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Volume 34, Issue 3, September, 2017, pages tbc.

Dickens, Miscellanies, and classical traditions of Satire

A detailed examination of Charles Dickens's influence on the genesis and development of the periodical that was originally advertised in the Autumn of 1836 as "The Wits' Miscellany" has yet to be made. Nevertheless I am going to argue that the context of its establishment was something of a watershed in the development of Dickens's approach to satirical writing as a journalist, editor and author.¹ "The Wits' Miscellany" was the planned title for the new monthly magazine that the publisher was projecting in 1836, to be jointly penned by the leading humorists of the day, and edited by the intensely fashionable "Boz", creative force behind a strange monthly confection of narratives known as *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, then taking literary London by storm. At Dickens's suggestion, we are led to believe, the title soon mutated from "The Wits' Miscellany" to *Bentley's Miscellany*, prompting R. H. Barham's quip "but why go to the other extreme?" The joke acts as an illustration of something that will also be touched on in this article, namely the place in satirical traditions of the hit which depends for its effect upon the identification of an individual victim. This gives satire a particular kind of hold which is more of a bite than an embrace. In exploring such matters, Dickensian satire will inevitably be brought into conversation—perhaps even criminal conversation—with the central Dickensian theme of conviviality.² With its emphasis on shared enjoyment, sociability and consensus, the convivial would seem to be at odds with the properly satirical, which has to leave its sting in

¹ The best study of the founding and editing of *Bentley's Miscellany* remains "Bentley's Miscellany, 1837–68," in Houghton *et al.*, 5–14, which draws on the recollections of Bentley's chief clerk, Edward S. Morgan ("Brief Retrospect," 4 July 1873, Bentley Archives, University of Illinois). Eileen Curran's study of "Verse in 'Bentley's Miscellany'" is a rarity in endeavouring to offer some analysis of the journal's contents.

² The present article is based on the text of a plenary paper read at the annual conference of the international Dickens Fellowship, Aberdeen, 20–25 July 2016, of which the central theme was "conviviality" (I am grateful to Paul Schlicke for the invitation to speak and to fellow conference-goers for their subsequent comments). "Dickens and Conviviality" was also the theme of the 28th "Dickens Day" conference, held at the Institute of English Studies, London, 11 October 2014.

somebody's flesh, and which usually exposes two sides to any question, leaving some unfortunate soul—at times even its readers—uncomfortably stranded on the wrong bank, and scrambling for safety.

This naturally prompts the question of what Dickens himself, as a young writer already being lionized for his wit in the mid 1830s, understood by such terms, as they affected the practice of his craft. In other words, how did Dickens orientate himself as a budding humorist against the existing satirical and comic traditions of his day? To be sure, this is not a very fashionable line of enquiry.³ Following the great twentieth-century re-evaluation of Dickens as an artist, we have perhaps become conditioned to look for ways in which his works anticipated, predicted and prototyped his Modernist and postmodern successors and influenced the international current of prose fiction that was to come after. Nevertheless, it must occasionally be permissible to glance upstream as well as down, and try to understand Dickens's aesthetic and ethical development as a writer in terms of those he acknowledged and navigated amongst as forerunners: in this case well-established exponents of classical traditions of literary attack and reform. Dickens's "small Latin and less Greke" as a schoolboy is, in this respect, irrelevant, because such traditions were so widely diffused in Regency, Georgian and Victorian print culture, partly through the periodical press, but also through the warp and weft of parliamentary rhetoric, which of course, Dickens himself was as responsible as anyone for weaving into text during the 1830s (Hessell ch. 5). As George Augustus Sala would put it, in his book-length obituary of his mentor and former employer, Dickens as a young journalist "had listened to masters in every style of rhetoric: he had followed Henry Brougham the Demosthenes, Shiel the Cicero, O'Connell the Mirabeau, of

³ Honourable exception must be made for Sylvia Manning's *Dickens as Satirist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971), which, drawing on genre theorists such as Northrop Frye and Alvin Kernan, seeks to distinguish Dickens's satirical modes in the major fiction from those of canonical exponents from Ben Jonson onwards. In confining itself to Dickens's fiction, however, with its predominantly narrative priorities, rather than taking his magazine journalism into consideration, the study finds Dickens's formal relationship to classical satirists weaker than it perhaps might or should. See Appendix B, "Dickens and the Tradition of Satire," 234–51.

their age” (36–37). A classical education was by no means a prerequisite to participation in a literary culture imbued with neoclassical tendencies, and which was thoroughly accustomed to adapting familiar stylistic formulae and imaginative reference points in the contest between conservative and radical traditions. Dickens was literally and literarily in the thick of it.

Party spirits, party warfare and the satirical stakes were all high during the stormy passage of the Catholic Emancipation Act (1829), the “Great Reform” Act (1832), and the implementation of the radical Whig reform agenda during the Grey and first two Melbourne ministries (1830–39)—in particular as effects of the Poor Law Amendment Act (1834) and the Municipal Corporations Act (1835) took hold. In this context it is interesting to note that the fundamental *raison d’être*—the business case, indeed—of “The Wits’ Miscellany” and its ultimate incarnation as *Bentley’s Miscellany*, was that it was intended to act as an antidote to such polemics, if not a parody of them: it was to be the *I’m Sorry I haven’t a Clue* of its day.⁴ The Prospectus for the new journal was drafted by Dickens, and even before a list of consenting contributors had been obtained, he was promising “a feast of the richest comic humour [...] provided by the ablest and merriest caterers of the age.” The culinary metaphors, as I have argued elsewhere, speak more “to the idea of dinner parties rather than political parties” (Drew 39), and are as determinedly convivial as his editorial note on the completion of the first bi-annual volume is theatrical in its representation of the journal’s apolitical stance, likening the editor’s role to that of a stage manager eager only to please the public rather than push an agenda:

We have produced a great variety of novelties, some of which we humbly hope will become stock pieces, and all of which [...] have been most successful; and, although we are not subject to the control of a licenser, we have eschewed everything political,

⁴ Longstanding BBC Radio 4 satirical programme (1972–present), billed as “the antidote to panel games.”

personal, or ill-natured, with perhaps as much care as we could possibly have shown, even had we been under the watchful eye of the Lord Chamberlain himself.⁵

This eschewal of the political, indeed, was so well drummed into the contributors that it becomes a kind of anti-party party line over the course of the first volume, which had opened with a Prologue not by Dickens but by that elder statesman of periodical satire, William Maginn. Described by his biographer as “one of the most personal and political writers of the age,” and a classically-trained polemicist who “readily alluded to Rabelais, Juvenal, or Swift” (Latané 245), Maginn consciously invoked neoclassical traditions even as he worked to reassure readers that the last-minute change of title, from the hubristic “Wits’ Miscellany”, was an act in keeping with the journal’s studious commitment to entertain rather than hector:

[W]e now sail under the title of our worthy publisher, which happens to be the same as that of him who is by all *viri clarissimi* adopted as *criticorum longè doctissimus*, RICARDUS BENTLEIUS; or, to drop the Latin lore—Richard Bentley.⁶ [...] Our path is single and distinct. In the first place, we have nothing to do with politics. [...] Is it a matter of absolute necessity that people’s political opinions should be perpetually obtruded upon public notice? Is there not something more in the world to be talked about than Whig and Tory?

As David Latané notes, the ensuing poem, “Our Opening Chaunt,” also penned by Maginn, then simply “repeats this position in verse” (244), over ten tortuously rhymed quatrains:

VI.

Tory and Whig, in accents big,
 May wrangle violéntly;
 Their party rage shan’t stain the page—
 The neutral page of Bentley.

VII.

The scribe whose pen is mangling men
 And women pestiléntly,
 May take elsewhere his wicked ware—
 He finds no mart in Bentley.⁷

⁵ “Boz” [Charles Dickens], “Editor’s Address on the Completion of the First Volume,” *Bentley’s Miscellany*, Vol. I (London: Richard Bentley, 1837), p. iii.

⁶ Maginn shares with the classically-educated reader the knowledge that Richard Bentley (1662–1742) was considered by all “clear-sighted men the most learned of critics by far”. During the lifetime of the publisher Richard Bentley (1794–1871), his namesake had been celebrated as one of England’s greatest scholars in J. H. Monk’s *Life of Richard Bentley*, DD (1830; rev. ed, 1833).

⁷ [William Maginn], “Our Opening Chaunt,” *Bentley’s Miscellany*, Vol. I (January 1837), p. 6.

Satirical attacks on individuals are here presented as disreputable goods, but another kind of market there clearly was, however, in the journal's early years. Kathryn Chittick has observed how "the Prologue to *Bentley's Miscellany* still describes the age of literary coteries, but its advertisements, with their lists of names not topics, presages the age of publishing "stables." This is a pushing of commodities not opinions" (Chittick 113). Nevertheless, in their seamlessly-joined editorial position pieces for the *Miscellany*, Dickens and Maginn were seeking to convert apoliticism into a strong appeal to the market.

The appeal masks therefore a number of interesting oppositions, including that between convivial embrace and satirical bite. A "feast of the richest comic humour," the "merriest caterers of the age": this sounds like conviviality at its most classical (*convivium*, 2nd declension neuter, a feast or banquet; *convivial*, befitting a feast or banquet; festive). And neutral, a "neutral page", unstained—this sounds almost like a manifesto for colourless writing, if not blandness. It seems unlikely, however, that "Boz" could be so much in demand as an editor if he was somehow felt to be a neutral in the big debates of the era, though his politics were clearly difficult to pin down. Maginn himself, reviewing an indifferent novel in *Fraser's Magazine* in the same month as the "Eatanswill Election" episode of *Pickwick Papers* (August 1836), could not help exclaiming that "Mr Pickwick was a Whig, and that was only right; but Boz is just as much a Whig as he is a giraffe" (14: 242). But Maginn does not, cannot, positively label him a Tory, and in writing to Chapman and Hall, Dickens himself is no more forthcoming in commenting to his publishers that "I see honorable mention of myself, and Mr Pickwick's politics in Fraser this month. They consider Mr P. a decided Whig."⁸ And he leaves it at that. But conviviality and satirical humour need not necessarily be at odds with each other, and classical traditions themselves offer a rationale. Satire itself can be served at a feast or banquet. *Satura*, (1st declension feminine) a medley,

⁸ *Letters* 1:161, n. 1.

stuffing, a mixed assortment, a bowl of differing fruits: all of these meanings have been adduced by classical scholars⁹ as antecedent to and bearing on its literary application from the 1st century AD onwards to the collected poems of Horace and other Roman authors. Sheer miscellaneity, then, carries a kind of primary satirical charge, even before we start worrying about differing principles and effects. Poems in different metres, collected together, form *satura*; so too can articles in different genres in a “magazine”—another collective term indicating the place where different things are stored.

As a student of Dickens’s work as an editor and journalist, I find this a valuable touchstone for understanding the way in which his individual style of composing and structuring instalments of serially-published work, could strike readers as inherently satirical without conforming to specific traditions of satire later to be identified and set in opposition to each other. Under this rubrik, students of the genre—whether “dry and sandy with working in the graves of deceased languages” at the classical “hot house” of Dr Blimber’s Academy, or perhaps even those educated at Wellington House Academy in the Hampstead Road where Dickens himself was taught some basic Latin,—have long been taught a distinction between Horatian and Juvenalian satire that may yet be of some use in crystallizing Dickens’s own approach. In the former, we are told, the speaker is “an urbane, witty, and tolerant man of the world, who is moved more to wry amusement than indignation at the spectacle of human folly, pretentiousness and hypocrisy”.¹⁰ Like Horace, the former army officer turned Treasury civil servant in the post-Civil War Rome of Augustas and Maecenas, the Horatian satirist reforms the Establishment from a site on the margins of, or fully within, the establishment, and while they may win admiration for their daring, are nevertheless accommodators not over-throwers of the powers-that-be. In Juvenalian satire, by contrast, the speaker is an

⁹ B. L. Ullman “Satura and Satire”, *Classical Philology* Vol. 8, No. 2 (Apr., 1913), pp. 172–194.

¹⁰ Definitions elaborated in successive editions of M. H. Abrams hugely influential *Glossary of Literary Terms* (1957); quotations from M.H. Abrams, Geoffrey Harpham *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 11th ed. Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2014 p. 353.

outraged moralist who decries modes of vice and error “which are not less dangerous because they are ridiculous”, a censor who delivers a grave, often outraged, castigation—obviously with a harsher and more corrosive effect. Not much is known for certain of Juvenal’s life, but most authorities infer the composition of the work during a period of exile imposed for insulting a court favourite with high levels of influence: the emperor who banished him is given as either Trajan or Domitian, and all the biographies place his exile in Egypt, with the exception of one that opts for Scotland. But the point is, the Juvenalian satirist differs from the Horatian through standing outside the inner circle of power, and writes from a greater critical distance, and certainly doesn’t pull any punches. Where evil, rather than folly, is detected, it needs rooting out, so the Juvenalian satirist has few scruples over *ad hominem* attacks. There is also a third, less clearly established, classical pattern for satire on which it will be interesting to touch in due course, but my initial aim is simple to map the straightforward Horatian/Juvenalian contrast onto the political scene as the writer known as “Boz” comes to the fore as a commentator in the late 1830s. Dickens’s more than passing knowledge of both writers, in the original and in translation, has been well traced by Sylvia Manning,¹¹ but the intention is not to detect literary influence *per se*, but rather to conceptualise Dickens’s satirical methods by means of the stances characteristically assigned to each.

¹¹ Manning notes “there is good evidence for Dickens’s knowledge of Juvenal” (234), citing *Dombey and Son* ch. 14, where the *Satires* are quoted, and *Letters* 4:322 (?16-21 June 1845), in which Forster is told that Dickens in Rome had “been always lugging” a copy of Juvenal “out of a bag, on all occasions”; Stonehouse records an “old calf” octavo copy of Dryden’s *Translations of Juvenal and Persius’s Satires ... with a Discourse on Satir* (1711) in Dickens’s Gads Hill Library in 1870, which may have been the book in question. As for Horace, a “number of references suggest that, as Dickens knew Pope’s *Imitations of Horace*, he was familiar with the original too” (Manning 239); these include a brief (almost catchphrase) quotation in the essay “Tramps” from *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1860), a tacit allusion in *Tale of Two Cities* Bk. II, ch. 14, and knowledge of Horace’s “panegyric” on wine evidenced in *Pictures from Italy* (1846), ch. 10. Further references not mentioned in Manning come in *Pictures* ch. 11, a name-check in *Dombey & Son*, ch. 11 (“Like a bee, Sir,” said Mrs Blimber with uplifted eyes, “about to plunge into a garden of the choicest flowers, and sip the sweets for the first time. Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Terence, Plautus, Cicero.”) and mention in one of Dickens’s earliest works of fiction, “The Boarding House” (May 1834), in which one of the inmates of the house, Frederick O’Bleary, is described as “reading Horace and trying to look as if he understood it” (Dent 1, 298). There could be an element of self-mockery here, but there is no reason to suppose a technical lack of proficiency in Latin prevented Dickens from fully absorbing the trademark approaches to satire of either writer, whether first or second hand.

Two examples, quoted at some length, will have to suffice as a mapping exercise. The first is from *Bentley's Miscellany*, a sketch by Dickens called "The Pantomime of Life," published in March 1837, a month when only the second instalment of the continuation called "The Parish Boy's Progress" had appeared in the same miscellany, and the twelfth instalment of *The Pickwick Papers* had been published by Chapman & Hall. The sketch appeared under the understandable heading of "Stray Chapters by Boz"—a tacit confession that Dickens's *modus operandi* at this time was the generation of miscellaneous material for serial publication that could subsequently be remediated for novelistic purposes, as required, and if not, could still fulfil the dual purpose of satisfying his contract with Bentley on the one hand and on the other his contract with readers hungry for more. The paper opens harmlessly enough, with speculations on the "secret cause" of spectators' delight in pantomime, as a kind of sublimated recollection of the knocks and blows of common experience, but towards its close, the tone changes, when a searing analogy between the vulgar theatricals of pantomime and the Mother of all Parliaments is instituted:

We take it that the commencement of a session of parliament is neither more nor less than the drawing up of the curtain for a grand comic pantomime; and that his Majesty's most gracious speech, on the opening thereof, may be not inaptly compared to the clown's opening speech of "Here we are!" "My lords and gentlemen, here we are!" appears, to our mind at least, to be a very good abstract of the point and meaning of the propitiatory address of the ministry. When we remember how frequently this speech is made, immediately after *the change* too, the parallel is quite perfect, and still more singular.

Perhaps the cast of our political pantomime never was richer than at this day. We are particularly strong in clowns. At no former time, we should say, have we had such astonishing tumblers, or performers so ready to go through the whole of their feats for the amusement of an admiring throng. Their extreme readiness to exhibit, indeed, has given rise to some ill-natured reflections; it having been objected that by exhibiting gratuitously through the country when the theatre is closed, they reduce themselves to the level of mountebanks, and thereby tend to degrade the respectability of the profession. Certainly Grimaldi never did this sort of thing; [...]

But, laying aside this question, which after all is a mere matter of taste, we may reflect with pride and gratification of heart on the proficiency of our clowns as exhibited in the season. Night after night will they twist and tumble about, till two, three, and four o'clock in the morning; playing the strangest antics, and giving each other the funniest slaps on the face that can possibly be imagined, without evincing

the smallest tokens of fatigue. The strange noises, the confusion, the shouting and roaring, amid which all this is done, too, would put to shame the most turbulent sixpenny gallery that ever yelled through a boxing-night.

It is especially curious to behold one of these clowns compelled to go through the most surprising contortions by the irresistible influence of the wand of office, which his leader or harlequin holds above his head. Acted upon by this wonderful charm he will become perfectly motionless, moving neither hand, foot, nor finger, and will even lose the faculty of speech at an instant's notice; or on the other hand, he will become all life and animation if required, pouring forth a torrent of words without sense or meaning, throwing himself into the wildest and most fantastic contortions, and even grovelling on the earth and licking up the dust. These exhibitions are more curious than pleasing; indeed, they are rather disgusting than otherwise, except to the admirers of such things, with whom we confess we have no fellow-feeling. (Slater, Ed. Vol. 1, 505–06)

This is, on the classical distinction earlier established, in the manner of Juvenal not Horace—the palpable sense of disgust, of critical distance, the perspective of an alienated outsider, specifically a kind of superiority of perspective that, armed with biographical information, we can immediately understand as the viewpoint from the Reporters' Gallery—neither Tory nor Whig—but the voice of the ordinary citizen, elevated to a pitch of savage indignation.

Armed with a little more biographical information, about the books and authors that Dickens read and returned to throughout his adult life, we can also see clearly enough how Dickens's Juvenalian approach is mediated through Swift, specifically Gulliver's commentary on the antics of Flimnap and the gymnastic courtiers of Lilliput in Part I of his *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World* (1726).

Dickens's channelling of aspects of Swift's art will repay further attention after consideration of a second example. This is taken from a rare but nonetheless characteristic text that Dickens composed a little earlier in 1837, called "The Extraordinary Gazette," designed to go alongside a vignette engraving by "Phiz", by then enlisted as the illustrator of *Pickwick*. The Gazette was an 8-page advertising flier for the third number of the *Miscellany*, and here too Dickens's humour plays around with the formal business of government, this time with the reporting of the King's speech on the annual opening of parliament on 31st January that year, presented as the "Speech of his Mightiness on opening the Second Number

of *Bentley's Miscellany*", his mightiness being none other than a blown-up version of the editor, that is to say "Boz", himself:

"MY LORDS, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN:

"... It has been the constant aim of my policy to preserve peace in your minds, and promote merriment in your hearts; to set before you, the scenes and characters of real life in all their endless diversity... I trust I may refer you to my Pickwickian measures, already taken and still in progress, in confirmation of this assurance.

"... I continue to receive from Foreign Powers, undeniable assurances of their disinterested regard and esteem. The free and independent States of America have done me the honour to reprint my Sketches, gratuitously; and to circulate them throughout the Possessions of the British Crown in India, without charging me anything at all.

"... I deeply lament the ferment and agitation of the public mind in Ireland, which was occasioned by the inadequate supply of the first number of this Miscellany. I deplore the outrages which were committed by an irritated and disappointed populace on the shop of the agent.... I derive the greatest satisfaction from reflecting that the promptest and most vigorous measures were instantaneously taken to repress the tumult. A large detachment of Miscellanies was levied and shipped with all possible despatch...."

NOTE OF THE REPORTER

His Mightiness incorporated with his speech on general topics some especial reference to one "Oliver Twist." Not distinctly understanding the allusion, we have abstained from giving it.¹²

As responses to the King's Speech in the House of Commons, reported in the newspapers show, it covered a similar range of topics, including Irish discontent and a proposed remedy (introduction of the new Poor Law), so the parody here is both irreverent and topical (*Hansard*, 31 Jan. 1837). Also notable, in referring readers to his "Pickwickian measures," is Dickens's "brazen readiness to promote in a Bentley publication all his work as 'Boz,' whether published by Bentley or not" (Drew 40). In this example, the monarch himself is one of the satirical targets, but the satire must surely be considered Horatian, in the sense that it is so much voiced from the inside of the court circle that "Boz" and William IV speak in the same tones of secure self-satisfaction, and become, for the time being, inseparable. The satire is arch rather than savage, partly because, in an age when power was genuinely perceived to

¹² MS British Museum Dex. 306 (2); of the Gazette's 8 pages, pp. 1-4 consist of text by CD; see *Dickensian* 26 (1930) 54-56.

be transferring from the first to the fourth estate, the parodic hit works as much by parallel as it does by polarisation. For much of his writing career as one of Britain's most influential journalists and editors, Dickens's self-representation as the "uncommercial" purveyor of home truths and fanciful musings was at least half-aware of its commercial complicity in the commodification of his own opinions.

This knowingness extends, I believe, to Dickens's understanding of his own role as a satirist and the varying forms it could or should adopt towards the contemporary scene. A re-reading of that most satirical of novels, *Martin Chuzzlewit* in the light of the differing approaches discussed so far, suggests quite how nuanced this understanding is. The famous opening chapter, concerning the "high and lofty station, and the vast importance of the Chuzzlewits" in all ages, has rightly been compared to the far-reaching dystopian satire on "greatness" in Henry Fielding's *History of the Life of the Late Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743), written shortly after Fielding's own exile from the London stage, as a result of the Licensing Act of 1737.¹³ But unlike Fielding's exercise in Juvenalian satire, in which the *ad hominem* leads towards one easily identifiable target—prime minister Sir Robert Walpole—Dickens's satire remains at least half levied at fictitious targets, making the reader unsure if he or she is being caught up in the crossfire. As we move into the narrative proper, one can begin to detect a dual voicing of soft "inner circle" and harder, alienated satire, as Dickens invites us simultaneously to identify with and gently reprove young Martin, whom we visibly see become the architect of his own misfortunes, before he learns from others how to curb his inherited selfishness; and to denounce the outright wickedness of a group of reprehensible characters whose "smartness" shades into outright wickedness, particularly during the American episodes of the novel. It is notable that among these is Colonel Driver, editor of the

¹³ See Slater 208. In tone and bite, the *Chuzzlewit* chapter is also reminiscent of Thomas Moore's *Memoirs of Captain Rock* (1824), a volume contained in Dickens's edition of Moore's *Works* (1823 –), listed in the inventory of his books taken in 1844 (*Letters* 4: 712) and described in Stonehouse, p. 82.

New York Rowdy Journal, as well as other journalists “renowned, as it appeared, for excellence in the achievement of a peculiar style of broadside-essay called ‘a screamer’” so that the Juvenalian satire of these episodes is directed not at a corrupt court, but a corrupt media, as the newsboys of the port make clear:

“Here’s this morning’s New York Sewer!” cried one. “Here’s this morning’s New York Stabber! Here’s the New York Family Spy! Here’s the New York Private Listener! Here’s the New York Peeper! Here’s the New York Plunderer! Here’s the New York Keyhole Reporter! Here’s the New York Rowdy Journal! Here’s all the New York papers! Here’s full particulars of the patriotic locofoco movement yesterday, in which the whigs was so chawed up; and the last Alabama gouging case; and the interesting Arkansas dooel with Bowie knives; and all the Political, Commercial, and Fashionable News. Here they are! Here they are! Here’s the papers, here’s the papers!” (318; ch. 16)

As Martin makes Driver’s acquaintance and that of his Foreign Correspondent, the precocious Jefferson Brick, the reader is trained to register the two types of satire simultaneously, the affectionate nature of one being in direct counterpoint to the uncomfortable sharpness of the other:

“Mr. Jefferson Brick, sir,” said the colonel, filling Martin’s glass and his own, and pushing the bottle to that gentleman, “will give us a sentiment.”

“Well, sir!” cried the war correspondent, “Since you have concluded to call upon me, I will respond. I will give you, sir, The Rowdy Journal and its brethren; the well of Truth, whose waters are black from being composed of printers’ ink, but are quite clear enough for my country to behold the shadow of her Destiny reflected in.”

“Hear, hear!” cried the colonel, with great complacency. “There are flowery components, sir, in the language of my friend?”

“Very much so, indeed,” said Martin.

“There is to-day’s Rowdy, sir,” observed the colonel, handing him a paper. “You’ll find Jefferson Brick at his usual post in the van of human civilisation and moral purity.”

The colonel was by this time seated on the table again. Mr. Brick also took up a position on that same piece of furniture; and they fell to drinking pretty hard. They often looked at Martin as he read the paper, and then at each other. When he laid it down, which was not until they had finished a second bottle, the colonel asked him what he thought of it.

“Why, it’s horribly personal,” said Martin.

The colonel seemed much flattered by this remark; and said he hoped it was.

“We are independent here, sir,” said Mr. Jefferson Brick. “We do as we like.”

“If I may judge from this specimen,” returned Martin, “there must be a few thousands here, rather the reverse of independent, who do as they don’t like.”

“Well! They yield to the popular mind of the Popular Instructor, sir,” said the colonel. “They rile up, sometimes; but in general we have a hold upon our citizens, both in public and in private life, which is as much one of the ennobling institutions of our happy country as —”

“As nigger slavery itself,” suggested Mr. Brick.

“En-tirely so,” remarked the colonel. (325-26; ch. 16)

Towards the end of this sequence of the novel, Martin makes the acquaintance of the virtuous and genial Mr Bevan, and their conversation turns from the scurrility of the Press to the bravery of Benjamin Franklin in criticising it, with Martin venturing the opinion that it would have needed

great courage, even in his time, to write freely on any question which was not a party one in this very free country.”

“Some courage, no doubt,” returned his new friend. “Do you think it would require any to do so, now?”

“Indeed I think it would; and not a little,” said Martin.

“You are right: So very right, that I believe no satirist could breathe this air. If another Juvenal or Swift could rise up among us to-morrow, he would be hunted down. If you have any knowledge of our literature, and can give me the name of any man, American born and bred, who has anatomised our follies as a people, and not as this or that party; and who has escaped the foulest and most brutal slander, the most inveterate hatred and intolerant pursuit; it will be a strange name in my ears, believe me. In some cases I could name to you, where a native writer has ventured on the most harmless and good-humoured illustrations of our vices or defects, it has been found necessary to announce, that in a second edition the passage has been expunged, or altered, or explained away, or patched into praise.” (339–40; ch. 16)

There is something of a literary critical air about this passage which is far more analytical than dramatic, after the dark brilliance of Driver and Brick, but I think it illustrates fairly conclusively Dickens’s own mapping of classical satirical traditions onto the principles of media practice of his own day—something indeed he may have done in conversation with his American friend and confidant, Cornelius Felton, the Boston Professor of Greek on whom, *pace* Jerome Meckier, Dickens based his portrait of Bevan:—

[U]sing Bevan to excoriate Americans was superb satire: criticisms come from an insider, an educated, if fictitious, new England professional; they cannot be attributed directly to Dickens.” (Meckier 131)

The chapter concludes with an erudite and apposite quotation from Thomas Moore’s “Epistle to The Honourable W. R. Spencer”, in which, oppressed by the ignorance and imbruting “mob-mania” he claims he found on his American travels in 1803–1804, Moore praises his Delaware friend Mr Dennie: “Oh, but for *such*, Columbia’s days were done / Rank without ripeness; quicken’d without sun”. This tribute is re-directed by Dickens, with public homage to Moore and private tribute to Felton, to describe young Martin’s admiration of Mr Bevan (340). There is a skilful double echo of autobiographical correspondences here, very much in the neoclassical vein, as well as something else—a kind of posthumous public revenge for the slight inflicted on Moore, a very small man, by President Thomas Jefferson, who at their first audience apparently mistook him for somebody’s son, and ignored him.¹⁴ Dickens adroitly (and in this reader’s view, hilariously) turns the tables, and has Martin first mistake the pointedly named Jefferson Brick for Col. Driver’s son, and then Mrs Jefferson Brick for a child:

“Pray,” said Martin, “who is that sickly little girl opposite, with the tight round eyes? I don’t see anybody here, who looks like her mother, or who seems to have charge of her.”

“Do you mean the matron in blue, sir?” asked the colonel, with emphasis. “That is Mrs Jefferson Brick, sir.”

“No, no,” said Martin, “I mean the little girl, like a doll; directly opposite.”

“Well, sir!” cried the colonel. “*That* is Mrs Jefferson Brick.”

Martin glanced at the colonel’s face, but he was quite serious. (334–35; ch. 16)

The specific mention of Swift in the earlier passage quoted offers us an opportunity to pause to consider the importance of Swiftian satire in the formation of Dickens’s own aesthetic. It needs to be pointed out that as Victoria’s reign progressed, Dickens’s admiration

¹⁴ An incident recounted in Ronan Kelly, *Bard of Erin: The Life of Thomas Moore* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 2008) p. 113 (Ch. 5).

for Swift's courage in expressing his indignation at the injustices of the world as he found it, set him against a powerful and censorious anti-Swift lobby, who found the Irishman too bitter, too corrosive, too explicit for comfort. Foremost among these was Thackeray, whose character assassination of the man he dubs the "furious exile" in *The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century* is remarkable for its failure to distinguish ironic mouthpieces from implied authors, and for its general impression of revulsion:

Could Dick Steele, or Goldsmith, or Fielding, in his most reckless moment of satire, have written anything like the Dean's famous "Modest Proposal" for eating children? Not one of these but melts at the thoughts of childhood, fondles and caresses it. Mr. Dean has no such softness, and enters the nursery with the tread and gayety of an ogre. [Moving on to *Gulliver's Travels*, he writes] As for the humor and conduct of this famous fable, I suppose there is no person who reads but must admire; as for the moral, I think it horrible, shameful, unmanly, blasphemous ; and giant and great as this Dean is, I say we should hoot him. Some of this audience mayn't have read the last part of Gulliver, and to such I would recall the advice of the venerable Mr. Punch to persons about to marry, and say "Don't." When Gulliver first lands among the Yahoos, the naked howling wretches clamber up trees and assault him, and he describes himself as "almost stifled with the filth which fell about him." The reader of the fourth part of "Gulliver's Travels" is like the hero himself in this instance. It is Yahoo language : a monster gibbering shrieks, and gnashing imprecations against mankind — tearing down all shreds of modesty, past all sense of manliness and shame ; filthy in word, filthy in thought, furious, raging, obscene.¹⁵

The intensity of Thackeray's rejection of Swift stems, to put a Freudian spin on the matter, from the Horatian satirist's encounter with his suppressed Juvenalian Other. Dickens is, by contrast, unconcerned by Swift's anger, and—we learn this from the *Letters*¹⁶—uniformly impressed by his outspokenness.

Thackeray's rejection, of course, takes on the hue of what it seeks to deprecate, and gives us something of the intensity of Gulliver's own disgust at the Yahoos. The satire of Part IV is, indeed, fairly unrelenting, particularly when it is compared to the Voyage that precedes it, to Laputa, Balnibarbi, and Luggnagg, with its varied sallies and thrusts, against the Academy of Projectors, the peevish immortal Struldbruggs, Laputan women and so forth.

¹⁵ *English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century* [1853], ed. by Stark Young. Boston & London: Ginn and Co., 1911, pp. 26, 31.

¹⁶ See, for example, *Letters* 3, p. 266.

Somehow—and this returns us to the concept of miscellaneity, and the third classical pattern of satire—its juxtapositions and transitions afford a relief that Part IV denies the reader.

Thackeray, indeed, makes the common biographical error of assuming that the ordering of the books indicates a deepening personal misanthropy on the part of Swift, and folds back onto his composition of the *Travels* in the mid 1720s the documented mental disorder of the early 1740s, conveniently ignoring the fact that the “furious, raging, obscene” final part of the *Travels*, with its Yahoos and Houyhnhnms, was actually composed by Swift before he wrote the third.¹⁷

In our own day, Alethea Hayter has, I think, shown greater sensitivity than Thackeray did to the interrelationships between satirical writing and its original pattern of composition: what might be called its comic timing. Reviewing the second volume of Michael Slater’s selection of Dickens’s journalism in the “Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens’ Journalism”—the volume titled *Amusements of the People and Other Papers: Reports, Essays and Reviews, 1834–51*—Hayter highlights a crucial dimension to the response we make to journalistic or serially-published satire, when we read it out of its original periodical context, anthologised in a selection of “greatest hits”:

Such journalism tickles the palate when it is first published in a newspaper, but it is apt to taste rancid or stodgy when served up again as part of a complete meal. One can think of columnists and sketch-writers today of whom this remains true, though it does not detract from the force, often salutary, of the original impact. ... His constant use of what he called the “emphatic, homely English phrase of humbug” to damn as hypocritical any institution, custom or group of people which he did not personally relish sometimes tastes to the reader like an over-salted ragout, savoury but rather corrosive. [...] After all the carping, what wonderful journalistic work Dickens produced in the ... years covered by this volume; what marvels of close argument and true concern for misery, what lively descriptions, mimicry, telling absurdities of anecdote and illustration, inexhaustible invention of fantastic turns of speech, and sheer good fun. (Hayter, p. 18 col. d)

¹⁷ See Christopher Fox, “Introduction: Biographical and Historical Contexts,” in *Gulliver’s Travels* “Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism” ed. C. Fox. Boston and New York: Bedford/St Martin’s Press, 1995; p. 20.

This is a very rich response, though perhaps susceptible to some re-pointing. I don't necessarily agree with the idea that the *rechauffée* of the anthology is the complete meal intended by the satirist, as originally appreciated by his diners. As the orchestrator of the “merriest caterers of the age”, in what was a time-sensitive blend of literary and performance art, the fundamental role of Dickens as editor or conductor of miscellanies was to offer a medley, *satura*, of different effects and flavours—and to extract and assemble all the lemons from the fruit bowl in succession, is inevitably to experience an intensity of bitterness never part of the original mix. In describing how this might sometimes “taste to the reader like an over-salted ragout” Hayter also offers what I take to be a distant echo of Thackeray's dislike of the Juvenalian satire of Swift's *Modest Proposal*, in which the apparently benign speaker behind this apparently philanthropical tract suddenly announces the gist of his proposal for solving the problem of Ireland's impoverished children that he has set out with mathematical clarity and compassionate observation in the preceding paragraphs:

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricasie, or a ragoust.¹⁸

This is one of the finest comic sentences in the language, partly because after delivering its killer blow it meanders on, in innocent but ever more macabre detail, long after it should have had the discretion to stop, giving an enduring example of the satirical value of what George Orwell calls the trademark “unnecessary detail” in the Dickensian sentence (79). Orwell's example, from the story told at Bob Sawyer's dinner party also involved food—“baked shoulder of mutton and potatoes under it”—where the seeming irrelevance of a snippet of material beckons to a suppressed world of individual idiosyncrasy, in Swift's case, to one where a morally-unhinged philanthropist is secretly spicing up his cannibalistic experiments

¹⁸ *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of the Poor People of Ireland from being a Burthen to their Parents and the Country* [Jonathan Swift, 1729], ed. online by Jack Lynch, <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/modest.html> [accessed 7 February 2017].

with the latest imports from French cuisine.¹⁹ For me, therefore, the hint of Swiftian “ragoust” in Dickens’s satire is one of its great strengths, and if it is “over-salted” then that is the consumer’s doing, rather than the chef’s. The final phase of Hayter’s comment quoted above succeeds much better in synthesising and redistributing the corrosive, alienated elements of Juvenalian satire amongst the more affectionate Horatian elements of fun, compassion, mimicry and so forth.

One might even say, therefore, that to the extent that she recognises miscellaneity, mood changes, hybridity of genre and voice, “doing the police in different voices” Hayter is touching on the third and least clearly defined pattern of classical satire, known as Menippean, after the lost works of the Greek parodist Menippus (3rd C BC) whose blending of allegory, picaresque narrative and satirical commentary is held to have influenced Varro in Rome at the time of Augustus, and whose influence is perhaps most clearly identified in Petronius’s *Satyricon*, and in particular in the varied forms of the famous Trimalchio’s Banquet episode. In the late twentieth-century, as the work of Mikail Bakhtin from an earlier formalist/structuralist phase of enquiry in Russia, began to be translated and read by Anglophone critics, the importance of Menippean satire has become clear as an explanatory principle for the hold over the popular imagination exerted by the numerous loose baggy monsters of the European comic novel—including those by Dickens—which according to the tenets of Jamesian psychological realism, ought not to be enjoyed as art at all, at least not by responsible adults during daylight hours.²⁰ For those with a background in periodical studies, however, it also has significance alongside the other modes of classical satire, as a larger structural device that spreads over the contents of a magazine, as it is assembled by its editor,

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁰ Touched on in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (1987) and *Rabelais and his World* (1984), Menippean satire is anatomised by Bakhtin in a checklist of 14 characteristic features, referred to as the “Menippea” in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1984).

or over a novel that is itself like a magazine, and in Dickens's work, within the weave of the text itself: a kind of miscellaneity at the microcosmic level.

Across dozens of papers in *Household Words*,²¹ Dickens improvises in full Menippean mode, structuring essays around miscellaneous bundles and collections of ideas and *aperçus*, where the emphasis is on proliferation and plurality, and throughout all of these there is a kind of picaresque segueing from one idea to another. What is true on the mental plane also translates into physical displacement recorded as travel narrative, where the individual elements of the Menippean satire are presented as a series of stopping off points or mental associations made during the course of a *flâneur*'s walk or stroll: a key feature of the satirical poise or pose of "The Uncommercial Traveller."

The paradigmatic article in this respect—though it is far from Dickens's funniest or most moving—would therefore be the *Household Words* leader for 1 March 1856, simply entitled "Why?" Its relentless interrogative probing seems to canvas the totality of contemporary life for the British citizen, voter and ratepayer, whose strange sense of disenfranchisement in a society he is vaguely conscious of funding with his taxes, is traced with each transition:

I AM going to ask a few questions which frequently present themselves to my mind. I am not going to ask them with any expectation of getting an answer, but in the comforting hope that I shall find some thousands of sympathising readers, whose minds are constantly asking similar questions.

Why does a young woman of prepossessing appearance, glossy hair, and neat attire, taken from any station of life and put behind the counter of a Refreshment Room on an English Railroad, conceive the idea that her mission in life is to treat me

²¹ See, for example, "The Last Words of the Old Year," *HW* Vol. II, No. 41, 4 January 1851, 337–339; "A Few Conventionalities," *HW* Vol. III, No. 66, 28 June 1851, 313–315; "Whole Hogs," *HW*, Vol. III, No. 74, 23 August 1851, 505–507; "Lying Awake," *HW*, Vol. VI, No. 136, 30 October 1852, 145–148; "Proposals for Amusing Posterity," *HW* Vol. VI, No. 151, 12 February 1853, 505–507; "Frauds on the Fairies," *HW* Vol. VIII, No. 184, 1 October 1853, 97–100; "Things That Cannot Be Done," *HW* Vol. VIII, No. 185, 8 October 1853, 121–123; "Legal and Equitable Jokes," *HW* Vol. X, No. 235, 23 September 1854, 121–124; "That Other Public," *HW* Vol. XI, No. 254, 3 February 1855, 1–4; "Insularities," *HW* Vol. XIII No. 304, 19 January 1856, 1–4; "Proposals for a National Jest-Book," *HW* Vol. XIII, No. 319, 3 May 1856, 361–364. All available from www.djo.org.uk.

with scorn ? Why does she disdain my plaintive and respectful solicitations for portions of pork-pie or cups of tea? Why does she feed me like a hyæna? [...]

When a Reviewer or other Writer has crammed himself to choking with some particularly abstruse piece of information, why does he introduce it with the casual remark, that "every schoolboy knows" it? He didn't know it himself last week; why is it indispensable that he should let off this introductory cracker among his readers? We have a vast number of extraordinary fictions in common use, but this fiction of the schoolboy is the most unaccountable to me of all. [...]

When I overhear my friend Blackdash inquire of my friend Asterisk whether he knows Sir Giles Scroggins, why does Asterisk reply, provisionally and with limitation, that he has met him? Asterisk knows as well as I do, that he has no acquaintance with Sir Giles Scroggins; why does he hesitate to say so, point blank? A man may not even know Sir Giles Scroggins by sight, yet be a man for a' that. A man may distinguish himself, without the privity and aid of Sir Giles Scroggins. It is even supposed by some that a man may get to Heaven without being introduced by Sir Giles Scroggins. Then why not come out with the bold declaration, "I really do not know Sir Giles Scroggins, and I have never found that eminent person in the least necessary to my existence?" [...]

When I go to the Play, why must I find everything conventionally done—reference to nature discharged, and reference to stage-usage, the polar star of the dramatic art? Why does the baron, or the general or the venerable steward, or the amiable old farmer, talk about his chee-ilde? He knows of no such thing as a chee-ilde anywhere else; what business has he with a chee-ilde on the boards alone? I never knew an old gentleman to hug himself with his left arm, fall into a comic fit of delirium tremens, and say to his son, "Damme, you dog, will you marry her?" Yet, the moment I see an old gentleman on the stage with a small cape to his coat, I know of course that this will infallibly happen. Now, why should I be under the obligation to be always entertained by this spectacle, however refreshing, and why should I never be surprised?

Why have six hundred men been trying through several generations to fold their arms? The last twenty Parliaments have directed their entire attention to this graceful art. I have heard it frequently declared by individual senators that a certain ex-senator, still producible, "folded his arms better than any man in the house." I have seen aspirants inflamed with a lofty ambition, studying through whole sessions the folded arms on the Treasury Bench, and trying to fold their arms according to the patterns there presented. I have known neophytes far more distracted about the folding of their arms than about the enunciation of their political views, or the turning of their periods. The injury inflicted on the nation by Mr. Canning, when he folded his arms and got his portrait taken, is not to be calculated. Every member of Parliament from that hour to the present has been trying to fold his arms. It is a graceful, a refined, a decorative art; but, I doubt if its results will bear comparison with the infinite pains and charges bestowed upon its cultivation. [...]

Why? I might as well ask, Why I leave off here, when I have a long perspective of Why stretching out before me.

Of course the long perspective Dickens gestures towards here is anything but a monotonous plain—rather it is the infinitely varied terrain of the periodical's columns, which counter repetition with variation as an organising principles; and even in the space of a single article

like this one, the transitions and juxtapositions of critical commentary are a source of comic relief. The principle of miscellaneity and Menippean variety are therefore, I think, as related in Dickens's serially-published works as are the dichotomy or dualism of Horatian versus Juvenalian satire, organised from the 1830s onwards around such topical oppositions as Whig and Tory; Old World/New World; the Ins and Outs of Government and Opposition, the Establishment versus the Marginalised; the inner circle of the city fathers versus the bitter cry of outcast London.

*

This paper concludes with a kind of Freudian or psycho-biographical coda to the exploration of satirical standpoint which so far has been offered in somewhat dry neoclassical terms, by means of some suggestions as to why the insider/outsider split is such a crucial boundary in Dickensian satire, and informs his work at a profound level. We know from the autobiographical fragment published in the first volume of Foster's *Life* that by the late 1840s, Dickens was already, as he puts it in his penultimate "Uncommercial" essay, "accustomed to view myself as curiously if I were another man"²²—or, the child being father of the man, as if he were another boy. He looked back in the paragraphs cautiously entrusted to Forster on what he might have become, his alter ego, his shadow, thus:—

I know that I worked, from morning to night, with common men and boys, a shabby child. [...] I know that I have lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond. (Forster, Bk. 1, ch. 2)

The fear recalled is of becoming an outsider on the margins of society, an alien, though all close readers of Dickens know that the outsider's perspective, the vagabond's eye, is a source of great energy and conviviality in his work. Compare the opening of this passage from "The

²² "New Uncommercial Samples: A Fly-Leaf in a Life." *All the Year Round*, "New Series" I (22 May 1869) 589–591; p. 589.

Prisoner's Van," a sketch printed in *Bell's Life in London* in November 1835 but cancelled when these were collected up as *Sketches by Boz*: "We have a most extraordinary partiality for lounging about the streets. Whenever we have an hour or two to spare, there is nothing we enjoy more than a little amateur vagrancy" (see Slater, *Journalism* I, xvi–xvii). Or this, from the "Uncommercial" essay later republished as "Shy Neighbourhoods":

My walking is of two kinds: one, straight on end to a definite goal at a round pace; one, objectless, loitering, and purely vagabond. In the latter state, no gipsy on earth is a greater vagabond than myself; it is so natural to me, and strong with me, that I think I must be the descendant, at no great distance, of some irreclaimable tramp.²³

These are evidently the same observations of the self, viewed from a different angle, viewed indeed from the opposite side of a key social boundary, a division between what is respectable and what is not; between what is inside and Establishment, and what is excluded and marginalised. This is sometimes referred to as a glass ceiling, but it can also be a plate—an oval glass plate in a coffee-house door:

In the door there was an oval glass plate, with COFFEE-ROOM painted on it, addressed towards the street. If I ever find myself in a very different kind of coffee-room now, but where there is such an inscription on glass, and read it backward on the wrong side MOOR-EEFFOC (as I often used to do then, in a dismal reverie,) a shock goes through my blood. (Forster, *ibid.*)

This extraordinary recollection and confession, of a kind of repressed identity reversal, has been seized upon by G.K. Chesterton as the most necessary of "unnecessary details" required for understanding Dickens, but I also think the way it plays around the insider/outsider; home versus street boundary and allows us to invoke the distinction between accommodating Horatian and alienated Juvenalian satire that has helped organise our response to Dickensian satire. Chesterton writes:

That wild word, "Moor Eeffoc," is the motto of all effective realism; it is the masterpiece of the good realistic principle – the principle that the most fantastic thing

²³ [Charles Dickens]. "The Uncommercial Traveller." *All the Year Round* III (26 May 1860), 155–59; p. 156.

of all is often the precise fact. And that elvish kind of realism Dickens adopted everywhere.²⁴

Perhaps the reference to elves proved irresistible, but certainly in his 1939 essay “On Fairy Stories,” J.R.R. Tolkien took up Chesterton’s point, and the challenge of Moor-Eeffoc as a writer’s touchstone, arguing, however, for the limitations of its ability to help readers escape from the everyday:

Mooreeffoc is a fantastic word, but it could be seen written up in every town in this land. It is Coffee-room, viewed from the inside through a glass door, as it was seen by Dickens on a dark London day; and it was used by Chesterton to denote the queerness of things that have become trite, when they are seen suddenly from a new angle. That kind of “fantasy” most people would allow to be wholesome enough; and it can never lack for material. But it has, I think, only a limited power; for the reason that recovery of freshness of vision is its only virtue. The word *Mooreeffoc* may cause you suddenly to realize that England is an utterly alien land, lost either in some remote past age glimpsed by history, or in some strange dim future to be reached only by a time-machine; to see the amazing oddity and interest of its inhabitants and their customs and feeding-habits; but it cannot do more than that. (52)

Such was Tolkien’s opinion. It is the final contention of this article that for Dickens the satirist—no less than for Swift before, and Kipling after him—such a power, with its inherent ambivalence, its clarity and sharpness of vision, was more than enough for his writer’s task.

²⁴ From *Charles Dickens* (1906), repr. in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton* Vol. 15 *Chesterton on Dickens*, ed. by Alzina Stone Dale (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 65.

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