

Some Keywords in Dickens

HOORROAR! SIDEWAYS
HANDS RIVER
BOY FOUND OUT
DICKENS DEBT
CONDUCTOR
TASTE PLAY
MONOMANIA
OPIUM
PRISON
KEYWORDS
WORLDLY
LULLER-LIE-TE!
FACT



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In memory of Lucy

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Introduction

The book that follows can be seen as an idiosyncratic foray into relatively uncharted territory in the study of a great novelist. Dickensians at present lack any comprehensive study of the “keywords” that are used regularly by an author for whom such an approach, currently growing in popularity among literary scholars, would seem to be peculiarly appropriate. As the extant number plans for his novels from *Dombey and Son* onward (first studied in depth by John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson in *Dickens at Work* in 1957) amply demonstrate, Dickens can be seen engaged during the composition of his novels in monthly instalments in a kind of literary equivalent of the “continuity” work familiar in film production, constantly paying attention to the repetitions, continuities and contrasts between plot incidents, details of setting and environment, individual characters and their distinctive “signature tunes,” and, last but not least, to significant and recurrent words.

It is this last, of course, that is foregrounded here. The initial impetus for this book comes, naturally enough, from Raymond Williams’s classic *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* of 1976, which aims to provide a simultaneous assessment of words “which involve ideas and values” while conveying “a history and complexity of meanings.” It has thus provided a fertile source of challenge and/or supplement to classical dictionaries of language, exploring the wide cultural horizon of words “without fear of corrections, amendments, revisions.”

The free derivation here from Williams’s pioneering study clearly distinguishes what follows from any orthodox encyclopaedia, dictionary or glossary. We aim, first, to show in this book, through in-depth illumination of particular instances, how highly conscious Dickens was of words – of their meanings of course, and of the ideas they conjure up, but also of their very substance, texture, plasticity, visuality, aural and semantic resonance, as well as their interactions with other words and their cultural environment. Words in Dickens are treated here not as simple semantic units with a fixed meaning but rather as flexible linguistic constructs. We aim to provide a series of individual readings of

Dickensian keywords in their relations, oppositions, correlations and overlappings, each of a highly individualised nature, aiming to uncover and explore rich and often unforeseen systems of meaning.

These readings come in various shapes and sizes. Not many generalisations about them are profitable, though Jeremy Tambling's remark below, to the effect that few Dickensian keywords denote abstract concepts, may serve to indicate an important distinction from Williams's work. Many, if not most of the lexical items singled out here belong to the empirical, phenomenal world, open to detailed observation through one or more of the senses, whereas most of those studied by Williams are abstractions. Even this remark, however, is provisional, and relative to the particular words that happen to have been chosen for examination by the participating contributors: a more comprehensive work on the subject might, for instance, have examined the importance in Dickens of a word like "nature," which is the subject of probing analysis in novels like *Nicholas Nickleby*, where Charles Cheeryble upbraids Nicholas for taking Smike's fear and hatred of his father to be "unnatural" ("My dear sir ... you fall into the very common mistake, of charging upon Nature, matters with which she has not the smallest connection," ch. 46) or *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which challenges "moralists" and "Pharisees" who condemn Chartist violence and "soundingly appeal to human nature" to check whether "it has not been transformed, during your slumber, and the sleep of generation, into the nature of Beasts" (ch. 13). Such abstract "keywords" are often signalled through capitalisation, an important subject in Dickens, recently studied in Gavin Edwards's *The Case of the Initial Letter*.

Thus, we are throughout conscious of how much more work might be done in the direction we are travelling here. "Keywords" is currently a buzz-word, everywhere about us. Contributors to journals and compendia are routinely asked to provide "keywords" to link their work to that of others; Kindle possessors find that they have in their hands a useful research tool which only requires them to enter a search word for it to show up in an instant the number of uses to be found in the case of the given classic author of their choice. Naturally, therefore, "Keywords" approaches are springing up everywhere in literature studies, first in fields like American cultural studies and Children's Literature, but also more recently in fields more adjacent to Dickens studies. In 2018, for instance, Rachel Ablow and Daniel Hack edited a double issue of *Victorian Literature and Culture* entitled "Keywords," and in April 2019 a conference of English literature in the 1820s organised at the University of Glasgow by Matthew Sangster and Jon Mee – papers from which are shortly to be published by Edinburgh University Press – also gave prominence to significant words and concepts in the period.

As far as Dickens studies themselves are concerned, there are a number of invaluable aids to the work and times of the great Victorian novelists – "ency-

clopaedias” or “handbooks” or “companions,” covering biography, history, the novels, the journalism, etc. – but as yet no comprehensive guide to “keywords” in his writings. The present volume is obviously not that – it offers pointedly to consider only *some* Dickensian keywords – but its limitations of scope should be thought of as amply compensated for in three respects: first, through the strong individuality and even at times, quirky originality of the essays it contains, second, through the opportunity given to contributors to engage at length in close reading of the words and texts they select for attention, and third, through their pursuit of “keywords” in a wide variety of texts, including some unfamiliar ones such as “George Silverman’s Explanation,” highlighted in the final essay in the book.

It may be helpful, as far as understanding its nature and scope, to provide some account of the origins of the present contribution to the field. Like many scholarly books nowadays (including Mee and Sangster above), it grew out of a conference, or rather a seminar under the umbrella of a major conference, that of ESSE, the European Society for the Study of English, held in Brno in Moravia in the Czech Republic in the late summer of 2018, in one of the designated seminars on Dickens. Dickens seminars have been a regular feature of the biennial ESSE conferences since 2008, and those of us who have been regular or frequent participants tend to think of these as the “Sally Ledger seminars,” in memory of the prominent Dickensian who first put forward the idea of them, but then, dying suddenly in 2009, was never able to attend one. On this occasion, the idea for the keyword “Keywords,” came from one of the participants, Jeremy Tambling, via another, Dominic Rainsford, the current editor of *Dickens Quarterly*, who remembered his having suggested it as a topic for a previous occasion.

Beyond the stipulation that all contributions to the seminar should concern one or more Dickensian “keywords,” no particular restraints or directives were placed on any of the participants, neither at the time of the conference nor during the subsequent writing up of their papers for publication. This helps explain one aspect of the collection that perhaps needs a comment or two. Although the essential focus of any study of “keywords” in Dickens is linguistic, we make no apology for the fact that some of the essays herein tend to stray at times across the boundaries between words and things – *Les mots et les choses*, to remember a famous title by Foucault. To invoke Roland Barthes, and in particular partly to modify his assertion that literary language is essentially connotative rather than denotative, we do not lose sight here of the fact that Dickens was a practical journalist and activist as well as a great imaginative novelist, and that many of the “keywords” he employed have significant denotative as well as connotative dimensions. Some at least of the authors assembled have rightly felt it part of their remit to explore these.

Though they represent rising methodological innovations in the critical study of words and the analysis of lexical data in literary studies, recent techniques of distant reading, such as data mining or word clouds, are not included in the present volume. Their heuristic power was not considered as fruitful for this project as tried and trusted methods of close reading.

The second, concluding half of this introduction at first sight takes a thoroughly conventional form, consisting as it does of a summary in turn of each of the essays in this volume, marking out the “keyword” studied in each through the use of bold print. Its arrangement by means of an alphabetic ordering of the words examined might also look at first sight to be entirely conventional, were it not for the heterogeneity of the terms involved. Paradoxically, what at first looks like a rigidly ordered progression through the alphabet throws up a riot of potential links between words and concepts that the reader is free to construct for her/himself. These connections convey the essential spirit and purpose of this book.

1. Victor Sage: “Boy” in Dickens

The term “Boy” is both a name and a description in Dickens’s work. The word operates at two levels, the personal and the impersonal. It draws upon the huge army of anonymous boys operating on the burgeoning Victorian labour market: post-boys, costermongers’ boys, factory-boys, crossing sweepers and so on, whom Mayhew foregrounded in his writings. Dickens himself was one of them when he worked for Warren’s Blacking Factory around the age of 12 but he was also a “boy-*flâneur*” as depicted by Forster in his biography – two personae echoed in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*. A squadron of boys between five and eighteen years old are to be found hovering not far from any given scene in Dickens’s narratives. This essay investigates the word “boy” and the figures of boys in Dickens’s writing in relation to a dialectic between innocence and guilt, placing the propensity to evil on the one hand – thieving and the like – against the angelic qualities deemed inherent in children on the other. It notes the prominence in Dickens of a focus on adult regression to childhood or boyhood, on boys as witnesses, and the association of boys with both savagery and slavery.

2. Jeremy Parrott: “Charles Dickens as ‘Conductor’: an Exploration of Meanings, Roles and Associations”

In addition to the adulation Dickens received as a novelist, journalist and performer, Charles Dickens was a hugely successful editor of weekly magazines, supervising the publication of *Household Words* and its successor, *All the Year Round*, through nearly 1,000 issues over a 20-year run. Dickens did not, however, choose to style himself as an editor, using instead the term “conductor,” which appears in the mast-head of every issue of his journals. This essay explores the polysemous implications of the term, ranging across references to music, transportation, logistics, tourism and science. One of the earliest uses of the term “conductor” with reference to the employee of that name on an omnibus occurs in *Nicholas Nickleby*, and it is also in that novel that Charles Cheeryble conducts Nicholas across London to a bright new future. In that latter sense, the term is of much more ancient pedigree, and can be traced back to one of Dickens’s “special books” – Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, in which Mr. Great-heart conducts Christiana and a miscellaneous party of pilgrims towards the Celestial City. There can be little doubt that Dickens had this literary allusion in mind when choosing the appellation for himself, for the journey on which he is conducting his readers is conceived of as one from ignorance to knowledge.

3. Nathalie Vanfasse: “Revisiting Debt, Debtors and Indebtedness in *Little Dorrit*”

Over-indebtedness or insolvency lies at the heart of Dickens’s work. It is one of the mainsprings of Dickens’s writing and inspiration. This essay proposes to delve even deeper into the meaning of indebtedness and the keywords associated to it, to show how Dickens explores multiple definitions of the word debt in his novel *Little Dorrit*, combining all these meanings to raise essential ethical questions. These enquiries resonate not only with evolving legal measures regarding bankruptcy and insolvency procedures in the nineteenth century, but also with economic theory and the history of economic thought. *Little Dorrit* asks troubling questions such as whether what is most condemnable is to incur debts beyond what one can redeem, or to imprison a whole family for debt. Another poignant question the novel raises is whether it is illegal and immoral to incur debt in order to survive. From private, to public and commercial debts; from a concrete obligation to pay, to a more abstract feeling of personal obligation; from the financial significance of the word to its religious dimension, *Little Dorrit* investigates the notion of indebtedness, applying it to outstanding payment, debt

acknowledgement, as well as to the assumption and recognition of guilt and sin. It delineates an intricate web of interdependence that models a system foreshadowing twenty-first century theory on complex thought, in that it defeats compartmentalisation of knowledge and is not just the sum of its parts.

4. Peter Merchant: “‘Found Out’: Dickens and the Dread of Discovery”

G. K. Chesterton once pointed to the puzzle of Pecksniff: “Why take such trouble to unmask a man whose mask you have made transparent?” The thoughts offered in this essay exploring the recurrent phrase and its synonyms – “moled it out”, applied by Pancks to his discovery of the Dorrit family’s concealed fortunes, is a related example – constitute a tentative answer to that question. Such an out-and-outer as Dickens, apparently, is regularly driven in his attachment to it to push past the stage of seeing through to the finishing blow of the finding out. As to what that finding out entails, and who or what is subject to it, the pattern varies. While the tracing of whereabouts is one part of the process, another is the detection of imposture; and the deciphering of mysteries is a third. Dickens’s later novels, especially, conjure a world in which there is much for him to know and for us to find out. The reader in that sense necessarily shares in the investigative enterprise of “finding out” with many of the characters. Yet Dickens’s writing is also marked by an acute awareness of much in them, and a good deal in himself, that could invite some searching scrutiny of its own and that might then make for a truly troublesome unmasking. “It’s shocking to be ... found out,” as Flora Finching exclaims; “it’s really shocking!”

5. Ewa Kujawska-Lis: “Hands in *Great Expectations*: Some Narrative Uses”

This essay follows in the footsteps of a number of recent commentators on hands in Victorian fiction – in particular Peter Capuano and Sue Zemka – but focusses on one particular novel, *Great Expectations*, in which they feature abundantly, predominantly in two images: bringing Pip up “by hand” by his sister and in Mr. Jaggers’s “hand-washing.” Though these two phrases dominate the text as far as the occurrence of “hand” is concerned, this noun is also used with reference to other characters and in other contexts. This essay considers both literal and symbolic meanings associated with hands in those two images (perhaps adding to the established interpretations), but also explores those less often discussed cases

when the keyword “hand” appears and the narrative uses of “hands.” “Hands” in this novel are signs of social status and position (Joe’s “coarse hands” versus Miss Havisham’s “hands” rich in jewellery); they signify the physical and emotional condition of a character (Miss Havisham’s “withering hands”); they can incur violence and provide protection; they can be signs of guilt and conciliation; of affection and emotional indifference; of freedom and its lack. The various collocations and contexts in which the word “hands” appears build a rich semantic space in which the characters are placed and significantly contribute to their creation.

6. Nathalie Jaëck: “‘Hoorroar!’: Dickens’s Political, Epistemological and Aesthetic Rehabilitation of Noises”

Dickens’s novels are very sonorous novels full of “voices” and “noises”. Oliver’s approach towards Smithfield in *Oliver Twist* stands out in the readers’ memories because of the bellowing and shrieking to be heard, while Dickens is often credited with being an exemplary source of voices (witness T. S. Eliot’s original title for Part One of *The Waste Land*, “He do the Police in different voices,” a quotation from *Our Mutual Friend*). In this essay, “Voices” and “noises” can be interpreted as disorderly oral disturbance within the coherent and omniscient narrative, as a form of resistance. In his novels, Dickens stages the dialectic cohabitation between an authoritative narrator, and random, obscure, seemingly irrepressible voices and noises, that disturb the major mode, and bring about a welcome “quarrel” within the text, a horizontal fluctuation of the typical authoritative voice of the omniscient narrator. Dickens, celebrated for the polyphony and the dialogism of his novels, makes ample way for alternative, dissident and memorable “voices” and “noises” – like static or white noise, colonising and sometimes jarring with the major omniscient voice, like inner contradiction. The very noisy soundscape of London, and the constant humming and bustling of irruptive voices, both challenge from within the ideology of narrative omniscience and the social order the text also celebrates, opposing causality with randomness, linearity with wandering, order with a sense of irrepressible chaos.

In addition, this, and the related essay by Dominic Rainsford, concern words that are closer to the notation of sounds than of semantic units, and thus aim to complicate the reader’s assumptions about what a “keyword” should be.

7. Céline Prest: “It’s a monomania ... to think he is possessed of documents’: Paper Obsession and Possession in *Bleak House*”

It may come as a surprise to discover that the word “monomania” occurs frequently in Dickens’s writing – in three novels, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, and *Great Expectations*, and in a number of shorter writings, fictional and otherwise – and that it can be said to apply in addition to a number of characters throughout his work of whom it is not used (to Mr. Dick in *David Copperfield* for example). In this essay, Krook in *Bleak House* is presented as a monomaniac who collects papers compulsively, and whose patterns of thought revolve exclusively around them: the character seems more to be obsessed and possessed *by* than possessed *of* documents. Paper drives the character insane as he babbles away in unheeded monologues, in a kind of glossolalia at some remove from fully significant speech. In this respect, Krook looks forward to the Beckettian vagabond, subject to a particular obsession and unable to move on, at once mobile and immobilised.

This essay connects Dickens’s use of the word with the new nosological category of “monomania” identified in 1838 by the French alienist Jean-Etienne Esquirol, who characterises it as the misguided obsession of the subject with a single question. It attempts to show, in the case of *Bleak House*, that it concerns a good deal more than the single character of Krook, whose mind is comparable to the confined spaces of Chancery, saturated with legal documents and characterised by entropy. In *Bleak House*, the study of the obsession with documents is extended to include the whole of Victorian society, considered as suffering from a collective madness or *mal du siècle*.

8. Dominic Rainsford: “‘Luller-li-e-te!’ Language, Personhood, and Sympathy in *Sketches by Boz*”

Dickens was already doing very interesting things with the interrelations of literary character, real personhood and language in *Sketches by Boz* whose brevity gives this question a special kind of intensity. Dickens’s ability to do things with words feeds his extraordinary capacity to dwell creatively on what constitutes a person. The sketch “Miss Evans and ‘the Eagle’” first published in *Bell’s Life in London*, and *Sporting Chronicle* on October 4th, 1835 as “Scenes and Characters No.2,” under Dickens’s pre-Boz pseudonym of “Tibbs” illustrates these claims. It shows how Dickens produces personhood in print or life on the page, notably through the small number of significant words that his characters utter, their tiny

nuances of diction. We are able to measure the importance of language in constructing self and how much Dickens cared about every word, especially every one of his character's spoken words. This sketch presents caricatures on the verge of becoming characters and tipping into a fuller form of personhood. The particular combination of phonemes "Luller-li-e-te" epitomises this story of character and personhood, self-construction and self-awareness, conscious and unconscious self, and social performance that unfolds as a story of signs covering a deeper story of class, property and power.

9. Magdalena Pypec: "Opium as a Keyword in Dickens's Novels"

This essay explores the literal and metaphorical uses of the word "opium" and its common derivatives in Dickens's novels, as well as their interpretative implications for the texts themselves and their cultural milieu. As an opium-eater himself, the novelist displays in his many uses of the word that he was well acquainted with its effects, and all its uses and abuses. In addition, his writing reflects the evolving public perception of the drug during his lifetime, the anxieties accompanying its habit-forming qualities and the medicalisation of addiction. In his novels and letters, the word "opium" is used in a variety of contexts – to denote long-awaited sleep, as a means of combating insomnia, of deadening pain and sedating the restless and the suffering, as well as to refer to a method of manipulating people and depriving them of rational thinking. It is equally associated with the inability to work and fulfil one's commitments, with lethargy and drowsiness, lack of energy and concentration, but also with over-anxiety and restlessness. It is shown as a cheap substitute for alcohol capable of procuring oblivion and forgetting hunger and starvation. In Dickens, the word gives a name to a deadly poison used in murder and suicide, and is thus closely linked with death.

Somewhat inevitably, consideration of the word "opium" glides imperceptibly at moments into the examination of the thing itself and its cultural meaning. As "the milk of paradise," some vestige of its Romantic legacy as a remedy to boost creativity and inspirational visions remains. But on the other hand opium-smoking denotes vice, sin, moral degradation and even mental illness. And of course it is connected to the imperial context of Victorian trade in this commodity. It signifies the acquisition of tainted wealth through drug trafficking, as the parasitic British policy of supplying opium to users in China encourages the spread of addiction in that country. As such, it may symbolise imperial guilt.

10. Maria Teresa Chialant: “Play in *The Old Curiosity Shop*”

“Play”, is a recurrent trope in Dickens’s fiction; it appears, for instance, in *Pickwick Papers*, *Hard Times* and *Great Expectations*, to give only a few examples. But it is in *The Old Curiosity Shop* that this motif takes on a special meaning, as part of the conflict between life and death in which the novel is inscribed. In fact, although the centre of the text is Nell’s story, which is connected with the death theme, there is a peripheral world – “the world of life and energy and comedy that goes on in spite of the death at the centre” – that is connected with play in the shape of the fantastic (the puppets, the wax-works, the freaks) as well as of violence and chaos.

The aim of this essay is to suggest a reading of *The Old Curiosity Shop* from the perspective of and through the keyword of play. This reading takes its cue from Roger Caillois’ *Les jeux et les hommes* (1958), in which the French sociologist interprets many social structures as elaborate forms of games, and human behaviour as a form of play. Caillois argues that we can understand the complexity of games by referring not only to these play forms – *agon* or competition, *alea* or chance, mimicry or mimesis and role playing, *ilinx* or vertigo in the sense of altering perception –, but also to two types of play: *ludus*, structured activities with explicit rules (games), and *paidia*, unstructured and spontaneous activities (playfulness).

According to this classification of games and to Caillois’ structural pattern, it is possible to locate the characters in *The Old Curiosity Shop* within these different categories. From the distribution of the various characters in the text, we can assume that all of them, except Nell, are connected with play.

11. Francesca Orestano: “Prison”

This essay, with its focus on “prison,” deals with a keyword that is deeply entangled with the life experience of the writer and with his fiction. Prisons are seen, visited, described, narrated, represented, hinted at, felt as a taint: in sum, present in so many different fashions that for the sake of clarity the essay follows five different perspectives, that define the nature of “prison” and locate its origin or context. These avenues to prisons, albeit distinct for the sake of clarity, tend to become indistinguishable, inasmuch as they invade the space of memory, affect the olfactory sense, create a language or jargon, modify character and easily replicate themselves as social institutions. “Prison” and related keywords occur everywhere in Dickens, at both literal and metaphorical levels, to encompass, for instance, the prison of home, the prison of abroad, and the multiple constructed psychological prisons of individual characters.

Following Raymond Williams's classic *Keywords*, prisons are evoked here, not only through their geographical, historical, and material presence within the writer's life, but as discursive elements that extend their reach to Victorian society at large, as well as to the inner self. In Dickens prisons are regular keynotes, visually present in the foreground of his narration, or as persistent and disturbingly painful phantoms endowed with Protean ways of making their presence felt. In so many competing ways, prisons are linked to Dickens and his role as Victorian writer, whether they are described in their material presence or used as metaphors for the human condition.

12. Michael Hollington: "River and Text in Three Mature Novels by Charles Dickens"

This essay notes the frequency of the word "river" in Dickens, in particular with reference to the Thames. It notes how it seems to function in two quasi-allegorical contexts, first as a signifier for narrative flow, for the text of the novel itself in its linear progress, and second as a symbol of human life. The Thames, in its course from its source in unspoilt rural Gloucestershire, pure until it becomes a tidal river at Teddington just before entering London, then passing through a phase of pollution that is the product and expression of the city's physical and moral life before broadening out to flow ineluctably into the sea at Gravesend, serves as a tripartite image of the passage from childhood through adulthood to death.

Although the focus here is primarily on *Dombey and Son*, *Bleak House*, and *Little Dorrit*, these two motifs emerge first in *Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield*. In Dickens's first novel, the text itself is described as a "New River Company," laying on a supply of fresh water to counteract the poisonous fatal attraction of the Thames to would-be suicides, who figure both here and later in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*. The allurements of "death through drowning" are thoroughly apparent in *Dombey and Son*, where the waves are speaking of death not only at Gravesend but throughout the length of the Thames as a tidal river. In *Bleak House*, Bucket trawls metaphorically, as it were, through the mud of the river to find whoever is to be "FOUND DROWNED" in the city. The same capitalised motif is repeated in *Little Dorrit*, where, near his mother's house on the banks of the Thames, Arthur Clennam stumbles upon "a wretched little bill, FOUND DROWNED... weeping on the wet wall." It is a miniaturised version of the fusion of water and text to be found in this major Dickensian theme.

The word "river" and the cardinal Dickensian motif it refers to reach a climax of attention, of course, in Dickens's last novel *Our Mutual Friend*, not treated

here, since it forms a major focus of a companion essay, “Dickens, Pecksniff and the Thames,” published in the June 2020 number of *Dickens Quarterly* (XXXVII, ii, 101–110).

13. Lillian Nayder: “Sideways in Dickens”

Although readers are likely to associate Dickens’s use of the word “deep” with what is significant or profound – when Inspector Bucket of Bleak House “dips down to the bottom of his mind” to solve a crime, for example – what lurks on the side or approaches us “sideways” in Dickens’s fiction often proves more enigmatic, obscure and dangerous than what lies below. This essay examines Dickens’s use of “sideways” as a keyword – in reference to the position of objects, the motion of bodies, and the glances of characters – and considers the importance of the peripheral to the novelist, as characters mask intentions, limit legibility, and pair the playful with the threatening. Ranging among various Dickens’s novels, from *The Pickwick Papers* and *Barnaby Rudge* to *Little Dorrit* and *Our Mutual Friend*, the essay shows that Dickens uses the sideways to represent decrepitude, abuses of power and class unrest. Ultimately, the keyword bears self-referential meaning and captures Dickens’s own resistance to hierarchy – the lateral thinking conveyed when the novelist, like Kit Nubbles of *Old Curiosity Shop*, “stands sideways” to “get at his voice.”

14. Jeremy Tambling: “What is called taste is only another name for fact’: Two Dickens Keywords”

Dickens used few words dealing with abstraction but one of the places where he does use abstract terms is the novel *Hard Times* which brings together two such keywords in the schoolroom at the beginning of the novel, namely “Taste” and “Fact” whose connection is established in the aphorism pronounced in the schoolroom “What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact”. Fact has taken over what is not its territory: the “immaterial.” Dickens’s novel can be read as a parody of Henry Cole, one of the philosophic radicals associated with the Utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill in the 1830s. As secretary of the London School of Design in 1851, Cole stated that design must be useful and he expressed distaste for ornamentation. He was later associated with the management of the New Department of Practical Arts, itself connected to the Great Exhibition and to the Victoria and Albert Museum. Cole considered the direct imitation of natural forms as bad taste and the teaching of art to be a branch of manufacture. Art was

deemed valuable in the factual sense, that is consumerist. Dickens's response to any such standardization of what "the Arts" mean shows in his satire on Mr Podsnap in *Our Mutual Friend*.

As for fact, Dickens here touches upon statistics, their privileging of numbers, their aggregating of the human, their assumption that the individual is an abstraction and their construction of a knowledge that takes on an appearance of neutrality. What Dickens indicts is the substitution of the fetishisation of fact to its primary sense of an "act", from Latin *facere*, so that in *Hard Times* facts are more likely to impede action. The novel offers another reading of the word as the unpredictable in human affairs that gives a different sense of the industrial world and breaks with its monotony.

15. Michael Eaton: "The Wordly World of George Silverman"

Written in 1868 for an American magazine, and for which he was paid "at a rate unexampled in literature", *George Silverman's Explanation* was the last completed work of fiction by Charles Dickens. Though it remains relatively unknown and critically neglected, Dickens himself recognised "a certain unlikeness" to anything else he had written, confessing "I feel as if I had read something (by somebody else), which I should never get out of my mind!!!" The story is a first-person account of an unfulfilled life written by an aging clergyman. George Silverman grew up in poverty in a cellar in Preston where his mother was a member of an exclusive evangelical sect before dying of the plague. Her condemnatory term of abuse for her son is "worldly little devil" and this accusation continues to haunt him throughout his life. Though George's writing is an attempt to demonstrate that he has always endeavoured to act unselfishly, the reader nevertheless increasingly begins to doubt the narrator's self-justifications. This essay examines previous uses of "worldly" in Dickens's writings before analysing how, in this remarkable complex proto-modernist work, the word "worldly" is used to structure the account of an entire blighted life – as this word becomes the very theme of the story.

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