

Resurrecting the Author:
Authorial Memories in the Work
of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the work of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins in order to explicate the ways in which both writers fashion their authorial selves according to a species of memory and mourning, death and resurrection. The Introduction situates the discussion in the context of major theoretical and critical works, paying particular attention to the arguments of Roland Barthes, but it is the pioneering deconstructive philosophy of Jacques Derrida which informs the greater part of the thesis.

Although the manner in which Dickens and Collins resurrect their authorial selves differs, as I show in this thesis, both writers – who were friends, collaborators, and rivals – construct their authorial identities upon a similar pattern. Chapter 1 discusses the public readings Dickens performed from 1853 onwards, in which, it is contended, he, as well as his audiences, mourned his earlier authorial self. Chapter 2 discusses the intertextual relationship between Dickens's novels *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend*, which assumes the form of a postal correspondence between his earlier and later authorial selves. Chapter 3 explores the ways in which Collins figures his proper name and authorial signature as always already surviving his death; not least in terms of the four sensation novels which established his reputation. Yet, by the same token, this act of authorial resurrection is itself a death sentence, effacing the very name and signature he desires to live on. Chapter 4 outlines the need for a greater critical hospitality towards what I term the work of the "Other Collins"; that is, the fiction Collins produced in the 1870s and 1880s, which has traditionally been pushed to the margins of his canon. The future of Collins studies, it is suggested, depends upon resurrecting this much-maligned figure.

Through their respective works, the names and authorial signatures of Dickens and Collins have survived for over a hundred years. Yet, this thesis shows, such an act of literary survival began during their lifetime, as both writers, in a form of pre-posthumous authorial resurrection, strived to construct their authorial identities upon the notions of memory and mourning; at once announcing the death of the author, and his living on.

INTRODUCTION

[T]hat death or omission of the author
of which, as is certainly the case, too
much of a case has been made.¹

The author was dead, to begin with. At least, this is the opinion of Roland Barthes, as expressed in his seminal 1968 essay “The Death of the Author”, which continues to be one of the most eloquent and influential, as well as one of the most controversial, treatises on authorship. “The Death of the Author” rings the death-knell for auteurist literary studies, a critical school of thought in which the author is regarded as the origin and source of a text, a unifying figure in which the overall meaning of a work is supposed to reside. “The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions,” Barthes contends: “The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* ‘confiding’ in us.”²

In Barthes’s opinion, the widely-held belief that the author was an originating and unifying force of a work had the effect of reducing texts to “a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God)”: “To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.” (*DOA*, 146-47) In place of this monolithic construction of the author and, consequently, such a reductive conception of a text, Barthes proposes that “the death of the Author” would liberate the hermeneutics of a

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Signéponge/Signsponge*, trans. Richard Rand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 22; henceforth *Signsponge*.

² Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, trans. Stephen Heath, in Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 143, original emphasis; henceforth *DOA*.

text, enabling it to become “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (*DOA*, 146-48).

Barthes’s argument had been anticipated, to a certain extent, by the New Critics in the 1940s, who likewise viewed the notion of authorial intention with suspicion. In “The Death of the Author”, however, Barthes offers a more sustained and radical critique of the institution of authorship. Indeed, Barthes claims, “the new criticism has often done no more than consolidate” what he describes as “the sway of the Author” (*DOA*, 143). Barthes’s departure from the approach adopted by the New Critics is most evident in his rigorous application of linguistic theory. Within a text, Barthes asserts, “it is language which speaks, not the author”: “writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin” (*DOA*, 142-43). Therefore, Barthes claims, “the author enters into his own death” at the instant in which “writing begins” (*DOA*, 142).³

The originality and importance of “The Death of the Author” does not reside solely in Barthes’s declaration of the author’s death, however. Barthes would no doubt agree with Michel Foucault that “criticism and philosophy took note of the disappearance – or death – of the author some time ago”.⁴ Indeed, Barthes admits as much in “The Death of the Author” and, in this respect, the essay’s sensational, sloganeering title is misleading in that it is not simply the “death” of the author with which it is concerned.⁵ Barthes’s essay deftly moves beyond such a simplistic and trite declaration as “the author is dead” and, contrary to popular

³ The differences between Barthes’s work and that of the New Critics should not be overestimated, however. For example, in the “Intentional Fallacy”, the defining text of the New Criticism movement, W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley state: “The poem is not the critic’s own and not the author’s (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge. What is said about the poem is subject to the same scrutiny as any statement in linguistics or in the general science of psychology”; see W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy”, in W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 3-18 (5).

⁴ Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?”, trans Josué V. Harari, in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 101-20 (103).

⁵ “In France, Mallarmé was doubtless the first to see and to foresee in its full extent the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner [...] Mallarmé’s entire poetics consists in suppressing the author in the interests of writing (which is, as will be seen, to restore the place of the reader).” (*DOA*, 143)

opinion, he has no interest in any attempt to kill off or to eradicate the figure of the author absolutely. Rather, for Barthes, the author is a figure whose very identity is structured upon a play of not only death, but also resurrection. As Séan Burke notes, Barthes was conscious that “the concept of the author is never more alive than when pronounced dead”.⁶ Instead of merely proclaiming “the death of the author”, Burke writes, in Barthes’s theory “[t]he author can be at once dead and alive”: “A little like Dionysus, or Christ, the author must be dead before he can return. In a sense too, he must continue to be dead though he has returned.” (Burke, 33, 30)

With no small irony, Barthes, aware that his own authorial intention had been misconstrued, returned to the issues raised in “The Death of the Author” in his subsequent works, such as “From Work to Text” and *The Pleasure of the Text*, in order to clarify and elucidate his position concerning the “death” of the author. In these two texts – or, rather, meta-texts – Barthes maintains his belief in the author’s “death” or absence; but it is an absence figured as a ghostly presence, a “death” which contains its own resurrection. For example, in *The Pleasure of the Text*, published in 1973, Barthes writes:

As institution, the author is dead: his civic status, his biographical person have disappeared; dispossessed, they no longer exercise over his work the formidable paternity whose account literary history, teaching, and public opinion had the responsibility of establishing and renewing; but in the text, in a way, *I desire* the author: I need his figure [...] as he needs mine.⁷

This extract is notable for the ways in which Barthes reiterates, yet modifies, his claim concerning the author’s “death”. The author remains dead, for Barthes; yet the author’s return is also longed for and, perhaps, enacted. Commenting upon this passage, Burke writes: “the author will reappear as a desire of the reader’s, a spectre spirited back into existence by the critic himself” (Burke, 30). In place of Burke’s term “spectre”, it is more pertinent to employ

⁶ Séan Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (1992; Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) 7; henceforth Burke.

⁷ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), 27, original emphasis; henceforth *POT*.

the French word “revenant” – “literally that which comes back” – to describe Barthes’s conception of the author.⁸ Indeed, in order to enable the author’s return, Barthes, in his 1971 essay “From Work to Text”, explicitly draws upon the spirit of the revenant:

It is not that the Author may not “come back” in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a “guest.” If he is a novelist, he is inscribed in the novel like one of his characters, figured in the carpet; no longer privileged, paternal, aletheological, his inscription is ludic. He becomes, as it were, a paper-author: his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work; there is a reversion of the work on to the life (and no longer the contrary); it is the work of [Marcel] Proust, of [Jean] Genet which allows their lives to be read as a text.⁹

Returning to his or her text as a “guest”, but a “guest” who is also a ghostly host, the author in “From Work to Text” is figured as being at once present and absent, dead and alive.

However, the notion of the author which emerges in “From Work to Text” – as well as in *The Pleasure of the Text* – is not so much a reformulation or revision of the central premise of “The Death of the Author” as an inevitable consequence of the line of argument followed in the earlier essay. Like Nietzsche’s *The Joyful Wisdom*, in which “The Madman” declares “God is dead”, in Barthes’s “The Death of the Author”, the “death” of “the Author-God” presupposes not only that the author was once alive, but also, that the author can be resurrected, returned to life.¹⁰

The issues raised in and by Barthes’s work upon authorship provide a theoretical context for the following examination of the authorial identities of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. In particular, this thesis will be interested in analyzing the ways in which, like Barthes’s notion of the author, Dickens and Collins fashion their authorial identities upon a double movement of death and resurrection. Although Dickens’s and Collins’s work will be placed alongside one another in this study, the two writers differ in their relationship to these

⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 177; henceforth *Specters*.

⁹ Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text”, trans. Stephen Heath, in Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 155-164 (161); henceforth *FWT*.

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*, trans. Thomas Common (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1914), 168.

questions concerning the death and resurrection of the author. In terms of Dickens's work, the correlation between authorship, death, and resurrection is evident in terms of the public readings from his fiction that he intermittently performed from December 1853 to March 1870 (the subject of Chapter 1 of this thesis), and in the intertextual relationship between his novels *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend* (Chapter 2). In terms of Collins's work, it is in the survival of his authorial signature, due in no small part to the four sensation novels he produced between 1859 and 1868 (Chapter 3), and the neglect which his later work has suffered from critics and readers alike (Chapter 4), which provides the context for a discussion of the interrelationship between the death and the return of the author. Throughout this study, however, I am keen to stress the points of contact between the two authors in relation to the issues being addressed. For example, the nature of both Dickens's and Collins's authorial death and resurrection, I argue, is predicated upon the workings of memory, nostalgia, and, above all, mourning.

In his essay "Fosco Lives", A. D. Hutter states that throughout the 1850s and 1860s – the period in which the two authors were friends, collaborators, and literary rivals – Dickens's and Collins's fiction "maintains a steady interest in the theme of resurrection".¹¹ Hutter observes, however, that whilst "the theme of resurrection" is ubiquitous in Victorian fiction – particularly sensation fiction, a genre which Dickens and Collins helped to form and shape – in the work of both writers "we are not dealing with a common or overused cliché of nineteenth-century sensation writing" (Hutter, 225). Rather, Hutter claims, in Dickens's and Collins's work:

the function of resurrection in these works most closely resembles a form of humanistic magic, of faith and belief that fully allow for change through recreation [...] Rebirth, resurrection, the movement through a form of death into a new and more vibrant existence is far older and more meaningful than a motif of Victorian sensation writing. (Hutter, 226)

¹¹ A. D. Hutter, "Fosco Lives", in Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox, ed., *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 195-238 (225); henceforth Hutter.

Hutter is certainly correct in this assertion. In the work of Collins and Dickens there are numerous examples which demonstrate their “steady interest in the theme of resurrection”, which, as Hutter acknowledges, is so much more than a “theme” for the two writers. For instance, in Collins’s and Dickens’s 1867 collaborative Christmas story “No Thoroughfare”, the villainous Obenreizer is left “[s]peechless, breathless, [and] motionless” when George Vendale – whom Obenreizer had thought he had murdered in the Swiss alps – returns to confront him: “Vendale stood before the murderer”, we are told, “a man risen from the dead”.¹²

Resurrection is also central to Dickens’s 1859 novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, set during the French Revolution. Whilst the novel’s refrain of “recalled to life” – also the title of the first book – refers specifically to Dr. Manette who has been “[b]uried” for eighteen years as a prisoner within the walls of the Bastille, it also has a wider resonance in the story.¹³ For example, although Jerry Cruncher’s day-job is that of a messenger, he also has a clandestine occupation as a grave-robber which he carries out at night. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a grave-robber, who illegally exhumed corpses in order to sell them for medical research, was known by the more familiar term of “Resurrection-Man” – a darkly comic nick-name which is applied to Jerry by his son, “Young Jerry” (*TTC*, 170). It is Jerry’s night-job – as a “Resurrection-Man” – which enables him to find out that the funeral of the spy, Roger Cly, was an elaborate hoax to enable Cly to flee the country and, in the words of Sydney Carton, ““come to life again!”” (*TTC*, 316).

With the character of Sydney Carton, “the theme of resurrection” in *A Tale of Two Cities* is given a tragic intensity. Having lost Lucy Manette to Charles Darnay, his double and love-rival, Carton decides to swap places with Darnay when the latter is sentenced to death at

¹² Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, “No Thoroughfare”, in Charles Dickens, *The Christmas Stories*, ed. Ruth Glancy (London: Everyman, 1996), 782; henceforth, CS.

¹³ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, ed. Richard Maxwell (London: Penguin, 2000), 17; henceforth *TTC*.

the Revolutionary scaffold. Walking the Paris streets, after coming to his resolution to save Darnay's life at the cost of his own, Carton remembers the "solemn words, which had been read at his father's grave": "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.'" (*TTC*, 325) Like the phrase "recalled to life", these "solemn words" from John 11:25 are repeated in the text and parallel Carton's plight with Christ's resurrection, whilst foreshadowing Carton's "resurrection" after his death, living on in Darnay's and Lucy's child "who bore my name", as well as in the story of his sacrifice (*TTC*, 390).

As Hutter notes, one of the most sensational scenes in *The Woman in White*, Collins's pioneering sensation novel, involves the quasi-resurrection of Lady Glyde, otherwise Laura Fairlie. After Walter Hartright's sojourn in South America, he returns to England to discover that his beloved Laura has died. Visiting Laura's grave, Hartright espies two veiled women approaching him. As the two women reach the grave, one of them lifts their veil and it proves to be Marian Halcombe, Laura's half-sister. The other female figure also lifts her veil and reveals herself to be "Laura, Lady Glyde" who, in the words of Hartright, "was looking at me over the grave" – that is, the grave in which she is meant to be buried.¹⁴ That Laura's "resurrection" is eventually explained away by virtue of Count Fosco's and Sir Percival Glyde's substitution of Laura for her double, Anne Catherick – that it is Anne, and not Laura, who is buried in the grave – does not diminish the effect of her "return" to life. Indeed, Hartright's discovery that Laura is in fact alive, when he visits the site of what is believed to be her grave, indicates that she is symbolically, if not literally, "resurrected" within the text.

Dickens's and Collins's "steady interest in the theme of resurrection", I argue in this thesis, extends further than Hutter suggests, however. Both writers, I claim, also construct,

¹⁴ Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. John Sutherland (1996; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 419; henceforth *WW*.

and even deconstruct, their authorial identities through an engagement with the idea of resurrection. In this respect, this thesis departs in significant ways from other studies on Collins's and Dickens's public and private relationship. In order to discuss in more detail the manner in which this thesis differs from other works in the critical field, I will now turn to an appraisal of the studies undertaken so far of the nature of Dickens's and Collins's literary partnership.

II

Whilst Catherine Peters argues that, in terms of Collins's and Dickens's fiction, "[t]he much-debated question of 'influence' of one writer on the other" is "mostly sterile", it is true to say that most studies on the writers' working relationship have tended to focus upon the question of influence: that is, on whether Dickens influenced Collins or vice versa, and whether such influence was positive or negative.¹⁵ Perhaps unsurprisingly, Collins, in this respect, has fared less well than Dickens. In the early part of the twentieth century especially, Collins was regarded as the weaker link in the partnership and, more often than not, ignored in discussions of Dickens's life and work. When he was credited as having influenced Dickens, it was, as Robert Ashley explains in his 1952 essay "Wilkie Collins and the Dickensians", only to denigrate his contribution: "From Dickens's death to the present day [...] militant Dickensians lost no opportunity to bewail the Dickens-Collins relationship and to belittle Collins's achievement as a novelist [...] the result of their animosity was the low critical repute Collins enjoyed for thirty years after his death."¹⁶ This is no exaggeration. In the early part of the twentieth century Collins was the bane of Dickensians such as Percy Fitzgerald and J.W.T. Ley, who lost no opportunity of taking passing pot-shots at Collins as a man and an author. For Ley, in his 1924 essay "Wilkie Collins's Influence Upon Dickens", Dickens's friendship with Collins was "the most unfortunate happening in Dickens's life": "What was

¹⁵ Catherine Peters, *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1991), 312; henceforth Peters.

¹⁶ Robert Ashley, "Wilkie Collins and the Dickensians", *The Dickensian* 49.1 (March 1953): 59-65 (59).

Collins's influence? It drove Dickens along what I shall always hold must ever have proved a no thoroughfare for him. It drove him to mere labouriousness; it tended to suppress all his spontaneity."¹⁷

A more balanced account of Dickens's and Collins's working relationship was provided by T. S. Eliot in his 1927 essay "Wilkie Collins and Dickens". Despite labelling Collins "a Dickens without genius", Eliot is generally complimentary towards his fiction, even describing *The Moonstone* as "the first and greatest of English detective novels".¹⁸ In direct contrast to Ley, Eliot views the question of influence as mutually beneficial: "Each had qualities which the other lacked, and they had certain qualities in common." (Eliot, 466) Moreover, for Eliot, although as novelists Dickens and Collins have different strengths, "the work of the two men ought to be studied side by side" because "their relationship and their influence upon one another is an important subject of study" (Eliot, 461).

Eliot's contention that Dickens's and Collins's "influence upon one another is an important subject of study" was given fresh impetus in 1963 by Earle Davis's chapter on Collins's and Dickens's working relationship in *The Flint and the Flame: The Artistry of Charles Dickens*. However, for Davis, rather than merely a question of "influence", what characterized Dickens's and Collins's working relationship was a sense of rivalry and competition: "one can deduce that the effect [of Collins's influence] on Dickens's own writing might be in the direction of showing that whatever Collins did, he could do better. There is some indication of this in the fact that Dickens's last novel, *Edwin Drood*, was a direct attempt to surpass *The Moonstone*".¹⁹ The chapter that Earle Davis devotes to Collins's

¹⁷ J.W.T. Ley, "Wilkie Collins's Influence Upon Dickens", *The Dickensian* 20.2 (April 1924): 65-69 (66-68). In a later essay, Ley again attacks Collins: "Is there any critic who does not agree that the influence of Wilkie Collins on Dickens was a stultifying influence on the whole? His marvellous creative genius could not be suppressed, but his greatest work was done when his creativeness was unhampered"; see J.W.T. Ley, "Victorianism", *The Dickensian* 28 (Winter Number, 1931/32): 64-66 (66).

¹⁸ T. S. Eliot, "Wilkie Collins and Dickens", in T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1932; London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 460-70 (464-65); henceforth Eliot.

¹⁹ Earle Davis, *The Flint and the Flame: The Artistry of Charles Dickens* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1963), 189.

and Dickens's influence upon one another's work has itself proved influential. Sue Lonoff's essay "Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins" likewise detects "hidden competition" between Dickens and Collins at the time of *The Moonstone's* and *Edwin Drood's* publication.²⁰

The competitive spirit between Dickens and Collins identified by Davis and Lonoff is elaborated in Jerome Meckier's 1987 study *Hidden Rivalries in Victorian Fiction: Dickens, Realism, and Revaluation*. Meckier argues that Collins's highly successful novel *The Woman in White*, serialized from 26 November 1859 to 25 August 1860 in Dickens's *All the Year Round*, "demands to be read twice at the same time: as a tribute to Dickens and also a challenge to his supremacy": "Collins aspired to be Dickens writ large, bigger and better."²¹ However, for Meckier, while the publication of *The Woman in White* "led to a decade of intense rivalry that ended only with Dickens's death", rather than "bitter or envious" of his rival's success, Dickens was instead inspired by Collins's literary challenge and felt "goaded to reassert his supremacy" (Meckier, 93-122). In their account of how Collins's influence benefitted Dickens, as much as the other way around, Lonoff's and Meckier's studies advance Davis's belief in the competitive nature of Dickens's and Collins's working relationship.

More recently, the collaborations which Dickens and Collins produced have come under critical scrutiny. In her 1999 article "Collaborating in Open Boats: Dickens, Collins, Franklin, and Bligh", Anthea Trodd investigates the first published collaboration involving Dickens and Collins – *The Wreck of the Golden Mary* – which appeared in the 1856 *Household Words* Christmas number. Trodd claims that the narrative of *The Wreck of the Golden Mary* is suggestive "of a chain of collaborative friendship, working in self-sacrificing

²⁰ Sue Lonoff, "Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35.1 (1980): 150-70 (169).

²¹ Jerome Meckier, *Hidden Rivalries in Victorian Fiction: Dickens, Realism, and Revaluation* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1987), 95; henceforth Meckier.

unison”.²² However, because the “chain of collaborative friendship” which Trodd notes in *The Wreck of the Golden Mary* was also contained “within a strong hierarchical framework” – with Dickens firmly in command – Collins was relegated to a subordinate position in the collaboration whereby he was apportioned what Trodd terms the ““business part”” of the narrative; that is, to advance the plot when Dickens “had lost interest” in it (Trodd, “Collaborating in Open Boats”, 207-20).

Collins’s secondary position in this literary partnership is also the subject of Lillian Nayder’s 2002 examination of Collins’s and Dickens’s working relationship *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship*. Nayder’s discussion of Collins’s novels, journalism, and plays, as well as his collaborations with Dickens, offers by far the most comprehensive analysis to date of Dickens’s and Collins’s public and private relationship. Nayder traces Collins’s working relationship with Dickens from the time that he was a hired-hand at the offices of *Household Words* up until the time of Dickens’s death in 1870, when Collins was one of the most successful novelists in the world. Nayder’s study differs from Lonoff’s and Meckier’s argument – as well as Trodd’s, to a certain extent – in that, rather than solely examining Dickens’s influence on Collins or Collins’s influence on Dickens, she charts the divergent aims of the two authors.

Instead of simply viewing the working relationship between Collins and Dickens as a question of influence or as a rivalry, Nayder regards their literary partnership as one of discord in which the writers’ differences were barely masked. For Nayder, whilst Collins was subordinate to Dickens in his guises as paid staff member of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* and literary collaborator, Collins acts as a disruptive force, upsetting and destabilizing Dickens’s more conservative approach to literature:

²² Anthea Trodd, “Collaborating in Open Boats: Dickens, Collins, Franklin and Bligh”, *Victorian Studies* 42.2 (Winter 1999-2000): 207-25 (213); henceforth Trodd, “Collaborating in Open Boats”.

As a young man anxious to succeed as a professional writer [...] Collins willingly accepted his subordinate position in their collaborative relationship, at least at the outset [...] But [...] Collins held views that were considerably more radical than those of Dickens, and he did not always keep them in check [...] Hoping to succeed as a middle-class professional yet troubled by his perception of working-class injuries, gender inequities, and imperial wrongdoing, Collins not only complies with but works against Dickens from nearly the start of their collaborations.²³

Nayder's argument is convincing, and in its analysis of the power relations governing Victorian literature it is especially useful. For example, in its discussion of the inequities inherent in Victorian authorship, particularly in terms of Dickens's disinclination to permit any author's name other than his own to adorn his journals *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, Nayder's study reveals the dilemmas Collins faced as an author. As Nayder points out, whilst "Collins clearly benefitted from his association with Dickens and his employment as staff writer and collaborator," there is also a sense in which "he chafed under Dickens's control, and believed that Dickens sometimes got the credit that was due to his subordinates" (Nayder, *Unequal Partners*, 3).

The discussion of Collins's and Dickens's work in this thesis departs in significant ways from the argument proposed by Nayder, as well as, more generally, from previous studies on the Collins-Dickens literary partnership. Unlike the work of many critics, including Nayder, the primary aim of the present study is not to examine the fiction of Collins and Dickens, in a broadly literary historicist manner, in terms of the two writers' ideological differences, literary rivalry, or the manner in which they influenced one another. Instead, building on but expanding upon an area well served in previous scholarship, this study will raise new questions by focussing upon under-explored, even marginalized, areas of their work – such as Dickens's public readings and Collins's theatrical adaptations of his sensation novels – in order to examine the ways in which Collins and Dickens construct their respective authorial identities upon a movement of death and of resurrection. Generally

²³ Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 8; henceforth Nayder, *Unequal Partners*.

speaking, studies of Dickens's public readings and Collins's theatrical adaptations of his sensation novels tend to be historical rather than interpretative. What is offered in the present study is an attempt to read Dickens's public readings and Collins's adaptations of his sensation novels not only as literary-historical events, but also as imaginative acts signifying an attempt on the part of both writers to resurrect their former authorial selves. The purpose of this study is not merely to examine under-explored aspects of canonical writers, however. Rather, this thesis is interested in examining how these marginalized aspects of Dickens's and Collins's work are inseparable from their oeuvre as a whole.

The present study also differs from earlier examinations of Dickens's and Collins's literary relationship by adopting what can broadly be termed a theoretical approach to the subject. Whilst the poststructural logic of Barthes's "The Death of the Author" offers an essential theoretical starting point, it is the pioneering deconstructive work of Jacques Derrida that has proved most fruitful in terms of the present study. Derrida's work on authorship is, in some respects, similar to that of Barthes. As Maurice Biriotti and Nicola Miller explain: "Derrida's approach to the politics of authorship [...] jettisons liberal humanist ideas of the author, but does not do away with the author altogether."²⁴ Also like Barthes, for Derrida, writing and resurrection are inextricably linked. As John Schad points out, "Derrida's recurring description of writing as 'living on', as a spectral, posthumous life, brings him," in texts such as his semi-autobiographical "Circumfession", "so close to resurrection that it is as if he writes, or questions, from within it".²⁵

More specifically, Derrida, in terms of his work on authorship, is interested in unsettling the traditional life/work opposition. In this respect, for Derrida, the author's proper name and signature is vital. For example, in "Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and

²⁴ Maurice Biriotti and Nicola Miller, "Introduction: authorship, authority, authorisation", in Maurice Biriotti and Nicola Miller, ed., *What is an Author?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 1-16 (10).

²⁵ John Schad, *Victorians in Theory: From Derrida to Browning* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 93; henceforth Schad, *Victorians in Theory*.

the Politics of the Proper Name”, Derrida speaks of “a new problematic of the biographical in general” in which a “new analysis of the proper name and the signature” is required in order to re-examine “that borderline between the ‘work’ and the ‘life’” of philosophers in particular, and authors generally.²⁶ Following Derrida’s critical path, the aims of this study are to highlight the ways in which Dickens’s and Collins’s authorial identities are an amalgam of several factors, at once public and private, which are inseparable and are unable to be prised apart into stable categories such as “life” and “work”. In addition to his work on authorship, Derrida’s analyses of the post, revenants, names and signatures, and memory and mourning all inform this study. Instead of providing detailed explanations here of the various theories of Derrida’s which have a bearing on this thesis, I will refer the reader to the chapters themselves.

III

Since J. Hillis Miller employed a broadly deconstructionist reading of *Bleak House* in his introduction to the 1971 Penguin edition of the novel, Derrida’s theories have been slowly incorporated into critical evaluations of Dickens’s fiction, and of Victorian fiction more generally.²⁷ Of these studies that draw on Derrida’s theories in relation to Dickens’s fiction, John Bowen’s *Other Dickens: From Pickwick to Chuzzlewit*, which discusses Dickens’s early novels, is the most directly relevant to the argument offered in the present study. The fifth chapter of Bowen’s study discusses *The Old Curiosity Shop* in terms of how the novel parallels and prefigures the psychoanalytic work of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok and Derrida’s theory of mourning.²⁸ Like Bowen’s study, Chapter 1 of this thesis uses Derrida’s work on mourning as well as Abraham’s and Torok’s theory of “endocryptic” mourning as a

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, “Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name”, trans. Avital Ronell, in Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie McDonald and trans. Peggy Kamuf (1985; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 1-38 (5).

²⁷ See J. Hillis Miller, Introduction, in Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Norman Page (London: Penguin, 1971), 13-30.

²⁸ See John Bowen, *Other Dickens: Pickwick to Chuzzlewit* (2000; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 132-56; henceforth Bowen.

model through which to explore Dickens's public readings.²⁹ Dickens's public readings were hugely successful and an undoubted facet of their popularity was the fact that Dickens mainly selected texts from what is generally considered to be his early period; that is, the series of texts published before novels such as *Bleak House*, serialized in the early 1850s, which are generally seen by critics as being "darker" in content and which provide a more sustained critique of Victorian culture and society. As Paul Schlicke notes, Dickens was aware that "contemporary readers of his later works longed for the exuberant delights they had savoured" in his early texts, and he deliberately tailored his readings to cater for this demand.³⁰ Significantly, Dickens, in the public readings, would not only read extracts from his earlier fiction, but also act out and embody the characters from his texts. In performing the public readings, then, Dickens can be seen as embodying his early fiction. In doing so, I claim, Dickens contains his early fiction and his younger self within his performing body, as if it were a crypt, where they live on in a mourning which is also an act of survival.

Chapter 2 considers the importance of the post in Dickens's work by discussing the intertextual relationship between his second novel *Oliver Twist* and his last completed novel *Our Mutual Friend*. In 1863, shortly before commencing work upon *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens began drafting the reading text of "Sikes and Nancy", from his second novel *Oliver Twist*, for his public readings. The close proximity of these two texts in Dickens's imagination, I argue in this chapter, may account for the ways in which Dickens repeats elements of *Oliver Twist* within the narrative of *Our Mutual Friend*; of which, both novels' searing critique of the Poor Law is only the most obvious. It will rightly be contended that such an intertextual relationship between *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend* is one of many

²⁹ See Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, "The Lost Object – Me': Notes on Endocryptic Identification", in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 139-56 (142); henceforth Abraham and Torok, *LOM*.

³⁰ Paul Schlicke, *Dickens and Popular Entertainment* (1985; London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 229; henceforth Schlicke.

instances in Dickens's work. Indeed, in the 1860s, Dickens was to use another of his earlier texts – *David Copperfield* – as the template for *Great Expectations*. But, what sets apart the intertextual relationship between *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend*, I argue in this chapter, are the ways in which Dickens figures the return to his earlier novel as a form of postal correspondence. More than simply a repetition of *Oliver Twist*, *Our Mutual Friend* operates as a form of literary “reply” to his earlier self. In this respect, Chapter 2 offers a further investigation into the manner in which Dickens returns to his earlier authorial self. As I discuss in the chapter, however, Dickens's return to his earlier novel in *Our Mutual Friend* is not guaranteed; rather, it is a delivery forever delayed and deferred. In *Other Dickens*, Bowen explores Dickens's interest in the post, in terms of his fiction, by paralleling it with Derrida's work on the topic in relation to Derrida's playful examination of the postal principle in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Like Bowen's study, this chapter will use Derrida's work on the post to examine the intertextual relationship between *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend*. But, whilst the present study is indebted to Bowen's work, it also differs considerably from it, and in some ways extends it, by looking at Dickens's oeuvre as a whole, rather than his early fiction exclusively. In doing so, this thesis not only suggests that the theoretical complexity which Bowen locates in the early work is present throughout Dickens's career, but also that the distinction often made by scholars working on Dickens's fiction between his early and late periods needs to be redefined as a process of mourning and resurrection.

Critics working on Collins have tended to use Derrida's theories less frequently. This is not to say, however, that Collins's work has proved less “theoretical” than that of Dickens. As D. A. Miller illustrates in his ground-breaking Foucaultian analysis of *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, Collins's work is as theoretically demanding as that of any writer

in the nineteenth century.³¹ The absence of Derrida's theories in terms of Collinsian scholarship is somewhat surprising. As the few studies looking at Collins's fiction alongside Derrida's theories shows, Derrida's work can do much to elucidate Collins's work and, of course, vice versa. For instance, Carolyn Dever's gendered reading of *The Woman in White* examines Collins's work by using Derrida's theory of "the trace".³² Furthermore, two essays by Sundeep Bisla on *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, respectively, offer exemplary readings of Collins's fiction in terms of Derrida's theories and illustrate how Derrida's notions of "iterability" and "dissemination" are anticipated by Collins.³³

Derrida's work on proper names and signatures forms the basis of Chapter 3 of this thesis, which examines the ways in which Collins figures his proper name and authorial signature as always already surviving his death. Whilst, for Derrida, such an act of survival is inherent in every name and signature, Collins, I claim, whose fiction is intensely interested in the inheritance of names and the ways in which they live on past death as an act of remembrance, offers a special case of study and, in turn, does much to elucidate Derrida's theories. Furthermore, in this chapter, I will examine the ways in which Collins's name and authorial signature live on chiefly through the four sensation novels that he produced between 1859 and 1868; that is, *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Armada*, and *The Moonstone*. But while these novels have ensured the survival and, consequently, the resurrection, of Collins's authorial signature, they are, I contend, texts crucially concerned with the impossibility of fully signing one's name. For Peggy Kamuf, "[a] signature [...] is not an author or even simply the proper name of an author. It is the mark of an articulation at the border between

³¹ See D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); henceforth *The Novel and the Police*.

³² See Carolyn Dever, *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 114-18.

³³ See Sundeep Bisla, "Copy-Book Morals: *The Woman in White* and Publishing History", *Dickens Studies Annual* 28 (1999): 103-49; henceforth Bisla, "Copy-Book". See also Sundeep Bisla, "The Return of the Author: Privacy, Publication, the Mystery Novel, and *The Moonstone*", *boundary 2* 29.1 (2002): 177-222; henceforth Bisla, "Return".

life and letters, body and language.”³⁴ It is precisely this “articulation at the border between life and letters”, where Kamuf locates the space of the signature, which I will be interested in discussing in this chapter. Situated in between literature and biography, Collins’s signature escapes any stable categorization and reveals the fictiveness of his authorial self as he seeks to fashion it.

In Chapter 4, several of Derrida’s ideas – ranging from his work on hospitality, his ideas on the relationship between drugs and literature, and his notion that writing and Otherness are inextricably linked – are used to investigate Collins’s authorial career in the 1870s, in particular the theatrical adaptations of his sensation novels and the reasons for his supposed literary decline during this era. Unlike Collins’s four sensation novels, Collins’s plays – of which his theatrical adaptations of his sensation novels form a significant part – and his later work (his post-*Moonstone* novels and short stories) have been pushed to the margins of his canon. Indeed, these texts, commonly regarded as not fully belonging to Collins’s corpus, as not fully bearing his authorial signature, appear to bear the signature of another Collins – or the Other Collins – separate from the acclaimed sensation novelist. However, as I argue in this chapter, while these texts have been situated outside Collins’s oeuvre, ignored and neglected by critics and readers alike, they are inseparable from Collins’s allegedly “central” work and exist at once inside and outside his canon. The liminal position of Collins’s later work is evident in his stage versions of his sensation novels, which, critically speaking, combine the centrality granted to his sensation novels with the marginality afforded his plays. In order to do justice to Collins’s work, I propose in this chapter, underexplored areas such as his plays and his later fiction need to be examined in relation to his “central” work. Then, and only then, will Collins’s work be resurrected in any meaningful sense.

³⁴ Peggy Kamuf, *Signature Pieces: On the Institution of Authorship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 39.

Chapter 1, which explores Dickens's public readings, begins at the end, with Dickens's death in 1870. Like contemporary authors such as William Makepeace Thackeray, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Collins, Dickens died in the midst of writing what would become his last novel, which in his case was *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Unlike most "mystery" novels the key to unlocking the enigmatic narrative of *Edwin Drood* will never be discovered because of Dickens's death. Whilst it is possible to draw inferences from the published sections of the novel, about the possible routes the story may have taken, we, as readers, will never know for sure how Dickens intended *Edwin Drood* to end. The story of *Edwin Drood* has clear parallels with its predecessor *Our Mutual Friend*, however. For example, like the character of John Harmon in *Our Mutual Friend*, the plot of *Edwin Drood* revolves around the disappearance and probable death of its eponymous male character.

Unlike Harmon's return to life in the novel, however, because of Dickens's premature death we will never know if Edwin was to have been murdered or spared, whether he was to be mourned for his loss or celebrated for returning from the clutches of death. In this respect, *Edwin Drood* – the character and the novel – provides a parallel to Dickens's reading tours which, I argue in Chapter 1, are at once an act of mourning for and celebration of the early Dickens. That is, like the readings, *Edwin Drood*, in its unfinished state, can offer either a lost young man who "has long been given up, and mourned for, as the dead"; or, invite us to gaze in awe as we witness "the ghost of some departed boy [who seems] to rise" before us, signalling a resurrection, which is also the promise of a future, open and still to come.³⁵

³⁵ Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, ed. Margaret Cardwell (1982; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 169, 184; henceforth *ED*.

CHAPTER 1

The Late Dickens: Mourning the Memory of the Early Dickens

I am, for the time being, nearly dead with
work – and grief for the loss of my child.¹

At ten minutes past six o'clock on the evening of 8 June 1870 Dickens collapsed whilst at home. Despite efforts to revive him, he did not regain consciousness and died twenty-four hours later. On the morning of June 8, Dickens wrote the following glorious passage for *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the novel which he was working on at the time, and which remained incomplete at his death:

A brilliant morning shines on the old city. Its antiquities and ruins are surpassingly beautiful, with the lusty ivy gleaming in the sun, and the rich trees waving in the balmy air. Changes of glorious light from moving boughs, songs of birds, scents from gardens, woods, and fields – or, rather, from the one great garden of the whole cultivated island in its yielding time – penetrate into the Cathedral, subdue its earthy odour, and preach the Resurrection and the Life. The cold stone tombs of centuries ago grow warm; and flecks of brightness dart into the sternest marble corners of the building, fluttering there like wings. (ED, 216)

John Forster, in *The Life of Charles Dickens*, was the first to point out the poignancy of this passage; that, near death, Dickens should invoke John 11:25, “the Resurrection and the Life”. Forster writes: “the reader will observe with a painful interest [...] the direction his thoughts had taken”.² Forster’s belief that Dickens may have been contemplating his own mortality at the time of writing *Edwin Drood* is not without foundation. On 12 May 1869, shortly before commencing preliminary work on the novel, Dickens drew up his will and, as he did with his

¹ Madeline House and Graham Storey, *et al*, ed., *The Pilgrim Edition of The Letters of Charles Dickens*, 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-2002), vol. 2: 184; henceforth *Pilgrim*, followed by volume and page number.

² John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 2 vols. (1927; London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1948-1950), vol. 2: 415, henceforth Forster, followed by volume and page number. Dickens also refers to “the Resurrection and the Life” in *A Tale of Two Cities* (TTC, 325-27; 389) and *David Copperfield*; see Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. Nina Burgis (1983; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 125; henceforth *DC*. On the theme of resurrection in Dickens’s work, see John Schad, *The Reader in the Dickensian Mirrors: Some New Language* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 172-76.

previous novel *Our Mutual Friend*, insisted upon inserting a clause in his contract compensating his publishers, Chapman and Hall, in the event of his death during the novel's serialisation. When Dickens began work on *Edwin Drood*, Forster observes: "The end was near." (Forster, 2: 361) And Dickens knew it.

Dickens's death came five years to the day he had survived a serious train crash at Staplehurst. Referring to the Staplehurst accident in the "Postscript, In Lieu Of Preface", which supplemented his 1865 novel *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens states: "I remember with devout thankfulness that I can never be much nearer parting company with my readers for ever, than I was then".³ Whilst Dickens's health had been in decline for some time, after the Staplehurst accident it became progressively worse. Indeed, although Dickens was not hurt physically, the incident at Staplehurst left him, according to George Dolby, unable to travel by train "without experiencing a nervous dread".⁴ This would not have posed a significant problem had Dickens not been spending much of the 1860s travelling throughout Britain and later America as part of his public reading tours. Dickens commenced his readings in 1853 and undertook several tours over the next sixteen or so years. In the main, Dickens ensured that the reading tours did not coincide with any writing commitments that he had. This is not to say, however, that the readings did not play a significant role in Dickens's authorial career. Dickens was insistent that his career as a public reader was inseparable from his career as a novelist, that the one was the extension of the other; as Philip Collins notes, the readings "had intimate and illuminating connections with his literary art".⁵ At his first reading for profit on 29 April 1858, Dickens had declared that public reading "necessitates no departure whatever

³ Charles Dickens, "Postscript, in Lieu of Preface", in Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Adrian Poole (London: Penguin, 1997), 800; henceforth Dickens, *Postscript*.

⁴ George Dolby, *Charles Dickens As I Knew Him: The Story of the Reading Tours in Great Britain and America (1866-70)* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1885), 11; henceforth Dolby.

⁵ Philip Collins, Introduction, in Charles Kent, *Charles Dickens as a Reader* (1872; Farnborough: Gregg International, 1971), V-XIII (VI); henceforth Kent.

from the chosen pursuits of my life”: “I proceed to read this little book, quite as composedly as I might proceed to write it, or to publish it in any other way.”⁶

When Dickens began the readings from his texts in 1853 he was indisputably the premier author in Great Britain, and arguably the most popular author in the world. To lay aside his fiction writing to travel the country giving readings of his own texts was an extraordinary decision on his part. Although luminaries such as Thackeray, Thomas Carlyle, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge had given public lectures before Dickens began his reading tours, his decision to read his own texts onstage was a unique occurrence in that it was as much a performance as a reading. As Dickens explains to Robert Lytton, on 17 April 1867, near the end of his career as a public reader, the notion of an author reading his or her works on stage in the early-1850s was “then quite strange in the public ear” (*Pilgrim*, 11: 353-54). Dickens had been in the habit of giving private readings of his annual Christmas books, such as his 1844 story *The Chimes*, to select groups of friends, but it was his public reading of the first instalment of *Dombey and Son*, on 12 September 1846, whilst staying in the mountainous Swiss region of Lausanne, that first gave him the idea of giving paid readings of his work. Shortly after delivering the reading from *Dombey and Son*, Dickens writes to Forster: “I was thinking the other day that in these days of lecturing and readings, a great deal of money might possibly be made (if it were not infra dig) by one’s having Readings of one’s own books. It would be an *odd* thing. I think it would take immensely. What do you say?” (*Pilgrim*, 4: 631, original emphasis)

Forster was against the idea and, on his friend’s advice, Dickens decided not to go ahead with paid readings of his fiction. The idea did not go away, however, and, in 1853, when invited to perform readings from his work at Birmingham Town Hall, in aid of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, he gladly accepted the offer. Dickens gave three readings

⁶ K. J. Fielding, ed., *The Speeches of Charles Dickens: A Complete Edition* (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), 264; henceforth Fielding.

between 27 and 30 December 1853, and the texts that he chose to perform were drawn from two of his Christmas books produced in the 1840s, *A Christmas Carol* and *The Cricket on the Hearth*. After five years of charity readings, in 1858 Dickens started his first tour of paid readings. Although there were voices of dissension – Forster chief among them – claiming that, in performing the readings for his own benefit, Dickens was undertaking a role unfit for a gentleman, the paid readings met with unprecedented success. An acknowledgement of Dickens’s success can be garnered from Forster himself – by no means an enthusiast when it comes to Dickens’s readings – who claims that it was as a public reader, “as much as by his books, [that] the world knew him in his later life” (Forster, 1: 353).

With success there came a price, however. The strain on Dickens’s health – caused by the combined pressures of constant travelling and the punishing reading schedule which Dickens imposed upon himself – was enormous. Although Dickens was committed to the public readings, both financially and emotionally, he was not blind to the fact that they were endangering his health. In a letter to Forster on 22 April 1869, Dickens writes:

a year after the Staplehurst accident [...] I was certain that my heart had been fluttered, and wanted a little helping. This the stethoscope confirmed; and considering the immense exertion I am undergoing, and the constant jarring of express trains, the case seems to me quite intelligible. (*Pilgrim*, 12: 341)

Dickens’s case also appeared “quite intelligible” to Sir Thomas Watson and Francis Carr Beard, the physicians who examined him. Fearing for Dickens’s health, on 23 April 1869, Watson and Beard urged Dickens to postpone the remainder of his reading tours “for several months to come” (Forster, 2: 363). Dickens complied, but, rejuvenated by his sabbatical from the readings, and keen to continue with his performances, he managed to convince his friends, family, and doctors – in addition to himself – that he was well enough to perform a “Farewell Tour” of twelve readings at the beginning of 1870. He was not. Although Dickens staged all of the “Farewell Tour” of his readings in London, in order to ease the burden of travelling, his health once again deteriorated. Before leaving the stage as a public reader for

the last time, on 15 March 1870, Dickens told the audience: “from these garish lights I vanish now for evermore”.⁷ Three months later the same words would be written on his funeral card.

Various reasons have been put forth which attempt to account for Dickens’s decision to become a public reader. For Ackroyd, Dickens craved affection, and the readings fulfilled this need (Ackroyd, 1042). Schlicke argues that the readings formed part of his life-long commitment to public entertainment.⁸ And, Rosemary Bodenheimer, in *Knowing Dickens*, asserts financial necessities motivated his move into paid public readings.⁹ Dickens’s decision to perform his readings can be attributed to all of these reasons. However, in the following interpretation, I aim to show that the readings are also examples of Derrida’s conflation of the work of art and “the work of mourning” (*Specters*, 97). With the reading tours, I claim, Dickens provides a way in which he and his audience can resurrect and mourn the memory of his earlier authorial self, a personage Graham Greene would refer to in 1951 as “The Young Dickens”; that is, the early Dickens of *The Pickwick Papers*, *A Christmas Carol*, and so on.¹⁰

The chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section will outline the division of Dickens’s authorial identity between his early and late selves. The second section will present a general discussion of the ways in which Dickens doubles the acts of mourning and memory in his life and works. And the third section will explore, more specifically, the acts of mourning and memory in the reading tours and how this, in turn, resurrects his earlier authorial identity. Referring to Dickens, Ackroyd writes: “The art of fiction was for him the art of memory” (Ackroyd, 16). In addition to Ackroyd’s statement, I argue in this chapter, the

⁷ Quoted in Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (1990; London: Vintage, 1999), 1127; henceforth Ackroyd.

⁸ For Schlicke, “Dickens’s public readings were the culmination of his lifetime’s dedication to the cause of popular entertainment”: “By giving readings he was going out to people whose right to carefree, innocent amusement he had proclaimed all his life, and in his own person offering them a vital focus for their imagination.” (Schlicke, 227, 245)

⁹ See Rosemary Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 165; henceforth Bodenheimer.

¹⁰ See Graham Greene, “The Young Dickens”, in A. E. Dyson, ed., *Dickens: Modern Judgements* (London: MacMillan, 1968), 52-58. See also G.K. Chesterton, *Criticisms and Appreciations of the Works of Charles Dickens* (Thirsk, North Yorkshire: House of Stratus, 2001), 120; henceforth Chesterton.

art of Dickens's fiction is also the art of mourning and of resurrection. This is nowhere more evident than in his public readings.

I

One of the most disturbing scenes in all of Dickens's fiction occurs in the Fourth Stave of his 1843 Christmas Book *A Christmas Carol*. After visitations from Jacob Marley's ghost, "the Ghost of Christmas Past", and "the Ghost of Christmas Present", Ebenezer Scrooge meets "the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come".¹¹ This final spectre leads him into a darkened room to view the outline of a corpse, laid out on a bed, whose identity is concealed under the bed-covers. Scrooge feels an uncontrollable urge to lift the bed-covers and disclose the identity of the dead body, but is powerless to do so. Later on in the story, when Scrooge is taken by "the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come" to a graveyard and shown a headstone bearing his name, the miser realises that the corpse lying underneath the bed-covers was his own; that what he had witnessed was the future spectacle of his own dead body:

Scrooge crept towards it [the headstone], trembling as he went; and following the finger read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, EBENEZER SCROOGE.

"Am I that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried, upon his knees.

The finger pointed from the grave to him, and back again.

"No, spirit! Oh, no, no!" (CC, 75, original emphasis)

After witnessing his own corpse, and the site of his "neglected grave", Scrooge awakens upon his own bed – in the present – a man reborn or, rather, resurrected, and, what is resurrected is "his former self" (CC, 32). Scrooge's resurrection signals a return to "his former self" in two separate, but interconnected senses. Firstly, when "the Ghost of Christmas Past" forces Scrooge to revisit the scenes from his youth, "a thousand thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long, forgotten" are resurrected in his memory (CC, 30). Returning to see his

¹¹ Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, in Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Books*, ed. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 63: henceforth CC.

“former self” in the visions conjured up by “the Ghost of Christmas Past”, Scrooge mourns what he has lost in the intervening years by his selfishness and avarice.

Secondly, spurred on by these memories, Scrooge makes a conscious effort to resurrect his “former self”; that is, Scrooge attempts to make amends by returning to the person he was, before he became obsessed with the pursuit of money for its own ends at the cost of everything else in his life. In being taken to visit the site of his own grave by “the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come”, Scrooge not only mourns his own death, in a future that may or may not arrive, but also remembers and mourns the man he used to be. Realising that his “former self” had lain buried within him all along, as if it were contained in a bodily crypt, Scrooge resurrects his earlier self and declares that, for the rest of his life: “I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future.” (CC, 77)

In an influential essay entitled “Dickens: The Two Scrooges”, Edmund Wilson argues that Scrooge’s transformation – from miserly misanthrope to the essence of Christmas spirit – mirrors the duality found not only in Dickens’s fiction, which he saw as being divided between the light-hearted melodrama of Dickens’s early novels and the darker vision of his later novels, but also the split nature of Dickens’s personality. Wilson explains:

We have come to take Scrooge so much for granted that he seems practically a piece of Christmas folk-lore; we no more inquire seriously into the mechanics of his transformation than we do into the transformation of the Beast in the fairy tale into the young prince that marries Beauty. Yet Scrooge represents a principle fundamental to the dynamics of Dickens’ world and derived from his own emotional constitution [...] For emotionally Dickens *was* unstable [...] He was capable of great hardness and cruelty and not merely toward those whom he had cause to resent [...] But [...] we hear of his [Dickens’s] colossal Christmas parties, of the vitality, the imaginative exhilaration, which swept all the guests along. It is Scrooge bursting in on the Cratchits [...] This dualism runs all through Dickens.¹²

Whilst Wilson’s psychobiographical reading of Dickens’s fiction is somewhat outdated, the central premise of his argument, that Scrooge represented two sides of Dickens’s personality,

¹² Edmund Wilson, *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature*, 2nd ed. (1948; London: W. H. Allen, 1952), 55-57, original emphasis; henceforth Wilson.

is still relevant; as is Wilson's belief in the early and late periods of Dickens's work. Rather than simply being a manifestation of Dickens's emotional "instability", however, in the readings, I argue in this chapter, Dickens imaginatively reinterprets Scrooge's duality in *A Christmas Carol* as a metaphor for his own divided authorial identity. Significantly, it was to *A Christmas Carol* that Dickens first turned when he started out as a public reader, and the story remained the most performed of all his texts. What is more, of the two texts Dickens read when giving his "Farewell Tour" in 1870, one was "The Trial from Pickwick", taken from *The Pickwick Papers*; the other was *A Christmas Carol*.

Like Scrooge, who returns to his "former self", Dickens's split authorial identity in the readings is divided between his early and late authorial selves. Also like Scrooge, who views his own dead body and who visits the site of his own "neglected grave", with the public readings, Dickens mourns the death of his younger self. As I will show in this chapter, however, Dickens's reading of *A Christmas Carol* offers only one, of many instances, in which his early and late authorial selves are re-imagined by him in terms of a character who is divided in two, and who is in mourning – mourning as impossible as it is necessary – for himself. More specifically, in the readings, I claim, Dickens contains his former self – "the young Dickens" – within his performing body, as if it were a crypt. Exposing this internal, bodily crypt on stage during the readings, Dickens attempts – with the aid of his audience – to mourn the passing of, as well as to remember and to celebrate, "the young Dickens".

Such an interpretation of Dickens's readings rests upon the manner in which he delivered them. In his 1872 Dickens-endorsed chronicle of the readings, *Charles Dickens as a Reader*, Charles Kent writes: "the Readings were more than simply Readings, they were in the fullest meaning of the words singularly ingenious and highly elaborated histrionic performances" (Kent, 264). As Ackroyd observes, in these "singularly ingenious and highly elaborated histrionic performances", Dickens would act out scenes from his fiction, assuming

the guises of different characters as he did so, as if he were possessed by the creatures of his imagination: “It was a complete performance, but it was more than a performance. It was a kind of spectacle. And it was a kind of haunting. When Bob Cratchit [in *A Christmas Carol*] sniffs and smells the pudding in his little house, Dickens bent over and did the same” (Ackroyd, 1039). The “haunting” quality which Ackroyd detects in Dickens’s public readings, I argue, is attributable to the resurrection of “the young Dickens” during the performances, who returns in a ghostly fashion to be mourned by Dickens and his audience. The audiences who attended the readings played an essential role in helping Dickens mourn the death of his earlier authorial self. Because Dickens was on stage he was unable to witness the spectacle of his performing body. Instead, Dickens left it to his audience to gaze in awe as, with each performance, he exposed the workings of the internal crypt in which was entombed “the young Dickens”. The strange and cryptic self-haunting that characterizes Dickens’s readings is reminiscent of the effect that murdering Tigg Montague has on Jonas Chuzzlewit in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, first serialized between 1 January 1843 and 1 July 1844. Like Jonas, in the readings Dickens becomes “in a manner his own ghost and phantom [...] at once the haunting spirit and the haunted man”.¹³

But, as I also argue, whilst his resurrection of “the young Dickens” during the readings figures his earlier authorial self as a loss to be mourned, it is a mourning which is incomplete, unsuccessful. For Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, when the act of mourning “fails”, in the traditional Freudian account of mourning, the dead object is “incorporated” within the mourner’s ego, as if it were contained within a crypt; but, a crypt in which the body housed therein is simultaneously dead and alive. The manner in which Dickens internalizes the death of his earlier self within his performing body in the readings, I contend, at once mourning and failing to mourn his own death, parallels Abraham’s and Torok’s re-

¹³ Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ed. Margaret Cardwell (1982; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). 619; henceforth *MC*.

evaluation of Freud's work on mourning. The relevance of Abraham and Torok's theory of mourning to Dickens's readings will be discussed in further detail in the third section of this chapter.

In recent Dickens scholarship, Abraham's and Torok's theory of mourning, and Derrida's interpretation of it, has been used to elucidate Dickens's work. As discussed in the introduction, Bowen has analysed "Nell's Crypt" in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Bowen, 132-56). Elsewhere, John Schad has examined "Dickens's cryptic Church" in an essay on Dickens's travelogue, *Pictures of Italy*; while Allan Lloyd Smith has provided a "cryptonymic" reading of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.¹⁴ Whereas previous studies discussing Dickens's anticipation of Abraham's and Torok's work have discussed a single text, however, this chapter extends the work already produced on the Dickensian crypts by focusing upon the public readings and their relation to Dickens's oeuvre as a whole. In particular this chapter is interested in the ways in which, Dickens, in his readings, juxtaposes the early Dickens and the late Dickens and, in doing so, constructs an authorial identity that is at once doubled and divided; a resurrection of itself.

Although tenuous, the distinction between the early and late fiction of Dickens was made during his lifetime and has been maintained ever since. In the Victorian era, Bodenheimer explains, Dickens "was recognised and loved as the comic genius of the early novels, which retained their nostalgic flavor for many Victorian readers" (Bodenheimer, 3). As Bowen observes, however, the view that the early Dickens is superior to the late Dickens did not survive into the twentieth century: "Most critics of Dickens in [the twentieth] century have placed a higher value on his later novels" (Bowen, 3). Broadly speaking, the fiction of the early Dickens is renowned for its exuberant comic force and spontaneity, and spans the

¹⁴ See John Schad, "Dickens's cryptic Church: drawing on *Pictures from Italy*", in John Schad, ed., *Dickens Refigured: Bodies, Desires and Other Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 5-21; henceforth Schad. See also Allan Lloyd Smith, "The Phantoms of *Drood* and *Rebecca*: The Uncanny Reencountered through Abraham and Torok's 'Cryptonymy'", *Poetics Today* 13.2 (Summer 1992): 285-308.

time period from *Sketches by Boz* in the mid-1830s, until the publication of *Martin Chuzzlewit* or *Dombey and Son* in the mid-to-late 1840s. The late Dickens, usually regarded as emerging from *Dombey and Son* onwards, heralds the beginning of his so-called darker period, in which the loosely-plotted comedy that characterized the early novels is jettisoned in favour of scathing social criticism, rich symbolism, and the introduction of tighter and more carefully constructed plots.¹⁵ As Monroe Engel explains in his 1959 study, *The Maturity of Dickens*: “In *Dombey and Son* and the novels that follow, the same themes are present [as in Dickens’s early novels], but in a new state of coherence, in a higher order of relationship to one another.”¹⁶ Engel is following the critical path first trodden by commentators such as Edmund Wilson and Humphry House. With his 1941 study *The Dickens World*, House was one of the first modern critics to notice the profound shift in focus in Dickens’s fiction from the mid-1840s onwards. For House, one of the defining characteristics of Dickens’s later period is that “[e]verybody is more restrained”: “The eccentrics and monsters in the earlier books walk through a crowd without exciting particular attention: in the latter they are likely to be pointed at in the streets, and are forced into bitter seclusion; social conformity has taken on a new meaning.”¹⁷

¹⁵ In his essay “*Edwin Drood*: Early and Late Dickens Reconciled”, A.O.J. Cockshut neatly sums up this division between the early and late periods of Dickens’s career (although it will be noted that, unlike many critics, he regards Dickens’s late period as commencing after *David Copperfield*, and not *Dombey and Son*): “The distinction I make between the early and late Dickens is in no way original and can be briefly summarized. In books like *Pickwick* and *Nicholas Nickleby* we have a spirited macabre and humorous development of the traditions of English melodrama. Grotesque fantasy of plot and character is made tolerable by that marvellous gift which never deserted Dickens throughout his career, his obsessive power of communicating the reality of physical objects. But in *Little Dorrit*, *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend*, we have controlled symbolic comment on society, largely conveyed through the development of simple ideas which haunted him throughout his life – dirt, money, prisons, and the like. On the whole, except in *David Copperfield*, which is a rather unsatisfactory special case, there is little mingling, of the two methods, and certainly no earlier satisfactory synthesis”; see A.O.J. Cockshut, “*Edwin Drood*: Early and Late Dickens Reconciled”, in John Gross and Gabriel Pearson, ed., *Dickens and the Twentieth Century* (1962; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 227-38 (232); henceforth Cockshut.

¹⁶ Monroe Engel, *The Maturity of Dickens* (1959; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), 105.

¹⁷ Humphry House, *The Dickens World*, 2nd ed. (1941; London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 134-35. In addition to the works discussed in the body of this chapter, other notable studies concentrating on Dickens’s later fiction include: Barbara Hardy, *Charles Dickens: The Later Novels* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1968) – which begins with *Bleak House*; F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis, *Dickens the Novelist* 3rd ed. (1970;

As Bodenheimer points out, however, the prevalent critical view from the mid-twentieth century onwards that the best examples of Dickens's fiction are to be found in his later works was not shared in the nineteenth century. Rather, for the majority of critics and readers of literature in the Victorian era, Dickens's reputation rested upon his early novels; that is, the novels up to *Dombey and Son* or *David Copperfield*. This view is emphasized in obituary pieces published in the wake of Dickens's death, such as an 11 June 1870 unsigned obituary notice which appeared in the *Saturday Review*, entitled "The Death of Mr Dickens". When referring to well known characters in Dickens's early novels – *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Martin Chuzzlewit* – the tone of "The Death of Mr Dickens" is laudatory: "They were alive; they were themselves. And then the atmosphere in which they lived was one of such boundless fun, humour, and geniality."¹⁸ Whilst the obituary eulogises the fiction of the early Dickens, however, the novels signed by the late Dickens are seen as inferior: "Age did not certainly improve Mr DICKENS'S powers [...] and some of his later works were his worst [...] It is useless to pretend that the later writings of Mr DICKENS are equal to his earlier writings." (*DCH*, 509-10)

Reviewing *Our Mutual Friend* for *Nation* on December 21 1865, a young Henry James was even more severe in rebuking the late Dickens: "For the last ten years it has seemed to us that Mr. Dickens has been unmistakably forcing himself: 'Bleak House' was forced; 'Little Dorrit' was labored; the present work is dug out as with a spade and pick-axe."¹⁹ "In all Mr. Dickens's works the fantastic has been his great resource", James adds, before setting up an opposition between Dickens's early and late authorial selves:

London: Chatto and Windus, 1973) – which begins with *Dombey and Son*; and John Lucas *Charles Dickens: The Major Novels* (London: Penguin, 1992) – which begins with *Dombey and Son*.

¹⁸ Philip Collins, ed., *Dickens: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), 509; henceforth *DCH*.

¹⁹ Henry James, "Charles Dickens", in Henry James, *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 853-58 (853); henceforth James, "Our Mutual Friend".

[*Our Mutual Friend*] is the letter of his old humor without the spirit [...] In former days there reigned in Mr. Dickens's extravagances a comparative consistency: they were exaggerated statements of types that really existed. We had, perhaps, never known a Newman Noggs, nor a Pecksniff, nor a Micawber; but we had known persons of whom these figures were but the strictly logical consummation. But among the grotesque creatures who occupy the pages before us, there is not one whom we can refer to as an existing type. (James, "Our Mutual Friend", 854)

Nor was it only critics who preferred Dickens's earlier work; his two closest friends, Forster and Collins, also expressed their admiration for the early Dickens, whereas they were less enthusiastic about his later fiction. As K.J. Fielding points out, with the exception of *Great Expectations*, Forster cared little for the novels after *David Copperfield*.²⁰ While, Collins, for his part, compared *Edwin Drood* – which he described as "Dickens's last laboured effort, the melancholy work of a worn-out brain" – unfavourably with *Oliver Twist*, a novel which he considered written "in the radiant prime of [Dickens's] genius" (qtd. Peters, 352).²¹

Such a judgement concerning Dickens's later works did not go uncontested, though. For example, an unsigned review of *Edwin Drood*, published in the *Spectator* on 1 October 1870, questions received opinion by suggesting that there is no distinction between the novels signed by the early and late Dickens. Rather, the reviewer claims, it is the critics who have aged, not Dickens's fiction:

We have seen it asserted by the critics that Mr Dickens had lost, long before he wrote *Edwin Drood*, the power of giving to his grotesque conceptions that youthful *élan* which is essential to their perfection. But may not a great part of the explanation be that the critics, before they read *Edwin Drood*, had lost that youthful *élan* which was essential to enjoying it, – and that they continue to enjoy even Mr. Dickens's younger works more by the force of memory and tradition, than by virtue of any vivid and present appreciation of their humour? (DCH, 548)

The notion that the early Dickens lives on in the fiction of the late Dickens is also put forth by E.S. Dallas's review of *Great Expectations*, which appeared in *The Times* on 17 October

²⁰ See K.J. Fielding, "Forster: Critic of Fiction", *The Dickensian* 70.3 (September 1974): 159-70 (165).

²¹ A further indication of the fondness afforded to Dickens's early novels in the nineteenth century is emphasized in Louisa May Alcott's acclaimed *Little Women*, published in two volumes (October 1868 and April 1869). In this novel, which appeared shortly after Dickens's readings in America, the March sisters form a "Pickwick Club"; see Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (London: Penguin, 1994), 94.

1861. Whilst acknowledging that *Great Expectations* belongs to the late Dickens, Dallas believes that the text in fact bears the signature of the early Dickens:

Mr. Dickens has good-naturedly granted to his hosts of readers the desire of their hearts. They have been complaining that in his later works he has adopted a new style, to the neglect of that old manner which first won our admiration. Give us back the old *Pickwick* style, they cried, with its contempt of art, its loose story, its jumbled characters, and all its jesting that made us laugh so lustily; give us back Sam Weller and Mrs. Gamp and Bob Sawyer, and Mrs. Nickleby, Pecksniff, Bumble, and the rest, and we are willing to sacrifice serious purpose, consistent plot, finished writing, and all else. Without calling upon his readers, Mr. Dickens has in the present work given us more of his earlier fancies than we have had for years. *Great Expectations* is not, indeed, his best work, but it is ranked among his happiest. (*DCH*, 430-31)

As the multiple responses to his later fiction in the Victorian era illustrate, the division of Dickens's authorial self – between the early and late Dickens – is not the product of modern literary criticism, but is instead one of the ways in which contemporary critics and readers of Dickens's work constructed and made sense of his authorial identity. Whether directly comparing the texts signed by the early Dickens alongside those signed by the late Dickens, denying such a split in Dickens's authorial identity has occurred, or claiming that certain of his late works mark a return to the early Dickens, contemporary critics of his fiction inaugurated a discussion of Dickens's authorial identity which continues to this day.

Dallas's view, that in *Great Expectations*, a novel serialized in *All the Year Round* between 1 December 1860 and 3 August 1861, Dickens returns to his earlier work, is suggested by one of the strangest scenes in the narrative when, near the end of the story, Pip returns from "the East" to revisit the house where he was raised, and where Joe Gargery and Biddy now live as man and wife.²² Pausing upon the threshold of his former home, and looking in "unseen", Pip relates: "There, smoking his pipe in the old place by the kitchen firelight, as hale and as strong as ever though a little grey, sat Joe; and there, fenced into the corner with Joe's leg, and sitting on my own little stool looking at the fire, was – I again!"

²² Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Edgar Rosenberg (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1999), 309; henceforth *GE*.

(*GE*, 356). The “I” whom Pip observes is Joe’s and Biddy’s child, also called Pip. As Joe explains: “‘We giv’ him the name of Pip for your sake, dear old chap’” (*GE*, 356). The meeting of the two Pips is indicative of the fact that Pip the elder has made no forward progression in his narrative. Transported back to his own childhood at the novel’s conclusion, Pip meets himself at the beginning of the story.²³ In addition, his return signifies that he is now an outsider, a guest in his former home. As Catherine Waters points out, when he returns home, “Pip finds himself displaced from the family fireside by his namesake”: “He is not part of this cosy family unit, and his marginality is further emphasized by his status as voyeur, gazing in upon the hearth-side scene of domestic life.”²⁴

For Dominic Rainsford, “Dickens is bound up with Pip in such a complicated way”: “the boundaries between the actual author and fictional author, between the character that we or Dickens think that Pip should be and the person that we or Dickens might think that Dickens himself was [...] [are] uncertain”.²⁵ Rainsford’s connection between Dickens and Pip is nowhere more evident than in the scene of Pip’s return, which is analogous to the ways in which Dickens returns to his earlier authorial self – “the young Dickens” – in *Great Expectations*. Just as Pip is confronted by his younger self on his homecoming, on returning to his earlier fiction in *Great Expectations*, Dickens (re-)encounters “the young Dickens”, who, like Pip’s young double, is to all intents and purposes frozen in time, crystallized within the pages of the earlier fiction, never to grow older. Dickens also mirrors Pip’s homecoming in the respect that in returning to his earlier fiction in *Great Expectations* – most obviously in terms of *David Copperfield* – he literalizes Barthes’s claim, discussed in the introduction to this thesis, that the author can only “‘come back’ [...] in his text [...] as a ‘guest’” (*FWT*, 161).

²³ On the importance of repetition to *Great Expectations*, see Peter Brooks, *Reading For the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (1984; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 113-42; henceforth Brooks.

²⁴ Catherine Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 170; henceforth Waters.

²⁵ Dominic Rainsford, *Authorship, Ethics, and the Reader: Blake, Dickens, Joyce* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997) 161-62.

That is, like Pip, who remains on the threshold of his former home, in every sense, Dickens is unable to return to his early fiction as the “host or author” in *Great Expectations* – and these terms are interchangeable for Dickens in the 1841 preface to *The Old Curiosity Shop*, a text signed by “the young Dickens” – and, instead, can only revisit the old haunts of his earlier texts as an outsider, a guest, or ghostly absent/present host.²⁶

The texts Dickens produced which preceded *Great Expectations* are likewise concerned with problematizing the notion of returning home.²⁷ In his article “A Walk in a Workhouse”, published in *Household Words* on 25 May 1850, Dickens wonders, with the bitterest irony, if “Billy Stevens” – who had recently died in the titular workhouse and whose name, like that of “Charley Walters”, another deceased inhabitant of the workhouse, is all that remains of him – had “ever told” the present inmates “of the time when he was a dweller in the far-off foreign land called Home!”²⁸ A year before the publication of “A Walk in a Workhouse” the first monthly instalment of Dickens’s novel *David Copperfield* had been issued. Like “A Walk in a Workhouse”, “Home”, in *David Copperfield*, is also figured as a “far-off foreign land” by the eponymous narrator – in the sense that, as nothing but a memory, it is unreachable – after his mother’s imprudent marriage to Mr. Murdstone. Remembering when, as a young boy, he returned home from Mr. Creakle’s school, “Salem House”, David writes:

Ah, what a strange feeling it was to be going home when it was not home, and to find that every object I looked at, reminded me of the happy old home, which was like a dream I could never dream again! The days when my mother and I and Peggotty were all in all to one another, and there was no one to come between us, rose up before me sorrowfully on the road, that I am not sure I was glad to be there – not sure but that I would rather have remained away and forgotten it in Steerforth’s company. (*DC*, 103)

²⁶ See Charles Dickens, Preface, in Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brennan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

²⁷ *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens’s successor to *Great Expectations* begins with the discovery that John Harmon has died on his way home to England to inherit his father’s fortune. The fact that Harmon is in truth alive and hiding under an assumed identity is again illustrative of the ways in which the notion of return is made problematic in Dickens’s fiction in the 1850s and 1860s. The unfinished *Edwin Drood* also concerns the possible return of the title character.

²⁸ Charles Dickens, “A Walk in a Workhouse”, in Charles Dickens, *Selected Journalism: 1850-1870*, ed. David Pascoe (London: Penguin, 1997), 244; henceforth *SJ*.

The “strange feeling” that David experiences when returning home resides in the fact that his home is not his “home” anymore; that, in essence, he is, like Pip after him, a stranger at home.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, first serialized in *All the Year Round* from 30 April 1859 to 26 November 1859, Charles Darnay is sentenced to death on his return to France because of a Revolutionary decree declaring him an “Emigrant” (*TTC*, 256). This decree, passed in the wake of The Terror, a postmaster explains to Darnay, “banish[es] all emigrants, and condemn[s] all to death who return” (*TTC*, 258).²⁹ Of “the many wild changes observable on familiar things”, which the narrator tells us Darnay experiences on his return to France, none can be stranger than the fact that he is treated as if he were an outsider and an enemy in his own country, a home which is home to him no longer (*TTC*, 258). The connection between death and returning home, which Dickens makes in *A Tale of Two Cities*, is also made in his novel *Hard Times*, first serialized in *Household Words* between 1 April 1854 and 12 August 1854. Like his depiction of Darnay’s return home, Dickens, within the narrative of *Hard Times*, is concerned with how the familiar surroundings of home – in its broadest sense – can become, unfamiliar, strange, and foreign. In Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel *North and South*, a text which appeared in *Household Words* less than a month after *Hard Times*, the southern, middle-class Margaret Hale is considered “a foreigner, and nothing more” by the mill-hand Nicholas Higgins when she first arrives in the northern smoke-stack region of Milton Northern.³⁰ By contrast, in *Hard Times*, it is the northern, working class Stephen Blackpool

²⁹ Putting himself in the place of the Revolutionaries, Thomas Carlyle writes of this decree passed in March 1793: “all Emigrants are declared Traitors, their property become National; they are ‘dead in Law’, – save indeed that for *our* behoof they shall ‘live yet fifty years in Law’, and what heritages may fall to them in that time become National too!”; see Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History*, ed. K.J. Fielding and David Sorenson, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), vol. 2: 266, original emphasis.

³⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, ed. Angus Easson (1973; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 134.

who is presented as an outsider within the narrative.³¹ Also unlike Margaret, Blackpool is not depicted as a stranger in a strange land, however. Rather, Dickens depicts him as a “foreigner” in his hometown, the industrial city of Coketown, owing to his refusal to join the rest of the Coketown mill-hands when they go on strike.

Despite Blackpool’s heartfelt plea to his fellow-workers at the Coketown mill that “‘I ha’ my reasons’” for continuing to work during the strike, he understands and accepts that he will be shunned because of his actions: “‘I know weel that if I was a lyin parisht i’ th’ road, yo’d feel it right to pass me by, as a forrenner and stranger.’”³² As a “forenner and stranger” in the familiar surroundings of his hometown, Blackpool cuts an isolated and pathetic figure in the novel:

Thus easily did Stephen Blackpool fall into the loneliest of lives, the life of solitude among a familiar crowd. The stranger in the land who looks into ten thousand faces for some answering look and never finds it, is in cheering society as compared with him who passes ten averted faces daily, that were once the countenances of friends. (*HT*, 190)

Blackpool’s ostracism from the Coketown community is made complete when the factory owner Josiah Bounderby fires him for not turning informer upon his work colleagues during the strike. Cast adrift by both his work-mates and his employer, Blackpool has no choice but to leave Coketown and find a home and job elsewhere; but as Blackpool himself acknowledges, with a reputation of “‘being troublesome’”, he has little chance of finding work (*HT*, 211). Summing up Blackpool’s plight, Louisa Gradgrind asks with dismay: “‘Then, by the prejudices of his own class, and by the prejudices of the other, he is sacrificed alike?’” (*HT*, 211) Later on in the novel, Blackpool is “sacrificed” further when he is made a scapegoat by Tom Gradgrind for Gradgrind’s robbery of Bounderby’s bank. By not participating in the strike and in being the main suspect concerning the bank robbery,

³¹ For a comparison of the relative merits of Gaskell’s and Dickens’s novels, as well as a more general discussion on “the industrial novels” of the 1840s and 1850s, see Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1850* (1958; London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), 87-109.

³² Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, ed. Paul Schlicke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 188; henceforth *HT*.

Blackpool has been, in the words of the demagogic union activist, Slackbridge, “cast [...] out for ever!”: “Yes, my compatriots, [I] happily cast him out and sent him forth!” (HT, 329)

Discussing the ritual of the scapegoat, Derrida explains that, whilst it centres upon “the expulsion of the evil [...] out of the body (and out) of the city”, what is “expelled” and “excluded” is in fact “*constituted*, regularly granted its place by the community, chosen, kept, fed, etc., in the very heart of the inside”.³³ Therefore, Derrida observes, the figure of the scapegoat or *pharmakos* “is thus played out on the boundary line between inside and outside” (*Dissemination*, 134). Mirroring the ritualistic ceremony of the scapegoat, Blackpool is “expelled” and “excluded” from his hometown – where he had once been “in the very heart of the inside” – simultaneously belonging and not belonging to Coketown. Moreover, it is significant that on returning to Coketown to clear his name of the criminal charges brought against him, Blackpool should fall into a disused mine shaft – suffering injuries that lead to his death – only “a few miles away” from his former home (HT, 352). Dying on the edge of what was once his hometown, Blackpool again symbolizes the figure of the scapegoat in that his death is located on “the boundary line between inside and outside”. Dying on the border of Coketown means that Blackpool will forever be a native unable to return home fully. In death, just as in life, Blackpool is situated on the threshold of the community, at once inside and outside and neither inside nor outside his hometown.

A “forrenner and a stranger” at home, Blackpool can be seen to prefigure Dickens’s characterization of Arthur Clennam in *Little Dorrit*, his follow-up to *Hard Times*, serialized monthly from 1 December 1855 to 1 June 1857. Indeed, like Blackpool, Clennam tells Mr. Barnacle of the infamous “Circumlocution Office”: “Allow me to observe that I have been

³³ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (1981; London: Continuum, 2004), 133-34, original emphasis; henceforth *Dissemination*.

some time in China, [and I] am quite a stranger at home”³⁴ Near the beginning of *Little Dorrit* we find Clennam amidst a group of “fellow travellers” seeking a return to England, but who find their plans curtailed when they are detained in quarantine at Marseille (*LD*, 12). Even when the quarantine is lifted and Clennam is free to embark for England, however, after spending several years abroad, returning home is a difficult process for him. Unable to readjust to the English way of life, Clennam feels ““a stranger in the land”” of his birth (*LD*, 169). In addition, Clennam’s return to the home of his mother, Mrs. Clennam, is described in ominous terms: “He thought of the darkly threatening place that went by the name of Home in his remembrance, and of the gathering shadows which made it yet more darkly threatening than of old.” (*LD*, 490) Like Mr. Meagles’s alteration of the proverb “Rome is Rome though it’s never so Romely”, for Clennam: ““Home is Home though it’s never so Homely”” (*LD*, 441).

Clennam’s anxiety concerning his return home to his mother’s house is partly due to his austere upbringing. Delaying his return home, Clennam sits in a coffee-shop remembering his unhappy childhood:

There was the dreary Sunday of his childhood, when he sat with his hands before him, scared out of his senses by a horrible tract [...] There was the sleepy Sunday of his boyhood, when like a military deserter, he was marched to chapel by a picquet of teachers three times a day [...] There was the interminable Sunday of his nonage; when his mother, stern of face and unrelenting of heart, would sit all day behind a bible [...] There was the resentful Sunday of a little later, when he sat glowering and glooming through the tardy length of the day, with a sullen sense of injury in his heart (*LD*, 24).

Earlier in the novel, when in conversation with Mr. Meagles, Clennam recalls the unceremonious nature in which he was sent away from home by his mother: ““I was [...] shipped away to the other end of the world before I was of age, and exiled there until my father’s death there, a year ago”” (*LD*, 17). The reason behind Clennam’s “exile” from home

³⁴ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. Harvey Peter Sucksmith (1979; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 93-94; henceforth *LD*.

by Mrs. Clennam, which he remains unaware of throughout the novel, is down to his illegitimate birth. Discovering not only that her husband engaged in a premarital affair with, in her words, a “guilty creature”, but also, that the illicit union produced Clennam, Mrs. Clennam demands that, as a punishment to Clennam’s biological mother, Clennam is placed in her – that is, Mrs. Clennam’s – possession (*LD* 647). As further punishment to his biological mother, Mrs. Clennam sends her adopted son to China, to work with his father.³⁵ Directly equated with his illegitimacy – which Mrs. Clennam calls an “angry mark upon him at his birth” – Clennam’s “exile” to a foreign country reinforces his outsider status at home, and means that his reunion with his mother is no return at all, but a further instance of his inability to belong, to forever be “a stranger at home” (*LD*, 659).

The period in which these novels were written coincided with a turbulent phase in Dickens’s life. By the early-1850s Dickens’s marriage was undergoing difficulties and, in 1858, following his meeting with Ellen Ternan, he very publicly separated from his wife, Catherine. Forster delicately refers to Dickens’s domestic problems as arising from “[a]n unsettled feeling greatly in excess of what was usual with [him]”: “the satisfactions which home should have supplied, and which indeed were essential requirements of his nature, he had failed to find in his home” (Forster, 2: 193). Whilst it would be speculative to suggest that Dickens’s dissatisfaction with his home-life in the 1850s influenced the fiction that he created, it is significant that the texts he produced during this period are populated with characters who attempt to return home, but who are, for whatever reason, unable to do so. There is a more definite case to be made that part of Dickens’s motivation to perform the readings was a desire to escape the family home. Indeed, in addition to the reasons given in the introduction to this chapter, which account for Dickens’s decision to perform the readings, Philip Collins claims Dickens’s marital problems in the 1850s were a contributory

³⁵ Considering the importance and symbolic force of “home” in *Little Dorrit*, it is significant that the firm Mr. and Mrs. Clennam run is called “the house of Clennam and Co.” (*LD*, 293).

factor. Dickens's public readings, Collins writes, "manifestly seemed a welcome diversion of energy and an escape from home", while the close and regular contact with his audience "might provide him with some of the emotional nourishment which he could not now find in his marriage".³⁶

A letter written to Forster, on 13 April 1856, reveals that as Dickens's marriage collapsed – "I find that the skeleton in my domestic closet is becoming a pretty big one" – he desired a return to the past: "The old days – the old days! Shall I ever, I wonder, get the frame of my mind back as it used to be then? Something of it perhaps – but never quite as it used to be." (*Pilgrim*, 8: 89) The readings provided, albeit ephemerally, such a return to "the old days" that Dickens longed for. However, like the characters in his novels produced during this period, Dickens's return to "the old days" in the readings is doomed to failure. For a brief period onstage, Dickens was able to relive the past, to resurrect "the young Dickens". But, once the performance was over, he mourned the passing of the past over again, and once more longed to return to it. Writing to Collins on 22 April 1863, Dickens explains that because of the constant travelling occasioned by the readings he could not "regard [himself] as having a home anywhere" (*Pilgrim*, 10: 239). Metaphorically speaking, Dickens's emotional investment in the readings – his longing to go back to "the old days" and resurrect "the young Dickens" – also meant that he was "homeless" in the sense that, unable to return to the past, he found it increasingly difficult to live in the present. Moreover, like novels such as *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Hard Times*, the resurrection of "the young Dickens" in the readings unites the notion of return with death, with the work of memory and of mourning. Before discussing the death and resurrection of "the young Dickens" in the readings, I will first turn to an examination of the work of memory and mourning in Dickens's fiction more generally.

³⁶ Philip Collins, Introduction, in Philip Collins, ed., *Charles Dickens: The Public Readings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), xvii-lxix (xxi-xxii); henceforth *Public Readings*.

II

News of Dickens's death was met with shock and sadness. But, more than this, it was also as if a valued family friend had passed away. As the 10 June 1870 obituary notice in *The Times* explains, Dickens's death was "nothing less than a personal bereavement" (*DCH*, 506).³⁷ A leading article published in *The Sunday Times*, on 12 June, sums up the mood of a nation:

He [Dickens] lived not only before our eyes, but in our very hearts. He not only had a place there, but a home – a home, too, which he continually occupied, and which his presence made too glad and happy for memory to lose or eloquence explain. And now he is dead, and the home is darkened [...] and all the household mourns. (*DCH*, 512)

Whilst mourning Dickens's loss, however, the same obituary piece is critical of the ways in which, in his fiction, Dickens "allowed his sentimentalism to become extravagant, not to say affected or morbid" (*DCH*, 513). The criticism expressed in *The Sunday Times* obituary concerning the "extravagant" and "morbid" "sentimentalism" of Dickens's fiction was levelled at his work throughout the nineteenth century, and remains problematic today.

Traditionally, Dickens's fiction is criticized for its sentimental depiction of death-bed scenes and for its representations of excessive acts of mourning. More often than not, it is the deaths of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and Little Paul Dombey in *Dombey and Son* that most pique the critics. In the opinion of John Ruskin, Nell's death was nothing other than a cynical ploy on Dickens's part to tug upon his readers' heart-strings: "Nell [...] was simply killed for the market, as a butcher kills a lamb" (*DCH*, 100). Others, such as Oscar Wilde, were derisory of the sentimentality surrounding Nell's death: "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing."³⁸ For G. K. Chesterton, Little Nell's death is "a mere example of maudlin description like the death of Little Paul".³⁹ Again, in his 1930 study, *Vulgarity in Literature*, Aldous Huxley deplores Dickens's characterisation of

³⁷ Forster also states that "in every country of the civilised earth" news of Dickens's death was treated "as if a personal bereavement had befallen everyone" (Forster, 2: 417).

³⁸ Quoted in Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (1987; London: Penguin, 1988), 441; henceforth Ellman.

³⁹ G. K. Chesterton, Introduction, in Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1907; London: Everyman, 1966), v-xiv (viii).

Little Nell, and particularly her death: “The history of Little Nell is distressing indeed, but not as Dickens intended it to be distressing; it is distressing in its ineptitude and vulgar sentimentality.”⁴⁰

Recent discussions of Dickens’s work have taken a more sympathetic approach to his handling of scenes of death and mourning. In her 1985 study *Forms of Feeling in Victorian Fiction*, Barbara Hardy situates Dickens’s overly sentimental portrayal of death-bed scenes in his work in the context of the mourning customs of Victorian Britain as a whole. However, whilst Hardy states that “Dickens and the Victorians found it notoriously hard to distance and particularize feelings of morbid pathos [...] in a way uncongenial to modern tastes”, she reiterates the charge that Dickens’s sentimental depiction of death remains a weak point: “Dickens’s representations of death-bed passions evolves, but he never entirely gets over a tendency to oscillate between crude rhetoric and subtle drama.”⁴¹ Indeed, like Huxley and Chesterton before her, Hardy sees the death of characters such as Little Nell as “stereotyped, mawkish, and overdone” (Hardy, 63). But, whilst the much maligned deaths of Little Nell and Little Dombey are regarded as being at best “mawkish” and at worst cynical, Dickens’s thoughts concerning the act of mourning were in fact deeply ambivalent.

Dickens was himself susceptible to extraordinary acts of mourning. This is especially evident in Dickens’s reaction to the death of Mary Hogarth, his seventeen year old sister-in-law who died, in his arms, on 7 May 1837. The impact of Mary Hogarth’s death upon Dickens cannot be overestimated. Mary’s death, as Ackroyd observes, “represented the most powerful sense of loss and pain he was ever to experience” (Ackroyd, 238). Certainly, Dickens’s actions in the immediate aftermath of his bereavement are those of a man overcome with grief and unable to come to terms with his loss:

⁴⁰ Aldous Huxley, *Vulgarity in Literature: Digressions From a Theme* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930), 57.

⁴¹ Barbara Hardy, *Forms of Feeling in Victorian Fiction* (London: Peter Owen, 1985), 63; henceforth Hardy.

He cut off a lock of Mary Hogarth's hair and kept it in a special case; he took a ring off her finger, and put it on his own [...] he kept all of her clothes and two years later was still on occasions taking them out to look at them [...] He also continually expressed a wish to be buried with her in the same grave [...] For the next nine months he dreamed of her every night – he called these nocturnal phantoms “visions” of Mary – and in addition he used to say that her image haunted him by day. (Ackroyd, 238-39)

At the time of Mary's death, Dickens was in the process of writing *The Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist*, both of which were being serialized in monthly instalments in *Bentley's Miscellany*. Following Mary's death, however, Dickens found it impossible to continue with his usual writing schedule. On 17 May 1837, he explains to Williams Ainsworth:

I have been so much unnerved and hurt by the loss of the dear girl whom I loved, after my own wife, more deeply and fervently than anyone on earth, that I have been compelled for once to give up all idea of my monthly work, and try a fortnight's rest and quiet. (*Pilgrim*, 1: 260)

The intensity of Dickens's grief expressed in his letter to Ainsworth is repeated in several other letters written during this period. Referring to the “blank” left by Mary's death, Dickens tells George Thomson on 8 May 1837: “I could have better spared a much nearer relation or an older friend, for she has been to us what we can never replace” (*Pilgrim*, 1: 257). Writing to Thomas Beard on 17 May 1837 Dickens declares: “I have been so shaken and unnerved by the loss of one whom I so dearly loved” (*Pilgrim*, 1: 260). And, on 31 May 1837, Dickens informs Richard Johns: “I have lost the dearest friend I ever had. Words cannot describe the pride I felt in her, and the devoted attachment I bore her.” (*Pilgrim*, 1: 263)

Whilst Dickens felt “compelled” to abandon his novel writing for a brief time after Mary's death it seems that he was unable to stop writing letters about the effect that her death had upon him. The letters that Dickens wrote following Mary's death allowed him the chance to mourn her death over and over again, and this interminable mourning process for Mary was to continue in his fiction. Mary's youth and innocence is redirected in a host of female characters in his texts, such as Rose Maylie in *Oliver Twist*, Agnes in *David Copperfield*, and Mary in *The Wreck of the Golden Mary*. Two Christmas stories written in the 1850s also

allude to Mary's death. In "What Christmas is, as we Grow Older", published in 1851, Dickens writes of "a dear girl – almost a woman – never to be one – who made a mourning Christmas in a house of joy, and went her trackless way to the silent City": "O look upon her beauty, her serenity, her changeless youth, her happiness! The daughter of Jairus was recalled to life, to die; but, she, more blest, has heard the same voice, saying unto her, 'Arise for ever!'" (CS, 23) Four years later, in "The Guest", Dickens's contribution to *Household Word's* 1855 Christmas number, *The Holly-Tree Inn*, the narrator recounts the recurrent dreams he experiences of "a very near and dear friend" he "had lost [...] by death": "Every night since, at home or away from home, I had dreamed of that friend; sometimes, as still living; sometimes, as returning from the world of the shadows to comfort me; always as being beautiful, placid, and happy; never in association with any approach to fear or distress." (CS, 95)

The most widely known of Dickens's fictional surrogates for his lost, beloved, Mary is Little Nell. In chapter seventy-two of *The Old Curiosity Shop* the dead Nell is described by the narrator as "so young, so beautiful, so good".⁴² As Elizabeth Brennan points out, these words are an almost exact replica of the inscription Dickens wrote for Mary's grave: "Young, beautiful, and good, God numbered her with His angels at the early age of seventeen." (OCS, 615) After writing the scene of Little Nell's death in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Dickens remarked to Forster, in January 1841: "Dear Mary died yesterday, when I think of this sad story." (*Pilgrim*, 2: 182) Sublimating his grief for Mary in his fiction, Dickens situates his mourning upon the very borderline separating the public and the private, ensuring that his sister-in-law will be remembered for generations to come.

Dickens's outpouring of grief over Mary Hogarth's death demonstrates only one aspect of his complex response to the act of mourning, however. Perversely, as Andrew

⁴² Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, ed. Elizabeth M. Brennan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 541; henceforth OCS.

Sanders notes, Dickens detested the overly elaborate scenes of mourning and the public outpourings of grief that were common in the nineteenth century. For Dickens, Sanders writes, “a semi-pagan celebration of death negated a belief in the resurrection” whilst it also “destroyed the essential privacy of mourning”.⁴³ In a 21 July 1868 letter to his sister, Laetitia Austin, Dickens explains his refusal to attend a funeral, which he was invited to, on the grounds that he was not sufficiently close to the deceased, when living, to warrant his presence “at that solemn rite”: “I have the greatest objection to attend a funeral in which my affections are not strongly and immediately concerned. I have no notion of a funeral as a matter of form or ceremony [...] I was not in the poor good fellow’s house in his lifetime, and I feel that I have no business there when he lies dead in it.” (*Pilgrim*, 12: 155)

In his 1863 article “Medicine Men of Civilisation”, Dickens condemns what he considers the hypocritical “game” of funeral rites in the mid-nineteenth century – tantamount to an ignominious “performance” of mourning in his eyes – and compares them unfavourably to those adopted by “savages”:

Real affliction, real grief and solemnity, have been outraged, and the funeral has been “performed.” The waste for which the funeral customs of many tribes of savages are conspicuous, has attached these civilised obsequies; and once, and twice, have I wished in my soul that if the waste must be, they would let the undertaker bury the money, and let me bury the friend.⁴⁴

Dickens’s distaste for the culture of mourning that permeated Victorian society is also evident in his article “Trading in Death”, published in *Household Words* on 27 November 1852. In “Trading in Death”, Dickens bemoans the decision to revive “the obsolete custom of a State Funeral [...] in mis-called ‘honor’ of the late Duke of Wellington”:

We earnestly submit to our readers that there is, and there can be, no kind of honor in such a revival; that the more truly great the man, the more truly little the ceremony; and that it has been, from first to last, a pernicious instance and encouragement of the demoralising practice of trading in Death. (*SJ*, 439-40)

⁴³ Andrew Sanders, *Charles Dickens: Resurrectionist* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), 38-45.

⁴⁴ Charles Dickens, “Medicine Men of Civilisation”, in Charles Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller and Reprinted Pieces* (1958; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 285; henceforth *UT*.

Dickens's moral stance on the "demoralising practice of trading in Death" – typified for him by the State funeral awarded to Wellington – was no mere journalistic posturing on his part, nor was it the only occasion in which he expressed his disapprobation for memorials of this kind.⁴⁵

After being asked to contribute to a national Shakespeare memorial, in 1864, Dickens retorted that the Bard's "last monument is in his works" (qtd. Ackroyd, 999). Dickens did not subscribe to the national Shakespeare memorial; but, as his will reveals, he did subscribe to his own theory. In his will, dated 12 May 1869, Dickens outlines strict instructions regarding his burial and any posthumous memorials that may be erected in his honour:

I emphatically direct that I be buried in an inexpensive, unostentatious, and strictly private manner; that no public announcement be made of the time or place of my burial; that at the utmost not more than three plain mourning coaches be employed; and that those who attend my funeral wear no scarf, cloak, black bow, long hat-band, or other such revolting absurdity. I DIRECT that my name be inscribed in plain English letters on my tomb, without the addition of "Mr." or "Esquire." I conjure my friends on no account to make me the subject of any monument, memorial, or testimonial whatever. I rest my claims to the remembrance of my country upon my published works, and the remembrance of my friends upon their experience of me in addition thereto. (Forster, 2: 421-22)

The vehemence of Dickens's antipathy towards Victorian forms of mourning is keenly felt in this passage from his will. Considering his detestation of the pomp and ceremony afforded to the Duke of Wellington's state funeral, Dickens's express wish that his own funeral was to be "strictly private" is understandable. Yet, Dickens's highly specific directions concerning not only his funeral arrangements, but also, the mourning apparel of those attending the funeral, appears overdone, even perverse. It is as if, in his will, Dickens forbids the mourners at his funeral to mourn his death. Indeed, the only mourning on his behalf which Dickens appears to condone is one of remembrance which, in a decidedly Victorian fashion, is distinguished between the public and the private.

⁴⁵ In the already cited letter to Laetitia Dixon, Dickens also expresses his disgust at those "trading in death": "I cannot endure being dressed up by an undertaker as part of his trade-show." (*Pilgrim*, 12: 155)

Rather than simply being an example of Dickens's deep-seated aversion to Victorian mourning customs, Robert Garnett argues that Dickens's insistence on being buried in a "strictly private manner" was attributable to two separate factors. Firstly, Garnett claims, by the late-1860s there was "a trend among the Victorian middle classes toward more modest funerals".⁴⁶ Secondly, Garnett adds, by demanding a "strictly private" burial, Dickens enabled his mistress Ellen Ternan to attend the funeral "with no questions asked, and with no scandal" (Garnett, 110). Although speculative, Garnett's argument is persuasive, particularly in its suggestion that Ellen was present at the funeral ceremony. But it is less successful in accounting for Dickens's heartfelt disgust at the "revolting absurdity" of Victorian forms of mourning, especially his specific desire that his friends and family resist the usual and, in his opinion, outlandish Victorian funeral rites. Whilst Dickens's insistence that he should be buried in "strictly private manner" may correspond with contemporary trends in Victorian funerals, the imperative tone Dickens adopts when addressing those responsible for organizing his funeral arrangements – "I emphatically direct"; "I DIRECT"; "I conjure" – indicates that they are his personal feelings on the subject, and not the general tastes of the middle-classes. What is more, Dickens may well have expressed a wish for a private funeral in order to shield Ellen Ternan from public scrutiny; but it is equally likely that, had he never met her, he would have made a similar demand. Ironically, though, Dickens's request that he was to be buried privately in Rochester was disregarded, and his remains were interred in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Moreover, just as Dickens believed that Shakespeare's "last monument is in his works", it is notable in his will that he prohibits any future public memorials that may be erected in his honour and insists that he trusts only to "rest my claims to the remembrance of my country upon my published works". This is a significant remark by Dickens, not only

⁴⁶ Robert Garnett, "The Mysterious Mourner: Dickens's Funeral and Ellen Ternan", *Dickens Quarterly* 25. 2 (June 2008): 107-17 (109); henceforth Garnett.

because it confirms his opinion regarding the Shakespeare memorial, but also, because it presupposes that, even before his death, his work is always already in “remembrance” of him. The connection between Dickens’s novels and the act of mourning is implicit in the publication in 1866 of “The Charles Dickens Edition” of his novels. As Dickens’s comments about himself and Shakespeare make clear, to a certain extent, every author’s work is his or her own lasting memorial. However, in the prospectus which accompanied “The Charles Dickens Edition”, Dickens quite deliberately sets up his work as a memorial. The prospectus states: ““this title [“The Charles Dickens Edition”], appended to every volume, may suggest to the author’s countrymen his present watchfulness over his edition and his hope that it may remain a favourite with them when he shall have left them for ever””.⁴⁷ To read Dickens, then, even before his death, is to mourn Dickens. Offering, through his fiction, a means of mourning his death *before* he has died, it seems that Dickens, like Derrida, sees a concordance between the work of art and the “work of mourning”.

In his work, Derrida regards the mourning process as indissociable from the workings of memory. As Mark Dooley and Liam Kavanagh explain: “for Derrida, an act of memory, the desire to identify with the past, is always a work of mourning”.⁴⁸ For example, in *Memoires for Paul de Man*, Derrida speaks of “the memory of mourning and [...] the mourning for memory”.⁴⁹ Like Derrida, Dickens often doubles the acts of memory and mourning in his work. In *Our Mutual Friend*, following the death of her adopted child, Johnny Harmon, who is named in memory of the supposedly dead John Harmon, Mrs. Boffin decides against ““reviving John Harmon’s name”” in the future if she takes care of any more

⁴⁷ Quoted in J. Don Vann, “Collected editions over which Dickens had control”, in Paul Schlicke, ed., *Oxford Reader’s Companion to Dickens* (1999; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 207-9 (208).

⁴⁸ Mark Dooley and Liam Kavanagh, *The Philosophy of Derrida* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2007), 7-8; henceforth Dooley and Kavanagh.

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler and Eduardo Cadava (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 29; henceforth *Memoires*.

orphaned children.⁵⁰ Instead, as Bella Wilfer “musingly” suggests, the name “John Harmon” is “[l]aid [...] up as a remembrance” by the Boffins (*OMF*, 331). The fact that John Harmon, who is named after his own father, is believed to have died on his return home to England doubles this scene of memory and mourning.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the dissolute character of Sydney Carton is given the nickname of “Memory” by Mr. Stryver (*TTC*, 91). When Mr. Stryver calls Carton “Memory” it is simply a nickname for his powers of remembrance. However, dying in the place of Charles Darnay at the Revolutionary scaffold as a sacrifice to Lucy Manette, the woman he loves but whom he has lost to Darnay, Carton’s death signifies what he will become: a memory that cannot be forgotten.⁵¹ In the prophetic vision that closes the novel – which it is important to remember is offered by the narrator and not by Carton, though it is meant to represent his thoughts as he approaches the scaffold – it is foreseen that Carton will “‘hold a sanctuary in their [Darnay’s and Lucy’s] hearts, and in the hearts of their descendants, generations hence’”: “‘I know that each was not more honoured and held sacred in the other’s soul, than I was in the souls of both.’” (*TTC*, 390) Because of Carton’s inability to live in the present, due to his troubled past, it seems as if, by sacrificing his life for Lucy, he decides to live eternally in the future as a memory to be mourned.

Dickens’s 1848 Christmas story *The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time* – a text which he prepared for his readings, but never performed – offers another example of Dickens’s doubling of the concepts of mourning and memory. The “haunted man” of the story’s title refers to the character of Redlaw who, burdened by his past remembrances, particularly the death of his beloved sister, wishes to erase his past memories: “‘I bear within me a Sorrow and a Wrong. Thus I prey upon myself. Thus memory is my

⁵⁰ Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Adrian Poole (London: Penguin, 1997), 330; henceforth *OMF*.

⁵¹ According to Richard Maxwell, before opting for *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens had considered “Memory Carton” as a possible title; see Richard Maxwell, Introduction, in Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, ed. Richard Maxwell (London: Penguin, 2000), ix-xxxiii (xiii).

curse; and, if I could forget my sorrow and my wrong, I would!” (CC, 342) Redlaw is given the chance to forget his sorrows when a “Phantom” appears who bears “an awful likeness of himself” (CC, 338). The “Phantom” proceeds to tell Redlaw: “Hear what I offer! Forget the sorrows, wrong, and trouble you have known! [...] I have the power to cancel their remembrance – to leave but very faint, confused traces of them, that will die out soon” (CC, 343).

Regarding his memories as “poison in my body”, Redlaw readily accepts the “Phantom’s” “gift” of forgetfulness (CC, 343-44). However, the “gift” of amnesia bestowed upon Redlaw soon turns poisonous. Firstly, because part of Redlaw’s “bargain” with the “Phantom” is that it destroys any “memory of sorrow, wrong and trouble” in anybody that he happens to come into contact with, and this contagious amnesia has devastating effects (CC, 344). Secondly, lacking memories of his own suffering, Redlaw is unable to understand or commiserate with the suffering of others and, consequently, loses his humanity. After watching in horror as the destructive effect of his presence tears apart the once happy families of the Swidgers and the Tetterbys, Redlaw laments:

I am infected! I am infectious! I am charged with poison for my own mind, and the minds of all mankind. Where I felt interest, compassion, sympathy, I am turning into stone [...] I am only so much less base than the wretches whom I make so, that in the moment of their transformation I can hate them. (CC, 370)

However, it is the combined force of memory and mourning that makes Redlaw aware of the sacrifice he has made in making his bargain with the “Phantom”. After Redlaw learns that his sister had expressed a hope that, in the event of her death, he would “keep his memory of me green, and [...] not let me be forgotten”, he cries “[t]ears more painful, and more bitter than he had ever shed in all his life” (CC, 401). Once Redlaw realizes that in bargaining away his memories, “of sorrow, wrong, and trouble”, he loses “all man would remember”, his memory and his humanity are restored, and he is capable of mourning, as well as keeping alive, the memory of his sister (CC, 401).

After finishing *The Haunted Man*, Dickens turned his attentions to writing *David Copperfield*. Like the Christmas tale, in *David Copperfield* the acts of mourning and memory play a central role within the eponymous narrator's text. Indeed, as much as anything else, David's autobiography is not only, as is it generally perceived, a work of memory, but also, of mourning. In his narrative, David mourns the deaths of his mother, Steerforth, Ham, and his first wife Dora. But, one of the striking features of his mourning for these characters is that it begins before their deaths. This is not ascribable simply to the fact that by the time that David writes his memoir these characters are already dead and are, therefore, only a memory consigned to the past. Rather, David's acts of mourning and memory in his narrative correspond with Derrida's notion of "bereaved memory": "*already* you are *in memory* of your own death; and your friends as well, and all the others, both of your own death and already of their own through yours" (*Memoires*, 22, 87, original emphasis). As Derrida puts it elsewhere, "[a] memory is engaged in advance, from the moment of what is called life": "I live in the present speaking of myself in the mouths of my friends, I already hear them speaking on the edge of my tomb [...] Already, yet when I will no longer be."⁵²

With the blackest of comedy, the chapter which deals with David's reaction to his mother's death is entitled "I have a memorable Birthday" (*DC*, 116-27). Significantly, David's manner of mourning his mother's death is constituted upon an act of memory: "From the moment of my knowing of the death of my mother, the idea of her as she had been of late had vanished from me. I remembered her, from that instant, only as the young mother of my earliest impressions" (*DC*, 127). That David, in mourning for his mother, should remember her after her death is hardly noteworthy. What is noteworthy, however, is the specific nature of David's act of remembrance concerning his mother after her death because it suggests that, even before she died, David was already in mourning for "the young mother of [his] earliest

⁵² Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (1997; London: Verso, 2005), 5.

impressions". Similarly, before Steerforth perishes in the terrific storm on the Yarmouth coast, David's mourning for his old school friend has already begun. For example, recollecting the time in which Steerforth absconds with Ham's fiancée, Emily, David remembers that his initial reaction was not to condemn Steerforth for his actions, but to mourn his lost friendship, and what David terms "the memory of my affection for him", as if his friend was dead already: "What his [Steerforth's] remembrances of me were, I have never known – they were light enough, perhaps, and easily dismissed – but mine of him were as the remembrances of a cherished friend, who was dead." (DC, 443)

The work of mourning and memory also extends to David's act of writing the autobiography. Robin Gilmour notes that "the rhythm of memory in *David Copperfield* is more than simple nostalgia: it is an imaginative process [...] mediating between different states of being".⁵³ The "different states of being" that Gilmour identifies can be defined as the split between the David Copperfield who is the active participant in his history, and the David Copperfield retelling his own experiences. The division of David's self which is presented in the text leaves him a spectre haunting his own narrative: "Once again, let me pause upon a memorable period of my life. Let me stand aside, to see the phantoms of those days go by me, accompanying the shadow of myself, in dim procession." (DC, 609) Similarly, earlier in the novel, when David describes his return to Blunderstone, the town of his birth, he depicts himself as a ghost "haunting" the lanes of his memory:

For my own part, my occupation in my solitary pilgrimages was to recall every yard of the old road as I went along it, and to haunt the old spots, of which I never tired. I haunted them, as my memory had often done, and lingered among them as my younger thoughts had lingered when I was far away. (DC, 310)

Haunting the text from the inside, in a series of memories, David becomes his own "written memory" (DC, 671: DC, 796).⁵⁴ Indeed, David Copperfield's "written memory" – the text,

⁵³ Robin Gilmour, "Memory in David Copperfield", *The Dickensian* 71 (January 1975): 30-42 (31).

⁵⁴ David's assertion that his autobiographical work is his "written memory" places the text within a long tradition of literary, psychological, and philosophical schools of thought associating the act of memory and the

David Copperfield – is, to all intents and purposes, all the reader has of the character, David Copperfield; he is the sum of his written memories, and nothing more. Moreover, in referring to his autobiography, on two separate occasions, as “my written memory”, David would appear to be aware that his narrative is inextricably linked to his death; that it is, from the beginning, a work of mourning, always already in memory of him, and that he is nothing other than a ghost haunting his text.⁵⁵

David Copperfield is also a work of memory and mourning on the part of Dickens. However, unlike his mourning of Mary Hogarth, which also spills over into his fiction, Dickens does not mourn a relative or a friend in *David Copperfield*. Rather, he mourns his own childhood, and an address: “Warren’s Blacking, 30 Strand”. The seemingly arbitrary and innocuous address of “Warren’s Blacking, 30 Strand” was Dickens’s contribution to “The Memory Game” which formed part of the Dickens family Christmas festivities in 1869. According to Dickens’s son Henry, when reflecting on this incident after his father’s death: ““He gave this [address] with an odd twinkle in his eye and a strange inflection in his voice which at once forcibly arrested my attention and left a vivid impression on my mind for some time afterwards.”” (qtd. Ackroyd, 1117) Henry Dickens was right to suspect that the address his father gave during “The Memory Game” held a wider significance than was immediately apparent. It is now widely known that, after his father’s imprisonment for debt at the Marshalsea Prison, the twelve year-old Dickens was sent to work at Warren’s Blacking Factory, situated in the Strand, where he would paste labels on pots of paste-blackening.

act of writing. Of this tradition linking memory and writing, Plato’s *Phaedrus* is exemplary. As Derrida observes in “Plato’s Pharmacy”, for Plato, writing is figured as the *pharmakon*, simultaneously “a remedy, a beneficial drug” which aids remembrance and also something which poisons memory, “a harmful substance, a philter of forgetfulness” (*Dissemination*, 129).

⁵⁵ Two of the prospective titles for the novel eventually named *David Copperfield* – “The last living speech and confession of Mr. David Copperfield” and “The last Will and Testament of Mr. David Copperfield” – also suggest that, for Dickens, David’s narrative was inextricably linked to death, as well as being figured as a work of mourning; see *DC*, 871-73.

The traumatic effect that working at Warren's Blacking had on Dickens is indisputable. For a young boy expecting to become a middle-class gentleman, the experience was humiliating, and once he had finished working at Warren's Blacking, Dickens, as well as his family, never alluded to the subject of his childhood labour (Ackroyd, 103). Indeed, throughout his life Dickens remained silent upon his time at Warren's, only confiding his secret to his wife Catherine and to Forster. However, in the late 1840s, Dickens, haunted by the memory of his time at Warren's Blacking and the burden of concealing it, "had reached a point where the episode of his childhood humiliation could remain his 'secret' no longer" (Ackroyd, 580).

Around the time in which he was working on *The Haunted Man*, Dickens had planned to write an autobiography, but, significantly, he did not manage to get any further than describing his time at Warren's Blacking. Due to its unfinished state, Dickens's account of his time at Warren's Blacking has since become known as the "Autobiographical Fragment". This document was brought to the public's attention in 1872 when Forster included the material in the first volume of his biography of Dickens. An act of mourning and memory, as well as an act of catharsis, the "Autobiographical Fragment" documents Dickens's sense of outrage and injustice, towards his mother in particular, at being forced to work at such a young age and in such a lowly occupation. In the "Autobiographical Fragment", an incredulous Dickens bemoans: "It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age." (Forster, 1: 21)

While the "Autobiographical Fragment" was not published until after Dickens's death, his fiction provides clues to his childhood experience at Warren's Blacking. In fact, Dickens's work is littered with references to Warren's "Blacking Ware'us", as Joe Gargery pronounces it in *Great Expectations* (GE, 171). Most obviously, there are textual echoes between the "Autobiographical Fragment" and *David Copperfield*. Andrew Sanders observes

that “certain fragments of the autobiographical manuscript [...] clearly bear a similarly verbatim relationship to David’s account of himself” and, as Sanders acknowledges, this is most evident in David’s account of his time working for Murdstone and Grinby (*DC*, 856). “No words can express the secret agony of my soul”, writes Dickens in the “Autobiographical Fragment”, of his time at Warren’s Blacking (Forster, 1: 22). “No words can express the secret agony of my soul”, repeats David Copperfield, referring to his experiences at Murdstone and Grinby’s Blacking warehouse (*DC*, 150).

Other examples of Dickens’s inability to forget his time at Warren’s Blacking, include his first novel *The Pickwick Papers*, serialized from 31 March 1836 to 30 October 1837, in which Mr. Wardle’s servants “speedily produced a bottle of blacking, and some half-dozen brushes” in order to polish Mr. Pickwick’s boots.⁵⁶ In the same novel, Mr. Weller also tells his son Sam of “them low fellows” who work at “Warren’s Blackin” (*PP*, 406). In *Nicholas Nickleby*, published between 31 March 1838 and 30 September 1839, before Newman Noggs hands a letter to Ralph Nickleby, he reads out the address and describes its appearance: “Post-mark, Strand, black wax, black border, woman’s hand, C. N. in the corner.”⁵⁷ Referring to his years of impoverishment, Mr. Bounderby, in *Hard Times*, claims: “For years upon years, the only pictures in my possession [...] were the engravings of a man shaving himself in a boot, on the blacking bottles that I was overjoyed to use in cleaning boots with” (*HT*, 223). In *Barnaby Rudge*, the house belonging to the Haredale’s is called “the Warren”.⁵⁸ And, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the narrator details the philosophy behind the new “hybrid hotel[s]” that are “timidly beginning to spring up”, which “gives the traveller to understand that it does not expect him [...] to order a pint of sweet blacking for his drinking [...] but insinuates that he may have his boots blacked instead of his stomach” (*ED*,

⁵⁶ Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, ed. James Kinsley (1986; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 60; henceforth *PP*.

⁵⁷ Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, ed. Paul Schlicke (1990; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 18; henceforth *Nickleby*.

⁵⁸ Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, ed. John Bowen (London: Penguin, 2003), 101.

205). This brief list of references is by no means exhaustive. It does not include, for example, the many prisons that form such an important element of Dickens's fiction, which hark back to his experience of visiting his father at the Marshalsea Prison. Nor does it mention Dickens's co-worker at Warren's Blacking, a certain Bob Fagin, whose surname would reappear in *Oliver Twist*. When it came to the address "Warren's Blacking, 30 Strand", Dickens, it seems, had been playing "The Memory Game" throughout his literary career.

Discussing the importance of Dickens's time at Warren's Blacking in terms of his life and fiction, Bodenheimer writes:

All roads, it sometimes seems, lead back to Warren's Blacking [...] Ever since Dickens's closest friend and biographer John Forster published Dickens's autobiographical fragment in the first volume of *The Life of Charles Dickens*, it has been impossible to separate Dickens from the memory of his employment at Warren's. (Bodenheimer, 17)

More than merely a "memory", however, Dickens's obsession with his brief time at Warren's Blacking is also an act of mourning. Like the constant references and allusions, in his letters and fiction, to Mary Hogarth, Dickens memorializes his time at Warren's Blacking in his fiction in an endless process of mourning for his lost childhood, for the young Charles Dickens. Indeed, the "Autobiographical Fragment" includes phrases that not only suggest a traumatic childhood experience, but also, an act of mourning. For example, Dickens speaks of his "deep remembrance", and of his "misery [...] that day by day, what I had learned [...] was passing away from me, never to be brought back anymore" (Forster, 1: 22). He also describes how he was "miserably unhappy" (Forster, 1: 26). Even returning to the neighbourhood where Warren's Blacking was situated could recall a remembrance verging upon mourning: "My old way home by the borough made me cry, after my eldest child could speak." (Forster, 1: 33)

Moreover, at the time of writing the "Autobiographical Fragment", Dickens was still unable to come to terms with the loss of his childhood: "My whole nature was so penetrated

with [...] grief and humiliation [...] that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life.” (Forster, 1: 23) Once again, the phrase “grief and humiliation” is suggestive of an act of mourning on Dickens’s part. As the passage also indicates, however, what Dickens mourns – his younger self – has not died. Rather, the child Dickens remains within the adult Dickens, as a memory which lives on; a memory not only mourned, but also, resurrected. Such an act of mourning and memory is also suggested in *David Copperfield* when David writes after returning to the area in which he worked at Murdstone and Grinby’s Blacking warehouse: “When I tread the old ground, I do not wonder that I seem to see and pity, going on before me, an innocent romantic boy, making his imaginative world out of such strange experiences and sordid things!” (DC, 164)

The 1867 preface to “The Charles Dickens Edition” of *David Copperfield*, arguably Dickens’s most memorable, likewise indicates that the child Dickens lives on inside the adult Dickens. In the preface, Dickens writes:

Of all my books, I like this the best. It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my hearts of hearts a favourite child. And his name is DAVID COPPERFIELD.⁵⁹

On the surface this seems like another example of how “[i]n patriarchal Western culture [...] the text’s author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis.”⁶⁰ In addition to this possible reading of the preface, however, something far stranger is happening. Although the comparison of a child to an author’s literary progeny is a fairly common one, particularly in the nineteenth century.

⁵⁹ Charles Dickens, “Preface to the Charles Dickens Edition”, in Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. Nina Burgis (1983; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 870; henceforth Dickens, *DC Preface*.

⁶⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979; New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2000), 6; henceforth Gilbert and Gubar. Gilbert and Gubar cite Gerard Manley Hopkins’s 1886 letter to R. W. Dixon as an example of this ubiquitous practice: “The artist’s ‘most essential quality’, he declared, is ‘masterly execution, which is a kind of male gift, and especially marks off men from women, the begetting of one’s thought on paper, on verse, or whatever the matter is.’” (Gilbert and Gubar, 3)

Dickens's preface offers a striking example.

As outlined above, *David Copperfield* was written shortly after Dickens had planned to write an autobiography, of which only the "Autobiographical Fragment" that appeared in Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* is known to exist, and is commonly seen as a story based upon Dickens's own childhood experiences, and his later life as a writer. Therefore, there is a sense in which, in the preface, Dickens divides himself in two; not merely becoming at once a "fond parent" and a "favourite child", but, more specifically, the "fond parent" of his own childhood, his younger self. Like the precocious Master Harry, in Dickens's 1855 Christmas tale "The Boots", with the 1867 preface to *David Copperfield* it is "as if he had been his own father" (CS, 114).⁶¹ More than this, however, by figuring himself as his own "favourite child" in the 1867 preface to *David Copperfield*, Dickens contains both his lost childhood and, by association, his novel within his, decidedly paternal, authorial signature; which, by 1867, was that of the late Dickens.

Dickens's conflation of his childhood and his fiction in the preface means that he internalizes his sense of mourning for his lost childhood within his authorial identity, a loss imaginatively recast in a novel concerned with acts of memory and mourning, and which is itself mourned by Dickens in its own right after the conclusion of its serialization. This is significant because Dickens does precisely the same thing in his reading tours, with the notable difference that, rather than mourning his lost childhood through his fiction, he mourns the loss of the earlier incarnation of his authorial self: "the young Dickens".

III

Like his earlier review of *Great Expectations*, E.S. Dallas's review of *Our Mutual Friend*, which appeared in *The Times* on 29 November 1865, sets up an opposition between the early and late Dickens. In contrast to James, who, in the review quoted above, declared the novel

⁶¹ In 1858, renamed "Boots at the Holly-Tree Inn", "The Boots" was added to Dickens's public reading repertoire.

“the poorest of Mr. Dickens’s works”; Dallas regards *Our Mutual Friend* as one of “Mr. Dickens’ best works”:

It would not be wonderful if so voluminous an author should now show some signs of exhaustion. On the contrary, here he is in greater force than ever [...] We hear people say, “He has never surpassed *Pickwick*.” They talk of *Pickwick* as if it were his masterpiece. We do not yield to anyone in our enjoyment of that extraordinary work [...] But we refuse to measure a work of art by the amount of visible effect it produces [...] What if we allow that *Our Mutual Friend* is not nearly so funny as *Pickwick*? It is infinitely better than *Pickwick* in all the higher qualities of a novel, and [...] we class it with Mr. Dickens’ best works. (James, “Our Mutual Friend”, 853: *DCH*, 466)

Dickens was so pleased by Dallas’s favourable review that he presented him with the manuscript of the novel. Ackroyd claims that the motivation behind Dickens’s unprecedented act of generosity towards Dallas is a manifestation of the insecurity he felt concerning the worth and popularity of his later fiction. For Ackroyd, Dickens craved “the kind of praise that preferred his later novels to his early ones”: “Of all things this is what he most wanted to hear: that he had never deteriorated, that he was still at the height of his powers.” (Ackroyd, 1022) However, whilst there is truth in Ackroyd’s comment concerning Dickens’s desire for his later fiction to be as highly thought of as his early fiction, such a statement is too simplistic. For example, Ackroyd ignores Dickens’s public readings, in which he had been setting up a direct comparison between his early and late novels for over ten years before the publication of *Our Mutual Friend*.

One of the notable aspects of Dickens’s readings is his reliance on texts from his early period, the era of “the young Dickens”. Philip Collins observes that a “striking feature of [Dickens’s] repertoire is that it over-represents the earlier fiction”, a portion of which had been “familiar for over twenty years before he began performing them” (*Public Readings*, lxv). Collins goes on to say:

the novels from which he gave Readings [...] were, as they still are, the essential “popular” Dickens. During his lifetime, the earlier novels were also more esteemed, as well as more loved [...] So in confining his Readings to his earlier novels, as in relying so heavily upon the *Carol*, Dickens was – whether to please them, or himself,

or both – giving his public what he rightly guessed they would most want. (*Public Readings*, lxvi)

Like returning to the style of “the young Dickens” in *Great Expectations*, Dickens, when selecting material for his readings, was aware of the nostalgic longing that the public entertained for his early work, and catered for this in his performances. Therefore, if, as Ackroyd claims, Dickens was desirous that his late fiction received the same critical and popular adulation as his early work, and was sensitive to any criticism that compared his later novels with his earlier ones, it would appear a strange move on his part to set up such a striking juxtaposition of these two periods of his authorial identity in his readings. Moreover, as Schlicke notes, Dickens was aware that “contemporary readers of his later works longed for the exuberant delights they had savoured in *Pickwick*”, and even “the shorter works selected [for the readings] which he had written at later dates – *Boots at the Holly-Tree Inn* (1855), *Doctor Marigold* (1865) – were emphatically in the vein of his earlier fiction” (Schlicke, 229).

The omission of Dickens’s novels published after 1850 from his reading repertoire has not been sufficiently explained. As his decision to give readings of *Boots at the Holly-Tree Inn* and *Doctor Marigold* illustrates, Dickens could just as easily have chosen texts from his later period in his performances. It is significant that, on the whole, Dickens did not decide to do this. There are, of course, practical reasons for Dickens’s omission of his post-1850s novels; not least that at the beginning of the 1850s, when Dickens began the readings, many of them were not yet written. However, this does not account for the fact that in 1861, nearly ten years into his career as a public reader, Dickens should add readings from *David Copperfield*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Pickwick Papers* to his repertoire – all first published prior to 1851 – but not the reading text of *Great Expectations*, which he had been preparing at the same time.

One possible reason accounting for Dickens's decision to mainly draw upon his early fiction in the readings has been offered by Collins, who notes that, from the beginning, Dickens:

evidently judged that public readings were not the occasion for social criticism. Passages such as Scrooge's vision of Ignorance and Want were deleted in the Reading texts: and this may be one reason why the later and "darker" novels struck him as less appropriate for Reading purposes. (*Public Readings*, lxv)

However, this does not explain why Dickens does not perform the reading taken from *Great Expectations*. As Dallas's review makes clear, at the time of its publication *Great Expectations* was viewed as a throw-back to Dickens's early period and, unlike novels such as *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, or *Our Mutual Friend*, it is not a text renowned for its "social criticism". Similarly, Collins also proposes that because Dickens regarded the readings as light-hearted "entertainments" he may have considered "the later and 'darker' novels" inappropriate for his purposes (*Public Readings*, lxv). If this is true, however, it does not account for Dickens's decision to include the "storm" scene from *David Copperfield* in his readings; nor his brutal rendition of Sikes's murder of Nancy, in the reading taken from *Oliver Twist*. A possible reason that Collins does not give, is that Dickens's earlier novels are more "episodic" and, therefore, more congenial to adaptation into the reading text format. But again, such an explanation seems inadequate in accounting for the predominance of Dickens's early novels in his repertoire.

The answer to the question why Dickens, in the readings, should mainly turn to his early fiction may be found in the manner of his performance. As Malcolm Andrews explains, Dickens's familiarity with the reading texts – made more familiar with each public performance – means that applying the term "readings" to Dickens's performances is something of a misnomer: "By the time the Readings were ready for public performance, Dickens would have come to know much of the text by heart, and the cut-and-pasted, inkily

‘cobwebbed’ prompt-copies became increasingly superfluous aids.”⁶² “[H]is books had become props”, Andrews adds: “They lay on the Reading desk. Dickens glanced at them from time to time, and would flick pages over, but he was no longer reading from them.” (Andrews, 136)

Observing one of Dickens’s readings, Andrews writes, “was like watching the man create his fictions - *become* his fictions - in a furnace of energy” (Andrews, viii, original emphasis). Andrews’s claim is backed up by Kent, a contemporary eyewitness, who writes of Dickens’s performances: “character after character appeared before us, living and breathing, in the flesh, as we looked and listened [...] his individuality, so to express it, altogether disappeared” (Kent, 31-32). Dickens was able to perform, rather than merely read, his texts on stage by virtue of rehearsing each reading for three months at a time to ensure that his performance was flawless and that the reading was embedded in his memory. To give an idea of the painstaking and gruelling rehearsal process that Dickens employed in terms of his preparation for the readings, Collins notes that Dickens “claimed to have rehearsed *Doctor Marigold* over two hundred times” (*Public Readings*, xxxii).

In his readings, then, the spectacle of Dickens’s performing body would merge with the Dickens corpus, allowing his fictions to return to life onstage, as well as his earlier authorial self to be resurrected.⁶³ The ways in which, Dickens, during the readings, internalizes his earlier authorial self – “the young Dickens” – within his performing body is analogous to the manner in which the young Dickens lives on inside the adult Dickens in his description of his experience of working at Warren’s Blacking. In both instances, Dickens does not mourn his childhood or “the young Dickens” in the conventional sense. Rather,

⁶² Malcolm Andrews, *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves* (2006; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 95; henceforth Andrews.

⁶³ “The similarity between the body as corpse and the text as corpus is not just a metaphoric or etymological issue, it goes to the very essence of our experience of being bodies in the world, our means of conveying that experience through linguistic materials, and our profound inability to put that experience into material form”; see William Watkin, *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 86.

Dickens entombs his younger self in an internal, bodily crypt, in a process that Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok refer to as “inexpressible mourning” – “No words can express the secret agony of my soul”, writes Dickens in the “Autobiographical Fragment” – or “incorporation”.⁶⁴ Drawing upon Freud’s metapsychological work, in particular Freud’s 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia”, Abraham’s and Torok’s theory of mourning centres upon the figure of the “crypt”, which they define as “a secret tomb inside the [mourning] subject” (Abraham and Torok, *MM*, 130). Before examining Abraham’s and Torok’s work in terms of Dickens’s readings, I will briefly outline the contrasts and continuities between their theory of mourning and that of Freud’s.

In “Mourning and Melancholia”, Freud examines the correlation between what he terms “the normal affect of mourning” and the pathological condition of melancholia.⁶⁵ For Freud, “the normal affect of mourning” is a painful, but necessary, process that “impels the ego to give up the object [the person who has died] by declaring the object to be dead and offering the ego the inducement of continuing to live” (Freud, 267). That is, Freud argues, the “normal” work of mourning is complete when the dead are accepted as dead and are, so to speak, internalized into the mourner’s body; then, and only then, can the mourning process end.

Like the work of mourning, Freud asserts, melancholia “may be the reaction to the loss of a loved object” (Freud, 259). Unlike the work of mourning, however, in cases of melancholia, the “loved object” may not have “actually died, but has been lost as an object of love” and, what is more, cannot be given up or accepted as dead, whether literally or metaphorically speaking (Freud, 253). In contrast, to “normal mourning”, then, which as

⁶⁴ Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, “Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation”, in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 125-38 (130); henceforth Abraham and Torok, *MM*.

⁶⁵ Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia”, in Sigmund Freud, *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, The Penguin Freud Library vol. 11, trans. James Strachey, ed. Angela Richards (1984; London: Penguin, 1991), 245-68 (251); henceforth Freud.

Nicholas Rand explains involves a “gradual acceptance of loss”, melancholia is distinguished by a refusal to mourn, an inability to accept that the “loved object” is lost or dead.⁶⁶

Consequently, in contrast to “normal mourning”, the refusal to mourn that characterizes Freud’s account of melancholia means that the lost “object of love” cannot be truly internalized within the mourner’s ego, resulting in a mourning that does not fully begin and yet never ends.

Freud’s distinction between “normal mourning” and “melancholia” was taken up in the 1960s and 1970s by Abraham and Torok. In their work, Abraham and Torok refer to Freud’s notion of “normal mourning” as “introjection”; whereas, “pathological mourning” is termed “incorporation”.⁶⁷ For Abraham and Torok, when the work of mourning is unsuccessful, the lost love object is “incorporated” inside the mourner’s body, an act “which leads to the establishment of a sealed-off psychic place, a crypt in the ego” (Abraham and Torok, *LOM*, 141). Elsewhere, Abraham and Torok write: “The crypt marks a definite place in the topography. It is neither the dynamic unconscious nor the ego of introjections. Rather, it is an enclave between the two, a kind of artificial unconscious, lodged in the very midst of the ego [...] The ego is given the task of a cemetery guard.”⁶⁸ In this crypt, for Abraham and Torok, the “lost object” is “buried alive” within the mourner’s body, which it forms part of without forming part: “It [the “lost object”] is memory entombed in a fast and secure place, awaiting resurrection.” (Abraham and Torok, *MM*, 130; Abraham and Torok, *LOM*, 141)

Like Abraham’s and Torok’s notion of “incorporation”, I claim, “the young Dickens” is “entombed” within Dickens’s performing body during the readings, as if it were a crypt, a

⁶⁶ Nicholas Rand, “Introduction: Renewals of Psychoanalysis”, in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1-22 (8).

⁶⁷ Maria Torok, “The Illness of Mourning”, in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 107-24 (113).

⁶⁸ Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, “The Topography of Reality: Sketching a Metapsychology of Secrets”, in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 157-64 (159); henceforth Abraham and Torok, *Topography*.

memory not only mourned, but also, “awaiting resurrection”.

During the period in which Dickens undertook the readings, crypts – both literal and metaphorical – feature in several of his texts. In *Great Expectations*, the room in Satis House where Miss Havisham spends her days mourning her lost love, like a Freudian “melancholic”, is also the room in which her corpse will lie-in-state, exhibited for all to see: “‘This’, said she, pointing to the long table with her stick, ‘is where I will be laid when I am dead. They shall come and look at me here.’” (*GE*, 70) However, Miss Havisham, who lives among “pale decayed objects” and is described by Pip as “corpse-like” – as well as wearing a “withered bridal dress” which looked “like grave-clothes” and a “long veil so like a shroud” – is already buried alive in a crypt of her own making (*GE*, 52). Indeed, it is significant that when recalling seeing Miss Havisham for the first time, Pip compares her appearance to that “of bodies buried in ancient times” (*GE*, 52).

Crypts also feature in Dickens’s journalism. In his 16 May 1863 article for *All the Year Round*, entitled “Some Recollections of Mortality”, Dickens, in his guise as “The Uncommercial Traveller”, recounts a visit to the Paris morgue, as well as his role as a member of a jury which acquits a young mother from the charge of infanticide. The body of the dead child, the narrator writes, was kept “[i]n a kind of crypt devoted to the warehousing of the parochial coffins” (*SJ*, 108). In an earlier article, “Travelling Abroad”, first published on 7 April 1860 in *All the Year Round* and which also formed part of “The Uncommercial Traveller” series, Dickens, or, rather, the narrator, revisits the Paris morgue: “Whenever I am at Paris, I am dragged by invisible force into the Morgue. I never want to go there, but am always pulled there.” (*SJ*, 196) Before describing what he encounters during his visit to the public morgue, the narrator of “Travelling Abroad” recalls two corpses that he had witnessed on two previous occasions. Firstly, the narrator remembers “[o]ne Christmas Day” in which he was “attracted in, to see an old grey man lying all alone on his cold bed” (*SJ*, 196). The

second memory of the Paris morgue concerns “[o]ne New Year’s Morning” where, according to the narrator, he “was pulled in again to look at a flaxen-haired boy of eighteen” (*SJ*, 196).

After remembering these two bodies the narrator describes the corpse of a drowned man that he encounters on his most recent visit:

This time, I was forced into the same dread place, to see a large dark man whose disfigurement by water was in a frightful manner comic, and whose expression was that of a prize-fighter who had closed his eyelids under a heavy blow, but was going immediately to open them, shake his head, and “come up smiling.” Oh what this large dark man cost me in that bright city! (*SJ*, 196)

What “this large dark man” “costs” the narrator is his peace of mind during his sojourn on the Continent. The corpse of the “large dark man”, housed in the Paris morgue, reappears in “Travelling Abroad” to haunt the narrator’s memory, we are informed, for “about a week” afterwards, in a series of uncanny visions (*SJ*, 198). Even when the ghost of the “large dark man’s” disfigured corpse is apparently exorcized, and the visions cease, the narrator returns to the morgue to view the body, one final time, as he prepares to depart from Paris.

Earlier on in the piece, the narrator relates his meeting with a “very queer small boy.” (*SJ*, 193) After conversing with the “very queer small boy”, the narrator “took him up” and walks on until reaching Gads-Hill, where his young companion states: ““This is [...] where Falstaff went out to rob those travellers, and ran away.”” (*SJ*, 193) Impressed by his erudition, the narrator asks the “very queer young boy” if he “admires” Gads-Hill, to which he replies:

when I was not more than half as old as nine, it used to be a treat for me to be brought to look at it. And ever since I can recollect, my father, seeing me so fond of it, has often said to me, “If you were to be very persevering and were to work hard, you might some day come to live in it.” (*SJ*, 194)

Shortly afterward this conversation, the narrator “dropped the very queer small boy and went on”; but not before reflecting on the boy’s appreciation of Gads-Hill: “I was rather amazed to be told this by the very queer small boy; for that house happens to be *my* house, and I have reason to believe that what he said was true.” (*SJ*, 194, original emphasis) In fact, Gads-Hill “happened” to be Dickens’s home at the time of writing “Travelling Abroad”, and “true” the

“very queer small boy’s” comments certainly were. As David Pascoe notes, the “very queer small boy” represents “Dickens as a child.”⁶⁹ (SJ, 613) Moreover, the story that he puts into the boy’s mouth corresponds with a passage in Forster’s *Life of Charles Dickens*:

amid the recollections connected with his childhood it [Gads-Hill] held always a prominent place, for upon first seeing it [...] with his father, and looking up at it with much admiration, he had been promised that he might himself live in it or in some such house when he became a man, if he would only work hard enough. (Forster, 1: 5)

The narrator’s “amazement” at the “very queer small boy’s” remarks concerning Gads-Hill, and his belief in their truth, then, lie in the fact that it is a repetition of Dickens’s own experience, his own childhood recollections. The fact that Dickens does not spell out the connection between himself, the narrator, and the “very queer small boy”, in “Travelling Abroad”, does not diminish the effect of the piece. Rather, it accentuates the strangeness of the article, in that, like the autobiographical elements of *David Copperfield*, it yet again highlights Dickens’s desire to keep his private memories to himself, while, at the same time, publishing them for all to read.

Mirroring the uncanny visions of the “large dark man” housed in the Paris morgue, visions which recur in the narrator’s mind, Dickens’s memory of himself as a young boy returns to haunt him within the text. That these “visions” concern a body housed in a crypt is significant, as is the fact that Dickens should at once reveal and conceal the biographical implications of the piece. Commenting upon Abraham and Torok’s work, Derrida writes: “The grounds [*lieux*] [of the crypt] are so disposed as to disguise and to hide: something, always a body in some way. But also to disguise the act of hiding and to hide the disguise: the crypt hides as it holds.”⁷⁰ Like Derrida’s discussion of a psychic crypt, in presenting one crypt in “Travelling Abroad”, in his recounting of the Paris morgue, Dickens hides another

⁶⁹ Forster confirms: “The queer small boy was indeed [Dickens].” (Forster, 1:5)

⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Foreword: *Fors*: The Anglish Words of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok”, trans. Barbara Johnson, in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolfman’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), xi-xlviii (xiv); henceforth Derrida, *Wolfman*.

within his text in which he entombs his younger self. In this respect, the narrator's reluctance to provide a name for "the very queer small boy" in "Travelling Abroad" becomes important. For Abraham and Torok, Jodey Castricano notes, "the crypt [...] hides and hold[s] the unnameable".⁷¹ The links between "Travelling Abroad" and Abraham and Torok's theory of "incorporation" does not end with the notion of a concealed, yet revealed, secret. The fact that the narrator "took [...] up" the "very queer small boy" – that is, carried him in his arms – is invested with a deeper significance than is immediately apparent. In Abraham's and Torok's work, the verb "to carry" signifies the act of "incorporation", the internalisation of a lost object; like the "boy" under their analysis "who 'carried' inside him his [dead] sister" (Abraham and Torok, *MM*, 130).

The crypt housed within Cloisterham's Cathedral, in *Edwin Drood*, plays an ominous and prominent role in the portion of the narrative that was published before Dickens's death and, had he finished the novel, may have been the place in which Edwin Drood's body was eventually discovered. Described as "that secret place", the crypt in *Edwin Drood* becomes a literalized version of Abraham's and Torok's psychic crypt, the metaphorical walls of which are erected upon a repressed secret (*ED*, 28).⁷² Early on in the narrative, the narrator informs us that, in terms of "the Cathedral crypt", the stonemason Stony Durdles – who suffers from "Tombatism"; a form of rheumatism which is an occupational hazard in his line of work as "a stonemason; chiefly in the gravestone, tomb, and monument way" – is "better acquainted than any living authority; it may even be than any dead one" (*ED*, 28-30).

A.O.J. Cockshut claims that *Edwin Drood* "synthesize[s] two periods of a great career": the early Dickens and the late Dickens (Cockshut, 233). For Cockshut, *Edwin Drood* "seems to be in some ways a regression to the author's more superficial early style" and "may at first sight look very like the second childhood of his talent" (Cockshut, 228). In Cockshut's

⁷¹ Jodey Castricano, *Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 46.

⁷² See Abraham and Torok, *Topography*, 157-64.

opinion it is in the depiction of Durdles which most prominently illustrates the return of Dickens's "more superficial early style": "It is here that we can see most clearly how the old and new Dickens are united in an exciting new pattern [...] Durdles, as a character, is bizarre early Dickens." (Cockshut, 232-33) Cockshut's singling out of Durdles as a character that is as much the product of the early Dickens, as his later authorial incarnation, is significant. For Marisa Sestito, the character of Stony Durdles figures as Dickens's double within the narrative: "owning a name with seven letters like Dickens, beginning and ending with the same sounds of D and S, he seems to be a very carefully disguised alter-ego, who is allowed, under dust and dirt, to show some specific and identifiable traits of the artist, and of the interrelation between author and narrator".⁷³ Sestito's suggestive claim is backed-up in *Edwin Drood* when, referring to himself in the third person as if he were the narrator as well as the author of the novel, Durdles tells John Jasper: "Durdles was making his reflections here when you come up, sir, surrounded by his works, like a poplar [*sic*] author." (*ED*, 33) The "works" that Durdles speaks of are the sarcophagi, monuments, and gravestones that he has produced, and which are housed in Cloisterham's graveyard. Durdles's familiarity with the strangeness of "that secret place", "the Cathedral crypt", not only suggests that an author's corpus is a work of mourning (their body of work analogous to a corpse – or corpses – housed in a crypt), but also, provides a key to unlock the Dickensian crypt: the public readings. Like Dickens's performances in the readings, Durdles is at once an author and a character in *Edwin Drood* and, also like Dickens's readings, he is an amalgamation of the early and late Dickens. The full disclosure of the Dickensian crypt, however, demands a close reading of one of the most enigmatic – or, rather, cryptic – scenes in *Our Mutual Friend*, the predecessor to *Edwin Drood*.

⁷³ Marisa Sestito, "Original Imitations", in Clotilde de Stasio, Carlo Pagetti and Alessandro Vescovi, ed., *Dickens: The Craft of Fiction and the Challenges of Reading* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2000), 166-75 (174).

Our Mutual Friend begins with Gaffer Hexam and his daughter Lizzie dredging what is believed to be the drowned corpse of John Harmon out of the Thames. The corpse that is mistakenly thought to be Harmon's drowned body is in fact that of George Radfoot who, after drugging and robbing Harmon, and disposing of Harmon's body in the Thames, is himself attacked and thrown into the river by his villainous cohorts. Unlike Radfoot, Harmon survives his near drowning and hears of his supposed death after reading a poster announcing that a body has been found answering to his description at a local police station. Disguised as "Julius Handford", Harmon goes to observe Radfoot's corpse in what is termed a "cool grot" in the yard of the police station – the root meaning of "grot" being "crypt" (*OMF*, 33). Harmon is simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by Radfoot's corpse, which doubles as his own, at once feeling impelled to observe the body, and yet describing it as "a horrible sight!" (*OMF*, 34). Significantly, Harmon does not inform the police inspector that he has made a mistake concerning the identity of the drowned corpse. Instead, Harmon leaves the police inspector in the belief that he has correctly identified the body as his own; that it is Harmon's drowned corpse, and not Radfoot's. Henceforth, Harmon assumes the name and identity of "John Rokesmith" and lives his life as if "John Harmon is dead." (*OMF*, 366)

Although declaring that "John Harmon is dead", Harmon – as Rokesmith – finds it difficult to accept his self-imposed death and remains haunted by his earlier self; that is, Harmon finds that he cannot mourn his own death; indeed, to mourn one's own death would be to experience the impossible. Despite taking on the identity of "John Rokesmith" and, as the narrator puts it, "heap[ing] mounds upon mounds of earth over John Harmon's grave", in an attempt to metaphorically bury his former self, his true identity of "John Harmon" constantly resurfaces (*OMF*, 372). Partially "buried" within his new identity of John Rokesmith, Harmon is figured as being at once dead and alive – "the living-dead man", as the narrator calls him – and lives on as a ghostly presence within his own body (*OMF*, 367-72).

By attempting to “bury” John Harmon “fathoms deep”, as the narrator puts it, in his adoption of the guise of “John Rokesmith”, Harmon can be seen to inter his former self – “John Harmon” – in a bodily crypt (*OMF*, 372). Harmon’s act – as Rokesmith – of attempting to “bury” his former self within his new identity, then, can be seen to parallel Harmon’s act of observing what is believed to be his own dead body in the police station’s “cool grot”. In both instances Harmon’s body is made strange and other to himself and, in both cases, Harmon finds it impossible to come to terms with, and to mourn, his own death.

The scene in which Harmon visits what is supposed to be his own corpse housed in the police station’s “cool grot”, mirrors Abraham’s and Torok’s concept of “incorporation” and, in particular, Derrida’s interpretation of their theory of an “endocryptic” mourning (Abraham and Torok, *LOM*, 142). “[T]he crypt in this instance”, Derrida explains, “is that which is constituted as a crypt in the body for the dead object in a case of unsuccessful mourning, mourning that has not been brought to a normal conclusion”: “Not having been taken back inside the self, digested, assimilated as in all “normal” mourning, the dead object remains like a living dead abscessed in a specific spot in the ego.”⁷⁴ In this psychic crypt, Derrida adds: “The incorporated dead, which one has not really managed to take upon oneself, continues to lodge there like something other” (*Ear of the Other*, 57-58).

On seeing his own dead body, which is and is not his corpse, Harmon cannot successfully mourn his own passing. Instead, Harmon, who is a literal “lodger” at the Wilfer residence, “lodges” within the assumed identity of “John Rokesmith” – at once dead and alive – “like something other”, to use Derrida’s phrase (*OMF*, 115). The fact that Harmon is attempting to “incorporate” his own death within his body literalizes the sense of “otherness”, a division within the same, that Derrida identifies as constituting a fundamental part of Abraham’s and Torok’s theory of an “endocryptic” mourning. Harmon’s unsuccessful

⁷⁴ Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie McDonald and trans., Peggy Kamuf (1985; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 57; henceforth *Ear of the Other*.

attempt to mourn his self-imposed death, and his semi-internalisation – or “incorporation” – of his former self within the body of his new identity of “John Rokesmith”, leads Harmon to an act of mourning as endless as it is impossible. It is precisely this endless and impossible attempt to mourn one’s own death that Dickens attempts with the public readings of his earlier texts, and which, by exposing on stage, he allows his audience to participate in.

The importance of the audience to Dickens’s readings cannot be overestimated. As Schlicke notes, “the rapport between himself and his audiences had become so much the spirit of the readings” (Schlicke, 227). Indeed, more than anything else, it was the audience’s emotional response to his readings, the outpouring and sharing of their private feelings in public, which Dickens valued the most when performing. He would often preface his readings with a direct appeal to his audience to “give expression to any emotion, whether grave or gay, and to do so “with perfect freedom from restraint, and without the least apprehension of disturbing me” (Fielding, 169).

Undoubtedly, part of the pleasure derived from watching Dickens’s performances of characters such as Sam Weller, Mrs. Gamp, and Scrooge, in his readings was their familiarity to the audiences. For example, Kent writes of the wilful amnesia the typical audience attending the readings would affect: “many passages were, almost word for word, remembered by those who, nevertheless, listened as if curious to learn what might follow” (Kent, 98). Similarly, when Dickens was reading “The Trial from *Pickwick*” in Boston, during his tour of America, Dolby, who managed Dickens’s tours from the mid-1860s onwards, recalls: “nearly every line of ‘*Pickwick*’ was as well known to the audience as to himself” (Dolby, 175). Offering his public a night of nostalgia by assuming the guise of popular characters from his literary past what Dickens displays onstage during the readings is a performance of “the young Dickens”. Such an authorial resurrection offered in the readings necessitates that Dickens should turn to his early rather than late work. In returning to the

early novels during the readings, what Dickens presents on stage is not only an embodied memory of his literary past, shared by himself and the collective body of his audience, but also, a common sense of loss, an expression of mourning for “the young Dickens”. Like Harmon’s attempt to “bury” his former self within his assumed identity of “John Rokesmith”, Dickens contains his former self – “the young Dickens” – within his performing body: where it is lodged, at once dead and alive, in a strange, and cryptic, self-haunting.

Dickens’s cryptic internalisation of “the young Dickens” during the readings is suggested by a review of an 1869 performance of “Sikes and Nancy”, the reading taken from *Oliver Twist*. Commenting upon Dickens’s performance of “Sikes and Nancy”, on 14 January 1869, the reviewer for *Freeman’s Journal* states: “It can honestly be said that Mr. Dickens is the greatest reader of the greatest writer of the age.” (qtd. *Public Readings*, liv) For David Cole, the review of Dickens’s performance of “Sikes and Nancy”, which appears in *Freeman’s Journal*, describes “a moment of vertiginous double vision”: “The author splits in two before our eyes: this ‘greatest writer’ whose ‘greatest reader’ Mr. Dickens is – is he, then, *another* than Mr. Dickens? How many novelists can you find on this platform?”⁷⁵ The answer to Cole’s question is: at least two novelists; because what Cole identifies in the reviewer’s “moment of vertiginous double vision” is not only the sundering of Dickens’s authorial selves, as reader and writer of his own work; but also, the construction of an authorial identity that merges his past and present selves: the early Dickens and the late Dickens.

Echoing the scene in which Harmon visits what is believed to be his own corpse and his later attempt to mourn his own “death”, Dickens’s readings can be seen to expose, through the spectacle of his performing body, the “living-dead” corpse of “the young Dickens”. Just as Harmon “fails” to mourn his own death, for Dickens, this mourning process

⁷⁵ David Cole, *Acting as Reading: The Place of the Reading Process in the Actor’s Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 233.

remains incomplete, with each performance of the readings testifying to his inability to mourn the passing of “the young Dickens”. This scene of an incomplete, endless, and impossible mourning is evident in Dickens’s stubborn insistence on continuing the readings, night after night, even when it was clear that it was endangering his health, even his life. Contained within the performing body of the later Dickens, as if housed within a crypt, with each performance of the readings the early or “young Dickens” returns to life onstage. But, by the same token, the end of each performance heralds yet another “death” for “the young Dickens”, and the resumption of an act of mourning as endless as it is impossible.

Shortly after he became a professional public reader, in 1858, Dickens published a short story in *All the Year Round*’s 1859 Christmas book *The Haunted House*, entitled “The Ghost in Master B.’s Room”. In “The Ghost in Master B.’s Room”, the narrator tells us that the ghost haunting the room of the title is nothing other than “the ghost of my own childhood, the ghost of my own innocence”: “Many a time have I pursued the phantom: never with this man’s stride of mine to come up with it, never with these man’s hands of mine to touch it, never more to this man’s heart of mine to hold it in its purity.”⁷⁶ Like the narrator of “The Ghost in Master B.’s Room”, Dickens pursues the ghost of his younger self in performing the readings. Also like the narrator of the short story, however, Dickens’s desire to “pursue the phantom” of his younger self is doomed to failure. Dwelling in “the haunted house” of Dickens’s fiction, the readings testify to an incomplete and unsuccessful mourning for “the young Dickens”.

In an examination of the intertextual relationship between *Our Mutual Friend* and *Oliver Twist*, which, I argue, Dickens figures as a form of postal correspondence, the next chapter will discuss another aspect of Dickens’s resurrection of “the young Dickens”. More than

⁷⁶ Charles Dickens, “The Ghost in Master B.’s Room”, in Charles Dickens, *The Haunted House* (London: Hesperus Press, 2003), 71-81 (81).

simply a return to or a repetition of the central themes, tenets, and issues, first developed in *Oliver Twist*, I contend, *Our Mutual Friend* operates as a form of literary “reply” to his earlier novel and, consequently, his earlier authorial self, “the young Dickens”. However, like the first section of the present chapter, in which the notion of a return home is problematized, Dickens’s return to his earlier novel in *Our Mutual Friend* is not guaranteed. Just as Mr. Venus tells Silas Wegg in *Our Mutual Friend* that he cannot articulate his “miscellaneous” amputated leg because Wegg has “got a twist in that bone”, in the next chapter, I argue, Dickens’s later novel cannot be re-joined or returned to *Oliver Twist* fully (*OMF*, 85).

The present chapter’s discussion of the Dickensian crypt is not without relevance in terms of the next chapter’s investigation of the post in Dickens. For Derrida, crypts and postcards share an essential relation in that they are both “half-private half-public, neither the one nor the other”: “there are nothing but postcards, anonymous morsels without fixed domicile, without legitimate addressee, letters open, but like crypts”.⁷⁷ Schad has highlighted how, like Derrida, Dickens’s 1846 travelogue *Pictures from Italy*, the first third of which was originally published under the title “Travelling Letters”, associates crypts and postcards (Schad, 7). Likewise, I argue in the next chapter, in *Our Mutual Friend*, a novel which Nicholas Royle describes as having a “cryptic character”, Dickens makes a similar connection between crypts and the post; a fact evident in the “Postscript, in Lieu of Preface” – or post-crypt – which supplements the text.⁷⁸ It is to the cryptic postal correspondence between *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend* that I now turn.

⁷⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (1980; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 62, 53; henceforth *Post Card*.

⁷⁸ Nicholas Royle, “Our Mutual Friend”, in John Schad, ed., *Dickens Refigured: Bodies, Desires and Other Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 39-54 (45); henceforth Royle, “Our Mutual Friend”. For Derrida, “a preface” is “a crypt in its turn” (*Wolfman*, xii).

CHAPTER 2

Dickens's Authorial Return to Sender: Dead Letters from *Our Mutual Friend* to *Oliver Twist*

[L]ike dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away.¹

The previous chapter argued that Dickens's public readings were an attempt to mourn "the young Dickens". For modern critics, wishing to resurrect Dickens's performances, a sense of loss still pervades the readings. As Andrews explains, the meagre resources available to modern critics working on the readings means that they are now "lost events":

All we have left is a few relics. We have his worn prompt-copies, but he never stuck to these in performance; and they are now resonantly silent, locked up in library bookcases. We still have his Reading desk [...] We have a few statuesque pictures of him at the Reading desk, posed for the camera. We have sheaves of eyewitness accounts from newspaper reviews, friends and family, many of them vividly detailed; and the more striking those details the more one realizes the scale of what is now irretrievable – the event itself. (Andrews, vii-viii)

Modern critics wishing to reconstruct the "lost events" that are Dickens's public readings – as well as Dickens "the public reader" – do so from an amalgamation of texts, none of which is authoritative. Without the aid of video technology, in order to recreate the performances of the readings, modern critics are for the most part forced to rely upon the written accounts of those who attended the performances. But, like all acts of memory, contemporary eyewitness accounts of the readings can only go so far in helping us to imagine the spectacle of Dickens's performance, to resurrect Dickens "the public reader". Those who recorded their experience of witnessing the readings are not blind to the fact that their accounts are at best subjective and at worst incapable of adequately describing Dickens's performances.

¹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, "I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day", in W.H. Gardner, ed., *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 3rd ed. (1918; London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 109.

Early on in his account of the readings, Kent insists upon the subjectivity of his reminiscences concerning Dickens's performances: "Everything [...] which is set forth in them ["the pages of this memorial"] is penned with a knowledge of its inevitable revision or endorsement by the reader's own personal remembrance." (Kent, 6-7) In her lecture "An Evening with Dickens", delivered intermittently between 1870 and 1896, Kate Field goes further than Kent by claiming that, no matter how accurate, it is impossible to do justice to the force of Dickens's performances through an act of memory alone: "Would that photography had done its duty and preserved what has now gone forever."² Paradoxically, it seems, one of the reasons why the readings are "lost events" is that they are remembered, and not because they are forgotten.

The ways in which modern critics attempt to resurrect the readings and Dickens "the public reader" through a variety of texts – the prompt-copies of the readings, the photographs of Dickens at his reading table, and various eyewitness accounts – offers a microcosm of the intertextual (re-)construction of Dickens's authorial identity more generally. For over a century now, Dickens has been resurrected in a variety of texts. These include, biographies; the reminiscences of his family, friends, and acquaintances; his voluminous correspondence; and, of course, his fiction. But, like the public readings and Dickens "the public reader", Dickens "the Victorian author" is "lost" to modern critics in the sense that, whilst much is known about his "life" and "work", there is much that is also irretrievable. In this respect, the desire for modern critics to "resurrect" Dickens "the author" itself resembles Derrida's notion of mourning: "We can never resurrect the past from the ashes of history. But in mourning we will strive to interpret it and make it coherent, to do our best to tell its story and give it the promise of a future." (Dooley and Kavanagh, 9)

² Gary Scharnhorst, "Kate Field's 'An Evening with Charles Dickens': A Reconstructed Lecture", *Dickens Quarterly* 21.2 (June 2004): 71-89 (74).

Although Dickens destroyed the majority of the letters he received (a subject discussed in the first section of this chapter), his substantial surviving correspondence is one of the most valuable tools available in terms of resurrecting Dickens “the author”. Rather than Dickens’s correspondence simply providing biographical information, however, his letters are commonly regarded as if they are a works of fiction themselves. As Angus Easson explains, Dickens’s letters offer “a significant body of work, important not only as biographical materials or a commentary upon his age, but as part of the Dickens canon”.³ Easson’s belief that Dickens’s letters are “part of the Dickens canon” is echoed by Ackroyd, who views Dickens’s letters as themselves works of fiction which cannot be separated from his literary texts: “in his correspondence [Dickens] tends to recreate the world of his fiction so that we cannot look in his letters for any reality extending beyond his novels but rather a continuation of those novels themselves” (Ackroyd, 731). Like Freud, then, “whose correspondence is part of his corpus”, it is difficult to uphold the work/life dichotomy in terms of Dickens’s letters (*Post Card*, 62). In this respect, the construction of Dickens’s authorial self – from the pages of his correspondence – mirrors Barthes’s notion of “a paper-author”: “his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work; there is a reversion of the work on to the life [...] which allows [his life] to be read as a text” (*FWT*, 161).

Like the division of Dickens’s authorial identity between his early and late selves, the manner in which, for Easson and Ackroyd, Dickens’s correspondence melts the distinction between “life” and “work” is not a twentieth century theoretical invention. In fact, the idea that Dickens’s private letters parallel his fiction was originally suggested in *The Letters of Charles Dickens* – the first published collection of Dickens’s letters, which appeared in three volumes in 1880 – edited by Georgina Hogarth, Dickens’s sister-in-law, and Mamie Dickens,

³ Angus Easson, “Letters of Dickens”, in Paul Schlicke, ed., *Oxford Reader’s Companion to Dickens* (1999; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 334-39 (335).

his eldest daughter. In the preface to *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, the editors explain that their “great desire” in publishing Dickens’s correspondence was “to give the public another book from Charles Dickens’s own hands”: “As no man ever expressed *himself* more in his letters than Charles Dickens, we believe that in publishing this careful selection from his general correspondence we shall be supplying a want which has been universally felt.”⁴ Georgina’s and Mamie’s assertion that the publication of Dickens’s letters constitutes “another book from Charles Dickens’s own hands” indicates that from the beginning his correspondence is treated as if it were another of his fictions, as if his letters were not only signed with his paraph, but also, inscribed with his authorial signature.

Just as Dickens’s letters are deemed as belonging to the Dickens corpus, as if they are works of fiction in their own right, it is the contention of this chapter that the reverse is also true; that Dickens’s fiction can itself be read as if it were part of his correspondence. In particular, this chapter will examine the intertextual relationship between *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend*, which, I argue, is analogous to a form of postal correspondence. However, like the argument outlined in the previous chapter, Dickens’s fiction is not only a correspondence with his public, the readers of his novels, but also, with himself; or, rather, his authorial selves: the early and the late Dickens.

The chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section of this chapter will discuss the importance of the letters and the post in Dickens’s life and work in general terms. The second section will explore the ways in which Dickens sets up the intertextual relationship between *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend* in his reading text of “Sikes and Nancy” – which, like so many of his readings, is a resurrection of “the young Dickens” – as well as analysing the role of the post in *Oliver Twist*. The third section will outline the nature

⁴ Georgina Hogarth and Mamie Dickens, Preface, in Georgina Hogarth and Mamie Dickens, ed., *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1880-82), vol. 1: vii-ix (vii-ix), original emphasis; henceforth Hogarth and Dickens, followed by volume and page number.

of the postal correspondence between the two novels; how, in a curious species of authorial return, *Our Mutual Friend* is figured as a novelistic-letter directed to *Oliver Twist*.

Jacques Lacan concluded his seminar on Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Purloined Letter" by declaring: "what the 'purloined letter' [...] means is that a letter always reaches its destination".⁵ Less confident about the fate of the titular "purloined letter" in Poe's story, Derrida reformulates Lacan's deduction. Unlike Lacan, for Derrida, "a letter can always not arrive at its destination": "Not that the letter never arrives at its destination, but it belongs to the structure of the letter to be capable, always, of not arriving. And without this threat [...] the circuit of the letter would not even have begun. But with this threat, the circuit can always not finish." (*Post Card*, 444) The radicalness of Derrida's counterargument to Lacan, as Dooley and Kavanagh explain, lies in the fact that rather than viewing the possible non-arrival of a letter sent through the post as an aberration, Derrida regards such deviations as essential to the workings of the postal system:

the very possibility of sending a letter is also the impossibility of guaranteeing that it will always arrive at its intended destination [...] This does not mean, of course, that [...] because it is possible that a letter may go astray [...] that it necessarily *will* go astray. But this possibility is no mere accident that befalls the otherwise smooth functioning of the postal service. The very act of sending a letter always contains this possibility of *destin-errance*. (Dooley and Kavanagh, 69, original emphasis)

For Derrida, then, in order for a letter to arrive at its intended destination there must always already be a possibility of the contrary; that a letter will not arrive – that it will get mislaid, misdirected, lost in the post – and end up a dead letter. In a similar vein to Derrida's notion, that "a letter can always not arrive at its destination", there is no certainty that the novelistic-letter that is *Our Mutual Friend* reaches *Oliver Twist*, that Dickens's fictional reply arrives at the threshold of his earlier authorial self. But, as I argue in this chapter, whilst *Our Mutual*

⁵ Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'", *Yale French Studies* 48 (1972): 38-72 (72). As Barbara Johnson notes, however, in Lacan's essay "[i]t is not even clear what the expression 'the purloined letter' refers to: Poe's text? the letter it talks about? or simply the expression 'the purloined letter'?" see Barbara Johnson, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (1980; Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press 1982), 125.

Friend is “capable, always, of not arriving”, as long as each novel continues to be read, a correspondence will exist between *Our Mutual Friend* and *Oliver Twist*.

I

For Bowen, the importance of the post in Dickens’s writings cannot be overestimated: “Dickens throughout his career is interested in the post, and often reaches for analogies and allusions to it in his writing.” (Bowen, 54) Dickens’s “analogies and allusions” to the post in his fiction often border on the bizarre and grotesque, and the post-office in particular appears to have captured his imagination. For instance, in *David Copperfield*, the eponymous narrator describes a sleeping Uriah Heep as having “his mouth open like a post-office” (*DC*, 374). A decade later, in *Great Expectations*, Pip transforms David’s simile into a metaphor when he writes of Mr. Wemmick: “His mouth was such a post-office of a mouth that he had a mechanical appearance of smiling.” (*GE*, 136) In *Bleak House*, when Esther Summerson helps an illiterate elderly lady write a letter to her grandson it is “considered by the whole village the most wonderful achievement in the world”.⁶ But as an embarrassed Esther relates, this is nothing compared to when the grandson replies “all the way from Plymouth”: “I got all the credit that ought to have been given to the Post-Office, and was invested with the merit of the whole system” (*BH*, 447). In stark contrast to Esther, on being unable to sing due to the dry air in the Sol’s Arms public house, *Bleak House*’s Mr. Swills claims he is “like an empty post-office, for he hadn’t a single note in him” (*BH*, 404).

Dickens’s interest in the post is also evident in his journalism. Bemoaning the fact he has been “the chosen receiver of Begging Letters”, the narrator of Dickens’s 1860 article “The Begging-Letter Writer” writes: “My house has been made as regular a Receiving House for such communications as any one of the great branch Post-Offices is for general correspondence.” (*UT*, 379) In “Valentine’s Day at the Post-Office”, a 30 March 1850 article

⁶ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), 446; henceforth *BH*.

for *Household Words* in collaboration with W. H. Wills, Dickens describes, amongst other things, the workings of the Dead-Letter Office.⁷ Two years later, Dickens and Wills returned to the topic of the post with another *Household Words* article entitled “Post-Office Money Orders” (Stone, 2: 392-400).

For Bowen, “[l]ike Derrida, Dickens is interested in the mistakings, doublenesses, and potential fatality associated with the post” (Bowen, 55). This is evident in arguably the strangest occurrence of the post in Dickens’s fiction, “The Story of the Bagman’s Uncle”; one of the interpolated tales in his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. Narrated by “the Bagman”, “The Story of the Bagman’s Uncle” is a ghostly tale about Jack Martin – the titular “Uncle” – who, after falling asleep amongst the “decaying skeletons” of “worn-out mail coaches”, awakens to find not only the mail coaches miraculously restored to their former glory, but also, that they are being boarded by spectral guards, porters, coachmen, and passengers (*PP*, 614-5). On boarding one of the coaches, Martin notices “the other mails [...] driving round and round in circles, at a slow trot of about five miles an hour” (*PP*, 618). At the end of the tale, the landlord, who has been listening to “the Bagman’s story”, asks, “I wonder what these ghosts of mail-coaches carry in their bags”: “The dead letters of course,” said the Bagman.” (*PP*, 625)

This chapter, like Bowen’s study, will also use Derrida’s work in order to examine “the postal principle” in Dickens’s fiction, and how it is inextricably linked to doubleness, misdirection, and death (*The Post Card* 54). In contrast to Bowen’s work, however, which focuses upon the ways in which Dickens uses postal references and metaphors in his early novels, this chapter will explore how Dickens figures *Our Mutual Friend* – a novel signed by the late Dickens – as a return or reply, in the postal sense, to *Oliver Twist* – a novel signed by the early Dickens. In essence, I claim, *Our Mutual Friend* is akin to a letter that Dickens

⁷ See Charles Dickens with W.H. Wills, “Valentine’s Day at the Post-Office”, in Harry Stone, ed., *Charles Dickens’ Uncollected Writings from Household Words: 1850-1859*, 2 vols. (1968; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), vol. 1: 169-84; henceforth Stone, followed by volume and page number.

addresses to himself or, rather, to his early authorial self. Writing on generic “great station hotel[s]” in “Refreshments for Travellers”, an article published on 24 March 1860 in *All the Year Round*, Dickens states: “We all know this hotel, where we have no individuality, but put ourselves into the general post, as it were, and are sorted and disposed of according to our division.” (*SJ*, 191-92) Mirroring the experience of being “put [...] into the general post” during his stay at the hotel, by returning to *Oliver Twist* by means of *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens sends his later authorial self through the detours of the post and in doing so enacts another return to and a resurrection of “the young Dickens”. But like “the dead letters” in “The Story of the Bagman’s Uncle”, this return is haunted by the ghostly remains of a past which cannot be retrieved.

Dickens destroyed his personal stock-pile of letters on 3 September 1860 in a fire in the grounds of his home at Gad’s-Hill.⁸ As he watched the conflagration, Dickens is reported to have said: “Would to God every letter I had ever written was on that pile!”⁹ The day after he burnt his letters, Dickens writes to W. H. Wills:

Yesterday I burnt, in the field at Gad’s Hill, the accumulated letters and papers of twenty years. They sent up a smoke like the Genie when he got out of the casket on the seashore; and as it was an exquisite day when I began, and rained very heavily when I finished, I suspect my correspondence of having overcast the face of the heavens. (*Pilgrim*, 9: 304)

Fittingly, his daughter Mamie, a future co-editor of the first published edition of Dickens’s letters, who along with her brothers Henry and Plorn witnessed the fire, “begged her father to save some of the letters”, particularly those from notable nineteenth century figures.¹⁰

Dickens refused to make any exceptions, however, and the letters were destroyed

⁸ Oddly foreshadowing Dickens’s act of destroying his letters in 1860, in Collins’s 1854 short story “A Stolen Letter” (originally titled “The Fourth Poor Traveller”), an unnamed, cantankerous lawyer who has fallen on hard times, states: “My experience in the law [...] has convinced me that if everybody burnt everybody else’s letters, half the Courts of Justice in this country might shut up shop”; see Wilkie Collins, “A Stolen Letter”, in Wilkie Collins, *Mad Monkton and Other Stories*, ed. Norman Page (1994; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 27; henceforth *Mad Monkton*.

⁹ Quoted in Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, Revised and Abridged* (1952; London: Allen Lane, 1977), 487; henceforth Johnson.

¹⁰ Fred Kaplan, *Dickens: A Biography* (1988; Sevenoaks, Kent: Sceptre, 1990), 17; henceforth Kaplan.

indiscriminately: “All the correspondence from Forster went into the flames; so did letters from such old intimates as Ainsworth, Macready, Maclise, Bulwer-Lytton, and Talfourd, as well as everything from Tennyson, Thackeray, Browning, Captain Marryat, and many other British and foreign men of letters.”¹¹ As Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie note, Dickens was frequently “shocked by the misuse of the private letters of public men” and it is therefore unsurprising that he should decide to destroy his correspondence to prevent it entering the public domain after his death (MacKenzie, 327).¹² But, as I will now go on to discuss, this tells only one side of the story because, on at least one notorious occasion, Dickens was not entirely against a private letter of his becoming public.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in 1858, two years before Dickens burnt his letters, he separated from his wife, Catherine. During this period he became increasingly concerned that the collapse of his marriage would affect the public’s perception of him. This was especially troubling for Dickens as his separation from Catherine coincided with his decision to become a professional public reader. In an attempt to assuage any doubts the public may have had of him after hearing news of his domestic problems, Dickens made public two private documents which cannot but affect our understanding of his anxiety concerning the publication of his private letters more generally.

Firstly, in the immediate aftermath of his separation from Catherine, Dickens published an announcement in *The Times* on 7 June 1858 and in his own journal, *Household Words*, five days later, which laid bare the details of his separation from his wife, or at least as much as he was willing to let be known. Inappropriately entitled “Personal”, this very public pronouncement states: “Some domestic trouble of mine, of long-standing, on which I will make no further remark than that it claims to be respected, as being of a sacredly private

¹¹ Norman and Jeanne MacKenzie, *Dickens: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 327); henceforth MacKenzie.

¹² Similarly, Kaplan writes: “[Dickens] had no belief in or commitment to the idea of a public record about private matters [...] His art, not his life, was public property.” (Kaplan, 18)

nature, has lately been brought to an arrangement, which involves no anger or ill-will of any kind” (*SJ*, 51). Dickens then went on to refute, in the strongest possible terms, any suggestions that another woman was involved in the break-up of his marriage, before explaining his motivation behind the publication of the announcement:

there is a great multitude who know me through my writings, and who do not know me otherwise; and I cannot bear that one of them should be left in doubt, or hazard of doubt, through my poorly shrinking from taking the unusual means to which I now resort, of circulating the Truth (*SJ*, 52).

As Fred Kaplan explains, however, the article did little to improve Dickens’s public persona: “Whatever there was of truth in the statement, it was sufficiently awkward to convince no one not already convinced.” (Kaplan, 396) Furthermore, until Dickens published “Personal”, very few people, indeed if any, outside of the esoteric London literary circles knew anything about the domestic problems Dickens was facing at the time (Ackroyd, 864; Johnson, 461).

The second inexplicable and regrettable decision Dickens made around this time occurred shortly after the publication of “Personal”, when he wrote what he would later refer to as the “violated letter” (Forster, 2: 206). In the “violated letter”, as Ackroyd explains, Dickens “exculpated himself and implicitly blamed his wife for all the woes of their marriage” (Ackroyd, 860). For example, Dickens states in the “violated letter”:

Mrs. Dickens and I have lived unhappily together for many years. Hardly any one who has known us intimately can fail to have known that we are, in all respects of character and temperament, wonderfully unsuited to each other [...] For some years past Mrs. Dickens has been in the habit of representing to me that it would be better for her to go away and live apart; that her always increasing mental estrangement made a mental disorder under which she sometimes labors – more, that she felt herself unfit for the life she had to lead as my wife, and that she would be better far away.¹³

Dickens also hinted that Catherine was a neglectful mother: “In the manly consideration toward Mrs. Dickens which I owe to my wife, I will merely remark of her that the peculiarity of her character has thrown all the children on some one else [her sister, Georgina Hogarth].”

¹³ Charles Dickens, “Appendix A: The ‘Violated Letter’”, in Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1983), 373-74; henceforth *Violated Letter*.

(*Violated Letter*, 373) As he had done in “Personal”, Dickens again attempted to quash the rumours, spread by Mrs. Georgina Hogarth (Catherine’s mother) and Helen Hogarth (Catherine’s sister), suggesting that another woman prompted his decision to separate from his wife:

Two wicked persons [...] have (as I am told, and indeed to my personal knowledge) coupled with this separation the name of a young lady for whom I have a great attachment and regard. I will not repeat her name – I honor it too much. Upon my soul and honor, there is not on this earth a more virtuous and spotless creature than that young lady. I know her to be innocent and pure, and as good as my own dear daughters. (*Violated Letter*, 374)

Astonishingly, Dickens did not intend for the “violated letter” to be perused only in private by his close friends and trusted confidantes. On the contrary, Dickens prefaced the “violated letter” with a note to Arthur Smith, who was then employed as the manager of his readings, giving him his “full permission” to show the letter “to any one who wishes to do me right, or to any one who may have been misled into doing me wrong” (*Violated Letter*, 373).

The predictable conclusion to this rather unseemly episode is that the “violated letter” was eventually published in the press, both at home and abroad, first appearing in the New York based *Tribune* on 16 August 1858.¹⁴ On 9 September 1858, the “violated letter” found its way to *The Liverpool Mercury* where Dickens’s want of delicacy and good taste was condemned: ““we consider this practice outrageously impertinent as regards the public, and so wantonly cruel as regards the private persons whose names are thus forced into a gratuitous and painful notoriety, that we feel called upon to mark it with indignant reprobation”” (qtd. Ackroyd, 865). Despite being the architect of his own downfall, when Dickens discovered that the press had got hold of the “violated letter”, he was reportedly “much upset at its publication” (Johnson, 463). Moreover, after the publication of “the violated letter”, Slater points out, while “Dickens announced that this publication was against his wishes, calling it a violation of confidence”, it was suspected “that he may have connived

¹⁴ See Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1983), 400; henceforth Slater.

at its publication” (Slater, 400).¹⁵

Understandably, after the gross miscalculation of judgement concerning the publication of “Personal” and his naivety in allowing the “violated letter” to be read by all and sundry, Dickens, at the close of the 1850s, became increasingly anxious that, if published, his private letters might be misconstrued after his death: “Aware that fame generated its own detractors, that the exposure of secrets had as much excitement within public discourse as within fiction, he feared the Victorian equivalent of his phone being tapped.” (Kaplan, 18) Things came to a head in 1860 when Dickens destroyed his extensive stockpile of correspondence. Ackroyd argues that when Dickens burns his letters in 1860 it is “yet another example of his desire to resist his past, to efface it, to rewrite it, to turn his separation from his wife and the start of his new life into something much more real, more tangible [...] In his new life there is almost some kind of hatred of the past.” (Ackroyd, 931) Likewise, Johnson writes: “During this time [...] Dickens seemed torn by a mania for breaking with the past.” (Johnson, 487)

In addition to Dickens’s act of letter burning illustrating his “hatred of the past”, however, his actions are also suggestive of an attempt to manage it. Indeed, as the unfortunate episodes concerning the “violated letter” and the article “Personal” illustrate, in this period Dickens appears intent on, if not rewriting history, then at least ensuring only his version of events exists. With Dickens, as Kaplan points out, there is a sense in which “[a]ll other voices should be silenced.” (Kaplan, 18) Burning two decades worth of correspondence, Dickens is protecting and controlling his literary legacy, at least as much as it is in his power to do so. By destroying his letters, Dickens leaves doubt where there should be certainty, particularly and significantly in terms of his relationship with Ellen Ternan. Rather than merely being indicative of Dickens having “burned his links to the past”, Dickens also burns our links with

¹⁵ For Catherine Waters, “Dickens may have intended the [“violated”] letter to be made public without his being seen to sanction its appearance: a version of having one’s cake and eating it” (Waters, 9-10).

his past, or at least a significant portion of it (MacKenzie, 327). It appears that if Dickens cannot stop his private life becoming public, he can at least have a say in how much of it becomes public.

Moreover, Dickens does not simply burn his letters in 1860. He also writes a letter telling Wills that he had burnt them. Admittedly, the destruction of two decades of correspondence is a noteworthy event, and there were no other means of communicating this information. Nevertheless, it is a curious decision on Dickens's part. It is as if Dickens, aware of the impact it will have on his legacy, feels compelled to confess his act of destruction. If Dickens had wanted to "erase" the past he could have burnt the letters without documenting it in a letter, thereby leaving no trace of his actions. By burning his letters and then informing Wills that he has done so – in, of all things, a letter – Dickens reveals exactly what he wanted to remain hidden. The letters destroyed at the Gad's Hill bonfire are kept in circulation by dint of Dickens's letter to Wills, resurrected each time the letter to Wills is read, but forever delayed in their delivery to us.

In *Martin Chuzzlewit* we are told that the mysterious Mr. Nadgett:

wrote letters to himself about [Jonas Chuzzlewit] constantly; and, when he found them in his pocket, put them in the fire, with such distrust and caution that he would bend down to watch the crumpled tinder while it floated upwards, as if his mind misgave him, that the mystery it had contained might come out at the chimney-pot (*MC*, 505).

For Derrida, Nadgett's act of memorizing and then burning his letters would constitute an act of mourning. As Derrida puts it in one of the postcards which form the "Envois" section of *The Post Card*: "Keep what you burn, such is the demand. Mourn what I send to you, myself, in order to have me under your skin." (*Post Card*, 60) Referring to this enigmatic axiom, Dooley and Kavanagh explain that like the act of mourning, for Derrida, "[t]o burn something is to desire *both* to keep it *and* let it go": "The only way to preserve and keep something safe is to burn it. Take the example of a love letter. The only way to prevent it from falling into

the public domain and the risk of exposure and interpretation, is to burn it. To keep it, one has to let it go.” (Dooley and Kavanagh, 15, original emphasis) Learning the letters he directs to himself by heart, Nadgett simultaneously holds onto and relinquishes his self-addressed messages. Following Derrida’s logic, however, because the letters Nadgett burns are self-addressed, his acts of mourning and sending are therefore directed to himself.

Whether Dickens’s act of burning his letters can be regarded, in the light of Derrida’s work on mourning and the post, as simultaneously preserving and destroying the past, of keeping it and letting it go, is open to question. However, like his ambivalent attitude towards the act of mourning outlined in the previous chapter, Dickens maintains two seemingly contradictory positions regarding the publication of his private correspondence. On the one hand, Dickens abhors the fact that his letters are likely to be published after his death and takes drastic measures – such as burning them – in order to maintain a degree of control over his posthumous legacy. On the other hand, he is himself guilty of allowing a document containing intimate details of his marriage to circulate like an open letter and to be read by anybody who cared to read it. As I will now go on to discuss, four years after Dickens destroyed his letters, he figured *Our Mutual Friend* as a cryptic, open letter – at once public and private – directed to *Oliver Twist* and his earlier authorial self; an act which, like the public readings, enabled him to mourn “the young Dickens”. Before this, however, it is necessary to explore the ways in which *Oliver Twist* gets lost in the post.

II

Writing in 1911, G. K. Chesterton regards *Our Mutual Friend* as “a reversion to the spirit as well as the form” of “the earlier Dickens manner” (Chesterton, 119). Mirroring the argument proposed in the previous chapter to this thesis, for Chesterton, *Our Mutual Friend* – a novel signed by the late Dickens – not only resurrects the early Dickens, but also, “show[s] that the young Dickens had never died” (Chesterton, 120). Conflating the authorial resurrection of the

early Dickens in *Our Mutual Friend* with Harmon's supposed death and return to life in the novel, Chesterton observes: "*Our Mutual Friend* marks a happy return to the earlier manner of Dickens at the end of Dickens' life [...] Those who most truly love Dickens love the earlier Dickens; and any return to his farce must be welcomed, like a young man come back from the dead." (Chesterton, 118) Chesterton's evocative simile ("like a young man come back from the dead") suggests that what is resurrected in *Our Mutual Friend* is the ghost – or "spirit" as Chesterton puts it – of the early Dickens. That is, for Chesterton, the early Dickens is figured as a revenant – defined as "literally that which comes back" – haunting the late Dickens's imagination during the writing of *Our Mutual Friend* (*Specters*, 177).

Although Chesterton compares *Our Mutual Friend* favourably with texts signed by "the young Dickens", such as *The Pickwick Papers* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and considers characters from the novel, like Mr. Podsnap and the Analytical Chemist, as drawing from the same spirit of comic invention that characterized much of Dickens's earlier texts, he is unspecific concerning the spectral return of the early Dickens in *Our Mutual Friend* (Chesterton, 119-20).¹⁶ Whereas Chesterton discusses the resurrection of "the young Dickens" in *Our Mutual Friend* in general terms, I will now offer a more specific analysis. The resurrection of "the young Dickens" in *Our Mutual Friend*, I argue, is played out in the novel's intertextual relationship with *Oliver Twist*; a text bearing the signature of the early Dickens, and also one in which Dickens returned to shortly before writing *Our Mutual Friend*.

Following his brutal murder of Nancy, in *Oliver Twist*, Bill Sikes flees London. But, whilst Sikes can leave "the town behind him", go where he will, he can find no escape from

¹⁶ For example, when comparing the opening of *Our Mutual Friend* with the first chapter of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Chesterton states: "there is a quality common to both, and that quality is the whole of Dickens. It is a quality difficult to define – hence the whole difficulty in criticising Dickens. Perhaps it can best be stated in two separate statements or as two separate symptoms. The first is the mere fact that the reader rushes to read it. The second is the mere fact that the writer rushed to write it." (Chesterton, 121)

the guilt he feels after committing the crime, personified by the ghostly image of Nancy's bloody corpse, which haunts his imagination:

Every object before him, substance or shadow, still or moving, took the semblance of some fearful thing; but these fears were nothing compared to the sense that haunted him of that morning's ghastly figure following at his heels [...] At times, he turned, with desperate determination, resolved to beat this phantom off, though it should look him dead; but the hair rose on his head, and his blood stood still: for it had turned with him and was behind him then.¹⁷

Like Sikes, Dickens was haunted by Nancy's death. This is clear in his frenzied re-enactment of her death in the "Sikes and Nancy" reading, which he added to his repertoire on 15 January 1869. As Collins notes, the "Sikes and Nancy" reading affected Dickens to an almost intolerable degree: "The effect of the Reading upon Dickens himself was remarkable, and is indisputable. His desire to repeat it became a fierce obsession." (*Public Readings*, 470) The intensity of Dickens's performance of "Sikes and Nancy" is evident in Edmund Yates's article "Mr. Charles Dickens's New Reading", which appeared in *Tinsley's Magazine* in 1869. Yates describes Dickens's gripping performance as that of a man possessed: "gradually warming with excitement, he flung aside his book and acted the scene of the murder, shrieked the terrified pleadings of the girl, [and] growled the brutal savagery of the murderer [...] there was not one [...] but was astonished at the power and versatility of his genius" (qtd. *Public Readings*, 465).

Bizarrely, after performing "Sikes and Nancy", Dickens began to identify openly with the murderer, Sikes. In his correspondence during this period he conflates performance with reality, claiming he is "murdering Nancy" in the readings and that after each performance he has "a vague sensation of being 'wanted' as [he] walk[s] about the streets": "The crime being completely off my mind and the blood spilled [...] I commit the murder again" (qtd. Ackroyd, 1098). Dickens's performance of "Sikes and Nancy" also had a powerful effect on his

¹⁷ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, ed. Fred Kaplan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 321; henceforth *OT*.

audience. In a November 19 1868 letter to the eminent actor William Macready, five days after a trial performance of “Sikes and Nancy”, Dickens recalls the reaction of Mary Ann Keeley, also an acclaimed actress, to the reading: “the public have been wanting a sensation for a few years – and by Heaven they have got it!” (*Pilgrim*, 12: 224).

Several of Dickens’s friends attempted to dissuade him from performing “Sikes and Nancy”. Forster, in particular, was vociferous in his objections. Explaining that Dickens’s pulse rate would rise up to 124 during performances of the piece, Forster rightly believed that the “terrible physical exertion” required for the reading was damaging Dickens’s health (Forster, 2: 359-411). In addition, Forster also claimed that the grisly demise of Nancy was not in keeping with the spirit of the readings. Justifying his decision to perform “Sikes and Nancy”, Dickens tells Forster in November 1869: “I wanted to leave behind me the recollection of something very passionate and dramatic, done with simple means, if the art would justify the theme.” (*Pilgrim*, 12: 220) Forster remained unconvinced, however. Forster recalls: “It was impossible for me to admit that the effect to be produced was legitimate, or such as it was desirable to associate with the recollection of his readings.” (Forster, 2: 358) But if Dickens’s judgement concerning his decision to perform “Sikes and Nancy” is open to question, his belief that the reading would “leave behind [...] the recollection of something very passionate and dramatic” is not. Reflecting upon Dickens’s performance of “Sikes and Nancy” in 1872, Kent states: “the recollection of [“Sikes and Nancy”] among those who once saw it revealed through the lips, the eyes, the whole aspect of Charles Dickens will not easily be obliterated” (Kent, 258). As Dickens intended it to be, it seems, his reading of “Sikes and Nancy” proved unforgettable to those who witnessed it.

The “fierce obsession” which drove Dickens to perform “Sikes and Nancy”, night after night, even though it was patently affecting his emotional and physical well-being, is commonly believed to have precipitated his death and is well-documented (Ackroyd, 1098).

Less well known, however, is the fact that although “Sikes and Nancy” was first performed on 15 January 1869, Dickens began preparing the reading text in 1863, less than a year before his last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, was first serialized. The close proximity of these two texts in Dickens’s imagination in the early-to-mid 1860s, I argue, accounts for one of the ways in which he creates an intertextual relationship between *Our Mutual Friend* and *Oliver Twist*. As discussed in the previous chapter, Dickens considered his readings as an extension of his oeuvre, as being inseparable from his career as a novelist. It is therefore a matter of no small significance that Dickens should begin preparing the “Sikes and Nancy” reading text – violently torn from the pages of *Oliver Twist* – shortly before writing *Our Mutual Friend*. What is more, if “Sikes and Nancy” impacted upon Dickens’s conception of *Our Mutual Friend*, it would not be for the first time that one of his reading texts intersected or even interacted with a novel he was either preparing to write or in the process of writing. Indeed, the intertextual relationship between *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend* is reminiscent of the manner in which Dickens doubles two of his other novels – *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* – in the early-1860s.

Two years before Dickens began preparing “Sikes and Nancy”, Dickens added a new item to his reading repertoire: *David Copperfield*. Dickens had been attempting to incorporate *David Copperfield* into his readings, without success, from the mid-1850s onwards (*Public Readings*, 213-14). It is notable, however, that the *David Copperfield* reading text was completed shortly after *Great Expectations* finished its weekly serialisation in *All the Year Round* on 3 August 1861. That *David Copperfield* provides a model for the narrative of *Great Expectations* is unquestionable. In 1860, when beginning work on *Great Expectations*, Dickens tells Forster: “To be quite sure I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions, I read *David Copperfield* again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe.” (*Pilgrim*, 9: 325) Despite Dickens’s claim, the two novels have much in common.

Indeed, whether or not the repetitions are “unconscious”, on reading *Great Expectations*, we are led to believe that Pip is another David Copperfield. Even Pip seems to be of this opinion. However, as Peter Brooks points out, “Pip has in fact misread the plot of his life.” (Brooks, 130) The fact that at the end of their respective narratives the two protagonists suffer very different fates only heightens, rather than detracts from, the ways in which David and Pip exist as intertextual doubles. With his depiction of Pip, in *Great Expectations*, Dickens represents the darker side of his “favourite child” (*DC Preface*, 870).

Even if it is accepted that the preparation of “Sikes and Nancy” informed Dickens’s writing of *Our Mutual Friend*, the intertextual relationship that Dickens sets up between *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend* may not appear worthy of note. At the time of writing *Our Mutual Friend* in 1864 Dickens had been a professional author for nearly thirty years, and it is unsurprising that he should return to his earlier work in order to draw inspiration, especially given the readings from his early work that he was undertaking at the time. Moreover, J. Hillis Miller observes, works of fiction are by their very nature a tissue of repetitions: “an author may repeat in one novel motifs, themes, characters, or events from his other novels [...] A novel is interpreted in part through the noticing of such recurrences.”¹⁸ However, what sets apart the intertextual relationship between *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend* are the ways in which Dickens figures the return to his earlier novel as a form of postal correspondence. More than simply a return to or a repetition of the central themes, tenets, and issues, first developed in *Oliver Twist*, *Our Mutual Friend* operates as a form of literary “reply” to his earlier novel and, consequently, his earlier authorial self: “the young Dickens”.

The link between *Our Mutual Friend* and *Oliver Twist* was first noticed by Forster in *The Life of Dickens*, and will be discussed in more detail later on in this section. However,

¹⁸ J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 2.

with the exception of Dickens's modern biographer, Peter Ackroyd, the intertextual relationship between *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend* has received little critical comment since. In fact, although James R. Kincaid believes that *Our Mutual Friend* is "very much like *The Pickwick Papers*, as very few people will admit" – in that both novels share "the same dark optimism" – Chesterton's view that *Our Mutual Friend* signals a "return" to "the earlier Dickens" is not one shared by the majority of critics who have written on the novel.¹⁹ Rather than a "return" to "the young Dickens", *Our Mutual Friend* is often regarded as a novel bearing the exclusive signature of the late Dickens, and a text which looks forward to the literature produced in the twentieth century. This view was first promulgated in 1941 by Edmund Wilson, who believed that *Our Mutual Friend* "like all these later books of Dickens, is more interesting to us to-day than it was to Dickens' public" (Wilson, 66).²⁰

In his influential 1958 study *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels*, J. Hillis Miller reiterates Wilson's claim when he says of *Our Mutual Friend* that it is "the novel by Dickens perhaps most interesting to a contemporary reader".²¹ For Miller, *Our Mutual Friend* is "most interesting to a contemporary reader" because of the ways in which Dickens "[presents] in the very structure of his novel a rejection of the idea that the world has a unity in itself, outside of any distorting perspectives" (Miller, *World*, 292). In doing so, Miller argues, "*Our Mutual Friend* destroys a major premise of the traditional English novel, and anticipates twentieth-century fiction": "If *Pickwick Papers* was a farewell to the eighteenth century, *Our Mutual Friend* is on the threshold of the twentieth." (Miller, *World*, 292-93)

More recent critical examinations *Our Mutual Friend* have likewise considered the novel as a

¹⁹ James R. Kincaid, *Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 223-34; henceforth Kincaid.

²⁰ Contemporary critics also observed a new direction in Dickens's writing in terms of *Our Mutual Friend*. In his 1865 review of *Our Mutual Friend*, E. S. Dallas speaks of Dickens's "[...] astonishing [...] fertility" in creating a novel "in which we can trace no signs of repetition" (*DCH*, 466). This is in stark contrast to Dallas's 1861 assessment of *Great Expectations*, a novel in which he saw a clear return of the "earlier fancies" (*DCH*, 431).

²¹ J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958), 332; henceforth Miller, *World*.

precursor to twentieth century forms of literature. For example, Robert Kiely sees *Our Mutual Friend* as a “forerunner” of “modernist fiction” and a novel which “anticipates a number of modern writers”, most notably Samuel Beckett.²² Meanwhile, for Frederick Luis Aldama, *Our Mutual Friend* “anticipates the coming into its own of twentieth-century global-fictions authored by the likes of a Franz Kafka, a Jorge Luis Borges, a Toni Morrison, and a Salman Rushdie, to name a few.”²³ But if *Our Mutual Friend* is in certain respects a novel ahead of its time it is also, as I will now show, a return to “the young Dickens”.²⁴

That Dickens should “reply” to *Oliver Twist* through *Our Mutual Friend* is not wholly surprising. In addition to including a chapter entitled “Wherein Oliver is Delivered Over to Mr. William Sikes”, *Oliver Twist* also begins with the delivery of Oliver Twist (*OT*, 139-45). Little Oliver is “delivered” at the beginning of the novel in two separate senses of the word. Firstly, the story opens with the scene of his birth in the shadow of the workhouse. Secondly, after barely surviving his birth, Oliver is handed over to the care of the workhouse authorities and then “despatched to a branch-workhouse” so that he can be ““farmed”” by the less than maternal Miss Mann, who is described as “the female to whose protecting care Oliver Twist was delivered over” (*OT*, 20). More generally, as Bowen points out, the post figures heavily both in terms of the character Oliver Twist and within the narrative of *Oliver Twist*. Bowen argues, however, that the notion of “arrival” is made problematic in the novel, particularly in terms of the eponymous hero:

²² Robert Kiely, “Plotting and Scheming: The Design of Design in *Our Mutual Friend*”, *Dickens Studies Annual* 12 (1983): 267-83 (281-2).

²³ Frederick Luis Aldama, “Novel Possibilities: Fantastic and Real Fusions in *Our Mutual Friend*”, *Dickens Quarterly* 19.1 (March 2002): 3-16 (13).

²⁴ The modern critical view of *Our Mutual Friend* as a novel which looks forward to twentieth century literature has not gone uncontested. For example, Audrey Jaffe suggests that what is considered neoteric in *Our Mutual Friend* is in fact an authorial sleight of hand: “*Our Mutual Friend* is generally regarded as the most modern of Dickens’s works because of the absence of a prominent omniscient voice and a clear omniscient perspective [...] Yet [...] if the Dickens narrator lets his omniscience go without saying, he by no means lets it go without being felt”; see Audrey Jaffe, *Vanishing Points: Dickens, Narrative, and the Subject of Omniscience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 150.

Journeys, especially Oliver's, are always being detoured, delayed or broken in the story, sending him to entirely different, or other, places from where he is intended to go [...] Oliver twice becomes a little postman, taking Mr. Brownlow's book back to the shop and Mrs. Maylie's letter to Harry [Maylie]. Both times he is interrupted, first by Nancy and Sikes who take him back to Fagin's parcel office, and then by Monks [...] Once or twice he even sends himself off, like a parcel with no destination, to be found by Jack Dawkins at the side of the road and bundled off to Fagin's, a little message, a fold or twist of paper, passed on and read by Agnes, Bumble, Sowerberry, Brownlow, Fang, Fagin, Sikes, Monks, the Maylies, and many others, to say nothing of Dickens and his readers. (Bowen, 94-95)

For Bowen, it seems, Oliver functions as a quasi-dead letter in the novel; at once arriving and not arriving; undeliverable and yet constantly being delivered; sent to "no destination" and yet claimed by everybody as their property. In this respect, Oliver resembles the character of "Moloch" – otherwise Sally Tetterby – in *The Haunted Man*, who is described by the narrator, whilst being carried by her sibling Johnny, as being like "a very large parcel, which was not directed to anybody, and could never be delivered anywhere" (CC, 349).

The denouement of *Oliver Twist* likewise revolves around two papers written by Oliver's father, Edwin Leeford, which figure as quasi-dead letters in the narrative – in an almost literal sense, seeing that they were "not to be forwarded till after he was dead" – both of which are fatefully delayed before being delivered over to Oliver (OT, 343). Even then, the delivery is at best partial; almost no delivery at all. The first paper concerns Leeford's will, a document which outlines the conditions Oliver, his illegitimate son, must meet in order to inherit his fortune. In his work, Derrida sees an essential relation between the notion of inheritance and the post. As Dooley and Kavanagh note, for Derrida, "[t]he postal metaphor [...] raises interesting questions about inheritance and the past" (Dooley and Kavanagh, 70). The links Derrida makes between the notion of inheritance and the post is most evident in the "Envois" segment of *The Post Card*, a text made up of fragmented postcards, where he claims "Freud sent himself his will in order to survive his heirs" (*Post Card*, 52). Similarly, when discussing "[t]he presumptive heir, Plato," a figure who "receives the [Socratic] inheritance", but, like Freud, "has sent it to himself", Derrida tells the

anonymous addressee of the postcards: “you can try to forward the inheritance” (*Post Card*, 52). Like Derrida, Dickens, in *Oliver Twist*, presents Leeford’s will as if it were a type of dead letter, a missive gone astray. For example, before it reaches Oliver, the will is intercepted by his half-brother, Monks, and Monk’s mother – the two brothers share a father, not a mother – who, after reading it, burn the details of Oliver’s inheritance. Although Mr. Brownlow discovers the truth concerning Oliver’s inheritance, owing to the fact that the will has been destroyed, the document itself is undeliverable, and cannot be presented to Oliver and, consequently, to the reader of the novel, other than in the form of paraphrase.

Leeford’s will is supplemented by a second paper he writes, a letter which is to be sent to Oliver’s mother, Agnes, in the event of his death. The letter expresses Leeford’s regret that he is unable to marry Agnes and prevent her from the ignominy of giving birth to an illegitimate child. Describing the letter as a ““a penitent confession””, Monks summarizes the letter’s contents: ““He told her all he had meant to do, to hide her shame, if he had lived, and prayed her, if he died, not to curse his memory, or think the consequences of their sin would be visited on her or their young child; for all the guilt was his.”” (*OT*, 343) Like Leeford’s will, however, the letter intended for Agnes is intercepted by Monks’s mother. As Monks explains: ““The letter never reached its destination; but that, and other proofs, she kept in case they ever tried to lie away the blot.”” (*OT*, 344) If Leeford’s will becomes a quasi-dead letter, his letter to Agnes is a dead letter in a more literal sense, in that, it not only fails to reach its intended destination, but, also, by the time that the letter’s contents are divulged, Agnes, the intended recipient, has been dead for several years, and therefore it will remain forever a dead letter; that is, a letter sent from the dead to the dead. Furthermore, the fact that the will and the letter are only presented in the text in paraphrase – the documents themselves destroyed or missing – means that they at once arrive and do not arrive in the text of *Oliver Twist*.

By claiming that “Dickens and his readers” participate in the “scenes of sending” that take place in the story, Bowen implies that it is not only the character of Oliver Twist that is “a little message” that is “passed on and read”, but, also, *Oliver Twist*, the novel. This is significant because Dickens appears to be of the same opinion. But, it seems, even Dickens could not always rely upon Oliver being “delivered”. On 13 March 1838, in the midst of writing *Oliver Twist*, Dickens complains in a letter to Forster: “The morning is not inviting, and I am sitting patiently at home waiting for Oliver Twist who has not yet arrived.”

(*Pilgrim*, 1: 387) According to a footnote provided by the editors of the *Pilgrim Edition* of his letters, Dickens is “waiting” “for inspiration – not for proofs” (*Pilgrim*, 1: 387). In addition to this interpretation, Dickens’s choice of expression in his letter to Forster (that he is “waiting for Oliver Twist who has not yet arrived”) lends itself irresistibly to the notion that, for him, “Oliver Twist” – the character and/or the novel – is a delayed or misdirected letter, a dead letter unable to reach its destination.

The March 1838 letter to Forster is not the only instance during this period in which Dickens, in his correspondence, uses language commonly associated with the post when mentioning *Oliver Twist*. Writing to the Reverend William Giles in August 1838, Dickens states: “I send you such books as I have already finished. I wish that Oliver were among the number, but when he appears in three volumes, I shall find means of forwarding him to Manchester.” (*Pilgrim*, 1: 429) In a 9 November 1838 letter to *Oliver Twist*’s illustrator, George Cruikshank, Dickens writes: “I returned suddenly to town yesterday afternoon to look at the latter pages of Oliver Twist before it was delivered to the booksellers, when I saw the majority of the plates in the last volume for the first time.” (*Pilgrim*, 1: 450) On 31 January 1839, Dickens tells Thomas Noon Talfourd: “I return your Oliver, which has only just now reached me.” (*Pilgrim*, 1: 503) Like the letter to Forster, the language Dickens employs in his messages to Giles, Cruikshank, and Telford, when referring to *Oliver Twist* – “forwarded”,

“delivered”, and “returned” – again suggests that the novel figures in his imagination as a type of novelistic-letter.

Thirty years after it was first published, *Oliver Twist* is, to borrow Bowen’s expression, “passed on and read” by Dickens, as if he were a literary postman, in his performance of the “Sikes and Nancy” reading. The idea that the readings acquire a form of correspondence between himself and his audience is in keeping with Dickens’s view of his performances. In a letter to Wilkie Collins on 28 August 1861, Dickens appears to see a link between the public readings of his novels and the post, telling him: “I have got the [David] Copperfield Reading ready for delivery” (*Pilgrim*, 9: 447). Whilst it may seem clear that he is referring to the vocal “delivery” of the *David Copperfield* reading text, with Dickens, as his letters written at the time of *Oliver Twist* illustrate, one can never be entirely sure. Indeed, in *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens fuses these two senses of the term “delivery”. For example, after Mr. Boffin gives a particularly diffuse speech upon the word “Patronized”, the narrator states: “Having delivered himself of these remarks, Mr. Boffin took a trot, according to his usual custom, and trotted back to the spot from which he had started.” (*OMF*, 383) “Having delivered himself” in this scene, it as if Boffin becomes his own self-addressed letter and, moreover, by “[trotting] back to the spot from which he had started”, Boffin mimics this movement of self-address, of return, in which he “delivers” himself to himself. In the next section I claim that Dickens, like Boffin, “delivers” himself to himself, via his novel *Our Mutual Friend*, in a species of authorial return to sender.

III

For Forster, *Our Mutual Friend* signals a clear return to *Oliver Twist*. In particular, Forster claims, it is Dickens’s portrayal of Betty Higden in *Our Mutual Friend*, whose mission in life is to avoid the workhouse – that much maligned product of the New Poor Laws and the place of so much misery and the subject of so much scorn in *Oliver Twist* – that is suggestive of a

link between the two novels. Although Forster admits that *Our Mutual Friend* “has not the creative power which crowded his earlier page”, he acknowledges: “the observation and humour he excelled in are not wanting to it, nor had there been, in his first completed work [*Oliver Twist*], more eloquent or generous pleading for the poor and neglected, than this last completed work contains. Betty Higden finishes what *Oliver Twist* began.” (Forster, 2: 295) In a similar vein to Forster, Ackroyd observes: “in the figure of the distressed Betty Higden running from the spectre of the workhouse, he returns to the attack he had made upon the New Poor Laws twenty-seven years before in *Oliver Twist*. All the radicalism of his youth is returning again, in his last finished novel.” (Ackroyd, 998) Both a “completion” of and a “return” to *Oliver Twist*, *Our Mutual Friend* is described by Forster and Ackroyd as if it were a sequel to the earlier novel.

The links between the two novels that Forster and Ackroyd identify is further suggested by the intertextual doubling of Oliver in *Oliver Twist* and Johnny in *Our Mutual Friend*.²⁵ Like Oliver, Johnny is an orphan. Unlike Oliver, however, there is no happy ending in store for Johnny, who dies almost as soon as he is introduced into the story. But as the narrator of *Oliver Twist* remarks, shortly after Oliver’s birth at the workhouse, it is through luck rather than judgement that Oliver narrowly escapes an early death himself:

if during this brief period, Oliver had been surrounded by careful grandmothers, anxious aunts, experienced nurses, and doctors of profound wisdom, he would most inevitably and indubitably have been killed in no time. There being nobody by [...] Oliver and Nature fought out the point between them. The result was, that, after a few struggles, Oliver breathed, sneezed, and proceeded to advertise to the inmates of the workhouse the fact of a new burden having been imposed upon the parish, by setting up as loud a cry as could reasonably be expected from a male infant who had not been possessed of that very useful appendage, a voice, for a much longer space of time than three minutes and a quarter. (*OT*, 18)

In stark contrast, despite giving Johnny every advantage that he denied to Oliver, Dickens sentences Johnny to death. Through the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, Johnny, after he

²⁵ Less convincingly, and with a touch of irony, Kincaid states that the character of Mr. Twemlow in *Our Mutual Friend* “is just what *Oliver Twist* would have grown up to be” (Kincaid, 239).

becomes seriously ill, is placed in a “Children’s Hospital” and is “surrounded” by “experienced nurses and doctors of profound wisdom”, but this is still not enough to save him (*OMF*, 325). Before they put Johnny into the hospital, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin explain to his grandmother, Betty Higden, their reasons for doing so: ““We want to move Johnny to a place where there are none but children; a place set up on purpose for sick children; where the good doctors and nurses pass their lives with children, talk to none but children, touch none but children, comfort and cure none but children.”” (*OMF*, 325) Irrespective of the care and attention that Johnny receives, he dies shortly after entering the hospital. The original readers of *Oliver Twist*, it seems, would have to wait over twenty-five years for the delivery of the punch-line to this “rather black joke”: through neglect and ill-use Oliver lives; through care and attention Johnny dies (Bowen, 83). The different fates meted out to Oliver and Johnny by Dickens – which is reminiscent of the contrasting fortunes of David Copperfield and Pip – is summed up by Sydney Carton, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, who, when talking to himself after meeting his doppelgänger, Charles Darnay, says regretfully: ““he shows you [...] what you might have been!”” (*TTC*, 89).

The ways in which Oliver and Johnny parallel one another is not the only instance in which Dickens figures characters from *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend* as intertextual doubles. As Forster points out, Mr. Riah in *Our Mutual Friend* is a conscious attempt, on Dickens’s part, to amend his anti-Semitic portrayal of Fagin in *Oliver Twist*: “The benevolent old Jew [...] was meant to wipe out a reproach against his Jew in *Oliver Twist* as bringing dislike upon the religion of the race he belonged to.” (Forster, 2: 291) Dickens felt it necessary to atone for his depiction of Fagin after receiving a letter, on 10 July 1863, from Mrs. Eliza Davis. Of Jewish descent, Davis was understandably uncomfortable with Dickens’s representation of Fagin. Davis wrote to Dickens outlining her concerns, “remonstrating with him on the injustice to the Jews” (Hogarth, 2: 204). Dickens defended

his characterization by appealing to artistic verisimilitude, claiming that his portrayal of Fagin was just “because it unfortunately was true of the time to which that story refers, that that class of criminal almost invariably *was* a Jew” (*Pilgrim*, 10: 269, original emphasis). Dickens adds: “I have no feeling towards the Jewish people but a friendly one.” (*Pilgrim*, 10: 270)

Remaining unsatisfied by Dickens’s explanation, Davis replies with another letter which again questioned his treatment of Fagin, as well as his use of the word “Jew”. An editorial note which supplements Davis’s second letter to Dickens in the 1880 edition of his letters explains: “The reply to *this* letter was the character of Riah, in ‘Our Mutual Friend’” (Hogarth, 2: 205, original emphasis). Johnson notes that Davis’s “communication” with Dickens “curiously influenced the design of [*Our Mutual Friend*]” (Johnson, 503). More than this, however, if the character of Riah is Dickens’s “reply” to Mrs. Davis’s letter, his attempt at answering any charges of anti-Semitism, it is also a “reply” to his own characterization of Fagin, a reply to his younger self. That is, there is a sense in which the character of Riah becomes a letter— one definition of “character” is “letter”, as in a printed or written letter, symbol, or distinctive mark – that he sends or returns to himself. When Mr. Brownlow tells Nancy in *Oliver Twist* that if Monks “cannot be secured” then she “must deliver up the Jew” – namely, Fagin – to justice, she refuses to do it (*OT*, 308). Dickens, it seems, has no such scruples concerning Riah, whom in 1863 he willingly “delivers up” and sends into the detours of the post.

J. Hillis Miller writes that Riah is “an apparition strange, ghostly [and] uncanny”.²⁶ For Miller, this is especially true when Riah’s figure emerges walking in the London fog: “The fog makes Riah a species of Baudelairean revenant, like those seven identical old men who appear on a foggy day in Paris, in [Charles] Baudelaire’s ‘Les sept vieillards’” (Miller,

²⁶ J. Hillis Miller, *Others* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 46; henceforth Miller, *Others*.

Others, 46). Miller is right to recognize the spectral quality of Riah, who, at one point, the narrator describes as “stealing through the streets [...] like the ghost of a departed Time” (*OMF*, 400). What is more, Miller’s claim that Riah is a “revenant” – again, “literally that which comes back” – has important implications for the argument outlined in this chapter that *Our Mutual Friend* is a return to *Oliver Twist* (*Specters*, 177).

Discussing the figure of the revenant, Derrida explains: “Given that a *revenant* is always called upon to come and to come back, the thinking of the specter, contrary to what good sense leads us to believe, signals toward the future.” (*Specters*, 196, original emphasis). For Derrida, a revenant or spectre – “a specter is always a *revenant*”, Derrida points out – involves “[a] question of repetition”: “One cannot control its comings or goings because it *begins by coming back*.” (*Specters*, 11, original emphasis) Dickens’s portrayal of Riah parallels Derrida’s conception of the revenant. For example, when Fascination Fledgeby enters the “little garden” on the roof of his premises which Riah has created, Jenny Wren rebukes Fledgeby for calling Riah “back to life”; that is, to the dreariness of life, a life which equals death:

“Why it was only now”, said the little creature, pointing at [Riah], “that I fancied I saw him come out of his grave! He toiled out at that low door so bent and worn, and then he took his breath and stood upright, and looked all round him at the sky, and the wind blew upon him, and his life down in the dark was over! – Till he was called back to life [...] Why did you call him back?”²⁷ (*OMF*, 279)

For Royle, Jenny’s claim that Riah is “called back to life” would provide another example of the ways in which *Our Mutual Friend* is a novel “about living on, not as the triumph of continuing to live but a movement of return or haunting which comes back, folds back from the beginning on what one might have wanted to call ‘life’ itself. There is no life in *Our Mutual Friend*, there is only the spectral elusiveness of living on.” (Royle, *Our Mutual*

²⁷ For Lothar Černý, in *Our Mutual Friend* there is a sense in which “[t]he *topos* ‘death in life’ has been re-cast, the sequence logically reversed into ‘life in death’”; see Lothar Černý, “‘Life in Death’: Art in Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*”, *Dickens Quarterly* 17.1 (March 2000): 22-36 (23).

Friend, 49) However, Royle's recognition of "the movement of return or haunting which comes back, folds back from the beginning" in *Our Mutual Friend* extends further than simply within the novel's narrative.

Royle uses the term "living on" in the sense that Derrida does in his essay "Living On: Borderlines": "Survival and *revenance*, living on and returning from the dead: living on goes beyond both living and dying".²⁸ As his use of the term "revenance" makes clear, for Derrida, the notion of "living on" is inextricably linked to the figure of the revenant.²⁹ Therefore, just as Fledgeby calls Riah "back to life", Dickens, by depicting Riah as a revenant, a ghostly "reply", calls Fagin "back to life" in *Our Mutual Friend* and allows him to "live on". But if Riah is a revenant – as Miller believes him to be and the text suggests that he is – he is not simply a "reply" to Fagin in the conventional sense. Rather, because a revenant "begins by coming back", Fagin – who is described by the narrator in *Oliver Twist* as "like some hideous phantom" and by Sikes as "like a ugly ghost just rose from the grave" – is always already "coming back": "from the beginning", to use Royle's phrase, a spectral return or "reply" to Riah (*OT*, 311, 133). Like Mr. Bumble in *Oliver Twist*, who claims that he had "always loved" the much younger Oliver "as if he'd been my – my – my own grandfather" – or even Mr. Twemlow in *Our Mutual Friend* who is never entirely sure "whether he was [Mr.] Veneering's oldest, or newest friend" – the intertextual relationship between Fagin and Riah, it seems, sidesteps logical temporality (*OT*, 345: *OMF*, 18).

Riah is not the only character in *Our Mutual Friend* who links the post and revenants, however. After declaring himself "dead", for the reasons outlined in the previous chapter, John Harmon, who is described as "haunting" and "stumping overhead in the dark, like a Ghost" is figured as an anti-revenant (*OMF*, 207). Shortly after his supposed "death",

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, "Living On: Borderlines", in Harold Bloom *et al*, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1979; London: Continuum, 2004), 62-142 (89); henceforth *Living On*.

²⁹ Derrida writes: "This living on is also a phantom revenance (the one who lives on is always a ghost) that is noticeable (re-markable) and is represented from the beginning" (*Living On*, 112).

Harmon, referring to Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, declares: ““Dead, I have found the true friends of my lifetime still as true and tender and as faithful as when as I was alive [...] If I had come back, these noble creatures would have welcomed me, wept over me [...] I did not come back”” (*OMF*, 367). This impossible statement by Harmon – impossible because, if Harmon “did not come back”, who is this “I” speaking? – appears in Book 2 of the novel, in a chapter entitled “A Solo and a Duett [*sic*]”, where Harmon first reveals he is in fact John Rokesmith in disguise (*OMF*, 359). Speaking of Radfoot’s attack, which led to his “death”, even Harmon appears to be unsure as to who the “I” is he refers to:

I could not have said that my name was John Harmon – I could not have thought it – I didn’t know it [...] This is still correct? Still correct, with the exception that I cannot possibly express it to myself without using the word I. But it was not I. There was no such thing as I, within my knowledge. (*OMF*, 363)

Harmon’s impossible declaration forms part of a longer monologue which makes up the bulk of the chapter, the only section of the novel written in the first person, in which he attempts to recollect the events leading up to his “death” by conversing with himself. Placed at the centre of the narrative, Harmon’s monologue is often regarded as a clumsy plot device.³⁰ For the writer of an unsigned review of *Our Mutual Friend*, published in the *London Review* on 28 October 1865, “the mystery concerning John Rokesmith is explained in an [...] objectionable manner”:

Young Rokesmith, or Harmon, *tells himself* his own previous history, in a sort of mental soliloquy (in which a long series of events is minutely narrated), evidently for no other purpose than to inform the reader. It is surprising that so experienced a romance-writer as Mr. Dickens could not have devised some more artful means of revealing that portion of his design. (*DCH*, 456, original emphasis)

Whilst it may be deemed a weak point of the novel, Harmon’s monologue provides another opportunity for Dickens to send a character into the detours of the post. As a “sort of mental soliloquy”, Harmon’s monologue is, as MacKay points out, a form of “self-address”; that is,

³⁰ Carol Hanbery MacKay writes of this episode: “Readers and critics alike have found this exposition problematic, usually seeing its length and form as implausible and awkward”; see Carol Hanbery MacKay, “The Encapsulated Romantic: John Harmon and the Boundaries of Victorian Soliloquy”, *Dickens Studies Annual* 18 (1989): 225-76 (255); henceforth MacKay.

a correspondence with himself (MacKay, 270). As the narrator of the novel puts it, in “A Solo and a Duett”, Harmon is “communing with himself” (*OMF*, 367).

The “self-address” of Harmon’s soliloquy is not the only occasion in the text in which he corresponds with himself. When applying for the post of “Secretary” to Mr. and Mrs. Boffin’s business affairs, Harmon is asked by Mr. Boffin to write a letter in order to test his suitability for the role:

“Now, as to a letter. Let’s”, said Mr. Boffin, rubbing his hands in his pleasantly childish admiration, “let’s try a letter next”.

“To whom shall it be addressed, Mr. Boffin?”

“Anyone. Yourself”.

Mr. Rokesmith quickly wrote, and then read aloud [the letter] (*OMF*, 181).

By writing and then reading aloud the letter addressed to himself, Rokesmith parallels the “self-address” of his soliloquy in “A Solo and a Duett”. Commenting upon the ways in which Nietzsche “writes to himself to himself”, Derrida argues that “there is no possible distinction [...] between the letter I write to someone else and the letter I send to myself” in the sense that, in both instances, “plenty of accidents can occur” which prevent the letter being delivered to its intended destination (*Ear of the Other*, 88-89). If not an “accident”, in the strictest sense, the fact that “Mr. Rokesmith” is Harmon in disguise means that he cannot receive a letter from “himself”, because he is not “himself”. Just as Harmon’s “death” leaves him with the sense that there is “no such thing as I, within [his] knowledge”, his dual existence as John Rokesmith/Harmon leaves his identity fractured – “divided in my mind”, as he puts it – and makes it impossible for him, as Rokesmith, to address a letter to himself and for that letter to arrive (*OMF*, 360).

In another of his texts dealing with the nature of “self-sending [*s’envoyer*]”, Derrida explores the implications of the repetition of the word “yes” within Molly Bloom’s so-called

“monologue” in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.³¹ For Derrida, the fact that Molly’s “monologue” is bracketed by two “yeses” annuls its monologic status:

Nothing is less a monologue than Molly’s “monologue”, even if, within certain conventional limits, we have the right to view it as belonging to the genre or type known as the “monologue.” But a discourse embraced by two *Yeses*, could not be a monologue, but at the very most a soliloquy [...] *Yes* indicates that there is address to the other [...] For if there is some other, if there is some *yes*, then the other no longer lets itself be produced by the same or by the ego. *Yes* [...] addresses itself to some other which it does not constitute, and it can only begin by *asking* the other, in response to a request that has always already been made, *to ask* it to say *yes* [...] The self-affirmation of the *yes* can address itself to the other only in recalling itself to itself, in saying to itself *yes, yes*. The circle of this universal presupposition, fairly comic in itself, is like a dispatch to oneself, a sending-back [*renvois*] of self to self, which *both never leaves itself and never arrives at itself*. (*Ulysses*, 299-303, original emphasis).

Although it appears less frequently than in Molly’s “monologue”, the repetition of the word “yes” in Rokesmith/Harmon’s soliloquy means that it is not only a “self-address”, but also, an “address to the other” within himself (*OMF*, 363-66). Moreover, as already mentioned, Harmon’s soliloquy in “A Solo and a Duett” is the only portion of the novel which is narrated in the first-person. By switching to the pronoun “I” – a homophone for “aye”; that is, “yes” – Dickens provides another instance in which Harmon can “address the other”, even if, for Harmon, ““there is no such thing as I”” (*Ulysses*, 306).³² Doubling his own divided identity, the word “yes” in Harmon’s soliloquy means that, like the letter he addresses to himself, it is a self-address “which both never leaves itself and never arrives at itself”. Also like the letter that he addresses to himself, then, rather than being simply a “soliloquy” or “monologue”, Harmon’s “self-address” in “A Solo and a Duett” takes on the form of a discourse between

³¹ Jacques Derrida, “Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes In Joyce”, in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 253-309 (303); henceforth *Ulysses*.

³² In Dickens’s 1864 Christmas story *Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions*, written whilst he was still working on *Our Mutual Friend*, the eponymous doctor provides a different pun on the word “I”: “I was aware that I couldn’t do myself justice. A man can’t write his eye (at least *I* don’t know how to)” (*CS*, 586, original emphasis). For Derrida, the pronoun “I” and the word “yes” are also linked in a performative sense: “A promise, an oath, an order, a commitment always implies a *yes*, I sign. The *I* of *I* sign says *yes* and says *yes* to itself, even if it signs a simulacrum [...] [J. L.] Austin reminds us that the performative *par excellence* is that of a sentence in the first person of the present indicative: *yes, I promise, I accept, I refuse, I order, I do, I will, and so on*. ‘He promises’ is not an explicit performative and cannot be unless an *I* is understood, as, for example, in ‘I swear to you that he promises.’” (*Ulysses*, 298-300, original emphasis)

his two selves – Harmon and Rokesmith – in which the ghost or revenant of Harmon “comes back”, but does so in a species of return which makes any sense of arrival impossible.

Harmon is first implicated in the vagaries of the post much earlier in the story. *Our Mutual Friend* is the first of Dickens’s novels to include a postscript, which he entitled, in the tradition of Walter Scott’s *Waverley*, “Postscript, in Lieu of Preface”. As Gregg A. Hecimovich points out, however, the title of the postscript is inaccurate: “In the two editions of the novel that Dickens personally oversaw a 1 x 4 inch slip of paper overlaps the opening paragraph. This slip contains instructions addressed to the reader”.³³ In a footnote, Hecimovich adds: “He titles his afterward [*sic*], ‘A [*sic*] Postscript, in Lieu of a [*sic*] Preface’ neglecting the prefatory slip of paper.” (Hecimovich, 976-7) According to Hecimovich, modern editors of the novel, as well as critics more generally, tend to follow Dickens, in that they neglect it as well: “the slip heretofore exists as a sort of ‘purloined letter’, so conspicuously present that it has been missed entirely. Scholarly reprints of the novel [...] omit the slip, while critical works maintain more than a century of silence on the subject.” (Hecimovich, 955) The slip of paper which originally prefaced *Our Mutual Friend* can certainly be seen to “[exist] a sort of “‘purloined letter’”, but not necessarily in the sense in which Hecimovich intended. In addition to being, as Hecimovich claims, “so conspicuously present that it has been missed entirely”, the slip of paper is, I argue, like Derrida’s reading of “The Purloined Letter”, in that it enables the reader of *Our Mutual Friend* to at once arrive and not arrive.

The slip of paper which prefaced *Our Mutual Friend* is addressed to the reader of the novel and contains the following words: “The Reader will understand the use of the popular phrase OUR MUTUAL FRIEND, as the title of this book, on arriving at the Ninth Chapter.” (OMF, 801) Dickens’s decision to preface the novel with a slip of paper, explaining that his

³³ Gregg A. Hecimovich, “The Cup and the Lip and the Riddle of Our Mutual Friend”, *English Literary History* 62.4 (Winter 1995): 955-77 (955); henceforth Hecimovich.

“use of the popular phrase OUR MUTUAL FRIEND” would eventually become apparent, may be in part an attempt to forestall any criticism from his more pedantic readers. As Chesterton notes, “[t]he very title is illiterate. Any priggish pupil teacher could tell Dickens that there is no such phrase in English as ‘our mutual friend’. Anyone could tell Dickens that ‘our mutual friend’ means ‘our reciprocal friend’, and that ‘our reciprocal friend’ means nothing.”

(Chesterton, 118) Rather than a defensive tactic aimed at grammarians reading his novel, however, the slip of paper allows Dickens another opportunity with which to send Harmon into the post.

“[O]n arriving at the Ninth Chapter” – as if the readers of *Our Mutual Friend* are themselves letters – “the Reader” finds Mr. Boffin in a conversation with Mrs. Wilfer, the topic of which concerns her new lodger John Rokesmith. Referring to Harmon/Rokesmith, Mr. Boffin says: “I may call him Our Mutual Friend [...] What sort of fellow is Our Mutual Friend [...] I’m not particularly well acquainted with Our Mutual Friend, for I have only seen him once” (*OMF*, 115, original emphasis). Many critics have been dissatisfied with Dickens’s labelling of Harmon as “Our Mutual Friend”. For John P. Farrell, “[b]oth the mutual friend and the ‘our’ to whom he belongs are only minimally identified in the text”: “Rokesmith-Harmon is several times unhelpfully referred to as ‘Our Mutual Friend’, a designation based merely on his acquaintance with both the Boffins and Wilfers.”³⁴ In one of his many readings of the novel, J. Hillis Miller is likewise left unsatisfied by Dickens’s reference to Harmon as “Our Mutual Friend” and feels it necessary to expand upon the title’s possible meaning:

The use of the phrase as the title for the whole novel [...] suggests a wider reference [...] beyond the centrality of John Harmon to the novel’s melodramatic intrigue, beyond, that is, the way John Harmon is mutual friend of all the characters. The novel is full of situations in which one person is related to another not directly but by way of a third person whom both know. (Miller, *Others*, 50)

³⁴ John P. Farrell, “The Partner’s Tale: Dickens and *Our Mutual Friend*”, *English Literary History* 66.3 (Fall 1999): 759-99 (759-94).

Miller is undoubtedly correct in stating that, rather than applying solely to Harmon, the phrase “Our Mutual Friend” “suggests a wider reference” within the narrative. But this does not account for Dickens’s decision to name Harmon “Our Mutual Friend”.³⁵ As Arnold Kettle explains, “it is perhaps significant that in this big, ambitious, eminently serious novel Dickens should have underlined in his title the role of John Harmon”.³⁶ Like Miller, Kettle believes that Harmon’s “function within the novel” as “Our Mutual Friend” “is to link not only diverse characters but diverse areas” (Kettle, 214). I propose an alternative reading, however. In being referred to as “Our Mutual Friend” by Boffin, I contend, Harmon is figured by Dickens as *Our Mutual Friend*; that is, the novel.

As Royle points out, Harmon is not described by Boffin as “our mutual friend”, but as “Our Mutual Friend”: “What is going on when a title is quoted within the text to which it refers? Boffin’s capitalisation of the phrase exacerbates the strangeness, as if he were a reader of Charles Dickens’s novel as well as a character in it.” (Royle, “Our Mutual Friend”, 41) Following Royle’s logic, if Boffin can be interpreted as “a reader of Charles Dickens’s novel”, his reference to Harmon as “Our Mutual Friend” means that, by the same token, Harmon can symbolize or personify *Our Mutual Friend*, “Charles Dickens’s novel”. Any sense of “understanding” that “the Reader” may have reached “on arriving at the Ninth Chapter” in terms of “[t]he use of the popular phrase OUR MUTUAL FRIEND” – namely, that it applies to Harmon/Rokesmith – is undermined, or at least problematized, because, as already outlined, Rokesmith is not himself, but rather Harmon in disguise. Therefore, “the Reader”, “on arriving at the Ninth Chapter” simultaneously arrives and does not arrive because, like Harmon’s letter he sends to himself and the “self-address” of his soliloquy, the destination is at once single and double. In this sense, the “purloined letter” which is the

³⁵ The phrase “our mutual friend” reappears throughout Dickens’s texts. See, for example, *OCS*, 364; *MC*, 389; *DC*, 515; *BH*, 250-52; and *LD*, 103, 237.

³⁶ Arnold Kettle, “Our Mutual Friend”, in *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (1962; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 213-25 (214); henceforth Kettle.

“prefatory” slip of paper, resembles Derrida’s notion of a letter, more generally, in that it is “a divided echo of itself [...] lost for the addressee at the very second when it is inscribed, its destination is immediately multiple, anonymous” (*Post Card*, 79).

Harmon – “Our Mutual Friend” – is also sent into the detours of the post later on in the novel when he writes a letter for Betty Higden which she carries around with her, and is to be returned to him only on account of her death. As already mentioned, for Forster and Ackroyd, it is through the character of Betty Higden in *Our Mutual Friend* that Dickens’s return to *Oliver Twist* is made manifest. One of the ways in which “Betty Higden finishes what *Oliver Twist* began” – in the words of Forster – is through Dickens’s criticism of the Poor Laws. Defending his portrayal of Betty in the “Postscript, in Lieu of Preface”, Dickens criticizes the Poor Law for its “illegality”, “inhumanity”, and “lawlessness” and, in doing so, he refers to two of his other novels – *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit* (Dickens, *Postscript*, 799). *Oliver Twist*, however, his novel most commonly associated with the inequities of the Poor Law, is conspicuous by its absence in the “Postscript”. Like his 1838 letter to Forster, Dickens, it seems, is still waiting for *Oliver Twist* to arrive in the “Postscript”.

Despite the omission of *Oliver Twist* from the “Postscript”, the character of Betty Higden, as Forster and Ackroyd acknowledge, acts as an intermediary between *Our Mutual Friend* and *Oliver Twist*. For example, at one point Betty is described by the narrator as “our sister in Law – Poor Law” (*OMF*, 507). Following this description of Betty as “our sister in [...] Poor Law” the narrator mentions “our Brother too” (*OMF*, 507). It does not take a gigantic leap of imagination to see “our Brother” in Poor Law as the character of Oliver Twist. In Dickens’s fictional “family”, Betty Higden can be regarded as the sibling or the twin sister of Oliver Twist/*Oliver Twist* (*DC Preface*, 870).

In order to avoid a slow, agonising death in the workhouse, Betty explains to Mr. and Mrs. Boffin her plan of “[t]rudging round the country and tiring myself out” to “keep the

deadness off, and get my own bread by my own labour” (OMF, 376). The Boffins consent to Betty’s plan on the condition that they ““must not lose sight of [her]”” and ““must know all about [her]”” as she travels the country (OMF, 378). Betty admits that she cannot communicate ““through letter-writing, because letter-writing – indeed, writing of most sorts – hadn’t much come up for such as me when [she] was young”” (OMF, 378). To allay this problem, Harmon/Rokesmith writes a letter for Betty Higden, addressed to himself as well as the Boffins, and tells her to keep it in her pocket. The letter, Rokesmith explains, ““merely stat[es], in the names of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, that they are your friends”” (OMF, 382).

Mr. Boffin is adamant that Betty should take Rokesmith’s letter with her: ““As to the letter, Rokesmith’, said Mr. Boffin, ‘you’re as right as a trivet. Give her the letter, make her take the letter, put it in her pocket by violence.’” (OMF, 383) Without any “violence” on Rokesmith’s part, however, Betty takes the letter and keeps it “[s]ewn in the breast of her gown, [with] the money to pay for her burial” (OMF, 502). As its close proximity to the burial money in her pocket suggests, the unspoken point of the letter that Rokesmith writes for Betty is that it will inform Rokesmith and Mr. and Mrs. Boffin in the event of Betty’s death. “Sewn in the breast of her gown,” the message Betty carries around with her is the message of her own death, which will be returned, on her death, to its author, Harmon/Rokesmith: “Our Mutual Friend”. By carrying Rokesmith’s or “Our Mutual Friend’s” letter containing the news of her death, the character of Betty, who is at once a return to and a personification of *Oliver Twist*, literalizes the metaphor of *Our Mutual Friend*’s quasi-postal correspondence with *Oliver Twist*.

Betty’s letter becomes a post card in Derrida’s sense of the term: “half-private half-public, neither the one nor the other” (*Post Card*, 62). Betty’s letter is suggestive of a postcard when she meets Rogue Riderhood and Lizzie Hexam. After Betty’s letter is read by Riderhood, and then Lizzie, it makes those two characters into types of dead letter offices.

trying to decipher its address in order to forward or return it. Riderhood meets Betty Higden in his post as “Deputy Lock” as she is flees from a village that is going to place her in the workhouse. Preying on her insecurities Riderhood tells Betty: “‘I’m a honest man as gets my living by the sweat of my brow, and I may fall into trouble by letting you go [...] it would be asked, Why did that there honest Deputy Lock, let her go, instead of putting her safe with the Parish?’” (*OMF*, 501). Betty replies to Riderhood:

“As I’ve told you, Master, I’ve the best of friends. This letter will show how true I spoke, and they will be thankful for me”.

The Deputy Lock opened the letter with a grave face, which underwent no change as he eyed the contents. But it might have done, if he could have read them. (*OMF*, 501)

This is certainly a strange scene. Betty Higden, who cannot read or write, hands a letter to Riderhood who only pretends to read it, because he cannot read or write either. The encounter between the illiterate characters of Riderhood and Betty resembles another aspect of Derrida’s examination of the post card. Derrida claims that “letters are always post cards: neither legible nor illegible, open and radically unintelligible” (*Post Card*, 79). Literalizing Derrida’s claim, Riderhood’s inability to decipher the meaning of Betty’s letter makes it “illegible” and “radically unintelligible” to him.

Shortly after her encounter with Riderhood, Betty meets Lizzie Hexam. If, like Mr. Boffin ““all print is shut”” to Riderhood then, like Silas Wegg, ““all Print is open”” to Lizzie Hexam (*OMF*, 57). Able to read Betty’s letter, Lizzie Hexam represents the letter’s openness and legibility.³⁷ At the point of meeting Lizzie, Betty is on the brink of death. When she sees Lizzie, Betty mistakes her for “an Angel” and has just enough breath to mouth the words ““Paper. Letter”” to her namesake (*OMF*, 505-6).³⁸ Noticing the letter, Lizzie takes it from Betty’s breast pocket and asks: “Am I to open it? To read it?” (*OMF*, 506) As Lizzie reads

³⁷ Earlier on in the novel, though, Lizzie is unable to read and tells her brother Charley: “‘I should be very glad to be able to read real books.’” (*OMF*, 39)

³⁸ In giving Betty Higden and Lizzie Hexam identical initials or letters (“E. H.”) Dickens hints at a possible correspondence between them.

the letter “with surprise”, Betty requests that she ““send it”” to Harmon and the Boffins (*OMF*, 506). After accomplishing the safe return of her letter, Betty dies. The next chapter begins with Betty’s funeral service and the following passage read out by the Reverend Frank Milvey: ““WE GIVE THEE HEARTY THANKS FOR THAT IT HATH PLEASED THEE TO DELIVER THIS OUR SISTER OUT OF THE MISERIES OF THIS WORLD.”” (*OMF*, 507) In Milvey’s service the word “deliver” is used in the Christian sense of being “saved”, “rescued”, or “set free”. In addition to these possible meanings, Betty’s “delivery” hints at a connection between her death and the return of the letter which is “[s]ewn in the breast of her gown”.

By figuring *Our Mutual Friend* as a return to *Oliver Twist* and “the young Dickens”, Dickens mirrors the notion of “self-sending” apparent in his characterisation of Harmon/Rokesmith. However, like Harmon’s many attempts to address a letter to himself in the novel, because Dickens’s return to *Oliver Twist* within the narrative of *Our Mutual Friend* is dispatched from his later authorial self to his earlier authorial self, the letter does and does not arrive at its intended destination. Therefore, if *Our Mutual Friend* signals the “arrival” of “*Oliver Twist*”, which Dickens had written to Forster about in 1838, or the “return” to *Oliver Twist*, which Forster and Ackroyd identify, it is an “arrival” and a “return” marked by absence and loss; a dead letter that lives on. For Chesterton, the return to “the earlier Dickens”, in *Our Mutual Friend*, “must be welcomed, like a young man come back from the dead”. As Dickens shows in *Our Mutual Friend* and his public readings, however, such a return is not only a resurrection, but also, an endless act of memory and of mourning.

What I have sought to do in this chapter is in part an experiment in critical method. In the case of Dickens’s public readings, it is possible, within established critical parameters, to read the resurrection of earlier published works in a new performance medium. In the case of the fictions analysed in the present chapter, however, a more complicated relationship is at work. In the internal economy of Dickens’s fiction, earlier and later works recombine and

influence each other, but not always, as I have suggested in relation to the characters of Riah and Fagin, in conventional chronological order. In contrast to the public, performative Dickens of the previous chapter, therefore, this chapter has explored a more consciously private, even self-protective Dickens – the same Dickens who both burned his letters and wrote to announce that fact.

Collins, the subject of the next two chapters, acted as an advisor to Georgina Hogarth and Mamie Dickens when they prepared their edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens* in 1879. According to Peters, he was “the only friend [of Dickens] consulted” and, rather than Hogarth, whom it is generally supposed excised any potentially offensive material, it is probable that it was Collins who first “[suggested] cuts, and censorship of sensitive passages”: “The obligations of friendship, to the Dickens family as well as Dickens himself, in the end took precedence over biographical truth.” (Peters, 351) Many of the issues discussed in relation to Dickens in this thesis – authorial return, the work of memory and mourning, and the perception, both by Dickens and his critics, of an Other authorial self – are relevant to the subsequent chapters on Collins’s work. Before analyzing Collins’s work, however, it is worthwhile to sketch a brief history of one of the most remarkable friendships in English literature.

Dickens first made Collins’s acquaintance in 1851, when he offered Collins a minor role in Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s comedy *Not So Bad as We Seem*, a play that Dickens’s amateur theatrical troupe were performing in aid of the Guild of Literature, a charitable organisation which had recently been established by Dickens and Lytton. Despite their considerable differences in terms of age, temperament, and literary standing, Dickens and Collins became firm friends during the play’s production. During the early years of their friendship Dickens acted as a literary mentor to Collins. Grateful for Dickens’s support and

assistance, Collins dedicated his 1854 novel *Hide and Seek* to Dickens “as a token of admiration and affection”.³⁹ Dickens, on his part, was enthused by his protégé’s progress and, by the mid-1850s, Collins was a regular contributor to *Household Words*, before being hired as salaried staff-member; a position that he continued to occupy when Dickens disbanded *Household Words* and set up *All the Year Round* in 1859. It was in the pages of *All the Year Round* that Collins first published some of his most memorable works: *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, and *The Moonstone*. Dickens and Collins were also involved in several collaborative projects in the 1850s and, to a lesser extent, the 1860s. The best-known of their collaborations is the 1857 Collins-penned drama *The Frozen Deep*, which Dickens substantially revised; a play notorious for giving Dickens the opportunity of meeting Ellen Ternan.

As Collins rose to prominence in the late-1850s with the publication of *The Woman in White*, he tended to rely upon Dickens less, even resigning his staff-position with *All the Year Round* in 1862 to produce a novel for *The Cornhill*, an upmarket, rival publication which had boasted no less a personage than Thackeray as its editor. In fact, rather than being dependent on Dickens, Collins, in the 1860s, became his main literary rival. Possibly in consequence of this literary rivalry, their friendship cooled in the latter stages of the decade. Certainly the last extant letter between Dickens and Collins hints that an estrangement had occurred between them as the 1860s came to a close. Perhaps surprisingly, the letter suggests that it was Collins, and not Dickens, who severed their ties. Writing to Collins on 27 January 1870, Dickens states: “I don’t come to see you, because I don’t want to bother you. Perhaps you may be glad to see me by-and-bye. Who knows!” (*Pilgrim*, 12: 471) When Dickens died, a little over five months after writing this letter, Collins was one of only a select group of people invited to the funeral. But, as Peters observes, “there is a curious hardness in Wilkie’s

³⁹ Wilkie Collins, *Hide and Seek*, ed. Catherine Peters (1993; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 3. henceforth *HS*.

reaction [to Dickens's death] that shows the distance he had already put between them" (Peters, 319). The "hardness" which Peters perceives is exemplified in a remark Collins made to his agent, William Tindell, on 16 June 1870: "The day of Dickens's funeral was a lost day to *me*. I am backward with the proofs for the book [*Man and Wife*] – and, as they are not at all intelligently read, they take a long time."⁴⁰

However, if, in the immediate aftermath of Dickens's death, he was guilty of "a curious hardness", Collins, as he approached the end of his own life, remembered their friendship with affection. On 15 March 1886, Collins writes to Robert du Pontavice de Heussey, the French translator of his work: "We saw each other every day, and were as fond of each other as men could be. Nobody (my dear mother excepted, of course) felt so positively sure of the future before me in Literature, as Dickens did." (*Public Face*, 4: 151)

⁴⁰ William Baker, Andrew Gasson, Graham Law, and Paul Lewis, ed., *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins: The Collected Letters*, 4 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), vol. 2: 195, original emphasis; henceforth *Public Face*, followed by volume and page number.

CHAPTER 3

“A Living Story-Teller”: Naming, Signing, and Survival in Collins’s Fiction

[T]he last signature is incomplete, defaced, blotted.¹

Collins died, after a prolonged period of ill-health, on 23 September 1889. The beginning of the end was signalled after he suffered a “paralytic stroke” on 30 June of that year, from which he never fully recovered.² It is a commonly held opinion that, at the time of his death, Collins’s literary reputation had entered into a period of decline, in both a critical and commercial sense, and he was to all intents and purposes a relic of a bygone age, neglected and ignored by contemporary critics and readers of fiction. Such a view was first proffered by Harry Quilter in his article “A Living Story-Teller”, published in the *Contemporary Review* in April 1888. In “A Living Story-Teller”, Quilter laments the critical neglect Collins’s fiction has suffered since his heyday in the 1860s:

There is living amongst us at the present time the last of that group of great novelists whose work will make the fiction of the Victorian era for ever famous [...] [Yet] it is but rarely we hear the name of Wilkie Collins mentioned in England nowadays, that we read a word in his praise, or hear of the slightest claim being made on his behalf [...] I seldom hear a generous word spoken, or read a criticism which recognizes the service he has done, the genius he has shown, and the noble purpose which has always directed his work.³

Norman Page is dubious of Quilter’s assertion. “Collins had not lost his readers,” Page claims, nor had “the reviewers [...] forgotten him”: “the *Athenaeum*, the *Spectator*, and other leading arbiters of taste continued to discuss his books at length [...] right to the end of his

¹ Sir Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, ed. Fiona Robertson (1991; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 320; henceforth Scott.

² Kenneth Robinson, *Wilkie Collins: A Biography* (London: The Bodley Head, 1951), 321; henceforth Robinson.

³ Norman Page, ed., *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 230–47; henceforth *WCH*

life”.⁴ For Page, Quilter had reasons of his own for overstating the extent of Collins’s decline in popularity: “It is hard to see on what such an impression could have been based: possibly, like many another writer of an ‘appreciation,’ Quilter was anxious to justify his own attention to the subject by exaggerating its neglect at the hands of others.”⁵ (Page, Introduction. 24)

Irrespective of the questionable accuracy of the article’s content, however, Quilter’s “appreciation” retains its importance because it offers one of the earliest attempts to rehabilitate – or resurrect – Collins as an author of note. In the early to-mid-twentieth century, when Collins’s literary star was indisputably on the wane, similar attempts at rehabilitating his literary reputation were put forth by the likes of T.S. Eliot, Dorothy Sayers, and Robert Ashley. The significance of Quilter’s article, though, and what distinguishes it from other later efforts to restore Collins’s reputation, is that it attempts to reawaken interest in Collins and his work during his lifetime. In doing so, Quilter’s essay assumes a strange, funereal tone and reads like an obituary, albeit a pre-posthumous one.

Discussing Henry James’s scathing 1865 review of Dickens’s penultimate novel *Our Mutual Friend* – a novel which James states is “the letter of his old humor without the spirit” – Bowen argues that whilst it “is written before Dickens’s death”, the review “is haunted by the possibility that Dickens may have already in some way passed away” (James, “Our Mutual Friend”, 854; Bowen, 31). This sense of pre-posthumous mourning is evident in Quilter’s article, which, to use his own expression, “is professedly a eulogium” (*WCH*, 230). By stating that “A Living Story-Teller” “is professedly a eulogium”, Quilter seems to be cognizant of the air of pre-posthumousness which haunts the article and, more than anything, his article appears to be concerned that the author has died a premature death. In fact, if

⁴ Norman Page, Introduction, in Norman Page, ed., *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974)1-36 (25); henceforth Page, Introduction.

⁵ Ashley is also sceptical of what he terms “the ‘decline and fall’ legend”: “Although Collins suffered from the general neglect of Victorian fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he suffered nothing like a total eclipse. Although he was generally ignored by critics and scholars, the reading public had not forgotten him”; see Robert Ashley, *Wilkie Collins* (1952; New York: Haskell House, 1976), 131; henceforth, Ashley. Collins’s “decline” will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Quilter protests too much about anything in “A Living Story-Teller”, which appeared more than a year before Collins’s death, it is that Collins, to say nothing of his fiction, is alive and not dead. Indeed, as if there is some doubt in the matter, Quilter, in “A Living Story-Teller”, stresses that Collins is still a “living” story-teller. Yet, by the same token, there is a tangible sense in which, for Quilter, Collins is dead already.

Following Collins’s death, Quilter wrote an obituary for Collins in the October 1889 edition of the *Universal Review*. Quilter’s obituary for Collins provides another opportunity for him to launch into a passionate and heartfelt defence of Collins’s artistry: “That Wilkie Collins was a great (one of the greatest) novelist we *know*; we, who have studied his works, have marked their range and power, their sincerity of purpose, their perfection of expression”.⁶ For Quilter, however, this only reveals one aspect of Collins’s greatness:

it is a little thing to have written stories so well that the whole world listened to them gladly for forty years, and listens to them still [...] but very certainly it was not a little thing to remain unspoiled through fame and censure, through popularity and neglect [...] still toiling in the service of his art, and still to keep that fresh, unspotted, kindly heart with which he had won his way to equality of friendship and honour with those great dead writers from whom the critics would to-day disassociate him (Quilter, 224, original emphasis).

Mirroring his earlier article, “A Living Story-Teller”, Quilter’s obituary performs a double movement of mourning Collins’s loss, whilst at the same time attempting to enact the survival of its subject in the hearts and minds of the reading public. This double movement – of simultaneously resurrecting Collins and condemning him to death – is also evident in Quilter’s desire to create a lasting memorial to Collins, which he hoped would be erected in either Westminster Abbey or St. Paul’s Cathedral. In his obituary piece, Quilter writes of the proposed memorial: “I cannot think that the great reading public for whom alone Collins worked, whom alone he cared to please, will refuse to honour him now that he can please them no more.” (Quilter, 223)

⁶ Harold Quilter, “In Memoriam Amici: Wilkie Collins”, *The Universal Review* 5 (1889): 205-25 (224), original emphasis; henceforth Quilter.

Quilter's planned tribute to Collins had the public support of George Meredith and Thomas Hardy, who both served on the committee, but his "energetic campaign to raise a subscription for a memorial to Wilkie" fell on deaf ears and "less than £400 was subscribed" (Peters, 433). Unlike Dickens, Collins did not forbid his friends from making him "the subject of any monument, memorial, or testimonial whatever" (Forster, 2: 422). Collins did, however, share his friend's distaste for the ostentatious mourning customs prevalent in the Victorian era and, Peters claims, even if a public monument honouring him had been erected, "Wilkie would have had no interest in such a memorial" (Peters, 433).⁷

This chapter examines the survival of Collins's work, from his 1848 biography of his father, to his last, uncompleted novel, *Blind Love*. Particular attention will be paid to Collins's sensation novels, which, more than any other areas of his canon, are responsible for the continued interest in his work. The first section will discuss the importance of names and signatures in Collins's fiction, especially the ways in which they are inextricably linked to notions of memory, death, and resurrection. The second section primarily focuses upon Collins's first published text, an 1848 biography of his father, in which, I argue, Collins signs within his father's signature and, in doing so, resurrects and mourns his memory. In addition, this section will look at the ways in which Collins's association with Dickens has enabled his work to survive, but sometimes to Collins's cost. The third section examines Collins's sensation novels, which, while enabling the survival of Collins's work and regarded as inseparable from his authorial identity (his name and signature), are in fact texts concerned with the impossibility of fully signing one's name. The fourth section looks at Collins's final novel, *Blind Love*, in order to clarify and elucidate the key points of the chapter.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis it was argued that Dickens's desire to be remembered after his death for nothing but his fiction, as well as his decision to publish "The Charles Dickens

⁷ According to Peters, Collins "ordered that there were to be no funeral scarves, hatbands or feathers" at his service (Peters, 431).

Edition” of his novels in 1867, presupposes that, even before his death, his work is always already in memory of him. This chapter will examine the ways in which Collins’s fiction offers a similar act of pre-posthumous memorialization. But whereas Chapter 1 analyzed notions of memory and mourning in Dickens’s work in terms of his early and late authorial selves, this chapter will instead focus upon the proper name and authorial signature of “Wilkie Collins”, which, I argue, is always already in memory of himself and his work. In this respect it is significant that Quilter’s article “A Living Story-Teller”, which in its attempt to restore Collins’s literary reputation reads like a pre-posthumous obituary, should draw attention to the absence of Collins’s name: “it is but rarely we hear the name of Wilkie Collins mentioned in England nowadays”. Like Quilter, I claim, Collins was aware that, in order for his work to live on in the future, it was necessary for the name and authorial signature “Wilkie Collins” to be resurrected pre-posthumously, to survive his death, even before his passing.

I

In *Memoires for Paul de Man*, Derrida claims that one’s name is always already an act of memory and mourning and, therefore, anticipates one’s death:

Memory [...] is the name of what for us [...] preserves an essential and necessary relation with the possibility of the name, and of what in the name assures preservation [...] [D]eath reveals the power of the name to the very extent that the name continues to name or to call what we call the bearer of the name, and who can no longer answer to or answer in and for his name. And since the possibility of this situation is revealed at death, we can infer that it does not wait for death, or that in *it* death does not wait death. In calling or naming someone while he is alive, we know that his name can survive him and *already* survives him; the name begins during his life to get along without him, speaking and bearing his death each time it is pronounced in naming or calling, each time it is inscribed in a list, or a civil registry, or a signature [...] We cannot separate the name of “memory” and “memory” of the name; we cannot separate name and the memory. (*Memoires*, 49, original emphasis)

Derrida’s belief in the impossibility of separating “the name of ‘memory’ and ‘memory’ of the name” is outlined in his other works. For instance, in *The Post Card*, Derrida writes: “The name is made to do without the life of the bearer, and is therefore always somewhat the name

of someone dead.” (*Post Card*, 39) As the extract from *Memoires for Paul de Man* implies, in addition to one’s name anticipating one’s death, Derrida regards the signature as equally haunted by the work of memory and mourning. Just as a name can live on after the death of its bearer, a signature can continue to act after the death of the person who has signed. The legality of wills, for instance, is established upon such a principal.⁸ In his eulogy for Michel Servière, Derrida adds the following postscript to the comments made in *The Post Card*:

Before anything else, even before the name, a signature bespeaks the possible death of the one who bears the name; it offers assurances of this beyond the death that it recalls just as soon, the death that is promised, given or received, the death that thus always comes before coming – and so, alas, comes always before its time.⁹

For Derrida, then, what unites the proper name and signature is the manner in which both are harbingers of death; to bear a proper name and to sign one’s name, means that one is always already in memory of one’s death.

Collins’s work anticipates Derrida’s theories concerning proper names and signatures. Like Derrida, Collins figures names as being always already in memory of the bearer; as living on, not only after, but also before, death. In Collins’s work, names are passed on from generation to generation – from father to son and/or from mother to daughter – and like all forms of inheritance they are ineluctably bound up with death. For example, in his 1886 novella, *The Guilty River*, the narrator introduces himself as “Gerard Roylake, son and only child of the late Gerard Roylake of Trimley Deen”: “At twenty-two years of age, my father’s death had placed me in possession of his large landed property.”¹⁰ For Collins, like Derrida, the act of signing one’s name is also haunted by death. This is most apparent in his 1858 short story “Fauntleroy”, which tells the story of the last man in England to be hanged for

⁸ For Geoffrey Bennington, although signatures can be regarded as “attempts to deal with the power of death at work in the proper name”, in effect, they “only [move] this power to a different level”; see Geoffrey Bennington, “Derridabase”, in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (1993; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 157-58; henceforth Bennington.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, “As If There Were an Art of the Signature”, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, in Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 135-37 (136).

¹⁰ Wilkie Collins, *The Guilty River*, in Wilkie Collins, *Miss or Mrs? – The Haunted Hotel – The Guilty River*, ed. Norman Page and Toru Sasaki (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 246; henceforth GR.

forgery – and, significantly, what Fauntleroy forges is a signature. Like “Fauntleroy”, the narrative action of Collins’s 1852 novel *Basil* springs from an act of forgery, and again leads to the forger’s execution. But even before this thread of the plot is unravelled, the link between names and memory is first suggested near the beginning of *Basil*, when the eponymous narrator explains his reasons for composing his fictional autobiography: “When these pages are found after my death, they will perhaps be calmly read and gently judged, as relics solemnized by the atoning shadows of the grave. Then [...] the children of the next generation of our house may be taught to speak charitably of my memory”.¹¹ In one sense, these remarks by Basil indicate that he regards his narrative as a means of vindicating his actions in the future. In another sense, however, it also figures “Basil” – both the character bearing that name, as well as the text itself, which is named after him – as always already in memory of him, of surviving his death before the event.

In *Hide and Seek*, published in 1854, Collins explores the inheritance of an illegitimate maternal name. On its original publication, the novel was subtitled “The Mystery of Mary Grice” and it is through the character of Mary Grice that Collins interweaves notions of death, naming, and memory.¹² As the original subtitle to *Hide and Seek* implies, the character of Mary is of central importance to the novel. But because Mary’s death precedes the narrative’s chronology, with her sad tale of spurned love and an illegitimate child told in a series of reminiscences and retrospective accounts, she is figured as nothing other than a name and a memory in the text, and it is her absence and not her presence that is of significance and which drives the “mystery” forward. Absent from the text, in the sense of being an active protagonist in the story, all that survives of Mary in the text is her name: which, in its repeatability after her death, illustrates the structure of survival inherent in every name.

¹¹ Wilkie Collins, *Basil*, ed. Dorothy Goldman (1990; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1; henceforth *Basil*.

¹² The phrase “the Mystery of Mary Grice” also appears within the narrative; see *HS*, 217.

The repetition of Mary's name occurs in a variety of forms in the narrative, the most obvious of which is when she is mentioned by other characters in the story or by the narrator. In addition, her initials of "M.G." appear on "a cambric handkerchief" and "a small hair bracelet" which are found on her body after her death (*HS*, 86). Again, Mary's brother, Mat Grice, whose initials repeat his sister's, is handed a box of her possessions with the name "MARY GRICE" painted on it (*HS*, 212). However, by far the most noteworthy repetition of Mary's name in *Hide and Seek* is offered by Mary's illegitimate daughter, also named Mary. Significantly, the naming of the younger Mary occurs almost at the instant of her mother's death. As Mary Grice draws near death, she hands over her infant child to the care of Mrs. Peckover and declares: "Its name's to be Mary." (*HS*, 85) Soon after naming her child, Mary "lay dead on the living baby's arm", but by naming her daughter after her, Mary lives on (*HS*, 86). The "resurrection" of Mary in her daughter is articulated by Mat who, struck by the resemblance between his sister and his niece, exclaims that Mary, the younger, is "Mary's ghost": "So like her [mother Mary], it was a'most as awful as seeing the dead come to life again. She had Mary's turn with her head; Mary's – poor creature! poor creature!" (*HS*, 333, 253)

While Mary names her daughter after herself, however, when Mary, the younger, is adopted by Valentine Blyth and his wife, she is renamed "Madonna" (*HS*, 116). Ostensibly stemming from his artistic inclinations and her physical attractiveness, Valentine's choice to alter his adopted child's name – from the English "Mary" to the Italian "Madonna" – also hints at an underlying sense of "foreignness" in the illegitimate child's nature. But the fact that the Italian name "Madonna", which translates into English as "my lady", is another name for the Virgin Mary means that, in effect, Mary's new name of Madonna is simply a "foreign" translation of the name she bears already. In this respect, Collins's novel contrasts with Derrida's assertion that "a proper name cannot be translated like another word in the

language ('Peter' is not the translation of 'Pierre')".¹³ However, Collins's translation, which is not a translation, of Mary's name, is in concordance with other areas of Derrida's work. Firstly, it is consistent with Derrida's belief that "what remains *untranslatable* is at bottom the only thing *to translate*, the only thing *translatable*" (*Ulysses*, 257-58, original emphasis). Secondly, it also corresponds with Derrida's notion of "triumphant translation", which is described as "neither the life nor the death of the text, only or already its living *on*, its life after life, its life after death" (*Living On*, 82, original emphasis).¹⁴ That is, by translating the untranslatable and giving Mary the Italian name "Madonna", Collins again allows her mother's name to live on, only this time in translation.

The plot to *No Name*, serialized in *All the Year Round* between 15 March 1862 and 17 January 1863, revolves around the fate of two sisters, Magdalen and Norah Vanstone, who are left "legally speaking" with "No Name", in the words of their governess Harriet Garth, after it emerges that their parents were unmarried at the time of their respective births (*NN*, 181). Although Norah's and Magdalen's parents are eventually married, therefore making their children legitimate *ex post facto*, the marriage invalidates the will drawn up previously by their father, leaving them dispossessed on the event of their parents' death. Worried that

¹³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 137; henceforth *OH*. In *No Name*, Collins again translates a name. After informing Magdalen Vanstone about the scientific pursuits of her late husband, Professor Lecomte, Mrs. Lecomte states: "The English circle at Zurich (where I lived in my late master's service) Anglicised my name to Lecount. Your generous country people will have nothing foreign about them – not even a name, if they can help it"; see Wilkie Collins, *No Name*, ed. Virginia Blain (1986; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 280; henceforth *NN*. In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens offers a comical translation of a name. After Mrs. Clennam's house literally collapses, Jeremiah Flintwinch is believed to have perished under the rubble and to be "lying somewhere among the London geological formations" (*LD*, 663). Rumours of Flintwinch's death may have been exaggerated, however, as there are sightings of an "old man" answering the description of Flintwinch in Holland (*LD*, 663). What is more, not only does this "old man" physically resemble Flintwinch and is "very well known to be an Englishman", but, also, the name he answers to – "Mynheer von Flyntevyng" – bears more than a passing resemblance to his English moniker, albeit in quasi-Dutch form (*LD*, 663).

¹⁴ Derrida is drawing on the influential work of Walter Benjamin, who argues that a translation can be seen as a text's "afterlife": "a transformation and a renewal of something living"; see Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*", trans. Harry Zohn, in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (1970; London: Fontana Press, 1992), 70-82 (73). Commenting upon Benjamin's concept of the act of translation, Paul de Man writes: "The process of translation, if we can call it a process, is one of change and of motion that has the appearance of life, but of life as an afterlife, because translation also reveals the death of the original"; see Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 85; henceforth de Man.

his ““desire to do their mother justice”” may end in disinheriting his children, Andrew Vanstone, Norah’s and Magdalen’s father, draws up another will which provides for his daughters (*NN*, 137). However, while travelling to London in order to finalize the details of his will, Vanstone is killed in a rail crash. Dying before the will could be amended and ratified by Vanstone’s signature means that, in the eyes of English law, Norah and Magdalen are still considered illegitimate, and are unable to receive a penny of their inheritance.

On hearing the news of her husband’s death Mrs. Vanstone, who is also pregnant, falls into a swoon and loses consciousness. In the words of the family lawyer, Mr. Pendril, “[t]he one chance left, was that their mother might sufficiently recover to leave her third share to them, by will, in the event of her decease.” (*NN*, 137) In this respect, Pendril explains, their mother’s signature is vital: ““It is of the last importance that I should see her, in the event of her gaining strength enough to give me her attention for five minutes, and of her being able at the expiration of that time to sign her name.”” (*NN*, 111) The one hope for Norah and Magdalen to reclaim their inheritance, then, is dependent upon their mother signing in the name of “Mrs. Vanstone”; a name which, as Pendril points out, ““she has a right to now”” (*NN*, 131). Mrs. Vanstone dies before she is able to perform the act of signing her name, however. The absence of Mrs. Vanstone’s signature, which inadvertently disinherits her children, is symbolic of her children’s illegitimate namelessness in that they are also left without a name and, consequently, a signature, “legally speaking”. The remainder of *No Name* can be said to chart Magdalen’s search for a name and signature of her own, a name and signature to which she also has a “right”. When adapting *No Name* for the stage, in 1870, Collins removed the pivotal scenes in which Mr. Vanstone and his wife both die before they are able to sign the amended will that provides for their illegitimate children. Instead, this action is summed up by Mr. Pendril in a letter in Act One. While Collins excised this scene from the theatrical version of *No Name*, however, he included the

episode that appeared in the novel in which Noel Vanstone dies shortly after modifying his will in order to prevent his wife – namely, Magdalen – from inheriting his fortune, which again unites the act of signing one’s name with a scene of inheritance and of death.¹⁵

It is possible that Collins’s interest in the connections which exist between naming, signing, and memory originated in the writing of his first published text, the *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A.*, a biography of his father, published in 1848. Whilst certain and necessary qualifications have to be made when intermixing an author’s life and work, the *Memoirs* anticipates important aspects of the fictional pieces he was to produce later on in his authorial career, not least the repeatability of names, and their relationship to the acts of mourning and memory. Indeed, as a “memoir” – literally a “memory” – Collins’s biography, which was written in the wake of his father’s death, emerges as a work of mourning, and, moreover, one which resurrects his father’s signature through the fashioning of his own – authorial – signature. Before discussing the *Memoirs* in any detail, however, it is worthwhile examining the proper name and authorial signature “Wilkie Collins”.

II

In her biography of Collins, Peters reveals one of her subject’s many idiosyncrasies, his insistence on being known only as “Wilkie”: “To anyone more than a mere acquaintance, man or woman, adult or child, he was always Wilkie. Not ‘Mr. Collins,’ not ‘Collins.’ What has become normal practice was then so unusual that the reminiscences of his friends make a point of it.” (Peters, 2) Despite his preference for the name, “Wilkie” was in fact his middle name. Christened “William Wilkie Collins”, Collins was named after his father, a popular landscape painter and Royal Academician, who was himself named after his own father. Collins’s middle name of “Wilkie” was in homage to his father’s close friend and fellow Royal Academician, Sir David Wilkie, who was also Collins’s godfather. For Peters,

¹⁵ See Wilkie Collins, *No Name: A Drama, in Four Acts* (London: n.p., 1870), 61. See also *NN*, 581.

Collins's renunciation of his Christian name can be attributed to two factors: "'Wilkie' was [...] distinctive enough to bring him out from under the shadow of his famous father," whilst allowing him to "avoid the anonymity of being one of the hundreds of William Collinses" (Peters, 21).

To a certain extent, Peters is right in her judgement that, in order "to bring him out from under the shadow of his famous father", Collins, by necessity had to forge an original authorial signature. Even this, however, was not enough for Collins's fiction to escape from the inevitable comparisons with his father's work. For example, in an 1855 critical essay, significantly entitled "William Wilkie Collins", Émile Forgues draws comparisons between Collins's novels and his father's art work.¹⁶ But, Peters explains, Forgues is not merely content to make a passing reference to Collins's father in his study:

Forgues began his essay with a comparison of the art of William Collins with that of David Wilkie, pointing out that where Wilkie's figures were at the heart of his pictures, for Collins they were adjuncts to a landscape. With this deliberate reference to Wilkie Collins' antecedents, he prepared the ground for an assessment of his writing, its potential and its shortcomings. (Peters, 156)

It is far from clear, from an expositional point of view, why Forgues should begin an essay on Collins's novels with a discussion of his father's paintings; or, indeed, his godfather's. Clearly, seven years after the publication of the *Memoirs*, Collins's authorial identity is still intimately connected with his father's name. Indeed, the doubling of Collins's authorial identity with William Collins's artistic signature was a common trait in the early criticism of his work. This is especially apparent in terms of his 1852 novel *Basil*, where critics were shocked that the son of a respected painter could produce a story which, in their opinion, lacked any decency. Unlike the *Memoirs* which, for Nicholas Rance, is "strenuously

¹⁶ See *WCH*, 62-66.

moralistic”, what upset contemporary critics the most was the novel’s perceived amoral stance.¹⁷

Condemning *Basil* as a “tale of criminality, almost revolting from its domestic horrors”, D. O. Maddy, in his 4 December 1852 *Athenaeum* review, reproaches Collins’s want of taste in a direct comparison with his father: “Mr. Collins, as the son of an eminent painter, should know that the proper office of Art is to elevate and purify in pleasing.” (*WCH*, 48) And, although the unsigned review of *Basil*, which appeared in the *Westminster Review* in October 1853, does not mention Collins’s father by name, it is evoked implicitly in the following admonitory passage:

There are some subjects on which it is not possible to dwell without offence: and Mr. Collins having first chosen one which could neither please nor elevate, has rather increased the displeasure it excites, by his resolution to spare us no revolting details [...] [W]e cannot [...] close our animadversions on his last production without begging his attention to the great aims of fiction, as an art. It matters not much whether the artist hold the pencil or the pen, the same great rules apply to both [...] He may take a higher moral ground, and move to compassion by showing undeserved suffering [...] He may also paint scenes of cruelty and sensuality so gross that his picture will be turned to the wall by those who do not choose to have their imagination defiled. (*WCH*, 52-53)

Even in more sympathetic reviews, such as the double review of *Basil* and Thackeray’s *Henry Esmond*, which appeared in *Bentley’s Miscellany* in November 1852, Collins cannot escape the shadow of his father:

There is the same difference between them [*Henry Esmond* and *Basil*] as between a picture by Hogarth and a picture by Fuseli. We had well nigh named in the place of the former one of the great painters, whose names are borne by the author of *Basil*. But in truth the writer of that work ought to have been called Salvator Fuseli. There is nothing either of Wilkie or Collins about it. (*WCH*, 45)

For the reviewers from the *Athenaeum* and *Bentley’s Miscellany*, it appears that whilst Collins may be named after the illustrious painters William Collins and Sir David Wilkie, his authorial signature is not a continuation of theirs. In terms of the contemporary critics of

¹⁷ Nicholas Rance, *Wilkie Collins and Other Sensation Novelists: Walking the Moral Hospital* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991), 29; henceforth Rance.

Basil it is as if Collins's novel, and by extension his embryonic authorial signature, can only be understood negatively, in terms of its difference from the paintings bearing William Collins's and Sir David Wilkie's signatures. Yet, while the difference between the work of Collins and his father is clearly demarcated by critics, Collins still cannot escape the legacy and the memory of his father's name.

At one point in *Basil*, the eponymous narrator says to his father: "'You may be able to forget that you are my father; I can never forget that I am your son.'" (*Basil*, 205) This is equally true of Collins's relation to his own father. As the contemporary criticism of *Basil* indicates, Collins could not "forget" that he was William Collins's son because reviewers took evident relish in comparing him to his father at every opportunity at the beginning of his career. Moreover, because Collins's authorial signature is placed alongside his father's and his godfather's, his name is not seen to be fully in his possession: "nothing either of Wilkie or Collins about it", as the reviewer from *Bentley's Miscellany* puts it.

It is not just the reviewers of Collins's novels that highlight the contrast between Collins's work and that of William Collins, however. Although there is no instance on record of Collins explicitly stating that his fiction is a reaction to William Collins's work, his own conception of art differed greatly from that of his father's. At the close of the *Memoirs*, Collins says of his father's paintings: "Throughout the whole series of his works, they could look on none that would cause them a thrill of horror, or a thought of shame."¹⁸ This sentence is significant because it is in contradistinction to what would be said of Collins's own "series" of works, from *Basil* onwards; not only from outraged critics, but also from Collins himself. Tamar Heller explains that Collins's "melodramatic Gothicism [...]" would have

¹⁸ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A.: With Selections From His Journals and Correspondence*, 2 vols. (1848; East Ardley, Wakefield: E. P. Publishing, 1978), volume 2: 312; henceforth *Memoirs*, followed by volume and page number.

shocked [his] father”; Collins, no doubt, was aware of this fact.¹⁹ Indeed, in helping to shape the genre of sensation fiction, Collins, unlike his father, appears to relish causing “thrills of horror” and “thoughts of shame” and has nothing but contempt for what he sees as “the Clap-trap morality of the present day”, as he puts it in the foreword to *Armada*.²⁰ In fact, it is Collins’s abhorrence of “the whining cant and the petty restrictions of a false Puritanism” that led Forgues to praise Collins so highly amongst contemporary English novelists (*WCH*, 64). As Collins proudly declares in his article “Reminiscences of a Story-teller”, throughout his forty year literary career his work has been “stuff concealed from pa, stuff which raised the famous Blush, stuff registered on the expurgatory Index of the national cant”.²¹ However, as Nayder argues, while there is a sense in which Collins deliberately constructs his authorial identity in contrast to his father’s work, it is important not to overstate this: “Wilkie’s relationship to his father is not quite as oppositional as he might have us believe. Rather than wholly rejecting his father’s artistic and political legacy, he learned from it, reworking the artistic strategies and values of William Collins to suit his own ends.”²²

Certainly, at the beginning of his authorial career, Collins neither distanced himself from the name nor the memory of “William Collins”. When two of the earliest extant stories bearing Collins’s name appeared in the early-1840s – *Volpurno – or the student* and *The Last Stage Coachmen* – he employed the authorial signature of “W. Wilkie Collins”.²³ “W. Wilkie Collins” was also the authorial signature that Collins employed when writing the *Memoirs*. The fact that Collins retains the initial “W” as part of his authorial signature, especially in terms of the *Memoirs*, indicates hesitancy on his part to dissociate himself from the memory

¹⁹ Tamar Heller, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 38; henceforth Heller.

²⁰ Wilkie Collins, Foreword, in Wilkie Collins, *Armada*, ed. John Sutherland (London: Penguin, 1995), 5.

²¹ Wilkie Collins, “Reminiscences of a Story-teller”, *Universal Review* 1 (May-August 1888): 182-92 (191).

²² Lillian Nayder, *Wilkie Collins* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 5; henceforth Nayder, Wilkie Collins.

²³ “Though named for his father and Sir David Wilkie, he never appeared in print as “William Wilkie Collins”; instead, he began as ‘W. Wilkie and soon became plain ‘Wilkie’”; see Sue Lonoff, *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers: A Study in the Rhetoric of Authorship* (New York: AMS Press, 1982), 40; henceforth Lonoff.

of his father's name, which is also his own. If, as Peters believes, Collins's use of the name "Wilkie" brought him "out from under the shadow of his famous father", the very act of writing the biography of his father, and doing so both within and alongside his father's name, would appear to place him directly back there.

In fact, rather than disavowing his father's name in the *Memoirs*, Collins appears fascinated by it. At the beginning of the biography, Collins frequently returns to the name "William Collins". For instance, Collins first explains that his father's family "descended from the same stock as the great poet whose name they bore", before going on to mention how a branch of his father's ancestors "emigrated [*sic*] to Ireland, and fought on the side of King William, at the Battle of the Boyne" (*Memoirs*, 1: 4). Following this, Collins talks at length about his paternal grandfather who, as mentioned above, was also called "William Collins" (*Memoirs*, 1: 1). In the *Memoirs* Collins also provides an anecdote centred upon the repetition, or *mis*-repetition, of his father's name. When travelling in Italy, Collins explains, his father employed a particularly eager domestic servant, named Beppo, who had apparently once cooked for Lord Byron. According to Collins, Beppo, in deference to his father's status as an English gentleman, insisted on writing William Collins's name above the door of the house he was renting: "Having served other Englishman, besides Lord Byron, [...] this Beppo had picked up some ideas of manners and customs in England; one of which was, that all English gentleman had their names written over their house doors." (*Memoirs*, 2: 149) Unfortunately, Collins relates, Beppo had evidently misheard his master's name. The result being that on returning to his house after a painting expedition: "Mr. Collins, to his astonishment, found two or three idlers gazing up at a black board [...] hung over the entrance, and bearing in large white letters, this impressively simple inscription, – 'Wimichim Collins.'" (*Memoirs*, 2: 149)

Furthermore, it was the “shadow” of his father, in the sense of his death, which prompted Collins to write the biography in the first place. Unable to find a publisher for his first completed novel, *Iolani; Or Tahiti as it was*, written between 1844 and 1845, Collins started work on what would become his first published novel, *Antonina; Or the Fall of Rome*. During the course of writing *Antonina*, in February 1847, Collins’s father died after a long illness. After the death of his father, Collins interrupted his work on *Antonina* and began writing his father’s biography. As Peters observes, however, whilst the act of writing his father’s biography was undoubtedly “an act of filial duty” – Collins even prefacing his authorial signature of “W. Wilkie Collins” with the phrase “By his son” – it was also a shrewd career move by Collins, “a respectable enterprise which might prepare the way for an unknown novelist” (Peters, 76).

Using his father’s name, which was also his own, as a means of establishing himself as an author, the *Memoirs* becomes more than just a biography of his father; it also represents the first attempt by Collins to fashion his authorial identity. As Heller notes: “What is striking about the *Memoirs* is the way they reflect Collins’s desire to construct a masculine artistic identity empowered by the father’s example.” (Heller, 41) However, Heller adds, the masculine authority which Collins uses as a means by which to establish his own “masculine artistic identity” is itself impotent: “The son can thus have a character only by writing about his father, yet the patriarchal character is history, the dead who perhaps can no longer be resurrected. The nostalgia for the father’s character is the more marked because that character is associated with aesthetic form and artistic success.” (Heller, 47) What Heller fails to acknowledge, however, are the ways in which Collins “resurrects” his father within the very pages of the *Memoirs* by writing within his father’s artistic signature. In doing so, Collins’s authorial signature takes on a hybrid form, making it impossible to distinguish the one from the other, the father from the son.

The double authorial signature appended to the *Memoirs* is especially evident in one of the characteristic features of the text, Collins's lengthy and detailed descriptions of his father's paintings, which, as Heller comments, combine the father's and the son's artistic signatures: "The *Memoirs* in fact define the son's art as literally a translation of the father's; Collins' word pictures transform his father's paintings into his own medium and anticipate [...] the landscape descriptions in his novels."²⁴ (Heller, 41) The double authorial signature attached to the *Memoirs* is also indicated within the text itself. For example, the bulk of the narrative of the *Memoirs* is taken up with William Collins's private correspondence and a journal that he wrote intermittently. In the biography, Collins provides the following extract from his father's journal of 1844: "As I think it quite possible that my dear son, William Wilkie Collins, may be tempted [...] to furnish the world with a memoir of my life, I purpose occasionally noting down some circumstances or leading points, which may be useful." (*Memoirs*, 2: 247) As this journal entry illustrates, rather than merely a biography of his father, the *Memoirs* are a collaborative act – part biography and part autobiography – in which father and son countersign the other's authorial signature. In this sense, the *Memoirs* become more than just a biography of William Collins, authored by Collins. Instead, Collins's use of William Collins's journal and correspondence means that the *Memoirs* assume the form of collaboration. In essence, the signature attached to the *Memoirs* is at once single and double, meaning that, like the name "William Collins", the text at once belongs and does not belong to both father and son. The *Memoirs* has since been consigned to relative obscurity among Collins's canon and, if he had written nothing other than the *Memoirs*, it is unlikely that his own name would still be remembered today, let alone held in such high regard amongst other Victorian writers. Yet, in this formative text, in which he resurrects his

²⁴ In a similar vein to Heller, Ira B. Nadel writes: "In the biography of his father, the pictorial elements that later distinguished Collins's writings appear in the detailed descriptions of William Collins's writings"; see Ira B. Nadel, "Wilkie Collins and His Illustrators", in Nelson Smith and R.C. Terry, ed., *Wilkie Collins to the Forefront: Some Reassessments* (New York: AMS Press, 1995), 149-64 (153).

father's name and artistic signature by writing within it, it is possible to trace the first instance of Collins's awareness of the force of memory and mourning inherent in names and signatures.

Whereas Collins's father's name and signature belonged to the past where it could be negotiated and worked through on his own terms, by associating himself with Dickens – as a contributor to *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, as well as in the series of collaborations they undertook together in the 1850s – Collins risked losing control over his authorial signature. As editor of *Household Words*, between 1850 and 1859, and *All the Year Round*, from 1859 to 1870, Dickens employed a strict policy of anonymity regarding contributors. On 31 January 1850, Dickens explains this practice to Elizabeth Gaskell: “No writer's name will be used – neither my own, nor any others – every paper will be published without any signature” (*Pilgrim*, 6: 22). What Dickens elides in his letter to Gaskell, however, is that although every article and story in *Household Words* “will be published without any signature” each weekly edition of his journal bears the legend: “Conducted by Charles Dickens”. Therefore, whilst individual articles in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* appeared anonymously, they were enclosed by Dickens's overarching authorial signature. Understandably, Collins objected to his work being published anonymously, and it was for this reason that he was initially reluctant, in the mid-1850s, to join the staff of *Household Words*: “Collins was afraid that he would be submerging his distinct identity as a writer in the journal's collective personality in which all articles appeared unsigned under Dickens's editorship.”²⁵ As Nayder notes, Collins had good reason to be wary of Dickens's one-sided editorial practice: “When Collins's ‘Sister Rose,’ serialized in *Household Words* in April 1855, was reprinted by Peterson in Philadelphia later that year, it was published as a work ‘by Charles Dickens.’” (Nayder, *Unequal Partners*, 20)

²⁵ Anthea Trodd, “The early writing”, in Jenny Bourne Taylor, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23-36 (29); henceforth Trodd, “The early writing”.

In a 15 April 1856 letter to his mother, Collins reveals the extent of his anxiety that his association with Dickens will overshadow his own authorial identity:

I read the sketch of the plot of my new novel [*The Dead Secret*] to Dickens a few days since. He was quite excited and surprised by it [...] Keep all this a profound secret from everybody but Charley [Collins, his brother] – for if my good natured friends knew that I had been reading my idea to Dickens – they would be sure to say when the book was published, that I had got all the good things in it from him.²⁶

It was, then, not only rogue publishers that Collins had to be wary of attributing his work to Dickens; even his “good natured friends” would assume that he had “got all the good things” in *The Dead Secret* from Dickens if they knew of his assistance. Collins’s alliance with Dickens and *Household Words* also meant that the opposite was equally true, however; that is, just as people would assume that he had “got all the good things” in *The Dead Secret* from Dickens, the “bad things” in his novel were also attributed to Dickens’s influence. Deploring the “melo-dramatic sentimentalism” of *The Dead Secret*’s conclusion, an anonymous reviewer from the *Saturday Review* wryly notes: “Our readers will easily recognize who is the Gamaliel at whose feet Mr. Collins must have sat.” (*WCH*, 72)

Dickens remained sceptical about Collins’s objections to joining the ranks of *Household Words*, remarking in a 18 September 1856 letter to his sub-editor W. H. Wills: “I think him wrong in his objection, and have not the slightest doubt that such a confusion of authorship (which I don’t believe to obtain in half a dozen minds out of half a dozen hundred) would be a far greater service than dis-service to him.” (*Pilgrim*, 8: 189) Driving a hard bargain, Collins maintained that he would only join *Household Words* in a full time capacity “if his next novel [*The Dead Secret*] were serialized in the magazine under his own name” (Peters 168). Realizing Collins’s worth to his journal, Dickens eventually relented and conceded to his protégé’s demands. For Trodd, this “unusual concession [...] was a mark of Dickens’s respect for his work” (“The early writing”, 30). But whilst Dickens kept his word

²⁶ William Baker and William M. Clarke, *The Letters of Wilkie Collins*, 2 vols. (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), vol. 1: 155; henceforth Baker and Clarke, followed by volume and page number.

to Collins concerning *The Dead Secret*, he applied his own conditions to the agreement; namely, that Collins was to be acknowledged as the author of *The Dead Secret* in advertisements leading up to the novel's serialization, but once serialization commenced the story was to appear anonymously. In the already cited letter to Wills, Dickens states: "as far as a long story is concerned, I see not the least objection to our advertising, at once, before it begins, that it is by him. I *do* see an objection to departing from our custom of not putting names to the papers in H.W. itself" (*Pilgrim*, 8: 189, original emphasis).

Collins's unease when publishing his articles and stories in Dickens's journals is also evident when Collins fell seriously ill in the midst of writing *No Name* in 1862, which was at that time being serialized in *All the Year Round*. After learning of Collins's illness, Dickens, in France at the time, immediately volunteered his services:

Write to me at Paris, at any moment, and say you are unequal to your work, and want me, and I will come to London straight, and do your work. I am quite confident that, with your notes and a few words of explanation, I could take it up at any time and do it. Absurdly unnecessary to say that it would be a make-shift! but I could do it, at a pinch, so like you as that no one should find out the difference. (*Pilgrim*, 10: 142)

Collins politely declined Dickens's generous, if slightly unflattering, offer. Instead, Collins's doctor Francis Carr Beard became an impromptu amanuensis at Collins's request. Dickens's letter to Collins can either be read as a friend offering a helping hand, or the unease of an editor worried that the main feature of his journal will run behind schedule, or both combined. Whatever lay behind Dickens's motivation in offering his services to Collins, considering Collins's anxiety surrounding Dickens's influence upon his work, it is unsurprising that he should reject the offer. By necessity, Collins had to maintain "the difference" between his and Dickens's signature.

Collins's attempt to dissociate his signature from that of Dickens was to prove to be in vain, however. In his memoirs, William Winter, a friend of both Dickens and Collins, writes:

There is no resemblance of organic structure and mental idiosyncrasy between the works of Charles Dickens and the works of Wilkie Collins, yet Collins, as a novelist,

was a result of the prodigious influence of Dickens upon the literary movement of the time in which he lived, and the memory of the one irresistibly incites remembrance of the other.²⁷

Winter's belief that "[t]here is no resemblance of organic structure and mental idiosyncrasy between the works of Charles Dickens and the works of Wilkie Collins" would not necessarily be one endorsed today. While the fictional style of the two writers differed considerably, it is also true that, throughout the period of their near twenty-year friendship, they also imitated and emulated one another's work, whether consciously or unconsciously. The often noted similarities between *The Moonstone* and *Edwin Drood* offer one example of such a "resemblance" between the two authors. Nevertheless, Winter's claim that, in terms of Collins and Dickens, "the memory of the one irresistibly incites remembrance of the other" is accurate, if only on Collins's side, in that an undoubted reason for the survival of Collins's works is in part due to his association with Dickens.

As Ashley notes, Collins's work fell out of critical favour in the first half of the twentieth century, and he tended only to be mentioned in passing by Dickensians denigrating his fiction and his influence upon Dickens's novels, or by "scholars and writers who had stumbled on Collins in the course of investigating someone else, most frequently Dickens" (Ashley, 5). Criticism on Collins's work has progressed significantly in the intervening years, yet it is but rarely that studies on his work – including the present one – fail to mention his relationship with Dickens, while the converse does not necessarily hold true. In this respect, the ways in which Collins's 1857 play *The Frozen Deep* is deemed worthy of study is instructive.

Unlike many of Collins's plays, *The Frozen Deep* was not an adaptation of one of his novels, but was an original drama produced for Dickens's annual amateur theatricals at Tavistock House. The play proved so successful that it was revived at the Manchester Free

²⁷ William Winter, *Old Friends: Being Literary Recollections of Other Days* (1909; Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 203; henceforth Winter.

Trade Hall later on that year as part of a benefit for Douglas Jerrold, the playwright and journalist, who had recently died. While the play is regarded as Collins's work, questions have been raised as to how much creative input Dickens allowed him to assert. According to Dickens, in a letter to Wills on 6 April 1856, it was he and not Collins who first conceived the idea of *The Frozen Deep*: "Collins and I have a mighty original notion (mine in the beginning) for another Play at Tavistock House." (*Pilgrim*, 8:81) Furthermore, Dickens, who played a starring role in *The Frozen Deep* as the tragic, self-sacrificing Richard Wardour, made extensive revisions to Collins's play. In the words of Ackroyd, Collins wrote *The Frozen Deep* "almost entirely at his friend's direction": "Of course it was in essence Collins's play but Dickens was sending letters to him [...] suggesting changes or additions; then the first two acts which Collins had completed [...] were revised by Dickens" (Ackroyd, 803, 814). In fact, it was Dickens's revised version of the play – known as "The Prompt-Book" – that was used in the 1857 performances of the play, and not Collins's original version. Robert Louis Brannan argues that, because of this, *The Frozen Deep* is "at least as much Dickens's work as Collins's".²⁸

In addition to helping shape the narrative of the drama, *The Frozen Deep* is commonly associated with Dickens in three other ways. Firstly, *The Frozen Deep* is chiefly remembered for Dickens's enthralling performance in the lead role of Richard Wardour. Ashley explains: "Although many plaudits were showered on the play itself, most of the superlatives were reserved for Dickens's portrayal of the disappointed, self-sacrificing lover." (Ashley, 44) However, Dickens's acting triumph in the lead role of Wardour is regarded as occurring in spite of rather than because of the play itself and, moreover, has tended to obscure Collins's role as the author of the piece. For example, Robinson states: "That it [*The Frozen Deep*] created something of a sensation among audiences at Tavistock House and

²⁸ Robert Louis Brannan, Introduction, in Robert Louis Brannan, ed., *Under the Management of Mr. Charles Dickens: His Production of "The Frozen Deep"* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 1-88 (5); henceforth Brannon.

elsewhere must be attributed chiefly to Dickens' performances as Wardour."²⁹ (Robinson, 108) Collins was himself not blind to the fact that Dickens's mesmerizing performance as Wardour in *The Frozen Deep* was a major factor behind the play's success. For example, in 1874, Collins remarked: "Mr. Dickens himself played the principal part [of Wardour], and played it with a truth, vigour, and pathos never to be forgotten by those who were fortunate enough to witness the performance [...] He literally electrified the audience."³⁰

Secondly, *The Frozen Deep* also provided inspiration for Dickens's 1859 novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. In his 1859 preface to the novel, Dickens writes: "When I was acting, with my children and friends, in Mr. WILKIE COLLINS'S drama of *The Frozen Deep*, I first conceived the main idea of this story."³¹ The most obvious example of Dickens's use of *The Frozen Deep* as a source for *A Tale of Two Cities* is in his depiction of Sydney Carton who, like Wardour, sacrifices his life for the woman he loves. However, while Dickens emphasizes Collins's claim as the author of *The Frozen Deep* in the preface, because of his own alterations to the script, such a statement is debatable. Refuting Dickens's comments in the preface, Nayder writes: "as it was performed by Dickens and his friends, *The Frozen Deep* was hardly Collins's own drama, and *A Tale of Two Cities* more closely resembles Dickens's 1857 Prompt-Book than it does Collins's original draft" (Nayder, *Unequal Partners*, 96).

Thirdly, *The Frozen Deep* is also connected with Dickens in a biographical sense because it was during the performances of the play in Manchester that Dickens met Ellen Lawless Ternan, with whom he was to have a clandestine relationship until his death in 1870. Dickens's infatuation with Ellen after the performances is evident in a 21 March 1858 letter

²⁹ Brannon claims that Dickens's spellbinding performance as Wardour was attributable to the fact that his "conception of the play was partly independent of Collins's script" (Brannon, 5). For T. S. Eliot, "Dickens may have given to the role of Richard Wardour, in acting it, an individuality which it certainly lacks in the story" (Eliot, 466).

³⁰ Wilkie Collins, "Introductory Lines Relating the Adventures and Transformations of 'The Frozen Deep'", in Wilkie Collins, *The Frozen Deep and Other Tales* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1905), 7-11 (7-8).

³¹ Charles Dickens, Preface, in Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, ed. Richard Maxwell (London: Penguin, 2000), 397.

to Collins: “I can’t work, and (waking) can’t rest, one minute. I have never known a moment’s peace or content, since the last night of the Frozen Deep. I do suppose that there never was a man so seized and rended by one Spirit.” (*Pilgrim*, 8: 536) When one considers that “the last night of *The Frozen Deep*” was more than seven months before this letter was written, the extent of Dickens’s restlessness, his inability to forget Ellen, becomes strikingly apparent. As Kaplan puts it: “He could not get her out of his mind.” (Kaplan, 370) Perhaps more than anything else, Dickens’s infatuation with Ellen whilst performing *The Frozen Deep* accounts for the play’s longevity and its significance for biographers and critics, over and above its status as a literary text.

Comparing the 1857 version of *The Frozen Deep* with Collins’s revised 1866 production of the play, Brannon writes: “Neither of the dramatic versions is a good play. The 1857 script has some permanent importance, however, because that version attained a striking success, and because Dickens helped to write it, controlled every detail of its staging, and acted the principal role.” (Brannon, 2-3) Although written in the mid-1960s, Brannon’s comments still hold true today. Certainly, without Dickens’s involvement in *The Frozen Deep* – in terms of the writing of the play, his enthralling performance in the lead role, the play’s influence upon *A Tale of Two Cities*, to say nothing of his meeting Ellen during the Manchester performances – it is likely that it would have been long forgotten, another victim of the neglect which most of Collins’s dramas have suffered.

From a more positive angle, Collins’s link with Dickens has helped in terms of his reintegration into the canon of English literature, but this is not to say that, without his association with Dickens, he would have suffered the fate of many other Victorian novelists, whose works are now largely forgotten or neglected. Indeed, the continued survival of Collins’s name and signature not only rests upon his close friendship and working relationship with Dickens, but also upon the fiction which he produced, especially his four

sensation novels.

On 29 December 1883, a jubilant Collins wrote to Sebastian Schlesinger:

My novels are so popular among the native races of India (who can read English) that they are to be translated into the Bengali language for the native inhabitants who want to read me. The Series is to begin with “The Woman in White”. There seems to be some promise, in this, of the stories being alive when the story-teller is dead. (Baker and Clarke, 2: 464)

Despite its premier position in the Bengali translation series, *The Woman in White*, originally serialized in *All the Year Round* between 26 November 1859 and 26 August 1860, was Collins’s fifth novel – sixth, if his 1856 novella *A Rogue’s Life* is counted. If chronologically inaccurate, however, it is unsurprising that the Bengali versions of Collins’s novels should begin with *The Woman in White*. At the time of its publication, *The Woman in White* was by far Collins’s most successful work, and it catapulted him to literary stardom. Collins was no overnight sensation, however. He had tasted minor success with earlier novels and various short stories, and the potential evinced in these texts had brought him to the attention of no less a personage than Dickens. Nevertheless, it is true to say that before the publication of *The Woman in White*, Collins was another mid-Victorian author; afterwards, he was a household name. In short, *The Woman in White* was the novel which launched Collins’s career and, for most contemporary readers and critics of his fiction, marked the “true” beginning of his literary career.³² In their decision to commence the series of translations with *The Woman in White*, the Bengali publishers of Collins’s work clearly concur with such a view.

In addition to illustrating the pre-eminence of *The Woman in White* to Collins’s oeuvre, his awareness of the literary marketplace, and his truly global following, the 1883 letter to Schlesinger is noteworthy for the ways in which it connects the translation of his novels with the survival of his work after his death. As Collins puts it, the proposed

³² See Margaret Oliphant’s May 1862 *Blackwood’s Magazine* article “Sensation Novels” (*WCH*, 115-17).

“Bengali” translations of his novels suggest “some promise [...] of the stories being alive when the story-teller is dead”. In accepting the Bengali publisher’s decision to commence their series of translations with *The Woman in White*, Collins not only shows his awareness that a translation offers the possibility for a text to “live on”, but, also, that he is conscious where his posthumous literary reputation will lie: *The Woman in White*.³³ Indeed, Collins was conscious that, after his death, he would be mainly remembered for that novel in particular. This can be garnered from Collins’s self-penned epitaph – ““Author of *The Woman in White* and other works of fiction”” – which firmly establishes the novel, at least in his eyes, as central to his posthumous literary reputation (qtd. Peters, 432). Critics have tended to agree with Collins. In an April 1891 obituary entitled “Wilkie Collins and the Novelists of the Day”, which appeared in *Irish Monthly*, W.J. Johnston counts *The Woman in White* as numbering one of “the three books of this author that will live” – the others being *No Name* and *The Moonstone* (WCH, 278).

The fact that *The Woman in White* was – and still is – commonly regarded as the novel which inaugurated the immensely popular genre of sensation fiction, helped to cement its importance to Collins’s literary canon in the Victorian era, and undoubtedly influenced the Bengali publishers to begin their series of translations with the text.³⁴ Following the success of *The Woman in White*, over the next nine years Collins produced three other sensation novels: *No Name*, serialized in *All the Year Round* between 15 March 1862 and 17 January 1863; *Armada*, serialized in *The Cornhill* from 1 November 1864 to 20 June 1866; and *The*

³³ Throughout the period in which Collins wrote to Schlesinger, his correspondence repeatedly refers to the forthcoming “Bengali language” translations of his novels, but, if they were ever published, and there is no extant evidence in confirmation of this, one can assume that, in addition to *The Woman in White*, his three other sensation novels would have been included in the series. Indeed, it is also more than likely that the series would have included nothing other than Collins’s four sensation novels.

³⁴ John Sutherland writes: “The generally accepted historical starting point for sensation fiction is 1859 and the serial publication of Willkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (26 November 1859-26 August 1860)”; see John Sutherland, “Wilkie Collins and the Origins of the Sensation Novel”, in *Wilkie Collins to the Forefront: Some Reassessments*, ed. Nelson Smith and R.C. Terry (New York: AMS Press, 1995), 75-90 (75).

Moonstone, serialized in *All the Year Round* between 4 January 1868 and 8 August 1868. Consequently, however, Collins's authorial identity, for the remainder of his life, became synonymous with the sensation genre.³⁵ While Collins's sensation novels secured his literary reputation in the nineteenth century, however, they also proved something of an albatross around his neck. In the twenty years following the publication of *The Moonstone*, Collins's work was judged, sometimes unfairly, by the standard of his four sensation novels (a subject discussed more fully in the next chapter). It is of course fruitless to speculate on whether or not Collins's corpus would have survived into the twenty-first century, as a body of work worthy to be read and studied, had he not written these four novels. Yet, it is true to say that the sustained interest in his work is due, in no small part, to the sensation novels bearing his name, especially *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, and that, without them, he would not be so highly regarded. Certainly, until very recently, studies on Collins's work have tended to focus upon his sensation fiction, to the exclusion of the rest of his oeuvre.³⁶ On 15 May 1880, the *Spectator* declared: "When the ordinary reader thinks of Wilkie Collins, he connects him in his mind with memories of *The Woman in White*, *The Moonstone*, and *After Dark*" (*WCH*, 207). The importance of these two novels to Collins's literary canon – *After Dark*, an 1856 collection of his short stories, is now largely forgotten – is evident in various obituaries which appeared following news of his death. The next section will discuss a

³⁵ For the *Reader* on 3 January 1863, Collins is "by far the ablest representative" of "the sensation school" (*WCH*, 134). In the words of the *London Quarterly Review* in October 1866, "Mr. Wilkie Collins has done more, perhaps, than almost any writer of the day to foster the taste for sensational stories." (*WCH*, 156) According to *Vanity Fair* on 3 February 1872, Collins was "[t]he Novelist who invented Sensation"; see Jehu Junior, "Men of the Day. – No. XXXIX: Mr. Wilkie Collins", *Vanity Fair* 3 February 1872: 39. And, in his 1883 autobiography, Anthony Trollope states: "My friend Wilkie Collins is generally supposed to be sensational"; see Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography* (1923; London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 194.

³⁶ For T.S. Eliot, *The Woman in White* "is the only one of Collins's novels which everyone knows" (Eliot, 461). With the possible and notable exception of *The Moonstone*, which along with *The Woman in White* is the only novel of Collins's never to have been out of print, Eliot's comments hold true today. The fact that *The Woman in White* was transformed into a musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber in 2004, with Michael Crawford in the central role of Count Fosco, testifies to the novel's continued popular appeal.

selection of these obituaries before examining Collins's sensation fiction in relation to his authorial signature.

III

In his January 1890 obituary for Collins, which appeared in the *Contemporary Review*.

Andrew Lang writes:

Mr. Dickens began, as far as public recognition went, with the most delightful explosion of humorous high spirits in the world, then distinguished himself by several immortal stories, then had an interval of partial eclipse, and shone out again in new lights with *The [sic] Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*. Mr. Collins, on the other hand, had done a great deal of not particularly noticeable work for ten years or so before he found himself in *The Woman in White*, lost himself in *Armadale*, excelled himself in *The Moonstone*, and, after that, seldom rose much above the level of his earlier essays. His biographer – if he is to have a biographer – may be able partly to explain by reasons of health and circumstance this intermittent brilliance. (*WCH*, 267-68)

Lang's obituary points to the ways in which, unlike Dickens, whose fiction was – and still is – commonly divided between his early and late authorial selves, Collins oeuvre was – and also still is – commonly partitioned into three phases. The tripartite model of Collins's career is reinforced by Lang, when he discusses Collins's sensation novel *No Name*, later on in the obituary piece: "As a novel of the author's central period, it stands far above the common average of his immature and of his later work." (*WCH*, 269) For Lang and others, the first or "immature" period of Collins's career is confined to his early texts, and stretches from the publication of the *Memoirs* in 1848 to his 1857 novel *The Dead Secret*.³⁷ The second or "central" era of his literary canon covers the period of his four sensation novels – *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Armadale*, and *The Moonstone* – published between 1859 and 1868. As Lang's obituary makes clear, the "central" position which Collins's four sensation novels occupy in his oeuvre is of a dual nature. In one sense, they were, chronologically speaking, published at roughly the mid-point of his literary career; in another sense, they are "central"

³⁷ Nayder also comments upon the complex division of Collins's authorial identity; see Nayder, *Wilkie Collins*, 13.

in the respect that they were regarded in the Victorian era as his most popular and accomplished novels, and remain so today. The third or “later” period of his authorial career is also the longest; it begins with the publication of *Man and Wife* in 1870 and ends with *Blind Love*, which he only partly completed before his death, in 1889.

Lang was not alone in asserting that the four “central” sensation novels were the only texts bearing Collins’s signature that were worthy of notice. When Collins passed away he had been a professional author for over forty years and, like many Victorian novelists, his work-rate was prodigious. In addition to writing more than twenty novels during his five decade authorial career, he also produced a multitude of short stories and articles, as well as over a dozen plays. Yet, despite his voluminous and varied corpus, Collins was still mainly, and fondly, remembered for his four sensation novels, particularly *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*.

In a well-known obituary piece, entitled “Wilkie Collins”, which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* on 1 November 1889, A. C. Swinburne declares: “It is apparently the general opinion – an opinion which seems to me incontestable – that no third book of their author’s can be ranked as equal with *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*: two works of not more indisputable than incomparable ability.” (*WCH*, 257) A little further on in the obituary, Swinburne qualifies this “incontestable” opinion: “there are many, I believe, who think that Wilkie Collins would have a likelier chance of longer life in the memories of more future readers if he had left nothing behind him but his masterpiece *The Moonstone* and the one or two other stories which may fairly be set beside or but a little beneath it” (*WCH*, 259). With the exception of *The Woman in White*, Swinburne does not explicitly name the “one or two other stories” which are either the equal or near equal of *The Moonstone*; but given his high estimation of *No Name* (“*No Name* is an only less excellent example of as curious and original a talent”), and *Armadale* which, despite being labelled “a failure which fell short on

the verge of a success", is still praised ("the ingenuity spent on it may possibly be perverse. but is certainly superb"), it can be conjectured with some confidence that he is referring to these novels (*WCH*, 257-58).³⁸

Edmund Yates's belated obituary piece, "The Novels of Wilkie Collins", published in *Temple Bar* in August 1890, follows a similar pattern to that of Swinburne's. Yates begins the obituary by declaring: "With the death of Wilkie Collins we have lost almost the last of the great English novelists who made the middle of the nineteenth century memorable in the history of fiction." (*WCH*, 273) For Yates, Collins's reputation as "almost the last of the great English novelists" of the mid-nineteenth century rested upon the sensation novels he produced between 1859 and 1868. "In their own peculiar way, *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, it may be safely said, have never been surpassed", Yates writes:

Like the majority of writers, Wilkie Collins wrote his most popular books when in the prime of life [...] Collins wrote *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Armada*, and *The Moonstone*, in succession, between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five; and none of his many earlier or later fictions have achieved the same fame as those four brilliant novels. (*WCH*, 275)

In the first full-length biography of Collins, published in 1951, Kenneth Robinson continues the critical practice, initiated in the nineteenth century, of elevating Collins's four sensation novels above "the quantity of inferior work which he produced during the last twenty-five years of his life" (Robinson, 326). For Robinson, *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* number two of Collins's "best work" and, he adds, Collins's "reputation must stand or fall by these two books, together with *Armada*, *No Name* and perhaps, *Man and Wife*" (Robinson, 326). Similarly, Gordon N. Ray writes in 1956: "If today only Wilkie's faithful friends read

³⁸ Another candidate could be Collins's 1870 novel *Man and Wife* which Swinburne refers to as "brilliant in exposition of character, [...] dexterous in construction of incident, [and] so happy in evolution of event, that its place is nearer the better work which preceded than the poorer work which followed it" (*WCH*, 260).

his apprentice efforts and his ‘dotages,’ nearly every reader continued to know *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*.³⁹

Collins’s sensation novels continued to hold a monopoly over studies on his fiction in the 1960s and 1970s. Writing in 1974, Page states:

Wilkie Collins was one of the most popular novelists of the second half of the nineteenth century; yet of all his large output – the results of forty years spent in the pursuit of literature as a career – only two novels have achieved undisputed classic status. A handful of others (*Armadale*, for instance, and *No Name*) retain some kind of currency; the rest are forgotten by all except the most dedicated specialists.⁴⁰

By the 1980s and 1990s evaluations on Collins’s work began to look further than his four sensation novels. Yet, the centrality of Collins’s sensation novels was maintained. This is true of two of the most influential studies on Collins’s work, both published in 1988: D.A. Miller’s *The Novel and The Police* (which discusses *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*); and Jenny Bourne Taylor’s *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (which, as discussed below, while analyzing Collins’s oeuvre as a whole, mainly focuses upon his four sensation novels). Elsewhere, Peter Thoms, in a 1992 study of Collins’s fiction, outlines his reasons for concentrating on the “major novels” – that is, sensation novels: “If a case is to be made for Collins as a serious novelist, the focus should be on his best work. Thus in this study [...] [m]y concern is with Collins’s major decade (1859-1868), when he produced his four greatest novels – *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Armadale*, and *The Moonstone*.⁴¹

In a recent review article, Nayder comments that the belief held by critics such as

³⁹ Gordon N. Ray, Introduction, in Nuel Pharr Davis, *The Life of Wilkie Collins* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 1-7 (6); henceforth Davis, *Life of Wilkie Collins*.

⁴⁰ Norman Page, Preface, in Norman Page, ed., *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), xiii-xvi (xiii).

⁴¹ Peter Thoms, *The Windings of the Labyrinth: Quest and Structure in the Major Novels of Wilkie Collins* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), 6; henceforth Thoms. See also Lyn Pykett, *The Sensation Novel: From The Woman in White to The Moonstone* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994), 14-39; henceforth Pykett.

Robinson, Page, Thoms, and others, is now “rather outdated”.⁴² Undoubtedly, there is truth in Nayder’s assertion. Nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that a sea change in the critical opinion of Collins’s fiction has occurred. Mirroring Page’s comments made in 1974, Nayder herself explained in 1997: “Despite the revival of interest in Collins and his fiction, and the republication, as ‘World’s Classics,’ of several novels long out of print, a significant body of his work remains unread, except by biographers and the most devoted of literary critics.” (Nayder, *Wilkie Collins*, 133) Admittedly, in the ten years between Nayder’s 1997 study and the review article, the critical field has progressed from discussing only Collins’s four sensation novels; Nayder’s own recent examination of Collins’s and Dickens’s collaborations in the 1850s and 1860s is demonstrative of this fact. Even bearing this in mind, however, there is still no book length study analyzing Collins’s earlier or later texts in any great detail, and it is true to say that, for the majority of Collins’s critics, all roads still lead to his four “central” sensation novels. Indeed, while texts such as *Basil*, published in 1852, and *The Law and the Lady*, serialized in *Graphic* from 26 September 1874 to 13 March 1875, have received critical praise and attention, both novels – one of which precedes Collins’s “central” period and one of which succeeds it – are often discussed in terms of the ways in which they compare and/or contrast with the four sensation novels.

In the introduction to the 1992 “Oxford World’s Classics” edition of *The Law and the Lady*, Jenny Bourne Taylor, who perhaps more than any other critic has attempted to reawaken interest in Collins’s later novels, states a claim for the critical importance of *The Law and the Lady* to Collins’s corpus. Tellingly, however, the introduction, which begins by discussing the monopoly that Collins’s sensation novels have enjoyed over other works in his canon, analyzes the points of contact and divergence between the sensation novels and *The Law and the Lady*: “*The Law and the Lady* [...] is an intriguing example of Collins’s later

⁴² Lillian Nayder, rev. of Andrew Mangham, ed., *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), in *Wilkie Collins Society Journal* 10 (2007): 72-75 (72); henceforth Nayder, Review.

fiction. An early instance of a novel with a woman investigator as its heroine, it mingles and amplifies, often bizarrely and disturbingly, the concerns and conventions of the novels of the 1860s".⁴³ Moreover, while Bourne Taylor claims that *The Law and the Lady* "is not just a kaleidoscopic replay of the concerns and narrative conventions of the 1860s' novels" and that the novel "takes greater risks than did many of the earlier novels, and pushes their central themes far beyond their previous limits", the introduction, like many other studies analyzing Collins's later fiction, compares the novel unfavourably with his best-known works (Bourne Taylor, Introduction, ix-x). Tempering her admiration for the novel, Bourne Taylor writes: "By some criteria [*The Law and the Lady*] is certainly a less successful book than [Collins's sensation novels], lacking the labyrinthine threads of interwoven narrative found in *Armadale* or *The Moonstone*."⁴⁴ (Bourne Taylor, Introduction, ix-x)

In a similar vein to *The Law and the Lady*, *Basil*'s incorporation into Collins's popular canon has been achieved primarily because of the ways in which it "anticipates [the] characterization of the sensation novel by a decade".⁴⁵ As Sundeep Bisla puts it, "[t]wentieth-century critics have invariably been prompted to consider *Basil* a sensation novel *avant la lettre*".⁴⁶ The view that *Basil* provides an early example of Collins's sensationalist tendencies

⁴³ Jenny Bourne Taylor, Introduction, in Wilkie Collins, *The Law and the Lady*, ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor (1992; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), vii-xxiv (ix); henceforth Bourne Taylor, Introduction.

⁴⁴ In an earlier study of *The Law and the Lady*, Bourne Taylor also praises the novel by comparing it with Collins's sensation novels: "in *The Law and the Lady* [...] Collins approaches the cognitive complexity of *The Moonstone*"; see Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988), 221; henceforth Bourne Taylor, *Secret Theatre*. Yet, by the same token, the novel is relegated to secondary status in his canon: "*The Law and the Lady* is neither as structurally nor as conceptually complex as *The Moonstone*, nor does it draw explicitly on contemporary theories of the unconscious." (Bourne Taylor, *Secret Theatre*, 221) Like Bourne Taylor, David Skilton reassesses the literary value of *The Law and the Lady* in the introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel. Significantly, also like Bourne Taylor, while Skilton argues that *The Law and the Lady* "[breaks] new fictional ground", he maintains that "[i]t is less complex and less ingeniously planned" than Collins's "masterworks", otherwise *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*; see David Skilton, Introduction, in Wilkie Collins, *The Law and the Lady*, ed. David Skilton (1998; London: Penguin, 2004), vii-xxiv (ix-xxi).

⁴⁵ Dorothy Goldman, Introduction, in Wilkie Collins, *Basil*, ed. Dorothy Goldman (1990; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), vii-xxii (vii).

⁴⁶ Sundeep Bisla, "The Manuscript as Writer's Estate: Wilkie Collins's *Basil*, Sensation Fiction, and the Early-Victorian Copyright Act", *Genre* 32 (Fall/Winter 1998), 269-304 (279). Ashley, who regards *Basil* as a "tremendous stride [...] in the direction of his best and most characteristic work", was one of the first critics to recognize the link between *Basil* and Collins's sensation novels (Ashley, 32). Pykett also notes that *Basil* "had many features later labelled 'sensational'"; see Lyn Pykett, "Collins and the sensation novel", in Jenny Bourne

is also emphasized in Bourne Taylor's study *In the Secret Theatre of Home*, where she discusses the novel as a means by which to introduce some of the central themes which dominate the sensation novels: "The psychic and social processes which [*Basil*] explores are elaborated and transformed in the 1860s in more complex narrative and social contexts" (Taylor, *Secret Theatre*, 93). Moreover, *Basil* is the only novel which Bourne Taylor examines, outside of the 1859-1868 period of Collins's authorial career, which has an entire chapter devoted to it. By contrast, the two novels which succeed *Basil* – *Hide and Seek*, published in 1854, and *The Dead Secret*, serialized in 1857 – are dismissed in a single sentence as "much less risqué domestic melodramas", whilst his post-1868 work is discussed in a single chapter (Bourne Taylor, *Secret Theatre*, 25).

Like other contemporary critics discussing the novel, John Kucich regards *Basil's* dizzying mix of crime, sex, and madness as offering an early form of sensation fiction. *Basil*, Kucich writes, is "the first [of Collins's novels] to display the characteristic themes and styles of his signature 'sensation fiction'".⁴⁷ However, Kucich's belief that Collins's close association with the genre of sensation fiction assumes the form of a "signature", by which his work is able to be identified, is not as straightforward as it may first appear. Firstly, because, while Collins is often regarded as the genre's figurehead, not everybody has been convinced that he is the originator of sensation fiction. In an important May 1862 article entitled "Sensation Novels", which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Margaret Oliphant was one of the first to dispute Collins's position as the architect of the sensation genre: "Mr. Wilkie Collins is not the first man who has produced a sensation novel. By fierce expedients of crime and violence, by *diablerie* of divers kinds, and by the wild devices of a romance which smiled at probability, the thing has been done before now." (*WCH*, 111) For Henry

Taylor, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 50-64 (54).

⁴⁷ John Kucich, "Collins and Victorian masculinity", in Jenny Bourne Taylor, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 125-38 (127).

James, writing in November 1865, it was Mary Elizabeth Braddon and not Collins who “created the sensation novel”: “although Mr. Collins anticipated Miss Braddon in the work of devising domestic mysteries [...] she was yet the founder of the sensation novel [...] Mr. Collins’s productions deserve a more respectable name [...] They are not so much works of art as works of science.”⁴⁸

Others have considered Dickens as the originator of the genre. This view was first expressed by George Augustus Sala, who states in his article “On the ‘Sensational’ in Literature”, which appeared in *Belgravia* in February 1868: “among the modern ‘sensational’ writers Mr Charles Dickens is perhaps the most thoroughly, and has been from the very outset of his career the most persistently, ‘sensational’ writer of the age.” (*DCH*, 488) In an important early twentieth century study on the genre, Walter C. Phillips concurs with Sala: “sensation writing became the reproach and abomination of Victorian popular literature. Critic and moralist alike descried in it the collapse of taste and truth in the novel, and pointed their finger at Dickens with the accusatory ‘Thou art the man.’”⁴⁹ In addition, Waters points out that there was more than one type of “sensation” fiction in the nineteenth century: “While the serial publication of Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* [...] is generally held to mark the starting-point for sensational fiction, stories of a thrilling kind had been published in cheap family papers like the *London Journal* from the early 1850s” (Waters, 22).

Secondly, although Collins may primarily be renowned as a sensation novelist, it is problematic to describe the genre as his “signature”, not least because these novels – *Basil* included – are partly concerned with the instability inherent in signing one’s name. Indeed, if

⁴⁸ Henry James, “Mary Elizabeth Braddon”, in Henry James, *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 741–46 (741–43); henceforth James, *Mary Elizabeth Braddon*.

⁴⁹ Walter C. Phillips, *Dickens, Reade, and Collins: Sensation Novelists* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1919), 13. More recently, Mirella Billi claims: “Dickens has long been considered the father of sensation fiction”; see Mirella Billi, “Dickens as Sensation Novelist”, in Clotilde de Stasio, Carlo Pagetti and Alessandro Vescovi, ed., *Dickens: The Craft of Fiction and the Challenges of Reading* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2000), 176–84 (178).

his sensation novels are anything to go by, Collins would probably be less confident in regarding sensation fiction as his “signature”. For example, while the majority of *Basil* is written by the eponymous narrator, a significant portion of part three of the novel is given over to a confessional letter written by the villainous Robert Mannion, whose father was executed for forging Basil’s father’s signature on a bond.⁵⁰ It is in this letter, which stretches to nearly thirty pages, that Mannion relates his life story and explains the reasons for his vengeful pursuit of Basil, which, we discover, is linked to his father’s execution.

Before outlining the ignominious nature of his father’s death, Mannion prefaces his letter by referring to his signature: ““You may look at the signature when you receive this, and may be tempted to tear up the letter, and throw it from you unread.”” (*Basil*, 225) Basil does not tear up the letter; instead, the sight of Mannion’s signature appended to the letter leaves Basil transfixed:

I took out the letter, opened it with trembling fingers, and looked through the cramped, closely-written pages for the signature.

It was “ROBERT MANNION” [...]

“ROBERT MANNION!” I could not take my eyes from that name: I still held before me the crowded, closely-written lines of his writing, and delayed to read them. (*Basil*, 224)

Mannion reveals in the letter that, in the wake of his father’s execution, he was forced to choose between living with “[t]he gallows-brand [...] on [his] forehead” or “disowning [his] parentage and abandoning [his] father’s name” (*Basil*, 229-30). Although Mannion eventually casts off his father’s name, his revengeful pursuit of Basil’s father and his descendants – telling Basil that he was not only his father’s “enemy”, but also, his “son’s

⁵⁰ The crime of forgery is given a prominent role in Collins’s texts. “A Stolen Letter” published in 1854, is a short story based on the consequences relating to a forged signature: ““Ah!” says I. I know what he did”, the narrator of “A Stolen Letter” remarks dryly of the forger, “[h]e had a signature to write; and, by the most natural mistake in the world, he wrote another gentleman’s name instead of his own” (*Mad Monkton*, 25). Other texts produced during this period that are concerned with the act of forgery include *A Rogue’s Life*, published in 1856, in which the narrator Frank Softly not only makes copies of original paintings, but also, is forced to produce counterfeit money by Dr. Dulcifer; “Fauntleroy”, discussed above; and *The Woman in White*, where it is Sir Percival Glyde’s forgery in the marriage register, which is an attempt to illegally legitimize his birth *ex post facto*, which instigates the novel’s plot. In addition, Collins’s 1880 novel *Jezebel’s Daughter*, which is based upon his 1858 play *The Red Vial*, hinges upon the discovery by Mrs. Wagner that Madame Fontaine has falsified Mr. Keller’s ledger.

enemy, and his son's son's enemy, as I long as I lived" – suggests that Mannion finds it impossible to escape the legacy of his father's crime (*Basil*, 230). As Mannion himself admits, he is left with "no inheritance but the name of a felon's son" (*Basil*, 227). Even adopting a pseudonym does not prevent Mannion from suffering from the inheritance of his father's crime and name: "Wherever I went, the old stain always broke out afresh, just at the moment when I had deceived myself into the belief that it was utterly effaced." (*Basil*, 230)

Just as Basil tell us at the beginning of the story that he is "engaged in writing a historical romance", Mannion explains in the letter that he also had aspirations to become an author (*Basil*, 25). However, Mannion's desire to become an author remains unfulfilled, and he is instead resigned to working "as a hack-author of the lowest degree":

Knowing I had talents which might be turned to account, I tried to vindicate them by writing an original work. But my experience of the world had made me unfit to dress my thoughts in popular costume [...] in short, I called things by their right names; and no publisher would treat with me. So I stuck to my low task work; my penny-a lining in third-class newspapers; my translating from Frenchmen and Germans, and plagiarising from dead authors [...] In this life, there was one advantage which compensated for much misery and meanness [...] I could keep my identity securely concealed. Character was of no consequence to me; nobody cared to know who I was, or to inquire what I had been – the gallows mark was smoothed out at last! (*Basil*, 231-32)

Mirroring the abandonment of his father's name, Mannion's authorial signature is absent from the texts that he produces because, as a translator and a plagiarist, they do not belong to him. Instead, the texts that Mannion translates and plagiarizes bear another's authorial signature, meaning that his own name and signature remains anonymous, absent: "utterly effaced". However, whilst this may eradicate "the gallows mark" that has followed him since his father's crime, it also binds him to his father's name even more closely as, like his father, Mannion has now committed forgery: profiting from the illegal reproduction of somebody else's (authorial) signature.

Rather than allowing Mannion a further opportunity to distance himself from his father's name, his act of literary forgery means that, mirroring his father's crime, he

appropriates another's signature as his own. Even if it had been possible for Mannion to write "an original work", though, because he is forced to conceal his identity behind a pseudonym means that he could only partially sign the text. The fact that Mannion cannot sign his name fully is further complicated by Basil's admission, in a letter to John Barnard, that he is only "willing to permit the publication of [his] narrative, provided all names and places mentioned in it remained concealed" (*Basil*, 339). In being given to him by Basil, then, the name "Robert Mannion" – a name, we are told, he has assumed to avoid the shame of his father's crime – is doubly pseudonymous and, therefore, even less in his possession.

Basil is equally unwilling to name himself or his own family. In fact, like Mannion, the name that Basil is most willing to "conceal" in his autobiography belongs to his father. Early in the story, Basil writes:

Circumstances [...] have forced me to abandon my father's name. I have been obliged in honour to resign it; and in honour I abstain from mentioning it here. Accordingly, at the head of these pages, I have only placed my Christian name – not considering it of any importance to add the surname which I have assumed [...] It will now, I hope, be understood from the outset [...] why a blank occurs wherever my father's name should appear; why my own is kept concealed in this narrative, as it is kept concealed in the world. (*Basil*, 2-3)

Replicating the title of Collins's novel, the narrator of the autobiography is known only as "Basil". In addition, just as Mannion finds it impossible to "abandon" his father's name, when Basil attempts to relinquish his surname it still returns to haunt him in the text, even as an absence. Indeed, the "circumstances" that have "forced" Basil to abandon his father's name – his clandestine marriage to Margaret Sherwin, which his father opposed – are central to the novel's plot and, therefore, Basil cannot avoid referring to the subject despite the fact that he is unwilling to reveal his father's name. Basil's father's objection to his son's marriage stems not only from the fact that it was conducted in secrecy, but also because Margaret is the daughter of a linen-draper. Significantly, when Basil discovers that the object of his infatuation is of such "lowly" origins his first reaction is to consider his patrilineal

heritage: “A linen-draper’s shop – a linen-draper’s daughter! Was I still in love? – I thought of my father; I thought of the name I bore; and this time, though I might have answered the question, I dared not.” (*Basil*, 35)

After learning of his son’s marriage, Basil’s father, in a symbolic gesture, tears out the page containing Basil’s name from the family biography, telling his son as he does so:

““Would to God I could tear the past from my memory, as I tear the leaf from this book!””

(*Basil*, 203) Looking back on the scene of his disgrace, Basil remembers “the sharp, tearing sound as my father rent out from the book before him the whole of the leaf which contained my name; tore it into fragments, and cast them on the floor” (*Basil*, 203). However, Basil’s

father is not content merely to remove his son’s name from his family’s biography; he also offers Basil money to repudiate his name: ““Write what you please; I am ready to pay dearly for your absence, your secrecy, and your abandonment of the name you have degraded.””

(*Basil*, 204) Basil declines his father’s offer and renounces his surname without receiving a penny. By not presenting his father’s name in the text, Basil repeats his father’s own act of stripping him of the family name. Minus a surname, Basil can only partially sign his text, a fact emphasized in Basil’s letter to John Bernard which concludes the novel. Unlike other letters presented in the narrative, such as Mannion’s, or those by William and Mary Penhale, Basil’s letter is left unsigned, finishing abruptly with the words “Once more – farewell!”, which suggests that Basil cannot fully appropriate the text bearing his name and signature (*Basil*, 344).

With *Armada*, described as a “‘sensation novel’ with a vengeance” by the *Athenaeum* on 2 June 1866, Collins continues his investigation into the workings of the signature initiated within the narrative of *Basil* (*WCH*, 146). The plot to *Armada* is driven by the consequences of a name – “Allan Armadale” – being repeated in two generations of two separate families. For Catherine Peters, “[p]ossession of the name [Allan Armadale]

becomes a key question – an epistemological enquiry, as well as a plot device.” (Peters, 276) Yet, as Peters suggests, the question “Who is Allan Armadale?” is never fully answered in the novel (Peters, 276). In *Armadale* there are five characters that bear the name “Allan Armadale”. One of these characters adopts the pseudonym “Ozias Midwinter” – the name of “a drunkard, a ruffian, and a thief” – in order to escape the clutches of his step-father, Alexander Neal.⁵¹

Early on in the novel, Midwinter is “startled” to discover another person shares his “original” name of “Allan Armadale” (*Armadale*, 100). Midwinter becomes close friends with this other Allan Armadale, but he remains silent upon the fact that they both share the same name: ““As Ozias Midwinter, Mr. Armadale first knew me – as Ozias Midwinter he shall know me to the end of my days.”” (*Armadale*, 99) The reason for Midwinter’s reticence is due to the fact that his biological father (“Allan Armadale”) murdered Armadale’s father (also “Allan Armadale”). In a letter written to Midwinter on his death-bed, Midwinter’s father confesses his crime, while delivering a warning: “Again, in the second generation, there are two Allan Armadales as there were in the first [...] I see danger in the future, begotten of the danger in the past [...] avoid the man who bears the same name as your own.”” (*Armadale*, 47-48) On turning twenty-one, however, Midwinter is temporarily forced to revert back to his former name in order to claim his share from the sale of his family estate. After several years apart from his family, Midwinter finds ““some difficulty in proving [his] identity””, but when this obstacle is overcome, he is able to receive the money on the condition that he signs in his “original” name of Allan Armadale: ““Twice a year [...] I must sign my own name to get my own income. At all other times, and all other circumstances, I may hide my identity under any name I please.”” (*Armadale*, 99)

⁵¹ Wilkie Collins, *Armadale*, ed., John Sutherland (London: Penguin, 1995), 90-91; henceforth *Armadale*.

After meeting and falling in love with Lydia Gwilt, Midwinter reveals to her his true identity; that, like his friend, his name is also “Allan Armadale”. Lydia, whose past has been chequered by crime and vice, begins to see in Midwinter a chance of redemption, and she finds herself, against her better instincts, contemplating marrying him. By marrying Midwinter, Lydia hopes to “[trample] [her] own wickedness underfoot” and, on several occasions, she notices that thinking about and being with Midwinter makes her feel “unlike [her] usual self” (*Armadale*, 514, 440). This does not last, however. Eventually, Lydia’s “wickedness” returns and, along with the sinister Doctor Downward, she plans a crime based upon what Downward refers to as “the curious similarity between the two names” (*Armadale*, 591). ““What *haunts* me to begin with?””, Lydia writes in her diary, prior to concocting the plan: ““The Names haunt me.”” (*Armadale*, 424, original emphasis)

Lydia’s plot can be summarized thus: planning first to marry Midwinter under his “original” name of “Allan Armadale” (becoming “Mrs. Armadale” in the process), Lydia intends to murder the “real” Allan Armadale – that is, Midwinter’s friend. After Armadale’s death, Lydia plans to deny her marriage to Midwinter and pose as Armadale’s widow, therefore coming into sole possession of Armadale’s vast fortune. The embryo of this plan, of substituting one “Allan Armadale” for another, is first sketched in one of Lydia’s diary entries: “The similarity in the two names never struck me in this light before. Marry which of the two I might, my name would of course be the same [...] It’s almost maddening to write it down – to feel that something ought to come of it – and to find nothing come.” (*Armadale*, 441) However, whilst it is the name “Allan Armadale” which first suggests to Lydia’s mind the idea of substituting Midwinter for Armadale, the fulfillment of her plan depends upon a signature: Midwinter’s. What is more, like his biannual act of signing in his “own name” in order to receive his inheritance, for Lydia’s plan to work, Midwinter must sign his “original” name of “Allan Armadale” in the marriage register.

After much persuading, Midwinter finally agrees to marry Lydia as “Allan Armadale” and, for a while at least, she fools people into believing that she has married the “real” Allan Armadale. For example, when “the Spy” Jemmy Bashwood, arrives at the church in which Lydia and Midwinter were married, he asks to look inside the marriage register. As Bashwood opens the register, the narrator states:

The day’s register comprised three marriages solemnized that morning – and the first two signatures on the page, were “Allan Armadale” and “Lydia Gwilt”! [...] There, in black and white, was the registered evidence of the marriage, which was at once a truth in itself and a lie in the conclusion to which it led! There – through the fatal similarity in the names – there, in Midwinter’s own signature, was the proof to persuade everybody that, not Midwinter, but Allan, was the husband of Miss Gwilt! (*Armadale*, 538-9)

Paradoxically, by inscribing his “own signature” in the marriage register, Midwinter effaces it. While Midwinter’s signature performs its function, in that it validates his marriage to Lydia, it also calls into question the very validity of his marriage. Instead of attesting to Midwinter’s presence at the wedding ceremony, his “own” signature, doubling that of Armadale’s, un-signs his name, and makes him a stranger to himself in the process. Indeed, to paraphrase Lydia earlier in the narrative, with the act of signing his name in the marriage register, Midwinter, it seems, is ““*proved not to be [him]self*” (*Armadale*, 284, original emphasis). “[A]t once” a truth and a lie, Midwinter’s “own” name and signature are revealed to not fully belong to him; a logic which, Derrida points out, can be applied to all names and signatures.⁵²

So far this analysis of signatures in Collins’s work has been limited to characters or scenes in specific novels. Yet, the instability surrounding the act of signing one’s name, which Collins identifies in *Basil* and *Armadale*, is also evident on a more general narratorial level in arguably the most distinctive element of his “signature ‘sensation fiction’”; namely, his employment of multiple narrators, which are such a feature of *The Woman in White* and

⁵² “[Y]ou will never be your name, you never have been, even when, and especially when you have answered to it [...] One could not live, be there, except by protesting against one’s name, by protesting one’s non-identity with one’s proper name.” (*The Post Card*, 39)

The Moonstone. For Pykett, “his fragmented, multi-vocal narratives, were the boldest experiments with narrative form to be found in the sensation mode” (Pykett, 14). If Collins’s 1860 preface to *The Woman in White* is anything to go by, he is inclined to agree:

An experiment is attempted in this novel, which has not (so far as I know) been hitherto tried in fiction. The story of the book is told throughout by the characters of the book. They are all placed in different positions along the chain of events; and they all take the chain up in turn, and carry it on to the end. (*WW*, 644)

Collins’s prefatory comments supplement the opening statement by Walter Hartright, the fictional editor of the series of narratives which make up the novel’s story, who declares:

the story here presented will be told by more than one pen, as the story of an offence against the laws is told in Court by more than one witness – with the same object, in both cases, to present the truth always in its most direct and most intelligible aspect; and to trace the course of one complete series of events, by making the persons who have been most closely connected with them, at each successive stage, relate their own experience, word for word (*WIW*, 5-6).

Collins’s claims to originality in terms of his narrative design, Sutherland notes, were disputed by contemporary critics: “As a number of reviewers pointed out, the eighteenth-century epistolary novel [...] anticipated many aspects of Collins’s technique.”⁵³ There were critics who agreed with Collins’s declaration concerning the uniqueness of *The Woman in White*’s narrative structure, though. For example, referring to the 1860 preface, the unsigned review which appeared in *The Times* on 30 October 1860 states that Collins’s “laying claim to an unprecedented method of telling his story [...] is [...] a just one” because, in contrast to epistolary fiction, in *The Woman in White* “the narrators are like the witnesses at a trial” (*WCH*, 98).

Trodd argues that it was in the collaborative pieces with Dickens, such as the 1856 *All the Year Round* Christmas story *The Wreck of the Golden Mary*, where Collins “[learnt] to move from frame narrator to interpolated story narrator, and link [...] Dickens’s narratives”, which “produced his distinctive multiple narrative method” (Trodd, “The early writing”, 31-

⁵³ John Sutherland, Introduction, in Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. John Sutherland (1996; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), vii-xxiii (xv).

32). Despite Dickens's role in helping to form Collins's "distinctive multiple narrative method", he was not an advocate of this type of story-telling, and he was often critical of his collaborator's style. Ironically, after reading early-proofs of *The Woman in White* in early January 1860, Dickens's main criticism of the novel was that Collins's "distinctive multiple narrative method" was too distinctive, too unique to Collins: "the three people who write the narratives in these proofs, have a DISSECTIVE property in common, which is essentially not theirs, but yours" (*Pilgrim*, 9: 194-95). Dickens also soon grew tired of Collins's use of multiple narratives. This is evident when the two authors collaborated on *A Message from the Sea* – the 1860 Christmas story for *All the Year Round* – soon after the publication of *The Woman in White*. On reading an early draft of Collins's portion of the text, Dickens was dismayed to find that his collaborator had reverted to employing the narrative style first adopted in *The Woman in White*. On 14 November 1860, an incredulous Dickens wrote to Georgina Hogarth: "is it not a most extraordinary thing that it began: 'I have undertaken to take pen in hand, to set down in writing – &c – &c –' like the W in W narratives? Of course I at once pointed out the necessity of cancelling that" (*Pilgrim*, 9: 339).

With *The Moonstone*, Collins again used multiple narrators. Like *The Woman in White*, it is the fictional editor of the narratives, Franklin Blake, who outlines the text's narratorial method. Speaking to Gabriel Betteredge, Blake explains:

We have certain events to relate [...] and we have certain persons concerned in those events who are capable of relating them. Starting from these plain facts, the idea is that we should all write the story of the Moonstone in turn – as far as our own personal experiences extends, and no farther.⁵⁴

After reading Collins's preliminary work on *The Moonstone* Dickens's initial reaction to the novel was generally positive, but he again derided Collins's use of multiple narrators. On 30 June 1867, Dickens tells Wills: "Of course it is a series of 'Narratives,' and of course such

⁵⁴ Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, ed. John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8; henceforth *TM*.

and so many modes of action are open to such and such people; but it is a very curious story – wild, and yet domestic” (*Pilgrim*: 11: 385).⁵⁵ Dickens’s dismissive tone (“Of course [...] and of course”) indicates his sense of familiarity with Collins’s narrative techniques. But whilst Dickens may not have approved of such narratorial methods, his objections to Collins’s use of multiple narrators and narratives, as a means of telling his story, emphasize the ways in which they had become a distinctive and recognizable aspect of Collins’s novels. Indeed, following the enormous success of *The Woman in White*, Collins’s employment of multiple narratives became intimately associated with his work, in the minds of readers and critics, regardless of whether or not they broke new ground in fiction.⁵⁶

Collins’s distinctive use of multiple narratives in *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* assumes the form of a signature, through which his work is able to be recognized. As Geoffrey Bennington explains, a signature in this sense is defined as a form of writing “absolutely proper and idiomatic” to an author: “what I write is obviously by me, whether or not it be explicitly signed, immediately recognizable in what is usually called style” (Bennington, 180, 185). While referring to art, rather than writing, Charles Baudelaire’s analysis of Constantin Guy’s artwork offers a useful example of an authorial signature. Baudelaire points out that “not a single one of [Guy’s] drawings is signed, if by signature you mean that string of easily forgettable characters which spell a name”.⁵⁷ Yet, he argues, Guy’s works are instantly identifiable as belonging to him and nobody else: “all his works are

⁵⁵ A little over a year later, Dickens’s opinion of *The Moonstone* was not quite so favourable. Writing again to Wills, on 26 July 1868, Dickens states: “I quite agree with you about the Moonstone. The construction is wearisome beyond endurance, and there is a vein of obstinate conceit in it that makes enemies of readers.” (*Pilgrim*, 12: 159)

⁵⁶ For example, Yates, in the already cited obituary article, writes of “the distinctly Collins method of narration [...] which has had a world of imitators”: “it is required only to have recourse to a bewildering sequence of events, place the telling of them in the mouths of half-a-dozen narrators, and let the narration be as bald and colloquial as possible, in order that a man may avow himself a disciple of Wilkie Collins” (*WCH*, 275-6). Such was the familiarity of Collins’s narrative style that in 1867 he even had the dubious honour of his work being parodied by the humorist Bret Harte. Entitled “No Title”, Harte’s spoof sensation novel made an especial point of poking fun at Collins’s penchant for “multiple narratives and for medical witnesses” in his fiction (*WCH*, 161).

⁵⁷ Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life”, in Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), 1-40 (5); henceforth Baudelaire.

signed – with his dazzling *soul*; and art-lovers who have seen and appreciated them will readily recognize them from the description that I am about to give” (Baudelaire, 5, original emphasis).

It is significant, however, that one of the main elements of Collins’s authorial signature – his use of multiple narrators and narratives – is formed through the piecing together of a variety of narratives, each of which is signed by different characters in the novels. In doing so, Collins makes the texts themselves a form of fractured collaboration between the fictional narrators, none of whom have total narrative authority; that is, by constructing *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* out of a series of interlinked narratives “told by more than one pen”, these texts lack a coherent narratorial voice, a unified narratorial signature. This is emphasized in a particularly sensational scene in *The Woman in White* when Marian Halcombe’s narrative – which is in the form of a diary – suddenly breaks off as she succumbs to fever. As Marian slowly loses consciousness and her diary breaks off, we are presented with a “Note” from Hartright, the editor of the narratives that make up *The Woman in White*:

At this place the entry in the Diary ceases to be legible. The two or three lines which follow, contain fragments of words only, mingled with blots and scratches of the pen [...] On the next page of the Diary, another entry appears. It is in a man’s handwriting, large, bold, and firmly regular (*WW*, 342-3).

The “large, bold, and firmly regular” handwriting belongs to Fosco who, after perusing the contents of the diary, appends his “Postscript by a sincere friend”, which he ends by signing “Fosco” (*WW*, 343-44). In his controversial but influential account of this scene, D. A. Miller argues that Fosco’s appropriation of Marian’s diary is effectively a form of “rape”, in which the reader of the text is also implicated, as both victim and aggressor. “It is not only [...] that Marian has been ‘raped,’” Miller claims, “[w]e [the reader] are ‘taken’ too, taken by surprise [...] We are taken from behind”: “To being the object of violation here, however, there is an equally disturbing alternative: to identify with Fosco, with the novelistic agency of violation.

For the Count's postscript only puts him in the position we already occupy." (*The Novel and the Police*, 164)

For Sundeep Bisla, on the other hand, "Fosco's crime is less sexual than textual": "As Fosco's 'rape' is the unauthorized reading of Marian's diary, the narrative at this point necessarily lays particular stress upon the materiality of that text" (Bisla, "Copy-Book", 119). Instead, for Bisla, Fosco's "unauthorized reading of Marian's diary" can be read as Collins's condemnation of the piracy of his books in the States: "instead of shock while reading the Marian-Fosco scene the American readers [...] should have felt a twinge of recognition, because what Fosco is illicitly doing, Collins implies, to Marian's text is what they have been doing [...] for years to the texts of British authors." (Bisla, "Copy-Book", 121)

In addition to these differing readings of the scene, however, Fosco's act of reading Marian's diary and his subsequent and supplementary "postscript" – to say nothing of Hartright's appearance in the text as editor, situated in between Marian's diary and Fosco's signatures – offers a microcosm of the collaborative nature of the multiple narratives which constitute the text. In fact, what this episode marks is the site of a collaborative overload, because at this specific point in the narrative it is not clear whose signature is signing the text: Marian's, Hartright's, or Fosco's. Therefore, whilst this portion of the narrative is signed by all three characters, because each countersigns the others' signature, none gain authorial supremacy and, consequently, none fully sign the text. If Collins's use of multiple narratives in his sensation novels is regarded as an integral element of his authorial signature, this scene in *The Woman in White* illustrates that such a signature, like Basil's and Midwinter's, is founded upon dislocation rather than unity.

In texts such as *Basil*, *Armada*, and *The Woman in White* the act of fully signing one's name is portrayed as highly problematic. The fact that Basil and Midwinter, to say nothing of the host of fictional narrators who make up the narratives of *The Woman in White*

and *The Moonstone*, are all writers in one sense or another, demonstrates an understanding on Collins's part that one can never completely sign a text bearing one's name. This has serious implications for how we view Collins as a sensation novelist. Indeed, judging by the novels, in which a profound instability and uncertainty surrounds the workings of the signature, as well as the fact that there is some dispute concerning the origins of the sensation genre, one must be cautious when regarding sensation fiction as Collins's "signature". Like the quasi-collaborative text of the *Memoirs*, in which Collins's signature doubles his father's (and, consequently, destabilizes his position as the text's author), there is a sense in which Collins's "signature" – sensation fiction – at once belongs and does not belong to him.

Yet, as Derrida's work demonstrates, this sense of belonging and not belonging in terms of one's signature is a necessary condition of its being a signature. For Derrida, as Bennington explains,

a text is never closed upon itself, in spite of the effort of the signatory who wants to appropriate it. This desire is also paradoxical: for to make one's text absolutely proper to oneself, absolutely idiomatic, would be to bar all reading of it, even by oneself, and so the totally signed text, proper to its signatory, appropriated by him, would no longer be a text (Bennington, 163).

As this passage illustrates, a writer's desire to appropriate his or her text fully, by means of his or her signature, is an impossible one because in order for a text's signature to function as a signature it must, by necessity, separate itself from the signatory. Derrida describes this dual movement as "the *double band* of the signature":

the signature has to remain and disappear at the same time, remain in order to disappear, or to disappear in order to remain [...] There has to be a signature so that it can remain-to-disappear. It is lacking, which is why there has to be one, but it is necessary that it be lacking, which is why there does not have to be one. (*Signsponge*, 56, original emphasis)

Derrida's belief holds true not only for signatures appended to a text, but also for signatures of a more general kind, such as Collins's "signature", sensation fiction. In this respect, Collins's "signature" – sensation fiction – is analogous to Midwinter's act of signing his

name in the marriage register. Like Midwinter, whose signature effaces itself at the moment in which it is inscribed, Collins's "signature" is at once present and absent: that is, while, in one sense, Collins's "signature" allows him to sign his texts; in another sense, it does not enable him to appropriate them completely. Remaining and disappearing at the same time, Collins's "signature" at once belongs and does not belong to him; it escapes his full possession, yet it is ineluctably tied to his authorial identity. Moreover, while the various obituaries and critical studies, proclaiming *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* as his most memorable work, are testament to the fact that Collins's sensation novels – his "signature" – have enabled his name and work to live on, this sense of survival, as Derrida argues, is always already at work in the name and authorial signature "Wilkie Collins".

IV

Like Dickens, who died in the midst of writing *Edwin Drood*, Collins, at the time of suffering the stroke which eventually killed him, was working on *Blind Love*, which was due to begin serialization in *The Illustrated London News* on 6 July 1889. Foreseeing that he would not live to finish the novel, Collins, shortly after suffering the stroke, had asked the popular novelist Walter Besant to finish the novel in his place. Besant was not keen to undertake the task, but, as he explains in his 1890 preface to *Blind Love*, which supplemented the novel on its publication in three volumes by Chatto and Windus, "it was impossible to decline this request".⁵⁸

Besant and Collins shared a literary agent, A. P. Watt, and it was through Watt that Collins first enquired if Besant would complete *Blind Love* in his stead. Besant was not the only author who was considered a viable candidate to finish the novel, however. According to Peters, Collins had "thought about asking Hall Caine [the popular late-nineteenth century novelist and playwright] to finish the book for him, but decided that he was not up to the job"

⁵⁸ Walter Besant, Preface, in Wilkie Collins, *Blind Love*, ed. Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), 57-58; henceforth Besant.

(Peters, 429). Why Collins asked Besant to finish the novel – as opposed to another author – is unclear. For Peters, Collins determined on Besant because his “ideas on fiction were so close to his own and [he] had taken up so vigorously the defence of the rights of authors” (Peters, 430). However, while the two men were known to each other through the “Society of Authors” – an association founded by Besant and which Collins served in the capacity of Vice President – they were not close. This is evident in terms of the negotiations concerning Besant’s involvement in *Blind Love*, which were conducted through Watt and not directly between Collins and Besant themselves. For example, in a letter to A. P. Watt, dated 26 August 1889, Collins writes: “Pray tell Walter Besant that his ready and valued help has been offered to a grateful brother in the Art” (*Public Face*, 4: 381). In fact, no correspondence between the two authors has survived, if it ever existed. One possible reason for Besant’s involvement in *Blind Love* may have been his familiarity with collaborative fiction. In the 1870s, in particular, Besant had co-authored a number of texts with James Rice, such as *Ready-Money Mortiboy* (1875), *This Son of Vulcan* (1876), and *The Monks of Thelema* (1878). Besant was by no means an advocate of collaborative fiction, however. In his autobiography, which makes no mention of his involvement in helping Collins to finish *Blind Love*, Besant states: “if I were asked for my opinion as to collaboration in fiction, it would be decidedly against it [...] after all, an artist must necessarily stand alone”.⁵⁹

The Illustrated London News, as Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox note, remained silent upon Besant’s role in finishing the novel: “although it [*The Illustrated London News*] carried an obituary for Wilkie Collins, [it] did not at any point in the novel’s run publish an announcement indicating that the deceased author had been unable to complete his book”.⁶⁰ One can only speculate about the reasons for *The Illustrated London News*’s reticence regarding Besant’s involvement in *Blind Love*, but, it is likely that, as

⁵⁹ Walter Besant, *Autobiography of Sir Walter Besant* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1902), 188-89.

⁶⁰ Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox, Introduction, in Wilkie Collins, *Blind Love*, ed. Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), 9-47 (47); henceforth Bachman and Cox.

Bachman and Cox point out, “the editors felt that readership might fall off if readers felt they were not getting the genuine Wilkie Collins in their weekly installments” (Bachman and Cox, 47). Shortly after Collins’s death, however, rumours had been circulating concerning Besant’s role in completing *Blind Love*. To set the matter straight Besant issued a preface when the 1890 three-volume Chatto and Windus edition of *Blind Love* was published, which clarified the extent of his contribution.⁶¹

Besant’s preface is notable for the ways in which it downplays his substantial contribution to *Blind Love*. In fact, in the preface, Besant is adamant that the novel still bears Collins’s sole authorial signature. For example, Besant insists that the portions of *Blind Love*, which he produced, relied heavily upon the copious notes that Collins had left him. Besant explains that he was amazed by the detailed notes that Collins had left for him: “these were not merely notes such as I had expected [...] but an actual detailed scenario, in which every incident, however trivial, was carefully laid down” (Besant, 57). Such was the extent and depth of Collins’s notes that Besant claimed that the portions of the text which he worked on were not, by any means, a departure from Collins’s original intention. In the preface, Besant states, “I have altered nothing”:

The plot of the novel, every scene, every situation, from beginning to end, is the work of Wilkie Collins. The actual writing is entirely his up to a certain point: from that point to the end it is his in fragments, but mainly mine. Where his writing ends and mine begins, I need not point out. The practised critic will, no doubt, at once lay his finger on the spot.⁶² (Besant, 57-8)

To a certain extent, Besant had a point. When he took control of *Blind Love*, from early-August 1889 onwards, Collins had written roughly half of the allotted twenty-six instalments in advance, and it was not until Chapter 49, which appeared in the novel’s nineteenth weekly

⁶¹ On 2 October 1889, Besant wrote to Andrew Chatto, whose firm, Chatto and Windus, were publishing *Blind Love*: “I want to write a preface stating my share in the book. I hoped to keep this a secret but I saw it stated in the World [a contemporary journal] yesterday that I had finished it and in justice to Wilkie Collins and myself too I should like to give the real facts of the case.” (*Public Face*, 4: 391)

⁶² Despite Besant’s assurances, as Peters points out, “Besant did alter the final sentence of the novel. Wilkie’s manuscript reads, ‘Blind love to the last! How like a woman!’ The Published version has, ‘Blind Love doth never wholly die.’” (Peters, 430)

instalment, on 9 November, that Besant took over the narrative-reins in the sense of contributing new material. Nevertheless, Besant's contribution to the novel should not be underestimated. Indeed, as Bachman and Cox observe, *Blind Love* remains "a joint effort by two different authors" (Bachman and Cox, 34). Moreover, Besant's contribution to *Blind Love* has meant that the novel has never been seen as fully belonging to Collins, as fully bearing his authorial signature. Even Ashley, one of the foremost critics on Collins, regards the novel as being "only partly Collins's work" (Ashley, 124). In terms of *Blind Love*, life begins imitating art. Like the mysterious letter in the novel that is "written in a feigned hand, without a signature", Besant's involvement in finishing the novel, in which he imitates Collins's style, has cast a shadow of doubt over who the text belongs to.⁶³

Before Collins became too unwell to continue writing *Blind Love*, he had written his own preface to the novel. This preface, which Collins entitled "Author's Statement", was first reprinted in the recent *Broadview* edition of the novel, and is signed with his initials "W. C.": "W. C." being the signature that Collins used to sign the majority of his prefaces from 1870 onwards.⁶⁴ However, after Collins's death and amidst rumours of Besant's involvement in *Blind Love*, Collins's "Author's Statement" was replaced by Besant's preface, which he ended by signing with his name, "WALTER BESANT." (Besant, 58) Despite the fact that Besant's preface is clearly meant to reinforce Collins's position as the originator of the text, because it supplants Collins's "Author's Statement", Besant's prefatory countersignature of "WALTER BESANT" erases Collins's authorial signature of "W. C.". But, as I will now go on to explain, unlike the story of *Blind Love*, in which Lord Harry attempts to swap identities with a dead man named Oxbye, Besant is not simply substituting his signature for Collins's.

⁶³ Wilkie Collins, *Blind Love*, ed. Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), 94; henceforth *BL*.

⁶⁴ Wilkie Collins, "Author's Statement", in Wilkie Collins, *Blind Love*, ed. Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2004), 62.

Rather, it is a hybrid signature, belonging to both Collins and Besant and neither Collins nor Besant, which signs within and without the text.

Although Collins's prefatory signature of "W. C." disappears from its intended place in the text – that is, in the "absent" "Author's Statement" – it resurfaces within the narrative of *Blind Love*. What is especially interesting about this repetition of Collins's signature, buried within the pages of the novel, is that it appears in the portion of the text that Besant wrote from Collins's notes. In fact, by the time the instalment featuring Collins's "hidden" signature was serialized, Collins had been dead for over two months. Collins's "signature" reappears in *Blind Love* incorporated into an advertisement that the maid, Fanny Mere, writes in order to get in touch with her mistress Lady Harry: "Fanny M. L———— H————. I have not been able to ascertain your address. Please write to me, at the Post Office, Hunter Street, London, W. C." (*BL*, 344)

In terms of the advertisement, "W. C." stands for "West Central". Unmistakably, however, the letters "W" and "C" also stand for the name "Wilkie Collins", as well as replicating the signature Collins employs in the "absent" "Author's Statement" to *Blind Love*. As already mentioned, the initials "W. C." appear in Besant's portion of the text. Unlike the preface to *Blind Love*, then, where Besant's signature displaces Collins's, this time Besant signs for Collins and in his name; within a text that bears the name and signature of both authors. By signing in Collins's name within the text, Besant mirrors the way in which he unites his own authorial signature with Collins's in completing *Blind Love*; creating a dual authorial signature like that appended to the *Memoirs*. Just as *Blind Love* can be seen as not fully belonging to Collins's corpus of work – as not fully bearing Collins's authorial

signature – because of Besant’s involvement in finishing it, Collins’s signature in the text, signed by Besant, at once belongs and does not belong to him.⁶⁵

Two days before his death, Collins penned two short notes to his friend and physician Francis Carr Beard, which are believed to be the last things he ever wrote (Robinson, 322; Baker and Clarke, 2: 517). Collins was so debilitated by the effects of the stroke that the pencilled messages are, in the words of Catherine Peters, “faint and almost indecipherable” (Peters, 431). The first note is written on business-like writing paper and is headed by his address and emblazoned with his insignia: the initials “W” and “C” intertwined with a quill pen resting in the middle. The note simply, but movingly, states in a faltering hand: “I am dying old friend”, and is signed with his initials “W. C.” (*Public Face*, 4: 382). The second message, erratically scribbled on a separate sheet of paper without punctuation, is unsigned, and adds in a more distressed tone: “They are driving me mad by *forbidding* the [hypodermic] [...] Come for God’s sake [...] I am too wretched to write [...]” (*Public Face*, 4: 382, original emphasis).⁶⁶ These two notes which Collins writes on his deathbed – one signed, one unsigned – mirror the ways in which Collins’s name and signature are simultaneously inscribed and effaced in terms of *Blind Love*, as well as in terms of his sensation novels and his oeuvre more generally; while pointing to the ways in which his name and signature is always already at once a death sentence and a means of survival.

This chapter has discussed the survival of Collins’s work and the ways in which his name and signature lives on, but, because most critical studies still concentrate on the “central” period

⁶⁵ Collins includes a letter in the *Memoirs* in which William Collins informs his mother: “Mr. Collard [...] has enabled me to look smart, by lending me a cravat, marked, too, with his initials, W. C.” (*Memoirs*, 1: 94) The citation of the letters “W. C.” in William Collins’s letter, which at once represents William Collins’s and Mr. Collard’s initials, points to the fact that, like a borrowed item of clothing, he, like his son, is neither in full possession of his name nor his signature.

⁶⁶ To this day, whatever the nurse is “forbidding” Collins has remained a mystery: “The first letter of this word is clearly ‘h’, the second probably ‘y’. The remainder is indecipherable. Wilkie had been taking hypophosphates. ‘Hypodermic’ is another possibility, or the powerful sedative hyoscine.” (Peters, 431) In Baker and Clarke’s edition of Collins’s letters, the wording of this second note is slightly altered and the sentences are arranged in a different order; see Baker and Clarke, 2: 567.

in which he produced his four sensation novels, much of his corpus is still to be resurrected. The next chapter re-evaluates Collins's later fiction, an underexplored aspect of his oeuvre, by focussing upon the ways in which critics and biographers have deemed it inferior to his earlier work, as well as how they have attempted to explain away Collins's literary "decline". Commonly represented as a worn out, second-rate novelist, who, living on former glories, is too old, too ill, and too much under the influence of laudanum to effect a change in his literary fortunes, the later Collins is a figure often pitied and maligned in equal measure. Yet, as I discuss, through readings of Collins's 1876 novel *The Two Destinies* and his dramatic adaptations of *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, the work of the later Collins does much to elucidate our understanding not only of his oeuvre, but also of his authorial identity. It is to the Other Collins that I now turn.

CHAPTER 4

Welcoming the Other Collins: Towards a Resurrection of the Later Fiction

I do not know which of us has written this page.¹

Traditionally, Edward Said explains, there has been a tendency to view the figure of the author as “a person who originates or gives existence to something, a begetter, beginner, father, or ancestor”.² The notion of literary paternity that Said identifies, in which a text’s author is seen as its “legitimate” father, means that the translator of a text is placed in an uncertain position. In the words of Justin O’Brien, there is a sense in which an authorized “translation is [...] a legitimate form of plagiarism, ever offering the hope of rising to fame on borrowed wings”.³ As Paul de Man observes, “[t]he translator can never do what the original text did. Any translation is always second in relation to the original, and the translator as such is lost from the very beginning.” (de Man, 80) However, as Lori Chamberlain notes, the fact that “[t]ranslations can [...] masquerade as originals” means that, in addition to being placed in a secondary role, the translator can also be seen to usurp the place of the author, throwing any certainty regarding the authorship – or “paternity” – of a text into doubt.⁴ In translation, Chamberlain argues, “what the original risks losing [...] is [...] the sign of paternity, authority, and originality” (Chamberlain, 315). Indeed, for

¹ Jorge Luis Borges, “Borges and I”, trans. James E. Irby, in Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (1970; London: Penguin, 2000), 283.

² Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 83.

³ Justin O’Brien, “From French to English”, in Reuben A. Brower, ed., *On Translation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959), 78-92 (82).

⁴ Lori Chamberlain, “Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation”, in Lawrence Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2nd edn. (2000; London: Routledge, 2004), 306-21 (314); henceforth Chamberlain. As Chamberlain notes, Derrida’s essay “Living On: Borderlines” appeared “first in English – that is, in translation” (Chamberlain, 317). Elsewhere, Derrida writes: “I do not believe that translation is a secondary and derived event in relation to an original language or text”; see Jacques Derrida, “Letter to a Japanese Friend”, trans. Peggy Kamuf, in Peggy Kamuf, ed., *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 269-76 (275).

Chamberlain, the question posed by the act of translation – namely, “‘Who is the real father of the text?’” – exposes the tenuousness of literary paternity; that literary paternity, like paternity itself, is an unstable concept (Chamberlain, 309).⁵

In the preface to *After Dark*, a collection of short stories published in 1856, Collins uses the model of literary paternity to reinforce his legitimate claim to his novels.

Furthermore, Collins does this precisely by refuting any suggestions that his novels are plagiarisms of foreign texts; or, in other words, unauthorized translations. Collins states:

The fact that the events of some of my tales occur on foreign ground, and are acted out by foreign personages, appears to have suggested in some quarters the inference that the stories themselves might be of foreign origin. Let me, once for all, assure any readers who may honour me with their attention, that [...] they may depend on the genuineness of my literary offspring. The little children of my brain may be weakly enough, and may be sadly in want of a helping hand to aid them in their first attempts at walking on the stage of this great world; but, at any rate, they are not borrowed children. The members of my own literary family are indeed increasing so fast as to render the very idea of borrowing quite out of the question.⁶

Collins is being disingenuous in the preface; in the early 1850s he produced an unauthorized translation of a French melodrama entitled *A Court Duel*.⁷ Yet, clearly, for Collins, had the stories which make up *After Dark* been of “foreign origin” they would not be his “genuine” – that is, legitimate – “offspring”. Therefore, rather than being, as O’Brien puts it, a “legitimate form of plagiarism”, it appears that, in the preface to *After Dark*, Collins views any story translated into another language as essentially “illegitimate”. Even authorized translations would not be free from this stigma of illegitimacy because, in Collins’s terms, only the original text can be “genuine”, legitimate. However, the very fact that Collins feels it necessary to make such a declaration, regarding his undisputed claim as the legitimate father

⁵ Referring to the concept of paternity, in both a literal and literary sense, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar write: “There is a sense in which the very notion of paternity is itself [...] a ‘legal fiction’ [...] A man cannot verify his fatherhood by either sense or reason, after all; that his child is *his* is in a sense a tale he tells himself to explain the infant’s existence.” (Gilbert and Gubar, 5, original emphasis) The ambiguity surrounding the position of the translator is also evident in terms of the law of copyright where, as Lawrence Venuti notes, “the translator is and is not the author” of a given translation; see Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995), 9.

⁶ Wilkie Collins, Preface, in Wilkie Collins, *After Dark* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1856), v-vi (vi).

⁷ See Peters, 83-84.

of his texts, indicates the profound sense of anxiety underpinning the notion of literary paternity. Like many of the characters who populate his fiction, it seems that Collins's stories in *After Dark* are themselves tainted with the stigma of illegitimacy.

With slight modifications, Collins could have recycled his comments in the preface to *After Dark* in order to defend his later work, which, as Bourne Taylor notes, "was often regarded as 'illegitimate'" by contemporary critics because of "its own peculiar form of generic indeterminacy": "it wound up sensation conventions to an increasingly strained pitch, so that what had been a culturally dubious hybrid now became an unsettling montage".⁸ Collins's later fiction is also "illegitimate" in an altogether more straightforward sense, in that his fiction of the 1870s and 1880s is not deemed Collins's "genuine" "literary offspring". Elsewhere, Taylor notes, illegitimate children were regarded as "*fillius nullius* [...]" in civil and common law": "This defined the bastard as literally nobody's child, a 'stranger in blood'".⁹ Just as children of illegitimate birth in the nineteenth century were deemed, legally speaking, to at once belong and not belong to his or her own family – "a 'stranger in blood'" – Collins's later fiction is seen as not fully belonging to his "own literary family".¹⁰

The main reason that the work produced in the later phase of Collins's literary career – which is generally agreed by critics to begin after the publication of *The Moonstone* in 1868 – is not seen to belong fully to Collins's canon is, quite simply, that it is deemed inferior to his earlier work, particularly his four sensation novels. To a certain extent, the texts which

⁸ Jenny Bourne Taylor, "The later novels", in Jenny Bourne Taylor, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 79-96 (80-81); henceforth Bourne Taylor, "Later novels".

⁹ Jenny Bourne Taylor, "Representing Illegitimacy in Victorian Culture", in Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys, ed., *Victorian Identities: Social and Cultural Formations in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 119-42 (129). In Collins's novel *The Dead Secret*, Rosamond Treverton, the illegitimate child of a German servant and an English miner, repeats almost verbatim the *fillius nullius* decree when she says that her mother's enforced separation from her made her "'a stranger to the blood of her blood, to the heart of her heart'"; see Wilkie Collins, *The Dead Secret*, ed. Ira B. Nadel (1997; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 333.

¹⁰ Collins also speaks of his "literary family" in the preface to *The Dead Secret*; see Wilkie Collins, "Preface to the Present Edition", in Collins, *The Dead Secret*, ed. Ira B. Nadel (1997; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5-6 (5).

preceded his four “central” sensations have suffered a similar neglect to those which succeeded them and therefore can, in this respect, also be considered “illegitimate”. Yet, by the same token, these formative texts, many of which were written under the guidance of Dickens, are also considered crucial in paving the way for his most celebrated work and, as such, have been more highly esteemed by critics in comparison to the later work.¹¹ In simple terms, the works which preceded Collins’s four sensation novels are seen as evidence of his literary ascent; whereas the later fiction is regarded as a period of decline.¹²

As discussed in the previous chapter, the belief in Collins’s “decline” in the latter stages of his career first gathered momentum in the nineteenth century when contemporary critics, most notably Harry Quilter, attempted to reawaken interest in Collins’s work. To some extent, it is inevitable that critics should regard the later fiction as inferior. In the two decades following the publication of *The Moonstone*, over a dozen novels, nine plays, and a cluster of novellas and short stories, appeared bearing Collins’s signature. Without exception, however, none of these texts was able to repeat, let alone surpass, the success he had tasted with *The Moonstone* and the three other sensation novels he produced between 1859 and 1868. Critics – especially modern critics – are often divided in terms of the extent of the decline, however. On the one hand, for critics such as William H. Marshall, “[t]he proposal

¹¹ Unlike the later fiction, Collins’s early novels had their admirers in the nineteenth century, not least, of course, Dickens. Emile Forgues, despite his guarded praise, rated Collins’s early novels highly in his essay “William Wilkie Collins” (*WCH*, 62-66). In his June 1857 article “W. Wilkie Collins”, Edmund Yates recognized Collins’s undoubted potential – “I contend that as a story-teller he has no equal” – and “[placed] him in [his] own estimation as the fourth in rank among the British novelists of the present day” behind Dickens, Thackeray, and Charlotte Brontë (*WCH*, 68). Twentieth-century critics continued to view Collins’s early work in a positive light, as a stepping-stone to greater things. For Ashley, from the time of *Antonina*, his first published novel in 1850, to the serialization of *The Dead Secret* in 1857, Collins “developed, although he did not perfect, all of his prominent themes and character types, and experimented with the epistolary technique” (Ashley, 57). Similarly, Thoms states that with three of his early novels – *Basil*, *Hide and Seek*, and *The Dead Secret* – “Collins forecasts the thematic and structural concerns of *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Armadale*, and *The Moonstone*” (Thoms, 13-14).

¹² For Lang, in his January 1890 obituary of Collins, Collins’s work in the 1870s and 1880s “will be forgotten, while his earlier books may long retain their very wide and deserved popularity” (*WCH*, 267). More recent critics and biographers have also denigrated Collins’s later fiction. For Peters, “[b]y comparison with the novels Wilkie Collins wrote in the 1860s, many of the later ones seem flat and dated.” (Peters, 313) Similarly, Lonoff writes: “There is nearly universal agreement that Collins’s work began to deteriorate after *The Moonstone*, and that the novels of the 1880s are vastly inferior to those he wrote in his prime.” (Lonoff, 52)

that the work of Wilkie Collins from 1870 to the time of his death in 1889 is marked by evidence of progressive deterioration is too facile a comment upon a situation which, though perhaps not overly complex in its manifestations, was inconsistent in its developments.”¹³ On the other hand, critics such as Robinson observe of Collins’s later fiction: “The falling-off in quality is fairly steady” (Robinson, 304).

The first section of this chapter begins by outlining the main reasons which are believed to have led to the decline in his fiction in the 1870s and 1880s, before going on to discuss the reception of two of the most poorly received of his later novels, *The Fallen Leaves* (serialized in *The World* from 1 January to 23 July 1879) and *The Two Destinies* (serialized in *Temple Bar* between January and September 1876). In particular, I will discuss the ways in which Peters, Collins’s major modern biographer, depicts the late Collins as if he were an illegitimate authorial double of the “genuine” Collins who produced the four “central” sensation novels. The second section analyzes Collins’s plays, which are, arguably, the most underexplored aspect of his canon; a fact not only true of his later period, but also of his oeuvre as a whole. In this section, I will pay particular attention to Collins’s theatrical versions of his sensation novels in the 1870s and the ways in which they demonstrate Collins’s awareness of the Otherness inherent in his – and every other – authorial identity. The third section explores the concept of hospitality in Collins’s fiction, whilst also calling for a greater critical hospitality within the field towards his later fiction.

In his 1865 review of Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Aurora Floyd*, Henry James declares: “To Mr. Collins belongs the credit of having introduced into fiction those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors.” (James, *Mary Elizabeth Braddon*, 742) Just as, for James, Collins presents “those mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors” in his fiction, demonstrating, in the process, that the

¹³ William H. Marshall, *Wilkie Collins* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), 92; henceforth Marshall.

familiar surroundings of home are strange and unfamiliar, the future of Collins's studies depends upon critics welcoming the late Collins; a figure commonly presented as Other, but who, as I argue in this chapter, is always already lodged within the "central" Collins of the sensation novels.

I

The decline in Collins's fiction in the 1870s and 1880s has been accounted for in different ways by different critics. Inevitably, however, none are conclusive.¹⁴ One of the most easily disproved suggestions is the belief, held by Hugh Walpole, that overproduction was a potential cause of his decline: "By 1870 he had reached that sad decline into contemporary neglect that clouded all his later years. It is a sad story not to be told here; he [...] was now already deserted and almost forgotten."¹⁵ After the early-1870s, Walpole continues, "the decline [...] was very swift, and [...] novels like *The Two Destinies* and *A Shocking Story* proved how ruinous to any talent over-production and scamped work must be" (Walpole, 30). However, Walpole's view has been convincingly rebuffed by Robinson: "during the relevant period his output declined, if anything. In the twenty years up to 1870 he produced nine long novels, and in the following twenty years thirteen, of little more than half the length; he wrote roughly the same number of shorter stories in each period." (Robinson, 329-30)

For other critics, such as Lonoff, the fact that Dickens's death in 1870 occurred shortly before Collins's literary decline is by no means coincidental. Without Dickens's help (as mentor, editor, and friend), Lonoff argues, Collins lacked the steadying influence and guiding hand which had enabled him to produce his best work. Yet, while Lonoff states that "Dickens's death and Collins's decline are inextricably connected", she immediately qualifies this assertion (Lonoff, 54). Indeed, Lonoff admits that "throughout the years of their

¹⁴ As Rance puts it, "[s]uch theories as have been advanced of the decline [...] have been less than satisfying" (Rance, 153).

¹⁵ Hugh Walpole, "Novelists of the 'Seventies", in Harley Granville-Barker, ed., *The Eighteen-Seventies: Essays by Fellows of the Royal Society of Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 22-44 (30); henceforth Walpole.

friendship Dickens encouraged the propensities which ultimately led to the decline” and claims he “may unwittingly have hindered Collins from developing aspects of his talent that were likely to be unpopular” (Lonoff, 54).

For Peters, Collins’s ill-health was a major contributory factor of his literary downfall: “Perhaps because of perpetual illness, Wilkie seemed at this time [i.e. from the mid-to-late 1870s onwards] unable to sustain the long, involved stories, with their intricate plots, that he had earlier excelled in.” (Peters, 381-82) The argument proposed by Peters, however, has one essential flaw – Collins’s illnesses were “perpetual”. Indeed, in terms of Collins’s health, the phrase “perpetual illness” is something of a pleonasm. For example, at the time of writing *Armada*, a novel with an arabesque of a plot to rival any in fiction and which was produced in the middle of his creative peak during the 1860s, Sutherland explains: “Collins suffered a collapse of health before and during composition.”¹⁶ In fact, such was the severity of Collins’s ailment, Sutherland adds that “[h]is doctors [...] had prescribed in early 1863 a total sabbatical from writing which put back the eventual publication of *Armada* almost two years.” (Sutherland, Introduction, xi)

One of the more enduring reasons was first offered by Swinburne, in his obituary of Collins. Swinburne’s obituary infamously modified Alexander Pope’s words in order to illustrate what he believed to have contributed most towards Collins’s literary downfall in the 1870s and 1880s; namely, an ill-advised injection of social criticism: “What brought good Wilkie’s genius nigh perdition? / Some demon whispered – ‘Wilkie! have a mission.’” (*WCH*, 262) For Swinburne, however, it was less Collins’s spirit for reform and more his inability to perform the task that proved his undoing. After the tongue-in-cheek couplet, Swinburne adds the caveat:

Nothing can be more fatuous than to brand all didactic or missionary fiction as an

¹⁶ John Sutherland, Introduction, in Wilkie Collins, *Armada*, ed. John Sutherland (London: Penguin, 1995), vii-xxxiii (xi); henceforth Sutherland, Introduction.

illegitimate or inferior form of art [...] Many of the truest and noblest triumphs achieved by the matchless genius of Charles Dickens were achieved in this field: but Collins [...] was no more a Dickens than Dickens was a Shakespeare; and if the example of his illustrious friend misled him into emulation or imitation of such labours, we can only regret that he was thus misguided (*WCH*, 262-63).

While Swinburne was the first to condemn the overly didactic strain in Collins's later fiction, he was by no means the last. Lang's obituary also stressed that the moralizing and reforming streak in Collins's later novels is detrimental to his success as a novelist: "As a didactic writer, Mr. Collins injured his art somewhat" (*WCH*, 267). Following Swinburne, critics in the twentieth century continued to view Collins's "mission novels" – as they are now termed – as a gross misjudgement of his literary qualities.¹⁷

A rudimentary reading of Collins's later work would appear to back up Swinburne's and other critics' evaluation of its didactic nature. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, Collins used his novels as a platform by which to tackle contentious topics and, in the process, outline the need for reform. For example, in the preface to the first of his "mission-novels", *Man and Wife*, serialized in *Cassell's Magazine* from January 1870 to June 1870, Collins explains that the premise of the story is based upon two "social question[s]": "the present scandalous condition of the Marriage Laws of the United Kingdom" and "the question of the influence of the present rage for muscular exercises on the health and morals of the rising generation of Englishman".¹⁸ Several of Collins's later novels can be defined by the cause they either attack or defend: *The Law and the Lady* exposes the injustice of Scottish jurisprudence in terms of the "not proven" verdict; *The Fallen Leaves* is a text which defends that most Victorian of personages, the "lost woman"; and *Heart and Science*, serialized in *Belgravia* between August 1882 and June 1883, is one of the first anti-vivisectionist texts.

¹⁷ As Bourne Taylor explains, "Swinburne's parody of Alexander Pope stuck stubbornly to Collins's later writing through most of the twentieth century" (Bourne Taylor, "Later novels", 79). Ashley's critique of Collins's later novels is on similar grounds to that of Swinburne, in that it is Collins's execution of his social protest, rather than the content, that he feels is wide of the mark: "Collins's status as a social critic is negligible, for he lacked almost all the qualities needed by a purpose novelist." (Ashley, 121)

¹⁸ Wilkie Collins, Preface, in *Man and Wife*, ed. Norman Page (1995; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5-7 (5).

Swinburne's criticism of Collins's post-*Moonstone* texts, however, belies the fact that at least two of the four sensation novels that Collins produced between 1859 and 1868 are themselves novels-with-a-mission: *The Woman in White* can be read as an attack on the treatment and the false imprisonment of the insane in mid-Victorian Britain; whilst its successor, *No Name*, is an overt condemnation of contemporary illegitimacy laws. Disputing Swinburne's claim, Rance writes: "To label the fiction of the 1870s and 1880s 'social' and then intend to compliment the fiction of the 1860s by withholding the epithet, betrays a bias which, however prolonged it may have been in literary studies, is disqualified from doing justice to Collins." (Rance, 154) Nevertheless, Rance adds, "as far as modern criticism of Collins is concerned, Swinburne's pithy couplet would seem to remain a suggestive starting-point" in discussions of Collins's supposed literary decline (Rance, 154).

What is notable about nearly all of the reasons critics give as contributing to Collins's literary decline in the 1870s and 1880s – overproduction, Dickens's absence, ill-health, and his didacticism – is that, with the exception of Dickens's death, they are all factors which affect our understanding of the work of the "central" period as well; and, as Lonoff admits, even Dickens's presence was not always beneficial to Collins's work. Another factor which has also been seen as having a direct and negative influence upon Collins's later fiction – namely, his drug use – is likewise impossible to extricate from his "central" period.

It is believed that Collins was first prescribed laudanum on a regular basis in the early 1860s to help alleviate a condition termed "rheumatic gout".¹⁹ "Rheumatic gout" was to plague Collins for the rest of his life, and its severity was such that, at times, it prevented him from writing, as it had done during the composition of *Armadale*. As his rheumatic condition worsened with age, Collins's laudanum consumption steadily increased, and from the 1870s onwards he was taking prodigious quantities of the drug on a regular basis. Referring to

¹⁹ For Peters, "it seems clear that it was at this time that [Francis Carr] Beard [Collins's doctor] prescribed laudanum regularly as a palliative" (Peters, 240).

Collins's laudanum intake throughout the 1870s and beyond, Peters writes, "[h]e carried around a silver flask full of it": "He took enough to kill twelve people, according to the surgeon Sir William Fergusson, to whom Wilkie's eye surgeon George Critchett confided his nightly dose. Hall Caine claimed to have seen him swallow a full wineglass. Certainly, in his last illness, the dose was two tablespoonsful." (Peters, 336)

However, while it is true that, as his health deteriorated, Collins was left heavily dependent upon laudanum during the 1870s and 1880s, he was not a slave to his addiction. Discussing Collins's laudanum intake, William Winter is at pains to refute the notion that his friend was "a man of weak character, self-indulgent, and subservient to the 'opium habit'" (Winter, 214). Nonetheless, Collins's addiction to laudanum is considered by some critics to have had a detrimental effect upon his fiction. Referring to Collins's purported literary decline in the 1870s and 1880s, Robinson states that "[t]he chief cause must almost certainly have been opium":

The type of book at which Wilkie excelled, and which he was always trying to repeat, required above all a continuously clear intellect. One cannot expect a complex, elaborately constructed plot to emerge from a brain alternately clouded and stimulated by narcotics; and without the inspiration of such a plot Wilkie Collins seldom rose above the second-rate. (Robinson, 330)

However, there is no substantial evidence to suggest that Collins's laudanum use affected the fiction he produced from 1870 onwards in any significant way. If anything, as Collins's laudanum consumption increased, it is likely that he became desensitized to its effects and was better able to manage to work under its influence. Peters notes, for example, that despite the fact that Collins's "opium habit proved impossible to break [...] [h]e was never thrown off balance by it, or unable to work because of it. On the contrary, he felt it kept him going." (Peters, 256) If Collins's drug use hindered his work, Peters adds, "[t]here is no sign of this in

The Moonstone, written when his opium dependence was firmly established.”²⁰ (Peters, 313)

Peters’s reference to *The Moonstone*, when refuting the claim that Collins’s drug use hindered his later fiction, is significant in that it once again points to the ways in which what is considered to have a negative impact upon his later fiction was already established when he was writing the works of his “central” period.

Shortly after his death a newspaper article described how an elderly and infirm Collins, writing late one night, came face to face with his authorial doppelgänger:

the second Wilkie Collins sat at the same table with him and tried to monopolise the writing pad. Then there was a struggle, and the inkstand was upset [...] when the true Wilkie awoke, the inkstand had been upset and the ink was running over the writing table. After that Wilkie Collings [*sic*] gave up writing of nights.²¹

A scene worthy of one of his novels, this anecdote of Collins’s later years as a writer is, as both Clarke and Peters acknowledge, more than likely a consequence of his long addiction to laudanum (Clarke, 199; Peters, 1). The frequent hallucinations Collins suffered as a result of his immoderate laudanum usage were, as the above anecdote concerning “the second Wilkie Collins” illustrates, at once strange and horrifying. Mary Anderson writes that Collins suffered from a recurrent hallucination when retiring to his bedroom at night: “the staircase seemed to him crowded with ghosts trying to push him down”.²² Moreover, Ashley notes that Collins described to an interviewer a terrifying, laudanum-induced Chimera: ““It was a fearful, shapeless monster,” Collins explained, ““with eyes of fire and big green fangs.”” (qtd. Ashley, 110)

It is tempting to regard Collins’s laudanum-inspired hallucination – of a “second

²⁰ Combining both Robinson’s and Winter’s views on Collins’s drug use, Lonoff writes: “his decline is almost certainly connected to his long-term use of laudanum [...] but his drug dependency did little to change his habits of work and personality. He remained gregarious, kindly, and productive [...] What he wrote, however, was increasingly third-rate in style and content.” (Lonoff, 167)

²¹ William Clarke, *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins* (1988; Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2004), 199; henceforth Clarke. Clarke adds in a footnote: “Extract from newspaper cutting, signed ‘Family Doctor’ [...] I have been unable to trace the source or date of the cutting. But it was probably prompted by his death and the subsequent obituaries.” (Clarke, 269)

²² Mary Anderson, *A Few Memories*, 2nd ed. (London: Osgood, McIlvaine and Co., 1896), 143; henceforth Anderson.

Wilkie Collins” attempting to “monopolise the writing pad” as “the true Wilkie” vainly struggles to assert his authority – as symbolic of the general critical perception of Collins’s later work. Indeed, for critics and biographers, such is the level of deterioration evident in Collins’s later work it is as if the writer of *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* has been usurped by an inferior authorial double. This is certainly true of Peters, who appears to suggest that certain of Collins’s late novels bear the signature of “the second Wilkie Collins”, rather than the genuine authorial article. For instance, evaluating *The Fallen Leaves*, one of Collins’s “mission novels”, Peters writes:

Now a heavily didactic and moralistic strain, dangerously sentimental at times, took over his pen. It was the same *alter ego* who had been at odds with the imaginative writer in *Man and Wife* and *The New Magdalen* [two earlier “mission novels”]. *The Fallen Leaves*, more ambitious in scope, is arguably the worst book Wilkie ever wrote. (Peters, 385)

By regarding *The Fallen Leaves* as “arguably the worst book Wilkie ever wrote”, Peters is following the standard critical view; as Page notes, it “enjoys the distinction of general recognition as Collins’s worst novel” (Page, Introduction, 27).²³ What is significant about Peters’s analysis, however, is the suggestion that it is not Collins who has signed the text, but, rather, his uninspired and moralizing “*alter ego*”; namely, the late Collins, who has usurped Collins “the imaginative writer” (presumably the Collins of the 1860s). Opposing ideology and aestheticism in her damning critique, Peters argues that the “*alter ego*” which “took over [Collins’s] pen”, can be traced back to Swinburne’s comments concerning the missionary zeal which he believed informed much of Collins’s later work.

Before publishing *The Fallen Leaves*, Collins wrote *The Two Destinies*. Like its successor, *The Two Destinies* is regarded as one of his poorest novels, and has been since it was first published. As an unsigned review of *The Two Destinies*, which appeared in the 20 January 1877 issue of the *Saturday Review*, exclaims: “This is an amazingly silly book.

²³ For a defence of *The Fallen Leaves*, see Philip O’Neill, *Wilkie Collins: Women, Property, and Propriety* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 32-75.

Indeed it is almost silly enough to be amusing through its very absurdity [...] the characters generally are so weak and so sketchily drawn as to be beneath criticism.”²⁴ (*WCH*, 204) The novel fared little better with critics in the twentieth century, who either ignored it or dismissed it out of hand. For Robinson, *The Two Destinies* is unable to “[evoke] either the reader’s sympathy or his credulity”: “Both story and treatment are conventional to a degree [...] there is virtually neither mystery nor surprise to attract the interest.” (Robinson, 277) And, although Ashley claims *The Two Destinies* is “Collins’s most striking venture into the region of the occult”, he also describes it as “a thin and rather absurd novel” (Ashley, 124).²⁵

Peters’s own verdict on *The Two Destinies* concurs with the view held by the majority of critics who have written on the novel:

The Two Destinies is a dreary and badly constructed book [...] It would have been adequate for a short story [...] Stretched on the procrustean bed of the library novel, with the anagnorisis repeatedly postponed, it becomes absurd. Apart from some background description of Shetland, taken from Wilkie’s memories of his boyhood journey with his father and from Scott’s *The Pirate*, the only interest of the book is a curious emphasis on dictation in the ghostly incidents, which suggests that Wilkie feels he is not, physically or imaginatively, in control of his own pen. (Peters, 381)

Unlike *The Fallen Leaves*, in which Peters identified a conflictive and ultimately destructive impulse within both Collins’s text and his authorial identity (between the “didactic” late Collins and the “imaginative” Collins of the 1860s), *The Two Destinies* is undone by the author’s loss of the “control of his own pen” – as suggested by the “curious emphasis on dictation in the ghostly incidents” in the narrative. Nevertheless, in a similar vein to her assessment of *The Fallen Leaves*, Peters does not appear to regard *The Two Destinies* as belonging to Collins – that is, the “imaginative” Collins of the 1860s – and, moreover, again implies the novel is another example of Collins’s “*alter ego*” assuming authorial supremacy; indeed, if Collins is not “in control of his own pen”, then who is?

²⁴ Page states that the novel was also criticized in the 14 October 1876 edition of the *Academy*, where it was described as being “monotonous” and based on a “wild improbability” (Page, Introduction, 27).

²⁵ By contrast, in a recent, informed essay on *The Two Destinies*, Tamara Wagner describes it as a “fascinating, long-neglected novel”; see Tamara Wagner, “Victorian Fictions of the Nerves: Telepathy and Depression in Wilkie Collins’s *The Two Destinies*”, *Victorians Institute Journal* 32 (2004), 189-213 (193).

Peters is not alone in viewing the novel as not fully belonging to Collins's canon. *The Two Destinies* was also one of only two novels excluded from Lyn Pykett's 2005 study of Collins's work produced for the "Oxford World's Classics" *Authors in Context* series; the other was Collins's detective story, *I Say No* – another later novel, first serialized in the *Glasgow Weekly Herald* from 15 December 1883 to 12 July 1884.²⁶ Undoubtedly, the low regard in which *The Two Destinies* has been traditionally held by critics (as a "lesser" novel in Collins's oeuvre), accounts for its exclusion from Pykett's text. Pykett's excision of *The Two Destinies* from her study – an act which, rather bizarrely, places the novel outside the context of its author – is indicative of the ways in which the novel is, on the whole, excluded from Collins's canon.

Peters's belief that Collins was not "physically [...] in control of his pen" in terms of writing *The Two Destinies* is not without foundation, however. In fact, because of illness Collins was forced to employ an amanuensis and, therefore, was literally unable to be "in control of his pen" for a brief period of its composition.²⁷ During the writing of *The Two Destinies* Collins writes, or rather dictates, a letter to George Bentley, the editor of *Temple Bar* magazine, in which "[t]he signature is the only part of the letter in [Collins's] hand, the rest probably that of "Carrie" [Elizabeth Harriet Graves] who acted as his secretary." (Baker and Clarke, 2: 401) In this letter, dated 15 March 1876, Collins explains to Bentley that in consequence of being "again laid up with Rheumatic Gout in the eye", he will not be able to fulfil the monthly quota of writing he had originally promised: "So far the attack is not so serious as on former occasions, but there is enough pain to make dictation to an amanuensis not very easy." (Baker and Clarke, 2: 401) In this respect, the "curious emphasis on dictation in the ghostly incidents" in *The Two Destinies* could be a manifestation of Collins's authorial anxiety due to being forced to dictate the novel. As Peters herself acknowledges, Collins

²⁶ See Lyn Pykett, *Wilkie Collins: Authors in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁷ See also Davis, *Life of Wilkie Collins*, 283.

“preferred not to do this: he hated to lose control over his own work by not writing the first draft in his own hand” (Peters, 335). Similarly, Peters’s reasoning that the “curious emphasis on dictation in the ghostly incidents” illustrates that Collins is not “imaginatively, in control of his pen” is correct, but not in the sense in which she intends it. Before analyzing this line of argument in any more detail, however, it is useful to examine Collins’s use of dictation in *The Two Destinies*.

The Two Destinies is driven by a series of visionary, telepathic communications between its two central characters, the childhood sweethearts George Germaine and Mary Dermody.²⁸ Following Germaine’s and Mary’s enforced separation, instigated by Germaine’s domineering father, Germaine visits the Shetland Isles. After a riding accident whilst pony-trekking in Shetland he is taken to the house of Mr. Dunross. Along with Mr. Dunross, the house is also inhabited by his daughter, Miss Dunross. Due to the injuries sustained in the fall whilst pony-trekking, Germaine is left unable to write his own letters and, as a consequence, Miss Dunross offers to act as his amanuensis.

The only instance presented in the text in which Germaine dictates a letter to Miss Dunross occurs when he plans to write a message to his mother. As they begin to compose the letter, Miss Dunross, who has read Germaine’s previous correspondence with his mother, tells him that his mother is “suffering” and implores him to “[m]ake her happy by telling her that you sail for home with your friends. Make her happier still by telling her that you grieve no more over the loss of Mrs. Van Brandt [Mary]. May I write it, in your name and in those words?”²⁹ However, Germaine is unsure as to whether or not to accede to Miss Dunross’s request: “I felt the strangest reluctance to permit her to write in those terms, or in any terms of Mrs. Van Brandt.” (*TTD*, 110) Feeling uneasy about Miss Dunross’s interference, Germaine finds it increasingly difficult to compose the letter, telling Miss

²⁸ I am using the term “telepathy” anachronistically, as it was not coined until 1882; see Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy: 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1.

²⁹ Wilkie Collins, *The Two Destinies* (1995; Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2000), 110; henceforth *TTD*.

Dunross: “‘The effort of dictating seems to be beyond my power this evening.’” (*TTD*, 112)

Germaine eventually accepts Miss Dunross’s help in writing the letter, but her first suggestion is to return to the topic of Mrs. Van Brandt: “‘You have not told your mother yet [...] that your infatuation for Mrs. Van Brandt is at an end. Will you put it in your own words? Or shall I write it for you, imitating your language as well as I can?’” (*TTD*, 112) Germaine begrudgingly accepts her suggestion, but again he does not allow her to write in his name directly. Instead, Germaine dictates her sentence back to her: “‘With the image of Mrs. Van Brandt vividly present to my mind, I arranged the first words of the sentence which was to tell my mother that my ‘infatuation’ was at an end!’” (*TTD*, 112) This scene of dictation and counter-dictation, is further complicated when the alien presence of Mary Van Brandt arrives in the form of a telepathic vision.

Standing in “the presence of the apparition” of Mary, Germaine observes: “She lifted her hand [...] gently signing to me to remain where I stood.” (*TTD*, 114) Germaine adds:

I saw the ghostly Presence stoop over the living woman [Miss Dunross]. It lifted the writing-case from her lap. It rested the writing-case on her shoulder. Its white fingers took the pen, and wrote on the unfinished letter [...] There, on the blank space in the letter [...] were the written words which the ghostly Presence had left behind it; arranged once more in two lines, as I copy them here –

AT THE MONTH’S END
IN THE SHADOW OF ST PAUL’S.
(*TTD*, 114-5)

The telepathic vision of Mary, which Germaine sees in Shetland, is a repetition of an earlier scene in the novel. Germaine first sees “the ghostly Presence” of Mary, writing in his sketch book, at his mother’s “summer-house” (*TTD*, 48). After his first encounter with Mary’s apparition, Germaine “was absorbed, body and soul, in the one desire to look at the sketch-book” in order to be certain that his eyes had not deceived him (*TTD*, 49). Germaine was not hallucinating. “There was the writing!” he exclaims after examining the sketch-book:

The woman had disappeared – but there were her written words left behind her: visible to my mother as well as to me: readable to my mother’s eyes as well as by

mine!

These were the words we saw; arranged in two lines, as I copy them here:

WHEN THE FULL MOON SHINES
ON SAINT ANTHONY'S WELL.
(*TTD*, 49)

The readability of Mary's writing does not last very long, however. In fact, when Germaine shows Mr. MacGlue the message during dinner, later that day, it has entirely vanished, and Germaine is left with just the "blank white paper [looking] back at me" (*TTD*, 51). A perplexed Germaine tells MacGlue: "Not more than three hours have passed [...] and see for yourself, not a vestige of the writing remains." (*TTD*, 52) From a "ghostly Presence", Mary's writing message becomes an even ghostlier absence, and although it may have been "readable" to Germaine and his mother at the beginning, the writing's disappearance means that it does not continue to be so.

For Derrida, something can only be called writing when it is repeatable:

My "written communication" must [...] remain legible despite the absolute disappearance of every determined addressee in general for it to function as writing, that is, for it to be legible. It must be repeatable – iterable – in the absolute absence of the addressee or of the empirically determinable set of addressees. This iterability (*iter*, once again, comes from *itara*, *other* in Sanskrit, and everything that follows may be read as the exploitation of the logic which links repetition to alterity), structures the mark of writing itself, and does so moreover for no matter what type of writing [...] A writing that was not structurally legible – iterable – beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing. For the written to be the written, it must continue to "act" and to be legible even if what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written.³⁰

Judging by Derrida's comments, Mary's "written" message to Germaine ceases to be writing because its disappearance means it cannot be repeated. However, even though "no vestige of the writing remains" in his sketch-book, because Germaine memorizes Mary's written communication and copies it into his narrative, the repetition of her message remains as writing. What Germaine calls Mary's "mystic writing", then, occupies a very strange

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context", in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (1982; Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), 307-30 (315).

position in the text: what we are reading is at once writing and also *not* writing (*TTD*, 115). Moreover, Germaine's repetition of "Mary's" message leaves uncertainty as to who is the author of this passage. If the writing is not entirely Mary's, by the same token, it is also not entirely Germaine's either. By incorporating Mary's writing into his narrative, Germaine allows a ghostly Otherness to invade his narrative.

Furthermore, these scenes of telepathic communication within the narrative of *The Two Destinies* are redolent of the connection Derrida makes between dictation, writing, and Otherness in a 1989 interview entitled "The Rhetoric of Drugs". Derrida states:

consider the figures of dictation, in the asymmetrical experience of the other, (of the being-given over-to-the-other, of the being prey to the other, of quasi-possession) that commands a certain writing, perhaps all writing, even the most masterful (gods, the daemon, the muses, inspiration and so forth).³¹

What Derrida's analysis of "the figures of dictation" identifies – "figures" which are nothing if not ghostly – is the uncanny revelation that "[w]riting is in some respects perhaps what is always given over to the other and what always come from the other."³² Therefore, if, as Derrida observes, "the figures of dictation [...] that commands a certain writing, perhaps all writing" involve a process of "being-given over-to-the-other", then it is not simply, as Peters believes, that the "curious emphasis on dictation in the ghostly incidents" suggests Collins is not "imaginatively, in control of his pen." Instead, it points to Collins's awareness of the sense of Otherness which permeates the act of writing itself.

In this respect, the fact that the narrative of *The Two Destinies* is concerned with the notion of telepathy is significant. For Derrida, as Nicholas Royle points out, "a theory of telepathy [...] is inextricably linked to the question of writing" – it is "[d]ifficult to imagine a

³¹ Jacques Derrida, "The Rhetoric of Drugs", trans. Michael Israel, in Jacques Derrida, *Points....: Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), 228-54 (238); henceforth *RD*.

³² Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (2003; London: Routledge, 2004), 135; henceforth Royle, *Jacques Derrida*.

theory of fiction, a theory of the novel, without a theory of telepathy.”³³ Yet, the sense of Otherness inherent in writing, as well as in telepathy, does not necessarily come from an external source. Rather, like Germaine’s telepathic vision of Mary, it is a ghostly Otherness generated as much from within the self as without. As Derrida explains, “everyone reads, acts, writes with *his* or *her* ghosts, even when one goes after the ghosts of the other” (*Specters*, 139, original emphasis).

In “The Rhetoric of Drugs”, more generally, Derrida traces the relationship between literature and narcotics, both of which offer forms of “[escape] into a world of simulacrum and fiction” (*RD*, 236). “Let us consider literature,” Derrida writes: “Well then, is it not thus contemporaneous with a certain European drug addiction?” (*RD*, 237-38) For Derrida, “following the flight of the gods” and with it the notion of divine inspiration, drugs, which have the capability of creating another type of “inspired trance in what we habitually call writing”, became “the religion of the atheist poets” who sought “to discover a sort of gracious and graceful inspiration, a passivity that welcomes what repression or suppression would otherwise inhibit” (*RD*, 240).

During the writing of *The Moonstone*, Collins was the recipient of precisely such an “inspired trance”; that is, at least according to one anecdote Collins liked to tell. *The Moonstone*, widely considered to be Collins’s masterpiece, was written during a difficult period of the author’s life. Within three months of *The Moonstone*’s serialization in *All the Year Round*, Collins’s beloved mother, Harriet, died on 19 March 1868. To compound matters, shortly afterwards he was stricken with an acute attack of “rheumatic gout”. In order to alleviate the physical and emotional torment, Collins was administered large doses of laudanum, a drug which, ironically, he was already addicted to. Rather than collapsing under this double strain while writing the novel, however, the composition of the text provided a

³³ Nicholas Royle, *Telepathy and Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* (1990; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 15-17.

welcome distraction from the problems he was encountering – a “blessed relief” as he puts it in the 1871 preface to *The Moonstone* – and enabled him to triumph in the face of adversity.³⁴ Indeed, without “the responsibility of the weekly publication” of *The Moonstone*, Collins states in the preface, “I doubt if I should have lived to write another book”: “this story [...] forced me to rally my sinking energies of body and mind– to dry my useless tears, and to conquer my merciless pains” (Collins, New Edition, lv). In the preface, Collins also reveals that, such were the “merciless pains” he endured, he was forced to employ an amanuensis during part of the novel’s composition: “In the intervals of grief, in the occasional remissions of pain, I dictated from my bed that portion of *The Moonstone* which has since proved most successful in amusing the public – the ‘Narrative of Miss Clack.’” (Collins, New Edition, lv).

To his friends, Collins would embellish this tale of authorial suffering. William Winter recalls Collins explaining how he was forced to use a succession of amanuenses, during the time he dictated portions of *The Moonstone*, because “no one of them could endure the strain” of his “cries and groans” (Winter, 212). According to Winter, Collins added: “‘At last I engaged a young woman, stipulating that she must utterly disregard my sufferings and attend solely to my words. This she declared that she could and would do, and this, to my amazement [...] she indubitably and exactly did.’” (Winter, 212) A tale of several weak men and one strong woman, this anecdote reads almost like a Wilkie Collins novel in itself.

Mary Anderson recounts a similar story Collins told her concerning the dictated portions of *The Moonstone*. As he had done with Winter, Collins mentioned to Anderson the fainthearted amanuenses who were unable to bear his agonized groans and the “‘young girl [...] who wrote on steadily in spite of [his] cries’” (Anderson, 143). To Anderson, however, Collins added an extra thread to the yarn he had also spun to Winter. In Anderson’s version, Collins not only dictated portions of *The Moonstone* in physical and emotional agony, but

³⁴ Wilkie Collins, Preface to a New Edition, in Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, ed. John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), lv-vi (lv); henceforth, Collins New Edition.

also, she revealed that the latter part of the narrative was produced “largely under the effects of opium” (Anderson, 143). Anderson recollects Collins telling her: ““When it was finished, I was not only pleased and astonished at the *finale*, but did not recognise it as my own.”” (Anderson, 143)

Collins’s alleged authorial amnesia is, of course, uncannily reminiscent to the crucial moment in *The Moonstone*’s plot when Franklin Blake, under the influence of opium secretly administered by Dr. Candy, unconsciously takes the Moonstone diamond from Rachel Verinder’s room. In the words of Heller, “[b]y claiming that he wrote the end of the novel unknowingly, Collins writes himself into the role of Blake, who stole the Moonstone in a drugged trance.” (Heller, 162) Endeavouring to track the servant-girl Rosanna Spearman, whom he believes possess a vital clue as to who has stolen the diamond, Blake is drawn to “the Shivering Sand”, which is described as “the most horrible quicksand on the shores of Yorkshire” (*TM*, 22). On arriving at “the Shivering Sand” it becomes clear that Rosanna has committed suicide in horrific fashion, slowly submerging herself into the “Deepes of the Quicksand” (*TM*, 157). Before taking her own life, Rosanna had discovered that it was Blake who had stolen the diamond when she found a paint-stained nightgown inscribed with his name – a piece of evidence that Sergeant Cuff had deemed vital in the enquiry.

In an attempt to extricate Blake, Rosanna hides the incriminating evidence in a tin case in the quicksand, leaving Blake directions to its whereabouts in a letter, and tying a chain around it so that it can be recovered by him. When Blake pulls the case out of the quicksand, and takes out the nightgown, he is shocked by his discovery:

The nightgown itself would reveal the truth; for, in all probability, the nightgown was marked with its owner’s name.
I took it up from the sand, and looked for the mark.
I found the mark, and read –MY OWN NAME.
There were the familiar letters which told me that the nightgown was mine [...] I looked back again at the letters. My own name. Plainly confronting me – my own name. (*TM*, 307)

It is a truly sensational moment in the plot. Unaware of his crime, Blake finds his “own name” “confronting” him with the indubitable fact that he is the thief. Sundeep Bisla has pointed out that “the only disclosure more shocking than the one we actually get in this story might have been Blake’s having found the name to be ‘WILKIE COLLINS’” (Bisla, “Return”, 207). However, as Bisla suggests, this is, in some ways, precisely what we do get because, at the moment of Blake’s revelation, we do not read the name “FRANKLIN BLAKE”. Instead, we read only the words “MY OWN NAME”. The person who wrote the words “MY OWN NAME” in the text was not Blake, it was the author of the novel: Wilkie Collins. For Bisla, this scene, among many others in the novel, offers “a tangible expression of [Collins’s] unconscious understanding of the Otherness inherent in authorship” (Bisla, “Return”, 206).

Fittingly, Collins’s anecdote was itself “borrowed” from another writer: Sir Walter Scott. Peters has observed that Collins’s tale of laudanum-induced authorial amnesia is similar to a legend propagated by Scott concerning *The Bride of Lammermoor* (Peters, 303-4). Like Collins, so the story goes, Scott was administered laudanum when he became seriously ill during the composition of the text and was forced to employ an amanuensis. Quoting James Ballantyne, in volume six of the *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott*, J. G. Lockhart writes:

“The book” (says James Ballantyne) “was not only written, but published before Mr Scott was able to rise from his bed; and he assured me, that when it was first put into his hands in a complete shape, he did not recollect one single incident, character, or conversation it contained! [...] not a single character woven by the romancer, not one of the many scenes and points of humour, nor anything with which he was connected as the writer of the work.”³⁵

While critics express justifiable doubts as to whether such drug-induced authorial amnesia actually occurred in either Scott’s or Collins’s case, the fact that Collins assumes Scott’s story, which is itself a variation of Coleridge’s prefatory remarks to *Kubla Khan*, is itself

³⁵ J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1882), 89.

more than noteworthy.³⁶ There is no doubt that Collins was aware of Scott's yarn concerning his novel. Collins admired Scott's fiction immensely, more so than any other writer's, and, along with Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Lockhart's *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott* was his favourite biography (Ashley, 109).³⁷ Significantly, Winter even mentions that Collins, at the time of recounting his difficulties concerning the composition of *The Moonstone*, "referred to the experience of Sir Walter Scott, in the enforced use of laudanum, when writing 'The Bride of Lammermoor'" (Winter, 213).³⁸

The anecdote concerning the composition of *The Moonstone* suggests that Collins believes, as Oscar Wilde did, that "a man should invent his own myth" – or, as the case may be, appropriate one from another writer (qtd. Ellmann, 284). The strangeness of the myth Collins chooses to invent, or borrow, a myth entailing a division within his conscious and unconscious authorial selves, is exacerbated by the fact that it anticipates and undermines certain charges that will be levelled against his later work after his death. As revealed in his anecdote, rather than hindering his work, Collins's laudanum use when dictating *The Moonstone* proved a source of inspiration, and enabled him to surpass his previous novels. Moreover, Peters's belief that the insipidity of *The Two Destinies*, a text signed by the late Collins and generally regarded as one of his poorest efforts, can be attributed to Collins being neither "physically or imaginatively, in control of his pen" when writing the novel, is also undermined by the anecdote. Indeed, by Collins's own admission, Peters's pejorative remarks

³⁶ Commenting upon Scott's story, Jane Millgate states: "So far as the manuscript itself goes there is every reason to believe that Scott had completed most of the holograph before becoming seriously ill, and even if one assumes that he did indeed dictate the final fifth of the novel in April 1819, his illness had by that time abated sufficiently for him to substitute the taking of hot baths for the frequent recourse to opiates that had been necessary earlier"; see Jane Millgate, *Walter Scott: The Making of the Novelist*, (1984; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 171. Likewise, for Lonoff, the manuscript to *The Moonstone* does not back up Collins's anecdote: "Despite his claims that he dictated most of the story to a stoic young woman, the manuscript (now at the Pierpont Morgan Library) is almost entirely in his own hand. Only seven pages out of 418 are in another handwriting, and even there he has made his own corrections" (Lonoff, 171).

³⁷ For Collins, Scott was "beyond all comparison the greatest novelist that has ever written ... the Prince, the King, the Emperor, the God Almighty of novelists" (qtd. Ashley, 109).

³⁸ It is also probable that Collins's description of "the Shivering Sand" was inspired by "[t]he tenacious depths of the quicksand" at "Kelpie's Flow" where Lord Ravenswood perishes in *The Bride of Lammermoor* (Scott, 348)

can also be applied to *The Moonstone*, one of the most “central” of his “central” sensation novels. While Collins’s colourful anecdote has been largely discredited, this does not detract from the fact that Collins intended it as an intertext or paratext to the novel; an oral supplement to the novel which points to a tacit awareness, on Collins’s part, that his authorial identity is always already double, and haunted by Otherness.

Like *The Moonstone* and *The Two Destinies*, Collins’s anecdote provides another example, to repeat Bisla’s phrase, “of his unconscious understanding of the Otherness inherent in authorship”, as well as in writing more generally. In a similar vein to Derrida, it seems, Collins is attentive to the ways in which “[w]riting is in some respects perhaps what is always given over to the other and what always come from the other.” However, as Collins’s tall tale about dictating *The Moonstone* demonstrates, this sense of Otherness is not external to the writing self; it does not come from an outward source. Rather, for Collins, as well as for Derrida, the arrival of the Other is always already located within the writing subject, awaiting to be called, through whatever means or channels; be it inspiration, drugs, or otherwise. Collins, it seems, would agree with critics, such as Peters, who claim his work in the 1870s and 1880s was written by an “*alter ego*”. The only difference being that, for Collins, this authorial double – this Other Collins – is not solely confined to his later period, but, rather, always already lodged within his authorial identity, even within what Dorothy Sayers cautiously terms “the ‘real’ Collins – the ‘sensation’ writer”.³⁹

In the next section of this chapter another factor which has been attributed to Collins’s literary star waning after the publication of *The Moonstone* – his success as a dramatist – will be the subject under discussion. “Another change in Wilkie’s literary life undoubtedly had a major and deleterious effect upon his fiction,” Peters writes of Collins’s decline: “His plays began to be successful.” (Peters, 314) Like Dickens, Collins was an ardent devotee of the

³⁹ Dorothy L. Sayers, *Wilkie Collins: A Critical and Biographical Study*, ed. E.R. Gregory (Toledo: The Friends of the University of Toledo Libraries, 1977), 87.

theatre; but, unlike Dickens, Collins was an able playwright and, throughout his career, the allure of the stage proved difficult to resist. Collins's "success" as a dramatist is largely confined to the 1870s when he produced six plays, including notable dramatic adaptations of *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Armada*, and *The Moonstone*.⁴⁰ Whilst nowhere near as popular as their novelistic counterparts, Collins's theatrical versions of his sensation novels, with the exception of *No Name*, proved to be a hit on the stage.⁴¹ Nevertheless, Collins's plays, even more so than his later novels, have been ignored by critics. In the words of Lonoff, Collins's plays "are shallow period pieces; and had he won acceptance as a playwright, his work would now be forgotten" (Lonoff, 23).

The next section will focus almost exclusively upon Collins's theatrical adaptations of *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, and will do so for two reasons. Firstly, because these texts are considered his best and most characteristic work and, therefore, wholly removed from the late Collins. Secondly, it is in these two adaptations that Collins makes the most drastic changes, in comparison to the theatrical versions of his other sensation novels, *No Name* and *Miss Gwilt*, his 1875 dramatic version of *Armada*. Before analyzing the plays in detail, though, it is useful to examine an important, yet underexplored aspect of the Other Collins; that is, Collins "the playwright", an authorial role which he adopted for the majority of his literary career, but which has traditionally been relegated to the margins of his work.

II

Although short stories by Collins had been appearing in print since the early 1840s, his professional authorial career began, as mentioned in the previous chapter, in 1848, with the publication of the *Memoirs*. Following the publication of the *Memoirs*, Collins produced two texts in the early-spring of 1850: *Antonina; or, the Fall of Rome*, his first full-length novel

⁴⁰ The two other plays Collins produced during this period are *Man and Wife* (1870) and *The New Magdalen* (1873). In 1877 the Lyceum Theatre also produced an authorized adaptation of Collins's 1857 novel *The Dead Secret*. Collins was not involved in the project, however.

⁴¹ Produced by Augustin Daly, Collins's dramatization of *No Name* was performed at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, New York from 7 to 16 June 1871. The play was never staged in England; see Ashley, 125.

which he had interrupted to write the *Memoirs*; and *A Court Duel*, an unauthorized translation of a French melodrama, which opened on 26 February 1850, two days before the publication of *Antonina*. Davis claims that whilst, “[o]f the two achievements [...] the publication of *Antonina* was far the more substantial [...] the play, though it brought him in no money, was more exciting.” (Davis, *The Life of Wilkie Collins*, 79)

It is characteristic of Collins to have been working on a play and a novel at the same time. In the “Letter of Dedication” to *Basil*, the text which succeeded *Antonina*, Collins declared: “the Novel and the Play are twin-sisters in the family of fiction; [...] the one is a drama narrated, as the other is a drama acted”.⁴² Throughout his career Collins adhered to this philosophy. In fact, of the fifteen plays Collins produced, ten were adaptations of his novels and short stories and a further two plays – *The Frozen Deep*, first performed in 1857, and *The Red Vial*, first performed in 1858 – were later transformed into a short story and a novel respectively.⁴³

The reason that such a high percentage of Collins’s plays are adaptations of his own novels is often attributed to the outdated copyright laws still in operation in the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century, as authors such as Collins or Dickens serialized their fiction, theatrical pirates, both at home and abroad, would produce unauthorized stage adaptations of their novels and did so with little or no chance of repercussions. As Graham Law argues, “the specific pressure inciting Collins to make plays out of his fiction [...] was the sense of outrage at the inadequacy of legal protection for the plots and characters created by the Victorian novelist”.⁴⁴ There is clear evidence in support of Law’s claim, and despite the fact that his first theatrical piece was itself an unauthorized translation, Collins, like

⁴² Wilkie Collins, “Letter of Dedication”, in Wilkie Collins, *Basil*, ed. Dorothy Goldman (1990; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xxxix-xliv (xli).

⁴³ As well as *A Court Duel*, this figure takes into account both dramatisations of *Armadale*, but not Bayle Bernard’s 1863 Collins-authorized theatrical adaptation of *No Name* which is sometimes numbered among his dramatic texts.

⁴⁴ Graham Law “The professional writer and the literary marketplace”, in Jenny Bourne Taylor, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 97-111 (105).

Dickens, was left indignant by theatrical piracy when it affected his own novels and those of his peers.⁴⁵

Writing to William Holman Hunt on 11 March 1873, Collins expresses his discontent with contemporary copyright laws: “a recent decision in a Court of Law has declared that anybody may dramatise any of my novels or of any other man’s novels, without the leave of the author” (Baker and Clarke, 2: 363). Fifteen years later, in a 8 February 1888 letter to Hall Caine, a fellow novelist, Collins’s sense of injustice has not diminished: “let me warn you that the stupid copyright law of England allows any scoundrel possessing a pot of paste and a pair of scissors to steal our novels for stage purposes unless we ourselves produced our story on the stage, *before the publication of the novel*” (*Public Face*, 4: 299, original emphasis). On 7 May 1875, Collins even admitted to Moy Thomas, the drama critic of the *Daily News*: “I have dramatised my own books in the face of existing piracies.” (Baker and Clarke, 2: 393) Collins’s openness concerning the pragmatic motivation behind the adaptations of his novels has not helped his standing as a dramatist; there is an air of business acumen pervading the plays rather than artistic merit.

However, while there is undoubtedly an element of truth in the argument that Collins would often dramatize his novels and stage one-off performances in order to secure copyright over them, it is an oversimplification as well as an exaggeration to claim that this was his sole reason behind his decision to dramatize his work. Although Collins tells Holman Hunt, in the letter quoted above, that “I am obliged to dramatise the novel I am now writing [*The New Magdalen*], *against time* [...] or the thieves will take *that* from me also”, the theatrical pirates

⁴⁵ In *Nicholas Nickleby*, itself subject to various unauthorized theatrical adaptations, Dickens fires the following volley, via the eponymous hero of the novel, against the dramatic pirates: “you take the uncompleted books of living authors, fresh from their hands [...] and carve them to the powers and capacities of your actors, and the capability of your theatres, finish unfinished works, hastily and crudely vamp up ideas not yet worked out by their original projector [...] all this, without his permission, and against his will [...] and then, to crown the whole proceeding [...] put your name as author” (*Nickleby*, 633). Like Collins, however, Nicholas is something of a hypocrite. Earlier in the story Nicholas is handed a French play by Mr. Crummles with the instructions to “turn that into English, and put your name on the title-page” (*Nickleby*, 296). Nicholas, we are told, “smiled and pocketed the play” (*Nickleby*, 296).

were not the reason for his decision to adapt the novel (Baker and Clarke, 2: 363, original emphasis). In fact, it was Collins's intention, from the beginning, to translate *The New Magdalen* onto the stage; the theatrical pirates merely speeded-up the process (Peters, 337).

Such was the regard that Collins had for the theatrical adaptations of his novels that if he did not think the story was suitable he would not translate it for the stage merely for the sake of it. Believing that *Poor Miss Finch*, a novel first serialized in *Cassell's Magazine* between October 1871 and March 1872, was "eminently *unfit* for stage purposes", Collins is horrified to find that "some obscure idiot in the country" had dramatized his novel without his consent (Baker and Clarke 2: 362, original emphasis). In a 25 February 1873 letter to John Hollingshead, Collins vents his anger: "What I dare not do with my own work, another man (unknown in Literature) is perfectly free to do, against my will, and (if he can get his rubbish played) to the prejudice of my novel and my reputation." (Baker and Clarke, 2: 362-63) Therefore, it is more prudent to say that, although they can be seen as the catalyst, the extant copyright laws were only one reason accounting for Collins's decision to adapt his sensation novels for the stage.

Collins would, however, often write his novels with theatrical adaptations in mind, even dividing certain of his prose texts into "Scenes" and "Acts" rather than chapters. Conversely, he would at times also reverse this process and create a novel or a short story from one of his plays. Also, Collins would, on occasions, work on a novel and its dramatization – or a drama and its prose version, depending on which way it is viewed – concurrently. In this respect Collins was in harmony with the era in which he was writing. As Deborah Vlock points out, "the 'drama' was not supplanted by the novel in the nineteenth century but merged with it": "the lines between the theatre and prose fiction were fluid, and

novel reading was performed in the rich and ambiguous area in between”.⁴⁶ Vlock adds: “Victorian novel-readers [...] entered a sort of hybrid novelistic-theatrical genre.” (Vlock, 18).

The interrelation of the genres of the novel and the drama, which Collins saw as integral to his art, has been examined in various critical discussions of his work. For instance, T. S. Eliot claims that Collins’s sensation novel *Armada* “has no merit beyond melodrama, [but] it has every merit that melodrama can have” (Eliot, 468). For Lonoff, Collins’s novels are “unabashedly melodramatic” in that, like the work of contemporary authors such as Dickens and Charles Reade, Collins “incorporated into [his] fiction many of the staple ingredients of melodrama: the curtain lines, the emotional exchanges, the direct appeals to those beyond the footlights” (Lonoff, 9-22).

More recently, critics have focused upon the potentially subversive capacity of the “theatricality” present in Collins’s texts. Lauren Chattman, for example, has explored the links between theatricality and the domestic ideal in Collins’s *No Name*. Referring to *No Name* as a “theater novel”, Chatman argues that in “the feminine combination of domestic self-effacement and theatrical self-display”, the novel “not only supports but also threatens to subvert a middle-class ideology of gender”: “Collins [recognizes] that domestic women’s self-effacement is the kind of performance that cannot be separated from theatrical display.”⁴⁷ Similarly, after describing “the sensation novel [as] the most obviously theatrical Victorian subgenre”, Joseph Litvack argues that the theatricality inherent in Collins’s sensation novels, in particular *The Woman in White* and *No Name*, acts as a disruptive force within the texts.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Deborah Vlock, *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3-10; henceforth Vlock.

⁴⁷ Lauren Chattman, “Actresses at Home and on Stage: Spectacular Domesticity and the Victorian Theatrical Novel”, *Novel* 28.1 (Fall 1994): 72-88 (73-86).

⁴⁸ Joseph Litvack, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 129.

However, whilst critical studies on Collins's work focus upon the theatricality of his novels, they tend to elide the ways in which his prose texts correspond with his plays. This is an important omission because the two novels discussed by Chatman and Litvack – *The Woman in White* and *No Name* – were both later adapted into plays by Collins. The exclusion of the theatrical versions of *The Woman in White* and *No Name* from Chatman's and Litvack's respective studies is part of a larger critical trend which ignores the plays Collins produced. As Richard Pearson remarks, Collins's plays have at best "functioned merely as extraneous footnotes on the novels themselves": "Collins's plays [...] are simply described, and with an air of critical curiosity that seems almost astonished that Collins could have been bothered with such trifles."⁴⁹ Even critics, such as Nayder, who endeavour to look at the plays in a more sympathetic light, do so by excusing their excision from Collins's canon: "The neglect from which Collins's melodramas have suffered is easiest to understand [compared to some of his novels and stories], since twentieth-century audiences have lost their taste for the extravagant emotionalism and the stark moral polarities that characterize the genre." (Nayder, *Wilkie Collins*, 133)

There are several factors – both practical and aesthetic – which account for Collins's plays being absent from critical discussions of his work. A reason which has undoubtedly helped to relegate the plays to the margins of Collins's literary canon is that they were, and to some extent still are, difficult to obtain. In 1991, Peters observed: "Wilkie Collins's plays have not so far been collected. Though they were, with the exception of *The Red Vial*, printed during his lifetime, they were not put on sale to the general public, and copies are extremely rare." (Peters, 477) In 1997 Nayder reiterated Peters's remarks concerning Collins's plays: "none are readily available, and most have never been printed or revived" (Nayder, *Wilkie*

⁴⁹ Richard Pearson, "Twin-sisters and Theatrical Thieves: Wilkie Collins and the Dramatic Adaptation of *The Moonstone*", in Andrew Mangham, ed., *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 208-22 (208); henceforth Pearson. The exception, as Pearson acknowledges, is Collins's 1857 drama, *The Frozen Deep*.

Collins, 133). More recently, steps have been taken to make Collins's plays more accessible and, through the dedicated work of James Rusk, the majority of Collins's plays are now available online.⁵⁰ However, the lack of a scholarly collected edition of Collins's plays has tended to divert critical attention away from them and, consequently, has profoundly affected Collins's standing as a playwright.

The undulating quality of Collins's dramatic works provides another important factor for their critical neglect. On 15 April 1862, Collins declared to Charles Ward: "if I know anything of my own faculty, it is a dramatic one" (Baker and Clarke, 1: 208). Few critics, if indeed any, have agreed with Collins's assertion concerning his primarily "dramatic" "faculty".⁵¹ An unsigned obituary of Collins, which appeared in the *Athenaeum* in September 1889, stated that whilst "[m]elodrama was Wilkie Collins's forte [...] he worked better as a novelist than as dramatist." (*WCH*, 248) Critics in the twentieth century have shared this view. For Nayder, "Collins's suspenseful and elaborate plot constructions do not work nearly as well in stage productions as they do in novels serialized over a period of months." (Nayder, *Wilkie Collins*, 134) Even an ardent Collinsian such as Ashley is forced to admit that Collins's plays are not the equal of his novels: "despite his own conviction to the contrary, Collins's talent was not essentially a dramatic one" (Ashley, 46). Collins is not alone in this respect, however. As Michael R. Booth explains, "[i]n the nineteenth century, not a single great poet or novelist made any kind of dramatic reputation for himself."⁵²

Easily the main factor accounting for the lack of critical interest in terms of Collins's plays is that examinations of his fiction are generally concerned with the four "central" sensation novels. In the previous chapter I argued that the splitting of Collins's oeuvre into

⁵⁰ See James Rusk, *The Fiction of Wilkie Collins*: <http://www.digitalpixels.org/jr/wc/>.

⁵¹ By contrast, in the summer of 1869, Collins expresses his doubts concerning his dramatic credentials to the theatre manager, John Hollingshead: "As a novelist, I can hold my audience, when I have once got them, and lead them (whether they like it or not) to the end. As a dramatist, I am not equally sure of the ground I walk on." (*Public Face*, 2: 136)

⁵² Michael R. Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), 47.

those texts which are considered marginal and those deemed “central” raises important issues concerning the construction, as well as the survival, of both his authorial persona and his literary canon; not least the difficulty in maintaining the distinction between the purportedly “marginal” and the “central” areas of his work. As I now discuss, the very fact that Collins returned to the four “central” sensation novels in the 1870s, when he adapted them for the stage, fuses two phases of his authorial identity which are usually seen as distinct.

The reasons for Collins’s decision to return to his four sensation novels in the 1870s are unclear. The prospect of huge financial gain cannot be ruled out as a primary motive; although, as Clarke has verified, Collins’s income, with the exception of one or two years, remained steady, and throughout his career he never suffered from pecuniary hardship (Clarke, 274). A clue may lie in the wider context of his authorial career in the 1870s, in that the theatrical adaptations of his four sensation novels for the stage forms part of a larger trend in which he revisits the haunts of his old texts from the 1850s and 1860s. For example, in 1879 Collins republished his novella *A Rogue’s Life*, which had first appeared in *Household Words* in 1856.⁵³ Furthermore, in 1873 Collins toured America to give public readings from his work, just as Dickens had done in 1868. Like Dickens’s readings, the texts which Collins performed onstage – “The Dream-Woman” and “The Frozen Deep” – were from his literary past, with both texts dating back to the mid-1850s. Unfortunately, Collins’s readings were unlike Dickens’s in being neither critically nor commercially successful. Nevertheless, for Collins, the 1870s was clearly a decade of retrospect; the theatrical adaptations of the sensation novels demonstrating only one aspect of this species of authorial return.

Tamara Wagner argues that from the 1870s onwards, Collins’s work became increasingly concerned with “nostalgic longing”, particularly in his depictions of

⁵³ In addition, Collins’s 1880 novel *Jezebel’s Daughter* is a prose translation of his 1858 play *The Red Vial*.

“nostalgically recalled men of sensibility”.⁵⁴ It is tempting to regard Collins’s return to his sensation novels, ten years after they were first published, as further evidence of the sense of “nostalgic longing” that permeated his later fiction. Ann C. Colley points out that “[n]ostalgia mourns the loss of a collective memory [...] and offers, through a shared set of rituals, the illusion of belonging to a communal identity where remembrance occurs among people, not within the solitary individual’s mind.”⁵⁵ The theatre would, therefore, seem a natural place to relive these literary memories. Indeed, like Dickens’s public readings, this sense of nostalgia for his sensation novels would be shared by the theatre audiences whose pleasure in watching the performance would be heightened by their familiarity with the stories. Just as Dickens’s readings were more than nostalgia pieces, however, to view Collins’s dramatic adaptations as works of nostalgia is only partly true. As I now discuss, Collins’s dramatic adaptations not only offer a form of nostalgic return, but, also, a disconnection with his literary past; a repetition with a difference, a haunting sense of Otherness.

Collins’s dramatization of *The Woman in White*, first performed on 9 October 1871 at the Olympic Theatre in London, was an instant and sustained success. An indisputable aspect of the play finding favour with the theatregoing public can be attributed to a nostalgic affection for the novel. As Robinson explains, “[t]he popularity of the book ensured plenty of advance interest in the play” (Robinson, 252). Perhaps aware of this, Collins, to a certain extent, tailored the dramatization to reflect the sense of nostalgic longing for the novel. For instance, the “Prologue” begins with Walter Hartright’s friend, Professor Pesca, reading a letter he has received from the secret Italian “Brotherhood”, of which he is a member, instructing him to notify them when he identifies a traitor to their organization. Referring to this demand, Pesca laments: “I, who ask nothing better, in my exile, than to forget the past,

⁵⁴ Tamara Wagner, “‘Overpowering Vitality’: Nostalgia and Men of Sensibility in the Fiction of Wilkie Collins” *Modern Language Quarterly* 63.4 (2002): 471-500 (472).

⁵⁵ Ann C. Colley, *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture* (1998; Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 210.

and to end my days in peace – *I* am singled out, by my chief in Italy, to decide the dreadful question of a man’s life or death!”⁵⁶ For the benefit of Hartright, as well as the audience, Pesca reads aloud the description of the traitor:

PESCA. “Personal description of the traitor. A man of sixty years old – immensely stout – bears in his face a striking resemblance to the great Napoleon – gaudy in his dress, smooth in his manners, singularly fond of pet animals, such as canary birds and white mice [...] The name under which he travels is Count Fosco.” (*PESCA closes the letter, and speaks.*) “Fosco?” I know nobody named “Fosco.” “Immensely stout?” “fond of pet animals?” I do not recognise the description. Heaven grant – when I see him – I may not recognise the man!
(*He puts the letter into his pocket.*)
(*WW Drama*, 12)

In this opening scene of the play, Collins appears to be appealing directly to the audience’s collective memory of Count Fosco, a character described by Edmund Yates, in his obituary of Collins, as a “memorable figure” (*WCH*, 276). Pesca may not “recognise the description” of Fosco, nor “recognise the man” when he eventually meets him, but, clearly, Collins assumes that, even before his name is announced, the references to Fosco – his likeness to Napoleon, his “stoutness”, his “gaudy” dress, and his love of animals – will revive the audience’s memories of him. In much the same way as those witnessing Dickens’s readings delighted in seeing characters from his early texts, such as Sam Weller and Scrooge, come to life on the stage, so part of the attraction for the audiences observing the dramatic rendition of *The Woman in White* would be nostalgic pleasure in watching Fosco plot and scheme in the flesh.

Collins also undercuts this sense of nostalgia in his dramatization of *The Woman in White*, however, by creating, in certain respects, a new and different version of the story. This is highlighted in a review of the play which appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* on 11 October 1871: “A drama of extraordinary power was this wonderful story; but, knowing every line of the book as we all do, we are actually able to be excited – if not more – over the play than

⁵⁶ Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White: A Drama, in a Prologue and Four Acts* (London: n.p., 1871), 11, original emphasis; henceforth *WW Drama*.

over the novel. The book has been turned inside out”.⁵⁷ What is notable about the review is its awareness not only of the sense of nostalgia surrounding the dramatic adaptation of *The Woman in White* (“knowing every line of the book as we all do”) but also, of Collins’s refusal to produce a simple piece of nostalgia. Indeed, while the reviewer’s belief that in terms of the theatrical version of *The Woman in White* “[t]he book has been turned inside out” is a slight exaggeration, in translating the text from the genre of the novel to that of the play, Collins omitted several key scenes and episodes which fundamentally alter our understanding of the story.

One of the most notable excisions from the dramatic version was Hartright’s first meeting with Anne Catherick, the eponymous “woman in white”, an encounter described in the novel thus:

I [...] was strolling along the lonely high-road [...] when, in one moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me [...] There, in the middle of the broad, bright high-road – there, as if it had that moment sprung from out of the earth or dropped from the heaven – stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments; her face bent in grave inquiry on mine, her hand pointing to the dark cloud over London, as I faced her (*WW*, 20).

The omission of this scene from the theatrical adaptation of *The Woman in White* – a scene which D.A. Miller describes as “the novel’s originary account of sensation” and “the novel’s primal scene”, and which “Dickens considered [...] one of the two most dramatic scenes in literature, the other being Carlyle’s account of the march of the women to Versailles in *The French Revolution*” – is, to say the least, noteworthy (*The Novel and the Police*, 153: Peters, 208).⁵⁸ Yet, as the above review from *The Daily Telegraph* illustrates, contemporary critics

⁵⁷ Quoted in Janice Norwood, “Sensation Drama? Collins’s Stage Adaptation of *The Woman in White*”, in Andrew Mangham, ed., *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 222-36 (227); henceforth Norwood. Some modern critics have been less forgiving, however. For A. D. Hutter, “when we compare the novel with the play he wrote and produced ten years later, everything is changed in the worst possible ways”: “The results we find in the dramatized version of *The Woman in White* are frequently horrifying.” (Hutter, 222-23)

⁵⁸ Nor was this the only “sensation” scene which Collins excised from the play. The manner of Sir Percival Glyde’s death is also changed considerably. Rather than perishing in the vestry of a church whilst attempting to destroy the textual proof of his illegitimacy, Sir Percival, in the play, dies off-stage, in Act 3, as “[h]e attempted

were more than complimentary towards the alterations Collins made to the story. Another review, for example, which appeared in *The Times* on 12 October 1871, also commended what it considered to be the judicious cuts Collins had made to the dramatic text of *The Woman in White*: “He has firmly grasped the rarely appreciated truth, that situations which appear dramatic to a reader, are not necessarily dramatic when brought to the ordeal of the footlights.” (qtd. Peters, 334)

The changes Collins made when dramatizing *The Woman in White* may have been in part a reaction to contemporary theatrical trends. Considering that the novel of *The Woman in White* was the first and one of the best examples of sensation fiction, and that Collins was the premier exponent of sensation fiction, it would appear likely that in adapting it for the stage he would tailor the play to suit the conventions of the then still popular theatrical genre of the sensation drama. As Michael Diamond explains, “[l]ike the sensation novel, the sensation drama was a phenomenon of the 1860s”: “To qualify as a sensation drama, a play had to contain one or more ‘sensation scenes’ showing some overwhelming experience, often a disaster – a fire, an earthquake, an avalanche, a shipwreck, a train crash.”⁵⁹

Within the novel there are several key episodes which could have made the theatrical version of *The Woman in White* conform to the genre of the sensation drama. Perhaps perversely, Collins does not make the play of *The Woman in White* even remotely resemble a sensation drama, however. If anything, Jim Davis explains, with the dramatic version of *The Woman in White*, Collins “was deliberately breaking away from the excesses of the sensation drama” and instead produced “a more restrained version” of the story for the stage.⁶⁰ In a similar vein, Janice Norwood writes of the theatrical version of *The Woman in White*: “He

to cross [the English Channel] in a fishing boat.” (*WW Drama*, 65) The extraordinary scene in which Hartright sees the supposedly dead Laura Fairlie standing by the site of her own grave was likewise cut from the play.

⁵⁹ Michael Diamond, *Victorian Sensation: Or, the Spectacular, the Shocking and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2003; London: Anthem Press, 2004), 218.

⁶⁰ Jim Davis, “Collins and the theatre”, in Jenny Bourne Taylor, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 168-80 (174); henceforth Davis, “Collins and the theatre”.

deliberately avoided the obvious sensation scenes. Undoubtedly he knew that the audience was aware of the plot to the novel.” (Norwood, 226) Norwood adds: “Collins as a dramatist surprises his audience by changing details. He toys with audience expectation. He thus creates intellectual titillation rather than stimulating physical excitement and suspense.” (Norwood, 226)

Collins’s theatrical adaptation of *The Woman in White* is illustrative of the, at times, sharp contrast he sets up between his dramatic versions of the four sensation novels and the novels themselves. Indeed, while Dickens would revise his early texts for his public readings, these revisions were slight compared to the wholesale changes Collins made in terms of translating his sensation novels into a dramatic format. With *Miss Gwilt*, Collins’s dramatic version of *Armadale*, first performed at the Alexandra Theatre in Liverpool on 9 December 1875, Collins again made significant changes. Jim Davis refers to *Miss Gwilt* as “Collins’s somewhat ruthless adaptation of *Armadale*”, and it is certainly true that in terms of the dramatic version, Collins made two significant changes from its novelistic “twin”; three if the title is taken into consideration (Davis, “Collins and the theatre”, 176). Firstly, rather than friends who share an intense, homosocial relationship, in *Miss Gwilt* Allan and Midwinter are cousins. Secondly, as the change in title suggests, the eponymous villainess of the piece takes centre stage and, significantly, her character is depicted far more sympathetically than it is in the novel. As Peters explains, in *Miss Gwilt*, Lydia Gwilt “becomes a flawed heroine, the victim of the wickedness of others rather than the mainspring of crime. She is not bigamously married, does not commit a murder, and is a pawn in the hands of the sinister Dr. Downward, who becomes the central villain of the play.” (Peters, 378) Although, as Jim Davis acknowledges, it is important not to overstate Lydia’s transformation in *Miss Gwilt* as “a flawed heroine” – she is, after all, hardly a one-dimensional villainess in *Armadale* – her

character is made far less reprehensible in the play than it is in the novel.⁶¹ This is most obviously portrayed in Act 5, in which Lydia laments to Downward: “From first to last I have been a means of getting money, moved by your merciless hands. My life has been wasted – my life has been turned to stone – my tongue has been taught to lie – I have loved and hoped – I have sinned and suffered – to put money in *your* pocket.”⁶²

The revisions Collins made to *The Woman in White* and *Armadale*, when adapting them for the stage, were slight compared to the extensive alterations that he made to the dramatic version of *The Moonstone*, first performed at the Olympic Theatre on 17 September 1877. In the dramatic version of *The Moonstone*, for example, Collins jettisoned the Indians whose pursuit of the diamond is such a central feature of the novel. Also gone were characters such as Rosanna Spearman and Ezra Jennings, who played essential roles in the prose version. Moreover, as he had done with the play of *The Woman in White*, Collins excised prominent “sensation scenes” from the theatrical version of *The Moonstone*. Most notably, Collins removed the uncanny and atmospheric episode at “the Shivering Sand” when Blake discovers that it is in fact himself who is the diamond thief. In contrast to the novel, Godfrey Ablewhite is arrested at the end of the play, rather than being murdered by the avenging Indians.

By far the most significant change that Collins made to the theatrical version of *The Moonstone*, however, is that in Act 1 he attributed Blake’s somnambulism, the cause of his unwitting theft of the diamond, to a bad case of indigestion – “eating when he was not accustomed to eat, and drinking when he was not accustomed to drink” – and not, as it is in

⁶¹ “The focus of the new adaptation is the almost unredeemable Miss Gwilt and her villainy, and while the play treats her more sympathetically than does the novel, she is still very much the adventuress in the Lady Audley mould.” (Davis, “Collins and the theatre”, 176) In collaboration with François-Joseph Régner, Collins had first produced a dramatic text of *Armadale* in 1866, though it is unclear whether or not it was actually performed. On reading the 1866 text, Dickens was generally enthusiastic, but he also suggested changes – particularly in terms of the character of Miss Gwilt – which Collins adopted in both versions of the play.

⁶² Wilkie Collins, *Miss Gwilt: A Drama, in Five Acts* (N.p., 1875), 68, original emphasis.

the novel, because he was secretly administered opium by Doctor Candy.⁶³ In Act 2 of the play, Rachel tells Ablewhite: “My memory is not to be trusted, Godfrey!” (*TM Drama*, 51) Collins, it seems, was suffering from a similar form of memory loss. Just as Collins claimed after writing the concluding chapters to the novel of *The Moonstone*, when he was heavily sedated by opium, that he was unable to “recognise it as my own”, he also appears to suffer a bout of amnesia in terms of *The Moonstone*’s plot when translating it onto the stage.⁶⁴

Like Davis’s and Norwood’s comments concerning *The Woman in White*, Peters believes that, in making the changes to the dramatic version of *The Moonstone*, Collins is again dissociating his work from the sensation genres, both of the novel and the drama. For Peters, Collins’s “alterations to the story were perhaps made in response to the reviewers’ objections [of the novel] to his strange and lurid fictional imaginings, and in line with the more naturalistic theatre becoming popular. It did not suit his style.”⁶⁵ (Peters, 380) It is possible that Collins toned down the more sensational elements of *The Moonstone* in order to make it more palatable to his audience, to say nothing of the censors. However, Peters’s belief, that Collins’s plot change is “in line with the more naturalistic theatre becoming popular”, should be treated with scepticism. In fact, if anything, the reason given in the novel to account for Blake’s sleepwalking and subsequent theft of the diamond is, in many ways, far more “naturalistic” than the reason afforded to it in the play. Moreover, as Lynn M. Voskuil notes, the distinction which Peters and others make between “natural” and “sensation” theatre was not one that was necessarily upheld in the nineteenth century:

⁶³ Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone: A Dramatic Story, in Three Acts* (1877; Liskeard, Cornwall: Diggory Press, 2008), 27; henceforth *TM Drama*.

⁶⁴ Ironically, the “amnesia” which Collins appears to be suffering from, in terms of the changes he makes to the dramatic adaptation of *The Moonstone*, links the play to Collins’s four sensation novels. For example, Nicholas Dames argues that “a culture of forgetfulness” pervades Collins’s novels of the 1860s. For Dames, the trauma-induced amnesia of Laura Fairlie in *The Woman in White* and Franklin Blake’s opium-induced memory loss in *The Moonstone* drive the respective narratives and provide the novels with their suspense: “the strange spectacle of Collins’s plots from the 1860s, a constant and pervasive forgetfulness allows the mystery in question to be prolonged and intractable”; see Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 170-80.

⁶⁵ Jim Davis also notes that Collins “may have been inspired by the wish to write a more subdued and naturalistic version of the original” (Davis, “Collins and the theatre”, 176).

“sensation theater received its cultural impetus from the same theoretical and cultural matrix as natural acting, a matrix in which theatricality and authenticity were inseparably though variably intermeshed”.⁶⁶

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the indiscriminate changes Collins made to the story, the dramatic version of *The Moonstone* was not a success with either critics or theatre audiences, and ran for only nine weeks. Nevertheless, like Collins’s dramatic treatment of *The Woman in White*, the theatrical version of *The Moonstone* was commended in a contemporary review, which appeared in the *Illustrated London News* on 22 September 1877, precisely because of its marked difference from its novelistic namesake: “All novel readers are well acquainted with the incidents of this clever story [...] Mr. Collins has arranged [the adaptation] upon a safe plan. He has successfully resisted the temptation to found his plot upon the principle of surprise, and has substituted for it that of expectation.” (qtd. Pearson, 215) This review is perceptive in that it pin-points the key problem Collins faced when adapting *The Moonstone* for the stage; namely, the audience’s familiarity with the story. But, what the review misses is that, as Norwood points out in terms of the dramatic version of *The Woman in White*, Collins does in fact “[surprise] his audience by changing details”. That is, Collins knew he could not “surprise” his audience in terms of the novel’s plot, so he was forced to “surprise” them in other, perhaps more disconcerting, ways. As with the theatrical version of *The Woman in White*, the dramatic adaptation of *The Moonstone*, rather than providing a comforting and sentimental sense of nostalgia, presented its audiences with a play that did not correspond with their collective memories of the story. Essentially, with his dramatic rendition of *The Moonstone*, Collins makes a familiar text strange, and wholly Other.

⁶⁶ Lynn M. Voskuil, *Acting Naturally: Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004, 63.

Referring to the ways in which Collins's dramatic adaptations of his sensation novels – particularly *The Moonstone* – diverge from the novels, Pearson observes:

It is important, when examining Collins's plays, we recognize that, rather than attempting repetition and replication of his novels, the dramatic adaptations of the 1870s [...] deliberately distance themselves from the originals. In this way, Collins makes his plays truly “twin-sisters” of his fiction: not replicas, but different and independent; not misreading, but rereadings or even counter-readings. Yet in their revisiting of the original texts, the whole process of duplication and dramatisation becomes an activity fraught with authorial identity-crisis: a theft, a disguise, an imitation, that puts in doubt the author's ability to establish a stable self, an homogenous whole, as Foucault might have described it. Collins divides himself as an author in such a way that threatens his survival in both. It was a ground he loved to haunt (Pearson, 212).

Pearson is correct to view Collins's theatrical versions of *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* as “different and independent” from the sensation novels from which they were adapted and as “deliberately [distancing] themselves from the originals”. Evidently, Collins clearly made a conscious effort to ensure the dramatic adaptations of *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* differed from their novelistic counterparts, and he did so in specific ways. More than anything else, as noted above, Collins's revisions can be seen as a concerted and deliberate attempt on his part to dissociate himself and his dramatic texts from the “sensationalism” which, as he well knew, was inextricably linked to his authorial identity. In this respect, the “authorial identity-crisis” which Pearson claims affects Collins as a direct consequence of translating his sensation novels from one genre to another, and which, moreover, “puts in doubt the author's ability to establish a stable self, an homogenous whole”, can be attributed to the attempted fusion between two phases of his authorial career: on the one hand, the late (dramatist) Collins of the 1870s; and, on the other hand, the “central” (sensation novelist) Collins of the 1860s. When Dickens revisited his earlier work in the public readings it signaled a period of mourning for “the young Dickens”. Rather than a sense of mourning, Collins's return to his sensation novels, a decade after they were first serialized, suggests an internal conflict within his authorial identity, in which the late Collins

struggles to assert his authority, and does so by dint of a wilful amnesia.

Such an argument has limitations, however. While Collins's revisions can be seen as an attempt to divorce his later authorial career from the "sensationalism" which preceded it, such an authorial split points not just to a "crisis" in terms of his "authorial identity". Rather, it also demonstrates a tacit acknowledgement by Collins that an "authorial identity", like any identity, is never "stable" or "homogenous". Indeed, the phrase "authorial identity-crisis" is something of a pleonasm; that is, in terms of authorial identities, as well as identities more generally, a sense of "crisis" is the norm. Instead, as a multitude of characters in Collins's novels testify, and as the dramatic versions of the sensation novels indicate, identities, authorial or otherwise, are dynamic and fluid; open to revision.

Moreover, although Pearson is largely sympathetic towards Collins's theatrical adaptations of his sensation novels, he also reaffirms the conventional critical position regarding the work of the late Collins. Like Peters, Pearson appears to suggest that the late Collins is not only secondary to Collins's earlier, sensation novel-writing, incarnation of his authorial self, but, also, through the terminology used in his article to describe the dramatizations – "a theft, a disguise, an imitation" – that the work of the late Collins is somehow inauthentic, illegitimate. For Pearson, it seems that, in terms of the dramatic renditions of the sensation novels, Collins becomes his own counterfeiter, paradoxically producing unauthorized theatrical versions of his own texts. Pearson is right, in certain respects, to regard the late Collins, who dramatizes the "central" Collins's sensation novels, as in some sense an imitator or counterfeiter. Rather than indicating an "authorial identity-crisis", however, as in his anecdote concerning *The Moonstone*, Collins's paradoxical self-forgery when revisiting the sensation novels provides another example of his awareness of the "Otherness inherent in authorship"; or, more exactly, the Otherness inherent in his, and every other, authorial signature.

The issues raised in and by Pearson's essay – issues concerning “repetition”, “duplication”, “originality”, “imitation”, and so on – leads us back to the question of Collins's “signature” first outlined in Chapter 3 of this thesis. As discussed in Chapter 3, although Collins's “central” sensation novels constitute a fundamental part of his authorial signature, they also destabilize the very act of signing one's name within their narratives. In *Armada*, for example, Midwinter's “identity” (or, at least, the character generally known in the text as “Midwinter”) is situated in-between two names and signatures – “Allan Armadale” and “Ozias Midwinter” – neither of which fully belongs to him. Like Midwinter, I argued in Chapter 3, Collins's “signature” – sensation fiction – simultaneously belongs and does not belong to him.

Beneath the title of each dramatic adaptation of his sensation novels Collins added the phrase: “Altered from the Novel for Performance on the Stage.” In claiming that the plays are “altered from the Novel”, Collins not only points to the ways in which he regards the dramatic versions of his sensation novels as a generic form of repetition with a difference, but also, that they are, for him, inhabited by an essential or necessary Otherness. “Alterity” (“Otherness”) is inextricably linked to the act of signing one's name in Derrida's work. For Derrida, Bennington notes:

The fact that my signature, if it is to be a signature, must be repeatable or imitable by myself entails just as necessary the possibility that it can be imitated by another, for example a counterfeiter. The logical form of the reasoning by “necessary possibility” authorizes us to say that my signature is *already* contaminated by this alterity, already in some sense the other's signature. (Bennington, 162, original emphasis)

What Pearson identifies in terms of Collins's return to his sensation novels, a return which, like a signature, he recognizes as a type of repetition with a difference, is not, then, simply an “authorial identity-crisis” triggered solely by a literary “theft”, “disguise”, or “imitation”; in other words, a form of self-counterfeiting. Instead, it is a necessary consequence of what Pearson himself refers to as Collins's “counter-readings” – for which we could substitute the

term “countersigning” – of the “original” texts when adapting them for the stage.⁶⁷ That is, in returning to the four “central” sensation novels, Collins repeats, with a difference, his authorial signature, but, because this signature does not fully belong to him, it is a repetition always already marked and haunted by Otherness. It is not, then, that Collins becomes his own counterfeiter after dramatizing his sensation novels. Rather, from the outset of his authorial signature, there is a sense in which Collins’s signature, in order to function as a signature, is “*already* contaminated by this alterity”; already, that is, a type of self-forgery. In contrast to Pearson, who perceives an “authorial identity-crisis” in Collins’s dramatic versions of his sensation novels, a conflict or split within Collins’s authorial self, Collins embraces this alterity, welcomes the coming of the Other, just as he had done so in the anecdote of the “inspired trance” when dictating *The Moonstone*.

III

In an article entitled “New View of Society”, published in *All the Year Round* on 20 August 1859, Collins – or, rather, the narrator of the piece – expresses light-hearted dissatisfaction with the contemporary fashion of holding dinner-parties during the sweltering summer months, and recalls one particular dinner-party that he was invited to attend “in the scorching hot condition of the London atmosphere”.⁶⁸ Preparing to dress in his stifling bedroom before the dinner-party, the narrator remembers that “the thermometer had risen to eighty, in the house”: “I was sitting, a moist and melancholy man, with my eyes fixed upon my own Dress Costume reposing on the bed, and my heart fainting at the prospect of going out to Dinner.” (NVS, 396) Rather than suffer in “the prison of suffocating black broadcloth in which [his] hospitable friends required [him] to shut [himself] up” – otherwise, his “coat, waistcoat, and

⁶⁷ As Bennington notes, Derrida does not distinguish between reading and signing: “We must then rethink reading as a relation of signature and countersignature, which allows us to think in what way a text remains *essentially* open to the other (to reading). The text’s signature calls up the reader’s countersignature, as is the case with all signatures [...] [and] the countersignature it calls up is essentially the countersignature of the other, be that other myself.” (Bennington, 162-63, original emphasis)

⁶⁸ Wilkie Collins, “New View of Society”, *All the Year Round* 1.17 (1859): 396-99 (396); henceforth NVS.

trousers” – the narrator reveals that he instead wrote a letter to his hostess, in which he feigned a “sudden indisposition” and excused himself from attending the party (*NVS*, 396-97). After dispatching the letter, the narrator admits that while it is “a startling confession to make, in a moral point of view”, he was, “without any exception whatever, the happiest man at that moment, in all London” (*NVS*, 397).

Not content with merely enjoying “the full luxury of [his] own cool seclusion”, however, the narrator decides to visit the house in which the dinner-party is being held and “[gloat] over the sufferings of my polite fellow-creatures in the dining-room from the cool and secret vantage ground of the open street” (*NVS*, 397). Disguised in an “airy and ungentlemanlike costume”, the narrator blends in with “[a] little crowd of street idlers – cool and comfortable vagabonds, happily placed out of the pale of Society” who are “assembled on the pavement, before the dining-room windows” (*NVS*, 397). From this position outside the house, the narrator is able to view the proceedings of the dinner-party and, much to his delight, observes of a group of male guests sitting uncomfortably at the dinner-table: “There they were, all oozing away into silence and insensibility together; smothered in their heavy black coats, and strangled in their stiff white cravats!” (*NVS*, 397)

As the narrator surveys the scene from the window, he glances, from guest to guest, as they sit around the table; describing, as the case may be, their boredom, exhaustion, and, in one instance, loquacity. The narrator then notices an empty chair, which he instantly identifies as the place that he would have occupied had he attended the party, and notes with mock-horror:

There is a [...] place vacant [...] *My* place, beyond a doubt. Horrible thought! I see my own ghost sitting there: the appearance of that perspiring spectre is too dreadful to be described. I shudder in my convenient front place against the area railings, as I survey my own full-dressed Fetch at the dinner-table [...] The imaginary view of that ghost of myself sitting at the table has such a bewildering effect on my mind, that I find it necessary to walk away a little [...] I retire gently over the pavement. (*NVS*, 398, original emphasis)

Besides adding to the comic-tone of the piece, Peters argues, this episode in “New View of Society”, in which the narrator is confronted by his own ghost, has an autobiographical connotation. Shortly before writing the article, Collins, who rejoiced in flouting Victorian mores, met Caroline Graves, with whom he would maintain a clandestine relationship for the rest of his life, without ever marrying. For Peters, the dual tension in Collins’s life after meeting Caroline Graves, of appearing to conform to Victorian middle-class values concerning morality while in fact transgressing them, is reflected and imaginatively reworked in his *All the Year Round* article. “‘A [*sic*] New View of Society’, hints at his delight in the double life he was leading”, Peters writes: “His arrangement with Caroline Graves seems to have been [...] an escape from the politely perspiring ‘Fetch’ that middle-class society mistook for Wilkie Collins. If the arrangement closed some ‘Society’ doors to him, so much the better.” (Peters, 196)

In addition to such an autobiographical reading of the piece, “New View of Society” also provides an example of Collins’s investigation into the concept of hospitality, an interest which he shared with Dickens. Indeed, more than anything else, “New View of Society” is an article concerned with the notion of hospitality and, more specifically, the interrelationship between host and guest. After all, it is the narrator’s refusal to accept his friend’s hospitality which forms the basis of the piece. Such a refusal is given an ironic twist in “New View of Society” when the narrator, still outside his friend’s house and in the company of the “little crowd of street idlers”, is asked to leave the spot he is occupying, outside the window, by a policeman: “I am the first and foremost vagabond whom he thinks it desirable to dismiss. To my delight, he singles me out, before my friend’s house, on the very threshold of the door, through which I have been invited to pass in the honourable capacity of guest, as the first obstruction to be removed.” (*NVS*, 398)

Some of the more notable and, perhaps less well known, instances of Collins’s and

Dickens's interest in the concept of hospitality in their work include two articles written by Collins, entitled "My Paris Lodging" and "My London Lodging", which appeared in the 7 and 14 June 1856 editions of *Household Words*, respectively, and which are collectively titled "Laid Up in Lodgings".⁶⁹ The Dickens edited collections of Christmas stories, which appeared in extra numbers of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, are especially rich in references to the concept of hospitality, which is perhaps unsurprising given that the concept of hospitality is central to Christianity, particularly the Nativity. For example, *All the Year Round's* 1863 Christmas book was entitled *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings*; while, *A House to Let*, an 1858 Christmas book for *Household Words*, concludes with a jointly authored story by Collins and Dickens, called "Let at Last", which features a house that is eventually "turned into a hospital for sick children".⁷⁰

The 1855 *Household Words* Christmas number, entitled *The Holly-Tree Inn*, begins with a short story, written by Dickens, entitled "The Guest". As the title suggests, "The Guest" is narrated by a character called Charley who is residing at the eponymous inn. Whilst Dickens's story is entitled "The Guest", however, the narrator is in fact the "host" of the set of tales which constitute *The Holly-Tree Inn*; in the sense that it is his story which provides the framing narrative. "The Guest's" main narrative is followed by Collins's tale "The Ostler". The word "ostler", another name for a stableman at an inn, originally began with an "H": making it "hostler". Although the "H" was eventually dropped, the word is still linked, etymologically, to "hostel", "hospital" and "host". This leaves us in the rather perplexing situation whereby "The Ostler's" story, or the "host", becomes a "guest" in "The Guest's" main narrative.

⁶⁹ See Wilkie Collins, "Laid Up in Lodgings", in Wilkie Collins, *My Miscellanies* (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, 1900), 85-125.

⁷⁰ Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins, "Let at Last", in Charles Dickens, *A House To Let* (London: Hesperus, 2004), 85-94 (94). Etymologically, the terms "hospital" and "hospitality" are linked. In his novel *Little Dorrit*, Dickens illustrates his awareness of this fact when he has the character of Maggy form the portmanteau word "hospitally" (*LD*, 146).

Dickens's and Collins's transposition of the terms "host" and "guest" can be traced back to the word "*ghost-ti*", which "lodges" the terms "host" and "guest" in its signification. As J. Hillis Miller observes: "The words 'host' and 'guest' go back in fact to the same etymological root: *ghost-ti*, stranger, guest, host, properly 'someone with whom one has reciprocal duties of hospitality' [...] A host is a guest, and a guest is a host."⁷¹ Similarly, when writing on the "laws of hospitality", Derrida states: "The guest becomes the host's host. The guest (*hôte*) becomes the host (*hôte*) of the host (*hôte*)." (*OH*, 125) As the quotation from Derrida illustrates, the interchangeability of the terms "host" and "guest" is still present in the French language. It can be assumed that, Collins, a self-confessed Francophile who translated a French play into English in 1850, and Dickens, a competent if not wholly fluent speaker of the French language, would have been aware of the instability inherent within the host/guest binary opposition in the French language.

An interesting aspect of Collins's interest in the notion of hospitality entails an investigation into the workings of the proper name and the signature. For Collins – as texts such as the *Memoirs*, *Basil*, and *Armada* testify – one's name and signature exceeds any notion of belonging and not belonging: we possess them only on the condition that we accept that they are not "ours" to possess. In Collins's view, we are, as it were, at once host and guest when it comes to our names and signatures. This is emphasized in Collins's and Dickens's collaborative 1867 Christmas story "No Thoroughfare", in which the name of "Walter Wilding" – a name central to the narrative – is described as "a name to let" by one of the managers of the London Foundling Hospital (*CS*, 692).

In *The Woman in White*, Sir Percival Glyde demands that his wife Laura sign a document, but he will not allow her to read it beforehand. Understandably, Laura refuses to sign the parchment until she has read its contents, but, as her husband, Sir Percival demands

⁷¹ J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host", in Harold Bloom, *et al*, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1979; London: Continuum, 2004), 177-207 (180).

that Laura obey him. Laura's half-sister, Marian Halcombe, who is to countersign the document, entreats Sir Percival to be more reasonable: "I cannot assume the responsibility of witnessing her signature, unless she first understands what the writing is which you wish her to sign." (*WW*, 248) To this an irate Sir Percival responds: "The next time you invite yourself into a man's house, Miss Halcombe, I recommend you not repay his hospitality by taking his wife's side in a matter that doesn't concern you." (*WW*, 248-49) For Sir Percival, Marian, as a self-invited guest, must repay his hospitality by offering her signature without complaint. As both husband and host, Sir Percival believes that the signature of his wife, as well as her sister while she dwells under his roof, belongs to him. But, as we soon find out, Sir Percival is of illegitimate birth, meaning that, in the words of Hartright, Sir Percival "was not Sir Percival Glyde at all" and, therefore, his own name and signature does not even belong to himself; that is, Sir Percival, in terms of the name which he bears, is at once both host and guest and neither host nor guest (*WW*, 521).

Collins's interest in what is termed "the duties of hospitality" in *I Say No* was maintained after Dickens's death.⁷² For instance, Collins's 1886 novella *The Guilty River* features a character who is nameless, and yet possesses several appellations, one of which being "The Lodger": "I have ceased to bear my family name [...] Here, they know me as The Lodger. Will you have that? or will you have an appropriate nick-name? [...] Call me The Cur." (*GR*, 257) Significantly, "The Lodger's" confessional narrative, entitled "Memoirs of a Miserable Man", is unsigned (*GR*, 260-72). As he had done in *The Guilty River*, in *The Two Destinies* Collins traces the relationship between the concept of hospitality and the workings of the proper name and the signature. Like Dickens's and Collins's stories in *The Holly-Tree Inn*, *The Two Destinies* is concerned with the destabilization of the distinction between host and guest, especially in its representation of "Shetland Hospitality".

⁷² Wilkie Collins, *I Say No* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1995), 121. This phrase also appears in *The Moonstone* (*TM*, 296).

While pony-trekking in the Shetland Isles with an unnamed “travelling companion” and a local guide, Germaine breaks away from the group he is riding with, eventually becoming lost on a stretch of treacherous terrain “surrounded by dripping white mist, so dense that we become invisible to one another at a distance of half a dozen yards.” (*TTD*, 88) The guide tells Germaine and his friend, in his local tongue, “[j]ust leave it to the pownies” to find their own way to safety (*TTD*, 88). Germaine is less than convinced, however:

Our guide [...] answers that it will end in the ponies finding their way certainly to the nearest village or the nearest house. “Let the bridles be,” is his one warning to us [...] It is easy for the guide to let his bridle be – he is accustomed to place himself in that helpless position [...] The time goes on, and no sign of an inhabited dwelling looms through the mist. (*TTD*, 88-9)

Shortly after the guide offers his opinion as to the safest means of return, Germaine panics and seizes the bridle. His inexperience in handling the native Shetland ponies proves costly as both he and the pony fall heavily. Not only does Germaine injure himself when he falls, but, also, as the pony crashes to the ground, its hoof hits an old wound on his body and he is left barely able to move, leaving him, in his own words, “a disabled stranger” (*TTD*, 90). After several anxious moments, the travellers find a dwelling in which to seek shelter and allow Germaine to time to recover. Germaine describes it as “a long low house of one storey high” with “[t]he door [...] hospitably open” (*TTD*, 91). He is so thankful to have found shelter that he enters “without caring to enquire into whose house [he has] intruded; without even wondering at the strange absence of master, mistress, or member of the family to welcome our arrival under their roof” (*TTD*, 91).

The house, Germaine later discovers, belongs to Mr. Dunross. In the meantime, in this “human dwelling-place”, Germaine finds himself in an odd situation: with “[t]he door [...] hospitably open” it appears that he is welcome as a guest and yet the “strange absence” of any host leaves him in an uncertain position in “the household [...] on whose privacy [he has] intruded” (*TTD*, 91-92). After discovering whose house they have entered, Germaine asks the

guide: ““Are we here [...] by permission of Mr. Dunross?”” (*TTD*, 92) Receiving no reply other than a blank look, Germaine observes: “The guide stares. If I had spoken to him in Greek or Hebrew, I could hardly have puzzled him more effectually.” (*TTD*, 92)

The reason for the guide’s inability to understand Germaine’s simple inquiry lies in the fact that, in Shetland, the terms “host” and “guest” are not, necessarily, opposed. The chapter in which the exchange between the guide and Germaine takes place is significantly titled “Shetland Hospitality” and it is precisely the locality of the hospitality which is at stake in the scene. This is emphasized in the chapter following “Shetland Hospitality”: “The Darkened Room”. It is in this chapter we, as well as Germaine, are first introduced to Dunross. Although, on meeting the two strangers in his home, Dunross politely says to them ““I bid you welcome, gentleman, to my house””, Germaine feels uncomfortable: “we naturally attempt to apologise for our intrusion. Our host defeats the attempt at the outset, by making an apology on his own behalf.” (*TTD*, 93) Germaine adds:

My uneasy sense of committing an intrusion on him steadily increases, in spite of his courteous welcome [...] I assure him that it is only within the last few moments that my travelling companion and I have become aware of the liberty which our guide has taken in introducing us, on his sole responsibility, to the house. Mr. Dunross looks at me, as if he, like the guide, failed entirely to understand what my scruples and excuses mean. After a while the truth dawns on him (*TTD*, 93).

The “truth” which “dawns” on Dunross is that both his and the guide’s actions have been lost in translation. Dunross explains:

We are so used here to our Shetland hospitality [...] that we are slow to understand the hesitation which a stranger feels in taking advantage of it. Your guide is in no respect to blame, gentleman. Every house in these islands [...] has its Guest’s Chamber, always kept ready for occupation. When you travel my way, you come here as a matter of course; you stay here as long as you like; and, when you go away, I only do my duty as a good Shetlander in accompanying you on the first stage of your journey to bid you Godspeed. The customs of centuries past elsewhere, are modern customs here. I beg of you to give my servant all the directions which are necessary to your comfort, just as freely as you could give them in your own house. (*TTD*, 93-4)

Although Dunross calls Germaine “my guest” and offers his “Guest’s Chamber” for Germaine to stay in until he decides to leave, because he is encouraged to act as if it is his

“own house” he is not received as a “guest”, as such, but rather, as if he is the “host”.

Germaine’s liminal position within Dunross’s home – as both host and guest and neither host nor guest – is emblematic of his relationship to his own name and his position as the narrator of the text.

Germaine’s biological father’s surname is never revealed in the text. “Germaine” is in fact his step-father’s surname, and Germaine only appropriates it as a condition of him inheriting his step-father’s fortune. The word “germain(e)” in French means “full”, or “first”, and is used to refer to children born of the same parents, or more generally any closely related member of a family, such as cousins. After its adoption into the English language, “germain(e)” was altered to “german”, without a capital “G”. Like its French equivalent, the Anglicized version of “germain(e)”, means “closely akin”. One would say, for instance, “brother-german”, “german-sister” or “cousin-german”.⁷³ This form of the word “german”, however, is taken from the same Latin root as the more familiar “German” – with a capital “G” – denoting a native of Germany. Therefore, the fact that, as an adopted name, Germaine’s surname does not fully belong to him is reinforced by the dual meanings of “Germain(e)”, as well as its French origin. Indeed, Germaine is at once “german” and “German”; that is, his adopted name of “Germaine” makes him at once a close relation, who is also an outsider: a foreigner at home, a stranger to his name.

The first section of *The Two Destinies*, entitled “The Prelude”, frames the main narrative (“The Story: from the manuscript of George Germaine”). The first chapter of “The Prelude” is entitled “The Guest Writes the History of the Dinner-Party” and, as the sub-title implies, describes a dinner party hosted by Germaine and his wife Mary. “The Guest’s” name is never revealed in the novel, however. We know only that he is “a citizen of The United States, visiting England with his wife” – his wife also remaining nameless (*TTD*, 185). At the

⁷³ Scott uses the phrase “[t]wo cousins-german” in *The Bride of Lammermoor* (Scott, 228).

very beginning of *The Two Destinies*, then, a writer signing himself “the guest” is the author of the prefatory narrative, and he makes a point of distinguishing American hospitality from its English variety:

In America, and (as I hear) on the continent of Europe also, when your host invites you to dine at a given hour, you pay him the compliment of arriving punctually at his house. In England alone, the incomprehensible and discourteous custom prevails of keeping the host and the dinner waiting for half an hour or more – without any assignable reason, and without any better excuse than the purely formal apology that is implied in the words, “Sorry to be late.”⁷⁴ (*TTD*, 2)

However, because “the guest’s” “little narrative” is enclosed within the supplementary framing narrative of “The Prelude” – that is, positioned at once inside and outside the story – it is also situated as a guest itself, as opposed to the “host” of the main text: Germaine’s story (*TTD*, 185). At the dinner party, Germaine is referred to as the “host” three times by the “American guest” (*TTD*, 1-2). The repetition of the term “host” reinforces the symbolic position of Germaine’s main narrative as the “host”, as opposed to the metonymically named “American guest’s” chapter, which figures as its narrative “guest”. However, because of the instability inherent within the host-guest opposition it is not as straightforward as this. The American “guest” is always already a host; just as the English host is himself also a guest.

In fact, whilst Germaine’s narrative is meant to be the host, it is the “American guest” who publishes the story, and it is his supplementary chapters that begin and end the novel, enclosing Germaine’s story within his own signature. Like the name that does and does not belong to him, Germaine’s manuscript is not simply the “host” narrative because it is also housed, as a “guest”, within the “American guest’s” narrative. But because the “American

⁷⁴ In the texts which immediately succeed *The Two Destinies*, the novella *The Haunted Hotel*, published in 1878, and his novel *The Fallen Leaves*, the subject of “American hospitality” is again alluded to. In *The Haunted Hotel*, the narrator writes: “The Americans are not only the most hospitable people to be found on the face of the earth – they are (under certain conditions) the most patient and good-tempered people as well”; see Wilkie Collins, *The Haunted Hotel*, in Wilkie Collins, *Miss or Mrs? – The Haunted Hotel – The Guilty River*, ed. Norman Page and Toru Sasaki (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 168. In *The Fallen Leaves* Collins again draws on the differences between English and American hospitality: “The virtue of hospitality [...] seems to have become a form in England. In America, when a new acquaintance says, ‘Come and see me,’ he means it. When he says it here, in nine cases out of ten he looks unaffectedly astonished if you are fool enough to take him at his word”; see Wilkie Collins, *The Fallen Leaves* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1994), 55.

guest's" name is not revealed – that he is known only as the “American guest” – means that he also does and does not sign the sections of the novel which should bear his authorial signature; a fact making him, like Germaine, simultaneously host and guest in his own narrative and the story more generally.

It is possible to see a parallel between Collins's deconstruction of the host/guest binary opposition, which is evident throughout his oeuvre, and the critical perception of the late Collins. Indeed, to describe the late Collins as at once host and guest would be to neatly summarize his liminal position within Collins's oeuvre as a whole. On the one hand, Collins, as the author of the later fiction, can be seen as the host of the texts. On the other hand, because of the later fiction's perceived inferiority compared to the earlier texts, the late Collins is deemed an unwelcome guest, who intrudes upon the writing of the “true” or “genuine” Collins. Yet, as I have discussed in this and the previous chapter, there is a sense in which, from the beginning, Collins – even the “central” Collins – is always already *at once* host and guest; not least in terms of his name and his signature, which both signs and does not sign his texts, and which simultaneously anticipates his death and survives him.

The character of Miserrimus Dexter in *The Law and the Lady*, a novel bearing the late Collins's signature, is often seen as a fictional double of Collins. As Lonoff points out, “Dexter shares a surprising number of his author's tastes and idiosyncrasies. Like Collins, he fancies himself a gourmet, dresses eccentrically, finds women irresistible, combines a talent for painting with a talent for writing.”⁷⁵ (Lonoff, 166) Unlike Collins, Dexter is born without legs and because of his deformity, as well as his unbalanced mental state, he is depicted as monstrous: “I believe that monster's madness is infectious”, Valeria's clerk Benjamin

⁷⁵ In addition, Casey Cothran observes, Dexter “is the author of many events of the narrative”: “his actions may be said to most closely resemble those of detective novelist. He describes himself as an artist, he manipulates information, he tells stories, urging his listeners to draw certain conclusions and to overlook others, withholding the truth for as long as possible”; see Casey Cothran, “Mysterious Bodies: Deception and Detection in Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady* and *The Moonstone*”, *Victorians Institute Journal* 34 (2006): 193-214 (205). Bourne Taylor also observes another connection between Collins and his fictional creation: “‘Dexter’ is also a pun on ‘writer.’” (Bourne Taylor, Introduction, 424)

states, after she returns from visiting Dexter.⁷⁶ In this respect, Dexter's monstrosity means that he is not merely, as Peters believes, "an author-surrogate in a generalized sense" (Peters, 374). Rather, Dexter is also, more specifically, an "author-surrogate" for the common depiction of the late Collins, who is regarded as a monstrous Other. The future of Collins studies depends upon critics welcoming this monstrous, Other Collins; a figure hitherto situated on the very threshold of his canon, at once host and guest and neither host nor guest, awaiting the critical hospitality afforded to his earlier authorial self.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Wilkie Collins, *The Law and the Lady*, ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor (1992; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 319; henceforth *LL*. Dexter is also at one point described by the narrator as "looking [...] like a monstrous frog" (*LL*, 259).

⁷⁷ For Derrida, "the future is necessarily monstrous": "A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would already be a predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow. All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the monstrous *arrivant*, to welcome it, that is, to accord hospitality to that which is absolutely foreign or strange, but also, one must add, to try to domesticate it, that is, to make it part of the household and have it assume the habits, to make us assume new habits"; see Jacques Derrida, "Passages – from Traumatism to Promise", trans. Peggy Kamuf, in Jacques Derrida, *Points...: Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 372-95 (387).

CONCLUSION

Come back and be dead, Come back and be dead!¹

Death-in-Life answered, *I am coming*.²

This thesis began with a Barthesian paradox: the seemingly contradictory belief that the author is, from the beginning, at once dead and alive. In this impossible but necessary condition, Barthes argues, the author is always already sentenced to death; yet, at the same time, resurrected, returned to life. As I have shown in terms of both Dickens and Collins, however – who fashion their authorial identities upon a dual movement of death and resurrection – Barthes’s paradoxical ideas on authorship are not as illogical as may appear. Like Barthes, it seems, Collins and Dickens implicitly understood not only that the author is “dead” but, also, that “the Author may [...] come back in the Text” as a ghostly host and/or guest, resurrected by themselves and through the readers and critics of their work (*FWT*, 161).

Dickens’s and Collins’s conception of authorship also moves beyond the Barthesian paradigm, however. For example, while Barthes believes that the author’s identity is inherently divided, that it is situated upon the threshold separating life and death, he also maintains that traditional literary and philosophical criticism insists upon the unity of the author’s subjectivity: “The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* ‘confiding’ in us.” (*DOA*, 143, original emphasis) However, as the analysis of Dickens’s and Collins’s authorial identities in this study has shown, Barthes is mistaken in this belief. Indeed, this thesis has been an attempt to

¹ *OMF*, 279.

² *Armada*, 13, original emphasis.

draw together the ways in which Dickens's and Collins's authorial identities are constructed upon an essential duality, not only by critics – including those writing in the nineteenth century – but also by themselves. The picture which emerges throughout this study is that Dickens's and Collins's authorial identities are marked by a profound sense of division, a fracture which calls into question such a supposedly stable and unified concept as an authorial identity. Rather than signalling a “crisis” within their authorial identities, however, this very division constitutes it.

For Dickens and Collins, this split within their authorial identities is in part due to the distinction made between their earlier and later authorial selves, a distinction which, in both cases, is created as much by the authors themselves as by critics writing about their work. In this sense, rather than traditional literary and philosophical criticism asserting that a given text or corpus reveals “the voice of a single person, the *author* ‘confiding’ in us”, it instead points to the fact that the authorial subject has long been considered as doubled and divided. There are marked differences between the two authors, however. On the one hand, the late Dickens mourns the passing of his earlier authorial self in the readings, and attempts to reconnect and communicate with this sundered half of his authorial identity in *Our Mutual Friend*. On the other hand, Collins strives to survive his death by living on in a signature that continually escapes his full possession; a signature which, for many critics, is effaced from his later work, yet remains hospitably open for those welcoming the coming of the Other Collins. Despite such differences, however, this thesis points to the ways in which each writer enacts a species of authorial resurrection, both for themselves and for readers of their fiction.

More generally, the analysis of Dickens's and Collins's authorial identities offered in this study also illuminates an implicit, yet nevertheless underexplored, aspect of Barthes's work on authorship; namely, that, in addition to being at once dead and alive, the author is also a figure to be mourned; whether it is by readers, critics, or, as in the case of Dickens, the

author himself. While Barthes (especially in his seminal essay “The Death of the Author”) would appear to intimate that one is always already in mourning for the figure of the author, he does not state this explicitly. Instead, Barthes speaks of the ways in which readers “need” and “‘*desire*’ the author” who, in turn, “needs” and “desires” his or her readers (*POT*, 27, original emphasis). For Barthes, as Burke puts it, “the author will reappear as a desire of the reader’s, a spectre spirited back into existence by the critic himself” (Burke, 30). However, while this reciprocal “need” and “desire” on the part of author and reader does not necessarily preclude the work of mourning, Barthes’s failure to address the issue of mourning directly limits the usefulness of his work upon authorship, at least in terms of the present study.³ Indeed, as this thesis illustrates, there is an essential link between memory, mourning, and authorship, and, in terms of Dickens and Collins, it profoundly affects our understanding of their authorial identities.

In this respect, the theories of Derrida are especially useful in understanding the construction of Dickens’s and Collins’s authorial identities. As outlined in this thesis, Derrida’s concern is not simply with the author’s “death” or his or her resurrection. Rather, as Royle points out, “Derrida is in fact obsessed with the *life* of the author”: “He is fascinated by the enigmatic nature of autobiography, by the question of survival or ‘living on’” (Royle, *Jacques Derrida*, 7, original emphasis). For Derrida, an essential element of “survival or ‘living on’” is what he describes as “the work of mourning”, which, he claims, “is not one kind of work among others. It is work itself, work in general.” (*Specters*, 97) This is evident in Derrida’s interest in the ways in which an author’s death is anticipated by the name and signature. Names and signatures, Derrida argues, are nothing other than acts of mourning and of memory, containing within them the possibility of a future resurrection, but only on the understanding that they are always already a death sentence. As the analysis of Collins’s

³ “I believe desire is affirmation, and consequently that mourning is itself affirmation as well”; see Jacques Derrida, “Dialanguages”, trans. Peggy Kamuf, in Jacques Derrida, *Points...: Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 132-55 (143); henceforth “Dialanguages”.

work in this study demonstrates, he is of the same opinion as Derrida. Like Derrida, for Collins the author is at once dead and alive, not merely through the “needs” or “desires” of his or her readers, but also through his or her name and signature, which never quite belongs to the bearer, and is, from the beginning, in memory of his or her passing.

Derrida’s work also does much to elucidate our understanding of the texts signed by the late Collins. While Collins could not have envisaged the extent to which after his death critics would divorce the later work from the novels of his “central” period, he is, in a similar vein to Derrida, attentive to the inherent ghostliness of writing; that it offers, in some sense, a resurrection or reawakening of the Other, even within oneself. In the case of *The Two Destinies*, Collins appears to acknowledge that writing is by necessity given over to the Other. Consequently, however, this sense of Otherness leads us to conclude that such an authorial ghostliness is not solely confined to his later work, but, instead, pervades his oeuvre. Indeed, this haunting sense of Otherness is evident not only in the instances of dictation which occur in *The Two Destinies* but also in his return to the four “central” sensation novels when he adapted them for the stage. In this species of authorial return, Collins makes a self-conscious choice to disconnect himself from his literary past, from the texts which make up his authorial signature. Yet, in doing so, Collins shows that these texts, which are at once central and marginal to his oeuvre, always already bore the signature of the Other Collins.

The death and resurrection of Dickens’s authorial self provides a different critical challenge to that of Collins’s. Nevertheless, like Collins’s, Dickens’s authorial identity is haunted by a sense of Otherness, in which the division of his earlier and later authorial selves is paramount. Derrida’s theories are equally helpful in enabling us to understand the ways in which Dickens unites the acts of mourning and memory to the concept of authorship. In his examination of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Bowen draws on Derrida’s work on mourning. For

Bowen, “the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of mourning – is one that *The Old Curiosity Shop* constantly attempts to arouse in its readers” (Bowen, 143). As I have argued in this thesis, however, “the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of mourning” extends further than the readers of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and can be seen to include Dickens’s entire oeuvre, and even Dickens himself. This is especially evident in Dickens’s public readings, in which he contains his earlier authorial self within each performance, like a crypt, where it lives on within his performing body, at once signalling a resurrection and an endless mourning.

Our Mutual Friend, Dickens’s last completed novel, is a key text in helping us to understand how the act of mourning defines his authorial identity. In this novel, Dickens not only sublimates the cryptic internalization of his earlier authorial identity displayed in the public readings but also, as if it were a literary reply to his former self, offers an attempt to open the lines of communication with *Oliver Twist*, a text signed by “the young Dickens”. However, the quasi-postal correspondence which Dickens sets up in *Our Mutual Friend*, between the early and late halves of his authorial identity, at once both fails and succeeds. Just as it is always possible that a letter cannot reach its intended destination, *Our Mutual Friend*, like any dispatch to one’s self, at once arrives and does not arrive. A type of literary dead letter marked by absence and death, *Our Mutual Friend* calls into question the very nature of return – authorial or otherwise – and shows that while the public readings strived to resurrect “the young Dickens” such a resurrection can only ever be partial, incomplete.

The public readings and the intertextual or postal correspondence between *Our Mutual Friend* and *Oliver Twist* – or between the late Dickens and the early Dickens – are analogous to what Derrida terms the “terrible logic of mourning” (“Dialanguages”, 152). For Derrida, “[m]ourning is the interiorisation of the dead other, but it is also the contrary. Hence the impossibility of completing one’s mourning” (“Dialanguages, 152). Derrida adds: “I

cannot complete my mourning for everything I lose, because I want to keep it, and at the same time, what I do best is to mourn, is to lose it, because by mourning, I keep it inside me.” (“Dialanguages”, 152) Like his public readings, with *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens remained faithful to this “terrible logic of mourning”; that is, in order for his earlier authorial self to survive, Dickens was aware that it had to be at once resurrected and condemned to death. Therefore, while his acts of mourning were incomplete or unsuccessful – and Dickens may well have been aware of their futility – they can, by the same token, be seen as efforts to keep alive the memory of his former authorial self, the only means by which “the young Dickens” could live on.

T.S. Eliot remarked of Collins and Dickens that “the work of the two men ought to be studied side by side” (Eliot, 461). For Eliot, this is because “a comparative study of their novels can do much to illuminate the question of the difference between the dramatic and the melodramatic in fiction” (Eliot, 461). As I have shown in this thesis – which, as Eliot directed, has examined Collins’s and Dickens’s fiction “side by side” – “a comparative study” of the two writers’ work is instructive in ways that Eliot did not appear to envisage. In particular, Dickens’s and Collins’s fiction reveals crucial and intimate connections between resurrection and death, memory and mourning; not only within the narratives of the texts themselves, but also in relation to their authorial identities. The author was dead, to begin with; but, Dickens and Collins show how the author can live on, resurrected as a memory to be mourned, today and in the future.

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