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Seeing Things in Dickens: A Study of Representation and *Hypotyposis*

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Abstract

The thesis tries to answer a central question about Dickens’ works: how can writing that is, in Grahame Smith’s words, ‘essentially…distorting’ also be ‘more real than reality itself’? If ‘the language of realism’ is, as Donald Fanger says in his seminal book on, among others, Dickens, ‘a language that does not do violence to its objects’, a language that ‘present[s] the object with…a minimum of emotional or stylistic deformation’, how is Dickens’ language ‘real’? To answer these questions, this thesis takes up and expands on Brigid Lowe’s notion of a ‘realistic hypotyposis’, realism as ‘fantasmatic’ (the purpose of the classical trope hypotyposis being, Aristotle affirmed, to ‘mak[e] our hearers see things’).

The thesis explores, through Dickens’ writing, the descriptive procedures required to make the reader ‘see things’, to stimulate ‘fancy’. To do so, it ranges across three chapters in relation to Dickens’ writing. The first of these chapters examines knowledge in Bleak House, meditating on what is known, and when, and how, to argue that knowledge is dubious in Dickens and, further, is subordinate to fancy. The second chapter examines constructions of science in relation to Hard Times to show how fancy can actually yield knowledge, showing how defamiliarising language such as hypotyposis facilitates discovery better than the starveling abnegations of positivism. The final chapter examines The Haunted Man and The Mystery of Edwin Drood to show ‘reality’ itself defamiliarised in tranced visions. Its main interest is how these visions correlate with Dickens’ descriptive prose. That is the essence of the thesis: an effort to explain how distortion, even falsity, is essential to the transacting of representation in Dickens’ writing.
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Lastly, I must thank my parents, my sister Nina and my brother Nick, another proofreader. I have shared more years with them than they would care to reflect on, but they have always been unstinting in all the good ways. I am lucky to have them.
Abbreviations and Textual Note

I have used the following abbreviations where necessary. If I have not mentioned a name recently or am using it for the first time in a chapter section, I revert back to the unabbreviated name (one hesitates to write ‘full name’, since these full names are themselves abbreviations).

American Notes – AN
Barnaby Rudge – BR
Bleak House – BH
Hard Times – HT
The Haunted Man – THM
Little Dorrit – LD
The Mystery of Edwin Drood – Drood
Martin Chuzzlewit – MC
Oliver Twist – OT
Our Mutual Friend – OMF
Pictures from Italy – Pictures
Sketches by Boz – Sketches

Where they are valid I have retained alternative spellings in quotations. For example, I do not amend Carlo Ginzburg’s rendering of ‘defamiliarise’ as ‘defamiliarize’. On the topic of s’s and z’s, I use an s after possessive apostrophes for multisyllabic names ending in s sounds but not for multisyllabic names ending in z sounds. This means I write ‘Lewes’s’ but not ‘Dickens’s’ or ‘Todgers’s’, which I realise is at odds with standard Dickens usage.
Introduction

Well into the contents pages of *The Pickwick Papers* the reader is presented with, impeccably timed, this anti-précis of a chapter: ‘16. Too full of Adventure to be briefly described’. Its delightful silliness – not to mention its intimation of sprawling picaresque – strikes the keynote of the novel. More is the pity, I have felt at times, that the same dodge is not available to me here in the introduction to my thesis. It would be no less apt. The contents of this thesis represent a few years’ enthusiasms underwritten by a lifetime of interest. They are less an argument than an aftermath, purporting, with fingers crossed, to be a methodologically coherent ratiocinative enterprise. I have not composed the thesis so much as convened it. Amid the slow embezzlement of useful words from the copious verbal turnover of the past four years, much has changed. I imagine this is true of most theses. Any introduction to a thesis is the concierge of a hotel that started life as a Ritz in New York gleaming in its creator’s eye and ended up as an affordable, modestly spacious inn/conference facility in Cincinnati. It makes the thesis hard to describe. To show a reader around the thing itself without remembering the dream is to separate the dancer from the dance. This is so not least because the dream informs outposts of that thing in a big way. A thesis aspires to be prescriptive like a bill of rights when it is really accretive like common law. From false start to loose end, everything is relevant even when it exists only as absence; everything is a precedent. Yet here one must pool and condense the many parts of the thesis, not merely these in the canon of submission but those in the sundry apocrypha of miscellaneous word documents. The carry-on portability of an abstract, its wieldy parcel of summation, is tricky to pull off.
I dwell on these points because the subject of the thesis is description, the transmission of people, scenes, objects, behaviours and so forth in fictional and non-fictional discursive prose. If the foregoing qualifications obtain for a measly research project, how infinitely more must they do for reality? I shall expatiate on what reality – that is, Reality or ‘reality’ – means in the context of this thesis presently, lest its methodology come awry. For the time being, however, let me set aside this troublesome term and its fractious semantic brood. Reality is, if nothing else, too full of adventure to be briefly described. Artless questions of this type and the curiosity they piqued were the dream of the thesis, its Ritz in New York, excitingly but impractically extravagant. It seemed natural to alight on Dickens, not least because my artless questions seemed always to be returning to his work like bailiffs to a debtor, Coavinses to Harold Skimpole. Unfortunately, a question like ‘How does Dickens describe things?’ occupies, if not a rickety scaffold between connoisseurship and scholarship, a mezzanine area for which the proper planning permission has not been obtained. It will not do as a question. A better question might be: how can writing that is, in Graham Smith’s words, ‘essentially…distorting’ also be ‘more real than reality itself’ (63)? If ‘the language of realism’ is, as Donald Fanger says in his seminal book on, among others, Dickens, ‘a language that does not do violence to its objects’, a language that ‘present[s] the object with…a minimum of emotional or stylistic deformation’, how is Dickens’ language ‘real’ (6)? Dickens criticism, in particular that of these two eminent practitioners, has served the writing very well but I find these questions have not received the attention due to them. It might be worth rectifying that, and the following begins trying to.

This, then, is the thing itself, as opposed to the dream; and, as it must be, the thing is much smaller in scope, cropped to a serviceable exactitude. Despite my reservations about describing it, what it proposes to do is actually very simple. It attempts to explore the
connection between verisimilitude and the visionary – the thing itself and the dream, if you like – in Dickens. The phrase ‘seeing things’, with its suggestive ambiguity, nicely encapsulates the connection between versimilitude and the visionary. In its blandest sense, ‘seeing things’ is what any writer does and affirms in his writing, usually implicitly, to have done. I have been there, I have seen it. Dickens calls his memoir of Italy *Pictures from Italy* even though what it comprises are pictures *of* Italy, which is to say, writings on or of Italy.

The preposition matters. As he says in his preface, ‘The Reader’s Passport’:

> The greater part of the descriptions were written on the spot, and sent home, from time to time, in private letters. I do not mention the circumstance as an excuse for any defects they may present, for it would be none; but as a guarantee to the Reader that they were at least penned in the fulness of the subject, and with the liveliest impressions of novelty and freshness. (260)

Dickens’ purpose, to adapt and tweak an earlier line in the preface, is to reproduce the inaccessible contents of Italy ‘before the eyes of my readers’ (259). It is important that we accept Dickens was physically present in Italy rather than just spiritually present, as he later would be when mesmerically treating Madame de la Rue. It was all extemporaneous, a mere account, rapid and partial – in both senses – rather than a memoir, deliberate and crafted, its versions pored over. What we already see in microcosm here, though, is a division I shall explore as the thesis proceeds. Dickens wants to be close to his descriptive subject (‘on the spot’) because he wants his descriptions ‘penned in the fulness of the subject’. But that phrase, ‘the fulness of the subject’, does not betoken knowledge of the subject. For Dickens, knowledge means less than an immersion that acts as an afflatus for his fancy (the ‘liveliest impressions of novelty and freshness’). This is why he says the ‘circumstance’ of the penning and impressing is no ‘excuse’: the ‘circumstance’ is in fact his normal procedure. The author who wants his readers to ‘visit [Italy] in fancy’, a phrase I shall return to in chapter two,
visted it in fancy even when he visited it in person. This point gets lost amid the quite just appreciations of Dickens’ extraordinarily capacious knowledge. As Robert Alter writes in *Imagined Cities*, ‘He has the mapped co-ordinates of the city firmly in mind…but he is up to something very different from cartography’ (46-47). I shall return to this point below, and then again later, particularly at the end of chapter two.

‘Seeing things’ also has its colloquial sense, and this type of ‘seeing’ is one that writers, none more so than Dickens, also do. Dickens is, of course, a very easy mark in this regard. John Forster, in his biography of Dickens, quotes his friend as saying that ‘some beneficent power shows it all to me, and tempts me to be interested, and I don’t invent it – really do not – but see it, and write it down’ (*Life v.2* 272). He saw his characters as a sick man sees hallucinations, it had been suggested by his contemporary G.H. Lewes, whom Forster was citing that quote to rebut, in an essay I shall return to below. Innumerable others have come to the same conclusion since. Much like Forster, I do not think that making a pathology of genius – that is, in slightly less loaded terms, the capacity for producing verbal prodigies – is very helpful or accurate. To imply that Dickens wrote so well because he suffered a benign madness is not just wrong but impertinent, both misunderstanding and deprecating the writing. Yet literary practice, certainly fictional practice, demands ‘seeing things’ at an illusory, if not hallucinatory, level. As Brigid Lowe writes, ‘When we “see” a house in a novel, there is nothing “there”, and worse, there is really no “there” for a “there” to be’ (76). We take a demonstrable illusion and believe in it as if it were real, though we never believe that it is real: that *would* be madness, as balmy as the fanatical literalists G.K. Chesterton invents ‘who could prove that Micawber never lived, and…who could prove in what particular street he lodged’ (533). As Lowe sees it, it is a mistake to impute to fiction a
propositional content that can be believed or not believed, since that is not the transaction that occurs between fictional texts and their readers:

Not to understand the distinction between an untrue sentence and one that, like most fiction, elicits not an inference about a state of affairs but an imagining of the things it tells of, is to miss an important distinction. If we fail to note this distinction we will find ourselves...amazed at our frequent engagement in ‘the rather startling (upon examination) action of believing that inside the novel is not only a three-dimensional space but a person with some kind of physical and psychological depth and contour as well’. We don’t believe anything of the kind – even temporarily – but rather imagine it. (82)

In the light of these words, Dickens prefatory remarks seem like backpedalling, indemnifying himself, as he often did in his prefaces, against charges of misrepresentation. If the text lies, he suggests, it will lie like truth. This sense of ‘seeing things’, the imaginative sense that is the stereoscopic mean of the other two senses I shall adumbrate, is the one I am most interested in and shall pursue in this thesis. One sees things and one ‘sees things’, often the same things. Seeing things in the first way leads to seeing things in the second way, much as ‘A Rapid Diorama’, the title of one of Pictures’ chapters, produces an after-image. That assertion is one of the foundations of my second chapter, on Bleak House. In my third, on Hard Times, I look at the opposite of this: the way that ‘seeing things’ influences seeing things. But more on that soon.

The thesis proceeds through three different areas, each area having one or two novels for the exploration of its respective themes. Before that, however, I extend some of the preoccupations of this introduction. The first chapter sketches the different understandings of realism. The discussion is brief and not meant to be exhaustive. It is there to give the context and flavour of what follows, to preface certain assumptions the rest of the chapter and thesis make and build on. As I suggest below, realism is a vexed matter and, though it is an
important matter to this thesis, a sustained theoretical discussion of it would distract from my other concerns. I want to suggest that ‘realism’ is best served by ‘world-creating’ defamiliarisation, and that the reason Dickens succeeds in persuading readers that his work is ‘more real than reality itself’ is in part because of the defamiliarising trope hypotyposis, a rhetorical device ‘to make’, in Aristotle’s evocative phrasing, ‘your hearers see things’.

The second chapter is on what I might rather pompously call the epistomology of seeing and knowing, with Bleak House adduced for textual support. This chapter is interested in the ability of the characters and their anonymous satellite to see things and not to be seen. I track the novel’s vanishings, from the sudden physical absences and arrivals of characters to queer textual lacunae, particularly those quiet rifts in knowledge evinced by the narrators and, to a lesser extent, the vast fictional laity they superintend. Audrey Jaffe asserts in her book Vanishing Points that ‘omniscience in Bleak House is paradoxically proscribed, limited to one half of the novel’ (128). She is making the point that by being sundered from Esther Summerson’s narrative, the purport to omniscience of the anonymous narrative is ‘undermined’ because the unsuitability of third-person narration to handling ‘the personal’ is exposed at book length: it ‘reveals a lack in what is supposed to be complete’ (128-29). Her point is well made and I do not disagree with it, but I think there is a second way in which the one narrative undermines the other’s omniscience. There are several instances in BH of the anonymous narrator misleading us about information he possesses, sexing up his intelligences. In Esther’s narrative the reverse happens: at times she occludes vital information and at others she seems, if you like, pointedly obtuse.

The third chapter has similar concerns but is not interested in fictional seeing and fictional knowledge at this rudimentary level so much as in the language used to capture the
things seen and known. Indeed, the metaphoric import of a word like ‘capture’ is exactly the point of the chapter. It argues that the thinking behind such a usage is completely misguided. What is seen and known cannot be transmuted into verbal units of reality wherein some truth content is thereafter sequestered for infinite readings. To argue this it looks at those nineteenth-century constructions of science that exemplified this way of thinking and informed fictional practice, as well as at *Hard Times*, with its failures of positivist representation and its satire of hermetic ‘Facts’. Prompted by Dickens’ review of Robert Hunt’s *The Poetry of Science*, the chapter also meditates on constructions of scientific observation. Darwin famously listed the ‘inimitable contrivances’ the human eye uses for comprehending light and space and for adjusting to sudden changes in them; he observed that the idea it ‘could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest possible degree’ (*On the Origin of Species* 140).

The slightly cavalier frivolity in these words suggests the aesthetic quality I have laboured at earlier. Both the evolution itself, with its endless relay of favoured mutations, and the imaginative vault needed to infer and accept it: both of these things are absurd. They remain absurd notwithstanding their likelihood. Indeed, their likelihood becomes more compelling as if because of their absurdity. It is surely a rhetorical sleight on Darwin’s part, this confession of absurdity, yet it is surely also an expression of his rapture at apprehending such implausible truth. Natural selection is one enormous vagary. This chapter is tasked with exploring that absurdity. Lastly, I am interested in Wordsworth’s ‘authentic tiding of invisible things’ in science, much written about by the likes of Gillian Beer (fn). The purview of science becomes observing, recording, examining and describing, if not often in that crisply linear order, things that may as well be fiction: atoms, bacteria, much of the cosmos and evolution, and so on.
The final chapter looks at the domination of falsity, places where falsity does not yield ‘the true’ but merely further falsity, as in the example from ‘Monmouth-Street’ I refer to below. The chapter’s subject is trances and addled vision in two novels, Dickens’ final Christmas novel *The Haunted Man* and his final novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. I examine the former text in detail, partly because it rewards such attentions and partly because criticism on it has been meagre by Dickensian standards. My main interest in the text, aside from its peculiar waywardness, is mesmerism and doubling. I find in mesmerism a cogent analogue of the aesthetic transaction I shall discuss as hypotyposis. Fred Kaplan makes this unexceptional remark in his classic study *Dickens and Mesmerism*: ‘For the central mesmeric experience is that of sleepwalking, in which we awaken from the dreams of illusion and see the truth of reality’ (217). But I want to quarrel with this, because I think it gets things the wrong way around. Sleepwalking and its fellow tranced states, mostly but not always resulting from the labours of the mesmerist, cultivate the truth of illusion. This chapter is more concerned with exploring hypotyposis than the two chapters before it. I try to explicate what I had earlier intimated, such as here in this introduction’s criticism of *Pictures from Italy* and *American Notes*, about the importance of speed and disorientation to hypotyposis in Dickens.

* 

The two kinds of seeing I distinguished above, seeing things and ‘seeing things’, are indeed present in *Pictures*. As I indicated, Dickens often eschews the approach his title suggests he will take. In place of dogged veracity, holiday snaps from Boz’s grand tour, we get something like the Venice chapter, the heady and headlong ‘An Italian Dream’, wherein Dickens adopts
the pretense that we cannot trust what he sees at all. As a rhetorical stance, this is, though very effective, not especially notable on its own. To treat this fantastic floating city (‘anchored…in the deep ocean’ [331]), a peculiar compound of dilapidated port and grand capital, as if it could not possibly be real is a standard device for conveying its ‘luxurious wonder’; another, I suppose, would be to carry on as if it were hardly wondrous, not that Dickens partakes of this. Soon after, for example, Ruskin would have it both ways in *The Stones of Venice*: ‘it was no marvel that the mind should be so deeply entranced by the visionary charm of a scene so beautiful and so strange as to forget the darker truths of its history and its being’ (26). This paraphrases Dickens’ own response, which attempts, not always with conviction, to allay his intense beguilement by marking that dark history. One finds some clue of how Dickens came to his rhetorical stance from his correspondence with John Forster, where he reels in heady awe at the sight of Venice and professes to falter in his descriptive response:

[M]y dear fellow, nothing in the world that ever you have heard of Venice, is equal to the magnificent and stupendous reality. The wildest visions of the *Arabian Nights* are nothing to the piazza of Saint Mark, and the first impression of the inside of the church. The gorgeous and wonderful reality of Venice is beyond the fancy of the wildest dreamer. Opium couldn't build such a place, and enchantment couldn't shadow it forth in a vision. All that I have heard of it, read of it in truth or fiction, fancied of it, is left thousands of miles behind. You know that I am liable to disappointment in such things from over-expectation, but Venice is above, beyond, out of all reach of coming near, the imagination of a man. It has never been rated high enough. It is a thing you would shed tears to see. When I came on board here last night (after a five miles' row in a gondola; which, somehow or other, I wasn't at all prepared for); when, from seeing the city lying, one night, upon the distant water, like a ship, I came plashing through the silent and deserted streets; I felt as if the houses were reality – the water, fever-madness. But when, in the bright, cold bracing day, I stood upon the piazza this morning, by Heaven the glory of the place was insupportable! And diving down from that into its wickedness and gloom – its awful prisons deep below the water; its judgment chambers, secret doors, deadly nooks, where the torches you carry with you blink as if they couldn't bear the air in which the frightful scenes were acted; and coming out again into the radiant, unsubstantial Magic of the town; and diving in again, into vast churches, and old tombs -- a new sensation, a
new memory, a new mind came upon me. Venice is a bit of my brain from this time…. But
the reality itself, beyond all pen or pencil. I never saw the thing before that I should be afraid
to describe. But to tell what Venice is, I feel to be an impossibility. And here I sit alone,
writing it: with nothing to urge me on, or goad me to that estimate, which, speaking of it to
to anyone I loved, and being spoken to in return, would lead me to form. (Letters v.4 217)

I quote at such length because there is so much to remark upon. Dickens’ discomposure is
apparent from the clumsiness and infelicities, especially his repetition of ‘reality’, which
ironically comes to be as effective as any trope. ‘Reality’ changes meaning, going from
‘magnificent and stupendous…gorgeous and wonderful’ but unquestionable, to an
accomplice in unlikeness (the houses are ‘reality’ to make the water seem a ‘fever-madness’),
to ‘beyond all pen or pencil’. It is almost an unconscious tic, betraying with its several
utterances his refusal to believe that what he saw was ‘reality’. This is reinforced by his
invocation of the ‘Arabian Nights’, drugs and bewitchment (‘enchantment’, ‘Magic’). On the
one hand, he is saying that all of one’s speculative industry is bootless when it comes to
describing Venice, yet Venice is comparable only with imaginative speculation, willed or
induced, ‘the fancy of the wildest dreamer’. It is ‘insupportable!’ – and here Dickens sounds
as if he were engaging in a thought experiment, the chief engineer on the Venice Building
Project advising on structural plans, rather than a tourist – yet it stands anyway. To go back to
Smith’s formulation, it is so real it is more real than imaginative visions, and this reality is
distorted and unreal (hence the idiom: ‘insupportable’, ‘unsubstantial’). Venice must be seen
to be imagined, yet can only seem imagined once seen; is only possible to describe once
verified, whereupon it becomes impossible to describe. And so on. Dickens is in a tangle, yet
that tangle is itself potent. Pictures retains much of this energy. It is a queer book, oppressed
at times such as its stint in Venice; a book touched with a sense of its own ‘impossibility’, a
book that describes what its author ‘should be afraid to describe’. Thus while the Venice
chapter’s trope is standard, the rupture it creates, or at any rate bespeaks, is fascinating none
It is important to note this rupture, the rupture being knowing and fancying, seeing and ‘seeing’. I would submit that the potency both here and elsewhere in Dickens arises from the division between seeing and knowing, the ‘impossibility’ that must be acknowledged and transcended. The worth of seeing Venice to Dickens is finally in ‘seeing’ it, in the transports of wonder that prompt this visitor to hold it in mind, to fancy and describe it to correspondents and eventually readers.

It is also worth noting about Dickens’ words in this letter that they are always on the move, traversing an entire continent (‘thousands of miles behind’) and never reposing. I believe that this is because ‘the liveliest impressions of novelty and freshness’ require constant movement – and, indeed, in ‘An Italian Dream’ Dickens spends only about two consecutive paragraphs not in motion (‘My only comfort is, in Motion,’ he wrote home to his wife Catherine from Italy [Letters v.4 215]) – that both affirms and denies the reality one apprehends, both discredits and vivifies one’s perceptions. Ruskin seems to be alluding to Dickens’ account when he goes on to say that

though many of her palaces are for ever defaced, and many in desecrated ruins, there is still so much of magic in her aspect, that the hurried traveller, who must leave her before the wonder of that first aspect has been worn away, may still be led to forget the humility of her origin, and to shut his eyes to the depth of her desolation. They, at least, are little to be envied, in whose hearts the great charities of the imagination lie dead, and for whom the fancy has no power to repress the importunity of painful impressions. (27)

To wrest those novel and fresh perceptions from the place and preserve them, to experience ‘the wonder of that first aspect’, means getting out of the places as soon as possible. As Garrett Stewart puts it in Dickens and the Trials of Imagination, ‘fancy,’ about which I shall say more below, ‘wants a certain drive, a push and rapidity. Whether in words or in wishful fictions, it must quicken, enliven’ (184). Yet the ‘wonder’ here has corroded enough for
awkward reefs of desolation to have emerged. Dickens has stayed just long enough to see the
ghoulish inquities lurking behind the splendid face. We see it as he descends into the ‘darker
truths’, or darker half-truths, of Venetian dungeons. In these dungeons he observes a ‘loop-
hole’ in the wall of a dungeon where condemned men were detained before execution,
writing that here

in the old time, every day, a torch was placed – I dreamed – to light the prisoner within, for
half an hour. The captives, by the glimmering of these brief rays, had scratched and cut
inscriptions in the blackened vaults. I saw them. For their labour with a rusty nail’s point, had
outlived their agony and them, through many generations. (333)

This is interesting for several reasons. We find the two modes of the book mingling. Instead
of reality providing grist to the dream-mill of the unconscious, the dream engenders reality.
What does ‘dreamed’ even mean here? Hitherto it has been an anaphoric instrument of the
rhetorical stance I mentioned: ‘I dreamed that I was led on…’ and so on (332). But here it
seems to resume its meaning, to be meant. It is hard to know how much of the passage
Dickens personally authenticated, his presence in the dungeon notwithstanding. That is what
gives ‘I saw them’ – both emphatic and, because of its location, slightly weak – its piquancy.
Here again is the reader’s intrepid correspondent, descending to these hideous cells, these
‘darker truths’; here he is, bearing witness. But perhaps instead he ‘saw them’ in his mind’s
eye, fancied them; perhaps he still ‘dreamed’ (Garrett Stewart, another reader to alight on this
small passage and that odd, irruptive gasp in particular, finds ‘I saw them’ to be an
‘hallucinatory suggestion’ [‘Written in the Painting’ 222]). That said, ‘I saw them’ also seems
to cover ‘by the glimmering of these brief rays’, which Dickens has already incorporated in
his picture of the scene.
Kate Flint writes that in *Pictures* ‘Dickens is especially fascinated with the act of seeing, and with the consideration of how his memory operates in relation to what he has observed’, and here we see a good example of this (*Visual Imagination* 145-46). Whether the rays that Dickens himself presumably sees and add to his conjecture were actually seen by any of the captives is entirely moot. Moreover, one infers that he would not see anything there without artificial illumination, which must have been dim. He has not really seen anything here except those inscriptions, one surmises. And why a ‘rusty nail’s point’? This comes across as a sly embellishment, the sort of over-egging that journalists privy to background briefings might try to put over the reader. Even if he had seen nails around, and they were rusty, and he had been told they were used by the prisoner, he had no way of knowing what state the nails were in when wielded to style the walls. But, knowing Dickens, we know this embellishment emanates from the gambolling of fancy – what Lewes called ‘his fanciful flight’, but more on that below – here checked by the grim historical truth of the prisoners’ fate (*Critical Assessments* v.I 460). There is fancy and its sombre ballast: the suggestive contrast between those authors and their truncated yet timeless testimonies, for which they suffered greatly, and this author and his luxurious, potboiling testimony. But it is checked too by its sudden, almost unconscious recollection that its documentary purport is dubious – indeed, to the extent that Dickens would see fit to disclaim any such purport later. The problem is that the lapidarists’ inscriptions are dauntingly *true*.

* 

Where does this impulse toward the illusory, toward, ‘distortion’, emanate from? Why is it successful? For G.H. Lewes, writing about Dickens calls for not faint praise so much as faint damning. The essay comes across as a rather peremptory sensibility allowing with great
difficulty that Dickens, for all his manifold offences against taste, is somehow not a terrible
writer but a great one. Lewes is a commander of a defeated army suing for peace whose
concession nevertheless trails conditions. Dickens’ state of mind, insofar as he had a mind
well-developed enough to be discussed in Lewes’s reckoning, was of dubious soundness. He
was certifiably a genius, as it were, his literary faculty tantamount to madness yet also clearly
distinct from it (Lewes misquotes Dryden’s tag ‘Great wits are sure to madness near allied /
And thin partitions do their bounds divide’, though he denies ‘wishing to imply any
agreement’ with it [Critical Assessments v.I 458]).

It is worth commending Lewes’s intellectual honesty, since the Dickens he defends in
this essay trangresses all his principles of literary success. Indeed, Lewes had tacitly patted
himself on the back when he noted, in his introduction to the argument, that ‘few minds have
flexibility enough to adopt at once a novelty which is destined in its turn to become a
precedent’ (Critical Assessments v.I 454). Lewes had previously enjoined that ‘Realism [the
representation of Reality, i.e. of Truth] is thus the basis of all Art, and its antithesis
is…Falsism’ (‘Realism in Art’ 37). Among his desiderata were words and phrases such as
‘congruous’, ‘strict reality’, ‘internal life’ and ‘rigidly bound down to accuracy in
presentation’, an idiom for which Dickens’ writing indubitably wanted (38-39). Lillian R.
Furst neatly flicks away Lewes’s ‘simplistic and dogmatic declaration’, which is not only
reductive but irrelevant (4-5). What if reality itself is not ‘strict’ or ‘congruous’ or
‘accura[te]’: how then can representation be ‘rigidly bound’ to anything? Furst queries
George Eliot’s ‘real unexaggerated lion’ in Adam Bede, asking what the ‘proper proportions’
for such a figure could be (4). Furst’s point is that nineteenth-century realism, inchoate and
superficially abjuring convention, had no template for a ‘real unexaggerated lion’. But the
less subtle point from which Furst implicitly advances is that this figure is intrinsically
chimerical. Michael Hollington notes a letter in which Dickens tells Jane Carlyle offhandedly that ‘it’s impossible to caricature Americans, they are already walking caricatures’ (*Dickens and the Grotesque* 125). What is a ‘strict’ representation of a caricature meant to look like?

Lewes writes that ‘we…were startled at the revelation of familiar facts hitherto unnoted, and felt our pulses quicken as we were hurried along with him in his fanciful flight’ (*Critical Assessments v.I* 460). ‘Familiar facts hitherto unnoted’ and ‘fanciful flight’: such assertions inform the idea that Dickens’ work is what Taylor Stoehr and Donald Fanger respectively called it half a century ago: an exemplar of ‘super-naturalism’ and ‘fantastic fidelity’ (Stoehr vii; Fanger 91). Stoehr, further echoing or anticipating Fanger (they wrote at exactly the same time), goes on to say that ‘Dickens is neither realist nor fantast, but something in between’ (viii). Versions of this idea and this idiom, particularly the reality/fantasy division, have existed since Dickens wrote and persist now. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst declares in his lively recent biography that Dickens had ‘an imagination so rich it made the real world seem like a pale and flimsy imitation of its fictional rival’ (5). Rather wonderfully, ‘the real world’ has been usurped by its shadow much as Peter Schlemihl, whom I adduce in my third chapter, was by his. It is wanting: dull, insubstantial, etiolated. Terence Hawkes in his old primer *Metaphor* cites Wallace Stevens’ offhand remark that ‘Reality is a cliché from which we escape by metaphor’, and that is precisely how ‘the real world’ appears in comparison to Dickens (57). Reading Dickens one can, as The Man With the Blue Guitar can, ‘believe, in face of the object // a dream no longer a dream, a thing, / Of things as they are’ (*Collected Poems* 152) With Dickens, unlike a thesis, the dream usurps the thing itself. Grahame Smith in *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema* implicitly takes up where Lewes left off:
His writing has seemed to many critics to have precisely this dreamlike quality, a heightening and exaggeration of reality which has the effect of making books appear to be more real than reality itself. In other words, the vividness and detail of Dickens’s writing can create a response akin to that of leaving the cinema only to find the world outside flat and colourless. This quality is compatible with the notion of his novels as giant mirrors capturing the panoramic variety and intensity of urban life in a process of reflection cum creation, providing that we accept its essentially distorting nature and function. (63)

There is much to unpack here. For Smith, there is a Lewes-inflected hint of contradictoriness in the aesthetic success of Dickens' writing. Smith suggests that what Dickens does has an ‘essentially distorting nature and function’, a suggestion earlier alluded to in ‘a heightening and exaggeration of reality’, which seems to hold that reality’s altitude is medial and constant. But what is ‘reality’? What is ‘the real’? I take for granted, as Smith seems to, that aesthetic success depends on ‘appear[ing]...real’, but what we mean by such locutions as ‘real’ and ‘reality’ is moot and changeable. What is more, querying what we mean by them can sound like idly callow metaphysics. But this thesis tries to do that, in its modest way, if only by the way. It must ask what we see when we see the real because it seeks to explain how a ‘distortion’ can be ‘more real than reality itself’. There will be more on these rather recondite points of representation later in the introduction and in the first chapter.

I would also take issue with that analogy, ‘the vividness and detail of Dickens’s writing can create a response akin to that of leaving the cinema only to find the world outside flat and colourless’, which the Douglas-Fairhurst quote above is so similar to. It is, surely, the opposite response. The reader – and the auditor of Dickens himself during his readings, to whom the analogy is apter still – leaves the cinema to find the world is not as she has imagined it. It is not blanched and stifled but gaudy and teeming. The Dickensian reader is like A.D. Nuttall’s viewer of Rembrandt self-portraits:
When we leave the gallery we look with greater insight into the first face we encounter. He thereby directly deepens our experiential knowledge of the real human face… [I]njecting fresh life into Gestalten which are in turn used in ordinary perception, he deepens our knowledge of the world we live in. (*Mimesis* 76)

As it happens, Smith’s employment of ‘flat’ in that passage strikes an enduring paradox in appreciations of Dickens right down through history. Stoehr neatly sets out the divergence of views between those who, like EM Forster, thought Dickens wrote “‘flat”’ characters’ and those – with, as we have seen, Smith and Douglas-Fairhurst later enlistments – to whom he was a Columbas of deliverance from the ‘flat…world’ (39). The term ‘flat’ begs the question of what ‘flat’ means. What is actually meant by ‘flat’ is not flat at all: someone quite worthy and boring like Ada Clare, whom we learn a good deal about, is less ‘flat’ in this sense than someone like Inspector Bucket. Yet nobody would dispute that Bucket is the more interesting and vivid, a word I use advisedly, of the two. Besides, there are characters whose flatness, in this reckoning, does not preclude richness and even complexity. The character in Dickens I treasure most, Mr Guppy, is ‘flat’ yet imparts to us all of what Lewes would call ‘internal life’ as I shall discuss in my first chapter. What matters more to a Potemkin village, its dimensions in space or the insipidness of its facades? Could an Invisible City, conjured up in words, be less ‘flat’ than, say, poor old Cincinnati?

I would adduce Garrett Stewart’s description of ‘characters like Tom Pinch’ who ‘deter monotony, war against…the degrading flatness of things’ (*Trials* 180). With Fanger’s coinage ‘fantastic fidelity, he is following on from Gissing, who perceived a ‘marvellous fidelity’ in Dickens (Fanger 98; Gissing 121). Gissing is in fact following and seconding Lewes, though he sharply demurs from the Lewesian diagnosis elsewhere, in saying that
This is what makes the difference between an impossible person in Dickens and the same kind of vision in the work of smaller writers... [I]n our literary slang, he ‘visualized’ every character... Seeing them, he saw the house in which they lived, the table at which they ate, and all the little habits of their day-to-day life. Here is an invaluable method of illusion, if an author can adopt it (122).

This is a fairly representative statement of appreciation, and it seems to me mostly correct. Note the use of ‘impossible’, a recurring term in the lexicon of Dickens criticism. ‘Impossibility’ is crucial to the effectiveness of hypotyposis. But while they do second Lewes, Gissing’s remarks also seems to me in certain respects misleading. For one thing, it turns Dickens into a mere auditor of the imagination, which is quite a different thing from the ‘literalist of the imagination’ Lewes found. In this appraisal, Dickens is a humble quality controller manning a conveyor belt of lifelike images. He ‘see[s] the object as in itself it really is’, to quote Matthew Arnold’s formulation (Homer 64). Indeed, this appraisal renders Dickens a Realist, albeit one with the biggest aerial and thereby the clearest, most receptive transmission of verisimilar data. Gissing himself saw Dickens as the opposite of a Realist, an idealist, but I am talking about the implication of his assertion here. It renders him a kind of oracle, a prophet facing sideways, to adapt Krauss’s famous epigram, sideways toward a fictional alternative reality. Lewes, too, explicitly invokes the vatic (‘seer of visions’). The Realist novelist, as I shall discuss presently, was in certain constructions visited by reality in this uncanny way, wherein he was not a rigorous observer but himself a kind of seer. As we saw with Pictures, he is not a passive recipient in this way; nor, unlike the Realists, did he seek to be. At this point it is important to repeat my assertion that to talk of madness is to go astray. When I invoke Lewes or likeminded critics I am doing so because I think it furnishes insights into Dickensian description, which will become clear as the thesis develops, especially the first chapter. ‘Deformation’ or ‘distortion’, those slavish verbal helpmeets of the Dickensian critics I admire most, are what Dickens engaged in. As John R. Reed writes in
Dickens’s Hyperrealism, Dickens ‘rendering of real places did not have the realistic novel’s ambition of transparency; rather, he wished his artfulness to be obvious in a manner essentially unwelcome to realism’ (15).

Another issue is actually the reverse of a question I just asked: what is the ‘distortion’ Smith writes of? What does this usage of ‘distorting’ speak to? What is ‘distortion’ in the context of literary practice? Smith refers to the ‘effect’ Dickens’ writing would ‘appear’ to have, that of being ‘more real than reality itself’. But this observation begs yet another question: what does it mean to be ‘real’? Smith is taking a certain degree of rhetorical licence here. Nevertheless, it is interesting and notable. The implication is that the super-realness is connected with the ‘distortion’; that, actually, it supervenes upon it. This picks up on the old notion that Dickens’ writing effects its startling animation through what John Forster calls the ‘splendid excess of his genius’ (Life v.2 273). The notion that ‘reality’, the thing that by definition it and only it is, the semantic area it has a perpetual monopoly over, can be insufficient as reality is not meant to be taken seriously. ‘Reality’ is its own perfection and to say that something, the Dickensian ‘real’, is more perfect, as it were, is merely to emphasise that the two things are not the same. And, of course, they are not: one is concrete, the other imaginative. In Smith’s formulation it also goes without saying in a different sense. If something can be ‘more real’ then plainly, to recast what I wrote above, realness is not essential to what reality does. I do not want to pick more holes in such innocuous commonplaces lest they become rabbit holes. I merely want to suggest the central tenet of my argument, the thesis of the thesis: that to be ‘real’ is to be artificial; and not just artificial but also illusory; and, further still, false.

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George Levine, paraphrasing Richard Rorty’s influential treatise *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, writes that ‘all “descriptions” of reality, all governing assumptions about it, are arbitrary. They must be recognised not as fixed and stable formulations of the prelinguistic real…’ (*Realism and Representation* 4). It is quite astonishing, this idea, namely its proposition that any serious reader had ever thought this way about “descriptions” of reality’. Those surprised by the assertion that ‘language is not, as he puts it, “transparent to the real”’ are, or ought to be, as much figments as the notion of exact correspondence itself. It is wrong and, worse, frivolous. Of course they are ‘arbitrary’! What could ‘a fixed and stable formulation’ possibly be? Words do not minister exclusively to a client, like an old family retainer. They accrue semantic ambiguities, conflicts and outright contradictions, so that ‘sanction’, for example, is its own antonym. Reed notes that in *Oliver Twist* the ‘Jacob’s Island’ where Bill Sikes reaches his end has an existence comparable to Dick Cheney’s conception of the US Vice-Presidency, oscillating between at least three different states. It was a real place but also a real fiction, and in Dickens it became a fictional real¹. Brigid Lowe, among others, forcefully rebuts the cant about ‘fixed and stable formulations’. ‘Fixed and stable formulations’ would be inimical to fiction. Fiction is animated by the sense of possibility inherent in any given configuration of words and its notional objective referents, a sense that such formulations, if they existed, would annul. The idea that you can make up something or someone, conjure up an entirely abstract and conceptual version of that thing or person (or animal or whatever one likes), and make that version interesting is, quite apart from the means of conjuring itself, the ur-impulse of fiction. I repudiate the idea of ‘Fixed and stable formulations’ not because it is false and even question-begging (‘fixed and stable’ in what sense?) but because failing to understand the representative procedures of Realist

¹ For more on this, refer to Reed (11-24). Reed teases out a fascinating explication of the ‘real’ in *OT*, and Dickens generally, which this thesis should complement.
writing makes it harder to understand their deviant, Dickens’, whose writing is nevertheless realistic.

We see this problem in Reed’s *Dickens’ Hyperrealism*. A further problem, not unrelated, is that the reader is never enlightened as to the meaning of its titular concept. It takes a loan word, ‘hyperrealism’, from Umberto Eco, but why and what this term actually adds to Reed’s analysis are unclear. The best Reed can do to define ‘hyperrealism’ is to note that Dickens’ works contain ‘always a touch of exaggeration of the real (and sometimes more than a touch)’ and that ‘while he sought to render the material world in a factual manner, he also sought to enhance it for the improvement of his readers’ (1; 9). This is essentially meaningless – ‘enhance’ is somewhat, shall we say, protean here – and seems to imply that Realists, who if nothing else aspired ‘to render the world in a factual matter’, were not engaged in edification, a view Reed surely does not hold. If the finding is that Dickens exaggerates, then the term ‘hyperrealism’ adds little to Stoehr’s more suggestive ‘supernaturalism’; indeed, it adds little to Lewes’s seminal essay quoted above. So extraneous does the concept seem that Reed in his conclusion declines to mention it. Instead he quietly retreats to ‘nonrealist’, in the rather questionable ‘exploring his use of such nonrealist devices as personification, first-person narration, and typical or symbolic naming’ (why is ‘personification’, let alone first-person narration, incompatible with Realism or realism? [106]). Perversely, Reed is less successful at explaining the question ‘hyperrealism’ begs, namely ‘What is realism?’, than he is at explaining why Dickens was not a realist. But defining ‘realism’ is a broad problem, which I shall come to in the following chapter.

True, ‘hyperrealism’ is ‘an honorific’, but even if it is, the argument it flags is never elucidated (Reed 4). Instead, ‘hyperrealism’ comes across as a binding agent for a handful of
very good though different articles. One is left frustrated, all the more so because the critical instincts that ‘hyperrealism’ the concept seems to arise from strike one as correct, and Reed is elsewhere trenchant and interesting, as I have tried to indicate. This thesis shares Reed’s conviction that Dickens’ enduring strength is his ‘ability to convey a sense of the everyday world while at the same time almost magically transforming it’ and that this magical transformation occurs because, to indulge in a crude summary of the motivations behind his style, Dickens ‘wanted to emphasize the human capacity to imagine’ (4; 106). I stress the importance of this capacity to Dickens in my third chapter especially. But immediately after the latter assertion, Reed adds that Dickens ‘wanted to heighten human experience through fancy’. ‘Heighten’ again! The laureate of flatness is the master of heights. The triteness of this metaphorical expedient, conveniently nebulous and therefore irrefutable, disguises the issue at hand, one Reed ought to have addressed. What, exactly, is ‘fancy’ and how might it – let us say ‘expand and enrich’ rather than ‘heighten’ – ‘human experience’?

‘Fancy’ suffers from neglect in Dickens studies. The neglect is evident even in those studies to which its explication is most pertinent. I think that Reed’s inability to define ‘hyperrealism’ is actually symptomatic of an older failure to define ‘fancy’, one which the other scholars I have discussed are also guilty of. Like Reed, Grahame Smith is quite correct and also wanting on this point. Mentioning in passing ‘the energy of Dickens’s inexhaustible linguistic virtuosity’ in a few of his great mature novels, Smith writes that these novels ‘do fulfil one of Dickens’s crucial purposes in writing, the stimulation of the imaginative faculties (what he called fancy) in a utilitarian age’ (82). Smith is very penetrating on the ‘stimulation’ but not on why it must occur ‘in a utilitarian age’ or on ‘fancy’. Why was this ‘crucial’? As to ‘fancy’, the lack of further discussion in Smith’s work aligns with the rest of Dickens criticism. There is a peculiar remissness over ‘fancy’ that could do with correction. If
anything, the stray examples of engagement with the concept are more illustrative. Mildred Newcomb’s dilation on her phrase ‘inventive fancy’ in her notes indicates the poverty of definition (7). Standing athwart the ‘customary’ conflation of ‘imagination and fancy’, she sides with Coleridge (192-92n).

In fairness, ‘fancy’ is an amorphous term and Dickens could summon it in various usages. Coleridge avers that ‘fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties’, not ‘according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or at furthest the lower and higher degree of one and the same power’ (50). Evidently from Dickens’ usages of these words, he subscribed to that ‘general belief’. As Harry Stone, who one infers is working from Coleridgean principles, concedes this when he writes that ‘Without imagination (or “fancy,” as Dickens often called it) human beings could not truly be human’ (Invisible 3). In what follows I use these terms interchangeably as Dickens did. But ‘fancy’ is nevertheless important to understanding what Dickens was up to when ‘distorting’ For this is what his ‘fancy’ did; this is the faculty that ‘fancy’ denominates. What is most surprising about the neglect of ‘fancy’ is that nobody has sought to examine its affinities, to delineate its aesthetic context. That is to say, ‘Fancy’ has seldom been considered in the light of its patent heir, Shklovsky’s ostranenie (‘estrangement’ or ‘defamiliarisation’). Tore Rem, the only critic to do this in a sustained way, notes that ‘it is indeed rare to come across references to Shklovsky (or, for that matter, [fellow Russian Formalists] Tynyanov, Thomashevsky, Eikhenbaum, and even Jakobson) in Dickens studies’ (230).

This is odd given that Dickensian critics are not averse to borrowing Shklovsky’s language. Reed uses it rather unhelpfully: ‘Turning the inanimate propeller into a moral guide

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2 I use ‘defamiliarisation’ throughout this thesis in spite of the translator Benjamin Sher’s presumably sound disdain for it. He calls it ‘dead wrong!’ and instead prefers his own coinage, ‘enstrangement’ (Theory xix). I felt, however, that an abundance of ‘enstrangement’ might only confuse the reader.
is precisely the kind of trick to defamiliarize his material for his readers and make them take notice’ (83). But why Dickens does this is or what that loaded verb ‘defamiliarize’ connotes is never dealt with, in part because Reed is never expounding a wholly coherent thesis.

Elsewhere in the chapter on personification from which the quote comes, Reed finds that Dickens’ inveterate deployment of this trope exists less to ‘make [readers] take notice’, to refresh perception and ‘heighten human experience through fancy’, than to imbue the world with one’s feelings or personality, to project a contiguous subjectivity on one’s surroundings in a kind of Pathetic Fallacy. Ostensibly one of the closest Dickens monographs to Shklovsky’s ideas, Robert Newsom’s *Dickens on the Romantic Side of Familiar Things*, mentions him only in a single note: the earlier nineteenth-century discussion of ‘the romantic and familiar,’ he writes, ‘in turn anticipates the interests of various Russian formalists…whose notion of defamiliarization is in many ways analogous to the definition of the novel I am working with here’ (163n). It is curious that neither Newsom nor anybody else, Rem aside, has taken up this analogue. I shall say more about Shklovsky in the first chapter.

Fancy, like ‘defamiliarisation’, is a form of literary magic. The success of a magic trick arises from doing something manifestly ‘preposterous’, to use Lewes’s words, in a way that is convincing. The more preposterous the thing, the greater the delight the audience feels upon its being done well. To see it done is to believe that what cannot be already was. The success does nothing to dispel the falseness of the act. Nobody sensible accepts that spectral doubles truly emerge from people and wander about near them. What the magic act is really saying is that if you do such-and-such in this way, with this imperceptible but crucial particular elided, you can make the preposterous convincing, at once impossible and believed. Patrons of the ‘Pepper’s “Ghost”’ illusion, an adaptation of Dickens’ Christmas
book *The Haunted Man*, could be swayed into doubting what they knew to be so. Helen Groth quotes a contemporary critic who wrote this of the illusion:

> The spectres and illusions are thrown upon the stage in such a perfect embodiment of real substance, that it is not till the *Haunted Man* walks through their apparently solid forms that the audience can believe in their being optical illusions at all. Even then it is almost difficult to imagine that the whole is not a wonderful trick, for people cling to the old saying, that seeing is believing. (‘Reading Victorian Illusions’ 61)

What interests me is that ‘even then’, that after-image of belief in spite of a simultaneous ‘belie[f]’ in their being optical illusions’. The critic is like the earlier spectator of panorama who notes that you ‘are obliged almost to reason with yourself…that it is not nature…’ (G. Smith 30). Presumably someone once called a breeze ‘stiff’ for the first time and an interlocuter found this unlikely description, with its accurate travesty of strong wind, winning. It would take a dull reader not to find Joyce’s description of a night sky, ‘the heaventree of stars is hung with humid nightblue fruit’, witty and memorable; and for many of those who find it memorable, it must begin to change the way they think of stars and see them (573). Yes, ‘nightblue’ and ‘fruit’ are felicitous, but they exist to complete the treble of assonance. It is their sonic cognate, ‘humid’, that affects one’s perceptions thereafter. One

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3 Helen Groth summarises the illusion thus:

> It was produced by a specially designed magic lantern concealed beneath the stage that projected a strong light onto an actor positioned before a sheet of glass that extended from pit to ceiling between the audience and the stage. A moving image of the concealed actor would then appear superimposed on a second actor onstage above, so that when the latter enacted Redlaw’s feverish desire for amnesia, his spectral double came to life (‘Reading Victorian Illusions 55).

The illusion relied on the audience assuming there was no ‘sheet of glass’. Word of this sheet of glass eventually leaked; the results were as one would expect (see below).

4 Well, up to a point. The analogy is imperfect. Simon During, writing about ‘Pepper’s “Ghost”’, notes that when the audience tumbled to the main instrument of the illusion, the transparent plate of glass between the audience and the stage, it did not continue to be enchanted. Common japes included peppering what you might call the fourth window ‘with paper balls…and watching them bounce off’ (149-50). ‘Despite their enormous initial success,’ During goes on, many such startling magical acts ‘were relatively short-lived’ (150). At this point the illusion had entered what, to pursue the analogy just a little further, we might call the clichéd phase of its existence. In Lewesian terms, the novelty had in its turn become a precedent.
feels both that stars cannot be humid and that they will always be ‘humid’ thereafter. The
rightness of the metaphoric fancy fords its unlikeliness, that gap between the new idea and
the received one. Nobody has thought that way before, one feels, and nobody reading it can
forget that thought again. This gap is important to Dickens, impelling his fancy, as I discuss
with regard to Newgate’s walls in my second chapter.

There are forms of defamiliarisation that I am not really considering here. It is
certainly defamiliarising in David Copperfield when Mr Mell is assailed in class by
Steerforth over his penury and his mother’s lowly quarters. David, who has betrayed this
intelligence to Steerforth, stands aside Mell. There are many ways in which Mell could
respond, notably with mortification or anger toward David, whom he surely knows is to
blame. Instead, he stands up to Steerforth, rebutting his jeers with quavering but righteous
opprobrium, boldly courting the political consequences he and Steerforth know will follow.
What is truly astonishing, though, is that as he does this he merely pats David on the back.
Pat, pat: this follows each sally (94). It is almost as if he is defending David against
Steerforth – which in a way, he is. David has sullied his name and allied himself with the
person who will steer him awry. It is one of the most poignant moments in all Dickens. But
this does not comport with what I mean, which is ‘Fancy’ as Dickens’ contemporary
Alexander Bain defined it most germanely in the tenth ‘Figure of Speech’ from his primer on
rhetoric:

Original comparisons, besides having the effects just stated, cause an agreeable surprise, and
are introduced into composition with that view.

A comparison that is new and not obvious, strikes us with a pleasurable flash, even
although contributing little, either to elucidate a subject, or to excite livelier feelings in
connection with it. In the following instance, the agreeable effect arises, partly from the
elevation of the subject (See QUALITIES OF STYLE, Strength), and partly from the
detection of a certain resemblance between two things lying remote in nature:— “The actions
of princes are like those great rivers, whose course every one beholds, but their springs have
been seen by but few.”

When comparisons have no other effect than the pleasure of surprise, they are often
termed fanciful. This indicates one of the meanings of Fancy. Luxuriant composition, as the
poetry of Shelley or Keats, is apt to abound in this species of effect. (25)

Fanger expatiates on this ‘pleasure of surprise’ by lodging a rather useful working definition
of Dickensian fancy: ‘the ability to see the world in adult terms but with a child’s vision’
(89). Commenting on the preamble to the first number of Household Words, with its
forthright repudiation of ‘mere utilitarian spirit…iron binding of the mind to grim realities’
and extolling of ‘that light of Fancy’, Fanger writes that the impulse of the latter phrase, it
‘would seem, is to discover, or be fed by, the romance that is sufficient in all familiar things’
(72). Fancy and ‘imagination – which may or may not be a different thing…’ are ‘a softener
of “brutal fact”’ (72). Fanger’s paraphrase has utility as a schematic overview of Hard Times,
a novel where Fancy and Fact are famously coerced into a duel. But Fancy is more than a
palliative ‘softener’. This thesis is not really interested in political motives – ‘What is
reality?’ is surely easier to account for than Dickens’ shifting, nebulous and often
blockheaded politics – but Fancy is not some paltry nostrum for the working classes,
imaginative alms as a substitute for meaningful reform. Nor, I think, is it an index of spiritual
health, or not just an index of spiritual health anyway. Wittman is conflicted on this point,
disagreeing with Garrett Stewart in writing that ‘it is the wondering itself…that matters’ but
then seeming to agree later when she implies that the Sketches are interested in provoking
wonder because Dickens ‘is interested in knowledge and social action’ (197, 206n). She goes
on to say that:
The fundamental exigency of the Sketches is the need to take what has been ‘obscured’ by habit and overfamiliarity and enervating closeness and refigure it as a cause for wonder, (and do so, we take it, to prevent or alter the course of suffering—wonder is, considered optimistically, a precursor to care) (207).

My own view is that it is the means itself that matters: what I discuss in the first chapter as the salutary ‘process of creativity’ of defamiliarisation – which Wittman, too, never discusses, despite employing its idiom. This is what I argue in the second chapter, though in the third I see ‘fancy’ and ‘wonder’ as facilitating knowledge. But more on that below. Suffice it to say, I agree with Harry Stone, who suggests that ‘Dickens…champions the power of imaginative sympathy. He sees the story…as a way of evoking the power of sympathetic response that slumbers within each person’, which, Stone says, ‘humanises and saves’ (Invisible 29).

To see how Dickens does this, we need to look at the key word in Fanger’s paraphrase, ‘discover’. Fancy is the procurer of discovery. He begins to get at what I think is at the heart of Dickens’ aesthetic success. He cites Newcomb, whose name he apparently does not know how to spell, on the ‘“allegorical”’ nature of Dickens’ narratives and their constituents (82). But it is more useful in these discussions, Reed’s and my own, to think not of the text as allegory but of reality itself as allegory. This differs slightly from Tambling’s similar argument for the allegorical nature of Dickens, which leans heavily on Benjamin. Tambling finds Dickens sharing with Baudelaire what Benjamin called ‘the gaze of the allegorist…of the alienated man’ (Going Astray 55). To this gaze, commodities, the commerical tokens of the metropolis, are inherently allegorical; and Tambling takes many of his examples from Sketches by Boz, with its proliferation of commodities. I can assent to the argument this far. But I think Tambling goes astray when he suggests that certain objects ‘allegorise the neighbourhood, their unsorted, ruinous state images what the area is, and
enables a partial reading of it’ (56). This seems to get things the wrong way around, in that Dickens wants to project allegorical significance on them that they do not have. Firstly, I should note that the meanings of ‘allegory’ Benjamin, Tambling and I are working with are loose and elide the scrupulous quiddities of, for example, C.S. Lewis and Erich Auerbach as unpacked by A.D. Nuttall. ‘Allegory’ implies fixity, and Benjamin and Tambling seem to take this for granted. But Boz and behind him Dickens are not retrieving stable, intrinsic meanings. The point is the meanings’ contingency. Indeed, in Lewis’s terms Dickens would be practising a kind of ‘symbolism or sacramentalism’ rather than allegory, wherein the ‘world which we mistake for reality is the flat outline’ of what he earlier calls ‘the invisible world’ (in Two Concepts 16). A great source of impetus for Dickensian representation is the ardour for allegorical meanings that cannot be, that shall always remain subjective. For Dickens, reality is fancy’s allegory. It is a series of concrete referents yielding brilliant flashes of ersatz conjecture, all the more astonishing for the opacity of their quondam selves.

This is not to discount the point I made above: the process itself is foremost, means above end. To borrow Shklovsky’s phrase about defamiliarisation, which I shall come to in the next chapter, it is ‘the process of creativity’, both for Dickens himself and for his readers, that is of the greatest importance (6). But allegory matters too. As Reed himself writes:

Dickens wants his readers to think of the natural and the man-made world as having a meaning that is discoverable by the imagination, not merely by reason and the interpretation of facts. (82)

Just so, and this thesis expands on that insight. Look at ‘Meditations in Monmouth-Street’ from Boz in this connection. Boz fancies the entirely invented man mournfully wishing he could ‘have been restored to life’, restored to the entirely invented childhood which has now
surreptitiously consolidated itself as reality, as ‘life’. The entirely invented man has now gone from mere fictional predicate, a car in the train of fantasy, to a respectable citizen of the factual. Much like Elizabeth Bishop’s ‘The Man-Moth’, a lavish absurdity spun from a single diverting corruption of ‘mammoth’, Dickens ‘Monmouth’ turns baseless illusion into sturdy memory simply by proceeding as if it were. ‘The ‘working of fancy’, to quote a line from *Martin Chuzzlewit* I dilate on below, actually becomes ‘a real gesture’. A jaunt of question-begging takes place wherein subsequent falsity retroactively confirms some false antecedent as true. It is, as Barbara Hardy writes about Pip’s fantasies of Satis House in *Great Expectations*, ‘arbitrary and zany, a free-floating fancy wrung out of the imaginative’, and, like Pip, Boz ‘pushes fantasy beyond belief and forces his interlocuters to believe him’ (73). That contradiction is noteworthy. Pip transcends and yet also compels belief, much as, in Smith’s formulation, Dickens distorts reality and yet also persuades us that his writing is more real than reality. I shall say more about this in the next section. J. Hillis Miller puts it best when he identifies the way the prose ‘moves not only to free Boz’s speculations from their voluntary basis and to make them into a self-generating reverie. As speculation becomes vision, quaint fancy becomes grotesque hyperbole’ (‘The Fiction of Realism’ 13). This ‘self-generating reverie’ seems to me the essence of Dickensian description. It is what I believe Lewes is referring to when he gropes for his pathological similes: ‘speculation becomes vision’, falsity reality. As Lewes writes of Dickens:

> believing in its reality however fantastic, he communicated something of his belief to us. He presented it in such relief that we ceased to think of it as a picture. So definite and insistent was the image, that even while knowing it was false we could not help, for a moment, being affected, as it were, by his hallucination. (*Critical Assessments v.I* 458)

He is not really saying Dickens was suffering a ‘hallucination’ any more than Dickens himself was saying that in his letter to Forster I referred to earlier. That last sentence is
tantamount to the ‘self-generating reverie’, the ‘definite and insistent image’; ‘even while knowing it was false we could not help, for a moment, being affected’ (my italics, needless to say). I shall discuss this rhetorical technique further and at some length in my final chapter, taking in examples such as the opening page of The Mystery of Edwin Drood, the passage from Little Dorrit that Dorothy van Ghent cites in her great essay ‘The Dickens World: A View from Todgers’, and lastly Pip’s first look at Barnard’s Inn in Great Expectations. The potential of inanimate, or at any rate insentient, things to be truants from themselves needs to be emphasised in a discussion of Dickens. It is never emphasised enough.

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I am not the first person to suggest that the realness or vivacity or what have you in Dickens exists not in spite but because of the ‘distortion’, such as it is, Lewes’s ‘false’. Karen Petroski, writing about Dickens and phantasmagoria, postulates a stylistic development in Dickens in the period of his American works, American Notes and MC, and A Christmas Carol. She argues that Dickens abjured a stable point of view and began to essay a style of description marked by flickering contingency, a repertory of semblances waylaid in vicissitudes, whose cleaving to the makeshift and the shape-shifting serves better to indulge what Forster called Dickens’ ‘wealth of fancy’ (Life v.2 273). In AN, Petroski contends, ‘Dickens draws on forms of description’ that make the reader similar to a viewer of phantasmagoria: ‘knowing that what they witness is illusion but nevertheless temporarily allowing themselves to believe in its reality and to be affected by it’ (73). Dickens himself likens the novel to a phantasmagoria, and in doing so, Petroski writes, he ‘is implying that it reveals a truth indirectly, in flashes: partially, ironically, metaphorically, and by example’
(82). She amplifies these points by citing Dickens on ‘the varying illusions’ American tree stumps present in twilight (AN 194-95).

Dickens is certain that they are not what they seem yet at the same time allows himself to see them as if they are something other than what they are and identifies them with an entirely different kind of illusion. Contrary to what would seem reasonable, the stumps become more meaningful to Dickens when he perceives them to be something that they are not. (75-76)

It seems to me very perceptive, that line about Dickens both seeing things as more meaningful – more, in a sense, fully themselves – when ‘he perceives them to be something they are not’. Dickens’ contemporary Thoreau, also writing in Massachusetts and at the very same time, declares at the end of his *Natural History of Massachusetts* that ‘We must look a long time before we can see’ (28). But what are we seeing? What is Dickens seeing? The thrust of Thoreau’s conclusion is a swipe at the dominant construction of science. You cannot see without looking, he suggests. But while ‘the true man of science’ looks, the false man, as I suppose we have to call him, does not. ‘We do not learn by inference and deduction, and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy’ (28). I shall return to the subject of scientific looking in chapter three, but for now let me note that ‘sympathy’ is an important word to Petroski too. Petroski writes that ‘Dickens presents such [phantasmagoric] moments as, literally, moments of vision – moments of perceptual confusion that produce not disorientation but a recovery of the ability to sympathize’ (88).

Brigid Lowe, writing about sympathy and, among other authors, George Eliot, notes that in Eliot’s *Scenes of Clerical Life* she approvingly declares that “‘imagination’ questions the ‘new-varnished efficiency, which will yield endless diagrams, plans, elevations, and sections, but alas! No picture’” (118). ‘[F]eeling, thinking, experiencing beings, with social and creative capacities’ are, Eliot and Lowe both believe, beyond ‘the cold, rationalistic and deterministic equations of political economy’ (118). I return to sympathy toward the end of
chapter two, but for now I want to implant this notion of sympathy being in opposition to ‘cold, rationalistic and deterministic equations of political economy’. While it anticipates my reading of *Hard Times*, it also, and more importantly, foreshadows my division between sympathy and knowledge in *Sketches* and *The Uncommercial Traveller*. But again, more on that soon.

One of Petroski’s examples of these temporarily convincing illusions is from *MC*. Montague, already severely agitated, has a fantastic vision of his companion Jonas rearing up to slay him as they travel in a coach through a storm. That vision is in fact a premonition borne out by subsequent events. The ‘curious optical illusion’, a ‘piece of pantomime which had so impressed his mind to be a real gesture, and not the working of his fancy’, anticipates the ‘presentiment and vague foreknowledge of impending doom’ that Montague feels after seeing off Pecksniff and just before his sudden rendezvous with Jonas on the path back to town (*MC* 606; 608). Mark that contrast between ‘real gesture’ and ‘the working of his fancy’; a distinction between these two things is not so much made as assumed: one thing is, one is not. The concession here, to hark back to Smith, is that the thing that is not may nevertheless be as potent as the thing that is.

The distinction, though, is in some ways facile. Fancy does not exist in abstraction; it has a context. Later on, Jonas, remorseless but fearful of capture, suffers presentiments of his own. In a passage reminiscent of Poe’s recently published ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’, ‘his own heart beat[s] Murder, Murder, Murder…’ and, looking in the mirror, he sees ‘a tell-tale face’ (682; 683). The murder is legible, he fancies, ‘broadly written on his face’ (682). The illusory displaces reality, his alibi becoming a parallel existence which his return, in a

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5 Barbara Hardy, among others, has also identified this resemblance in *Dickens and Creativity* (7).
remarkable inversion, threatens to destroy rather than complete. Whereas at first ‘He pictured in his mind…the tumbled bed, and he not in it, though believed to be’, soon, upon his return, ‘The passage was empty when his murderer’s face looked into it. He stole on to the door on tiptoe, as if he dreaded to disturb his own imaginary rest’ (682; 683). This, more than Jonas imagining that Montague will await him in his room, a Gothic staple, is the true horror: he is a double for whom there is no avatar to supplant. ‘He became in a manner his own ghost and phantom, and was at once the haunting spirit and the haunted man’ (681). By taking another’s life, he has forfeited access to easy domesticity, now alien – even the morning’s pottering about the house is foreboding – and must bear this testimony, almost a Mark of Cain, henceforth. He has, like Janus, whose name his so plainly connotes, a second face, ‘his murderer’s face’, that suggestive usage, which implies that he has, in murdering Montague, also murdered himself (682).

There is, to my mind, an even better example of Petroski’s contention in *Dombey and Son*. More than an omen of death, it brandishes its falsity, contains its falsity within it, and even, perhaps, is annealed by it. Before Carker carks it, struck on the railway line, he is struck by an uncanny portentous fear, ‘some visionary horror, unintelligible and inexplicable, associated with a trembling of the ground – a rush and sweep of something through the air’ (810). He recovers, just, but as the narrative tells us in a queer paratactic paradox: ‘It was not gone, it never had been there’ (810). What that means depends on how you parse the words – that is to say, on which side of the ambiguity you come down. Either the clauses have a logical relationship or the comma stands athwart two separate, contradictory assertions. Ostensibly his dread sensation cannot go because it never came, yet there follows a concession that it ‘left behind’ a ‘startling horror’. It had not come, it had never been there, yet it had left something behind. It is, as the second of the dual readings suggests, both there
and not there rather like the man upon the stair in ‘Antigonish’, or like Jonas’s invented, yet
to everyone else true, sleeping self. Indeed, this hints at the very opposite of the first reading:
not that it could not have gone because it had never come but that it could never go – could
linger, a psychic toxin – precisely because it never was. Being chimerical makes it vital and
irrefutable, not susceptible of being expunged. During rationality’s hasty inquest into the
irrational, reason is unwittingly surrendered.

There is a precursor of Carker’s dread in, to complete the circle, AN. Dickens has
arrived at Niagara Falls, or in the vicinity of Niagara Falls, having ‘strain[ed] my eyes in the
direction where I knew the Falls must be’. Upon disembarking from, as it also happens, a
train, he writes that ‘I heard the mighty rush of water, and felt the ground tremble underneath
my feet’ (199). Recall that Carker, a few years on, feels something ‘associated with a
trembling of the ground – rush and sweep of something through the air’. Tambling posits that
Carker is going through ‘what Derrida calls “a trace”, which precedes experience of [an
event]’ – appropriate concerning one afraid of being ‘traced’ (810) – and in the visit to
Niagara Falls it is as if there is a trace of that trace (Going Astray 116). Dickens presses on
toward the source of the tumult in a passage that is the literary equivalent of J.M.W. Turner
lashing himself to the mast like Odysseus and weathering the tempest. It is kinetic and
intense, disoriented and clamouring for orientation, which it claims only to lose it again in the
current, ‘the hurried water gathering strength’ (200). The passage, which it is in more ways
than one, begins with this paragraph:

The bank is very steep, and was slippery with rain, and half-melted ice. I hardly know how I
got down, but I was soon at the bottom, and climbing, with two English officers who were
crossing and had joined me, over some broken rocks, deafened by the noise, half-blinded by
the spray, and wet to the skin. We were at the foot of the American Fall. I could see an
immense torrent of water tearing headlong down from some great height, but had no idea of shape, or situation, or anything but vague immensity. (199)

It is not easy to tell whether the passage is bravura or merely wilful, but it is intense and verily overwhelming. In this part of it, Dickens is stumbling onto the stage of the Sublime. The cadences are as broken as the rocks; the tenses slip as Dickens and the officers must have, between present tense (I cannot forget a misreading of ‘The bank is very steep’ as having a *cinema verité* shakiness, not unlike ‘I saw them’ in the Venetian dungeon) and past. The ‘immense’/’immensity’ repetition, almost clumsily pleonastic, is Dickens getting his literary bearings, scrabbling for a handle or foothold on the experience. Dickens is trying to rise to the literary occasion, with, as I have insinuated, mixed results. He writes of ‘Niagara before me, lighted by the sun and by the moon, red in the day’s decline, and grey as evening slowly fell upon it’ but he might as well add that it is empurpled by his prose (200). It is worth noting the faintly antagonistic rift of duality between these points (sun/moon, red afternoon/grey twilight). We see many other dualities in the passage, notably between the ‘Light’ that ‘came rushing on Creation at the word of God’ – whose proxy Dickens presumably is, electing himself to God’s retinue (‘I felt how near to my Creator I was standing’) – and a kind of infernal darkness. Between these dualities, in fact, is the tension that makes the passage really interesting; they roil it, leave it ‘troubled yet, far down beneath the surface’ (200).

Indeed, it is this sort of tension that, perhaps more than anything else, makes all of Dickens’ writing really interesting to me. It is about this that I write when discussing *The Haunted Man*, that strangest of Dickens productions, in chapter three. Here in the Niagara passage, however, the Christmas books look a long way off. Upon finally surveying the Niagara Falls complete, Dickens writes that ‘the first effect, and the enduring one – instant
and lasting – of the tremendous spectacle, was Peace’ (200). He goes on to count the ways in which he feels ‘Peace’. But as with the contradictory conclusion to Carker’s daymare, there is something unstable here, not least Table Rock, the landform on which Dickens is standing and which frequently subsided. A capitalised ‘Peace’ is no bulwark against the tremendous force of the Falls; and that reinforcing capital, elevating a passing feeling to an abstract concept or poetic humour, seems intended to shore it up, so to speak. It seems a concession that the rest of the passage rebuts its assertion, for there is no peace.

Dickens is apprehending the Falls almost in spite of his sensory organs’ impairment. Dickens owns up to being ‘in a manner stunned, and unable to comprehend the vastness of the scene’. Over the next few hundred words he gallantly tries to redress this by looking at and describing ‘the cataracts from all points of view’, summoning them into manifold, torrential periods. I am particularly taken by ‘some great height’. ‘Some great height’ makes it seem as if he is ignorant of the waterfall’s height and provenance; turns it, for a moment, into something nebulous, unknown, even imponderable. Yet it is the very height Dickens descended from and would soon ascend again. The context of the waterfall has been elided by its ‘stunn[ing]’ effect. Dickens seems to have become estranged from his earlier perceptions, both aware of his situation (‘the foot of the American Fall’) and yet perpetuating a falsity, a distortion (he knows the ‘situation’!): ‘We were at the foot of the American Fall. I…had no idea of…situation’ reads like ‘it was not gone, it never had been there’. As I noted earlier, I shall return to the connotations that ‘estranged’ throws out like spray from a waterfall in the next chapter. Dickens does not himself overtly return to his estrangement but it abides in those irreconciled dualities. ‘But always,’ he writes near the end of the passage, ‘does the

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6 Melville alludes to these subsidences in Moby-Dick: ‘Almost in the same instant, with a thunder-boom, the enormous mass dropped into the sea, like Niagara’s Table-Rock into the whirlpool’ (324). James Barbour records that the the biggest collapse, which Melville was probably thinking of, took place on June 25th, 1850 (‘The Composition of Moby-Dick’ 207).
mighty stream appear to die as it comes down, and always from its unfathomable grave arises that tremendous ghost of spray and mist which is never laid (201). In that subtle ‘unfathomable’ is the crux of the passage. Here we find the ghost of the estrangement itself arising, never laid. The malcontents of thought linger, disturbing the ‘Peace’ earlier professed much as the waterfall disturbs its antecedents below.

It occurs to me that reading Dickens’ descriptions is not entirely dissimilar to this experience of the waterfall. At times one is ‘deafened’, ‘half-blinded’ and disoriented. The frequency of these assaults only increases when one tries to write a dissertation on Dickens, as I have found, and have not stopped finding. In one’s relative critical nonage, contending with this voluminous bequest of mostly excellent criticism is deflating as well as inspiring. But it is only so voluminous because Dickens’ merits are so numerous, never more so than in the descriptions, reading which has been a tonic for any despair. At their best these descriptions are just as magnificent as Niagara, and I have tried, in my modest way, to do justice to them here. That has meant trying to write in their spirit: if nothing else, this thesis should be lively, or at any rate, I hope, not too dull. It should also transmit the pleasure that moved me to write it, which is now beginning to seem a tremendous, foolhardy presumption. But only beginning, as this thesis is only beginning.
This chapter explores the matter of realism itself, sketching its two dominant constructions of and then mounting an argument for the relevance of a salient mode within one of those constructions, ostranenie (‘defamiliarisation’), to Dickens’ work. Carrying on from the suggestion in the introduction that ‘distortion’ or Lewes’s ‘Falsism’ was essential to Dickensian representation, I explore the ways in which defamiliarisation, itself portended by Dickens’ numerous remarks about ‘the romantic side of familiar things’, could make a represented thing seem ‘more real than reality itself’, as Smith put it. As I shall point out, distortion, or Fanger’s ‘deformation’, was the aim of defamiliarisation. My central argument is that Dickensian representation is so successful not in spite of its distortions, its falsity, but because of them.\(^7\) Here I shall try to show that not only was this so but that the ‘Falsism’ is in fact a better instrument of realism than ‘world-reflecting’ Realism. It seems to me that Dickens’ work is ‘world-creating’, which is to say defamiliarising; its emphasis on what Grahame Smith identifies as the ‘continued process of Dickens’s language’ foments what I note Shklovsky discussing: ‘experienc[ing] the process of creativity’ (G. Smith 159). If the reader is to ‘experience the process of creativity’ then it helps for the writer to possess a style that, like Dickens’ at his best, is fabulously extemporising. I have already looked at the germane aspects of Dickens’ style and shall return to them, especially in the last chapter. Finally, this chapter introduces the notion of hypotyposis, a mimetic trope that employs incongruous, fanciful illusions to convey reality.

Put reductively, which division into conceptual binaries never fails to do, there are two paradigms of mimesis: what Stephen Halliwell calls the ‘world-reflecting’ and ‘world-

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\(^7\) To repeat an earlier comment, I equate ‘success’ with being ‘real’, as I believe Smith and other Dickensians I cite do too. I acknowledge – I could hardly not acknowledge – the intractably problematic nature of words like ‘real’ and ‘reality’. Part of this chapter is unpacking what ‘realism’ means and how it is relevant to Dickens. Another part is demurring from those who, I humbly submit, bowdlerise the term so they can make rather specious arguments against it.
creating’ (or ‘heterocosmic’) paradigms (23). The former is ‘a response to a reality… that is believed to exist outside and independently of art’; the latter, ‘an imaginary world-in-itself… [defined by] fictional coherence or congruity’ (23). Mack Smith,\(^8\) referring to similar paradigms, writes of ‘correspondence’, a ‘word-to-world’ relationship, and ‘coherence’, a word-to-word one (2). These are, as Halliwell and Smith are eager to qualify, merely provisional heuristics. So, in its much larger way, is that section of the chapter. It tries to outline the difference between the ‘world-reflecting’ and ‘world-creating’ paradigms, the latter of which I favour in this thesis. I must give summary of the ‘world-creating’ paradigm so that I can discuss Shklovsky’s ‘defamiliarisation’, which in turn is there to precede the classical trope of hypotyposis. Hypotyposis is, I shall argue, a ‘world-creating’, defamiliarising trope that is realistic despite courting artificiality, the illusionistic and the fantastic – in short, the opposite of what is conventionally understood to be ‘realism’.

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‘Realism’ has the ambiguous honour of being something all writers want their works to achieve, but few want them to be examples of. Damian Grant has noted that the various branches of ‘realism’ have their etymological root in the Greek word ‘res, “thing”,’ supplementing this with Harry Levin’s term ‘“choisme”, “thing-ism”’ (43). ‘Thing-ism’, which Brooks also cites, is a nicely evocative – or, perhaps, nicely unevocative – term, connoting as it does both exactitude and a shrugging vagueness. The rub, the reason for the vagueness, is: what does one do with a ‘thing”? How does one represent it? And that is why I shall try to distinguish between realism and Realism, which has its own indigenous assumptions of what ‘thing-ism’ ought to be. The tenor of many writers’ attitudes toward

\(^8\) All subsequent mentions of ‘Smith’ in this chapter are references to Mack Smith. All mentions elsewhere are references to Grahame Smith, excepting brief references to the prisoner John Smith and Dickens’ friend Albert Smith in chapters two and three respectively. It is, I hope, always clear to which ‘Smith’ I am referring.
Realism and its ‘thing-ism’ is epitomised by Flaubert’s peremptory snort that ‘I hate what is conventionally called realism, though people regard me as one of its high priests’ (Stromberg 38). The clerical metaphor is, I think, apposite in this case. Doubted even by adherents, among whom various intramural quarrels have occurred, and strenuously repudiated by modern opponents, it is like the God of the Anglican Church (indeed, the American Katherine Kearns, discussing the ‘confusion’ of philosophical realists, characterises their position as ‘a sort of Episcopalian largesse, the sense that one can believe in God and not believe’ [49]). The reasons for this are plain. As Peter Brooks writes:

The lesson of much criticism and theory in the last decades of the twentieth century seemed to suggest that notions of representation, and especially representation that thinks of itself as an accurate designation of the world, are naive and deluded. (6)

An abiding trait of subsequent literary theory is a growing loss of faith in the ability of language to represent at all. Poststructuralism – which informs much of the ‘much criticism and theory’ – has done the most to tend this growth. As Pam Morris writes, poststructuralists like Lyotard believed that ‘realistic representation’ is inherently unsatisfying because too satisfying: it is intended ‘to produce a reassuring interpretation of reality in terms of predictability, unity, simplicity, and communicability’ (31). So, for example, when Luc Herman opens a chapter by pronouncing that ‘Deconstruction did not cause the death of realism criticism’, it is tacit that the high priests of poststructuralism were about to perform the last rites (208). To take another example, George Levine, discussing Middlemarch and Sketches by Boz, remarks almost as an aside that ‘neither of the[se]… insistently realistic texts turns out to be really realistic. Nor can any text be’ (Secularism 186). The breeziness of this confirms Brooks’s point. The notion that language has realistic potential is absurd, the anti-realists seem to say. But why should this be so? On what is this startling complacency
founded? It was not ever thus, as Levine implies: such texts were once taken to be ‘really realistic’. At the beginning of this chapter I want to alight on a few, dare one say it, representative quotes and ideas of Realism and the kindred ‘world-reflecting’ literary paradigm.

Champfleury, self-appointed mouthpiece of Realistic painting’s high priest Gustave Courbet, explained his theory of realist writing thus: ‘what I see enters my head, descends into my pen, and becomes what I have seen’ (Herman 10). That curious, unwitting inversion at the end of the sentence is telling. ‘Becomes what I have seen’ naturally – and, one would add, necessarily – has it backwards for a ‘sincériste’, as Champfleury called artists who cared nothing for form, only for content (those who cared about form were ‘formistes’ [Grant 26]). It only becomes what one sees when it is on the page and not before that, he would seem to be saying, implying writerly mediation. But Champfleury is not saying that. Indeed, his conception is curious enough on its own. It portrays the Realist as less a neutral observer than a mystical amanuensis, a Saint Matthew being visited by the angel. This conception of realism is interesting because redolent of older mimetic dispensations. George Herbert wrote his ‘Jordan’ poems to chastise the presumption of himself and other poets to embellish reality: ‘I sought out quaint words, and trim invention /…Curling with metaphors a plain intention, / Decking the sense…’ he writes in ‘Jordan (II)’, adding ‘Nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sunne’ (Gardner 133). This, one is given to understand, renders the poet a blasphemous upstart. Auerbach finds a similar awareness of the writer’s ontological place in ‘the Biblical stories’:

Their aim is not to bewitch the senses, and if nevertheless they produce lively sensory effects, it is only because [of] the moral, religious and psychological phenomena which are their sole concern. (14)
Writers ‘decking the sense’ (doing their ‘dutie / Not to a true, but a painted chair’, as Herbert writes in ‘Jordan [I]’) commit an infidelity not merely to reality but to the glory of God, because reality is God’s – or, rather, is God (Gardner 125). Likewise, Levine writes, George Eliot hewed to the belief that the ‘submission of the self to the voices of external reality was a condition of real knowledge (just as, for contemporary Victorian science, objectivity was a condition of acquiring the truth)’ (Secularism 25). He cites her ‘doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by the humble and faithful study of nature’, as opposed to ‘substituting vague forms, bred by imagination on the mists of feeling, in place of definite, substantial reality’ (28). This is doubly interesting because it connotes both one old dispensation (‘submission of the self’) from which Realism emanates and, through ‘vague forms’ another, a fundamentally Platonic dispensation. Another theorist of Realism, Georg Lukacs, articulates this in his ‘Art and Objective Truth’:

> The more ‘artless’ a work of art, the more it gives the effect of life and nature […], the more clearly it exemplifies an actual concentrated reflection of its times and the more clearly it demonstrates that the only function of its form is to express this objectivity, this reflection of life. (Frow 15)

Lukacs’s criticism, like any that invokes ‘objectivity’ and ‘reflection’ as criteria for art, is predicated on what Morris calls ‘eternal, transcendent realities’ (50). One concedes that for Plato, the intractable problem of mimesis was that it could not ‘express this objectivity, this reflection of life’. In The Republic, for example, Socrates asks if, when one looks at a bed ‘from the side or straight on, or any other way, does it at all differ from itself, or does it not differ at all, though it appears differently?’ (330). To which his interlocutor answers, with Socrates’ implicit agreement, that it does not. There are, in short, big differences between Plato’s conception of mimesis and the Realist one – namely, Plato’s assertion that writers were ‘poor imitators’, at ‘two removes’ from the universal ‘ideal Forms’ (rather than ‘vague
forms’) by the mediation of our perceptions and their own mediation of that mediation; Realists, however, held that artists could be absolute imitators (Morris 50). But there is a fraternity of thought among the differences. Courbet sounds very Platonic when he promulgates that ‘it’s dishonest to write poetry’ (in Grant 26). ‘Poetry’, for the Realists and Plato alike, was the syrup of style poured over content.

These older dispensations were also compounded with a much newer one. Levine’s analogy with ‘contemporary Victorian science’ is not incidental. An enduring interpretation of what Brooks terms ‘the realist vision’ yolks it with the dominant nineteenth-century paradigms of science. Literature, craving respectability, sought the legitimating rigour of scientific method – it sought to marry up. Indeed, writing in 1886 about the realists’ and naturalists’ ‘art of observation rather than imagination’, Emile de Vogue comments that ‘jealous of the rigour of scientific procedure, the [realist or naturalist] writer proposes to instruct us by a perpetual analysis of feelings and of acts’ (Grant 31-32). One finds abundant examples of de Vogue’s sentiments in the literature of the period. ‘Because the true world which science reveals to us,’ French polymath Ernest Renan wrote in 1848-49, ‘is much superior to the fantastic world created by the imagination’ (Realism, Naturalism, and Symbolism 26). Once again there is a partitioning of ‘science’ and ‘imagination’, ‘the true’ and ‘the fantastic’, just as there was in the quotes from Eliot. Grant, citing Roland Stromberg, asserts that ‘Coleridge’s “shaping spirit of the Imagination” had been replaced by the “shaping strength” of science’ (39). The brothers Goncourt announced in 1864 that ‘the novel has taken upon itself the researches and duties of science’, a statement epitomised by Zola, with his belief that the scientific novelist was engaged in the ‘conquest of nature’, the tabulation and taxonomising of reality (Grant 38, 40). ‘Imagination,’ Zola wrote, ‘is no
longer the novelist’s most important faculty’ (Grant 30). It hardly needs saying what he thought had replaced it.

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Lukács’s contentions on realism were put in the service of a broader historicism, a socio-political teleology. ‘History moves toward a predetermined goal,’ Frow paraphrases, ‘and this goal is the realization of an “objective rationality”: the process is rational, and the writer must reflect this rationality…’ (13). This distinguishes it from the historicism of someone like Auerbach, which identifies no ‘predetermined goal’ for this development. Auerbach’s historicism identifies the development of literature from the essentially macrocosmic biblical and Homeric narratives to the microcosmic ‘serious treatment of everyday reality’ apparent in nineteenth-century fiction (491). But it is instructive that both critics, both cleaving toward a ‘world-reflecting’ (or ‘correspondence’) paradigm of mimesis, expound historicist arguments. Lehan writes that ‘literary naturalism’ had an ‘analogue’ in the ‘old historicism’, since both ‘depended on a belief in the linearity of history, the necessity of cause and effect, and the idea of a verifiable narrative’ (15-16). Conversely, the Russian Formalists, cleaving toward a ‘world-creating’ (or ‘coherence’) paradigm, disclaim historicism. They expound, rather, a constructionist dialectics of Smith’s ‘word-to-word’ relationship: ‘a kind of accretion of broken prohibitions’, as Frow calls it (86). That is, as Smith writes:

Dynamic, innovative expression, rising in response to an automatized mode, also becomes automatic in readers’ responses and is soon replaced by a newer expression that is dynamic in relation to the now traditional one’. (8)
‘Dynamic, innovative expression’: I want to emphasise this. For the Russian Formalists, a work should not be ‘more “artless”’ but more artful: style matters, in other words. Smith reiterates this point in the conclusion to his treatise: ‘Harry Levin writes that “yesterday’s realism is today’s convention”… for realism is not a static form: it is a mode of literary change’ (241). Brooks seconds Smith, noting that ‘the founder of modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure’ analogised language with our system of money (14). That much is obvious, of course: we speak of ‘coining’ new words, ‘minting’ new images. For ‘the great realist novelists,’ Brooks goes on to assert, ‘words… are part of a circulatory system subject to inflation and deflation, that meanings may be governed by the linguistic economies and marketplaces of which they are part’ (14). Language, particularly clichés, is subject to inflationary pressures (except that, unlike in economics, interest rates go down rather than up in response). One finds an incipient awareness of this in Flaubert. Brooks writes that Monsieur Homais in Madame Bovary ‘is constructed of nothing but clichés’ and that the Dictionary of Received Ideas, that inventory of ossified expression, ‘confirms a fully disabused, or deconstructed, understanding of language’ (63). So, for example, Flaubert, countering Christopher Ricks’s argument that clichés have a short shelf life (a cliché with a decidedly long shelf life), remarks of ‘candour’ that it is ‘always “disarming”’ and of congratulations that they are ‘always “hearty”, “sincere”, etc.’ (Ricks 358; Flaubert 297, 299).

Quite how different this is from the ‘objective’, ‘world-reflecting’ paradigm is evident in a letter Flaubert wrote to Louise Colet in 1852. He declared that he wanted to write a book ‘about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the internal strength of its style, just as the earth, suspended in a void, depends on nothing external for its support,’ a book with ‘almost no subject’, or, at any rate, an ‘invisible’ one (in
Flaubert’s dream was quixotic – just as the earth, after all, does depend on external things for its support, words must always be ballasted with referentiality – but it was not wholly unserious. A strain of Flaubert’s thinking, the idea for a book ‘held together by the internal strength of its style’, infects many Romantic and post-Romantic writers. Whereas Herbert lamented of his poetry that ‘nothing could seem too rich to clothe the sunne’, Shelley, in Hazlitt’s waspish caricature, ‘determined to “elevate and surprise”’ and ‘distort[ing] everything from what it was’, ‘would swear that it was black’ (211). The writer ceases to be a ‘poor imitator’ and becomes an ‘artificer’, in Philip Sidney words, who ‘bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature’ (100). The writer makes the ‘ideal Forms’. The extreme version of this tendency construes the artist as a kind of God. Brooks notes Stephen Dedalus’s ideal in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: ‘the artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails’ (Brooks 198). The artist ceases to be only a ‘humble and faithful’ minister to God’s ‘handiwork’, to nature – what Herbert called ‘a sweetnesse readie penn’d’ – and becomes ‘world-creating’. Halliwell notes that the originator of the term ‘aesthetics’, the eighteenth-century German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, conceived of the poet as, among other things, ‘a human maker on analogy with the divine creator himself’ (9). Baumgarten’s contemporary Shaftesbury conceived of the artist as a ‘second maker’ (God being the first); Bellori before him conceived of the artist as one who ‘“imitates” God himself (Halliwell 360; 356).

Scientific procedure and attempts at exclusively denotative prose – Zola’s ‘screen [of] plain glass, very thin, very clear, which aspires to be so perfectly transparent’ – were no basis for literary representation (Grant 28). Perhaps this is merely symptomatic of ‘the crisis in confidence in the scientific account of reality which occurred late in the nineteenth century’
(Grant 43). But I submit that it pre-dates this; indeed, Keats’s sentiments about ‘cold philosophy’ I discuss in chapter three tell us as much. Emily Dickinson, to take only a minor example, writes in a poem on spring that: ‘A color stands abroad / On solitary hills / That science cannot overtake, / But human nature feels’ (her italics, surprisingly [259]). No, art would ‘make its appeal through the senses’, Conrad writes, ‘to our capacity for delight and wonder’ (232; 231). Sensory impressions, not ‘facts’ or ‘ideas’, would be literary art’s bulwark against irrelevance: ‘to show [a ‘rescued fragment’ of the world’s] vibration, its colour, its form; and… reveal the substance of its truth—disclose its inspiring secret…’ (232). One would approach this undertaking with ‘tenderness and faith’ (my italics [232]).

It is ‘the shaping spirit of the Imagination’, not the ‘shaping strength’ of science, that predominates; the writer does indeed imitate God, ‘imitating’ the way Coleridge also postulated, ‘by artistic remaking’ (Halliwell 366). Morris makes the now fairly banal point that Realism emerged concurrently with photography, saying that ‘this coincidence may well have encouraged a pictorial or photographic model of correspondence’ (5). But there is an alternative mechanical comparison to be made, one pertinent to the distinction I am trying to draw. Robert Alter, discussing the concept of ‘phantasmagoria’ in the nineteenth century, nominates the magic lantern, ‘an exhibition of optical illusions’, as its seminal influence (30). ‘Phantasmagoria,’ he continues, ‘is the exact antithesis of the guidebook representation… in which everything is mapped out, ordered… as a system’ (30). In the same way, one infers, the magic lantern is the exact antithesis of the linear verisimilitude of photography, affiliated as it is with the ‘mapped out, ordered’, systematic representations of Realism. Moreover, it bewitched nineteenth-century writers like Dickens; indeed, Morris herself, like apparently all critics of Dickens, quotes his figure of London as ‘that magic lantern’ (22). The suggestiveness of the magic lantern comes from the ‘optical illusions’ Alter speaks of. Both
concepts feature in the following paragraphs. My conjecture is that much post-Romantic fiction, and some of that especially, increasingly engages in a project of ‘mak[ing] you see’, of cultivating illusion to show reality – of, before all, ‘world-creating’. As Brooks notes, ‘realism’ (of any kind) is a term ‘resolutely attached to the visual, to those works that seek to inventory the immediate perceptible world’; it is, he goes on later in the book, ‘highly visual, invested in the faculty of sight, in a viewing of the things and the milleux people move amid, rub up against’ (16; 223). Levine goes even further, asserting that ‘Realism is an illusion, just as representational art is illusory’ in the deployment of perspective and the rendering of light (189). The latter, Levine perceptively remarks, achieves its purpose ‘just by not making the brush strokes look like the thing being represented’ (Secularism 189).

What Levine means here is encapsulated by James Wood in How Fiction Works: ‘Aristotle’s original formulation of mimesis, in the Poetics’, with its valuing of convincing impossibility over unconvincing possibility, emphasises not ‘simple verisimilitude or reference’ but ‘mimetic persuasion’ (179). Writers, like painters, ‘convince’ their audience that what is palpably not the object, just words on a page or paint on a canvas, represents it. Therefore I think Barthes errs in his essay ‘The Reality Effect’ when, identifying what he sees as the origins of modern literary description, he adduces the ‘functional genre… the epideictic’, ‘intended to excite the admiration of the audience (and no longer to persuade it)’ (143). Surely no such division between ‘exciting’ and ‘persuading’ exists, for how is one possible without the other? Nobody, when watching a magic trick, is excited yet not persuaded (Socrates condemns art and ‘conjuring’ both for just this reason [336]). This is what Henry James meant by his phrase ‘the intensity of illusion’, which Wayne Booth expatiates on in The Rhetoric of Fiction:
‘The intensity of illusion’, [James] tells us again and again, is the ultimate test. The mere illusion of reality of itself is not enough…. Whatever intensity is achieved must be an intensity of the illusion that genuine life has been presented. (43-44)

Barthes further contends that ‘by posing the referential as real, by pretending to follow it in a submissive fashion, realistic description avoids being reduced to fantasmatic activity’, such as that practised, he says, before the nineteenth century (145). But Brigid Lowe emphatically rebuts Barthes’s assumption that modern literary representation, even pseudo-‘transparent’ prose, is not engaged in a similarly ‘fantasmatic activity’. ‘It is not at all clear,’ she writes, ‘why the description of familiar, common and representative scenes – quite as much as fantastic scenarios… cannot put things before the reader’s eyes’ (86). In short, as Levine suggested, Realism is not actually real, and criticism like Barthes’s tends to perpetuate those ‘naïve and deluded’ notions even while repudiating them. Kearns, integrating the tendency of fictional texts to bear false witness to any style or program their authors might espouse, writes: ‘the literary process itself destabilizes the positivist program of fact-gathering, for things that appear to be facts can elide and metamorphose with the intricacy of the language game’ (11). In one sense this is manifest. If ‘the literary process’ did not do this, the whole anti-realism critical edifice would be invalidated: realism would be real. Too much criticism of realism ignores this corollary, as Barthes’s does, or carries on, as Kearns’ does – and Levine’s and Rorty’s too in the introduction to this thesis – as if it were some trenchant discovery.

A problem with the Barthes-Kearns antipathy to realism, I think, is that they are complicit in the Realistic preference for ‘science’ over ‘imagination’, the ‘true’ over the ‘fantastic’: they perceive avowedly mimetic fiction to be attempting the ‘communication of information’, not of ‘imaginative experience’ (Lowe 83). Lowe argues that, insofar as these
binaries are not crudely simplistic, the latter surely not very far at all, ‘imagination’ is the shaping spirit and the shaping strength of fiction. She concedes that ‘Barthes seems to be partly aware of language’s potential for… conjurings of imaginative experience’ (83). But, she writes, ‘[f]or Barthes the paradigm classic realist text leaves little for the reader to do but understand the words’ (92). Lowe counters that, for the reader, fiction is a ‘real of sensual and experiential pleasure, a “phantom” as Bronte calls it, of real experience’ (94). (Plato, too, uses ‘phantoms’, along with ‘phantasies’ and ‘phantasma’ [Melberg 11].) The idea here is of a piece with Wood’s ‘mimetic persuasion’. It is an engagement of the reader, and goes back to the time of Plato and Aristotle:

The traditions of mimeticism are firmly aligned with a recurrent Greek tendency to judge the impressiveness of artistic representations partly in terms of their success in drawing the hearer or viewer into a strong engagement with the possibilities of experience they depict. (My italics [Halliwell 21])

I want to return to this ‘strong engagement’ in the final section of this chapter, where I discuss hypotyposis. Before that, however, I must extend the discussion of formalism’s ‘world-creation’ to ‘defamiliarisation’, Viktor Shklovsky’s concept of aesthetic success. ‘Defamiliarisation’ seems to me the underwriter of hypotyposis’s efficacy as a trope, and the latter cannot be viewed outside of that context.

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When I was a child I can remember having a brief fascination with questions that required, to use what then seemed a glamorous, occult phrase, lateral thinking. These questions, which in retrospect look like disappointed riddles, occasioned a pleasurable windfall of surprise when one came upon their answers. The secret of their effectiveness was that unlike riddles, to take
the comparison slightly further, their answers were, at least to the simple questions fit for
duller children, obvious from the beginning. To a question such as ‘what weighs more, a
tonne of iron or a tonne of feathers?’, the answer was obvious in more ways than one. The
iron, naturally. My juvenile brain, not much more agile than the objects under consideration,
had cracked the case. Iron beat feathers in this rogue rock-iron-feathers game. Feathers
cannot be heavy. Indeed, that young version of me would not have been alone in finding a
tonne of feathers truly unimaginable. Not in the world’s biggest roosting site nor in its biggest
natural history museum nor in the entirety of the *The Birds* could there possibly be a tonne of
feathers. Perhaps a quilt that wrapped the Opera House, say, as if in one of Christo’s stunts,
would be in the tonne-of-feathers ballpark. The rapid extirpation of moas in New Zealand
might have yielded a tonne of feathers.

At that age, however, I was unfamiliar with colonial slaughter and Christo. ‘Feathers’
and ‘weight’ were tantamount to an oxymoron. Whereas a tonne of iron – well, one had only
to look around. Iron was the population-bearing stuff of the vast conurbation around me. It
was the difference between skyscrapers and thatched cottages, adobes and yurts. That I could
apprehend the existence of thatched cottages, adobes and yurts about as well I could
apprehend the existence of the word ‘conurbation’ hardly mattered. Iron was heavy, and I
knew it. Yet by alighting on that cannily irrelevant bit of misdirection, the comparison
between iron and feathers, I had overlooked the mutual annullment taking place between
‘tonne’ and ‘tonne’. My error was to assume that I knew what a tonne of anything was like.
This was how these questions – ‘conundrums’ might do more justice to the modishness of
their origins – worked, and worked me over. They thrived on covert prejudices. In this way
they were salutary. Once one recognised or was told the answer, that local prejudice – and
others, if one grasped the principle of the question – would have been identified and
temporarily neutralised. Nobody experiencing this would then sleep under an iron quilt or try
to make cars out of feathers. But for everybody who did experience it, their understanding of
what iron and feathers can be – which is to say, what they are – was enhanced.

What I have just outlined is the process of art as Viktor Shklovsky saw it. Explaining
it is not as straightforward. A problem with Shklovsky’s work is that one feels its rightness
without being able to employ anything more cogent than obtuse platitudes to account for it.
One is reduced to the dialectical position of Saint Augustine on time, knowing what it is and
why it is true until one is asked to explain it. Evidently, Shklovsky was too. As Fredric
Jameson remarks, ‘characteristically, Shklovsky does not conclude; he is temperamentally
allergic to metaphysical assertions’ (79). Shklovsky, with his various explications and
applications of one simple idea, appears to be a hedgehog but is actually much more the fox.
His prose is discursive and belletristic; he thinks as a writer does, feeling first for aesthetic
contours rather than thematic architectonics. Unlike his contemporaries Vladimir Propp or
Roman Jakobson, for example, he never erects a theoretical trellis for his ideas and readings
to grow on. It is in his encounters with writing that he is a brilliant critic: his ‘theory of prose’
is just the sum of these encounters. Even at its most abstract, it is buoyed on the thermals of
textual appreciation.

It is, therefore, hard to extrapolate anything systematic from his criticism. Moreover,
the charge of frivolousness has often rumbled around him. Jakobson held that ostranenie, a
term he alleged Shklovsky had purloined from the Formalist patriarch Osip Brik, was, in
Douglas Robinson’s words, a term that ‘should not be taken too seriously’ (80, 268n). It was
as loose and mercurial as Shklovsky himself. In fairness, signs of slipshod methodology and
unseriousness were marked in Formalists other than Shklovsky. Victor Erlich called Boris
Eikhenbaum ‘not a methodologist par excellence. He was capable of acute insights, as long as he dealt with purely literary matters....’ (133). This could apply to Shklovsky as well. But Erlich goes even further about Shklovsky, alluding to him as a capricious iconoclast, ‘a rebel...a reckless Bohemian’ (67). Shklovsky – whose ‘reading was wide but spotty. Erudition was never his forte’ – ‘always’, in the words of his sometime acolyte G. Gukovskij, whom Erlich quotes with approval,

worked by intuition[;] he was apt to misstate some details, to construct his theories above and beyond historical data... Both defects were outweighed by the consistency and freshness of his views on art. In his hasty and brilliant formulas he embodied the yearnings of Russian scholarly and literary thought in the Futurist era with a clarity and pungency hardly paralleled by any of his contemporaries. (Erlich 133)

Robinson is more disobliging still, though his reproof too is leavened with admiration for Shklovsky’s puckish impudence, his talismanic centrality to Russian Formalism. He calls Shklovsky ‘a devious writer’ whose ‘rhetorical deviousness’ in his later work on ostranenie ‘is sheer devious fun’ (92-93). This actually comports, or does not entirely discomport, with Shklovsky’s estimate. Shklovsky saw himself, and ostranenie itself, as the knight in chess, which ‘moves in a L-shaped manner because it is forbidden to take the straight road’ (Knight’s Move 3). The genius of the knight is that its occasionally cumbersome, laggard progress, which also includes the ability to vault other pieces, is unique. The knight is not bound by the linearities of the rook and the bishop and their composite, the queen.

Only the knight, then, can attack the pivotal queen without being threatened by her: only it can grasp the nettle. To attack with another piece requires the mobilisation of further pieces in support; three or four pieces usually are required to make sure she does not escape, and at least one of those usually must be sacrificed. In other words, queens dominate the
structure of the board and its pieces much as conventions dominate thinking about any aesthetic matter (‘There are many reasons for the strangeness of the knight’s move, the main one being the conventionality of art, about which I am writing’ [KM 3]). The thinking is done on the conventions’ terms and the game played on the queens’. But the knight alone can change the latter, and Shklovsky likewise sought to attack one of the former: namely, that ‘the purpose of the image’ is to make the unfamiliar familiar. This is not so, Shklovsky holds, and turns the proposition on its head: it is not to make the unfamiliar familiar, ‘to draw our understanding closer to that which this image stands for, but rather to allow us to perceive the object in a special way...’ (10). The image must be an antidote to automatisation, that baleful symptom of familiarity.

Automatisation is pervasive, as Shkovsky could attest. In his scarifying memoir-cum-parable of revolutionary Saint Petersburg in the midst of a torrid winter (‘the Arctic Circle became a reality’ [13]), he wrote that ‘when the pressure is enormous, it obliterates the differences between a hardness of straw and a hardness of iron. It all takes a single shape’ (14). While such an obliteration would presumably have made it easier to answer any lateral thinking question about iron and straw (or feathers), it connives at the same end as the one the question would try to counter: obscuring perception. For Shklovsky, this imaginative poverty is more obscene than many of the kinds of material poverty he depicts. Moreover, while it was a symptom of the circumstances, it was also, he implies, a cause, an enabler of them. This aesthetic matter was also a moral one, as I suggested in the introduction that it was for Dickens. It is an implication of Shklovsky’s arguments that is seldom noted: ostranenie is edifying. I alluded to this in my anecdote. The more we ‘saw’, the more we should try to ‘see’. By noting this, I do not wish to engage in a debate over whether aesthetics can be edifying, merely to highlight that Shklovsky appeared to believe they could be, after a
fashion. There is another point about automatisation, this perceptual entropy, that Shklovsky does not mention: it is also linguistic entropy. As Erlich, summarising *ostranenie*, writes, ‘by bringing together disparate notions, the poet gives a *coup de grace* to the verbal cliche and to the stock responses attendant upon it’ (177). It could just as easily be the other way round: perceptual cliche and the stock words and phrases attendant upon *it*. Either way, to make a point that should not need making, the verbal is hand in glove with the perceptual. The metaphor ‘hand in glove’ itself illustrates this. It does nothing special to impress on the reader my meaning. Like the note in place of a missing file in an archive, it represents without yielding apprehension, with making its referent live on the page. To change figures, it is a tyre whose innumerable torsions have reduced its purchase.

As Sheldon notes, Shklovsky, countering Trotsky’s assertion that ‘the word is the “phonetic shadow of the deed”’, declared that ‘the word is not a shadow but a thing’ (*KM* viii). The word, the ‘image’, is not a mere helpmeet, an intermediary between reader and object; it is more akin to a private detective who uncovers some scandalous piece of intelligence about an object, who sees it in a way others do not. Yet it is not a corollary of *ostranenie* that the strangeness itself must be cultivated and fetishised, as if the essence of literary wit were one of those creative writing exercises in which the student has to write a paragraph comparing, say, sophisticated financial instruments to a hippotamus. Literature is not an estrangement arms race. Indeed, it is better to adduce examples that are as far as can be from wilful strangeness. That wonderful little grace of Shklovsky’s about the frigid weather – ‘the Arctic Circle became a reality’ – is an example of an image that ‘deforms’, to use Fanger’s parlance, without being wilful, without resorting to an input of extraneous phenomena. If an historian or a memoirist, such as a later version of Shklovky himself, were to say anachronistically that ‘all of St Petersburg had climbed into a freezer’, he would be
invoking an extraneous object, the freezer, in what is really an implicit simile (‘Living in that winter was like living in a freezer’), with only the slight peculiarity of ‘climbed’ estranging the central metaphor’s triteness. But the Arctic Circle is, one hazards without any expertise on such matters, a big influence on the weather in its metropolitan satellite St Petersburg. As a gloss of the weather patterns in St Petersburg, Shklovsky’s line has a terse utility. Yet it is so strange, strange in a way the freezer simile could not be. How does a geographical location ‘become a reality’? It is, surely, always a reality, and a reality to the city of St Petersburg most of all. In fact, what Shklovsky does here is simulate the very perceptual automatisation the average St Petersburg resident suffers from as this unprecedented coldwave comes on. For him or her, cold is by the by, winter a routine hardship much as feudalism and tsarist absolutism were. Although the cold was a reality, it was a reality that had been assimilated. It took this extraordinary weather event to make the cold palpable again. That is what the image registers. A big part of its effectiveness comes from the ostensible simplicity on which it hinges. The plainness and lightness of ‘became’ as the verb make the tremendous cold seem to the residents, and to us, an in media res job: without knowing how it came to this, we have found ourselves amid a full-scale annexation by the cold, under the jackboot of winter. The place through which explorers had long sought a passage is now sending an expedition of its own to find a passage south, as if it desired a way to unite with Antarctica in polar solidarity.

What we have here is ‘an artifact that has been intentionally removed from the domain of automatized perception’ (Theory 12). What makes it exemplary is that, aside from its wit, it represents, as I noted before, others ‘experiencing the process of creativity’: ‘seeing’ the Arctic Circle – or the cold: it makes no difference which – not ‘recognising’ it (Theory 6). We find the reverse in the Boz sketch ‘Vauxhall Gardens by Day’, where Boz, entering the Gardens, looks at their ‘disenchanted’ contents and notes that ‘we just recognised
them, and that was all’ (129). The effect of Shklovsky’s phrase is the effect Dickens seeks and aspires to in his writing. In Shklovsky’s case, it is perceiving ‘the Arctic Circle’, the node of contexts that presupposes Shklovsky’s image, in a new context, which, in this first encounter, seems to be not a context but ‘a reality’. ‘Became’, then, has dual meanings, or rather dual subjects. Parsing the image ‘the Arctic Circle became a reality’, one finds that there is a kind of perceptual hypallage occurring: the true subject is the ostensible object, the greater populace of St Petersburg, and a paraphrase of the image would read ‘we became aware of the Arctic Circle’s reality’. The indefinite article is appropriate since ‘reality’ here merely denotes the ascendent context at that moment of perception. To ‘become a reality’ is to usurp the erstwhile ascendent context, or contexts. The bigger the gap between the new context and the old – and here it is as big as the gap between absence and presence, otherness and acquaintance – the bigger the thrill to the defamiliarising coup. What is important to remember is that familiarity does not preclude estrangement: indeed, it is a predicate of estrangement. Familiarity is really just a complex of fortified associations. The measure of aesthetic success, at least as far as ‘defamiliarisation’ goes, is the strength of the fortifications one is breaching. I was familiar with feathers and iron; Shklovsky, or the implied resident of St Petersburg, was familiar with the Arctic Circle. Our familiarity made us more susceptible to astonishment at the defamiliarising tropes. We were like passengers on a plane who took their altitude, of which they had only a partial understanding to begin with, entirely for granted – could ‘recognise’ it but no longer ‘see’ it – until a door opened and they were sucked out.

But Shklovsky’s critical enterprise continually begs the question of whether ‘defamiliarisation’ is ‘Art’ or ‘device’: the principle of aesthetic success or just one means to it. If the former, it follows that literature really is no more than an estrangement arms race.
Shklovsky appears to suggest the former. ‘The device of enstrangement is not peculiar to Tolstoi.... In my opinion, enstrangement can be found almost anywhere (i.e., wherever there is an image),’ he wrote in “Art as Device” (Theory 9). Stacy assents to this, declaring that ‘Shklovsky himself...clearly implies that ostranenie includes all techniques whereby the artist portays or describes – and thereby causes us to see – something in a fresh, defamiliarized way’ (39). But when in 1966 the elderly Shklovsky revisited his article and dutifully recanted the concept of ostranenie, he noted that the concept ‘seemed to me a phenomenon common to Romantic, realistic, and so-called modernist art’ (Robinson 79). Carlo Ginzburg asks whether the term should ‘be considered as coterminous with artistic practice in general, as Shklovsky suggested, or should we understand it as a procedure bound up with a particular literary tradition?’ (4). Ginzburg hews, in his circuitous way, to the second consideration. As he sees it, Shklovsky’s theory is founded on Russian texts, and in particular on Tolstoy. In this paradigm, Tolstoy is the inheritor, by way of Voltaire and other French Enlightenment writers, of Marcus Aurelius’ ‘quest for true causal principles as an antidote to false images’, and ‘Defamiliarization, in this tradition, is the means by which we overcome appearances and arrive at a deeper understanding of reality’ (18). This is not the first attempt to identify the historical lineage of ostranenie. Usually quoted in this connection – by, for that matter, Shklovsky himself, who by 1966 had become aware of it – is Novalis’s affirmation that ‘the art of making things in a pleasing way strange, making them alien and at the same time familiar and attractive – in this consists Romantic poetics’ (Robinson 79). There were more recent, and certainly more direct, antecedents. James M. Curtis, in his seminal article ‘Bergson and Russian Formalism’, notes the real affinities between Shklovsky and the philosopher who had written less than two decades earlier, in his treatise Laughter, that ‘art has no other object than to brush aside...the conventionally and socially accepted generalities, in short, all that masks reality from us.’ (111). Shklovsky cited Bergson in one of his articles
on Charlie Chaplin, and his ‘friend Lev Yakubnsky associates the very important word “automatization” with Bergson’ (Curtis 112). There are many other circumstantial affinities that, taken together, establish ‘a Bergsonian resonance in the formalists’ context’ (113). The concepts of ‘seeing’ and ‘recognising’ posited by Bergson were later adopted by Shklovsky and, as I indicated earlier, are essential to his own concept of ostranenie.

Proust, on the other hand, is operating within a different paradigm, one that could easily, though incorrectly, be subsumed into the ample portfolio of ostranenie. Proust appears to be ‘trying to preserve the freshness of appearances against the intrusion of ideas, by presenting things “in the order of perception”’, which is the reverse, or so Ginzburg thinks anyway, of ostranenie (18). The phrase of Proust’s occurs in a passage Ginzburg studies, the passage in which Proust’s narrator finds a resemblance between Madame de Sevigne and the fictional Impressionist Elstir, quoting the letter in which de Sevigne ““came across a thousand chimeras””; Proust, with Ginzburg nodding in the background, suggests that this perception is as veracious as, and certainly more potent than, a more sober, causal explanation: namely, that moonlight had come over the figures she perceives (18). Interestingly, Jameson, writing a few decades earlier, had cited the very same passage from Proust, though in a different translation (thus he quotes ““a thousand phantoms”” [54]). (One can only guess that the one eminent thinker simply had not read the other, for Jameson is nowhere mentioned in Ginzburg’s capacious notes.) As Jameson puts it:

The implication [is] that the abstract understanding (an explanation through cause-and-effect) is a kind of poor substitute for perception, that there is a kind of interference between a purely intellectual knowledge of a thing and some genuine, spontaneous, visionary experience of it.... It is at the same time part of a general feeling in the modern world that life has become abstract, that reason and theoretical knowledge have come to separate us from a genuine existential contact with things and the world. (54-55)
Jameson, who does not distinguish Proust’s object from Shklovsky’s and Tolstoy’s, also notes that this goes for criticism too, since Proust’s passage is less narrative than an act of criticism. Proust is essaying Shklovsky’s ‘knight’s move’.

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James Wood concludes that realism ‘cannot be mere verisimilitude…but what I must call lifeness: life on the page, life brought to different life by the highest artistry’ (186). As I have shown, James, too, put much store by ‘the illusion that genuine life has been presented’. Taken alone, these remarks could mean anything. Indeed, it may be a valid stricture on this thesis that it conscripts such remarks without attending to the nuances of their context. But I want to argue that ‘lifeness’ is predicated on illusion, falsity, and I think there is ample evidence to support this argument. My reading of Wood and James certainly comports with the classical tradition of mimesis criticism. Halliwell writes that:

> the persuasive vividness of a mimetic work or performance is more than the achievement of a specious surface. It involves the creation of something that, through its sense of life, can affect the viewer or hearer emotionally too: in the case of the hymn, it is a matter of the power to ‘bewitch’ or ‘enchant’. (his italics this time [21])

To give the object represented ‘life’, Halliwell, like Wood and James, means, the writer must ‘make the stone feel stony’. Bitzer’s anatomy of the horse is ‘hopeless’ because bereft of ‘life’. The question remains, though, of how a writer is to do this. And here is where I want to concentrate on hypotyposis. Roland Barthes alludes to ‘a specific figure, hypotyposis, whose function was “to put things before the hearer’s eyes”’ (145-46). No reference is supplied, but the Oxford English Dictionary describes the function of hypotyposis the same way (‘bringing it, as it were, before the eyes of the hearer or reader’). So does The Cambridge History of
Literary Criticism, which calls hypotyposis ‘the supreme elocutionary achievement of the rhetorician… bringing its object to the reader’s or listener’s mind with such force that it is experienced as if before one’s eyes’ (193). Indeed, there is a rich fund of like descriptions in the classics. As James Ker writes, ‘Quintilian in his Institutio oratoria explains that [hypotyposis] “shows itself to the eyes of the mind in some way”’ (344-45).

Earlier still than Quintilian, Aristotle admonished that ‘the words, too, ought to set the scene before our eyes’, which he later paraphrases as ‘making our hearers see things’ (Barnes 2251, 2252). What is notable about all these descriptions is their peculiarly synaesthetic quality. The reader or auditor of what Ann Vasaly calls ‘vivid description’, seeing only by hearing, is itself at a kind of Platonic remove (102). And not just one. For Aristotle, the way to get us to see what we hear is to ‘represent things as in a state of activity’; ‘things’, including ‘inanimate things’, ‘are made into living beings’ (2252-53). An example of what he means might be the line from Macbeth, ‘the Norweyan banners flout the sky’ (55). It is, patently, anthropomorphic. But saying that does not quite explain why it is has ‘life’. A banner, like a flag, is acted upon: flown, blown, storm-tossed and so on. In Shakespeare’s image, though, it ‘flouts’ (gods, gravity, the elements) and rides the wind. The trick is a reversal much much like that I referred to in Shklovsky’s ‘The Arctic Circle became a reality’. The ‘banner’ is now the acting subject rather than the acted-upon object, and is flaunting that agency like a child that has just learned how to walk. The banner has been emancipated – from preconceptions, even from reality itself (indeed, by flouting the sky it is flouting reality) – and is revelling in its new freedom. It is given a temporary life, a life it does not have outside the image. Aristotle’s understanding of rhetorical representation was, in other words, that we see something in its fullest representation by hearing it described as
being utterly different from what it is. Aristotle also believed that the Sun revolved around the Earth.

Just as, apocryphally, Inuits have so many words for ‘snow’, the act of putting things before the hearer’s eyes, the reader’s eyes, one’s eyes and the mind’s eyes actually has many words in classical rhetoric. Vasaly gamely tries to collate the terms for ‘vivid description’:

\textit{ekphrasis, enargeia, hypotyposis, diatypsis, evidentia, repraesentio, illustratio, demonstratio, descriptio, and sub oculos subiectio}’ (90). Hypotyposis might, however, be preferred for a discussion of modern literary impressionism. Unlike, say, \textit{enargeia}, it is a term with modern associations. Barthes adduces it; Kant expends not a little of his \textit{Critique of Judgement} and \textit{Critique of Pure Reason} on it; and Lowe makes her argument for a ‘\textit{realistic hypotyposis}’. It is not much, but it is more than can be said for the others (\textit{ekphrasis}, which has likewise obtained in modern discussions, has a discrete meaning: broadly, the representation of art in writing. Barthes, for example, treats it separately from hypotyposis in ‘The Reality Effect’). As John Carlos Rowe writes, ‘The root of the word… \textit{hupotupoun} means “to stamp or to form”’ – which correlates with the idea of ‘artistic remaking’, of transfiguring (209). True, \textit{enargeia}, as Richard Lanham writes, connotes a ‘visually powerful’ description (64). But, as Lanham also writes, ‘it would make sense to use \textit{enargeia} as a basic umbrella term for the various special terms of vigorous ocular demonstration’ (65). \textit{Enargeia}’s meaning, then, is perhaps too diffused for it to be applicable to the modern fiction I am interested in. Or, rather, it might be better employed the way ‘metaphor’ and ‘metonym’ are: as a specific term, to be sure, but more so as a general one.

Rowe notes that ‘hypotyposes are presentations for Kant, “not mere characterizations [\textit{Charakterismen}] or designations”’ (210). Whether its separation from ‘designations’ may
beg the question of whether a ‘designation’ is possible I do not know. But the emphasis here should be on ‘presentations’ – by which he means ‘the rendering of concepts and ideas “in terms of sense”’, as Howard Caygill puts it in *A Kant Dictionary* (231). Hypotyposis, in Kant’s portrayal, is an intrinsically artificial trope; not so much ‘artificial’ in the pejorative sense but in the older sense, the sense of making or mediation (an entire thesis could probably be written on the semantic souring of words like ‘artificial’ and ‘fabulist’). In fact, this twofold meaning is why ‘making your hearer see things’ is such a good translation of Aristotle. It accounts for the ‘conjuring’ facility of the language, and allows, too, for the artificiality, even the trickery, that the phrase ‘see things’ connotes in modern usage. Barthes elaborates on this:

> classical rhetoric had in a sense institutionalized the fantasmatic as a specific figure, hypotyposis, whose function was ‘to put things before the hearer’s eyes’; not in a neutral, constantive manner, but by imparting to representation all the luster of desire. (145-46)

Hypotyposis is not ‘neutral’; is, indeed, ‘fantasmatic’. What precisely Barthes means by ‘fantasmatic’ is something like the Grimm and Perrault folk tales. Earlier, talking about ‘ecphrasis’, he writes that pre-modern writers ‘had no hesitation in putting lions or olive trees in a northern country’ (144). But, as I have shown Lowe countering, representations of ‘familiar, common and representative scenes’ may also have the ‘luster of desire’ (86). A possible example of this – of hypotyposis in modern fiction – would be the opening paragraphs of *Bleak House*, the first Dickens novel I consider:

> London. Michaelmas term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln’s Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots,
making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full–grown snowflakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another’s umbrellas in a general infection of ill temper, and losing their foot–hold at street–corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls deified among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier–brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little ‘prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds. (13)

The ‘impressions’ conveyed to us in this the passage have, of course, a structural purpose: to sound the theme that will be developed throughout the novel. The ubiquitous fog, the mud, ‘mire’, ‘infection’ and ‘slipping and sliding’ are there as a kind of pathetic fallacy, loose symbols presaging what is to come (the ‘fog’ of the Chancery, the moral as well as literal squalor we find in many of the principals). But what I want to concentrate on is how fanatically, fantasmatically visual the passage is – it is, if nothing else, a ‘vigorous ocular demonstration’. Dickens is not simply laying it on a bit thick; he is caking an impasto as thick as the ‘crust upon crust of mud’. Rowe notes that, etymologically, ‘the impression is always an act of physical violence, ‘a pressing into or upon’, and asks why this meaning has been ‘subordinated to the narrow philosophical meaning: the presentation of sensible data to our
mental faculties’ (192-193). Aesthetically, the prose is violent: the compulsive anaphora
(‘fog’ begins eleven clauses in the second paragraph), the casual hyperbole (‘if this day ever
broke’), the antic anthropomorphism (‘fog cruelly pinching…’), the ‘fantasmatic’ (‘a
Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill’).
Diagnosing this passage and the following paragraphs as ‘fantastic realism’, Rosemary
Jackson writes of

its emphasis upon things emerging out of invisibility and amorphousness… slowly
distinguishing discrete forms and units out of a murky, indistinct mass. The city itself has
become fantastic, undifferentiated, a vast inchoate mass where beings merge together and
things are promiscuous, amorphous. (133)

Alter remarks of this and a similar passage from Our Mutual Friend – in which ‘inanimate
London was a sooty spectre’, Dickens paradoxically animating the ‘inanimate’ as Aristotle
prescribed – that it ‘vividly demonstrates that a mode of representation which may still
justifiably be called realism is perfectly compatible with the exercise of… a faculty of
visionary fantasy enabled by metaphor’ (76). We find the same idiom here as in Fanger,
Smith, Douglas-Fairhurst and so on. This metaphor-enabled ‘faculty’, Alter goes on, is ‘one
of the chief reasons that [Dickens] is a law unto himself as a novelist…’ (48). And yet the
narrator is as much impressed upon as impressing. You can see this in the parataxis of several
sentences (‘implacable November weather’; ‘dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses,
scarcely better’). Whatever they purport to be – journalistic, diaristic – these sentences seem
by their very nature reactive. The rapidity upon which fancy in Pictures from Italy subsisted
is replicated here. Dickens, through his proxy the narrator, is not crafting long, lapidary
periods but stunted, ungainly pseudo-sentences. And the figures used by Dickens have a
conditional quality, fleeting upon the imagination in a wave of ‘sensible data’. The various
iterations of ‘fog’ are not wilful but indicative of sensory overload. The narrator alights on
the most ‘sensible’ aspect, the most imposing, of the scene, and mentally rolls it around the
tongue of the mind (underneath the eyes of the mind) to wrest some sensitivity back after the
sense-dulling assault (something like this can be seen in the final, comic repetition of ‘fog’:
‘into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them’). The result is that the passage, so
characteristic of Dickens’ prose, illustrates how Rowe’s two constructions of literary
impressionism might be twinned; and how the visuality of hypotyposis is – aptly, given its
bent for anthropomorphism – bodied forth in rhetoric.

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As Brooks suggested, recent literary criticism has sought to cashier ‘realism’, portraying it as
the ‘naïve and deluded’ production of ‘a reassuring interpretation of reality’. This
misunderstands what realism is, or can be. Nobody disputes that the pseudo-scientific
premises of Realism are false, since, as Brooks also notes, ‘the linguistic sign…in fact does
not transparently designate the world’ (6). Words cannot retrieve and contain reality’s
exhibits as they did for science’s naturalists. They do, however, have the power to conjure, to
create with what Halliwell calls ‘persuasive vividness’ what Wood calls ‘life on the page’.
Hypotyposis in Dickens seems to me an affirmation of this. Lowe appeals for a ‘realistic
hypotyposis’, meaning a realism founded not in ‘artless’ and direct ‘word-to-world’
referentiality but in something quite different: a realism that is, paradoxically, artificial, a
visual realism that consists of ‘optical illusions’. This hypotyposis is, as I see it a kind of
defamiliarising trope, hence my invocation of Shklovsky. In the following chapters I look at
that ‘interference between a purely intellectual knowledge of a thing and some genuine,
spontaneous, visionary experience of it’ Jameson identified. In the next chapter I note its
division between knowledge and Dickens’ ‘sympathetic relations’; in the third chapter I argue
that ‘visionary experience’ of ‘a thing’ facilitates that ‘knowledge’; and in the last chapter I investigate ‘visionary experience’ on its own.
Dickens famously wanted to call the journal that became known as *Household Words* by an altogether different name, ‘The Shadow’. He described ‘The Shadow’ in a letter to John Forster. This name represented a composite, notional agent – ‘The Shadow himself’ in Dickens’ odd wording, as though it were real – who was to be an indispensible companion to families, gadfly to society and scourge of humbug. Dickens seemed to think the rather sinister figure would be a cheerful presence, as consonant with the hearth as the eventual blander title would be (he actually calls it an ‘always welcome Shadow’ [*Letters v.5* 622]). It is not really surprising that this unfortunate name was later abandoned, although not before Dickens hazarded over a dozen other titles, among them, delightfully, ‘Charles Dickens’, which, as a kind of novel explicitly about himself, would have been a natural progression from the recent *David Copperfield* (*Letters v.5* 622, *v.6* 25)\(^9\). But the proposal for ‘The Shadow’ is worth discussing here. Dickens suggested that the Shadow ‘may go into any place…and be in all homes, and all nooks and corners, and be supposed to be to be cognisant [sic] of everything, and go everywhere….’ This figure, he continued, would be ‘a kind of semi-omniscient, omnipresent, intangible creature’ (622).

*Critics have taken the enticing bait, marking and elucidating links with the narratives of Dickens’ fiction. Audrey Jaffe, appraising the ‘fantasy of omniscience’, invokes ‘The Shadow’ and writes of ‘semi-omniscience’ that it ‘more accurately describes these knowledge-producing bodies, which can never succeed in fully capturing the subjects they set out to describe’ and also ‘describes Dickens’s Asmodean narrators as they hover between presence and absence’ (*Vanishing* 6-7, 15). In his recent essay ‘Knots in Glass: Dickens and Omniscience from Boz to Bucket’, Clayton Carlyle Tarr persuasively argues for*
manifestations of The Shadow within the narratives. He notes a progression from Boz to Quilp to Carker and finally to Inspector Bucket, a progression from ambulatory, flaneurial speculations to ‘semi-omniscient, omnipresen[ce]’. I believe Tarr’s argument is a good point from which to begin this chapter. Like his article, the chapter’s chief concern is fictional knowledge: seeing and apprehending within a fictional text. Later chapters are concerned with the fantasmatic in relation to manifestly fantasmatic subjects, fancy and phantoms, but this is about the fantasmatic in the very walls of the house Brigid Lowe referred to in that line the introduction quoted: ‘When we “see” a house in a novel, there is nothing “there”, and worse, there is really no “there” for a “there” to be’ (76). To do this the chapter looks at, appropriately, Bleak House. It is not surprising that Tarr finishes with that novel, for eminent critics such as Jaffe have alighted on it to discuss omniscience before. My interest is slightly different from theirs in that I want to explore ‘seeing what cannot be seen’, to adopt Philip Fisher’s phrase, in BH (121). What if realism itself is, as Lowe suggested in response to Barthes, fantasmatic?

That is the question this chapter will try to answer, or at least to meditate on in a way that advances the thesis. Like Jaffe, I want to consider omniscience in BH, in particular the claims, or disclaims, to omniscience its two narrators share. Jaffe suggests that ‘a narrator who is also a character cannot be omniscient, since he is a part of the scene he observes’, yet I would suggest in response that this is frequently untrue of Esther (23). Adducing John O. Jordan’s Supposing Bleak House, I shall discuss knowledge withheld and permuted in her narrative. This is the knowledge of the supra-Esther feigning to know only what her array of earlier selves knew at their respective moments in the narrative. Likewise I shall discuss the third-person narrator’s different feigning, his subtle narrative aggrandisements wherein he

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10 All references to Jordan throughout the thesis are to Supposing Bleak House.
imputes to himself knowledge he does not possess. This argument includes a suggestion of rather marked eccentricity and wilfulness, namely that he cannot see inside what Benjamin calls ‘the windowless room’; cannot, as ‘the Shadow’ is meant to, ‘go into any place’. In the process of these discussions, I want to suggest that knowledge itself is not primary in BH or elsewhere in Dickens, reality being indeed fantasmatic. Benjamin’s elevated mutterings about ‘the windowless room’ are a way of demonstrating this. ‘The true’, in his construction, is an elusive, abstract figment. In the chapter’s final section I extend this argument to take in walls, chiefly those of Newgate. The chapter is thus about procuring the invisible ‘true’ from the ‘windowless room’, from behind Newgate’s walls; about conjuring the thing that is not a thing, which vanishes upon exposure, as Bucket does when he carries off his uncanny vanishing acts, particularly those in which he is not the vanisher.

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Everything in Bleak House vanishes, even the story itself. Much as Jarndyce and Jarndyce, the Chancery suit that infests the narrative and precipitates the ruin of more than a few of its characters, “‘lapses and melts away’”, Esther Summerson’s concluding chapter is truncated mid-speech, as it were, when she writes, aposiopetically, ‘and that they can very well do without much beauty in me – even supposing...’ (975, 989). A novel that begins mantled with a terrifically dense, ubiquitous fog (‘Fog everywhere’) is, amid its vast, ostensibly discrete architectonics, a series of interludes between vanishings (13). The cruces of the story’s action as it reaches its abortive end are the murder of Mr Tulkinghorn, itself a form of vanishing, and the vanishing of the culprit from the scene; the vanishing in turn of the prime suspect, Lady Dedlock, comes soon after. But more quotidian, domestic – and yet somehow more peculiar – vanishing acts occur. According to Mr Kenge, Mr Jellyby ‘is, so to speak, merged
– Merged – in the more shining qualities of his wife’; likewise, ‘Mr and Mrs Snagsby are not only one bone and one flesh but, to the neighbours’ thinking, one voice too. That voice, appearing to proceed from Mrs Snagsby alone...’ (50, 156). This is repeated in the Bagnets’ marriage, in which Mr Bagnet defers to his wife on all matters pertaining to thought. But it is repeated in so many other ways, in so many other guises, throughout the novel. The purpose of this chapter is to explain how such vanishings – and their converse: appearing acts, as it were, self-conjurings – relate to the authority of the narrators and to the purported verisimilitude of their narration. As I discussed in the first chapter, realism is, by universal consent, predicated on decidedly shaky epistemological ground. To what extent can anyone, even an omniscient narrator, grasp the real, prise the true observation from reality, have the innermost thought of a character vouchsafed to them? In exploring these matters, I draw upon BH’s instances of enclosed spaces, chiefly locked rooms, and their transcendence by the characters. My aim is to advance the introductory discussion by looking at the posture of Dickensian representation in all its naivety, its artless artfulness.

Esther’s narrative was for a long time considered a folly on Dickens’ part. Readers objected to what they saw as the vapidity of her narration, the way it becalmed in blandness, and often in coyness and tweeness, the onward thrust of the story. Their quarrel with Dickens was that he had never been much good at female characters elsewhere, so why entrust half a novel to one, let alone one so annoyingly sanguine and disingenuous? Harold Bloom calls her ‘perhaps the most critically maligned of all central characters in Dickens’ (vii). Nabokov, for example, surveying BH in one of his Lectures on Literature, growled in medium dudgeon about her ‘artificial baby talk’ and ‘schoolgirl style’ (100).
But Esther’s narrative is better and more nuanced than this, as recent commentators have agreed. Suzanne Graver, writing about ‘double vision’ in *BH*, notes ‘an additional double vision, caused by self-division,’ namely that ‘between [Esther’s] affirming or accommodating self and that critical or desiring self she at once suppresses and obliquely expresses’ (3). Or, as John O. Jordan puts it, the narrative entity to whom Dickens delegates the first-person narrative actually comprises two people, Esther Summerson and Esther Woodcourt, to whom we may add ‘Esther Hawdon’ and Esther’s other soubriquets (Jordan 3, *BH* 466). Furthermore, those two people themselves comprise numerous, variegated perspectives, especially those of Esther Summerson, who, having only a vestigial hand in the authorship, cannot observe and narrate from any stable perspective, unlike Esther Woodcourt, who tells her story seven years later (4). An abundance of ‘temporalities’ and a ‘confusion of subject positions’ arise from the conflation of these disparate Esthers (3). The real narrator, Esther Woodcourt, is to Esther Summerson as Esther Summerson is to Lady Dedlock (and so on, presumably, back to Honoria Barbary and her antecedents). And, indeed, Jordan adduces the scene where Esther Summerson espies her mother in the church to point out the way ‘three distinct times and three separate selves converge in the space of only a few words’, about which I shall say more anon (4). During the worst of her illness and its concomitant mental disturbances, Esther herself, or rather herselfs, narrates a manifestation of this. It is the compression of three identities into one, a kind of Esther trinity:

> While I was very ill, the way in which these divisions of time became confused with one another, distressed my mind exceedingly. At once a child, an elder girl, and the little woman I had been so happy as, I was not only oppressed by cares and difficulties adapted to each station, but by the great perplexity of trying to reconcile them. (555)

Just as ‘There’s no now for us suitors’, in Richard’s agitated words, there is no now for Esther (596). Another matter that interests Jordan is the way ‘[r]etrospective
narration...entails foreknowledge on the part of the retrospective narrator of as yet unnarrated events’ (4). This foreknowledge, he continues, ‘impinges on the present moment of her narrating’ and distorts its autobiographical fallacy, its conceit that what we are hearing from Esther in a given chapter represents her thoughts at that moment in the chronology of the narrative (5). A fairly straightforward example of this ‘ambiguity’, as Jordan calls it, occurs when ‘little Esther Summerson’, as she is known at school, is saved from the custody of the wicked harridan Mrs Rachael: ‘Mrs Rachael was too good to feel any emotion at parting, but I was not so good, and wept bitterly’ (29; 35).

Jordan later discusses this scene at length without mentioning ‘ambiguity’. His interest lies more in what one might call, in the context of this discussion, backshadowings: instances of Esther describing minor details, which themselves bear no real narrative import, simply because of a tenuous ‘association’ they have with a significant future event that lent them a retrospective emphasis (14). They are not, like foreshadowing or prolepsis or whatever one wishes to call it, forward-looking; the narrative pile, so to speak, runs back toward them. The frivolous, illogical expedients by which Richard justifies his profligacy early in the novel, for example, are different from this backshadowing because they seem to have led in some way, however indistinct, to his later claim on the Jarndyce legacy. Thus ‘the little lawn-gate’ outside which the coach waits to take Esther Summerson from Mrs Rachael, ‘recalls,’ in Jordan’s words (apt, although I believe unwittingly so, is Jordan’s use of ‘recalls’ here in this backward – which is to say, forward – sense) ‘the “iron-gate” of the graveyard in which Hawdon/Nemo is buried and where Lady Dedlock dies’ (BH 36; Jordan 14). Jordan’s bigger contention is that the scene itself, as the sum of its retrospectively emphasised details, is not a depiction of what actually occurred in it, insofar as ‘what actually occurred in it’ can be more than a chimera. It is a version of the keener valedictory scenes future Esthers were to
experience – her mother’s death, and so on – superimposed on this one. Those later scenes project backward to this one and further ‘to the unnarrated moment of her birth’ as much as the earlier scenes project forward to them (14). The integrity of the subjective experience’s narration, the bailiwick of a first-person narrator, is compromised by a totality of knowledge one would associate with a third-person narrator.

I find the scene curious and remarkable – and found it so independently of Jordan’s discussion, I should add, which testifies to its intrinsic remarkability – for a similar, if slightly different, reason. Any reader can perceive the irony in those words, ‘Mrs Rachael was too good to feel any emotion at parting, but I was not so good’; but whose irony is it? There is no clear answer to that question. Is it the irony of Esther Woodcourt or is it that of some later, wiser version of Esther Summerson? We know that the adult Esthers, for all their ostensible goodness and blandness, are capable of such mordancy. Their dealings with Mrs Jellyby, Mr Turveydrop and, eventually, Mr Skimpole, to name a few, smart with examples of it. Take Esther’s cynical assessment of what achievements qualify one for ennoblement in the eyes of the Crown: of ‘men distinguished by peaceful services’, only those whose services ‘consisted of the accumulation of some very large amount of money’ are eligible, she says, parrying Miss Flite’s ingenuous faith in the honours system with ‘I am afraid she believed what she said; for there were moments when she was very mad indeed’ (570). But mordancy is not the only possible explanation. Is the irony instead – or, perhaps, as well – a dramatic irony? Little Esther cannot discern what we and later Esthers have discerned. But both propositions are gainsaid by the fact that little Esther’s distress, or at least the putative cause of that distress, is quietly subverted over the following pages.
We might not ascribe to her the feeling that Mrs Rachael’s kiss upon her forehead was ‘like a thaw-drop from the stone porch’ as it sounds too knowing (Jordan, demurring, nevertheless writes that ‘some readers have seen it as evidence that Dickens, not Esther, is doing the writing’ [13]). But two pages hence Esther Woodcourt recounts that her juvenile self told John Jarndyce – as yet unidentified, though of course known to be him by the narrator – that ‘I must have been crying...because of Mrs Rachael’s not being sorry to part with me’ (37). In other words, little Esther was fully cognizant of Mrs Racheal’s cruel indifference, therefore the irony is not a dramatic irony; and, given the knowledge she possessed made her capable of perpetrating the irony, it may indeed be hers. At the very least, it strikes the reader that she is complicit in the irony. Or, rather, that she acquiesces in the irony, feeling, one infers, the same mordancy in response to the snub as prompts the later version of herself to perpetrate the irony – though the earlier version may not command quite the same articulateness. Yet another possibility, though less pertinent to a discussion of such a local example, is that we see a meta-dramatic irony, a supra-dramatic irony, in which the narrative apparition of Dickens intercedes between us and the kaleidoscopic regress of Esthers. According to J. Hillis Miller, ‘because he is not so innocent as she’, there is ‘a subtle irony in Dickens’s attitude to Esther as narrator’, which Dickens makes clear through, among other things, ‘the juxtaposition of the two modes of narration’ (World 222). But, as I say, this further, final permutation of irony may not be applicable here. The irony, like Esther herself, is strangely orphaned, its attribution as unclear as the distribution of the Jarndyce legacy.

The issue of who is seeing, of where the focalisation resides, is complex and often obscure in Esther’s narrative. On many occasions the narrative is muddied because of it. One of these occasions, when it is assuredly not clear who is seeing, is that most neglected of bewildering slips in the book, greater even than Tulkinghorn’s infamous failure to observe
the disguised Lady Dedlock through the window of his study or the general failure to
apprehend the definitive Jarndyce will: Esther hearing and not recognising ‘the name of
Barbary’ from the would-be jurist Mr Krook among the surnames connected with Jarndyce
and Jarndyce (71). We know, or think we know, she has heard it before because we have seen
her record it in her narration. ‘I needn’t inform you [Mrs Rachael], who were acquainted with
the late Miss Barbary’s affairs...and that this young lady, now her aunt is dead – ,’ Kenge
says during the meeting to settle Esther’s future; and Mrs Rachael soon adds, ‘Miss Barbary,
sir...who is now among the Seraphim – ’ (33, 34). Lest it still not be clear to whom the
speakers refer, Mr Kenge clarifies in an address to Esther herself: ‘Miss Barbary, your sole
relation...being deceased...you are in a position to receive the renewal of an offer which I was
instructed to make to Miss Barbary some two years ago...’ (34). Esther has heard this name,
probably not for the first time either, repeated by both her interlocuters. She has, one
presumes, retained this exacting memory of a conversation that completely altered her life
and nursed it as she nurses Charley. Then, when the time came to commit her memoir to
paper, she has repeated the conversation in it. Yet she completely overlooks the significance
of that name, surely not a common name (‘Dear me, that’s not a common name,’ Grandfather
Smallweed remarks of ‘Honoria’, which seems the appropriate thought for Esther) – indeed,
an exotic one, with its suggestion of oriental piracy, a second African link in the book (824).
And then she overlooks it again in her narrative. She does not so much as enquire about the
origins of her patronage, whereas Pip in *Great Expectations*, say, is consumed with the
origins of his.

It is the name that one dwells on, then, mainly because Esther never does. She
foreshadows learning the nickname ‘Conversation Kenge’ and having her initial estimation of
its bearer coloured, or at least that is what I take her meaning to be despite an ambiguous
‘even then’ (‘I was very much impressed by him – even then, before I knew that he formed
himself on the model of a great lord who was his client...’ [34-35]). Yet she makes no
allusion to the power of the name ‘Miss Barbary’. She is reduced to Mr Jellyby-esque muteness – ‘I was not able to speak, though I tried’ – the younger Esther sundered from the elder one who narrates:

What the destitute subject of such an offer tried to say, I need not repeat. What she did say, I could more easily tell, if it were worth the telling. What she felt, and will feel to her dying hour, I could never relate (35).

Perhaps Jordan could find in Esther’s peculiar choice of ‘destitute’ the faint ring of future events – her mother’s death, perhaps, or Richard’s face ‘destitute of colour’ (976) – but generally this prose seems to me oblivious of those events. I do not see discretion here, nor, worse, secretiveness, but a jarring lacuna, a narrative subsidence that is never amended. When Esther discovers that ‘Barbary’ was her mother’s maiden name, she does not remark on having heard it before; it takes the gormless extortioner Guppy to insinuate the name back into the narrative, though not into Esther’s. Why is this so? ‘Is the hand not always pointing there?’ as the Allegory does to the window and Lady Dedlock (259).

Often for so perspicacious a character Esther abdicates her narrative eyrie and becomes almost obtuse; or, at any rate, she becomes incidental to the very story she is telling, incidental in the way that all non-narrating characters are incidental. She becomes, to invoke what I suppose is an anachronistic term, unreliable. Audrey Jaffe, ruminating on the ‘problem’ of knowledge in *BH*, writes that by ‘insisting upon her status as one who does not know, who does not even occupy the subject’s position in her own narrative, Esther works to efface her own knowledge’, and that this effacement is by design (131, 132). In the example I have just cited, that is highly questionable – as I say, the effacement of knowledge is not strategic, it is just an inexplicable omission – but there are other examples that seem to confirm Jaffe’s assertion. Only much later in the novel do readers deduce that Esther is herself a beauty (if Lady Dedlock is one, and Esther bears a startling resemblance to her –
‘how well I know that picture!’ Guppy, thinking unconsciously of Esther, says twice of Lady Dedlock’s ‘perfect likeness’ – then Esther by extension is too [110-111]). Indeed, Esther is the rival in looks of her beloved companion Ada, whose looks she repeatedly extols; and her sedulous humility, not always so far from the ‘bombastic humility’ of Josiah Bounderby in *Hard Times*, has acted as a kind of misdirection (Graver uses ‘indirection’ but I prefer the more resonant ‘misdirection’, pertinent to vanishings [9]). Allan Woodcourt laughs at her for saying ‘my old looks – such as they were’, quoting ‘such as they were’ back to her in the form of a question, as if her self-disparagement were not only mistaken but a silly peccadillo he had long ago got used to. This impression is reinforced by the way her final words, ‘even supposing’, seem coyly to concede the point (989).

When Esther meets the Lord Chancellor, ‘His lordship gave me an indulgent look, and acknowledged my curtsy very graciously’ (46). Words like ‘indulgent’ and ‘graciously’ come to seem rather gnomic, as if written in a code, and one begins to wonder why the sentence is there in the first place. At first, ‘indulgent’ inculcates little Esther’s littleness, suggesting that his flicker of attention is a gratuity from so eminent a man to so modest, in both senses, a girl. Or it could be that his arch jest to Kenge a moment before about Esther being a suitable companion for Richard lingers in his mind. But one’s later knowledge makes the ‘indulgent look’ seem pregnant. It is possible that the Lord Chancellor, having consulted his briefing papers, is apprised of the delicate – which is to say, indelicate – reasons for Mr Jarndyce’s patronage. But one begins to detect a counter-reading, flipping Esther’s quote ‘That he admired her, and was interested by her, even I could see in a moment’ (45). Where she means young, ingenuous Ada, to whom the Lord Chancellor takes only a proprietorial interest (he is a surrogate father, ‘a poor substitute for the love and pride of parents’), a reader with foreknowledge intuits that this gush more befits the maturer, cleverer Esther (45).
I dwell on these points for a couple of reasons. I want to elucidate the permutations of knowledge in the novel: ‘knowledge’ as Jaffe means it, as the apprehension of those events taking place within the narrative ken, both at the broad level of the narrators and at the subsidiary level of the characters. And, further to this, I am taken by the converse of knowledge, by Esther’s studies in naivety, for example, and what they betoken. This will become clearer, I hope, presently. For now, it is worth dwelling on other points, points to do with the apprehension of events, the mimetic capturing of them. Walter Benjamin, discussing panorama in a sketch toward his *Arcades Project*, holds that ‘What is found within the windowless house is the true’ (840). I am mindful of Michael Hollington’s admonition not to make too much of Benjamin in criticism of Dickens. Benjamin, Hollington noted, did not really care for Dickens and had read less of him, whereas his friend Adorno did and had.\textsuperscript{11} Quite so. But Grahame Smith and Jeremy Tambling disobey in their excellent Benjamin-seasoned *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema* and *Going Astray*. The ‘vision’ of *Arcades*, Smith writes, ‘provides a cue for my reading of Dickens in relation to film’ – and I feel I might profitably do the same here (50). So, what is Benjamin on about? Does ‘windowless’ mean devoid of any aperture for the exchange of light with the world outside the house, or does it mean devoid of any material – namely glass – within that aperture, as the fourth wall between stage and audience is usually windowless (he suggests both interpretations in turn)? He offers nothing helpful to elucidate or qualify this assertion, here or in the similar draft elsewhere in the book, adding only that the true does not look outside: which, if anything, confuses one’s initial reading. One’s initial reading is that the true can

\textsuperscript{11} Refer to Works Cited.
only be hermetic, unaffected by the medium of the window and the tacit behavioural transaction it prompts. To know that one might be watched, as one does when near an unobscured window, taints one’s behaviour there. One might temper or refrain from certain habits and acts: sex, bathing, picking one’s nose, and so on; and not to do so, to flout the view any observer could be getting, would not be to escape that taint.

The true, then, is immanent: it ‘has no windows,’ Benjamin writes elsewhere in *Arcades* (532). This might explain his remark about it not looking out, for, the practical obstacle of not having any windows through which to look out notwithstanding, it has no need to look out, being discrete, self-sufficient, self-completing, utterly monologic. It is, after a fashion, Platonic, an ideal. Or perhaps, though the two things do not have to be in conflict, it is merely unconscious. ‘The true’ is certainly also inaccessible to those outside the windowless house, a hypothetical, a latent fallacy, an illusion waiting to happen. It is nonesuch reality, its integrity never compromised. There is a witty analogy to this construction of ‘the true’ in *BH*. When Jo squires the disguised Lady Dedlock to the pauper’s grave of her former lover, Captain Hawdon, he is transfigured into Orpheus. Instructed not to look back at her, his Eurydice, he ‘sticks to the terms imposed upon him, and does not look round’; but when, finally, he ‘look[s] aside to see if he has made himself intelligible, he finds that he is alone’ (262, 264). Looking upon Lady Dedlock is akin to looking upon the real. This makes ‘found’ nicely ironic, since ‘finding’ is not an activity one could engage in without violating the fundamental precept of the windowless house. One would have to be in the windowless house itself, perpetrating truth, not looking out, to ‘find’ anything, thereby obviating the need – and, by definition, one’s ability – to do so.
Perhaps to take this as the corollary of the foregoing line of thought is unfair, and we must accord his words a degree of reflexivity, an aphoristic provisionality. To quote the poet and aphorist Don Paterson, an aphorism comes from ‘a sudden momentary conviction... The truth of that conviction is neither here nor there; nor is the fact that you might disagree with it five minutes later’ (188). Aphorisms are Nietzsche’s ‘wicked thoughts’, samizdat versions of those ‘sudden momentary convictions’, their contingent truths liable to crumble before the basilisk-like interrogations of the scholar. They are like the bandaged nuts thrown by Tarkovsky’s Stalker to guide his own journey to that other windowless house, The Room. They arrogate certitude and therefore a degree of authority but nevertheless stand outside those ersatz qualities, holding them up matadorially. Indeed, they are rather similar to hypotyposis. But I digress, or digress ahead of myself, so to speak. Contrast Benjamin’s remark with Tolstoy’s, quoted by Shklovsky, on the sensory desuetude brought about by repeat performances of an act:

Since these movements are habitual and unconscious, I felt that it was already impossible to remember it [dusting]. If I had in fact dusted the sofa and forgotten that I had done so, i.e., if I had acted unconsciously, then this is tantamount to not having done it at all. If someone had seen me doing this consciously, then it might have been possible to restore this in my mind.

(*Theory 5*)

Tolstoy’s point, which he amplifies in the next sentence, is that awareness of an act, observation of it, is essential to its reality; without it, our ‘complex life’ is not merely impoverished but retroactively annulled: ‘it’s as if this life had never been,’ Tolstoy writes, promoting the arm’s-length ‘tantamount to’ to the more freely fraternal ‘as if’. In other words, the windowless house only exists when it has been exposed to consciousness, even an external consciousness, and vanishes if it has not been: precisely the opposite of Benjamin’s point, or at any rate the conjecture I filleted from its vatic opacity. But as I shall go on to
explain, BH manages to yoke these contradictory views together. At crucial moments, the windowless house is exempt from scrutiny, from consciousness let alone observation; yet, paradoxically in the light of Benjamin and Tolstoy, it is the attentions of the observer that are necessary for its ‘truth’ to be transmitted.

Whatever the truth of Benjamin’s assessment of the true, it is suggestive, and pertinent to the enterprise of narration. Narration is, after all, fanatical about places into which observers cannot look and the coveted seam of reality, whether social or mental, those places enclose. These are the places Dickens writes of in the famous passage near the beginning of *A Tale of Two Cities*: ‘A solemn consideration...that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every room in every one of them encloses its own secret’ (12). As Kate Flint says in commentary on this passage, ‘for Dickens, one of the tasks which a narrator can perform is to reveal those closely guarded secrets. The narrator can lift off the roofs...and adopt a panoramic viewpoint’ (*Dickens* 70). This impulse to wrest the ‘true’ from enclosed places, windowless houses, is there from the beginning of the novel. Peter Brooks cites a moment from Le Sage’s 1707 novel *Le Diable boiteux* in which ‘the benevolent devil Asmodée takes the novel’s protagonist, Don Cleofas, up to the top of the highest tower in Madrid, then removes all the city’s rooftops’ (3). Together the pair behold all that occurs in the residences within their purview, a veritable cross-section of society. In one house, there is an old man dozing in his armchair; in another, feasting and merriment; in yet another, what appears to be two lovers in conversation (5). Novelists purport to be Asmodées, pretending to offer readers this magical vision and the secret knowledge it yields. As Brooks notes, ‘realist literature is attached to the visual, to looking at things, registering their presence in the world through sight...mak[ing] sight paramount’ (3).
To see is, pace Benjamin, to prise ‘the true’ from the world surveyed; and the narrator is an overseer. Flint notes that Le Sage’s novel was ‘a text with which Dickens was familiar in translation’ and that he alluded to it in *Dombey and Son* (‘Oh for a good spirit who would take the house-tops off’ [71]). Flint continues, ‘Dickens most notably organises his texts around the roof- and wall-penetrating abilities of a roving narrative viewpoint’ (71). But omniscience in *BH*, such as it is, does not always confer panoptic abilities upon the omniscient. When Mr Guppy is courting Esther, she notes that ‘I never looked at him, but I found him looking at me’, and indeed Audrey Jaffe, noting the implausible extent of Esther’s prodigious recall, contends that ‘for much of her narrative...[she] might as well be omniscient’ (*BH* 148, *Vanishing* 130). But the supposedly omniscient narrator can never find without looking, which in turn he can almost never do without surrogate eyes to look through. It is notable that whereas in the illustration cited by Brooks empty rooms are among the fantastical conspectus, in *BH* empty rooms are seldom even seen, let alone described. Or not empty rooms but windowless empty rooms, rooms devoid of habitation that admit no observation from without.

Look at two scenes; two deaths, as it happens, both of them taking place in Mr Krook’s foul rag-and-bone shop. Look especially at the way the purportedly omnisicent narrator can only see these death scenes when witnesses have arrived. The deaths are those of Nemo (*né* Captain Hawdon) and Krook. The scenes share more than a location; indeed, the first is a template for the second, though the causes of death are, to say the least, somewhat different. In both scenes, the narration follows two men – Tulkinghorn and Krook in the first scene, Guppy and Weevle (*né* Jobling) – whom the grisly task of finding the dead man’s remains, such as they are in the latter scene, awaits. In neither scene does the death actually occur, so that the deaths, whose causes are never properly solved despite the arcane
ceremonies of investigation they provoke, become objects of speculation, fulcrums for the fantasies of all the would-be witnesses thereabouts. The deaths occur off-stage, as it were, and manifest themselves through what you might call noises-on: forebodings, a mood, a grain of palpable omens running toward death. David Paroissien’s casual summary is an orthodox, and by no means incorrect, way of looking at the first scene: ‘The lawyer’s words [“He’s dead!”], addressed to the landlord of the deceased, make explicit the intimations of death with which the previous chapter [10] closed’ (24). The entire room comes across as an objective correlative of death, everything within it seeming to be a metonymic sentinel, bruiting the central death, the core death, by dying in sympathy: the ‘rusty skeleton of a grate’, ‘it collapses like the cheeks of a starved man’, ‘one old mat...lies perishing’ (164). But the neat trajectory of discovery is more complex than it appears to be. Leave aside the question of whether the narrator is narrating events as they happen (although I do not believe he is – a line such as ‘Railroads shall soon traverse all this country... but as yet such things are non-existent in these parts’, for example, seems more like an acknowledgement of subsequent events than a prophecy – meaning the present-tense is a contrivance [839])\(^*\). In that first scene, none of Paroissien’s ‘intimations’ occur until after Tulkinghorn and Krook have stepped foot in Nemo’s room; though, it must be said, in the second scene the pitchy muck that Guppy and Weevle find in Nemo’s old room presages the discovery of Krook’s spontaneous combustion downstairs. But the point stands: that there is no inkling of the witnesses’ appointments with death, let alone of the victims’ themselves, independent of the witnesses. It takes Tulkinghorn and Krook, Guppy and Weevle to initiate the stirrings of

\(^{12}\) As an aside, there is a passage in *Little Dorrit* I refer to in the conclusion, a description of Arthur Clennam’s lodgings upon his return home, that is very similar to the description of Nemo’s room.

\(^{13}\) John R. Reed writes perceptively in the chapter ‘Present Tense’ about the way Esther uses the ‘traditional past tense of history’ of a third-person narrator and the third-person narrator eschews this for present tense (33-35). In connection with my suggestion above, he writes the following about instances of present tense in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*: ‘in some of these instances it appears as though the simultaneous narration is compromised and the narrator is providing an account of events that have already transpired’ (35).
morbidity; the stirrings do not come about otherwise. Even though the apprehension of these stirrings cannot necessarily be ascribed to those characters, it is concomitant on those characters’ ventures. The narration is a ghostwritten account of what they see and feel, with the narrator acting as ghostwriter. As Bert Hornback writes, ‘The omniscient narrator invades Tony Jobling’s and Mr. Guppy’s discovery of Mr. Krook’s combustion,’ and indeed ‘invasion’ and ‘borrowing’ are words he uses often (5).

I differ from Hornback, who sees the third-person (or ‘omnisicent’) narrator’s invasions as few and exceptional. Certainly they are common in these scenes since, as I indicated, these scenes are entirely predicated on the characters being the observers. To take one example of ‘invasion’, Tulkinghorn, addressing what he does not yet know is a corpse, says ‘“Hallo, my friend!”’ and the narrator follows with ‘He thinks he has awakened his friend. He lies a little turned away, but his eyes are surely open’ (165). ‘Friend’ and ‘surely open’ here are both compounds of irony and fidelity, since the narrator, while choosing the free indirect discourse for comic purposes (Nemo was not Tulkinghorn’s friend and Tulkinghorn was not there for friendly reasons; his eyes are open, but not because he is alive, therefore it is Tulkinghorn’s eyes that are not open), is also beholden to Tulkinghorn, who is seeing what he, or it, cannot. The death, then, does not really seem to have occurred until Tulkinghorn and Krook arrive to verify it. In this way, it recalls the account of Marley’s death that opens A Christmas Carol:

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge’s name was good upon ’Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was a dead as a door-nail. (33)
Marley is only dead because a document says he is, in the circular logic of the paragraph, because those officials and the obdurate chief mourner are signatories to his death; that and not the physical symptoms of death—the lack of breath, pulse or sentience, say, none of which is so much as alluded to—is what removed ‘doubt’. Noting the slight pun on ‘hand’ here, we might adapt it and say that Marley is dead by the hand of those four public men. Likewise, Nemo is only dead because Tulkinghorn marked the effect his handwriting had on Lady Dedlock and sought him out (in that sense, Nemo is dead by his own hand in more ways than one). Hitherto, his death existed in suspension, in a vaccuum: he was both dead and not dead, a kind of Schrodinger’s Nemo. So was Krook later on, even if we have seen his remains in the ‘thick, yellow liquor...A stagnant, sickening oil, with some natural repulsion in it’ that has transpired out of his room and onto the window sill of Weevle’s tenement (516). Both deaths take place in a virtual ‘windowless house’, in windowless rooms. Well, that is not strictly true: both rooms actually have windows. And though ‘the discoloured shutters are drawn together’ in Nemo’s room, ‘two gaunt holes [are] pierced in them’, which Jordan calls ‘a notable example of inanimate watching in the text’ (BH 164, Jordan 28). But the eyes are unseeing, too small for surveillance, and instead seem to be tokens of observation: only ‘famine might be staring in’, much as, in another case of symbols looking, ‘Allegory’ watches over Tulkinghorn’s murder. And Krook, in a closed room with ‘“the shutters up”’ is hidden from view, his cat Lady Jane the only witness to his death (663).

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I have been trying to discredit the third-person narrator. But I have done this for a reason. I want to argue that even such workaday acts of omniscience—knowing what is going behind closed doors in the story you are telling—are impeachable, and their content fantasmatic in
some way. Now I want to expand upon a reference I made earlier to third-person narration. I said the narrator could ‘almost’ never observe without surrogate eyes, and that empty rooms were ‘seldom’ seen. I deployed these qualifiers, both a kind of word-asterisk, as a means of anticipating the inconvenient exceptions to the drift of my argument that take place exclusively, as nearly as I can tell, in the scenes at Chesney Wold. But the point I was making might indeed stand unchaperoned by those protective handlers. The times when the third-person narrator does disclose secret knowledge – surprisingly few for a novel of such size and breadth – are frequently equivocal; the means by which he procured the knowledge, and indeed the veracity of his accounts, are not clear. Only once during the entire novel does the narrator make explicit that he is seeing events occurring beyond the sight of others. This scene takes place as late as the beginning of Chapter 40, when Chesney Wold, hitherto shut up for the season, is awaiting the return of its master and mistress (‘though no instructions have yet come down’, Mrs Rouncewell is able to divine its imminence [639]). What is described is a kind of *danse macabre* in which the family portraits morph into grotesque sprites or engage in incongruous activities, ‘strange movements com[ing] upon their features, as the shadows of leaves play there’ (641). An ‘ancestress of Volumina’ is canonised by the nimbus the setting Sun bestows on her; ‘A maid of honour of the court of Charles the Second, with large round eyes (and other charms to correspond), seems to bathe in glowing water’ (641).

The scene foreshadows the impending cavalcade of Dedlocks, entitled relatives and distinguished hangers-on (‘a pretty large accession’ of them, with ‘accession’ subtly ironic for a family that is about to be brought so low [639]). It is also richly symbolic. The portrait of the maid of honour, whose dishonour in the libidinous Restored court is heavily implied, is the last portrait mentioned before Lady Dedlock’s for a reason; and darkness succeeds the
late afternoon brilliance in a house headed for, if not ruin, then receivership. The narrator describes this with all the licence it behoves his fancy to take. But, unusually, he makes a point of avowing his corporal presence at the scene. This is quite irregular, and counters George Levine’s assertion about epistemology in BH and other ‘classic Victorian narratives’ that ‘the best way to acquire knowledge is to be nowhere’ (Dying 148, 149). BH’s third-person narrator says:

So did these come and go, a Dedlock in possession might have ruminated passing along; so did they see this gallery hushed and quiet, as I see it now; so think, as I think, of the gap that they would make in this domain when they were gone; so find it, as I find it, difficult to believe that it could be without them; so pass from my world, as I pass from theirs, now closing the reverberating door; so leave no blank to miss them, and so die. (639)

Jordan, adducing the illustration of this scene, writes that ‘Since no living human figure is mentioned as present at the scene, the focalization of this image’ – the illustration – must come from either ‘the homoperceptive viewpoint of a fellow ghost’ or ‘the heteroperceptive viewpoint of the “narrator”, or else a combination of both (117-18). But the narrator obfuscates the issue of whether others are present in the house. ‘Dreary and solemn the old house looks,’ he writes, ‘with so many appliances of habitation, and no inhabitants except the pictured forms upon the wall’ (639). But that depends on what one construes as an ‘inhabitant’ and what the ‘house’. Mrs Rouncewell is there, we know, because the narrator tells us she is there, as is a groom, and perhaps other staff, in what we take to be a concurrent exchange between her and the groom over Lady Dedlock’s health (642). We know that Mrs Rouncewell resides in the house because the narrator told us she did in Chapter 7:

...the house, as she expresses it, “is what she looks at.” She sits in her room (in a side passage on the ground floor, with an arched window commanding a smooth quadrangle, adorned at regular intervals with smooth round trees and smooth round blocks of stone, as if the trees
were going to play at bowls with the stones), and the whole house reposes on her mind. She can open it on occasion and be busy and fluttered, but it is shut up now and lies on the breadth of Mrs. Rouncewell's iron-bound bosom in a majestic sleep. (105-06)

Why does he say there are no inhabitants when there is one, and probably several others, since it is unthinkable that Mrs Rouncewell would occupy such a grand house alone? Perhaps as a mere servant of the house Mrs Rouncewell does not qualify as an ‘inhabitant’, although there is no evidence for this usage elsewhere in the book. All of those who reside in a dwelling are its inhabitants in the narrative census, or, at any rate, those identified as ‘inhabitants’ are not thus sundered from other residents; even the fowls Mr Bagnet is duped into buying are ‘the oldest inhabitants of any coop in Europe’ (753). Or perhaps Mrs Rouncewell, residing in what appears to be an annex – a servants’ quarter connected with the house physically and professionally but regarded as foreign – is not technically an ‘inhabitant’ of Chesney Wold. But the house is, if not inhabited by, certainly incident upon Mrs Rouncewell herself: it ‘reposes on her mind’ and ‘lies on the breadth of [her] iron-bound bosom in a majestic sleep’. By implication, the house suckles at Mrs Rouncewell (‘iron-bound’ is a peculiar allusion to her son, the ‘iron gentleman’, who appears almost to have had his course in life predestined at his mother’s teat). It gains nourishment and hence life from her bosom. She is, we are soon told, ‘as upright as the house itself” (134). It is not very surprising, then, that she can divine the return of her master and mistress unaided by a single portent.

But what one really notices here is her control over the ‘open[ing]’ and ‘shut[ting]’ of the house; the enclosure of it is wholly hers to administer. When Mr Guppy arrives without forewarning, Mrs Rouncewell is aghast – ‘“Guppy!” repeats Mrs. Rouncewell, "MR. Guppy! Nonsense, I never heard of him!”’ – and she only rights the situation, after Guppy assuages her with the shibboleth ‘Mr Tulkinghorn’, by superintending the entire tour herself,
attempting, as Rosa’s peripheral overseer, to make sure that what is seen is what ought to be seen, the official, expurgated version (109). But she does not succeed. As the narrator reports in this appropriately centaur-like formulation, a mix-up in which the perspective is Mrs Rouncewell’s but the idiom Guppy’s, Guppy and his companion ‘straggle about in wrong places, look at wrong things, don’t care for the right things, gape when more rooms are opened, exhibit profound depression of spirits, and are clearly knocked up’ (110). They will not be guided. Finally, crucially, Guppy’s attention is piqued by the portrait of Lady Dedlock, which, as far as he is unwittingly concerned, is notable solely for being a poor facsimile of his beloved Esther’s face, and the vast train of disgrace gains a little further impetus. Mrs Rouncewell’s industry has not availed her, but her intent on regulating the house’s narrative, on maintaining her power of admission, is plain. For the narrator to flout that power and trangress the dominion she wields it over, as he does in the later scene, is a tremendous usurpation, and a tremendous assertion of his own power. No wonder he is so keen to vaunt his ability to bear witness.

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Before I resume this examination of omniscience and enclosure, permit me to digress momentarily with regard to Guppy and a different sort of enclosure. D.A. Miller, writing about delinquency in *Oliver Twist*, says that Dickens ‘makes [the novel] an enclosed world from which it is all but impossible to escape. Characters may move from more to less advantageous positions in the system, but they never depart from it altogether’ (5). This is true of *BH* too, and in subtler ways. To take just one example, we see characters incarcerated by their verbal inaptitude, characters who try, and usually fail, to use language to move from less to more advantageous positions in the system. Jo, for example, is not only illiterate but scarcely able to speak, and this deficiency counts against him several times. At the inquest
into Hawdon’s death, he is dismissed because he ‘can’t exactly say’ (177). ‘It seemed’ poor, benighted Mr Jellyby ‘several times opened his mouth when alone with Richard… as if he had something on his mind; but had always shut it, to Richard’s extreme confusion, without saying anything’; much later he resembles Lord Burleigh in The Critic: ‘He opened his mouth now, a great many times, and shook his head in a melancholy manner’ (57; 481). He endures similar troubles later in the novel, when Caddy Jellyby is preparing for her wedding, thrice failing to finish the sentence ‘Never have a Mission, my dear child’, and eventually reposing with his head against the wall in catatonic silence (481). George is partly ‘a ne’er-do-weel’ because ‘I have no head for papers, sir. I can stand any fire better than a fire of cross questions…. [W]hen I come into things of this kind I feel as if I was being smothered’ (435). The same is true of George’s comrade Bagnet, who, as I noted in the introduction, needs his wife to act as kind of oracle for his thoughts and, when Tulkinghorn reads out an undertaking, ‘puts his hand on his bald head again under this new verbal shower-bath’ (552).

The faculty of speech, the ability to master different discourses, is often commensurate with one’s identity and place in society. The French maid Mademoiselle Hortense is ‘almost an Englishwoman in her acquaintance with the language’ (187). The importance of speech to status is most keenly represented in the diction of the law clerk Mr Guppy, who has designs on a loftier station in society but whose efforts to attain it are comically cackhanded. Upon being granted an audience with Lady Dedlock, for example, he is anxious to impress on her that at the firm Kenge and Carboy ‘my standing – and I may add my income – is tolerably good’, and in an absurd speech later on:

‘Now, it’s a very singular circumstance, your ladyship… though one of those circumstances that do fall in the way of professional men – which I may call myself; for though not admitted, yet I have had a present of my articles made to me by Kenge and Carboy, on my mother’s
advancing from the principal of her little income the money for the stamp, which comes
heavy…” (462, 465)

Guppy’s standing may be ‘tolerably good’ but it is nevertheless precarious, and Guppy knows
that. He ‘is not admitted’. In that bathetic parenthesis, the ‘present of [his] articles’ is clearly
no present at all, being contingent on his own impecunious mother (‘her little income’)
making provision for a trifling object that Kenge and Carboy, of whose wealth from the
Chancery racket Kenge himself boasts, would surely have had. It recalls an earlier description
of Guppy: ‘Mr Guppy suspects everybody who enters upon the occupation of a stool in
Kenge and Carboy…. He is clear that every such person wants to depose him’ (316).
Throughout the novel he is on the make, but the modesty of his background always seems to
clash with his premature airs: compare his ‘tall hat’, for example, and his ‘not… very
impressive letter of introduction in his manner and appearance’ when presented to Lady
Dedlock (460).

The precariousness is manifest in his language, with its comical slips of grammar and
register. As Hortense is ‘almost an Englishwoman in her acquaintance with the language’,
Guppy is only almost a gentleman. Elsewhere he says, with Jo’s command of English, things
like ‘I dare say you was not aware of me’ (464). But here there is the pretentious, tortuous
passive construction of the clause ‘I have had a present of my articles made to me by’, when
what he means is ‘Kenge and Carboy have given me my articles’. Even better is the way he
gets above himself with the legalese ‘advancing from the principal of’ for what he candidly
acknowledges is a pittance, and the odd poetry of ‘the stamp, which comes heavy’. Again,
low colloquialism keeps company with high magniloquence; and there is a pathetic irony in
the ‘heavy’ stamp, since Kenge and Carboy has withheld its stamp from Guppy, who himself
seems ‘heavy’ with the insecurity that the withholding perpetuates. Such changes in register
are evident elsewhere too, such as in his proposal to Esther. (That scene’s juxtaposition of caption and illustration expresses it wonderfully: Guppy portrayed down on one knee while underneath the caption says ‘In re Guppy. Extraordinary Proceedings’ [151].) Or in his affectations of a barrister in front of Jobling and Smallweed, with whom he nevertheless falls into a blokey patois that fits nearly as ill (‘it might pay you to knock up a sort of knowledge of him’ (326). His speech is a gauche compound. Earlier in the novel, there is an exchange between Kenge and Richard:

‘Mr Richard Carstone, who has so meritoriously acquitted himself in the – shall I say the classic shades? – in which his youth has been passed, will, no doubt, apply the habits, if not the principles and practice, versification in that tongue in which a poet was said (unless I mistake) to be born, not made, to the more eminently practical field of action on which he enters.’
‘You may rely upon it,’ said Richard in his off-hand manner, ‘that I shall go at it and do my best.’
‘Very well, Mr Jarndyce! …Really when we are assured by Mr Richard that he means to go at it, and to do his best,’ nodding feelingly and smoothly over those expressions… (200)

Richard’s mocking rejoinder is a droll counterpoint to Kenge’s pompous mauldering, which is simply a mess (not least in its amusingly mystifying implied condemnation of classical ‘principles and practice’). Guppy, so much Kenge’s apprentice in pompous mauldering, can nevertheless go beyond it and complement it, as Kenge plainly cannot, with the idiom of Richard’s ‘off-hand manner’. Indeed, he manages to do it in the same sentence. But, though he can move between registers, he can escape his social enclosure. It is what leaves Guppy, in that entirely coincidental naming of which Dickens appears have been astonishingly prescient, a guppy, a tiny fish at the mercy of the bigger ones.14

14 Amusingly, Guppy the character precedes his marine namesake by more than a decade. The OED supplies this etymology: R. J. Lechmere Guppy (1836–1916), British-born naturalist of Trinidad, who sent the first recorded specimen to the British Museum, used as the specific epithet in Gerardinus guppyi (A. Günther Catal. Fishes Brit. Mus. (1866) VI. 353), the name used when the fish was first described.
To return now to my earlier point, the reality of Nemo’s and Krook’s deaths is only accessible upon the arrival of characters. It is as if looking upon the uninhabited room, the room where no living being perceives, is outside the narrator’s terms of reference. The narrator is less a roof-raising demon than a parasite (he is able to ‘invade’, in Hornback’s words, humans, those windowed houses: ‘If Mr Snagsby could stand his little woman’s look, as it enters at his eyes, the windows of his soul, and searches the whole tenement...’ [414]). Perhaps, in a novel so consumed with infection, it is apt that the ‘omniscient’ narration be a contagion. Gases and contagions, ambient, incorporeal things, can transcend the carceral strictures that local, solid people, with the exception of Bucket and Tulkinghorn and, to an extent, Woodcourt, Mrs Rouncewell and Mrs Snagsby, cannot. And, as I shall go on to explain, those people are themselves fairly ambient and incorporeal. In a typical description of Tulkinghorn, for example, we learn that

His manner of coming and going between the two places [Chesney Wold and his home in London] is one of his impenetrabilities.... He melted out of his turret-room this morning, just as now, in the late twilight, he melts into his own square. (661)

Tulkinghorn ‘melts’, changes state and is thereby able to change location. He and the others I just noted are shape-shifters, itinerant, unknowable and, Tulkinghorn’s murder aside, immutable. As, in what could serve as an epigraph for the novel, all of the ‘slime’ and ‘pestilential gas’ and manifold other iniquities and defects ‘shall work its retribution through every order of society up to the proudest of the proud and to the highest of the high’, so shall Tulkinghorn, and indeed so shall Bucket and Woodcourt, similarly travel (710). They
regulate the exchanges between open and enclosed spaces, windowless houses, and in this way they are expert conjurers. We have seen Mrs Rouncewell’s domain; Mr Woodcourt’s abilities are likewise partial. For a romantic hero, a noble gentleman whose good deeds we see evidence of, he is also a spooky figure, a harbinger of death who is ready to act as Charon. He is there for Nemo’s death and for Lady Dedlock’s, among others. It makes his ostensibly generous offer of succour to Jo, terrified of Inspector Bucket finding him, look much darker: soon after Jo has declared “he’ll see me if I’m above ground”, Woodcourt tells him “I will find you a better place than this to lie down and hide in” (718). That better place turns out to be, via the Shooting Gallery, a pauper’s grave in “that there berrying-ground”, which is, to be sure, a better place to lie down and hide in (733).

But, excluding his personal absence from much of Esther’s narrative, here is where Woodcourt’s conjuring powers end; he cannot enclose or permit escape from enclosure in any other way. In truth, the closest thing in the novel to real omniscience, that ultimate ability to penetrate enclosed spaces, belongs to neither character and certainly neither narrator. Rather, it is those anthologists of hidden affairs, Tulkinghorn and Bucket, who possess it, as they possess so much else. When Tulkinghorn strides home in triumph after the disclosure of his intention to reveal Lady Dedlock’s secret, the prose, focalised through his eyes, blithely takes in the street and its houses and it records, with a generous dash of congratulation, that many of [their] mysteries, difficulties, mortgages, delicate affairs of all kinds, are treasured up within his old black satin waistcoat. He is in the confidence of the very bricks and mortar. The high chimney-stacks telegraph family secrets to him. (747)

Tulkinghorn would have no truck with the wistful expression ‘If these walls...’, for walls talk to him. They traffic in their intelligences, inform on their occupants. For him, the
darkly clustered houses and their rooms enclose no secrets. As we know, or infer, depending on our familiarity with the story, Tulkinghorn is about to receive his comeuppance. The narrator makes much of his failure to recognise this, his failure to see the portents that the narrator, effacing his own retrospective knowledge through the equivocal use of the present tense, freely concedes do not exist outside of his fancy (in this respect they are like Esther’s backshadowings, a retrospective imposition in this superficially present tense). The portents, the refrain they do not say outside of the narration, ‘Don’t go home!’, serve not just as an instrument to tauten the terrible foreboding afflicting the reader – and, again, not Tulkinghorn, who blunders on – but as instruments to jeer Tulkinghorn for being the only one who cannot see this, for being so obtuse. The end of the chapter – the report of the shot that slew Tulkinghorn having just been heard and ignored outside, where the reader has been detained – dwells on the irony that the Allegory on the ceiling, though a ‘paralysed dumb witness’, also foretold the death (752). Had Tulkinghorn been in the confidence of his own bricks and mortar, he might have been privy to this. But he was not, and by dwelling on this oversight the narrator vaunts his superiority over his dead rival.

Bucket, about whose capabilities I shall say more anon, is able to do more than simply know the ‘mysteries, difficulties, mortgages, delicate affairs of all kinds’ that are occluded by the walls of the windowless houses: he is able to breach the walls themselves. He conjures Jo out of his makeshift hospice at Bleak House (497). He conjures the indefatigable Hortense out of a room like ‘a homely Jupiter’ (‘it is impossible to describe how Mr Bucket gets her out’ [837]). He conjures George out of the friendly Bagnet household, the heads of which look at the arrest differently as Bucket takes George away: ‘Mrs Bagnet remarks...that Mr Bucket “almost clings to George like, and seems to be really fond of him”’ (765). This is the triumph of Bucket’s dark art. He has managed to spirit away George in plain sight and make
it look like he is doing exactly the opposite, like he and George are actually old chums partaking of their companionship. Looked at this way, it is a more remarkable escape than any George could have made through the escape-proof backyard at the Bagnets’, whose inviolability Bucket had ascertained prior to this with a meticulous reconnoitre:

‘What a very nice backyard, ma’am! Any way out of that yard, now?’

There is no way out of that yard.

‘Ain’t there really?’ says Mr. Bucket. ‘I should have thought there might have been. Well, I don’t know as I ever saw a backyard that took my fancy more. Would you allow me to look at it? Thank you. No, I see there’s no way out. But what a very good-proportioned yard it is!’

Having cast his sharp eye all about it, Mr. Bucket returns to his chair next his friend Mr. George and pats Mr. George affectionately on the shoulder (762).

So successful is Bucket’s ruse that he has begun to gull not just the Bagnets but the narrator too: ‘friend’ – whether irony or free indirect discourse, or both – subtly, insidiously intrudes into the narration much as Bucket has intruded into the house (indeed, much as it did in the example I quoted earlier, when another man, Tulkinghorn, kept up a pretense of friendship). ‘Affectionately’ facilitates the subsequent misapprehension.

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The commonplace, my conventional initial reading of Benjamin, is that by looking into the windowless house we change the windowless house. The pristine ‘true’, eternally moot, becomes a truth-compound, reacting to the intrusion of the world outside and forming some sort of less-than-‘true’ molecule, a bowdlerisation of the ‘true’. But this still begs, while infinitely deferring, the question of what that seminal ‘true’ was. What is going on inside those darkly clustered houses? The omniscience of the two omniscient figures in BH,
Tulkinghorn and Bucket, finally fails. Tulkinghorn carelessly accepts a walk-on part in his own murder scene, and Bucket, for all his uncanny powers, cannot prevent that murder, nor can he find Lady Dedlock and prevent her death. But Benjamin’s ‘the true’, the changeling that always eludes us, that always switches clothes with Jenny and sends her the opposite way as a diversion, paradoxically becomes through its reticence the opposite, the false: the wild conjecture that attends on Nemo’s and Krook’s deaths, for example. We cannot know the ‘true’. Indeed, the stability of ‘the true’ – which is to say, the instability – is all we can be sure of. Discussing phantasmagoria, Terry Castle adduces another great novelist, Proust, whose narrator reminisces about an episode from his youth in which a magic lantern was given to him to lift his spirits:

[The magic lantern] substituted for the opaqueness of my walls an impalpable iridescence, supernatural phenomena of many colours, in which legends were depicted as on a shifting and transitory window. But my sorrows were only increased thereby, because this mere change of lighting was enough to destroy the familiar impression I had of the room, thanks to which, save for the torture of going to bed, it had become quite endurable. Now I no longer recognised it, and felt uneasy in it, as in a room in some hotel or chalet, in a place where I had just arrived for the first time... The anaesthetic effect of habit being destroyed, I would begin to think – and to feel – such melancholy things (43).

As Castle adds, ‘Here, ironically, the magic lantern produces nothing but estrangement’. Here we find the marriage of Benjamin’s and Tolstoy’s ideas and their transcendence. Within the windowless house (‘the opaqueness of my walls’ means the same thing) is ‘the true’, or variegated forms of it, but perceiving it is contingent on ‘the anaesthetic effect of habit being destroyed’. The distortion of the room by the window that is not a window is also inherent in the room, another truth; for, though it is the agent of the magic lantern that produces this distortion, the distortion is organic distortion: ‘this mere change of lighting was enough to destroy the familiar impression I had of the room’. The room is still what it was, still tangibly
the same – it would still look the same – but the narrator Marcel ‘no longer recognise[s] it’.

Importantly, Marcel recognises that it is still tangibly the same room while continuing to believe in its alteration. Tales of people believing such things, believing in the illusions created by a magical apparatus even when they know them to be fake, are legion. Grahame Smith writes that spectators at panoramas could hardly believe that they were facing an illusion. In the words of one spectator, you ‘are obliged almost to reason with yourself...that it is not nature, instead of a work of art’. Indeed, there are stories of viewers putting out their hands to touch objects which they believed were three-dimensional despite the fact that they had been painted on a flat surface (30).

According to Castle, a contemporary observer of the phantasmagoria saw ‘a man striking at one of his phantoms with a stick’ (39). There are many such instances – and reversals, the transformation of reality into illusion, which is exactly what the ‘Pepper’s “Ghost”’ illusion, for example, would perform – in BH. Lynda Nead writes in Victorian Babylon of how gaslights ‘produced the dream-images of the city at night... an uncanny, nocturnal city’, and that Dickens’ sketch ‘Night Walks’, which I discuss below, provides ‘a hallucinatory, dream-like evocation of the city as a phantasmagoria of past and present’ (9, 102). This evocation is reprised when Mr Snagsby, a witness to this phantasmagoria, is ‘so confused’ as to be ‘doubtful of his being awake and out – doubtful of the reality of the streets through which he goes – doubtful of the reality of the moon that shines above him’ (365).

What is real and what is not is, in Marcel’s words, ‘shifting and transitory’. When Bucket, accompanied by Snagsby and a police constable, literally alights upon Jo with his bull’s-eye lantern, ‘Jo stands amazed in the disc of light, like a ragged figure in a magic-lantern’ (361-62). This simile does not come until after their search for Jo through the slums of Tom-all-Alone’s, but it is essential to understanding Dickens portrayal of the search. Upon
the trio’s entrance, ‘the crowd… hovers around the three visitors, like a dream of horrible faces, and fades away up alleys and into ruins, and behind walls’ (358). Of course, the crowd is not a ‘dream’, though society wishes to regard it as such, but the belief that it is infuses the language (it is not the narrator who is seeing here but one of the trio), and the crowd’s incorporeality is reified, as it were, and perpetuated. It is, however, unreal: this is an attempt to suppress its reality. More interesting to me are moments in which illusion persuades a viewer or reader of a reality, much as Marcel’s magic lantern does. In the scene of Gridley’s death, George returns to his shooting gallery accompanied by Jarndyce and Esther to find:

As he pulled a bell-handle which hung by a chain to the door-post, a very respectable old gentleman, with grey hair, wearing spectacles, and dressed in a black spencer and gaiters and a broad-brimmed hat, and carrying a large gold-headed cane, addressed him (400).

As soon as they are inside, the ‘physician stopped, and, taking off his hat, appeared to vanish by magic, and to leave another and quite a different man in his place’ (401). The ‘different man’ is Inspector Bucket. Bucket’s simple disguise is dressed up, so to speak, as an act of ‘magic’, a kind of visual alchemy. It is not the same man wearing different clothes but ‘another and quite a different man’, as if they really were two separate people. Notice also the gap between George’s pulling of the bell-handle and Bucket’s addressing him; what ought to have occurred between these two acts, Bucket’s approach, is omitted. This is all the stranger given that, in Esther’s account, the party approached the shooting gallery through ‘narrow courts’ (400). The implication is that Bucket has simply materialised next to them. Elsewhere in the novel it is more than implied, when we learn that ‘time and place cannot bind’ him: ‘Like man in the abstract, he is here today and gone tomorrow – but, very unlike man indeed he is here again the next day’ (803). The omniscient narrator, again unable to ‘bind’ a subject, imputes to Bucket supernatural powers. He is as one risen from the dead, ‘here again the next
day’, his humanity sequestered into abstraction and his uncanny reanimation bodied forth in reality.

Marcel Mauss, in *A General Theory of Magic*, remarks of the magician that ‘the ritual [of magic] itself…turns him into another man’ (32) – as Bucket is turned when he becomes the doctor – and that ‘His words, his gestures, his glances, even his thoughts are forces in themselves. His own person emanates influences before which nature and men, spirits and gods must give way’ (41). This notion of Bucket as magus of some kind is evident from the beginning of his portrayal. When Snagsby sits in Tulkinghorn’s office, he notices Bucket, ‘who was not there when he himself came in, and who has not since entered by the door or either of the windows’ and who has a ‘ghostly manner of appearing’ (355). Bucket’s means of entry is not reckoned, but nor is it elided as it is by Esther in the passage cited above. Snagsby in this focalisation – which is perhaps too grand a term for it, since by seeing things through Snagsby’s perspective we see next to nothing – is actually engaging in the kind of ratiocination Bucket might employ. Look at his shabby little inventory of the knowable when he goes on to think, at least in the narrator’s paraphrase, that ‘There is a press in the room, but its hinges have not creaked, nor has a step been audible upon the floor. Yet this third person stands there…’ But it little avails him. Prosaic observation, the recording of significant absences, those uncreaking hinges and inaudible footfalls, yields only a profound, unresolved absence, which is itself absented as it is recorded. Snagsby and the narrator are so adamant too that these absences existed, as it were; it is implicit that their knowledge of the perceptible is absolute and they do not so much as countenance, let alone brook, fault. The only conclusion is no conclusion at all, the evanescence of Bucket before Snagsby’s, and our, discombobulated eyes. Bucket goes from being ‘a person’, ‘stoutly built, steady-looking’, to

15 The reference applies to all BH quotes in this and the following paragraph.
something both less and more than a person, a figure with ‘a ghostly manner of appearing’. The earlier certitude precipitates a kind of clumsy subterfuge. Snagsby and the narrator conclude that ‘there is nothing remarkable about him at first sight’, except that ‘manner’, as though the performance of something impossible, surely a working definition of a miracle, could so be airily dismissed. But Snagsby is out of his depth. If nature, spirits and gods ‘must give way’ to such a figure, what hope has poor old Snagsby got?

Albert D. Hutter has observed that in this first perception of Bucket, Bucket is constantly deferred by the clotted syntax, so that one whose livelihood is apprehension cannot be apprehended himself; one who fingers, in the literal and inculpatory metaphorical senses, others and says ‘that’s what you are’: what he is nobody can say, nobody can point to. ‘Mr Snagsby is dismayed to see…’, which begins the first sentence of the paragraph, is sundered from its object by several subordinate, qualifying clauses, a rhetorical device repeated two sentences later (89). Snagsby has trouble seeing anything here. All we see is the verbal equivalent of the fog. The device – later taken to its extreme by Conrad in the portrayal of Mr Kurtz in Heart of Darkness, who seems to exist almost entirely in the novella-length catalogue of rumours about him, and is seen in the ill, mortally-wounded flesh only as a kind of vanishing point at the end of them – ironically takes us further away from discerning the character of Bucket. That is, for all the verbiage slopping about his name in instances like Snagsby’s, and our, first encounter with him, he absconds: helped, paradoxically, by the verbiage itself.

Bucket, like Benjamin’s windowless house, is a pending disappearance, perpetually inscrutable, a ‘man in the abstract’ whose reality can never be perceived, who is always beyond the attentions of others. Perhaps it is this that allows credulity to be confronted and
imposed on – squatted in – as it is above and elsewhere. Peter Carey, reconstituting in *Jack Maggs* the scene Esther describes, captures the main point of it. In a ‘tight little alcove’ much like the ‘narrow court’ in *BH*, we find this observation: ‘This doctor, with his twisted red mouth and wild bright eyes, was incredible, ridiculous, and yet he *existed*, given life by some violent magic in his creator’s heart’ (174). This is Jack Maggs’s perception of the author Tobias Oates, fictional counterpart to the young Charles Dickens. Oates has been dragooned into pacifying Maggs, for which purpose he has disguised himself as doctor. What makes the passage notable is the way Maggs, who has already been apprised of the doctor’s identity and finds it ‘incredible, ridiculous’, must nevertheless concede that ‘the doctor... *existed*, that the vivifying gusto of the performance transcended scepticism without at all effacing it.

Paradoxically, Maggs is convinced by what he finds to be unconvincing and knows to be unreal. It is a convincing unconvincing impossibility, to adapt Aristotle. It recalls the Karen Petroski observation I quoted in the introduction that, in much the same way, the Dickens who wrote *American Notes* ‘explicitly put readers in a position’ in which they ‘know[...] that what they witness is illusion but nevertheless temporarily allow[...] themselves to believe in its reality and to be affected by it’ (73).

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Earlier I invoked the allusion to Asmodée in *D&S*. This comes amid an impassioned jeremiad about ‘Nature’ and the ‘unnatural’. The irony of this passage is that what it calls for is actually inimical to Dickens’ preferred means of attaining and conveying understanding, as distinct from knowledge. The Dickens adumbrating ‘The Shadow’ is not saying that he wants to *know* what is taking place at all those hearths. That is not interesting to him. Knowledge is easily debased, liable to be vulgar gossip or sinister intelligences, the stuff the Tulkinghorns
of this world possess and exploit. Instead, he craves distance, the better to foster the efflorescence of fancy. Proximity deadens. Wittman is very good on the ways that Dickens contrives to preserve some measure of distance even where one might conclude he is surmounting it. Noting the ‘narratable and narrative distance between the viewer and the object’ in *Sketches*, particularly ‘A Visit to Newgate’, she observes that ‘The familiar walls of Newgate in effect go from being “whats” to “what ifs?” or “hows?” as soon as they begin to generate narrative’ (220). This follows from Jaffe, who notes that ‘Seeking out in order to sympathise, [Boz] provides a model for sympathy that intervenes, if at all, only from a distance’ (*Vanishing* 44). This should not be a stricture on Dickensian sympathy, however, since the point of the sympathy is that Dickens wants his readers to imagine the distant experience of those wretches, not familiar experience (that is, within the ‘familiar’ walls lurks something distant, foreign). Sympathy’s ability to vault distance and permeate divides is what makes it salutary; provoking sympathy for those who are not distant is otiose. This is why ‘sympathy retains for Dickens…itts positve potential’, as Lowe puts it (10). It is why, to use the Harry Stone quote from the introduction, ‘Dickens…champions the power of imaginative sympathy,’ which he says ‘humanises and saves’.

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16 Perhaps remissly, I do not discuss Dickensian coincidence in the thesis, where I am not interested in plot. But it is germane to this tendency. Forster writes that ‘On the coincidences, resemblances and surprises of life Dickens liked especially to dwell, and few things moved his fancy so pleasantly’, especially the fact that ‘people supposed to be far apart were so constantly elbowing each other’ (*Life v.1* 59). The existence of convicts ‘within one yard’ of convivial free men and women is both ‘coincidence’ and ‘surprise’, a template for those coincidences Dickens engenders in his novels. Esther, for all that her faculty of noticing avails her, could have forestalled many problems by imagining the ‘wretched creature[...] pent up’ on the other side of the door at Krook’s (*Boz* 199). In this way, sympathy has an appreciable utility.

17 Lowe sharply differs from Jaffe in her conception of ‘Sympathy’, and in this summary I am perhaps guilty of falling between two formidable stools, or even favouring Jaffe’s conception despite my enthusiasm for Lowe’s treatise. Lowe writes of ‘sympathy’ and the much later coinage ‘empathy’ that the two words are now often opposed to one other, with ‘empathy’ comprehending feelings with another person from their point of view, the feeling of their feelings, and ‘sympathy’ indicating a feeling for them from distant, outside, or still separate perspective. (9)

I do not see why ‘sympathy’ cannot imagine ‘the feeling of their feelings’ from a ‘distant, outside, or still separate perspective’. As I write above, and argue through the rest of this section, in Dickens the distance is what gives the act of sympathy its meaning.
The distance kept means, however, that knowledge is eschewed. As Tambling notes, the two condemned prisoners who did not win a reprieve as the third did, John Smith and John Pratt, were lovers, the last homosexuals to be executed in Britain. Furthermore, their wretched outing and incrimination arose from their wretched lodgings, where, the sitting magistrate noted, ‘the room was so poor that what was going on inside was easily visible from without’ (Going Astray 42-43). They were the victims of poverty’s Asmodée. Dickens does not want to relay these squalid tidings, writing euphemistically that ‘the nature of [their] offence rendered it necessary to separate them even from their companions in guilt’ (Boz 207). Perhaps it is a kind of probity or perhaps simple distaste that prompts Dickens’ discretion on this matter, almost as if he were once again a court reporter and were belatedly respecting a suppression order. In that passage from D&S that alludes to Asmodée, Dickens writes of

rousing some who never have looked out upon the world of human life around them, to a knowledge of their own relation to it, and for making them acquainted with a perversion of nature in their own contracted sympathies and estimates. (685)

The ‘knowledge’ here is not the knowledge that goes with omniscience; indeed, omniscience may vitiate it. It is imaginative ‘sympathy’, the engagement that refreshes minds. Wittman finds the notion of a ‘sympathetic identification between the “helpless” fellow-creature [in gaol] and the reader’ to be ‘facile and unsatisfactory’ (223). But the point of ‘Newgate’ is surely to nourish that ‘sympathetic identification’. Throughout we are privy to the terrible brutalisation the prisoners suffer. As much as anything, the want of deviations from familiarity induces this state. To the prisoners, ‘such scenes were too familiar to them…to excite more than a passing thought’ (202). But knowledge of this is only meaningful if it permits the reader to accept the invitation to ‘Imagine what have been the feelings of the men
whom that fearful pew has enclosed’ and then again to ‘Conceive the situation of a man, spending his last night on earth in this cell’, a template for which the text provides (206, 208). It is an invitation to imagine the invisible, something that cannot be grasped no matter how ‘easily visible from without the prisoners’ – though it is notable that in both instances the figures are ‘enclosed’, the cell pointedly having only ‘a small high window in the back [that] admitted as much air and light as could struggle in’ (208). Those ‘utterly unmindful’ outside the gaol, ‘not even knowing, or if they do, not even heeding, the fact [of their closeness to the condemned]’, may possess the knowledge but decline the invitation (199). We seen indirect confirmation of this elsewhere in that passage from *D&S*:

> Look round upon the world of odious sights—millions of immortal creatures have no other world on earth—at the lightest mention of which humanity revolts, and dainty delicacy living in the next street, stops her ears, and lisps ‘I don’t believe it!’ (684)

The point is the failure of imagination, not of knowledge. The gentle ‘dainty delicacy’ has bred this incredulity and obduracy, a kind of civilised barbarousness that will lead its victims to cover their ears like a child. Such people are no better off than the prisoners ‘no more concerned by what was passing before there eyes, and within their hearing, than if they were blind and deaf’ (*Boz* 202). They might know something, but in a cursory way, and without the exercise, let alone the enlargement, of sympathy. As with the ‘Vauxhall Gardens by Day’, so with the prison and its occupants: ‘we just recognised them, and that was all’ (*Boz* 129). It is notable that the best means of provoking this imaginative sympathy is, by Boz’s own admission, a wild fancy of defamiliarising hypotyposis: ‘If Bedlam could be suddenly removed like another Aladdin’s palace, and set down on the space now occupied by Newgate,’ almost nobody who passed the site’s ‘familiar’ walls would do so ‘without bestowing a hasty glance on its small, grated windows, and a transient thought upon the
condition of the unhappy beings immured in its dismal cells’ (199). In lieu of this, we have Dickens’ sketch so that readers can visit the interior of Newgate, like Italy in *Pictures*, ‘in fancy’. To ‘visit…in fancy’ is the important thing.

In a later sketch, ‘Night Walks’ from *The Uncommercial Traveller*, Dickens’ engages in a reprise of Boz’s mobile speculations. By this time the spectator is an exile: The Uncommercial Traveller has been rendered ‘houseless’ by insomnia – that word a borrowing from De Quincey, as Michael Slater and John Drew note – and a concomitant impulse to wander the streets (*Uncommercial* 149). Amid these wanderings he encounters other of what soon become ‘us houseless people’, a noticeably less jocular collective of the shunned, with whom he establishes ‘sympathetic relations’ (150). But these ‘sympathetic relations’ are not what one expects. He does not interact with anyone, much less converse with them. For him, ‘capital company’ and ‘good society’ is ‘the reek, and the smell of grains, and the rattling of the pump dray horses’ from inside a brewery (152). Farther on in his wanderings, he observes that ‘When a church clock strikes, on houseless ears…it may be at first mistaken for company and hailed as such’ (154). A ‘railway terminus’ is ‘remunerative company’ until lamps are lighted and porters emerge (156). He is seeking his ‘own solitary way’ (157). Those people he does interact with are ghosts or beasts: ‘the ghost of a watchman’, ‘the most spectral person’ and ‘a thing’, a ‘creature’, an ‘ugly object’ who – or, rather that, since it is an ‘it’ – is ‘like a worried dog (152, 156, 154-55). The ‘driven cattle’ the Traveller elsewhere espies are beasts invested with more sympathy, because distant and enclosed in ‘stone walls’ and ‘six inches’ worth of iron railing’ with ‘their heads down…for tossing-purchase at quite imaginary dogs’ (157). ‘Sympathetic relations’, akin to the ‘sympathetic identification’ Wittman scorns, means to watch and fancy, which is its own form of edification. Dickens is
alluding to the edifying properties of “sympathetic relations” in the earnest, rather pious letter salving the unhappiness of young Danish correspondent Emmely Gotschalk:

In every human existence, however quiet or monotonous, there is range enough for active sympathy and cheerful usefulness… It is through such means that I humbly believe God must be approached… Sympathize, not in thought only, but in action, with all about you. *(Letters v.6 25)*

He is talking in part, one infers, about charitable ministrations, Good Works. But ‘sympathy’ also evokes, and not inadvertently either, its usage in ‘Night Walks’.

The Uncommercial Traveller desires not only stimuli for his fancy but locations that might license and sponsor it. He goes to Bethlehem Hospital ‘partly, because I had a night-fancy in my head which could best be pursued within sight of its walls and dome’ (153). He must be outside because his interest is only piqued insofar as an insurmountable barrier is in place, the better to embellish the fancy that makes that barrier wonderfully permeable. As Jaffé writes, ‘though sympathy supposedly transcends difference, it in fact depends on establishing the difference it proposes to transcend’ *(Vanishing 36)*. Fittingly, the author so taken with extremities in people and things desires them of places too. He is obsessed with walls, hewing to them wherever he goes as though he were blind. It is notable that among these walls is Newgate’s: ‘it afforded matter for reflection to take Newgate in the way, and, touching its rough stone, to think of the prisoners in their sleep’ (152). Here he seems to read the tactility of the ‘rough stone’, its ordered abrasions, and in doing so projects his sympathy through it. This is what he seeks for the ‘utterly unmindful’: imaginative ‘sympathetic relations’.
Externals, exteriors, extremities: these are the keys to their opposites, to their transcendence, palpable tokens of the invisible. At one point he sees watchmen doing their rounds in a cemetery ‘among the graves at stated times, and mov[ing] the tell-tale handle of an index which recorded that they had touched it at such an hour’. Merely this vicarious experience of touching an exterior foments a ‘solemn consideration’, a flare of fancy about the ‘enormous hosts of dead’ beneath in the graves themselves (154). The Uncommercial Traveller then entertains a wonderful and terrible fancy, one of Wittman’s ‘what ifs?’: ‘if they were raised while the living slept, there would not be the space of a pin’s point in all the streets and ways for the living…’ (154). But they have been raised, here in the narration, and the living still sleep.

* 

In BH, the narrator is ostensibly like ‘the Thing at…the window, by the fire, in the street, in the house, from infancy to old age, everyone’s inseparable companion’ but is in important ways different. He is frustrated – as all such narrators must be frustrated, not being able to intervene, not having agency in this imagined world. There is a sense, as I have argued, that not all the world of which he appears to have such absolute mastery is accessible to him. The reality within the fiction is as tenuous and fantasmatic as Lady Dedlock is to Jo in their parody of Orpheus and Eurydice’s flight from the underworld. It is so even to its narrator, for all his knowing purports. Yet as I have also argued, the worth of accessibility is questionable, the apprehension of Benjamin’s ‘the true’ being beyond such simple, linear transactions. We see an example in the failure of postivist observation in Snagsby’s manful, thwarted effort to apprehend Bucket. This is an especially important point, as it presages the next chapter’s discussion of Hard Times and modes of scientific observation and knowledge.
Moreover, the worth of accessibility is also moot. One can enter Newgate – though Boz makes much of the labyrinthine floorplan and innumerable gates and turnkeys, tacitly inculcating the difficulty of his procession – but one is watching people cognizant of being watched, and their behaviour, ‘the true’ within the ‘windowless room’, is changed. Some ‘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…’ (206). This applies to the less ostentatious too. Those ‘desirous to avoid even the casual observation of the strangers’ cannot escape the observers’ influence (206). To lift the rooftops and see men having sex together when such an act is furtive and illegal is probably to see something unfamiliar, yet it is not to enter ‘sympathetic relations’ with those rather differently sympathetic relations. It is to become a mere voyeur and an informant, a potential accessory to Bucket’s or Tulkinghorn’s equally disturbing simulacra of ‘semi-omniscience’. In ‘Night Walks’ we find the narrator pursuing his ‘solitary way’ to preserve and enact his fancy, a fancy that gives him better ‘sympathetic relations’ with the chimerical ‘true’ on the other side than any Asmodée.

The next chapter takes up that idea by discussing how fancy came to be an agent of knowledge in nineteenth-century science, supplanting an epistemological paradigm in which ‘the true’, the ‘facts’ of *Hard Times*, was sundered from sight. This paradigm proscribed fancy, as indeed do *HT*’s proponents of ‘fact’, abjuring even hypothesis, that imaginative extrapolation from the known. Dickens, I argue, saw the importance of fancy to fact in scientific investigation and appreciation. Fancy in the next chapter is not a process that could be morally improving in a nebulous way, as it was in this chapter. It is the harbinger of discovery.
3

The previous chapter looked at knowledge and fancy in BH and elsewhere in Dickens as if they were in opposition, the former sequestered from the latter by the ‘rough stone’ of Newgate’s walls. I argued that knowledge, or the reality it must apprehend to be so, dwelt in Benjamin’s ‘windowless room’ and fancy was left outside to conjure its prodigies of illusion. If that argument seemed like a derogation of fancy, it should not have. The point was that knowledge – the complacent airs of omniscience in BH’s third-person narration, the dogged empirical investigation of Newgate by Boz – was either dubious or insufficient. That is, the point was that knowledge was not the point for Dickens. Its utility in Boz’s ‘A Visit to Newgate’ was as a means to stir the reader’s fancy and thereby rouse him from “the force of habit”, ‘the power which habit and custom exercise’, those potent narcotics of the quotidian. This chapter takes up that stirring, but it tweaks the relationship with knowledge. What if instead of a relationship in which fancy supervened upon knowledge, knowledge supervened upon fancy? What if it were fancy that were primary? Indeed, that is the persistent implication of ‘Night Walks’, the sketch I finished the previous chapter discussing.

It is more than an implication in the novel I discuss this chapter, Hard Times. HT presents us with a town where the want of fancy is so pervasive and grievous that much of the populace are as brutalised as the prisoners in Newgate. The Gradgrind children and their school cohort are no better off than Newgate’s piteous urchins, children ‘who have never known what childhood is’, who ‘have entered at once upon the stern realities and miseries of life, and to their better nature it is almost hopeless to appeal’ (Boz 202-203). In the recesses of the gaol and in HT’s Coketown, there is a clear answer to the question posed in that passage from Dombey & Son I cited: ‘whether…it is not natural to be unnatural’ (683). Furthermore, HT inculpates the education in those ‘stern realities’ as an accessory to Tom
Gradgrind’s crime, the pivotal moment in the novel. The peaceable obduracy of those free men and women dulled by habit outside ‘Newgate’ is unsustainable in HT; a want of fancy begets delinquency, threatening to make delinquency a social pandemic.

This chapter examines HT and fancy – and with it wonder, as I shall explain – in relation to scientific vision in the nineteenth century. My main interest is what Jude V. Nixon, writing recently on Dickens, calls ‘the scientific eye’\(^\text{18}\). The chapter looks at nineteenth-century constructions of science as a legacy of disembodied facts, these facts as hermetic in their way as ‘the true’ in ‘the windowless room’. Such constructions were antithetical to Dickens’ own construction of science, which I shall argue was the one that began to prevail as the century went on. Adducing his review of Robert Hunt’s The Poetry of Science for The Examiner newspaper in late 1848, I note Dickens’ belief that ‘the facts of science are at least as fully of poetry, as the most poetical fancies ever founded on an imperfect observation and a distant suspicion of them’. Knowledge itself, in this construction, can be wondrous; facts, those disenchanted units wielded by early scientists such as William Whewell and later on Joseph Gradgrind and his colleagues in HT, fanciful. It revives the Romantic notion that fancy and wonder have a place in science.

Throughout this thesis the main question I try to answer is the one I adapted from Grahame Smith in the introduction: how can writing ‘essentially…distorting’ also be ‘more real than reality itself’? My suggestion is that distortion, far from an obstacle to being ‘more real’, is actually essential to it. The last chapter considered the ways in which the ‘real’ itself might not be real, might indeed be fantasmatic. This chapter proceeds by examining how the distortions of fancy are intrinsic to the discovery and representation of scientific knowledge.

\(^{18}\) This chapter is indebted to Nixon’s and K.J. Fieldings articles, a fact I see I have not made quite clear. It will be apparent to anyone familiar with the articles and their vital, compendious learning.
in the nineteenth century. In the previous chapter, I tried to show that Dickens ultimately preferred The Uncommercial Traveller fancying outside Newgate’s walls to the seeing Boz inside them. In this chapter, however, I try to show that Dickens believed fancying and seeing were mutually necessary when it came to science, and that the unfancying invigilators of HT are unseeing too. The ‘fanciful imagination’ HT and Dickens in his non-fiction cleave to as salutary might yield, as I argue, the fabulous distortions of evolutionary theory in its various iterations.

There is an even deeper bond with the preceding chapters. In the previous chapter I tried to show that the most convincing entity in BH was its falsest, Bucket, and that he was at his most convincing when his falsity was plainest. The sheer ostentatiousness of his falsity served to display and accentuate the barriers his extraordinary fancies – his entance to the ‘narrow courts’ and his disguise as a physician, say – were surmounting. This trait, which is the essence of hypotyposis’s rhetorical efficacy, I shall in this chapter identify with wonder. Wonder is at its most potent when most unbelievable: to use the Stephen Greenblatt quote from later in the chapter, ‘It calls attention to the problem of credibility and at the same time insists upon the undeniability, the exigency of the experience’. In flaunting its simultaneous incredibility and ‘undeniability’ it recalls both Petroski and, further back, Lewes’s ‘even while knowing it was false we could not help, for a moment, being affected’. To provoke wonder is to provoke knowledge, I argue, and these twin provocations arise from distortion, from the defamiliarising speculation that courts fallacy as it yields truth. As I note later, Beer writes that Darwin took ‘pleasure in “making strange”, in skimming off the familiar and restoring it’ and that he practised this in his scientific investigations. Indeed, as I shall argue, Darwin was practising a rigorous modern update of hypotyposis’s extravagant Latin descendent, Impossibilia.
*HT* begins with contempt for the ‘suppositious, non-existent’ and ends with a chapter-length egress into it (8). ‘Hard facts’ cede their dominion to ‘imaginative graces and delights’ (7, 219). At first that ‘man of realities’, Thomas Gradgrind, intones with blind certitude about the perniciousness of fancy: ‘Ay, ay, ay! But you mustn’t fancy… You are never to fancy’ (8, 11). His blindness has already been figured in the text: ‘his eyes found commodious cellarage in two dark caves’, the eyes either a surplus good or, it is suggested, gouged out (7). But at last this gives way to visionary foreknowledge, notably that of his daughter and what she had earlier called ‘that wild escape into something visionary’: ‘watching the fire… How much of the future might arise before her vision?’ (162, 218). The narrator is acting as the presumed surrogate for her pyromantic divinations by relating them (‘These things were to be’ [219]). Blindness gives way to vision, to ‘seeing things’, and the novel proclaims, in contravention of its origins, its magical power to transcend them. How does that come about? This chapter tries to delineate the context and significance of that transcendence. The chapter’s broader purpose, as I indicated above, is to show how Dickens’ attitude to science is not only of a piece with his approach to representation, but also illuminates it. There exists ample scholarship by eminent Victorianists on Dickens’ vexed relationship with science. But I might begin by taking up a few almost incidental remarks from one such scholar, Jude V. Nixon. Nixon contends that although ‘Dickens could, occasionally, get the description just right’ as scientific observation in certain letters, the writings, ‘despite the desire… lack the scientific eye and/or vocabulary’, unlike those of Gerard Manley Hopkins, to whom Nixon compares him (275). What the ‘scientific eye’ and ‘get[ting] the description just right’ mean
Nixon does not elaborate on; neither do all the other words spent in that commodious cellarage of scholarship on Dickens and science. Consider this an elaboration.

To proceed, however, it is necessary to retreat. Coinciding with the start of Dickens’ career as a writer came the ramification of the old ‘natural philosophy’ into the sciences we recognise today: physics, biology, and the sundry other ‘Ologies of all kinds’, as Mrs Gradgrind calls them in *HT* (149). Indeed, William Whewell did not officially mint the term ‘scientist’ until 1840, well after Dickens had retired the soubriquet ‘Boz’ (Chapple 1). The Royal Astronomical Society was formed in 1831, the Botanical Society in 1836 and many other scientific groups besides during this period. Dickens’ great friend and influence Thomas Carlyle affirmed in his 1829 jeremiad ‘Signs of the Times’ that ‘the science of the age…is physical, chemical, physiological’, supplanting, to Carlyle’s regret, Metaphysics (67). Furthermore, the ‘intellectual bias of our time’ was an ‘all-pervading disposition to that line of inquiry’ (70). Carlyle contrasted the prevailing ‘Mechanism’ of the age with the ‘Dynamism’ of the individual genius; the great achievements of ‘Science and Art’ were ‘Dynamical’, and were not abetted, indeed were hampered, in Carlyle’s opinion, by institutions such as the British Association for the Advancement of Science, also founded in 1831. In the ascendant was the view propounded by Lord Kelvin later in the century: that one’s knowledge of a thing was ‘of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind’ unless one could measure that thing or ‘express it in numbers’ (73). Or as Carlyle put it earlier in the century, ‘what cannot be investigated and understood mechanically, cannot be investigated and understood at all’ (70). The ‘English scientific movement’, though it had abjured the splitting of the two into rigid ‘cultures’, had made ‘its own publicly visible steps toward literature and science differentiation’:

19 Knowledge of this efflorescence is probably common enough for me to assume it, and many of the sources cited here anyhow mention the societies’ establishment. Refer, for example, to Holmes’s *The Age of Wonder* (xix).
As a writing practice, science would now forego the whole realm of rhetorical persuasion and figuration. Instead it would cultivate plain, naked, unadorned language, a univocality fit to express the true meaning of nature as understood through the authoritative interrogation of experimental method. (2)

Writers tended to deal with these nascent sciences in one of two general ways. Some took the adversarial view put by Keats in his contention that Newton had taken the poetry out of rainbows by explaining them. ‘Do not all charms fly / At the mere touch of cold philosophy?’ Keats asks in ‘Lamia’, going on to write that this ‘cold philosophy’ could ‘Conquer all mysteries by rule and line’ and ‘Unweave a rainbow’ (193). This is the classic example of what John Christie and Sally Shuttleworth call ‘a kind of expressive practice termed rhetorical and figural…redefined, bounded and mapped in terms of its opposition to science’ (2). Keats’s lines seem gratuitous and even slightly wrong – in a strictly visual sense, it was surely white light that was unwoven by water droplets, not the rainbow by Newton – but they unweave an atmosphere of disquiet over that burgeoning ken of ‘rule and line’ that could make poets redundant and, in doing so, brutalise everyone else. Even the contemporary popular astronomy author John Bonnycastle, hardly a partisan, acquiesced in the sundering of poetry and science: ‘Poetical descriptions, though they may not be strictly conformable to the rigid principles of the Science they are meant to elucidate…’ (in Holmes 206). Carlyle might inform the thinking behind HT, but before Carlyle comes Keats.

Not all Romantic writers shared this view of science, it should be said. Wordsworth, and eventually Coleridge, were among those dissenting. Perhaps inevitably, one infers from the tenor of his other ideas, Coleridge ‘came…to believe in a unifying complementarity between science and poetry, the latter being not the substitute but “the corolla and fragrance of the austere and many science”’ (in Levere 88). Coleridge found in Sir Humphry Davy
‘poetry, as it were, substantiated and realised in nature: yea, nature itself disclosed to us…as at once the poet and the poem’ (in Levere 88). Newton’s science was indeed to be abhorred, but because rather than precluding poetry it was unimpressed by the ‘shaping spirit of Imagination’\(^{20}\) that could render its ‘complementarity’ with its kith in nature’s unity.

(‘Newton’s astronomy was “not only depressive from its monotony but revolting from its want of analogy to…all our other experiences of…Nature” [Levere 94].) Wordsworth, in his 1800 Preface to the \textit{Lyrical Ballads}, forecast that in future ‘the remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralologist, will be as proper objects of the Poet’s art’ (423). Science, the physical ‘form of flesh and blood’, and the Poet, he of the ‘divine spirit’, would plight their troth, become a single ‘Being’, ‘a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man’ (418). Bliss would it have been in that dawn to be alive.

But it did not quite happen that way, and if their troth remained unplighted it may have been because the conception itself was faulty. The ‘scientific’ was sundered from the ‘poetic’, ‘flesh’ from ‘spirit’, neither of them willing. And this was an enduring division.

Three-quarters of a century later, Darwin famously confessed to suffering ‘atrophy of that part of the brain alone, on which the higher tastes depend’ (\textit{Autobiography} 54). He, much like Wordsworth, distinguished the ‘higher tastes’, the poetic, from the more workaday faculties of science: the ethereal from the material. Or, in the terms of \textit{HT}, ‘fanciful imagination’ from the ‘eminently practical’, from ‘Facts’. By century’s end, Wordsworth’s augury of an ecumenical love-in between the poetic and the scientific had not come about; indeed, something closer to its opposite had. In his speech ‘Literature and Science’, Matthew Arnold struck a familiar note. When ‘the generality of men’, he said, have heard that

\[^{20}\text{It is useful at this point to remind the reader that, as I noted in the introduction, Dickens did not observe Coleridge’s or anyone else’s distinction between ‘fancy’ and ‘imagination’. He used the terms interchangeably, as I shall in this chapter. That said, I must concede there is an example in this chapter of him invoking ‘fancy and imagination’ together, but not to any purpose – indeed, pleonastically, helping to clinch a rhetorical point at the end of a speech. As it happens, Wordsworth did not observe Coleridge’s distinction either (Brett 49).}\]
their ancestor was [as Charles Darwin said] ‘a hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits’, there will be found to arise an invincible desire to relate this proposition to…the sense for beauty. But this the men of science will not do for us, and will hardly, even, profess to do. (Essays 335-36)

Such a complaint was advanced in slightly different form a decade later by Joseph Conrad’s assertion that whereas ‘the scientist [plunges] into facts’, ‘It is otherwise with the artist’, who ‘speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder’ (231). The crudity of this was doubtless in no small way provoked by the triumphal march of science’s partisans, but it would be cruder of me not to mention that many scientists were not partisans. As early as 1823, Yeo notes, Whewell ‘did not want science to be constructed as the obvious antithesis to poetry, and hence to the realm of imagination, feelings, and emotions’ and protests to a friend who, ‘following Coleridge’, had expounded such a view that he has embraced irrationality merely for its own sake (Telling Lives 68). At any rate, some portion of those voluminous talking points that spanned the century from Coleridge to Conrad, establishing ‘beauty’ and related notions as a bulwark against science’s cultural annexation, inform Dickens’ work and foment a roiling equivocalness in its disposition toward science that never really settles.

* * *

How Dickens felt about science is not easy to discern, his own views on such matters being, despite the industry of critics such as George Levine and K.J. Fielding, less coherent. He was, after all, the novelist who made a character, Krook in Bleak House, spontaneously combust and then, rather than explain when challenged by G.H. Lewes that of course it was meant to be fantastic, mounted a humourless appeal to forgotten works of cod science like Robert
Macnish’s *The Anatomy of Drunkenness* that he had scarcely read anyway\(^{21}\). Dickens was the novelist who readily subscribed to the veracity of Mesmerism as medical science, and was a great sponsor of John Elliotson’s sensational proselytising on behalf of Mesmerism’s scientific legitimacy. This thread of scientific cluelessness has long fomented the critical impression that Dickens was ignorant on such matters, perhaps even out of hostility toward science (Winyard and Furneaux 1). At a general, conceptual level, it is easy to find the imputation of hostility from reputable sources. Philip Collins, writing of ‘the anti-scientific and anti-rational tendency of the Romantics’ that so vexed Whewell, notes that among its manifestations were ‘such rubbish as…Keats’s distress at the prismatic explanation of the rainbow, [which] recurs with a similar naivety in Dickens’ (193). Donald Stone supports this view, finding that ‘a simplified and sentimentalized version of the Wordsworthian-Coleridgean trust in the spontaneous, untutored imagination placed in opposition to the scientific-rationalist strain’ was endemic (250). At a specific, practical level, moreover, the picture of Dickens’ scientific awareness would seem hardly more favourable. Andrew Sanders’ dry caveat about the engineer Daniel Doyce in *Little Dorrit* – ‘It is, however, indicative of Dickens’s ignorance of engineering that the nature and quality of his great invention is never actually spelled out to readers’ – has an antecedent in a review of *The Haunted Man* by one of Dickens’ contemporaries:

> It is amusing to notice Mr Dickens’s conscious ignorance of chemistry. He, who is so painfully minute in describing the occupations of his heroes, who points out every pin lying on the floor of their daily life, and who introduces into his sketches each smallest particular, yet dares not give an inventory of Mr Redlaw’s laboratory, but simply fills it with “the reflection of glass vessels that held liquids”! (Sanders 161; *Critical Assessments v.I* 326)

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\(^{21}\) He rebutted Lewes, with a piquant irony of which he does not seem to have been aware: ‘I looked into a number of books with great care, expressly to learn what the truth was. I examined the subject as a Judge might have done’ (*Letters v.7* 28). Not a ‘Judge’ in Chancery, one hopes.
Such facts naturally tell against Dickens. We have a credible impression of someone who was a fellow traveller with the ‘anti-scientific and anti-rational…Romantics’; who invoked cranks to acquire and defend what little scientific knowledge, such as it was, he had; and who scarcely bothered about scientific details in his fiction. Yet that impression is, if not misrepresentative, not entirely representative either. In the words of William F. Axton, ‘the breadth of [Dickens’] scientific knowledge was greater than many have been led to believe’ (Nixon 359). The scientific debts of Bleak House, for example, have been teased out by numerous critics, most influentially Ann Wilkinson. Fielding notes that that novel’s famous opening cribbed some of its details from William Buckland’s sixth Bridgewater Treatise – Buckland being the discoverer of the Megalosaurus in 1824 – and Reverend John Kirby’s seventh (214). Furthermore, John M. Picker notes that Dickens also owned and was ‘startled’ by his friend Charles Babbage’s apocryphal Ninth Bridgewater Treatise; indeed, three decades on he was still citing Babbage’s idea that the air was “‘one vast library’” of every utterance ever spoken, as if the transmission of the idea was itself “‘immutable’” (Picker 16-17). The examples of Dickens’ fellowship with scientists are likewise legion. Dickens counted among his friends such eminent scientists as the palaeontologist Richard Owen, and had a spirited correspondence with Michael Faraday about his ‘talk on the chemistry of a candle’ in 1850 (Winyard and Furneaux 4). His personal library contained voluminous science writing, much of it, contrary to the gossip bruited by Lewes, legitimate and important, including Darwin’s On the Origin of Species and Charles Lyell’s Geological Evidence of the Antiquity of Man (Winyard and Furneaux 1; Fielding 205-06).

What decides the issue, I think, is this: Dickens did not hold to any partitioning of science and ‘poetry’. We know he did not hold to it because of the review he wrote in December 1848 for the London newspaper The Examiner. The review was of a book – which,
Fielding avers, his close friend Forster probably set aside for him – called *The Poetry of Science, Or Studies of the Physical Phenomena of Nature* by a physicist-cum-geologist called Robert Hunt (Fielding 201). Though several scholars have already dined out on this fugitive morsel of Dickensian science journalism, it remains necessary to sketch what Dickens said. Here is the most illustrative passage, in which he observes that it is ‘salutary to the spirit of the age’

To show that the facts of science are at least as fully of poetry, as the most poetical fancies ever founded on an imperfect observation and a distant suspicion of them…[T]o show that if the Dryades no longer haunt the woods, there is, in every forest, in every tree, in every leaf, and in every ring on every sturdy trunk, always changing, always going on…and always leading the student from wonder to wonder, until he is wrapt and lost in the vast worlds of wonder. (*Amusements* 131)

Dickens’ encomium to science does not end there. He defends science against those who held that it was ‘binding us, as some would have it, in stern utilitarian chains’. Moreover, seconding Wordsworth, he waxes giddy about the ‘ample compensation, in respect of poetry alone, that Science has given us in return for what she has taken away’, the latter including such fantastic inventions as ‘sirens, mermaids, shining cities glittering at the bottom of the quiet seas, and in deep lakes’, ‘the noted dragons of the fables’, and so on (132). Dickens’ enthusiasm for scientific discoveries is reinforced by the fact that his journal *All the Year Round* commissioned no fewer than three articles on *The Origin of Species* in 1860-61, all of them to varying degrees favourable (Fielding 201). Indeed, Fielding goes so far as to assert that ‘Dickens was a decided evolutionist about a dozen years before the *Origin of Species*’ (10). Dickens had been a convert to Robert Chambers’ incendiary, proto-evolutionary 1844 pamphlet *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, the ‘famous’ work, as Gosse put it in *Father and Son*, ‘which had been supplying a sugar-and-water panacea for those who could not escape from the trend of evidence, and who yet clung to revelation’ (60). Chambers was a
gentleman amateur and a resourceful speculator in scientific ideas, ‘commendably well-disposed toward new ideas that might possibly exhibit merit, however strange they might appear to his more cautious (and more scientifically experienced) contemporaries’ (Hutchison 78). It is clear from Dickens’ review how much he shared Chambers’ cavalier temperament with regard to science. That is important, since it meant that like Chambers he cherished the ‘strange’, the ‘ideas’ that distorted reality as it was seen at the time. Dickens’ review, then, is very interesting and useful. It shows that he had clearly nursed a passion for science. It also shows, in that line about ‘stern utilitarian chains’, a prefiguring of HT. But more than anything it shows Dickens’ conflation of science and fact with poetry and wonder, fidelity to the observed with the speculative.

It is useful to think about what ‘wonder’ might be. The word is certainly precious to Dickens as a fecund heuristic, much as I have indicated ‘fancy’ was. Kara Elizabeth Wittman asserts that ‘the centrality of the term in Dickens’ work [has been] deemphasized, or overlooked completely’ (192-93). Moreover, she adds, ‘the move to provoke a sense of wonder is inherent in or constitutive of Dickens’ representational and narrative strategies’, although this is of a piece with her assertion that ‘wonder is immanent in the form of the novel’ (194). As I mentioned earlier, Stephen Greenblatt, meditating on the word, surmises that wonder is the quintessential human response to what Descartes calls a ‘first encounter…. [B]y definition wonder is an instinctive recognition of difference, the sign of heightened attention, ‘a sudden surprise of the soul,’ as Descartes puts it…in the face of the new. The expression of wonder stands for all that cannot be understood, that can scarcely be believed. It calls attention to the problem of credibility and at the same time insists upon the undeniability, the exigency of the experience. (20)
By this standard, wonder is, to say the least, problematic in its guise as a scientific term. If it ‘insists upon [its] undeniability’, its unfalsifiability, and if its expression ‘stands for all that cannot be understood’, then it stands against science, surely, and it is no wonder that Gradgrind and his colleagues are relentless invigilators against any utterance of the word ‘wonder’ (‘never wonder’ is the frequent injunction to students). Whether that stance ‘for all that cannot be understood, that can scarcely be believed’ is militant or passive, merely definitional – though necessarily indefinite – is moot. Wonder resides outside science’s purview, and is therefore impervious to it. Science, however, is not impervious to its imperviousness. A contributor to All the Year Round, anonymous as usual but sounding very much like his proprietor, wrote an article in 1859 called ‘Wonders Will Never Cease’ in which he suggested that ‘imagination…demands wonderful facts, false or true – but in either case strange matter that is credited’ (ATYR 497). While it had hitherto slaked ‘the common thirst for wonderment’, the contributor notes, superstition had been superseded, and this was no bad thing. Meanwhile, the ‘Marvels of Science’ were the pretenders to its position as the age’s wonder-dispenser. But from ‘false or true’ one infers that science needed not be other than an ersatz neo-supertition, and that pseudo-science was as entitled to prosper as the British Association for the Advancement of Science’s edifying enlightenment. Even in this, wonder could appear to debase the epistemological integrity of science.

Yet there was, as I have suggested, a strain of thought resistant to all that I have just said. Its adherents propounded the view that it was science that was baleful, science that could not merely debase but annul wonder. Professor Teufelsdrockh in Sartor Resartus, prefiguring HT, records ‘that progress of Science, which is to destroy Wonder, and in its stead substitute Mensuration and Numeration…’ (104). And it is true that disciplinary standards were zealously guarded. Yeo finds that responses to Chambers’ book by scientists
were clearly meant ‘to ostracize the anonymous author from [their] ranks, to separate reputable science from irresponsible amateurism’ (‘Scientific Method’ 71). Their quarrel with Chambers was over methodology; they could not abide ‘the extent of hypothetical speculation in the book’ (‘Scientific Method’ 71). Though antagonists such as David Brewster were themselves repudiators of the neo-Baconianism promulgated by John Herschel and all of British science before him, that a posteriori fundamentalism holding that facts preceded theories and were discrete from them, Chambers, both upstart and throwback, infringed their disciplinary conventions. ‘Non hypothesi fingo’, ‘avoid the fictions of hypothesis’, Levine quotes Newton as saying, and notes his nineteenth-century inheritors as espousing (Novelists 101). Speculation, a word that still made semantic oscillations across the ambiguous hinterland between this sort of abstract hypothesis and practical observation, was frivolous and unbecoming:

We must not direct the unformed youthful mind to launch its little bark upon the waters of speculation, till all the agitation of discovery, with its consequent fluctuation and controversy, has well subsided. (Whewell 521)

As Yeo observes, those ‘gentlemen of science’ like Brewster and Whewell ‘stressed the methods of scientific thinking rather than scientific facts’, and while ostensibly this seems to align them with the Chambers-Hunt-Dickens nexus, the meaning of ‘scientific thinking’ was contentious (‘Scientific Method’ 78). To be ‘wrapt and lost in the vast worlds of wonder’ was no place for a scientist, the attendant speculation no way for a scientist to think. As John Herschel notes in his 1831 work Preliminary Discourse, the human mind’s pesky disposal to ‘speculation’ means that ‘on the least idea of an analogy between a few phenomena, it leaps forward, as it were, to a cause or law’, intoxicated by its caprice (164). ‘[E]ven the return of comets…has ceased to amaze’, he says elsewhere in the work, as if rebutting Dickens in
advance; ‘the age of mere wonder in such things is past, and men prefer being guided and enlightened, to being astonished and dazzled’ (27). An enthusiasm such as Dickens’ in his review for ‘the coming of some unknown body through the realms of space’ is, in Herschel’s words, ‘[un]enlightened’ (132).

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Ostensibly, though, Dickens’ enthusiasm for scientific discovery and its ‘ample compensation’ is not clear, to put it mildly, from his ‘philosophical treatise on science’ HT (Nixon 288). For a start, the dedicatee is Carlyle, whom Dickens told ‘it contains nothing in which you do not think with me, for no man knows your books better than I’ (HT 274). It is salient that M’Choakumchild discards Coleridge’s embellishing ‘corolla and fragrance’ in his exchange with Sissy over the desirability of ‘a carpet having a representation of flowers upon it’ (11). In that, it appears to treat science as, in the words of Conrad, ‘the unveiling of…those heartless secrets which are called the Laws of Nature’ (233). A reading might employ Matthew Arnold’s Culture and Anarchy, in which, as James G. Paradis writes, ‘“machinery”…stood for the rigidity, literal-mindedness, and passion for law that Arnold felt inspired those who consider the methods of science a sufficient model for the cultural ideal’ (161). It might note Arnold’s recollection of a student at one of the schools he inspected translating the line from Macbeth, ‘Can’st thou not minister to a mind diseased’, into ‘Can you not wait upon a lunatic?’ (Essays 343). This Arnold deplores as barbarous and offensive to all people of sensibility. He then proceeds to imagine an educational system where children knew ‘that the moon is two thousand one hundred and sixty miles in diameter’ and yet could tender nothing better than this paraphrase. Or, dare one utter it, the hypothetical reading might simply note the education Edmund Gosse professes to have had in Father and
Son. Dickens was an ally of Edmund’s father: the articles in All the Year Round mentioned below cleave more to Philip Gosse’s naturalism than to Darwin’s, explicitly adducing Gosse’s work in ‘Under the Microscope’. He might, then, have been aware of Gosse père’s educational methods:

Never in all my early childhood did anyone address to me the affecting preamble, ‘Once upon a time!’ I was told about missionaries, but never about pirates; I was familiar with hummingbirds, but I had never heard of fairies—Jack the Giant-Killer, Rumpelstiltskin and Robin Hood were not of my acquaintance; and though I understood about wolves, Little Red Ridinghood was a stranger even by name. So far as my ‘dedication’ was concerned, I can but think that my parents were in error thus to exclude the imaginary from my outlook upon facts. They desired to make me truthful; the tendency was to make me positive and sceptical. Had they wrapped me in the soft folds of supernatural fancy, my mind might have been longer content to follow their traditions in an unquestioning spirit. (17)

‘[W]rapped me in the soft folds of supernatural fancy’ sounds exactly like ‘wrapt and lost in the vast worlds of wonder’, the inculcation of ‘facts’ at the expense of fairy tales and ‘the imaginary’ as depicted in *HT*. And yet the novel does not so much look forward to any of those texts as hearken back, but not to the *Poetry of Science* review. Between October 1837 and September 1838 Dickens published two facetious squibs on the meetings of ‘The Mudfog Association For the Advancement of Everything’ that, as Michael Slater notes, anticipate the tone and concerns of *HT* (*Boz* 513). The pieces are coloured by a juvenile parochialism and the satire is indiscriminate, yoking science with the ‘stern utilitarian chains’ where the later text is more nuanced. Yet there is in the following, for example, the same tone and tenor, the same satire of the Utililitarian notion that children be put through the John Stuart Mill and come out as prodigies:
‘[The children] had not the slightest conception of the commonest principles of mathematics, and considered Sindbad the Sailor the most enterprising voyager that the world had ever produced.

‘A Member strongly deprecating the use of all the other books mentioned, suggested that Jack and Gill might perhaps be exempted from the general censure, inasmuch as the hero and heroine, in the very outset of the tale, were depicted as going up a hill to fetch a pail of water, which was a laborious and useful occupation.’ (Boz 527)

Such writing was not the exclusive province of Dickens, though; far from it. Concurrent with the establishment of those aforementioned scientific organisations – one of which, the British Association for the Advancement of Science, was the butt of Dickens’ mockery here – was the emergence of rebarbative scientific parodies much like this. As Paradis writes, there was ‘friction and an extraordinary range of argument as Victorian society sought accommodation with the rapid consolidation of sciences’. Amid this welter of subversive ideas, he continues, ‘[i]rony, and its militant form, satire, was an important Victorian choice for expressing the difficulty of assimilating science and its trends’ (146-47). Thus, as Paradis goes on to illustrate, there were many upstart scribblers like Dickens, many of them his acquaintances, who were employing ‘irony’ or ‘satire’ to fleer at the ‘farcical scientific proceeding, which was used from the late 1830s through the 1870s’ (154). One of these, Albert Smith, later to be a close friend of Dickens’, published in 1848 his Natural History of the Idler Upon Town; it was what Margaret A. Rose calls a work of ‘mock anthropology’, and what his publisher slyly advertised as ‘Social Zoologies’ (40). Rose notes that ‘Smith’s “physiologies” of the idler… speak of several types or categories of the same as idlers, mooners, and loungers so as… to ironically imitate the more scientific physiology’ (41).

Dickens’ novel likewise makes great sport with scientific discourse. As we see early on, Thomas Gradgrind, the ossified educator of Coketown, wandering among Mr Sleary’s travelling circus and alighting on a group of children, ‘took his eyeglasses out…. 
Phenomenon almost incredible though distinctly seen, what did he then behold but his own metallurgical Louisa peeping with all her might through a hole’ (15). ‘Phenomenon incredible though distinctly seen’ is focalised through Gradgrind and his monocle, unable to see his own daughter except as a ‘phenomenon’. Later, and more wittily, we are told of ‘the daring vaulting act…the Wild Huntsman of the North American Prairies’ comprising the circus performer Childers and ‘his infant son’ – in reality his co-performer – Kidderminster, the latter

being carried upside down over his father’s shoulder, by one foot, and held by the crown of his head, heels upwards, in the palm of his father’s hand, according to the violent paternal manner in which wild huntsmen may be observed to fondle their offspring. (27)

The last line here is one of exquisite bathos, a Gradgrindian anthropological observation that seeks, with absurd feebleness, to regulate the foregoing irregularity. That is, it seeks to put the ‘upside down’ aright and bring it back down to earth by giving this performance a spurious context, the context having been credulously extrapolated from the title of the show. The incursion of what is really a pseudo-scientific register – who has ever ‘observed’ this? – is funny because it misses the vital point that none of the act is real. The ‘Wild Huntsman of the North American Prairies’ is just schtick, the patter used to cloak the central stunt in narrative. It may have been with such an example in mind that James Clerk Maxwell remarked in 1871 that, owing to the cultural ascendance of science, ‘the most absurd opinions may become current, provided they are expressed in language, the sound of which recalls some well-known scientific phrase’ (‘Scientific Method’ 79). In HT, these travesties of scientific discourse become as pervasive as the black muck benighting Coketown. ‘This

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22 This recalls ‘the Indian Savage and the Maiden’, the ballet interpretation of a Native American seduction in Nicholas Nickleby (64). The description of the dance allows Dickens to flaunt the trusty comic device of deadpan literalism, itself not far from the defamiliarisation Shklvosky finds in Tolstoy. Pip indulges in the same when he watches Mr Wopsle’s Hamlet. Tore Rem is very insightful on these matters (235-36).
observation must be limited exclusively to his daughter’, the narrator tells us at one point, as if making a note on an experiment (51).

The avatar of this discourse is Bitzer, the precocious idiot-savant of Gradgrind’s ‘model’ school where the pedagogical units of ‘hard facts’ are meted out. Bitzer’s brain seems almost completely impervious to the non-literal: he is perplexed, or at least pretends to be, by the question ‘Do you have a heart?’, supplying its self-evident answer with reference to ‘the facts established by [William] Harvey’ (211). As with Harthouse – who is ‘touched in the cavity where his heart should have been’ – the heart is, to borrow Levine’s borrowing of Hopkins’s phrase, ‘in hiding’ (HT 172; Novelists 214). One even finds that ‘a complaint of the heart’ afflicts the railway station as the train arrives to take Louisa toward her reckoning and reformation (159). Furthermore, the heart’s surreptitious industry is what saves Louisa: as Gradgrind acknowledges, “‘what the Head had left undone and could not do, the Heart may have been doing silently’” (166). Dickens is satirising and repudiating the view that Lord Kelvin would come to express, a pursuit he enjoyed elsewhere in his writing23.

Focalising again through Gradgrind as he walks toward Coketown with Josiah Bounderby at the beginning of chapter five, the narrator tells us that ‘what you couldn’t state in figures…was not, and never should be’, ‘state in figures’ being virtually identical to Kelvin’s ‘express in numbers’ (23).

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23 Dickens’ disdain for ‘rule and line’, to introduce Keats’s synecdoche again, is apparent in the high-handed squib ‘Mr Barlow’, where he writes that the eponymous character ‘would have proved, by map and compass, that there was no such kingdom as the delightful kingdom of Casgar’ (Uncommercial 373). To adapt Chesterton’s quip, Mr Barlow is the man who would prove that Micawber never lived.
The fictional world of *HT* is consumed with observation. Surveillance recurs throughout the novel. Mrs Pegler owns up to having looked at her son Mr Bounderby ‘once a year, when he has never knowed it’ (193). If Stone Lodge is what Tom Jr calls a ‘Jaundiced Gaol’, if Tom is later ‘an inmate of Bounderby’s house’, then Coketown is a Benthamite panopticon, with the ‘evil eye’ of the Sun watching over it (43, 71, 86). Early on in *Barnaby Rudge*, John Willet is described as a kind of Argus, the mythical hundred-eyed giant: ‘he seemed all eyes from head to foot’ (5). In rather the same way, there is a description of Bounderby’s housekeeper Mrs. Sparsit that refers in a peculiar construction to ‘the dark eyes of her body’ (156). Further, Stephen dreams that ‘there was not one pitying or friendly eye among the millions that were fastened on his face’ (68). But Coketown can also be read as a giant experiment, much as the ‘model’ schools and their ‘model’ students and teachers are part of an experiment, each a scientific replication as well as a dehumanised industrial product.

I bring up observation because I think it is of no little significance here. To return to Darwin’s autobiography, there is a passage in it where he modestly records his superiority ‘in noticing things which easily escape attention, and in observing them carefully…in the observation and collection of facts’ (55). A central rupture in *HT*, if perhaps one that has easily escaped attention, is that between those two things Darwin mentions last: observation and facts. Let me be clear that by ‘observation’ I do not simply mean the way Gradgrind fails to observe, say, that his ‘system’, as he calls it, is loathed. Rather, I mean the rupture between scientific observation and the desiccated ‘Facts’. The former does not, if you like, irrigate the latter. This rupture is bodied forth, I submit, in that difference between the novel’s beginning and end I alluded to at this chapter’s beginning. Dickens is more astute than he is given credit for in his exploration of this. He will, in an identical vein to that of the earlier examples I
gave, deftly parody the language of scientific process. Talking about the changes wrought by age, the narrator writes:

Young Thomas and Sissy being both at such a stage of their working up, these changes were effected in a year or two; while Mr Gradgrind himself seemed stationary in his course, and underwent no alteration. (72-73)

The register alters in Gradgrind’s clause, as if he were himself an experiment, the last three words finally betraying this sense (an equally deft touch it is, too, that Young Thomas and Sissy are ‘working up’). But this is inaccurate, for the novel is concerned with, I suggest, how unobservant this type of scientific process is; how, as the novel says, ‘Reason…and its big dumb shape set up with a sightless stare, never to be moved by anything but so many calculated tons of leverage’ (148). The problem is that it is not simply ‘Reason’ without ‘Fancy’, without ‘Imagination’, but ‘Reason’ with a ‘sightless stare’, ‘Reason’ without observation of the ordinary kind, unleavened by it and impoverished because of that. A few pages later this is reinforced:

As if an astronomical observatory should be made without windows, and the astronomer within should arrange the starry universe solely by pen, ink, and paper, so Mr Gradgrind in his Observatory…had no need to cast an eye upon the teeming myriads of human beings around him, but could settle all their destinies on a slate. (75)

In his review of *The Poetry of Science*, Dickens’ encomium to scientific discovery was in part an encomium to what he called ‘two astronomers, far apart, each looking from his solitary study up into the sky, [who] observe, in a known star, a trembling which forewarns them of the coming of some unknown body through the realms of space’ (132). These he called ‘professor[s] of an exact science’. ‘Exact science’, then, need not be arid; what makes it so in Gradgrindian pedagogy is observation, and hence the chance to be ‘wrapt and lost in the vast
worlds of wonder’, being proscribed (‘never wonder’). Louisa Gradgrind looking through an aperture into the circus booth, for example, is scandalous.24

Moreover, it is worth pointing out that whereas the dogma of ‘Facts’ exists almost a priori, observation where it does take place usually exists without facts in the novel. There is again a notable disjunction between ‘observation’ and ‘facts’. Mrs Sparsit’s sedulous ‘cat-like observation’ of Louisa and James Harthouse’s affair, culminating in her sodden vigil in the bushes at Bounderby’s retreat as the two conduct their final rendezvous, is obviated by the fact that no such affair has taken place nor is one desired by Louisa, who leaves not to attend a tryst at Harthouse’s, as Mrs. Sparsit believes, but to avoid one. Likewise, Mrs Pegler comes yearly to observe her son Bounderby, never once intervening in his life, and thereby remaining unaware of what a hectoring, vainglorious cretin he is. Stephen Blackpool’s ‘being seen – night after night – watching the Bank’, an intelligence Bounderby loudly puts about, is a fiction that yields the further fiction that Blackpool was the bank robbery’s culprit. And of course, to return to the earlier quote about the ‘wild huntsman’ and his offspring-fondling, the ‘violent paternal manner’ is not really ‘observed’, as it says, at all. Or, rather, the observation is false and the extrapolation anyhow does not follow from it. It is the weakest sort of induction, imputing to wild huntsmen an imagined set of behaviours.

24 Indeed, more scandalous than it appears, for there were actual restrictions on observation by women. The Literary Gazette thundered that permitting ladies to attend the BAAS’s ‘Sections’ was ‘utterly inconsistent with the scientific pursuits of the Association, and subversive of the purposes for which it has been instituted’ (Morrell and Thackray 457). Further, Beer, citing Huxley’s charge that women would be responsible for ‘hindering the progress of...science’, indeed for its ‘degradation’, notes that to this mentality ‘Observing is a strong and objective activity when undertaken by professional men’, but ‘the presence of other, uninitiated observers, whether they be workers or women’ would seem to undermine those virtues, to be ‘subversive’ of their licit undertaking (Open Fields 205, 206). Observation was licensed and therefore political, determined as it was by a cartel. Dickens, probably obtuse on this point, here blunders his way into satire. The politics are outside the ken of this chapter but the circumscription is still pertinent. Coincidentally, of those whose futures are foretold at the novel’s end, Bounderby’s and Gradgrind’s ability to see them is disavowed; only Louisa’s is not.
Yet perhaps, one might say, it is my observation that is false. Certainly, the remarks I have just been making may seem to be gainsaid by a fact, a nuisance exchange hard upon the action’s denouement. Louisa and Sissy seek intelligence on Tom’s safety and whereabouts, and Sleary directs them to “take a peep at the Ring” (207). The two “find a thpy-hole” each, ‘a chink in the boards’, and gaze at the figures arrayed there. What they see is a tableau of props and characters from ‘Jack the Giant killer’, which one infers from the fact that the ‘two comic black thervanth’ are ‘twithe ath big ath the [prop] houthe’ to be a slapstick rendering of the fairy tale (‘a piethe of comic infant bithnth’). Sleary exhorts the two girls to look at what they see again and more closely, though neither is able to apprehend his design. “Look at ‘em again”, said Sleary, “look at ‘em well”, yet still they do not see, and only ‘see’ when told. “Ith a fact”, Sleary says of his illusion, not without irony. He adds that “even knowin’ it, you couldn’t put your finger on him”. If observation has succeeded, it has done so by default.

We can see from both the Examiner review and from HT that Dickens sought after a type of science that would, as he said all representations and studies ought to in the ‘Preliminary Word’ to his journal Household Words: ‘show to all, that in familiar things, even in those which are repellent on the surface, there is Romance enough’ (Amusements 177). Penetrating surfaces – noticing things that, in Darwin’s words, ‘easily escape attention’ – is what is important here. It is what Bitzer, and the whole ‘hard facts’ project with him, does not do. As Levine notes, Dickens was ‘particularly fascinated by the minutiae revealed under the microscope – the dramatic disparity between what is visible to the naked eye and what is really there’ (Novelists 126). In an essay for All the Year Round in September 1859
that Levine rather boldly attributes to Dickens, though it remains apocryphal\textsuperscript{25}, the author declares:

we venture to say that the poet who spoke of butterflies kissing the sweet lips of the flower…never looked through a microscope at that flat coiled tongue bristling with hairs and armed with hooks, rifling and spoiling like a thing of worse fame, but of no worse life. 

\textit{(Novelists 126; ATYR 490)}

As Levine goes on to say, Dickens had the ‘instinctive view that matter of fact is really mysterious and wonderful’, seconding Beer, who noted this and also that ‘the study of “fact” was for Dickens… an exploration of the fantastic’, not at all like the deformations of \textit{HT}, fetishising as they do hermetic ‘fact’ so that, by eliding this first look through the microscope (or, for Louisa, through the ‘hole in a deal board’), they omit all observation and therefore all experience \textit{(Novelists 127; Plots 74)}. For Dickens here, what might be called poetic knowledge, failing to show the ‘romantic side of familiar things’, is discredited; it leaves us, if you like, Imagination without Observation (of the scientific kind: note the capital O). This is the fervid Imagination culpable in that erroneous truckling to the specious trill of convention, ‘butterflies kissing the sweet lips of the flower’ (although, poor old Shelley might counter, it is Dickens whose attention something has easily escaped, since it is a moth that does the kissing, not a butterfly). This is what Dickens meant in his review when he spoke of ‘the most poetical fancies ever founded on an imperfect observation’. Yet, while showing this, Dickens also shows how it is nevertheless subsumed into the scientific discovery, the science’s ‘form of flesh and blood’, in Wordsworth’s words, imbued with the ‘divine spirit’ of poetry to become ‘a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man’. Or as \textit{HT} puts it, we are given ‘Reason through the tender light of Fancy’.

\textsuperscript{25} Levine gives no evidence for this attribution in \textit{Darwin and the Novelists} or, as nearly as I can tell, any other of his erudite books. The piece he refers to is not in the Slater \textit{Gone Astray} or the Slater and Drew \textit{Uncommercial Traveller}, nor is it in Harry Stone’s editions of the \textit{Uncollected Writings}. I believe the attribution remains intact the 1992 edition.
I am using ‘observation’, and ‘Observation’, heuristically and doubtless too loosely. Yet there are appreciable distinctions to be made between types of observation. As Chapple notes, the French scientist E. Geoffroy Saint Hillaire held in 1830 that ‘I observe facts merely, and go no further’, as if the scientist were nothing more than a sentinel whose task it was to accrue ‘facts’ (17). This impoverished construction of science and the scientist’s place is not quite the construction of science in *HT*, however, as I have tried to show; there science has its ‘sightless stare’. But it is no less denuded. For what does it mean to ‘observe facts’, with the implicit Baconian sundering of observation from theory? What is a ‘fact’? The siblings in Dickens’ ‘tender’ little tale ‘A Child’s Dream of a Star’, ‘wonder[ing] all day long’, ‘wondered at the height and blueness of the sky’ (*Amusements* 185-86). It might be observed as a ‘fact’ that in daylight, people with normal eyesight register a clear sky as blue. Yet this ‘fact’ is also deceptive, since it conceals what one might say are more factual ‘facts’: the blueness is illusory, the product of scattered light. The great scientific explicator John Tyndall’s 1870 lecture ‘Scientific Use of the Imagination’ conveys this limpidly: ‘an undue fraction of the smaller waves is scattered by the particles, and, as a consequence, in the scattered light, blue will be the predominant colour’ (114-15). In fact, so to speak, the ‘sky’ itself is illusory, a kind of descriptive convention. It is the strata of invisible spheres, with no practical application as a term. In much the same way, Darwin and others felt that ‘species’ were what Levine calls ‘mere conventions of thought’; while the term itself was, in Darwin’s words, ‘“one arbitrarily given for the sake of convenience”’ despite his famous employment of it (*Novelists* 98). Tyndall explains that as the Sun lowers and therefore gets farther away, ‘the transmitted light,’ as distinct from the scattered shorter waves responsible for the blue
sky, ‘must pass from yellow through orange to red’ (115). Likewise, the author of ‘Under the Microscope’, writing about ‘blood disks’, notes that ‘Alone, they are simply of a light yellowish tinge, as a mass they are a deep bright scarlet’ (487). In both cases, the observable phenomena are paradoxically truth and illusion at the same time, fact and its refutation, as even the observed butterfly is not.

The clearest example in *HT* would be the presentation of Tom in his gaudy kit to his father, ‘In a preposterous coat…with cuffs and flaps exaggerated to an unspeakable extent…’ and so on, despite the incredibility of which Tom’s identity remains obscured: ‘Mr Gradgrind never could by any other means have believed in [the outfit], weighable and measurable fact though this was’ (208). Here, as with Louisa’s ‘exclamation, partly of distress, partly of satisfaction’ at the same fact, we have an expression of wonder precisely as Greenblatt defined it, ‘call[ing] attention to the problem of credibility and at the same time insist[ing] upon the undeniability, the exigency of the experience’; or perhaps even better, his comment upon citing an excerpt from *Paradise Lost*: ‘The transformation of the rebel angels is at once unbelievable and true’ (20-21). What Gradgrind is seeing is ‘at once unbelievable and true’, illusion and truth. Moreover, it is the very absurdity of the apparel and make-up – ‘preposterous’, ‘exaggerated’, ‘full of holes’, the make-up running down his face – the very ‘problem of credibility’, that sustain the persuasiveness of their deception, almost as if they were an after-image in a thaumatrope (‘literally, “wonder-turner”’) or phenakistiscope (‘literally, “deceptive view”’) (Crary 105, 109). An observer like Hillaire, ‘going no further’ according to his precept, would be liable to interpret the ‘fact’ of the sky’s blueness or blood’s redness as homogenous and self-sustaining. As I have suggested, though, facts are never like this; they exist in a continuum, not a vacuum. They are theory reservists, always
waiting for an imagination to conscript them into service, the permanent constituents of explanations live, lost and still to be made. A theory or explanation is just realised facts.

None of which, of course, I say because it is profound or original. My purpose is merely to indicate the necessity of imagination. What Dickens intuits, I think, is the necessity of a transfiguring ‘fanciful imagination’ to science. If, as Tyndall’s lecture derisively notes, ‘There are tories even in science who regard imagination as a faculty to be feared and avoided rather than employed,’ Dickens was one of the earliest whigs (103). To return to my earlier point, the necessity of ‘fanciful imagination’ is one Darwin intuited early on too: as Beer writes, one of the two books he took with him on the Beagle, and the only one he kept with him always, was a collection of Milton’s poetry (Open Fields 34; DP 5). This chimes with Robert Hunt’s assertion that ‘The philosophy of physical science is a grand epic, the record of natural science a great didactic poem,’ which suggestively conflates Milton’s grand didactic epics and nature (401). G.H. Lewes himself eventually came to recognise it. As he wrote in 1865, ‘both poet and [natural] philosopher draw their power from the energy of their mental vision – an energy which disengages the mind from the somnolence of habit…’ (Principles 18). Peter Allan Dale notes that Lewes’s construction of scientific discovery becomes akin to the aesthetic ‘principle of vision…a power of “insight” into the unapparent, typical structure of things’. It is the same ‘principle of vision’ affirmed throughout HT and figured fantastically in its last chapter. Lewes goes on to say, in his final work Problems of Life and Mind, that ‘The grandest discoveries…have revealed by the telescope of Imagination what the microscope of observation could never have seen’ (in Dale 107).

One finds Hopkins coming to a similar conclusion, although for utterly different reasons; it is a view of scientific observation that belies the one ascribed to him by Nixon.
Beer gives a précis of it, declaring that in Hopkins’s view, one ‘must look from a point of view contrary to the ordinary’ and that ‘[n]ew circumstances… can make things fresh…de-familiarization can make things seem new’ (*Open Fields* 253). Likewise, she writes of Darwin that he also felt a ‘pleasure in “making strange”, in skimming off the familiar and restoring it, enriched and stabilised… fulfilling, bodying forth, and replenishing what has appeared humdrum, inexplicable, or taken for granted’ (*Plots* 75). In Hopkins and Darwin as in Lewes, there obtains the belief that a foundation of scientific discovery is in making things ‘fresh’; in a ‘de-familiarisation’, a *hypotyposis*, that ‘disengages the mind from the somnolence of habit’; in ‘renew[ing] the fullness of thing in themselves’, which, Beer writes, Darwin sought (*Plots* 40). They are all of them Coleridge’s spawn, the Coleridge who valiantly opposes the depredations of ‘custom’, averring that ‘genius’ is the ability ‘to represent familiar objects as to awaken in the minds of others a kindred feeling concerning them, and that freshness of sensation’, thereby retrieving ‘the most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission’ (*Biographia* 48-49).

So Lewes, for example, will write that ‘Ordinary men live among marvels and feel no wonder, grow familiar with objects and learn nothing new about them’ (18).

In his essay ‘Fishes in the Trees’, A.D. Nuttall talks about *hypotyposis*’s kindred trope *Impossibilia*. This mode is, as its name suggests, a vacation from the verisimilar. Rather as *hypotyposis* features lions in northern countries, in Barthes’s terms, *Impossibilia* is ‘a way of talking about what could never happen, the absurd’; although at other, more respectable times, it is redeemed from this faintly shabby occupation and cast ‘as a way of describing miracles’ (*Stoic* 76). Usually, however, the term retains the pejorative connotations of the former: Nuttall’s essay begins with Horace, and the *Ars Poetica*’s disparagement of *prodigialiters*, those who substitute fantastic dissembling for good noticing, puffing up their
jerry-written verse with the leaven of tawdry marvels (Stoic 70). It is, to Horace, a dereliction of probity, an unethical shortcut. Yet, the Renaissance Italian critic Minturno asserts, ‘No one can be called a poet who does not excel in the power of arousing wonder’, and as Nuttall makes plain, Horace is not averse to a spot of Impossibia himself: the poet is too good to obey the prohibitions of his austere critical strictures (Greenblatt 79). What is especially noteworthy about these manifestations is that they are not always on furlough in the fantastic; they are, indeed, very far from an abdication of seriousness. ‘Only a bad poet, Horace says, would give us fishes in trees’, a precept he violates in his own Odes. Moreover, as Nuttall indicates, trees are quite apt to be fruitful of fish on occasion of a flood. In the same way, there is preternatural insight in this ‘deliberately extravagant conjuration’ (Stoic 77). Nuttall relates a ‘slave in Lycophron’s Alexandra who sought to apprise King Priam of his danger by telling him how once before the dolphin browsed on the oat, the acorn and the grape’ (Stoic 77). And, indeed, that is approximately what the dolphin once did. ‘Pigs grow[ing] wings’ is a figure of incongruity to Horace, but it is not so very removed from the notion of dolphins growing legs, vestiges of which are extant in the dolphin’s skeleton and those of other aquatic mammals.

The writer of science in the nineteenth century was, whatever stern sobriety of style he practised and espoused, engaged in such Impossibia, such hypotyposis. Darwin was a writer who, as Horace puts it, ‘to vary his subject in the / most marvellous way paints the dolphin in the woods’ (in Stoic 68). In the first edition of The Origin of Species, he reports another’s observation of a black bear in North America swimming around in water with its mouth open, catching insects, ‘like a whale’; he speculates fantastically on ‘a race of bears’ being gradually metamorphosed into leviathans ‘as monstrous as a whale’ (184). It is instructive that for Baroque prodigaliter Saint-Amant ‘[i]t was a matter of no small
delight…that in the southern hemisphere (where the world really is reversed) there really are flying fishes’ (in \textit{Stoic} 71). Darwin shares his wonderment, and essays a conjecture as bold as the flying fish’s ‘glide through the air’, transmitting with all the literary graces he could summon the smacks of pleasure he felt in its world-reversing emancipations:

[I]t is conceivable that flying fish, which now glide through the air, slightly rising and turning by the aid of their fluttering fins, might have been modified into perfectly winged animals. If this had been effect, who would have ever imagined that in an early transitional state they had been inhabitants of the open ocean[?] (137)

Who indeed. It is worth dwelling on this point further, for Darwin seems to be conceding that scientific observation would little avail one in respect to his hypothetical flying fish: its perfection would resist detection. His use of the word ‘imagined’ recognises that only an imaginative conceit even more daring than his own would suffice. It is striking how Dickensian Lamarck – who had the right idea the wrong way round, as it were – sounds when he is postulating his explanations for the unique characteristics of certain animals. The giraffe, like the platypus a walking \textit{Impossibilita} (\textit{Camelo-pardalis}, as Lamarck tell us, or ‘camel leopard’), is ‘obliged’ by its food source to cultivate a longer neck and thereby forelegs longer than its hind ones (in Carey 59). It is an extraordinary notion, verily a piece of ‘fanciful imagination’. That Dickensian tone is not surprising, really, for as the great scientist Hermann von Helmholtz declared in his lecture ‘On Thought in Medicine’:

The first discovery of a new law, is the discovery of a similarity which has hitherto been concealed in the course of natural processes. It is a manifestation of that which our forefathers in a serious sense described as “wit”, it is of the same quality as the highest performances of artistic perception in the discovery of new types of expression’. (\textit{Open Fields} 180-81)
The ‘first discovery’ is akin to ‘artistic perception’. Again, penetrating the surface is what matters; and, indeed, we find Lewes and Tyndall making an identical point about ‘conceal[ment]’: the one, extolling ‘the independent mind’, finding that by its preternatural insight ‘the link so long hidden, has now been made visible to us; the other, that ‘hidden things to be revealed’ is the business of science (Lewes 18; Tyndall 103). But more important is how those hidden things are revealed, how the hidden link is made visible. To return to Hunt for a moment, it is his pious hope that ‘those minds which are allowed the privilege of tracing out [a grain of dust’s] marvellous properties’ may bring the laity closer to God, and in so doing may grant those minds admission ‘to that infinite power to which the great secrets of creation will be unveiled’ (410). Tyndall submits this to an iconoclastic reversal, however, finding that there is ‘a power of expansion – I might almost call it a power of creation – which is brought into play by the simple brooding upon facts’, going so far as to insinuate that our theistic beliefs may have been borne from this faculty (106). The ignition of discovery transmutes nature’s clerics into its gods. The wicked effrontery of Tyndall’s amusing thrust is not the point; rather, it is that he is, like Helmholtz but to a greater extent, acknowledging the scientist’s fraternity with the creative artist. The scientist’s creativeness is no longer the sinister kind of a Frankenstein but the legitimate one of ordinary scientific praxis. And if it takes ‘wit’ to make the discoveries, it takes wit to convey them. Jeff Wallace writes of Darwin that the ‘animation’ in his prose is borne out of the realisation that some mental energy and projection is required on the part of his reader to envisage some of the practical effects of the abstract process of species “striving to increase at a geometrical ratio”. (32)

That is important to note. Insofar as novels have points, a variant of this is a basic point of *HT*: that language gets it wrong, fails at its mimetic task, when it aspires to ‘get[ting] the
description just right’, for that ‘get[ting] the description just right’ does not renew the fullness of things in themselves. Bitzer’s description of a horse – ‘Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth and twelve incisors…’ – Peter Brooks correctly pronounces ‘flawless and hopeless’, for it contains an impeccable taxonomic profile that does nothing at all to convey the animal (HT 9; Brooks 41). The reason for its hopelessness is indicated by that quote from Shklovsky, setting forth his concept of defamiliarisation: the purpose of art is ‘to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony’ (Sher 6). What Bitzer does not do, and why his description is ‘hopeless’, is that, as Brooks notes, he does not make the horse horsy. What Dickens seeks is for language that, like ‘the image’ in Shklovsky, ‘allow[s] us to perceive the object in a special way, in short, to lead us to a “vision” of this object rather than mere “recognition”’ (Shklovsky 10). All the counting serves only to subtract from its presence in the mind’s eye, not the ‘the bodily eye’, although it is notable that in the description of Bitzer just before his performance he is, like Gradgrind, unseeing: ‘His cold eyes would hardly have been eyes, but for the short ends of lashes which… expressed their form’ (9). There is no ‘complete and scientific view’, to borrow Whewell’s phrasing; indeed, it took the mechanical eye of the camera to observe the true gait of the horse in full stride, famously reproving the rank inaccuracy of great observers like Degas (Whewell 94). In exactly the same way as Bitzer’s inventory of a horse, Macauley’s invented zoological description of a porcupine, which, with its talk of ‘grinders’ and such, Dickens must surely have seen, is also ‘hopeless’:

[O]f the genus mammalia, and the order glires. There are whiskers on its face; it is two feet long; it has four toes before, five behind, two fore teeth, and eight grinders. Its body is covered with hair and quills. (in Chapple 148)

26 For consistency, I have kept Sher’s translations here despite their clunkiness. An alternative translation of the first point, for example, is ‘art exists so that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony’ (Lodge 20). This seems preferable.
As Macauley asks rhetorically, ‘when all this is said, would any one of the auditors have formed a just idea of a porcupine?’ (148). The risk of language sponsored by ‘fanciful imagination’ is that it may not engender a ‘just idea’, may indeed be riotously, perfidiously unjust; for it must be that dual agent, compound of truth and illusion: the ‘deep bright scarlet’ mass of blood that comprises only ‘light yellowish’ discs, the ‘black thervant’ who is unrecognisably Tom. Postivist language, that ‘patent de-odorized and non resonant language’, as George Eliot calls it, expressing only what can be measured in an object needs must fail at getting that object’s measure; ‘it may be a perfect medium of expression to science,’ Eliot continues, ‘but will never express life, which is a great deal more than science’ (in Plots 34). Mimesis is got wrong in these ways and others time and again in HT. There is a covert joke in M’Choakumchild’s admonition that ‘You don’t find that foreign birds and butterflies come and perch upon your crockery’; perhaps intentionally, it alludes to the tale about the classical Greek painter Zeuxis, whose portrait of grapes was so exact that it had birds pecking at them (HT 11; Halliwell 3). The illusory fecundity is so potent that it creates its own reality, sanctions its own truthfulness. For the birds’ part, their delectation is as understandable as that of patrons who thrill to the spry mendacity of Heston Blumenthal’s puckish culinary conjurations.

A good analogy is with that ubiquitous artefact of Victorian popular entertainment, the spectroscope, whose patenting and vogue was contemporaneous with HT’s publication. As Jonathan Crary notes, ‘By 1856, two years after its founding, the London Stereoscopic Company alone had sold over half a million viewers’ (118n). Its relevance to a discussion of mimesis, however, is that its main progenitor, Charles Wheatstone, ‘aimed to stimulate the actual presence of a physical object or scene, not to discover another way to exhibit a print or drawing’ (Crary 122). His co-progenitor Brewster, writing a history of the spectroscope in
1856, goes further, tacitly promoting it as not merely ‘an amusing and useful instrument’ but a superior mimetic medium to painting (3). He affirms that a painting is less ‘truthful’ – an idiom he is comfortable using – than a spectroscopic image because, perversely, not illusion enough; for when in the former ‘art has exhausted its powers, we seldom, if ever, mistake the plane picture for the solid it represents’ (2). The spectroscope, with, in both senses, its deeper illusion, wrests from the plane the solid it represents; it comes closer to being ‘truthful’.

Moreover, its illusion is a distortion within a distortion, an illusion achieved by the opposite of the means the layviewer might expect. The device ‘throw[s] the image of N a little to the right side of the optic axis of the left eye, and a little to the left of the optic axis of the right eye’ (Brewster 82-83). Yet its effects were profound. Crary quotes Helmholtz testifying, again in the 1850s, that the stereoscope, ‘so true to nature and so lifelike’, could implant counterfeit memories in the viewer: ‘we get the impression when we actually do see the object, that we have already seen it before and are more or less familiar with it’ (124). The hypotyposis, the defamiliarisation, of the illusion radically confers ‘familiarity’ on it. It recalls Sleary’s comment, ‘even knowin’ it, you couldn’t put your finger on him’. The illusion persists; in Greenblatt’s terms, it cannot be denied even though its incredibility is plain.

* *

What then of the ‘scientific eye’? Lewes condescends to ‘The incurious unimpassioned gaze of the Alpine peasant on the scenes which mysteriously and profoundly affect the cultivated tourist’. The latter’s cultivation, his climb up to the slightly lower altitudes but more rarefied air of Parnassus, has bequeathed him ‘an education of the eye’: the poet has ‘taught [him] to look’ (21). Lewes does not pause to consider whether that mysteriousness and profundity of
effect is in fact a species of what he earlier described; that the tourist’s response is a stock one to ‘the somnolence of habit’, better known as convention, in the poetry he consumed, in the same way a poet might see butterflies kissing the sweet lips of a flower. Nevertheless, two years after Lewes published those words a young compatriot, Gerard Manley Hopkins, travelled through the Alps and made sketches like this:

If you took the skin of a white tiger or the deep fell of some other animal and swung it tossing high in the air and then cast it out before you it would fall and so clasp and lap round anything in its way just as this glacier does and the fleece would part in the same rifts; you must suppose a lazuli-like under-flx would appear. This spray out of one end I tried to catch but it would have taken hours: it was this which first made me think of a tiger-skin, and it ends in tongues and points like the tail and claws indeed the ends of the glaciers are knotted or knuckled like talons. Above, in a plane nearly parallel to the eye, becoming thus fore-shortened, it forms saddle-curves with dips and swells. (194)

Nixon also cites this, and it does indeed have a very mysterious and profound effect on one. I confess I still do not know what Nixon means by ‘scientific eye’. Nevertheless, surely no cultivated tourist ever looked on an Alpine scene with such discrimination and invention. ‘The discoverer and poet are inventors,’ Lewes writes, ‘and they are so because their mental vision detects the unapparent, unsuspected facts’ (26). That extraordinary conceit, the whirling of the white tiger pelt, seems almost to impel the perspective centripetally back to its point of origin – the eye, to court glibness, of the storm – which we hear about much as we have just heard about the glacier’s. ‘It was this which first made me think of a tiger-skin’, Hopkins writes, as if he had wound back to before he threw his prodigy away – metaphorically and perhaps literally as well, since it is stowed in his journals. There is a constant threat of imbalance in the passage; several times he seems to check himself lest he go the way of his projectile.
 Appropriately, we see the conceit falter, and after ‘rifts’ at that: hypothesis becomes the solicitation of ‘you must suppose’. In the next sentence, the conceit briefly appears to dissolve as the ‘spray’ does into the air. ‘The spray out of one end I tried to catch but it would have taken hours’ he writes with a pinch of bathos, but also with integrity, for he is at the precipice of words too. Indeed, the irony, even the paradox, is that the object he could not apprehend is the source of the conceit. Notice also how the wide gyres of the swinging tiger affect the rest of the passage in other ways. The conceit slips from his grasp, and as it does so he redoubles his exactitude with those ‘tongues and points like the tail and claws’. It does not avail him: away hurtles his heady conceit, as the animal figuration slips in a different way from tiger claws to bird ‘talons’, and at the end to ‘saddle-curves’, suggesting a horse. A week later Hopkins wrote of a tree’s ‘eye-taking sky-clusters’ (195). ‘Eye-taking’ is a strange, alluring locution, as if it were not the banal, idiomatic piquing of one’s attention so much as an act of visual larceny.

But Hopkins is not a victim here; his perspective has successfully righted itself, which he demonstrates with the sudden change in register to the scientific, invoking optics: ‘a plane nearly parallel to the eye, thus becoming fore-shortened’. The eye – I suppose we shall call it the ‘scientific eye’ – has remained steady; it has not swooned at the sublimity; it has not been subverted, nor even disturbed. Hopkins drolly, or again bathetically, begins the next paragraph with: ‘The view was not good’. Whether artful or artless, this is certainly bemusing. What is he saying about his conceit? Perhaps that it was mere whimsy, an indulgence. Another conjecture, not unrelated, is that Hopkins is qualifying it out of modesty, that he is retracting his brazen imposture. As Phillips notes, some critics ‘have seen a conflict in Hopkins’s verse between his recording of a full and free response to natural beauty and a castigating of that response into religious didacticism’ (263). Perhaps, though, it is as much a
conflict between that response and scientific didacticism. Hopkins is not unlike Sleary, whose ‘one fixed eye…and one loose’, more than drawing attention to the ‘sightless stare’ of Gradgrind and his kind, seem to ironise their surroundings (34). Hopkins’s eye is both constant and moving, ‘taken’ and retained. The voluptuous prose bodies forth this conflict, lost in the vast worlds of wonder yet unmoved and keenly, almost fanatically observing; turning facts into extraordinary figures, breaking ‘the somnolence of habit’, yet, with Horace’s approbation, remaining aware of its duty.

After *HT*, then, if not necessarily because of it, a change occurs in the orientation of science toward imagination. Dickens had trouble foreseeing it, the steam arising from his polemical fury, or the haze of Coketown, having perhaps clouded his vision. Had he but known it, many of the scientists were actually not so very far from his way of thinking, at least with regard to ‘facts’. But he could not, as Bounderby does, ‘project[…] himself…into futurity’ and grasp this (217). Writing about the ‘stimulus of the imagination’, Tyndall asserts that:

> Scientific men fight shy of the word because of its ultra-scientific connotations; but the fact is that without the exercise of this power, our knowledge of nature would be a mere tabulation of co-existences and sequences. We should still believe in the succession of day and night, of summer and winter; but the conception of Force would vanish from our universe; causal relations would disappear, and with them that science which is now binding the parts of nature to an organic whole. (104)

Tyndall’s exemplar of this is Davy, whom, recollect, Coleridge lauded for the same quality. There is, then, a unification of sorts taking place here. The irony of this change, this rehabilitation of wonder and the imagination, is that it took place just as the sciences were beginning to abdicate referentiality. ‘Many chemists of the present day,’ says Tyndall, ‘refuse to speak of atoms and molecules as real things’ (108). Atoms were inherently speculative;
one could not display the carbon atom in a museum. They were like the dread smudge in the distance that travellers infer to be Coketown, ‘suggestive of itself, though not a brick of it could be seen’ (85). Daniel Brown, writing about Tyndall, observes that ‘Physics and mathematics became increasingly dependent upon the imagination during the early to mid-Victorian period… marking a shift from positivist experiment to a priori analysis and speculation’ (142). He goes on to note ‘[William Rowan] Hamilton’s dictum that “imagined possibility affects us otherwise than believed reality”’ and that ‘The sober professional science that the BAAS had been instrumental in establishing in the preceding decades looked like it was being undermined by a spate of rash apriorism’ (144). Science was going toward the abstruse and abstract, in the direction of Louisa’s fabulous divination27. Indeed, this was already true. ‘Major scientific theories have the function of prophecy’, Beer observes, as if reiterating the observation made by Lewes more than a century before that

A good chemist does not need to test many a proposition by bringing actual gases or acids into operation, and seeing the result; he foresees the result: his mental vision of the objects and their properties is so keen, his experience is so organised, that the result which would be visible in an experiment, is visible to him in an intuition. (Plots 84; Principles 19)

Science profits by the mind’s eye, the ‘mental vision’. The good scientist is one capable, as Louisa and the narrator are, of foretelling events that have not yet occurred, proofs that have not yet yielded to observation, his gift the same enchanted afflatus as Louisa finds in the fire.

The difference between Darwin and his gainsayer Philip Gosse, for example, is the difference between these imaginative prodigies and that imaginative poverty. Edmund Gosse, remarking

27 As Srdjan Smajić writes in his excellent Ghost-Seers, Detectives and Spiritualists:

nineteenth-century science opened up new paths into the occult by virtue of its explorations of objects and phenomena that elude the limited register of the bodily senses – the invisible, unseen world surrounding us, whose properties we cannot directly observe and measure, but about which we can make strong, seemingly incontrovertible inferences. (137)

This is worth quoting because it illuminates not just the present point but also the following chapter, which counts among its interests Dickens’ ghost story The Haunted Man and mesmerism.
on his father’s ‘very absence of imagination’, declares that ‘as a collector of facts and marshall of observations, he had not rival in that age…But he was more an attorney than a philosopher’ (68).

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*HT* and scientific contemporaries ask us to behold a paradigm of scientific discovery in which the ‘loose’ eye that takes in everything but the obvious. This eye is the agent of fancy, the mind’s eye. To see with a ‘fixed eye’ only is to see nothing more than Bitzer sees, a barbarous grotesque precisely because Bitzer has *not* distorted it; rather, he has truncated it to these abstract satellites, the sum of its parts. To adapt Wittman, the only distortion here is of Dickens’ own fondness for metonymic description, of which this is a betrayal. The horse’s externalities are ones that, unlike those from ‘Night Walks’ I discussed in the previous chapter, conjure nothing, wrap no reader or auditor in wonder about the horse, since what Dickens elsewhere called ‘the tender light of fancy’ has been extinguished. To such a sensibility, the contraband of incongruity in those ‘Wild Huntsmen’, with its whiff of *hypotyposis*, must be repudiated, delegated to a ‘fixed eye’ somewhere else that nevertheless is, ironically, just as fanciful. Yet this ‘fixed eye’ is not really seeing in the book. It is ‘Reason with a sightless stare’, akin to that fetish of ‘facts’ in early scientific thought that sought to efface the observer.

The thread of this thesis is becoming clear. So far the distinction between seeing things and ‘seeing things’ I established in the introduction has undergone two different treatments: one in which they remain distinct; the other in which ‘seeing things’, incredibly yet convincingly (the essence of wonder) and finally truly in scientific hypotheses, informs
seeing things. In the next chapter, the final one, I shall look at vision, and descriptive prose with it, that is entirely distorted. In *HT* Dickens wishes the devoutly literal inventories of reality that Bitzer graces us with, under the austere tutelage of the ‘Hard Fact men’, to be expelled to a Coketownian perdition (188). In the prose I shall alight on next, he presents us with its antidote. The examples I give are nearly all examples of ‘seeing things’, even when no apparations are in sight. What I tilted at with amiable vexation in the introduction, the lexicon that finds in Dickens ‘heightening’ and ‘exaggeration’ (Grahame Smith’s words, but they could be anyone’s), is borne out in these examples, at least ostensibly. My intention is to argue at greater length about the issues I raised in the introduction when discussing Dickens’ extraordinary impressions of Venice, a place which to describe would be an ‘impossibility’. Recall the discussion of *Impossibilia*, that kindred mode of *hypotyposis*, in this chapter. ‘Impossibility’ is crucial to *hypotyposis*, and this I shall make clearer with sustained textual analysis. Not much to get through, then.
In the preceding two chapters I have looked at different aspects of seeing and representation in Dickens. In the second chapter, those aspects were chiefly ones of textual knowledge. The accrual of knowledge both within *Bleak House* and on its hazy peripheries were quietly magical, I argued, a network of impossible vanishings and conjurations. I took up this theme again in the third chapter, albeit with a different novel, *Hard Times*, and a consideration of rather different aspects. Whereas the second chapter found representation in *BH* to be an illusion, the third considered the way in which the illusory in Dickens is a superior form of aesthetic transmission. But both *BH* and *HT* are interested in essentially stable vision, if you like. Tulkinghorn solicits intelligence on the verisimilar happenings behind the verisimilar walls; *HT* is about scientific observation that desires to make vision so stable it is cashiered, a vestigial faculty to be acknowledged but never truckled to. In the two novels as well as the writing I discussed in connection with them there slouched exceptions to this axiom, but generally it obtains. So what then of writing where it does not obtain? In *The Haunted Man* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* it does not. Certainly in the former text vision is unstable—deranged, its sensory data the fantasmatic distortions of *hypotyposis*—as it is at times in the latter text. Simply put, the central characters in both books are, to invoke my title again, ‘seeing things’ in the colloquial sense. If the first principle of the thesis is that Dickens is representing things most veraciously when most falsely—recall Lewes’s ‘Falsism’, the distortion that Smith says is ‘more real than reality itself’—then doubles and trances and so forth, modes of false perception that nevertheless appear to yield potent truths, are its natural terminus. Thus this chapter.
One purpose of this chapter is to audit THM’s peculiarity and elucidate its relation to trances, specifically the mesmeric pall that shadows the text. As in the preceding chapter and subsequent ones, my main interest is vision and language: entranced vision, entranced language. In the final section I want to demonstrate how similar Dickens’ aesthetic procedure in his long descriptive passages is to the unfolding of an hallucination, which Lewes first identified with Dickensian style. The point, to restate an earlier qualification, is not to suggest that Dickens actually was hallucinatory in his writing, which seems to me an impertinence. It is merely to illuminate how his style is so persuasive, how it makes its readers believe. In doing so I expand on a point I made in the first chapter about the ‘self-generating reverie’ Miller identified.

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It is true that almost nobody has ever liked The Haunted Man. Michael Slater was being charitable when he noted that ‘the reception accorded to this last Christmas Book was, in fact, very mixed, with hostile criticism predominating’ (Christmas Books 237). Indeed, it seems to induce dislike in its readers in rather the same way its titular protagonist spreads his dubious ‘gift’. Those who have felt its touch become captious and dismissive toward the unusual, underfed novella they behold. Angus Wilson writes that it and its remarkably similar Christmas predecessor The Battle of Life were ‘deservedly less successful in their own time and have only the interest now of being quarries in their rather peculiar stories for autobiographical obsessions’ (181). Its unpopularity has been so prodigious and so abiding that it ought by now to have reaped a belated profit: to be grubbed from its fallen state in the

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28 Exceptions include Harry Stone and Peter Ackroyd – good exceptions to have. The latter says THM, though the ‘strangest’ of the Christmas books, is ‘a wonderful story, filled with darkness and shadow’ that ‘must stand alongside A Christmas Carol for its rendering of true feeling’ (103, 104). As to the last point, I would submit that Redlaw is not the only one seeing things.
back canon of Dickens works and, if not restored, granted some small provision of interest and living out its days in comfortable obscurity, with reverent loyalists occasionally visiting to pay tribute. Somehow, though, this has not happened. Like The Haunted Man himself, Redlaw, and his haunted dwelling, it exists as an anomaly, unchanged amid much change, free of readerly molestation. Critical availing on its behalf, though often clever and sensitive, has been sporadic. Yet I think this ‘rather peculiar’ work is a good deal better than its reputation indicates. And not merely better, but more peculiar.

If THM is virtually forgotten among Dickens’ works, it might be helpful to recapitulate the plot and the circumstances surrounding its publication. It was the last of Dickens’ Christmas books, the fifth in a series of five tales, compact by his standards, that he published each Christmas beginning with A Christmas Carol in 1843 and ending with the present text in 1848, the only exception being 1847. Though the last of these books, THM was, as Michael Slater says in his later Penguin edition, the only one after A Christmas Carol ‘that can be said to be actually about Christmas’ (xxi). It is set in Christmas time, and strives to impart a yuletide flavour, or at any rate to import it into the protagonist’s isolated, almost atemporal existence. The ‘haunted man’ is a famous chemist named Redlaw. Redlaw was once betrayed by a friend who jilted his sister to take up with the woman he, Redlaw, loved. This has precipitated a serious case of ‘haunting’, which is to say harrowment to the point of brutalisation. Years later, pent up in his chambers at the college where he teaches, roiled in a spin-cycle of reverie and travail, Redlaw, at least ostensibly, begins receiving an apparition, alternately called a ‘Ghost’, a ‘Phantom’ and a ‘spectre’. This ‘Phantom’, the soubriquet that Dickens uses most despite the title, is Redlaw himself: ‘the animated image of himself dead’ (144). The Phantom offers to annul Redlaw’s ‘sorrow and…wrong’: to, in Redlaw’s words,
‘blot it from my memory’, leaving him with a perfectly spotless mind (145). Redlaw accepts its offer.

What Redlaw does not know, unfortunately, is that the offer comes with a disagreeable rider. His own bad memories annulled, Redlaw wields the involuntary power to annul the same memories in others. And so, again ostensibly, he does. For reasons that Dickens never elucidates, as nearly as I can tell, Redlaw does not wrest from others ‘their sorrow and their wrong’ but the parts of their personalities that moderate or suppress those feelings. He turns them into selfish, querulous grotesques, and they are only saved, and he redeemed, through the beatific intervention of the servant Milly. Milly and the nameless street urchin, ‘a young monster, a child who had never been a child…a mere beast’ who takes shelter in Redlaw’s dwelling because of her ministrations, are crucial to the story and Redlaw’s redemption (150). They alone are immune to his influence: the one because she possesses a ‘humanising touch’, the other because he has never received it – a point on which the Phantom, who it transpires is something of a bleeding heart, harangues Redlaw (204). They and the ‘Christmas Waits’, music that at first heralds the Phantom and then heralds Redlaw’s redemption, are the story’s primary motive forces.

The text is in part Gothic boilerplate and in part a peculiar alloy, a kind of morbid whimsy. Establishing the scene, Dickens pursues a rhetorical strategy that, at first, cleaves to the safety of convention. The ‘haunted man’ lives in an ‘old, retired part of an ancient endowment’, and each succeeding period in the introduction is a tolling on this bell: ‘the obsolete whim of forgotten architects’, ‘old trees’, ‘mildewed earth’ (126). Redlaw’s habitat is sepulchral, vault-like; its depth in the ground is dwelt upon as if it were a living archaeological site, sunk below the city (this is not the only such occurrence in Dickens, as
Dorothy Van Ghent notes [*Critical Assessments v.IV* 63]). Not surprisingly, as I indicated above, Redlaw leads an austere, hidebound existence there, ‘remote in fashion, age, and custom’ like his dwelling (127). Stanley Tick, who does not seem to like the story very much, calling it ‘half-hysterical’, remarks that ‘there appears to be some force outside the text that unsettles the writing’; he goes on to observe that ‘Dickens composes thirty-two sentences in a row beginning with the word ‘when’, a kind of rhetorical eruption without cause or purpose’ (65). But is there really no purpose to this addled yet incantatory prose? I do not wish to get ahead of myself, but I submit that this magnificent prose – and I believe, contrary to Tick, that it is magnificent – might be likened to the ‘passes’ mesmerists performed in front of their subjects as they lulled them into a trance. Taylor Stoehr, an altogether more trustworthy reader on this matter, makes his own suggestion that is pertinent here about a trope common in Dickens’ writing:

We recall, for example, Dickens’ anaphoric ordering of detail, where the bits and pieces of the visual scene are, so to speak, suspended in time by the directionless rhetorical pattern, producing a dreamlike ‘simultaneity’ of the separate elements. What movement there is in the scene appears to be an effect of simple scanning, from point to contiguous point, and the relations between elements are mere juxtapositions, formalized in the anaphoric schematization. As in dream, the realism one would expect from constant emphasis on objects familiar to the eyes is strangely modified by this mode of presentation. The combination of *movement by contiguity and order without direction or classification* makes the scene appear to present itself, so that the total effect is not realistic at all, but magical, even supernatural.

(76)

The anaphora that Tick censures, Stoehr finds to be part of a complex rhetorical strategy. The opening pages of *THM* are as perfect expression of Stoehr’s criticism as can be imagined. ‘When’ provides a ‘visual scene…suspended in time’ as all the ‘bits and pieces’ wait for this long deferred ‘when’ to arrive, held together by nothing except the baroque ‘anaphoric schematization’, and with the ‘magical, even supernatural’ made overt in lines such as ‘when
twilight everywhere released the shadows, prisoned up all day, that now closed in and
gathered like mustering swarms of ghosts’ (128). Seconding the effect that Stoehr identifies, I
would submit that the book begins very much in the manner De Quincey famously discerned
in *Macbeth*. We are ‘made sensible,’ De Quincey writes, ‘that the world of ordinary life is
suddenly arrested – laid asleep – tranced – racked into a dread armistice: time must be
annihilated; relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn’ (197).
Something very much of the sort is here being attempted in *THM*. On the ‘sun-dial’ outside
Redlaw’s dwelling ‘no sun had straggled for a hundred years’ and ‘the snow would lie for
weeks when it lay nowhere else’ (126). Time itself has been ‘annihilated’ – the sun not
corroborating it, winter continuing there long after it had tempered toward spring elsewhere –
and ‘relation to things without’ has all but been ‘abolished’. It is, like Poe’s ‘Dream-Land’,
‘Out of SPACE – out of TIME’ (70). Or, as Milly’s husband Mr. William says when he
greets Redlaw, ‘it’s a good bit past the time to-night’ (130).

*The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is in some ways a different book altogether. It does not
seem to be as riven as *THM*, as peculiarly conflicted about its ends. It does not seem
unconvinced by itself and therefore does not become self-compromising as *THM* does. *THM*
is a curate’s egg of the strange and the stock. It is open to badness as *Drood* never is. Indeed,
in this way *THM* has something in common with *Drood*’s predecessor *Our Mutual Friend*,
whose rampant waywardness gives way to the honed functionality of *Drood*. In this last book
Dickens seems to write within himself. The comic diversions are scrupulously kept in check;
the novel proceeds soberly, purposefully. The disappearance of the title character is the direct
result or cause of every event in the novel, a structural economy not observed in the
sprawling novels before it. Even *THM* excludes some events from Redlaw’s expanding,
diabolical purview.
Sobriety is an appropriate treatment of Cloisterham’s stifling abstinence, its provincialism and insularity, which Jasper feels more keenly than anyone else: ‘the cramped monotony of my existence grinds me away by the grain’ (48). Later, he adds ‘Cloisterham is a little place. Cooped up in it myself, I know nothing beyond it, and feel it to be a little place’ (64). Cloisterham is so little that the odd repetition is telling rather than merely circumlocutory. Jasper speaks of being ‘cooped up’ – though by what a young single man of his gifts and wanderlust could be cooped by, he does not say, but let that pass – and in that additional clause finds himself returning to ‘a little place’, as if he were ‘feeling’ the walls of his coop, its oppressive confines. In the midst of conversation, he has without meaning to enacted his predicament. The remark is doubly and trebly interesting for reasons I shall return to, namely for its being a lie and also for the nature of that lie: his clandestine sprees to London, where he dreams of the Orient. Cloisterham is sleepy, a backwater; its life, such as it is, has thickened to a torpor. Many of the citizens we are introduced to, if only in passing – or, that is, long passed – and anonymously, are sleeping. They are interred in the Cathedral, bearing up in its walls and grounds. Nevertheless, time passes. At certain moments we see it happen before our eyes. It is a testament to the novel’s lightly-worn mastery that a paragraph such as this seems unremarkable:

The bright frosty day declined as they walked and spoke together. The sun dipped in the river far behind them, and the old city lay red before them, as their walk drew to a close, the moaning water cast its seaweed duskily at their feet, when they turned to leave its margin; and the rooks hovered above them with hoarse cries, darker splashes in the darkening air. (169)

This passage comes as Edwin and Rosa part – for good, as they are not to know. The effortless virtuosity is in the writing’s ability to make a stretch of time – half an hour, say, perhaps longer – pass with only, as it were, a few strokes. We go from ‘bright frosty day
declin[ing]’ to a ‘sun dipped in the river’, which in turn bathes ‘the old city’ in ‘red’; then we get seaweed cast ‘duskily’ before we fetch up finally at those rooks, ‘darker splashes in the darkening air’, a line that makes it seem as if the quality of light is dwindling with every word. Moreover, implanted here are the first stirrings of intimations about Edwin’s fate. The faint incongruity of ‘seaweed’ in the river (the search parties will extend miles downstream to the sea); the ‘moaning’, itself a vague portent, combining with the ‘hoarse cries’, suggestive of strangulation, to hint at the imminent murder.

*

I think that there is an important connection between the temporal suspension in THM and Redlaw; indeed, that the two can be conflated. Helen Groth suggests that Redlaw has succumbed to ‘the dissociative hypnotic state induced by intense reverie’ (‘Reading Victorian Illusions’ 49). She argues that ‘the specter is an externalization of what are later described as the “banished recollections” underlying the “inter-twisted chain of feelings and associations haunting Redlaw’s conscious thought”’ (50). Citing the work of two contemporaries of Dickens, the physiologist William Carpenter and the critic John Addington Symonds, she offers the explanation that the Phantom emanates from ‘a dream-like state’ (51). Certainly John Forster refers to ‘the dialogue [with the Phantom] which is no dialogue, but a kind of dreary dreamy echo’, ‘dreary’ being meant, lest there is any confusion with other criticism I have quoted, in its original sense (Life v.2 59-60). And as Forster also notes, though without getting the poem’s title right, Dickens’ original epigraph for the book was four lines from Tennyson’s ‘The Day-Dream’ (Life v.2 59). In other words, all of Groth’s points are well-taken; with the thrust of them I certainly concur. But I would go a little further than she does and suggest that, just as his environs are ‘laid asleep – tranced’, Redlaw is in, or is in
something akin to, a somnambulistic trance. Indeed, I would go much further than she does and suggest that the entire story could be a figment of this trance. The text itself indicates as much, being coy about what it calls ‘the veracity of this history’:

> Some people have said since, that he only thought what has here been set down; others, that he read it in the fire... others, that the Ghost was but the representation of his gloomy thoughts, and Milly the embodiment of his better wisdom. I say nothing. (228)

Chauncey Hare Townshend, ‘an accomplished man, who has written better of mesmerism than anyone else’, Dickens declared in his correspondence years later, observes in his seminal 1840 treatise *Facts of Mesmerism* that ‘A mesmeric sleepwalker rarely observes any external object of his own accord. His state is one of concentration, abstraction, and internal thought’, and we can see something of this in Redlaw (Townshend 379; *Letters v.7* 342). There is evidence that Redlaw possesses some of the primary risk factors for tranced states. It is useful here to cite Robert Macnish, the Scots doctor whose *Anatomy of Drunkenness* Dickens infamously cited to defend Krook’s spontaneous combustion in *BH*. Macnish says in his *Philosophy of Sleep*, a work Dickens possessed, that the ‘tendency to see visions, and to place faith in what he sees’ is commensurate with how ‘abstracted from the bustle of life’ he is; Macnish goes on, ‘solitary [is] the district in which [such an] individual resides; and...romantic and awe-inspiring the scenes that pass before his eyes’ (*Letters 1844-46* 725; *Philosophy* 260-61). Macnish had already identified the correlation between ‘a large development of the organ of Wonder’ and a personality ‘strongly inclined to believe in the supernaturality of ghosts, and peculiarly liable to be visited by them’ (246). Redlaw is ‘the wise and learned man to whom the wonders of nature were an open book’; and it is perhaps noteworthy that when he hears the Christmas music ‘his face became less fixed and wondering’, although he is about to have his final colloquy with the Phantom (218, 202).
Macnish’s writing is germane to *THM* in another way too. In his diagnosis, ‘those whose minds are oppressed by care, or over-stimulated by excessive study’ are most susceptible:

> The sorrowful man, above all others, has the most need of sleep; but, far from shedding its benignant influence over him, it flies away, and leaves him to the communionship of his own sad thoughts. (199)

Such formulations as ‘over-stimulated by excessive study’ are common in Macnish’s treatise and others, so it is significant that Forster describes Redlaw as a ‘man of studious philosophic habits’ and then as ‘the over-thinking sage’ (507-08). One can adduce other writings by Dickens to buttress this suggestion that Redlaw is a somnambulist. In his February 1848 *Examiner* review of the book *The Night Side of Nature*, by the novelist Catherine Crowe, Dickens contended that what he calls ‘the renowned Lady Beresford ghost story’ was an act of somnambulism; that she

> was actually doing them [‘her acts’], with the disturbed, imperfect consciousness of doing them which is not uncommon in cases of somnambulism, or even in common dreams; when the sleeper, lying on his own arm, or throwing off his own bedclothes, makes his own act the act of an imaginary person, and elaborately constructs a story in his sleep, out of which such incidents seem to arise. (in *Amusements* 86-87)

It seems to me very plausible that *The Haunted Man* is just such a story too. Redlaw, who is often described as ‘abstracted’ and ‘roused’ by human activity, certainly appears to act with a ‘disturbed, imperfect consciousness’. When we are introduced to him, he is ‘moving his thin mouth as in speech, but silent as the dead’, as if rent by a vatic fit (126). When Mr William speaks to him, Redlaw is ‘waking as from a dream’ (132). In this, indeed, he is analogous not so much to any figure in ‘The Day-Dream’ but to the Prince in Tennyson’s *The Princess*,
which had been published the year before, in 1847 – especially the Prince who speaks these spookily apposite lines:

And, truly, waking dreams were, more or less,
An old and strange affection of the house.
Myself too had weird seizures, Heaven knows what:
On a sudden in the midst of men and day,
And while I walk’d and talk’d as heretofore,
I seem’d to move among a world of ghosts,
And feel myself the shadow of a dream. (157)²⁹

Those last three lines may as well be Redlaw, who walks and talks as heretofore while seeming to move among a world of ghosts, albeit ghosts that are intended to be construed as supernatural. Dickens makes plain to Mark Lemon, with whom he was dramatising the story, that ‘I don’t think it would do to shew the Phantom. I think it would involve an absurdity in reference to the prevailing idea of the book’ (Letters v.5 456). As Ruth Glancy notes in this connection, the Phantom ‘appears to Redlaw in order to dramatise the dialogue taking place within Redlaw’s psyche’, his ‘“spiritual desolation”’, adding that Dickens referred to the dialogue in a letter to the Earl of Carlisle as ‘an allegorical one’ (71). Or, as Forster puts it, it is ‘the darker presentment of himself embodied in those bitter recollections’ (Life v.2 59). It is, moreover, perfectly normal for the somnambulist not to be betrayed by his appearance, as Redlaw, walking and talking as heretofore, is not. In Barnaby Rudge, Barnaby dreams of being pursued by a monstrosity ‘in the shape of a man’, but this has been facilitated by his mesmerist interlocutor Gabriel, and Barnaby is in fact awake the entire time – a scene that

²⁹ We could surmise that Dickens had read those lines even if ‘The Day-Dream’ had not been the source of his original epigraph. He was an admirer of Tennyson’s poetry: ‘I have been reading Tennyson all this morning,’ he begins one letter to Forster, and elsewhere writes of reading Tennyson ‘again and again’ (Letters v.3 279; Life v.1 329). Indeed, they were on such friendly terms that in 1845 Dickens made Tennyson a godfather to his son, Alfred D’Orsay Tennyson Dickens. This was not the only unhappy end of their friendship, if Forster’s allusions to strain are any guide (Life v.2 83).
anticipated Dickens’ real mesmeric treatments of Madame de la Rue, to which I shall return
\((BR\ 47-48;\ Kaplan\ 219)\). Indeed, Dickens was fastidious about this, eager to correct Crowe’s
misapprehension that ‘the strange powers [of] somnambulists…[are] generally exercised
with closed eyes, which is not the case’ (86).

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It is possible too that the trance, if trance there is, is not somnambulistic but
mesmeric; or, rather, that it is a combination, the former brought on by the latter. Macnish
notes that ‘animal magnetism appears to have the power of inducing a peculiar species of
somnambulism’ (176). The trance seems to me manifest later on in the story when, upon
hearing Christmas music, Redlaw ‘rose, and stood stretching his hands about him, as if there
were some friend approaching within his reach, on whom his desolate touch might rest’ (200-01). It is quite possible this music, ‘the Christmas Waits’ that had begun playing when the
Phantom first materialised and leave their ‘last chord’ in Redlaw’s ear when he materialises
the second time, could have been responsible for starting and ending his trance (142, 202). “I
know that some change was upon me, when those sounds were in the air just now,” Redlaw
says (203). Edmund Wilson, in his great essay ‘Dickens: the Two Scrooges’, contended:

\[\text{It was supposed in Dickens’ time that this influence [mesmerism] could be projected through}
\text{the agency of mere sound: hence the insistent keynote in the piano scene and the swelling note}
\text{of the organ that frightens Rosa in the garden. (81)}^{30}\]

\[^{30}\text{The first, more interesting example Wilson cites from Drood is this, where Rosa Bud confesses to Helena}
\text{Landless her fear of John Jasper:}
\]

‘He has made a slave of me with his looks. He has forced me to understand him, without his saying a
word; and he has forced me to keep silence, without his uttering a threat. When I play, he never moves
his eyes from my hands. When I sing, he never moves his eyes from my lips. When he corrects me, and
strikes a note, or a chord, or plays a passage, he himself is in the sounds, whispering that he pursues me
as a lover, and commanding me to keep his secret. I avoid his eyes, but he forces me to see them
without looking at them. Even when a glaze comes over them (which is sometimes the case), and he
seems to wander away into a frightful sort of dream in which he threatens most, he obliges me to know
it, and to know that he is sitting close at my side, more terrible to me than ever.’ (95)
Whatever the reason, supervening upon Redlaw’s comment the ‘sun-dial…shook off the finer particles of snow that had accumulated on his dull old face in the night’ and ‘some blind groping of the morning made its way down’ (205). Time has begun again.

None of this is to say that Redlaw’s somnambulism makes him exclusively the mesmeric subject of another (after all, who could that other be?). Mesmerism rears up in the text through the agency of Redlaw and the dispensing of his gift. To be sure, Redlaw’s ‘strange power’ appears mesmeric in nature, and it is this power that ultimately dominates the text. We see quite obvious examples of it: ‘The Chemist’s steady eye controlled him somewhat, or inspired him with enough submission to be raised upon his feet, and looked at’ (183). At times it is even a sort of ‘phreno-mesmerism’, the practice of controlling people mesmerically through, as Alison Winter writes, ‘touch[ing] the place on a subject’s skull corresponding to a particular phrenological organ,’ upon which ‘the entranced person manifested the appropriate sentiments’ (19). When Redlaw fruitlessly tries to mesmerise the guttersnipe, ‘[he] asked these questions to attract his eyes towards himself, and…now held him by the chin, and threw his wild hair back, though he loathed to touch him’ (185). Nor is mesmerism the domain of Redlaw alone. We are even led to consider Milly’s mesmeric powers, although perhaps that is not so surprising. This is the Milly whom it transpires is invested with all love and compassion, a pure, subsumed goodness that she is able to bestow on those around her. She becomes, as I noted earlier, the vessel of divinity, a figure no longer quite human. This impression is reinforced by the fact that her avatar is magically transmitted to Redlaw’s sight. Given all this, mesmeric powers would seem to be the least of her faculties. Notice the ambiguity here in her innocuous relation of an encounter with the young student who, it transpires, is Redlaw’s nephew:
Milly’s voice resumed, like quiet music very softly played:

‘He muttered in his broken sleep yesterday afternoon, after talking to me’ (this was to herself) ‘about some one dead, and some great wrong done that could never be forgotten; but whether to him or to another person, I don’t know. Not by him, I am sure.’ (141)

Had he ‘muttered in his broken sleep’ about it or had he ‘talk[ed] to [her]’ about it? The placement of the quotation marks renders this question interestingly moot. The difference is significant. If the parenthesis in her remarks ends after ‘me’ and does not extend to include ‘about some one dead’ right through to the semi-colon, the complexion of the clause ‘after talking to me’, and indeed of the whole sentence, changes. Although ‘(this was to herself)’ suggests, if anything, the other parsing, her confusion over what he meant (‘whether to him or to another person, I don’t know’) counters it. And besides, if the other parsing were accurate then why mention the ‘mutter[ing]’ at all, since it would be redundant?Parsed the way I have described, the clause becomes very curious. Milly appears to be stressing the fact that he muttered about those things ‘after talking to [her]’ – ‘after’ now taking on tacit quotation marks – as if there were a causal link between the two acts. That is, Milly is saying he ‘muttered in his broken sleep’ because of ‘talking to [her]’, which implies that she coerced him in some doubtless benevolent manner. Note that her ‘voice…[was] like quiet music’, making it as enchanted as the Christmas Waits I suggested could have influenced Redlaw.

The question of how Milly and Redlaw might ‘diffuse’ their mesmeric gifts is answered in the Reverend George Sandby’s 1844 treatise Mesmerism and its Opponents. Like Townshend and Macnish, Sandby leans on a sodality of quacks. But he is nevertheless clear on the mesmeric transaction in a way that writers like Townshend and John Elliotson, beset by anecdotal desultoriness and casebook obscurantism respectively, are not. Writing about ‘this “transfer of thought,” of which we have been speaking’, he says:
Dr. Collyer has written an able work on this subject; he supposes that a vital electricity is the medium of communication from mind to mind; that there is an ‘embodiment of thought’; in other words, an impression of the thoughts of one mind, through a Mesmeric agent, on the brain or mind of another. (126)

There is more than a little of the flavour of galvanism, mesmerism’s immediate forebear as voguish pseudoscience, to this theory; and, as Winters notes, the mesmerist F.S. Merryweather did indeed figure the brain as a ‘galvanic battery’ (120). But this also sounds almost viral, and the ‘Mesmeric agent’ a kind of vector, so it is not surprising that Sandby proceeds to use the word ‘contagious’ (127). Redlaw, spreading his gift against his will, is also a vector, also ‘contagious’. He is practising a version of what Michael T. Taussig calls “‘contagious magic’”, involving what appears to be a physical connection in order to effect, through rite, the substance connected’ (x). I shall return to Taussig’s remarks below, because ‘contagious’ recurs in this essay and seems to illuminate what I take to be hypotyposis.

There is an interesting tension between the pathological constructions of the somnambulistic trance. I have already noted Macnish’s perorations on the disorder of the unmediated trance; but the mediated type described here is professedly therapeutic. Elliotson staked his career on its being so, breaking with the medical establishment and publishing his treatises and periodical The Zoist to expound his view. The therapeutic and anaesthetic benefits were what the frontispiece of Elliotson’s Numerous Cases of Surgical Operations Without Pain in the Mesmeric State refers to as ‘the inestimable blessings of mesmerism’.

Elliotson begins that book by recording the tale of the labourer James Wombell, who needed his leg amputated, and the extraordinary influence on him of a mesmerist, Mr W. Topham (a barrister, of all things). According to Elliotson’s testimony, Topham was, through an intense program of mesmeric subjugation, able to palliate Wombell’s agony to the extent that the
surgeon began to doubt ‘the propriety of immediately amputating the limb’ (6). In the very next line, however, it seems these doubts have vanished like the pain and the patient is told of his imminent amputation. Understandably, he takes rather a bad turn upon hearing this; but, as Elliotson makes clear, he is returned to mesmerised docility within ‘four minutes and a half’. Elliotson goes on to observe that, by dint of those mesmeric passes, Wombell enters a state of extreme analgesia: ‘the sensibility to mechanical causes of pain was so far lessened that violent pinching, and sudden pricking, and of even the diseased limb, produced no evidence of sensation’ (6). The rest of the narrative is as gruesome as can be imagined, the sort of experimental ordeal that, for all its ostensibly benign intent, one infers is good enough for a common labourer but never for a barrister or a surgeon, although Winter makes a cogent, passionate defence of its efficacy (163-187). Wombell is prostrate and utterly still, utterly silent except for ‘“a low moaning”…at intervals’ which Elliotson, in an audacious coup, imputes not to the surgery but to ‘troubled dreaming’ (9). To Elliotson, this is a familiar manifestation: ‘this patient was very likely, and from my experience I should say, was almost certain, to be [dreaming of the operation he was afraid of]’. It is as if Elliotson is not merely vouching for the utility of mesmeric treatment, he is anticipating future charges of malpractice.

Fred Kaplan, apparently paraphrasing the view of Dickens and other subscribers to mesmerism, affirms that ‘For the central mesmeric experience is that of sleepwalking, in which we awaken from the dreams of illusion and see the truth of reality’ (217). Here a nice scrambling of Kaplan’s division between ‘the dreams of illusion’ and ‘the truth of reality’ is occurring. There is the truth of the illusion and the dream of the reality, and here they are potently commingled. This low moaning aside, though, poor old Wombell is become an effigy of himself; as Elliotson puts it, ‘he lay like a statue’. Such a figure, who is capable of
nothing except vocalisation, anticipates the titular character in Poe’s ‘The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar’, a story that was in fact inspired by the report of Townshend, who contended that ‘under God, the life of my friend, R.T. was prolonged, at least, two months by the action of Mesmerism’ (Enns 73). Likewise Valdemar is kept alive by mesmerism in a state of trance, but it is, as it were, posthumous life – ‘I am dead’, he says to his former companions, who had probably already picked up on this – consisting of nothing more than a “‘strong vibratory motion” emanating from the tongue’, the auditors of which apprehend as palpable (Poe 662, 661).

This ‘awaken[ing]’ in sleep, comprising what Kaplan then calls ‘moments of insight’, is not merely figurative either. Contemporary writings on mesmerism and somnambulism posited a mode of sight that existed outside our eyes, which is to say inside our heads. This sight was supra-optic, permitting the ‘truth of reality’, the tangible, to be observed as well as the ‘dreams of illusion’, those transcendental visions permitted to Madame de la Rue while she was under Dickens’ care during his time in Genoa in 1842 and again in 1845. The treatise Animal Magnetism and Magnetic Lucid Somnambulism by Edwin Lee sets forth the principles of this trenchant sight, this ‘second sight’ or mind’s eye, in the course of its eccentric treatments of studies ranging from ophthalmology to physics. He asks the question about sleepwalkers, ‘how can they see in obscurity, or with closed eyes?’, and tries to answer it by invoking, as writers such as Macnish, Townshend and William Stone did before him, a tissue of quotations from sources which, despite their obscurity, can often be seen through by sleepwalker and non-sleepwalker alike. He quotes ‘a recent writer’ on the topic:

> It would appear, as a general rule, that rays of light, though invisible to the eye, are passing from all objects continually, and can penetrate readily certain substances, if not all, which are opaque to ordinary light. Those rays seem to be able to pass at once to the brain of sensitive
persons, and give the sensation of vision, without the intervention of the eye as an organ. Ordinary light is too coarse for such a refined instrument as the brain to receive without the intervention of an organ; but for this refined light the brain needs no such go-between, but passes at once through the portals and is admitted into the inner chamber of the soul. (97)

If the brain did not look down, as it were, on that vulgar ‘ordinary’ light, we would have no need of eyes at all. This notion of ‘internal vision’ was a pervasive and important one in the various theories of mesmerism. It is noteworthy that Browning makes so much of it in his poem ‘Mesmerism’, published in *Men and Women* in 1855, well after the onset of mesmerism’s eclipse. The speaker’s enthralled subject – a ‘helpless, somnambulistic automaton’, as Steven Connor calls her – he has summoned remotely, much as Dickens mesmerised Madame de la Rue from London (Connor 5). She is coming to him, and despite her trance she is unhindered, apprehending the way by alternative means: ‘Not turning to left nor right / From the pathway, blind with sight’ (Browning 87). But ‘internal vision’ is not just available to mesmeric subjects. The efficacy of the mesmerist’s art depended on vision, both internal and plain old external. As Alison Winter writes:

> Mesmerism was an ocular practice in a more dynamic sense than phrenology and physiology. It provided both a display and an account of the way displays affected audiences. An account of the power of looking as well as powerful sight for Victorians to see. It often achieved its displays through the use of the eye, since one of the primary means of establishing the trance was through sustained eye contact. The power of looking and the relations of influence operating between the person looking and the thing being looked at were at the heart of experiments. (30-31)

In ‘Mesmerism’, the speaker remarks that the subject is ‘In the grasp of my steady stare’ (86). Dickens himself ‘referred to the power of his eyes and his magnetism as his “visual ray”, to de la Rue’s eyes as his “optic ray” or nerve’ (Kaplan 98). The ‘internal vision’ of the mesmerist is less clear from the sources but it is explicit in ‘Mesmerism’, and, in fact, it is
what makes the poem so interesting, which is to say unusual. Its narrative is not that of a mesmerist exerting his will over a subject, ‘held in the clutch of steady ken’; instead, we see what begins as the theft of a soul, verily spirited away, turning into a kind of uncanny Pygmalion-esque, even necromantic, vivification (86). As Daniel Karlin writes, the speaker ‘first hallucinat[es] her image and then compel[s] her by occult power to “inform the shape” he has imagined with her living presence’ (in Winters 240). The poem’s first line, ‘All I believed is true!’, has a slightly different meaning from the one inferred by Connor (16-17). It is not an exclamation of empirical scientific success, a ‘Eureka!’ moment, but an assertion of the speaker’s ability to create, in the words of Kaplan again, the ‘truth of reality’ out of the ‘dreams of illusion’. It is worth quoting the most relevant sections of the poem:

I have sat and brought
(So to speak) my thought
To bear on the woman away,
Till I felt my hair turn grey —

VI
Till I seemed to have and hold,
In the vacancy
‘Twixt the wall and me,
From the hair-plait’s chestnut gold
To the foot in its muslin fold —

VII
Have and hold, then and there,
Her, from head to foot
Breathing and mute,
Passive and yet aware,
In the grasp of my steady stare…

IX
Having and holding, till
I imprint her fast
On the void at last
As the sun does whom he will
By the calotypist’s skill…

…As I see my belief come true.

XXI
For, there! have I drawn or no
Life to that lip?
Do my fingers dip
In a flame which again they throw
On the cheek that breaks a-glow?

XXII
Ha! was the hair so first?
What, unfilleted,
Made alive, and spread
Through the void with a rich outburst,
Chestnut gold-interspersed? (86, 88)

The speaker’s arch suggestion in those last two stanzas that he has instilled ‘the woman’ with life (‘made alive’) is trussed by the allusion of those last two lines back to stanza VI. The suggestion is that she exists there in person not because she has travelled but because he ‘seemed to have and hold, / In the vacancy’ her image – he later figures it as a calotype – ‘In the grasp of [his] steady stare’, the latter actually being not the mesmerist’s usual deployment of his eyes but an act of ‘internal vision’. If we revisit Dickens’ talk of his ‘visual ray’ we notice the distinction he makes between ‘visual’ and ‘optic’. By implication, it is the mesmerist and not the subject who has ‘internal vision’, ‘can see in obscurity’;31 the subject is a medium, but like the eye she is not a ‘refined instrument’. Dickens makes this implication clearer at other times. He does in talking about his own mesmeric experiences, and in so doing tacitly draws the connection between his mesmeric practice and his fictional one. ‘He

31 There is a moment in THM when, as ‘the shadows went and came’ and Redlaw stares into the fire, we find that ‘he took no heed of them, with his bodily eyes’ (130). ‘Bodily eyes’, that odd usage, has come up before in this thesis and comes up more often in Dickens than one might expect.
implied,’ Kaplan writes, ‘that Madame de la Rue and her Phantom were extensions of him, “part of me”, the result partially of Madame’s creation’s and his own suggestions’ (Kaplan 90).

*  

The other, related issue Browning’s poem touches on is that of doubles. Since the speaker has conjured his adored’s ‘fancied shape’ and thus wrested her soul, the poem’s consummation – to be followed, one imagines, by their union’s, at least in the speaker’s ‘dream’ – must be the restoration of soul to ‘shape’: ‘and now the dream is done / And the shadow and she are one’ (89). The poem is a descendent of the Schaeurroman, the genre of Hoffmann and Chamisso, though in the poem the speaker is a literal shadow-romancer (K. Miller 124). THM romances many shadows, but not all of them are the obvious kind, which is what makes Browning’s metaphor of the calotype so pertinent. In THM, we find that the Phantom is ‘the animated image of himself dead’ and ‘this fearful shadow’ (144, 148). The Phantom presents Milly’s ‘shade and picture’, her ‘image’ (202). All of these sound like stock Gothic ghoulishness, but they also have a relationship with contemporary developments in photography. When reflecting on the daguerrototype in a letter to her friend Mary Russell Mitford, Elizabeth Barrett adjures her to ‘think of a man sitting down in the sun & leaving his facsimile in all its full completion of outline & shadow’, is effusive about the ‘the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there fixed for ever!’, comparing it to ‘the Mesmeric disembodiment of spirits’ and finding it much the better of the two (Victorian Photography 135). William Henry Fox Talbot, inventor of the rival calotype that Browning refers to in ‘Mesmerism’, describes its manufacture of an image as the ‘Art of fixing a Shadow’, extolling as Barrett does its capacity to make ‘all that is fleeting and momentary…fettered by the spells of our “natural
magic, and…fixed forever in the position which it seemed only destined for a single instant to occupy” (Victorian Photography 136).

Photography and mesmerism alike were reagents capable of relieving the ‘shadow’ of its body. Indeed, the chemistry metaphor is apt in the case of THM:

Some of these phantoms (the reflection of glass vessels that held liquids), trembl[ed] at heart like things that knew his power to uncombine them, and to give back their component parts to fire and vapour. (126)

In the rather less scientific parlance of Dickens, his Chemist has the ‘power to uncombine’ his chemicals, but that power on its own is irrelevant; the dramatic purpose it serves is to act as a literary omen of his power to uncombine people’s souls. The choice of ‘phantoms’ reinforces this, suggesting as it does the murk of the self with which Redlaw will tamper, and Dickens presumed to tamper in real life. Furthermore, I submit that chemistry furnishes the story with another metaphor. Redlaw in his bleak Gothic isolation, with his recondite knowledge and his extensive apparatus of ‘glass vessels’ carrying mysterious substances, cannot help seeming like one who has searched for the philosopher’s stone. And indeed he has, after a fashion. He yearns to efface bad memories, and he appears to succeed. It is worth noting the glints of alchemy in Redlaw’s precursors. The hapless Peter Schlemihl transmutes his shadow by way of exchange into an inestimable wealth of gold pieces that at times take his shadow’s place: ‘I shook out gold, and gold, and gold, and still more gold;—strewed it over the floor, trampled on it’ (19). Where his shadow was is now gold. In THM, though, the yield of gold manifests itself in a different way, and with altogether happier results. The ‘leaden face and hands’ of the Phantom bespeak the terrible pall over Redlaw and the weight of despond that lades him (142). When that ‘leaden pall’ lifts, ‘the chimney stacks and gables
of the ancient building gleamed in the clear air, which turned the smoke and vapour of the
city into a cloud of gold’ (205). London’s own shadow is turned into the gold of a new dawn.

Paganoni writes in her study _The Magic Lantern: Representation of the Double in Dickens _that ‘strictly speaking, Dickensian doubles cannot be compared to those that we find in some famous nineteenth-century texts belonging to the canonical literature of the double’ (55). She notes that Dickensian doubles are not autonomous like those in the _Schauerroman_ genre, but are instead ‘psychological[ly] imbalance[d]’ or else are separate characters (55). But as the tenor of remarks suggests, she would perhaps concede that this does not refute the link above. Moreover, her injunction is gainsaid in another way. Karl Miller makes this clear, delineating the connection between narratives of doubles and the rise of mesmerism:

The story of the modern double starts with the magical science of the eighteenth century in Europe, when Mesmerists or Animal Magnetists went in for an experimental separation of the second self, and romantic writers went in for its cultural exploitation… [T]his was the heyday of the Rosicrucian doctor, of Romanticism’s scientific virtuoso or dilettante… A craze for duality spread from Germany to the rest of Europe. The Gothic strain in the literature of nineteenth-century Scotland and England was to accommodate the lore and idiom of magic, and of the new pseudo-sciences, Magnetism and Phrenology. In relation to most manifestations of the dualistic epoch of the nineteenth century Magnetism and its successor, hypnotism, were to prove an enduring stimulus. Duality was, among other things, an abracadabra. It was a taste for spells, powders, draughts, elixirs, wizard’s wands and doppelgänger-sticks. (49)

The denotation ‘Romanticism’s scientific virtuoso’ certainly applies to Redlaw. And indeed, as I have indicated, one may consider him just as close to the figure of the ‘Rosicrucian doctor’ too, dabbling alchemically in potions. It is surprising, then, that Dickens affected to disparage doppelgängers and the _Schauerroman_, the ‘craze for duality [that] spread from Germany to the rest of Europe’ I quoted above. In his review of Catherine Crowe’s book,
Dickens fleered at ‘the Doppelgänger, or Double, or Fetch, of Germany’, facetiously remarking that ‘immoderately hot stoves, which often have an uneasy influence upon the head…may have something to do with the abundance of phantoms perceived in Germany’ (*Amusements* 85). Given the vehemence of this, it is not really surprising that he wrote a story about a character and his ostensible ‘Double’ later that year. It is as if he wanted to protect his creation from any imputations that he had been influenced by all that Teutonic silliness, from those funny old ‘learned professors and studious men in Germany’ with their German Metaphysics and all that (*Amusements* 85). Dickens is certainly not leery of invoking doubles in *THM*, where he is inordinately fond of dualities. But the doubles are not always the minatory replacements of the typical *Schauerroman*. Milly’s pathetic candour about her stillborn child, for example, complements the voices that resound in Redlaw’s head:

‘All through life, it seems by me,’ she continued, ‘to tell me something. For poor neglected children, my little child pleads as if it were alive, and had a voice I knew, with which to speak to me.’ (226)

Indeed, the child may be doubly a double, as critics such as Wendy K. Carse have linked it with the Phantom (172-3). As with Redlaw’s double, the grief-wrought voice, anguished and doleful (one fancies the syntax itself, the commas like locks on a canal, reflecting this), is actually a source of edification. Contrast this with Mr Tetterby’s own double. At first it seems a much lighter case, as light as the doubling of Redlaw’s mesmerism: the Tetterby spawn feigning ‘mesmeric influence’ on him, for example, or ‘Mr. William…direct[ing] persuasive glances at Mrs. William, and secret jerks of his head and thumb at Mr. Redlaw, as alluring her towards him’ (158, 139). Tetterby operates a small concern called ‘A. TETTERBY &. CO., NEWSMEN’, in which ‘Co.’ stands for nothing, is ‘a mere poetical abstraction, baseless
and impersonal’ (155). ‘Co.’, having never existed, is not even a vestige like Marley. Yet, in
the comic fantasy Dickens indulges in, Tetterby is usurped by ‘Co.’:

The best position in the firm was too evidently Co.’s; Co., as a bodiless creation, being
untroubled with the vulgar inconveniencies of hunger and thirst, being chargeable neither to
the poor’s-rates nor to the assessed taxes, and having no young family to provide for. (156)

What starts out as the sort of wry thoughts Tetterby himself might entertain quickly drifts into
an area of ontological ambiguity, even crisis. ‘Co.’ is prospering at Tetterby’s expense as the
doubles in Poe’s ‘William Wilson’ and Hans Christian Andersen’s tale ‘The Shadow’ do at
their originals’. “Better to be called ever so far out of your name,” Mr William avers.
‘What’s a name for? To know a person by’” (133). That is mocked here. We see it mocked
further in the case of the base guttersnipe, ‘the child who had no name or lineage’, who was
‘more strange to the ways of childhood than a rough dog’ (228). This child is less a child than
Milly’s dead, unborn babe.

The text’s dualities tend to play on subjectivity: on losses of it and, in this case, on its
redistribution. When the Phantom grants his ‘gift’, he bestows an imprecation on Redlaw:
‘man whom I here renounce!’ (149) – a fate to which, it must be said, Redlaw rather seems to
acquiesce. Likewise, little Johnny Tetterby, laden with his newborn sister and entrusted with
her care, is threatened with a ‘conditional renunciation of him’ if any harm should come to
her (160). His fate is truly contingent on hers, for the threats seem to transcend bluster, seem
almost to be metaphysical. Even the Tetterby baby, which has not yet been named, seems to
suffer from a subjective crisis. We find that ‘Mrs Tetterby always said’ of the baby Moloch’s
first tooth that “‘it was coming through, and then the child would be itself’; and still it never
did come through, and the child continued to be somebody else’ (206). Elsewhere we read of
‘the wondering child, half-scared and half-amused, a stranger to itself’, and the wretch who wronged Redlaw plaintively muses ‘“I might have been another man, my life might have been another life…”’ (128, 224-25). On and on one could go. The abundance of examples in a purportedly warm, if sententious, Christmas diversion is startling. The text seems to be haunted not so much by ghosts but by the loss of subjectivity. That is to say, the abiding fear is not of incorporeal externalities but of incorporeal internalities. And yet that does not diminish the importance of the corporal; indeed, as in all good examples of Schauerroman, this only enhances its importance. In his deepest trough of, if you will permit the anachronism, existential despair, Redlaw

looked confusedly upon his hands and limbs, as if to be assured of his identity, and then shouted in reply, loudly and wildly; for there was a strangeness and terror upon him, as if he too were lost. (149)

It is as if Redlaw is suffering what those in attendance upon Monseigneur in A Tale of Two Cities, among them ‘unbelieving Chemists who had an eye on the transmutation of metals’, would later suffer: ‘the leprosy of unreality’ (126). One might well ask how looking upon his ‘hands and limbs’ would avail him in his attempt ‘to be assured of his identity’. The answer, it seems to me, is that he fears what all those visited by doppelgängers fear. ‘I have got so much body. I have even got flesh,’ Andersen’s ‘shadow’ says, almost tauntingly, to ‘the learned man’, whose corporal presence thereafter evanesces as the Shadow gradually supplants him (The Fairy World 59). As Emily Walker Heady notes, ‘concrete objects continually stand in for and comment on private thought’ in THM; so, then, might objects that are no longer concrete (13). The dissolution of the body betokens the dissolution of the soul, although one cannot help thinking that, as with ‘Co.’, this need not be such a bad thing.
I am not sure I agree with Groth’s assessment that the text affirms ‘the civilising power of memory, its ability to suppress the chaos of individual desire and to foster social responsibility’ (‘Reading Victorian Illusions’ 43). There is a mutinousness in it, as there is in Redlaw himself; an insurgency of weirdness wells up in it. This is all the more peculiar given that, as Ruth Glancy notes, Dickens was scrupulously careful in writing and rewriting the text, not at all like an author knocking off a nice little earner in the quick turnaround before Christmas (76-77). Consider that Redlaw, for all that ‘he is come back to himself!’ at the end, is portrayed as an apparition, one invisible to the people around him, as if his fears for his ‘hands and limbs’ were not misplaced:

While she was speaking, Redlaw had come in, and, after pausing for a moment to observe the group of which she was the centre, had silently ascended the stairs. Upon those stairs he now appeared again; remaining there, while the young student passed him, and came running down. (216)

He ‘appeared again’, as if at some point during his ascension he had disappeared, and the student passes him without appearing to notice that he is there. Bear in mind that the Tetterby household is scarcely more than a tenement; at a guess, it would be difficult to pass someone on those stairs at all. Refer to Tenniel’s illustration of him holding a lantern on the staircase; as in the Leech illustrations elsewhere, Redlaw is an enormous figure and appears to take up the entire landing. Yet the student is oblivious, and it is only belatedly that ‘the old man...espied the Chemist, whom until now he had not seen’ (220). How could anyone fail to see such a figure? It is as if he has degraded to the same level of attenuation as The Learned Man in Andersen’s tale. This aporia makes the twee ending – the principals gathering to feast, flush with the ideal of the ‘Swidgers’ like Mr William and Milly holding hands around the circumference of the world – appear meretricious, a desperate bulwark against the ‘dark swallowing one up’ that Mr William refers to in his first conversation with Mr William.
There is still that lacuna in the text: namely, that while Redlaw’s victims were under his ‘charmed influence’, their behaviour was actually inherent. There seems nothing to stop such behaviour irrupting again; ‘the chaos of individual desire’ is not suppressed, much as the ending, an occlusion rather than a conclusion, tries to suppress it.

*K*

Kaplan’s reversed formulation, ‘the truth of the illusion and the dream of reality’, is a neat summary of a longstanding, cogent line in Dickens criticism. Take Lewes’s striking remarks on Dickens as a ‘seer of visions’ whose ‘vividness of mind approach[ed] so closely to hallucination’:

What seems preposterous, impossible to us, seemed to him simple fact of observation. When he imagined a street, a house, a room, a figure, he saw it not in the vague schematic way of ordinary imagination, but in the sharp definition of actual perception, all the salient details obtruding themselves on his attention. He, seeing it thus vividly, made us also see it; and believing in its reality however fantastic, he communicated something of his belief to us. He presented it in such relief that we ceased to think of it as a picture. So definite and insistent was the image, that even while knowing it was false we could not help, for a moment, being affected, as it were, by his hallucination. (*Critical Assessments v.I* 457, 458)

Insofar as any subjective judgement can be, this seems to me just about right as an assessment of what made Dickens a successful novelist. And in its capacious rightness there seem to me many points that animate ones I have made about hypotyposis, or not even so much ‘points’ as ‘tendencies’, perhaps, tacks whose destination is between Lewes’s points, stewarded by the lighthouse of their illumination. Its rightness can be extrapolated from the similarity of so much criticism that followed it. Henry James, for example, almost seems to be plagiarising Lewes when he writes about the ‘the [imaginative] power of evoking visible
objects and figures, seeing them themselves with the force of hallucination and making others see them all but just as vividly’ that he believed Dickens and Balzac to share with Shakespeare (Fanger 75). My first thought upon seeing the passage from Lewes was how much the idea of ‘believing in its reality however fantastic’ recalled Townshend, who expends reams of prose on relating the revelation of the first act of mesmerism he witnessed, the epiphany he felt:

That which I had heard mocked at as foolishness — that which I myself had doubted as a dream, was perhaps about to be brought home to my conviction, and established for ever in my mind as a reality. Should the present trial prove successful, how much of my past experience must be remodelled and reversed! (59)

All I believed is true! Notice once again the subversion of Kaplan’s division between ‘the dreams of illusion’ and ‘the truth of reality’: what Townshend ‘had doubted as a dream’ is ‘established for ever in my mind as a reality’. But from Lewes’s passage we can also see the conspicuous relation between the ‘seer of visions’ it describes and the tranced vision of mesmerised patients. As I noted earlier, under his observation Dickens’ mesmeric patient Madame de la Rue ‘spoke earnestly [about a scene], as if the scene had been actually visible to her…something that she can see and fears to miss any sight’. But, as Lewes says here, this could just as soon be about Dickens himself. One recalls that famous comment by Dickens that I quoted in the introduction: ‘I don’t invent it – I really do not – but see it, and write it down’. This is an extraordinary assertion. Implicit in this model, and close to explicit in the Dickens quote, is the idea of the author being tranced, a broadcaster of his literary delirium. Here we might concur with Lee’s tentative hypothesis that ‘the oracles of old, those for instance of Delphi, [might] be explained by the responses of a magnetic somnambulist in the highest state of lucidity’ (127). Returning to a passage from Macnish I quoted earlier, in which ‘the sorrowful man’ who is ‘stimulated by over-excessive study’ is unable to sleep, we
find that coupled with this Redlaw-like figure described first, there is a very Dickens-like one described just below it:

It is the same with the man of vivid imagination. His fancy, instead of being subdued by the spell of sleep, becomes more active than ever. Thoughts in a thousand fantastic forms—myriads of waking dreams—pass through his mind, whose excessive activity spurns at repose, and mocks all his endeavors to reduce it to quiescence. (199)

To quote a description from later in the treatise that can be Redlaw with equal justice, ‘It is the series of false images or sounds, which are so vivid as to be mistaken for realities’ that Dickens perceives (216).

To return again to Madame de la Rue and Dickens’ mesmeric relationship with her, Dickens records that she was ‘shedding tears…and shewing the greatest sympathy’ as she saw with her internal vision her brother ‘Charles’, even though no such brother existed (Letters v.4 248). In a further comical development during this highly comical episode32, de la Rue began to speak of ‘a man’ she saw in her trances; only it was not clear she did see him, and he was not clear to her if she did. In Dickens’ account, the man is ‘dimly seen’ but she ‘“dare not” look at’ him. When the ‘man’ is next spoken of, however, he is a ‘phantom’, as if he were both physically evanescing before our eyes – though not Dickens’ and certainly not de la Rue’s, except perhaps de la Rue’s after all – yet also gaining in malevolent influence. It is at this point that we get the most peculiar sentence, a sentence not easy to parse in its entirety, and even harder to understand:

32 Michael Slater relates that in Rome in late 1844 Dickens and Madame de la Rue resumed face-to-face treatment – though this hardly seems the right phrase when we think of the occasion when he was summoned to the de la Rues’ bedroom one night to find Madame ‘rolled into an apparently impossible ball, by tic in the brain’ and was only able to find where her head was ‘by following her long hair to its source’. (Charles Dickens 233)

With delicacy Slater goes on to note that ‘the situation made Catherine…understandably very uneasy’.
I connect [the phantom] with the figure she calls her bad spirit; in consequence of her trembling very much, when I once asked her, lying on this imaginary hill, if that phantom were to be seen: when she implored me not to speak of him. (248)

Suddenly Dickens’ faulty modifier has vaulted him into the dream, which is apt since he appears to be both progenitor and double of the figure (248). The scene is a reprise of the scene from *BR* I referred to earlier, where the mesmerised Barnaby dreams of being pursued by a monster ‘in the shape of a man’. The willingness earnestly to pursue a chimera until it becomes lodged as truth, whereupon its status as truth is hastily taken for granted to the point of complacency and it is then distorted further, is a staple of Dickens’ writing. It goes all the way back to *Boz* and its rickety, fabulous extemporisations. Dickens knows the ‘phantom’ who ‘has persecuted her’ is a ‘Fancy’, yet he allows it to persecute him as well. As Connor notes, ‘Dickens became obsessed with this figure of the phantom, who seems to be both his double and his rival’, convinced of existence, whatsoever that existence may have been (19). Like his tranced subject, he behaves ‘with as much earnestness as if the scene had actually been present to [his] view’ (*Letters v.4* 248).

Glancy records that when Dickens wrote the scene in which Milly reveals that she had once had a stillborn child, he wept: ‘the manuscript is heavily blotted with tears at this point,’ Glancy writes, noting that Dickens had told William Bradbury the day after finishing it that he was ‘crying my eyes out over it – not painfully but pleasantly as I hope the readers will – these last three days’ (73). Three days’ mourning, irrigated with those incomparably Victorian ‘pleasent’ tears. He was, in other words, pitched into transports of grief over a fictional character he invented discussing a baby that she had, with the aid of Dickens, invented herself – ‘made alive’ in the words of Browning’s mesmerist – by projecting the
fancied life its stillbirth precluded it from enjoying. There is nothing unusual in weeping over a piece of writing, I should add. Moreover, one infers from Dickens’ report to Bradbury that his ‘pleasant’ tears are not a little self-congratulatory as he surveys the vista of acclaim beyond publication. ‘If you had seen Macready last night,’ he tells a correspondent after performing a private reading of *The Chimes*, ‘undisguisedly sobbing, and crying on the sofa as I read, you would have felt, as I did, what a thing it is to have power’ (A. Wilson 187). Still, self-congratulation aside, the scene with Milly he is ‘seeing…thus vividly’, and seeing too how he will ‘mak[e] us also see it’. It is interesting that the virtually identical conditions Macnish describes in those quotes about ‘myriads of waking dreams’ and ‘false images or sounds…so vivid’ and the art Lewes describes, which it seems to me are not merely similar but analogous, have something else in common. Macnish ascribes the conditions to ‘inflammation of the brain’; this comports with Lewes’s insinuation of a pathology, where he has Dickens spreading his ‘hallucination’, a kind of derangement, as if it were a malady, the ‘gift’ of *THM* (216). Dickens is like the ‘Mesmeric agent’ in Sandby, a vector.

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On the opening page of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* there is a famous passage detailing the dream of the intoxicated, entranced Jasper as he slowly rouses from his stupor in an opium den. If this is the Dickens book without an ending, it is also a book rather without a beginning. A.D. Nuttall suggests in his brilliant study *Openings* that other Dickens books such as *Barnaby Rudge* have *in media res* beginnings, but this seems to me incorrect since in *BR* and other of the third-person books we are *in media* well before we get to the *res* (174). Here there are no well-fed preliminaries. What we get is lean, without context, without even
orientation. The perceiving consciousness has just been startled by the irruption of a town, his
town, and its landmark the Cathedral:

An ancient English Cathedral Tower? How can the ancient English Cathedral tower be here!
The well-known massive gray square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here? There
is no spike of rusty iron in the air, between the eye and it, from any point of the real
prospect. What is the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? Maybe it is set up by the
Sultan’s orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers, one by one. It is so, for
cymbals clash, and the Sultan goes by to his palace in long procession. Ten thousand scimitars
flash in the sunlight, and thrice ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers. Then, follow white
elephants caparisoned in countless gorgeous colours, and infinite in number and attendants.
Still the Cathedral Tower rises in the background, where it cannot be, and still no writhing
figure is on the grim spike. Stay! Is the spike so low a thing as the rusty spike on the top of a
post of an old bedstead that has tumbled all awry? Some vague period of drowsy laughter
must be devoted to the consideration of this possibility.

Shaking from head to foot, the man whose scattered consciousness has thus
fantastically pieced itself together, at length rises, supports his trembling frame upon his arms,
and looks around. (37)

What is ‘fantastically pieced’ together here is a fictional portrait of an hallucination that is
nevertheless capable of discerning an intra-textual ‘real’ within its own fiction (intra poema,
to quote from Nuttall again: ‘within the fiction’ [Openings 184]). That is, we are at two
removes from the sense-impressions percolating back to us. We may add a third layer of
mediation in the form of a dispute over whether this is indeed ‘a real prospect’ of an opium
trance. Hayter suggests Dickens’ descriptions of Jasper’s dream ‘sound factitious’; Stanley
and Tracey, however, both appear to rebut this, contending that it follows from De Quincey
directly and also indirectly through, among others, Macnish and Elliotson (Hayter 295). For
the reader, it is not even clear what a ‘real prospect’ would be with regard to such a vision.
Leave aside the two incongruous elements and the vision is still a simulacrum of lurid
exotica. Stanley wonders whether Jasper is truly as much under the influence as we assume:
‘Jasper's dismissal of the Cathedral vision as something unrealistic,’ he writes, is in keeping
with how a clear, unintoxicated mind ‘would reject incongruous perceptual phenomena. Questions [remain] as to what extent the opium trance has displaced Jasper’s grasp on reality’ (16). As Stanley would have it, Jasper is in effect cultivating and tending his own hallucination: this is ‘the anomaly of a hallucinogenic trance that can define and maintain its own inner reality by reference to the visions it produces,’ unseen in literature hitherto (15). But surely the point here is that the ‘curious depersonalization of [Jasper’s] account’ arises from the waning of the opium. It was never Jasper’s trance, in the sense of him being its arbiter, much less Jasper’s account, since we are seeing instead a focalised paraphrase (16). Nor is ‘the inner reality’ ever ‘maintained’ in our scant glimpses of the dream. The Cathedral’s unwelcome debut presages the dissolution of the trance, both internally (the dream it produces) and externally (Jasper awakes), insofar as it was ever more than an association of ‘incongruous perceptual phenomena’. Jasper cannot arrange for his ‘horde of Turkish robbers’ to be skewered on the spike for his delectation, though clearly he is eager to see it (there is a sadistic smack of the lips in ‘writhing figure’ and an impatience with the lack of one). He does not even know who is responsible for the erection of the spike.

Indeed, the expressed bewilderment near the beginning of the passage comes to seem slightly absurd. ‘How can that be here!’ is not censorious when one looks at the marvellous figments taken for granted. What would ‘ten thousand scimitars’ look like? Are the ‘thrice ten thousand dancing girls’ precisely quantified, or is the figure arrived at merely the retention of the preceding clause’s exaggerated unit? In exhibiting a stonerish fascination with irrelevant minutiae, to which ‘a vague period of drowsy laughter is devoted’ at the end, Jasper is not seeing the forest for the trees. There is no perspective in this ‘phantasmagoria’, as Stanley calls it, but Jasper tries to impose one anyway, a doomed attempt (14). ‘Between the eye and it, from any point of the real prospect’ suggests a standard of verisimilitude that
the dream elsewhere refutes. Nothing can be ‘real’ here because it is all incongruous. None of
the other envisioned things is in Cloisterham either. The spike as incongruous in the context
of the dream is less interesting than the spike as incongruous in the context of itself. Jasper
laughs because it is veritable child’s play: the transmutation of some furnishing’s rundown
extremity into the instrument of the wicked Turkish robbers’ comeuppance, a patently
ridiculous fancy. For a moment the ordinary has been rendered extraordinary. It gives the
subsequent observation of ‘the large unseemly bed’ another shade of meaning, nudging a
latent pun from ‘unseemly’. The bed has ceased seeming and returned to its habitual prosaic
state, utterly disenchanted. The room is all the more slovenly for the contrast, hence Jasper
and the narrator’s shared revulsion.

The ‘incongruity’, far from being an impediment to the fantasy, is its impetus. Nor
does the weaning from vision to reality, albeit a reality as tainted and therefore as unreliable
as this, impede the play of seeming. How much more accurate are the images Jasper sees in
the room when awake than those he sees in his trances? Jasper and the reader come upon the
image of the pipe’s ‘red spark of light’ that ‘serves in the dim morning as a lamp to sh
ow him
what he sees of her [the old opium-dealer]’. That odd phrasing, the biblical pleonasm of
‘show him what he sees of her’, is noteworthy. Construed literally, it implies that without the
spark he would not see anything when he sees her – a self-annulling nonsense – almost as if
she were no more than a screen on which to project the lamp. There is, however, further
evidence for this in the twisted distortion on the next page: ‘He notices that the woman has
opium-smoked herself into a strange likeness of the Chinaman’ (38). Jasper believes in this
contagion and panics at the corporal threat it appears to pose, like Redlaw before him.
The dream cathedral is actually a species of *hypotyposis*, *hypotyposis* at its purest. Or, at any rate, it is an inversion of *hypotyposis* at its purest. If an exemplar of *hypotyposis* is ‘putting lions or olive trees in a northern country’, as Barthes puts it, then the imposition of a foreboding, deathly English cathedral on a grandiloquent vision of ‘white elephants caparisoned in countless gorgeous colours’, among other Oriental splendours, is the same thing in reverse (144). We may note further that the incongruity is not quite what it purports to be. To put it another way, the impossible juxtaposition within Jasper’s sense-impressions is not so much an ‘incongruity’ as an unapprehended congruity, to be perceived by both reader and protagonist during the course of the novel. The link between Cloisterham and Jasper’s furtive secret life in the opium world, with its seedy den and transcendent visions, is present and strong, if mostly unseen at this point. Yet the ‘spasmodic shoots and darts that break out of her face and limbs, like fitful lightning out of a dark sky’ as Jasper watches the old lady ‘Princess Puffer’ smoking her opium pipe are answered back in Cloisterham when ‘the intoned words’ of the church service’s opening prayer ‘rise among groins of arches and beams of roof, awakening muttered thunder’ (39, 40). The link is not idle, since this metaphorical consonance foretells both the scene of Drood’s presumed entombment and the book’s broader thematic play. Opium, secreted in this London den, will nevertheless impinge on Cloisterham, as will the Orient in its repeated guises, of which opium is but one.

The passage featuring Jasper’s dream recalls John Carlos Rowe’s comment on the etymology of *hypotyposis* that I quoted in the introduction. He notes that ‘the impression is always an act of physical violence, “a pressing into or upon”’. It is, among other things, the rhetorical device of putting something ‘where it cannot be’. We find an even better example, better for being less ostentatious, in *Drood*’s ‘little nook composed of two irregular quadrangles, called Staple Inn’, where Rosa’s attorney Mr Grewgious has his chambers:
It is one of those nooks where a few smoky sparrows twitter in smoky trees, as though they called to one another, ‘Let us play at country,’ and where a few feet of garden mould and a few yards of gravel enable them to do that refreshing violence to their tiny understandings. (133-34)

They might almost laugh at this play as Jasper laughs at the bed spike. ‘Refreshing violence’ is, as Fanger wrote, contrary to ‘realism’, which must consist of ‘a language that does not do violence to its objects’. Yet the birds’ incongruous fiction, ‘refreshing’ as defamiliarisation is refreshing, is nevertheless persuasive; the birds enjoy the ‘truth of illusion’. So does Jasper’s dream. Fancy courts a giddy, vertiginous apprehension of the world, by turns delightful and horrific, similar to what Dorothy Van Ghent wrote about in her seminal essay ‘The Dickens World: A View from Todgers’, where she calls ‘Dickens’s method…a scrupulous rendering of nature gone wrong in all its parts’ (*Critical Assessments v.IV* 58). This is the passage she writes about, with the addition of the paragraph before it:

The top of the house was worthy of notice. There was a sort of terrace on the roof, with posts and fragments of rotten lines, once intended to dry clothes upon; and there were two or three tea-chests out there, full of earth, with forgotten plants in them, like old walking-sticks. Whoever climbed to this observatory, was stunned at first from having knocked his head against the little door in coming out; and after that, was for the moment choked from having looked perforce, straight down the kitchen chimney; but these two stages over, there were things to gaze at from the top of Todgers’s, well worth your seeing too. For first and foremost, if the day were bright, you observed upon the house-tops, stretching far away, a long dark path; the shadow of the Monument; and turning round, the tall original was close beside you, with every hair erect upon his golden head, as if the doings of the city frightened him. Then there were steeples, towers, belfries, shining vanes, and masts of ships; a very forest. Gables, housetops, garret-windows, wilderness upon wilderness. Smoke and noise enough for all the world at once.

After the first glance, there were slight features in the midst of this crowd of objects, which sprung out from the mass without any reason, as it were, and took hold of the attention whether the
spectator would or no. Thus, the revolving chimney-pots on one great stack of buildings seemed to be turning gravely to each other every now and then, and whispering the result of their separate observation of what was going on below. Others, of a crook-backed shape, appeared to be maliciously holding themselves askew, that they might shut the prospect out and baffle Todgers’s. The man who was mending a pen at an upper window over the way, became of paramount importance in the scene, and made a blank in it, ridiculously disproportionate in its extent, when he retired. The gambols of a piece of cloth upon the dyer’s pole had far more interest for the moment than all the changing motion of the crowd. Yet even while the looker-on felt angry with himself for this, and wondered how it was, the tumult swelled into a roar; the hosts of objects seemed to thicken and expand a hundredfold, and after gazing round him, quite scared, he turned into Todgers’s again, much more rapidly than he came out; and ten to one he told M. Todgers afterwards that if he hadn’t done so, he would certainly have come into the street by the shortest cut; that is to say, head-foremost. (MC 133-34)

Indeed, Jasper’s opium dream is very similar to the titular view from Todgers’ boarding house. In *MC*, what appears to be a panorama is something far more discomfiting, since it is not the viewer’s eye whose gradual movement pans across or tracks the diverse phenomena, nor is it the phenomena themselves that gradually but uniformly move. Indeed, the ‘revolving chimney-pots’ are a strange parody of the panorama, ‘whispering their separate observation of what was going on below’ (58). ‘What was going on below’ is quite unruly, nay riotous, each phenomenon changing of its own accord, coalescing or emerging or withdrawing. As Francesca Orestano, writing about Dickens’ eschewing of conventional ‘picturesque’ perspective for the fluidity of the magic lantern’s dissolve, puts it: ‘Dickens’s experiments with description’ result in ‘paradigmatic cogency of visual forms in their mutually creative relationship’ (264). The scene is in flux, though not the ordered flux of afternoon turning to sunset and then on to dusk that I quoted near the beginning of this chapter in my summary of *Drood*. ‘A scrap of cloth’ is seen to ‘gambol’. Some trivial activity’s cessation causes a ‘ridiculously disproportionate’ rend in the view, much as the spike on the bedstead was
ridiculously disproportionate in Jasper’s dream. As Garrett Stewart writes, ‘things do not simply exist, they happen, they swarm and start to life, and before long they have startled and harried the observer’ (Trials 175). Finally, what perspective there ever was is lost and ‘the hosts of objects seemed to thicken and expand a hundredfold’, the numerary exaggeration dialled down only a little from ‘ten thousand’, ‘thrice ten thousand’ and ‘infinite’.

There is a description in Great Expectations that brings together many of these themes: ghosts, disorientation and its aesthetic, and even the ‘refreshing violence’ to the sparrows’ ‘tiny understandings’, though admittedly its single instance of counting is exact (‘in number half a dozen or so’):

…[W]e were at Barnard’s Inn. My depression was not alleviated by the announcement, for, I had supposed that establishment to be an hotel kept by Mr. Barnard, to which the Blue Boar in our town was a mere public-house. Whereas I now found Barnard to be a disembodied spirit, or a fiction, and his inn the dingiest collection of shabby buildings ever squeezed together in a rank corner as a club for Tom-cats.

We entered this haven through a wicket-gate, and were disgorged by an introductory passage into a melancholy little square that looked to me like a flat burying-ground. I thought it had the most dismal trees in it, and the most dismal sparrows, and the most dismal cats, and the most dismal houses (in number half a dozen or so), that I had ever seen. I thought the windows of the sets of chambers into which those houses were divided were in every stage of dilapidated blind and curtain, crippled flower-pot, cracked glass, dusty decay, and miserable makeshift; while To Let, To Let, To Let, glared at me from empty rooms, as if no new wretches ever came there, and the vengeance of the soul of Barnard were being slowly appeased by the gradual suicide of the present occupants and their unholy interment under the gravel. A frowzy mourning of soot and smoke attired this forlorn creation of Barnard, and it had strewn ashes on its head, and was undergoing penance and humiliation as a mere dust-hole. Thus far my sense of sight; while dry rot and wet rot and all the silent rots that rot in neglected roof and cellar,—rot of rat and mouse and bug and coaching-stables near at hand besides—addressed themselves faintly to my sense of smell, and moaned, ‘Try Barnard’s Mixture.’

So imperfect was this realization of the first of my great expectations, that I looked in dismay at Mr. Wemmick. ‘Aht!’ said he, mistaking me; ‘the retirement reminds you of the country. So it does me.’
He led me into a corner and conducted me up a flight of stairs,—which appeared to me to be slowly collapsing into sawdust, so that one of those days the upper lodgers would look out at their doors and find themselves without the means of coming down,—to a set of chambers on the top floor. (173)

As with ‘Co.’, ‘Barnard’ yields a complex of fancies that, as it develops, corroborates and extends its own veracity through a mixture of legerdemain and anaphora. ‘Barnard’s’ is veritably a name to conjure with. He has been ‘called out of [his] name’, though there is no evidence beyond the possessive that a man ever existed to be called out of anything. Pip acknowledges that he ‘now found Barnard to be a disembodied spirit, or a fiction’, in other words nothing. Much like the man in Madame de la Rue’s dream, he has waned from corporeality, if only an illusory corporeality in Pip head, to a menacing ‘disembodied spirit’ or ‘soul’ who takes ‘vengeance’ against his tenants for some undisclosed wrong with this manslaughter apparatus posing as a dwelling. He superintends their ‘unholy interment’ in the mass grave underneath his unholy grounds. As it happens, Pip is already explaining why future ‘wretches’ might be compelled to ‘suicide’ by observing the apparently rotten flight of stairs. It all arises out of revulsion, a distate made literal by the advertisment for the homicidal tonic ‘Barnard’s Mixture’, itself having unwittingly assimilated the earlier, seminal fiction that Barnard might be some kind of grand publican in the great metropolis. The tattoo of ‘Dismal’ — a word that in fact frequently recurs in the novel — is answered by the tattoo of ‘To Let’, both of them uttered as if imprecations against this hateful place. As with Jasper’s dream and Todgers’ aspect, such a view can only occur without any measure of perspective; it subsists on enclosure, with even its vocabulary confined to stinting anaphora, an anaphora that imposes Stoehr’s ‘order without direction or classification’ on froward reality but is also captive and impoverished, as if Pip could not conceive of other worlds, let alone ways of describing this one without the manacles of ‘dismal’ and ‘rot’. This is akin to the ‘devious mazes’ on the way to the other inn, Todgers’, a world as oppressive as Redlaw’s or Jasper’s
And yet while this deadly place is made to live on the page, we are made aware of just how distorted is Pip’s view, quite the opposite of ‘realization’ in the other sense, by the glorious bathos of Wemmick’s comment “the retirement reminds you of the country. So it does me.” One would not be surprised if the ‘dismal sparrows’, like their counterparts in Drood, felt the same way.

‘His visions were of objects at once familiar and potent,’ Lewes writes, repeating Dickens’ view, expressed in his preface to BH, that he saw ‘the romantic side of familiar things’ in his fiction. Juliet McMaster, writing about BR, observes that in that novel ‘illusions recurrently turn real: dreams are prophetic, ghosts are substantiated into flesh and blood, and the wild fantasies of madmen are actually enacted’ (Critical Assessments v.II 444-45). She demonstrates this with wonderful perceptiveness, and concludes with the further observation that ‘by showing how visions turn real, he is announcing his faith in the faculty of the mind to figure forth that which is not, and recognize its validity’ (456). Quite so, but this is true of other works too. Illusions turn real in the novels I have discussed, and, as Petroski put it, the reader temporarily allows himself to be persuaded of their truth. Donald Fanger, quoting the remark in ‘Meditations in Monmouth-Street’ that ‘we saw, or fancied we did – it makes no difference which’, notes that in Dickens’ work sight and vision, seeing things and ‘seeing things’, are conflated (78). Observing that the ‘fancy’ of its ‘fanciful observer[s]’ is always in surplus, he writes that ‘it enters as well into the very fabric of the narration and constitutes one of the indices of the quality of hallucination…’ (86). There is something unlawful, intractable about such fancy, as we have seen. It seems quite plausible to me that a further, different example of what Fanger means and of what I have been discussing is visible in the Tetterby household. Poor Johnny, laden with the baby in that diabolical reprise of pregnancy, must be mindful of spilling any food on it: ‘He was required…to keep his pudding, when not
on active service, in his pocket’. This follows from the description of children ‘utterly routing’ each other. Further down the page, that whimsical little intrusion of the martial appears to bloom:

a party of light skirmishers in night-gowns were careering about the parlour all through supper, which harassed Mr Tetterby exceedingly, and once or twice imposed upon him the necessity of a charge, before which these guerrilla troops retired in all directions and in great confusion. (216)

It is as if Dickens’ ‘fancy’ more than the Tetterby brood is what is careering about, excited by the glimpse of one brief metaphor into an insurrection, a wild, ungovernable conceit. Another example might be that from _BH_ noted by Garrett Stewart: ‘“deposits” of mud in the opening paragraph, whose seemingly neutral choice of diction triggers the caustic metaphor (and fiscal send-up), “accumulating at compound interest”’ (‘Dickens and language’ 140). There is a temporality, a contingency, occurring here, notably different from other types of description in Dickens’ writing. What we find is not so much a conceit or extended metaphor but a _distended_ metaphor: swollen, distorted and contaminating. To complete the Michael T. Taussig quote I cited when discussing Redlaw’s ‘contagion’, we find in such prose:

‘contagious magic’, involving what appears to be a physical connection in order to effect, through rite, the substance connected… Words can do this, too, writing no less than reading being a ritualistic practice, and thus words can be links to viscerality, into the thingness of things connected in chains of being, not chains of meaning. (x)

‘[V]iscerality’ and ‘the thingness of things connected in chains of being, not chains of meaning’ is perfect as a description of Dickens’ descriptive prose at representative moments like those I quoted above. Fanger, anticipating Rosemary Jackson’s ‘fantastic realism’, refers to this sort of trope as ‘fantastic fidelity’, a nicely motley phrase (91). Illustrating his
argument, he adduces a comment by Dickens from his preface to *Oliver Twist*: ‘It is useless
to discuss whether…the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or
wrong. IT IS TRUE’ (6). It is true, Dickens writes, regardless of whether it is ‘a
contradiction, an anomaly, an apparent impossibility’ (7). The scrambling, perhaps even the
abrogation, of Kaplan’s division between the ‘dreams of illusion’ and the ‘truth of reality’ is
complete here, for Dickens aspires to transcend them. Looking again at Lewes’s comment,
we see that the comment about ‘visions…of objects at once familiar and potent’ is the
reverse, the other side, of ‘the romantic side of familiar things’, for it holds that Dickens sees
illusory things as if they were familiar objects. There is a scrambling here too, and in *THM*,
that scrambled text, it is bodied forth: a reality of dreams, the truth of illusion as perceived
through his ‘internal vision’. Just as, in Redlaw’s words, ‘a dream, like her’s has stolen over
my life’, one has stolen over the text too (145).

We see some of this temporality, a completely different version from that example of
sunset and then dusk I quoted earlier, in the following Chinese whispers, to use an aptly
Oriental term. It is useful to look at how easily this rhetorical technique I have dilated on
corresponds to sheer malicious gossip. Drood and his antagonist Neville Landless, both
drugged by Jasper and unaware of it, have some kind of brawl; word of this, presumably via
Jasper, gets out and its contagion quickly spreads and mutates. The narrator is arch about its
transmission, entertaining several fanciful notions of how it breached The Nuns’ House
where Drood’s fiancee Rosa and Neville’s sister Helena reside. Eventually he alights on the
formulation ‘certain it is that the news permeated every gable of the old building before Miss
Twinkleton was down’. Particulars of the transmission thereafter are given in this passage:

Miss Landless’s brother had thrown a bottle at Mr Edwin Drood.
Miss Landless’s brother had thrown a knife at Mr Edwin Drood.
A knife became suggestive of a fork, and Miss Landless’s brother had thrown a fork at Mr Edwin Drood.

As in the governing precedence of Peter Piper, alleged to have picked the peck of pickled pepper, it was held physically desirable to have evidence of the existence of the peck of pickled pepper which Peter Piper was alleged to have picked; so, in this case, it was held psychologically important to know why Miss Landless’s brother threw a bottle, knife, or fork—or bottle, knife, and fork—for the cook had been given to understand it was all three—at Mr. Edwin Drood?

Well, then. Miss Landless’s brother had said he admired Miss Bud. Mr. Edwin Drood had said to Miss Landless’s brother that he had no business to admire Miss Bud. Miss Landless’s brother had then ‘up’d’ (this was the cook’s exact information) with the bottle, knife, fork, and decanter (the decanter now coolly flying at everybody’s head, without the least introduction), and thrown them all at Mr. Edwin Drood. (107)

We begin with the suggestion of a charge sheet in the line-length paragraphs and the legal formality of Drood’s title in ‘Mr Edwin Drood’, rather piously repeated in a way that speaks to the comic solemnity of the gossip. Couching low demotic exchanges in lofty registers was a favourite device of Dickens’. It is formality in inverse proportion to the frivolity or colloquialness of the scene as a means to maximum bathos. He proceeds with the device right the way through the passage. It is easy not to notice that we are being presented with a shadow investigation, even a shadow criminological study (‘it was held psychologically important’), that ends in parody: the narrator before an invisible – or doubly invisible, since imagined by the imaginary – drawing room of potential suspects, recapitulating the facts of the case as well as demonstrating his power of deduction. This shadow detection seems complacent about the enormous imaginative leap needed to surmount the chasm between the first two facts of the case and the last, such as it is. The irony of appearing to pronounce upon a crime is that the spurious logic is actually being used in the service of a real, far more sinister crime. How easily in the minds of those who accept the rumours’ veracity might a fight become suggestive of a murder, or indeed anything of anything else. So it proves:
‘Neville was detained, and the wildest frenzy and fatuity of evil report arose against him’ (198).

Each scurrilous intelligence is a shy at the truth like the stones shied at Durdles, a false representation that begets further false representations. The lineage of more and more outrageous accounts expands until it reaches that triad of projectiles, ‘bottle, knife, or fork – or bottle, knife, and fork – for the cook had been given to understand it was all three,’ whereupon the cook confects the addition of a ‘decanter (the decanter now coolly flying at everybody’s head, without the least introduction)’ (107). In this droll sketch, people continually embellishing the altercation, an altercation they relish as they disapprove of it, we see the old style become noxious. Does it matter what happened? But this is no more than an exercise of fancy, is it not? As I have implied throughout this chapter, however, fancy is not always salutary. The ‘over-thinking sage’ possesses a ‘large development of the organ of Wonder’. It yields Madame de la Rue’s imagined figure, ‘that Fancy [who] has persecuted her’.

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This purpose of this chapter has been not to look at the fictional real as fantasmatic, which the second chapter did, nor to look at conceiving the fantasmatic as a means of expanding one’s knowledge of the real, as the third chapter did in its explorations of ‘facts’. It has been to look at the fantasmatic perceived as real, the conception of the fantasmatic in lieu of the real. Or, to put it another way, I have argued that with BH we and the fictional entities within the text are ‘seeing things’ even when we and they are seeing things, discounting any kind of ‘world-reflecting’ Realism. In nineteenth-century science, where this positivist Realism obtruded, we
should be ‘seeing things’ when seeing things is preferred; that is what Dickens in both his
Examiner review and HT tries to impart. Finally, in THM and Drood we are ‘seeing things’
either way. I have proceeded in this manner because the thesis has been arguing a few
different things at once in response to that simple question I adapted from Grahame Smith
about Dickens’ writing being ‘more real than reality itself’. In this chapter I have tried to give
my fullest answer to this question from an aesthetic perspective – if ‘perspective’ is not inapt
for the disoriented aspects I have just criticised. This is the aesthetic perspective I
foreshadowed in the introduction when invoking Lewes, Petroski and J. Hillis Miller. As
Lewes first argued, the reader of Dickens ‘believe[es] in [the novels’] reality however
fantastic’; ‘even while knowing it was false’, this reader ‘could not help, for a moment, being
affected’. So it proves in the examples above. The aesthetic procession of a Dickens passage
is akin to that of a trance, the contingent ‘self-generating reverie’ of Miller as contagious as
Redlaw’s ‘gift’.
Conclusion

This thesis has sought to trace the way in which ‘distortion’, ‘Falsism’, yields a cogent sense of realism in Dickens, indeed a devout conviction of it. There have been many ancillary arguments needed to dilate on and explicate this simple contention. First, I have attempted to show the grounds on which this distortion is admissible as ‘realism’. The reasons for this attempt were to confirm the impression of realism that other readers and I have demonstrably felt and to explain why a new term was not needed – Lewes’s ‘Falsism’ not really counting as a credible term, merely an inversion for rhetorical effect. I have tried to show how the classical trope hypotyposis can illuminate what about Dickensian description, which as I indicated at the very beginning of this thesis is its main focus, creates the impression of realism. Clearly I am not suggesting Dickens wrote under any apprehension of this term, a risible idea. Instead I am proposing it to show how such a term – though I believe it to be the most precise of those terms in its ken – is a fruitful one for understanding the descriptive style. It expresses what Petroski finds in Dickens from his American tour onward, a style in which things ‘become more meaningful to Dickens when he perceives them to be something that they are not’, which makes the reader akin to the spectator of the panorama who could not quite concede what he had seen and knew to be an illusion was not real. This is the reader of Dickens. To adapt Aristotle’s description of hypotyposis’s effect again, this reader is made to ‘see things’.

In the introduction and four chapters this has extended from discussing the breaches of ‘distortion’ in Dickens’ non-fiction to discussing the nature of realism. In particular, the thesis discussed the way falsity is not incompatible with constructions of realism and then discussed defamiliarisation as one means of transmitting the
‘real’, which is where hypotyposis came in. In the chapters that followed I sought to show these findings across different Dickens novels. In the second chapter I tried to identify the falsity within the ‘real’, though not in that tiresome way critics who are surprised by novels’ fictionality try to identify it. My suggestion was that if the fictional ‘real’ is false anyway, might not falsity be an index of realism in a way totally different from that imagined? This would explain why so many readers find Dickens’ outlandish productions realistic. The third chapter complemented this by showing how falsity – defamiliarisation, Impossibilia – could facilitate scientific discovery. I wanted to stress ‘discovery’ because at its best Dickensian descriptive prose actually seems a discovery; withal, it seems to discover itself as it proceeds. This is the ‘continued process of Dickens’s language’ Smith talks about. The fourth chapter was about reading this ‘process’ in several examples. It was also about demonstrating how Lewes’s metaphor of the ‘hallucination’ was applicable to that ‘process’ after all. The chapters were about other things besides, but those were the central themes.

In this thesis I have tried to convey my own pleasure in Dickensian description, a pleasure that, for better or worse, led to this thesis. As I have tried to show, what I find so exciting about Dickensian description is its vivifying thrust, but ‘energy’ is perhaps not quite what I mean. ‘Energy’ accounts for that bustle of onward progress, the descriptions tilting at their scenes and people and objects, almost belabouring them at times. It tilts at them as the Tetterby children tilt at each other. But ‘energy’ alone would not suffice for the manifest greatness of the prose, even greatness sustained over such expanses – though not, it should be said, without interludes of wilfulness or badness. What makes the wild career of the descriptions
unique is that revisionism and permutation, the contingencies that make the writing
*live*, and thus alive, not just lively. Metaphors are riffled and adjectives, usually
pejorative, toll and then disappear only to return, subtly altered, a few sentences on.
Garrett Stewart expresses this stylistic tendency very well, discussing a passage from
*LD* in which Amy Dorrit is travelling to Venice:

> [T]he kaleidoscopic barrage of the Dickens passage is more unreflective and nightmarish, a
dizzy unfurling of contradictory impressions without any of the perspective tacitly achieved
by rhetorical balance in [George] Eliot. The whole headlong tourist trek seems, from Amy
Dorrit’s assaulted perspective, like a delirious dream in its senseless, expensive repetitions…
(‘Dickens and language’ 139)

He is referring to ‘the whole day’s dream’ (*LD* 517). It culminates in ‘the crowning
unreality’ of Venice itself, where Dickens reprises the rhetorical poses in the
descriptions of Venice I quoted in the introduction. Venice is a ‘collection of wild
fancies’, and all Dickens’ descriptions of it, like the ‘massive stone darkened by ages’,
are ‘built in a wild fancy’ (520). Again it is all rapid, as is the scene Stewart describes
before it, a ‘family procession’ that pauses only when Little Dorrit ‘sat down to muse’
(519). But what one notes about the passage is not, for a change, the description,
which adds little to the decade-old descriptions it paraphrases. It is the ‘other places
and…other scenes associated with those different times’, namely Marshalsea and its
‘old gate’ and the disgrace in which she was reared (520). We have already seen
evidence of Marshalsea disturbing Little Dorrit’s thoughts in the free indirect line
‘[the family] were to live in Venice some few months in a palace (itself six times as
big as the whole Marshalsea)’ (519). Now Marshalsea and ‘other scenes’ are as if
before Little Dorrit: she would ‘look over at the water, as though they all lay
underneath it’ (520). The fear is that the water ‘might run dry, and show her the prison again, and the old inmates, and the old visitors: all lasting realities that had never changed’ (520). She cannot escape it, as incongruous as it is there in Venice, where it is another ‘wild fancy’.

This is something I wish to discuss before leaving off, because I think it clinches my argument as well as anything could. Throughout this thesis I have been trying to grasp and put into words exactly what Dickensian style is like. Not what it is, since doing that is as easy as reading the wonderful high-buled edifices of prose I am fond of importing. As I have shown, trying to put into words what the style is like, how it strikes one – and I use ‘strikes’ advisedly, since it can be a buffeting – is a common labour for Dickensians. For Lewes the style is like an hallucination; for Smith like walking out of a cinema after watching a film, though he also follows Lewes in finding an ‘hallucinatory power of observation’ (155). In the previous chapter I followed Lewes’s example and tried to explain, with help from his inheritors Taylor Stoehr, Donald Fanger, Dorothy Van Ghent, Stewart and Smith, what it meant to be hallucinatory (or Smith’s ‘dreamlike’). But at the risk of repeating myself, I feel ascribing Dickens’ virtuosity to a form of profitable derangement eventually causes problems. The movement of the prose follows the co-ordinates of an hallucination or dream but the artificer forming it – and as I have indicated, the ostentation of the forming is a big part of the effect – has not taken leave of his senses. On the contrary, he is preternaturally sensitive.

This leads me to my own modest suggestion of what the style is ‘like’. It is a modest suggestion and may have been made before, though I cannot recall seeing it in
my rounds on the Dickens beat. The suggestion is this: it seems as if Dickens is constantly describing scenes as if he had just murdered them. Or perhaps, at any rate, he is describing scenes as if he were, like Sikes, a new murderer on the loose and were wandering through them. Bear with me. Perception has been whetted to the point at which everything impresses on it without perspective and discernment, and selectiveness is apparently effaced. We see it after that seminal murder, Bill Sikes bludgeoning Nancy in *OT*. Sikes has fled but, as we saw with Jonas in the introduction, flight is never wholly possible for a murderer. Indeed, as with scenes of hypotyposis, visions of murder scenes can appear in incongruous places. Murder is itinerant. This is true even for the wicked John Jasper, whose suppression of guilt falters for a moment in Grewgious’s presence when he swoons (*Drood* 191-92). Unlike Jasper’s murder of Drood, however, Sikes’s murder of Nancy is not cold-blooded, and the shock rends him. Harried and exhausted, he collapses and ‘undergo[es] a new torture’:

For now, a vision came before him, as constant and more terrible than that from which he had escaped. Those widely staring eyes, so lustreless and so glassy, that he had better borne to see them than think upon them, appeared in the midst of the darkness: light in themselves, but giving light to nothing. There were but two, but they were everywhere. If he shut out the sight, there came the room with every well-known object – some, indeed, that he would have forgotten, if he had gone over its contents from memory – each in its accustomed place. The body was in its place, and its eyes were as he saw them when he stole away. He got up and rushed into the field without. The figure was behind him. He re-entered the shed, and shrunk down once more. The eyes were there, before he had lain himself along. (322)

We recall that at the time Nancy’s dying body ‘was a ghastly figure to look upon’ and Sikes reared from it ‘shutting out the sight with his hand’ (317). Yet what Sikes is
really afraid of is its post-mortem pursuit of him, an entirely irrational fear. We are told ‘he had never once turned his back upon the corpse; no, not for a moment’ (317). This is because, as we are also told, ‘it was worse to fancy the eyes, and imagine them moving towards him, than to see them glancing upward’ (317). To ‘fancy’ or ‘imagine’ something is more potent than to ‘see’ it, as I argued in my second chapter especially but also throughout this thesis. Things are most alive when one has just killed. This is the greatest possible means of doing ‘violence’ to reality, to revisit Fanger’s term and one favoured by Dickens. The description of Sikes’s vision is an acute case of what we find in all the great extended ‘fanciful flights’, as Lewes called them, in Dickens – with ‘flights’ doing double duty here in Sikes’s case, although the epistolary vision of Venice I quoted in my introduction is not so different, as I shall explain below. Jasper himself has just killed Drood in his dream, but Pip’s vision of Barnard’s Inn, say, is no less intense. You find a wonderfully paradoxical distillation of Stewart’s ‘expensive repetitions’ or Reed’s ‘riches of redundancy’ in the oxymoron ‘These were but two, but they were everywhere’, which is amplified by the hideously quasi-comic procedure of its repetition in ‘The eyes were there’ (Reed 85). The repetition is redundant because we have already been told the eyes were ‘everywhere’, so naturally they ‘were there’; but it is also redundant because they just were there – we were just told they were there. Delusion has acquired its own logic. Indeed, it is almost as if ‘there’ was by this point ‘the accustomed place’ for the eyes. In this way, repetition, contrary to Taylor Stoehr’s suggestion in the last chapter that it was an expression of ‘simple scanning, from point to contiguous point’, marks change. It is only ever ostensibly redundant.
The problem for Sikes is that nothing is really ‘in its accustomed place’ – the body is there in his mind’s eye, and though dead it is pursuing him like Madame de la Rue’s ‘Phantom’ – which is why the ‘vision’ is ‘torture’. But for Dickens, this is the opposite of a problem. Scenes and their things and people not being in their ‘accustomed place[s]’ is the essence of aesthetic success. In those two examples I just alluded to, Jasper wants them that way – his ‘accustomed place’ is the awful bondage of Cloisterham – while Barnard’s Inn not being Pip’s ‘accustomed place’ is why it is so objectionable. We see it in the example of BH’s opening page, which I discussed in chapter one. The description turns something entirely natural, the ambience of fog in London, into something dread and portentous. It makes it, indeed, no different from the vision of Nancy’s corpse that ‘torture[s]’ Sikes’. Dickens writes as if the narrator was responsible for ‘the death of the sun’ and is suffering never to escape it, as if stuck in Todgers’ ‘devious mazes’. In her great essay on ‘The View from Todgers’s’ I cited in the last chapter, Van Ghent finds ‘naked and aggressive existence’ both in the view and in the Dickensian world broadly. The view is alienating, its constituents in rebellion against the pleasing yoke of literary coercion. Yet ‘naked and aggressive’ existence is also in opposition to a force that would efface their ‘existence’. This force finds expression in words like ‘mud’, ‘fog’, ‘shadow’, dark’, in the traumatic rote of their repetition. I think Dickensian description, with its mixture of the metaphors that resist coercion and the anaphoric consolidation that asserts it, gains much of its energy from these two opposing forces.

If I may quote at length one last time in this thesis, this description of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters from OMF is a perfect example of what I have been arguing.
We know how fastidiously Dickens planned his later novels, but this seems utterly extemporaneous, as apparently misshapen and liable to collapse as the tavern itself:

The Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, already mentioned as a tavern of a dropsical appearance, had long settled down into a state of hale infirmity. In its whole constitution it had not a straight floor, and hardly a straight line; but it had outlasted, and clearly would yet outlast, many a better-trimmed building, many a sprucer public-house. Externally, it was a narrow lopsided wooden jumble of corpulent windows heaped one upon another as you might heap as many toppling oranges, with a crazy wooden verandah impeding over the water; indeed the whole house, inclusive of the complaining flag-staff on the roof, impended over the water, but seemed to have got into the condition of a faint-hearted diver who has paused so long on the brink that he will never go in at all.

This description applies to the river-frontage of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters. The back of the establishment, though the chief entrance was there, so contracted that it merely represented in its connexion with the front, the handle of a flat iron set upright on its broadest end. This handle stood at the bottom of a wilderness of court and alley: which wilderness pressed so hard and close upon the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters as to leave the hostelry not an inch of ground beyond its door. For this reason, in combination with the fact that the house was all but afloat at high water, when the Porters had a family wash the linen subjected to that operation might usually be seen drying on lines stretched across the reception-rooms and bed-chambers.

The wood forming the chimney-pieces, beams, partitions, floors and doors, of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters, seemed in its old age fraught with confused memories of its youth. In many places it had become gnarled and riven, according to the manner of old trees; knots started out of it; and here and there it seemed to twist itself into some likeness of boughs. In this state of second childhood, it had an air of being in its own way garrulous about its early life. Not without reason was it often asserted by the regular frequenters of the Porters, that when the light shone full upon the grain of certain panels, and particularly upon an old corner cupboard of walnut-wood in the bar, you might trace little forests there, and tiny trees like the parent tree, in full umbrageous leaf.
The bar of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters was a bar to soften the human breast. The available space in it was not much larger than a hackney-coach; but no one could have wished the bar bigger, that space was so girt in by corpulent little casks, and by cordial-bottles radiant with fictitious grapes in bunches, and by lemons in nets, and by biscuits in baskets, and by the polite beer-pulls that made low bows when customers were served with beer, and by the cheese in a snug corner, and by the landlady’s own small table in a snuggest corner near the fire, with the cloth everlastingly laid. This haven was divided from the rough world by a glass partition and a half-door, with a leaden sill upon it for the convenience of resting your liquor; but, over this half-door the bar’s snugness so gushed forth that, albeit customers drank there standing, in a dark and draughty passage where they were shouldered by other customers passing in and out, they always appeared to drink under an enchanting delusion that they were in the bar itself. (67-68)

It would seem as if Dickens wants us to be under that same ‘enchanting delusion’. And we are, apparently in spite of the passage’s ‘distortion’, its absolute contrivance, but actually because of it. To quote Shklovsky one more time, the scene is ‘perceived not spatially but, as it were, in its temporal continuity. That is…the object is brought into view’ – which is to say, brought before the hearer’s eyes: we and Dickens are ‘seeing things’ (*Theory* 12). The contrivance is what I am interested in, the way the passage seems ‘stamp[ed] and form[ed]’, to use John Carlos Rowe’s definition of *hypotyposis*. The contrivance emerges most fully in what appear to be a series of connotations extrapolated from idle puns by Dickens’ quick fancy. ‘Dropsical’ earlier on – ‘a red-curtained tavern, that stood dropsically bulging over the causeway’ – seems to yield the fancy of a house with ‘toppling oranges’ for windows that is slumping into the water it is ‘all but afloat’ in yet somehow resisting that final drop it is ‘impending over’ like ‘a faint-hearted diver’ (36). Even the water itself seems in part to arise from ‘Porters’, which as with ‘dropsical’ (‘drop’) includes a word with a
different meaning, ‘port’. Likewise the word ‘sprucer’, through its other meaning, a
tree, seems to yield the ‘wilderness’, or any rate the ‘little forests’. Or perhaps it is the
‘wilderness’ that yields the ‘little forests’. The idea of wood in general has emerged
from the previous chapter, in which Dickens introduced us to the wooden-legged Silas
Wegg, a ‘knotty man, and a close-grained’, words that recur in slightly altered
versions here. Wegg’s personal woodeness means he ‘seemed to have taken his
wooden leg naturally, and rather suggested to the fanciful observer’ that he would be
‘completely set up with a pair of wooden legs in about six months’.

This passage works as the mind of that ‘fanciful observer’, who is really the
same observer, works: through wayward contiguities that are nevertheless figurative,
transmutative, more than metonymic. As with the aforementioned connections, so
with the ‘toppling oranges’, which also appear to have emerged from the previous
chapter. They yield the ‘lemons in nets’, almost as if the latter were ‘toppling’ citrus
fruits for which the precaution of a ‘net’ had happily been taken, the ‘net’ implying
their potential to ‘drop’. The ‘toppling oranges’ also show us the contrivance of the
metaphors. Even if we can accept that windows can be ‘corpulent’ as a ‘cask’ – where
‘corpulent’ recurs – can, how can they be like ‘toppling oranges’? It is all apparently
wilful. Dickens wittily imputes to the things themselves their own wilful similes,
writing of ‘the wood’ that ‘here and there…seemed to twist itself into some likeness
of boughs’ when it is actually Dickens doing the ‘twist[ing]’, Dickens providing the
‘stamp and form’. Notice too the rapidity of these changes, their provisionality. What
seems encompassing is the ‘wild fancy’ I referred to earlier. As with Venice in the
introduction, the point is ‘seeing things’, not seeing things; fancy matters more than
knowledge. Just as Sikes finds it ‘worse to fancy the eyes, and imagine them…than to
see them’ – which is to say, more affecting to do so – so here it is more affecting to ‘fancy’ and ‘imagine’ the tavern, to wrest these prodigies from it, than to ‘see’ it.

The passage recalls the quote from Peter Carey’s *Jack Maggs* in my second chapter. The composite of Dickens and Inspector Bucket’s physician disguise is ‘incredible, ridiculous, and yet [it] existed, given life by some violent magic in his creator’s heart’. So is this passage, and so it does. It is an enormous distortion, and I have not even mentioned the infelicities and circumlocutions. It is ‘bulging’ yet ‘snug’, but, though impossibly ‘the bar’s snugness so gushed forth that, albeit customers drank there standing, in a dark and draughty passage’, as though snugness could gush, at which moment it would surely cease to be snug (contradicting not just itself but the earlier ‘no one could have wished the bar bigger,’ which is only true if you are under the ‘enchanting delusion’). A ‘snugness’ that ‘gushed’ is anyhow a mystery, ‘gushed’ having been suggested by the beverages (‘draughty’ is stirring with semantic possibilities, though they are limited to an ordinary pun). Yet, of course, the snugness would be gushing if the entire tavern were ‘afloat’, as we have been told it ‘all but’ is at ‘high water’. In this way the whole thing, through what J. Hillis Miller calls ‘self-generating reverie’, has developed its own sense, even cogency.

I hope that, after its own at times tortuous procession, this thesis has too. It has sought to question, meditate on and finally explain how such a ‘preposterous’ place as the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters can seem to be there before us in such a compelling guise. Dickens, in Taylor Stoehr’s words from the last chapter, ‘makes the scene appear to present itself, so that the total effect is not realistic at all, but magical, even supernatural’; yet, as Stoehr also notes, it nevertheless persuades us of its realism.
That is *hypotyposis*, ‘a presentation’ that insists on its own reality however
‘preposterous’ through its rhetorical persuasiveness. I hope my rhetorical
persuasiveness in this thesis has sufficed to do justice to Dickens’, and by extension
my argument. Ultimately, though, the thesis is less an argument for *hypotyposis* than a
pretext for an appreciation of this ‘magical’ quality. Happily for us, there is so much
of it to appreciate.
Primary Sources


**Secondary Sources**


