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THE INTERTEXTUAL QUEST(ION): DETECTION IN NEO-VICTORIAN REWRITINGS OF CHARLES DICKENS

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to the University of Kent/ Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3 or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

Signed ……………………………………………
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Abstract

This thesis concerns a body of contemporary novels which all use Charles Dickens's works as hypotext while also featuring the Victorian author amongst their cast of characters. In these novels, the Inimitable is either presented as a detective, or as a criminal figure, or both. Drawing upon both Detective Fiction and Neo-Victorian Studies, the present work shows how the neo-Dickensian novel (and neo-Victorianism at large) may be thought of in terms of a detective mode, which provides a framework that enables a renegotiation of intertextuality. Neo-Victorian fiction is fascinated with the emergence of the city as the site of modernity, of a shattered, threatened identity. From the crowded streets the figure of the *flâneur* emerges first, soon to be followed by that of the detective. Neo-Dickensian novels exhume the Victorian, or rather Dickensian London, to immerse their readers in this re-constructed past. The study of the relation to space and place draws upon Yi-Fu Tuan's theory (1977) but also Franco Moretti's (1998), which enables to see that in novels from the Antipodes, the topographical plots of the nineteenth century are reversed. The texts under study not only invest the Dickensian city but Dickens himself through the use of biofiction. If historians and biographers may be thought of as detectives of a kind, then neo-Victorian writers engaging in biofiction are detectives who distort, play with and question the historical facts that they encounter thereby revealing uncanny but also alternative plots. Neo-Victorianism creates its own criticism as it goes and thus challenges, teases its critics who have no choice but to try and go through with these riddles.

KEYWORDS:

Charles Dickens, Neo-Victorianism, Detection, Reading praxis, Intertextuality, Biofiction

Résumé

Cette thèse explore un corpus de romans contemporains qui ont en commun la réécriture de Charles Dickens, l'œuvre et l'homme. Dans ces romans, l'Inimitable apparait tantôt sous les traits du détective, tantôt sous ceux du criminel. Ces portraits de Dickens nous amènent à nous interroger sur l'usage des modalités de la détection dans les romans néo-Victoriens qui réécrivent l'auteur. Cette thèse vise à démontrer que la détection est partie intégrante du roman néo-Dickensien (et, par extension, du roman néo-Victorien), offrant une autre façon de concevoir la double structure temporelle caractéristique du genre ainsi que le rapport à l'intertextualité. Le premier chapitre offre une réflexion sur la lecture et la représentation de l'espace, en particulier, la ville, Londres, que l'on comprend ici non pas comme reflet de la réalité historique mais comme appropriation du Londres fictionnel de Dickens. Mon étude de la relation entre le lieu et l'espace s'appuie sur les théories de Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) et de Franco Moretti (1998). Ce dernier permet de voir comment les romans postcoloniaux réécrivent et renversent la topographie des romans victoriens. Se pose également la question de la biofiction. Si les historiens et biographes peuvent être considérés comme des sortes de détectives, les auteurs néo-Victoriens ayant recours à la biofiction sont des détectives qui déforment, remettent en question et jouent avec les faits historiques, ce qui les amène à créer des intrigues alternatives et inquiétantes. Le néo-Victorianisme créée sa propre critique au fur et à mesure, en défiant et taquinant les critiques qui eux n'ont guère d'autre choix que de plonger et démêler ces énigmes intertextuelles.

MOTS CLEFS :

Charles Dickens, Néo-Victorianisme, Détection, Lecture, Intertextualité, Biofiction

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A mon père, mon héros

Abbreviations

List of abbreviations used for both Victorian and neo-Victorian works studied at length in the dissertation (alphabetical order):

AE: Andersen's English, Sebastian Barry (London: Faber and Faber, 2010)

BH: Bleak House, Charles Dickens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1852] 2008)

D: Drood: A Novel, Dan Simmons (London: Quercus, 2009)

CPW: The Crimson Petal and the White, Michel Faber (Edinburgh: Canongate, [2002] 2003)

F: Fingersmith, Sarah Waters (London: Virago, [2002] 2011)

GBD: Girl in a Blue Dress, Gaynor Arnold (Birmingham: Tindal Street Press [2008], 2011)

GE: Great Expectations, Charles Dickens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1860] 2008)

JM: Jack Maggs, Peter Carey (London: Faber and Faber, 1997)

Letters: *The Letters of Charles Dickens: 1820-1870*, House, Charles Dickens, ed. by Madeline Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, 2nd edn., electronic edn., (Charlottesville, Virginia: InteLex Corp., 2001)

M: *The Moonstone*, Wilkie Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1868] 2008)

MED: The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Charles Dickens (London; New York: Penguin, [1870] 2012)

MP: Mister Pip, Lloyd Jones (New York: Dial Press, [2006] 2008)

SJ: Selected Journalism 1850-1870 (London; New York: Penguin, [1995] 1997)

W: Wanting, Richard Flanagan (Atlantic Books, London, [2008] 2010)

WW: The Woman in White, Wilkie Collins (London: Penguin, [1860] 2012)

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INTRODUCTION

'I have met Mr. Dickens, and this is not him.'

(Lloyd Jones 2008: 255)

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) certainly is the literary figure that most marked the nineteenth century in England, to the extent that his name is almost equated with the term 'Victorian'. His persistence today is still vividly felt, be it in literature, cinema, academia or other media. Neo-Victorian novels rewriting Dickens abound and often choose as hypotexts two novels in particular, *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). The former has a specific resonance for postcolonial writers as it participates in 'a vast history of speculation about and experience of Australia' (Said 1993: xv) while the incomplete character of the latter, 'defined as much by the half that [Dickens] did not write and by the half he did' (Orford 2019: 299) led numerous writers on the trace of the 'lost' narrative. The present dissertation deals with a specific body of contemporary neo-Victorian fictions which not only rewrite Dickens's texts but also Dickens himself. In all of the novels under study, Dickens is turned into a character (sometimes under the guise of avatars) or as a shadowy presence in the margins. However, the prime interest of this thesis does not lie in biofictions of Dickens *per se* – a work that has been done by Azure Engelbrecht's 2016 thesis *Neo-Victorian Dickens(es): The Hogarth/Dickens Circle and Recent Biofiction* – but rather in the way the neo-Victorian relation to the past and reading may be theorised in terms of detection. Apart from Lynn Shepherd's 2012 novel entitled *Tom-All-Alone's*, the novels under study cannot be said to be detective novels, yet they all assume a detective *mode* of writing and reading, a concept which shall be defined throughout the dissertation. I argue that this detective mode provides us with a framework for understanding the mechanisms of neo-Dickensian and neo-Victorian novels at large, especially their much commented upon double temporality (looking backward to look forward), as well as the relation with readers. The interest of detection in relation to neo-Victorianism has not gone entirely unnoticed, however no substantial study on the subject has been published yet. In fact, critics of neo-Victorian fiction often call upon notions that partake of detection and, at times, suggest that there is a 'detective game', but the relation between the two genres is rarely addressed as a primary subject.[1] This lack of interest might stem from a

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[1] For instance, Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben sees it as part of the generic 'mongrelisation' that is inherent to neo-Victorian fiction (2012: 37). Louisa Hadley acknowledges the presence of a detective trope in neo-Victorian fiction which she aligns with intertextual quest. Her chapter devoted to the detective only focuses on neo-Victorian fiction that also fully adopt the conventions of detective fiction, which she frames within historical narratives and historical recovery (2010: 60-61). Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz is perhaps the critic who comes closest

long prejudice against detective fiction, often considered as low-brow literature, a mere intellectual game as numerous critics of detective fiction deplore (Knight 1980: 2, Eisenzweig 1986: 7-8, Dubois 2005: 26-30), which shows that neo-Victorian fiction opens up or, at least, points out the persistence of the debate over highbrow and lowbrow literature, a debate that scholars such as Marie-Luise Kohlke have started to identify as problematic (2014: 29-30). This issue is strikingly epitomised by the British Association for Victorian Studies (BAVS) and its call for bloggers in which neo-Victorian interests appear as 'recreational':

> Given the recent saturation of Neo-Victorianism in popular culture, we are opening up a space for bloggers to create nuanced, critical reviews of Neo-Victorian television shows, films, plays, books, video games, and experiences (festivals, interactive museums, etc). These reviews will not only create dialogues between Victorian scholars about their mutual *recreational* interests, but will also help to link popular culture with the academic sphere (Wickes 2017: n.p.; my emphasis)

Such statements are highly questionable, further containing neo-Victorian studies 'as a ghost in the corner of the Victorian Studies parlour, relegated to the margins of an established field with its own vital foci and concerns' (Kohlke 2008a: 1). That BAVS is still not able to recognise that Neo-Victorian Studies do matter undermines the exponential growth of works in the field in the last two decades. The problematic ways of considering Neo-Victorian Studies lead us to focus on the birth and development of neo-Victorian fictions and of neo-Dickensian novels.

I. Scene of a Crime/Crime Scene: Neo-Victorian and Neo-Dickensian Novels

The process of establishing Neo-Victorian Studies has been a long and convoluted one starting in France with Georges Letissier's thesis, *La trace obsédante de l'intertexte victorien* (1997), followed by Christian Gutleben's publication of *Nostalgic Postmodernism* (2001). In the English-speaking world, the first highly noticeable work on neo-Victorian fiction is *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* edited by John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff published in 2000. As can be seen, neo-Victorian fiction is conceived from the start in relation to postmodernism understood as 'a period of playful freedom and consumer choice' or 'as a culture that has gone off the rails as communities around the globe have their traditions obliterated by the spread of capitalism', or yet again as 'complex theories and outlandish cultural productions [which] mark an abdication from any engagement with the real world at all' (Malpas 2010: 4-5). Yet, Letissier divides approaches to the genre into two groups:

> There are those who, in the wake of Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), see in post-Victorianism a monolithic, static 19th century that would be complacently revisited by late postmodernists writers, ready to pander to the dictates of polite correctness, and to the

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to our interests as she too sees in 'detective fiction a highly appropriate medium for neo-Victorian fictional histories' (2017: 46). However, the scope of her article does not enable her to develop on the interests of the detective mode in relation to intertextuality and biofiction but focuses instead on female sexploitation.

taste of a large readership. On the other hand, there are those, for whom the Victorian past can be inscribed within a historical project. Following Foucault, this second group of scholars claim that the representation of the past can aim at 'disturb[ing] what was previously considered as immobile', 'fragment[ing] what was thought unified', and at 'show[ing] the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself'. (Letissier 2004: 111-112)[2]

Letissier's opposition thus ponders on the way we read and understand neo-Victorianism as a genre and cultural phenomenon. In the inaugural issue of *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Marie-Luise Kohlke asks '[w]hat properly belongs *in* and *to* this emergent, popular, inter-disciplinary field of study' (Kohlke 2008a: 1), an interrogation which finds an answer in Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (2010) which offers the following definition: 'To be part of the neo-Victorianism we discuss in this book, texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with an act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*' (2010: 4; original emphasis). Following from these discussions, I align myself with works that consider neo-Victorian fictions in terms of the palimpsest and 'historiographic metafiction'. Linda Hutcheon coins this term to define what she identifies as the 'postmodern paradox' in contemporary novels:

> By this I mean those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages […]. Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains [literature, history or theory]: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (*historiographic meta*fiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past. (1988: 5; original emphasis)

In a later work, she adds: 'To parody is not to destroy the past; in fact, to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it' (1989: 6). This double intention, celebrating and questioning, is at the centre of the present corpus, often leading to conflicting directions. Neo-Victorian fiction is quintessentially intertextual, hence the importance of such a metaphor as the palimpsest which was first used by Gérard Genette to denote the textual copresence of the hypotext and the hypertext (1982: 8). The palimpsest enables us to think about the neo-Victorian text in terms of multiple layers and copresence rather than of original and copy. Such a perspective asks us to take into account the particular historical context of the nineteenth century as Louisa Hadley and Simon Joyce do in their works, respectively *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative* (2010) and *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror* (2007). Both Hadley and Joyce identify the emergence of neo-Victorian fiction in relation to Thatcherism and especially the former PM's speech on Victorian values (Hadley 2010: 8-11, Joyce 2007: 114-122). While their discussion of the definition of what we understand to be

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[2] Letissier's nomenclature shows his will to underline the connection between what we now call 'neo-Victorian' and the postmodern. For a discussion of the variations in the nomenclature to denote contemporary fictions and cultural phenomena engaging with the Victorians, see Andrea Kirchknopf article '(Re-)Workings of Nineteenth-Century Century Fiction: Definitions, Terminology, Contexts', *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 1:1 (2008), 53-80.

Victorian and Victorianism is of great interest, showing that this notion is unstable – lack of date, of precise genre etc. (Hadley 2010: 30-33, Joyce 2007: 1-7) – their limitation of the neo-Victorian genre to that context reduces the impact of neo-Victorian fiction as well as the importance of this movement for contemporary readers.

From the start, the relation between the neo-Victorian text to its Victorian predecessor seems vexed, a form of nostalgia for Gutleben (2001: 46), alternative 'sites of memory' for Kohlke (2008a: 13), leading Mark Llewellyn to wonder:

> What is a neo-Victorian engagement? What is a neo-Victorian text? Can it be any text published after 1901 which is set in the Victorian period, or is it about characters from a Victorian text, or about real-life Victorians? Can it be a text set in the contemporary period but with recognisable allusions to Victorian texts, characters, people? Where does conscious and deliberate appropriation begin and general awareness or accidental echoes of the Victorian end? What are the different shades of neo-Victorianism – and can they be theorised differently to the variations in other kinds of historical fiction? (2008: 175)

Elizabeth Ho and Kate Mitchell each attempt to provide an answer to these various questions. Mitchell offers to use memory discourse in 'discussions of historical fiction because this broader sense of cultural memory incorporates history as one way in which we understand the past' while offering a departure 'from historians' narratives to consider the role that a wide range of other media play in shaping our beliefs about the past' (Mitchell 2010: 32). Ho goes further as she suggests that the move away 'from the rubric of history to the vocabulary of memory offers not just a rehearsal of postmodernism's political concerns about the detotalization of history but also an opportunity to theorize and represent more accurately the experience of postcolonialism' (Ho 2012: 15).

The intertextual nature of neo-Victorian fiction puts to the foreground the importance of the reader. For Marta Dvorak, in intertextual fictions a '"full" understanding or grasp of both meaning and significance, which can involve an ontological and phenomenological reflection, depends on the reader's recognition and identification, in other words, on his or her culture and ability to connect and collocate' (2009: 362). J. Hillis Miller identifies 'repetition' as a key to reading and interpretation: 'A long work like a novel is interpreted, by whatever sort of reader, in part through the identification of recurrences and of meanings generated through recurrences' (1982: 1). In neo-Victorian fiction, it is this system of repetition from one text to another that is at stake. Neo-Victorian fiction is defined by a constant interplay between the Victorians and contemporary writers, and between readers and critics. If neo-Victorian literature is a popular success, the genre also finds its audience amongst critics. And it seems that neo-Victorian writers are well aware of the latter's interest in the genre. Indeed, if the term 'neo-Victorian' is always redefined, it is because neo-Victorian writers are playing with their critics, appropriating and regurgitating/rewriting/destabilising categories. Thus, neo-Victorian fiction not only enters into dialogue with fiction (both Victorian and postmodern fiction) but also with

criticism/scholarship (again, both Victorian and postmodern/neo-Victorian). As Jessica Cox boldly put it in a recent talk: 'there are no neo-Victorian texts, only neo-Victorian readers' (Cox 2019).

These concerns are especially catalysed and apparent in what is now a subgenre within neo-Victorian fiction, the neo-Dickensian novel. As Charlotte Boyce and Elodie Rousselot note: '[s]o persistent and pervasive is Dickens's cultural cachet, he frequently eclipses other Victorian writers in the modern imaginary' (2012: 4). Simon Joyce coins the term 'neo-Dickensian fiction' which he defines by 'its ability to move beyond its inherited form in dealing with matters of sexuality and human reproduction', adding that 'the target of these novels is not just the Victorians themselves (or a reconstructed image of them) but also the contemporary conservative discourse that seeks a return to silence and legal prohibition' (2007: 148). This definition is problematic as Joyce seems to use 'neo-Dickensian' as an umbrella term for neo-Victorian fiction at large while limiting the latter to a response to Thatcher (a point also made by Louisa Hadley (2010: 14)). Recently, Matthew Sherrill commented on the proliferation of the brand '*Dickensian*' to describe contemporary novels, showing the double edge of the use of such a coinage which, on the one hand, 'conjures, whether we like it or not, shivering orphans, cloying sentimentality, fortuitous coincidence, and virtue rewarded' while on the other hand, 'it delimits and cheapens the work of the alleged *Dickensian*' (2014: n.p.). This dissertation will try to reinsert the Dickensian into 'neo-Dickensian', investigating the particular aspect of texts rewriting Dickens. This is not to obliterate the importance of the 'neo', as Samantha J. Carroll reminds us, 'neo-Victorian fiction serves not one but two masters: the "neo" as well as the "Victorian"; that is, homage to the Victorian era and its texts, but in combination with the "new" in a postmodern revisionary critique' (2010: 173). Bearing this in mind, my focus is thus closer to Georges Letissier's which favours the term 'post-Dickensian' and identifies:

> a Dickensian tropism *i.e.* a turning towards Dickens, as a literary and cultural landmark, and an acknowledgement of his influential presence, which needs not be an unmitigated endorsement. […] Dickens is written *after*, but also occasionally *against*, he is adapted or appropriated, overwritten through parody, and unwritten through minimalist narratives. (2012: 246)

Letissier's aim is to establish a first map for sustained studies on neo-Dickensian fiction. The present thesis partakes of an effort to enlarge this map and discover what is particular to neo-Dickensian fiction alongside Azure Engelbrecht's thesis *Neo-Victorian Dickens(es): The Hogarth/Dickens Circle and Recent Biofiction* (2016). The latter's scope attends more to the act of representation of historical figures, Charles Dickens and his circle, and lays emphasis on biofiction. Engelbrecht sees in the proliferation of biographies and biofictions a response to a demand from modern readers, Dickens thus becoming a kind of brand (2016: 224-226). In

contrast, this dissertation argues that looking at neo-Dickensian novels through the lens of detection would not only enable the investigation of the (mis)representations of Dickens and his circle but also offers the opportunity to look at other tropes and motifs inherent to neo-Victorian fiction at large, such as the city and trauma while underscoring the particular ways of rewriting Dickens. The canonicity of Dickens definitely impacts both the way neo-Victorian writers engage with his work and/or life and readers' reception of the latter's works. And indeed, underlying any appropriation of Dickens (in novels and other media) stands the issue of who that appropriation, and indeed Dickens, is for, which, as Juliet John points out, is the same as asking 'what is culture and who is it for?' (2010: 289).

II.   Murder Will Out: Reading through Traces, Clues and with Ghosts

The omnipresence of the Dickensian intertext puts to the forefront neo-Victorian concerns with the act of reading and that of writing. Indeed, as Julie Sanders remarks in the opening lines of *Adaptation and Appropriation,* '[a]ny exploration of intertextuality, and its specific manifestation in the forms of adaptation and appropriation, is inevitably interested in how art creates art, or how literature is made by literature' (2005: 1). Furthermore, 'as readers and critics, we also need to recognize that adaptation and appropriation are fundamental to the practice, and, indeed, to the enjoyment, of literature' (*ibid.*). Christian Gutleben notes the heterotic nature of neo-Victorian fiction:

> Neo-Victorian possibilities of procreation seem limitless, all the more so since any new artistic trend can immediately be mingled with the existing stock of neo-Victorian novels to engender yet another breed. Such unrestrained potential and such extended possibilities of cross-breeding unmistakably have monstrous implications and the neo-Victorian undertaking thus deals with ontological monstrosity not only in its themes but also in its very generic constitution. (2012: 324)

The present dissertation wishes to attend to one of those literary 'mongrels' – if I may put it this way – and especially to the neo-Victorian use and abuse of the detective mode of writing and reading. As shall come clear and in accordance with Gutleben's remarks, it is impossible when studying neo-Victorian fiction to have clear-cut generic boundaries, hence my use of the term 'mode' rather than 'genre'. Talking about a mode allows us to understand the way in which the neo-Dickensian novels under study use the conventions of the detective novel without reaching for the same aim. To a certain extent, this comes close to Michael Holquist's analysis of 'metaphysical detective stories': 'If, in the detective story, death must be solved, in the new metaphysical detective story it is *life* which must be solved' (1983: 173). In neo-Dickensian novels, life indeed must be solved too, but death still lurks around, raising considerations on the relation to the past and intertextuality. The monstrous pervades neo-Victorian fiction, haunting its characters, readers and authors, be it in the form of ghosts or the return of repressed

traumas, pointing out an ontological issue with filiation in a Frankenstein-like way, the creature doubling the creator, as a monstrous copy, loved and hated.[3]

The Frankenstein image leads us to a key trope in neo-Dickensian novels, that of origin and legitimacy. Just like Pip and Oliver, the respective protagonists of *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*, the characters of the novels under study ponder about their identity, legitimacy and legacy. Such a quest is in fact at the centre of detection since detecting and investigating is always an act of unveiling: what is revealed to the detective and reader is the name of the criminal and the back story of the victim. This entails that the nature of the detective narrative is dual. This duality emerges from the sense of mystery, the vital necessity for the narrative to sustain the reader's interest by concealing what it knows. For Uri Eisenzweig, the narrative of detective fiction is always 'in search for another narrative, the first narrative is triggered by the discovery (or anticipation) of a crime, the second narrative brings about the identity of the criminal, his/her motive and the circumstances of his/her action' (1986: 52; my translation).[4] This feature of the detective mode highlights the duality of neo-Dickensian and neo-Victorian fiction. The editors of *Crime Culture* (2010) demonstrate that the impact of crime on culture results from its complex relation to modernity (McNulty, Nicol & Pulham: 2-3). While I too look at crime and problematic modernity, I depart from the focus on criminality by looking to/incorporating the agent who unveils, decodes criminality: the detective, which entails a concern with interpretation.

The very nature of neo-Victorian fiction implies that the mode of reading it creates is always one of question and interpretation and is thus closely related, if not entirely similar, to that of detective fiction. In other words, neo-Victorian fiction in general, and neo-Dickensian fiction in particular, constantly asks its readers to use their 'personal encyclopaedia' – which, in Eco's terminology, denotes the reader's knowledge (about the world, the author etc.) and his/her previous readings (1985: 13-29) – in order to actualise the 'horizon of expectations' – to borrow Jauss's terminology (1978: 53-60) – created by the re-investment of Victorian literary codes, texts and culture. What I would also like to suggest is that this entails a Model Reader, a would-be detective tracking down the (inter)text itself.[5] It is small wonder then that the

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[3] There is a growing interest in the pervasion of the detective mode into other forms of fiction and studies (such as anthropology, history, photography etc.) as the late Cerisy symposium, entitled 'Raconter l'enquête: une forme pour les récits du XXIème siècle?', shows.

[4] 'un récit qui en recherche un autre, le premier découlant de la découverte (ou anticipation) d'un crime, le second fournissant l'identité du criminel, ses motivations et les modalités de son acte.'

[5] I am using 'Model Reader' (Eco 1985: 68-69) rather than ther term 'Implied Reader' developed by Wolgang Iser in his phenomenological theory of reader-response (Iser 2002: 391-396, Chandler & Munday 2019a). While both terms concern the interaction between text and reader, Eco's puts an emphasis on the way texts position the reader as subject (Eco 1986: 72, Chandler & Munday 2019 b). My intent is therefore to lay emphasis not only on the way the reader fills in the blanks of the text (Iser) but also on the way s/he decodes the text (Prince 1982: 131).

detective genre, especially in biofictions, is a privileged mode used by neo-Victorian writers since narrative structure relies on the ability of both the detective *and* the reader to interpret and solve the mystery that lies at the origin of the narrative itself. In Shoshana Felman's words:

> One of the specificities of the detective novel is that it epitomises the interpretative *question* as narrative scheme: since at the beginning the novel the main plot, *i.e.* the story of the crime, is shrouded in mystery for both the detective and the reader, and will only be resolved, understood and reconstructed at the very end; since it is the role of the detective – accompanied by the reader – to *interpret* the bits and pieces collected so as to *decipher* the story *i.e.* to find, at the very end, the vantage point from which the story may be re-told in a classic chronological fashion, then one can say that the detective novel enacts reading and thematises the reader's posture within the text, thereby dramatising interpretation in the shape of a question: the question of its own incompleteness. (1983: 24; original emphasis; my translation).[6]

In neo-Victorian detective fiction and biofiction, the role of the reader is doubly layered: on the one hand, as in any detective fiction, the reader is being asked to solve the interpretative question that emerges from the plot; on the other hand, this detective mode of reading is extended to the intertextual traces in the text. The incompleteness of the detective novel, which made Uri Eisenzweig call it an 'impossible narrative' (1986: 14-16), is thus displaced in neo-Victorian fiction when looking at the second layer of the role of the reader. Or, more accurately, incompleteness is then reconfigured in a double direction: there is a form of incompleteness in the felt absence of the hypotext and/or of the Victorian author, however, the text is also saturated by intertextuality. The text therefore is almost *too* complete, creating a rhizomatic network in which the reader has to find his/her way. Thus, it would seem that this intertextual reading offers a double invitation to the reader: on the one hand, the reader is invited to detect, decode the intertext by using/actualising his/her own encyclopaedia, while, on the other hand, being invited to (re)read the Victorian text. Neo-Victorian fiction thus seems to be a locus for reading: turning the reader into a detective of a kind, neo-Victorian fiction also offers in its rewritings a rereading of Victorian fiction and, maybe, mediates Victorian works that the reader might not have read. This is not to reduce neo-Victorian fiction to 'nothing more than a transitional step, never the destination itself' (Carroll 2010: 178): the detective mode in fact allows us to reject the dichotomy parent/child that Carroll denounces while enhancing the active role of the reader.

To a certain extent, neo-Victorian fiction seems to answer to a desire to immerse ourselves in the past. I contend that the quest for the past, which is never straightforward and

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[6] 'Le roman policier a ceci de particulier que la figure narrative qu'il emblématise est celle-là même d'une *question* interprétative : puisque l'histoire du crime qui fait l'objet du roman est, au départ, enrobée de mystère pour le détective comme pour le lecteur, et ne sera comprise, éclaircie, reconstituée qu'à la fin; puisqu'il incombe donc au détective - accompagné du lecteur - *d'interpréter* les données lacunaires pour en *déchiffrer* l'histoire, c'est-à-dire pour trouver - mais seulement à la fin - la position de savoir qui permette de raconter l'histoire en tant que récit classique, le policier met en acte la lecture et thématise la figure du lecteur à l'intérieur même de son récit. Ce faisant, le récit met en scène l'interprétation comme question : comme question de sa propre incomplétude.'

always questioned, mimics to a great extent the detective narrative. As Casey A. Cothran and Mercy Cannon point out:

> mystery and detective fiction addresses the human struggle to make sense of the *fragmentary past, the uncertain present, and the unknowable future.* As readers follow the adventures of questing sleuths, they are provided with mysteries, gaps, dislocations … and finally with answers to many of their questions. As a consequence of its structure, one which first obscures and clarifies, the detective genre demands and cultivates a special sort of cognition, pushing readers to consider both that which is unknown and that which is knowable. (2016: 1; original emphasis)

It is true that detective fiction's way of staging '*the fragmentary past, the uncertain present, and the unknowable future*' might seem constructed, giving a sense of safety thanks to its repetitive structure and sense of closure offered by the denouement, an aspect which neo-Victorian fiction does not try to repeat or provide. This might be the greatest contrast between detective fiction and neo-Victorian fiction. However, the latter nevertheless seems to be using the detective mode to tackle the epistemological uncertainties that Cothran and Cannon underline. Neo-Victorian fiction may not provide us with all the answers, but the motif of the quest and the ontological issue of being in the world definitely are shared traits. The quest is not only turned backward, but also moves forward, as Viktorija Krombholc argues:

> The search for truth and the fascination with the sensational are also reflected in the fact that detective fiction has been particularly appealing to writers working in the neo-Victorian mode and can be said to mirror our wider cultural fascination with the figure of the detective and its many reconfigurations in popular culture (seen in the abundance of popular detective shows, forensic, scientific or otherwise). (2013: 126)

For both the detective and the neo-Victorian reader are focused on a trace, the trace left on the body of the victim, the trace left by the palimpsest. For Alexis Tadié, the trace not only triggers the detective process but is at the origin of novelistic writing ('écriture romanesque') (2007: 237-238). If, as Sarah Dunant has it, 'one of the central functions of crime fiction […] is to take a dead person and in some way make them alive again', then the neo-Victorian turn to Dickens through the detective mode both speaks of intertextual relations and partakes of a sort of spiritual act, reviving Dickens for a contemporary audience (2000: 13). The trace then also hints, as Rosario Arias observes, at a copresence which both suggests an absence and a presence (2014: 111-114). Reading is thus haunted, but reading is also a h(a)unting game as the reader turns into a detective of the (inter)text.

III.   A map for our investigation

This dissertation takes a look at a range of diverse works in an effort to more fully understand the function and impact of the detective mode upon/within neo-Victorian rewritings of Charles Dickens. The discussion revolves around rewritings of three main novels by Dickens: *Bleak House* (1853)*, Great Expectations* (1861) and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870)*. These

three novels are often considered as the first stones which paved the way for the emergence of detective fiction in the wake of Poe's 'rationalisation' stories and alongside Wilkie Collins's most famous novels, *The Woman in White* (1859) and *The Moonstone* (1868) (Dubois 2005: 14-15).

The Mystery of Edwin Drood holds an important appeal for neo-Victorian writers; left unfinished by the sudden death of its author on June 9th, 1870, the text is amputated and has been the object of many rewritings and attempts at providing a solution to its puzzle. The open wound of the text turned the ending of the novel into a spectral text of our collective imaginary library and it certainly is in *La verità sul caso D.: Romanzo* (1989) that the novel's potential for reinvention and investigation is best exemplified. Indeed, fictitious detectives such as Holmes, Poirot or even Dupin are gathered at a conference held in Rome to find the key to the mystery (the denouement is striking as it reveals Dickens's text as a coded message in which the Victorian author identifies Wilkie Collins as his murderer). The novel interpolates Dickens's text with the contemporary text written by Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, thereby staging the crucial role of the reader in searching the past text for clues, but also in staging the relation past/present text. Revising Dickens's texts and life, writers of neo-Dickensian novels using the detective mode can also be said to 'play detectives as much as their literary protagonists, trying to pry into the secret life of well-known figures and unearth contrasting or otherwise shocking aspects of their personas' (Krombholc 2013: 127).

Throughout the dissertation I will be engaged in close readings of the main texts chosen to form my corpus as well as, when necessary, of other texts to better ground my claims and hypotheses. It is, I believe, in the small details of the text that we can best understand the neo-Victorian poetics at work in the corpus, especially where the 'travail de citation' is concerned. I conduct an analysis dictated by the mechanisms of neo-Victorian fiction, developing a methodology detecting the trace and based on it. The present dissertation opens up the discussion on widely acclaimed fictions such as Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997), Richard Flanagan's *Wanting* (2008) and, Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip* (2006). Written by writers from Australasia (Carey and Flanagan are both Australian, Jones comes from New Zealand), these novels respond to *Great Expectations*. The 'appeal' of the latter for postcolonial writers has been discussed by John Thieme, amongst many others, who sees such a novel as *Jack Maggs* as an 'affiliative' response to Dickens's (absent) representation of Australia. In *Jack Maggs*, the eponymous character returns to London after years spent in Australia. Sent there as a convict, Maggs made himself a fortune and comfortable life but comes back to England for his beneficiary Henry Phipps. Little does Maggs know that Phipps hates him and wants to avoid meeting his 'shameful' benefactor at all costs. The story focuses on Maggs's

attempts to meet Phipps and his encounter with a young author, Tobias Oates, Dickens in disguise. Oates is obsessed with Maggs's past and offers to help the latter find Phipps if he lets himself be mesmerised which is a means for Oates to plunder Maggs's memory in order to write his novel. Whereas Carey's novel mainly focuses on one narrative, that of Magwitch's return to London, Richard Flanagan's novel, *Wanting,* is divided into two distinct narratives. The first is set in Tasmania in the 1840s and relates the life of Mathinna, a young Aboriginal girl adopted by Sir John Franklin and his wife. Lady Jane's aim is to educate the young girl, but Mathinna fails her expectations and when the Franklins have to leave the island, she remains behind, sent to an orphanage and doomed to decay and death once out in the streets. The second narrative focuses on Dickens in the 1850s. The link between the two periods is Lady Jane, who asks Dickens to write a play to shake off any belief that her husband might have turned to cannibalism in the lost Franklin expedition (1845-1846). While setting the play up, Dickens encounters Ellen Ternan, a young actress for whom he will break his marriage. Contrary to Carey's and Flanagan's novels, *Mister Pip* is not set in the nineteenth century but focuses on the island of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea during the 'Crisis', that is the civil war that opposed the New Guinean to the Bougainvillean in the 1990s. Matilda, the protagonist and narrator, tells the reader of her traumatic experience and the way in which her white teacher, Mr Watts, enables her and her friends to 'escape' from the horrors of the war by reading *Great Expectations*. However, the book unleashes the violence of the Papuan soldiers, or 'redskins', on the villagers as they discover the name 'Pip' written in the sand and mistake it for a real individual. As the inhabitants are unable to prove that Pip is only a character in a story (the novel was hidden and then destroyed), the soldiers burn the village before slaughtering Mr Watts (who lied about his identity) and Dolores (Matilda's mother). Matilda is able to escape from the island and later becomes a Dickens scholar. While writing her PhD dissertation Matilda suffers from depression which she overcomes by writing the narrative that composes the novel itself. All these novels appropriate the themes of location, reading and writing that are to be found in Dickens's novel for their postcolonial response to the canon.

I also chose works that have received less critical attention, such as Lynn Shepherd's *Tom-All-Alone's* and Dan Simmons's *Drood*. *Tom-All-Alone's* is the second mystery novel written by Shepherd, the first from the Charles Maddox series. In all her novels, Shepherd turns a literary classic into a detective novel: Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* in *Murder at Mansfield Park* (2011), *Frankenstein* in A *Treacherous Likeness* (2013) and, finally, *Dracula* in *The Pierced Heart* (2014). Shepherd's novel is a detective fiction featuring Charles Maddox, a young private detective, who is asked to investigate a case of blackmail by a certain Tulkinghorn. The novel thus rewrites *Bleak House*, enhancing its detective potential but also,

and most interestingly, interweaving Dickens's novel with Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*. Keeping a double narratorial structure, with on the one hand, an omniscient narrator and, on the other hand, Hester's first-person narrative, Lynn Shepherd turns Esther's story into a tragic melodrama as she conflates Dickens's heroine with Laura Fairlie/Anne Catherick. *Drood* too interconnects Dickens and Collins as the latter is the unreliable narrator of the novel. The fictional Collins intends to uncover the secrets of Dickens's last five years, starting with the Staplehurst train accident in which Dickens was involved on June 9th, 1865, exactly five years before Dickens's death. Collins is convinced that Dickens is a murderer working for a certain Drood. As it turns out, the novel is all at once a biofiction, detective and ghost story as Collins and Dickens look out for the eponymous Drood, a phantasmatic figure whose reality is utterly questioned at the end of the text as it is revealed that Dickens played a sinister joke on his friend.

I have chosen to study more briefly Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), Gaynor Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress* (2008) and Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002), selecting only the aspects of their work that were essential for this argument and might illuminate the main texts of the corpus. In addition to novels, I have also included analyses of a rather unknown French graphic novel, *Dickens and Dickens* (2017), and a play by Sebastian Barry, *Andersen's English* (2010). Sarah Waters is very well-known in neo-Victorian studies, especially for her queer take on the Victorians. In *Fingersmith*, she offers a rewriting of both Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins in a tale of swapped identities. *The Crimson Petal and the White*, which Letissier dubs a 'neo-Victorian classic' (2009: 113), is a tale of social mobility and the senses revolving around the prostitute Sugar. Under the guise of Dorothea Gibson, Arnold's novel provides us with an 'account of what it is like to be the wife of a genius' (Moseley 2010: 446), an attempt to break the silence revolving around Catherine Dickens. This silence is also addressed in Sebastian Barry's play. Indeed, the Irish playwright focuses on Hans Christian Andersen's short stay with the Dickenses in 1857 and provides another viewpoint of Dickens's separation from his wife. *Dickens and Dickens* is a *Doppelgänger* tale: Charlie, a criminal version of Dickens, decides to swap his life in the slums of London with that of his famous double, Charles Dickens.

The present selection was guided by several criteria such as the biofictional presence of the author; the setting (mainly London or echoes of London); a relation to one of the three aforementioned Dickensian texts and to collaborative works with Wilkie Collins or works by Wilkie Collins. The aim of this dissertation is not so much to identify relations, motifs, themes belonging to the detective mode as to see how the detective mode shapes our relation to the Victorian past, especially as embodied by Dickens, as well as calls for and creates a particular model of reading. As a result, the present dissertation is concerned with issues of reader

complicity, intertextuality, meta- and biofiction. It is divided into three chapters: 'Decrypting the Victorian map', 'The Inimitable imitated: searching for Mr Dickens' and 'Spirit rap(p)ing: writing/reading the unspeakable secret'.

Chapter 1 concerns the neo-Dickensian engagement with place, with a special focus on the representation of London which, as shall be seen, is always Dickens's version of London rather than a historical version of the city. London turns into a space to be read and immersed in. The idea of reading the city is taken from Walter Benjamin's work on Paris and Baudelaire in 'Charles Baudelaire: A Lyrical Poet in the Era of High Capitalism'. In this essay, the German philosopher investigates the way in which the unreadable city leads to the evolution of figures such as the detective and the *flâneur*. These figures are theorised as able to 'read' the city and to make its layers of texts legible to readers (Benjamin 1969: 40-41). Although Benjamin's theory is rooted in the examination of Paris, Michael Hollington's work in the 1980s, together with Sara Thornton's, Estelle Murail's and Gillian Piggott's ongoing research have shown that Dickensian studies gained from the German thinker's concepts.[7] Without claiming that both cities are interchangeable, I do think that links can be drawn between their representations. However, I am also aware of different positions on the matter: Lynda Nead's study of the Victorian capital offers numerous insights, most particularly on the issue of mapping (2000). She, like Benjamin, is preoccupied by the question of modernity, however she argues that Benjamin's understanding of modernity is utterly masculine and leaves no space for a female modernity. Her study, as well as other works such as Lauren Elkin's *Flâneuse* (2016)*, rehabilitate the female experience of the city. My stance on the matter is however dictated by the corpus as Benjamin's *flâneur* and detective are appropriated by the neo-Victorian texts and little space is conceded to the female *flâneuse*. It is the experience of modernity, of place as conceived by Benjamin that is to be found at the centre of the works under study, in the experience of Dickensian London or, in the postcolonial novels of the corpus, the experience of the Pacific and of a 'dream-England'. Such texts as *Mister Pip* and *Wanting* in fact reorient the cartography of *Great Expectations* by displacing the setting from the centre of the empire, London, towards its periphery, the Antipodes. They thus offer a counter-version to the cartography that Franco Moretti identifies at the centre of the nineteenth-century novel in his *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (1997).

Chapter 2 presses on the dissertation's central conceit *i.e.* the way Dickens's fiction and life are plotted in neo-Dickensian texts. We shall see that Dickens is both a victim of the neo-

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[7] Piggott insists in different places on the fact that even though Benjamin's work is mostly based on Paris and Baudelaire's writing, the German philosopher is also using examples from Dickens. In their works on the city, Murail and Thornton each cannot avoid from looking at Dickens's works.

Victorian act of re-membering as well as turned into a criminal figure, thus echoing the ambivalent position towards the Victorian canon. All the neo-Dickensian novels under study, especially in the case of the biofictions, create an alternative form of Dickens, be it as detective, *Doppelgänger* or criminal. Indeed, the neo-Victorian works under study insert doubles within their intertextual reference to Dickens. My following investigation of the figure of the double is informed by Clément Rosset's works on the double especially his *Le réel et son double* (1976) and *Impressions fugitives* (2004). I contend that Dickens's act of writing himself into his fiction provides him with a shadow, a mirror or echo image of himself. The image that is to be found in his novels might be tainted, distorted, half concealed but it is still a reflection of the author. This play on distorted reflection might have its origin in Dickens's well-known habit of pulling faces at his mirror when writing:

> On one of these mornings, I [Mamie Dickens] was lying on the sofa endeavouring to keep perfectly quiet, while my father wrote busily and rapidly at his desk, when he suddenly jumped from his chair and rushed to a mirror which hung near, and in which I could see the reflection of some extraordinary facial contortions which he was making. He returned rapidly to his desk, wrote furiously for a few moments, and then went again to the mirror. The facial pantomime was resumed, and then turning toward, but evidently not seeing, me, he began talking rapidly in a low voice… (M. Dickens qtd. in Ackroyd 1999: 590)

It is easy to agree with Peter Ackroyd that this 'extraordinary scene' testifies to the vivacity of Dickens's imagination, especially if we pay attention to viewpoint. In this description, it is not Dickens who is the focaliser, but Mamie who is looking at 'the reflection of some extraordinary facial contortions' *i.e.* Dickens's distorted *reflected* face. Arguably, this kind of oblique viewpoint revealing Dickens's disquieting face, while his characters take on a life of their own, is explored in the restless mirror of the neo-Dickensian novel. The texts under study also show a profound interest in providing us with 'what-if?-plots', that is with versions of Dickens that might have been, thereby engaging with a developing current in Victorian Studies, the counterfactuals. I want to suggest that the use of the detective mode in texts featuring this alternative Dickens crystallises the relation of the neo-Victorian writer to his/her predecessor thus inexorably pointing out the absence of Dickens. Ultimately, this absence seems to call for the ubiquitous presence of intertextuality, as if Dickens's texts were to replace him or at least to signify his presence in his absence.

At the end of her inaugural article for *Neo-Victorian Studies*, Marie-Luise Kohlke stipulates that 'neo-Victorian texts will one day be read for the insights they afford into twentieth- and twenty-first century cultural history and socio-political concerns' (2008a: 13). Chapter 3 suggests that by using the detective mode, especially striking tropes such as the body (dead, marked, fragmented, abused, traumatised) and pathologies, neo-Victorian fiction enables readers to understand both the Victorian and the contemporary world. The mainstream vision of the nineteenth century is that of a repressed and oppressed society, a repression most often

associated with sexuality. However, this is the result of the nineteenth-century image-making as Ronald Pearsall would have it:

> The Victorians conducted their public relations not for themselves, but for us; they wanted to appear to posterity as good, noble, pure in word, heart, and deed; and that they have succeeded so well is due not only to the energy with which they tackled this project, but to our own laziness in preferring the easy stereotype to the reality. (1969: xiv)

It may be argued that neo-Victorianism aims at going beyond this image-making and/or appropriates it in an attempt to decode, decipher who the Victorians truly were (as well as who we are today, in a society equally ridden, perhaps, with repression and violence). Pearsall's study may be considered as a pioneering and ground-breaking work in its area, the study of Victorian sexuality, and it is interesting to note that its publication year, 1969, almost coincides with that of the two works often considered as the two first neo-Victorian novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). This interest in nineteenth-century sexuality leads to considerations on the Victorian body, our gaze dissecting and thereby recovering repressed secrets. As Sarah Dunant observes: 'Crime fiction, by its very nature, has an intimate relationship with the dead body' (2000: 11). The dead body is a staple feature in detective fiction. As Dunant further adds:

> in crime fiction death is the start of something, not the end. More often than not, the body in some shape or form begins the story. Without the body, without the murder, there would be no fiction. Thus, death is the beginning of the investigation. (12)

The body is a narrative device, as Joy Palmer puts it: '"Whose body?" is of course the pivotal question propelling the narrative of the detective novel in action' (2001: 54). For her, the 'body is a dead one, bearing the anatomical signs of a life-history, but also the physical traces of the absent criminal body that must be tracked down during the course of the plot' (*ibid.*). Dunant further argues that the victim in crime fiction is '[f]ar from being forgotten' but, on the contrary, is 'reactivated'. For Dunant there are two ways of doing so: either the corpse itself takes an active role so that the body is 'exposed, investigated, documented and examined. It is given careful, almost loving, attention and as a result yields secrets and provokes thoughts. […][T]he dead person stays around on the slab as a main character, albeit without words'; or, the process is abstracted as the detective revives the personality of the victim in order to solve the mystery of the victim's death (2000: 13). Dunant's paradigm finds a parallel in neo-Victorian studies, especially in Rosario Arias's work on the spectral and the trace. Drawing upon psychoanalytical (Abraham and Torok) and deconstructionist (Derrida) conceptions of the spectre, Arias considers the trace as a dynamic and overarching paradigm of neo-Victorian fiction. According to her, the trace is a fruitful theoretical framework to analyse the 'presentness' of the Victorians in contemporary fiction since '[t]he hybrid nature of the trace, which partakes of both absence and presence, past and present, facilitates the blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries between the Victorian and the contemporary age' (2014: 111). I intend to use both paradigms

– that of the reactivated body and that of the trace – as a framework for thinking further about neo-Victorian representations of bodies. The body is exposed, coded and decoded, scarred, there for all to see. As such, neo-Victorian fiction seems to subvert the idea of Victorian repressed, hidden bodies by making them over-visible. The body turns into an entry point in Dickens's relationship to women, the pathological Victorian society and child abuse. Finally, I hope that this dissertation will show how our relation to the Dickensian canon is re-visioned, re-membered, worked through and reoriented towards new horizons.

CHAPTER 1: DECRYPTING THE VICTORIAN MAP

> And, because this is Dickens, he is not simply walking but *writing* "London", which means he is writing *about* London, and, by writing, creating London. […] And "writing London" is a pun: London also writes, constructing Dickens.
>
> Jeremy Tambling (2009: 1-2; original emphasis)

For Jeremy Tambling, movement, the city and writing are entwined in the case of Charles Dickens. London is turned into a fiction, a place that may be known through reading as much as walking; London is malleable, 'reformed with each encounter', 'a taking-place of mystery, catachresis and ineffability' (Wolfreys 1998: 4). Conversely, the city characterises and writes Dickens too, so that the city and the author seemingly become fictions together. The

association of Dickens with the experience of London is ambivalent in its nature, as Peter Ackroyd points out: 'London created Dickens, just as Dickens created London. […] London entered his soul; it terrified him and it entranced him. It became the material for his fantasy and the arena for his polemic. And in the end, it was truly Dickens' London' (1994: 7).[8] The opening chiasmus of this quotation not only puts on an equal footing the Victorian author and the city, but it introduces the city as both dreadful and appealing, dead and alive. In the end, Tambling and Ackroyd also testify to Dickens's appropriation of the city so that the idea of London is marked by, and can even be said to be a construct of, Dickens ('truly Dickens' London'). London not only is the privileged setting of Dickens's novels but turns into a character itself, so much so that it seems that our knowledge and sense of Victorian London is fashioned by Charles Dickens's work.

The idea of a constructed London filtered by Dickens appears in V.S. Naipaul's and Salman Rushdie's works – amongst other postcolonial writers. For Salman Rushdie the sense of place is a construct resulting from loss, memory or trauma (2010: 10-18), an issue upon which his *Midnight's Children* (1981) hinges and which also pervades Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987): 'The London I knew or imaginatively possessed was the London I had got from Dickens. It was Dickens – and his illustrators – who gave me the illusion of knowing the city' (Naipaul 1987: 144). Dickens also first discovered London through literature before experiencing it at first-hand, so that for him too, '[t]he city was a topographical palimpsest' (Andrews 2016: 5). Dickens's London, Naipaul's illusion of London or Rushdie's 'dream England' are all provide an insight on the relation we have, as human beings, with place, a relation that Yi-Fu Tuan studies in his *Space and Place* (1977). Tuan distinguishes between space as the environment that surrounds us and place, which connotes our construct of space as a centre of set values influenced by culture, society and memory (5).[9] This definition of space and place casts an interesting light on the works of neo-Dickensian writers who rewrite a specific London, Dickens's London, amplifying its terrors and horrors, playing with its sense of characters and of community. In his distinction between place and space, Tuan uncovers

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[8] As Marie-Luise Kohlke notes, Ackroyd's works (his biographies of Dickens and London) are influenced by neo-Victorianism, a genre he also indulges in in his works of fiction (2014: 31). It might be argued that, though directly addressing Dickens's relation to London, Ackroyd might also be reflecting on his own relation with the capital. His work on London in fact is very postmodern in its generic hybridity: a historical work, it claims to be a biography, thus blurring the frontier between literary and historical genres.

[9] Furthermore, place is defined by a sense of identity and aura which Tuan exemplifies with the reaction of two physicists when visiting Kronberg Castle in Denmark. The castle's association with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is endowed with an altogether different vision because it makes the castle a 'center of felt values' (1977: 4).

another dichotomy: child vs adult. For Tuan, the child has a closer relation to space, a relation marked by cognition and exploration while the adult is more readily thinking of a place associated with memory:

> The child not only has a short past, but his eyes more than the adult's are on the present and immediate future. His vitality for doing things and exploring space is not suited to the reflective pause and backward glance that makes places seem saturated with significance. […] Young children, so imaginative in their own sphere of action, may look matter-of-factly on places that to adults are haunted by memories. (33)

This quotation highlights the relation between place, the past and spectrality, characteristic features of neo-Victorian fiction as Dianne F. Sadoff and John Kucich suggest in *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century*. Using Frederic Jameson's theory of postmodernism, Sadoff and Kucich demonstrate that the explosion of the interest in, and demand for, 'Victoriana' both turns the Victorians into a historical 'Other' and transforms the contemporary into an aesthetic of a kind (2000: x-xii). This chapter will attempt to demonstrate that neo-Victorian fiction is using different modes of reading corresponding to the different figures of the *flâneur*, the detective, the criminal but also the postcolonial subject to convey an experience of place by proxy. Each figure presents the reader with a different vantage point on the experience of place, and ways of deciphering the city. The activity of reading is thus redefined not only as a process of decoding signifiers, to achieve meaning, but also as a sensory experience.

The interest of the city for neo-Victorian writers seems to be nourished by the opportunities it offers to thematise the (un)readable. As stated in the introduction, Walter Benjamin was amongst the first to see a correlation between the unreadable city and the emergence of such figures as the *flâneur* and the detective as agents of reading. Benjamin also offers an insight into considerations of the experience of the city conveyed by movement and the senses. This ties in with Tuan's theory on the relation between the body, space and place: we organise space into place according to the orientation of our bodies (Tuan 1977: 34-50). The experience of the city is at the centre of the works under study and points to a reflection on modernity. The unreadability of the city is linked to the inability to unravel its palimpsestic nature. Indeed, London has been the subject of numerous novels, poems and other forms of writing, so much so that it can be argued that it is made of textual layers. For Wolfreys, this multiplicity shows how 'London' not only denotes a place but a 'transformative process' which offers 'a map of unknowability' (1998: 7-16). This protean textuality relies on the multiplicity of textual fragments encroaching upon the walls, the proliferation of advertisements and posters in Victorian England, but also, as Peter Ackroyd suggests in his two works on London, on the

fact that the English capital is built on clay.[10] For Ackroyd, as for nineteenth-century writers, clay is a malleable material that records the traces and shapes of objects and thus London has kept the traces and shapes of its own past (2011: 1). Clay, as is well known, was used as writing material especially for the cuneiform writing system (Puhvel: n. p.). It is little wonder then that it should bear connections with (re)writing and the notion of trace. A trace is both the expression of movement and a presence *in absentia* which, in this case, offers a temporal layering as Marie-Luise Kohlke and Christian Gutleben underline: 'Palimpsestically, we read the past city through the overlaid present, but conversely, we also read the present city backwards through the underlying and resurfacing past' (2015: 11). Kohlke and Gutleben thus suggest a double act of reading, forward and backwards as well as upwards and downwards. This movement is at the core of the hermeneutic praxis neo-Victorian fiction engages with. Kohlke and Gutleben also warn their readers against the temptation of reducing the term palimpsest to a metaphor for intertextuality: they suggest that this palimpsest, especially when referring to, for instance, the issue of poverty as it appears in Victorian texts, allows neo-Victorian writers to expose the persistence of these social issues today (14). The palimpsestic nature of the city thus complicates its readability since 'the represented city is always haunted by another vaster spectral city of unrepresentability' (4). The city escapes total representation due to the limitations of perspective (there always is a perceiving consciousness), its multiple layers of narratives, and its transitory aspect. Made of different layers, both vertical and horizontal, London therefore is a representation of multiple spaces and temporalities at the same time. I argue that the detection mode prompts the reader to decipher space and decode intertextual and neo-Victorian layers, not simply to piece together the diegetic puzzle and solve the secret which the plot is offering as bait to its readers, but to decipher the historical and ideological issues at stake. Thus, on the vertical axis, this palimpsestic space unravels temporal layers, from the construction of new buildings on top of vestiges and ruins (including the churchyard) to psychological unconscious depths (and here the crypt is a powerful motif), calling on the horizontal axis which has more to do with the politics of representation (hence the focus on the encroaching slums as well as on multiculturalism). This double axis informs the construction of this chapter as a whole, since the representation of unreadability and city space leads us to discuss ideological issues raised by the return to Dickensian London in neo-Victorian fiction, including the postcolonial attempt to revisit Dickens's engagement with space.

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[10] One may think of such paintings as John Orlando Parry's 'A London Street Scene' (1834). Cf. also Sara Thornton, *Advertising, Subjectivity and the Nineteenth-Century Novel: Dickens, Balzac and the Language of the Walls*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009.

I.   DECODING THE RIDDLE OF THE CITY

*It was well said of a certain German book that "*es lässt sich nicht lessen*" – it does not permit itself to be read*
Edgar Allan Poe (2006: 229)

For Walter Benjamin, Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'The Man of the Crowd' epitomises the city as unreadable and similar to a crime scene (1969: 48-55). The above quotation insists on the unreadable while playing on metatextuality: just as the behaviour of the man in the crowd is unreadable for the first-person narrator, the plot peters out amongst descriptions of the London crowd and streets, repeats itself again and again and ends up in a baffling loop as it reverts to the beginning: 'and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that "*es lässt sich nicht lesen*"' (Poe 2006: 237). The repetitive movement caused by the city and the crowd in Poe seems to contaminate neo-Victorian fiction, as London becomes a structural device which allows for self-reflection and rewriting.

According to Benjamin, Poe's story also shows the shift from the figure of the *flâneur* to that of the detective in various nineteenth-century representations of the city (*e.g.* journalism, novels etc.) as a better means to relate to, and make sense of the anxiety springing from, modernity and the urban space. Indeed, the unreadability of the city leads to the emergence in the nineteenth century of such genres as physiologies, sketches of city scenes that were biased, in favour of the bourgeois type, and whose failure to deal with contemporary anxieties permitted the craze for detective or sensation fiction. While the slums were seen as a hotbed of murder, the fear and fascination with the tales of crimes transgressed the city's boundaries of geography and class, 'the well-established moral and visual semiotics to identify the social character of streets as rough or respectable' (Walkowitz 1992: 34). The entire urban space became an area of investigation.

Hence the connection and the contrast between the *flâneur* and the detective.[11] Benjamin notes the parallel spread of urbanism and the emergence of crime stories doubled by that of the *flâneur* and of the detective (1969: 40-41). As Carlo Salzani suggests, this prompts us to

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[11] On the importance of the *flâneur* in nineteenth-century literature, cf. Estelle Murail, *Beyond the Flâneur: Walking, Passage and Crossing in London and Paris in the Nineteenth Century* (2014).

consider the different ideological and epistemological characteristics of the genre through the figure of both the *flâneur* and the detective (2007: 100). Both figures offer different ways and means of reading the city, as evidenced by the works of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. It is only logical that the *flâneur* and the detective should in turn be reconfigured in neo-Dickensian fiction. The trope of the city is intrinsically linked to concerns with hermeneutics: the *flâneur* and the detective (but also, through them, the reader) have to decipher the urban cityscape to interpret and decode it, for instance by observing and analysing faces in the crowd (Poe's topos) or by constantly looking for clues to solve mysterious crimes, as Charles Maddox does in *Tom-All-Alone's* (2012). Yet, this process of reading, deciphering or decoding, is not straightforward and follows winding ways as the characters meander and wander through the streets of London. As we shall see, the reader is invited to step into the story, an invitation which can assume a challenging tone – as in Michel Faber's novel, *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) – and must become part of this erratic, eccentric progression through the textual labyrinth. Many scholars have studied the city, both in Dickens's work and in neo-Victorian fiction, like Kohlke and Gutleben for instance. Though their *Neo-Victorian Cities* tackles the 'encounter with the city', this 'experience' is limited to the visual, the sense of transformation or the effect of genre (especially the Gothic) on the reader. I would like to suggest that neo-Victorian fiction rewriting Dickensian London seeks to appropriate the experience of the Victorian city by capturing the pedestrian movement and sensory experience of its inhabitants, while highlighting the cryptic value ascribed to space in detection.

A.   Entering the city: Thresholds of uncertainty

When discussing the dialectics of participation and distancing inherent to the reading process in *La Lecture comme jeu*, Michel Picard suggests that reading is a form of play, involving the delight of playing, the suspension of disbelief, and the more active game of decoding and interpreting (1986). This is particularly true of detective fiction, which relies on decoding and playing, as well as of engaging and captivating Dickensian and neo-Victorian intertextuality. Neo-Victorian fictions rewriting Dickens's London enhance the activity of reading and make it not only an activity of the mind (*i.e.* decoding the relation signifier/signified) but an activity of the body, a sensory activity. As Isabelle Cases puts it, the

Victorian era is the subject of many a book in which 'the overall impression when following the author through the streets and lanes is of re-imagining, rediscovering and re-experiencing Victorian London' (Cases 2015: 10). This aspect of the neo-Victorian genre seems to be linked to the postmodern idea of simulation. The immersive quality of neo-Victorian fiction has been identified by Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss as a defining feature of the genre: 'self-reflexivity should not be paramount in any definition of neo-Victorian fiction as it forestalls the analysis of immersive practices of reception and consumption, which may turn out to be equally defining features of the neo-Victorian project' (2014: 7). Relying mainly upon the Dickensian texts, the neo-Dickensian fictions under study do not appropriate or imitate the actual London of the nineteenth century, but Dickens's own construct of this reality in his fiction and non-fictional works. Thus, the London presented by neo-Dickensian fiction is more a copy of a copy than an imitation of reality. Neo-Victorian texts provide the reader with a simulation of Dickens's London to use Jean Baudrillard's term, collapsing the hierarchical opposition between the real and the copy (1981: 11-12). Reading these rewritings of London seems to become an *experience* of a version of nineteenth-century London. It presents the reader with a larger-than-life portrait of Victorian London, so much so that the latter paradoxically and ironically eludes reading. It is my main contention that the Victorian London represented in neo-Dickensian fiction does not give access to the past as it was but to *a* version of the past which belongs to collective memory and which arises from Dickens's representations of London.[12]

In his article 'Dickens the Flâneur', Michael Hollington reads the link between Dickens's well-known habit of walking and his creative power through the lens of Benjamin's notion of the *flâneur*. Among other things, Hollington emphasises the sense of observation as well as the importance of the crowd. This leads him to reread Dickens's writing and especially his use of the term 'speculative' so that 'the *flâneur* is a person with an immanent purpose – observing and speculating on his surroundings – giving the appearance […] of a pickpocket' (1961: 78).[13] When comparing the early Dickensian *flâneur* with his later incarnation in *The Uncommercial Traveller,* Hollington also points out that the activity of the *flâneur* is underlined

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[12] This also relates also to our contemporary use of the terms 'Dickens' and 'Dickensian' which seem to stand not only for the man and his work but for the Victorian era at large what Joss Marsh identifies as 'that mysterious slippage of modern culture, whereby Dickens=London=Victorian=England' (Marsh 2001: 207). Marty Gould and Rebecca N. Mitchell, following Marsh's argument, identify the term 'Dickensian' as a 'portmanteau term' (2010: 147).

[13] Hollington's remark foregrounds Salzani's on the ambivalence of the *flâneur*: a detective figure, he can also be related to the criminal (2007: 173).

by a sense of temporality: 'The Uncommercial's activity is no longer immanent; unlike the Inimitable, he must "speculate" abstractedly on the process of historical change, searching for traces of the vanished past or premonitions of the hidden future. The signs are darker, and harder to read' (79).[14] This description of the loss of the 'Balzacian confidence of the early Dickensian *flâneur*' could equally be applied to neo-Victorian fiction itself. Indeed, the latter reinvests and engages with elements concerning literature which were already present during the Victorian era. The neo-Victorian rewriting of the figure of the *flâneur* should not be misunderstood as limited to intertextual playfulness. Indeed, it exemplifies the way in which neo-Victorian fiction exhumes deeper discursive issues connected to modern urban subjectivities. The *flâneur* thus conveys the experience of modernity that constitutes the touchstone of the re-appropriation of discourses surrounding the city and its representation. As this experience relies heavily on the senses, it is small wonder that the privileged genre for such writings should be that of the sensation novel. The link between modernity, the city and the sensation novel in Dickens's writings is sketched by Gillian Piggott.[15] She argues that the sensation novel not only represents the urban experience as shock but that 'the narrative form is also designed to enable the reader to experience the fictional world on these terms' (2012: 141). A striking example of the interweaving of sensation, time and place is Walter Hartright's encounter with the woman in white in Wilkie Collins's novel. It is the tactile shock of the encounter with Anne Catherick that triggers the sensation: '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' (*WW*: 17). The spectral encounter is marked by an ominous sense of death brought by the stopping of Hartright's blood circulation. Hartright's physical position, at the crossroads between London and Hampstead, lends itself to a temporal as well as a spatial interpretation, if we recall Yi-Fu Tuan's theory. Occurring at a crucial moment of change in his life – Hartright prepares to go to live and work in Cumberland –, he thus is looking back towards London, his past, and entering into (a shocking) tactile contact with his future. This contact comes from a blind spot; the quotation above thrives on tactile sensations but is excluding sight. Anne Catherick prefigures, as is well known, Laura Fairlie. Tuan argues that we associate the space in front of us, our horizon, with the future, whereas what cannot be seen and stands at the back partakes of the

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[14] Note the duality of Dickens in this passage as two entities/personae are being projected on him. This will be tackled further in chapter 2 dealing with the construction of Dickens as character.

[15] Piggott is not the first scholar to point out the (obvious) link between the sensation novel and the senses, in *The Novel and the Police* (1989) D. A. Miller insists on this relation which is obliterated in Patrick Brantlinger's definition of the genre in his 'What is "Sensational" About the Sensation Novel?' (1982), for instance.

past (36). Anne Catherick standing behind Hartright disrupts the latter's conceptualisation of space and thus triggers the haunting motif of the novel.

Neo-Victorian novels revisit the shock of London as the privileged generic site of Dickens's work and sensation fiction. This textual spasm, that collapses past, present and future, is what all neo-Victorian texts attempt to trigger, in a more repetitive, second-hand, systematic way. Hence Ackroyd's stress on disorientation and anomalies hovering just behind the reader, materialising the intertextual process:

> The readers of this book must wander and wonder. They may become lost upon the way; they may experience moments of uncertainty, and on occasions strange fantasies or theories may bewilder them. On certain streets various eccentric or vulnerable people will pause beside them, pleading for attention. There will be anomalies and contradictions – London is so large and wild that it contains no less than everything – just as there will be irresolutions and ambiguities. But there will also be moments of revelation, when the city will be seen to harbour the secrets of the human world. Then it is wise to bow down before the immensity. So we set off in anticipation, with the milestone pointing ahead of us 'To *London*'. (2012: 2; italics in the original text)

The Benjaminian, unreadable city refuses totalised representations as the terms 'uncertainty', 'bewilder', 'anomalies and contradictions' underline. Ackroyd's quotation is marked by stylistic echoes of Dickens such as the use of doublets, 'wander and wonder', introducing the main motif of the passage, the labyrinthine wanderings. The reader of Ackroyd's text is drifting, 'lost upon the way', borne away by the sentences, the text acting like a 'milestone pointing ahead of us "To London", recalling Oliver Twist's slow progress to reach the city'.[16] The reader is embarking on a journey as s/he is represented in the text through the inclusive pronoun 'we'. Ackroyd points out the necessary ambivalence intrinsic to the nature of the city: 'anomalies and contradictions', 'irresolutions and ambiguities'. Finally, the city is presented in relation to the apocalyptic topos that is often to be found in urban literature, especially in neo-Victorian fiction, denoting both destruction and revelation. The epitome of the apocalyptic city is, of course, Babylon which was used as an image for London in the nineteenth century as has been noted by Efraim Sicher in *Rereading the City, Rereading Dickens* (2003) and Lynda Nead in *Victorian Babylon* (2000). This Babylonian representation of London is at the centre of Ackroyd's text, which constantly hovers between images of the Great Capital and that of its destruction (*e.g.* the recurring references to the Great Fire). On the whole, Ackroyd's text is polyphonic, so that the reader is given the impression of hearing voices from the past.[17] It should be added that Ackroyd's strategy is also political as he is not merely voicing the past but giving a voice to certain figures from the past, and especially the poor: the 'eccentric or vulnerable people […]

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[16] 'The stone by which he was seated, bore, in large characters, an intimation that it was just seventy miles from that spot to London. The name awakened a new train of ideas in the boy's mind.' (Dickens 1994: 63)

[17] Ackroyd's text tackles every strata and sensory experiences of London life, from its lighting, smells, music, or taste, cooking and drinking.

pleading for attention.' This political gesture and this 'plea' are at the heart of the neo-Victorian fictions under study. As shall now be seen, neo-Dickensian fiction relies on (unsavoury) senses to foreground the immersion in the city. Thus, the reader has to wade his/her way through the strata of the city.

1. The rules of the game

Ackroyd's introduction to London paves the way for Lynn Shepherd's opening invitation in the prologue to her novel *Tom-All-Alone's,* at the end of which the reader is propelled inside the narrative itself, through a play on the senses:

> Muffle your face, if you can, against the stink of human and animal filth, and try not to look too closely at what it is that's caking your boots, and sucking at your tread. And keep your pocket-book close as we go – this part of town is as silent with thieves as it is strident with drunks. We must find him soon, or risk losing him altogether. (*TAA*: 2)

The echo of Dickens is unmistakable, but the evocation is raw, clipped, iconic, with a blunt use of sight and smell through the stench which emanates from the filth of London's streets. In fact, there is a double discourse: Shepherd encourages her reader to anesthetise his/her senses ('muffle your face, […] against', 'try not to') while pointing out the excess of smell and excrements. This double discourse is symptomatic of neo-Victorian rewritings, at once looking back and forward, brandishing intertextual landmarks while concealing them. The use of imperatives gives the reader a kind of agency which creates an immersive experience for the reader. This recalls John Fowles's narration in *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* especially in the first section (1969: 7-9). The peripatetic movement triggered by the sense of walking in Shepherd also is a means to turn the scene into a trying somatic experience, in which the reader's ostensibly distanced position is being challenged. Not only is the reader virtually experiencing the city, but s/he is also threatened by it, as if thieves or smells could assault him/her.

Shepherd presents the act of reading, and especially of reading intertextually, as a somatic experience. The process is both intellectual (identifying allusions) and instantly physical (engaging with the reader's body, through a mirror response, a kind of neurological stimuli), recalling Vincent Jouve's categories of *lu, lectant* and *lisant*. Drawing upon theories of reading as developed by Wolfgang Iser, Hans Jauss, Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes, Michel Picard or Philip Hamon, Jouve offers to consider the fictional character from the point of view of the reader. According to the French critic, the character is an effect constructed by the text

and interpreted by the reader hence his coining of the term 'effet-personnage' or 'character-effect': 'In novels, characters therefore never result from an act of *perception* but, rather, one of *representation*' (1992: 40; original emphasis, my translation).[18] The character is thus as much dependent on its reception by the reader as on its construction by the text. Jouve's theory identifies different modes of reading which in turn produce different receptions of the character: *lectant*, *lisant* and *lu* (82). The first considers reading as play, or reflection, and is associated with the author. The *lectant* is often the targeted reader of metafictions, hence its important presence in neo-Victorian fiction. The *lisant* relates to the mode of reading during which the reader believes in and identifies with the story being told. Once more reading is associated with play here. Finally, the *lu* offers a slight variation on the *lisant* as here the focus is on an unconscious impulse yielding to emotion, curiosity or desire (83-91). Furthermore, while targeting all these aspects of the reader, intertextuality, as Michael Riffaterre points out in his *Semiotics of Poetry*, comes as an obstacle in the act of reading because it must be identified and interpreted so that the reader can go on (1983: 162-163). This challenge is strongly felt in Lynn Shepherd's novel, especially in her pastiche of the emblematic opening of *Bleak House*. Thus, spatial clues must be read as semiotic code and as intertextual code, and from the very start the reader is asked to look for differences, missing or transformed elements, as in the following excerpts that we may compare:

> LONDON. Michaelmas Term lately *over*, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if *the waters* had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a *Megalosaurus*, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. (*BH*: 11; my emphasis)

> London. Michaelmas term lately *begun*, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as *in a Flanders field, and almost as little hope, at least for some*. (*TAA*: 1; my emphasis)

The replacement of 'over' by 'begun' suggests that the novel that will unravel is not exactly matching Dickens's, due to a shift in the timeline; thus 'begun' also acts as a metaphor: the game is afoot, the text which was closed is pried open, twisted, torn, and appropriated. The second part of the quotation introduces the twenty-first-century stance of the omniscient narrator. Shepherd is not only playing with the temporality of the diegesis but also with that of the non-diegetic. Discrepancy is further identified by the reference to Flanders Fields, an anachronistic allusion to World War One. Both texts refer to a crisis: on the one hand, the nineteenth-century narrator reflects upon the conflict between science and religion (in the conflation of advances in palaeontology and imagery related to the Flood), *i.e.* the crisis of faith

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[18] 'Le personnage romanesque, autrement dit, n'est jamais le produit d'une *perception* mais d'une *représentation*.'

in the nineteenth century; on the other hand, Shepherd's reference to the First World War reflects the crisis of modernity and the sense of trauma that ensued in the twentieth and twenty-first century.[19] Michael Hollington identifies a similar association of mud with mortality in Dickens, pointing out the 'attraction of repulsion' it exerts on the nineteenth-century author: the mud reflects both creativity, as a Protean material, and pessimism (1961: 85-86). If the mud conveys the materiality of the streets, the mud of Flanders Fields updates the frame of reference, a metonymy which colours our reading of the moment when Charles Maddox investigates in a churchyard, a mix of earth and human remains which reminds us of the soldiers who fought in the trenches. The reference to Flanders Fields, its triggering of the trope of the living-dead and apocalyptic city inscribes Shepherd's text in a continuum of representation of the city as her text may also echo Eliot's 'The Waste Land'. Indeed, his decaying London, fragmented by intertextuality, is 'an "unreal" city in which the inhabitants are alienated from each other, unable to communicate. They are effectively the living dead' (Beville 2013: 607).

From the start, the reader's activity is directed so as to reconfigure his/her experience of *Bleak House* from another, more anachronistic, perspective. As Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss argue, 'Neo-Victorianism is concerned with repetitions and reiterations of that which is considered Victorian, and many of the theoretical approaches of the field […] consequently contain a notion of return or revisitations' (2014: 4). Shepherd's prologue is an instance of such repetition, which prompts a literal return to the Victorian scene and an immersive mode of reading. The latter is foregrounded by a sudden intrusion of the omniscient narrator addressing the reader, with a hint of time travel: 'on this dark early winter day in 1850 you might be forgiven for thinking you've been transported, on a sudden, to a circle of hell even the devil has given up for lost' (*TAA:* 1). The aside ('on a sudden') mimics the intrusion of the narrator in the text, as much as it emphasises the immersive experience which hinges on the *lectant* mode of reading, thus enhancing the metareflexivity of the novel:

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[19] In *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence* (2009), Lawrence Frank reads the opening of *Bleak House* against controversies emerging in the first half of the nineteenth century concerning the creation of the world. In particular, Frank links Dickens's text to debates over the Nebular hypothesis (that is the fact the Solar system would be made of nebulous matter). Hence, Frank reads the reference to the Megalosaurus as well as that to the crust of earth as intertextual traces echoing advances in palaeontology and geology. Lawrence Frank's argument, linking the emergence of detective fiction to that of new sciences and new paradigms serves our argument on the role of intertextuality and detective fiction in neo-Victorian texts, especially in the image of the geological crusts as a record, a text of the past. (Cf. Chapter 3, '*Bleak House*, the Nebular Hypothesis, and a Crisis in Narrative': 71-98)

> If a single man can ever be said to stand for a city, then it is this city, in this year, and the name of that man is Charles Dickens. But if that name conjures up colour and carol singers and jolly old gentlemen, then think again. These streets are no cause for comedy, and know no tones but grim and grey. More than two million souls, and as many as a third of them sunk in a permanent and repellent destitution that will turn your stomach long before it touches your heart. Night and day London moves and sweats and bawls, as riddled with life as a corpse with maggots. (*ibid.*)

In this quotation, Shepherd is both acknowledging her use of Dickens's *Bleak House* as hypotext and readjusting simplistic visions of Dickens passed on for generations through popular texts such as *A Christmas Carol in Prose* – and its adaptation for children or for the cinema.[20] The colours and vividness evoked by Dickens's Christmas book are put in sharp contrast with the 'grim and grey' tones of the streets; the grimness of which is accentuated by the plosives. The focus is clearly set on the streets which epitomise the city, as well as on destitution. The latter is omnipresent and has a kinaesthetic effect on the reader: 'that will turn your stomach long before it touches your heart.' Not only is the reader asked imaginatively to step into Victorian London but the city itself is given an agency linked to the body. The accumulation puts peripatetic movement, hearing and smell at the core of the experience of Victorian London. The latter denotes unpleasantness, leading to the association of the city with a corpse or, at least, a dying body. The stress on a squalid, poor, decaying London is a constant of neo-Victorian fiction, a 'slumming trope' introduced earlier by the echo of Dante (Kohlke & Gutleben 2011: 26-27). Shepherd thus inscribes herself in the tradition of considering London as an ailing body.

The somatic reading is furthered by the inclusive use of the pronoun 'we' and seemingly panoptic omniscience: 'From where we stand, the air is so deadened with a greasy yellow fog' (*TAA*: 1). Shepherd is playing with Victorian codes related to narration: whereas in Dickens's text the verb 'stand' is used to denote an extra-diegetic presence, a God-like authority rising above the story to offer a panoramic viewpoint, here, on the contrary, the narrator and the reader are situated at the centre of the fog-shrouded streets. The passage is marked by clichéd images of Victorian streets, revisited via T.S. Eliot. The 'greasy yellow fog' – which recalls the greasy papers in Dickens as highlighted by Sara Thornton (2009: 8), Victorian commonplace depictions of the London pea-souper as well as T.S. Eliot's yellow fog sticking to windowpanes in *The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* – is a common feature of neo-Victorian writings on London. We find it in Ackroyd as well as in Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* for instance. Here the

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[20] *A Christmas Carol* has been adapted in various forms as a classic representative of Christmas time. Claire Wood (University of Leicester) is currently working on the adaptation of the novella into pop-ups. Amongst other things, such as narrative strategies, her presentation at the ESSE 2016 conference in Galway pointed out the emphasis such adaptations put on bright colours and vividness.

fog is given a materiality and an agency as it triggers silence ('the air is so deadened'). Shepherd's depiction of the fog contrasts with Dickens's, in which it permeates the city and its inhabitants, expanding from the city to the countryside and the sea. The fog in Dickens denotes interconnectedness and obfuscation – the latter resulting from its use as an image of the operations of the Court of Chancery (J. Carey 1973: 175-176, Sicher 2003: xiii, Alter 2005: 66) while adding to 'the Gothic meteorological repertoire' of the city (Mighall 2007: 56). The omnipresence of the fog is stylistically rendered by the anaphora and the rhythm it establishes, especially with the prepositions up/down/on, as well as by the gerund:

> Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds. (*BH*: 11)

The transposition exemplifies Shepherd's will to write *à la manière de*, her deliberate decision to openly tackle the most evocative passage from *Bleak House* (and other hypotexts) that speak to her concerns in her own novel. The passage is immediately followed by another explicit rewriting of *Bleak House*:

> The shops are lit two hours before their time, but the gas gutters, and the windows are sallow and unappealing, the merchandise filmed with the same sticky brindling of soot that will coat your clothes and line your lungs by the time we're done. (*TAA*: 2)

> Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time — as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look. (*BH*: 12)

The main change concerns the tenses: where Dickens uses the conventional preterit, Shepherd turns to the present tense – and to the future – which emphasises the sense of immediacy and partakes of the invitation for the reader to 'enter' the text. Whereas Dickens's text presents its readers with a reified viewpoint (the gas is the focaliser), the neo-Victorian writer returns to human focalisation. The personified gas of Dickens's novel – echoing the aforementioned fog – is even more unappealing in Shepherd's version, as the sticky film might be construed as an intertextual pellucid layer that sticks to words. The immersion is furthered by the presence of soot which, like Dickens's fog, is ubiquitous and 'invades' the Model Reader as it 'will coat [his/her] clothes and line [his/her] lungs' (*TAA*: 1).

2. The challenging immersion of the reader

Thus, Shepherd's prologue – hovering between the inscription of the reader in the text itself and her numerous appeals to verisimilitude – uses viewpoints, peripatetic movements and the *flâneur* to establish her intertextual play (later on in the novel the peripatetic movement is taken up by the roaming detective, Charles, and the prostitute, Lizzie). The passage bears witness to the way neo-Victorian fiction employs postmodern strategies of writing as defined by Linda Hutcheon. In a passage focusing on what she calls 'historiographic metafiction', Hutcheon claims that postmodernism distinguishes between 'events' and 'fiction' and that history is conceived as a discourse, a narrative. Furthermore, she argues that this kind of fiction shows that the past is only available through textualisation which revolves around experience:

> Historiographic metafiction refuses the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth to claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from their identity. This kind of postmodern fiction also refuses the relegation of the extratextual past to the domain of historiography in the name of the autonomy of art. (Hutcheon 1988: 93)

The opening of Michel Faber's novel *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) illustrates the plurality of historical truth. The novel focuses on the story of Sugar, a prostitute (and aspiring novelist) who becomes the mistress of William Rackham, owner of perfumeries. At the beginning of the novel, Rackham is a penniless and lazy gentleman who then turns into a successful company manager thanks to Sugar. The novel opens in the following way:

> Watch your step. Keep your wits about you; you will need them. This city I am bringing you to is vast and intricate, and you have not been here before. You may imagine, from other stories you've read, that you know it well, but those stories flattered you, welcoming you as a friend, treating you as if you belonged. The truth is that you are an alien from another time and place altogether.
> When I first caught your eye and you decided to come with me, you were probably thinking you would simply arrive and make yourself at home. Now that you're actually here, the air is bitterly cold, and you find yourself being led along in complete darkness, stumbling on uneven ground, recognising nothing. Looking left and right, blinking against an icy wind, you realise you have entered an unknown street of unlit houses full of unknown people. (*CPW*: 3)

This opening, which strongly resembles Shepherd's prologue, challenges the conventional expectations that readers tend to have of representations of Victorian London, especially Dickens's London. Faber implicitly refers to the feeling of appropriation and comfort that Ackroyd identified in his introduction to *Dickens' London* quoted at the very beginning of this chapter. There, in contrast to Faber's narrative, the reader turns into an '"explorer" of the reimagined Victorian environment, an environment that is ostensibly familiar due to popular historical (mis)conceptions but which nonetheless needs to be (re)discovered in this work' (Leavenworth 2012: 265-266). Once more the privileged status of the reader is deconstructed as imperatives are being used to force the reader into the streets of London, while constructing

the omniscient narrator's persona.[21] The text is slippery and disorienting as the use of the conjunction 'but' and the gradation 'those stories flattered you, welcoming you as a friend, treating you as if you belonged' show. The Model Reader is utterly estranged from the nineteenth-century setting, as the narrator reminds him/her of his/her position: 'you are an alien from another time and place altogether', an estrangement which is furthered through the senses. This disorientation aligns Faber's strategy to John Fowles's in *The French Lieutenant Woman* in which the reader is constantly reminded of his/her extradiegetic position in the twentieth century.

In Faber's novel, the senses challenge both our comfortable position as readers and our knowledge of the city. There is a paradoxical play on immediacy – which is rendered by using the gerund – and on distance – expressed by the negative prefix 'un-' as well as the dark and bitterly cold surroundings. Silvana Colella argues that the omnipresence of smell enables a sensorial access to the past in the novel while noting the same ambivalence between immediacy and distance, as the reference to historical smells 'shatters the illusion of immediacy and the pleasure of intimacy, even as it contributes to sustain both' (2010: 88). The opening hovers between the position of the twenty-first-century reader, and the staging of the Model Reader entering the story – and nineteenth-century London. The narrator, who, as we come to realise, personifies the book itself, metatextually plays with the discomfort triggered by this new reading praxis:

> Now you hesitate, still holding on to me, but tempted to let me go. When you first picked me up, you didn't fully appreciate the size of me, nor did you expect I would grip you so tightly, so fast. Sleet stings your cheeks, sharp little spits of it so cold they feel hot, like fiery cinders in the wind. Your ears begin to hurt. But you've allowed yourself to be led astray, and it's too late to turn back now. (*ibid*.)

This passage reflects the stakes of this opening (of any opening): to arouse the interest of the reader and to get him/her to read on. The novel reflects its own strategy and acknowledges that this confrontation with the reader is a means to 'grip' him/her, thus constructing a particular reading pact in which the reader is forced to accept the narration as there is no possible way back. At the same time, the novel goes on plunging the Model Reader into the physical experience of the cold street with the acute depiction of the sensation of sleet. This sensation triggers a whole descriptive detour: the verb 'stings' is emphasised by monosyllabic terms – 'sharp' and 'spits' – conveying the oxymoronic sensation of sleet: ice which feels hot. The

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[21] In a talk given at Málaga, Ana Chapman argued that by turning to transgressive women Faber's novel opens doors for 'productive communication' between past and present (Chapman 2019).

detour also accentuates the confusion which emerges in a subtle echo of 'Gone Astray' ('led astray'), Dickens's account of his getting lost in the streets of London as a child.[22]

Michel Faber's opening is parodic in Linda Hutcheon's understanding of the term that is to say written in a mode which 'allows an artist to speak *to* a discourse from *within* it, but without being totally recuperated by it' (1988: 35; original emphasis). In other words, neo-Victorian fiction as a parodic mode uses markers of Victorian fiction – in Faber's case the omniscient and authoritative narrator as well as the city – while at the same time distancing and subverting those very elements, here pointing out the status of London as a (Dickensian) construct and challenging the traditional reading pact. Faber's challenge to the reader questions traditional ways of reading and seeks to reconfigure hermeneutics. Thus, reading literally becomes an activity which is represented by the 'presence' of the Model Reader in the text, a form of haunting that is doubled by the 'spectral smells' (Colella 2010: 90). The opening of the novel thus goes from direct confrontation or challenge to the reader's incorporation resulting from a gradual process of initiation. Etymologically, *incorporatio* relates to two ideas. Firstly, it refers to 'the action of incorporating two or more things […] [with] another', to the 'union in or into one body'. In philosophy, it relates to 'the combination of two or more parts of speech in one word, as when the object or complement of a verb is inserted between its stem and termination so that the whole forms one word' ('Incorporation, n.' *OED*). The first usage underlines Faber's play on substances as well as on light. The second sense stresses intertextuality as a combination, a notion most relevant to neo-Victorian fiction, which inserts its own narratives into Victorian hypotexts. The question of intertextuality is further complicated when looking at the third sense of the word: incorporation as 'the formation of a legal corporation or body politic' (*ibid.*). Thus it may be argued that the incorporation of Victorian texts in neo-Victorian novels plays with the motif of liability clauses in industry that were spreading in the 1850s. These clauses were cancelling the responsibility of the different members of a corporation in the case of bankruptcy, a motif at the centre of *Little Dorrit*. I suggest that the intertextual play in neo-Dickensian fiction raises issues concerning ethics, and especially legitimacy and responsibility. It is both the responsibility of the neo-Victorian writer and that of his/her reader which is at stake.

Faber's opening can be compared to an initiation ritual, relying on the 'character-effect'. Indeed, we move on from a *lectant* position to the *lu* and are asked to look for the pawn-

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[22] The Model Reader of Faber's text is asked to identify with Dickens's younger self described in the article as lost in the city, both terrified by its excess and fascinated by its vividness.

character who will introduce us to the story. While the narrator is built as an expert, guiding the reader through the streets of London, the Model Reader is constructed as unfit for nineteenth-century experience: 'you blunder forward' (*CPW*: 3). The narrator stands for the *flâneur* figure, at ease in the crowd and in the streets, transparent and representing scopic power.[23] The reader relies heavily on the narrator and is only gradually being prepared for the role of the roaming detective. The text plays with the reader's expectations as it overthrows the traditional balance of power between character and reader:

> The main characters in this story, with whom you want to become intimate, are nowhere near here. They aren't expecting you; you mean nothing to them. If you think they're going to get out of their warm beds and travel miles to meet you, you are mistaken. […] [T]heir servants wouldn't have let you in the door. (4)

The text endows its main characters with agency and free will, making them indifferent to the reader. The protagonists are also characterised by their social background as can be inferred from the reference to servants. More importantly, Faber's text is shifting in its discursive level as readers (the Model Reader as well as the empirical reader) are put on the same level as the characters. In other words, Faber blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality, confronts the reader with a peculiar experience of the city and as such establishes a strong connection with the Dickensian city, while challenging it at the same time. As Gillian Piggott observes, Dickens's novels create a literary space and convey 'through his narrative form, how the city is experienced' (2012: 139). The experience of the city, Piggott further argues, is linked to the notion of shock, what Benjamin calls the *Erlebnis* and *Chockerlebnis*.[24] This shock is rendered by a fragmentation of the narrative as well as by the expression of anxiety (*ibid.*). Neo-Victorian texts openly echo concerns with the city that were already present in the Victorian hypotext and, especially in the case of Faber, this is deployed to such an extent as to simulate anxiety for the reader. In Faber, the shock stems both from the encounter with the re-created city and with the denial of the suspension of disbelief.

Christian Gutleben observes that neo-Victorian fiction keeps on plunging the reader into a spatiotemporal context in order to arouse 'realistic expectations' (2001: 98). Neo-Victorian fictions thus create a mode of reading the city which comes close to producing a reality effect. In *The Crimson Petal and the White* these expectations are pushed to their very limits. For

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[23] The relation between the *flâneur*, transparency and scopic power has been studied at length by Estelle Murail in her PhD dissertation: 'Beyond the Flâneur: Walking, Passage and Crossing in London and Paris in the Nineteenth Century' (2013).

[24] As Piggott remarks, '*Chockerlebnis*' refers to the 'shock' of the city which results from the 'overstimulation by the urban landscape' (91). '*Erlebnis*' is linked to the experience of the urban stimuli and designates the 'case of living the immediate and trivialized passing moment and in an anxious, hyperconscious state' (92).

Eckart Voigts-Virchow, Faber's 'voyeur is the narratee – by implication the reader' not the narrator (2009: 117). Faber not only points out this voyeuristic stance but challenges it: the reader will have to wait before being 'introduced'. Faber exploits a Dickensian feature, that of interconnectedness, as he writes: 'a person who is worth nothing must introduce you to a person worth next-to-nothing, and that person to another, and so on and so forth until finally you can step across the threshold, almost one of the family' (*CPW*: 4).[25] This sentence is reminiscent of the way focalisation works in novels such as *Bleak House*, especially in the chapters told by the omniscient narrator. Faber's opening not only prepares the reader to take on the role of the *flâneur*, but it also moves from third person and omniscient focalisation to an internal focalisation, while remaining in the third person: 'Of course – didn't I mention this? – I'm about to leave you' (5). As Voigts-Virchow puts it: 'Faber's omniscient narrator uses the privileged city stroller with time on his hands as a keynote metaphor and later, he even provides the reader with a body, inviting him or her to the prostitute Caroline's bed' (2009: 117). Characterised as 'your first connection', Caroline becomes a point of entry into the text and the city, a sort of informant, especially with the narrator's ambivalent projection of the readers' identification with her:

> She's a sweet soul, you'll like her. And if you don't, it hardly matters: as soon as she's set you on the right path, you can abandon her without fuss. Within the five years since she's been making her own way in the world, she has never got within shouting distance of the sorts of ladies and gentlemen among whom you will be moving later; she works, lives and will certainly die in Church Lane, tethered securely to this rookery. (6)

Faber uses the possible lack of identification, of empathy, to denounce the indifference of the Establishment towards the poor. Establishment here refers both to the nineteenth-century meaning of the world, related to the Church with the ironic toponym, and to the twentieth-century meaning which denotes superior and respectable classes. Caroline's importance for the reader is relegated to the margins of the story because she does not belong to the same background as the protagonists. As such she is comparable to Jo the sweeper in *Bleak House,* who stands at the crossing of all the plotlines of Dickens's novel (in a literal and symbolic way):

> What connexion can there be between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabout of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard-step? […] Jo sweeps his crossing all day long, unconscious of the link, if any link there be. (*BH*: 235)

Just as Jo leads Lady Dedlock through the streets of London to Nemo's grave, Caroline leads us to the protagonists. Caroline's position is limited, compared to the Model Reader who is

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[25] One can notice, once more, the irony denoting, nevertheless, social concerns.

characterised by movement; Caroline is 'tethered', which suggests immobility and inescapability. The social denunciation doubles the structure of the text: Caroline is reduced to a 'pawn-character' (Jouve 1992: 92-107). She is constructed only in terms of her function in the structure of the narrative. This turns the Model Reader into the prostitute's client, an image which doubles the functionality of the character. Sensations are now focalised through Caroline and reflect her trade as she equates snow with sperm: 'The cobbled paving of church Lane is no longer white with snow, the sleet has left great gobs and trails of slush, like monstrous spills of semen, glowing yellowish in the gas-light' (*CPW*: 7). The equation between slush and sperm hints at hidden intercourse, sexual repression and exploitation; it is a clue which the reader must decipher. Faber's neo-Victorian stance extends Jouve's theory of character, especially concerning the role of the reader, as Faber has his Model Reader immersed within the story while his main characters are resisting reading and thus create a counter-effect.

Gutleben shows that neo-Victorian fiction is far from being solely nostalgic: as the example of Faber illustrates, it can be very challenging and deconstructive. At times, this subversive activity takes the form of 'an aesthetic of the unsavoury' which is a means to take a distance from Victorian hypotexts (Gutleben 2001: 129-133). This can be seen in Faber's novel in which a sense of estrangement is created as the reader is warned about the area depicted: 'In short, this is another world altogether, where prosperity is an exotic dream as distant as the stars' (*CPW*: 5). The reader's expectations and the realism of nineteenth-century novels are debunked: 'You hear muffled drunken voices from somewhere nearby, but what little you understand doesn't sound like the carefully chosen opening speeches of a grand romantic drama; instead, you find yourself hoping to God that the voices come no closer' (*ibid.*). Faber's debunking springs from his ironical undermining of Victorian fiction and 'grand romantic drama' exemplified by 'the carefully chosen opening speeches'. The slums of St Giles are both distant and close, lying beyond the reach of law and order, a heterotopia to use Michel Foucault's term (1986: 24).[26] Foucault claims that while the nineteenth century was obsessed with time, our society is concerned with space, especially the notion of site. Foucault defines heterotopias as 'real places […] which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (Foucault 1986: 24). This definition

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[26] The importance of Foucault's concept in neo-Victorianism has also been noticed by Elizabeth Ho who focuses on the ship as heterotopia and the turn to the sea in postcolonial neo-Victorian fiction (2012: 176).

fits Faber's description of St Giles, with its Dickensian pastiche of puns (the 'do-gooders' that 'do no good') and wall-eyed, crumbling edifices:

> Church Lane is the sort of street where even the cats are thin and hollow-eyed for want of meat, the sort of street where men who profess to be labourers never seem to labour and so-called washer- women rarely wash. Do-gooders can do no good here, and are sent on their way with despair in their hearts and shit on their shoes. A model lodging-house for the deserving poor, opened with great philanthropic fanfare twenty years ago, has already fallen into the hands of disreputables, and has *aged terribly*. The other, more *antiquated* houses, despite being two or even three storeys high, exude a *subterranean* atmosphere, as if they have been *excavated* from a great *pit*, the *decomposing archaeology of a lost civilisation*. Centuries-old buildings support themselves on *crutches* of iron piping, their *wounds and infirmities poulticed* with stucco, *slung* with clothes-lines, *patched up* with rotting wood. The roofs are a crazy jumble, the upper windows cracked and black as the brickwork, and the sky above seems more solid than air, a vaulted ceiling like the glass roof of a factory or a railway station: once upon a time bright and transparent, now overcast with filth. (*CPW*: 4-5; my emphasis)

Using mirror structures and negation, Faber reverses utopian representations of the city and deconstructs philanthropic projects through the personification of the buildings. He is thus both deconstructing the modes of writing in nineteenth-century novels, as we have seen above, and confirming nineteenth-century writing about the condition of the poor, an aspect of Dickens's work which was much commented upon by Efraim Sicher (2003: 3-7). The personification in the quotation above identifies the buildings with aging, dying and infirm bodies as the italics illustrate. This personification is a way for Faber to make the inhabitants of such tenements visible: what is excavated here are the transformed bodies of the working-class. The overall impression is that of a world stuck in decay, with a hint that this is the result of industrialisation as the comparison 'like the glass roof of a factory or a railway station' indicates while echoing the Crystal Palace built for the 1851 Great Exhibition. The heterotopia enables Faber to represent and create a discursive space in which such issues as the deviant, the poor and reading can be tackled. The personification of the slums echoes Foucault's analysis of the cemetery, the evolution of which, as churchyards were moved to the suburbs in the nineteenth century, reveals a cultural shift in the relation to death and fear of contamination. In other words, the slums of St Giles, having the same heterotopic function as churchyards, reveal a fear of contamination as they highlight the porosity of the city. It is a feature of nineteenth-century culture which appears in *Bleak House* as Lady Dedlock's dress is stained when she follows Jo to Nemo's grave:

> The servant shrinks into a corner, into a corner of that hideous archway, with its deadly stains contaminating her dress; and putting out her two hands and passionately telling him to keep away from her, for he is loathsome to her, so remains for some moments. Jo stands staring and is still staring when she recovers herself. (*BH*: 243)

The churchyard is characterised in Gothic fashion, calling upon the monstrous – the archway reminds us of the grotesque – which spreads on Lady Dedlock's dress and encompasses Jo, an effect emphasised by the gerund. The violence of the emotions produced by the churchyard is

conveyed by the syncopated rhythm: the text stammers with repetition, polysyndeton and apposition. Echoing this description, Faber's St Giles also is a heterochrony – a place where time is erased (Foucault 1986: 26):

> Caroline has no clock. Few people in Church Lane do. Few know what year it is, or even that eighteen and a half centuries are supposed to have passed since a Jewish troublemaker was hauled away to the gallows for disturbing the peace. This is a street where people go to sleep not at a specific hour but when the gin takes effect, or when exhaustion will permit no further violence. This is a street where people wake when the opium in their babies' sugar-water ceases to keep the little wretches under. This is a street where the weaker souls crawl into bed as soon as the sun sets and lie awake listening to the rats. This is a street reached only faintly, too faintly, by the bells of church and the trumpets of state. (*CPW*: 6)

The sense of distance between the inhabitants of St Giles and the rest of society is conveyed by a gradual dehumanisation which reaches its climax with the verb 'to crawl', as well as through the anaphora 'This is a street where', and blends layers of archetypes, from Hogarth's *Gin Lane* to De Quincey's architecture in his *Confessions* to Dickens. However, the passage also satirises the members of the Establishment, *i.e.* the Church – with the reference to Jesus – and the Government. It is striking that the unreachability of the slum should be conveyed by the erasure of sounds. In its preoccupations with the representations of the streets which hint at the persisting issue of the poor, Faber's text can be said to be a neo-Dickensian novel, rather than counter-Dickensian, in the way Simon Joyce defines this subgenre (2007: 147-148).

The heterotopic place created by Faber is meant to thematise reading, as he presents his readers with the unreadable: 'It's an ashen hour of night, blackish-grey and almost readable like undisturbed pages of burnt manuscript' (*CPW*: 3). This quotation offers the reader a paradoxical image, which plays on an impossible comparison. Later on in the passage under study, a new mode of reading/cognition is represented as the reader is asked to readjust to Caroline's cognitive mode, which is a first step into detection:

> Apart from the pale gas-light of the street-lamps at the far corners, you can't see any light in Church Lane, but that's because your eyes are accustomed to stronger signs of human wakefulness than the feeble glow of two candles behind a smutty windowpane. You come from a world where darkness is swept aside at the snap of a switch[.] (5)

The reader is being asked to adapt his/her senses and related cognitive apparatus to nineteenth-century experience. This marks a shift from *flâneur* to detective, with the term 'sign', though this is not yet central to the novel's strategy. The last sentence also breaks the suspension of disbelief, as the reader is reminded that s/he is an outsider belonging to the twenty-first century. The narration plays on peripatetic movement as the reader is being invited to enter the house Caroline lives in:

> Come up with me to the room where that feeble light is shining. Let me pull you in through the back door of the house, let me lead you through a claustrophobic corridor that smells of slowly percolating carpet and soiled linen. Let me rescue you from the cold. I know the way.
> Watch your step on these stairs; some of them are rotten. I know which ones; trust me. You have come this far, why not go just a little further? Patience is a virtue, and will be amply rewarded. (*ibid*.)

The anaphora and the imperatives gradually force the reader to merge with the story, playfully mentioning the unsavoury while creating a sense of trust. The text is saturated by appeals to sensations: the cold, the smells, the floor's texture which reaches its climax at the end of the passage. The act of reading is equated with the peripatetic motion simulated by the perspective of the narrator as the rhetorical question illustrates. This peripatetic motion doubles the 'olfactory [that] haunts the house of realism in Faber's novel' which 'contributes to tearing holes into the nostalgic veneer of contemporary representations of the doxological Victorians' (Colella 2010: 106). The text takes on a further step in virtual immersion as the reader is invited to slip into Caroline's bed. The Model Reader is constructed by the somatic experience as well as by gender: 'Lift the blankets and ease your body in. If you are a woman, it doesn't matter: women very commonly slept together in this day and age. If you are a man, it matters even less: there have been hundreds here before you' (8). Bringing gender into play not only characterises the Model Reader but also, since there are two possibilities offered here, directly addresses the empirical reader. This unusual play on gender opens two different readings or meanings for the simulation: in the case of a female reader, the relation with Caroline is constructed as innocent while if the reader is a man, he is prompted to switch to the prostitute narrative. From this moment on, the reader is properly introduced to the story which can unfold; within a couple of pages the main character, Sugar, appears. Reading is thus turned into a virtual experience of presence, a simulation somewhat reminiscent of gamebooks and roleplay in which reading is interactive as the reader's choices turn into action. Though the notion of choice has been erased here, the interaction between the book, the story and the reader is very present in Faber's text, which creates a new and challenging way of reading as the reader is partly writing/constructing the text.

3. Reading the city through peripatetic movement

The relation between text, character and reader in neo-Dickensian fiction is not always as challenging an invitation. In the case of Peter Carey's novel, *Jack Maggs,* the nineteenth-century figure of the *flâneur* is re-invested with a different aim and emphasis. There we shift from the *flâneur* as the omniscient narrator (a writer's personae) to a representation of the *flâneur* as a character, switching from the rambling pleasure associated with the *flâneur* to a more oppressive urban space, yet still retaining that quality of randomly walking and registering, camera-like, the sights of the city. The character rather than the narrator is now

endowed with the *flâneur'*s scopic power and peripatetic movement, thus becoming a mediator inducing an immersive experience of reading. The first experience of London in Carey's novel plunges the reader into the mystery surrounding Jack Maggs, while triggering an intertextual play.[27]

Throughout the beginning of the novel – until Maggs is hired as a footman for Mr Buckle – Carey's eponymous protagonist is characterised as an outsider or Other (Maggs is repeatedly called 'the stranger' or 'the man' in the first sections of the text). Carey is playing with his readers, who may know that Jack Maggs is a rewriting of Abel Magwitch, the convict of and Pip's benefactor in Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Thus, Carey's construction of Maggs as Other posits him as a postcolonial subject returning to England, defining the novel as a counter-narrative or 'affiliative' rewriting, to use John Thieme's terminology (2001: 107). The protagonist's otherness is also constructed in terms of temporality since he embodies the haunting return of the past at the centre of the rewriting process itself. This is first indicated by Maggs's clothes: for instance, we are told that his red waistcoat is out of fashion (*JM*: 1) while his handkerchief is described as 'a bright green Kingsman of an *earlier time*' (3; italics mine). The emphasis on Maggs's otherness in fact shows how 'Carey's novel insists that London stories and places are ghosted by colonial reflections and sceptres' (Mirmohamadi and Martin 2012: 137). The temporal distance which marks Maggs's arrival in London reflects the reader's own temporal distance from Victorian London, creating a connection between the Model Reader and the protagonist. Yet, focalisation resists total equation as Maggs's thoughts are not being shared: Jack Maggs is surrounded by mystery, eluding clear identification by other viewers, including the reader. As such, he is a figure of the crowd, escaping fixed representation, while recalling the convict in the coach in *Great Expectations*. This absence of identification echoes Estelle Murail's insistence on the transparency and 'polymorphism' of the *flâneur* which 'allows readers to take on his empty shell to see with and through him' (2013: paragraph 10-11). The characterisation of Jack Maggs as a *flâneur* is thus in keeping with an identification of the reader with the convict. This in fact crystallises the intertextuality of the passage, which is an echo of both Pip's arrival in London at the end of volume one and Pip's journey with convicts in chapter XXVIII. In Pip's narration, the presence of the convicts in the coach is marked by a sense of being haunted, a return of the past encounter with Magwitch:

[27] In a recent article, Keyvan Allahyari argues that '*Jack Maggs* constitutes a literary world' which 'is far from limited to London or even England; it is stretched across two extremely distant geographies, those of the metropolitan London and the peripheral Sydney' (2017: 326). Allahyari's article sheds a new light on the novel by considering literature as a world and thereby demonstrating the way in which the novel borrows from both English and Australian literatures.

'The two convicts were handcuffed together, and had irons on their legs, – irons of a pattern that I knew well. They wore the dress that I likewise knew well' (*GE*: 207). The 'pattern' identified by Pip signifies the materiality of the irons but also, symbolically, it points out Dickens's narrative pattern which plays on repetition. Carey's rewriting reverses the prominent clues in Pip's narrative, in which the convicts are over-signified as threatening Others:

> They laughed and slued themselves round with a clink of their coupling manacle, and looked at something else. The great numbers on their backs, as if they were street doors; their coarse mangy ungainly outer surface, as if they were lower animals; their ironed legs, apologetically garlanded with pocket-handkerchiefs; and the way in which all present looked at them and kept from them; made them (as Herbert had said) a most disagreeable and degraded spectacle. (*GE*: 208)

Yet, the over-signification emerging from clichés associated with criminality ('a clink of their coupling manacle,' 'ironed legs') reduces the convicts to a spectacle, an empty dumb show, Pip and the other voyagers (hence the reader as well) looking no deeper than the surface. The convicts of *Great Expectations* and *Jack Maggs* are thus construed as blank pages, 'street doors,' as the different characters they encounter project possible functions/identities onto them.

Like Pip's encounter with the two convicts on the coach, and his strolling through the streets towards Smithfield meat-market, Maggs's characterisation is in keeping with another aspect of the *flâneur*: the collocation of past and present in the experience of the city. As Gillian Piggott argues in her study of the relation between Dickens's works and Benjamin's, for the latter, the experience of the city, of modernity, is marked by spectrality, a conception of urban experience which Piggott identifies in *David Copperfield*. Piggott's reading of *Copperfield* points out the haunting traces of the past that identify the palimpsest of the city with David's own experience: 'The city space is a palimpsest, somehow haunted by the fading traces of an earlier, elusive "self" – a trace that is constantly reworked and overwritten with each revisitation' (2012: 130). Piggott's use of such terms as reworking, revisiting and overwriting is interesting in relation to the neo-Victorian text, as they shape both the form and content of *Jack Maggs* for instance.

Julian Wolfreys argues that the London depicted in *Jack Maggs* partakes of the suggestive mode. He demonstrates that Carey's text is characterised by a lack of a sense of place, as the reader has to fill in the gaps. The elements added by the reader are determined by the haunting of the original novel so that, according to him, London is 'a mere chimera' (2015: 132). Therefore, Wolfreys only sees in Carey's London 'the spectre of itself' (*ibid.*).[28]

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[28] For Wolfreys, it seems that neo-Victorian representations of the city constitute 'a series of post-Dickensian tics, gestures, stereotypes and clichés (in the original, rather than pejorative sense of those words)' (2015: 232) which

Yet Wolfreys may be underestimating the role of London and of the senses in the novel. For Carey creates a geography of encounters, red herrings and recollections, which gradually disclose the secrets of the past, and of colonial oppression. Detection is often considered as a temporal process allowing one to solve a puzzle, but the spatial landmarks of the process are equally important. For instance, for Wolfreys, the ubiquity of light in the opening scene is only an effect producing an illusion which conceals the city (137). Contrary to Wolfreys, I suggest that the use of light does not conceal but highlights the city and Maggs's winding way through the streets. Jack Maggs's wandering through London is indeed characterised by the omnipresence of light: 'the man with the red waistcoat set off into the night, his cane tapping on the cobblestones, and straight up into the Haymarket, his chin up and the orbs of his eyes everywhere reflecting an unearthly flare and glare' (*JM*: 2). The link between sight and light is made apparent as Maggs's eyes reflect the light of the lampposts. This epitomises the representation process: the reader is 'seeing' London through Jack Maggs's viewpoint, while the light is demonic and threatening. This is a clue (is Maggs a villain, or someone who has gone through the hell of punishment?) while Maggs may well also be reflecting suspicions towards gas lights, a nineteenth-century reaction to this new technology from someone who has never seen it before.[29] The following paragraph opens with an accumulation depicting the light spilling over the streets:

> This light had shone all the way from Elephant and Castle: gas light, blazing and streaming like great torches; sausages illuminated, fish and ice gleaming, chemist shops aglow like caves with their variegated vases illuminated from within. The city had become a fairground, and as the coach crossed the river at Westminster the stranger saw that even the bridges of the Thames were illuminated. (*ibid.*)

In this passage, the focaliser insists on the ubiquitous modernity of 'gas light' which contrasts with 'like torches' and 'like caves'. The city is conjured up through metonymies (Elephant and Castle, the signature vases of nineteenth-century chemists), and given an unreal, *carnivalesque* aspect as it is compared to a 'fairground'. The *carnivalesque* allows for vivid images of London as they were depicted by Dickens himself. Once more, the London rewritten by the neo-

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nevertheless make London 'all the more weightily insistent, for being so overdetermined by the Dickensian archetype of the modern city' (133). Wolfreys compares Carey's text with the opening of *Our Mutual Friend*. It is true that Dickens's opening is forcibly called upon by Carey as Wolfreys suggests, Maggs's arrival echoing the incipit of Dickens's novel:

> In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise, a boat of dirty and disreputable appearance, with two figures in it, floated on the Thames, between Southwark bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone, as an autumn evening was closing in. (Dickens 1991a: 1)

[29] This suspicion towards technology, and especially progress linked to lightning, is a motif that comes back in different neo-Victorian works, in *Drood* the narrator Wilkie Collins acknowledges his reluctance to have gas/electric lights; in the (arguably) neo-Victorian TV Show, *Downton Abbey*, Mrs Patmore, the cook of the Crawley household, is suspicious of lights too while the show opens on the installation of the telephone which brings the news of the probable death of Earl Grantham's cousin, triggering the main plot of the first series.

Victorian writer is not that which was in existence but the (nostalgic) Dickensian creation. Light functions as a double clue here: it is a code for the Dickensian intertext, but also for the reversal Carey wishes to achieve, since the carnivalesque is also a hint which foreshadows the porosity of the city, especially of the class system, a theme which is at the heart of Carey's novel, its protagonists bearing witness to social mobility. In a Bakhtinian way, the carnivalesque city of *Jack Maggs* helps to map Carey's narrative of the suppressed voice of the convict, who becomes the centre of the novel as well as of the streets, while Henry Phipps (Pip's stand-in) is relegated to the very margins of the narrative.

Light is also being used to enhance Maggs's trajectory through the streets of London. His coach enters London through Elephant and Castle, before crossing the Thames at Westminster and arriving at Charing Cross, as was usual for travellers from Kent.[30] Other street names are called upon later on in this opening, presenting us with a loitering Maggs:

> His Kinsman safely put away for the moment, he started along the Strand, then seemed to change his mind, for a moment later he was heading up Agar Street, then cutting up to Maiden Lane.
> In Floral Street, he paused before the now illuminated window of Mc Clusky's Pudding Shop. He blew his nose again, whether from soot or sentiment the face gave no indication, and then, having entered that famously lopsided little shop, emerged with a syrup dumpling sprinkled liberally with confectioner's sugar. He ate the dumpling in the street, still walking. What he began in Floral Street he finished in St Martin's Lane. Here, just a little south of Seven Dials, the stranger stood on a quiet corner, alone, free from the blaze of gas.
> It was Cecil Street he had come to, a very short street linking Cross Street to St Martin's Lane. He dusted down his face carefully with his kerchief, and then set off into the darkness, peering to find what street numbers he could see – none. (*JM*: 3)

This quotation has Maggs – literally – wandering and circulating in the area encompassing Soho, St Giles and Seven Dials. Annegret Maack identifies the passage as an echo of *Oliver Twist*, especially the passage when Oliver walks with Bill Sikes through London, pointing out the cartographic precision inherent to both texts (2004: 233). When looking at his trajectory on a map, one realises that it forms a circle. Maggs's roaming in the streets is not straightforward and is mimicked by Carey's peripatetic mode of writing. The use of verbs denoting movement associated with prepositions as well as the punctuation emphasise Maggs's wanderings. The rapid pace of the first and last paragraphs contrasts with the second paragraph as Maggs pauses at a baker's. As we have seen in Shepherd, here too the ubiquity of the street is represented by the soot which enters the body ('He blew his nose again, whether from soot or sentiment his face gave no indication'). The gerund indicates perpetual movement. Floral Street as well as Cross Street constitute inaccuracies in the text. The first is anachronistic: in the nineteenth century Floral Street was known as Hart Street (Sheppard 1970: 182-184). Cross Street does

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[30] I am indebted to Prof. Malcom Andrews for this piece of information.

not exist but might refer to Charing Cross Road. These inaccuracies seem purposeful as the text alternates between only two kinds of traffic routes – lanes and streets – which creates a further marker of rhythm going thus: street-lane-street.[31] The alternation plays with scales, streets are opposed in width to lanes ('Street' *OED*), which reflects on the porosity of the area Maggs is walking through. To a certain extent, the text is reminiscent of Charles Booth's Poverty maps and their colour code distinguishing between seven categories, from 'Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal' to 'Upper-middle and upper classes. Wealthy'.[32] The peripatetic quality of this passage, its association with light and wandering all define Maggs as a *flâneur*. The text and Maggs's model shift when he arrives in Seven Dials: light is now replaced by darkness and the loitering turns into a more purposeful walk. This shift operates a turn from Maggs-the-*flâneur* to Maggs-the-detective/criminal as the evocation of numbers (or lack of) suggests: '[he] then set off into the darkness, peering to find what street numbers he could see – none'. Maggs's circulation in the streets of London makes the city legible at a cartographic and macroscopic level which is counter-balanced at the microscopic level of 'streets numbers' which resist reading.

Figure 1: 'Jack Maggs's circulation in Haymarket' based on Charles Booth's map

The omnipresence of light in Carey's text may be contrasted with the sensation of dirt which pervades Pip's narrative, especially when he decides to explore Smithfield:

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[31] Charles Dickens temporarily lived in Cecil Street in 1833, the time during which the novel takes place (Hartley 2012: 4), it being Maggs's destination can thus be interpreted as one of Carey's play with the nineteenth-century author's biography.

[32] Charles Booth's poverty maps are accessible online on the 'Charles Booth's London – Poverty maps and police notebooks' website which enables to superpose it onto a contemporary map of London. The website is part of a project led and funded by LSE Library https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map/15/-0.1179/51.5022/46/0

> So, I came to Smithfield; and the shameful place, being all asmear with filth and fat and blood and foam, seemed to stick to me. So, I rubbed it off with all possible speed by turning into a street where I saw the great black dome of Saint Paul's bulging at me from behind a grim stone building which a bystander said was Newgate Prison. (*GE*: 151)

The accumulation of 'filth and fat and blood and foam' as well as the alliteration in /s/ and /f/ represent the sticky dirt of the Smithfield cattle market: Pip's walk is endowed with a new function, cleaning himself up, while the passage introduces peripatetic movement. Walking becomes a means of escape for Pip as he 'rubs' off the dirt. The reader is following Pip's progression in Smithfield and the surrounding areas step by step. Pip's peripatetic experience revolves around Newgate and seems to turn Smithfield into a crime scene: 'the shameful place' is tainted with blood. Pip becomes an ambiguous criminal figure, trying to escape but failing to do so as he arrives at Newgate. The tour of the prison turns into a traumatic experience (a reflection of Dickens's own trauma in his childhood when visiting his father): 'This was horrible, and gave me a sickening idea of London' (*GE*: 152). Ackroyd certainly has Pip in mind when tackling Newgate in his biography of London, as he comments on those tours:

> Newgate also became a kind of theatre when, on Wednesdays or Thursdays between the hours of twelve and three, it was open to visitors. Here sightseers would be shown casts of the heads of notorious criminals, as well as the chain and handcuffs which once held Jack Sheppard; they could at their wish be locked into one of the condemned cells for a moment, or even sit within the old whipping post. (2012: 209)

This example once more highlights the fact that neo-Victorian recreations of London are only recreations of Dickens's representations, in this case, of Newgate as an immersive experience for Pip and, by proxy, for the Model Reader. By renegotiating Dickensian London, neo-Dickensian fiction is not giving its readers access to Victorian London but repeating reading experiences that were already appealing to the Victorians themselves.

This is obvious in Shepherd's text and in *Drood*, where the characters roam the streets looking for clues connected with crime or the underworld. Carey's text is also reworking Pip's arrival in London, and especially his experience with the coachman who takes him from the Cross Keys inn to Jaggers's offices in Little Britain. The depiction of the coachman's capes symbolises deception as much as discomfort: 'a hackney-coachman, who seemed to have as many capes to his greasy great-coat as he was years old' (*GE*: 149). The strata composing the capes turn the coachman into a figure of the city, echoing the geological strata of clay on which London stands. The whole passage is ironic and plays on the discrepancy between the length of the 'journey' to Little Britain and the preparations provided by the coachman: '[he] packed me up in his coach and hemmed me in with a folding and jingling barrier of steps, as if he were going to take me fifty miles' (*ibid*.). The coach itself symbolises decay, a former well-off coach

turned into rags, the coronets and the space for footmen associated with rags show that the coach has 'come down in the world' (468).

Pip's ironic yet dark first discovery of London thus contrasts with Carey's colourful depiction of the city as Maggs enters Haymarket and compares it to 'a grand ball'. The passage opens up onto other represented sensations, once more creating an immersive environment for the reader: 'Not just the gas, the music, the dense, tight crowds. A man from the last century would not have recognized it; a man from even fifteen years before would have been confused' (*JM*: 2). The city is a place of estrangement for the newcomer due to its apparent excess. Carey thus plays with the idea of London as ever-changing. This mutability is also a way to further characterise Jack Maggs as a figure of the past. A contrast is established between the past and the current city Jack Maggs gradually uncovers, a contrast which is conveyed when he enters a gin palace. This is first established by the name of the place – 'Dram shops had become gin palaces' – and is furthered by the comparison to a sacred place: 'This one here- it was like a temple, damned if it was not, the door surrounded by stained panes of rich dyes: rosettes, bunches of grapes' (*ibid.*). Carey is here using Maggs's viewpoint through free indirect speech as well as playing with the Victorian crisis of faith, the architecture of sacred places being reinvested in pubs. The city presented to the reader is confusing and overwhelming: 'All around him was uproar, din, the deafening rush, the smell of horse shit, soot, the yellow smell of London Town' (*ibid.*). This synaesthetic image partakes of multiple representations of London and its fog, including Peter Ackroyd's.

Neo-Victorian fiction thus draws upon the claustrophobic dimension of Dickens's representation of space in *Great Expectations*. Once left alone in Jaggers's office, Pip, though indoors, experiences London as a place of imprisonment: 'Mr Jaggers's room was lighted by a skylight only, and was a most dismal place; the skylight, eccentrically patched like a broken head, and the distorted adjoining houses looking as if they had twisted themselves to peep down at me through it' (*GE*: 150). The room is unappealing, associated with death (the broken-head form of the skylight foregrounds the plaster casts of hanged men later in the description) all the while letting the city in. The mention of the broken head enables Dickens to displace the human imagery onto the adjoining houses which are given agency and, as such, seem to represent a threat for Pip. For Tambling, the death-masks 'which imply that everything has become a commodity, even dead bodies, indicate how the past continues its power over the present, even after the state has had its way by hanging people'. They point to Mr

Jaggers's power to hang others while '[t]he office, as if because empty of Jaggers, is a death-mask too' (Tambling 2009: 188).

The nearby houses and the room are felt to be oppressive as Pip describes the wall and the spectral presence of past clients: 'The room was but small, and the clients seemed to have had a habit of backing up against the wall: the wall, especially opposite to Mr Jagger's chair, being greasy with shoulders' (*GE*: 150). The interior of the office recalls Pip's earlier description of the market, the 'greasy' wall being an echo of the sticky dirt while representing the trace of previous clients.[33] Mr Jaggers's association with death is established through the description of his armchair: 'Mr Jaggers's own high-backed chair was of deadly black horsehair, with rows of brass nails round it, like a coffin' (*ibid*.). The room and Jaggers are like London, in that both are felt by Pip to be oppressive and deadly. The room, like the city, triggers a double reaction, at once threatening and fascinating to Pip: 'I sat down in the cliental chair placed over against Mr Jaggers's chair, and became fascinated by the dismal atmosphere of the place' (*ibid*.) and '[o]f course I had no experience of a London summer day, and my spirits may have been oppressed by the hot exhausted air, and by the dust and grit that lay thick on everything' (151).

The play on attraction and repulsion is much worked upon in neo-Victorian fictions. However much Shepherd or Faber may harp on a threatening London, the city remains fascinating for both characters and readers. The 'fairground' impression derived by Maggs is tainted by a sense of oppression or threat created by his arrival in the city. After travelling on board *The Rocket*, a stage-coach going from Dover to London (we can see here a parallelism with Pip's own journey from the Kent marshes to the capital), Maggs arrives at the 'Golden Ox' inn which is used as a metaphor for the city that 'invokes the rapacious, self-consuming world of nineteenth-century business' (Woodcock 2004: 266). The threat that Pip once felt in Jaggers's office is now materialised by the name of the inn, a clue connoting sacrifice and colonial consumption, as if London were about to devour Jack Maggs: 'in the bright aura of gas light, a golden bull and an overgrown mouth opening to devour him – the sign of his inn, the Golden Ox'(*JM*: 1). Carey's novel is also marked by a sense of oppression which stems from a panoptical impression.

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[33] Karl Ashley Smith offers a study of the functions of dirt in Dickens's novel in chapter 3 of his *Dickens and the Unreal City*, which focuses especially on the way dirt replaces more traditional Gothic imagery such as the castle (2008: 63-90).

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These openings ask their readers, in different ways, to enter the story which is about to unfold and, by extension, to enter a version of Victorian London, Dickens's London. Reading becomes an interactive activity, relying on the senses as well as on the position of the reader, narrator and characters. *Flâneur*-like, the reader is asked to wander in the streets of London, re-activating Benjamin's figure of the *flâneur,* in a space that contains secrets and must constantly be deciphered. If Dickens walks and writes the city in Tambling's aforementioned words, for us as neo-Victorian readers, reading means entering the city as a palimpsestic construct.

As such, these texts are also reminiscent of theme-parks which attempt to recreate a certain version of nineteenth-century England or literary attractions, the main example being 'Dickens's World' in Chatham, Kent which opened in 2007 and closed in October 2017. Such places are symptomatic of the appeal and attraction of Victoriana for twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers/consumers. Marty Gould and Rebecca N. Mitchell argue that the Kentish literary theme park, in its resistance to '*disneyification*', offered its visitors different forms of adaptations of the literary texts. The latter were conveying a representation of the act of reading which, they argue, was mostly constructed in a passive and nostalgic mode: 'Dickens World offers a unique perspective on the act of reading, the nature of narrative, and the varied layers of readerly desire and textual pleasure' (Gould and Mitchell 2010: 164). More recently, a new trend in video games is emerging in which the immersion and interaction with a reconstructed nineteenth-century setting reaches its climax. The scope of this chapter does not enable a deeper analysis of these questions but academic research currently tackles this phenomenon, like the presence of Dickens in the videogame *Assassins' Creed Syndicate* (2015).[34] This points to the reinvestment of a genre that appeared after Dickens's death: the 'Dickens's country' genre, a first example of which is F.G. Kitton's 1905 *Dickens's Country*.

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[34] Amongst other academics, Fransesca Orestano (University of Milano) analysed the role of Dickens in the game as antonomasia in a talk she gave at the ESSE conference held in Galway in 2016. Clémence Folléa (Universite Paris Cité) too is interested in the spectral presence of Dickens in this videogame but also in the cinema and TV shows as her PhD dissertation has shown (2016).

B.   The reader as roaming detective in neo-Victorian fiction

After entering the fictional theme park of neo-Victorian London, the reader is asked to keep decoding spatial clues and recognise significant landmarks throughout the novels under study. There is an implicit process of mapping, which further signals the shift from the *flâneur* to the detective, as it relates to the activity of ordering a more anxious world, in other words, of rendering it intelligible or reading it. Urban space leads to new ways of relating to, and making sense of, place, and thus has long been associated with cartography. The relation between the city, mapping and reading has been noticed by many critics, including Efraim Sicher, Michel de Certeau or Walter Benjamin.

Mapping had long been a matter of concern.[35] In the nineteenth century, the city became the focus of surveys in an attempt to keep the spatial lay-out under control, to ascertain the growth of its population and to reform its living conditions. In *Victorian Babylon* (2000), Lynda Nead associates mapping with the discourses on improvement in the 1860s. She argues that mapping became an essential tool for the Metropolitan Board of Works during the construction of the new drainage system, as well as of the underground railway: 'Maps can be seen to be embedded in the attempt to modernise London in the mid-nineteenth century. The Skeleton Ordnance Survey marked the transition from an older, static view of the city to its conception as changing and progressive' (2000: 21). As is clear from this quotation, mapping is a tool of change, triggering movement, a key aspect of modernity: 'The map enabled London to get moving' (22). Her argument, based both on the works undertaken at the time and on their reception in contemporary newspapers (especially *The Illustrated London News*) as well as on paintings, shows that mapping and the improvement of the city impacted the representation of the latter and the definition of modernity – the main object of her study. Indirectly, mapping affected literature, especially with the new urban genres of the urban travel genre, the detective and sensation novels.[36]

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[35] Cartography was influenced by the colonial discoveries of new territories but also, from the eighteenth century, by political and social demands. The eighteenth century saw the beginning of the accumulation of data and surveys requested by the state, first for military then civil/sociological purposes. This activity increased in the nineteenth century especially in Britain (as the works of Edwin Chadwick, Charles Booth or Henry Mayhew show) and in France (*e.g.* Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet or Louis Auguste Blanqui, amongst others). It testifies to a gradual shift from a subjective to a more and more factual representation of the world.

[36] Though of course maps also influenced other genres such as the adventure novel, which was also spreading in the nineteenth century, reflecting colonial imperialism. Catherine Waters notes that also shows that the 'desire to impose order, to codify urban types' was also present in the urban sketches published in *Household Words* (2008: 10).

In novels, mapping functions in a literal and figurative way. Drawing upon Louis Marin, Nead distinguishes between the 'panoramic image' where the 'city slowly unfolds in a kind of narrative circuit', and the 'geometric map' where 'the city is abstracted into free and constructed space' (22). Dickens's novels mostly reflect in their content a panoramic vision of the city, with their encompassing personification of streets and houses. In contrast, their structure, represented mainly by the table of contents, partakes of the geometry of mapping, while relying on actual maps. However, even in the case of Dickens we should not try to find perfect equivalents between the representations of the city that are to be found in the corpus and the actual Victorian London, as Efraim Sicher points out: the aim is to 'see how the text engages in discourses about the city' (2003: xii), the map created being that of an imagined city (15). Sicher understands representation as always 'in and of discourse' and thus always intertextual: 'There is indeed a real world out there, but its representation relies on an epistemology colored with the writer's subjective viewpoint, language, social and institutional context, judgments, and personality, among other local factors' (18). This remark on Dickens's approach to the representation of the city is actualised in neo-Victorian texts, as they provide a version of London that is itself already a representation. The discourses about the city discussed in the following pages show how the process of detection allows us to explore hidden elements of the decaying city, such as the Poor and the crowd.

1. Signs refusing to be read: the failure of the detective

City maps are not as readable as they might seem at first sight, hence Franco Moretti's identification of a 'third space' in Dickens's novels (1998: 115-133). Moretti contrasts the macroscopic map – which orders the city in a regular pattern, distributing the Poor around the Thames and the Wealthy in the West End and around commercial arteries – with the more microscopic maps, which reveal the less clear-cut interweaving of different social groups in more concentrated areas. This leads Moretti to conclude 'that the whole is quite ordered – but its individual parts are instead largely random' producing a 'confusion' which resists legibility (77-78). These areas of potential social mobility are the third space which Moretti sees as crucial

for Dickens.[37] Neo-Victorian novels re-activate this spatial aspect of plot. In both Shepherd's and Faber's novels, mapping is not only present in the content of the text – following the characters in the streets of London – but also at the level of structure. We shall choose to dwell on Faber's novel here, as most significant in this respect.

The table of contents of Faber's novel is programmatic. It exposes the dichotomies of inside and outside, public and private as can be seen from the titles of each part which are as follows:

-Part 1: The Streets
-Part 2: The House of Ill Repute
-Part 3: The Private Rooms and the Public Haunts
-Part 4: The Bosom of the Family
-Part 5: The World at Large

Each title refers to place, as a type, and each defines the setting and/or foregrounds the action revolving around Sugar, the protagonist. Parts 1 to 4 evolve from lower, public settings to respectable, domestic ones. Part 3 functions as a transition from the disreputable world of brothels to the highly respectable houses of Villa Chows and Rackham's factory. This transitional function is underlined by the chiasmus in the title. Part 5 opens up onto the world, outside of the city and of the novel. Thus, the reader is given a reading map that builds suspense and his/her 'horizon of expectations' to borrow Hans Jauss's term (1972: 54-69). The chapter titles draw a parallel between the mapping of the setting/city and the evolution of the character, confirming Moretti's idea of the 'Third'. The gradual elevation in the strata of the city mimics Sugar's own elevation in society, from prostitute to mistress, governess and, finally, independent woman (a woman who, in turn, writes a gory novel in which the main protagonist, a prostitute, murders her clients). Hence, we may read the novel as a kind of *Bildungsroman*. Interestingly enough, Sugar is the only protagonist able to leave the city of her own free will (Sophie is abducted by Sugar and thus unwillingly follows her). Sugar escapes from the city as she eludes William, the novel and, eventually, the reader. Indeed, the reader is left unsure as to her future: '"We have a very, very long journey ahead of us, Sophie," she responds' (*CPW*: 813). However, the novel does not end here: there are two more chapters to be read. Faber subverts Benjamin's claim that the end of the novel signifies the death of the character. Just as Sugar escapes the finality of the novel, Faber refuses closure as he makes clear in his foreword

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[37] Moretti further argues that the nineteenth-century novel was transformed by different ways of interacting with this problem: from the binary vision of London in 'silver fork' and Jane Austen's novels to what he terms 'Stories of the Third' in Dickens. The 'Third' is defined by Moretti as '*the figure of social over determination*' which triggers plots of social mobility and interconnectedness which explode in Dickens's novels (1998: 108; italics in the text).

to his collection of short stories *The Apple*: '[the characters] had moved away, disappeared into history. I had to let them go' (2011: xviii).

The penultimate chapter has William wandering in search of Sugar and Sophie through the streets of London. The progression of the chapter is reversing that of the whole novel. Starting from William's house, the narrative follows him as he goes back to Mrs Castaway's brothel (Sugar's home), to Emmeline Fox's house and finally to Church Lane and Caroline, the prostitute with whom the novel opens. In this chapter, William is endowed with the characteristics of the amateur detective, acting as a surrogate for the police who are defined by their inefficiency:

> An unspecified number of policemen are dawdling through the streets, seeing no farther than the next corner, distracted by brawling and scurrying thieves, keeping their eyes half-open for a lady with a small child who, unlike all the hundreds of innocent respectable ladies with small children strolling the metropolis, must be arrested. Is this the best they can do, when the daughter of William Rackham is in danger of her life? (*CPW*: 819)

The passage is marked by a sense of inaccuracy and by the limited action of the policemen. The city and its inhabitants are constructed as an obstacle to the investigation. William is thus forced to undertake the role of amateur detective, a sensation novel trope identified by Patrick Brantlinger in Collins's *The Moonstone* or *The Woman in White* for instance (1982: 13).[38] William's act of detection is closely related to reading and the city. Indeed, to retrace Sugar's flight, William retrieves the pages of her manuscript which she threw away in the streets: 'Is there nothing more effectual he can do in the circumstances, than scour the streets for lost pages of a tale in which men are tortured to death?' (*CPW*: 815-816). The first section of the chapter is set in William's parlour as he reads the muddy pages, recollecting his first step in his attempt to solve his daughter's abduction. William's investigation truly starts with the interviewing of his household and is marked by failure. Desperate and clueless, William wishes for a scopic power, offering us a metatextual reflection on narration and omniscience:

> If only he could be granted, for just one hour, a God's-eye-view, an aerial perspective far above the city's rooftops but short of the obscuring clouds; and if only Sugar could be carrying on her person, unknowingly, a halo of guilt, an incandescent mark of criminality that made her glow like a beacon below, so that he could point down from the sky and cry *There! There she goes!* (819; original emphasis)

The quotation recalls Holmes's reflection at the beginning of 'A Case of Identity' and turns the investigation into a Cluedo game, the streets suddenly becoming an echo of a board game.[39] In

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[38] *The Crimson Petal and the White* can also be said to be a sensation novel on the literal mode too as the plot also revolves around perfumeries and Sugar's crackling skin, thus echoing D.A. Miller's emphasis on the importance of the senses and sensations in the genre (1988: 147).

[39] Note Holmes's use of the conditional and the Asmodean image ('remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on') in the following excerpt:

this Asmodean vision (Murail 2013: paragraph 5-10), Sugar is turned into a pawn, marked out by a halo. William has no such vision and the first step setting him into motion is his housemaid's suggestion: 'Could she have gone home, sir?' (*CPW*: 821). William then becomes the narrator's pawn, going from one place to another in search of Sugar, just as in the board game one player has to move his pawn from one room to another to get more clues as to where, how and by whom Dr Black was killed. This enigma now focuses on who is hiding Sugar and where. But it is a game the reader and William are bound to lose as the latter gradually discovers: Sugar has left the city and the board/novel altogether.

William's way back to Mrs Castaway's brothel is marked, as is the case earlier on in the novel, by the confusing location of the place: 'William Rackham knocks at the door of the house in Silver Street – the house that never was, despite the claims of *More Sprees in London*, in Silver Street proper' (822). *More Sprees in London* is the fictional guide to the best brothels in London, which led William to Sugar in the first place, a significant but inaccurate, parodic guidebook. After William made Sugar his mistress, the book turned into a threat against his reputation as it might have led Bodley and Ashwell (two friends of William's) to Sugar. Their search is now echoed by William's investigation at the brothel which fails again as he learns of the death of Mrs Castaway (Sugar's mother). The evolution of London and of the characters is embodied by the refurbishment of the brothel. Whereas at the beginning of the novel it was described as an austere place, overcrowded by images of the Virgin, it now bears associations with Oriental imagery: 'what Rackham can see of the house's interior is renovated beyond recognition. An unfamiliar face peeks out of the parlour, followed by a body: an exquisitely dressed apparition in blue and gold Algerine' (*ibid.*). While the present is haunted by the past, the text switches to archetypes related to brothels and Orientalism. Similarly, 'Castaway' is a most suitable name for a Fallen Woman, a social outcast; the protagonist does not really bear a first name but a name tag which partakes of her eroticisation: 'Sugar'. The brothel is only a stop on the map of the quest for Sugar. William is given a clue as to her possible new location:

> She [Sugar] isn't in *this* house, that's clear enough; and if not here, then where? Is it really conceivable that Sugar might throw herself on the mercy of the Rescue Society? How else to explain the curious coincidence of Emmeline Fox sending Sugar a parcel a few days ago? Is this yet another example of clammy collusion between two tragically misguided females? (823)

My dear fellow," said Sherlock Holmes as we sat on either side of the fire in his lodgings at Baker Street, "life is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent. We would not dare to conceive the things which are really mere commonplaces of existence. If we could fly out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the strange coincidences, the plannings, the cross-purposes, the wonderful chains of events, working through generations, and leading to the most outré results, it would make all fiction with its conventionalities and foreseen conclusions most stale and unprofitable. (Doyle 2015: 208)

This passage makes use of free indirect speech to present William's train of thoughts and deductions to the reader, triggering the next turn of the game and thus leading to the next location: Mrs Fox's house.

Emmeline Fox stands for the philanthropist New Woman in the novel, refusing marriage and helping poor women.[40] William crosses London to go to her place:

> After an excruciating omnibus ride, in which he sat face to face with a smirking dowager – she with an advertisement for Rackham's Damask Rose above her head, he with an advertisement for Rimmel's eau de Benzoin above his – William disembarks in Bayswater, and proceeds directly to the long row of modest little houses in Caroline Place. (*ibid.*)

The transitional space of the omnibus is marked by the ironic play on adverts. As Sara Thornton points out, in the Victorian age, the perpendicular texts of advertisements impacted on the reading eye everywhere, resulting in a vertical and kaleidoscopic reading as 'the pedestrian, the omnibus passenger, the reader of pages of advertisements were subject to optical effects in their daily round in the city' (2009: 23). In fact, in *Household Words*, Dickens, and his contributors, 'offers forms of imaginary flânerie to [his] consumer-readers in [his] representation of the city as spectacle for consumption' (Waters 2008: 66). Here, William is associated with his competitor, while the dowager is associated with William himself, offering him a mirror image of a kind. Once more Faber plays with clichés and Oriental images: there is an opposition at the centre of the chiasmus between Rackham perfumeries and Rimmel's which is underlined by Oriental items: the Damask Rose (a possible slight displacement of the English rose?) and Benzoin, a product from Indonesia.

The failure of William's investigation is foreshadowed by the lack of response when he knocks at the door of Mrs Fox's house. The place is a red herring, the door is the threshold between reason and unreason, materialising the obsessional nature of the search: 'Now that he's made the effort to come here, his initial suspicion that Mrs Fox might hold a clue to Sugar's whereabouts has swollen into the manic conviction that she's harbouring the fugitives herself' (*CPW*: 824). The possibility that Sugar might be with Mrs Fox is debunked by the term 'manic conviction' which characterises William as a desperate, crazy man. Detection, here, becomes violation. William's imagination is in fact marked by topoi of the sensation novel and melodrama, two genres which rely on excess: 'William can bear it no longer; his fantasy of wrenching open a wardrobe and, with a cry of triumphal relief, pulling Sugar and his terrified daughter into the light has withered utterly' (826). Yet the sensation plot peters out as Sugar is

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[40] Sugar is a New Woman of a kind in the novel too, as she writes a gory novel in which the main protagonist, a prostitute, savagely murders her clients.

not to be found in the wardrobe. The incriminating inspection of the house lays bare the physical decay of Mrs Fox.[41] The intrusive examination of the house is akin to a rape, hence the sense of guilt, crystallised by William's sudden stammer: '"Mrs Fox," he says, feeling dirtier than the contents of the cardboard box on the landing. "I-I … How … This violation of your p-privacy. How can you ever f-forgive me?"' (*ibid*.). William's stammer also mimics his movements from one place to another which, because it repeats the structure of the novel as a whole but also pauses, gives the impression that the text itself stumbles and stammers.

Faber then revisits the topos of the industrial waste land. William's next move is to go to St Giles to interrogate Colonel Leek, whom Sugar had paid earlier in the novel to pass as her grandfather on a visit to William's lavender fields. Whereas the other places were barely sketched, the picturesque rendering of St Giles plays on the chiaroscuro produced by sunset:

> By the time William finally reaches Mrs Leek's house in Church Lane, St Giles, the sun is low in the sky, casting an incongruous golden glow on the ancient, ramshackle buildings. The convoluted exoskeletons of iron piping on the walls like monstrous necklaces, the poultices of stucco are butter-yellow on the walls, the clothes-lines flap their ragged burden like courtly pennants. Even the cracked attic windows tilting skew-whiff under the roofs blaze with reflected light – a light that's doomed to fade in a matter of minutes. (827-828)

The sense of decay, the displaced Gothic and the 'exoskeleton of the pipes' come curiously close to the sublime tone, given the association of the slums with gold ('incongruous golden glow'). The various comparisons present in the quotation deploy this discrepancy especially in the oxymoronic 'monstrous necklaces'. The term 'exoskeleton' stands out, the structure of the buildings becoming excessively visible and thus crystallising the postmodern effect created by Faber. The image figuratively shows the way in which the structure of the text itself is pulled inside out. All of this partakes of the picturesque as defined by Lynda Nead: a mode of representation which relies on contrast and which was renewed in the nineteenth century through the representation of London and the railway works (2000: 31-32). It is this Victorian renewal of the picturesque that is to be found in Faber's depiction of Church Lane:

> The picturesque is a comfortable aesthetic experience; it does not stimulate dramatic emotions and can be immediately comprehended in a single sweep of the scene. The picturesque is found in *contrast rather than in unity*, in irregularity rather than in continuity, and in the *fragment rather than in the whole*. It is an aesthetic of the *ruin* and of the artistry of age. (Nead 2000: 32; my emphasis)

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[41] As the reader of the novel knows, William is misreading Mrs Fox's lack of reaction to the news of Sophie's abduction. Mrs Fox suffers from tuberculosis and has decided to let herself slowly die. Her appearing 'sang-froid' is a trace of her disconnection from the world. Like most of the women surrounding William, she does not act as requested by the Establishment or as he would have expected: 'Why the devil doesn't she swoon, or drop to her knees with her hands clasped to her bosom, or lift her feeble fist to her brow and cry "Oh"?' (*CPW*: 824-25).

Faber thus appropriates Victorian modes of representation that were developing in the nineteenth century in relation to change.[42] It is change that, in his narrative, triggers this new vision of the slums. Nead's definition of the picturesque relies on the ephemeral and its relation to the experience of modernity: 'The signs of the metropolitan picturesque are thus signs of modernity; they are signs of a changing urban geography and of altered spatial relations' (32). Nead argues that the picturesque staged in the nineteenth-century embodies a discourse on the past which is reduced to 'relics' while the demolished areas 'are transformed into pleasing images' as can be observed in figure 2 below (33). Nead explains that in this drawing, the pastoral landscape of the eighteenth-century has been replaced by the demolished market (*ibid.*). Faber not only echoes the picturesque aesthetic described here but the description also reads as a textualisation of the illustration to be found in chapter 46 of *Bleak House*, 'Tom-all-alone's' (fig. 3). The image repurposes the picturesque: the order of the old city is represented by the Church in the background while in the foreground the derelict street encapsulates the slums.[43]
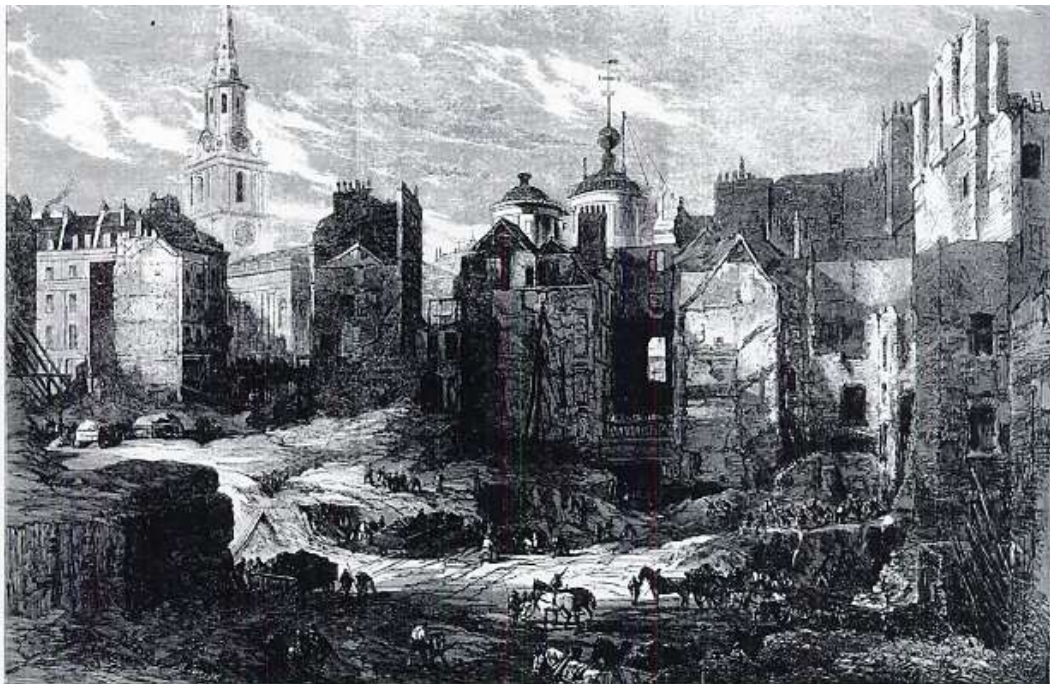
Figure 2: 'Demolition of Hungerford Market: View Looking Towards the Strand,' *Illustrated London News*, 27 December 1862

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[42] It may be added that Faber recognises to have been influenced by nineteenth-century illustrations of London in the acknowledgements: 'Thanks to the folk who've written about the era, and especially to those who photographed and painted it' (*CPW*: 837).

[43] In *Excavating Victorians*, Virginia Zimmerman analyses the way in which the nineteenth century changed London, turning city workers into archeologists, a striking image which makes its way into Dickens's fiction in which characters 'reassemble ruined fragments into whole narratives' (2008: 143).

Figure 3: 'Tom-all-alone's', plate from *Bleak House,* No. 14, April 1853

Thus, Dickens and his illustrator subvert the codes, just as the exoskeleton of the pipes mars the potentially sublime blaze of light in the postmodern text quoted above. In Faber's novel, the bright light that vanishes ('a light that's doomed to fade in a matter of minutes') may be read as a metaphor of detection, an illumination that does not bring a romantic epiphany, in the manner of William Turner's blurred landscapes, but that highlights the misery of the rookeries in a flash, recalling the bull's-eye lanterns of the police. This disclosure is instantly interrupted by William's relentlessness and his refusal to look at signs of modernity: 'However, William is not inclined to admire the view' (*CPW*: 828). His inability to see foreshadows the failure of his quest.

William's umpteenth failure is foregrounded in his encounter with the Colonel as the latter refers to crops and bankruptcy. Colonel Leek is characterised throughout the novel by his tendency to quote the endless lists of casualties and disasters that he finds in newspapers. In

this passage, he chooses a list of crop disasters which reaches its climax with the suicide of one entrepreneur:

> 1813: prospects for farmers never better! 1814,1815,1816: frosts the like of which was never before, ruined crops from shore to shore, bankruptcy aplenty! Adam Tipton, of South Carolina, known in 1863 as the Cotton King! In 1864, after the coming of the weevil, found with a bullet in his brain! (*ibid.*)

His litany is peppered with exclamation marks, mimicking sensational headlines, which turns Colonel Leek into a hawker of a kind. To William's question as to whether Sugar is in the house the answer is, once more, negative but enables William to meet Caroline. The encounter with the prostitute brings together two parts of the novel, William and Sugar's relation on the one hand, Caroline's relation with Henry (William's brother) on the other: 'Caroline watches the well-dressed stranger's eyes widen in offence, and just as she's thinking how much he reminds her of someone she once knew, she twigs that this fellow is the perfumer Rackham, the brother of her gentle parson' (829). Caroline's reaction is, however, misread by William, in a metatextual parody of the logic of detection which leads towards the climactic moment of disclosure:

> As surely as if a lid had been lifted from a vat, William detects the heady stench of a secret that can no longer be kept hidden. At last he's on the right track! At last this affair is moving towards the explosive dénouement he has been craving - the revelation, the release of tension, that will shake the universe in one fierce convulsion, and then allow everything to fall back into its rightful place, restored to normality! (829-30)

William is over-characterised as a detective. Here, there is a telescoping effect which transfers the stench of the streets onto the secret, a possible ironic play with William's career as a perfumer. William is misreading the (lack of) 'clues' because he is blinded by his own reading of sensation fiction. This shift is triggered by the term 'dénouement', and the accumulation of stereotypical sensation fiction devices. William Rackham's failure to find his abducted daughter is equated with his failure to read signs or rather, with his excessive reading of sensation novels.

When William rushes upstairs, the depiction of the streets and street-workers reveals once more that the object of detection in the neo-Victorian novel is London itself, as much as the lost girl; here, the overview offers a literal de-tection, in the etymological sense of the word. Detection comes from the Latin *detectionem*, literally meaning to take off the roof, thereby to discover, to disclose, to bring to light. The reader is allowed to see through the roofs, and catch a glimpse of poor creatures gluing matchboxes and performing other menial tasks, uncovering and exposing the humblest, shabbiest trades of London:

> Night has fallen over St Giles, over London, over England, over a fair fraction of the world. Lamp-lighters are roaming the streets, solemnly igniting, like an army of catholic worshippers, innumerable votive candles fifteen feet in height. It's a magical sight, for anyone looking down on it from above, which, sadly, no one is.

> Yes, night has fallen, and only those creatures who are of no consequence are still working. Chop-houses are coming to life, serving ox cheeks and potatoes to slop-shop drudges. Taverns, ale-houses and gin palaces are humming with custom. The respectable shop-keepers are shutting up their premises, locking the stanchions and bolting the latches; they snuff out the lights, condemning their unsold merchandise to the penance of another dismal night of self-contemplation. In the lower reaches of society, poorer, shabbier creatures labour in their homes, gluing matchboxes, sewing trousers, making tin toys by candlelight, pushing neighbours' washing through the mangle, squatting over basins with their skirts rucked up to their shoulders. Let them toil, let them grub, let them disappear into obscurity, you haven't time to see any more. (830)

The passage is reminiscent of Dickens's own panoramic depictions with its use of comparisons as shops come to life, or with the momentous, almost biblical style at the end. The opening anaphora presents the reader with a gradation which mimics the movement conveyed by the aforementioned table of contents, leading from the slums to the world, perhaps also recalling the fog in the opening of *Bleak House*. The night now spreads over London and the world, turning the lighting of the streets into a ceremony. The second paragraph, opening with an emphatic 'Yes, night has fallen' and its reduction of working classes and slum dwellers to 'creatures' is an echo of Dickens's article, 'On Duty with Inspector Field', to which we shall return in Chapter 2 and which offers an archetypical typology of the types of business and works available in the poor areas of London. The echo is reinforced by the gradation 'Let them toil, let them grub, let them disappear into obscurity'. Yet, unlike Dickens who denounces the inefficiency of the Government to help the Poor, Faber's narrative hints at the inefficiency of the narrative to actually show the Poor and dooms them to silence. Indeed, the different accumulations of the passage rely on archetypes and echoes, creating an effect of excess which veils rather than reveals its object. This veiling is crystallised by the refusal to fix visual agency, since the text claims that no one has panoramic vision, no one has time to stop and watch. Ultimately, the whole chapter simply leads to the deconstruction of the readability and representation of the city. Rackham's multiple failures at reading signs and the refusal to provide the reader with a totalised view echoes Sicher's remarks on Dickens's representation of the streets:

> The city's geography is mapped out through the reading of signs – linguistic as well as topographical – but the itinerary works against mimesis and represents the city's illegibility by making it visible, by constructing a narrative out of the confusion of its signs. Dickens's reading of the city challenges the validity or coherence of the other representations of the city such as the conventional panorama. (2003: xix)

Reading, mapping, seeing are here combined in the act of representation and Faber's metatextual novel offers to look at the relation between all three. The neo-Victorian treatment of the Poor also refuses a voyeuristic approach, avoiding sentimentality. Faber's stance is opposed to that of such representations of the slums as can be found in the BBC reality TV-documentary show, *Victorian Slum* (2016). The show has different participants (four

families and one single man) living in the reconstruction of a Victorian slum. Most participants claim that the experience is a means for them to connect with their ancestors as well as to get a sense of living together as a family and community, a sense presumably lost in our twenty-first-century way of living. This sentimental make-believe is oblivious to the harsh living-conditions of the rookeries and to the collocation of the dead and living, which makes the responses of the participants sound somewhat naïve. The show is flawed by its intersection between nineteenth-century slum and twenty-first-century London: the participants have to work in present-day London dressed in nineteenth-century clothes. It thus partakes more of Baudrillard's idea of a simulacra than of reconstruction. This truly undermines the claim that it is voicing 'the forgotten voices of the London Poor'. The program contrasts with Faber's approach as the latter refuses a panoramic view while the first is making the nineteenth-century Poor over visible, putting them on show, and thus, takes off their substantiality.

Faber then goes on depicting the city, this time focusing on wealthier neighbourhoods before coming back to William. The gap in the text is not accounted for: William is wounded, and the reader will never know why. The novel ends with Caroline helping William to New Oxford Street where he can catch a cab. Waiting for the cab, William is haunted by the spectres of Sugar, Sophie and the corpse of his deceased wife, Agnes. The whole passage is marked by the presence of shadows and apparitions symbolising the haunting figures. The London street is thus transformed into a palimpsest of spectres and Caroline herself turns into a dematerialised voice, a shadow that refuses to be read: '"Goodbye!" sings her voice, for her body is already gone, blotted into the unreadable darkness' (*CPW*: 833). Caroline, like Sugar, escapes William and the Model Reader as the text underlines: 'she nimbly slips from his embrace and hurries back towards Church Lane, out of his reach, out of yours' (*ibid*.). Here Rackham and the Model Reader are on an equal footing, helpless. There only remains the narrative's own farewell in the form of a postscript directly addressed to the reader:

> And to you also: goodbye.
> An abrupt parting, I know, but that's the way it always is, isn't it? You may imagine you can make it last for ever, then suddenly it's over. I'm glad you chose me, even so; I hope I satisfied all your desires, or at least showed you a good time. How very long we've been together, and how very much we've lived through, and still I don't even know your name!
> But now it's time to let me go. (835)

In this postmodern send-off, Faber is playing with the actual reader and his/her reactions to the novel. The metalepsis calls our attention to the form of the novel and to the narrative fallacy, since the actual reader always remains outside the fictional world of the novel: 'I don't even

know your name!'.[44] Thus, the mapping of the city in Faber is a means to play with the reader as well, and most importantly, with generic codes. Faber's prose excessively relies on the codes of the detective and sensation novel to better debunk them. The investigation is doomed to failure because of the discrepancy between William's (and the Model Reader's) reading of the city and Sugar's escape. Faber shows the limits of representation, as both William and the reader are denied the full resolution of the plot.

2. Letters as signs: decoding and mapping the decaying body of the city

This prompts us to return to Shepherd's novel, which is very much concerned with the activity of reading, especially in its development of compelling strategies to engage with the reader. The reader is asked to adjust his/her reading of detective fiction. The end of the prologue opens on a pursuit – 'We must find him soon, or risk losing him altogether' (*TAA*: 2) – which sends the reader on the track of a man, whose identification is delayed by the use of the pronoun 'him' and who happens to be young Charles Maddox, a private detective and the main character of the story. As Carlo Ginzburg argues in 'Signes, Traces, Pistes: Racine d'un paradigme de l'indice', the detective is the one in search of traces left behind, of signs to be deciphered (1980: 5). I argue that this notion is at the core of the reading of neo-Victorian fiction and is doubled in neo-Victorian detective/sensation novels. *Tom-All-Alone's* appeals to the aforementioned categories defined by Jouve: the reader is trying both to solve the case at the core of the novel as well as to detect intertextual traces in the text. This double reading is grounded in the city which provides a carbon copy of key places used in both *Bleak House – e.g.* Lincoln's Inn Fields, the slums of Tom-All-Alone's – and of the other hypotext for the novel, *The Woman in White* with the reference to Hampstead. This cartographic dimension of the novel is itself doubled by the clues to this intertextual quest that are disseminated in the chapter titles which point out to the intersections between young Maddox's investigation and *Bleak House* characters and events.

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[44] Gérard Genette was the first to identify metalepsis as a narratological device which consists of breaking down of the frontier between the world of the telling and that of the told (1972: 243-246). In his preface to *The Apple*, his collection of short stories published after the novel, Faber justifies his postmodern ending which leaves many questions open: "isn't fun , at the end of a book, to be challenged to do what the Victorians themselves were obliged to do between instalments of serialised novels: construct what happens next in our imagination?" (*The Apple*, 2011: xvi).

Once more Faber's and Shepherd's novels echo one another, the backbone structure given to the novel by the chapter titles forming a road map guiding the reader within the intertextual layers that form the text. Lynn Shepherd uses titles to emphasise the genre of her novel, *i.e.* the neo-Victorian detective genre, with titles that mimic the rhythm of the investigation (for instance, 'Closing In', 'Pursuit'). In Shepherd, the detective is thus construed as the one able to find his way in the streets: he is the one who knows the city, is able to map it and read its maps. However, the slums of London resist mapping and thereby a clear readability:

> We could do with [Charles] now, though – if only for his near-perfect sense of direction. It's doubtful any cartographer has ever ventured anywhere near these tightly interlocking streets. The traveller who trusts to John Rocque's serene and civilized version of the city – some hundreds years older than the map on Charles' desk – will come in full expectation of a symmetry of orderly boulevards in a seven-point star, as formal and considered as a London Versailles. What he will find instead is squalid and rat-infested passageways that open suddenly and erratically into uneven rutted courts [.] (*TAA*: 116-117)

The resistance to mapping gives way to a labyrinthine representation of the slums characterised chiefly by confusion and disorder. The Model Reader is here presented as a 'traveller' who needs to adapt to the new city, hence the reference to John Rocque, and his map of London (1748). The order associated with the latter is deconstructed by a chiasmic play. Thus, the phrase 'serene and civilized' is replaced by 'squalid and rat-infested' and 'full expectation of a symmetry of orderly boulevards' by 'suddenly and erratically into uneven rutted courts'. The passage also calls for a comparison with the sanitisation of Paris: the reference to Versailles calls to mind the architecture of the gardens, its straight and perpendicular lines, an architecture that Haussman applied to the city. The 'seven-point star' stands for Seven Dials. The reference to this particular area of London foregrounds the debunking of Rocque's map and of the expectations associated with it; Seven Dials was indeed far from Versailles and much in need of sanitisation in the nineteenth century. Finally, the squalor called upon at the end of the quotation is an intertextual echo of Dickens's *Sketches by Boz* (1833-1836): '[t]he stranger who finds himself in "The Dials" for the first time, and stands-Belzoni-like, at the entrance of seven obscure passages, […] will see enough around him to keep his curiosity and attention awake' (Dickens 1989: 69). The district is compared to a 'gordian knot' (*ibid.*) where an 'unwholesome vapour […] renders the dirty perspective uncertain and confined' (70).

The labyrinthine quality of the slums does not preclude the activity of mapping altogether. It only delays its purposefulness and conceals the centre/focus. This partakes of Shepherd's detective game. Only two chapter headings refer to places: 'In Mr Tulkinghorn's Chambers' and 'Bell Yard'. Hence, the world of the Lincoln's Inn Fields is aligned with that of the Poor. The area of St Clement's Lane and Bell Yard was located on the west side of the City of London and was characterised by its intermingling of poverty and wealth. The depiction of

St Clement's Lane represents the city as ever changing. Indeed, the pot boy leading Charles to Boscawen's lodgings takes him to a 'boarded-up house' (*TAA*: 126). The house represents the palimpsestic city, as it 'flutters with bills for penny-theatres, law-writers and dancing-schools' (*ibid.*) giving a sense that what is no longer useful has to be made visible through writing. But it also points out the vampiric quality of advertisement in the nineteenth century as Sara Thornton suggests (2009: 33).

The house being useless to Charles, he questions the nearby butcher. This leads to the depiction of the city as a decaying body. There is a transfer from the rotten meat sold in the official business of the butcher – 'the slabs and hunks of rancid greenish meat'– to the underground activities of illegal burying conducted by the landlord:

> The house, he finds, was closed down weeks before, when the floorboards in the ground floor caved in on an open sewer choked with corpses. It turned out the landlord excavated his basement and started a lucrative side-trade in bargain burials, with standard no-frills internments for less than half the price of the official graveyard up the road at St Clement Dane's. With two slaughter-houses nearby no one had even noticed the smell. (*TAA*: 127)

Here we see how the dead emerge, as it were, in London's life, becoming intrusive figures. Quite literally, death interrupts the flow of the city that the sewers represent as it is 'choked with corpses'. The image constructed by the omnipresence of decay suggests that 'the cemetery *is* London, or is used synecdochally, because London is depicted as a place of death, mourning, disease, haunted and inscribed with memories' (Martin 2015: 202). Susan K. Martin demonstrates that the cemetery is connected to the act of rewriting because it reiterates a first reiteration. She argues that in the Victorian era, the cemetery was already a double of the city as it reflected the latter's social conditions, thus neo-Victorian fiction turns into a double of a double (210). It can be added that this double doubling conveys a twofold representation of space: the horizontal space of the city, visible, mappable, and a vertical space, hidden, characterised by mirrors, inverted images and haunting.

This reading is furthered by the association of Bell Yard and Lincoln's Inn Fields on both the horizontal axis (the former geographically stretches out from the latter), and on the vertical axis as in Bell Yard Charles uncovers clues referring back to Lincoln's Inn. This play on axes allows for a topographical inscription of the repressed or concealed crimes committed by Tulkinghorn and his clients:

> It's [Bell Yard] an area, as it happens, that Charles knows well. Part of that warren of courts and lanes behind Lincoln's Inn, and hard by the far more palatial residences of Lincoln's Inn Fields that number among them Mr Tulkinghorn's tall and blank-faced house. Another fact that cannot – surely? – be irrelevant. Bell Yard, by contrast is narrow and dingy, and the lad he corners by the entrance points him towards Cook's rags and bottle shop at the far end of the shop. (*TAA*: 127-128)

Another vertical reading of the passage is that of the intertextual trace recalling places in *Bleak House*, as is made clear by the reference to 'Cook's rags and bottle shop'Cook is part of Shepherd's onomastic game, her take on Dickens's Krook. The extract echoes the first introduction of the shop in Esther's narrative, as well as Jobling's rental of Nemo's lodging. The figure of Krook is used in the two novels, to enhance the parallel between Bell Yard and Lincoln's Inn Fields, and as a trope of the dead haunting the living.

In *Bleak House*, Krook first appears as a living-dead figure, characterised in Gothic terms, while his shop is a significant locus of both secrecy and detection. Esther's visit to the shop as she follows Miss Flite is given a dreamlike quality through the repetition of the verb fancy and the use of the fog:

> As it was still foggy and dark, and as the shop was blinded besides by the wall of Lincoln's Inn, intercepting the light within a couple of yards, we should not have seen so much but for a lighted lantern that an old man in spectacles and a hairy cap was carrying about in the shop. Turning towards the door, he now caught sight of us. He was short, cadaverous, and withered, with his head sunk sideways between his shoulders and the breath issuing in visible smoke from his mouth as if he were on fire within. His throat, chin, and eyebrows were so frosted with white hairs and so gnarled with veins and puckered skin that he looked from his breast upward like some old root in a fall of snow. (*BH*: 62)

The passage relies on chiaroscuro as Krook seems to emerge from darkness. The narration also plays with the semantic field of sight: the shop is 'blinded'; the protagonist cannot see and Krook belatedly catches sight of the group. Krook is described as a kind of Gothic living corpse, as suggested by the adjective 'cadaverous' as well as by the smoke of his breath (which foreshadows his later combustion), or connects him with a winter landscape ('he looked from his breast upward like some old root in a fall of snow').[45] On the other hand, Krook is presented by Miss Flite as a mirror image of the Chancellor: 'He is called among the neighbours the Lord Chancellor. His shop is called the Court Chancery. He is a very eccentric person. He is very odd' (63). As Kenneth J. Fielding summarises: 'Krook expressly 'symbolises' the Lord Chancellor; his shop, the system of law; his tenants, its victims; his death, the consequences' (1986: 77).

Krook's oddness and eccentricity signify an excess which is also embodied by his shop. It contains a profusion of papers and items related to writing and the law. As a result, the shop is over-inscribed – over signified:

> She had stopped at a shop over which was written KROOK, RAG AND BOTTLE WAREHOUSE. Also, in long thin letters, KROOK, DEALER IN MARINE STORES. […]. In another was the inscription BONES BOUGHT. In another, KITCHEN-STUFF BOUGHT. In another, OLD IRON BOUGHT. In

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[45] Anachronistically, this passage is reminiscent of Alfred Sisley's paintings such as *Winter, Light Effect* or his series of *Winter in Louvenciennes*.

another, WASTE-PAPER BOUGHT. In another, LADIES' AND GENTLEMEN'S WARDROBES BOUGHT. (*BH*: 61)

The cumulative effect is produced by the anaphora and the repetition of the noun 'Krook' and verb 'bought'. Esther also notices the various bottles in the shop, hence the accumulation of epistrophes, starting with blacking bottles and finishing with 'ink bottles' (*ibid*.). A link can be drawn between this accumulation and Dickens's own life, from his traumatic experience at the blacking factory to his success as a writer. The ink bottles bear another significance for Esther as they bring about the connection with the law: 'I am reminded by mentioning the latter, that the shop had, in several little particulars, the air of being in a legal neighbourhood, and of being, as it were, a dirty hanger-on and disowned relation of the law' (*ibid*.). From then on Esther notices numerous resemblances between this place and Kenge and Carboy's office, the most important being handwriting which Esther mentions in passing:

> Some of the inscriptions I have enumerated were written in law-hand, like the papers I had seen in Kenge and Carboy's office, and the letters I had so long received from the firm. Among them was one, in the same writing, having nothing to do with the business of the shop, but announcing that a respectable man aged forty-five wanted engrossing or copying to execute with neatness and dispatch: Address to Nemo, care of Mr Krook within. (61-62)

As the reader of Dickens's novel knows, handwriting is the key to Nemo's identity, Lady Dedlock's secret and Esther's roots. As Tambling notes, Nemo's handwriting constitutes a form of trace which signals the way in which the city should be read:

> The 'trace' means, as it does in Derrida, the pre-existence of writing which has inscribed the street, the human body, and the city alike. All these have the signs of writing upon them, the markers of history; the city is textual throughout, not accidental, not just there, but culturally produced, and to read the streets is the aim of urban analysis. With Dickens, it is not possible to read his streets literally, but his novels show the trace, invisible markers of how the city had been culturally constructed, the memory of history, much of it repressed. (2009: 5)

Esther however does not make anything of this: not enough information has been provided at this stage for her to draw connections. However, it is a first clue for the reader-as-detective, to borrow Jean-Pierre Naugrette's term (2015:18), hinting at the connections between Krook, the Court of Chancery and Nemo. As Céline Prest argues, the centrality of Krook's shop for the detective story of *Bleak House* stands in the shop's association with signs and secrecy. Prest demonstrates that Dickens writes the secret of Tom Jarndyce's will in an ostentatious manner ('*en pleine lumière*') which paradoxically makes it invisible to the characters and reader. The text and shop need further investigation to make the secret visible (Prest 2016: 55-56).[46]

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[46] This task is partly undertaken by Guppy, the amateur detective of the novel who looks into Esther's background and investigates Nemo. He is very close to Benjamin's detective and to the man of the crowd in Poe's story as he is characterised with the same ambivalence. Indeed, he is associated with the crowd, merging with it and unexpectedly springing out of it as when he takes Mrs Chadband to Esther.

The reader-as-detective of Shepherd's novel also has to pay attention to signs and traces, to the way in which the plot relies on mirrors and doubles like Dickens's. The novel picks up other places to signal secrecy and prompt detection; views are deceptive, like Hester's view of London from her room in Hampstead: 'The window looked down upon the flower garden, and across the heath to the faraway steeples and towers of London, almost ethereal that day under a light silvery cloud' (*TAA*: 40). The heavenly view masks the fact that the room is a cell, wrapped in the rhetoric of delusion. Shepherd's cartographic plot interweaves the two spatial readings of the city identified by Moretti: the web of her plot spreads over Tom-All-Alone's, Bell Yard, Lincoln's Inn Fields and Hampstead and is articulated by the circulation of letters and messengers. She also inscribes her novel in the tradition of detective fiction as she embeds crime in Lincoln's Inn Fields and Hampstead, two wealthy areas of London. As Moretti argues, crime fiction presents its readers with an asymmetric representation of crime reality which spreads in poor areas (1998: 136). Moretti further suggests that this results from a need of secrecy by contrasting 'Booth's criminal world [which] is the nearly inevitable result of urban poverty: it is a visible, widespread reality, which has absolutely no mystery about it' with the world of 'detective fiction, [where] crime must be exactly an *enigma* […]. It is the old London of privilege that we encounter in detective fiction' (137). In fact, in Shepherd's neo-Victorian detective novel, places turn into metonyms for the secret. Indeed, for Susanne Gruss the London presented to us 'mirrors (and, quite possibly, breeds) the crimes [Charles] investigates – a city of shiny facades and grimy backyards' (2016: 85). Numerous are the locations which play with mirrors or secret passages. The most striking example might be Tulkinghorn's chambers in which a secret museum is found. The museum is accessible thanks to stairs built on a *trompe l'oeil* while mirrors create a labyrinthine space. Therefore, as Gruss notes, '[w]ith the depiction of Tulkinghorn's house, [Shepherd] creates an urban gothic maze *within* the labyrinth that is London' (86). This secret museum harbours a heteroclite collection of Roman, Grecian and Egyptian items which further point to the occult so that Tulkinghorn's house is 'symbolic of the dark secrets at the heart of the text (prostitution, infanticide and incest) and reflects the mindset of its creator' (*ibid.*).

3. Traces, secrets, maps and the criminal

The dual sense of space, which we have just seen in Shepherd's novel, is a feature of neo-Victorian fiction, and recurs in various guises. Kathleen J. Renk observes that in Peter

Carey's novel, 'Maggs's world intersects with Dickens's own world of near "abandonment"', superposing the mapping of London and that of the colonial mind (Renk 2004: 64). Thus, the duality concerns less the hidden depths of London than the secret layers of the colonial system, contrasting the so-called centre and the periphery, London and Australia. To unravel the connection, Carey revisits an archetype of detective fiction, the fact of tailing or following someone, which allows one to roam the city and return to the spatial landmarks of detection. Salzani's reading of Benjamin suggests that the German thinker does not propose a binary typology of the urban wanderer but that there is a third alternative: the criminal (2007: 170-171). It is the criminal figure that is at the centre of Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*. While at the opening of the novel Maggs is presented as a *flâneur* figure, the novel actually illustrates the ambivalence of Benjamin's model by enhancing Maggs's past as a criminal. Carey's novel in its rewriting of the sensation/Newgate novel provides its readers with an experience of London marked by transgression. This appears after Maggs's encounter with Tobias Oates, Dickens's stand-in. Suffering from a tic in the cheek, Maggs attracts the attention of Oates who, like Dickens, is an amateur mesmerist. Oates assuages the footman's pain by hypnotising him. Maggs faints and is unsure of what he might have revealed of his past as a convict. Feeling 'plundered' (*JM*: 32) by this forced mesmerism, he decides to track Oates down in London's streets, turning Oates into a fugitive or prey: '[Maggs] was preoccupied with Tobias Oates whom he feared would escape at any moment' (33). At first, Maggs's desire to take his revenge over Oates takes on the features of an investigation. Indeed, as Oates is leaving the house, Maggs eavesdrops on him. The scene relies heavily on Maggs's senses, that of hearing, sight but also in a way the tactile:

> 'By Jove,' he heard a familiar voice float upwards. 'I'll tell you this, Hawthorne. You are mistaken, most grievously mistaken'
> Jack Maggs lifted his window sash as high as it would go, and when it jammed half-way he would not be stopped but squeezed himself like a python through the opening his shiny buckled feet first, then his stomach, then (painfully) his shoulders, until he was standing on the steep and mossy stales three giddy storeys above the street.
> Keeping his hand on the window ledge, he looked down over a thin line of guttering and confirmed with his eyes what his ears had already told him: there, forty feet below, was little Tobias Oates, standing in the rain. (34-35)

The window might be read as a threshold, breaking the frame of enclosure, a metaphor of the shift from Victorian to neo-Victorian fiction. Indeed, it may be read as a metonymy for Carey's relation to Dickens since the convict leaps out of the window to pursue the author who wronged him. Above all, the use of the window to get out, the simile with the python, characterise Maggs as a criminal. The way out of the window is a somatic experience for the Model Reader. Focusing on the process of getting each part of the body out, references to pain and vertigo

creates an immersive reading: the reader is asked to identify with Maggs. The pursuit of Oates is marked by a sense of immediacy conveyed by the gerund: 'Tobias Oates, however, was walking. He was crossing Great Queen Street diagonally, heading east' (35).

The opening of the next section of the novel is a repetition of the preceding scene from Oates's viewpoint. This change in focalisation offers a rereading of the scene: while at first, we might have thought the exchange between Oates and Hawthorne to be about the mesmeric experiment, the reader understands that Hawthorne is suggesting that Oates is having an affair. In both cases, Oates remains a fugitive, an outlaw figure: 'And then he fled, or so it felt, into the wet night with his coat drawn around him tightly, whispering to himself as he scurried round the corner from Great Queen Street' (36). After a digression providing an insight into Oates's background, the destination point of the pursuit is given:

> It was towards this pleasant house in Lamb's Conduit Street that he now walked briskly, but not quite directly. He could not arrive there yet. He was too agitated by this conversation which had set his heart beating wildly in his chest. Instead he set off down to Lincoln's Inn Fields – the long way home – to calm himself. (37)

In this quotation, the streets and walking conceal Oates's secret and shame. The topography of London, conveyed by the direction of the character, thus crystallises secrecy. The detour by Lincoln's Inn Fields is an echo of *Bleak House* since this area, as was suggested in the analysis of *Tom-All-Alone's*, symbolises secrecy *par excellence*. This is made even clearer in the following passage:

> His [Oates's] secret had been seen.
> This secret pressed at him all day long, and as he set out through the dark streets towards the place where the secret had its nest, it was with the most perplexing mixture of feelings. He walked briskly – some would say fiercely – with his shoulders back, a fast sort of duck-toed march as if he were intent on Moscow, as if he could escape his secret, which was that he was in love with his wife's sister. (37)

The quotation roots the secret in the city with the parallelism between the oppression engendered by the secret and that created by the streets. Furthermore, the secret becomes inescapable, and the flight useless as is suggested by the rhythm of the sentence, which is marked by accumulation of clauses, the repetition of 'as if' marking the futility of the escape. The sentence reaches its climax with the revelation of the nature of Oates's secret: his affair with his sister-in-law. The detour and oppression enacted in the city contaminates the form of the narrative as Oates remembers his moving in Lamb's Conduit Street. The narrative comes back to the city at the end of the section with a mention of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

The next section opens with Maggs's viewpoint which offers a somatic experience relying on bathos with the focus on his suffering feet, an ironic take on the phrase 'to step in a dead man's shoes' (Maggs is wearing the shoes of the former footman who committed suicide).

The irony of the opening of section 11 is entailed in the pain provoked by the shoes which undermine his skills: 'Jack Maggs was famously fast upon his feet, but now he was half-crippled by his dead man's shoes' (38). The shoes hinder Maggs in his pursuit and almost make him lose track of his prey. The text turns into a parody of a pursuit and can only go on thanks to Oates's singing:

> With all this fuss, he almost lost sight of Tobias Oates, and had the writer not begun to sing so free and careless, he might have disappeared into the fog. But then, by Jesus, there came that fine tenor voice, not twenty yards ahead. 'Sally in our Alley'It was a filthy song. (*ibid.*)

Once more, the pursuer relies on his senses, especially hearing as sight fails. The fog conveys the unreadability of the city as it obliterates sight. The folk song echoes Oates's affair with his sister-in-law and is another trace of the secret stamped onto the city, the term 'alley' linking it to the urban architecture. The song leaves its traces on the city and replaces the footsteps: it is the song that Maggs is following. There is a parallel between the rhythm of the song and the form of the city, the song thereby turns into a map of a kind: 'As the song arrived at that place where "Nature's soft stream was flowing" they came to coal-dark Carey Street. By then they were but fifteen feet apart' (38-39). This aural mapping of the city as metaphor of the secret crystallises the intertextual poetics Carey develops. The reader, like Maggs, will have to listen for echoes of *Great Expectations* to trace Carey's rewriting. This is further emphasised by Oates being equated with, and even replaced by, the song since Oates stands for Dickens in the novel.

The pursuit does not end with Oates getting home but is followed by Maggs's transgression as he breaks into the house. Carey alludes to Maggs's past as a convict in Australia. Section 12 thus opens with a depiction of convicts' tenements in Australia compared to Oates's London house:

> In the place Jack Maggs had most recently come from, the houses had been, for most part, built from wood. They strained and groaned in the long hot nights, crying out against their nails, contracting, expanding, tugging at their bindings as if they would pull themselves apart.
> Tobias Oates's house in Lamb's Conduit Street was built from London brick. It was newly painted, newly furnished. Everything in it glistened and was strong and bright and solid. This was a house that would never scream in the dark, nor did it reek of sap or creosote. Its smells were English smells – polished oak, coal dust, Devon apples. The intruder breathed these strange yet familiar odours for as long as it took the master to get himself to bed. (40-41)

The focus on sounds and smells creates an immersive experience of both places. The tenements are characterised by their lack of roots. Australia is hinted at but not named and thereby repressed while the present house is over-determined by location, 'Tobias Oates's house', 'Lamb's Conduit Street', 'London'. There is a clear contrast between the temporary tenements, built of frail wood, and the stability of the London house suggested by the brick, its association with Englishness and the accumulation 'strong and bright and solid'. The sweet smells

associated with Englishness contrast with the oozing tenements. Oates's house is a means to characterise Maggs, rejecting him as a criminal ('the intruder') but also refusing him a sense of belonging. Maggs is haunted by Australia and cannot identify with the London house hence his uncanny feeling ('these strange yet familiar odours'). It seems that the character can only experience the English house through theft. This image seems to crystallise Carey's affiliative stance, to use John Thieme's term, the tension between the text and its hypotext, its rejection of the Victorian novel. Theft in Carey's novel is a privileged image to problematise the legitimacy of intertextual filiation which is at the centre of the novel. This scene is reiterated later on in the novel as Oates submits Maggs to further mesmeric séances in which Maggs recalls his youth as a thief and his breaking into upper-class houses. The London map in *Jack Maggs* embodies the secrets related to the two antagonists of the novel. While Oates hides his secret affair onto the map of London, Maggs reveals his past. The Model Reader experiences a pursuit by proxy, yet the pursuit is displaced as the fugitive is followed by another. This doubling crystallises the novel's multiple layers and thus the trope of secrecy and of the repressed which stands at its core. Most interestingly, the senses are used to convey the city's rejection of Maggs as an intruder. In contrast, Carey picks up the association of Dickens and the city highlighted in the opening of this chaper, which enables him to construct Oates as belonging to the city. Indeed, Oates reflects on the way 'he constructs London and invents himself' at the same time (Maack 2004: 235):

> Now each day in the *Morning Chronicle*, each fortnight in the *Observer*, it was Tobias Oates who 'made' the City of London. Wih a passion he barely understood himself, he named it, mapped it, widened its great streats, narrowed its dingy lanes, framed its scenes with the melancholy windows of his childhood. In this way he invented a life for himself: a wife, a babe; a household. (*JM*: 182)

The gradation turns Oates into a surveyor of the city, playing with scales ('widened', 'narrowed') and providing keys to interpreting the city ('framed'). Above all, the passage points out how the city enables self-(re)invention.

C.   Discovering dungeons: beyond the map

Before moving to counter-narratives located 'Down Under', a process which is only hinted at in *Jack Maggs*, and which will become the core of *Wanting* and *Mister Pip*, we must conclude this section with the most formidable rewriting of London as a gloomy space of detection. In *Drood*, we no longer simply wander over the surface of the streets to follow and

tail potential villains, or seek a lost woman or child, but we are made to go down, further and further and deeper and deeper, towards the dark entrails of the city where the intruder from the East is in hiding.

Drood taps into the sense of threat which pervaded nineteenth-century London. The city had turned into a threatening, uncanny place for which, as Walter Benjamin states, literature found new ways of representation, taking a distance from the 'bonhomie' of physiologies. Indeed, the increase of accurate/objective maps bore witness to sociological phenomena: the increase of criminality and of poverty. As we have seen, the link between criminality and the city is at the centre of Benjamin's notion of *Erlebnis* and especially his thoughts on the crowd. Benjamin identifies the basis of detective fiction with the experience of modernity emerging from the crowds: 'Here the masses appear as the asylum that shields an asocial person from his persecutors. Of all the menacing aspects of the masses, this one became apparent first. It is at the origin of the detective story' (1969: 40). As aforesaid, Benjamin draws a link between the *flâneur* and the detective, the one emerging from the other: 'In times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in a situation where he has to play detective. Strolling gives him the best prospects of doing so' (*ibid.*). Benjamin's observation grounds literature in cultural and social behaviour, drawing a link between habits of living and habits of reading. The nineteenth-century literary development was thus responding to and reflecting new anxieties and behaviours resulting from the experience of modernity. I argue that neo-Victorian fiction not only revives those literary tropes but also re-invests the crisis that the experience of modernity represented. In *Drood*, the wandering detective Collins himself, roams through a maze of places, that ultimately lead below the surface of the earth to confront phantasmatic, subterranean places of fear where the key to the secret (*i.e.* Drood) might be found.

From the start, the novel presents London as a dark, heterogeneous, violent space bearing, as Costantini notes, the traces of orientalism, abjection, sexuality and cannibalism (2015: 181):

> This true story will be about Charles Dickens's final five years and about his growing obsession during that time with a man – if man he was – named Drood, as well as with murder, death, corpses, crypts, mesmerism, opium, ghosts, and the streets and alleys of that black-biled lower bowel of London that the writer always called 'my Babylon' or 'the Great Oven'. (*D*: 3-4)

The accumulation is programmatic, setting the agenda or sketching the map of the novel. This programme is a katabatic descent into the body of the city, moving from obvious traces ('murder, death, corpses, crypts') to less visible ones ('mesmerism, opium, ghosts', 'bowel').

Simmons's choice of setting reworks the mid-Victorian tropes used to map London in fiction, *i.e.* the labyrinth and the underworld: 'Both used as psycho-social metaphors, they gave spatial visibility to the fears and disorientation felt by the middle classes in facing the "dark" recesses of their dichotomous civilisation' (Costantini 2015: 176). It is the second that is most highlighted in *Drood* with sewers and catacombs, what Mariaconcetta Costantini calls an underworld space 'troped as the destination of katabatic journeys of self-understanding in coeval fiction and journalism. The hellish imagery associated with the city's underbelly highlighted the dangerous proximity of a hidden space of abjection, a counter-world of violence and barbarity' (*ibid.*) within the 'body' of the city itself. We need to point out here that the underworld presented by the narrator Wilkie Collins is a construct of Dickens, who pranks his friend Collins into believing in Drood and his terrible abode. Thereby, the role of the reader as interpreter is of paramount importance in Dan Simmons's novel especially as the narrator is more and more unreliable: 'the ambiguity of the narrator's [and of Dickens's] fascination with the abyss incites the reader to take an active part in determining the political stakes of the text' (Costantini 2015: 180). We shall return to this narrative ambiguity in the following chapter of the dissertation; for the moment, let us dwell on Simmons's labyrinthine sense of space.

1. When the city invades the house: playing with the uncanny

While Shepherd's text uses mapping as a generic device as well as a means to delineate the decaying body of the city, *Drood* offers a representation of the city as unmappable and unreadable, relying on the Gothic and the uncanny.[47] A hybrid novel, at once a Gothic and a detective-sensation novel, it revolves around the eponymous phantasmal Drood, used as a synecdoche for the threat of the East (Orient) and the Poor (East End). Traces of orientalism shows a cross-fertilisation between Simmons's text and theories in academic engagement with *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*; one may think of Felix Aylmer's 'most outlandish theory, arguing that Jasper is trying to save Edwin from Oriental assassins' (Orford 2019: 305). Read through the lens of the detective mode, *Drood* echoes what Caillois defines as the 'final temptation' in detective fiction, *i.e.* to have the cause of the crime lie outside the frame of the story:

> These are the murders committed by an Oriental sent to Europe by his sect to punish a scholar violating a sanctuary or profaning a tomb. These deviations make the discovery of motive impossible, and are

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[47] Paul Dobraszcyk offers an interesting chapter on London's underworld in fiction. The fiction he studies depart from *Drood*: in them, the urban underground is legible and mappable (though, an imagined space), characterised by a sense of circulation and materiality (2015: 242-244).

clearly related to the procedure which lets the detective alone know certain clues so that the reader has no chance at all of discovering the guilty party. (Caillois 1983: 6)

The plot described by Caillois could be a summary of *Drood* with its pastiche or parody of mummy fiction and violated tombs. Drood is the corpse, the mummy (as we discover, he is partly Egyptian) who comes to take his revenge on the centre of the empire and the city. Drood appears as the Gothic Other, offering a grim reworking of the signpost in *Oliver Twist*:[48]

> 'To Limehousse [*sic*],' hissed the ungainly form in the dark cape. 'Whitechapel. Ratcliff Crosss [*sic*]. Gin Alley. Three Foxesss [*sic*] Court. Butcher Row and Commercial Road. The Mint and other rookeriesss [*sic*]'
> Dickens glanced up sharply at this strange recital, since their train had been going to the station in central London, not to these dark alleys in East London. 'Rookeries' was a slang term for the worst of the tenement slums in the city. But now they had reached the bottom of the hill, and without another word, this 'Drood' turned away and seemed to glide into the shadows under the railway bridge. In a few seconds the man's cape blended with the darkness there. (*D*:14)

The association of Drood with the rookeries and the railway points to the early experience of the latter as an 'annihilation of time and space', since the railroad created new spaces by destroying the in-between space between points or 'travel space': 'The railroad knows only points of departure and destination' (Schivelbusch 1977: 37-38). *Drood* thus plays on a shrinking notion of space as well as on the idea of the city as ever-changing. The malleability of the city enables Simmons to insert anachronistic references to America in his text. For instance, the fictional Inspector Field invites the fictional Collins – and the reader – to:

> Imagine all of London from Billingsgate to Bloomsbury to Regent's Park being huge glass pyramids and bronze sphinxes […] if not in this century then the next. Imagine those glass pyramids – and the temples, sir, and the secret rites in those temples, with mesmeric magic and slaves to their mental influence – rising everywhere you look in that direction come the twentieth century. (*D*: 416)

With these 'glass pyramids', Simmons refers to new urban spaces, to the proliferation of skyscrapers in most important cities, especially in the United States, where headquarters of influential companies are located. Such a passage illustrates how 'the novel also invites its neo-Victorian readers to re-map London from their epistemological perspective, in order to detect continuities and discontinuities with urban experiences pertaining to their own historical time-frame' (Costantini 2015: 178).

As Maria Beville puts it, in postmodern fiction, the metropolis becomes 'a zone of uncanny spectrality, a setting that is decentred, fragmented and defined by the otherness encountered in the crowd and the simulacra of signs that swarm upon and around the city walker' (2013: 603). The encounter with Drood is a displaced encounter (taking place at

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[48] The signpost returns later on in the novel in a pathetic outcry as Dickens is dying: 'I must go to London at once' (*D*: 737). Here the injunction is reversed: the movement towards the city is not the beginning of the protagonist's expectations but signifies the death of the author who is eventually reduced to a corpse lying 'on the ground' (*ibid.*).

Staplehurst) with the otherness of the city. This otherness is associated with a specific area of London: the East End and its rookeries, and especially the area between Whitechapel and Limehouse. This area was known in the nineteenth century for its slums and its large number of immigrants. Limehouse was indeed the site of many docks and numerous immigrants from the East settled there, while Whitechapel was associated with Irish and Jewish communities. The Limehouse resonates with different motifs tackled in the novel, namely, opium and lime (an echo of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, to which we shall return). As Costantini notes, the fictional authors' 'favourite haunts are the labyrinthine slums and the criminal underworld of London, which are threateningly opposed to respectable urban areas' (2015: 179). She further adds that '[t]he more frequently Dickens and Collins penetrate these sinister haunts, the faster the city is invaded by uncanny forces which reveal the existence of monstrous interconnections between the urban underbelly and the upper-tier world' (179-180).

The city is thus construed as dual, with an 'other space' that escapes control and maps as Inspector Field warns Dickens and Collins: 'I feel it my duty to point out, gentlemen, that we are now entering Bluegate Fields proper. It ain't even on most city maps, officially speaking' (*D*: 74). The unmapped space allows for mystery, exoticism and danger (J.-Y. Tadié 1982: 154). Not only is Bluegate Fields unmapped, but it is described as the location of immigration, a contact-zone with the empire:

> 'Lascars and Hindoos and Bengalees particular and Chinamen by the gross,' continued Hatchery. 'Also Irishmen and Germans and other such flotsam, not to mention the scum o' the earth sailors ashore a'hunting for women and opium, but it's the Englishmen 'ere in Bluegate Fields you have to fear most, gentlemen. The Chinee and other foreigners, they don't eat, don't sleep, don't talk mostly, just live for their opium … but the Englishmen 'ereabouts, they are an uncommonly rough crew, Mr Dickens. Uncommonly rough.' (*D*: 75)

The exotic population marks Bluegate Fields as Other – as the space where the 'natives' are turned to savages, where the foreigners are reduced to static creatures, almost like a kind of living-dead. Playing with Oriental imagery (such as the opium dens), the underworld of London turns into an exotic space and thereby these sections of the novel not only partake of the urban Gothic, but also of the adventure novel. For Jean-Yves Tadié, the exotic setting is a marker of the adventure novel, conferring upon the genre the sense of travel and the distance of the dream (1982: 152). In Simmons's novel, the whole expedition hovers between a sense of reality, conveyed by toponyms and the depictions of the inhabitants of the area, and of disorientation as Collins is at a loss to make sense of their route:

> Most of the streets we had already passed through were not marked and the maze of Bluegate Fields was even less delineated, but Hatchery seemed to know exactly where he was going. […] [T]he detective answered my whispered question by listing, in his normal tone of voice, some of the places we had been or were soon to see: the church of St Georges-in-the-east (I had no memory of passing it), George Street,

Rosemary Lane, Cable Street, Knock Fergus. Black Lane, New Road, and Royal Mint Street. I had noticed none of these names posted on signs. (*D*: 75)

The over-presence of the toponyms in the accumulation that fills the text is belied by the absence of actual signs in the streets, a symptom of impossible detection. For Costantini, Collins's disorientation echoes that 'of the well-to-do in facing the dismal spaces inhabited by the dispossessed' while also being 'a symbol of the social and economic insecurities of the middle-class Victorians' (2015: 183). The expedition turns into an exploration of the abject rendered in cannibalistic terms, as the gentlemen find babies' corpses riddled with maggots that Collins first mistakes for 'skinned rabbits' (*D*: 76) while Dickens refers both to a butcher and to classics: '"I thought of pigs" feet the way they are usually displayed at a neat tripe-shop," said Charles Dickens. "It's hard not to think of Thyestes' feast when encountering such an image."' (77). This allows Collins to bring attention to intertextual echoes, as he notes that Hatchery may not know the reference to the Greek cannibalistic myth.

Furthermore, *Drood* reworks the genre of the sensation novel in its constant shift between romance and the realist mode – something which Winifred Hughes pointed out as being characteristic of the genre (1980: 50) – to depict London as a devouring place, where the predator, the criminal, must be tracked. We can see this metaphorically in a striking passage when Collins recollects a visit to the London Zoological Gardens with Dickens where they watch snakes being fed:

> They fed the reptiles, most specifically the snakes, a diet of mice and larger rats and the spectacle seemed to mesmerise Dickens who, a mesmerist himself, absolutely refused to allow anyone to mesmerise him. He would stand transfixed. Several times …. Dickens would remind me of how, frequently, two snakes would begin devouring the same rat at exactly the same time until the head and tail and hindquarters of the rodent were invisible in the snakes' gullets, while the struggling rat was still alive, hind and forelegs scrabbling in the air even as the powerful jaws advanced on them. (*D*: 37-38)

In this passage, the feeding of the reptiles is turned into a spectacle and the reader, by proxy, is also transfixed by the description. The struggle between the two snakes symbolically refers to Drood's awful threat (strikingly, Drood's face is characterised by reptilian features, as is often the case in depictions of Egyptians in mummy fiction and of Easterners in colonial fiction), but also implicitly to the fight for author-ity between Dickens and Collins, to which we shall return later. [49] The snake imagery is developed in the following paragraph as Dickens confesses his own hallucination: 'he was seeing the legs of furniture in his house …. as snakes slowly consuming the tabletops and draperies and tub. "When I am not looking, the house is devouring itself, my dear Wilkie."' (38). The urban image enters the domestic sphere and uncannily transforms it. Costantini points out how the chase after Drood is reversed as the latter persecutes

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[49] I am grateful to Nolwenn Corriou for this piece of information.

his hunters and invades the 'upper-world': 'By merging fantasy with realism in a titillating plot of persecution, Simmons describes the penetration of the ghoulish Drood into the lives of topside Londoners, who are mentally (maybe even physically) vampirised by his spectral figure' (2015: 181).

This is enhanced by the chiaroscuro which creates a Gothic atmosphere as when dim lights and sounds blur perception: 'the flickering gaslight at the first-storey landing worked poorly, casting but the smallest circle of doubtful light, leaving the rest of the stairs in deepest darkness' (*D*: 62); 'The noise, obvious as a silk dress rustling, descended the dark stairway from the attic above' (*ibid*.). At one point, the ghostly apparition of a female figure may recall the intrusion of Bertha Mason in Jane Eyre's room. The figure is characterised by the colour green, unfolding the snake imagery: 'wearing an aged green silk dress with a high bodice'; 'On the dark green silk were tiny gold *fleur-de-lis*'; 'Her skin was green – the green of very old cheese or of a moderately decomposed corpse' (62-63). The ghost only appears in a particular corridor of Collins's house so that Simmons seems to deploy the generic shift from the Gothic castle to the mansion which, as Robert Mighall shows, reflects the terrors the urban experience triggers (2003: 31). A double anxiety is emerging from urbanisation: that of the increasing labouring and poor population associated with crime and the spreading of anonymous bourgeois suburbs which enhance a sense of the *Unheimlich* (Dupeyron-Lafay 2005: 226-228). The strange figure, a short-lived female avatar of Drood who instantly vanishes, might be read here as a clue or an allegory. The decaying yet living body of the city we have seen in Shepherd has here entered the domestic space.[50]

2. Crypts and caves: the exploration of liminal zones

Thus Drood threatens to invade the domestic sphere too, as the fictitious Field warns Collins while sealing a hole in Collins's coal-cellar, a hole which could enable Drood to invade the house: 'The thing that you call Drood can enter in through smaller apertures than that, alas, Mr Collins. If once invited, that is' (*D*: 378). Simmons plays with a common trope of vampire literature (vampires can only enter a house if invited in). Whereas, as Karl Ashley Smith shows, the house (and by proxy, the city) restrict access to information in Dickens's novels, providing

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[50] Ultimately, the green woman proves to be an illusion: 'I lighted all the lamps on the first storey. There was no one else here' (*ibid*.). This detail is a clue that foreshadows the novel's ending: Dickens's pursuit of Drood, this 'game' as Collins defines it, proves to be only the result of a mesmerist act.

the reader with 'a metropolis whose own structure and atmosphere […] den[ies] the individual's attempts to fathom its secrets' (2008: 34), in Simmons's novel the house can be invaded and yields secrets. The domestic space can be transferred onto the city and thereby subverts crime scenes, denoting a porosity which uncannily appears with the trope of the lost detective, when Collins discovers a strange crime scene:

> Looking up, I was startled to see that someone had decorated the interior high spaces of the small crypt with some sort of glistening garlands. The gleaming grey strips had not been there when Hatchery and I had entered hours – *days? Weeks?* – ago, I was certain of that. Christmas was more than two weeks past. And why decorate an empty crypt in the first place? (*D*: 443)

Collins (and the reader along with him) is unsure of the scene that he sees, still under the impression of the traumatic opium dream in which he was abducted (or so it seemed) by Drood. The disturbing quality of this passage stems from the discrepancy between the location (the crypt) and what Collins supposes to be homely festive decorations. The adjectives 'glistening' and 'gleaming' as well as the absence-presence of Hatchery (note that he is only mentioned in reference to the past) foreshadow the appalling truth:

> It was Detective Sergeant Hibbert Hatchery, his white face distorted into a huge, silent scream, his all-white eyes staring sightlessly towards the garland-festooned bas-relief carvings and tiny gargoyles set along he corners of the small crypt's ceiling. […] Rising from his gaping belly were the stretched and glistening grey garlands that were no garlands at all. (443-444)

Hatchery is the detective whom Collins had paid to escort him to the opium dens in Undertown. Hatchery's expression, characterised by oxymora, recalls Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893), the garlands appearing as faded echoes of the red strips at the top of the painting. Simmons relishes this gory Gothic which is called upon by the architecture of the crypt with its 'bas-relief carvings' and 'gargoyle', a grotesque trope recalling Roman imagery. The gory image subverts both the 'gargoyles' – the ironic figures which Chesterton deemed characteristic of Dickens's writing – and the way in which the Romans used to decorate with elaborate figures architectural caves in their gardens where they would receive their guests (Couëlle-Dezeuze 1997: 17). Hatchery's body recalls divinatory practices, but here the oracular is debunked, the omens do not point anywhere.[51] The disembowelling of Hatchery and the disappearance of his traces point to another trope: the devouring city. Hatchery's body is ripped out and consumed by the city, in the churchyard where thousands of other bodies are digested by the earth. In Simmons's novel, the city is not only to be explored on a horizontal axis, but the reader, following Dickens and Collins, is always led down into the bowels of the city or Undertown.

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[51] This relish in excessive gore is a beloved trick of Simmons's in this novel, which hints that this might only be an illusion, part of Collins's hallucinations – later on Collins will look in vain for reports on Hatchery's death in the newspapers. At the end of the novel, Dickens reveals to Collins that Hatchery was robbed and killed by '[f]our Hindoo sailors' (*D*: 718).

The process of detection, here, is phantasmatic but also sociological. The discovery of the slashed body could be read as a metaphor for the unhealthy belly of the city which is a prime concern of detective fiction. Neo-Victorian fiction reinvests unpalatable spaces to uncover issues raised in the nineteenth century and that were to lead to the sanitisation of the city. Mariaconcetta Costantini shows that Simmons's reliance on smells and the putrid is a means of resistance to the bourgeois model, so that the 'plethora of horrific details used in [the description of the slums] is undoubtedly a strategy for reviving the spectre of political radicalism' (2015: 184). Numerous historical studies are devoted to the sanitisation of London and Paris, one of the most interesting being Alain Corbin's 2001 *Le Miasme et la jonquille*, which focuses on the senses. Corbin demonstrates throughout that the city is a site of opposition between the middle-class or bourgeois model of living and that of the poor. This struggle was shaped by the eradication of smells (or any sources of bad smells) as a means of disciplining the masses and of relegating the poor to the margins. This ideological use of smells seeps into neo-Victorian fiction, especially in Dan Simmons's version of London in *Drood* which relies on the senses and movement, especially when the characters, Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens, start to investigate the mysterious Drood with the help of the police – including Inspector Field – in the reeking slums of the metropolis. The politics of representation of the neo-Victorian novel rely on the explosion of odours. In chapter four, there is an increasing gradation of disgust evident in the depiction of the slums and their smell resulting from hot weather. A first simile is established between the city and a sick body suffering from fever: 'This was the hottest, most feverish time of the hot, feverish summer' (64). Simmons emphasises the effects of the refuse of the city in a scatological depiction of the sewers and the Thames, the latter being exposed as 'our greatest open sewers' (*ibid*.), a well-trodden trope in neo-Victorian fiction. The infected body image soon leads to that of the deceased and decaying body: 'July lay over London this summer like a heavy, wet layer of decomposing flesh' (65). This layering of decaying bodies is further developed by the focus on the cemeteries and the merging of corpses with the earth: 'new corpses joining the solid humus of festering and overcrowded layers of rotting bodies below' (*ibid*.). Not only are the dead merging with the earth on which the city stands, but the living are contaminated by the dead: the gravediggers are immersed in this liminal space, 'their hips in rotting flesh' (*ibid*.). Death conveys a sense of the inescapable: 'the reeking miasma drove people out of surrounding homes and tenements – and there was *always* a cemetery nearby. The dead were always beneath our feet and in our nostrils' (*ibid*.; original emphasis). The peripatetic movement of the narrator in this chapter provides not only an exploration of putrid and decaying spaces but also of the margins, the blind spots of Victorian society. This is

conveyed by the slums' resistance to signifiers, the characters entering a liminal space, off the map and yet acutely there: 'Most of the streets we had already passed through were not marked and the maze of Bluegate Fields was even less delineated' (75). Once in Undertown, the oozing smell of the mud gets even more powerful, first confusing the senses, '[t]he stench brought so many tears to my eyes that I had to wipe them in order to be able to see' (117), before shutting them off: 'the overwhelming power of the stench had all but numbed my sense of smell. I realised that I would have to burn my clothes; a misfortune, since I particularly prized the jacket and waistcoat' (119). The stench contaminates the trespassers. The gentleman's clothes must be sacrificed in order to retain a sense of identity.

Simmons's rewriting of nineteenth-century fiction reworks the Dickensian and Gothic city as part of the postmodern poetics informing the representation of the city delineated by Maria Beville. The search for the elusive Drood compels the protagonists, and the readers, to share a labyrinthine, fragmented experience of the city, as the maze of London is doubled by narrative detours, analepses and prolepses following Dickens's and Collins's night walks in the underworld of London. This peripatetic experience of deciphering secret places entails the use of various means of transport, itself doubled by the narrator's shifting train of thoughts, as the narrator Collins collocates memories belonging to different temporalities. The exploration of London is thus the exploration of Dickens's and Collins's past. The topography of the East End in fact relies on numerous Gothic tropes and on concentric circles which might recall Dante's *Inferno*. These concentric circles work as layers: from Old Sal's den, the riverbank churchyard, the crypt to the underworld starting with King Lazaree's opium den (a reflection of Old Sal's), the *loculi* and eventually, the subterranean river which, Styx-like, leads Dickens to Drood.

Simmons's version of Old Sal is a Charon of sorts, offering the two authors a sensational account of Drood's life before pointing them towards 'the deepest parts of Undertown. Down where the Chinee named King Lazaree provides Drood and t'others the purest pure opium in the world. Down in Undertown with the other dead things' (85). Before finding Lazaree, the two authors enter a crypt (the same in which Hatchery will die) which recalls, in this passage, the function of the cave in Greek theology (but which also finds echoes in Plato's myth): in the midst of the churchyard, beyond the reach of civilisation, it is the realm of illusions and shadows, an entry point into the subterranean world (Couëlle-Dezeuze 1997: 11). In the passages set underground, Simmons presents the chthonian space as a 'crossing point' ('lieu de passage'), *i.e.* both disjunctive and connective, a contact zone between two worlds (Gaillard 1997: 5). The link with Greek imagery is reinforced by the shape of the entrance itself, an empty

bier 'just long enough to hold a coffin or sarcophagus or shrouded body' (*D*: 97) recalling the passage through which priests had to go down to receive oracular visions (Couëlle-Dezeuze 1997: 15).[52] Alice-like, Dickens and Collins venture down the hole (Hatchery and Field stay behind, the underworld is thus out of reach for the police force, strengthening the idea that they belong to a different world) and arrive in King Lazaree's opium den. Detection, here, is moulded by space, the process of discovery is shaped by the strange successive spaces that Dickens and Collins must enter. Lazaree's opium den is yet another liminal space peopled with 'mummified figures' (*D*: 110), one more step before reaching Undertown and the sewers. Simmons plays on reiteration: the den is a Gothicised version of Sal's den as Lazaree seems to be an echo of the old crone, also characterised as a Charon-figure (112-113): 'Unlike Opium Sal's dry rattle, the Chinaman's laughter was easy and liquid and rich' (110). Lazaree's den has a liminal status defined as a zone hovering between the world of the living, London, and that of the dead, Undertown where Drood reigns. Lazaree himself is a liminal figure in between life and death: his name is a transparent allusion to Lazarus, which enhances the tropes of life after death and resurrection to be found in the novel. It also creates an echo with Drood's story as he is associated with death (he was left for dead by Whitechapel butchers and arrived in England in a coffin).[53]

To the Greco-Roman imagery, Simmons adds another topology linked to the Gothic: the cathedral. The name of the Cathedral, 'Wells', is interesting as it echoes the topography of the underground London, marked by subterranean rivers, former springs and wells (Ackroyd 2011: 30-32). Lazaree reveals to the fictional Collins and Dickens that to find Drood, they have to go deeper in the sewers and catacombs of the city. In an enigmatic riddle, Lazaree refers to wells which Dickens, recalling Sherlock Holmes, understands as a clue:

> This lower level of the catacombs obviously is laid out in the design of a great cathedral … Wells to be precise. What seems random is quite determined. […] King Lazaree's opium den, for instance, as he was kind to explain, would be where the Cloister Garth is in Wells Cathedral. Our entrance point from above would be at the western towers. (*D*: 115)

The upside-down cathedral (another playful allusion to the opening scene of *Edwin Drood*) leads the two writers to a new labyrinth, the sewers in the middle of which they find a den,

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[52] Strikingly, in Greek myths, consultants would encounter two snakes at the bottom to which they would feed honey pastries (Couëlle-Dezeuze 1997: 15). It may be a further play with Grecian imagery on Simmons's part.
[53] The story of Lazarus not only establishes this trope but also plays on ambiguity and belief. In the Bible, the resurrection of Lazarus leads a part of the Jews to believe in Jesus while precipitating his fall. Besides, there is a slight ambiguity in the way Jesus refers to Lazarus's death: 'Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. […] Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they [his disciples] they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep' (John 11: 11-13). This biblical reference thus prefigures the trick Simmons plays on his reader: the possibility that all this is just an illusion.

which reminds them of stories from *The Wild Boys of London* (120) but which also echoes the previous den with the reference to the stove and sleeping mats. Dickens and Collins finally arrive at a subterranean river: the katabatic journey is thus complete, Drood is to be met at the end of this 'river voyage' (116). Dickens turns into a sort of Ulysses (recalling the passage when he decides to question Tiresias), paying his way up the river (123) but leaving Collins behind on the quay. As we come to realise later in the novel this is all staged and a first clue is given as Collins notices Dickens's sudden lisp when getting onboard the boat and advising him to go back to Hatchery and Field: 'I noticed the lisp in his voice that others often had commented upon. I thought that perhaps it became more noticeable when he was carrying out an act of treachery' (124). With the phrase 'act of treachery', Collins denotes the fact that Dickens suddenly abandons him in this threatening place but, on a second reading, it becomes clear that this is a red herring left by Simmons, betraying the trick being played upon us too.

3. A hermeneutic quest in the underworld

As we have seen, Simmons's underworld is composed of palimpsestic layers, which rely on persisting sensational *topoi*, such as Roman crypts and the pyramid's labyrinth, a popular topos in mummy fiction and films. The Thames is another motif which allows for a palimpsestic game in the depiction of the slums in *Drood* as the narrator Collins keeps on insisting on the oozing smells emanating from the river alluding to *Our Mutual Friend*:

> I was reminded that night of a passage in Dickens's most recent – and still uncompleted – book, *Our Mutual Friend* […] in which our author has two young men riding in a carriage down to the Thames to identify a body found drowned and dragged out of the river by a father and daughter who do that daily for a living –
> *The wheels rolled on, and rolled down by the Monument, and by the Tower, and by the Docks; down by Ratcliffe, and Rotherhithe; down by where accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed from higher grounds, like so much moral sewage, and to be pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk it in the river.* (*D*: 93)

Collins quotes, and glosses over, the moment Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn follow Charley Hexam to see John Harmon's body. Dickens's text is marked by a sense of movement which mimics the ebb and flow of the Thames, with the 'down by' and 'rolled on, and rolled down'. The inhabitants of the slums are reduced to 'the scum of humanity', the product of the River, but also excrements, the refuse of the city hence the 'moral sewage' image. In *Drood*, Collins's narration is cut by the quotation (note the dash) which may lead the reader to infer that Dickens's prose might not be surpassed. Collins identifies with 'the dissolute young characters in the coach in Dickens's novel' (*ibid.*) which foregrounds the pursuit of Drood and finds echoes in Headstone's pursuit of Wrayburn. The reference to *Our Mutual Friend* might

be motivated by a central motif at the heart of Dickens's novel: the circulation of stories (Duncan 2019: 288). As Ian Duncan argues, *Our Mutual Friend* is itself a palimpsest calling upon various literary traditions (289-293). The Thames in Dickens's novel has transformative powers, the river is invested with 'transcendental meaning according to the imperatives of the plot and [Dickens's] fluctuating attitudes to the religious ideas traditionally discussed in terms of water imagery' (A. Smith 2008: 177). In *Drood*, the Thames hints at the interchangeability of roles (from detective to criminal) but is emptied out of religious significance: Drood is thrown in the river, his body truncated (*D*: 84), yet his resurrection only points to palimpsestic imagination.

As Joachim Frenk notes, the descent to the underworld is 'an intertextual pastiche,' (Frenk 2011: 143). Its first hypotext obviously is *The Mysteries of Edwin Drood* and its opening on an opium den. Indeed, the fictitious Dickens and Collins stumble on a scene recalling John Jasper's first appearance after hallucinating a Turkish invasion (*MED*: 1). Simmons enhances or exaggerates Dickens's text as Jasper's three companions, 'a Chinaman, a Lascar, and a haggard woman' (*ibid.*), also present in *Drood*, multiply: 'Eyes peeped furtively at us from beneath rags in the adjoining rooms even as I realised that there were more bodies – Chinese, Occidental, Lascar – sprawled on the floors and in corners' (*D*: 78). Dickens's Orientalised opening thus turns into a nightmarish vision and partakes of Simmons's effort with 'his morbid details and unresolved ambiguities, [to exemplify] the perverse use of the slums made by Victorian middle-class observers, who were constantly at risk of sensationalising, moralising or objectifying a reality they only experienced as voyeurs' (Costantini 2015: 180). Simmons taps into an imagery that will be found again in Peter Ackroyd's *London Under*: that the London underground is a 'shadow or replica of the city', an organism 'with its own laws of growth and change' (Ackroyd 2011: 2). The seemingly cannibal boys that Dickens and Collins face (*D*: 120) are thus a Gothic version of the 'inhabitants' of London's underground whom Ackroyd characterise as a 'subterranean race of "toshers"' (Ackroyd 2011: 71) known as 'the beings of the underworld who entered the sewers on the banks of the Thames at low tide, armed with large sticks to defend themselves from rats' (72). Scavenging the sewers, they would recuperate 'the relics of Victorian London' (73), thus becoming pilgrims of a kind and emphasising 'the notion that the tunnels and streams underground were still somehow sacred' (*ibid.*).

The descent into Drood's hellish maze still builds the suspense and the anguish that characterise thrillers and crime fiction, offering a Gothic version of detection as Collins and Dickens venture into the bowels of the earth to try to find out who Drood is; Simmons also

plays constantly in this descent on pastiche and parody. The descent into the underworld is paced by Dickens's quiz on Collins's literary knowledge ('do you know your Edgar Allan Poe?' (*D*: 101), going from Poe to Ben Jonson to Mayhew and *The Wild Boys*. The space in which the characters evolve turns into an accumulation of figurative locked rooms, from the claustrophobic streets of the slums, to the catacombs and their *loculi* – themselves hermetic spaces, as referring to tombs or urns ('Loculus' *OED*) – and finally the subterranean sewers. The intertextual imbrications themselves constitute locked rooms in their self-reflexivity while pointing out texts in which locked rooms appear such as Poe's 'The Cask of Amontillado' (1846) as the fictitious Dickens notes: 'Evidently this Poe loved to write about crypts, corpses, premature burials, and hearts ripped out of living breasts' (*D*: 101). We can see that the accumulation is a map of the two authors' adventures in the underworld, foreshadowing Hatchery's death whose bowels are ripped out. In Poe's story, the narrator immures a friend for revenge while *Edwin Drood* is a kind of textual locked-room mystery. These intertextual traces also guide the way this novel should be read as they constitute so many clues as to the development of the plot.

The palimpsestic nature of the underworld lays an emphasis on the novel's interest in illusion as Frenk states: 'The exuberant materiality of Undertown, the horrific spectacle of Drood's world, is largely a fiction created by the narrator, the product of Collins's drug-addled mind' (2011: 144). This links up with a certain type of London writings inspired by De Quincey in whose *Confessions as an Opium Eater* '[t]he city is the expression of a drugged state, and its existence is to question the subject' (Tambling 2009: 232). In fact, throughout the novel, Collins is haunted by De Quincey's *Confessions.* Indeed, the contract established with the reader at the beginning of the novel echoes De Quincey's text: in both cases, we find the direct address to the reader, a narrative marked by a paradoxical call for redemption but lacking any sense of guilt and a posthumous publication. Like De Quincey, Simmons's *Drood* bears witness to an identity in crisis: unable to cope with the transformation of the city, Collins, like De Quincey, turns to opium dens as an attempt to control his drifting sense of self (Wolfreys 1998: 110). As Wolfreys comments on *The Confessions*: 'The city traces itself in the veins of the text as the signature of addiction and anxiety. […] London […] is not just a reality, but of the order of discourse wherein the subject searches out the symptoms of his selfhood' (111). Thus, Simmons's palimpsestic and drug-induced vision of the city departs from Dickens's concern 'with the city as city' to align his text with Poe and Collins in whose writings 'the city assumes

an even greater function not only as backdrop or stage, but as psychic context' (Wolfreys 1998: 209).

The intertextual echoes of the Odyssey and other Greek myths (in an enigmatic poem, Lazaree evokes Charon, Cerebus and other figure from Hades (*D*: 112)) invite a reading of the River as the Styx but also sheds light on the imagery of the cave and the oracular. Indeed, Collins becomes a regular visitor to King Lazaree's den. This is not without consequences: it will further the impression that Collins is unreliable, and, above all, it will lead to an 'encounter' with Drood. This turns Collins into a sort of unwilling consultant figure as his stays in the opium den can be compared to the stays Greek priests were going through in order to induce oracular vision. Collins's oracular vision is traumatic as Drood anaesthetises his senses and forces a scarab down his throat, as will be seen later on. I would like here to focus on the scene that follows that vision when Collins awakes naked in the obscure *loculi*. The passage takes place in utter darkness which has Collins believing that he has gone blind: 'Now there was only absolute darkness' (437). The reassuring lights of Lazaree's den (a sort of night light) have disappeared, leaving no spark of hope. The darkness suggests that Collins is no philosopher and is still unable to tell fantasy from facts: 'Just as in the dream. Or just as in my real abduction by Drood' (*ibid.*). Simmons might allude to the myth of Plato's cave to strengthen the idea that Collins is unreliable and unable to make out fantasy from reality, thus dooming him to live in the shadows.

The palimpsestic game not only fuels the self-reflectivity of the novel as Simmons has Lazaree suggest that Dickens's and Collins's interest in the opium den and Undertown might lead to a publication (playing with the historical writers' well-known habit of going on slumming expeditions for journalistic and novelistic material) which leads Collins to the following reflection: 'I was a novelist. Everything and everyone in my life was material. How could he speak for me and say that I would never write about such an extraordinary place?' (111). Simmons's reiterative topography bears humoristic undertones in the contrast between seemingly knowledgeable Dickens and utterly lost Collins. The exploration of the underworld is thus a game Dickens plays on Collins as much as a game between the reader and the author. The latter relishes the unsavoury underground, forcing us, like Mayhew's mud-boys, to wade in and sift the 'foul matter' of these sewers for red herrings. 'Foul matter' is yet another self-reflective joke as the narrator Collins points out: '"Foul matter" is what we writers call the manuscripts and written-upon galley pages that the publishers return to us. I wonder if Dickens

was making some weak joke' (117). If Collins is unsure whether Dickens is having fun at his expense, the reader is asked to read this as a sign pointing to the act of (re)writing.

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Thus, neo-Victorian texts create a sense of place, a maze through which the *flâneur* is replaced by detective and criminal figures, writers and readers, who seem to wander aimlessly, constantly decoding and misreading space and, in *Drood,* going deep down in the belly of the city. Above all, the London re-created in neo-Victorian fiction gives 'a sense of the presence of the past, but a past only to be known via texts' in this case, via the mediation of Dickens's texts (Hutcheon 1989: 4). But these Dickensian literary crypts also return under different guises, when the authors decide to displace Dickens to the other side of the world.

II.   REVISITING THE CRYPT: DICKENS DOWN UNDER

If Dickens is the representative writer of London, neo-Victorian writers are also interested in places that have been forced to remain in the margins of his fiction, such as Australia, or places that are ignored in today's global map, such as distinctive regions as Tasmania or Papua New Guinea. Such fictions bear witness to what Larissa McLean Davies has called 'Magwitch Madness' *i.e.* the necessity to engage with Dickens for Australian writers (2011: 130, qtd. in Lanone in print: 16). Let us shortly begin with Peter Carey, who explores London but gives us metonymic glimpses of Australia.

As we have seen, Peter Carey chooses to write back by looking at London. The rewriting of the canon in Carey's novel may thus be considered as an instrument of decolonisation, as 'the redemption of Jack Maggs from the marginality into which Dickens's text had relegated his "convict", is the emblematic expression of this very process' (Dolce 2000: 23; my translation).[54] However, the Victorians also left their mark on the soil of the colonies as shown by the numerous statues of Queen Victoria which mark sites of both memory and resistance in former colonial cities (Ho 2012: 1-4). In *Great Expectations*, Australia is the Other place where Magwitch is sent, far away from the comforting Kent marshes and transformative city. A

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[54] 'Il riscatto di Jack Maggs dalle marginalità cui il testo di Dickens aveva relegato il suo "convict", si fa espressione emblematica di quel processo.'

dungeon of sorts, it is supposed to keep the convict out of sight so that, as Edward Said stresses, his return dooms him to death (2000: 17). In *Jack Maggs*, the dungeon turns out to be London since, as Janet C. Myers notes, Maggs had hoped to return to an idealised England, the image of which he construed through fictional accounts (2011: 455-463). In neo-Dickensian novels such as *Wanting* and *Mister Pip*, Australia writes back with a vengeance (to use Rushdie's phrase), destabilising the Dickensian topography. The reeking slums and churchyards are replaced by the tantalising vegetation of the island on which the novels are set (Bougainville and Tasmania).

The sense of place in postcolonial neo-Victorian fiction taps into 'the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place' (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 8). For Elizabeth Ho, '[p]ostcolonial neo-Victorian production, in particular, has been dominated by a need to work through the historical relationships with the former coloniser, usually Britain, in order to pose deimperialised futures' (2019: 2). Ho further observes that when dealing with 'ex-colonial Asian sites', 'neo-Victorianism offers a highly visible, highly aestheticised code for confronting again the histories of empire and neoimperialist presents' (*ibid.*). Thus, the neo-Victorian interaction with the Dickensian constructedness of London takes another dimension in postcolonial contexts, which put to the forefront '[t]he gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it' (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 9). The following sections will thus demonstrate that the interconnection between London and Bougainville or the penal colony of Van Diemen's Land moves detection away from crimes *per se*; detection here articulates issues surrounding postcolonial representation and enunciation. The reader is asked to decipher colonial constructs and secrets.

A.   Revising the colonial plot

Wanting turns the tropes of detection on their head; one of the greatest detection plot of the nineteenth century, the search for Franklin's lost expedition, vanishes, and is displaced by the excavation of another secret, what happened to Mathinna, a little Aboriginal girl, when Franklin was governor of Tasmania. Decoding, here, strays from the *topoi* of detection which we have seen so far, to tackle the colony as prison. The representation of space plays a key part in this process of retrieving a colonial secret. In his *Atlas of the European Novel*, Franco Moretti

suggests that the nineteenth-century novel was used as a means to represent and make sense of the nation-state, be it in novels set in England or in the colonies (1998: 70-73). Moretti shows that the plot of these novels is linear, with no bifurcation but only obstacles, embodying the European perception of the colonies and ideology; it reduces the natives (in Moretti's cases studies, Africans) to beasts: 'Penetrate; seize; leave (and if needed, destroy). It's the spatial logic of colonialism; duplicated, and "naturalized", by the spatial logic of one-dimensional plot' (61). I argue that Richard Flanagan's novel *Wanting* appropriates this plotline, in the literal sense of the term, to debunk the colonial novel. Flanagan's novel follows the spatial structure of the colonial novel delineated by Moretti: the organisation of space revolves around three main places in the novel, Wybelanna, Hobart and London. This mimics the colonial relation to the land, from the periphery to the main harbour and to the metropolis. Yet, Flanagan establishes a parallelism between London and Van Diemen's Land which problematises and questions the seeming linearity of the spatial organisation of the novel.

The form of Flanagan's novel requires the narratee to read Mathinna's story and Dickens's in parallel as chapters alternate between a first narration set in the 1840s in Van Diemen's Land and the second set in the 1850s in London. This structural parallelism is enhanced by repetitions at the end of chapters one and two:

> It was 1839. The first photograph of a man was taken, Abd al-Qadir declared a jihad against the French, and Charles Dickens was rising to greater fame with a novel called *Oliver Twist*. It was, thought the Protector as he closed the ledger after another post mortem report and returned to preparing notes for his pneumatics lecture, inexplicable. (*W*: 3)

> It was 1851. London's Great Exhibition celebrated the triumph of reason in a glass pavilion mocked by the writer Douglas Jerrold as a crystal palace; a novel about finding a fabled white whale was published in New York to failure; while in the iron-grey port of Stromness, Orkney, Lady Franklin farewelled into whiteness the second of what were to be numerous failed expeditions in search of a fable that had once been her husband. (8)

Both extracts follow the same organising structure. The dates and events chosen ideologically contextualise the two narrations that are to be unfolded. Flanagan is thus not only writing back to Dickens – *Great Expectations, Oliver Twist, The Frozen Deep* and his articles following the publication of Dr Rae's report on the Franklin Expedition – but a whole ideological set of discourses, as Thieme's term 'con-text' underlines:

> It is also intended to suggest the need to locate the postcolonial works in broader *context* than those offered by the apparently determinant *pretexts* for writing provided by their English 'parents'. So, although 'con-texts' is a term that may initially suggest oppositionality, it is used here to refer also to the full range of discursive situations (contexts), many of which have little to do with the canon, from which the counter-discursive works emerge. (2001: 4-5)

The different cultural references evoked in these passages introduce the main tropes of the novel: the notion of progress and of colonial unrest; the literary references establish the tropes

of poverty, of the orphan as well as biblical tropes with the reference to Melville's *Moby Dick*. The latter references also ground the intertextual quality of the novel. Each chapter ends with a return to the main focaliser of the chapter, the Protector in the first case and Lady Jane Franklin in the second. In the first quotation, the notion of progress as triggered by the colonial agenda is deconstructed by the reference to Abd al-Qadir who embodied the beginning of the crumbling French empire in North Africa (though, as is known, Algeria would only get independence after the Second World War). The Algerian unrest highlights the war in Oceania referred to at the opening of the novel: 'The war had ended as wars sometimes do, unexpectedly' (*W*: 1). Most of all, the whole chapter describes the impact of colonialism upon the native aboriginal tribes who were contaminated by European diseases such as typhoid, as Andrew Lambert has it: '[When Franklin arrived to take his office as governor] [i]t was already far too late to save this tragic people from the onslaught of European diseases, European agriculture and European violence' (2009: 99-100). Flanagan denounces the colonial stance on those issues by putting the diseased on equal footing with economics as the passage from post-mortem reports to 'his pneumatics lecture' shows. In the second quotation, the focus is on Lady Jane and the conjunction 'while' as well as the noun 'whiteness' equate the narrative of *Moby Dick* and the search for Sir John Franklin. This equation is enhanced by the phrase 'a fable that had once been her husband': Sir John is turned into a mythical, ethereal and elusive figure. This transpires throughout the novel: the expedition is the elision that marks the structure of Flanagan's narrative, the events narrated being set either before or after the expedition. The expedition is much referred to, yet it is given the status of a fable, a fiction especially as the closest we get to an account of it is the re-presentation of the play *The Frozen Deep*.

This mirror suggests that the two places are doubles. The link between space and double is at the centre of Louis Marin's 'utopic map' ('utopie de la carte'). Marin's analysis is of paramount importance for the understanding of mapping as a dual process, that is to say as representation but also as discourse and reading. Marin's argument concurs with that of Moretti: both thinkers conceive the map as a text with a syntax which entails the presence of a viewpoint. Above all, Marin points out that the duality of the map, at once equating and being 'other' than its double, is the site of simulacra (1973: 291). The map as conceived by Marin highlights the conception of the colony both historically and in the novel. As Andrew Lambert claims in his biography of Sir John Franklin, the role of the Australian and Tasmanian colony was to supply wealth and power to the metropole whose policies were unfitting as 'London remained insulated from the realities of colonial conditions by vast distances and considerable time' which doomed

the colonial system to failure (2009: 107). As is argued throughout this section, the representation of Tasmania in Flanagan's novel revolves around this parallelism that transforms the colony into a simulacrum of London which is deconstructed by the novel itself. London and Hobart Town are constructed as inverted images of each other. There are only a few depictions of London and England in the novel, all characterised by grimness and bleakness:

> But as the door of Lady Jane's home closed behind him [Dickens] and he faced the morning gloom, thick flakes of soot eddied around him like black snow, and nothing seemed bright. He made his way from Pall Mall in a hansom cab, through the mud and shit so thick and deep that dogs and horses seemed formed from it. People dissolved in and out of the dirty fog like fen monsters, like wraiths, filthy rags wrapped around their faces to ward off the cholera miasma that had carried away six hundred souls only a month before. London seemed all stench and blackness: blackness in the air and blackness in his eyes, blackness in his very soul begging to be white once more as he made his way home to his family. (*W*: 31-32)

The passage is a rewriting of the opening of *Bleak House,* very different from Shepherd's, which was discussed earlier, as Flanagan keeps key features of the hypotext (or pre-text to use Thieme's term (2001: 4)): the mud and fog. The passage is marked by its monochrome depiction of the streets conveyed at first by the oxymoronic simile between snow and soot: 'flakes of soot', 'like black snow'. The monochrome of London enhances the undistinguishable quality of the figures in the streets and setting. This dilution of living beings in the streets and the fog introduces the trope of contamination and death that the comparisons 'like fen monsters, like wraiths' illustrate as well as the reference to the cholera. This echoes the opening of the novel which opposes the 'blacks' to the white man, the Protector, and which is also pervaded by contamination. The image provided to the reader is that of a city of the living dead which contaminates everything and everyone, Dickens included (at the end of the passage the monochrome is used to represent his inner psyche). The novel thus uses the city as a monochrome space to refract the image of the colony, it is also the site of grief and redemption for Dickens. The colour white associated with him foregrounds the whiteness of *The Frozen Deep*. As Catherine Lanone puts it: 'The heat of Tasmania is opposed to the rain in London and to the ice which becomes an obsessional metaphor for Dickens as he identifies with Franklin and his men' (2012: 26-27). In comparison to this grim depiction of London, Hobart Town is multi-coloured:

> The child had seen nothing like the town, a vast confusion of white men in many colours, and large buildings and mud and shit and horses – so many horses! And the whole effect, as she rode by the new warehouses and the older grog shops and slum cottages, as they drove past pigs and cows roaming free in the streets, men in yellow and black clothes chained like oxen, men in red clothes leaning on muskets, and finally up a hill to government House, was one of overwhelming excitement. (*W*: 113)

The passage is told from Mathinna's perspective and the colourful depiction enhances her sense of confusion and excitement which is conveyed by the polysyndeton and gradation. However, collocated to her sensations is the narrator's stance which taints the child's vision with signs to

be deciphered by the reader. These signs are reminders to the reader that the narration is set in a penal colony. Poverty is hinted at by the reference to 'slums cottages' while the comparison of men to oxen represents the convicts working in town. The colours that pervade the passage denote the penal system, the 'yellow and black clothes' of the convicts, the red uniforms of the soldiers. The confusion depicted might thus not only be that felt by Mathinna but also represent the composite nature of society in the penal colony. Lambert's biography mainly focuses on Franklin's policies to improve the conditions of living in the penal colony and the re-insertion of the convicts. Lambert dismisses the issue surrounding the destruction of the aboriginal people under Franklin's governance, claiming that by his arrival nothing could be done (2009: 99). Flanagan's novel writes back to this silencing of the aboriginal people and the genocide that then took place. The force of this novel, as well as of Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip* which will be discussed in the following section, is that the author uses an individual story, that of the black Aboriginal girl, as a vector for a counter-vision of the imperial story.[55]

The depiction of Hobart Town in chapter 7 reworks the experience of free settlers in the colony and the distortion brought by the number of convicts. The exotic (Western) representation of Australia is deconstructed:

> Visitors, old colonists and prospective new free settlers alike sailing into the island's capital, Hobart town, were all momentarily buoyed up by an initial enthusiasm, spirits raised by the journey up a splendid estuary full of picturesque wooded hills and romantic little bays that revealed nothing of the miserable lives of those who lived beneath the occasional wisps of chimney smoke rising from deep within the forests. (*W:* 106-107)

Flanagan uses a gradation which relies on the movement represented by the nautical semantic field to show the enthusiasm of new settlers which reaches its climax with the depiction of the estuary expressing a cliché of colonial perception in the use of the adjectives 'picturesque' and 'romantic'. The vision is dismantled by the contrast established by the semantic fields of industry and misery. Hobart Town is characterised by its duality which relies on the visible/invisible dichotomy. The next paragraph further breaks down the idyllic vision:

> And how correspondingly large was their disappointment, how their spirits then sank, when they finally came upon the bedraggled town that not so much rose as staggered drunkenly up the cove to the foothills of the great mountain beyond. It seemed to combine the worlds of the army barrack and the prison yard into a town at best monotonous and at worst monstrous. (107)

To the positive phrase 'buoyed by an initial enthusiasm' now corresponds 'their spirit sank', a contrast enhanced by the emphatic anaphoric use of 'how'. The decadence of the inhabitants of

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[55] This aspect has also been noticed by Catherine Lanone in her article 'Revisiting *Great Expectations*: The Postcolonial Persistence of Dickens' in *Etudes Anglaises* (2012) as well as by Jennifer Gribble in her book chapter 'Portable Property, Postcolonial Appropriations of *Great Expectations*' in *Victorian Turns, Neo-Victorian Returns,* 2008: 182-192.

the town is represented by its personification as it 'staggered drunkenly'. The colonial adventure novel is thus undone by the representation of the penal colony.[56] The chapter goes on to describe the governor's mansion which is characterised as a palimpsestic place in the strongest sense of the term as the image of the skin and of the onion demonstrates: 'Much as the colony had grown from a few hundred souls desperate for survival to a society of forty thousand, skin upon skin the cottage grew, until a great onion of a building had arisen' (*ibid.*). The use of the word 'skin' instead of layers is not benign as it subtly echoes the genocide of the Aborigines. What is even more interesting about the mansion is its relation to history. Playing on the instability of narratives, Flanagan uses Van Diemen's land to both show that history is a construct but also to prefigure the decline of the colony itself: 'The island's capacity to transform everything into unreliable memory even before it happened, or in spite of it never happening, was already apparent in that crumbling edifice, which, though only thirty years old, was already a relic of – magnificent decay' (107-108). The unreliability of history is crystallised in the 'crumbling edifice'. Flanagan's imagery echoes Salman Rushdie's theory of postcolonial subjectivity and the relation to the past, especially the necessary fragmented writing of the world: 'Writers are no longer sages, dispensing the wisdom of the centuries. And those of us who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism forced upon us' (2010: 12).

Flanagan's representation of the penal colony writes back to the genre of the colonial novel and helps to foreground Mathinna's tragedy. Indeed, Mathinna misreads Hobart Town and the mansion as she believes at first in the values given to her by the colonial enterprise represented by the Protector.[57]

> But when Mathinna finally arrived there the spring following the Franklins' visit to Wybalenna, after a journey that had taken far too long, her eyes did not see the rising damp, the peeling paper, the cracked and patched plaster, the pitching building that left door and window frames rising and falling like so many winking eyes. She saw instead a palace of the type she had heard the Protector describe. Even its musty smells of dead huntsman spiders and stale possum piss she understood as being what the Protector had told her so much about: the fragrance of God. (*W*: 108)

There is a contrast between Mathinna's figurative blindness, her misreading, and the accumulation of details conveying a sense of decay; the latter is accentuated by the gerund as well as by the use of alliterated plosives. The simile 'like winking eyes' gives the uncanny

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[56] For a study on the colonial adventure novel see Jean-Yves Tadié, *Le roman d'aventures* [1982], Editions Gallimard: Paris, 2013.

[57] There is a deep sense of irony in Robinson's function as 'The Protector', which is present throughout the novel, instead of the last name. Far from 'protecting' Mathinna, Robinson sends her to her destruction symbolised both by her being abandoned by the Franklin, and, most strikingly, by her being raped by Sir John. The issues raised by the representation of Mathinna's rape will be at the centre of chapter 3.

impression that the mansion is alive. Mathinna's misreading reaches its climax as she associates human and animal smells with the spiritual, thus highlighting her mis-appropriation of colonial Christian values or at least suggesting that these values may not be taken at face value, or may be hiding a darker side. Mathinna's misreading of the mansion and of the Franklins refracts and displaces Pip's misreading of Satis House. Pip's first encounter with Miss Havisham is marked by over visibility:

> But I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose had shrunk to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could. (*GE*: 52)

The passage is marked by the omnipresence of sight, which is conveyed by the anaphorical and rhythmical use of 'I saw' as well as the focus on Miss Havisham's eyes which are in turn compared to that of a waxwork and of a skeleton. The passage is also marked by decay as Miss Havisham is compared to fading flowers and finally equated with the skeleton. The scene is visual, almost cinematic, with an especial focus on a faded brightness which forms like a film or filter on Pip's vision. The depiction of the skeleton wearing a 'rich dress' is proleptic as it invites the identification with the old woman. Another resemblance between Pip and Mathinna is that Pip is also accompanied by a 'protector', Mr Pumblechook who then boasts that he helped Pip to become a gentleman. Like Pumblechook with Pip, the Protector is convinced that it is right to send Mathinna over to the Franklins. In fact, Mathinna is part of the cargo sent over to the main town as she is topographically inscribed: 'Mathinna Flinders – as she was entered in the ship's log, […] – had taken ten days to sail from Flinders Island to Hobart Town at the southern end of Van Diemen's Land' (*W*: 108). The name conferred upon Mathinna roots her (literally) in Wybelanna and marks her appropriation by the colonial power, as the islands were named for Matthew Flinders ('Flinders Island' *Encyclopaedia Britannica*). The passage is also another instance of Flanagan's debunking of the spatial movement that defines the colonial novel in Moretti's study (1998: 58). The movement is not anymore inwards towards the centre of the continent but outwards; the focus is not anymore on the colonial subject but rather its object – Mathinna in this passage is characterised as a commodity. It is also the beginning of her being inscribed upon or re-written as she is being imposed a name. Lady Jane's education of Mathinna is an attempt to control and appropriate the aboriginal girl. Mathinna's failure and resistance to this leaves her a broken and hybrid subject, neither belonging to white nor black

society. It is Mathinna's failure to read the white world, her failure to adapt as well as her failure to use writing effectively that dooms her to death. The colonial invasion of Mathinna's body and culture calls for a postcolonial re-vision. This re-vision is ambivalent as it voices Mathinna's story while transforming it into the origin of Lady Franklin's trauma, her wanting. Mathinna is comparable to a fissure in the London sections of the novel, absent and yet spectrally present.[58] The ambivalence of Flanagan's ending contrasts with Peter Carey's in *Jack Maggs*, which also inverts the colonial plot but, as John Thieme observes, ends on a positive note:

> As an incursion into the heart of Dickens's darkness, it is set almost entirely in nineteenth-century London, but it remains a distinctively 'Australian' novel in its orientation and outlook. So it is fitting that Jack – and the narrative – should finally settle in Australia and that Jack and Mercy should achieve prosperity and happiness in an environment where there is no need to disguise identity. The colonial, affiliative stance of *His Natural Life* has been turned upside down. (2001: 122)

This ambivalence is all the more felt in a novel such as *Mister Pip* in which *Great Expectations* is not only the hypotext, whose shadows lurk in the postcolonial rewriting, but is an object the characters interact with and have to decipher.

B.   Detecting meaning: the book, the school and problematic spatial identity

As in *Wanting*, detection in *Mister Pip* concerns the exposure of civil war in Papua New Guinea, a painful episode that seems to have been all but erased from global history. Here too, the truth will out from a space which is construed as a crypt or prison, as well as a luscious island. Movement and space in the novel are figuratively triggered by the symbolic encounter with Dickens's book, before being truly enacted by Matilda's forced flight to Townsville and later, her moving to England where the novel ends as Matilda, looking out at the sea in Gravesend, considers going back to her island. As the epigraph of the novel claims, this novel is about literal and figurative migrations. The figure of the migrant is called upon in the epigraph of the novel, a quotation from Umberto Eco's essay 'On Some Functions of Literature': 'Characters migrate'.

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[58] Catherine Lanone remarks that 'the signifier "blackness" reinscribes in the London scenes the absent body of Mathinna' (2012: 28). The traumatic spectrality of Mathinna will be further analysed chapter 3.

The relation to the sense of place in the novel is first limited to the island of Bougainville, which is felt as an oppressive place (due to the war and the heat). Indeed, references to the civil war and the heat are ubiquitous in the novel:

> We could see the beach palms spreading to a blue sky. And a turquoise sea so still we hardly noticed it. Halfway to the horizon we could see a redskins' gunboat. It was like a gray sea mouse – it crawled along with its guns aimed at us. In the direction of the hills we heard sporadic gunfire. We were used to that sound – sometimes it was the rebels testing their restored rifles – and besides, we knew it was a longer way off than it sounded. We had come to know the amplifying effects of water, so the gunfire just merged with the background chorus of grunting pigs and shrieking birds. (*MP*: 20)

This quotation gradually weaves the gunfire with nature, which seemingly normalises the war. This 'normalisation' creates a new habitus as the inhabitants of the island adapt to the violent sounds and visual elements. This effect is gradually constructed by the text as we move from a comparison of the gunboat with a sea mouse to the sound of the gunfire. The equation of the sound of the gunfire with the sea is created by verbs denoting habit ('we were used', 'We had come to know') and finally the use of the verb to merge. The gunfire thus seems to replace the sound of the waves. This merging of sounds however creates a constant sense of oppression and inescapability as the apposition in the above quotation signals ('it crawled along with its guns aimed at us'). The reader is left with the impression of a pending catastrophe, and as such, Jones's novel is reminiscent of another postcolonial rewriting of a nineteenth-century novel, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Rhys's depiction of the vegetation from the very start of her novel establishes a sense of danger:

> Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible – the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild. […] Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root. […] The scent was very sweet and strong. I never went near it. (2000: 6)

The biblical reference introduces the excess of nature. The text's lengthy depiction of flowers and smells is a foreboding to the coming Fall.[59] In *Mister Pip* too, the oppressive nature is counteracted by the inhabitants and is represented in terms of life and death: 'Bougainville is one of the most fertile places on earth. […] But for a machete, we would have no land of our own. Left alone the bush would march down the steep hillsides and bury our villages in flower and vine' (*MP*: 15). The relation to nature evoked in this passage is representative of the whole

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[59] There are two falls in Rhys's novel: firstly, the destruction of Coulibri Estate separating Antoinette from her mother who has gone mad; secondly, Antoinette's alienation resulting from her husband, Rochester – though he is never named in the novel – who decides that she too is mad. In part two, nature is exerting such an oppression on Rochester that he is sick and feels he will never be able to leave: 'English trees. I wondered if I should see England again' (106). The wild trees and orchid also mark the past, obscuring Rochester's view of his wife as he finds the former place where Coulibri Estate stood. As the novel stresses from the start, it is the lack of interference, the *laissez faire* attitude of the inhabitants that led to this state of things and crushes the characters.

novel's relation to place: one has to create a place for oneself in order to survive. Even the school is reclaimed from the forest:

> This is why it was easy to forget there had ever been a school. Creepers had smothered two trees in purple and red flowers, as if to soften the blow, and by that way crept onto the school roof; they had climbed in the windows and found a way across the ceiling. Another six months and our school would have disappeared from view. (*ibid.*)

The passage is marked by the agency of the creepers which have taken possession of the school. The latter is truly retrieved, and the passage foregrounds the later retrieving of *Great Expectations* that will take place inside the school itself. Monica Latham observes that in the novel 'memory, literary and oral heritage are often expressed in terms of rooms or spatial containers' (2011: 29) as we can see here with the school. Indeed, from the very start the school is identified as what Pierre Nora calls a 'site of memory' ('lieux de mémoire') 'where memory crystallizes and secretes itself' (1989: 7), 'the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it' (12). The school thus truly corresponds to Nora's idea that such sites 'originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally' (*ibid.*). It becomes the site of a ritualised ordinariness for the children, while refracting once more the epigraph of the novel, and Eco's idea that migrating characters are those who partake of our collective memory (Eco 2004: 9). However, the school that is retrieved is not exactly its past version but something different, described by the narrator Matilda in uncanny terms:

> This was school, but not how I remembered it. Perhaps that's why everything felt strange, as if we were trying to squeeze into an old life that didn't exist anymore, at least not in the way we remembered. We found our old desks and even they felt changed. The cool touch smooth wood on the backs of my legs was the only thing that was familiar. None of us kids looked at each other. Instead, we stared at our new and unexpected teacher. (*MP*: 16)

The discrepancy between what is remembered and what is felt is the trigger for the uncanny sensation that is most emphasised in this passage. Matilda's use of negations ('but not how', 'didn't exist anymore', 'at least not') as well as the repetition of verbs denoting change and of the verb 'remember' all convey that unfamiliar feeling. The passage is also set under the mark of sensation especially touch – which we find in the use of the verbs 'feel', 'squeeze' and the depiction of the sensation from the contact with the wood – and of sight. All this unfamiliarity has one converging point: Mr Watts aka 'Pop Eye'. The characterisation of Mr Watts as the 'new and unexpected teacher' identifies him as the trigger of the uncanny feeling as well as it establishes a contrast between the 'us' standing for the children and the lonely Mr Watts. This contrast is enhanced by Mr Watts being the only white man remaining on the island. This

passage represents the encounter of two cultures. As in *Great Expectations*, where the school was mostly comic but was an important stage for its *Bildungsroman* quality, the school is a significant space. Here, it allows us to decipher the current ungraspable violence of the situation, through the transformation of *Great Expectations* into a textbook for culture and survival. Lloyd Jones's novel is thus far from 'a kind of cultural sickness that distorts the mind rather than liberates its potential', as Mark Llewellyn would have it (2008: 179). Indeed, it is a filiative postcolonial novel: its main aim is not to deconstruct the canon or to attack the colonial system. Like Rushdie's and other postcolonial fictions, Jones's novel celebrates hybridity and cultural encounters embodied in the school which is construed by Mr Watts as a site of enlightenment: 'I want this to be a place of light' (*ibid.*). This hybridity is represented by the mixture of lessons given by Mr Watts (his reading of *Great Expectations*) and the stories told by the mothers. As Jennifer Gribble notes, the novel's focus on those stories as well as its use of a heroine acknowledges the matrilineal culture of the island while articulating identity formation, so that the encounter with *Great Expectations* inaugurates 'a process of mutual affirmation, a cross-fertilisation in which stories bring people and ideas together and empower them' (2008: 190).

This contrasts with Richard Flanagan's novel in which the cultural encounter is doomed to failure. This failure is linked to acculturation which is brought to its climax in the depiction of the orphanage. If Matilda's school stands for light in Jones's novel, the orphanage which Mathinna is sent to in Flanagan's novel is ultimately characterised as a place of darkness. St John's Orphanage is very much reminiscent of the workhouse in *Oliver Twist*. Flanagan reconfigures Oliver's adventures in the colony so that while Oliver 'reveals to the reader the secrets of London's criminal underbelly,' (McMullan 2014: n.p.) Mathinna reveals those of the imperial system. The location of the orphanage emphasises solitude and oppression, its broken architecture leaving no space for possible escape:

> The oppressive solitude of St John's orphanage seemed heightened by the dark forests and snow-mantled mountain that wrapped around it. At its centre was a sandstone church with a tall steeple, on either side of which the children's dormitories […] fell away like broken wings. (*W*: 184-85)

Flanagan draws on Dickens's denunciation of the workhouse and the Poor Laws as in both texts children/the poor are described as a nuisance by the authorities in charge of them:

> [T]he parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be 'farmed,' or, in other words, that he should be dispatched to a branch-workhouse some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-halfpenny per small head per week. Sevenpence-halfpenny's worth per week is a good round diet for a child; a great deal may be got for sevenpence-halfpenny, quite enough to overload its stomach, and make it uncomfortable. (Dickens 1994: 5)

> Though St John's was intended to be for children without virtue, in practice it was for those without defence, children who annoyed the authorities by running through the streets of Hobart Town unattended, by playing, in imitation of their adult betters, games of flogging and hanging and bushranging. They were now rounded up and locked away at St John's. (*W*: 185)

Dickens's text makes use of irony to denounce the living conditions of the poor; Oliver's life at Mrs Mann's is marked by the 'accidental' deaths of other children while his asking for more at the end of the chapter turns him into a threat and triggers horror. To Dickens's excessive irony corresponds Flanagan's more contained expression. However, both texts allow a reflection not only on the treatment of children but of adults too. The mimicry performed by the children hints at the penal colony's treatment of convicts while the depiction of the workhouse where Oliver is sent for his ninth birthday enumerates the different regulations established by the board to control the poor. Another of the features of Dickens's workhouse that is reworked by Flanagan is physical appearance. In Dickens's novel, the inmates become thinner and thinner following from their new diet, so much so that: 'It was rather expensive at first, in consequence of the increase in the undertaker's bill, and the necessity of taking in the clothes of all the paupers, which fluttered loosely on their wasted, shrunken forms, after a week or two's gruel' (Dickens 1994: 14). Mathinna's transformation starts with her being shaved and her red dress being exchanged with a blue pinafore (*W*: 188) to her total estrangement after only a few days spent at the orphanage. This estrangement is conveyed by Mathinna's animalistic behaviour:

> Were it not for Mathinna's colour, she [Lady Jane] would not have recognised the already scabby, shaven-headed child in a drab cassock who sat alone and unmoving in the dirt below. When hit in the face by some mud hurled at her by another child, Mathinna bared her teeth and appeared to hiss, which, oddly, seemed to put an end to the attack. (192)

Mathinna's reaction and the discovery later on in the passage that she has started to eat insects, lead the Warden and Lady Franklin to acknowledge that her education has failed, undermining her as a savage, rejecting her previous behaviour as pure pretence: 'Because when rewarded, the child pretended to one thing. But here we see that they are capable of the grossest deceit. Precisely *because* progress is impossible, they regress quickly' (193; original emphasis). Through the Warden, Flanagan ventriloquises imperial and racial discourses. For a short moment in the narrative, Flanagan has Lady Jane feel remorse and acknowledge her own destructive behaviour:

> She wished to be the mother she had tried so hard never to appear, to put her nose in Mathinna's hair and comfort and protect her, and revel in her difference and not seek to destroy it, because in that moment she knew the destruction of that difference could only lead, in the end, to the terrible courtyard below, and the white coffins below that. (195)

The motherly picture we have in this short-lived epiphany is undermined by her embracing of the Warden's conclusions and her decision to leave the girl behind. She thus dooms Mathinna to death, a death which is deeply rooted by the sense of decay emanating from the orphanage. Indeed, the orphanage is characterised by its squalor, the typhoid outbreaks, the oozing smells of the dormitory and the expressionless children who are utterly dehumanised (190). For Mathinna there is no escape from the violence of the colonial empire, and though she is freed from the orphanage after the Franklins' departure, she remains estranged. Her liberation was an attempt to play down black rebellion but instead of connecting with other Aborigines, the girl is characterised by her alienation from both black and white communities: 'she spoke in a manner that was neither white nor black, but in a strange way with strange words that made no sense to anyone' (213). A hybrid subject, Mathinna does not belong anywhere and the rest of the novel unfolds her downfall until her death.

While Mathinna fights acculturation because white values are imposed on her, Matilda is able to appropriate Western cultural capital. This appropriation results from her relation to the canon. On the enclosed and presumably inescapable island of Bougainville, Matilda and her schoolmates find in the reading of *Great Expectations* a means to escape from their ordinary life:

> But as the rebels and redskins went on butchering one another, we had another reason for hiding under the cover of night. Mr. Watts had given us kids another world to spend the night in. We could escape to another place. It didn't matter that it was Victorian England. We found that we could easily go there. (*MP*: 23)

As this quotation makes clear, reading, and the world-making that the activity of reading entails, becomes a means for the children to cope with the trauma of the war. As Monica Latham points out: 'Dickens's novel enlarges the small world on the island and lets the children escape somewhere else; it teaches them to use their imaginations, slip into alternative realities, and allows them to live vicariously and claim Pip's experiences as their own' (2011: 27). The effect of the reading breaks at the end of each chapter, which is equated with emptiness and the end of the children's escape in the world, away from their island: 'the story was at an end. So was our journey in that world. We were back to our own. Without any prospect of escape, our days lost their purpose' (*MP*: 92). The only solution found by Mr Watts is to reread the text so that even though the story does not change, 'we would still have another country to flee to. And that would save our sanity' (93). This last quotation shows the therapeutic value of the reading of

the novel for the children. For Matilda, the reading of *Great Expectations* becomes a means to order her life as she identifies with Pip, or later reads her mother, Dolores, as Miss Havisham, as we can see in the travelling terms at the beginning of the tenth section of the novel: 'It was always a relief to return to *Great Expectations*. It contained a world that was whole and made sense, unlike ours' (67). Deciphering the book, being able to identify with Pip and recognise her mother in Miss Havisham, shows that *Great Expectations* helps Matilda (and the other children) to make sense of the world. Once more, Jones glosses over Umberto Eco's essay 'On Literature' as the passage echoes the Italian critic's argument on the function of literature in community:

> But I would like to make one point: the wretches who roam around aimlessly in gangs and kill people by throwing stones from a highway bridge […] [turn out this way] because they are excluded from the universe of literature and from those places where, through education and discussion, they might be reached by a glimmer from the world of values that stems from and sends us back again to books. (2004: 4)

Jones's novel opposes the children's reading, that enables them to escape from the island, at least in imagination, to the soldiers' ignorance. This is made obvious by the misreading of Pip's name on the sand towards the end of the novel. The redskins are unable to identify the inscription as the name of a character and thus misread it as the name of a hidden inhabitant. This misreading, and the failure to prove the soldiers wrong by bringing the book (Dolores hid the book in her house which was then burnt down), eventually leads to the slaughter of Mr Watts and Dolores.

The reading of *Great Expectations* provides the children with a sense or knowledge of a place, England. As Latham points out: 'Mr. Watts, the white foreigner, introduces the children to an alien world, an unknown territory and a cultural and linguistic environment' (2011: 25). Reading is thus endowed with a cognitive function that is introduced from the first mention of Dickens in the text: 'when you read the work of a great writer […] you are making the acquaintance of that person. […] some of you will know Mr. Dickens when we finish the book' (*MP*: 21-22). This cognitive aspect of reading is also exemplified by the learning of new words that are distinctive of a place, such as the Kent marshes described by Dickens in the first volume of his novel. 'Marshes' is a word that at first bewilders Matilda and for which she must find an equivalent in her own reality:

> There was lots of stuff I didn't understand. At night I lay on my mat wondering what marshes were; and what were wittles and leg irons? I had an idea from their sound. *Marshes*. I wondered if quicksand was the same. I knew about quicksand because a man up at the mine had sunk into it, never to be seen again. That happened years earlier when the mine was still open and there were white people crawling over Panguna like ants over a corpse. (24)

The quotation makes direct references to the opening chapter of Dickens's novel and Pip's encounter with the convict Magwitch. The words characterising the English landscape are endowed with a magical quality which stems from their sound and the use of italics in the text. 'Marshes' enables Matilda to 'travel' as well as triggers her own storytelling. Her equation of the marshes with the quicksand not only is a way for her to make sense of the text but also to appropriate it and use it to tell her own story. It is interesting to note that once more the image of the decaying body appears, though displaced, as a metaphor for colonialism.

The representation of Matilda's reading and spatial experience bears common points with Salman Rushdie's idea of the migrant. Rushdie compares the reader to a migrant of a kind, a definition that is doubled in the case of the postcolonial subject reading Victorian fiction from England and which enlightens the spatial representation in *Mister Pip*. As Matilda does throughout the novel, Rushdie glosses over the common assumption that reading enables imaginative travels. He also suggests that the text is to be understood as a space to inhabit which enables him to crystallise the activity of rewriting:

> There are books that open doors for their readers, doors in the head, doors whose existence they had not previously suspected. And then there are readers who dream of becoming writers; they are searching for the strangest door of all, scheming up ways to travel through the page, to end up inside and also behind the writing, to lurk between the lines; while other readers, in their turn, pick up books and begin to dream. (2010: 276)

The experience of the migrant is defined by three changes in Rushdie's definition: the displacement of spatial, social and linguistic roots (278). According to the Indian-British writer, the migrant is the paramount figure of the twentieth century, and I would add of the reader of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Matilda's learning of new words and worlds estranges her from her mother. This estrangement follows the discovery of the expression 'a rimy morning': 'we were amazed when he told us the truth of a rimy morning. We could not imagine air so cold that it made smoke come out of your mouth or caused the grass to snap in your hands. We could not imagine such a world' (*MP*: 34). The expression conveys an altogether different world impossible to imagine because of spatial displacement. While the expression enables Matilda to project herself in Pip's world, it establishes a break, a fissure in her relationship with her mother:

> But that was the last time she asked to hear an instalment from *Great Expectations*. And I blame 'a rimy morning'. Although she didn't say so, I knew she thought I was showing off and that I was biting off a bigger piece of the world than she could handle with language like 'a rimy morning'. She didn't want to encourage me by asking questions. She didn't want me to go deeper into that other world. She worried she would lose her Matilda to Victorian England. (35)

In this quotation, the three disruptions that define the migrant's experience are present. This separation from the mother marks the moment when the rhythm of the narrative accelerates,

and the inhabitants hid in the jungle as helicopters fly above the village. For the first time, the latent threat of the war becomes active. This forces Dolores to come to the classroom to tell her story on faith. As Mr Watts and Dolores stand in the same room, Matilda reads her life through Pip's. This once more is conveyed in spatial terms:

> As we progressed through the book something happened to me. At some point I felt myself enter the story. I hadn't been assigned a part – nothing like that; I wasn't identifiable on the page, but I was there, I was definitely there. I knew that orphaned white kid and that small, fragile place he squeezed into between his awful sister and lovable Joe Gargery, because the space came to exist between Mr. Watts and my mum. And I knew I would have to choose between the two. (47)

In this passage, reading becomes an activity linked to movement, a somatic experience linked to walking as we have seen in the first part of this chapter. This movement enables Matilda to identify with Dickens's first-person narrator and to relate to her world through Pip's story. The opposition between Joe and Mrs Joe enables her to verbalise the opposition between Dolores and Mr Watts. However, Matilda is unable to see that her relation to her mother in the two aforementioned passages reflects Pip's own relation to Joe. Joe can barely read or write his name properly nor does he have any knowledge about London. Pip's schooling gradually estranges him from the blacksmith so that Pip becomes ashamed of him as when they meet Miss Havisham, for instance: 'It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home. […] Home had never been a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister's temper. But, Joe had sanctified it, and I had believed in it' (*GE*: 97). However, while reading estranges Matilda from her mother, her writing is set under the sign of celebration and reconciliation.

The relation between place and reading highlights Jones's personal postmodern and postcolonial approach to truth and place.[60] The knowledge of England that the children get from *Great Expectations* is biased and only reflects a certain perception of London, yet it is still liberating. The novel articulates the plurality of truth, a concept dear to Rushdie and Eco (Rushdie 2010: 10-14, Eco 2004: 7-8):

> We soon learned there were many Englands, and Mr. Watts had only been to two or three of them. The England he visited was very different from the one Mr. Dickens had lived and worked in. This was a challenging notion for those of us who had never been anywhere, because we had the feeling that life on the island was much the same as it had been for our grandfathers' and their grandfathers, especially after the blockade was imposed. (*MP*: 29)

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[60] As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note, '"Post-colonial", "post-modern", and "poststructuralist" are inconvenient labels which cover a wide range of overlapping literary and cultural practices' (2002: 160-161). Postmodernism and postcolonialism share an interest in narrating History and the constructedness of 'Truth', but postcolonial texts respond to a particular 'con-text' as John Thieme puts it. To put it shortly, in the case of Jones, the postcolonial discourse emerges in the response both to the Dickensian con-text (the representation of Australia in *Great Expectations*) and to that of the Bougainville Crisis. The novel's reflections on narrative and storytelling partakes of its postmodernist side.

Jones contrasts the static environment of the island – characterised by tradition and by the war – to the world of England. The diversity of England is represented at the end of the novel as Matilda moves there for her studies. Her relation to London is limited to two places: the British Library and the Foundling Hospital. In the former, the figure of Dickens is debunked as Matilda discovers that the man she took for the public representation of united family 'cannot wait to turn his own kin out the door. He wants them out in the world' (247). Matilda's treatment of London in her narration follows her attachment to the Kent marshes. Though we are told that the book is read to the children and that they must recall and retrieve the whole novel when the book is lost, the part of *Great Expectations* which stands out corresponds to the first volume set in Kent. The representation of London is mentioned only once, in section 12, and it is linked to Mr Watts's own experience of London which is filtered through the Dickensian novel: 'He said everything was vaguely familiar since he had already been led around London by Mr. Dickens' (83). London seems to be both at once far and close in time as Mr Watts reads about Pip's journey to the city: 'The distance from Pip's house in the marshes to the 'metropolis' of London was about five hours. […] But five hours was nearer than a century and a half and a whole lot closer than half a world away' (*ibid.*). This example shows how Pip's reality seems closer to the children than their own, isolated situation. London is a space that defies understandability: 'We heard that Pip was scared of London's "immensity". *Immensity*?' (*ibid.*, italics in the text). The receptacle of Mr Watts's memory and of his white identity, London estranges him from the children who cannot grasp the city and only know it through *Great Expectations*:

> We had an idea he was back in London with his younger self staring in that lit window – this was one of those moments that reminded us of Mr. Watts's status as the last white man on the island. There he stood before us, one of a kind, with a memory of a place none of us kids had visited or seen or could imagined except in the way supplied by Mr; Dickens. (84)

Mr Watts's enthrallment with the metropolis contrasts with Matilda's experience of England which is bitter.

London and Kent enable Matilda to tackle the experience of the migrant which Pip becomes the representative of: 'Pip is an orphan. He is like an emigrant. He is in the process of migration from one level of society to another. A change of name is as good as a change of clothes' (70). This echoes the quotation from Eco in the epigraph, setting the novel under the sign of spatial movement and exchanges while enhancing the displacement of Pip's story in the Pacific and the equation of Pip and Matilda on which the novel ends: 'Pip was my story, even if I was once a girl, and my face black as the shining night. Pip is my story, and in the next day I would try where Pip had failed, I would try to return home' (256). The epigraph may be said to have almost exactly the same function as the epitaphs on the graves of Pip's parents in

Dickens's novel: both mark and shape the identity of the protagonist of the novel. Matilda's depiction of Kent bears witness to dramatic changes since Dickens's lifetime as she notes that 'the landscape from *Great Expectations* is gone, that its fabled marshes lies beneath motorways and industrial estates' (249) or:

> In Rochester you arrive at a place you know you feel obliged to like. There it is – the perfect postcard of how an English village is supposed to have looked like in eighteen-hundred-and-something. You trip over the cobbles and choke on the sentimentality. Everywhere you look Dickens is a shopkeeper, a restaurateur, a merchant in secondhand goods. You find you have the choice between Fagin's Café or eating at Mrs. Brumbles or A Taste of Two Cities. (253-254)

Matilda's account characterises the place she came to know through her reading as an illusion, a fable. Rochester is reduced to a postcard, a simulacrum marked by the excessive presence of Dickens as she enumerates the numerous puns based on Dickens's novels used as restaurant names and which palimpsestically are in possession of numerous places all over Kent. Her account echoes V.S. Naipaul's 1987 novel, *The Enigma of Arrival,* and especially the writer's depiction of his arrival in London. Here too, the discrepancy between the knowledge got from reading and the experience of the reality is expressed in terms related to illusion. This discrepancy estranges the narrator from London. Naipaul's narrative of his appropriation of London through reading is enlightening for the purposes of this chapter:

> I felt that when as a child far away I read the early Dickens and was able with him to enter the dark city of London, it was partly because I was taking my own simplicity to his, fitting my own fantasies to his. […] Using no words to unsettle a child far away, in the tropics, where the roofs were of corrugated iron and the gables were done in fretworks, and there were jalousied windows hinged at the top to keep out the rain while letting in light and air. Using, Dickens, only simple words, simple concepts, to create simple volumes and surfaces and lights and shadows: creating thereby a city or fantasy which everyone could reconstruct out of his own materials, using the things he knew to re-create the described things he didn't know. (1987: 145)

Naipaul presents the activity of reading as that of rewriting through appropriation, an activity that is at the centre of *Mister Pip*. The novel thus posits reading as a 'cognitive' and escapist experience of a kind, giving a grasp of what England/London is; yet this cognitive aspect of reading is problematic. Both Naipaul and Jones make it clear that there is a discrepancy between the 'dream-England', to use Rushdie's term, and the 'real' England that the character is later faced with. While the England depicted by Mr Watts in his reading of Dickens enables the children to dream and escape the harsh reality of the island, the English setting described by Matilda once she moves there is marked by disappointment. The London described by Dickens is a memory, a fiction or a construct. This is also what we have at the end of *Wanting* when Mathinna, utterly estranged from the community, mimics Lady Jane: 'Mathinna swung the conversation to dresses they were now wearing in London, and, though she knew she was only repeating what she had heard years before, she tried to lead the conversation as she had seen Lady Jane lead her soirées' (*W*: 244). The image of London conveyed by Mathinna is thus

reduced to a pale echo of a past memory of glory that no longer is. Yet the two endings diverge; through Dickens, Matilda graduates to a voice of her own and can tell her own story; Mathinna, on the contrary, is strangled, deprived of a voice and all but wiped out of History.

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For John Thieme, 'an emphasis on the specificity of place often emerges most forcefully, when in fact the sense of place is insecure or threatened' (2013: 100). Indeed, neo-Dickensian fiction does not present its readers with a comfortable portrait of London but maps a city that invites us in, as much as it repels us. Neo-Dickensian writers play with uncanny, disturbing places, giving a special importance to the slums, or to unstable postcolonial spaces, such as the troubled genocidal Tasmania, or the war-torn Papua New Guinea. Thus, they play on 'heteropian sites' to engage the reader with London, Dickens's London, and move beyond it. This goes along with, as Marta Dvorak suggests in her article on collocation, the apparent need for the canon to be mediated so as to be read (Dvorak 2009). She mainly takes examples from postcolonial literature, especially *Mister Pip*, but I wish to argue that this could be applied to the neo-Victorian canon as a whole. It thus seems that the appeal of London for neo-Victorian writers does not only rely on the experience of modernity, but on ideological and sensory issues which are all generic devices to the neo-Victorian novel. London appeals to neo-Victorian writers and readers because it is a vector for something even larger: the Dickensian canon which itself is set in London. In this chapter, mapping has been studied in relation to detection, showing that it could be understood as a synecdoche for the reading and writing processes. The reading of the city, its ordering into maps also bears witness to ideological concerns linked to the idea of London as an ever-changing place, always under the threat of disappearance (Cases 2015: 97-100). The city had to be made sense of which, in the nineteenth century, led to detailed surveys and mappings in order to control it. The dramatic changes in Victorian London – resulting from an increase in urban population (the population doubled between early nineteenth century and the time of Dickens's death) as well as from the expansion of the railway and of the sanitation movements – impacted Dickens's writing which may be understood as an effort to picture, capture life in the city (Wolfreys 1998: 27).[61] This leads neo-Victorian writers to explore the dark, hidden layers of the city, including the slums and the sewers, and to expand

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[61] I am indebted to Pr. Malcom Andrews introductory remarks to his Dickens London Tour for the University of Kent which took place on November 2nd, 2016.

towards previously foreclosed areas, the unspoken plights of convicts and Aboriginal people down under, as well as engage with modern conflict and war.

The rereading and rewriting of Dickensian London bring a new interaction with the canon, leading the reader back to Dickens, as well as beyond him. Reworking Dickensian sense of place, neo-Victorian fictions seem to establish themselves as 'heterotopian sites, apart from the external world: other places in which their authors have developed imaginative spaces, which we as readers are invited to inhabit with them' (Thieme 2013: 118). If the sense of neo-Victorian places is so much marked by Dickens's own experience of and life in the city, it seems only natural to turn in the next chapter to the interconnection between detection and biofiction.

CHAPTER 2: THE INIMITABLE IMITATED: SEARCHING FOR MR DICKENS

Having had the opportunity to live and write part of my dissertation in Kent, I could not help but notice the spectral persistence of Dickens in the area. In Broadstairs, you can indeed go to the Bed & Breakfast 'Bleak House' (formerly 'Fort House') and visit Charles Dickens's study there. The latter is turned into a collage of 'Dickensiana', from facsimile of manuscripts, letters, legal documents and photographs to theatre bills. The view of the bay from the desk is said to be very similar to what Dickens might have seen when writing *David Copperfield*, a probable fantasy too, which is ironically debunked by the narrator of *Drood*: 'Dickens invariably faced the windows looking out into his garden and towards Gravesend Road but never *saw* anything of the scene […]. The writer was lost in the worlds of his own imaginings and effectively blind while working' (*D*: 25, italics in the text). Commodified mugs and teapots turn the novels and novelist into 'portable property'. The ubiquity of blue plaques related to Dickens in Broadstairs extends to the area of Rochester and Chatham on the other side of the county. In the historical dockyards of Chatham, now a shopping centre, the paradoxical presence of the now closed theme park Dickens World is quite uncanny: signposts in the street point towards it and you can still gaze at its exterior façade which flaunts a scene from *Great Expectations* promising visitors that they are about to embark on a wondrous journey and that

they will have 'the time of their lives'.[62] The attempts to exhume Dickens fall short of doing so; no wonder that the narrator of *Mister Pip* should muse, when visiting the Eastgate House in Rochester and facing the mothy dummy of the author on display there:[63] 'I have met Mr. Dickens, and this is not him' (*MP*: 255).[64]

Figure 4: Dickens dummy, Rochester Guildhall, personal photograph (2017)

Alison Booth claims that 'The reception of Dickens is emblematic of all things neo-Victorian' (2016: 257). Dickens paraphernalia, 'Dickens Country' and 'Dickensland'[65]

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[62] Juliet John's *Dickens and Mass Culture* explores at length the commodification of Dickens. The origin of such a commodification emerges from Dickens himself, as she argues, and the particular nature of his books: 'Dickens's novels were not just books to be read; they were commodities to be coveted, (for the illiterate) stories to be heard, and they provided gossip or news to be exchanged' (2010: 4). More than his books, John notes that: 'A distinctive feature of Dickens's mass cultural impact is his "portability", the ability of his novels and indeed his image, even during his lifetime, to travel across various media and national boundaries, and after his death, across historical periods' (15).

[63] Matilda's comment might also refer to the haunting persistence of Dickens in Australia after his death. Indeed, in the 1870s Dickens featured amongst other wax figures displayed in Melbourne and other places. For Kylie Mirmohamadi and Susan K. Martin, this replication was part of the 'colonial uncanny' (2012: 134-135).

[64] The omnipresence of Dickens in the Kentish landscape is also linked to economic questions. Broadstairs, Rochester and Chatham rely on this heritage as part of (literary) tourism. This reflects a nostalgia for our own past experiences emblematised for Marty Gould and Rebecca N. Mitchell by the recreation of a Victorian school that used new technologies to interact with visitors in Dickens World (2010: 153-55). For a study of Dickens World as performance, see Patrick Fleming (2016: 12-31).

[65] *Dickens Country* has a long history. Travel guides, such as for instance, *The Kent of Dickens*, by Walter Dexter or *Dickens Country* by F.G. Kitton, were published very early on with the aim to provide the readers with itineraries of 'pilgrimages' to famous Dickens-related sites. Malcom Andrews notes that almost from the start, readers 'have wanted to know where exactly in the real world he had located certain scenes and characters, notwithstanding the fact that they had all been fictional products' (2016: 2). For Andrews, '[t]he fictional acquires historical authenticity, and the biographical a mythical resonance' (6). Dickens is not the only one to be the object of such 'pilgrimages', as *Homes and Haunts: Touring Writers' Shrines and Countries* by Alison Booth testifies. The latter

trigger a paradoxical impulse: a need to retrace the existence of Dickens, while at the same time, to point out the un-representability of what Dickens stood for, the unreadability of an unspeakable loss and the need to topple down the icon all at once. As Marie-Luise Kohlke suggests: 'both 'factual' life-writing and biofiction explore subjectivity's emergence from the complex confluence of narrated past and writing present, while simultaneously testing the epistemological limits encountered in the (re-)construction of past lives and selves' (2013: 4). This may account for the dual position of neo-Victorian authors, at once celebrating the canonical author and writing back to challenge his work, 'both loving and hating him' as the narrator of *Sophie and the Sybil* claims that the author, Patricia Duncker, does in the epigraph of the novel. Undermining Duncker as 'one of those sentimental people who need to admire their chosen heroes and heroines', the narrator ironically remarks that 'she has scores to settle with Mr. Darwin and Mrs. Lewes, but she adores them both. And that is her weakness. Her vindictive little game is undermined by love' (2015: i).

Dickens was bound to be a case study too. For after all, the neo-Victorians were not the first to fictionalise Dickens – *he* was, in many ways. Just as the Kentish landscape, the background of both Dickens's life and his work, was appropriated and transformed in his fiction which is marked by an oblique form of life-writing as Forster perceptively suggested in his early biography of Dickens:

> The idea of *David Copperfield*, which was to take all the world into his confidence, had not at this time occurred to him; but what it had so startled me to know, his readers were afterwards told with only such change or addition as for the time might sufficiently disguise himself under cover of his hero. For, the poor little lad, with good ability and a most sensitive nature, turned at the age of ten into a 'labouring hind' in the service of 'Murdstone and Grinby,' and conscious already of what made it seem very strange to him that he could so easily have been thrown away at such an age, was indeed himself. (1948 a: 19)

At the time, the disclosure of the well-kept secret of Dickens's childhood and of the unknown episode of the blacking factory was a *coup de théâtre*. This well-known passage reveals the autobiographical nature of *David Copperfield* and highlights Dickens's use of disguise in his fiction, while making the reader the receptacle of his 'confession' unawares. Forster eulogised Dickens but, with the episode of the blacking factory, he started to excavate what had been left unsaid; as such, his biography might be considered as the lynchpin of all rewritings, of all the 'Dickenses that could have been'.

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deals with literary heritage, pointing out the 'fascinating and irrepressible history of interrelated practices, texts, and institutions' (2016: 1): 'Books that narrate visits to the habitations of authors are a form of collective biography' (3). Finally, Lee Jackson, a historian, is currently writing a PhD entitled 'Dickensland' at the Royal Holloway in collaboration with the Dickens Museum.

Thus, the image of Dickens was not only a product of his success but a production of the author himself. Dickens fashioned his own public image, but also constantly wrote himself into his fiction, leading to a blurring between himself and the world of his characters.[66] This self-created image endures in the canonical Dickens fashioned for tourists, Juliet John's 'heritage Dickens' (2010: 240-272). Peter Ackroyd's (neo-Victorian) biography (1990) is a case in point, famously interweaving fiction and reality.[67] Even biographies like Christopher Hibbert's *The Making of Charles Dickens* (1967) or Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist* (2011) (with their telling titles), which focus on Dickens's early life and career as a process and invention, give their readers the impression that Dickens *is* a character. The latter delineates an unstable identity which almost follows the pattern of a *Bildungsroman*: the biography evolves from lack of identity – signified by the prologue entitled 'Somebody and Nobody' – to the last chapter 'Being Dickens'. This shows that 'Dickens the author' is already always defined, even outside fiction, as a construct. The overall impression given by such texts is that the identity/personality of Dickens can only be grasped through his fiction. Therefore neo-Dickensian fiction not only rewrites the 'facts' of Dickens's life but enters into a dialogue with the construction of Dickens by critics and by himself.[68] Dickens in biographies and in neo-Victorian fiction is turned into a case study that must be investigated – and to do so, neo-Victorian fiction absorbs him, rewrites him into a detective figure.

The neo-Victorian return to Dickens and the Victorian past therefore comes as a response to what Juliet John identifies as 'the fossilizing of Dickens in an idea of the Victorian past' that results from its omnipresence, and thus familiarity, within the collective memory and the new light cast by successive biographies (2010: 273). Neo-Dickensian fiction complicates this aspect, renegotiating his legacy by playing on alternative versions of Dickens. This de-fossilisation results in a displacement of the figure of the author and of the nineteenth century while mediating the past, thus leading the reader to his/her own detection and epistemological reconfiguration of the past.

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[66] The aforementioned blue plaques to be found in Rochester also indicate places associated with characters. For instance, Restoration house, in Rochester, is said to be 'Satis House', Miss Havisham's house in *Great Expectations*. Likewise, London tours on Dickens equally mix the author's life and his fiction.

[67] Cora Kaplan offers a thorough study of the hybrid form of this literary biography, a form she finds problematic especially as regards the relation biographer – subject and the shortcomings of Ackroyd's work, in *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (2007: 50-62).

[68] Steven Connor offers a thorough history/description of the evolution of the critical reception of Dickens from the 1850s to the 1990s (1996: 1-33).

This reconfiguration has itself become Protean, through the prism of successive readings. Karen Laird's study of commemorative adaptations of Dickens on the stage and on the screen leads her to divide Dickens's posthumous fame into three distinct moments: 1870, 1912, and 2012; this entails a gradual shift from the eulogistic (and patriarchal) portrayals of Dickens, to the firm construct of Dickens as a metonymy of English national heritage, leading to a more controversial Dickens (2012: 13). We should note that the temporal distinctions may not be so clear-cut. Presumably, Carl Roberts's novel *This Side Idolatry* (1928) was the first novel that sought to unravel a different past. Armelle Parey considers this relatively early text as a proto-neo-Victorian fiction: '[t]he thesis of this novel is basically that Dickens was anything but the benevolent Victorian paterfamilias one usually tends to imagine. Finally hinting at the falsification of facts and the rewriting of history, it explains how the traditional view emerged' (2008: 192). Such a process of demystification, however, took a different turn after Dickens's affair with Ellen 'Nelly' Ternan to which we shall return in chapter 3. The neo-Victorian biofictional agenda, with its 'what-if?-plots' is different from historical fiction and biographies, as Duncker stresses:

> Now, the usual point of writing an historical novel is to measure the distance travelled between those previous generations, and ourselves; sometimes we contemplate the roads not taken and expose the reasons why. But sometimes we venture down precisely those unknown, un-chosen roads, rewriting history as fiction. This is what might have happened, should have happened. Even if it didn't. (2015: 57)

What distinguishes neo-Victorian novels is that they are concerned with 'those unknown, un-chosen roads', as Duncker puts it.[69] What is true of Duncker's novel is also true of the corpus under study which offers a range of alternative versions of Charles Dickens. Not only are his novels reworked, or the sense of place created by his novels reconfigured as was seen in chapter 1, but his own biography is being rewritten. The different novels in our corpus all develop different strategies to present their readers with an alternative version of Dickens, the man and the author. For Laird, the latest, more controversial version of Dickens is characteristic of neo-Victorian poetics and politics, engaging with a concern with nostalgia which resists idealisation:

> Bicentenary Season aggrandised Dickens's mastery as a writer of Victorian crime fiction while probing his personal shortcomings. The result was a composite portrait of 'The Other Dickens' that might be best

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[69] This second extract from Duncker's novel epitomises crucial questions raised by drawing reputation from and recycling history in neo-Victorian fiction. Her biofictional novel relates the writing of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* in Germany. The protagonist is based on the real-life historian and politician Maximilian Wolfgang Duncker, but the neo-Victorian writer has him split into two bodies in a Jekyll-and-Hyde way: Wolfgang, the eldest, is a reasonable businessman while Max, the youngest brother, is a gambler and a brothel regular. This play on doubles partakes of the author's claim when 'rewriting history as fiction'. The neo-Victorian writer in this case is not trying to establish historical truth but rather, to expand possibilities and alternative truths as her play on modal verbs illustrates ('what might, should have happened').

dubbed 'The Fallen Dickens' as its focus was overwhelmingly on the hidden, unsavoury details of Dickens's biography and dark, even demented, themes of his later novels. (2012: 23)

The process of othering (Laird dubs him the 'Fallen' and 'Other' Dickens) encapsulates neo-Victorian aesthetic terms. She thus seems to suggest that some kind of investigation has also brought the dark side to light.[70]

Like Laird, Louisa Hadley considers neo-Victorian biographical novels (she does not use the term biofiction) as an appropriation of the nineteenth-century concern with truth and authenticity which was crystallised by the boom of Victorian biographies (2010: 41). According to her, this appropriation, set under the sign of postmodernity, leads to a complex understanding of truth as construct, best exemplified by the creation of alternative versions of historical figures/events (26). The presence of biographical and detective modes of fiction should not be studied separately, as Hadley does, but together as complementary modes. While agreeing with her stance on detective fiction as a mode concerned with the reader's relation to the past and the possibility of knowing it, I wish to argue that biographical and detective narratives can be read alongside one another, in *Drood* or *Tom-All-Alone's*, of course, but also, perhaps even more so in *Jack Maggs*, one of the novels Hadley chooses as a case study for the neo-Victorian re-investment in biographical narrative but discards in her account of detective fiction. It is my contention that the neo-Dickensian novels under scrutiny rewrite Dickens's biography via the detective mode which is concerned both with the past, its traces and narration, and with radical revision.

The link between the biographical and the detective genres was first identified by Eisenzweig who claims that in both genres 'it is the same character who is placed at the intersection between the outside and the inside, the intra- and the extra-textual' (1986: 44; my translation).[71] Eisenzweig establishes the premises of a comparison between life writing and the detective novel, which may apply to the detective mode at play in the neo-Victorian fictions under study (*ibid.*).[72] This chapter will look at the way elements of Dickens's biography are being plotted and transmuted, focusing on the transformation of Dickens into a detective and/or criminal figure. This in part leads to a consideration of the way in which the poetics of

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[70] Following Laird, I wish to argue that the figure of the 'Fallen Dickens' is not to be limited to mere debunking, pastiche or parody but rather that it partakes of the specific agenda of neo-Dickensian poetics. This is a position I share with C. Kenneth Pellow who reads *Jack Maggs* not only as a vindication against Dickens but as a text motivated by postmodern concerns with writing, the past and authorship (2013: 86-108).

[71] 'c'est le même personnage qui se trouve à l'intersection du dehors et du dedans, de l'intra- et de l'extra-textuel.'

[72] Similarly, Cora Kaplan points out that biography is necessarily an ambivalent genre, especially where ethics are concerned, as the biographer reveals the secrets of his/her subject (2007: 47).

neo-Dickensian fiction in particular, and neo-Victorian fiction in general, partakes of an epistemological quest, an investigation of the past and of truth. Destabilising the canonical perception of Dickens, the neo-Victorian texts in this study seem to claim that the possibility of knowing the past is limited, while engaging with transmission, legacy and intertextuality. This critical dialogue seems to be inherent to the form of the detective novel itself, in its structural engagement with 'method' and with reading. Indeed, the detective novel is, it would seem, the privileged locus to enter and create a dialogue with critical discourse. As Eisenzweig argued, the history of the detective novel, of its categorisation as a genre, is marked by a crisis in literary theory which led to the genre being rebuked as '*le mauvais genre*' ('bad books') due to both technicality and popularity (1986: 30-36). This bears a similarity to the reception of the neo-Victorian genre, also stemming from a crisis in representation and seen as very popular (especially its steampunk subgenre). Indeed, reading in the detective mode means probing into both literary and non-literary categories or boundaries: for, as we shall see, many neo-Victorian fictions turn to the model of the detective novel, in order to thematise and crystallise their relation to the hypotext. [73] Thus, the rewriting takes on the value of a crime, a form of theft or murder while, paradoxically, the new text undertakes an effort of self-legitimation. At the same time, the spectral presence of the past can be explained as the resurgence of the 'impossible narrative', that of the victim. This is intertwined with biofictional elements in which, paradoxically, the nineteenth-century author is both the detective and the criminal (depending on the filiative or affiliative stance of the novel) and the victim, inexorably bound to die.

I.   THE GRAPHIC NOVEL AS A VISUAL THRESHOLD: SEEING DOUBLE

Detection is a popular genre, and as a kind of threshold to this part, we may take a detour and see how Dickens and detection are linked in the popular imagination. It is fitting indeed that the detective mode of reading and rewriting Dickens should not to be limited to neo-Victorian novels but extended to other neo-Victorian media. Juliet John's study *Dickens and Mass Culture* highlights the proliferation of Dickensian traces outside the realm of

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[73] Apart from the novels belonging to the corpus we can mention amongst others Charles Palliser's *The Quincunx*, Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*, Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* or, in a more popular trend, the *Kitty Peck series* by Kate Griffin.

literature. Indeed, traces of Dickens's influence pervade a wide range of media such as children's books, drama (as Karen Laird points out); video and board games (with the famous case of *Assassins' Creed*); entertainment (with the now closed theme park Dickens World) or cinema and television adaptations (such as the numerous BBC adaptations or specific shows, such as *Dickensian*, not to mention iconic allusions in *Doctor Who* episodes as well as in the ITV show *The Frankenstein Chronicles* featuring a very young 'Boz').[74] While the vastness and richness of such ludic activities calls for a study in itself, it also testifies to new ways of mediating and experiencing literature.

While a lot has been written on Dickens and various media, the relation between Dickens and the graphic novel is less studied. This omission is not limited to Dickens but applies to a whole range of neo-Victorian works as Anna Maria Jones and Rebecca N. Mitchell underline in the introduction to their ground-breaking study *Drawing on the Victorians: the Palimpsest of Victorian and neo-Victorian Graphic Texts* (2017).[75] Dickens's novels have been adapted as comic books, but this is not the sort of rewriting this dissertation is interested in. As a kind of visual threshold, I would now like to focus on *Dickens and Dickens* (2017) which is not a mere work of adaptation, an illustration of one of Dickens's novels, but a work featuring Dickens and his *Doppelgänger*, and thereby presenting a number of archetypal features, enabling us to see how neo-Victorian fiction probes into and deepens the compelling, and compulsive, representation of Dickens and the detective. Interestingly, this work does not come from the English-speaking world but is a 2017 French graphic novel which shows the range of Dickens's influence.[76] *Dickens and Dickens* partakes of a subgenre of the graphic novel that has not yet been the object of extensive research, the biofictional graphic novel, whereas there

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[74] At the 2016 ESSE conference, Claire Wood investigated the different possibilities offered by pop-ups and illustrations in editions for children of *A Christmas Carol*. Wood pointed out that the different range of media used by the editors (from pop-ups, illustrations featuring guinea pigs or apps) created a new interactivity with the original story published in 1843 (ESSE conference, University of Galway, 2016).

[75] '[N]owhere has the engagement with the Victorians been more striking than in contemporary image-texts. […] However, the bulk of neo-Victorian studies scholarship focuses on novels and film and television adaptations and how these hark back to the Victorian novel. There has been no sustained examination of the connections between Victorian and neo-Victorian graphic texts.' (2017: 5-6)

[76] The phenomenon seems to be specifically French. Other biofictional graphic novels have been published such as *Une nuit chez Kipling* (2007), *Huitième continent* (the first and only published volume in 2011 is devoted to Edgar Poe), *Darwin* (two volumes, 2016) and also include biofictions of French nineteenth-century writers such as *Rimbaud – L'explorateur maudit* (2016) or *Les aventures du jeune Jules Verne* (2010). As these titles suggest, these biofictional works are also concerned with the French literary canon. This pool of graphic texts shows that neo-Victorianism touches media from other countries than those belonging to the English-speaking world. This phenomenon has started to call the attention of the editors of *Neo-Victorian Studies* as the issue on global neo-Victorianism (2015) and the latest issue of devoted to neo-Victorian Asia (2019) show.

are numerous works on (auto)biographical graphic novels.[77] The growing focus on the latter form can be explained by the history of the genre and of its reception in the academic world. Indeed, comics being defined by their popularity and having been associated with superheroes, critics, especially in America, tended to disregard this form as 'lowbrow' and thus unfit for 'serious' research. As Ashley K. Dallacqua observes, the genre was in fact seen as having a negative influence on its readers, so much so that it was thought to be a factor in causing delinquency (2012: 365). In the French tradition, this bias is less sharp, comics being often taken as the object of studies in semiotics (Gardner and Herman 2011: 3). However, both in America and in Europe, separate, defined and autonomous field of studies, Comics Studies, has emerged following from the publication of comics that not only were popular but were considered as 'literary' such as *Maus: a Survivor's Tale*, a biographical fiction by Art Spiegelman which received the Pulitzer Prize in 1992. However, it seems that only steampunk art, Allan Moore and a few mangas have made their way into neo-Victorian studies (Ho 2006: 99-121; Loh 2019: 40-63).[78]

In this section, I use the term 'graphic novel', commonly adopted by publishers and scholars (especially anglophone scholars), even though I am aware that this idiom is used as an umbrella term to designate various forms. I find this term useful as it accentuates both the visual and the textual, something that is at the heart of Catherine Labio's definition of comics:

> First, comics have traditionally been mass-market products and continue to be so, mutatis mutandis. Secondly, they can be as short as a handful of panels, or they can be hundreds of pages long. Third, they are a global genre that draws on distinct traditions as well as on an important cross-cultural dissemination machine that features translations, cooperation between publishers and creators, and movie and web adaptation. Fourth, they are a hybrid genre that is both visual and literary, but that generally does not privilege text over image. (2011: 124)[79]

Though I am aware of debates surrounding the use of the term 'graphic novel' (Dallacqua 2012: 126), I am choosing to use it to facilitate the discussion of *Dickens and Dickens,* the object of

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[77] See Michael A. Chaney, 'Terrors of the Mirror and the *Mise en Abyme* of Graphic Novel Autobiography', *College Literature*, 38-3 (Summer 2011): 21-44.

[78] Though pointing out key aspects concerning Alan Moore's *From Hell,* Ho's study seems, at times, to read more like an article on a novel than on a *graphic* novel. A whole issue of the journal *SubStance*, devoted to steampunk, shows how steampunk studies are more open to this kind of genre, maybe because steampunk not only denotes a literary/written movement but is also concerning cultural/societal phenomena. Waiyee Loh focuses on the manga *Black Butler* and its representation of masculinity.

[79] Labio disagrees with the use of the term 'graphic novel' which she finds problematic as its implications changes according to the context it is being used in as well as it 'sanitizes' comics studies. However, graphic novels being part of comics studies, they do partake of the definition she gives in her article. For other discussions over the terminology see Eddie Campbell, 'What is a Graphic novel?', *World Literature Today,* 81-2 (2007): 13-15; Anne Behler, 'Getting Started with Graphic Novels: A Guide for the Beginner', *Reference and User Services Quarterly*, 46-2 (2006): 16-21; Ben Saunders and Hillary Chute, 'Divisions in Comics Scholarship', *PMLA*, 124-1 (2009): 292-295; Kathryn Strong Hansen, 'In Defense of Graphic Novels', *The English Journal*, 102-2 (2012): 57-63. Thierry Groensteen, *La Bande Dessinée*, Editions Milan: Toulouse, 1996.

this section being not to delve into Comics Studies but rather to show how neo-Victorianism is not to be constrained to novels and movies, the main areas studied so far. *Dickens and Dickens*, unlike *From Hell*, is not a long piece of work divided into chapters but is closer to regular French *bandes dessinées*.[80] The two volumes are approximately fifty-five pages-long, a format which allows detailed images and the kind of reception defined by Dallacqua: 'essentially, graphic novels use images and print text to engage readers and tell a story. Readers walk with characters and see from their points of view. Letterpress and images are equally important, both providing essential information to the story' (2012: 365). In the first chapter of this dissertation, we have seen how crucial the urban setting is for neo-Victorian texts; here too, in this popular subgenre, it is very striking that *Dickens and Dickens* should open on the protagonist walking in the streets of London.

A.   Who is the narrator?

In these opening pages, the text and the images present the reader with different narratological strategies. The first page is composed of five regular panels and a splash. The latter, on the top left-hand side of the page, introduces the story and its setting, identifiable as London thanks to the caption and an iconic Saint Paul's Cathedral in the background (fig. 5). The speech bubbles introduce the protagonist, Charles Dickens, as if the reader was hearing a piece of conversation in the street. This sets the intertextual game afoot. As opposed to the busy splash, the following panels focus on Dickens; the caption: 'Mr Dickens has a problem and asks for our help', shows how graphic novels rely on the reader's ability to deal with both image and text.[81] The use of the possessive 'our' ('nous' in French) also operates a shift, from the omniscient narration used for the splash, to a homodiegetic narrator yet to be clearly identified. As we learn on page five, the passage is actually narrated by one of the detectives of the Wyatt & Jones private detective's office. Suspense is then gradually created in the bottom tier of page three with the insistence on Dickens's loneliness, as if recalling Dickens's essay 'Night Walks'. The tier reaches its climax as the caption hints at an oddity in Dickens's habits with the conjunction 'but' ('or' in French) which is visually confirmed by the question mark. Moreover, the gradual shift from a frontal view to Dickens's back, confirms the impression that the

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[80] It should be noted that were I writing this dissertation in French I would more likely call this work a *bande dessinée* ('comic strip'). However, the French term denotes something more complex than what is understood to be comic strips.

[81] 'M. Dickens a un problème et il fait appel à nous.' My translation; all subsequent translations are mine.

character is under threat as a shadowy figure lurks in the background. The last panel of the central tier takes on the viewpoint of this mysterious figure while the narration emphasises the echo effect produced by the chaser tailing him: 'When Dickens comes to a halt, the other does too…', 'when he resumes his walk, the other follows in his footsteps!', 'and if he tries to turn to him, the guy vanishes in the air/disappears!'[82]

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[82] 'Quand Dickens s'arrête, l'autre aussi … quand il repart, l'autre lui emboîte le pas !'; 'Et s'il essaie de revenir vers lui, le type disparaît !'

*F*igure 5: 'Mr Dickens has a problem and asks for our help'

These captions and images introduce the theme of duality, of the double as Other and, as Clément Rosset argues, *i.e.* as a shadow, an echo. In *Impressions Fugitives,* Rosset establishes two types of doubles that are to be distinguished: the phantasmagorical double, that which corresponds to a refusal of the real and partakes of an illusion, and doubles that mark the real, which he calls 'doubles de proximité' which I am translating as 'immediate doubles' (2004: 9). Those immediate doubles designate the shadow, reflection and echo of the voice of a person so that though 'the double guarantees the reality of the object it doubles' it nevertheless is 'deprived of materiality and is reduced to the "fugitive impression" of a body standing alongside another body. Thus, it is not a body but the illusion of a body' (18; my translation).[83] *Dickens and Dickens* makes a striking use of the latter. There is a sense of the uncanny which stems from the haunting shadow tailing Dickens (who is thus doubled) and from the resounding echo of his own footsteps. The uncanniness is also visually enhanced by colours. Contrary to such a work as *From Hell,* which is all in black and white, *Dickens and Dickens* uses colours to set moods and emphasise different aspects of the narrative. The shift from the yellowish first page (which cannot fail to remind the reader of the thick yellow Victorian smog) to a dark blue punctuated with the yellow stains of gas lamps emphasises the threatening and uncanny atmosphere that pervades the story. Conversely, the next page is much lighter which gives a sense that the action is taking place during the day. While at night Dickens is being chased by a threatening figure, during the day he reacts and goes to see private detectives as can be seen on page five. The bottom tier confirms that the narrator was the detective and prompts the reader to identify with his team. From this opening, it seems that the plot that is about to unfold will revolve around the dark figure following Dickens at night and that the reader will share the private detective's viewpoint. However, when turning the page, the reader realises that this first narration is in fact embedded in another narration that is related by Dickens to his friend Collins – 'That's how everything started...' ('Voilà comment tout a commencé… ').

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[83] 'Si le double est le garant de la matérialité de l'objet qu'il duplique, il est en revanche parfaitement privé lui-même de matérialité et ne constitue que l''impression fugitive' d'un corps accompagnateur de corps. Il n'est pas corps mais illusion de corps.'

Figure 6: A mysterious murderer

The gutter (and the page) truly function as an ellipsis, a blank as Scott McCloud has it in his *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (2007: 68-101). This montage not only enables Dickens to take over the narratological power but foregrounds the demise of the detectives. Indeed, the next scene shows Dickens going out, followed by two detectives meant to protect him, but they are killed by the shadowy figure. The face of the figure is hidden to the reader yet the exclamation marks in the top left panel can be understood in two ways. When first reading this graphic novel, they can be seen as simple markers of the detectives' surprise at being caught unawares while they were chasing the figure. With the benefit of hindsight, it is obvious that these markers express their surprise concerning the identity of the figure *i.e.* Dickens's own double.[84] This testifies to the multiple readings and interpretations that are inherent to the form of the graphic novel. As Jacques Dürrenmatt notes, the omnipresence of ellipsis in graphic novels 'enables the reader to leaf through signification' and thus, like films, graphic novels can be said to be 'the art of *découpage*' (2013: 28-29; my translation).[85] The last panel of page seven, enclosed in two columns of text, insists on the chasing shadow, on his cruelty and violence with a kind of low angle shot, as if taken from the ground next to the bleeding corpse

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[84] The effect is repeated at the very end of the second volume when Dickens sends killers after Charlie.
[85] 'l'omniprésence de l'ellipse, qui permet un feuilletage de significations'

of the detective. The next page offers a repetition as Dickens calls at the detective's office. However, the lack of response introduces a difference which impacts not only the story but the narration as well. Indeed, the inability of the detective to lead the investigation enables Charlie, the criminal double, to enter Dickens's life, while leaving the narratological position empty. Thus, while the very first pages seemed to present the reader with a typical detective plot and narration, the graphic novel soon debunks the readers' first expectations and leaves space for another narrator: the criminal *Doppelgänger*, Charlie, in a Jekyll-and-Hyde kind of twist.

The more the story unfolds, the more Charlie's take on the narration of the story is felt (whereas in Shepherd's novel, for instance, the criminal figures, Tulkinghorn and Lord Cremorne, refuse to take on the narratorial function, preferring to conceal their narrative in boxes and behind screens). From the moment he reveals himself to Dickens to the very end of volume two, Charlie literally and figuratively leads Dickens, the plot and the reader. He first takes Dickens to the Thames and the site of the Warren's blacking factory, which triggers a series of flashbacks, first featuring Charlie's own memories, then Dickens's. Later on, Dickens receives an envelope containing the story of Emilie Sagée, a French teacher who is supposed to have encountered her own double (a *mise en abyme* of the *Doppelgänger* plot). The riddle triggers reading and misreading, the process of deduction which is characteristic of the detective genre. While at first Dickens identifies his friend and psychiatrist Ernest Elter-Braun as the sender of the envelope, the actual sender proves to be Charlie (*D&D a*: 39). A little after this, Charlie leads Dickens to London's underworld where he leaves him to take the author's place at his home in Tavistock Square. The struggle for narratological, as well as spatial and social power, is strikingly obvious in the quotation from *David Copperfield* on which volume two opens. The French translator Paul Lorain slightly changed Dickens's text by turning hesitation into a direct question.[86] This opening question here casts a doubt on the identity of the true narrator of the graphic novel. As the volume unfolds, it becomes obvious that the 'play on reflections' of the secondary title ('Jeux de miroir') is a topos which applies both to the protagonists and to the structure of the work itself. Indeed, numerous echoes of the first volume appear in the second one, in a kind of mirror effect. These repetitions operate at different levels, both within each volume and bridging the two volumes. Hence, the two covers, with the enigmatic parallelism of the title and, more forcibly, the two medallions which, exactly like a

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[86] Here is Lorain's translation: 'Serai-je le héros de ma propre histoire ou quelque autre y prendra-t-il cette place ? C'est ce que ces pages vont apprendre au lecteur' (Dickens 1996: 11). Dickens's original text reads as follows: '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' (Dickens 1981: 1).

mirror (yet another trace of the immediate double), present one image and its inverted reflection.[87] Thus, the very format of the graphic novel, as a genre, enables Rodolphe and Griffo to open up the possibilities of representing and narrating duality.
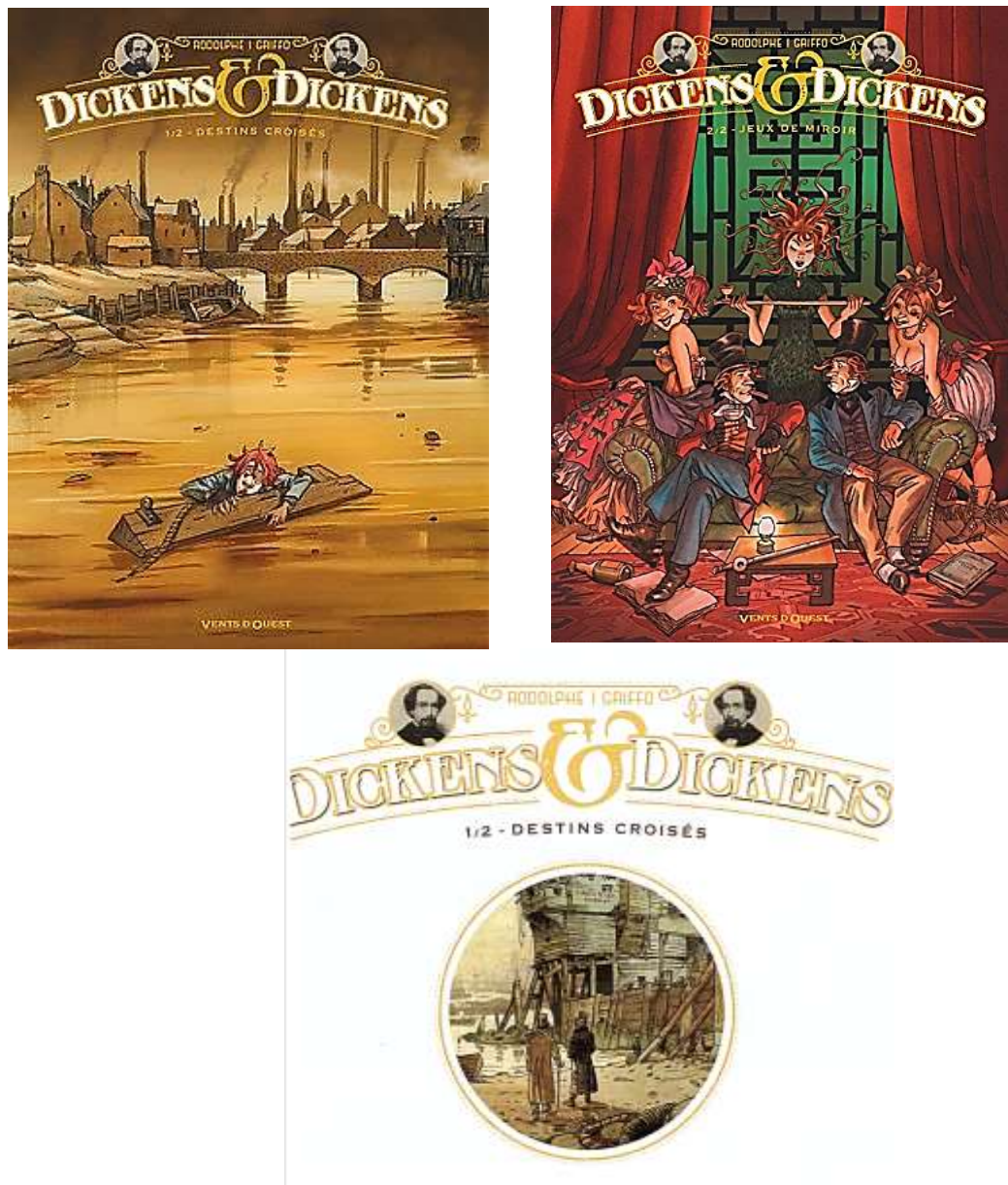
Figure 7: Dickens and Dickens, covers volume 1 and volume 2 and volume 1 title-page close up

[87] The photograph that is used is a lithograph by Charles Baugniet dating from 1858 (five years after the events taking place in the graphic novel) and is now held at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

B.   The very strange case of Dr Dickens and Mr Charlie

The graphic novel pits Queen Victoria's palace against opium dens, Dickens's wife against prostitutes. In an interview, Rodolphe and Griffo explain that they love Dickens but sense a schizophrenic split between the famous, bourgeois writer and the would-be reformer, acutely aware of the poor (2017 webpage). The graphic novel actualises this split which, for Rodolphe and Griffo, hinges on the episode of the blacking factory. Indeed, the graphic novel materialises the 'Other Dickens' that haunts Dickens's writings and himself, from this moment henceforth:

> No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these every day associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, 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 1948 a: 22-23)

In this famous passage from Forster's biography, Dickens attempts to write this turning-point or inner faultline, an attempt that partly fails, hence the preterition, 'no words can express the secret agony' of a period that 'cannot be written'. Yet his text conveys an overwhelming sense of desolation and misery that emerges from accumulation and the lexical field of helplessness: 'I sunk', 'crushed my heart', 'misery'. Most of all it is the image of the broken dream that is poignantly expressed here as well as the unspeakable traces of trauma that still surface in nightmares at the end of the extract. The autobiographical fragment finds many resonances in Dickens's work, most especially in *David Copperfield*, when the narrator claims that 'I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond' (Dickens 1981: 139). This might as well be the starting point of the plot of *Dickens and Dickens*. It is at least the suggestion that emerges from the cover of the first volume which represents the moment when Dickens's identity split in two.

It is striking that in both *Drood* and *Dickens and Dickens*, Wilkie Collins should be Dickens's closest confidant, to whom Dickens confides his past. Dickens tells Collins of the man that has been following him for weeks and then, as he walks his friend home, hints at his past: 'I am living some moments, some painful scenes belonging to my childhood […] I was

not always a gentleman' (*D&D a*: 12).[88] Yet the narration of this traumatic experience is soon stopped: 'no, no, I cannot tell this' (*ibid.*).[89] Whereas Collins will come into his own as a Protean character in Simmons's *Drood,* here he remains a mere listener, Dickens's confession arousing his and the reader's curiosity. The narration of the trauma can only truly start once Dickens is alone and muses on the images that haunt him, and only once an empowered double, Charlie, comes in and tells his story.

Figure 8: Charlie's birth

The panels' size is one of many ways in which illustrators play with the pace and temporality of their story (McCloud 2007: 107). The splash and the size of vignettes highlight the twin trajectories, hinging on the split on the blacking factory, and the fall in the Thames, from which Charlie emerges as Dickens's double or Other. The importance of this revelation scene which marks Charlie's 'birth' is enhanced by the fact that the cover of the volume represents the fall while the title page shows Charlie and Dickens looking at the remains of the blacking factory (fig. 7). Thus, the graphic novel emphasises its concern with this alternative

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[88] 'Je revis certains moments, certaines scènes pénibles lorsque j'étais jeune […] Je n'ai pas toujours été un gentleman.'
[89] 'non, non, je ne peux raconter ça.'

Dickens and his dubious past. Like a fallen Oliver Twist, Charlie, the Other Dickens, sums up his training as a pickpocket, a member of the underworld, in metatextual terms, as if it were an open book: 'If I had to tell [my story] like you do, like in a book, I'd say first I was born when I was twelve…' (*D&D a*: 19).[90] Only a few details distinguish one man from the other in such images, the cane that Dickens has but Charlie lacks, Charlie's threadbare hat, and the colour of the coats. Dickens is associated with yellow, a bright colour that, as was noted earlier, is associated with daylight in the graphic novel, while Charlie's is blue, a signifier of night.

Dickens's fall in the Thames is of course reminiscent of the Fall while the graphic novel hinges on an Esau-Jacob kind of relation as Charlie seeks to take Dickens's place.[91] This alter ego is necessarily uncanny as he did not grow up but started life as a twelve-year-old and is associated with a sense of fragmentation: 'It was as if my fate, my story was then fragmented, broken into two entities … yet, not only my story, but my own person: my body and my mind …' (31).[92] The main underlying themes of the graphic novel, besides crimes and detection, are identity, loss and instability. As Charlie takes Dickens's place, he acts out the return of the repressed: 'I suddenly remembered a dramatic event I had since entirely overlooked' (29).[93] The French term 'occulté', which I am here translating as 'overlooked', bears many significations. Etymologically related to the term occult, from the Latin *occulere i.e.* to hide, the term refers to something hidden by a mystery as well as, in philosophy, to the causes of events that are not accessible to the human mind ('Occulté' *Littré*). This term thus encapsulates both Dickens's repression of the event and one of the themes of the graphic novel: the problem of the origin of the double.

To build their *Doppelgänger*, Rodolphe and Griffo allude to famous apparitions (Percy Shelley seeing himself shortly before he died for instance) or to nineteenth-century lore, like the reported case of Emily Sagée, a teacher whom her pupil saw in two places at the same time. Embedding the teacher's subplot highlights the importance of reading and writing as far as the process of duplicating and switching identities is concerned. The child's surprise is metonymic of the blurring of boundaries between Charlie and Dickens and of the inability of other characters to tell them apart. The reason why Dickens almost turns into a criminal is that his identity (his uniqueness) is being questioned by the presence of this double, to the point that

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[90] 'Si je devais raconter ça comme toi, façon bouquin, je dirais pour commencer que j'suis né à douze ans…'

[91] It is also possible to see an echo of *Our Mutual Friend* and the twisted/-ing plot elaborated by John Harmon.

[92] 'C'était comme si mon destin, mon histoire, s'était alors fragmenté, fracturé en deux entités … et pas seulement mon histoire, mais encore ma personne : mon corps et mon esprit…'

[93] 'M'est alors revenu un événement dramatique que j'avais depuis totalement *occulté*.' (italics mine; these are Dickens's musing in the graphic novel).

other characters seem not to be able to tell the difference. For instance, his wife Catherine notices the change of clothes and the new libidinal drives of her 'husband' but fails to see those as clues to the lure (and comically relishes the latter) (*D&D b*: 24). Later on, Dickens's jump out of his window into the night repeats the first fall into the Thames which triggered the split. While Dickens is trained in thieving and criminality, Charlie is told how to write by Collins (reversing the Collins-Dickens relation, as explored by Lilian Nayder in *Unequal Partners*). Charlie is also given a space to tell his own story, so that in the graphic novel, life writing becomes a sort of life taking.

While the *Doppelgänger*'s violence contaminates Dickens, the impostor and thief seeks to steal his narrative power (a scenario which engages with Victorian duality, but which may also be read metatextually as a symptom of difficult filiation, of a kind of guilt entailed by modern appropriation). What is simply playful in this graphic novel is to become one of the major issues in our novels under study. With its detective plot, its visual double and graphic contrasts, the cartoon version of a split Dickens may provide us with clues, that will become more complex in the novels, where imposture and narratological power are at stake and reveal the politics of writing. We shall see how this split takes the shape of textual absence in *Tom-All-Alone's*, how in *Drood* Collins loses his writing power to Drood and the Other Wilkie, whereas in *Jack Maggs* Carey uses the competing versions of Maggs's life as told by Maggs himself in his letters, his scars, to counter Oates's novel, so that the Dickens figure becomes the real impostor and thief.

In this graphic novel, on the other hand, the double is a hermeneutic device, and can be construed as an embodiment of the return of Dickens's repressed past as a poor boy, as shown by the aforementioned nightmare, while the ending brings resolution. For Paul Meehan, both in folklore and in literature, the *Doppelgänger* functions as an omen of death, and very often the denouement of *Doppelgänger* plots features a final fight in which the haunted protagonist kills his double, thereby destroying himself (as in 'William Wilson', *The Picture of Dorian Gray* etc.) (2017: 3-4). Here, the scenario differs from such literary archetypes. Charlie embodies, as we have said, the return of the repressed within Dickens himself, trapped by his self-constructed public persona. He might be a mere hallucination, the kind of 'heautoscopic' double that Oliver Sacks describes in *Hallucinations* as 'a rare form of autoscopy where there is interaction between the person and his double; the interaction is occasionally amiable but more often hostile' (2013: 265), or be construed in terms of schizophrenia, multiple personality disorder, as is hinted by the character of Ernest Elter-Felbraun, the alienist. Be that as it may, the

disappearance of the uncanny double no longer entails the death of Dickens. As volume two reveals, Charlie soon tires of his life 'as Dickens' and when the latter is almost corrupted, he simply vanishes. Charlie's unmasking of the two men sent after him and his decision to leave displaces the traditional *Doppelgänger* denouement.

Figure 9: 'Et Charlie disparut pour toujours...'

The moment of Charlie's revelation to Dickens by the Thames is ultimately repeated at the very end of the graphic novel in a spread that seems to bring closure to the story as Charlie walks towards the river (fig. 9, *D&D b*: 53). Just as he emerged from the waters, the *Doppelgänger* seems to disappear back in them – again, an echo of *Our Mutual Friend*. Characteristically, this is the only full spread in the two volumes, while the sunset and the position of the two men confirm the sense of closure: while Dickens stands looking at the sunset, Charlie walks in that direction. The sunset is the vanishing point of the picture, a perspective reinforced by the movement of the gulls, the buildings on either side and the rivulets of water on the pavement. Charlie 'disappears' as he walks towards the vanishing point or 'point de fuite' of the image. Possibly one of the weaknesses of this graphic novel is that Rodolphe and Gruffo found it necessary to add a second ending, which brings it back to the traditional

Doppelgänger plot as it represents Dickens's and Charlie's quasi simultaneous death (there is no fight, Charlie dies in the street, walking to Dickens's funeral at Westminster abbey). While closure was given to the fantasy created, the epilogue illustrates Dickens's funeral, hinting that though Charlie 'disappeared' from his life he was still very much alive and that their fate is intertwined. The tone of the epilogue is given by the colour palette which is predominantly black. While the first page pictures Dickens's funeral at Westminster abbey, the second page depicts Charlie's death in the street on his way to the abbey. The epilogue seems to justify the rewriting act as the omniscient narrator comments in a documentary tone: 'The story of [Dickens's] encounter with Charlie obsessed him and he often tried to shape it into a novel but never achieved it.'[94] Thus, the graphic novel hints that this remains a very untold story. However, this epilogue offers an interesting displaced portrait of Dickens as Charlie. Whereas throughout the two volumes the portrayal of Dickens is not really convincing (contrary to the drawings of Wilkie Collins, Catherine Dickens or Queen Victoria who are clearly recognisable), the very last panel bears an uncanny likeness to Millais's drawing of Dickens. But Dickens is absent from these very last pages, being only represented by his coffin and the tombstone bearing his name in Westminster. The portrait is thus 'displaced': instead of being Dickens it is Charlie, who, by contrast, is present in every panel and whispers 'I'm coming, mate. I'm coming, old chap.' These words which sound like a reunion, are a final evidence that the true narrator and subject of this graphic novel is Charlie and recalls the uncanny impression of the last page of volume one, in which Charlie, walking towards Dickens's house in Tavistock Square, impersonates his double: 'Hello, I'm Dickens.'[95]

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[94] 'L'histoire de sa rencontre avec Charlie l'obsédait et il essaya à plusieurs reprises de lui donner la forme d'un roman, mais il n'y parvint pas.'

[95] It can be observed that once again colour bears its importance as the epilogue is using a dark hue, like a brownish-grey filter that recalls the pencil colour of Millais's drawing.

Figure 10: Dickens by John Everett Millais (1870) and Charlie's death

C.   On the tracks of fiction

A growing number of researchers are interested in the graphic novel in relation to narrative and narration as well as literacy and teaching as it is often seen as a tool to teach literary devices and promote literacy.[96] I do not reduce the genre to a step towards the reading of literary novels, but argue that such works as *Dickens and Dickens* cannot help but attract readers to the literary canon they engage with, in this case Dickens's works. Jacques Dürrenmatt considers that some playful French *bandes dessinées* aim to dramatise intertextuality as much as detection 'so as to play with the reader, just as in detective novels, but at a level that is not only concerned with the plot but with the poetic form which makes use of a very tight network of allusions' (2013: 30; my translation).[97] Dürrenmatt's comments apply to *Dickens and Dickens* and its interweaving of references to Dickens's works and visual adaptations, to the genre of the *Doppelgänger* and of detective fiction.

Rodolphe and Griffo provide us with an entertaining story and mystery in which the numerous intertextual layers mediate the Dickensian canon and try to attract French readers to Dickens's texts. In France, apart from *A Christmas Carol* and *Oliver Twist*, Dickens is less read than in England (at least, outside academia) and thus the constant references to *David Copperfield* as well as to *Bleak House* and 'Night Walks' are not necessarily obvious to a French reader. The graphic artists thus develop various strategies to mediate Dickens. When

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[96] The two notions are not contradictory: reception theory, narratology and other theories related to the act of reading and readership partly emerged from and at the same time as concerns on literacy and on teaching how to read (Piégay-Gros 2002: 13-14).

[97] 'pour jouer avec le lecteur, comme dans les romans policiers, mais à un niveau qui n'est pas seulement celui de l'intrigue, mais aussi celui de la forme poétique qui use d'un réseau serré d'allusions.'

reading *Dickens and Dickens*, the reader is struck by the omnipresence of footnotes which are meant to fill in gaps in the readers' knowledge: for instance, we find a footnote referring to Dickens's article on the Great Exhibition written and published in July 1851 (*D&D a*: 9). Other notes include an explanation of Dickens's horror at the link between the death of his daughter and her namesake Dora in *David Copperfield* (11) or to Micawber (13) and to *Household Words* (14). Under the guise of filling gaps in the reader's knowledge, the footnotes also highlight the underlying theme of the graphic novel: the link between life writing and fiction writing.

Beyond the detective plot, the palimpsest of allusions triggers another hermeneutic quest built on 'visual quotations', which, as Lisa Zunshine puts, demand an 'active mind' on the part of the reader, the game starts with the cover, the first semiotic site (2011: 124-128). The cover of volume 2 of *Dickens and Dickens* (fig. 7) thus appeals to numerous intertextual elements from the reader's encyclopaedia. Most interestingly, the lockets at the top featuring a photograph of Dickens are doubled in the full picture. The mirror effect is confirmed with Dickens dressed in proper, respectable clothes but looking uneasy, and Charlie dressed in a shabby costume and casually drinking champagne. What's more, there are two books at the bottom; the one on Dickens's side is closed: its blue cover is that of the 1836 serial edition of *The Pickwick Papers*, complete with the full title, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, the identifiable hunter at the top and Pickwick sleeping in a rowing boat. This book marks the beginning of Dickens's celebrity and of his career as novelist. This contrasts with the book on Charlie's side, or, to be more accurate, under Charlie's foot. The reader must infer that the open book with its white pages and position contrasts with Dickens's incipient celebrity and signifies Charlie's take on the story. Finally, the Chinese woman holding an opium pipe, in a somewhat Asian setting, recalls the historical opium dens, and possibly Sherlock Holmes or *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Interestingly, she is the only character that is not doubled on this cover, but the opium pipe is: one pipe has been used and the Chinese woman is about to offer another to one of the two men. It is easy to infer that Dickens will have to smoke it which suggests a rite of passage. This scene does not feature in the graphic novel but heralds most of the themes that will be developed in the volume.

Besides the cover, the settings work as palimpsests, pervaded with elements of the nineteenth century and of Dickens's works thereby creating a rhizomatic visual network relying on what Barthes calls the 'rhetoric of the Image' (1964: 48-51). Like the Biblical Fall, the plot of *Oliver Twist* haunts the novel, especially with the resonance of number five: Charlie has to make 'five-a-day' *i.e.* must steal five shillings to be fed by the Signori; while Oliver is

constantly associated with the number five when sold/let to other characters for instance.[98] In both works, the number five seems to determine the fate of the character, leading Oliver from one place to another, leading Charlie to rebel against the Signori when asked 'for more'.[99] Whereas Oliver is defenceless, an innocent and passive figure, Charlie takes his revenge on his version of Fagin *i.e.* the Signori. The killing of the Signori marks Charlie's entrance into the underworld of criminality, offering a stark contrast with the innocent Oliver. Strikingly, the Signori is the spitting image of Timothy Spall who played Fagin in the 2007 BBC adaptation of the novel.

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[98] In Chapter 2 of *Oliver Twist* we are told that: 'a bill was next morning pasted on the outside gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish' (Dickens 1994: 16). In chapter 3, Mr Gamfield is close to taking Oliver as an apprentice (for 'three pounds ten' (21) but is taken back to the workhouse after his audience before the magistrates. As a consequence, 'The next morning, the public were once more informed that Oliver Twist was again To Let, and that five pounds would be paid to anybody who would take possession of him' (27).

[99] As Charlie grows old, the Signori asks him 10 shillings a day to be fed, an amount that Charlie refuses to pay (*D&D* a: 22-23). Rodolphe thus triggers an ironical take on Oliver's famous plea.

Figure 11: Timothy Spall as Fagin, Oliver Twist, BBC, 2007 (above) The Signori (bottom; *D&D a*: 20; 22)

What's more, the wreck to which Charlie is brought is a direct allusion to *David Copperfield* as it picks up the original illustration by Phiz which has the boathouse upside down, an image that was not indicated by the text itself (Allingham 2009: n.p.). The visual dialogue enhances the role of illustrations, which played a part in the popularity of Dickens's novels at the time and still help to shape our Dickensian imaginary/imagery today. The graphic novel inserts itself within the tradition of visual adaptations of Dickens, truly embodying adaptation as:

> a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision itself. […] [It is] offering a revised point of view from the 'original', adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized. Yet adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the process of proximation and updating. (Sanders 2006: 18)

Thus, the popular genre of the graphic novel achieves mediation or 'proximation', which Genette defines as an actualisation of the hypotext through a spatial and/or temporal transposition (1982: 431). Here, the actualisation works through generic transposition as the graphic novel enables a better grasp of the hypotext. We shall return to this concept with *Mister Pip* which transposes the voices of the marginalised inhabitants of Bougainville and their experience of the war. To adaptation Sanders opposes appropriation, the latter being 'a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain […] [that can be] divided into two broad categories: embedded texts and sustained appropriations' (26). It is easy to see how this category applies to *Jack Maggs* or *Wanting*. With *Dickens and Dickens*, mediation, on the contrary, challenges only to lead back to Dickens's works.

Figure 12: 'Mrs. Gummidge casts a damp on our departure' by Phiz (1849) (top); The Signori's boathouse (bottom *D&D* a: 20)

Besides, there are other signs the reader must pay attention to, in order to perform the detective work required to fully grasp the link between text and image. Indeed, the visual intertextuality of *Dickens and Dickens* is not only related to the appropriation of Dickens's novels. The setting is also marked by pervasive allusions to adverts from the nineteenth century. Hence, for instance, the reference to the great Nassau Balloon (we can read with the help of a magnifying glass the mention 'Brite Tanen Nassau balloon' on the poster behind Dickens) (*D&D a*: 4). There also are numerous theatre bills or bills advertising such entertainments as the Vauxhall gardens (6). We find a reference to the memoirs of Charles Mathews (though the date seems wrong, the first volume was published in 1838 but the poster featuring in the graphic novel indicates 1833). Such references partake of an attempt to create a sense of verisimilitude,

to accentuate this aspect of the nineteenth century that appeals to neo-Victorian writers as we saw in chapter 1, *i.e.* the city as a palimpsest, a book or 'a looking-glass in which the reader, like Alice, might discover the world and the self in changed form' (Thornton 2009: 1). Traces of the nineteenth century are also used to signal (in the full sense of the term *i.e.* as sign/signifier) different elements of the story. We see then how the visual works in relation to the textual and is truly part of the rhetoric of the genre of the graphic novel. A striking example will suffice here. When Charlie reveals to Dickens their resemblance the board on the left side of the barber's door in front of which they are standing seems ominous as it reads: 'If you leave the shop YOU LOSE YOUR TURN' (*D&D a*: 17; capitals in the text). The message prefigures the narratological struggle for power that is to unfold as once the two men leave the barber's shop, Charlie indeed takes on narratological control.

Figure 13: Haunted streets (*D&D a*:14)

There is a striking scene in which both text and image build a visual sense of 'proximation'. At the beginning of volume one, Dickens walks Collins back home after dinner. The narration then follows Dickens on his way back to his own house (fig. 13). At this very point, the different captions turn out to be quotations from Dickens's 1860 article 'Night Walks' which describes Dickens walking the streets at night because of a 'distressing impression' (*SJ:* 73), an insomnia provoked by the recent death of his father. The walks provide him with 'a fair

amateur experience of houselessness' (*ibid.*) as Dickens identifies with 'us houseless people'. Harping on sounds and using an onomatopoetic ternary rhythm, he blends the figure of the wanderer and the allegory of poverty and 'Houselessness': 'Walking the streets under the pattering rain, Houselesnness would walk and walk and walk' (*ibid.*); 'Drip, drip, drip, from the ledge and coping, splash from pipes and water-spouts, and by-and-by the houseless shadow would fall upon the stones that pave the way to Waterloo-bridge' (74). This psychogeographic journey, close to 'Gone Astray', with its tone and the shocking display of information (in the fantasy of a man about to be chopped up: 'The chopped-up murdered man, had not been lowered with a rope over the parapet when those nights were; he was alive, and slept then quietly enough most likely, and undisturbed by any dream of where he was to come' (*ibid.*)) cannot fail but trigger a sense of uncanny, danger and threat. Clearly, Rodolphe and Griffo are familiar with the text.[100] Their Dickens passes along the theatres, such as the Lyceum, then walks on to the King's Bench Prison, a slight diversion compared to 'Night Walks' where Dickens mentions Newgate. Rodolphe and Griffo clarify the theme of imprisonment for debt as they refer to Micawber and a footnote indicates that the character was inspired by Dickens's father, as is well known. In their adaptation of 'Night Walks', Rodolphe and Griffo remain thematically faithful to the original text, but empty it of its ideological meaning and its denunciation of the plight of the poor to displace the focus on autobiographical inspiration and on the blending of fiction and reality, through a psychogeographic journey which is visually materialised for the reader. Skipping for instance the passage on the Bank and the 'Dry Rot', a 'disease' Dickens sees in different prisoners (an allusion to actual prison fever, but also suggesting broken identity, loss of purpose as much as a decaying body).[101] Rodolphe and Griffo lead their character to Bedlam Hospital: the reference is once more emptied of Dickens's reflections on sanity and insanity and reduced to the comment 'Even worse than prison.'[102] Dickens's walk in London turns into an uncanny visual experience as three panels show him surrounded by skeletons rising from their own graves 'to invade the city' (fig. 13). This marks an intertextual shift from 'Night Walks' to *Bleak House* and *A Christmas Carol*, recalling the contamination from the churchyard in the first or Scrooge's ghosts in the second. The intertextual reference is complete with the appearance of the Megalosaurus from the opening of Dickens's novel which

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[100] In many ways, Rodolphe and Griffo's graphic novel bears many similitudes with Peter Ackroyd and Piers Dudgeon's work in *Dickens London*.

[101] 'To this, succeeds a smell as of strong waters, in the morning; to that, a looseness respecting money; to that, a stronger smell as of strong waters, at all times; to that, a looseness respecting everything; to that, a trembling of the limbs, somnolence, misery, and crumbling to pieces' (*SJ*: 76).

[102] The comment is reductive compared to Dickens's vivid accumulation of questions starting with 'Are not the sane and the insane equal at night as the sane lie a dreaming?' (*SJ*: 77).

is misattributed to 'Night Walks' in the caption. The gap between what is seen and what is written creates a misdirection. This flawed mediation, misdirecting the reader seems too big a mistake to be involuntary and could rather be interpreted as a 'pedagogical' tool, teaching the reader to keep a critical distance and to check pieces of information. Besides, the presence of anachronistic portraits like Virginia Woolf's mother in other parts of the volume suggests that the graphic novel plays with the codes of the detective genre in which everything can turn into a sign though not always a signifier, presenting the reader with, in Reuter's words, red herrings ('leurres') which emerge from an overabundance of clues (Reuter 2017: 51). Looking for clues and their meanings, readers are led along the wrong tracks, but then this is precisely the point, as is pointed out in Mark Siegel's graphic novel *Sailor Twain* quoting Mark Twain: 'Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot' (Twain 2003: 1; Siegel 2013: 43).[103] In this notice, the American author mocks the rules of fiction especially as they had been established by the eighteenth-century novel.

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[103] The plot of this other neo-Victorian graphic novel is construed as a series of embedded detective stories, as a mysterious woman comes to a sailor and asks the truth concerning certain earlier events. The story that then unfolds relates how Twain, the captain of the *Lorelei*, a steamboat crossing the Hudson river, found a mermaid, the very same creature who bewitched Lafayette, the owner of the boat. This fantastic story has an interesting take on writing: the reader learns that the mysterious woman is in fact an author who before revealing her identity passed herself for a man, C. G. Beaverton. The graphic novel also makes numerous references to Mark Twain (and again the notion of name and truth is called upon), one of the most important being the quotation of the notice featuring at the beginning of *Huckleberry Finn*. Its emergence in Siegel's novel (2013: 43), read by two boys looking like avatars of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn and who keep appearing and disappearing, counterbalances the very structure of the graphic novel. Indeed, the narrative follows the trajectory of the steamboat on the Hudson, each chapter begins with a geographical reference and the date, some chapters even feature the hour. A break is marked between chapters and parts with newspapers clippings and a page representing a map of the area where the action is taking place. All these elements call for a detective mode of reading that is debunked by the reference to Twain and the presence of supernatural elements such as the mermaid.

Figure 14: Pointing to *Old Curiosity Shop* (full page and close up, *D&D b*: 24)

Visual clues can also support elements of the plot as in the erotic dimension of the play on doubles (which recalls Plautus's *Amphitryon).* Thus, in volume two after having spent the night in a brothel and the day hiding the corpse of an inspector who died of an overdose, Dickens comes home and meets Catherine in the corridor (fig. 14). While she flirts with her husband, hoping, as can easily be inferred by her gestures and looks, to have sex again as she had with Charlie (though she thought she was sleeping with her husband) the reader can see in the background of the first panel an illustration hanging on the wall. The illustration seems to be from *The Old Curiosity Shop,* picturing Dick Swiveller and Quilp and therefore adds to the feeling Dickens has of losing his wife, echoing Swiveller who is manipulated, thinking he will marry Little Nell whereas the dwarf is after her money. A similar strategy is used to highlight the *Dopplegänger* plot in the office of the alienist Ernest Elter-Felbraun where the reader can identify no less than two main elements pointing to duality. The background of the first panel shows the inside of the doctor's office which features a painting with twin girls holding a fishing bowl. The background of the next panel features a Pre-Raphaelite painting by Frederick Sandys, *Love's Shadow* (1867). The image of the shadow refers to the larger field of the double as defined by Rosset. It becomes apparent that visual hints double and amplify the textual elements of the graphic novel. They also inscribe the work in different intertextual backgrounds and, with the latter elements, in traditional representations of duality. The graphic novel thus creates a

hermeneutic quest of its own, like a hypertextual game in which the reader must click upon the details of the various images to unfold further meaning, delighting in solving each tiny riddle of the fanciful puzzle. The aim of the game remains within the scope of entertainment, offering a threshold to the Victorian era it revisits, through creative pastiche. As such, it recalls Roger Caillois's definition of detective fiction as a formulaic game (1983: 10-11).[104]

In the novels under study, deeper issues regarding the act of rewriting are at stake as they belong to what Julie Sanders considers as 'an act of recreation' *i.e.* a rewriting which entails critique and re-evaluation as much as it does stylistic mimicry or pastiche:

> the Victorian era proves in the end to be ripe for appropriation because it throws into sharp relief many of the overriding concerns of the postmodern era: questions of identity; of environmental and genetic conditioning; repressed and oppressed modes of sexuality; criminality and violence; the urban phenomenon; the operations of law and authority; science and religion; the postcolonial legacies of the empire. (2006: 129)

It is to some these very considerations – 'identity,' 'criminality and violence,' 'authority' and 'postcolonial legacies' – that the following pages will attend in relation to the intertwined use of the detective mode.

II.   PLOTTING/TAILING DICKENS

> I shall answer the question which perhaps no one else alive in our time knew to ask – 'Did the famous and loveable and honourable Charles Dickens plot to murder an innocent person and dissolve away his flesh in a pit of caustic lime and secretly inter what was left of him, mere bones and a skull, in the crypt of an ancient cathedral that was an important part of Dickens's own childhood? And did Dickens then scheme to scatter the poor victim's spectacles, rings, stickpins, shirt studs, and pocket watch in the River Thames? And if so, or even if Dickens only *dreamed* he did these things, what part did a very real phantom named Drood have in the onset of such madness? (*D*: 4; italics in the text)

Neo-Victorian novels deploy various narrative devices to fictionalise Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins; [105] as Marie-Luise Kohlke puts it: 'the implication of famous figures in shady dealings, conspiracies, outright criminality, or sinister supernatural happenings

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[104] The link between detective fiction and game is so present that Caillois claims it reached its climax with such books as *Murder Off Miami*, by Dennis Wheatley and J.G. Links. In the latter case, the reader was given a dossier with all the clues and interviews related to the case as well as an envelope containing the solution (1983: 11). The pastiche at play in *Dickens and Dickens* is even more obvious in 'gamebooks' such as Ced's ongoing series *Sherlock Holmes La BD dont vous êtes le héros.* In each book, the reader can choose his/her character (Watson, Holmes, Irene Adler or Moriarty) and has both to find clues and to 'interview' the other characters of the story (a set of limited questions is given) to solve the case. Each clue and set of information leads to another page in the book (the reading is nonlinear). The reader thus truly turns into the 'hero' and detective of the graphic novel.

[105] For another examination of this point cf. Louisa Hadley, especially Part 1 'Narrating the Victorians' (2010: 30-58).

constitutes a particular popular device' (2013: 12). The provocative opening of *Drood* presents Dickens as a murderer scattering the victim's portable property and dissolving the body in lime (as Orlick threatens to do in *Great Expectations* or Jasper in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*). Othering Dickens, the neo-Victorian text turns him into a central character of the plot, which takes us beyond the graphic novel we were dealing with. This sensational start creates a riddle, switching from the canonical writer to the calculating criminal. For Marie-Luise Kohlke, 'biofictional subjects thus partake of an uneasy liminal existence, an inter-subjective half-life between self and Other, fact and fiction, embodiment and textualisation' (2013: 4).[106] From our perspective, what matters most is the way in which Simmons's opening transforms the autobiographical account of the narrator, the fictionalised Wilkie Collins, into a detective story, retracing the steps of this shady character known as Dickens.[107]

All the neo-Dickensian novels under study create an alternative form of Dickens, be it as detective, *Doppelgänger* or criminal. The very nature of neo-Victorian fiction implies that the mode of reading and interpreting is closely related, if not entirely similar, to that of detective fiction. In other words, neo-Victorian fiction constantly asks its readers to use their 'encyclopaedia', to use Eco's term, in order to actualise the horizon of expectations created by the re-investment of Victorian literary codes, texts and culture. What I would also like to suggest is that this entails a Model Reader as a would-be detective tracking down the (inter)text itself. In John Scaggs's words:

> What postmodern detective fiction emphasises at every turn are the clear parallels between reading, detection, and interpretation, and it is the ease with which crime fiction can articulate and investigate these parallels that account for both the profusion or postmodern, or anti-detective, novels, and the various critical and analytic responses to them. Crime narratives that are structured around the investigation of a crime are, by default, metanarratives. (2005: 142)

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[106] Moreover, the point of these appropriated biofictions often is to turn the tables over the canonical figure and reclaim the viewpoint of the Other. These alternative versions of history are mediating marginalised or repressed aspects of history: be it the voice of the historically silenced, as Kohlke's focus on the Hottentot Venus shows, but also of the hidden, private aspects of well-known persons. For other studies of neo-Victorian biofictions cf. Julia Novak 'Biographical Fiction to Historiographic Metafiction: Rewriting Clara Schuman' in *Brno Studies in English*, vol. 37.2 (2011): 145-158; Julia Novak and Sandra Mayer 'Disparate Images: Literary Heroism and the "Work vs. Life" Topos in Contemporary Biofictions about Victorian Authors' in *Neo-Victorian Studies* 7:1 (2014): 25-51; José M. Yebra 'Neo-Victorian Biofiction and Trauma Poetics in Colm Tóibín's *the Master*' in *Neo-Victorian Studies* 6:1 (2013): 41-7; Ansgar Nünning 'An Intertextual quest for Thomas Chatterton: The Deconstruction of the Romantic Cult of Originality and the Paradoxes of Life-Writing in Peter Ackroyd's Fictional Metabiography *Chatterton*' in *Biofictions: The Rewriting of Romantic Lives in Contemporary Film and Drama*, ed. By Martin Middeke and Werner Huber, Camben House: Rochester, USA, 1999: 27-49. For a study of the link between the historical novel and biofictions cf. Michael Lackey 'The Rise of the biographical Novel and the Fall of the Historical Novel' in *A/b: Auto/Biographies Studies*, 31:1: 33-58.

[107] The interest in Dickens's 'dark side' is not limited to fiction but has also been the object of a thorough study in Harry Stone's *The Night Side of Dickens* (1994) in which we find motifs that make their way in neo-Dickensian fiction such as cannibalism or murder (15-16). Stone's study certainly is a source of inspiration for Simmons's work

In neo-Victorian detective fiction and biofiction, as in any detective fiction, the reader is being asked, on the one hand, to solve the interpretative question that emerges from the plot; on the other hand, this detective mode of reading is extended to the intertextual traces in the text, mediating texts that the reader may or may not have read. The incompleteness of the detective novel, which made Eisenzweig call it an 'impossible narrative' (1986: 14-16), is then displaced in neo-Victorian fiction: there is a form of incompleteness in the felt absence of the hypotext and/or of the Victorian author, however, the text is also saturated by intertextuality. The text then is almost *too* complete, creating a rhizomatic network in which the reader has to find his/her way. Thus, neo-Dickensian fiction extends a double invitation to the reader: s/he is invited to detect the hypotext by using/actualising his/her own encyclopaedia, while, having to (re)consider the Victorian text itself in the process.

A.   Dickens and *the* detective

Turning Dickens into either a detective figure or the object of the quest and inquest is highly interesting in terms of genre; this also reflects on Dickens's own relation with, and fascination for, the criminal world. *Drood* and *Tom-All-Alone's* engage with Dickens's walks in the London slums under the aegis of the police, which he depicted in various articles published in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* such as: 'A Walk in a Workhouse' (25 May 1850), 'Detective Police' (27 July and 10 August 1850), 'Three "Detective" Anecdotes' (14 September 1850), 'On Duty with Inspector Field' (14 June 1851), not to mention 'Night Walks' (21 July 1860), which was quoted, as we have seen, in *Dickens and Dickens* too.[108] The first two articles, 'A Walk in a Workhouse' and 'Detective Police', relate an evening spent with different members of the Detective Force and open with a contrast between this brand-new branch and the 'old Bow Street Police'. The Bow Street Runners had been created in the eighteenth century by Henry and John Fielding, while the detective branch was founded in 1842 and was part of the Metropolitan Police of London (created in 1829) (Eisenzweig 1986: 266,

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[108] Originally 'Detective Police' was published in two parts as 'A Detective Police Party' in *Household Words*, 27 July and 10 August 1850. The edition being used is taken from *reprinted Pieces* which explains this change of title.

Shpayer-Makov 2011: 13-26). Thus, even in the case of the Bow Street Runners, active policing and law enforcement were still fairly recent phenomena. For John L. McMullan, '[a]n important feature of the sociology and history of London policing is that it is very difficult to periodize in any stark fashion. There is no dramatic divide which separates the old from the new police' (1995: 121). As Haia Shpayer-Makov points out, the Bow Street Runners were not meant to associate with the brand-new detectives due to a fear of re-establishing an eighteenth-century thief-taking system (2011: 189). Indeed, eighteenth-century policing relied on spying, hence plain-clothes detectives were reminiscent of the 'figure of the spy, the invisible policeman who eavesdrops and pries even into the lives of the innocent' (*ibid.*).[109] This suspicion and fear are tackled by Dickens who partly endorses popular beliefs about the old system and partly seeks to demystify it:

> We are not by any means devout believers in the old Bow Street Police. To say the truth, we think there was a vast amount of humbug about those worthies. Apart from many of them being men of very indifferent character, and far too much in the habit of consorting with thieves and the like, they never lost a public occasion of jobbing and trading in mystery and making the most of themselves. Continually puffed besides by incompetent magistrates anxious to conceal their own deficiencies, and hand-in-glove with the penny-a-liners of that time, they became a sort of superstition. Although as a Preventive Police they were utterly ineffective, and as a Detective Police were very loose and uncertain in their operations, they remain with some people, a superstition to the present day. (*SJ*: 246)

This opening paragraph is marked by the semantic fields of conspiracy and mystery, multiplicity, pomposity and inefficiency. The effect is to produce an ambiguous portrait as the Bow Street Runners turn into liminal figures hovering between the world of the law and that of criminals, working not for the public but for themselves. In this passage, the Bow Street Runners appear as icons or cult figures ('devout believers') whose worth must be questioned (note the contrast between 'humbug' and 'worthies', the latter term being used ironically), an image which is challenged by Dickens's rhetoric ('Apart from', 'Although') paving the way for the praise of the new Detective Force. Indeed, Dickens eulogises the new police, through a list of qualities that belies the euphemisms ('faint idea'): 'we now proceed to endeavour to convey to our readers some faint idea of the extraordinary dexterity, patience, and ingenuity, exercised by the Detective Police.'[110] The skills here mentioned are developed throughout the article, as

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[109] McMullan also comments on eighteenth-century monied policing, citizens were turning into informants in exchange for money. Thief-takers developed a form of profitable business, relying on blackmail, numerous informants and pickpockets for instance, leading to a 'merchandising' of information and crime control (1995: 123-126).

[110] Charles Dickens, 'A Detective Police Party', *Household Words*, vol.1, 27/07/1850, [web.] http://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-i/page-409.html: 409. The passage quoted here only appears in the original article and not in the *Reprinted Pieces* which was used by David Pascoe in his edition of *Selected Journalism*. Minor changes were made between the two versions including the elision of this passage which links the present article to an earlier article on the police, 'The Modern Science of Thief-Taking'.

Dickens describes the Detective Police in terms denoting professionalism, method and the ability to respond to public need:

> On the other hand, the Detective Force organised since the establishment of the existing Police, is so well chosen and trained, proceeds so systematically and quietly, does its business in such a workman-like manner, and is always so calmly and steadily engaged in the service of the public, that the public really do not know enough of it, to know a tithe of its usefulness. (*SJ*: 246)

Dickens thus establishes a rhetorical reversal; unlike the former 'penny-a-liners' devoted to an imperfect proto-police, he unravels the secret feats of a police force whose detection escapes the public eye. Dickens thus appears as a sort of eyewitness, a mediator between the clueless audience and the knowing detectives.

Dickens offers a similar portrait of the Bow Street Runners in *Oliver Twist* with the utterly incompetent Blathers and Duff. The two characters form a rather comic duo:

> The man who had knocked at the door, was a stout personage of middle height, aged about fifty: with shiny black hair, cropped pretty close; half-whiskers, a round face, and sharp eyes. The other was a red-headed, bony man, in top-boots; with a rather ill-favoured countenance, and a turned-up sinister-looking nose. (Dickens 1994: 272)

Dickens relishes making fun of this Laurel-and-Hardy pair of policemen and of their investigation (less anachronistically, they also recall Thomas Rowlandson's caricatures and sketches of life in London). This contrasts with the later account of Inspector Field's work, especially in the way Dickens makes use of light. Whereas the bull's eye lantern, similar to an eye, confers a god-like authority to the historical inspector, in his early portrayal of the Bow Street Runners, light produces a comedic situation enhanced by repetition. Ironically, the use of various lights does not enlighten the situation but further obscures it:

> Lights were then procured; and Messrs. Blathers and Duff, attended by the native constable, Brittles, Giles, and everybody else in short, went into the little room at the end of the passage and looked out at the window; and afterwards went round by way of the lawn, and looked in at the window; and after that, had a candle handed out to inspect the shutter with; and after that, a lantern to trace the footsteps with; and after that, a pitchfork to poke the bushes with. (274)

The scene reaches its climax with first the theatrical interview of Mr Giles and Brittles – they go 'through a melodramatic representation of their share in the previous night's adventures: which they performed some six times over: contradicting each other, in not more than one important respect, the first time, and in not more than a dozen the last' (*ibid.*) – and then with the council held by the two policemen: 'held a long council together, compared with which, for secrecy and solemnity, a consultation of great doctors on the knottiest point in medicine, would be mere child's play' (*ibid*). Such irony debunks the whole investigation, pointing out the incompetence of the policemen who are turned into a mere jest. Let us note that for Philip Collins, even if Blathers and Duff fail to solve the case, and become the butt of humour, they still reveal Dickens's fascination with crime and crime-solving, foreshadowing his closer

interest in the new detective force: '[the] tones and the relish of this account, and its uneducated idiom, anticipate Dickens's more famous account and more adulatory presentation of the Scotland Yard detectives a dozen years later' (Collins 1962: 202).

In the 1850s, the reputation of detectives was still to be grounded: their lack of uniform provoked suspicion and resistance in both the working class and the bourgeois milieu. Drawing upon Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, Eisenzweig suggests that in a sense, the creation of the new legal and police system relied on narrative (the verdict and the investigation) rather than the spectacle (the chastisement), and thereby led to the emergence of a new narratological mode, the detective novel; at the same time, the detective novel itself produced the narrative for the representation of the new police force (1986: 260-263). As Shpayer-Makov argues, Dickens's articles were among the first to present readers with interviews promoting the work and the methods of the detective branch (especially the controversial use of 'cover') (2011: 197).[111] In 'Detective Police', Dickens invites the detectives to the office of *Household Words* (*SJ*: 246). Giving his readers details regarding the meeting, Dickens asserts the authenticity of his narrative, while withholding names to suggest mystery ('a certain Inspector', 'And we beg to repeat that, […] our description is as exact as we can make it' (*ibid.*)). As discussed in chapter one, the setting is a key function of the reading contract with the reader. Here, there is both a playful grandeur (the 'magnificent chamber') and a generic, standard description of the newspapers' office. Dickens grants his readers a degree of freedom while imposing fixed pieces of furniture (the sofa and the table) (246-47), which seems to place the reader on the same level as the author and thereby exemplifies the narrative contract of the detective genre as defined by Eisenzweig. Indeed, the French critic posits the empiric author as the other player against whom the reader is playing (1986: 44). Besides, the cosiness of the setting echoes the 'armchair detective' made famous by Poe's stories. The *mise en abyme* of journalism (Dickens is writing an article on researching for and writing an article) is an echo of a key aspect of Dupin's work: the reliance of the detective on the newspapers.[112] The author also refers to dusk and to the crowds going to the Lyceum theatre opposite the office (247), a theatrical hint that points to his

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[111] As Céline Prest suggested to me, the suspicion towards policemen under cover might be link to the distrust of disguises and of actors. Since the Middle Ages, the theatre has always had a difficult existence in England, especially in relation to the Church but also to the government as even in the nineteenth century plays had to be approved by the Lord Chamberlain.
[112] The relation between journalism and the detective novel genre has been explored by Eisenzweig at length in *Le récit impossible* in which he shows that the narrative of the investigation is almost always triggered by an extra-textual reference to a newspaper article. Eisenzweig concludes that the classic detective novel thus presents itself as a rewriting of the press thus substituting itself to the press as the most perfect representation of the police institution (1986: 270-273).

own text as a performance too. The contract with the reader is finally sealed by the presentation of the protagonists, 'Inspector Wield and Stalker' as well as six other sergeants ('Wield' is obviously an alias for Field).[113] Each detective is presented according to his own area of expertise and method which leads the author to remark that:

> They are, one and all, respectable looking-men; of perfectly good deportment and unusual intelligence: with nothing lounging or slinking in their manners; with an air of keen observation and quick perception when addressed […] They have all good eyes: and they all can, and they all do, look full at whomsoever they speak to. (248)

The impression produced is that of efficiency, reliability, keen observation and one coherent body, enhanced by the anaphoric 'They', which points out their ubiquity both in the streets of London and in the text. The anecdotes that follow and the chatty manners of the detectives, eager to share their past experiences, aim to convince readers that the Detective police has quickly become indispensable, but also create the premise of the detective genre: each anecdote consists of a micro detective narrative. The reader is invited to 'glide into a review of the most celebrated and horrible of the great crimes that been committed within the last fifteen or twenty years' (249). We are told of an encounter with Maria Manning (the last hanged murderess in London); of pursuits of thieves tracked down thanks to letters exchanged between the criminal and his wife or thanks to the identification of a singular item as in Sergeant Dornton 'adventures of the Carpet Bag'. Dickens concludes these stories with a now well-trodden motif partaking of the detective genre, the game of chess: 'These games of chess, played with live pieces, are played before small audiences, and are chronicled nowhere. The interest of the game supports the player. Its results are enough for Justice' (261). The presentation of Wield in two of the stories is striking as Dickens renders Wield's work under cover with the progressive metamorphosis of the officer who morphs into another character: '[e]ven while he spoke, he became a greasy, sleepy, shy, good-natured, chuckle-headed, unsuspicious, and confiding young butcher' (256).

Interestingly enough, Field is something of a blank in Dickens's biographies.[114] Indeed, the inspector is hardly ever mentioned except sporadically, in relation to the articles and to *Bleak House*, identifying him as the potential inspiration for Inspector Bucket and as the escort on Dickens's expeditions in the rookeries.[115] Yet Field looms large in the article and deserves

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[113] Wield is quite a fitting alias for the Inspector since in Old English means to govern, subdue, direct.

[114] The same treatment is given to Wilkie Collins in Forster's biography. As different biographers of Dickens have shown, but most especially Lilian Nayder's work *Unequal Partners*, Collins had a more important place in Dickens's life than Forster's version might leave its readers to infer.

[115] The inspector is almost non-existent in Forster's biography apart for his unnamed appearance in a note on the descriptions of the opium-dens in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*: 'I went lately with the same inspector who accompanied Dickens to see the room of the opium-smokers, old Eliza and her Lascar or Bengalee friend' (note

a closer look. Dickens's articles did much to *fashion* a positive image of the detective in which the shift from a model relying on representation to one relying on narration is most palpable, especially through his accounts of his 'slumming tours' escorted by Inspector Field. This was all the more influential as his magazine was popular and had a wide readership, cutting across social classes. Fashioning an image of the new police force was thus widely due to the emergence and democratisation of new media, as Shpayer-Makov's book shows at length, illuminating the interdependence between detectives and journalists, presenting them almost as doubles since both 'examined the lives of the poor and desperate' while the journalists relied on the detective to 'see things that others could not – for example, identifying disguised criminals and habitual thieves' and detectives 'imparted knowledge that only they possessed, and that journalists could then convey to their readers' so that 'detectives served as mediators between print agents and information' (2011: 165). This resonates with neo-Victorian poetics especially as far as the themes of disguise, of the unseen or presences on the margins, not to mention the trope of mediation, are concerned. Numerous are the neo-Victorian works that take on the detective mode and thus explore the Victorian interest in, and relation to, crime. Neo-Victorian fiction thus seems to want to recuperate a mode which was developing in the nineteenth century and that came to embody a form of modernity as Jacques Dubois argues at length in his book *Le roman policier ou la modernité* (2005). The decision to turn Dickens into a detective figure unravels the similarities between the detective and the journalist, digging into Dickens's own fascination with crime and his 'slumming tours'. It also is a postmodern turn as both the writer and the detective here collapse into a single figure, while historically both figures were separated, the former standing for fiction and narrative, the second for facts, resolution and the law (Shpayer-Makov 2011: 175). This contradistinction between fact and fiction demonstrates that the opposition between detectives and journalists hinges on epistemological considerations.

288, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, Vol. I-III, 2008 (ebook) accessed at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/25851/25851-h/25851-h.htm#FNanchor_288_288). Fred Kaplan mentions the inspector only once, referring briefly to the articles and mentioning his help in Dickens's plan to create lodgings for the lower classes with Miss Coutts (1988: 225). Peter Ackroyd first mentions Field in a passage in which he deals with Dickens's work for *Household Words*. Ackroyd finds many a comparison with Dickens's fiction, especially with *Bleak House*. He suggests that not only did Field provide material for the journal and for Inspector Bucket, but that he also contributed to 'Dickens's tendency to exaggerate the facts' and comments on Field's attachment to the theatre (1999: 630). The other two references that Ackroyd makes to Field are yet again linked to the project with Miss Coutts (682) and the writing of *Bleak House* (687). Philip Collins is maybe the critic who gives us the greatest amount of information about the famous detective in his aforementioned work (1962: 206-211).

However, the description of Inspector Field in 'On Duty' complicates such considerations. I wish to pick up Philip Collins's clue, when he hints that Field becomes a character, like Bucket. Collins points out that Dickens establishes what will become a long tradition of fictional detectives who 'seem, indeed, to divide their time between looking almost ostentatiously ordinary […] and donning the most exotic disguises' (1962: 211-13). In the opening of 'On Duty', Field – now Wield – is presented as 'the guardian genius of the British Museum' (*SJ*: 306) at the time of the Great Exhibition (the article was published in January 1851) and thus stands as the figure of knowledge, of the Investigator. The passage is marked by an opposition between light and darkness, between (empirical) knowledge and mysticism ('Suspicious of the Elgin marbles, and no to be done by cat-faced giants' (*ibid*.)). The whole passage is reminiscent of Plato's allegory of the cave, Field standing for the philosopher, the escaped prisoner who enlightens the others by his knowledge: 'Inspector Field, sagacious, vigilant, lamp in hand, throwing monstrous shadows on the walls and ceilings' (306). Dickens seems to be turning the historical figure into a conceptual character standing for modernity, turning him into the embodiment of surveillance (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 60-81).[116] The style of the article, an almost immersive experience thanks to the use of questions, of the pronoun 'we' and of the insistence on perception: 'the long lines of street lamps are blurred, as if we saw them through tears' (*SJ*: 306), prefigures in many ways detective novels yet to come. Furthermore, placing Field in the museum and then in the slums truly shows how, as a conceptual character, he 'territorialises, de-territorialises and reterritorialises' the concept of knowledge as he seems to be in control of all spaces (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 59; my translation). Knowledge is no longer to be confined to museums but must be taken out to the slums in order to discipline and punish the lower and dangerous classes. This movement is initiated in the description of the museum as an Egyptian mummy is turned into a commoner: 'If a mummy trembled in an atom of its dusty covering, Inspector Field would say, "Come out of that, Tom Green. *I know you*!"' (*SJ*: 306, my emphasis). As Karl Ashley Smith points out, Dickens was fascinated with 'these striking figures, serving society below the level of its notice' which 'helps to explain the character of fascination Bucket exerts in the fiction over characters such as Mr Snagsby and Esther herself' (2008: 95). In his well-known analysis of *Bleak House,* D. A. Miller remarks that:

> Embodied in the prison, the workhouse, the factory, the school, discipline became, quite precisely, a *topic* of Dickensian representation: a site whose redoubtable but all the more easily identified boundaries

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[116] Throughout the article, Field is associated with the bull-light lantern, the glaring eye that scrutinises the slums. One might also see a connection with Foucault and panopticism as defined in *Discipline and Punish* (1991: 195-228).

allowed it to be the target of criticism to the same extent that they isolated it from other, better sites. The topic of the carceral in Dickens – better, the carceral as topic-thus worked to secure the effect of difference between, on the one hand, a confined, institutional space in which power is violently exercised on collectivized subjects, and on the other, a space of 'liberal society,' generally determined as a free, private, and individual domain and practically specified as the family. (1983: 59)

Miller sees in *Bleak House* a 'readjustment' of Dickensian representation as the lines between carceral and free space are blurred since each character is under surveillance, each character is a potential suspect. It seems that this readjustment is already at play in Dickens's journalistic works as we have just seen. Similarly, Inspector Bucket is crystallised as a 'conceptual character' in chapter LIII as 'Time and place cannot bind Mr Bucket. Like man in the abstract, he is here to-day and gone to-morrow—but, very unlike man indeed, he is here again the next day' (742).[117]

Thus, by creating the figure of the detective, be it Inspector Wield/Field or Inspector Bucket, Dickens initiates a detective trail that will be followed up by readers and writers. This creative act is the target of neo-Dickensian fiction which seems to displace and renegotiate the assumed opposition between fact and fiction, journalists and historical detectives, so as to problematise its relation to the past and to truth, offering a new epistemic model. Epistemology is, as Todorov demonstrates, an essential aspect of detective novels, informing both their content and structure in their intrinsic tension between narrative and facts (1978: 11-13). Lynn Shepherd's *Tom-All-Alone's* is a case in point, revisiting the figure of the Dickensian detective.

B.   Playing hide and seek with the detective figure in *Tom-All-Alone's*

1. Reconfiguring detective fiction in neo-Victorian fiction

Jacques Dubois argues that the detective novel revolves around a single issue, that of identity (2005: 47-49; 63-65):

As the detective hermeneutic narration questions identity, confronts one to one's Fall and plays with one's death, it engages with the old ontological question concerning Being and essence before undertaking a more contemporary viewpoint embracing the instability of being. […] One might say that at the end of

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[117] John Carey offers a similar reading of Bucket whom he associates to myth: 'He performs the mythical function of the saviour, the unraveller, who finds and shows lost adventurers the clue to the labyrinth. Bucket enters the story almost like a supernatural figure - a mythical god, arriving on earth to take a hand in mortal affairs.' For him: 'He is not like the other characters. He is not involved in the story as they are. He comes from outside, to solve it' (1991: 185).

each short trip, the detective arrives to a reassuring state of being, distinguishing the subject and the other: the criminal is the criminal, the detective is the detective. Yet this certainty is short lived: soon afterwards we read (they write) another detective story and so on. (65: my translation)[118]

Identity not only is a theme but is an inherent part of the narrative structure, a phenomenon that becomes most apparent when looking at the relations between characters. For Dubois, the detective novel tends to be summed up by a triangular pattern (88):
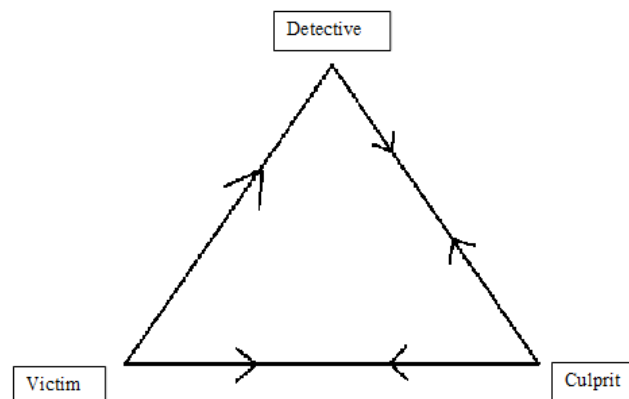

Figure 15: Triangular formation (2005: 90)

On the one hand, the victim and the culprit struggle against (and thereby define) each other while, on the other hand, the investigator, called for by the victim, is in search of the culprit who remains in hiding. Thus, the detective is at once defined both by his/her relation to the victim and by his/her relation to the culprit. Dubois offers an interesting variation which consists in adding a fourth character, the suspect. Thus, the French critic slightly displaces the object of the investigation: the detective does not simply focus on the victim's body as a cryptogram, but investigates suspects, who in turn create a series of enigmas in the narrative, the answer to which must emerge gradually, to bring out the culprit. This is the basis for his 'hermeneutic square' (a concept he borrows from Greimas), which relies on a double opposition: on the one hand, that of the story of the crime and that of the investigation; on the other hand, the '*régime*' of truth and that of lies:

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[118] 'Parce qu'elle questionne l'identité, parce qu'elle confronte l'individu à la faute, parce qu'elle joue avec sa mort, la narration herméneutique policière reprend la vielle question ontologique de l'être et de son essence avant de rejoindre le point de vue plus contemporain de l'instabilité de cet être. […] Sans doute [les détectives] conduisent-ils en fin de chaque bref trajet, à une réassurance quant à la spécificité du sujet et de son autre : le coupable est le coupable, le détective est le détective. Mais cette assurance est de courte durée : peu après, nous lisons (ils écrivent) un autre récit policier et ainsi de suite.'
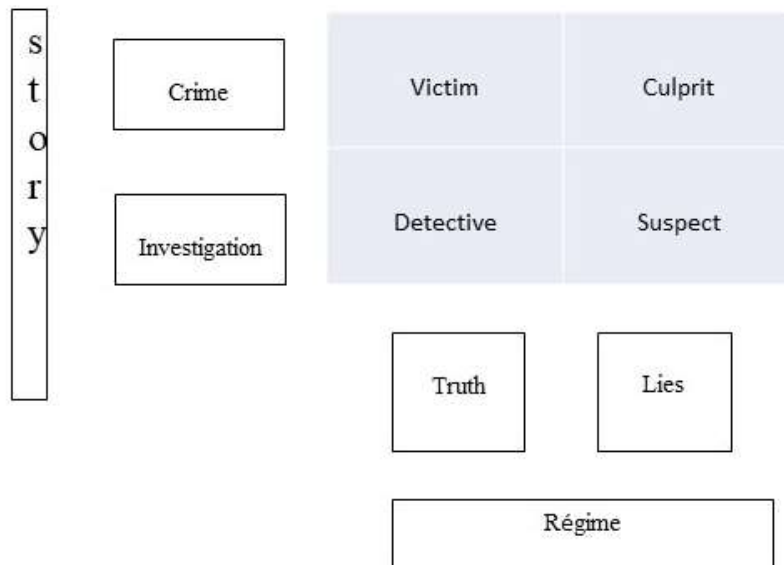
Figure 16: Dubois's hermeneutic square (2005: 92; my translation)

This hermeneutic structure leads Dubois to claim that 'the detective novel functions like a spinning wheel of roles' ('le roman policier est un tourniquet de rôles') (*ibid.*; my translation), a phrase that may easily be applied to the neo-Victorian novel, and its own anxious exploration of fragmented identity. Indeed, neo-Victorian novels simply twist the play on archetypes and structure that Fabienne Soldini, a French sociologist, observes. For Soldini, Agatha Christie's novels, for instance, work on two levels, first on a formal 'level in which characters seem to obey their formal definition: they are defined by their actions and correspond to their definition. […] Form plays on readers' preconceptions' (1996: 79; my translation).[119] Conversely, the second level, the structural one, is 'based on an aesthetic game *i.e.* a play on appearances: things are not as they seem, hence two characters presented as formally distinct can merge together. […] To be able to play this game requires both metalinguistic and intertextual competences' (*ibid.*; my translation).[120] Dubois's semiotic categories may fit the neo-Victorian novel, but in this case the square is not fixed: not only do the structural elements merge (for instance in *Drood*, where Dickens and Collins each take on the different functions of detective, victim and criminal), but the stress is also put on the self-reflective activity of the reader:

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[119] 'Dans le niveau formel, les personnages ont l'air d'obéir à leur définition formelle: ils sont définis par leurs actions et correspondent à leur définition. […] La forme joue avec les préjugés courants du lecteur.'

[120] 'Le niveau structural se base sur un jeu esthétique c'est-à-dire un jeu sur les apparences: les choses ne sont pas ce qu'elles ont l'air d'être et il peut par exemple s'opérer une fusion entre deux personnages présentés comme formellement distincts […]. Il requiert pour y jouer des compétences métalangagières et intertextuelles.'
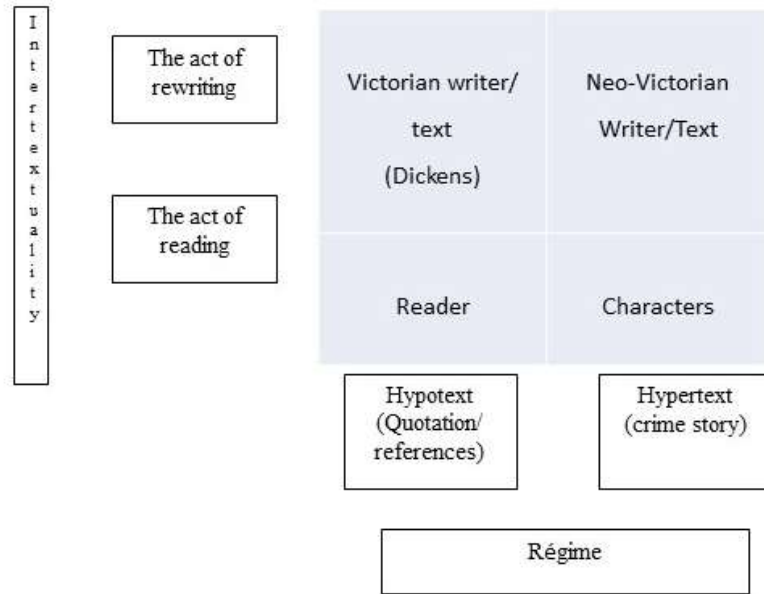
Figure 17: Neo-Victorian hermeneutic square

Just as the detective tries to find the truth about the death of the victim by identifying the culprit after questioning the suspects, the reader of neo-Victorian fiction looks for clues leading to, in our case, Dickens (his texts as well as himself) while reading about (*i.e.* questioning, decoding, to use Dubois's terminology) the characters (suspects) created by the neo-Victorian writer, the latter replacing the culprit. Neo-Victorian writers thus bring to the fore the self-reflective and inherent quality of detective fiction, especially its play on the dramatisation of narration and reading. The detective mode seems to formulate the 'anxiety of influence' as neo-Victorian writers emulate the image of the writer as criminal. For S.E. Sweeney, the latter emerges as 'a Byronic figure [and] […] [a]ccording to this Romantic view, art itself is a kind of crime, a secretive act in which man presumes to create as if he himself were God' (1990: 8). The roles are thus slightly displaced: Dickens is not only the starting point of the story (as hypotext) but also its destination: rewriting Dickens, be it his texts or his life, is an invitation to (re)read, to go back to his novels, to his biographies, just as the victim of the detective novel both triggers the narration and an investigation/reading of his/her life. As such, neo-Victorian fiction can be said to mediate Victorian texts for twenty-first century readers as various critics have shown (Hadley 2010: 117, Dvorak 2009: 358-369). The characters, like suspects, form an opaque screen that conceals the neo-Victorian writer who thematises the act of rewriting in the crime story. The shift from detective plot to plotting intertextuality is flaunted in *Tom-All-Alone's*.

2. Detection and riddles: the plot of *Tom-All-Alone's*

In detective fiction, the villain and the detective play hide and seek. In our corpus, *Tom-All-Alone's* is the novel that comes closest to the detective formula defined by Dubois. This 'neo-Victorian thriller set in a grim Londonscape' (Costantini 2015: 178) revolves around four riddles: the protagonist, Charles Maddox, is asked by Tulkinghorn, a lawyer, to investigate pen letters; he is called by policemen when several babies' bodies are found in a churchyard; he investigates the disappearance of Mr Chadwick's grand-daughter; and he is haunted by the abduction of his own sister long ago. This entails a spinning-wheel of suspects, and victims whose bodies haunt the text (Chadwick's daughter, the babies, but also murdered prostitutes). As Susan K. Martin observes, such multiple riddles and scattered bodies point out the fact that '[d]etective fiction is a genre particularly suited to the desire for Victorian closure and tying up of threads, and to the neo-Victorian complications of that desire' (2015: 216).

The text follows the pattern of the hermeneutic quest defined by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*: it formulates one or several enigmas and brings us close to a solution several times, but delays the answer through dramatic peripeteia or 'dilatory morphemes' (1970: 75).[121] For instance, Charles manages, against all odds, to trace the letters, but finds that the sender and the inn where he was staying have been burnt and Lizzie, the prostitute and 'Informer, undercover agent, decoy, spy' (153-154), is stabbed before she can deliver information. Such delays turn reading into a guessing game. Prompted to guess (by the cultural and symbolic codes defined by Barthes, but also the proairetic code, actions that lead us to expect reactions or further deeds), the reader becomes engrossed in his/her own hermeneutic quest. In the end, Shepherd stages a series of dramatic discoveries: the case of the threatening letters and the Chadwick case prove to have been one and the same, while full closure is denied since the mystery of the protagonist's missing sister is not solved. Shepherd's novel thus teases the reader and builds up suspense, along chapters entitled 'Turn of the Screw', 'Closing In' or 'The Pursuit'.

However, the text's allusions to Dickens (for instance, Charles visits slums known to Dickens, while the narrator observes 'Charles Dickens himself will make almost exactly this journey in a few months' time' (92)) repeatedly suggest that the secret which slips out of control and calls attention to itself is not simply the riddles Charles must solve as a detective, but the

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[121] The part of *S/Z* from which I am quoting here has been very influential for both French and English detection theory, its translation by Richard Miller is reproduced in the anthology *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (eds.), Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers: New York, 1983: 118-121.

game structured by intertextual allusions. Buried on top of each other in the churchyard in *Tom-All-Alone's*, the babies' bodies materialise layers of mystery, a fitting image for a novel composed as a complex palimpsest with multiple layers. Shepherd harps on the conception of *Bleak House* as a novel about connections as she adapts Dickens's famous omniscient hermeneutic question to her novel:

> But what deadly link can it be that binds these two men [Lord Cremorne and Boscawen] men so wide asunder? 'Only connect' is proving a difficult aphorism to follow, and Charles has been forced, however reluctantly, to park the idea for the present, merely for lack of avenues to pursue. (180-181)

Dickens's 'miniature version of the interconnectedness of people in all levels of society' (J. H. Miller 1971: 12) takes on a further layer of meaning here as Shepherd's palimpsestic text points to copresence and, with proximation (note the anachronistic car metaphor), to connections between the Victorian past and our present.

3. Intertextual riddles

The novel thus calls for the kind of decoding that I defined in Figure 17, where the reader of neo-Victorian fiction looks for clues leading to Dickens's texts, while reading about (*i.e.* questioning, decoding, to use Dubois's terminology) the characters (or suspects) created by the neo-Victorian writer. This is signalled by the title, *Tom-All-Alone's*, borrowed from *Bleak House* (in the latter, Jo, the crossing-sweeper, lives in the destitute Tom-All-Alone's). In fact, the novel was given a British and an American title, the latter being *Solitary House.* As Paul Graham puts it in his review of the novel: 'Dickens considered, but discarded, *Tom-All-Alone's* as the title for his novel of 1851-3. Lynn Shepherd appropriates it for this homage to *Bleak House*, together with that novel's chapter headings and many of its characters' (2012: 256). 'Solitary House' was also amongst the list of provisional titles Dickens jotted down for his novel. In Shepherd's case, the British title 'highlight[s] the existing alignment of *Bleak House* around the graveyard in which Nemo is buried as the centre of the city and the focus of the narrative' (Martin 2015: 217), whereas the American title points more straightforwardly towards the site of the secret, Hester's narrative and the asylum in Hampstead. The duality embedded in these two titles is fitting. Like *Bleak House*, *Tom-All-Alone's* follows an apparently dual plotline, and alternates chapters devoted to Charles Maddox and chapters narrated by 'Hester', replacing Dickens's Esther, in the 'Solitary House', substituted for 'Bleak House'. In *Tom-All-Alone's*, Shepherd presents her readers with rhizomatic intertextuality, ranging from, amongst others, Poe's 'Purloined Letter' and Doyle's 'A Scandal in Bohemia'

and 'Five Orange Pips', or Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor,* to allusions to the Ratcliffe Highway Murders (which Thomas De Quincey discusses in *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*) and the Jack the Ripper Case, not to mention, of course, *Bleak House* and Dickens's fictionalisations of Field in his journalistic works or Willkie Collins's *The Woman in White.* Shepherd thus inscribes her novel into the tradition of detection, since she builds a structural dialogue with the characteristic proto-detective novels of Dickens and Collins, and with the shocking, sensational cases of the nineteenth century (the Ratcliffe Highway Murders and Jack the Ripper, cases in which there either was no resolution, or the resolution proved highly problematic and led to a miscarriage of justice).[122] Charles also looks for the man who wrote the letters in Bermondsey, which may also refer to 'the Bermondsey horror', *i.e.* the famous case of the servant, Marie Manning, who killed her lover (Dickens witnessed her executionand based Hortense, Lady Dedlock's maid, on her).[123] Charles's reading through his uncle's former files, or prying into Tulkinghorn's boxes of papers, may be read as a metatextual image of the way in which Shepherd revisits former 'cases' or texts; like the analysis of the tanner's smell of the letters that Charles investigates, the moment in which Charles's uncle discusses the Ratfcliffe Highway Murders (*TAA*: 67-70) is a typical instance of deduction, or ratiocination (in the manner of Poe's Dupin or Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes), mingled with a signature anachronism, an allusion to P.D. James's re-reading of the case, obliquely referred to as 'one of our most revered crime novelists' and 'the Baroness of Holland Park' (68). The 'Bermondsey horror' is an intertextual nod that also connects to *The Woman in White,* in which it is used by Marian Halcombe as a comparison with Count Fosco when giving examples of mean fat people:

> I have invariably combated both these absurd assertions [that fat people are always nice] by quoting examples of fat people who were as mean, vicious, and cruel as the leanest and the worst of their neighbours. I have asked whether Henry the Eighth was an amiable character? Whether Pope Alexander the Sixth was a good man? Whether *Mr Murderer and Mrs Murderess Manning* were not both unusually stout people? […] Holding these strong opinions on the subject with might and main as I do at this

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[122] Of course, whether or not *Bleak House* may be considered as a detective novel is a moot point. While Wilkie Collins's works, especially *The Moonstone*, are often cited as first representatives of the genre in England, it is not necessarily so for Dickens's *Bleak House*. If, on the one hand, English critics (amongst whom Philip Collins (1962: 204)) readily recognise Dickens's novel and articles as the works that paved the way for the detective genre to come, on the other hand, French critics of the detective novel show a tendency to associate his work alongside Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (Reuter 2017: 105, Dubois 2005: 14). Jacqueline Banerjee clearly crosses out *Bleak House* from the sphere of detective fiction (2013: n.p.).

[123] 'I believe that a sight so inconceivably awful as the wickedness and levity of the immense crowd collected at that execution this morning could be imagined by no man, and could be presented in no heathen land under the sun' (*Letters* November 13, 1849: 646). In his letter to *The Times¸* Dickens made a strong case against public executions, which he considered as an obscene spectacle. There is a similar scene in *Dickens and Dickens*, with a twist, as Dickens and Charlie attend the execution of 'Mary Crump' who mistakes Dickens for Charley. The former is appalled by the spectacle and ventriloquises the aforementioned letter (*D&Da*: 46-49). For a detailed account concerning Manning cf. Albert Borowitz, *The Woman Who Murdered Black Satin: The Bermondsey Horror,* Ohio State University Press, 1981.

moment, here, nevertheless, is Count Fosco, as fat as Henry the Eighth himself, established in my favour, at one day's notice, without let or hindrance from his own odious corpulence. Marvellous indeed! (*WW*: 239-40; my emphasis)[124]

The consequence of this dialogic stance is that the neo-Victorian text seems to be fashioning a Model Reader who must be a well-read criminologist, perhaps akin to an academic reader. Indeed, the acknowledgements of the novel identify the reader as a 'Dickens devotee', an expert (355).

Of course, such intertextuality is, up to a point, a feature of the detective genre. As Uri Eisenzweig argues, the detective novel is by essence intertextual, referring to other texts (and cultures) thereby claiming a generic appurtenance while asserting the superiority and originality of the narrative being told (1986: 169; 182). Demonstrating that the detective novel has, from the start, been conceived as a futureless genre because it is only interested in the past (that of the crime which the present narrative investigates), Eisenzweig asserts that:

> Thus, there is no possible future yet, at the very same time, there *must* be a past (previous crimes and puzzles) in relation to which is established a comparison and which would justify the use of superlatives – i.e. the detective novel, in one way or another, is always locating itself within a tradition, even when the latter does not exist (yet). (1986: 180; my translation, original emphasis)[125]

Eisenzweig's claim that the presence of intertextuality in the detective novel is motivated by content, 'previous crimes and puzzles', entails structural concerns: 'The detective reading contract can only work within an intertextual framework since surprise can only arise in relation to a pre-established horizon of expectations' (171; my translation).[126] This key aspect concerning the detective novel is also a key to the neo-Victorian novel. The reading contract specific to neo-Victorian fiction relies on intertextuality, to create horizons of expectations from which it deviates, so as to surprise the reader (and one shall recall that surprise is one of the functions of the detective novel).

On the other hand, the neo-Dickensian novel inserts itself in a more critical dialogue with the past, embodied by Victorian texts. Using the actual names of Dickens's characters, Shepherd plays with her Model Reader who is expected to look for displacement and/or distortions, as she considerably changes the role of each character whose name the reader may

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[124] The association of Fosco's corpulence with his villainy is at the centre of current debates over the 'sexing-up' of his character in the recent BBC adaptation of the novel. Cf. Hannah Furness, 'BBC sexed up *Woman in White* to swap "odious corpulence" of fat Count Fosco for "boyband" heartthrob', *The Telegraph*, 06/05/2018, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/06/bbc-sexed-woman-white-swap-odious-corpulence-fat-count-fosco/

[125] 'Il n'y a donc pas d'avenir possible mais en même temps, il *doit* y avoir un passé (les crimes et problèmes qui précèdent) par rapport auquel s'établit la comparaison et se justifient les superlatifs – c'est à dire que le récit policier, d'une manière ou d'une autre, se situe toujours dans une tradition, même si celle-ci n'existe pas (encore).'

[126] 'Le contrat de lecture policier ne peut fonctionner que dans un cadre intertextuel car il n'y a surprise que par rapport à un horizon d'attente déjà bien établi.'

recognise. Bucket is only one instance in this process; we might also mention Tulkinghorn, who no longer seeks out the secrets of others but undertakes to hide his own secret and incestuous relation with his daughter Hester thus fleshing out an aspect of the character that remains unexplored in the hypotext as John Carey suggests: 'Tulkinghorn represents the power and the secrecy of the law. […] Since his secrets are secret, there is no telling how many he holds' (1991: 177). Similarly, Shepherd's anagram Esther/Hester signals that while structurally the role of Hester is the same as Esther's in Dickens's novel, her story is different, inverted as through a glass darkly (I shall dwell on this in Chapter 3). Here, Field's name may be read as a clue, as the term 'field' refers to an area of study or research. Dickens had already played on this polysemy when evoking his slumming tours, as is observed by Paul Schlicke: 'Dickens referred to these expeditions as "field-days", and Bucket, ready to expose Hortense, also prepares for a "field-day"' (2011: 240). In the same way, Shepherd's choice of name for her main character, 'Charles,' cannot be a mere coincidence: Shepherd echoes Dickens and, to a certain extent, pastiches Dickens's own play with his name in *David Copperfield*, the initials of the protagonist being the reverse of the author's.[127]

In other words, this creates a dialogue or dialogism, to use the Bakhtinian term, which supposes not only a movement backward but also forward. Indeed, the neo-Victorian novel modulates the dual structure of the detective novel first identified by Todorov in his 'Typology'. The detective story is composed of two narratives, one set in the past and associated with the victim and the murder, the other, that of the investigation, set in the present (1978: 11-12). As far as neo-Victorian novels are concerned, the plot of the crime becomes less important, to a certain extent, than the intertextual source that becomes the past 'story' which must be retrieved. As such, they double and emulate the nature of 'plotting' (Sweeney 1990: 5). The absent narrative, that of the crime, thus turns out to be the hypotext, or, perhaps more accurately, the act of *rewriting* the hypotext. The neo-Victorian novel is indeed this impossible narrative, to borrow Eisenzweig's formula, which narrates what it tries to silence. The traces of the hypotext to be found in the text are similar to clues, both hiding and revealing and thus, engaging the reader in a reading contract which defines him/her as a detective. Thus, a double process of investigation appears in neo-Victorian detective novels: one undertaken by the protagonists and, another undertaken by the reader, the former often crystallising/thematising the latter.

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[127] This also furthers Shepherd's intertextual relationship with John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant Woman*, as the name of her protagonist echoes that of Fowles's novel, Charles Smithson.

4. A spectral Field: narratological absence

The neo-Victorian novel conjures up various detectives from the past. Hence the 'cameo' appearance of Wilkie Collins's Sergeant Cuff from *The Moonstone* in *Tom-All-Alone's*:

> The second officer comes up now and stands behind him, watchful but silent. Charles thinks he's seen him before but can't remember his name. Clough, is it, or Cuss? Something like that anyway. His face is as sharp as a hatchet and his skin as dry as an autumn leaf. (*TAA*: 11)[128]

Though this is the only reference to Collins's character, the passage is not to be dismissed. It partakes of the intertextual strategy of the detective novel: indeed, it contributes to the inscription of the text in a detective genealogy, as *The Moonstone* is considered by many as one of the first detective novels. Furthermore, the ironic paronomasia Clough/Cuss/Cuff shifts from the sense of control conveyed by the 'handcuffs' to the swearing contained in the term 'cuss' and, finally, clumsiness entailed by the term 'clough' which designates a slippery ravine ('Clough'; 'Cuss' *OED*). The comicality here is yet another trace of Shepherd's recycling of Dickensian techniques as it echoes the irony of Inspector Bucket's own name, an irony that is identified by Jacqueline Banerjee: 'Inspector Bucket, as suggested by his rather comical name, makes it his business to dredge up all sorts of secrets — and is also a repository of many of the attributes later associated with fictional detectives' (2013: n.p.). This short example shows how intertextuality, in Shepherd's novel, creates a rhizomatic way of reading, both pointing to the form/genealogy of the text and giving the reader clues as to the plot itself.

Another case in point is Inspector Field, a character that, as we have seen, shines in Dickens's articles, but fares rather badly in biographies on Dickens. In Lynn Shepherd's novel, Field is also dismissed to the margins of the text, and remains in the wings, so to speak. Dickens's aforementioned 1851 article 'On Duty with Inspector Field', almost opens with the question: 'Where is Inspector Field?' (*SJ*: 306) (in Dickens's article, he then becomes ubiquitous). This question could be applied to the whole novel in which the name of the inspector is called upon in five passages only: each time the inspector himself is not present as characters merely mention his name. In the first occurrence, Field's name is used to trigger the

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[128] Shepherd attenuates the description by skimming the polysyndeton and the accumulation, keeping only the striking details that the careful reader will be able to spot: 'His face was as sharp as a hatchet, and the skin of it was as yellow and dry and withered as an autumn leaf' (*M*: 96).

action when he sends word about the discovery of babies' bodies in a crammed London churchyard:

> 'Message for you, Mr Maddox. From Inspector Field.
> 'Wait there – I'm coming down.
> The message, when he [Charles] gets it, is no more than two scrawled lines, but such a brevity is only to be expected from such a man, and in such circumstances.
> 'The inspector thought you'd like to see for y'self, sir,' says Batten, […]. 'Before we do the necessary. Seeing as you're taking an in interest in the Chadwick case.'
> 'Tell Inspector Field that I am indebted to him. I will be there directly.' (*TAA*: 5)

This passage truly triggers the plot of the novel: until then, the narration was devoted to the introduction of its protagonist Charles Maddox, the 'Young Man' of the chapter's title. The message thus breaks the descriptive opening and sets Charles on a new track in the case he is investigating. In fact, before Batten's interruption, Charles was writing a letter which, as the reader is made to infer, acknowledges a failure: 'So engrossed is he – so concerned to find words that will keep hope in check but keep it, nonetheless, alive' (4-5). Thus, Inspector Field's message opens up a new direction and possibilities, renews hope for the protagonist while stirring the curiosity of the reader who has never heard of the Chadwick case before. The use of the name Chadwick is an interesting extratextual echo conferring a topical quality to Charles's investigation, as it is the name of the public health reformer Edwin Chadwick, who worked on the reform of the poor laws (1834-1846) and enforced the Public Health Act (1848). Chadwick believed in the miasma theories, a theory which, as we have seen in chapter one, Shepherd re-invests in the depiction of the churchyard and streets (Bloy 2002: n.p.). Field is thus characterised from the start as pointing the way, positioning Charles as a subordinate as the latter relies on the favours of the former. Field's authority stems from Charles's debt to him, but also from his almost God-like position, outside the case (and indeed outside the story). The characters are constantly forwarding information from and to him: 'I will forward my report to Inspector Field in due course' (*TAA*: 195). The reference to Field is both a quotation and a means to produce a sense of verisimilitude. Shepherd lends the tone of Dickens's closing remarks in his article 'Detective Police Party' to Charles's thoughts: 'Such are the curious coincidences and such is the peculiar ability, always sharpening and being improved by practice, and always adapting itself to every variety of circumstances' (*SJ*: 261). The anaphoric repetition of 'such', ('but *such* a brevity is only to be expected from *such* a man, and in *such* circumstances' (*TAA*: 5; my emphasis)) imitates the emphatic rhythm used by Dickens.

The authority of the inspector is displaced when Charles arrives at the churchyard and is met by another policeman, Sam Wheeler:

It's Sam Wheeler – Cockney chipper and as quick as ginger. They worked together for six months out of St Giles Station House. It was Wheeler who'd taught him the ways of the London underworld, and Wheeler who'd been at his side the night Field first took him to Rat's Castle and the rookeries. (9)

The trope of transmission is here introduced on two levels: explicitly, by the reference to Charles's training and discovery of London's slums with Wheeler (and not Field); implicitly, transmission and legacy comes forth through the palimpsest and the pastiche as a *literary* transmission. Sam Wheeler is quite an obvious reference to one of Dickens's most famous characters, Sam Weller from *Pickwick Papers*. His name refers to the wheel thus conveying the idea of movement, guidance. The rhythm and the consonance 'Cockney chipper' and 'quick as ginger' are reminiscent of Cockney slang.[129] The mentions of St Giles, Rat's Castle and the rookeries in Shepherd's novel are again an echo of 'On Duty' in which St Giles's clock is omnipresent, timing the exploration of the slums: 'Saint Giles's clock strikes nine. We are punctual' (*SJ*: 306) or 'Saint Giles's clock strikes half-past ten. We stoop low, and creep down a precipitous flight of steps into a dark close cellar' (308). Shepherd's (almost compulsive) endless returns to or repetitions of Dickens's texts are thus part of her recreation of the detective mode. As Eco points out, the detective novel offers the 'artisanat' of an occurrence that repeats itself, a feature that appeals to the postmodern aesthetic (Eco 1994: 11; 22-24). This repetition occurs in neo-Dickensian fiction through the return to Dickens, the use of a detective structure as well as, most strikingly, through intertextual repetition: quotations undertake a new value as echoes of the past.

However, Shepherd's reference to Field is a far cry from Dickens's article. In the latter, St Giles's clock paces the text and the protagonists' exploration of the slums and is directly associated with Inspector Field, theatrically announcing his arrival and playing with the codes of sensation fiction:

Presently, a sensation at the Station House door. Mr Field, gentlemen!
Inspector Field comes in, wiping his forehead, for he is a burly figure, and has come fast from the ores and metals of the deep mines of the earth, and from the Parrot Gods of the Sea Islands, and from the birds and beetles of the tropics, and from the Arts of Greece and Rome, and from the Sculptures of Nineveh, and from the traces of the elder world, when these were not. (*SJ*: 307)

Dickens thus bestows upon Field an ancestral authority and lineage, starting with a secular reference to recent scientific discoveries gradually replaced by ancient myths. The effect produces a mystical image of the detective while insisting on the precursory quality of Field's work, and thereby, Dickens emphasises the originality of his own work: it is the very first time

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[129] Later in the novel as Charles is found on a murder scene, Sam ventriloquises Field: 'Well, you found 'er [*sic*.], didn't you? Remember what Inspector Field always says – he who 'appens[*sic*.] on it 'appen done it. And I mean – look at you' (193). Thus, Charles is not only incriminated by his discovery of Lizzie's corpse but also by the aphorism, the word of the (absent) inspector.

such an article is being published. There is an insistence on verticality while Field passes through ages. The mythical quality of the inspector is then extended to the bull's eye lanterns used by the different officers, 'Rogers is ready, strapped and great-coated, with a flaming eye, in the middle of his waist, like a deformed Cyclops' (307), from which the poor and criminals cannot escape.[130] Inescapability appears with the personification of the lantern, 'the eye', and the anaphoric use of 'all': 'Inspector Field's eye is the roving eye that searches every corner of the cellar as he talks. […] All watch him, all answer when addressed, all laugh at his jokes, all seek to propitiate him' (308). Sight is ubiquitous in the article, presented as this single accusing 'flaming eye' (the expression appears five times) and numerous are the verbs and adjectives denoting surveillance.[131]

In Shepherd's text, on the contrary, the inspector vanishes. The bells of the city no longer pace his progress but offer an image of rewriting, with 'their hourly catechism of answer and reply', so that 'the silence that descends is electric with after-echo' (*TAA*: 136). Rewriting is thus akin to a resonance that strikes the reader as an electric shock would. The contrast between the striking and ubiquitous authority of the inspector in 'On Duty' and his spectral presence in *Tom-All-Alone's* weakens the figure of Field, to create a symptomatic narratological emptiness in the neo-Victorian text. However much the inspector may be used by Shepherd as an intertextual trace, the last occurrence of his name utterly debunks his authority, confirming the deviation from the model established by Dickens's articles, thwarting readers' expectations. In chapter 17, Charles Maddox digs further into the blackmail case and attempts to use the privileges granted to him by Field to access a file. However, this is denied by a Bow-Street constable: '"Look, sir," he says with a practised theatrical sigh, "you *say* you know Inspector Field, […] but he's not *my* inspector, and *my* inspector would take a pretty dim view of me divulging anything in our files without the proper authority"' (231, italics in the text). The emphasis on 'say' and 'my' stresses the theatrical tone of the constable but also undermines Field's authority, implying that Charles's relation to Field is suspicious and not right. Quite

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[130] The mythical aspect of the Inspector is kept throughout as later Dickens compares him to Moses in a reference to the plagues of Egypt (Exodus 8-12), turning the blood painted on the Israelites' door posts into the bureaucracy's 'Red Tape': 'With such scenes at our doors, with all the plagues of Egypt tied up with bits of cobweb in kennels so near our homes, we timorously make our Nuisance Bills and Boards of Health, nonentities, and think to keep away the Wolves of Crime and Filth, by our electioneering ducking to little vestrymen and our gentlemanly handling of Red Tape!' (*SJ*: 310) The reference to the Bible is obviously ironic, showing the inefficiency of the legislative reforms.

[131] This might also recall a specific passage in Virginia Woolf's essay 'Street Haunting: A London Adventure' (1939) in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942). I am referring to the passage in which the narrator depicts the inhabitants of Holborn and Soho (22-23). Another topos called upon here is the Asmodian vision which we have discussed in chapter 1.

interestingly, it is the last reference to Dickens's real-life inspector who then is replaced by his fictional counterpart, Inspector Bucket.

5. A detective party

Shepherd's plot revolves around three detective figures, Charles Maddox, Uncle Maddox and Inspector Bucket, a choice which contrasts with *Bleak House*, in which it may be said that everyone plays detective at some point, be it Bucket, or of course, Tulkinghorn, Guppy, and Richard. Shepherd explores three key detective figures of the nineteenth century. I contend that the number of detective figures present in the novel is a way for Shepherd to negotiate the empty place left by the mythical Inspector Field (and by the authority he stood for in Dickens's articles). Whereas Field is characterised as Charles's benefactor, and is recognised as such by the latter, Bucket is shown as Charles's antagonist – Bucket dismissed Charles from the police, forcing him to turn to private investigations (23). The opposition that lies between the two detectives is epistemic as it concerns their method of investigation. It is on the ground of epistemic differences that Shepherd presents her readers with three main types of detective: the thief-taker represented by uncle Maddox, the private detective, *i.e*. Charles and, the official police detective, Bucket.

To begin with, Shepherd's Inspector Bucket cannot but recall Dickens's own, and through him, Field. Indeed, correlation between the real inspector Field and the fictional inspector Bucket has been observed by many a critic; Albert Hutter, for instance, considers this relation in terms of acting and disguising.[132] According to him:

> The ability to impersonate, to identify with, and to reproduce the idiosyncratic behaviour of the criminal, characterizes the way in which Dickens portrayed Bucket's original, Inspector Field. Like Bucket, Field uses his knowledge to pierce to the very heart of a labyrinthine city and identify that larger disease which affects all levels of society. (1975: 194)

The similarity in Dickens's representation of the two detectives is given a twist in Shepherd's novel. In *Tom-All-Alone's*, Bucket's appearance has been heralded since the beginning of the novel: but like Field, Bucket looms at first in the background of Charles's investigations (in *Bleak House* too his appearance is postponed: he is mentioned for the first time in chapter XXII). Initially, he appears to have changed sides, as Charles mistrust and resents him, believing him to be responsible for the execution of an innocent and for his own dismissal from

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[132] Philip Collins also points out this correlation while warning against a simple equation between the historical man and the fictitious character (1962: 207).

the police. Yet the reader gradually discovers that he fulfils the same narratological function as Field since he too points the way: he recommends Charles's services to Tulkinghorn (*TAA*: 23), thus opening the second plotline of the narrative focusing on Charles. He also appears in the nick of time in the end to save Charles, becoming the *deus ex machina* a proper detective should be. This simultaneous distortion and similarity underlines the recycling of names, which partakes of the intertextual game.

When he first appears in *Bleak House,* Inspector Bucket is characterised in terms denoting the supernatural: 'a ghostly manner of appearing' (*BH*: 328). His sudden presence in Tulkinghorn's chamber does not make sense for Snagsby, nor does it for the reader, who thought the latter was alone with the lawyer:

> Mr. Snagsby is dismayed to see, standing with an attentive face between himself and the lawyer at a little distance from the table, a person with a hat and stick in his hand who was not there when he himself came in and has not since entered by the door or by either of the windows. There is a press in the room, but its hinges have not creaked, nor has a step been audible upon the floor. Yet this third person stands there with his attentive face, and his hat and stick in his hands, and his hands behind him, a composed and quiet listener. He is a stoutly built, steady-looking, sharp-eyed man in black, of about the middle-age. (*ibid*.)

In this description, the detective seems to gradually detach himself from the setting, with the shift from a face to a person. The lack of audible evidence of the detective's entrance in the study echoes the locked-room motif (Poe's 'Murder in the Rue Morgue', the first of this kind, was published in 1841). The detective thus appears as an immaterial body without influence on his surroundings, reduced to a face, eyes and mind. The 'attentive face', the 'hat and stick', as well as 'his sharped-eyed' look are picked up by Shepherd: 'Bucket looks at [Charles] with his habitual attentiveness' (*TAA*: 272); 'the stout Bucket with his eagle eyes, and the others struck with wild surmise' (312). Encoded in this depiction is another intertextual trace, a pastiche of Keats's sonnet 'On First looking Into Chapman's Homer':

> Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
> He star'd at the Pacific — and all his men
> Look'd at each other with a wild surmise —
> Silent, upon a peak in Darien. (1816: 12)

Introducing a Romantic topos in her novel, Shepherd, with this pastiche, also harps on the idea of transposition, translation and appropriation since it is Chapman's translation which enables Keats to discover Homer's text and thus to embark, with the reader, on an exploration. It also furthers Keats's rhetoric of association, 'striking its readers almost as a remembrance' (Mc Nally 1980: 532). If characters in detective novels are often considered to be flat and mechanical, especially in early criticism of the genre (Haycraft 1942: 246) – Shepherd's detective deepens through self-reflexivity in this intertextual telescoping.

Types overlap in *Tom-All-Alone's* as Shepherd re-negotiates the figure of the detective to articulate and arrange different ways of reading. Thus, Shepherd stimulates her readers by playing with typology. The collocation of these three types is also a way for Shepherd to engage with legacy and legitimacy. Indeed, legacy is what characterises the relation between Charles and his uncle from the start:

> That's what he's [Charles] good at: using his eyes and applying his mind – just as he was taught by his great-uncle Maddox, the celebrated thief-taker. His parents had named him Charles in Maddox's honour [….]. 'Charles Maddox' he is then, the second of that name, but his parents could hardly have expected he would want to emulate his predecessor in a far more significant way and take up the same base calling. (*TAA*: 10)

The passage is marked by images of transmission, in terms of method, profession and onomastics. The name 'Charles Maddox' thus takes on a double value: first, that of glory when signifying the uncle ('celebrated', 'Maddox's honour'), then, of comparison when signifying Charles ('the second of the name', 'his predecessor').[133] The relation between the two men is one of correlation and likeness, almost as if they were doubles, as can be inferred from the terms 'second', 'emulate' and 'the same base calling'. This transmission revolves around a key topos of detective fiction: pattern. This is what the omniscient narrator suggests in the following excerpt: 'It may even be – though Maddox has never considered this – that the protégé has patterned himself on the mentor in this, as much as in so much else' (73). The image is also self-reflective, denoting the copy and the original but also the act of rewriting. Indeed, it can be no coincidence that at the end of *Bleak House*, as Esther and Inspector Bucket are looking for Lady Dedlock, the inspector should define the young woman using the same term: 'you're a pattern' (*BH*: 834). The effect is, in *Tom-All-Alone's,* to give additional weight to underlying narrative threads and intertextual traces (at the end of the novel, it is also quite telling that the image should be used again when Charles finally understands the connection between Hester, Tulkinghorn and Cremorne). This is yet another example of the need for the detective to belong to a tradition, a genealogy, as Shepherd creates a familial background for her protagonist. It also helps to historically ground the characters. The adjective 'base' used as a determiner for Maddox's profession reflects the general opinion on thief-takers. In the passage elided in the above quotation, Shepherd inserts a historical comment, the effect of which is twofold:

> Maddox might have made a lot of money out of his chosen profession, but it was not one well regarded by the middle classes. Not then, when Maddox was practising, in the early years of the century, and certainly not now. But then again, the Victorian bourgeoisie can rely on a properly constituted police force, which is a luxury their grandparents never had. Thief-taking may never have been a particularly

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[133] There is however a contrast, if not a paradox, between the celebration of the thief-taker and the undermining of the nature of his work ('base calling'). Charles's parents thus seem to sneer at the profession, a further link between Shepherd's protagonist and Fowles's. Indeed, the latter break with the family's tradition as he refuses to hunt or to take part in political life to instead devote himself to geology (1977: 16-17).

respectable occupation, but it was an essential one, nevertheless, and all too often the only bulwark between order and anarchy. (*TAA*: 10)

At the level of characterisation, the passage defines Maddox as an eccentric, liminal figure: at once necessary and despised. The passage ventriloquises nineteenth-century opinion on the issue. While Charles muses on the evolution of the Victorian police system, the passage is also aimed at the twenty-first-century reader who might not be aware of this historical dimension. The eccentricity of uncle Maddox casts light on Charles who, after an attempt at following a respectable profession (the reader is told that at first, he 'reluctantly agreed to follow his father into medicine') turns to his real vocation in 'The Detective' (11).[134]

Charles and his uncle thus stand at the two opposite extremes of the spectrum, Maddox belonging to the past system and Charles to a new, independent form of detection. The temporal gap is emphasised by Maddox's old age and his dementia. For the time being, I wish to look at Maddox's condition metaphorically, as a way of mirroring and stressing the narratological pattern at work in detective stories: his sudden lapses point to a structure in which clues appear and vanish, and the solution is hinted at but repeatedly withdrawn until the final revelation. Maddox's disease enacts the repeated blanks, the constant erasure that lies at the heart of detection, possibly a postmodern take on Iser's 'blanks' (2002: 293-294). Maddox is therefore the epitome of the paradoxical detective, doomed to fail because he cannot remember. Indeed, the detective, by definition, is the one character in search of truth and the past. Thus, this condition creates a paradox, an irony as the past becomes irretrievable due to the increasing memory loss. Presenting us with such a figure, Shepherd is tackling twenty-first-century issues while presenting us with the figure of the almighty (though sick) detective. Shepherd is not the first to use this figure: in 2005 the American author Mitch Cullin published a novel entitled *A Slight Trick of the Mind* which features an elderly Sherlock Holmes obsessed with a past case he cannot entirely remember. More recently, Emma Healey's novel *Elizabeth Is Missing* makes use of a narrator suffering from dementia and investigating both a present mystery, the disappearance of Elisabeth, and a past crime, the disappearance of her sister.[135] As far as nonfiction is concerned, it is impossible not to think of Oliver Sacks's analysis of the case of Howard Engel, discussed in *Mind's Eye* (2010). Engel happens to be a writer of detective fiction suffering from alexia sine agraphia, that is to say he cannot read anymore but is still able to write. Engel's case enables Sacks to assert that reading is not only attributable to the activity of

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[134] Interestingly enough, Charles's education plays with the parallelism one can see between detection and a diagnosis. Furthermore, it may be construed as a possible reference to Conan Doyle who worked as a doctor.
[135] For an analysis of the role of dementia in relation to detection in this novel cf. David Orr, 'Dementia and Detectives: Alzheimer's Disease in Crime Fiction', *Dementia*, 2018, 1-14.

one part of the brain (the visual word form area) but to other parts of the brain. It is thanks to this that Engel was able to overcome his disease, 'to explore new ways of trying to read', first, tracing letters with his fingers, then, with his tongue: 'Thus, by an extraordinary, metamodal, sensory-motor alchemy, Howard was replacing reading by a sort of writing. He was, in effect, reading with his tongue' (Sacks 2010: n.p.). After that, Engel was able to write two detective novels which feature 'his alter ego, the detective Benny Cooperman' who suffers from alexia and amnesia but whose 'powers of inference, however, are intact, and enable him to stitch together disparate clues, to figure out how he landed in the hospital and what happened in the mysterious few days he can no longer remember' (*ibid.*).[136] The recuperation of such experiences, in the rewriting of such a prominent figure as that of the detective, as an elderly patient suffering from Alzheimer's bears many implications concerning the form and reception of the detective novel, as it emphasises the contradictions of the genre in the impossibility to remember, while displacing the genre towards more biographical issues. The scope of this dissertation does not allow for a further discussion of this issue, yet it seems that a lot could be said in relation to this thematisation of Alzheimer's in the detective genre.[137]

It is important therefore to note that the disease does not entirely invalidate Shepherd's old detective; despite his recurrent fits of anger or helpless paralysis, he can still, at times, recollect the past, apply his method and transmit his knowledge to his nephew. In fact, the mention of the activity of detection seems to be the only way for Charles to reach his uncle (here again, dementia is being used to reflect on the dual temporality of the detective novel): 'It may be the magic word "case", or perhaps it's something in Charles's tone, but Maddox is suddenly alert' (83). The old detective holds some keys that could help Charles and the latter has to dig for them. He very often proves to be a better detective than Charles, cautious in his approach to criminals but his nephew does not care to listen:

> 'Take care, Charles,' he says eventually. 'I fear you will find neither child [he is referring to both Chadwick grand-child and Charles's sister] now, after all these years –'
> 'You're not the first to say that.'
> 'But you run a very great risk of losing your *self*' (73)

But, however much Charles may yearn for the help of his uncle ('ever since he saw the butchery done to Lizzie's ravaged body he's wanted to talk to Maddox, get advice from Maddox, elicit

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[136] The two novels referred to are *Memory book* (2005) and *The Man who Forgot How to Read* (2007).

[137] I am partly indebted to Armelle Parey for these remarks. Parey devotes part of her research on the contemporary novel to the representation of Alzheimer's. Her paper, 'Alzheimer's victims in fiction', delivered at the Université Caen Normandie in 2018, argues that there are two types of novels dealing with Alzheimer's victims. Novels which use Alzheimer's as a motif, as a secondary aspect of the plot and that only share the viewpoint of the victim's relatives. The other type incorporates the victim's viewpoint. Parey specifically discussed *Elisabeth Is Missing*, which she reads as a detective novel in which the position of the diseased as detective figure is empowering.

from Maddox some part of his unparalleled insight' (219)), Charles does not listen or pay attention to the events surrounding him. The narration keeps insisting on that point, Charles even becomes the victim of his own detractors as the following convoluted image shows:

> he walks the length of the Strand without being in the least aware that his footsteps are being followed, and all his movements as closely watched as if he, too, were a prize specimen – one no less worthy of scrupulous surveillance, but far more vulnerable to an observing but unobserved eye. (102)

He is therefore unable to foresee upcoming events, contrary to the clairvoyant observations of elderly Maddox, who draws the psychological portrait of the suspect – almost as a modern profiler would: 'the individual with whom we are dealing is a swift, skilled and ruthless killer. Of *men*. He is, by contrast, a slow, cruel and utterly depraved murderer of *women*. […] [A] man [demonstrating] […] an unhealthy relationship with the fairer sex' (223). However, his analysis is cut short by the return of an episode of dementia which crushes his authority as he turns into an old man 'kicking and biting and bawling profanities' (224).

Shepherd thus uses the whole range of nineteenth-century sleuths, Charles echoing the prototypical Sherlock Holmes, even though he fails to live up to his acumen. Like his Doylean counterpart, Charles is fond of sciences, a metonymy of investigation and discovery. He mocks a lecture on unicorns at the British museum but is fascinated by apiology:

> The accuracy is exceptional. The fragility of the shimmering stained-glass wings, the sharp serrations on the articulated legs, and the density of the improbably long and heavy body. In reality, this creature is barely an inch long, but at this magnification there's something faintly horrifying about the size of those eyes, and the monstrous efficiency of that hooked proboscis. And if you're wondering where we are, this is the third room of the Northern Zoological Gallery of the British Museum; we are by the table marked *Hymenoptera*, and we – like Charles – are looking at a display devoted to bees. (112)

Shepherd asks her reader to play along ('we', 'like Charles'). A pastiche of the sublime adds to the baffling description. The bee's body fascinates, an architectural work ('stained-glass wings', 'articulated', 'density') which does not quite make sense ('improbably') and turns into a 'monstrous' vision, though in the end 'this creature is barely an inch long'; the gaze must pick up clues, leading to delayed decoding, the solution of the visual riddle. Besides, Charles's room, before moving in with his uncle, is described as a 'perfect "cabinet of wonders"' (4) with its various exotic objects, stones, maps, a 'paraphernalia of personal effects' (63).[138] Shepherd links detection and science, and brings her reader's awareness to the part played by objects, as props, clues, or metonymies of the cultural code and context; but also, through these clichés, Shepherd asks her reader to show a 'willing suspension of impatience, scepticism, and

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[138] Susan K. Martin sees in this 'cabinet', and especially in the presence of a shrunken head another reminder of the underlining image of the novel: the alignment of the city with the necropolis so that, according to her, 'Shepherd's novel stabilises the *Bleak House* view of the city, and the slum within the city, appropriating Dickens's own lines to stress the corruption and fog of bureaucracy which causes the city to have such a putrid heart' (2015: 219).

discrimination, that will tolerate clichés, absurdities, stereotypes, and temporary abandonment of a normal sense of reality' (Dove 1990: 36). Objects as scientific enigmas fascinate Charles, a fascination he shares with Maddox but also with Tulkinghorn. Indeed, Charles's small 'cabinet of wonders' is echoed and amplified in Tulkinghorn's secret chambers, 'his private labyrinth, where there are artefacts seen only by him, and secrets known only to him, and spaces that no one but himself has ever penetrated' (*TAA*: 144). This epiphora ('by him', 'to him') recalls Dickens's description of the lawyer in chapter XXII:

> More impenetrable than ever, [Mr. Tulkinghorn] sits, and drinks, and mellows as it were in secrecy, pondering at that twilight hour on all the mysteries he knows, associated with darkening woods in the country, and vast blank shut-up houses in town, and perhaps sparing a thought or two for himself, and his family history, and his money, and his will—all a mystery to every one— (*BH:* 326)

Shepherd's novel seems to pry open the mystery of Tulkinghorn's life, turning him into the centre of an enigma, the villain of her detective novel. The lawyer's secret chambers truly turn into a puzzle, a *trompe l'oeil* as Charles and then Bucket are made to discover: 'in this hall of mirrors and distortions even the staircase are an elaborate hoax' (*TAA:* 313). The chamber in Shepherd's text thus echoes the eponymous character's locked chest of drawers in Dickens's novel. It is no wonder that Charles's desperate struggle with Robbie Mann, the murderer he was after, should take place precisely here, by the *trompe-l'oeil* staircase and mirror that function as metatextual emblems of the detective plot.

As Jean-Pierre Naugrette stresses, such narratives present detectives in the act of reading (thereby, it is not incidental that Charles's case should rely on letters) which reflects the reader's own activity as detective (2015: 19-26). Paper, the material support of these plots, is of importance. As Andrew Stauffer reminds his readers, paper is ubiquitous in the Victorian age, an omnipresence which finds its way into Dickens's work as a Gothic image, that of 'the necropolitan library'. The critic links archeological discoveries, especially Belzoni's, with the presence of paper in Dickens's text; focusing on *Bleak House*, Stauffer notes 'the grotesquerie, even the horror, of the overflowing and decaying material that is Krook's – and [Dickens's] own – stock-in-trade' (2007: paragraph 20).[139] Dickens offers a similar image of Tulkinghorn, who, like a mummy, seems to emerge from the piles of papers of the Court of Chancery as well as from dust (which associates him with the street): 'In his lowering magazine of dust, the universal article into which his papers and himself, and all his clients, and all things of earth, animate and inanimate, are resolving' (*BH*: 325). The use of the verb 'resolve' is ironic, playing on its second meaning, it points out the endlessness of the cases which merge, dissolve and find

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[139] On Dickens and paper, cf. also, Céline Prest*,* 'Le spectre du document : Supports, signes et sens dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Charles Dickens' (2016).

no resolution. In *Tom-All-Alone's*, Tulkinghorn keeps this association, featured in the letters. Most strikingly, Charles is characterised in relation to paper by his uncle who associates him with 'an image of a bright sheet of smooth paper, folded and folded and folded again until it is nothing more than a hard tight knot, closed into a fist' (74). It is almost impossible to miss the metaphor in this passage, referring to both the fictionality of the character ('un être de papier') but also his narratological position as a 'knot', his role being to disentangle the different folded plots. And yet, there might be a touch of irony in this self-reflexivity and the 'nothing more than', an irony which is furthered later on in the novel in an episode in which Charles's forefinger is cut out by Robbie Mann (*TAA*: 206). The mention of the finger is not without recalling two elements of *Bleak House*: the Allegory on Tulkinghorn's ceiling and, most tellingly, Bucket's forefinger. The finger is now established as a metatextual image for detection: having Charles's finger cut thus ironically plays with the motif and for a time, blurs his detective skills. This is logical since these are two sides of the same coin. We may now sum up Shepherd's use of what Jouve calls 'l'effet-personnage', here the detective:

Type	Narratological function	Intertextual attributes
Official Detective: Inspector Bucket /Field	• Absent driving force for the plot (Field) • Pointing connections and unravelling knots (Bucket)	• Intertextual echo to *Household Words* and *Bleak House* • Physical description (finger) • *Hercule Poirot:* denouement

Thief-Taker : Uncle Maddox	• Adjuvant: fills gaps in the reflection • Metaphorises 'reader's blanks' • Provides a genealogy	• Epitome of the paradoxical detective (Alzheimer's)
Private detective : Charles Maddox	• Main detective figure: counterpoint to official, non-efficient forces. • A foil for the reader	• Sherlock Holmes stories (especially apiology)

Figure 18: Character-effect in *Tom-All-Alone's*

Not only does Uncle Maddox stand for the model associated with thief-takers but also, at a figurative level, he epitomises the way in which the detective novel is intrinsically linked to the activity of reading. Promoting the incorporation of detective novels and stories in French secondary schools' syllabus, Marc Lits emphasises the didactic use of detective novels, especially their capacity to 'teach' how to read (thanks to their structure, clues etc.) and to prepare pupils for the reading of canonical (and more complex) novels (1994: 23). This is particularly true of Shepherd's novel, which teaches its reader to connect clues, and thereby both to grasp her plot, and to see more clearly Dickens's own method through displacement and distortion. For instance, when Shepherd creates a network of signs for Uncle Maddox and Charles to read, she emphasises the detective quality needed to apprehend Dickens's theme of interconnectedness. As J. Hillis Miller puts it: 'The reader of *Bleak House* is confronted with a document which he must piece together, scrutinize, interrogate at every turn – in short, interpret – in order to understand' (1971: 14). These words are echoed at the end of Shepherd's novel when Charles finally understands the connection linking together Tulkinghorn, Cremorne, Glyde and the dead babies as he enters the asylum in Hampstead: 'There's a large refectory on one side with a smaller office opposite, and straight ahead of him a heavy carved staircase that branches left and right to the two wings of the house. At last the pieces shift, slide together, and form – finally – a pattern' (322). The two diverging directions of the staircase leading to a converging point reflect the novel's, apparently, diverging narratives: Charles's investigations and Hester's life as housekeeper. However, to be able to solve the case of the curious letters received by Sir Julius one needs to wonder at and draw the link between Hester and Charles.

The phenomenon of crystallisation appears most forcefully in Shepherd's novel as she offers a variation on Dickens's use of interconnectedness in *Bleak House*. For instance, Chapter 16 ends on a variation on a topos of detection, the missing link between the murders, raising the question of connection through a series of questions:

> But what was a respectable woman doing in that part of town in the first place, and what link can there possibly be between her and a whore like Lizzie? And what can either of them have to do with the strange persecution practised by William Boscawen, and the violent death meted out to him by way of retribution? (227-228)

This is a pastiche of *Bleak House* in which the omniscient narrator wonders:

> What connexion can there be between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard-step? (*BH*: 235)

For Caroline Levine, networks in *Bleak House* are not simply thematic and structural, but also reveal Dickens's wish to represent the social concerns of his age. Grounding her article in design and cognitive theories, Levine relies heavily on the concept of affordance, *i.e.* 'the range of potential actions and uses latent in different forms' (2009: 517). This concept enables her to conclude that 'rather than claiming to capture the family, the city, or the nation, Dickens points us to a model of social interconnection that is larger and longer than the novel itself could ever manage' (519). If we apply the concept of affordance to Shepherd's novel, we can say that her uncanny revision of Esther's story into Hester's, a story revolving around incest and 'hysteria', deploys one of the affordances of Dickens's text.

Furthermore, Shepherd's letters transpose a motif that appears in *Bleak House*: Esther's handkerchief. Appearing five times in the novel, the handkerchief works as a network (a possible play on the motif of the text as textile, a handkerchief being composed of interwoven threads). Indeed, it first connects the brick makers with Esther as she covers the body of Jenny's dead baby with it: 'Presently I took the light burden from her lap, did what I could to make the baby's rest the prettier and gentler, laid it on a shelf, and covered it with my own handkerchief' (*BH*: 123). Most importantly, the handkerchief enables Esther to identify Lady Dedlock as her true mother while later, Inspector Bucket is the one who uncovers the connection between the two women. Already in his novel, Dickens endows the handkerchief with the function of a clue. The handkerchief first appears in the eighth chapter as a telling sign. The chapter's title, 'Covering a Multitude of Sins', not only shows the utter poverty of the brick makers but also figuratively points to Esther's secret origin. This association is prepared for by the fact that it symbolises the loss of a child and motherly love:

> No effort had been made to clean the room — […]; but the small waxen form from which so much solemnity diffused itself had been composed afresh, and washed, and neatly dressed in some fragments

> of white linen; and on my handkerchief, which still covered the poor baby, a little bunch of sweet herbs had been laid by the same rough, scarred hands, so lightly, so tenderly! (125)

Susan K. Martin also notes this circulation of handkerchiefs in *Tom-All-Alone's*. Her analysis relates this commodity to the representation of death in both novels, and especially to the neo-Victorian revision of the abject (2015: 209). Shepherd reverses the images and associations of the handkerchief. Whereas in *Bleak House*, for instance, Esther covers Jenny's baby, the baby's body remains visible in Shepherd's rewriting while Charles wipes his hand with the handkerchief, in an attempt to cleanse himself from the contact with putrefaction. The handkerchief is no longer a token of love but a repulsive object that must be discarded: 'No amount of laundering will persuade him to use that thing again' (*TAA*: 10). On top of this, Shepherd entitles her eleventh chapter 'Covering a Multitude of Sins', a chapter which begins with the teasing: '*It may be that you are the only one left who can resolve this mystery*' (145; original emphasis). A seemingly direct address to the reader, it is in fact Charles's conclusion of his letter addressed to Chadwick. Handkerchiefs are thus connected to another circulating commodity in *Tom-All-Alone's*. Shepherd highlights this network also by turning the handkerchief into uncanny blackmailing letters that point to another unpalatable truth: Tulkinghorn's incestuous relation with Hester.

6. Tracking clues and intertextual sutures

Misleading the reader is part of Shepherd's game, for instance with intertextual traces like chapter headings, which all are from *Bleak House* but do not follow their 'original' order, so that a discrepancy is often built as to their content. Thus we find titles buttressing the rhythm of the plot: they gradually direct the reader-as-detective to a solid lead ('A Morning Adventure', 'A discovery', 'A Struggle', 'A Track'), then we have a pause ('Perspective') before the rhythm speeds up at the end with the last four chapters focusing on the action (something that is also present in *Bleak House*). This indicates how Shepherd's selection of titles from the hypotext *Bleak House* is guided by generic concerns, thus deeply grounding her novel in the conventions of the detective novel genre an aspect furthered by other titles related to objects or clues ('Signs and Tokens', 'The Letter and the Answer', and ' A Discovery').

We also find titles referring to characters: chapters one and four – respectively, 'The Young Man' and 'A New Lodger,' – such titles are revolving around the figure of young Charles Maddox but they do not identify him straightaway, the vague circumlocution and the

indefinite article 'a' preventing any clear identification and thus triggering curiosity. The two following titles referring to groups of people also seem to refer to anonymous figures, 'Sharpshooters' and 'Attorney and Client'. In these two instances, reading the chapter discloses the actual identity of those people. The last example however is characterised by its overdetermined quality stemming from intertextuality: 'Mr Bucket'. The reader who has read *Bleak House* will know who this character is. The chapter dedicated to the detective occurs late in the novel (four chapters before the end) and long after the reader has been introduced to him in the course of the narrative. This undermines the importance of Inspector Bucket to the story as indeed the chapter bearing the name of the famous protagonist appears much earlier in Dickens's text (it is the twenty-second out of sixty-seven chapters). This structural strategy furthers the balance of power between Charles and Bucket: Bucket is not only construed as Charles's superior but also as his enemy. However, the chapter is also legitimising Charles as a detective. This legitimation is conveyed by the approval and acknowledgement of his predecessor (and this precedence is double, both inter- and intra-textual). Finally, the chapter points at the converging structure of the novel as Bucket reveals to Charles 'that we are, in fact working on the same case – albeit from different ends' (*TAA*: 282) thereby producing a mirror effect.

This instance exemplifies how much Shepherd plays on doubling effects at the level of both structure and content, the one reflecting or being reflected by the other. As such Shepherd's way of writing illustrates how neo-Victorian fiction epitomises postmodern strategies of writing and especially the meta-reflective games intertextuality offers. In his *Semiotics of Poetry*, Michael Riffaterre analyses the effect of intertextuality on hermeneutics in terms which are reminiscent of the detective activity which grounds the claim of an existing analogy between the detective genre and intertextual writings/ readings:

> He is therefore under strict guidance and control as he fills the gaps and solves the puzzle. Since reading is restricted, the reader's interpretation is a scanning of the sociolect's commonplace, the practice of a lore of well-tested *exempla*, the recognition of forms and hallowed symbols through scrambled transmission. (Riffaterre 1978: 165)

The terms used to describe the linguistic identification of intertextuality are all expressions that apply to the activity of detection. This association of intertextuality with the figure of the detective highlights the strategies developed in neo-Victorian fiction and the reading praxis such fictions generate. This aspect of intertextuality is indeed present in the content of Shepherd's novel as the plot hinges on a detective plot on the one hand, and on a psychoanalytic one on the other: Hester's narrative tells of a patient locked up in a lunatic asylum and trying to cope with her reality by creating a fantasy world of her own. *Tom-All-Alone's* thus deploys the

same narratological structure as *Bleak House* as it is divided between two narrators: an omniscient narrator and a first-person narrator, Hester. The balance between the two voices which is found in Dickens's text – in which we have thirty-three chapters narrated by Esther and thirty-four by the omniscient narrator – is undermined in Shepherd's in which only four chapters are narrated by Hester, all entitled 'Hester's narrative'.[140] Lynn Shepherd's rewriting demands an active reading of the novel which engages the full participation of the reader. The reader's task is not only to read the text but to pay close attention to elements belonging to the paratext such as the titles of chapters or to decipher the quotations and echoes which are creating obstacles, roadmaps and red herrings in the investigation being solved in the diegesis. In other words, Shepherd is presenting us with a complex figure of the reader-as-detective and of the text as intertextual map.

The novel represents a dialectic relation between the reader and the detective character, a chiasmic sharing of functions which was analysed in depth by Jean-Pierre Naugrette in his study of Sherlock Holmes. Naugrette's understanding of detective fiction is centred around the activity of reading, be it that of the reader or that of the detective. Following from his work, I argue that to the figure of the reader-as-detective is juxtaposed that of young PI Charles Maddox, who represents the detective-as-reader in Shepherd's novel. The reader is put on an equal footing with (and even in a superior position compared to) Charles. This is achieved by the omniscient narrator's use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' to guide the reader's attention to specific events, clues in the text.[141] Like many detectives before him, and following from what has been said on Ginzburg, Charles reads signs and traces so as to solve his cases. This is epitomised by the use of letters in Shepherd's plotting – an aspect of the neo-Dickensian novel which is reminiscent of *Bleak House* and its obsession with letters and papers.[142] Letters are a symbol of circulation, passing from one character to another. It is only logical then that they should be associated with mapping – as a motif and as structural device. The use of letters in Shepherd is not only referring to the legal documents and messages to be found in Dickens but it is also a borrowing from the detective novel tradition. Indeed, this aspect of the novel is

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[140] The repression of Hester's voice is furthered by the shift of viewpoint in seven chapters originally narrated by Esther ('Signs and Tokens', 'A Morning Adventure', 'Bell Yard', 'Covering a Multitude of Sins', 'The Letter and the Answer', 'A Struggle' and, 'Perspective') as well as by the closure of the novel told from the omniscient perspective, a point to which we shall return in chapter 3.

[141] At times the narrator presents the readers with more clues than Charles has, at other times, the unveiling of clues is delayed thus maintaining suspense.

[142] Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock are looking for the law-writer whose handwriting Lady Dedlock has recognised as being her former lover's, Captain Hawdon; Guppy is looking for Krook's letters which might prove the family bounds uniting Lady Dedlock and Esther, grandfather Smallweed looks for the same letters to sell them to Tulkinghorn, and the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case is characterised by its massive piling up of papers.

reminiscent of the Sherlock Holmes stories and most particularly of 'The Five Orange Pips' (1891). The letters thus convey a sense of intertextuality at the same time as they trigger the detective work. As the end of the novel reveals, Tulkinghorn's various clients as well as himself all received a letter containing a baby's hand as a reminder of their crime:

> Charles stares at her [Alice Carley], understanding at last the riddle of the letters, and the terrible menace the last one had contained. Julius Cremorne had opened that package to find the decomposing hand of his own bastard child; a child born of incest and rape, a child he had instructed Jarvis to do away with. Small wonder he went as white as death when he saw it; small wonder he looked as if he'd seen a ghost. (*TAA*: 334)

A well-trodden trope of the detective genre, the enigmatic letter conveys the idea of the detective-as-reader and of rewriting. The investigation of the letter given to Charles first considers its materiality: its smell leads to the conclusion the culprit is a tanner (86). The spelling reveals the regional origin of the culprit: Cornwall (87). Knowing that the man he is looking for is a tanner enables Charles to identify the place where he might be: Bermondsey (91). Charles's enquiry at the district proves, however, unsuccessful. The reception of the envelopes helps him further as they indicate several receiving-houses. While at first this clue seems to widen the scope of possibilities (101) it is through a reference to bees (like Holmes, Charles is fascinated with insects) which enables Charles to find out Boscawen's (the sender of the letters) true hiding place:

> Now he has a new way to interpret what he sees; now he can find a pattern in this apparent randomness. The man he's seeking may well be no more conscious of what he's doing than the bees Duncan is studying, but Charles is prepared to bet his motive is exactly the same. Like them, his first priority is self-protection; like them, he's prepared to travel much further than he needs, to conceal his quarters from anyone who might want to track him down. (115)

The confrontation of the map with the various receiving-houses thus leads Charles to the conclusion the culprit dwells in Seven Dials. Charles's reading of the map and letters defines the detective as the figure of a reader who can find a pattern in the world and thus, make the world readable.[143]

As Naugrette suggests, the detective not only reads but also writes letters, as is the case in 'The Five Orange Pips'. Naugrette thus distinguishes between two stages in the detective's activity: that of theory, during which reading is a process, an analysis; and that of practice, in which the detective is able to infiltrate the code and use it again against the criminal (2015: 28-29). I want to suggest that the same process can be seen in the practice of rewriting itself. Neo-Victorian writers are first readers of Victorian texts, decoding their mechanisms they can break their code and re-use it to produce their own new text. Hence, it may be asserted that through

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[143] This passage recalls another Sherlock Holmes story, 'A Scandal in Bohemia' (1891). For a study of the way Holmes analyses the paper cf. Jean-Pierre Naugrette 2015: 21-22.

the figure of the detective-as-reader, (re)reading in *Tom-All-Alone's* is actually a form of (re)writing. This leads to a blurring between the hypotext with its hypertext, a blending which is at once intertextual play but also metatextual reflection, a 'double coding' described by Umberto Eco as a characteristic feature of postmodernism which enables the writer to create a bond with the Model Reader (2011: 34-35).

Let us, for the time being, return to *Bleak House*, to better understand this use of objects as clues. Dickens seems to be opposing misreading characters to a clairvoyant reader, an opposition that is underlined by the narrating Esther at the very end of chapter 8:

> How little I thought, when I raised my handkerchief to look upon the tiny sleeper underneath and seemed to see a halo shine around the child through Ada's drooping hair as her pity bent her head—how little I thought in whose unquiet bosom that handkerchief would come to lie after covering the motionless and peaceful breast! I only thought that perhaps the Angel of the child might not be all unconscious of the woman who replaced it with so compassionate a hand; not all unconscious of her presently, when we had taken leave, and left her at the door, by turns looking, and listening in terror for herself, and saying in her old soothing manner, 'Jenny, Jenny!' (*BH*: 125)

Esther's retrospective and anaphoric remarks alert the reader to the future circulation of the handkerchief. Indeed, with the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to identify 'the unquiet bosom' as signifying Lady Dedlock. The latter will haunt the novel, being repeatedly referred to as 'the lady in the veil' (note Dickens's transposition from one fabric to the other, as if Lady Dedlock had sprung out of the handkerchief itself). The different characters who come upon 'the lady in the veil' are unable to identify and/or see her connection with Esther. Thus, when Esther meets Jo for the first time at the brickmakers', he mistakes her for her mother:

> I had not lifted my veil when I first spoke to the woman, which was at the moment of our going in. The boy staggered up instantly and stared at me with a remarkable expression of surprise and terror.
> […] 'I won't go no more to the berryin [*sic.*] ground,' muttered the boy; 'I ain't a-going there, so I tell you!'
> I lifted my veil and spoke to the woman. She said to me in a low voice, 'Don't mind him, ma'am. He'll soon come back to his head,' and said to him, 'Jo, Jo, what's the matter?'
> 'I know wot she's come for!' cried the boy.
> […] 'He has been talking off and on about such like all day, ma'am,' said Jenny softly. 'Why, how you stare! This is MY lady, Jo.'
> 'Is it?' returned the boy doubtfully, and surveying me with his arm held out above his burning eyes. 'She looks to me the t'other one. It ain't the bonnet, nor yet it ain't the gownd [*sic.*], but she looks to me the t'other one' (451; capitals in the text)

In this passage, Jo is terrified of Esther as she looks like the lady who asked him to show her Nemo's grave at the beginning of the novel. If Jo is able to tell the resemblance between the two women ('It ain't the bonnet, nor yet it ain't the gownd, but she looks to me th'other one'), he is soon convinced by Charley that he is wrong and thus his comments are relegated to the margins of the text. Later on, it is Miss Flite who reports on 'a lady with a veil inquiring […] [after] Fitz Jardnyce's health and taking a handkerchief away with her as a little keepsake merely because it was my amiable Fitz Jarndyce's! Now, you know, so prepossessing in the

lady in the veil!' (521). Unable to draw a parallel between Jo's failed recognition scene and this report, the characters make all kinds of suppositions:

> 'My love,' Miss Flite suggested, advancing her lips to my ear with her most mysterious look, 'in MY opinion—don't mention this to our diminutive friend—she's the Lord Chancellor's wife' […]
> I did not think very much about this lady then, for I had an impression that it might be Caddy. (522)

It is only once Lady Dedlock faces Esther at Chesney Wold that her identity is disclosed: 'I cannot tell in any words what the state of my mind was when I saw in Lady Dedlock's hand my handkerchief with which I had covered the dead baby' (535). Emphatically recycling images of interconnectedness, of narration and fictionalisation, Shepherd plays with the hermeneutic function of the detective novel.[144]

Another trace of this interconnectedness is the motif of contagion that pervades *Bleak House*, especially as Esther is contaminated by Jo. This contagion is perhaps best exemplified in the famous opening of chapter 46, the slums of Tom-All-Alone's being compared to a diseased body, spreading on the city and contaminating all the strata of population:

> There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute, this very night, the choice stream (in which chemists on analysis would find the genuine nobility) of a Norman house, and his Grace shall not be able to say nay to the infamous alliance. There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution through every order of society up to the proudest of the proud and to the highest of the high. Verily, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his revenge. (654)

Dickens is stressing the fact we are all equal when facing diseases, so that, as Susan K. Martin puts it the novel 'is pervaded by miasmas, literal and figurative' (2015: 218).

Shepherd's misreading characters contrast with the detective figures of Dickens's novel: Inspector Bucket and Mr Guppy. The latter is struck by Esther's resemblance with Lady Dedlock's portrait (painted on canvas, another kind of textile network) and thus decides to investigate their possible connection (offering a counterpoint to Jo). As Philip Collins observes about *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 'Dickens had introduced the professional police detective into English fiction nearly twenty years earlier, but he never outgrew his fondness for the amateur, who can […] enjoy the fictional advantage of being emotionally involved with the victim or the villain' (1962: 214). In *Bleak House*, Dickens does exactly that with Mr Guppy, who is in love with Esther, the 'victim' of the mystery of her own origin, a mystery the young clerk decides to investigate.

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[144] For Robert Newsom, such passages are characterised by an uncanny sense of *déjà vu* which contributes the surveillance effect within the novel (1991: 59-60).

In detective fiction, narratological power is always at stake. Eisenzweig highlights the Holmesian model and distinguishes between four main types of narrators: the Watsonian narrator who tells the present narrative, that of the investigation, and who is necessarily naive and incompetent (a foil to the expertise of the detective who *plays* dumb) (1986: 105-107); the victim, who knows everything and thus could narrate but is silenced in consequence of murder, trauma etc. (111); the criminal, who also knows everything but refuses to take the narratological lead so as to hide him-/herself (108-109); and, finally, the detective, whose investigation leads to the narrative of what has happened, a narrative that closes that of the investigation while offering an alternative version of it (151). For Eisenzweig, the detective offers a hybrid, alternative version of the text because it is neither the narrative of the crime, nor that of the investigation but both at once (*ibid.*). Eisenzweig also identifies witnesses as partial and temporary narrators, their testimonies being their version/narration of the crime of which they only know a part (117-122). The issue of narratological power determines not only the structure of the narrative as a whole, but also the status of the characters who, when turning into narrators, cease to be pawns in the story which they tell.

Tom-All-Alone's does not entirely partake of the model offered by Eisenzweig in so far as Charles's investigation is told by a narrative voice that parodies a Victorian device, the intrusive omniscient Victorian narrator: here the narrator is both omniscient and cunning (while Watson for instance is merely homodiegetic and naive), playing almost against his/her character as the reader is given clues that Charles does not get. Indeed, right after Tulkinghorn commissions Charles to investigate the letters, the reader is told about the lawyer's true purpose. This is introduced in a scene during which Charles fails to see a key character (he is not even aware of his presence) whereas the reader is shown the unknown man's arrival and thus is empowered as a detective when Charles 'walks slowly to the corner and waits to let a carriage go past, then stoops for a moment to refasten his boot' and therefore 'does not see that same equipage come to a halt at Tulkinghorn's door, or the man who emerges from it' (27). The parody of the Victorian narrator here is at its utmost. What follows is a thorough description of the man with an insistence on a detail that no other character can know about: 'his most distinguished feature is concealed at present by a black leather glove: he bears an unsightly red scar on the back of his hand, the result of an unfortunate wound received some years since while travelling on the Continent' (28). This passage shows how Shepherd's narrator subtly plays with what is seen and what is hidden, especially in the use of the adjective 'unsightly', which furthers the idea of concealing as it suggests something unpleasant to the eye and,

etymologically, something invisible ('Unsightly' *OED*). This first sign is accompanied by another which, this time, Charles sees: 'The panel [of the carriage] bears a rather striking black swan on its coat of arms, which Charles glances at idly […] [b]ut these arms, arresting though they are, he [Charles] does not recognize' (*ibid*.). The black swan is an 'arresting' clue which the reader may or may not pick up; be that as it may, s/he is warned, and will notice when the strange figure reappears (the adjective 'arresting' hints that we are in the presence of the criminal). This paves the way for an intertextual recognition that the protagonist, Charles, can never have, though he too begins to track down the same figure. Indeed, Charles later decides to investigate the reason why Cremorne was blackmailed (something Tulkinghorn does not want him to do) and thus visits Argyll Rooms where he interrogates a manservant named Jack (152). The latter reveals that 'sometimes there's a stiff old geezer with grey hair, but usually it's another younger cove with a bad mark on the back of his hand' (*ibid*.). Following this declaration, the narrator directly addresses the reader to emphasise his/her active role as detective: '*You and I have seen* this man before, but Charles, of course, has not, which means he cannot possibly realize the significance of this otherwise trivial observation' (*ibid*.; my emphasis). We are thus gradually led towards the novel's striking *coup de théâtre*, which twists the rules of the genre, as we later discover that this mysterious character is no other than Sir Percival Glyde. There is a first moment of revelation, when the identity of the murderer, not Cremorne but Robert Mann, a lad with cold, 'saurian' eyes (305), is disclosed ('It takes a fraction of a moment for Charles to realize he's been wrong all along – not just wrong but hopelessly, disastrously wrong' (*ibid*.)). But the true revelation comes later, when, in a flash of understanding, the reader grasps Shepherd's use of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* as a second, secretive, intertext, which was there all along, buried beneath the obvious reference to *Bleak House*. The two plots are entwined, when the 'solitary house' (where Hester's narrative is written) proves to be, entirely unexpectedly, the asylum where Anne Catherick and Laura were locked up in *The Woman in White*. For the reader and Charles, it now all makes sense as 'the last pieces shift, slide together, and form – finally – a pattern. […] [T]here must be a link – a connection – not only between this place and Cremorne, but between this place and the baronet of the black swan' (322). It is small wonder that the most telling clue we were given regarding Glyde should be a scar: a typical motif of the detective story, it also figuratively stands as a kind of intertextual suture, its stitches being woven into the skin of the text.

Glyde is thus turned into a rhizome of signs to be read: the swan on the carriage, the hidden scar and the intertextual reference to Collins's novel. The identification of Sir Percival only occurs when Charles shares his findings with Bucket:

> 'That's the whole point. I didn't find *anything* – there wasn't enough time. There were some references to an address in Hampstead, and to money being sent there, but I don't know why, or even what sort of place it was. That box I had, the papers related to a baronet – I saw him tonight. His arms are a black swan –'
> 'I know him,' interrupts Bucket quietly. 'I know him.' (314)

At this point, the reader has already figured out that the 'address in Hampstead' actually refers to the place where the action of the second narrative, Hester's, is set, s/he might also dimly recall that when Walter Hartright first encounters Anne Catherick in *The Woman in White*, he is standing 'where four roads met – the road to Hampstead, along which I had returned; the road to Finchley; the road to west Ends; and the road back to London' (*WW*: 17), so that Shepherd's text is beginning to point towards the Hampstead asylum. Bucket reveals part of Glyde's story, still without naming him:

> That baronet you mentioned has so encumbered his estate by debts got by gaming, he inveigled an innocent young woman to marry him, merely to lay his hands on her fortune. A young woman who has now died not long since, and all unexpectedly. (*TAA*: 318)

As the reader begins to guess, Bucket is here ventriloquising the main plotline of Collins's novel. Only then can the process of investigation unravel leading to the moment of naming identified by Eisenzweig as the detective's alternative narrative: 'Do you know a man named Sir Percival Glyde?' (*ibid*.).

As Shepherd's Bucket puts it, when Charles finally understands that Hester's mother was Honoria Chadwick, the two cases, 'against all expectations' – a Dickensian irony – have been solved: 'I wondered how long it would take you to marry it all together' (348). Simultaneously, it all adds up for the reader, suddenly marrying it all together too, grasping the textual cross-fertilisation between *Bleak House* and *The Woman in White*. Shepherd offers a final playful metatextual comment, when the last secret turns out to be Uncle Maddox's romance with 'Mary', the widow of a man whose heart was cut out and whose body was 'burned on a windswept Italian shore' (352). The allusion to Mary Shelley playfully suggests that we have been reading a Frankenstein monster of a text, composed of textual parts, just as Mary Shelley's monster and text were.[145] Shepherd, here, chooses to 'marry' or graft Dickens's and Collins's texts. In other neo-Dickensian novels, the relationship between Dickens's and Collins's texts, and Dickens and Collins themselves, becomes more antagonistic.

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[145] It might also be a hint of her next novel, *A Treacherous Likeness*, published in 2013 and presenting a new Charles Maddox investigation embedded in a rewriting of Shelley's novel.

III. 'GONE ASTRAY': ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS OF DICKENS

Thus, as we read with 'retrospecular eyes', as Garett Stewart puts it (2015: 190-209), Shepherd's novel draws attention to doubling, from Charles and his uncle Maddox, who bear the same name, to the relocation of Collins's Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick within Hester's 'solitary house'. Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* actually hinges on this mirror effect, as Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie look alike and exchange identities. Laura and Anne are associated with shadows and mirrors, and Walter Hartright is struck by the resemblance between the two women:

> There stood Miss Fairlie, a white figure, alone in the moonlight; in her attitude, in the turn of her head, in her complexion, in the shape of her face, the living image, at that distance and under those circumstances, of the woman in white! The doubt which had troubled my mind for hours and hours past flashed into conviction in an instant. That 'something wanting' was my own recognition of the ominous likeness between the fugitive from the asylum and my pupil at Limmeridge House. (*WW*: 61)

In this passage, Walter eventually understands what is troubling him so much about Laura, her likeness to the strange woman he once met on his way to Limmeridge. Collins's novel revolves entirely around this duality. We may apply here Rosset's work on doubles in *Impressions fugitives* and his 'immediate doubles' we tackled in our discussion of *Dickens and Dickens*. I contend that Laura and Anne are connected as 'immediate doubles' of a kind, the existence of one confirming the reality of the other, hence the strangeness characterising both women when separated, a sense of something 'wanting'.

In this passage, Laura is defined as only complete when associated with Anne Catherick ('something wanting') or, to be more accurate, when she *reflects* Anne as she is compared to her 'living image.' Walter's depiction of Laura thus echoes that of Anne when he first met her:

> There, in the middle of the broad, bright high-road […] 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.
> […] All I could discern distinctly by the moonlight was a colourless, youthful face, meagre and sharp to look at about the cheeks and chin; large, grave, wistfully attentive eyes; nervous, uncertain lips; and light hair of a pale, brownish-yellow hue. (17-18)

In the two passages, Walter comments on the moonlight, the figure, and the face of the woman he is looking at. What's more, his characterisation of Anne Catherick makes her look like a

ghost, and the comparison between the two women is in fact marked by the dichotomy living/dead. Thus, as Laura is then characterised as a reflection of Anne, Laura becomes the double of a double, a concept which I am borrowing from Rosset.[146] The Frenk critic presents two types of doubles, the phantasmagorical and the immediate double – and I wish to argue that the latter category sheds a new light on *The Woman in White*. If, contrary to Rosset's definition, Laura and Anne have real bodies, their characterisation relies on images associated with shadows and mirrors. The duality of Laura is also inscribed in the onomastic as 'Fairlie' can also be read as a 'fair lie'. Laura comes to truly embody her name when she pretends to be dead while in fact it was Anne who died. The revelation that Laura is still alive is both epiphanic and uncanny as 'Laura, Lady Glyde, was standing by the inscription [on her tombstone] and was looking at me over the grave' (456). Almost like a walking dead, Laura is still presented as fragmented through Walter's hesitation on her name and her juxtaposition by her grave. At the end of the novel, the two women are split again when Laura recovers her true identity as 'the false inscription [was] struck off the tombstone' after which '[o]ne line only was afterwards engraved in its place: "Anne Catherick, July 25th, 1850"' (694).[147]

The haunting doubles of nineteenth-century fiction (in Dickens's as well as Collins's works) beget the doubles that also recur in neo-Victorian fiction. As we have seen, in *Tom-All-Alone's* the different pairs structure the narrative (with the split between third-person narrative and first-person narrative reflecting the pair Charles/Hester), the enunciative power (negotiated through the absence/presence of the pair Field/Bucket) as well as underline such themes as epistemological transmission (Uncle Maddox/Charles) or mental issues (Hester/Anne Catherick). Hester might be the only character who internalises doubleness as her narrative is in fact repressing the horror of her life at the asylum. However, this doubleness only appears as such at the end of the novel when Charles discovers the truth behind the blackmailing letters received by Tulkinghorn and his clients and eventually goes to the asylum located in Hampstead. Shepherd's strategy thus contrasts with Simmons's and Carey's, as it is not really

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[146] Darcy Irvin notes that the multiple doubles of the novel are reflected at the structural level of the novel which revolves around copies of documents (2009: 227); Natalie Huffels offers to read the relationship uniting Laura and Anne in terms of 'double consciousness', 'the pathological splitting of the self into two distinct consciousness' with on the one hand Anne who experience s shock and, on the other hand, Laura who suffers its consequences (2011: 46).

[147] Dickens made a slightly similar use of twins in *Little Dorrit* in which Pet's twin sister dies yet Mr. Meagles refuses to consider his second daughter as dead so that Pet somewhat seems double:

> 'Pet and her baby sister were so exactly alike, and so completely one, that in our thoughts we have never been able to separate them since. It would be of no use to tell us that our dead child was a mere infant. We have changed that child according to the changes in the child spared to us and always with us. As Pet has grown, that child has grown; as Pet has become more sensible and womanly, her sister has become more sensible and womanly by just the same degrees […]' (Dickens 2012: 33).

aimed at subverting the image of Dickens. Her use of doubles ultimately remains quite close to Dickens's and Collins's: the references to Anne Catherick and the final revelation recall the swap between Anne and Laura in Collins's novel. Contrariwise, Simmons's and Carey's agendas are very different from Shepherd's. The Dickensian plot is transformed, while Dickens himself is fictionalised, turned into a problematic character. We have already seen this alternative self in the graphic novel *Dickens and Dickens*. With Simmons's novel, the reader must switch to a more Gothic kind of detection with disquieting *Doppelgängers*.

This kind of split was established as a central device by prototypical forms of detective fiction. Thus, in Poe's 1839 short story 'William Wilson,' the narrator is persuaded that he is being followed by a double who seems to elude him until the denouement, when it is revealed that he was chasing himself.[148] Poe's short story revolves around a split identity. From the very start, the narrator takes the name of his antagonist, refusing to give his real name: 'Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation' (Poe 2006: 168). In this passage, as in the rest of the short story, identity is defined (and challenged) in relation to ink and writing so that we can see the premises of a problematised authorship. As for the denouement, it leads to a forced embrace with 'the other self':

> It was my antagonist — it was Wilson, who then stood before me in the agonies of his dissolution. His mask and cloak lay, where he had thrown them, upon the floor. Not a thread in all his raiment — not a line in all the marked and singular lineaments of his face which was not, even in the most absolute identity, mine own! (186)

Here, the dash marks the split, thus establishing both a distinction and a link, the latter being confirmed by the syntactic parallelism ('It was my antagonist – it was Wilson'). The double loses the props of the culprit, *i.e.* 'the mask' and the cloak (Eisenzweig 1986: 124). Dropping these accessories symbolising concealment turns the scene into an epiphany, or, more accurately, a mirror scene. Once more, this other figure is also *written*: the face is described as a network of 'lines' and 'lineaments'. Ultimately, the other of the narrator is nothing else than his own reflection in a mirror, a reflection that is inscribed in Poe's use of a double negation ('not a thread in all his raiment – not a line […] which was not my own'). Poe thus offers his readers an extreme representation of the uncanny inversion that anyone of us experiences when looking in a mirror, since, as Clément Rosset puts it: 'The reflection differs from the shadow

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[148] This theme is not particular to Poe, Henry James also used it in his fiction. For a thorough analysis of this theme in James, cf. *Henry James and the Poetics of Duplicity* edited by Dennis Tredy, Annick Duperray and Adrian Harding, Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle upon Tyne, 2013.

and the echo in that it is characteristically dissymmetrical: what I am seeing in the mirror, or in the rear-view mirror, is always the reverse of what it reflects' (2004: 59; my translation).[149]

> As Evija Trofimova puts it:
>> Writing often starts with a focus on the other, a distant object of *detection*. But that other is a double, in fact, a sort of *doppelgänger*, needed so that the process of investigation at some point can shift toward the detective himself. The quest gets turned inward, as the other (*un autre*) becomes 'I' (*je*). (2014: 95)

Such is the case in neo-Victorian fiction, where doubles fluctuate between Rosset's phantasmagorical position and an 'immediate position'. As we have seen, *Dickens and Dickens* revolves around the figure of the *Doppelgänger*, Charlie, who materialises an alternative reality, embodying the events that could have happened. More disquietingly, in *Drood*, the double is at once phantasmagorical – the result of hallucinations (whether Drood is produced by the mesmeric trance induced by Dickens, or whether the Other Wilkie proceeds from Collins's large intake of laudanum) – and immediate, Drood and the Other Wilkie being characterised as mirror images respectively of Dickens and Collins.

The theme of the double, be it the phantasmagorical or the immediate double, highlights one of the symbolic functions of characters in the detective novel identified by Dubois. For the critic, characters in detective novels enable their writers to tackle a number of ontological issues, especially related to the psychological and social, under cover of entertainment (2005: 98). For Dubois, these ontological issues are the starting point of the detective narrative, best formulated as 'who is the Other?' and, ultimately, 'who am I?' The 'I' here is that of the detective whose expertise forces him to identify with the object of the investigation itself, *i.e.* with the criminal (152). This question is slightly displaced in the neo-Dickensian novels under study, from 'who may the killer be?' to 'who was the "Other Dickens"?' These questions can only be asked because Dickens is turned into a detective figure, who then (more or less explicitly) identifies with the criminal figure, as we shall see now.

A.   Searching for ghosts*:* Dickens as amateur detective?

Charles Dickens died before *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* was finished; so that *Edwin Drood* has become something of a textual locked-room mystery, or perhaps 'a locked door to which everyone thinks they have the key' (M. Douglas-Fairhurst 2012: n.p.) Since then, there

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[149] 'Le reflet, à la différence de l'ombre et de l'écho, présente un caractère dissymétrique qui fait que ce que je vois dans le miroir, ou le rétroviseur, est toujours l'inverse de ce qui s'y reflète.'

have been several attempts to provide a last instalment to the novel and thereby solve the mystery. In 1914, for instance, G.K. Chesterton, the creator of the popular detective Father Brown, and George Bernard Shaw, pieced together the 'Edwin Drood Murder Case', a trial against John Jasper with the aim to bring closure to the novel. More recently, Pete Orford has launched an interactive investigation, the 'Drood Inquiry', which presents its users with a review of the case, characters' as well as 'Witnesses'' statements – including statements by Charles Dickens Jr., Kate Perugini (Dickens's daughter) and John Forster to name but a few. The user of the website is offered the possibility to give a verdict determining whether Edwin Drood is dead or alive, where the body is, who the murderer was (Orford 'Drood Inquiry' website). While the title of Dan Simmons's novel signals the intertextual connection with Dickens's, his option is radically different as his biofiction seeks to pastiche, parody and deconstruct, rather than simply provide the missing piece of the puzzle.

It is not the first time that Simmons revisits a canonical work: published between 1989 and 1997, his *Hyperion Cantos* series is a science fiction take on Keats for instance. Discussing Simmons's novel *Illium* and the importance of intertextuality for the American writer, Gaël Grobéty reads his work as 'a bridge between antiquity and contemporary literature' (2015: 264). In 2007, he published *The Terror*, a Gothic biofictional account of the Franklin Expedition to which he obliquely returns in *Drood,* through references to Dickens's own rewriting of the expedition in his 1852 play, *The Frozen Deep* (written in collaboration with Wilkie Collins). If, as Umberto Eco has it, a novel is the representation of a 'possible world' which superposes 'itself upon the "real" world of the reader's encyclopaedia' (1985: 168, my translation) then, biofiction plays with the gap between these two worlds by rewriting the lives of celebrities, including canonical writers.[150] As aforementioned, in the case of Dickens, the temptation seems already there in historical studies, as Robert Douglas-Fairhurst signals at the beginning of his biography of Dickens: 'Reimagining the past has long been a popular parlour game for historians for whom what did happen cannot always be disentangled from what might have happened in its place' (R. Douglas-Fairhurst 2011: 1). This uncanny duality of history, always haunted by what might have been, is at the centre of neo-Dickensian novels which are giving voice to this 'other version'.[151] Dan Simmons's novel *Drood* is a case in point, deploying what

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[150] 'Un monde possible se superpose abondamment au monde "réel" de l'encyclopédie du lecteur.'
[151] Marie-Luise Kohlke notes that: 'In one sense, biofiction merely develops existing novelising tendencies within auto/biographical practice, which problematise our understanding of life-writing's self-revelation and the revelation of Others' selves' (2013: 4).

I shall term a 'what-if?-plot' which relies on an alternative version of Dickens, and it is this alternative version of what we know of Dickens which turns him into a fictional character.[152]

Furthermore, there seems to be a cross-fertilisation with recent critical interest in the study of 'counterfactuals' in Victorian literature. Andrew H. Miller, especially, demonstrates that the 'optative mode' is at the centre of Dickens's writing. This mode relates to the common idea of 'seeing life as a track (or path, or river), […] as bounded by ghostly, counterfactual possibilities' (A. Miller 2012: 774). The optative mode is thus the act of explaining one's identity in reference to the history of unrealised possibilities: 'The lives we do not lead are internal to those that we do; our past possibilities live within us' (775). For Miller, in *Great Expectations* both the narrator Pip and the narrated Pip define themselves according to events and choices that remain unrealised so that Dickens's 'books make us see that the things that do happen and those that do not are complementary parts of the narrative machinery, paired cogs with interlocking teeth' (779). Miller identifies three occasions when the optative mode occurs: career, marriage and children (dead ones) or childhood (785-787). Miller shows that Dickens expressed himself in the optative mode at times, especially when talking about his possible career as an actor (784). Interestingly, neo-Victorian counterfactual versions of Dickens's life do not make use of Dickens's absence at an audition which led him to turn to a career as a writer, but rather focus on his childhood trauma as in *Dickens and Dickens* in which the unled life is materialised as Charlie (interestingly, the regretting subject here is not Dickens but the optative one, Charlie). This first fork is added to others to which we shall return in chapter 3, such as Dickens's marriage with Catherine and his near-death experience in the train accident at Staplehurst.

In *Drood*, the notion of regret is also evacuated as the departure point for the counterfactual hinges on the possibility that Dickens might have been a murderer, hence his keen interest in criminals. Duality seems to be a way for Simmons to play with the limits of the genre by blurring the dissociation detective/criminal, mimicking the fanciful identification of Jack the Ripper with celebrities of the nineteenth century. Let us recall once more the striking incipit:

> Did the famous and loveable and honourable Charles Dickens plot to murder an innocent person and dissolve away his flesh in a pit of caustic lime and secretly inter what was left of him, mere bones and a skull, in the crypt of an ancient cathedral that was an important part of Dickens's own childhood? And

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[152] Critics often point out Simmons's liberties with biographical data. It may be argued that Simmons is very aware of these inaccuracies as his reply to similar criticism concerning *The Crook Factory* (a biofiction on Ernest Hemingway) shows: 'Historical fact was used to illuminate the essence of the novel, not vice versa' (quoted in Shindler 2001: 31).

did Dickens then scheme to scatter the poor victim's spectacles, rings, stickpins, shirt studs, and pocket watch in the River Thames? And if so, or even if Dickens only *dreamed* he did these things, what part did a very real phantom named Drood have in the onset of such madness? (*D*: 4; italics in the text)

Using the canonical writer as an allegory of Victorian deceit, as if the text were a scholar's attempt to prove that Dickens was a murderer, the novel's opening dictates a programmatic reading which points to an event yet to come in the narration. Simmons's incipit creates a riddle with its particular questions and prefigures the way in which the author handles the detective mode. The accumulation of questions is symptomatic of the optative mode.

The novel construes riddles thereby relying on Jauss's 'horizon of expectations' and Fabienne Soldini's definition of mystery novels as puzzles. The 'horizons' set by Simmons can be inferred from the clues given by the narrator, Simmons's fictionalised Collins. The reader of Dickens's text will spot various key elements related to the disappearance of Edwin Drood in the hypotext, such as the lime pit, the crypt, and, most especially, 'spectacles, rings, stickpins, shirt studs, and pocket watch'. Indeed, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Mr Crisparkle finds in the Weir 'a gold watch, bearing engraved upon its back E. D.' and a shirt pin (*MED:* 145). The reader of Simmons's novel is also teased by the mysterious phrase a 'very real phantom named Drood'. This oxymoronic characterisation conjures up ontological questions concerning the figure Drood: what/who is he? This characterisation functions as a red herring that on a first reading seems only to insist on the threat represented by Drood, but on a second reading, points to the unreliability of the narrator. George N. Dove observes that '[t]he detective formula, in providing a set of norms shared by author and reader, supplies a regulative context and "programs" the gaps and blanks of the text' (1990: 27). Such a formula leads to the creation of a 'reading sub-culture', an 'interpretive community' (28). It may be said that neo-Victorian fiction, in its self-reflective engagement with the Victorian canon and with narrativity, creates another specific 'interpretive community', eager to repeat (with a difference) the experience of nineteenth-century fiction/life.[153] The limited, often deceptive, flow of information, is part of Barthes's enigma code, and requires the reader to guess and construct his/her interpretation, so that such teasing details become the key terms of what Soldini calls the 'parallel text' constructed by the reader (1996: 84-85). In other words, the reader will be on the lookout for the terms, events or images that will confirm or contradict his/her guessing concerning the plot (86-88). Soldini observes that the readers she interviewed all construct a parallel text that keeps being updated as they go through the novel they are reading. The new, alternative text thus

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[153] The increase in the steampunk market, especially the numerous costumes, might be considered a very tangible trace of this community.

constructed bears witness to the cognitive aspect of the reading of detective novels (88). While it is not the purpose of this dissertation to discuss empirical readers' reactions to the novels under study, Soldini's work nevertheless sheds light on the way in which neo-Victorian fiction is asking its readers to produce a parallel text.

Not only so, but the neo-Victorian text seems to present itself *as* a parallel text to the original hypotext so that, for instance, Simmons's novel reads as a parallel text to both *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and Dickens's biography/ies. The novel's seeming agenda (proving that Dickens was a murderer) and its hybrid nature (a biofiction written in the detective mode), well illustrate the overlapping between the detective novel and the biographical genre that was pointed out earlier. This also establishes a contract with the reader based on *agôn*: the text is understood as a game and the reader must attempt to 'solve the problem offered by the writer hence positioning him/herself in both a rivalling and a cooperative relation' (Soldini 1996: 81; my translation).[154] But there is a difference between the expectation at the heart of every detective novel and that created by the opening of this novel. Indeed, the opening riddle recalls Oedipus's call: 'Where in God's earth are they? Or how withal//Find the *blurred trail* of such an *ancient stain*?' (Sophocles: v. 108-19; my emphasis). Simmons's enumeration of questions points to a past that seems unrecoverable. However, it will be recovered by the narrative. There is a similar suggestion in the fictional Collins's claim, which shows confidence: the past is not unrecoverable but is apparently *disclosed* to the reader from the start. Simmons is creating a discrepancy, since the detective novel, as was stated earlier, is supposed to present its reader with two distinct stories: that of the crime and that of the investigation, the latter retracing the former. In this opening, the crime has not yet been committed but is announced. The story of the crime and that of the investigation collapse into one another. And yet, the context of enunciation (Collins is writing at the moment of his death in 1889) and of 'reception' – the book is supposed to be published 'at least a century and a quarter after [his] demise' (3) – gives a sense of retrospection, of a 'regressive structure' which makes such questions problematic since they must have been answered in the meantime (Reuter 2017: 47). *Drood* is thus to be read as a detective novel, yet from the start, Simmons plays with his readers, since after all, his Collins suggests both that Dickens might have been a murderer and that he might not, an ambivalence which is suggested by the verb in italics, 'dreamed'.

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[154] 'ils tentent de résoudre l'énigme proposée par l'auteur et de ce fait se situent à la fois dans un rapport de rivalité et de coopération.'

The slippage between fact and fiction is developed throughout the novel as the reader is given to read Dickens's and Collins's investigations while they pursue the eponymous Drood. Such displacements are typical of postmodern novels' appropriation of the detective novel. As JoAnn Cannon remarks '[t]he impact of the metaphysical detective story is largely dependent upon its deviation from a set of strictly formulated rules'. She further adds that the codification in detective fiction necessarily 'awakens certain expectations in the reader', but in the end the author of postmodern metaphysical detective fiction 'thwarts those expectations' (1980: 42).[155] I am reading *Drood* not so much as a detective novel *per se* but rather as a novel experimenting with the generic possibilities of detective fiction. Simmons thus certainly belongs to the group of novelists 'who appropriate this structure to displace and subvert it' and whose 'aim is to present a critical work on the form of the novel in general so as to give it some meaning back'. For these novelists, it is thus a 'way to say that the novel starts with a question, that it undertakes the form of an investigation heading towards the unveiling of the secret' (Dubois 2005: 154; my translation).[156] The self-reflective quality of Simmons's novel, teasing the reader's expectations, bears witness to Simmons's 'self-consciousness' about his position in contemporary culture, and it is this very aspect which distinguishes this novel (and neo-Victorian novels as a whole) from mere historical fiction.

If the opening lines build a teasing horizon of expectations, the end of Simmons's novel utterly deconstructs the suppositions presented in the opening of the novel as the narrator Collins is never able to show that Dickens is a murderer (in spite of his many claims, for instance after the disappearance of Dickenson). The only 'murder' Dickens is guilty of is that of Nancy, which is a figurative murder performed as part of the author's public readings. The discrepancy between the event which is imagined and that which truly happens surprises the reader and creates a double novel. This recalls Rosset's definition of the oracle which is based on *Oedipus Rex* and is similar to an illusion, a sleight of hand that forecasts an event, while at the same time creating a kind of shadowy snare, the phantom situation that the listener will try to avoid, thereby fulfilling the prophecy against his/her will. Rosset argues that the event that corresponds to the announcement made by the oracle always comes as a surprise, producing a feeling that one has been cheated on or 'doublé', the French term being quite straightforward as to the

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[155] For another reference on metaphysical detective novels cf. Michael Holquist, 'Whodunnit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Postwar Fiction' in *Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*, Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (eds.), Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers: New York, 1983: 149-174.
[156] 'ces romanciers modernes dont nous avons parlé qui reprennent cette structure pour la dévier et la pervertir' ; 'leurs fins sont précisément de se livrer, par ce biais, à un travail critique sur la formule romanesque générale comme pour lui faire rendre sens.'

duality implied in the oracle (1984: 27). This surprise, or trick, points out that another event was expected (*ibid.*) so that the real event is quite uncanny, both at once similar and different *i.e.* double (42). Somewhat like Oedipus in Sophocles' play, *mutatis mutandis*, the fictional Collins finds out that the true murderer is no Other but himself. Paradoxically, while claiming to present his readers with a biography of his friend, Collins actually writes about his own guilt, deception and the murders he has committed (both figuratively, as he dreams that he kills Dickens, and literally, as in the end he kills his maid and Joseph Clow). Having Collins as the actual murderer of the novel, Simmons thereby breaks a key rule of detection (Knox 1947: 194), thus also recalling a classic of detection, Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) in which the narrator, Dr. James Sheppard, is the murderer. However, while deceptive premises relying on the unreliable narrator were key features of Christie's novel, here Simmons's Collins is not aware of the plot: he is an unconscious narrator rather than a cunning one. The *tour de force* achieved by Simmons is to have his unreliable narrator misread his own past, repressing his criminal self so that readers misread the novel too, looking for the signs of Dickens's guilt and only finding an illusion. Let us now see how, between the opening and closing lines of the novel, Simmons grafts elements of Dickens's life onto the radically modified hypotext, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood,* to arouse suspense.

1. Telling and seeing: staging detection and information

> Plots revolving around the riddle of a crime rely upon two basic notions: 'seeing' and 'telling'. Someone, the criminal, has killed without being seen and doesn't want to tell; someone else, the detective, has not seen but will put together with words what he could not see. When 'telling' coincides with 'seeing' then the puzzle will be solved. (Lits 1994: 86)[157]

Marc Lits's dichotomy between telling and seeing is at the very heart of Simmons's novel, at the beginning of which the distribution of the enunciative power casts the characters in a specific position within the 'hermeneutic square'. Thus, the chapter devoted to the description of the Staplehurst accident casts Collins as a detective, Dickens as a suspect (his version of the event is challenged) and Drood as the murderer.[158] Indeed, Collins could not have 'seen' the accident, since he was not present, yet he *tells* the readers about it as many different markers in

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[157] 'On pourrait ramener le récit à une énigme criminelle à deux notions de base : ''voir'' et ''dire''. Quelqu'un, le criminel, a tué sans être vu et ne veut pas le dire ; quelqu'un d'autre, le détective, n'a pas vu mais va reconstituer par sa parole ce qu'il n'a pu voir. Lorsque le ''dire'' va coïncider avec le ''voir'', l'énigme sera résolue.'

[158] Simmons is not the only one to see a detective in Collins, Grinstein does too as he conflates the author and his characters from *the Moonstone*: 'Throughout his work Collins was constantly searching for the truth and thus is very much a detective himself' (Grinstein 2003: 142).

the text prove: 'I have not forgotten 9 June 1865,' 'I am told that Mrs Byrne is known primarily for a book' (*D*: 10). Moreover, it seems that Collins's investigation is based on documents, presenting the readers with clippings from *The Times* (*ibid.*) as well as an official report on the accident and the testimony of two guards which he compares to Dickens's own account:

> I should interrupt our mutual friend's description here just long enough to say that, using the names listed in the official railway report as my guide, I later tracked down the very guard that Dickens reports stopping and galvanising into such useful action. The guard – a certain Lester Smyth – had a somewhat different recollection of those moments. (12)

Prefaced with a very Dickensian, ironic, 'our mutual friend,' this comparison sheds doubt on the veracity of Dickens's words, pointing out the melodramatic construct designed to give him a flattering role, as opposed to Smyth's version of events:

> Dickens writes that he grabbed and stopped one of them [guards], demanding of the man, '*Look at me! do stop an instant and* look at me, *and tell me whether you don't know me.*'
> '*We know you very well, Mr Dickens,*' he reports the guard replied at once.
> '*Then, my good fellow,*' cried Dickens, almost cheerily (at being recognised at such a time, a pretty soul such as Clara Pitt Byrne might have interjected), '*for God's sake give me your key, and send one of those labourers here, and I'll empty this carriage.*'(*ibid.*, italics in the text)
>
> 'We were trying to get down to 'help [sic.] the injured and dying when this toff who'd climbed out of the teetering first-class coach runs up to Paddy Beale and me [Lester Smyth], all wild-eyed and pale, and keeps shouting at us, 'Do you know me, man!? Do you know me!? Do you know who I *am?*'
> 'I admit that I replied, 'I don't care if you're Prince Albert, mate, get out of my bleedin' way'It was not the usual way I'd speak to a gentleman, but that wasn't no usual day.' (12-13)

These two passages offer a contrast in tone and content: Dickens's narration is slightly made fun of, with the ironic mention of Mrs Byrne, before being utterly reversed by the testimony brought by Smyth. In this short extract, Simmons foregrounds one of the main themes of the novel: how the written word is not a guarantee of truth but is more likely to be a kind of fiction. As such, Simmons's work illustrates several of the points Hutcheon makes about 'historiographic metafiction', from the problematisation of narrative representation, to an ironic and critical self-reflectivity (1986: 40-41). Simmons therefore inscribes his work in 'the project of postmodernism' which entails 'the challenging of certainty, the asking of questions, the revealing of fiction-making where we might have once accepted the existence of some absolute "truth"' (Hutcheon 1986: 48).[159]

Simmons chooses this scene to introduce Drood as an eerie, out-of-place figure among the ruins, who seems to perform much in the same way as Dickens, so that from the start, they seem to be doubles. Two following examples show the contrast between the two figures:

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[159] Typical of celebrity biofiction is the debunking of an iconic moment as the canonical writer's construction of his own legend. Naomi Jacob point out that fiction biography moves away from 'telling a whole life' to focus on 'a crucial years or few years' while abandoning 'the conventional biographical point of view' (1990: 43). Cf. also: Julia Novak and Sandra Mayer, 'Disparate Images: Literary Heroism and the "Work vs. Life" Topos in Contemporary Biofictions about Victorian Authors' (2014).

> [Dickens] went to the stream and looked back to see a figure he took to be Drood – presumably no one else was foolishly dressed in a heavy opera cape on that warm June day – solicitously bent over the woman. When Dickens returned a few seconds later with his top hat filled with river water, the man in black was gone and the woman was dead but still showing her ragged, bloodied gums in a parody of a final smile. (*D*: 16)

> The two figures doing the most that day that terrible afternoon amidst the wreckage and groans were Dickens and the bizarre form who called himself Drood, although on the verge of vanishing from sight again, and always appearing to glide rather than walk from wrecked carriage to wrecked carriage. (17)

Both passages show that Dickens's attempt to rescue and help the victims of the accident is weakened by the uncanny presence of Drood. This Drood is a far cry from his namesake, the innocent young man who goes missing in Dickens's *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*: he looms large in the scene, a spectral, threatening presence, the villain rather than the victim. As Frenk notes, his appearance owes to 'the figure of the vampire, which has been all the pop-cultural rage in the nineties and noughties' (2011: 142). In the second extract, the character's flickering, 'bizarre form', recalls the *Doppelgänger* in Poe's 'William Wilson'. Indeed, in the short story, the double is characterised by his soft voice, a feature that is to be found in the hissing whisper used by Drood (*D*: 14). Furthermore, Poe's narrator and his double are rivals: 'Yet this superiority – even this equality – was in truth acknowledged by no one but myself; […]. Indeed, his competition, his resistance, and especially his impertinent and dogged interference with my purposes, were not more pointed than private' (Poe 2006: 172-173). Simmons's Drood is repurposed as Dickens's double, in the manner of Poe. This intertextual echo is furthered by the motif of the broken glass at the end of the passage when Dickens is retrieving the manuscript of *Our Mutual Friend* from his carriage. The passage plays on the semantic field of light and reflection and Simmons uses light to emphasise the wreck: 'Standing on the back of this last row of seats in the swaying, creaking coach, the river thirty feet below reflecting darts of dancing light through the shattered windows, he retrieved the overcoat' (*D:* 21). The 'dancing light' and 'shattered window' are then given a new dimension as the first creates an illusion and the latter turns into a distorting mirror:

> Dickens then happened to look straight down, down through the shattered glass of the door at the end of the carriage. Far below beneath the train car, some trick of the light making him appear to be standing *on* the river than *in* it, apparently unconcerned by so many tons of wood and iron swaying above him, the person who called himself Drood was tilting his head far back to stare straight up at Dickens. (*ibid.*)

The shattered glass works like a mirror, or a refractor deforming Dickens's image into Drood's. The equation between both figures is reinforced by semantic echoes, the repetition of the verb 'swaying', the unconcerned attitude to the wreckage surrounding both. The passage recalls the revelation at the end of Poe's story which is semantically marked by the mirror and the portrait:

> But what human language can adequately portray that astonishment, that horror which possessed me at the spectacle then presented to view? […] A large mirror, —so at first it seemed to me in my confusion— now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine

own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait. (Poe 2006: 186)

Here the opposition between up and down, the shattered glass and the river on which Drood seems to walk, transpose the topos of the mirror, suggesting that Dickens and Drood converge like doubles, as if the latter were a fantasy or a figment of the former's imagination, an unconscious emanation rather than a real person. For the reader, such intertextual echoes cast doubt on the reality of this Drood.

This doubt is constantly fed by Simmons's Collins who continues to play detective and investigates, as when he looks up Edmond Dickenson, whom Dickens rescued from the accident. The interview with the young man, an avid reader of Collins and Dickens cosily set in his hospital bed, unsettles the narrative, as this witness does not remember seeing such a man as described by Dickens. Collins's aim thus shifts from locating Drood to finding out clues as to his existence: 'I had gone through shifting opinions on the veracity of the 'Mr Drood' commentary. Charles Dickens was not a liar. […] But why invent this Drood character?' (*D*: 59). As Joachim Frenk puts it: '*Drood* gets its thrills not from the absence of Dickens but from the absence of the mysterious figure Drood' (2011: 141). Assuming Dickens invented Drood is tantamount to saying that Dickens is reinventing himself: 'to make Charles Dickens look better' (*D*: 59). This ties in with the idea of Dickens as a 'self-made man', controlling his public image, which prevails in Juliet John's book (2010) and in many biographies (Hibbert's might be the most striking example with it's telling title). It is at this point too, when Dickens is supposed to turn to his advantage his reconciliation with Thackeray, that Simmons starts to align his version of Dickens with Laird's category of the 'Fallen Dickens' and thus offers a portrait which contrasts with the presentation (and reception) of Dickens as an ideal.

Rather than simply fashioning his public image, Dickens is presented as acting. In fact, the narration turns into a performance and a game which Collins (and, by proxy, the reader) is forced to play: 'But what game would we be pursuing if Dickens and I actually sought out this Mr Drood figure? What purpose would it serve other than to gratify yet another boyish impulse of Charles Dickens's? And what dangers would be involved?' (*D*: 61) The series of questions creates an effect of suspense but also of confusion. For if Dickens only pretends that Drood is real then the endeavour to look for him is irrational; if not, Dickens must have a piece of information that Collins and the reader are not aware of. In the latter case, the hermeneutic square stands thus: Dickens is cast as the detective and Collins as his companion, a Watson-like figure who serves as a foil to the detective and thus who necessarily is in the dark as to what is

happening. Simmons deepens the filiation with the 'whodunnit' novel which Reuter defines as 'a (postulated) "intellectual game" between the author and the reader, figuratively represented by the intellectual (and not physical) confrontation between the investigator and the criminal' (2017: 48; my translation).[160] The use of this particular detective mode triggers the 'parallel text'. Indeed, at the very end, the text reveals that Dickens is a 'trickster', but throughout the novel, the reader is taken in by the illusion, along with Collins, the narrator.

As we have seen in chapter 1, the scene in which the reader follows Dickens-the-detective in the sewers illustrates the way in which Dickens takes on a figurative mask, that of the enthusiastic detective, to conceal the truth, *i.e.* that Drood is an illusion. This parodic and intertextual game is an example of the way in which Simmons deconstructs an 'archaic theme' dear to the detective genre, *i.e.* the hunt, with its trails and traps (Reuter 2017: 117): 'But then, in July, the hunt for the phantom began in earnest' (*D*: 64). The whole expedition turns into a Chinese box effect with a succession of detective figures, from Inspector Field to detective Hatchery, Dickens and finally Collins who is left alone while the former is taken away to meet Drood. At the very end of the novel, we are implicitly asked to reconsider the whole underground sequence and construe this as a figurative mask, built to conceal the truth, *i.e.* that Drood is an illusion. The trick is achieved through focalisation. Having Collins as narrator sustains the mystery surrounding Drood, which would otherwise be nullified. This corresponds to what Reuter refers to as 'a textual staging of knowledge' ('mise en texte du savoir') which relies on four main devices: paralipsis, anachronies, explanatory analepsis and metalepsis (2017: 50-53), all of which are being used at some point by the narrator Collins. We saw that Shepherd uses prolepses to make comparisons with our world, thus slightly breaking the illusion of the text, or to let the reader know more than Charles does, but whereas Shepherd empowers her reader and maps cognitive activity, Simmons here keeps his readers in the dark.[161] The reader is meant to identify with Collins and is left in the same blurry space. When rereading the novel, it becomes clear that the whole excursion is a hoax, staged and scripted from beginning to end by Dickens.

Like Shepherd's, Simmons's Field is emptied of his functions as teller of the truth (by his authority as detective) but is not evacuated from the diegesis since the detective actively participates in Collins's secret investigation of Drood. However, it gradually appears that Field

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[160] 'un "jeu intellectuel" (postulé) entre auteur et lecteur, figuré par l'affrontement intellectuel (et non physique) entre enquêteur et criminel.'

[161] Simmons's references to the twenty-first century are more subtly inscribed in the text and often take up the form of guesses, offering a contrast with Shepherd's more straightforward style.

is disillusioned, and is gradually portrayed as obsessed with Drood to the point of losing his sanity – Simmons might be said to be parodying the detective novel's nemesis plot there. Playing on the detective's 'theatricality', Simmons underlines the dangers of certain beliefs that can only lead to textual evacuation, *i.e.* death. Later, when Collins suggests that Dickens should bring Inspector Bucket into his new novel (Simmons thus seems to hint at the development of detective series), Dickens is reticent at the idea: 'since the original for Bucket, Inspector Charles Frederick Field, is no longer among the living, I should, by all propriety, consign his copy to the grave as well' (565). We can see here how Simmons plays with the notions of original and copy, the *Doppelgänger* plot and the link between life and death, embedded in a biofiction in which facts are distorted (the actual Field only died in 1874, four years after Dcikens's death). The news comes as a surprise for both Collins and the reader, creating a new and unexpected development, the date of Field's death corresponding to the night Collins went Undertown and encountered Drood himself.

The succession of detective figures in the underground scene is answered by a succession of witnesses, from Old Sal to King Lazaree. Interestingly enough, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the old woman is presented in terms of duality as she 'opium smoked herself into a strange likeness of the Chinaman. His form of cheek, eye, and temple, and his colour, are repeated in her' (*MED*: 4). In Simmons's text, the optical illusion reappears, as she tells, with the same accent and mannerisms, Drood's '*true* and awful Story' (*D:* 81, italics in the text): a haunting tale, tainted with images of criminality in the East End, opium and Orient (with references to Egypt, Lascars and Hindus). The typographical insistence on the adjective 'true' functions as a red herring for the reader, while the capital S of 'Story' turns Sal into a storyteller – later her account is characterised as 'lies' and Dickens is said to be 'enthralled by the tale and the teller' (84). In her tale, Drood turns from criminal opium-addict to religious leader, a resurrected truncated body living in the subterranean parts of London: 'Drood's dead is what I been tellin' [*sic.*] you. […] But 'is band, 'is group, 'is followers, 'is co-religionists – them other 'gyptians [*sic.*], Malays, Lascars, Irishmen, Germans, Hindus – they fished 'is rotting, bloated corpse out of the river […] and brought Drood back to life again' (*ibid.*). The motif of resurrection points to intertextual revival, as do other intertextual references as pointed out earlier in chapter 1.

There is a clear echo of *Dracula* when the '*new* protective angel' (67), private Hatchery, offers an explanation regarding the lack of evidence that could confirm Drood's presence at Staplehurst:

> 'But in the second mail carriage,' said the detective, 'there was [*sic*.] three coffins being transported to London. Two of them had been loaded at Folkestone and the third had come over on the same ferry what brought Mr Dickens and … his party. The railway papers showed that this third coffin, the one what had come from France that day – no record of from where in France – was to be released to a Mr Drood, no Christian name listed, upon arrival in London.' (73)

The coffins are emptied of their supernatural connotations as Dickens remarks: 'If you were a criminal, Wilkie – known to the port police as well as to London police – what would be the easiest and most effective way that *you* could get from France back to London?' (74). The allusion foregrounds Drood's 'Undead' quality, reviving and revisiting the hypotext. Besides, there is an explicit reference to another detective/Gothic intertext with a reference to Poe's 'Cask of Amontillado', a tale of revenge in which a man is immured alive by his offended friend: 'Evidently this Poe loved to write about crypts, corpses, premature burials, and hearts ripped out of living breasts' (101); 'And the entrances to these *loculi* have been bricked up, which reminds me of a story by the late Mr Poe of whom I was speaking somewhat earlier' (107). The reference to Poe enhances the Gothic aspect of the passage while creating suspense as the reader may wonder whether it is Dickens's plan to immure Collins alive or whether Poe's story foreshadows Collins's future murderous impulses concerning Dickens.[162] All in all, if Collins is duped by Dickens, it is because he is unable to recognise the tricks: his reading of the events is that of an inexperienced rather than experienced reader. Therefore, we are in fact facing a 'reading interlude' which, as Sweeney remarks, defines detection as a whole since for him 'a detective story is one prolonged reading interlude, in which the text reads its own mystery and suggests possible ways to solve it' (1990: 9).[163] And indeed, Simmons already prefigures the ending of his novel as Dickens disappears and the truth about his encounter with Drood is withheld for a few chapters. This play on repetitive disappearances is a clue to the reader as to the central issue of the novel: the 'process of *un*ending, both the text and the author – who turns into another absence' (Frenk 2011: 135).

Hence, Simmons seems to mock his narrator *with* his readers, while interweaving Gothic and humour, an aspect of neo-Victorianism which, as Christian Gutleben puts it, 'constitutes a distancing device meant to assert an anti-nostalgic stance both towards an imaginary original gothic and the Victorian production of its own Gothic myths' (2012: 311). As Gutleben claims, in the novel, '[t]he dark side of Dickens-Drood appears constantly *both* fearful and entertaining, *both* Gothic and humorous' (319). This intertwining of 'fear and fun' constitutes, according to

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[162] Cf. Mariaconcetta Costantini for other intertextual traces in this passage (2015: 182).
[163] The notion of reading interlude is coming from Gerald Prince (which he also refers to as 'metanarrative signs'). The notion is close to metafiction as it denotes the way a text gives us clues and 'explicitly refer to [the narrative's] code' (1982: 117).

Gutleben, the neo-Victorian redefinition of the Gothic (318), and, for Romero Ruiz, it reflects our postmodern state: a 'symbol of instability and decline in postmodern culture' (2017: 46).[164]

2. Doubles, detection and opium

Thus, Simmons plays with alternative versions of Dickens. This recalls Dickens's own fascination with doubles. For Susan Gillman and Robert Patten, this is a fundamental aspect of Dickens's writing, 'from doubling as a means of teasing out narrative from static conventions to doubling as fundamental internalized warfare between the demonic energies of the unconscious and the civilizing repressions of the conscious' (1985: 448). The neo-Dickensian novel repurposes this theme: the double is now used to raise the question of the authenticity of Dickens's status as part of the canon and as emblem of the Victorian era, as well as that of the authenticity of our own reading. Most importantly, duality is inscribed in the activity of writing and in the fight for authorial/narratological power, a fight which, as was demonstrated in the previous section, is central to the concerns of the detective genre. This is why, in *Drood*, duality is ascribed to Collins as much as to Dickens.

The writer's canonical status is first challenged by the problematic presence of the two writers, simultaneously positioned as friends, writing partners and foes, in other words, as doubles. In the novel, Dickens and Collins struggle with what Bloom calls 'the anxiety of influence', problems of authenticity, originality and primacy as an author. It has long been contended that Dickens strongly influenced and partially rewrote *The Frozen Deep*, the play which he had asked Collins to write and which they both performed in London and Manchester. Simmons's Collins resents this and presents himself as an author in his own right, while debunking criticisms on his work:

> There was much idle chatter and some small written comment to the effect that I, Wilkie Collins, had learned my craft from Charles Dickens and […] had even borrowed my narrative styles from Charles Dickens. […] that I was 'incapable of character-painting'.
> This, of course, was pure nonsense. (D: 55)

In a hyperbolic fashion, Simmons has Dickens's work contaminated by Collins with the transposition of Wardour and the reference to Collins's most famous novel, *The Woman in White*:

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[164] Romero Ruiz studies the cross-fertilisation of detective fiction and neo-Victorian historical fiction but her aim is different from mine in this dissertation as she focuses on the representation of female abuse and sexploitation in such narratives.

> Dickens himself admitted, as I have mentioned earlier, that his idea for self-sacrificing Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities* had come from my character of Richard Wardour in *The Frozen Deep*. And what was his 'old woman in white' in *Great Expectations*, the much-ballyhooed Miss Haversham, if not a direct steal from my central character in *The Woman in White*? (56)

The image conveyed here is that of a thief, as Simmons reverses the tenets of the relationship uniting Dickens and Collins: no longer a collaboration, the balance of power now has Collins as superior to Dickens. This could be read as merely a sign of Simmons's reclaim of Collins, yet the neo-Victorian writer's emphasis on the unreliability of his narrator seems to contradict such a straightforward interpretation, or at least to introduce an ambivalence. More likely, this passage seems to be an intrusion of the American author within the text. This is one of the few polyphonic passages in which through Collins's voice can be heard that of the neo-Victorian writer himself, which can be traced in the American idiom 'ballyhooed'. Just as the influence of Collins on Dickens is conveyed by theft, so is the American trace present in the play on onomastics. Simmons's misspelling of Miss Havisham as 'Miss Haversham' grounds the idea of theft, 'haver' being a possible reference to the unstable 'ownership' of the character ('Haver' *OED*). Quoting Dickens's and Collins's texts and characters, Simmons complicates the quotation work by introducing the notion of theft which raises ethical and legal questions. All these images may be reminiscent of Antoine Compagnon's concerns with the perigraph in his work on quotation. The perigraph is used as a touchstone from which to tackle issues of possession, appropriation and property. According to the French critic, the perigraph, branding the text with the name of the author, brought about the notion of textual property (2006: 443). These three issues underline three models of relationship between, on the one hand, a subject and an object, and, on the other hand, the subject of the enunciation and the enunciation itself (439). Possession is thus to be understood as a fantasy of fusion of the text and subject, while appropriation implies a confusion between the self and what belongs to the self, whereas property separates the book from the author (*ibid.*). Compagnon's categories shed light on intertextual relations, especially the embedded intertextual relations at play in the passage under study. They also highlight the ambivalent relation between Dickens and his works. Indeed, the author both strove for the establishment of international copyright, literary propriety, but at the same time seemed to be 'possessed' by his work, be it in his writing process, his public readings, or when comparing his characters to siblings, as Malcom Andrews notices (2016: 194-199).[165] This recalls J. R. Brown's posthumous cartoon which depicts 'Dickens witnessing his

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[165] Interestingly Compagnon uses the image of a soul inhabited by a demon (441).

characters swarming around him' (Andrews 2016: 5) as a unique representation of a writer's legacy.[166]

Besides, Simmons's Collins associates his fit of rheumatic gout with the anxiety linked to the prospect of his own forthcoming death, a metaphor for the anxiety of influence and the wish to appear unique:

> If a farmer is ill, others till the field in his place. If a soldier falls ill, he reports to the infirmary and is replaced on the field of battle. If a tradesman falls ill, others – perhaps his wife – must perform daily duties in his shop. If a queen falls ill, millions pray for her and voices and footsteps are muffled in her bedroom wing of the palace. But in all these cases, the work of the farm, army, shop, or nation goes on. If a writer falls terribly ill, everything stops. If he dies, his 'business' ends forever. In this sense, a popular writer's career is most like that of a famous actor – but even the most famous actor has an understudy. A writer does not. No one can replace him. His distinctive voice is everything. This is especially true for a popular writer whose work is already in the process of being serialised in a major national magazine. (*D*: 481)

This passage is built upon the contrast between replaceable individuals and the singular, irreplaceable voice; the anaphoric repetition betrays the fictional Collins's anguish, while on a metatextual level, this meditation plays with Dickens's own definition of himself as the 'Inimitable' (a phrase which also highlights the way in which it was possible for Dickens to become as much a symbol of the Victorian era as the Queen herself), and the way in which Dickens's own death left the novel unfinished. It is also possible to see here an acknowledgment on the part of the American writer as to the impossibility to imitate and finish Dickens's work. Be that as it may, Collins's anguish is also linked to *The Moonstone*. Collins tells us of its serial publication in *All the Year Round* and an American journal, *Harper's Weekly*, and shares the strenuous demands of serialisation: 'Although I had several numbers written in advance of this initial publication, those were already being set in type; new instalments would be needed almost immediately' (*ibid*.). This slight divergence from the reader's expectations contributes to emphasise the way in which Collins constructs himself as a double of Dickens and challenges the status of the canonical author. Turning the attention to himself seems to be an attempt to give a new balance to their unequal partnership, to use Nayder's phrase.

The tug-of-war between the two writers persists at the end of the novel, and leads us back to detection, as when Dickens comments on Collins's work: 'You may not have been aware of it, my dear Wilkie, but it is possible that with that sensationalist novel you may have created an entirely new genre of fiction' (561). The remark is full of irony for the twenty-first-century reader, since indeed Collins's novel is considered as the first detective

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[166]The editors of the victorianweb.org have compiled twelve similar portraits accessible at: http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/gallery/gallery4.html

novel. The irony is strengthened by the narrator's statement that he 'had no idea what [Dickens] was talking about' (*ibid.*). With his credulous narrator, Simmons seems to claim that Collins's creation of a new genre happened by chance and that we can only perceive such (generic) changes in retrospect. The metatextual reflection goes on as Dickens provides a definition for the genre:

> The idea of an entire novel revolving around a single mystery, with an interesting and three-dimensional detective character – perhaps a private enquiry detective rather than a formal police detective – in a central position, and with all character development and nuance of daily verisimilitude flowing from the side-effects and after-effects of whatever crime was the mainspring for the novel's central tale … why, it is revolutionary! (561)

This metatextual passage lays emphasis on three key elements: the single mystery, the detective figure and the life-like experience ('three dimensional', 'verisimilitude', 'side-effects and after-effects'). But it is also a way for Simmons to return to his own metatextual tale, Dickens then revealing he is working on a novel whose title would be 'something like *The Mystery of Edmond Dickenson*' (*ibid.*). The mention of the young man's name awakens Collins's anxiety: while Dickens thinks the young man left for Australia, Collins is sure that he is enlisted in Drood's factions in the crypt. This back-and-forth game between the characters' analysis of the work of their real namesakes and Simmons's plot goes on, '*Drood*' being also something like '*The Mystery of Edmond Dickenson*'.

Collins not only fights with Dickens but also with himself and his demons. Drugs are both a romantic topos (recalling Coleridge or De Quincey, the latter being often referred to in the novel) and a staple feature of detective fiction, as instanced by Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes; they are also a central feature of Dickens's *Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which opens on Jasper's visit to the Princess Puffer's opium den. For Joachim Frenk, Simmons's main concern is 'Collins's deteriorating state of mind, his ever more idiosyncratic behaviour and his opium visions' (2011: 142). Indeed, Simmons's novel uses an element from the historical Collins's biography: his chronic pain behind the eye linked to gout, as a symptom of impaired vision and cognition, a clue to the narrator's unreliability (*D:* 43). Collins's gout led him to addiction as laudanum was the only means to alleviate his suffering (Ackroyd 2013: 1).[167]

Wilkie Collins was ambivalent about laudanum, a source of vision and inspiration, but also a painful (and shameful) addiction, and therefore not everything he wrote about opium

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[167] According to Ackroyd, Collins's affliction was genetic, inherited from his father: 'Gout is associated with the pleasures of the flesh, but is often a genetic condition that provokes unusually large levels of uric acid in the blood; the acid crystallises in the joints, causing an acute form of arthritis with accompanying pain, stiffness and swelling. It may attack the hands and feet but, as in the case of Collins, the uric acid may accumulate around the eyes' (2013: 54).

must be taken at face value. For instance, Alexander Grinstein links Collins's intake of laudanum and his relation to his mother: he comments on a memory that Collins shared with William Winter regarding Samuel Taylor Coleridge's own addiction and claiming that the latter was comforted by Collins's mother. For Grinstein, this is a dubious anecdote:

> Winter's quotation, based on his memory of Collins's reminiscence, inevitably raises questions as to its veracity – whether Collins's reminiscence was of a real event or revealed a wish on his part that his mother would have been so permissive, in order to alleviate whatever guilt feelings he himself may have had about his own drug addiction. (2003: 144)

While such reminiscence is problematic for the purpose of Grinstein's book (a biography), it is enlightening for us as we can see that Simmons fleshes out the unreliability proper to Collins's biographies. Directly addressing the reader, Simmons's Collins provides us with a description of the drug, justifying its use as being part of the norm and going as far as to praise it: the direct address to the reader in the following lines ('Dear Reader of my posthumous future') is a pastiche of Victorian texts, and a signature postmodern clue, stressing temporal discrepancy:

> After that incident, I have kept the amount of medicine of which I partake a secret, but not the fact of my general use of the blessed drug.
> Please understand, Dear Reader of my posthumous future, that everyone in my day uses laudanum. Or almost everyone. (*D*: 44)

While this self-justification is supposed to bring verisimilitude and to strengthen the contextual aspect of the novel (with implied references to other well-known users of laudanum such as Coleridge, Walter Scott, Bulwer-Lytton and De Quincey), it is also highly symbolic:

> That afternoon I returned to my home – one of my two homes – at 9 Melcombe Place, off Dorset Square […] and secreted the new jug of laudanum, but not before drinking two full glasses of it.
> Within minutes I was my real self again … or as close to my real self as I could be while such pain from rheumatoid gout still battered at the windows and scratched at the door of my corporeal self. (45)

Not only is laudanum presented as an addiction that must be concealed, but it is intrinsically linked to the theme of split identity. Duality is inherent to the historical Collins's private life (he was involved in a relation with two women at the same time) and his two homes, but laudanum brings this split to a different level, when Simmons's Collins uses the semantic field of the house to describe his own pain, thus suggesting that both physical suffering and the remedy, laudanum, shatter the edifice of the self, a metaphor that smacks of Jekyll and Hyde. Furthermore, the mention of the 'real self' crystallises the idea of Collins as a double and prefigures the appearance of the 'Other Wilkie', just as the violence of the verbs, 'battered at the windows and scratched at the door', prefigures the apparition he sees in the staircase of his house. At the end of the passage, Collins's position as a detective figure is being questioned: while he will continue to play that role within the narration, the reader is led to consider him as a suspect, or at least, at this point, a partially unreliable narrator. The characterisation of Collins

is thus contradictory as he is both at once empowered as a detective figure and undermined as an unreliable narrator.

As such, Simmons repurposes Collins's use of laudanum in *The Moonstone*, especially the portrait of Ezra Jennings (which Collins drew from personal experience as Catherine Peters points out):[168]

> The one effectual palliative in my case, is—opium. To that all-potent and all-merciful drug I am indebted for a respite of many years from my sentence of death. But even the virtues of opium have their limit. The progress of the disease has gradually forced me from the use of opium to the abuse of it. I am feeling the penalty at last. My nervous system is shattered; my nights are nights of horror. (*M*: 376)

Simmons's text recalls Jennings's praise and awareness of the dangers linked to opium in Collins's novel, the drug showing two godlike characteristics: might and punishment/sanction. Though Jennings does not expand on his nightmares, they are clearly linked to Collins's hallucinations. Collins, like Dickens, peppered his fiction with traces of himself. Grinstein offers a Freudian reading of Collins and remarks that though 'Collins provided the reader with details and references that are readily recognizable as referring to himself', his work consisted of a 'montage, one that cannot be readily regarded as an exact or accurate copy either of himself or of a single individual or experience' (Grinstein 2003: 6).

This montage is revisited by Simmons who punctuates his novels with opium-related scenes in which Collins goes through withdrawal symptoms after a relatively long period without laudanum, scenes which suggest disturbed rather than heightened perception:

> The light from the street gas lamps hurt my eyes. My own footfalls struck my brain like chisel blows. The rumble of a passing waggon made my entire body twitch with pain. I was trembling. A sudden, bitter taste of coffee filled my mouth – not an echo of the coffee I had enjoyed with dessert, but something far more vile. There was a confusion in my mind and a nauseating sickness permeating my body. (*D*: 61)

The street seemingly turns against the author in this gradation leading from sensory pain ('eyes', 'brains', 'body'), to visceral pain in the image of nausea. Such passages debunk the detective's power to see (as Collins's gout attacks his eyes and what he sees is not necessarily real) and thus undermine his power to tell. Thus, the novel gradually creates an imbalance; laudanum adds to the narrative uncertainty that was previously discussed and helps to turn the fictional Collins into an unreliable figure, his narrative power crumbling to pieces. The reader is always challenged as s/he cannot be sure of the truth of the narrative.

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[168] Catherine Peters, amongst others, notes that: 'Certainly the experiences of Ezra Jennings, his frightful dreams, the effect of being stunned after a larger than usual dose, the relief from intolerable pain, were based on Wilkie's own experiences at this time of severe pain and deep unhappiness' (1991: 303). Also, Grinstein 2003: 142-146.

This is all the more significant since Simmons picks up Collins's most telling opium-induced hallucination. Peter Ackroyd explains that Collins's intake of laudanum triggered a range of visions, including himself:

> A second Wilkie Collins sat at the desk with him, trying to take control over the writing pad, struggling with him until the inkstand was upset. Then the 'real' Collins woke up. When he ascended the stairs at night he was confronted by a swarm of ghosts who tried to push him down. Sometimes he saw a woman with green tusks, and sometimes a monster with 'eyes of fire and big green fangs'. (2013: 103)

In *Drood*, the 'Other Wilkie' appears when Wilkie Collins is writing *The Moonstone* and suffers from his rheumatic gout. The narrator is shaken by Drood, by his competitive relationship with Dickens, by the strange ceremony underground, as well as by the discovery of the disembowelled corpse of Hatchery, the detective who was supposed to be his bodyguard. After eventually deciding not to kill himself, Simmons's Collins goes to his study where the Other Wilkie is waiting for him:

> The Other Wilkie sat sideways behind my desk, reading a book in the near total darkness. He looked up at me as I came in and adjusted spectacles that reflected my candle, hiding his eyes behind two vertical, flickering columns of yellow flame. I noticed that his beard was slightly shorter and slightly less grey than mine. (*D*: 485)

This oxymoronic description of the *Doppelgänger*, hidden rather than revealed by the candle, characterises the antagonist as an intruder trespassing into Collins's sphere, taking his own seat (note the use of possessives to talk about objects belonging to Collins rather than the Other Wilkie). Simmons's description borrows from the Gothic – with the literal flaming eyes: 'I noticed that even without the spectacle-glass in front of them to reflect, his eyes were still two flickering vertical cat's irises of flame' (485-6) – and from tales as the apparition seems similar to a genie. Indeed, the apparition offers its help and seems to have been triggered by Collins's fidgeting with his pistol. It is not so surprising that the *Doppelgänger* should appear at such a climax of anxiety and suicidal thoughts, as indeed the apparition of *Doppelgängers* has often been associated with a coming death (Meehan 2017: 3). This passage also is one of the other most striking echoes with Poe in the novel, as Collins's interrogations cannot fail to recall 'William Wilson': '*When the Other Wilkie dies, will I die? When I die, will the Other Wilkie die?*' (*D*: 485; original emphasis). This perfect chiasmic formulation clearly questions any dream of a united self and truly embodies Collins's psychological split into infinite self-reflectivity – again a trace of the locked room motif. Ultimately, the double materialises to further destabilise Collins's power as a narrator and as a writer, since it is the Other Wilkie who now invites him to write: 'Shall we start tonight?' (*ibid.*) However, the invitation is declined, the act of writing is postponed for a few pages until the *Doppelgänger* comes back.

At first, the Other Wilkie assumes the role of amanuensis as he waits for Collins to dictate. The mirror effect is furthered by the name, physical similitude and similar clothes, with barely distinguishable differences, such as the shorter beard or the play on inversions as in the following quotation: 'I saw that he wrote with his left hand. I was right-handed' (494). This mirror effect, at first, seems to suggest a mere hallucination. In *Hallucinations,* Oliver Sacks identifies the *Doppelgänger* as a form of hallucination close to out-of-body experience. Sacks calls this phenomenon an 'autoscopic hallucination' which he defines in the following terms:

> The autoscopic double is literally a mirror image of oneself, with right transposed to left and vice versa, mirroring one's positions and actions. The double is a purely visual phenomenon, with no identity or intentionality of its own. It has no desires and takes no initiatives; it is passive and neutral. (2013: 263)

However, Sacks also identifies a particular form of autoscopic hallucination which he calls 'heautoscopy' *i.e.* an autoscopic hallucination in which the patient interacts, often in a hostile way, with the double. What is interesting to us with this specific case is that 'there may be a deep bewilderment as to who is the 'original' and who is the 'double', for consciousness and sense of self tend to shift from one to the other' (265). Thus, Collins 's *Doppelgänger* in *Drood* – as well as Charlie in *Dickens and Dickens* – shares some of these characteristics.

While insisting on physical sensation, and thus prompting his reader to think of such neurological interpretations, Simmons above all uses such psychological experience to question authority, as Collins is gradually overwhelmed by his double. His loss of agency emerges from the discrepancy between his fight with pain and the absolute stillness of his Other:

> Between moans and the occasional cry of pain, I began –
> 'FIRST NARRATIVE – all capitals for that – *Contributed by MISS CLACK* – capitals on the name as well, mind you – colon after the name – *niece of the late Sir John Verinder* … triple spaces … *CHAPTER ONE,* in roman numeral …double space…*I am indebted to my dear parents, who are now both dead* … no, change that … begin parenthesis, *both now in Heaven*, end parenthesis… *for having had habits of order and regularly[sic.] instilled me at a young*…no, Miss clack was never young, make that… *at a very early age*, full stop, begin new paragraph.'
> I moaned and collapsed further back into the sweat-soaked pillow. The Other Wilkie, pencil poised, waited patiently. (*D*: 494; emphasis in the text).

The typography, though mimicking the presentation of the text, can also be seen as a sign of Collins's pain: the text is syncopated by the dashes, by the series of dots as well as by the interweaving of narration and dictation. The physical collapse marks Collins's surrender which is then emphasised by his alienation from his own work:

> It certainly was not my handwriting. The hastily pencilled words slanted the wrong way (as befitted a left-hand writer, I realised), the letters were formed differently – sharper, more spiked, almost aggressive in the indecorous bluntness – and even the spacing and use of the margins were alien to my style. (495)

The identification of the handwriting truly works as a sign of the Other Wilkie's reality, the letters becoming as many signifiers to characterise him as is illustrated by the enumeration of superlatives in the apposition. Finally, the content of the page reveals the Other Wilkie's act of

rewriting: 'The first sentence was precisely as I had dictated it. Nothing else was. […] D—n his eyes! The Other Wilkie was writing *The Moonstone* and there was nothing I could do about it. And he was the better writer' (496). Simmons thus gives a shape and an origin to Collins's text by appropriating the nineteenth-century author's experience of writing: as Grinstein reminds his readers, Collins was in such pain when writing *The Moonstone* that he indeed suffered from slight amnesia, an element which Collins uses for his plot (2003: 143). Collins's loss of author-ity in this passage echoes Simmons's own rewriting of Dickens and Collins, reflecting on his choices concerning style (Simmons's style is much lighter and more straightforward than his predecessors'). The passage subverts the balance of power between Collins and his ghostly Other, between the original and the copy as the latter surpasses the former, an inversion which is cryptically hinted at by 'his eyes' which might be read as 'he is I'. This passage marks the acceleration of the second movement of the novel in which Collins dreams of supplanting (and murdering) Dickens.

The episode also recalls a passage of Ackroyd's biography of Dickens which focuses on the 'mysterious and instinctive in Dickens's creation' (1999: 422), especially on the creation of characters.[169] Using different sources, Ackroyd records that the characters not only seem to have a mysterious origin but that they might sometimes be quickened to life, as shown by a discussion with Charles Collins (Wilkie Collins's brother and Dickens's son-in-law) during which Dickens is supposed to have confessed that: [170]

> on one occasion when I had shadowed a certain course for one of my characters to pursue, *the character took possession of me* and made me do exactly the contrary of what I had originally intended. So [Dickens] becomes the observer – he "heard" every word of what they said and took it down as if in dictation. (*D*: 423)

Simmons offers a convoluted rewriting of this as Collins dictates but the Other Wilkie, a character resulting from hallucinations yet a character all the same, rewrites his version of the story. Thus, what in Ackroyd partakes of and revives the myth of the writer as genius (Letissier 2012: 250) is ironically debunked in Simmons. The debunking is striking from the very start with the epigraph to the novel:

> What brought good Wilkie's genius nigh perdition?
> Some demon whispered – 'Wilkie! Have a mission.' (*D*: n.p.)

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[169] In an interview for the French journal *Télérama*, Simmons acknowledges Ackroyd's biography of Dickens, and especially the blanks left by the author concerning the last years of Dickens's life and the effects of the train accident. Christine Ferniot, 'Dan Simmons, l'attrape-lecteurs', *Télérama*, 26/08/2011.

[170] As Ackroyd notes, this aspect was grudgingly regarded by Dickens's son, Charles. In *Girl in a Blue Dress*, Gaynor Arnold addresses from the start the resentment Dickens's children expressed towards his literary work and celebrity as his fictional version of Kate complains about the mob present at her father's funeral (*GBD*: 1-5).

These verses written by Algernon Swinburne for *The Fortnightly Review* (1891) truly set the program of the novel and introduce the secret, the mystery of the whole novel, that of literary creation.

In Simmons's novel, everything turns out to revolve around mesmerism, revisiting the central device of *The Moonstone*, while providing a metatextual image of the act of rewriting itself. In Collins's novel, Ezra Jennings reveals that the idea of the theft was inscribed into Francis Blake's mind after he was given a dose of laudanum by Dr Candy. The plot repeats itself when Jennings offers to re-enact the event to prove his innocence and solve the mystery, and then mesmerises Blake. Whereas opium triggers the theft but also helps to solve the crime in *The Moonstone,* Simmons uses it as a means to utterly thwart the detection narrative, through the *coup de theatre* of the denouement: Collins's entire search proves to have been a vision induced by Dickens through hypnosis. Simmons creates a dialogue between *The Moonstone* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, therefore inserting himself within the Dickens-Collins relation, since Dickens's last novel may actually be seen as an answer to Collins's, as Lilian Nayder shows in chapter 6 of *Unequal Partners* (2002: 163-197).

In the end, doubles, visions and hallucinations perform a trick not only on Collins, but on the reader as well – twice in the novel, Collins refers to a gold watch that Dickens moves before his eyes, when telling Collins about the accident for the first time (*D*: 27) and at the moment of revelation when Dickens attempts to mesmerise Collins again (723). After a second reading, the reader understands that Dickens mesmerised Collins (and thereby him/her). The mesmeric trance is unresolved for Collins (Dickens didn't manage to break the spell) but the last word of the novel, 'unintelligible', seems to break the spell for the reader. Acting as a mesmerist, Simmons therefore seems to apply literally one of the most traditional literary concepts, Coleridge's 'suspension of disbelief'.

All in all, Simmons enhances the metatextuality of his neo-Victorian text made of narratological concentric circles as well as of metatextual comments on the work(s) being (re)written. Simmons is not the only one to do so. We have seen how *Tom-All-Alone's* rewrites Inspector Field (paradoxically absent) and collocates *Bleak House* and *The Woman in White*, the latter obliquely referring to the collaboration of the two writers. While Shepherd's text shows only traces of the Dickens-Collins relationship, Simmons goes further: the collaboration is not only used as a structural element but is also represented and Gothicised, with a split as Collins dreams of murdering Dickens. Eventually it appears that the idea has been 'planted' all along: as Armelle Parey puts it, 'it is the novelist character who plants the 'phantom' in the

brain of his patient and thus creates the need for his mesmerizing skills' (2008: 194).[171] Staging narration as well as questioning authority and representing the creative act as a hallucination, a loss of agency, Simmons pointedly draws the attention of his readers to the phantom Drood and his own creative process. The reader must therefore pick up recurrent motifs as clues.

3. Looking for geraniums: ominous clues

Like Shepherd, Simmons plays on recurrent images to build a network of clues, and they may be seen as metonymies of the hermeneutic quest, or ways of turning the reader into a detective. Simmons also seems to emulate Fred Kaplan's ominous description of the last years of Dickens's life. Kaplan stresses the omnipresence of death (be it of friends, in texts etc.), commenting on Dickens's growing obsession: 'Committed to the importance of the emotional current of dream, he was convinced that the striking and unlikely coincidences that frequently occurred had psychological significance. Unexpected reversals in which people actively but unconsciously pursue their own deaths fascinated him' (1998: 523). Simmons peppers his text with similar ominous elements such as the constant references to the Staplehurst accident and the ubiquity of Drood; but we also find, among the novel's trails of recurrent clues, red threads and red herrings, the 'scarlet geraniums' from Gad's Hill. The first occurrence of the geraniums appears quite early in the novel, soon after the Staplehurst accident, when Dickens asks Collins to pay a visit to Edmund Dickenson:

> The front yard at Gad's Hill was as tidy as everything else under the man's control: Dickens's favourite flower, scarlet geraniums, planted in precise rows […].
> Something about the rows of geraniums we were walking between as we approached Charley and the basket cart bothered me. In fact, they made my heart pound faster and my skin go cold. […]
> As we came down the drive and away from the scarlet geraniums, the sense of panic left me as quickly and curiously as it had arrived. (*D*: 34-35)

Geraniums were indeed Dickens's favourite flowers and, according to Jenny Hartley, had positive associations in his work, especially in their ability to trigger memories in a Proustian way (2018: n.p.).[172] Simmons repurposes these associations: the flowers cannot help but recall the 'red strings' on detective display boards that are so common in detective fiction and TV shows, another proximation or displacement of a generic convention. Yet the geraniums are not

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[171] Parey is talking about *Jack Maggs*, but this equally applies here. If we extend the reach of Parey's claim, it can also be said that the neo-Victorian novelist 'plants' a phantom, Drood, Maggs's phantom, into his readers' mind, tantalising them to read further.
[172] The association of Dickens with red geraniums is also strongly felt in the badge for the Dickens Fellowship, a red flower, chosen purposefully to mark this trait cf. http://www.dickensfellowship.org/frequently-asked-questions

used to link crime scenes together but rather spot crucial events to come. For instance, the first occurrence marks the beginning of the search for Drood, *i.e.* of Collins's psychological collapse.

Each occurrence is a flash of red, signalling the clues the reader has to be on the lookout for. More dramatically, they are often associated with Collins's ominous sense of impending events to come, as when he is convinced that Dickens will kill Dickenson:

> I was drifting off to sleep, banishing Charles Dickens and his phantom Drood from my thoughts, when my nostrils were filled with a cloying, almost sickening scent – rotting meat, perhaps – and images of scarlet geraniums, bundles and heaps and funeral-thick towers of scarlet geraniums, pulsed behind my eyelids like spurting of blood.
> 'My God,' I said aloud, sitting up in the dark, filled with a certainty so absolute as to be a form of clairvoyance. 'Charles Dickens is going to murder Edmond Dickenson.' (*D*: 175)

The flowers return as Collins is trying to 'banish' Dickens and Drood from his mind, to repress anxiety; the hallucinatory presence of the flowers spreads the scent of corruption, contamination, as their perfume and colour recall blood and meat. The geraniums become flowers for the dead, with the incongruous compound adjective and architectural image, ('funeral-thick towers of geraniums').

Dickens is not the only one who encounters Drood: Collins does so on three striking occasions; for the scope of this section I shall focus on the first encounter only. This encounter occurs while Collins accompanies Dickens on his reading tour, and it is announced by the return of the geraniums. The narrator nonchalantly remarks the presence of a bunch in Dickens's dressing room as Dickens 'now cut one [flower] for his buttonhole, adjusted it, and then cut another and set it in [Collins's] lapel' (270). Contrary to previous mentions, there is no reference to an uneasiness triggered by the flowers. It is thus a complete surprise when the public reading turns into a Gothic scene: Simmons can thus be said to play with the rules he sets for himself and the reading of his novel.

As Collins sits in the audience, he suddenly hallucinates Drood who comes on stage and kills him. The scene introduces a central motif I shall come back to, dummies or puppets: 'I realised that up through the darkness rose hundreds of slender, white, barely perceptible cords, their ends tied to the middle finger on the right hand of every member of the audience' (275). Above all, it is a return of the haunting crypt – 'The Birmingham hall had turned into a giant crypt and was just that silent' (*ibid*.) –, of the repressed ceremony that is yet to come in the crypt of the Undertown (if, for the reader the event has not yet occurred, it has for the narrator who writes in retrospect). The theatre's light is compared to blood – 'the light seemed thicker, slower, darker, almost gelatinous' (*ibid*.) – the audience is seemingly dead, and Dickens is

replaced by his *Doppelgänger* Drood. The latter's characterisation in this passage is a palimpsest of all the clues gathered about the ghost in the course of the novel, from his 'pale white skin', 'the ravaged ears, the lidless eyes, the nose that was little more than two nictitating membranes' to his smell which is 'like the Thames near Tiger Bay where Opium Sal's opium den rotted away', not to mention his Egyptian knife 'on which hieroglyphs were visible' (276). The scene reaches its climax with Drood cutting Collins's throat; this puts an end to the nightmarish vision and Dickens's public reading goes on as if nothing had happened: 'The audience began applauding wildly. The gelatin-thick air had lightened to normal. The silken cords were gone' (277). However, once Collins is back in his lodgings with Dickens, Wills and Dolby, it appears that he bears some traces of the 'encounter' with the ghost: 'There is dried blood all over your collar and neck. You look like Nancy after Bill Sikes has done with her' (278). The dried blood uncannily recalls the geraniums while introducing the 'Murder' piece in the novel.

Logically enough, the flower is again called upon when Collins visits his friend, who is preparing for the reading of the murder in his Châlet at Gad's Hill (with an ironic mention of Charles Collins, whose death Dickens constantly foretells but which only occurred in 1873). Here the flower stops signifying the terror related to Drood and/or the idea of Dickens as murderer and instead points to Dickens's coming death and Collins's murderous impulses. Quite tellingly, when Collins decides to confront and kill Dickens (on June 8, 1870 – the day before Dickens's death) the flower appears again. Collins lurks around Dickens's house, but the author does not show up. Looking through the windows, Collins sees some agitation in the household. What Collins does not know is that Dickens has fainted and is in a coma he won't ever wake up from. Collins only thinks of killing his 'friend' but, as he is going to shoot at the window, he is 'seized from behind by many hands' (731) and is 'thr[own] […] down onto the stones and sharp-twigged flower bed of closely packed geraniums' (732). The scene turns into a 'blood bath' and Collins turns into a figurative corpse, an image of Nancy:

> *The red geraniums!* They filled my vision – along with flashing stars following my skull's impact with the ground – and the red of the blossoms struck me clearly, impossibly, even in the darkness.
> Dickens's red geraniums. Blossoms of blood. A gunshot's flower blossoming on the white field of a formal shirt. The red geranium flower of Nancy's Murder as Bill Sikes bashed her brains out. (*ibid*.)

This explosion of red and flowers, seemingly both invading the body and leaking out of it, operates as a blood stain on the text while telescoping all the symbolic elements the flower stands for in the novel. This image of a dying Collins, a gory vision, makes up for what is kept hidden in the comfort of the house: the unrepresentable death of Dickens.

Let us note also that at times the smell of the geraniums is used to frame a moment, a sequence, as when Collins is listening to Dickens's description of the way in which Drood praised his novels when they supposedly met underground, in a library scene that also recalls the tradition of Christie's detective stories, gathering the characters in the library to point out the guilty party: 'You can imagine the sense of oddness, my dear Wilkie, sitting in this underground Undertown temple-library with this odd man […], hearing him praise my books rather as if I had just completed a reading in Manchester' (157). Geraniums are stressed at the beginning and end of this scene. The focus is on the oral transmission of Dickens's books, itself embedded in a storytelling act as Dickens is inventing this whole story for Collins – and, by proxy, for the twenty-first-century reader. Simmons's story thus turns into a (self-reflective) 'private reading,' an illusion that is emphasised by Dickens's direct address to Collins/the reader: 'I spent the next half hour or so drinking tea and listening to his story, my dear Wilkie. Would you care to hear a summary of Drood's biography now, or shall we save it for another day?' (158). Simmons teases his readers, playfully echoing the genre suggested by the title of his novel – a biography – and using typography to create a sense of suspense. Typographical cuts are used in the novel to stress a shift (either in the form of a flashback or a prolepsis) but here, the reader's expectations are thwarted as what comes next is Collins's answer to the question that was just asked. Collins, like the reader, is enthralled with his friend's story and eager to know more: 'my headache had been all but forgotten while I was listening to this fantastical tale. I said, "By all means, Dickens. Let us hear the end of this story"' (158). The use of 'us' prompts the reader's identification with the narrator.

In his 'Decalogue', Ronald A. Knox enumerates a certain number of rules followed by detective writers, dismissing super- or preternatural agencies, since, as he puts it, 'No Chinaman must figure in the story' (1947: 194-5). Simmons is thus also breaking one of the capital rules of detection as Drood brings in magic in the form of a new, Egyptian religion grounded in the belief in the powers of mesmerism (we shall return to this in Chapter 3). However, hypnosis is truly performed by Dickens rather than Drood; Collins remarks that he 'had been half-mesmerised by the sound and tone and drone of Charles Dickens's voice' (*D*: 165), a hint to the fact that throughout the novel, Collins has actually been under the magnetic control of Dickens, but of course this notion can only be understood with the benefit of hindsight. More strikingly, the tale becomes a Dickensian version of *The Arabian Nights*¸ raising questions of Orientalism and authenticity: 'Charles, are you asking me whether I think Drood was telling *you* the truth with this story or whether you are telling *me* the truth?' (*ibid.*). The geraniums

function here as a red slash, framing the sequence to highlight that what is at stake, throughout the entire investigation, is nothing but the power of voice, which is further exemplified by Dickens's own performances. Repurposing the representation of Nancy's murder is a key part of Simmons's appropriation of the topoi of detective stories.

4. Author-ial/-ing murder: (re)enacting Nancy's murder

Helen Davies, in *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2012), points out that the concept of voice is often called upon in neo-Victorian theories but never fully explored (2012: 1-4).[173] In both fictional accounts of *The Frozen Deep* and of the public readings, Simmons is interested in voice – appropriation and projection. Davies notes the legendary quality of certain voices, like Wilde's for instance, which fascinates twenty-first century artists and writers and has led to many attempts to recreate it (2012: 5-7). The same fascination pervades accounts of Dickens's readings, from contemporary witnesses to present-day biographers and critics describing the author's voice. Malcom Andrews, for instance, comments on Dickens's inflection and lisp 'as if his tongue were rather too large for his mouth' (2006: 183). Reworking Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and simulation, Davies shows that the sense of mourning, loss and anxiety entailed by Baudrillard's concepts is not present in the case of Victorian voices, as there is almost no recordings of them, 'hence the original is irretrievable; the copy is an act of creation in itself' (2012: 6). Therefore, the question that the motif of the voice raises is twofold as it is concerned less with the attempt to achieve a sense of authenticity than the extent to which the copy in fact becomes the original (28).

Simmons relishes Dickens's ability to call upon imaginary worlds almost through his voice alone, impersonating his characters and thus blurring the limit between fact and fiction, a topos which, as we have seen on many occasions, is at the centre of biofictional preoccupations. This blurring could only appeal to his postmodern sensitivity, hence Simmons's depiction of Dickens's first private rehearsal of 'Sikes and Nancy', a *mise en abyme* of the motif of murder, which is at the core of detective fiction. At first, the act is mistaken for a real aggression:

> Suddenly both young men [Charley Collins and Charley Dickens] heard two people, a man and a woman, shouting and arguing, the rising racket coming from somewhere on the lawn out of sight below and behind the house. It was the unmistakable sound of a quarrel escalating in violence. The woman's screams, my brother later told me, were terrifying. (*D*: 549)

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[173] It is an argument she had first sketched in her article 'Original copy: Neo-Victorian Versions of Oscar Wilde's "Voice"', in *Neo-Victorian Studies* 4:1 (2011): 2-4.

The passage teems with duality – since the witnesses are in fact Dickens's son and Collins's brother, both called 'Charley', like Dickens, pointing to Simmons's playful work on onomastics. The 'voices' seem to rise from an uncanny, out of sight place. Prompted by frustration (triggered by the birth of his affair with Nelly, or his rivalry with Collins and the latter's growing reputation as a writer), the scene also re-enacts the historical Dickens's exploration of the criminal mind and the collapse of boundaries as in this particular piece, the author seemed to delight, in Fred Kaplan's words, in 'being both murdered and murderer' (1998: 532).[174]

Dickens started his paid public readings in 1858, a project he had nurtured for some years, following the success of his private readings of his work to his family and friends; this was also inspired by the increasingly popular lectures delivered by literary men, such as Thackeray's lecturing tours in America (Schlicke 1999: 482-483). His readings were tremendously successful from the start, enabling him to make more money than his novels did, which was one of the reasons for Forster's disapproval. The readings offered Dickens the opportunity to 'escape from the restrictions of Victorian domesticity', fully experience his passion for the theatre as well as his connection with his audience while providing money for 'the expenses of his "limp" family' (Hibbert 1967: 26). Above all, Dickens was an excellent reader and had always wanted to be an actor.[175] Most, not to say all, of Dickens's biographers tend to read the effect of his readings backwards, infusing, as Angus Wilson does, a sense of the ominous, the readings almost being equated with the cause of Dickens's death and thus reversing their first exhilarating and liberating associations. Dickens was forced to put an end to his readings when his health began to collapse. He began his farewell tour in London on

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[174] Gerald Dickens (Dickens's great-great-grandson) in his performance at the 2017 edition of the Dickens Rochester festival plays all the parts, like his ancestor. His only propos are a desk and curtain similar to that used by Dickens himself. The illusion, *i.e.* the blurring of the victim with the murderer was particularly striking. Gerald Dickens's show, 'Mr Dickens is Coming!', is an extraordinary fit as it can be considered a biofictional performance of Dickens. In a *mise en abyme* way, G. Dickens re-presents his great-great-grandfather's public readings *i.e.* embodiments of his characters, but also revives the Inimitable himself as the actor plays on his resemblance with his ancestor, posing like him and wearing a similar costume. At the Rochester festival, he parades as Charles Dickens thus stepping in the nineteenth-century author's footsteps. As we learn from G. Dickens's website, the actor pulled his play together from various sources on Charles Dickens. Interestingly, 'Nancy's murder' is not just a scene in this show but has been turned into a show of its own which G. Dickens summarises thus: 'This is Victorian theatre at its most dramatic. Most of Charles' readings were safe, well-known and often comic passages from his novels, but in 1869 he introduced Sikes and Nancy to his repertoire. When Dickens performed what he called 'The Murder' he judged the success of the evening by the number of ladies who had fainted with horror. Today it has lost none of its power.' (http://www.geralddickens.com/shows.htm)
[175] Talking about his reading of *The Chimes* in 1844, Angus Wilson stresses Dickens's capacity to enthral his 'distinguished audience': 'It was a power that he was to taste more fully over a decade later, a power that was to grow into an addiction, a slowly killing drug' (1970: 187).

October 6, 1868 in which he included the reading of 'Nancy and Sikes' adapted from *Oliver Twist*.

The idea of this particular reading dawned upon him in 1863. However, afraid of its possible impact on the audience, Dickens postponed its actual introduction in his repertoire up to 1868.[176] The project exhilarated him and before performing it as part of his show he gave a private reading on November 14th, 1868, before a hundred people (*Letters* November 5, 1868: 217, November 19, 1868: 225). This 'private' reading being a success, he decided to include the piece. The first public reading of 'Nancy and Sikes' took place on January 5th, 1869, in London. Dickens was very happy with it and readily identified with Sikes in his letters about the performance as can be seen in this letter sent to Frederic Ouvry: 'I murdered the girl from *Oliver Twist* last night in a highly successful and bloodthirsty manner' (*Letters* January 6, 1869: 273). His account to Mary Boyle (in a letter sent on the same day) is even more playful but puts a disquieting emphasis on Dickens's identification with the criminal world, an identification and gruesome writing style that could only appeal to Simmons for his Gothic rewriting:

> My preparations for a certain Murder that I had to do last night, have rendered me unfit for letter-writing these last few days, or you would have heard from me sooner. The crime being comfortably off my mind and the blood spilled, I am (like many of my fellow-criminals) in a highly edifying state to day. (*Letters* January 6, 1869: 271)

This excerpt also bears witness to the toll taken on the author's health. Dickens's exhaustion following the reading of this particular piece has been commented upon by many – from his contemporaries, Dolby, Edmund Yates and Forster amongst others, to recent critics and biographers such as Andrews, Ackroyd or Kaplan – and was retrospectively sketched by Harry Furniss in 1924:

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[176] Charles Dickens, Letter to Reverend W. Brookfield, (*Letters*, May 24, 1863: 247): 'I have been trying, alone by myself, the Oliver Twist murder; but have got something so horrible out of it that I am afraid to try it in public' (250).

Figure 19: *English Novelist Charles Dickens Exhausted* (1924), pen-and-ink drawing by Harry Furniss

Malcom Andrews inserts this illustration right after his reconstruction of the reading, visually suggesting the impact it had on the Victorian author (2006: 225). The shadowy and sketchy representation of the murder in the background (top right) and Dickens's posture in the foreground seem to constitute an uncanny revision of Robert William Buss's *Dickens's Dream:*

Figure 20: *Dickens's Dream* (1875), watercolour, Robert William Buss.

The peaceful and semi-coloured blueish slumber of Buss's portrait, featuring all the favourite characters belonging to Dickens's works, is replaced by the nightmarish vision and the harshness of the hatchings of Furniss's. Besides, Forster's account is also very accurate, the biographer featuring the author's pulse taken at his readings in Birmingham in January 1870 (by then Frank Beard, Dickens's family doctor, was in the wings as well as his son Charley in case the author were to faint on the platform):

> I may briefly mention, from the notes taken by Mr. Beard and placed at my disposal, at what cost of exertion to himself he gratified the crowded audiences that then and to the close made these evenings memorable. His ordinary pulse on the first night was at 72; but never on any subsequent night was lower than 82, and had risen on the later nights to more than 100. After *Copperfield* on the first night it went up to 96, and after *Marigold* on the second to 99; but on the first night of the *Sikes and Nancy* scenes (Friday the 21st of January) it went from 80 to 112, and on the second night (the 1st of February) to 118. From this, through the six remaining nights, it never was lower than 110 after the first piece read; and after the third and fourth readings of the *Oliver Twist* scenes it rose, from 90 to 124 on the 15th of February, and from 94 to 120 on the 8th of March; on the former occasion, after twenty minutes' rest, falling to 98, and on the latter, after fifteen minutes' rest, falling to 82. (1948b: 410)

Forster plays on rhythm and numbers, syncopating his text to mimic Dickens's heartbeat, a palindrome of a kind (starting and ending with 82) reaching its climax with 'Sikes and Nancy'. The nineteenth-century biographer successfully manages to take his readers 'backstage' (seeing how popular Dickens's readings were, it may be assumed that most of his readers in the UK attended at least one of his readings), uncovering the tremendous physical efforts Dickens put in his performance.

This kind of biographical data is taken up by Simmons, whose account of the first reading of 'Sikes and Nancy' focuses on its effect on the audience, but also on Dickens and Collins:

> On Tuesday evening, 5 January, Dickens murdered Nancy, in St James's Hall for the first time in front of the paying public. Dozens of women screamed. At least four fainted. One older man was seen staggering out of the hall, gasping for air, helped out by two pale friends. I left before the riotous applause began, but it still chased me down the snow-covered street filled with carriages and cabs waiting for the audience to emerge. (*D*: 612)

Re-presenting the terror emanating from the reading, Simmons appropriates Dickens's way of talking about this particular moment ('Dickens murdered Nancy'), a means to further blend reality and fiction, whilst transferring the identification with the criminal onto Collins when he leaves the theatre. Indeed, the verb 'chase down' is an echo of Dickens's own fears, which were commented upon by Fred Kaplan: 'Finding it difficult to distinguish between himself and his text, after each rehearsal, as he walked the streets, he had the vague sensation of being "wanted"'(1998: 538). Creativity and murder are lingering associates in Dickens's fictions but, as Gillman and Patten notice, with *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and 'Nancy and Sikes' they are 'inextricable' so that 'Dickens' own death seems, in what may merely be our compulsion

to write fictions of his ending, the only socially viable solution: like Merdle, Dickens takes himself into custody, so that the respectable artist will not become a Hyde' (1985: 448).

The fragile boundary between the 'respectable artist' and 'Hyde' is precisely the touchstone of Dan Simmons's novel, Dickens being cast as a criminal, especially in the obsessive representation of his public readings of Nancy's murder. It is small wonder that Simmons should have taken such an interest in Dickens's performances, since they testify to the fluctuation from self to other which appeared in the impersonation of his characters: 'He wanted not simply to suggest a character in action with a little mimicry, but to become that character.[…] He wanted to people the platform with more than just the figure of the gentlemanly narrator' (Andrews 2006: 202-203). Critics have often read Nancy's murder as a metaphor for the rejection (*i.e.* a kind of symbolic murder) of Catherine. The novel reads this literally. Furthermore, the appeal of the Readings (and of the desire to rewrite them) may also be attributed to the fact they 'never achieved definitive form' (Schlicke 1999: 486). Indeed, similarly to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the texts of the Readings were never really fixed but were constantly being revised. In their elaboration, Dickens himself was accomplishing an act of rewriting as 'Dickens did a quick scissors-and-paste job and had this mock-up printed and well-bound before undertaking further revision' (*ibid.*). The image recalls Compagnon's claims that the experience of reading is akin to the child's activity of cutting and pasting (2006: 17-20). He further adds that cutting a quotation off from its text turns it into a metonymy, standing for the source while becoming a text of its own (34-37). Bringing together Dickens's last two works in progress, relying on numerous forms of quotations, Simmons emulates Dickens's methodology for the writing of his Readings, giving a new (and Other) voice to the canonical author with whom his readers are so familiar, playing with the reader's 'historical' and 'fictive' knowledge (O'Gorman 1999: 19-26).

Simmons also literally takes up the cut-and-paste image, which the reader cannot help but see as a metatextual comment reflecting on the neo-Victorian writer's own appropriation of Dickens's text and method:

> I glanced at the stacks of pages on his desktop. […] I had seen his method before. He had torn pages out of one of his books – in this case, *Oliver Twist* – mounted the pages on stiff pasteboard, and was busy scrawling changes, additions, deletions, and marginal comments. He would then send these to his printers and have a final version printed up – three lines of white space between oversized text, wide margins in which to add more stage and readings comments, and notes in very large script. This would be his reading text for the coming tour. (*D*: 559)

The verb 'torn out' points to Simmons's emulation of gory elements that is to follow. Through the viewpoint of his narrator, Simmons seeks to convey the shocking quality of Dickens's stage directions: 'Beckon down … Point … Shudder … Look Round with Terror … Murder

coming …' (*ibid*.). The gradation shifts from Sikes to Nancy while the punctuation signals both the cuts in the text and the escalation of the threat, which reaches its climax in the next excerpt

> … he beat it *twice* upon the upturned face that almost touched his own *... seized a heavy club*, and *struck her down!! ... the pool of gore that quivered and danced in the sunlight of the ceiling ...* but *such* flesh, *and so much blood!!! ... The very feet of the dog were bloody!!! ... dashed out his brains!!!!* (559-560; italics in the text)

The passages chosen by Simmons are all striking passages from the reading, which were underlined in the original manuscript (both the real manuscript and the fictional manuscript Collins is holding in his hands).[177]

In his intertextual play with biographers (especially Kaplan and Ackroyd), Simmons seems to point out the way in which Truth is constructed, especially in relation to historical facts. Simmons is an adept of uncanny distortions as when he humorously reworks Macready's well-known celebration of Dickens: '[Macready] bellowed out, 'No, Dickens – er – er – I will NOT – er – er – have them, my dear boy – er – gone, gone! – no!' And here the bellow became a roar. 'It comes to this – er – TWO MACBETHS!'' (*D*: 616) Dickens himself reported Macready's words in a letter to his American friends Mr and Mrs Fields in a letter dated from February 15th, 1869, and which is his most thorough account of the readings:

> I went to Cheltenham expressly to do the Murder for him, and we put him in the front row, where he sat grimly staring at me. After it was over, he thus delivered himself, on my laughing it off and giving him some wine: —"No Dickens—er—"er—I will not"—with sudden emphasis—"er— have it—er—put aside. In my—er—best times—er—you remember them my dear boy—er—gone, gone! —no, I'll be damned"—with great emphasis again— "it comes to this—er—Two Macbeths!"—With extraordinary energy. (*Letters* February 15, 1869: 292)

It is striking to see how Simmons recycles Dickens's transcription ('no', 'gone' and 'Macbeths' were sharply underlined in the original letter) with his typography. He keeps the humour which pervades Dickens's portrayal of the old actor, the whole description being a patchwork of unacknowledged quotations from Dickens's letter, especially with Macready's stare at Dolby followed by his 'vacancy', the actor turning into 'a clever pale optical illusion of himself' (*D*: 616; *Letters*: *ibid*.). However, Macready's comedic portrait leads to an ominous image, as Dickens, Lady-Macbeth-like, is depicted thus: 'Dickens had been washing his hands for fifteen minutes or more. "*I cannot get the blood off,* Dolby," said the exhausted writer, looking up with haunted eyes. "*It stays beneath my nails and in the skin*"' (D: 618; my emphasis).

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[177] Malcom Andrews also offers a sort of reconstitution of the experience of the readings relying on various audience testimonies (2006: 219-25). The text is based on a copy of Dickens's own prompt-copy which, unfortunately, was lost (230). This reconstitution, in which Dickens at many a time seems to dissolve into his characters, certainly is yet another testimony of the cross-fertilisation between the work of the scholar and that of the writer. The text of the reading was also edited in a collection entitled *Sikes and Nancy and Other Public Readings*, edited by Philip Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

Emphasising Dickens's deteriorating health, Simmons takes quite literally the biographers' association of the tour with Dickens's death: 'I decided to go to Edinburgh to see Dickens Murder Nancy. And, possibly, to the Murder murder [*sic*.] Charles Dickens' (*ibid*.). The reading is turned into a noun 'Murder' (hence the repetition) which endows it with agency, casting Dickens as the victim. Simmons seems yet again to be harping on and displacing an image from Fred Kaplan: 'Though constantly on his own trail, he was determined never fully to catch the 'him' that he was following, ultimately more successful as the pursued than the pursuer, the criminal than the detective' (1998: 537). While for Kaplan, Dickens shifts from detective to criminal figure, Simmons, in the end, portrays him as the victim, the criminal figure eventually being recast as Collins.

The novel not only revolves around Nancy's murder but also presents Collins as a murderer. There is also a constant parallelism between Dickens's death and Collins's, appearing most forcibly at the end of the novel. Collins's dream of killing Dickens can be articulated in terms of parricide, a means to assert his own legitimacy and independence as a writer (this again is a slight echo of the classical tragedy). The sense of illegitimacy builds up from the constant reference to Collins as coming second as for instance in the passage in which Dickenson shows his admiration for Collins (55-56). It is the 'anxiety of influence', to borrow Bloom's concept, which seems to trigger the murderous impulse in Collins. In many ways, it seems that Simmons uses the readings of 'Sikes and Nancy' to encapsulate Dickens's passion for the stage, which prompts Collins's jealousy and murderous impulses. The stress laid on Dickens's public readings is a good instance of the way in which Simmons revisits the Dickens-Collins collaboration, which was already present in Simmons's earlier representation of the collaborative writing of the 1856 play *The Frozen Deep* at the beginning of the novel and in *The Terror*. But in the end, in *Drood*, Collins only dreams that he killed Dickens. When the opportunity does turn up in 'reality', Dickens is already dead. Instead of killing Dickens, Collins kills his maid (elaborating a whole scheme to conceal the true reasons behind her disappearance) and, as the reader is led to infer, Joseph Clow, Caroline Graves's husband.

The altogether surprising and unexpected ending of Simmons's text, that this might all have been an illusion, debunks the original hypothesis. If Dickens ever was a murderer, it was only a performance (in his enactment of Nancy's murder on stage) and the actual murderer turns out to be Collins himself. Thus, not only are there many *Doppelgängers* in this novel but the structure of the novel loops back upon itself, demanding that the novel should be read twice. Dan Simmons thus plays with duality at all levels: his novel is an illusion, an oracular invitation

that proves misleading, in which the characters themselves are doubles or figures of a dual reality (Collins and Drood). Finally, its reading is double too, fully investing in the possibilities offered by the detective novel which, especially in the case of the (self-reflective) locked room, asks of its readers to construct a parallel text to the one they are reading. It thus invents new ways of responding to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood,* the latter being defined by Lyn Pykett as 'doubly a detective story, doubly a mystery,' whose 'abrupt curtailment of the novel has made successive generations of readers into detectives, compelled to speculate on Dickens's intentions […], scrutinizing the text for clues' (2012: 307). It may be defined as a mock trial, so to speak, whereas other revisionary responses are more antagonistic.[178]

B.   Life-writing, detection and thieving in *Jack Maggs*

We shall now turn to *Jack Maggs* in which, under the disguise of Tobias Oates, Peter Carey portrays a secretive, adulterous, immoral and unethical Dickens obsessed with 'the Criminal Mind' and mesmerism, thieving others' lives for his fiction. Simmons's novel also plays with the 'Fallen Dickens', *i.e.* the representation of Dickens concerned with the 'hidden, unsavoury details' of his life (Laird 2012: 23); but Carey's agenda is quite different as, as Armelle Parey puts it, he 'accentuates the portrait of Dickens/Oates as a liar' (2008: 194). According to her, this unflattering portrait does not embrace the ambivalent portrayal of neo-Victorian celebrities (that we saw in Shepherd, or, up to a point, in Simmons) since Carey leaves no room for nostalgia (Parey 2009: 131).

It is small wonder that the Australian writer should choose to 'write back' to *Great Expectations*, a novel which, as we have started to see in chapter 1, keeps Australia in the margins, safely removed from the so-called centre of the Empire, London, and which refuses to allow the convict, Magwitch, the right to return to England. For Maria Renata Dolce, the novel offers a dialogue between a figure belonging to colonial literature (and glorified by the Empire), and the Other, postcolonial figure. Characteristically, Carey offers a decentring

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[178] Incidentally, the mock trial was also used to account for Dickens's readings, in Kate Field's eulogy of Dickens's second (and last) American Tour in *Pen Photographs* (1871). Presenting her account as a form of investigation, Field concludes with a 'Verdict' section, in which she finds Dickens 'guilty' of numerous charges such as to be 'without peer', or, 'Charles Dickens is twice Charles Dickens' (144). Field's 'pen photographs' praise Dickens's talent as both author and actor, and it is easy to see how Simmons's *Doppelgänger* tale ties in with, and differs from, this tradition.

narrative, rewriting *Great Expectations* from the margins and, as Parey puts it, 'puts the source-text into perspective as one version of the truth possible amongst others and thus reveals the space for the writing of alternative versions' (2009: 131). The clear-cut positions of Parey, Dolce and Thieme – amongst others –regarding the affiliative stance of the novel tend to be qualified by critics like Andreas Gaile, who points out that this re-vision, which aims to set 'more than 130 years of Dickensian distortion', 'comes in the form of another nineteenth-century-style fiction and thus presents us with a perfectly postmodern paradox where one lie is more truthful than another lie, but still remains a lie' (2010: 52). This convoluted phrasing highlights the complexity of Carey's position, as if writing back failed to decolonise. As Carey himself puts it:

> Looked at in this way, *Great Expectations* is not only a great work of English literature; it is (to an Australian) also a way in which the English have colonized our ways of seeing ourselves. It is a great novel, but it is also, in another way, a prison. *Jack Maggs* is an attempt to break open the prison and to imaginatively reconcile with the gaoler. (Carey Q&A)

Answering the postcolonial debate about the textual prison lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Moving away from the model of detection *stricto sensu*, that was central to Shepherd and Simmons's agenda, I simply contend here that the complexity of Carey's strategy seems to play with, and displace, some of the conventions belonging to detective fiction.

The following sections will revolve around the different modes of writing/storytelling that are used in *Jack Maggs,* which will enable us to see how '[b]y subverting literary convention, [Carey] puts tone, atmosphere, image, diction, character and action to new uses' (Snodgrass 2010: 5). This need for other narratives is tackled by Thieme who claims that 'straightforward lines of descent, such as one, at least supposedly, finds in canonical English literature, are replaced by literary genealogies that reject colonial parent figures' (2011: 7). As we shall see, *Jack Maggs* not only engages with *Great Expectations* but also with other 'myths' of British identity and fiction, through Ma Britten, for instance.

1. The criminal's tale vs. tracking the criminal

There are two kinds of crime that must be disclosed here; on the one hand, Tobias Oates, a young writer, or rather Carey's fictional version of Dickens, seeks to discover Maggs's criminal past as a convict; on the other hand, the novel's purpose is to disclose the real crime, the process of colonial appropriation inherent in all fiction written in colonial times, including Dickens's. More specifically, Carey repurposes two key motifs, that of the mask, traditionally

associated with the criminal figure, and its opposite, the pen ('la plume') which for Eisenzweig epitomises the detective (Eisenzweig 1986: 124). Here, Compagnon's understanding of appropriation as a kind of 'make-up' ('maquillage') concealing a stolen good is quite useful (2006: 435). These concerns are crystallised in the novel by the constant stress laid on the figure of the writer, the moment of writing and of reading, enabling us to see how '[b]y exaggerating the techniques of narrating – while having two characters – Carey makes his reader aware of the artifices underlying any story and stresses the part of the author in arranging the facts' (Parey 2009: 133). This novel therefore demands the active participation of the reader since Maggs writes letters about his past which are presented in a fragmented way so that:

> It is only by piecing together the information from these various accounts that the reader is able to understand Maggs's biography. Although Carey's novel gives Maggs a voice of his own, then, the narrative technique suggests that this account needs to be supplemented by other narratives. (Snodgrass 2010: 41)

Carey's novel presents its readers with the biofiction of a marginalised subject, to use Kohlke's typology, as he turns the tables on *Great Expectations* with a focus on Magwitch, here renamed Maggs. Returned from Australia where he established a prosperous business, Maggs seeks to find his *protégé*, Henry Phipps (Carey's version of Pip), but the latter resents his benefactor. The plot of the novel makes it almost impossible for the reader not to detect the hypotext and its detective features. Dickens's novel has its readers pondering over the riddle of the unnamed benefactor; Pip proves to be a poor detective (he draws wrong conclusions and believes in the fairy-tale scenario); crime is also present, through Compeyson's betrayals rather than Magwitch's theft; finally, it is death to come back, as Magwitch's return leads to a chase, trial and execution. In Carey's novel, anachronies (backwards and forwards) gradually uncover Maggs's past. The end of the novel offers two contradictory 'explanatory anlepses' – which usually denotes the detective's speech at the end of the detective novel in which the plot is unravelled (Reuter 2017: 53) – with on the one hand *The Death of Maggs*, which casts the Australian convict as a villain, and, on the other hand, Mercy's and the narrator's reparative version in which Maggs is enabled to go back to and prosper in Australia.

It is also in this novel that the parallelism between the biographical and the detective genres is most felt. This parallelism emerges from the conflation of the detective and the criminal, as well as from the narratological power allotted to Jack Maggs. The latter aspect links the novel to a prototypical form of the detective novel: the Newgate novel.[179] Eisenzweig sees

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[179] The possibility to consider *Jack Maggs* as an engagement with the Newgate novel was evoked in a discussion at the Victorian Persistence seminar. The session's keynote, Hubert Malfrey, presented some aspects of his PhD

in the passage from the Newgate to the detective novel a shift in the narrative structure of the genre: from a narrative of the crime justified by moralistic aims to the narrative of the investigation which aims at unmasking the criminal (Eisenzweig 1986: 263-265). For the critic – who draws upon Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* – this shift is representative of the one taking place in the police system, from the *spectacle* of punishment to the *reading* of the sentence. As Foucault has it, in detective fiction 'crime is glorified because it is one of the fine arts' to the point that:

> the criminal represented in this literature had made himself impervious to suspicion; and the struggle between two pure minds – the murderer and the detective – will constitute the essential form in the confrontation. […] [W]e have moved from the exposition of facts or the confession to the slow process of discovery; from the execution to the investigation; from the physical confrontation to the intellectual struggle between criminal and investigator. (Foucault 1975: 68-69)

For both French critics, the investigation led by the police and the trial produce a narrative that takes the place of the spectacle of the punished body in the old police system (Eisenzweig 1986: 8-9, Foucault 1975: 261). Foucault's formulation is striking when read alongside Carey's novel, as both the system of showing and that of narrating appear in the course of the story. *Jack Maggs* revisits the threshold between the two kinds of texts: the narrative that Maggs writes to Henry Phipps – and, by proxy, to the reader – links Carey's novel to the Newgate novel as it presents the reader with the confession of the old convict regarding his past crimes.

Meanwhile, Tobias Oates, through his mesmeric séances, investigates Maggs's past and thus wishes to read (and even write) Maggs's punishment: 'He [Tobias Oates] would be the archaeologist of this mystery; he would be the surgeon of this soul' (*JM*: 54). Interestingly enough, in this quotation, Carey reinvests some of the motifs present in *Bleak House* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, as well as the early association of detection and of origins with geology (Frank 2003: 70-130).[180] As commentators of the detective novel suggest, the genre could not have appeared without first the emergence of the (detective) police force nor without that of such sciences as geology or palaeontology (Browne 2010: 222). Carey's novel deploys certain discourses on the 'criminal type' that emerged with the advent of photography and especially the use of composite photography by the police force (for instance, Cesare Lombroso's theory in 'The Criminal Man' (1880)). The séances in the front room, with 'a straight-backed chair upholstered in green velvet set up in the middle and some four or five assorted dining chairs arranged like pawns in the defence of a beleaguered king' (*JM*: 79), may

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dissertation entitled 'Pour une esthétique du crime: les 'Newgate Novels', essai de définition d'un genre populaire'. The seminar took place in Paris on 26/11/2014.

[180] Interweaving mesmerism, fiction and the search for the past, Carey's narrative seems to echo Fred Kaplan's analysis of Dicken's relation to mesmerism, see chapter 6, 'The Past Illuminated' (Kaplan 1975: 139-164).

remind us of scientific lectures, especially those performed by mesmerists such as Elliotson (Kaplan 1975: 211), but this also turns the whole scene into a game of chess ('like pawns in the defence of a beleaguered king').[181] Chess, as Roger Caillois has it, is a metonymy for detective fiction (1983: 9-10). Here detection works in two ways; Oates is investigating Magwitch, but as the reader is prompted to read the scene as an ironic instance of colonial manipulation, Carey is investigating Victorian domination, and, thereby, the limits of Dickens's representation. Indeed, as Renata Dolce remarks, despite his importance regarding Pip's fortune, Magwitch remains tethered to his otherness, as Dickens cannot redeem him and keeps him a victim of the 'collective guilt' ('colpa collettiva') (2000: 23-24). The result of Oates's investigation, *The Death of Maggs,* can also be defined as a composite photograph of sorts. This parallelism between narrative and composition or construct is enhanced by Carey's constant use of terms related to archaeology when he depicts Oates's writing process, based on Dickens's well-known habit of elaborating plots while walking:

> But in all English literature there was nothing like the dark journey he now planned to take inside the Criminal Mind. He began, as he walked, to chisel away at its plot. He charted a course by abstract reasoning, almost algebraically. From Birth to Death, from Light to Dark, from Water to Fire. (*JM*: 178)

Maggs is thus 'plotted' while the author turns into the explorer of a construed heart of darkness (a 'dark journey'). Oates's guilt and denial are dramatised when, at the end of the novel, he burns the bloody linen of his sister-in-law, with whom he had an affair and who has been killed by a medicine meant to cause abortion. In the flames, he sees Lizzie's face turning into Maggs's, still displacing and plotting the convict, making up the novel that the reader will never get to read:

> It was Jack Maggs, the murderer, who now grew in the flames. Jack Maggs on fire. Jack Maggs flowering, threatening, poisoning. Tobias saw him hop like a devil. […] It was Jack Maggs who had done this, and in his grief Tobias began to heap up all his blame upon him. It was now, on the seventh of May, in the darkest night of his life, that Jack Maggs began to take the form the world would later know. This Jack Maggs was, of course, a fiction, and so it may no matter that Tobias never witnessed the final act of the real convict's search. (326-7)

For Oates, the scene is cathartic, with the emphatic anaphoric use of his name construing Maggs as the epitome of the murderer in hellish flames. But Carey's irony ('this Jack Maggs was, of course, a fiction') debunks Oates's narrative. He also subverts Pip's authorship, as the passage is a telling rewriting of Magwitch's return in the nineteenth-century novel: 'Out of such remembrances I brought into the light of the fire, a half-formed terror that it might not be safe to be shut up there with him in the dead of the wild solitary night' (*GE*: 296). Carey's novel ends on Maggs, his return to Australia and prospering family life with the chambermaid Mercy.

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[181] It echoes Jaggers's chair (*GE*: 150), an intertextual trace further linking mesmerism and detection.

Maggs has managed to carve a place for himself; this is also underlined by Janet C. Myers, who shows that the metaphor of carving is linked to surgery and violence in the novel, 'implying both the degree to which Oates aspires to carve out a narrative from the raw material Maggs provides, thereby immortalizing the convict's story through his own narrative inventions, while also hinting at the violence underlying these aspirations' (Myers 2011: 464).

Though John Jordan deems it impossible not to see in Carey's appropriation of biographical data 'a rough but affectionate embrace' (Jordan 2000: 300), for Parey, Carey challenges the celebration of Dickens that is to be found in biographies (from Forster's to Ackroyd's, with the telling exception of Tomalin and Nayder) (2008: 195). Carey's engagement with Dickens is also deeply personal. The haunting scene in which Sophina is forced to have an abortion can be seen as a fictionalisation of Carey's similar experience with his first wife (then girlfriend) Leigh Weetman (Snodgrass 2010: 9). Quite obviously, the Australian author casts himself as the returned convict, hence his identification with Magwitch in interviews (a point that Julie Sanders raises too (2006: 135)):

> Then one day, contemplating the figure of Magwitch, the convict in Charles Dickens' Great Expectations, I suddenly thought THIS MAN IS MY ANCESTOR. And then: this is UNFAIR!
> Dickens' Magwitch is foul and dark, frightening, murderous. Dickens encourages us to think of him as the 'other,' but this was my ancestor, he was not 'other'. I wanted to reinvent him, to possess him, to act as his advocate. (Carey Q&A)

In this extract, Carey seems to vouch for an utterly affiliative stance (note the use of capitals, the term 'advocate') relocating himself and reconfiguring the view of Dickens's novel from an Australian perspective ('but this was my ancestor, he was not "other".'). Carey likens his historical writing to a war-like enterprise which may grant independence from the original colonial figure:

> When you choose to write about nineteenth century London, you are entering very well travelled streets, and there is nothing in the least neurotic about being nervous about it. You are entering the territory of Dickens or Thackeray, Wilkie Collins. If you go to them for information, you will be nothing more than a *plagiarist and a thief*. Yet you must somehow–to put it bluntly–*invade their territory and repossess it*. How can this be possible? You need maps, charts. You need spies, agents, correspondents from the past. Foreign spies are always the best. They see things the English themselves will never tell you. (*ibid.*; my emphasis)

Interestingly enough, Carey presents himself as a spy, a detective discovering Victorian secrets, blaming Oates, rather than himself, for plagiarism and theft. He claims that he actually shows a form of respect for Dickens, through displacement and reinvention: 'I would have thought it presumptuous (and rather boring) to adapt, adopt, or meddle with Dickens' actual characters' (*ibid.*).

Carey's position *vis-à-vis* Dickens may account for the way in which the so-called curative mesmeric séances turn into revelations concerning Maggs's past as a convict in Australia. The novel therefore represents punishment in its use of the body as a space that may be written over. As a convict, Maggs was flogged in Australia, a punishment which seems to embody the 'physical confrontation' and spectacle defined by Foucault, while being re-enacted in Victorian England, thus replacing the periphery at the centre and forcing, as it were, the reader to 'watch'. In fact, not only does Maggs suffer from a *tic* but his back bears the marks of the whip, a point we shall come back to in chapter 3. The discovery of Maggs's back (one might add of his 'back story') opposes Oates and Percy Buckle. While for Oates the scar dooms Maggs to prison, marking him as an outcast from New South Wales, for Buckle the scar is only a sign to be read, a story:

> Oates snorted. 'Did you not see his *back*, man? He is a scoundrel.'
> 'Well, we saw a page of his history,' said the little grocer stubbornly. 'Whatever his offence, anyone with half a heart can see that he has paid the bill. I could not send him back for more.' (*JM*: 87-88)

By comparing the scars on Maggs's back to 'a page of his history,' Buckle evokes the possibility for Maggs to redeem himself, to go forward. Furthermore, the image of the page invites a comparison with Maggs's narratological power, that is fully exploited in the letter he writes in parallel to the main plotline of the novel. Thus, Buckle's opinion seems to confirm the possibility for Maggs to have a future, to turn the page over, so to speak. It thus foregrounds the end of the novel and his return to Australia, where, '[r]eturned to Aristotle's *tabula rasa* (blank slate) state, he eludes the evils of the colonial overlords who flogged him and repatriates to New South Wales, the source of his true character and liberty' (Snodgrass 2010: 241).

This contrasts with Oates's version, which is supposed to be an actual book that the reader may look at: 'Finally [Mercy] owned no fewer than seven copies of the last edition [of *The Death of Maggs*], and each of these is now (together with Jack Maggs's letter to Henry Phipps) in the collection of the Mitchell Library in Sydney' (*JM*: 328). As Parey notes: 'Following tradition, the narrator never directly acknowledges that he is telling a story but ostensibly pretends that his characters and their writings are real' (2009: 132). Interestingly enough, 'Mag' is the name Dickens originally intended to give to Pip and the novel would have been entitled 'Mag's diversion' (James 1998: n.p.). While Dickens turns Mag into Magwitch, shifting from hero to convict, Carey's novel retrieves him and reclaims his textual scars. What's more, Carey's renaming both takes away the demonic associations contained in the name Abel Magwitch and 'reflect[s] the laconic tacurntity considered characteristic of the "typical" Australian man' while rendering 'the Australian "drawl"' (Schmidt-Haberkamp 2004: 253).

Maggs is represented in a double act of writing which itself doubles the novel, a playful revision of the double structure intrinsic to detective fiction as we have seen. On the one hand, Maggs writes a long letter to his beneficiary Henry Phipps while on the other hand, he records the events of the day: 'Some time after midnight Jack Maggs would begin to record the events of his first evening as a servant. By six o'clock that evening, he had been transformed into a footman good and proper' (*JM*: 25). Maggs's notes are thus used to justify the narration's use of his viewpoint – Carey's third-person narration shifts from one focaliser to another, mainly, Mercy, Buckle and Oates. As they are set in the main narrative of Carey's novel, these recordings are associated with the visible and the public (as the convict makes no effort to conceal them). This contrasts with the writing of the letters which is marked by secrecy, since Maggs arranges a hidden workplace where to write them (66), writes backwards and uses an invisible ink (74) (metatextually, this is a clear sign of the way in which the postcolonial novel writes back to the canonical text). Myers sees in the latter 'a recurring image of disappearing text,' for her, 'Carey invokes the trope of invisible writing to dramatize the question of who Jack Maggs' story belongs to – Oates or Maggs, Dickens or Carey, England or Australia' (Myers 2011: 458). However, the secrecy of the activity of writing as well as the content of the letters is jeopardised: Mercy follows Maggs into Phipps's house (66) – the writing only starts once she is forced to leave when Mr Buckle returns – and Oates pries into Maggs's history through the mesmeric séances. All in all, the secrecy of the letters and the scars on his back force Maggs to lead a double life:

> Each night, behind the double curtains, Jack Maggs impatiently roamed Henry Phipps's rooms, inquiring deftly into drawers and dressers, running his large square-fingered hands over damask and lace. Here he slept fitfully on the settle, alert to every noise that might signal the return of the man he had come to meet. Here in these rooms he continued the letter which he intended the Thief-taker to present to the house's absent tenant.
> Each morning, by dawn, he was back in Mr Buckle's house, and as the clock at St George's rang for Morning Prayer, he would wearily present himself at Tobias Oates's front door. On being admitted by the taciturn house-keeper, he would carry a cup of tea up to Mr Oates's study where he would, at eight fifteen precisely, be mesmerized. (90)

The structure of both paragraphs inscribes duality within the parallelism established by 'Each night', 'Each morning'. Night is associated with the narrative of the past (the letter), while Maggs is construed as a double figure, a determined investigator searching Phipps's rooms ('roaming', 'inquiring', 'running') and a criminal waiting for his arrest. The phrase 'behind the double curtains' endows the setting with secrecy, recalling the idiom 'behind closed doors', and creating an opaque screen.[182] There is a slight ambiguity as to who 'the man he had come to

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[182] 'Behind double curtains' also echoes the phrase 'behind the double door', a reference to the hospital and especially ORs. Read in this light, the image shows Henry Phipps's house as a projection of Maggs's trauma, an idea furthered by the fact that the house depicted in the mesmeric séances seems to be the same.

meet' may be: while the novel has asserted until then that this man is Henry Phipps, 'the house's absent tenant', the evocation of the Thief-taker opens another possibility for the reader's 'parallel text': Maggs might be (unconsciously) waiting for his arrest. While this paragraph relies on the use of gerunds, on repetition of the spatial marker ('here'), the second paragraph is marked by the rhythm imposed by time: 'by dawn', 'as the clock at St George's rang', 'on being admitted', 'at eight fifteen precisely'. The insistence on time introduces the way mesmerism conveys the detective narrative. The rhythm of the passage is also a marker of its connection to the Dickensian hypotext and indeed is reminiscent of a letter Dickens wrote to Miss Burdett Coutts in 1856:

> Your note finds me settling myself to *Little Dorrit* again, and in the usual wretchedness of such settlement — which is unsettlement. Prowling about the rooms, sitting down, getting up, stirring the fire, looking out of window, tearing my hair, sitting down to write, writing nothing, writing something and tearing it up, going out, coming in, a Monster to my family, a dread Phenomenon to myself, &c &c &c (*Letters* February 19, 1856: 61-62)

Both Dickens and Maggs seem to be in perpetual movement (all the verbs in the letter denote movement). The gerund that Carey uses is ubiquitous in Dickens's letter too. The latter text is hectic, playing with opposites to depict an uncanny state of being, the author turning into 'a Monster' and 'a dread Phenomenon' *i.e.* an apparition (etymologically, this is the first meaning of phenomenon) ('Phenomenon, n.' *OED*). It can be argued that Dickens is playing on the two meanings of the term 'phenomenon', both as a pejorative representation of himself as a dreadful monster, and as a genial, marvellous prodigy. Subverting Dickens's letter, the passage describing Maggs's habits of writing is also marked by the streets, presenting his itinerary from Mr Buckle's house to Oates's as a sort of ritual, as we can see with the mention of St George's church and Holborn. To some extent, we can say that this double life conforms to the double narrative of detective fiction as identified by Todorov: night-time is associated with the narrative of the past and daytime with that of the investigation. Furthermore, it crystallises within Maggs the shift from Newgate to detective novel, from confession to psychoanalysis.[183] The con-text, to use Thieme's phrase, from which this neo-Victorian novel is written doubles these concerns with a postcolonial take: through his writing, Maggs reclaims urban space and foregrounds his textual ownership by writing his version of his own life. As Myers puts it, such scenes both suggest 'the liminality and inaccessibility of Maggs's own narrative and the degree to which ownership of his story is contested and shrouded in secrecy' and yet 'Maggs' invisible

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[183] As Colin Davis notes, the link between the detective genre and psychoanalysis is usually taken for granted as both the detective novel and psychoanalysis are 'invention[s] of the late nineteenth century', the detective and the psychoanalyst both 'search out the relevant clues that point to a hidden truth' (2002: 294). Sally R. Munt goes as far as suggesting that detective fiction enables to cope with grief and mourning (1998: 134).

writing is fluid and powerfully subversive, since it allows him to express otherwise overwhelming emotions while retaining control over his own story' (2011: 458).

2. Stealing the lives of others

Not only does Carey displace the marks of punishment towards reading and writing, he also reverses the roles of the criminal and the detective. Just as Oates 'is described as an illusionist with powers of manipulation, mystification, fraud' (Woodcock 2004: 268) so is biofiction presented as a form of fraud, a treachery, a theft. Indeed, when Oates experiments on Maggs, the investigation becomes a violation, a crime in itself as Maggs feels that '[h]e was burgled, plundered, and he would not tolerate it' (32). As Myers puts it: 'Carey frames this relationship as analogous to other forms of colonial violence insofar as Maggs is symbolically colonized by Oates and by the Phantom that the author implants in Maggs' mind' (2011: 464). The novel unfolds Maggs's story in spite of himself, as Oates searches within Maggs's unconscious. Carey, as C. Kenneth Pellow argues, is in fact using theft as a motif to reflect on Dickens's way of negotiating with his own life in his fiction: 'Intertextuality, for instance, takes on complexity and function, as Carey juggles numerous "texts": Dickens's life is one; his fiction is another; the manner in which he reworks his life in that fiction is yet another' (2013: 87). Dickens's 'habit of incorporating into his fiction slightly disguised versions of events, but especially of people, from his own life' (90) proves ethically troublesome in both Dickens's and Carey's novels.

Indeed, Carey mocks Dickens's habits as when Oates's cook presents her master (and, by proxy, Dickens) as a kind of parodic Sherlock Holmes indulging in a hermeneutic quest, seeking to read signs and steal a man's story:

> 'Did he tell you to wait?' she said.
> 'He did, Ma'am,' said Jack Maggs, automatically smiling and showing her his strong straight teeth.
> 'Said he was going to fetch a shilling? Said you were to tell him your story, I that so?'
> He stood and stretched. 'So he said, Ma'am.'
> The cook – for he assumed her to be so – shook her head and went about readying the kitchen for breakfast, […].
> 'He cannot stop himself. He saw your livery, and thought: there's a chap with dirty livery. Just what you would think or I would think, but Mr Oates, he can't stop there – he's thinking, how did that fatty-spot get on his shoulder? He's wondering, in what circumstances were the stockings torn? He's looking at you like a blessed butterfly he has to pin down on his board. It is no that he hasn't got a heart. Indeed, I'm like as not cold-hearted in comparison. But he is an author, as I'm sure you don't need telling, and he must know your whole life story or he will die of it.' (*JM*: 42)

The passage testifies to Maggs's adaptability; the adverb 'automatically' denotes his ability to conform to the role assigned to him by others, while having in the house a stranger with a story

to tell has clearly become a routine for the cook who impersonates Oates/Dickens's working habit. In her evocation of Oates's writing habits ('He cannot stop himself'), the cook likens the writer to a detective, with the breathless questions ('how', 'in what circumstances'). As in the case of Sherlock Holmes, the detective is highly scientific. From the start, the figure of the detective was associated with science, especially entomology, pinning down suspects, or interesting specimens. As Snodgrass puts it: 'Carey pictures Oates collecting the ex-con like a lepidopterist pinning a butterfly to a collection box. Like an early Sigmund Freud on the prowl for human fault, Oates the voyeur sets out in search of literary plunder' so that, 'worse than a housebreaker who swipes silver, Oates loots souls to turn into sensationalized crime fiction, a staple of England's gothic market' (2010: 241). The process seems to strip the character of emotions (something Dickens has been accused of),[184] but the cook dismisses this, as if Oates's career justified everything: 'But he is an author.' The ironic remark may be read as a metatextual comment, as if Carey pointed to the limits of his own fiction writing which, as Parey puts it, 'is then presented as having no more claim to the truth than Oates/Dickens's version' (Parey 2009: 133).

Thus, the investigation of Maggs's past makes Oates a detective, a mesmerist and an author, which is a way for Carey to problematise authorship and to explore neo-Victorian concerns with writing, especially with appropriation, adaptation and intertextuality. For Hadley, Carey's staging of mesmerism binds the novel with the 'biographical impulse to establish the true character of the subject', mesmerism enabling an in-depth analysis where phrenology and physiognomy only allow for the 'reading of external signs' (2010: 45). Oates makes almost no effort to hide the fact that his 'magnetic cure' will serve his novelistic interests:

> 'But what is it to you, Sit? It is my pain after all.'
> 'I am a naturalist.'
> 'I heard you was [*sic*.] an author.'
> 'Yes, an author. I wish to sketch the beast within you. If you were to continue with this experiment I would not only attempt the cure, I would pay you wages.' (*JM*: 47)

The contract between Oates and Maggs is biased, the latter not knowing what he reveals of himself while being under someone else's control:

> 'Dear Mr Buckle,' he began, 'one sometimes hears a servant described by this or that lady as a 'treasure'.' With his prisoner's breathing whispering in his ear, he continued – three drafts before he had it exactly right.' (54)

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[184] Paul Schlicke observes that Dickens's way of talking about his working progress might at times sound cold, giving the example of a reference to the writing of *David Copperfield*: 'nearing the end of David Copperfield, he wrote to his wife: 'I have still Dora to kill' (2011: 118).

Maggs is thus turned into a prisoner, unwillingly forced to reveal himself to Oates, the climax of this revelation being the aforementioned scene in which Maggs partly undresses. The séance is marked by the tension between both men, signalled by the imperatives used by Oates, Maggs's answers which are amiss, his resistance to undressing, Oates's lies and his play with Maggs's feelings going from utter fear to relief. The scene truly represents the conflict between two narratological powers, that of the criminal and that of the detective, showing the detective as superior. Yet, this superiority is tainted by cunning. As in any detective fiction, the moment of resolution gives space to the narration of the investigation that we witnessed during the séance as Oates provides us with his viewpoint as an expert:

> 'Did you not wonder at my intuition, Lizzie? I guessed he was a bolter from New South Wales. […] It was when he described the pelicans, Lizzie, I knew the theorem was proved. Do you see what I have now? Do you see what I have been given? […] Don't you see what I now possess? A memory I can enter, and leave. Leave, and then return to. My goodness, my gracious. What a treasure house, eh, Buckle? You can hear the cant in his talk. He has it cloaked in livery but he wears the hallmarks of New South Wales.' (87)

> 'When he mentioned the double cat-cat on our previous encounter, that was the clue to his secret. It is a punishment invented in New South Wales.' (88)

In these excerpts, Oates traces his own investigation, while he belittles Maggs as a fugitive ('bolter'), marked out as deceitful ('cant' and 'cloaked in livery'); but the figurative speech presents Oates as a thief plundering Maggs, who, ironically, stands for the 'treasure house'. The characterisation of Oates as a thief and his working notes on Maggs enable Carey to thematise his concern with the truth and writing (Hadley 2010: 43-44) as can be seen in the following passage:

> 'But when we return to London I'll give you the tin box and all my notes. And we will burn them together. Now kindly release me. You are hurting my ear.'
> Jack Maggs held him [Oates] grimly. 'Your notes are lies, mate. Your notes say nothing about me taking off my shirt. The truth is: you have had me reveal secret information in my sleep. […]
> 'When I read you making fun of that Canary Woman,' said Jack Maggs, with a quietness that in no way contradicted the violence of his dark eyes, 'why, then it was clear as gin – you'd do the same with me. You'd tell my frigging secrets to the world.'
> […] 'How much will they pay you for a bit of fun like you have with that poor old biddy? One quid? Two? How much does it take to put her secrets in the gutter?
> 'I told none of her secrets, Jack'
> This Maggs answered by tightening his massive grip. 'This is where my secrets are,' he whispered. 'Inside this box. The brain box. This is what we must break into.' (*JM*: 232-233)

In this passage, Oates and Maggs are travelling by coach to Gloucester, where they hope to find Henry Phipps. The scene takes place after Maggs has discovered the truth about Oates's doings, namely, that the writer is using him to write a novel, the draft of which is contained in a tin box. The box epitomises the world of secrets. An angry Maggs threatens Oates and hints that more secrets are contained in his mind, suggesting that they are unreachable. However, Oates's pages are filled with those secrets Maggs believes to be unreachable since they are transcripts of the

mesmeric séances. This trespassing into the realm of intimate secrets is all the more ironic since the historical Dickens himself feared intrusion acutely and decided to burn all his correspondence in 1860 as he tells 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. (*Letters* September 4th 1860: 305)

Dickens's tone is half-humorous, the text is tainted with magic ('the Genie') intermingled with a sense of shame ('overcast the face of the Heavens'). The image of the secret casket applies therefore to both Dickens's letters and to Jack Maggs's mind; once more, there is an intertextual parallelism between Maggs and Dickens, demonstrating a fear of the instability of the written word (as 'lies') and the impossibility of ever getting an absolute truth. In a postmodern way, Carey opposes the search for truth/authenticity vs. fiction/lies. What's more, Carey introduces a slight anachronism in the reference to the gutter which cannot fail to evoke the gutter press in the minds of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers. Thus, while as we have seen in chapter one, the streets and, by extension, the city have enabled Oates to hide his secret adulterous affair with his sister-in-law, the reference to the gutter here shows the contrary: it refers to cheap publication, and to streets that now disclose secrets instead of concealing them.[185]

Ultimately, the problem that Carey's novel highlights is that of identity as construct. It is often noted that Carey's work embodies a form of Australian identity which, due to its historical context, is always marked by colonialism. Both postmodern and postcolonial in his strategies, Carey offers with this novel a counter-narrative to the grand narrative entailed by *Great Expectations*. As Dolce puts it, Carey offers 'a critical revision and an imaginative rediscovery of history, through a dialectic confrontation with the past' while 'taking away the artificial stability of official accounts, an identity in the present is restored which builds itself not despite, but in virtue of, the diversity of its own expression' (2000: 16; my translation).[186] Maggs's identity is clearly built in such terms. As we have seen in chapter 1, at the beginning of the novel Carey uses various viewpoints to give voice to projections regarding Maggs's identity. However, the more the novel unravels, the less Maggs accepts such projections: in the end, he asks Oates to burn the papers in the tin box in order to challenge, resist and escape

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[185] The phrase 'gutter press' only appeared in 1903 and was at its climax in 1989 (*OED*).
[186] '[una] revisione critica e la riscoperta immaginativa della storia, in un confronto dialettico con il passato ; sotratto all'artificisoa fissità dei resoconti ufficiali, esso restituisce un' identità nel presente che si costruisce non a dispetto, ma in virtù della diversità delle sue espressioni.'

representation. Contrariwise, Oates is unable to do so, always staging himself, trying to keep his secret affair hidden from others. Even at the end, even when the secret is out in the open and Lizzie is dead, Oates needs and seeks representation in the transfer of his own guilt onto his fictitious version of Maggs.

3. Writing as distorting

We should note that the intertextual palimpsest beckons to other texts, beyond *Great Expectations* and Dickens's correspondance. The mention of the 'Canary woman' in section 50 is significant, as it brings to mind Miss Flite from *Bleak House*. It also works as a screen: while Maggs thought he was to be given his own story, Oates instead presents him with the story of the Canary woman, hiding his séances transcript (226). The story works as an opaque screen or an alibi concealing the truth: Oates is in fact rewriting Maggs's love story with Sophina.[187]

Maggs is presented as a victim of his misreadings, a feature which draws a further parallel with Pip. As Peter Brooks suggests, the problem lies in the fact Pip constantly looks backwards so that detective work 'can offer no comfort and no true illumination to the detective himself. Like deciphering the letters on the tombstone, it produces no authority for the plot of life' (1984: 135). Both Maggs and Pip fall for the world of fantasy and appearances rather than pay attention to evidence: '"Not a particle of evidence, Pip," said Mr. Jaggers, shaking his head and gathering up his skirts. "Take nothing on its looks; take everything on evidence. There's no better rule"' (*GE*: 307). After his séances, Maggs is turned into a reader of what he believes to be his own mind and is taken aback by what he discovers: 'At first the convict had been astonished to read Dabareiel's flowery speech – he could not believe that such an educated being might exist within him – but he accepted it soon enough' (*ibid.*). Oates feeds Maggs with dreams of social mobility, claiming Maggs has within him the makings of a gentleman. But the dream is debunked; the writer is but a crook: 'as in all crooked businesses, there were two sets of books' (*JM*: 91). The text Maggs reads is 'fabricated' and constitutes a means to contain the convict while functioning as an opaque screen behind which Oates hides. Like Simmons, Carey makes use of the trope of the mirror: 'for the writer, stumbling through the dark of the convict's past, groping in the shadows, describing what was often a mirror held up to his own turbulent

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[187] Annegret Maack identifies another trace of *Bleak House* in the incipit of *The Death of Maggs* which rewrites the incipit of Dickens's novel (2004: 236-237).

and fearful soul' (*ibid.*). But while Simmons uses this trope to create a *Doppelgänger*, Carey uses it to highlight the suffering of the convict and thereby reflect upon the violence of the coloniser.

Oates's theft of Maggs's secret is doubled by Maggs's own investigation into Oates's knowledge regarding the truth about his past so that the novel turns into 'a compulsive account of its author's life and of the text's writing, the identities of Carey's criminal and writer merge. The secret mimesis or replication at the heart of the novel identifies writer as criminal and criminal as writer' (Sadoff 2010: 180). Maggs's investigation begins with the pursuit in the streets of London, analysed earlier in chapter 1, and reaches its climax from section 73 through to section 75: 'Having heard Sophina's name on Tobias Oates's lips, having finally begun to understand the extent to which his secrets had been burgled, Jack Mags became, by degrees, severely agitated' (*JM*: 272). The duality of the novel's structure is summarised in this short extract: just as the unconscious 'tic douloureux' and the mention of the pelican in Maggs's trance led Oates to discover Maggs's true identity (87), so does Oates's unconscious speech turn Maggs into a detective. Once more, the written document becomes a set of signs, as paper betrays Oates's treachery regarding Maggs.

His skills as a thief prove to be very useful to pick the manuscript out of Oates's pockets. The manuscript turns into a metonymy, as Carey plays with the well-known phrase from *Great Expectations*: Wemmick's 'portable property' (*GE*: 184). For the recuperation of 'that which was his' (*JM*: 273), Maggs has to read the book. The whole passage puts the reader and Maggs on an equal footing, both discovering the hidden text at the same time: 'He had had that feeling in his gut before, that cold terror associated with the triangle. He knew his life and death were not his own. His forehead creased in a grid of criss-crossed frown marks' (*ibid.*). The revelation of Oates's true activity, as well as his mockery of Maggs's clichéd dream of becoming a legitimate Englishman '*in England's green and pleasant land*' (*ibid.*; italics in the text), come as a shock for Maggs. The grid of marks on his forehead turns the body into a somatic text, expressing the horror of dispossession. Myers points out that '[b]y likening the experience of reading Oates' narrative to that of being flogged, Carey implicates Oates – and by extension Dickens – in the violent brutality of colonialism' (2011: 465). Indeed, Maggs's free-will seems crushed while he is reduced to a page, 'a grid of criss-crossed' marks. The latter image reworks Pip's characterisation of Magwitch as he watches the convict sleeping in his lodgings: 'his bald head tattooed with deep wrinkles falling forward on his breast, I would sit and look at him, wondering what he had done, and loading him with all the crime in the Calendar' (*GE*: 309).

As Céline Prest has it, the passage turns Magwitch into 'an open document covered with inscriptions', and Pip presents himself as a writer:

> While the marks already exist on Magwitch's face, Pip turns them into a proper document which he wishes to be permanent, for all to see and read. The comparison with the inscription of the piece of paper is explicit since tattoos are made from ink imprinted on the skin. Pip thus writes the narrative of Magwitch's criminality and marginality by inscribing him within the lineage of western outcasts. (2016: 327-328; my translation)[188]

Carey's text thus writes back to the implicit suggestions of Dickens's novel so as to highlight the violence of colonial discourse.

IV.   DICKENS AS PORTABLE PROPERTY

A.   From one text to the next: paratextual evidence

One of the aims of this dissertation being to investigate the way in which the detective mode used by neo-Victorian writers impacts reading, it seems of paramount importance to turn to the object-book, following recent studies on reading theory and material culture such as Karin Littau's.[189] Such studies show how ideas circulate through the material world of things, such as books and paintings. Within a network of material and social relations, certain aspects of books appear significant, such as the size of the book, its cover, but also its design, including chapter headings, epigraphs and author's note. The latter two inform the reader of the bibliography used by the author for his work. Antoine Compagnon attaches an importance to this 'bi(bli)ography': as a reader, it triggers his desire to read the book in his hand as it creates an 'atlas' of the adventure he is going to engage in (2006: 412). Compagnon's pun, 'bi(bli)ography', lays emphasis on the 'reader's skill' ('compétence de lecteur') as self-revealing, a form of autobiography: 'We always read with our memories, each new book displacing a little, creating

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[188] 'si les marques existent déjà sur le visage de Magwitch, c'est Pip qui en fait un document à part entière, qu'il rêve indélébile, visible et lisible de tous. L'analogie avec l'inscription sur la feuille de papier est explicite puisque le tatouage se forme à partir d'une encre que l'on imprime sur la peau. Pip écrit ainsi le récit de la criminalité et de la marginalité de Magwitch, rattachant ce dernier à la grande lignée des exclus de la tradition occidentale.'

[189] In *Theories of Reading*: *Books, Bodies and Bibliomania* (2006), Littau claims the importance of the materiality of the book, her work is therefore inspired by both reading theories (such as Iser's and Jauss's) as well as by the history of the book. She is also interested in affect theory, an aspect of reception the present work will not deal with. Pierre-Louis Patoine also wrote extensively on affect theory in relation to reading in *Corps/texts: pour une théorie de la lecture emphatique*, Paris: ENS Editions, 2015.

new memories' (*ibid*.; my translation).[190] A memory, a souvenir (as object) is called upon by epigraphs and author's notes. The epigraph, for Compagnon, is the quotation *par excellence* as both a symbol of and clue to intertextual relations (417). This may apply to the neo-Victorian novels under study, but also to the books that are embedded within them as objects. Interestingly enough, in all the novels of our corpus, the paratextual threshold is the first clue which prompts the hermeneutic quest.

In *Jack Maggs,* Peter Carey chooses as an epigraph a quote from Armand Jacques de Chastenet's *Du magnétisme animal,* which enables him to introduce the main theme of his novel, magnetism, and its shape, hypnosis sessions. De Chastenet's text is hybrid: it offers a history of sciences related to magnetism, some guidelines to magnetise as well as his correspondence/ letters.[191] The epigraph is rewritten when, during a dinner at Mr Buckle's, Oates tells an anecdote about a thief-taker who arrested a criminal thanks to magnetism. Oates then goes on to expose the mechanisms of magnetism:

> 'The Cerebrum,' said Tobias Oates, looking from one to the other of his listeners, 'is a vessel that never leaks. It holds everything, remembers everything. And if Mr Hawthorne likes to think of Animal Magnetism as a scurrilous parlour game, it is only because he has not read his Villiers or Puységur.' (*JM*: 27)

Oates thus takes on the image of fluids that was present in the epigraph ('then imagine magnetic fluid circulating from one hand to the other' (n.p.)) while prefiguring his investigation of Maggs's 'Criminal Mind'. The passage also identifies Oates as a reader of Puységur which hints at his connection with Dickens. In fact, the epigraph sets the novel in the context of 1837, that is to say around the time when Dickens started to take an interest in mesmerism (Kaplan 1975: 26-27).[192] Carey's association of magnetism and criminality blends two of Dickens's interests. Indeed, *Great Expectations* was dedicated to Chauncy Townshend:

<div align="center">

Affectionately Inscribed
To
CHAUNCY HARE TOWNSHEND (*GE*: 3)

</div>

Townshend was a mesmerist trained by Elliotson, whom Dickens befriended in 1840. Dickens became his literary executor and not only did he dedicate *Great Expectations* to his friend but he also gave him the manuscript. Carey plays with his readers by cross-referencing elements of Dickens's life. The end of Carey's novel also constitutes a kind of acknowledgement, since

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[190] 'On lit toujours avec ses souvenirs, chaque livre les déplace un peu, en crée de nouveaux.'

[191] Armand du Chastenet, Marquis de Puységur, *Du magnétisme animal*, Paris, Desenne, 1807, accessed online at https://archive.org/details/dumagntismeanima00chas on August 24, 2017.

[192] Kaplan in fact dates Dickens's first experience in mesmerism around January 1838 when he visited the University College Hospital in Gower Street and met William Wood, John Elliotson's assistant (1975: 3). As Annegret Maack notes, the novel spans 'a period of three weeks, beginning 15 April 1837, at 6 o'clock precisely' (2004: 229).

Oates's manuscript seems to materialise *Great Expectations* anew (the date, 1860, is similar), while the title displaces Pip and upholds the revisited character of Magwitch, Maggs:

> *The Death of Maggs*‚ having been abandoned by its grief-stricken author in 1837, was not begun again until 1859. The first chapters did not appear until 1860, that is, three years after the real Jack Maggs had died, not in the blaze of fire Tobias had always planned for him, but in a musty high-ceilinged bedroom above the flood-brown Manning river. Here, with his weeping sons and daughters crowded round his bed, the old convict met death without ever having read 'That Book'. (*JM*: 328)

The peaceful death of Jack Maggs, surrounded by his loving family, contrasts with and reverses his fictional death in Oates's version, a mark of Carey's affiliative perspective and reaction against *Great Expectations*. Besides, Mercy, now Maggs's wife, reads and collects copies of Oates's novel which are then bequeathed to a library:

> Finally, she owned no fewer than seven copies of the last edition, and each of these is now (together with Jack Maggs's letter to Henry Phipps) in the collection of the Mitchell Library in Sydney. Of the seven volumes, six are cloth, one is leatherbound, and this last is signed: *To Mercy from Captain E. Constable, Clapham 1870.*
>
> The Mitchell's librarian has noted on each index card the 'v. rough excision' of that page which reads:
>
> <div align="center">
>
> Affectionately Inscribed
> To
> PERCIVAL CLARENCE BUCKLE
> A Man of Letters, a Patron of the Arts (*ibid*.)
>
> </div>

By having Maggs's letters and Oates's novel enshrined together in a library, Mercy reclaims the truth about Maggs, confronting the stolen and pejorative version Oates wrote with the confessional and authentic, so to speak, letters written by Maggs. The library also confers upon the written letters a canonical value, turning them into a site of memory, a testimony vying with the book published by Oates. The convict is reclaimed, in his own words, and not simply glossed over by imperial master discourses. The pastiche on which Carey's novel ends is his last blow aimed at the Victorian author, since the official dedication is printed only to be ripped out of the text, so that there only remains the dedication to Mercy with the mention of Constable (the footman who helped Maggs), a name connoting British cultural capital. Tearing signals Mercy's appropriation of the text, a metatextual image of Carey's own tampering with the hypotext and wish to respond to or vie with Dickens. Carey thereby reclaims the voices of the past silenced by the fame of the Western canon, but also creates a new literary canon which is equally worthy of entering the sanctuary of libraries.

Flanagan's paratext in *Wanting* is much more ambivalent since the 'Author's note' of the first edition is cut out in further editions of the novel. The 2008 'Author's note' insists on what the novel is not – 'This novel is not a history, nor should it be read as one' – refusing the reading of the novel as historiography (Flanagan 2008: 255). Flanagan presents his novel as a 'bifurcation' from historical events, which seemingly likens it to counterfactuals (Miller 2012:

779): 'It was suggested to me by certain characters and events in the past, but it does not end with them' (Flangan 2008: 255). Flanagan insists on the speculative nature of the events which are at the centre of the novel: Mathinna's life, Franklin's expedition and Dickens's relation with Ternan as he ventriloquises biographers (his tone is close to Michael Slater's).[193] regarding the speculations around the Ternan-Dickens affair ('Exactly what together means remains debated' (256)), and the use of general knowledge to fuel his version of Mathinna ('I have seen no evidence that Mathinna was beaten by the Catechist at Wybelenna, but it is known that other Aboriginal girls were, and one, Fanny Cochrane Smith, did attempt to burn down the catechist's house.' (*ibid.*)), which turns the girl into an epitome of Aboriginal fate. Strikingly, Flanagan relies on the semantic field of detection to talk about these historical figures ('details', 'speculation' (255), 'knowledge now irrevocable', 'I have seen no evidence', 'there is no record' (256)) and invites the reader to further investigate his 'free use of sentences and phrases from Dickens' own work' outside the book, on a dedicated website.[194] Lena Steveker sees in this note a marker of the neo-Victorian return to the author:

> Telling the reader how to read his book, [Flanagan] fashions himself as a figure of privileged textual authority. Therefore, it is in the novel's 'Author's Note' rather than in its protagonist that the figure of the Victorian author returns, positioning himself as the supreme ruler of what he has written. (2014: 77)

In this regard, the erasure of this note in later editions is ambivalent. It seems to efface Flanagan's investigation, thereby refusing to leave clues for the reader who is on his/her own for this hermeneutic quest. In the copyright section we can read the following statement: 'This novel is entirely a work of fiction. The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities, is entirely coincidental' (*W*: i). This disclaimer seems to refuse the interpretation of the novel as a historical novel and to distance Flanagan's narrative from the real, insisting on its being a fiction. The irony stems from the gap between the insistence on the 'coincidental' resemblance with 'actual persons' and the fact that Flanagan did not change any names, using Catherine, Ellen and Dickens as characters. This might also be Flanagan's response to the controversy caused by the comments of Kate Grenville following the publication of her 2005 novel, *The Secret River*, which was attacked by some historians for its fictionalisation of history and sparked a debate in Australia between historians and novelists about who owns the past.[195]

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[193] Slater's introduction to *Dickens and Women*, for instance, sets out to sift 'the mass of legend and doubtful traditions about Dickens's private life that often appear masquerading as biographical fact' (1986: xi).
[194] The website does not exist anymore, therefore I was not able to retrieve the intertextual information it contained.
[195] See especially Inga Clendinnen's essay 'The History Question: Who owns the past?' (September 2006).

We may recall here how this kind of 'all persons fictitious' disclaimer came to be used after the suit against the 1932 MGM film *Rasputin and the Empress* directed by Richard Boleslawski and Charles Brabin. As Natalie Zemon Davis argues, there is an opposition between the statement defending the film and its actual content:

> I cite this landmark decision not so much to chide the producer for inventing a seduction, although he seems in fact to have done so, but to underscore what the filmmakers had to say about the truth status of their creation. […] Once the trial was under way, MGM claimed, against much contrary evidence, that Princess Irina was not the referent for Princess Natasha, and that, in any case, the film intimated that Natasha was raped, not seduced. Even better, as one of the justices astutely noted, the defendants now wished they had said, as at the opening of a novel, 'All circumstances . . . are imaginary, and none of the characters are in real life.' (1986-1987: 457-458)

What interests me here is both the problem linked to truth in this extract and the nature of the incident that led the filmmakers and film company to being sued: the suggestion that Princess Irina might have been seduced/raped by Rasputin. The use of the disclaimer in the novel might therefore be linked to the crime at the centre of the novel, the rape of Mathinna by Sir John Franklin, but also, according to Tammy Ho Lai-Ming, Dickens's seduction of Ellen 'Nelly' Ternan (2012a: 43). What is 'wanting' in the novel is not so much Dickens (contrary to Frenks's argument regarding the absence of the author in *Drood* (2011: 141) as love and Mathinna. There is thus a displacement of absence from the canonical writer to the postcolonial subject/object in which the affiliative stance of the novel is inscribed. The disclaimer signals that the reader must detect similarities, but also be prepared to find out about the concealed crimes of the past, seduction, rape and abandonment.

This stands in sharp contrasts with the writers we studied at the beginning of this chapter, who are keen to acknowledge their literary hypotexts. Such is the case of Dan Simmons (who both uses the disclaimer and gives an exhaustive yet 'partial list' of sources related to Dickens and Collins (*D*: 773)), and of Lynn Shepherd. In the latter case, the acknowledgement becomes a second site where the detective novel may achieve closure. Indeed, while the novel ends on the resolution of Charles's case, the acknowledgement discloses intertextual leads, confirming the hypothesis raised by the novel. The function Shepherd gives to her acknowledgement section is marked out typographically by the following opening line: '*These acknowledgements include details of the novel's plot, so readers may want to wait to read them until the end*' (*TAA*: 355; italics in the text). Shepherd plays with her readers, and the temptation to look at the end for the resolution: once more, she establishes the rules of the detective game by promising to give her readers a complete resolution. This resolution entirely concerns the intertextual quality of the novel as Shepherd reveals her three main hypotexts: *Bleak House, The Woman in White* and *London Labour and the London Poor*. In fact, the acknowledgement

reads like a guide to Shepherd's writing; like a detective, she goes through the process of her own creation, underscoring the clues she disseminated in her text:

> For a writer who aspires to write 'literary murders' herself, it [*Bleak House*] could hardly be richer territory to explore, and I hope that anyone who loves Dickens as much as I do will enjoy seeing how I have interleaved my own mystery with the characters and episodes of his novel, and used his chapter titles for events of my own, though each time with a new twist, and a rather different meaning. (355)

> The moment when *Tom-All-Alone's* really came to life for me was when I realized that the time-scheme of *Bleak House* could be made to run parallel with Collins' very precise chronology for *The Woman in White*, which culminates in Sir Percival Glyde's death in a fire in late November 1850. This allowed me to create a 'space between' these two great novels, where I could locate a new independent story of my own, and explore some of the same nineteenth-century themes of secrecy, madness, power, and abuse, though with the benefit of twenty-first-century hindsight. (356)

Shepherd stresses the act of appropriation ('I have interleaved', 'used his chapter titles' 'explore some of the same nineteenth-century themes'). The notion of in-betweenness that stems from the terms 'interleaves' and 'space between' refers to the position Shepherd assigns to herself, the way she inscribes her text within the literary field. The verb 'interleaves' brings to mind Hutcheon's claim that parody must be both the same as, and different from, the original (1988: 26). It is worth noting that prefaces and postscripts play an important part in Dickens's works, often used as reflection on the content of the text as well as on its reading so that Dickens seems to provide his readers with guidelines of sorts.

Moreover, Shepherd's acknowledgements partly refuse the parting from the reader. Indeed, her acknowledgements are an invitation to read *on:* be it the historical sources she used herself, or (neo-)Victorian novels. More to the point, she prompts her readers to go back to her own novel and reread it to look for any intertextual trace that they might have missed, like Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* for instance. Shepherd thus acknowledges that she is a neo-Victorian author partaking of the tradition set by Fowles's novel (which explains the status/nature of her narrator binding 'the Victorian age to our own') as she gives us some direct clues in the text: 'It's Fowles who is the "celebrated novelist" I refer to in Chapter 17, and readers who know his book well will spot a very young Ernestina Freeman […] and the deliberate echoes of Sarah Woodruff in my own "Sarah"'(357). Shepherd seems to find it hard to leave her reader, her acknowledgements extending rather than putting an end to her fiction, which may bring to mind the difficulty of finding an ending that Duncker talks about in her essay on writing neo-Victorian fiction (2014: 260-263). Duncker compares the ending to a figurative death and a parting:

> The moment of completion is also the moment of cessation, the moment when we reach the edge. Thus, the ending of each novel, especially a great novel, is a little death. […]
> For an end is also a parting. The reader parts with the book, leaves behind the writer and the characters. The end of a novel is loss, absence. It is also the last time the writer speaks to the reader, for it is the point

towards which you have been travelling together. Your ending will be your strongest statement to the reader. Last words are always the words you remember. (262)

This quotation resonates strongly with Dickens's poignant postscript to his last complete novel, *Our Mutual Friend,* which ends thus:

> I remember with devout thankfulness that I can never be much nearer parting company with my readers for ever, than I was then, until there shall be written against my life, the two words with which I have this day closed this book: —THE END. (1991: 822)

Dickens compares his death with the end of a book, blurring life and fiction, bearing witness to 'his recurrent desire to override the separation between public and private spheres' (Waters 1997: 203). In retrospect, this statement seems quasi ominous and is surrounded by dark irony as he died without putting an end to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

Thus, in the case of Simmons and Shepherd, there is a desire to achieve closure by embracing the hypotext, even in a wild, deconstructive fashion; in contrast, the novels by Carey, Jones and Flanagan create a threshold that leads the reader elsewhere, where detection mutates to disclose the crimes of colonialism or of neo-colonialism, of war following commercial exploitation. Hence the epigraph from Eco's 'On Literature' which is to be found in Jones's novel: 'Characters migrate.' Jones thus gives his reader a clue, asking him/her to focus on transposition, compelling the reader to compare his characters to the cast of *Great Expectations* and, ultimately, prefiguring Matilda's final words 'Pip is my story' (*MP*: 256).

B.   The riddle of the portrait

As John Thieme underlines, postcolonial texts do not write back to a unitary canon but rather 'the texts to which they were responding were unstable objects that were […] being constructed anew by each postcolonial writer's gaze in a kind of parodic reversal process by which postcolonial subjects had been constructed as "other" during the heyday of imperialism' (2001: 2). *Wanting* and *Mister Pip* engaged with their Victorian con-text in the form of 'Biofictions of Marginalised Subjects' (with the second being an auto-biofiction as it is a first person narrative) *i.e.* the kind of biofiction that 'commemorates not just the marginalised subjects, but the injustice of their historical disregard and silencing' (Kohlke 2013: 10). Although we seem to depart from detection, this 'historical disregard and silencing' is

crystallised in both novels in two crimes: the slaughter of Mr Watts and Dolores in Lloyd Jones's and the rape of Mathinna in Flanagan's novel.

In the case of Flanagan's work, detection is an intrinsic part of the writing process. As the Australian author acknowledged in various interviews, it is the discovery, at the age of twenty, of Mathinna's portrait that led him on to investigate and write Mathinna's story.[196] Flanagan's attention was especially piqued by the discovery, once the frame of the watercolour had been removed, of Mathinna's bare feet, hitherto cropped out of the picture. The truncated feet 'provide a metaphor for the historically marginalised, who are often deliberately "cropped" from official narratives' (Ho Lai-Ming 2012: 17). Mathinna herself has been turned into a 'portable property': a poignant little girl, an orphan, presented in a commodified portrait. In the novel, Mathinna does sit to have her portrait done but the copy is thrown into the sea (*W*: 198). The actual portrait the passage is referring to was painted by a convict, one of the only historical clues pointing to Mathinna's existence alongside James Bonwick's account to be found in *The Last of the Tasmanians*, published in 1870 and a newspaper article from 1856 in which her death was reported. The historical painting presents us with a truncated Mathinna as her feet are below the frame. The feet thereby become a riddle to which Flanagan's novel attempts to provide an answer. Bonwick introduces Mathinna as follows:

> No story can be sadder, as illustrating both civilization and decline, than that told me at Oyster Cove by the Superintendent concerning a beautiful Tasmanian girl, who had been adopted by Lady Franklin, and afterwards thrown into the herd of degraded savages. (1870: 382)

It seems Flanagan may have read this account as in Bonwick's text we find the gist of the novel, with many striking clues, especially the kangaroo skin and pet opossum that accompany Mathinna everywhere. Bonwick's text suggests that Mathinna is yet further evidence of Tasmanian 'decline', a colonial view Flanagan rejects by means of turning the national hero, Sir John Franklin, into a rapist. Flanagan thus appears as a detective revisiting the case as he turns Bonswick's account and a newspaper article briefly summing up Mathinna's life and death into a murder case. The culprit is not so much the young man who strangles her, as the Franklins. Indeed, Flanagan mentions the portrait after Lady Jane witnessed Mathinna's decline at the orphanage and the colonist couple is sailing towards England. Not only is the portrait 'predating her rather sorry decline' (*W*: 197) but it also predates her rape (*ibid*). In Flanagan's

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[196] Cf. Richard Flanagan, 'What led you to write WANTING? – Richard Flangan talks about his new book Wanting', Random House Books AU, 20/10/2008. Carol Raabus, 'The hidden story of Mathinna: spirited, gifted, utterly destroyed', 16/02/2011, ABC Radio Hobart; Richard Flanagan, 'Untitled Interview for ABC Radio Hobart' (audio) both available at: http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2011/02/16/3140544.htm

version, the watercolour portrait is 'marred only by one detail: her bare feet' (*ibid*.). A copy is ordered, 'with shoes' but 'it had somehow lost the delightful spontaneity of the original' (*ibid*.). Mathinna's bare feet thus stand for her resistance to 'civilisation' as well as her authenticity. Strikingly, the version Franklin offers his wife is the truncated version that we know: 'His oval frame neatly cut Mathinna off at her ankles and finally covered her bare feet' (*ibid*.). Mathinna is therefore contained, 'framed', the excision of her feet being reminiscent of the violence of the rape, itself signified as a cut, a blank in the novel.

Flanagan's novel presents its readers with a double narrative: the first is set in Van Diemen's Land (known today as Tasmania) in the first half of the nineteenth century and revolves around Sir Franklin and his wife's stay there as governors as well as their adoption of a black girl, Mathinna. The second narrative is set in 1852 and relates Dickens's writing and staging of *The Frozen Deep*, a play commissioned by Lady Franklin in reaction to Dr John Rae's report on Franklin's failed expedition in the Arctic, a report that claimed that Franklin and his men had resorted to cannibalism in order to survive. Applying modes of analysis corresponding to the detective mode of writing in order to analyse the structure as well as themes of *Wanting* opens up a new dynamic approach to the novel. Indeed, the dual structure of the novel cannot fail to echo the dual structure underlined by Todorov to which I have referred many times. Instead of having one story followed by the other, *i.e.* the story of the victim followed by that of the crime, Flanagan has both stories running alongside which enables the reader to draw parallels between the one and the other. This enables Flanagan to underline the distinction between biofiction and historical research, a distinction he is eager to comment upon in interviews (Flanagan 2008a, 2011). The dual structure is debunked so that what is investigated is perhaps not so much the story of the victim, Mathinna, but that of the historical figure Flanagan casts as a criminal, her rapist: Sir John Franklin.

In this text, to navigate between the two plotlines, the reader must pick up clues and connect dangling threads. Flanagan's novel is writing back to Dickens's fiction and non-fiction, pointing out the duality of an author who is able to poignantly depict the slums of London but unable to see the negative impact of colonialism. This writing back is operated through the parallelism that the novel subtly and gradually operates between Franklin and Dickens. In fact, both characters evolve in a similar group of characters, the two groups hinging on Lady Franklin: on each side we find a figure of male authority (Sir John/Dickens) and a submissive female (Mathinna/Ellen Ternan). However, this equation stops there as each character's function is different. *Wanting* does not really fit into the detective scheme aforementioned and

the aim of this typological analysis is not to force the text into those specific categories. However, I would like to suggest that Flanagan calls upon and reworks some of the figures belonging to detection. Obviously, the first narrative features a criminal figure, Sir John, and his victim, Mathinna. Lady Jane's position opens up a new category that we have not touched upon yet: that of the blinded/silent witness. In the second narrative, her role differs somewhat: she presents herself (and her husband) as the victim of Dr Rae's report while still being haunted by her memories of Mathinna, a symptom of her guilt and repressed knowledge. In this configuration, Dickens seems to be cast as the detective figure, aiming for the 'truth' and thus writing/righting Sir John's baffled honour. However, the true detective figure is the reader meant to distinguish the different versions of the truth. What's more, having Dickens as a sort of double of Franklin, Flanagan invites his readers to see in the Dickens a criminal, lusty figure (both Franklin and Dickens are consumed by sexual desire) but also, arguably, the victim of Ellen, under whose power he submits himself.

This postcolonial novel, with its affiliative stance, its emphasis on the notion of construct, truly embodies the complex relation between detective fiction and historical narrative that has been alluded to throughout this chapter. In this case, as we have said, the writer acts as a detective reconstructing the past. Indeed, the novel destabilises the comforting parallelism between the work of the detective and that of the historian, rejecting the 'obligation to Truth' since such a conception of detection and/as history 'presupposes the existence of one prior, correct version of the past, which it is possible to arrive by a careful process of recovery, and to which it is imperative to owe allegiance' (O'Gorman 1999: 20). However, Flanagan's novel does not present us with a recoverable past but with a construct of Truth, in the re-presentation of *The Frozen Deep* and in the narrative of Mathinna's life. Furthermore, Flanagan belittles the temporal distinction between his narratives by using the same tenses (simple past) but also always hinting at events that are about to occur in a more or less near future.

The novel sets out to show that history is a construct, by playing on the myth of the explorer and its celebration in *The Frozen Deep.* As is the case in *Drood*, Flanagan picks up Dickens's incredible gift for performance: Dickens thus literally turns into the character he is acting, Richard Wardour. But while in Simmons's novel acting functions as a mask covering and/or enabling Dickens to perform his murderous impulses, revealing the author's Gothic humour, Flanagan repurposes the performance to debunk Dickens as a fraud, as *only* a mask concealing emptiness:

> 'People forget Shakespeare was an actor first,' he said finally, when, frightened by those eyes, he had dropped his gaze back to the bird in her hands. 'And a writer only second. That is the secret of his genius. He had no sense of himself and existed only through his imitations of others.'
> There, Dickens thought with an odd shock: I have given you [Ellen] the secret of myself. (*W*:155)

If this extract may recall the discussion of *Jack Maggs* on life-thieving, it may be argued that Flanagan goes one step further: Dickens is not merely thieving others' lives but is reduced to a simulacrum, an empty shell. The image of Dickens as a performer, a mask, is one that circulates amongst the novels of our corpus as we shall see now with the example of *Mister Pip*.

C.   Looking for Dickens in the Pacific: The Poetics of Reading as Mediation in *Mister Pip*

1. Reading and misreading

Earlier in the chapter, we have seen how fascinated Simmons is with the tradition of 'Dickens Readings' – a tradition best exemplified by such personalities as Bransby Williams, Emlyn Williams or, very recently, Simon Callow and Gerald Dickens (Schlicke 1999: 201). This tradition calls to mind Walter Benjamin's 'storyteller'. The latter relates to two groups of experience, the first one 'embodied in the resident tiller of the soil, and the other in the trading seaman' (2006: 363), thus opposing local tales and tales from abroad, gathered from one's journey. These two models are at the bottom of the opposition between the written text and oral tradition in *Mister Pip*. This novel is not to be categorised as a detective novel, yet it uses some aspects of the detective mode, since reading is turned into a kind of detection. Since the 1980s, there has been a growing consensus on the idea that detective fiction thematises reading, especially following studies by Derrida (1967) or Carlo Ginzburg (1980). It is especially in relation to the latter two that Jean-Pierre Naugrette uses the notion of detective-as-reader and detective-as-writer in his study on Sherlock Holmes, a notion that runs through our argument and comes to the forefront in the following section (2015: 18-20). As in Peter Carey's case, however, the process of detection is repurposed in Jones's novel to explore the postcolonial context. The question which is raised, therefore, is the tension between orality, connected with the matrilineage specific to Papua New Guinea, and the inheritance of the colonial culture. As Homi Bhabha reminds his readers, colonial (and postcolonial) literature tends to address the

problem of cultural capital by dramatising the symbolic discovery of an English book (the Bible):

> It is, like all myths of origin, memorable for its balance between epiphany and enunciation. The discovery of the book is, at once, a moment of originality and authority. It is, as well, a process of displacement that, paradoxically, makes the presence of the book wondrous to the extent to which it is repeated, translated, misread, displaced. It is with the emblem of the English book – 'signs taken for wonders'- as an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline [.] (2004: 145-146)

In Lloyd Jones's novel, the function of the book, as a sign of wonder, is ambiguous but much more positive than Bhabha's account which takes *Heart of Darkness* as an example. The wondrous book that Matilda comes across is *Great Expectations*. It is an instance of British canonical culture, a kind of portable cultural property, but it is also a riddle, a mystery that must be deciphered, and that might therefore become a sort of secret password.

The encounter with *Great Expectations* triggers a process of linguistic deduction, or induction. In the postcolonial context, foreign words are used to defamiliarise British readers. But the contrary occurs in *Mister Pip*; the English signifier becomes the riddle. This is the case for the word 'rimy', which is entirely alien to Matilda's experience, both linguistically and materially, since the weather is so very different from England:

> 'A *Rimy morning* was the phrase I had decided to bring home with me. I used it now to create the picture of Pip carrying the pork pie and file off to the convict Magwitch waiting in the marshes. 'It was a rimy morning …'
> I paused, wickedly, in the dark for my mother to ask what it meant. All she did was breathe more sternly as if she knew my mind and what I was up to.
> Earlier in the day I had stuck up my hand for the very first time […]
> 'What is a rimy morning?'
> 'A rimy morning is a frosty morning. It is a word you don't hear much anymore' [Mr. Watts] smiled.[…]
> 'What is a frosty morning?'
> […] This time he put the question to the class. 'Can anyone tell me what a frosty morning is?'
> Nobody could. We were amazed when he told us the truth of a rimy morning. We could not imagine air so cold that it made smoke come out of your mouth or caused grass to snap in your hands. We could not imagine such a world. None of us had tasted anything cold for months, since the last generator had stopped working. For us something cold was something left in the shade or buffed by the night air.
> A rimy morning. I waited for my mum to bite. But that bait didn't interest her. She didn't care what a rimy morning was. Or else she didn't want to appear dumb and backwards. So when her question didn't come I brought her up to date with events more pleasing to her. […]
> But that was the last time she asked to hear an instalment from *Great Expectations*. And I blame 'a rimy morning'. Although she didn't say so, I knew she thought I was showing off and that I was biting off a bigger piece of the world than she could handle with language like 'a rimy morning.' (*MP*: 33-35; italics in the text).

In Chapter 1, we have seen how the phrase 'rimy morning' epitomised the experience of the migrant in the novel. I would like here to dwell on the linguistic investigation that is led by the children which informs their hermeneutic relation to *Great Expectations*. This passage is typical of the representation of gradual adaptation and linguistic education in the novel: starting with the introduction of a linguistically problematic phrase, 'A *Rimy morning*', Matilda's gradual awareness and appropriation is displayed in the form of an analepsis. The repetition of the

strange phrase, 'a rimy morning', is incantatory, highlighted by the use of italics and repetition, the use of interrogations and finally the direct quote from the third chapter of *Great Expectations* which endows it with a fairy-tale quality as it is reminiscent of the well-known formula 'Once upon a time'. This passage allows us to see the workings of decipherment in the novel. The answer to the initial question, 'What is a rimy morning?', leads to a new question 'What is a frosty morning?' This points out the failure of transfer: Mr Watts needs more than a synonym to define the word 'rimy'. Mr Watts' definition of 'rimy' triggers a moment of imaginary creation which is marked by anaphoric negations pointing out the unimaginable quality of 'a rimy morning'. Just as Pip was initially lost in the desolate marshes, the children are utterly alienated by their own situations, which transforms Pip's world into a fantasy. It is clear, however, that Matilda is able to make sense out of the expression, to construe meaning for herself, since that 'rimy morning' may be 'taken home' and offered to her mother, like a choice morsel or a precious object. As Sadoff argues, 'Matilda has become a fledging critic, for she has learned not only to practice a kind of mimetic identification but to interpret fictional structure and narrative purpose as well' (2010: 182).

But the phrase 'A rimy morning' then reappears in italics, and typographically stands out: it creates a dividing line, severing the connection between mother and daughter. For Dolores resists and refuses to play this linguistic and literary game. She will not enter this other world conjured up by reading, this alien culture composed of alien words, and will not hear anything any more about *Great Expectations* and the instalments read in class. The magical aspect of the phrase is undermined when Matilda refers to its impact on Dolores: the italics are replaced at the end by inverted commas, which casts a pejorative light on the phrase, reinforced by the use of the verb 'blame'. 'A rimy morning' marks the rupture between Matilda and Dolores. The phrase becomes a linguistic trap aimed at Dolores ('wickedly', 'bait'), a trap which, however, fails. Matilda's proclaimed superiority is opposed to Dolores' silent resistance. The interpretation of Dolores' silence alienates her as she is depicted either as indifferent or as ignorant and ashamed. This passage contains many elements that will be re-enacted later in the novel, for instance at the moment of the catastrophe as we find again a passage focusing on a peculiar word or phrase that triggers an analepsis and will mark a rupture with the audience. The apparition of the book, then, sharpens divisions; on the one hand, we find Mr Watts, Matilda and her schoolmates as well as the Model Reader; on the other hand, we find the characters who cannot relate to the book, Dolores and the other villagers, the redskin soldiers and the rambos (the villagers who fight against the Papuan government). The book divides the

microcosm of Bougainville, separating the world of the classroom from the world of the island, just as the island is cut off from the (Western) world.

Thus, reading is portrayed as ambivalent. To begin with, while the war that rages on Bougainville secludes the children, the reading of *Great Expectations* turns into a retreat or, as Matilda puts it: 'Mr. Watts had given us kids another piece of the world. I found I could go back to it as often as I liked' (24). Reading creates a strong bond between the teacher and the children which separates/estranges them from other villagers. Paradoxically, the book is not construed as a means of alienation but rather as a refuge from the brutality of the events surrounding the island. *Great Expectations* offers an escape to the children, and allows potential for re-invention, now or later (Mr Watts is able to create different personalities for himself, Matilda will go on to write a PhD on Dickens and orphans, and she will eventually write the narrative of her life during the war). But the act of reading also estranges the children from the villagers and ultimately endangers Mr Watts and the whole community. This separation, which begins when Dolores rejects the book and Matilda's enthusiasm about the story, is emphasised by the arrival of the soldiers and their burning of the book. For Yui Nakastuma, 'the novel suggests that [Mr Watts] turns [Matilda] and the local kids into a sort of white gentlemen as the 'magician' in the form of Magwitch and Miss Havisham has transformed Pip and Estella into a gentleman and a lady' (undated: 116). It might be argued that such concerns are not in fact so very alien to Dickens's own world, and may actually be related to an ambivalence that is intrinsic to *Great Expectations,* where reading according to Max Byrd, allows 'to form a community even in silence' but also leads to 'a potentially alienated imagination' (1976: 259). Reading at school breeds communality, but just as Pip was close to Joe when he could barely write his letter, but is estranged from him by his gentleman's education, so is Matilda alienated from her mother.

It is no wonder, then, that there should be echoes of Pip's reading and misreading in *Mister Pip.* There are many scenes of misreading or, to be more accurate, scenes in which reading goes amiss because of linguistic gaps and of a play on the literal and the figurative. That the Kiwi writer should have chosen *Great Expectations* as the locus for the thematisation of reading in his own novels is unsurprising. Indeed, Dickens's novel is very much preoccupied with questions revolving around literacy and (mis-)reading. Hence the pattern of repetitions identified by Max Byrd from chapter 7 onwards: 'the chapter establishes for Pip and the reader a sequence of steps that will be repeated in various terms everywhere in the novel: a text is established, read by Pip incorrectly, and corrected by a better reading from an authoritative

figure' (1976: 261). The theme of reading itself appears in the very opening of the novel, which can be said to be a scene of reading and misreading. Presenting himself to his readers, Pip engages in an act of reading his parents, through induction, drawing somewhat comical conclusions from the engravings on their tombstones:

> As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape of the letters on my fathers, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, '*Also Georgiana Wife of the Above*,' I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. (*GE*: 3)

In this much commented upon passage, Pip is transcribing the inscriptions (*i.e.* signs) he reads on his parents' graves into images of them, images dictated by the shape of letters, the enumeration of adjectives concerning his father being both applicable to a human being or to a handwriting.[197] The Narrating-I is also debunking the interpretation that is made by his younger version, as the adverb 'unreasonably' and the adjective 'childish' demonstrate.

In Jones's novel, misreading appears under different guises. It is first deliberate, in a kind of strategic bowdlerising. When she rereads *Great Expectations* years after the events on the island, Matilda discovers that passages were omitted by Mr Watts, especially the whole Orlick subplot. Mr Watts thereby appears as a figure of mediation, rewriting *Great Expectations* so as to make it legible: 'Mr. Watts had read a different version to us kids. A simpler version' (*MP:* 225). Jones harps on the intricacies of Dickens's novel, returning to the traditional view of text as textile: 'He pulled the embroidery out of Mr. Dickens' story to make it easier on our young ears' (228). Mr Watts's adaptation of the text is justified by an episode of misunderstanding/reading by Dolores's mistrust, as he must address the 'problem of finding the appropriate language' (226), leading to a kind of appropriation: 'The word belonged to him; the whole sentence did. […] He said all that and I think from that day on he did the opposite' (227-8). As Monica Latham notes: 'in his eagerness to help the children to understand, adhere to the story and appropriate the foreign cultural and linguistic context, [Mr Watts] digested it for them' (2011: 30). In the end, the *Great Expectations* told to the children is a 'threadbare, skeletal' version of the story (*ibid.*).

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[197] For Peter Brooks, the scene shows Pip's attempt 'to interpret signs as if they were mimetic and thus naturally tied to the object for which they stand' and thereby pointing 'the making of a fiction unaware of its status as fiction making' (1984: 130-131). For Catherine Waters, 'the material culture of mourning persistently engages Dickens's imagination' (2012: 2), thus the text may be read as a response to the commercialisation of epitaphs which are reduced to conventions and are literalised (8). Waters also reads this passage as a representation of 'an absent family', Pip's reading reconstructing family relations: 'The tombstone text inscribes divisions of power within the family which are registered in Pip's reading, and indicate that the process of identity-formation expressed here is not conducted in some neutral inguistic medium. The language Pip works with is already gendered' (1997: 151).

Matilda ventriloquises and imitates Pip but to no better result: 'I found some examples of his handwriting. He wrote in small capital letters. What did that say about him? He wanted to be noticed, but not too noticeable?' (*MP*: 25). As Matilda's questions seem to point, Pip's reading of the tombstones empties names of their meaning thus rejecting/cancelling the act of signifying: in the end, Squeaker does not really refer to Pip, nor does it refer to the meat on the table and the point of Pumblechook's moral is quite lost. Contrariwise, Matilda's misreading is highly creative as she grants Pip a symbolic dimension. Pip becomes a friend to Matilda. She tries to give him a certain reality through spoken words, but also by shifting from paper to a more indigenous kind of writing, composed of local things or 'heart seeds' which both suggests that the girl takes Dickens's words and character to heart, and that they are the seeds of her own future: 'I had collected a basket of cowrie shells and was adding these to the heart seeds to make PIP even more visible, when Mr Watts looked up from his beachcombing. […] "A shrine," he said approvingly. "Pip in the Pacific"' (68). Here we have a *mise en abyme* of the circulation of the text. The visibility of the word 'Pip' is insisted upon as Matilda's inscription is interpreted by Mr Watts as a shrine. The choice of this word is quite interesting since etymologically *scrinium* means 'chest for books': Pip is thus embedded in textuality as well as in a certain sacredness. The image of the shrine also offers a parallelism with the incipit of *Great Expectations* as Pip reads his parents' identity from the inscriptions on their tombstones. Likewise, the reading of the shrine made by Matilda goes amiss as the soldiers interpret it as the name of an inhabitant who must be hidden:

> 'Who is Pip?' [the redskin officer] asked.
> No one answered.
> 'I asked for all your names,' he said. 'You did not give them all. Why?' (96)

Misreading here, is not associated with Matilda but with the soldiers, whose hermeneutic quest is all wrong. Again, we find here an echo of the detective novel, with this quest or *in*quest, this breathless investigation as the soldiers seek Pip; they believe that he must be a spy or trouble maker, the dangerous, guilty party. However, 'Pip' does not signify an actual person and this misinterpretation triggers a search for Pip which is doomed to failure. The officer is unable to recognise Pip's name for what it is: the signifier of a fictitious character. Mr Watts' inability to prove Pip is a fictive character by bringing the book (which has been hidden by Dolores as the reader later discovers), unleashes the violence of the soldiers. Just as Pip's name is a distortion of Pirrip and foreshadows his inability to fully grow (Lanone 2012: 21), Mr Watts's name seems to raise the question of problematic identity, echoing 'what' rather than who. The loss of reference triggers the catastrophic event because the name, the symbol of identity *par excellence*, fails to designate a real entity and thus fails to be read correctly.

2. Mistaken identities: Mr Watts, Mr Pip and Mr Dickens

The inscription in the sand occasions a first misunderstanding regarding Mr Watts's identity as Daniel, Matilda's classmate, exclaims '"Pip belongs to Mr. Dickens, sir" […] And Daniel, who looked so proud to be giving the answers, pointed in the direction of the schoolhouse' (*MP*: 97). The officer has no idea that Dickens is a Victorian writer and thus thinks Daniel talks about a real person. Thus, whereas Daniel's sentence is in the figurative mode, the soldier interprets the given information literally, assuming that the white man standing in front of him must be Mr Dickens:

> The officer walked across to Mr. Watts. [….]
> 'You are Mr. Dickens'[…]
> Whatever Mr. Watts might have said changed the moment his eyes rested on Daniel, beaming, a step behind the officer. I think that's when he realized where the misunderstanding had come from, and a whole different set of circumstances resulted in Mr. Watts saying, 'Yes, I am that man.'
> That was a lie that any one of us kids could have put right, and I understood, we must all have, the tremendous trust he placed in us at that moment. [….] Mr. Watts step[ped] lightly into the skin of the greatest English author of the nineteenth century. (99)

Mr Watts adapts himself to what has been projected on him by the officer and chooses to lie to protect Daniel, a choice which is crucial for the whole novel, as is inferred from Matilda's comment that 'a whole different set of circumstances resulted in Mr. Watts saying, "Yes, I am that man."' It also raises ethical issues: it is a lie that no one will rectify. The silence of the villagers is identified as an agreement with Mr Watts, a mark of trust. This trust will be tainted by guilt later on when Matilda discovers her mother has kept *Great Expectations* hidden from the soldiers, which results in the burning of the villagers' possessions.

Interestingly enough, Mr Watts's change of identity is defined as a performance. Theatricality is a motif that is applied to Mr Watts throughout the novel and this from the very start as he is depicted in a parodic way, pulling his wife Grace in a trolley and wearing a red nose: 'Some stood by with their idle machetes, waiting for the spectacle to pass. […] The sight represented a bit of uncertainty in our world, which in every other way knew only sameness' (2). Theatricality creates a liminal space between reality and fiction, a space that puts into question the order of things, but also raises the question of authenticity as Matilda realises, years after the civil war, when she pays a visit to Mr Watts's first wife, June, in Wellington, New Zealand:

> The fact he enjoyed acting gnaws away with questions of sincerity. Especially when I think about Mr. Watts' classroom gestures. The stare to the back of the room. His eyes rolling up to the ceiling. The studied pose of a man thinking and considering. Was this Mr. Watts, or an actor playing Mr. Watts the schoolteacher? Who was it that us kids saw in the classroom? (244)

As Monica Latham puts it: 'Mr. Watts is an impersonator, an actor playing several roles at the same time, which brings Matilda retrospectively to wonder how much of his identity – father-figure, teacher, gentleman, loving husband, martyr – was an act' (2011: 35). Matilda's reflections, her doubts as to the sincerity and authenticity of Mr Watts's behaviour and classes encapsulate concerns that are also to be found in postmodernism, especially the issue of fixed meaning. Therefore, Mr Watts's malleable identity subverts the possibility of a stable identity (Hutcheon 1988: 189-190). To Matilda's vision of Mr Watts as a moral person ready to sacrifice himself is opposed June's view of her husband as a coward who cheated on her: 'I have no idea of the man June Watts knew. I only know the man who […] taught us how to reimagine the world, and to see the possibility of change, to welcome it into our lives' (*MP*: 244-245).

It is at this moment of the novel, at the end of the penultimate chapter, that we are to understand that Matilda's vision of Mr Watts is just one version of him, just as the novel is *a* version of *Great Expectations*. It is at this moment too that the elegiac tone of the novel is felt most strongly as Matilda reads Mr Watts's different 'parts' as a series of necessary changes leading up to his sacrifice:

> Perhaps there are lives like that – they pour into whatever space we have made ready for them to fill. We needed a teacher, Mr. Watts became that teacher. We needed a magician to conjure up other worlds, and Mr. Watts became a magician. When we needed a savior, Mr. Watts had filled that role. When the redskins required a life, Mr. Watts had given himself. (245)

Just as this quote makes use of anaphora, the novel uses a system of echoes and in many ways, constructs an elegy for Mr Watts. This elegy is marked by the blurring of identities which characterises Mr Watts from the start, from the very title of the novel: 'Mister Pip' not only refers to *Great Expectations* but also to the last identity chosen by Mr Watts.[198] When the rambos (*i.e.* the rebels who oppose the government set by Moresby and the redskins) enter the village Mr Watts presents himself as Pip:

> Mr. Watts' decision to introduce himself as Pip to the rebels was risky, but it was easy to see why he'd made it. Pip would be a convenient role for Mr. Watts to drop into. If he wanted, he could tell Pip's story as Mr. Dickens had written it and claim it as his own, or he could take elements from it and make it into whatever he wished, and weave something new. Mr. Watts chose the second option. (165)

Mr Watts's new identity as Pip is marked, again, by the motif of acting but also by that of intertextuality, rewriting, which is of course a meta-reflection for Jones who is doing exactly the same thing. In a passage echoing the *Arabian Nights*, Mr Watts, Scheherazade-like, tells the villagers and rebels his story as 'Mister Pip', which interweaves biographical as well as intertextual elements from *Great Expectations* and tales from the island. As Matilda puts it this

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[198] Latham notes that the malleability of Mr Watts's identities is inscribed in the names that are allocated to him and which each represent an aspect of his character (2011: 23-24).

palimpsestic narrative represents: 'his Pacific version of *Great Expectations*. As with the original, Mr. Watts' version was also serialized, parcelled out over a number of nights with a deadline in mind' (175). This quotation illustrates the way Matilda reads Mr Watts through the prism of literature and fiction, as here Mr Watts is compared to Dickens himself, transposing instalments into reality. Matilda seems to attempt to order the narrative of Mr Watts's identity, though it ultimately fails too as he jeopardises himself in the process. As Dana Shiller observes, Mr Watts is the tragic example of Jones's awareness of the limits of creativity: 'Telling the story of his life is not, for Mr. Watts, ultimately empowering' (Shiller 2012: 96).

In the end, it is Mr Watts's inconsistent identity, his play acting that sentences him to death. Mr Watts thus retains his status as a performer and a storyteller, but also turns into an opaque screen or empty dummy. Indeed, the search for Pip and the failure of the villagers to provide a proof that Pip does not exist but is a fictional character force Mr Watts to assume multiple identities. Mr Watts thus becomes a sort of palimpsestic screen, changing identity according to his audience. This may be characteristic of the postmodern effort to displace the boundary between fact and fiction, thus unsettling identity, but in the context of Bougainville, this bears dangerous consequences (Lanone 2012: 25). Mr Watts refuses to be read by either the redskins or the rambos and keeps hiding behind a surrogate identity, more often than not, Pip's. Thus, much like Alice when asked by the Caterpillar 'who are you?', Mr Watts answers amiss. Like the suspect who temporarily conceals his identity, he hampers the investigation which goes amiss: the soldiers are not aware that they are searching for a fictitious character, whom they fear because of his apparent reputation. The rambos are 'enthralled' with his story (*MP*: 174) but they too entirely fail to read the clues. Storytelling proves dangerous as the rambos are inadequate detectives:

> So in the first instance they were after information. In the second, they found themselves seduced by Mr. Watts' story. By the third night, it was settled. Mr. Watts was Pip and they – like the rest of us – were the audience. (*ibid*.)

In this passage, Mr Watts is characterised as a suspect questioned by the rebels and soon his identity is indelibly equated with Pip's. Once more we find the narratological tension that, as we have seen, is at the heart of neo-Dickensian fiction using the detective mode, which here slips from the 'detective figure' to the suspect figure. This slip is syntactically embodied in the shift of agency in the structure of the passage. At first the rebels are the agents of the search and no mention of Mr Watts is made: 'they were after information.' The introduction of a passive form in the next sentence undermines the agency of the rebels, suggesting that they will act mechanically, stupidly, and that they embody the violence of blind power. Finally, 'Mr Watts'

is the subject of the last sentence, but this only enhances the equation, and turns the scene into a spectacle of power, casting Matilda as part of the helpless audience, along with the villagers.

3. Reinventing the canon

At the end of the novel Matilda therefore turns into a kind of detective too. Her investigation takes the shape of a PhD, a topos that marks neo-Victorianism, as evidenced by A.S. Byatt's landmark novel, *Possession* (1990). In contrast to Byatt, Jones does not invent a poet but has Matilda investigate Dickens:

> Mr. Dickens was easier to understand than Mr. Watts. For one thing, more of his life is available and on show. Shelves of libraries are given over to the life of Dickens and his works. An interest in Dickens is more easily rewarded than any effort at playing Mr. Detective and investigating the life of Mr. Watts. The contents of Dickens' life have been ransacked and sifted over by experts, and I was well on my way to becoming one of them. (*MP*: 246)

As can be seen here, Matilda willingly undertakes the role of the detective. She also opposes the lack of information regarding her war-time teacher and the surfeit of information on the canonical author, a way for Jones to point out this historical discrepancy and thereby to reclaim the silenced story of Mr Watts alongside that of the islanders.

However, Matilda's investigation does not simply appear at the end of the novel. The whole novel revolves around the following question – 'who is Mr Dickens?' as much as 'Who is Mr Watts?' – Lloyd Jones's postcolonial *tour de force* is not to give a unique answer to either. On the contrary, the novel highlights multiple versions of Dickens. As John Thieme puts it: 'Postcolonial responses to Dickens are, however, especially complex, since he is variously seen as occupying a central role in the canon and as an outsider who could be a trenchant critic of the dominant social codes of his day' (2001: 102). It is this ambivalent position that is strikingly and subtly underlined in Jones's novel. At first, the novel seems to claim that reading Dickens is a means to reach out, embrace the Victorian text and know its author (*MP*: 22). The reading of *Great Expectations* thereby turns into an encounter (21). Interestingly enough, while Dickens is praised on the island (in part due to Mr Watts's passion for him), Matilda's 'encounter' with Dickens in England turns into a rejection of a kind. Matilda clearly undermines Dickensian scholars and writes back to the canonical Dickens. As Mark Llewellyn argues, Matilda's rejection 'is also a comment on a continued desire to understand and re-interpret canonical texts within a more global, intellectualised and emotionalised schema' (2008: 179). Thus, Matilda pinpoints the contradictions of the author as she notes: 'The man who writes so touchingly and

powerfully about orphans cannot wait to turn his own kin out the door. He wants them out in the world' (*MP*: 247). As Lena Steveker argues, writers such as Flanagan and, I would add, Jones, 'present their readers with "alternative" biographical stories' of Dickens and by so doing, 'undermine the humanist notion of the "Great White Man"' often associated with the nineteenth-century author (2014: 70). Dickens's sons, Walter, Francis, Alfred and Plorn turn into colonial subjects, mapping the whole Empire as they are dispatched to India, Australia and Canada (*MP*: 248). Arguably, Matilda does not construe them as colonisers but as orphans of a kind, a point we shall return to.

Eventually, Matilda confronts 'Dickens', or, more accurately, his dummy on display in Rochester (fig. 4):

> The tour ended in Mr. Dickens' study. A mannequin of the author himself reclined in a leather chair, his legs sprawled before him, his hands in gentle repose. His sleepy eyelids at half-mast. We had walked in on Mr. Dickens while he was daydreaming. Behind the restraining rope, the man standing next to me heard me whisper, 'I have met Mr. Dickens and this is not him.' (255)[199]

The confrontation with the dummy, or copy, turns into a rewriting of Buss's aforementioned painting, *Dickens's Dream* (fig. 20), which is turned ridiculous and grotesque: note the dummy's posture, 'reclined' and 'sprawled', and its sleepy eyes. For Matilda, the truth of Dickens does not lie in Rochester nor in any other part of 'Dickensland'. For her, Dickens belongs to the Pacific and is actually embodied by Mr Watts, as the last description in the novel claims:

> The Mr. Dickens I had known also had a beard and a lean face and eyes that wanted to leap from his face. But my Mr. Dickens used to go about barefoot and in buttonless shirt. Apart from special occasions, such as when he taught, and then he wore a suit. (255-6)

For Dana Shiller, this 'encounter' with Dickens's mannequin shows that: 'There are no originals anymore and no copies, only Matilda's version of Charles Dickens, which manifests itself most solidly, at the end of Jones's novel, as inspiration for Matilda's autobiography' (2012: 99). This appropriation which breaks the dichotomy original/copy is to be found in different postcolonial accounts of the encounter with literature from the Empire, as in the case of Naipaul who, as a child, would adapt Dickens to Trinidad (Thieme 2001: 104). This creolisation of the canonical text points out the way in which Dickens 'speaks across cultures' (105). Interestingly enough, what is hinted at in Jones's novel is fleshed out in the cinematographic adaptation, in which Pip appears as a black boy and Matilda dreams she is wearing Victorian dresses (Adamson 2012).

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[199] Matilda visits Rochester approximately at the very beginning of the 2000s (she left the island in 1993 (*MP*: 220) when the Eastgate House was still holding the Dickens centre. The centre closed in 2004 and while Dickens's dummy is to be found in the Guildhall Museum, Miss Havisham's does not seem to have been kept for the public (http://www.friendsofeastgatehouse.org/eastgate-house.html).

Matilda, and through her Jones, asserts once more the power of narrative, of telling: 'my Mr. Dickens had taught us kids that our voice was special, and we should remember that whatever else happened to us in our lives our voice could never be taken away from us' (256). As Dianne F. Sadoff shows, this final remembering, as well as the embedded remembering of *Great Expectations,* points to an act of 'cultural preservation' while disseminating 'Dickens's literary scene of trauma' and their own (2010: 184). The silenced teacher, who does not survive his *Arabian Nights* plot, is reclaimed/re-membered and given a voice again.

The use of this trope enables Jones to offer a nuanced response to the postcolonial rejection of British cultural capital as it appears in Carey's novel for instance. In his novel, scenes of misreading illustrate the way in which the reading of the Western canon can be lived as both a liberating and an alienating experience for postcolonial subjects. Indeed, misreading is violent and blind, in the case of the villagers and the soldiers. Misreading, however, may also be intensely creative, as when the Western figure, Mr Watts, and the children assimilate Western literature during the reading classes. During the latter, Mr Watts reads *Great Expectations* to the children and at first some words lose their meaning because they are unusual to them. However, as we have seen, alienation is soon overcome as the children, and especially Matilda, make the new words their own. But when the book disappears, the children and Mr Watts can only continue to read if they recreate the novel, if they literally remember it, that is to say attempt to piece it back together through the children's memories of what they had been read. Detection is here displaced: Dickens's text is the secret message that is lost and that the children have to retrieve, fragment by fragment. What surfaces, here, is the topos of the torn apart message that spreads and contaminates the whole novel. Re-membering *Great Expectations*, the children's activity turns into a metareflective activity which recalls postmodernist fragmentariness, but also postcolonial images of memory as can be found for instance in Salman Rushdie's essays in *Imaginary Homelands*. The author of *Midnight's Children* (1981) defines his novel as 'a novel of memory and about memory', which forces its author 'to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost' (2010: 10-11). For Georges Letissier, 'the experience of retrieving and sharing a Victorian fiction, through the mediation of a white teacher in this particular case, is conductive to a form of mental emancipation' (2012: 257). Piecing together their memories of the lost canonical novel, the children blend Dickens and their own experience in Bougainville, a striking image of postcolonial appropriation, a metaphor of the way in which the postcolonial novel itself revisits the Dickensian canon.

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Thus, in this second part, we have seen that the various alternative versions of Charles Dickens that the neo-Victorian novels under study present their readers with enter in sharp contrast with Angus Wilson's conclusion to his biography of the writer:

> Our response to his death should be entirely a sense of loss for the riches he still had to give us and could not. In this sense the Victorians understood better. They mourned his death all over the world as a diminution of the richness of their lives. Luke Fildes's 'Empty Chair' was not, as we have come to think, a sentimentalism, but a fitting tribute to the void left by this untimely parting. The teasing possibility of a whole new extension to this world in Edwin Drood remains a permanent reminder of it. But the lasting legacy of Dickens is the wonderful, shaped vitality of his novels: a life so strong and so individual that it could feed writers following him as diverse and idiosyncratic as Dostoevsky and Daudet, Gissing and Shaw, Proust and Kafka, Conrad and Evelyn Waugh; and yet be accounted, as he rightly called himself, 'Inimitable'. (1970: 297)

Wilson's last words cherish the memory of Dickens as an ideal that cannot be surpassed. Neo-Victorian writers do not fully endorse this nostalgic, mournful declaration. Conversely, they partly use it to nourish their negotiation of the legacy left by Dickens that enables new stories to come out of Dickens's work and of his personal past. Exploring and representing alternative versions of Dickens, neo-Victorian fiction exemplifies reception as defined by Jauss, that is to say as historical and changing through time. As Laird's article demonstrates, it seems that each period needs its own Dickens. Neo-Dickensian fiction hovers between a Dickens-as-detective and a criminal Dickens which testifies to the multiple ways of engaging with the canonical author. As this chapter has started to hint at, the dialogue with Dickens is not done on easy terms. If neo-Victorian texts use the mode of detection, featuring detective and criminal figures, they necessarily entail a victim. Ultimately, the unsavoury Dickens that appeals to neo-Victorian writers underscores various form of crimes and thereby traumas, then and now: rape, war, railway accident and so on. Therefore, having scrutinised the story of the investigation, we now need to turn our attention to the story of the victim.

CHAPTER 3: SPIRIT RAP(P)ING: WRITING/READING THE UNSPEAKABLE SECRET

'Secrets, mysteries and silences are at the heart of the literary'
(Ruth Evans 2005: 10)

Eisenzweig, amongst others, argues that the narrative in detective fiction aims to uncover what it strives to conceal (1986: 7), while for Todorov, this crime relates to an absence which is predominantly characterised by the impossibility of its being present in the narrative (1978: 12). The detective text compellingly circles this absence; in this chapter we wish to focus on the figure of the victim rather than on the clues that lead to resolution. The story of the victim is marked by a sense of belatedness; the victim is always presented as a silent witness of his or her own experience of violence – a silence caused by shock, amnesia or, in the most common scenario, death. The victim triggers fascination from the start; as Yves Reuter points out: '[it] *haunts the whole of literature*, […]it is the first subject [the detective novel] continually harps on, either to exorcise it [….], or to confront it while knowing that death in the end always wins'

(2017: 119; emphasis in the text; my translation).[200] The fascination with the victim is materialised by the compelling return to the crime scene, as described by Sally Munt:

> the [detective novel]'s obsessive return to the crime scene, the instigatory event, is each time to change that moment as it is related by each witness, as its meaning in the narrative changes. Also, this continual reliving of the event paradoxically signifies its very distance from the present, in the difficulty of its retrieval. The reader's desire is never satisfied, despite the text's promise, because its motor is a nostalgic displacement of the present. (1998: 136)

All the novels studied in this dissertation open on a scene marked by death, but this is not necessarily a crime, or at least not obviously so. In Gaynor Arnold's *Girl in a Blue Dress*, a biofiction focusing on Catherine Hogarth (here renamed Dorothea Gibson) the husband is the one who dies: 'My husband's funeral is today. And I'm sitting here alone in my upstairs room while half of London follows him to his grave' (*GBD*: 1).[201] The death of the Author is thus dramatised in a way that challenges Victorian mourning conventions and authorises modern rewriting; the actual victim appears to be the discarded wife and/or hidden mistress rather than the dead husband. *Drood* opens on the spectacular train accident that foreshadows Dickens's death and prompts the eponymous spectral criminal to emerge from the train's debris. Shepherd's novel, the one which most fits the pattern of the detective genre, begins with a more conventional death place, the churchyard, with the surplus body that should not have been there. *Jack Maggs*, *Wanting* and *Mister Pip* offer a colonial version of the crime scene. Maggs returns (literally) to the scene of his past crimes, London, a return that threatens his life. Flanagan's novel opens with accounts of massacre of the Aborigines in Van Diemen's Land. Finally, *Mister Pip* returns to the island where Dolores's and Mr Watts's deaths took place. These examples demonstrate the way in which neo-Victorian fiction returns to crime scenes. Except perhaps in the most obvious case of Shepherd, the crime is repurposed, so that locating and understanding the crime, or the victim, become a critical act.

This leads us to consider the Victorian era as a sort of crime scene to which neo-Victorian writers feel a compelling need to return. To focus on the story of the victim thereby entails exhuming past secrets and breaking the silences of History. The difference between ordinary detective fiction and neo-Victorian detection is that, in a way, the whole Victorian era has become a crime scene, turning Victorian writers into unreliable witnesses and neo-Victorian writers and readers into so many detectives opening up this cold case. As neo-Victorian fiction is haunted by death (including the demise of Dickens, of the Victorian novel

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[200] 'La mort, qui *hante toute notre littérature*, est ici l'objet premier que l'on soumet à d'invariables variations, soit pour l'exorciser […], soit pour l'affronter en sachant qu'elle finit toujours par triompher […].'
[201] The funeral is related a few couple of pages later by Kitty, Dorothea and Alfred Gibson's (aka Charles Dickens) daughter, giving us another version of the event (this time closer to public reports).

and the Victorian age), it may also be construed as a belated reaction to the losses and traumas affecting the Victorians, not simply the characters of a particular novel.

Hence the sense of repetition but also recognition. Marie-Luise Kohlke picks up the Victorian fad, table-rapping, as a metaphor of intertextual revival, contributing to cultural memory (2008: 9).[202] Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham go on to demonstrate that neo-Victorianism is defined by *déjà-vu,* an uncanny return in which 'Victorianism [is] understood as a revenant or a ghostly visitor from the past' (Arias and Pulham 2010: xv). Embracing Derrida's liminal ghost, 'neither present nor absent' (xvii), and Abraham and Torok's phantom, *i.e.* the unspeakable secret of the past and inherited wound, the two critics claim that 'the Victorian age is spectralized and appears as a ghostly apparition in contemporary literature; in returning as a revenant, it opens up multiple possibilities for re-enactment, reimagining, and reinterpretation' (xix). But neo-Victorian fiction is not simply ghosted by the past. The ghost comes with a vengeance; hence the pun on 'rapping' and 'raping' in the title of this chapter, for violations of the spirit (and/or the body) are exposed. This is what Kohlke and Gutleben call 'after-witnessing', that is to say 'the fictional re-creation of trauma that both testifies to and stands in for inadequate, missing, or impossible acts of primary witness-bearing to historical trauma' (Gutleben & Kohlke 2010: 7). Neo-Victorian fiction thus seems to trope trauma which, as Kohlke and Gutleben observe, is not limited to reconstitution but rather entails creation:

> By speaking for these speechless characters, recording their unrecorded thoughts, telling their untold stories, asserting their human rights to be recognised, to be given back a face, to have their suffering affirmed, contemporary fiction does not repeat the already said, but rather gives birth to what has never been able to be born. It gives historical non-subjects a future by restoring their traumatic pasts to cultural memory. (31)

The focus on the victim also reminds us that 'neo-Victorian fiction's representation of the Victorian past is also the lens through which a variety of *present* concerns is examined' (Carroll 2010: 180; original emphasis) so that the trauma of the past, in turn, casts light on the present. For Gutleben and Kohlke, contemporary trauma is not simply rooted in the two world wars (and the spate of ensuing traumatic events) but it starts much earlier, so that 'the nineteenth-century hysteric or otherwise disturbed and decentred personality, the object of scientific investigation and analysis, stands as the harbinger of the omnipresent traumatised and (self) alienated subject

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[202] For a thorough study of neo-Victorian fiction as memory text cf. Kate Mitchell, *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian After-Images,* Palgrave MacMillan: London, 2010. Interestingly enough, Dickens was very much keen on the topic of spiritualism, be it in his fictional works or as a journalist, investigating cases of haunted houses and so on cf. for instance 'The Spirit Business' in *Household Words*, May 7, 1853 (*SJ*: 553-559).

of postmodernity – a subject radically "othered" and "other" even to itself' (2010: 2). This is why, for Arias and Pulham, we perform this 'critical deciphering of encoded political, sexual, and racial messages in Victorian literature' (2010: 14). As Mark Llewellyn notes in the first issue of *The Neo-Victorian Studies Journal*, the trope of spectrality also engages with our present: 'the fact that the text haunts, ghosts, and demands reinterpretation […] suggests [that] there is an increasing relevance about the spectrality trope and the idea of haunting in neo-Victorian texts and criticism' (2008a: 177). Arias and Pulham conclude that 'the Victorians become not merely spirits of the past, but agents of the future' (2010: 7). While retrieving and exploring the trauma of the past to cast light on the present is an ethical gesture, 'after-witnessing' also necessarily entails a problematic appropriation of trauma, which we shall bear in mind.

I. INVESTIGATING INVISIBLE WOMEN

The first skeleton in the closet concerns Dickens's treatment of his wife. In 2016, in the London Dickens museum, Lilian Nayder curated an exhibition entitled 'The Other Dickens: Discovering Catherine', to challenge the way in which the house itself, as Juliet John puts it, was a relic, in keeping with the nineteenth-century view of the house as the space of the self – a patriarchal self which erases its victim, the wife (John 2010: 258). Nayder wished to present 'an accurate picture of a woman who met Charles Dickens in her teens'; furthermore, visitors could hear the sound artist Felicity Ford reading extracts from Catherine's letters to her sister Mary as part of the *Hearing Catherine* project, aiming to 'use Catherine's own words to give her a presence and build something of the atmosphere that she would have known in the family home' (King 2016: n.p.). For Nayder the 'psychologically unfit', 'incompetent wife and mother' is a 'construct', a 'plotline' (Nayder 2011: 11; 1). Indeed, Michael Slater points out that not only did Dickens give *his* version of the separation, but it was determinedly preserved

by Georgina Hogarth (with the help of his children Mamie and Henry Dickens) well into the twentieth century (Slater 2012: 32-55).[203]

Both Lilian Nayder and Claire Tomalin became literary detectives in order to reclaim their subject from the misconstructions and silences of history and *his* story.[204] *The Invisible Woman* (1990) and *The Other Dickens* (2011) shocked the academic world: 'For many years anyone who suggested publicly that there might have been a sexual affair between Dickens and Nelly Ternan was held to be a despicable scandal-monger by his admirers, although, curiously, his ill-treatment of Catherine did not worry them much' (2011: 333). In both cases, as Tomalin and Nayder argue, these women are plotted, their voices confined to the gaps and silences of history, their identities estranged and manipulated, thus turning them into *riddles*. Building on Tomalin's landmark biography, and either following or anticipating Nayder's, neo-Victorian texts allow the return of the repressed, imposing *their* versions of the story. For Michael Slater such 'resurgences' testify to:

> the public's apparently endless fascination with Dickens's love life, more especially his sex life. This leads journalists and scholars, as well as some creative writers, to revisit again and again the subject of departure from the marital home of his wife of twenty years and Dickens's subsequent twelve-year secret relationship with a young woman from the world of the professional theatre who was born in the same year as his second daughter. (2012: 3)

Eventually, Catherine Dickens and Ellen Ternan can be read as neo-Victorian characters who, as Georges Letissier puts it, resist 'the death verdict of the closed book, or any compulsory order of textual residence, through a process of migration that is an extension of fictitious life' (2015: paragraph 15).

A.   Tracing the Unseen Woman

1.   Dispelling the myth of the family man

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[203] For instance, commenting on another love interest in Dickens's life, Maria Beadnell, and the controversy about the publication of Dickens's letters to her, Slater writes: 'In 1882, she herself had, in fact, included one later, anodyne, letter to Maria in the third volume of her and Mamie's edition of Dickens's letters with a note that Maria had been "a very dear friend and companion of Charles Dickens in his youth" and that was all she wanted the public to know of her' (2012: 48).

[204] Michael Slater's study on Dickens's relation to women features two appendixes, one containing the 'Violated Letter', the basis for most narratives concerning Catherine; the other, with its telling subtitle 'A Chronological Record of the "Evidence"', presenting the reader with a history of the discoveries made about Ternan, from the publication of the novel *This Side Idolatry* to Katharine Longley's article 'Dickens Incognito' published in *The Dickensian* in 1981 (Slater's book pre-dates Tomalin's biography of Ternan (1990) hence the lack of reference to this work).

Michael Slater notes that the details of the separation necessarily 'cast their shadows back to the 1830s, to Dickens's earliest association with Catherine' as '[o]nce we know how a story ends we can never again read its beginning with an open mind' (1986: 103). Neo-Victorian texts cast an ironic light on Dickens's whole life. They also tend to focus on the events leading up to the separation, especially the period surrounding the composition of *The Frozen Deep*, that is to say the moment when Dickens met Nelly and definitively distanced himself from his wife.

Revisiting Dickens's passion for theatricality, Sebastian Barry's 2010 play, *Andersen's English*, thus dramatises Hans Andersen's stay at the Dickenses' in 1857, *i.e.* during the preparation of *The Frozen Deep* and shortly before the couple broke up. As Benjamin Poore puts it, 'what we have is a "prequel" to the more well-known incidents of Dickens's life in the 1860s: the Ternan affair, the Staplehurst accident, the reading tours, and his supposedly life-shortening performances of "Sikes and Nancy"' (2012: 317). Interestingly enough, the play was written before Nayder's biography. The tensions between husband and wife are glimpsed from the viewpoint of the Danish author, who is unable to understand clearly what is going on around him due to his linguistic shortcomings. Using an outsider, a foreigner, introduces a comedic dimension and helps to decentre the master narrative and decolonise Catherine's existence. Indeed, Sebastian Barry is an Irish writer, and writing back to Dickens's version of Catherine, via Andersen, may be in part an oblique way of engaging with English cultural domination and oppression in Ireland. Contrary to the version of Catherine Hogarth passed down for decades, his Catherine is not dull but sharp, picking up on her husband's judgement:

> DICKENS: […] I am afraid I will be much in town now myself, if I am to make arrangements for Jerrold's family. At least there are only five children. It was my fate to have so great a crowd of them, Andersen, that I meet them in the corridors in the night, and think I have prowlers. One night I may shoot one.
> MAMIE: Papa…
> CATHERINE: I hope you would not kill one of our children.
> DICKENS: Of course not, madam – since it was you made them in the first place. It's just that you made so many.
> KATE (*quite sternly):* You would be quite lost without us, Papa.
> CATHERINE: And I would be married then to a murderer, and I would not like that. […]
> DICKENS: In earlier years, Andersen, Catherine was the finest female silly mid-on in England.
> CATHERINE: Is that a compliment?
> DICKENS: It is intended as such. (*AE*: 25-26)

Barry debunks Dickens's legend as a family man and a philanthropist. Catherine instantly reacts to his barbed compliment: seemingly praising her gift as a cricket player, the term 'silly' cannot fail to echo representations of Catherine as dumb in historical records. Similarly, his children are 'prowlers' he longs to get rid of, a joke which betrays his pent-up aggressiveness. Barry's

play thus offers a counter version of events. For instance, Dickens is shown wishing for his wife's death:

> DICKENS: She is my mirror and I have the urge to smash it in pieces.
> GEORGIE: Who is your mirror?
> DICKENS: Your sister. Her face is my mirror, I peer in there and see my face. (63-64)

The passage depicts Catherine as a double, an inverted or negative image of Dickens with the comparison to a mirror. Dickens seems repulsed by this 'reflection' because it testifies to the passing of time and old age dawning on him. Suggesting a mid-life crisis, the play underlines that Dickens has actually been constructing the image of his wife for a long time, using both Catherine and Georgina as mirrors, capriciously keeping one and smashing the other.

Dickens's symbolic violence forces everyone to take sides, prompting betrayal and further isolating his wife. For instance, Georgina is made to usurp the part of the mother once Catherine is sent away from her children, remaining loyal to Dickens: 'Whatever happens, I will wish to stay at your side, and do my work as always, the children, and the house' (64). Neo-Victorian representations of Catherine hinge on the idea that Catherine is deemed expendable and replaceable, like Dorothea in *Girl in a Blue Dress*. In *Drood,* not only is Catherine replaced by Georgina but Collins steps into Dickens's shoes as a writer, when his friend goes to America: 'It felt as if I had replaced the Inimitable as surely and easily and completely as Georgina Hogarth had replaced Catherine Dickens' (*D*: 411). In Flanagan's *Wanting* too, family is a myth:

> Family, of course, was everything by that morning in 1854 – families alike and unlike, families happy and unhappy – for across classes and suburbs and counties, family had arrived like the steam train, unexpectedly but undeniably. […] Few had gambled so boldly and profited so handsomely as Lady Jane, the devoted wife, or Dickens, the very bard of family. But celebrating family was one thing. Practising it, Dickens had discovered, was something else altogether.' (*W*: 32)

As Catherine Lanone puts it: 'Dickens and Lady Franklin are shrewd calculators capitalizing on the family myth, drawing upon iconic Victorian values without qualms' (2012: 26).

Barry's play uses Andersen to cast an ironic light on Dickens, exploiting the power of spoken dialogue and the theatre's ability to conjure up what happens offstage as well as onstage. Benjamin Poore points out that the play 'takes one of the most well-known details from Dickens's relationship with Catherine – the boarding-up of the doorway connecting their bedrooms – and renders it invisible, in the process making a claim that Catherine is the *real* "invisible woman"' (2012: 318). Besides, Dickens simply will not hear what she has to say, as when the 'echoing phrase' is applied to the owl rather than to his wife's response:

> DICKENS: I did not sleep in that little room last night. I went out and walked under the pine trees like a ghost. Then over the dark earth to Higham, like a homeless soul, the trees breathing along the white road,

and rounded the sleeping village with my dogs, and came back – none the wiser, none the calmer. There was an owl that called the whole night over the marshes.
CATHERINE: I heard it too.
DICKENS: It was like an echoing phrase, but what it was saying I cannot tell.
CATHERINE: It is saying perhaps, *love your wife*.
DICKENS: Catherine, Catherine.
CATHERINE: I love you still, Charles. I will always love you.
DICKENS: Catherine, Catherine, Kate and Georgie are just there, and Walter, and poor Andersen, he frightens so easily, let us not burden them with our difficulties.
CATHERINE: What is it that offends you, what is it?
DICKENS: Nothing, nothing, I do not know. If I had the words to tell you, I would tell you.
CATHERINE: I have no one to turn to for advice.
DICKENS: Look, look, I believe they have discovered the summit. At last.
He pulls away from her. She is left bewildered.
CATHERINE (*to herself*): I will always love you. But who is this 'I'? I, Catherine Dickens? I feel as if I have left my body, and am looking down on myself. Give mercy to me, dear Christ, give mercy. (*AE*: 60-61; italics in the text)

Dickens's stuttering repetitions ('Catherine Catherine', 'Nothing, nothing', 'Look look') underline his hypocritical self-deception. Dickens's sense of his future betrayal of Catherine partakes of the unspeakable ('If I had the words to tell you, I would tell you'). Twice he repeats 'Catherine, Catherine', as if to placate her or write off whatever she might say. Barry's Catherine is both faithful and blunt, as when she ironically mocks his wallowing spree of self-pity ('homeless soul') by bitterly suggesting that the owl might equally advise him to love his wife. Catherine's devotion ('I will always love you') turns hollow at the end of this passage, a routine phrase which leaves her all but fragmented: 'But who is this "I"?'

Ultimately, there is no female solidarity here. Catherine is as crushed by her sister's betrayal as by Dickens's. The Biblical allusion subverts the motif of *A Tale of Two Cities,* as Catherine is being buried alive (never to be 'recalled to life')*,* when Dickens decides to part from his wife but not from Georgina:

CATHERINE: You defeat me. I am like one of those old cities in the *Bible*. One city built upon another. You are building your own city on top of me.
GEORGIE: Because you have dragged a boulder onto your own breast, and it is crushing you, does not license you to say that I put it there.
CATHERINE: Oh, Charles, I pray you, send her away, send her away.
DICKENS: Enough of sending away, enough. (79)

The image used by Catherine is a possible reference to Isaiah 25:2: 'For thou hast made of a city a heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built.' The passage occurs after the prophecy of the fall of Babylon and offers an apocalyptic vision of the future. Catherine thus casts herself as the victim of a wrathful God, Dickens, foreseeing the apocalyptic end of her marriage.

2.   Extenuating circumstances: motherhood and the female body

Between 1836 and 1852 Catherine Dickens bore ten children (and suffered two miscarriages) which is not surprising by Victorian standards, the average being six children (Nayder 2011: 154, Slater 1986: 120-121). There is a disagreement amongst critics on Dickens's reactions to his wife's pregnancies. Whereas Slater 'only once found Dickens sounding less than fully sympathetic to his wife's pre-natal trials' (1986: 121), Nayder considers that 'Dickens perceived her childbearing as "overbearing" because of the sheer number of dependents to whom she gave birth' (2011: 155). She points out that Dickens only partly acknowledged his part in Catherine's pregnancies (157). In her reading, the couple might be said to reflect Victorian concerns around the demographic issue: with Dickens's quasi-Malthusian reaction on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Catherine's affirmation of the importance of motherhood and of having a husband 'since her sense of worth, purpose, and community was largely dependent on it' (160). As Catherine Waters observes, 'appealing to the middle-class ideal of womanhood' enables Dickens to hold Catherine responsible for their separation (1997: 9). For Waters, 'the controversy surrounding the end of Dickens's marriage reveals more than just an ironic contrast between the sanctification of the hearth in his fiction and journalism, and the disharmony of his own family life' (12). Rather, it shows 'evidence of the ways in which ideologies of sexual difference and separate spheres were simultaneously constructed and contested' so that it may be said that the 'family's function' is only 'a [political] *construct* in Dickens's writing' (*ibid.*; italics in the text). Kohlke and Gutleben point out the paradox of the Victorian age '[w]here motherhood was sanctified as women's ordained destiny, but where mothers, even after the 1839 Custody of Infants Act, had only limited legal rights over their children' (2011: 3). The deliveries took their toll on Catherine's body, as her portraits testify:

Figure 21: Catherine Dickens née Hogarth, portrait by Samuel Lawrence (1838, left), photograph (1857, right)

In Sebastian Barry's play, Catherine's soliloquy reveals that she has absorbed such criticism, as she blames herself ('I accuse myself', 'I so wished to grieve') in the quotation below). Catherine turns herself into the guilty party while Dickens is cast as victim, but Barry only *seems* to follow the 'official' version of events. Simultaneously, Catherine throws an ironic light on the male gaze and defends her 'poor body':

> CATHERINE (*to herself*): It is not as if anything terrible has occurred, beyond harsh words, beyond being accused of lethargy. I accuse myself also of fatness, of a certain disgustingness of form brought on by bearing so many children year after year. Oh, when little Dora died, I so wished to grieve, but *his* grief was so much greater, so much more *important* – and something of him went down with her into the underworld, leaving me with half a ghost, half a shining man. […] I make no sense, I make no sense. When we should be quiet, after the day, he becomes agitated, wakeful, watching me closely, till I am thinking he is noting every wobble in my poor body, and remembering years ago, when it was often said I was like a wraith, a beautiful revenant. I always got compliments when I was a girl, far more than Georgie. He said I was the loveliest creature he had ever seen. And wrote me such letters. (*AE*: 39; italics in the text)

Barry here debunks the image of the angel in the house through the semantic field of morbidity ('wraith', 'revenant') calling to mind images of anorexia. The mention of Dora, in this passage and elsewhere, construes the death of the child as the breaking point in the relationship between the couple. Harping on Catherine's body, out of shape as a consequence of her many pregnancies and thus no longer fitting the norms of beauty, Barry leads the audience to reflect on Dickens's harshness, but also on our own society's fascination for, or rather obsession with, body image and weight (one may think for instance of the recurrent attacks against H&M advertising, spreading what Naomi Wolf calls 'the beauty myth' (2002: 3-4)).

In Gaynor Arnold's novel, *Girl in a Blue Dress*, Catherine is renamed Dorothea, and presented as a victim whose body grows out of control ('But the children kept coming' (*GBD*: 205)). The stouter Dorothea grows, with her repeated pregnancies, the more impatient and annoyed Alfred Gibson (aka Charles Dickens) becomes, causing Dorothea much distress, especially after her sister Alice's death: 'I didn't dare tell him I was with child again. I hoped that maybe I was mistaken, that the shock of Alice's death might have disturbed my functions. But in my heart, I knew' (128). While pregnant, Dorothea spends most of her time in her room, dozing in front of the fire. Even then her body is controlled by male desire (she is the object of Alfred's sexual appetite). Arnold also rewrites Henry Dickens's birth, Catherine's eighth delivery, during which she was anesthetised with chloroform, another way to depict her submission to male power.[205]

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[205] For a detailed account of this delivery see Lilian Nayder (2011: 155).

If the historical Catherine Dickens did not much complain about her pregnancies, her neo-Victorian avatars do speak the pain her pregnancies are bound to have brought. Dorothea is torn between her sense of duty as a wife and a mother (which breeds shame) and her sufferings:

> I felt ashamed. […] I had a hard-working and home-loving husband who was amusing and affectionate and kind, and who provided me with all the money I required. […] Yet every day I sensed that Alfred's feelings towards me were less intense than they once had been, and the more I thought, the more I felt that motherhood was the cause of it. […] 'I know it's our women's lot – but I feel so *very despondent* when I'm carrying, and doubt I shall be looking excessively fat before the month is out. Is it so selfish to want a breathing space? A chance for Alfred and I to be sweethearts again?' (133)

The longing to retrieve the young sweetheart as opposed to the resentful older husband adds pathos. Dorothea is confiding in a female friend who denies sympathy, and uses the patronising nickname 'Dodo', like the extinct bird: 'But Dodo dearest, you and Alfred are *not* sweethearts any more. You must acknowledge the change' (*ibid*.). The repetitive syllables foreground her own paralysis as she is made redundant by strong-willed women such as her sisters, Alice and Sissy (standing respectively for Mary and Georgina Hogarth) or Miss Ricketts (*aka* Ellen Ternan): '*Poor Dodo* – how quickly I came to live to that description!' (202). Dorothea's attempts to confront her condition are always checked, by friends or Alfred himself. He always rejects her complaints as childish and unfounded as when she returns from a spa and finds that her sister has usurped her place: 'it was Sissy who greeted me at the front door like a *chatelaine*' (216). The gap is signified by the door between the wife's bedroom and her husband's, which she finds locked.

Flanagan and Simmons opt for more violent representations of Catherine's confinement. In *Wanting*, Catherine literally merges with her bed as she is depicted as a 'heaving mound of feather quilt, rheumy eyes and stifled sobs' (*W*: 33). The Dickenses' conflict impregnates the house itself:

> The situation, he knew, was felt painfully by all in the house, a house that seemed to breed only quarrels – between son and daughter, between elder and younger, between governess and servants – the whole house was wracked by a wretched spirit and even the furniture seemed to bear grudges against the walls. (33-34).

This vision contrasts with the way in which Catherine once catalysed Dickens's creative power, as in the following chiasmus: 'A long time ago he had fled from himself into Catherine, but now he was fleeing from Catherine into himself' (34). Whereas Arnold's Dorothea confesses to her husband her distress at being pregnant, Flanagan's Catherine remains silent, her thoughts on the topic are only shared with the reader: 'But you haven't borne ten children, she wished to reply […]. You don't know what it does to you. You grow heavy, your memory wanders, your body leaks, your back burns. But she said none of it' (157-158). Catherine's poignant depiction

of the way multiparity affects her body is utterly crushed by her husband ('unstoppable', 'undeniable') and by the way he plots her: 'He was unstoppable, undeniable, he bent the world to his schemes and dreams as surely as he did his characters. And she knew that her part […] would be the fat and hopeless housekeeper, the hysteric, the invalid, the harridan and virago' (158). Catherine accepts her fictionalisation contained in the gradation, her plea is a tragic epiphany that cannot be uttered out loud:

> Catherine finally understood that she had been his invention as surely as any of the blurred pages on the desk, as much as any of those dull creatures he passed off as women in his books. He had made her stupid. He had made her that boring woman of his novels; she had become his heroine in her weakness and compliance and dullness. (159)

> The world, she realised, was whatever Charles Dickens wanted. She had no defence. (*ibid*.)

She is only able to let out one cry: 'It hurts!' (160). This cry shows Catherine's inability to speak her mind. As such, she may be compared to the other wife of the novel, Lady Jane, who is unable to speak out her feeling for Mathinna, also instancing what Nayder calls the prison house of the Victorian marriage, the two women being trapped by either numerous children or the absence of a child (2011: 7).[206]

Whereas Barry, Arnold and Flanagan debunk the family myth constructed by Dickens, Dan Simmons is more ambivalent. The fictional Wilkie Collins keeps presenting Catherine as a bovine figure, a simile borrowed from Dickens:

> So it is little wonder that when the expensive bracelet, meant for Ellen, showed up at Tavistock House, Catherine, between pregnancies, roused herself from her vague-minded shuffling sluggishness and bellowed like a milk cow with a Welsh dairyman's prod between her withers.
> Dickens responded as any guilty husband would. But only if that husband happened to be the most popular writer in all of England and the English-speaking world and perhaps the greatest write r who ever lived. (*D*: 6-7)

Is turning Catherine into a cow, a lethargic body, a comic turn on the way the historical Dickens represented his wife? The second paragraph however is also an attack, this time exaggerating Dickens's reaction. This results in the forced encounter between Catherine and Ellen. Simmons seems to pastiche the appetite for scandal, using the same harshness towards both parties (recalling the *Sun* or such tabloids' scandalmongering). Can Collins's report of the events be linked to the melodrama of everyday life as it appears in tabloids and is Simmons mocking both the Victorian and the contemporary fad for celebrity scandal?

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[206] One might contend that Flanagan also problematises motherhood by presenting Mrs Ternan, as a manipulative woman plotting for her daughters whose failures to become successful actresses must be compensated (*W*: 89). Mrs Ternan is thus depicted not only as Ellen's chaperone but as controlling her. Flanagan's portrayal of Mrs Ternan might have been influenced by Tomalin who suggests Ellen's life is embedded in matriarchy (2010: 13).

B.   Is it truly possible to write back?

Thus, neo-Victorian revision endows Catherine Dickens with varying degrees of empowerment. In Sebastian Barry's critical biofictional play, for instance, Dickens's plotting is met with resistance, especially as far as Kate is concerned, the one character that in all representations of the Dickens family is shown as strong, wilful and daring to stand up to her father:

> DICKENS: Be my daughter. Be more like your sister Mamie, gentle and true. Do not torment me.
> KATE: I do not wish to be *authored* by you.
> *He starts to move away.*
> You are bringing away the light, Papa.
> DICKENS**:** Then follow after me, child. (*AE*: 51)

Dickens's use of imperatives shows his will to shape his daughter into a more submissive woman ('gentle and true'). However, Kate refuses to yield to her father's whim and reminds him that she is not one of the characters he has 'authored'. Kate's resistance finds an echo in Barry's portrayal of Catherine, who cares for her children, an ethical reversal of Dickens's 'Violated Letter' – the infamous letter in which Catherine was depicted as the origin of the unhappiness reigning in the Dickens household.[207] Whereas Dickens cannot wait for his son Walter to leave for India, Catherine is distressed at the idea: 'Charles, do not say so lightly that he is going. To that terrifying place. No, no, forgive me' (25). Her friendship with Andersen works as a counterpoint to her crumbling relationship with her husband. At some point, Andersen confides in her that he has no children, no wife and is quite alone since his mother died, which allows a moment of communion which underlines the difficulty of speaking a foreign language:

> ANDERSEN: Never marry, but I have been able to observe that difficult – landscape.
> CATHERINE: Yes. What excellent English, again, Mr Andersen. It is so good to talk. I know you have trouble understanding me. Perhaps that is a mercy.
> *Andersen perhaps does not understand, but he lays a hand on Catherine's arm.*
> ANDERSEN: Dear lady. (45)

Andersen's phrase 'difficult – landscape' suggests he is slightly aware of what is going on in the household, the dash marks not only his hesitation but the split. The end of the play presents a powerful challenge to Dickens's construction of the women who took a part in his life in the

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[207] This letter is in fact a statement Dickens wrote about his separation. It was given to Arthur Smith, Dickens's business-manager for his next Reading Tour. The letter was to be used to vouchsafe for Dickens's integrity, however, it ended being published in newspapers (first in America, then in England) against Dickens's wishes (Slater 1983: 400). As Catherine Waters notes, Dickens had previously published a 'Personal' statement that has also been much under the scrutiny of Dickens's biographers (1997: 2). For Waters, 'the episode participated in the growing phenomenon of "sensationalism" that was already being denounced by conservative critics' (3).

form of successive epilogues. Each woman in turn is offered the opportunity to give her side of the story. Poore comments on the epilogues that '[i]n contrast to the candid gaze of the witnesses in the television drama-documentaries, here the speakers' ability to explain their subsequent lives, and their deaths, gives them a ghostly quality' (2012: 319).

As Tara Macdonald and Joyce Goggin demonstrate, the neo-Victorian project bears affinities with the feminist 're-vision' (2013: 1-2), as defined by Adrienne Rich's for instance:

> Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. (1972: 18)

Re-vision seems to be Gaynor Arnold's main aim, wishing 'to give voice to the largely voiceless Catherine Dickens, who requested that her letters from her husband be preserved so that "the world may know he loved me once"' (*GBD*: 439). Arnold's choice to make Dorothea a first-person narrator marks her will to fully reclaim the historical figure, especially since she is the only neo-Victorian writer to attempt to do so. Indeed, Dorothea is construed as a sort of 'detective narrator' to borrow a concept from non-fiction crime books: she knows 'when to be silent' and how 'to gather information, to provide a link between an investigation into the past and the present' (Dale 2015: paragraph 12). The entire novel is devoted to her quest for self-knowledge, a quest which takes the shape of a contest against her husband's version of events. Playing with the detective in the armchair trope, domesticity morphs into detection. As Dorothea receives her children as well as her friends and goes to see her sister and the Queen, each visit brings out new elements that help to reconstruct the relation between Dorothea and Alfred.

Dorothea's narrative is thus used to demonstrate the constructedness of history. Opening on the funeral of the husband, the novel writes back to the 'Violated Letter' and ends with a seemingly feminist note when Dorothea protests to O'Rourke (John Foster's stand-in): 'It makes you all *uncomfortable* when a woman voices her views. […] You all get so angry when we don't fit your moulds. Women aren't angels; why do you try to make us so?' (406). Dorothea has an epiphanic revelation: 'As long as Alfred was content with me, I had everything I could wish for, but once I no longer pleased him, I was cast off with no redress' (407). As Margaret D. Stetz points out: '[h]er plaint is meant to resonate with the modern reader in an age when wives are still discarded in favor of younger replacements, and when divorce often impoverishes women while men's incomes rise' (2013: 146). Arnold naturalises confinement,

connecting multiple child-bearings and the wife's condition, contained and constrained at home.

Yet neo-Victorianism, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, is an ambivalent genre, reclaiming the eclipsed outcast while often still celebrating the Victorian, here Dickensian, legacy. Arnold's novel is no exception to this rule: if Dorothea is presented as both the detective and the narrator, she also clings to her idealised vision of the past, when she was the eponymous girl in a blue dress and not the dumb, fat and eventually estranged wife. When she wishes to see the city (a scene which has attracted little notice so far) London is scanned from behind the cab's window, acting as a kind of screen or shield, in terms that ventriloquise Dickens's descriptions. As soon as she gets out, she becomes vulnerable, attacked as she is by the rain and by the crowd going to Westminster, Gibson's readers mourning their dead author. The stream of people washes Dorothea up Westminster towards the grave of her husband, upon which she faints, a symbolic moment which once more tropes the crowd as devouring. The hostile crowd might stand for the 'purists' and thus, as Tammy Ho Lai-Ming suggests, represent the neo-Victorian writer's anguish and fear of failing to appeal to the Dickensian readership (2012a: 61). This fear might relate to Harold Bloom's 'anxiety of influence'. Indeed, though it is not the object of the present dissertation, a study of *readers'* reception of neo-Victorian fiction might be of interest: while it is true that neo-Victorian fiction is a market success, the reception of the neo-Victorian is varied as can be seen when consulting both the critical response and such websites as goodreads.com for instance.

Besides, Dorothea is visited by the ghost of her husband at the end of the novel, a twist upon *A Christmas Carol*. While Kathryne Ford sees this as the starting point for Catherine's rehabilitation as an author (2016: 73), Nayder points out that Dorothea is asked not to write her own text but that of her husband, thus turning into an 'echo', an interpretation I agree with especially as the novel ends with the image of blood (2011: 16).[208] She proves unable to act or

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[208] Interestingly, no mention is made of a text actually written by Catherine Dickens, *What Shall We Have For Dinner?* (1851). According to Michael Slater and John Drew, Dickens encouraged Catherine to gather her recipes and menus as a way to distract her and recover from the sudden loss of their daughter Dora. Slater and Drew note 'Lady Maria Clutterbuck' comes from a little farce in which Catherine had played earlier that year. While the main content of the book was written by Catherine, Slater and Drew suggest that: 'although there is no external proof that Dickens wrote the following jokey little Preface for the book, his authorship seems, from internal evidence, sufficiently probable to justify its inclusion here' (2000: 420). The Victorian text is yet another possible appropriation of Catherine's voice by Dickens, the most authoritative part of the book being potentially kept under Dickens's command. The fictional author of the preface claims that her menus conquered her husband, Lord Clutterbuck – 'I am consoled in believing that my attention to the requirements of his appetite secured me the possession of his esteem to the last' (421) – offering a contrast with the poor relations her friends have with their husbands. The book's aim thereby is:

> to rescue many fair friends from such domestic suffering, that I have consented to give to the world
> THE BILLS OF FARE

counteract the ready-made discourse that reifies her: in spite of transfocalisation, she remains shaped by Dickens, as when she meets her daughter-in-law: 'and here I am, living up to my own reputation by being so flustered and unprepared' (306). The novel fails to offer a fully revisionist vision of Dickens as it tries to liberate Dorothea/Catherine from the oppressive shadow of Gibson/Dickens while at the same time sticking with a 'Heritage Dickens' figure. This contrasts with Peter Carey's representation of Catherine in *Jack Maggs*.

Indeed, Peter Carey offers a more radical revision of Dickens's fiction, and of his version of his wife and life, in order to offer a postcolonial response to the cultural domination of the so-called mother country. Mary Oates, Carey's version of Catherine Dickens, is a revengeful mother who fights not to be replaced by her sister, Lizzie Warriner, a younger and more beautiful version of herself. Like Arnold, Carey rewrites Dickens's attachment to his sister-in-law Mary Hogarth, and his grief at her death, but Carey is far more explicit concerning the possible sexual relation between Mary and Dickens as her fictional counterpart becomes pregnant. Once more, it is the 'Fallen Dickens' (Laird) that is at stake. Whereas Oates (*i.e.* Dickens) is careful, Lizzie feels that her sister is not sharp enough to find out; she plans to give birth to her child in France, and to come back pretending it's a foundling. This blends the figures of Mary Hogarth and Ellen Ternan: Ternan is supposed to have stayed in France in 1865 to conceal her pregnancy; the child may have died, hence her presence at Staplehurst in June of that year (Tomalin 1990: 140-144). Strikingly, Lizzie dies at the moment when Phipps shoots Mercy, putting an end to all embedded fictions.

Using Tobias as focaliser, Carey constructs Mary as a strong woman who decodes her sister's pregnancy (285-6). When she discovers her sister's betrayal, she cannot speak: 'what she now knew, she would not name, what she was about to do she would not look at' (286). Her sense of abjection may recall the vindictive Miss Havisham, who stops the clocks when jilted by Compeyson, and who reacts to what Jeremy Tambling defines as the trauma of abandonment, by enacting her revenge on Pip (2009: 205; 210). Indeed, Mary goes to Ma Britten to buy abortive pills. In the waiting room, Mary is overwhelmed by 'a collective impression of shame' (*JM*: 287). It seems that Carey is addressing social hypocrisy, medical

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> Which met with the approval of sir Jonas Clutterbuck, believing that by a constant reference to them, an easy solution may be obtained to that most difficult of questions – 'WHAT SHALL WE HAVE FOR DINNER?' (*ibid.*; original emphasis)

Whoever may have written these lines, Catherine was to be estranged not only from Dickens's table but from his life only seven years after the publication of this bestseller, thereby questioning the validity of the loving-family model foregrounded above.

welfare then and now, and the cultural reception of abortion (he himself had to face such a situation with his first wife (Snodgrass 2010: 9)).

Ma Britten thus becomes an ominous counterpart of Mary (indeed, 'Ma' is short for 'Mary', as well as an ironic echo of Mother Britain). Significantly, the limits between the middle-class world, which Oates and Buckle belong to, and the underworld of Silas and Ma Britten are blurred (Buckle used to be a fishmonger and Oates's father lived in jail – recalling Dorrit – and was accused of murder). Through Oates's failed marriage and Ma Britten's violence towards young Maggs, Carey points out the hypocrisy of Victorian society. Carey creates a parallelism between Jack Maggs and Sophina on the one hand, and Tobias Oates and Lizzie on the other. This parallelism is reflected by the structure of the novel as revelations of Oates's affair are interwoven with Maggs's narration of his love story with Sophina. Both end fatally since Lizzie dies of an overdose of abortive pills (Mary had put some in her tea and Tobias, who had the same idea as his wife, asks Lizzie to take a pill) while Sophina, Maggs's lover, dies after her miscarriage.

Finally, Mercy opens a third way in the novel. Mercy is presented as a sort of mother figure to Maggs, or at least a nurse, wishing to care for him. She refuses to 'read' Maggs's scars and reduce him to a convict. She sees the scars for what they are: traumatic wounds linked to the past and which must be healed. She is present when Maggs faces Phipps and makes him go back to Australia to take care of his biological children. From the moment the ex-convict tells her about them she decides to look after them, symbolically, she holds locks of their hair in her right hand when Phipps shoots her other hand (324). In a truly postcolonial fashion, Carey hints that Maggs's redemption, his recovery, can only be achieved away from the traumatic scene (England): 'There is no character like Mercy in *The death of Maggs*, no young woman to help the convict recognize the claims of Richard and John to have a father kiss them good night' (327). Maggs's sons are similar to convicts, characterised by their wildness and as outlaws of a kind: '[Dick] had twice been up before the magistrate' and John 'had the same hard belligerent face, the same dark and needful eyes' (*ibid.*). Mercy's role as mother then turns out to 'civilise' and give 'birth to five further members of '[t]hat race' (*ibid.*), thereby offering Maggs a 'happy ending' (Maack 2004: 241).

C.   The Invisible woman

Logically enough, the other key female figure of Dickens's life, Ellen 'Nelly' Ternan, also lacks a proper story. Juliet John observes that the image we now have of Dickens is not only the product of temporal distance but of Dickens's own creation especially concerning the 'Ternan years' (2010: 245). Dickens hardly ever mentioned her except as 'the Patient' in four letters written to W. H. Wills; he pretended not to know her when writing to the station-master enquiring whether the jewellery belonging to a young woman had been found.[209] Staplehurst, as Tomalin points out, was also a moment of 'reckoning' for Ellen: '[i]t made clear to her and her sisters that, whether she was guilty or innocent, and whatever these terms meant, she was obliged to live her life in the gap between what could be said and what really happened – to be invisible' (Tomalin 2011: 333). The title of Tomalin's biography obviously points to Ternan's shadowy existence, as well as its opening sentence: 'This is the story of someone who – almost – wasn't there; who vanished into thin air' (Tomalin 1990: 3). Tomalin, insists on 'her own obliteration', as 'she left no written trace' and 'was wholly excluded from the great biography of Dickens written by his friend John Forster' (*ibid.*).[210] Dickens prompted his friends to annihilate all evidence of his relationship with Ternan as Juliet John notes:

> That he was so successful in gaining the collusion of friends and family is evidence of his extraordinary power over others, and of the supreme importance his public image held for him, as well as his keen awareness of the relationship between his mass success and his appeal to a family audience. What the destruction of the Ternan papers illustrates, moreover, is Dickens's efforts to *shape* his own image, not simply for his own time, but for 'endurable retrospect'. (2010: 246; my emphasis)

The presence of Ellen Ternan in neo-Victorian fiction resists the erasure commanded by Dickens and can be read as a figure of the return of the repressed.

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[209] Dickens picks this nickname because she broke her arm in the Staplehurst accident. For Claire Tomalin, Dickens's use of a nickname for Ellen is yet another means to 'construct' her as she remarks: 'He also began to call her "The Patient" in his letters to Wills: and patient she was obliged to be' (2011: 333).

[210] It is striking to see that the first openly counter narrative of Dickens's life should have taken the form of a biofictional novel: *This Side Idolatry: A novel* based on the life of Charles Dickens, published in 1928. The text originally was to be published as a biography but, due to Henry Dickens's refusal to let the author print excerpts from letters, C. E. Bechhofer Roberts turned to fiction, paving the way for the neo-Victorian biofiction, bringing awareness to the issue of the limit between what can be said and what cannot. It therefore seems that where Dickens's romantic/sexual life is concerned, the tale can only be blurred, veiled by Dickens's own constructs/lies and the process of righteous concealment that followed his death (Michael Slater 2012: 57). Benjamin Poore wonders: 'how do writers show his private life without making him look like the worst kind of humbug? Put more broadly, should he now be cast as hero still, as anti-hero, or as villain?' (2012: 315).

1.   Dickens's bane

> […] deeply attracted to her [Ellen], it seems, from the beginning, the flirtatious manner he adopted with her soon changed into a gnawing passion. And the more intensely he desired her the more repelled he was by Kate, the more firmly gripped by 'grim despair and restlessness'. (Hibbert 1967: 251)

Quite interestingly, Dickens's male biographers and critics tend to negotiate Tomalin's reclaimation of Ternan by dealing with the secret relationship in traumatic terms, as in the above quotation, where Hibbert presents 'gnawing' desire as some kind of disease, leading Dickens to despair; such is also the case of Peter Ackroyd, for whom Ellen Ternan is Dickens's downfall (1999: 833). One type of neo-Victorian biofiction also casts Ellen as 'catastrophe' (the term 'catastrophe' denotes both an event subverting the order of a system and an unhappy conclusion) ('catastrophe' *OED*). The best example of this Ackroydian reading is of course Dan Simmons's novel.

Ronald Pearsall notes that, for the Victorians, 'the married state was a coupled steam engine; if anything went wrong, it was a mechanical failure, and the trouble could be located, rectified, put right' (1969: 170). In *Drood*, Ellen enters the novel with the train accident, as if to shatter the 'steam engine' of marriage, derailing his life, the origin of his 'fall' and of an anxiety that leads to his early death. The tryst with Ternan is presented as a middle-aged man's unrequited fancy: 'How ironic it would have been if I had died on Carrick Fell because of Charles Dickens's covert passion for an eighteen-year-old actress who had absolutely no awareness of his feelings for her' (*D:* 90).[211] She hovers on the margins, an elusive *femme fatale*, placing the Inimitable in a figurative and literal 'murderous mood' (92), and thereby becomes part of the detective plot: 'then finally [we] went on to Doncaster, which had been our true and secret (or rather Charles Dickens's secret) destination all along' (*ibid.*). Collins places her under the surveillance of Inspector Field, suggesting that she might be one of Drood's accomplices: 'I am convinced that Miss Ternan connects to this … mystery … that the best interests of Charles Dickens may have been compromised by this woman. […] I need to understand more about her life and their relationship' (188). Ultimately, more than an 'intruder' helped by Georgina the 'usurper' (236), Ellen embodies the gap between Dickens and Collins as the latter realises 'that none of us – none of Dickens's friends or family or even his biographers in some future era, such as yours Dear Reader – would ever know the real story of his strange relationship with Ellen Ternan' (688). The mention of 'biographers' hints at

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[211] Here Simmons refers to a biographical element: during this trip, Collins did fall and twist his ankle. Obviously, the narrator here exaggerates the importance of his injury.

Tomalin. Ellen turns into a series of unanswered questions. Therefore, it may be argued that Simmons's way of 'plotting' Ellen points out the limits of our access to the past, but also the free range this allows to fiction. We may see this free scope if we compare Simmons's text with other versions of Ellen Ternan.

2. The sexual woman

Other kinds of biofiction trope Ternan as the intrusion of sexuality, but also seek to reclaim her from invisibility. In Arnold's novel, Dorothea is not the only character who is trapped in a house; indeed, her rival, Miss Ricketts (read Ellen Ternan) is also confined in the house set up for her by Dickens. Hence the mirror effect when the two women meet. Whereas Flanagan, for instance, shows how Dickens forced his wife to pay a social call to the Ternans, here the meeting takes place after Gibson's death, modifying historical chronology to reclaim Catherine: the encounter no longer entails shame and guilt for her. On the contrary, Dorothea is portrayed as powerful; the experience is shared yet not fully liberating. Miss Ricketts (like Sissy, Georgina's counterpart) is also socially imprisoned: her relationship with Gibson ruins her prospect of getting married.[212]

Ellen's first appearance in *Wanting* is aboard a train (87), but the similarity with Simmons's novel ends there. Flanagan turns Ellen into a site of sexual ambivalence, an ambivalence that was a staple feature of Victorian attitudes towards actresses as Claire Tomalin suggests (1990: 16-18). In the novel, Mrs Ternan wants 'to make it clear she was not a fallen woman' (*W:* 9); Flanagan opts for the trope of the innocent kept woman. Ellen is distressed by the sexualisation of her body on stage: 'Ellen here feels that she is undone in the final scene when she must appear in the ripped dress. She feels it leaves too much of her leg revealed' (98). This foreshadows the fact that Ellen will be the object of Dickens's sexual appetite for most of the novel. From the start, Flanagan strives to build surprising connections between Ellen and Mathinna, as when, for instance, the train crosses a frozen landscape (87), which cannot fail to recall the Franklin expedition, as if to suggest that Ellen's fate is inescapable. Paralleling Ellen's and Mathinna's stories enables Flanagan to picture the former as Dickens's victim, as Tammy Ho Lai-Ming contends, reading the relationship in terms of craving consumption, where

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[212] Interestingly enough, the historical Ellen married some years after Dickens's death. However, she lied about her actual age and her relation to the author (Tomalin 1990: 206).

Dickens preys on the much younger Ternan (2012b: 27). This appears most strikingly when Dickens has a first private encounter with the young woman:

> After twice getting lost, he came upon the backstage, a confusion of beams, bulkheads, ropes and rollers, and such mixing of gaslight, of long shadows and short shadows, that none of the natural laws of the universe seemed any longer to apply. And sitting amidst it all, stripped by the shadows, was a young blonde woman silently sobbing. (*W*: 97)

The description turns the backstage into a sort of enchanted forest which, as Tammy Ho Lai-Ming suggests, makes Dickens appear as an avatar of Bluebeard (2012a: 3; 53-56) Hence, Flanagan's play on light as Ellen is locked in a cage like a bird ('stripped by the shadows'). The image echoes and reverses their first official encounter in which it is Dickens who is presented as trapped in a cage: 'She was watching his hands. They darted about like the wings of a wild bird in a cage' (*W*: 99).

Yet bird imagery in *Wanting* also seems to suggest that a parallelism, not simply an antagonism, may be drawn between Dickens and women (whereas such is not the case for the fictional Franklin). While rehearsing the play, Ellen 'step[s] out of character' (153) to prevent her sister from crushing a bird she keeps hidden in her coat (154). Upon this discovery, Maria (the sister) exclaims: 'She's always collecting dying birds and trying to save them' (*ibid*.). Knowing that up to this point Flanagan laid emphasis on Dickens's sense of impending death, the reader is made to associate the wounded bird with Dickens. Whereas Ellen is depicted as imprisoned, Dickens sees in the starling the possibility for relief and liberation: 'when at the end of the first week's rehearsal the starling vanished, presumably having gathered its strength and flown away, Dickens could not withhold the feeling that there was something liberating in the omen' (157).

Similarly, the swan, which functions as a symbol of colonial violence in the case of Franklin, is perhaps more ambiguous in the case of Nelly and Dickens than Ho Lai-Ming suggests. For instance, the visit to the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition is marked by Ellen's consciousness of her own sensuality and flirtation with Dickens: 'And if such innocence were tinged with a flirtatious frisson, what of it?' (161). As Margaret Harris observes, Flanagan's fictional scene (Dickens and Ternan never went together to this exhibition) 'bring[s] his meditation on desire to a climax' (2018: 150). Ellen too seems to delight in the sensual (or even sexual) tension aroused by a copy of Michelangelo's *Leda and the Swan* (fig. 22, left). The painting, however, is mis-attributed as Ellen sees 'two pair of babies, each just hatched from an egg' (*W*: 166). She therefore seems to be looking at Leonardo da Vinci's painting (fig. 22,

right). Flanagan's mis-attribution confronts two visions of the myth, one focusing on sexual desire, the other advocating family bliss:

Figure 22: *Leda and the Swan*, after Michelangelo (1530; left); *Leda and the Sawn*, Leonardo da Vinci (1505-10; right)

It is significant that the painting should offer a private moment shared by Ellen and Dickens, during which he confesses the circumstances of the death of his baby daughter, Dora: 'We leave a sick child in order to make a speech' (168). Ellen is able to face and respond to Dickens's grief:

> It was then Ellen Ternan told him something no one had. It was as if she had heard something beyond the words. It felt like absolution.
> 'You're not to blame,' said Ellen Ternan. (*ibid.*)

The Leda motif veers away from rape here, to echo the lost child motif.[213]

The novel reaches its climax in the representation of *The Frozen Deep* in Manchester. Flanagan makes Ellen (instead of Maria) play the lead role opposite Dickens's Wardour. While the play wished to implicitly assert Franklin's heroism and dispel the accusations of cannibalism, Dickens's performance turns into a cannibalistic scene: 'he wanted to lose himself in Ellen Ternan's breasts, to bury himself in her belly, to bite her thighs, to be rid of all that being still and alone made him fear' (238). The performance turns into a sexual embrace, a scene in which Dickens yields to his sensations and desire. As Tammy Ho Lai-Ming suggests, 'Dickens, devouring Ternan sensually as if she is edible, must realise […] the hypocrisy of

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[213] As shall be seen later on, Flanagan does not drop the motif of rape entailed by this myth but uses it in his postcolonial discourse surrounding Mathinna.

giving in to his passions while portraying Wardour. In some sense, although the stakes are perhaps smaller, Dickens has become the cannibal Franklin' (2012a: 86). Yet, it might also be argued that the scene also functions as an intimate encounter as Dickens lies in Ellen's arms:

> Ellen Ternan knelt down and gently rolled his head into her lap.
> He could feel her thighs beneath his neck as she cradled him, he could feel the white light envelop them at last as she wrapped him in her arms, and he wanted to stay that way, in her arms and in that light, forever. (*W*: 237)

Playing with light and Dickens's position, Flanagan turns Ellen into a kind of sensual Madonna. Her body is overwhelming, creating a nest for Dickens, one last trace of the bird imagery. For Flanagan, the play utters what the nineteenth century might not have been able to: 'Dickens realised he was no longer speaking to a script – improbably, inexorably, inescapably – describing his soul' (*ibid.*). The gradation lays emphasis on the epiphany, the realisation that the play was never simply about Franklin but also was self-fictionalisation. For Lena Steveker, Flanagan's focus on this relationship is an attempt to challenge the usual one-dimensional construct of Dickens so as to provide him with 'an "internal" dimension' (2014: 74). Thus, this epiphanic moment 'reconciles his internal and external selves, and thus overcomes his repression' (*ibid.*). Whereas Dickens yields to his sensations, Ellen tries to resist but is compelled to give in to the embrace: 'But Dickens was pulling her into him, into some strange and terrible new fate, and she was unable to stop falling. She was terrified for them both' (*W*: 238). If there is trauma and violation here, it comes from Victorian denial and enforced secrecy. The narration turns into a kind of prophecy (note the repetitive structure and use of 'would') as the twenty-first century narrator unexpectedly steps in (it is only instance in the novel):

> He could not know that within a year his marriage would be ended. That in the thirteen years of life left to him, he would be faithful to Ellen Ternan, but that theirs would be a hidden and cruel relationship. That things broken would never be fixed. That even their dead baby would remain a secret. That the things he desired would become ever more chimerical, that movement and love would frighten him more and more, until he could not sit on a train without trembling. (241)

Flanagan caricatures colonial possession in the case of Franklin, but also offers a more nuanced treatment of Dickens and Ternan's tryst, as victims of Victorian repression. Troping Nelly Ternan, even in texts that seek to reclaim her from invisibility, suggests that something deeper than Dickens's personal plight is at stake, that the novels engage with social pathologies as much as personal ones. Whereas Catherine Dickens and Ellen Ternan seem to represent split femininity, as the mother on the one hand and the sexual female on the other, the two figures of mother and prostitute are conflated in the novels that explore hysteria, as we shall see now.

II. A PATHOLOGICAL SOCIETY: WORKING THROUGH VICTORIAN TOPOI?

A. Victorian pathologies/Body and soul: entering the Victorian mind?

1. From the Angel in the house to the Madwoman in the attic

Recently, John Bowen has uncovered new elements concerning Dickens's separation from his wife, showing that the Violated letter was no mere threat: 'But we now know that it was more than that; Dickens actually tried to bend the law to have her incarcerated' (2019: n.p.), that is to say he tried to have Catherine interned as mad.[214] This historical discovery appears as an uncanny element casting light on neo-Dickensian fiction's fascination with the trope of the woman locked up in an asylum. The hysterical female figure is largely seen as a product of the nineteenth century, a prolific period for the medical and clinical study of this protean condition. As Elaine Showalter remarks, for many 'the nineteenth-century hysterical supermodels – the canonical or articulate hysterics – epitomize universal female oppression' (1997: 10). Today, this view has trickled its way down into the mainstream sphere through novels, movies and TV series, such as the recent neo-Victorian TV show, *Penny Dreadful*.[215] For the figure remains surprisingly relevant in our time, as Showalter suggests:

> Hysteria not only survives in the 1990s, it is more contagious than in the past. Infectious diseases spread by ecological change, modern technology, urbanization, jet travel, and human interaction. Infectious epidemics of hysteria spread by stories circulated through self-help books, articles in newspapers and magazines, TV talk shows and series, films, the Internet, and even literary criticism. The cultural narratives of hysteria, which I call, *hystories*, multiply rapidly and uncontrollably in the era of mass media, telecommunications, and e-mail. (1997: 5)

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[214] This historical discovery uncannily confirms neo-Victorian fictionalisations of Catherine Dickens.

[215] Very often, the hysteric's condition is likened and/or explained as a symptom of past abuse suffered in childhood, or as related to the supernatural. In *Penny Dreadful*, the protagonist's condition (which is revealed via such symptoms as migraines, sexual urgings, split personality etc.) defines her as hysteric. In the first series, Vanessa's condition seems to result from her possession by the Devil. Series two digs further into this supernatural explanation: Vanessa is in fact the object of a curse. However, in series 3, the screenwriters opted for a more 'scientific' explanation: Vanessa suffers from a form of depression and thus seeks the help of an alienist. In order to find out about the 'master' she presumably met when she was younger and sent to a clinic, the alienist, Dr Seward, hypnotises her so she may relive this event. Not only does this series hover between supernatural explanations and scientific ones, but the supernatural plot is reinforced and resolved thanks to this medical intervention (all this links back to Dracula).The series plays on expectations concerning hysterics, summoning both what has come to be thought of as 'a Victorian disorder, a female reaction to sexual repression and limited opportunities, which diminished with the advent of modern feminism' and the 'blame of external sources […] for psychic problems' placing 'cause and cure outside the self' (Showalter 1997: 4).

What's more, hysteria has come not so much to denote a disease as to denote a language, a code, a myth:

> Above all, hysteria tells a story, and specialists in understanding and interpreting stories know ways to read it. As hysteria has moved from the clinic to the library, from the case study to the novel, from bodies to books, from page to stage and screen, it has developed its own prototypes, archetypes, and plots. Many of these motifs are adapted from myth, popular culture, folklore, media reports, and literature. […] [H]ystories have their own conventions, stereotypes, and structures. Writers inherit common themes, structures, characters, and images; critics call these comment elements *intertextuality*. (6)

Acting out what cannot be said, the hysterical body expresses repression and oppression, while diagnosis and case studies are modelled upon detection, reading symptoms as signs. Instead of hysteria *per se,* we wish to dwell here on one specific trope, the way in which hysteria, or madness in general, was used as a pretext to dispose of women, to lock them up. Without any doubt, the nineteenth-century novel which most obviously presents hysteria as a theme and a plot device is *The Woman in White,* where, as we have seen, Fosco and Percival plan to use the resemblance between Anne and Laura to place the latter in the asylum instead of Anne, and then to bury Anne (who is severely ill) under Laura's name, exchanging their identities to inherit Laura's wealth. Collins tropes madness as manipulation rather than as a female disease, and this is perhaps why this novel 'has become an important inspiration for neo-Victorian authors, screenwriters, musicians and stage producers' (Enciu 2015: 794). As Elena Enciu argues, this is due to 'the continuing popularity of the sensation fiction and the fact that the novel's major themes – madness, loss of identity, the effects of traumatic experiences, the legal and social status of married women still appeal to modern audiences' (*ibid.*). This leads us to two neo-Victorian novels which blend *Bleak House* and *The Woman in White*. Lynn Shepherd's *Tom-All-Alone's* and Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002) engage with the representation of madness in ways that resonate both with the Victorian era and with today's world.

a. Entering the madhouse

In *The Violent Effigy*, John Carey makes a daring suggestion: *Bleak House* should be understood as an unwritten novel. According to him, *Bleak House* contains two novels that Dickens failed to write, one on illicit sex that might have dealt with Lady Dedlock's story, and the other one that might have dealt with the workings of the Chancery (1991: 174-175). The Lady Dedlock subplot is all the more interesting if we recall Dickens's practical attempt to help fallen women by setting up Urania Cottage, financed by Angela Burdett-Coutts. For Carey, the interest of *Bleak House* does not lie in its power to prompt the reader to interpret (a view borne

by J. Hillis Miller for instance) but rather in the way this very invitation conceals the missing parts of the novel:

> The detective story-plot is a decoy. It is self-evolved and self-involved. That is the function of the detective story genre. It generates feelings of success and security in the reader by solving a problem that it has itself invented. The problem of the Court of […] Chancery is not of this kind, of course. That exists outside the realm of fiction. (184)

Carey refuses to see Dickens's novel as an answer to the social issues of his time and points out the tautological aspect of the detective plot within the novel. A safe resolution of detection is improbable when dealing with social ills. According to Carey, the murder of Tulkinghorn by Hortense is yet another displacement that has nothing to do with either Chancery or Lady Dedlock's secret, though all characters seem tied to it as suspects and/or witnesses: 'All this mystification is a diversionary tactic, and what it diverts us from is the novel's subject'(*ibid.*) Carey thus suggests that the true subject of *Bleak House* is sexuality, a subject which Dickens cannot tackle openly. Through the silencing of Lady Dedlock, issues of repression, illicit sexuality and psychological tension are raised.

It seems that neo-Victorian writers follow John Carey's lead. Sarah Waters in *Fingersmith* and Lynn Shepherd in *Tom-All-Alone's* weave the worlds of *Bleak House* and *The Woman in White* to fill the gaps. Repression is fully exposed through the rewriting of Esther as Hester, in Shepherd's novel, and as Maud and Susan in Waters's (Enciu 2015: 797). As Alex Zwerdling points out, until the 1970s, critics considered Esther as Dickens's 'failure' at characterisation, lacking psychological depth. However, Zwerdling argues that such readings ignore the character's slow evolution in the novel, which mimics real-life psychological development (1973: 429-430). I contend that by relocating Esther's narrative in the madhouse, neo-Victorian writers seek to respond to, and parody, the debate surrounding Esther's psychological depth.

In Sarah Waters's novel, the madhouse is a point of origin and a means of both liberation and entrapment. As Kate Mitchell points out, Waters's choice of settings 'performs the sensation novel's inscription of the domestic sphere as a site of danger characterised by threatened and actual incarceration, typical of urban gothic and sensation narratives' (2010: 134). It is interesting to note that in the first two parts of the novel, the madhouse is not solely viewed as a place of containment but can also be a place of liberation and freedom: Maud, who was born in the madhouse, finds a unique place within its female community and enjoys there a high degree of freedom, which she uses as a tool for her own escape. For instance, her memory of the asylum enables her to cope with the strangeness of the house: 'now and then the great

clock shifts its gears, and chimes; and I draw what comfort I can from my idea that somewhere in the house walk lunatics, and with them watchful nurses' (*F*: 190). However, such is not the case for Sue, who is framed into going there. In her case, 'the madhouse becomes a symbol of disintegration of the female identity: the inhabitants go mad, simply because they are imprisoned in it' (Enciu 2015: 797). The madhouse is thus a grey zone and is doubled by, if not projected upon, the mansion in Briar, 'so each is a spectralised form of the other' (Mitchell 2010: 135). Here containment is conveyed by multiple diegetic elements: the rigid domestic sphere, the regular chimes (a Dickensian trope), Maud's gloves which are forced upon her, her dresses which are compared to cages (recalling Miss Flite's bird cages in *Bleak House*), the obligation for Susan to keep to Maud's room in her absence, the golden mark in her uncle's library. The dual representation of the madhouse reflects the structure of the novel which, as Letissier observes, 'intertwines a plot and a counterplot when Sue is duped into a cunning scheme by her criminal step-mother and her accomplice, Richard Rivers, alias Gentleman, to become Maud's maid, and later, to be locked in the madhouse in her place' (2012: 254).

Furthermore, like *Oliver Twist* and many other novels by Dickens, the novel returns to what Elena Enciu calls 'family trauma' and the orphan's plight:

> Motherhood is a frequent theme in sensation fiction and it is a sub-plot in both Wilkie Collins's novel as well as its […] neo-Victorian adaptations. […] Neither of the female main characters [in *Fingersmith*] gets the chance to meet her father and lacks the protection and social standing that a father might provide. Most of them grow up without a loving mother and are sentimentally crippled as a result of their inability to work out their family trauma. (Enciu 2015: 799)

Initial family trauma leads to the madhouse manipulation plot. The novel revisits Victorian *topoi*, such as theatricality (Sue confuses a performance of *Oliver Twist* with reality), multiple viewpoints (like Dickens's Esther, Maud and Sue each narrate their own version of the story), unstable identity (the two girls have been swapped in infancy, like changelings, and as in *The Woman in White*, their identities are about to be exchanged again), deception (Richard Rivers also known as Gentleman, is no Walter Hartright but a Percival Glyde in disguise, plotting to have one of the women, like Laura Fairlie, locked up in the asylum), revelations (Maud turns out to be the daughter of Mrs Sucksby, a shady character or female Fagin, while Sue, in contrast, learns that she is the true daughter of Marianne, just as Dickens's Esther finds out that she is the illegitimate daughter of Lady Dedlock).[216] Recycling the Dickens/Collins plots, the novel is a coming-of-age story in which Maud and Sue escape entrapment, whether in the asylum or in Mrs Sucksby's house, as Letissier puts it: '[t]he characters' deliverance from

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[216] Waters plays with onomastics. In many ways, Gentleman echoes another Victorian villain, Rigaud, the French villain and former gentleman in *Little Dorrit*.

the scheme in which they are trapped depends on their ability to unravel and decipher the plot in which they have been imprisoned since their births' (2012: 254). Waters updates the role of the detective mode in the narrative (both Maud and Sue discover Gentleman's and Sucksby's plot to steal their inheritance, Marianne's legacy, as well as their own true identity) in order to expose Victorian gender politics.

Waters's novel picks up the Victorian theme of family trauma, but there is a twist since she seems to be influenced by the feminist study *The Madwoman in the Attic.* The fact that the two women tell their own stories, for instance, is a sign of partial empowerment, reflecting Waters's own wish to steal the pen and write back to her literary forefathers. Maud's biological lineage is forced upon her by her uncle and his household (recalling Esther's aunt), especially at dinner times as Maud is made to drink 'in a crystal glass engraved with an M. The ring of silver that holds my napkin is marked a tarnished black with the same initial' (*F*: 196).[217] As the protagonist notes: 'They are to keep me mindful, not of my name, but of that of my mother; which was Marianne' (*ibid.*). However, the young girl refuses this single mother, clinging to her multiple mothers, the nurses of the lunatic asylum she was raised in: 'My proper mother I hate' (197). We might read this as a metatextual statement of rebellion, since Maud calls for a female genealogy echoing the 'female literary tradition' reclaimed by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979: xi): '"I have twenty mothers," I say at that; "and am handsomer than any of them"' (*F*: 184).

Besides, when musing upon her own birth, Maud instinctively associates her coming into the world with writing ('imagine', 'ink'): 'I imagine a table, slick with blood. The blood is my mother's. There is too much of it. There is so much of it, I think it runs, like ink' (179). The image connotes illusion, storytelling (Maud's identity is, after all, a fib, a fiction, unbeknownst to her); it also signals, metatextually, the part played by intertextuality; birth comes from ink as much as blood, as Waters is writing back to Dickens and Collins and giving their plots a feminine and/or feminist twist. The need to steal the pen, upheld by Gilbert and Gubar, is explicitly dramatised by the association between so-called education, writing, and female sexploitation or pornography. Mr Lilly, her uncle, trains Maud as his secretary to help him in his 'scholarly' work, which ironically proves to be of a very unusual kind:

> I call them lessons; but I am not taught as other girls are. I learn to recite, softly and clearly; I am never taught to sing. I never learn the names of flowers and birds, but am schooled instead in the hides in which books are bound – as say, morocco, Russia, calf, chagrin; and their papers – Dutch, China, motley, silk. I

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[217] Waters's first depiction of Mr Lily recalls Mr Tulkinghorn while the old man's sensitivity to light, sounds as well as the fact he keeps to his office point him as a rewriting of Collins's Mr Fairlie.

This accumulation certainly echoes Krook's shop in *Bleak House* while othering Maud, estranging her from 'other girls'. She is also estranged by the 'education' she has received in the madhouse which at first influences her interpretation of the books in her uncle's library: 'The cover is black, by which I recognise it as a Bible. The others, I deduce, hold hymns. I suppose that hymn-books, after all, might be bound in different hues, perhaps as suiting different qualities of madness' (187-188). Maud soon learns, however, that these books are in fact pornographic and that her uncle's scholarly project consists of indexing every existing book belonging to the genre.[218] Waters subverts the Victorian theme of woman as amanuensis (like Mina in *Dracula*, or like the bright Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, compelled to dim her wit and help Casaubon to compile his endless mythical encyclopaedia). As Francis O'Gorman puts it, 'Christopher Lilly lives, collecting a vast collection of pornography, pursuing his will with cruelty and the charade of impartiality. As a novel about double-crossing, the hypocrisy trope is a particularly helpful one' (2010: 17). We might say that the unwritten sexuality of *Bleak House* is read, copied and indexed by Maud and her uncle, while the plot of *The Woman in White*, around which the first part of the novel mainly revolves, is doubly reversed.

For Letissier, Sarah Waters is an important landmark in the 'Dickens industry', presenting readers with a queer twist (2012: 253). She also pushes Collins's homoerotic innuendoes and his play on duality a step further. Sue and Maud are depicted as doubles/twins, and the parody of heterosexual elopement (Gentleman's manipulation) matters less than the erotic and emotional tension between the two women. When Sue is to be locked in the asylum instead of Maud, the denouement of the first part lays emphasis on their doubling and their swapped position:

> I had struggled against [the doctor's] grip. At his words, I grew slack. I gazed at my sleeve of silk, and at my own arm, that had got plump and smooth with careful feeding; and then at the bag at my feet, with its letters of brass – the *M,* and the *L.*
> It was in that second that I guessed, at last, the filthy trick that Gentleman had played on me. […]
> Gentleman had moved back, his hand before his face. Beyond him, the light in bars upon her from the louvred blinds, sat Maud. Her face was thin, her hair was dull. Her dress was worn with use, like a servant's dress. Her eyes were wild, with tears starting in them; but beyond the tears, her gaze was hard. Hard as marble, hard as brass. (*F*: 174)

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[218] *Fingersmith* is often quoted as an example of neo-Victorian pornography, for Laura Helen Marks pornography partakes not only of an aesthetic of the 'unsavoury' but enables a critique of 'legitimate and mainstream culture' especially of 'the postmodern stereotype of the repressed Victorians'. She further adds that '[w]ithout the puritanical and forbidden, without the notion of the private, pornography would arguably not exist' (2015: 257). Waters's work ties up with Foucault's work on sexuality especially as developed in *The Will to Knowledge*, which renegotiates the 'repressive hypothesis' concerning sex and thus offers to investigate the way in which sex is 'put in discourse' and thereby uncover the relation between knowledge, power and pleasure (Foucault 1998: 11-12).

Maud is presented in a new light, ironically that of the asylum, showing her as strong and determined whereas so far Sue had described her as a hesitant, weak and fragile woman. As Mitchell argues, the narration relies on our reading Maud 'in terms of a set narrative conventions', *i.e.* as a Gothic heroine, while the second part operates a shift, turning Maud into 'the woman of sensation, victimised […] but also criminally implicated herself' (2010: 136). The passage may thus be read as a parodic epiphany, in which the traditional 'verbal of lyric poetry' (Lodge 1992: 148) is replaced by swear words: 'You thought her a pigeon. Pigeon, my arse. That bitch knew everything. She had been in on it from the start' (*F*: 175). The betrayal which matters, here, is Maud's, not Gentleman's. Maud's hard eyes suggest collusion with masculinity, as if Waters refused to romanticise the female gaze. Yet, Waters also allows her protagonists to gradually disengage from masculine norms, to free themselves and meet again. The female body is omnipresent in the novel which is paced by scenes of dressing and undressing. Hence the importance of touch, of the materiality of the body. As Marie-Luise Kohlke points out, neo-Victorian writers relish the eroticisation of the Victorians (2008b: 54).

Appropriating the politics of desire and writing back to the canon are metaphorised by the play on pornography. Once again, there is an echo with critical discourse here; Angela Carter advocates in *The Sadeian Woman* that women must appropriate erotic discourse to stop being victims, but she pictures her female figure as violent, which is not the case for Waters (Carter 1979: 5).[219] As Kohlke puts it,

> Waters also employs the neo-Victorian sex trope for a subversive textual/sexual politics of turning the tables on heteronormativity. In *Fingersmith*, she ironically appropriates the male dominated realm of pornography, represented by the lesbian protagonist Maud Lilly's abusive and tyrannical collector 'uncle'. After his death, Maud assures her economic independence by writing Victorian pornography, a lesbian profiteering from male desires by simulating fantastic sex on paper, and probably mainly heterosexual sex at that. (2008b: 64)

Waters updates and fleshes out elements which were already there in Dickens's novels, elements which, however, were kept to the margins and/or denoted the deviant/outcast such as female companionship (here we may think of Tattycoram and Miss Wade in *Little Dorrit*). Letissier argues that unlike Dickens, 'Waters does not dramatize the passionate and pathological aspects of deviance, but rather pleads for a full recognition of same-sex love as

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[219] Interestingly enough, Carter engaged with the Dickensian canon as for instance in *Passion of the New Eve* (1977) in which Tristessa, the enigmatic trans-gender movie star, is an avatar of Miss Havisham. The protagonist finds her in her house, amidst wax dummies of dead stars. Carter's use of wax dummies echoes a trope identified by John Carey who notices that 'waxworks staring at people and people who appear to be waxworks are regular inhabitants' of Dickens's, the most striking example being Miss Havisham (1991: 84). Nadine Muller reads *Fingersmith* and its fragmented matrilineal narratives 'as a comment on the (dis)continuities between feminist pasts and presents' taking as a starting point Carter's essay and its reflection on matrilineality as feminist metaphor (2009/2010: 111).

perfectly normal' (2012: 254). Written during the LGBT movement in support of same-sex marriage (made legal in the UK in 2014) (Kohlke & Gutleben 2011: 14-16), 'Waters for her part sticks to her own agenda by propounding homoeroticism as the vehicle through which women may challenge the laws of patriarchy, even if such a statement involves a certain anachronistic bias in the context of Victorian England' (Letissier 2012: 255). If Waters normalises what in Victorian times passed as deviance, Shepherd, as we shall see now, overwrites ongoing deviances.

b. Un-/Re-writing *Bleak House*

Both Waters and Shepherd are interested in what Romero Ruiz calls 'The perversions and secret vices of the aristocratic villain' which 'lead to sexual crimes associated with pornography, sadomasochism, and early "snuff" movies, graphically rendered on screen' (2007: 61). However, their approaches to the topic diverge. If Waters's novel is marked by the (over)presence of sexuality and of the body, in Shepherd's novel, notwithstanding the female corpse (a point to which we shall come back later), the living female body is strategically erased, as we shall see now. Shepherd's strategy seems in fact to respond not only to Victorian concerns with disappearance, prostitution and murder, but to contemporary as well. As Romero Ruiz points out, the circulation of women's bodies today, aggressions and human trafficking are as acute a problem in our current society as in Victorian days:

> current debates centre primarily on how best to regulate and control the influx and prevent the illegal movement of these 'deviant' individuals across national borders, rather than on providing victim support: the 'prostituted other' is deemed part of the problem to be controlled and, in the case of undocumented aliens, to be quickly deported wherever possible. Any sense of genuine mourning for these women seems lacking from the public discourse of politicians and authorities, who prefer to address the problem of trafficking and forced prostitution in terms of security, crime, and economics rather than its human costs. (52)

Giving Hester a voice, and refusing to over-expose her body, seems to be a way for Shepherd to give a voice and dignity to these 'prostituted others'. In a way, Shepherd's novel might be said to be about child prostitution and abuse, but it is a novel she writes obliquely as this theme is filtered through Hester's own fantasy about her surroundings. The text revisits the *cliché* of Victorian hysteria on the one hand, and that of sexual repression on the other, displacing them by representing hysteria as erasure rather than frantic gestures. The trauma of incest and abuse is therefore overwritten by the orderly world Hester invents for herself and displaced by her imagined role as a housekeeper. If John Carey understands the detective story that is an inherent

part of *Bleak House* as a means of displacement, of making up for the untold story (1991: 184), what about Shepherd's novel and her double plot? What does this paradox mean in the context of a neo-Victorian novel?

It may appear quite striking that, as we have seen, Charles's narrative should be crowded with bodies, some, such as Lizzie's, overly visible in order to challenge 'sexploitation'. By contrast, bodies are utterly absent from Hester's narratives. Shepherd seems to take her cue from Dickens's novel in which Esther's body is always relegated to the margins whereas the bodies of others are often commented upon. Indeed, Esther often points out Ada's beauty; she notices Caddy's blotted fingers ('what principally struck us was a jaded and unhealthy-looking though by no means plain girl at the writing-table, who sat biting the feather of her pen and staring at us. I suppose nobody ever was in such a state of ink' (*BH*: 44)) or Skimpole's childish/dandyish looks ('a little bright creature with a rather large head, but a delicate face and a sweet voice, and there was a perfect charm in him', 'It struck me as being not at all like the manner or appearance of a man who had advanced in life by the usual road of years, cares, and experiences' (81)). Contrariwise, when she is paid a compliment, Esther discards it: 'I knew he meant well in paying me this compliment, so I laughed at myself for blushing at it when he had shut the door and got upon the box' (45). Bringing such denial to the limit, Shepherd's Hester is unable to construe her own body, especially in the passage about her pregnancy in which she only mentions a swell, 'a sense of fullness' (*TAA*: 264). Not only is she unable to understand changes in others' bodies, for instance when Clara (Ada's stand-in) is taken away – when the girl reappears after having delivered her baby, Hester only notices a 'secret sorrow' (174) – but she is unable to reconcile herself with her own body and to perceive what is happening within it.

This is a far cry from Dickens. Dickens's reason for removing Esther's body from the centre of attention of the narrative is that her body (especially her face) is at the centre of the detective plot as it stamps her connection with her mother, Lady Dedlock. The subplot revolving around Esther's identity is in fact built upon a mirror game as Esther is said to be the spitting image of her mother, a physical resemblance that Guppy picks up with a certain uncanny feeling when visiting Chesney Wold and facing Lady Dedlock's portrait. The motif of the mirror is taken up by Shepherd in a symbolic way as is suggested by the play on onomastics: Esther/Hester. Hester is thus turned into a distorted version of Esther, a distortion that revolves,

interestingly enough, around a rewriting of Esther's sickness, when she contracts smallpox and her face is disfigured.[220]

c.   When the victim speaks

Shepherd rewrites the episode of Esther's illness, when she contracts the smallpox. The neo-Victorian writer appropriates this moment of unreliability in Dickens's novel as a narrative strategy veiling the truth from the reader. The hazy memories caused by fever in Dickens's text turn into the narrative of repressed trauma. Hester's narrative masks everything which is actually happening, so that the reader must infer that she is expecting a child, and that she is unable to face the sexual abuse she has suffered and therefore cannot reconcile herself/her self with her pregnant body. Shepherd's decision to read Esther/Hester's disease as an unacknowledged pregnancy might seem far-fetched at first sight, since neither Esther nor Laura Fairlie/Anne Catherick (though committed to the asylum) are pregnant. However, both novels revolve around absent mothers. What's more, Shepherd seems to have picked on the presence of the verb 'labour' in the following excerpt from *Bleak House:*

> For the same reason I am almost afraid to hint at that time in my disorder—it seemed one long night, but I believe there were both nights and days in it—when I laboured up colossal staircases, ever striving to reach the top, and ever turned, as I have seen a worm in a garden path, by some obstruction, and labouring again. I knew perfectly at intervals, and I think vaguely at most times, that I was in my bed; and I talked with Charley, and felt her touch, and knew her very well; yet I would find myself complaining, 'Oh, more of these never-ending stairs, Charley—more and more—piled up to the sky', I think!' and labouring on again. (*BH:* 513)

Shepherd's pastiche of the narrative of Esther's fever underscores new possible readings of the Victorian text:

> My dreams the night before had been unusually tangled and hectic, and when I woke the room was still dark and I could not free myself from the impression that something had happened during the night, though I did not know what it was, that had left me with a curious sense of fullness, as if I were becoming too large altogether. […] And as the room grew gradually colder and colder I found I was shivering from head to foot, and yet I was growing all the while not more wakeful but more somnolent, and my thoughts soon became so confused that I began to lose a sense of who I was – now the girl in the room was me,

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[220] The novel relies on numerous reflections/inversions of Dickens's text, each strengthening the containment of the protagonist. For instance, the encounter between Esther and Miss Flite is redirected. Whereas in *Bleak House* Miss Flite is happy to share with Esther the origin of her lawsuit, Miss Flint is distressed at Hester's question, and represses her words (172). Thus, while Miss Flite (and her ironically caged birds) 'represents the madness and frustration Chancery causes' (J. Carey 1991: 177), Shepherd presents us with an internalisation of the madness of the institution which becomes unspeakable because it is traumatic and (certainly) related to forced sexuality or other forms of violence. Ultimately, it is the house itself which is reflected: in Dickens's novel Esther ends up living with Woodcourt in a replica of Jarndyce's original Bleak House. As Juliet John notes, the houses in the novel are like dollhouses in which Esther plays governess (John 2010: 257). The madhouse in Hampstead in *Tom-All-Alone's* is yet another replica, a third, literally 'bleak' house as it proves to be.

and now she was Clara, and now she was poor confused Miss Flint, distraught and tormented, and crying aloud in fear in the darkness. (*TAA*: 264)

Hester's body, denoted by the expression 'a curious sense of fullness, as if I were becoming too large altogether', is changing and Shepherd's choice of terms hints at pregnancy. Shepherd is here drawing directly upon Dickens and reading him against the grain, endowing Dickens's text with connotations that seem to be subconsciously there:

> But I was not free from an impression that I had been walking about the two rooms in the night, a little beside myself, though knowing where I was; and I felt confused at times—*with a curious sense of fullness, as if I were becoming too large altogether.* (*BH:* 463; italics mine).

Like the narrative focusing on Charles, Hester's narrative fits Hutcheon's definition of parody as a 'repetition with difference' which enables 'modern writers to come to terms with the past – through ironic recording, or […] "trans-contextualising"' (2000: 101). Yet the parody or repetition works slightly differently in this second narrative. Indeed, its difference from the hypotext is more oblique and implied, relying entirely on the reader's ability to decipher signs. Interpretation truly is at stake here: Shepherd's novel stages various ways of reading, the reader being constantly asked to play detective. The interpretive process activated in Hester's narrative somewhat fits J. Hillis Miller's description of the reading of *Wuthering Heights*:

> Once the reader catches sight of this wavering away from the literal in one detail, he becomes suspicious of every detail. He must reinterrogate the whole, like a detective of life or of literature on whom nothing is lost. The text itself, in its presentation of enigmas in the absence of patent totalizing explanation, turns him into such a detective. (1982: 43)

It is precisely because Hester's narrative does not present us with a 'totalizing explanation', but instead with the partial account of an unreliable homodiegetic narrator that detection is triggered. By contrast, the omniscient narrative seems to prepare the reader to become an autonomous detective (as we have seen, the narrator points the way). In the fever scene quoted above, changes in the body lead to a fissure as Hester's identity becomes fragmented: 'I began to lose a sense of who I was'. The fragmentation is emphasised by the anaphora 'now', as well as by linguistic/referential dissociation (Hester uses the third person to refer to herself, 'the girl', 'she'). The identification with Miss Flint is a clue for the reader, who is made to understand that Hester might be mad. Ultimately, this passage contributes to, and marks, Hester's unreliability. The reader is thus asked to question, in retrospect, the various pieces of information gathered in the different chapters entitled 'Hester's narrative'.[221]

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[221] Just as the hypotext forces its readers to wonder why parts of the narration are undertaken by a first-person narrator, Esther, so does *Tom-All-Alone's* with Hester. However, the (attentive) reader of Dickens's novel already knows the purpose of the strategy: something is hidden, awry, so the reader of the neo-Victorian fiction will be suspicious towards Hester. The reader is therefore on the lookout for withheld pieces of information. If we refer to the hermeneutic square that was established in the previous chapter, Hester as narrator is therefore cast as a suspect/or witness, not merely a victim, creating an opaque screen for the reader who has to *read through* her.

Shepherd thus reverses Dickens's text in which Esther's disease temporarily fragments her identity but, in the end, reconciles her with herself as she no longer is defined as her mother's double but has become unique. Shepherd's novel forces a new reading upon *Bleak House* as a narrative containing/repressing its character Esther, but also highlighting the disorder suffered by the protagonist and the lurking traces of signifiers connoting pregnancy; indeed, Dickens shatters the identity of his protagonist too:

> At once a child, an elder girl, and the little woman I had been so happy as, I was not only oppressed by cares and difficulties adapted to each station, but by the great perplexity of endlessly trying to reconcile them. I suppose that few who have not been in such a condition can quite understand what I mean or what painful unrest arose from this source. (*BH*: 513)

> Dare I hint at that worse time when, strung together somewhere in great black space, there was a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which I was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the rest and when it was such inexplicable agony and misery to be a part of the dreadful thing? (514)

The gradation, 'a child, an elder girl, and the little woman', telescopes the list of interpretations of Esther by the other characters of the novel. It seems that the confusion triggered by her disease reveals or reflects the confusion of her mind and identity.[222] Such is also the interpretation of Judith Wilt: 'Esther is here experiencing the nightmare of solipsism, of being caught in a ring, a staircase, an endless series of receding selves once the gaze is really fixed permanently inward, once the self is fully known as separate from the world' (1977: 307). Finally, Hester and her narrative (a textual body) stand as a metonymy for the opaque screen of the suspect/witness: she is the key, but she veils clues as much she reveals them. The staircase as motif (with its Gothic counterpart, which allows Charles to chase the murderer) becomes a textual spiral, mirroring Victorian hysteria and today's wound culture, a point to which we shall return later.

2. Forgetting / remembering: Alzheimer's as traumatic experience

Neo-Victorian writers like Shepherd may also engage with other pathologies that reflect today's anxieties, not necessarily associated with women. I wish here to come back to the presence of Alzheimer's in Shepherd's novel, already hinted at in chapter 2. This interest in the disease might stem from its capacity to thematise not only memory loss but identity loss. Characters suffering from Alzheimer's are thus often depicted as fragmented selves, torn

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[222] Helena Michlie sees in this passage, and especially in the mention of the beads, a foregrounding of Esther's separation from her mother since Lady Dedlock is constantly referred to through jewellery (1989: 206). Ian Ousby has a similar reading of the passage (1975: 390-391).

between the past and a present they do not (or only partially) recognise. This trope could not fail to be of interest for neo-Victorian fiction which, as Kate Mitchell puts it, 'prompts authors, readers and critics to confront the problem of historical recollection' (Mitchell 2010: 3).

Though it resonates in a specific way today, Shepherd's depiction of pathological memory loss is in fact highly Dickensian too. For Dickens was interested in figures suffering from dementia and other kinds of age-related illnesses, as the presence of such characters as Mr Dick in *David Copperfield* or the Aged P., Wemmick's father, in *Great Expectations* demonstrates. However, it certainly is in *Little Dorrit* that 'Dickens is at his most alert when he is showing us people who are cracking up under the strain of life, the frail, the mentally debilitated – souls now preserve in a primitive state of being' (Crees 2002: 11). Indeed, old people abound in the novel, from the Dorrit brothers, Mrs Clennam, to Mr F.'s Aunt or old Mr Nandy, Mrs Plornich's father. These old people are all characterised by dependency upon others: Dorrit relies on Amy, Mrs Clennam on Flintwinch and Affery, Mr F.'s Aunt on Flora and old Nandy on his daughter. Mr F.'s Aunt suffers from dementia and bursts into incomprehensible fits which are accepted by Pancks, who patronises her with a 'Indeed, ma'am?' (Dickens 2012: 163).[223] For Mark Crees, Dickens uses forgetfulness as a comment on serial publication: '[r]eading a book for one-and-a-half years is a completely different experience from reading slim novels of today. That kind of reading memory, which is such a vital component of a Dickensian story, is no longer so necessary –' (2002: 12). But he also engages with aging more literally: 'It is as if the book recreates the uneasy symptoms of Alzheimer's early stages' (*ibid.*).

Thus, for all the comic effect, there is a deeper dimension to old age in Dickens's novel. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer puts it, 'The senile dementia of Mr F.'s aunt renders any and every time as emotionally present; her sudden eruptions can be located nowhere in temporal sequence' (2007: 83), turning her into a 'mechanical thing' which, as Alan Wilde notices, 'parodies and calls into question the authenticity of life in the other characters of the book' (1964: 36). Wilde in fact goes as far as to suggest that 'the old woman is at the heart of the book; she is the analogical centre of the chaotic forces that pervade it, the genuine contrast to Little Dorrit, who is the symbolic centre of the forces for and of good' (38). Using humour and multiple perspectives, Dickens denounces the hypocrisy of society towards poor old people as

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[223] Russell Brain diagnoses Mr F.'s Aunt as a schizophrenic in an interesting article on the representation of various mental disorders in Dickens's novels (1955).

when old Nandy, who lives in a workhouse, is given a day a year to visit his family and his old friend Dorrit.

> Not ready for more ham yet, Nandy? Why, how slow you are! (His last teeth,' he explained to the company, 'are going, poor old boy.')
> At another time, he said, 'No shrimps, Nandy?' and on his not instantly replying, observed, ('His hearing is becoming very defective. He'll be deaf directly.') […]
> The Father of the Marshalsea tapped his forehead ('Memory weak.'). (Dickens 2012: 372-374)

Dorrit's hypocrisy is denounced by Arthur who remarks that he acts '[a]s if he were a gracious Keeper, making running commentary on the decline of the harmless animal exhibited' (372). The integration of old people suffering from dementia is ambivalent: though Dickens plays on bathos, there remains an uneasiness on the part of both the characters and readers.

Shepherd's portrayal of a demented detective revisits Dickens's concerns regarding the elderly, to engage with both Victorian lapses and our own fear of such pathologies, as well as with the problem of the integration of the elderly within an extended family circle (and, by extension, within the narrative). We have seen in Chapter 2 the metatextual function of Alzheimer's as a motif; it no longer reflects publication by instalments but the inquest's *modus operandi*, with clues that are disclosed and elements that remain missing, as Maddox (re)collects clues from past cases in order to solve the present puzzle. In the intergenerational discussions of the crimes, transmission is broken, the mind is a crumbling archive; whenever Maddox is about to establish a full profile of the murderer in connection to Cremorne's doings, a fit of dementia silences him. Charles – and the reader along with him – has to learn to retrace Maddox's footsteps, rediscovering tracks and deciphering clues anew (as when Charles searches through boxes filled with paper clips). Transmission thus turns into a process of repetition, an act of rewriting. These passages thus may be construed as a *mise en abyme* of the reading process activated by neo-Victorian rewriting of the detection mode, providing 'an endless series of textual metonymies', which Mark M. Hennelly Jr. sees in Byatt's *Possession*, that suggest 'previous repetitions even before repeating repeats them again' (2003: 443). Shepherd reconfigures such tropes as the epistolary and the diseased mind (either suffering from dementia or madness/hysteria) to tackle cognitive and readerly issues.

But it is also significant that Shepherd should refuse to dehumanise Maddox; he remains a very good armchair-detective, reminiscent of Dupin and Holmes, though he is frustrated and hampered by sudden lapses of memory and awareness. Contrary to Mr F.'s Aunt and Nandy, Maddox is well-aware of his condition: 'I was about to say something, but it is eluding me' (*TTA*: 224). He is struggling to remain sane and in control: 'But I *should* know – if there are officers of the law in this house – *my* house – then *I* should be the one to –' (220; italics in the

text). Charles is not afraid of dementia; he is afraid of losing the great man and detective his uncle once was. If, as D.A. Miller has it in *The Novel and the Police*, detection is about restoring order, Shepherd offers positive closure, allowing the patient, uncle Maddox, to be re-integrated within the family circle and thus to be re-membered. Detection becomes a kind of antidote to Alzheimer's. During his fits, Maddox retains some clear-sightedness, as when he hands over a piece of paper which 'certainly seems to have been written from a clouded place: as far as Charles can see it's nothing more than a string of random numbers and letters' (225). Yet, the 'looping scrawl' (*ibid*.) turns out to be a most important clue once Charles is able to decipher it (226). By combining Alzheimer's and detection, Shepherd is able to bring a satisfying closure to her novel. Her use of narrative as healing actualises and recycles the nineteenth-century novel for contemporary readership. This cathartic plot becomes much more problematic in the case of post-colonial rewriting.

3. Written on the flesh and under the skin: the convict's trauma

Whereas Alzheimer's is a personal pathology, Peter Carey engages with the collective experience of amnesia and the erasure of convicts' abjection and pain in Australia. Both Carey and Simmons (as we shall see) repurpose the hypnotic scene as a neo-Victorian trope, using mesmerism, séances and table rapping as metaphors of intertextual revival (making the dead authors speak and twisting their words through impersonation) and as metaphors of intertextual subversion (shattering Victorian repression and engaging with the politics of trauma and repression). Both novels draw upon the historical Dickens's interest in hypnosis, but with a very different agenda.

In *Jack Maggs*, Oates acts as Maggs's hypnotist and analyst. The episode draws upon Dickens's relation to Mme de la Rue.[224] Both Jack Maggs and Mme De la Rue suffer from a 'tic' located in the cheek, the trance and the dialogue between the mesmerist and the 'patient' recall the historical Dickens's experiment. For instance, in her trances, Mme de la Rue sees a crowd, then her brother's ghost:

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[224] As Angus Wilson states, Dickens began to be interested in mesmerism around the year 1838, when he met Dr Elliotson, but his practice was really prompted by his encounter with Mme de la Rue whom he met in Genoa in 1834 and who kept dreaming 'suffered from a nervous tic and, as it came out in more intimate friendship, recurrent nightmares, particularly of a mysterious and evil stranger who threatened to enter her real life' (1970: 188). Ackroyd has a longer passage devoted to this case which, as usual, bears witness to his semi-biofictional technique (1999: 472-476); the treatment of Maggs is very similar to the description of Madame de la Rue. Fred Kaplan has devoted a complete study to Dickens's relation to Mesmerism in *Dickens and Mesmerism* (1975).

'Are there many people there?'—'Yes. A good many' 'Men, or women?'—'Both' 'How they are dressed?'—'I can't see. I have too many things to look at.'— 'But you can tell me what they are doing. Can't you?' — 'Yes. They are walking about, and talking'— 'To you?' — 'No. To each other'— (Hartley 2012: 152)

Whereas in Mme de la Rue's vision, the people only talk to each other, in Maggs's they seem suspicious, they trespass into his house and attempt to deny him access: '[They are] walking around, spying on things. They are opening the drawers and the cupboards' (*JM*: 51), and 'They should not be there. It is my place, not theirs. […] They don't want me owning it. They'll take it from me' (52). This may be connected with Oates's attempt to appropriate Maggs's mind, and with Victorian society's refusal to forgive and to let convicts back in. In both cases, the presence of the window seems to suggest the liminal space of the mind, the threshold between consciousness and unconsciousness, but it also becomes for Maggs a metaphor for the social and geographic boundaries cutting colonies like Australia off from the motherland.

No wonder then, that, unlike Mme de la Rue, Maggs should attempt to resist Oates, as when the latter induces, or forces upon him a narrative: 'Then we are going to make a picture, like in a fairy tale. We are going to imagine a door so thick, the pain cannot get to you. We can imagine high walls made of thick stone' (50). Maggs's response to this suggestion highlights his traumatic past as a convict:

'A prison …'
'Very well, a splendid prison, with its walls twenty feet thick and –'
The Somnambulist began to move his arms about violently. 'No!' he shouted. 'No, damn, you!' (*ibid*.)

The scene becomes a metaphor for Carey's reading of Dickens's appropriation of Magwitch, forcing words upon the convict that ignore his actual pain. In Carey's text, the narrative is partly led by Maggs – for instance when he specifies a brand for the doors of his imaginative house (*ibid*.) – and suffering is recollected, and thereby exposed to the reader. In this case, the 'Phantom' is not a brother but the shape of pain, the trace of trauma and the repressed truths that haunt *Great Expectations*. As Dianne Sadoff puts it:

Carey's neo-Victorian rewriting immerses us in the mesmerically recalled scene of trauma, submitting us to the 'hypnotic imitation' that reading represents, even as it reminds us that the traumatic remembering or mimesis, into which we readers are immersed, is a kind of fabrication or simulation, as is hypnosis. (2010: 180)

This leads to the climactic display of Maggs's flogged body which we analysed in chapter 2 in relation to the shift from spectacle and punishment to detection and narrative.

Jack Maggs shed his jacket, then his silk ruff and shirt, then the coarse wool singlet, and stood before them, naked to the waist. […] The footman turned. As Lizzie Warriner raised her eyes, she gasped at the sea of pain etched upon the footman's back, a brooding sea of scars, of ripped and tortured pain. (*JM*: 86)

The naked skin reveals the violence of transportation, exposing what was concealed in Dickens's elliptic text, since *Great Expectations* reveals next to nothing of what happens to

Magwitch as a convict in Australia. Carey on the contrary pries open the fissures of Dickens's text, which enables him to 'bring to light the establishment of the penal colony' which was hushed in traditional narratives of Australia (Dolce 2009: 24; my translation).[225] The spectacle of Maggs's body, a seascape of pain and flesh (note the gradation 'sea of scars, of ripped and tortured pain'), is twofold: on the one hand, it confirms Oates's narrative, that is to say his investigation into the convict's past as he then exclaims: 'I got the rascal' (*JM*: 86). On the other hand, it exposes, for the reader, the endemic violence of the inhuman system. The séance turns into a scene of torture, Maggs is compared to a wild animal being tamed: 'Jack Maggs began to beat his fists upon his chest. He was truly like a wild animal, and Toby his expert trainer' (84). This image challenges Oates's claim that *he* is liberating Maggs. The scene is voyeuristic as the stress laid on the body shows: 'As that alien body finally surrendered, Lizzie Warriner felt an unexpected stirring of her own blood' (82). Lizzie is forced to watch, her 'gasp' (84) at the sight of Maggs's scars being a far cry from Pip's horror when Magwitch is sentenced to death (*GE*: 417-18). This shows how, as Georges Letissier puts it, 'the penal colony is always at one remove, fetishized through the welts and scars on Maggs's back' (2012: 256).

The '*tic douloureux*' calls for interpretation too: it points to (and doubles) the wound in the cheek of Jack and Sophina's dead child, a wound described in uncanny terms: 'on his queerly familiar little face, a cruel and dreadful cut' (*JM*: 241). In the Phantom standing for Henry Phipps, Jack enshrines another son. What surfaces from the mesmeric séances is thus the physical wound, the scars but also the double wound (to use Caruth's concept) of Jack's failure as a father: unable to protect his first born, he is rejected by his 'adopted' son for whom he abandons his children in Australia.[226]

> Diane F. Sadoff observes that:
>
> The novel's multiple focalisers, its embedding of fictional autobiographical fragments as well as mash-ups of Charles Dickens's biography and *Oliver Twist*, enables the narrative to make visible and spectacular the second stage of trauma: re-membering that identifies past suffering as traumatic. […] In this traumatic scenario, the subject's other returns from the repressed, and that same other, a split-off fragment of the subject, becomes worthy of embrace, of identificatory desire, even of emulation. (2010: 176)

What or, rather, the person who is repressed by Maggs and returns to haunt him is Henry Phipps, whom Jack has provided for from Australia. As Letissier observes, 'Maggs too falsifies the real

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[225] 'riportando to luce il momento cruciale dell'insediamento della colonia penale'

[226] Caruth, following Freud, asserts that the wound of the mind:
> is not, like the wound of the body, a simple healable event, but rather an event that […] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. (2016: 3-4)

through writing. In his notebooks he deludes himself into creating a mythologised version of the ideal gentleman that his hard work and generosity would have shaped' (2012: 256). It turns out that Henry has nothing to do with this idealised vision. Henry is thus the wrong, displaced, hidden body. Indeed, Henry hides behind the portrayal of the Prince Regent (he sends Maggs a picture of the Regent, pretending it to be his own portrait) just as he is hiding behind the wall of bricks in Jack's mind.[227] The brick wall becomes a metonym for the opaque screen behind which the figure of the criminal remains hidden in classic detective fiction, repurposed here as a trope for colonial violence, denying human status to both the convicts and the Aborigines.

4. Loss, mourning and legitimacy[228]

The use of spectrality and mesmerism is very different in Simmons's mainstream novel. In their essay 'Mourning or Melancholia,' Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok investigate the subject's reactions to trauma, and especially loss, by opposing two terms: introjection and incorporation. The first refers to a process produced by the psyche which enables mourning and the working through of trauma: 'learning to fill the emptiness of the mouth with words is the initial model for introjection' (1994: 128). The process of introjection refers to the ability to fill one's empty mouth with language (the baby's cries) so that absence is worked through and given a 'figurative shape' through language. Contrariwise, incorporation is not a process, but a fantasy produced by the ego to protect itself from 'topographical shifts' (125). Grief is thus not overcome as incorporation does not allow working through language. This may cast a light on Simmons's scenes of literal incorporation as a plot device motivating the actions of the narrator, the fictional Wilkie Collins, and as a fantasy and a means of reflecting on authoring.

a. Coming to terms with trauma and loss? Gothic incorporation

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[227] Phipps's duality is suggested by his features: 'it was the mouth which was the most expressive aspect of his physiognomy: being one moment utterly persuasive of its charm, and the next distinguished by its churlishness' (162). In fact, Phipps is suspected by Edward Constable (one of Buckle's footmen) to be responsible for his lover's death, which Phipps denies. This homosexual triangular relation doubles Maggs's wish to see his beneficiary as Constable acts as messenger between the two men. Furthermore, homosexuality is somewhat orientalised: Constable and Phipps meet in a private, semi-hidden London club located in the rooms above 'Mafooz & Son's, Importers of Dates and Coffees' (160).
[228] Elements of the following section has been published in the journal *Litterae Mentis* under the tile: 'Dickens and his *Doppelgangers*: Playing Detective in Neo-Victorian Fiction' (2018).

In Simmons's novel, ritual scenes mesmerise the characters. For instance, as we have seen in Chapter 2, Collins considers Dickens's 'public murder' of Nancy as a genuine sacrifice, a devilish deal that frees Dickens from the contract forcing him to write Drood's biography: 'To kill an innocent human being in full sight of othersss [*sic.*][…] He hopesss [*sic.*] that his imagination shall provide the equal service, that the gods will be fooled, but so far he …. and hisss[*sic.*] much-vaunted imagination … have failed' (*D:* 430). Collins is unable to understand the play on the literal and the figurative, as he interprets the reading of Nancy's murder as performative.

Besides, the novel reaches its climax with a phantasmatic incorporation scene involving a beetle. Simmons's counterfactual plot draws upon Richard Marsh's 1897 novel *The Beetle*, in which the eponymous insect is a polymorphous monster from Ancient Egypt encapsulating fears of degeneration and reverse colonisation. For Mariaconcetta Costantini, the link with Marsh's novel is 'suggested by [Drood's] half-Egyptian origins, the revenge he takes on his cold-hearted British father and the scarabs he is supposed to implant into people's bodies' (2015: 183 footnote). Thus, Drood is a 'ghoulish creature that travels in a coffin and vampirises British subjects' (*ibid.*). The novel plays on modern *topoi*, such as Tutankhamun's so-called curse (after Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon opened the tomb in 1922) and staple films like Stephen Sommers's 1999 *The Mummy*, that features ghostly carnivorous scarabs. In *Drood*, in a Gothic Egyptian ritual underground, a 'hairy glob', a scarab, is forced into Collins's mouth:

> The stag beetle's gigantic pincers pierce my flesh just below the sternum. The pain is beyond anything I have ever experienced. The tendons of my neck audibly creak as I strain to lift my head further to watch. […] I can feel the huge beetle *inside me*. (433)

> The insect seizes the hairy mass in my throat and drags it down deeper with it, back into my gullet and upper belly. (434)

Beyond Gothic paraphernalia (Collins is on a slab, Drood is chanting in Egyptian and English, his chant is echoed by a hooded chorus) the act of swallowing the 'hairy mass' seems to materialise the process of mental incorporation and 'intrapsychic secret' which Abraham and Torok describe thus: 'Because our mouth is unable to say certain words and unable to formulate certain sentences, we fantasize, for reasons yet to be determined, that we are actually taking in our mouth the unnameable, the object itself' (1994: 131; 128). The scarab given by Drood also recalls the Wolf Man and his sister: 'It was the word, the demetaphorized and objectified word that had to be swallowed in a display of coprophagic bravado' (133). The scarab materialises

the 'unintelligible', the 'unspeakable', and leads Collins to a further identification with Dickens which now revolves around the murderous impulse: [229]

> *Did Dickens have a scarab in him? Did it crawl from his brain to his heart and sink its huge pincers in when he did anything that would release him from Drood?* (*D:* 452; italics in the text)

> *Did Dickens have his own scarab?* Does *Dickens have a scarab now?* This is all I could think about as the carriage rumbled on. If Dickens *had* a Drood-implanted scarab but somehow rid himself of it – *by the public murder of an innocent man?* – then Dickens was my only hope. If Dickens still carried the monster beetle but had learned to live and work and function with it, Dickens was still my best hope. (488; italics in the text)

The murderous impulse can be understood not simply as jealousy and rivalry, but as an object hidden away in the psychic crypt of the subject, the shameful desire that dares not speak its name, the love/hate relationship with the fellow author. Hence incorporation leads to murder in *Drood*. Towards the end of the novel, Collins shoots Dickens. Before the body of the author falls in a lime pit, he utters the word: 'Unintelligible'.

In a striking *coup de théâtre,* the chapter is deconstructed as merely an illusion as Dickens adds: 'awake' and the next section of the chapter opens with Collins actually waking up. In Chapter 50, Dickens reveals to Collins that the whole Drood nightmare was nothing but a fantasy, a construct begotten by a mesmeric experience (716-717). While the narrative is deconstructed as a fantasy, a 'faux' (717) this does not preclude reading Collins's narrative in terms of incorporation, since the scarab represents both the sense of being smothered, unconscious love and hate, and the wish to kill; moreover, Collins cannot let pretence, violence comes to an end as he eventually kills Joseph Clow, Caroline Graves' husband (754).

b. Incorporation and author-ity

The incorporated beetle may also be read as a metaphor of intertextuality and postmodern appropriation. Turning Collins into a dummy, Simmons relies on the principle of 'misdirection' which, as Daryl Hutton puts it, consists in focusing the reader's attention on the dummy, thus effacing the ventriloquist and achieving efficient illusion (1975: 63). Simmons uses and extends the notion of 'misdirection' to diffuse the origin of voice thus offering to readers a 'multivocal' novel, to borrow Helen Davies's term, as in the following passage which literally dethrones the canonical writer:

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[229] Metaphorised by the absorbed abject object, the inability to speak recalls the unspeakable, 'unintelligible' Drood. Furthermore, the scene is discovered to be a fantasy at the end of the novel (when the term 'unintelligible' turns out to be the key to the hypnosis) but when Collins goes through it is lived as if for real.

> He was the most popular novelist in England, perhaps in the world […] – the greatest writer who had ever lived. […]
> I had seen Charles Dickens stuck in rural, doorless privy with his trousers down around his ankles, bleating like a lost sheep for some paper to wipe his arse, and you will have to forgive me if that image remains more true to me than 'the greatest writer who ever lived.' (*D*: 5)

Simmons is poking fun at Dickens, through Collins, the dummy, who is 'talking back' to the so-called Inimitable. Thus, by repeating Collinsian and Dickensian modes of writing, Simmons creates a 'space for multiple voices' (Davies 2012: 31), the repetition turning into a subversive act as Simmons widens the cracks of the relationship between Dickens and Collins.

The Frozen Deep marks the climax of collaboration and division between the two writers:

> 'My work – our work – on the play continued through the autumn of that year. I had conceived of the main character (to be played by Dickens, of course) named Richard Wardour […] and my idea was that the Wardour character would be older, perhaps not very competent […], and a bit demented. Perhaps even somewhat a villain.
> Dickens completely rewrote this idea, changing Richard Wardour into a young, intelligent, complex, angry, but – in the end – totally self-sacrificing character. '*Perpetually seeking and never finding true affection*' was the phrasing in Dickens's voluminous notes on the re-creation of his character. He wrote many of the character's monologues by himself and actually kept them to himself until our final rehearsals.' (*D*: 41-42)

The narrator's tone is sarcastic as he concedes the changes in between dashes. Wardour is construed in opposite terms by the two writers, a villain for Collins, a martyr and a hero for Dickens. Dickens's version of Wardour is described in terms of literary appropriation, as he is rewriting or recreating the character worked out by Collins. This is a metatextual trace, and Simmons does the same with the two writers. The collaborative work between Collins and Dickens thus thematises the 'collaborative' work between the Victorian author and his neo-Victorian successor.

Hence the haunting unconscious desire to finish the book, which mimics Simmons's own attempt to vie with *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*:

> 'You heard me, Wilkie. You want to approach Chapman and tell him that you can finish the novel for me – William Wilkie Collins, the famous author of *The* Moonstone, stepping in to carry on the work of his fallen friend, his deceased onetime collaborator. William Wilkie Collins, you will tell dear mourning Chapman and Hall, is the only man in England – the only man in the English speaking-world – the only man in the entire world! – who knew Charles Dickens's mind sufficiently that he, William Wilkie Collins, can complete the mystery so tragically truncated when the aforesaid Mr Dickens disappeared suddenly, almost certainly taking his own life. You want to complete *The Mystery of Edwin* Drood, my dear Wilkie, and thus quite literally replace me in the heart s of readers as well as in the annals of great writers of our time.'(697-698)

Harping on the two names, Simmons exposes the antagonism between the two 'unequal partners', to borrow Lilian Nayder's title. But of course, there is also a play on history since Simmons reverses the offer that Dickens made to Collins when the latter was laid up with gout and therefore unable to finish the writing of *No Name.* The circumvoluted intertextual and

metatextual game is best phrased by Simmons himself who describes his novel as doing 'a Salieri to Dickens' Mozart' (Gwinn 2009: n.p.).

The loop is looped when Collins dies repeating the key word: 'already it is painful and terrible and intolerable and unintelligible. Unintelligible' (*D*: 771). This, for Joachim Frenk, concludes the metatextual game:

> As an author, Collins, writing himself to death, remains the victim of his own fictions. He pens the last word: 'Unintelligible' – a word that appears repeatedly both in this novel and in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. The spin-off emphasises its dependence on its pre-text by quoting it at the very end while at the same time adding to the pre-text's unintelligibility. (2011: 144)

Besides, repetition and revision are vindicated by the allusion to Dickens's American tours, which are also used to thematise intertextuality.

> Despite his great interest in America – having travelled there already and written books about it, not altogether flattering books one must add, and after having struggled so fiercely to receive some recompense for the piracy of his works in the copyright-flaunting chaos of former colonies – Dickens had little interest in a war between some distant North and more-distant South. (*D*: 4)

While stressing the Eurocentric bias (Dickens pays no attention to the American Civil War), the question of copyrights also highlights one of the main concerns of neo-Victorian poetics: the dichotomy between the copy and the original. Dickens angrily realises that the play *No Thoroughfare*, another collaborative work with Collins, has been pirated (423). Collins dismisses this as 'this distant disaster' (424) yet berates Dickens's later rewriting of the play, again appropriating Collins's work.[230] This might suggest that, for Simmons, intertextual appropriation is an ongoing process, thereby vindicating all Victorian and postmodern textual games. Another example may be the way Dickens is compared to Shakespeare, Chaucer and Keats (5). Indeed, taken at face value, these references assert Dickens's status as one of the most illustrious writers of the English-speaking world. However, for the reader of Simmons's novels, this enumeration may recall Simmons's rewritings of Keats's poetry in his science-fiction series *Hyperion Cantos* (1989-1997). Thus, Simmons shifts from the Dickensian motif of cannibalism, the unpardonable sin, to cannibalising texts and the neo-Victorian appetite for predecessors. Whereas Peter Carey denounces literary cannibalism through Oates (Allahyari 2017: 331), Simmons vindicates the process, as a struggle for authorship and authority which

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[230] Simmons is not the only American neo-Victorian writer interested in Dickens's relation to copyrights. Indeed, copyrights have an important role in Matthew Pearl's novel *The Last Dickens* (2009). The novel opens on a pursuit as a young clerk in possession with the new instalment of Dickens's novel is followed in the streets of Boston and is accidentally run over by an omnibus. The manuscript is taken away by an attorney whohappened to be there.The publisher, J.T. Fields (who, historically, was Dickens's American publisher) and his associate, James Osgood, decide to find the manuscript back but also to go to England after Dickens's death to discover the end of the novel and be able to publish before their competitors, the Harper brothers, can publish a pirated version of the novel.

legitimates textual piracy. The train accident may also be read as a way of engaging with both the Victorian and the modern world.

B.   Channeling the train accident

The nineteenth century was an age of industrial change. Britain was proud of its technological advances. The railway is a case in point. Considered as a machine ensemble made of the train engine, the carriages and the tracks, the railway may therefore be seen as a fitting metonym for Victorian society and Victorian progress as a whole, reflecting its rapid improvement as Wolfgang Schivelbusch contends in *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (1977). The first railway to use a steam engine was completed in 1825 (the Stockton and Darlington Railway, 25-mile long); though it could carry both passengers and goods, the use of the railway for passenger transport did not become permanent before 1833. All the major trunk lines were built by 1869 (constructions continued afterwards to fill gaps) (Bogart *et al.* 2018: 9-22). The railway network brought staggering change, allowing ordinary people to travel far and contributing to Britain's economic and industrial supremacy. The advent of the railway prompted new perceptions of time and space and, correlatively, it impacted the genre of the novel with its new repertoire of images, and plots, and its modern readership keen on new literary forms, like sensation fiction and the detective novel, amongst others.[231]

But if trains appealed to the cultural imagination, as the vehicle of modernity shaping the ideology of progress, they also aroused anguish. Indeed, reactions to the railway were ambivalent: on the one hand, it felt safe and smooth; on the other hand, it was feared that locomotion and tunnels might damage the brain with an excess of nervous excitement, while also being associated with violence and a potential for destruction (Schivelbusch, 1977: 129-

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[231] For further material on the relation between the railway and its impact on the shape of nineteenth-century novels, cf. Nicola Kirkby, 'Victorian Terminals and the Imagination, 1830-1860', unpublished PhD dissertation, 2018. For a specific study of the way the railway journey impacted Dickens's fiction cf. Jonathan H. Grossman, *Charles Dickens's Networks: Public Transport and the Novel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. For a specific study of the connexion between the emergence and popularity of the detective novel and the development of the railway cf. Laura Marcus, 'Oedipus Express: Trains, Trauma and Detective Fiction' in *The Art of Detective Fiction,* Warren Chernaik, Martin Swales and Robert Vilain eds., Houndsmills, Basingstoke; New York: MacMillan Press, 2000. Also, Walter Benjamin, 'Romans policiers, en voyage' in *Autopsies du roman policier* [1983], ed. by Uri Eisenzweig, Chrisitan Bourgeois: Paris, 1983, 220-223.

130). No wonder, then, that railway accidents should have also triggered fascination, connoting irrational mechanical rhythm and rupture, modernity run mad, derailed. Accidents did happen, locomotive boilers exploded, cast iron bridges collapsed. The imagination of disaster alarmingly countered tales of progress, and so did the hitherto unknown effects on victims. For Cathy Caruth, the train accident is 'the exemplary scene of trauma par excellence' as it 'does not simply represent the violence of a collision but also conveys the impact of its very incomprehensibility' (2016: 6). Therefore, the victim is haunted 'not only [by] the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known' (*ibid.*). Though the Victorians could not have used terms like post-traumatic stress disorder, they were certainly grappling with ways of coming to terms with violent disruption.

Agniezska Golda is surprised at neo-Victorian writers' lack of interest in Victorian technological improvement: 'It is as if the contemporary novelists were forgetting that nineteenth-century England was the setting of the Industrial Revolution and saw numerous technical inventions that shaped the character of the century' (2003: 164).[232] I would argue that contemporary writers have not forgotten the importance of the Industrial Revolution but, by choosing to focus on anxieties and traumas linked to technological advances, neo-Victorian novels depart from the grand narratives of History and take an interest in its 'darker side' among which railway disasters loom large.

For instance, the train accident appears as part of the litany of disasters uttered by Colonel Leek in Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White*:

> Disastrous overturn of train at Bishop's Itchington. Gunpowder explosion on the Regent's Canal. Steamer gone down off the Bay of Biscay. Destruction by fire of the *Cospatrick*, half-way to New Zealand, four hundred and sixty lost, mere days ago. Think of it! These are *signs*. The whirlpool of disaster. And at the centre of it – what there, eh? What there? (*CPW*: 18)

The colonel's interpretation of these accidents as signs with no meaning might be construed as a form of irony on Michel Faber's part, who playfully establishes himself as a postmodern writer. The novel is punctuated by such litanies which remain obscure and, thereby, unreadable. What's more, Leek himself is associated with the machine which, as Georges Letissier notices, points to Faber's appropriation of the character of Pancks, the rent collector in *Little Dorrit,* which is marked by the semantic field of smoke (2009: 119). If in Faber's novel the train accident haunts the background of the novel, in *Drood* it comes to the fore as the opening scene revisits Dickens's collision with catastrophe.

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[232] This argument is to be nuanced since Steampunk, a neo-Victorian subgenre, takes its root in science fiction and deeply engages with technology.

1. Dickens, trains and trauma

Dickens died on the fifth anniversary of the Staplehurst accident, 'an uncanny repetition' (Matus 2001: 414) which was bound to nourish the interest of neo-Victorian writers, especially Dan Simmons. Simmons's focus on the accident reflects a growing interest in Victorian studies, from the 1970s onwards, in the possibility of seeing Dickens as a Victorian example of a post-traumatic condition. Neo-Dickensian novels may thus be said to uncover shifts and patterns in the evolution of criticism.

The accident itself was spectacular. On June 9th, 1865, the South Eastern tidal train going from Folkestone to London crashed just before its arrival at Staplehurst, Kent. The viaduct above the river Beult was under repair and the workmen, who misread the timetables, were not expecting the train for another couple of hours. The last section of the viaduct had been taken out, which caused the accident. There were ten deaths and forty-nine people were injured out of a hundred and ten passengers.[233] Of course, onboard was Dickens, accompanied by his mistress Ellen Ternan, and her mother. The traumatic impact of the accident on Dickens is strikingly visible over the summer of 1865, during which he wrote no less than forty-four letters referring to the accident. The content of these letters is quite telling, presenting us with Dickens's own account of the experience, they testify to the way in which the accident impacted him. His accounts are marked by the repetition of specific elements such as the uncanny sensations experienced as the accident was actually taking place, the mention of the carriage suspended in the air, the shock linked to 'the work among the dying and the dead', the terrific aspect of the wreckage and his own 'shaky' handwriting afterwards, as when abruptly cutting short his letter to Thomas Mitton: 'But in writing these scanty words of recollection I feel the shake and am obliged to stop' (*Letters* June 13, 1865: 57-58). As Nicholas Daly observes, it is quite striking that Dickens should use the term 'shake' which, alongside the lingering symptoms of the accident for years, testify to the fact that Dickens was 'one of the most famous victims of a peculiarly modern form of nervous after-effect: shock' (Daly 1999: 462).[234] Dickens is also construed as a striking *exemplum* of the victim of the railway accident by Schivelbusch's study. For Schivelbusch, Dickens's report foreshadows medical literature on railway shock, especially John Eric Erichsen's 1866 *On Railway and Other Injuries of the Nervous System*, the first work

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[233] For details on the investigation as well as register of deaths cf. the railway archive website accessible at: http://www.railwaysarchive.co.uk/eventsummary.php?eventID=31

[234] For a while, Dickens could not stand speed, when on board a train he would be very frightened and feel as if the train were sliding on the left handside. In a note, Matus points out that '[b]iographers have not generally remarked on the fact that Dickens suffered post-traumatic stress disorder' (2001: 433).

which added to physical injuries the concept of shock, due to severe tension between the momentum of speed and sudden arrest – Erichsen was not ready yet to discard pathological explanations for a psychological one; this would come much later, with Herbert W. Page (Schivelbusch 1977: 137-145).

As Dickens was a celebrity and a Victorian icon, his own brush with collision and catastrophe made the accident more striking and contributed to the sense that progress was reversed by such casualties. In *Dombey and Son*, Dickens had already likened the train to a shrieking monster, a version of Death that runs over a character. Immediately after the accident, Dickens retrieved the manuscript of *Our Mutual Friend* which he had had with him in the carriage. His August episode was to be two pages short: he had temporarily lost his voice and found it hard to write. In 1866, in the Christmas edition of *All the Year Round*, he published a ghost story which draws upon the accident, 'The Signalman'. Simon Bradley observes that its 'genesis must be sought in the railways themselves, and the role they had come to play in the author's own world' (2015: ix).[235] The story revolves around the apparition of a spectre, whose warnings ('Bellow there! Look out! Look out!') are both mysterious and frightening for the eponymous signalman. Ultimately, the signalman is killed by a train whose driver utters the very same words of warning the spectre had shouted before. This ghost story may easily be read in terms of trauma.

Matus demonstrates that '"The Signalman" constitutes a kind of literary missing link between the Victorian discourse of nervous shock and Victorian conceptions of unconscious memory' (2001: 416). For her, '[t]he railway accident was the exemplary instance for Victorian medical discourse that propelled the prevailing pathological bias in relation to injury in the direction of a psychic interpretation of injury' (417). Dickens's story might thus be read as a post-traumatic expression of the author's anxieties. Indeed, the text is marked by repetition, by a sense of incomprehensibility, as the signalman. complains to the narrator: 'What does the spectre mean?' (Dickens 2015: 23). It features a double wound, that of the signalman who, ultimately, dies, and that of the narrator. There is some bleak irony in the title of the story and the profession of the protagonist: whereas the signalman is supposed to warn against dangers, to code and decode signs of dangers (the signalman is obsessed with his telegraph in the story), he fails to understand and therefore dies. At the very end, it is both the repeated cry heard by

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[235] Interestingly enough, Simon Bradley considers the short story to be 'Dickens's last finished masterpiece', a designation more often attributed to *Our Mutual Friend*.

the signalman as well as the unspoken interpretation of the narrator that is spoken by the engine-driver:

> Without prolonging the narrative to dwell on any one of its curious circumstances more than on any other, I may, in closing it, point out the coincidence that the warning of the Engine-Driver included, not only the words which the unfortunate Signal-man had repeated to me as haunting him, but also the words which I myself—not he—had attached, and that only in my own mind, to the gesticulation he had imitated. (30)

For Michel de Certeau, the railway epitomises containment and surveillance while, at the same time, the order and shelter offered by the carriage, he suggests, bears similarities with that of the page, in that both can be said to entail a form of circulation (1988: 165-166). This order relies on the clear distinction between inside and outside, a distinction materialised by the window-pane which acts as a separation which 'allows us to *see*, and the rail, what allows us to *move through*' (1988: 112).[236] This dichotomy, however, disappears in the railway accident: the glass is broken and the separation between the inside and the outside of the carriage collapses.[237] To a certain extent, this collapse seems to be doubled in Dickens's short story by the collapse of the distinction between being inside and outside the mind, as the engine driver enacts what was only an interpretation of the narrator (hence the emphasis in the apposition 'not he').[238] Since Dickens's life and writing seem, if not shattered by the accident, at least severely shaken, neo-Dickensian fiction was bound to return to this moment of unbalance, when modernity—and the iconic writer— went off the tracks.

2. Appropriating/Twisting Victorian tropes of trauma

'Ghost-stories, illustrating particular state of mind and processes of the imagination, are common-property, I always think –'

(Letters November 25, *1851: 547)*

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[236] Schivelbusch notes that the traveller becomes part of the machine ensemble working as a filter through which the outside is perceived. Furthermore, he insists on the telegraph as another medium (1977: 24; 31).

[237] It is to be noted that the railway is obsessively present in other art forms such as paintings, photographs or the cinema: strikingly enough, the Frères Lumière's first movie, 'L'arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat' (1896), not only represented a moving train but, famously, frightened the viewers who feared the train might leap out of the screen, another telling example of the rupture between the inside and the outside.

[238] Dickens's striking postscript to *Our Mutual Friend* which we mentioned in chapter 2 also bears witness to the shock of the Staplehurst accident, a testimony which is marked by belatedness: written three months after the accident, it comes after the novel, 'In lieu of preface'. The manuscript is personified as Mr and Mrs Boffin, thus turning the fictional characters into victims of the accident, thereby intertwining the fate of the protagonists with their author's, an intertwinement that reaches its climax with the last words of this postscript: '– THE END' (1991: 822).

Simmons re-enacts Staplehurst and the experience of trauma which, according to Caruth, occurs when 'the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event' (1995: 4-5, italics in the original). Neo-Victorian fiction, itself a belated re-presentation of past events (and/or fictions) takes possession of the 'belated' nature of traumatic experience. More specifically, not only does Simmons play with a rhizome of intertextual references but he also recuperates nineteenth-century images such as the following illustration which was used as a cover for the *Penny Illustrated Paper* issued on June 24, 1865:
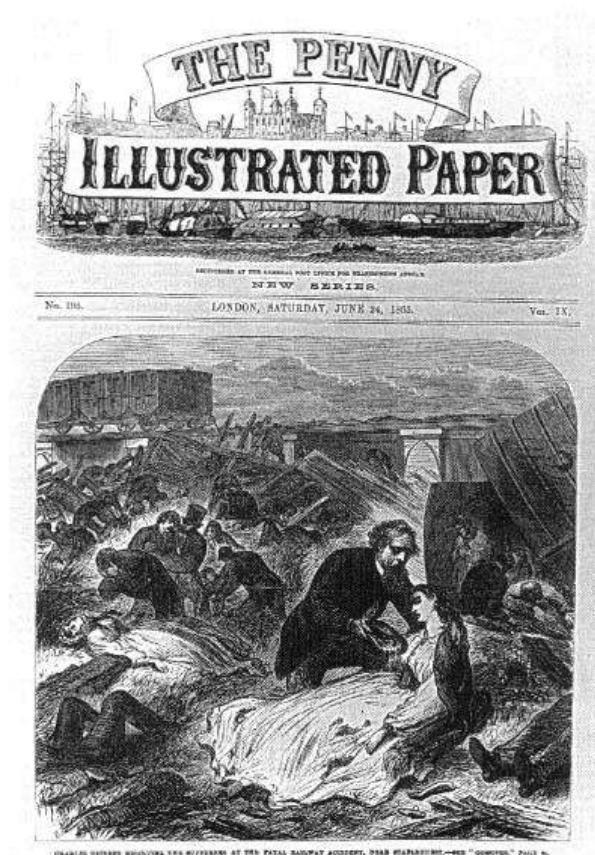
Figure 23: cover of *The Penny Illustrated Paper* showing Staplehurst rail accident on 9 June 1865, with Charles Dickens tending to the injured (June 24, 1865)

The carcass of the train forms a V at the very centre of the picture, drawing the attention of the viewer to the two characters in the foreground, Dickens and the woman he is giving water to from his hat. Dickens bends with concern, the couple seems fairly still compared with the rest of the picture which is very dynamic and chaotic, suggesting the full horror of the accident (note the severed limb lying on the ground beside the woman whose white dress points out her innocence). It is a kind of melodramatic iconography turning Dickens into a quiet hero which

is reversed in *Drood*. I contend that Simmons uses the Gothic (as the accident turns into a crime scene of sort, casting Dickens as the detective figure suspecting the dubious Drood) as a means to reactivate the Victorian trauma of the train accident in contradistinction with overall melodramatic contemporary accounts.

We should note that for Matthew Wilson Smith 'the dangers posed and the traumas inflicted by the railway arose from crises that resisted translation into the familiar terms of melodrama' and that Dickens's transposition of the accident in 'The Signalman' 'gropes toward a new language for a traumatic condition, a language haunted by melodrama even as it moves beyond it' (2012: 499). This is a first shift from, for instance, the aforementioned letter Dickens wrote to Thomas Mitton, with the melodramatic posture and theatrical exclamations of the two women accompanying the writer (*i.e.* Ellen Ternan and her mother) and the writer's own call to solemn silence in the face of adversity, casting the event in a familiar plot rather than voicing trauma: 'I caught hold of them both (the old lady sat opposite, and the young one on my left)' (*Letters* June 13, 1865: 57). Ironically, with the benefit of hindsight, the call to silence may also be read as the fear of scandal, should Ellen and Dickens be identified.

By replacing melodrama with the Gothic, Simmons seems to claim that the former is utterly obsolete as a means of conveying trauma, in contrast with the Gothic, a genre born in the eighteenth century but revived and booming at the *fin de siècle* with such fictions as 'The Stange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde' (1886), *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1890), or *Dracula* (1897). As Fred Botting puts it: 'Gothic signifies a writing of excess.' The genre seems to be always associated with transgression and anxieties since 'Gothic atmospheres —gloomy and mysterious — have repeatedly signalled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents and evoked emotions of terror and laughter' (2005: 1). The dual temporality of the genre cannot fail to recall that of neo-Victorianism, a link that was identified by Christian Gutleben and Marie-Luise Kohlke (2012: 4-11). Simmons's Gothic relishes excess. The American author picks Victorian accounts and transforms them into Gothic vignettes. In the letter to Mitton, for instance, the historical Dickens acknowledges the unbearable sight of the man with a split skull without stressing the gory vision of the brain:

> Suddenly I came upon a staggering man covered with blood (I think he must have been flung clean out of his carriage) with such a frightful cut across the skull that I couldn't bear to look at him. I poured some water over his face, and gave him some to drink, and gave him some brandy, and laid him down on the grass, and he said 'I am gone' and died afterwards. (*Letters* June 13, 1865: 57-58)

While Dickens's synecdochic style renders the agitation he is going through ('and gave', 'and gave', 'and laid', 'and he said'), Simmons's narrative stretches the two sentences into three

paragraphs. The unexpected encounter ('Suddenly I came upon') is turned into a forced embrace: 'Dickens watched a man stagger towards him, arms outstretched as if for a welcoming hug' (*D:* 15). The gory grotesque is played upon in the description of the cut: 'The top of the man's skull had been torn off rather the way one would crack an eggshell with a spoon in preparation for breakfast. Dickens could clearly see the grey-and-pink pulp glistening within the concave bowl of splintered skull' (*ibid*.). The discrepancy between the breakfast simile and the surgical comparison ('pulp' and 'bowl') creates an uneasiness, rendering the vision somewhat unpalatable for the reader while the use of the adjective 'splintered' puts on an equal footing the human body and the carriages. This play on *clichéd* gory images blends the topsy-turvy world of the catastrophe and that of carnivalesque inversion, a genre which, as Kelly Hurley suggests, drawing upon Bakhtin and Kristeva, 'delights in outrageously disgusting embodiment for its own sake' (2007: 143-142). The text reaches its climax with the scene of the arm without a body, which recalls the limb in the picture of *The Penny Illustrated News*. Revisiting Dickens's sense of the incommunicable and indescribable horror, Simmons's excessive mode of writing insists on the broken bodies and corpses of the victims.

Simmons's Gothic relies on *textuality*: the relish in these excessive gory images seems gratuitous, they do not move the plot forward but are to be taken for their own sake. As such, Simmons's text corresponds to the characteristics of postmodern Gothic identified by Fred Botting in the following terms:

> It involves a pervasive cultural concern—characterised as postmodernist—that things are not only not what they seem: what they seem is what they are, not a unity of word or image and thing, but words and images without things or as things themselves, effects of narrative form and nothing else. Unstable, unfixed and ungrounded in any reality, truth or identity other than those that narratives provide, there emerges a threat of sublime excess, of a new darkness of multiple and labyrinthine narratives, in which human myths again dissolve, confronted by an uncanny force beyond its control. (2005: 111)

The 'horror of textuality', to borrow Botting's phrase, is yet best exemplified by the main Gothic element of the chapter: the figure of Drood himself, no longer Dickens's character sketched in his unfinished last novel, but the eponymous invention that comes to haunt Simmons's text. Drood is the locus of horror: his characterisation is marked by intertextual references to *Dracula* while his appearance is that of a moving corpse:[239]

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[239] A possible reworking of another intertextual reference would be Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), a Victorian novel which, as Aris Mousoutzanis puts it, is also concerned with '[t]he dialectic between industrial accident and technoscientific development […]. The main plot involving the revenge of a mysteriously shape-shifting creature with mesmeric abilities against a British politician is complemented by a subplot involving the researches of the inventor Sydney Atherton' (2014, 31). For Mariaconcetta Costantini 'Drood bears a strong resemblance with the mythicised figure of Jack the Ripper who, like him, horribly slashed his victims. References to Jekyll and Hyde, finally, can be traced in the many characters exhibiting a split personality, including the fictive Dickens and Collins, who gradually 'Droodised' and assimilated to their demonic double' (2015: 183). Furthermore, the hissing

> This figure, as Dickens later described to me in a throaty whisper during the days after the accident when his voice 'was no longer his own,' was *cadaverously* thin, almost *shockingly pale*, and stared at the writer from *dark-shadowed eyes* set deep under a pale, high brow that melded into a *pale*, bald *scalp*. A few strands of greying hair leapt out from the sides of this *skull-like visage*. Dickens's impression of a skull was reinforced, he said later, by the man's *foreshortened nose* – […] – and by small, sharp, irregular teeth, spaced too far apart, set into *gums so pale* that they were *whiter* than the teeth themselves. (*D*: 13; my emphasis)

Relying on the lexical field of the cadaverous, Drood appears as a truncated body, as if he were himself part of the debris emerging from the ruins of the train.

Not only does Drood destabilise the boundary between victim and criminal but, as an epitome of the abject, he also disturbs identity, and ordered systems. As Julia Kristeva puts it: 'The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably become a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance' (2000: 543). Most importantly, the corpse destabilises the boundary between the living and the dead, as it forms 'a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. The border has become an object' and therefore it represents 'the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life' (543-544). Characterised as a living corpse, Drood is doubly abject, fallen from the train and invading the scene of the accident, the rookeries and, eventually, the novel as a whole. For Gutleben, Drood 'is typical of the Gothic's attempts at saying the ineffable and uncanny, that is, at playing with the limits of representation – just as with any limits' (2012: 318). Ultimately, Drood seems to defy all boundaries and thereby corresponds to Benjamin Poore's description of (neo)Victorian villains as 'microtexts': 'Like Spring-Heeled Jack, neo-Victorian villains are migratory creatures, moving across media, crossing over, often removed […] from their original' (2017: 9). In the end:

> we are dealing with a powerful historical feedback loop, a *mise en abyme*, where the Gothic trope of the incursion of the past into the present provides the imaginative space for Victorian cheap fiction, and later the 'Victorian Gothic', while the Victorians' own modernity is then Gothicised by the twenty-first century along with all history's earlier Gothics. (3)

Drood Gothicises Victorian modernity, reduced to a dreadful mouth: 'The figure's lips parted, its mouth opened and moved, the fleshy tongue flickered out from behind and between the tiny teeth, and hissing sounds emerged' (*D*: 21). The image recalls the monstrous train in *Dombey and Son*, with, to borrow Matthew Smith's words, '[t]he shout, the shriek, the vindictive passion, the sickness and terror, the demonic eyes, the licking lips, the fiery heat, the juxtaposition of utter passivity and relentless evil, the frenzy of mutilation' (2012: 514). Simmons thus reworks the 'demonic train' figure of the Victorian Era, transforming it into the

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sounds that Drood produces might recall Christopher Lee's performance as Dracula in the 1966 adaptation of the novel.

haunting figure of Drood (fig. 24). Drood thereby serves to Gothicise and embody technology, furthering and finding a new 'grammar' for nineteenth-century tropes.[240]
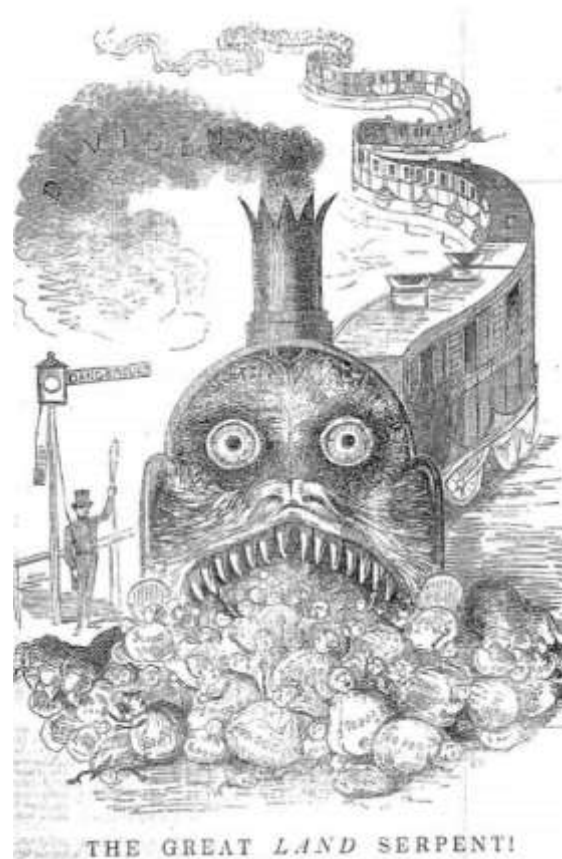
Figure 24: The great Land Serpent, Railway Dragon, from *The Puppet-Show* (1848*)*

3. Victorian trauma? Deciphering Katrina in / through Staplehurst

Discussing *Little Dorrit* and debates about its two opposite themes, imprisonment and circulation, Jonathan Grossman offers to embrace both perspectives and to therefore understand the novel as a 'host of reversible images' similar to Joseph Jastrow's drawing entitled 'Duck-Rabbit' (2012: 155-214). The idea of a reversible image seems quite applicable to neo-Victorian fiction especially when considering *Drood*, a novel entangled in a nineteenth-century plot but perhaps also revolving around concerns that hit closer to home. From the start, the narrator's

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[240] Part of the above material was used for a talk delivered at the seminar Victorian Persistence. I am indebted to Sara Thornton for pointing out the link between Simmons's strategy and French nineteenth-century writers' such as Zola in *La Bête Humaine* or Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables*. Dickens himself used this device as for instance with Pancks in *Little Dorrit* who is constantly described as a puffing tugboat. Similarly, Krook in chapter 11 of *Bleak House* is presented as a form of vampiric figure, smoking from inside (a foreshadowing of his instant combustion).

addressee is defined as a twenty-first century reader that the fictional Collins characterises in the following terms: [241]

> Perhaps you British or American peoples a hundred and twenty-five years or so years in my future do not speak English at all. Perhaps you dress like Hottentots, live in gas-lighted caves, travel around in balloons, and communicate by telegraphed thoughts unhindered by any spoken or written language. (*D*: 3)

Simmons uses his narrator Collins as a vector to address the twenty-first-century reader, having fun at and with them. Like Dickens's carriage balanced over the void, the temporality and narrative strategy of Simmons's text seem to be out of joint, interweaving past and present, as though the window-pane separating the twenty-first-century reader from the nineteenth-century setting were lowered at times by metalepsis. The accident is channelled through Collins who, as we saw in chapter 2, is positioned as a detective figure while casting Dickens as a suspect. But Collins is also being used as an entry point for the voice of the American writer. Simmons's aim might be understood as twofold: on the one hand, the American writer seeks to play with Dickens's canonicity through an iconoclastic portrayal; on the other hand, Simmons seems to tackle contemporary anxieties. As Dorman T. Shindler puts it: 'Though his novels are often wrapped in the trappings of genre fiction – mystery, science-fiction and horror – they have a subtext that goes beyond expected conventions' (2001: 30).

Mariaconcetta Costantini identifies in Simmons's neo-Victorian Gothic a 'radical potential' that highlights environmental issues, such as the concern with pollution and poverty in the city (2015: 178-179). She also suggests that Drood may be viewed as a figure of reversed colonisation and thereby:

> By deconstructing the myth of hermetically sealed spaces, Simmons not only reinforces Victorian racial concerns. He also evokes present-day views of the metropolis, which in the aftermath of 9/11, are increasingly perceived as conglomerations of illusory segregated spaces and identities. […] [T]he idea of interdictory urban areas is nowadays challenged by the re-emergence of underwordly [*sic.*] demonised forces (fundamentalism, anti-capitalistic movements) which, like Drood and his followers, invade the upper tiers of the Western city and confound their axiological points of reference. (197)

Not only does Simmons's novel underpin recent changes in the city and its representation in literature, but it reflects on the shift from Eurocentric Gothic to American Gothic. Urban Gothic responds to topographical changes in the city: 'Subterranean Gothic has proved eminently useful for populating modern cities with terrors' (Mighall 2007: 57). For Robert Mighall, 'the fear of what lies beneath the ostensible modern sunlit world is most powerfully evoked in American Gothic fiction, and it is in the New World that the true successor to London is found' (*ibid.*). Mighall locates this mode of urban Gothic not only in the metropolis, New York, but in

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[241] Simmons possibly refers to late-nineteenth-century science-fiction such as Jules Verne's novels or, though an anachronistic reference, H.G. Wells's *Time Machine* (1895).

places like derelict New Orleans, with its rich cultural layers, racial guilt and decaying houses: 'New Orleans is perhaps now the quintessential Gothic city, as responses to Hurricane Katrina sadly reinforced' (*ibid.*).

It may be argued then that Simmons chose the Victorian train accident to channel the more contemporary trauma of Katrina, a natural catastrophe. I propose to read here the passing reference to the hurricane not as a detail but as a fragment, a metonym that reveals much about the novel as a whole. As stated above, the train accident entailed a notion of repressed violence, perceived at the time as 'demonic' and, as Schivelbusch notes, '[o]ne might also say the more civilized the schedule and the more efficient the technology, the more catastrophic its destruction when it collapses' (1977: 130-131). Certainly, the horror that was triggered by Katrina emerged in part from the way in which it cast light on what America chose to ignore, the reality of the poor, especially black people. As the media coverage of the event shows, old racial issues surfaced from the marshes of New Orleans in the wake of the hurricane.

However, the nostalgic undertones of the novel and the author's refusal to end Dickens's last novel may be seen as attempts to move away from this binary opposition. The reference to the American Civil War that appears right at the beginning of the novel ('Dickens had little interest in a war between some distant North and more-distant South'(4)) also enables Simmons to relate the issue of trauma to the faultlines of American history, as if embedded layers could emerge from the narration of the Staplehurst accident. Simmons thus seems to suggest that Other, American, representations of trauma can revive Dickens's own particular experience. The parallelism with Katrina is made explicit by the comparison between the ruins of the train and that of New Orleans after it was swept by the hurricane:

> The train carriages in the riverbed and adjoining swampy banks were no longer recognisable as railway coaches. Except for iron axles and wheels protruding here and there at impossible angles from the water, it was as if a series of bungalows had been flung out of the sky, perhaps dropped from some American cyclone and smashed to bits. And then the bits looked to have been dropped and smashed yet again. (*D*: 15)

Recasting the adjective 'swampy' used by Dickens himself in his letter to Thomas Mitton, Simmons transforms the Kent marshes into Louisiana's swamps as he refers to 'bungalows' and 'cyclones'. The comparison mediates the traumatic experience, looking backward at Staplehurst to look forward to Katrina, a double movement now considered as characteristic of most of neo-Victorian fiction. For DJ Taylor, Simmons 'betray[s] [himself] by lapses into modern Yankee demotic' (2009: n.p.). Where Taylor sees inconsistency and failure to reach one's ambition, I rather see what I would term 'cryptical' encoding of the text, that is to say both cryptic and critical.

There is in fact a shift from the demonic train, a Gothicised vision of the machine, to the vampiric figure of Drood, a projection of the spreading rumours concerning cannibal activities in the aftermath of Katrina. Vampires have been associated with New Orleans in recent Gothic fiction following from Anne Rice's series, it therefore seems that Simmons reactivates this trope to tackle issues closer to us. The coverage of the aftermath of the hurricane bears similarities with sensationalist papers from the nineteenth century and, most strikingly, seems to collapse the boundary between fact and fiction as can be observed in the following title: 'Murder and rape – fact or fiction?' (Younge 2005b). Most importantly, it is the binary opposition between life and death that seems to dissolve: 'Left to sink or swim', 'Still alive amid the chaos: rescuers arrive at last to discover the forgotten survivors', or, most tellingly with its reference to Romero's zombie movies 'Week of the Living Dead' (Younge 2005a, Younge & Campbell 2005, Powers 2005). Simmons's appropriation of Dickens's repeated phrase to describe the event, his 'work among the dying and the dead', takes on a new meaning as it resonates with the coverage of the aftermath of the hurricane: 'But as well as the living, there was also the dead' (Younge & Campbell 2005). We find images that tie in with Drood's characterisation: 'Reports of the complete degradation and violent criminals running rampant in the Superdome suggested a crisis that both hastened the relief effort and demonised those who were stranded' (Younge 2005a). New Orleans is described as a decaying place, where violence reigns and where truth and fiction are hardly distinguishable: 'During a week when communications were difficult, rumours have acquired a particular currency. They acquired through repetition the status of established facts'; Katrina thus seems to have caused 'an information vacuum' (Younge 2005b). There is an uncanny number of casualties. Not only did most of them rot 'beyond recognition', but a large number of bodies were never recovered; New Orleans is thus marked by a spectral presence-absence. Journalists have pointed out the bleak irony of a sign at the morgue: 'The sign on the entrance to the morgue's assessment area had a message for those outside Harrahs who had gambled and been lucky. "*Mortui Vivis Praecipant*," it read. Or: "Let the dead teach the living"' (Younge & Campbell 2005). This message may be construed as a form of intertext, as it is echoed in the ceremonies led by Drood. It might also be seen as encapsulating part of the appeal of the Victorian era for contemporary writers and readers. Or rather, we may consider that Drood tropes trauma and emerges from the ruins of Katrina, as much as from Victorian England.

The traumatic accident of Staplehurst thus simultaneously conveys Victorian and contemporary traumas; the latter then infiltrate the entire novel. Indeed, the images developed

at the opening of the novel form a constellation of extended metaphors that permeate the whole novel, connoting cannibalism and foreignness. Recycling not only *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* but also *Dracula* and *The Beetle*, Simmons creates a compound text, the components of which all express in different ways the increasing sense of foreignness that pervaded the nineteenth century and led to the Alien Act of 1905 and the first appearance of the term xenophobia in 1909. As the editors of *Fear, Loathing and Victorian Xenophobia* remind their readers, while the emergence of postcolonial studies led to a study of discourse on race and foreignness in terms of imperialism, xenophobia has often been underappreciated by Victorian Studies (Tromp, Bachman, & Heidi Kaufman 2013: 2). The essays devoted to Simmons's three aforementioned hypotexts that feature in this collection provide us with a new filter through which to look at Simmons's Gothic tale: xenophobia. I contend that Simmons's use of the Gothic is not a mere postmodern, humorous and emptied revival of the Gothic form, but rather that this neo-Victorian text subtly underscores ongoing issues related to xenophobia as it was put to the foreground of American news in the wake of Katrina. The fear of contamination spreading over the London depicted by Simmons, the fear of Drood, this 'Other' figure, thus can all be read as channelling xenophobic responses to Katrina. As Gary Younge puts it:

> Events on the Gulf coast following Hurricane Katrina have been a metaphor for race in the US. The predominantly black population of New Orleans, along with a sizeable number of poor whites, was left to sink or swim. The bulging banks of the Mississippi momentarily washed away the racial divisions that appeared so permanent, not in a common cause but a common condition – poverty.
> Katrina did not create this racist image of African-Americans – it has simply *laid bare its ahistorical* bigotry, and in so doing exposed the lie of equal opportunity in the US. (Younge 2005; my emphasis)

Just as the issue of racism and poverty resurfaces in the aftermath of Katrina, one might say that it is the return of the repressed, which cryptically invades and resurfaces in Simmons's text, from the ruins of the train accident to the subterranean and decaying slums of London. Simmons's text bears witness to the ongoing trauma of Katrina which revived racist imagery still very active at the time of the novel's publication, as the following excerpt from an article published in 2009 reveals:

> What people were willing *to believe* about Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans four years ago is a more serious matter. Of racism. And cliché. The *story, as the mainstream media* presented it at the time, was about marauding hordes of looters, rapists and murderers swarming through the streets. The descriptions were pretty clearly focused on African-Americans, the great majority left behind in the evacuation of the city (which was then two-thirds black anyway). (Solnit; my emphasis)

Yet again this article lays emphasis not only on racism but also on the construction of truth and the role of the media and authorities. What is at stake with reactions following Katrina and the representation of the foreign in Dickens's novel is the question of containing the Other. As John Powers bluntly puts it: 'Suddenly, the Others were right in front of our noses, and the major media — predominantly white and pretty well-off — were talking about race and class' (Powers

2005).[242] Katrina and the trauma it caused is still to be worked through (especially in an age marked by the increase of climate change and its impact on human society) yet Simmons seems to suggest that such traumas can only be tackled obliquely. At the end of the novel, the lack of closure concerning Drood not only points to the ongoing process of 'unending both the text and the author – who turns into another absence' (Frenk 2011: 135), but to the ongoing trauma and racism suffered in the region of New Orleans. Katrina thus remains an open wound that has yet to be worked through, treated and healed.

As Simmons puts it in an interview: 'There's something icky about the Victorian era […]. We identify with it very strongly, in that we've tried to become the opposite of the Victorians, and the roots of a lot of our neuroses are in the Victorian era' (Gwinn 2009: n.p.). It seems that Simmons's combined use of the detective mode and the Gothic enables him to point to this 'icky' aspect of the Victorians, but also of his own times, to encrypt his narrative with double clues signalling both past psychopathologies, the train accident, and contemporary traumas, here, Katrina. Hovering on a double temporality, the text forces the reader to look for oblique signs. That Simmons should inscribe his text with such cryptic signs shows, however, that this ideological agenda might not be his prime concern, contrary to other, more political novels which are often considered as more 'serious'.

C.   Devouring threats: revisiting the Ripper

As we have just seen, the corpse-like Drood emerges from the open carcass of the crashed train, projecting his uncanny and abject shadow on the setting of the novel, London, while obliquely reflecting the streets of New Orleans strewn with the corpses left behind by the hurricane Katrina. There is another kind of abject body that detection and the urban Gothic draw attention to, that of the prostitute; for Maria Isabel Romero Ruiz: '[n]eo-Victorian Gothic productions work to unfold decentred and uncertain subjectivities like those of the prostitute/ fallen woman and the victim of sexual violence' (2016: 46). We shall now turn to the prostitute's body as a cryptogram of sorts.

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[242] Powers ironically identifies Larry King's show, *The Cryptkeeper,* and the moment he sprung from a sarcophagus as the climax of the events that took place in September 2005. It may be far-fetched to see a connection with the Egyptian Drood but the image remains quite striking.

1. Repressed stories: the materiality of the prostitute's body

Shepherd's novel engages with the Victorian discourse of prostitution as a 'Great Social Evil', which, in the nineteenth century, was not understood as resulting from socio-economic factors but as a symptom of a moral downfall: 'the urban environment became a place of vice, depravity and sexual danger' (Joyce 2008: n.p.). Since John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, the neo-Victorian fascination with Victorian sexuality has been an obvious way of challenging the success of nineteenth-century image making, which Ronald Pearsall defines thus:

> The Victorians conducted their public relations not for themselves, *but for us*; they wanted to appear to posterity as good, noble, pure in word, heart, and deed; and that they have succeeded so well is due not only to the energy with which they tackled this project, but to our own laziness in preferring the easy stereotype to the reality. (1969: xiv; my emphasis)

Hence the ubiquitous sexual figure in neo-Victorian fiction, from the vindictive Sugar in Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* to Nan who passes for a 'renter' (a male prostitute) in Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet,* Mercy Larkin and Lizzie Warriner in *Jack Maggs*, or Mathinna in *Wanting*.[243]

McDonald and Goggin warn us against 'the repeated characterisation of these now-standard figures [which] risks turning them into clichés that reinforce unproductive stereotypes, rather than giving voice to women as distinctive subjects' (2013: 5). In *Tom-All-Alone's,* Shepherd strives to make Lizzie Miller a distinct figure not just a dead body, when she appears in the hubbub of Haymarket:

> Back out on Haymarket, the lights are even brighter, the music even louder, and the crowds even thicker. Charles has just stepped aside […] when he feels a small cold hand slide into his, and another close tightly around his balls. 'Fancy a frig, mister?'
> He knows the voice; has known it, in fact, these five years and more. (*TAA:* 153)

Lizzie's voice and gestures single her out. Closing her hand around Charles's genitals signals her trade, while the simultaneous handshake shows that their relation is other than a sexual one. Beyond her stereotypical accent, her garish clothes and her ostentatious make-up, Lizzie is given a form of agency as Charles's '[i]nformer, undercover agent, decoy, spy' (153-154). Yet, she cannot speak as the street is a threatening space. Indeed, gas lamps provide means of surveillance from which the characters try to escape ('The girl moves away from the glare of

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[243] For a study of prostitution in Sarah Waters's novel cf. María Isabel Romero Ruiz, 'Prostitution, Identity and the Neo-Victorian: Sarah Waters's *Tipping the Velvet*' in *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, 72, 2016: 187-198.

the lamp, and Charles follows her into the comparative shadow of a closed doorway' (154)), while the female pimp looms large ('[Lizzie]'s about to say something else, but the old woman is already upon them' (155)). Lizzie's speech remains hacked by hyphens, perhaps an omen of her future silencing and butchering; her sentences are fragmented, a foreshadowing sign of what will happen to her body: '"Look," says Lizzie in a quick whisper, "come and see me Monday – I'm off to Brighton for the weekend first fing wiv one a' me reg'lars [*sic*.]– Bert 'Itchins – remember 'im [*sic*.]? – But I'll be back Monday. Come and see me in the afternoon, but meanwhile – "' (*ibid*.). Her unfinished sentence is never to be completed. Lizzy's agency is thereby both hinted at and constrained. It might be argued that Shepherd's representation of prostitution underscores the double edge of such representations that Kohlke warns against when talking about the emergence of a 'substitute Orientalism' when 'writers turn to their own culture to discover, or more accurately, (re)construct a substitute Other', which 'owe[s] as much to Victorian pornography as to any of its other literary predecesors' (Kohlke 2008b: 69). So that the most significant element might be the way in which the streets devour female bodies, Lizzie's but also Elizabeth's, Charles's sister who got lost in the crowd. Urban pathologies are encapsulated by the rewriting of the Whitechapel murders.

2. Prying the body open / prying into the open body

Because Shepherd chooses to rewrite the Ripper case (besides *Bleak House* and *The Woman in White*), there are more bodies here than in any other novel of our corpus; Shepherd covers the pages of her novel in bright red traces as Charles stumbles on different corpses during his investigation. The nickname (Ripper) itself is part of the legend, as Mark Jones observes: '[w]hen "Jack the Ripper" was added, almost certainly by an enterprising journalist, to this variable nomenclature, the mysterious murderer was provided with something that had the semblance of a name, a vocation, and pathology' (2017: 162). The faceless, nameless figure emerges through the conjunction of violence, criminology and print culture. For Kate Lonsdale, the Ripper is part of new storytelling modes, the explosion of journalism and a new literate readership; in time, through lack of solution and narrative closure, the historical figure has been replaced by 'quite a discursive history, a continuing dialogue that transcends the boundaries of

genre, running the gamut from scholarly criminology to romance novels Ellery Queen mysteries, graphic novels, and low budget horror films' (2002: 97).[244]

Benjamin Poore describes the Ripper case in terms that recall Rosario Arias's definition of the neo-Victorian play on the spectral trace: 'I see Jack the Ripper as *a space, an absence*, one which has come to serve as a *portal between past and present*, between literary fiction/arthouse movies and popular culture, and between fantasy and reality' (Poore 2017: 6; my emphasis).[245] With the Ripper case then, the past is turned into a detective fiction, the lack of closure opening up the possibility for narrative, and Shepherd is one of those who seek to fill in the 'vacant space', '[the] incredible vacuum, [the] blank page' left by the case and 'to paint [her novel] in lurid colours', as Max Duperray argues, resulting in a 'prevailing dichotomy [which] is not so much fact versus fantasy as fiction *alongside* another' (2012: 168; my emphasis).[246]

The discovery of Lizzie's body, marked by the sensory, bears witness to a staple trope in neo-Victorian fiction: the senses as a means of access to the Victorians (Arias 2014: 116). As Rosario Arias observes: 'the trace is linked with our being affected in a bodily sense. Ultimately, it should not be forgotten that this characteristic of producing *effects* is related to the trace's *passing* or *passage*' (117). The sensory trace, however, is also necessarily pre-scripted by Ripper lore. Shepherd draws upon the murder of Mary Jane Kelly, supposedly Jack the Ripper's last victim, in a description which recalls the well-known photograph of her body, as if exhuming the visual archive. For Lonsdale, the victims' bodies are a mere signature, 'stage props for the performance of [the Ripper's] discursive role' (2002: 103). As Maggie Humm suggests: 'By its very absence, and by its anonymity, such a photographic memory becomes a generic picture. […] The imagery in the absent photograph encourages us to connect

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[244] Mark Willis in 'Jack the Ripper, Sherlock Holmes and the narrative of detection' argues that the Whitechapel murders contributed in the making of Holmes's personality as well as 'in creating the classic forms and ideologies of English detective fiction' (2007: 157).

[245] According to Poore, the 'villain effect' relies on a double presence and strange absence: '[t]he villain is both too-much there, and not-enough' (2017: 29). Poore also connects this 'threat' to earlier stories about Spring Heeled Jack, for instance (9). Mark Jones draws a typology of the various representations of the Ripper resulting from this collapse of fact and fiction (2017: 161-179). Max Duperray himself can be said to 'indulge' in the rewriting of this narrative to the extent that he published a study of the case focusing on the way literature built the myth of the Ripper and 'Ripperature'. Cf. *La Lame et la plume: une littérature de Jack l'Eventreur*, Max Duperray, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012. Cf also Max Duperray, '"Jack the Ripper" as Neo-Victorian Gothic Fiction: Twentieth-Century and Contemporary Sallies into a Late Victorian Case and Myth' in *Neo-Victorian Gothic: Horror, Violence and Degeneration in the Re-imagined Nineteenth Century*, eds. Christian Gutleben and Marie-Luise Kohlke, Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2012; Judith R. Walkowitz, 'Jack the Ripper' in *City of Dreadful Delight*, London: Virago, 1992, 191-228.

[246] Romero Ruiz also notes the 'blank' left by the Ripper in her article (2016: 57).

our private histories to those horrific public events' (2003: 650-651).[247] Kelly's murder is the most violent murder attributed to the Ripper, it took about six hours to reconstitute her body, an aspect which Clive Bloom describes using an image of emptiness too:

> Here the body is emptied, turned into a shell into which the murderer could plunge knife and hands. The emptying assumes the form of an attempt to 'go beyond' the boundaries of flesh in a 'new' and horrific way. This violence demolishes and liquefies the body, which flows away and takes with it its ego boundaries. The body is opened, penetrated, dissected, made totally possessable. (2007: 104)

The maimed mass of Lizzie's body resembles Kelly's photograph and represents what Benjamin Poore and Kelly Jones call the neo-Victorian 'profound concern with the material body and its somewhat grotesque actuality' (2008/2009: 8):

> The room is like a slaughterhouse, and it's only much later that he will realize exactly what it is that's strewn about his feet in such raw glutinous slabs. For the moment, all he can see is what's on the bed. *What*, not *who*, for identity – personality – self – have been brutally obliterated. It's Lizzie, but he only knows that because he knows the little rose tattoo still visible on her right shoulder. She's turned towards him but does not face him – cannot face him because someone has taken a knife to her skin and hewn her pretty features away, leaving only a sodden coagulating mass of flesh. (*TAA*: 191-192)

Lizzie is reduced to a 'what', an object of analysis, no longer a subject as is emphasised by both the gradation 'identify – personality – self' and the narrator's own correction 'does not face him – cannot face him'.

With the Ripper case, Shepherd revisits Victorian trauma and the anguish and fascination aroused by murders. As Clive Bloom has it

> 'Scanning the grim, grainy, obscure picture taken of Mary Kelly's eviscerated body as if in search of clues we become dabblers in the oracular and the occult. In her photo the Ripper steps out of Victorian history to become the epitome of Victorian history, its embodiment and spokesman. (2007: 97)

Often read as a way of forcing open the hidden collusion with prostitution, the Ripper case dissolved the boundaries of the bodies, of inside and outside, of upper class and lower class, since suspicion was cast on well-known gentlemen. By connecting her own Ripper to such deviant figures as Tulkinghorn, Cremorne and Glyde, Shepherd claims that the real person responsible for the Ripper episode is not so much a single (malevolent) individual (nor, as some claimed at the time, the poor and depraved women bringing such a fate upon themselves) but the upper middle class. In fact, there was a social as well as a medical underside to the murderer's graphic parody of anatomy. This must be read in the context of degeneration discourse, but also of the much earlier 1832 Anatomy Act which marked a shift from a system in which dissection was authorised on criminals (considered as a further punishment) to a

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[247] Humm is commenting on the way in which Virginia Woolf rejected the 'pornography of violence' when refusing to print war photographs and 'to aestheticize war' in *Three Guineas*. Sontag also reflects on the power of the photograph in relation to Plato's allegory of the cave and capitalism. Intesringly for us, she defines photographs as images that 'usurp reality because first of all a photograph is not only an image […], an interpretation of the real; it is also a *trace*, something directly stencilled off the real, like a *footprint* or a *death mask*' (1978: 154).

system relying on (more or less given) consent (Marshall 2003: 81). The Act in fact displaced or transferred dissection to the world of the poor and powerless thus, as Tim Marshall puts it, '[r]eplacing the murderer on the anatomist's slab, the pauper, having lived on the public purse, repaid his debt to society' (*ibid.*). What's more, 'the research value of the body was a dividend, in utilitarian terms, paid to the greatest happiness of the greatest number' (*ibid.*). Lizzie and other avatars of the Ripper's victims seem therefore to endorse this role.

In part, Charles reacts as a professional, as if the body were a mere detection device: 'The policeman in Charles computes – almost automatically – that this must have been some time after the killer hacked her throat through with such ferocity that he can see her spinal bones' (*TAA*: 192). The terms 'computes' and 'automatically' call up a comparison with forensics. But there is also a significant slippage between the professional and the private, when Charles's gaze gradually comes into focus with a dizzy sense of familiarity: [248]

> When the door creaks open, his eyes are momentarily blinded by the contrast between the bright sunshine outdoors and the darkness inside. He knows this room well – he's slept here more than once himself – but as his senses adjust, something about it strikes a strange note. It's a small squalid space, no more than ten or twelve feet square, sparsely furnished and damp for nine months of the year. But behind the bed, on the left-hand wall, the unplastered brick seems to him oddly dark – in fact not just dark but thick with something that – he sees now is dripping its slow way on to the floor and congealing in pools on the bare boards.
> Blood. (191)

The chiaroscuro creates suspense, contributing to the slow rhythm of the passage marked, as it were, by stages ('blinded', 'but as his senses adjust', 'he sees now'). 'Blood' is syntactically and typographically set apart from the rest of the text, like a stain that spreads onto the narrative.

There is a monstrous inversion of sexual desire as Charles is struck 'suddenly by a memory – an image of himself on that bed – of Lizzie in not so very different a pose – and he staggers, reaches for the wall to stop himself sinking and spews acid vomit all over the floor' (192). Lizzie's personality surfaces with insistence, however disfigured she may be: 'He cannot take his mind's eye from that room – cannot change the hacked flesh on the bed for the Lizzie he knew – the Lizzie he cared about as much as he's ever cared about anyone' (196). Here

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[248] The passage might also recall *A Tale of Two Cities* in which is described a wine shop. The customers and the street appear to all be stained by red wine (Lady Macbeth-like), the end of the passage offers a striking comparison with blood which prefigures the blood shed for the revolution:
> Those who had been greedy with the staves of the cask, had acquired a tigerish smear about the mouth; and one tall joker so besmirched, his head more out of a long squalid bag of a nightcap than in it, scrawled upon a wall with his finger dipped in muddy wine-lees—BLOOD.
> The time was to come, when that wine too would be spilled on the street-stones, and when the stain of it would be red upon many there. (Dickens 1991b: 34)

pathos diffuses what La Capra calls the 'pornography of violence', through the personal connection between Charles and Lizzie.

The melodramatic shift that brings the murder home for Charles, is meant to make the reader reflect upon such staple features closer to home too. Tim Marshall shows the resonance of debates and changes around anatomy in the period going from the 1980s to the early twenty-first century, and in medicine today (2003: 86-88). For Romero Ruiz: '[t]he view of prostitutes as "deviant" and "other" still predominates in neo-Victorian representations of the past, but also pervades twenty-first century societies, where women likewise remain prey to abjection and dispossession' (2017: 62). She further discusses the equation between the two periods:[249]

> Such news items became very popular in the second half of the nineteenth century when cases of rape and sexual violence especially attracted a wide audience among the middle-class, as well as the increasingly literate working-class. [….]
> The prevalent attraction to sex crimes also marks contemporary society, with present-day audiences craving coverage of ever new offences while simultaneously condemning them. […] The morbidity and excitement that these cases provoke are features which contemporary societies share with their nineteenth-century antecedents, suggesting the existence of trans-historical, perhaps even universal patterns of deplorable behaviour and response. (49-50)

Besides, it is not only violence which is at stake but the representation of violence. As Romero Ruiz puts it, there is a voyeuristic aspect to such scenes: '[a]ll the disgusting aspects that surround her [the victim's] death, such as blood, bruises, and mutilation, are presented to the viewer, who becomes a witness to the discovery and subsequent police investigation' (59). Indeed, visibility is problematic, at least as much as, if not more so, than the Victorian taste for the theatrical macabre. By exposing the reader to a plundered body which Charles can hardly look at, Shepherd also questions our current fascination with such bodies, and the titillating dissemination of graphic images in films and TV series:

> The Victorians refused to expose the sexual body (ostensibly), and so its exposure in neo-Victorian texts rewrites the Victorians in illuminating and exciting ways. When this revelation is combined, or underpinned, with the exposure of the dead body (which the twentieth and twenty-first centuries so often hide and sanitise in Western contexts) the thrill of the forbidden transfers from one to the other: death becomes the new sex. (Martin 2015: 204)

The cut-up body is a shocking but familiar figure, so often has the Ripper case been rewritten. Indeed, Shepherd draws upon the Victorian archive and myriad of transpositions here, but also upon our own visual culture and the palimpsest of texts and films, whether they actually revisit

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[249] This, of course, strikes a chord nowadays, when sex crime seems to be ubiquitous what with TV crime fiction and True Crime documentaries, novels, the press, leading to the recent (though anachronistic for our corpus) disclosure of the Weinstein affair and #METOO phenomenon on social media. The neo-Victorian project is fascinated with Victorian sexuality, a fascination which may explain why the genre emerges in the late sixties, early seventies, a period of sexual liberation which is also marked by a 'reluctant fascination', to use Cora Kaplan's words (2007: 85-86), with anything Victorian, a phenomenon epitomised by the publication of Steven Marcus's ground-breaking study, *The Other Victorians* (1964). The context was thus ripe for such novels as Rhys's or Fowles's to appear.

the Ripper case or not. TV series repeatedly portray serial killers and female victims —with scopophilic emphasis on bodies on floors and slabs, thinly justified by forensic study. The anachronistic reference (the Ripper acted in the 1880s while the novel takes place in the 1850s) posits the novel as a 'prequel'.

Of course, it might be argued that Shepherd simply follows the cinematic/literary fad, such as Thomas Harris's series revolving around the serial killer Dr Hannibal Lecter (the last book in the series, *Hannibal Rising* (2006), relates Lecter's youth and was adapted in 2007). In this reading, Shepherd simply clings to readers' preconceptions, regardless of their historical validity (Kohlke 2014: 25). As Kohlke reminds us, the neo-Victorian genre is not merely aimed at well-read scholars and readers but is also meant to be a marketable product (30-32). Hence, Shepherd's self-conscious play with clichés seems to paradoxically sex up and revamp the Victorians through an excess of violence. By writing a prequel for the Ripper murders, Shepherd taps into our fascination for serial killing. As Mark Seltzer has it: 'Serial killing has its place in a public culture in which addictive violence has become not merely a collective spectacle but one of the crucial sites where private desire and public space cross' (1997: 3). The detective novel seems the ideal locus for such yielding as the violence and chaos brought by the serial killer are supposed to be controlled and contained by the structure of the novel and its representative, the detective.

On the other hand, Charles's recollection of past sexual intercourse when he sees the dead Lizzie's 'legs gap[ing] open in a gruesome parody of birth, or sex' (*TAA*: 192) also highlights the penetration of the gaze, the murderer's, but also the investigator's and the reader's, whether the public relishing tabloids in real life or the reader of Shepherd's novel, as Romero Ruiz puts it:

> not only the manner in which the corpse […] becomes dehumanized by the juridical gaze, but how this objectification takes place through the processes of the gendered look that eroticizes that power relation. The penetrative gaze violates the body, just as the rapist had, but his violation is a 'public event'. (2016: 60)

Shepherd may be questioning voyeuristic descriptions of mutilated female bodies. As Benjamin Poore and Kelly Jones wonder: 'Is our culture's continued hunger for the details of such crimes – the victims' nakedness and dishevelment, the removal of their organs and genitalia, the evidence of their diets from the contents of their stomachs – any more disinterested or free of suspicion?' (2008/2009: 9) The problem underpinned here is that of the gaze, a problem which is central to detective fiction in which the gaze is always gendered, as Joy Palmer notes:

> the detective novel is defined by its masculinist drive to know, with the detective functioning as the very epitome of ratiocinative logic. […] [T]he process of detection and tracing the criminal body is

simultaneously a process of 'feminization', whereby that body is rendered an object of the scientific gaze. (2001: 56)

It also points out our fascination with the representation of violated bodies, a fascination and obsession which is at the bottom of 'our wound culture' in which 'the very notion of sociality is bound to the excitations of the torn and opened bodies, the torn and exposed individuals, as public spectacle' (Seltzer 1997: 4). For Mark Seltzer, trauma and the wound allow the emergence of a pathological public sphere, which is defined by a 'breakdown between inner and outer and "subject" and "world"' (11). Seltzer even notices a 'binding of trauma to representation or scene':

> the trauma is something like the compulsive return to the scene of the crime – not merely in that the trauma is the product of its repetition, but also in that it is the product, not an event itself, but of how the subject repeats or represents it to himself. (*ibid.*)

Neo-Victorian representations of violence thus seem to highlight the way in which the media become addictive. Thus it may be said that *Tom-All-Alone's* and *Drood* offer a specimen of two major trends in Ripperature, the former belonging to the neo-historical novel, with a rational and social solution while the latter, with its occultist and ubiquitous vampiric figure, partakes of the fantasy Ripper, heightening the mythical status of the murderer. Shepherd's novel recasts the Ripper as 'Robert Mann', an ironic name for this 'mash up' intertwining the figure of Jack the Ripper and Mr Hyde, an ape-like 'parody of a child' (*TAA*: 305). Mann is a pathological symptom of deviance in Victorian Britain, and by extension in our own contemporary society, though we may wonder, of course, if neo-Victorian representations of bodily violence make our world more comprehensible to itself (Poore 2017: 25). As Mark Jones argues, '[t]he pervasive presence of Jack the Ripper continues to remind us of the violence that lurks behind modern society, and, in his many formulations, the various and diffuse structure of power that maintain it' (2017: 173).

Ultimately, Lizzie's body leads back to other bodies, as when Charles is waiting at the police station and sees a police notice that reads thus:

<div align="center">

£100 reward – **Wanted** for **Murder**
Dead Body Found
Missing Child
(*TAA*: 196; emphasis in the text)

</div>

For Charles, there is no connection between this notice and Lizzie's murder but the reader may be struck by the notice standing out in the middle of the novel, and is bound to pick up the clue. Thus, the 'Dead body Found' might be construed as Lizzie's while 'Missing Child' seems to refer to the Chadwick case as well as at Charles's lost sister. The hint is confirmed at the end of the chapter as the narrator addresses the reader:

> Coincidence? It hadn't even occurred to him that Lizzie's death might be anything but a coincidence. But what if he's wrong? (198)

The figure of the missing child is therefore entwined with that of the body cut up by Mann's version of the Ripper.[250] As we shall see now, the child too is eaten by the streets, powerless when facing adult sexual appetite.

III.   FROM THE BLACKING FACTORY TO BLACK OUT

'Neo-Victorian childhoods are not to be enjoyed but to be endured.'

(Kohlke 2011: 121)

As the title of Hugh Cunningham's book, *The Invention of Childhood* (2006), shows, childhood is not a given and its conception has evolved in various and, at times, contradictory ways for centuries. Cunningham points out that whereas the worshipped child was a Victorian invention, this was also the age of dire exploitation of the poor:

> Think of Victorian children and certain phrases and images are likely to flash through our minds: little children who should be seen and not heard, under-tens slaving away in cotton factories and coal mines, Oliver Twist asking for more or the velveteen Little Lord Fauntleroy. We see children on the one hand protected by a formidable array of nannies and governesses, and on the other hand exploited to an extent previously unknown. It is, in short, a world of contrasts. (2006: 140)

Neo-Victorian fiction is keen to explore this contradiction as Kohlke and Gutleben observe:

> [T]he emergence of the child as a nineteenth-century social and literary reality is inevitably taken up in neo-Victorian fiction; it could even be said to be emphasised (or capitalised upon) via the near systematic presentation of children as molested, abused, or murdered, casting neo-Victorian fiction as their 'rescuer' and righter of historical wrongs against them. (2011: 24)

Dickens fought against child abuse, with his emblematic orphans like Oliver Twist; he was deeply marked by his own memories of Warren's blacking factory, where he had to work as a boy when his father was jailed for debt, a traumatic episode which he disclosed very late in his life to his friend Forster.[251] It is no wonder that neo-Dickensian fiction should focus on child abuse, unveiling the dark side of the Victorian age that Dickens did not unveil, such as child prostitution, which may resonate with today's 'sex trafficking, paedophilia, conflict rape, and

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[250] Having Robert Mann arrested before any of the historical murders, Shepherd seems to suggest that the persistence of the Ripper may be put an end to. Yet, at the same time, this novel is followed by two other Maddox adventures suggesting that other monsters and/or villains lurk in the dark.

[251] The collective work *Dickens and the Imagined Child* (2015) 'explores the function of the child and childhood within Dickens's imagination as well as the cultural resonance of his engagement with this topic' (6).

sex tourism on a global scale, all of which radically undermine and commodify the family's biological and cultural reproductive functions', as Gutleben and Kohlke put it (21).

A.   On the tracks of the lost child

The figure of the lost child recalls the fact that, in the nineteenth-century, it was not rare for children to be stolen in the street or to find announcements for lost children in the columns of Victorian newspapers.[252] This issue was in great part related to child-farming, an activity which remained uncontrolled (or inefficiently so) for most of the nineteenth century: many babies and infants died because they were not cared for or were murdered while others were sold. This had quite an impact on Victorian society and its representation of babies as Tamara S. Wagner notes: 'The exposure and execution of notorious baby-farmers—convicted of murdering hundreds of infants in their care—were widely publicized and sensationally reported at the time; such large-scale and systematic infanticide generated the most gruesome images of the Victorian baby' (2017: 137).

Child-stealing also looms large in *Tom-All-Alone's*, whose title recalls a lonely child, the little sweeper from *Bleak House*, Jo. While the Chadwick case leads Charles to Hester, Charles is haunted by the disappearance of his own little sister, Elizabeth, who is first mentioned in chapter 5 as Charles and uncle Maddox discuss old cases. With the anaphoric use of the deictic 'this', the present tense and the lexical field of angst ('evading', 'fear'), Elizabeth's disappearance is construed as a repressed secret and a traumatic event:

> He has not said her name since he left his father's house for the last time six years before. […] Hearing it now, so unexpectedly, he feels the iron close again about his heart. This is what he had been evading, all that time; this is what he feared, coming here again. (*TAA*: 71)

The utterance of his sister's name triggers a shock, the anaphoric 'this' and the iron clamping his heart suggest that Charles is chained to the past. Furthermore, the scene enacts the return of the repressed:

> Charles shakes his head, but the memory, so long stifled, will be suppressed no more. And as if in revenge for such long denial, the pictures in his head are more vivid now than the day it happened – the sounds more intense. […] It was *his* fault. It had always been his fault. Not just what happened that day, but what it led to. It was all his doing. And he had never had the courage to confess it. (72)

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[252] For an example of one such case Cf. Margaret Makepeace, 'Victorian children - lost and found' , *Untold Lives Blog*, https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/2014/12/victorian-children-lost-and-found.html

The violence and unequivocal return of the repressed are evoked by the absolute negation ('no more') as well as by the opposition between 'stifled' and 'suppressed no more' or 'revenge' and Freudian 'denial'. Ultimately, Charles's responsibility in the event is stressed by the italics ('*his* fault') an expression which is repeated to convey the pang of guilt. Elizabeth's disappearance is thus construed as a traumatic event, triggering what Dominick LaCapra defines as 'traumatic experience', the ongoing belated effects or symptoms of that breaking point (2001: 41). Charles's painful feeling of guilt cannot be alleviated because of the unspeakability of his trauma ('he had never had the courage to confess it'): 'He sees the soft curves of his sister's face, and the tiny golden curls escaping – as they always did- from under the edge of her straw bonnet' (*TAA:* 72). The description of the little girl is sensual ('soft curve') and marked by elusiveness ('curls escaping'). Arias observes of the presence of Victorians today that '[t]he appearance of the absent other signifies because it constitutes us as survivors' (2014: 121). Trauma thus stems from the fact that Charles did survive the streets where his sister was lost. It is in this relation to temporality and trauma that we can most clearly see the ways in which neo-Victorian fiction makes use of the past to offer a reflection on the present: [253]

> In the ethical encounter with the absent Victorian dead, we become their survivors and they provide meaning to contemporary culture. [...] In speaking for the other, we take an active role in memorialising the dead, and become their inheritors, giving meaning to their traces in contemporary culture. (121-122).

The child that disappeared is present in a spectral way through the series of girls that look like her, while investigating is Charles's way of helping other victims. The repression of Charles's trauma is underlined by the narratorial voice:

> There is one fact about Lizzie Miller that you need to know, and will not discover from anything these two are about to say: she is the same age, almost to the day, as the sister he has lost. That other Elizabeth who had the same golden hair, and the same bright green eyes; that other Elizabeth he has never, in all this time, ceased to search for. (*TAA*: 154)

The anaphoric 'that other Elizabeth' points out both the resemblance and the distinction between the two girls, stressing Charles's sister's distinctness by means of the deictic 'that'. The narrator thus invites the reader on the trail of the lost sister, in a 'side quest' which strengthens the links between the parallel narratives of the novel and investigations. The golden locks of the female characters, from Hester and her mother to Clara and Lizzie, all dimly echo the lost Elizabeth, a clue which is hinted at by Uncle Maddox when he asks Charles: 'Is that why you took the Chadwick case? Because you hope to find not only a lost grand-child, but a lost sister too?' (72). Like Hester, the reader is invited to draw connections in retrospect. If the

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[253] Arias also links her argument to Kohlke and Gutleben and their concept of 'to speak-for-the-other' (2010: 20).

golden locks are a metonymy for Elizabeth, Hester simply remains a misrepresented and/or missing body. When reading the novel for the second time, we understand that though Hester's body is almost never represented, it is latent in Charles's narrative through various avatars such as the dead babies in the opening scene of the novel, the missing child of the case, or Charles's own sister, Elizabeth (which, to a certain extent, links her to Lizzie's over-visible body).

At the same time, Elizabeth cannot really be considered as belonging to the cast of characters. She hovers on the margins of the text, one of these neo-Victorian child figures that Marie-Luise Kohlke defines as 'significant to the plot development but [who] never become fully-fledged characters, not being accorded distinct narrative identities, voices or agency, suggesting that they serve a more catalytic or emblematic function' (2011: 131).[254] Indeed, Elizabeth's disappearance and the Chadwick case may be read as instances of a 'double wound' as defined by Cathy Caruth:

> it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (2016: 4)

Significantly, each reference to Elizabeth is triggered by events in the present investigation: the utterance of her name by uncle Maddox, the encounter with Lizzie and, eventually, the pursuit of Hester in the streets of London. In the latter passage, the pursuit turns into a contact zone between Hester's trauma and Charles's:

> The few people they pass in the streets seem hardly alive, and as they raise faces to him that seem now as blank and eyeless as in a long-repressed nightmare, the kaleidoscope pieces of the case start to shift and mingle with his own haunted memories – his mother gagged and bound, her eyes streaming and imploring, her bare feet kicking against the two women struggling to carry her away. The stifled incoherent screams that even now are inextricable from the cool impersonal voice of the doctor ensuring his father that he had made the right decision […]. He never knew how much his father had believed of this; all he did know for sure was that he never saw his mother again. And that all of it – from the beginning – was his fault, and there was nothing he could ever do that that [*sic.*] would put it right. (*TAA*: 340)

Shepherd revises the sensational trope of wrongful confinement, furthering the intertextual play with *The Woman in White*.[255] The point of contact between the two stories is materialised by the dash which operates as a bridge between the bleak vision of the present and Charles's nightmarish memory, the sight of another enforced confinement, the mother's. Shepherd seems to purposefully use terms referring to the experience of trauma ('long-repressed nightmares', 'haunted memories'), while the image of the kaleidoscope denotes fragmentation and distortion. This vividly recalls Caruth's idea that 'one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another'

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[254] Kohlke identifies as one such character Sophie Rackham in *The Crimson Petal and the White* in which the infant is silent and mirrors Sugar's childhood, eventually redeeming the latter (131-134).

[255] Rosario Arias identifies a similar revision in John Hardwood's novel *The Asylum* (2013) (2015: 29).

and thus 'trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound' (2016: 8).

B.   Troping unspeakable child abuse

Child abduction also entails the threat of sexual abuse. As Benjamin Poore observes, the deviant interest in children and paedophilia is a topos of neo-Victorian fiction, becoming '*the shorthand marker of neo-Victorian villainy*' (2017: 36; original emphasis). Paedophilia and incest were first diagnosed as a social and legal issue in the late nineteenth century, following the publication in 1885 of W.T. Stead's series of articles entitled 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' which dealt with child prostitution. These articles aimed not only at exposing this issue but at rallying support for the ratification of 'a Criminal Law Amendment bill raising the age of consent from 13 to 16'. As Ronald Pearsall notes, the series of articles was not uniformly acclaimed but was thought of as obscene and fraudulent. Indeed, Stead went as far as 'buying' a virgin girl for the purposes of his demonstration (1969: 303). Another key historical event was Freud's discovery concerning a major part of his wealthy female patients: most of them had been abused as children by members of their family, leading him to develop his 'Seduction Theory' in *Aetiology of Hysteria* (1886). But this theory was rejected by his peers who were 'unwilling to support this revolutionary theory of mental illness which appeared to strike at the heart of the myth of the sanctity of family life' (Coldrey 1996: 372). As Barry M. Coldrey remarks, this led Freud to develop a more 'acceptable' thinking in the form of the Oedipal complex, which presented attraction between parents and children as a universal fantasy and blurred specific facts, so that:

> When Freud rejected the seduction theory in 1899, the public knowledge that child abuse by parents in their homes and by extension close relatives and professional care staff, was not uncommon, was lost again and only 're-discovered' in 1962 when 'The Battered Child Syndrome' was published in the *Journal of American Association*. (373)[256]

Since the 1960s, on the contrary, sexual abuse has come to the fore:

> paedophiles have been presented as major social threats. This publicity has helped survivors to understand, and have a language for, what has happened to them, and has encouraged them to come forward in greater numbers. Yet the coverage of child sexual abuse is still shaped, and distorted, by many of the assumptions and practices developed in earlier decades. (Bingham & Settle 2015: n.p.)

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[256] This syndrome was discovered by Pediatric radiologists who traced the origin of children injuries back to acts of violence on the part of their parents. The essay mentioned here by Coldrey was written by Dr Kempe. Stephen J. Pfhol article provides an extensive history of the movements that led to this 'discovery' and of the context in which it emerged (1977).

The emergence of neo-Victorian fiction thus roughly corresponds with increasing sociological awareness of this issue.

The secret, and crime, hidden at the very bottom of Shepherd's neo-Dickensian detective novel is indeed sexual abuse (and more particularly incest), as Charles and the reader discover once the detective opens the locked doors of the Solitary House, in a denouement which underlines 'important intersections here between neo-Victorian trauma narratives and the Gothic in terms of the horrors it depicts and exploits' (Kohlke 2011: 135). The infantile yet sexual way young women of the novel are treated simply prolongs child abduction. Charles discovers Miss Flint 'cowering away from him on the filthy floor, her night-dress yellow with old urine' (*TAA*: 325) while Woodcourt finds traces of the practice of 'a barbaric form of brain surgery' (328). Shepherd plays on the topos of the sordid, mistreating medical institution; and on the scandals of the 'houses of horrors' which recurrently hit the headlines.[257] The description of Clara, Hester's best friend, subverts the Madonna image, as she is presented as a 'golden-haired girl […] as beautiful as a Botticelli Madonna, but what stops Charles's breath and freezes his heart is the short rose taffeta dress she wears, and the sight – all innocent as it seems – of an old rag-doll lying on a chair' (325-326). Clara's body is in fact constrained to match Cremorne's deviant sexual desires:

> *Sir Julius bloody Cremorne is only interested in little girls or those of us as can pass ourselves off [sic.] as such. Same type every time. Always blondes. And the younger the better. Ribbons, ringlets, pink dress, the whole friggin'[sic.] farrago. He even gave me a bloody doll to hold while he was on top of me...* (326, in italics in the text)

This is a flashback of a discussion Charles had with a girl prostitute (a double of Lizzie) in the course of his investigation. Clara Adams is thus construed as the original to the 'copies' Cremorne creates with the prostitutes, pointing out his fetishism. In a manner reminiscent of Fowles's narrator in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (especially chapter 35), the omniscient narrator denounces the lack of legislation to prevent child prostitution:

> […] that there were literally thousands of young girls being prostituted in London every night, as often as not by their own families, and in their own homes. And most of what Sir Julius Cremorne was doing was – in the strict sense of the term – perfectly legal, since the age of consent in 1850 was twelve, not sixteen. (292)

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[257] Interestingly, this topos has known many a revival in parallel of changes or raising issues concerning mental health as was the case in the 60s with Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoos's Nest* (1962) and its famous adaptation in 1975. Mistreating mental institutions are a favourite in horror (*Gothika* (2003); *Kingdom Hospital* (2004)) and thriller movies as in the late psychological horror movie *Unsane* (2018).

Incidentally, sixteen became the age of consent in the UK with the Sexual Offence Act of 2003 but it is still an issue in the country today.[258] In its report of 2013, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) observes that '[t]he number of recorded sexual offences against children decreased by 13 per cent between 2005/06 and 2008/09, but since then has risen back up to more than 17,000' with 'a total of 21,493 sexual offences against children recorded by police in the UK in 2011/12' (Harker et al. 2013: 20).

Clara Adams and Hester also offer a representation of 'grooming,' that is to say 'when someone builds an emotional connection with a child to gain their trust for the purposes of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or trafficking' (NSPCC 'grooming': n.p.), as both are depicted in the novel as trusting and relying on the bond with their aggressor (Cremorne in the case of the former, her unnamed 'Guardian' in the case of the latter):

> 'Clara is by no means the only beautiful girl here. Nor even the most beloved.'
> I, very much abashed, hardly knew where to look, and when at last I had the courage to glance up, I saw him looking at me with that careful fatherly look of his that I had come to know so well. I took his hand and kissed it, and held it in mine.
> In a little while he smiled, and drew one of my pale flaxen curls through his hand.
> 'So let us hear no more, Hester, about your looks.' (*TAA*: 46)

Hester's Guardian builds a relation of trust by putting an end to Hester's self-deprecation. In this pastiche of Esther Summerson's narratorial style, Shepherd also distils clues for the reader as to the true identity of the Guardian and the nature of his interest in the young woman.

Thus, the novel combines child abuse and incest and therefore reworks the family secret plot. As a final twist, Hester's Guardian turns out to be her father and no other than Tulkinghorn, a revelation which is foreshadowed, here, by the 'careful fatherly look':

> Seems that this young Hester was *his* [Tulkinghorn's] daughter. Secreted away, all these years, where no one would think to look. Seems he styled himself her 'Guardian', and never revealed, even to Jarvis, that he was the father. Not even when he got her with child – that same child that even now lies mouldering away in the foul earth of Tom-All-Alone's. Seems Hester's mother was his own niece[.] (348)

This comes as a *coup de théâtre* because of the unreliable narrative Hester provides the reader with. Shepherd creates a 'documentary novel' in which Hester is cast as reporting victim, but we only discover this at the end. Hester's narrative is in fact a form of 'scriptotherapy' as defined by Henke *i.e.* 'the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment' (1998: xii). To be more accurate, it is a form of *failed* scriptotherapy in the sense that Hester cannot say, or even consciously know, what is actually happening, while writing remains a means of coping for her. Indeed, Hester masks the trauma

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of incestuous sexual abuse with a fancy world which is that of *Bleak House*. Shepherd quotes *verbatim*: 'I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever. I always knew that' (*TAA*: 33). The same device is used for the encounter with Mr Jarvis (read Jarndyce):

> I put my arms about his neck and kissed him, and he gently patted me on the head and handed me a handkerchief scented with lavender. 'There! There!' he said. 'There is no cause for tears. This is your home now, and you will find no one here but those who wish you well'At least, that is my memory of what he said. 'wish', I am sure it was. (41)

Like her Victorian original, Hester is overwhelmed by this first conversation and the sudden turn in her fate. But Shepherd inserts slight variations here: no handkerchief is involved, Esther kisses Jarndyce's hand, the latter first distances himself from the young woman and merely lists his reasons for making Esther his housekeeper (*BH*: 107). Shepherd's revision hints at another kind of scene, especially on a second reading of the novel. The passage hints at a possible dosing/doping of the character and, most importantly, is ominous regarding the events Hester is hiding from the reader.

Thus, Shepherd expands on and subverts Esther Summerson's lack of confidence as a narrator to create a systematic syllepsis.[259] For Riffaterre:

> Syllepsis is a trope consisting in the simultaneous presence of two meanings for one word. I modify this definition thus: the meaning required by the context represses the one incompatible with that context. Repression, however, entails a compensation: it generates a syntagm or even a text in which the repressed meaning reappears in various guises (1987: 375).

This is most evident when Clara Adams attempts to confide in her friend her incestuous relation with Cremorne (her uncle) which Hester utterly misunderstands:

> 'Oh Hester!' she cried. 'I have *a secret to tell you*! I have been wanting to tell it for so long – so very long! Please forgive me!'
> And what secret might that be, my beautiful darling girl?
> 'What is it Clara? Shall I try and *guess*?'
> 'Oh you could never guess! How could you guess *such a thing*?' […]
> '*It's about* –'she began in a whisper. 'It's *about* – ' […]
> 'Let me guess, my own pretty one,' I said soothingly. 'Could it, perhaps, be about a certain gentleman?'[…]
> I felt her *stiffen in my arms*, and burst into sobs. 'Oh Hester, he <u>says – he</u> says he loves me dearly. That *no one will ever treasure me as he does*, or love me more.'
> 'And did you think you could conceal such a thing from you own Hester?' said I with a smile. 'Why, I have known all about it for many weeks now! […] I knew you would tell me in your own good time.'
> 'But now I *have* – *you* don't think it wrong of me, do you?' […]
> I shook my head. 'Of course not,' I replied encouragingly. 'How could he not love an angel as beautiful as you, and *being an angel*, how could he not return that love?'
> 'But that's not *quite the worst* of it!' cried Clara, holding me even tighter and hiding her face once more upon my breasts.
> 'Why you never mean to *say that you* –' I began with a smile.

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[259] For an analysis of Esther Summerson's narratological power, especially as a feminine, self-depreciating narrator, cf. Alison A. Case, *Plotting Women: Gender and Narration in The Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Novel*, Charlottesville: University press of Virginia, 1999: 125-146.

'Yes, yes!' she sobbed. 'Even *that – even* that! And now you know *it all*. You know *everything*!' (*TAA*: 110-111; my emphasis)

The passage is a pastiche of Ada's confidence to Esther of her love for Richard. Shepherd subverts Ada's hesitation and Esther's teasing. Importantly, Shepherd takes out references to names, leaving blanks in the text which, for instance, originally reads: '"It's about –" said Ada in a whisper. "It's about – my cousin Richard!"' (*BH*: 193). Dashes in *Tom-All-Alone's* thus operate as a screen, textualising the unspeakability of the secret of incest. Clara attempts to confide her incestuous relation with her uncle, Lord Cremorne, and their sexual activity ('Even that – even that!'). We can see here how dashes are used to enshrine the syllepsis. Indeed, finishing Clara's sentences in her stead, Hester prevents the incest from irrupting in her narrative and replaces it instead by a heteronormative scenario: Clara's love for the new inmate, Rick. This act of miscommunication enables Shepherd to keep control over the detective plot.

This raises the question of the function of child abuse and incest in the novel, as a narrative device and/or as a social concern. On the one hand, the novel uses incest to subvert the kind of order epitomised by Tulkinghorn, the representative of the law. Shepherd gives a literal and subversive meaning to Dickens's metaphoric way of associating Tulkinghorn with secrets: 'He wears his usual expressionless mask—if it be a mask—and carries family secrets in every limb of his body and every crease of his dress' (*BH*: 175). In *Tom-All-Alone's*, the secret is that of *his* family, and that of the connection between the two plots, since Hester's mother is no other than Chadwick's estranged daughter, 'Honoria Chadwick' (*TAA*: 348) – a name which recalls Lady Dedlock's but also Edwin Chadwick who advocated policies in the 1830s-40s which contributed to the exploitation of children in the workplace and thereby was Dickens's ideological opponent (Cunningham 2007: 150). Lord Cremorne, whose name ironically recalls Victorian gardens, embodies Victorian oppression and his status suggests that contrary to common beliefs of the time, sexual abuse was not 'limited' to the poor.[260] Shepherd thus takes quite literally Annette Kuhn's definition of the family secret: 'Family secrets are the other side of the family's public face, of the stories families tell themselves, and the world, about themselves' (2002: 2).[261]

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[260] Ronald Pearsall has a section on child prostitution and the cult of the child in which he both uncovers the ambivalent relation Victorians had to children and their sexuality emerging from its praise as an age of innocence (1969: 352-362).

[261] Kuhn's book explores the family secret and its relation to collective memory work. In *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*, Anne Hailman and Mark Llewellyn too devote a chapter to inherited secrets (2010: 33-65).

While such incestuous relations uncover the failures of legislation in the Victorian era, they also hold up a mirror to the present. For Gutleben and Kohlke, debunking the family myth is an ethical gesture which points forwards as well as backwards in time:

> If the family is so often considered as a mirror of society, it is because the former is both a metonym (being part of it) and a metaphor (being an image of it) of the latter. This metonymic and metaphoric relation between the family and society, the country, the nation, or even the Empire, is nowhere more evident than in the field of trauma where familial disorders are systematically presented as the products and symptoms of their social contexts. […] Accordingly, in so far as the historical traumas of the family as nation (and of the nation as family) linger on in today's society, it becomes the ethical task of contemporary literature to provide a narrative witness to these traumas. The intergenerational nature of the traumas confronted in neo-Victorian works explains their dual perspective, addressing the past in order to deal with the present, being simultaneously retrospective and prospective. (2011: 33)

Similarly, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn stress that neo-Victorian fictions expose the link between past and present 'cultures of scandal':

> The subsequent 'uncovering' of the Victorian body mimics the scandalous disclosures of Victorian society (lurid divorce cases, male brothels frequented by prominent public figures, organized female child abuse and under-age girl trafficking). This culture of scandal interconnects with the culture of exhibition: the Victorian preoccupation with collection, display, and scopophilic objectification of 'other' bodies and races is reflected in today's Big Brother culture of (sexual) exhibitionism. (2010: 107)

Hence Shepherd's novel implicitly underlines the ongoing issues of 'sexually transmitted diseases, violent internet and child porn, and paedophilia' which 'could be read as an uncanny doubling and intensification of prevalent Victorian social problems, indicating a return of the repressed rather than "progress"' rather than 'reasserting our own supposedly enlightened stance towards sexuality and social progress' (Kohlke 2008b: 56). Once more, the motif is powerful here because it addresses Victorian trauma but also engages with the fears of our own age. Unearthing of past secrets also unveils present ones, and Elizabeth's resonates with contemporary cases of child-abduction such as the case of Madeleine 'Maddie' McCann who was abducted in 2007. As Kholke puts it:

> An uncanny temporal mirroring effect […] for it is, of course, these same sorts of crimes that present-day society experiences as particularly traumatic, leaving as they do a long-term haunting legacy for the cultural imagination – as witnessed in the UK, for instance, by the Moors Murders (1961-63), the James Bulger case (1993), the Victoria Climbié case (2000), the Soham Murders (2002), the murder of Amanda 'Millie' Dowler (2002) and, more recently, the Baby P. killing (2008). The Gothic trope of neo-Victorian child abuse is as much a spectre of the present as of the Victorian past. (2011: 140)[262]

Just like Maddie, Elizabeth was not under the surveillance of her parents, and brother, when abducted. Abducted children, like Maddie, are in a way turned into a Victorian Other so that we may come to term with the persistence of such criminal actions toward/against children and engage with contemporary shock. Presenting us with a character haunted by the abduction of a figure of the past, Shepherd hints at the ongoing historical trauma related to child trafficking.

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[262] Likewise, the body snatchers of Victorian times had a persisting presence in medical practices in the UK in 1980s-1990s with the case of children' stolen hearts (Marshall 2003: 74-75).

Besides, the fictional closure of Charles's investigation may lead the reader to believe that detection in the future may solve the baffling cases of today. Elizabeth, a figure of Charles's past, comes to represent a part of the 'Other Victorians', but also, by proxy, us. Shepherd is thus using the double plot and double temporality of the detective mode to ==highlight== persisting traumas.

But it might also be argued that incest in the novel functions above all as a narrative device, rather than as an ethical quest. Mark Llewellyn notes that many neo-Victorian women writers, like A.S. Byatt and Sarah Waters, deal with incest as a textual game (2010: 158). Likewise, Shepherd's novel uses incest as a metaphor for cross-fertilising intertextuality, a sort of 'palincest', with *Bleak House* and *The Woman in White*, as we have seen in Chapter 2. Tulkinghorn is the epitome of the criminal as defined by Eisenzweig, hiding in plain sight in the main narrative, never identified by Hester (1986: 66). There is a problematic scopophilia in the way such issues come to light here. For 'the almost unspeakable spoken here', as Susan K. Martin puts it, remains part of the titillation of detection: 'Paedophilia and incest provide some of the frisson and scandal' (2015: 220). As Ellen Serlen Uffen argues, the closure provided by detection precludes the kind of angst that full indignation requires since these remain fictions; readers are thus 'assured that no matter how gruesome the crimes committed, no matter how deranged the criminal who commits the crimes, the disruptive situation depicted lasts only as long as it takes to finish the book' (1992: 195). In Shepherd's novel, Hester's narrative is cut short by aposiopesis:

> [Carley said] that what she was telling me was the truth, and yet, how can I believe it? How can I accept what she says, without questioning everything I thought I knew – everyone I thought I trusted – every word that has been said to me in this house since the day I came here? I have gone over it in my mind, a hundred times, and still I cannot – *cannot* – believe my Guardian could have done such a thing.
> And even if it were true – even if he did – even supposing – (*TAA*: 268)

The anaphoric questions, the modal 'cannot' and the broken rhythm mark Hester's turmoil. The passage ends on a dash which, along with Hester's flight to Tom-All-Alone's in search of her baby's grave, denies her the possibility to come to terms with her trauma. To some extent, Shepherd seems to revive or recycle the question of gender and narration that Alison A. Case sees at the centre of documentary novels such as *Dracula* or *The Woman in White*. Indeed, in all three novels the 'thematization of the struggle to shape and deploy narrative reveals both the close association of narrative authority with other forms of social power and agency' (1999: 147). In Collins's and Stoker's novels, '[t]he interplay of narrative voices ultimately enlists the reader's own sense-making efforts in the task of subordinating, or reading against, the female voice, and reinforcing masculine efforts at narrative "mastery"' (186). Shepherd avoids this trap

but Hester's position as narrator remains problematic as the novel promptly accepts and embraces the conservative characteristics of the detective novel. It seems that beside her role as opaque screen, unwilling/knowing witness and victim, Hester has no further value, which casts a shadow on the possible feminist agenda of the writer. As the novel ends, Bucket uncovers the remaining secrets (Anne Catherick's past and the fact that Cremorne's wife knew it all) and, most importantly, Hester's true identity, thereby solving Charles's case in his stead. This enhances the artificiality of the plot and thereby undermines the subversive potential of the novel.

C.   Denouncing child prostitution as the result of neglect

Whereas Shepherd's representation of sexual abuse seems artificial, two of the postcolonial novels of this corpus truly show the disruptive potential of such tropes. Looking at debates and discourses on child abuse, it may be argued that *Jack Maggs* is also rooted in these issues with Ma Britten who practices abortion and steals children. Infant farming seems to recall Dickens's famous phrase 'brought up by hand', as Maggs is often beaten by her just as Pip was by his sister, repurposing it to trope the crushing power exercised by Britain over its colonies. An abandoned child who talks too much, Jack Maggs is raised by Ma Britten, suggesting that Britain is responsible for turning Maggs into a criminal. For M. Pilar Baine Alarcos, maternity 'is mostly presented from a gothic perspective, always framed by the colonial and the postcolonial relationship between Britain and Australia' (2010: 30). Carey also seems to respond to preventive penology, which in the nineteenth century saw in battered children possible future criminals. Both Maggs's and Mercy's success in Australia show that criminality is not to be equated with poverty and/or having been abused as a child.

Strikingly, *Jack Maggs* rarely elicits further comments on Mercy Larkin's past as a child prostitute, a fact often acknowledged but soon discarded to focus on the convict. This is the case for instance of John Thieme who acknowledges the presence of her 'parallel history' but reduces it to Mercy's relation to Percy Buckle and the intertextual relation with Richardson's *Pamela* (2001: 117).[263] Mercy's past is revealed to the reader in section 19 of the novel; this is

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[263] For Thieme, Mercy's identification with Pamela is a way to provide her expectations as well as trope social mobility, inheritance and class-status (118).

a section which strikes one as odd within the structure of the novel as its retrospective narrative is only aimed at the reader and does not, it seems, cast light on the current plot. This contrasts with, for instance, Maggs's recollections which have an addressee within the diegesis: Henry Phipps. The reader is therefore the privileged addressee of Mercy's narrative, which reveals how she was forced by her mother to prostitute herself as an attempt to save them from grinding poverty following the death of her father. Because it is less embroiled in the dynamic of detection, Carey is thus unveiling a repressed aspect of Victorian sexuality more forcefully than Shepherd: the prostitution of working-class children. As Ronald Pearsall observes, this 'trade in virgins' answered to a specific demand from Victorians males (1969: 290). Mercy's backstory as a child prostitute seems therefore to strengthen one of the central issues of the novel: the denunciation of the motherland, England.

Carey revises the figure of the protective parent by depicting the gradual fall of Marjorie Larkin, Mercy's mother. Such revision partakes of the postcolonial project as Thieme puts it: 'For the postcolonial writer, the very nature of the family is under question and membership is at best a matter of affiliation' (2001: 121). Once Mercy and her mother turn into plum duff sellers, the latter seems to try and protect her daughter through silent resignation, enduring abject poverty: 'Now, in widowhood, her quietness seemed darker, deeper, more alarming, and when she cut her hair so queerly short, she had nothing but silence to answer the questions of her weeping daughter' (*JM:* 68). Silence here expresses her shame at having had to sell her hair for money, a sadly common practice at the time. The mother also keeps silent as she leaves Mercy alone in the tenement which turns into a prison: 'During the day Mercy was imprisoned in their little tenement'; 'Then she locked Mercy in the room with chains and a great black padlock' (*ibid*.). The ambivalence of the protection provided by the isolated room is signalled by the image of the prison foreshadowing the crime to come. Soon this isolation is broken as Marjorie silently dresses up her daughter and takes her to Haymarket.

The description of the events oscillates between the innocent viewpoint of the narrated Mercy and that of the knowing narrator, the latter using bird imagery to signify and foreshadow the act of prostitution in which Mercy is unwillingly and unknowingly involved: 'They walked down into Fleet Street, the mother in severe black, the daughter like a bird of paradise. They paraded, their heads high, amongst quality along the Strand, and from thence on into Haymarket' (69). The contrast between mother and daughter focuses the attention on the latter while turning the former into a pimp: 'a tall gentleman with a red set of whiskers doffed his hat to her mama, and talked to her with such solemn familiarity that Mercy supposed him to be an

old employer of her father's' (*ibid.*). The young Mercy misreads the scenario playing in front of her for a courteous greeting, her innocence cannot construe the horrible truth, that her virginity is being sold to that gentleman. Revealingly, Marjorie only breaks from her silence to force her daughter to go with the man.

Carey attempts to frame Mercy's sexual abuse within a traumatic narrative. The omniscient narrator uses the street, wind and soot as metaphors for Mercy's rape: 'That was when the storm started, not in the still, humid street that was their destination, but in Mercy's mind; years later, the confusion of her memory still blew dust and soot across that street and curled up into the evening sky' (69). The traumatic event is blurred in Mercy's memory by the sensations of the street, yet the rest of the narrative refuses oblivion and the reader is forced to follow Mercy and the gentleman down the streets. Carey again highlights Mercy's innocence and her inability to understand what is happening: 'She had set off in innocent expectation of being bought an ice, or tea' (*ibid.*). Mercy's rape is inescapable as:

> He helped her into the doorway, and she took the door knob, expecting it to open. When she found it locked, she did not have time to turn before she felt the stranger's arms around her waist, and then he was squashed against her back with all his great weight, holding her clamped, talking to her all the while as he lifted her dress. (69-70)

Carey's depiction seems to appropriate Fragonard's famous 1777 painting, *Le Verrou* (*The Lock*), with the verbs 'squashed', 'clamped' and, most obviously, the locked door.[264] Carey twists the painting as the scene is devoid of flirtation, the comfortable, rich and colourful bourgeois interior is replaced by a shabby 'humid' street. The upside down vase, strewn rose petals and the apple of 'temptation' featuring in the painting are replaced by prosaic images: 'What happened then happened, and like a broken plate was soon all pieces, most of them missing in the dark – the pain, the onions cooking in the butter, the smell of pipe tobacco on his whiskers, the wetness on her legs' (70). The rape is signified figuratively by the broken plate but also by the almost synaesthetic experience conflating touch ('pain', 'whiskers', 'wetness') and smell ('onions cooking in the butter', 'smell of pipe tobacco'), the latter being predominant and thereby emphasising the threat and violation of the aggressor. As Marie-Luise Kohlke notes, 'by privileging disillusionment and horror over childish capacity for wonder, representations of childhood nonetheless participate in the genre's typical contestation and complication of nineteenth-century facile idealisations of the family' (2011: 134). Indeed, following this aggression, Mercy tries to hide away ('She sought out the dark corners of the

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[264] Fragonard's painting was also used for the cover of the Canongate edition of *The Crimson Petal and the White* which presents the reader with a close up of the right hand-side of the painting, focusing on table, the upside-down chair and part of the bed leaving the lovers out.

lane, places where the wetness she could feel would not show up in the light' (*JM*: 70)) but, as if red-marked, she is constantly brought to the light by the passers-by who construe her as a prostitute: 'A tall severe woman, eyes glaring beneath her hat, handed her a small square of white paper: REPENT FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND' (*ibid*.; original emphasis). This example is striking as it reveals Peter Carey's denunciation of Victorian philanthropy which blamed rather than helped destitute women.[265] It may also be that Carey denounces a practice which was still common place in the 1990s (and to some extent today) of laying the blame for sexual aggression on the victim rather than the aggressor.

At the end of the section, once Mercy has been raped, Marjorie is unable to cope with her action and channels all her anger at Percy Buckle who tries to rescue her and Mercy: 'But the mother did not understand his offer, imagined he was making the offer she had already solicited, and now the poor wretch turned […] to the owner of the coffee stall, and asked him to chase the fish seller away' (71). Marjorie attempts to lay the responsibility elsewhere and Carey turns her into an almost inhuman creature who only calms down when Buckle 'opened his fishy little purse and put a silver florin in her hand' (*ibid*.). Carey thus subverts the nineteenth-century rescue narrative: while Buckle appears as the Larkins' saviour or protector, offering his help notwithstanding 'the jeering crowd' (*ibid*.), his action is far from purely altruistic. Indeed, his offering some money to Marjorie as well as his future relation with Mercy point otherwise: Buckle is not rescuing Mercy from prostitution but turns her into his mistress. Adults in this narrative utterly fail to provide a safe environment for the child who slips from one dreadful scenario of abuse to another. Indeed, Alarcos identifies Marjorie and Mary Oates as 'irresponsible mothers' and comes to the conclusion that:

> The negative description of these mothers [Mary Oates, Marjorie but also Ma Britten, Sophina and Lizzie], who are all British, can also be read as a piece of criticism against Britain's refusal or inability to look after its own people. In other words, these mothers can be said to represent the fatal relationship between the mother land and its children, no matter if they live in Britain itself or in the colonies. (2010: 38)

This suggests another possible reading of the end of the novel and of Mercy's name. Irina Bauder-Begerow identifies Mercy's status as a 'fallen woman' as an empowering motif in the novel as she 'actively courts Maggs and eventually becomes his wife, thereby bringing about a change for the better in the convict's life and finally managing her own social rise down under' so that she turns into an 'anti-"Angel in the House" wife' (2009: 121). Mercy also redeems her past and starts afresh in this country and, like Sugar in *The Crimson Petal and the White*, is able 'to break with her genealogical inheritance, so as not to turn into her hardened,

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[265] This passage might be construed as possible echo of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Uberville.*

merciless mother' (2011: 133). Thieme offers a complementary reading of her name which he associates with a child character in Patrick White's *Voss*: 'an orphan who becomes the symbol of a new direction for Australian cultural identity. […] [So], the novel [*Jack Maggs*] emphasizes the female as well the male line of Anglo-Celtic Australian ancestry' (2001: 117). As Diane F. Sadoff puts it: 'Carey sutures the female version of nineteenth-century underclass British life to that of the transported criminal, and he represents Maggs and Mercy as rightfully earning their married life and happy ending' (2010: 178). Therefore, by moving to Australia, Mercy escapes the Pamela-scenario Buckle had set for her (Maack 2004: 241) and takes her destiny in her own hands.

D.   'And he was thrilled no more': the invasion of the colonial body

Whereas Carey criticises child abuse at 'home' to better displace the centre of his narrative towards the margins, Australia, Flanagan makes use of rape in Tasmania to signify the extinction narrative. In *Wanting,* Richard Flanagan revises two main colonial/postcolonial discourses: the savage child in need of an education and rape as metaphor of territorial invasion (Brantlinger 2009: 63-72). As Flanagan sexualises Mathinna's body, the novel seems to partake of such neo-Victorian texts Kohlke defines thus: 'the neo-Victorian novel exoticises and seeks to penetrate the tantalising hidden recesses of the nineteenth century by staging a retrospective imperialism' (2008b :62). Flanagan deploys a whole range of motifs belonging to both Western and Australian traditions, ranging from the myth of Leda and the swan to corroboree, an Aboriginal dance ritual ('corroboree' *OED*). The latter is liberating from Mathinna's viewpoint but also eroticising from Franklin's stance. In this narrative, Flanagan 'iconicise[s] the figure of Mathinna for whom very little archival information exists' (Johnson 2015: 7).

The rape of Mathinna has no known historical basis, thereby it truly works as a symbolic element, contributing to Flanagan's aim at writing back to the Empire. Mathinna seems to be doomed to the same tragic fate as the Greek figure Leda, since the first time the child is introduced to the reader she is presented as 'Leda', the name chosen for her by Protector Robinson (up to that point, she had only been referred to as 'the girl' and 'she'): 'Her real name was the one he had christened her with, Leda, but for some reason everyone else called her by her native name. He was annoyed to find himself now doing the same. "Yes, Mathinna?"' (*W:*

10). At the same time, Flanagan subverts the colonial viewpoint ('her real name' vs. 'her native name') since we can see here a resistance to the colonial naming which is endorsed by the 'Protector' figure. This play on name is further complicated by historical facts: historically, Mathinna is not even the native name of the Aboriginal girl, this name was given to her by the Franklins upon adoption, her actual name was Mary (Felton 2006: n.p., Russell 2012: 345).[266] It may thus be assumed that Flanagan's renaming of the Aboriginal girl emphasises the way Mathinna is now considered 'as a postcolonial symbol of dispossession' (Russell 2012: 342).

Flanagan presents his readers with a caricature of colonial practices by problematising George Robinson's habit of renaming the black people under his authority with names from Shakespeare's plays or Ancient myths. Indeed, it gives the impression that Mathinna is cast as a character in the tragic play orchestrated by the God-like Robinson.[267] Flanagan's mocking of Robinson's habit of naming the natives is most evident when the Protector presents Mathinna to Lady Jane, a passage which is striking for its ominous undertones:

> 'And what eggs, Mr Robinson,' Lady Jane smiled, 'do you expect her to bring forth for posterity?'
> 'Eggs?' asked the Protector, slightly confused. 'I meant the child, not a chook.'
> 'You must protect her from swans,' said Lady Jane, making small mischief.
> 'I'm sorry, Ma'am,' said the Protector, whose knowledge of classical mythology extended little beyond the names contained in his battered copy of *Carswell's Classical Names and Almanac*.
> 'Leda,' said Lady Jane.
> 'Yes,' smiled the Protector. 'A beauty in the ancient world.'
> 'The ancients believe that, in order to rape the beautiful Leda, Zeus transformed into a swan.'
> 'Marvellous tale, of course,' laughed the Protector, utterly appalled by the story, by Lady Jane's frank language, an, above all, by the exposure of his own ignorance. […] 'Such stories! Mind you, […] we prefer to call it Mathinna.' (*W*: 51-52)

The eggs refer to the birth of Castor and Pollux, a possible omen of Franklin's later expedition: the Dioscuri are known to save sailors from shipwreck, it might therefore point to an uncanny irony on Flanagan's part. It is also the occasion of a pun as Robinson doesn't understand the reference as figurative ('I meant the child, not a chook'). Thus, Flanagan opposes Robinson to Lady Jane since the latter is shown to be far more learned and therefore destabilises the balance of power: the colonial male is proved inferior to the female figure. In the novel, Lady Jane is pictured as a manipulative, ambitious and superior female, contained and constrained by her status as a wife.[268] Lady Jane's injunction ('You must protect her from swans') as well as the

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[266] Penny Russell also notes that 'Mathinna' is the name that will stick to the historical figure even though she changed her name after leaving the orphanage (353-354).

[267] It is also a way for Flanagan to poke fun at the way colonialists like Robinson would call out ancient myths as a means to distance and justify the violence of their deeds: 'And though all knew well that he was talking about people and events not even a decade old, it was, the Protector realised, already another era, and he was both its Norseman, its final destroyer, and its Bede, its only chronicler' (57).

[268] For Amanda Johnson, Flanagan's biofictional account of Lady Jane is too Manichean, portraying her as a villainess which contrasts with other fictionalisations of this Victorian female explorer (2015: 10).

mention of rape obviously foreshadow the rape of Mathinna that will occur a few chapters later. The ominous quality of Lady Jane's encounter with Mathinna is what seems to attract the former to the little girl: 'the mix of spirit and tragedy in one so young intrigued Lady Jane' (52). To a certain extent, Flanagan subverts Hamlet's monologue to Yorick's skull when Towterer/King Romeo's skull is presented to Lady Jane as she decides to adopt the little girl: 'As a further course of roast black cygnets was served, Lady Jane announced she wished to adopt the native child, as though it were the final item to be ordered off a long menu' (69). Mathinna is here turned into an edible item (note the pronoun 'it'). Tammy Ho Lai-Ming picks up the association of Mathinna with Australian fauna (the black swans, the recurring reference to her white kangaroo skin garb as well as her possum) which she understands as 'a variation of Freud's meal – in this case we see the tribal member (Mathinna) dressed up not to consume the totem but to be consumed as a totemic representation of her people' (Ho Lai Ming 2012a: 76-77). In both this scene and the rape scene, then, Mathinna is turned into a metonym for her country and for the colonial invasion.

This invasion is performed by a Zeus-like figure, Sir John, who is dressed up as a black swan at the ball after which he rapes Mathinna, making the reference to the myth of Leda complete. The rape of Mathinna is somewhat foregrounded, as in an echo, by Lady Jane's submission to her husband's libido. The representation of Franklin's body is quite revealing in this regard as it is compared to that of a bear: 'Lady Jane had long sensed there was within him some mechanism or spirit, some passion, waiting to be set in motion. In private she at first called him Bear, because that was how she imagined him: a great bear in hibernation' (*W*: 53). The images of machine and hibernation construe Franklin as a sexual predator *en puissance*, whose sexual appetite is still dormant. If at first his sexuality is repressed, Lady Jane soon evokes his 'bestiality' which she contrasts with her self-control:

> It disgusted her, his sound and flesh and face, and reminded her of all that she had devoted her life not simply to forgetting but to burning out of her being with experiences of a higher nature. Occasionally he forgot himself and was captive to his basest urges: at such times she believed herself exemplary in her tolerance of the revolting bestiality that is man. She endured his clumsy dull repetitions, the finger exercises of one tone-deaf to flesh. She came to see men as weaker – depraved, certainly – and in servitude to an uncontrollable animality, which was only the more mocking in her case because it never resulted in a child. (55)

The passage plays on the dichotomy mind/flesh which underlines Lady Jane's refusal of sexuality. Strikingly, Lady Jane portrays herself as a superior mind and a passive body ('endured', 'dull repetitions', 'one tone-deaf') subdued to the active, uncontrollable body of her husband. Lady Jane disguises her passivity as 'exemplary tolerance' whereas Sir John is described as a slave to his sexual impulses ('he forgot himself', 'captive', 'in servitude to an

uncontrollable animality'). Moreover, she generalises her judgment to all men ('revolting bestiality that is man', 'She came to see men as weaker') while opposing this fruitless act with the fruitful activities of the mind and sciences. This hints at the way the historical Lady Jane 'endlessly represses and reinvents the details of her travelling missions to ensure a socially acceptable "safe feminine passage" in British society' (Johnson 2015: 7). Contrary to Amanda Johnson who sees Flanagan's characterisation of Lady Jane as limited (6), I contend that the reader needs to look for a 'cryptical' characterisation which encodes the text: this passage presents Lady Jane 'the exemplary scientific explorer' as a façade concealing a deeper truth, that of sexual repression. Sexuality is traumatic for Lady Jane ('she had devoted her life not simply to forgetting but to burning out of her being with experience of a higher nature') and sexual encounters with her husband are akin to rape. Therefore, Lady Jane's sexual experiences construe her as a double of Mathinna, foregrounding the latter's rape. Indeed, Lady Jane's passive body is echoed in the rape scene as Mathinna lies unconscious on a bed.

The motif of appetite and hibernation returns throughout the first part of Mathinna's stay with the Franklins in Hobart town as Sir John is gradually aroused by her.[269] The narrative insists on sir John's growing fascination with Mathinna: 'But secretly he began to crave such touch and warmth' (*W*: 134) and the duality his proximity with the child triggers: 'Secretly he delighted in what had become his life: those few stolen moments with the child, as opposed to the interminable fantasy world of colonial government, which he increasingly lived in only as a shell' (137). The chiasmic construction points to Franklin's awakening to an innocent, natural life opposed to that of civilisation. But soon innocence is replaced by paedophilic desire which is associated with both touch and food:

> He *thrilled* at seeing the dark down of her expose forearm, and as he leant in with his candle, the better to see her, he would wish to kiss her eyes, her lips. But terrified of his engorged heart, he would abruptly straighten and leave.
> He was enchanted and, like all those enchanted, he wanted proximity to his enchantress, and he manoeuvred and manipulated to make sure he got it. If he thought there was a wrongness, even a perversity, in his growing infatuation, he gave no sign of it. (140; my italics)

The verb 'thrill' is a key word, inscribing the sexual appetite for Mathinna leading to the rape scene. The passage turns into a pastiche of fairy tale, first casting Sir John as the bad wolf ('the better to see her') but then casting Mathinna as a magical being and thus transforming the paedophilic desire into a curse of a kind in the passage when he is focaliser. The shift in

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[269] Tammy Ho Lai-Ming notes that the novel plays on an association between rape and cannibalism, be it in the scene when Lady Jane eats the cygnets or when Sir John feeds Mathinna with buttered toasts (2012a: 77-78). This offers a contrast with the way in which Dan Simmons makes use of cannibalism in *Drood* to denote the invasion of London by Drood and his associates but also to problematise the relationship between Dickens and Collins as we have seen in chapter 2.

focalisation also operates a shift in the generic codes called upon as Flanagan turns to the detective mode. Indeed, manipulation and deceit ('gave no sign of it') are characteristic features of the criminal. Sir John seems conscious of his manipulations which reach their climax in his decision to dress up as a swan for the ball. As Tammy Ho Lai-Ming argues, 'dressing up as a swan, Sir John is arrogantly and knowingly imitating the myth and the ancient god's transformation' (2012a: 78).

We have seen how rape is prefigured through the association of Mathinna with Leda, with exploration as well as with Sir John's sexual appetites for his wife and growing infatuation with the little girl. Flanagan uses yet another motif to represent rape: dance which partakes of the Australian literary tradition (Jewell 2011: 14). Flanagan in fact opposes and conflates two different kinds of dances: Aboriginal corroboree and social dance. In the novel, the Franklins see Mathinna for the first time as she performs a corroboree which is yet again a means of focusing their attention, as well as the reader's, onto the girl's body (Johnson 2015: 14). [270] As Melinda Jewell argues, dance is a dual activity: a bodily performance as well as a visual phenomenon, bringing up the issue of the gaze: 'The relationship between seeing and being seen, and therefore between power and disempowerment, is now understood to be fluid and complex' (2011: 15-16). The dance thus conflates two concepts highlighted by Marie-Louise Pratt: that of the colonial gaze and that of the contact zone, which results in cultural ambiguity (1992: 4; Lanone inprint: 3). The interchangeability and fluidity between empowerment and disempowerment are at the centre of Flanagan's depiction of the ball taking place on the deck of the *Erebus* and celebrating the departure of the Antarctic expedition.

The ball epitomises the zoomorphism at the centre of the novel as it turns into a kind of fable, mixing imaginary and real animals of which Mathinna is the envied princess:

> She did not know this [that she was envied], but she could feel it in the way all these men and women in their strange animal costumes – platypuses, griffins, centaurs, unicorns and wombats – leant down and tried to catch her attention, […] but she just smiled; smiling was what worked, smiling kept Sir John and Ma'am happy, smiling kept something between you and them. (*W*: 147)

However, from being an object of envy, Mathinna soon turns into an abject object of contempt for the onlookers. While she waits for the quadrille, people surrounding her discuss the state of the colony so that gradually, Mathinna is invaded, penetrated by such discourse:

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[270] Historical records insist on the fact that 'the Franklins were captivated by the young girl's beauty, intellect and spirit.' (Johnson & McFurlane 2015: 284). According to Penny Russell, the actual encounter is almost always romanticised: 'The idea that Lady Franklin saw Mathinna, and wanted her, while she was in Robinson's charge remains an unassailable presence in almost every dramatic account of Mathinna's story' (2012: 352).

> She understood nothing of what was being said above her, except that while her blackness marked her out as exceptional, it also made her in some way not just bad, but wrong. And that made no sense, because she could remember all the steps. (148)

> Though Mathinna understood almost nothing of it, she let it fall in, all the smell and sights and voices, all the music, while trying to remember how to count beats and how many bars it was before you span back around. (*ibid.*)

In this scene, the thin protection that had set around Mathinna while living with the Franklins crumbles away as she is undeniably marked out as Other. The tragedy stems here from Mathinna's awareness of her paradoxical situation which makes her similar to a tamed bear.[271] Flanagan seems to echo the codes of late-twentieth-century representation of the corroboree in Australian literature. As Jewell shows, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers from that period reclaimed black corroboree from colonial appropriation which had turned it into a white spectacle (2011: 61). What the onlookers cannot grasp is Mathinna's discovery of her inner self: 'Mathinna was filling with the music, sensing at first the intense desire for communion carried in all the bodies on the dance floor, then only aware of her own body – its memory, its desire – filling to overflowing' (*W*: 149). Adding new steps to the European dance, Mathinna appropriates it and becomes a spectacle – 'then, to growing applause, went on to mesmerise everyone with variations on her footwork and body turns' (150) – which leads her to experience an awakening: 'It was as though she was approaching some truth of herself, and people were applauding her for it. […] Her movements were no longer steps or skips or slides but something magical that had taken hold of her body' (*ibid.*). Yet, on the other hand, the epiphany is not complete, the power of the colonial gaze disempowers her, her dance is cut short by the negative reactions that once more invade her, and she faints:

> She tried to keep dancing but someone was yelling and something was wrong, so terribly wrong; […] she was no longer leaping and flying, but falling and falling, and hands were coming to her, white hands, hands in awful gloves like rags used to dress the dying – and was she dying? (151)

The sense of confusion is conveyed by the past continuous which insists on the incomplete aspect of the action.[272]

Variations in quadrille were not exceptional in the nineteenth century, as Jewell notes, this followed from the lapse of time between the moment when the dance was learned in Britain or America and the moment it was taught in Australia (2011: 106-108). Flanagan somewhat subverts this historical phenomenon as he conflates the social dance, a predominantly white

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[271] Strikingly, when she arrives on the *Erebus*, a guest dressed as a bear exclaims: 'The sweetest savage!' (147).

[272] For Catherine Lanone, this scene is a 'tribute to Aboriginal culture' as 'Mathinna maintains her own cultural practices alive in her body' and thereby 're-semiotises the ship as a ceremonial gathering in which Dreaming stories may be introduced'. For Lanone, Mathinna thus attempts 'to maintain a balance between her English lifestyle and her own culture' (Lanone inprint: 23-24).

activity, with the corroboree, an Aboriginal rite, which reflects Mathinna's awakening to her hybridity:

> Her cheeks were fired, her body liberated, her mind had never felt so free of what she now knew was a strange fog that had lain upon it for so long as she could remember. And yet she did not sense the strange rupture she was making in the evening. Her eyes had never felt so sharp, so able to see and know everything – but she failed to notice the gasps, the shaking of heads, the angry and dark looks as in and on she span and now jumped, as she felt not the wax with which the oak deck had been prepared but the earth of Van Diemen's Land, as with two deft movements she kicked off her shoes and became a kangaroo absolutely still, except for its head, click-clicking around, then a stamp, two leaps, and she was flying. (*W*: 150-1)

We may note the importance of bodily sensations which are soon undermined by the discrepancy between Mathinna's awakening, leading her back to her roots and echoing Robinson's communion with Towterer's tribe at the beginning of the novel, and the disapproval of the onlookers for whom the princess has turned into a monster.[273] The discrepancy is typographically marked by the dash and the shift of focus from her body to the spectators' bodily reactions ('gasps,' 'shaking of heads,' 'angry and dark looks'). For Lena Steveker, the passage presents Mathinna as 'the exotic Other of colonial discourse, thus uncritically perpetuating the racist ideology of Victorian imperialism' (2014: 75).

As Mathinna is taken away from the dance floor into the captain's cabin she wonders 'was it Rowra?' (*W*: 152), which links the scene back to her first appearance in the novel: 'And, suddenly realising why she was there, Mathinna said, "Rowra," using the native word for the Devil, then quickly, like it was a spear rushing at her, "*Rowra,*" and then "ROWRA!"' (10; emphasis in the text). The typographical changes mimic Mathinna's growing anxiety. In the captain's cabin, as Mathinna lies half-unconscious she does not recognise Sir John but 'opened her eyes and was immediately terrified. Above her loomed the face of a giant black swan. […] "*Rowra,*" Mathinna whispered' (152). Having the word in italics is yet another way for Flanagan to echo his previous use of the term and the phallic image of the spear in the quotation above. It seems clear that Flanagan inscribed clues to Mathinna's rape in the very first scene

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[273] It is not the only passage in the novel in which Mathinna's sensation come to the fore. Strikingly, the first appearance of Mathinna in the novel depicts her running and focuses on the sensuous link between her feet and the earth:

> A small girl ran fit to burst through wallaby grass almost as high as her. How she loved the sensation of the soft threads of fine grass feathering the beads of water into her calves, and the feel of the earth beneath her bare feet, wet and mushy in winter, dry and dusty in summer. She was seven years old, the earth was still new and extraordinary in its delights, the earth still ran up through her bare feet to her head into the sun, and it was as possible to be exhilarated by running as it was to be terrified by the reason she had to run and not stop running. (9)

There is an obvious link with the quote above as the deck of the Erebus turns into the earth of her native place. Above all, this passage presents us with a child as innocent as the grass she runs through, capable of wonder yet elusive to the onlookers that we are: she is not named, she bolts through the landscape for an unknown reason. Revealingly, a similar event was chosen by certain editions of the novel, such as the Atlantic books, the cover of which features the blurry photograph of a dark-skinned girl running in a red dress.

when the reader encounters her in the narrative so as to trope and even *plot* rape. The rape itself

is only signified by the mythical association referring to Leda and the blank in the text:

> He was all things and all things were him. Looking down on Mathinna, her diminutive body, her exposed
> black ankles, her dirty little feet, the suggestive valley of her red dress between her thin legs, sir John felt
> thrilled.
> And after, was thrilled no more. (152)

Franklin's identification with godly figures is blatant here with the reference to Revelations and

the denomination of God as the Alpha and Omega (Revelations, 1:8; 21:6 and 22:13).

Mathinna's body is eroticised in a paedophilic way as shown by the emphasis on the smallness

of her body.[274] Flanagan revises the common trope of the land as a female body ('the suggestive

valley of her red dress'), turning the young girl into an unexplored territory.[275] The repetition

of the adjective 'thrilled' signifies the passage from intense sexual excitement to post-coital

state. Flanagan's depiction of Franklin as a paedophile seems to write back to a particular

passage in Bonwick's account of Mathinna in which the latter is constructed as a sort of

temptress:

> The age of womanhood found her attractive in mind and body. But for whom were these charms to bud?
> On whom could she bestow her affections, and preserve her virtue? Could she, who indulged in the
> drawing-room of the Governor, who had become used to the luxuries of civilization, be content to be the
> bride of ever so handsome a Black? Dare she hope to be the mate of an Englishman whose tastes and
> education were equal to her own. Her moral danger had been foreseen by her kind friends, and many a
> lecture had she received upon duty. (1870: 258)

Picturing Mathinna as a child creates a discrepancy with Bonwick's text while, of course,

enhancing the shock of the rape.

In both this case and Carey's representation of Mercy's rape, the reader is cast as an

eyewitness who shares, in the former, the viewpoint of the abuser and, in the latter, that of the

victim. To a certain extent, they expand the 'reality effect' that was used in the early reports of

child abuse in *The Child Guardian*, a Victorian journal run by members of the NSPCC. The

aim of such reports was to create 'bonds of sympathy between the child and the reading

audience by urging the reader to imagine being 'under the look of hard face, and the sound of

a domineering voice' (Flegel 2007: 91).[276] Flanagan's text is problematic in the Australian

context, especially that of the extinction narrative since the novel insists on the little girl's

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[274] This contrasts with an earlier passage in which Sir John justifies or undermines the perversity of his desire for
Mathinna as such: 'in her physical naturalness she seemed complete, as if she were already fully formed, an adult
at ten, as though there were little more life allowed her' (142).
[275] Earlier on, when discussing Lady Jane's education of Mathinna, Sir John acknowledges that: 'a child is a *tabula
rasa*, not an old moth-eaten book' (127), an image also identifying Mathinna with exploration.
[276] The quotation Flegel uses does not describe sexual abuse but the physical and moral abuse a child received
from her parents.

doom, shattering her innocence (which, at times, is close to a Rousseauist vision of the 'noble savage') and refusing salvation. As Amanda Johnson puts it:

> But while this slant on John Franklin, connecting to current public anxieties around paedophilia, makes for an easy plot curve, it is one made without the dramatic benefits/expansiveness that might have come via strategic name-changing. Thus this depiction of the actual governor reads as grand guignol, a plot device driving the spun-out tale of Mathinna's victimhood. (2015: 9)

The representation of sexual abuse in neo-Victorian fiction enables writers to echo concerns that still resonate today, in a society marked by sexual violence. While Carey points to a possible reparation, a possible 'after' for Mercy, such is not the case for Mathinna and Hester. Ultimately, all these texts frame sexual abuse in childhood trauma. This issue has a particular resonance in the UK today where social services partake in the 'institution making of abuse' ('la fabrique institutionnelle de la maltraitance') (Thomas & Chassagnieux). In 'Les enfants perdus d'Angleterre', a documentary broadcast on French TV channel France 5 in April 2019, Stéphanie Thomas and Pierre Chassagnieux presented the consequences of the Children Act of 1989 which enables social services in the UK to remove children from their parents' custody on suspicion of abuse. However, it appears that the social services have proved overzealous, breaking apart families without any substantial grounds. The documentary tracks the winding and torturous path of children removed from their family and who lack stability since they are first sent to foster families (where they stay for a short amount of time) before eventually being sent to children's homes. In the latter, children suffer more damage (abuse, rape, school dropout, child traffic and sexploitation) due to lack of staff and means. The problem mainly comes from the privatisation of children's homes (mainly set in the north of England) which makes a business out of these issues.[277] The issue is so alarming that the UN asked the UK for an explanation in 2016. The documentary aims at showing how the state and its institutions claim to protect those children. In the following section, we shall turn to the way childhood trauma is treated in some of the neo-Dickensian texts under study.

E.   Blacking the code

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[277] The fact that these private children homes are established in the North has an uncanny resonance with the Foundling Hospital which, in the nineteenth century, also sent children from London and the South to work in the North where they could be exploited, especially when working in the mines (Berry 2019 talk)

In 1824, twelve-year-old Charles Dickens saw his father, John Dickens, sent to prison for debts. Young Charles was therefore taken away from school and forced to work in Warren's Blacking factory, 30 Hungerford Stairs, Strand. The experience proved extremely traumatic, especially since Dickens was made to work in the window of the business and thus was working under the gaze of passers-by. Dickens himself wrote about the haunting quality of this experience in an autobiographical fragment:

> My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, 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 (qtd. in Forster 1948a: 23).[278]

Peter Brook reads *Great Expectations* in terms of trauma and Freud's theory on repetition, compulsion and the repressed (1984: 113-142). As we have had occasion to see, neo-Dickensian fictions tend to feature or at least refer to this traumatic episode. Ankhi Mukherjee offers to 'read literary rewriting as an *intentional* act of wish fulfilment that emphasizes the retroactivity of meaning', especially in *Jack Maggs*, instead of considering such productions as 'symptoms' (2005: 122). In the following pages, we shall see that postcolonial writers give Dickens's childhood trauma a particular turn: the blackness of the factory which epitomises Dickens's childhood trauma is transferred/ displaced onto the skin of young Maggs, Mathinna and Matilda, thereby 'blackening' trauma.

It is not surprising that so many postcolonial writers should choose the genre of neo-Victorian fiction. Indeed, if, as Marie-Luise Kohlke argues, neo-Victorian fiction is a favourite location to give voice to those who have been silenced by normative accounts of History, then it is only logical that postcolonial writers should take an interest in the genre (2013:10). Indeed, the colonised may be seen as the silenced Other *par excellence* – revealingly, Kohlke indeed takes the fictionalisation of Saartje Baartman as a case study. Yet, at the same time we may wonder at the efficiency and ethics of such a gesture. Indeed, it seems that neo-Victorian fiction cannot escape from, or at least calls for, a reading influenced by Gayatri Spivak who famously asks: 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Talking about the production of *Pericles* and of *The Winter's Tale* by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2006-2007, in which the cast of 25 actors only counted 10 non-whites, Ayanna Thompson contends that we should be 'assessing what and how a production renders the semiotic value and meaning of that actor's race' (2008/2009: 2). This issue is central to *Mister Pip* and *Wanting*. These novels are written by white men while focusing on and, in the case of Jones, being narrated by, a black girl. In *Jack*

Maggs, Jack is construed as Other too which is one of the reasons why the novel is studied in the following section. The postcolonial novels mentioned here have a geographical common point: Oceania. As Elizabeth Ho and Pacific historians argue, the colonial experience in the Pacific differed from that of India and Africa whence most postcolonial theory was developed, which brings about specific questions related to race and education (Lal 2007: 197, Ho 2012: 13). These configurations lead us to wonder whether, to take up Thompson's pun, readers are asked 'to notice or not to notice' the way in which the presence of blackness is represented in all three novels.

1. From the blacking factory to blacking chimneys: a convict's childhood

The novels of our corpus from the Antipodes are direct and fruitful in their postcolonial strategies of appropriation and writing back. Indeed, colonial discourse tended to use numerous metaphors related to education casting the colonised as children and colonisers as parents. This aimed at justifying the colonial 'civilising' mission and the notion of progress. It is an aspect of colonial discourse which has been much explored by anti- and postcolonial thinkers, most strikingly Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha to mention most well-known instances. In all three postcolonial novels under study, it is literacy, the act of reading and writing, which comes to the foreground. This may explain why, amongst the whole Western canon, these writers have chosen *Great Expectations* as their hypotext. These novels not only engage with Dickens's construction of Australia and the colonial Other in this novel but also with the way the nineteenth-century author represents and makes use of literacy. As is well known, *Great Expectations* opens on a scene in which Pip reads his parents tombstone. Later on, Pip is in part estranged from Joe (who is illiterate) because of his education. For Peter Brooks, Dickens's novel is an epitome of reading life through plot and thus of the structuring operation that reading is (1984: 114).

We have already commented upon the representation of writing and of the writer within Peter Carey's novel, I would now like to turn to reading and its relation to the novel's focus on poor, criminal childhood. This aspect contaminates all strata of the novel as it seems that all the male protagonists' origins are socially dubious: Henry Phipps turns into a gentleman thanks to Maggs and Buckle used to be a fried-fish seller. Carey also rewrites Dickens's experience as a child giving it a criminal turn since Oates's father, John Oates, is imprisoned for murder and

not debt (*JM*: 196).[279] Tobias is not sent to work in a factory but lives in Newgate with his father. The passage offers many echoes with *Little Dorrit* as John Oates wins the sympathy of the turnkey and eventually is pardoned. Most strikingly, the experience is expressed in traumatic terms, leaving its trace onto young Tobias: 'All this, naturally enough, made its impressions on the little boy' (*ibid.*). A figurative scar, the 'impression' calls to mind theories of the trace as developed by Carlo Ginzburg for whom the trace, the (foot)print opens up possibilities for imagination and thus is at the root of fiction (qtd. in A. Tadié 2007: 227-229). This correlation between 'impressions' and fiction writing is most explicit in the following passage and its use of parallelism: '[Tobias] feared poverty; he wrote passionately about the poor. He had nightmares about hanging; he sought out executions, reporting them with a magistrate's detachment' (*JM*: 197). Carey's rewriting of Dickens's experience portrays a man that has not and never will come to terms with past trauma, for whom recovery and working through are impossible:

> This scene, or rather the specific of its setting, reappears not only in *The Death of Maggs* and *Michael Adams*, but in almost everything Tobias Oates ever wrote. […] For Tobias Oates emerged into High Holborn with his fears not beaten, but magnified, and a great certainty that he would rather drown himself than take his family down into such purgatory. (197-8)

Oates is thus depicted as relentless, never at peace, a portrayal which offers a sharp contrast with the protagonist of the novel: Jack Maggs.

Contrary to Oates, Maggs is able to come to terms with his trauma once he embraces Australia. It is often noted that the antagonists take part in a 'competition to tell the story [which] serves as an allegory for the novel itself, in which Carey as an Australian writer reimagines elements of his British predecessor's plot in order to recuperate the image it offers of his native country' (Myers 2011: 456). The novel offers the convict's story of his own childhood, a story marked by an alternative mode of education and of reading.[280] Trained to be a thief by Silas (a Fagin-like figure), Jack is soon taught the art of thieving and introduced to the 'book of marks'. As you can see below, Carey incorporated the marks within his text creating a visual clue for the reader while cutting Maggs's sentence in two:

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[279] The name also echoes that of Dickens's father: John Dickens.
[280] Bruce Woodcock reads Maggs's childhood as 'the kind of criminal child labour that Marx documents in *Capital*' (2004: 266).

I soon deduced that it was not poetry, but a peculiar collection
of odd signs, thus

with handwritten annotations attached to almost every one.   (*JM*: 103)

The transcription of the signs is reminiscent of numerous codes that pervade (Victorian) detective fiction from early works like *Bleak House* – and its chalked words on the walls of Krook's shop – to Poe's 'The Gold-Bug' or yet again 'The Adventure of the Dancing Men', a Sherlock Holmes story. However, the convention is subverted here: the code is not discovered by a detective and it does not point to a criminal (or a secret as in *Bleak House*), thereby it is no 'signature'. The marks stand for the brands of the items to be stolen therefore denoting wealth and value. Peter Carey not only displaces and mocks the conventions of detective fiction but also that of the *Bildungsroman*. Indeed, Jack is first certain he is going to get a 'proper education' but his dreams quickly vanish as he follows Silas in the dark streets of London and up its roofs (97). Whereas Jack expects to learn about literature, which would make him a better man, he learns to be a better crook: 'I imagined it must be the Shakespeare [Silas] […] liked to quote. But when I asked if it was poetry, he laughed and said […] that I should memorize a line or two and it would improve my prospects no end' (*ibid.*). Carey plays with expectations while extending the motif of literature as a crooked business, thus echoing the main plotline of the novel and Tobias's set of books.

The learning of the marks is one step in Jack's training, a rite of passage of a sort following another, more striking and literal as he is also made to go down a chimney. Peter Carey thereby appropriates and displaces the trope of exploitation of children by giving a turn to the most visible street children of nineteenth-century London: the chimney sweeps, who would be noticed in crowds due to their blackened faces. Quite often, they would hit the headlines as a child would die stuck in a chimney which brought about various changes in law (Cunningham 2006: 155-156).[281] The figure of the chimney sweep enables Carey to strikingly harp on the image of poor children as a threat. The nineteenth century saw numerous laws and reforms which amounted both to exploiting and confining these children who were often thought to be doomed to criminality (Cunningham 2006:161-162). However, taking the

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[281] Dickens too wrote about chminey sweepers in 'The First of May' in *Sketches by Boz* (Dickens 1989: 169-176). For a study of this work, cf. Galia Benziman, '"Who Stole the Child?": Missing Babies and Blank Identities in Early Dickens', *Dickens and the Imagined Child*, 27-41.

viewpoint of the child, Carey re-humanises these figures. Maggs's first experience in a chimney is thus marked by anxiety and fear at getting stuck in a chimney pipe:

> First it was tight as a pipe, and the walls were caked with soot so many inches deep that I was held by soot, swaddled by soot, and had I not got given a great push on the crown of my head, I would not have fit at all. But push I got, and there I was jammed in like a cork in a grog bottle, some foot below the top, coughing and wailing and choking myself with fear. (*JM*: 98)

> Then a great sheet of soot gave way, a thick lump of it, and I shrieked out in fright as I fell. The chimney was widening. In my alarm, I scratched at the walls, thus binging down more filth into my panicked lungs. I coughed. I choked. I might have fallen to the grate below had I not, like a babe, jerked out my arms and legs and thus gained purchase on those protuberances which Silas had doubtless referred to when he said the inside was like a staircase. (*ibid*.)

We can note the omnipresence of soot which penetrates the body, resulting in fear. The scene ends in a birth-like fashion: 'like a babe, jerked out my arms and legs.' Re-humanisation thus occurs through reversal: Maggs does not climb up to reach roofs but down into living rooms. With this new-born thief, Carey revises the creation of the nation Australia. Elizabeth Ho argues that:

> Jack's childhood may place his narrative in nineteenth-century realist tradition, but his lack of status as an orphan and the novel's recurring incidents of abortion and loss also tap into Anglo-Australian literary tradition: the early Australian settler literature depicting lost children and its more recent branch, stories of abandoned children. (2012: 66)

After all, Maggs is given birth to as a criminal by Ma Britten and Silas forces him down a pipe, somewhat precipitating his transportation.

Jack's discovery of the rooms in which he lands is almost fairy-tale-like, marked by smells and wealth:

> And what a place I had arrived at.
> It was the smells that first of all impressed themselves, the smell of apples and oranges, and what may have been cinnamon, but in any case something sweet and strange. There were no smells of drains either, and it was this I'm sure that made all other smells the sweeter and gave me a feeling of comfort.
> It was a long double room with great glass doors which, I soon discovered, could be shut across the middle to make it into two separate rooms, but for now the doors were open, and the resulting space was bigger than Mary Britten's quarters. […] All around the room there were arm-chairs, sofas, chaises, love-seats – none of which I could have named for you, never having seen such things before. In my enchantment, I sat on each of them, each one, and it is only now, all these years later, that I reflect on the sooty mess I must have left behind. (*JM*: 99)

The passage plays on the contrast between the sweet smells of fruits and that of dirt (the reference to drain might be a slight hint at the hydraulic imageries used in debates concerning emigration schemes in the nineteenth century (Brantlinger 1988: 116-117)). The passage is also ironic as there is a chiasmus between the sweet smells 'impressed' on Jack and the sooty 'mess' he impresses on the seats. The passage brings to mind Charles Kingsley's novel, *The Water-Babies* (1863) which features a similar scene as Tom the sweeper mistakenly lands in a room characterised by its whiteness. Tom is puzzled by what he sees, especially and amusingly by the washing-stand and all its paraphernalia, which leads him to (wrongly) deduce that the person

who lives in these chambers 'must be a very dirty lady' (1904: 14). The fairy tale reaches its climax when Tom discovers the inhabitant who is compared to snow white (*ibid.*). But the dream is crushed when Tom catches his own reflection in the mirror:

> And looking round, he suddenly saw, standing close to him, a little ugly, black, ragged figure, with bleared eyes and grinning white teeth. He turned on it angrily. What did such a little black ape want in that sweet young lady's room? And behold, it was himself, reflected in a great mirror, the like of which Tom had never seen before. (*ibid.*)

As Cunningham observes, the biblical style and Tom's sudden realisation tend to align him with a Fallen Adam while the depiction of the reflection characterises him in orientalising terms (2006: 155).[282] The encounter between wealth and poverty in Carey's novel enacts a mutual contamination while reworking a topos of colonial literature: the blank map blackened by colonial ink. If the scene is taken as part of a rite of passage, initiating Jack to his life as thief, the trigger of his subsequent adventures, then the traces left by Jack come close to the trace as understood by Alexis Tadié, following Carl Ginzburg: 'In the history of the novel, the footprint in the sand is indeed important because it is the event which operates a shift in the prose narrative as it turns into fiction' (2007: 231; my translation).[283] Indeed, the whole episode is followed by a passage in which the narrating-Maggs resists to Ma Britten's plotting of his young self:

> It is only now that I write this down for you […] that I feel the fury in my furnace: that the bitch would make this speech before a little nipper, letting him know that he had been raised for a base purpose like a hog or hen. (*JM*: 106)

Jack Maggs's return to England and his own life-writing are thus to be understood as a form of writing back, which partly fails because Maggs clings to his Englishness, and which can only work out once he embraces the 'fiction' he built for himself in Australia.

The whole scene returns at the very end of the novel as Jack is one last time mesmerised by Oates and remembers being flogged, a kinaesthetic memory as Maggs remembers the smell of the earth which he associates with the pain caused by the whip (321). The memory stages the way in which Maggs came to idealise England and his childhood experience as a means to cope with the trauma of flogging: 'As the flies began to tease his skin, the wretched man would

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[282] Peter Ackroyd also comments on the dual characterisation of chimney sweeps: 'These children, blackened by the soot and refuse of the city, were rarely, if ever, washed. They were coated in London's colours, an express symbol of the most abject condition to which it could reduce its young.' Thus, they were often seen as thieves or beggars. Ackroyd seeing these figures as two-faced: 'characteristically dressed in foil, gold leaf and ribbons just as were the children in the pageants of the medieval city; in that sense they came to represent once more holiness and innocence, in however vulgarised fashion. Yet, banging the instruments of their trade along the thoroughfare, they also become lords of misrule for the day; thus their wildness is being emphasised, itself a threat to the city unless it were formalised and disciplined within ritual patterns' (2012 : 543-544).

[283] 'Si la trace de pied dans le sable est importante, dans l'histoire du roman, c'est qu'elle est l'événement qui fait basculer le récit en prose dans la fiction.'

begin to build London in his mind. He would build it brick by brick as the horrid double-cat smote the air, eddying forth like a storm from Hell itself' (*ibid.*). The image of the brick illustrates the way in which London turns into a crypt protecting Maggs (while the scene reverses Oates's later command to tear the wall down around the Phantom):

> His mind crawled forward, always constructing piece by piece the place wherein his eyes had first opened, the home to which he would one day return, not the mudflats of the Thames, nor Mary Britten's meat-rich room at Pepper Alley Stairs, but rather a house in Kensington whose kind and beautiful interior he had entered by tumbling down a chimney, like a babe falling from the outer darkness into light. Clearing the soot from his eyes he had seen that which he later knew was meant by authors when they wrote of England, and of Englishmen. (322)

Carey harps again on the motif of birth which he displaces: the violence of the expedition into the chimney is dispelled and, ironically, Maggs' criminality turns into gentlemanliness. As Myers has it, the event is 'idealized' as 'Maggs remembers this experience as a moment of rebirth' which 'serves as a highly symbolic moment within the novel and offers an elusive ideal to which Maggs continually strives to return'. Furthermore, 'Maggs fetishizes this moment throughout his life' so much so that 'the novel largely centres on the process whereby he comes to terms with its falsity and learns to value an alternative domestic ideal, one that is rooted in Australian rather than English life' (2011: 459-460).

Carey's choice to present young Maggs as a chimney sweep in reverse (he does not climb up the chimneys but down) enables him to introduce and appropriate orientalising discourses on the poor that spread in nineteenth-century London. Cunningham notes that '[t]hese children were the "street Arabs" of Victorian Britain' (2006: 163). As Cunningham further argues, comparing street children to Arabs or Bedouin in the desert endowed them with a sense of independence and mobility, characteristics which were thought of as undesirable (*ibid.*). As Peter Ackroyd notes:

> Children were confined precisely because, in their natural and liberated state, they were considered to be wild. […] Very few social observers chose to discuss whether the conditions of London itself brutalised and dehumanised these small children; the reality was too overwhelming, and too palpable, to elicit any cogent analysis beyond the imagery of bestiality and savagery. (2012: 543)

Likewise, Maggs is Othered from his childhood onwards as he is hailed as 'nigger' after his expeditions down chimneys: '– Aye, black as a nigger but carrying the King's silver' (*JM*: 105). Ma Britten's characterisation of Maggs epitomises colonial/imperialist discourse and the vision of the colonies as goldmines for exploitation. Annegret Maack notes hat throughout the novel Maggs is assigned roles, eradicating his name and calling him instead 'criminal' or 'convict', therefore turning him into 'the representative of transported convicts, the victims of a cruel system of justice' (Maack 2004: 237-238). In fact, Jack Maggs comes to epitomise the

Australian Other as he is also referred to as 'The Australian' (*JM*: 165, 284), an identity he refuses when Mercy tries to convince him to return to Australia:

> 'You have babies in the place where you come from.'
> His mouth tightened in denial.
> 'My son is an Englishman.'
> 'I meant your real children.'
> 'I am not of that race.'
> 'What race?'
> 'The Australian race', he said. 'The race of Australians.' (312-313)

This passage shows Maggs's inability to drop his Englishness off, refusing to acknowledge his biological children and favouring a fiction. This moment best exemplifies the tension around identity that underlines the whole novel which will only be resolved at the end, once Maggs accepts that he is 'The Australian' and returns to his true sons. This furthers the link between the convict and the neo-Victorian writer who, as Paul Kane notes, 'comes to us always already as an Australian novelist' (2005: xii). As Elizabeth Ho suggests, Carey's novel enters and offers a solution to the debate around national and personal identity in Australia: citizenship filtered through the family. In the end:

> The 'many stories' of 'old' Australia collected by the Maggs clan is a legacy bequeathed to those not able to recognize themselves in the 'new' Australia that official multiculturalism supports. 'Old' Australia is reimagined as healthy and more importantly, as uninfected by its traumatic encounter with England. (Ho 2003: 131-132)

While Carey is concerned with Australia's past as penal colony, Flaganan's novel invites us to decipher another debate connected to identity in Australia, that over the 'Stolen Generation'.

2. 'Stolen Generation': failing to whitewash Mathinna

The question of origins is of paramount importance for Australian literature bespeaking an unstable identity which emerged from its colonial history, a tale of two colours: the whiteness of the Anglo-Celtic settlers and convicts versus the black/brown skin of aborigines. Australian colonial history is also marked by two stains: that of convictism and that of aboriginal dispossession. If, as Elizabeth Ho argues, *Jack Maggs* has more to do with the first and the debates around multiculturalism that were raised in the 1990s while avoiding, to a certain extent, the aboriginal question (2003: 124-127), Richard Flanagan's novel, *Wanting*, directly engages with the '[r]edressing [of] the inaccuracies and simplifications of colonial historiographies, in which Aboriginal people have ofen been marginalized and silenced' (Colomba 2016: 58). For Caterina Colomba, 'Flanagan' s neo-Victorian novel in its

investigation of the traumatic colonial past, contributes to the construction of historical knowledge in contemporary Australia' (*ibid.*).

On February 13th, 2008 the Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, addressed an apology to aboriginal peoples of the country. In this apology, Rudd acknowledges the 'Stolen Generations' and their sufferings: 'For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry' (Rudd 2008: n.p.). The apology is set under the sign of reconciliation and recovery as Rudd claims that 'We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation' (*ibid.*). This apology was preceded by a 'Motion of Reconciliation', negotiated in 1999 by Prime Minister John Winston Howard. As Christian Gutleben and Marie-Luise Kohlke observe, this political debate influenced neo-Victorian fiction from Australia with the publication of Mathew Kneale's *English Passengers* in 2001 to *Wanting* in 2008 (though they were published beforehand) (2011: 13). Both novels reflect a period of 'heightened national debate in Australia about the appropriateness or otherwise of the government issuing a public apology for the historical suffering inflicted on the country's indigene population' (*ibid.*). Taking advantage of blanks in history, Flanagan contributes to the 'invention' of Mathinna. As Penny Russell notes: 'Mathinna's story has twisted and evolved, each new layer being added in a precise social and cultural context that invests the narrative with a new significance' (2012: 342). For Flanagan then, Mathinna's story epitomises the narrative of the 'Stolen Generations': an indigenous girl severed from her people to live in a white family but who ends up being an outcast from both backgrounds.[284] Sue Kossew, however, wonders whether 'literary works, particularly those written by non-Indigenous writers, [can] play a productive part in the process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians? […] Can telling stories "truthfully" help to heal the wounds of past silences?' (2013: 174).

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[284] Not only does Flanagan write an account of Mathinna's life but he partly gives a voice to other aboriginal voices silenced by history. Indeed, when Lady Jane is given Towterer's skull by Protector Robinson, the narration cuts Robinson's account of the life of Mathinna's father to give another version. This seems to be Flangan's way of writing back to the incorporation of the aborigines, who are turned into English-like characters by Robinson (57-58). The narration of Towterer's past plays on porlepsis ('Then, his name was Towterer'). Towterer appears as a strong and sagacious man (58). Towterer surrender to Robinson is told on the mode of a colonial tale. The colonial encounter relies on motifs such as the unmapped world and the sacred nature (58) versus the white man, armed, cunning and using an interpreter (59, 62) (such motifs also appear in *Mister Pip* when Matilda tells about her grandfather (*MP*: 5-6). Robinson joins the Aborigines in their nakedness but the liberation this procures him is repressed ('He was momentarily beset by the terrifying idea that this was what he truly desired' 'It could not last' (*W*: 60), replaced by his will to control the aborigines: 'Robinson wanted Towterer' (66). Interestingly, before putting Towterer and the members of his clan in captivity, Robinson is referred to by his last name, but once he 'possesses' Towterer, he turns into the 'Protector', an ironic denomination.

The 'layers' that Russell identifies as part of the ongoing construction of Mathinna are evident in Flanagan's novel in that the story of the 'adoption' of the little girl is inscribed within a whole set of colonial discourses and behaviours. It is not only Mathinna whom the Franklins want to appropriate and whitewash, but the whole colony as Lady Jane is pictured recreating English scientific society in Hobart. For Amanda Johnson, Flanagan's and other 'new literary portrayals differently exploit the historical figure of Jane Franklin […] to enact trenchant critiques of the parochial, racist colonial culture of early "Hobarton"' (2015: 3). Focusing on the narrative taking place in London in Flanagan's novel, Johnson contends that:

> Flanagan evokes the myriad ways in which British social, cultural and political instrumentalities created and sustained a mythic whitewash around voyage narratives, glamorising and heroicising [*sic*.] colonial voyages, and thereby helping to naturalise the 'take-up' or taking of colonial lands and the acquisition of sundry ethnographic 'spoils'. The cultural romanticisation of the voyage is […] always complicit with the masking of violent dispossessions attending that enduring oxymoron, colonial progress. (16)

However, this 'cultural romanticisation of voyage' is parodied in Flanagan's depiction of Hobart and Lady Jane's re-creational endeavour:

> For the leaders of Van Diemen's Land weren't objectionable because they had dull poets, pompous naturalists and bad watercolourists, but because, having them, they couldn't keep quiet about it. They recited grating verse, hung their walls with brutal brushwork, gloated about their learned societies and assured each other their several amateur scientists were daily making extraordinary discoveries. (*W*: 104-105)

There is a blatant contrast between the pride felt by the settlers and the pejorative adjectives which qualify their activities. As Johnson observes: 'artists and writers have rushed to entwine portraits of J[ane] F[ranklin] and Mathinna in order to illuminate the racist "philanthropies" of early colonial administrations. Neither the story of Jane Franklin nor Mathinna can be told without the other' (2015: 7-8).

Indeed, from the start Mathinna is considered as a complex, if not contradictory, scientific object rather than subject in the eyes of Jane Franklin: 'For Lady Jane, what saved the child from being a child was that she was a savage, and what saved her from being a savage was that she was a child' (*W*: 51). This chiasmic formulation epitomises Lady Jane's contradictory feelings towards Mathinna, her longing for the child as a mother and her philanthropic ambition to know, control and educate Mathinna. Later on, we are told that 'the child was about to embark on a rigid programme of improvement' (115). Just like Lady Jane dreams of being Franklin's 'muse and his maker' (54) – which she eventually becomes – Lady Jane dreams of shaping Mathinna (and, by proxy, all aboriginal people): 'Lady Jane had declared the Van Diemonian Aborigines there a scientific curiosity as remarkable as the quagga roaming free in the Ménagerie du Jardin des Plantes' (56). Flanagan's choice of imagery in this comparison is quite telling. Indeed, the Ménagerie du Jardin des Plantes is the second oldest

zoo in the world: built in 1794, its nineteenth-century collection of animals and architectural expansion benefited from colonial and Napoleonic wars (cf. Jardin des Plantes website). This image of scientific progress and colonialism is associated with that of the quagga, a now extinct subspecies of zebra. The quagga extinction was brought about by exploitation and colonial expansion in South Africa (where the quagga comes from). The quagga thus turns into a metaphor for the dying and almost extinct Van Diemonian Aborigines whereas the Ménagerie stands for Lady Jane's Hobart. The dichotomy progress/extinction however does not only concern the aborigines and their treatment but is also displaced onto the Franklins as Flanagan builds up a sense of undermined control, thereby prefiguring Franklin's loss of his position as governor following the economic crisis suffered on the island: 'And so, with the boom over, the island suffered and seethed and began planning its vengeance. The Franklins continued exploring, reporting and holding soirées. For Sir John and Lady Jane were keen observers of everything, save the people around them' (106). The verbal forms alongside the repetition of 'and' in the first sentence instigate a sense of complete action ('suffered and seethed') and of deliberate intention ('began planning') (Hamya 2012: 23). The island's agency contrasts with the stasis in which the Franklins seem stuck. Indeed, V-ING complement of the verb 'continued' erases the notion of interruption that 'continue' usually denotes. As Sophie Hamya notes, the form 'continue + V-ING' emphasises an absence of rupture in contrast with the more canonical 'continue + To-infinitive' (26-28). This linguistic contrast emphasises the narrator's conclusion in the third sentence which records the Franklins' inability to perceive their coming fall.

This opposition between the dynamic island and careless couple comes back again when Mathinna arrives in Hobart and her candid viewpoint is contrasted with that of the island:

> The island's capacity to transform everything into unreliable memory even before it happened, or in spite of it never happening, was already apparent in that crumbling edifice [the governor's mansion], which, though only thirty years old, was already a relic of magnificent decay.
> But when Mathinna finally arrived there […] her eyes did not see the rising damp, the peeling paper, the cracked and patched plaster, the pitching building that left door and window frames rising and falling like so many winking eyes. She saw instead a palace of the type she had heard the Protector describe. Even its musty smells of dead huntsman spiders and stale possum piss she understood as being what the Protector had told her so much about: the fragrance of God. (*W*: 107-108)

In both passages, we can see that the island becomes an agent capable of overthrowing the colonial project. Nature infiltrates and thus undermines the colonial architecture and thereby Western civilisation. The second passage shows the way in which Mathinna is already conditioned by Robinson's teachings. The description of the house draws on that of Satis House

in *Great Expectations*: like Pip, Mathinna misreads its inhabitants as her benefactors. As Catherine Lanone has it:

> Flanagan gives us another variation on *Great Expectations*, problematizing progress and imperial logic, and above all resurrecting the plight of a displaced child, torn from her culture, sent to a Government House which transposes Satis House in Tasmania […]. Hovering between irony, pastiche and parody, the novel revisits Dickens to suggest his enduring presence, but also to highlight the plight of the unknown child, displacing the focus and contesting the very notions of centre (London) and periphery (the doomed settlement of Wybalenna and Van Diemen's Land). (2012: 24)

The passage also introduces an important part of the civilising mission as represented in the novel: religion. Like a puppet, Mathinna is shown repeating words that she was told without understanding them as the omniscient narrator notes:

> If Mathinna wondered what sinful desires might be, or why the people of God might wish to kill the child of God, or if she saw it as obvious, having grown up ruled by the children of God, it was impossible to know, for having completed her task to the captain's satisfaction, she burst into chatter. (*W*: 109)

For the little girl, catechism is a task to perform in order to please and be free to chatter away. The passage is an illustration of Flanagan's criticism of the so-called philanthropic and religious sentiment that supposedly was at the bottom of the civilising project.

Religion is also used in relation to literacy in the novel. It is through writing and reading that Mathinna is being appropriated: 'But she wanted to write and Lady Jane said she could have pen and ink only if she kept her shoes on. For the magic of written words had not escaped Mathinna' (119). As Mathinna understands the empowerment ('magic') provided by writing, her conception of the world shifts, erasing her aboriginal understanding of nature for a while. Indeed, as the child innocently asks: 'Is God the Father writing me?', Lady Jane laughs which leads the girl to the conclusion 'that what was written in the world mattered not, but what was written on paper mattered immensely' (120). Flanagan's representation of acculturation plays out a paradigmatic shift from reading the natural world to reading signs on paper. This leads Flanagan to make use of a historical record of Mathinna's writing, which was certainly dictated by Lady Jane herself. In Flanagan's novel, the letter turns into an act of reclaim, of reaching out to Mathinna's own roots. It is an act of preservation as her letter is addressed not to her colonial 'fathers' (Robinson and Franklin) but her biological father, Towterer:

> And she knew the magic of white paper would reach him there and he would understand all that she was trying to tell him: her loneliness, her dreams, her wonder, her joy, her ongoing ache of sadness – all the things that were in danger of vanishing. (120-121)

The letter is ambivalent, an attempt to preserve aborigine culture it nevertheless testifies to the process of acculturation Mathinna is undergoing: 'I read books not birds'; 'I have got sore feet and shoes and stockings and I am very glad' (121). Lady Jane sees the letter as a proof of improvement, misreading the father it is addressed to for her husband. Yet, Mathinna does not

embrace white culture for long as her letters remain unanswered and 'stashed in a pale wooden box beneath a skull' (*ibid.*). This discovery results in 'melancholy of disillusionment' (*ibid.*) and her dropping of Lady Jane's teachings: 'One day, she set down her sampler, the bare trunk of the tree of knowledge, took off her court shoes, and walked outside' (122). Thereby, '[a]cculturation partly fails, as Mathinna resists teaching, and refuses to put shoes on' (Lanone 2012: 26).

Retrieving the 'Stolen Generation' narrative, Flanagan raises the question of problematic motherhood. Amanda Johnson argues that Lady Jane 'is often fictionalised less as complex character than plot device' (2015: 4). For her, Flanagan's Lady Jane 'is depicted as a person of monstrous ego', her scientific zeal and endeavours 'are seen, in studied sexist fashion, as the distorted motivational by-products of […][her] repressed desire for children' (9). If it's true that Lady Jane's adopts Mathinna to civilise her, she nevertheless shows feelings – as conflicted as they may be – towards the little girl. In fact, the encounter with Mathinna is framed by revelations about Lady Jane's infertility:

> Lady Jane was unable to bear children; if pressed, she told friends it had never been a burden, but was, in an odd way, a relief. This was untrue, but over time, like all evasions, it created its own truth. She came to avoid children [...][.]There was something in them that she *lacked*, and which, in her heart, she found terrifying. As if the more of them, the less of her. As though she were dying in proportion to their living. (*W*: 49-50, italics mine.)

Just like with her husband in the London narrative, Lady Jane represses the truth about her infertility and creates her own myths. Devoid of the power to create life, Lady Jane associates herself with death, turning into a wraith, a waning being in the last two dichotomies ('more of them, less of her', 'she were dying in proportion to their living'). The italicised term 'lacked' is an obvious echo of the title: the lack or want that Lady Jane suffers from and fears is motherhood and life. Her numerous miscarriages are suffered alone, in silence, hidden from her husband:

> More pregnancies ended abruptly. She made life, yet it left her. No one knew. Her life grew incommunicable. There were no death notices in *The Times*. No commiserations, no conversations, no wearing of black. The grief had nowhere to go but inside her. And then time ran out: her body changed. And so now, watching the little Aboriginal girl on the beach, Lady Jane was shocked to sense some intolerable weight dissolving, to feel an unnameable emotion rising. (50)

Lady Jane's suffering emerges from the utter 'uncommunicable' nature of her pregnancies (note the anaphorical use of 'no'). The text establishes a dichotomy between outwards signs of mourning which were part and parcel of Victorian life and Lady Jane's inward grieving. As her womb cannot retain life it turns into a crypt, a graveyard for her dead children. The encounter with Mathinna breaks the crypt open ('intolerable weight dissolving'). Mathinna awakens Lady Jane's spontaneity and an urge to touch the child. This urge is reciprocal. We are told that

Wongerneep, Mathinna's biological mother, dies soon after arriving at Wybalenna and that 'rather than depressing her daughter, [her death] had the oddly opposite effect: the toddler became more friendly, more lively, more curious of what others were doing' (67). Flanagan's play on the same dichotomy he used for Lady Jane, life vs. death, has Mathinna turning into an epitome of liveliness and innocent curiosity (these characterise her up to her abandonment). Lady Jane's longing for a child is echoed by Mathinna's longing for a mother: 'Thereafter, Mathinna seemed always to be around the feet of adults, as if seeking a new mother' (*ibid.*).

As Catherine Lanone notes: 'Wanting, the desire to hold Mathinna, is the leitmotif on which her character is hinged' (2012: 22). Mathinna's touch haunts Lady Jane in the London sections. When the latter is first introduced in the narrative, asking Dickens to write her version of her husband's death, she abruptly interrupts her account as 'for an instant she thought somebody, something was tugging at her skirts' (*W*: 28). There is therefore a displacement from performed grief for her husband to unbearable mourning for the little girl she left on the island. There is a hint of the tragic fate met by Mathinna before the text turns into '[a] mosaic of images [which] recreates the presence of the absent girl, in a paragraph which ends, of course, with the obsessional image of naked feet' (Lanone 2012: 22). Mathinna thus turns into a spectre, pointing out 'a paradoxical relationship with the past because both invoke presence and absence, life and death, present and past' (*ibid.*). In this scene, Mathinna's red dress, her possum, black eyes and naked feet turn into traces, 'vestiges of the past and disrupt temporal linearity in collapsing past and present' (*ibid.*). Lady Jane is never able to truly acknowledge the nature of her feelings for Mathinna as she always reasserts the barrier of racial difference. As such, Flanagan's fictionalisation of Lady Jane echoes accounts made by children of aboriginal descent adopted by white people (Swain 2013: 212-214).

If Flanagan's novel does take part in the debate over the 'Stolen generation' and the acknowledgement of aboriginal sufferings, its response is ambiguous. On the one hand, as both Penny Russell and Amanda Johnson note, the narrative of Mathinna's adoption by the Franklins furthers the 'fixity of fictions' surrounding the aboriginal girl (Russell 2012: 342; Johnson 2015: 10). As Kohlke noted in a recent talk, Flanagan's way of portraying Mathinna entails ideological choices and thus points out ethical issues raised by biofictions (Kohlke 2019). The novel utters as much as it silences parts of Mathinna's history.[285] Various passages in the novel

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[285] Flanagan obliterates the historical presence of John Franklin's daughter from a preceding marriage in whose education Lady Jane was disinterested (Johnson 2015: 9). This slight distortion enables Flanagan to enhance Lady Jane's desire. Likewise, Mathinna is not the only aboriginal child adopted by the Franklins. Indeed, they also

hint at the possibility for cultural interpenetration (Robinson's part in a corroborhee, Lady Jane's feelings for Mathinna and the latter's education) yet they all fail as the Protector does leave Mathinna with the Franklins though the idea repulses him, Franklin rapes Mathinna and Lady Jane leaves her behind at the orphanage, never to see her again. Ultimately, Mathinna dies alone in a gutter, unable to belong either in white or black society: 'She had seen her break into a drunken dance in the middle of a Hobart street before it was even noon – part native jig and something of a toff's dance, half-hyena and fully princess, queer, lost, belonging and not belonging' (*W*: 250-251).

The death of Mathinna in Flanagan's novel is a counterfactual version of the archives on the matter. Indeed, Mathinna not only drowns in the puddle but she is murdered, strangled with a red scarf, a reminder of the red dress the Franklins had offered her. This murder is problematic, 'gratuitous', as Penny Russell observes. On the one hand it seems 'to add a touch of realism, a clarity of perception' washing away 'the softening euphemisms that cloaked the dubious moralities of the Victorian era' while on the other hand, it suggests 'the impossibility of extricating ourselves from the clinging legacies of a colonising past, and the necessity of examining the political implications of our own inventions' (Russell 2012: 355). The depiction of her decaying body gives the impression that nature claims her back, devouring her: 'it more resembled an insect nest than a human being. Several bloody holes gored the exposed flesh where forest ravens had eaten, their unreadable footprints in the mud around' (*W*: 250). The unreadability of the ravens footprints echoes that of Mathinna's, which are cropped out of the frame of history. In the end, Mathinna is not any-body but *the* body epitomising Stolen Generation, colonial invasion and aboriginal extinction. On the other hand, as a silenced, forgotten figure of history, Mathinna belongs to 'these individuals, whose lives are not the object of public mourning, [who] are the protagonists of deaths that lack social relevance' (Romero Ruiz 2016: 60). To a certain extent then, Flanagan's graphic display of Mathinna's body 'promote[s] empathy for the suffering of victims of trauma and their families' (*ibid.*). Mathinna is not any-body, but a victim 'individuated with a sympathy-evoking back story' (*ibid.*). She is the little girl wearing a white kangaroo skin over her red dress, running bare feet through high grass.

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adopted a young boy whom Lady Jane tried to train for service but eventually sent to the orphanage (Russell 2012: 347-348).

3. Retrieving the 'Lost Generation': the possibility to re-member in *Mister Pip*

Neo-Victorian critics have been prone to use spiritualism as a metaphor for the contemporary text/author relation with the past, a relation that is often conceived as gender biased since nineteenth-century mediums were most frequently women set under the control of a male manager (Willis 2000: 71). Though it may seem paradoxical, Chris Willis relates spiritualism and detective fiction, arguing that 'The medium's role can be seen as being similar to that of a detective in a murder case. Both are trying to make the dead speak in order to reveal the truth' (2000: 60). He goes further and relates the figure of the author to that of the manager, a comparison which we may fruitfully apply in the case of *Drood* as we have seen with ventriloquism in chapter 2: 'In writing about mediums, a skilled author can manipulate the reader in the same way the manager would manipulate the medium's audience, playing on their preconceptions and expectations' (70). In the present section, spiritualism, as a trope and/or metaphor, has to do with the appropriation of children' voices, especially so in *Wanting* and *Mister Pip*. To some extent, Mathinna and Matilda may be considered as mediums since it is through them, through their bodies and voices that concerns with the past are conveyed to the reader, linking back to the title of the present chapter and the issues it raises concerning gender and rape.

We noted earlier that the detective mode entails a form of fascination for the body, especially the female dead body, as the detective tries to uncover the secret and criminal hiding behind the traces of the violence suffered by the victim. *Wanting* and *Mister Pip* demonstrate a slight change since the representation of the body and its aim somewhat differ. In *Mister Pip,* the body, that of Dolores, is anonymised by being chopped up and then fed to the pigs. This anonymisation doubles Mr Watts's body since the latter was chopped up before hers. No body, not even the white male body of Mr Watts is safe. While the rape scene is replaced by the blank of the page in *Wanting*, it features explicitly in *Mister Pip* as Matilda discovers her naked mother, sexually abused and beaten up by soldiers. When Matilda is threatened by the soldiers, Dolores offers herself as a sacrifice in exchange for her daughter's life. Jones chooses not to depict the violence of Dolores's slaughter. Instead, Matilda is ordered to turn around so that the violence of the scene is replaced by the beauty and peace of the panorama:

> All the lovely things in the world came into view- the gleaming sea, the sky the trembling green palms. I hear him [the officer] sigh. I heard him rustle around in his shirt pocket for a cigarette. I heard him strike a match. I smelled the smoke, and I heard him make that kissing sound as he smoked. We stood there, almost shoulder to shoulder, for what felt like a long time but was surely no more than ten minutes. […]

> I found out last what I didn't see. They took my mum to the edge of the jungle, to the same place they'd dragged Mr. Watts, and there they chopped her up and threw her to the pigs. This happened while I stood with the redskin officer, listening to the sea break on the reef. This happened while I gazed up at a sky where I hardly noticed storm clouds gathering for the brightness of the sun in a blue sky. The day held so many layers, almost too many things, contradictory things, all jumbled up, that the world lost any sense of order. (*MP*: 208-209)

The passage is striking for the contrast between the colourful and utterly silent scenery described by Matilda and the event taking place simultaneously. The emphasis on the senses, especially related to the perception of the smoking officer, gives an impression of stasis. The contrast with the violence of the event is enhanced by the anaphora 'this happened while'. In an effort to come to terms with the traumatic event, to give back some order to the world, Matilda overwrites the event with a lyrical language. The contrast thus established testifies to the unspeakable/unwritable quality of the event. The silencing of Dolores's slaughter partakes of the novel's aim to give a voice to and (re)humanise the victims of the Bougainville Crisis.

Above all, Matilda gives a voice to her mother. However, it is only in a second reading that the reader is able to understand that the novel is a form of elegy which puts on an equal footing Mr Watts and Dolores. Section 2 of the novel opens on a portrait of this woman whom, in the end, Matilda did not know so well:

> What I am about to tell results, I think, from our ignorance of the outside world. My mum knew only what the last minister had told her in sermons and conversations. She knew her time tables and the names of some distant capitals. She had heard that man had been to the moon but was inclined not to believe such stories. She did not like boastfulness. She liked even less the thought that she might have been caught out, or made a fool of. She had never left Bougainville. (7)

The characterisation of Dolores here pictures her as an epitome of traditional, pragmatic knowledge, severed and estranged from the global world which she distrusts (as the reference to Neil Armstrong makes clear). This portrayal, and especially Matilda's introducing line, sets the first stone of Jones's denunciation of the isolation of the island from the rest of the world which made it possible for the Bougainvillean war to happen without calling the attention of Western countries. For Matilda, working through the trauma of the civil war implies having to go through a recovery/recollection of her mother. Ultimately, as Caterina Colomba observes, '[r]ecalling those painful events at a distance of time, Matilda sees her mother in a different perspective, connecting her with the figure of the Dickensian "gentleman"' (2017: 282).

The trope of spiritualism is not solely concerned with the body but also entails a reflection on intertextuality. Kate Mitchell understands the text as 'an important medium for materialising the past', a comparison that aptly applies to Matilda's case (2010: 178). In *Mister Pip*, the metaphor of the ghost, the importance of which is highlighted by Mitchell (180), is slightly displaced. Indeed, if Matilda may be considered as a medium, her Ouija table then

would be Dickens's novel, *Great Expectations*. The Victorian novel is used in various ways in Jones's novel: a means to cope with the war and its atrocities, the novel also turns into a metaphor for re-membering and recovery as Matilda's act of narration doubles the re-memorisation of the novel when she was a child.[286] Elizabeth Ho argues that neo-Victorian fiction turns postcolonial theory into memory practice. For Ho, memory is a driving force in society which influences the political, cultural and personal spheres while its unreliability 'speaks to an overwhelming sense that dis-ease, disorder and pathology are the regulating norms when considering the past and its relationship to the present' (2012: 15). A key question raised by the critic is 'why are neo-Victorian texts asking us to think about history as memory (and vice versa) and how do they theorise both?' (16). Looking at a civil war largely forgotten by historical records of the world from the perspective of a young child's experience, Lloyd Jones embeds the act of memory in a neo-Victorian take on *Great Expectations* which enables him to thematise the act of reading and that of remembering. As such *Mister Pip* truly illustrates how '[n]eo-Victorianism offers what postcolonial theory has long called for: a way of thinking about history differently, a way of making it accountable to the present – and a way of being with the past in the present' (*ibid.*). Jones makes very clear who the accountable people are: the outside world who turned a blind eye on what was happening on the peripheral island. In Colomba's words: 'he entrusts literature (and *significantly* the voice of a black female character) with the task of bringing a dramatic episode in contemporary history to the attention of an international audience' (2017: 279; original emphasis). Of course, Jones's whiteness and maleness might be seen as problematic and aligned with Spivak's 'intellectual' figure (1994: 78). Yet, alongside Colomba and Monica Latham, I would argue that Jones's choice to give a voice to Matilda is far from an act of appropriation, of white dominance but rather constitutes a creative act of re-action or re-covery through skin-colour- and gender-crossing (Colomba 2017: 284, Latham 2011: 39).

In *Wanting* the tropes of reading and writing enable Flanagan to stress Mathinna's failed acculturation/adaptation to bring awareness to the Stolen Generation. Contrariwise, Lloyd Jones's novel, *Mister Pip* advocates a positive cross-fertilising between Western and Eastern cultures. Jones offers a creative challenge to critical concepts of hybridity 'as camouflage, as a contesting, antagonistic agency' (Bhabha 1994: 277) and of silent subalterns (Spivak (1994)). *Mister Pip* indeed belongs to a set of 'novels [which] contest the ideas both that the dispossessed

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[286] Monica Latham provides a useful and detailed typology of the various hypertextual presences of *Great Expectations* in her article 'Bringing Newness into the World' (2011).

are of necessity voiceless, and that silence, where it does exist, must invariably reflect disempowerment' (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 69). Furthermore, Lloyd Jones's novel illustrates a recent shift in Pacific historiography. As Brij Lal argues, Pacific historians long sustained an island-oriented view of history with an emphasis on the colonial encounter and its 'fatal impact' on indigenous populations. This take on Pacific history is now reconsidered in more global terms with a shift of focus on recent history (Lal 2007: 196-197). If the colonial encounter features at the beginning of Lloyd Jones's novel, it is soon disregarded to focus on the recent 'Crisis' that shook the island of Bougainville in the 1990s and thus bringing awareness to the latter's persisting resonances today. In fact, granting narratorial power to Matilda is Jones's way to represent the experience of the 'Lost Generation.' This term labels the youths who experienced the conflict first-hand and were deprived of schools and other services while living in terror. They now represent 60% of Bougainville's population and are thus a main concern for the country especially as they face difficulties in social and economic integration. Furthermore, the trauma suffered by these youths generates 'a youth sub-culture today involving alcohol, substance abuse and petty crime' (Wilson 2016: n.p.). Matilda's narrative bears witness to this trauma while offering hope through education thereby echoing and bringing awareness to current policies developing in the country.[287]

Jones challenges or creatively interacts/tampers with Spivak's notion of the silent subaltern by turning the tables over; it is not that the female subaltern cannot speak but that the Western world will not listen: 'the white world had forgotten about us' (*MP*: 49). Lloyd Jones's novel, focusing on Matilda's isolated village, bears witness to the localised conflicts that took place on Bougainville. From the onset, Matilda insists on the very particularity of the setting of her story: the island and its isolation from the rest of the world as neither she nor her mother have ever left Bougainville. Both contrast with Matilda's father who works for the copper mine and leaves the island to work there. Matilda's father is characterised as a sort of colonised figure, colonised by the Papua New Guinea (PNG) government: 'When I was eleven, my father flew off on a mining plane. Before that, though, he was invited to sit in a classroom and watch films about the country he was going to' (7). Soon afterwards, Matilda and her mother Dolores:

> were going to join him – that's what we were going to do, when Francis Ona and his rebels declared war on the copper mine and the company, which, in some way that I didn't understand at the time, brought the redskin soldiers from Port Moresby to our island. According to Port Moresby we are one country.

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[287] In 2007, a collective of women in Hako instigated a skills training program which still runs today. Cf. Catherine Wilson, *idem*. For further information on the Bougainville Crisis cf. Kristian Lasslett, *State Crime on the Margins of Empire: Rio Tinto, the War on Bougainville and Resistance to Mining*, London: Pluto Press, 2014.

> According to us we are black as the night. The soldiers looked like people leached up out of the red earth. That's why they were known as redskins. (9)

The announcement of the breaking of the war is encapsulated in the dash that comes as a rupture in both the sentence and Matilda's life. The passage plays out the opposition between the individual, Francis Ona, and the anonymised group, Port Moresby, the capital city of Papua New Guinea where the central government is set. Another opposition that springs from these lines is that related to skin colour: the inhabitants of Bougainville have a very dark skin whereas other populations in Papua New Guinea have a lighter, reddish complexion. The simile used by Jones is not benign but cryptically inscribes the conflict and ideological concerns in the text as the reader is asked to notice, to use Thompson's pun, skin colour.

However, if the war seems to break the narrative and the page, its effect on the characters is gradual just as its presence builds up throughout the novel. For the most part of the novel, the felt effect of the war is that of a reinforced isolation due to the blockade imposed on the island. The war seems to align itself with the surrounding ocean and jungle, creating a stifling environment as we have seen in chapter 1. In the following passage, I would like to stress the way in which the setting is used as a screen on which opposing discourses are projected to filter the war:

> News of war arrives as bits of maybe and hearsay. Rumor is its mistress. Rumor, which you can choose to believe or ignore. We heard that no one could get in or out. We didn't know what to make of that, because how could you seal off a country? What would you tie it up in or wrap around it? We didn't know what to believe, then the redskins soldiers arrived, and we learned about the blockade.
> We were surrounded by sea, and while the redskins' gunboats patrolled the coastline their helicopters flew overhead. There was no newspaper or radio to guide our thoughts. We relied on word of mouth. The redskins were going to choke the island and the rebels into submission. That's what we heard. (9)

In this passage, two discourses clash: that of the everyday and that of the political, the first denoted by hearsay and rumour, the image of cling film or kitchen foil, the reference to newspaper and radio, and those to nature; the other discourse is using terms denoting war ('blockade,' 'helicopters,' 'patrolled' etc.). Underlying these discourses is a biblical intertext from the Gospel according to Mathew which concerns Jesus foreshadowing of the signs of the End of Time and the return of the Son of Man: 'And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet' (Matthew 24:6). Thus, the Bougainville conflict is filtered through the biblical intertext which foretells the atrocities that will be suffered by the protagonists of the novel, the horror of the war, Mr Watts's and Dolores's sacrifices. Furthermore, the biblical reference foregrounds another conflict at the heart of the novel: the opposition between Mr Watts, who brings fiction to the children, and Dolores, who stands for tradition, be it matrilineal or Christian.

The opposition between these two models of knowledge turns the school into a battlefield of a kind. This in turn reflects the impact of the Bougainville conflict on the educational system of the country which was devastating. According to a survey published in 2003, while before 1988 Bougainville had a high rate of literacy and was the leading province of PNG in terms of secondary school, the '[a]rmed conflict virtually destroyed the education system. Education facilities were closed and a large number of schools were damaged or destroyed. Between 15,000 and 20,000 young people—an entire generation—were denied a formal education because of the war' (Alpers and Twyford 2003: 48) As Matilda so well puts it in the novel, the destruction of the educational system led to vacuum:

> My sense of time was governed by the school year – when term began, when it ended, the holidays between. Now that we had been set free we had all this time on our hands. […] The weeks passed. Now we had an idea of what our time was for. It was to be spent waiting. (*MP*: 12)

Having Mr Watts re-opening the school and reading Dickens to the children of the village can thus be seen as Jones's way to write back to the violence of the conflict, to atone for a lost generation.[288]

The re-opening of the school is first characterised as a symbol of hope, of a return to 'normal life': '"You've got school today." She must have enjoyed that moment. I could tell it cheered her up just to say it. As if we had slipped back into a comfortable old routine' (14). Jones slightly distorts historical facts so as to tackle and reflect post-conflict policies, that is the current effort of numerous associations on the island to help 'Lost Generation' youths integrate. As the comparative 'as if' denotes in the quotation above, this 'return' is only temporary and soon debunked since most children are missing (they fled the island) and the vegetation has grown over the abandoned school, alienating and transforming it into an obscure place: 'This was school but not as I remembered it. Perhaps that's why everything felt so strange, as if we were trying to squeeze into an old life that didn't exist anymore, at least not in the way we remembered' (16). The repetition of 'as if', the use of the verb to squeeze and 'old life' convey the feeling of an unrecoverable past, lost to the conflict and vegetation that took over the place. The defamiliarisation at play in this passage, linked to memory, is a trope that pervades the whole novel and paces the *Bildungsroman* of Matilda's life.

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[288] Jones does not only lead this fight in the novel but also in real life. Shortly after the publication of the novel and its success, Jones started a developmental project on Arawa, the main settlement on Bougainville. The project, called Bougainville Library Trust aimed at helping local people in planning and building new infrastructures. It still is active today, with a working library run entirely by locals. When talking about this project in an interview for *The Guardian*¸ Jones calls it 'a temple for story', an image that strikingly emerges in the novel about the school (Cohen 2010: n.p.).

This defamiliarisation is partly embodied by Mr Watts who is presented in contrast with the former teacher: 'Our last teacher had been Mrs. Siau. She was a small woman, not much bigger than us younger kids. Pop Eye stood where she had and so he seemed too large for the room' (15). The children are thus opposed to Mr Watts, with the use of a nickname, their identification with Mrs Siau expressed by the superlative and by the pronoun 'us'. This passage encapsulates the shift from a matrilineal to a patriarchal transmission, an echo of issues raised by the establishment of the copper mine on the island. This is reinforced in a way by Mr Watts's decision to read *Great Expectations,* a canonical work written by a male author, about patrilineal transmission (after all, the possibility for a matrilineal transmission in the figure of Miss Havisham is debunked, countered by the figure of Magwitch). However, Mr Watts's aim is not to smother the children and their heritage but rather to create a stronghold against the war which passes through renewal: '"I want this to be a place of light[.] […]No matter what happens." […] [F]or the first time we were hearing that the future was uncertain. […] "We must clear the space and make it ready for learning [.] […]Make it new again"' (16-17). Going back to school, cleaning it up thus becomes an act of resistance.

Jones's rewriting of *Great Expectations* relies heavily on heteroglossia as Pip's Victorian story is put on equal footing with the inhabitants' stories and words of wisdom. This becomes most apparent when Mr Watts tells the story of 'his life', especially the passage devoted to the spare room and its white wall. This room is prepared for the Watts' future baby, Sarah. Grace and Mr Watts decide to cover it up with inscriptions: 'It had started with Grace writing her relatives' names on the walls of the spare room. Now the writing spread to other areas. Mr Watts and Grace put up their separate histories and ideas. They argued like roosters' (184). Jones seems to create a visual 'Third space', that is a space between the You and I which produces meaning (Bhabha 1994: 53).[289] Yet, the verb 'separate' and the couple's argument suggest that the wall may as much be read as a 'Third space' as one of mere colocation, stressing the lack of interweaving and hybridity. For Monica Latham, 'the blank wall (a scriptural space which invites creative initiatives) […] encloses a hybrid popular and literary production' while initiating 'a figurative battle between two cultures and a competition to inscribe and leave their marks' (2011: 85). Furthermore, as Caterina Colomba remarks, this 'visual "Third space" […] tellingly remains unexplored as the premature death of the baby annuls that possible hybridised future' (2017: 281). If hybridity fails in the Watts' home, it strives and flourishes on the island. As Monica Latham puts it: 'Mr Watts' tale around the fire contains a multitude of stories,

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[289] For a gloss on Bhabbha's concept see also Thieme 2003: 258-259.

multicoloured threads which he weaves in order to compose a believable story – a story which temporarily enables him to survive' (2011: 86). In this climactic moment, Jones acknowledges the heterogeneity and the multivocality of islanders and realises the program set by his working title: 'Inventing the Pacific: Last Chance'.[290]

In fact, though the novel is told from the perspective of the villagers who suffer the conflict, Jones leaves space for both the rebels and the Papuan soldiers to be heard and seen. When the rebels sit by the fire, Matilda pauses in her narrative to tell the reader about their living conditions:

> Three years in the jungle setting death traps for the redskins had made them dangerous, but when I saw the soft focus of their eyes by the fire, I saw faces that missed the classroom. They were practically kids themselves. The one with the sleepy eye would not have been more than twenty. (*MP*: 174)

For Matilda then, the rebels are not an ungraspable entity but 'kids' who happen to have had another fate. Once again, the dominant element is the 'classroom' which in a way is reconstituted by the campfire. That these youths should be 'as enthralled as the rest of us' (*ibid.*) by Mr Watts's narrative redeems them from the war. Contrariwise, Jones's portrayal of the redskins offers no redemption. There is no 'Third Space' shared with the redskins: communication is impossible as they fail to understand that 'Pip' is only a trace, a sign written on the sand. However, though redemption is no option for the redskins, the text hints at pity: 'Once more I saw how yellow and bloodshot his eyes were. How sick he [the officer] was with malaria. How sick of everything he was. How sick of being a human being' (208). The gradation, shifting from literal to figurative sickness, construes the officer as trapped by his position, a victim of a kind.[291]

Colomba argues that compared to other rewritings of *Great Expectations*, Jones's novel is 'unconventional' as instead of 'challenging the fixity of colonial texts through operations of textual hybridisation, as well as by processes of intertextual and metatextual dismantling and reassembling', *Mister Pip* uses Dickens's hero to 'problematiz[e] the concept of "home" and the act of "returning", as well as [to] explor[e] the process of constructing one's identity' (2017:

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[290] Most interestingly, Lloyd Jones admits that this passage was the starting point of the novel, to the point that he even 'thought the novel might never leave that room' until he created Matilda. In 'From *Hard Times* to *Great Expectations*', Geraldine Bedell, *The Guardian,* 30/11/2007 https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/oct/14/bookerprize2007.thebookerprize. At the same time, it may be noted that Jones decided not to have pidgin in the text but translation in English. The presence of pidgin on the island is only mentioned: the whole scene with the rebels is said to be translated from English to pidgin by Matilda for instance. Thus, Jones's work slightly differs from postcolonial works from Indian and African writers in whose work creolisation is of uttermost importance.

[291] The encounter with the rebels is, to a certain extent, reminiscent of *Heart of Darkness* and the threatening omnipresence of black people in the jungle. Jones repurposes these figures of darkness and rehumanises them. As far as the Papuan sergeant is concerned, his characterisation aligns him with the slave drivers of the novella.

276). Indeed, Matilda is no mere hybrid (Bhabha) but a 'migrant' in Salman Rushdie's sense as we have seen in chapter 1. Lloyd Jones remarks that: 'If you're from a migrant society, it's easy to see the orphan and the migrant as interchangeable. For both, the past is at best a fading photograph' (Bedell 2007: np.). For Matilda, the photograph has not faded yet but as both migrant and orphan, she is able to choose her own parents: she chooses Mr Watts and Dolores. Both her decision to write her PhD dissertation on orphans in Dickens's fiction as well as the fact that she writes her narrative on the back of her dissertation draft re-activate a common trope linked to orphan figures: the problematic quest for identity.

The quest for identity is inherent to the representation of orphans be it in the issues raised by the establishment of the Foundling Hospital in London (1739), in *Oliver Twist* (1837)*, or Mathinna in Flanagan's novel and eventually Matilda. Indeed, when the Foundling Hospital opened, children admitted there would lose their name which would be replaced by a number and a new name: 'This new identity purposefully broke the link between parent and child and protected the mother's identity'.[292] The anonymisation of foundlings profoundly interested Dickens as can be seen in his article 'Received a blank Child' published in *Household Words* in 1853. The article opens with the transcription of the administration form then provided by the hospital to mothers: 'The blank day of blank, Received a blank child' (Dickens 2009: 74). The gaps left for the mothers to fill in are materialised by the word 'blank', pointing out Dickens's will to make visible 'those little gaps in the decorous world' (*ibid.*). Dickens satirises the admission process and its dehumanising administration.

The problem of dehumanisation and anonymisation works both ways: not only were the children deprived of their biological identity but their mothers were erased too. However, orphans were left with a clue, a trace back to their origins in the shape of tokens left in their files by their mothers. The tokens were used as means of identification for the time when mothers would be able to claim their child. The Foundling Museum in London displays a range of tokens, as many touching signs of a broken bond never to be repaired. The display of tokens started with S. Branlow in the 1850s, an act which testified both to an interest in these objects while 'sever[ing] the link between token and child.'[293] The museum also offers a dialogic experience as voices of the past are interwoven with voices of the present in the shape of young artists' responses to the Foundling story or, as was the case very recently, by tying up their

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[292] Wall text for the museum's Introductory Gallery. Foundling Hospital Museum, London.
[293] *Idem*.

introductory gallery with their temporary exhibition.[294] Alongside this exhibition, another display is integrated into the introductory gallery downstairs, the 'Women of Note' display which consists of wall texts attached to certain artefacts of the general display and written by twentieth- and twenty-first-century remarkable women. For instance, it was possible to read Francesca Haywards's reflections on the tokens which read as follows:

> In each token I can see the story behind it and my mind thinks about the lives that both mother and child went on to lead and how they were shaped by this forever. Did they ever meet again and where did they go on to become and achieve? So many untold stories of so many different emotions represented by these small objects.[295]

As Hayward notes, these tokens are double signs (quite strikingly, most of them are coins): on the one hand, they are traces of a past bond between a mother and her child; on the other, they stand for 'untold stories' that one can only imagine or try and investigate.

The Foundling Hospital Museum is not only important as a historical landmark for neo-Victorian rewritings of Dickens but is also the setting for Matilda's gradual realisation of her traumatic separation from her mother. In fact, Matilda is unable to relate to the Foundling Hospital Museum's display of 'painterly scenes of the orphanage', by which she certainly refers to such paintings as Henry Nelson O'Neil *A Mother Depositing her Child* (1855) for instance. Matilda debunks the inauthenticity of these paintings as she compares them to her own separation from her mother: 'I remember my own mum holding her arms out to me. I remember the slow open and close of her airless mouth. I remember feeling torn apart' (*MP*: 248). The anaphora, 'I remember', marks the permanent mark of the separation. Dolores is depicted as a statue, arms stretched out, silent and yet conveying an incommensurable sense of helplessness. The separation rips mother and child apart, creating a traumatic wound that Matilda finds wanting in the paintings she discovers at the museum: 'Yet on the faces of the mums in the paintings I could find no trace of distress. You see the same slightly bored faces at a supermarket checkout' (*ibid*.). Matilda's comparison hints at and debunks the nineteenth-century way of dealing with foundlings reduced to disposable property, numbers. Thus, Matilda's criticism finds a striking echo in present art project exhibited at the museum which deflects the numbers attributed to children upon arrival. The debunking goes so far as to criticise Dickens's own

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[294] When I visited the museum in January 2018, the exhibition was entitled 'Ladies of Quality and Distinction' and was devoted to the twenty-one women who signed Thomas Coram's petition for the establishment of the Foundling Hospital and which is part of a series of exhibitions celebrating the centenary of female suffrage in the United Kingdom and, more broadly, 'the remarkable contribution that women have made to British society, culture and philanthropy' (Caro Howell, 'Preface', leaflet for the 'Ladies of Quality and Distinction' exhibition, Foundling Museum, 2018: n.p.).

[295] Francesca Hayward, wall text for 'Tokens', Foundling Hospital Museum, London. As indicated by the curator of the display, Hayward became the first black female principal dancer at the Royal Ballet in 2016.

relation to his children as Matilda notes that: 'The man who writes so touchingly and powerfully about orphans cannot wait to turn his own kin out the door. He wants them out in the world' (247). Uncovering Dickens's contradictions is a way for both Matilda and Jones to reflect on storytelling and identity formation. The novel claims the multiplicity of stories and truth by presenting us with multiple versions of *Great Expectations* and having, Mr Watts, as we have seen in chapter 2. It also reminds us of the role of literature to challenge established and dominating truths such as that surrounding the Bougainville war: 'When I told my father of my mum's death he broke down and wept. That is when I learned there is a place for ambellishment after all. But it belongs to life – not to literature' (253).

Having come to terms with the wound of separation, Matilda is able to clearly assert her identity by the end of the novel. This identity is prone to changes, migration is formative as Georges Letissier puts it:

> by construing Pip as unfixed and in a state of becoming, Matilda is encouraged to become aware of her own fluctuating identity, as a black kid whose father has migrated to white Australia to support the family and as a future migrant herself destined to leave the impoverished island to do some research on Dickens in England later. (2015: paragraph 12)

Thus, Matilda can claim 'Pip is my story' (*MP*: 256) once she has recovered from her traumatic past and uncovered all the traces left by Mr Watts and Dickens's novel:

> *I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip* is one of the most endearing lines in literature. This is who I am: please accept me as you find me. This is what an orphanage sends its charges out to the world with. This is what emigrants wash up on Pacific shorelines with. This is what Mr. Watts had asked the rambos to accept. (254)

Ultimately, the novel turns to us, readers, and asks to accept Matilda's testimony, to take in and acknowledge its violence, its poetry, its appropriation of Dickens and its polyphony. In short, it asks us to accept that 'Pip could become Handel' (249) or Matilda.[296]

<center>***</center>

This chapter has uncovered the numerous wounds left open for the neo-Victorian writers to probe into and try to heal and suture. Dickens being a 'self-fashioned man', always in control of his public image, it is small wonder that neo-Dickensian fiction should be so fascinated with constructedness. Catherine Hogarth and Ellen Ternan, two faces of a same coin, testify to the

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[296] Here we can see a contrast in the way Jones's novel uses the optative mode. On the one hand, Mr Watts undertakes multiple identities, refusing to state his separtedness which dooms him to die. On the other hand, Matilda chooses not to regret, not to let others tell her story and thus has a positive way of positing identity.

neo-Dickensian endeavour to reclaim silenced voices. Contained by the man they love, they also point to other discourses of oppression that pervade Victorian society and take a pathological turn in their neo-Victorian resurfacing. The body of the Victorian era is the locus of traumatic experiences linked to the mind (hysteria, Alzheimer's, mourning), technology as we have seen with the Staplehurst accident, the city or colonisation.

Neo-Dickensian novels feed on Dickens's traumas, most importantly that of the blacking factory which finds dire resonances with contemporary issues revolving around child abuse and childhood trauma. It is striking to see that whereas Dickens's trauma following his accident is readily associated with evolution in psychoanalysis, it is less so concerning his childhood trauma. However, it is possible to see that Dickens foregrounds the conception of child abuse that evolves throughout the nineteenth century and is established in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is not to argue that Dickens was abused by his parents – after all he was not the only twelve-year-old boy forced to leave school to go to work – but the impression the event left on him suggests that he experienced it as such. I hope that this chapter has shown how neo-Dickensian fiction uncovers the crimes of the past, the traumas suffered by Victorian victims not so much to dig into our contemporary yearning for the 'unsavoury' but rather, to highlight horrible continuities lurking in our society and in our construction of victims' stories.

Conclusion

'The specificity and strangeness of literature, the capacity of each work to surprise the reader, if he can remain prepared to be surprised, means that literature continually exceeds any formulas or any theory with which the critic is prepared to encompass it.'

J. Hillis Miller (1982: 5)

Neo-Victorian fiction partakes of a craze playing on nostalgic revival and debunking of the Victorians. As we have shown, this ambivalence is strongly felt in neo-Dickensian texts which, in their appropriation of Dickens's novels, necessarily revive his texts yet, portraying Dickens as 'Fallen', turn him into a crook, a criminal figure, cruel to his wife and children. These novels ask of their readers to re-consider the way in which the past is mediated to us. Therefore, this 'neo-Dickens' is a far cry from the respectable family man praised in the nineteenth century. It is the interplay of various figures belonging to detection that enables neo-Dickensian novels to question the grand narratives that emerged in the Victorian era. Louisa Hadley identifies the relation between neo-Victorian and detective fiction through the figure of the detective whom she sees as 'perform[ing] a similar function to that of the omniscient narrator as it is the detective who elucidates the connections between seemingly random characters and events to present a coherent and contained world to the reader' (Hadley 2010: 152). She thus limits neo-Victorian texts using the detective mode to 'a "puzzle" constructed by the author to tease and please the reader' (143) so that '[u]nlike much postmodern historical fiction, which questions the possibility of accessing the past, neo-Victorian fiction suggests that it is possible to narrate the past' (153). However, through the emphasis on the constructedness of the past, and especially of what we think we know about the Victorians, neo-Victorian fiction plays with the very possibility to know the past, yielding to our desire for immersion, yet refusing total knowledge and control by playing with the

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modalities of narration. This immersion relies on the use of figures belonging to detection (from the *flâneur* to the detective and criminal) who roam the city. The way in which neo-Dickensian texts both create a new hermeneutic square based on that of detective fiction and, at times, depart from it, shows that the relation between past and present is much more complex. This aspect pervades all the novels under study but comes strikingly to the fore in *Drood* as Simmons's novel refuses closure. Presenting us with detective figures, the novels under study have called for an active engagement of the reader who thus turns into a 'reader-as-detective', both looking for a resolution of the plot and for intertextual traces. Filtering neo-Dickensian fiction through the detective mode has enabled us to break down the dichotomy original/copy to pay further attention to palimpsest. The effect is both to mediate the Victorian texts to twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers and to provide new ways of reading the former as we have seen most strikingly with *Tom-All-Alone's* secondary plot which revolves around Hester. The model of writing that has emerged further complicates the relation between neo-Victorian and Victorian author while presenting the former as readers. This led us to consider the neo-Dickensian novels as parallel texts of a kind. The Victorian body of texts (fictional and non-fictional alike) keeps on yielding secrets hence its persistence in our culture and our ongoing returns to it in both fiction and academia. It is especially in playing with the latter that neo-Victorian fiction aims at surprising its readers, offering bifurcations, opening secret wounds. As the example of Matilda shows, the model of reading that is promoted hinges on a balance between 'a scholarly and an emotional approach, a commitment to the historical context of the past with a concern for their afterlife in the present' (Hadley 2010: 130).

We have seen that detective fiction emerges at a moment in time when a new kind of fiction is called for to make sense of the shock of the city, of its violence which needs to be confronted, contained and controlled. The issue of modernity is at the bottom of both detective fiction and the neo-Victorian novel. In the latter, it is Dickens's sense of London, of its transformative power, its threat, that is reworked from different perspectives (the *flâneur*, the criminal or detective) to invite, in a more or less challenging way, the reader into an immersive experience of the past. The past also is a foreign country, kept in the shadow of the Victorian text but returning with strength in neo-Victorian postcolonial fiction. This might lead back to other novels and locations: Mathew Pearl's *The Last Dickens*, for instance, offers a cross-boundaries plot expanding from Bengal to Boston and England while *Havisham*, a biofiction centred on the youth of Dickens's character, returns to the traumatic scene of the brewery.

We have probed into the overlap between biofiction and detection when rewriting Dickens. Neo-Victorian writers are fascinated with Dickens's experience and ambivalence. While some, like Shepherd, lay emphasis on his excursions with Field, creating absences in the text that are made up for with the intertext, others, like Simmons, lay emphasis on the (disturbing?) obsession of the author with criminality. The public figure is turned into a possible criminal which, in the case of Simmons, hinges upon the author's last years and the reading of 'Nancy and Sikes' whereas the French graphic novel *Dickens and Dickens* opens the counterfactual plot much earlier, as a response to Dickens's childhood trauma. The 'Fallen Dickens' fascinates and can be seen as the origin of Dickens's creative power as in *Jack Maggs* (embodied by Oates) or it can be rejected as in *Mister Pip*.

If the Victorian era still fascinates us today, it is because we can see continuities with our contemporary society, so that the nineteenth century turns into an echo chamber for our concerns. Chapter 3 looked at these by turning to the body, secrets and trauma. This chapter confronted the Victorian era as a crime scene of a kind from which emerges the painful plotted lives of Catherine Dickens and Ellen Ternan, victims of the Victorian author. To focus on the story of the victim means to expose past secrets and silences of History. The neo-Dickensian novels that we have studied allow for violence as in the case of *Drood* or *Tom-All-Alone's*: in the latter, Charles's sister is still missing at the end of the novel, refusing recovery and closure and thus hinting at ongoing crimes towards children. The secret, seemingly contained violence and pathologies of the Victorian era thus still lurk around, unleashed. What's more, neo-Dickensian novels turn the tables by picturing detectives who are not in control and/or are no better than criminals themselves. This is the case of Tobias Oates whom Carey uses to make a political claim on our perception of history and 'English identity'. In the end, the criminal not necessarily is who we had thought it would be. The ghost of the past returns with a vengeance, forcing us to look at violated bodies but also, suggesting the possibility of healing and of working through: for instance, Matilda will return to Bougainville.

As Simon Joyce and Louisa Hadley have shown, the notion of 'Victorian' is unstable, always depending on the reader while the numerous biofictional accounts of Dickens as a whole hinge on the distinction between historical and fictive knowledge and testify to readers' pleasure in the latter. More precisely, it is the pleasure in the congruence between 'historical' and 'fictive' knowledge that seems to be harbingered by these texts: the reader relishes validating his historical knowledge in its fictive re-enactment, *e.g.* that Dickens was involved in a railway accident in 1865 and its Gothic representation and consequences in *Drood*. There

is also a pleasure in delineating what partakes of historical knowledge and what is fictitious. Comparing the underlying similarities between historical writing and detective fiction, Ellen O'Gorman shows that the reader's interest does not so much lie in the crime itself as in the process of uncovering what happened, that is in the detective's story and figure (O'Gorman 19-20). If we modulate this statement, we may say that in the corpus under study, the reader's interest lies in the neo-Victorian writer, in the displacements, quotations etc. that point out the rewriting process. Neo-Victorian fiction thus seems to celebrate the reader as detective. This of course seems to modify the table exposed at the beginning of chapter 2 in which I posited the neo-Victorian writer as criminal and the canonical author, in our case Dickens, as the victim. Yet, as was seen throughout, these categories are slippery and shift according to the point of view taken. Neo-Victorian writers like to flaunt their illegitimacy and the way in which they tamper with the hypotext. This is not to say that anything can be proved right when tackling neo-Victorian texts but rather that *because* of its very metatextual nature, neo-Victorian fiction forces its commentators to perform 'gymnastics' – if I may put it that way – and dynamic theoretical leaps to account for this inherent ambivalence.

Literary criticism has evolved too, but the structuralist shift to focus on writing, and thereby reading, remains crucial today. As Anne-Emmanuelle Berger reminded us in a recent talk, reading doubles writing, so that the efforts of the reader offer a form of counter-writing (Berger 2019). As Umberto Eco has it, the novel is 'a machine for generating interpretations' and authors and narrators try not to give meaning but only clues (or 'key' for Eco) that produce in turn various readings (Eco 2004: 541).[297] Furthermore, we read and write within our own culture, our previous readings (545). This relates to Antoine Compagnon's idea of the quotation as a metonym for the whole text it is cut from (2006: 34-37). I see this as a driving force for neo-Dickensian rewriting and intertextual hermeneutic. The detective mode enables us to consider neo-Victorian fiction not merely as mediating Victorian texts to twentieth- and twenty-first century readers but, as a parallel text, they offer a particular reading and therefore new perspectives on these texts. At a moment of crisis in the teaching of literature which seems to emerge from an epistemological crisis in academia (the rejection of structuralism, of close reading, the turn to neuro-sciences and the appearance of the 'trigger-warning'), neo-Victorian fiction seems to claim that it is still possible to read by taking us back to the details of the text, back into its body, asking readers to pay attention to echoes, sutures, erasures, crossings out,

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[297] In the Italian version, Eco uses the term 'macchina' which also means car or vehicle which, I think, further emphasises the idea of reading as process, as movement (Eco 1989: 507).

omissions, similarities and departures. Recently, Chris Louttit wondered in a tweet whether the loop of neo-Victorian fiction had come full circle with the new BBC series 'Year of the Rabbit', a neo-Victorian parody of neo-Victorian fiction (tweeted January 4th, 2019). Louttit's comment is an echo of the persisting doubt concerning the longevity of the genre, first identified by Marie-Luise Kohlke (2008a: 5) and later scrutinised by Samantha J. Carroll (2010: 173). I see this as a symptom of the self-consciousness of our literature and of our society. Thereby, it would seem that we have turned into the victims of our own detection.

I would like to end by returning to the counterfactual which was evoked in chapter 2. As we have seen, neo-Dickensian novels tend to be more interested in the 'what-if?' plots of Dickens's life than sticking to known facts, thereby questioning the possibility to ever know the truth about the past as well as the nature of what we think we know about the past. The counterfactual, with its optative mode offers the possibility to think of identity as multiplicity *en puissance*. Writing the scenarios left in the margins of past novels and past authors' lives, I argue that the neo-Victorian project resists the oneness of what we call the 'Victorians' and thus opens them up and explores their possible multiplicity:

> The path is narrow, my body its border. I am this person, none other, no one other than myself. […] There are so many paths I might have taken, so many lives I might have led, and yet, of all those possibilities, I find myself nowhere but here. (A. Miller 2012: 774)

The neo-Victorian project refuses this oneness and explores, opens up, scavenges the other paths that the Victorian body could have trodden and this from the very start looking at who Bertha could have been had she not been secluded in the attic of Thornfield. Neo-Victorianism is haunted indeed, not only by the dead Victorians but also, and forcefully so, by all the Victorians that were not, who are repressed, encrypted in the kernel of Victorian literature and lives (Miller uses the term in reference to Barthes's studies on narratology but it is impossible not to see the resonance with Abraham and Torok): 'The lives we do not lead are internal to those that we do; our past possibilities live within us' (775) ...

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INDEX

Abstract

This thesis concerns a body of contemporary novels which all use Charles Dickens's works as hypotext while also featuring the Victorian author amongst their cast of characters. In these novels, the Inimitable is either presented as a detective, or as a criminal figure, or both. Drawing upon both Detective Fiction and Neo-Victorian Studies, the present work shows how the neo-Dickensian novel (and neo-Victorianism at large) may be thought of in terms of a detective mode, which provides a framework that enables a renegotiation of intertextuality. Neo-Victorian fiction is fascinated with the emergence of the city as the site of modernity, of a shattered, threatened identity. From the crowded streets the figure of the *flâneur* emerges first, soon to be followed by that of the detective. Neo-Dickensian novels exhume the Victorian, or rather Dickensian London, to immerse their readers in this re-constructed past. The study of the relation to space and place draws upon Yi-Fu Tuan's theory (1977) but also Franco Moretti's (1998), which enables to see that in novels from the Antipodes, the topographical plots of the nineteenth century are reversed. The texts under study not only invest the Dickensian city but

Dickens himself through the use of biofiction. If historians and biographers may be thought of as detectives of a kind, then neo-Victorian writers engaging in biofiction are detectives who distort, play with and question the historical facts that they encounter thereby revealing uncanny but also alternative plots. Neo-Victorianism creates its own criticism as it goes and thus challenges, teases its critics who have no choice but to try and go through with these riddles.

Résumé

Cette thèse explore un corpus de romans contemporains qui ont en commun la réécriture de Charles Dickens, l'œuvre et l'homme. Dans ces romans, l'Inimitable apparait tantôt sous les traits du détective, tantôt sous ceux du criminel. Ces portraits de Dickens nous amènent à nous interroger sur l'usage des modalités de la détection dans les romans néo-Victoriens qui réécrivent l'auteur. Cette thèse vise à démontrer que la détection est partie intégrante du roman néo-Dickensien (et, par extension, du roman néo-Victorien), offrant une autre façon de concevoir la double structure temporelle caractéristique du genre ainsi que le rapport à l'intertextualité. Le premier chapitre offre une réflexion sur la lecture et la représentation de l'espace, en particulier, la ville, Londres, que l'on comprend ici non pas comme reflet de la réalité historique mais comme appropriation du Londres fictionnel de Dickens. Mon étude de la relation entre le lieu et l'espace s'appuie sur les théories de Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) et de Franco Moretti (1998). Ce dernier permet de voir comment les romans postcoloniaux réécrivent et renversent la topographie des romans victoriens. Se pose également la question de la biofiction. Si les historiens et biographes peuvent être considérés comme des sortes de détectives, les auteurs néo-Victoriens ayant recours à la biofiction sont des détectives qui déforment, remettent en question et jouent avec les faits historiques, ce qui les amène à créer des intrigues alternatives et inquiétantes. Le néo-Victorianisme créée sa propre critique au fur et à mesure, en défiant et taquinant les critiques qui eux n'ont guère d'autre choix que de plonger et démêler ces énigmes intertextuelles.