After Dickens is both a performative reading of Dickens the novelist and an exploration of the potential for adaptive performance of the novels themselves. John Glavin conducts an historical inquiry into Dickens's relation to the theatre and theatricality of his own time, and uncovers a much more ambivalent, often hostile, relationship than has hitherto been noticed. In this context, Dickens's novels can be seen as a form of counter-performance, one which would allow the author to perform without being seen or scrutinized. But Glavin also explores the paradoxically rich performative potential in Dickens's fiction, and describes new ways to stage that fiction in emotionally powerful, critically acute adaptations. The book as a whole, therefore, offers a radical new reading of Dickens through an unusual alliance between literary criticism and theatrical performance.

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
LITERATURE AND CULTURE 20

AFTER DICKENS

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE AND CULTURE

General editor
Gillian Beer, *University of Cambridge*

Editorial board
Isobel Armstrong, *Birkbeck College, London*
Terry Eagleton, *University of Oxford*
Leonore Davidoff, *University of Essex*
Catherine Gallagher, *University of California, Berkeley*
D. A. Miller, *Columbia University*
J. Hillis Miller, *University of California, Irvine*
Mary Poovey, *New York University*
Elaine Showalter, *Princeton University*

Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly syntheses and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as ''background,'' feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field.

This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

A complete list of titles published will be found at the end of the book.

AFTER DICKENS

Reading, Adaptation and Performance

JOHN GLAVIN

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011–4211, USA htt://www.cup.org
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© John Glavin 1999

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1999

Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Baskerville 11/12.5 pt [VN]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 63322 2 hardback

FOR

MARGARET O'KEEFFE GLAVIN

quaerens margaritas bonas,
unam pretiosiorem Margaritam inveni

(Matthew 13:44)

Contents

Acknowledgments xi
Note on the text xiii

Introduction 1

PART I SET UP

1 Dickens, adaptation and Grotowski 13

2 . . . as upon a theatre 47

PART II FLASHBACK

3 . . . to be a Shakespeare 83

4 Exit: ‘‘the sanguine mirage’’ 118

PART III RESOLUTION

5 How to do it 155

6 Coda 189

Notes 209
References 216
Index 223

Acknowledgments

The Dickens Project, University of California, Santa Cruz, begot the adaptations that began *After Dickens*. Indeed, the book itself was first the idea of the Project's two Directors, Murray Baumgarten and John Jordan. Dickensians, at least, will know what I mean, then, when I gratefully acknowledge them as my Chapman and Hall. They each read the entire manuscript in its earliest stages, and their prudent counsel turned a loose, baggy monster into something that had shape if not quite style. The former and current administrators of the Project, Linda Rosewood Hooper and JoAnna Rottke, made working bicoastally anything but a binary opposition. And the Friends of the Dickens Project have always been just that, heroically friendly, especially Barbara Keller, the Friends' dynamic leader during most of this book's gestation.

James Kincaid read the entire manuscript at a crucial stage, when his enthusiastic support renewed my depleted faith in its possibility. Even more than his advice, the bliss of his perfect frivolity has been a beacon ahead, showing me where and how criticism ought to go, even when I haven't had the wit to follow.

N. John Hall, Gerhard Joseph and Hilary Schor also read the manuscript, and generously guided its outcome. They taught me, in a dozen years of incomparable conversation, to recognize eccentricity as the most precious of a critic's commodities, and to treasure aberrancy as the only sure guard against a scholar's mere and dull competence.

And Regina Barreca has from the very beginning always been – quite unlike Agnes Wickfield – pointing upward, showing me, in her life and in her work, that if you're not angry, you are probably not thinking, and that if you are not laughing, you certainly cannot claim to have cared for the things of men. And if you are not generous without stint, then you have everything to learn from her example.

Among many others on the Project faculty I happily acknowledge my debt to: Janice Carlisle, Joseph Childers, Philip Collins, Edward Eigner,

Regenia Gagnier, Catherine Gallagher, Elizabeth Gitter, Albert Hutter, Wendy Jacobson, Jacqueline Jaffe, Fred Kaplan, Carol MacKay, Sylvia Manning, Joss Marsh, Patrick McCarthy, Helena Michie, Robert Newsom, David Parker, Robert Patten, Robert Polhemus, Norris Pope, Judith Rosen, Robert Tracy, and the late Elliot Gilbert.

At Georgetown, my colleagues Gay Gibson Cima and John Pfordresher persuaded me I had something to say, when that didn't seem terribly likely. The English department had four Chairs while I worked on this project: Paul Betz, James Slevin, Lucy Maddox and Leona Fisher. All of them made my finishing this book their own high priority. Lynne Hirschfeld, the administrator of the department during most of that time, listened patiently and counseled wisely though most of what she heard was merely paranoia. I am happy also to acknowledge the gracious support of the past and present Deans of Georgetown College, Royden Davis, S.J. and Robert Lawton, S.J.

Among my other Georgetown colleagues I owe happily acknowledged thanks to: Valerie Babb, Randall Bass, Edward Bodnar, S.J., Denis Bradley, Aimee Cooper, Maureen Corrigan, Bruce Douglass, Judith Farr, Keith Fort, Kim Hall, Lindsay Kaplan, Carol Kent, Joseph O'Connor, Patricia O'Connor, Victoria Pedrick, Michael Ragussis, Elaine Romanelli, Jason Rosenblatt, Nicholas Scheetz, Alexander Sens, Roger Slakey, Bruce Smith, Margaret Stetz, and Anne Walsh.

I am indebted to Josie Dixon at Cambridge University Press for a warm summer of welcome e-mail.

I have been buoyed by unflagging support from my friends: George Bear, P.-L. Bland, Gordon Davis, Patricia Dietz, Deborah Fort, Jane Jordan, Christine Smith, Judith Throm, Rebecca Tracy; from my family: James Glavin, Margaret Higgins Glavin, Joanne Parrack, Mary Joseph Pirola, Mark Pirola; from my son and daughter, Thaddeus Glavin and Cecilia Glavin, ecstatic that we are all now finally After Dickens; and from my wife, Margaret O'Keeffe Glavin, to whom this book is dedicated, and who makes everything that is good in my life possible.

Note on the text

For Dickens's texts I have, without apology, relied on a motley assortment of different paperbound editions, just those dog-eared ones I use to teach, because that's where my notes and markers are.

> For *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend* I relied on the Penguins.
> For *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* I used the Oxford Illustrated Edition.

Although I do not quote them in the text of *After Dickens*, for Dickens Letters, I read the multi-volume Pilgrim Edition published by The Clarendon Press and edited principally by Madeline House and Graham Story.

I

Set Up

"We have not outgrown the two great Theatres."
Household Words, January 1, 1853

Well before he became an author and Boz, Dickens, young, impecunious, and fiercely ambitious, managed to get himself that rare chance, a Covent Garden audition. He had been preparing sedulously for this opening, and capable judges thought he had a decent chance to be hired as a comedian. But when the day of the audition arrived, he bunked. He said he was ill. And he never rescheduled. Almost everything that follows in this book emerges from thinking about that no show.

I don't think this audition is the missing clue to reading Dickens, just as I don't think *Citizen Kane* is serious about Rosebud. The hidden clue lost in the early life seems to me just Welles's and Mankiewicz's *tour de force* satire about the over-easy Freudianism swamping pre-war Hollywood. And that's just as it should be. All I'm saying, to start, is that from the start Dickens was in not quite equal parts thrilled (less) and (more) frightened by the stage.

CHAPTER I

Dickens, adaptation and Grotowski

Winter of 1990–91. The gift shop of the Metropolitan opera is selling a beach towel. The top of the towel proclaims: ''The Original Ending of Verdi's Aida.'' The middle displays a pyramid, some palm trees, and two figures in Egyptian dress, one male, the other female, peeking, suspicious and surprised, through an opening in the structure. And at the bottom: ''Who would have thought there was a back door to this place?''

After Dickens is looking for that back door: to Dickens, to adaptation, to theatre, to theory. The back door that allows all four to escape, like Aida and Radames, from the nineteenth century, the century of the *liebestod*, the ecstatic union that relies on live burial. I want to adapt in a way that frees the originals from a regime which identifies bliss with death and insists on mere pleasure as the only real good: the greatest good of the greatest number, yes, but never the ecstatic. But on that retrograde threshold I also want to locate an even more encompassing ''site of bliss,'' a moment and place for us as well as the characters (Barthes 1975: 4).

The ''site of bliss,'' Roland Barthes says, is the place, the moment, where and when ''the garment gapes,'' an *intermittence* ''which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing . . . between two edges'' (pp.9–10). This is the delight of taking what we want rather than accepting what we are offered, the bliss we spy rather than the pleasure we are shown. For me, that site focuses on the performance of adaptation. And what I emphatically reject is any form of adaptation that functions as memorial or monument, let alone masterpiece theater, any variation on Verdi's final pyramid tomb, the novel or the script as burial site. But in that rejection I want also to open a back door to current critical practice, to *theory*, opening a way out for the affect theory has bottled in, an outlet for the full range of feeling critique has boiled down to anger.

To open that way, I begin by defining my three crucial terms: Dickens, Adaptation, and Grotowski.

DICKENS

To begin, *After Dickens* reads Dickens generously, that is as a kind of idiot savant. He could do brilliantly one or two of the things that few of us can do at all – like write prose that actually improves when read aloud. But he couldn't do at all most of the things that most of us do without thinking, like think. The brilliant Winnicottian Adam Phillips has cannily observed that "psychoanalytic writing finds it difficult to show that everyone else is not like everyone else" (Phillips 1994: 36). And most kinds of non-psychoanalytic contemporary critical writing find it equally "difficult" to show that everyone is not like everyone else in some fundamental sort of group, linked by gender, or race, or class, or more recently by sexual orientation. This is because most of what we mean by thinking turns out to be some form of *slotting*, taking a category as more significant than the individual item being organized within the slot. It's slotting that makes it possible not only to organize, but to explain and to predict human behavior. Dickens doesn't think – actually I think that he can't think – precisely because he resists with all the force of unmitigated childish narcissism any and every claim of the slot on the self.

It's not simply that in life and in fiction Dickens separates from the group at every opportunity – the Inimitable Boz – but that he can't underwrite any sort of category as normative or determinative or even helpful. This insistence on unconditioned idiosyncrasy makes him, in all of his writing, and much of his life, remarkably, even absurdly, and certainly proudly *childish*. He did after all proclaim the goal of life to be finding ways to "preserve ourselves from growing" ("Where We Stopped Growing," *Household Words*, January 1, 1853) – a goal he largely succeeded in achieving. That's why George Orwell was right to say that Dickens had no ideas. And it is why his fiction has provided such a fertile field of incoherence for Derrideans a while back and more recently for Foucauldians. Seeing Dickens as an idiot savant, then, means that we should treat him not as a genius in the Romantic sense but as a *monstre sacré*, whose performance we'll use Grotowski to adapt, that is to desecrate (*sacré*) and gore (*monstre*).

Dickens himself is also deeply concerned with *adaptation*. Like Darwin, he is attracted to Nature's "sports" – the bizarre, unexpected, dazzling adaptations, the eccentric individuals marked off from the mass. Indeed,

Dickens's characteristic plot is very like Darwin's, the orphaned stand-out's story of rapid change and adaptation in response to the vicissitudes of a cruel and competitive environment. But where Darwin prizes adaptation *to* circumstances, Dickens insists on adapting *against* them. Generalized Darwinian adaptation is driven by the need to save a species. But about the species, or any thing of that ilk, childish Dickens could hardly care less. He is driven only and supremely by the child's care for self.

Look at *A Tale Of Two Cities*, written while Dickens was adapting himself to survive the flop of his domestic life by taking up a distinctly asocial liaison with the actress Ellen Ternan. The ostensible hero, Charles Darnay, returns altruistically to revolutionary France from his work as a teacher in England, confident that he can intervene for the private and for the general good. His blind choice virtually destroys himself and his family. Sydney Carton, his self-absorbed double, follows Darnay, cynically dupes the revolutionary authorities, and winds up turning himself into a sort of Messiah – ''It is a far, far better thing'' – redeeming not the fallen history of the French people or the more generalized cause of liberty but his own tarnished self-image, and in the process purloining Darnay's family to become, in effect, his own. Carton literally adapts himself into the progenitor to a line of adulating, eponymous followers, in a setpiece of megalomania simply staggering in its narcissistic grandiosity. ''I see'' Darnay's child, bearing ''my name . . . winning his way up in the path of life . . . so well, that my name is made illustrious there by the light of his,'' and finally ''bringing a boy of my name . . . to this place . . . [to] tell the child my story, with a tender and a faltering voice'' (*Tale*, p.404) and so on through the annals of time. No greater love hath any Dickensian man than that he lay down his life for himself. If generalized adaptation means a forgetting, a leaving-behind, to make a different future possible, Dickensian adaptation means always remaking the future as a way of refinding that past, re-funding what the individual adaptor cannot bear to lose, the precious and individual self.

A Tale of Two Cities tells us then a tale of two sorts of adaptation. Darnay, the instructor in language, is a figure for thinking, for generalization, for those vulnerabilities to the slot that sap energy from Dickensian life. He is *gamous*, deeply invested in reproduction and genealogy: nephew, husband, father, son-in-law, in almost all of those relations disastrous and disaster-producing. And he is also deeply susceptible to the *mythic*, drawn by the appeal of historical change, to the illuminating narrative of cause and effect which the novel can only condescendingly

dismiss as the Lodestone Rock. Finally, he is *theoretical*, no surprise in a teacher, that is someone who insists on yielding himself up to Law, in this case, both English and French law, someone who must permit himself to be identified, classified, imprisoned and condemned by ineradicable marks of class and manner (the Frenchman, the aristocrat). In contrast, cannily *agamous* Carton centers a story that relies on features we can call *episodic* and *mimetic*. He not only survives but triumphs by his imaginative manipulation of discontinuities. His narrative depends on episodes, on the gaps that baffle rather than the seams that connect. And he wins by miming, by regularly and heroically pretending to be somebody else, competently basing his success in performance rather than identity.[1]

These three stances, agamous, the episodic, the mimetic, make a deep appeal to the adaptor in me, so deep that I'm eager to risk arguing that Dickens's enduring and essential claim on the attention of readers roots precisely in his *childish* rejection of thought. The agamous characterizes the actual child; the episodic and the mimetic seem to return us to something like the childhood of the race, to a moment before written language, before history, before culture. Reading Dickens, then, engages us in a determined turning away from what has become our dominant cognitive experience, the homogenizing culture of "the hybrid modern mind" (Donald 1991: 359). His childish, pleasure-seeking eccentrics do all they can to refuse to be included in "the massive statistical and mathematical models and projections routinely run by governments" (p. 355). His episodic narratives can't be assimilated by the narrative-theoretical mind that produces science, law, economics and history. They catch us up – not in a conventional bourgeois idyll, but – in something deeply primitive and aberrant, in what he called in *Pickwick* "the delusions of our childish days" (XXVIII: 375).[2]

While it may be easy, or at least easier, to feel this rapture could happen in reading the early and incomparably comic *Pickwick*, I want to make my argument more demanding and insist that we have the same experience when we read even the darker, later novels. Or to put it more accurately: we have to let ourselves have the same childish experience when reading the later novels if we want to feel glad we happen to be reading them. Clearly, a great many people who make their life's undertaking to study the Victorian novel don't feel that way, bringing to that undertaking something like an undertaker's frame of mind.

Let's look for a moment more closely at these three categories.

The agamous: There are people needing other people but, maugre

Barbra Streisand, there are people who need themselves more. How much harm we'd prevent if we'd get over thinking it's only the flawed or the weak who never get over preferring themselves. Another way to describe the agamous personality might very well be to call it "the unethical imagination . . . the creative spirit perverted by self-interest" (Stewart 1974: 67). But the moral view is distinctly not a view agamy would choose to embrace. Indeed, I want to argue that the line between the gamous and the agamous probably goes deeper and makes more of a difference than the more conventional boundaries between straight and gay or between feminine and masculine. Certainly, Dickens's protean imagination refuses to believe that loving men might be the only alternative to loving or to not loving women, or, of course, vice versa. Instead, with reckless and unrelenting perversity (a good term here) he continually retrieves and resuscitates eros in a dazzling range of eccentric forms, forms frequently forced to masquerade in what intolerant societies will accept as the real thing. But behind those masks, and sometimes out of them, Dickens gives his heart to agamy.

Agamy detests everything the marriage plot depends on. And it doesn't care very much for romance either. Agamy is the Shaker dream. Not necessarily averse to sex, agamy loathes and fears union. Thus, happy families in Dickens, unless they're very poor, have always first lost a spouse. Dickensian happiness is incompatible with regularized intercourse. It dreams the happiness of untouchables safely at play in the glory of *noli me tangere*, of egos who don't need solitude to feel supreme. Agamy's about being self-sufficient even while feeding one's appetites. Sometimes it's nasty, as in the myth of Narcissus, agamy's poster boy and the prototype not only of selfish Carton but of Dickensian alter-egos like Davy and Pip. But quite frequently, from Pickwick to Boffin, it's nice, avuncular, grandfatherly, and kind.

Nor is agamy unique to childish Dickens. Inevitably it pervades much of British Romantic and post-Romantic literature where an unassuageable nostalgia for childhood is virtually *the* literary subject. (The other great subject being snobbery. Which helps explain why any right-minded British adult would prefer to remain [even] a British child.) We find agamy coursing metaphysically through most of Wordsworth – how happy to be lonely as a cloud – and in the best of Shelley and Keats – Oh to be a wind, ah to be an urn, how simply lovely to be a bird. Unsurprisingly, it is everything to professionally chaste Hopkins: each man does the thing he is. *Wuthering Heights* is its charter. You find agamy nowhere determinative in Charlotte Brontë or George Eliot, who can't

or won't imagine unmediated happiness. But it's all over Conan Doyle and Carroll and Kipling. Nor is it a merely a Victorian phenomenon. Agamy is key to Shaw, to Joyce, to Woolf, and – it's too obvious to mention – to Barrie: to anyone whose ideal of happiness is a room – or a land, even a never-never land – of one's own. And it remains the driving force in the fiction of Iris Murdoch and Muriel Spark – both of whom, not coincidentally – have written terrific continuations of *Peter Pan*.

The episodic A gamous culture is also, necessarily, rigorously continuous. It can't admit a kiss is just a kiss. It won't let time go by. Instead, it keeps on insisting we'll always have Paris, until it manages to squander all the succulent lubricities Casablanca might sustain. The episodic, in contrast, entertains the delicious possibility of forgetting without loss. Sternly it stares down the psychoanalytic project: the transformative necessity of recovery and recuperation. Adam Phillips sees two sorts of narrative: Freud's and Proust's (Phillips 1994: 13). Freud views everything as stemming from the individual's desire, acknowledged or unacknowledgeable. Proust insists, on the contrary, that only accidents and the unforeseen can create genuine possibilities for epiphany. Phillips favors Proust. But both are narratives of remembrance. And both kinds of narrative the episodic imagination finds suspect. Where and as it can, it refuses them both.

That is why, in part, you can never actually remember a Dickens novel (unless you are Michael Slater). A test: think of the one you know best and try to repeat exactly in order everything that happens. You can't. How could you? And why should you? Dickens offers not a coherent, unified world but (in William James's phrase) a multiverse: particulars, innumerable, unconnected, intensely vivid, a collection of moments rather than a train of events.[3] *Adam Bede*'s narrator undertakes in her opening words to "show" the "reader," "With this drop of ink at the end of my pen," "far-reaching visions of the past." In one sense or another that's exactly what virtually every Victorian novelist offers, except Dickens. Indeed, far from being its typical voice, Dickens turns out to be a highly unlikely Victorian writer, as unlikely a novelist for his time as, say, Arthur Miller is an unlikely playwright for ours.

Childish Dickens, proud master of parts publication, always sides with forgetting, even when he finds that forgetting is not humanly possible. Those who persist in remembering victimize either themselves, like Miss Havisham, or others, like Tulkinghorn, or both, like Miss Havisham and Tulkinghorn. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, most of the harm gets done when people become involved with the Bank, the site of

accumulation, accounting, storage, where the present draws on the past. Outside its London office the beheaded are paraded on Temple Bar. In the courtyard of its Paris premises, the Terrorists sharpen their knives. History can only mean repetition. And the Terror merely recreates the horrors of the *ancien régime*. The Terror is all about remembering. When episodic Dickens drops his ink, it's to blot the past out.

The mimetic The *mimetic* is the furthest thing we have from Mimesis. Mimesis makes a cult of the original, of the prior real that can only be examined and then copied in some way that is irretrievably second-hand. But the *mimetic*, as I'm defining it here, refuses the priority of any sort of origin. Carton makes a much more interesting and effective Darnay than Darnay ever could. *Déclassé, arriviste* Dickens always knows that origins contaminate. If you honor them you'll only reach deadlock. Pretending opens the sole path toward presence. All the memorable Dickens characters specialize in pretending. Little Dorrit, Esther Summerson, Pip, they are all first-rate pretenders. They save themselves, and even others, by the skill with which they make believe.

And that mimetic skill is the antithesis of writing. It is not too much to say that Dickens hates writing. His letters make it clear that very shortly after he began his career as a novelist he began to find writing a virtually intolerable burden. And that burden increased beyond toleration as he grew older. I would even claim that his mature life took shape as a flight from writing, a flight, from which he was repeatedly recalled by the necessity to earn his and his increasingly expensive family's, living. There's only one novel in the last decade of his life, when he was at the height of his powers and of his fame, and also when he had the widest possibility for opportunities to earn money apart from writing. What Dickens loved of course was speaking, turning writing into reading aloud. That's certainly what he meant when he claimed at the 1858 Royal Theatrical Fund Dinner that "Every writer of fiction, though he may not adopt the dramatic form, writes in effect for the stage." Not that he loved the stage – which I believe he feared almost as he hated writing – but that he loved speech.

For Dickens, writing and speaking mean entirely different linguistic feats, and all of his sympathy yearns toward the latter. Recent research not only supports the difference between phonological and ideographic alphabet use, but may also provide neurological and sensory grounds for Dickens's preference of the former. The phonological connection between sign and meaning seems more immediate and powerful than the ideogrammatic. Evidence "drawn from studies of the genetically deaf

and of both deep and surface dyslexias make it clear that alphabet-based writing . . . follows a parallel but quite different visual or ideographic route [from speech], a route between sign and potential reference more diffuse and various'' (Donald 1991: 303–304). Reading calls upon different parts of the brain than hearing, pathways that lack that strong sense of immediate affect produced by responding to speech.

Speech is episodic and individual; writing cumulative and impersonal. Speech relies on the visual/mimetic; writing on the phonetic/symbolic. Speech is expressive; writing merely suggestive. Speech points; writing replaces. Hence those most characteristic features of Dickensian prose: onomatopoeia and paronomasia; parataxis rather than conventional syntax; the increasingly audacious manipulation of the fragment as opposed to the grammatical unit; a rhythm so regular it frequently approaches blank verse, and a persistent reluctance to generate any form of coherent reference. In a prolepsis of that high modernist poetic cliché, Dickens's prose wants to be, not mean. He elides writing for sense into the sheer play of sound. As much as possible within the constraints of narrative, he writes a prose that wants to signify only itself signifying, a prose that refuses to refer.

This inimitably rich play of Dickensian signifiers is always in riot against the constraining claims of the signified, the signs in gleeful revolt against the demands of written representation. In Dickens there is literally no there to imitate, or, rather, the only there in Dickens is a literal there, a word-play there, a trace. At the end of a long passage of Dickensian description, you only think you know what you've seen. Go back and try to draw it; you find the street, the building, the room spontaneously combusts. Its lines won't come together or hang true. Instead, language delightedly, delightfully, dissolves identity, solidity, value in just about every thing and person and place the ambient culture expects to value, name, and prize. In Dickens, then, what you see is what you, inevitably, don't get, can't get because it's just some version of mirage. And if you're naive enough to think you've got something, you are, just as inevitably, a dupe. You're Copperfield letting the wolfish Steerforth into the happy family at Yarmouth. You're Pip trusting Miss Havisham. You're the howling mobs on the Place de la Concorde bloodlusting after Darnay, while a smugly self-congratulating Carton takes his place.

Inevitably, speech is the weapon against the world Dickens's child-heroes most skillfully deploy: Paul Dombey, and David, and most poignantly Pip, whose ''infant tongue'' refuses the patronymic and

therefore ''Called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip'' (*Great Expectations* I: 35). But writing is the club of the Goliaths, most powerfully instantiated in the law writers of *Bleak House* whose collective name is Nemo, and who busily, endlessly inscribe the tyrannies of Chancery. Against their depersonalized world and the impersonal narrative that describes them, *Bleak House* sets its second, its other, its preferred voice: Esther's narrative which imagines itself not to be writing but speech, direct and immediate address.

Finding it ''a great difficulty'' to begin to ''write [her] portion'' of the novel's pages – an instant indication of Dickensian virtue – Esther immediately displaces the act of writing for the recollection of speech. ''I can remember, when I was a very little girl indeed, I used to say to my doll, when we were alone together, 'Now Dolly, I am not clever . . .' And so she used to sit . . . staring at me, . . . while I busily stitched away, and told her every one of my secrets'' (I: iii, 62). Speech here and everywhere in Dickens belongs to a culturally prior and therefore – to the *childish* mind – a more authentic oral-narrative mode of cognition-representation. Unlike writing which is always in and of the past, speech takes place in a continuous present and offers at least the illusion of real presence, of an affective liaison among speaker, subject and audience. Esther knows her doll is looking at Nothing but that does not disenable her from the verbal tasks at hand, in the nursery or in the novel.

Writing, however, is trauma. Writing, inevitably, betrays the promise of language. It longs to lapse entirely into an *infinite caricaturing of woe* (*Tale* I:xiv, 189), a prime instrument of Terror, sorting not only subject but speaker within the deadening realm of the theoretical, the legal, the external and the collective. That certainly seems to be how we are asked to read the crucial episode of Dr. Manette's memoirs in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Imprisoned in the Bastille, Manette has written down and hidden away the true story of his persecution at the hands of the Evremondes. Much later in the novel, he succeeds before the tribunal of the Terror when he speaks movingly for life of the Evremonde heir, now his son-in-law. But that release is immediately reversed when the Defarges produce the written history, snatched from concealment by Defarge during the Fall of the Bastille. Suddenly, nothing Manette can do or say in the present can save his family from the deadly writing of the past. Writing has rendered him literally speechless, enrolled him in the lists of the ''dumb'' (p.322). The inscribed word, separated from the speaker-audience bond, takes on a perverse life of its own, a life of the theoretical and impersonal system the Terror delights to generate. His own writing

comes back upon Manette like Laocoön's serpents, writhing, coiling, crushing his life and the lives of his children, overwhelming any effort he can make against their sinuous claims. Only the improvisational comedy of Carton's silent mimesis can save the Manettes from the consequences of their tendency toward prose.

But nothing can relieve Dickens himself from the burden of writing. He must write though he longs to speak, longs for the other position even as he is repeatedly forced to recognize his insuperable dependence on the form he views not merely with suspicion but with disdain and fear – hence the inexhaustible, exhausting obsession with the public readings. If he's got to write the damned stuff out first, at least he will redeem that compromise by endlessly, exhaustively reading it aloud. Speech making up for past print. But it doesn't. The reading aloud is always a reading of what has been written. In the same way the parts become volumes. The episodes construct plot. And the agamous routinely surrenders itself to be swallowed up in some version of marriage and reproduction.

Carton is Dickens's only completely successful agamous protagonist, and he has to die to achieve agamy's completion. Dickens's usual story is more likely to be some version of Pip's. Pip starts off dreaming himself a sort of little god who can name his own I Am. He believes he inhabits a world where language has the immediate clarity of pointing, thus approximating the earliest stage of writing (lists) where the symbols and what they express seem one. ''The shape of the letters on my father's [tombstone], gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, '*Also Georgiana Wife of the Above*,' I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly'' (*Great Expectations* I: 35). Nothing is arbitrary where the look of letters, their sound, their meanings are all the same. There is no significant lack or gap. But that *childish* world is in fact a grave. Over it Pip immediately finds himself, pulled upside down by Magwitch, even as he attempts to read further. Magwitch not only robs and starves him but seems to castrate him as well, emptying his pockets. The child cannot resist. He becomes not only enthralled but even made the unwilling son to that superior adult power, which the world reads as the Father and which Dickens reads as Shame.

Virtually everything in Dickens turns on shame, or, rather, on this contest between shame and bliss, a contest bliss always loses (except, patently, in Carton's ''Tale'') but which shame also never quite wins. In this contention, shame names the internal, apparently insuperable drive

that insists the Child become a Father in order to be a Man, that he enter the ritualized scenarios of courtship and reproduction that allow organized life to deploy him as it wills. Conversely, bliss names the possibility that the Child is not Father to but the Man Himself, that he retains into adult life the power to disrupt the all-encompassing scenarios of cause and effect – subordinating, integrational, teleological, to remain indomitably selfpreferring and proudly solo (if not precisely single). It's this notion of bliss that's always out there beckoning from Heights like Emily Brontë's. But Charles Dickens is no Emily Brontë. He is too committed to making it in the world, to making it big in the world, to permit himself that dubious flight onto the moors. Those moors, his moors, he's terrified must inevitably turn out to feel, if not look, a lot like the Marshalsea. (Isn't that the main thrust of the Alpine episode in *Little Dorrit*?) And yet, at the same time, and with the same passion, he's too thoroughly invested in this childishness (a more technical term for which is, of course, narcissism) ever to surrender easily or entirely to the canons, mythic, theoretical, gamous, of realism. He compromises instead.

One way to describe that compromise is to say that Dickens *adapts*. Outlining the form of that adaptation will take us much of the remainder of this book. Suffice it to look here at the recurring Dickensian version of playing Happy Families. What we see is that it's never the case that Dickens speaks ''for'' and ''from the hearth,'' if hearth means the ordinary bourgeois experience of a traditional domestic order (D. A. Miller 1988: 82). No, the intact family hearth invariably means misery in these novels. From Dingley Dell, to – preeminently – Bleak House, and finally to the Nuns House at Cloisterham, Dickens prefers instead a career-long series of parody-hearths, hearths-as-it-were, hearths under adaptation. All these places function more like cloisters than homes, with Mothers and Fathers to be sure, but these are reverend mothers and very reverend fathers, superiors in the rituals of agamy rather than parents engaged not only in but by reproduction. At these parody hearths, ''deeply damaged characters whose core sense of self is devastated or almost nonexistent'' play at parody families (Kohut 1985: 158). There they fulfill that most Dickensian of desiderata: they Stop Growing. They enclose themselves in bliss apart from the adult world, erecting elaborate and ''destructive defenses'' not only against their own ''drives'' but also against all those ''adult'' characters driven by instinct who might assert against their fragile fantasies the imperatives of shame.

ADAPTATION

But must we go on to performance? Why can't we stick with the page, with critique, with argument? After all, isn't acting merely artifice, the sugar-substitute when the real sweetness of experience has already been abjured? No, that's the Puritan notion of acting, the idea of acting common to all those isms that have misread the importance of being earnest. Done well, acting is, as Hollis Huston claims, the closest thing we have to the examined life (Huston 1992: 6). And we can't stick to the page, critique, argument, for exactly the reasons that prevent us from cutting directly to the therapeutic cure without going through all that messy business of transference. We can't settle merely for thinking because, sadly but bluntly, no one has ever been changed only by an idea. We can be interested in and by an idea, of course, but we are only changed by an idea in performance.

The triumphant rise of therapy in our culture roots largely in the corresponding decline of our theater. ''Must you be so theatrical,'' we ask self-righteously, equating theatricality with excessive and inauthentic feeling, and vice versa. No clearer sign alerts us to the continuing Utilitarianism of our post-industrial era than this deeply conditioned, self-defensive dread of extreme emotion. But emotion must be siphoned off somehow, banned from public and authentic expression increasingly into secret sessions of private shame. Theatre, and what theatre used to express, have become for us the compost on which therapy thrives.

We operate now within a public culture trained to get over grief as quickly as possible, taught to cope rather than to mourn, and, as Harry explained to Sally, to go home as soon as possible on the morning after the night before. We learn to keep our distance, in order to keep our selves intact. Deep feeling ties you down. And rather than being tied down, gain the advantage by putting down the other guy first. Billy Crystal: the implicit master of all the ceremonies of our contemporary lives. The put-down: *Aporia*'s popular cousin. It is as though we are terrified that feeling, any sort of strong feeling, can and must in the end lead only to a post-cathartic emptiness. Feeling finally can only let you feel let down.

Without access to affect we are left – and we have left those we train – without either the stimulus or training to respond with complex feelings to complex texts. Not a problem if human beings could be moved to live well, to behave generously, to seek justice, through disinterest or abstraction. I am not thinking here only of the great public choices but of

the perhaps even more significant choices that foster healthy and durable intimacies, choices that are perhaps even more at risk the way we live and read now. Choice always follows from feeling. Complex choices from complex feelings. And that shaping of complex feelings has been from the beginning of culture, not only Western culture, the particular province of literature.

Of course, if I want to dude things up, I can try to defend these assertions by identifying my position with what Mary Louise Pratt has called a ''linguistics of contact,'' her phrase for the endeavor to gain ''a linguistics and a criticism whose engagement with the social world is not confined'' either to the ''utopian'' or the ''dystopian'' (Pratt 1987: 64). Her ''linguistics of contact'' calls for an essentially intra- and inter-cultural contact, a way to connect severed communities now almost exclusively focused on their differences, and on the history of outrages that have generated those differences. However my kinds of contact, between text and performance, between author and adaptor, between actors and audiences, are far less global. Nevertheless, my notions of adaptation do overlap Professor Pratt's in a kind of shared horror at criticism's vertiginous fascination with the Frankensteinian specter of *aporia*.

Yearning toward *aporia* slants academic effort and prestige heavily toward a poetics of lamentation and denunciation, a more or less exclusive focus on the impasse, the dead-end, the stone that keeps a crypt a tomb. It's a focus that risks doing to literary studies what logical positivism earlier did to – at least, British – philosophy, submitting discourse to a hermetic critique so rigorous and scathing that the discipline itself ceases to matter to anyone outside the professional field. Obviously, there's an urgent need to unmask and frustrate the hegemonic asymmetries persuasively, sometimes invisibly, seeping from the texts of both elite and popular culture. But what really requires resisting, I think, is not literature itself but a model of literature, common to both older and contemporary criticism, that generates *aporia* by mistakenly treating literature as a branch of epistemology.

Literature is, of course, not an epistemology, as Plato acknowledged when he banished the artists. He understood, in his inimitably mean-spirited way, that far from being a part of philosophy, art is philosophy's implacable foe. The offspring of sly craft and idle play, literature always sides with rhetoric against philosophy, sides with doing against thinking, feeling against reason, acting against mere knowing. Of course, no one would ever have forgotten this were it not for the Cartesian curricula of the French lycées.

Literature always prefers a way to a truth, any day, even when the way leads only to trouble. That means literature constitutes an instance of what the Greeks called a *poros*, literally ''a way,'' which ''unlike contemplative philosophy'' – as Bruce Robbins has argued about *poros* generally – offers ''a practical and professional know-how associated not with universals but with particular local situations of conflict, danger and rapid change, like those of the navigator, the doctor, the athlete, the politician, and the sophist'' (Robbins 1990: 229). Literature then is a *poros* in two senses. One way, as a craft, is the ''know-how'' to do ingenious things with words, as navigators do things with winds and tides, or doctors with blood and muscle. The other way, as a style: literature is *poros* that offers a practical guide to mistrusting wisdom, doubting knowledge, suspecting counsel, sidestepping understanding, and generally keeping out of the way of oracles, a way, then, of constructing sturdy plots and of being, as actors say, in the moment.

Literature opens this *poros* by persuading, inciting, exciting, moving, enchanting, all the stances philosophy loathes, cold, remote, disdainfully theoretic philosophy. (By philosophy I mean here, it goes without saying, the post-Heideggerian, anti-humanist, largely French amalgam that angles so eagerly for what Peter Dews following Max Weber has recently called ''the disenchantment of the world'' [Dews 1995: 159].) Like philosophy literature makes us think, but entirely unlike philosophy it does so because first it makes us feel. And mostly it makes us feel how little we learn or accomplish when we, only, think. Certainly literature loses all potential to make any kind of real difference to its readers when denied the power to provoke strong response.

But strong response is precisely what the Theory Shop seems determined to contain. Affect, as Elin Diamond says about catharsis, always ''situates the subject at a dangerous border,'' a border where being is in some way ''seized,'' seized by the text, or its subject, or our own vulnerabilities, causing us to ''suffer a disturbance in the totalizing vision that affirms consciousness and mastery'' (Diamond 1995: 154). Of course, never before has criticism been so absorbed in defending that ''totalizing vision'' of its own autonomous mastery, even as it works to defenestrate any viable notion of the individual subject. Inevitably, then, never before has criticism felt so threatened by the dangers that lurk at the crossing between thinking and feeling, knowing and being known.

Richard Wolin has recently written illuminatingly of the way so much of the most advanced theoretical argument, in literary, historical and cultural studies, clings to the ''inordinately dispirited images'' that

derive from ''Foucault's cheerless image of a 'carceral society'.'' Repeatedly, he shows, the most advanced thinking prefers to align itself with ''a vision of utopian possibility that resides beyond the fallen and desolate landscape of the historical present,'' rather than ''to activate elements of the past for the sake of an emancipated future'' (Wolin 1995: 57). Obviously, this is not the place to get into the vexed business of Habermas v. Foucault, so I will limit myself here only to asking whether Wolin does not seem to be pointing in this willed bleakness to a choice that adumbrates the classic Freudian forking between eros and thanatos. We seem to be torn between a demand to feel which forces us under the other's sway and an overpowering need to feel nothing at all rather than giving way to that which we can't predict or predicate. Reread in this way, criticism's anti-feeling defense seems to imagine as our only effective, not to say affective, alternatives the interclasped terms that will shape much of the argument that follows: self-protecting narcissism or empty-hearted shame.

In moving away from this dilemma toward annexing affect to thought, we have to realize that not every sort of adaptation will do equally well. Brecht warned that ''Literary works cannot be taken over like factories'' (1964: 108). By that he did not mean that ''literary works'' should not be taken over at all, only that they are harder to take over than gas and similar sorts of works. But the adaptor's challenge remains profoundly revolutionary as Brecht understood revolution: to expropriate the original owner of the work, the author, and thus free up its hoarded resources for a different sort of distribution.

Obviously, that sort of adaptation works toward goals very different from the adaptations we are used to: alright I'll be brutal, by the sort we tend to import from the United Kingdom. I'm by no means making a blanket charge against all British-based adaptation. The Glasgow Citizens' Theater has recently shown exactly the kind of innovative, provocative, radical reading adaptation should produce in its brilliant mounting of Giles Havergal's all-male, four-performer adaptation of Graham Greene's picaresque *Travels With My Aunt*. Nor would I wish to leave the impression that the contemporary American theatre offers no models for the kinds of adaptation I'm endorsing. The contrary is clearly demonstrated by work like Mary Zimmerman's extraordinarily inventive adaptation of *The Arabian Nights* for twelve performers, originally at Lookingglass Theatre in Chicago, and later at the Manhattan Theater Club. Of course, it is not incidental that the production originated in Chicago, the real home of innovative theatre in the USA.

And I'm certainly not thinking here of unpretentious, clearly commercial enterprises like the musical versions of *Oliver Twist* and *Edwin Drood*, or the endlessly spun-out versions of *A Christmas Carol*. No, scandalously, I want to impeach the virtually hypercritical status of adaptations like the ambitious and high-minded, not to mention long-winded, RSC *Nicholas Nickleby*, as well as comparably monumental screen and video presentations like the Alec Guinness–Derek Jacobi *Little Dorrit* and the Diana Rigg–Trevor Howard *Bleak House*. These standard-setting adaptations are all far more colonizing than revolutionary. They intervene to subsume, not to subvert, to profit from rather than share out the resources at hand. They eagerly do the work of shame.

But the RSC *Nickleby* is explicitly Brechtian, you have just said! It's got *Verfremdungseffekt* you can eat with a spoon. It's about the Poor! For what more can one ask? My answer is: we want an adaptation that remembers most clearly what Dickens seems to be struggling hardest to forget – bliss, and an adaptation that forgets just as energetically what Dickens insists on remembering – shame. Adaptations that are themselves insistently agamous, episodic, and mimetic. Adaptations that release the heroic energies of the self-loving self to perform its self-inventions in whatever arrangements it chooses to contrive. Or, if it can't manage that – and none of the adaptations in this book do – then we want an adaptation which might mark off clearly for us how much we lose when we buy into what Dickensian shame has to offer. An adaptation that understands that the mimetic gives life, and that mimesis kills.

Aristotle famously insists that effective drama requires both mimesis and catharsis. But adaptation regularly, and often even obsessively, fetishizes only mimesis. Conventional adaptations, like the ones I've just named, *imitate* the original text's *imitation* of life, imagining that it's in that imitation that the text's bliss resides. They solidify a fiction's figures and spaces and plots into bodies and places and lives. But these real bodies in apparently real settings inevitably ''naturalize'' fiction into specimen. They can tend either toward *verismo*: ''Did you know that every one of those extras is wearing authentic period underwear; can you imagine the itch.'' Or toward the stylized: ''Oh look! How well they are pretending to be people riding in a crowded carriage! And it's only a kitchen table. Isn't that amazing!'' Either way: we see the plot's pain but we feel only admiration. In conventional adaptation particularly our interest becomes monopolized by a simulation of life so life-like it stops us from wondering if life, on these terms, should be liked at all. That's

why of course the favorite American slot for adaptations like these is TV at the end of a Sunday evening, preferably in winter: the Cocoa hour.

A doubled mimesis invariably cripples catharsis. It forfeits those elements in the original form which stimulated feeling without feeling free to invent new and dramatic forms which can stimulate the production's own specific affect. The successful, in the sense of powerful, adaptation knows – since it is exchanging spaces – that it must in fact change the space, particularly the space of fiction. Theatre takes shape as fiction's foe. Even with writers far less evasive than Dickens, it is the business of fiction to elude crystallization, to distend, to postpone, to submerge. That's both the fascination and the glory of its form.[4] Indeed, as Bert O. States claims, ''part of the liberty of the novel form'' roots in its ability ''to put perspectives on top of perspectives, to reach out in philosophical, biographical, societal, and most commonly, descriptive directions that lie behind the scene and the action'' (States 1985: 136). In fiction such digressions and delays usually feel interest-enhancing and theme-enriching. But in the theatre they just as usually feel digressive, tangential, drifting. The general, indeed the generic, business of the stage is to embody, to clarify, to present: to stand and deliver.

This is a matter of epistemology as well as of affect. For all the misreadings of the Aristotelian unities, there is a sense in which Aristotle was right. Drama must observe a unity of action. It is so hard to pay attention to as it moves along. We can't slow down, let alone stop. We can't check back. We can't pause to ponder. We can't clarify or refer. And so even in the most experimental and avant- garde sorts of play we require a clarity and intensity of focus on action, so that we can begin the process of interpretation with some degree of assurance that at least we know what is happening even if we do not yet, or never will know, what it means. And it's only that sort of clarity which will provide the foundation for a strong audience response. It is hard to care in any way about that which we find merely baffling. What in the novel is all suggestion in the powerful emptiness between the markings on the page must, on the stage, make itself seen to be felt.

But what I don't want to feel is what Henry James liked to get from St. Peter's in Rome. ''You think you have taken the whole thing in, but it expands, it rises sublime again, and leaves your measure itself poor.'' As his friend Clover Adams joked, James always enjoyed chewing more than he could bite off. But even for appetites less gourmandising than James', there's a way in which, when any master's work *expands*, the rest of us seem to wind up feeling somehow diminished. For the work of this

book, therefore, I prefer a spatial model very different from either Aida's pyramid or James' St. Peter's.

Here's what I like. ''Twined round the grand apartments in the Ducal Palace at Mantua is a series of smaller rooms where a person of normal height must stoop and finds beautifully chiselled doorframes awkward to get through. These rooms butting on ones of normal size were constructed for the court dwarfs'' (Harbison 1988: 28). Obviously, as Dickens's adapter, I play dwarf to his superb Duke – though this dwarfing may be a back way to Verdi, to that other Mantuan Court freak, the insubordinate Rigoletto. But I am also Duke (dux, leader) to the *childish* Dickens who Stopped Growing, and to all those dwarfish characters he styled in his self-image, selves ''that have stayed behind . . . deliberately . . . a heroism like that of Carroll playing with his schoolgirls'' (Harbison 1988: 22).[5]

The ''inter*twining*'' of the two kinds of space establishes a paradigm of adaptation. Harbison rightly keys on the dwarves' beautifully chiseled doorframes as the defining objects in the complex space. The framed doors refuse to cut off dwarfed from ducal, refuse to polarize along the lines of the Jamesian poor measure and the Petrine sublime. Instead, they enforce beautifully a need always to be moving in and on, what Harbison notes as the crucially double rhythm of the doubled space, *growing* and *shrinking*, *tightening* and *relaxing*. The doors open each series into its continuation and its antithesis. They demand our own ongoing negotiation of a never less than awkward passage. That negotiation insists bliss comes from refusing to settle in the norm, ours or another's. Mantua thereby models both the bliss and the task of adaptation: eagerly remembering what one is choosing to forget, all the while forgetting what one has decided keenly to remember.

This doubleness means that Mantua's exquisitely carved, always inviting doorways refuse *aporia*. They insist instead that we adapt: outgrow, intervene in, modify, adjust, redeploy the original. We get Dickens to outgrow his own, enclosed, great theatres of shame. At the same time we open ourselves to the opportunity of bearing a witness that we can find more satisfying, challenging and inaugural than anything we can achieve with a strict and faithful copy. To generate that witness, we turn to the radically alternative performance agenda developed as Poor Theatre by the great Polish director Jerzy Grotowski. We construct this agenda by combining accounts of Grotowski's own adaptations (1960–70) with the theoretical arguments in his epic *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1968). Together they offer the most powerful and persuasive

contemporary model I know for capturing the goal at the core of this book's project, the bliss that seeks to move beyond theoretical *aporia*: to retain the enormous affective power of Dickens's episodic and mimetic inventions, but at the same time to refuse his deep investment in the disenfranchising structures of shame.

AND GROTOWSKI

Introducing their collection of essays on *Performativity and Performance*, Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofky Sedgwick ask: ''When is saying something doing something? And how is saying something doing something?'' (Parker and Sedgwick 1995: 1). Interesting as those questions may be, I think we're likely to get more useful answers for performance, certainly for adaptation, if we revise them to ask something like: ''When is telling something doing something? And how does telling something get something done?'' Telling may be a form of saying but it is not the same as saying. Saying can happen in a void, it requires no audience. Telling, however, always assumes a told-to. There is always a response to telling, even if it is only the very response no teller wants – You lie! I don't believe you! Anyone trained for the stage, any stage, knows that only poor actors only *say*. Knowing actors always *tell*, their scene-partner, if they have one, but in every case, the audience.

Failing to mark that distinction between telling and saying is what causes the usually keen J. L. Austin to get theatre thoroughly wrong in his famous dismissal of stage-speech as parasitic. He sees the actors speaking to each other on the stage and knows that, in that narrow room, they make nothing happen. But he refuses to see that their speech is actually directed at an audience, and, in so far as they are skilled at what they do, those actors must of course be producing affect. Masters of perlocution, they are stirring, rousing, thrilling, exciting, irritating, angering, appeasing – the list goes on – the audience. Affect, we may well claim, is the intended effect of all their telling. If we doubt this, we need only think of the long history of theatre riots. Or of theatre censorship.

But my point here is not the obvious one that stage-speech stirs. We've known that since Aristotle. I'm interested in the more telling point that successful stage speech, entirely perlocutionary, inevitably affective, can never guarantee the effect at which it aims. The audience not only always can, but frequently does, resist. Think of poor shamed Henry James at the curtain call to *Guy Domville*. Or Yeats at the Abbey

Riots. Nor do theatre audiences think and feel as one. It is different of course in the much more deliberately manipulative experience of film. Film apparatus not only makes us see as one, it also induces us to feel as one. But stage audiences rarely bond. That divergence results from what Timothy Gould calls ''perlocutionary gap,'' the gap between the intention and effect of a speech act (Gould 1995: 31). In terms of theatre, it's the gap between saying and telling. Cinema works to make that gap as narrow as possible. But the conditions of stage action make perlocutionary gap an inevitable feature of all live performance. Indeed, perlocutionary gap is the problem much of drama theory sets out to overcome. But, for our purposes, perlocutionary gap is the break through which adaptation arrives.

And that's precisely why, for its model of adaptation *After Dickens* must turn, regretfully, away from Brecht. No figure in twentieth-century theatre argues more intelligently or wittily for the necessity of critique than does Brecht. It is his greatest achievement to have resoldered the long-rusted link between theatre and thought. Why, then, isn't this chapter called ''Dickens, adaptation and Brecht''?

Of course, as co-heirs to the reformation of theatre begun by Stanislavski and Meyerhold, Brecht and Grotowski have an enormous amount in common: Grotowski, as he explicitly claims, completing Stanislavski's reformation of actors' training; Brecht continuing, indeed plagiarizing, Meyerhold's contrary theatre of alienation. (But, then, again, whom didn't Brecht plagiarize – except, perhaps, Stanislavski?) All of these reformers work to secure the theatre's position within modernism, by repositioning the spectator within the theater. They break from a theatre of ''the fourth wall,'' rigidly typological, relentlessly presentational, a theatre that is – only – watched, the ''evident meeting . . . of story and picture'' (Meisel 1983: 3). In this new, modern theatre, not only do the spectators become part of the work of performance but the key goal of that performance becomes the spectators' transformation. Of course, nineteenth-century theatre aimed to move its audience, but it always kept its audience moving more or less in place, passively stimulated, unchanged, indeed unchallenged, in feeling or belief. A theatre of the churn. But self-consciously modern theatre set out to make things not only new but different, to make something happen, in the audience even more than on the stage. And that is where Brecht and Grotowski part company. Both passionate advocates of transformation, they nevertheless mean by transformation radically different sorts of change.

Brecht's theatre is fundamentally indicative, a theatre, as he so often said, of quotation. Its transformations are public, political, ideologic. Top-down, Socratic, Brecht aims to take the spectator, not merely figuratively, out of him or herself to a position Brecht knows is better. He is "concern[ed]," as his notes to *Mother Courage* explain, "that the spectator should see" (Brecht 1955: 120). See what? The reverse of "those who look on at catastrophes wrongly" (p. 119). Brecht's theatre teaches us then to see the (Brecht's) truth, and that is a truth that not only suspects but demonizes every sort of affect. For Brecht, affect merely confirms the individual in mirage-like, deleterious subjectivity, "in an imaginary coherence . . . the condition of which is the ignorance of the structure of his production, of his setting in position" (Heath 1992: 234). Affect keeps "the masses" passive, "objects" of stimulation, and "so long as the masses are the *objects* of politics they cannot regard what happens to them as an experiment but only as a fate" (Brecht 1955: 120). If the audience is to be transformed, the theatre must break from this misleading realm of feeling by a ceaseless process of distanciation, a distancing from all that is private, personal, interior, individual, from everything the self might (mistakenly) label and cherish as its own.

It's that same self that Grotowskian transformation labors not to repudiate but to mobilize. Grotowski's theatre, fundamentally affective, is also fundamentally interrogative. It has no answers, only questions. In fact, it asks only one question, repeatedly, powerfully, even savagely hurled at the spectator: how do you feel about this? To that question it has no answers of its own. Indeed, it repudiates the notion that any one answer would be the goal of any such process of interrogation. (And here, if we are still looking out for forebears, we should claim that Grotowski is even more the heir to Freud than he is to Stanislavski, just as Brecht is even more the heir to Marx than he is to Meyerhold. Or better: that each ephebe continues the work of the predecessor largely by mobilizing a theoretical vision to which the pioneer lacked access.) To be truly transformative, Grotowski's theatre insists, each answer must be an individual spectator's own.

That is my position also. Auden, who almost never got anything wrong, surely didn't get it right when, entombing Yeats, he insisted that poetry makes nothing happen. Anyone who knows a certain sort of undergraduate – or Helen Vendler – understands that poetry often makes too much happen. It's theatre that *makes* nothing happen. Theatre does not convert, nor does it prohibit. That's why Grotowski abandoned theatre after 1971, devoting himself thereafter to paratheat-

rical research in a series of nontheatrical venues around the globe (in theory-crazed spaces like Irvine, California: What could Grotowski himself have thought when he found himself landing at John Wayne International Airport?). Like Brecht, Grotowski wanted to see change effected not merely prepared for. Indeed, Brecht himself, always pragmatic, spent most of his time at the Berliner Ensemble trying to figure out ways to make his plays entertaining, *à rebours* all those theories of alienation. At its best, theatre prepares the ground for action. It prepares that ground by rehearsing – in a phrase recently popularized by Daniel Goleman – our adjustment of ''emotional intelligence,'' an individual's nuanced, continuously jeopardized, constantly tasked capacity to modify emotion by thought, and thought by emotion. It's in the playhouse, supremely, that we get to practice this delicate, endlessly difficult, always imperfect balance. Simply put, theatre prepares us to care intelligently about life. And it's more or less up to the rest of culture to manage the outcome. The preparation alone is task enough for theatre. Thus I find myself, paradoxically, more loyal to Poor Theatre than its inventor. Where others later sow, I'm happily content to harrow.

So I don't mind that Grotowski is likely to seem *vieux jeu* to many in the contemporary theatre (as *vieux jeu* as saying *vieux jeu*). He is generally thought to have made his contribution, largely to actors' training, twenty years ago, and has pretty much vanished along with other gurus of the late 'sixties and early 'seventies. Grotowski himself contributed to that eclipse by abandoning theatre just as he achieved an international reputation. Complicating that choice, his retirement coincided with the notorious failure of the 1968 revolutions to generate the wholesale transformation of bourgeois culture that had seemed the logical next step in the development of modernism. (As a counter, it's tonic to examine a work like Laura Jones's *Nothing Except Ourselves: The Harsh Times and Bold Theatre of South Africa's Mbongeni Ngema* [1994], to gain a sense of how Grotowski can contribute to a society in which theatre continues to play a vital part.)

Even aside from seeming dated, Poor Theatre does not lack its own intrinsic problems. As a director-manager, Grotowski seemed unable to center a play on a woman; indeed, he invariably staged women as those two stale types, the temptress and the whore. And his insistence on transgression (about which more in a moment) can border dangerously on the masochistic. Finally, both his productions and his theories are profoundly anti-historicist, suffused with dubious notions like the ''timeless'' and the ''essential.'' That essentialist, anti-feminist, masochistic

slant I try to correct in the adaptations I advocate. Thus, as you will see, I deliberately re-center *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend* on the women whose stories the narratives suppress rather than on the ventriloquized women their patriarchies endorse. And I look for every chance to use comedy to counter Grotowski's (not to mention Dickens's) celebration of pain. In effect, I adapt by adapting Grotowski. Nevertheless, I retain, indeed blazon, my loyalty to Poor Theatre. I do so because of the way in which Grotowski heroically preserves that adherence to the individual that seems to me basic to all theatre: unique player connecting powerfully to singular spectator.

This connection relies on two cardinal features of Grotowski's method. He trains actors to make themselves malleable rorschachs within which each spectator uncovers whatever he or she specifically needs – or refuses needing – from that performance. And he constructs performance out of roles not characters, thereby shortcircuiting conventional theatre's fetishistic focus on the idealized subjectivity of a heroic histrionic self. (Which is how he managed to escape the trap that bagged Stanislavski: equating a naturalism of surface with an authentification of inner life.) As a result, rather than striving for unity, Poor Theatre revels in the perlocutionary gap. It designs performance that provokes different, shifting, particular struggles in each spectator, struggles against one's self, one's cultural history, and the cultures that produce those histories, struggles made possible by, but not overdetermined by, affective stimulation. Each audience member ''reads'' the play for him or herself. Each watcher feels a unique, and intimately personal, response.

The core value here is transgression. (My preferred word, as I've already suggested, would be harrowing.) It is transgression that promotes the goal of transformation. Grotowski's adaptations stage three sorts of successive, and successively interdependent, transgression: of the text, of the performer, of the audience. Indeed, part of Poor Theatre's attraction for this book draws on Grotowski's insistence that the greatest theatre, from the Greeks onward, has always depended on the re-vision of a prior text. His own practice purloined a range of sources from plays by Marlowe and Calderon to chapters of Genesis and The Gospel According to St John. These prior texts the audience should know in advance, yet in the theater they experience not their continuation but their transgression. The adaptations freewheelingly reverse or invert these sources even as they work to retain the original emotional resonance. In turn, the performers transgress their own inhibitions, performing without reserve their deepest and most private feelings. And, finally,

the audience members, responding to these violations, experience a profound transgression of their individual and communal self-regulation.

In other forms of modernist theatre practice, Stanislavski's, Brecht's, or – most notably – Artaud's, the performers sustain all this burden of self-transgression, laboring on the audience's behalf: Artaud's famous metaphor of the actor as martyr signaling to us from within the pyre's flames. And, of course, this is the tradition that also generates the theoretical basis, at any rate, for most of contemporary Performance Art. But in Poor Theatre each participant, on stage or off, is called upon to mount in some way his or her own scaffold. The performers' self-transgressions mark merely, sublimely, the inciting incident that sets off an ongoing chain of comparable transgressions incomplete until the entire audience, individual by individual, has shared the affective burden of the performers' task. As Stefan Brecht puts it: ''Grotowski's theatre . . . intensely individualist'' is concerned ''not with an individual but with individuality,'' not with the received but with the forged or forging self (S. Brecht 1970: 187).

Across the spectator, then, as across the actor and the text, Poor Theatre thus deftly traces a *scalpel*, a key metaphor for Grotowski, to cut away whatever is ''banal and stereotyped'' (Grotowski 1968: 43), all the dodges, equivocations, prevarications that dare not name their speakers. That anatomizing goes beyond any customary, mere, or safe critical analysis. Even (or perhaps especially) the most advanced sorts of criticism regularly turn out to be something like versions of telephone-sex. They risk nothing for or of the critic, except for the impersonal gestures of reason and resistance. (Criticism does, that is; not telephone sex). But Poor Theatre gives us a model of performance which insists that the scalpel must be wielded not only toward the parent-text but also, effectively and affectively, against the scalpel-wielder. That is: dangerous and necessary, it brings working on texts back into the spectators' main, if bloody, stream.

In Poor Theatre no audience member can hold back, can enforce any emotional limit beyond which she or he will not let the performance reach. Like the actor, the spectator must permit the adaptation to take her or him as its target. In effect, the spectator must permit the self to be adapted also. Eric Bentley, for example, wrote of responding to Grotowski's *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* in a way that had never happened to him in the theatre before, with feelings so intimate, indeed secret, that he could not without severe embarrassment reveal them in his review. A

true Brechtian, he even doubted whether such feelings could be experienced appropriately in the theatre (Kumiega 1985: 149). That's exactly the transgression Grotowski intends: the power of a performance to pierce to a level of affect not only contained, reserved, held back by cultural norms, but in effect reinforced by standard cultural performance.

In his magisterial study of *The Audience* (1990), Herbert Blau argues that Grotowski's own audiences were "not so much instructed as constrained to bear witness." Though the spectators were "close enough to see the actors sweat," "the actors were not playing with or to" the audience (p.34). That is exactly right (and marks clearly Grotowski's break with Brechtian "instruction"). Grotowski demands "the actor must not have the audience as a point of orientation, but at the same time he must not neglect the fact of its presence . . . the essential thing is that the actor must not act *for* the audience, he must act in confrontation with the spectators, in their presence" (1968: 213–214). Grotowski thus wants his audience not merely to witness but to bear witness to what it watches, as one bears witness in attesting to a will or giving an affidavit or contributing evidence. In those instances, as in Poor Theatre, one doesn't simply see, one becomes, knowledgeably and acknowledgeably, part of what one sees. Poor Theatre insists we interpret simultaneously from and against our selves. From our selves because we must respond to performance affectively out of our own private limitations, our own unique sorts of emptiness. Against our selves because the frontiers of our own history are precisely what Poor Theatre aims to transgress. But "In this struggle with one's own truth," Grotowski insists, "this effort to peel off the life-mask," we will "cross our frontiers, exceed our limitations, fill our emptiness."

A phrase which lands us squarely back with Dickens.

AND BACK, THEN, TO DICKENS

To achieve these goals, *After Dickens* traces a genuinely *critical* process of adaptation, perfidious not faithful, transgressive rather than imitative. We show why and how to coax from Dickens's texts something like the performance Lacan argues that therapy must coax from the subject: a radically different sort of witness, the better, more reliable story lurking behind the plausible one that first gets told. Adapting Lacan, we can claim that, like the analyst, the adaptor must beware not to bear false witness. Obviously, the Dickens text is calling on us powerfully and

persuasively ''to bear witness'' (Lacan 1975: 50). It wants us to believe, support, adhere. But warily we should take all such original versions as a kind of ''empty speech:'' Lacan's term for an account ''in which the subject loses himself in the machinations of a system of language, in the labyrinth of referential systems made available to him by the state of cultural affairs to which he is a more or less interested part.'' Instead, from ''this empty speech'' we budge the subject (the text-being-adapted) toward a ''full speech,'' the speech that ''realises the truth of the subject.'' For that truth, of course, adaptation can claim no more ontological warrant than can therapy. Truth here simply means, for therapist and adapter alike, that which the subject is hell-bent to evade.[6]

What would that turn out to be like, you well may ask.

Let me try to answer that question, and in the process make concrete much of the tiresomely abstract speculation that has preceded, by briefly outlining how we applied this process in adapting *Bleak House*.

We centered our staging of *Bleak House* on a character from the novel who adapts herself into a character from the stage. Before *Bleak House* begins, Lady Dedlock's sister changes her name to Barbary when she cuts herself off from the world, to raise in secret her sister's bastard, the novel's other heroine and demi-narrator, Esther Summerson. In fact, we never do learn the sisters' maiden name. But why does this recluse call herself Barbary? Not a usual English name. In fact, so unusual a name that it seems to cross purposes with her ostensible desire for absolute anonymity. A Miss Smith or Jones or even Pym faces a fair chance to pass unnoticed, but a Miss Barbary? You're likely to remember the extravagance, the sheer staginess of its self-conscious theatricality. It sticks out like a signpost, a symptom, a name that asks for attention, that asks to be read. And in that name I think I hear Lacan warning me to hear Dickens inadvertently signaling me not to recreate his work. I believe I hear Dickens cautioning me instead to unwrite it and thereby to revive what he dares not openly name, the novel's ''sufficiently censored dreamable dream'' (Phillips 1994: 24), to finish it as adaptation – that is, in a phrase I adapt from the inimitable Barthes: ''To be with the one I love and to think of something else'' (Barthes 1975: 24).

I think I'm witnessing in Barbary one of those names that work to conceal an origin while at the same time setting it up in lights: a stage name. The stage named, of course, is *Othello*. Barbary must be naming herself – or, if you wish, Dickens has to be naming her – after the maidservant that Desdemona recalls so pitiably as she is preparing for

her death-bed. The only other Barbary I can think of is Richard II's "roan Barbary," the horse Bolingbroke usurps along with the crown. Richard: "Rode he on Barbary? Tell me, gentle friend, / How went he [Barbary] under him [Bolingbroke]?" (*Richard II* V:5.81–82). Others may make much of this. "That jade hath eat bread from my royal hand? / . . . Would he not fall down, / Since pride must have a fall, and break the neck / Of that proud man that did usurp his back?" (85. 87–89). Jade was a demeaning term for women. The horse Barbary betrays one who loves him – the former king – as the aunt Barbary seems to betray gentle, trusting Esther. And Pride leads Bolingbroke as it does Miss Barbary. You can begin to imagine what others might do with all this. And therefore, no doubt, you think I'm right to shun it, and return to *Othello*.

Here is how Desdemona remembers Barbary.

> My mother had a maid called Barbary.
> She was in love, and he she loved proved mad
> And did forsake her. She had a song of "Willow."
> An old thing 'twas, but it expressed her fortune,
> And she died singing it. That song tonight
> Will not go from my mind; I have much to do
> But to go hang my head all at one side
> And sing it like poor Barbary. (*Othello* IV 3.28–35)

Now that seems to turn out a lot more promising than the equine business.

Like Desdemona, Miss "Barbary" can't get *Othello* "from [her] mind." Which means, in effect, that Miss Barbary can't get Desdemona from her mind: that she and Desdemona both see Barbary as their common type and as their future fate. But surely Miss Barbary is even less like Desdemona than she is like Desdemona's mother's maid. Gentle, trusting, married Desdemona is about to be betrayed to her death, like the maid Barbary, by a lover who has in effect proved mad with jealousy. Miss Barbary, peremptory, repressed and repressive, refuses out of wounded pride the only suitor, Lawrence Boythorn, she has ever had. And what won't go from her mind is not some old lovelorn ballad but the sternly apocalyptic warnings from the Gospel of Mark: "Watch ye therefore! lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!" (I: 3, 67 – Mark 13: 35, 37). Beyond that, she rigidly preserves her silence.

Her silence, or Dickens's? *Bleak House* fiercely castigates Miss Barbary for her attempt to silence Esther. Miss Barbary, it insists, has tried as

hard as possible to prevent Esther's story from entering the field of narration. Her own ''cruel words'' told Jarndyce – who later tells the adult Esther – how ''the writer [Miss Barbary] had bred her [Esther] in secrecy from her birth, had blotted out all trace of her existence, and that if the writer were to die before the child became a woman, she would be left entirely friendless, nameless, and unknown. It [the letter] asked me, to consider if I would, in that case, finish what the writer had begun'' (VI: xvii, 290). But doesn't that word ''writer'' invite us, ironically, to think about Dickens's own role in this project of suppression. Isn't that entire erasure, after all, exactly what Dickens does to or for Miss Barbary? Hasn't his writing ''bred [Miss Barbary] in secrecy . . . blotted out all trace of her existence, and . . . left [her] entirely friendless, nameless, and unknown?''

In fact, when you think about it, Dickens silences Miss Barbary far more effectively than Miss Barbary comes close to silencing Esther. Esther, after all, not only finds her voice and writes, she writes almost half of *Bleak House* – no mean feat for someone who was intended to have had ''blotted out all trace of her existence.'' But we can learn nothing about Miss Barbary: nothing of her own ''story'' apart from a bleakly drawn outline of its intervention in the fully, indeed fulsomely, narrated stories of her sister and her niece. Her would-be-readers can scarcely start, let alone ''finish what the writer had begun.'' May we not conclude, then, that Dickens is warning us, despite himself, that he is the real Miss Barbary, if being Miss Barbary means rendering ''a woman . . . entirely friendless, nameless, and unknown.'' And if that's so, doesn't it also mean that we somehow have to consider Dickens as the real, if reluctant, Othello, to Miss Barbary's Desdemona-Barbary: the forsaking lover, who should love but who instead, somehow struck mad, betrays, betrays in fact exactly as Othello does by stopping his beloved's voice.

The answer to this is No, but Yes, and then No again, and therefore finally Yes-and-No.

Here's No, the first time.

Dickens doesn't love Miss Barbary at all. That's right, isn't it? She is the bad mother, in D. W. Winnicott's famous binary, repressive and denying, juxtaposed against the good and loving, would-be-nurturing but deluded, ''real'' mother, Lady Dedlock. Isn't that polarity literally the matrix of the novel's ongoing fantasy, Esther's fantasy and Dickens's? Overcome the bad mother's forced separation of the child from the good mother by inventing the polymorphous pre-Oedipal Jarndyce,

at once mother, father, and lover, who unites all the potential objects within an ideal of impossibly powerful, agamous benevolence? Of course that's the story the novel tells if, by reading, you want, like Jarndyce, to ''finish what the writer had begun.'' But perhaps you suspect, like me, what volunteering to continue that project might entail: the surrender of bliss in favor of mere, snug comfort.

What if you think, instead, that this kind of writing, the writer's unfinished project, parallels what Miss Barbary calls ''sleeping?'' What if, instead of writing, we ''Watch!''? Can we tell a different, transgressive story, if we keep our eyes open for other plots inside the novel competing to be seen? – Not only different but better stories, or at least fairer, than the one the writer has begun.

This brings us to Yes, the first time.

Yes means reading Miss Barbary or, at least, her ''choice'' of name as a sort of symptom. Symptom is a key element in D. A. Miller's extremely influential reading of *Bleak House*. Central to his complex and incisive argument is the rejection of '' 'contradiction' in the text'' as ''in a certain Marxist manner . . . the 'symptom' of an ideological bind, obligingly betrayed to our notice in the text's taken-for-granted 'distanciation' from its own program'' (D. A. Miller 1988: 65. OrIG. 1983). Ingeniously, Miller argues instead that incoherence marks ''a positively advantageous *strategy*'' for the text's intervention ''in the ideological 'conflict' '' that surrounds it (p. 66). Unpersuaded, Dominick LaCapra has responded to this argument by stressing the ways in which ''symptomatic, critical, and possibly transformative forces interact in relating a text to its various contexts (or subtexts)'' (LaCapra 1984: 117). My post-Freudian use of symptom obviously proposes no intervention in that argument. In a sense, transgressive adaptation wants to cut the Gordian knot of ideology by treating the text not as already-processed but as still-and-indeed-endlessly-raw material. I'm interested therefore in using symptom in a different and earlier, more as it were raw, sense.

In the Greek, symptom meant literally a mishap or mischance. Medically, it thus came to mean a sign or a reminder of a mishap we might otherwise overlook. With those meanings in mind we might then ask: what misfortune does a sign named Barbary remind us we have overlooked, or, better still, remind us of what Dickens is having trouble forgetting? There are a number of answers to that inquiry. All of them invoke the word betrayal. And all of them circle back on the fact that, by calling the character Miss Barbary, the novel like a screen dream alludes to, or reminds us, of a narrative that something or someone has

attempted to obscure, the kind of tell-tale self-accusation the accuser appears to prefer to believe that he has not let slip. We begin then to see Miss Barbary as a sort of rock in the narrative stream, catching and withholding that which might otherwise rush past us unnoticed.

Desdemona's Barbary tells of a woman who dies from neglect because the man she loves is incapacitated from loving her back; her word is ''mad.'' That's also, of course, Desdemona and Othello's story; their word is jealous. It's also Miss Barbary and Dickens's story, as we've seen; their word is Bleak. But it's also a story that *Bleak House*, like *Othello*, feels compelled to retell in manifold. Repeatedly, the novel returns to women whom their lovers abandon to madness, degradation and death, ''entirely friendless, nameless, and unknown.'' All of these Dickensian *stories* focus like Shakespeare's on a literally lethal hero, insisting that virility is viral because of an innate male incapacity to discover or deliver bliss. The stories of not only Ada and Richard, or Honoria and Hawdon, but also of Lady Dedlock ruined by the sadist Tulkinghorn – who clearly adores her – and the impotent Leicester Dedlock – who also loves her as best he can. And, of course, Miss Barbary herself. The novel may pretend these are not its preferred fictions, telling them from a safe, censorious distance, but that distance it continually betrays by the savagery with which it indicts any woman who like Mrs. Jellyby would try to remove herself from the plot of heterosexual subjugation and neglect.

Another way to say all this – our preferred way – is to claim that *Bleak House* can find no viable mode for agamy. It wants to, it's got to, show ''the romantic side of familiar things'' because the familiar seen straight on is just deadly. We are encountering here, I think, a middle-aged and ageing male narcissism, as frustrated as it is demanding. (Narcissism will come up again, at great length, later on.) Dickens seems doubly disabled: unable any longer either to love being a man, or – being a man – to love. That second inability, to love women, drives the novel's theme, its obsessive repetitions of Barbary's story. But the first inability, to love being a man, shapes its form, the famous bifurcation into a second, female voice. In effect, Dickens evades the shame in failing to love women by permitting himself, as Esther, to imagine instead what it might be like to be one. After a succession of best boys, from Sam Weller to David Copperfield, he has turned to – and almost into – the incomparably best of girls.

We might well frame this reversal by contrasting the doubling in *Bleak House* (1850) with an apparently comparable move in the earlier *The Old*

Curiosity Shop (1840). *Curiosity Shop* also divides into a male and female fiction, although both are narrated in the same voice. Doomed Nell centers a horrific, heterosexual plot of predatory desire and ruthless persecution. But hobbledehoy Dick Swiveller memorably provides the novel with an engaging counter-focus, spinning out its agamous comic plot of mutual liberation, in which Swiveller and his beloved Marchioness intervene to save each other and themselves. Ten years later, the genders have switched genre. The male is now both deadly and dying; it is the female alone that seems viable. Alone is the operative term here. Men who desire women both give and catch death. Women, women who preserve themselves from wanting men, promise the only mode of preservation. And they are the only women the novel finds worth having. It would seem as though Dickens can now only endlessly re-narrate his sex's, his own, need to desert and destroy those whom they love. But as a woman he senses that he might get to tell a story that permits him not only to save but to love himself. Between *Curiosity Shop* and *Bleak House* he appears to have to become something like that archetypally bold coward, the guy who gets off the sinking ship by huddling inside a shawl.

This *travesti* means that *Bleak House* need not hang its head and sing ''Willow.'' It can *express* instead the peculiar and bizarre model of a cheerier *fortune*: contrasting eros-seeking, betrayed, abandoned Honoria and Ada against virginal Esther whose happiness is secured by transference from unworthy suitors (Guppy) to non-contaminating patriarchy (Jarndyce) and its passive surrogate (Woodcourt). The novel goes out of its plot's way to reassure us that this bleak eros is virtually non-carnal and therefore reliably non-lethal. Esther loses even her meager claims to physical attractions. Woodcourt is repeatedly sent to sea with scarcely the suggestion of a proposal, let alone a proposition. From Jo to the shipwrecked colonials, everyone is dead and dying all around Woodcourt. He's Doctor Death, incapable of supporting or renewing life, and, inevitably then it would seem, Jarndyce's ideal of a husband. And Jarndyce enters the marriage plot only so that we can see him withdraw in time, an epitome of the eros interruptus which leaves this novel giddy. Both Bleak House south and its copy Bleak House north are reassuringly prophylactic against any contaminant libido. Erotic bliss they literally ''blot out.'' And in its place they supply bespoke lives in a bijou residence, what Adam Phillips might call a ''banal replacement-memory'' (Phillips 1994: 24) or what Roland Barthes would term a text of *pleasure*: one that, expunging the reckless avidity of desire, guarantees

Dickens the ''consistency of his [threatened] selfhood'' (Barthes 1975: 14). We might call this agamy-without-(even the shadow of)-a-vengeance: a renunciation of erotic bonding so sterile that it guarantees to do no one harm, by insistently refusing to do anybody any sort of good.

But this novel's alternative is never entirely or convincingly the conventional banalities of pleasure. And that gets us back toward, if not yet exactly at, No, again.

In all the novels of the middle period, Dickens reliably finds mere pleasure insufficient, despite his strenuous efforts to endorse its comfort. (That is another way, I suppose, of saying that Dickens is both a writer who endlessly renews his right to canonical status, and a typical Victorian.) He continues to gesture, never more poignantly than in this middle period, with longing and regret toward the earlier male sites of bliss he now finds himself constrained from incorporating: for example, in Copperfield's notorious love and admiration for Steerforth, especially in his final refusal to condemn his errant friend, or in Sir Leicester's final pairing with Trooper George, a partner far more faithful than Lady Dedlock could ever have been, a pairing which perhaps gives us one last privileged glimpse into the final days of Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller.

And it's that palpable longing which leads me to prefer Richard Carstone as the best informed reader of the novel, its preferred adaptor because its most resistant character. Richard urges Esther and us ''to take an interest'' and ''To look into'' Jarndyce, and then to see how he becomes ''quite another thing'' (XII:xxxvii, 581) from what he pretends. Bliss may kill in this novel, Richard shows us, but pleasure surely mummifies. Jarndyce's Bleak House is a kind of proto-Ibsenite Doll's House, in which Esther figures as Trilby to Jarndyce's ventriloquizing Svengali, or as key-wound Coppelia to his Doctor Coppelius in a bleak house that holds no possibility for either bliss or flight. Listening thoughtfully to Richard, we begin to realize we should pay more attention to Barbary, and very little to Jarndyce. We should at least entertain, despite all Dickens's claims to the contrary, the possibility that good Esther Summerson may very well be her mother's ''shame,'' the pleasant alternative that both damns and disguises access to women's bliss. In effect, we should refuse, like Richard, to believe that *Bleak House* ''works.''

If *Bleak House* ''works,'' the reader commits to that fundamental bifurcation: that it tells two contrasting stories, narratives that not only differ from but counter each other – Esther's endorsed ''amateurish, slowly dilating 'circle of duty' as a paradigmatic alternative to Chan-

cery's expansive 'circle of evil'" (Robbins 1990: 214). The Chancellor centers a public story of illimitable desuetude. Jarndyce pulls together around himself and his house the opposing story, a private narrative of consolation and reconstruction – to which Richard Carstone proves the stiffnecked exception that underscores the necessity for the Rule, Lucifer to Jarndyce's omniscient Patriarch. But Richard insists there's not two stories but only one: "I do declare to you that he becomes to me the embodiment of the suit; that, in place of its being an abstraction, it is John Jarndyce" (XIII:xxxix, 609). Richard anchors this reading in the novel's double play on *suitor* (p.580). Most of the characters are in one way or another *suitors* to Chancery, refused, postponed, manipulated, cheated suitors. But many of those same characters, and certainly the younger ones, are also *suitors* in erotic plots, suitors refused, postponed, manipulated and cheated by Jarndyce. When the young Richard could feel "utterly regardless of this same suit," that is the Chancery suit, then he and Jarndyce "got on very well." But when he grew into manhood "it was quite another thing. Then John Jarndyce discovers that Ada and I must break off, and that if I don't amend that very objectionable course" – but there are two courses now, the suits for the will and for Ada – "I am not fit for her" (p.581).

The impersonal narrator makes us see the horror of the Chancellor, that soft-spoken, middle-aged, gentlemanly person, in his cozy chambers, the robes thrown aside. But Richard insists we see the Chancellor doubled not denied in that other middle-aged, snuggery-loving dominator, Jarndyce, whose vampirish needs fasten on the sweet young things in his care, keeping them from young men who might provide them something like bliss. Richard thus reads for us scenes or moments that Esther repeatedly wills us to not mind. Jarndyce's initial, terrifying encounter with the child Esther in the carriage. His solipsistic trust in Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle. His blind indifference to the misery of the Jellyby and Pardiggle families and of the unemployed families who neighbor his estate. His delighted, constantly defended harboring of Skimpole. His bizarre choice of the emotionally retarded Boythorn as best friend. Richard asks us to see that Esther is wrong when she, blindly loyal, insists that Jarndyce has "kept himself outside the circle" (p.589). Far from being outside, Richard claims, he shares the circle's center. Jarndyce, not Krook, is really the Chancellor's "brother." As Richard wittily insists, it is only "wise and specious to preserve that outward difference" (p.581).

The novel now seems to be compelling us to rewrite it, to let Barbary

sing the Willow her betrayer has silenced, to say Yes and No. Barbary is the memory that resists the novel's imperative forgetting, the ghost in the machine of Dickensian repression. And Richard has all along been, we suddenly glimpse, a would-be best boy, an agamous lover, terrible at marriage no doubt, but then that's what agamous lovers are supposed to be, and – we have Ada's witness for this – wonderfully satisfactory at all the other things one might desire a lover to be. Even prune-toned Esther can't manage to resist his charms. If only Jarndyce had loved Richard early and well, we begin to muse, as Pickwick loved Sam, or the Cheerybles loved Nickleby, what a quite different story, what an unbleak story, we might have read. And even without that love we can still read inside *Bleak House* a novel which insists on our resistance, which time and again implores us to look where it mutely points, away from what it seems to say. It is after all Dickens who authored Richard. It is after all Dickens who named Barbary.

But here we have strayed to the verge of a reading. We've probably even overstepped that boundary, entering a territory next to the one so carefully policed by Jonathan Arac, Terry Eagleton, D. A. Miller and Bruce Robbins. From all of them we already know well ''Dickens' complicity with the social structures he deplored'' (Robbins 1990: 226). And right next to that we've found a field where Dickens deplores his misery-making complicities. But neither field should distract us now. That way's aporia, and we remain committed to *poros*. We only offered this reading, really, as a sort of dumb show, like the prelude to *The Moustrap*, just a little something to adumbrate the harrowing that is to come. The play, that is: the adaptation, remains the thing at which we aim. But to get there, we've got to swerve now away from reading and toward theatre, toward, specifically, the theatre that Dickens himself would urge us, dangerously, to adopt, his as-it-were theatre that shudders at any hint of adaptation.