party taking another such coach to the church. Yet, as the essay progresses, the satire is modified by an apparent love of humanity that "Boz," the man-of-the-world, the sophisticated and objective observer of life, finds difficult to disguise,[28] as is evident in the scene of

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[28] I am here utilizing C. B. Cox's interpretation of the nature of Dickens's comic perception of man (in his "Comic Viewpoints in Sketches by Boz," pp. 132-135). Dickens, he suggests, sees man as a fool, but he also sees that man's love of life and man's exuberant and unhypocritical acceptance of life are what at the same time redeem him from utter futility.

the grandmother's leave-taking:

> The servant-girl, with the pink ribbons, at No. 5, opposite, suddenly opens the street-door, and four small children forthwith rush out, and scream "Coach!" with all their might and main. The waterman darts from the pump, seizes the horses by their respective bridles, and drags them, and the coach, too, round to the house, shouting all the time for the coachman at the very top or rather very bottom of his voice, for it is a deep bass growl. A response is heard from the tap-room; the coachman, in his wooden-soled shoes, makes the streets echo again as he runs across it; and then there is such a struggling, and backing, and grating of the kennel, to get the coach-door opposite the house-door, that the children are in perfect ecstasies of delight. What a commotion! (NLE, I, i, 103-104)

This active scene contains a certain amount of humor, but of humor dependent not so much upon satire as upon a slightly heightened picture of reality and upon what Harold Nicolson might call "high spirits," one of the causes he lists for spontaneous amusement.[29]

After the children and their mother have seen the grandmother into the coach, along with "a little basket, which we could almost swear contains a small black bottle, and a paper of sandwich," Dickens concludes the scene:

> Up go the steps, bang goes the door, "Golden Cross, Charing Cross, Tom," says the waterman; "Goodbye, grandma," cry the children, off jingles the coach at the rate of three miles an hour, and the mamma and children retire into the house, with the exception of one little villain, who runs up the street at the top of his speed, pursued by the servant; not ill-pleased to have such an opportunity of displaying her attractions. She brings

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[29]Harold Nicolson, The English Sense of Humour and Other Essays (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1956), p. 27.

> him back, and, after casting two or three gracious glances across the way, which are either intended for us or the pot-boy (we are not quite certain which), shuts the door, and the hackney-coach stand is again at a standstill. (NLE, I, i, 104)

It is, in the end, the picture of the "little villain" pursued by the flirtatious servant-girl with the pink ribbons that establishes the tone and the authorial attitude in this passage. We see human foibles, but they are so amusingly presented that we smile in delight rather than in derision. And, despite the humor achieved through exaggeration, we see that the specific and carefully selected details give the scene the color of reality and the characters a touch of human nature.

In the next paragraph, Dickens describes a wedding party that has hired a hackney-coach for the ride to the church:

> There were the bride, with a thin white dress, and a great red face; and the bridesmaid, a little, dumpy, good-humoured young lady, dressed, of course, in the same appropriate costume; and the bridegroom and his chosen friend, in blue coats, yellow waistcoats, white trousers, and Berlin gloves to match. They stopped at the corner of the street, and called a coach with an air of indescribable dignity. The moment they were in, the bridesmaid threw a red shawl, which she had, no doubt, brought on purpose, negligently over the number on the door, evidently to delude pedestrians into the belief that the hackney-coach was a private carriage; and away they went, perfectly satisfied that the imposition was successful, and quite unconscious that there was a great staring number stuck up behind, on a plate as large as a schoolboy's slate. (NLE, I, i, 105)

To this point the scene is satirical; a few additional touches could easily make the scene a relatively sharp exposé

of human pretentiousness. But such is not Dickens's purpose. In keeping with his intention to amuse his readers, Dickens needs to modify the satire already present in the paragraph by a touch of sentiment. His actual concluding sentence puts the entire scene into proper focus: "A shilling a mile!--the ride was worth five, at least, to them." This highly effective combination of satire with sentiment is, certainly, characteristic of the later, more famous works of Dickens, where one finds it used for characterization as well as for mood. Here, in these early sketches, one can observe this important "Dickensian" characteristic in formation.

Dickens's advancement in his use of description, the descriptive (as opposed to the "dramatic") scene, and characterization also contribute to the development of the "Dickensian" approach to fiction during this period of his career. Also important is the background of buildings, people, incidents, and attitudes as viewed from a specific point of view that Dickens creates in the "Our Parish" sketches. In addition, however, Dickens is usually able in these essays to deal with these aspects of the craft of fiction in relative isolation from one another and as a result to advance more rapidly as a craftsman than if he had continued to wrestle with the more complex form of the tale.

Because these are, after all, descriptive essays, Dickens was able to work far more extensively with the

techniques of description to set and to develop his scenes in his "Sketches of London" than he had earlier in the Monthly Magazine tales. Sometimes his descriptions are little more than itemized lists. In "The Pawn-broker's Shop," for example, his depiction of the exterior and interior of the shop usually lapses into a mere listing of the articles displayed in the window or behind the counter. Yet he had more consciously created an atmosphere in the earlier Morning Chronicle sketch, "Brokers' and Marine-Store Shops," where, in describing and humanizing the articles in the shop, he related them to the lives of the people who had once owned them. Generally speaking, most of his descriptions in the essays are of fairly high caliber, equal to the best passages in the Monthly Magazine tales and not inferior to many of the descriptions in Pickwick Papers. The following passage from "Hackney-Coach Stands" might very well have begun a scene in which Mr. Pickwick and his company take a hackney-coach to some new destination and some new adventure. Dickens's use of specific detail, a certain amount of exaggeration for effect, some imagery, and even an occasional bit of pathetic fallacy characterizes most of his early and late description, as do his concern with the sounds, colors, and pictures created by certain words (as "lumbering," for example) and his fascination with various rhetorical devices:

> There is a hackney-coach stand under the very window at which we are writing; there is only one coach on it now, but it is a fair specimen of the class of vehicles to which we have alluded--a great, lumbering, square concern of a dingy yellow colour (like a bilious brunette), with very small glasses, but very large frames; the panels are ornamented with a faded coat of arms, in shape something like a dissected bat, the axletree is red, and the majority of the wheels are green. The box is partially covered by an old great-coat, with a multiplicity of capes, and some extraordinary-looking clothes; and the straw, with which the canvas cushion is stuffed, is sticking up in several places, as if in rivalry of the hay, which is peeping through the chinks in the boot. The horses, with drooping heads, and each with a mane and tail as scanty and as straggling as those of a worn-out rocking-horse, are standing patiently on some damp straw, occasionally wincing, and rattling the harness; and now and then, one of them lifts his mouth to the ear of his companion, as if he were saying, in a whisper, that he should like to assassinate the coachman. (NLE, I, i, 103)

Occasionally, as in "The Streets--Morning" or in "Greenwich Fair," Dickens writes an essay whose purpose is mainly descriptive. In the former, Dickens depicts the streets of London, recreating their changing scenes and moods at various hours and half-hours as the morning progresses. For the most part the details are effective if conventional--the drunken man staggering home, a policeman, market carts, laborers on their way to work, the confusion in Covent Garden Market, the servants and apprentices, the opening of the shops, stage coaches arriving and departing. But occasionally a more truly imaginative picture emerges, such as that of the "rakish-looking" cat that "runs stealthily across the road and descends his own area with as much caution and slyness--bounding first on the water-butt, then on the dust-hole, and then alighting

on the flag-stones--as if he were conscious that his character depended on his gallantry of the preceding night escaping public notice" (NLE, I, i, 62).

If Dickens can isolate and individualize such a minor detail in one essay in order to establish a mood, in others he can deal as adequately with crowds. In the following passage from "Greenwich Fair" his details are meant to convey a general impression, but the specificity with which the fragments of the scene are described is responsible for creating the mood of bustle and gaiety that pervades the entire sketch:

> The road to Greenwich during the whole of Easter Monday, is in a state of perpetual bustle and noise. Cabs, hackney-coaches, "shay" carts, coal-waggons, stages, omnibuses, sociables, gigs, donkey-chaises--all crammed with people (for the question never is, what the horse can draw, but what the vehicle will hold), roll along at their utmost speed; the dust flies in clouds, ginger-beer corks go off in volleys, the balcony of every public-house is crowded with people, smoking and drinking, half the private houses are turned into tea-shops, fiddles are in great request, every little fruit-shop displays its stall of gilt gingerbread and penny toys; turnpike men are in despair; horses won't go on, and wheels will come off; ladies in "carawans" scream with fright at every fresh concussion, and their admirers find it necessary to sit remarkably close to them, by way of encouragement; servants of all work, who are not allowed to have followers, and have got a holiday for the day, make the most of their time with the faithful admirer who waits for a stolen interview at the corner of the street every night, when they go to fetch the beer--apprentices grow sentimental, and straw-bonnet makers kind. Everybody is anxious to get on, and actuated by the common wish to be at the fair, or in the park, as soon as possible. (NLE, I, i, 138-139)

Frequently Dickens mixes description and action in a virtually inseparable combination to produce the effect

described by Percy Lubbock in his The Craft of Fiction as "pictorial," that is, "the reflection of events in the mirror of somebody's receptive consciousness" rather than "a scene which might be put upon the stage" (which is "dramatic").[30] In his novels Dickens naturally will use the pictorial method to move his story rapidly through time or space from one "dramatic" scene to another or to speed up time slightly within such a scene. He will also use the pictorial method for humor, for presentation of minor, particularly comic, characters, and to describe comic and melodramatic action. His use of this method can be illustrated by an examination in some detail of one of the "Sketches of London."

"Early Coaches" is Dickens's narrative description of a trip to the booking-office to purchase a place on the six a.m. coach for a trip out of town, the going to bed and the difficulty of sleeping, the inconvenience of arising at five o'clock on a frosty morning, the trek through the streets of London to the booking-office, the wait for the coach, and the departure in the coach. The result is pictorial, for, though his intention is, in a way, dramatic, Dickens's approach (because he is writing an essay and not a tale) is descriptive. Yet action seems to be taking place

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[30]Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), pp. 69, 70. I am obviously more indebted to Lubbock's classic work than to any other study of fictional techniques even though my indebtedness does not always find overt expression in the footnotes.

in the sketch; it is not merely being described. Perhaps the following paragraph, containing a picture of the streets as seen from "Boz's" window at five o'clock in the morning, will afford a satisfactory illustration:

> A thaw, by all that is miserable! The frost is completely broken up. You look down the long perspective of Oxford Street, the gas-lights mournfully reflected on the wet pavement, and can discern no speck in the road to encourage the belief that there is a cab or a coach to be had--the very coachmen have gone home in despair. The cold sleet is drizzling down with that gentle regularity, which betokens a duration of four-and-twenty hours at least; the damp hangs upon the house-tops and lamp-posts, and clings to you like an invisible cloak. The water is "coming in" in every area, the pipes have burst, the water-butts are running over; the kennels seem to be doing matches against time, pump-handles descend of their own accord, horses in market-carts fall down, and there's no one to help them up again, policemen look as if they had been carefully sprinkled with powdered glass; here and there a milk-woman trudges slowly along, with a bit of list round each foot to keep her from slipping; boys who "don't sleep in the house," and are not allowed much sleep out of it, can't wake their masters by thundering at the shop-door, and cry with the cold--the compound of ice, snow, and water on the pavement, is a couple of inches thick--nobody ventures to walk fast to keep himself warm, and nobody could succeed in keeping himself warm if he did. (NLE, I, i, 168)

The vividness of the description and Dickens's use of the present tense and of the "you" who is not exactly the narrator and not exactly the reader give this passage the immediacy of a dramatically conceived scene. The active, highly descriptive verbs also contribute to this effect: the sleep "drizzling down," the water "running," the horses "falling down," the milkwoman "trudging slowly along," the apprentices "thundering" and "crying" at the doors.

The paragraph still remains basically descriptive, and therefore pictorial, however. The passage that follows, which describes the trip to the booking-office, though technically still pictorial, is dramatic in intent:

> You enter a mouldy-looking room, ornamented with large posting-bills; the greater part of the place enclosed behind a huge lumbering rough counter, and fitted up with recesses that look like the dens of the smaller animals in a travelling menagerie, without the bars. Some half-dozen people are "booking" brown-paper parcels, which one of the clerks flings in the aforesaid recesses with an air of recklessness which you, remembering the new carpet-bag you bought in the morning, feel considerably annoyed at; porters, looking like so many Atlases, keep rushing in and out, with large packages on their shoulders; and while you are waiting to make the necessary inquiries, you wonder what on earth the booking-clerks can have been before they were booking-office clerks; one of them with his pen behind his ear and his hands behind him, is standing in front of the fire, like a full-length portrait of Napoleon; the other with his hat half off his head, enters the passengers' names in the books with a coolness which is inexpressibly provoking; and the villain whistles--actually whistles--while a man asks him what the fare is outside, all the way to Holyhead!--in frosty weather, too! They are clearly an isolated race, evidently possessing no sympathies or feelings in common with the rest of mankind. Your turn comes at last, and having paid the fare, you tremblingly inquire--"What time will it be necessary for me to be here in the morning?"--"Six o'clock," replies the whistler, carelessly pitching the sovereign you have just parted with, into a wooden bowl on the desk. "Rather before than arter," adds the man with the semi-roasted unmentionables, with just as much ease and complacency as if the whole world got out of bed at five. You turn into the street, ruminating as you bend your steps homewards on the extent to which men become hardened in cruelty, by custom.[31]

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[31] NLE, I, i, 165-166. An interesting parallel to the above passage can be quoted to show Dickens in relationship to one of his contemporaries and to show, to some extent, the quality of Dickens's description as well as the effectiveness of his use of the pictorial method for this

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particular scene. John Poole's essay, entitled "Early Rising: 'I'll Pack My Portmanteau'," which originally appeared in the New Monthly Magazine, and was reprinted by Poole in his Sketches and Recollections I, 17-38, was apparently used as a model by Dickens. While there are certain significant differences between the two essays, Dickens's essay, the later of the two, strikingly resembles Poole's essay at times. One can only hope that Dickens's sketch was a conscious attempt to expand the scope of Poole's subject and to improve its quality. Nevertheless, in places Dickens comes dangerously close to plagiarism, as, I believe, the following passage from Poole's essay will illustrate:

> . . . I went into the coach-office, expecting to be told, in answer to my very first question, that the advertisement [for a coach leaving at five o'clock in the morning], was altogether a ruse de guerre.
>
> "So, sir," said I, to the book-keeper, "you start a coach to London at five in the morning?"
>
> "Yes, sir," replied he--and with the most perfect nonchalance!
>
> "You understand me? At five? in the MORNING?" rejoined I, with an emphasis sufficiently expressive of doubt.
>
> "Yes, sir, five to a minute--two minutes later you'll lose your place."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "And would you, now, venture to book a place for me?"
>
> "Let you know directly, sir.--(Hand down the 'Wonder' Lunnun-book, there.)--When for, sir?"
>
> I stood aghast at the fellow's coolness.
>
> After a momentary pause, "For to-morrow," said I.
>
> "Full outside, sir; just one place vacant in."
>
> The very word, "outside," bringing forcibly to my mind the idea of ten or a dozen shivering creatures being induced, by any possible means, to perch themselves on the top of a coach, on a dark, dull, dingy, drizzling morning in January, confirmed me in my belief that the whole affair was, what is vulgarly called, a "take-in."
>
> "So you will venture then to book a place for me?"
>
> "Yes, sir, if you please."
>
> "And, perhaps, you will go so far as to receive half my fare?"
>
> "If you please, sir--one pound two."
>
> "Well, you are an extraordinary person! Perhaps now--pray be attentive--perhaps, now you will carry on the thing so far as to receive the whole?"
>
> "If you please, sir--two pound four."

There is, obviously, very little need for a dramatically conceived scene at this point in Dickens's essay; thus, the pictorial approach is highly effective.[32] In addition, because Dickens (i.e., the narrator, the "you") is speaking in his own voice, he can be humorous through his comments on the action or on the characters, and he can effectively summarize, at any one point, action that is apparently continuous throughout the scene, such as the book-keeper's whistling. The pictorial technique, whether tending toward the dramatic, is one that Dickens will always find exceeding useful and effective for the obviously necessary foreshortening of action but also as a means of achieving comic and pathetic effects.

In regard to characterization, as in regard to subject matter, theme and tone, description, and pictorial scene, the Dickens who wrote the "Sketches of London" is closer to achieving those qualities that will come to characterize his writing as "Dickensian" than was the Dickens

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> I paid him the money, observing, at the same time, and in a tone calculated to impress his imagination with a vivid picture of attorneys, counsel, judge, and jury--"You shall hear from me again."
>
> "If you please, sir; to-morrow morning, at five punctual--start to a minute, sir--thank'ee, sir--good morning, sir."
>
> And this he uttered, without a blush!!!
>
> "To what expedients," thought I, as I left the office, "will men resort, for the purpose of injuring their neighbours!"
>
> (Sketches and Recollections, I, 25-27)

[32] Contrast the relative ineffectiveness of Poole's scene quoted in footnote 31, above.

who wrote the Monthly Magazine tales. As a matter of fact, while writing these essays, he seems to have developed significantly his concept of characterization: certainly an examination of the various fictitious personages who fill the pages of these essays will reveal some characters who would not be out of place in Pickwick Papers and who could have made the early tales sparkle with brilliance.

One reason for the improved characters in the "Sketches of London" may be due to the fact that they appear in essays rather than tales. They have the advantage of being based upon real people, for the essays are mainly on subjects related in one way or another to Dickens's personal experience and observation. In transposing the real people into fictitious personages, Dickens touches them up; combines parts of one person with parts of another; exaggerates speech peculiarities, mannerisms, or physical traits in order to achieve the characters he needs; and even generalizes their characteristics sufficiently to make use of the created figures as types rather than as individuals (though by no means the superficially conceived types of the early tales). Another product of the fact that these characters appear in descriptive essays is that most of the figures are "minor" ones, and therefore easier to create. If dealt with to the same length in a novel, they would merely be people who inhabit a landscape or briefly fill a lull in the actions of the main characters. Even in a

short story, they would play roles of scarcely greater importance. Yet because they serve as relevant examples in the essays of the expository ideas with which Dickens works, they are created with careful attention to detail. Sometimes a quick physical description is all that the essay requires; at other times, frequently within the space of a sentence or two, Dickens must begin to establish a mood, add a touch of humor, relate the characterization to the theme, establish an attitude toward another character, tone down a satirical portrait with a touch of humor, or give the final twist to the developing picture of a hypocrite. As examples rather than as fully conceived personages, they are easier for Dickens to develop satisfactorily than if they were characters interacting with other characters within a scene, busily working out the predetermined story. That Dickens will give the same careful attention to such minor characters who will later appear briefly in his novels not only explains why he creates so many memorable characters in any given story but also suggests that he early learned the value of such quick, characterizing description. Because of his extremely limited space and because of the expository emphasis in the sketches, Dickens's accomplishments are not sensational, but they are substantial. One sees him by the middle of 1835 well on his way to writing Pickwick Papers.

Examining the nature of Dickens's new characters in more detail, one particularly notices Dickens's much greater

use of mannerisms and actions, dialogue and dialect to delineate his characters, what Walter Bagehot refers to as his "vivification of character, or rather of characteristics," the process by which Dickens "expands traits into people."[33] One recalls the servant-girl with the pink ribbons running down the street in "Hackney-Coach Stands," the whistling booking-clerk in "Early Coaches," and the brief picture, in "Gin Shops," of the two old washerwomen who "are rather overcome by the headdresses and haughty demeanour of the young ladies who officiate. The first two examples have already been used in this chapter. In the last, the old women receive their half-quartern of gin and peppermint, with considerable deference, prefacing a request for 'one of them soft biscuits,' with a 'Jist be good enough, ma'am.'" (NLE, I, i, 231). Dialogue and dialect are also used fairly often by Dickens in these sketches to give an individualizing touch to a character. In "Gin Shops," for example, one finds a cleverly handled scene between one of the female gin dispensers and an impudent young man in "a brown coat and bright buttons," who

> ushering in his two companions, and walking up to the bar in as careless a manner as if he had been used to green and gold ornaments all his life, winks at one of the young ladies with a singular coolness,

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[33] Walter Bagehot, "Charles Dickens (1858)," in his Literary Studies (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1911 [Everyman's Library]), II, 176 and 180.

> and calls for a "kervorten and a three-out-glass," just as if the place were his own. "Gin for you, sir?" says the young lady when she has drawn it: carefully looking every way but the right one, to show that the wink had no effect upon her. "For me, Mary, my dear," replies the gentleman in brown. "My name an't Mary as it happens," says the young girl, rather relaxing as she delivers the change. "Well, if it an't, it ought to be," responds the irresistible one; "all the Marys as ever I see, was handsome gals." (NLE, I, i, 231)

The combination of realistic speech patterns with the characterizing mannerisms not only creates a humorous incident but also, despite the virtually complete absence of physical description, creates two believable characters within the scope of about one hundred words.

Occasionally, as in parts of "The Pawnbroker's Shop," and "Astley's," somewhat more fully developed scenes enable Dickens to do greater justice to a few characters. In "Astley's" the description of the family consisting of father, mother, nine or ten children, and a governess is worthy of the later Dickens in its delicate touches of humor, its minute details, and, despite Dickens's claim that he is describing "our beau idéal of a group of Astley's visitors," its individualized characterizations. One finds, for example, "a child in a braided frock, and a high state of astonishment, with very large round eyes, opened to their utmost width," who is lifted over the seats, "a process which occasioned a considerable display of little pink legs," and an eldest son, "a boy of fourteen years old, who was evidently trying to look as if he did

not belong to the family" (NLE, I, i, 105). The entire group is best captured in the following paragraph:

> The play began, and the interest of the little boys knew no bounds. Pa was clearly interested, too, although he very unsuccessfully endeavoured to look as if he wasn't. As for ma, she was perfectly overcome by the drollery of the principal comedian, and laughed till every one of the immense bows on her ample cap trembled, at which the governess peeped out from behind the pillar again, and whenever she could catch ma's eye, put her handkerchief to her mouth, and appeared, as in duty bound, to be in convulsions of laughter also. Then when the man in the splendid armour vowed to rescue the lady or perish in the attempt, the little boys applauded vehemently, especially one little fellow who was apparently on a visit to the family, and had been carrying on a child's flirtation, the whole evening, with a small coquette of twelve years old, who looked like a model of her mamma on a reduced scale; and who, in common with the other little girls (who generally speaking have even more coquettishness about them than much older ones), looked very properly shocked, when the knight's squire kissed the princess's confidential chambermaid. (NLE, I, i, 131-132)

In addition to the new richness that one finds in the characters who appear in the "Sketches of London," Dickens seems to be more consciously creating the effect he achieves with each character or group of characters in these essays. That he created the characters to illustrate specific expository ideas undoubtedly contributes greatly to the consistency of their personalities and the attitude he has toward them. For example, most of the people he describes are treated humorously. Dickens forces the reader to laugh at the family in Astley's audience and even, perhaps, in doing so, to laugh at himself; at the same time, however, the joyous outing of the family leaves the reader with a refreshing sense of the occasional splendor

of the human condition. Dickens's attitude toward such characters is reflected in his remark in "Thoughts about People," that he admires his "very particular friends," the hackney-coachmen, cabmen, and cads of London, "in proportion to the extent of their cool impudence and perfect self-possession" (NLE, I, i, 272). That he was conscious (at least by 1836) of his attitude toward such characters is evident in the revised ending that he wrote for this essay for the first series of Sketches by Boz. Having described a group of London apprentices with a touch of satirical humor, a certain sentimental affection, and perhaps a remembrance of his own recent past as a clerk for Ellis and Blackmore, Dickens concludes:

> We may smile at such people, but they can never excite our anger. They are usually on the best of terms with themselves, and it follows almost as a matter of course, in good-humour with every one about them. Besides, they are always the faint reflection of higher lights; and, if they do display a little occasional foolery in their own proper persons, it is surely more tolerable than precocious puppyism in the Quadrant, whiskered dandyism in Regent Street and Pall Mall, or gallantry in its dotage anywhere.[34]

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[34] NLE, I, i, 274. The original conclusion was, Butt and Tillotson indicate, "much more clearly partisan than the revised version of 1836" and less urbane, the revised version substituting "the bland smile of the periodical essayist for the glare of the propagandist." A part of the omitted passage, reprinted by Butt and Tillotson (p. 46), follows:

> . . . we see no reason why the same gentleman of enlarged and comprehensive views who proposes to Parliament a measure for preserving the amusements of the upper classes of society, and abolishing those of the lower, may not with equal wisdom preserve the former more completely, and mark the distinction between the two more effectually, by bringing in a Bill "to limit to certain members of the hereditary peerage

While Dickens creates most of his characters as humorous personages, others are produced by a much more bitter, more pessimistic point of view. One manifestation of this approach is to be found in "The Pawnbroker's Shop," in which the satirical treatment of the pawnbroker, his clerks, an old, "sallow-looking" woman, a "slipshod" woman, and an unshaven, dirty, "sottish-looking" fellow is unrelieved by the least hint of humor. Dickens here gives expression to a darker view of human nature than in most of the sketches; in so doing, he creates several striking characters, developed through direct statement, physical description, gestures, mannerisms, speech, thought, and the impressions of other characters, as illustrated in the following passage:

> "What do you strike the boy for, you brute?" exclaims a slipshod woman, with two flat-irons in a little basket. "Do you think he's your wife, you willin?" "Go and hang yourself!" replies the gentleman addressed, with a drunken look of savage stupidity, aiming at the same time a blow at the woman which fortunately misses its object. "Go and hang yourself; and wait till I come and cut you down."--"Cut you down," rejoins the woman, "I wish I had the cutting of you up, you wagabond! (loud.) Oh! you precious wagabond! (rather louder.) Where's your wife, you willin? (louder still; women of this class are always sympathetic, and work themselves into a tremendous passion on the shortest notice.). . . . "An't it shocking?" she continues, turning round, and appealing to an old woman who is peeping out of one of the little

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of this country and their families, the privilege of making fools of themselves as often and as egregiously as to them shall seem meet". Precedent is a great thing in these cases, and Heaven knows he will have precedent enough to plead.

> closets we have before described, and who has not the slightest objection to join in the attack, possessing, as she does, the comfortable conviction that she is bolted in. "An't it shocking, ma'am?" (Dreadful! says the old woman in a parenthesis, not exactly knowing what the question refers to.)
>
> (NLE, I, i, 239)

The parenthetical explanation of the slipshod woman's passionate outburst is unfortunate, for it tells what Dickens effectively reveals by other, subtler means. But apart from this, the bitterness of the satire to which Dickens treats his characters is particularly successful in reinforcing the picture of pawnshops that Dickens had initially proposed in the sketch: "Of the numerous receptacles for misery and distress with which the streets of London unhappily abound, there are, perhaps, none which present such striking scenes as the pawnbrokers' shops" (NLE, I, i, 233).

Another manifestation of Dickens's early pessimistic attitude toward life is to be found in the characters he presents in "Thoughts about People." "It is strange," he begins in this sketch, "with how little notice, good, bad, or indifferent, a man may live and die in London. He awakens no sympathy in the breast of any single person; his existence is a matter of interest to no one save himself; he cannot be said to be forgotten when he dies, for no one remembered him when he was alive" (NLE, I, i, 268). Such a character as the shabby-genteel man, who is a product, as Dickens sees him, of man's indifference to other men, will appear over and over again in Dickens's later works.

In Pickwick Papers, the interpolated tales and the chapters devoted to Mr. Pickwick's incarceration in the Fleet prison abound with such creatures. Other earlier examples may also be found in "Gin Shops," "London Recreations," "The Pawnbroker's Shop," and one or two of the "Our Parish" sketches in Sketches by Boz. The sentimental mood with which Dickens surrounds such characters at times disguises the underlying bitterness of Dickens's opinion of man; in such later works as Bleak House and Our Mutual Friend, however, even the sentimental mood will be gone.

But Dickens's development of the character of the shabby-genteel man reveals more than the philosophic basis (however crudely he may have formulated it at this stage of his career) of Dickens's handling of characterization. It also more specifically reveals at least one method by which the young author's characters come into existence. In this sketch, he starts with the idea, already mentioned, that many Londoners live and die unnoticed. Next, he searches for possible examples in real life to illustrate the idea: "We were seated in the enclosure of St. James's Park the other day, when our attention was attracted by a man whom we immediately put down in our own mind as one of this class." Having selected his model, Dickens describes his physical appearance, which naturally reinforces the initial concept Dickens began with. The reader by now has a relatively clear, relatively complete picture of the external man, a picture that shows he must indeed be one

of the unfortunate, unnoticed people of London. Dickens does not stop here, however. "There was something," he continues, "in the man's manner and appearance which told us, we fancied, his whole life, or rather his whole day, for a man of this sort has no variety of days." At this point, then, Dickens calls his imagination into use; speculating about the man's life, he projects in great detail a day in it that, in various ways--through the man's actions, his occupation, his behavior, his mannerisms, his tthoughts, all the minutiae of his life--reveals the essence of a type of human being.[35]

By August 20, 1835, when the last of his "Sketches of London" appeared in the Evening Chronicle, Dickens had come a long way in his understanding of the needs of effective characterization and his ability to use at least the important basic techniques to achieve such characterizations. How bad the creations of the early farcical tales are can easily be seen by contrasting them with the personages that Dickens created in order to illustrate his descriptive essays. Dickens has not as yet created a character approaching the scope and depth of a Mr. Pickwick or a Sam Weller, say, or even an Alfred Jingle or a Fat Boy; he would need the length of space that only a novel could give him for such an achievement. Yet in the "Sketches of London,"

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[35] NLE, I, i, 268-271.

he is at least beginning to have a better understanding of what genuinely comic, more bitterly satiric, and more sentimentally conceived characters require if they are to be more than stick figures or stock types. He is beginning to breathe some life into them, minor though they still are. In the tales and character studies he will shortly write for Bell's Life in London and in the somewhat longer tales he will write for the first series of Sketches by Boz and for the Library of Fiction, he will have an opportunity at least to use the length of a short story in which to develop a few characters more fully than he has to this point. In the light of what he was able to accomplish in the way of characterization in the essays that he wrote for the Morning Chronicle and the Evening Chronicle, these somewhat later achievements will be sufficiently notable to suggest that he is ready by early 1836 to write Pickwick Papers.

Finally, six of the Evening Chronicle essays merit singling out. Dickens collected them in the first series of Sketches by Boz (February, 1836) under the heading of "The Parish," with which they had all been titled upon their initial appearances, giving them the specific subtitles by which they are now known. Presumably in the tradition of Mary Mitford's Our Village. Sketches of Rural Character and Scenery (5 vols., London, 1824-1832) and John Galt's Annals of the Parish (Edinburgh, 1821),[36] the sketches

[36]Butt and Tillotson, p. 41, n. 2, suggest that Dickens's series was "probably intended as a novel variation" of Miss Mitford's "popular series." The title of Galt's work, though in reference to a Scottish parish, naturally suggested itself.

were from the beginning[37] intended to form a series that depicted through description, characterization, and dramatic scene the essence of an urban parish. Taken as a whole, these six essays (with a seventh, "Our Next Door Neighbour," that Dickens first published in the second series of Sketches by Boz) are significant because they show Dickens creating a setting--a background of buildings, people, and attitudes--that is seen through a limited point of view (the editorial "we") and against which the main characters of a novel could perform. The number of pages, the sheer length occupied by these sketches, is in itself important, for here Dickens is working with the proportions of a novel. The parish setting, if it were part of a novel, would be one of the areas in which action important to the plot would take place. The characters who inhabit the sketches--the Beadle, the four sisters, the Curate, the Old Lady, the Captain, Mr. Bung, the members of the Ladies' Societies, even, in some of the sketches, the narrator himself[38]--would

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[37]Dickens was apparently making plans for the series as early as late 1833 or early 1834, for in discussing his future writing plans with Henry Kolle, he stated, "I shall then, please God, commence a series of papers (the materials for which I have been noting down for some time) called The Parish." (Nonesuch Let., I, 29, to Henry Kolle, [1834]).

[38]The narrator, presumably "Boz," appears most prominently as a character in "The Four Sisters," the humor of the sketch depending largely upon his personality. His assumed naivete maintains a certain suspense for the reader as to which of the four sisters actually is married to Mr. Robinson and as to how soon it will be before the "clever" narrator will realize what the reader is pretty certain of, that Mrs. Robinson, whichever one of the sisters she is, is obviously pregnant. See NLE, I, i, 17-23.

form an associated group of minor characters, comparable, for example, to the Dingley Dell group in Pickwick Papers, the Yarmouth group in David Copperfield, or the Bleeding Heart Yard group in Little Dorrit. They have life as individuals, but also as a group occupying a particular part of the total landscape of a novel.

One can see, then, that between September 26, 1834, when the first of Dickens's five "Street Sketches" appeared in the Morning Chronicle, and August 20, 1835, when the last of his twenty "Sketches of London" appeared in the Evening Chronicle, Dickens developed considerably in the art of description (scenic and narrative) and in the other elements the descriptive essay holds in common with the fictional tale: setting, incident, authorial attitude, point of view, tone and characterization. Interestingly enough, in turning from the farcical tales in order to write a series of twenty-five essays, Dickens prepared himself not only to write sometimes excellent descriptive essays but also far more effective tales than he had done. He is obviously much better prepared to return to fiction.

The "Scenes and Characters" in Bell's Life in London

Dickens returns to the farcical tale in some of the twelve "Scenes and Characters" that he contributed to the weekly Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle

between September 27, 1835, and January 17, 1836.[39] Its editor, Vincent Dowling, was a former colleague of Dickens in the Parliamentary galleries and, according to Frederic G. Kitton, "is credited with being one of the first to discern Dickens's genius for descriptive writing and character-sketching, and was apparently instrumental in securing the young writer's services on behalf of that popular periodical."[40] When Dickens grouped the contents of his two series of Sketches by Boz under headings for the collected edition (published in monthly parts, 1837-1839, and in volume form, 1839), he placed three of these twelve sketches--"Seven Dials," "The Last Cab-Driver and the First Omnibus Cad," and "The Streets by Night"--under the heading of "Scenes" and the rest under that of "Characters," but this division does not characterize these sketches as adequately as one might like. Five of the

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[39]"Seven Dials," September 27; "Miss Evans and the Eagle," October 4; "The Dancing Academy," October 11; "Making a Night of It," October 18; "Love and Oysters"(retitled "The Misplaced Attachment of Mr. John Dounce" in the second series of SB), October 25; "Some Account of an Omnibus Cad" (enlarged and retitled "The Last Cab-Driver and the First Omnibus Cad" in the second series of SB), November 1; "The Vocal Dress-Maker" (retitled "The Mistaken Milliner--A Tale of Ambition" in the second series of SB), November 22; "The Prisoners' Van," November 29; "The Parlour" (retitled "The Parlour Orator" in the second series of SB), December 13; "Christmas Festivities" (retitled "A Christmas Dinner" in the first series of SB), December 27, 1835; "The New Year," January 3; and "The Streets at Night" (retitled "The Streets by Night" in the second series of SB and later "The Streets--Night"), January 17, 1836.

[40]Kitton, The Minor Writings of Charles Dickens, p. 7.

sketches are actually tales. The remaining seven sketches are, structurally speaking, at least, essays, but essays developed mainly through scenic descriptions, dramatic scenes, or character studies. The series title, "Scenes and Characters," is revealing: it strongly suggests that Dickens wrote these sketches with two important aspects of fictional craftsmanship consciously in mind. By this time he also may have realized that the sketches I have described as tales, because they are like the earlier pieces he himself had so designated, were more character studies than plotted stories.

As is true of the essays Dickens wrote for the Morning Chronicle and the Evening Chronicle, those in Bell's Life in London contain passages of description, characterization, and even an occasional scene. "Seven Dials" and "The Streets by Night," for example, are largely developed through descriptions of various buildings, streets, shops, and people, and are endowed with the colorful and realistic details that already characterized the writing of young Dickens. "The Parlour Orator" and "The Prisoners' Van" are developed mainly through dramatic scenes dependent upon strong characterizations for their effect. The former contains an excellent satire of an argumentative, red-faced man accustomed to having his own way on political topics who is put down by a little greengrocer using the orator's own major argumentative technique of "Prove it!" The three remaining essays are also interesting studies of characters.

"The New Year" and that portion of "The Last Cab-Driver and the First Omnibus Cad" (the second half) that was originally published in Bell's Life in London[41] deal at some length with mainly one character each, the former with a most sociable man by the name of Winkles in the original and Tupple in the revised version and the latter with a roguish omnibus cad by the name of "Bill Boorker" (William Barker). A number of the characters described in these essays will also make brief appearances in Pickwick Papers, as anyone familiar with the work must know. So will many of the characters in "A Christmas Dinner," which contains a large cast, all members of a family, from a comical grandfather to the melancholic daughter who has been disowned by her father (the grandfather) and mother for having married a poor man. The essay, too, ranges from the extreme of farce to the extreme of sentimentality. Most noticeably, it is told almost completely in non-dramatic narrative, as Mr. Gabriel Parson's tale of his wedding night had been. One senses that Dickens is becoming aware that this method of narration suits the requirements of both the comic and the pathetic moods, where the author occasionally needs tighter control over his materials than a dramatically presented scene can give him. A pictorially conceived scene enables him to use not only irony but also suggestion through the presence and point

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[41]See Butt and Tillotson, pp. 42 and 54.

of view of the narrator and through direct statement.

In the earlier "Street Sketches" and "Sketches of London," Dickens had begun, as "Boz," to assume the role of the superior, sophisticated observer of human behavior, but the journalistic nature of these sketches prevented him from obtruding too much as narrator. The essays he wrote for Bell's Life in London, however, seem to have been initially conceived by him as essays of greater "literary" quality. Influenced, no doubt, by his favorite eighteenth century essayists, he made his narrator (to whom, borrowing from Goldsmith, he gave the pseudonym "Tibbs") not only a recorder of what he saw but a presumably omniscient evaluator of it. "Christmas time! That man must be a misanthrope indeed, in whose breast something like a jovial feeling is not aroused--in whose mind some pleasant associations are not awakened--by the recurrence of Christmas," he begins "A Christmas Dinner," and concludes his opening paragraph with an exhortation to his readers redolent of patriarchal wisdom: "Dwell not upon the past. . . . Reflect upon your present blessings--of which every man has many--not upon your past misfortunes, of which all men have some. Fill your glass again, with a merry face and contented heart. Our life on it, but your Christmas shall be merry, and your new year a happy one!" (NLE, I, i, 274-275). Also clever--almost too clever--is the disdainful "Pooh!" to which he builds the second paragraph of "Seven Dials":

> We boldly aver that we doubt the veracity of the legend to which we have adverted. We can suppose a man rash enough to inquire at random--at a house with lodgers too--for a Mr. Thompson, with all but the certainty before his eyes of finding at least two or three Thompsons in any house of moderate dimensions; but a Frenchman--a Frenchman in Seven Dials! Pooh! He was an Irishman. Tom King's education had been neglected in his infancy, and as he couldn't understand half the man said, he took it for granted he was talking French.
> (NLE, I, i, 87)

However much one may dislike the archness of the narrator's style, he is observing an author consciously developing a style, formulating an attitude toward his subject, and working with a predetermined point of view in his narrator. Dickens will abandon the flippant tone following Oliver Twist, but it will characterize his writing until that time.

If in these seven sketches from Bell's Life in London, one can see Dickens continuing to develop as a conscious technician, the five remaining "Scenes and Characters," which are like the type of farcical tale he wrote for the Monthly Magazine, illustrate his further development as a creative writer. These five--"Miss Evans and the Eagle," "The Dancing Academy," "Making a Night of It," "The Misplaced Attachment of Mr. John Dounce," and "The Mistaken Milliner--A Tale of Ambition"--are much better written than the earlier tales, partly, one suspects, because of the fictional techniques that Dickens had mastered in the process of writing the twenty-five essays for the Morning Chronicle and the Evening Chronicle.

His plots are still rather weak, sometimes because they lack that element of suspense created by the conflict

inherent in the structure of an effective story, sometimes because, although the conflict may be present, it is awkwardly developed, and its resolution comes too abruptly. "Miss Evans and the Eagle" contains a certain amount of conflict. In the story, Mr. Wilkins calls for Miss Evans with plans to take her to the Eagle, apparently a minor sort of Vauxhall Gardens. On their way they meet another couple, of Miss Evans's acquaintance, with whom they stop at the Crown for a drink. Following a few drinks, they proceed to the Eagle where, after still more drinks, the two escorts become incensed by the attentions two other gentlemen are paying to Miss Evans and her friend. A verbal exchange gives way to fisticuffs, and Mr. Wilkins and his fellow beau are bested by the other gentlemen, who, upon the shrieks of the two women, disappear into the night. Miss Evans and her friend end the evening by being carried home, by hackney-coach, in "a state of insensibility, compounded of shrub, sherry, and excitement" (NLE, I, i, 293). The tale obviously lacks the requisite structural conflict, for the abortive flight that ends the tale is not really the logical result of earlier determined behavior or deliberate scheming. The reader may recognize the lower class characteristics of the characters by the touches of dialect Dickens gives them, and he knows from the tone of the story that comic action will ensue, but these are no indication, for example, that the two women will necessarily

be easy marks for the two rakish gentlemen, or that Mr. Wilkins and Co. will be motivated to violence by the attentions of the gentleman in the whiskers or the one in the plaid waistcoat. In other words, Dickens does not adequately prepare the reader for what is to come in the story. The same structural deficiencies will also be found in most of the other tales.

By way of contrast, the encounter of Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller with Mr. Jingle and Job Trotter at Eatanswill (Chapter XVI, in NLE, II, i, 274-299) is quite adequately plotted. Sam and Mr. Pickwick are out for revenge but have forgotten the devious cleverness of the two men whom they are dealing with. As a result, Mr. Pickwick, the hero who has gone to warn the young ladies about Mr. Jingle's bad reputation, finds himself in the awkward position of having to explain what he is doing in the back garden of the Westgate House Establishment for Young Ladies at night. He is finally rescued when his friends come to vouch for his character, but he and Sam Weller realize that they have been duped:

> "Jingle suspected my design, and set that fellow on you with this story, I suppose?" said Mr. Pickwick, half choking.
> "Just that, sir," replied Mr. Weller.
> "It was all false, of course?"
> "All, sir," replied Mr. Weller. "Reg'lar do, sir; artful dodge."
> "I don't think he'll escape us quite so easily the next time, Sam?" said Mr. Pickwick.
> "I don't think he will, sir."
> "Whenever I meet that Jingle again, wherever it is," said Mr. Pickwick, raising himself in bed, and indenting his pillow with a tremendous blow, "I'll inflict

> personal chastisement on him, in addition to the exposure he so richly merits. I will, or my name is not Pickwick."
>
> "And wenever I catches hold o' that there melancholly chap with the black hair," said Sam, "if I don't bring some real water into his eyes for once in a way, my name an't Weller. Good night, sir." (NLE, II, i, 299)

Given the characters of the four men, the revenge planned by Sam and Mr. Pickwick has to end as ignominiously as it does. Besides, Dickens intends the innocence reflected in Mr. Pickwick to be ineffective when it comes up against men such as Jingle who are wise to the ways of the world and live in harmony with such ways. Not even the experience of Sam Weller is always sufficient to save Pickwick. Yet, as a result of what happens in Chapter XVI, Pickwick and Sam have learned another lesson in life; it seems likely that the vows they make at the end of the chapter will be fulfilled at some time later in the novel.

As scenes, however, or as incidents that reveal the true natures of the characters involved, the tales in Bell's Life in London are better than their predecessors. Except that it still bears touches of the early Dickens, the episode described in "Miss Evans and the Eagle" could, with little difficulty, be fit into an early Dickens novel and not seem completely out of place. The same is true of "Making a Night of It," which, while it lacks plot in the conventional sense, is an amusing anecdote of two clerks' evening out. It ends, not surprisingly, in the police court. The effectiveness of these tales as "scenes"

or "episodes" has nothing to do with plot, however; one must examine the characterization, the description, narration, point of view, and tone of these five tales in order to discover those qualities that make them notable improvements over the Monthly Magazine pieces and that move Dickens closer to the writing of Pickwick Papers.

If one approaches these tales as character studies, the structure that Dickens has given them makes somewhat more sense. From this point of view, the tales become gradual revelations of the true personalities of certain characters. In "Miss Evans and the Eagle," we see, as a result of the action in the story, that Miss Evans and her friends are flirtatious by nature (at least after a few drinks) and are by no means the quiet, delicate, fragile creatures that the narrator archly pretends they are. In "The Dancing Academy," Dickens reveals the foolish behavior that results from a young man's social pretensions, but he also uncovers the disgusting motivations of Signor Billsmethi and his family, who, as one shortly discovers, play upon the vanities of foolish young men. In "The Mistaken Milliner--A Tale of Ambition," the reader makes almost parallel discoveries about foolish Miss Amelia Martin, who is convinced by the Rodolphs that she is good enough to be a professional singer, and about predatory Mr. and Mrs. Rodolph, who build up their own reputations as judges of talent and also get Miss Martin, in gratitude

for their attentions, to sew elegant costumes for Mrs. Rodolph. "The Misplaced Attachment of Mr. John Dounce" is even more obviously a character study from the beginning, for the opening paragraphs are in the essay mode, Dickens beginning with a discussion of old gentlemen, of whom he presents Mr. Dounce as a representative. The whole purpose of the piece is to illustrate the foolishness of "old boys," just as in "Making a Night of It" the purpose is to show the comic foolishness of "young" boys.

Most of these characters may be types, but they are far superior to the types who inhabit the pages of the earliest tales Dickens wrote. Mr. Dounce, for example, though his story is brief, is more thoroughly delineated than his earlier prototype, Mr. Watkins Tottle, whose story is rather too long and who, himself, as discussed in Chapter Two of this study is not only inconsistently but also inadequately characterized by Dickens. One certainly cannot see Mr. Dounce as a "round" character, but he does have the advantage over Mr. Tottle, at least in regard to comic action, of being motivated by love, or what he conceives to be love, rather than money. Even if it is merely the pretty face and the pleasing manner of the young lady in the oyster shop that attract Mr. Dounce, the reader at least sympathizes with the aging gentleman's all too human foibles. One laughs at him but also feels a certain sympathy, motivated, perhaps, by the cruelty of the lady's treatment of him, by his loss of friends and daughters, and by his unfortunate

marriage to his cook, a final punishment not quite as drastic as that of Mr. Tottle.

One might also investigate the characters in "The Dancing Academy." Mr. Augustus Cooper, though one of many young men in Dickens's tales, is a new character, a new type for Dickens. Perhaps we get an earlier suggestion of him in the apprentices briefly glimpsed in "Thoughts about People"; he may also have a resemblance to some of the frustrated amateurs in "Private Theatres." He is definitely a predecessor of Mr. Winkle. But he is not the typical young man of the Monthly Magazine tales, such as Percy Noakes, Horatio Sparkins, or Theodosius Butler, who seems to have been attractive to Dickens earlier. Mr. Cooper, Mr. Wilkins of "Miss Evans and the Eagle," and Mr. Potter and Mr. Smithers of "Making a Night of It," all "heroes" in their respective stories, are comic figures. As such, they deserve whatever satire Dickens treats them to; they are, to be more precise, defined as characters by such satire. And yet, while they are intended by Dickens as figures who embody human foibles, there is a certain joie de vivre in their actions that keeps them from being merely farcical creations. The reader must not forget just how naive, how foolish, how stupid Mr. Cooper is in the story, but he must also remember, after all, that Mr. Cooper joined the dancing academy to show his independence of a domineering mother who had forgotten that her little son had grown up;

his return to her care after the incident at the dancing school merits, at least to some extent, the sympathetic reaction of the reader. In addition, the Billsmethi family has victimized him to the tune of some twenty pounds.

Still more interesting is the fact that even as the reader hesitantly extends his sympathy to Mr. Cooper, this does not necessarily unleash his disgust upon the Billsmethi family. Like other rogues who will, later, strut through Dickens's novels, they, too, have a certain dash, a certain joie de vivre, about themselves:

> After the practising was over, Signor Billsmethi, and Miss Billsmethi, and Master Billsmethi, and a young lady, and the two ladies, and the two gentlemen, danced a quadrille--none of your slipping and sliding about, but regular warm work, flying into corners, and diving among chairs, and shooting out at the door,--something like dancing! Signor Billsmethi in particular, notwithstanding his having a little fiddle to play all the time, was out on the landing every figure, and Master Billsmethi, when everybody else was breathless, danced a hornpipe, with a cane in his hand, and a cheese-plate on his head, to the unqualified admiration of the whole company. Then Signor Billsmethi insisted, as they were so happy, that they should all stay to supper, and proposed sending Master Billsmethi for the beer and spirits, whereupon the two gentlemen swore, "strike 'em wulgar if they'd stand that;" and were just going to quarrel who should pay for it, when Mr. Augustus Cooper said he would, if they'd have the kindness to allow him--and they had the kindness to allow him; and Master Billsmethi brought the beer in a can, and the rum in a quart pot. They had a regular night of it; and Miss Billsmethi squeezed Mr. Augustus Cooper's hand under the table; and Mr. Augustus Cooper returned the squeeze, and returned home too, at something to six o'clock in the morning, when he was put to bed by main force by the apprentice, after repeatedly expressing an uncontrollable desire to pitch his revered parent

> out of the second-floor window, and to throttle the apprentice with his own neck-handkerchief.[42]

Reinforcing Dickens's gradual movement away from the use of the simple, typed character of the Monthly Magazine tales is the greater emphasis on realistic and sometimes exaggerated details of characterization in these slightly later tales. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Dickens's use of colorful details was first noticeable in the necessarily descriptive "Street Sketches" and "Sketches of London," where they gave the characters in his illustrations, minor though many of them are, usually simple but always striking appearances, mannerisms, speech, and personalities. This practice, soon to become one of the qualities which thousands of readers would adore in Dickens, is extended to the main characters of the tales in Bell's Life in London. Previously, Dickens had seldom taken space to go into such minute detail as he does, for example, in his description of Mr. Samuel Wilkins's face as being "round and shiny, and his hair carefully twisted into the outer corners of each eye, till it formed a variety of that description of semi-curls, usually known as 'aggerawators'" (NLE, I, i, 287), or in this one of Miss Evans wearing "a white muslin gown

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[42] NLE, I, i, 324-325. To examine the extent to which the more "villainous" characters in this tale are given humorous rather than bitter treatment, one may wish to contrast them to the Rodolphs in "The Mistaken Milliner--A Tale of Revenge." Dickens does little or nothing to mitigate the harshness of their characterizations, nor does he do much to attract the reader's sympathy to Miss Amelia Martin.

carefully hooked and eyed, a little red shawl, plentifully pinned, a white straw bonnet trimmed with red ribbons, a small necklace, a large pair of bracelets, Denmark satin shoes, and open-worked stockings; white cotton gloves on her fingers, and a cambric pocket-handkerchief, carefully folded up, in her hand--all quite genteel and ladylike" (NLE, I, i, 289).

But Dickens's techniques of characterization go beyond mere detailed physical description. As the quotations above show, he is already using such descriptions for the pre-setting, through suggestion rather than through direct statement, of his characterizations. We know, certainly, that both Mr. Wilkins and Miss Evans (or "Miss Ivins," as her family calls her and as Dickens revealingly insists on referring to her in the tale) are to be comic rather than heroic figures. Mr. Wilkins's size, for example, borders upon the "dwarfish," his "sabbath waistcoats" are "dazzling," and he talks "domestic economy" with Mrs. Evans while waiting for Miss Evans to dress; when Dickens has him leave with his beloved "J'mima" for the Eagle, one reads: "And away went Miss J'mima Ivins and Mr. Samuel Wilkins, and a dress-cane with a gilt knob at the top. . . ." (NLE, I, i, 289). Mr. Wilkins's self-satisfaction, his pretentiousness, his ostentation are all suggested in the quick but characterizing descriptive touches, particularly in the seemingly self-propelled cane, and these

characteristics Dickens gives to Mr. Wilkins will inevitably motivate him into the altercation that closes the tale. Although the reader has no reason for noticing it at the time, the behavior of the young woman in the oyster shop in "The Misplaced Attachment of Mr. John Dounce" is also carefully pre-set by Dickens in the light of her later flippant rejection of Mr. Dounce:

> Behind . . . the barrels was a young lady of about five-and-twenty, all in blue, and all alone--splendid creature, charming face and lovely figure! It is difficult to say whether Mr. John Dounce's red countenance, illuminated as it was by the flickering gas-light in the window before which he paused, excited the lady's risibility, or whether a natural exuberance of animal spirits proved too much for that staidness of demeanour which the forms of society rather dictatorially prescribe. But certain it is, that the lady smiled; then put her finger upon her lip, with a striking recollection of what was due to herself; and finally retired, in oyster-like bashfulness, to the very back of the counter. The sad-dog sort of feeling came strongly upon John Dounce: he lingered--the lady in blue made no sign. He coughed--still she came not. He entered the shop.[43]

Sometimes these touches are exaggerated for the sake of more immediate characterization--as well as for the sake of humor, of course--as in the picture of the drunken Mr. Smithers in "Making a Night of It," "embellishing the theatre by falling asleep, with his head and both arms gracefully drooping over the front of the boxes" (NLE, I, i, 337). At other times, the descriptions of mannerisms,

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[43] NLE, I, i, 309. Mr. Dounce's foolish behavior had likewise been established even earlier in the tale. See NLE, I, i, 244-247.

speech, or gestures display significant personality traits. The following passage from "The Mistaken Milliner--A Tale of Ambition" pinpoints the pretentiousness and self-delusion of Mr. and Mrs. Rodolph upon their first appearance as the "musical friends" of Miss Martin's wedded friends:

> To hear them sing separately was divine, but when they went through the tragic duet of "Red Ruffian, retire!" it was, as Miss Martin afterwards remarked, "thrilling." And why (as Mr. Jennings Rodolph observed) why were they not engaged at one of the patent theatres? If he was to be told that their voices were not powerful enough to fill the House, his only reply was, that he would back himself for any amount to fill Russell Square--a statement in which the company, after hearing the duet, expressed their full belief; so they all said it was shameful treatment; and both Mr. and Mrs. Jennings Rodolph said it was shameful too; and Mr. Jennings Rodolph looked very serious, and said he knew who his malignant opponents were, but they had better take care how far they went, for if they irritated him too much he had not quite made up his mind whether he wouldn't bring the subject before Parliament; and they all agreed that it "'ud serve 'em quite right, and it was very proper that such people should be made an example of." So Mr. Jennings Rodolph said he'd think of it. (NLE, I, i, 315-316)

Certainly missing from the various passages quoted above and, in general, from the tales themselves are the crudities that earlier marred Dickens's characterizations. No longer does he inevitably summarize in direct statement the impression that he wants a character to have upon his reader; suggestion, humor, tone, carefully selected details, and even the remarks of others now reveal this character to the reader. He does not, for example, converse monotonously upon irrelevant topics. If, as mentioned below, there is far less dialogue, that now present is there for the purpose

of characterization as well as for moving along what plot there is. Finally, Dickens makes far less use of elaborate stage directions in conjunction with the speeches of his actors than he had earlier, relying more upon a careful selection of language and upon other characterizing devices (such as synecdoche in the following passage where he refers to the various members of the audience by the kinds of beverages they are drinking) than upon the elaborate speech tags that fill the Monthly Magazine tales. In this fragment of a scene from "The Mistaken Milliner--A Tale of Ambition," in which, upon her first public appearance in a duet with Mr. Rodolph, Miss Amelia Martin has just revealed the lamentable weakness of her singing voice, the characterization, the effectiveness of the scene depend far more upon the speeches and the colorful descriptions than upon speech tags that smack of stage directions:

> "Sing out"--shouted one gentleman in a white great-coat. "Don't be afraid to put the steam on, old gal," exclaimed another. "S-s-s-s-s-s-s"--went the five-and-twenty bottled ales. "Shame, shame!" remonstrated the ornamental painter's journeyman's party--"S-s-s-s" went the bottled ales again, accompanied by all the gins, and a majority of the brandies.
>
> "Turn them geese out," cried the ornamental painter's journeyman's party, with great indignation.
>
> "Sing out," whispered Mr. Jennings Rodolph.
>
> "So I do," responded Miss Amelia Martin.
>
> "Sing louder," said Mr. Jennings Rodolph.
>
> "I can't," replied Miss Amelia Martin.
>
> "Off, off, off," cried the rest of the audience.
>
> "Bray-vo!" shouted the painter's party. It wouldn't do--Miss Amelia Martin left the orchestra, with much less ceremony than she had entered it; and, as she couldn't sing out, never came out.
>
> (NLE, I, i, 255)

Obviously, in putting the characters he had created for the essays for the Morning Chronicle and the Evening Chronicle into the tales he wrote shortly thereafter, Dickens did not lose any of the vitality, the color, or the individualizing traits that made them notable. In expanding a character, in developing a portrait to greater descriptive and psychological fullness, he moved another step closer to the kind and scope of character and to the variety of techniques of portrayal that he would need in order to write a novel.

Another important feature of these five tales is Dickens's almost complete use of the pictorial rather than the dramatic scene, the latter of which predominated in the early Monthly Magazine tales. The influence responsible for this change may very likely be of the young author's own making; that is, in these five tales, he continues to use the methods of descriptive narrative that characterize the twenty-five essays he wrote just prior to his association with Bell's Life in London. The intervention of the essays; the time he had to devote to his other journalistic tasks; the evenings he spent writing in his rooms, covering a Parliamentary session, or journeying out of town on some reportorial mission;[44] and the less time he devoted, as a result, to attending the theaters may also have been

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[44]See Walter Dexter, ed. Mr. & Mrs. Charles Dickens, His Letters to Her (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1935) for glimpses of his activities during this period.

responsible for the noticeable lessening of the influence of the one-act farce that had tended to mar the Monthly Magazine tales. Under this influence, his earlier tendency had been to develop scenes dramatically through action, certainly, but mainly through tedious, irrelevant dialogue, even when there was no structural necessity for such scenes. Dickens almost goes to the other extreme in the five tales among the "Scenes and Characters"; one occasionally wishes for a scene developed along somewhat more dramatic lines.[45] Yet the technical ability evident in Dickens's pictorial scenes, as discussed earlier in this chapter in regard to the "Sketches of London," makes more frequent dramatic scenes unnecessary.

When such a scene is necessary to maintain the complex movement or rhythm of a story, Dickens writes it. In the admirable "Making a Night of It," he does not need to develop the scene in the inn dramatically. To begin with, Dickens describes only Mr. Smithers and Mr. Potter. His purpose in the scene is to show them gradually getting drunk enough to get into trouble later, an end that he can achieve more humorously through a description of their behavior than through what they might say to each other or

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[45] I do not mean to imply that Dickens could not create a dramatic scene. A very fine one is presented in "The Parlour Orator" as seen through the point of view of a narrator present in the scene but not an active participant in it (NLE, I, i, 293-299).

possibly to a waiter or other customers in the inn. Such conversation could only quickly become monotonous and might, as the young men become more vociferous, make them less sympathetic characters than Dickens would want. In the following description of their behavior in the inn, Dickens uses verbal humor that he could not have employed had the scene been dramatic. This verbal humor is important, for, while it points up the silliness of the men's actions, it does not exactly suggest that one must therefore condemn their behavior. We smile at them, but, as Dickens concludes about the group of apprentices he describes in "Thoughts about People," "they can never excite our anger":[46]

> When the cloth was removed, Mr. Thomas Potter ordered the waiter to bring in two goes of his best Scotch whiskey, with warm water and sugar, and a couple of his "very mildest" Havannahs, which the waiter did. Mr. Thomas Potter mixed his grog, and lighted his cigar; Mr. Robert Smithers did the same; and then Mr. Thomas Potter jocularly proposed as the first toast, "the abolition of all offices whatever" (not sinecures, but counting-houses), which was immediately drunk by Mr. Robert Smithers, with enthusiastic applause. So they went on, talking politics, puffing cigars, and sipping whiskey-and-water, until the "goes"--most appropriately so called--were both gone, which Mr. Robert Smithers perceiving, immediately ordered in two more goes of the best Scotch whiskey, and two more of the very mildest Havannahs; and the goes kept coming in, and the mild Havannahs kept going out, until what with the drinking, and lighting, and puffing, and the stale ashes on the table, and the tallow-grease on the cigars, Mr. Robert Smithers began to doubt the

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[46] NLE, I, i, 274. This is a revised passage from the first series of SB (February, 1836).

> mildness of the Havannahs, and to feel very much as if he had been sitting in a hackney-coach with his back to the horses.
>
> As to Mr. Thomas Potter, he would keep laughing out loud, and volunteering inarticulate declarations that he was "all right;" in proof of which he feebly bespoke the evening paper after the next gentleman, but finding it a matter of some difficulty to discover any news in its columns, or to ascertain distinctly whether it had any columns at all, walked slowly out to look for the moon, and, after coming back quite pale with looking up at the sky so long, and attempting to express mirth at Mr. Robert Smithers having fallen asleep, by various galvanic chuckles, laid his head on his arm, and went to sleep also. (NLE, I, i, 335-336)

As the tale builds to a climax, Dickens has the young men who are "making a night of it," progress to the theater. Both are now considerably under the influence of the pots of stout and the glasses of whiskey-and-water. Mr. Smithers promptly falls asleep again, but Mr. Potter is ripe for trouble. At this point the narrative, rising to a climax of outrageous drunken behavior, slips momentarily and almost imperceptibly into a dramatic scene as Mr. Potter stirs up the audience:

> On his first entry, he contented himself by earnestly calling upon the gentlemen in the gallery to "flare up," accompanying the demand with another request, expressive of his wish that they would instantaneously "form a union," both of which requisitions were responded to, in the manner most in vogue on such occasions.
>
> "Give the dog a bone!" cried one gentleman in his shirt-sleeves.
>
> "Where have you been a-having half a pint of intermediate beer?" cried a second. "Tailor!" screamed a third. "Barber's clerk!" shouted a fourth. "Throw him o--VER!" roared a fifth; while numerous voices concurred in desiring Mr. Thomas Potter to "go home to his mother!" All these taunts Mr. Thomas Potter received with supreme contempt, cocking the low-crowned hat a little more on one side, whenever any reference was made to his personal

> appearance, and, standing up with his arms a-kimbo, expressing defiance melodramatically.
> (NLE, I, i, 337-338)

The scene is brief, quickly moving back into the pictorial mode in a brilliantly comic paragraph:

> The overture--to which these various sounds had been an ad libitum accompaniment--concluded, the second piece began, and Mr. Thomas Potter, emboldened by impunity, proceeded to behave in a most unprecedented and outrageous manner. First of all, he imitated the shake of the principal female singer; then, groaned at the blue fire; then, affected to be frightened into convulsions of terror at the appearance of the ghost; and, lastly, not only made a running commentary, in an audible voice, upon the dialogue on the stage, but actually awoke Mr. Robert Smithers, who, hearing his companion making a noise, and having a very indistinct notion where he was, or what was required of him, immediately, by way of imitating a good example, set up the most unearthly, unremitting, and appalling howling that ever audience heard. It was too much. "Turn them out!" was the general cry. A noise, as of shuffling of feet, and men being knocked up with violence against wainscoting, was heard: a hurried dialogue of "Come out!"--"I won't!"--"You shall!"--"I shan't!"--"Give me your card, Sir!"--"You're a scoundrel, Sir!" and so forth, succeeded. A round of applause betokened the approbation of the audience, and Mr. Robert Smithers and Mr. Thomas Potter found themselves shot with astonishing swiftness into the road, without having had the trouble of once putting foot to ground during the whole progress of their rapid descent. (NLE, I, i, 338-339)

Having attained a rhythmic peak of movement, the tale concludes in three swift paragraphs of action even more selectively summarized as, under the impetus of their experiences in the theater, Mr. Potter and Mr. Smithers continue to look for trouble, find it, are packed off by the police, spend the night in jail, are found guilty of drunken assault, and are reprimanded and fined in Police

Court the following morning.[47]

If one sees these five tales more as character studies than tales, as small fragments, in a way, of a lengthy novel, he sees that Dickens is justified in the pictorial approach he takes in narrating the action. Such episodes would not be important scenes in novels, so that to have developed them dramatically would have been to distort the emphasis of the novels in which they might have appeared. Besides, since much of the humor in these five tales is dependent not so much upon what the characters say or converse about but upon what they do, it is most effectively achieved through description liberally sprinkled with verbal witticisms and elaborate, attention-attracting rhetorical devices, as in the paragraphs above from "Making a Night of It." In addition, as I have indicated earlier in this chapter, Dickens developed the ability in his "Street Sketches" and in his "Sketches of London" to write description

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[47]For sheer comic brilliance, the following paragraph from Pickwick Papers illustrates what use Dickens makes of summarized action. Mr. Dowler, certain that Mr. Winkle is having an affair with Mrs. Dowler--a horrible mistake, naturally, on Mr. Dowler's part--takes out after Mr. Winkle with a "small supper-knife":

> But Mr. Winkle didn't wait for him. He no sooner heard the horrible threat of the valorous Dowler, than he bounced out of the sedan, quite as quickly as he had bounced in, and throwing off his slippers into the road, took to his heels and tore round the Crescent, hotly pursued by Dowler and the watchman. He kept ahead; the door was open as he came round the second time; he rushed in, slammed it in Dowler's face, mounted to his bed-room, locked the door, piled a washhand-stand against it, and packed up a few necessaries ready for flight with the first ray of morning." (NLE, II, ii, 147)

filled with action, of which the last passage quoted above is an especially fine example. In writing these tales, Dickens apparently discovered that, in using the pictorial rather than the dramatic approach to his subject, he could present a wider range of details and actions with more economy, more humor, and, therefore, more effectiveness.

Dickens's almost complete use of the pictorial method in these five tales contributes also to his attainment of a more unified purpose than he had achieved in the earlier tales. He continues, though perhaps somewhat more unobtrusively in the tales than in the sketches he wrote for Bell's Life in London, the role of narrator that he had assumed in his newspaper sketches. Thus, the stories are told from a controlling point of view just as the contents of the essays among the "Scenes and Characters" had been described by the same sort of narrator. This point of view combines objectivity with sentiment, humor with pathos, and worldly amusement at the foibles of man with a kind of naive but pleasant enjoyment of the genuinely comic. The results, in both the essays and the tales, is a sketch or a story that amuses the reader, that occasionally satirizes human behavior, and that almost as often softens the satire by making the faults of the characters eminently human. The less bitter endings obviously contribute to the production of this more characteristically Dickensian approach to reality. Miss Evans, for example, may be carried home drunk at the end of an exciting evening, but she will

certainly live to flirt again. Mr. Cooper may return home to his mother, Mr. Potter and Mr. Smithers may be heavily fined after a night in jail and vow never to make "another night of it," Mr. Dounce may be taken in marriage by his cook and live "a henpecked husband, a melancholy monument of antiquated misery, and a living warning to all uxorious old boys" (NLE, I, i, 312), and Miss Martin may find it convenient to give up her hopes for a singing career somewhat abruptly, but these are all harmless punishments, or at least ones meted out with some satiric justice--almost what one might have expected in a humorous story. Certainly no one commits suicide, as Mr. Tottle had done, or gets involved in an unhappy marriage that leads to disgust, desertion, or debtors' prison. It is true that, like Mr. Calton in part one of "The Boarding House" (and later, like Mr. Pickwick), Mr. Cooper is sued for breach of promise, but a comic rather than a bitterly ironic effect is intended, as is the case with Mr. Dounce's marriage.

The relatively complex humor that Dickens worked into these five tales and that is an inheritance from the essays he had written earlier does more than characterize the dominant mood or tone of Dickens's writings of late 1834 and of 1835. It also contributes to the impression the reader receives of the tales' intimate association with reality, an impression not produced earlier by the artificial, stagy Monthly Magazine tales. In making his readers laugh

or even sneer at the behavior of his characters and then sympathize with their resulting downfalls, Dickens makes his readers more aware of the fallibility of human nature, thus achieving the air of reality that characterizes these tales. Combined with this is the sheer volume of the details Dickens uses to describe characters, actions, and settings. The more specific and detailed the writing becomes, the more the readers suspect, however faulty such "logic" may be, that Dickens is frequently describing people, places, and events that are related in some way to his personal observation as he traversed the streets of London and to the experience of his family, his friends, and himself. The observations involve an accuracy of perception that can only come, one senses, from actually having been there at the time. In the same way, the perception of human behavior behind the creation of his characters tells one that the author is a man sensitive to nuances of speech and gestures, to mannerisms, and to the comic and pathetic in the human condition. The vividness and sheer wit of much of the description, the colorful and often exaggerated personalities of the characters, and even the exuberance and vitality of the actions themselves lend a sense of joyous, heightened life to these stories and sketches. Finally, the personality of the narrator himself, who seems to be the author (that is, "Tibbs," and ultimately Charles Dickens) and not some fictitious creation, also adds a sense of reality to these tales.

He is a never tiring observer of men and events, sometimes a crusader in their behalf against the inhumanity of other men and institutions (this last is found in the sketches of "Scenes and Characters" but not in the tales themselves), frequently an exposer of their shortcomings, but always a supporter of their participation in the fullness of life.

By January 17, 1836, when the last of his "Scenes and Characters" appeared in Bell's Life in London, Dickens seemed to be ready for more important literary work. Since the time of his Monthly Magazine tales, and mainly as a result of the twenty-five essays he had written for the Morning Chronicle and the Evening Chronicle, he had shown considerable improvement in the arts of description and narration, of tone, mood, and point of view, of characterization, and of thematic consistency. His writing of the "Street Sketches," the "Sketches of London," and some of the "Scenes and Characters" enabled him to work to a large extent with these various elements of fiction at a relatively simple level and frequently with single elements in isolation from the others, as in a descriptive illustration, an anecdote, or a brief character study. When he did, once again, in five of the "Scenes and Characters," return to character studies that bore certain resemblances to the episodic Monthly Magazine tales, he was much better equipped technically to produce tales that had an air of reality about them and a sustained tone that often combined the

comic with the sentimental. Obviously, Dickens is now almost ready to write a novel. His final preparations, conscious and unconscious, which filled the months of late 1835 and of most of 1836, will form the subject of the following--and concluding--chapter of this study of the contribution of Dickens's Sketches by Boz to his gradual development into a novelist.

CHAPTER IV

SKETCHES BY BOZ--CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

"A Visit to Newgate" and Three Tales

It was in the year 1836, upon being appointed by my kind friend John Black, the editor of the Morning Chronicle, to the office of assistant sub-editor of that influential journal, in conjunction with Mr. George Hogarth, that I first made the acquaintance of Charles Dickens. I was then in my twenty-second year, and Mr. Dickens was two years my senior. We were both of us comparatively unknown in literature, but Dickens had acquired some reputation as the author of some lively sketches which he contributed to the Evening Chronicle . . . under the celebrated signature of "Boz." He was one of the twelve parliamentary reporters of the Chronicle, and had the reputation of being the most rapid, the most accurate, and the most trustworthy reporter then engaged on the London press, and was consequently in high favour with his employers. He earned a salary of five guineas a week in that capacity, supplemented by an extra salary of two guineas for his brilliant sketches of London life and manners. . . .

It was part of my duty as sub-editor to confer with Mr. Hogarth and Mr. Black on the employment of the Parliamentary reporters during the recess, when Parliament was not in session, and to utilize their services in the general work of the paper,--such as attendance at public meetings, reviews of books, or notices of new plays at the theatres. Mr. Black desired to spare Mr. Dickens as much as possible from all work of this kind, having the highest opinion of his original genius, and a consequent dislike to employ him on what he considered the very inferior work of criticism. "Any fool," he said, in his usual broad Scotch, "can pass judgment, more or less just or unjust, on a book or a play--but 'Boz' can do better things; he can create works for other people to criticize. Besides, he has never been a great reader of books or plays, and knows but little of them, but has spent his

> time in studying life. Keep 'Boz' in reserve for great occasions. He will aye be ready for them."[1]

Black may have been mistaken about Dickens's education, but his realization that "Boz" was ready for great occasions and could create books for other people to criticize indicates the reputation Dickens had assuredly made for himself among his journalistic colleagues. More important, however, is that by the autumn of 1835, as F. J. H. Darton states, Dickens "must have begun to take himself a little more seriously as an original writer, or to think more clearly of prospects in that capacity."[2] He had not as yet written a novel, but he had planned to write one from perhaps as early as late 1833 or early 1834,[3] and he had been developing as a creator of fiction through the sketches and tales he had been writing for various periodicals and newspapers. He produced additional pieces in late 1835 (overlapping the "Scenes and Characters" he was also writing then for Bell's Life in London) and throughout 1836, all but one of which, "The Tuggses at Ramsgate," were reprinted or first printed in the first or second series of Sketches by Boz.[4]

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[1] A reminiscence of Mr. Charles Mackay, quoted in Kitton's Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil, pp. 133-134.

[2] Darton, "Dickens the Beginner: 1833-1836," p. 65.

[3] Nonesuch Let., I, 29, to Henry Kolle, [1834].

[4] Information about earliest publication follows the title: "A Visit to Newgate," SB, 1st ser., Feb.; "The Black Veil," SB, 1st ser., Feb.; "The Great Winglebury Duel," SB, 1st ser., Feb.; "The Tuggses at Ramsgate," Library of Fiction, April; "A Little Talk about Spring, and the Sweeps" (re-titled "The First of May" in SB, 2nd ser., Dec.), Library of

The three pieces that Dickens wrote especially for the first series of Sketches by Boz ("A Visit to Newgate," "The Black Veil," and "The Great Winglebury Duel"[5]) in combination with "The Tuggses at Ramsgate," which he wrote early in February, 1836, form a convenient and climactic group. The essay and the three tales represent the last of Dickens's writing prior to the offer extended by Chapman and Hall on February 10 to write what was shortly thereafter to be known as the Pickwick Papers. The other essays and tales he would write in the remaining ten months of 1836 would fade into insignificance in the shadow of the increasing popularity of his comic novel. But the four remaining pieces written prior to February 10 were seen by Dickens and his literary friends--John Macrone, George Hogarth, John

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Fiction, June; "The Hospital Patient," Carlton Chronicle, Aug. 6; "Meditations in Monmouth-Street," Morning Chronicle, Sept. 24; "Scotland-Yard," Morning Chronicle, Oct. 4; "Doctors' Commons," Morning Chronicle, Oct. 11; "Vauxhall-Gardens by Day," Morning Chronicle, Oct. 26; "Our Next-Door Neighbours" (the seventh "Our Parish" sketch), SB, 2nd ser., Dec.; and "The Drunkard's Death," SB, 2nd ser., Dec., 1836. Some of these were reprinted, prior to book publication, in the Evening Chronicle (authorized), the Carlton Chronicle (unauthorized), and Bell's Life in London (unauthorized)--see Hatton and Cleaver, pp. 99-103, for more complete details.

[5]"The Great Winglebury Duel" had actually been written for the Monthly Magazine for December, 1835, then under the editorship of James Grant, whom Dickens had known from the galleries of Parliament, but, as had been the case with the magazine in 1833 and 1834, its funds were so limited that it could not afford to pay Dickens what he asked for his story. Accordingly, the tale did not appear in print prior to SB, 1st ser. See Nonesuch Let., I, 47, to John Macrone, [10/27/35].

Black, William Ainsworth--significant literary achievements.

About "A Visit to Newgate" they were particularly specific. Even in late October, 1835, when Dickens was contemplating a tour of the prison to acquire material for this fine descriptive sketch, he was confident himself that it would "tell extremely well."[6] When he finished the essay on the evening of November 19, he immediately showed it to George Hogarth, his prospective father-in-law and editor of the Evening Chronicle. Hogarth, as Dickens informed John Macrone the following day, "perused it very carefully last night and bid me tell you that it would 'make' any book--an opinion which Black more than confirms."[7] Macrone, in turn, though he apparently suggested certain revisions and additions, also praised the sketch, as did Ainsworth.[8] When Hogarth came to review the first series of Sketches by Boz, he referred to "A Visit to Newgate" as the "most remarkable paper in the book," and compared it favorably to Victor Hugo's "Dernier jour d'un condamné."[9]

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[6]Nonesuch Let., I, 47, to John Macrone, [10/27/35].

[7]Nonesuch Let., I, 53, to John Macrone, [11/20/35]. Dickens apparently showed the sketch to Black, editor of the Morning Chronicle, that night also or else early the following morning, for the letter is headed "Friday Morning."

[8]Nonesuch Let., I, 56, to John Macrone, [12/9/35]; I, 61, to John Macrone, [1/7/36]. Ainsworth, as Dickens states in the latter letter, had taken a "very kind interest . . . in our proceedings" (p. 61).

[9]In the Morning Chronicle the first week in February. Quoted in D[exter], "The Reception of Dickens's First Book," p. 44.

Dickens had long projected sketching the interior of Newgate prison, but when the time came to write he had some trouble putting what he had seen on paper, as he indicated to Catherine Hogarth in apologizing for not calling on her:

> I have made considerable progress in my "Newgate" Sketch, but the subject is such a very difficult one to do justice to, and I have so much difficulty in remembering the place, and arranging my materials, that I really have no alternative but to remain at home to-night, and "get on" in good earnest. You know I have frequently told you that my composition is peculiar; I never can write with effect--especially in the serious way--until I have got my steam up, or in other words until I have become so excited with my subject that I cannot leave off; and hoping to arrive at this state to-night, I have, after a great deal of combating with my wish to see you, arrived at the determination I have just announced--I hope to do a good deal.[10]

Dickens did, apparently, become excited with his subject despite his difficulties, for he managed to write the sketch in about two days.[11]

"A Visit to Newgate" is about twice as long as earlier sketches Dickens wrote and, from the comments in Dickens's letters to Macrone already referred to, was a conscious attempt on the author's part to produce an essay of definite literary merit. Particularly noticeable is the variety that characterizes the work. Dickens's purpose, as it had

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[10] Dexter, ed. Mr. & Mrs. Charles Dickens, pp. 35-36. The date of the letter was probably 11/18/35.

[11] Nonesuch Let., I, 53, to John Macrone, [11/20/35]. "A day's time," he had earlier written Macrone, "is a handsome allowance for me--much [more] than I frequently had when I was writing for the Chronicle" (Nonesuch Let., I, 47, to John Macrone, [10/27/35]).

been in the sketches he had previously written, is certainly to amuse. His first reaction to Newgate itself, described in a letter he wrote to Catherine immediately after touring the prison buildings, was that he had "lots of anecdotes to tell" her, some of which he found "rather amusing: at least to me, for I was intensely interested in everything I saw."[12] This interest is reflected in the paper itself, in which he states that, having made a visit to Newgate--"in an amateur capacity of course, . . . we proceed to lay its results before our readers, in the hope--founded more upon the nature of the subject, than on any presumptious confidence in our own descriptive powers--that this paper may not be found wholly devoid of interest" (NLE, I, i, 250). The reader familiar with the later Dickens might have expected that after the dash following the word "hope" Dickens would have included some strong moral preachment, would have required his readers to share in the sympathy and horror aroused in him by the visit and to act to alleviate whatever conditions he might have found there. But he does not do any of these, because he intends the essay to be descriptive and literary rather than didactic. Replying to Macrone's query about the omission of some description of the prison kitchen, Dickens wrote: "Again, about the Kitchen. I know no place in which

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[12]Dexter, ed. Mr. & Mrs. Charles Dickens, pp. 34-35. The letter was probably written early in November, 1835.

I could introduce the fact without weakening my subsequent description, and I left it out lest scrupulous ninnies who do not see these things as you and I do, should think there was something disgusting in the idea, and repulsive."[13] Here, obviously, is the craftsman at work, less concerned about complete realism than about the effect the work will have on his readers. The same comments apply about Dickens's justification, in the same letter, for his omission of a section about the House of Correction in the essay and his refusal to write a separate piece on the subject: "You cannot throw the interest over a year's imprisonment, however severe, that you can cast around the punishment of death. The Tread-Mill will not take the hold on men's feelings that the gallows does; and Hogarth--whose judgment in these matters from long experience is not to be despised--says that he thinks the insertion of another Prison paper would decidedly detract from the 'hit' of the first."[14]

Yet, as suggested by his desire to work with his readers' feelings, Dickens cannot, and presumably does not want to dissociate himself entirely from suggestions for reform. George Hogarth indicates in his review of the first series of Sketches by Boz that "A Visit to Newgate" is written throughout "in a tone of high moral feeling, and with great eloquence, and must leave a deep and lasting

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[13] Nonesuch Let., I, 56, to John Macrone, [12/9/35].

[14] Nonesuch Let., I, 56, to John Macrone, [12/9/35].

impression on the mind of every reader."[15] By "high moral feeling," Hogarth is presumably not referring to the indignation of a reformer, for such is scarcely emphasized in the essay,[16] but to the horror (and the resulting pathos) created not so much by conditions in the prison itself as by its inhabitants and the actions that have brought them there. Dickens's comments about a girl with "pinched-up half-starved features," who is visiting her mother in the jail, provides an illustration:

> The girl belonged to a class--unhappily but too extensive--the very existence of which should make men's hearts bleed. Barely past her childhood, it

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[15]Quoted in D[exter], "The Reception of Dickens's First Book," p. 44.

[16]One does find a criticism, quite general in nature, concluding Dickens's description of the prison chapel, but even this is virtually unique:

> At one time--and at no distant period either--the coffins of the men about to be executed, were placed in the pew [for condemned prisoners], upon the seat by their side, during the whole service. It may seem incredible, but it is true. Let us hope that the increased spirit of civilisation and humanity which abolished this frightful and degrading custom, may extend itself to other usages equally barbarous; usages which have not even the plea of utility in their defence, as every year's experience has shown them to be more and more inefficacious. (NLE, I, i, 260)

That Dickens perhaps had reform as an underlying but scarcely obvious purpose is suggested by a footnote he added in a later edition. The footnote, however, reflecting Dickens's somewhat later interest in prison reform, may have little or no connection with Dickens's intentions when he first wrote the essay: "The regulations of the prison relative to the confinement of prisoners during the day, their sleeping at night, their taking their meals, and other matters of gaol economy, have been all altered--greatly for the better--since this sketch was first published. Even the construction of the prison itself has been changed." (NLE, I, i, 257)

> required but a glance to discover that she was one of those children, born and bred in neglect and vice, who have never known what childhood is: who have never been taught to love and court a parent's smile, or to dread a parent's frown. The thousand nameless endearments of childhood, its gaiety and its innocence, are alike unknown to them. They have entered at once upon the stern realities and miseries of life, and to their better nature it is almost hopeless to appeal in after-times, by any of the references which will awaken, if it be only for a moment, some good feeling in ordinary bosoms, however corrupt they may have become. Talk to them of parental solicitude, the happy days of childhood, and the merry games of infancy! Tell them of hunger and the streets, beggary and stripes, the gin-shop, the station-house, and the pawnbroker's, and they will understand you.
> (NLE, I, i, 254-255)

The tone, too, as it reflects Dickens's changing attitudes toward the objects of his description, shows considerable variety. If he can sympathize with such people as the girl above or the men awaiting the gallows (see NLE, I, i, 259-263), he can also describe others in a tone predominantly objective with perhaps a touch of sarcasm or even disgust, as in his study of the boys under fourteen years of age in the schoolroom:

> There were fourteen of them in all, some with shoes, some without; some in pinafores without jackets, others in jackets without pinafores, and one in scarce anything at all. The whole number, without an exception we believe, had been committed for trial on charges of pocket-picking; and fourteen such terrible little faces we never beheld. There was not one redeeming feature among them--not a glance of honesty--not a wink expressive of anything but the gallows and the hulks, in the whole collection. As to anything like shame or contrition, that was entirely out of the question. They were evidently quite gratified at being thought worth the trouble of looking at; their idea appeared to be, that we had come to see Newgate as a grand affair, and that they were an indispensable part of the show; and every boy as he "fell in" to the line, actually

> seemed as pleased and important as if he had done something excessively meritorious in getting there at all. We never looked upon a more disagreeable sight, because we never saw fourteen such hopeless creatures of neglect, before. (NLE, I, i, 257-258)

If Dickens excluded certain scenes he had witnessed at Newgate from his essay because he felt they would offend the sensibilities of his readers, he did so partly because he feared such offence would destroy the effect he was working for and partly, perhaps, because he believed that in his unpleasantly realistic treatment of such scenes as the one above he had achieved the satiric, ironic, possibly even pathetic effect without actually turning away his readers. In one or two other places in "A Visit to Newgate," Dickens drops into the somewhat artificial, somewhat irritating jocularity that occasionally mars other essays:

> Following our conductor by a door opposite to that at which we had entered, we arrived at a small room, without any other furniture than a little desk, with a book for visitors' autographs, and a shelf, on which were a few boxes for papers, and casts of the heads and faces of the two notorious murderers, Bishop and Williams; the former, in particular, exhibiting a style of heat and set of features, which might have afforded sufficient moral grounds for his instant execution at any time, even had there been no other evidence against him. Leaving this room also, by an opposite door, we found ourselves in the lodge which opens on the Old Bailey; one side of which is plentifully garnished with a choice collection of heavy sets of irons, including those worn by the redoubtable Jack Sheppard--genuine; and those said to have been graced by the sturdy limbs of the no less celebrated Dick Turpin--doubtful.
>
> (NLE, I, i, 251)

Most impressive in the essay is the scene with which Dickens concludes. Having described the rows of condemned cells, Dickens states, "Conceive the situation of a man spending his last night on earth in this cell." From this point on, putting himself in a position of such a man--as he no doubt actually did when he wrote the scene--Dickens utilizes the melodramatic techniques that he was shortly to become noted for in his novels, most noteworthy of which is his early use of a mixture of description, unexpected sounds such as the ticking and chiming of a clock, various rhetorical devices, hallucinations, reminiscence, and other devices to produce an effect slightly related to stream of consciousness (NLE, I, i, 264-267):

> Seven hours left! He paces the narrow limits of his cell with rapid strides, cold drops of terror starting on his forehead, and every muscle of his frame quivering with agony. Seven hours! He suffers himself to be led to his seat, mechanically takes the bible which is placed in his hand, and tries to read and listen. No: his thoughts will wander. The book is torn and soiled by use--and like the book he read his lesson in, at school, just forty years ago! He has never bestowed a thought upon it, perhaps, since he left it as a child: and yet the place, the time, the room--nay, the very boys he played with, crowd as vividly before him as if they were scenes of yesterday. . . . The voice of the clergyman recalls him to himself. He is reading from the sacred book its solemn promises of pardon for repentence, and its awful denunciation of abdurate man. He falls upon his knees and clasps his hands to pray. Hush! What sound was that? He starts upon his feet. It cannot be two yet. Hark! Two quarters have struck;--the third--the fourth. It is! Six hours left. Tell him not of repentence! Six hours' repentence for eight times six years of guilt and sin! He buries his face in his hands, and throws himself on the bench. (NLE, I, i, 265-266)

In "A Visit to Newgate," then, in addition to such a specialized technique as that used in the preceding passage, one can see the development of that sometimes crude, sometimes subtle combination of pathos, melodrama, sentimentality, realistic objectivity, and even waggery that will characterize much of what Dickens will write in the future. In addition, one finds created here a fully realized setting with an attendant atmosphere or mood--not always consistently maintained and not as yet achieved through the great organizing, recurrent images as the fog in Bleak House, the chains and other symbols of imprisonment in Little Dorrit, and the dust and water in Our Mutual Friend. All that the essay needs is a group of more fully developed characters and a plot in order to become a highly effective melodramatic chapter in a novel, related, say, to that of Pickwick's incarceration in the Fleet, that of Fagin's last night alive, or, with a different setting, that of Jonas Chuzzlewit's murder of Tigg with his accompanying twinges of conscience evoked and paralleled by the setting itself. Once again, if one finds echoes in "A Visit to Newgate" of what Dickens will later write, he also finds here the early preparation that will enable Dickens to create such scenes, characters, and settings.

Perhaps the most noteworthy of the three tales that Dickens wrote in late 1835 and early 1836[17] is "The Black

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[17]"The Great Winglebury Duel" was completed by October 27, probably a week or so earlier (see Nonesuch Let.,

Veil." A melodramatic story strongly reminiscent of the Gothic romances, it may very likely have been suggested to Dickens by his visit to Newgate prison and may have been a product of the thought processes out of which he created "A Visit to Newgate" and "The Prisoners' Van," both of which he wrote immediately before "The Black Veil." However much one may dislike the artificialities of Gothic tales, dependent as they are upon the rankest melodrama and exaggerated sentiment, he must concede that in this tale Dickens makes a significant advance in his handling of plot--even of structure, in which plot, the balancing of narrative and descriptive passages, characterization, point of view, setting, and tone combine to produce the effect initially desired by the author. The earlier deficiencies in this respect, as has been consistently pointed out in the preceding chapters of this study, are suddenly, almost surprisingly overcome.

The plot itself is simple, but it is there. A distraught woman wearing a black veil appears in the office of a surgeon, requesting his services in a matter of life or death, but on the following morning. Mystified by the apparent lack of urgency and the woman's refusal to explain the situation, the surgeon agrees to attend upon the unknown

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I, 47, to John Macrone, [10/27/35]); "The Black Veil" was written in late November, apparently shortly after Dickens had finished "A Visit to Newgate" and "The Prisoners' Van," the latter being one of the "Scenes and Characters" for Bell's Life in London (see Butt and Tillotson, p. 42, and Dexter, ed. Mr. & Mrs. Charles Dickens, p. 34); and "The Tuggses at Ramsgate" was probably completed on February 11, 1836, the deadline the publishers of the Library of Fiction had set (see Nonesuch Let., I, 65, to Catherine Hogarth, [2/10/36]).

personage. The following morning, after certain delays, he is brought to the bedside of the patient. Here he discovers not only that his patient is dead but also that the dead man is the woman's son, who had been hanged that morning for a crime he had committed. She, in her delusion and resulting madness, had hoped that through some miracle, or at least through some oversight or haste on the part of the executioner, a spark of life might have remained and that a skillful surgeon could have fully restored the son. Observed structurally, the plot is simply that of a mystery finally revealed. What conflict there is resides in the surgeon's (and the reader's) not knowing until the climax of the story why the woman requires his services.

Yet the story is more interesting and more suspenseful than an examination of the plot reveals, for the plot is bolstered, reinforced, given dimension by the other aspects of Dickens's craftsmanship. One evening in November, 1835, Dickens wrote Catherine Hogarth, "an extraordinary idea for a story of a very singular kind occurred to me this morning, and I am anxious to commit it to paper before the impression it made upon me is lost."[18] Whatever his "extraordinary" idea may have been, it clearly involved more than the plot itself. The whole

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[18] I am accepting Butt and Tillotson's suggestion that the tale referred to is "The Black Veil" (p. 42). The letter, dated only "Friday Evening," is included among the letters the editor has attributed to November, 1835, in Dexter, ed., Mr. & Mrs. Charles Dickens, pp. 36-37.

artist--the conscious craftsman--becomes totally involved at this point.

To begin with, the characters, the surgeon and the woman wearing the black veil, even the man who answers the door of the house in Walworth, are created to reinforce the effect Dickens hoped to achieve in the story. The black veil hides the woman's secret from the reader as well as from the surgeon, at the same time suggesting death, or perhaps some unknown horror connected with the grave:

> It was a singularly tall woman, dressed in deep mourning, and standing so close to the door that her face almost touched the glass. The upper part of her figure was carefully muffled in a black shawl, as if for the purpose of concealment; and her face was shrouded by a thick black veil. She stood perfectly erect, her figure was drawn up to its full height, and though the surgeon felt that the eyes beneath the veil were fixed on him, she stood perfectly motionless, and evinced, by no gesture whatever, the slightest consciousness of his having turned toward her.
> (NLE, I, ii, 48-49)

Since Dickens uses her not to achieve an impression of reality in the story but to create suspense, mystery, and terror, the woman is an exceptionally "flat" character. Her speech is in the fine old melodramatic tradition, as are her actions:

> "It is not for myself, or on my own behalf . . . that I come to you. If I laboured under bodily disease, I should not be out, alone, at such an hour, or on such a night as this; and if I were afflicted with it, twenty-four hours thence, God knows how gladly I would lie down and pray to die. It is for another that I beseech your aid, sir. I may be mad to ask it for him--I think I am; but, night after night, through the long dreary hours of watching and weeping, the thought has been ever present to my mind; and though even I see the hopelessness of

> human assistance availing him, the bare thought of laying him in his grave without it makes my blood run cold!" And a shudder, such as the surgeon well knew art could not produce, trembled through the speaker's frame. (NLE, I, ii, 50)

There is "a desperate earnestness" in her actions, she "passionately" clasps her hands, she "bursts" into tears, weeps "bitterly," sobs hysterically, conveys a "convulsive attitude of grief," rushes "frantically" to the bedside of her dead son and flings herself on her knees at the bedside, she "starts" to her feet, beating her hands together, she responds "with a burst of passion, amounting almost to frenzy," she chafes the hands, breast, and forehead of "the senseless form before her," she throws herself before the surgeon to prevent him from letting light into the room, she exhibits "a nervous contortion of the lip and an unnatural fire in her eye," and she finally falls senseless at the feet of the surgeon, incurably insane (NLE, I, ii, 50-52, 58-60).

The surgeon himself, though his actions are at times also derived from the melodramatic tradition, is essentially a straight-forward creation. His characteristics do not seem to be exaggerated, he is a "serious" as opposed to a "comic" character, he speaks the language of educated people (as do the other characters in the story), he is poor but respectable, and he is an intelligent and sympathetic gentleman at all times. Like the adult David Copperfield, he is more an observer of the action than a participant in it, a focal point for the author's point of view. This is

the first such character in Dickens's writings. The surgeon plays a further role in the story, however, for it is through his eyes and his mind that the reader sees much of the story, a technique that Dickens uses to increase the suspense of the story. Following the opening scene in which the surgeon accedes to the woman's entreaty for his help on the following day, the surgeon speculates upon what her request might signify, thus heightening the sense of mystery already aroused in the reader:

> This woman . . . spoke of another person--a man; and it was impossible to suppose that a mere dream or delusion of fancy would induce her to speak of his approaching dissolution with such terrible certainty as she had spoken. It could not be that the man was to be murdered in the morning, and that the woman, originally a consenting party, and bound to secrecy by an oath, had relented, and, though unable to prevent the commission of some outrage on the victim, had determined to prevent his death if possible, by the timely interposition of medical aid? The idea of such things happening within two miles of the metropolis appeared too wild and preposterous to be entertained beyond the instant. . . . (NLE, I, ii, 53)

In another place, while the surgeon is waiting in the house at Walworth, the arrival of the son's body is given a more vivid effect by being described from the surgeon's point of view:

> The young surgeon sat down by the fireplace, to await the result of his first professional visit.
>
> He had not remained in this position many minutes when the noise of some approaching vehicle struck his ear. It stopped; the street-door was opened; a low talking succeeded, accompanied with a shuffling noise of footsteps, along the passage and on the stairs, as if two or three men were engaged in carrying some heavy body to the room above. The creaking of the stairs, a few seconds afterward, announced that the new-comers

> having completed their task, whatever it was, were leaving the house. The door was again closed, and the former silence was restored.
>
> (NLE, I, ii, 57-58)

Obviously, Dickens uses this restricted point of view to increase the element of suspense, the air of mystery in the story, in preparation for its dramatic climax.

The transitions from pure description to pictorial scene to dramatic scene are not only smoother in this story than in the tales Dickens had earlier written for the Monthly Magazine and Bell's Life in London, but each type of description or narration serves a purpose. The two dramatic scenes contain the two most important moments in the plot, that in which the woman first approaches the surgeon, where the action to follow is carefully prepared for, and that in which the surgeon is brought to use his skill on the son's body, the climactic moment of the story. The pictorial scenes, occurring mainly between these two dramatic ones, are used to get the surgeon from one day to the next, to move him from one area of London to another, to paint the various settings in which the action takes place, and to lengthen the space between one dramatic scene and another in order to increase the suspense.

Finally, the setting itself contributes to the structure of "The Black Veil." Dickens had earlier used setting, in an incidental way, to establish the mood of a particular scene, but in this story he uses it in several places to maintain the mood he needs for the entire story.

Each setting--the surgeon's office, Walworth, the drawing room of the house in Walworth, and the bedroom upstairs--helps to establish the mood. The opening paragraph of the story, in emphasizing the dismal weather outside, subdues the relative cheerfulness of the parlour inside, preparing for the entrance of the mysterious woman:

> One winter's evening, toward the close of the year 1800, or within a year or two of that time, a young medical practitioner, recently established in business, was seated by a cheerful fire in his little parlour, listening to the wind which was beating the rain in pattering drops against the window, or rumbling dismally in the chimney. The night was wet and cold; he had been walking through mud and water the whole day, and was now comfortably reposing in his dressing-gown and slippers, more than half asleep and less than half awake, revolving a thousand matters in his wandering imagination. First, he thought how hard the wind was blowing, and how the cold, sharp rain would be at that moment beating in his face, if he were not comfortably housed at home. Then his mind reverted to his annual Christmas visit to his native place and dearest friends; he thought how glad they would all be to see him, and how happy it would make Rose if he could only tell her that he had found a patient at last, and hoped to have more, and to come down again, in a few months' time, and marry her, and take her home to gladden his lonely fireside. . . .
>
> (NLE, I, ii, 47-48)

The surgeon's reflections about friends and sweetheart will serve as a contrast, certainly, to the situation of the woman in the black veil, but even the cheerful fireside at which he is doing his dreaming becomes, in the course of the paragraph, a "lonely" one. Because the woman herself, her actions, and her story, as well as the surgeon's speculations upon her visit, maintain the mood of disturbing mystery, of some nameless, foreboding terror, to the

end of the scene, Dickens has no need for further elaboration of the setting.

The second scene begins with a description of Walworth on the following day:

> The appearance of the place through which he walked in the morning, was not calculated to raise the spirits of the young surgeon, or to dispel any feeling of anxiety or depression which the singular kind of visit he was about to make, had awakened. Striking off from the high road, his way lay across a marshy common, through irregular lanes, with here and there a ruinous and dismantled cottage fast falling to pieces with decay and neglect. A stunted tree, or pool of stagnant water, roused into a sluggish action by the heavy rain of the preceding night, skirted the path occasionally; and, now and then, a miserable patch of garden-ground, with a few old boards knocked together for a summer-house, and old palings imperfectly mended with stakes pilfered from the neighbouring hedges, bore testimony, at once to the poverty of the inhabitants, and the little scruple they entertained in appropriating the property of other people to their own use. Occasionally a filthy-looking woman would make her appearance from the door of a dirty house, to empty the contents of some cooking utensil into the gutter in front, or to scream after a little slip-shod girl who had contrived to stagger a few yards from the door under the weight of a sallow infant almost as big as herself; but scarcely anything was stirring around; and so much of the prospect as could be faintly traced through the cold damp mist which hung heavily over it, presented a lonely and dreary appearance perfectly in keeping with the objects we have described.
>
> (NLE, I, ii, 54-55)

Three sentences in the above paragraph, the first, the second half of the third, and the last, clearly indicate the conscious uses to which Dickens puts his description. Parts of the setting reveal the characters of the people inhabiting the area, the entire setting is meant to reflect the mood of the surgeon as well as of the story, and the

meteorological atmosphere reflects the symoblic atmosphere produced by the physical surroundings of the area.

The exterior of the house is "desolate and unpromising," the house itself being low, standing "at an angle of a narrow lane," appearing closed up and withdrawn, too, from the other buildings in the vicinity, there being "no other habitation in sight" (NLE, I, ii, 55). The man who lets the surgeon in is "a tall, ill-favoured man, with black hair, and a face as the surgeon often declared afterwards, as pale and haggard as the countenance of any dead man he ever saw" (NLE, I, ii, 56). He directs the young man to wait in the back parlour. Dickens's description of this room continues to reinforce the cold, desolate, lonely, frightening atmosphere of the tale:

> It was a little cold room, with no other furniture than two deal chairs, and a table of the same material. A handful of fire, unguarded by any fender, was burning in the grate, which brought out the damp if it served no more comfortable purpose, for the unwholesome moisture was stealing down the walls, in long, slug-like tracks. The window, which was broken and patched in many places, looked into a small enclosed piece of ground, almost covered with water. Not a sound was to be heard, either within the house or without. (NLE, I, ii, 57)

The bedroom upstairs receives only the most cursory description. Like the room downstairs, it is poorly furnished; in addition, the dim light from the curtained window "rendered the objects in the room so indistinct, and communicated to all of them so uniform a hue," that the surgeon has some difficulty seeing the people in the room (NLE, I, ii, 58). At this point, however, further

description is unnecessary to establish the tale's dominating mood, for the woman's speeches and actions, culminating in swooning and madness, achieve the same end more dramatically.

Interesting to observe, in all but the last setting, is the emphasis on water: on rain and mud in the first scene, on mist and pools of stagnant rain in the second, and on the dampness in the parlour and the water in the yard in the third. Dickens's use of the adjective "unwholesome" to describe the moisture on the parlour walls reveals the effect he hoped to achieve through the water. Also noticeable, though not in every scene, is Dickens's reliance on loneliness, bareness, dirtiness, crookedness, and silence to reinforce the mood. Certainly one finds in this early work a rudimentary and surely a conscious use of weather, geography, and other physical surroundings to create an atmosphere. In the later novels such descriptions will form images that not only convey mood and reveal character and environment, but also comment upon institutions and social systems, upon the nature of man, and upon man's relationship to greater, more spiritual forces loose in the universe. "The Black Veil," for all its melodramatic effectiveness (if a modern reader can stomach such melodrama) lacks the social and philosophical insights of the later novels. Actually, it makes no attempt to deal with them; the tale is an effective piece of mystery, suspense, and horror, but nothing more. Nevertheless, one can observe Dickens already

making conscious and effective use of techniques that will later artistically reinforce more profound themes in his novels.

"The Great Winglebury Duel" and "The Tuggses at Ramsgate," the two remaining tales that Dickens wrote prior to beginning Pickwick Papers, return him, in a way, to the start of his career as a professional author. Superficially similar to the early farcical stories he wrote for the Monthly Magazine, they are about the same length; they are mainly developed by dramatic scenes rather than the pictorial ones that predominate in the tales for Bell's Life in London; they still bear a strong influence from the farcical drama of the period; and the author's purpose is still to present a picture of human foibles. Although they lack the caliber of conception and of style of Dickens's novels, including even the Pickwick Papers, they are noticeable improvements over the first tales that Dickens wrote. As a result, they clearly indicate Dickens's development in the craft of fiction between 1833 and 1836.

In regard to plot and structure, they can scarcely avoid advancing beyond the design of the earlier tales. F. J. H. Darton's comments about the significant revisions Dickens made in "Mr. Minns and His Cousin" sometime in 1836 (see chapter two of this study for an analysis of these revisions) apply to the general improvement in Dickens's writing ability also:

> [B]etween the autumn of 1833 and that of 1836 he had begun to study the art of literary form. He had learnt that if you approach the task of writing, and committing what you have written to the judgment of others, "with fear and trembling," you yet can, by taking pains, foresee some of the faults which others may perceive in it. To carry that foresight too far bears the danger of producing hack-work, of finding a sterile self-expression through mere technique. But to temper spontaneity with foresight is the beginning of imaginative victory.[19]

"The Great Winglebury Duel," written by late October, 1835, and therefore earlier than "The Black Veil," already exhibits Dickens's concern with "literary form." One may look with distaste upon the conventionally mechanical plot revolving around a classic case of mistaken identity, but he must also appreciate the fact once again that the story has a plot at all; this fact indicates an advancement in Dickens's craftsmanship. Later, the more mature, more technically experienced author will formulate his plots with greater finesse and surer skill, and will pay more heed to the plot techniques of Fielding and Smollett than to those of the popular story writers and dramatists of the early nineteenth century. In the meantime, the emphasis Dickens gives to the plot of "The Great Winglebury Duel" shows his new interest in this aspect of fiction. Following a picturesque and somewhat lengthy introduction, Mr. Alexander Trott is delivered the challenge from Horace Hunter, his rival for the affections of Miss Emily Brown.

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[19]Darton, Dickens, Positively the First Appearance, pp. 76-77.

This challenge initiates the action that follows and creates the suspense that will continue through the story as the reader waits to discover exactly how Trott will manage to avoid the duel promised in the title. The co-ordinate plot, of which Miss Julia Manners is the protagonist, also moves forward at the same time. Her arrival at the inn by coach preceded the delivery of Mr. Trott's letter, and Dickens continues her story immediately following the scene in which Mr. Trott makes preparations to avoid the duel. Her plans, as well as those of Trott, involve the mayor of Great Winglebury, a fact that, to one familiar with such intricately plotted tales, strongly suggests a clever working out of the scheme. The promised duel never comes off, and the mix-up occasioned by the mayor's mistaking Trott for Lord Peter is never straightened out in time for the original marital plans of Mr. Trott and Miss Manners to be fulfilled. Instead, as a result of the mayor's mistake, finding themselves in the coach on the way to Gretna Green, Mr. Trott and Miss Manners decide that since each has the characteristics the other requires in a mate, it would be a pity, as Dickens's concludes, "to have all this trouble and expense for nothing; and that as they were so far on the road already, they had better go to Gretna Green, and marry each other; and they did so" (NLE, I, ii, 112). The twist that Dickens gives to the tale is highly clever, for even as he manipulates the plot to comment upon human

nature, he manages to bring the tale to at least an ostensibly happy ending for these two thwarted lovers.[20]

The plot of "The Tuggses at Ramsgate" lacks the suspense and complexity of that of "The Great Winglebury Duel"; as a matter of fact, it is somewhat close to that of the Monthly Magazine tales but even more so to that of the tales of Bell's Life in London, being more an episode than an intricately plotted piece. Having inherited a large sum of money, Mr. Tuggs gives up his grocery business and takes his family on a vacation to Ramsgate. What follows, in more or less picaresque fashion, depends upon their gullibility, their lack of social graces, and their newly reinforced class snobbery. One discovers at the end of the tale that what happens to Simon Tuggs (or "Cymon," as he prefers), the son of the family, has been prearranged by the scheming Captain Walters, his wife, and a subordinate officer. But this discovery is not sufficiently exciting to compensate for the annoying episodic nature of the tale. On the other hand, despite its episodic nature, the tale moves more inevitably toward its predetermined end than do

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[20]The plot of "The Strange Gentleman," the "comic burletta" that Dickens wrote sometime in late 1835 or early 1836 (it was finished by early February--see Nonesuch Let., I, 66, to Chapman and Hall, [2/18/36]) is even more complicated than that of "The Great Winglebury Duel," upon which the play was based (see NLE, XVIII, ii, 277-316), involving the manipulation of some thirteen characters through their dramatic paces. Here, too, one may find, obviously, Dickens acquiring additional practice in plot construction and characterization--and on a more advanced level than that in the tales--all in preparation for the novels to come.

Dickens's earlier, relatively plotless stories. Given Simon Tuggs's romantic nature, his social pretensions, his father's inheritance of twenty thousand pounds, and as Dickens would have one believe, his "tendency to weakness in his interesting legs" (NLE, I, ii, 1), one suspects that not only is he due for a downfall later in the story, but the downfall will somehow result from these characteristics. Having sent the Tuggses to Ramsgate, where they presumably will be out of their social depth, Dickens has obvious plans to dabble in slapstick and satire. When he introduces the Tuggses to Captain and Mrs. Waters and causes "Cymon" to fall immediately in love with Mrs. Waters, as any reader of eighteenth century novels or a viewer of eighteenth and early nineteenth century comedies knows, Dickens is preparing for the pledge of hopeless love, the unexpected return of the husband, the innocent but compromising situation, the attempts to hide, and the discovery, followed by a duel if the story is serious, or by farcical disgrace and perhaps (as in "The Tuggses at Ramsgate") by the surprise revelation of a successful confidence game.

Certainly the combination of techniques in which Dickens had shown considerable improvement between 1833 and 1836 at least to some extent rescues "The Great Winglebury Duel" and "The Tuggses at Ramsgate" from their still somewhat inadequate plots. One is not surprised to find effective scenes, humorous and relatively well developed characters,

a fairly artistic handling of descriptive and narrative techniques, and a tone and atmosphere consistent with the author's intentions. Dickens had, after all, been acquiring considerable practice in these techniques during the course of writing the earlier tales and particularly the descriptive essays that appeared in the Morning Chronicle, the Evening Chronicle, and Bell's Life in London, as indicated in chapter three of this study. In these two tales, Dickens also handles dialogue more brilliantly than he had in his earlier tales and essays--to develop his characters fully in "The Tuggses at Ramsgate" and to aid in forwarding the intricacies of the plot in "The Great Winglebury Duel." It is less stilted than it had been earlier, perhaps less dependent upon word play of one kind or another and more dependent upon Dickens's developing "ear" for speech patterns, nuances, and dialects. One even notices a more successful attempt by Dickens to separate clearly the speech of one character from another. In "The Tuggses at Ramsgate," for example, the Waterses speak fluent, educated English for the most part while the Tuggses frequently lapse into colloquialisms and slang expressions that betray their lower class origins. Captain Waters, though suave in his speech, is sometimes blustery; on the other hand, Mrs. Waters, who is appropriately named Belinda, has a tendency to use words with highly sentimental connotations almost every time she speaks. In addition to being more fully formulated through speech than before, Dickens's characterizations rely more

heavily in these later stories on action as well as on description, which itself more carefully particularizes appearance, mannerisms, and attitudes. One recalls the comic donkey ride made by Simon Tuggs, his sister, and Mrs. Waters:

> "Kim up!" shouted one of the boys who followed behind, to propel the donkeys, when Belinda Waters and Charlotta Tuggs had been hoisted, and pushed, and pulled, into their respective saddles.
>
> "Hi--hi--hi!" groaned the other boy behind Mr. Cymon Tuggs. Away went the donkey, with the stirrups jingling against the heels of Cymon's boots, and Cymon's boots nearly scarping the ground.
>
> "Way--way! Wo--o--o--o--!" cried Mr. Cymon Tuggs as well as he could, in the midst of the jolting.
>
> "Don't make it gallop!" screamed Mrs. Captain Waters, behind.
>
> "My donkey will go into the public-house!" shrieked Miss Tuggs in the rear. . . .
>
> Everything has an end, however; even the galloping of donkeys will cease in time. The animal which Mr. Cymon Tuggs bestrode, feeling uncomfortable tugs at the bit, the intent of which he could by no means divine, abruptly sidled against a brick wall, and expressed his uneasiness by grinding Mr. Cymon Tuggs's leg on the rough surface. Mrs. Captain Waters's donkey, apparently under the influence of some playfulness of spirit, rushed suddenly, head first, into a hedge, and declined to come out again; and the quadruped on which Miss Tuggs was mounted, expressed his delight at this humorous proceeding by firmly planting his fore-feet against the ground, and kicking up his hind-legs in a very agile, but somewhat alarming manner.
>
> This abrupt termination to the rapidity of the ride naturally occasioned some confusion. . . . The efforts of the boys, however, assisted by the ingenious expedient of twisting the tail of the most rebellious donkey, restored order in a much shorter time than could have reasonably been expected, and the little party jogged slowly on together.
>
> "Now let 'em walk," said Mr. Cymon Tuggs. "It's cruel to overdrive 'em." (NLE, I, ii, 16-17)

The picture of long-legged Mr. Tuggs on the short-legged donkey, his obvious inexperience in riding such beasts, the

suggested characterizations of the donkeys themselves, the comic tableau of chaos and confusion that temporarily ends the ride, and the implications of Mr. Tuggs's last remark contribute not only to Dickens's characterization of the young man's pretentiousness but also explode it. In addition, each of these details, in common with others, of course, contributes to the unified, consistent comic conception of the story. Merely one episode in a tale of many episodes, this scene does little to forward the plot. For that matter, though it bolsters what is already known it does not reveal anything new about Cymon Tuggs that Dickens has not already presented in the opening scene of the story. Yet its function is important, for it contributes an additional layer of detail, character, incident, and comedy to an already relatively massive accumulation of such material. More specifically, nothing at Ramsgate, obviously, is going to turn out well for the social-climbing Tuggses, which comes very close to being what the story is all about.

In places this rich concoction is considerably reinforced by the settings Dickens creates to contain the action of his stories. He has paid little attention to setting during his first year as a writer; as a result his earlier works lack the color and sense of place that add depth to his later tales. When G. K. Chesterton concludes that Dickens's farcical tales (he is rather indiscriminantly referring to "Horatio Sparkins" as well as to "The Tuggses

at Ramsgate"), despite their lack of "that verbal felicity or fantastic irony that Dickens afterwards developed," have something in them that "there is not in the ordinary stock comedies of that day: an indefinable flavour of emphasis and richness, a hint as of infinity of fun,"[21] he is touching upon precisely the atmosphere, the air of expectation that one encounters just as the action begins in "The Great Winglebury Duel":

> The day was hot and sunny, the town in the zenith of its dulness, and with the exception of [a] few idlers, not a living creature was to be seen. Suddenly the loud notes of a key-bugle broke the monotonous stillness of the street; in came the coach, rattling over the uneven paving with a noise startling enough to stop even the large-faced clock itself. Down got the outsides, up went the windows in all directions, out came the waiters, up started the ostlers, and the loungers, and the post-boys, and the ragged boys, as if they were electrified--unstrapping, and unchaining, and unbuckling, and dragging willing horses out and forcing reluctant horses in, and making a most exhilarating bustle.
>
> (NLE, I, ii, 92-93)

The description of the Winglebury Arms, immediately preceding the above passage, prepares the reader, by a kind of associative process, for all kinds of picaresque complications and delights plucked from the pages of Fielding and Smollett, or later Dickens:

> The house is a large one, with a red brick and stone front; a pretty spacious hall, ornamented with evergreen plants, terminates in a perspective view of the bar, and a glass case, in which are displayed a choice variety of delicacies ready for dressing, to catch the eye of a new-comer the moment he enters,

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[21] Chesterton, Appreciations and Criticisms, pp. 7-8.

> and excite his appetite to the highest possible pitch. Opposite doors lead to the "coffee" and "commercial" rooms; and a great wide, rambling staircase--three stairs and a landing--four stairs and another landing--one step and another landing--half-a-dozen stairs and another landing--conducts to galleries of bedrooms, and labyrinths of sitting-rooms, denominated "private," where you may enjoy yourself, as privately as you can in any place where some bewildered being walks into your room every five minutes, by mistake, and then walks out again, to open all the doors along the gallery until he finds his own.
>
> (NLE, I, ii, 92)

The rest of the story unfortunately does not continue with the richness of action, characterization, comic situation, and authorial comment that one expects from a novel by Fielding or Smollett and that one does find, though in bits and pieces, in some of the essays Dickens had written prior to this tale. Dickens will not get too far into the writing of Pickwick Papers, however, before he will have mastered at least the important techniques of picaresque richness and structure as well as of serial publication, advancing far beyond the comic sporting works of Surtees and others upon which Seymour had originally intended the work to be modelled. In "The Great Winglebury Duel" and "The Tuggses at Ramsgate," Dickens is at least beginning to move within the circle of influence from better models. He seems to be thinking of himself no longer as the journalist but as the man of letters, the novelist. Also important is the fact that one can observe him in these two tales, as well as in "The Black Veil," more effectively (though still awkwardly at times) merging the elements of fiction into a unified work of literature. His intentions seem

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