
Axton discusses Dickens’s uses of theatrical modes and traditions as going far beyond simple exploitation of dramatic forms and techniques. “Dickens argued,” Axton writes, “that the conventions of the popular theater contain an inherent truth to life . . . obscured from the man in the street by his own dullness of vision, and that it was the function of the creative artist to revivify this vision by depicting the commonplace—as it really seemed to Dickens—in all the glowing color, light, movement, and surprise of the playhouse” (p. 8).

Axton’s discussion, then, presents the devices of the theatre as (frequently hyperbolic) resources Dickens used for recharging language. Axton’s defense of such devices extends readily beyond the “theatrical” to include the closely related “melodramatic,” “sensational,” and “sentimental”—all descriptive of action heightened and exaggerated by the imagination to make us see what has been dulled by familiarity.

This book reinforces my own arguments to the same effect, but from a different point of view.


Carey’s book enlarges upon ideas that are underlying assumptions of my study: that Dickens’s view of life is essentially comic, that the violent and the orderly aspects of his nature are equally and uncompromisingly real, that his spontaneous responses to experience are childlike in their honesty and in their lack of inhibition by conventional expectation (a consequent “literalism” is a crucial aspect of his humor) —and that all of these characteristics somehow define the special quality of his genius.

In the chapter on “Corpses and Effigies,” Carey explores the relentless interest Dickens maintained in dead bodies and their accoutrements, as well as in their facsimiles in dolls, dummies, masks, and the like; his seeking out of mortuaries and waxworks; his repeated ap-
pearances at hangings and beheadings. I believe that our separate discussions significantly complement one another.

I find the chapter on "Dickens' Children" one of the most enlightening in the book for the illumination it throws on the contrast between Dickens's childlike and totally honest portrayals of experience and his moralizing distortions of it. Most of the chapter draws the sharp contrasts between his "model children, pious little monsters, moribund and adult"—dwarfs—and his very different fully imagined children who have not yet been civilized. Their responses to the realities around them are honestly complete without a moral or social censor telling them what would be the right or proper response. They therefore frequently appear heartless to well-trained adults. Because they are children, their perceptions and interpretations are still largely tied to sensory responses. What Carey says of Dickens's children can equally well be applied to Dickens himself.

Toward the end of the chapter, I believe that Carey takes a wrong turn when he says that "Dickens produces dwarfs because he stops remembering what it was like to be a child" (p. 146). Carey does not draw the most important conclusion immediately at hand. In the chapter on Dickens's humour, he argues that the humour is a child's humour. This chapter offers further convincing evidence that the "secret" of Dickens's imagery is not the "obsession" claimed by psychoanalysts, but rather the childlike nature of his imagination. He does not have to "remember" responses he made before he was civilized out of them: they are still his responses. He himself might be called a "natural" adult. This idea, in fact, makes more sense to me than anything else I have encountered on the subject.


Cockshut's book is included in this review largely because of the insistence of its title. Only peripherally can it be regarded as a study of the "imagination" of Charles Dickens. Although Cockshut discusses "symbols" and "myths," it is mainly as they attach to the external rather than the internal world. The "mythical" elements he explores belong to "the revolutionary and even the reforming Dickens." The source of the myth's abiding strength he finds, "not in Dickens's opinions, nor in the actual political tendencies which can be discerned in his books, but in his hypnotic power over the reader's imagination" (p. 55). Cockshut thus tends to suggest that the informing imagination belongs to the reader rather than to the author: that Dickens employs such things as fantasy, fancy, and melodrama to manipulate the imaginations of his readers for persuasive purposes, instead of writing into his novels the
genuine products of his own imagination for purposes of expression or communication.

The final sentence in the book reiterates Cockshut's "performing" emphasis, and his overall failure to understand Dickens's imagination: "So, in the end, his lack of intellectual consistency, already castigated in these pages, and the neurotic instability of the man's feelings, hardly matter, because the vivid journalist, the entertainer and the artist are triumphantly at one" (p. 186).


The emphases and directions of Daleski's study are clearly set forth in the preface. Having selected texts that seem to him representative of stages in Dickens's development, he tries to show (taking his lead from Steven Marcus's observation [see p. 223] that Dickens has an "analogical imagination") "how our perception of the play of analogy in Dickens both directs us to the focus of a given work and makes manifest its structure" (p. 13). Daleski has been concerned to demonstrate both the increasing complexity of the cluster of ideas that is at the thematic centre of the novels, and the increasing comprehensiveness of vision that results from Dickens's more and more skillful use of analogy as a structural principle.

We are so far in agreement. Our paths diverge when he states that it also discloses "a traditional Dickens who is preeminently concerned with money and love" (p. 14). Appropriately, then, his discussion primarily explores analogies as devices rather than natural products of Dickens's imagination. The book is based on careful and detailed readings, which instructively parallel readings in this work, but they are based on different premises and lead to different conclusions except for a shared belief in Dickens's developing control of his analogies and art.


Ford's article extends my own limited discussion of time into the larger context the subject deserves. While restricting his discussion to Dickens, Ford begins his article with a helpful review of previous studies on the general question of the Victorian "senses of time."

Ford finds in Dickens and other major Victorian writers at least two of the attitudes accounting for the different voices we hear in their
literature. The public Whig voice of Dickens is the future-oriented Victorian belief in evolutionary change and progress. The personal voice of Dickens, on the other hand, his “secret prose” invoking “the music of memory” (Graham Greene’s terms) in anticipation of Proust, is a private, past-oriented vision. Accepting this simplification, “we can say that his prose moves between these two poles of public and private, each with its own wavelength” (p. 51).

Throughout much of his detailed development of these instructive observations, Ford tends in a direction I find troublesome. Critical approaches that are primarily biographically or historically grounded tend to blur the distinction between a period in the past and the past as a universal concept. This distinction I consider pivotal in evaluating Dickens’s imagination. In his discussion of the conflict between past and future, for example, the specific historical context influences his judgment, which stops with the statement that “the conflict between past and future was never resolved” (p. 55). The larger view would perhaps include the further thought that it is of crucial importance for human development to maintain the uneasy tension between past and future rather than to seek a more comfortable resolution. Although Ford’s conclusion can be interpreted to include the larger interpretation, much of the discussion seems to point in the other direction.


I have included Franklin’s solid little essay as an interesting companion piece to Ford’s entry reviewed above. Franklin takes issue with critics who find in Dickens’s acceptance of time either a rejection of the past or a “vigorous Whig tone” (Ford), a “Macaulaysque cheerleading” equating with progress the changes taking place around him. His title is meant to suggest that “Dickens’ undoubted fascination with clocks rests on what they record, the flow of time and the action of time on existence, rather than on any particular form of time, such as history of the past. . . . [T]o Dickens that the clock ticks on is of utmost relevance, where its hands point means little” (p. 2). I totally agree.

Franklin also finds a “surprisingly strong resemblance” between Dickens’s and Henri Bergson’s views of free will and time. Both reject what Bergson describes as the spatialization of time, envisioning it as discrete blocks lying side by side. Bergson’s durée is “the temporal continuum that Dickens signifies so often by the ticking of a clock or the chiming of a bell” (p. 3). But unlike Bergson, Dickens locates duration in the exterior universe rather than solely in the consciousness.

In his analysis of The Old Curiosity Shop, Franklin quite rightly chal-
lenges conventional views regarding Dickens's rejection of the historical past. But Dickens was not a champion of the historical present either. His "own attitude toward temporality simply precludes consideration of time in terms of periods or eras, except insofar as . . . linguistically convenient" (p. 9). To live in good acts and to die in peace of mind, he concludes, are the "Christian" lessons of time in the book.

The extended discussions of the various novels from Franklin's point of view are stimulating, instructive, and solidly based. And there can surely be no argument with his conclusion that "this clock without hands sums up Dickens' creative incorporation of time into his novels, and it expresses both the moral implications Dickens attributes to temporal attitudes and also the deliberate, intellectual affirmation of life that is Dickens' career-long response to the problems inherent in temporality" (p. 34).

He adds, however: "And if, as Dickens' many symbolic clocks suggest, duration is the mode of time in the exterior universe as well as in the human mind, then that duration—to which man is free to conform and which he must confront to function for the good—must be an expression of the consciousness of a greater mind, the mind of God" (p. 35). In this statement, Franklin has taken his own "leap of faith" to find in Dickens a "supernatural" Christian, a conclusion for which he has produced no real evidence. Dickens' affirmation of life, so far as I can see and so far as Franklin has presented evidence, simply does not warrant the larger conclusion.


Holloway's discussion accepts the definition of Dickens's language as "symbolic" in nature. Within this definition, the essay draws a number of important and valid conclusions I believe my own study supports. Reviewing preceding treatments of Dickens's symbolism, Holloway identifies "two main directions in which the symbolism has been explored" (p. 53), both of which rely upon the idea that Dickens "uses" symbolism in some way; this idea indicates that the critic "is beginning to think about him mechanically" (p. 56). In a great work of the imagination, Holloway says, this is not the right language. The power of the symbolic image "lies in what is mysterious, enigmatic and contradictory about it" (p. 57)—where it somehow escapes from the trite. This power cannot be explained away.

Holloway explains that previous symbol criticism tends toward an analytical, Benthamite model. In introducing his own predilection for a synthetic Hegelian view, Holloway points out that this view was available to Dickens through Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh ("In a Symbol there is
concealment and yet revelation") (p. 58), as well as in statements by Coleridge ("... by a Symbol I mean, not a metaphor or allegory or any other figure of speech or form of fancy, but an actual and essential part of that, the whole of which it represents"). The logic of this paradoxical structure "invites us to become aware of fuller significance in... revelation and concealment" (p. 59).

Holloway opposes any implication in his predecessors that by using symbols Dickens has provided a means of simplifying meanings; any suggestion that the "symbolic dimension of the novel in question... could be expressed merely by an other and simpler version of the tale." Dickens "seems almost at pains to invest whatever could look like a symbol with a dialectical, self-contradictory potentiality" (pp. 61, 63, emphasis Holloway's). Consequently, the "symbolic message (if message it can be called) is one only to behold, not to de-code" (p. 64).


Hornback proposes in this book to examine the inseparableness of imagination and society in the art of Charles Dickens, and to conduct an exploration of the vision of the world he creates from it, a vision both realistic and mythic. Dickens's "mythology" consists of his use of mythic symbols from Genesis. In later novels, the myth is directly realized in the story.

In Dickens's world of change, says Hornback, the opposing forces are growth in his characters and decay in civilization. Whereas in early novels, the "degeneration often overwhelms him, and he takes his characters away into their retreats to save them" (p. 5), later novels (though his vision of chaos/disorder is darker) exhibit more opportunity for changing things for the better by making the best of this world and making new beginnings in it.

Two of these mythic elements—Eden and the Flood—obviously relate directly to this study. In my judgment, Hornback's thesis leads him to too narrow a view of the materials he isolates for treatment and throws his conclusions askew.

Kearns, Michael S. "Associationism, the Heart, and the Life of the Mind in Dickens' Novels," Dickens Studies Annual XV (1986), pp. 111-44.

Kearns's article presents in a clear and cogent fashion how nineteenth century ideas of associationism can contribute to a better understanding of Dickens's character development and related themes.

David Copperfield is a paradigm showing how the heart can be
strong to oppose the external forces, with a complex of associations leading to convictions and acts of will. While Dickens did not have the twentieth century concept of an "unconscious realm," he did acknowledge processes of the mind continuing without direct attentiveness. The life of David's associationally structured mind moves "toward a character determined by his heart rather than by chance impressions from the external world" (p. 124).

Kearns considers Dombey an excellent example of Dickens's "radical revision of association psychology" (p. 132), showing that while Dombey has "perverted his best nature and hardened his character" by the association principle, Dickens "holds [him as well as every other] individual fully accountable for how the principle is applied" (p. 135). The process through which he develops control of his own life involves first the necessity to wipe the slate clean. Kearns demonstrates that each of the characters surveyed must wander in his "own tremendous region" (p. 120) and then become a child again before this reformation can take place.

The dilemma of psychology at Dickens's time was "how to reconcile the data of physiology with a dominant belief in an immaterial mind and the general commitment to the divine analogy" (p. 141), maintaining that a structural similarity between the mind and the external world disposed the former to replicate internally "all the works of God." Kearns concludes his essay with the argument that Dickens solved this problem very logically by showing that if the mind could have shapes impressed on it, it could also be returned to a state of smoothness. He presented a version of death and resurrection that did not rely on divine intervention but made use of what all human beings knew they possessed, because they could feel its urgings—the heart (p. 142).


I have included Kligerman's essay in this bibliography because I think it is strikingly revealing about Dickens's relationships with women and throws light on some of my discussions, particularly with regard to Arthur Clennam. It possesses the rare virtue of having been written by an M.D. for publication in a professional journal of psychoanalysis. It has the added virtue of careful analysis (until the last novels) relating Dickens's life to the literary text.

Kligerman defines as his subject Dickens's tendency to idealize a certain ethereal kind of young girl, along with the consequences of a series of narcissistic disappointments in relation to them. His specific purpose is to contribute to understanding two puzzling features of
Dickens's life: first, that "this supremely successful writer, a man of vitality, good will, virile charm" had such an unhappy love life and, secondly, that in later years he turned increasingly from writing to public dramatic readings "which he pursued in demonic, quasi-suicidal fashion that undoubtedly hastened his death" (pp. 783–84).

Kligerman's interpretation takes the reader through a fascinating retracing and associating of the various relationships with women in Dickens's childhood and youth to his conclusion that Dickens suffered from a "split maternal image" creating an ambivalence toward women that he never resolved. On the one hand was a repressed malignant image; on the other, an idealized image of the ethereal young girl.

At the end of his life, as Dickens "apparently began struggling with more aggressive tendencies and the liberation of less neutralized rage" he "worked fanatically as his feminine literary characters became progressively more hateful" (pp. 79–98). (In this statement, though, he is spectacularly wide of the mark.) But with some point he cites Dickens's affair with Ellen Ternan as evidence of his continued psychic distress.

Kligerman attributes the suicidal public performances only partly to the exhibitionist release they provided. The murder of Nancy (in Oliver Twist) as the last adaptation in his repertoire of dramatic readings reached into "a deeper, more primitively instinctual motive" (p. 798). When he died shortly thereafter of stroke, Kligerman concludes, "the author and his ideal were finally reunited... by symbolic murder and suicide."


This small study of David Copperfield, which considers language in the novel and its relationship to reality, has implications that enlarge into a commentary not only on David as a writer, but, in terms employed also in my study, on Dickens as well. The article argues a disillusionment with realism ("that literary mode which stresses language's ability to repeat or represent accurately in words the world of things" [p. 2]). Fancy, on the other hand, focusing on the difference between the world of objects and a linguistic world, emphasizes what imagination adds when it undertakes to describe the world "out there." As David's memory wrestles with the problem, the "power of the word" becomes evident.

Pointing out its relationship to the "talking cure" of Freud, McGowan says: "The word in art, in repetition, is magic: by merely talking about it the past can be changed, a change which must also influence the present" (p. 19). In writing of a past he had long repressed, Dickens examined this possibility. As his disillusionment with
the “real” England grew, he relied increasingly on “fancy” as an escape from that England and as a possible means of changing it. In common with other criticism tying its conclusions to history, this article unfortunately tends to reduce “fancy” to its realistic implications.


In examining the authenticity of “visions” in Barnaby Rudge, McMaster comes to conclusions that reenforce my own on the transcendent reality of the dream world in a novel that perhaps I did not sufficiently consider. In this novel, she writes, “those visions that move on the edge of consciousness—dreams, fantasies, chimeras of the imagination—recurrently leap into the center of the action, and are confirmed as being more real than the rationality that rejects them” (p. 1). While several Dickens novels “expose the illusory nature of mental projections,” in this novel, for the most part, the vision is validated. “Illusions recurrently turn real, dreams are prophetic, ghosts are substantiated into flesh and blood, and the wild fantasies of madmen are actually enacted. In the unleashed frenzy of the Gordon Riots we have an analogy for the release of the untamed forces of the unconscious” (p. 2).

McMaster believes that the supernatural—easily overlooked in a novel ordinarily considered historical—has a special place in its exploration of “the uneasy relation between the conscious and unconscious levels of the mind; and it reenforces the vision of the riots as a dream-like emanation from the unconscious” (p. 10).

McMaster concludes that while “the pattern confirms that this is a novel about the eruption of the unconscious . . . the pattern also suggests that [it is] about the imagination, that shadowy everyman’s land that lies between the conscious and unconscious regions of the mind . . . . The imagination, properly recognized, can mediate between the conscious and the unconscious, authority and impulse, the governing and the governed” (p. 16). This conclusion avoids the temptation to “psychoanalyze” Dickens himself, granting him instead the artist’s power to convey the workings of the human mind.


McMaster here argues that, in “examining the relation between the outward and visible and the inward and spiritual” (p. 3), Dickens reveals a “painter’s philosophy.” All artists in considering their art must “ponder the relation between appearance and reality.” While much
great literature, particularly, is concerned with appearances that are illusory or deceptive, there is a sense in which Dickens’s art is like the painter’s in its declared faith in the invisible as the true. Like Browning’s Fra Lippo Lippi, Dickens believes the “outward and visible world ‘means intensely.’” Particularly in his creation of character, “there is a consonance between appearance and essence that pertains more usually in the visual than in the verbal arts. . . . He writes as a kind of semiotician, studying visible phenomena as signs—door-knockers as symbols for their owners; houses as signalling their occupants; faces, clothes, carriages, cabs all as telling a story about something else, some inner reality that is accessible only by this language of appearances” (pp. 3–4).

McMaster’s book throws light on her declared subject: Dickens as “designer.” It therefore has much to say on Dickens’s methods and skill as a visual craftsman but quite appropriately does not concern itself with the internal imaginative processes.

I find some difficulty in accepting at face value a statement that Dickens had a “declared faith in the visible as true” comparable to that of Fra Lippo Lippi. The point is rather that Dickens creates appearances consistent with the reality, writes as if they are there, and asks a reader to believe in them as trustworthy. Despite Dickens’s unquestioned fascination with physiognomy, I believe that his correspondences (like his ghosts) are a product of imagination rather than of his belief system. Indeed, do most artists share Fra Lippo Lippi’s belief? Making the internal visual is their only medium of expression (cf. my review of Marten, below).


In this illuminating “small study,” McWilliams points out first that recent critics have emphasized how, in Dickens’s later novels, beneath the confusion and multiplicity Dickens encourages, the world is gradually reordered for the reader “according to lines of plot which reflect Dickens’ conviction that all men are connected with and responsible to one another” (p. 255). McWilliams states his own purpose to argue that the novel’s unity also depends upon Dickens’s conscious use of a cluster of interrelated images that turn into symbols.

McWilliams’s discussion develops the interpretation of beacon and gibbet by relating them to the “governing metaphor” for Pip’s Bildungsroman as a ship journey. These three images haunt Pip’s imagination. Because Pip describes his expectations, failures, and new understandings through these metaphors, the reader is constantly returned to the quality of the boy’s imagination. Pip dreams in symbols taken from his
experiences. When those experiences lead to greater insight, Pip has
the sensitivity to alter the symbols without discarding them.

Although I do not agree with all of McWilliams’s discussion, I be-
lieve his main points are well taken.

Marcus, Steven. Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey (New York: Basic Books,
1965).

The sheer variety of things Marcus says he is trying to do in this
widely quoted book ("relating these novels to each other, to the course
of Dickens’ life and thought, and to the culture to which they belong"
[p. 9]) leads him finally to abandon his original plan to consider all of
the novels and to limit discussion to the seven novels from Pickwick to
Dombey. Unfortunately, rather than limiting the scope of his enquiries
in order to develop his most provocative and penetrating general
observations, he merely introduces what I would consider his intrinsi-
cally most significant topics and then dismisses them. Since the topics
slighted are all relevant to my own study, I miss what further he might
have said, for example, when he briefly comments that the "transcen-
dence" Dickens achieves in "the miracle of Pickwick Papers," is "in large
measure achieved unconsciously" (p. 18).

Even more buried and stimulating is a single sentence (also picked
up in part by Daleski [see p. 215]) that Marcus simply drops into the
middle of a very long paragraph: "This analogical imagination is pre-
eminently Shakespearean; it is what G. Wilson Knight refers to when
he describes Shakespeare’s plays as ‘expanded metaphors’" (p. 40).
Once more, I find myself waiting for explanation that never appears.

In another instance, Marcus alludes to a topic which fired Dickens’s
imagination: how to account for the "peculiar uneasiness" that wax
dummies generally arouse" (p. 148). Its origin lies, Marcus says, para-
phrasing Ortega Y Gasset’s thought, in "the provoking ambiguity with
which wax figures defeat any attempt at adopting a clear and consist-
ent attitude toward them. . . . Looking at them we suddenly feel a
misgiving: should it not be they who are looking at us? [cf. Carey
on ‘Corpses and Effigies.’]" (p. 148). The habitual regard Dickens held
for such creatures of imagination as though they were real people,
Marcus says, has much to do with his singular, primitive powers as an
artist, an idea he again does not develop.

Finally, in a discussion of "communication," Marcus finds it neces-
sary to clarify what Dickens seemed to have in mind when he em-
ployed the term "my meaning" in explaining to his readers why he
had decided to discontinue Master Humphrey’s Clock. Dickens has in
mind, Marcus states, "not some abstract moral or maxim, but a com-
plex, enlarging state of consciousness which the novelist dramatizes or
'works out' in the course of the writing, a vision and interpretation of experience" (p. 171). This parenthesis seems to me worth more development than what purports to be his main topic.

"The Changing World" described in chapter eight I find to be the most satisfactory section of the book. His discussion of Dombey and Son, focusing on many of the scenes, images, and themes important to my own investigations, goes along lines that interestingly complement my findings, while the total discussion goes to different but not conflicting conclusions.


Marten's analyses of the imaginative similarities between Hogarth and Dickens are strikingly identified and persuasively developed in this engrossing article. He argues that comprehension of Dickens's "artistic indebtedness" to William Hogarth provides one way to "recognize the aesthetic framework" for his multitudinous fictional bases: "In matters of total formal construction and treatment of scenic detail especially, the grotesque visual artistry of Hogarth will help us come to grips with the work of the novelist who so much admired it" (p. 145).

Acknowledging the obvious similarities between Hogarth and Dickens, he moves on quickly to what he considers of "greater interest and importance": "the Hogarth-Dickens correlation in matters relating to the creative imagination" (p. 149). The middle of the article is thus of special relevance to the matters explored in my book.

Responding to earlier critical comments by Ford and Monod indicating that Dickens was a "spatial" rather than a "temporal" writer, he points out (as I would) that their remarks must be qualified. Although we respond to most visual art spatially and to most fiction temporally, the work of both Hogarth and Dickens requires us consciously to respond both spatially and temporally, the "impact of the scenes con[ing] most immediately from the relations among the elements within them (scenic details, characters) and then gradually from the relation to the whole" (p. 150).

Specific discussion of "scenes" from both artists is based on Hogarth's own description of his artistic intentions as "intricacy of form," defined as "that peculiarity in the lines, which compose it, that leads the eye a wanton kind of chase" (as quoted on p. 151, emphasis Hogarth's). This "chace," says Marten, is a "visual adventure and tremendous fun," in which "nothing stands still. We focus on a multitude of detail, all of it interesting. The eye stops and moves, stops, turns and begins again taking in the tremendous variety of life in the scene" (p. 151). The ensuing discussion is an illuminating lesson in how the
“speculation of the artist” moves from particular to particular gathering meaning as it goes.

The remainder of the article examines what Marten calls the “Hogarthian-Dickensian grotesque.” In the prints and novels, our familiar world, though rooted in verifiable fact, is “abruptly turned askew. This confusion of the everyday is menacing” (p. 158). At the same time, “straight” details in the scene manage to preserve a precarious balance. Both artists (with some failures) “get the effect of terror and also . . . achieve the comic.”

While a number of statements in the article seem to imply—no doubt rightly so—the influence of Hogarth on Dickens, much of the weight of the article points to a natural relationship embedded in their respective natures, which would have drawn Hogarth to Dickens as much as it drew Dickens to him.


This is the first and continues to be one of the best of the comprehensive imagination studies. When, in the mid-1960s, I conducted the original investigation that led to The Imagined World, I carefully postponed reading far into Miller's book until my own analyses were secure. I sensed at once the degree to which our thinking was going along parallel lines, and did not want my own perceptions and observations to be swayed by his in any way. In retrospect, I believe that this was a sound decision. As a result, although our separate studies frequently meet and proceed together for a while, they soon part to go in different directions.

Miller's general statements in the introduction are in almost complete harmony with my own opinions. I can take little exception to his statement that "taken all together, all the unit passages form the imaginative universe of the writer. . . . His style is his own way of living in the world given a verbal form. So in literature every landscape is an interior landscape, just as each imaginary man or woman is also a figure in the writer's own private world of perception or memory, longing or fear" (pp. ix—x).

Miller explains that what he means by the “world” of Dickens's novels is the totality of all things as they are lived in by all human beings collectively. For Dickens, its totality is embodied in the great modern commercial city. But how could he reach the real city? Since all of its millions of inhabitants interpret their world in terms of their own fears, fancies, and opinions, any single point of view is both partial and distorted. Dickens's solution is to seek the truth by giving "an exhaustive survey of the surface itself," and "when enough of the iso-
lated parts are described, and their relations discovered, the truth behind each, it may be, will be liberated—a truth at once particular and universal" (p. xvi). Miller thus relates Dickens’s method most interestingly to Browning’s attempt to tease out the truth in *The Ring and the Book*.

In a general way I find Miller’s summaries and conclusions persuasive and agreeable. The idea that each protagonist begins in isolation, moves through successive adventures, essentially attempts to understand the world and integrate himself in it, and thus finds his real self appears unarguable. So is his observation that the frustrated search for a transcendent spiritual power undergirding human values ends in an existential affirmation, though I see little evidence of “the frustrated search” itself.

More specific judgments and conclusions invite argument or a call for clarification. When he says that “the death of Nell near the graveyard of a country church reflects back on Oliver’s retreat to a happy rural paradise and suggests that it was an evasion of Dickens’s problem, not a real solution” (p. 330), Miller seems to say that Dickens should have sought the latter—yet surely the real point is that the problem itself is insoluble except in a person’s/character’s belief system.

Most importantly, I find it difficult to accept as real the “changes” Miller finds in the last novels. If the idea that “the transcendent spiritual power glimpsed at the margins or in the depths of the material world is not really a positive support for human values” (p. 333) is a new one, some evidence of a contradictory earlier view must be forthcoming. This evidence I do not believe exists, except perhaps in Dickens’s apparent belief in a kind of retributive justice, a belief he still exhibited in the last novels.

Neither can I accept the flat statement that Dickens rejected the past. The discussion in which the statement is imbedded misses what is to me the crucial step of absorbing the past into memory as a part of the process of self-identification.


In this study Newsom gives fresh insights into the dualistic nature of Dickens’s vision of reality by picking up his own expression, “the romantic side of familiar things” from the preface to *Bleak House*. His thesis is that, properly understood, “the phrase explains with extraordinary precision the central imaginative principle of Dickens’ art” (p. 2). That is, rather than merge the romantic and familiar into some new synthesis, he sought to keep each intensely alive: “a mixture of fact and fancy,” both of which must be maintained with their own identity.
Two chapters in particular explore matters of moment to discussions in my book. In chapter two, " Bleak House, I, Suspended Animation," Newsom develops the methods by which Dickens succeeds in creating in Bleak House a world of mysterious relationships, a world in which 'what we have come to think of as the 'familiar' suddenly ceases to be so, and strikes us instead as something the very opposite . . . the 'romantic' [the converse likewise being true]" (p. 18). How does he achieve this? Newsom points to a "chaotic circularity," which returns the reader again and again to a point that seems to promise an action not yet begun. "Reading the opening chapter is like watching the workings of a complex machine when all the gears have been disengaged, but continue to turn under their own momentum" (p. 25) in a state of suspended animation.

In chapter three, " Bleak House, II, The Uncanny," Newsom pursues these ideas through discussion of the constant tension between romantic/familiar, eternal/topical, and dreaming/waking created by "the experience of imperfect, circular, and involuntary repetition we know as deja vu" (p. 50). This sense of deja vu is achieved for the reader in the double perspective provided by the double narration.

In the second section of chapter three, Newsom reviews Freud's essay on "The Uncanny." I found particularly rewarding his account of "the resonance between Dickens' techniques for evoking feelings of uncanniness and Freud's description of the conditions giving rise to and the particular dynamics of the uncanny" (p. 65). He quotes Freud's comments on the uncanny in literature, which Freud thought provides "a much more fertile province than the uncanny in real life." Newsom points out that the tension between two quite different frames of reference, the "commonsensical and rationalistic view of scientific scepticism on the one hand, and the primitive belief in the supernatural on the other, is quite precisely one of the things Dickens has suggested by dwelling on 'the romantic side of familiar things'" (p. 66).

The quality of double perspective is accounted for in psychoanalytic theory by the dramatic cooperation between the conscious, pre-conscious, and unconscious. This cooperation is a prominent feature of hypnosis, hypnagogic states between sleeping/waking, and neuroses. It is also related to phenomena involving movements into altered states of consciousness followed by amnesia for these altered states (for all of which Dickens had a lifelong interest).


Romano sets the stage for his discussion of Dickens's realism (which he hopes will generalize into a discussion of realism itself) in an introductory chapter with a well-chosen title furnished by Flora Finching:
“The Horizon of *et cetera*.” He finds clearly inadequate a definition of realism as representational. Using *Our Mutual Friend* as his illustrative novel, Romano points out that, in contrast to Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, Dickens’s novel makes no effort to conform to our “real” world. Its details reconcile primarily only to each other “cohering at last in a significant whole but responsible along the way to no expectations derived from experience outside the text” (p. 3). While thus agreeing with the Formalists, Romano argues that the notion of realist form has recognizable and important implications beyond the formal, in particular for themes and character. A realist such as Tolstoy or Dickens “resents the unreality of the conventions of artistic presentation, such as the posture, the limitation at the edge of the canvas, and the alien frame” (p. 7). In his frustration at trying to get at “the world that lies beyond the farthest border of his power to portray,” he seeks a way to explode the forms of his novel to admit this outside world of reality.

Taking issue with the views of such Formalists as René Wellek and Austin Warren that in a successful work of art “materials are completely assimilated into the form” (p. 19), and that only the cohering formal whole is capable of correspondence to the real world, Romano argues further that it is exactly at the points where the novelist momentarily succeeds in destroying the closed form of his novel that his work touches the reality of the world outside and thus, in the most significant sense, becomes most “realistic.”

I particularly respond to Romano’s example of Charley Hexam’s unexpected disruption of the Veneering’s formal dinner-party world. His detailed discussion of its “mirrored” surface, as opposed to the “depths” represented by Charley, parallels and complements my own discussion of the novel.

Romano weaves many considerations into his analysis and pursues the implications of his argument into many specific and detailed aspects of form and its disintegration by the momentary intrusion of the “formlessness and sprawl of reality” (p. 46). Dependence on the real world is the first fact of realism, as opposed to the autonomous notion of “pure form,” which asserts its radical independence. Bradley Headstone (as well as a host of other characters) tries to reduce his life to ordered forms, only to be “exploded” by the “lurking, primordial” dimensions of existence. Romano calls Dickens an “artist of language in love with his medium, whose use of words protests against the limitations imposed upon them in the service of representational form” (p. 106).

Deriving his terms from Roman Jakobson, Romano considers Dickens’s extensive use of metonomy as opposed to metaphor (which is primary in the literary schools of romanticism and symbolism) to be an indication of his “realistic” trend. This metonomy (the “substitution of proximate things”) maintains an openness, relating its world to the
real world by an “imperfect closure . . . a certain area of experience actually located on the world’s horizon” (p. 114). Form is fragmentary rather than whole. Life’s reality, for Dickens, is “a contradictoriness that is not equipoise but schism, not harmony but a jangling discordance, as of bells” (p. 116). Both a novel and a person are shaped by “the other”—by what they exclude, by what they are not. What the individual owes to others, what the work of imagination owes to the world, is nothing less than its life.


Stewart’s lively and generally persuasive stylistic study of Dickens’s imagination is itself charged with the wit and verbal skill about which he writes. The book could not have happened otherwise. The sharp and detailed analyses in this densely packed book are irreducible: properly, it must be read rather than summarized (as should many of the studies reviewed here).

Stewart calls Dickens the “great writer of modern industrial society,” his prose increasingly a response to the London industrial metropolis. “Countering the pull of urban anonymity, the quirks and assertions of its own verbal personality were there constantly to remind us that identity might still vibrantly hold its ground” (p. 225). Dickens’s characters struggle to “regain . . . the acute beauties of wit and style from which they have been dispossessed” (p. 224). Although he thus relates Dickens’s prose to his contemporary world, Stewart does not make the mistake of accounting for it historically. Rather, he considers that it is Dickens’s unique gift to show us how the verbal imagination enables any one to retain a center of personal freedom in the midst of an impersonal but imprisoning outer world. “With a furious and persuasive invention unequalled in our fiction,” Stewart writes, “Dickens’s effortless way with words becomes an access back to their source, an exploratory ‘way’ into the poetic impulse itself from which language springs.” Our views of the essential function of Dickens’s language as crystallized in the quoted sentence are so harmonious that I find most of his book singularly relevant to my own interpretations.

Among the profusion of Dickens characters Stewart finds many representations of both true and false artists of the figurative imagination. For the true artists (such as Sam Weller, Dick Swiveller, or Jenny Wren) the imaginative fancy creates inspiring language fictions in which to believe. Their creations are visionary. The false artists, in contrast, merely “pretend” to believe their fictions for personal aggrandizement.
Stewart carefully “diagnoses” the problems, the “trials” of imagination, that confront Dickens’s characters. In *Pickwick*, imagination “quarantined” itself against, specifically, the false public rhetoric of the outside world (Sam Weller entering the novel as the life-bringing force of the true artist of the imagination). “Yet in one of Dickens’s novels after another it is the naughtiness of language—its impurities both ethical and esthetic; its moral and metaphorical lapses, confusions, indelicacies, excuses—which is dragged before us in comic review” (p. 114).

After Dick Swiveller, Stewart notes that the characters fall silent (Mark Tapley and, very much later, Jenny Wren are the only exceptions in their revitalization of language). Verbal wit has forsaken them and imagination must go underground in the “romantic” withdrawals of escape artists, both true and false pastoralists. Verbal wit is never for long, however, denied to the narrative voice.

In his chapter on “Escape Artists,” Stewart concludes that Dickens’s novels show us that the irrational impulse alone can ransom us away from a world that makes neither rational nor poetic sense, a reality of neither rhyme nor reason. They show fancy to be our only deliverance, yet they know too that “the poetry of existence” can be a destructive sham, not honest relief but a mere subterfuge.

My only quarrels with Stewart are based on his view that Dickens totally controlled his novels from the beginning and on his practice of extrapolating on occasion too far for credibility. In *Pickwick Papers* especially I think the novel can be more accurately accounted for as the spontaneous creation of a young genius yet learning to control his craft and working his fiction out of a number of difficulties by his imaginative resourcefulness. The novel therefore changed and grew as he wrote it, rather than having been thought out in all its complexities in advance. Both *Pickwick* and Dickens, I believe, learned a good deal during the course of the story. On the second point, I have already commented on the extended life he provides for Little Nell as unwarranted, though most interesting (see Introduction). All in all, however, in my opinion this is the best and most comprehensive of the stylistic studies.


The first four chapters of Stoehr’s book are particularly interesting in relationship to this study. His exploration of the dream elements in Dickens’s fiction provides highly relevant theoretical background for many of my discussions.
The first three chapters consider "The Style," "The Vision of Reality," and "The Analogy to Dream." "The Style," as Stoehr convincingly presents it through analysis of the St. Antoine "Hunger" passage in A Tale of Two Cities, acquires its characteristic flavor from its use of detail as an active ingredient in setting and plot and from its use of rhetorical devices such as anaphora and metonymy (both interpreted broadly) to order and connect these details. As apparently needless and accidental details weave into a "whole narrative . . . webbed with . . . interconnections" (p. 9), they lead to a denouement of discovery that the apparently disconnected elements are in fact related and even form a logical sequence. Stoehr argues that Dickens's whole procedure (true for the passage analyzed, certainly) may be described as metonymical. The way he catches a moment isolated in time and space exactly identifies his graphic realism of detail. Similarly, the articulation, juxtaposition, superimposition of such details give, by the combination of order and disjunction, the strangely unreal effect we also associate with Dickens: "the sense of a world all in pieces, where every fragment is nonetheless intimately and mysteriously involved with every other fragment" (p. 19). Metonyms of character and plot become "montage-clusters," any part of which, as Kenneth Burke has explained, "may do synecdochic duty for the whole" (p. 20). Stoehr summarizes Dickens's stylistic blend as "dream-like, hallucinatory, surreal" (pp. 32–33).

Chapter two, "The Vision of Reality," gets into "one of the most tangled questions in contemporary criticism" (p. 34), that of mimesis, tracing the movement from style to manner. Critics must first ascertain the way in which any novelist relates the particular fictive world to facts. Theoretically, verisimilitude may appeal to a reader's judgment that fiction and life correspond, or to his impression of lifeliness. The first may be called natural; the second artificial. Stoehr locates Dickens's vision between them. He attains a "very high degree of natural verisimilitude," but the devices he uses "although sometimes conducive to artificial verisimilitude are often destructive of it" (p. 41).

A carefully detailed and highly relevant discussion of "The Role of the Narrator" concludes the chapter. Dickens's "negative capability" enables him to project himself into every character to such a degree that he cannot be identified with any of them. This is true even with first-person narrators. As the narrator identifies himself with everything, he himself disappears: he becomes the narrative, a natural corollary of allowing the scene to stand alone and to provide its own interpretation. The kinds of choices Dickens makes and the order he imposes on them contribute to the illusion of a story telling itself. Here Stoehr's discussion is particularly complementary to that in other studies. He concludes the chapter by observing that while Dickens's
metonymic style particularly creates the impression of the story writing itself, and leads to a judgment of natural verisimilitude, his metaphors do likewise by seeming to have been stumbled upon rather than searched out by an authorial intelligence. The result is a "mythic" reality, with the weirdly hallucinatory effect of dream.

In chapter three, "The Analogy to Dream," Stoehr relates the various features of Dickens's vision to Freudian dream theory (thus pointing out the similarities between poetic work and dream work). Dickens's stylistic devices, in simultaneously concealing and revealing his explosive subject matter, parallel Freud's theory that the elements of dream work both hide and display the dream content. The chapter develops various perspectives related to the analogy.

"The Novel as Dream" shifts from theoretical to practical as Stoehr analyzes the "Dark Novels" of Dickens's later years. He acknowledges at the outset that he will often speak of Dickens "as a psychotherapist might speak of a patient whose dreams he is analyzing" (p. 93). But he insists that the point of this discussion is not to understand Dickens, but his novels—the end not his health, but our pleasure. The distinction, I think, becomes murky. Also, along the way, the connection between the discussion and dream is not clear to me. Nonetheless, the psychoanalytic interweaving of biographical and social influences into Dickens's "nucleus of pain" is interesting in itself. Stoehr further acknowledges that "much of the foregoing discussion might very well have been undertaken without any reference to dreams and the dream manner" (p. 135). But he insists (with some point!) that psychoanalytic interpretation furnishes understandings impossible with ordinary methods of stylistic analysis. He resists calling Dickens an allegorist, and reenforces the idea that his novels "are not mere codes to be deciphered." Each novel must, like dreams, be attended and responded to fully, to be absorbed, rather than to be added up into meanings.


In this book, Stone has attacked matters associated with the experiential sources of Dickens's "fabling mind," which I tried to avoid as irrelevant to what I was doing. I therefore have found it a valuable complementary study.

For me, the highlight of the book is chapter three, "Dickens' Fabling Mind: 'A Mist of Fancy over Well-Remembered Facts.'" In this chapter he constructs plausible and probable origins for the fabling mind in the people and experiences of Dickens's childhood. Stone be-
lieves that this mind arrived at its final form with Dickens’s exper-
ences in the blacking warehouse. He registers his own uneasiness,
however, at what may seem “a bald and reductive way of summarizing
something that was infinitely more mysterious and complex” (p. 69).
Nonetheless, he concludes that by the time Dickens left the blacking
warehouse the essential habit of his creativity had been formed. At the
center of that habit was the fanciful transformation of life that was not
simply a by-product of his creativity but indistinguishable from it.

I must share Stone’s own misgiving that the very nature of his in-
vestigation frequently results in discussion that tends to reduce his
subject to what can be explained and accounted for. His conclusion at
the end of the book, however, is unarguable:

Dickens’ universality, like his motifs and techniques, is . . . connected to his
commitment to fairy tales. For that commitment helped him tap the same
deep reservoir of wishes and urges that fairy stories tap, a reservoir fed by
man’s immemorial responses to life. Fairy tales, like myths, legends, fables,
fantasies, and other correlates of the invisible world—correlatives that over-
lap and reflect one another—survive because they embody deep and pro-
foundly attractive or frightening human hopes and fears. At the same time,
fairy stories also embody a sense of life’s mystery and wonder, a refraction
of life’s strangeness and wildness; they testify to the weird signatures and
correspondences, the enigmatic forces that lie buried deep in the hidden
heart of things. (p. 338)

As with Steven Marcus’s work, reviewed earlier, I wish that Stone
had found a different way to limit his book: namely, that he had de-
cided upon a comprehensive look throughout the novels at “Nursery
Tales” alone. I also think that a most crucial aspect of Dickens and
fairy tales remains unexplored in his book. Although the progression
from fact to fancy is extensively traced, Dickens’s deep belief in the
need to reverse the process from fancy back to fact again receives no
attention; yet final reconciliation between them is essential to complete
the story. (This last criticism is probably what Robert Newsom had in
mind when he noted the lack of attention to the “critique of fantasy
[or fancy] implicit in much of Dickens [and notably in Great Expecta-
tions]” [DSA, 9, 1981, p. 270].)

These criticisms should not obscure the fact that within the discus-
sion are many illuminating references and insights pertaining to
Dickens’s imagination that make Stone’s book a stimulating and val-
uable resource. To choose one of these, I am specifically indebted to
him for referring me to Dickens’s essay entitled “When We Stopped
Growing.” His conclusions from reading this essay reenforce my own
beliefs from other evidence. Stone states that “certain powerful im-
pressions of his childhood fixed themselves indelibly in his mind; his
growth, insofar as such impressions are concerned, stopped at the mo-
ment of encounter. Throughout the novels, one catches a glimpse of how fixed yet imaginatively free [an] image was when one meets the same detail in a totally transformed context” (p. 40).


The title of Vogel’s study urges its inclusion in this bibliography. It is an engrossing, extremely clever and ingeniously argued book difficult to evaluate. At one extreme it proceeds on assumptions, goes along a path, and draws conclusions that nobody would or could argue with. At the other extreme, it makes leaps of inference that seem so speculative and so improbable that they are difficult to credit. The very ingenuity of argument by which a circuitous route leads to a triumphant conclusion puts strains on credulity. In between, Vogel piles up the patterned evidence to a degree that seems more than adequate to justify her thesis that Dickens was in studied control of all the threads of pattern pointing to Scriptural allegory.

Dickens was unquestionably and unarguably in deepest sympathy with Christian ethics and principles (though I find it hard to consider him a “devout” Christian), and his familiarity with the Bible provided him with an abundance of analogical resources, which he utilized fully in David Copperfield. But the allegory or myth, I would argue, belongs to the Bible rather than to Dickens. In this regard, like Faulkner he is a myth-user rather than a myth-maker. His myth (in Jung’s terminology, the myth he “lives in”) is quite another. Perhaps, then, the problem I have with the book begins with the title (why not Scriptural Allegory in Dickens?) and extends through those arguments that try to make Christianity Dickens’s own enveloping myth.