

Dickens and Childhood

Edited by
Laura Peters



A Library of Essays on Charles Dickens

Dickens and Childhood

A Library of Essays on Charles Dickens

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Dickens and Childhood

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Series Preface

The twenty-first-century researcher, teacher or student of Charles Dickens seeking to engage with the dynamic critical industry that has grown up around his work faces a daunting task. A library series that brings the survey of Dickens criticism up to date is therefore surely one of the most desirable and fitting forms of commemoration marking the bicentenary of his birth in 2012. From the publication of his first sketches in the *Monthly Magazine* in the 1830s, and especially after the phenomenal success of *Pickwick*, Dickens attracted the attention of contemporary reviewers and critics who variously praised his humour and pathos, condemned his sentimentality, marvelled at his poetic imagination or objected to his lack of realism. Following a temporary lull in his reputation among early twentieth-century critics, the explosion in scholarship on Dickens from the second half of the twentieth century and on into the twenty-first reflects the major critical approaches that have emerged in literary studies since then.

Anthologies of criticism illustrating particular approaches to Dickens's writing have appeared in the past, as have selections devoted to particular works or showcasing developments in criticism from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. But the six volumes of this Ashgate series present a selection of the very best scholarship organized around six key themes that have become central to Dickens studies, particularly over the last two decades. When Michael Hollington published his authoritative *Critical Assessments* series in 1995, his chronologically organized survey devoted less than half of its final volume to thematic studies of Dickens, the bulk of the four volumes illustrating biographical and general critical studies and assessments of individual works. All of the themes identified by Hollington remain important for research in one form or another today, but some have been reconfigured by changes in the field, new topics have emerged and others have become much more prominent since then.

For example, while Dickens and illustration continues to be an important area for critical work, it is now part of the more broadly construed field of Victorian print cultures. As Robert L. Patten explains in his volume introduction, since the pioneering studies of Victorian publishing carried out in the uncongenial climate of New Criticism in the 1960s and 1970s, 'book history' or the study of 'print culture' has come of age and now constitutes a field of ever-growing complexity. From the impact of Victorian book culture on writers, to the issues of serialization, illustration, circulation, readership and editing, the importance of Dickens's work in understanding Victorian print cultures is apparent in this volume. Dickens and childhood has also stimulated a wide range of critical work. While much attention has been devoted to the formative effects of Dickens's own childhood, as Laura Peters shows, the child quickly became a 'suggestive figure' for deployment in the exploration of other topics, such as Romanticism, the family, empire and various categories of difference. In his volume on *Dickens and the City*, Jeremy Tambling's selection of essays shows some of the ways in which Dickens's writing of London is 'qualitatively different' from that of any of the other cities he knew. Tambling maps the trajectories of criticism on this topic, from concern with Dickens's topography to the role of the city in his advocacy of social reform, its

symbolic functions in the fiction and finally to those critics who ask not ‘how Dickens related to London’, but rather ‘how London constructed Dickens’. John J. Glavin’s volume shows how the discussion of Dickens in relation to film, theatre and television has been transformed by the break from mimesis in adaptation studies. He probes the question as to why Dickens has proved so irresistible to adaptation and also addresses his rewriting by contemporary novelists such as Peter Carey and Lloyd Jones. One of the most vibrant areas of debate in recent years has been Dickens’s relation to questions of sexuality and gender, and as Lillian Nayder’s selection demonstrates, his treatment of these categories of difference ‘is typically doubled-edged’: although ‘he proves willing to draw on conventional ideas’ of masculinity and femininity ‘to serve his ends – artistic, political, personal – and to idealize or vilify his characters, he also represents those ideas as inadequate and confining’. Finally, Dickens’s position as global writer is considered in the volume edited by John O. Jordan and Nirshan Perera. As they observe, ‘Dickens is better known as an English novelist, even as a novelist of Englishness, than he is as a figure of international scope, subject matter, reputation and influence’. But the essays gathered in this volume – written by contributors who come from a variety of cultures, national origins, linguistic backgrounds and locations – show just how limited a view of Dickens this can be.

The new ways of reading Dickens demonstrated in these six volumes reflect some of the most important and influential critical trajectories to have emerged within literary studies over the last half century. That they also represent abiding preoccupations and distinguishing features inherent in Dickens’s writing is testimony to his continuing critical and cultural significance.

CATHERINE WATERS
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Introduction

This volume of critical essays on Dickens and childhood broaches one of the central areas of Dickens studies, the child in Dickens. Not limited to the powerful pathos of such characters as Tiny Tim and Oliver Twist, the child and childhood more generally have proved suggestive, stimulating a vast array of critical work in Dickens studies. The focus of the volume is not to reprint many of the most well-known and iconic pieces but rather to highlight the recent new work in the area. In doing so, it is necessary to provide an overview of the development of Dickens studies relating to the child and childhood. This introductory essay seeks to provide a narrative through this important area of study, illuminating the links and leaps undertaken by various aspects of this criticism. From the short first section on 'Biography', the collection moves through the following: 'The Romantic Child in Victorian Times', 'Childhood and the Family', 'The Child, Empire and Difference' and 'The Child as a Theoretical Vehicle'.

Biography

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these every day associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless, of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children, and wander desolately back to that time of my life. (Forster, n.d., pp. 18–19)

Destroying 'the accumulated letters and papers of twenty years'¹ in a bonfire at Gad's Hill on 3 September 1860, Dickens declared that there would be no biography. Barely five years later, a biography *did* appear, generating significant interest in Dickens the man, the quote above offering perhaps the most startling revelation which would become the most well-known aspect of Dickens's life. As Dickens's lifelong friend, confidante, sometime editor, the holder of most of Dickens's original manuscripts and executor of his will, John Forster was ideally placed to tell Dickens's story. Although he was aware of Dickens's objections to the biographical form unhelpfully shifting the focus away from the writing on to the man, Forster did not hesitate after Dickens's death to bring out his account of Dickens's life in *The Life of Charles Dickens*; the volume's dedication to Dickens's daughters Mary and Kate clearly indicates family cooperation in this task. Perhaps Forster, as one so close to Dickens that he was entrusted to act as executor of Dickens's will, understood more of Dickens's own complex inner emotional identity than anyone else. The letter Dickens wrote to Forster on the conception of *Great Expectations* underlines exactly how powerful memories of his own childhood and their recollection in fiction were to Dickens: 'I read *David Copperfield* again

¹ Letter to W.H. Wills, 4 September 1860 (Dickens, 1997, p. 304).

the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe.’² Clearly Forster did believe it; Forster understood the extent to which Dickens’s childhood experiences shaped both his adult and his artistic identity. Revealing hitherto unknown aspects of Dickens’s life and suffering, particularly as a child, *The Life of Charles Dickens* generated such significant interest in Dickens’s own life that exploring its manifestation in Dickens’s work formed the basis of much of Dickens early criticism. In Dickens’s life and suffering, critics found not only an inspirational source for David Copperfield but for other key male children from *Oliver Twist* to *Pip*. More generally, when Dickens wonders how he could have ‘been so easily cast away at such an age’ he highlights the condition of a number of children like him at the time:

It is wonderful to me, that; even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion enough on me – a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily or mentally – to suggest that something might have been spared, as certainly it might have been, to place me at any common school. Our friends, I take it, were tired out. No one made any sign. My father and mother were quite satisfied. They could hardly have been more so, if I had been twenty years of age, distinguished at a grammar-school, and going to Cambridge. (Forster, n.d., pp. 17–18)

Thus Dickens’s own life provides a node for early Dickens criticism: it provides a point of convergence for the specificity of his own experience, for the role of the family in raising children and for the extent to which Dickens’s life highlighted social conditions at the time for vast numbers of poor children.

Dickens’s life continues to provide a rich vein of material to mine for further insights into contemporary issues. Michael Slater’s recent biography *Charles Dickens* (2009), merging biography and astute critical analysis of Dickens’s work, demonstrates in the most comprehensive and illuminating fashion to date how Dickens’s writing was a dynamic of his life. As Slater notes in Chapter 1 of this volume:

Meanwhile, Dickens was unwittingly continuing that education in the teeming street-life and strange old corners of London that was to be so fundamental to his later artistic triumphs, and to which he was to pay wry tribute in chapter 20 of *Pickwick* when Tony Weller answers Mr Pickwick’s enquiry about his son Sam’s education by saying he had ‘let him run in the streets when he was very young, and shift for his-self’, this being ‘the only way to make a boy sharp’. The young Dickens now had ample opportunity, for example, ... to observe and hear stories about such weird London characters as the half-crazed ‘White Woman of Berners Street’ who was always dressed as a bride and who was, years later, to contribute to the creation of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*. He could make a close study, too, of his father’s fellow-prisoners in the Marshalsea, remembering them all ... during Mr Pickwick’s incarceration ... in *Copperfield* and in *Little Dorrit*. (pp. 11–12)

Dickens the professional writer was inseparable from Dickens the man. The recently published *Charles Dickens: A Life* (2011) by Claire Tomalin continues the reinvigoration of critical praxis by the text of Dickens’s life.

The Romantic Child in Victorian Times

In his daughter Mamie’s assertion that the ‘different child characters in his books’ demonstrate what ‘a wonderful knowledge he had of children’ (M. Dickens, 1974, p. 14), it is possible

² Letter to John Forster, (Dickens, 1997, p. 325).

to deduce the seeds of another key area of Dickens criticism. Clearly Dickens did have a wonderful knowledge of children and a child's perspective, but what did he know? Or more generally, how did the Victorians understand the term 'child'? There is a strong area of Dickens criticism which explores his conceptualization of childhood. In Chapters 2 and 3, respectively, Peter Coveney and Dirk den Hartog align Dickens criticism more broadly with work on the concept of childhood and its construction. Such an alignment is strongly influenced by earlier work by George Boas (1966) and Philippe Ariés (1962) which explores the changing construction of childhood with strong emphases on the Romantic conception of the child. For Coveney, den Hartog and others, identifying Dickens's Romantic inheritance is vital to understanding his construction of a multitude of child characters. Central to this inheritance is the conception of childhood as a special spiritual state of innocence: 'Trailing clouds of glory do we come/From God, who is our home'.³ Such a child is fresh from the Creator, unsullied by an earthly genealogy and as such provides a powerful force of inspiration. Conceiving of childhood as a special state of spiritually charged innocence offered powerful opposition to the largely Calvinist view of childhood as a state of inherent evil which required forceful religious instruction by parents and educators to overcome. Such Calvinist attitudes, as exemplified by the Murdstones in *David Copperfield*, had long-established roots evident in late seventeenth-century writers such as James Janeway who, in *A Token for Children, Being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths of several Young Children* (1672/73), asks in an open letter 'To All Parents, School Masters and School Mistresses, or any that have any hand in the Education of Children': 'Are the souls of your children of no value? Are you willing that they should be Brands of Hell? ... take some time daily to speak a little to your children ... about their miserable condition by Nature.' In contrast to the grim, bleakness of the Calvinistic doctrine, Dickens posits a model of childhood as a state of inherent innocence. The adult writer communes with this state when seeking creative inspiration. Such a Romantic representation of childhood emphasized the liberating possibilities of the concept of child: 'A child, more than all other gifts/That earth can offer to declining man,/Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts'.⁴ As the various discourses demonstrate, the child is a site of inscription, a palimpsest which will bear the marks of a number of discourses. Jacqueline Banerjee's article on the larger cultural significance of the ambivalence and contradiction embodied by the child in Victorian fiction hones in on this notion of palimpsest while arguing that the figure of the child simultaneously offers contradictory narratives.

Like the Romantics, Dickens saw childhood as a special state; the ability to recollect and commune with this state offered a significant artistic, inspirational power. Hence, there are numerous ways in which Dickens's relationship to his own childhood and to the concept of childhood more generally, provide an important impetus for his work. Clearly his own personal childhood shaped the way he wished others to understand childhood; throughout his career he emphasized the formative influence of childhood stories. 'Where We Stopped Growing' (1 January 1853) offers a vision of childhood as 'so beautiful and engaging' in which childhood influences remain an unalterable formative influence, 'Real people and places ...

³ William Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' (Wordsworth, [1904], 1975, p. 66).

⁴ William Wordsworth, 'Michael' (Wordsworth, 1888, pp. 146–8).

never outgrown, though they themselves may have passed away long since: which we always regard with the eye and mind of childhood' (Dickens, 1998, pp. 107–10). The oft-quoted Romantic credo, the child is the father of the man, clearly informed Dickens and underlines the importance Dickens invested in this figure; critics are right to take note of it. More broadly, Dickens's avocation of this notion of childhood forms the basis of his contribution to the *bildungsroman* genre as Jerome Buckley's piece (Chapter 5) demonstrates; his narration of childhood is not just a vehicle for introspection but also provides new voices in a mode that maps the development of child to adult. In his work, the achievement of what Dickens would consider an ideal adulthood is dependent on being able to revisit, through memory, the imaginative power of childhood. Although Dickens, in his 1841 Preface to *Oliver Twist* and elsewhere, acknowledges his admiration for and indebtedness to Fielding, Defoe, Goldsmith, Smollett, Richardson and Mackenzie, his approach to the *bildungsroman* is one in which the central character is singular, vested with a special significance 'not like other boys in the same circumstances' (Dickens, 1966, p. 70).

The legacy of the Romantic conception of the child as a state of innocence worked in conjunction with the Romantic concept of the Noble Savage, often attributed to François-Marie Voltaire's 1766 essay 'Of the Different Races or Kinds of Men' in which he describes the indigenous peoples in America as 'noble savages' whose existence represents an Edenic existence, 'preserved [in] a pure state of nature'. The concept of the Noble Savage constructed the indigenous peoples encountered during the expansion of empire as people living in a prelapsarian state, uncorrupted by the artificiality of a capitalist-driven civilization and modernity. They were seen as possessing an inherent nobility and were idealized in depiction. They were also depicted as in the childhood state of man: a Romantic lament for a lost childhood state. Dickens's encounter with Pitchlynn, a chief of the Choctaw tribe, on his trip to America in 1842 inspired a section of *American Notes* in which Dickens clearly articulates notions of the noble savage. The meeting occurred after Pitchlynn sent his card to Dickens while they were both travelling by train. Not only did Pitchlynn speak 'English perfectly well' but he had also 'read many books and was strongly impressed by Sir Walter Scott's poetry' (Dickens, 1989a, p. 165). Dickens laments the loss of the indigenous dress, much as he laments the imminent demise of the indigenous peoples:

He was dressed in our ordinary every-day costume, which hung about his fine figure loosely, and with indifferent grace. On my telling him that I regretted not to see him in his own attire, he threw up his right arm, for a moment, as though he were brandishing some heavy weapon, and answered, as he let it fall again, that his race were losing many things beside their dress, and would soon be seen upon the earth no more: but he wore it at home, he added proudly ... He was a remarkably handsome man; some years past forty, I should judge; with long black hair, an aquiline nose, broad cheek-bones, a sunburnt complexion, and a very bright, keen, dark, and piercing eye. There were but twenty thousand of the Choctaws left, he said, and their number was decreasing every day. A few of his brother chiefs had been obliged to become civilised, and to make themselves acquainted with what the whites knew, for it was their only chance of existence. But they were not many; and the rest were as they always had been. He dwelt on this: and said several times that unless they tried to assimilate themselves to their conquerors, they must be swept away before the strides of civilised society. (1989a, pp. 164–5)

The Romantic legacies of both childhood and the noble savage intertwine in the child. In Chapter 6 Malcolm Andrews usefully explores Dickens's work at the intersection of these discourses for which childhood embodied not only an individual developmental state but

also a state of development of various races, cultures and nations. In recounting his travels in *Pictures from Italy* (1846), Dickens is appalled by the savagery to which the children of Naples are reduced as a result of their poverty. On the arrival of his party to Naples, Dickens is met by 'a group of miserable children, almost naked, screaming' who quickly 'discover that they can see themselves reflected in the varnish of the carriage, and begin to dance and make grimaces, that they may have the pleasure of seeing their antics repeated in this mirror'. These are quickly joined by 'half-a-dozen wild creatures wrapped in frowzy brown cloaks' (Dickens, 1989c, pp. 410–11). However, this is a portrait of a child as savage distinctly lacking nobility. Dickens is clear that a life of want and neglect will leave children in a state akin to savagery. If this could happen in Europe then it could clearly happen at home as well; Dickens continually returns to the conditions of the poor at home, most powerfully in 'On Duty with Inspector Field' (1851), *Bleak House* (1852–53), 'A Sleep to Startle Us' (1851) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65). In the last mentioned, while Mr Dolls is making his way through Covent Garden to find Eugene Wrayburn he is accosted by a group of street children whom the narrative clearly depicts as savages: 'There is a swarm of young savages always flitting about this same place, creeping off with fragments of orange-chests and mouldy litter – Heaven knows into what holes they can convey them, having no home! – whose bare feet fall with a blunt dull softness on the pavement as the policeman hunts them' (Dickens, 1989b, pp. 729–30). The production of such child savages was a lifelong concern for Dickens. Dickens's most infamous challenge to the concept of the noble savage came in the article of the same name written in 1853. The figure of the noble savage was a site of ambivalence: for some it was a lament for a prelapsarian existence untouched by the corruption of civilization, for others it embodied the degenerative possibility, a warning that one or indeed a civilization could regress to barbarous impulses.

The Romantic identification of childhood as a state of innocence perforce introduces an oppositional category of evil; it is a tension articulated by William Blake as between innocence and experience. A significant area of Dickens criticism explores Dickens's conceptualization of this opposition as not only child *versus* adult, innocence *versus* experience but also one of rural *versus* urban and ultimately, rich *versus* poor. As Hugh Cunningham identifies in *Children of the Poor*, there existed a 'duality' in the conception of childhood: 'On the one hand we inherit from this period a conception of childhood as properly happy and free while protected and dependent; on the other, in the children of the poor, children are represented as both exploited and independent, slaves and savages' (1991, pp. 6–7). Dickens's criticism mines a rich vein which maps the Romantic opposition between innocence and evil on to larger social concerns regarding urbanization and the very visible poverty associated with it. Dickens is quite clear that the deprived conditions of the poor, particularly the children of the poor, produced a contagion, a moral and physical disease which would wreak havoc on society. While celebrating the special state of the Romantic child which sets Oliver apart from others, Dickens also works to highlight the condition of the children of the poor:

Countenances, expressive of almost every vice in almost every grade ... cunning, ferocity, and drunkenness in all its stages, were there, in their strongest aspects; and women ... with every mark and stamp of their sex utterly beaten out, and presenting but one loathsome blank of profligacy and crime: some mere girls, others but young women, and none past the prime of life: formed the darkest and saddest portion of this dreary picture. (1966, p. 164)

Often identified as spearheading social reform, Dickens's interventions into the conditions of the children of the poor correspond with other social reforms of the day seeking to improve working conditions, to limit the working hours for children and to provide children with education. Informed by the Romantic legacy of the child, the approach to educational reform sought formal education provision and the possibility of learning-through-play, particularly outdoors. Childhood is not only a state of innocence but a vital stage in itself and to be valued as such.

Increasingly Victorian social reform identified the need for other provision for children. Destitute families could not afford to provide for their children. Single mothers struggled against financial adversity if widowed and against social ostracism if they bore a child out of wedlock. The mortality rate often meant that parents died before their children reached adulthood. An early example, pre-dating the Victorian period, was the establishment of the Foundling Hospital in 1739 by Thomas Coram. The Foundling Hospital was established to provide for the children abandoned by their parent(s). By Dickens's time the premises were considerably expanded. He lived close by and was a patron. Dickens's concern for, and involvement with, the children of the poor cuts across his writing, journalism and daily life. Jenny Bourne Taylor's work with the archives of the Foundling Hospital (Chapter 7) situates Dickens within this nexus of charitable endeavour. In doing so Bourne Taylor explores the problems illegitimacy posed for the notions of family, marriage and affiliation that underpinned Victorian social values.

The centrality of the family and the home had powerful imaginative and psychological resonances beyond providing for the physical needs. But what did the home represent at this time? John Ruskin's famous 'Of Queen's Gardens' lecture enshrines the notion of the domestic ideal: 'This is the true nature of home – it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division ... it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods' (1905, p. 122). The central importance of middle-class notions of the family and home rests in their functioning as a site of morality, snug domesticity, a haven from the 'amoral world of market' and a beacon welcoming those back from foreign travels and the work of empire (Davidoff and Hall, 1987, p. 74). Thus, the foundling child, as one neglected by or without family, offered a special case which interested Dickens. Dickens also explores the restrictive nature of the middle-class conception of the family as excluding the poor. Certainly the environment and living conditions of the poor often meant it was impossible to locate the home. The parents were judged as failures because of their poverty. Large numbers of children of the poor lived on the streets in no discernible family unit, becoming known as 'street arabs'. These children were hardly perceived as human children: rather more as a social pest.

There is no present fear of the noble annual crop of a hundred thousand diminishing. They are so plentifully propagated that a savage preaching 'civilisation' might regard it as a mercy that the localities of their infant nurture are such as suit the ravening appetites of cholera and typhus. Otherwise they would breed like rabbits in an undisturbed warren, and presently swarm so abundantly that the highways would be over-run, making it necessary to pass an Act of Parliament, improving on the latest enacted for dogs, against the roaming at large of unmuzzled children of the gutter. (Greenwood, 1869, p. 5)

Childhood and the Family

The child provides a vehicle through which the larger significance of the family was explored. Although the idealization of the family has been a central focus of Victorian studies, and Dickens studies in particular, it is this same area which has been the subject of exciting contemporary reconsiderations of the family ideal. This area brings fresh new perspectives, as found in Catherine Waters's *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (1997), to the established critical view that Dickens's work was dominated by problematic families, broken families and failed families. Waters opens with Dickens's own failed marriage to highlight the disjuncture between 'the sanctification of the hearth in his fiction and journalism, and the disharmony of his own family life' (1997, p. 7). Waters explores how Dickens both constructs and contests the notion of separate spheres, the roles of the sexes, public and private, and the family. It is in this treatment that the politics of the family become overt. Through a reading of *Oliver Twist* Waters highlights 'two competing conceptions of the family' as part of a 'larger cultural hegemony in the Victorian period' (1997, p. 32). At stake is the middle-class construction of normative domesticity in the face of models of deviance, such as the orphan, outcast and pauper, whose very existence points to the failure of the family.

Albert Hutter's 'Nation and Generation in A Tale of Two Cities' offers the familial father-son relationship as one which 'carries a particularly powerful social resonance' (1978, p.448); the psychological conflict embodied in this familial relationship forms the basis of larger social conflict, including interclass strife and revolution. New work by Hilary Schor (1999) examines specific familial relations, such as the father-daughter relationship which enacts the legal and paternal power of the father and the alienation of the daughter as one who will always be between two houses, either the property of the father or the husband. Schor's text explores this moment of alienation as a moment of doubling in which the good daughter exists alongside an angry double who exercises narrative voice. Schor's work itself crosses two volumes in this collection, providing a useful contribution to the 'Ideals and Transgressions' section of the volume on *Dickens, Sexuality and Gender* edited by Lillian Nayder. Helena Michie, in Chapter 12, extends the consideration of the family and law in a piece which revolves around the central concept of embarrassment. There is stimulating work exploring what Liz Thiel describes in another context as 'transnormative' families – that is, 'those family units headed by single parents, step-parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings or the state that exists in opposition to the "natural" and "complete" family of husband, wife and children' (2008, p. 8). This body of work challenges the restrictive definitions of the family. Work such as Holly Furneaux's *Queer Dickens: Erotic, Families, Masculinities* (2010) situates alternative families, alternative groupings and same sex configurations within the domestic.⁵ In these cases the bonds of affection and shared experience assume a greater importance than biological and/or genetic relationships which hitherto have constituted the family.

⁵ Furneaux also offers a useful way of reading the queer family in Dickens in 'Serial Bachelorhood and Counter-Marital Plotting' included in the 'Queer Family' section of *Dickens, Sexuality and Gender* edited by Lillian Nayder.

The Child, Empire and Difference

If the concept of the family was largely a myth, an ideal lost even before it was realized, it still provided a powerful point of identification for those undertaking the work of empire in faraway lands. In 1849 James Froude writes of a particular kind of homesickness: that of the 'exiled' emigrant in the colonies. 'God has given us each our own Paradise, our own childhood over which the old glories linger – to which our own hearts cling, as all we have ever known of Heaven upon earth. And there, as all earth's weary wayfarers turn back ... in thought, at least, to that old time of peace – that village church – that child-faith – which, once lost, is never gained again' (Froude, [1849] 1904, p. 116). Home then is one of the underlying tenets to imperialist ideology. There is an impulse, which Graham Dawson identifies in *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, 'to extend the boundaries of "home" [in imperial endeavours] and [to] transform more of the wilderness, through enlightened cultivation, into a garden' (1994, p. 65). The issue of how the family replicated itself was a central concern not only to Dickens but to a British nation embarked on a far-reaching imperial project, subjecting large swathes of the globe to British imperial rule. It was a project that not only exercised domination over those of other races but contributed to an emerging scientific racism which largely rejected notions of shared humanity across races in favour of a racial hierarchy. Such thinking conceived of racial difference as evidence of a lesser developed state and, at worst, as a state aligned with animals. Yet as the contributions thus far have shown, it was also a time in which childhood was revered and celebrated. In Chapter 14 Deirdre David offers a suggestive insight into the implications of reproduction and sexual politics of empire in her reading of Dickens and Kipling. Catherine Robson's essay (Chapter 17) considers the extent to which the spaces and possibilities in empire were gendered for girls and boys. At the intersection of discourses on family, nation, race and empire, the child provides a suggestive figure. As one in need of tutelage, maternal care and paternal protection, the child embodies a lack of development; it was a model replicated both in the paternal assumptions underlying empire and in the establishment of racial hierarchies.

Hence, there appear two types of children: the predominately white British boy for who an increasingly burgeoning body of imperial juvenile literature, including travel writing and adventure narratives, appeared and the child who embodies racial difference (to be discussed later). The body of adventure writing, as Martin Green has argued in *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, worked to consolidate 'the energising myth of empire' (1980, p. xi) across classes through the propagation of largely Arnoldian values of the public school. Such adventure writing appealed to Dickens throughout his life. From the 'attraction of repulsion' of Dickens's young days of *The Terrific Register*, through exotic childhood favourites *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tales of the Arabian Nights*, to his adult years when he avidly devoured African travel narratives for which Forster recalls the adult Dickens had a particular 'insatiable relish' (n.d., p. 391), the adventure narrative provides a rich opportunity for Dickens to continue his engagement with childhood in all its manifestations. In Chapter 13 Grahame Smith explores the interrelationship between narratives of childhood, repression and empire immediately following Dickens's bonfire of his papers at Gad's Hill in 1860. Harry Stone, in Chapter 15, provides a *tour de force* in his exploration of Dickens and cannibalism. James E. Marlow (Chapter 18) extends the exploration of cannibalism beyond 1859 while in Chapter 19 Shuli Barzilai offers a full account of the influence of Dickens's childhood reading on his adult

writing. This area of Dickens criticism illustrates how the adventure stories appealed to children and to the child in Dickens, providing a vibrant source of inspiration and renewal.

In 'Where We Stop Growing' (1 January 1853) Dickens reflects on the importance of the continuing influence of childhood fancy on the adult. In doing so, Dickens evokes his childhood favourite, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which he knew virtually by heart. 'We have never grown the thousandth part of an inch out of Robinson Crusoe. He fits us just as well, and in exactly the same way, as when we were among the smallest of the small' (Dickens, 1998, p. 108). The exotic of racial difference contained within this narrative, 'the black figures of those Cannibals moving round the fire on the sea-sand' (Dickens, 1998, p. 108), and other childhood stories continued to influence Dickens. In *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, Octave Mannoni argues that the *raison d'être* of the desert islands and faraway exotic places in literature is to be peopled with imaginary beings; such places and imaginary beings fulfil a child's longing to escape the prohibitions they face. This offers a useful way to conceptualize Dickens's continual emphasis on ensuring that these imaginary places remain unchanged. In his 1860 essay, 'Nurse's Stories', Dickens confesses 'it is an affair of my life to keep them intact'; his insistence on his consent being required before one can 'move a book in it' (Dickens, 2000, pp. 171–3), underlines the profoundly static nature of the imaginary to which Dickens returns, an eternal spring providing continual inspiration developed in childhood. Adhering to the legacy of Romanticism which privileged the value of retaining a child-like sensibility, this fancy is required to stay childlike.

According to Mannoni, the continual return to the exotic of childhood, to the imagination, signals a latent and repressed 'colonial complex'. This complex is not composed of actual experiences of or trips to the colonies, but rather is formed through childhood experiences such as reading. The lifelong attraction of *Robinson Crusoe* may well lie in the appeal of a story which has the effect of coming directly from Defoe's own unconscious speaking to Dickens's own desires. This 'colonial complex' can be understood as a father–child relationship. The father dominates a child who in turn replicates this dominating desire in his relationships with others.

Thence emerged the story of Robinson, in the way a dream might occur. When this dream was published, however, all Europe realized that it had been dreaming it. For more than a century afterwards the European concept of the savage came no nearer reality than Defoe's representation of him, and it was on that figure that the European, if he was more or less infantile in character or, like Rousseau, unable to adapt himself to reality, projected the inner image of which there was no counterpart in the solid and too familiar world of reality. (Mannoni, [1956] 1964, p. 103)

Mannoni is helpful in offering a conceptual framework in which to situate Dickens's complex engagement with notions of the exotic, childhood and race. Racial difference increasingly was seen as an early developmental stage, often likened to childhood. Thought about in such terms, racial difference was infantilized; Dickens had a vested interest in maintaining a paternal dominance ensuring that all the places that he has 'never been ... Damascus, and Bagdad, and Brobdingnag ... Lilliput, and Laputa, and the Nile, and Abyssinia, and the Ganges, and the North Pole, and many hundreds of places' are kept 'intact' (Dickens, 2000, p. 173). The concept of a colonial complex offers a way of understanding the largely unchanging nature of the exotic within Dickens's work and within culture more generally at a time of fluid and rapidly developing racial science.

When starting this section I referred to two types of children. The first was the boy absorbed by adventure narratives and dreams of empire. The other child who appears is the 'other' child, the simultaneous embodiment of the racial difference of empire and the embodiment of the difference within. In Chapter 16, 'Heredity, Class and Race', Goldie Morgentaler demonstrates how these discourses were simultaneously inscribed on the child. My own work, *Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire* (2000), explores the child at the intersection of melancholia around the loss of family with the issue of racial difference. The special child, the orphan, whose very presence inscribes the loss of the family, offers a text: 'a supplement in which is embodied difference within a notion of sameness' (Peters, 2000, p. 26). As one who is outside the family, the orphan is a foreigner, embodying difference. Yet as can often be seen in the literature of the time, there is a dynamic at play here. The orphan is produced by the very state and charitable structures that were to provide for his/her care. Travel writing, particularly popular adventure narratives for boys provided a useful backdrop for 'the marginalised figure without family ties', the 'orphan sailor' (2000, p. 61) who undertakes the work of empire for a nation which marginalised him. It is a format which attracted Dickens. In examining Dickens's 'The Perils of Certain English Prisoners' (1857) it is possible to see how Dickens himself negotiates this discursive juncture of the child, empire and difference, displaying a colonial complex while simultaneously identifying the inability of Victorian society to provide for its children, particularly poor orphans. Yet the identification of the child as a node of convergent discourses ensures that the understanding of this figure moves beyond the confines of realism.

The Child as a Theoretical Vehicle

Some of the most exciting recent work on Dickens and childhood reads across and between the categories of literature and theory to the mutual illumination of each. Such theoretical areas as structuralism, post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, new historicism, Marxism and post-colonialism demonstrate an active sustained engagement with other disciplines including philosophy, psychology, translation studies, science, geography and economics. Today the child remains a site of inscription; recent work explores the theoretical possibilities that the child offers both for understanding Dickens's work and for larger debates about the aesthetic. In Chapter 21 Jonathan Loesberg uses theoretical discourses to approach a hitherto underrepresented area in Dickens criticism, namely disability studies, and to situate it in a discussion of the sublime. Through the figure of the child, John Bowen (Chapter 22) offers a startling new reading of *The Old Curiosity Shop* which extends the received understanding of the novel as *about* the death of a child to one which reads *the child* as a site of death rather than life.

In conclusion one might be tempted to say that the study of Dickens and childhood has come full circle: initiated largely by the death of Dickens, critics were quick to find in Dickens's own childhood and in the figure of the child a source of creativity, inspiration and life. The pathos of Dickens's time in the blacking factory and of the instability of his childhood life more generally provided a focus for numerous social concerns about the treatment of children at the time. The Romantic legacy informing Dickens's representation of childhood became a powerful tool for social reform. Yet the child quickly moved from its personal, literal origins to become a site of inscription as well as a figure in need of tutelage. It was this very combination

that made it a suggestive figure for the intersecting discourses of empire and difference. It is this combination that continues to provide a vehicle through which a range of varying theoretical discourses can be explored. There is the danger that the child becomes an empty signifier providing a convenient space to articulate any given concepts, lacking in specificity. Yet the continued critical investment in the concept of the child, the ever-expanding areas for which the child and individual development are central, plus the continued centrality of global concern about the plight of children, ensures that this central area of Dickens studies will continue to offer new possibilities for understanding his work. Poignant and exhibiting a powerful pathos, the often solitary, vulnerable child in Dickens continues to engage critics and readers alike.

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Part I

Biography



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1

Early Years: London, 1822–1827

Michael Slater

When I tread the old ground, I do not wonder that I seem to see and pity, going on before me, an innocent romantic boy, making his imaginative world out of such strange experiences and sordid things!

David Copperfield, ch.11

THE DICKENSES' new home, 16 Bayham Street in Camden Town, was appreciably smaller than their last house in Chatham, though the rateable value (£22 p.a.) was higher than that of the Ordnance Terrace house (£5. 10s.). John Dickens needed to retrench but the evidence indicates that he was soon running up bills with his baker and other tradesmen. For her part, Elizabeth Dickens continued to be landlady as well as wife and mother and so arranged the new home that, even within the confined space of its four rooms on two floors, young Lamert could continue lodging with the family, at least for the time being. He probably had the front room on the first floor, as Tommy Traddles does in *Copperfield* (ch. 27) when he lodges with the Micawbers in Camden Town, in a house Dickens seems to have based on his memories of Bayham Street. The family, now six in all, would have been squeezed into the remaining accommodation and the little orphan maid-of-all-work whose 'sharp little worldly and also kindly ways' Dickens was later to recall when depicting the Marchioness in *The Old Curiosity Shop* would have bedded down in the basement kitchen. Dickens himself slept in a kind of rear garret which had its own little staircase but was no more than 'a sort of cupboard some four and a half feet high, hanging over the [main] stairway'.¹

Forster, doubtless echoing what he had often heard from Dickens himself, described the area as being then 'about the poorest part of the London suburbs' and the house itself as 'a mean small tenement, with a wretched little back-garden abutting on a squalid court'. This description of Bayham Street and its environs was objected to by some *Daily Telegraph* readers when Forster published it in vol.1 of his *Life of Dickens*. One reader signing himself or herself 'F. M.' called it 'a perfect caricature of a quiet street in what was then but a village' while another opined that such a grim description 'must have been prompted by [Dickens's] personal privations'.²



3 16 Bayham Street, Camden Town

Forster's treatment of Bayham Street exemplifies, in fact, the problematic nature of attempting any sort of objective account of Dickens's life during 1822–24. Over twenty years later Dickens himself wrote very powerfully and eloquently about this period in the so-called 'autobiographical fragment' which he used in *Copperfield* and then gave to Forster (though in quite what form is a puzzle). Forster quotes extensively from it in the second chapter of his *Life of Dickens* and, since neither anyone involved with the Dickens family at this time nor even anyone who simply came across them has left any record, we have nothing against which to check this strongly emotional account by Dickens himself of his experiences and way of life during these two years. We should also remember that by the time he wrote it he had long been vividly aware of himself as 'the Inimitable', a phenomenally gifted and hugely popular creative artist – of being, in fact, what Carlyle was to call 'a *unique* of talents'. Moreover, after the profound effect that his 1842 American journey had had upon his sense of self, he had begun, from the time of writing *A Christmas Carol* onwards, to draw on his own early life for fictional purposes at a much

deeper level than before. It is from the standpoint of an established and much-acclaimed literary prodigy, a man in his own words 'famous and caressed and happy', that he looks back in anger, grief and pity, as well as something close to incredulity, at what was done to him in his eleventh and twelfth years.³

There must certainly have been much that was bewildering and disturbing about the new family situation for a sensitive and imaginative ten-year-old like Dickens. The abrupt termination of his schooling with, apparently, no plan for its resumption and an only partial comprehension of his father's increasing financial difficulties – a partial comprehension later turned to richly comic account when he was writing the Micawber chapters of *Copperfield* – must have been uppermost among his concerns, as well as his sudden isolation from friends of his own age. It may have been about this time, too, that his infant sister Harriet died which, along with the news of Mary Lamert's death in Ireland in September 1822, would have added further gloom to the already beleaguered household. Then in April 1823 Fanny, his dear companion and confidante, left home, having been admitted as a boarder and piano pupil at the newly-founded Royal Academy of Music. It was not only the loss of her company that would have distressed Dickens but also what must have seemed to him the sheer unfairness of this. Somehow thirty-eight guineas a year could be found to pay Fanny's board and tuition fees at the Academy but apparently nothing could be spared for the continuance of *his* education. There would have been a bitter personal resonance for him many years later in what he wrote in chapter 8 of *Great Expectations*, 'In the little world in which children have their existence . . . there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as injustice.'

Today we may well understand how Fanny's harassed parents must have welcomed Thomas Tomkison's willingness to recommend her to the Royal Academy of Music. Tomkison was a piano-maker in Dean Street, Soho, and perhaps came to know the Dickenss through Thomas Barrow, who lodged close by in Gerrard Street. The young Dickens could hardly have been expected to reflect that this privileging of Fanny's education was, from his parents' point of view, entirely reasonable. Yet, as a close student of Dickens's early life has observed (surely correctly), 'Although Charles had given promise of a precocious literary bent . . . Fanny's talent as a pianist and her possession of a good soprano voice were deemed to be a surer guarantee of potential earning power.' In fact, John and Elizabeth had precious little evidence for detecting a 'precocious literary bent' in their eldest son. True, he had written *Misnar* and maybe some other 'juvenile tragedies' but this had more to do with his passionate response to theatre than with literature. They would not have seen his two sketches of curious London characters mentioned in the previous chapter (above, p. 1) as he had not dared to show them to anyone. What *was* remarkable was his talent for comic recitals and comic songs, something that proved to be also very useful at this time for entertaining his godfather Christopher Huffam and his cronies,

one of whom pronounced the boy a ‘progidy’. But a career for his eldest son as a ‘professional gentleman’ entertaining the boozy patrons of ‘harmonic evenings’, like Mr Smuggins in *Sketches by Boz* or Little Swills in *Bleak House*, would hardly have been something that even the convivial and generally easy-going John would have contemplated with equanimity.⁴

So the puzzled boy was left alone to fall into a mooching way of life, in which he would often, as he later told Forster, spend time gazing dreamily at the distant city of London from a spot near some almshouses at the top of Bayham Street, ‘a treat that served him for hours of vague reflection afterwards’. He made himself useful about the house, cleaned his father’s shoes, and ran domestic errands, all the time doubtless feeling both bewilderment and hurt that no-one seemed to have any plans for him. He knew he had a ‘kind-hearted and generous’ father who had watched by him when he was ill ‘unweariedly and patiently, many days and nights’, and who had encouraged him to dream of one day coming to live in a fine house like Gad’s Hill if he worked hard enough. Yet this same father seemed, he later wrote, ‘in the ease of his temper and the straitness of his means . . . to have utterly lost at this time the idea of educating me at all, and to have utterly put from him the notion that I had any claim upon him, in that regard, whatever.’ Whether this was John Dickens’s actual state of mind with respect to his eldest son or whether, as is most likely, he was simply unable to pay a second set of tuition fees we cannot now know. Nor can we know what answer he gave when Dickens asked him, as surely he must have done, when he was going back to school. All we know for sure is that, whatever the situation was at the time, the way Dickens recalled it twenty years or so later was that John’s attitude towards his education seemed, incomprehensibly, to have been one of total obliviousness.⁵

Dickens’s life, if devoid of schooling, was not without its treats and pleasures at this time, however. Lamert made a toy theatre for him to play with, and perhaps even took him again to some actual theatres. He found a new source for books, among them Jane Porter’s *Scottish Chiefs* and Holbein’s *Dance of Death*, borrowing them from Uncle Thomas Barrow’s landlady in Gerrard Street, who was a bookseller’s widow (he went there often to visit and help Barrow, laid up with a broken leg). Many of these pleasures can be related directly to his later emergence as the supreme novelist of London, the writer who, both as novelist and journalist, was to describe the city ‘like a special correspondent for posterity’. Among the books he borrowed was the same collection of comic verse, Colman’s *Broad Grins*, in which his father had found the recitation piece with which he had scored such a triumph at the ‘annual display’ at Giles’s school in Chatham. Whether or not this now gave him a pang, he was entranced by the description of Covent Garden he found in another of Colman’s doggerel poems and one time ‘stole down to the market by himself to compare it with the book’. Telling Forster this, he remembered how he went

'snuffing up the flavour of the faded cabbage-leaves as if it were the very breath of comic fiction'. This seems to have been a solo expedition, as perhaps were his visits to Gerrard Street, but more usually he was accompanied by an adult – sometimes James Lamert perhaps – on visits to the city, responding with fascination and delight to all the sights and sounds of the place. In particular, he was strongly attracted (the 'attraction of repulsion' as Forster calls it) to the so-called 'rookery' or labyrinthine slum sheltering many criminals of St Giles, located at the southern end of the Tottenham Court Road, the kind of locality he was later to describe in his 1841 preface to *Oliver Twist* as full of 'foul and frowsy dens, where vice is closely packed and lacks the room to turn'. Forster records him as saying that 'if he could only induce whomsoever took him out to take him through Seven-dials [an area forming part of the "rookery" or crime-infested slum of St Giles and later the subject of one of his Boz sketches], he was supremely happy: "Good Heaven!" he would exclaim, "what wild visions of prodigies of wickedness, want, and beggary, arose in my mind out of that place!" He loved also the visits to Godfather Huffam in Limehouse which gave him glimpses of the riverside and boatyard life there while "the London night-sights as he returned were a perpetual joy and marvel". These visits must have seemed a bit like the old days at the Mitre in Chatham come back again as Huffam's friends applauded the boy's comic singing, and his kindly godfather gave him also more tangible proof of his appreciation in the form of a very handsome half-crown tip. Huffam was, as Dickens was to put it later, the kind of godfather "who knew his duty and did it".⁶

The essay in which this phrase appears is 'Gone Astray', which Dickens published in his magazine *Household Words* on 13 August 1853. Written in the first person, it purports to describe, 'literally and exactly', how the writer was taken as a child for a sight-seeing walk in London, got accidentally separated from his escort, and spent a whole day wandering about the city with his head full of stories about Dick Whittington and Sinbad the Sailor and wondering at all the mysteries and marvels of the place like the huge images of the giants Gog and Magog in the Guildhall. Whether this essay was based on an actual experience of being lost we do not know but one distinguished Dickens scholar has noted that the vividness of his description of little Florence Dombey's feelings when she finds herself lost in a similar situation (*Dombey and Son*, ch. 6) suggests that he is indeed remembering an actual occurrence. However this may be, what is certainly true is that one of the main effects Dickens seeks to create in 'Gone Astray' is to make the reader experience a romantic child's thrilled and attentive response to the city with all its multitudinous wonders and dangers and this is something that we may certainly take as reflecting autobiographical truth.⁷

For it was at this time that Dickens's lifelong fascination with the sights and sounds of London, and with the myriad strange human life-forms bred or

shaped by the city, really took hold of him, and even found its first expression in writing. As already noted in the previous chapter, he tried his hand at sketching a couple of ripe London characters. He came across the eccentric old barber (who may have been none other than the father of Turner) through Thomas Barrow, who was shaved by him. The deaf old woman who helped his mother in Bayham Street had a skill in making 'delicate hashes with walnut-ketchup' that put Dickens in mind of a character in one of his favourite stories Le Sage's *Gil Blas*, the pampered canon's housekeeper who could soften dishes down 'to the most delicate or voluptuous palate'. It seems very likely that the old barber, 'who was never tired of reviewing the events of the last war', also reminded Dickens of Sterne's Uncle Toby in another of his favourite books *Tristram Shandy* (Toby is obsessed by memories of certain events of the Seven Years' War). We seem to have here, in fact, traces of the earliest example of something that was to become a leading characteristic of Dickens's later writings both fictional and non-fictional, that is, his use, for a variety of purposes, of literary allusion, especially to Shakespeare and to many of the best-loved books of his childhood such as those just mentioned and *The Arabian Nights*.⁸

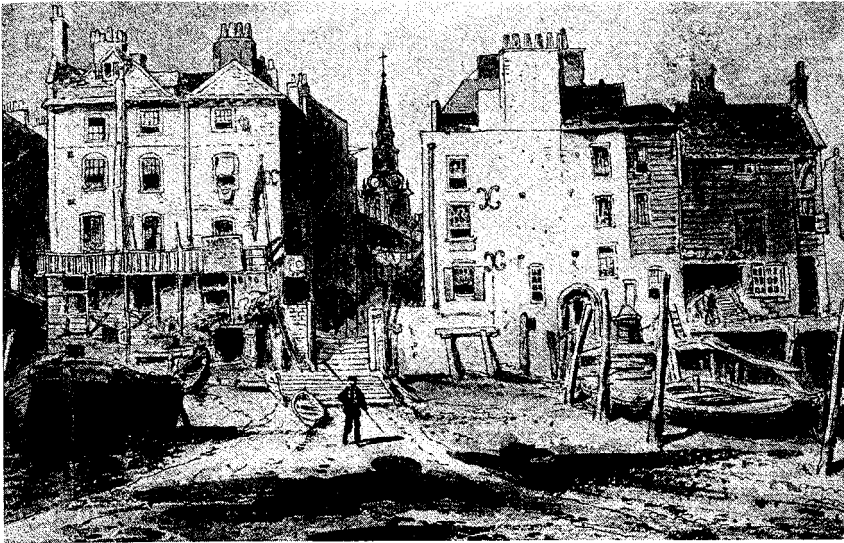
John Dickens's affairs, meanwhile, went from bad to worse. He fell behind with payment of the rates and got deeper into debt. He could hardly expect further help from Thomas Barrow nor from his widowed mother, former housekeeper at Crewe Hall, who was now living in retirement in Oxford Street. From her he had, as she recorded in her will in January 1824, already had 'several Sums of Money some years ago' and she therefore left him £50 less than she left to his childless elder brother William. To young Charles she gave her husband's silver watch but no more money to John. In the autumn of 1823 Dickens's mother, feeling that she must 'do something', decided to open a school. Dickens presents this in the autobiographical fragment and in *Copperfield* as a comically hopeless undertaking and was still mocking it years later, after his mother's death (in *Our Mutual Friend*, Bk I, ch.4), even though it really was not such a hare-brained idea. By Dickens's own account, Elizabeth Dickens was a good teacher and it was reasonable to hope that Christopher Huffam might, through his contacts with parents going out to India, be able to get her some pupils. Bigger and better-situated premises were certainly needed for the purpose, however, and shortly before Christmas, the family moved into 4 Gower Street North, Bloomsbury, which had a rental value of £50 per annum. A large brass plate on the front door read 'Mrs Dickens's Establishment', circulars were printed and Charles helped to distribute them but not a single pupil appeared. For Huffam the timing was unpropitious as he was verging on bankruptcy. Charles's errands now mainly consisted of taking household items (as well as precious books from his father's library) to the pawnbroker's while his parents made a last desperate struggle to stay afloat. Eleven years later, after Dickens had begun publishing sketches of London

under the pen-name of 'Boz', his enthusiastic readers would have no suspicion of the wretched personal experience on which he was drawing for the harsh comedy and pathos of his *Evening Chronicle* sketch (30 June 1835) of a pawn-broker's shop, with its 'little dens, or closets' for the concealment of the more timid or respectable customers.⁹

By early February 1824 it was clear that the school idea was a non-starter. Then came an opportunity for Charles, now just twelve years old, to become largely self-supporting. A cousin of James Lamert's had bought a business and installed him as its manager. The business in question was a small riverside manufactory of blacking for use on boots and stoves, located at Old Hungerford Stairs, just off the Strand. A certain Jonathan Warren had started it, having quarrelled with his brother Robert, owner of a well-established blacking factory at 30 Strand. Lamert offered to employ Charles to make neat wrappers for the pots of blacking, and to paste labels onto these. For six or seven shillings a week the boy would work a ten-hour day six days a week, with an hour allowed for a mid-day meal and a half-hour for tea. Dickens's parents accepted this offer, perhaps believing in their optimistic way that this humble 'factory-floor' job might prove to be the first step on the ladder of a business career. Six or seven shillings a week was, moreover, by no means a bad wage for a twelve-year-old in 1824. Three years later, for example, Charles's starting-wage as an attorney's office-boy was only ten shillings and sixpence per week. Lamert undertook to give him some schooling in the dinner-hour and initially kept him segregated from two other boys similarly employed. Both these arrangements soon proved impracticable, however. The lessons lapsed and Charles moved downstairs to work alongside the other two whose names were Bob Fagin and Poll Green.

Dickens's laconic later comment about Bob Fagin in the autobiographical fragment, 'I took the liberty of using his name, long afterwards, in *Oliver Twist*, has – not surprisingly – been much discussed. Clearly, something much deeper and more complex was going on in Dickens's psyche when he named his diabolic arch-villain Fagin than when he borrowed Poll Green's first name, as he also confessed to having done, for the minor character Poll Sweedlepipe in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. It is something best discussed later, however, in the context of the writing of *Oliver Twist*.¹⁰

The exact date when Dickens began work at Warren's is unknown but seems likely to have been 9 February 1824, two days after his twelfth birthday. Hardly had he had a chance to deal with this apparent extinction for ever of all hopes of the kind of professional or genteel middle-class career he had been brought up to expect than there came another terrible blow. His wonderful gentlemanly father was arrested for debt. After a brief interval in a sponging-house, during which Charles (presumably granted leave from the blacking factory) ran frantic errands trying to borrow some ready money from one source or another, John



4 Old Hungerford Stairs

Dickens entered the Marshalsea Prison, Southwark, on 20 February. 'The sun', he declared with characteristic grandiosity, 'had set on him for ever'. This humiliation of his father must have been an appalling thing for Charles, made worse by his lurid memories of Smollett's description of Marshalsea prisoners in *Roderick Random*. 'I really believed at the time', Dickens told Forster later, 'that they [his parents] had broken my heart.' John had been arrested at the suit of a baker to whom he owed £10 but it has been pointed out that this debt (which, with costs, amounted to £40) was only a holding one and others would doubtless have been put in after his detention. Remarkably, he was still getting his Navy Pay Office salary but next quarter-day was a whole month off and meanwhile there were the outgoings on the house in Gower Street to meet as well as the family's general living expenses. 'Quarter-days', 'Boz' was later to write, no doubt remembering John's difficulties, 'are as eccentric as comets: moving wonderfully quick when you have a good deal to pay, and marvellously slow when you have a little to receive.' On 2 March John addressed a petition from 4 Gower Street North to the Navy Treasurer William Huskisson asking for superannuation on account of ill health ('chronic affection of the Urinary Organs'). He was entitled to a pension of five-twelfths of his salary because of his length of service and retirement would leave him free to seek other employment with which to supplement this.¹¹

Meanwhile he and Elizabeth had to address the present crisis. A debtor's family could join him or her in the Marshalsea if, like John, he or she could pay

for a private room. The Gower Street house, now presumably mostly denuded of furniture, was given up, probably early in April, and Elizabeth and the three younger children, Letitia, Fred and Alfred, moved into the prison while a lodging for the orphan servant-girl was found nearby. Dickens himself was sent to lodge in Little College Street, Camden Town (just around the corner from Bayham Street), with an old family friend, Mrs Roylance, on whose character and personality he later drew when creating the rebarbative Mrs Pipchin in *Dombey and Son*. From Little College Street to Warren's Blacking was nearly three miles. On Sundays he would call for Fanny at the Music Academy and they would go together to the Marshalsea which would mean a twelve-mile walk for him in total. All this must have intensified his sense of banishment from the family bosom, as well as adding such long treks to either end of his working day. His later account of this period in the 'autobiographical fragment' is full of bitterness towards his parents and pity for his younger self (as well as not a little pride in his capacity for survival) but there can surely be no doubt that at the time he would have been deeply unhappy and miserably bewildered both by what was befalling him and by his parents' apparent insouciance. The result was that the figures of inadequate, or downright culpable, parents and hapless, innocent child-victims were deeply imprinted upon his imagination at this time and later became central to his fictional world.¹²

Dickens later told Forster that 'in every respect . . . but elbow-room' his parents and siblings 'lived more comfortably in prison than they had done for a long time out of it' and experienced 'no want of bodily comforts' there. In fact, they were crammed into a low-ceilinged room ten and a half feet square in a stale-smelling, crowded tenement. Although recently rebuilt, the Marshalsea was still a very confined place, unlike the more spacious and comfortable King's Bench Prison to which Dickens later sent Mr Micawber. John may indeed have been able to afford some 'bodily comforts' and he certainly made himself a person of consequence inside the prison by becoming chairman of the inmates' committee that effectively ran the place. Nevertheless, life within the Marshalsea walls would still have been pretty oppressive – though much less so, of course, than for the destitute debtors living 'on the poor side'.¹³

Meanwhile, Dickens was unwittingly continuing that education in the teeming street-life and strange old corners of London that was to be so fundamental to his later artistic triumphs, and to which he was to pay wry tribute in chapter 20 of *Pickwick* when Tony Weller answers Mr Pickwick's enquiry about his son Sam's education by saying he had 'let him run in the streets when he was wery young, and shift for his-self', this being 'the only way to make a boy sharp'. The young Dickens now had ample opportunity, for example, to explore the 'fine, dissipated, insoluble mystery' of Covent Garden, or the differently mysterious 'dark arches' beneath the Adelphi Terrace, to come upon

unexpected sights like coal-heavers dancing outside a riverside public-house, or to observe and hear stories about such weird London characters as the half-crazed ‘White Woman of Berners Street’ who was always dressed as a bride and who was, years later, to contribute to the creation of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*. He could make a close study, too, of his father’s fellow-prisoners in the Marshalsea, remembering them all, as he later wrote, ‘when I looked with my mind’s eye, into the Fleet prison during Mr Pickwick’s incarceration’, and recalling them again later both in *Copperfield* and in *Little Dorrit*. In the evenings he would listen avidly to his mother as she relayed to him all the stories she had heard about, or from, various of the debtors.¹⁴

These evening talks took place after more congenial lodgings had been found for him closer to the prison, in Lant Street (later to be humorously sketched in chapter 32 of *Pickwick*) so that he could breakfast and sup with his family. His new landlord was ‘a fat, good-natured, kind old gentleman’ who was lame and had ‘a quiet old wife’ and ‘a very innocent grown-up son, who was lame too’. He was to remember them all when he came to depict the Garland family in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Sometimes, when waiting for the prison-gates to open in the morning, he would meet his parents’ little maid on London Bridge and tell her ‘quite astonishing fictions about the wharves and the tower’. Perhaps some of them derived from a twopenny magazine he bought every Saturday called *The Portfolio of Entertaining and Instructive Varieties in History, Science, Literature, the Fine Arts, etc.* This paper, although it included much crude sensationalism (‘All of us are in Danger of being Buried Alive’ runs one typical headline), was also full of ‘smart schoolboy humour’ and had definite pretensions to literary merit and middle-class cultural values, as its title indicates. These pretensions, together with the magazine’s fondness for reprinting tales from his beloved *Arabian Nights*, must have represented for Dickens a precious link back to his Chatham schooldays and altogether happier times.¹⁵

John Dickens meanwhile was beginning the process of regaining his freedom through getting himself declared insolvent. His mother died while his application to the Insolvent Debtors’ Court was still in process but he could not touch his £450 bequest since it had to be applied to the settlement of his debts. He was, in fact, discharged from the Marshalsea, ‘per Insolvency Act’, on 28 May, a whole week before his mother’s will had been proved by his brother, the sole executor.¹⁶

The family at first went back to stay with Mrs Roylance in Little College Street and then, according to Forster, moved to somewhere in Hampstead. This meant that Charles’s walks to and from the Strand once again became even longer treks, though he perhaps now had his father for company since John had resumed his duties at Somerset House whilst awaiting the result of his superannuation request. On 29 June 1824 Charles witnessed the ceremony at which Fanny

received the Royal Academy of Music's silver medal and the second prize for the piano and wept to think that he himself had no opportunity to compete for such honours. All he could do was to rival Bob Fagin's dexterity in dealing with the blacking-pots. Unfortunately, the boys' remarkable speed and skill made passers-by stop to stare admiringly in at the window by which they worked in the Chandos Street premises, just a bit north-west of Covent Garden, to which Jonathan Warren had moved his establishment. This exposure of his status as 'a common labouring boy' to the public gaze must have been a searing experience for the young Dickens and it has been persuasively argued that it left an indelible mark upon his art. It may also have been the means of securing his release from Warren's. This public exhibition of his son and heir working at a menial job might, Dickens later believed, have offended his father and have caused the sharp quarrel between him and Lamert that resulted in John's taking his son away. To the boy's incredulous horror, his mother (presumably only too aware of the continuing precariousness of the family finances) exerted herself to patch up the quarrel and came back from Chandos Street with a request for the boy to return the next day. John would not allow this, however, and declared that he should return to school. And so the notorious blacking factory episode, which, according to the latest research, may have lasted much longer than was once assumed – thirteen or fourteen months, an eternity for a twelve-year-old – came at last to a close.¹⁷

At the close of 1824, a couple of months before John Dickens began drawing his pension, the Dickens family moved to Johnson Street, Somers Town, described by the Dickens scholar Frederic Kitton in 1905 as having been 'a poverty-stricken neighbourhood even in those days'. It was a colourful district, however. Successive waves of French and Spanish political refugees had come to live there, as well as a large artistic colony, noted in Hone's *Year Book* for 1826. Many years later, when he was writing *Bleak House* and located the dilettante Harold Skimpole in this neighbourhood, Dickens remembered, and included in his topographical description, the 'poor Spanish refugees walking about in cloaks, smoking little paper cigars' whom he had noticed in his boyhood.¹⁸

The first evidence we have of John's having a new job occurs in September 1826 when we find him writing articles on marine insurance for *The British Press* but it seems likely that he had been working for this paper as a parliamentary reporter for some time previously. The presumption is that some time during 1824/25 he had decided to try journalism, taught himself Gurney's fiendishly complicated system of shorthand, and had begun picking up what reporting and other journalistic work he could. He most likely had help from another brother-in-law, John Henry Barrow, who had contributed to *The British Press* in the past. His financial difficulties continued, as shown by his letter to the Royal Academy of Music of 6 October 1825, asking for an 'order', or I.O.U., to be accepted in lieu of present payment for Fanny's next quarter's

fees. 'A circumstance of great moment to me,' he wrote, 'will be decided in the ensuing term [i.e., legal term of Michaelmas] which I confidently hope will place me in comparative affluence, and by which I shall be enabled to redeem the order before the period of Christmas Day.' Whether this 'circumstance' related to the first pay-out to his creditors, which happened in Rochester on 2 November, we do not know but that would most likely have had to do with his mother's legacy. Here he may have been referring to the possibility of becoming a staffer on *The British Press*, though that would hardly make him 'affluent' – unless, of course, the 'comparative' relates to near-indigence.¹⁹

Continuing difficulties notwithstanding, John was evidently now able to dispense with Charles's six or seven shillings a week and to send him back to school. Charles emerged from Warren's 'with a relief so strange that it was like oppression' and went, as a day boy of course, to the grandly-named Wellington House Academy in the Hampstead Road, which had a reputation, evidently thoroughly undeserved, as 'a very superior sort of school, one of the best indeed in that part of London'. The school was owned and run by one William Jones, whom Dickens later described in a speech in 1857 as 'by far the most ignorant man I have ever had the pleasure to know, who was one of the worst-tempered men perhaps that ever lived, whose business it was to make as much out of us and to put as little into us as possible, and who sold us at a figure which I remember we used to delight to estimate, as amounting to exactly £2.4s.6d a head.' Jones's fondness for thrashing his pupils, especially plump, tightly-clad boys, is well attested in the memories of Dickens's schoolfellows as communicated to Forster and Robert Langton. Dickens afterwards made it a notable attribute of David's brutal schoolmaster, Mr Creakle for whom it was 'like the satisfaction of a craving appetite'.²⁰

Such reminiscences as are on record all agree in describing Dickens as a very lively schoolboy with 'a more than usual flow of spirits', something that the letter quoted at the beginning of the last chapter seems to bear out. An anonymous contributor to *The Dickensian* in 1911 remembered attending a 'juvenile party' in Johnson Street at which young Charles sang a popular comic song, 'The Cat's Meat Man', with 'great energy and action, his tone and manner displaying the full zest with which he appreciated and entered into the vulgarity of the composition'. Evidently, his time in the blacking-factory had left no outward mark upon him unless it were to make him more self-consciously gentlemanly in his bearing and appearance. He held his head 'more erect than lads ordinarily do' and was 'very particular with his clothes . . . a blue sailor costume and a blue cloth cap', appearing always 'like a gentleman's son, rather aristocratic than otherwise'. He seems to have imported into Wellington House from his Chatham schooldays the 'lingo' joke (pretending to be speaking in a foreign language). A favourite occupation among Jones's pupils was, according to two of them who wrote to Forster, the getting up of amateur theatricals, either in the school – though this

is categorically denied by the anonymous writer in *The Dickensian* – or in each other's homes. One of Forster's correspondents remembered Dickens getting up a play in the back-kitchen of a friend's house with an improvised plot and speeches: 'when we had finished, we were quite sure that if there had only been an audience they would all have cried, so deep we made the tragedy'. As already noted, Dickens also belonged to a little club that wrote and circulated small tales, and with a fellow-pupil called John Bowden, he produced something they called *Our Newspaper*, written on scraps of copy-book paper and loaned out on payment of marbles or pieces of slate pencil. As to academic studies, although the personal oddities of some of the ushers (assistant masters) are recalled in these various reminiscences, hardly anything is said about their actual teaching. Dickens may or may not have been taught some Latin at the school (the evidence is conflicting) but as to English, 'his wonderful knowledge and command of English must have been acquired by long and patient study after leaving his last school.' In fact, the foundations of this 'wonderful knowledge and command' had been laid three or four years earlier during his voracious private reading of literary classics in his Chatham days.²¹

From the point of view of Dickens's development as a writer, therefore, the only effect of his two years' schooling at Wellington House would seem to have been to provide him with some good copy for future use. Besides supplying Jones as a model for Creakle Wellington House also provided rich material for Dickens's fanciful reminiscent essay 'Our School' in *Household Words* (11 Oct. 1851). As to what mainly fed his imagination during these two years we must look for this not to the school curriculum but to the various cheap weekly magazines to which he and his schoolfellows were addicted. One that he specially mentioned to Forster was called *The Terrific Register*. With this he could, at the cost of a penny, frighten the very wits out of his head, which, as he told Forster, 'considering there was an illustration to every number, in which there was always a pool of blood, and at least one body, was cheap'. It has been noted that the stories featured in it 'range into torture, incest, the devouring of human bodies, physical details of various horrible methods of execution, and a variety of other such pleasant and profitable subjects'. Clearly, it was stronger meat than *The Portfolio* and had none of that magazine's pretensions to middle-class culture and 'improvement', but Dickens, now restored to his rightful place in society, had no longer any need to be anxious about this and so could dispense with *The Portfolio*. A normal schoolboy now, he could feel free to indulge in 'a taste for crude sensationalism'.²²

We know little about John Dickens's financial situation during 1826/27 except that there was a second pay-out to his creditors on 13 November 1826, and that he experienced repeated difficulties in paying Fanny's fees at the Academy. A severe blow to him must have been the closure of *The British Press* at the end of October 1826 and on 6 February he petitioned Lloyds Insurance Company,

which he had always boosted in the paper, for some compensation since this closure had ‘caused him serious pecuniary inconvenience’ (he was awarded ten guineas). The failure of the paper may have deprived Charles of some little income too in that, as ‘a smart, intelligent, active lad’, he had, according to Samuel Carter Hall, who also worked on *The British Press*, taken to bringing to the paper voluntary reports of accidents or fires not covered by the paper’s regular reporters and to being paid for them as a ‘penny-a-liner’. There was evidently some sort of crisis in the Dickens family finances in March 1827 when they were evicted from their Johnson Street house for non-payment of rates and moved into temporary lodgings in the Polygon, a circle of houses facing outwards in nearby Clarendon Square. Fanny had to leave the Academy in June but returned two months later as a part-time ‘sub-professor’ paid seven shillings for six hours work a week. Meanwhile, Charles left Wellington House for good. He quitted it, one presumes, with little regret, eager to ‘begin the world’ again, as the phrase then went, but this time to do so in a respectable situation.²³

Elizabeth Dickens had a married aunt, Elizabeth Charlton, who kept a boarding-house in Berners Street (the notorious White Woman’s beat). She often visited this aunt and sometimes took Charles or Fanny with her. Lodging with Mrs Charlton was a young solicitor called Edward Blackmore whom Elizabeth begged to find employment for Charles. Since, as Blackmore later recalled, the boy was ‘exceedingly good-looking and clever’ and had very prepossessing manners, he was happy to take him on as a junior clerk, and in May 1827 Dickens began working for the firm of Ellis and Blackmore in Gray’s Inn, where he was to remain until November 1828. Both Blackmore himself and the firm’s articled clerk George Lear contributed their memories of Dickens to Frederic Kitton’s 1890 compilation *Charles Dickens by Pen and Pencil*. Both men recall something that happened on Dickens’s first day at the office. He had turned up wearing ‘a military-looking cap which had a strap under the chin’ and carried it ‘rather jauntily on one side of his head’. He was sent out on an errand and returned with a black eye. Asked by Lear how he had come by it, he explained:

a big blackguard fellow knocked my cap off as I was crossing over Chancery Lane from the Lincoln’s Inn gateway. He said ‘Halloa, sojer!’ which I could not stand, so I at once struck him and he then hit me in the eye. A gentleman who was crossing at the same time said to the fellow, ‘You blackguard! how could you dare to hit a little fellow in that way?’ His answer was ready, – ‘Vy, he hit me fust!’

This reads like a miniature ‘Sketch by Boz’ and prompts us to recognise the extent to which Blackmore’s reminiscences, and still more Lear’s, show how the writer of the 1834 *Morning Chronicle* ‘Street Sketches’ was already stirring

in the fifteen-year-old junior clerk they are recalling. They certainly recognised this themselves. Blackmore wrote, 'His knowledge of London was wonderful, for he could describe the position of every shop in any of the West End streets' and Lear remembered that 'having been in London two years, I thought I knew something of town, but after a little talk with Dickens I found that I knew nothing. He knew it all from Bow to Brentford.' Lear also remembered how his new colleague 'could imitate, in a manner that I have never heard equalled, the low population of the streets of London in all their varieties, whether mere loafers or sellers of fruit, vegetables, or anything else'.²⁴

It was very soon after Dickens had started work for Ellis and Blackmore, in fact, that the original Boz was born, in the shape of his last sibling, Augustus Newnham Dickens (the second name honouring a former neighbour in Ordnance Terrace who had just died and left a little money to Letitia). The new baby was given the family nickname of Moses after Dr Primrose's gullible son in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, a name that he pronounced as 'Boses' when he began to talk. The family adopted this and shortened it to Boz (ardent Dickensians still dispute as to whether it should be pronounced with a short or long o), the pen-name Dickens adopted when he first wrote for money.

Both Blackmore and Lear also comment on Dickens's passion for the theatre, something he shared with a salaried clerk in the office called Potter, who carried his enthusiasm so far as to pay to act in a cheap theatre in Catherine Street, off the Strand. Dickens and Lear sometimes went to watch him and Dickens drew richly on his memories of such visits, at the same time distancing himself from this somewhat tawdry former activity, several years later in his sketch 'Private Theatres' published in the *Evening Chronicle* on 11 August 1835. There he describes such establishments as being patronised mainly by 'dirty boys, low copying-clerks in attorneys' offices . . . and a choice miscellany of idle vagabonds.' He also introduces Potter by name into another, more raffish, sketch involving a theatre, 'Making a Night of It' (*Bell's Life in London*, 18 Oct. 1835), where Potter features as a city rather than an attorney's clerk, and is distinguished by an 'off hand, dashing, amateur pickpocket sort of manner'. Nor, if we are to believe Blackmore and Lear, was Potter the only figure Dickens encountered during his two years in the offices of Ellis and Blackmore who would later serve him as a model for an eccentric character. They also mention a broken-down farmer called Newman Knott who called regularly at the office to collect an allowance made to him by friends from his more prosperous days and link him with Newman Noggs in *Nickleby*. Lear also mentions an original for Miss Flite in *Bleak House* who was known as 'the Little Old Lady of the Court of Chancery'. She was 'the victim of some prolonged Chancery suit which had turned her head'.

Far and away the greatest contribution these two years made to Dickens's later literary achievements, however, was the experience it gave him of some of

the arcane mysteries of legal London, and the opportunity to observe the habits and hear the talk of the men, mainly of low or middling professional status, who made their living from the law. Lear admired the pinpoint accuracy of Dickens's portrayal of the various gradations of lawyers' clerks in chapter 31 of *Pickwick*, and the law and its practitioners feature prominently in his writings from the clerks, attorneys and barristers of *Pickwick* right through to Grewgious and Bazzard in *Edwin Drood*, most notably, of course, in his great masterpiece *Bleak House*. Lear also mentions that his firm did much work as agents for country solicitors and remembers that Dickens 'soon became very handy in doing the work at the public offices, and the old clerks who presided over the business in them, both Chancery and Common Law, came in for his imitations and descriptions'. Among the public offices young Dickens would have had to attend for business were 'the Alienation Office, the Affidavit Office, the Clerk of the Escheats, the Dispensation Office, the Filazer's, Exigenter's and Clerk of the Outlawry's Office, the Hanaper Office, the Enrolment Office, the Pell Office, the Prothonotaries' Office, the Six-Clerks Office and the Sixpenny Receivers Office'. The sheer oddity of many aspects of the world in which he was now moving must, one feels, have been some compensation to Dickens for the 'drudgery' of much of his office work. It was this drudgery that Blackmore believed was the reason for Dickens's leaving the firm in the winter of 1828. The literary barrister, and later judge, James Fitzjames Stephen, who delighted to lambaste Dickens in *The Saturday Review* from the mid 1850s on, crushingly (and snobbishly) observed in 1857 that Dickens's 'notions of law, which occupy so large a space in his books, are precisely those of an attorney's clerk'. But it was having occupied that very position that gave Dickens the opportunity to observe, at ground level, so to speak, ways in which the law could affect individuals – sometimes in the most mystifying and alarming way – and also how it specialised in making business for itself, how legal processes could become ends in themselves with very comfortable results for many of the law's practitioners. Both these perceptions were to be fundamental to the later presentation, both comic and sinister, of law and lawyers in his fiction and also in some trenchant journalistic pieces.²⁵

When he left Ellis and Blackmore Dickens transferred for a few months to the office of another solicitor, Charles Molloy of New Square, Lincoln's Inn, but was beginning to chafe at the routine and restrictions and life as an attorney's clerk ('a lawyer's office', he wrote a few years later in a letter outlining the very brief and sanitised version of his biography that he was prepared to make public, 'is a very little world, and a very dull one'). For all his continuing enjoyment of larks, he was now past the stage of being one of those 'office lads' he later described in *Pickwick* chapter 31 who 'in their first surtouts . . . feel a befitting contempt for boys at day-schools: club as they go home at nights for saveloys and porter: and think there's nothing like "life"'. He was, after all, no longer an undersized boy

but, in the latter months of his time at Ellis and Blackmore's, had, as it seemed to George Lear, 'grown into a young man at once' who one day, Lear remembered, presented himself in 'a new suit of clothes, brown all alike, coat cut like a dress coat, and with a high hat'.²⁶

Dickens seems to have decided, after a few months working for Molloy, that the time had come for him to strike out in a different line, in a wider world. The one lasting benefit he derived from his time there was the close friendship he formed with Molloy's articled clerk Thomas Mitton whose family lived near to the Dickenses in Somers Town (they had resumed occupation of the house in Johnson Street but it is not clear on what basis). Mitton seems to have been a rather eccentric, and somewhat prickly, character but he and Dickens stayed close friends for decades, with Dickens relying on his advice in many matters. Mitton acted, in fact, as Dickens's solicitor until the 1850s, and continued to deal with certain business matters for him after that. He was especially helpful to Dickens in the 1830s and 1840s, responding to requests for small loans early on and generally helping to deal with the recurrent difficulties caused by John Dickens's fecklessness in financial matters.²⁷

As far as change of career was concerned, the most obvious thing for Dickens to do was to follow his father's example and try for success as a journalist. The fact that he had a close family relative active in that world, his uncle John Henry Barrow, who might be able to give him a helping hand, must have been an added incentive. Another, but riskier, possibility was the stage. Dickens had apparently boasted to Lear of his father's intimacy with some of the leading actors of the day but we have no evidence for this, and, if he tried for an acting career, he would have to rely on his own talents. These were indeed considerable (Lear marvelled at his ability to imitate to perfection the speech and manners of so many of the contemporary stars of the stage) but, even so, the lack of contacts would have been a drawback. As will appear later, he by no means abandoned the idea of a stage career but evidently decided to try journalism first. Accordingly, he set vigorously to work to tame what *David Copperfield* was later to call 'that savage stenographic mystery', just as his father had done before him.²⁸

Notes

1. 'sharp little worldly and also kindly ways': *F* 30; 'a sort of cupboard . . . over the [main] stairway': Willoughby Matchett, 'Dickens in Bayham Street', *D* 5 (1909), 147–52, 180–4 (Matchett photographed the house before its demolition in 1910).
2. *Daily Telegraph*, 7 and [?] Dec. 1871, quoted by Walter Thornbury and Edward Walford in *Old and New London* (1873–78) V, 314–15.
3. 'a unique of talents': *F* 836; 'famous and caressed and happy': *F* 26.
4. 'Although Charles had given promise . . .': W.J. Carlton, 'Fanny Dickens, Pianist and Vocalist', *D* 53 (1957), 133–43; 'a prodigy': *F* 12; for Mr Smuggins see *SB*, 'The Streets – Night', for Little Swills see *BH*, ch.11.
5. 'a treat that served him . . .': *F* 11; 'kindhearted and generous father . . .': *F* 10 (JF quotes from what he calls a 'sketch' of John Dickens that he says CD gave him as, apparently, something separate from the autobiographical fragment but see Philip Collins's comment in his 'Dickens's Autobiographical Fragment and *David Copperfield*, *Cahiers Victorians et Edouardiens* no.20 (Montpellier, 1984, 93).
6. 'like a special correspondent for posterity': Walter Bagehot, 'Charles Dickens', *National Review*, Oct. 1858 (quoted Collins, *CH*, 394); for CD's visits to Thomas Barrow see *PI*, 144; 'stole down to the market . . .': *F* 12 (the description of Covent Garden occurs in a comic poem called 'The Elder Brother' which begins: 'Centrick, in London noise and London follies, / Proud Covent Garden blooms, in smoky glory; / For chairmen, coffee-rooms, piazzas, dollies / Cabbages and comedians, famed in story'); 'attraction of repulsion': *F* 11; 'the London night-sights as he returned . . .': *F* 12; 'knew his duty and did it': *Journalism* II, 157 ('Gone Astray').
7. one distinguished Dickens scholar: see Kathleen Tillotson, 'The Middle Years from the *Carol* to *Copperfield*', *Dickens Memorial Lectures*, The Dickens Fellowship (1970), 12.
8. the father of Turner: see W.J. Carlton, 'The Barber of Dean Street', *D* 48 (1952), 8–12; 'delicate hashes . . .': *F* 12; 'to the most delicate and voluptuous palate': Alain-René Le Sage, *The Adventures of Gil Blas of Santillane*, trans. Tobias Smollett (1749), Bk. II, ch.1; 'never tired of reviewing . . .': *F* 12.
9. 'several Sums of Money': see Angus Easson, '“I, Elizabeth Dickens”: Light on John Dickens's Legacy', *D* 67 (London, 1971), 35–40; 'do something', *F* 13; 'little dens, or closets': *Journalism* I, 184.
10. 'took the liberty of using his name . . .': *F* 25; the most famous and influential discussion of CD's use of the name Fagin is Steven Marcus's Freudian take on the subject in an appendix, 'Who is Fagin?', to his *Dickens: from Pickwick to Dombey* (London, 1965).
11. For date of CD's starting work at Warren's see Michael Allen, *Charles Dickens' Childhood* (1988; hereafter cited as Allen), 81; 'the sun was set upon him for ever', 'I really believed at the time . . .': *F* 13; for the amount for which John Dickens was arrested see Angus Easson, 'The Mythic Sorrows of Charles Dickens', *Literature and History*, I (1975), 49–61; 'quarter-days are as eccentric as comets': *SB*, 'Making a Night of It'; for John Dickens's petition and pension arrangements see Angus Easson, 'John Dickens and the Navy Pay Office', *D* 70 (1974), 41.
12. For details of distances given in this para. see Allen 86.
13. 'In every respect . . . but elbow-room': *F* 30; for details about the prison see Trey Philpotts, 'The Real Marshalsea', *D* 87 (1992), 131–45, also Angus Easson, 'Marshalsea Prisoners: Mr Dorrit and Mr Hemens', *DSA* 3 (1974), 77–86.
14. 'fine, dissipated, insoluble mystery': 'Where We Stopped Growing', *HW* 1 Jan. 1853 (*Journalism* III, 105–12); 'dark arches': *F* 31; coalheavers dancing: *DC*, ch.11; the 'White Woman' of Berners Street appears in 'Where We Stopped Growing'.

15. 'a fat, good-natured, kind old gentleman . . .': F 30; 'quite astonishing fictions . . .': *ibid.*; 'smart schoolboy humour': see Gillian Thomas, 'Dickens and *The Portfolio*', D 68 (1972; hereafter cited as Thomas), 167–74.
16. See Angus Easson, '“I, Elizabeth Dickens.” Light on John Dickens's Legacy', D 67(1971), 35–42.
17. For the possible effect on CD's art of his being stared at see John Carey, *The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens's Imagination*, 2nd edn (London, 1991), 104; for the length of time CD worked at the blacking factory see Allen 102–03.
18. 'a poverty-stricken neighbourhood . . .': Kitton, *P and P*, 132; 'poor Spanish refugees . . .': *BH*, ch. 43.
19. For John Dickens and *The British Press* see Allen 110; for Gurney's shorthand see W. J. Carlton, *Charles Dickens. Shorthand Writer* (London, 1926); 'A circumstance of great moment . . .': D 9 (1913), 148, reprinted Allen 111.
20. 'with a relief so strange . . .': F 35; 'a very superior sort of school . . .': F 43; 'by far the most ignorant man . . .': *Speeches*, 240; 'like the satisfaction of a craving appetite': *DC*, ch. 7.
21. 'with great energy . . .': D 7(1911), 229; 'more erect than lads ordinarily do . . .': F 41; 'very particular with his clothes . . .': F 835, *n.*; 'when we had finished . . .': F 835; for *Our Newspaper* see Langton 89; 'his wonderful knowledge . . .': F 43.
22. 'Our School': see *Journalism* III, 35–42; 'considering there was an illustration . . .': F 43f., *n.*; It has been noted . . .: see R. S. McMaster, 'Dickens and the Horrific', *Dalhousie Review* 38 (1958), 14–28; 'taste for crude sensationalism': Thomas 172.
23. For details of John Dickens's dealing with the Royal Academy of Music see W. J. Carlton, 'Fanny Dickens. Pianist and Vocalist', D 53 (1957), 133–43; for John Dickens and Lloyd's see Allen 110; 'a smart intelligent lad . . .': Samuel Carter Hall, *Retrospect of a Long Life; from 1815 to 1883* (1883) I, 111, quoted by Allen 110; the Polygon address is known from 'Mr George Lear's Recollections', Kitton, *P and P*, 130–3.
24. All material in this paragraph is drawn from 'Mr Edward Blackmore's Recollections' and 'Mr George Lear's Recollections' in Kitton, *P and P*, 129–33.
25. 'the Alienation Office . . .': see W. J. Carlton, 'Mr Blackmore Engages an Office Boy', D 48 (1952), 162–7; Dickens's 'notions of law . . .': Collins, *CH* 369; trenchant journalistic pieces: examples might be: 'A Poor Man's Tale of a Patent' (*HW*, 19 Oct. 1850; *Journalism* II, 284–90), 'Things That Cannot Be Done' (*HW*, 8 Oct. 1853; *Journalism* III, 174–9) and 'Legal and Equitable Jokes' (*HW*, 218–25; *Journalism* III, 218–25); the classic discussion of CD and the law is to be found in William S. Holdsworth, *Charles Dickens as a Legal Historian* (London, 1929).
26. 'a lawyer's office . . .': *PI*, 423.
27. See William J. Carlton, 'The Strange Story of Thomas Mitton', D 56 (1960), 141–52.
28. 'savage stenographic mystery': *DC*, ch. 43.



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Part II
The Romantic Child in Victorian
Times



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The 'Cult of Sensibility' and the 'Romantic Child'

Peter Coveney

THE literary climate in which the Romantic child developed was prepared in the half-century from Rousseau's *Emile* to Wordsworth's *Prelude*. His appearance lay in the opposition of two centuries, the eighteenth and nineteenth; in the development of the 'cult of sensibility'; in the 'revolt', as J. S. Mill, in his *Essay on Coleridge*, called it, of the 'human mind against the philosophy of the eighteenth century'; in the whole movement of the late eighteenth century from Reason to Feeling.

Literary generalizations notoriously distort and underestimate the figures who go to make them. No period demands a minimum of generality and a maximum of particular reference more than the half-century from Rousseau to Wordsworth and Coleridge. The 'cult of sensibility' conjures the influence of Rousseauism, of Richardson and Sterne; and the 'revolt' of Mill's essay gives precisely the influence of Coleridge upon nineteenth-century thought; and it might be objected that to align the two is to invite confusion. But it is the continuity of interest, the intellectual focus which gives the character to the generation of the Pre-Romantics, and allows us to talk of a central conflict between Reason and Feeling, within which the romantic child was created.

The eighteenth century had seen a consolidation of the achievement of the closing decades of the seventeenth. Newton's *Principia* and Locke's *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding* initiated a period of wide intellectual acceptances and assurance. Addison's 'shining frame' and 'spacious firmament' proclaimed their 'great Original'. 'The works of Nature everywhere sufficiently evidence a Deity,' said Locke, and Shaftesbury declared the deity 'the best-natured Being in the world'. To another, Man lived in a 'spacious and well-furnished world', and to yet another, the 'Works of the

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Lord' were 'incomparably contrived, and as admirably made, fitted up, and placed in the World'.

There was indeed a savour of a cosmic estate agency about the thought of the age; of tensions relaxed within the general frame of things. If a century before the fear had been that the 'frame of things' might 'disjoint', Newtonian science had provided, for those who wanted to accept it, a new frame, within which a rational universe was seen to pursue its natural laws in sensible assurance and peace. Tragic possibilities disappeared from literature; the nervous line of earlier seventeenth-century verse gave way to the measured Augustan cadence. The scope of literature became contained within the potentialities of satire, which in itself presupposes an order fundamentally accepted. Satire is an emanation from order itself, investigating such factors as 'bad taste', which would be likely to disrupt its underlying values; and the greatest Augustan literature is satirical.

But the cosmic peace, the 'cosmic Toryism', as Professor Willey has called one aspect of it, was short-lived. The imperfections of the social and political order of the old régime brought against itself inevitable ridicule. The wars, corruption, injustice, and brutality of eighteenth-century Europe suggested that the cosmic frame, orderly though it might be, contained a blurred and imperfect picture, and gave the edge to Voltaire's ironic '*Tous les événements sont enchaînés dans le meilleur des mondes possibles*'. Order, Nature, and Reason remained; but they now became the basis of 'perfectibility', of Reason applied to human institutions. The rationalism of acceptance of the early century became by the middle the newer rationalism of discontent, which in time informed the optimisms of the French Enlightenment and the social engineering of the Revolution itself. If Newton had revealed the Divine Original Engineer in the universe, perfectibility would reveal the perfect engine of man in the body social and politic. It became a common acceptance of dissident thought by the middle of the century that social imperfections might be eradicated, and man's unruly superstition controlled, by the application of Reason and the human engineering made possible by the fundamental application of 'associationism'.

A passage from Mill is relevant:

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Every consistent scheme of philosophy requires as its starting-point, a theory respecting the sources of human knowledge. . . . The prevailing theory in the eighteenth century . . . was that proclaimed by Locke, and commonly attributed to Aristotle – that all knowledge consists of generalizations from experience. Of nature, or anything whatever external to ourselves, we know, according to this theory, nothing, except the facts which present themselves to our senses, and such other facts as may, by analogy, be inferred from these. There is no knowledge *a priori*; no truths cognizable by the mind’s inward light, and grounded on intuitive evidence. . . . From this doctrine, Coleridge, with the German philosophers since Kant . . . strongly dissents.

This account of the basic premise of the century stands as it did when Mill wrote it. A quotation from Locke serves to show it at its source:

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas: How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from EXPERIENCE.

The deliberately diminishing implications of ‘busy and boundless fancy’, ‘painted’, and ‘endless variety’ find their vanishing point in Locke’s ‘one word’.

This materialist determinism informed the thought of the whole generation of *philosophes* in France; and in England, Hartley, in his *Observations on Man* (1749), following the mechanics of Newtonian science, desired to explain the mind in terms of a mechanism. Knowledge for him, as for the whole school, proceeded by association between the senses and the external world; not from the intuitive sensibility, not from the Imagination of the Romantics, not from the Vision of Blake; but from the sense-perceptions only, by which men are linked to their physical environment. Remove their environment and all men are equal; determine the environment and you may contrive man’s happiness.

It was this determinism which Priestley developed from Hartley, and Godwin vulgarized at the end of the century. It was through Bentham that it was transmitted into practical application in England in the nineteenth century. He acquired the first statement of the moral

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mathematics of the utilitarian calculus from Priestley's *First Principles of Government*:

It was from that pamphlet, and that page of it [that contained the phrase, the greatest happiness of the greatest number] that I drew the phrase, the words and import of which have been so widely diffused over the civilized world.

For morality itself, following the premise, was reducible to sensation. Values were not absolutes cognizable by man through his human nature, but a matter merely of pleasure and pain. The moral hedonism of Bentham derived essentially from the sensationalism of Locke.

It was, then, against this materialist, rationalist, perfectionist, and essentially secular eighteenth century that Rousseau, Blake, and pre-eminently Coleridge reacted. The thought of the century was abstract, intellectual, contemptuous of the past. 'How glorious, then, is the prospect, the reverse of all that is past, which is now opening upon us, and upon the world,' declared Priestley at the outbreak of the Revolution in France, and he was not untypical.

Rousseau's 'natural man', Blake's 'Vision', Coleridge's 'Imagination', and, in political thought, Burke's principle of 'human nature', were all solvents of the rationalist order of the *philosophes*. When Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* declared that 'politics ought to be adjusted, not to human reasonings, but to human nature; of which the reason is but a part, and by no means the greatest part', he was declaring himself on the side of those who reacted against the intellectualism of the century, on the side of those who glorified Feeling. He was, in fact, through an irony of misunderstanding, on the side of his anathematized Rousseau.

The establishment of the child as a literary theme was everywhere closely related to this reinstatement of Feeling. The rationalist school had itself been continually concerned with the theory of education. Locke's own *Thoughts Concerning Education* had in fact informed a whole tradition of educational theory. But the tradition was associationist; concerning itself with the swift creation, through controlled environment, of the rational adult man. It seldom considered the nature of the child as a child. Treated as a small adult, the child was to be trained out of his childish ways into the moral and rational per-

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fection of regulated manhood. The child was the *tabula rasa* upon which, through education, sensation could work its beneficent influence. The tradition culminated in England in the work of Godwin, to be parodied in life in the education of J. S. Mill, and in fiction in the Gradgrindery of *Hard Times*. The cult of the child which informed the romantic literature of childhood lay with the opposing school, with the ‘cult of sensibility’ associated with Rousseau:

As the eighteenth century wore on [says Professor Willey], it was discovered that the ‘Nature’ of man was not his ‘reason’ at all, but his instincts, emotions, and ‘sensibilities’, and what was more, people began to glory in this discovery, and to regard Reason as an aberration from ‘Nature’. *Cogito ergo sum* is superseded by *je sens, donc je suis*, associated with Rousseau.

About nothing did Rousseau *feel* more passionately than about childhood. His influence lies behind the whole progressive concentration of interest upon the child in the second half of the century. He more than any other created the climate in which Blake, Wordsworth, Lamb, Southey and Coleridge wrote.

Rousseau is an essentially ambiguous figure. Decried as an intellectual libertine by some (Dr Johnson thought him fit to be run from any civilized country), for others, he was the seminal authority of the Revolution which brought the triumph of Reason and Intellect in France. More than half the misunderstanding came from his own intellectual flamboyance; from his chronic inability to deny himself the extravagant pleasure of saying almost everything for the sake of effect.

If we associate with him the ‘cult of sensibility’, the ‘noble savage’, ‘*l’homme nouveau*’, it is to be remembered that he wrote when there was already a growing predisposition to consider the ‘Nature of Man’ and ‘Man in a state of Nature’. Hume, in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1738), had through Reason declared the limits of Reason, and had, in Halévy’s words, found that ‘it is good to trust instinct, to give oneself up to Nature without being duped by any logical illusions’. Before Hume, Reason had been associated with Nature; after him, Nature became inextricably related to Feeling. In many ways he lay at the turning-point of the century.

Already, too, before Rousseau, there had been a reaction away

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from the pessimistic concept of human nature propagated by religion through its doctrine of original sin, and by the brutal strictures on human motive contained in Hobbes. A long tradition of Hebrew and Christian literature postulated the uncorrupted nature of the child, which had found expression in the verse of Vaughan and Traherne. The perfect 'pre-existent' state was an idea common to the Cambridge Platonists. Shaftesbury and Hutcheson had both declared man's benevolence in Nature. Shaftesbury speaks of 'that simplicity and innocence of behaviour which has been often known among mere savages, ere they were corrupted by our commerce . . . 'twould be an advantage to us to hear the causes of . . . our deviation from Nature'. Hutcheson described the natural state as one of 'Good-will, Humanity, Compassion, mutual aid, propagating and supporting off-spring'. Already the first impact on the strongholds of original sin were made on behalf of original innocence before Rousseau's *Emile*. The voyages of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had stimulated interest in primitive cultures; and it became an accepted formula for satire in the early century to contrast the original virtue of the savage with the debilitating corruptions of artificial society. The way of the tide was clear in La Drévetière's *Arlequin Sauvage* (1721), which was done into English in 1738 as *Art and Nature*. The last, significant word is given to the Indian:

Come with me then. I'll take you to a country where we shall have no need of money to make us happy, nor laws to make us wise; Our Friendship shall be our Riches. . . . No, no, let us go, and enjoy ourselves, and be happy as Nature and Common-Sense can make us!¹

'Nature' and 'Common-Sense' make a remarkable meeting-point for the two opposing cults of the century.

Rousseau's great contribution was to give authoritative expression to the new sensibility, and to direct its interest towards childhood as the period of life when man most closely approximated to the 'state of Nature'. His primary demand was, and it is perhaps difficult for us to see it as quite the revolutionary idea it was, that the child is important in himself, and not as a diminutive adult. For him the child was not the passive creature of external perception, but a self-active

1. Translated: Louis de Lisle de la Drévetière's *Arlequin Sauvage*, Paris, 1721.

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soul, endowed with natural tendencies to virtue from birth, which in a state of nature could be developed, and, with extreme care, be nourished slowly towards the necessities of social existence. As early as his *First Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* he diagnosed a division between natural and social man. Society's ills derived, he declared, from man's departure from the state of natural grace: 'Our minds have been corrupted in proportion as the arts and sciences have improved.' He carried this anti-intellectualism further in his *Second Discourse*, in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and in the great educational treatise, *Emile*.

Lord Morley in his work on Rousseau placed *Emile* well enough:

[It is] one of the seminal books in the history of literature, and of such books the worth resides less in the parts than in the whole. It touched the deeper things of character. It filled parents with a sense of the dignity . . . of their task. . . . It admitted floods of light and air into the tightly closed nurseries and schoolrooms. . . . It was the charter of youthful deliverance.

Rousseau was indeed so seminal that if anyone now bewails the relaxation of discipline in the schools, he pays hostile, if unconscious tribute to the latter-day influence of his theories.

The first, typical gesture of the book is well remembered: '*Tout est bien sortant des mains de l'Auteur des choses; tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme.*' The public corruption of the day required this extravagant assertion. The secluded country life in which *Emile* was to be reared in the solitary company of his tutor was a condition in part forced on Rousseau, though it accorded well with the fashionable primitivism of the times. Although, in fact, he never made of it an absolute, it became the best remembered part of the whole educational romance. The popular climate any great thinker creates seldom reflects his own more subtle intentions. The importance of Rousseau lies as much in what became Rousseauism as in the gospel of *Emile* itself.

The central emphasis of the book lay on the assertion that the primary concern of all education should be the identity and peculiar nature of the child itself. The whole approach to childhood before Rousseau is nowhere better seen than in the fashionable dressing up of children as little adults. Art provides no more pathetic sight than

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the portraiture of this and the previous century with its little Dutch and English children starched into lace and taffeta before their time. But for Rousseau:

Nature wants children to be children before they are men. If we deliberately pervert this order, we shall get premature fruits which are neither ripe nor well-flavoured, and which soon decay. . . . Childhood has ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling peculiar to itself; nothing can be more foolish than to substitute our ways for them.

And again in the Preface:

We know nothing of childhood: and with our mistaken notions the further we advance the further we go astray. The wisest writers devote themselves to what a man ought to know, without asking what a child is capable of learning. They are always looking for the man in the child, without considering what he is before he becomes a man.

True education is simply the development of the original nature of the child.

And, for Rousseau, the 'original nature' of the child was innocence.

Let us lay it down as an incontrovertible rule that the first impulses of nature are always right; there is no original sin in the human heart; the how and why of the entrance of every vice can be traced.

This was different indeed from Watts's 'All the elect are born into this world, sinful and miserable', and from Janeway's *A Token for Children* (1671-2), in which he counselled parents to 'take some time daily to speak a little to your children one by one about their miserable condition by nature'. 'They are not too little to die,' he said, 'not too little to go to hell.'

Rousseau denied the whole solemn and substantial literature of the Christian 'fallen state'. For him all deviations from virtue derive from environment, from the ill-considered direction of parents and teachers. Previously moral education had lain in restraints imposed upon natural vice by rational virtue; and throughout medieval and Elizabethan times the chief restraint had been so often the actual sanction of corporal punishment - 'God's instrument to cure the evils of their condition'. For Rousseau, punishment, if there were to be any, should more justly fall on those who by their unwisdom corrupt the natural virtue of the child. Discipline he accepted; but its

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restraint should grow naturally from within, through the lessons of experience. If a child broke a window, he should be made to sleep in the draught caused thereby and thus learn natural wisdom. The method may have overlooked certain obvious possibilities; but religious exaggerations had often led to harsh repression. His theories removed the natural behaviour of children from an atmosphere of religious abomination and sin.

From these basic positions, Rousseau moved to the actual education of the child. At each stage he demanded that the child's particular nature should be respected. In infancy, everything should stimulate his senses and cultivate his body. His mind, his reasoning faculty, should be kept dormant for as long as possible. In childhood, his rational powers should be stimulated by activity only, and never by argument, never by words. Throughout his education the child should be confronted by the consequences of action, and never be deadened by the weight of abstract words. ‘What do they teach? Words, words, words! To conceal their deficiencies teachers choose the dead languages.’

And then, from twelve to fifteen, the same anti-intellectual, anti-literary principle continues. ‘Do, and don't say; only where it is necessary.’ Books should be entirely forbidden, except for *Robinson Crusoe*, which alone could show the child how man in isolation might face his environment and subdue it. As for the rest: ‘I detest books. . . . Reading is the scourge of childhood. They [books] merely teach us to talk about things we know nothing about.’

In adolescence, however, moral and social considerations must inevitably present themselves. Sexual passion could scarcely be contained experimentally. Here, indeed, the ‘negative’ method tended to break down. But, even so, the conscious ‘teaching’, the positive education he disliked so much, should be carefully withheld, even at this stage, until the child had acquired his first restraints for himself, naturally.

Later eighteenth-century educational theory became largely a gloss on the ideas conveyed so forcefully into the European consciousness through Rousseau's *Emile*. The vital genius of the book inspired the whole progressive school of educational thought in the nineteenth century. If original sin had informed the Christian centuries in

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their attitude to childhood, it is Rousseau's *Emile* that dominates the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries until Freud.

*Hommes, soyez humains, c'est votre premier devoir. . . . Aimez l'enfance, favorisez ses jeux, ses plaisirs, son aimable instinct. Qui de vous n'a pas regretté cet âge où le rire est toujours sur les lèvres et où l'âme est toujours en paix? Pourquoi voulez-vous ôter à ces petits innocents la jouissance d'un temps si court qui leur échappe . . . ? Pourquoi voulez-vous remplir d'amertume et de douleurs ces premiers ans si rapides, qui ne reviendront pas plus pour eux qu'ils ne peuvent revenir pour vous? Pères, savez-vous le moment où la mort attend vos enfants? . . . Faites qu'à quelque heure que Dieu les appelle, ils ne meurent point sans avoir goûté la vie.*¹

No one of Rousseau's stature and influence had written in this way of children before. This lyrical enthusiasm, this humanist rhetoric, which can only properly be sensed in its original, echoed throughout the romantic literature of the child; even, and, perhaps most significantly, its sentimental appeal to nostalgic regret.

The effect in England was immediate. The book was announced in August 1762 in the *Monthly Review*. The following month the *London Chronicle* published an article with extracts. Nugent's translation followed in 1763. M. Roddier, in his *Rousseau en Angleterre*, computes that at least 200 treatises were published before the end of the century, all in some way influenced by *Emile*. Some were no more than fashionable exercises on a theme. Many echoed Mrs Macaulay in her *Letters on Education* (1790):

There is not a virtue or a vice that belongs to humanity, which we do not make ourselves. . . . There is not a wretch who ends his miserable being on a wheel, as the forfeit of his offences against society, who may not throw the whole blame of his misdemeanors on his education.

All were in sympathy with Lord Kames's *Loose Hints upon Education* when he declared himself chiefly concerned with the culture of the

1. 'Men, be human beings; this is your first duty. . . . Love childhood, indulge its games, its pleasures, and its lovable nature. Who has not looked back with regret on an age when laughter is always on the lips and when the spirit is always at peace? Why take from these little innocents the pleasure of a time so short which ever escapes them . . . ? Why fill with bitterness and sorrow these first swift years which will never return for them any more than they can return for you? Fathers, do you know the moment when death awaits your children? . . . Make sure that whenever God calls them, they do not die without ever having tasted life.'

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heart; since, as he thought, the heart was in great measure overlooked by writers upon education.

One of the most famous examples of Rousseau's direct influence was of course the education of Richard Lovell Edgeworth's son, Dick, who, through his father's youthful enthusiasms, was reared in the manner of *Emile*. Edgeworth wrote his *Memoirs* (1808) long after the first impulse of his optimism was spent. His account of the boy's education is half-sketched, and therefore the more tantalizing; one would like more detail of what actually happened. Evidently, left to his own freedom, the child became ‘frank, generous, and courageous’, but even before the father took him to Paris to present him to the author of *Emile*, the boy showed signs of too little ‘deference for others’. Walking the Paris streets for two hours with the philosopher, the child displayed excessive prejudice and enthusiasm for England; every horse and cart they saw being roundly declared by the boy to be ‘English’. Unable to give the child continuous attention, Edgeworth delivered him over first to tutors and then to the care of an English public school. Disowned for his persistent waywardness, the boy went for the Navy, and after a period of service, settled in America, to die at the early age of thirty-two.

Edgeworth realized that he was as much to blame as the system he adopted. Disillusioned, he declared the system ‘erroneous’, but when he came to write, in collaboration with his more famous daughter, his *Essays on Practical Education* (1798), he could still write: ‘... we see many [children] whose temper and whose understanding have been materially injured by premature ... instruction; we see many who are disgusted, perhaps irrevocably, with literature, whilst they are fluently reading books which they cannot comprehend. ...’

Edgeworth's early enthusiasm had been greatly stimulated by his somewhat bizarre friend, Thomas Day, who in a letter of 1769 had written to him: ‘If all the books in the world were destroyed, the first I should wish to save after the Bible would be Rousseau's *Emile*. ... The more I read it, the more I admire it!’ Day was a strange, unkempt youth, fearful of women, yet desperately searching for his own ‘Sophie’, his own perfect wife. Enthusiastically adopting two young orphan girls, he hoped in them to rear himself a wife. He reared them (until decency required their being sent away to school

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at Sutton Coldfield), performing endless experiments on their characters, so rumour had it, which included the firing of blank cartridges close to their ears, and the pouring of boiling wax on their arms, chastising them if they flinched for their lack of moral courage.

Not all of Rousseau's influence, however, lay in such diverting eccentricity. A whole flourish of 'Indian' plays, celebrating the cult of Nature, were in frequent production from the sixties until the turn of the century. Although the minor novels of 'sensibility' of Mrs Frances Brooke, Mrs Inchbald, Bage and Charlotte Smith may have derived their general character from Richardson and Sterne, their theme was often enough Rousseau's:

When I see the dumb creation, my dear Harry, pursuing steadily the purposes of their being . . . I am astonished at the . . . degeneracy of man. . . . It has always appeared to me that our understandings are fettered by systems . . . and that there needs no more to minds well disposed than to recover their native freedom. . . . Convinced that the seeds of virtue are innate, I have only watched to cherish the rising shoot, and prune, but with a trembling hand, the too luxuriant branches.¹

Mrs Brooke pursued the same polite enthusiasms in her next novel:²

I cannot help observing here, that the great aim of modern education seems to be, to eradicate the best impulses of the human heart, love, friendship, compassion, benevolence; to destroy the social, and increase the selfish principle. . . . If my ideas are right, the human mind is naturally virtuous. . . .

In her *Nature and Art* Mrs Inchbald rears her hero among the natives of 'Zocotora Island'; whilst the 'villain' is corrupted among people who 'taught him to walk, to ride, to talk, to think like a man – a foolish man, instead of a wise child, as nature designed him to be'. The most extravagant expression of the school perhaps came with Beaurieu's *Elève de la Nature*, which was done into English in 1773 as *The Man of Nature*. To preserve the hero from corruption, Beaurieu consigns him to the solitude of a wooden cage until he is fifteen, when he is transported to an uninhabited island, where his uncorrupted 'sensibility' is such that he weeps for the falling leaves.

1. Mrs Frances Brooke, *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (1763).

2. *The History of Emily Montague* (1769).

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The increasing concern for childhood and education in the last decades of the eighteenth century is nowhere more significantly seen than in the literature actually written for children at that time. It was closely related to the general interest in education of the period, and often stemmed from the same enthusiasms as Methodist Non-conformacy. It was this perhaps which gave it frequently a moralizing quality entirely alien to the intentions of Rousseau, to whom, however, it frequently accorded superficial homage.

The condition of childhood of the time had aroused many religious consciences. Industrial development, together with the collapse of the public system for the relief of poverty, the decline of true craft apprenticeship, the exploitation of charity-school labour, especially in the industrial towns of the Midlands and North, created a situation that religious opinion could scarcely ignore. The miserable condition of so many children inspired some of Blake's greatest lyrics. Earlier if less indignant concern had resulted in the work of the Industrial and Sunday School Movements. The enthusiasm which created these also inspired the numberless tracts of varying moral weight which fell on the heads and shoulders of pauper and middle-class children in the last decades of the century.

One of the most popular of these moralizing books was Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton*. Written between 1783 and 1789, it had nine editions before 1812. There are indeed forty-three editions of the work in the British Museum published before 1883. Influenced by Mrs Barbauld's *Early Lessons*, Day wished to continue her exhortations to juvenile virtue in a work of his own, and achieved one of the most famous of Victorian children's classics. Thousands of children in the nineteenth century were nurtured on the tale of Tommy Sandford, the poor farmer's son, reared under the care of the worthy vicar, Mr Barlow, and Harry Merton, the spoiled son of a rich West Indian merchant. The tale develops the simple theme of the regeneration of the one child by the other. Everywhere honesty has its due reward. The poor are ever honest; and the greater their poverty the nobler they prove. It was an odd (though perhaps not so odd) literary converse of the adult acquisitiveness which so distinguished the Age. The cult of poverty echoes throughout the pages of the children's literature of the time. Intended most especially

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for the sons and daughters of the middle class, these tales in the Sandford and Merton tradition frequently celebrate the ironic virtue of not laying up for yourselves treasures where thieves break through and steal.

Day's own moralizing was perhaps even exceeded by Mrs Trimmer, the 'mother' of children's literature, as Charlotte Yonge called her, and by Hannah More and John Aikin, pioneers of the Sunday School Movement. Maria Edgeworth began her literary career with moral tales for young people. Her *Parent's Assistant* (1800) continued to be issued by Macmillans as late as 1897.

In her criticism of Maria Edgeworth's *Moral and Popular Tales*, Madame de Staël saw the essentials of the situation clearly enough: '*Cette route rationnelle et morne*,' she wrote, '*qui, par la science et la morale menait l'enfant au Dieu*.' The way, '*rationnelle et morne*', was indeed leading to the savageries of Mrs Sherwood and her Fairchild children. Already the tormented shadow of the Fairchild children taken to see a murderer hanging at the gibbet, as a simple lesson not to quarrel among themselves in the nursery, lay before them.

All the sensuousness, the 'sensibility' of Rousseau and Madame de Genlis died in these harsh moralizing tracts of the Barbaulds and Trimmers. They are of that other 'eighteenth century'. For them Nature became something to 'dissect', to 'know'. Morality for little Tommy Sandford was essentially utilitarian and false, and essentially demoralizing therefore. Saved by the animals he had once taken care of, he declares: 'This proves to me that a good deed is never lost.'

Madame de Staël's acute strictures were echoed in England by Coleridge, who decried these 'prodigies of presumption, of arrogance, and insincerity . . . these nurslings of perfected pedagogy'. Wordsworth ridiculed them in *The Prelude*, and Lamb, in a letter to Coleridge, declared: 'Hang them, I mean the accursed band of Barbaulds. . . . Think what you would be now, if, instead of having been nourished by good wives' stories, one had stuffed your head with geography and natural history.' 'Give me,' said Coleridge in reply, 'the works which charmed my youth, give me the *Thousand and One Nights*.'

The Barbaulds, even Day himself, had in fact taken Rousseau and

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denied his central premise of ‘negative’ education. They created the Enlightened ‘*vieux savants*’ and ‘*jeunes docteurs*’ he had so much detested. Madame de Staël, Lamb, Wordsworth and Coleridge, however, stood in Romantic opposition, on the side of fancy and the imaginative nourishment of make-believe, for the tradition of old wives’ tales and the earlier chapbooks. Already in Coleridge’s denunciations of ‘Enlightened’ education we hear the later strictures of Dickens on the ‘forcing-system’, in *Dombey and Son* and *Hard Times*.

The Romantic reaction against moralizing, utilitarian literature for children was part of its whole reaction against the child of the associationist eighteenth century; which in turn was part of its whole reaction against the central intellectual traditions of the Enlightenment. The literary tide was full set towards the shores of Feeling, and bore with it the fragile craft of the Romantic child. Helen Maria Williams could declare that : ‘However dull the faculties of my head . . . when a proposition is addressed to my heart I have some quickness of perception.’ For Mackenzie: ‘The decisions’ of the feelings ‘will be always right’. Keats had a certainty of ‘nothing, but the Holiness of the Heart’s affections, and the Truth of the Imagination’. Within this assertion of Feeling, of the nineteenth century against the eighteenth, Blake entered with his own assertion that ‘everything that lives is Holy’, castigating the whole achievement of English rationalism for its ‘Single Vision and Newton’s sleep’. It was Blake who declared the ‘vast majority’ of children to be on the ‘side of Imagination or Spiritual Sensation’. With Blake we have the first coordinated utterance of the Romantic Imaginative and spiritually sensitive child.

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