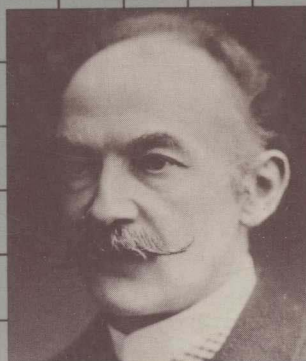
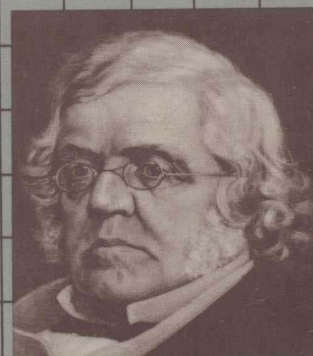
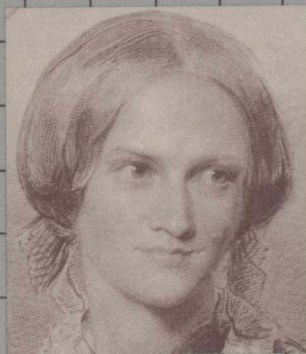
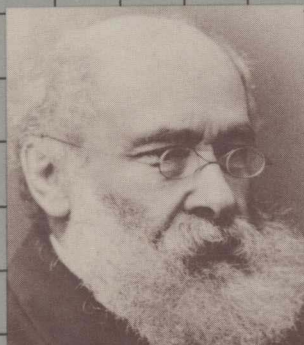


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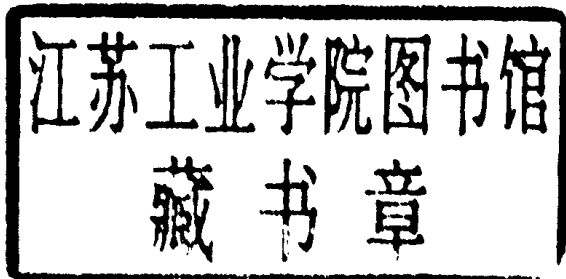
Victorian Fiction



THE CRITICAL COSMOS SERIES

Victorian Fiction

Edited and with an introduction
by *HAROLD BLOOM*
Sterling Professor of the Humanities
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Editor's Note

This book aims to present a comprehensive collection of the best criticism available upon Victorian prose fiction, conceived here as covering the half century from 1830 to 1880, ending with the late Victorian novelist Thomas Hardy. A companion Critical Cosmos volume on *Edwardian and Georgian Fiction 1880–1914* can be said to form a natural unit with this volume.

The critical essays are arranged here, as far as is possible, in the order of the dates of the novelists' births. I am grateful to Marena Fisher and Susan Laity for their erudite assistance in editing this volume.

My introduction begins with a discussion of the relationship between Thackeray the narrator and Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*, and then passes to what Ruskin called "stage fire" in Dickens, particularly manifested in two of his masterpieces, *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*. Following is an analysis of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as Byronic "Northern romances." George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, perhaps *Bleak House*'s true rival as the great novel of the age, is read here as a romance of the Protestant will. My introduction then concludes with exegeses of two of Thomas Hardy's strongest novels, *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Studies of the individual novelists begin with an overview of the earlier political novels of Edward Bulwer-Lytton, seen by Elliot Engel and Margaret F. King as belated instances of High Romanticism, which enters again in Donald D. Stone's essay on Disraeli's Byronism.

Catherine Gallagher closely reads Mrs. Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, finding in it the need for a new form to embody the dialectic of free will and determinism. Thackeray receives two considerations, with Jack P. Rawlins emphasizing authorial self-awareness of the narrative voice and George Levine expounding Thackeray's realistic polemic against the fancifulness of Sir Walter Scott.

The great central voice of Victorian fiction, that of Charles Dickens, is studied in Garrett Stewart's analysis of irony in the first chapter of *Pickwick Papers*—Dickens's first major fiction. John Carey considers how Dickens energetically represents violence while John Kucich defends the novelist's much-maligned happy endings by assigning them to the realm of fairy tales.

Michael Riffaterre, studying Trollope's rhetoric, gives us a good sense of the vast scope of this novelist's writing, a sense confirmed by George Levine's account of Trollope's insights into love and marriage in *Can You Forgive Her?*

Wuthering Heights and *Jane Eyre* are coupled in Tony Tanner's essay on modes of narrative identity in the Brontë sisters, while Jan B. Gordon first reads Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and then compares it to *Wuthering Heights*, in order to show how Anne attempted to individuate herself against her sister's fiercer vision.

George Eliot, Dickens's closest rival in aesthetic eminence, is shown by Barry V. Qualls to have been questing for a narrative strategy that might combine John Bunyan and William Wordsworth. In parallel ways, Daniel Cottom compares romance and realist elements in Eliot, and T. B. Tomlinson shows differences and similarities in the representation of "spiritual dread" between Eliot and some later novelists: Hardy (in *Jude*), Conrad (in *Victory*), and James (in *The Awkward Age*).

Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* is rather surprisingly shown by Valentine Cunningham to have been an industrial reform novel in the context of its own time. In D. A. Miller's lively reading of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, we receive another surprise with the critic's revelation of the sexual strategies that pervade this novel.

George MacDonald, fantasist and Christian moralist, is surveyed by Humphrey Carpenter, who emphasizes both the violence and the religiosity of the fairy tales. A wonderfully different moralist, comic and secular, George Meredith is shown by Rachel M. Brownstein to have inverted the tradition of Samuel Richardson by concentrating upon the curious hero rather than the heroine of *The Egoist* and to have recreated the real-life model for *Diana of the Crossways*.

Lewis Carroll's Alice is uncovered by Nina Auerbach as an unusual representation of a Victorian female child, since she is so markedly and delightfully aggressive. Thomas L. Jeffers studies Samuel Butler's polemical reactions to the crucial and controversial evolutionary ideas of his age in the brilliant *Way of All Flesh*.

This book concludes with J. Hillis Miller's now classic account of Thomas Hardy's rhetorical and psychological detachment in his fiction and with Jean R. Brooks's reading of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as a dramatic conflict between personal and impersonal elements in Tess's distraught being.

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Introduction

I

G. K. Chesterton, saluting Thackeray as the master of "allusive irrelevancy," charmingly admitted that "Thackeray worked entirely by diffuseness." No celebrator of form in the novel has ever cared for Thackeray, who, like his precursor Fielding, always took his own time in his writing. Thackeray particularly follows Fielding, who was the sanest of novelists, in judging his own characters as a magistrate might judge them, a magistrate who was also a parodist and a vigilant exposé of social pretensions. Charlotte Brontë, Thackeray's fierce admirer, in her preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre* said that he "resembles Fielding as an eagle does a vulture." This unfortunate remark sounds odd now, when no critic would place Thackeray anywhere near Fielding in aesthetic eminence. Nor would any critic wish to regard Thackeray as Dickens's nearest contemporary rival, a once fashionable comparison. Thackeray, we all agree, is genial but flawed, and until recently he did not have much following among either novelists or critics. Trollope and Ruskin sometimes seem, respectively, the last vital novelist and great critic to regard Thackeray with the utmost seriousness. Splendid as he is, Thackeray is now much dimmed.

Though *Henry Esmond* is a rhetorical triumph in the genre of the historical novel, *Vanity Fair*, itself partly historical, is clearly Thackeray's most memorable achievement. Rereading it, one encounters again two superb characters, Becky Sharp and William Makepeace Thackeray. One regrets that Becky, because of the confusion of realms that would be involved, could not exercise her charms upon the complaisant Thackeray, who amiably described his heroine's later career as resembling the slitherings of a mermaid. Anyway, Thackeray probably shared the regret, and what I like best in *Vanity Fair* is how much Thackeray likes Becky. Any reader who

does not like Becky is almost certainly not very likeable herself or himself. Such an observation may not seem like literary criticism to a formalist or some other kind of plumber, but I would insist that Becky's vitalism is the critical center in any strong reading of *Vanity Fair*.

Becky, of course, is famously a bad woman, selfish and endlessly designing, rarely bothered by a concern for truth, morals, or the good of the community. But Thackeray, without extenuating his principal personage, situates her in a fictive cosmos where nearly all the significant characters are egomaniacs, and none of them is as interesting and attractive as the energetic Becky. Her will to live has a desperate gusto, which is answered by the gusto of the doubtlessly fictive Thackeray who is the narrator, and who shares many of the weaknesses that he zestfully portrays in his women and men. Perhaps we do not so much like Becky because Thackeray likes her, as we like Becky because we like that supreme fiction, Thackeray the narrator. Sometimes I wish that he would stop teasing me, and always I wish that his moralizings were in a class with those of the sublime George Eliot (she would not have agreed, as she joined Trollope and Charlotte Brontë in admiring Thackeray exorbitantly). But never, in *Vanity Fair*, do I wish Thackeray the storyteller to clear out of the novel. If you are going to tour *Vanity Fair*, then your best guide is its showman, who parodies it yet always acknowledges that he himself is one of its prime representatives.

Does Thackeray overstate the conventional case against Becky in the knowing and deliberate way in which Fielding overstated the case against Tom Jones? This was the contention of A. E. Dyson in his study of irony, *The Crazy Fabric* (1965). Dyson followed the late Gordon Ray, most genial and Thackerayan of Thackerayans, in emphasizing how devious a work *Vanity Fair* is, as befits a narrator who chose to go on living in *Vanity Fair*, however uneasily. Unlike Fielding, Thackeray sometimes yields to mere bitterness, but he knew, as Fielding did, that the bitter are never great, and Becky refuses to become bitter. An excessively moral reader might observe that Becky's obsessive lying is the cost of her transcending of bitterness, but the cost will not seem too high to the imaginative reader, who deserves Becky and who is not as happy with her foil, the good but drab Amelia. Becky is hardly as witty as Sir John Falstaff, but then whatever other fictive personage is? As Falstaff seems, in one aspect, to be the child of the Wife of Bath, so Becky comes closer to being Falstaff's daughter than any other female character in British fiction. Aside from lacking all of the Seven Deadly Virtues, Becky evidently carries living on her wits to extremes in whoredom and murder, but without losing our sympathy and our continued pleasure in her company.

I part from Dyson when he suggests that Becky is *Vanity Fair*'s Volpone, fit scourge for its pretensions and its heartlessness, of which she shares only the latter. Becky, like her not-so-secret sharer, Thackeray the narrator, I judge to be too good for *Vanity Fair*, though neither of them has the undivided inclination to escape so vile a scene, as we might wish

them to do. Becky's most famous reflection is "I think I could be a good woman if I had five thousand a year." This would go admirably as the refrain of one of those ballads that Brecht kept lifting from Kipling, and helps us to see that Becky Sharp fits better into Brecht's world than into Ben Jonson's. What is most winning about her is that she is never morose. Her high-spirited courage does us good, and calls into question the aesthetics of our morality. Thackeray never allows us to believe that we live anywhere except in *Vanity Fair*, and we can begin to see that the disreputable Brecht and the reputable Thackeray die one another's lives, live one another's deaths, to borrow a formulation that W. B. Yeats was too fond of repeating.

Thackeray, a genial humorist, persuades the reader that *Vanity Fair* is a comic novel, when truly it is as dark as Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*, or his *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. The abyss beckons in nearly every chapter of *Vanity Fair*, and a fair number of the characters vanish into it before the book is completed. Becky survives, being indomitable, but both she and Thackeray the narrator seem rather battered as the novel wanes into its eloquent and terribly sad farewell:

Ah! *Vanitas Vanitatum!* Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?—Come children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.

II

Courage would be the critical virtue most required if anyone were to attempt an essay that might be called "The Limitations of Shakespeare." Tolstoy, in his most outrageous critical performance, more or less tried just that, with dismal results, and even Ben Jonson might not have done much better, had he sought to extend his ambivalent obiter dicta on his great friend and rival. Nearly as much courage, or foolhardiness, is involved in discoursing on the limitations of Dickens, but the young Henry James had a critical gusto that could carry him through every literary challenge. Reviewing *Our Mutual Friend* in 1865, James exuberantly proclaimed that "*Bleak House* was forced; *Little Dorrit* was labored; the present work is dug out as with a spade and pickaxe." At about this time, reviewing *Drum-Taps*, James memorably dismissed Whitman as an essentially prosaic mind seeking to lift itself, by muscular exertion, into poetry. To reject some of the major works of the strongest English novelist and the greatest American poet, at about the same moment, is to set standards for critical audacity that no one since has been able to match, even as no novelist since has equalled Dickens, nor any poet, Walt Whitman.

James was at his rare worst in summing up Dickens's supposedly principal inadequacy:

Such scenes as this are useful in fixing the limits of Mr. Dickens's insight. Insight is, perhaps, too strong a word; for we are con-

vinced that it is one of the chief conditions of his genius not to see beneath the surface of things. If we might hazard a definition of his literary character, we should, accordingly, call him the greatest of superficial novelists. We are aware that this definition confines him to an inferior rank in the department of letters which he adorns; but we accept this consequence of our proposition. It were, in our opinion, an offence against humanity to place Mr. Dickens among the greatest novelists. For, to repeat what we have already intimated, he has created nothing but figure. He has added nothing to our understanding of human character. He is a master of but two alternatives: he reconciles us to what is commonplace, and he reconciles us to what is odd. The value of the former service is questionable; and the manner in which Mr. Dickens performs it sometimes conveys a certain impression of charlatanism. The value of the latter service is incontestable, and here Mr. Dickens is an honest, an admirable artist.

This can be taken literally, and then transvalued: to see truly the surface of things, to reconcile us at once to the commonplace and the odd—these are not minor gifts. In 1860, John Ruskin, the great seer of the surface of things, the charismatic illuminator of the commonplace and the odd together, had reached a rather different conclusion from that of the young Henry James, five years before James's brash rejection:

The essential value and truth of Dickens's writings have been unwisely lost sight of by many thoughtful persons merely because he presents his truth with some colour of caricature. Unwisely, because Dickens's caricature, though often gross, is never mistaken. Allowing for his manner of telling them, the things he tells us are always true. I wish that he could think it right to limit his brilliant exaggeration to works written only for public amusement; and when he takes up a subject of high national importance, such as that which he handled in *Hard Times*, that he would use severer and more accurate analysis. The usefulness of that work (to my mind, in several respects, the greatest he has written) is with many persons seriously diminished because Mr. Bounderby is a dramatic monster, instead of a characteristic example of a worldly master; and Stephen Blackpool a dramatic perfection, instead of a characteristic example of an honest workman. But let us not lose the use of Dickens's wit and insight, because he chooses to speak in a circle of stage fire. He is entirely right in his main drift and purpose in every book he has written; and all of them, but especially *Hard Times*, should be studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions. They will find much that is partial, and, because partial, apparently unjust; but if they ex-

amine all the evidence on the other side, which Dickens seems to overlook, it will appear, after all their trouble, that his view was the finally right one, grossly and sharply told.

To say of Dickens that he chose "to speak in a circle of stage fire" is exactly right, since Dickens is the greatest actor among novelists, the finest master of dramatic projection. A superb stage performer, he never stops performing in his novels, which is not the least of his many Shakespearean characteristics. Martin Price usefully defines some of these as "his effortless invention, his brilliant play of language, the scope and density of his imagined world." I like also Price's general comparison of Dickens to the strongest satirist in the language, Swift, a comparison that Price shrewdly turns into a confrontation:

But the confrontation helps us to define differences as well: Dickens is more explicit, more overtly compassionate, insisting always upon the perversions of feeling as well as of thought. His outrage is of the same consistency as his generous celebration, the satirical wit of the same copious extravagance as the comic elaborations. Dickens's world is alive with things that snatch, lurch, teeter, thrust, leer; it is the animate world of Netherlandish genre painting or of Hogarth's prints, where all space is a field of force, where objects vie or intrigue with each other, where every human event spills over into the things that surround it. This may become the typically crowded scene of satire, where persons are reduced to things and things to matter in motion; or it may pulsate with fierce energy and noisy feeling. It is different from Swift; it is the distinctive Dickensian plenitude, which we find again in his verbal play, in his great array of vivid characters, in his massed scenes of feasts or public declamations. It creates rituals as compelling as the resuscitation of Rogue Riderhood, where strangers participate solemnly in the recovery of a spark of life, oblivious for the moment of the unlovely human form it will soon inhabit.

That animate, Hogarthian world, "where all space is a field of force," indeed is a plenitude and it strikes me that Price's vivid description suggests Rabelais rather than Swift as a true analogue. Dickens, like Shakespeare in one of many aspects and like Rabelais, is as much carnival as stage fire, a kind of endless festival. The reader of Dickens stands in the midst of a festival, which is too varied, too multiform, to be taken in even by innumerable readings. Something always escapes our ken; Ben Jonson's sense of being "rammed with life" is exemplified more even by Dickens than by Rabelais, in that near-Shakespearean plenitude that is Dickens's peculiar glory.

Is it possible to define that plenitude narrowly enough so as to con-

ceptualize it for critical use, though by "conceptualize" one meant only a critical metaphor? Shakespearean representation is no touchstone for Dickens or for anyone else, since above all modes of representation it turns upon an inward changing brought about by characters listening to themselves speak. Dickens cannot do that. His villains are gorgeous, but there are no Iagos or Edmunds among them. The severer, more relevant test, which Dickens must fail, though hardly to his detriment, is Falstaff, who generates not only his own meaning, but meaning in so many others besides, both on and off the page. Probably the severest test is Shylock, most Dickensian of Shakespeare's characters, since we cannot say of Dickens's Shylock, Fagin, that there is much Shakespearean about him at all. Fagin is a wonderful grotesque, but the winds of will are not stirred in him, while they burn on hellishly forever in Shylock.

Carlyle's injunction, to work in the will, seems to have little enough place in the cosmos of the Dickens characters. I do not say this to indicate a limitation, or even a limit, nor do I believe that the will to live or the will to power is ever relaxed in or by Dickens. But nothing is got for nothing, except perhaps in or by Shakespeare, and Dickens purchases his kind of plenitude at the expense of one aspect of the will. T. S. Eliot remarked that "Dickens's characters are real because there is no one like them." I would modify that to "They are real because they are not like one another, though sometimes they are a touch more like some of us than like each other." Perhaps the will, in whatever aspect, can differ only in degree rather than in kind among us. The aesthetic secret of Dickens appears to be that his villains, heroes, heroines, victims, eccentrics, ornamental beings, do differ from one another *in the kinds of will that they possess*. Since that is hardly possible for us, as humans, it does bring about an absence in reality in and for Dickens. That is a high price to pay, but it is a good deal less than everything and Dickens got more than he paid for. We also receive a great deal more than we ever are asked to surrender when we read Dickens. That may indeed be his most Shakespearean quality, and may provide the critical trope I quest for in him. James and Proust hurt you more than Dickens does, and the hurt is the meaning, or much of it. What hurts in Dickens never has much to do with meaning, because there cannot be a poetics of pain where the will has ceased to be common or sadly uniform. Dickens really does offer a poetics of pleasure, which is surely worth our secondary uneasiness at his refusal to offer us any accurately mimetic representations of the human will. He writes always the book of the drives, which is why supposedly Freudian readings of him always fail so tediously. The conceptual metaphor he suggests in his representations of character and personality is neither Shakespearean mirror nor Romantic lamp, neither Rabelaisian carnival nor Fieldingesque open country. "Stage fire" seems to me perfect, for "stage" removes something of the reality of the will, yet only as modifier. The substantive remains "fire." Dickens is the poet of the fire of the drives, the true celebrant of Freud's myth of frontier concepts,

of that domain lying on the border between psyche and body, falling into matter, yet partaking of the reality of both.

III

If the strong writer be defined as one who confronts his own contingency, his own dependent relation on a precursor, then we can discover only a few writers after Homer and the Yahwist who are strong without that sense of contingency. These are the Great Originals, and they are not many; Shakespeare and Freud are among them and so is Dickens. Dickens, like Shakespeare and Freud, had no true precursors, or perhaps it might be more accurate to say he swallowed up Tobias Smollett rather as Shakespeare devoured Christopher Marlowe. Originality, or an authentic freedom from contingency, is Dickens's salient characteristic as an author. Since Dickens's influence has been so immense, even upon writers so unlikely as Dostoevsky and Kafka, we find it a little difficult now to see at first how overwhelmingly original he is.

Dickens now constitutes a facticity or contingency that no subsequent novelist can transcend or evade without the risk of self-maiming. Consider the difference between two masters of modern fiction, Henry James and James Joyce. Is not Dickens the difference? *Ulysses* comes to terms with Dickens, and earns the exuberance it manifests. Poldy is larger, I think, than any single figure in Dickens, but he has recognizably Dickensian qualities. Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors* has none, and is the poorer for it. Part of the excitement of *The Princess Casamassima* for us must be that, for once, James achieves a Dickensian sense of the outward life, a sense that is lacking even in *The Portrait of a Lady*, and that we miss acutely (at least I do) amidst even the most inward splendors of *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*.

The Personal History of David Copperfield, indeed the most personal and autobiographical of all Dickens's novels, has been so influential upon all subsequent portraits of the artist as a young man that we have to make a conscious effort to recover our appreciation of the book's fierce originality. It is the first therapeutic novel, in part written to heal the author's self, or at least to solace permanent anxieties incurred in childhood and youth. Freud's esteem for *David Copperfield* seems inevitable, even if it has led to a number of unfortunate readings within that unlikely compound oddly called "Freudian literary criticism."

Dickens's biographer Edgar Johnson has traced the evolution of *David Copperfield* from an abandoned fragment of autobiography, with its powerful but perhaps self-deceived declaration: "I do not write resentfully or angrily: for I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am." Instead of representing his own parents as being David Copperfield's, Dickens displaced them into the Micawbers, a change that purchased astonishing pathos and charm at the expense of avoiding a personal

pain that might have produced greater meaningfulness. But *David Copperfield* was, as Dickens said, his "favourite child," fulfilling his deep need to become his own father. Of no other book would he have said: "I seem to be sending some part of myself into the Shadowy World."

Kierkegaard advised us that "he who is willing to do the work gives birth to his own father," while Nietzsche even more ironically observed that "if one hasn't had a good father, then it is necessary to invent one." *David Copperfield* is more in the spirit of Kierkegaard's adage, as Dickens more or less makes himself David's father. David, an illustrious novelist, allows himself to narrate his story in the first person. A juxtaposition of the start and conclusion of the narrative may be instructive:

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a *Friday, at twelve o'clock at night*. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.

In consideration of the day and hour of my birth, it was declared by the nurse, and by some sage women in the neighbourhood who had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of our becoming personally acquainted, first, that I was destined to be unlucky in life; and secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits; both these gifts inevitably attaching, as they believed, to all unlucky infants of either gender, born towards the small hours on a Friday night.

I need say nothing here, on the first head, because nothing can show better than my history whether that prediction was verified or falsified by the result. On the second branch of the question, I will only remark, that unless I ran through that part of my inheritance while I was still a baby, I have not come into it yet. But I do not at all complain of having been kept out of this property; and if anybody else should be in the present enjoyment of it, he is heartily welcome to keep it.

And now, as I close my task, subduing my desire to linger yet, these faces fade away. But one face, shining on me like a Heavenly light by which I see all other objects, is above them and beyond them all. And that remains.

I turn my head, and see it, in its beautiful serenity, beside me.

My lamp burns low, and I have written far into the night; but the dear presence, without which I were nothing, bears me company.

O Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when realities are melting from me, like

the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward!

No adroit reader could prefer the last four paragraphs of *David Copperfield* to the first three. The high humor of the beginning is fortunately more typical of the book than the sugary conclusion. Yet the juxtaposition does convey the single rhetorical flaw in Dickens that matters, by which I do not mean the wild pathos that marks the death of Steerforth, or the even more celebrated career of the endlessly unfortunate Little Em'ly. If Dickens's image of voice or mode of representation is "stage fire," then his metaphors always will demand the possibility of being staged. Micawber, Uriah Heep, Steerforth in his life (not at the end) are all of them triumphs of stage fire, as are Peggotty, Murdstone, Betsey Trotwood, and even Dora Spenlow. But Agnes is a disaster, and that dreadful "pointing upward!" is not to be borne. You cannot stage Agnes, which would not matter except that she does represent the idealizing and self-mystifying side of David and so she raises the question, Can you, as a reader, stage David? How much stage fire got into him? Or, to be hopelessly reductive, has he a will, as Uriah Heep and Steerforth in their very different ways are wills incarnate?

If there is an aesthetic puzzle in the novel, it is why David has and conveys so overwhelming a sense of disordered suffering and early sorrow in his Murdstone phase, as it were, and before. Certainly the intensity of the pathos involved is out of all proportion to the fictive experience that comes through to the reader. Dickens both invested himself in and withdrew from David, so that something is always missing in the self-representation. Yet the will—to live, to interpret, to repeat, to write—survives and burgeons perpetually. Dickens's preternatural energy gets into David, and is at some considerable variance with the diffidence of David's apparent refusal to explore his own inwardness. What does mark Dickens's representation of David with stage fire is neither the excess of the early sufferings nor the tiresome idealization of the love for Agnes. It is rather the vocation of novelist, the drive to tell a story, particularly one's own story, that apparels David with the fire of what Freud called the drives.

Dickens's greatness in *David Copperfield* has little to do with the much more extraordinary strength that was to manifest itself in *Bleak House*, which can compete with *Clarissa*, *Emma*, *Middlemarch*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Women in Love*, and *Ulysses* for the eminence of being the inescapable novel in the language. *David Copperfield* is of another order, but it is the origin of that order, the novelist's account of how she or he burned through experience in order to achieve the Second Birth, into the will to narrate, the storyteller's destiny.

IV

Bleak House may not be "the finest literary work the nineteenth century produced in England," as Geoffrey Tillotson called it in 1946. A century