MIND REFLECTED ON PAPER:
DICKENS, VICTORIAN PSYCHOLOGY, AND THE FIRST-PERSON NOVEL

by

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ABSTRACT

*Mind Reflected on Paper* explores the interrelations of Charles Dickens’s first-person novels and mid-century psychological debates about the immateriality of the mind and immortality of the soul. Recent studies of the connections between Victorian psychology and the novel have tended to overlook the centrality of Christianity to nineteenth-century mental science; I address this oversight by examining the powerful shaping force exerted on Victorian psychology by widely felt religious anxieties about the threat of materialism. I restore Dickens’s work to the midst of the controversy such fears aroused by reading his novels alongside popular and specialist nineteenth-century writings on the mind, and by charting Dickens’s own often-overlooked interest in the psychological theorizing of his contemporaries. To be precise, I analyze both Dickens’s deployment of the discourse of nineteenth-century psychology and his use of the first-person form as efforts to resist the encroachment of a scientific, physiological model of the mind. Yet I argue that since the key terms of nineteenth-century psychological discourse—mind, soul, consciousness, and so forth—were variously defined, Dickens’s attempts to avoid the implications of reductionist mental science are undermined by the meanings accumulated by the psychological terminology on which his novels draw.

Furthermore, because introspection remained the primary method of mental research at mid-century, making the first-person perspective the means by which theorists positioned themselves in psychology’s battle of philosophies, I contend that even first-person narration carried with it the traces of such debate and meanings inimical to the model of the mind Dickens sought to endorse. In large part, then, it is precisely the confused and confusing way Dickens employs mental science in his fiction that makes
his work such a valuable instance of how the mind was popularly constructed during the nineteenth century. *Mind Reflected on Paper* therefore reveals both what was at stake for most readers and writers in Victorian psychological debate—the possibility of immortality and the validity of religious belief—and the discursive means by which a mental science whose terms many worried were incommensurate with an afterlife was nevertheless able to rise to dominance in the period.
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DEDICATION

To Klaus
A NOTE ON THE TEXTS

Wherever possible, I have used the Clarendon Dickens editions of the novels. In their absence, I have turned to Norton Critical editions. For those of Dickens’s texts which have yet to be published in either Clarendon or Norton Critical editions, I have used the New Oxford Illustrated editions of the novels. For Dickens’s letters, I have cited the recently completed Pilgrim Letters edited by Madeline House, Graham Storey, et al.
CHAPTER ONE:
Introduction

George Henry Lewes’s *Fortnightly Review* article “Dickens in Relation to Criticism” (1872) presents itself as an attempt to rescue Charles Dickens from the critics, but the essay ultimately articulates a series of positions that have come to represent standard ways of attacking the novelist. Lewes begins by asking how we might reconcile Dickens’s overwhelming popularity with the critical contempt shown his work; after all, “there probably never was a writer of so vast a popularity whose genius was so little appreciated by the critics” (143). How can this paradox be explained? Lewes fails to offer any satisfying answers to his own question, putting forth instead an especially damning portrait of his late friend. Yes, Dickens was “[g]reat . . . in fun” (144), and the vividness of his imagination was unrivalled in any other sane mind. But that unrivalled imagination was also the problem with Dickens’s work. Indeed, Dickens’s claims that he distinctly *heard* the voices of his characters put Lewes in mind of the hallucinations of the insane:

[T]here is considerable light shed upon his works by the action of the imagination in hallucination. To him also *revived* images have the vividness of sensations; to him also *created* images have the coercive power of realities, excluding all control, all contradiction. What seems preposterous, impossible to us, seemed to him simple fact of observation. When he imagined a street, a house, a room, a figure, he saw it not in the vague schematic way of ordinary imagination, but in the sharp definition

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1 Rosemarie Bodenheimer also notes the way Lewes’s article shifts from an apparent defence of Dickens to an attack on the unreality of his creations (*Knowing* 4-5).
of actual perception, all the salient details obtruding themselves on his attention. He, seeing it thus vividly, made us also see it; and believing in its reality however fantastic, he communicated something of his belief to us. . . . So definite and insistent was the image, that even while knowing it was false we could not help, for a moment, being affected, as it were, by his hallucination. (145)

Lewes is quick to insist that he never entertained any doubts about Dickens’s sanity, but the damage is done. If Dickens was not insane, his art was nevertheless not rational; Dickens, Lewes laments, was no thinker (151). Even worse, Dickens’s work seemed to lull to sleep the critical faculties of his readers, too. His creations were fantastic and unreal, but they were so forcefully presented that criticism insisted in vain that they were “distortions of human nature”:

[T]hese unreal figures affected the uncritical reader with the force of reality; and they did so in virtue of their embodiment of some real characteristic vividly presented. The imagination of the author laid hold of some well-marked physical trait, some peculiarity of aspect, speech, or manner which everyone recognised at once; and the force with which this was presented made it occupy the mind to the exclusion of all critical doubts: only reflection could detect the incongruity. (146)

By this point, Lewes’s conclusion that criticism has been mistaken in disregarding the force and vividness of Dickens’s representations—his ability to play on our emotions—seems beside the point. Forceful or not, Dickens’s characters are false: puppets, inhuman mechanisms, personified catchwords, not real.
If Lewes’s criticisms were especially strident, they were, in terms of their content, nothing new. As Lewes himself suggests, Dickens had been plagued by criticisms of the unreality of his fictions—and particularly the unreality of his representations of human nature—since the beginning of his career. The French writer Hippolyte Taine, writing in 1856, anticipated many of Lewes’s complaints in his History of English Literature: he, too, admits Dickens’s unrivalled eye for detail (121), but he laments that Dickens only captures character “in a single attitude” (148), each character being only “a vice, a virtue, a ridicule personified,” “an abstraction in man’s clothes” (149). Even more damning, though, are Taine’s apparent doubts of Dickens’s sanity: he insists that Dickens’s grotesque and passionate imagination “is like that of monomaniacs” (124), those frequently invoked Victorian sufferers whose judgement, otherwise sound, was deluded on a single point. No wonder Dickens can enter so thoroughly into the mindset of the mad—for his “eccentricities,” Taine writes, “are in the style of sickness rather than health” (125).

If the criticisms of other writers were more tempered, they nevertheless amounted to much the same thing. Contrasting him with Thackeray in 1859, David Masson, for example, defends Dickens by insisting that he is of the Ideal, rather than the Real, school, so that “he has characters of ideal perfection and beauty, as well as of ideal ugliness and brutality” (35), but even Masson must acknowledge the frustration of many critics with the way this idealism tends towards exaggeration and caricature (37). Sir James Fitzjames Stephens was far harsher in his criticism of Dickens’s novels, writing in the Saturday Review in the same year that they lack the “careful and moderate delineation of character” (41) that one finds in the highest art. These fictions instead work on readers’
emotions with the coarsest stimulants and—almost as though it were done
mechanically—achieve their effects by placing common occurrences in a grotesque light;
the unreality of Dickens’s descriptions is, for Stephens, matched only by the unreality of
Hablots Browne’s illustrations (46). Henry James’s criticisms of Our Mutual Friend
(1865) are merely another variation on the same theme: he insists that “[i]t is hardly too
much to say that every character here put before us is a mere bundle of eccentricities,
animated by no principle of nature whatsoever” (49). “[W]e are convinced,” James adds,
“that it is one of the chief conditions of his genius not to see beneath the surface of
things. If we might hazard a definition of his literary character, we should, accordingly,
call him the greatest of superficial novelists” (52). Even George Eliot entered the fray,
writing in “The Natural History of German Life” (1856):

We have one great novelist who is gifted with the utmost power of
rendering the external traits of our town population; and if he could give
us their psychological character—their conceptions of life, and their
emotions—with the same truth as their idiom and manners, his books
would be the greatest contribution Art has ever made to the awakening of
social sympathies. (55)

Instead Dickens offers only “false psychology,” only the external and humorous, rather
than the real. His representations of human nature—and Eliot seems to want to include
here his conceptions of human nature—are shallow, static, and frivolous.

That is to say that many of the criticisms of Dickens’s characterization were, like
both Lewes’s and Eliot’s, founded on Dickens’s alleged limitations as a thinker.2 Walter
Bagehot, for example, asserts that Dickens is “utterly deficient in the faculty of

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2 On this point, see also Bodenheimer, Knowing 3-4.
reasoning” (392). Stephens alludes to Dickens’s “incurable vulgarity of mind and of
taste” (39) and insists that “[n]o portion of his popularity is due to intellectual excellence”
(41), while James declaims that Dickens “has added nothing to our understanding of
human character. . . . Mr. Dickens is a great observer and a great humorist, but he is
nothing of a philosopher” (52). We may laugh or cry as we read the fiction, but we will
hardly be called upon to think; Dickens, it seems, simply was not blessed with the
intellectual gifts to write that sort of novel.

As definitive as these statements sound, Dickens was not without his champions,
both during his career and after his death. John Forster, for example, responded to
Taine’s criticisms by insisting that Dickens’s trifles evince a “feeling of the subtlest and
most effective analogies, . . . from which is drawn the rare insight into the sympathies
between the nature of things and their attributes or opposites” (2: 264).3 Certainly
Dickens himself perpetually insisted that his novels accurately reflected reality, as in his
discussion of Nancy in the preface to Oliver Twist (1837-39):

It is useless to discuss whether the conduct and character of the girl seems
[sic] natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. IT IS
TRUE. Every man who has watched these melancholy shades of life knows
it to be so. Suggested to my mind long ago—long before I dealt in
fiction—by what I often saw and read of, in actual life around me, I have,
for years, tracked it through many profligate and noisome ways, and found

3 It is perhaps not surprising that Forster often praises Dickens’s characterization. The following are but a
few more examples of his assessments of this aspect of Dickens’s work: of The Pickwick Papers he writes,
“We had all become suddenly conscious, in the very thick of the extravaganza of adventure and fun set
before us, that here were real people. It was not somebody talking humorously about them, but they were
there themselves” (1: 73); he quotes with approbation a review that says much the same about the
characters in Nicholas Nickleby (1: 95-96); later he insists on the realism of the characters in all the novels
up to Martin Chuzzlewit (2: 273-74).
it still the same. From the first introduction of that poor wretch, to her laying her bloody head upon the robber’s breast, there is not one word exaggerated or over-wrought. (lxv)⁴

But it is perhaps John Ruskin, in an 1860 *Cornhill Magazine* essay on *Hard Times* (1854), who most boldly and astutely defends Dickens’s fictions:

> The essential value and truth of Dickens’s writings have been unwisely lost sight of by many thoughtful persons merely because he presents his truth with some colour of caricature. Unwisely, because Dickens’s caricature, though often gross, is never mistaken. Allowing for his manner of telling them, the things he tells us are always true. (47)

However Dickens expresses them, there are fundamental truths in the novels for Ruskin.

Of course, it was the rare Victorian critic (other than, perhaps, Dickens himself) who dared assert that Dickens’s characters were realistically represented;⁵ Ruskin, though, makes visible the slippage in so many of the attacks on Dickens between what Dickens had to say and how he said it. Why might it be that so many critics eschewed Ruskin’s

⁴ That is, Dickens here insists that his mode of representation is realistic. Most critics who defended him, however, admitted the limitations of Dickens’s realism but insisted that his novels nevertheless expressed important truths. Lisa Rodensky also reminds us that this preface “is of a piece with many others that justify as factually accurate some fantastical element of the story—the talking raven Grip in *Barnaby Rudge* or, more famously, Krook’s spontaneous combustion in *Bleak House*” (42).

⁵ The reviewer in the *National Magazine and Monthly Critic* for December 1837, however, applauds Dickens’s “perception of character, the pathos, and accuracy of description” (65); the anonymous reviewer of *Oliver Twist* in the 24 November 1838 issue of the *Literary Gazette* praises Dickens in reference to the “creation of individual character: to the raising up and embodying of a number of original human beings in so substantial a form, and endowed with such living feelings and passions, and acting in so real and natural a manner, that they immediately become visibly, personally, and intimately known to us” (79). As I have said, these critics who saw Dickens’s characters as realistic were the exception. Much like Ruskin, meanwhile, Edwin P. Whipple writes that Dickens’s characters are “caricatured more in appearance than reality, and if grotesque in form, are true and natural at heart” (239); he adds that “[a] caricaturist rarely presents any thing but a man’s peculiarity, but Dickens always presents the man” (240). And the unsigned reviewer in the 28 October 1865 issue of the *London Review* writes that “[t]he creations of authors such as Mr. Dickens have a life of their own. We perceive them to be full of potential capacities—of undeveloped action. They have a substance and the freedom of actual existences; we think of what they would do under other conditions; they are possessed of a principle of growth” (455).
precision and asserted—or merely assumed—that Dickens’s grotesque characterization grew out of an inadequate knowledge or understanding of psychology? Why equate his mode of representation, the way (in Ruskin’s words) he chose “to speak in a circle of stage fire” (47), with what he had to say?

As a way of beginning to answer these questions, it is worth noting the definite terms in which Dickens’s nineteenth-century critics discuss “human nature,” as though its status were any less contentious than it is now. It was not: as I discuss below, Lewes’s article appeared as the fledgling discipline of psychology was witnessing a fierce struggle—or, more precisely, a series of fierce struggles—about exactly such questions. It is in this context that I want to place Lewes’s essay; I want to suggest that his essay is less an aesthetic judgement of Dickens’s novels than another shot fired in the mid-century “Battle of Philosophies” that constituted the field only just beginning to be called “psychology.” The language of Lewes’s piece and the metaphors for which he reaches, as I shall demonstrate in the following pages, very clearly position Lewes in a particular psychological camp, a camp it will be one of the purposes of this project to show that Dickens strongly opposed.

Throughout “Dickens in Relation to Criticism,” Lewes positions himself as possessing a professional knowledge that both the author and the mass of his readers lacked. This knowledge is at first comprised under the heading “Criticism,” but the professional judgements of the critic in Lewes’s piece seem perpetually to be shifting into

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6 I take this phrase from the title of Alfred Barry’s 1869 Contemporary Review article.
7 I therefore think John Bowen is mistaken in constructing Lewes’s attack on Dickens as the collision of a scientific view with the very different—artistic?—worldview underlying Dickens’s “extraordinary writing” (17). Such an argument seems to reinforce Lewes’s claim that Dickens was ignorant of science, that he was merely following his muse, dragged along by his vivid imagination—by his “feeling”—rather than articulating a considered psychological position, a “theory of the mind” (17). Bowen, that is to say, seems in danger of buying in to the greatly exaggerated reports of Dickens’s ignorance.
something broader: the vain efforts of criticism to correct error very soon come to sound like the parallel efforts of scientific men and women. That is, it quickly becomes apparent that Lewes writes less for readers and critics of Dickens than for scientists and psychologists: can we really believe that a lay readership—even in a generalist intellectual culture like Victorian Britain’s—would grasp his offhand remarks about the atomic theory or the methods by which one obtains carbonic acid (148)? “Psychologists,” he elsewhere contends (revealing his expectation that it is for psychologists that he writes), “will understand both the extent and the limitation of the remark, when I say that in no other perfectly sane mind . . . have I observed vividness of imagination approaching so closely to hallucination” (144). He follows this assertion, moreover, with an explanation of what distinguishes the hallucinations of the insane from those experienced by healthy individuals (144-45)—an explanation that attests to Lewes’s awareness that his argument would baffle the common reader. What I want particularly to stress, then, is that psychological knowledge is here constructed as a sort of specialist knowledge in a way it rarely had been in the first half of the nineteenth century; Lewes knows what he does because of his “studies” (145), studies in which the common reader was increasingly less capable of engaging. It is for this reason—his scientific authority—that Lewes can pronounce so definitively on both Dickens’s imagination and the deluding effect which his imagination had on readers. The general reader, after all, hardly even considers his or her mental state: “Think how little the mass of men are given to reflect on their impressions, and how their minds are for the most part occupied with sensations rather than ideas, and you will see why Dickens held an undisputed sway” (146). Even the

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8 Bodenheimer makes a similar point. She writes that Lewes argues “in a scientific vein about the mental processes that feed the hallucinations of the insane and their belief in their visions” (Knowing 4) and that his criticisms of Dickens are “[c]ouched in the authoritative language of the mental sciences” (Knowing 5).
scientific nature of Lewes’s language—not merely scientific, but informed by a specific type of science—aligns him with a particular psychology,\(^9\) one which, against the opposition of those like Dickens, was far along in its ascendency by the time that Lewes wrote.\(^{10}\)

This opposition between Dickens and Lewes on the subject of psychology lends a particular aptness to the analogy—the “parallel case”—for which Lewes reaches to describe the effect of the “bias of opposition” on the reception of Dickens’s work among critics:

> Let us suppose a scientific book to be attracting the attention of Europe by the boldness, suggestiveness, and theoretic plausibility of its hypotheses; this work falls into the hands of a critic sufficiently grounded in the science treated to be aware that its writer, although gifted with great theoretic power and occasional insight into unexplored relations, is nevertheless pitiably ignorant of the elementary facts and principles of the science; the critic noticing the power, and the talent of lucid exposition, is yet perplexed and irritated at ignorance which is inexcusable, and a reckless twisting of known facts into impossible relations, which seems wilful; will he not pass from marveling at this inextricable web of sense and nonsense, suggestive insight and mischievous error, so jumbled together that the combination of this sagacity with this glaring inefficiency

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\(^9\) On Lewes’s place in the history of psychology, see Reed 145-56. Boring has little to say about Lewes, other than to identify him as an important theorist of evolutionary psychology (244). Certainly Lewes’s positivist tendencies were not ones Dickens shared, as I discuss in Chapter Three.

\(^{10}\) Richard Menke notes the “uproar” created by Lewes’s “scientific comparisons” in this essay and suggests it may have played a part in his failure or refusal to complete another work of original literary criticism after “Dickens in Relation to Criticism” (618).
is a paradox, and be driven by the anger of opposition into an emphatic assertion that the belauded philosopher is a charlatan and an ignoramus?

(147)

It will be my contention in this project that Lewes’s “parallel case” almost exactly describes his own resistance to Dickens’s novels. I shall argue that these novels, like Lewes’s hypothetical scientific book, offered interventions in the still relatively inchoate field of psychology, interventions against the psycho-physiology that Lewes promulgated and helped construct. Lewes’s attack on Dickens’s fiction, then, is as much a defence of the latter psychology as it is a fair evaluation of the artistic limitations of Dickens’s writing; while Lewes laments the practice of those critics who “interpret an author’s work according to some standard which is not his” (141), in terms of psychology this is precisely what he himself does with Dickens’s novels. To put my contention another way, it is not only that Dickens fails to represent psychology realistically, as his many critics insisted, but that, to borrow Eliot’s words again, he offers a false psychology—a model Lewes wished to deny.11 No wonder, then, that Lewes is so keen to insist on Dickens’s intellectual limitations: “[H]is was merely an animal intelligence,” Lewes writes, and “[h]e never was and never would have been a student” (151). Ignoring the countless scientific and psychological volumes to be found on Dickens’s shelves at Gad’s Hill after his death, Lewes claims that Dickens “still remained [at their second meeting in the late 1830s or early 1840s] completely outside philosophy, science, and the higher

11 On the way Lewes’s psychological theories of character aligned with Eliot’s novelistic characterization, see Rylance, Victorian 133. My argument here shares something with Bodenheimer’s claim that the controversy between Lewes and Dickens on the topic of spontaneous combustion (which I discuss in Chapter Three) was grounded in the respective privileging of two different types of knowledge (Knowing 9-10). The point I will make both in this introduction and in my third chapter, however, is that in the middle of the nineteenth century both views could be considered “scientific.” On the notion that Lewes’s attack is related to his scientific theories, see also Gallagher and Greenblatt 203.
literature, and was too unaffected a man to pretend to feel any interest in them” (152).  
Whatever the limitations of Dickens’s understanding of these topics, I argue that his novels nevertheless represent an earnest engagement with them that belies Lewes’s interested assertions.  

Lewes’s positioning within a particular psychological school is nowhere made more visible than in his assertion that Dickens’s characters are like the products of vivisection:

When one thinks of Micawber always presenting himself in the same situation, moved with the same springs, and uttering the same sounds, always confident on something turning up, always crushed and rebounding, always making punch . . . when one thinks of the “catchwords” personified as characters, one is reminded of the frogs whose brains have been taken out for physiological purposes, and whose actions henceforth want the distinctive peculiarity of organic action, that of fluctuating spontaneity. Place one of these brainless frogs on his back and he will at once recover the sitting posture; draw a leg from under him, and he will draw it back again; tickle or prick him and he will push away the object, or take one hop out of the way; stroke his back, and he will offer one croak. All these things resemble the actions of the unmutilated frog, but they differ in being isolated actions, and always the same: they are as uniform and calculable as the movements of a machine. (148–49)

12 For the contents of Dickens’s Gad’s Hill library, see Stonehouse.
13 Lewes does, however, acknowledge Dickens’s keen interest in the subject of dreams (153–54).
In addition to the way Lewes’s simile here further insists on a specialist psychological knowledge, its implicit suggestion—that the way to such knowledge was through physiological experiment—remained controversial in 1872. More precisely, as I explain below, the specific experiments Lewes invokes here were employed by defenders of physiological psychology to argue for a material mind, to argue against the psychological position that I contend Dickens defended. In his essay “On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata, and Its History” (1874), for example, T. H. Huxley describes the results of exactly such experiments (364) in order to suggest that consciousness is but a coincident phenomenon of bodily life, and that it is but an illusion that the mind or will can cause the motions of the body (365-66), a doctrine he rightly anticipates will be scorned as “Fatalism, Materialism, and Atheism” (366).

There is, however, another way that we can read Lewes’s comparison of Dickens’s characters to brainless frogs: Lewes here uses Dickensian character for his own ends, appropriating Micawber et al. to prop up (implicitly) his own physiological psychology. The brainless frogs allow us to understand Micawber, but Micawber also reinforces the physiological conclusions drawn from the actions of the brainless frogs. In thus appropriating Dickens’s characters, I want to stress, Lewes was not alone. These characters—despite their alleged unreality—were persistently taken up by psychological writers as illustrative examples of their respective theories of the mind, not all of which Dickens would have endorsed had he a say in the matter. Athena Vrettos points out that Darwin drew illustrations for *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872).

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14 In “Fiction as Vivisection,” Menke offers a compelling examination of the connection between Lewes’s literary criticism, vivisection, and the psychology Lewes endorsed. Menke notes Lewes’s efforts to replace or supplement introspection with experiment as the basis for a science of the mind (622-24). He also sees Lewes’s psychological experimentation as controversial, but for a different reason than I discuss here: the perceived cruelty to animals of vivisection (624-27).
from *Oliver Twist* (“Defining” 421) and that William James appropriated Dickens’s minor characters for his own psychological work (“Defining” 401); somewhat similarly, Jill L. Matus notes that William Carpenter offered as evidence for his discussion of memory in *Mental Philosophy* (1874) Dickens’s claims about his experiences composing fiction (423). Furthermore, in his *Contemporary Review* article “The Physiology of the Will” (1871), Carpenter describes Iago, Rashleigh Osbaldistone, and Quilp as examples of characters who “use their power of self-control for the purpose of hypocrisy and dissimulation, and cover the most malignant designs under the veil of friendship” (217). Lewes’s case, then, is only an extreme example—extreme in the utter opposition of Lewes’s psychological theories to the views I argue Dickens held—of what seems a fairly general practice. While Dickens constructed his characters as means of supporting a Christian psychology, theorists in opposing camps were able to reinscribe those characters in such a way that they could subsequently be placed in the service of very different models of the mind. The afterlife of Dickensian character thus stands as a particularly striking parallel case of the rhetorical means by which, at least in part, a physiological psychology was able to overcome popular opposition and rise to dominance by the end of the nineteenth century. And here is one of the cruxes of the argument that this project makes: I contend that, just as Lewes so successfully turned Dickens’s characters to his own theoretical ends, psycho-physiologists redefined the terminology of an earlier, Christian mental philosophy in order to oppose the very thinkers whose terminology they had appropriated. This study therefore seeks to focus attention on this strategy of redefinition, to chart the various significations loaded onto a
series of key psychological terms and trace how these meanings were received by a popular audience.

**Psychology in the Nineteenth Century**

As a number of literary critics and historians of science have shown, sketching the outlines of the nineteenth-century discursive field that was only just coming to be called “Psychology” is a daunting task. Psychology was less a well-defined body of knowledge than a series of competing discourses (including many that a modern reader would dismiss as pseudoscientific), a field in the process of being defined;\(^\text{15}\) there is ample reason for the metaphors of battle for which so many writers reached when trying to describe the state of mental philosophy in Britain during the nineteenth century. The subject matter and boundaries of the discipline were by no means agreed upon. Did practicing psychology mean studying the soul? The mind? The brain? The nervous system? The answer, of course, depended on whose book or article one was reading.\(^\text{16}\) Even the name of this body of knowledge was contentious: psychology, or moral philosophy, or mental philosophy, or mental science? Although I use them more or less interchangeably, each had its own connotations. Rick Rylance traces four competing discourses that shaped the field, those of the soul, philosophy, physiology, and medicine,

\(^{15}\) This is Roger Smith’s point. On the role of the periodicals in this shaping process, see his “The Physiology of the Will: Mind, Body, and Psychology in the Periodical Literature, 1855-1875,” 82-83. Rick Rylance argues that “[psychology] was an unshapely, accommodating, contested, emergent, energetic discipline, filled with dispute and without settled lines of theory or protocols for investigation” (Victorian 7). On the varied discourses that contributed to psychology, see also Boring 157-58; Shuttleworth, Charlotte Brontë 2; and Roger Smith “Physiological” 76-77, “Physiology” 82-83, 85.

\(^{16}\) Edward Reed argues that at the beginning of the century psychology was considered a science of the soul, and by the end mind had more or less replaced soul as an object of study (3). This sketch is, in the broadest terms, correct, but we should note that there was discord about the object to be studied in psychology throughout the century. Overall, Reed’s book suggests as much, despite the generalization I have just quoted.
but as I argue—particularly in Chapter Four—this list is far from exhaustive. As is suggested by the diverse discursive tributaries that fed into the larger stream of mental science, psychological works were written (and read) by a broad cast of characters:

Edward Reed explains that “we should not be surprised to find doctors, academics, preachers, writers, and quacks all actively engaged in the practice of psychology” (xi). And the written forms in which one could contribute to the field were many: treatises, textbooks, periodical articles, poems, stories. In other words, what I want to stress here at the outset—and what I gestured at in the last section—is that novelists, too, contributed to Victorian psychology, both in making explicit interventions in the field and in supplying familiar examples for other theorists. In the generalist intellectual culture of Victorian Britain, that is, literary texts represented a perfectly viable means of participating in psychological debate—one that we must understand as being read alongside the denser, drier, and more daunting (more recognizably “academic” or “scientific” to a twenty-first-century reader) texts of other psychological theorists.

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17 Nor was the influence of each of these discourses equal.
18 Rylance employs a similar metaphor to describe the intermixing of the varied discourses that constituted psychology in the period (Victorian 15).
19 Sally Shuttleworth’s Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology does an exemplary job of demonstrating both how psychological writers drew on literary texts for “evidence” and how they tended to recirculate the same supposedly true narratives to support their theories (13-14). On the legitimacy of literary texts as contributions to the field, see also Reed 11.
20 Roger Smith considers the difficult question of which readers actually read the dry and technical texts that were produced in the period (“Physiology” 100). On the generalist intellectual culture of Britain in the nineteenth century, see Rylance, Victorian 28. He writes elsewhere that “the broad audience for psychology perceived the issues it raised as matters of common, not specialized, intellectual and cultural concern” (Victorian 7). Smith echoes Rylance, arguing that “[t]here were no clear dividing lines between science and the wider culture in this writing. The literature on mind and body at one and the same time formed a public discourse about science and reflected on central moral questions of human identity and agency” (“Physiology” 81); he adds that “psychology in Britain was shaped in a public arena, not through the specialization or differentiation of academic life” (“Physiology” 83). Nicholas Dames’s assertion that “the work of Bain, Hamilton, and Mill was never disseminated in popular form in the manner of phrenology or mesmerism” (139) therefore hardly makes sense in the context of Victorian Britain. If none of these theorists published his work in chapbooks, for instance, each was widely reviewed in the generalist periodicals and likely would have been known of by many non-professional readers.
Yet as diverse as were the discourses that constituted it by the middle of the
nineteenth century, psychology had its origins as a study of the soul, and despite the
unsettled nature of psychological discourse at mid-century, this focus on the metaphysical
continued to hold a central place in writings on mental science. I would suggest that the
idea that the mind was immaterial and distinct from the body, its essence indefinable—
essentially, that is, that “mind” was more or less a synonym for “soul,” and “mental” in
many ways indistinguishable from “spiritual”—existed as a sort of default position as late
as the 1840s, where this study begins. This doctrine was the closest thing to a standard
belief we are likely to find in Victorian psychology, in part because of its accordance
with popular religious belief—hovering behind the key word “immaterial,” after all, was
always its near-homonym, “immortal.” It goes without saying, based on the outline I have
just offered of the contentiousness of so much of this field, that not all agreed with the
notion of an immaterial and immortal mind acting (in this plane of existence) on and
through the body. But those writers who wished to contest this view realized that they
faced an uphill battle, realized that they must convince their readers—against a great deal
of popular prejudice—that the standard position was mistaken.

I want to emphasize here the centrality of religious discourse—and religious
belief—to the various psychologies of mid-century, whether in the breach or in the
observance. James Martineau, in his 1860 review of the work of Alexander Bain, insists
on the necessary connection between Christianity and mental science:

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21 Insisting that “[e]arly encyclopaedias were committed to the discourse of the soul” (Victorian 23), for
example, Rylance cites a number of early- and mid-nineteenth-century entries that define “psychology” in
these terms.

22 See, for example, Thomas Reid’s Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man (1785), 20.

23 Roger Smith asserts that “[t]he basic terms and framework for discussion of mind and brain came from
religious and moral preoccupations. This was the case even where authors set out to show that new,
[W]hatever be the destination of Intellectual Philosophy, draws with it that of Ethics and Religion: for, once within the enclosure of the distinctive human faculties, it is impossible for the inquirer to insulate the Reason, whilst relegating Conscience and Faith to quite another field. (501)

We see a similar conception of the relationship between Christianity and psychology in James Collier’s claim that theology, the “mother of all the sciences, . . . gives birth to Psychology first of the sciences of mind; all the great problems, the discussion of which carries the science through its subsequent revolutions, are raised by it” (378; see also 382-83). The author of the 1859 review of Sir William Hamilton’s Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic (1859) in The Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology reverses Collier’s genealogy, writing that “Theology is wholly dependent upon Psychology” (316), but, for my purposes, the two statements amount to much the same thing. Against the (still oft-repeated) popular narrative of the nineteenth century as an age moving inexorably towards religious doubt, or the easy opposition of Victorian science and religion, I therefore want to stress both the resiliency of Christian belief in the period and the important ways that it continued to inform the methods and subject matter of even a “scientific” body of knowledge like psychology.24 Questions about the afterlife

scientific knowledge upset existing beliefs: it was existing beliefs that gave meaning and significance to new argument” (“Physiology” 84).

24 On the notion that psychology could in fact buttress religious belief, see Reed 2-3. He argues that this understanding of psychology as a prop for religion continued throughout the century and suggests that “[t]he ‘scientific’ debates over mind, body, and soul in the 1800s are inseparable from the religious debates concerning these matters—it is, in fact, anachronistic to separate the two” (3). See also Dixon, From Passions 234. Dixon notes the way that our own assumptions about the secularism of science have restricted which nineteenth-century theories of mind are considered by historians of science (From Passions 181). On this point, see also Roger Smith (“Physiology” 84). Dixon furthermore points out the varieties of Christian belief of those writing Christian psychology (From Passions 181-82)—the religion of those who held broadly Christian positions in their psychological work was far from monolithic. Responding to Reed’s claims that nineteenth-century mental science was “inherently theological, or ‘deistic’ or compatible with religious belief,” Dixon insists, “[i]t is important . . . to make more fine-grained
and the existence of God were considered just as legitimate psychological questions as, for example, the functions of the nerves or the origins of our mental furniture. Indeed, in the intellectual culture of mid-century one could not begin to ponder either of the latter questions without also pondering the former.\textsuperscript{25}

The assumption that the mind was immaterial and distinct from the body, that it was essentially outside of nature, seems initially to have justified the primary method by which mental research was conducted in the middle of the century, introspection. What was significant about mind was only to be perceived by looking inwards; tracing the visible and external signs of consciousness—studying the body—could reveal little or nothing about the private subjective experience of mental life that an orthodox Christian dualism privileged.\textsuperscript{26} But not only did the status of mind justify the use of introspection: introspection was equally thought to confirm the immateriality of mind. As Lewes describes it, “The central position of Spiritualism when . . . it advances positive arguments, is that Consciousness emphatically declares Mind to be something essentially distinct from Matter, and declares it to be simple not composite” (“Spiritualism” 491).\textsuperscript{27}
Nearly every psychological study from the period explicitly or implicitly founds its claims on evidence unearthed through introspection. The utterly orthodox John Abercrombie—two of whose books were on Dickens’s shelves at Gad’s Hill—thus insists, for example, that “the only field, in which the mental philosopher can pursue his researches with perfect confidence, is his own mind” (1-2); James Martineau makes the same point, arguing that knowledge of mind is to be obtained by turning inward to “count the beads of thought and note the flush of feeling” (503). Sir Henry Holland (a physician who numbered among his clients Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and six Prime Ministers [Rylance, *Victorian* 127]) echoes Abercrombie and Martineau, writing in 1858 that introspection “can alone furnish us with those elementary facts which lie at the bottom of all mental philosophy, under whatever name propounded” (*Chapters* 116).

What we must remember, however, is that it was not only the conservative and the orthodox who relied heavily on introspection for their psychological research. Alexander Bain, whose extreme psycho-physiology I discuss in Chapter Five, was even more insistent on the centrality of introspection to proper mental research than Abercrombie, Martineau, or Holland. He writes in 1892 that introspection is “the alpha and omega of psychological inquiry: it is alone supreme, everything else subsidiary. Its compass is ten

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28 I have cited the 10th edition of Abercrombie’s *Inquiries* (1840), which was the edition that Dickens owned. Abercrombie is a particularly useful case study here, since his work is not original in any substantial sense, but instead reflects the popular influence of earlier, more profound thinkers, such as Dugald Stewart and Thomas Reid. James McCosh describes Abercrombie as a popular disseminator, one whose work constitutes “expositions of mental and moral investigation for the use of upper schools, male and female, and the reading population who have not the advantage of a collegiate education” (*Scottish* 406). I discuss Stewart and Reid in Chapter Two. On Abercrombie’s work, see also Graham Richards 331-32.

29 Holland’s position here acquires added significance for my own argument in light of Roger Smith’s assertion that “[e]veryone” in the period “noted that medical writings led the way in identifying psychology with physiology” (“Physiology” 88). In any case, Rylance suggests that Holland’s work influenced *Middlemarch* (1871-72) (*Victorian* 130). Holland was Eliot and Lewes’s physician.
times all the other methods put together, and fifty times the utmost range of Psycho-
physics alone” (“Respective” 42). While John Stuart Mill—another bugbear to the
orthodox—suggests means to supplement the analysis of one’s own consciousness with
the observation of children, animals, those raised in solitude, and those destitute of
particular senses, he, too, assumes the primacy of introspection to the study of the mind
(“Bain’s” 297). Introspection, in other words, served as a key method of psychological
research for theorists of all stripes, even those who sought to challenge or undermine
conventional Christian ways of understanding the relationship of either mind to body or
man to God.

That is to say that if a broad Christian dualism justified the primacy of
introspection in Victorian psychological research, not all who looked inwards reached
such orthodox conclusions. Others, as I have been suggesting, employed introspection in
their psychologies yet questioned the notion that mind was separate and distinct from
matter, a challenge made most visible in the claim—ever-more frequent at mid-century—
that the brain was the organ of the mind. Of course, this assertion was not inherently
controversial: the middle of the nineteenth century found even the most orthodox
theorists increasingly admitting that the body had a role in mental processes, that it could
affect mind just as mind affected matter. We see this position in the words of the

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30 See also Bain’s Emotions and the Will (1859), 608-9. Indeed, Robert M. Young is critical of Bain’s
reliance on introspection in his psychological work, writing that “[a]s long as psychology was conducted as
mental philosophy it had no hope of obtaining the data necessary for the understanding of emotional
phenomena” (Mind 128).
31 On introspection in Mill’s psychology, see also Herbert Spencer’s “Mill versus Hamilton—The Test of
Truth” (1865), 536.
32 This position was not as obvious as it seems to us. In his 1814-15 Edinburgh Review article “Functions
of the Nervous System,” John Gordon works to deny that the brain has any part in mental processes. On the
role played by phrenology in convincing theorists that the brain was the mind’s organ, see especially
Young’s Mind, Brain, and Adaptation in the Nineteenth Century. I discuss phrenology and the brain at
greater length in Chapter Six.
physician Thomas Laycock, for example: “Few men doubt that they use the brain as the organ of thought; fewer doubt that the mind which thinks influences the bodily organ, and that the organ influences the mind” (“Body” 423). What made the claim that the brain was the organ of the mind a potential site of controversy was the particular relationship imagined between brain and mind by each theorist who employed the construction.33 When more conservative thinkers made such assertions, they tended to mean that the brain was the material instrument by which the soul communicated with the world: just as the eyes were no more than the organs through which individuals saw, the brain was but an organ employed by the soul for thought.34 This is, more or less, Abercrombie’s position:

The brain, it is true, is the centre of that influence on which depend sensation and motion. There is a remarkable connexion between this organ and the manifestations of mind; and by various diseases of the brain these manifestations are often modified, impaired, or suspended. We shall afterwards see that these results are far from being uniform; but, even if they were uniform, the facts would warrant no such conclusion respecting the nature of mind [as that it is a function of the brain]; for they accord

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33 Henry Maudsley, in his 1879 article “Materialism and Its Lessons,” outlines the two primary relationships that were imagined when theorists wrote of the brain as the organ of the mind.

34 This specific example is Laycock’s. He writes, “It is part of the great scheme of Divine Providence that animals endowed with the power of vision shall use the eyes given to them to exercise that power; it is equally a part of that great and wondrous scheme that the brain and nervous system shall be the organs of thought. It is for this purpose that they have been so exquisitely constructed” (“Body” 439). On the tendency of orthodox mental scientists to see the brain as the soul’s tool, see Dixon, From Passions 183; Jacyna, “Physiology” 113; and Reed 4-5. In light of this dualist treatment of the relationship of mind and brain, Shuttleworth seems to overstate the case when she argues that, in the period, “[n]o longer was the mind viewed as an immaterial or spiritual essence, but was placed firmly within the workings of the body” (Charlotte Brontë 42). The controversy evoked by any Victorian writer who would make such bold claims about the brain and body seriously undermines Shuttleworth’s assertion.
equally with the supposition that the brain is the organ of communication
between the mind and the external world. (30)

The physical organ could affect the mind, could even limit the soul or mind’s perceptive
powers, as I discuss in Chapter Five—but it was by no means constitutive of the mind.

Yet others made precisely such heterodox claims. Dickens’s friend and physician
John Elliotson—two of whose works Dickens owned, and who seemed ever to be
courting controversy—boldly asserted in 1840:

MIND is the functional power of the living brain. As I cannot conceive life
any more than the power of attraction unless possessed by matter, so I
cannot conceive mind unless possessed by a brain, or by some nervous
organ, whatever name we may choose to give it, endowed with life. I
speak of terrestrial or animal mind; with angelic and divine nature we have
nothing to do, and of them we know, in the same respects, nothing.

(Human 32)

The relationship here is one of dependency; Elliotson’s words amount to a claim that the
brain is the foundation and source of the mind. W. K. Clifford made much the same point
in 1874, arguing “not only that some change in the matter of this organ is the invariable
antecedent, but that some other change is the invariable concomitant of sensation,
thought, and emotion” (717). Brain was very clearly the cause and mind the effect for
these theorists. The point, again, is that introspection was, like Dickens’s characters, put
to use in psychologies that reached utterly contradictory conclusions. It is one of the
fundamental contentions of my project—as I discuss below—that the introspective mode
was therefore marked by the various uses to which it was put, that it carried with it traces
of both orthodox mental philosophies and those physiological psychologies that used it to deny a Christian dualist conception of the mind.

The claims made by Elliotson, Clifford, and others with respect to the physical basis of the mind owed something—and in turn helped to justify—the burgeoning efforts in the middle of the century to subject psychology to the standards (and, to some degree, methods) of the physical sciences. These efforts were not initially free of opposition: the very idea that psychology could be a science had for years been rejected by more orthodox thinkers. Conservative psychologists had insisted that science had to do with the physical world, with that which could be observed and measured; the mind and soul, as immaterial entities, were therefore necessarily outside the realm of science. But by mid-century the views of even many orthodox thinkers had shifted, and the idea that the mind could be studied “scientifically” gained relatively wide acceptance. Central to this shift was the notion that making psychology accord with the standards of the physical sciences did not necessarily mean shifting the focus of study from the mind to the physical body—that is, it did not mean abandoning the dominant dualist notion of the self which privileged the immaterial mind over the body—nor did it require deposing introspection as mental science’s central research method. Indeed, Thomas Dixon points out that the trope of inward “observation”—introspection, in other words—employed by John Locke itself reflected an attempt to model psychology on experimental natural philosophy. Introspection, that is, was for the Victorians a scientific

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35 On this point, see Reed 13-14, 22-37; Rylance, *Victorian* 47-49; and Roger Smith, “Physiological” 79. 36 Note, then, Dixon’s assertion that “being an anti-physicalist in psychology was not the same as being anti-scientific. It meant, rather, having a different set of beliefs from the physicalists about the nature of the scientific method and the way it should be applied to human mental life” (From Passions 199). See also From Passions 235 and Roger Smith, “Physiology” 86-90, 98-99.
methodology. The definition of psychology in the 1838 *British Cyclopaedia* further illustrates how attempting to model psychology on the physical sciences did not necessarily mean abandoning a dualist notion of the mind:

> **PSYCHOLOGY** , the science of the soul, or the spiritual principle in man . . .

may be defined to be the scientifically conducted observation of the operations and changes of the human soul . . . . It takes for granted the distinction of the spiritual substance from the body, as a matter of consciousness, and does not therefore attempt to explain it. (qtd. in Rylance, *Victorian* 23)

As this definition suggests, however, the allowable sphere of the physical sciences within psychology often remained severely limited. In particular, the nature of the connection between mind and body was widely seen to be beyond the scope of proper inquiry. Abercrombie, for example, writes that of this connection “we know nothing but the facts; when we attempt to speculate upon its nature and cause we wander at once from the path of philosophical inquiry, into conjectures which are as far beyond the proper sphere as they are beyond the reach of the human faculties” (23). William Carpenter, too, insists in 1842 that “[t]he degree in which the operations of the Mind itself are dependent upon its material instruments, is a question which cannot be regarded as conclusively determined by scientific evidence alone; and it has little practical bearing on Physiological research” (*Principles of Human Physiology* 59). Carpenter’s assertion, to be clear, is as much an insistence that science should not answer this question as an accurate assessment that it could not do so.

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37 Roger Smith makes this point ("Physiological" 79). Dixon also traces the early application of the scientific methods of observation, experiment, and induction to the mind (*From Passions* 102-3).

But if making psychology accord with the standards of the physical sciences did not necessarily mean shifting the focus of study from the mind to the physical body, such a shift proved too tempting for some writers to resist. The concession among even conservative writers that the body had some part in mental function—as well as the gradual inclusion of physiological data in even the most orthodox studies—worked towards naturalizing the mind, towards reinserting it into nature;\(^{39}\) as Reed has argued, the increasing belief that certain mental processes went on outside the realm of consciousness further seemed to necessitate supplementing introspection with other research methods (19). For conservative thinkers, these external, physical modes of research were acceptable so long as they remained only a supplement, rather than a replacement for introspection. This is James Martineau’s point in 1860:

> It is not that we doubt the physiological importance of the modern cerebral researches, or feel anything but regret at their hitherto scanty achievements. But if they were ever so successful,—if we could get to look at all that we want,—if we could turn the exterior of a man’s body into a transparent case, and compel powerful magnifiers to lay bare to us all that happens in his nerves and brain,—what we should see would not be sensation, thought, affection, but some form of movement or other visible change, which would equally show itself to any being with observing eyesight, however incapable of the corresponding inner

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\(^{39}\) Carpenter, for example, writes that “even though [the philosopher] may come to the conclusion that ‘Mind and Matter are logically distinct existences,’ yet he finds their operations so inextricably interwoven in the phenomena of Man’s terrestrial life, that he cannot pursue either class of phenomena by itself alone” (Principles of Human Physiology 59). On some of the various approaches by which mind was naturalized in Victorian Britain, see especially L. S. Jacyna’s essay “The Physiology of Mind, the Unity of Nature, and the Moral Order in Victorian Thought.” Roger Smith also points out the widespread acceptance of physiological approaches in the latter half of the century (“Physiology” 81).
emotion. Facts thus legible from a position foreign to the human consciousness are not mental facts, are not moral facts, and have no place in the interior of a science which professes to treat of these, and reduce them to their laws. (505)

An acceptable psychology would remain founded on introspection, on the consideration of “mental facts”—that is, the consideration of subjective experience, of the inward and private knowledge of the mind which is figured here as irreducible to the nerves and brain. It was a short step, however—and one, I repeat, many took—from including the physical among the objects of psychological study to arguing that psychology ought to restrict itself to (or at least focus primarily on) that which could be seen and measured: in short, the physical.40 This move was both justified by and itself encouraged those theories that saw mind as a *product* of matter; thought, in other words, came to be treated by these theorists as a consequence of organic processes in the same way that nutrition or secretion were.41 “Between the facts of life, as manifested through the lower grades of organised existence, and the facts of mind, special to our race,” Martineau further complains in the article I have just cited, the reductionist theorist “recognizes no ultimate distinction, and confidently looks for evidence of essential identity” (501). If mind was

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40 This is, for instance, the drift of J. D. Morell’s claim that, “where a direct objective material of research exists—one to which we can have immediate access, which presents actual facts and phenomena to our view, and which can be interrogated by inquisitive observation,—it is folly to neglect these patent facts, and then to retire into the recesses of our own minds to find the laws we seek for there” (349). On the efforts of reductionist physiological theorists to make mental science a science of matter, see Dixon, *From Passions*. As he puts it, “[T]he transition was made in this period from the by-now very well-established tradition of applying methods connected with the physical sciences to the mind qua mind (observation, induction, analysis and classification of mental states), to the new practice of using the methods and results of the physical sciences per se (especially evolutionary biology and neurophysiology) as the basis of an understanding of the mind” (*From Passions* 141). On the impact on psychology of the rise of scientific naturalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, see also Boring 44, Daston, Harrington 30-31, and Young, *Mind* 54. (Incidentally, Harrington includes Hippolyte Taine among the leaders of the “cult of science” in France during the period.) Frank Turner’s *Between Science and Religion* remains to my mind the best study of nineteenth-century scientific naturalism.

41 On this point, see Lewes, “Spiritualism” 490.
but a function of the nerves and brain, just one more product of life and organization, then tracing the nervous changes that paralleled or caused subjective experience seemed to become, for these theorists, the proper activity of psychology.

Such reductionist psychology was therefore (reductively, to be sure) characterized by its opponents—by writers like Martineau—as cold-blooded dissection, as the measurement of mind by inch-rule, precisely because of its alleged focus on the external at the expense of subjective experience. Still, for much of the century introspection remained, even for reductionist theorists—those who collapsed mind into matter—an essential mode of inquiry. Note Henry Calderwood’s description, in his Contempory Review article “The Present Relations of Physical Science to Mental Philosophy” (1871), of what he argues is the inevitable end of physical investigations of mind:

Muscles, nerve, and brain have all been found already. What we have [in humankind as opposed to the lower animals] is only finer nerve, with larger brain, having more involved convolutions. Shall we not then say that the vital energy in the brain manifests itself in the form of thought, feeling, volition, and other phenomena of consciousness? This is a perfectly legitimate thing to say, as a provisional hypothesis which may give us a clue for further inquiry. But now comes into use the old method of mental philosophy, much as it has been maligned. There is no escape. The dissecting knife and the forceps can render us no aid here. We must go back to the old plan of questioning consciousness. . . . What is within consciousness, physiology cannot account for; what belongs to physiology, consciousness cannot account for. (228-29)
Calderwood’s position is that even a physical psychology must eventually look inwards, must eventually lean again on introspection, and many psycho-physiologists agreed. With the exception of extreme externalists like Henry Maudsley (who sought to banish introspection entirely), these writers simply argued more sweepingly than their conservative counterparts that introspection must be supplemented with other, more quantifiable methods.⁴²

Whatever concessions were made among the orthodox towards aligning psychology with the natural sciences, any approach that threatened to reduce mind to matter was met with fierce criticism throughout the century. This criticism is clearest in the way such reductionist approaches were tarred with that most damning of nineteenth-century philosophical brushes, the charge of materialism.⁴³ The vitriol of these accusations was remarkable: Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, whose Theory of Pneumatology (1834) Dickens owned, calls materialism a “monstrous idol” (39), while Abercrombie insists that materialism is “not to be viewed only as unsound reasoning, but as a logical absurdity, and a total misconception of the first principles of philosophical inquiry” (28). Maudsley, a self-identified materialist, writes that materialism “has been lately denounced as a ‘philosophy of dirt’” and the materialist called “‘the most odious and ridiculous being in all the multiform creation’” (“Materialism” 249). Yet if they were

⁴² See Jacyna, “Physiology” 109; and Young, Mind 185-86. Certainly there were those who attacked introspection as a methodology: Maudsley, as I have just suggested, is likely the key figure here. For discussions of Maudsley’s critique of introspection, see Jacyna, “Physiology” 114-15, and Daston 199-200.
⁴³ Reed points out that, at least later in the century, materialism was not the only way psychology could endanger Christianity: at the other extreme end of the spectrum, the claims of the spiritualists were equally heterodox (9). As is clear from Dickens’s frequent criticisms of spiritualism, he also rejected this mode of understanding the mind. If spiritualism allowed for the soul as the centre of Dickens’s psychology, its other contraventions of orthodoxy—as well as its failure to meet the standards of scientific evidence—seem to have made spiritualism objectionable to Dickens. At mid-century, however, “materialism” seemed the more pressing threat to psychological orthodoxy. On the energy consumed in attacking “materialist” approaches, see Rylance, Victorian 25-26. Roger Smith makes a similar point about the virulence of these attacks (“Physiology” 85).
agreed in their hatred for materialism, conservative writers were less in accordance when they attempted to define it.\textsuperscript{44} The label, then, served as a catch-all for anxious metaphysical writers, a broad means of attacking any theorist they saw as a threat to the Christian dualist psychological orthodoxy. As Roger Smith puts it, “materialism” worked “as an umbrella term for anything in the modern world that appeared to devalue what was held dear” (“Physiology” 86); it was, he explains, “the heading under which public disquiet about science found expression” (“Physiology” 98). Alfred Barry’s definition of the term, however, perhaps most aptly gets to the heart of the anxieties about the materialist trend: “[A]s I understand the word,” he writes, materialism is “not a study of that which is Material, but the desire to make all things Material—to ignore any distinction of kind between mind and matter, and, by a natural conclusion, to obliterate the great distinction between right and necessity” (236).\textsuperscript{45} That is, materialism for Barry works “to reduce all creation to one dead level, over which Material laws shall reign supreme” (240), and he thus finds ample cause to worry that physical science will “finally absorb and obliterate, as a distinct philosophy, the philosophy of mind, and of its objects” (240). I have already commented on how reductive the constructions of physiological psychology that one finds in the work of those writers who attacked it tended to be: any psychology that lingered too long over the physical, that (even worse)

\textsuperscript{44} T. Collyns Simon, for example, insists that the materialists are those who hold “that there is an occult matter over and above all that we see and feel in material things, which occult matter can perceive things” (247). Perhaps the only recognizable aspect of his definition is that the materialist denies spirit (260). Lewes complains about the slippery way that “materialism” is defined by other writers (“Spiritualism” 708). He defines materialism as “the reduction of vital and mental phenomena to conditions from which everything extra-organic and metempirical is excluded” (“Spiritualism” 707). Dixon also remarks on the “generous and inaccurate use of the label ‘materialist’ for thinkers writing within positivist, physiological, or evolutionary schools of thought” (From Passions 180).

\textsuperscript{45} Barry’s anxiety here about the obliteration of the distinction “between right and necessity” offers one example of the common conclusion that materialism would lead to the collapse of morality. I discuss these worries below.
tried to unpack the relationship between mind and matter, was inevitably accused of eliminating the mental altogether. As Alexander Bain (himself a victim of such attacks) describes, “[A]ny thinker maintaining the separate mental substance to be unproved, and unnecessary, is denounced as trying to blot out our mental existence, and to resolve us into watches, steam-engines, or speaking and calculating machines” (“Common” 172).

To be precise, because of the way the immaterial mind tended to be conflated with the immortal soul in much mainstream psychological writing, those theories that saw (or appeared to see) mind as a product of matter were widely understood to cast doubt on the possibility of an afterlife. Abercrombie, for instance, writes that if the mind is considered a function of the living brain, then the inevitable conclusion to which we must come is “that like our bodily senses it will cease to be, when the bodily frame is dissolved” (30). Richard Simpson’s 1856 essay “The Morals and Politics of Materialism” makes much the same point. Simpson contends that to engage in the “gross materialism” of certain modern thinkers, a group who “judge of acts only by their permanent results impressed on the material world, and capable of being tested by the senses” (453), is “to weigh worth by avoirdupois pounds, to measure humanity by the imperial quart, and to reduce all virtue to statistical tabulation and numerical values. It is, after all, only a genteel way of denying the existence of heaven and of any future life” (447-48). “[F]or our moderns,” he adds, “a man once gone is annihilated; nothing remains except what he manufactured; his acts, his virtues, and his vices, are all gone” (453). As Simpson’s piece hints, moreover, with the afterlife that materialism denied would go ethics and morality as well—both because of the implied absence of divine judgement (Simpson 454) and because of the elimination of free will in determinist, materialist constructions of the

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46 Maudsley also acknowledges this criticism of materialism (“Materialism” 250).
mind. Hence such claims as Jung-Stilling’s, that materialism leads inevitably to “infernal irreligion” and “eternal perdition” (23).

It is worth bearing in mind, however, that just as the charge of materialism was levelled far more often than was justified by the actual positions assumed by those tarred with the label, numerous relatively benign psycho-physiologies were dismissed by conservative thinkers as leading to atheism. That is to say that the understanding that “materialism,” however broadly defined, necessitated an end to immortality was fundamentally illogical and ideologically motivated, as many physical psychologists—those who emphasized the material basis of mind—pointed out. J. C. Bucknill, for instance, insists that “physiological materialism is thoroughly consistent with the doctrines of our holy religion” (qtd. in Jacyna, “Physiology” 118); Carpenter also denies that psycho-physiology is “inconsistent with the Revealed doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul” (Principles of Human Physiology 59). After all, physical theorists could justify their approach just as well as those who grounded identity in the soul by having recourse to the mysteries of Creation. What prevented the Almighty from bestowing the power of thought on matter? Furthermore, I have already mentioned how, by the middle of the century, even the most conservative thinkers acknowledged that the body had some part in human identity, and that physiology had something to contribute to psychology; I

47 On anxieties about materialism and morality, see Daston 192, 197-98, and Rylance, Victorian 73, 90.
48 As Jacyna explains, “[T]here was no necessity that physiological psychology should become the vehicle for any particular cosmological schema” (“Physiology” 118). Nor, he adds, was there any “logical connexion between physiological psychology and monism. To interpret its doctrines in a way that conflated matter and spirit required a decision, and such decisions were structured by the interests which different parties brought to the resources afforded by contemporary psychological and cosmological thought” (“Physiology” 119). In this project, I have adopted the labels “physical psychology” or simply “psycho-physiology” for those theories that Victorian writers tended to label materialist. I have done so to avoid perpetuating the anxious Victorian mislabelling of these approaches to mind.
49 In his Bridgewater Treatise, Thomas Chalmers makes more or less the same point (1: 47); see also Abercrombie 36-37.
50 The anonymous author of “Locke and his Critics” makes precisely this point (332). So, too, do Bucknill and Tuke in their physiological textbook (343).
have also discussed the way that even Christian dualist psychologists had, by this period, begun to borrow both metaphors and methods from the physical sciences for their own theories of mind. Science, again, was perfectly compatible with religion for many Victorians.\textsuperscript{51} Thomas Dixon thus judiciously insists that we must reassess the simplistic view that the history of psychology traces a straightforward course of secularization:

Just as enthusiasm for scientific concepts and methods could be combined with Christian, non-Christian or anti-Christian commitments, so a lack of interest in new scientific psychologies was by no means always a symptom of a Christian commitment. . . . Commitment to science and commitment to Christianity were not mutually exclusive; there was no simple correlation between indifference or hostility to Christianity and promotion of a scientific approach to mental life. \textit{(From Passions 234-35)}\textsuperscript{52}

It is nevertheless true that conservative psychological writers in the nineteenth century consistently insisted on such simple correlations: even as these theorists admitted the influence of body on mind, psycho-physiology retained for many a whiff of heterodoxy. Of course, the primary sticking point for orthodox thinkers, as I have argued, was the suggestion not that body influenced mind, but that body might cause mind; what I want to stress, though, is that even these claims did not \textit{necessarily} preclude a Christian afterlife. In fact, a number of the theorists who made such claims were committed Christians (while others merely struck this pose, although there was nothing in their psychology that

\footnote{Roger Smith suggests that “[t]hough many writers raised the bogey of materialism, they also, by and large, welcomed new scientific knowledge. Few writers thought, however, that a physiology of the brain could or would replace the science of mind” (90).}

\footnote{Roger Smith also challenges the belief that a scientific psychology’s “growth must be at the expense of a religious view of human being” (“Physiology” 84).}
was not logically consistent with religion). As I discuss in Chapter Four, many of these writers simply asserted that the resurrection would be of body, and that the mind would be a product of the nerves and brain in Heaven as it is on earth.

But even if a physical psychology was not necessarily incompatible with belief in a Christian God, we should not overlook how often it was discussed as fundamentally irreligious in conservative and popular psychological texts. Considering this widespread anxiety about it, then, the fate of psycho-physiology in the last half of the century is surprising, for the years between 1850 and 1900 witnessed the gradual ascendency of physical psychology, largely at the expense of the sort of Christian dualist mental philosophies that I have been discussing as psychological orthodoxy. Of course, “psycho-physiology” was itself by no means a monolithic entity: it is more accurate to talk about the ascension of physical psychologies in the last half of the century. For example, the mid-century theories of evolution that I explore in Chapter Five—which were quickly incorporated into theories of mind—challenged the orthodox assumption that our mental furniture was God-given, dealing a powerful blow to earlier Christian mental philosophies. As I discuss in Chapter Six, moreover, psychologists explained away increasingly greater swaths of mental life as the result of reflex function; larger and larger chunks of mental function were thus theorized as occurring mechanically and unconsciously, outside the control of the will and beyond the reach of introspection.

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53 Dixon outlines some of the Christian commitments of a variety of “materialist” thinkers (From Passions 234). Maudsley further insists that many noted Christians—including Milton and the preacher Robert Hall—were materialists (“Materialism” 249-50).

54 As I argue in Chapter Four, this position with regard to the resurrection was not an orthodox one in the middle of the century. Nevertheless, even some conservative thinkers—like Carpenter and Abercrombie—acknowledged that “materialism” could be made to accord with belief in a future life through the mechanism of a physical resurrection; Abercrombie even admits that an immaterial soul does not itself guarantee immortality, finally insisting that the mind/soul’s materiality or immateriality has no bearing on its immortality (36-37).
Hence the appearance of so many brainless frogs in mid-century psycho-physiological writing—the frogs to which Lewes compared Dickens’s characters, and which were employed by physiological writers to demonstrate the body’s ability to act reflexively, without a conscious will.\textsuperscript{55} As I have mentioned, T. H. Huxley, drawing on theories of reflex action and illustrating his points with just these decerebrated frogs, went so far as to posit that our bodies were automata, and that consciousness was merely epiphenomenal to bodily life, as the steam whistle is to the locomotive (\textit{Science} 236): that is, molecular changes in the brain could cause mental states, but mental states could have no causal power over physical states for Huxley.\textsuperscript{56} This was a position that he (and the many other authors who put forth models of psycho-physical parallelism) justified through the theory of the conservation of energy, which suggested that the physical world was a closed system and could not be interfered with by any such thing as an immaterial mind, which must necessarily exist \textit{outside} the system.\textsuperscript{57} Lewes, on the other hand,

\textsuperscript{55} In addition to those in the work of Lewes and Huxley, see also the decerebrated frogs in Carpenter, “On the Doctrine” 402.

\textsuperscript{56} For discussions of Huxley’s automatism, see Daston 200-201; Dixon, \textit{From Passions} 143-44; Jacyna, “Physiology” 124; Reed 157; and Rylance, \textit{Victorian} 91-93. Carpenter questioned the logic of Huxley’s one-way model of causation: “But if (to use his own appropriate terms) \textit{neuroses} can give rise to \textit{psychoses}, it is surely quite accordant with the great fundamental principle of interaction to affirm that conversely \textit{psychoses} can give rise to \textit{neuroses}” (“On the Doctrine” 416)—that mind can affect matter as much as matter can affect mind. Other models of psycho-physical parallelism denied any causal relationship between mind and matter, as Carpenter acknowledges (“On the Doctrine” 416). For a discussion of Bain’s psycho-physical parallelism, see Boring 236-37; Jacyna, “Physiology” 115; Young, \textit{Mind} 101-33. On Laycock’s theory, see Jacyna, “Physiology” 115-16. On Clifford’s theory, see Daston 201-2 and Jacyna, “Physiology” 127-29.

\textsuperscript{57} Clifford thus comments on the “enormous gulf” (726) between physical and mental facts and insists that the trains of physical facts that underlie consciousness “are perfectly complete physical trains, and every step is fully accounted for by mechanical conditions. . . . The amount of energy is the same as before by the law of the conservation of energy” (727). He adds, “[T]he physical facts go along by themselves, and the mental facts go along by themselves. There is a parallelism between them, but there is no interference of one with the other” (728). I discuss Clifford’s work at greater length in my final chapter. On the significance of the theory of the conservation of energy to late-Victorian psychology, see also Boring 237, 239-40; Harrington 210; Hilton 308-11; and Roger Smith, “Physiology” 95. Jacyna discusses how such theories were seen as denying God’s ability to interfere in the universe (“Physiology” 119-20). As I explain in Chapter Six, Carpenter therefore conceded that the mind could not create energy, but he nevertheless insisted that the theory of the conservation of energy left room for the human will: “[J]ust as a rider utilizes
argued for a dual-aspect monism—that consciousness was merely the subjective side of bodily life. Although he could thus be seen as defending the significance of consciousness against theories of psycho-physical parallelism, Lewes’s construction of mind was rooted in the body and in the here and now, without a hint of a possibility of immortality; so far as conservative psychologists were concerned, then, he had saved the bathwater and thrown out the baby. At the same time, other theorists exerted considerable energy trying to localize cerebral functions in the brain, an exercise that both challenged the notion of a unified mind or soul and further focused attention on matter over mind. Broadly speaking, psychological research also began to move from the introspectionist’s study to the academic laboratory, with the work of research being increasingly taken over by professionals. That is, if psychology remained a loose
umbrella term for a series of warring discourses in the latter part of the century, the general trend was towards materialism, towards a focus on and valorization of the visible and tangible, and away from the Christian dualism of mid-century.

Yet to repeat Dixon’s assertion, the history of psychology cannot be adequately explained as the triumph of secularization. The notion that science should accord with—rather than oppose—Christian faith persisted throughout the century, and the demand for a Christian psychology never quite disappeared. How, then, are we to explain the rise of the very psychology that mid-century commentators had constructed as a threat to religion and morality? Surely one of the factors that enabled this ascendancy is the placatory tone that Roger Smith has identified in much mid- to late-century psychological writing:

“[I]n the periodical literature there was a great deal of what I will call expressive reassurance,” Smith explains, “a welcome for new truth framed as a claim that it makes no difference to fundamental values” (“Physiology” 90). This reassurance came from both conservative thinkers and those who were challenging orthodoxy. Smith notes, for example, the various conservative theorists who claimed that physiological discoveries only proved how untenable materialism was (“Physiology” 91-93). Calderwood was such a theorist, arguing that psycho-physiology demonstrates that there is something in our mental life beyond mere matter:

The dualism of mind and matter has now begun to receive the testimony of physical science, not only after the adverse appearances connected with theories of protoplasm and development, but as the direct result of the

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62 On this point, see Dixon, *From Passions* 180-203, 233-35, and Reed 3. Mark Knight and Emma Mason also insist that “Christian discourse continued to dominate British culture well into the twentieth century” (167). Of course, as Knight and Mason point out, “Christian discourse” in the nineteenth century was varied and polyphonic, a series of discourses rather than a monolithic entity (167).

63 Rylance makes a similar point (*Victorian* 37).
prosecution of these. The struggle towards unity in a theory of all life has been strenuously maintained, until the hopelessness of the attempt has been allowed, by those who have been most earnest and successful in prosecuting the investigations which the character of the problem imposed. (230)

William Carpenter’s refusal to give up the notion of an immaterial will that might control the reflex functions of the nerves and brain—an entity so clearly linked for him to an immortal soul—seems a slight variation on this theme: physiology, Carpenter makes clear, need not eliminate the dualism (or the Christian foundation) of an earlier psychology.64 Others insisted that we ought not to fear the revelations of science, for God had created all. This is more or less the position taken by John Charles Bucknill and Daniel H. Tuke in their psycho-physiological work A Manual of Psychological Medicine (1858), which according to Sally Shuttleworth was a “standard textbook” (Charlotte Brontë 13). Writing of the mystery of how a combination of cells can result in thought, for instance, they insist that “[a]ll we can say is, that the cerebral cell and gravitating atom are creatures of the Almighty Creator, acting in obedience to laws impressed upon them by His fiat, laws whose phenomena we can trace, but whose ultimate nature we cannot understand” (343).

Still other physical psychologists insisted that their models of mind left space for the morality that “materialism” was popularly thought to threaten;65 indeed, the absence of God might even aid morality. Maudsley, drawing on the theory of the hereditary

64 As Daston points out, the significance of the will to Victorian psychology is connected to anxieties about the moral implications of more deterministic models of mind (192-93). See her article “British Responses to Psycho-Physiology, 1860-1900.”
65 See especially Roger Smith, “Physiology” 90-98.
transmission of acquired characteristics (which I discuss in Chapter Five), suggests that our moral behaviour will affect the fate of the race—whether humanity will develop or degenerate—for the laws of morality are based on natural law and our accumulated social experience (“Materialism” 253-57). Such a view encourages us to do good for others—that is, not for the selfish reason that we wish to ensure our own salvation, but for the good of our descendents (“Materialism” 260). Once morality is divorced from religion, Maudsley further argues, we will no longer believe that we can compensate for vice with prayer; we will see that the wages of sin are inescapable and enacted on earth, offering us an “urgent motive to study patiently the laws of nature in order to conform to them” (“Materialism” 258). Clifford also found in science a better basis for morality than in religion: he echoes Maudsley’s assertion that the fate of the race depends on our moral actions, for example, and insists that belief in a Being outside the realm of physical causes has throughout history worked against humankind’s efforts to do right (730). He claims: “The distinction of right and wrong grows up in the broad light of day out of natural causes wherever men live together; and the only right motive to right action is to be found in the social instincts which have been bred into mankind by hundreds of generations of social life” (736). The notion that we are automata, he further insists, merely means that our actions are dependent on our character; if instead “there is a certain point where the law of causation does not apply, where my action does not follow by regular physical causes from what I am, then I am not responsible for it because it is not I that do it” (730). Readers ought thus to look truth boldly in the face, all the while assured that morality can survive the death of both God and religion. It goes without

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66 For a fuller discussion of Maudsley’s claims about morality, see Daston 199-200.
saying, of course, that the tack taken by Maudsley and Clifford was ill-chosen to assuage the fears of most Victorian readers.

Psychology’s other attempts at reassurance were obviously more successful. As I have already suggested, however, in this project I propose another means by which psycho-physiology was able to gain such ground in the last half of the nineteenth century, namely by appropriating and redefining the terminology of Christian mental science.\(^{67}\) We see the evidence of this strategy, I want to suggest, in the persistent complaints among physical theorists about the imprecision of the existing language of the mind. Earlier writers had insisted that the language of mental philosophy proved orthodox views: the conservative theorist James McCosh, for example, writes that “[w]e may appeal to language as containing the universal and unprejudiced judgment of mankind, that the notion of the Infinite is natural to the mind” (“Sir William Hamilton’s Lectures” 304). Reductionist claims about psychology’s imprecise language, then, served as a means by which those who were engaged in the project of shifting psychology away from Christian belief could take issue with orthodoxy. These criticisms are a constant in the literature: Bain, for instance, complains about the inaccuracy of the language of an orthodox mental science (“Common” 172-75); Lewes suggests “the desirableness of a new nomenclature to replace the very lax expressions now in use” (Physiology 2: 14)—after all, he insists elsewhere, “Science demands precision of terms” (“Consciousness” 156). Central to the complaints of these writers was the claim that the prejudices of conservative thinkers against psycho-physiology grew out of the distortions imposed on

\(^{67}\) It is worth noting here Roger Smith’s insightful claim that what we witness in the nineteenth century is the shaping of an area of discourse known as psychology (“Physiology” 82-83).
mental science by the language with which the mind had been described. In a representative passage, Bain writes:

> These various questions respecting the Will, if stripped of unsuitable phraseology, are not very difficult questions. They are about as easy to comprehend as the air-pump, the law of refraction of light, or the atomic theory of chemistry. Distort them by inappropriate metaphors, view them in perplexing attitudes, and you may make them more abstruse than the hardest proposition of the “Principia.” (“Common” 175)

If psychological language seems to prove orthodox views, that language must be flawed. Some therefore insisted that mental science should employ a physiological terminology; Calderwood discusses Huxley’s arguments for such a move, based on the latter’s desire to eliminate the obscurity of spiritualist language, on the one hand, and better connect thought with the other (material) phenomena of the universe, on the other (234-35). But far more often, I will argue, physical theorists redefined the existing nomenclature of mind—under the guise of making that nomenclature more accurate—rather than replacing it. As I discuss in Chapter Six, for instance, Lewes worked in his psychological writing to redefine “soul”—the foundation of a Christian psychology—to mean nothing more than the subjective side of bodily life (“Consciousness” 166), and he broadened “consciousness” to include even those sub-threshold (physical) sensations of which we take no notice (Physiology 2: 34-40; “Consciousness”).

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68 Therefore note Calderwood’s claim that, despite Huxley’s wish for a materialist psychological language, he has had to fall back on spiritualist terminology (235). My point is that these theorists made that spiritualist terminology, materialist.
Historians of science have commented on the shared language of the psychologies of the nineteenth century, Dixon and Rylance foremost among them. But to my mind no one has yet adequately examined psycho-physiology’s redefinition of Christian psychological terminology as a strategy, nor has anyone adequately charted the effects of these multiple significations on how the language of psychology was received and understood by a popular readership. It is among the central purposes of this study to address these scholarly oversights. Each of the following chapters thus has at its centre a single term or concept that was variously defined by Victorian theorists of mind; by tracing the interplay of meanings contained within these terms, I posit a rhetorical means—one means among many, to be sure—by which the psychology so loudly accused of materialism throughout the century was nevertheless able to establish itself as the primary mode of understanding mentality.

Psychological Dickens

Dickens’s first-person novels are the primary site at which I trace the interplay of meanings in this series of key nineteenth-century psychological terms and concepts. Surely, though, this will seem a curious place to look for Victorian psychological debate: as Lewes’s dismissal of Dickens suggests, there have been few readers of these novels who have found in them anything approximating to psychological realism. Instead, as I

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69 Dixon discusses the varied meanings these terms assumed in different psychologies (e.g., From Passions 140, 158, 188, 201-3, 249-50), focusing especially on the various ways that the term “emotions” was appropriated and defined. But it seems that he views this terminological change as “mapp[ing]” a shift in psychology (From Passions 250), rather than serving as a fundamental catalyst of that change—as indicative of fundamentally different psychological assumptions, rather than a means of undermining the assumptions of an earlier model of mind. On the shared terminology of Victorian psychology, see also Young, Mind 53.

70 Daston is, to some degree, an exception (194). See also Rylance’s discussion of Robert Chambers’s Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (Victorian 32-37).
have mentioned, one of the central criticisms of Dickens over the past century and a half has concerned the utter unreality of his characterization; for contemporary critics (as much as for their nineteenth-century counterparts, whom I discussed at the outset), Dickens’s characters are little more than walking bundles of tics and catchphrases, less dynamic human beings than mechanical contraptions caught ever in the same routine.\(^{71}\)

No right-thinking critic would suggest that Dickens ever paints the sort of deep and rounded characters we find in, say, George Eliot. Nor, critics more or less agree, does Dickens give us characters’ internal views; he instead tends to depict character through a fetishistic focus on a single remarkable physical peculiarity.\(^{72}\) George Orwell’s declaration that “Dickens’s characters have no mental life” (82) has thus carried the day, and those who have obstinately persisted in wanting to find mentality in Dickens’s novels have been forced to seek it elsewhere than in individual characters. Karen Chase’s argument that each of Dickens’s characters represents one aspect of the mind, a single part of a larger personality, is perhaps the most clever such means of defending Dickens against criticism of his unreal characterization. We are mistaken in looking for wholeness in any individual character, Chase suggests; it is the works themselves that represent the unity absent in these character-fragments. “Characters may be simple,” Chase writes, “but the work becomes a complex of simples” (98). That is, the complexity so notably absent from Dickens’s people manifests itself instead in his complicated and tortuous

\(^{71}\) Jay Clayton argues for a “post-modern” Dickens, insisting that “[w]ell before the deconstruction of the subject, Dickens was presenting many figures as mere collections of humors or tics” (149). It is also worth noting Chase’s point that the catchphrases are not only the characters’: “One of [Dickens’s] preferred ironic devices is the recurrent epithet that reduces a character to a descriptive phrase” (114).

\(^{72}\) It is Greenblatt and Gallagher who call Dickens’s artistic practice “fetishistic,” writing that Dickens has “long been accused of a preposterous reliance on material trifles to trigger or express the most significant mental states” (207). At least Greenblatt and Gallagher allow that Dickens is attempting to represent “significant mental states”; not all critics have been so generous. Unfortunately, Greenblatt and Gallagher work from Dickens’s fascination with the physical here to argue that he sympathized with materialist psychology, an argument that I believe to be fundamentally mistaken.
plots (102-3). But must we go to such lengths to find psychological realism in Dickens? Are his characters—as individuals—so far divorced from other nineteenth-century representations of the mind?

It is not my intention entirely to rescue Dickensian character from the critics, although I think it is important to note that most of Dickens’s eccentrics—most of his bundles of tics and humours—are minor characters.73 The same criticisms do not quite apply to his first-person narrators, even if we must finally concede that these characters, too, fail to achieve the complexity and “reality” we find in other novelists. Nevertheless, I think it is worth remarking that those critics who continue to overlook Dickens’s engagement with the psychology of his day because of the flatness of his characters have fallen into the very trap identified by Ruskin: these critics, like their Victorian forebears, have made the mistake of conflating what Dickens has to say with how he chooses to say it.74 What does it matter, again, if he chooses to speak in a ring of stage fire?

Whatever his ability to represent psychological realism in his fictions, Dickens was deeply interested in the latest developments of the burgeoning field of mental science, a topic on which he read much and thought at length.75 Lewes, that is, was appallingly unfair to his late friend when he wrote that Dickens “never was and never would have been a student” (151), or that he found himself “outside philosophy, science,

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73 Alex Woloch’s comments on the distorting effect of minor characters’ limited “character space” is worth taking note of here.
74 Another way of saying the same thing, I think, is to take Brian Rosenberg’s tack, and distinguish between characters that resemble people in an external world and those which inspire a particular reaction in readers: “To say that a character represents a complicated personality is not necessarily to say that it catalyzes a complicated response in the reader. The quest for a definition of ‘realistic’ characterization, probably hopeless already, is made more so by attempting to distinguish a realistic or lifelike image from a lifelike reaction. Dickens, it seems to me, is considerably more adept at producing the latter than the former. That is, his characters do not so much re-create actual individuals as re-create the reactions to actual individuals, and particularly the difficulties and dilemmas” (30).
75 Bodenheimer considers Dickens’s explorations of the contested ground between consciousness and unconsciousness (Knowing 6-7). Her discussion, however, seems to have as its basis an ahistorical understanding of “unconsciousness” in the Victorian period.
and the higher literature, and was too unaffected a man to pretend to feel any interest in them” (152). Fred Kaplan long ago traced Dickens’s fascination with mesmerism, including his successes as a mesmeric operator, and others—perhaps especially Leonard Manheim—have charted Dickens’s thoughts on the subject of insanity. But Dickens was also a wide reader in the more mainstream psychological texts of the period. His shelves were full of works of mental philosophy: by Abercrombie, E. S. Dallas, Elliotson, Lewes, Locke, Hume, Jung-Stilling, Robert Macnish, Dugald Stewart, and others. Dickens himself quoted Abercrombie’s work in his journalism (as I discuss in Chapter Five), and another writer for Household Words quoted from Bain’s The Senses and the Intellect (which would suggest that Dickens at least encountered Bain’s work at second hand). As I have already mentioned, Dickens was also personally acquainted with a number of the major figures of mid-century psychological thought: he considered Elliotson and Lewes friends, he was acquainted with Dallas, and there is evidence that he at least met Carpenter. Moreover, the periodicals he went on to conduct include numerous articles on psychological subjects, and—as this project will demonstrate—his

76 Orwell here, too, echoes Lewes, writing of Dickens’s “unscientific cast of mind” and asserting that he possessed “very little intellectual curiosity” (69). The wide scope of Dickens’s library alone belies the claims of both Lewes and Orwell.
77 See Kaplan’s Dickens and Mesmerism: The Hidden Springs of Fiction. Bodenheimer also discusses Dickens’s experiences as an operator (Knowing 11-12). Forster, finally, recounts Dickens’s description of his mesmeric successes with his wife, Kate, in America (1: 229-30). In a letter to Forster on 26 September 1849, Dickens, after having recounted how he mesmerized John Leech, jokes, “What do you think of my setting up in the magnetic line with a large brass plate? ‘Terms, twenty-five guineas per nap’” (5: 615).
78 As Kaplan puts it, “Dickens was a much more perceptive reader of a wider variety of books than he has been given credit for, particularly if we grant that he read even an small portion of those he owned on travel, economics, social sciences, and Italian literature” (5). See also Kaplan 216-17.
79 Bodenheimer counts over 30 books in Dickens’s library at Gad’s Hill “on the workings of the mind,” broadly defined (7). Kearns also acknowledges how many of the key texts of mental science Dickens owned (113).
80 It seems clear that Dickens only published in Household Words and All the Year Round articles with which he agreed. In a 10 March 1853 letter to his sub-editor W. H. Wills, Dickens recommends changes to a potential contributor’s submission by insisting, “The article in itself is very good, but it must have these points in it; otherwise I am not only compromising opinions I am known to hold, but the journal itself is blowing hot and cold and playing fast and loose, in a ridiculous way” (7: 47). Similarly, he wrote to Robert
novels abound in the language and concepts of Victorian psychology. Dickens even did some theorizing of his own: in response to the latter’s article on “Dreams” in *Household Words* (8 March 1851), Dickens wrote to Dr. Thomas Stone on 2 February 1851 and outlined his own theory of the phenomenon, based on his reading on the subject and on his own observations.  

As evidence mounts of Dickens’s engagement with nineteenth-century theories of mind, a few literary critics have in recent years begun to outline the connections between his writing and Victorian psychology. Kaplan’s book suggests that mesmerism was the “hidden spring” of Dickens’s fiction, and Chase also employs mesmerism as a key to unlock the novels (104-7). In a somewhat different manner, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher consider the way Dickens’s fiction incorporates the discourse of mesmerism as well, especially in regard to Victorian debates about the blurry boundary between life and death (163-210). A handful of others have considered Dickens’s engagement with more mainstream psychological texts. Most significantly for my own

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Dale Owen on 31 July 1860 about the article “Modern Magic,” “[t]he article to which you refer, is not of my writing. I need not add that I approve of it, however, as that may be inferred from its channel of publication” (9: 278). Robert Newson writes that “Dickens’s pen was everywhere in *Household Words*—just as his name was the only one to appear in its pages (indeed, on every one of its leaves). It was estimated by one of the *Household Words* staff writers that in 1854, when Dickens was beginning to relax both his control over the periodical and the energies he had been putting into writing for it, he ‘read nine hundred unsolicited contributions and used eleven after entirely rewriting them.’ His corrections and revisions of even solicited pieces and those by the staff writers themselves were so extensive, moreover, that they often constituted rewriting” (98). In light of Dickens’s editorial policy of ensuring his journals only published articles that echoed his own views, the essays he printed that discuss the mind are a valuable resource in understanding Dickens’s position in psychological debate.

81 At other times, Dickens merely provided material for other thinkers: he informed Elizabeth Gaskell in a letter of 25 November 1851 that a story of his own, in “To Be Read at Dusk,” had made its way into Elliotson’s *Human Physiology* (6: 546).

82 Along with the works named in this paragraph, the following is nearly an exhaustive list: Jane Wood has charted the parallels between Dickens’s representation of female characters and nineteenth-century medical constructions of womanhood (43-58); Bodenheimer traces Dickens’s engagement with contemporary theories of memory (*Knowing* 57, 83), and Shuttleworth reads the “Haunted Man” (1848) in light of Victorian debates about memory and self-control (“‘Malady’” 46-47). Natalie Rose finds in Dickens’s treatment of flogging a site of Victorian anxieties about the will and “the fragility of autonomy and self-determination” (506). William A. Cohen, meanwhile, examines Dickens’s representation of embodied,
work, both Michael S. Kearns and Nicholas Dames have argued that Dickens draws on associationist psychology in *David Copperfield*; as I discuss in Chapter Two, however, I think both critics misunderstand the psychological discourse to be found in that novel. More successfully, Athena Vrettos has adeptly argued that Dickens’s mechanical characters, rather than representing a failure of realism, in fact have as their basis Victorian theories of the binding force of habit and anxieties about the effects of industrialization. In another excellent reading of Dickens and psychology, Jill L. Matus has explored Dickens’s engagement with Victorian theories of the unconscious and his attempts to articulate in his fictions the relation between trauma and memory.

What is missing among these studies is a sustained and substantial consideration of Dickens’s response to the major psychological issue of the nineteenth century, the new discipline’s move towards “materialism.” Put another way, these readings of Dickens’s fictions alongside nineteenth-century mental science tend to be local interventions: much good work has been done in tracing Dickens’s engagement with specific aspects of Victorian theorizing about the mind, but no study has yet considered Dickens’s response to changes in the field as a whole. Even more significantly, no critic has yet considered Dickens’s response to the religious stakes of the discipline of mental philosophy.

This last omission is all the more surprising considering the number of studies in the last few decades that have suggested the sincerity of Dickens’s religious beliefs and their centrality to his work as both a novelist and a journalist. Dickens criticism is no longer content to go along with Humphry House’s dismissal of Dickens’s Christianity: the claim that the Established Church, while “firmly built into the Dickens landscape”—

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material subjectivity (*Embodied* 27-40), and Jenny Bourne Taylor demonstrates the way Dickens draws on Victorian constructions of the unconscious (“Obscure”).
lending the novels “scenes and forms and language” (110)—was little more for Dickens than “a national depository of good-feeling” (111). For House, that is, Dickens’s “work shows no indication of any powerful feeling connected with a genuinely religious subject” (131), the religious imagery of his novels serving instead as only a mask behind which lurks Dickens’s real emotion, a bit of self-indulgence dressed up in the ill-fitting vestments of Christianity (132). House’s position has been (justly, I think) attacked by many scholars over the years, and in this project I will add my voice to their number. My own position, in other words, accords with Andrew Sanders’s insistence that Dickens’s “professions of faith are both constant and, it would seem heartfelt,” his religion “both vital and pervasive” (x). “At no point,” Sanders adds, “does he seem to have doubted basic Christian teachings, or to have been troubled by the phenomenon which modern writers have styled “the Victorian crisis of faith”” (xi). His was a personal belief, a Christianity founded primarily on the New Testament and emphasizing the importance of the work each individual is called to do. Dickens had little time for the minutiae of doctrine or rigidly held religious positions—as is made clear in his last will and testament.

83 Sanders also quotes Dickens’s son Sir Henry Dickens, who insists that while his father “made no parade of religion . . . he was at heart possessed of deep religious convictions” (qtd. in Sanders 61).

84 Hence his frequent pleas to correspondents that they do their duty in this life: in a wholly representative letter to Miss Emmely Gotschalk on 23 December 1850, he writes, “If we all sat down to brood on Death, this scene of Duty would become a dismal place—no Duty would be done—mankind would soon sink into ignorance and misery—and Death would find us with a poor account to render, of our work. I apprehend it is because we are placed here to work (all of us in our spheres of action can work, whatever those spheres be) that it is so natural to us to dismiss the contemplation of that end that must come in the fulness of God’s time. Our business is to use Life well. If we do that, we may let Death alone” (6: 244).

85 As Sanders puts it, “Doctrinal dispute, niceties of scriptural interpretation, the dissidence of dissent, the Catholic revival, Tractarianism, Evangelicalism and agnosticism seem equally to have enraged him rather than to have engaged his mind, ever intolerant of party spirit and narrowness” (xi). House gives this tendency in Dickens’s work a more cynical spin, arguing that “one of the chief causes of his success as a popular moralist and reformer was the skill with which he struck a good religious note without committing himself beyond the common stock of Christian phrases” (109-10). See also Cole 206; Larson takes a slightly more nuanced position (9). Numerous critics have agreed in labelling Dickens’s a Broad Church Christianity: House (109), Larson (319), Karl Ashley Smith (14), Walder (174), and Zemka (123). For a useful exposition of the Broad Church position, see Karl Ashley Smith 14-15. It is worth bearing in mind, however, Cole’s reminder of “the difficulty and complexity of making any kind of absolute pronouncement
testament, which instructs his children “humbly to try to guide themselves by the teaching of the New Testament in its broad spirit, and to put no faith in any man’s narrow construction of its letter here or there” (qtd. in Forster 2: 422). This last note, indeed, is one Dickens strikes often in his correspondence as well. On 10 March 1860, for example, he wrote to George Moore:

I dare say you have long ago suspected me of forgetting the curious book we spoke of at your house, when I dwelt upon the Christianity of taking broad kind views of the spirit of our religion, and not binding any human creature hand and foot to the uncertain letter—for which, I need not remind you, there is higher authority than mine. (9: 221)

But it seems his faith was above all genuine, his professions of Christianity as significant as—indeed, inextricable from—his pronouncements on social issues. For Dickens, after all, the Victorian reader’s duty towards the poor was founded on the Christian brotherhood that linked him and them, as both *Bleak House* (1852-53) and *Hard Times* make exceedingly clear.

The critical reassessment of Dickens’s Christianity surely owes much to the completion of the Pilgrim Edition of his letters, for it is in these letters that Dickens most explicitly gives voice to his religious belief. He writes often of his hope of a future life, and, as I discuss in Chapter Four, in so doing he consistently figures heaven as a realm to which our immaterial and immortal souls ascend at death. In a 4 May 1848 letter, for

on Dickens’s religious beliefs” (229n10). She cites Walder, who explains that the task of defining Dickens’s religious views is “complicated by his independence of easily identifiable systems of worship, by his intuitive and shifting point-of-view, and, it should be added, his discretion” (Walder 171). On the idea that Dickens’s was a personal belief, see Walder 208-9. Citing Blanchard Jerrold, he notes that Dickens told both Lady Lovelace and two of his sons that he prayed twice daily (208). On Dickens’s preference for the New Testament over the Old, see Cole 220, 225; Sanders xi; Karl Ashley Smith 12; Walder 2; and Zemka 129-32. On his works-based Christianity, see House 111; Karl Ashley Smith 13-14, 22-23; and Walder 196.
example, he assures the Rev. James White that the latter’s child is “now among the angels of God” (5: 296); Dickens’s precise meaning here becomes clear when we set this letter alongside his comments in “Old Lamps for New Ones” (1850) on the “pure spiritual condition” of these same angels (2: 244). Writing later in 1848 to the Rev. William Giles, Dickens similarly remarks:

I am grieved to hear that so many who have been dear to you have gone before, to that world of rest, of which some solemn glimpses open to the happiest and most fortunate among us. Heavy and insupportable indeed, such sorrows would be, but for our blessed hopes through the Redeemer of Mankind. (5: 432)

Yet as consistent as his Christian perspective is in his correspondence—and if the letters are any indication, he seems to have been unchanging in his belief throughout his life, as I have noted—Dickens hesitated to proclaim his Christianity publically. As he phrases it (restating as well his abhorrence of doctrinal dispute) in a letter to the Rev. R. H. Davies on Christmas Eve, 1856:

There cannot be many men, I believe, who have a more humble veneration for the New Testament or a more profound conviction of its all-sufficiency than I have. If I am ever (as you tell me I am) mistaken on this subject, it is because I discountenance all obtrusive professions of, and tradings in, Religion, as one of the main causes of real Christianity’s having been retarded in this world; and because my observation of life induces me to hold in unspeakable dread and horror, those unseemly squabbles about the Letter, which drive the Spirit out of hundreds of thousands. (8: 244-45)
Little wonder, then, that earlier scholars tended to be sceptical about Dickens’s Christianity, since he himself avoided “obtrusive profusions” of it. As we can infer from this letter to Davies—itself clearly motivated by such an attack—even Dickens’s contemporaries were led by his relative coyness on matters of belief to accuse him of being inadequately or improperly religious.

But if Dickens avoided making public professions of his own Christianity, to some degree he nevertheless saw his fictions as vehicles for religious instruction: in the *Uncommercial Traveller* essay “A Fly-Leaf in a Life” (1869), for example, he humbly asserts how throughout his career he has worked “to inculcate some Christian lessons in books” (4: 389).86 The influence of Christianity on Dickens’s fictions—the centrality of religion to these texts—is even clearer in a letter addressed to the Rev. David Macrae in 1861, in response to the latter’s criticisms of Dickens’s representations of Christianity:

> With a deep sense of my great responsibility always upon me when I exercise my art, one of my most constant and most earnest endeavours has been to exhibit in all my good people some faint reflections of the teachings of our great Master, and unostentatiously to lead the reader up to those teachings as the great source of all moral goodness. All my strongest illustrations are derived from the New Testament: all my social abuses are shown as departures from its spirit; all my good people are humble,

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86 Whether Dickens’s lessons were understood or absorbed by his readers is, of course, another question entirely. Janet Larson has pointed out the hermeneutical instability of Scripture in the Victorian period and the multiple—and at times contradictory—meanings Dickens’s religious allusions therefore carry with them. These contradictory meanings are not entirely accidental for Larson: she argues for the heterogeneity—rather than the mere piety—of Dickens’s treatment of the Biblical text (8). I am sceptical of this reading, as will become clear in later chapters.
charitable, faithful, and forgiving. Over and over again, I claim them in express words as disciples of the Founder of our religion[.] (9: 556)

Dickens adds in the same letter that the Christmas books cannot be “separated from the exemplification of the Christian virtues and the inculcation of the Christian precepts” (9: 557). The point is that Dickens strove to inculcate the religious lessons of his novels subtly (however unsubtle those professions can seem to a twenty-first-century reader). He says as much in a 20 December 1852 letter to the Hon. Mrs. Edward Cropper:

Pray do not . . . be induced to suppose that I ever write merely to amuse, or without an object. I wish I were as clear of every offence before Heaven, as I am of that. I may try to insinuate it into people’s hearts sometimes, in preference to knocking them down and breaking their heads with it . . . but I always have it. Without it, my pursuit . . . would be utterly worthless to me. (6: 828)

The novels always have a purpose, even if it is expressed subtly; in them Dickens is perpetually striving to bring home to his readers the lessons of Christianity. It is this purpose, indeed, that makes the fictions worthwhile for Dickens, that makes novel-writing a means by which he might do his own duty in this world.

The primary argument that this study will advance is that Dickens’s religious faith equally underlay and was inseparable from his position with regard to psychology; to some degree, to put my claim another way, Dickens’s Christian belief is among the best evidence of his psychological affiliations, not only because of the tendency in the nineteenth century to align faith with an orthodox dualism, but because Dickens’s Christianity, as I have said, posits as the sequel to life on earth the (immaterial) soul’s
ascension to heaven at death. As I have already suggested, then, I read Dickens’s first-person novels as intervening in psychological debate—subtly, again—on the side of an orthodox Christian mental philosophy, among the lessons he tries to inculcate in his readers are that their identity is founded on an immortal soul, that mind can never be reduced to brain, that their actions in this world are leant meaning by the next. What we overlook if we view the nineteenth century through the standard narrative of the opposition of science and religion is that these lessons are not merely religious for Dickens, but scientific as well—founded on what remained a perfectly legitimate and respectable theory of the mind.

This project thus uses Dickens’s novels to consider both how scientific discourse made its way into the Victorian novel and how the Victorian novel, in turn, was able to intervene in scientific debate. To some degree, Dickens is a particularly illuminating figure through which to ask such questions because, as so many contemporary reviewers put it, he was no philosopher: if, as I suggest, Dickens attempts to advance a Christian psychology in his novels, he nevertheless shows signs of not always fully understanding the material on which he draws; he is more knowledgeable of the debates than many

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87 As I have argued, and as I will make clear throughout this study, I find Greenblatt and Gallagher’s suggestion that Dickens should be counted among the nineteenth-century materialists utterly baffling (209). Such a claim ignores Dickens’s religious beliefs, the nineteenth-century stakes of being “materialist,” and the actual psychological positions Dickens assumes in the novels. Kaplan, in his reading of mid-Victorian mesmerism, seems closer to my own position. He argues, for example, that Dickens would have approved of the work of Jung-Stilling “because it seemed an authoritative refutation of the materialistic philosophies that were threatening Christian belief in the supernatural world” (16). I also cannot agree with Bowen’s claim that Dickens’s novels “stretch our notions of psychology” (29); what is perhaps most interesting about Dickens’s engagements with nineteenth-century mental science is their utter orthodoxy (in the attempt, if not always in the execution).

88 In later chapters, I provide evidence from Dickens’s letters, journalism, and fiction of his position with regards to psychology. But on the topic of the immateriality of mind, consider for now Dickens’s complaint to his sub-editor W. H. Wills about the task of editing a particularly troublesome number of Household Words: “If my mind could have been materialised, and drawn along the tops of all the spikes on the outside of the Queen’s Bench prison, it could not have been more agonized” (6: 835). As his joke suggests, mind is not for Dickens a material entity.
critics have given him credit for, but he is still apt to be intermittently (and inadvertently) obscure and inconsistent in his interventions. What effect, I ask, does this inconsistency have on the ways his novels reproduce and create psychological knowledge? What light do Dickens’s struggles with mental philosophy shed on the means by which psycho-physiology gained ground in the century? Shuttleworth, describing the shared textual economy on which nineteenth-century novelists and psychologists drew, writes that “[c]hanges in the conventions governing the representation of character in the novel highlight, and contribute to” changes in “[t]he language and categories used to articulate the self within each historical era” (Charlotte Brontë 1). But do such claims make sense when describing Dickens, whose characterization seems to eschew the demands of realism? Here, again, the novels on which I focus in these pages offer a particularly valuable means of complicating our understanding of the relations between novelistic and psychological discourse in the nineteenth century.

Another of the key claims I make here is that we can locate one of the primary intersections of these two discourses—novelistic and psychological—in the narrative mode of the first-person novel. To some degree, that is, first-person narration offers a way around the shortcomings of Dickens’s characterization: if the bundles of tics and fixed phrases that otherwise populate his novels represent only a “false psychology,” the same cannot be said (or so I suggest) of Dickens’s introspective narrators. I use the adjective “introspective” here advisedly: my suggestion is that this narrative mode was attractive to Dickens—at least in David Copperfield (1849-50)—not (or not only), as is so often claimed in Dickens criticism, because of Dickens’s autobiographical musings and writings in the 1840s, but precisely because of the way that the first-person mode
mirrored the essential research method of Victorian mental philosophy. What better way to intervene in psychological debate, to endorse in novelistic form an embattled orthodox model of the mind, than by assuming the point of view of the psychologists? Here, finally, Dickens was truly able to write from inside his characters. Yet as I have suggested, and as my argument will demonstrate, because introspection was still employed by writers on both sides of psychological debate, the first-person mode brought with it into the novels traces of arguments that ran counter to those Dickens apparently wished to advance. In part the mixed messages of Dickens’s introspective approach are a product of his slightly tenuous hold on the intricacies of mental scientific debate. I will argue, however, that psycho-physiology’s reinscription of the introspective mode also offers a further glimpse into the way in which that psychology rose to ascendancy.

I turn for my second chapter, “‘What Is Natural in Me’: David Copperfield, Faculty Psychology, and the Association of Ideas,” to Dickens’s first sustained foray into both the first-person mode and psychological debate in his novelistic fiction. I focus not on the autobiographical echoes in this novel, but on the way the introspective form of David Copperfield allows Dickens to write in detail about the structure of David’s mind. More precisely, I trace the way Dickens constructs David’s psychology in accordance with the conceptual model of the association of ideas, a model that, at its most basic, posited the construction of complex mental phenomena out of associated simple

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89 This seems to have been a key component of Dickens’s artistic approach. Forster quotes his criticism of Hawthorne’s Mosses from an Old Manse (1846): “It seems to me as if it were written by somebody who lived next door to the people, rather than inside of ’em” (2: 58). Forster also insists that “no man had ever so surprising a faculty as Dickens of becoming himself what he was representing; and of entering into mental phases and processes so absolutely . . . as to reproduce them completely in dialogue without need of an explanatory word” (2: 116-17). The only exception, of course, is A Tale of Two Cities (1859), as I discuss in Chapter Three. On Dickens’s practice of writing characters from the inside out, see especially Bodenheimer, who discusses the first-person as a mode of identification with characters (Knowing 20-23). She of course draws very different conclusions from my own based on these claims.
sensations. The language of association, however, was shared by two schools of psychology that Victorian commentators perceived to be fundamentally opposed, associationism and Scottish faculty psychology. As I have already explained, in the few studies that have considered Dickens’s engagement with psychological discourse in this novel, critics have consistently argued that Dickens finds the language of association in the works of the former school, but such arguments ignore the way associationism was popularly constructed in the period: as a materialist body of thought that denied the existence of an immortal soul by suggesting that all thoughts and ideas were derived from experience. Considering the religious language that permeates David Copperfield, as well as David’s insistence on the innate gifts that associationism denied, I demonstrate that this novel is instead immersed in the soul-based faculty psychology, which granted to humankind certain God-given ideas, and against which the Victorians invariably set associationism. However, I also consider how the critical confusion about Dickens’s psychology in this novel illuminates (and replicates) the difficulties Victorian readers experienced in understanding precisely the nuances of the psychology Dickens wished to endorse.

I explore how first-person form inflects the representation of character in my third chapter, “Mysteries of the Mind: First-Person Narration, Character, and Bleak House.” I acknowledge that Dickens’s artistic purposes in his choice of Esther Summerson as narrator lie elsewhere than in the explicit definition of the structure of the mind; however, because of the way psychological debate had marked the introspective mode, the first-person narration of Esther’s portion of the novel situates the text in the midst of psychological controversy. In Esther, Dickens offers a character either unwilling or
unable to describe her mind in the detail with which David describes his, and the novel’s third-person narrator also largely refuses to delve beneath the surfaces of characters. I trace the way this relative silence on the interior lives of the novel’s characters becomes indistinguishable from the legal system’s denial in *Bleak House* that anything exists beyond the physical surface. This position, in turn, comes to look very much like a certain type of physiological psychology’s refusal to consider anything beyond the material body, a refusal, as I have suggested, that was widely understood to constitute a denial of any immaterial or immortal part of human existence. Consequently, I contend that the first-person form in *Bleak House* made the novel seem for many Victorian readers like an endorsement of the very psychology to which Dickens was opposed.

My fourth chapter, “Filthy Minds: Sanitary Reform, Intramural Burial Grounds, and the Location of the Psychological,” approaches *Bleak House* from a different angle. I argue in this chapter that to consider the way Victorian psychology informed and interacted with the novel we also need to look elsewhere than explicit discussions of mind or subjectivity. To that end, I demonstrate that *Bleak House*’s deployment of the discourse of sanitary reform is thoroughly marked by the concerns of Victorian mental science. The anxieties of sanitary reformers stemmed as much from the dangers of filth to mental health as from the threat it posed to physical well-being; calls for sanitary reform therefore consistently hinged on the interrelation of mind and body. This novel’s fascination with the decaying corpse offers yet another means by which *Bleak House* is penetrated by psychological discourse, for Victorian anxieties about the overcrowding of London’s intramural burial grounds raised questions about the nature of the resurrection—whether it was to be of body or of spirit—that were at the heart of
psychological debate: as I have already noted, psycho-physiological writers often
defended their theories against charges of atheism by insisting that there would be a
bodily resurrection on the Day of Judgement. Despite Dickens’s allegiance to a Christian
psychology, *Bleak House*’s depiction of the physical harm done by Nemo’s burial in a
shallow and pestiferous grave inadvertently seems to lend support to this notion of a
bodily resurrection, even though such a resurrection was popularly deemed a materialist
sophistry and thus no resurrection, no immortality, at all.

In my fifth chapter, “The Latent and the Manifest: Faculty Psychology, Psycho-
Physiology, and the Echoes of Evolution in *Great Expectations,*” I chart in *Great
Expectations* the various constructions of mental latency that circulated in the early
1860s. Based on Pip’s frequent invocations of the mental work that goes on outside his
consciousness, I suggest that Dickens attempts in this novel to undergird his soul-based
psychology by means of the metaphysical latency theorized in Sir William Hamilton’s
*Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic* (1859), a model of the mind that appears to conflate
unconsciousness with the presumed powers of the soul when freed of its earthly,
corporeal habitation. Yet in the 1860s Hamilton’s model of latent mental modifications
found itself flanked by a pair of quite different theories of the unconscious, both of which
suggested in their own ways that what was latent to the mind was purely physical, the
nerves and fibres that underlay consciousness. In the second part of Chapter Five, I
explore these two models, which I call physiological and evolutionary latency. I focus
particularly on the work of a pair of mid-century theorists—Alexander Bain and Herbert
Spencer—who melded these respective models of unconsciousness with the latest
advances of associationist psychology, making the ambiguities inherent in the language
of association far more problematic for Dickens’s anti-materialist project than they had been in the 1840s. In considering the ideas of the second of these two men, this chapter situates *Great Expectations* in the midst of evolutionary debate, but evolution of a sort quite different from Darwin’s natural selection. Instead, I trace how Spencer’s evolutionary psychology, which posited the hereditary transmission of inherited characteristics, redefined the notion of habit—so central to *Great Expectations*—as the source of those innate qualities that were seen by faculty psychologists to be the gifts of God. Diverging from Vrettos’s discussion of Dickensian habit as a locus for anxieties about mechanization and individuality, I therefore argue that *Great Expectations*’s deployment of the discourse of habit threatens to deny the “divine spark” that, according to the author of the *All the Year Round* article “Our Nearest Relation” (1859), separates humankind from the beasts and serves as evidence of the existence of God—a conviction that was obviously central to Dickens’s psychology.

I conclude with what would have been Dickens’s most explicit challenge to materialist psychology, had he lived to complete it. This is the subject of my sixth chapter, ““An Earthy Flavour throughout’: Double Consciousness and the Redefinition of the Soul in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood,*” which contends that the primary source of interest in *Drood* was to be the psychology of the enigmatic John Jasper, not the apparent murder plot. According to Forster, the novel was to conclude with Jasper’s relation of the murder of his nephew “as if, not he the culprit, but some other man, were the tempted” (2: 366). In this psychic split, and throughout the novel, Dickens’s depiction of Jasper draws on the nineteenth-century psychological concept of double consciousness, a condition in which individuals seemed to possess two discrete mental lives. Yet while
Dickens enlists contemporary theorizing about double consciousness in this novel, I suggest that he does so in order to engender scepticism about the concept, precisely because of the way double consciousness had been connected by 1870 to the theory of the bicameral brain—used, that is, as evidence of the physiological basis of mind—as well as to theories of reflex thought that were understood to leave no room for any such immaterial entity as the will. Included in this gradual rewriting of double consciousness, moreover, was the redefinition of “soul” by physical psychologists so that the word became no more than a synonym for consciousness. Because of Drood’s unfinished state, however, Dickens’s position in relation to psycho-physiology in this novel is never made entirely clear to most readers, and the concept of double consciousness consequently only imports into the novel the various physical meanings that I argue—on the basis of Dickens’s letters, Forster’s discussion of the novel’s plot, and subtle hints in what exists of the text—Dickens in fact sought to refute.

Dickens’s inability to finish The Mystery of Edwin Drood is in some ways symbolic of his failure, in his engagement with Victorian psychology, ever to achieve any sort of meaningful closure, ever to have the last word—a failure which in turn only underscores the effectiveness of the rhetorical strategies physical psychologists employed against the soul-based theories they sought to displace. Again, it is these rhetorical strategies that this study seeks to trace. Using Dickens’s first-person fictions to examine the way psycho-physiological models slowly redefined the language of Victorian psychology, and considering the way even introspection itself came to acquire a residue of physiological thought in the second half of the nineteenth century, I attempt to cast new light in the following pages on both the stakes of Victorian psychological
controversy and the discursive factors that helped to enable psychology’s transformation into a “scientific” discipline.
CHAPTER TWO: “What Is Natural in Me”: *David Copperfield*, Faculty Psychology, and the Association of Ideas

David Copperfield begins the narrative of his life by musing on the gifts with which he was born. Already in the novel’s second paragraph, he jokes about the inborn ability ascribed to him by various women in his neighbourhood, on account of the time of his birth: the ability to see ghosts and spirits. In the rest of the novel, David returns often in a more serious vein to the claim that at least some of his mental faculties are innate. Writing of his power of observation, for instance, he contends that “most grown men who are remarkable in this respect, may with greater propriety be said not to have lost the faculty, than to have acquired it” (11).

This same inborn power of observation, moreover, is the clue by which we learn that David’s complaint about his being sent to Murdstone and Grinby’s is founded on the wonderful innate gifts that were thereby nearly wasted. As he explains:

[I]t is a matter of some surprise to me, even now, that I can have been so easily thrown away at such an age. A child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt bodily or mentally, it seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf. (132)

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90 That the distinction between innate and learned abilities was an important one for Dickens is hinted at in his underlining of the words “not to have lost” in the manuscript of the novel. As Nina Burgis indicates in her edition of *David Copperfield*, the phrase is italicized in both corrected first sets of galleys, but must have been changed in a later proof that does not survive.

91 Jennifer Ruth, citing a string of other critics, agrees that “what outrages David (and Dickens) is less that a *child* has been forced into wage labor that that *he*, David Copperfield, a child who might qualify for higher pursuits, is ‘thrown away’” (306). Compare this with David Musselwhite’s discussion of the autobiographical fragment: “What Dickens seems to be complaining most about . . . is that his poor harassed and pressed parents didn’t realize that it was not just their nearly teenage son that they had to do with but the great popular novelist Charly Dickens” (156).
In other words, while criticism may have found in David a rather bland everyman, this is decidedly not how Dickens—or David—would have us see him. Instead, we sense the novel’s approval of Micawber’s assessment of a young David, that his mind “is a rich soil teeming with latent vegetation” (221): the seeds of David’s future success, his substantial innate gifts, are there at birth, only waiting to burst forth.

Knowing as we do from Forster’s Life of Charles Dickens (1872-74) that Dickens drew upon his own experiences at Warren’s Blacking for his depiction of David’s suffering at Murdstone and Grinby’s, it almost goes without saying that David, in insisting on his inherited gifts, sounds very much like his author. But sound like Dickens he does. The latter’s autobiographical fragment includes a nearly identical passage to the one above:

> It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age. It is wonderful to me, that, even after my descent into the poor drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion enough on me—a child of singular abilities: quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily or mentally—to suggest that something might have been spared, as certainly it might have been, to place me at any common school. (1: 21)

It is peculiar, then, that in the little that has been written about this novel’s engagement with the psychology of its day, critics have persistently asserted that David Copperfield (1849-50) draws on a body of psychology that denies the existence of innate gifts:

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92 D. A. Miller, of course, says of David, “[H]e is not there” (215). For this notion of David’s blandness or invisibility, see also Dowling 59-60, Jaffe 113ff, John 177, and Saville 787. Franco Moretti argues that this blandness is a fundamental aspect of the English bildungsroman (191-92).

93 Ruth also discusses this passage in terms of innate gifts (311-12). As will become apparent, I agree with her assertion that the novel insists on the necessity of hard work to develop these latent gifts. But I see David’s claims about the necessity of hard work as more tentative, more anxious than I think Ruth does.
associationism. Nor is it only association psychology’s failure to provide for the inborn abilities on which both David and Dickens insist that makes such readings problematic. The 1840s and 1850s also found associationism at the heart of passionate debate and popularly viewed with distrust, perceived as a threat to religious belief and to the promise of immortality. To read Dickens as an associationist, in other words, we would somehow have to find a way to explain the disjunction between his scientific and his religious beliefs.

This chapter restores *David Copperfield* to its position in the midst of such mid-century psychological debate. Against the seeming critical consensus that this is a novel deeply indebted to associationist psychology, I argue for *David Copperfield’s* immersion in the still-dominant—and spiritually informed—Scottish faculty psychology of the 1840s, the psychology against which Victorian commentators invariably set associationism. In doing so, as I suggested in my last chapter, my aim is to reconsider the ways that we as scholars of the Victorian novel understand (and draw upon) the psychology of mid-century Britain, in part by offering a reminder of the centrality of Christian belief to nineteenth-century mental science. Yet my reading of *David Copperfield* will also consider the implications of the ambiguity of the novel’s psychological language, the potential difficulties for readers in distinguishing its soul-based theory of mind from both associationism and such other physical models as phrenology. For if faculty psychology offered Dickens a means to insist on both God’s dominion over earth and the promise of rebirth in another world, the various meanings loaded onto the language of association and of the faculties by mid-century threatened to point readers towards very different conclusions.
Mind Reflected on Paper

*David Copperfield* represents a departure from Dickens’s earlier work in the explicitness of its intervention in psychological debate; as I argue in the following pages, this is a novel teeming with the language and concepts of mid-century mental science. But *David Copperfield*’s engagement with Victorian psychology is nowhere more obvious than in its narrative form: in addition to being among the Dickens novels that draw most fully on the language of mental philosophy, *David Copperfield* is the first of Dickens’s *first-person* novels, his initial attempt to reproduce psychology’s introspective viewpoint in his long fiction. David tells us that the novel is his “written memory” (589; 699), an attempt “to reflect [his] mind on . . . paper” (594-95); more broadly, it is in many ways an examination of the nature of the mind along introspective lines. To be clear, my contention is that, in David’s reflection of his inner view, Dickens expresses his own understanding of human psychology; David, in this respect at least, serves as Dickens’s mouthpiece in this text. This is not merely to state, as many critics have, that David shares Dickens’s beliefs or opinions, although I would suggest that to some degree he

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94 That is not to say that the earlier novels were free of psychological language. Indeed, Dickens increasingly drew on the language of both association and the faculties in the fiction he published in the 1840s. In *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44), this language is infrequent and seems mere adornment, as in this description of the Blue Dragon: “It was none of your frivolous and preposterously bright bedrooms, where nobody can close an eye with any kind of propriety or decent regard to the association of ideas” (27). In *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), however, Dickens employs this terminology more consistently, writing of the glance Captain Cuttle casts at Walter’s old desk upon his visit to Carker, for example: “The association of ideas, thus awakened, did the Captain a great deal of good; it softened him in the very height of his anger, and brought the tears into his eyes” (452). We hear, too, of the associations that arise for Dombey in his empty house after his ruin. Then there is the following rumination on the mind, put forth by Mr. Toodle: “I don’t know how as I said it partickler along o’ Rob, I’m sure. I starts light with Rob only; I comes to a branch; I takes on what I finds there; and a whole train of ideas gets coupled on to him, afore I knows where I am, or where they comes from. What a Junction a man’s thoughts is” (512-13). The difference between these novels and *David Copperfield*, though, is one of degree: the latter offers a more sustained and more in-depth engagement with nineteenth-century mental philosophy than either of the earlier works. 95 John O. Jordan points out the apparent discrepancy between *David Copperfield* and the novels that immediately preceded and followed it: it appears to be “more concerned with David’s inner experiences, with the growth of his consciousness and the disciplining of his heart, than it is with outer realities” (61). Jordan goes on to illuminate the social sub-text that underlies this surface; my focus will be on David’s interiority.
What I am discussing is something more fundamental, the sort of foundational belief that determines how one understands one’s world; in this sense, it seems almost a given that David would give voice to how Dickens perceived the self, to the particular cultural model of identity (to borrow Paul John Eakin’s phrase [4]) in which Dickens was invested. Among the tasks I have set myself in both this chapter and the larger project of which it is a part is therefore to parse this soul-based construction of the self, to consider the ideological work it did in Victorian culture and explore how it was opposed by other, emergent discourses.

In other words, I want to expand on one of the major critical commonplaces about David Copperfield, that it works to discipline and shape its readers into ideal bourgeois or liberal subjects. It is not enough to argue that the novel “channels the reader into normative modes of conduct,” as Matthew Titolo summarizes the disciplinary reading of this novel (172); this label “liberal subject,” after all, elides the distinction between the models of self—each individualist and apparently autonomous, but carrying with it

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96 That is, my approach does not preclude an ironic distance between author and narrator of the sort Jordan describes (64)—Jordan makes a convincing case for such irony in other of David’s claims, such as those that express his blindness to the economic realities constraining the Peggottys or to his own class privilege. But considering the charged atmosphere of Victorian psychological discourse and the perceived stakes of the various models of the self, I have trouble believing that Dickens would ironize David’s view of the self.

97 It might be helpful here to consider Charles Taylor’s discussion of the self as only existing in relationship with other selves: “This is the sense in which one cannot be a self on one’s own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding—and, of course, these classes may overlap. A self exists only in what I call ‘webs of interlocution’” (36). Whether we accept Taylor’s model or not, what I want to make clear here is the idea common in autobiography studies that the “I” we inhabit when we write about ourselves is culturally and linguistically pre-made; we can only inhabit a position, a model of the self, that has already been made available by our culture.

98 Forster seems inadvertently to have hit on the novel’s attempts to write its readers: he remarks that the novel “can hardly have had a reader, man or lad, who did not discover that he was something of a Copperfield himself” (2: 107). For critics who have discussed this aspect of the text, see Ablow 24, Cordery 81-82, Edwards 332, D. A. Miller 208-9, and Poovey 89.

99 In other words, the psychology with which Dickens is engaging does not efface the lines between individuals or refuse to “conform to post-Enlightenment conceptions of individualism” (Annoying 60), as Kincaid suggests in his chapter “Viewing and Blurring with Dickens,” nor, I am suggesting, does
vastly different implications for the bearer’s soul—that I began to discuss in the last chapter. What needs pointing out is the precise shape those subjects took—the precise shape, that is, into which this novel attempts to write its readers—a shape that only becomes clear once we understand the psychology that informs and surrounds the text.

Prefatory to unpacking the model of the self we find in *David Copperfield*, I should stress at greater length how committed Dickens was to it—certainly he was more invested in this novel’s construction of selfhood than intellectual interests alone might suggest. David’s story is in many ways his own, one so thoroughly informed by Dickens’s autobiography that Dickens wrote to Forster as he drew towards the novel’s close: “Oh, my dear Forster, if I were to say half of what *Copperfield* makes me feel to-night, how strangely, even to you, I should be turned inside-out! I seem to be sending some part of myself into the Shadowy World” (6: 195).\(^{100}\) Dickens’s autobiographical attachment to this novel, his “favourite child,” is well known. As he writes in the 1850 preface:

> My interest in it, is so recent and strong; and my mind is so divided between pleasure and regret—pleasure in the achievement of a long design, regret in the separation from many companions—that I am in danger of wearying the reader whom I love, with personal confidences and private emotions. (lxxi)

What I want to call attention to, though, is Forster’s claim that Dickens’s attachment to the novel was due to its introspective, first-person structure:

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\(^{100}\) Dickens echoed these words in the 1850 preface to the novel. As will become clear in Chapter Four, Dickens’s construction of heaven as “the Shadowy World” aligns him with an orthodox dualist psychology.
A suggestion that he should write it in the first person, by way of change, had been thrown out by me, which he took at once very gravely; and this, with other things, though as yet not dreaming of any public use of his early personal trials, conspired to bring about the resolve to use them. (2: 76)

My suggestion is that first-person narration, Dickens’s sharing an “I” with David, did not merely invite Dickens to draw on his experiences in the literal way that Forster is describing; that is, it did not merely provide him with a chance to sneak into the text some mention of his time at Warren’s Blacking, although the inclusion of these experiences suggests Dickens experienced some level of identification with David (as does Dickens’s obstinate holding on to the name “David Copperfield,” which shared his own, reversed initials [Forster 2: 78]). Rather, my argument is that this structure encouraged Dickens to have David inhabit his I in the same way Dickens did—it encouraged him to structure David’s fundamental experiences of himself as a self along the same lines that Dickens experienced his own selfhood. This novel consequently draws on Dickens’s interior view of the structure of the mind—what his own introspection revealed about the ontology of mind and about the relationship between mind and body—if not necessarily its contents.

I want then to shift the terms in which we understand Dickens to have mined his own experiences for this novel. Much criticism of *David Copperfield* has, of course, read the novel against Dickens’s autobiographical tinkering in the years leading up to its

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101 Burgis seems to agree with Forster here, writing that “Dickens may have planned beforehand many of the events and characters of David Copperfield’s history, but he did not foresee how wonderfully at home he would find himself in first-person narrative, how the experience of writing in that mode would affect the very ‘idea’ of the novel” (xxvi).
publication: we now know, in large part due to the work of Nina Burgis, that Dickens spent a great deal of time in the 1840s thinking about writing his life. The autobiography was never completed, and some part of it was finally consigned to the flames: Dickens wrote to his one-time sweetheart Maria Beadnell, then Mrs. Winter, on 22 February 1855, “A few years ago (just before Copperfield) I began to write my life, intending the Manuscript to be found among my papers when its subject should be concluded. But as I began to approach within sight of that part of it, I lost courage and burned the rest” (8: 543-44). What remained, apparently—but does not remain today, at least not in manuscript—was the well-known autobiographical fragment describing Dickens’s childhood experiences at Warren’s Blacking that Forster reproduces in the second chapter of his Life. Forster identifies this fragment as the genesis of the novel, and Dickens himself wrote of his integration of those chapters based on the fragment into David Copperfield, “I really think I have done it ingeniously, and with a very complicated interweaving of truth and fiction” (Letters 5: 569). My interest here is not in the debates that surround this fragment—whether this bit of writing constituted all the autobiographical material Forster had in hand, for instance, or how honestly it reflects Dickens’s experience. What I wish to stress instead is the fragment’s absence. For all we know at present, it could have been partly or entirely Forster’s creation, drawn by him from David Copperfield (although Dickens’s son Charley, too, attests to its existence

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102 See Burgis’s preface to the Clarendon edition of the novel. Numerous other critics, sometimes working from Burgis, have also made this point, at times suggesting their own theories about why Dickens wished to write his life or why he decided not to complete it. See, for instance, Bodenheimer, “Knowing” 279; Carr; Collins, “Dickens’s”; Tick, “Autobiographical” 62-63; and Welsh, From Copyright.
103 Philip Collins suggests that Forster likely had more than this (“Dickens’s” 90).
104 Does the fragment do away with authorial shaping and nakedly reveal Dickens’s shame? Does it present a mere screen memory for an earlier trauma, perhaps a primal scene, as Steven Marcus suggests (370-73)? Is it a self-conscious attempt by Dickens to package himself for his readers, to shape an appropriate past for the famous author, as David Musselwhite argues (154)? Is it an attempt to shape the biography that Forster would one day write (Bodenheimer, “Knowing” 220)
Certainly its facts are unverifiable (Collins, “Dickens’s” 90). But because Forster situates it as the seed out of which *David Copperfield* grew, what the fragment has done is validate the autobiographical element in the novel and then conveniently disappear, leaving *David Copperfield* as a primary—although deeply problematic—means by which criticism has sought to understand Dickens the man. Only note the vast number of monographs and articles that find Dickens’s life in the novel. Nor is such substitution of David for Dickens—or construction of Dickens through David—anything new. Forster tells us that even upon the novel’s first publication, “there was withal a suspicion, which though general and vague had sharpened interest not a little, that underneath the fiction lay something of the author’s life” (2: 98).

My point is that the line of criticism that comes to this novel looking for the life finally appears utterly circular: because of the fragment’s absence, those readings that “find” Dickens’s autobiography in *David Copperfield* are equally engaged in using the novel to write that autobiography. It seems to me, then, that mine is a more defensible

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105 As Bodenheimer puts it, “[W]e cannot be certain whether the fragment was written as a continuous narrative, whether some memories were conveyed orally, whether certain sections were quoted only from the proof sheets of *David Copperfield*, or whether Forster himself reshaped, deleted, or even rewrote portions of the quoted text” (“Knowing” 218). Welsh makes much the same point (*From Copyright* 3).

106 Of the fragment, he writes that “what it had 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” (1: 19-20). The novel, that is, finally replaced the autobiography: “It had all been written, as fact, before he thought of any other use for it; and it was not until several months later, when the fancy of *David Copperfield*, itself suggested by what he had so written of his early troubles, began to take shape in his mind, that he abandoned his first intention of writing his own life” (1: 20).

107 Oliver Buckton, for instance, asserts that the fragment “has given critics their strongest evidence for reading the novel autobiographically” (192).

108 The following is, of necessity, only a partial list of the critics who make such a move (in one way or another and with varying degrees of complexity): Berlatsky, Buckton, Burgis, Collins (“Dickens’s”), Dowling, Gilmour, Federico, Fleishman, Hirsch, Houston, MacKay, J. Hillis Miller (*Charles Dickens*), Powell, Shires, Spengemann, Tick (both works), Tracy, Walder, Welsh (*From Copyright*), and Westburg. Perhaps more relevant for my purposes are those critics who see the novel as a substitute (improved) life for Dickens. See, for instance, Buckton 196, Carmichael 666, Federico 86, and Vanden Bossche, “Cookery” 105.
and more useful way of understanding this novel as being rooted in Dickens’s own experience: what seems worth emphasizing, instead of the autobiographical nature of this text, is the way David shares Dickens’s inner view, the parallels between what each sees (or believes he sees, or wishes he saw) when he looks inward. At the same time, we can begin to perceive what is at stake in the model of selfhood we find in *David Copperfield*. To some degree, it is Dickens’s self, not merely David’s, that is written in these pages.

**Associationism, Faculty Psychology, and the Threat of Materialism**

In the little that has been written about Dickens’s engagement with Victorian psychological discourse in this novel, critics have agreed that Dickens structures his depiction of David’s mind according to the tenets of associationism. This is the theory—drawn originally from Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, and refined by, among others, David Hume, David Hartley, and James Mill—that associated simple sensations are the building blocks of all our mental faculties, joining together to form ever more complex ideas, desires, emotions, and volitions. Certainly *David Copperfield* gives us ample evidence on which to build such a supposition: already on the second page of the novel, David writes of his “childish associations,” and much of the text, especially in those chapters that describe David’s childhood, is dedicated to enumerating the linked

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109 The two most developed arguments for associationism in *David Copperfield* are those put forth by Nicholas Dames and Michael S. Kearns. The latter, however, argues that Dickens revises this psychology to allow for the possibility of moral transformation. Rick Rylance briefly also asserts that Dickens here employs associationist psychology (*Victorian* 56), although he acknowledges Dickens’s criticism of the psychology in *Hard Times* and *Our Mutual Friend* (*Victorian* 68-69). Athena Vrettos focuses on psychological writers who question the possibility of moral transformation that Kearns discusses, but Vrettos nonetheless asserts that it is associationist psychology with which Dickens is engaging (422n3). J. Hillis Miller, finally, argues that David’s recollected events are organized “through the powerful operation of association” (*Charles Dickens* 155), but he does not engage with the psychological theory in any more explicit or sustained way than this.

110 My list here is drawn primarily from John Stuart Mill (“Bain’s”).
thoughts and sensations that make up his mature understanding (the association of Agnes with the stained glass window being perhaps the most notable of these).

Despite its name, though, associationism was not the only psychological theory that employed this model of associative thought. The idea was also a central part of the Scottish faculty psychology, the model put forth most prominently by Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, and Sir William Hamilton, initially in reaction to the scepticism of Hume. In his *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792), for instance, Stewart offers a long chapter entitled “Of the Association of Ideas,” and the principle of association plays a central role in his psychology, as it does in Reid’s. Regardless of these similarities, however, associationism and faculty psychology were considered to be fundamentally opposed, as is clear from the way they were so often set against one another in contemporary discussions of psychological or philosophical thought.

If both associationism and faculty psychology depended on the association of ideas, what was there to distinguish between them? What led Victorian commentators to set them at odds? The primary difference is suggested in the titles John Stuart Mill applies to each: he calls associationism and faculty psychology “the à posteriori and à

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111 Many commentators, in fact, accept the process of association as a given: James Martineau, for instance, calls it “a verifiable and universally recognized psychological law” (513). What such comments show us, coming as they do from figures who, as we will see below, were opposed to the fundamental tenets of associationism, is that Dames is incorrect when he asserts, “We should remember… that to ‘associate’ was still, when used of mental operations, a term that referred narrowly and specifically to association psychology” (139). I should note that Rylance, too, has commented on this sharing of vocabulary and concepts between associationism and faculty psychology (*Victorian* 55).

112 For Reid’s acceptance of the principles of association, see, for example, *Essays* 347-51. Reid, however, does not see association as an original principle, but resolves it into habit. Stewart argues for the opposite stance, resolving habit into the association of ideas (281).

Perhaps because of the centrality of association to his psychology, Stewart has been treated by both Michael Kearns (113) and Nicholas Dames (129-34) as an associationist. He was not. Such a classification ignores the aspects of Stewart’s psychology that align him with faculty psychology (aspects I outline below); his close relationship with Reid, who might be called the founder of this school; and the way he was classified by nineteenth-century commentators. On this last point, see, for instance, Carlyle 444-46; “Locke and his Critics” 318-19; Masson, “Bain” 213; McCosh, *Scottish* 279; Mill, “Bain’s” 288-90; Fraser, “Scottish” 192; Tagart 252; and Webb 504.
priori schools” (“Bain’s” 287), respectively. That is, the essential question that divided the two models was whether the mental faculties were developed entirely from experience, as claimed by the associationists, or were (at least to some degree) innate. The former school imagined the mind at birth to be a blank slate. Locke writes, for instance:

Let us then suppose the Mind to be, as we say, white Paper, void of all Characters, without any Ideas; How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless Fancy of Man has painted on it, with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of Reason and Knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, From Experience: In that, all our Knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives it self. Our Observation employ’d either about external, sensible Objects; or about the internal Operations of our Minds, perceived and reflected on by our selves, is that, which supplies our Understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the Fountains of Knowledge, from whence all the Ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring. (104)

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113 See Fraser, “Scottish” 203; Lewes, “History” 1036; and J. S. Mill, “Bain’s” 287.
114 On this central distinction between associationism and faculty psychology, see also Reed 27-30; Rylance, Victorian 40; and Young, Mind 97.
115 Locke also employs the metaphor of the mind as an empty cabinet that is slowly stocked with ideas as it develops (55).
116 As this passage should already make clear, Locke’s description of the mind did seem to posit at least one innate faculty, that of reflection. But as Young explains, “[T]he vagueness of his concept of reflection gradually led to the explanation of complex mental phenomena in terms of the relations among simple sensations, and the ideational complexes which they formed. The single explanatory principle which was eventually extended to account for all mental processes was the ‘association of ideas’” (Mind 95). I should point out here that Hume explicitly dismisses the notion of innate ideas: see his A Treatise of Human Nature (1739-40) 106.
Locke was thus taken to mean that the mind’s mental furniture was accumulated during life, not something with which one was born.

Against this entirely experiential basis of identity, faculty psychology saw the mind to be possessed of some “original and natural” (Reid, Essays 21) materials—innate beliefs, as in the existence of God,\textsuperscript{117} or innate mental faculties that only awaited the material of experience to be set working.\textsuperscript{118} Indeed, these theorists pointed out that even the associationist model, logically speaking, required some innate faculties: Stewart writes of those philosophers to whom he is opposed, “Having remarked the wonderful influence of education over the mind, they have concluded, that man is wholly a factitious being; not recollecting, that this very susceptibility of education presupposes certain original principles which are common to the whole species” (33). Faculty psychology pointed out the active part of perception, the innate material even infants bring to their encounters with the world. As John Stuart Mill summarizes their position:

> [T]he à priori thinkers hold, that in every act of thought, there is an ingredient which is not given to the mind, but contributed by the mind in virtue of its inherent powers. The simplest phenomenon of all, an external sensation, requires, according to them, a mental element to become a perception, and be thus converted from a passive and merely fugitive state.

\textsuperscript{117} Carpenter, in Précis of Human Physiology (1842), singles this out as the lone innate belief (54). Stewart also suggests that religion has its roots in the original principles of the mind (360). Reid argues that we are born with certain judgements: “Such original and natural judgments are therefore a part of the furniture which nature hath given to the human understanding. They are the inspiration of the Almighty, no less than our notions or simple apprehensions. They serve to direct us in the common affairs of life, where our reasoning faculty would leave us in the dark. They are a part of our constitution, and all the discoveries of our reason are grounded upon them. They make up what is called the common sense of mankind; and what is manifestly contrary to any of those first principles, is what we call absurd” (Inquiry 215).

\textsuperscript{118} This is, for example, the position taken by Stewart (99) and by Abercrombie (40). Although we have already seen where Carlyle’s views are in harmony with those of faculty psychology, he is critical of the school’s over-reliance on innate faculties, a move that he sneers at as a letting loose of “Instinct, as an undiscriminating bandog” (446).
of our own being, into the recognition of a durable object external to the mind. (“Bain’s” 291)\(^{119}\)

The source of such innate qualities was obvious: these were, in Reid’s words, “the faculties which God hath given us” (\textit{Essay} 12)\(^{120}\) and therefore unaccountable by mental philosophy (\textit{Essays} 258).\(^ {121}\) The faculties might be cultivated and improved (Stewart 20), or they could be abused, neglected, and perverted (Stewart 24),\(^ {122}\) but they originated as a divine gift. In other words, faculty psychology was, like Agnes Wickfield, ever pointing upward, finding always in human identity some trace of the handiwork of the Almighty.

Because associationism, on the other hand, appeared to construct the individual entirely out of experience, one of the central criticisms that arose of it was that it made the individual completely passive.\(^ {123}\) Such seems inevitable, for example, in James Mill’s argument that because our ideas “are derived from sensations,” they “spring up, or exist, in the order in which the sensations existed, of which they are the copies” (1: 78). His son thus laments:

Those who have studied the writings of the Association Psychologists, must often have been unfavourably impressed by the almost total absence, in their analytical expositions, of the recognition of any active element, or


\(^{120}\) See also his \textit{Inquiry into the Human Mind}, in which he calls the mind a “nobler work” than the body, for “even more of the wisdom and skill of the divine Architect hath been employed in its structure” (11).

\(^{121}\) Reid writes, “Our original faculties are all unaccountable. . . . He only who made them, comprehends fully how they are made, and how they produce in us not only a conception, but a firm belief and assurance of things which it concerns us to know” (\textit{Essays} 258). Stewart muses that “there must be some limit, beyond which the theory of association cannot possibly be carried; for the explanation which it gives, of the formation of new principles of action, proceeds on the supposition that there are other principles previously existing in the mind. The great question then is, when we are arrived at this limit; or, in other words, when we are arrived at the simple and original laws of our constitution” (384).

\(^{122}\) On the development of the faculties, see also Hamilton (\textit{Discussions} 46)

\(^{123}\) Kearns has also made this observation (112), but he argues that Dickens reshapes associationism to accommodate for free action. I shall show below why this view is mistaken. Vrettos’s discussion of habit in nineteenth-century psychology shows how discussions of habit tapped into precisely this anxiety about individuals being acted upon by external forces.
spontaneity, in the mind itself. Sensation, and the memory of sensation, are passive phenomena; the mind, in them, does not act, but is acted upon. ("Bain’s" 301)

Coleridge’s critique in the *Biographia Literaria* (1815-17) of this aspect of associationism was perhaps best known. He there complains of Hartley’s association that it reduces the will, reason, judgement, and understanding from the causes of association to its mere “mechanical effects” (VII.I: 110); under such a theory, he insists, our whole life would be “divided between the despotism of outward impressions, and that of senseless and passive memory” (VII.I: 111). Associationism, that is, eliminates the possibility of meaningful human action by reducing us to mere conduits for external forces, so that, for instance, we must say that “[t]he inventor of the watch did not in reality invent it; he only looked on, while the blind causes, the only true artists, were unfolding themselves” (VII.I: 119-20).

We are now coming to what was most threatening about associationism, for Coleridge’s criticism leads us to the more significant anxiety that arose in the period surrounding this model: the effect it had on belief in an immortal soul. Under the despotism of impressions that is associationism, insists Coleridge,

[T]he soul becomes a mere ens logicum; for as a real separable being, it would be more worthless and ludicrous, than the Grimalkins in the Catt-harpsichord, described in the Spectator. For these did form a part of the process; but in Hartley’s scheme the soul is present only to be pinched or stroked, while the very squeals or purring are produced by an agency wholly independent and alien. (VII.I: 117)
The greater fear, of course, was not that associationism made the soul irrelevant, but that it made it disappear. In other words, while faculty psychology grounded its conception of identity in a Christian view of humankind, there were many who doubted that the same could be said of associationism; and associationism, as J. S. Mill laments, was consequently “not unfrequently stigmatized as materialistic” (“Bain’s” 295).124 Carlyle, for instance, after calling Stewart the “last amiable cultivator” (445) of the science of mind, criticizes the psychology of Locke for being “material” and “mechanical” (446); James McCosh writes of James Mill that his psychology retains “no religious belief whatever” (Scottish 379); and Edward Bulwer-Lytton insists that Locke’s “known belief in our immortality has blinded us to the materialism of his doctrines” (1: 350), before proceeding to call Locke the inadvertent “founder of a school of Materialists, and the ready oracle of those who refuse an appeal to Theology and are sceptical of Revelation” (1: 351). The frequency with which one encounters such views in the period, and the manner in which they are stated—as though they were self-evident truths—suggests that these views had gained popular currency, and that they would have been familiar to a great many of Dickens’s readers. This notion is only supported by the anticipatory gestures made by many who wrote on associationism: supporters of the theory felt compelled to pre-emptively answer the charge of materialism. Consider David Masson’s review of Alexander Bain’s *The Senses and the Intellect* (1855), an associationist text I discuss at length in Chapter Five:

We do not refer to the objections likely to be made by foolish persons, to whom all talk about “nervous currents” and the like, in connexion with the

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124 Edwin Eigner (7-8), Rylance (*Victorian* 44), and Reed (32-33) have also discussed the perception of certain Victorian commentators that associationism would lead to materialism.
human mind, may be supposed, in itself, to be both novel and disagreeable. Such persons have yet to qualify themselves for being reasoned with at all, in matters pertaining to mental science; they are in the same position relative to speculations of this order, as the ignorant vulgar were in relation to geology at a time when geology was beginning to be a science. (“Bain” 218)

The similarity of the argument I am making here to one I made in the last chapter about that nebulous group I labelled psycho-physiologists is no accident. While we cannot perfectly map the divide between faculty psychology and associationism onto that between those I called orthodox theorists and those who were labelled materialists, the overlap is substantial, or at least was popularly perceived to be so. And what I am most interested in here is the way associationism was popularly received: as a materialist body of thought that threatened belief in our immortal souls.

These charges of materialism against associationist psychology, merited or otherwise, generally stemmed from two main sources. First, they arose from associationism’s suggestion that the higher faculties were constructed out of the lower (J. S. Mill, “Bain’s” 295), out of those baser instincts, such as appetite and desire, associated most closely with the body and shared with the lower animals (Rylance, Victorian 27). Thus, while Stewart is willing to concede that associationism need not lead to scepticism or “weaken the foundation of morals”—this very concession, of course, suggests others were not so sure—125—he argues that it certainly tends “to degrade the dignity of human

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125 For the anxieties surrounding Locke’s treatment of morality, see “Locke and his Critics” 330. Consider also Reid’s assertion that “[i]f man had not the faculty given him by God of perceiving certain things in conduct to be right, and others to be wrong, and of perceiving his obligation to do what is right, and not to do what is wrong, he would not be a moral and accountable being” (Essays 551).
nature” (385). Second and more significantly, associationism seemed to many to eliminate God’s role in the construction of the mental powers, and to make “Mind . . . a property of Matter” (Lewes, “History” 1036). Stewart, in arguing merely that experience provides the material by which the faculties are set working, thus feels it necessary to distance himself from the implications of an entirely experiential basis of identity. He writes:

Although, therefore, we should acquiesce in the conclusion, that, without our organs of sense, the mind must have remained destitute of knowledge, this concession could have no tendency whatever to favour the principles of materialism; as it implies nothing more than that the impressions made on our senses by external objects, furnish the occasions on which the mind, by the laws of its constitution, is led to perceive the qualities of the material world, and to exert all the different modifications of thought of which it is capable. (99)

Sensation, then, does not create the faculties for Stewart, but for a number of Victorians, sensation did seem to replace God as creator of the mind in associationism. 126

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126 One of the other reasons why associationism might be labelled materialistic is hinted at in this passage from Stewart: the way it seemed to reduce mind to matter. Consider Edward Tagart’s discussion of James Mill: “Mr. Mill expressly classes the human will among the physical causes; he could hardly say material causes. But where then is the distinction between physical and metaphysical, in the subjects of scientific investigation? The moral sciences, which have special and exclusive relation to the phenomena arising out of, or concerned in, the human will and its functions, and which, according to Mr. Mill, would seem to require a logic of their own, are then reduced to the level of the physical sciences. The phenomena dependent on mental antecedents or conditions, thus become blended with the phenomena confessedly dependent on material conditions, and the old and useful division of physics and metaphysics is destroyed” (136-37). Consider also the passage from C. Rémusat that Tagart cites in the same work: “Thus from a philosophy which exaggerates the part played by sensation, it was doubtless natural to conclude the reference of all reality to that which is perceived by sense (sentit).—a conclusion which drives us to consider only body in the universe” (?). Tagart was a friend of Dickens and minister of the Essex Street Unitarian chapel Dickens attended.
I stress again, though, that this view of associationism as materialist was not necessarily accurate: T. E. Webb, for one, argues that Reid and Stewart did not understand Locke (504); and the unnamed reviewer of Victor Cousin’s *Cours d’Histoire de la Philosophie* in *The British Quarterly Review* for 1 May 1847, insists both that Locke’s views on innate ideas have been misunderstood (299-301) and that he in fact believed that certain faculties were innate (314-24). Frederick Lange, too, writing later in the century, points out that the notion of associationism as materialist comes from a “one-sided view of Locke, which dominated the last century in a degree difficult to understand, that the whole intellectual content comes through the senses” (3: 119). But the view of associationism as materialistic, if mistaken, was certainly prevalent enough to make many anxious about the model; and as I have said, the popular perception of associationism is my main concern here.

**The Immaterial Self in *David Copperfield***

As I suggested at the outset, in light of this popular view of associationism the critical unanimity that Dickens draws on this model of the mind in *David Copperfield* is perplexing. Yes, the novel occasionally flirts with a view of the mind akin to associationism. Note Peggotty’s response to David’s mother’s surprise that the former should all of a sudden think of Betsey Trotwood: “‘I don’t know how it is,’ said Peggotty, ‘unless it’s on account of being stupid, but my head never can pick and choose its people. They come and they go, and they don’t come and they don’t go, just as they like’” (97).

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127 Tagart offers the same defence (251). Of course, innateness itself does not preclude materialism, as I argue when discussing evolutionary associationism in Chapter Five. But most discussions of innateness in the 1840s assumed that the inborn must come from God, and this position in turn tended to be aligned with dualism.
Nor can David account for how he first thinks of going to find his aunt, telling us twice that he is not sure why the idea came into his head (148; 151). Here, it would seem, are associationism’s passive recipients of ideas, their thoughts at the mercy of what Coleridge calls “the phantasmal chaos of association” (*Biographia*, VII.I: 116). But surely passages like these are insufficient evidence on which to found an argument that Dickens consistently uses associationism to model David’s mind. Such a reading becomes even more untenable if we turn, as I would like to do now, to a brief overview of the scientific and psychological articles that Dickens published shortly after *David Copperfield*, in the pages of *Household Words*. We need not delve very deeply into these articles—all of which Dickens read and approved for publication—to find in them a very different picture of the mind than that put forth in associationist texts. For example, in his article on “Somnambulism” in the 3 May 1851 number, Dr. Thomas Stone writes:

> The most interesting circumstance connected with somnambulism is that it brings palpably under our observation a preternatural state of being, in which the body is seen moving about, executing a variety of complicated actions, in the condition, physically, of a living automaton, while the lamp of the human soul is burning inwardly, as it were, with increased intensity; and this very exaltation of the mental faculties proves, incontestably, that the mind is independent of the body, and has an existence in a world peculiar to itself. (138)

The notion of the self here is in line with what we would find in Reid or Stewart—selfhood is founded on the immaterial, the immortal. Yet we need not even look to scientific articles—or to other pens than Dickens’s—for a refutation in Dickens’s
publications of the associationist (or, more properly, what was popularly understood as the associationist) view of the self. The oft-quoted “A Preliminary Word,” which appears on the first page of the first number (30 March 1850), denies this model as forcefully as Stone does. Dickens there writes of “that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast; which, according to its nurture, burns with an inspiring flame, or sinks into a sullen glare, but which (or woe betide that day!) can never be extinguished” (1); associationism, as popularly understood, did not allow for any such “inherent” qualities. Moreover, even the objects in the world Dickens describes seem inspired by some immaterial principle: in the same article, Dickens claims that “[t]he mightier inventions of this age are not, to our thinking, all material, but have a kind of souls in their stupendous bodies which may find expression in Household Words” (1). And the notion of a spiritualized, immaterial entity in the human breast—a notion, to repeat, that most Victorians accused associationism of denying—also seems to underlie Dickens’s horror at the spectacle of public execution, as he expressed it in a letter to The Times on 13 November 1849:

When the two miserable creatures who attracted all this ghastly sight about them were turned quivering into the air, there was no more emotion, no more pity, no more thought that two immortal souls had gone to judgement, no more restraint in any of the previous obscenities, than if the name of Christ had never been heard in this world, and there were no belief among men but that they perished like the beasts. (Letters 5: 645)
As my fourth chapter will make clear, the notion that these criminals’ souls had instantaneously ascended to Judgement again clearly aligns Dickens with the Christian dualism that associationism was thought to challenge.

If we wanted further proof of the model of the mind in which Dickens was invested in the late 1840s, we could look to the Christmas book he wrote immediately before *David Copperfield, The Haunted Man* (1848). After all, what Redlaw loses along with his memory is a sense of the mysterious something extra in Creation. Witness his gazing at the stars, that perpetual symbol of mystery in Dickens:

[T]he breaking forth of the moon induced him to look up at the Heavens, where he saw her in her glory, surrounded by a host of stars he still knew by the names and histories which human science has appended to them; but where he saw nothing else he had been wont to see, felt nothing he had been wont to feel, in looking up there, on a bright night. (364)\(^{128}\)

This is the bloodless scientific perspective on the world, the measuring by inch-rule that fails to capture the ineffable mystery of Creation, that critics perceived in associationism. Equally mechanical is Redlaw’s response to music—it holds no spiritual element for him either, but is only a combination of “the dry mechanism of the instruments and his own ears, with no address to any mystery within him” (364). Redlaw’s scientific endeavours even sound something like the analytical decomposition of the elements of association:\(^{129}\)

we are told of the shadows of his vials in the opening scene that “some of these phantoms

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\(^{128}\) As I have said, Dickens often uses the stars in his fiction as a symbol of the hereafter: think of the stars at which Stephen Blackpool gazes after falling down the Old Hell Shaft. Of course, the connection of the stars with heaven in Dickens is nowhere more obvious than in “A Child’s Dream of a Star” (1850).

\(^{129}\) Because associationism was founded on the assumption that our faculties are built up out of associated simple sensations, associationist psychologists were ever engaged in analyzing the mental furniture into its component parts. Lost in this disassembly, some suggested, was the unfathomable element superadded by the Almighty, the mystery of human nature that made men greater than the sum of their parts.
[the reflection of glass vessels that held liquids] [were] trembling at heart like things that knew his power to uncombine them, and to give back their component parts to fire and vapour” (318). Indeed, as I discuss in Chapter Five, his work as a chemist, specifically, also aligns Redlaw with a “materialist” conception of science. But the book as a whole works to refute his bloodless scientific gaze. To be redeemed, he must learn by the text’s close of the mysterious aspects of Creation—and of the human mind—that his researches have overlooked.

As should be clear from my discussion in Chapter One of the varied understandings of science that underlay the different psychologies at mid-century, Dickens’s criticism of Redlaw’s science should not be read as a critique of scientific inquiry more broadly. If nothing else, the great number of scientific articles in the periodicals Dickens edited discourage such a reading. But Dickens is clear about the relationship that should exist between science and religion: science must support Christianity, must remain mindful of the ineffable elements of existence that it cannot finally explain. The science of mind—as in another book Dickens owned, Thomas Chalmers’s Bridgewater Treatise On the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God, as Manifested in the Adaptation of External Nature to the Moral and Intellectual Constitution of Man (1835)—should buttress belief in God, should provide evidence for His existence.130 Or, to borrow the words of Dickens’s friend Bulwer-Lytton: “It is right, therefore, that the science of moral philosophy should be pursued and cultivated in all its

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130 Reed points out that even later in the century, most psychologists still expected their work to reinforce religious belief (3).
freedom and boldness, as the means, not to supplant, but to corroborate—to furnish and follow out—to purify and to enlarge the sphere of—religious instruction” (1: 338).\textsuperscript{131}

With this relationship between science and religion in mind, it seems clear that the psychology that informs \textit{David Copperfield} is faculty psychology. After all, while David insists at length on his firmness and self-denial, on the way he has single-handedly cleared the trees in the forest of difficulty—in short, while he applauds himself on being a self-made man—he is careful never to go so far as to deny that at least some of his abilities were inborn.\textsuperscript{132} His self-praise is always tempered with an acknowledgement of the wonderful gifts with which he had to work.\textsuperscript{133} He becomes an author, for instance, through a combination of “nature and accident” (589). Note, too, the delicate balance between self-creation and innate talent that David strikes in the following passage, after having praised his own diligent habits and well-formed character:

The man who reviews his own life, as I do mine, in going on here, from page to page, had need to have been a good man indeed, if he would be spared the consciousness of many talents neglected, many opportunities wasted, many erratic and perverted feelings constantly at war within his breast, and defeating him. I do not hold one natural gift, I dare say, that I have not abused. My meaning simply is, that whatever I have tried to do in

\textsuperscript{131} Since psychology was by no means a discipline or a formalized body of knowledge in the middle of the century, much of the work we would consider psychological was done under the banner of moral philosophy.

\textsuperscript{132} Kearns runs into difficulties in his discussion of the novel precisely because he overlooks these innate qualities. See, for instance, p. 118 of his article. For a different discussion of innate and acquired “mental capital” in the novel, see Ruth.

\textsuperscript{133} Most critics, however, have focused on the possibility of self-creation in this text, generally arguing that the novel perpetuates the myth of the self-made bourgeois individual. See, for example, Ablow 29, Edwards 343, Houston 219, and Kellogg 70. Welsh notes how David downplays his own extraordinary talent in stressing the necessity of hard work, in order to perpetuate the ambition modern economics require (\textit{From Copyright} 170-71). But arguments such as Welsh’s should not obscure David’s refusal to omit entirely his extraordinary abilities. David makes clear, then, that he is not “made by himself” (\textit{Annoying} 57)—or at least not completely—contrary to what Kincaid argues.
life, I have tried with all my heart to do well; that whatever I have devoted
myself to, I have devoted myself to completely; that, in great aims and in
small, I have always been thoroughly in earnest. I have never believed it
possible that any natural or improved ability can claim immunity from the
companionship of the steady, plain, hard-working qualities, and hope to
gain its end. (518)

David here is torn. As powerfully as he wishes to assert his hard work and diligence, he is
compelled to admit that that this hard work only developed—even, at times, failed to
develop—that with which God blessed him. Of course, the flip side of this coin is that we
must not overlook the role self-development, discipline, and hard work play in David’s
story. Edwin M. Eigner’s assertion that novels like *David Copperfield* eschew developing
characters (88) is therefore patently false, based on a misunderstanding of the
psychological alternatives available in the nineteenth century to those who disagreed with
associationism. That is, while I would argue that Eigner is correct in positioning Dickens
against Locke (or at least against the associationism that looked to his work for its
origins), he is mistaken in assuming that Dickens does not agree with the psychological
process of association: the point is that the model of associative thought to which Dickens
subscribes is that which we find in faculty psychology.

We also see the influence of faculty psychology in the novel’s description of the
characters by whom David is surrounded. As David tells us at the beginning of Chapter
XXXII, in explaining why he continued to love Steerforth after Emily’s seduction,
“[w]hat is natural in me, is natural in many other men, I infer” (388). Even allowing for
the significant amount of rationalization in this passage,¹³⁴ the novel does not question
David’s insistence on nature as a primary means by which we become who we are. If he is finally disappointed to learn that Steerforth’s charm was art rather than nature (371), his distinction between these two origins still suggests that other qualities—or these same charms in other men—are inborn. Indeed, Steerforth was blessed with other qualities “that might have made him a man of a noble nature and a great name” (388); Rosa, too, blames his conduct on both nature and nurture, “his inheritance of [his mother’s] nature” and her “pampering of his pride and passion” (685). We see, as well, that Mr. Wickfield’s degradation at the hands of Uriah Heep is only made more apparent by his “native superiority” (440), of which David can still catch a faint glimmer. Finally, David suggests that the unsuitability that troubles his own marriage to Dora is owing to her mind already having been formed (593); his conclusion that what he finds in her is her “natural self” (594) hints that he believes a significant portion of this forming to have occurred at birth.

As the many meanings loaded onto the various forms of the word “nature” in this last paragraph demonstrate, the meaning of the term is unstable and ever-shifting in this novel. It would be unwise, then, to read David’s use of the word “nature” as unproblematically reflecting his immersion in the perspective of faculty psychology. There is much more going on here than that, including, as I have said, a fair bit of justification of David’s own shortcomings, and a fair bit of blindness on his part to the factors that complicate his naturalization of the behaviour of a Steerforth or a Dora. But neither should we let David’s abuse of human nature as a concept obscure its availability as a concept—David is able to rationalize his shortcomings in this way precisely because Dickens legitimizes in this novel a model of identity that takes seriously the notion of

¹³⁴ Baumgarten mentions the note of justification in this passage (“Writing” 50-51).
innate faculties. The concept of natural gifts is sound, regardless of whether or not David abuses it.

According to the model of the mind Dickens endorses here, then, David makes his first appearance in the novel already carrying with him the seeds of his future life, brought from the region in which, he tells us, his sister remained:

I lay in my basket, and my mother lay in her bed; but Betsey Trotwood Copperfield was for ever in the land of dreams and shadows, the tremendous region whence I had so lately traveled; and the light upon the window of our room shone out upon the earthly bourne of all such travelers, and the mound above the ashes and the dust that once was he, without whom I had never been. (11)

As David’s invocation of the “tremendous region” makes clear, this novel presents a largely Christian construction of selfhood. To ignore this point, to describe Dickens’s engagement with mental science without identifying its Christian content, is to fail to understand the stakes of Victorian psychological controversy; David Copperfield’s mental philosophy is inseparable from its incessant religiosity. I have already commented in passing on the image with which the novel closes, Agnes pointing David’s soul upwards. But David’s comments on God, on his soul, or on the afterlife towards which he heads, fill the text. At his mother’s funeral he muses on the words the Lord will one day speak to Peggotty (113); when he first arrives at Betsey Trotwood’s he imagines his mother and brother coming to him from Heaven along the moonlight (170); after Steerforth’s seduction of Emily he worries about the witness his sorrow will bear against his old school-friend before the Judgement Throne (388); and in recalling the death of the
child he bore with Dora, he writes how the “spirit fluttered for a moment on the threshold of its little prison, and, unconscious of captivity, took wing” (596). We need not multiply examples unnecessarily—such religious material is familiar to any reader of Dickens. My point is that these images and Dickens’s employment of faculty psychology are merely two manifestations of the religious belief that anchors this novel, the same religious belief that led Dickens to write *The Life of Our Lord* (1846) in the years immediately before he published *David Copperfield*, or that is expressed in his assurance to the Rev. F. W. H. Layton (in a letter of 25 March 1847), “[M]y creed is the creed of Jesus Christ, I believe, and my deepest admiration and respect attend upon his life and teaching, I know” (5: 45). We err, I stress again, if we fail to recognize the intimate link between Dickens’s religious and his scientific beliefs.

The novel’s Christian perspective is also to be seen in the way the text (perhaps because David enters its pages trailing clouds of glory) consistently attempts to employ memory to gain some assurance of the next life. This is most powerfully suggested through the peculiar amnesia that Emily experiences upon fleeing from Steerforth. Having fallen into a fever, she loses the language of the country to which Steerforth has taken her, and she is thus unable to communicate with the young wife who takes her in. The language remains irrecoverable for Emily even as she heals from her fever, until one day it all instantly returns. This sudden recovery of language, of course, would remind many Victorian readers of Coleridge’s similar story in the *Biographia* of the ignorant German girl who, in a fever, began to rave in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, which she as a

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135 Avrom Fleishman also points out the debt that the latter part of the novel owes to spiritual autobiography (213-18).
young child apparently had overheard spoken by a pastor who had charitably taken her in

*(Biographia, VII.I: 112-13)*. For Coleridge, this story proves it probable

that all thoughts are in themselves imperishable; and, that if the intelligent

faculty should be rendered more comprehensive, it would require only a
different and apportioned organization, *the body celestial* instead of *the

body terrestrial*, to bring before every human soul the collective

experience of its whole past existence. And this, this, perchance, is the
dread book of judgement, in whose mysterious hieroglyphics every idle

word is recorded! *(Biographia, VII.I: 114)*

Emily’s miraculously restored memory seems to offer a guarantee of the hereafter, a
promise that our thoughts and memories, like our souls, are immortal—that all will be
reborn on what David calls “the shore where all forgotten things will reappear” (113).

David, however, is not content to await either such miraculous resurrections of
memory as Emily experiences or his arrival upon that farther shore. Speaking of his
unhappiness with Dora, he writes that “the contented days with Agnes, in the dear old
house, arose before me, like spectres of the dead, that might have some renewal in
another world, but never never more could be reanimated here” (595). If David laments
that such phantoms of memory will only rise again in the next life, he is nevertheless
constantly reanimating them in this one, marshalling them before himself as he writes.
Perhaps the most persistent figure of memory in this text is David, as writer, watching the
resurrected procession of the past march by. This figure is clearest in the novel’s
“Retrospect” sections—David introduces Chapter XLIII, for instance, by writing, “Once
again, let me pause upon a memorable period of my life. Let me stand aside, to see the
phantoms of those days go by me, accompanying the shadow of myself, in dim procession” (534). The point of this exercise is made plain in the terms David chooses to describe it: David seems to raise these spectres as some sort of guarantee that he will himself one day be raised from the grave.

Note, though, that here as elsewhere David also sees the younger version of himself before his eyes, whom he remembers (he tells us) “as something left behind upon the road of life—as something I have passed, rather than have actually been—and almost think of him as of some one else” (229). David’s externalization of memory, in other words, only demonstrates his alienation from both the past and his earlier selves. There is even a certain telling parallelism between the way David describes his memories and the way King Charles’s troubles keep working their way into Mr. Dick’s head—yes, these are David’s own memories, but they are no less external or detached than those that harass Dick.

Such, of course, is a fact of life: memory fades, the past is irrecoverable. Why, then, is David’s (in)ability to recapture the past so significant for him? What is at stake in his apparent alienation from his earlier selves? To answer these questions, we must recall the importance faculty psychology ascribed to origins, for what this focus on origins means is that David’s development is, in a sense, always backwards-looking. In attaining the position of famous author, he merely becomes what he has always been meant to be, just as he is forever retracing his steps and physically returning to the scenes of his

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136 Others have drawn parallels between Dick and David. Certainly their twin autobiographies invite such comparisons. For arguments that link the two, see Frank, Charles Dickens 64-66; McSweeney 105-6; and Westburg 65-66.

137 Ruth, in her discussion of mental capital in the novel, makes much the same point. But she has not situated this focus on the innate in terms of faculty psychology or any of the cultural implications of the innate that I discussed above. In light of my comments here, consider also Fleishman’s discussion of the Bildung as “not merely the cultivation of the faculties but an opening up of one’s potential nature, an
past. His marriage to Agnes, which so many critics have seen as a move backwards, aptly captures the general tendency of the novel in that direction. To some degree, it is this constant eye to origins, this desire to confirm the gifts with which he was born, that underlies the significance of memory for David. This is then to counter those arguments that describe this novel as staging frequent returns of a painful past that must be buried, escaped, or transcended. It is David who constantly wishes to look to the past in order to confirm the model of the self on which so much depends.

It is such a wish that underlies one of the peculiarities of David’s text: how far back he traces his life. Dickens has him begin at birth, with events, David points out repeatedly in the novel’s first pages, of which he could have no memory. Neither Esther Summerson nor Pip begin so early. Nor, for that matter, do Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, Henry Esmond, Alton Locke, or the titular hero of William Harrison Ainsworth’s Mervyn Clitheroe (1851). At least part of David’s fixation on his memories, and the reason for his

overcoming of alienation in the world, and a return to one’s originative self” (212). Note also Jordan’s point, that the inclusion of Blunderstone Rookery in the novel’s full title is an inclusion of David’s origins, not the destination towards which he grows (66). Finally, consider Moretti’s assertion that in the English bildungsroman “the most significant experiences are not those that alter but those which confirm the choices made by childhood ‘innocence’” (182); in the English bildungsroman, the hero is “finally recognized for what he has always been” (204). Moretti furthermore argues that David Copperfield reinforces the child’s naïve perceptions of characters over the later judgements of experience (183).

My point here in some sense is also paralleled by the claims of such critics as Kellogg, who writes that David’s “drama of recovery” is a “repeated fantasy of reestablishing his true name and identity in the face of recurring corruptions” (61). Kellogg, however, is discussing lineage and gentility, how David’s identity is fixed even before he is born by his family’s social position (63-64). We should also keep in mind Welsh’s point that much of what Dickens is engaged in here is justifying his own ambition and social rise (From 158). See also Newey’s discussion of David’s apparent election, his sense of writing as a calling (151) and his rediscovery of his “true self” (153); and see Dames’s discussion of the way associative memory works in David Copperfield to confirm an integral self (146-47). Again, though, these critics fail to identify why this notion of a “true identity” is so essential to David

138 This has been noted by, among others, Gilmour (36), Mundhenk (331), and Westburg (48).
139 Bodenheimer, for instance, writes that “[w]hen David marries Agnes he marries, so to speak, a forgiven version of his own history” (“Knowing” 231). McSweeney and Westburg make similar points.
140 This is then to counter those arguments that describe this novel as staging frequent returns of a painful past that must be buried, escaped, or transcended. On this, see, for instance, Bodenheimer, “Knowing” 223; Buckton 191; Frank, Charles Dickens 66; and J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens 154. It is David, I argue, who constantly wishes to return to the past, in order to confirm the model of the self on which so much depends.
desire to go farther back in his life than memory allows, I am suggesting, stems from faculty psychology’s stress on the gifts with which we are born. And while it would be impossible to offer a definitive reason why Dickens felt compelled to have David find proof of his inherited gifts (and thus the nature of his mind and immortality of his soul), surely some of the impetus behind this decision comes from the way, as I explained at the outset, David’s internal view mirrors Dickens’s, the many ways that David stands in for—and reflects back upon—his author.

But as the figures of alienation that I discussed above reveal, and as countless critics have argued, David’s relationship with the past, with his origins, is more troubled than he—or Dickens—would like it to be. By the same token, his confidence about the inherited nature of his mental faculties is perhaps less sure than I have made it appear. He is, indeed, everywhere hampered in this last regard by his inability to recapture the first moments of his life.\textsuperscript{141} He may insist that “the memory of most of us can go farther back into such times than many of us suppose” (11), but he can never go far enough back—his infancy is always a “blank,” a “confusion of things” (12), and his early memories are never entirely discernible from fancies (11). It is not just that David is unable to recover some sort of Edenic childhood bliss, as a number of critics have suggested, but that he cannot \textit{remember} the beginnings of his life.\textsuperscript{142} Because he has only a “shadowy remembrance” (2) of these beginnings, moreover, David has no way to assure himself

\textsuperscript{141} Ohi usefully discusses the difficulty for autobiography of this absence of memory: “[O]ne cannot truly be ‘present’ at one’s own birth, one has to be informed of it by someone else—and one \textit{must} believe one’s informant. This \textit{must}, then, is the condition of possibility for autobiographical utterance, even as it locates the origin of that utterance not in the narrating subject but in an anybody else who allows that subject to ground itself on nothing firmer than the evidence of hearsay” (438).

\textsuperscript{142} On David’s longing for his irrecoverable past, see, for instance, Carmichael 657, Federico 77, and Vanden Bossche, “Cookery” 89.
that his faculties are actually innate.\textsuperscript{143} This, indeed, was one of the grounds on which associationists attacked faculty psychology, its inability to prove a faculty to be inborn. As J. S. Mill writes, the only evidence the \textit{a priori} school could provide was negative: “[N]othing can positively prove that any particular one of the constituents of the mind is ultimate. We can only presume it to be such, from the ill-success of every attempt to resolve it into simpler elements” (“Bain’s,” 296).\textsuperscript{144}

My argument here is therefore meant as a supplement to the prevalent strain of criticism of this novel that unearths the vast amount of repression necessary for David’s formation as a liberal subject: repression, for example, of his exploitative position in relation to the Peggotty (Jordan, “Social” 73); of his childhood sexual knowledge (Poovey 97); of his anger at his mother (Knoepflmacher); of his homoerotic desire (Buckton; Shires 132); of sexual desire more generally (Edwards 343; Federico 84-85); or of his similarity to Heep (Bodenheimer, “Knowing” 224; Jaffe 127; Poovey 117-18).\textsuperscript{145} A reading of the novel that is rooted in the psychological discourse by which \textit{David Copperfield} was originally surrounded reveals what the model of repression leaves out: the intense longing to know that David experiences. We should not allow our revelations of what David does not tell himself to obscure the lengths to which he goes to know the past, perhaps to awaken as “infantine” (94) a memory as does the song he hears

\textsuperscript{143} Incidentally, this is the very criticism that Martineau aims at associationism, that “[t]he doctrine, appealing as it does chiefly to the earliest experience, and making rapid use of the years of infancy, rests, to a dangerous extent, on a conjectural psychology” (514).

\textsuperscript{144} On the tracing of original faculties, see Stewart, \textit{Elements}, 37 and 393. I should point out that those who sought to trace the origins of our faculties would be unlikely to try to do so (exclusively) through memory. But \textit{David Copperfield’s} urge to return to the moment of birth suggests that the novel does long to establish some guarantee of personal inheritance in this manner.

\textsuperscript{145} Bodenheimer, at least, insists that the novel is self-conscious about the acts of repression it represents, that these moments of repression call attention to themselves as repressions (“Knowing” 225-226). Of course, D. A. Miller also makes secrecy—or at least the “open secret”—a fundamental component of subjectivity in this novel, both for David and for the text’s readers (\textit{Novel} 215). For a different sort of repression in \textit{David Copperfield}, see Kucich. I should point out here that in lumping these various critics together, I am eliding the differences in their respective conceptions of repression.
his mother singing to his newborn brother. Nor should we overlook the anxiety David expresses when he worries he is forgetting something, whether it be his lessons before the Murdstones or his learning at Murdstone and Grinby’s. Situating this novel within the context of psychology’s move to materialism further emphasizes that David’s need to remember is bound up with the significance for his soul of the nature of his origins. The anxiety that fuels David’s—and Dickens’s—drive to recover the past, then, is the fear that he is entirely a product of experience, that his might be only a mortal and material self.

Troubling the Innate: Heep, Micawber, Phrenology

David’s failure to recall the beginnings of his life is not the only source of anxiety for him—or, more properly, for Dickens—surrounding the issue of innate gifts. As I have suggested, David is careful always to balance his claims about the degree to which he is a self-made man with an acknowledgement of the inborn talents that allowed him to succeed. But he makes it clear that these gifts are not available (or at least not equally available) to all—he is singled out from those below him on the social ladder through his exceptional gifts. Amidst the degradation of Murdstone and Grinby’s, as I argued at the outset, there is something that holds David apart from the common men and boys with whom he works; even if this difference is merely David’s “conduct and manner” (139), as he claims, it is significant that David feels compelled to insist on the distinction between him and them. Therefore, while we may infer David’s approval of Mr. Peggotty’s assertion to Mrs. Steerforth, that one day “all of us shall be alike in quality

146 Vanden Bossche, too, notes that David considers himself one of the elect (“Cookery” 104). In this light, consider also Ruth’s argument about the significant distinction the novel draws between those gifted individuals who invent and those, like Traddles, Dora, or Mr. Dick, who merely copy (313-14).
afore our God” (400), it is difficult to avoid an equally strong sense that there is a
difference in quality—in terms both of social class and of some more fundamental aspect
of being—in this world.

This unequal parceling out of innate gifts was not a necessary part of faculty
psychology. On the contrary, the school’s most prominent thinkers tended to skirt the
issue of whether everyone received the same gifts. Reid seems to suggest that they do:

Of the various powers and faculties we possess, there are some which
nature seems both to have planted and reared, so as to have left nothing to
human industry. Such are the powers which we have in common with the
brutes, and which are necessary to the preservation of the individual, or
the continuance of the kind. There are other powers, of which nature hath
only planted the seeds in our minds, but hath left the rearing of them to
human culture. It is by the proper culture of these, that we are capable of
all those improvements in intellectuals, in taste, and in morals, which exalt
and dignify human nature; while, on the other hand, the neglect or
perversion of them makes its degeneracy and corruption. (Inquiry 13)

He thus argues that the “savage hath within him the seeds of the logician, the man of taste
and breeding, the orator, the statesman, the man of virtue, and the saint”; only “want of
culture and exercise” leave these seeds buried (Inquiry 13). Stewart, however,
equivocates on this point:

In whatever way we chuse to account for it, whether by original
organisation, or by the operation of moral causes, in very early infancy; no
fact can be more undeniable, than that there are important differences
discernible in the minds of children, previous to that period at which, in general, their intellectual education commences. There is, too, a certain hereditary character (whether resulting from physical constitution, or caught from imitation and the influence of situation), which appears remarkably in some families. (24-25)

Stewart’s comments, unlike Reid’s, seem at least to leave room for inborn differences in quality, for the unequal parceling out of gifts at birth.

Dickens, I suggest, draws on a model that assumes hereditary difference, so that David’s insistence on the innate nature of his faculties tends to blend into the sort of class-snobbery we see in the discussion of Blood that occurs at the Waterbrooks’ dinner.147 Indeed, David’s description of Mr. Waterbrook would seem to apply almost equally well to the David who writes this text: he tells us that Mr. Waterbrook’s “Yes,” with which he peppers his conversation, conveyed the idea of a man who had been born, not to say with a silver spoon, but with a scaling-ladder, and had gone on mounting all the heights of life one after another, until now he looked, from the top of the fortifications, with the eye of a philosopher and a patron, on the people down in the trenches.

(319)

David reinscribes the expression “born with a silver spoon in his mouth” here to endorse a particular version of faculty psychology. Waterbrook, like David, is born with this tool for ascending the social heights. Later, repeating his insistence that inborn gifts nonetheless demand to be developed through hard work, David expands on this figure:

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147 There have been a number of discussions of David’s troubled relationship with social class. Perhaps the best of these remain those written by Jordan (“Social”) and by Vanden Bossche (“Cookery”).
Some happy talent, and some fortunate opportunity, may form the two
sides of the ladder on which some men mount, but the rounds of that
ladder must be made of stuff to stand wear and tear; and there is no
substitute for thorough-going, ardent, and sincere earnestness. (518)

For all his talk of how he made himself the man he is, then, it is a rigid social hierarchy
that underlies David’s implied claim that one is born talented or not, and that no amount
of effort can turn a Heep into a Copperfield. As many critics have shown, David is thus
engaged in a particularly egregious kind of class-snobbery, but while this is class-
snobbery, it is more than that, too. David acknowledges—even boasts of—the hard work
required to turn innate gifts into social position, to scale the ladder with which the lucky
few are born. Yet this contingency seems to evaporate when David considers the social
hierarchy. This hierarchy instead becomes a reliable indicator that, if nothing else, those
at the top were blessed with certain God-given talents, even that there is a God to dole out
such talents.

At least this is what David tells himself. But if we take seriously the reading I
have put forth in this chapter, what are we to make of that figure who seems galvanically
to jerk his way into all discussions of this novel, Uriah Heep? Faculty psychology allows
us to see Heep anew, I suggest; yet Heep also offers another perspective on faculty
psychology, by—as many critics have pointed out—destabilizing the hierarchy that
David sets out to establish and load with such meaning. Mary Poovey has perhaps most

148 It is thus worth noting Rylance’s alignment of faculty psychology with conservative politics (Victorian
62-63). In terms of class in this text, note Jordan’s point that the name David possesses in the title of the
novel—David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery—“is a title with pretensions to gentility
acquired through birth. Rather than stress the middle-class occupation of novelist that David has earned
through his own labour, the title emphasizes that he is well-born, that he has a father whose name he is
proud to bear, and that he has an estate with a rather grand-sounding name” (“Social” 66-67). Jordan goes
on to argue that the novel reveals the hollowness of these claims.
clearly articulated the danger Heep represents: “This, then, constitutes Heep’s real threat in the moral scheme of the novel—not that he is fundamentally different from David Copperfield, but that he is, in some important respects, the same” (117). He takes over David’s room at the Wickfields’, after all, and his desire for Agnes mirrors David’s. In a moment of specularity seized on by critics, he even charges David with the sin that David had been leading us to ascribe to him: “Copperfield, I have always hated you. You’ve always been an upstart, and you’ve always been against me” (650). Such an accusation reminds us that Heep’s social ambition and mobility provide another point of resemblance between David and him.

Of course, this prospect, that he and Heep are much the same person, terrifies David. But why? At least one of the reasons, I think, is that Heep is so clearly devoid of any sort of innate gifts—his cadaverous paleness seems a coded suggestion that he is quite literally a blank slate, a nightmare vision of the associative self. David, then, to defend his own claims to being born laden with innate gifts, must refute the similarities between him and Heep that seem so obvious to us. If anything, the extremity of his efforts to load Heep with repulsive characteristics—and thus differentiate himself from the red-headed animal—give the game away. Heep’s fishy hands, the snail-like tracks he leaves on the paper, his sheer repulsiveness: it is all too much, too revelatory of the anxiety he causes David. So, too, are David’s attempts to position Heep as of a species apart. He is a fox, an eel, a baboon. Set alongside Wickfield’s “native superiority”—or, say, David’s—the distinction is even clearer: “If I had seen an Ape taking command of a Man,” David tells us, “I should hardly have thought it a more degrading spectacle” (440).
What is really repulsive about Heep, in other words, is what he threatens to reveal about David. That Heep plays the role of exposér in this text has long been a staple of criticism; after all, David tells us that Heep “knew me better than I knew myself” (530). On the basis of such admissions, critics have praised Heep for shedding light both on David’s secrets and on those of the class system of Victorian England. But I think we need to say more. Heep is not merely a threat to David’s class position; or, rather, he threatens to expose the artificiality of David’s station, to show that David is “in quite a wrong position” (530)—a statement David tells us he feels to be true—but there is more at stake here than social shame. Should Heep rise, the social system would cease to function as David needs it to function—as a reliable index and guarantee of innate gifts. If Heep could make his way in the world, that is, what would there be to prove that David was ever especially gifted? No wonder he must be put down by novel’s end. David and Heep’s relationship therefore raises another possibility than the one at the heart of this chapter, that Dickens endorses faculty psychology in this novel in order to underwrite a religious view of humankind against the perceived materialism of associationism. Might what Dickens finds agreeable in faculty psychology be also its offer of giftedness, the way it allows the Inimitable to rest assured that he is, indeed, inimitable?

Heep, though, is not the only character whose resemblance to David unsettles the latter’s sense of self: there is also the man who exposes Heep, Mr. Micawber. After all, Micawber does tend to sound like an overblown David, ever insisting on his talents, his genius, his imaginative powers, his inherent fitness for whatever occupation might fall in

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149 Jordan, for example, writes that “Heep’s marginal position within the class system gives him insight into its operations and thus makes him potentially a subversive figure with respect to the unstable hierarchies on which the system rests. Heep’s social ambition threatens the idea of ‘station’ as something inalterable from birth” (80). Bodenheimer also has much to say about Heep’s “exposing role” (217) in the novel, as do Jaffe and Joseph.
his way. Like David, he even writes his own texts—his many letters, his articles in the Port Middlebay Times—to support his claims to genius. One of the things about which we are most sure in David Copperfield, however, is that Micawber’s boasts are entirely empty. But what about his former lodger? Does Micawber not give us reason to suspect David’s (more subtle, yet essentially similar) claims? Of course, we can dismiss Micawber’s failures as being the product of his speculating on his innate gifts and not investing the necessary work to develop them, as Ruth would have it (215). But this hardly solves the problem: what if work is all that matters? What if innate gifts simply do not exist? If Micawber can be so resolutely mistaken about his own innate qualifications, what guarantees are there that David—not known for his self-awareness—has properly assessed himself? Because of the way the novel constructs the faculties as evidence of an immortal soul, the consequences of their absence would be considerable.

Yet even after the novel has imprisoned Heep and banished Micawber to the colonies, another spectre still haunts David Copperfield’s psychological model: phrenology, which makes a series of oblique appearances in the novel. Note, for instance, David’s description of the pie he shares with the Micawbers in his chambers: “The pigeon-pie was not bad, but it was a delusive pie: the crust being like a disappointing head, phrenologically speaking: full of lumps and bumps, with nothing particular underneath” (352). Dickens here forces phrenology to the margins of his text and lightheartedly dismisses it—but what might motivate him thus to mock and to expel this

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150 Small, too, notes the parallels between David and Micawber (29-30).
151 Rotunno notes the way David attempts to hide this similarity by establishing himself as a literary artist and Micawber as a common hack (425). See also Baumgarten 46 and Small 30.
152 Others have seen Micawber’s claims as parodic. Vanden Bossche notes that Micawber’s “(great) expectations that ‘something will turn up’ are a parody of the plot in which the orphan’s true identity finally returns him to his proper place in society” (91). Kincaid sees in him a parody of the businessman waiting to spring on opportunity (Dickens 179). See also Newey 164. I am suggesting, however, that the similarity between David and Micawber is much more troubling than these critics seem to think it.
psychology? His treatment of phrenology here is not singular: the novel’s other references to it are equally brief, marginal, or oblique. The occult operations Miss Mowcher performs on Steerforth’s hair seem vaguely reminiscent of a phrenological reading, as she stands behind him and examines his head. David tells us that Steerforth “submitted his head to her inspection” (282), not his hair, and the way Mowcher travels the countryside profiting off her specialist knowledge might also strike us as aligning her with the itinerant phrenologists who went from town to town and lectured on their craft. Yet not only is Mowcher made an entirely comic and dismissible character—so much so that the figure on whom she was modelled protested her depiction to Dickens—but she also misreads how things stand between David and Steerforth with respect to Emily. Dickens furthermore makes the concerns expressed about David’s brain by the phrenologically-minded Mr. Chillip—who remarks on Murdstone’s strongly-developed “organ of firmness” (713)—seem comically misguided. As a generation of critics has shown, it is David’s undisciplined heart that is at issue here.

But what might be the trouble with phrenology for this novel’s representation of the mind? The answer may be found in the work of George Combe, who is perhaps most responsible for disseminating the ideas of phrenology throughout England: his Constitution of Man (1828) significantly outsold both The Origin of Species (1859) and Robert Chambers’s Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (1844). In another of his works, System of Phrenology (1819), Combe writes that “the same Divine Wisdom which ordained the universe, presided also at the endowment of the brain with its functions; that the brain is the organ of the mind, and that mind is the noblest work of

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153 Cooter cites total sales of The Constitution of Man of 80,500 by 1847. In comparison, The Origin of Species sold 50,000 copies by the end of the century, and Vestiges sold 25,000 copies between 1844 and 1860 (Cooter 120).
Phrenology, that is, was founded on many of the same innate faculties as faculty psychology; in fact, Roger Cooter points out that “70 percent of the names Gall attached to his physiological faculties were similar to those that the Scottish Common Sense philosophers attached to their psychological concepts,” an overlap that led some to accuse Gall of having stolen this nomenclature from Reid and Stewart (25). Moreover, Dickens’s version of faculty psychology shares with the phrenology disseminated by Combe the idea that God doles out the faculties unequally. The problem with phrenology for one like Dickens, however, the reason why he might be led to discredit it in David Copperfield, lies in the way it located the faculties in discrete areas of the brain that could then be read through bumps in the skull. Although it was not a necessary next step, many feared that phrenology thus threatened to reduce mind to brain—to offer a dangerously materialist view of the self, to tie to mortal and corruptible flesh the very faculties that in David Copperfield serve as evidence of immortality. Or, to put it another way, phrenology reversed what might be Mowcher’s greatest show of wisdom,

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154 Lange makes this point (3: 120), as does Lewes (“History” 1037). On the innate nature of the faculties for Gall, see also Young (Mind 15-16). Nonetheless, these two sciences of mind—faculty psychology and phrenology—were seen as opposed: note the way Cooter sets them up as adversaries (39-66).

155 Cooter discusses the way that this claim of Combe’s worked to naturalize—to biologize—social and economic inequalities (127-28).

156 It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Elliotson was a vocal supporter of phrenology. For the fear that phrenology was materialist, see Cooter 5 and Young, Mind 16. Cooter points out that since Gall’s lectures were forbidden by the Emperor of Austria because they “were conducive to materialism, immorality, and atheism” (41), word of his social unorthodoxy would have made it to England, even if few in that country actually read his works (41). It is worth noting, too, that Cooter argues for differences in the phrenology of London—that espoused by Elliotson—and that of Edinburgh, or Combe. Cooter suggests that Elliotson’s “own relatively autonomous social position encouraged a following that tended to despise the socioreligious pretensions of Spurzheim and Combe and to openly endorse a wholly materialist conception of man and nature” (93). Before leaving the subject of phrenology and materialism, I should point out that it was not only phrenology’s perceived reduction of brain to mind that troubled observers. Problematic, too, was the way phrenology seemed to destroy the unity of the soul through its manner of structuring the faculties. Lange explains: “We have a parliament of little men together, of whom, as also happens in real parliaments, each possesses only one single idea, which he is ceaselessly trying to assert. Instead of one soul, phrenology gives us nearly forty, each in itself as mysterious as the life of the soul is generally” (3: 124). Lange denies the connection between phrenology and materialism (3: 118), but this denial speaks to the frequency with which such a connection was made.
her warning to David to avoid the elision committed by the phrenologists—and adherents of physical psychology more generally—and to “[t]ry not to associate bodily defects with mental” (396). In light of the significance of faculty psychology to this novel, it therefore seems likely that Dickens’s ridicule of phrenology, his need to marginalize it, stems from the way it materialized the religious psychology that is at this text’s centre.

My argument here will sound strange to some ears, for not all are agreed that Dickens was opposed to or made anxious by phrenology. Fred Kaplan, for instance, insists that Dickens shared Elliotson’s support of both mesmerism and phrenology (69). The only evidence Kaplan provides for Dickens’s support of phrenology, however, is the passage from Chapter XXXIII of *The Uncommercial Traveller* that reads, “I hold phrenology, within certain limits, to be true.” But consider the words that follow this statement:

I hold phrenology, within certain limits, to be true; I am much of the same mind as to the subtler expressions of the hand; I hold physiognomy to be infallible; though all these sciences demand rare qualities in the student. But I also hold that there is no more certain index to personal character than the condition of a set of castors is to the character of any hotel. (333)

A ringing endorsement this is not—obviously there are significant reasons why we should not take this passage, unequivocally, as Dickens’s offer of support for phrenology. The voice here is not his, but that of his narrator, and the passage quickly descends into absurdity. Nor ought we to feel compelled to reach the conclusion Kaplan has based on Dickens friendship with Elliotson. Yes, Elliotson was a strong supporter of phrenology: his *Human Physiology* was deeply informed by it, and he founded the London
Phrenological Society in 1823.\textsuperscript{157} But as I argue in later chapters, Dickens’s and Elliotson’s views diverged widely on other issues, and if Elliotson was a strong supporter of phrenology, Thomas Stone, who published three psychological articles in *Household Words* in 1851, was a strong opponent—he criticized the psychology before the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh in both 1828 and 1829 (Cooter 28). We are left, then, with Dickens’s writings. Certainly whenever phrenology is mentioned in his novels, it is treated with contempt. In addition to the examples I cited above from this novel, consider Magwitch’s description in *Great Expectations* (1860-61) of the men who performed phrenological examinations on him in prison: “Then they looked at me, and I looked at them, and they measured my head, some on ’em—they had better a measured my stomach” (259). Or, consider the ridiculous tips we are offered in *Sketches by Boz* (1836-37) on how to perform phrenological examinations of our neighbours’ door-knockers.\textsuperscript{158} The question of Dickens’s position on phrenology is not one we can answer definitively, but the textual evidence certainly makes it doubtful that Dickens was a supporter.

\textbf{Rewriting Association}

To this point I have argued that Dickens attempts in *David Copperfield* to offer a picture of an immaterial, spiritualized mind—that is, to refute the materialism towards which psychology seemed to be drifting at mid-century. Such is the mindset that informs the novel. But how Dickens’s picture of the self was understood by readers is another matter entirely. If Nicholas Dames and Michael S. Kearns are mistaken in asserting that Dickens

\textsuperscript{157} For Elliotson’s advocacy of phrenology, see Cooter 29-31 and Elliotson’s entry in *The Dictionary of National Biography*.

\textsuperscript{158} This is to be found in Chapter VII, “Our Next-Door Neighbour.”
here employs associationist psychology, this mistake is nonetheless both understandable and telling. As I explained above, the terminology employed by these two psychologies—impression, association, faculty, terms found often in *David Copperfield*—was largely shared. Even many of the central concepts of the two psychologies, such as the principle of the association of ideas, were more or less identical. What Dames and Kearns demonstrate for us, then, is how easy it is to mistake the one psychology for the other. If these two critics have trouble distinguishing between them, it is very likely that a great number of Victorian readers would have made the same mistake.

Already by the 1840s this confusion of associationism and the faculty psychology with which Dickens shapes his depiction of David’s mind would have done considerable damage to Dickens’s anti-materialist project, as should be clear from the charges of materialism leveled at associationism that I have outlined above. But associationist psychology, like Victorian psychology in general, was quickly moving towards a much more boldly material understanding of identity. Already some, like Thomas Laycock in 1845 (“Reflex” 303, 310-11) and William Carpenter in 1846 (“Mr. Noble” 544), had suggested a physical component to the process of association—Laycock, for instance, speaks of “the variety of ideas interwoven into the connate structure of the cerebro-spinal axis, or written during life on the brain” (“Reflex” 310). Of course, David Hartley, with his theory of vibrations and vibratiuscles—essentially an attempt to blend Newton and Locke—had also put forth a physiological basis for association; it was this aspect

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159 Carpenter’s assertions are much less bold than Laycock’s in this regard.
160 For the influence of Newton on Hartley, see Boring 195. Hartley attempted to avoid the materialist implications of his theory by insisting that the material only paralleled the mental—it did not cause it. On this move, see Boring and Young, *Mind* 96.
of his psychology, indeed, that most drew Coleridge’s ire in the *Biographia*. But the
attempts to find a material foundation of association in the 1840s were substantially
different from those conducted by Hartley: for one thing, these new theorists based their
arguments on a much better-informed knowledge of physiology, in place of Hartley’s
largely speculative system.

In Chapter Five I read the work of a pair of associationist psychologists who, in
the 1850s, tied associationism to the latest advances in physiology in ways far more
devastating to Dickens’s soul-based mental philosophy. But even in the work of Laycock
and Carpenter we can glimpse how the language of associationism was already being
marked by psycho-physiology, being tied to a reductionist understanding of the
relationship between mind and body. In this light, then, when we read how David’s days
of imprisonment after biting Murdstone are “stamped on [his] remembrance” (52), for
example, it is difficult to ignore the way these words are inflected by physiologically
informed takes on association. Thought, identity, and memory in *David Copperfield*, read
through these writers, threaten to become as physical as the memorial scar impressed on
Rosa Dartle’s lip.

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161 J. S. Mill, in his preface to his father’s *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, blames Hartley’s
theory of vibrations for the book’s lack of success: he writes, “[H]is book made scarcely any impression
upon the thought of his age. He incumbered his theory of Association with a premature hypothesis
respecting the physical mechanism of sensation and thought” (xi). Reid for his part worried that the
tendency of Hartley’s model was “to make all the operations of the mind mere mechanism, dependent on
the laws of matter and motion” (*Essays* 79); Lange, too, comments that “it cannot be denied that
Materialism has drawn plentiful nourishment from this theory” (2: 4-5).

162 Physiology had come a long way by the 1840s. Carpenter insists that “the whole science of physiology
has been remodeled” since the turn of the century, with the “almost utter ignorance… in regard to the
special functions of the nervous system” having been cleared away (“Mr. Noble” 526). Carpenter is
specifically discussing the advances that had been made since Gall and Spurzheim wrote. Concerning
physiology, J. S. Mill, too, notes the “important discoveries which have been made in all its branches, and
especially in the functions of the nervous system” (“Bain’s” 299), since even his father wrote; he echoes
this in his preface to James Mill’s *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, where he writes that
many of the corrections he and Bain made to the work were due to “the imperfection of physiological
science at the time at which it was written, and the much greater knowledge since acquired of the functions
of our nervous organism and their relations with the mental operations” (xix).
In short, while Dickens attempts, in offering us the written reflection of David’s mind, to put forth a picture of a spiritualized, immaterial mind—that is, while he attempts to present this novel as a bulwark against the encroachment of materialism—his efforts are ultimately undermined by the very words with which he makes them. Part of the problem here, it seems, is his idea that readers should work out his meaning for themselves, his desire “to tempt and entice people to think, instead of taking them by the throat” (6: 142), as he put it in an 1850 letter. He refuses to steer his readers too explicitly, and because the terms of Victorian psychology were borrowed and shared, and thus carried with them even as Dickens wrote vastly contradictory meanings, these readers could hardly be expected to distinguish in this text the precise meaning Dickens wished to convey with it. We shall see in the chapters to come that as psychology shifted to an ever-more empirical, scientific pursuit, and as these terms were loaded with an increasingly physical perspective, this problem was only exacerbated. In this light, then, David’s desire that his autobiography be seen by no eyes but his own (and perhaps also Dickens’s refusal to complete his own autobiography in the 1840s) makes a new sort of sense. For once David’s (and Dickens’s) text becomes public, once it has more readers than its author alone, Dickens loses control of it, and it lays itself—and the self at its centre—open to being rewritten and appropriated by the other discourses with which it became surrounded.163

163 It is certainly likely that the threat of losing control of his biography played a part in Dickens’s refusal to write his life. See Bodenheimer, “Knowing” 220-21; Buckton 215; and Carr 449. It is worth noting that in late 1849, Dickens was working to refute the biography of him published by Thomas Powell in the New York Evening Post. On this, see the note in Volume 5 of the Letters, 631, and the flurry of letters Dickens wrote on Powell in the next few months.
CHAPTER THREE: 
Mysteries of the Mind: First-Person Narration, Character, and Bleak House

After having considered the problems with the self’s circulation in language that seem so prominent in *David Copperfield*, it is difficult not to be struck by the way *Bleak House* (1852-53) takes up these difficulties as a thematic concern. Lady Dedlock’s worry when Tulkinghorn reveals that he is in possession of her history is that her name will soon be in many mouths: “Is it the town-talk yet?” she demands of him. “Is it chalked upon the walls and cried in the streets?” (508). Once Tulkinghorn is dead, of course, her fears come to pass. All he holds against her “is flung to the winds, and chance-sown in many places” (666), even among those “who know nothing and ever did know nothing about her” (692). Yet if the trade in Lady Dedlock’s story is where the text most centrally figures the problems with which I concluded the last chapter, this is not the first time representations of Lady Dedlock have circulated widely: her portrait in the copper-plate impressions of the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty has already graced the walls of even the poorest chambers, and we can only assume that she has been mentioned in those newspaper reports “about the brilliant and distinguished meteors that are shooting across the fashionable sky in every direction” (256) from which Weevle turns back “to the Galaxy portraits implicated; and seems to know the originals, and be known of them” (256).¹⁶⁴ Nor can this anxiety about the self being passed from text to text—or simply

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¹⁶⁴ Somewhat similarly, Peter Thoms suggests that Weevle, as “one of the many who crave the latest gossip and thus support that journalism that hounds the fashionable set,” is “implicated in the voracious pursuit that undermines and eventually eradicates privacy and individuality” (157). Anny Sadrin writes of Lady Dedlock’s portrait in this series that it “has been profaned by too many hands and too many eyes, displayed on too many walls (including those of the room in which the lady’s unmentionable lover had ended his obscure life) for Dickens not to have feared the gossips of this ‘speaking likeness’ . . . and their disparaging effects on Esther’s reputation” (73).
misconstrued in text—be contained within Lady Dedlock’s story. Jarndyce, for instance, is similarly perverted into the “Incarnation of Selfishness” (729) in Skimpole’s diary.

Little wonder, then, that those in the law work to avoid exposing themselves through the written word. Guppy has acquired from his work “the habit of not committing myself in writing” (359), and Bucket, too, frowns upon the same as “too artless and direct a way of doing delicate business,” for “he often sees damaging letters produced in evidence, and has occasion to reflect that it was a green thing to write them” (629). Yet it is not only those affiliated with the law who are thus made mysterious in the novel: Bleak House’s characterization on the whole seems founded on secrecy.165 Again and again, the novel denies us an inner view; even the text’s introspective narrator, Esther Summerson, largely avoids any discussion of the workings of her own mind. In other words, Bleak House is a prototypical mystery novel in more ways than one: as part of Dickens’s efforts to hold back Esther’s origins and Lady Dedlock’s secret, the novel makes a mystery of interiority as well. This is therefore a peculiar text to discuss in a project on Dickens’s engagement with psychology, precisely because of this way its mystery plot forestalls the revelation of the inner workings of character. Indeed, I argue in the following pages that while Bleak House’s various mysteries elicit from Dickens occasional observations on the ineffable aspects of mind, generally speaking this novel seems not to be meant as an intervention in psychological debates (at least as far as character is concerned). Whatever Dickens’s intentions, however, it will be part of the

165 The mention of secrecy in Dickens’s characterization inevitably calls up D. A. Miller’s massively influential reading of secrecy and subjectivity in another of Dickens’s novels, David Copperfield: in “Secret Subjects, Open Secrets,” Miller famously argues that Dickens represents subjectivity as an “open secret.” Yet such a reading overlooks the psychological significance of the mystery at the core of selfhood in the middle of the nineteenth century: as I argue, this mystery was figured as utterly inaccessible—certainly not an open secret—and proof of the essential selfhood that Miller finally denies. That is, the differences in our readings are the differences between a deconstructive and a historical reading of Dickens’s fiction.
contention of this chapter that the novel nevertheless comes to look as though it is taking a stance on exactly these issues.

The introspective mode in which Esther narrates her portion of the novel works to situate Bleak House in the midst of psychological debate; especially following Dickens’s use of the mode to make a psychological intervention in David Copperfield, Esther’s first-person narration creates a readerly expectation that this novel, too, will represent a contribution to mental philosophy. I thus consider in this chapter the particular resonances the novel’s refusal to grant an inner view would have had in the 1850s. If this reticence could be read as in line with Christian dualist invocations of the mystery of soul and mind—a position that had long been fundamental to the soul-based psychology that I am arguing Dickens endorsed—by the 1850s it was becoming difficult to distinguish such a position from the stance a more physical psychology tended to assume. That is to say that the novel’s apparent suggestion that the immaterial self was in significant ways unknowable, particularly through outside observation, comes perilously close to the (perceived) implication of an ever-increasing movement in psychology, that there was simply no immaterial or immortal self to know. The absence of psychological insight or comment in Esther’s narration, I argue, particularly seems to align this novel with such psychological heterodoxy. In the final section of this chapter, I therefore trace the way Bleak House’s rhetoric of mystery threatens to undermine the Christian psychology Dickens elsewhere endorsed.
Character in *Bleak House*

To begin to reveal the way that *Bleak House* is marked by the psychological resonances of Esther’s first-person narration, I want first to make clear how little we see in the novel of its characters’ inner psychological workings. Almost without exception, our view of these figures comes from the outside. For half the novel, this is an inevitable consequence of first-person narration: Esther, as a character like any other, can only see the exteriors of those with whom she comes into contact. Where the novel’s treatment of character becomes remarkable among Dickens’s novels is in the third-person narrator’s equal refusal to reveal the inner life of his characters.166 Consider his first description of George Rouncewell, for example, in which the narrator self-consciously adopts the position of an outside observer, describing in intricate detail George’s hair, eyes, chest, and the peculiar way he has both of brushing his phantom moustache and of making room in his chair for phantom accoutrements. “Altogether,” this narrator muses, refusing to tip his hand, “one might guess Mr. George to have been a trooper once upon a time” (264).

The novel’s refusal to give us a glimpse beneath the surface of its characters finds its clearest expression in Tulkinghorn, that “silent depository” (13-14) of secrets, that “Oyster of the old school, whom nobody can open” (119)—including, the narrator

166 Compare this with J. B. Bullen’s description of Dickens’s frequent practice in this novel (and elsewhere in his work) of offering verbal “portraits” of characters upon their introduction to the novel. As Bullen explains, “[i]n each of these cases the head and the face of the new character is separated from its surroundings and documented in some detail. It is, as it were, offered as a portrait” (252). In these portraits, “the narrative pauses and the mental eye dwells momentarily on the physical appearance of a character undistracted by the forward movement of the story” (252). My point is that in most of Dickens’s fictions such portraiture is followed by an inner view.

167 In reference to this passage, Lawrence Frank writes that “[i]t is all too tempting to dismiss the speculation . . . as Dickensian coyness, rather than to acknowledge the experiment in narrative that is suggested” (*Victorian* 86). Frank sees the narrator here joining the ranks of *Bleak House*’s amateur detectives who speculate on the histories of the novel’s characters.

168 Many critics have noted Tulkinghorn’s impenetrability. See, for instance, Morris 688, Steig 340, and Trotter 119. Virginia Blain notes that many critics have complained about Tulkinghorn’s lack of motive for his vendetta against Lady Dedlock (39): Christine van Boheeman-Saaf, for instance, calls him
repeatedly insists, the third-person narrator himself. Of the agreeableness to Sir Leicester of Tulkinghorn’s “mute, close, irresponsible” dress, for example, the narrator says the following: “Has Mr. Tulkinghorn any idea of this himself? It may be so, or it may not” (14); elsewhere he comments that Tulkinghorn “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. Whether his whole soul is devoted to the great, or whether he yields them nothing beyond the services he sells, is his personal secret” (147). Tulkinghorn’s inscrutability extends even to his chambers, where “[t]he titles on the backs of his books have retired into the binding; everything that can have a lock has got one; no key is visible. Very few loose papers are about” (119); his manner of travelling between London and Chesney Wold, too, is chalked up as another of his “impenetrabilities” (514). What we generally see of Tulkinghorn, then, what anyone generally sees of Tulkinghorn, is “nothing but his shell. As easily might the tone of a delicate musical instrument be inferred from its case, as the tone of Mr. Tulkinghorn from his case” (127).

Again, though, Tulkinghorn is only the most extreme case in a novel where the “tone” of characters is persistently hidden from view. The language of inscrutability

“mysteriously evil” (251); Taylor Stoehr suggests that it is simply “in his character and calling to root out and gobble up such family secrets” (163); and Karen Chase resolves the difficulty by arguing that Sir Leicester’s more violent aspects are displaced onto the lawyer (100). But this, I think, goes too far: we can never be sure that Tulkinghorn does not have a motive, since we are generally not presented with an interior view of him (there are exceptions, which I discuss below). Indeed, the critical frustration with Tulkinghorn’s apparently motiveless malignancy only underscores my point about how little information the narrator grants us about him (and, by extension, the characters in this novel). Blain, however, ascribes a motive to Tulkinghorn: his hatred of the female sex (39).

Indeed, Frank insists that “[a]ll the characters in Bleak House are veiled, to some extent, to others and themselves” (Charles Dickens 113). D. A. Miller makes much the same point for Dickens work more generally, arguing that in Dickens we find an “extraordinary multitude of memorably disjunct characters, each psychologically sealed off from understanding any other” (88). Miller’s point comes close to that common criticism of Dickens’s work, voiced also by Chase (herself drawing upon Lewes’s comments): Dickens’s characters are “self-enclosed and self-repeating, immune from external impression” (97). My point, however, is that this mode of characterization is (almost) peculiar to Bleak House.
and impenetrability that surrounds him seems also to infect the description of Lady Dedlock, as can be seen throughout the game of cat and mouse they enact.\footnote{Jasmine Yong Hall considers the way that the construction of woman as secret—as in the novel’s pursuit of Lady Dedlock’s sexual secret—generates narrative in this text (174-75), and she explores how the “female body is rendered as the secret to be uncovered through the striptease of reading” (186). Certainly a number of critics have considered what lies within Lady Dedlock. Blain suggests that beneath this surface lurk “fiendish powers of destruction” (38); Lady Dedlock also, of course, holds the knowledge of Esther’s parentage (38). Alex Zwerdling explains the novel’s refusal to peer beneath her surface by suggesting that Lady Dedlock’s “inner history Dickens could not write for a Victorian audience” (433).}

Lady Dedlock reveals to both Tulkinghorn’s and the world’s eyes only her “habitual air of proud indifference,” which she draws about her “like a veil” (450); that this surface is no indication of what lies within is made clear in her first conversation with Esther as mother and daughter, in which she assures her daughter that the mask she presents to the world is entirely contradicted by the suffering she endures behind it. Furthermore, the word so often applied to Tulkinghorn, and the word that seems most aptly to capture this novel’s construction of character—“close”—slowly comes to be fitted to a number of the figures that people this text. Krook complains of his lodger Nemo, for example, “I know next to nothing of his habits, except that he keeps himself very close” (125); George, after handing over Hawdon’s letter to Tulkinghorn, remains for the rest of the day “in close order” (429); and Chick Smallweed explains his silence about his family relation to Krook by telling Guppy and Weevle, “You two were so close about him that I thought you would like me to be the same” (411). If they are not specifically described as close, the broader point here can nevertheless also be made of Sir Leicester, Jarndyce, Skimpole—the inner lives of all these characters are barred from us.

Despite the near-unanimity among critics that Dickens’s characters are devoid of any mental life, \textit{Bleak House’s} lack of characterological interiority makes it nearly unique among his novels. Whether or not the psychology he offers is “false,” Dickens
generally at least attempts to represent the inner lives of his characters. This inner view is most obvious in his description of those haunted by crime: the long narration of the guilty consciences of Bill Sikes, Jonas Chuzzlewit, or Bradley Headstone, for example, or the haunted musings of Mr. Dombey after he is ruined. Dickens’s focus on dreams offers another especially clear instance of his efforts to depict interiority, as in Oliver’s hypnagogic dream that he sees Fagin and Monks outside the Maylies’ window:

Oliver knew, perfectly well, that he was in his own little room; that his books were lying on the table before him; and that the sweet air was stirring among the creeping plants outside. And yet he was asleep. Suddenly, the scene changed; the air became close and confined; and he thought, with a glow of terror, that he was in the Jew’s house again. There sat the hideous old man, in his accustomed corner: pointing at him: and whispering to another man, with his face averted, who sat beside him.

(228)

Roughly parallel to such dreams is Dickens’s fascination in the novels with delirium, such as Arthur Clennam suffers at the Marshalsea, and the imaginary self-narration by which Dickens introduces Thomas Gradgrind equally represents a sustained inner view. But it is not only in such sustained ways that Dickens tends to grant us access to his characters’ minds. His frequent employment of the language of association in Martin Chuzzlewit and Dombey and Son—which I remarked upon in the last chapter—also necessarily depends on the revelation of thought.

My point is that we find almost no such revelation in Bleak House, which instead seems closest in its characterization to A Tale of Two Cities (1859). The latter novel’s
refusal of an inner view is perhaps best captured in the famous “Night Shadows” passage, with which Dickens begins the text’s third chapter:

A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other. A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city by night, that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every room in every one of them encloses its own secret; that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of breasts there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it! . . . My friend is dead, my neighbour is dead, my love, the darling of my soul, is dead; it is the inexorable consolidation and perpetuation of the secret that was always in that individuality, and which I shall carry in mine to my life’s end. In any of the burial-places of this city through which I pass, is there a sleeper more inscrutable than its busy inhabitants are, in their innermost personality, to me, or than I am to them? (10)

But Dickens represented his characterization in *A Tale of Two Cities* as a departure from his regular practice. He wrote of the novel to Forster:

I set myself the little task of making a *picturesque story* . . . with characters true to nature, but whom the story should express more than they should express themselves by dialogue. I mean in other words, that I fancied a story of incident might be written . . . pounding the characters in

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171 It is worth noting that Dickens’s silence about interiority in *A Tale of Two Cities* also seems motivated by a desire to keep secret the novel’s mysteries—what Dr. Manette knows about Charles Darnay, for instance.
its own mortar, and beating their interest out of them. (qtd. in Forster 2: 281; emphasis in original)

These characters would reveal their natures by means of the novel’s plot, not through either what they had to say or any glimpses of their inner lives. Insofar as Bleak House mirrors that novel’s characterization, then, it stands out from the mass of Dickens’s work.

The notion of character that we see in Bleak House is perhaps best figured through the locked containers that proliferate both in Tulkinghorn’s office—full of cast-iron boxes with his clients’ names on their exterior—and throughout the novel. In Nemo’s room, Tulkinghorn reports to Lady Dedlock, was discovered an old portmanteau, but it obstinately refused to reveal its secret—his identity—for there were found within it “no papers” (150). Bucket discovers Lady Dedlock’s secret—or at least a clue to it, Esther’s handkerchief—locked away in a chest in an inner drawer in Lady Dedlock’s rooms (671). And George, when he first enters Tulkinghorn’s office, “stands looking at these boxes a long while—as if they were pictures” (336). Here again Tulkinghorn only makes especially clear the logic of the novel’s symbolism; if he is “closer” than others, it is merely because he has more containers, each nested within the one before. Note the ritual he must go through to access his wine cellar: “Mr. Tulkinghorn takes a small key from his pocket, unlocks a drawer in which there is another key, which unlocks a chest in which there is another, and so comes to the cellar-key” (517). That these cases are meant to stand in for the self, moreover, becomes apparent in his conversation with Hortense when she comes upon him in the midst of this ritual. Throughout their discussion, he taps himself absent-mindedly with this same key, even rubs his head with it (518), as though he were the container that it unlocked.
From Tulkinghorn’s keys and boxes we move to the keys that Esther is ever jingling and—as most critics of the novel have noted—that become an index to her psychological state.\(^{172}\) Esther even almost makes the symbolic task of such locked containers explicit upon her first visit to Krook’s shop, when she muses that “I could have fancied that all the rusty keys, of which there must have been hundreds huddled together as old iron, had once belonged to doors of rooms or strong chests in lawyers’ offices” (49). Esther describes no such chests—surely the choice of words here is telling—as being present; instead, she tells us that “[o]ne had only to fancy, as Richard whispered to Ada and me while we stood looking in, that yonder bones in a corner, piled together and picked very clean, were the bones of clients, to make the picture complete” (49). How, we might ask, do such bones complete the picture? Might they constitute the chests to which these keys once belonged?

Another central way in which the structure of character is symbolically represented in this novel—that is, in which the secrecy of the interior is stressed—comes through the text’s many descriptions of houses.\(^{173}\) Of course, Bleak House—under its former name, the Peaks—is as confused in its inner turnings as Tom Jarndyce became under the influence of the suit. The house decayed along with Tom, moreover, as Jarndyce explains:

\[\text{In the meantime the place became dilapidated, the wind whistled through the cracked walls, the rain fell through the broken roof, the weeds choked}\]

\(^{172}\) See, for instance, William Axton. He writes that “Dickens employs the motif of the basket of keys at significant places throughout the novel to remind the reader of Esther’s love-plight without forcing the girl to do so explicitly” (551n).

\(^{173}\) Robert Newsom discusses the novel’s deep concern with houses, homeliness, and houselessness (59ff). As Newsom points out, these are recurring themes in Dickens’s work (103-5). Closer to my point, Michael Ragussis notes how “houses and places . . . in Bleak House are so consistently personified” (254).
the passage to the rotting door. When I brought what remained of him home here, the brains seemed to me to have been blown out of the house too; it was so shattered and ruined. . . . Although Bleak House was not in Chancery, its master was, and it was stamped with the same seal. (89)

By the same logic, Esther finds solace in kissing Ada and Richard’s door when she secretly pays a visit to their new home. Elsewhere as well the novel explicitly conflates house and body, as in the present-tense narrator’s description of the “brick and mortar physiognomy” (405) of Cook’s Court on the morning after Krook’s demise, in his comparison of the empty house at Chesney Wold, to “a body without life” (498), or in his recounting of Mrs. Snagsby’s suspicious gaze upon her husband during one of Chadband’s orations: “If Mr. Snagsby could withstand his little woman’s look, as it enters at his eyes, the windows of his soul, and searches the whole tenement, he were other than the man he is” (322). The confused associations Esther experiences during her search for her mother also provide Dickens with an opportunity to lay bare the symbolic work he has asked houses to perform in this text: Esther recalls how, during her search, “the stained house fronts put on human shapes and looked at me” (712).

Dickens often personifies houses in this way in his fiction, as countless critics have noted. What is significant about this strain of symbolism in Bleak House is that the exteriors of the houses in this text so often belie what lies within. Chesney Wold, for example, conceals its inner secrets and turmoil from outside view as thoroughly as does Lady Dedlock. Esther, on first seeing the house, remarks upon the “serene and peaceful  

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174 Later the narrator repeats this figure of visitors as the soul of a house, describing how as the house dwindles away like the life that remains to Sir Leicester, there are “no visitors to be the souls of pale cold shapes of rooms” (767). The novel’s subsequent claim that the house has “no stir of life about it” (767) thus has a double meaning: there are literally no people in the house, but also the house-as-person seems moribund or dead.
hush that rested all around it,” its air of “undisturbed repose” (222). Even after Lady Dedlock’s flight, the third-person narrator insists that the Dedlock town house “gives no outward sign of anything going wrong within” (667); later, he reiterates the point, informing his readers that, “[s]til impassive, as behoves its breeding, the Dedlock town house carries itself as usual towards the street of dismal grandeur” (690).

But if, as this symbolism suggests, we are primarily prevented from seeing characters from within in *Bleak House*, the novel does occasionally grant us precisely such a view; the third-person narrator offers us intermittent glances into the minds from which he so frequently bars us. He reveals to us the confused course of Mr. Snagsby’s imagination as he tries to puzzle out the secret in which he finds himself entangled (315-16), as well as Mrs. Snagsby’s suspicious thoughts as she attempts to penetrate into her husband’s mystery. We are even granted brief access to the impenetrable Tulkinghorn’s thoughts, as he admires the restraint and composure shown by Lady Dedlock in their final interview (508). We are told of how Chesney Wold “reposes on [Mrs. Rouncewell’s] mind” (78), and the third-person narrator informs us that, despite his paralysis, Grandfather Smallweed’s mind

is unimpaired. It holds, as well as it ever held, the first four rules of arithmetic, and a certain small collection of the hardest facts. In respect of ideality, reverence, wonder, and other such phrenological attributes, it is no worse off than it used to be. Everything that Mr. Smallweed’s grandfather ever put away in his mind was a grub at first, and is a grub at last. In all his life he has never bred a single butterfly. (257)
These last examples, however, ought to give us pause. The glimpse we are offered of Mrs. Rouncewell’s thoughts comes immediately before information that is framed as what she would tell us if asked, while Smallweed’s mind is described through his phrenological attributes—what we see of him, that is, is what would be available to a perceptive and well-informed observer. Somewhat similarly, at times what these characters wish to secrete behind their outer façades cannot be hidden from view. Coming upon Guppy as he parts from Lady Dedlock, for instance, even Tulkinghorn cannot prevent his thoughts from becoming legible: “[F]or an instant the blind that is always down flies up. Suspicion, eager and sharp, looks out. Another instant; close again” (416). In other words, a great many of the interior views we are granted even in the omniscient narrator’s portion of Bleak House come as though from outside; we are allowed within for a moment, only to be forced outside again.

Generally speaking, the most we are told of the psychology of Bleak House’s characters is what Mrs. Pardiggle says of her son Alfred at the Infant Bonds of Joy—that they “manifested consciousness” (95). With the exception of the moments I mentioned above, the third-person narrator is rarely willing to do more than seem to make an informed guess at the interior life of these figures; his description of one of the portraits at Chesney Wold is emblematic of how the novel treats its characters, too: “A staring old Dedlock in a panel, as large as life and as dull, looks as if he didn’t know what to make of it [Lady Dedlock’s first meeting with Rosa]—which was probably his general state of mind in the days of Queen Elizabeth” (142). That is to repeat that the inner life, like the
secret in which Mr. Snagsby finds himself entangled, is in this novel “wrapped round with secrecy and mystery” (568).\(^\text{175}\)

The implications of *Bleak House*’s characterization become clearer when we turn to the third-person narrator’s peculiar disquisition on the intelligent life of animals, with which he begins Chapter VII:

There may be some motions of fancy among the lower animals at Chesney Wold. The horses in the stables . . . *they* may contemplate some mental pictures of fine weather on occasions, and may be better artists at them than the grooms. . . . The whole seemingly monotonous and uncompanionable half-dozen, stabled together, may pass the long wet hours, when the door is shut, in livelier communication than is held in the servants’ hall, or at the Dedlock Arms;—or may even beguile the time by improving (perhaps corrupting) the pony in the loose-box in the corner.

(76-77)

I want first to note that the narrator here is as doubtful about the interiority of the servants who surround the animal life of Chesney Wold as he is about that of the beasts. If the animals do enjoy some mental pictures, these may be more colourful than those contemplated by the grooms, a comparison that cannot help but call into question the interior life of the latter group as thoroughly as that of the former. The conditional nature

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\(^{175}\) In other words, I take issue with Chase’s assertion that “one great movement” in the novel is “the determination of the particular, the removal of ambiguity, and the settling of identity through the bestowal of an essentializing description”: the fixed phrases—the man from Shropshire, the ironmaster, the little mad old woman—that are so frequent in Dickens (114-15). Chase goes on to argue that much of Esther’s activity in this text involves freeing these characters from such essentialized and fixed identities (115). My departure from Chase likely owes much to the different ways in which we each conceive of selfhood: while she is discussing something like the way society views these individuals, I am interested in the deep, psychological structure of the self that realism asks us to infer for these characters (an identity that is of course no less socially constructed).
of the narrator’s musings here would also seem to work to infect his construction of both parties, the beasts and the servants: perhaps the animals experience some motions of fancy, and perhaps the servants do, too. The consequent scepticism of the passage is, of course, a position that Sir Leicester shares:

He supposes all his dependents to be utterly bereft of individual characters, intentions, or opinions, and is persuaded that he was born to supersede the necessity of their having any. If he were to make a discovery to the contrary, he would be simply stunned—would never recover himself, most likely, except to gasp and die. (78)

What both these passages make clear, apart from the classism of the latter, is that it is more than characters’ thoughts that are withheld from us by the particular stance the novel’s two narrators take towards the characters they describe. For what the refusal to grant an inner view in this text amounts to is a refusal to state explicitly what consciousness looks like, a refusal to take a stance on the ontology of the mind.

At the most basic level, of course, the mystery of this novel’s characterization is a necessary condition of our interaction with those by whom we are surrounded in the world outside the text. We can only infer the consciousness and interiority of others, according to an orthodox dualism, and we are consequently in the dark about their thoughts. This is Bucket’s point to Sir Leicester, in revealing the secret knowledge of which Tulkinghorn was in possession:

“Why, he might have been going to reveal it on the very morning when I examined the body! You don’t know what I’m going to say and do, five minutes from this present time, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet; and
supposing I was to be picked off now, you might wonder why I hadn’t
done it, don’t you see?” (640)

As I have suggested in earlier chapters, the point Bucket articulates here was a standard
justification in the psychological literature for the centrality of introspection to mental
research. Recall Abercrombie’s assertion:

\[ T \]he only field, in which the mental philosopher can pursue his
researches with perfect confidence, is his own mind. In his observations
on the minds of other men, he is obliged to judge of the internal operations
by external phenomena; and in this manner a degree of uncertainty attends
his investigations, which does not occur in physical science.\textsuperscript{176}

If we were to read this novel as an intervention in psychological debate, then, \textit{Bleak
House}’s insistence—at least in its third-person narration—about the inscrutability of the
mental lives of others certainly could be construed as an orthodox rebuttal of the psycho-
physiological focus on the body (which I discussed in my first chapter). Remember that
at mid-century orthodox theorists suggested that introspection seemed to prove the
immateriality of mind: as Lewes puts it in a passage I have already quoted, “The central
position of Spiritualism when . . . it advances positive arguments, is that Consciousness
emphatically declares Mind to be something essentially distinct from Matter, and declares
it to be simple not composite” (“Spiritualism” 491). What was significant about the mind,
then, lay in the private, subjective experience of consciousness; even the closest and most

\textsuperscript{176} Or, as Reid puts it of the researches of the mental anatomist, “It is his own mind only that he can
examine, with any degree of accuracy and distinctness. This is the only subject he can look into. He may,
from outward signs, collect the operations of other minds; but these signs are for the most part ambiguous,
and must be interpreted by what he perceives within himself” (\textit{Inquiry} 13). He says much the same thing in
the \textit{Essays on the Intellectual Powers} (41-42; 56). See also Holland, \textit{Chapters} 47; Southwood Smith,
\textit{Philosophy} 1: 89-90; and Dugald Stewart 8, 11.
astute analysis of the brain, nerves, and body could not offer insight into what James Martineau—in a passage to which I shall return later in this chapter—called “mental facts.” To put these orthodox thinkers’ contention another way, we simply cannot clearly see within the human mind, either while reading this novel or when we turn from the novel to the world around us. The mind, that is, is yet another of the novel’s—and the world’s—myriad mysteries.

But there are numerous other reasons for the novel’s withholding of information about its characters’ inner lives that seem more likely to have motivated Dickens’s reticence. As I have mentioned, Esther’s first-person perspective of course makes omniscience impossible in her half of the novel. More significantly, the third-person narrator’s coyness is motivated by the generic requirements of the text’s mystery plot: Lady Dedlock’s mind, for example, must be barred to us at least until the secret of Esther’s parentage has been revealed. Still, while the interests of suspense go most of the way towards explaining the great amount of attention the third-person narrator calls to his refusal to grant us an inner view, the teasing way he hints at characters’ thoughts without plainly stating what they are, I want to suggest that Dickens’s rhetoric of

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177 Audrey Jaffe, however, points out the inconsistencies in both Esther’s and the present-tense narrator’s narrations: “[R]eaders tend not to care about those ways in which the fiction sustaining each narrative cannot be upheld: about the fact that the third-person narrator speaks, for a moment, in the first person, or about the numerous times when Esther’s ‘little body’ does ‘fall into the background,’ as she says—times when she records conversations in such detail that, if the narrative’s premise is to make sense, we must imagine either that she writes constantly or possesses an uncanny capacity for memorization. For much of her narrative, that is, Esther might as well be omniscient” (130). Insofar as Esther’s amazing powers of recall are concerned, Jaffe is right. For the most part, however (and I discuss the exceptions below), Esther is unable to perceive the inner lives of those around her.

178 It is precisely the third-person narrator’s refusal of omniscience that paves the way for such theories as that put forth by Robert Newsom, that the present-tense narration is also penned by Esther. He insists that “the only way to explain the double narrative according to even the loosest standards of ‘realism’ is to say that Esther has chosen to write in the first person, but has written an ‘other,’ third-person narrative to cover those events of her story in which she has not directly participated” (87). Hilary M. Schor agrees, explaining that the narration of those events that occur when Esther is not present could be her “imaginings” (117).
inscrutability is nevertheless fundamentally *inflected* by his psychological beliefs. That is to say that the way Dickens describes the inscrutability of this novel’s characters offers us another glimpse of the position he took in psychology’s battle of philosophies. The mystery of this novel’s plot frequently shades into an assertion about the mysteries—and the fundamental privacy—of the immaterial mind; the novel’s temporal mysteries seem to provide Dickens a space in which to contemplate the more profound mysteries that are at the centre of both his worldview and his science.

At mid-century, Dickens’s frequent recourse to the *mystery* of interiority would have continued to work for many readers to suggest that mind was immaterial and immortal—that the mind was the soul. We cannot know precisely how the soul interacts with the body, this popular line of reasoning went; we only know—because of revealed religion—that it is there. I acknowledged above the parallels—perhaps more apparent than real—between my reading of *Bleak House* and D. A. Miller’s argument in “Secret Subjects, Open Secrets.” What I am discussing here, however, is the sort of fundamental resonance of the rhetoric of mystery that Miller overlooks in reading Dickensian subjectivity as an “open secret.” Indeed, there is a peculiar way that the secrets that the novel equates with interiority seem to come to stand for the soul itself;¹⁷⁹ this is the greatest of the secrets that so many characters in this novel hide within their “chests,” that they lock away in the containers—the bodies—that are everywhere in this text. Contrary to what Miller insists, then, Dickens seems to want us to understand these secret selves—these souls—as precisely the opposite of open secrets, as instead both inaccessible to and indeterminable by culture. The novel’s handling of its characters’ secrets often comes

¹⁷⁹ Dickens seems to figure “secrets” similarly in the “Night Shadows” passage from *A Tale of Two Cities* that I quoted above. There, too, “secret” seems perpetually blending into “soul.”
close to making explicit this equation of secrets and the soul: consider, for instance, the third-person narrator’s assertion that “[t]here are noble Mausoleums rooted for centuries in retired glades of parks, among the growing timber and the fern, which perhaps hold fewer noble secrets than walk abroad among men, shut up in the breast of Mr. Tulkinghorn” (14), an assertion that registers the secrets (or souls) that remain in the grave—or, as my next chapter will make clear, that flee from the Mausoleums after death, leaving a greater number of secrets in Tulkinghorn’s breast. Similarly, when Lady Dedlock walks out on the night of Tulkinghorn’s murder, it is because she is oppressed by her secret, but we are told that she walks out because “[h]er soul is turbulent within her; she is sick at heart, and restless. The large rooms are too cramped and close. She cannot endure their restraint, and will walk alone in a neighbouring garden” (583).

There was by the 1850s a substantial body of precedent in psychological discourse for precisely the sorts of gestures of ineffability or unknowability that I am suggesting Dickens makes in *Bleak House*—along the way, apparently inspired by the novel’s overall rhetoric of mystery. Rick Rylance, discussing both the ontological distinction between body and mind and the assertion that their relationship and their natures were beyond enquiry, suggests that “[t]hese assumptions are a cornerstone of psychology as the discourse of the soul” (*Victorian* 23). Rylance later labels this “the traditional theological and metaphysical embargo on considering the attachment of body to mind” (*Victorian* 33), and he calls inscrutability “a structural requirement of the faculty psychology” (*Victorian* 49). As he puts it, speaking of Natural Theology, such approaches “embedded mystery into the study of nature and the human mind, and where
there was mystery there could also be faith” (Victorian 25-26). Recall the entry for “psychology” in the British Cyclopaedia (1838), which I quoted in my first chapter: after defining psychology as “the science of the soul, or the spiritual principle in man,” the entry goes on to insist that psychology “takes for granted the distinction of the spiritual substance from the body, as a matter of consciousness, and does not therefore attempt to explain it” (qtd. in Rylance, “‘Disturbing’” 243); the author of “A Psychological Study” (1854) similarly writes of the “veiled mysteries of our complex nature” (35), and the author of “The Philosophy of the Senses” (1854) insists that once the body is saturated with “the principle of vitality,”

[T]he commonplace elements . . . become obedient to a higher law than the chemist can explain; a power which the scalpel cannot reach, the crucible cannot extract, is brought into play, and the dust which recently appeared so dull and torpid as it lay on the ground becomes charged with magical activities. (411)

Even more to the point is this writer’s description of the interrelation between mind or soul and brain:

[W]hat takes place between the two, it would be venturesome to surmise. Into that council chamber where our thinking principle communes with its faithful vizier, we must not seek to pry. Strange as it may seem—perhaps

180 See also Reed 13ff. Somewhat optimistically, perhaps, John Gordon writes more than twenty years before Bleak House that “[s]peculations respecting the nature of Mind, seem now universally abandoned, as endless and unprofitable” (439). Of the nervous system, he adds that “[n]ot only is this System placed almost entirely beyond the reach of inspection during life; but there is every reason to believe, that the changes which are induced upon it, and the seat of which we are in search of [sic], are far too subtle to be perceptible to any of our senses” (440). Jung-Stilling, finally, insists that “man himself is the greatest enigma” (27). Yet some, like J. S. Mill, who were more open to those strains of psychology that others dubbed materialist, subtly altered this rhetoric of ineffability for their own purposes. So, in his System of Logic (1843), Mill writes that “on the inmost nature of the thinking principle, as well as on the inmost nature of matter, we are, and with our human faculties must always remain, entirely in the dark” (1: 81).
of all paradoxes the greatest—we are utterly ignorant of what we
ourselves do in that mystic retreat. Our consciousness is a complete
stranger to the confidential servant [the cerebral pulp] who receives all our
behests, and brings us all our sensuous intelligence. We know him not,
except as an object of mere physiological research. How he acquaints us
with the tidings he has gathered from his subordinate nerves—how he
receives the instructions we choose to communicate with regard to the
movements we require him to execute through the agency of the limbs—is
a question which neither of the parties concerned can answer in the least.

(418)
The scalpel or crucible can do nothing to explain the “magical” goings-on in this “mystic
retreat.” As I suggested in my first chapter, this was more than an assertion of the
limitations of science; when orthodox theorists made such assertions, they meant them as
little less than bans on even the attempt to shed light on these mysteries, for fear that
doing so would threaten the faith that mystery made possible. Abercrombie therefore
insists—in a passage I have already cited—that of the connection between mind and body
“we know nothing but the facts; when we attempt to speculate upon its nature and cause
we wander at once from the path of philosophical inquiry, into conjectures which are as
far beyond the proper sphere as they are beyond the reach of human faculties” (23);
elsewhere he reiterates the point, adding that the mind “has been endowed by its Creator
with a power of perceiving external things; but the manner in which it does so is entirely
beyond our comprehension. All attempts, therefore, to explain or illustrate its operations
by a reference to any thing else, can be considered only as vain and futile” (27).
It might seem that the claims about Dickens’s rhetoric of mystery that I am making here are contradicted by such assertions as those Esther makes about her fever, that psychological knowledge is both necessary and potentially beneficial: “It may be that if we knew more of such strange afflictions,” Esther says of her illness, “we might be better able to alleviate their intensity” (432). Esther’s is, after all, a position frequently taken in *Household Words*, as in Harriet Martineau’s article “Idiots Again” (1854), which declares that “[t]he great improvement in the treatment of idiots and lunatics since science began to throw light on the separate organization of the human faculties, is one of the most striking instances in all human experience of the practical blessedness induced by knowledge” (198). At mid-century, however, I suspect few would have seen such claims as Esther’s and the mystery of Dickens’s characterization in *Bleak House* as contradictory. The point is not that Dickens, through his treatment of character in this novel, can be read as denying the practical usefulness of, or inherent interest in, psychological inquiry, longing rather to maintain the mysteries of the soul. Instead, the novel seems merely to be giving voice—again, merely by the way—to an essential aspect of an orthodox Christian psychology, an aspect at which I have already hinted: the belief that, at a certain point, all psychological inquiry would reach a barrier that it could not pass. Beyond that barrier lay religious mystery, a space that enabled the continuance of the Christian faith.

Obviously such orthodox notions of the mystery at the heart of the self depended on the solid division between body and mind, matter and spirit, that I described in my first chapter. The necessity of this division, once again, stemmed from the way the dominant model of psychology in the early 1850s continued to hold that the mind must
be spiritual if faith in God were to be maintained. This is, for example, the necessary next step of W. E. Hickson’s 1851 argument that “the fact that mind exists” is evidence in favour of “the pre-existence of the human soul” (183). This logic is even clearer in the following passage from Benjamin Brodie in 1854:

> However immeasurable the distance may be between the mightiest intellect of man and that of the Deity, it must be admitted that they belong to the same mode of existence, and I do not understand how anyone who believes in the existence of a Deity can receive without hesitation the doctrine that any kind of mind can be nothing more than the result of a peculiar arrangement of the molecules of matter. (*Psychological* 211)

Mind is as immaterial as its Creator, serving therefore as a guarantee of His existence. “Materialism,” meanwhile, threatens to erase both soul and God in a single gesture.

I am therefore suggesting that if Dickens’s characterization in *Bleak House* does not represent a sustained intervention in psychological debate, his refusal to reveal the interior lives of his characters in the novel is nevertheless in keeping with his engagement with that body of Christian psychology that, in my last chapter, I placed under the broad heading of “faculty psychology.” While Dickens’s silence about the mental in this text seems first and foremost owing to *Bleak House*’s mystery plot, this psychological reticence also fits into his broader pleading for the “poetry of science,”181 to borrow the title of Robert Hunt’s 1848 book, which Dickens reviewed in the pages of the *Examiner*

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181 James Buzard recognizes the natural theological perspective in this novel, but he argues that what is going on in *Bleak House* is “the appropriation of such comforting cosmologies for an implicit argument about the specific national community and its locale” (113), that within British culture nothing can fail to matter.
on 9 December of that year. Indeed, Hunt himself employs the topos of mystery that I have been discussing:

[I]t is in vain that the chemist or the physiologist attempts to examine this change of the inorganic elements to an organized state; it is one of the mysteries of creation, which is to be, in all probability, hid from our eyes, until this “mortal coil” is shaken off, and we enjoy the full powers of intelligence in our immortal state. (343)

Of course, the very mention of Dickens’s review of Hunt’s book might seem to bring to light a crack in the foundation of my argument, for in that essay Dickens has generally been understood to praise Robert Chambers’s *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), and as I discuss in Chapter Five, Chambers’s book was widely attacked for its materialism—it was, in other words, precisely the sort of text that I have been arguing made Dickens anxious. How can I account for this discrepancy? The apparent “praise” Dickens offers Chambers’s book has been overstated: he writes that “by rendering the general subject popular, and awakening an interest and spirit of inquiry in many minds, where these had previously lain dormant, [Chambers] has created a reading public—not exclusively scientific or philosophical—to whom such offerings [as Hunt’s] can be hopefully addressed.” Whatever Chambers’s theories, at least he created a readership for scientific works. Nor, Dickens further asserts, is this Chambers’s “least important service to his own time.” He also calls *Vestiges* “that remarkable and well-abused book” (2: 131). Well-abused in what sense? Because it deserved abuse? Dickens concedes, too, that one like Hunt would not be pleased by the claim that his book owes anything to *Vestiges.* In
short, none of the few words Dickens writes of Vestiges can be called much better than backhanded compliments.

My argument, then, is that in Bleak House Dickens implicitly and indirectly endorses a view akin to that stated by Thomas Stone in the Household Words article “Chemical Contradictions” (1850), that the “aim and end” of science “is to prove the harmony and ‘eternal fitness of things’” (591).\(^{182}\) Perhaps Dickens’s rhetoric of inscrutability even offers us yet another way to understand the enigmatic assertion with which he concludes the preface to the novel: “In Bleak House, I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things” (4).\(^{183}\) This same sense of the romantic, the poetic, the invisible—all of which allow human identity to transcend mere matter— informs Dickens’s psychology, chary as he is of explicitly describing his characters’ inner lives in this novel.

The particular approach to both science and human identity that Dickens takes in Bleak House becomes especially clear when we turn to the controversy between Dickens and George Henry Lewes that arose out of the former’s choice of deaths for Krook: spontaneous combustion. The story here is a well-known one: Lewes protested in the 11 December 1852 number of his weekly “Literature” column in The Leader about the

\(^{182}\) Anne Y. Wilkinson also discusses to similar effect the relation of this article—and its view of science—to Bleak House (228). I explain her conclusions in the next note.

\(^{183}\) A number of critics have attempted to gloss this phrase. For a survey of some of the readings that it has generated, see Christopher Herbert (101n2). Herbert’s excellent article also attempts to parse Dickens’s phrase. Among the moves Herbert makes is to align the romantic with the third-person narrator and the familiar with Esther’s portion, a division that he concedes does not hold up throughout the novel (as Esther’s narrative becomes “contaminated” with the fantastic). In the sense in which I read the phrase, however, the romantic side of familiar things is to be found everywhere in both narratives from the start. Of course, Newsom’s entire book originates in Dickens’s phrase. But it is Wilkinson’s reading of the romantic side of familiar things that is closest to my own: she understands Dickens to be saying that “[h]e will translate back into poetry the great physical laws of his day” (229).
science—or lack thereof—behind spontaneous combustion, insisting that “[i]t is allowable to introduce the Supernatural in Art, but not the Improbable” (1189). Dickens responded in the novel’s next number, describing the reaction to Krook’s death:

[M]en of science and philosophy come to look, and carriages set down doctors at the corner with the same intent, and there is more learned talk about inflammable gases and phosphuretted hydrogen than the court has ever imagined. Some of these authorities (of course the wisest) hold with indignation that the deceased had no business to die in the alleged manner.

(413)

The novel proceeds to reel off a list of the authorities who support the possibility of the phenomenon, nevertheless insisting of the men of science and philosophy—such men as Lewes—that “still they regard the late Mr. Krook’s obstinacy, in going out of the world by any such byeway, as wholly unjustifiable and personally offensive” (413-14). Not surprisingly, this was not the end of the matter, for the pair continued to argue the point both in personal correspondence and in the pages of *The Leader* for a number of weeks.

What is significant about this exchange for my argument are the epistemological differences that ensured the prolongation of the controversy. Lewes rejects the authorities Dickens produces, insisting instead on the weight of scientific law. In his 5 February

184 Gordon S. Haight’s article on the subject remains the best overview of the debate between Lewes and Dickens. On this debate, see also Hack 133-34 and West 125. Daniel Hack sees the controversy as centring on who had the authority to pronounce on such matters, and he sees Dickens as using spontaneous combustion “to investigate and manipulate . . . distinctions between events and symbols, bodies and signs, empirical investigation and textual interpretation, and scientific and literary authority” (135). Hack asserts that Dickens wishes to argue against “the silencing or discrediting of individuals lacking what those in positions of authority deem sufficient cultural capital” (146). John B. West, on the other hand, insists that the question of “animal heat” central to this debate, the process of combustion in the human body, was “one of the central problems of human physiology” in the period (126), and he points out that Lewes’s theory of tissue combustion was also at odds with the mainstream physiology of the period (128). Jahn, finally, sees Krook’s death as of a piece with the imagery of degeneration that she locates in the novel (372).
1853 column, for instance, he dismisses Dickens’s evidence because it is “bad evidence for anything, but mainly because it testifies to a physical impossibility” (138). Throughout the debate, he obstinately denies the possibility of occurrences that have not been proven: on 12 February—clearly summarizing his own attitude—he insists that Dickens would “laugh to scorn the argument founded on any one’s saying he can conceive conditions which he does not specify and prove to be operative” (163). Lewes, that is, insists on the need for proof, for detail, for a precise explanation of the mystery; allowing for the mere possibility, when its various causes cannot be perfectly traced, is simply not acceptable for him. Such thinking, he insists—assuming a position familiar from my first chapter—is the product of “the avid credulity of unscientific minds” (137). Even more telling is his response in that 12 February column to one of the explanations offered for combustion, Fodéré’s argument that a weakening of the vital force could pave the way for the phenomenon. Lewes complains that “vital force” is “a name used to conceal our ignorance” (161), a “metaphysical fiction” (161n). In this he anticipates his much more substantial comments in The Physiology of Common Life (1859–60), where he writes that “[a] Vital Principle is incapable of proof; if it exist, we cannot know it; and unless its existence can be proved, it is to us a mere phrase concealing our ignorance” (2: 290). Later in the same book, after refuting this notion of a vital principle, he writes: “I have dwelt the longer on this topic, because, although the hypothesis of a Vital Principle has fallen into general discredit, the metaphysical attitude of mind which is implied in the hypothesis, is still unhappily too common among physiologists” (2: 294).

To be clear, it is against precisely this metaphysical attitude of mind that Lewes sets himself in the controversy with Dickens. In his 26 March column he refutes a
correspondent who merely asserts that “it strikes me as going too far to deny, a priori, the possibility of such an occurrence” (303); another letter writer, George Redford, also lays bare the terms of the controversy, citing the limitations of our knowledge and the mysteries of existence as evidence against Lewes (305).\(^\text{185}\) Lewes’s response in this column to the suggestion by the first correspondent of the possibility that nerve force could decompose water, and thus enable spontaneous combustion, further makes clear his approach to scientific matters: he writes that “we must have some evidence that it does so; we must know of certain facts which warrant the assumption” (303). What Lewes wants, again, is proof, tangible evidence, physical laws.

It should come as no surprise that it was equally a metaphysical attitude by which Dickens was guided in this matter.\(^\text{186}\) It is something very close to a lack of faith in the possibilities of Creation of which he accuses Lewes: writing to Elliotson on 7 February of the evidence the latter had supplied him—in a lecture Elliotson had composed on the subject—Dickens writes, “It is inconceivable to me how people can reject such evidence, supported by so much familiar knowledge, and such reasonable analogy. But I suppose the long and short of it is that they don’t know, and don’t want to know, anything about the matter” (7: 23). In a 25 February letter to Lewes, Dickens furthermore insists on the

\(^{185}\) It is worth noting that immediately before his second mention of spontaneous combustion in *Bleak House*, in the 29 January 1853 Literature column, Lewes wrote the following about Faraday’s discoveries concerning magnetic force and sunspots: “How beautifully this illustrates the slow and certain conquests of Science, compared with the rapid and illusory usurpations of Metaphysics! The facile method of a metaphysician would have been employed in vain upon these sunspots. The ‘depths of moral consciousness’ might have been ransacked, and die Idee zu constrüiren—the construction of the true Idea would have been hopeless. Nature answers if we ‘interrogate;’ but only if we interrogate her, not if we interrogate ourselves. She will have nothing to say to the Idee als solches!” (111).

\(^{186}\) Haight insists that “Dickens’s notions of physiology were always vague and naïve. . . . This discussion of spontaneous combustion gives a striking example of the intellectual limitations that made him indifferent or hostile to the scientific developments of his age” (63), but the issue here seems less Dickens’s naiveté about things scientific than his endorsing a different type of science, one in keeping with a substantial body of (natural theological) thought.
inability of science to know what occurs in spontaneous combustion, just as his
psychology insists that science cannot penetrate to the mind’s inner sanctum: “No one
can suppose that such a death comes of any normal or natural condition of the body. No
one can know what astonishing change has taken place in the body when it arrives at that
pass; because the body is in the main destroyed” (7: 24). There are some mysteries we
simply cannot solve, it seems. Lewes’s citation of the laws of physiology can make no
headway against faith in the possibilities of the universe. Elsewhere in the same
letter to Lewes, Dickens instead insists on the irrelevance here of what science knows:

But I know that before such a death can take place, there must be a
stupendous disturbance of the usual functions of the body; and to tell me
that if the gas were not there, and the water were all there, or other usual
proportions and balances were preserved, the body could not be
consumed, is merely to tell me in other words that if I be always quite
well, I shall never die; or that if I retain the sight of both eyes, I can not
possibly be blind. (7: 29)

In a final move that again resonates with what I have so far said about Bleak House’s
characterization, Dickens shows himself content to allow the phenomenon’s workings to
remain a mystery. “I champion no hypothetical explanation of the fact,” he writes to
Lewes, “but . . . I take the fact upon the testimony, which I considered quite impartially
and with no preconceived opinion” (7: 31).  

So, too, with the workings of the mind—
not all need be measured by inch-rule. Both Dickens’s science and his psychology

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187 In a comment that fits with my discussion of Dickens’s approach to this matter, Janet Larson insists that
“Krook’s bizarre demise by a ‘fire not blown’ is grounded as much in biblical as in the scientific sources
Dickens defended to George Henry Lewes” (146); yet at the same time Larson argues that “a
melodramatized Scripture no longer quite serves” (147) in the 1850s.
allowed for the invisible and ineffable, allowed for the mystery that paved the way for faith. The novel’s silence about the inner lives of its characters, then, while not apparently dictated by Dickens’s psychological concerns, nevertheless allows some space in which Dickens is able to gesture at his orthodox Christian beliefs about both the mind and what mental science could discover about it.

Esther’s Tale

As I have stressed throughout this project, if the psychology I am arguing that Dickens endorsed was predicated on the division between body and mind, one of the significant consequences of this division concerned the means by which one could know the latter. Precisely because it was invisible and intangible—that is, was not matter—the primary way to gain knowledge of mind was thought to be through introspection.188 As Sir William Hamilton insists in 1859, the proper analysis of consciousness “is effected by observing and holding fast the phenomena or facts of consciousness, comparing these, and from this comparison, evolving the universal conditions under which alone an act of consciousness is possible” (Lectures 1: 132); such a process was not to be achieved from any external position.189 Again, as I have explained at length, because the mind was

188 On this point, see also Haley 39; Jacyna, “Physiology” 109; Rylance, Victorian 47-49; and Roger Smith, “Background” 78-79. Daston also writes that “[p]rior to 1850 the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter had validated the separation of psychology from the natural sciences in Britain. By maintaining a two-tier ontological system, the explanatory reduction of mental phenomena to a mechanistic substratum was excluded as a possibility. The peculiar nature of mind dictated the proper methods for its investigation, namely introspection” (194-95). Daston explains, however, that in the 1850s some were beginning to question whether a science could be based on introspection. Introspection was not, strictly speaking, inductive—it “examined only the individual consciousness and could not, properly speaking, accumulate reinforcing instances from the consciousness of another. Subjective by definition, introspection could lay no claim to objectivity” (195).

189 As Roger Smith explains—and as Hamilton’s words make clear—“[m]any people believed that introspection could be a rigorous method and result in law-like and therefore scientific generalizations about the mind” (79). For a counter perspective on the limits of introspection—at least for the determination of moral laws—see John Stuart Mill, “Whewell’s Moral Philosophy.”
essentially different from matter this strain of psychological writing held, in James Martineau’s words, that “no refinement of growth in the other sciences has any tendency to blossom into knowledge of the Mind” (502); or, as Martineau explains in different terms, “Mental Science is Self-knowledge: Natural Science, the knowledge of something other than Self” (502).

These several assertions would of course seem to be in keeping with Bleak House’s refusal to describe consciousness from an outside perspective, but by this same logic, one would expect Esther’s narrative to be privileged by the novel. Here, at least, one will get the introspective viewpoint, the inside perspective, the sole reliable avenue for psychological research, according to that line of thinking that is represented by the writers whom I have just cited. We therefore begin to see how this novel is inflected by Esther’s first-person narration. That narrative mode, as I have argued, was by the 1850s marked by introspection’s place in psychology; first-person narration, I contend, therefore works to situate Bleak House in the midst of psychological debate. So while Dickens, in the guise of his third-person narrator, is reticent about his characters’ interiority in order to maintain the novel’s several mysteries, the mode of Esther’s narrative encourages readers instead to seek the novel’s model of selfhood in her portion of its pages.

But what we encounter in Esther’s narrative—especially if we compare it to David Copperfield’s introspective narration—is the almost complete absence of

190 This, certainly, is the expectation underlying such comments as Marcia Renee Goodman’s, that “Dickens . . . tried to balance in this novel, particularly through the use of the split narration, his interest in the individual self’s psychological make-up and his concern for the social conditions and psychological health of England at large” (154), or Zwerdling’s assertion that “all the other victims of this parentless world are seen from the outside. We are conscious of their numbers and of their superficial traits, but we know little of the internal cost of this absence of nurture” (432).
psychological material, at least in the sense in which I am using the word “psychological.”\textsuperscript{191} Esther offers no equivalent to David’s recounting of the associations on which his mental life is based, nor does she speculate in the way David so persistently does on the structure or ontology of the self.\textsuperscript{192} Indeed, her most frequent gesture is to apologize for writing about herself at all, pausing her narrative to insist, for example, “It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself! As if this narrative were the narrative of my life! But my little body will soon fall into the background now” (27). Esther, that is, constantly brings to our attention her desire to talk about anything other than her inner life:

I don’t know how it is, I seem to be always writing about myself. I mean all the time to write about other people, and I try to think about myself as little as possible, and I am sure, when I find myself coming into the story

\textsuperscript{191} Although Forster is not discussing the absence of self-conscious psychological analysis in *Bleak House*, he does note the difference between David’s and Esther’s narratives. He writes that “[t]he autobiographical form of *Copperfield* was in some respect continued in *Bleak House* by means of extracts from the personal relation of its heroine. But the distinction between the narrative of David and the diary of Esther, like that between Micawber and Skimpole, marks the superiority of the first to its successor” (2: 113).

\textsuperscript{192} Alex Zwerdling conversely sees Esther as “a subtle psychological portrait clear in its outlines and convincing in its details” (429). Others, too, have found grains of psychological realism in Esther: Goodman, for instance, argues that Esther “represents much of [Dickens’s] inner experience” (147), her difficulty speaking and fear of self-revelation paramount among this experience; and William Axton sees her as a depiction of “what we would now call a morbid personality existing behind a superficially busy and cheerful mask” (549). (Axton, however, notes the imperfection of Dickens’s understanding of the “subtle details” of Esther’s “illness” as revealed by “modern psychology” [549-50].) Alexander Welsh, too, is impressed with the realism of Esther, and he sees in her aspects of her author (Dickens 23-37). He argues that Esther’s psychological depth is expressed in the Dickensian tendency not to “develop and make understandable the psychology of several characters as they interact but rather reveal the psychology of his protagonist as it is projected upon, or aimed against, some other invented figure,” and he explains that “[t]he value of this procedure is its depth psychology, a study of what someone does not know about her- or himself” (40). Chase somewhat similarly argues that other characters in this novel enact alternate possibilities for Esther. Psychological complexity in this novel, then, comes through the wider view of the many aspects represented by single characters (133-35). Of course, all of these more positive readings of Esther may very well be true without altering the point I am making, that Esther offers very little insight into the structure or ontology of the self. That is, she may behave as people in the real world do, but she cannot tell us much about the immateriality of the mind, for instance.
again, I am really vexed and say, “Dear, dear, you tiresome little creature,
I wish you wouldn’t!” but it is all of no use. (102-3)

Esther is self-effacing in more ways than one, wishing to write about neither herself nor her self.¹⁹³ She wishes to disappear from this narrative, to fade into the background, to be “nothing,” narratively speaking, as in her oft-commented-upon description of her doll “propped up in a great arm-chair, with her beautiful complexion and rosy lips, staring at me—or not so much at me, I think, as at nothing” (17). What seems clear, then, is that Dickens’s artistic purposes in Esther’s narration are other than the relation or analysis of consciousness (as opposed to, for instance, the representation of an insecure or psychically damaged character); *Bleak House*, at least in this regard, is not a “psychological” novel in the way that *David Copperfield* was. My point, however, is that at mid-century the introspective mode was so thoroughly marked by its use in psychological research that Dickens, in his characterization of Esther, *is* making a psychological point, albeit inadvertently. In the remainder of this chapter, then, I want to tease out the way the expectation that Esther’s narrative fosters—that this novel will make a psychological intervention—inflects both what we hear from Esther and the novel’s treatment of its other characters.

Our expectation that Esther’s narrative will intervene in mental debate is only heightened, I would suggest, by the amount of attention Dickens has her draw to her *failure* to focus on her inner life. Consider the knots in which she ties herself when told of Jarndyce’s plans to send her to school as a girl, all to avoid talking about herself: “What

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¹⁹³ William Axton notes the *other* sort of self-effacement in which Esther engages, writing that “[a]lthough, as we soon learn, the girl has the most acute insight of anyone in *Bleak House*, the dominant note here is an emphatically repeated denial of her cleverness” (549). But he goes on to argue that Esther’s denials “become an indirect assertion of self and condemnation of those who made her as she is” (549).
the destitute subject of such an offer tried to say, I need not repeat. What she did say, I could more easily tell, if it were worth the telling. What she felt, and will feel to her dying hour, I could never relate” (23). Surely all this hand-waving must be for a point. But when she does talk about herself, Esther offers us platitudes in place of analysis, as that Jarndyce’s “benignant expression” has “long been engraven on my heart” (68) or that his kindness made her “heart so full” (87). She excuses the absence of analysis from her narrative by explaining that she is unqualified for such speculations as David makes about the mind: writing of her first months after moving to Bleak House, she tells us at one point that “I . . . dreamed of the days when I lived in my godmother’s house. I am not sufficiently acquainted with such subjects to know whether it is at all remarkable that I almost always dreamed of that period of my life” (111); amounting to much the same thing, she insists to Mrs. Pardiggle, when asked for her assistance on Pardiggle’s charitable rounds, “That I was inexperienced in the art of adapting my mind to minds very differently situated, and addressing them from suitable points of view. That I had not that delicate knowledge of the heart which must be essential to such a work” (96). Very rarely does Esther speak of her memory, either, and the odd moments in which she does so only underscore how different her narrative is from David’s. There are few passages here that would fit into the earlier novel, and most of these seem to be wrung out of her by the proximity of the novel’s close: Esther writes, for example, how the days before Richard’s death, “[t]he days in which I frequented that miserable corner which my dear girl brightened, can never fade in my remembrance” (725), and later how “[w]hatever little lingerings may have now and then revived in my mind, associated with my poor old face, had only revived as belonging to a part of my life that was gone—gone like my
infancy or my childhood” (729). These two brief passages constitute nearly the entirety of
Esther’s musings on memory.

Of course, insofar as Esther’s characterization reflects a reality outside the text, her relative lack of comment on her mental processes is not unusual. The ability to analyze the mind—what both men call “reflection”—is held by Reid and Stewart to be the last intellectual power to unfold itself (Reid, Essay 59; Stewart 461). Such a power, after all, is very different from mere consciousness, the latter of which, according to Reid, is to reflection as “a superficial view of an object which presents itself to the eye, while we are engaged about something else,” is to “that attentive examination which we give to an object when we are wholly employed in surveying it” (Essays 59). That is, the difference between reflection and consciousness is the difference between a voluntary and an involuntary act. It is a rare and difficult skill to be able to “resolve and analyse complex operations into their simple ingredients” (Essays 61); indeed, according to Reid,

Most men seem incapable of acquiring it in any considerable degree. Like all our other powers, it is greatly improved by exercise; and until a man has got the habit of attending to the operations of his own mind, he can never have clear and distinct notions of them, nor form any steady judgment concerning them. His opinions must be borrowed from others, his notions confused and indistinct, and he may easily be led to swallow very gross absurdities. (Essays 59)\(^{194}\)

Little wonder that one like Esther might struggle to tell us much about the nature of her mental life. But whether Esther’s reticence is realistic or not, readers who come to this

\(^{194}\) Dugald Stewart echoes Reid’s claims about the difficulty of analyzing the operations of the mind (461-63).
novel expecting psychological analysis are likely be perplexed by Dickens’s choice of such a narrator. Why grant an introspective view only to reveal nothing that could not be perceived by an external observer (as, for example, Esther’s self-effacement clearly could be)? What could he possibly be trying to say about mental philosophy?

Among the few times that Esther describes the workings of her mind are in those altered, trance-like states that more than once beset her. Recalling the last moments of her search for her mother, she writes:

I have the most confused impressions of that walk. . . . At the same time I remember, that the poor girl [Guster] seemed to be yet telling her story audibly and plainly in my hearing; that I could feel her resting on my arm; that the stained house fronts put on human shapes and looked at me; that great water-gates seemed to be opening and closing in my head, or in the air; and that the unreal things were more substantial than the real. (712-13)

Even more powerful is her description of the delirium of fever she experiences in her illness. She comes to feel separated from her past: “In falling ill,” she writes, “I seemed to have crossed a dark lake, and to have left all my experiences, mingled together by the great distance, on the healthy shore” (431). The “divisions of time [become] confused”

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195 This is a marked difference from Emily’s response to fever in David Copperfield: recall that, in that novel, Emily’s delirium gave her access to a sort of divine unconscious. Of course, not all were agreed on the wonder of such circumstances. Stone, in “Somnambulism,” writes of how “old associations” are “vividly recalled to the mind; this very frequently happens also in the delirium of fever. There is nothing miraculous in such cases” (136). This seems to have been a fairly standard position: Robert Macnish, for example, writes of the power of delirium to recall “to the mind events which had been wholly obliterated from it, and restor[e] them with all the force of their original impression” (116), before proceeding to recount the story from Coleridge—described in Chapter Two—of the girl who recovered the Welsh language in a fever. Brodie, on the other hand, writes that “[a]fter fever . . . and some other bodily ailments, the memory is not unfrequently impaired or lost” (54).
for her, a fact which “distress[es her] mind exceedingly” (431). But even here, Esther hesitates to mention the worst of her delusions, insisting, “I am almost afraid to hint at that time in my disorder . . . when I laboured up colossal staircases” (431), and asking, “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!” (432). As if she has already said too much, she finally concludes, “Perhaps the less I say of these sick experiences, the less tedious and the more intelligible I shall be” (432).

In the novel’s focus on altered states—however little Esther has to say about those she suffers—*Bleak House* would seem to be engaging with timely debates in Victorian psychological writing, a fact that leads Jane Wood to argue that Dickens here employs “the altered consciousness experienced in delirium to examine concepts of identity away from the objects and events which fill normal waking life” (111). While this may be true of the use of altered states in other novels in the period, however—even other Dickens novels—Esther’s deliriums shed little light on the nature of her mind. Unlike, for example, Dickens’s use of double consciousness in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), which I discuss in Chapter Six, Dickens does not here engage explicitly with the terms of Victorian psychological writing, despite his lifelong (and oft-noted198) interest in such altered states. He has Esther instead describe delirium in so generic a fashion that she

196 Somewhat more optimistic about the insight of Esther’s altered states than I am, Helena Michie writes that, during this illness, “Esther’s removal of herself from Ada’s presence creates a space in which she can focus, narratively and psychologically, on her own interior life. . . . Esther’s feverish hallucinations are, in condensed and highly poetic form, the story of her life, which she deliberately excluded from her earlier narrative” (205).

197 This is an idea to which, generally speaking, I am sympathetic. See my discussion of double-consciousness in Chapter Six.

198 On this interest, see Newsom109-110, 117-18.
ends up revealing very little about the ontology of the self. These altered states seem merely the stuff of fiction, symbolic clusters that cryptically reveal thematic material central to the novel, but not the sorts of descriptions that would implicitly purport to reflect the realities of the world outside the text. Esther, moreover, insists on the incomprehensibility of her sufferings for most of the novel’s readers. In speaking of her struggles to reconcile the duties of her various stations in life, all of which are confused in her fevered mind, Esther suggests that “few who have not been in such a condition can quite understand what I mean, or what painful unrest arose from this source” (431). There is certainly more psychological material in these altered states than in the rest of Esther’s narrative, but even here Esther falls far short of the sort of analysis we find in David Copperfield.

What we get in Esther, furthermore, is not merely a character who refuses to speak about herself or lacks the discernment necessary to analyse the self—she has more precisely seemed, for many readers, deeply lacking in self-understanding. Even she

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199 The difference becomes immediately clear if we compare Esther’s trance states to Emily’s recovery of language on the beaches of the country to which Steerforth takes her, as I mentioned in a previous note. Emily’s recovery engages very clearly with contemporary psychological writing and quite obviously positions Dickens on the side of an orthodox Christian psychology in a way Esther’s delirium does not. In other words, I disagree completely with Newsom’s claim that Esther “writes here as an amateur psychologist of sorts—in a voice she will adopt again in describing her delirium” (78).

200 In general terms, Wood acknowledges how useful novelists often found these altered states as a narrative device (113). She later writes, however, that “[w]hen they included delirium in the lives of their characters, [Dickens and Collins] were aiming to explore the perplexing ontological questions which the phenomena raises” (115). Obviously I do not find this to be an accurate assessment of Esther’s delirium.

201 Of course, many readers have been made suspicious by Esther’s disavowals, by her claims that she has been misunderstood, seeing these gestures as denials of her true intentions. The question of Esther’s lack of self-understanding—or dishonesty about that which she does understand—has preoccupied much of the criticism of this novel. The following is but a partial survey of the most relevant studies to my own argument: Jonathan Arac suggests that Esther is “incomprehensible” to herself, as are others in the novel to themselves (127); Goodman sees Esther subtly expressing anger at her mother for abandoning her a second time as well as an unconscious desire to expose her mother’s secret (156ff); and she sees Esther letting slip her own desires and painful feelings (162); calling Esther “a space of willed unconsciousness” (429), Martin A. Danahay insists that Dickens must make Esther unaware of the motivation behind her urge to mother so as not to recognize that she is a “working woman” (419), so that the gaps in her awareness are “products of the Victorian gender hierarchy of labour” (419), and he sees Dickens as withholding from her
admits as much, explaining on the first page of her narrative, “I have not by any means a quick understanding,” and she assures nearly everyone she meets that she is “not clever” (17). What is most troubling about Esther’s failure to understand herself, however, is that she is not the lone character in this novel who experiences such failings. If anything, Richard is even less self-aware—the Lord Chancellor tellingly reproves him for “not knowing his own mind” (300)—even if he does offer one brief glimpse of self-knowledge, blaming his condition on the “unfinished” state of his affairs and acknowledging that he is “conscious sometimes that I am but a worthless fellow to love my confiding cousin Ada” (288).\footnote{202} Mr. Snagsby, too, spends much of the novel bewildered about the guilty secret in which he finds himself entangled, a state of affairs that seems especially significant if we recall the way the novel seems to equate the soul with the secrets that so many characters in this novel struggle to keep; according to the logic of the novel’s conflation of secrets and souls, that is, it seems that Snagsby’s confusion is a product of an absence of self-knowledge as much as anything else.

The point I wish to repeat, though, is that if Esther is the clearest and most thoroughly developed case in the novel of this lack of self-comprehension, her position as introspective narrator makes her incomprehension all the more difficult to explain, at

\footnote{an awareness of her role in policing the family (424); Hall sees Esther as denying or suppressing her illegitimacy and, potentially, her sexuality (177ff), and hiding her awareness of what is going on around her in her pursuit of her mother (178); Jaffe notes Esther’s repression and “denegation,” arguing that she is divided from herself and (attempts to be divided from, or to seem divided from) her own knowledge (131); Thomas M. Linehan argues that Esther accepts her aunt’s perverted view of her (136), leading to self-suppression and denial (138); Garrett Stewart writes that Esther’s “mystery of parentage becomes a mystery of selfhood, and, not knowing where she comes from, Esther can say neither who nor even whether she is” (445); Welsh charts how she projects her feelings onto others and unknowingly expresses her wishes (Dickens 35), as well as readers’ sense that they know more than Esther but that she knows more than she lets on (Dickens 37), and he discusses at length her secret aggression; Wilt traces the deep confusion of Esther’s narrative, insisting that Esther’s own identity is never more than “only partly known” (307); and Zwerdling argues that Dickens’s attitude toward Esther “is essentially clinical,” that we are to “look very much at Esther rather than through her” (429), to see a character “who does not fully understand herself” (432), who is “alienated from her true self and unable to acknowledge her deepest feelings” (433). 

\footnote{202 On Richard’s lack of self-awareness, see Stoehr 157.}
least for those who come to this text expecting another *David Copperfield*. Yet a sort of logic to Esther’s incomprehension becomes clear in the way we find her perpetually looking at herself from outside in the novel, assuming towards herself the position of an external observer: I am speaking of course of her habit of speaking of (and to) herself in the second person, best captured in the scoldings she is constantly giving herself, “Esther, now you really must! This *will not* do!” (28) or “Esther, Esther, Esther! Duty, my dear!” (76), shaking her finger at herself until she has repressed any stray bit of emotion that might peep out. Artificial as these moments appear, there does seem to be something fundamentally revealing in the stance Esther here assumes towards herself. Numerous critics have read these moments as representations of a split subjectivity, but these arguments have all been founded on an anachronistic twentieth-century psychology.

What I am discussing, in any case, is not the actual coherence (or incoherence) of

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203 Many critics have noticed this habit of Esther’s. Newsom, for example, writes that “Esther’s regular tendency . . . is to view herself as it were from outside herself” (76). Others—and even Newsom himself—have gone a step further, to see in Esther some sort of divided or fractured selfhood: Cummings calls her “a split subject” (193); Frank sees her as possessed of multiple selves (*Charles Dickens* 109); Jaffé reads Esther as a “split subject, divided from herself” (131), one who “structures herself as a subject by structuring herself as object” (135); Kevin McLaughlin sees in Esther, at least as she looks in the mirror after her illness, an example of Hegel’s “self-estranged” subject (88); Malone argues that “the ‘I’ of this narration is intractably plural” (109) and divided; Pam Morris discusses her “alienated sense of self” (696); Newsom, too, finds a “deep division in Esther’s very sense of self” (78); Spiegel discusses Esther’s habit as a “splitting” (5) within herself, an indication of “the independence in her of the regulatory impulses from the reactive” (5), a distinction Spiegel draws from the physiology of mid-century. Somewhat similarly, Michie notes the specular way Esther comes to understand herself, through looking at her mother (205). Others discuss the way Esther constructs herself against an Other. Dever suggests that Esther’s doll initially fills the role of the absent mother, suggesting that “as [Esther] talks with her doll, she talks with herself, and by talking with her doll she constitutes herself . . . . Esther’s subjectivity is at this point directly dependent on her ability to construct a self by reading her reflection in the eyes of another” (88). Esther’s habit of viewing herself from outside might trouble us for more reasons than the one I am discussing, however. It is, after all, a habit into which Skimpole falls, too: Esther describes him “speaking of himself as if he were not at all his own affair, as if Skimpole were a third person, and if he knew that Skimpole has his singularities, but still had his claims, too, which were the genteel business of the community and must not be slighted” (66). Bruce Robbins discusses this abdication of moral responsibility by Skimpole, seeing it as an echo of the impersonality of the law and as echoed in Smallweed’s “friend in the city,” the latter of which practices he links with “the general irresponsibility of finance capitalism” (224); Robbins also highlights the disturbing similarity between Skimpole, Smallweed, and the law’s positions on the one hand and the impersonal proposal Jarndyce offers Esther on the other. Jaffé, too, notes the way that the personal seems in this novel “to take a peculiarly impersonal form” (139).
Esther’s self, only the view she takes of it: from the outside. This condition of being outside herself is only heightened in her altered states. Describing the moments before she encounters Jo in the midst of his delirium—an encounter that will lead to Esther’s own fever—Esther recalls the following:

I had no thought, that night—none, I am quite sure—of what was soon to happen to me. But I have always remembered since, that when we had stopped at the garden-gate to look up at the sky, and when we went upon our way, I had for a moment an undefinable impression of myself as being something different from what I then was. (380)

Throughout her fever, as well, Esther maintains this impression of being beside herself, and she hears herself speak as though her words were spoken by another. Again, these moments only underscore what is for Esther a habitual mode of thought, just as the strange sense of encountering her double in Lady Dedlock—how, as Esther puts it, the latter’s “face should be, in a confused way, like a broken glass to me, in which I saw scraps of old remembrances” (225)—only literalizes the way Esther has experienced herself, as something other and external, throughout the novel. Indeed, this standing outside herself becomes literalized in the novel in another way, too—in Esther’s altered face, an alteration that allows her to ring a variety of changes on the notion of her altered self, her old face, or an old Esther that is dead and gone. Esther, that is, assumes towards herself the very stance that the third-person narrator takes towards the novel’s characters, and she is therefore equally limited in what of the self she can reveal.

It would be foolish to ascribe all of Esther’s silences and bits of misdirection to a lack of self-understanding or an inability to analyze her own mind. There are many things
that Dickens simply does not wish for Esther to share with Bleak House’s readers. As I have mentioned, at least part of Esther’s reticence is determined by the novel’s plot, by Dickens’s need for suspense. Her gender plays a part here, too: Dickens’s representation of her is informed by nineteenth-century beliefs about women’s lack of insight and what subjects it was appropriate for a woman to broach. Beyond that, of course—as generations of critics have complained—Esther is also remarkably coy with her readers. Her love for Woodcourt is the subject on which she withholds the most information, although it would be hard to find a reader who did not see through these evasions long before Esther tips her hand. And that is what is most striking about Esther’s coyness: the sheer amount of attention she draws to it, for she certainly makes it clear that she is not telling the whole story. In short, Esther’s coyness is of so transparent a character that it can be seen through by all but the least attentive reader, and once we have taken it into consideration, it is still clear that Esther is simply not capable of understanding herself even as thoroughly as David Copperfield (who of course had his own limitations). In a peculiar way, that is, Esther’s failed inner view comes to look increasingly like the view from within Chancery, the view at the very heart of the fog.

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204 On the problem of female self-expression, see Goodman 152, Hall, Welsh, Dickens 30, and Wilt 303. Significantly, the author of “Woman in her Social Relations, Past and Present” (1856) longs for the days of “Miss Edgeworth and Jane Austen,” of “their clear, charming, crystalline pictures of life, dealing so artistically with all on the surface and never penetrating beneath” (542); at the time he writes, unfortunately, such female authors as George Sand and Currer Bell “plunge into the deepest mysteries of human life, raking and ploughing into experiences upon which men seldom touch” (542). These women “use their pens as dissecting knives, and lay bare social arteries till the blood spouts up, and common-place readers cry out and say it is all shocking and false” (542).

205 This has become almost a truism in criticism of the novel. See Axton 553-57; Hall 189; Hillis Miller, “Interpretation” 181; 196; Newsom 56; Sadrin 65; Schor 103; Thoms 167; Welsh, Dickens 52-53; Wilt 289; and Zwerdling 429, 434.

206 Unlike Robbins, that is, I would like to stress the similarities between Esther’s circle of duty and Chancery’s circle of evil. Chase’s argument is somewhat closer to my own. She writes that “[e]ntanglement is not only a problem for those in Chancery; it serves more generally to express that dangerous moral and psychological confusion which runs through the novel” (131). She includes Esther among those confused, although she sees her as being finally able to “sort out the tangle of her existence” (131). Newsom, too,
After all, those within Jarndyce and Jarndyce are no more clear about its meaning than those without: amidst the “groping and floundering condition” of Chancery (6), Jarndyce and Jarndyce is the pinnacle of confusion—it is “so complicated, that no man alive knows what it means,” the third-person narrator tells us. “The parties to it understand it least; but it has been observed that no two Chancery lawyers can talk about it for five minutes, without coming to a total disagreement as to all the premises” (7-8).

In a description of one of her visits to the court that subtly suggests precisely the parallel I am drawing, Esther herself remarks that “there seemed to be no reality in the whole scene, except poor little Miss Flite, the madwoman, standing on a bench, and nodding at it” (308). Esther, too, stands nodding in the midst of confusion, unable to make sense of the space—in her case, consciousness itself—in which she finds herself.

To repeat, then: if the form of Esther’s narrative encourages readers to treat the novel as intervening in psychological debates, her silence about her inner life would necessarily be hard for readers to parse. In a novel that for the most part denies access to the mental operations of its characters, Esther’s refusal or inability to analyze her mind means that readers are given no detailed view of the inner life. The confusion consequent upon Esther’s silence, moreover, looks substantially more problematic in light of the

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207 Herbert distinguishes between Chancery’s surface appearance and its deeper reality, granting the novel insight into the occult nature of the power of modern systems: “All one can observe directly of the workings of Chancery is a preposterous farce. It is played out in a London courtroom where lawyers haggle over ‘bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits,’ and suchlike procedural technicalities; the unseen reality of Chancery . . . lies in ‘its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire’” (107). He also calls Jarndyce and Jarndyce “a supernatural mystery, the very embodiment of the fearfulness that this novel finds in ordinary modern life” (107; cf 108). In another point close to my own, Herbert adds that the social and the psychological realms in this novel “tend . . . to collapse inextricably into one another” (108).

208 Buzard also discusses how those within Chancery understand it least, although he relates this state of affairs to the limitations of the ethnographic insider’s perspective (122).

209 Cf. Newsom 36.
novel’s overwhelmingly negative view of inheritance, seemingly a natural symbol for the innate principles that were central to the faculty psychology that I am suggesting Dickens endorsed. While inheritance, at least in Esther’s case, is offered here as the key to identity—Esther only truly understands who she is when she knows who her parents are210—this identity is something to be transcended or redefined rather than embraced.

The innate, after all, is figured in this text as the shadow upon her life that Esther is born with, the reason why she is instructed from childhood to “pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written” (19); it is the fault, in Esther’s words, “of which I confusedly felt guilty and yet innocent” (20).211 Esther is of course talking about the social construction of the sexual taint of her illegitimacy; my point, however, is that the novel figures this taint as something with which Esther is born, a sort of innate quality. This kind of social inheritance, that is, threatens to become indistinguishable from the God-given gifts that were the basis of faculty psychology. Nor is Esther alone in being obliged to transcend her birth in this text: an even more

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210 See, for example, Cummings 203 and Newsom 161. Nancy Armstrong sees this novel and Oliver Twist as both exploring “the question of how one acquires an identity in the modern urban world if one has not been born into a fixed position there” (131), arguing that the question of identity ultimately depends “on who a child’s mother is and under what circumstances she gave birth to that individual, as if knowing his origin would tell us who that child resembled and thus what kind of person that child is” (131-32). As Michele S. Ware points out, however, the resolution of that particular mystery in Esther’s case has little effect on the plot of the novel (5). Buzard, too, notes the “moral irrelevance of parentage” (151) in Bleak House.

211 Herbert argues that Esther views her physical resemblance to her mother as “an occult emblem of her actually inheriting, just as her aunt’s original-sin theology stipulates, her mother’s sexual guilt” (110); Sadrin sees Esther’s “inheritance of shame” as “all she has been endowed with” (64). More generally, Axton sees the novel as condemning “many analogues of parental irresponsibility which devolve from an undue reliance on inheritance” (546)—among them Chancery—and he argues that “the most evil inheritance of all . . . is the idea of irremediable inherited evil” (546), of which Esther is a victim. In a reading that more precisely gets at some of the potentially problematic resonances of inheritance in Bleak House, Van Boheemen-Saaf links the novel’s interest in origins with the developments of evolution in the 1850s. She sees Esther’s illegitimacy as standing “for the uneasy suggestion of a purely biological, nonphallic, nontranscendental notion of human origin” which must finally “be repressed from the consciousness of this Victorian novel” (240). Dennis Walder, however, sees Dickens—among other ways, through his choice of Esther as narrator—working to resist the ideology of natural depravity (167); somewhat similarly, Welsh sees illegitimacy as “another way of divorcing the child from the sins of its parents” (Dickens 24).
disturbing picture of inheritance comes in the fate of those, like Richard and Ada, who are cursed with being born into Chancery. In a more humorous register, the novel works against Mrs. Woodcourt’s fetishistic focus on birth and laughs at the “family gifts” (258) of the Smallweeds, that race that never bore children, but “complete little men and women,” all of whom “bear a likeness to old monkeys with something depressing on their minds” (258). Sir Leicester’s cousins, too, are held down by their birth, made listless and purposeless by their cousinship. Then there is Turveydrop, who insists that the points of Deportment, like any of the faculties, “are born with a man,” and “may be improved by cultivation, but can never be originated” (294)—such mockery is little better than those parts of the text where inheritance is made explicitly threatening. Once again, what I want to call attention to here is the way the novel’s representation of that with which we are born seems to blur or negate the fine distinctions in the psychological literature between, for example, biological inheritance and innate faculties—and I treat the resonances of inheritance at greater length in Chapter Five—thereby casting a negative light over all such inborn material.

Further complicating the novel’s psychology is the great deal of work the text does in order to achieve some sort of compensation for inheritance. Most centrally, Bleak House endorses Esther’s assertion upon learning of her parentage that “I was as innocent of my birth as a queen of hers; and that before my Heavenly Father I should not be punished for birth, nor a queen rewarded for it” (454-55). The precise meaning of “birth” here is hard to gauge: inheritance, social position, or innate gifts? Here and elsewhere, moreover, the novel rings changes on Numbers 14:18 as such a compensation

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212 Schor, however, reads this assertion as “as much a spirit-booster as a deeply held tenet” (105). If this is the case, I would contend that it is Dickens who is doing the spirit-boosting.
for birth—such as Jarndyce’s claim that “I think it must be somewhere written that the virtues of the mothers shall, occasionally, be visited on the children, as well as the sins of the fathers” (211). Other critics, of course, have had no trouble explaining away such moments as constituting a lesson about the moral imperative to apply oneself. But in light of the psychological weight of inheritance in the 1850s, the novel’s dark perspective on that with which we are born seems unsettling and confusing, particularly because of the way this novel encourages us—through its narrative mode—to read it as a psychological text.

Reckoning Up: Reading and Writing the Body

If Bleak House’s narrative generally refuses to reveal its characters’ interiority, and if Esther does not give us a substantial inner view in her portion of these pages, the novel necessarily casts us upon a third means of discerning what lies within: reading the outward signs of consciousness. Indeed, Bleak House—apparently anticipating Dickens’s claim in the Household Words article “The Demeanour of Murderers” (1856) that Nature’s “writing, as it may be read in the human countenance, is invariably legible, if we come at all trained to the reading of it” (505)—is full of moments where characters seem

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213 “The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.”

214 Blake argues that Esther “is the counter to Richard, who runs through his small fortune failing to apply himself in studying for medicine, the law, or the army because he is waiting for a judgment in Chancery, a legacy that will cancel the need for exertions” (7); on parentage, origins, and the curse of Chancery, see also Cummings 203-4. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson quote Robert Lowe’s piece on Chancery in the Times (14 June 1851), in which he describes “the hereditary curse which a suit in equity on the present system hands down to the children who are to inherit it. We leave our suits to our children just as we bequeath to them too often our mental peculiarities and bodily infirmities” (qtd. in Butt and Tillotson 186).
to read faces or bodies as reliable indicators of interiority.\footnote{It is important to distinguish such reading in \textit{Bleak House} from phrenology, Dickens’s problems with which I discussed in the last chapter. The legibility of the face in this novel seems instead informed by physiognomy, which purported to read the soul through the body. On the reading (or legibility) of bodies or faces in \textit{Bleak House}, see also Bullen 252-53, 262; Buzard 117, 133-38, 143-44; Michie 203-4, 206-207; Ragussis 273; Sadrin 66-67; Schor 106, 114-15; and Tracy 167. But none of these critics contextualizes such reading amidst nineteenth-century psychological debate. Gordon Bigelow, on the other hand, discusses “the failure of the body to provide a clear sign of family connections” (610), and Dever examines the way “texts produce bodies” (86) in this novel. On the general shift in how Victorian readers dealt with visual information—a shift fiction and photography both drew upon and helped to construct, and one that constituted a “radical restructuring of the difference between ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ the domains of subject and object,”—see Armstrong, “Fiction” 39ff (\textit{Cf. Fiction} 124-66). Armstrong also discusses the textuality of Lady Dedlock’s face in \textit{Bleak House} (“Fiction” 46 and \textit{Fiction} 152-53). For discussions of the legible body in Victorian psychology and medicine, see Wood 13-58. Vrettos also examines the widespread Victorian belief in “the expressive or communicative potential of the human—and particularly female—body” (\textit{Somatic} 21), as well as the belief in women’s especial ability to read these bodily signs (\textit{Somatic} 28). See her \textit{Somatic Fictions}, especially 20-47. Logan offers yet another perspective, suggesting that a new epistemology of the body in the Victorian period turned the body into “a group of specific signs without the earlier security of an assumed reference to a central source of significance,” since the signs of the body were now seen as “inherently ambiguous” (169); he sees this shift as paralleled by a shift in the assumptions of the realist novel, where ambiguous sign was now heaped on ambiguous sign (170). See also Elaine Showalter’s discussion of the physiognomy (and photographs) of insanity (92-97).} My point, however, is that the way \textit{Bleak House} inadvertently leads its readers to expect to discover something about the mind through a focus on the external—through a focus on the body—comes to seem like a capitulation to those psychologies that I argue Dickens was elsewhere (and in other aspects of \textit{this} text) seeking to refute. In the remainder of this chapter, I trace the means by which \textit{Bleak House}’s apparent situatedness in psychological debate becomes most damaging to Dickens’s own anti-materialist project. For if we turn to this novel seeking a position on the ontology of the mind, there is another way to read its reticence about the interiority of character than that I considered at the outset: as aligned with a reductionist mental science that sought (or was perceived as seeking) to shift focus away from the introspective view of consciousness and towards an empiricist observation of the physical body.

It is here that the way the novel seems to offer the body as a reliable means of discerning interiority becomes critical. Esther certainly is constantly engaged in reading
faces (“What a Dame Durden it is to read a face!” [750]): she is surprised, upon meeting the Jellybys, that Mrs. Jellyby’s “face reflected none of the uneasiness which we could not help showing in our own faces, as the dear child’s head recorded its passage with a bump on every stair” (37); she is able to chart the progress of Richard’s fascination with Chancery through the worn look that it engenders in his face; and the wordless communication between her and Jarndyce works precisely because each seems able to read the other’s looks. One of the hints of Woodcourt’s fitness for her is his ability to communicate in this way, too: describing his first meeting with Richard upon the former’s return, Esther writes—in a scene that also describes her own such reading, here of Woodcourt—that “Mr. Woodcourt had a perception that all was not going well with him. He frequently glanced at his face, as if there was something in it that gave him pain; and more than once he looked towards me, as though he sought to ascertain whether I knew what the truth was” (549). It is furthermore the similarity of their looks that threatens to reveal Esther and Lady Dedlock’s relation; hence Esther’s relief that her changed face no longer serves as an index to her connection with her mother.

Of course, we can never be completely sure that Esther’s readings (through the body) of the minds of those by whom she is surrounded are not infected by the knowledge she has gained in the years between the events she describes and the moment

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216 Peltason argues that “[t]he characters in Bleak House who most closely resemble their creator are the strange pair of Bucket and Esther Summerson, two penetrating observers” (690). Morris, too, notes Esther’s ability to imaginatively enter into the situation of others, figured in the text as “a reaching-out impulse of physical contact” (694). Zwerdling also comments on Esther’s “acute observation” (433), which leads her to perceive Skimpole’s true character more accurately than Jarndyce ever does. He argues that Esther’s eventual “self-confidence and clear-sightedness are evident in her ability to judge other deceptive or deluded characters in the book accurately—Mrs. Jellyby, Mr. Turveydrop, Richard” (433). Wilt argues that since Esther’s “purpose is the full telling of a story larger than herself and her own past to an audience wider than herself and her own present or future, her feats of memory, her insights into other minds, her happy presence at the crucial scenes of so many other lives are more credible than David’s or Pip’s” (302-3).
at which she writes. Does she really ever read those around her? Esther concedes the ambiguous source of her knowledge: as she says when asked by Jarndyce whether she supposed that Boythorn had a head and heart full of romance, “I think, Guardian, I might have supposed so. But it is easy to say that, when you have told me so” (111). Later she admits, of Prince and his father, “What I might have thought of them without the old lady’s account, or what I might have thought of the old lady’s account without them, I cannot say” (174).

Still, ambiguities aside, the novel seems set on asserting the possibility of accurately reading the interior through the body. It is worth repeating here a point I made above, that the third-person narrator, avoiding the internal view, often describes characters as though reading their appearances: I have already mentioned his first description of George; in a moment that more precisely captures the practice of reading the interior through the body, we are told that Weevle, after Guppy informs him of his communication with Lady Dedlock, “shows a dazed mind in his whole head of hair, and even in his cultivated whiskers” (495). If the third-person narrator dispenses with this practice in the encounter between Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock in her rooms, that moment in which the narrator offers us the novel’s most sustained omniscient perspective, much of the interior view the third-person narrator grants us only serves to show Tulkinghorn’s reading of Lady Dedlock’s exterior. We are told, for example, that she “falters, trembles, and puts her hand confusedly to her head. Slight tokens these in any one else; but when so practiced an eye as Mr. Tulkinghorn’s sees indecision for a moment in such a subject, he thoroughly knows its value” (510). To expand on my earlier
point: the novel lets us peek inside only to be forced outside again, with the consoling assurance that the outside, if read correctly, will reveal that which lies within.

Surely it is this notion of the body as text that lies behind the oft-noted proliferation of inky characters in the novel, figures whose stains seem to reveal their status as texts: criticism has seized on Caddy as the most obvious example here—upon first seeing her, Esther muses, “I suppose nobody ever was in such a state of ink” (38)—but Guppy, on his first encounter with Esther, has also “inked himself by accident” (28), and Nemo’s room is “a wilderness marked with a rain of ink” (124). The other Jellyby children become texts of another sort, having “notched memoranda of their accidents in their legs, which were perfect little calendars of distress” (57). Moreover, the logic of face-as-text that Bleak House seems to endorse is suggested in the way Esther, upon first seeing her mother’s face, casts her eyes down on her book (224), a telling move from one text to another. And Esther offers other comments that also almost make the textuality of faces explicit: in describing Charley’s look as the latter describes Jenny’s visit, Esther remarks, “If Charley could only have made the letters in her copy as round as the eyes with which she looked into my face, they would have been excellent” (379); she later writes of Richard’s fierce hopefulness, “[T]he commentary upon it now indelibly written in his handsome face, made it far more distressing than it used to be” (612). Related to this strain of symbolism are the ways in which characters talk through the body: Esther recalls how, when Kenge first spoke before her, he “sometimes gently beat time to his

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217 Caddy’s inky stains are, of course, reproduced in her baby, also named Esther. Michael Ragussis traces this inky connection even further: he argues that the inky marks “which originate on [Nemo’s] desk ‘marked with a rain of ink,’ seem to make of everyone in the novel—even Mr. George . . . — ‘a marked man’ . . . as Mr. George calls himself” (271). My point is different, that the inkiness of these characters suggests the textuality of the body, that it can be read. See also Buzard 133. For another reading of the conflation of signs and bodies, see Hack 148.
own music with his head, or rounded a sentence with his hand” (22); at her reunion with her son, Mrs. Rouncewell’s hands similarly “give utterance to her emotions” and speak eloquently (657).

If the novel seems to cast us on reading the body, to be clear, to some degree the practice seems an effective way of discovering interiority.218 Esther’s glosses on the faces of Jarndyce and Woodcourt generally seem accurate, even if she does misconstrue Woodcourt’s look at her new face as a look of pity. We are also assured that the merchants who serve Lady Dedlock can read her perfectly:

She supposes herself to be an inscrutable Being, quite out of the reach and ken of ordinary mortals—seeing herself in her glass, where indeed she looks so. Yet, every dim little star revolving about her, from her maid to the manager of the Italian Opera, knows her weaknesses, prejudices, follies, haughtinesses, and caprices; and lives upon as accurate a calculation and as nice a measure of her moral nature, as her dressmaker takes of her physical proportions. (14)

It is more than thoughts that are read here; this passage insists that the very essence and structure of the self can be rendered up and measured from without. And Dickens has his third-person narrator repeat the point, mentioning of the shops of London that “[t]he

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218 It is surely significant, then, that, as many critics have noted, the novel offers no physical description of Esther. On this point, see Bullen 253; Fasick 138ff, who insists that this effacement of Esther’s body is a means of suggesting that her soul is “virtually the only thing about her” and that the material is irrelevant (142); Jaffe 142; and Michie 203. Armstrong also points out Hablot Browne’s refusal to show us Esther’s face in the novel’s illustrations (Fiction 141; cf. Welsh, Dickens 42). Nevertheless, Newman charts the subtle ways that Esther is “defined as body” (75) in this text, not least of all by the presence of the third-person, bodiless narrator (76ff). She suggests that the contiguity of Esther’s fever and Krook’s combustion works obliquely to write Esther’s body into the text as Krook’s body (81-82). Still, she points out that all the characters in this novel who are not caricatures are “subject to a degree of dematerialization” (83). In a similar argument, Jaffe also points out that Esther describes herself “as existing because she is seen” (115), because she is the object of another’s gaze; on this point, see also Buzard 141-44.
patronesses of those establishments, albeit so loftly inscrutable, being as nicely weighed and measured there as any other article of the stock-in-trade, are perfectly understood in this new fashion by the rawest hand before the counter” (691).

The apparent legibility of the body in this text is also signalled by the way the novel conffates letters and characters, or replaces the latter with the former. Mrs. Jellyby’s letters crowd her children out of her attention; as mentioned above, the journalistic accounts of the denizens of the world of fashion suffice for Weevle in place of personal relationships with them. Esther’s only contact with her father, too, comes through the letters to her from Kenge and Carboy’s that he has copied, as well as the advertisement at Krook’s, “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” (49). 219 Indeed, letters constitute almost all of Esther’s contact with either of her parents: Lady Dedlock not once but twice offers Esther letters in place of personal contact; along with the first of these letters she explains to Esther that “when I had read it, and destroyed it . . . I must evermore consider her as dead” (450), a construction in which “her” could just as easily refer to the letter as to Esther’s mother. 220 Jarndyce’s proposal comes in textual form, not face-to-face, and the language Esther uses to describe it is telling: she explains that he was “represented before me by the letter on the table” (537), and she tells us, “I saw his face, and heard his voice, 219 Ragussis makes this observation as well (267). Herbert further notes that writing is all that remains in the novel of Nemo: the handwriting Lady Dedlock recognizes, the advertisement I have mentioned, his signature on the bills Smallweed holds, and the scrap of writing George keeps (112). See also Dever 94. 220 Dever also discusses the way that Lady Dedlock offers her first letter as a replacement for the mother (83). Schor calls their relationship “essentially scripted: the two women spend more time together through texts than they do through bodies” (120).
and felt the influence of his kind protecting manner, in every line” (537). Somewhat similarly, the “traces” in Krook’s shop “of its dead inhabitant” slowly shift as the narrative progresses from the greasy yellow liquid that accumulates on the windowsills to “his chalked writing on the wall” (492)—body, once again, becomes text.

To trace the workings of this symbolism even further, it would seem that the way in which texts hold the keys to so many secrets—combined with the logic by which the novel seems to establish the soul as the ultimate secret—means that these letters come to represent (in the sense of pointing towards) the interiority of which *Bleak House* makes such a mystery. Tulkinghorn tellingly seeks both to pierce Lady Dedlock’s icy surface and to acquire the secrets stored up in her correspondence with Captain Hawdon, but the novel’s equation of the letters and papers locked in Tulkinghorn’s various strong-boxes with human interiority is also the necessary consequence of the symbolism of the locked chest that I outlined above. At the same time, the confusion of papers in Richard’s barracks in Deal reveals the state of his Chancery-infected mind, a comparison Esther later makes explicit, writing that she found “Richard, poring over a table covered with dusty bundles of papers which seemed to me like dusty mirrors reflecting his own mind” (611). Guppy, too, seeks to bury Hawdon’s letters in oblivion as a necessary part of the process of burying the image of Esther in his heart, and the language used to describe the Smallweeds’ hunt for the letters in Krook’s shop—they are ever “rummaging and

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221 Christopher M. Keirstead also discusses the numerous examples in the novel of “letters replacing what had once been more personal, humane relationships” (92). But he sees Esther as working against this trend: focusing on her letter to the widow’s grandson (which includes a drawing of the hearth from which the grandson finds himself separated), he argues that Esther’s letter “transforms public back into private and the distanced into the intimate. Letter writing for Esther thus takes on the air of transubstantiation, the turning of substance into flesh, and of flesh into something higher—a soul culled from the faceless mass of society” (97). In this reading of the novel, Esther also achieves an equivalent personal bond with the reader of her portion of the novel. In a point somewhat closer to my own, Keirstead also discusses how “even the most intimate letter becomes a kind of verbalized double, a negative self existing apart from the individual but always ready to step forward and reassert its claim over the identity of the writer” (101).
searching, digging, delving, and diving among the treasures of the late lamented” (491)—comes significantly close to the language of depth psychology, of the digging and delving into others’ more intangible secrets, those locked beneath the bodily surface, in which so many characters in this novel are engaged.

But this way in which the body becomes a text, in which it comes to point to and reflect the interior, is deeply problematized by the way writing works in this novel. An earlier (deconstructive) strain of criticism—perhaps best represented by Michael Ragussis—pointed out that *Bleak House* stresses the disconnection between signs and what they signify.

222 Mr. Snagsby tells his two apprentices “how he has heard say that a brook ‘as clear as crystal’ once ran right down the middle of Holborn, when Turnstile really was a turnstile, leading slap away into the meadows” (118-19), but those names seem grossly inappropriate for the decrepit urban spaces they now name. The threat of writing that I am discussing, however, is something more significant than mere misnaming. This threat is captured in the way the discourse of inscrutability is employed and subtly skewed in this novel by the law—law in the broadest sense, encompassing the legal system (located in institutions like Chancery), the law as an abstract entity, and also, in this novel, the detective police.

I have already described how Tulkinghorn serves as an exemplar in this text of the rhetoric of inscrutability; Guppy seems able to adopt a similar air. In the latter’s first meeting with Lady Dedlock, after he has revealed what he knows of Nemo and Nemo’s

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222 Ragussis discusses how the “divergence between name and place, between signifier and signified, infects every aspect of the novel’s language, and the division between name and place is echoed more gravely in the division between name and person” (253). He argues that place names now “seem to function . . . as ironic commentaries on the present text of the place, or even as deliberate masks. . . . Words cloak and veil, rather than discover” (254). Ragussis’s argument posits as “the center of the problem of naming in the novel—the death of the father and Esther’s names (or namelessness)” (255). But somewhat closer to my own point, Ragussis describes a class of characters in the novel “who are nothing but words,” whose names swallow them up, “allowing [them] no identity apart from that sounded in the word” (256).
letters, Guppy becomes so impenetrable that the narrator insists on the difficulty of seeing beyond his shell:

Is this the full purpose of the young man of the name of Guppy, or has he any other? Do his words disclose the length, breadth, depth, of his object and suspicion in coming here; or, if not, what do they hide? He is a match for my Lady there. She may look at him, but he can look at the table, and keep that witness-box face of his from telling anything. (364)

Dickens’s representation of Vholes is similar: although he repeatedly insists that he wishes “in business to be exact and open,” Vholes is remarkable for his “inward manner of speaking” (470), for being “buttoned up in body and mind” (488), a closeness reflected in his place of business, which is as dark as Tulkinghorn’s irresponsive black attire.223 Against the distinction many critics have made between Chancery and the police,224 moreover, Bucket is described as being equally inscrutable, equally different from what he appears. We are told, for example:

Mr. Bucket pervades a vast number of houses, and strolls about an infinity of streets: to outward appearance rather languishing for want of an object.

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223 Thoms has also noted the way “those professionally involved with the law make it a practice not to expose themselves unnecessarily” (153), and Garrett Stewart writes of the “parasitic inwardness” of lawyers in this novel (471). See also Steig 346. In a somewhat different sense, D. A. Miller discusses the way Chancery resists interpretation, “because it cannot be localized as an object of interpretation, and because it is never willing to become the agency or subject of interpretation.” This system thus calls into being ”an easily comprehensible version of order” (69): the detective story.

224 D. A. Miller, of course, suggests that “Dickens’s New Police . . . polices, substantively as well as nominally, for the law, for the Chancery system” (75). Kathleen Blake criticizes Miller for conflating the two, calling it “most ill-considered and anti-historical to associate Chancery with the police as panoptical institutions. . . . The two are far more fundamentally opposed than aligned. The police are called modern in the novel; Chancery is immemorially old” (3). Goodlad, too, argues against Miller’s conflation of Chancery and the police, citing Dickens’s enthusiasm for the police, which institution she suggests Dickens presents as “bureaucracy at its best” (533). But the novel seems to wish us to conflate the two. Bucket, after all, is introduced to us in Tulkinghorn’s employ, and he shares definite similarities with the old lawyer, not least of all the way both seem simply to melt from one place to another. (Compare, for example, Bucket’s first appearance in the novel with Tulkinghorn’s appearance in London at the beginning of Chapter XLII.)
He is in the friendliest condition towards his species, and will drink with most of them. He is free with his money, affable in his manners, innocent in his conversation—but, through the placid stream of his life, there glides an under-current of forefinger. (626)

In terms of “closeness,” at least, there is little in this novel to distinguish between the law and the police, between Tulkinghorn on the one hand and Bucket on the other. Each is, in his own way, utterly illegible to the text’s other characters.

What is most significant for my purposes about the inscrutability attached to the law—as apart from the general inviolability of exteriors in this text—is the slippage into which the novel here falls between inscrutability and an inability to read: Guppy, for instance, says to Weevle of Krook, “I can’t make him out. . . . I have seen something of the profession, and something of life. . . . and it’s seldom I can’t make a man out, more or less. But such an old card as this; so deep, so sly, and secret. . . . I never came across” (251-52). Richard certainly has faith in the perceptive powers of the law, as is evident in the following exchange with Vholes:

“Who can read the heart, Mr. C?”

“You can,” returns Richard.

“I, Mr. C?”

“Well enough to know what his [Jarndyce’s] intentions were.”

But Vholes explicitly resists Richard’s faith, insisting “I never impute motives” (487). As George points out, however, whether or not the law can read those who fall under its gaze does not change the way that it proceeds in its business. George resists hiring a lawyer because, as he explains, even if he were innocent a lawyer “would be as likely to believe
me guilty as not; perhaps more. What would he do, whether or no? Act as if I was;—shut my mouth up, tell me not to commit myself, keep circumstances back, chop the evidence small, quibble, and get me off perhaps!” (621). The law cannot read motive, cannot gain access to an inner view; it therefore proceeds as though such an inner view were irrelevant, disregarding the interiority of those who come to it for a judgement as thoroughly as Sir Leicester ignores (or doubts) the mental life of his servants.

I have argued above for the conflation of the law and the police in this novel, but it might seem here as though, at least as concerns my present point, it would be more accurate to distinguish between the two. For certainly my assertions about the law’s failure to read seem to be contradicted by the nearly supernatural perceptive powers of Inspector Bucket, his ability to “reckon up” (639) anyone on whom he turns his eye. Shortly after Bucket uses this expression, the narrator offers an even better example of Bucket’s penetrative powers, writing that “Sir Leicester sits like a statue, gazing at the cruel finger that is probing the life-blood of his heart” (640)—Bucket’s gaze reaches to the very depths of the self. Tulkinghorn, for one, is so impressed with the detective’s powers that he has Bucket attend to Mr. Snagsby’s recitation of Jo’s story about the lady at Nemo’s grave; Tulkinghorn explains Bucket’s presence by saying, “I wanted him to hear this story . . . because I have half a mind (for a reason) to know more of it, and he is very intelligent in such things” (275). In this very meeting, moreover, we are told that

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225 On the law’s (and the police’s) powers of penetration, see also Malone 108. Van Boheemen-Saaf, on the other hand, argues that we must distinguish here between Tulkinghorn and Bucket: calling Bucket “the hero of this novel,” she writes that “[i]n contrast to Tulkinghorn, he dispels the darkness and fog of origin, leading Esther to the moment of revelation in the pauper graveyard. Similarly, Bucket’s power, seemingly preternatural—he is omnipresent, he has attendants everywhere, he penetrates secrets, and he moves about with infallible aim—is not the hoarding power of the older man but is the power of youth, mobility, sympathy, and wit” (252). She argues, moreover, that the power he represents is “based on the nineteenth-century belief in the power of scientific investigation” (252). As I argue below, I am sympathetic to the alignment of Bucket with the scientific gaze. Yet I contest van Boheemen-Saaf’s distinguishing Bucket from the law, as well as her claim that the novel takes a positive view of the former.
Bucket “dips down to the bottom of [Snagsby’s] mind” (275). Yet even here Bucket’s readings reveal themselves to be impositions and manipulations. When Snagsby prepares to respond to Bucket’s assertions about what sort of man the law-stationer is, the detective’s vehemence makes this clear: “That’s what you are, you know. . . . It an’t necessary to say to a man like you, that it’s the best and wisest way to keep little matters like this quiet. Don’t you see? Quiet!” (276). Bucket, to follow through the metaphor, appears to do less reading than writing, disregarding Snagsby’s inner view in favour of his own construction of the law-stationer.226 There is also a damning similarity between the way Bucket reckons individuals up and the way Vholes continually attempts to script a false narrative of his business practice with Richard, as though he were only following his client’s orders and not vampirically draining Richard’s lifeblood. And although it is perhaps a bit severe to criticize Bucket for falling short of omniscience, the novel does seem subtly to criticize him on just that point when, mounting a “high tower in his mind” (673), he fails to locate Lady Dedlock; nor should we forget how thoroughly duped he is by Lady Dedlock’s exchange of clothes with Jenny, the brickmaker’s wife.227 Bucket’s perception, clearly, is as limited as that of the other figures affiliated with the law.

226 Thoms agrees. He writes that Bucket’s “bluff familiarity . . . emerges as a strategy of authorial control, as he essentially tells people who they are.” Describing the scene with Snagsby I have quoted, Thoms argues that “Bucket initiates a one-sided conversation that seeks to define Snagsby’s character and thus the role he shall play for the detective” (163). Newsom writes that Bucket “gets his way with people through a kind of suggestion that borders on the hypnotic” (73), but he also argues that Bucket has “clearly magical powers” (75).

227 D. A. Miller charts the failure of the novel’s “amateur detectives” (Novel 70), although he blames this failure on these detectives having undertaken their work as individual projects (Novel 71). Hillis Miller, too, writes that “Tulkinghorn and Bucket, the two most clairvoyant and persistent detectives in the novel, are failures” (187). Thoms also concedes the fallibility of the novel’s detectives, although he points out that “the very threat of pursuit . . . drives Lady Dedlock to guilty flight and to the very embracing of that criminal identity she seeks to avoid” (159). For other readings of how the novel works to undermine Bucket, see Malone 108 and Goodlad 533-35. The latter points out that Jo’s belief in an omniscient Bucket is dismissed by Woodcourt as a product of the boy’s ignorance (535). Perhaps it was Bucket’s fallibility in this novel, then, that led Dickens to contradict reports that he was based on the real-life Inspector Field (as described by Butt and Tillotson [197-98]).
But to see the point I am making about the law’s inability to gain access to an inner view, it will help to step outside the novel, to consider one of Dickens’s other pronouncements on writing in the years immediately before he began *Bleak House*. In a speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association on 6 February 1850, following a speech by Dr. Blomfield, the Bishop of London, on the need for sanitary reform, Dickens spoke of how inexpensive sanitary improvement was, as his hearers knew “in the case of ‘Jacob’s Island,’ which he had described in a work of fiction some ten or eleven years ago, and where the improvements had been made at a cost of less than the price of a pint of porter or two glasses of gin a week to each inhabitant” (107). A few days later, the Marylebone vestry found itself in the midst of a discussion about whether ratepayers’ money should be spent on the education of parish children. Sir Peter Laurie opposed the motion, and asked to read a passage from the Bishop of London’s recent speech in order to show the misguided notions of which reformers could be guilty (Fielding 108-9).

In the preface to the Cheap Edition of *Oliver Twist*, published in 1850, Dickens recounts Laurie’s words: “The Bishop of London, poor soul, in his simplicity, thought there really was such a place [as Jacob’s Island], which he had been describing so minutely, whereas it turned out that it only existed in a work of fiction, written by Mr. Charles Dickens ten years ago [roars of laughter]. *The fact was admitted by Mr. Charles Dickens himself at the meeting*” (383). Dickens proceeds to make much of Laurie’s gaffe, writing how Laurie’s words forced him to recall

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228 K. J. Fielding offers a summary of Laurie’s words and Dickens’s response, upon which I have drawn (108-9). Laurie’s ignorance of this locale is all the more surprising since the author of “Cholera Gossip” (1849) reports that the *Morning Chronicle* had dubbed it “the ‘Capital of Cholera,’ ‘the Jessore of London’” (707). “Cholera Gossip” goes on to recommend its readers visit the place: “We earnestly commend the description of that frightful spot, and still more fervently a visit to the place itself, to all our readers. We could not abbreviate the description without injustice; we dare not, for fear of consequences, transfer it to our pages. It is too loathsome to trust to the chance of its being read aloud. If such the mere description, what the reality?” (707).
that when **FIELDING** described Newgate, the prison immediately ceased to exist; that when **SMOLLETT** took Roderick Random to Bath, that city instantly sank into the earth; that when **SCOTT** exercised his genius on Whitefriars, it incontinently glided into the Thames; that an ancient place called Windsor was entirely destroyed in the reign of Queen Elizabeth by two Merry Wives of that town, acting under the direction of a person of the name of **SHAKESPEARE**; and that **MR. POPE**, after having at a great expense completed his grotto at Twickenham, incautiously reduced it to ashes by writing a poem upon it[.] (384)

Dickens is not done yet, however, for having satirized Laurie in *The Chimes* (1844), he notes that writing must have effaced that gentleman, too:

> I say, when I came to consider these things, I was inclined to make this preface the vehicle of my humble tribute of admiration to **SIR PETER LAURIE**. But, I am restrained by a very painful consideration—by no less a consideration than the impossibility of his existence. For **SIR PETER LAURIE** having been himself described in a book (as I understand he was, one Christmas time, for his conduct on the seat of Justice), it is but too clear that there **CAN** be no such man! (384)

My suggestion is that the inability of the law to read the inner lives of those it views in *Bleak House* is made more problematic for Dickens’s Christian psychology by the way

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229 Apparently Jacob’s Island wasn’t the only thing the Marylebone vestry sought to erase. Note Dickens’s point in a 10 May 1851 speech to the same body: “My vestry even took the high ground of denying the existence of cholera in any unusual degree. [Laughter.] And though that denial had no greater effect upon the disease than my vestry’s denial of the existence of Jacob’s Island had upon the earth about Bermondsey, the circumstance may be suggestive to you in considering what Vestrylization is, when a few noisy little landlords interested in the maintenance of abuses, struggle to the foremost ranks; and what the so-called Centralization is when it is a combination of active business habits, sound medical knowledge, and a zealous sympathy with the sufferings of the people” (130).
legal language seems to *erase* its signified, in a troubling echo of these words in the 1850 preface to *Oliver Twist*. The clearest example of this phenomenon comes in the case of Gridley, the man from Shropshire, who can never be made to accept the Chancellor’s legal ignorance of him.\(^{230}\) Tom Jarndyce is also “erased” by the law—not only does it goad him into suicide, but Krook describes how on the afternoon of his death “my noble and learned brother, and all the rest of ’em, grubbed and muddled away as usual, and tried to look as if they hadn’t heard a word of the last fact in the case” (52). Nemo, for his part, seems to be deleted by his mere proximity to the law, leaving behind him only the advertisement that points to him at Krook’s shop.

Working in tandem with the tendency of the law to erase language’s referent is the way so many characters in this text reify the abstract or materialize the invisible.\(^{231}\) This is what Richard does:

> [T]he fighting with shadows and being defeated by them, necessitates the setting up of substances to combat; from the impalpable suit which no man alive can understand, the time for that being long gone by, it has become a

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\(^{230}\) Of course, he is noticed: on his appearance in court, “[a] few lawyers’ clerks and others who know this suitor by sight, linger, on the chance of his furnishing some fun, and enlivening the dismal weather a little” (7), and the Chancellor, “being aware of him” (10), disappears before Gridley can make his complaint. My point is only the way the language of the law refuses to point to him, even if it refuses wilfully. Yet to come at the problem from another direction, certainly the law’s ignorance of Gridley seems to have physically worn him down: telling of her first encounter with him, Esther describes his body as being “evidently in its decline” (187). When she sees him on his deathbed, she recalls, “[h]is voice had faded, with the old expression of his face, with his strength, with his anger, with his resistance to the wrongs that had at last subdued him. The faintest shadow of an object full of form and colour, is such a picture of it, as he was of the man from Shropshire whom we had spoken with before” (313). In any case, this refusal to see Gridley offers another parallel between the law and the police, for the policeman who visits Krook’s after Nemo’s death stands outside the door of the shop “like a tower, only condescending to see the boys at his base occasionally” (130). On the laws of exclusionary evidence that lie behind the law’s ignorance of Gridley, see Blake (6).

\(^{231}\) Hack describes this process in the novel in slightly different terms, as “the depiction or conceptualization of figuration and interpretation as physical processes”; he links both figuration and interpretation with spontaneous combustion (139), arguing that Krook’s remains reveal “the imagination’s limitations” (141).
gloomy relief to turn to the palpable figure of the friend who would have saved him from this ruin, and make him his enemy. (489)

Jarndyce is the substance that replaces the law’s shadows: as Richard tells Vholes, Jarndyce “becomes to me the embodiment of the suit; that, in place of its being an abstraction, it is John Jarndyce” (486). But the error into which Richard falls is, I stress, one of which numerous other characters are also guilty. Jarndyce, of course, literalizes his negative emotions in the east wind. More significantly, Esther, too, makes tangible and visible the invisible, the unseen, the spiritual. After her climactic meeting with her mother, she finds herself upon the Ghost’s Walk at Chesney Wold, where

my echoing footsteps brought it suddenly into my mind that there was a dreadful truth in the legend of the Ghost's Walk; that it was I, who was to bring calamity upon the stately house; and that my warning feet were haunting it even then. Seized with an augmented terror of myself which turned me cold, I ran from myself and everything, retraced the way by which I had come, and never paused until I had gained the lodge-gate, and the park lay sullen and black behind me. (454)

The novel itself echoes Esther’s notion that she is the spectre upon the Ghost’s Walk by placing the words with which she begins Chapter VIII immediately after Rosa’s claim, at the end of the previous chapter, that she can hear the steps upon the Walk. In any case, this turning of ghosts into bodies is nothing new for Esther. She recalls earlier that, awakening at the Jellyby’s, “I opened my eyes to encounter those of a dirty-faced little spectre fixed upon me. Peepy had scaled his crib, and crept down in his bedgown and

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232 This juxtaposition would have been less obvious in the serial publication of the novel, however, since Chapter VIII begins a new number.
cap, and was so cold that his teeth were chattering as if he had cut them all” (45); later, she remembers being introduced for a second time to someone from her past: “As he spoke, I saw before me, as if she had started into bodily shape from my remembrance, Mrs. Rachael of my godmother’s house” (309). This tendency among Bleak House’s characters (this tendency of even Bleak House itself) to make shadows into substance certainly risks suggesting that only the material can be taken account of—or should be. That is, while the novel’s characterization can be read as in line with Dickens’s notion that what is essential about the self cannot be seen, the process of reification I am describing pulls in the opposite direction, suggesting that everything worth considering is material, solid, and visible. If Esther’s narrative encourages us to read Bleak House as an intervention in debates about the mind, then, we begin to see how very different the position it appears to assume looks from the psychology Dickens elsewhere endorses.

Working in a similar direction is the way Bleak House persistently stresses the materiality of writing, the physicality of the texts it represents. Everywhere we turn in this novel we come upon mountains of paper: in Chancery, of course, there are the “cartloads of paper” (88) Jarndyce describes in the case, the “great heaps, and piles, and bags and bags-full of papers” (308) that Esther sees brought in on her first visit to the court, or the bundles of papers carried out when the suit is over—“bundles in bags, bundles too large to be got into any bags, immense masses of papers of all shapes and no shapes, which the bearers staggered under, and threw down for the time being, anyhow,

233 Hack has discussed this point as well. In a move that resonates with my own argument, he also points out the way Dickens calls attention to the materiality of the representation of Allegory on Tulkinghorn’s ceiling, writing: “In a move that proves typical of the novel as a whole, Dickens here calls attention to the material aspects of a sign, and treats this materiality as comparable if not identical to that of the human body” (148). Hack’s treatment of the body as referent is different from my own, however.
on the hall pavement, while they went back to bring out more” (759). As I have already mentioned, Chancery’s fixation on the materials of writing is also contagious, coming to serve as an index of the fascination with the court into which its suitors fall. Miss Flite, putting her hand into her reticule, declares, “I have nothing here but documents” (438); the most fitting revenge she can imagine for the Lord Chancellor’s wife is to throw “his lordship’s papers into the fire, my dear, if he won’t pay the jeweller!” (439). And the piles of dusty papers around Richard, once again, seem to grow at the same rate as his desperate entanglement in the suit. The proliferation of paper here infects even the sanctity of the domestic: Jellyby’s front sitting-room is “littered down with waste-paper and Borrioboolan documents, as an untidy stable might be littered with straw” (371). It is, moreover, “some fragment in Captain Hawdon’s writing” (333) that Tulkinghorn wants from George, and he and a great many other characters are fixated on Hawdon’s bundle of letters to Honoria. The police share this fascination with the physicality of writing: one of Bucket’s strongest pieces of evidence against Hortense is that Mrs. Bucket has “secured the corresponding ink and paper, fellow half-sheets and what not” (651) to the anonymous letters that accuse Lady Dedlock. Bucket’s desire to secure the tools of writing, furthermore, is matched by the novel’s fascination with tracing back these tools to their base elements: more than once, the third-person narrator reminds us of how in London “the sheep are all made into parchment” (514).

234 Blake cites Chancery’s overreliance on written documents as one of the points on which Bentham criticized the court (6). Bigelow, also writing about the masses of paper in Chancery, calls the legal system in this novel “a vast circulation of paper and ink” (594), a system that finally produces “a pure materiality of writing” (595). He points to Snagsby’s shop, too, which stocks “along with every variety of paper and pen, ‘all sorts of blank forms of legal process’” (595). For other studies that discuss the proliferation of paper in this novel, see McLaughlin 81; Schor 110; and Trotter 109. Other critics have focused on different material signs in this novel: Dever writes about Esther’s handkerchief (94); Sadrin, meanwhile, discusses both Lady Dedlock’s portrait (69-71) and the portrait of Allegory (70-71).

235 Bigelow, too, points out how the “metonymic confusion” of Chancery seems to be at work throughout English society (595).
The law’s—and the novel’s—fixation on the material tools and necessities of writing is reflected (and perhaps presented most clearly) in that mirror image and brother of the Lord Chancellor, the “dirty hanger-on and disowned relation of the law” (49) Krook.236 His shop is, of course, piled high with “old parchments and papers” (50) to such a degree that, after his death, Guppy worries it will take the Smallweeds seven years to make their way through them (490). But I turn here to Krook because it is in him that the implications of this focus on the materials of writing are made most visible, for Krook pointedly fails to proceed from the word to its referent.237 His focus on the text as physical object instead is such that Guppy is confident he and Weevle could fool Krook by replacing Hawdon’s letters with a “dummy” (399); Krook could never identify the letters through what they actually said. Words themselves become objects of interest for Krook, objects he breaks down into their component parts, chalking single letters on the wall before Esther. But not only can Krook neither read nor write—he refuses to be taught to do so, too worried, as he puts it, that someone “might teach me wrong!” (181). Little wonder, then, that Weevle is confident that Krook will never make progress in his education: “Read!” he exclaims to Guppy, “He’ll never read!” (398).

My argument, to be clear, is that in his failure to proceed from the material sign to its referent, Krook makes plain the similar failure of the law to concern itself with that to which language points.238 Those affiliated with or affected by the law in this text seem

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236 Welsh notes that “[i]f Snagsby, the law stationer, supplies fresh paper, Krook buys up all the used paper he can put his hands on” (109). Krook also mirrors the law in the close and incessant way he watches Jarndyce when the latter visits Miss Flite.

237 Ragussis writes that Krook, “the ultimate law-writer and interpreter of the law . . . cannot even read and write, and knows not what he reproduces in the only linguistic act he can perform, namely to copy senselessly” (268).

238 In his famous argument that “Bleak House is a document about the interpretation of documents” (“Interpretation” 179), J. Hillis Miller sees Dickens locating the sickness of his society in, among other things, the tendency “to take the sign for the substance” (“Interpretation” 198). Bigelow makes a very
less interested in what the papers or letters that are everywhere say than, for example, the identifying marks of the hand in which these words are written.²³⁹ It is her recognition of Hawdon’s handwriting, not the words he copies, that implicates Lady Dedlock; Esther also recognizes his writing—unconscious of whose writing it is, and without regard to what this writing says—in her first visit to Krook’s. Both the law’s and the novel’s concern with Hawdon’s letters, in other words, never seems to progress beyond the hand in which they are written: Guppy asks Weevle whether the letters are in “a man’s writing or a woman’s” (398); Tulkinghorn wants a scrap of Hawdon’s writing to confirm the hand; even Smallweed has noticed that the letters to Hawdon are in Lady Dedlock’s writing (642). Bucket notes that all the anonymous letters sent to him accusing Lady Dedlock of murder are in the same hand.²⁴⁰ Even the third-person narrator sees fit to point out that George’s letter to Esther, explaining why he turned over the sample of

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²³⁹ Dever observes that “[h]andwriting is a reliable index of identity in the novel, and is perhaps even determinant of identity; the legibility of a text is evidence enough to establish a definitive link with an individual” (95); of Hawdon’s letters she writes, “[T]he significance of the letters is not in their content, but rather in their existence” (95). Ragussis makes a similar observation, noting that “[n]ames may deceive, but the hand gives us away” (268). Thoms also discusses the novel’s focus on handwriting: “[H]andwriting is not only a vehicle for self-expression but also a set of personal characteristics that functions as a sign of identity” (153). For another reading of the “hand” in Bleak House, see McLaughlin (81–83).

²⁴⁰ Perhaps it is a similar focus on form rather than content, surface rather than depth, that allows Bucket to describe his case against Hortense as “a beautiful case,” even if, “from other points of view, such cases will always involve more or less unpleasantness” (632).
Hawdon’s writing, is written in “a neat round hand” (747) or that, after his stroke, Sir Leicester writes in “a hand that is not his” (668).

Dickens’s identification of this shortcoming of the law—its focus on the physicality of writing, on sign instead of signified—threatens much more far-reaching consequences than either the ruin of those who happen to be entangled in an equity suit or the revelation of Lady Dedlock’s indiscretion. The law’s implied belief that there is nothing of significance beyond the handwriting of a text—a statement that threatens to slide into the suggestion that there is simply nothing beyond the writing—is especially troubling when we consider the notion of body-as-text that I have identified in this novel. Might the sign in that construction—the body—also point to nothing?

Certainly the “letters” of the body fail to point to some essential identity: asked whether Nemo’s manner “denoted a fall in life,” Krook responds, “You might as well ask me to describe the ladies whose heads of hair I have got in sacks down-stairs” (127). These signs—Krook’s heads of hair—reveal nothing. Even when Chancery does not suggest that individuals are already empty, it threatens to make them so. This, anyway, is the gist of Flite’s description of the “fascination” of the court: as she tells Esther, “[M]y memory has been drawn out of me, with everything else, by what I mentioned. Ve-ry strong influence, is it not?” (442). Bleak House confronts us with numerous descriptions of other characters that suggest a certain fundamental emptiness: Krook is like “a bundle of old clothes, with a spirituous heat smouldering in it” (253), and Smallweed is “a mere

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241 Garrett Stewart certainly perceives such emptiness at the core of those who are affiliated with the law: he writes that when Tulkinghorn comes face-to-face with Nemo’s corpse, he might recognize “the No One at his own core, the terrible emptiness of the void” (472). Armstrong, too, argues that Lady Dedlock is drained of interiority in the novel (Fiction 150-51; “Fiction” 43); this feeds into her broader point that in Dickens, “truth resides in the image and not on its other side” (“Fiction” 41). In the case of the body-as-text, of course, such an assertion flies in the face of all we know about Dickens’s attitudes towards religion and science.
clothes-bag with a black skull-cap on the top of it” (259). Considered in light of the law’s failure or refusal to proceed beyond the sign—its tendency even to erase the signified—Dickens’s insistence on a rhetoric of inscrutability concerning the soul therefore begins to look very much like a suggestion that the body, too, points to nothing, that human identity is only what is figured here as the material sign—the body. Might that be what Mr. Jellyby, who ever opens his mouth only to show it empty of words, is always saying? Might Sir Leicester’s assumption about the mental blankness of his dependents be, in this way, correct?

The alignment of the law with the scientific gaze—an alignment made by more than one critic—only further draws out the potential implications of the law’s refusal to proceed beyond the sign. That is to say that, in a novel that stresses the interconnectedness of every aspect of society, as many critics have noted, this particular way of (not) reading—and, in the logic of the novel, (not) reading the self—cannot be contained within Chancery (or even the law more broadly understood). This is a point the novel stresses: the third-person narrator begins Chapter II by insisting, “It is but a glimpse of the world of fashion that we want on this same miry afternoon. It is not so unlike the Court of Chancery, but that we may pass from the one scene to the other, as the

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242 Cf. Buzard 139.
243 Ragussis argues that Esther bridges the gap between signifier and signified, and he couches this in explicitly spiritual terms (272). I am less sure of Esther’s success, although Ragussis’s reading certainly seems in line with what Dickens might want Esther to do.
244 I have already mentioned that van Boheemen-Saaf makes this connection between the law and science. In this light, consider the suggestion of the Household Words article “Chemical Contradictions” (1850): “Your analytical chemist [a favourite figure for the scientist in Dickens] sadly annihilates, with his scientific machinations, all poetry. He bottles up at pleasure the Nine Muses, and proves them—as the fisherman in the Arabian Nights did the Afrite—to be all smoke. Even the Will o’ the Wisp cannot flit across its own morass without being pursued, overtaken, and burnt out by this scientific detective policeman” (592). The claims here are made with tongue firmly in cheek, yet they touch rather closely upon dangers that seem, in Bleak House at least, very real.
That “moral Policeman” Mrs. Pardiggle, too, is especially law-like in the way she takes those she visits into “religious custody” (99), and Sir Leicester’s appreciation of the court also suggests that it is only one part of a larger system that effects the same ends:

"But he regards the Court of Chancery, even if it should involve an occasional delay of justice and a trifling amount of confusion, as a something, devised in conjunction with a variety of other somethings, by the perfection of human wisdom, for the eternal settlement (humanly speaking) of everything." (15-16, emphasis added)

Sir Leicester’s free-indirect discourse here lays bare the full implications of the novel’s construction of the connections between the law and the rest of society. Not only does he see the system of which the law is a part as touching all, but he figures its power as extending even to the hereafter—a particularly troublesome claim in light of my comments on the effects of the law’s mode of reading on our immortal soul. My point, once again, is that the law’s failures, in reading, to proceed beyond the surface tend to become indistinguishable from the novel’s similar failure to proceed beyond its characters’ surfaces—that is, indistinguishable from the very mode of characterization in Bleak House.

As my introductory chapter made clear, the consequent suggestion that the characters of Bleak House might be all surface—and that the novel, read as a

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245 Herbert’s discussion of Parliament’s willed ignorance of the suffering and dying poor makes it, too, sound very similar to Chancery (106). His description of Esther’s blindness to the poor upon her arrival in London does the same. Herbert also discusses the “almost infinite ramifications” (107) of Chancery. Bigelow, too, points out how the “metonymic confusion” of Chancery seems to be at work throughout English society (595).
psychological intervention, might imply that its readers are in this regard no different—was not outside the ordinary experience of these readers. This was, after all, the basis of materialism, which, as I have explained, essentially stated—or was popularly and reductively construed as stating—that all there was to the self was what could be seen (with, perhaps, the aid of the scalpel). Of course, my point is not entirely about what actually occurred in Victorian psychology, but about the particular anxieties that the naturalist or “materialist” movement in psychology engendered. The reassurance that Roger Smith notes in the periodical literature in the period (“Physiology” 90)—on which I commented in Chapter One—speaks to the reality of this anxiety. And, as I have explained, it seemed that it was towards a focus on the visible and tangible that Victorian scientific and psychological naturalism was drawing mental science in the 1850s. As I discussed at the outset, those who wished to fit psychology into the framework of the natural sciences resisted—or at least sought to supplement—the introspection on which an earlier psychology was founded, calling this mode of enquiry unscientific; these theorists insisted that psychology must instead adopt a suitably empiricist method, one that focussed on that which could be objectively observed. This is the direction in

246 On the naturalist bent of the new psychology in the period, see Daston 193ff; Jacyna, “Physiology” 121; Roger Smith, “Physiology” 84. In a somewhat similar vein, see Vrettos’s discussion of those, like Walter Cooper Dendy, who sought in the 1850s to incorporate spiritual phenomena into a scientific theory. Vrettos points out, though, that Dendy and others “believed that by revealing the scientific bases behind spiritual mysteries he was actually clarifying and strengthening the role of religion by bringing it into harmony with modern science” (55); as I discuss in Chapter Six, and as Vrettos goes on to argue, others saw hope for scientific proof of the soul in such phenomena as mesmerism (see, for instance, Jung-Stilling and Colquhoun).

247 See Daston 195; and Roger Smith, “Physiological” 79. On the ways such a method was justified by the increasing number of functions ascribed to reflex action, see Daston and Roger Smith, “Physiological” 84-86. I discuss reflex behaviour in Chapter Six. For an example of a psychological work that insisted that mental science ought to focus on the physiological, consider Bucknill and Tuke’s claim that “the growth and renovation of [cerebral] cells are the most ultimate conditions of mind with which we are acquainted. There may be more profound conditions, but they are beyond our ken, and so far as we know, there is no better sanction for their existence than the fantastic alliance of spurious physiology and Kantian metaphysics” (343). Still, though, even Bucknill and Tuke’s naturalism allows for some mystery. They add
which Robert Ferguson sees psychology moving in his review of Brodie, in which he worries that the “astonishing advances of physical science are such as to threaten to absorb all other sciences into its vortex” (90). Certainly Ferguson’s analysis seems an accurate assessment of the work of Herbert Spencer, for instance, who asks in 1855:

[W]hen from objective truths we pass to subjective ones—when from the outer phenomena cognized, we turn to the inner phenomena presented by the act of cognition—when, after analyzing knowledge, we begin to analyze that which knows, we are met by the question—What is here our test of validity? (3)

Spencer’s point is that introspection fails to accord to scientific standards of validity, and in the rest of Principles of Psychology he proceeds to work against the dependence of psychology on that method. Lewes, too, makes clear the sort of psychological investigation he endorses when he claims in 1859—in a passage to which I have already pointed—that once physiologists have rid themselves of such hypotheses as that of a vital principle, “We no longer set up fictions of our imagination in the place of a reverent observation” (2: 294). Instead of assuming phantoms like the immortal soul, Lewes argues, we ought to focus on what we can see and measure.

The point that I made in my first chapter, and the reason why this change in psychology’s focus caused such worry, is that this shift was both justified by—and itself worked to justify—a different ontology of the self. This is also Lorraine Daston’s point, who reminds us that the ontological dualism of an earlier psychology excluded that “[n]ot a thrill of sensation can occur, not a flashing thought or a passing feeling can take place, without changes in the living organism. . . . changes which we are not able to detect, and which we may never be able to demonstrate, but which we are, nevertheless, certain of” (347). I discuss this passage in Chapter Five.
psychology from the materialist reductionism of scientific naturalism (195-96). But as I argue in my fifth chapter, we see a very different conception of the self than that of the Christian dualist in the work of such men as Alexander Bain, who in *The Emotions and the Will* (1859) writes that consciousness is “constantly associated in nature with certain combinations of [the] physical properties” (4): in, for example, the exertion of active force, consciousness is only “the accompaniment of a material organism in active operation” (475), an “occasional and accessory fact” attached to the “organic energy” (475) that “cannot exist for one moment except under the processes of renovation and decay that characterize the animal body” (475). Consciousness, that is to say, merely “repose[s] upon material processes” (476) for Bain. Thomas Laycock, too, writes that “the will exerts a force on organized matter—the brain, in exciting motion, as plainly as the force of matter acts on the nerves in exciting sensation. The effects of these forces on matter constitute the legitimate objects of scientific research” (91). Consciousness is necessarily secondary: he writes that it “consists in a perception of the changes originated in the brain by the forces of matter; and volition in those excited by the will,—a volition being an act of the will” (97). In the theories of psycho-physical parallelism I discussed in Chapter One, moreover, consciousness—stripped of its causal power—equally became no more than a secondary concern for psychological inquiry. And as I argue in Chapter Five, other theorists at mid-century pointed to the vast amount of our bodily life that goes on without consciousness (476). The law’s refusal to look beyond the written word is also

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248 Conversely, as Roger Smith points out, it was “a recurrent argument that the essential attribute of mind, consciousness, was not, by definition, amenable to scientific investigation” (“Physiological” 79). As I have explained, some therefore argued that a scientific psychology should ignore consciousness and focus on the physical.

249 Of course, as I made clear in my introduction, Bain still accorded introspection a central place in his psychology.
neatly paralleled in the externalist stance taken by many psychological writers later in the century,\(^{250}\) a stance that found its apotheosis in the work of such men as Henry Maudsley; what the preceding should make clear, however, is that earlier thinkers had already been moving in that direction.\(^{251}\)

But the similarity of such approaches to the law’s failure to proceed beyond the surface—and the anxiety to which such a failure could lead—is perhaps best expressed in the writing of those who were critical of this “materialist” turn in psychology. Hamilton, for example, writes of sensationalism:

> From the mechanical relations of sense with its object, it was attempted to solve the mysteries of will and intelligence; the philosophy of mind was soon viewed as correlative to the physiology of organization. The moral nature of man was at last formally abolished, in its identification with the physical: the mind became a reflex of matter; thought a secretion of the brain. (*Discussions* 3)

Hamilton here neatly captures the fears of reductionism that lay behind accusations of materialism. Even more powerfully, James Martineau in 1860 complains—in a passage I

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\(^{250}\) On this, see, for instance, Clark 283-85; Daston, Roger Smith, and Reed 99, 144-67. James McCosh complained in 1874 that James Mill “has been the main book, or the only book on mental science, carefully studied by a certain class of London physiologists,—such as Carpenter, Huxley, and Maudesley [sic],—who seldom rise above the contemplation of sensations and sensations reproduced” and who subsequently “imagine that they can explain them all by organic processes” (*Scottish* 380).

\(^{251}\) Daston points out that “John Stuart Mill had concluded that scientific explanation must restrict itself to the enumeration of such unchanging sequences, leaving the problem of possible causal interconnections to metaphysics” (194; see also Reed 140); compare this with the view expressed by J. F. W. Herschel in his *Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy* (1831)—as summarized by Roger Smith—that “science is concerned only with laws; it is not concerned with the investigation of ‘ultimate causes’” (“Physiological” 99). See also Jung-Stilling 18-19, as well as Reed’s discussion of the materialist psychology of Erasmus Darwin (39-59). Nevertheless, Roger Smith offers a useful reminder that “[d]evelopments in physiology of the nervous system in the 1850s and the 1860s did not replace the analysis of mental content, however much physiology directed comment. Indeed, in many respects, the language of psychology continued to be much closer to the language of philosophy than to the language of physiology” (“Physiology” 89).
have already cited—that the physiologist recognizes “no ultimate distinction” between the facts of life and the facts of mind, “and confidently looks for evidence of essential identity” (501), a move that justifies a focus on only matter. He also laments the difficulty one has gaining an audience for the “Mental and Moral Sciences” in the intellectual climate of the 1850s, until the author of such work, catching the infection of our scepticism . . . assimilates them to physical knowledge, and reduces them from their autonomy to a mere province of the “Natural Sciences:” and then . . . when he has construed all that is “mental” in the phenomena into physiology, and all that is “moral” into the chemistry of ideas, we begin to suspect his doctrine of something better than metaphysic moonshine. (500)

Martineau continues to insist on what is lost by such an approach, claiming (in another passage I have already cited) that “if we could turn the exterior of a man’s body into a transparent case, and compel powerful magnifiers to lay bare to us all that happens in his nerves and brain,” what we would see “would not be sensation, thought, affection, but some form of movement or other visible change, which would equally show itself to any being with observing eyesight, however incapable of the corresponding inner emotion.” Such facts, he insists, “are not mental facts, are not moral facts, and have no place in the interior of a science which professes to treat of these, and reduce them to their laws” (505). Others, as I have already shown, made clear that a psychology that focused only on the physical—implying that all there was, was the physical—would come at an even greater cost: faith in God and in the future life. It is such fears that the similarity of Bleak House’s characterization to the “materialist” bent of the law threatens to arouse.
The implications of *Bleak House*’s first-person narration, then, are considerable. After all, if, as I have argued, Dickens’s characterization at times reveals hints of his Christian dualist understanding of the mind—and how could it do otherwise, if Dickens viewed his characters as reflections of the real people outside the text?—these hints appear far too subtle for most readers to have noticed. I stress again, however, that, at least as far as character is concerned, Dickens does not appear in *Bleak House* to have set out to write a psychological novel. We can therefore hardly blame him for not being as explicit about the nature of the mind in *Bleak House* as he was in *David Copperfield*; the former simply is not the same sort of novel as the latter, and there does not seem to be any good reason for thinking that Dickens wanted it to be. If nothing else, Esther’s frequent claims that she is incapable of analytical introspection ought to tell us not to expect the psychological here. But in the 1850s—and in the wake of *David Copperfield*—Dickens’s decision to have Esther narrate a substantial portion of the novel was a problematic one. The introspective mode was too thoroughly marked by its centrality to psychological research for Esther’s narration not to have encouraged readers to seek in *Bleak House*’s people—and especially in the novel’s representation of Esther—another attempt to inculcate in Dickens’s readers a psychological lesson. As I have argued, though, readers who come to this novel expecting psychology are liable to perceive in its pages a position that runs absolutely counter to the one Dickens assumed elsewhere in his writing. Read as taking a stance on mental science, that is, *Bleak House*’s reticence about the self finally becomes indistinguishable from the law’s—or perhaps, the novel seems to suggest, a certain type of science’s—assertion that what we
see is what we get with the self, that metaphysical mysteries are no more than metaphysical fictions.
CHAPTER FOUR:
Filthy Minds: Sanitary Reform, Intramural Burial Grounds, and the Location of the Psychological

If, as I discussed in my last chapter, the treatment of character in *Bleak House* leads Dickens into difficulties—if, that is, his characterization fails to make sufficiently clear his position in regards to materialism—this is only part of the story. For while Dickens largely seems to be thinking less of psychology than of the novel’s mystery plot in his characterization, the novel elsewhere treats the issues that were central to Victorian psychology; the novel’s failure to engage at length with the ontology of the self at the level of character is countered by its consideration of psychological issues in other areas of the text. The novel even obliquely suggests where we might look for the psychological in our introduction to the Court of Chancery: we are told that this is the court “which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard” (6). My suggestion is that the slum, the madman, and the graveyard are emblematical of the locations of the psychological in this novel: in the sanitary debates in which Dickens took such a large part; at the level of character (in a minor way); and in the debates about the resurrection that held such an important place in the psychological literature of mid-century.

In this chapter, I chart the way that *Bleak House’s* intervention in the debates around sanitary reform necessarily also constituted an intervention in psychological debates. After all, the concerns of sanitary reformers had as much to do with the harmful effects of filth on the mind as on the body. In part, then, this chapter reveals some of the broad influences on Victorian mental science, the way psychological discourse was intimately connected with, and itself informed, the discourses of both sanitary reform and
theology. To understand how the Victorians constructed mentality, I argue, we must occasionally look elsewhere than explicit discussions of the mind; one of my goals in this chapter will therefore be to expand the scope of what we deem “psychological” in Victorian culture. I trace in *Bleak House* the model of the relation of mind and body that underlies Dickens’s concern with unwholesome dirt, as well as the way his representations of the need for burial reform in London engage with mid-century psychological debates about the nature of resurrection. Yet I also am concerned here with the contradictions in his handling of these various discourses, the way his pleas for reform obscure and seem to render contradictory the position he assumes concerning the nature of mind. Dickens’s desire to impress on his readers the necessity of ridding London of the material barriers among the poor to health, education, and religion proves threatening—even contradictory—to his desire to assert the primacy of the immaterial part of the self. That is, the attempts Dickens makes to balance his sanitary and his psychological concerns in *Bleak House* offer a prime example of his struggles with the complexities of Victorian psychological theory.

**Sanitary Reform and the Nature of Mind**

At its most basic, the sanitary reform movement—which concerned what one writer on the subject called “one of the greatest social questions of the age” (130)\(^{252}\)—sought to eradicate what its proponents saw as the sources of preventable death, especially among the urban poor. This was a movement well in keeping with Dickens’s broader work for

\(^{252}\) These are the words of Dr. Kein Thaler, who describes the cause of the sanitary reformer thus: “To use the classic words of the Officer of the Health of London, he proves the occurrence of ‘preventable death,’ establishes the efficacy of ‘preventative medicine,’ and appeals to each individual, and to the social aggregate, to apply the resources of the latter to the removal and extinction of the former” (130).
social reform, and his interest in and work for the sanitary cause has long been recognized. He certainly made numerous public proclamations for the movement. He spoke twice—on 6 February 1850 and 10 May 1851—before the Metropolitan Sanitary Association, of which he was a member. He published numerous articles on sanitary reform in *Household Words*, often drawing on the advice of his brother-in-law Henry Austin, and K. J. Fielding and A. W. Brice argue that he also wrote for the *Examiner* a great many articles on the cause that critics have failed to recognize as his. Dickens also mentions approvingly one of the key texts of the sanitary reform movement—Edwin Chadwick’s *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842)—in the concluding paragraphs of *American Notes* (1842), writing that “the system of ventilation, and drainage, and removal of impurities, requires to be thoroughly revised. There is no local legislature in America which may not study Mr. Chadwick’s excellent Report upon the Sanitary Condition of our Labouring Classes, with immense advantage” (252). In the 1850 preface to the Cheap Edition of *Martin*
Chuzzlewit, moreover, Dickens asserts that “[i]n all the tales comprised in this cheap series, and in all my writings, I hope I have taken every possible opportunity of showing the want of sanitary improvements in the neglected dwellings of the poor” (848). In the preface to Oliver Twist of that same year, he further proclaims that

this Reform must precede all other Social Reforms; that it must prepare the way for Education, even for Religion; and that, without it, those classes of the people which increase the fastest, must become so desperate and be made so miserable, as to bear within themselves the certain seeds of ruin to the whole community. (382)\textsuperscript{257}

In short, the need for sweeping changes to the living conditions of the poor seems to have been among the causes with which Dickens was most concerned.

The centrality of the sanitary movement to Bleak House has been acknowledged wisdom in criticism of the novel since at least John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson’s work in the 1950s on Bleak House’s topicality. The novel’s engagement with the sanitary cause is hinted at in Guster’s education at Tooting,\textsuperscript{258} but it is mainly centred around two spaces: the brickmaker’s house—which Esther describes as “one of a cluster of wretched hovels in a brickfield, with pigsties close to the broken windows, and miserable little gardens before the doors, growing nothing but stagnant pools” (98)—and especially the slum Tom-all-Alone’s. The description of the latter both touches explicitly on the concerns of sanitary reform—poor drainage, poor ventilation—and insists that the slum is a taste of hell on earth:

\textsuperscript{257} Dickens echoed this sentiment in his 10 May 1851 speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association (129).

\textsuperscript{258} On Tooting, see Brice and Fielding’s “Dickens and the Tooting Disaster.”
Between his two conductors, Mr. Snagsby passes along the middle of a villainous street, undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud and corrupt water—though the roads are dry elsewhere—and reeking with such smells and sights that he, who has lived in London all his life, can scarce believe his senses. Branching from this street and its heaps of ruins, are other streets and courts so infamous that Mr. Snagsby sickens in body and mind, and feels as if he were going, every moment deeper down, into the infernal gulf. (277)

The officer who guides Snagsby and Bucket on this tour of the underworld points out that the ruins—“offensive to every sense” (279)—are “fever houses,” explaining that “the people ‘have been down by dozens,’ and have been carried out, dead and dying, ‘like sheep with the rot’” (278). Despite all the “mighty speech-making” about Tom (551), nothing has been done to alleviate the problem he constitutes, and “in the hopeful meantime, Tom goes to perdition head foremost in his old determined spirit” (553). Still, he has his revenge:

There is not a drop of Tom’s corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. . . . 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. (553)
Here, as has long been noted, are the novel’s metaphors of interconnection most powerfully manifested, with Tom’s corrupted blood travelling unhindered over the barriers of wealth and station.

That is to say that, as the novel’s descriptions of the brickmaker’s neighbourhood and Tom-all-Alone’s make clear, the foremost danger associated with the unsanitary dwellings of the poor for Dickens’s readers was that these slums would become the breeding grounds of disease, disease that—like the fever which emanates from Carlyle’s Irish widow—would spread to those in the classes above them.259 This was an experience familiar to most Britons—the cholera epidemics of the preceding years had killed thousands, with no regard for class.260 If there remained in the 1850s substantial disagreement about the precise medium by which these diseases were transmitted, it was nevertheless widely accepted that they originated in dirt and filth.261 Butt and Tillotson

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259 As Lauren Goodlad writes, against D. A. Miller: “Tom’s ‘revenge’ is precisely the impossibility of containment: physical, moral, or otherwise” (534). Dickens also made this point in his 1850 speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association, insisting “[w]ith regard to the objectors on the principle of self-government, and that what was done in the next parish was no business of theirs, he should begin to think there was something in it when he found any court or street keeping its disease within its own bounds” (107). This was of course a common means of stressing the importance of sanitary reform. Cf. Byng 214, “On Preventable Death” 134, J. Hill Burton’s “Sanitary Reform” 216; and Sieveking 106-7. In the Household Words article “Your Very Good Health” (1854), a review of Southwood Smith’s Results of Sanitary Improvement (1854), Henry Morley writes of “the preventibleness of what is called zymotic disease—of cholera, for instance” (524), and offers a very similar plea to that made through Tom’s: “The twenty-three thousand Londoners, fewer or more, who in this year, eighteen hundred and fifty-four, are otherwise to die through the want of a complete sanitary system, had better bestir themselves and look after reforms. The difficulty is to know, taking the number as we find it, which of us are to be enlisted in the army of dead men claimed yearly by King Dirt. A large part of the army, certainly, will be made up of those who are already cast out from society. Another large part will be made up of the children. The rest will consist of adult people, more or less influential, who can make their voices heard, if they choose to speak” (526). Williams explicitly connects Jo’s plight in Bleak House to that of Carlyle’s Irish widow (66-67).

260 Bruce Haley describes the waves of disease that struck England in the 1830s and 1840s (6). On smallpox epidemics, see Spiegel 8.

261 As Christopher Hamlin explains, “The concerns of Victorian sanitarians about rotting matter were founded in contemporary medical theories which viewed diseases as products of environmental filth (by which they usually meant the phenomenon of decomposition)” (382). There were a variety of different—and contending—models of how such filth caused disease (and how disease spread). For a discussion of these, see Haley 3-12; Hamlin; Logan 150-51; Morgentaler 93-95; Otis 8-36; Trotter 70-71; and Williams 1-42. Logan argues that, in his Report, Chadwick “is describing epidemic disorders in a generic sense . . .
point out that the stagnant channel in Tom-all-Alone’s and the stagnant pools by the brickmaker’s hovel would both have been clearly identifiable illustrations of the “generating elements of typhus” (190), and in the Household Words article “Epidemics” (1856), Eliza Lynn (later Linton) explicitly links disease to “open drains and uncleansed ditches” (397), along with “[o]ver-crowding, filth, exhalations from foul sewers, rivers, ditches, canals, &c., putrescent animal or vegetable matter, impure drinking-water, unwholesome meat, decayed vegetables, unsound grain” (398), of all of which “foul air ranks as chief” (398).

Sanitary reform, then, operated on the principle that by ridding these areas of filth and providing their occupants with clean air and pure water, the mortality of such diseases could be substantially reduced. as Dickens put it in a 26 October 1854 letter to Angela Burdett Coutts, the poor would never escape their high rates of mortality “until they have cheap pure water in unlimited quantity, wholesome air, constraint upon little landlords . . . to keep their property decent under the heaviest

and so defining, in essence, a single disorder requiring a single preventative remedy” (146). Certainly some insisted that the causes were mysterious: George Troup, for example, writes in 1849 that to the medical profession “belongs the duty of facing mysterious dangers—unseen miasmatic influences—incorporate forms of death, realizing the horrible fables of dragons, in olden time, whose breath was poison, with which their assailants perished” (119). See also “Cholera Gossip” 706. But most adhered, to some degree, to the pythogenic theory of disease, that disease came from filth. The British Quarterly Review in 1849 insists that “[w]herever the town in particularly ill-drained, ill ventilated, and densely peopled, there the connexion between dirt and disease becomes manifest” (“Sanitary Reform” 45); Thaler contends that “[f]he connexion of fever with bad drainage and ventilation is most marked. . . . And of both fever and [erysipelas] we may confidently affirm that there is little reason to suppose that they have any causes except decomposition and contagion, or that they ever occur except either as produced by the former or propagated by the latter agency” (133); the author of “The Cholera” (1848) confidently asserts that “[f]ilth and foul air are now known to be the temptations [cholera] scents when on the wing” (592). See also “Cholera Gossip” 708, Collier 107, and Guy 242.

Thaler similarly describes how “the want of natural or the neglect of artificial drainage results in a more or less marshy, quaggy condition of a large extent of ground, from which emanates a deadly poison capable of producing ague in a large number of those exposed to it” (130). He also remarks upon the over-crowded population of urban spaces, which limits the amount of air available and creates a “closeness of contact most favourable to the propagation of all infectious disorders” (131); the ineffective drainage endemic to large towns “causes whole districts of London, reeking with the stinks of organic decomposition, to recover and exceed the endemic fatality they possessed before the incidents of civilization had dispelled their emanations of ague-poison” (131).

The author of “Cholera Gossip,” for instance, writes of “the preventative properties of fresh air, good drainage, and pure water” (708).
penalties, efficient drainage, and such alterations in building Acts as shall preserve open spaces in the closest regions” (7: 443). Motivating many in their efforts to make such changes, to be sure, was the belief that if the mortality rates of the poor declined, so too would those of the rich.

The position that dirt was the primary cause of disease did not go uncontested (or at least uncomplicated). Others perceived the disease and death that haunted England as instances of divine judgement, particularly in response to the perceived immorality of the working classes (Williams 12). George Troup (1849) feeds into the notion that immorality lay behind the epidemics ravaging England when he lists the causes of the cholera to be “bad sanatory [sic] arrangements, personal intemperance, or debauched habits, personal exposure, or carelessness to cold, hunger, insufficient clothing, irregular diet, a regularly objectionable diet, or great mental anxiety—operating, perhaps, only through the imagination” (118). F. D. Maurice, in turn, offers a slight variation on this theme when he writes in 1855 of “the moral evils—the sloth, the indifference, the money-getting spirit” (41)—among the middle classes which produce so much sickness and disease among the poor. Nor were these the musings of isolated individuals. That the notion that disease was an instance of divine justice was taken seriously is suggested in the 1831 Scottish Act of Parliament, described by A. Susan Williams, which acknowledged the divine origins of cholera (12). British Parliament, too, voted numerous Fast Days as steps against the disease.

264 For valuable discussions of the tendency to blame disease on Providence, see Mort 24-26 and Williams 11-13. For contemporary examples of such thinking, see “Cholera Gossip” 711 and Guy, “Work and Wages” 529-30. Henson points out that Dickens resisted such beliefs (121).

265 See Frank Mort, who traces the ways “moral disciplining” (15) was set up as a solution to the immorality among the poor that was perceived as a source of disease. On moral policing in sanitary reform, see also Morris 684 and Trotter 67-75.

266 She explains, however, that this was “against the wishes of the Ministers” (12).
The construction of disease as divine judgement was a position Dickens opposed. Lynn, writing in *Household Words* about one such Fast Day, insists:

> We find no fault with Fast Days as spiritual exercises: we merely object to their being placed in the room of deeds; and protest against the impious idea that because a man abstains from meats, and goes to church twice on a certain week-day, he should therefore be saved all further trouble about his open drains and uncleanse d ditches. (397)

Against the notion that “disease is a sign of Divine wrath,” she argues for the position, justified by “all science and all fact,” that disease is “the consequence of certain fixed physical laws” (398). Dickens, as editor of *Household Words*, clearly approved.

Yet if Dickens set himself and his journal against the idea that the causes of disease could be a product of God’s wrath, he was in accord with a body of sanitary writing that figured the consequences of such degraded slums as Tom-all-Alone’s as both physical and moral—a state of affairs modelled in the way Tom sickens Snagsby in body and mind. We find the same suggestion in *Dombey and Son*:

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267 Compare this with Frederick Knight Hunt’s assertion in the *Household Words* article “The Registrar-General on ‘Life’ in London” (1850), that disease strikes those who “outrage the natural laws by which alone health and life can be preserved” (333); the mortality in the metropolis is “the penalty now being, day by day, inflicted upon sinners against sanitary laws in the English metropolis” (333).

268 Haley, for example, charts the way the broad term “health” was applied by the Victorians to the physical, mental, and spiritual (3-22). He asserts that, for the Victorians, “health [was] a state of functional and structural wholeness” (20), and he traces the conflation of the physical and mental effects of fever (32). Cf. Clark 274; Hotz 25; Rosenberg 186; Smith, “Physiology” 81; Vrettos 22-23, and Williams 77-101; as well as Jacyna’s discussion of moral and physicalist theories of insanity (“Somatic” 233ff). Logan charts the way Chadwick articulates “a theory of moral contagion” in which he argues that “the same unhealthy environment that leads to disease also destroys social morality” (150). Williams, moreover, describes how moral degradation was often “described in the terms of a disease” (81). William Strange, for example, writes in 1845 that “Vice, like pestilence, propagates itself by contagion” (qtd. in Trotter 72). As Trevor Blount points out, furthermore, both Dickens and George Walker—whose books Dickens owned—“believed that the moral harm done to the nation by [London’s] abominable graveyards far outweighed even the specific physical dangers and discomforts” (376). Blount also discusses Dickens’s awareness of “the inherent danger of a moral contamination from physical decay” (377). On moral contagion in Dickens, see Arac 129-32 and Williams 82-85. Vrettos treats a different form of “moral contagion,” a sort of large-
Those who study the physical sciences, and bring them to bear upon the health of Man, tell us that if the noxious particles that rise from vitiated air, were palpable to the sight, we should see them lowering in a dense black cloud above such haunts, and rolling slowly on to corrupt the better portions of a town. But if the moral pestilence that rises with them, and, in the eternal laws of outraged Nature, is inseparable from them, could be made discernible too, how terrible the revelation! Then should we see depravity, impiety, drunkenness, theft, murder, and a long train of nameless sins against the natural affections and repulsions of mankind, overhanging the devoted spots, and creeping on, to blight the innocent and spread contagion among the pure. . . . Then should we stand appalled to know, that where we generate disease to strike our children down and entail itself on unborn generations, there also we breed, by the same certain process, infancy that knows no innocence, youth without modesty or shame, maturity that is mature in nothing but in suffering and guilt, scale process of imitation that would turn discrete individuals into “the crowd” (84-85). On the moral blight of Tom-all-Alone’s, meanwhile, see Goodlad 534, Stoehr 143, and Williams 88-89.

Incidentally, Ruskin’s discussion of Bleak House in “Fiction—Fair and Foul” (1880) also discusses the moral corruption that stems from industrial pollution. In his case, he ponders what effects the degeneration of Croxted Lane—an idyllic place in his youth, a mess of pollution at the time he writes—would have on children growing up in the 1880s. He describes the power of such an environment over those who live in the city “for evil; the incapacity of their own minds to refuse the pollution, and of their own wills to oppose the weight, brings every law of healthy existence into question with them, and every alleged method of help and hope into doubt” (944). Ruskin’s major preoccupation in this piece, of course, is the focus of contemporary fiction on “moral disease” and “monstrous character” (943). He dubs this the literature of the Prison-house “because the thwarted habits of body and mind, which are the punishment of reckless crowding in cities, become, in the issue of that punishment, frightful subjects of exclusive interest to themselves; and the art of fiction in which they finally delight is only the more studied arrangement and illustration, by coloured firelights, of the daily bulletins of their own wretchedness, in the prison calendar, the police news, and the hospital report” (948). Ruskin concedes, however, that “[t]here is some excuse, indeed, for the pathologic labour of the modern novelist in the fact that he cannot easily, in a city population, find a healthy mind to vivisect” (950).
blasted old age that is a scandal on the form we bear. Unnatural humanity!

(619-20)

Noxious particles of filth lie behind the sinfulness bred in the poorer neighbourhoods as surely as they cause the diseases that arise there, and these moral contagions infect—or at least affect—the rich as inevitably as physical contagions do. Dickens expressed this same belief in the moral effects of unsanitary conditions in his 10 May 1851 speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association, in which he insisted that “no one can estimate the amount of mischief which is grown in dirt; that no one can say, here it stops, or there it stops, either in its physical or moral results, when both begin in the cradle and are not at rest in the obscene grave” (128).

One strain of such thought about the moral effects of filth can be seen in Bleak House’s brickmaker, who justifies his gin-drinking by pointing to the dirty water his family would otherwise consume; church, meanwhile, is simply too genteel for one in his state (99). This position differs little from that taken by Chadwick, who writes, for example, that dirty houses “form a strong barrier against personal cleanliness and the use of decent clothes” (196); for Chadwick the habits of the poor become “of a piece” with their dwellings (127), just as the dye r’s hand in Dickens’s preface to Bleak House becomes “subdued / To what it works in” (3). That is to say that Chadwick’s assertions

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269 Sidney Godolphin Osborne, in offering solutions to the problem of this “immortal sewerage,” includes among his suggestions the construction of “[p]reaching-houses of the plainest possible construction, such as the ragged and filthy can enter without rebuke from the very walls, much less from the crowded presence of beings they regard as altogether of another order from themselves” (15). On the hesitancy of the poor to go to church, see also Walder 168-69. On bad sanitation as a source of immorality, see Fasick 140; Goodlad 530; Hamlin 399, 403; Hotz; Morgentaler 95; Morris 684; Mort 24-29; and Williams 87-89. See also Guy, “Work and Wages” and Morley’s Household Words article “Letter from a Highly-Respectable Old Lady” (1850).
about sanitation sound very much like Dickens’s treatment of Chancery, which also taints all it touches.\textsuperscript{270} Chancery even seems to cause its own moral contagion:

Shirking and sharking, in all their many varieties, have been sown broadcast by the ill-fated cause; and even those who have contemplated its history from the outermost circle of such evil, have been insensibly tempted into a loose way of letting bad things alone to take their own bad course, and a loose belief that if the world go wrong, it was, in some off-hand manner, never meant to go right. (9)

Chancery, in other words, sounds little different from \textit{Dombey and Son}'s filthy haunts, sending up the seeds of its own pestilence. Countless other writers, too, made similar claims about the moral effects of bad sanitation, varying only in the severity of the consequences they imagined: Hector Gavin insists that the filth of their dwellings produces “[a]n infinite extent of demoralization” in the poor, leading the “dwellers in such scenes” to “become regardless of the feelings and happiness of others, and intensely sensual and selfish” (39-40); Maurice writes that these homes are “dark dens where there has been every temptation to foulness and corruption” (40). Dickens himself, moreover, worried in his 10 May 1851 speech that the presence of the dead relations of the poor in their small dwellings would tend to cause even death to lose its sanctity for them (129).\textsuperscript{271}

Such a process of moral degradation certainly seems inevitable in \textit{Bleak House}: Esther,

\textsuperscript{270} Axton, too, briefly discusses the “moral pestilence” caused by Chancery (546), as do Fielding and Brice (134) and Trotter (109).
\textsuperscript{271} Mary Elizabeth Hotz finds in Chadwick similar claims that it is “the extended spectacle, the excessive time and attention spent on the dead, the increasing familiarity with death and commensurate mental anguish among the survivors that threaten the labouring classes, in the eyes of the middle classes, not the physical effects of effluvia. Befriending death effaces respect and demoralizes character” (26-27).
for instance, notes the untidy habits of the brickmakers, but remarks, “I doubted if the best of us could have been tidy in such a place” (98).

What I am pointing to here, more broadly, is the way so many writers on sanitary reform saw the slums as sources of vice and crime, precisely because of the filth to be found therein. F. Byng writes in 1852 that “unless some better habitations are provided for the masses of our working population than exist in many districts, vice and immorality will be perpetuated in defiance of all efforts to counteract them” (210); already from this class, Byng insists, come the criminals and prostitutes who disgrace the streets of London (214). J. Hill Burton similarly asserts in 1850 that “the neglected refuse of civilisation has the faculty of nourishing social savages among mankind, just as it provides the favourite haunts of the vermin which frequent sewers and dung heaps” (216); he explains that “the unclean districts, which are the great centres of disease, are at the same time the great nurseries and fortresses of crime. The mind suffers in these cases with the body” (217). In such foul dens, Dickens insisted in his 10 May 1851 speech, even the Word of God can find no purchase: “Education and Religion can do nothing where they are most needed, until the way is paved for their ministration by Cleanliness and Decency” (129). 

Little wonder, then, that Dickens has Bucket assume a connection between filth and lawlessness, remarking to Jo of his living in Tom-all-Alone’s, “That’s a nice innocent place to live in, ain’t it?” (239).

Central to my argument is the frequent tendency in such writing to go even further, to insist on the ability of filth to cause real and substantial changes to the mental

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272 In a resolution moved before the Metropolitan Sanitary Association on 6 February 1850—a resolution Dickens seconded—John Cumming declared that the great sacrifice of life in London to preventable disease “is accompanied by an amount of physical degradation and mental depravity, which act as effective barriers to the inculcation either of social obligations or of Christian virtues” (Fielding 105). On this point, see Logan 159.
principle. This is the drift of the claims made by Sidney Godolphin Osborne, who in his article “Immortal Sewerage” (1853) writes that “[t]here are moral miasmas just as there are physical. The mind—the soul of man—can be just as polluted as to its springs of healthy life by external, removable causes, as can the human physical constitution;—there is a mental typhus” (7). The author of “Sanitary Reform” (1849) also moves in this direction: he begins with the simple assertion that “health and comfort, and, in some considerable degree, morality, are materially affected by the supply of air and water, and by the drainage, or means provided for the removal of refuse matter” (43). Bad sanitation, he goes on to claim, leads to “great debility of body and depression of spirits, producing an indisposition to work and a carelessness about consequences” (44); “among the moral evils of this state of disease,” he adds, “is the extent to which it destroys sympathy between the people” (46). Richard Oliver even suggests in the Household Words article “The Treatment of the Insane” (1851) that “poverty and its attendant evils (including defective education, and the unrestrained sway of appetites and passions, which tend to produce an exhausted state of the organic energies, whilst both means and discretion are wanting to check their ruinous career) are the most fertile sources of insanity” (575). It seems a similar message that we encounter in Esther’s description of her first trip through the London streets, in which she recalls that “[w]e slowly drove through the dirtiest and darkest streets that ever were seen in the world (I thought), and in such a distracting state of confusion that I wondered how the people kept their senses” (29). The anxiety we find so often in the literature of sanitary reform is that many did not.

In part these claims about the moral and mental effects of filth were the natural extension of the generally accepted interrelation of mind and body, which I have already

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273 See also the review of Lectures to Ladies on Practical Subjects in the Edinburgh Review (1856), 151.
discussed at length.\textsuperscript{274} Certainly, as I explained in my first chapter, it was commonly held that mind and body exercised mutual influence upon one another: Robert Ferguson, for example, writes that “[e]very sound physiologist must admit that the ‘commercium’ of soul and body is so intimate, that probably no change can take place in the latter which is not felt in the former; also that no mental state exists without influencing the corporeal tissues” (89); Scrooge’s assertion in \textit{A Christmas Carol} (1843) that “there is more of gravy than of grave” (18) about Marley amounts to much the same thing.\textsuperscript{275} As we have already seen, many sanitary texts made the mutuality of this relationship explicit. The drift in this direction of Morley’s \textit{Household Words} article “Sick Body, Sick Brain” (1854) is apparent from its title. Drawing an explicit parallel with the current state of England under the cholera, Morley here describes how “in the good old times men’s bodies were wasted, and how there was produced out of such wasting a weakening and wasting of their minds” (148); he insists, therefore, that “[w]e cannot study rightly sickness of the mind without bringing sickness of the body into question” (148).\textsuperscript{276} George Walker asserts in his \textit{Burial-Ground Incendiaryism} (1846) that “the mental and moral qualities of a people materially depend on their physical organization,—that causes, injuriously affecting the latter, must surely and inevitably blunt the

\textsuperscript{274} Note, then, that Southwood Smith, one of the most prominent sanitary reformers at mid-century, writes in his \textit{Philosophy of Health} (1835): “The mind is dependent on the body: hence an acquaintance with the physiology of the body should precede the study of the physiology of the mind” (xi).

\textsuperscript{275} See also Brodie, who writes that “[i]t is the business of medical practitioners to study, not only the influence of the mind on the body, but also that of the body on the mind; and in so doing they have the opportunity of learning more than others to trace moral effects to physical causes” (216). Brodie goes on to assert that such knowledge of the connection between mind and body is not peculiar to medical practitioners, however: “I stated on a former occasion that Mr. Chadwick had already exposed the operation of living in an unwholesome atmosphere as inducing the habit of gin-drinking with all the frightful moral consequences which follow in its train” (217-18).

\textsuperscript{276} More precisely, Morley argues that the “moral pestilences” of a previous age—cases of insanity caused by popular superstitions and diseased fancies—“acted upon brains that had first been weakened by the physical plagues to which bodies were subject” (148); he explains that “[w]hen bodies are ill-housed of ill-nourished, or by late sickness or other cause depressed . . . minds are apt to receive morbid impressions” (151).
susceptibilities and impair the energies of the former” (3). And Edward H. Sieveking, discussing in 1855 the knowledge necessary for those women who sought to attend to the poor, also asserts this interrelation:

It appears to me, that the knowledge required is essentially of a twofold character—physical and moral. In practice this duality must prove a unity, otherwise our teaching will not bring proper fruit; but as an ill-regulated mind may lead a healthy body astray, so the immaterial principle is but too often confined and cramped by the iron bonds with which it is held down by a diseased tenement. (103-4)

One cannot treat either body or mind in isolation; according to Sieveking, sanitary reformers must thus attend to the health of both the body and the immaterial principle if they hope to ward off the dangerous effects of filth. That is to say that the question of the relation between body and mind—that paramount question in Victorian psychology, the very question Dickens obscures in Bleak House’s treatment of character—was central to the issue of sanitary reform. Of course, that mental science would include in its concerns such issues as sanitary reform (and vice versa) should not surprise us, considering the generalist intellectual culture of Victorian Britain and the fact that, as Roger Smith notes, in a passage I have already cited, what we are witnessing in the period is “a shaping of an area of discourse, known as psychology” (“Physiology” 82).277

Sieveking makes the connection between sanitary reform and psychology explicit in further discussing the preparation necessary for those who wish to minister to the poor, insisting that the physiological knowledge that is a necessary part of such preparation

277 In other words, the rigid disciplinary boundaries that circumscribe psychology now were not present in the 1850s. On this point, see Rylance, Victorian 1, 7, 28; and Roger Smith, “Physiology” 82-83.
will help to elucidate much that is otherwise enigmatical with regard to the relation of mind and body; it will show that there is a correlation, on the one hand,—of temperance, equable temper, and other moral virtues and happiness, with an obedience to those physical laws of our Creator, which are not laid down in his revealed Word; it will exhibit a similar correlation; on the other,—of intemperance, vice, and misery, with a neglect of those Divine ordinances. (106)

Sieveking thus figures the relationship between these two bodies of knowledge as mutually illuminating: sanitary reform, in his construction, both profits from and contributes to psychological knowledge. Hence the significance of sanitary discourse to Dickens’s psychological project in *Bleak House*. Mid-century theorists saw in filth a means by which to gain new insights into the mysterious relationship between mind and matter.

The point I have been at pains to stress throughout this project is that the precise terms of this relationship could, obviously, have far-reaching consequences for how Victorians understood—and were able to experience—the self. It is in this light that I would like to consider, through *Bleak House*, the implications of the scenario outlined by Dickens in his 10 May 1851 speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association:

> What avails it to send a Missionary to me, a miserable man or woman living in a foetid Court where every sense bestowed upon me for my delight becomes a torment, and every minute of my life is new mire added to the heap under which I lie degraded? To what natural feeling within me is he to address himself? What ancient chord within me can he hope to
touch? Is it my remembrance of my children? Is it a remembrance of
distortion and decay, scrofula and fever? Would he address himself to my
hopes of immortality? I am so surrounded by material filth that my Soul
can not rise to the contemplation of an immaterial existence! (129)²⁷⁸

What, I want to ask, is the effect upon the soul of Bleak House’s filth? More precisely,
how does Bleak House’s anxiety about dirt inflect its treatment of the soul at a Christian
psychology’s centre?

The novel’s investigation of the psychological implications of the sanitary
movement—and the anxiety I would suggest is gestured at in the final lines of the
passage I have just cited—are primarily located in Jo, who “sums up his mental condition
. . . by replying that he ‘don’t know nothink’” (197). Like the figure Dickens
ventriloquizes in the speech above, Jo is deprived of education and ignorant of religion,
unable to say before the inquest “what’ll be done to him arter he’s dead if he tells a lie,”
although he is aware that “it’ll be something wery bad to punish him, and serve him
right” (134). Jo’s distance from God is reflected in his view of the cross on the summit of
St. Paul’s, for him “the crowning confusion of the great, confused city; so golden, so high
up, so far out of his reach” (243-44). No wonder, then, that in the law’s eyes Jo is an
instance of “terrible depravity” (134). Even the novel does not know quite what to do
with him, describing him in his first encounter with Woodcourt as being “like a growth of
fungus or any unwholesome excrescence produced there in neglect and impurity”
(556).²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ See also Fasick 135.
²⁷⁹ On the mid-Victorian tendency to describe the poor as being spontaneously generated from filth, like
maggots, vermin, or miasma, see Williams 91-93. She points out that the frequent comparisons of the poor
to animals were another way for the middle class to deny or repress their connection with the working class.
It is in such gestures as this, I contend, that the conundrum in which the novel finds itself with Jo is made most clearly visible. For in order to make its sanitary point, the novel must insist on Jo’s utter depravity, on his being cast beyond the pale by the neglect society has shown him. He is, the narrator feels compelled to insist, “not of the same order of things, not of the same place in creation,” as the people around him (564). The novel’s frequent comparison of him to the beasts, too, derives from precisely this desire to strengthen its sanitary argument. The novel places him beside a drover’s dog, for example, and compares the pleasure each derives from a bit of music on the street: they listen “probably with much the same amount of animal satisfaction; likewise, as to awakened association, aspiration or regret, melancholy or joyful reference to things beyond the senses, they are probably upon a par. But, otherwise, how far above the human listener is the brute!” (199).280 Or, to get more directly at the problem I wish to isolate here, consider the novel’s later suggestion that Jo is (96). Finally, she notes the way Dickens both demands sympathy for Jo and describes him as being of a race apart (96-97).

280 The significance of the novel’s assertion that Jo is lower than the beasts becomes clear when we recall that faculty psychology insisted on a rigid separation between humankind and the animal kingdom. As Rylance explains, humankind was believed to be more or less above the “heavy determinations of nature” and possessed of “special, distinctive capacities” (“Disturbing” 244; see also Victorian 26-27). See, for example, Dugald Stewart 18-19. Jacyna traces the way William Carpenter felt the necessity to insist that “the existence of a highly-developed cerebrum in human beings was the anatomical evidence of the sovereignty of an immaterial power in man which overruled the mechanical causes of action shared with lower organisms” (“Physiology” 113). Ferguson, meanwhile, quotes Sydney Smith’s argument that “there is a very strong anthropical party who view all eulogiums on the brute creation with a very considerable degree of suspicion, and look on every compliment which is paid to the ape as high treason to the dignity of man. . . . I confess I feel myself so much at my ease about the superiority of mankind—I have such a marked and decided contempt for the understanding of every baboon I have ever seen—I feel so sure that the blue ape without a tail will never rival us in poetry, painting, and music, that I see no reason whatever that justice may not be done to the few fragments of soul and tatters of understanding which they may really possess. . . . What have the shadow and mockery of faculties given to beasts to do with the immortality of the soul? . . . As facts are fairly stated, and boldly brought forward, the more all investigation goes to establish the ancient opinion of man, before it was confirmed by revealed religion, that brutes are of this world only; that man is imprisoned here only for a season to take a better or a worse hereafter as he deserves it” (116-17). William Henry Smith, in his review of Brodie, denies the higher faculties to animals by insisting that they “have no instrument or organ; they can only be described as the energies of the soul itself, exercised on the materials or in the organs of sense, of vision, of memory.”
Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets, only in soul a heathen. Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him: native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish. (564)

It is precisely Jo’s soul here that is both cast down and made so very different from those of Bleak House’s readers. That is to say that what is significant about the novel’s treatment of Jo is how hard the text works to make “strange” his “whole material and immaterial life” (198), to set him apart from the other, wealthier residents of London.

Yet for all the efforts it makes to relegate Jo to the status of a beast or a bit of fungus, Bleak House can never quite repress the knowledge that, as a character, Jo represents—as Chadband grandiloquently states—“a human boy” (242). Esther’s “iron barrier” between the classes cannot keep out the novel’s understanding that, insofar as Bleak House gestures at a reality outside the text, Jo is like Dickens’s readers at some fundamental level. 281 It is this anxiety, I would suggest, that lies behind the novel’s simultaneous (and ultimately confusing) efforts to undo the work it has done in setting Jo amongst the beasts; it is this anxiety, again, that fuels the narrator’s claims to Jo, “thou art not quite in outer darkness. There is something like a distant ray of light in thy muttered reason for this,” that Nemo was “very good to me” (138). The same could be said of the narrator’s assertion:

(409)—“the higher mental attributes of man are not such as we can . . . represent to ourselves as being exercised directly through a material organ” (409).

281 In this context, consider Osborne’s description of how the newborn baby of the poor would be indistinguishable from that of the higher classes, both possessed of the same “intellectual power in the germ,” both possessed of immortal souls, “yet here is one, like some larva of a rag and filth-nourished ephemeral, whilst the other has all the care and value of intelligence, immortality” (12); he writes, too, of the “appalling difficulty” (14) of leading such people as Jo to religion.
Though it may be, Jo, that there is a history so interesting and affecting even to minds as near the brutes as thine, recording deeds done on this earth for common men, that if the Chadbands, removing their own persons from the light, would but show it thee in simple reverence, would but leave it unimproved, would but regard it as being eloquent enough without their modest aid—it might hold thee awake, and thou might learn from it yet! (323)

For the novel’s initial figuration of Jo’s utter depravity—a position from which the text finally tries to retreat—threatens to call into question the immortal part on which Dickens’s psychology hinges. What other implications can we draw from the novel’s insistence that Jo’s death is “the strangest thing of all” (198)? To put it another way, the novel’s sanitary message, concentrated in Jo, seems in danger of making the immortal and the immaterial both dependent on and secondary to the material. What sort of immaterial and immortal nature is it that can be sunk so low—even, it seems, entirely

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282 Thomas M. Linehan argues that, through Jo, Dickens reveals “that a major consequence of grinding physical poverty is a kind of moral and psychological poverty from which one can never move on” (144). While Fasick concedes some hints of Jo’s moral nature in the text, she argues that he “is almost entirely flesh” (139). Citing the work of John R. Reed, she sees the naturalism of his description as working to deny Jo the possibility of free will (139-40), although she argues that Esther’s narrative redefines Jo, for her narrative assumes free will and the Providential ordering of the world. Fasick furthermore traces a shift in the novel’s treatment of Jo from a “concern with material social conditions to spiritual and personal ones, a shift from the visible to the invisible that deflects the book’s initial impulse toward large-scale social criticism” (143). I am less sure that the novel succeeds in making such a shift. Jo is also, for Fasick, finally redeemed, although he is ultimately only granted subjectivity “in relation to the middle classes” (144). Jahn, too, notes Jo’s conversion, arguing that it “alludes to Christianity as the redeeming power of community, the unique spirituality of mankind” (375). Garrett Stewart, on the other hand, sees Jo as dying still ignorant of God and of Heaven (468), a position to which I am more sympathetic. Brice and Fielding, too, argue that “saying the Lord’s Prayer over a boy shown dying because of man’s neglect is as useless to him in his last extremity as Snagsby’s half-crowns” (135), although this can hardly have been Dickens’s point. Walder argues that “[i]f there is sentimentality in Jo’s death, it is not of Dickens’s making: turning to his audience, turning upon his audience, he deflates any false consolatory hopes the preceding lines may have engendered” (159). Welsh, meanwhile, merely ascribes to Jo “the minimal humanity that attaches to us all,” although he sees Jo as finally accommodated “to a common faith” (Dickens 105).
eliminated—by mere dirt? How can Dickens’s readers have faith in a future life if it is thrown into doubt by something so insignificant?283

Peering into the Grave: The Corpse and the Soul in Bleak House

Perhaps the central site at which Bleak House engages with contemporary psychology, however, is not in Jo, but in its focus on the grave. As I mentioned above, Ruskin famously complained about the staggering number of deaths in the novel, linking this preoccupation with the grave to the mental corruption of city life. He counts nine deaths, and complains that these are “finished in their threatenings and sufferings, with as much enjoyment as can be contrived in the anticipation, and as much pathology as can be concentrated in the description” (945).284 Even worse for Ruskin is that all these deaths, but one, are of inoffensive, or at least in the world’s estimate respectable persons; and that they are all grotesquely either violent or miserable, purporting thus to illustrate the modern theology that

283 It might be worth recalling here part of Henry Maudsley’s argument—which I outlined in my first chapter—about the moral lessons of materialism. According to Maudsley, belief in God and immortality long prevented men from taking measures to improve sanitation: “Is there a person of sincere understanding who, uttering [a] prayer [to accept plague as punishment for our sins], now believes it in his heart to be the successful way to stay a fever, plague, or pestilence? He knows well that, if it is to be answered, he must clean away dirt, purify drains, disinfect houses, and put in force those other sanitary measures which experience has proved to be efficacious, and that the aid vouchsafed to the prayer will only be given when these are by themselves successful. Had men gone on believing, as they once believed, that prayer would stay disease, they would never have learned and adopted sanitary measures, any more than the savage of Africa who prays to his fetish to cure disease even now. To get rid of the notion of supernatural interposition was the essential condition of true knowledge and self-help in that matter” (“Materialism” 259). If Maudsley here sounds much like the articles on sanitation in Household Words, the larger argument of which this excerpt is a part was not one with which Dickens could agree. But might Bleak House’s similar focus on filth threaten to suggest—at least to a broad readership who were more swayed by popular anxieties about materialism than what physical theorists actually wrote—some of the same conclusions Maudsley reaches?

284 Robert Lougy, too, calls Bleak House “one of the most death-haunted novels in British literature” (479). Fielding and Brice make much the same point (136-37), as does Welsh (Dickens 12-13). Welsh connects this focus on death in Bleak House with the deaths of Dickens’s father and his daughter Dora Annie in the years immediately preceding the novel. In a point closer to my own, Schor, also noting the vast amount of death in the text, writes that “[t]he bodies pile up, or rather, seem to decompose before us, as if hurrying to return to their elements” (118).
the appointed destiny of a large average of our population is to die like rats in a drain, either by trap or poison. (946)

My suggestion, however, is that the novel’s body count is secondary to its fixation on the status of the body after death. The smell and taste of the ancient Dedlocks in the church at Chesney Wold, the deadly stains around Nemo’s grave, the general flavour of burnt chops, the greasy black fat, and the nauseous yellow liquor that are the products of Krook’s combustion: Bleak House is a novel relentlessly peering into the grave. Even when not focussing on the most repulsive details of death, the novel is constantly reminding us of what will happen to our bodies when we die: it calls the dust that comes in at Tulkinghorn’s windows “the universal article into which his papers and himself, and all his clients, and all things of earth, animate and inanimate, are resolving” (273); Mrs. Bagnet’s wedding ring, meanwhile, is so snug that it “will never come off again until it shall mingle with Mrs. Bagnet’s dust” (342). Just as the miasmatic products of the corpse could not be contained in London’s overflowing graveyards at mid-century, in Bleak House the decomposition of bodies spreads even to parts of the text that do not take death as their focus. The sliminess of putrefaction finds its way to the cutlery at the dining-house at which Jobling, Guppy, and Smallweed eat, where “the soiled knives and tablecloths seem to break out spontaneously into eruptions of grease and blotches of beer” (247), while the third-person narrator reaches for the grave as a metaphor in order to describe Lady Dedlock’s momentary “dead condition” in her conversation with Guppy, which passes away like “the features of those long-preserved dead bodies sometimes opened up in tombs, which, struck by the air like lightning, vanish in a breath” (362).

285 Hack also sees Krook’s combustion as an accelerated version of putrefaction (145).
In large part, Dickens’s focus on the grave in this novel is tied in with the novel’s sanitary plot, for the threat to health of London’s grossly overcrowded intramural graveyards was one of the central concerns of mid-century reformers.\textsuperscript{286} Certainly the revolting details of death in \textit{Bleak House} owe something to the literature of burial reform; it was such details, in any case, that struck Dickens upon reading this literature, as is suggested in his 27 February 1850 letter to Austin, thanking him for the General Board of Health’s \textit{Report on a General Scheme for Extra-mural Sepulture}: “Many thanks for the report, which is extraordinarily interesting. I began to read it last night, in bed—and dreamed of putrefaction generally” (6: 47).\textsuperscript{287} The impact this book had on Dickens is further evident in his 10 May 1851 speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association, in which he called the \textit{Report} “one of the most remarkable social documents ever issued under any Government, and an honour to the country and the time” (131).

\textsuperscript{286} Southwood Smith identifies putrefying animal matter as one of the sources of fever (\textit{Treatise on Fever} 349), and Walker writes of the “serious injury done to the population of our large towns by our present system of internal sepulture” (\textit{Second} 6), decrying the “indecent, immoral, and unchristian practices” (\textit{Second} 13), the “moral and physical evils,” that the limited space in these graveyards encourage. In the \textit{Punch} piece “Hamlet in the London Churchyard” (1849), Hamlet proclaims that “HEAVISIDES died, HEAVISIDES was buried, HEAVISIDES became gas, the gas is sulphuretted hydrogen; of sulphuretted hydrogen is bred typhus” (145). On this point (the sanitary concern with burial), and on the horrifying condition of London’s graveyards in the 1840s, see Blount 370; Fielding and Brice 124; Hotz; Richardson, “Why” 117; and Trotter 104-5. Hotz writes that “[i]n the metropolis alone, 52,000 bodies were added annually to the 203 acres available for burial” (22); the author of “Sanitary Reform (1849) offers slightly lower, although still deeply troubling, numbers: “The annual interments in the metropolis, exclusive of those in vaults or new cemeteries, are about 44,000. The bodies are commonly laid only three feet below the surface, and the bones, but imperfectly decayed, of earlier occupants are raked up and shoved into a corner” (55). Haley writes that “New Bunhill Fields burying ground . . ., less than an acre in size, was at this time the depository of over fifteen hundred bodies a year, though Chadwick estimated that only one hundred and ten could be ‘neutralized’ per acre of ground. . . . The graveyard of St. Martin’s, Ludgate, had long since filled, and hundreds more were interred in church vaults; the resulting stench drove away the regular worshippers from service” (10). The \textit{Examiner} article “Intramural Interment” (8 September 1849) claims that “the body deposited in the earth one day is soon disturbed, dismembered, and thrown to the surface again, to make room for other corpses” (qtd. in Fielding and Brice 124). Fielding and Brice further point out that the graveyard in which Nemo is interred is one with which Dickens was familiar as a child, the burial ground of St. Martins-in-the-Fields (125).

\textsuperscript{287} In his 10 May 1851 speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association, Dickens called the \textit{Report on a General Scheme for Extra-mural Sepulture} “one of the most remarkable social documents ever issued under any Government, and an honour to the country and the time” (131).
As A. Susan Williams explains, Dickens was “heavily involved in the campaign to close down intra-mural burial grounds” (69), and the issue of burial-ground reform frequently made its way into the pages of *Household Words*, often in terms redolent of the nauseous treatment of putrefaction in *Bleak House*. In the article “Graves and Epitaphs” (1852), for instance, James Hannay compares the “tranquil, ornate” graveyards outside the city with “those wretched places of skulls which disfigure and disgrace the great town,” where “the flat-beaten stones are lifted up now and then, disclosing a whity earth which tells far too clear a story, and a body is thrust in” (105); the consequence, for Hannay, is that “the church does not sanctify the burial, and the burial disgraces the church” (105). Percival Leigh’s *Household Words* article “Address from an Undertaker to the Trade” (1850) even more precisely reflects the macabre detail of *Bleak House*. Leigh’s undertaker remarks that Science

has explained how grave-water soaks into adjoining wells, and has shocked and disgusted people by showing them that they are drinking their dead neighbours. It has taught parties resident in large cities that the very air they live in reeks with human remains, which steam up from graves; and which, of course, they are continually breathing. So it makes out churchyards to be worse haunted than they were formerly believed to be by ghosts, and, I may add, vampyres, in consequence of the dead continually rising from them in this unpleasant manner. Indeed, Science is likely to make people dread them a great deal more than Superstition ever
did, by showing that their effluvia breed typhus and cholera; so that they are really and truly very dangerous. (302)\textsuperscript{288}

John Delaware Lewis’s poem “City Graves” (1850) speaks of the “half-unburied dead” in city graveyards that, mouldering, cause the living in their vicinity to “grow, day by day, / More like the dead within” (277), leading to thousands of other deaths. And Edmund Saul Dixon’s “Last Homes” (1852), discussing where we might be buried, asks, “[S]hall we be thrust into places where we must offend and injure the survivors whom we now profess to love—as in most English towns; shall we be horribly and indescribably put out of the way, after forms and appearances have been complied with—as in London[?]]” (259).

But as the entire question of materialism makes clear, the status of the body (and, more pointedly, the mind) after death was also a central—indeed, the central—concern for psychology in the 1850s. Consequently, as I suggested in my first chapter, the nature of the afterlife and resurrection were issues that persistently found their way into the psychological texts of the period. The ontology of mind came to be seen as the basis of hope for immortality, and, in a reciprocal way, psychological writers pointed to scriptural descriptions of the afterlife in order to support their arguments about the nature of mind. Mind must be immaterial, this line of thinking went, so that we might live again on another plane of existence, and we know the status of mind through scriptural discussions of the resurrection, since the Christian afterlife is a given. That is to say that the psychological writers of mid-century disinterred questions about the resurrection that had

\textsuperscript{288} The author of “Sanitary Reform” (1849) puts the case more succinctly: “We suffer from obnoxious vapours when alive, and we create them for the sufferance of others when we are dead” (42). This is echoed by Thaler, who writes that “[w]e bury our dead so that their putrefying remains not only remind the living of mortality, but produce it; so that the man whom society has slain by its ignorance rises from his grave, in the shape of a gaseous exhalation, to take a full though posthumous revenge; and the horrible fable of the vampyre is almost literally enacted by the dead in a city churchyard on their neighbouring and surviving relatives” (132).
for centuries been the purview of theologians, giving them new life (and restoring them to cultural centrality) as specifically psychological questions. The questions of resurrection and psychology were thus so closely bound up together that psychological works were often included in review articles that dealt with what we might be more likely to classify as theological questions. Hickson’s “Life and Immortality” (1851), for instance, considers such works as James Mill’s *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* (1829), the Rev. James Carlile’s *Manual of the Anatomy and Physiology of the Human Mind* (1851), and H. G. Atkinson and Harriet Martineau’s *Letters on the Laws of Man’s Nature and Development* (1851) alongside Christian Friedrich Sintenis’s *Immortality or Annihilation?* (1827) and F. W. Newman’s *The Soul, her Sorrows and her Aspirations* (1849). By the same token, Thomas Brown included a lecture “On the Immortality of the Soul” in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1820).

Nearly all other psychological works from the beginning to the middle of the nineteenth century offered at least some discussion of the hereafter.

The primary division in the possibilities the Victorians imagined for life after death can be located in the distinction Grant Allen would make in 1893, between the “Resurrection of the Body” and the “Immortality of the Soul” (317). Joseph Priestley and Thomas Laycock aligned themselves with the former position, though John

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289 Further underscoring my description of these as psychological issues, Allen sees burial as a protection against a surviving ghost, the belief in which he blames on “the crude and unscientific nature of early psychology. Unaware of the true relation between subject and object, and of the true theory of cerebral action, primitive men were of opinion that each of us possesses inside himself, in addition to the outer and visible man, another and smaller man, called the soul or spirit. I will not attempt here to decide at full by what reasoning this curious blunder in psychology first arose. The subject has already been fully treated by Mr. Herbert Spencer, and it is besides somewhat too large for such cursory examination as could be here afforded it” (321).

290 Jacyna traces Laycock’s support of this position to his family background among the dissenting sects which upheld the heresy of “mortalism,” the idea that the spirit was intrinsic to the body and would perish with it (“Physiology” 116). He adds that Laycock drew support for this position from the theologian
Elliotson offers perhaps the least compromising and most interesting example of this line of thinking. In his *Human Physiology*, Elliotson insists:

[M]aterialists may not only believe in God, but in the divine authority of Scripture; and more honour Scripture by looking implicitly in full faith to it alone, as God’s authority, for their belief in a future state, than those who endeavour to make its declarations more probable by fancying a soul immortal in its own nature and independent of matter, when the Scripture tells us we shall rise as matter,—with bodies, and go to heaven with bodies, where Christ, God himself, sits bodily,—as matter, flesh, blood, and bones, in the words of the Church of England. (691n)

In Elliotson’s view, mind will depend on the nerves and brain in the next life, just as it does in this one.291

Those who argued for an immaterial mind, on the other hand, tended to hold a position akin to Benjamin Brodie’s, that “there is something in us which will remain, and be capable of perception and thought, and it may be of pure and high aspirations, when the gross material fabric with which it is now associated has become resolved into its original elements” (*Psychological* 36), or to Thomas Brown’s that, “though the body moulders into earth, that spirit which is of purer origin returns to its purer source” (*Lectures* 641). Of course, both the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul—at least to all appearances—allowed for immortality. As I explained in my first

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Andrew Carmichael, who “denounced the ‘monstrous supposition’ of metaphysicians, ‘not only of soul, but of spirit in general . . . that it has no relation to space’” (“Physiology” 116). On Priestley, see Jacyna, “Physiology” 117. Reed also discusses Priestley’s doctrine of the material soul, which he traces to his Unitarianism (54).

291 On the idea that the mind might depend on the body in heaven, see also Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology* (1842) 55.
chapter, the popular insistence that materialist psychology spelled an end to immortality was therefore something of an oversimplification, for many who put forth even the most physical theories founded their models of the mind on (a reading of) Scripture. Or at least they made a show of doing so: Elliotson is a particularly revealing test case of the sincerity of physical theorists when they adopted Scripture in their scientific works, precisely because of the persistent rumours of atheism that swirled around him in the 1840s. Whether or not they trusted the sincerity of the religious justifications offered in defence of such theories, however, even some who were opposed to the suggestion of a physical resurrection conceded that it need not *necessarily* threaten the belief in a future state: Abercrombie, for example, writes that “our speculations respecting the immateriality of the rational human soul have no influence on our belief of its immortality” (36).

But as I have argued, the reciprocal relationship between the questions of the ontology of the mind on the one hand and of the nature of the resurrection on the other nevertheless meant that, for many, a bodily resurrection came to seem like no resurrection at all; these writers maintained, in Brown’s words, that “[t]he effect of the belief of *materialism* is undoubtedly, as far as it operates, to weaken our confidence in a state of future being” (“Belsham’s” 478). To understand why these writers dismissed the idea of a physical resurrection, it will be worthwhile to examine briefly some of the conflicting views surrounding the afterlife at mid-century. Allen claims that “Resurrection is the avowed and authoritative belief of the Christian world,” but he insists that most Victorians are simply confused: “[M]ost educated Europeans believe

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292 For a discussion of the history and biblical basis of such debates, see Wheeler 1-8. He points to the “latitude of interpretation” that both the New Testament and Book of Common Prayer allowed Victorian preachers and poets on this subject (6).
really in Immortality, even when they imagine themselves to be believing in Resurrection” (317). Yet there certainly remained in the 1850s popular prejudice in favour of some connection between the body and the future life. Ruth Richardson makes the same point about England twenty years earlier, arguing that “[t]he subject of physical resurrection was a controversial one in the years preceding the Anatomy Act [of 1832], brought to the public eye largely as a result of the bodysnatchers’ activities” (77)—the fear of bodysnatching, she contends, was informed by just such beliefs about the afterlife. It was also precisely these beliefs on which psycho-physiology played when it

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293 Allen writes that “[e]ven Christian systematists are quite accustomed to combine the incongruous beliefs in a future resurrection and in the continued existence of the soul after death, by supposing that the soul remains meanwhile in some nondescript limbo, apart from its body” (323). That is, even the bodily resurrection did not necessarily imply an entirely material notion of the self; Hickson quotes Theodore Parker’s assertion that “[t]he popular doctrine in our churches I think is this: That this body which we lay in the dust shall one day be raised again, the living soul joined on anew, and both together live the eternal life” (Hickson 178). Parker insists, however, that “[t]his whole doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh seems to me impossible and absurd” (qtd. in Hickson 179). Catherine Crowe, too, a sometime contributor to Household Words, writes in The Night-Side of Nature (1848) that “even those who hold that most unsatisfactory doctrine, that there will be neither memory nor consciousness till a second incorporation takes place, will not deny that the mind, however in a state of abeyance and unable to manifest itself, must still subsist, as an inherent property of man’s immortal part” (1: 149). See also Fourier 1: 233-43 and Macnish 235-36. Jung-Stilling, however, seems to split the difference between these positions in another way. He allows that the soul can part from the body—as in Animal Magnetism—but he writes that “[w]hen once the new heavens and the new earth shall be completed, then shall the souls of pious men, united to their resurrection-body, be conscious, not only of the new and glorified visible world, but also of the world of spirits, and be able to act in both of them” (96). Charles Fourier, whose The Passions of the Human Soul (1851) Dickens also owned, offers another unorthodox perspective on the afterlife. He puts forth a theory of metempsychosis, of the alternation and migration of souls through many lives and many bodies, eventually passing to the sun after dwelling on this world for 70,000 years (1: 217). Fourier does address the question of resurrection as more popularly understood, however, insisting: “Collect the votes of 1,000 opinions, and you will see 999 vote for resuming a body with great strength, beauty, and riches: you will hardly find one out of 1,000 who wishes for a soul without a body. . . . Why suppose God less generous to us in the other life than He is in this to certain privileged men, to whom He gives a body in full health, and riches to satisfy it?” (1: 226).

294 Richardson points out, too, that the effects of dissection upon physical resurrection were a recurring theme in the debate leading up to the Anatomy Act (93). While she concedes that “the fear that dissection denied the ‘subject’ life in the world beyond the grave was less often seriously asserted in print by lay critics of bodysnatching than it was ridiculed by members of the medical profession” (93), she suggests these attacks ring of defensiveness in response to real public disquiet about the threat to resurrection of the practice of dissection. She also describes a lawyer at the Norwich Assizes in 1828 who employed a rhetoric informed by such disquiet; she writes that “[b]oth the Examiner and Lancet responded swiftly—viliﬁying him with pandering to ‘the vilest prejudices’” (77). Richardson furthermore points to the mixed and varied beliefs in popular death culture and, drawing upon Vic Gammon’s work on the English funerary hymn, she asserts that these hymns bear “witness to the persistence of resurrection and judgement imagery and the
defended itself against charges of atheism by insisting that the dead would rise again when the final trumpet was blown.

However, the many articles on the subject in *Household Words* set themselves against any lingering suspicion that the body might be necessary to an afterlife, spending much of their time debunking such beliefs. Thus, Hannay insists in “Graves and Epitaphs” that “[w]e do not believe, in this century, in the possibility of the Manes of a friend being disturbed or restless. We believe that the body has returned to the earth of which it is made, and the spirit returned to God who gave it” (109). Leigh’s “Address” works at even greater length to deny the significance of the bodies of the dead. He acknowledges that many middle-class Londoners retain some belief that, after death, some part of the deceased remains connected to the body; if they did not, he asks,

[D]o you think they would attach any importance to the dead body which we bury underground? No; to be sure: they would look upon it merely as a suit of left-off clothes—with the difference of being unpleasant and offensive, and not capable of being kept. They would see that a spirit could care no more about the corpse it had quitted, than a man who had lost his leg, would for the amputated limb. (303)
Even more directly, Leigh’s undertaker insists that the funerary pomp of Victorian London would die away if people began “thinking consistently with their religious principles, instead of their religion being a mere sentimental kind of thing which they never reason upon” (303), for the current practices arise from the half-considered notion—“though parties won’t own it, even to themselves—that what is buried, is the actual individual, the man himself” (303). True religion, however, teaches that the soul is in a better place;²⁹⁵ if the religious recognized this, they, “being particular as to their moral conduct, would naturally consider it wrong and wicked to spend upon the dead an amount of money which might be devoted to the benefit of the living,” for the money spent on funerary pomp is “much the same thing with the practice of savages and heathens in burying bread, and meat, and clothes, along with their deceased friends” (303).

One of the central points brought forth both in Household Words and elsewhere to deny the possibility of a physical resurrection was the very putrefaction that is everywhere in Bleak House. This could take the form we see in Thomas Brown’s claim that materialism insists:

[T]he most heroic virtue we admire is but a certain aggregation of particles, which one other particle, by the new affinities it introduces, may wholly disarrange, and which must rot in the grave, with the other parts of the withered or ulcerated body. The contemplation of a putrefying soul

²⁹⁵ For a similar construction, see also Robert Dale Owen: “[W]hen death prostrates the body, the spirit remains not, slumbering in the grave, beside mouldering flesh and bone, but enters at once upon a new and active phase of life” (352). The rest of Owen’s thoughts on the afterlife, however, are decidedly unlike those held by most middle-class Victorians, as he concedes (353).
does not make the living man, who is to be the object of our sympathies of regard and veneration, a more interesting spectacle. (“Belsham’s” 479-80)

But Leigh’s article reveals another fundamental difficulty that putrefaction creates for the possibility of a physical resurrection:

Science—confound it!—shows that the dead do not remain permanently in their coffins. . . . It exposes the way in which all animal matter . . . is dissolved, evaporates, and disappears; and is ultimately, as I may say, eaten up by Nature, and goes to form parts of plants, and of other living creatures. So that, if gentlemen really wanted to be interred with the remains of their ancestors, it would sometimes be possible to comply with their wishes only by burying them with a quantity of mutton—not to say with the residue of another quadruped than the sheep, which often grazes in churchyards. (302)

Our bodies become the bodies of others, if not the bodies of animals or the material out of which plants grow. Even he of the highest station—or at least his body—is thus brought low, making ridiculous the idea of being buried alongside one’s noble ancestors to await the resurrection. Matter refuses to stand still in this manner, but undergoes in the meantime a far less exalted rebirth. Science, that is, quite literally demonstrates “that all flesh is indeed grass, or convertible into it; and not only that the human frame does positively turn to dust, but into a great many things besides” (302).

It was not merely that the body rots, then; the concomitant recycling of matter into new bodies seemed an impassable obstacle for the theory of physical resurrection. Moreover, it was well established in the 1850s that even during life the body was
constantly being recycled. This is echoed in Edmund Ollier’s *Household Words* article “A Scientific Figment” (1854):

[W]e ourselves are undergoing a perpetual decay and reconstruction. We die and are born again, in some imperceptible atom, every instant. That body which was the conscious and sensitive dwelling-house of our spirit in childhood, and through the gates and avenues of which our soul looked forth upon the outer world, and saw, and felt, and understood, the majestic shows of the universe, and the amplitudes of being—that temporary shell is already dead and in its grave; and the organisation which we now possess is the matrix of its own successor. It is calculated that, from the continual falling off of old, and access of fresh particles, we acquire a perfectly new body once in every seven years, or even less; so that we may be said to be constantly refashioning our own identity. Thus, that which seems most tangible and solid fluctuates with treacherous mutability, and vanishes even from ourselves; while the inner man remains unmoved in the midst of his sandy and shifting habitation.

(456).²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ Ollier’s suggestion that the body renews itself every seven years was a conservative one for the period. The author of the *British Quarterly Review*’s review of J. F. W. Johnston’s *The Chemistry of Common Life*, by contrast, put the figure at “a few weeks—certainly in the course of a few years” (117). Echoing the Leigh passage I cited above, the author of that article goes on to assert that “[i]n the range of a long lifetime each individual wears out several suits of bodies, as he does several suits of clothes” (117). Trimmer makes the same point, both about the daily death of some part of our bodies and about the recycling of the material of past bodies in our own (275-76). See also Abercrombie 33 and “The Philosophy of Apparitions” 411 and 429. Elliotson simply denies that the renewal of the human body makes any difference to the physical argument (360n).
The mutability of matter makes the permanence of the soul all the more apparent, justifying the faith that our immaterial part will survive death in precisely the same way it endures matter’s unceasing decomposition during our lives.

This is also the sentiment of another of Percival Leigh’s *Household Words* articles, “The Laboratory in the Chest” (1850), in which young Harry Wilkinson describes to his Uncle Bagges how while the blood “mixes oxygen with the old substance of the body, to burn it up, it lays down fresh material to replace the loss. So our bodies are continually changing throughout; but then, you know, a river appears the same from year’s end to year’s end, although the water in it is different every day” (567). Here again, the consequences of this material change for the future life are clear. Bagges insists, “[I]f the body is always on the change in this way, we must have had several bodies in the course of our lives, by the time we are old,” to which his nephew replies:

“Yes, uncle; therefore, how foolish it is to spend money upon funerals. . . .

If we are none the worse for [our previous bodies’] dying away in carbonic acid and other things without ceremony, what good can we expect from having a fuss made about the body we leave behind us, which is put into the earth?” (567)

At death the body is cast off, and the soul is no worse for the loss. To spend money on the burial of this husk is therefore a foolish and misguided concession to primitive prejudices.

As these passages demonstrate, in Leigh’s *Household Words* articles the immortality of the soul—as opposed to the resurrection of the body—is simply assumed.
But others used the circulation of matter through various forms and bodies to refute explicitly the idea of a physical resurrection. J. F. W. Johnston, for instance, concludes:

In the face of this clear knowledge, how untrue to nature, how irrational, how misleading are the views which many conscientious divines have promulgated with regard to the resurrection of man. As if the same matter which forms our body, when we are laid in the grave, and which, after a brief residence there, makes its way, through some nutritive plant, into the body of another man, and forms part of his body still when he is buried—as if this matter, which is neither his nor mine, has already “been slave to thousands,” and may be buried with ten thousand bodies more, before the resurrection comes—as if this matter were meant to form the clothing of the disembodied spirit, when, in visible form and sensible identity, it shall be raised on the day when “small and great” shall appear before the dread tribunal. (558)²⁹⁷

Not only did the putrefaction that residents of London were daily forced to see and smell seem to prove the impossibility of a physical resurrection: as is clear in the articles I have been discussing—particularly those from Household Words—this noisome and nauseous matter at the same time was made to stand as a guarantee of the future life, tangible and

²⁹⁷ Theodore Parker also employs this argument to deny a physical resurrection: he asks, “If my soul is to claim the body again, which shall it be, the body I was born into, or that I died out of? If I live to the common age of men, changing my body, as I must, and dying daily, then I have worn some eight or ten bodies. So at the last, which body shall claim my soul, for the ten had her? The soul herself may claim them all. But to make the matter still more intricate, there is in the earth but a certain portion of matter out of which human bodies can be made. Considering all the millions of men now living, the myriads of millions that have been before, it is plain, I think, that all the matter suitable for human bodies has been lived over many times. . . . Shall I then have a handful of my former dust, and that alone? . . . This whole doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh seems to me impossible and absurd” (qtd. in Hickson, 178-179n).
visible proof of the soul’s ascension to its next home.\textsuperscript{298} In a sense, then, by insisting on the foulness of matter in \textit{Bleak House}, by focussing on the most nauseous details of rotting flesh, Dickens is underscoring the necessarily immaterial aspects of human identity: what is of paramount importance is that part of the self that is permanent and unchanging, that which survives the falling away of the fleshly frame.

By this point, then, it should come as no surprise that \textit{Bleak House} consistently advances a rhetoric in keeping with the notion of a spiritual rebirth at death. This is clearest in Richard’s death, which, coming in a chapter entitled “Beginning the World,” is reported by Esther thus: “He slowly laid his face down upon [Ada’s] bosom, drew his arms closer round her neck, and with one parting sob began the world. Not this world, O not this! The world that sets this right” (763). The rhetoric here is akin to that we find in the \textit{Cornhill Magazine} article “A Meditation; on Skeletons—and some other Things” (1863):

\textsuperscript{298} The reviewer of Hunt’s \textit{Poetry of Science for Fraser’s Magazine} (1849) thus writes that “the awful change which fits man for communion with angels and spirits is one that begins by destroying and dissolving that gross framework of matter which now drags down and cripples, and defiles the pure and subtle workings of the poetic fire” (378). For another way putrefying matter was constructed in the period—the attempt, through the recycling of such matter into fertilizer, to fit putrefaction into the schema of natural theology—see Hamlin. He points out that others merely saw putrefaction as “a perversion of natural cycles which occurred only when organic wastes were not quickly returned to the soil” (391); he cites Chadwick as such a one.

\textsuperscript{299} That is to say that I find unconvincing Hack’s assertion about Krook’s remains that “[i]t only proves possible for the chapter to dwell on these repulsive substances when their nature is unknown” (141). The novel is constantly returning to the repulsive products of putrefaction, precisely because of the implications of these products for the future life.

\textsuperscript{300} Garrett Stewart calls this “one of the most economically explicit witnesses to a Christian afterlife in Dickens, certainly the only unequivocal claim for one registered in \textit{Bleak House}” (481). Nonetheless, Stewart points out the ambiguities inherent in the way this chapter ends, with Miss Flite releasing her birds (481-83). Also insisting that “the only judgment a novelist can afford to care about aesthetically is the one rendered by death, not after it” (484), Stewart argues that Dickens “for the most part owns to his uncertainty” in this novel about the possibility of an afterlife, ever “pull[ing] up short of his dying characters in their glimpses of eternity” (470); he sees Dickens’s language as “concentrating on death as life’s worldly absolutizing rather than its divine absolution. Jo is unarguably rewarded, but it may be simply by death itself” (470). As these pages will show, I think Stewart is wrong about Dickens’s intentions in this novel. For the reasons I describe, however, I agree that the novel’s final position on the afterlife is ambiguous.
Death and decay, heralds of life they were—and are; where the new life
dawns and the trembling spirit thrills on the brink of a new world, there
the appointed forerunners and ministers of life must be. Without death we
could not enter upon life; without processes which are essentially those we
know as processes of disease, we never could have drawn our vital breath.
. . . Dying is a birth we witness from the outer side; we see but the
departing, not the coming life. (628)

Even G. H. Lewes, in The Physiology of Common Life (1859-60), calls death “a new-
birth: with it certain forms of existence are completed, and certain others are
commenced” (2: 309), although, as I have shown, Lewes clearly did not see this as the
birth of the soul in heaven. As I demonstrated in my first chapter, however, the notion of
the afterlife as occurring in a new world is one Dickens drew upon in his personal life:
for example, he calls death a trip to “the distant country beyond the grave” (7: 648) in a
13 June 1855 letter of consolation to Mrs. Winter (the former Maria Beadnell) upon the
death of her infant daughter.

This construction of the afterlife as a new world—as opposed to a bodily
resurrection—is one to which Dickens has Esther constantly return: after her illness, she
muses that she “might aspire to meet [Woodcourt], unselfishly, innocently, better far than
he had thought me when I found some favour in his eyes, at the journey’s end” (443);301
later, having encountered Woodcourt again, she tells us, “I felt for my old self as the dead
may feel if they ever revisit these scenes. I was glad to be tenderly remembered, to be

301 Zwerdling also points to Esther’s claim that she is as innocent of her birth as any queen of hers as an
assertion that she will be “vindicated in death, not in life. God will recognize her innocence and heaven will
bring the rewards she has been denied on earth. But this reliance on a heavenly reward barely masks her
despair about the possibility of earthly fulfillment” (435).
gently pitied, not to be quite forgotten” (551). But lest it be thought that this construction of the future life is merely Esther’s fancy, a means for her to compensate for the shortcomings of this world, I should make clear how frequently the third-person narrator draws upon the same figure for the next life. That narrator tells us, for example, how “[t]he little plaintiff” in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, “promised a rocking-horse when [the suit] should be settled, has grown up, possessed himself of a real horse, and trotted away into the other world” (8); death he calls “the last thing that can happen to the consciousness of any baronet in the known world” (700); and after Sir Leicester’s stroke, he tells us that Lady Dedlock’s “letter to [him] is discovered on her table;—but it is doubtful yet whether he has not received another missive from another world, requiring to be personally answered” (668). *Bleak House*’s characters, too, make similar assertions. Miss Barbary, Mrs. Rachael insists, is “now among the Seraphim” (22); George tells Smallweed that to find Hawdon, “I must have gone to the other world to look” (270); and Gridley only finds hope for justice in his conviction that he will “accuse the individual workers of that system against me, face to face, before the great eternal bar!” (193).

Yet as extensive as is even this partial list of the assurances the novel gives that this life will be followed by a spiritual rebirth in heaven, *Bleak House* cannot entirely free itself of nagging details that work to undermine its apparent confidence in our immortality. As I have suggested, at the most basic level this emerges in the way these assurances are so often figured as the desperate compensations characters make for the unhappy fates they suffer in this world. Gridley’s hopes for another life take this form, as
do some of Esther’s. Equally troubling is Miss Flite’s expectation of a Judgement (34).302 How much difference is there between her mad hopes and the novel’s?

However, the major barrier to the novel’s endorsement of the Christian faith in an afterlife, at least within the context of Victorian psychology, is the resurrection promised for Nemo. The key passage here comes in the description of his burial, in a “hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed”:

With houses looking on, on every side, save where a reeking little tunnel of a court gives access to the iron gate—with every villainy of life in action close on death, and every poisonous element of death in action close on life—here, they lower our dear brother down a foot or two: here, sow him in corruption, to be raised in corruption: an avenging ghost at

302 Van Boheemen-Saaf writes that various characters in the novel “believe against reason in a ‘Last Judgment’ which will retrospectively vindicate their sacrifice of human qualities” (234); she sees this as one of numerous strategies in the novel that are “subterfuges to escape suffering, refusing the knowledge that the better characters in the novel patiently bear, a sense of being left without directive, of being an orphan in a bewilderingly complex world” (234). Hillis Miller sees a tension in the novel between “belief in some extra-human source of value, a stable centre outside the shadows of the human game, and on the other hand the shade of a suspicion that there may be no such centre, that all systems of interpretation may be fictions” (“Interpretation” 197). He sees these two perspectives as being located in the novel’s two narrators, Esther insisting on the power of Providence and the third-person narrator offering a nihilistic view, and he argues that the meaning of the novel lies in the irresolution of these two perspectives (“Interpretation” 198). Frank identifies a similar split in the novel between Esther’s faith in Providence (Victorian 78) and the third-person narrator’s refusal to posit “a divine Author” (Victorian 79), but he suggests that, on the whole, “the novel has stepped to the side of Natural Theology and other forms of Christian affirmation” (Victorian 94). In his earlier work, however, Frank suggests “there may be no eternal bar before which” Gridley may argue his case; he finds no guarantee that “there is a God within the pages of Dickens’s later novels” (Charles Dickens 99). Newsom sees the novel as, in some ways, “a typically Victorian statement about the loss of faith” (113) and traces “the novel’s pervasive sense of what we have come to refer to as the death of God” (113). Wilkinson, meanwhile, sees Dickens as having faith in a benevolent Providence, but she argues that “though Dickens may have consciously assented to these hopeful propositions, in the universe of the novel they are shown to be ultimately irrelevant” (246). For critical perspectives that see Bleak House endorsing a Christian view of the world, see Jahn and Wheeler 267-77.
many a sick-bedside: a shameful testimony to future ages, how civilisation
and barbarism walked this boastful island together. (137)

Dickens, of course, here plays on St. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:42—words repeated in the Church of England’s Order for the Burial of the Dead—“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.” He does so in the service of sanitary reform, echoing Hannay’s assertion in “Graves and Epitaphs” that intramural interment “sow[s] death, and reap[s] pestilence and fees” (105), or Leigh’s in “Address from an Undertaker to the Trade” that the dead rise from the grave in the form of disease (302). What is problematic about this use of Nemo for sanitary ends are the words with which Paul follows those on which Dickens plays: in the rest of the verse, Paul explains that the body “is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:43-44). The reason these words are troublesome for Dickens is that Paul was widely taken by psychological writers in the period to be here drawing a distinction between the material body and the immaterial; in this context, Dickens’s play on the words of 1 Corinthians essentially amounts to an assertion that Nemo will be both sown and raised in the body.

Indeed, Dickens’s words here echo Elliotson’s defence of physical psychology, that it is

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303 Of course, in a sense Nemo—or Hawdon—has already risen from the grave once, as pointed out by Herbert (112), Morgentaler (91), and Ragussis (278).

304 See also Thaler, who writes—in a passage I cited above—that “[w]e bury our dead so that . . . the man whom society has slain by its ignorance rises from his grave, in the shape of a gaseous exhalation, to take a full though posthumous revenge; and the horrible fable of the vampyre is almost literally enacted by the dead in a city churchyard on their neighbouring and surviving relatives” (132).

305 Johnston insists, “One would have thought that the words of [Paul’s] passage . . . were sufficient to deter” one from propounding the idea of a material resurrection (558-59), for “that which is formed of matter . . . can neither be a spiritual body, nor free from the changes which are commonly implied by the word corruption” (559). But even here there was room for disagreement. Hickson writes that “Paul’s idea of a future life was clearly not the common one of a resurrection of the same body, but of a transmigration of the soul from one body to another; from ‘a corruptible body’ to ‘an incorruptible body;’ from an ‘earthly body’ to a ‘celestial body’” (178). See also “The Philosophy of Apparitions” 389.
justified by scripture, which “tells us we shall rise as matter,—with bodies, and go to
heaven with bodies, where Christ, God himself, sits bodily,—as matter, flesh, blood, and
bones, in the words of the Church of England” (Human 691n), or that “the resurrection
will be positively of body,—that in our flesh we shall see God, and that therefore our
minds, according to the scripture doctrine, must appear as much a property of body
hereafter as at present” (Human 47).306

These implications were surely not perceived by Dickens; they seem, instead, to
be the troubling product of his failure, at least for a moment, to align his sanitary and his
psychological pleas in this text. But inflected by this momentary yet crucial slip, many of
Dickens’s other plays on what happens to the dead assume a more sinister appearance.307
We are told of Peffer—Mrs. Snagsby’s father—that “he has been recumbent this quarter
of a century in the churchyard of St. Andrew’s, Holborn, with the waggons and hackney-
coaches roaring past him, all the day and half the night, like one great dragon” (116). The
troubling drift of this passage for Dickens’s mental philosophy becomes clear when we
compare it to a similar one in the first chapter of The Old Curiosity Shop (1840-41):

306 Another of Dickens’s friends, the Rev. Chauncy Hare Townshend, offers a reading of Paul’s words that
would also have seemed unappealing to most Victorians. He writes: “When St. Paul affirms that there is a
spiritual body as well as a natural body, he not doubtfully declares the same thing. He does, in fact, draw a
distinction between the body we now have for purposes connected with the economy of this world and the
more lasting body which is to connect us with the universe in general. He was too good a logician to have
used the words ‘spiritual body’ in a vague and mystical sense. Body is body, and the only differences
between one body and another which can possibly obtain are gradations from grosser to finer, on the
contrary” (530-31). Earlier Townshend asserts that “one great object of Christ’s mission on earth [was] to
preach the resurrection of man with a body. Such a body then as would endure, and cleave to the mind
through all external changes, is, in fact, the fundamental life; while the organic life is but that grosser and
visible envelope which forms our tangible body in this world, and which is furnished with organs which
have especial reference to this particular state of existence,” and he asks, “[F]or what is life, in our case at
least, but mind incorporate?” (530).
307 Larson has noticed this same ambiguity in the novel on the subject of resurrection, writing that Bleak
House is divided on its faith in the resurrection and that the novel “both makes its assertions of faith” on
this head “and allows them to be placed in question” (154). She points, for instance, to Hortense’s
assertion, in mocking Bucket’s inability to restore Tulkinghorn to life, that it is the “same death eternally.”
Think of a sick man in such a place as Saint Martin’s court, listening to the footsteps, and in the midst of pain and weariness obliged, despite himself (as though it were a task he must perform) to detect the child’s step from the man’s, the slipshod beggar from the booted exquisite, the lounging from the busy, the dull heel of the sauntering outcast from the quick tread of an expectant pleasure-seeker—think of the hum and noise always being present to his senses, and of the stream of life that will not stop, pouring on, on, on, through all his restless dreams, as if he were condemned to lie dead but conscious, in a noisy churchyard, and had no hope of rest for centuries to come. (6)

Roughly similar to the analogy with which this passage closes is Bleak House’s description of the “fixed sleep” (628) into which Hortense’s bullet has cast Tulkinghorn. Fuelled by the novel’s ambiguity concerning Nemo’s resurrection, such moments suggest a nightmare vision of bodies lying in the grave awaiting a Judgement that, as Household Words was at the same time insisting, was as great a fiction as the one Flite awaits. For even this novel makes clear that, once the dead are in their graves, they will not come back. Such is the message of the third-person narrator’s description of Bucket’s mysterious travels from one spot to another: “Like man in the abstract, he is here to-day and gone tomorrow—but, very unlike man indeed, he is here again the next day” (626).

The description of Lady Dedlock’s burial in the Dedlock tomb carries with it a similar suggestion: we are told that the members of the World of Fashion “wondered the ashes of the Dedlocks, entombed in the mausoleum, never rose against the profanation of her company. But the dead-and-gone Dedlocks take it very calmly, and have never been
known to object” (764). To repeat, such assertions would only underscore the novel’s faith in a new world, were the novel able to promote such a faith unambiguously. Instead, inflected by Nemo’s “resurrection”—by, that is, the novel’s sanitary plot—such insistences that the dead will never rise (indeed, the novel’s implicit assumption that such a resurrection is an impossibility) become themselves deeply troubling.

Pushing readers to similar (mis)readings is the way that, while Esther and the third-person narrator insist on an immediate, spiritual afterlife, many of the novel’s characters seem less sure. Snagsby says of the deceased Nemo, “I no more know where he came from than I know—,” to which Woodcourt immediately replies, “Where has he gone to, perhaps” (128). Is Woodcourt’s interjection a comment on the likelihood Nemo is bound for hell, or do his doubts concern the existence of any afterlife? The novel fails to make the meaning of his comment clear. The narrator’s recounting of Bucket’s musings about Tulkinghorn equally gets to the heart of the issue, especially in light of the novel’s equation of secrets and the soul: we are told that Bucket “sits with most attentive eyes until the sacked depository of noble secrets is brought down—Where are all those secrets now? Does he keep them yet? Did they fly with him on that sudden journey?” (628). Does Tulkinghorn’s soul remain with his body? Has it gone elsewhere?

The novel’s failure to endorse unequivocally Esther’s faith that death is but a new birth is also apparent in the many ghosts that haunt this novel.308 For while, as I argued

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308 The notion that ghosts suggest an immaterial principle should not be assumed. Ferrier, for example, argues that the visibility of ghosts has been used to endorse a materialist view of the mind, ghosts in this construction being composed of a highly refined form of matter (224). In any case, it seems to be agreed that Dickens did not believe in ghosts. Lewes in his 12 February 1853 “Literature” column says as much (161). Certainly Dickens’s attitude towards such matters in both *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* is almost invariably one of scepticism. Henson, who has done perhaps the best recent work on this subject, suggests that Dickens did however believe that “the ghost story was an important focus of inquiry into the mysteries of the mind” (115), and she discusses his treatment of the ghost story as a means of exploring “naturalistic concepts of mind” and “the interrelations of mind and body” (116).
above, the novel works to deny the possibility of bodies rising from the grave, it does allow visitations of another sort. Many of the popular treatments of ghosts in the period—including works with which Dickens was familiar, like Catherine Crowe’s *Night Side of Nature* (1848) or Robert Dale Owen’s *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* (1860)—used such supernatural occurrences as a prop for faith, as a means to prove the existence of immortal life. And in places, *Bleak House*’s ghosts seem to fit with such an employment of the supernatural. The third-person narrator muses that Peffer, recumbent in the St. Andrew’s churchyard, might revisit the scenes of his life in Cook’s Court, but insists that “if Peffer ever do revisit the pale glimpses of Cook’s Court, which no law-stationer in the trade can positively deny, he comes invisibly, and no one is the worse or wiser” (116). The problem of the ghosts in this novel, however, is that the text refuses to allow them to remain invisible and immaterial. On the one hand, this is a consequence of the novel’s habit—a habit, to repeat, of which Esther is guilty, and which I discussed in my last chapter—of reifying ghosts into the substantial things and events of London life. Chancery is figured by Jarndyce as the “phantom that has haunted us so many years”

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*Night Side of Nature*, Dickens rejects the notion that ghosts might prove the immortality of the soul, as Henson points out (115). He also insists in letters to the Rev. James White (7 March 1854) and to Emile de la Rue (9 March 1854) that Crowe has been driven insane by spirit-rapping. Dickens further mocks Robert Dale Owen at great length in “The Spirit Business” (1853), and, of the spirit-rappers, remarks that “We have inquired of Dr. [John] CONOLLY, and are informed that there are several philosophers new resident at [the madhouse at] Hanwell Middlesex, and, also in St. George’s Fields, Southwark, who, without any tippings or rapping, find themselves similarly inspired” (220). The spiritualists are also mocked in Morley’s *Household Words* article “Latest Intelligence from Spirits” (1855). We can therefore perhaps assume that Dickens would have approved of Ferrier’s criticism of the spiritualists: “Our natural superstitions are bad enough; but thus to make a systematic business of fatuity, imposture, and profanity, and to imagine, all the while, that we are touching on the precincts of God’s spiritual kingdom, is unspeakably shocking” (225). In a 19 June 1855 letter to Mrs. Trollope, for example, Dickens himself claims, “I have not the least belief in the unseen World being available for evening parties at so much per night. And although I should be ready to receive enlightenment from any source, I must say that I have very little hope of it from the Spirits who express themselves through Mediums, as I have never yet observed them to talk anything but Nonsense—of which (as Carlyle would say), there is probably enough in these days of ours, and in all days, among mere mortality” (7: 652). In light of Dickens’s scepticism about ghosts, consider also Arac’s argument that the ghosts in *Bleak House* “arise from human actions and may be dispelled by them. They are not supernatural at all; their explanation is social” (126).
(302), and the third-person narrator also translates the mundane details of Mr. Snagsby’s domestic life into supernatural events:

> From beneath his feet, at such times, as from a shrill ghost unquiet in its grave, there frequently arise complainings and lamentations in the voice already mentioned; and haply, on some occasions, when these reach a sharper pitch than usual, Mr. Snagsby mentions to the ’prentices, “I think my little woman is a-giving it to Guster!” (117)

Even those visitations from the dead that the novel imagines are decidedly physical, much like Nemo’s. The text figures the earthy smell of the Dedlocks as a return from the grave: “On all the house there is a cold, blank smell, like the smell of the little church, though something dryer: suggesting that the dead and buried Dedlocks walk there, in the long nights, and leave the flavour of their graves behind them” (357). In other words, the spiritual is here made the consequence of—indeed, interchangeable with—the rotting matter that is everywhere in this text. Similarly, the “phantoms” of which “the air is full” (400) on the night of Krook’s death are immediately made indistinguishable from the greasy black fat that is the last physical remainder of him. As often as not, too, the ghosts in this novel are of inanimate things, of soulless matter: “the ghosts of grim furniture” reflected by fire on the walls and ceilings of Chesney Wold (349); the “ghost of a chaise departed” in which Esther rides at dawn in her search for her mother, surrounded by “plenty of spectral company, in ghosts of trees and hedges” (656); “the ghosts of sound” (400) that haunt Guppy and Weevle as they await their midnight rendezvous. Such ghosts as these most assuredly fail to point to a spiritualized hereafter from which the dead occasionally return.
Once again, Nemo’s resurrection is the lynchpin here. Ambiguously figured as a resurrection of the body, Nemo’s ghost suggests that there is nothing beyond the physical; the novel’s assumption—in service of a spiritual resurrection—that physical resurrection is impossible therefore comes to look frighteningly like a denial of any sort of resurrection at all. The novel’s description of the Dedlock portraits only underscores this point, as we see in Mrs. Rouncewell’s tour of the house for Guppy and Weevle: “Thus they pass on from room to room, raising the pictured Dedlocks for a few brief minutes as the young gardener admits the light, and reconsigning them to their graves as he shuts it out again” (81). Somewhat similarly, in our final view of Chesney Wold we are told the place is “less the property of an old family of human beings and their ghostly likenesses, than of an old family of echoings and thunderings which start out of their hundred graves at every sound, and go resounding through the building” (766). Metaphors like these, clearly not to be taken seriously, only remind us of the novel’s assumption that real resurrection—the physical resurrection of the dead—is a fiction.

This is also the suggestion of the novel’s many metaphorical vampires: Krook, for example, stands over Nemo’s deathbed “with his lean hands spread out above the body like a vampire’s wings” (125). Esther says of Vholes, moreover, “So slow, so eager, so bloodless and gaunt, I felt as if Richard were wasting away beneath the eyes of this adviser, and there were something of the Vampire in him” (720), and Vholes, with his hollow desk that resounds like a coffin (perhaps his own, the one he rises from each day) and makes a sound like “ashes . . . falling on ashes, and dust on dust” (486), seems to fit the part. There is also something of the vampire in Tulkinghorn, who is Lady Dedlock’s enemy “even in his grave,” giving her the impression “that from this pursuer, living or
dead—obdurate and imperturbable before her in his well-remembered shape, or not more obdurate and imperturbable in his coffin-bed,—there is no escape but in death” (666).

The relevance of vampires to the present discussion becomes apparent when we recall the particular resonance they had for the Victorians: if some figured ghosts as the returned spirits or souls of the dead, vampires were returned bodies, supernatural parodies of the physical resurrection. Herbert Mayo makes this clear: “A Vampyr is a dead body, which continues to live in the grave, which it leaves, however, by night, for the purpose of sucking the blood of the living, whereby it is nourished, and preserved in good condition, instead of becoming decomposed like other bodies” (qtd. in “The Philosophy of Apparitions” 399). The only vampires here are metaphorical; my point, again, is that these vampires thus suggest that it is only in metaphor that the dead can rise.

Further complicating the novel’s perspective on the afterlife, in light of the symbolic weight the novel grants to houses and containers as figures for the body, are the vast number of empty containers in this text, almost all explicitly associated with death. Upon Krook’s demise, for example, all the court is anxious that “the fiction of a full-sized coffin should be preserved, though there is so little to put in it” (413). Vholes’s desk, as we have seen, is described as sounding “as hollow as a coffin” (485); the passage might just as easily have read “empty as a coffin.” At Tulkinghorn’s funeral procession, moreover, there are only four human followers, “but the amount of inconsolable carriages is immense” (627), and these carriages are figured as representing coffins themselves: “The Duke of Foodle sends a splendid pile of dust and ashes, with silver wheel-boxes, patent axles, all the last improvements, and three bereaved worms, six feet high, holding on behind, in a bunch of woe” (627). The point here is that the coffins are empty because
the soul has flown to its future life; the dust and ashes that remain in the last example are insignificant, as is suggested in the way the novel asserts that Chesney Wold, empty, is “like a body without life” (498). According to the novel’s symbolic economy, this is also the gist of the narrator’s response to George’s musings on Lady Dedlock’s empty room: “As all partings foreshadow the great final one,—so, empty rooms, bereft of a familiar presence, mournfully whisper what your room and what mine must one day be” (693).

What works against a reading of these images as endorsing the immortality of the soul is the fictionality of both Krook’s full-sized coffin and the figure of carriage-as-coffin. Their emptiness thus becomes less a proof of the departure of the soul than a troubling suggestion that that schema is equally no more than a consoling fiction. If Krook’s coffin is really empty, what of the novel’s other containers, or even its characters? In short, according to the reciprocal logic of Victorian psychology’s conflation of the questions of resurrection and of the ontology of the mind, the very emptiness of these deathly containers works against the novel’s point that the body, after death, is an empty receptacle. For the novel’s point is far too close to that more frightening suggestion that Bleak House has been working to deny: that the body always was empty, that the law’s failure to look beyond the surface, which I discussed in my last chapter, was justified by there being nothing beyond the surface at which to look. Working in the same direction is the novel’s slippage in its assertions that the body is the soul’s lodging-place. Describing Nemo’s corpse, the third-person narrator calls the body “that last shape which earthly lodgings take for No one—and for Every one” (131). Yet this same narrator elsewhere contrasts Chesney Wold and the grave in asserting that “the
wide house is as quiet as the narrow one. The narrow one!” (509). Is the grave, then, literally our last home?

If the novel leaves this question unanswered, it is nevertheless clear that, as I have argued in this chapter, Bleak House does speak in more precise terms about the self than one might be led to believe if character were the only textual site at which to look for the psychological. Part of what I have been arguing, in other words, is that to consider the way Victorian psychology informed and interacted with the novel—and worked to assert the boundaries and ontology of the self in and through the novel—we need to look elsewhere than the obvious places, elsewhere than that body of writing that we have heretofore dubbed psychological. For the psychological also finds its way into the Victorian novel both through the representation and within the confines of bodies of discourse that seem far outside the disciplinary boundaries we have since erected around psychology. Yet I have also shown the way this very inclusiveness of Victorian psychology, the eclecticism of its interests, proves troubling for Bleak House in the novel’s efforts to prop up an orthodox Christian psychology. After all, while to some degree the questions of sanitary reform are also psychological questions, the overlap between these bodies of discourse is not exact. Nor, it seems, was Dickens knowledgeable enough about the nicer points of mental scientific debate to prevent inconsistencies and ambiguities from creeping into his treatment of the psychological in this novel. His desire both to assert the immateriality and immortality of the mind and to address the material conditions that were causing such suffering in England’s urban spaces therefore cannot, finally, hold up; his polemical insistence on the power of dirt, on the far-reaching effects of the material environment, appears to prove false his parallel
assertions of the pre-eminence of the immaterial. At the same time, Dickens’s use of the putrefying matter that was poisoning London’s overcrowded graveyards as a means to insist on the immortality of an immaterial soul seems to pull in the opposite direction as does his exposure of the harmful effects of this matter on the city’s living inhabitants; again, his (mis)handling of this material largely renders incomprehensible the psychological message—the support for a Christian dualism—Dickens seems to want to express in this novel. It is therefore precisely the way that sanitary reform and psychology—at least in the way Dickens represents them—do not fit together in this novel, are not compatible, that threatens to undermine Bleak House’s representation of the self.
For a moment, in the novel’s opening scenes, *Great Expectations* (1860-61) seems to offer a very different picture of the self from what we have encountered in Dickens’s other first-person novels. This moment comes in the curious description Pip offers of himself on that day when he reached his “first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things” (3): after itemizing the churchyard and marsh winds that surround him, Pip locates himself as “the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry” (4). As it soon turns out, he is not the only human bundle to be discovered in the marsh country: Mr. Wopsle’s great-aunt is an “old bundle of incompetence” (126), one of those people whom it is a relief to see overcome her “bad habit of living” (125), and the haberdasher Trabb will later tie each of the mourners at Mrs. Joe’s funeral into “ridiculous bundles” (279). Pip is granted an indication of the consequences of this model of identity, moreover, by the convict who rises from the gravestones in the novel’s opening pages, for Magwitch, too, is only a bundle—except he appears to be a bundle in perpetual danger of falling apart.309 Pip notes during their first meeting that Magwitch “hugged his shuddering body in both his arms—clasping himself, as if to hold himself together” (7); he remains hugging himself the next day (so starved with hunger, Pip recalls, that he would have eaten the file Pip gave him “if he had not seen my bundle”

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309 In this regard, note Alex Woloch’s point that Pip, in describing Magwitch, “focuses on isolated, fragmented articles of clothing instead of the full person” (182). As will soon become clear, the threat I am identifying in these opening moments is that those fragments are the full person. Woloch also discusses the vast number of other fragmented portraits in this novel, which he credits to a “misaligned character-system” (182).
Once put in mind of this threat of dissolution, one need not look far for other characters on the brink of falling apart. Orlick later hugs himself in a similar way (421), and Joe holds his knees tight before the fire, “as if he had private information that they intended to make off somewhere” (142). Bodily integrity—and with it, apparently, selfhood, if this novel’s critics are to be believed—seems in the novel’s opening pages to be unstable, ever on the brink of dissolution, as likely to be scattered to the winds as are Pip’s frequently scattered wits (32; 131).

If the fragility of selfhood, at least in these first pages, has been a standard observation in criticism of the novel, what has not been noticed is the clear allusion in Pip’s initial construction of himself (as a bundle of shivers) to the work of David Hume: arguing in A Treatise of Human Nature (1739-40) that all our perceptions “are different, and distinguishable and separable from each other, and may be separately consider’d, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing to support their existence” (164), Hume insists that each of us amounts to “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (165). As I described in Chapter Two, Hume was among the key associationist philosophers of the eighteenth century; it was in response to his

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310 For a moment, that is, Pip’s manner of stating things here makes it seem as though Magwitch’s imaginary young man is not the only cannibal escaped from the Hulks. The way Magwitch subsequently opens the bundle and empties Pip’s pockets in a single clause (18) only serves further to associate Pip’s bundle with Pip’s self.

311 On the instability of identity in this first scene, see Frank, Charles Dickens 164, 178; Jordan, “Partings” 23-24; Kreilkamp 85; Newey 182-84; and Pettit 247. As I discussed in my first chapter, the standard line that—in Dorothy Van Ghent’s wholly representative words—Dickens’s characters, here and elsewhere, lack a “personally complex psychology” (131) seems to be a product of, among other things, certain critics’ failure to understand Dickens’s engagement with the psychological theorizing of mid-century. Such claims are founded on an essentialist (and ahistorical) notion of selfhood, only theirs is not the orthodox essentialism of the 1840s, 50s, and 60s. As this chapter suggests, we must therefore take with a grain of salt the many readings that see Dickens as interested in the breakdown or fracturing of identity. On some level, of course, these readings of the novel are extensions of the common critical argument—which I considered in my first chapter—that Dickens’s characters are “mere collections of humors or tics” (Clayton 149).
scepticism—what J. D. Morell in 1847 called his “startling unbelief” (1: 338)—that Thomas Reid, founder of the Common Sense school, first put forth his own theories of mind. It bears repeating, then, that associationism remained, in the 1850s and 1860s, popularly marked as a materialist body of thought, and Hume’s model of the mind continued to be widely seen as challenging the essential identity on which a Christian psychology was founded. Indeed, Hume in particular among the associationists remained a target for more orthodox thinkers. It is surprising, then, to see how closely Pip’s self-portrait echoes Hume’s description of the self, all the more so because of the way—explaining our illusory sense of personal identity by speaking of the identity we ascribe to plants and animals, despite the changes we witness in them—Hume follows the passage I cited above:

Thus we feign the continu’d existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption; and run into the notion of a soul, and self, and substance, to disguise the variation. But we may farther observe, that where we do not give rise to such a fiction, our propension to confound identity with relation is so great, that we are apt to imagine something unknown and mysterious, connecting the parts, besides their relation; and this I take to be the case with regard to the identity we ascribe to plants and animals. (166)

Continuing what came to be popularly perceived as an assault on the Christian self—the self Reid would later defend—Hume lays bare the implications of the passage I have just

312 Daniel N. Robinson also makes this point (46ff). This was certainly the narrative repeated in nineteenth-century psychological literature.
313 On some of the more specific challenges Hume presented to Christian psychology, see Dixon, From Passions 106.
cited, insisting that “[t]he identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies” (169). Lest the religious be not thoroughly scandalized, Hume further contends that “the doctrine of the immateriality, simplicity, and indivisibility of a thinking substance is a true atheism” (157), because of what he alleges is its similarity to Spinoza’s monism, and he asserts that “the question concerning the substance of the soul is absolutely unintelligible: All our perceptions are not susceptible of a local union, either with what is extended or unextended” (163).

We can see in their reactions to his work the problem Hume’s philosophy represented for faculty psychologists. For Sir William Hamilton, Hume’s philosophy amounts to an assertion “that all our knowledge of mind or matter, is only a consciousness of various bundles of baseless appearances” (Lectures 204), and that “our thinking Ego is nothing but a bundle of individual impressions and ideas, out of whose union in the imagination, the notion of a whole, as of a subject of that which is felt and thought, is formed” (Lectures 259). There is nothing to hold these perceptions together, no substance—or, as faculty psychologists tended to infer from Hume’s writings, no essential self—standing behind and granting identity to them. Absent from Hume’s model of mind, in other words, is the innate mental furniture that was central to faculty psychology. As Thomas Dixon explains, in Hume’s work even the all-important “[w]ill was just one ‘impression’—in other words, a feeling—amongst others” (Dixon, Passions 107), passively received from external sources or the body instead of being granted by

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314 See also Dixon, From Passions 107, and Robinson 50.
Even to call Hume’s philosophy a model of mind is misleading, for according to the faculty psychologists whom he scandalized, the very existence of the mind was in doubt for him: as John Abercrombie described the case in 1840, Hume maintained “that we have as little proof of the existence of mind [as of the external world in Berkeley’s philosophy], and that nothing exists in the universe except impressions and ideas” (24). Hume’s philosophy was therefore constantly attacked for its irreligion. A. Campbell Fraser, for example, insists in 1848 that the “sceptical philosophy of Hume” is the seed, in Germany, of “the rank crop of religious scepticism, which is now imported into the popular literature of Britain and America, in the new species of infidelity which makes a virtual excision of those principles of common sense that lie at the root of our religious knowledge” (171). Once again, in light of these popular constructions of Humean philosophy, Great Expectations’s apparent endorsement of Hume’s conception of the self is perplexing.

Yet while selfhood appears inherently unstable in Great Expectations’s first scenes, it is not so for Dickens, as my previous chapters have made clear. This chapter charts the means by which Dickens trusses up this novel’s apparent bundles of selfhood (as Mrs. Joe trusses up Pip’s bundle of shivers in his “tightest and fearfulest suit” [54]); I will focus on the essential aspects of identity on which the novel insists but which the Humean reading I have just offered overlooks. For Great Expectations, at least in terms

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315 Douglas Steward seems to be the only critic who has commented on the passivity of the selfhood Pip describes in the novel’s opening scene: “Pip’s psyche, then, from his earliest memory, is of a passive nature, since ‘impression’ implies a being acted upon rather than an active assertion of identity” (34). Steward, though, does not consider the implications of this passivity in light of popular responses to Humean psychology.

316 That Dickens was aware of the popular perception of Hume is suggested in the letter sent to him by Bulwer Lytton on either the 24th or 25th of December 1861. In explaining his Strange Story, Bulwer writes that the character Fenwick “falls unto all kinds of visionary mistakes & illusions similar to those of great reasoners like Hume; La Place & La Marck” (Letters 9: 572). I shall have more to say about the last of these figures below.
of its psychology, is more similar to *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House* than different from them. This novel, like them, endorses a model of Christian faculty psychology, although it is a faculty psychology attuned to the very latest developments of that school.

To state the contention of this chapter another way, *Great Expectations* finds its solutions to the continued—and now even more pressing—dangers of associationism and materialism in what represented the furthest advances of the Common Sense school in 1860: Dickens’s psychology in this novel hinges on a spiritualized model of the latent operations of the mind, a theory that positioned Hume’s bundle of perceptions as merely the surface manifestations of a deeper essential—and immortal—selfhood.

That some notion of unconscious thought stands at the centre of *Great Expectations* has long been a truism of criticism of the novel: numerous critics have (anachronistically) argued about Pip’s or the novel’s “unconscious.”

Numerous critics, that is, have forced this novel into a psychoanalytic framework that both obscures the specifics of unconscious thought in this text (as opposed to the Freudian unconscious) and sheds no light on the cultural stakes for Victorian readers of the particular notion of the mind underlying that model of unconsciousness. This chapter, on the contrary, reads *Great Expectations* in the context of nineteenth-century models of latent thought. Part of the work this chapter does, then, is to trace the various models of unconsciousness that were available in the 1860s and the implications of each: for if faculty psychology seemed to be constructing latency in the late 1850s as pointing to a spiritualized and

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317 The most famous such reading is probably that put forth by Peter Brooks, who sees Magwitch’s return as a return of the repressed (129). Other critics who offer some form of psychoanalytic reading of the unconscious in *Great Expectations* include Baldick (120); den Hartog (146-47); Frank (Charles Dickens 160-65); Gallagher and Greenblatt (186); Gervais (95); Ginsburg; Houston (20, 22); Jordan (“Medium” 75-78 and “Partings” 27); Lesjak (103-6); Newey (189-91); Pettit (246-48); Van Ghent (134); and Woloch (196-98). Discussions of Pip’s guilt or criminality also tend to be expressed in psychoanalytic terms. Here Julian Moynahan’s “The Hero’s Guilt: The Case of *Great Expectations*” is most notable, but see also, for example, Steward (41).
immortal mind, other contemporary theories of unconscious thought were pushing the idea in radically different directions. In the latter sections of this chapter, I consider two such models, but two that are often so intertwined that the second of them at times seems merely a further development of the first. Taken together, these models—which I call physiological and evolutionary latency—establish what is latent to consciousness in the human mind to be no more than the physical substratum of thought, the nerve fibres and cerebral matter that, for many theorists, came to constitute the source of consciousness.

Exacerbating the problems of this materialization of the mind’s latent material for Dickens’s anti-materialist project was the work of two psychological writers on whom I focus in the latter part of this chapter, Alexander Bain and Herbert Spencer, who together offered a particularly powerful threat to Dickens’s Christian psychology—his efforts to resist the encroachment of materialist mental science—in their combination of these material models of latency with the most scientifically advanced associationist psychology of the day. While I argue that the mental philosophy of *Great Expectations* is modelled on a Christian faculty psychology, then, I simultaneously chart the way this psychology continued to grow indistinguishable from models that, particularly in the wake of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859), seemed a threat to religion. In tracing the ambiguities of the psychology of *Great Expectations*, this chapter will therefore reveal how little room was left in the 1860s in which a Christian psychology could differentiate itself from the physiological models of mind that continued their rise to dominance.
What Lies beneath: Faculty Psychology and Latent Mental Modifications

To show how *Great Expectations* upholds the Christian mental philosophy that Hume’s theories were thought to threaten, I want to begin by drawing attention to a series of generally unremarked aspects of Pip’s psychology. The first of these is hinted at in his peculiar and persistent recollections of knowledge that is present somewhere in his mind at the narrated moment but only recognized by his conscious self after the fact. This knowledge is gestured at in such convoluted constructions as Pip uses to recount his response when commanded by Magwitch to describe the other convict on the marshes, at which point Pip recalls “what I hardly knew I knew” (21). Pip points to a similarly unknown known after describing the appearance of the soldiers who seek Magwitch on Christmas day, telling us, “All these things I saw without then knowing that I saw them” (32). The pattern is persistent throughout the novel—such claims come to be almost a signature of Pip’s narration, only with here and there the slightest variation. His improbable recognition of Estella’s handwriting in the first letter she ever writes him—which he recognizes without being conscious of having seen her hand before—seems to fall into this latter category, as does the hidden means by which Pip later gains the impression that Estella and Drummle have been married.

The sense here is of a series of hints noticed unconsciously, noticed, that is, by some part of Pip’s mind that lets bubble into consciousness only the vaguest feeling of recognition. There is a family resemblance between moments like these I have just been describing and Pip’s claims elsewhere in the text that he is unsure about his perceptions:

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318 Claire Pettit seems to be the only other critic to have taken notice of this passage (247). She connects it with Victorian debates about consciousness and identity, but in very different ways than I do below. Certainly her conclusion that what Dickens here figures is “an identity continually under threat of collapse” (247) is antithetical to my own argument.
before describing his fight with Herbert in the garden of Satis House, for example, he insists that it is not to the purpose whether the garden gate had been open on the last time he was there, but that he does not think he noticed (90). In a novel that hinges upon its narrator’s failure to perceive the manifest clues that he is misreading his own life, the temptation is strong to collapse such comments about Pip’s perception into his more general and figurative failures of sight. But my suggestion is that these particular moments—which lay stress on the acts of perception and attention—have another purpose.

That purpose becomes clearer when the narratorial asides I have been describing are juxtaposed with a similar recurrent claim in Pip’s narrative, that of imperceptible changes around him that finally demand his conscious attention. Pip can never precisely name how Magwitch becomes softened in his eyes—commenting on the change when visiting Magwitch in his new rooms by Mill Pond Bank, Pip can only say that he has softened “indefinably, for I could not have said how, and could never afterwards recall how when I tried; but certainly” (375). Pip similarly fails, until late in the novel, to make himself conscious of the clues that lead him to assume that Herbert Pocket will never be successful; he initially only claims, “I don’t know how this was. I became imbued with the notion on that first occasion before we sat down to dinner, but I cannot define by what means” (176). Nor can he explain how he determined that the group of relations that waited on Miss Havisham at Satis House were all toadies and humbugs (81). It just “came to my knowledge” (191), as he elsewhere puts it—somehow, imperceptibly.319

319 Nor is Pip always capable of describing or recognizing the feelings that overcome him. After his uncomfortable encounter with the two convicts on the coach to the marsh country, Pip recalls: “As I walked on to the hotel, I felt that a dread, much exceeding the mere apprehension of a painful or disagreeable
The significance of the mental process gestured at in these comments is made clear in the way Pip notices Biddy’s maturation. Shortly after she has moved into the house at the forge, Pip remarks: “Imperceptibly I became conscious of a change in Biddy. . . . Her shoes came up at the heel, her hair grew bright and neat, her hands were always clean” (124). I want to draw attention to Pip’s conclusion as to what has precipitated the change in Biddy, however: “I reflected that even in those untoward times”—her tenure as his first teacher—“there must have been latent in Biddy what was now developing, for, in my first uneasiness and discontent I had turned to her for help, as a matter of course” (126). It is the discourse of latency that is significant here, for in what criticism has established as a tic of Dickens’s fiction, Pip here projects outward—at least in the terms he uses to describe Biddy’s change—a process that occurs within him: the mental manifestation of latent material. The activity of recognition, here as elsewhere, goes on outside the reach or awareness of consciousness; it is imperceptible, but somehow—by some part of him—sensed and noticed. Thus Pip can make the sort of distinction (between perception and sensation) that he makes in recalling coming to his senses in the sluice-house after being rescued from Orlick: “My eyes were fixed on the ladder against the wall, when I came to myself—had opened on it before my mind saw it—and thus as I recovered consciousness, I knew that I was in the place where I had lost it” (426).

To come at this question from a slightly different angle, what are we to make of Pip’s recurrent descriptions of a single moment into which a series of perceptions are crammed? These moments are so frequent as almost to escape notice. Pip, first encountering Compeyson, follows a description of this other convict by explaining, “All

recognition, made me tremble. I am confident that it took no distinctness of shape, and that it was the revival for a few minutes of the terror of childhood” (230).
this, I saw in a moment, for I had only a moment to see it in” (18). He makes the same claim after describing Miss Havisham’s rooms for the first time: “It was not in the first moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed” (58-59). He writes of the revival of his childish association that Havisham is hanging in the brewery, “So strong was the impression, that I stood under the beam shuddering from head to foot before I knew it was a fancy—though to be sure I was there in an instant” (398). And the series of clauses beginning “still in the same moment” (441) through which he describes his immersion in the river along with Compeyson and Magwitch at the latter’s final capture create roughly the same effect, telescoping a series of discrete perceptions into an instant. These perceptions outstrip consciousness; they can only be unpacked later, taken apart and made objects of knowledge. But what is it that first records them in an instant? Where are they stored before their separate details emerge into consciousness?

Perhaps the clearest example of the aspect of Pip’s psychology on which I am placing such significance is revealed in certain of the novel’s scenes of recognition. Pip’s recognition of Magwitch upon the latter’s return is of course the example that stands out, although it is but one in a long series of such moments in the novel. Pip, for instance, insists that he instantly knows it to be Joe’s file with which the convict at the Jolly Bargemen stirs his drink; he recognizes Jaggers from their first encounter on the stairs at Satis House in the instant he sees the lawyer at the public house; and it is in a flash that Pip and Herbert recognize one another as the prowling boy and pale young gentleman. What is important about the way that Pip recognizes Magwitch, though, is that after initially not recognizing him, he finally knows him in a flash—before he can consciously
recall a single feature, and again, in his words, “though, a moment before, I had not been conscious of remotely suspecting his identity” (313, emphasis mine). All the tumblers suddenly fall into place, the various clues that have stared Pip in the face finally, somehow, are pieced together into realization. The subsequent flash in which he learns who his benefactor has been (316) is a slight variation on the same idea, as is, perhaps, Joe’s moment of inspiration in which the text for his father’s gravestone arises in his mind like a horseshoe struck in a single blow—in an instant. To return to Pip’s recognition of Magwitch, the idea here is of details, individually noticed at some level, finally adding up to a whole. That is, the sense is largely that with which Pip teases us at such length—“What was it?” (238), again and again—before he finally sees that Molly is Estella’s mother, before the final “link of association” is “riveted” for him (388), in Pip’s tellingly passive construction. In both cases, I want to suggest, the real work of recognition has gone on out of sight, somewhere other than in Pip’s conscious mind.

I have spent time over this series of claims about perception and knowledge because the novel offers them, I argue in the following pages, as a bulwark against the sort of Humean instability and dissolution that are threatened in the text’s opening scene. For what these many claims about Pip’s psychology all share is, first, a sense of mental operations going on beneath the surface, outside the perception of the conscious mind, and, second—an idea I shall argue is intimately related—a notion of the extraordinary powers of the mind in extreme circumstances. What I am suggesting, in other words, is that Pip’s remarks collectively point to a notion of unconscious thought, but a notion very different from the constructions of the unconscious in those psychoanalytic readings of the novel that I mentioned earlier.
As an alternative to such readings, I want to connect the unconscious mental activity that *Great Expectations* describes to a nearly contemporaneous theory: Sir William Hamilton’s notion of latent mental modifications, described in his posthumous 1859 text *Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic*, which comprised his lectures as Chair of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh.\(^{320}\) Hamilton’s theory sets forth three degrees of mental latency. The first encompasses our acquired habits, our ability to draw upon, for instance, a language or a science—as Hamilton puts it, “[T]he infinitely greater part of our spiritual treasures, lies always beyond the sphere of consciousness, hid in the obscure recesses of the mind” (*Lectures* 236). The second degree describes systems of knowledge or acquired habits of which the mind is ordinarily unaware—this “latent furniture” (235) only rises to the surface under extreme circumstances, when the mind’s powers are extraordinarily exalted, as in fever, somnambulism, or madness (236). That is, Hamilton’s second degree of latency closely parallels the sort of remarkable recoveries of knowledge that I discussed in Chapter Two, in describing the instant restoration to Emily of the language of the country to which Steerforth had taken her.

For the moment, though, it is the third degree of latency to which I want to draw attention. This degree concerns unconscious *actions* of the mind, only the results of which rise to consciousness (241). If in the series of associations A, B, and C, for example, the idea B were latent, its existence beneath the surface could be deduced from the necessity of an intervening connection between A and C (244-45). Similarly, the individual volitions for each small movement of an acquired habit—Hamilton’s example here is playing the harpsichord—go on in the mind but never rise to consciousness.

\(^{320}\) Hamilton had also suggested the possibility of latent mental modifications in his edition of the works of Reid. Alexander Bain, about whom I shall have more to say below, quotes this section of Hamilton’s notes in *The Senses and the Intellect* (316n).
Hamilton’s point is “that the sphere of our conscious modifications is only a small circle in the centre of a far wider sphere of action and passion, of which we are only conscious through its effects” (242). Significantly for my argument, the first means by which Hamilton seeks to prove this point is by way of the process of perception. There is, he suggests, a “minimum visible” or a “Minimum Audible” (243), the smallest object that can be seen or quietest sound that can be heard, respectively. But our conscious perception of these minimums, Hamilton claims, is made up of even smaller parts—the greenness we perceive of a distant forest is constituted by the greenness of individual leaves, leaves of which we are not consciously aware. “[T]he total impression of which we are conscious,” according to Hamilton, “is made up of an infinitude of small impressions of which we are not conscious” (243). These leaves, or the sound of individual waves in a distant, murmuring sea, nevertheless “produce a certain modification,” but this modification occurs outside the realm of consciousness, so that Hamilton finally maintains “that what we are conscious of is constructed out of what we are not conscious of,—that our whole knowledge, in fact, is made up of the unknown and incognizable” (241). There is an unconscious component to every act of perception, and thus every piece of knowledge.

My suggestion, in the following pages, will be that the bundle of impressions—or shivers—with which this novel began represents but the surface phenomena of the mind; beneath this surface, binding together and granting permanence to the self, lie the spiritual treasures of the mind, as well as a mechanism that seems to sift the material of existence and send through to consciousness that which is significant or substantial. For Pip’s recurrent drawing of attention to the process of perception, his frequent invocations of the bubbling to the surface of the results of apparently latent mental operations, could
hardly fail to evoke for many in 1860 (the year in which *Great Expectations* began to be serialized) Hamilton’s recently published conception of the mind. And because of the way Hamilton was popularly viewed at mid-century, as I shall explain, his theory would have been widely understood as reinforcing the orthodox belief that selfhood was founded on an immaterial mind and immortal soul.\(^3\)

Hamilton’s star was at its zenith in the years during which *Great Expectations* appeared serially; indeed, Hamilton was widely considered during the 1850s to be among the finest philosophers England had produced in the nineteenth century.\(^3\) Note the high terms in which he was praised by his contemporaries: James McCosh writes in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1859 that “Hamilton may be regarded always, along with M. Cousin, still living, as the most distinguished metaphysician of the age now past or passing away” (155) and in the *North British Review* in 1857 that to Hamilton “is due in great measure the revival of philosophy in this country” (290); Francis Jacox, at the head of an article bursting with effusive praise of the philosopher, claims in the *New Monthly*
Magazine in 1853 that “[t]he metaphysical department of the Edinburgh Review owes whatever prestige it enjoys to the contributions of Sir William Hamilton” (377), and later that Hamilton’s edition of Reid “fixed the attention of Christendom at large” (379); John Stuart Mill, moreover, begins his Examination of Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy (1865) by insisting that, “[a]mong the philosophical writers of the present century in these islands, no one occupies a higher position than Sir William Hamilton” (1).

Hamilton’s fame is, retrospectively, difficult for us to perceive, precisely because of the way Mill so thoroughly undermined his work in the Examination, but Hamilton was, in the 1850s and early 1860s, extremely well-respected. 323

Surely part of what enabled Hamilton to gain such fame was that he was continuing in the line of those thinkers who, in the middle of the century, were still considered psychologically orthodox: as I explained in Chapter Two, Hamilton’s work was generally seen as an extension of the Common Sense philosophy of Reid and Stewart. 324 His perceived affiliation with that school is evident from the title of A. Campbell Fraser’s 1848 North British Review article “Sir William Hamilton and Dr. Reid” 325 or from John Cunningham’s claim that “Hamilton’s devotion to Reid is something wonderful” (85). Mill, in giving his reasons for attacking Hamilton in the

323 Mill severely damaged Hamilton’s reputation, but Janice Carlisle’s claim (drawing on a contemporary review of the Examination by Mark Pattison) that Mill had “simply erased Hamilton, destroying his claims to authority and rendering his influence non-existent” (171), seems grossly overstated. Hamilton’s high reputation did not evaporate overnight sometime in 1865, and to trace his disappearance from conversations about nineteenth-century philosophy entirely to Mill would be a massive oversimplification.

324 This observation has also been made by Graham Richards (339). The connection between Reid and Hamilton was made particularly clear when Hamilton edited Reid’s collected works. Of course, Hamilton was not a slavish follower of either Reid or Stewart. The author of the review of Hamilton’s Lectures in The Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology, for example, writes that “almost the only fault of these excellent lectures is the tendency to prove that Reid was wrong in everything: that Stewart and Brown have mistaken and misrepresented him; and that he has mistaken and misrepresented everybody else” (327).

325 Fraser calls Hamilton’s philosophy “a fusion of the spirit and doctrines of Reid and Kant” (157), though. See also McCosh, “Metaphysics” 155.
Examination, traces Hamilton’s roots to the reaction against Locke and Hume (Examination 1), and he describes Hamilton in his Autobiography (1873) as “the great fortress of the intuitional philosophy in this country” (203). After all, Hamilton argued for the innate mental structures that were the foundation of faculty psychology, and he explicitly contested what was widely perceived as the scepticism of Hume and Berkeley.  

That Dickens would have known of Hamilton is likely: the latter’s notion of latent mental modifications was repeated and discussed in numerous other texts of the period. His Lectures were reviewed in all the major periodicals, and the authors of these reviews invariably touched on the theory of latent mental modifications. Thomas Laycock, in his Mind and Brain (1860), quotes extensively from Hamilton’s discussion of latent thought, and Dickens’s friend G. H. Lewes, in the Physiology of Common Life (1859)—a book Dickens owned, although he seems not to have purchased it until 1862—points to Hamilton’s text in his notes after discussing unconscious thought (2: 44). Mill, of course, also devotes Chapter XV of the Examination to Hamilton’s theory, although the Examination was not published until 1865.

I have already glanced at some of the other theories of unconscious thought that circulated in the period, and I shall have more to say about these later in this chapter and in the next. What I want to suggest at present, though, is that Hamilton’s death in 1856

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326 See also [McCosh], “Lectures” 290.
327 See, for example, the review in The Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology 334-36; and McCosh, “Sir William Hamilton’s Metaphysics” 161-62, and “Lectures” 291-98. Moreover, as I pointed out above, while Hamilton’s discussion of latent mental modifications in the Lectures seems to have drawn especial notice, he had been advancing similar theories for some time. Fraser notes Hamilton’s theories of latent thought as early as 1848, an idea to which, he claims, Hamilton “often refers in the course of his philosophical writings” (166).
328 Lewes’s book is among those Dickens says he wants in a 6 May 1862 letter, probably to Charles Edmonds (Letters 10: 78).
and the publication of his *Lectures* in 1859—reviewed, I repeat, in all the major periodicals in that year—encouraged readers to connect the notion of unconscious thought with Hamilton’s work specifically,\(^329\) I want to propose further, then, that in 1860 unconscious thought would also have been frequently associated with the Common Sense school (and the connected notions of psychological orthodoxy and Christian belief popularly attached to that school). In this light, the notion of latent thought comes to seem like a direct response to Hume, one aspect of faculty psychology’s continued battle against the perceived materialism of associationist thought, and it is in this sense, I argue, that Dickens uses the theory in *Great Expectations*.

Yet it is not only through the numerous comments I discussed above on perception and the flash of realization that latent thought—Dickens’s most likely source for which in 1860, I repeat, was Hamilton—makes its way into *Great Expectations*. After all, among the phenomena that Hamilton saw his theory of latent mental modifications as explaining were those habits or automatic actions that, once set working by the will, go on without the intervention of consciousness (247).\(^330\) As Hamilton puts it, in such cases as the rapid playing of a musical instrument, “though we are conscious of the series of operations,—that is, of the mental state which they conjunctly constitute,—of the several operations themselves as acts of volition we are wholly incognizant” (255). The body performs, directed by the mind, without the intervention of consciousness; each act, Hamilton explains, “is an act of mental agency, but not of consciousness and separate

\(^{329}\) Jenny Bourne Taylor argues that Hamilton’s “three degrees of latent mental modification remained an important reference-point through the nineteenth century” (“Obscure” 145). Consider also the way both Carpenter and Laycock point to Hamilton, as I noted above.

\(^{330}\) Of course, this aspect of Hamilton’s theory is hardly unique. Compare, for example, Henry Holland’s chapter “On Instincts and Habits” in the second edition of his *Chapters on Mental Physiology* (1858). Automatic, reflex, and habitual actions provided perhaps the least controversial example of unconsciousness. But my point, again, is that in 1860 Hamilton would have been the most obvious source for theories of latency.
volition” (256). Closely related to such performances, of course, are the distracted and automatic actions in which Pip so often finds himself engaged.\textsuperscript{331} He follows Herbert to their fight in the garden apparently against his will, is surprised to discover himself crooning “Old Clem” when called upon by Miss Havisham to sing, and later only knows that he has rescued her from the flames by which she is engulfed “through the result, but not through anything I felt, or thought, or knew I did” (399).\textsuperscript{332}

Pip, indeed, pleads himself incapable of explaining why he does many of the things he does. While some of these claims must be seen for what they are—simple refusals to admit (or failures to perceive) his baser motives—Pip really does slip into an absent state of mind only slightly less often than the ever-abstracted Mrs. Pocket. His tendency to act unconsciously is only exacerbated by the wine he drinks with Pumblechook after being fitted for his first post-expectations suit of clothes—wine that causes him “slumberously” to get “to the turnpike without having taken any account of the road” (154)\textsuperscript{333}—by the shock of Magwitch’s return,\textsuperscript{334} or by the fever into which he

\textsuperscript{331} The close connection between unconscious thought and automatic action will become clearer in my next chapter, when I discuss at greater length the theories of Carpenter and Laycock regarding unconscious cerebration. As I explain there, both men—and many others in their wake—explained such thought by extending the nervous capability for reflex or automatic action into the cerebrum. Dickens seems to endorse the notion of involuntary or unconscious thought in several of his journalistic pieces. “Lying Awake” (1852) describes his struggles to control his thoughts as he longs for sleep; at one point, after encountering a “disagreeable train” of thought, he determines, “I must resolve to think of something on the voluntary principle” (3: 92)—presumably to ward off involuntary thought. In “Night Walks,” moreover, he muses of the uncontrolled and illogical connections made in sleep: “Are not the sane and insane equal at night as the sane lie a dreaming? . . . I wonder that the great master who knew everything, when he called Sleep the death of each day’s life, did not call Dreams the insanity of each day’s sanity” (4: 153-54).

\textsuperscript{332} And of course, when we last see her in the novel, Havisham is unconsciously and automatically begging for forgiveness.

\textsuperscript{333} Such automatic perambulation was an experience familiar to Dickens, although under the influence of marital strife rather than wine. In “Shy Neighbourhoods” (1860) he describes turning out in the middle of the night and walking thirty miles into the country, along the way falling asleep to the sound of his own feet: “Mile after mile I walked, without the slightest sense of exertion, dozing heavily and dreaming constantly. It was only when I made a stumble like a drunken man, or struck out into the road to avoid a horseman close upon me on the path—who had no existence—that I came to myself and looked about” (4: 118). This long walk came as a result of a fight with his wife, a fact Dickens for obvious reasons omits from his published account.
falls after Magwitch’s death. So while Pip hesitates, despite appearances, to claim that Miss Skiffins unconsciously rebuffs Wemmick’s attempts to encircle her with his arm—“Miss Skiffins’s composure while she did this was one of the most remarkable sights I have ever seen, and if I could have thought the act consistent with abstraction of mind, I should have deemed that Miss Skiffins performed it mechanically” (296)—the novel consistently shows us Pip acting in precisely this manner335 (just as, above, he was perceiving in this manner): without consciousness.336

But the reflex or automatic actions that unconscious thought explains and that Pip so often performs are certainly not what is most significant, for my purposes at least, about Hamilton’s theory of latent modifications. As I have already pointed out, Hamilton was generally understood to be continuing the project—the Christian psychology—of Reid and Stewart, and it is easy, I think, to read into his theory of latent mental modifications a particularly religious slant (even if this was not necessarily Hamilton’s point). In describing the second degree of latent modifications, for example, Hamilton quotes directly from Coleridge’s story in the Biographia of the ignorant German woman who, in a fever, was able to recall the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew that, as a young girl, she had overheard spoken by a Protestant pastor who had charitably taken her in (239-40). As I discussed in Chapter Two, for Coleridge this story proved

334 Magwitch’s return leads Herbert to act automatically, too. On the evening that he returns to discover Magwitch’s presence in the lodgings he and Pip share, and after Magwitch has retired for the evening, Herbert “unconsciously” takes a chair in which Magwitch had been sitting; Pip recalls, however, that realizing who had last occupied the chair, Herbert “next moment started out of it, pushed it away, and took another” (340).
335 Indeed, Pip tells us that he both comprehended and yielded to Orlick’s letter beckoning him to the limekiln “mechanically” (416).
336 Jonathan Miller has made clear the connection between automatic or distracted action and the questions of perception I discussed above: after considering mid-century theories of automatic action, he writes that “[t]he same principle applies to perception. We all know that heedlessness is more apparent than real and that as long as we are prompted or ‘cued’ in the right way, we’re often surprised to recall seeing something while our attention was apparently elsewhere” (18).
that relics of sensation may exist for an indefinite time in a latent state, in
the very same order in which they were originally impressed; and as we
cannot rationally suppose the feverish state of the brain to act in any other
way than as a stimulus, this fact (and it would not be difficult to adduce
several of the same kind) contributes to make it even probable, that all
thoughts are in themselves imperishable; and, that if the intelligent faculty
should be rendered more comprehensive, it would require only a different
and apportioned organization, the body celestial instead of the body
terrestrial, to bring before every human soul the collective experience of
its whole past existence. (217)

That is, Coleridge marked in explicitly religious terms the phenomenon described in the
story. Hamilton omits Coleridge’s explanation from the passage that he quotes, but the
story was so familiar that it seems highly probable that Hamilton’s quotation from it
would have pushed many readers to understand the theory of latent mental modifications
in the religious framework Coleridge had established. After all, Reid, the founder of
the Common Sense school in which Hamilton was perpetually cast, took a position in
many ways akin to Coleridge’s. In his Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man (1785),
he suggests:

We have reason to believe, that when we put off these bodies, and all the
organs belonging to them, our perceptive powers shall rather be improved

337 Coleridge’s story was frequently reprinted. Hamilton quotes it, of course, but we also find it—quoted
along with the explanation that Hamilton omits—in, for example, the article “Psychological” in the January
1848 issue of the American Journal of Insanity (223-25). Dickens recalls his own similar resurrection of
memory in a somnambulic state in “Shy Neighbourhoods”: “It is a curiosity of broken sleep, that I made
immense quantities of verses on that pedestrian occasion (of course I never make any when I am in my
right senses), and that I spoke a certain language once pretty familiar to me, but which I have nearly
forgotten from disuse, with fluency” (4: 118).
than destroyed or impaired. . . . We ought not, therefore, to conclude, that such bodily organs are, in their own nature, necessary to perception; but rather, that, by the will of God, our power of perceiving external objects is limited and circumscribed by our organs of sense[.] (72)

There was, in other words, good reason—and substantial precedent—to read Hamilton’s latent mental modifications as connected to the soul’s unfettered perceptive powers.

Certainly it was in the context of such religious sentiments that Dickens used (and understood) the idea of mental latency. Consciousness, in Dickens’s thinking, seems to constitute merely the limited perception of the soul in its earthly and embodied state; the bodily senses, that is, only constrain the soul’s capacious perceptive powers, an idea I have already discussed at length. Dickens’s sense of latency, in other words, seems to be

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338 Presumably mental latency is one of “those strange psychological mysteries in ourselves” (Letters 9: 412) of which Dickens wrote to Bulwer Lytton in 1861. In regards to Dickens’s religious take on latency, consider the opening assertions of the All the Year Round article “Undeveloped Impressions” (1863): “Beyond the region of positive ideas and emotions, there lies, in the minds of all persons who have any sensitiveness of perception, a strange ghostly tract of unexplored country, full of shadowy suggestions of thoughts and feelings, and lit by the faint, spectral light of what may perchance be the Aurora of some higher knowledge now on its way to us” (366). The article is, more or less, a discussion of the very phenomena Hamilton considers as latent mental modifications. Moreover, describing the recurrence of long-forgotten memories, the anonymous author wonders (in very Coleridgean terms), “Is it that every experience of life, even the most frivolous, leaves an indelible print on the mental organism, and that, although this print may seemingly fade out, it is still there, like writing in invisible ink, and only awaits some exciting cause to bring it out clearly and legibly? But, if so, what is the exciting cause, none being cognisable? What mysterious hand touches the spring that opens these forgotten doors?” (366). In addition to the echoes of Coleridge throughout this passage, of course, the last clause here echoes Great Expectations’s “Eastern story,” which I discuss below. In the Household Words article “Idiots” (1853), which Dickens co-wrote with his sub-editor W. H. Wills (and which frequently cites John Abercrombie’s book), Dickens describes how “the cultivation of such senses and instincts as the idiot is seen to possess, will, besides frequently developing others that are latent within him but obscured, so brighten those glimmering lights, as immensely to improve his condition” (313). The idiot here seems like a limit case of the corporeal limitations of the soul’s powers. This is, for example, the drift of Dickens’s comments that, with regards to prayer, the idiot’s “struggling soul would seem to have some instinctive aspirations towards its Maker” (315). Andrew Halliday’s All the Year Round article “Happy Idiots” (1864) makes similar claims. He concludes by noting the “subtle process by which these poor idiots are . . . insensibly led into developing their latent faculties, and assuming, as near as possible, the attributes of useful and intelligent human beings” (569).

339 In the Uncommercial Traveller article “Some Recollections of Mortality” (1863), for example, Dickens writes of the face of a defendant at a coroner’s inquest on which he sat, “[I]f I ever see it again in another world I shall only know it by the help of some new sense or intelligence” (4: 227).
that of the passage from Coleridge, or of William Carpenter’s discussion of the soul in the 1842 edition of *Principles of Human Physiology*:

> By this Immortal Soul, the existence of which is guessed by Man, but of whose presence within him he derives the strongest evidence from Revelation, Man is connected with beings of a higher order, amongst whom intelligence exists, unrestrained in its exercise by the imperfections of that corporeal mechanism by which it here operates; and to this state,—a state of more intimate communion of mind with mind, and of creatures with their Creator,—he is encouraged to aspire, as the reward of his improvement of the talents here committed to his charge. (*Principles [1842] 55*)

Humankind, in this plane of existence, sees through a glass darkly. The bubbling to the surface of latent thought, however, offers a glimpse of those powers we one day will possess, a brief hint of what the soul might be capable in the next world.

Dickens stated this position most clearly some twenty years before *Great Expectations*, in Oliver’s hypnogogic state at the beginning of Chapter IX in *Oliver Twist*:

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340 The limited nature of our senses had become something of a truism in mid-century psychological writing. Cunningham writes in his review of Hamilton’s *Lectures* that our knowledge “is relative to our senses, to our brain, to the knowing mind. We do not see the external world as it is in itself, but as it is presented to us by our organs of vision. . . . Our senses not only limit but condition our acquaintance with the external world” (97). He further insists that his conclusion here “is not greatly different from that advocated by Sir William Hamilton” (98). Fraser, in his 1848 discussion of Hamilton’s philosophy, writes of “the highest elevation that the human mind can reach, as long, at least, as the human faculties are limited by the boundary proper to this mortal existence” (166), and McCosh also remarks—in another review of Hamilton’s *Lectures*—on “the barriers by which man’s capacity is bounded” (“Metaphysics” 165). Another, similar strain of thought is to be seen in the discussion of miracles in the *British Quarterly Review* article “The Natural and Supernatural”: “The world has been full of reports of miracles, because there is that in man which goes out beyond the material system, with its rigid laws; because he is spirit and not body only, and his higher nature craves to hold communion with a world beyond this earthly chain, by which he is darkly bound—to pierce the veil between the seen and the unseen” (150).
Although Oliver had roused himself from sleep, he was not thoroughly awake. There is a drowsy state, between sleeping and waking, when you dream more in five minutes with your eyes half open, and yourself half conscious of everything that is passing around you, than you would in five nights with your eyes fast closed, and your senses wrapt in perfect unconsciousness. At such times, a mortal knows just enough of what his mind is doing, to form some glimmering conception of its mighty powers: its bounding from earth and spurning time and space: when freed from the restraint of its corporeal associate. (51)

A more thorough detachment of the soul from the body (from what Dickens called in *David Copperfield* the soul’s “prison”) finds its way into *Great Expectations*: Arthur, Miss Havisham’s half-brother, insists to Compeyson before his death that his sister haunts him in spectral form, a claim Compeyson dismisses (although without saving Arthur’s life) by insisting, “Why, you fool, don’t you know she’s got a living body? And how should she be up there, without coming through the door, or in at the window, and up the stairs?” (347). Havisham, in other words, seems to Arthur’s fancy to have escaped her bodily prison, which might explain his relief when he is assured that her “keeper” has been for her (347).\(^{341}\) He cannot explain her appearance, of course, but somehow—he

\(^{341}\) I do not see any compelling reason to follow Tambling in reading “keeper” here as the attendant of a madhouse (“‘Why’” 75), particularly considering the centrality of prisons to *Great Expectations*—a theme Tambling has himself discussed at length in “Prison-bound: Dickens and Foucault”—and the novel’s use of the word to describe the individual responsible for guarding the two convicts who ride down with Pip to the marsh country (228). To pursue further the idea of Havisham’s bodily prison: Pip later comments on her “profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed” by her “Maker” (396)—is this, again, a sort of prison? In any case, were we to take Arthur’s visions literally, we might do so by arguing that Dickens is representing the theory ascribed by Greenblatt and Gallagher to Chancy Hare Townshend (to whom *Great Expectations* is dedicated): “Townshend sometimes suggested that people might send ‘emanations’ of themselves across distances through [the mesmeric fluid], so that their bodies might be located in one place and their selves, viewable in a subtle form, in another” (194). The visions heralding Magwitch’s approach
maintains so convincingly that Magwitch half believes him—she is nevertheless there. Somehow, that is, her soul has been able to free itself from her living body.

But it is Pip’s confrontation with the possibility of death at the limekiln that constitutes this novel’s clearest and most sustained engagement with the spirituality of latent mental modifications, with the possibility that what was latent to consciousness was the soul itself. For the scene at the sluice-house offers one of Pip’s most extended discussions of his own psychology, and what he remarks upon most often is the rapidity and power of his thought as he stares down his imminent demise. It is as though his soul in these moments has already begun to struggle loose of the corporeal senses that bind it, just as, in a more figurative way, the contemplation of his sister’s death earlier had allowed Pip to place himself, for a moment, in the position of one looking back to this world from the next: having returned to the forge for her funeral, he writes how “the very breath of the beans and clover whispered to my heart that the day must come when it would be well for my memory that others walking in the sunshine should be softened as they thought of me” (277). At the sluice-house, Pip’s thoughts race with a seemingly supernatural speed. With “inconceivable rapidity” (422)—a construction he plays on again and again—Pip can trace out all of the most minute consequences of his approaching death, down to the way he will be “despised by unborn generations” (422);

that Pip experiences in the weeks before his arrival in Pip’s room could be seen as another instance of this phenomenon, a position considered by Greenblatt and Gallagher (194-96). Yet I do not think we should take Arthur’s—or Pip’s—visions seriously, just as it would be a mistake to read the ghosts in Dickens’s Christmas books as reflecting his belief in the supernatural. What is significant about Arthur’s vision, I insist, is that it gestures at something entirely different from what Townshend—who believed the soul to be but a more refined form of matter—describes: the eventual separation of body and soul.

342 Is this the explanation for the all-too-familiar phenomenon described in “Undeveloped Impressions,” the way “all human beings at the moment of dissolution experience [an] awful resurrection of the dead past” (366), all passing through a “point at which the memory is preternaturally excited” (367) and every impression is recalled? That would seem to be the suggestion of the passage I cited above from Oliver Twist.
as before, he is able to assume the perspective of one looking back from the next life, tracing how others will receive news of his disappearance and following Orlick in the latter’s attempts to form an alibi. “My rapid mind pursued him to the town,” Pip writes, “made a picture of the street with him in it, and contrasted its lights and life with the lonely marsh and the white vapour creeping over it, into which I should have dissolved” (423)—a passage that enacts the final separation of Pip’s mind (which pursues Orlick) from the bodily material that dissolves into vapour back on the marsh. Pip’s thoughts race too quickly for Orlick’s slow words, so quickly that Pip thinks in pictures instead of words, summing up years and years with each of Orlick’s sentences; here, in other words, Dickens reveals to us again some hint of the soul’s “mighty powers: its bounding from earth and spurning time and space: when freed from the restraint of its corporeal associate” (Oliver Twist 51). Pip remarks on “the excited and exalted state” of his brain (423), on the wildness of his “inward hurry,” on the wonderful force of the pictures in his mind (425), the vividness of his thoughts such that it cannot be overstated (423). And what saves him, ultimately, is the way he is able to draw on all the force within him, “until then unknown” (426)—or, to put it another way, until then latent.

What I want to insist, again, is that it is Pip’s proximity to death, his sense that he is mere moments away from the future life—the drops of his life like the scanty drops left in Orlick’s bottle (423), the “swift stream” of his life “fast running out to sea” (424)—that allows him access to this heightened strength, to this heightened perception, to this glimpse of the soul’s unfettered (manifest, that is, rather than latent) state.\(^{343}\) Surely it is

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\(^{343}\) Perhaps there is a parallel here to the way Herbert, justifying his actions by means of what he calls “the near prospect of our separation” (446) as he prepares to depart for the east, is able to set aside delicacy and ask Pip to join Clarriker’s house as a clerk. Impending ends—to a friendship, to a life—have power in this novel.
no coincidence that under the same pressure of the approaching end, Pip makes his most
explicit mentions of God and Heaven: for the first time in the novel, we see him praying,
beseeking pardon of Heaven at one moment, thinking a prayer in another.344

The notion of latency that I am describing here allows us to see that the Christian
sentiments of the final volume, if not elsewhere made as explicit, are nevertheless the
sentiments of the entire novel.345 This is, after all, a novel that begins in the churchyard
(on Christmas Eve, no less, the evening that Dickens elsewhere loaded with such
meaning) and that, already in its second paragraph, identifies the earthly life as “this state
of existence” (3), as opposed to the next. For those readers familiar with Coleridge’s
Biographia (or Berkeley’s Siris),346 even the tar-water that is Mrs. Joe’s panacea points
upwards to heaven: as Coleridge’s imaginary letter writer puts it in Chapter XIII, “[Y]ou
will be reminded of Bishop Berkeley’s Siris, announced as an Essay on Tar-water, which
beginning with Tar ends with the Trinity, the omne scibile forming the interspace” (VII.I:
303).347 And of course, the religious power of the scene of Magwitch’s sentencing is such

344 Newey also treats the sluice-house scene as bringing unconscious material to the surface (196-97), but
his reading of the unconscious in the novel is a psychoanalytic one and thus engages with none of the issues
in which I am interested here. More useful for my argument is David Gervais’s point that “Dickens
maintains [in Great Expectations] his old fascination with the last moments of consciousness. He is drawn
to death by its disclosure of a vital spark in people, beneath the level of moral differences, that seems to
hover most vividly on the brink of extinction” (107).
345 On the religious subtext of this novel, see also Gilbert 101. I do not agree with his conclusion that the
Biblical story merely offered Dickens useful narrative points of reference, however. Nor do I agree with
Goldie Morgentaler’s claim that “[r]eligious notions are . . . evoked in this novel only to be recategorized
according to secular principles” (717).
346 That is, if we had doubts about Dickens’s relationship to (what was popularly understood as) the
scepticism of Berkeley and Hume—a pair frequently lumped together in the nineteenth century—Pip’s
scornful mention of that “medical beast” who had “revived Tar-water . . . as a fine medicine” (12) ought to
set us right. For other nineteenth-century comments on the connection of Berkeley with tar-water, see
Blackie 165. John Jordan has also made the connection (“Medium” 87).
347 This chapter of the Biographia—even this very letter, which consumes so much of Chapter XIII (before
Coleridge’s definition of the imagination, another way in which the mind was connected with the Divine
essence in the nineteenth century)—is also echoed in the opening scenes of Great Expectations in a second
way. Describing his confusion with the discussion of the imagination in the first part of the chapter,
Coleridge’s letter writer remarks that the conclusions were so new to him, so opposed to all he had
previously believed, that even had he fully understood them, “I should have felt as if I had been standing on
that it echoes throughout the novel, at least on a second reading. My point is that it would be a mistake to conclude, from the relative lack elsewhere in the text of such explicit references to the Christian framework as in the courtroom scene, that *Great Expectations* is any less a reflection of Dickens’s religious views—any less grounded in his Christian way of understanding the world—than either of the novels I have treated so far, or any of Dickens’s writings whatsoever. As my discussion of latency should to this point have made apparent, whether or not Pip is blind or a hypocrite, Dickens’s construction of his psychology remains fundamentally orthodox, grounded as was the characterization of David Copperfield in the dualist Christian psychology of mid-century.

My argument, to be clear, is that the frequently invoked and spiritually informed notion of latency that we see in *Great Expectations*—signalled by Pip’s claims about perception and recognition, as well as by his heightened senses in the sluice-house—works to put forth an essentialist and Christian notion of selfhood, a construction of identity that is, more or less, equivalent to what we have seen in the earlier novels, only propped up by (a reading of) the latest theorizing of the philosopher who represented psychological orthodoxy in 1860. The apparent threat of dissolution in the novel’s opening scenes is therefore, for Dickens, just that—only apparent—for there is in Dickens’s model of selfhood always something in addition to and transcending Hume’s

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346 There is some truth to Dennis Walder’s claim that the expression of Dickens’s religious views is least obvious in *Great Expectations* (198). Recall, however, Dickens’s hesitancy about proclaiming his religion too directly. Nor do I see much point in making hay of Pip’s misquotation of the Publican’s prayer at Magwitch’s deathbed, at least as far as the religion of the novel is concerned. Moynahan was the first to offer Pip’s prayer as evidence that he had somehow failed to learn from experience (61). Similar arguments have been put forth by Jordan (“Medium” 83), Morris (947), Newey (194), and Tamblin (“Prison-bound” 22). But I am more apt to side with Walder on this point, who insists that the argument Moynahan and others advance “is misreading Dickens, who knows precisely where he is going here, and who expects us to realise that the force of this new application of the Word lies in this very alteration to fit both the immediate situation and the whole process of sin, repentance and forgiveness which operates in the novel, in the lives of Pip and Magwitch, Estella and Miss Havisham” (203).
bundle of impressions, something permanent that serves (in Hamilton’s words) as the basis of the “hope of immortality” (*Lectures* 260).

This model of selfhood—a latent, deeper layer hidden beneath the surface of consciousness, and intermittently making itself manifest in consciousness—is also reflected in the structure of the novel itself. One of the more manifest truths about this novel is that latency is its controlling metaphor. The mysterious tumbling of the Pocket children whenever they approach their mother (on the day of Pip’s introduction to that family) stands as an apt demonstration in miniature of the fate of this novel’s characters: tucked under Mrs. Pocket’s dress, the maid Flopson discovers, is her footstool, which unseen by all nevertheless exercises a power over the children that sends them head over heels—there is always something under the surface in this novel that sets its characters tumbling. The mists on which Pip so often comments suggest the novel’s vacillation between obscuring and revealing, a vacillation also to be seen in Jaggers’s alternation between hiding Molly’s strong wrists in “skilfully contrived” sleeves at her trial (391) and laying them bare for the admiration of his dinner guests. There are secrets everywhere in this text: secrets are, essentially, Jaggers’s stock in trade, but even a character like Herbert has one—his engagement to Clara. Identities are perpetually being hidden in this novel as well, whether to avoid the prosecution that would await Molly, to suppress the shame of Estella’s lineage, or to avoid the taint of Newgate that might otherwise penetrate Wemmick’s Walworth home. Describing his return home for his

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349 In terms of the split between the latent and the manifest in the novel’s structure, note Brooks’s distinction between the novel’s “official and ‘censoring’” plot and its “‘repressed’” one (117). For a different yet also valuable reading of the invisible and the visible in the novel, see Lesjak 89-111; for an adept reading of the novel’s secrets and the significance of suspense, see Caroline Levine 84-98. Woloch’s connection of this novel’s minor characters and hidden, marginalized labour—another reading that lays bare the structure I am describing here—is also very useful.
sister’s funeral, Pip even reveals the mundane and, for the moment, secret lives of the two sable warders guarding the doors of the house: in parentheses he tells us that the first was really the postboy (“discharged from the Boar for turning a young couple into a sawpit on their bridal morning, in consequence of intoxication rendering it necessary for him to ride his horse clasped round the neck with both arms”), and the second “a carpenter, who had once eaten two geese for a wager” (278). The play of the latent and manifest in this novel goes on even in such generally insignificant ways as this. More notably, the true—and shameful—source of Pip’s expectations is buried, but finds its way to the surface; it does so incrementally, moreover, first through the two one-pound notes, followed by the file that strikes down Mrs. Joe, the visions of Magwitch’s face that Pip sees in the weeks leading up to his arrival, and finally Magwitch’s arrival itself. Pip subsequently struggles to conceal Magwitch’s convict past, although it starts through any disguise in which Pip tries to dress him.

When there are no real secrets, Pip invents them: an inner meaning in Estella’s words, say, or a secret plan that Havisham wishes Estella and him to act out. Moreover, the revelation of the real source of Pip’s expectations positions the criminal underworld (or at least the shame and guilt that the underworld represents) as the hidden side of the social status Pip craves; it is not only Pip, but the whole social system, that is “on secret terms of conspiracy with convicts” (79). Great Expectations, then, is a novel fascinated with “the mysterious ways of the world both convict and free” (227, emphasis added), with the operations of “invisible agency” (213)—from the hidden means by which Jaggers draws out the worst of those around him, to that latent mechanism by which Wemmick and Miss Skiffins are announced at the Castle’s drawbridge.

350 This is Morgentaler’s point (713-14).
The essentially vertical structure of the novel, its play between latent and manifest, is also signalled, I suggest, in the novel’s persistent metaphorics of depth. What ultimately undermines Magwitch’s efforts to escape England, for example, is that Compeyson is, in Wemmick’s words, “at the bottom of half the regular business now transacted,” connected through latent lines of communication to Newgate and himself so deep that he misleads even “his own instruments” (448). The central passage here comprises Magwitch’s comments, at the beginning of his failed escape, about the mystery in which the outcome of their flight is wrapped: “I was a thinking through my smoke just then,” he tells Pip, “that we can no more see to the bottom of the next few hours, than we can see to the bottom of this river what I catches hold of” (434). What is significant about metaphors like this is the way they point to the connection between the novel’s verticality and the vertical conception of selfhood in the text.351 Wemmick draws on Magwitch’s very metaphor to describe Jaggers: “A river’s its natural depth,” Wemmick explains, “and he’s his natural depth” (205). Wemmick’s earlier insistence that Jaggers is “Deep . . . as Australia” (198) also effectively cements the connection between novel and mind, linking the central secret of the novel’s plot—the real source of Pip’s expectations—with the latency built into Jaggers’s selfhood. But it is not only Jaggers who comes to be described through such metaphors: the constables and Bow-street men who investigate Mrs. Joe’s assault are soon convinced that Joe is the culprit, and Pip recalls that they regarded Joe as “one of the deepest spirits they had ever encountered” (122). Wemmick calls Pip “a deep one” (259), too, and Pip’s description of the beneficial effect of tears—“they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlaying our hard hearts” (158)—equally establishes

351 Magwitch’s next words—“Nor yet we can’t no more hold their tide than I can hold this. And it’s run through my fingers and gone, you see!” (434)—work to associate the river with the novel’s plot.
that what is most valuable or revelatory about the self is deeply buried. Pip’s frequent
descriptions of the mazes in which he loses himself (his “poor labyrinth” [232], or the
maze of his future fortunes [140]) work to establish a similar representation of the mind,
as does his claim that Estella’s angry memories about the group of fawners and toadies
around Miss Havisham do not come “from any shallow place” (266). These metaphors
are, undoubtedly, so common as to elicit little notice from us. But in the 1850s and 1860s,
the notion of depth psychology on which they rely worked to position Dickens’s
conception of the mind against the sort of shallow, sensationalist selfhood that Hume
appeared to be endorsing.

The structure of both the novel itself and the selfhood at its centre is made
clearest—most manifest—in the “Eastern story” Pip borrows from The Tales of the Genii
to describe the effect of Magwitch’s return:

In the Eastern story, the heavy slab that was to fall on the bed of state in
the flush of conquest was slowly wrought out of the quarry, the tunnel for
the rope to hold it in its place was slowly carried through the leagues of
rock, the slab was slowly raised and fitted in the roof, the rope was rove to
it and slowly taken through the miles of hollow to the great iron ring. All
being made ready with much labour, and the hour come, the sultan was
aroused in the dead of the night, and the sharpened axe that was to sever
the rope from the great iron ring was put into his hand, and he struck with
it, and the rope parted and rushed away, and the ceiling fell. So, in my
case; all the work, near and afar, that tended to the end, had been
accomplished; and in an instant the blow was struck, and the roof of my stronghold dropped upon me. (309-10)

Other critics have pointed to the way this story effaces the agency by which the work it describes is done (Lesjak 96-97; Woloch 220); as Carolyn Lesjak has noted, the only agent named here is the sultan, and he strikes his blow “from a position of invisibility” (97). What seems particularly telling about this passage, then, is the way it so aptly sheds light on the mechanics of the mental processes that, I am arguing, stand as a bulwark against the threatened dissolution with which this chapter began. Pip knows his latent mental modifications by their effects, just as the only sign of the slow work done (beneath the surface) for the sultan is the eventual crashing down of the heavy slab on the bed of state. The “work” in both cases is invisible, impossible to see, but that the work goes on is, finally, known, and the effects of Pip’s latent thought, when they bubble to the surface, seem to guarantee for him a permanent (and immortal) selfhood.

Mental Latency and the Physical Substratum of Thought

If a spiritually informed variation on Hamilton’s model of latent mental modifications represents Great Expectations’s bulwark against the scepticism of Hume (and, by extension, against the perceived materialism of associationist psychology, still faculty psychology’s primary opponent), the idea of mental latency was by no means restricted to the mental philosophy that Dickens endorsed. Hamilton’s was the most orthodox and most widely recognized model of the unconscious in 1860; however, there were nevertheless numerous other models that figured latency in radically different ways. In

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352 In their own ways, both Lesjak and Woloch connect this passage with the invisibility of labour—of “work”—in the novel.
the remainder of this chapter, I want to consider two such models (although it is questionable whether we can distinguish these as two separate models, for the latter of the two seems more a development of the first than an absolute break from it).

As I suggested in my first chapter, in the time that elapsed between the publications of *Bleak House* and of *Great Expectations*, physiological psychology had continued to make substantial inroads into the psychological mainstream, and an ever-larger group of psychological writers were finding physical explanations for mental phenomena. The shift can be clearly perceived by comparing the different positions John Stuart Mill assumes in *A System of Logic* (1843) and in *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton’s Philosophy* (1865). In the first work, Mill hesitates to ascribe a physical substratum to thought: “[T]hat every mental state has a nervous state for its immediate antecedent and proximate cause, though extremely probable, cannot hitherto be said to be proved, in the conclusive manner in which this can be proved of sensations” (*System* 851), Mill claims, justifying his hesitancy by means of the fact that mental science had to this point outstripped the relative portion of physiology.\(^3\) By 1865, however, Mill writes of Hamilton’s latent modifications, “I am myself inclined to agree with Sir W. Hamilton, and to admit his unconscious mental modifications, in the only shape in which I can attach any very distinct meaning to them, namely, unconscious modifications of the nerves,” a position he justifies with reference to “what physiology is rendering more and more probable,” the theory that “our mental feelings, as well as our sensations, have for

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\(^3\) On Mill’s struggles with physiology, see Carlisle 164; on his hesitancy to endorse a physiological psychology, see Robinson, who suggests that “[p]erhaps the somewhat sluggish march of British Psychology toward ‘neuropsychology’ might be understood as the lingering influence of Mill’s own reservations” (75). Mill concedes, however, that the “physiology . . . of the brain and nervous system is in a state of such rapid advance, and is continually bringing forth such new and interesting results, that if there be really a connexion between mental peculiarities and any varieties cognizable by our senses in the structure of the cerebral and nervous apparatus, the nature of that connexion is now in a fair way of being found out” (*System* 860).
their physical antecedents particular states of the nerves” (*Examination* 282). The difference between Mill in 1843 and in 1865 is substantial, but it is also representative. Nor, as I have suggested throughout this project, was the change one to be taken lightly by those readers committed to a dualist Christian mental philosophy. The shift we mark by comparing Mill’s two texts engendered significant anxiety among just such readers.354

As I have already argued, Dickens accepted that the brain and nerves had some part in the manifestations of consciousness. The soul’s earthly imprisonment in the body meant that, in addition to being limited in its perceptive powers, the mind or soul could only work through the mechanisms of its corporeal associate.355 It therefore seems that it is only the damage Orlick’s blow causes to this organ of communication that renders Mrs. Joe so helpless; her selfhood is not essentially changed by her injuries. Indeed, her ability to ask for pardon on her deathbed would seem to gesture at the presence of an immortal and chastened soul trapped within her broken body. We see Dickens’s acceptance of the influence of body on mind (and vice versa) again in the self-satisfied whining of Camilla: she credits the “nervous jerkings” (86) in her legs and her poor digestion to the anxiety she suffers (when she wakes up in the night) for her relations; her husband insists that these same family feelings have made one of her legs shorter than the other (87). If she could only somehow be less affectionate, less concerned about others, Camilla insists, she would be blessed with a “better digestion and an iron set of nerves.”

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354 Graham Richards, for example, writes of the difficulty in sustaining the division “between the philosophically based ‘Science of Mind’ project and the increasingly experimental and materialist sciences of the body” in the period, and he insists that “their fusion was a consummation which many, even those centrally involved, devoutly did not wish. They saw the soul being driven from cover to cover, retreating from spinal column to brain and from cerebellum to cortex, while progressively being robbed of its functions by material physiological mechanisms” (361-62).

355 Or, as Dinah Mulock puts it in 1864: “[I]t has pleased the Maker of both to put the soul into the body; to cause the soul to be worked on through the body; and, whether we ignore it or not, to continue for good or for evil that intimate union until it is dissolved by the mysterious change which we call Death” (477).
Hypocrisy and manipulation aside, the mind-body relations Camilla invokes to gain Miss Havisham’s sympathy (and her money) were only an exaggeration of what was considered perfectly orthodox at mid-century, perfectly uncontroversial. As I have noted throughout this project, the problem for conservative thinkers like Dickens (conservative at least in terms of psychological theory) arose when the physical was privileged, or when, in extreme cases, the action of the nerves or brain—Camilla’s nervous jerkings, relocated from her legs to her cerebrum—were figured too thoroughly as constituting mental phenomena.

I have already discussed the growth of physiological psychology at mid-century in earlier chapters. I resume the subject here only to draw attention to the particular metaphors by which many of the psycho-physiological writers of the late 1850s and early 1860s asserted the significance of the body for the study of the mind. To put it another way, what is important about this move to physiology for my argument in this chapter is the way so many physiological psychologists drew on a discourse of latency to describe the role of the nerves and brain: the first of the two intertwined models of latency to which I have turned in the latter part of this chapter, what we might call physiological latency, posited the physical organs of thought to be the whole of that which was unconscious, that which was beneath the surface; the latent soul was erased in such accounts. This is clear in the passage from Mill’s Examination that I quoted above, his assertion that the only shape in which he could comprehend Hamilton’s latent mental

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356 Mark Francis points to the way readers confused the work of Mill and Hamilton and “eclectically borrowed from either when constructing their own ideas” (166). Surely the shared metaphors of the two thinkers had some part in this confusion. But Francis’s further argument that “[i]t was only after 1865 that British philosophers perceived a fundamental rift between Hamilton’s philosophy and Mill’s” (167) is inaccurate. As I have already shown (at great length), the divide between faculty psychology and associationism was firmly established in psychological writing long before Mill’s Examination. These two traditions did not “[s]uddenly” (167) appear in 1865, as Francis suggests.
modifications was as the “unconscious modifications of the nerves”; Mill, moreover, proceeds further in the same vein in the *Examination*, arguing, for example, that the latent links of association posited by Hamilton are explained “by one organic state of the nerves succeeding another so rapidly that the state of mental consciousness appropriate to each is not produced” (*Examination* 283). In a slightly different way, Andrew Wynter also redefined the spiritual latency I discussed above as a physical phenomenon. He interprets the sorts of recovered memories described by Coleridge as resulting from morbid conditions of the cerebral circulation: “It would seem as though the blood when at this high pressure had penetrated portions of the brain hitherto but feebly supplied, and brought into cultivation cerebral wastes that were before barren” (531). More generally, Wynter pronounces favourably on the theory of unconscious cerebration, but he constructs the phenomenon specifically as the product of “a power seated in the brain”—a power of the physical organ. Even when not describing latent thought, moreover, many physiologists fell back on a notion of latency to insist on the physical basis of the mental. For example, in their *Manual of Psychological Medicine* (1858), John Charles Bucknill and Daniel H. Tuke claim:

> Not a thrill of sensation can occur, not a flashing thought or a passing feeling can take place, without changes in the living organism; much less can diseased sensation, thought, or feeling occur, without such changes; changes which we are not able to detect, and which we may never be able to demonstrate, but which we are, nevertheless, certain of. (347)

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357 Laycock, in his 1856 *Edinburgh Review* article “Body and Mind,” makes a very similar point about the effects of increased circulation in the brain, ascribing to this cause the sort of heightened perception Pip experiences at the sluice-house (427-28). Compare these arguments with the 1848 *American Journal of Insanity* article “Psychological,” the author of which suggests that such phenomena are owing to “disease of the brain” (223).
The physiologist need not—indeed cannot—even perceive these latent changes, but (insists he) must posit their existence to explain the actions of the mind.

Carpenter and Laycock, the two men who—as I explained earlier—each claimed precedence for the idea of unconscious cerebration, brought out most clearly the sort of metaphorics I am describing. In the fourth edition of *Principles of Human Physiology* (1852)—in which he introduced his theory of unconscious cerebration—Carpenter, for instance, describes the movement of nerve-force through nerve-fibres as the underlying (or latent) action of the formation of conscious ideas and of the higher intellectual operations (1852, 755). He explains the force with which impressions on which the attention has been fixed before sleep arise again the next morning by suggesting that “these impressions modify the nutrition of the Brain . . . and that the peculiar readiness with which they may be recalled thus depends upon organic changes of which we are unconscious” (*Principles* [1852] 785). That which works beneath consciousness is not the soul—although Carpenter at least left room for such a spiritual part of our constitution—but the physical substratum. Similarly, describing the way two people can unconsciously fall in love, he explains:

[I]t would seem as if the material organ of these feelings tends to form itself in accordance with the impressions which are habitually made upon it; so that we are as completely unaware of the changes which may have taken place in it, as we are of those by which passing events are registered in our minds, until some circumstance calls forth the conscious manifestation, which is the “reflex” of the new condition which the organ has acquired. ([1852] 792)
I explain the role played by the reflexes in Carpenter’s model of unconsciousness in the next chapter. For now, I want only to draw attention to the way unconscious cerebration is explained here by means of the physical organs of thought, as it is throughout Carpenter’s writings of the 1850s. In his later Mental Physiology (1874) he is even more explicit, explaining that he has been led by the parallel between latent mental modifications and the movements of the limbs when performing an automatic action to the idea that “Cerebral changes may take place unconsciously, if the Sensorium be either in a state of absolute torpor, or be for a time non-receptive as regards those changes, its activity being exerted in some other direction” (516). For Carpenter, these physical cerebral changes are exactly equivalent to latent mental modifications, so much so that he insists, “To the Writer it seems a matter of no practical consequence, whether the doctrine be stated in terms of Metaphysics or in terms of Physiology—in terms of mind, or in terms of brain”—although he ultimately suggests that anything that goes on below consciousness should be designated “Functions of the Nervous System” (516). To many others, of course, whether the terms were spiritual or physical was of the utmost consequence.

But Carpenter seems positively conservative when set beside Laycock. Beginning from the assumption that “the brain and nervous system are the proper subject-matter of a true science of mind” (Mind 1: 3), Laycock argues in Mind and Brain (1860) that bodily states are “necessary antecedents” (1: 162) of mental states, that we rightly cannot conceive how the mind could act independently of matter (1: 164), just as we cannot conceive how gravity could do so (1: 165). The vital forces and affinities are for Laycock

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358 As Jenny Bourne Taylor argues, Carpenter revised Hamilton’s theory to argue that “latent traces are inscribed within the structures of the brain” (“Obscure” 154). See also Jonathan Miller 17.
the substratum of consciousness (2: 4), without which there could be no thought, and since these forces are correlative with such physical forces as attraction and repulsion, light, heat, electricity, and so on, Laycock suggests that we should be able to reduce the laws of life and organization—even the laws of thought—to “numerical expressions” (2: 8).

From this broader model of the mind, in which the vital forces underlie—are the latent material of—all thought, Laycock turns to the notion of unconscious cerebration. He begins by suggesting that those who deny the possibility of unconscious thought are led astray by their insistence that mind and bodily life be seen as necessarily separate; if, however, such writers were to give up this doctrine, they would see that consciousness and unconsciousness were merely different modes of existence determined by different phenomena of vital action (1: 173). Laycock thus glosses Hamilton’s claim that our conscious knowledge is constructed out of that of which we are not conscious by remarking, “These, as we have seen, are the vital changes, the results of which are coincident with conscious changes” (1: 177). So while he spends a considerable number of pages explaining Hamilton’s recently published lecture on latent mental modifications, Laycock everywhere is engaged in situating Hamilton’s theory within his own physical psychology. For example, describing Hamilton’s defence of the notion of latent thought against Dugald Stewart’s claim that all such thoughts are conscious, only so transient that they are immediately forgotten, Laycock writes that Hamilton does not explain how there can be ideas which do not rise into consciousness—for consciousness seems absolutely necessary to an

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359 This is a point Laycock had made in 1845, too, in his article “On the Reflex Function of the Brain” (310-11). See also his “Body and Mind” (239-41).

360 On the physicalism of Laycock’s psychology, see Danziger, “Mid-Nineteenth-Century” 128.
idea—unless the term be qualified by the term *material*; in which case a material idea corresponds to a series of vital changes in the organ of thought. (1: 179)

For Laycock, in short, “vital phenomena are in necessary relation to those states of existence termed ‘latent consciousness’” (1: 185); what is meant by these and other terms by which unconscious phenomena are described are “vital sequences occurring in the organ of thought, without any consciousness or knowledge of them or their results on the part of the individual; which sequences occur, however, according to mental laws, as revealed to us by or in consciousness” (1: 185). Once again, what is latent to the mind, what lies beneath consciousness, is not an immaterial and immortal soul, but the vital actions of the brain and nerves.

In light of both the physiocity of Laycock’s psychology and my discussion of resurrection in the last chapter, the mode of immortality that Laycock finally offers should hardly come as a surprise. Here the metaphor of latency finds its most explicit (and, as I argued in Chapter Four, troubling for a Christian dualist) expression:

Now, we *can* conceive mind to be existent and *latent*,—that is, if manifested in a past time, as not manifested *now*—or if manifested now, as not to be manifested at a future time. In this way we arrive at the conception of the latent existence of the soul after death—that is, as not manifested *for a time* until the man lives again; or, in other words, until the mind is manifested in another body. (1: 164-65)

[361] It is somewhat surprising to find the reviewer of Laycock’s book in the *London Quarterly Review*, after lamenting the absence of any appreciation of God in much recent psychological work, praising Laycock for keeping God at the centre of his psychology (444). This same reviewer, however, also insists on a physical resurrection (441).
Here, as in my last chapter, the soul is made a product of matter and the resurrection figured as a physical occurrence, with all the implications of that model of the afterlife that I have already discussed. Yet as if the physical bent of his psychology were not clear enough, Laycock proceeds to reach for analogies in the material world to justify the soul’s latency, pointing, for example, to the potential latency of heat or of electric or magnetic fluids (1: 165). By the end of *Mind and Brain*, then, Laycock has appropriated and reinscribed Hamilton’s model of latent modifications—appropriated and reinscribed the discourse of latency more broadly—in ways that directly opposed Dickens’s Christian psychology.

The potential “materialist” resonances of the discourse of latency in *Great Expectations* are also apparent in the novel’s treatment of the language of association. If *Great Expectations* does not employ this language as thoroughly as does *David Copperfield*, association nevertheless holds a central place in this text; the difference is that the process is more often demonstrated in its operations than described in the explicit

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362 Compare Laycock’s point with James Hinton’s in the fourth instalment of “Physiological Riddles” (1860): “We do not require, for organic life, to assume any new or special power; the common and all-pervading powers of nature are enough” (428). He later suggests gravity as “a true analogue of the vital force” (429). Hinton sees his article as engaged in tracing the processes of life to the laws of force, part of a larger project aimed at uncovering the latent truth which the Highest and Universal Worker has hidden in order to strengthen and enlarge our faculties in the search for it (431). In the first instalment, Hinton had also discussed “latent” force in both the body and nature (22-24); see also his discussion of embodied force in the second instalment (170-71). Carpenter also contemplates the connection of the forces within the body and those without. He explains the similarity of nerve-force and electricity through the doctrine of the correlation of force, and he—like Bain—traces this force back through the plant which provided the material for the human tissue which (by way of its decomposition) generated the force, all the way back to the heat and light supplied to that plant by the sun (“Phasis” 391-92). He concludes, then, that “of this, the highest form of vital force, all the material manifestations are of a kind that bring us back again into the region of physics and chemistry,” and Carpenter further suggests a “correlation” between nerve-force and mental agency (“Phasis” 392), a correlation that is “demonstrative of the intimate connection between body and mind” (“Phasis” 393). But Carpenter insists that his is not a material explanation of thought, for his readers should perceive “how complete is the distinction between matter and force, and how close is the relation between force and mind” (“Phasis” 393). So, in viewing the actions of the different forces in nature, “we perceive that it is only the mode of manifestation that is changed, the fundamental power remaining the same”—all being manifestations of the Divine Volition (“Phasis” 394). On the correlation of force, see also Dixon’s “Physical Force” (1859), a *Household Words* review of W. R. Grove’s *The Correlation of Physical Forces* (1846).
terms of the earlier novel. The movements of Pip’s mind in his first meeting with Miss Havisham—from the withered bride before him to a ghastly wax-work he had seen at the fair and a skeleton once dug out of the vault of one of the marsh churches (59)—represent the sort of moment I have in mind, as do Pip’s many dreams in this text, each of which demonstrates the associative links that undergird his thinking. Yet Pip at other times does name the process of association explicitly: it is, for example, the revival of a “childish association” (398) that causes him to see Miss Havisham for a second time hanging to the beam in the abandoned brewery, and the weary western streets of London are still melancholy in his mind due to their “association” with his petitions for a stay of Magwitch’s execution (455).

The chain that binds Magwitch’s leg on the marshes—and that is repeated in the chains of the two convicts on the coach, although this time “apologetically garlanded with pocket-handkerchiefs” (227)—is transmuted into the clearest symbol of the associative links that determine Pip’s fate, as in the closing of Chapter IX, which describes the evening of the first day Pip spends with Havisham and Estella:

That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But, it is the same way with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day. (73)

Pip later makes explicit the notion that he is “chained to” Magwitch (329)—mentally chained, as much as anything else. But the play of convicts’ chains and associative trains

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For a different reading of the associative chain in *Great Expectations*, see Woloch 199-207.
is given its most manifest exposition in Pip’s musing on his sudden realization that Molly is Estella’s mother:

I thought how one link of association had helped that identification in the theatre, and how such a link, wanting before, had been riveted for me now, when I had passed by chance, swift from Estella’s name to the fingers with their knitting action, and the attentive eyes. And I felt absolutely certain that this woman was Estella’s mother. (388)

The man identified in the theatre was Compeyson, of course—the novel’s arch-criminal, a man Pip has never before seen except in chains, and a man Pip has already (on that fateful day on the marshes) mistaken for Magwitch. The mental riveting here, then, cannot fail to evoke the chains Magwitch spent so much of that day filing off.

What this means is that the chains of association that we find in *Great Expectations* are constantly being set up as the sort of deterministic, imprisoning links that, as I discussed in Chapter Two, caused many to be anxious about associationism. In light of all I have said in this project about both Dickens’s Christian belief and the way association was popularly constructed at mid-century, it seems clear that Dickens’s treatment of the associative chains in this novel does not represent a shift in his psychological thinking. Instead, it appears more likely that Christopher D. Morris is correct when he suggests that Dickens wishes us to trace the determinist resonances loaded onto these chains to Pip, who offers them as a means by which to excuse his own actions (Morris 943). But the slant this novel thereby seems to impart to the process of association puts even more pressure on readers to assume—as a number of critics have
assumed—that Dickens draws the language of association from associationist psychology.

Yet it is another aspect of Dickens’s associations here that seems most troubling to his Christian psychology, I would suggest, an aspect gestured at in the description Herbert offers of his roommate: he calls Pip “a good fellow, with impetuosity and hesitation, boldness and diffidence, action and dreaming, curiously mixed in him” (248). The metaphor here, to be precise, is a chemical one, a fact underscored by Pip’s subsequent comment: “I stopped for a moment to consider whether there really was this mixture in my character. On the whole, I by no means recognized the analysis, but thought it not worth disputing” (248, emphases added). As I explain below, similar chemical metaphors had come by the 1860s to hold a central place in discussions of the association of ideas. And after perceiving the chemical nature of the metaphor exchanged between Herbert and Pip, one begins to find chemistry in the novel’s other, similar metaphors, as in Pip’s claim that “any good that intermixed itself with my apprenticeship came of plain contented Joe” (107), or in the renown Drummle gains “as a compound of pride, avarice, brutality, and meanness” (477). Perhaps there is even something telling in the gurgling of “chemical . . . combinations” (88) that Pip imagines he hears in Camilla’s throat.

That is, I want to suggest that the novel’s explicitly chemical metaphors push us towards reading as chemical the other, more central metaphors of inward mixtures in this text. Take, for example, Pip’s extended explanation of the way Estella grows on (or in) him:
Truly it was impossible to dissociate her presence from all those wretched hankerings after money and gentility that had disturbed my boyhood—from all those ill-regulated aspirations that had first made me ashamed of home and Joe—from all those visions that had raised her face in the glowing fire, struck it out of the iron on the anvil, extracted it from the darkness of night to look in at the wooden window of the forge and flit away. In a word, it was impossible for me to separate her, in the past or in the present, from the innermost life of my life. (236)

Estella, as Pip many times laments, is inseparable from his inner life. It is impossible to detach the idea of her from all of his thoughts, she whom he calls “part of my existence, part of myself,” who has been present in every line he has read, every prospect he has seen, every fancy that has traversed his mind (362)—she who, he says, “cannot choose but remain part of my character, part of the little good in me, part of the evil” (362-63). The language of these passages is not explicitly chemical; indeed, I think it likely (as will become clear from the following pages of my argument) that the idea of a chemical metaphor is here far from Dickens’s mind. But the language in many places comes close to the novel’s chemical metaphors, particularly in the notion of inseparability, of elements so intermixed (or grown together) that they can no longer be divided into their component parts. Whether or not readers understand these descriptions as informed by chemistry, moreover, it is certainly easy to perceive in these passages the same movement of thought, the same general conception of identity, that we find in Herbert’s chemical description of Pip. The same, I think, could be said of the way Pip, wrestling with the secret of his convict after the attack on Mrs. Joe, justifies his silence by insisting,
“[T]he secret was such an old one now, had so grown into me and become part of myself, that I could not tear it away” (121). The underlying idea here seems not to be that of the mechanical combination of disparate elements and associations, but of a blending and mixing of those elements, so that they become other than the mathematical sum of their parts.

I suggested above, however, that the novel’s chemical metaphors gave what would seem for Dickens’s Christian dualist psychology a problematic slant to the representation of the association of ideas. What is it about chemistry that might have this effect? The answer lies in the notion of “mental chemistry” used by a number of writers in the first half of the nineteenth century to explain the process of association. The concept originated with Thomas Brown, a theorist who occupied a sort of middle ground between the school of Reid and the associationism of Hume and Hartley, although he often set himself against Reid and Stewart. Dixon, who has produced the best recent research on Brown’s psychology, gives a sense of Brown’s middle position when he calls him a “common sense sceptic” (From Passions 111), or when he quotes Leslie Stephen insisting that Brown turned Common Sense philosophy into “pure empiricism” (qtd. in Dixon, From Passions 110). Occupying this middle ground (and further blurring the boundaries between faculty psychology and associationism), Brown was widely

364 On Brown’s attempted middle way between associationism and faculty psychology, see Graham Richards 332. Brown writes, for example, “While I am far from conceiving, therefore, with Condillac and his followers, that all our states of mind are mere sensations modified or transformed, since this belief appears to me to be a mere assumption without even the slightest evidence in our consciousness, I am equally unwilling to admit the variety of powers, of which Dr. Reid speaks” (213). Dixon has also noted this passage (From Passions 115). Hamilton blames Brown’s attacks on Reid and Stewart for the general apathy towards philosophy in Britain, saying these attacks led readers to lose confidence in philosophical pursuits (Discussions 49), and he is harshly critical of Brown throughout this essay. Bain also quotes George Combe’s discussion of Brown’s attacks on Stewart, in which Combe insists that “the fabric” of Stewart now “totters to its fall” (“Phrenology” 692).
influential, as Dixon demonstrates at length (From Passions 110ff; “Theology” 305; see also G. Richards 332), although Brown drew criticism for the reductionism of his psychology and for espousing various Humean views (Dixon, From Passions 115-16; “Theology” 306). Significantly for my argument, he was also reputed to be a religious sceptic (Dixon, From Passions 113-14; “Theology” 305).

Brown’s mental chemistry was essentially an early application of the methodologies of the physical sciences to the study of the mind, an attempt to analyze the mind into its component parts (Dixon, From Passions 117-18). As Brown puts it in his tenth lecture:

[T]he science of mind is in its most important respects, a science of analysis, or of a process which I have said to be virtually the same as analysis: and it is only, as it is in this virtual sense analytical, that any discovery, at least that any important discovery, can be expected to be made in it. (Lectures 60)\(^{365}\)

Obviously this is a potentially troubling project for Dickens, as I pointed out in Chapter Two by means of the representation of Redlaw (a chemist, after all) in The Haunted Man. For chemistry, as Dixon again observes, was by the nineteenth century “associated with

\(^{365}\) Note Brown’s justification of this process, in the same lecture, which comes to make him sound very much like Pip: he writes that one cannot advance a step in mental science without the need to perform some sort of analysis, for “[t]here is not a single pleasure, or pain, or thought, or emotion, that may not,—by the influence of that associative principle, which is afterwards to come under our consideration,—be so connected with other pleasures, or pains, or thoughts, or emotions, as to form with them, for ever after, an union the most intimate” (Lectures 60). He adds that “[t]he complex, or seemingly complex, phenomena of thought, which result from the constant operation of this principle of the mind, it is the labour of the intellectual inquirer to analyze, as it is the labour of the chymist [sic] to reduce the compound bodies, on which he operates, however close and intimate their combination may be, to their constituent elements” (Lectures 60). Brown is careful to add, however, that the processes in each case are as different as matter is from mind. Others, as we shall see, were not so cautious.
reductionism, materialism, and political radicalism” (From Passions 119);\(^{366}\) the resonances of mental chemistry, meanwhile, are hinted at in Abercrombie’s criticism of those materialists who suppose “that the rational soul of man is a mere chemical combination, which, by the dissolution of its elements, is dissipated to the four winds of heaven” (37-38). These seem hardly the sort of associations Dickens would want attached to his treatment of mind in Great Expectations.

Although the concept of mental chemistry originated with Brown, however, it is not its place in Brown’s psychology that most interests me. It is, instead, the centrality of mental chemistry to John Stuart Mill’s mental philosophy that I want to stress.\(^ {367}\) The important passage here comes in Book VI, Chapter IV, of A System of Logic:

[T]he laws of the phenomena of mind are sometimes analogous to mechanical, but sometimes also to chemical laws. When many impressions or ideas are operating in the mind together, there sometimes takes place a process of a similar kind to chemical combination. When impressions have so often been experienced in conjunction, that each of them calls up readily and instantaneously the ideas of the whole group, those ideas sometimes melt and coalesce into one another, and appear not several ideas, but one; in the same manner as, when the seven prismatic

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\(^{366}\) For similar nineteenth-century anxieties about chemistry—centring on John Dalton’s atomic chemistry—see Hilton 305-6. John Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor chart the ambivalent responses to chemistry’s claim to be improving on creation, as well as the science’s complicated relationship with natural theology. Trevor H. Levere, too, discusses a number of chemists who used the science to discover evidence of design (196). But to get a sense of the reductionist psychology to which such notions as mental chemistry seemed to point, consider Laycock’s claim that the laws of the substrata of thought “are as definite as those operating on chemical phenomena, could we but effect a sufficiently minute analysis and induction” (“Reflex” 308).

\(^{367}\) Graham Richards argues that Mill took this idea directly and explicitly from Brown (336). Dixon contends, however, that Mill’s mental chemistry was an attempt to avoid the reductionist “aggregate” model of association (From Passions 120). Dixon further notes that Bain also employed a model of mental chemistry in his treatment of the emotions (From Passions 157); as I argue below, Bain’s psychology was thoroughly reductionist.
colours are presented to the eye in rapid succession, the sensation produced is that of white. (853)

These constituent elements thereby generate, rather than compose, a complex idea (854), so that the complex idea is greater than the sum of its constituent elements. Mill’s mental chemistry thus offered a useful excuse for the associationist who could not trace to experience all of the mind’s thoughts and beliefs. While Mill states himself unwilling to conclude that mental chemistry can explain all aspects of the mind—including volitions, beliefs, and moral feelings—he remarks that other philosophers have rendered the case “extremely probable, but the experiments have not been tried with the degree of precision necessary for a complete and absolutely conclusive induction” (855). In his discussion of latent mental modifications in the Examination, moreover, Mill returns to the analogy of the seven prismatic colours, this time to describe a “mental chemistry” (284) by which various nearly simultaneous modifications of the nervous fibres can blend into a state of feeling utterly unlike its component elements, the elements never rising themselves into consciousness. Not only does Mill thus offer another explanation for those feelings that he cannot trace directly to experience (283)—feelings that might

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368 On this point, see Wilson 215-17. Michael Davis calls mental chemistry a product of “the British associationist psychological tradition” (“Incongruous” 210), although I am not convinced he is distinguishing associationism and faculty psychology. A number of contemporary commentators, however, seem to have made the distinction and connected mental chemistry with associationism. Cunningham, for instance, compares the sensationalism of Condillac thus: “Attention being thus elicited from sensation, all the faculties and feelings of the mind are shown to be compounds of these two; as the most varied substances are found by the chemist to be made up of elements more simple than themselves combined in different proportions” (101). Yet Cunningham also discusses the advances made “regarding the chemistry of thought” (83) by “Stuart Mill, Bain, Spencer, Mansel, . . . Morrel” and Hamilton (84), an utterly eclectic group.
otherwise be employed to deny the associationism he endorses—but he places the idea of
mental chemistry in the service of a model of physiological latency. 369

To be clear, it is my contention—viewing the novel as a whole, and keeping in
mind the spiritual notion of latency that Dickens appears intent on endorsing in it—that
Great Expectations continues to insist on more or less the same dualist Christian faculty
psychology of the earlier novels. But if the distinction between faculty psychology and
associationism was not always easy to make in David Copperfield, Great Expectations’s
determinist and chemical metaphors—as well as those metaphors that, inflected by the
novel’s explicit chemistry, come to assume a chemical air—only serve to obscure further
the difference between the two psychologies, particularly in light of the way, as I have
just described, Mill marshalled these metaphors in the service of a model of physiological
latency that, for most readers, would be difficult to differentiate from Hamilton’s more
orthodox model. That is, neither the novel’s language of association nor its model of
spiritual latency clearly distinguishes itself—at least clearly enough for the average
Victorian reader—from the physical mental science that I have argued throughout this
project Dickens is engaged in trying to suppress. Knowing what we do of Dickens’s
religious beliefs, and reading the novel alongside his more explicit endorsements of
dualism in the journals he edited, we have a solid basis for positioning Dickens on the
side of psychological orthodoxy; the novel itself, however, never allows its readers to
assume so firm a position. This ambiguity, of course, is my point: as I have argued
throughout this project, the shifting significations of psychological terminology in the

369 In terms of the cultural position or connotations of Mill’s philosophy, certainly it would also be difficult
for a Victorian reader to overlook those charges of heresy against Mill described in George Grote’s review
of the Examination in the Westminster Review (16-17).
nineteenth century made it increasingly difficult to endorse a Christian mental philosophy unambiguously. The confusion of faculty and association psychologies that I have just been discussing—and that was at the heart of Chapter Two—is but a case in point.

As I explained in my second chapter, in the 1840s this confusion of associationism and the faculty psychology with which Dickens shaped his depiction of David Copperfield’s mind would have done enough damage to Dickens’s anti-materialist project. But in the slightly more than ten years between David Copperfield and Great Expectations, associationist psychology, like Victorian psychology in general, had moved towards a much more boldly material understanding of identity. In the twin volumes The Senses and the Intellect (1855) and The Emotions and the Will (1859), Alexander Bain pushed the idea that there might be a physical component to association several steps further.\footnote{Bain was neither a minor nor an unread figure. Robert M. Young tells us that The Emotions and the Will (1859) was the standard British text for nearly half a century (Mind 101); Rick Ryalance writes that a digested version of these two volumes, entitled Mental and Moral Science: A Compendium of Psychology and Ethics (1868), served as a university-level textbook for a generation (Victorian 164); and Dixon cites a number of contemporary accounts that attest to Bain’s far-reaching influence (From Passions 137-38). Certainly Bain’s works became immensely popular. To be fair, however, Bain’s reputation had not yet been solidified by the end of the 1850s (Ryalance writes that “Bain had no substantial reputation in 1859” [Victorian 160]). Ryalance further points out that sales of The Senses and the Intellect were small; it was widely reviewed, however, and The Emotions and the Will sold well (so well, Ryalance writes, that it stimulated sales of the earlier volume) (Victorian 160). In any case, it seems that Dickens was aware of at least The Senses and the Intellect: it is quoted in the All the Year Round article “The Breath of Life” (485).\footnote{Lewes writes that Bain has “cut away the ground from under the feet of the à priori school” (“The Senses” 768). David Masson sees Bain’s reliance on experience as being so thorough that he writes, “[H]is place would seem to be among the thorough-going English Sensationalists, who carry out Locke’s fundamental maxim to its extreme modern issue” (214). He adds that Bain’s psychology is founded on the assumption “that whatever exists in the human mind has, and can have, no other origin than the workings of the physical organization of man in the midst of the conditions in which it is placed” (214).} In works variously dubbed “the most advanced inductive psychology of our day” (Lewes, “The Senses and the Intellect” 767) and a “great advance” over previous association psychology (John Stuart Mill, “Bain’s” 299), not only does Bain restate the associationist position that the mental faculties are derived from experience\footnote{Lewes writes that Bain has “cut away the ground from under the feet of the à priori school” (“The Senses” 768). David Masson sees Bain’s reliance on experience as being so thorough that he writes, “[H]is place would seem to be among the thorough-going English Sensationalists, who carry out Locke’s fundamental maxim to its extreme modern issue” (214). He adds that Bain’s psychology is founded on the assumption “that whatever exists in the human mind has, and can have, no other origin than the workings of the physical organization of man in the midst of the conditions in which it is placed” (214).} but he also
firmly grounds association in a physical model of the self. Bain bases his psychology on the latest physiological research, an aspect of the book routinely singled out for praise by reviewers. Armed with such knowledge, in *The Senses and the Intellect* he expands the notion that the brain is the organ of the mind: rather, the mind comprises the brain, the nerves, the muscles, and all the organs of sense (*Senses* 61). In an especially bold response to those in the opposing school, Bain even uses the size of Abercrombie’s brain—large as was his intellect, of course—to prove this point (*Senses* 11). So far Bain’s theory would not necessarily have been overly offensive to most readers. Bain even seems to offer a response to the criticism that associationism made the individual entirely passive, although he only does so by positing a spontaneous nerve power. From the perspective of one grounded in the faculty school, however, it is all downhill from there.

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372 William A. Cohen, too, notes Bain’s commitment to “explaining such immaterial entities as mind and self as elements of concrete physical being” (“Interiors” 8). This aspect of Bain’s work certainly disturbed James Martineau, who complains of Bain’s description of the processes of association: “While it throws not a ray of real light into them, it tinctures them with a language of materialistic description, at once unphilosophical and repulsive” (506). On this point, see also Francis 185. Taking a more balanced, retrospective view, Dixon argues that Bain privileged physical facts and methods over mental (*From Passions* 142), but that the theoretical underpinnings of his psychology—Dixon identifies these underpinnings as dual-aspect monism—“did not reduce mental phenomena . . . to mere brain activity, in the manner of the materialist” (*From Passions* 143). Dixon concedes, though, that in practice Bain’s psychology was both more physicalist and more reductionist than these theoretical underpinnings might suggest. Bain’s work, in fact, verges on a “tacit epiphenomenalism” for Dixon (*From Passions* 143). Mill, in reviewing Bain’s work, insists both that Bain’s knowledge of physiology far outstrips that of Hartley, Thomas Brown, or James Mill, and that the science itself has made great strides since these men wrote (299); Masson, too, praises Bain’s physiological knowledge (216). Of course, Masson had been a close friend of Bain’s at Marischal College: in his autobiography, Bain calls him “[m]y chum Masson” and describes him as “one of my inseparable companions” (80). John Grote, meanwhile, writes in a letter to Bain, “You have apparently a knowledge of physiology greater than most of your predecessors” (qtd. in Bain, *Autobiography* 254). Morell, however, complains that many things Bain passes off as physiological fact are pure speculation, including “the physiological theory propounded respecting the revived impressions of the senses” (360). Morell states, rather, that “we know next to nothing of the physical substrata of our ideas, or how they pass in and out of consciousness” (360). I should point out that historians of science tend to credit Bain with establishing the groundwork for a truly physiological psychology. See, for instance, Boring 219 and Young, *Mind* 119.

373 Bain describes this, in the child at least, as “a latent spur of volition” (*Senses* 295). He spends more time on the concept of spontaneous nerve force in *The Emotions and the Will* (327-39). Martineau, however, says of this spontaneous energy: “Though Mr. Bain grants us a spontaneity, he plants it where we have nothing to do with it, any more than if our limbs were spasmodically stirred by a galvanic touch. In his zeal to cancel Hartley’s prefix of a sensational stimulus, he forgets to leave any attendant consciousness at the fountain-head of all, and makes the movement come, *psychologically*, out of nothing” (507).
Bain reduces all thought to “nervous power,” derived from “the grand primal source of reviving power, the Sun” (Senses 59), hardly an adequate substitute for God. Thought is, for him, no more than a “return of the nervous currents exactly on their old tracks” (Senses 335), the tracks upon which the constitutive sensations first made their way to the brain, and association is merely the process by which multiple nervous currents come to be fused, so that one inevitably causes the commencement of the other (Senses 325).

Bain makes a similar move in his treatment of the emotions in The Emotions and the Will. Promising not to reduce the mental to the physical, he first claims that the mental excitement of emotion is always accompanied by

*a diffusive action* over the system, through the medium of the cerebral hemispheres. In other words, the physical fact that accompanies and supports the mental fact, without making or constituting that fact, is an agitation of all those bodily members more immediately allied with the brain by nervous communication. (Emotions 5)

Emotion, for Bain, is always *accompanied* by bodily agitation. Whether or not we can perceive this latent agitation, it is necessarily present: Bain insists that “no emotion, however tranquil, is possible without a full participation of the physical system, and that the tranquillity merely means that the wave of diffused influence is too feeble to produce observable effects” (Emotions 8). But the caveat that the bodily fact only accompanies the mental fact, without constituting it, seems to have evaporated within a few pages. Certainly Bain’s claim that the bodily agitations which “we take merely as signs of the emotion are a part of its own essential workings, in whose absence it would be something
entirely different” (10), threatens to shift into the sort of reductionist statement of which *The Senses and the Intellect* is full.

Tellingly for my argument, Bain explains habitual and automatic actions in *Emotions* through precisely the sort of physiological mechanisms that I discussed above. Both types of actions are performed “unconsciously” for Bain (*Emotions* 11), the feebleness or lack of the conscious impression explained through the hypothesis that “the originally diffused wave that accompanied [these actions] has become contracted within some narrow circles of the brain, which just suffice for the bare performance of the operations implied in them” (*Emotions* 11); “[t]he character of unconsciousness,” moreover, “would appear to arise exactly as the cerebral wave gets contracted, or as the brain at large fails to participate in the operation to be performed,” for Bain posits that the “amount” of consciousness depends on the degree to which the various portions of the brain are engaged (*Emotions* 12). The latency of a particular mental phenomenon is thus determined either by the strength of the cerebral wave that, for all intents and purposes, comes to constitute thought in Bain, or by the channels of the brain through which it travels. Either way, only the wave’s effects finally become manifest. Bain can therefore argue that the consciousness that accompanies an exertion of active force is not the antecedent of that effort. Rather, “[t]he consciousness is present, but only as the accompaniment of a material organism in active operation. The organic energy is the general and fundamental fact; consciousness is the occasional and accessory fact attached to it” (*Emotions* 475).³⁷⁵

³⁷⁵ Bain, in other words, advances a form of psycho-physical parallelism. Herbert Spencer, about whom I shall have more to say below, praises Bain’s work for the light it sheds on “the participation of the various bodily organs in the mental changes, and the addition to these mental changes of those many secondary ones which the actions of the bodily organs generate” (“Bain” 59-60).
Bain’s depiction of mental activity, then, is disturbing to a Christian dualist sensibility for two reasons. First, he suggests that the only difference between thought and sensation is one of intensity (*Senses* 333); the very same organs are involved in each process. Often Bain’s psychology tends to elide even this difference between them. He writes, for example:

The identity between actual and revived feelings shortens our labour by enabling us to transfer much of our knowledge of the one to the other. The properties that we find to hold of sensation in the actual, we may after a certain allowance ascribe to the ideal. . . . The senses are in this way a key to the mind. Sensation is intellect already in act; it is the mere outward manifestation of the ideal processes. (339-40)

What, the religious-minded might ask, of the active power that faculty psychology posited as having a role in perception? Where is the soul here? After witnessing such elision, moreover, and considering Bain’s implicit location of thought originally in sensation, it hardly comes as a surprise when he pronounces unfavourably on the doctrine of innate ideas (*Senses* 340).

Second, and as these questions already suggest, Bain’s psychology is thoroughly material. Bain implies that mind is the physical processes of thought—he argues that “[o]ur present insight enables us to say with great probability, no currents, no mind. The transmission of influence along the nerve fibres from place to place, seems the very

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376 The physicality of Bain’s psychology makes more sense when we consider that Bain was influenced by and wrote at length about phrenology. In his 1860 *Fraser’s Magazine* article “Phrenology and Psychology,” for example, he notes how phrenology was set up as “rendering a full account, for the first time, of the influence of the brain upon mental life” (692). As in both *The Senses and the Intellect* and *The Emotions and the Will*, however, Bain insists that “[i]t is not only incompetent, but wholly unphilosophical even in attempt, to resolve mind into brain, nerve, and muscle; the things are radically distinct in their nature, as heat is different from gravity, or light from solidity” (693).
essence of cerebral action” (Senses 61-62).

Bain’s notion of thought is so concrete, so physical, that he even imagines how, “[i]f our means of observation and measurement were more perfect” (Senses 60), we might measure the amount of nutriment consumed by the brain in its activities. His description of the nerve power at the centre of his psychology tends to be dehumanizing, too: the nerves, he suggests, conduct as telegraph wires do (Senses 38); the animal organism is like a steam-engine (Emotions 475); and elsewhere he compares the spontaneous nerve power, that response to the charges of passivity, to a voltaic battery (Senses 57). No wonder that one metaphysically minded reviewer, James Martineau, had trouble recognizing his own experience in Bain’s descriptions: “[W]e lose all sense of psychological truth,” he writes, “and no more know

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377 Again, Bain is careful, as in the first chapter of The Emotions and the Will, to insist that he here only describes the cooperation of thought and its physical concomitants (Emotions 4)—that he does not wish to resolve mind into matter—but his description of thought in both works does not seem to honour this distinction. Indeed, even in that first chapter of Emotions, he writes that we are “compelled to admit a connexion of dependence between [the mind] and a material organization” (4). In effect, then, Bain does reduce thought to the processes of nerve power. Bain’s persistent focus on nerve power leads Masson to speculate that “Mr. Bain would doubtless feel bound to regard the science of mind, in the long run, as the developed science of ‘nervous currents’” (219). Offering another glimpse of how Bain’s work was received, Dixon quotes a poem entitled Our Modern Philosophers: Darwin, Bain, and Spencer, published in 1884 under the pseudonym “Psychosis,” which includes the lines “‘By my hypothesis,’ says Bain, / ‘Man’s immortality’s a myth—his soul’s his brain’” (qtd. in Dixon, From Passions 136).

378 Masson thus responds, “If all mental states, present, continued, revived, or imagined, involve nervous currents, and if thought is the associability of mental states, then must thought also be, so far as physical investigation is concerned, the associability of nervous currents” (226). John Grote was less than willing to accept this point. After reading both The Senses and the Intellect and The Emotions and the Will, he asked Bain in a letter, “Now, about this irritability as the source of all, what I doubt is, true as it doubtless in a measure is, and to me a novel and important view, whether it is sufficient to account for the whole of the primary or rudimentary fact of will—is there not something more than bodily or nervous irritability, even in the first seed of volition?” On the emotions, moreover, Grote asks if the bodily phenomenon constitutes “the whole of the emotion” (qtd. in Bain, Autobiography 255) and adds, “I cannot conceive that the utmost refinement of analysis of the corporeal phenomenon of emotion will carry us beyond the region of organs or instruments, and the self which uses them must be something which has its realities, over and above what belongs to them. I have the same sort of doubt in regard of your views about knowledge” (qtd. in Bain, Autobiography 255-56). Describing this letter, Bain merely remarks, “John Grote’s criticism took exception to the thorough-going concomitance of mind and body, and gave certain indications of his own views, which have somewhat of the prevailing spiritualistic tendency” (Autobiography 252).
ourselves again than if, on looking in the glass, we were to see an anatomical figure
staring at us” (506).³⁷⁹

In a sense, Bain literalizes the metaphorical language of earlier psychology.³⁸⁰
Indeed, he himself makes this point in discussing the similarity of sensation and thought:

[T]he language that might otherwise be deemed figurative becomes literal.
The imagination of visible objects is a process of seeing; the musician’s
imagination is hearing; the phantasies of the cook and the gourmand tickle
the palate; the fear of a whipping actually makes the skin to tingle. (339)

Thought becomes a physical thing in Bain, and the “impressions” of previous
psychological models, for instance, here take on a seemingly non-metaphorical
meaning—such impressions, for Bain, leave a “coherent trace . . . in the brain” (445).
Association in Bain is thus as concrete and tangible as the irons that bind Magwitch’s
legs. This literalization is all the more devastating for faculty psychology because, as
Masson notes, Bain has taken care to include in his psychology the very terms one would
find in Reid or Stewart (227). Of course, Bain—in a move by now familiar—essentially
drains these terms of the last vestiges of their spiritual meaning.

To return to Great Expectations, if the ambiguity of the language of association in
the novel threatens to lead its readers into understanding Dickens’s text as an
endorsement of the sort of reductive, physical psychology we find in Bain, the novel’s
fascination with illusions, misreadings, and hallucinations only encourages such

³⁷⁹ Responses like Martineau’s were common from the religiously minded. For a valuable discussion of
such responses, see Rylance’s chapter on Bain (Victorian 147-202).
³⁸⁰ Thomas Reid discusses the tendency of philosophers to be imposed on by such analogical language,
which leads them “to materialize the mind and its faculties” (Inquiry 205).
misunderstandings. Pip’s misconstruction of the gravestones mentioned in the novel’s first scene is a case in point:

At the time when I stood in the churchyard, reading the family tombstones, I had just enough learning to be able to spell them out. My construction even of their simple meaning was not very correct, for I read “wife of the Above” as a complimentary reference to my father’s exaltation to a better world; and if any one of my deceased relations had been referred to as “Below,” I have no doubt I should have formed the worst opinions of that member of the family. Neither, were my notions of the theological positions to which my Catechism bound me, at all accurate; for, I have a lively remembrance that I supposed my declaration that I was to “walk in the same all the days of my life,” laid me under an obligation always to go through the village from our house in one particular direction, and never to vary it by turning down by the wheelwright’s or up by the mill. (44)

Pip is, of course, having fun at the expense of his childhood self, but in the context of the ambiguities in the novel’s psychology the means by which Dickens has him do so—by way of the theological questions on which this novel’s construction of selfhood hangs—threatens to slide into a criticism of the theological points Pip misunderstands. Might the positing of a world above be as baseless as Pip’s understanding that his parents’ tombstone made reference to that place?

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381 I might say the same about Pumblechook’s hypocritical claim that he sees the finger of Providence in Pip’s fall (472): the potential danger is that this criticism of Pumblechook could be read as a criticism of any argument that our fates are shaped by a Providential hand.
The effect of Pip’s description of Pumblechook’s reaction to the tar-water he has drunk in place of brandy is roughly similar. Pip recalls his own response to the scene: “I moved the table, like a Medium of the present day, by the vigour of my unseen hold upon it” (29). The trouble with this joke at the spiritualists’ expense is that it situates Pip as a creator of illusions about the immaterial; are his (or the novel’s) implicit claims about the soul substantially different? Dickens, of course, would say that they were, but would Bain? Is the soul of faculty psychology any less a phantom than the “visionary teacups and wine-glasses” (121) for which Mrs. Joe is ever reaching after being struck on the head? Is it only “disembodied spirit[s]” like Barnard’s that are “fiction[s]” (171)? My point, in short, is that Dickens’s attack on spiritualism looks very much like the sort of attack a reductionist psychologist would aim at dualist thinkers like Dickens. And when Pip immediately thereafter admits his inability to distinguish mind and body—“I have never been absolutely certain whether I uttered a shrill yell of terror, merely in spirit, or in the bodily hearing of the company” (30)—we have reason to grow even more doubtful about the sort of psychology Dickens seems to be placing in his mouth.

The Natural History of Latency: Evolution and the Meanings of Heredity

Bain’s psychology serves as an especially clear example of the confluence of associationism and a physical model of latency in the late 1850s. I have been arguing that the spiritualized model of latent mental modifications and the associative language of Great Expectations are thus, in many ways, almost indistinguishable from those of a reductionist physiological model—one we find in Bain—that worked at cross-purposes with Dickens’s own psychological thought. But the discourses of both association and
latency also pointed in a third direction, one equally troubling for Dickens. It is to this third model that I would like to turn now.

To get at this final model of latency, I want first to direct attention to the novel’s play with the idea of habit. Wemmick declares himself out of the habit of shaking hands (172); Pip, in describing his first dinner at Barnard’s with Herbert, remarks on the “wandering habits” into which the waiter is forced by the cramped nature of their rooms (177); and Drummle seems to have acquired the habit of creeping along by the sides of walls or rowing home under overhanging banks and among the rushes (203). Of course, these habits are not, strictly speaking, of the sort meant by physiologists or psychological writers when discussing habitual action. “Habit,” in Victorian psychological discourse, denoted those acts performed without conscious thought, even without volition—the sort of reflex acts that occupied an important place in theories of latency. Closer to this definition of habit is the unconscious and automatic way that Mr. Pocket is ever trying to lift himself by his own hair, for example, or the way Magwitch still walks as though there is an iron on his leg. For my present purposes, though, I want to put pressure on the looser sense in which Dickens uses the word habit in Great Expectations.\(^\text{382}\) If, at least in naming (rather than describing) habit, he does not often abide by the strict physiological definition of the concept, it is significant that he nevertheless invokes a consistent discourse of habitual action.

I stress this point because, quite apart from whatever light it (and the related concept of reflex action) shed on questions of unconscious cerebration, habit also had a central part in discussions of what was perhaps the most controversial topic in 1860:

\(^{382}\) As I mentioned in my first chapter, the best discussion of habit in Dickens is Athena Vrettos’s, although she does not write about the question of hereditary habit, as I do below.
evolution (or, less anachronistically, the “transmutation” or “development” hypothesis).

Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* had been published late in 1859, and it was, of course, widely reviewed in the periodicals. If the *Origin* did not (at least in the major periodicals) create quite the firestorm it is generally believed to have created, it nevertheless ensured that, as T. H. Huxley put it in the *Westminster Review* in 1860, the “species question” was on the mind of “general society” (541). It is important to remember, however, that Darwin’s was not the only theory advanced in the middle of the century to explain how species could adapt to their environments; on the contrary, there were in the 1850s numerous models of evolution, many of which saw this process occurring through “use inheritance,” or the passing down from parent to offspring of acquired habits.

Even Darwin flirted with a use inheritance model, as a number of historians of science have pointed out. The idea was by no means new: the French philosopher Pierre-Jean Cabanis had incorporated a model of use inheritance into his psychology, as had Jean-Cabanis was likely more famous in Britain for his comparison of the brain’s role in thought to the stomach’s in digestion: “[T]he brain, after a

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383 On the contrary, those reviewers who demurred from Darwin’s hypothesis judged him on the scientific validity of his theory, not on theological grounds. Even Huxley admits that, “as the evidence stands, it is not absolutely proven that a group of animals, having all the characters exhibited by species in nature, has ever been originated by selection, whether artificial or natural” (“Darwin” 567). Huxley does, however, try to dismiss many of the common criticisms of Darwin’s work (“Darwin” 568-69). Still, I do not mean to say that no one strongly dismissed Darwin’s argument or evolution more generally. The author of the *British Quarterly Review* article “The Natural and Supernatural,” for example, writes that evolution “is an unblushing intruder into the domain of science, unlicensed and unrecognised,” and he quotes E. Hitchcock’s claim that “All the great living and recently deceased masters of physical science reject it” (143). James R. Moore’s *Post-Darwinian Controversies* is perhaps the best resource for information on the aftermath of *On the Origin of Species*.

384 Not everyone was able to perceive the difference between Darwin’s theory and the theories of his contemporaries. Hopkins suggests that the difference between Lamarck’s and Darwin’s theories “is perhaps as much in appearance as in reality” (751), and he confesses the difficulty he experiences in “recognising any very essential difference in the fundamental hypotheses on which these two theories rest as physical theories” (752). On the confusion of, for example, Spencer’s and Darwin’s evolutionary theories, see Francis 189.


386 On Cabanis’s use inheritance, see Robert J. Richards, *Darwin* 28-29. Cabanis was likely more famous in Britain for his comparison of the brain’s role in thought to the stomach’s in digestion: “[T]he brain, after a

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Baptiste de Lamarck and Darwin’s grandfather, Erasmus Darwin. Most notably, the idea had been central to that most controversial of books in the 1840s, Robert Chambers’s *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844): a fundamental component of Chambers’s model of evolution was the claim that “[w]hat is a habit in parents becomes an inherent quality in children” (357), these habits arising from parents’ adaptation to their environment (352, 357-58). A number of mid-century psychologies also drew upon the notion of use inheritance. Benjamin Brodie, for example, writes of “those habits which are gradually acquired during several successive generations, by which chiefly the different races of mankind are distinguished from each other” (*Mind* 149), and Henry Holland remarks on the “tendency of [habits] to become hereditary;—a fact variously proved both as to bodily and mental habits” (240).

In this light, recall Magwitch’s comments about the men who performed a phrenological examination on him in prison: “Then they looked at me, and I looked at them, and they measured my head, some on ’em—they had better a measured my stomach” (345). Richardson insists, however, that this comparison of brain and stomach “is not the reductive analogy it was sometimes taken for, but rather makes part of his attempt to convey the active, complex, organic character of the brain-mind” (17). In any case, it is likely that few of Cabanis’s readers (or those who had merely heard of this analogy) would have been as generous in their responses as Richardson is. Richardson further points out that the controversial English physiologist William Lawrence borrowed this very analogy from Cabanis (26). On the dissemination of Cabanis’s thought to the British reading public, see Richardson 17-18.

387 See Robert J. Richards, *Darwin* 47-57. Huxley also discusses Lamarck’s use inheritance in his review of *On the Origin of Species* (“Darwin” 563-64), as does the author of the *All the Year Round* article “The Transmutation of Species” (520). For a hint of Dickens’s feelings about Lamarck, see the letter Bulwer Lytton sent him on December 24 or 25, 1861, about Bulwer’s *A Strange Story*, a letter to which I’ve already made reference. Bulwer therein writes of the “visionary mistakes & illusions” of Lamarck (*Letters* 9: 572).


389 Chambers is elsewhere more explicit in fitting the faculties into his evolutionary model, calling them “instinctive, that is, dependent on internal and inherent impulses” (345). He also severely limits the notion of free will (349). Chambers claimed that his model of adaptation implied design and a Creator (324), and he insisted that his theories could be placed in harmony with a liberal reading of Scripture (even if no one could quite see how in 1844 [390]), as new theories in geology and natural philosophy had been (389).

390 Holland notes the centrality of use inheritance to *Vestiges*, although he is critical of that work (*Chapters* 242). He also advances some tentative claims about the possibility of explaining the habits of entire races or national diversities of character through this mechanism (*Chapters* 249-50). For other models of psychological use inheritance, see Williamson 331-32.
Significantly, a number of these models of use inheritance incorporated the discourse of latency that has been at the heart of my argument in this chapter. That which habit altered in the psychologies I have been describing, and which was subsequently passed on to the next generation, was almost invariably the physical substratum of thought, the latent physiological material I discussed in the last section. For example, Cabanis believed that what was innate in his model of use inheritance was the altered structure of the nervous system (R. Richards, *Darwin* 43-44), and Chambers argues that individuals’ different intellectual inheritances are owing to variations in “the volume of particular parts of the brain and the general quality of that viscus” (350), variations established through the habits of these individuals’ parents.

These men, as I have already suggested, evoked a storm of controversy. The furore aroused by *Vestiges* has been extensively documented by James Secord, and Cabanis and Darwin were also both attacked for materialism (Richardson 30): Alan Richardson, for example, cites an 1801 reviewer of Cabanis’s work who remarked that few of Cabanis’s views “will be new to those who have studied the writings of the English materialists” (17). What is surprising, however, is that even as mainstream a physiologist as Carpenter drew on a similar model of evolutionary latency in his own work to describe the possibilities for the progression of the race:

> For we seem justified by the whole tendency of modern Physiological research, in the belief that alike by the discipline we exert over ourselves, and by the influence we exercise over others, will every effort judiciously directed towards the improvement of our Psychical nature impress itself upon our Physical constitution; and that, by the genetic transmission of
such modifications, will the capacity of future generations for yet higher
elevation be progressively augmented. (Mental 108)

These efforts at improvement, in other words, make their mark on that which is
physiologically latent, and they are subsequently passed on to the next generation. Lewes
similarly argues that “organisations are inherited,” along with their “tendencies and
aptitudes” (Physiology 2: 263): “A habit, or trick, which has been acquired, and so long
established that is may be said to be organized in the individual—whose mechanism has
grown to its performance—will stand the same chance of being inherited, as the bulk of
bone and muscle, or the sensibility of the nervous system” (2: 267). Again, what is
modified by habit and subsequently passed on are physical organs (“grown to [the
habit’s] performance”), the bodily material that, according to psycho-physiology,
underlay all mental activity. In other words, this model of evolutionary latency took the
notion of physiological latency and made its latent material hereditary—made it the latent
material of the entire race. Although he is discussing natural selection, we find a variation
of this idea in Carpenter’s review of On the Origin of Species: he describes how “freaks
of nature”—spontaneous peculiarities—have a tendency “to become hereditary, though
they frequently pass over a generation or two, to reappear in a subsequent one. The
latency of such influences is often extremely remarkable; but sometimes we seem able to
trace out their nature, though we cannot comprehend their mode of operation” (“Darwin”
195-96). This hereditary material remains latent in all descendants, but only manifests
itself—bubbles into our knowledge—in select cases.

It is Laycock, again, who seems to have gone furthest in consistently employing
this metaphor of latency to describe evolution. In his work of the 1840s, 1850s, and
1860s, he, too, argues for the hereditary transmission of a physiological substratum ("Body" 451; *Mind* 2: 51; "Reflex" 308-9), suggesting that "a certain size of the encephalon, and therewith a certain order of development, are transmitted from parent to offspring, with the hereditary tendencies to certain mental manifestations, whether they be good or evil" (*Mind* 2: 71). He also uses a more explicit metaphor of latency to describe the psychological history of the race:

> [J]ust as the last individual of a species is but the latent expression or manifestation of a long series of cycles of changes in the species, so the last thoughts, and feelings, and actions of an individual man are but the result of a series of changes dating far back in his own individual history, or having their roots in the modes of mental and vital activity of his ancestry. (*Mind* 1: 2)

Most significantly, Laycock explicitly inserts Hamilton’s theory of latent mental modifications into an evolutionary framework. Describing Hamilton’s first degree of latency (acquired knowledge), for example, he explains that it “corresponds to the primordial stage of life—that of the primordial cell and the immediate products of development,—a stage in which the energies of the whole future life are ‘latent,’ or ‘potentially’ present” (*Mind* 1: 174). Of the recoveries of memory Hamilton described in the second stage of latency (the sort of recoveries that were so spiritually revelatory for Coleridge), Laycock writes: “We shall see subsequently that such reproductions are not limited to the latencies acquired during the individual’s life, but that they extend to hereditary transmissions of habits, capacities, &c., deduced from the parents—one or
What is perhaps of most note here is that, in the way he thus retrospectively inserts use inheritance into Hamilton’s psychology, Laycock offers an especially clear instance of the way early evolutionary psychologists appropriated and redefined a faculty psychology model of the mind. But as I shall argue below, others reworked that model in more extensive ways.

For if a number of theorists in the first half of the nineteenth century suggested the possibility of adaptation through use inheritance, it was the centrality of the concept to Herbert Spencer’s psychology that was most influential—and most troubling for *Great Expectations*. After all, what is equally significant about Spencer’s psychology for my purposes was that it was clearly *associationist*; Bain’s was not the only work thoroughly to redefine associationism in 1855. That year marked the publication of Spencer’s *Principles of Psychology*, which worked in its own way to undermine Dickens’s anti-materialist project, and which represents the clearest and most fully developed example of the third model of latency I have been describing.

What is immediately of note in the *Principles of Psychology* is that Spencer refuses to see any distinction between the mental and the other vital functions: “Though we commonly regard mental and bodily life as distinct, it needs only to ascend somewhat above the ordinary point of view,” he writes, “to see that they are but sub-divisions of life in general; and that no line of demarcation can be drawn between them, otherwise than arbitrarily” (349). Also done away with are such distinctions as that between the higher

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391 Laycock elsewhere writes that the impressions constituted by inherited tissues and structures, since they are foreign to the experience of the offspring, often “assume the characters of obscure intuitions, or will appear something like glimpses of a mysterious pre-existent state of consciousness” (*Mind* 2: 69). That which had seemed spiritual for other psychologies is here made a product of evolution.

392 On the influence of *Principles of Psychology* on later thinkers, see C. U. M. Smith 62.

393 Bain’s and Spencer’s texts were often reviewed together. See, for instance, Morell and Lewes, “History.” Mill acknowledges Spencer’s work in his review of Bain, but only in a footnote.
and lower faculties, or the division of mind into discrete faculties at all: Spencer tells us that “intelligence has neither distinct grades, nor is it constituted of faculties that are truly independent; but that its highest phenomena are the effects of a complication that has arisen by insensible steps out of the simplest elements” (486).

As we might expect after his reduction of the mental to the level of the vital functions, Spencer goes on to argue—like Bain—for a physical basis and remnant of association. Indeed, he insists that it is common knowledge that there is a physical side to the process:

That an organized tendency towards certain complex aggregations of psychical states, supposes a structural modification of the nervous system—a special set of complex nervous connections whereby the numerous excitations constituting the emotion may be co-ordinated—no one having even a superficial knowledge of Physiology can doubt. As every student of the nervous system knows, the combination of any set of impressions, or motions, or both, implies a ganglion in which the various nerve-fibres concerned are put in connection. (606-7)

Life and experience are written on the brain and in the nerves for Spencer. What, then, remains to distinguish thought from the physical processes in the nervous system? Not much. The mind and thought seem utterly physical:

What is the meaning of the human brain? Is it not that its immensely numerous and involved relations of parts, stand for so many established relations among the psychical changes? Every one of the countless
connections among the fibres of the cerebral masses, answers to some permanent connection of phenomena in the experiences of the race. (581)

In other words, Spencer gives voice to the same sort of physiological latency that we find in Bain. Mill seems to have recognized as much, judging from an 1864 letter to Spencer: “It is very satisfactory to see how you and Bain, each in his own way, have succeeded in affiliating the conscious operations of the mind to the primary unconscious organic actions of the nerves, thus filling up the most serious lacuna and removing the chief difficulty in the association psychology” (qtd. in Young, *Mind* 150). Underlying and undergirding all mental experience in the work of both theorists is a latent substratum of nervous fibres and cerebral masses.394

But as I have been arguing, and as the final sentence of the last passage from Spencer already suggests, Spencer’s model of latency also possessed some very important differences from Bain’s. What proved to be most influential about Spencer’s psychological work, after all, was that it placed associationism within the framework of evolutionary biology.395 Spencer defines life as the organism’s continual adaptation to its environment, “the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations” (374), and the habits acquired in this struggle become the hereditary material an organism (or a person) passes on to its offspring. Therefore, while Spencer works to question the independence of the various faculties, one nevertheless encounters in Principles of

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394 Dixon also notes the physicalist reductionism of Spencer’s psychology (*From Passions* 179). See also Dixon, *From Passions* 143, and R. Richards, *Darwin* 284-85.
395 This is Young’s point (*Mind* 150; “Role” 197). See also Dixon, *From Passions* 149, Francis 175, Graham Richards 330, and Shuttleworth, “Fairy” 280. C. U. M. Smith points out that Spencer introduced the term evolution, in its modern sense, into biology (57); he argues that the “notion of evolution holds together the whole of Spencer’s system, from cosmology to anthropology, from sociology to psychology” (57). In an 1863 letter to Spencer, moreover, Bain suggested that the Principles of Psychology had constituted Spencer “the philosopher of the doctrine of Development, notwithstanding that Darwin had supplied a most important link in the chain” (qtd. in Robert J. Richards, *Darwin* 244).
This language, however, comes with a twist:

Though it is manifest that reflex and instinctive sequences are not determined by the experiences of the *individual* organism manifesting them; yet there still remains the hypothesis that they are determined by the experiences of the *race* of organisms forming its ancestry, which by infinite repetition in countless successive generations have established these sequences as organic relations: and all the facts that are accessible to us, go to support this hypothesis. Hereditary transmission, displayed alike in all the plants we cultivate, in all the animals we breed, and in the human race, applies not only to physical but to psychical peculiarities. It is not simply that a modified form of constitution produced by new habits of life, is bequeathed to future generations; but it is that the modified nervous tendencies produced by such new habits of life, are also bequeathed: and if the new habits of life become permanent, the tendencies become permanent. (526)

This is a far cry from the description of humankind we found in Reid or Stewart.

Humanity is, seemingly, essentially little different from the plants we cultivate or the

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Francis traces Spencer’s debt to Common Sense philosophy (157ff), although he goes considerably too far when he claims that it was primarily through Spencer’s writings that the “common-sense” philosophers had their “unrivalled” popular impact (158). This is, at best, an eclectic history of mid-century British philosophy. Spencer certainly saw himself as being influenced by Common Sense philosophy—most historians see him as trying to find a middle way between faculty and associationist psychology, rather than merely being confused in his reading, as Francis hints (166; see also Spencer’s “Universal Postulate,” for example)—but I suspect that nobody (either in the Victorian period or now) other than Francis, Spencer, or perhaps J. S. Mill would class him among the Common Sense philosophers. (Oddly, Francis later discusses Spencer’s rejection by this school [167-68].) Part of what I am trying to show in this chapter is how damaging Spencer’s views were to the religious aims of Common Sense philosophers. For alternative views to Francis’s, see Hilton 312 and Robinson 57.
animals we breed; the position reserved for man apart from and above the animal kingdom in an orthodox Christian psychology is here dissolved. Nor is it only instincts that are so transmitted. Dispositions become hereditary, too—the tendencies of races, for example, to be warlike or peaceful, slothful or industrious, are owing to this process of hereditary transmission (527). Even the will or the faculties of moral intuition can be traced to the psychic material passed down through generations.397

There are a series of problems here for the Christian reader. First, the means by which the faculties are transmitted is entirely material.398 Spencer writes, for instance:

[All the organized arrangements subsisting among the nerves of the cerebrum in the newly-born infant, not only make possible certain combinations of impressions into compound ideas, but also imply that such combinations will hereafter be made—imply that there are answering combinations in the outer world—imply a preparedness to cognize these combinations—imply faculties of comprehending them. (581)]

In other words, the infant is born with the latent physical mechanisms—acquired and passed on by its forefathers—that will enable it to reproduce the mental actions of those forefathers. Second, Spencer’s psychology rewrites the granting of innate gifts by God into the hereditary transmission of acquired characteristics. The associationist model by

397 On the will in Spencer as a hereditary reflex, see Dixon, From Passions 149. See also Shuttleworth’s discussion of Spencer’s rejection of free will (“Fairy” 258). On moral intuition, see, for example, the letter from Spencer to Mill that Young quotes (Mind 177-78).
398 Lewes therefore anticipates how Spencer’s physiology will elicit charges of materialism (“Herbert Spencer’s Psychology” 1013). And to some degree, he was right. The Spectator, for example, called the book “audaciously speculative, subversive of ordinary morality, and anti-Christian” (qtd. in Rylance, Victorian 213). Note also the difficulties finding a publisher that Spencer describes in his autobiography (1: 462), which he claims were partly due to “religious difficulties.” Boyd Hilton, moreover, calls Spencer “a key figure in the mid-Victorian slide into unbelief” (311). For a valuable discussion of the religious response to Spencer’s book—and to his work more generally—see Rylance (Victorian 228-40). As Rylance points out, however, there were some who saw in Spencer’s work a possible reconciliation of science and religion. Francis seems to have taken this idea seriously, and he argues that Spencer saw himself to be defending true religion against sectarianism (112).
which identity is entirely based on experience remains, only stretched from the single lifetime to the history of the race (529-30). As Spencer himself would explain in his Autobiography (1904):

The familiar doctrine of association here undergoes a great extension; for it is held that not only in the individual do ideas become connected when in experience the things producing them have repeatedly occurred together, but that such results of repeated occurrences accumulate in successions of individuals: the effects of associations are supposed to be transmitted as modifications of the nervous system. (1: 470)

The accumulated experiences of individuals, written onto the nervous system, are added to the psychic material of the race, and passed on to the next generation. God is eliminated from the equation. Read in terms of Spencer’s psychology, then, the innate gifts that for David Copperfield served as promises of immortality and the existence of God are now in danger of appearing as no more than a product of the long process of evolution.

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399 See also Robert Richards, Darwin 286-87, Rylance, Victorian 235-36, and C. U. M. Smith 66, 78. Dixon makes the same point about Darwin (From Passions 162-64).

400 I make this argument despite the fact that only 500 copies of the first edition of Spencer’s Principles of Psychology were published and that the book inspired little critical response (C. U. M. Smith 62). Nevertheless, Spencer’s ideas were widely circulated, and he published a number of the key concepts of his psychology in major periodicals. In his 1865 Fortnightly Review article “Mill versus Hamilton—The Test of Truth,” for example, Spencer expresses surprise that Mill had lumped him in with Hamilton in the Examination: “[C]onsidering that I have endeavoured to show how all our conceptions, even down to those of Space and Time, are ‘acquired’—considering that I have sought to interpret forms of thought (and by implication all intuitions) as products of organized and inherited experiences (Principles of Psychology, p. 579)—I am taken aback at finding myself classed as in the above paragraph” (536). Later in the same article, Spencer repeats his point that the relations between states of consciousness are inherited “in the shape of modified organic structure” (548). He hints at the same theory in his 1857 National Review article “The Ultimate Laws of Physiology” (333). In his review of Bain’s Emotions and the Will, moreover, Spencer writes that “the differences between civilized nations descended from the same stock, show us the cumulative results of small modifications hereditarily transmitted” (“Bain” 66), a process made possible by the way “the many nervous actions involved tend to grow organically connected” (“Bain” 67); he even criticizes Bain for failing to see that “where conditions render habits persistent in successive generations, such modifications are cumulative” (“Bain” 68). Spencer advanced a use inheritance model of evolution in
I have written that few reviews of Darwin’s *Origin* gave voice to the religious anxieties that the work is generally believed to have aroused; on the contrary, Darwin’s high reputation as a naturalist seems to have largely shielded him from such attacks, at least in the major periodicals.\(^1\) But there certainly were many who lamented the implications of the theory of the transmutation of species (if not specifically Darwin’s theory). Brewster, for example, is highly critical of the evolutionary theory put forth in *Vestiges*, “in which man with his immortal soul, is struck from a speck of albumen by an electric spark, and in which his divine form, the pride of the sculptor, and the theme of the poet, is developed from the brainless monad and the grinning monkey” (222), and he insists that “[t]he Mormonism of the religious world is not more baneful than the doctrines of . . . the development of man from monkeys” (223).\(^2\) T. H. Huxley,

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\(^1\) The author of the *All the Year Round* article “The Transmutation of Species” (1861), published alongside one of the numbers of *Great Expectations*, calls Darwin “one of our most ingenious and most sound geologists . . . who is also an excellent naturalist,” and he suggests that Darwin’s theory is “worthy of all consideration” (520). In his review of the *Origin*, Carpenter credits the impression made by the book to “the deservedly high reputation of the naturalist by whom it has been conducted” (“Darwin” 190) and suggests that Darwin’s reputation should forestall hasty criticism (“Darwin” 214); perhaps it is this reputation that leads him to insist that any theological objection to Darwin’s theory “seems simply absurd” (193), and instead to suggest how Darwinism could be made to fit with Christian belief (194). Even Samuel Wilberforce begins a largely negative review by conceding that “[a]ny contribution to our Natural History literature from the pen of Mr. C. Darwin is certain to command attention. His scientific attainments, his insight and carefulness as an observer, blended with no scanty measure of imaginative sagacity, and his clear and lively style, make all his writings unusually attractive” (223); he later adds that “out of respect to Mr. Darwin’s high character and to the tone of his work, we have felt it right to weigh the ‘argument’ again set by him before us in the simple scales of logical examination” (254), although he has no such qualms about attacking the evolutionary theories of Darwin’s grandfather (254-55). For other reviewers who grant Darwin leeway based on his reputation, see Blake (548), the review of *Origin* in the *London Review* (282), and Hopkins (752, 86). Levine also glances at those readings of Darwin’s work that placed it in a religious context (“Little” 23).

\(^2\) Even after insisting that science can discover no truths that will contradict religion, Wilberforce makes similar assertions about natural selection’s incompatibility with the Bible’s “representation of that moral and spiritual condition of man” (258); he also insists that Darwin’s theory “contradicts the revealed relation of creation to its Creator” and is “inconsistent with the fulness of His glory” (258). See also the *London Quarterly Review*’s discussion of Laycock’s *Mind and Brain* (435), and the *London Review*’s discussion of *On the Origin of Species* (305-6). It is worth noting that Dickens’s does not seem as threatened by the idea...
meanwhile, seems to have been unable to leave well enough alone in the wake of the *Origin*; his own reviews of Darwin’s text at times seem mere exercises in baiting the orthodox. If nothing else, that is, his response to Darwin made clear that the religious had something to fear from evolution. So while Dickens seems to have found a way to harmonize his religious beliefs with Darwin’s theories, it is clear that a significant portion of the reading public was made deeply anxious about the place of religion in the world of universal struggle Darwin describes.

As a number of critics have pointed out, Dickens seems to invoke this world in *Great Expectations*. Pip’s remark about his five deceased brothers at the novel’s opening, that they “gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle” (3),

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of evolution. The review of *On the Origin of Species* in *All the Year Round*—“Transmutation of Species”—is fairly positive, although the article’s author seems to want to fit Darwin’s theory into a natural theological worldview: he writes how we “see throughout nature a marvelous and exquisite adaptation of each part of all living beings to every other part,” and he muses that natural selection “is a great and most useful power in nature’s hands: or rather, perhaps, it is the simple method of nature in accomplishing all that is required for continuing the great cycle of existence” (521), finally concluding that “the mystery of creation has yet to be solved” (521). Dickens also published in *All the Year Round* an article—“Owen’s Museum” (1863)—that is at the very worst ambivalent about evolution: its author describes the skeletons of apes, “which caricature humanity so closely, and make one shudder at the theory of ‘links.’ And yet, what if, in very truth, the grandfather of all life should be a polype, and an ape the parent of humanity?” (67). See also Eliza Lynn Linton’s *Household Words* article “The First Idea of Everything” (1858). It is probably worth taking note here of George Levine’s point that even a Darwinian can “retail the natural-theological belief in the evidences of the creator” (“Little” 6; 20). Of course, as I mentioned in Chapter Three, Dickens also famously praised *Vestiges* in his review of Robert Hunt’s *Poetry of Science*. Nowhere does his praise touch on the truth of the theories therein, however. For a slightly different take on Dickens reading of *Vestiges*—which sees Dickens as taking seriously Chambers’s arguments from design—see Levine, “Little” 23.

403 In one of his reviews of the *Origin*, Huxley laments how “[i]n this nineteenth century, as at the dawn of modern physical science, the cosmogony of the semi-barbarous Hebrew is the incubus of the philosopher and the opprobrium of the orthodox,” and he wonders how many scientific lives have “been wasted in the attempt to force the generous new wine of science into the old bottles of Judaism, compelled by the outcry” of “Bibliolaters” (“Darwin” 556). Science, however, will have its revenge, he insists, for “[e]xtinguished theologians lie about the cradle of every science as the strangled snakes beside that of Hercules, and history records that whenever science and dogmatism have been fairly opposed, the latter has been forced to retire from the lists, bleeding and crushed, if not annihilated; scotched, if not slain” (556). If most of the reviewers of Darwin’s book avoided setting it (and evolution) up as a threat to religion, Huxley seems to have been doing his best to construct the theory as antagonistic to Christian belief.
situates the novel in an evolutionary context, and this context, as my discussion of Spencer should have made clear, threatens to detach the inborn qualities that hold so central a place in this novel from the Christian worldview that, for Dickens, gave them meaning. The pressure of this threat—or the pressure of an evolutionary latency—is most clearly visible in the novel’s ambiguous treatment of heredity. Again, Spencer’s redefinition of the innate, his placement of psychology within an evolutionary framework, meant that inborn faculties could no longer reliably serve as guarantees of immortality or of the existence of God, but as I demonstrated in my discussion of Hume and the novel’s model of spiritual latency (as well as in my discussion of associationism in Chapter Two), the possibility that we are born without innate gifts was even more troubling for Dickens. It hardly comes as a surprise, then, that the question of heredity is a fraught one in this novel, although Goldie Morgentaler’s claim that, owing to the influence of Darwin, “this novel marks the first time that Dickens jettisons heredity as a determining factor in the formation of the self” (708), greatly overstates the case. The most we can say is that the novel at times shies away from the question of inheritance. Indeed, the entire absence of Pip’s parents from the text (and from his life) could be read as an attempt on Dickens’s part to avoid taking a position one way or another about the qualities one draws from one’s forebears.

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404 This point is made by Meckier 542, Morgentaler 707, and Newey 185. Unlike Morgentaler, I do not see Dickens’s acknowledgement of Darwin in this passage as an acceptance of natural selection (see Morgentaler 709).

405 For similar reasons, I am uncomfortable with Greenblatt and Gallagher’s assertion that Great Expectations takes part in “the death of the plot of genealogical identity and rightful inheritance” (178). If Great Expectations does not engage in the same sort of genealogical plotting as Dickens’s earlier novels (and although the novel separates Pip’s origin and his destiny, as Greenblatt and Gallagher argue [179]), my point is that the novel nevertheless places considerable weight on the question of inheritance.

406 Numerous critics have read this opening scene as staging or representing a loss of origin. See, for example, Brooks 115-16. A. L. French points out that the backgrounds of many other characters—Mrs. Joe, Orlick, Jaggers, and so on—are similarly omitted from the novel (165).
The problem with such an argument is that it would need to be immediately tempered in light of the way *Great Expectations* continues to insist on the sort of innate qualities that were so central to both *David Copperfield* and the faculty psychology on which it—and, I am arguing, *Great Expectations*—drew. In addition to its value as an index of his own feelings of imprisonment, Pip’s identification with the seeds tied up in the drawers of Pumblechook’s shop—“I wondered when I peeped into one or two on the lower tiers, and saw the tied-up brown paper packets inside, whether the flower-seeds and bulbs ever wanted of a fine day to break out of those jails, and bloom” (54-55)—hints at one of the ways we can read his name: he is (or is possessed of) the pip of “latent vegetation” (to borrow Micawber’s phrase), loaded with the innate gifts that, given the right soil and the right fine day, might eventually bloom. The novel offers as one possible explanation for Magwitch’s fate his claim that it was his “constitution” that led him astray, that if he had not been born such a “heavy grubber” (329) he might not have found his way into so much trouble. Perhaps he—as Hubble claims of the young in general—was simply “[n]aturally vicious” (26). Even Pip’s assertions about Biddy’s checks on his growing snobbery, that they represent “a bad side of human nature” (148), only make sense (regardless of Pip’s moral blindness) because the novel legitimates a belief in such a thing as human nature, in some sort of essential and inborn humanity that is not—cannot be—merely derived from experience. Indeed, Pip, in his role as

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407 Jordan also connects these seeds with Pip’s name (“Medium” 80), but his conclusions are vastly different from my own.

408 As I have pointed out in earlier chapters, faculty psychologists turned often to the metaphor of the seed to describe innate faculties. Reid, for example, writes that “[o]f the various powers and faculties we possess, there are some which nature seems both to have planted and reared, so as to have left nothing to human industry . . . . There are other powers, of which nature hath only planted the seeds in our minds, but hath left the rearing of them to human culture” (*Inquiry* 13). Fraser, too, writes of “the seeds of a nature fallen from its high original and destiny, but which was not adapted only or chiefly for this earthly life between two eternities” (177).
The retrospective narrator, says as much, validating the sentiment but questioning its application (148): it was a bad side of human nature, but it was Pip’s bad nature that was on display.

The clearest and most prominent metaphor for the sort of inborn, essential selfhood that I have been gesturing at above finds its spokesman in Matthew Pocket. Herbert explains his father’s thoughts, in describing Compeyson’s wooing of Miss Havisham, thus:

I have heard my father mention that he was a showy-man, and the kind of man for the purpose. But that he was not to be, without ignorance or prejudice, mistaken for a gentleman, my father most strongly asservates; because it is a principle of his that no man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was, since the world began, a true gentleman in manner. He says, no varnish can hide the grain of the wood; and that the more varnish you put on, the more the grain will express itself. (179)

Enough has already been said in the criticism of this novel about the sort of thematic issues that this passage makes manifest, and I am not particularly interested here in the novel’s position on what makes a gentleman or how far short Pip falls of the mark. I cite this passage only to draw attention to its essentialism, quite apart from the particular subject of that essentialism. That is, whatever the novel’s (or Matthew Pocket’s) perspective on what makes a gentleman, this passage is remarkable for its concrete endorsement of the notion of innateness. Behind the triteness of Pocket’s claims about the true gentleman lies a worldview in which there is such a thing as essential goodness, for example, or in which individuals are born with a specific “grain” (developed, as we shall
see, through experience, but always a latent potentiality at birth, and never to be masked or done away with). One is born a gentleman or not, and no amount of money or fancy clothes—or education, even though that is the product Pocket sells—can change who one essentially is; the spectacular failure of Magwitch’s efforts to make a gentleman only reinforce the idea that one must be born into the position (whether one understands “gentleman” to designate the social title or the Christian gentleness of a Joe Gargery). 

*Great Expectations*, in other words, endorses the same sort of hierarchy of birth that I discussed in *David Copperfield.* Even the novel’s moral compass, Joe, hints at this hierarchy, noting that he is not right outside the forge or in the Sunday clothes he wears to meet Pip in London, and balking—to Pip, of course, but not to Mrs. Joe—about the plan to have Pip visit Satis House; after all, common ones would be better off keeping company with other common ones, “instead of going out to play with oncommon ones” (72).

To this point, there is nothing either particularly unorthodox or especially fraught about the novel’s notions of inheritance. But in addition to the innate gifts I have just described, Dickens’s conception of heredity also seems to allow space for the inheritance of acquired characteristics. After all, the sins of the fathers are often visited upon the children in Dickens’s worldview: the articles on insanity and idiocy he published in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* frequently explain both conditions through the vice of the afflicted individuals’ parents. Andrew Halliday’s article “Happy Idiots” (1864), for example, calls criminal children the “distinguished inheritors of evil ways and

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409 On this point, see William Sewell’s mid-century discussion of what distinguishes a gentleman (qtd. in Newey, 210). In a word, the social divisions on which the notion of the gentleman hinges are ordained by God. Newey, citing Dickens’s refusal to accept a gift of Sewell’s sermons, argues as I do that the distinction is based on inner faculties; he merely fails to note that these faculties are inborn.
vicious habits” (565),\textsuperscript{410} and in “Idiots” (1853) Dickens and W. H. Wills offer as one of the possible causes of idiocy “a latent want of power, in the mother” (317). Henry Morley in “The Cure for Sick Minds” (1859) writes that “[t]he main root of insanity is defect of nutrition, often a transmitted weakness,” an inherited defect of the material instrument by which the “immaterial essence” (417) communes with the world. Moreover, Dickens refused to print Harriet Parr’s Gilbert Massenger (1855) in Household Words in part because it turned on the idea of hereditary madness: as he wrote to Wills, “So many unhappy people are, by no fault of their own, linked to a similar terrible possibility—or even probability—that I am afraid it might cause prodigious unhappiness, if we could address it to our large audience” (Letters 7: 681).\textsuperscript{411}

The same notion of the wages of sin underlies Dickens’s comments in the preface to the Charles Dickens edition of Martin Chuzzlewit:

As we sow, we reap. Let the reader go into the children’s side of any prison in England, or, I grieve to add, of many workhouses, and judge whether those are monsters who disgrace our streets, people our hulks and penitentiaries, and overcrowd our penal colonies, or are creatures whom we have deliberately suffered to be bred for misery and ruin. (847)

Dickens was even more explicit in a 20 January 1856 letter to Forster. Describing a man who had fallen into his father’s “weaknesses” without ever having observed them, Dickens writes:

\textsuperscript{410} It is significant that Halliday’s remarks on the wondrous recoveries of “idiots” under the care at the Earlswood Asylum—such that Halliday insists “I found it difficult to say whether they were idiots or not” (568)—nevertheless gestures at some innate and essential human nature (or soul) that even these sufferers possess.

\textsuperscript{411} See also his 14 August 1855 letter to Parr, explaining his decision.
It suggests the strangest consideration as to which of our own failings we are really responsible, and as to which of them we cannot quite reasonably hold ourselves to be so. What A. evidently derived from his father cannot in his case be derived from association and observation, but must be in the very principles of his individuality as a living creature. *(Letters 8: 35)*

That vice could affect one’s children was, of course, a standard belief in the middle of the century. But it is one thing to make allowances for the way a parent’s misdeeds can harm his or her children; it is quite another to posit such (mis)deeds—stretched over millennia—as the source of all inherited characteristics. In the wake of Spencer’s evolutionary psychology, however, Dickens’s allowance of even a small space for the inheritance of acquired characteristics is deeply problematic for his Christian mental philosophy.

The ambiguous status of innate faculties in the wake of Spencer’s psychology—an ambiguity only heightened in Dickens’s work by his limited acceptance of the inheritance of acquired characteristics—is hinted at in the peculiar construction Dickens employs in the 1858 preface to the Cheap Edition of *Dombey and Son* (1846-48). Defending the realism of his characterization of Mr. Dombey, Dickens writes:

> I make so bold as to believe that the faculty (or the habit) of closely and carefully observing the characters of men is a rare one. I have not even found, within my experience, that the faculty (or the habit) of closely and

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412 The editors of the Pilgrim edition of Dickens’s letters suggest that the son in question was the Hon. Edward Robert Lytton. There seems to be a similar acknowledgement of the inheritance of acquired characteristics in Dickens’s 3 February 1860 letter to Henry Chorley, in which, writing of the Italian character, he wonders “whether their tendency to slink and conspire is not a tendency that spies in every dress, from the triple crown to a lousy head, have engendered in their ancestors through generations” (9: 207).
carefully observing so much as the faces of men, is a general one by any means. (834)  
The intended emphasis of the parenthetical tic here (the sort of tic we would expect of Dickens’s flattest characters) is difficult to parse. On the one hand, Dickens’s posture of indecision—is it a faculty or a habit?—suggests that there is a substantial difference between the two things, faculty and habit. Dickens may not be sure whether the ability to observe character is inborn or acquired, but these are two separate and discrete options, their difference marked by the black lines of the brackets on the page. But on the other hand, Dickens’s failure to insist on one or the other can also be read as suggesting that the two things are interchangeable: he is discussing either a faculty or a habit, but the difference is so minor that he need not spend the time to figure out which one it is. Here, then, is a particularly apt demonstration of the troubles into which Spencer’s redefinition of the innate threatened to lead Dickens’s contemporary readers (for whom, as I have been arguing, the distinction marked by those brackets was of the utmost importance). The evolutionary context of this novel—invoked by Pip’s reference to the universal struggle, but frankly inescapable in 1860—casts upon the innate qualities of Dickens’s characters (and the novel’s model of latency) precisely the ambiguity we see in the preface to *Dombey and Son.*  

Perhaps in response to the way this evolutionary context problematized the innate, or perhaps merely because Dickens was himself muddled in his thinking about the implications of Darwin’s (and Spencer’s) theories, the novel in places seems entirely

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413 The ambiguity here seems irresolvable. Both positions, however, are consistent with Dickens’s religious beliefs. It is certainly possible that he, like many Victorians, believed evolution could be made to fit into a Christian understanding of Creation. My point is about the novel itself, which ends up presenting readers with highly ambiguous representations of psychology and the self.
inconsistent in its representation of the factors out of which selfhood is made. For as much as the text seems to insist on the innate qualities that I described above, it also places substantial emphasis on the force of experience to shape identity, as has often been noted. I mentioned above Magwitch’s claim that his constitution got him into trouble, but the novel offers as an equally valid explanation that he was merely raised to be a “warmint” (328). His narration of his life to Herbert and Pip, moreover, stresses the social factors that led him to crime—the poverty into which he was born, his abandonment as a child, and the label of “hardened” (344) with which the legal system branded him—and the novel leaves hanging the question Magwitch ponders on his deathbed, “whether he might have been a better man under better circumstances” (452).

At the other end of the social spectrum, it is never clear whether we are meant to understand that Bentley Drummle is so many heads thicker than other gentlemen because he was born that way—that is, with a thick head to match his “sluggish complexion” and “large awkward tongue” that lolls as he does—or that he became a blockhead through the way his people in Somersetshire “nursed” his negative qualities (202). And what of Startop’s “woman’s delicacy of feature” and resemblance to his mother? The novel pushes us to connect these qualities not with the genetic material he inherited from his “weak mother,” but with the way he was “spoilt” by her “and kept at home when he ought to have been at school” (203), perhaps because his mother’s weakness seems so

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414 Critics of the novel have responded, as Morgentaler does, by discounting the significance of heredity to this novel’s representation of selfhood. Pettit, for example, insists on the novel’s “nightmare vision of environmental determinism” (252). That popular class of readings of *Great Expectations* that chart the way Pip “writes” his own identity, insofar as they go beyond using such writing as a metaphor, similarly overlook the centrality of inherited or inborn faculties to Dickens’s model of the self. French is thus remarkable among critics for having perceived the dual sources of influence on the self in this novel: writing of Pip’s sensitivity, he remarks that “being ‘morally timid and very sensitive’ is not the only possible reaction to injustice; Pip, if he had been born with a different temperament, could have responded in Magwitch’s way to the injustice he met” (149).
much like the example offered by Dickens—and described above—to justify the
inheritance of acquired characteristics. Then there is little Pip, who is a spitting image of
his namesake—so much so that, in the novel’s first ending, Estella assumes he is Pip’s
child—yet born of entirely different blood. Has environment determined both Pips?

To some degree, again, there is no contradiction here: as I have argued in earlier
chapters, faculty psychologists acknowledged the role experience played in the formation
of identity, and it is a mix of innateness and experience that creates the selves in this
novel. In Dickens’s words in an 1856 letter to Forster, a certain number of
“experiences, trials, perplexities, and confusions” are “inseparable from the marking or
unmaking of all men” (Letters 8: 178). What is problematic—at least for a Christian
dualism—about Great Expectations’s representation of experience is that, as the novel
shies away from questions of inheritance and the evolutionary baggage they bring with
them, experience in places comes to look like the sole explanation of how this novel’s
many characters came to be the way they are.

In light of Dickens’s apparent hesitancy to rely as heavily on innateness as he did
in the earlier novels, the significant role that influence plays in Great Expectations is also
potentially damaging to the idea of inborn faculties—and to the Christian psychology that
relies on these faculties. The novel seems deeply interested in the power of influence, the
varied ways by which we can shape our neighbours (and especially our children) for good

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415 That is, Dickens’s characterization here seems to be more or less what he describes in his preface to the
Charles Dickens edition of Martin Chuzzlewit: “I conceive that the sordid coarseness and brutality of Jonas
would be unnatural, if there had been nothing in his early education, and in the precept and example always
before him, to engender and develop the vices that make him odious. But, so born and so bred; admired for
that which made him hateful, and justified from his cradle in cunning, treachery, and avarice; I claim him
as the legitimate issue of the father upon whom those vices are seen to recoil” (846). See also W. Lucas
Collins’s 1863 Blackwoods article “Personal Identities”: “Circumstances do change men; humiliating as the
fact may be, we, the immaterial spiritual essences, are at the mercy of a thousand material combinations of
the veriest trifles in themselves” (739).
or for evil. Joe, for instance, sheds his beneficial influence on all he touches; if Pip cannot quite pronounce definitively on the extent of that influence, it is nonetheless real and powerful:

It is not possible to know how far the influence of any amiable honest-hearted duty-doing man flies out into the world; but it is very possible to know how it has touched one’s self in going by, and I know right well, that any good that intermixed itself with my apprenticeship came of plain contented Joe, and not of restlessly aspiring discontented me. (107)

This is a relatively pat paean to the values Victorian culture held dear—duty, hard work, honesty, and so forth. What is perhaps remarkable about Pip’s praise of Joe is how different it is from his many other invocations of the power of influence. For Pip, influence is usually a crutch, an easy excuse for his missteps and misdeeds; although he sprinkles throughout his text occasional praise of the influence of Biddy, Herbert, or Mr. Pocket, these moments are the exception. Of Satis House, for example, he laments: “What could I become with these surroundings? How could my character fail to be influenced by them? Is it to be wondered at if my thoughts were dazed, as my eyes were, when I came out into the natural light from the misty yellow rooms?” (96). While he soon thereafter adds, “How much of my ungracious condition of mind may have been my own fault, how much Miss Havisham’s, how much my sister’s, is now of no moment to me or to any one” (106), Pip’s words nevertheless raise the lingering possibility that his sins are not all of his own doing; moreover, in his later references to Satis House these qualifications have dropped out, and Pip now writes that “under its influence I continued at heart to hate my trade and to be ashamed of home” (124). Pip may call himself an
untaught genius at the art of lying (42)—although he has shown us enough of
Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe at this point to suggest he has had a few lessons—but the
blame for numerous other of his sins falls on others. With such a sister, such neighbours,
such a guardian, such a benefactor—he seems to want us to ask—how else could Pip
have turned out?

Pip, in his turn, exerts his own bad influence on others. The primary sufferer—or
at least the one whose sufferings Pip most regrets—is Herbert, who is led by Pip’s
expectations into a lavish lifestyle he cannot afford. But what is most telling here for my
purposes is the language in which the influence Pip exerts on Herbert is figured. Pip tells
us that “[m]y lavish habits led his easy nature into expenses that he could not afford,
corrupted the simplicity of his life, and disturbed his peace with anxieties and regrets”
(271). As I suggested above, the habits Pip here describes are not the sort of habits in
which psychological theorists were interested—these are not automatic actions controlled
by the reflex functions of the nervous system. However, I want to lay stress on the fact
that the word is the same. In describing Pip’s bad influence, then, the novel gives the
appearance of staging a figurative inheritance of habit. Pip’s habits, through the medium
of influence, become Herbert’s habits. Nor does Pip’s influence end here: he follows the
explanation of his regret for the harm he did Herbert by remarking, “I was not at all
remorseful for having unwittingly set those other branches of the Pocket family to the
poor arts they practised” (271). A significant portion of the Pocket family line, it seems,
has suffered some sort of inheritance from Pip and his expectations. In light of the
significance of habit in the midst of the evolutionary debates that surrounded this novel,
perhaps we ought also to be struck by the way Jaggers’s clients’ habit of backing up
against the wall in his office is registered there by a greasy mark (163); over time, that is, the force of habit marks its impression on the material, just as Camilla’s habit of waking in the night has slowly shortened one of her legs.

Now admittedly, the echoes of Spencer’s model in the passages above, such as they are, are surely accidental, but the accident of these uses of the word *habit*, if nothing else, serves as a reminder of the evolutionary spectre that haunts this text. In light of this haunting and the way it compromises the innate for Dickens, the emphasis this novel places on influence—on the way characters are made and unmade by experience, in Dickens’s words—works, as I have suggested, not merely to complement (as in Dickens’s earlier novels) but also to obscure the hereditary factors that play such a part in faculty psychology, hereditary factors that Spencer’s theories, I am suggesting, likely pushed Dickens to keep in the background. The difference in emphasis is clear if we compare this novel to *David Copperfield*, where Dickens insists much more stridently and unreservedly on the centrality of the innate, even in those moments when David is intent on applauding himself for his own hard work. As I have been arguing, however, Dickens’s shying away from the innate is hardly a viable alternative for a Christian psychology, since the weight the novel places on influence and experience pushes Dickens’s psychology back in the direction of Hume and Bain.

To shed further light on the ambiguity and (readerly) confusion that result from Dickens’s apparent vacillation between heredity and experience in his representation of selfhood, I turn now to that all-important concept in Dickens (especially in the 1850s): the “natural.” Recalling how he found himself aboard the coach down to the marsh country with the convict who long before had slipped him the two one-pound notes, Pip
remarks, “I was not only so changed in the course of nature, but so differently dressed and so differently circumstanced, that it was not at all likely he could have known me without accidental help” (230), a claim that registers the influence of both the innate—this seems to be the force of Pip’s construction of nature here, as that which causes him to grow and develop along particular lines—and circumstance, the changed clothes and social position that hide Pip’s identity as that boy to whom the convict was sent at the Three Jolly Bargemen. If this passage represents a relatively orthodox mix of the inborn and the acquired, though, the meaning of nature is elsewhere so shifting in this novel that Pip at times feels the need to clarify his use of the term. Describing Matthew Pocket for the first time, he calls his manner “natural,” immediately pausing to explain, “I use the word natural, in the sense of its being unaffected” (187). Wemmick, unfortunately, offers no such explanation for his claim that Jaggers is “only his natural depth” (205), like a river. Is Jaggers’s cunning something he was born with, then? The novel’s construction of the natural only becomes more confused later, when Pip assures Miss Havisham that while Matthew Pocket’s scheming relatives are of the same blood as he, “they are not of the same nature” (359)—a claim that, significantly, works to detach nature from heredity.

It is a similar difficulty that we see in the novel’s thoroughly inconsistent treatment of the “grain” of a man, the metaphor that, I argued above, stands as one of the clearest signals of the novel’s model of innate and essential selfhood. Horrified by the failure of all his and Herbert’s attempts to disguise Magwitch, Pip laments that “from head to foot there was Convict in the very grain of the man” (336). He was not born this way, of course; Pip is instead frustrated by the habits his years of imprisonment have impressed on him, such as dragging his leg as though it still bore upon it the weight of
leg-irons. But in Pip’s exasperated exclamation, the novel’s construction of a man’s grain threatens to blend into grain’s near-homonym, the “stain” of prison that haunts Pip. Describing the taint he felt upon visiting Newgate before meeting Estella in London, Pip muses:

I consumed the whole time in thinking how strange it was that I should be encompassed by all this taint of prison and crime; that, in my childhood out on the lonely marshes on a winter evening I should have first encountered it; that, it should have reappeared on two occasions, starting out like a stain that was faded but not gone; that, it should in this way pervade my fortune and advancement. (263)

This stain “starts out” exactly as does Magwitch’s grain, the latter of which blazes through all the disguises and makeup with which Pip and Herbert try to repress it. Nearly one hundred pages later in the novel from this initial description of his afternoon at the Cross Keys, Pip reaches for the metaphor a second time to describe this same day, again mentioning the “stain of the prison” (351) that haunted him as he waited to meet Estella at the coach-office. The repeated word “stain” is itself a significant one. The varnish—the stain—that Mr. Pocket insisted could never hide the grain has now become interchangeable with it, and, to turn from vehicle to tenor, the experience that faculty psychology suggested only developed the gifts with which God blessed each person now threatens to erase (or, in Spencer’s model, engender) those gifts.

The difficulties into which Dickens falls in attempting to avoid the two horns of the dilemma with which he is faced in this novel—Hume’s or Bain’s associationism on the one hand and Spencer’s evolution on the other—are registered most clearly in the
novel’s inconsistent treatment of Estella. Estella’s description of herself points to the shaping forces that influenced her *after* birth: the scheming of Miss Havisham’s relations that sharpened Estella’s young wits (266), the strange influence of Miss Havisham herself, the dreariness of Satis House. Estella is proud and hard because she has learned her lessons well—so well that she cannot muster love for Havisham any more than she can for the men she entraps. Yet these lessons are not necessarily the sum of her identity. Estella’s attempt to understand Havisham’s surprise at her inability to express love for her adoptive mother gets to the heart of the issue:

“I begin to think,” said Estella, in a musing way, after another moment of calm wonder, “that I almost understand how this comes about. If you had brought up your adopted daughter wholly in the dark confinement of these rooms, and had never let her know that there was such a thing as the daylight by which she has never once seen your face—if you had done that, and then, for a purpose had wanted her to understand the daylight and know all about it, you would have been disappointed and angry?” . . .

“Or,” said Estella, “—which is a nearer case—if you had taught her, from the dawn of her intelligence, with your utmost energy and might, that there was such a thing as daylight, but that it was made to be her enemy and destroyer, and she must always turn against it, for it had blighted you and would else blight her;—if you had done this, and then, for a purpose, had wanted her to take naturally to the daylight and she could not do it, you would have been disappointed and angry?” (303-4)
The language here allows us to read Estella’s circumstances as merely a perversion of, or a failure to develop, her innate capabilities. She has the ability to perceive light—she was born with the requisite organs, as one is born with the requisite faculties—but because she has never encountered it, she cannot understand it.\footnote{416} The drift of her claim that she has a heart to be shot or stabbed in is roughly similar (238): although she possesses the organ, she has never (figuratively speaking) learned to use it.\footnote{417} To return to her metaphor of being kept from the daylight, Estella further insists that she cannot take naturally to daylight, which is to say that it is natural to take to it, but that her faculties have been corrupted and twisted to such a point that she cannot do so. Moving in a similar direction is Pip’s mention of the “days when [Estella’s] baby intelligence was receiving its first distortions from Miss Havisham’s wasting hands” (308): the notion that Havisham both distorted and wasted suggests that Estella came to her possessed of some qualities to be distorted and wasted, and Pip’s mention of “baby intelligence” seems fairly clearly to denote something inborn, something that precedes experience. Or, to offer yet another example, the explanation that both Pip and Estella provide for Estella’s twisted constitution is the same Pip offers to explain Havisham’s perversion—Havisham’s mind has grown diseased because, in secluding herself, she has shut out the world’s “natural and healing influences” and reversed the order of her “Maker” (396), a claim which

\footnote{416} Compare Estella’s metaphor of the darkened room with the example Reid uses to refute the claim that the bodily organs are necessary to perception: “If a man was shut up in a dark room, so that he could see nothing but through one small hole in the shutter of a window, Would he conclude, that the hole was the cause of his seeing, and that it is impossible to see any other way? Perhaps, if he had never in his life seen but in this way, he might be apt to think so; but the conclusion is rash and groundless. He sees, because God has given him the power of seeing; and he sees only through this small hole, because his power of seeing is circumscribed by impediments on all other hands” (\textit{Essays} 73).

\footnote{417} Later, of course, Havisham laments that she stole Estella’s “heart away and put ice in its place,” to which Pip replies, “Better . . . to have left her a natural heart, even to be bruised or broken” (397).
reinforces the notion of a natural order and of a God who grants us the gifts Havisham has perverted.

But Estella very quickly begins to move away from such a rendering of her condition. Immediately after offering Havisham this metaphor of the child kept from daylight, Estella insists, “I must be taken as I have been made” (304), a construction which gives to Havisham a greater hand in Estella’s development than mere perversion. Havisham has not just twisted Estella; she has made her. Hovering in the background here, of course, is Frankenstein’s monster, soon to be invoked by Pip to describe his own relationship with Magwitch. Moreover, the inconsistencies of this novel’s take on selfhood are made particularly manifest in Estella’s response to Pip’s whimpering that her heartlessness “is not in Nature”: “‘It is in my nature,’ she returned. And then she added, with a stress upon the words, ‘It is in the nature formed within me’” (361). Here, in Estella’s need to stop and explain herself to Pip, is clearly written the difficulty in which Dickens is mired. As soon as Estella invokes the “nature” that in David Copperfield was unproblematically connected with the innate and divinely granted, she falls back to a different claim, about the shaping power of experience. After all, Spencer’s inherited faculties were themselves “natural,” but natural as opposed to divine—they were the slow productions of Nature, not of God. Nature, in other words, had been thoroughly reinscribed by 1860 as the source of those innate gifts which once had a loftier origin. In Estella’s consequent retreat from the term, the innate is utterly elided.

Paul Sheehan also sees the Havisham/Estella relationship as paralleling that of Frankenstein and his monster (101).
Dickens, however, is not content to let heredity entirely disappear from Estella’s makeup. For what is the basis of Pip’s recognition of Molly as Estella’s mother but something shared between the two, something passed down from mother to daughter? Estella’s hands seem to be the primary means of Pip’s recognition; what is it about them, though, that leads Pip to make the connection between the two women? The easy answer is that it is the appearance of their hands in which Pip notes the similarity, that Estella has inherited something of her mother’s physical characteristics; this is, more or less, what Pip says. Yet as is so often the case in this novel where the question of heredity is concerned, Pip’s description of the recognition scene is more equivocal than it first seems. Pip recalls that, at that moment, “a certain action of [Molly’s] fingers as she spoke arrested my attention. . . . The action of her fingers was like knitting . . . Surely, I had seen exactly such eyes and such hands, on a memorable occasion very lately” (387-88). If we take Pip as Dickens seems to want us to take him, the chain of thought here proceeds as follows: he sees her hands performing an act like knitting, he recalls that he lately saw Estella knitting, and once he has both women in his mind he sees the resemblance between them.

But Pip’s description also lays itself open to being read as saying that what he recognized was the knitting action itself. Earlier, in one of the many moments in which Pip has a strange sense that Estella reminds him of someone, he wondered whether he

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419 Cohen finds surprising the idea that Pip could see a similarity in Estella’s and Molly’s hands, for “they have nothing in common. The very attempt to align these two sets of hands by force of uncanny conjunction only points up the antithesis between them: Molly’s are marked while Estella’s are blank; Molly’s signify (even if what they designate is sexuality held in check) while Estella’s do not” (“Manual” 249). At the level of discourse Cohen is right, but at the level of story—the level of the imaginary reality that Pip lives in and describes—there ought not to be anything too surprising in the notion that mother and daughter might share some physical characteristics.
had merely caught Estella performing a habitual action she had imitated from Miss Havisham’s example:

In some of her looks and gestures there was that tinge of resemblance to Miss Havisham which may often be noticed to have been acquired by children, from grown persons with whom they have been much associated and secluded, and which, when childhood is past, will produce a remarkable occasional likeness of expression between faces that are otherwise quite different. (238)

Estella, of course, was parted from Molly too young to have acquired any such resemblance to her mother; they were never much associated or secluded. If we read Pip’s description of the recognition scene as suggesting that it was the action of knitting that he recognized—and I think the novel does inadvertently push us to make this connection—it would seem that it is the *habitual movement* of her mother’s fingers that Estella has inherited.

In short, any attempt to parse this novel’s position on the question of heredity—a question, I stress again, of the utmost significance to a Christian psychology at mid-century—must, it seems, end in confusion. Dickens is simply too unclear, too inconsistent, for reader or critic to put down *Great Expectations* with a firm sense of the novel’s position on the innate. How different from *David Copperfield*, where if the novel’s language of association might be confused with associationism’s nearly identical language, the text was nevertheless clear and consistent in its insistence on the gifts with which God blesses us. As I have argued, however, Dickens’s lack of both clarity and consistency on this head in *Great Expectations* should not be read as a wavering of his
commitment to a Christian psychology. Dickens, as I have shown, was as dedicated as ever in the early 1860s to the faculty psychology on which he drew in his earlier novels. What is revealed by the difficulty in charting Dickens’s position on the relative weights of the inborn and of experience is how effectively other, physiologically based psychologies had cut out the ground from beneath the feet of an orthodox Christian mental science by the time *Great Expectations* appeared. The stakes of the ambiguity of the language of association (through which, I repeat, both associationism and faculty psychology understood and described thought) had been considerably raised as a result of Bain’s influential connection of that language to an unapologetically physical notion of the self, where thought could be reduced to mere nerve force. Equally damaging was the way that evolution—the topic of the day in 1860—had naturalized the innate, redefining one of the most powerful means of distinguishing faculty from associationist psychology as merely another product of physiological processes, now stretched over generations. Even faculty psychology’s latest development, Hamilton’s theory of latent mental modifications, never quite distinguished itself from the parallel notions of latency and the unconscious that lay at the heart of physiological and evolutionary psychologies. By 1860, it seems, only the soul itself had not been appropriated and redefined by the physiological mental science against which Dickens set himself. As I shall argue in Chapter Six, however, even the soul would soon become part of a physical construction of the mind.
CHAPTER SIX:
“An Earthy Flavour throughout”: Double Consciousness and the Redefinition of the Soul in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*

In the preceding chapters I have charted the slow rise of a physical psychology in the second half of the nineteenth century. Despite physiology’s apparent ascendance, however, Dickens maintained his endorsement of a Christian mental philosophy until the end of his life, unswayed by science’s (or, more precisely, a particular type of science’s) seemingly unstoppable advance. His continued belief in an orthodox psychology is in fact nowhere more obvious than in his comments on 27 September 1869, in a speech before the Annual Inaugural Meeting of the Birmingham and Midland Institute; these were among his most explicit remarks on the scientific and psychological controversies I have been tracing in this project. Regardless of the inroads made by a reductionist mental science by the late 1860s, Dickens scoffed at the suggestion that his was a material—and thus irreligious—age:

I do not understand this much-used and much-abused phrase, a “material age,” I cannot comprehend—if anybody can: which I very much doubt—its logical signification. For instance: has electricity become more material in the mind of any sane, or moderately insane man, woman, or child, because of the discovery that in the good providence of God it was made available for the service and use of man to an immeasurably greater extent than for his destruction? Do I make a more material journey to the bedside of my dying parents or my dying child, when I travel there at the rate of sixty miles an hour, than when I travel thither at the rate of six? Rather, in the swift case, does not my agonized heart become over-fraught with
gratitude to that Supreme Beneficence from whom alone can have
proceeded the wonderful means of shortening my suspense? What is the
materiality of the cable or the wire, compared with the immateriality of the
spark? What is the materiality of certain chemical substances that we can
weigh or measure, imprison or release, compared with the immateriality of
their appointed affinities and repulsions, prescribed to them from the
instant of their creation to the day of judgment? (Fielding, ed., 404)

Dickens, that is, continued to insist during the last months of his life that there were more
things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in materialist philosophy. For him, as I
have argued throughout this project, that which could be seen and measured—the
physical, the tangible, the visible—represented only a fraction of existence, so that the
advances of science could only ever supplement, not undermine, religion. In the novel
he was beginning as he spoke these words, The Mystery of Edwin Drood (1870), Dickens
was similarly forthright in his defence of an embattled Christian psychology.

This novel, indeed, might represent Dickens’s boldest intervention in
psychological debate; from what exists of the text, it appears likely that Edwin Drood
would have been among Dickens’s most outright attacks on materialist psychology, had
he lived to finish it. This attack is primarily located in the novel’s representation of John
Jasper, through whose eyes the novel’s opening pages are focalized. For much of this
chapter, then, I focus on the particular construction of the mind we find in Jasper; more
precisely, I trace the way Dickens draws in his representation of him on Victorian
constructions of “double consciousness,” a mental malady that offers a particularly clear

420 This is not the sentiment of a single speech. See also Dennis Walder’s point, that Dickens “strongly
supports the basic intention of the liberal Christian manifesto, Essays and Reviews (1860), to reconcile
Christianity with the intellectual tendencies of the age and so save religion and the Church” (175).
site at which to witness the way psycho-physiology was engaged in rewriting the
terminology of orthodox Christian theories of the mind. As I hinted at the close of
Chapter Five, in fact, the changing constructions of double consciousness in the late
1860s and early 1870s allow us to see how even the most essential and most orthodox
aspects of a Christian dualist mental philosophy came to be reinscribed in the latter half
of the nineteenth century.

Jasper’s psychology has drawn considerable attention. Whatever Edwin’s ultimate
fate—dead or alive—critics seem confident that Jasper is guilty of something, and much
of what has been written about this novel has focused on parsing his criminal psyche.421
What such readings of the novel suggest—and what this chapter will presuppose—is that
it was not the mystery plot that primarily interested Dickens as he wrote Edwin Drood;
instead, both these readings and my own take as their starting point the notion that the
novel was to be founded on an interest in the mental life of its apparent villain. This, after
all, is the thrust of Forster’s assertions about how Dickens planned to end the novel: “The
story . . . was to be that of the murder of a nephew by his uncle; the originality of which
was to consist in the review of the murderer’s career by himself at the close, when its
temptations were to be dwelt upon as if, not he the culprit, but some other man, were the
tempted” (2: 366).

For the purposes of this chapter, among the details that are most telling in Jasper’s
psychology is the way, as Eve Sedgwick has noted, the novel attempts to insulate it from

421 Forster, of course, informs us that the story was to be “the murder of a nephew by his uncle,” and
Dickens’s daughter Kate Perugini corroborates Forster’s assertions (644). Among those who—with more or
less subtlety—have followed Forster in convicting Jasper of murder (or at least attempted murder) are
Doris Alexander (128-29), Philip Collins (291-93), John S. DeWend (180), David Faulkner (181), Judith
Prescott Flynn (321), Sean Grass (226-30), Ina Rae Hark (159), Gerhard Joseph (“Who Cares” 173), J.
Hillis Miller (Charles Dickens 320), Hyungji Park (“Dickens and the ‘Noble Savage,’” 982), Ronald A.
Thomas (221), and Edmund Wilson (86-87).
that of the text’s more “wholesome” characters (198). The narrator remarks of Rosa’s attempts to understand Jasper, for instance: “[W]hat could she know of the criminal intellect, which its own professed students perpetually misread, because they persist in trying to reconcile it with the average intellect of average men, instead of identifying it as a horrible wonder apart[?]” (175). Critics of the novel, too, have often only perpetuated this insulation of Jasper’s mind by writing of his abnormal psychology, his schizophrenia, or his mental disease.422 But why is Dickens so eager to cordon off Jasper’s mind from those of the text’s other characters? Why must the novel insist on his difference? The answer, I will argue, goes to the heart of the psychological controversies this project has charted.

Distinct and Separate Phases of Being: Double Consciousness in the Nineteenth Century

Sedgwick’s answer to the question I posed in the last section lies in her reading of the novel’s homophobia. My suggestion is that the novel’s fears have to do with the understanding of the self that seems to underlie Dickens’s depiction of Jasper. Beginning with the interior monologue that opens the novel, Jasper’s psyche is presented to us as being split. Numerous critics have charted Jasper’s internal tension between “Eastern” impulses and “English” ones;423 others have read in his mind a struggle between

422 For example, DeWind remarks on Jasper’s “mental disease” (171), Alexander writes of his “abnormal psychology” (125-26), Sedgwick calls his personality “psychotically divided” (181), Joachim Stanley mentions his “psychological dysfunction” (17), and Harry Stone says of his dual nature that it is “almost schizoid” (Night Side 381). Flynn goes so far as to call Jasper “a clearly demonic villain” (312), and Hark writes of his “warped soul” (163). Certainly the suggestion of abnormal psychology also informs Faulker’s reference to Jasper’s “case history” (181).
423 See, for instance, DeWind, Faulkner, and Hyungji Park, “Going to Wake Up Egypt.”
conscious and unconscious drives. More tangibly, Jasper serves as Lay Precentor by
day and opium addict by night, acting his part in the church yet troubled internally by
what he calls “some stray sort of ambition, aspiration, restlessness, dissatisfaction” (12);
he can also sing so that it seems “as if a false note were not within his power” (130) on
the very evening that he apparently plans to murder his nephew.

The clue to understanding Jasper’s split identity lies in a comment made about
another character in the novel, Miss Twinkleton, mistress of the school that Rosa Bud
attends. Describing the division between her public and private personas, Dickens writes:

As, in some cases of drunkenness, and in others of animal magnetism,
there are two states of consciousness which never clash, but each of which
pursues its separate course as though it were continuous instead of broken
(thus if I hide my watch when I am drunk, I must be drunk again before I
can remember where), so Miss Twinkleton has two distinct and separate
phases of being. (15)

One cannot read this passage without being struck by its applicability to Jasper as well,
especially considering, as Sean Grass points out, the connection of Jasper’s second state
with opium intoxication (233). What I would stress, however, is the text on which
Dickens draws here. Those critics who have identified a source for the passage in Edwin
Drood, noticing its parallels to one quoted by Ezra Jennings in The Moonstone (1868),
assert that the words of both paraphrase John Elliotson, who in his Human Physiology
quotes a similar excerpt from George Combe’s System of Phrenology (1830). Combe
writes as follows:

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I am thinking here especially of Ronald Thomas and Sean Grass.
Dr. Abel informed me of an Irish porter to a warehouse, who forgot, when sober, what he had done when drunk; but being drunk, again recollected the transactions of his former state of intoxication. On one occasion, being drunk, he had lost a parcel of some value, and in his sober moments could give no account of it. Next time he was intoxicated, he recollected that he had left the parcel at a certain house, and there being no address on it, it had remained there safely, and was got on his calling for it. The same phenomena present themselves in the state of somnambulism, produced by animal magnetism. (521)

I shall have more to say about the accuracy of this ascription to Elliotson later, but regardless of specifics, the passage in *Edwin Drood* certainly alludes to Combe, is taken from the psychological literature of mid-century—is indeed among Dickens’s most direct references to nineteenth-century mental science—and invokes the discourse surrounding the nineteenth-century concept of double consciousness.

The term “double consciousness” was used in the nineteenth century to describe a rigid split in a subject’s knowledge and awareness. Most frequently, the sufferer would fall into a deep and prolonged sleep, awaking with no apparent memory of his or her past life. Victorian case histories often describe their subjects as having had to relearn in their second state all they knew in their previous one, from handwriting to the identities of family members and friends. These alternate states also typically brought with them

425 Perhaps the best critical work done on double consciousness is that of Ian Hacking. See his “Double Consciousness in Britain 1815-1875,” *Rewriting the Soul*, and “Two Souls in One Body.”
426 Indeed, this led Eugène Azam to conclude that the condition was a failure of memory; he therefore argues that the disorder is best considered as periodical amnesia (603-4). Curiously, Hacking writes that British and American writers on double consciousness were “indifferent to questions of memory” in describing their patients (*Rewriting* 154). This statement, however, is contradicted both by the nineteenth-century case histories I have consulted and by Hacking’s own assertion in “Double Consciousness in Britain” that “amnesia is central to double consciousness” (135).
different personalities—often the subject went from being reserved, perhaps slightly morose, to high-spirited and rebellious. Sufferers made multiple switches between states; usually these alterations were unpredictable, although some patients offered more regular changes between selves. David Skae describes a man—of whom he was told by John Abercrombie—who alternated states of consciousness every second day:

[H]e was affected periodically, I believe, on every alternate day, or at least the regularity of the remission or intermission was such, that his family were able to anticipate, by calculation, the days on which he would be well, and those on which he would be ill, and to arrange their social and domestic engagements accordingly. On the intermediate days, he was perfectly qualified for the discharge of his several duties; on the other days, he was totally disqualified for social intercourse or the ordinary business of life. (10)

Like this man, sufferers of double consciousness were, in most cases, entirely unaware of their experiences from one state to the other. Memory typically persisted within a particular state, however; that is, sufferers would forget all that happened to them in their alternate state, but would have a complete memory of the experiences they had had while in the state in which they currently found themselves—the gaps in their memory would only comprise what they experienced in the alternate state to the one in which they found themselves at any given moment. Sufferers thus had two complete sets of memories, and

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Azam’s patient Felida X. is an exception: while she was unable to recall her second state while in her first, she could recall both states while in her second.
as such, patients are often described, as in the passage from *Edwin Drood*, as leading two entirely separate existences.\textsuperscript{428}

Consider, for instance, the case of Mary Reynolds, whose history, in addition to being one of the earliest described, is one of the most frequently recounted in the psychological literature.\textsuperscript{429} At about the age of 19, she awoke from a deep and lengthy sleep—S. Weir Mitchell reports that it lasted 18 or 20 hours (369)—with no recollection of her previous life: she could not recognize any of the members of her family and, according to the Reverend William S. Plumer, was “ignorant of the use of the most familiar implements, and of the commonest details of everyday life” (807). Dr. Mitchill insists that “her memory was *tabula rasa*” (186), what Plumer describes as the condition of a new-born infant (808): while she could pronounce a few words, she was unaware of their meaning. Reynolds was able to reacquire knowledge quickly, and she soon relearned the skills and knowledge she had lost. Five weeks later, however, she awoke from another sleep to find herself back in her previous condition, with no recollection of the intervening weeks. Shortly thereafter, she switched again, and her memory was solely that of her second state. These alternations continued for a number of years, until at the age of 35 or so she switched permanently into her second state.\textsuperscript{430}

\textsuperscript{428} See, for example, Azam 584, Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology* (1842) 459, Crichton Browne 536, Mayo 1202, Plumer 808, and Skae 12.

\textsuperscript{429} My discussion of Reynolds is drawn from S. Weir Mitchell’s “Mary Reynolds: A Case of Double Consciousness” (1888), “A Double Consciousness, or a Duality of Person in the Same Individual: From a Communication of Dr. Mitchill to the Reverend Dr. Nott, President of Union College” (1817), and Rev. William S. Plumer’s “Mary Reynolds: A Case of Double Consciousness” (1859-60). Others retell Reynolds’s story, although they do not always mention her by name. She is variously referred to as “Major Ellicott’s case” (Crichton Browne 539), in reference to the man who first reported her story, and “the American lady mentioned by [Robert] Macnish [in his *Philosophy of Sleep*]” (Azam 588).

Eric T. Carlson further writes that Reynolds is usually cited as the earliest case of double consciousness, but Benjamin Dwight’s cases, although published slightly later—1818 rather than 1817—occurred earlier.

\textsuperscript{430} Mitchell reports that Reynolds did seem eventually to regain some of her memory from the first state: he cites her nephew’s claim that “at a later period of her life she said she did sometimes seem to have a dim,
Although in her original state she was quiet and reserved, Reynolds became in her second energetic and carefree, willing to test the rules that were set for her and often forming strong prejudices against individuals. She insists that she had “no idea, while in my second state, of employing my time in anything useful. I cared for nothing, but to ramble about, and never tired walking through the fields and woods” (qtd. in Plumer 808). But it was not only her personality that varied between her two existences: those who recount the case also typically remark that even Reynolds’s handwriting altered with her condition.\textsuperscript{431} Plumer goes so far as to assert that “the whole structure of her mind and consciousness, and their mode of operating seemed dissimilar, according to her state” (812).

As the quotation from \textit{Edwin Drood} should make clear, though, double consciousness was not a unique ailment, but part of a constellation of similar abnormal states that interested writers of Victorian psychological texts. The way the condition was constructed in these works was informed by discussions of dreams, drunkenness, somnambulism, and mesmerism, and double consciousness was often explicitly equated—or conflated—with these states.\textsuperscript{432} Certainly the parallels between the divisions of memory witnessed in those either mesmerized or hypnotized and those seen in cases of

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\textsuperscript{431} Mitchell, though, reproduces two samples of her handwriting, taken from each state, and dismisses the assertion that there is any marked difference between them (372). A. T. Myers writes of the patient Louis V—, though, that even his speech changed between states, becoming indistinct and clipped (601; see also Frederic W. H. Myers, 649). In this case the patient also suffered from a series of hysterical physical symptoms. Louis V—’s case is perhaps more remarkable, though, for being one of the earliest cases of multiple, not just two, personalities. Felida X. also very rarely slipped into a third state, which according to Azam was “characterized by an indescribable terror” (589).

\textsuperscript{432} See, for example, Azam 600. Frederic Myers refers to Felida’s second state as her “somnambulic life” (654). He also makes explicit the connection between double consciousness and the other states mentioned above.
double consciousness was not lost upon theorists who wrote on either condition.\textsuperscript{433} In some cases, moreover, it was to mesmerism and hypnotism that doctors turned in their efforts to cure double consciousness: Frederic Myers and Crichton Browne both describe the use of mesmerism to alternate the patient Louis V—’s multiple states. How the self was conceived in theories of double consciousness could therefore have implications for areas of psychology far removed from this particular ailment, for to some degree double consciousness was constructed as but an extreme form of more common states of mind.

The Uses of Double Consciousness

But why would Dickens choose to employ this particular psychological malady in \textit{Edwin Drood}? Considering the close working relationship he and Wilkie Collins had once shared, one obvious answer might be that the condition—broadly defined—plays such an integral part in \textit{The Moonstone}: as I mentioned, Collins has Ezra Jennings quote the same Combe passage—which Jennings takes from Elliotson—and double consciousness, in the form of opium intoxication, serves as the basis for the solution of the novel’s mystery. Certainly there are a number of other similarities between \textit{Edwin Drood} and Collins’s novel, the most obvious being Jasper’s use of opium, as Wendy Jacobson has pointed out (\textit{Companion} 5).\textsuperscript{434} It therefore seems plausible that Dickens’s use of double consciousness in \textit{Edwin Drood} is simply another borrowing from Collins’s (exceptionally successful) work.

\textsuperscript{433} Carpenter, in both \textit{Principles of Human Physiology} (1842) (231) and \textit{Mental Physiology} (596), makes precisely this connection. Robert Macnish, too, in the later editions of his \textit{Philosophy of Sleep}, remarks on the “new consciousness” that the mesmerized subject attains (107), and he later explicitly connects double consciousness and mesmerism (113). On this point, see also Jenny Bourne Taylor, \textit{In the Secret Theatre of Home} 56 and Hacking, \textit{Rewriting the Soul} 148. Hacking further discusses the ways that the discourse of hypnotism gave Azam a paradigm in which to discuss Felida X. (\textit{Rewriting} 159-60).

\textsuperscript{434} Both Lonoff and Michael Hollington also note the parallels between the two novels. William M. Burgan even sees in the two novels parallel use of Masonic symbolism.
But it is possible to go even further. A number of critics assert that Dickens and Collins’s friendship had cooled by the time Dickens was writing *Edwin Drood*, perhaps because of Dickens’s dissatisfaction with the marriage of his daughter Kate and Collins’s brother Charles, perhaps because of Collins’s habit of bragging about his own achievements.\(^{435}\) And although Dickens initially responded favourably to Collins’s plans for *The Moonstone* (Lonoff 163), he later wrote of the novel (in a letter to his sub-editor W. H. Wills): “The construction is wearisome beyond endurance, and there is a vein of obstinate conceit in it that makes enemies of readers” (12: 159). Was this a case of envy of the younger author’s overwhelming success? Considering the evidence, one can see why Sue Lonoff might assert that Dickens set out in *Edwin Drood* to beat Collins at his own game (163).\(^{436}\) Dickens’s use of double consciousness, according to such a reading, would make perfect sense, as a strategy by which to put his old friend in his place.

I confess, though, that I do not find this scenario convincing, particularly in light of Dickens’s own deep interest in mental science. I would like to suggest an alternate reason for Dickens’s employment of the discourse of double consciousness: to cast doubt on the condition’s existence. This is, perhaps, a peculiar claim. But before dismissing it, let us take a moment and consider whether, in fact, John Jasper can be said to suffer from the malady, to have two separate states of existence. Certainly there is ample evidence to

\(^{435}\) Both of these explanations are offered by Lonoff (161-62). In any case, she asserts that the two had had a falling out “or, at any rate, had grown apart” (161), but she also points out that the men apparently were reconciled before Dickens’s death (159). The notion that Dickens was estranged from Collins at the time of writing *Edwin Drood* is made to appear somewhat less likely by the encouraging letter Dickens sent Collins on [15] February 1869, in which he praised Collins’s success with the play *Black and White* and offered suggestions for how the work might be improved, and by Dickens’s assertion in a letter to Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Fields on that same date that Collins had kept Dickens’s birthday with him. Both letters may be found in Volume 12 of the Pilgrim Edition of Dickens’s letters.

\(^{436}\) Michael Hollington semi-seriously puts forward a similar scenario. See also Wilson 93.
argue that he does: Forster’s claims about how the novel would end, with Jasper telling his autobiographical tale in the third person, would suggest as much, and there are good reasons for believing Forster. Dickens’s daughter Kate claimed that Forster was jealous of Dickens’s confidence and would have been deeply offended had Dickens misled him about this plot, as he had not done with those of any of his previous novels (644-46). If nothing else, Dickens early on places the thought of double consciousness in his readers’ minds: the novel’s second paragraph, after all, refers to Jasper’s “scattered consciousness” (1). I would further suggest that Mr. Tope’s assertion, in the novel’s second chapter, that it was Jasper’s memory that grew dazed in that morning’s service (5) hints at the intimate connection of double consciousness with memory. That Tope’s words are followed immediately by the Dean’s question, “And Mr. Jasper has gone home quite himself, has he?” appears to me at least tenuous evidence that Dickens is gesturing at the multiple selves that are the product of the disorder. To take the Dean’s colloquial phrase seriously for a moment: if Jasper is not himself, who else could he be?

437 Perhaps the most famous critical account to ascribe to Jasper a split consciousness is that of Edmund Wilson in The Wound and the Bow. Drawing on the work of Howard Duffield and Aubrey Boyd, Wilson argues that Jasper is a Thug who has unconsciously committed the murder as part of his sect’s rituals (85-88). Among those who accept, more or less, that Jasper’s personality is split—although they do not generally repeat the Thug thesis—are Alexander (128), Grass (226), Hollington (144), Kaplan (154), and Ronald Thomas (222). (Kathleen Wales merely toys with the idea [243].) But more often than not, those critics who concede that Jasper may possess a divided self view such fracturing through a psychoanalytic framework, rather than in relation to the psychological texts that Dickens was reading and to which he clearly was responding.

438 Although it is unlikely Dickens was making the connection, it is worth noting, considering Jasper’s dissatisfaction with his position, the observation of a number of modern commentators that those who suffered from double consciousness found in the disorder a way to transcend their social states. Elizabeth S. Bowman argues that double consciousness was often a response to the limited opportunities available to women in the nineteenth-century: “In the face of such societal restrictions, the formation of older or less socially conforming personalities is understandable” (183). Hacking makes a similar observation, adding to those cases that “concern young women who have not made peace with the social role into which they have been born” a group that concern mature men who have “wearied of occupations at which they were successful” (Rewriting 141).
More significantly, Jasper’s condition seems to be a physical one, apparently beyond what we might imagine to be the possibilities of mere shamming: his shifts between what the novel calls “two extreme states” (12) are accompanied by such symptoms as a film that creeps across his eyes; Edwin remarks of Jasper, moreover, that he is “subject to a kind of paroxysm, or fit” (118), which Jasper explains as the effects of opium stealing over him “like a blight or a cloud” (10)—something outside his power. Such physical symptoms seem to echo the hysterical symptoms that so frequently accompanied double consciousness. But even apart from the physical symptomatology of double consciousness, what are we to make of the effect Edwin’s disappearance has on Jasper, the toll it seems to take on him; of Jasper’s dogged determination to track down his nephew’s killer; or of his ability to sing so beautifully on the very evening that Edwin is to be murdered? If this were mere dissimulation, numerous critics have objected, would it not strain the credulity of Dickens’s readers?

However, those who deny the reality of Jasper’s condition—at least within the action of the novel—point out that there remain frequent enough hints that Jasper’s self is not as rigidly divided as I have suggested is the case in reports of double consciousness. The interior monologue with which the novel begins seems to contain elements of both his states of existence, the fantastical Eastern elements of his opium intoxication and the Cathedral Tower of his outward life. Does this combination not belie the idea of a split between these two states? And what of his ability to piece together his scattered consciousness in this opening scene? Does this suggest that Jasper is in control of his alternations from one state to another? Even the physical signs that seem to accompany

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439 This has been noticed by DeWind (170-71), Frank (Charles Dickens 204-5), Hark (157), Joseph (“Who Cares” 171), and Stanley (16-17).
Jasper’s changes are ambiguous, for they have a parallel in a story Dickens co-wrote with Collins, “No Thoroughfare” (1867); in that text we are told of the villain Obenreizer, who clearly does not suffer from double consciousness, that “a certain nameless film would come over his eyes—apparently by the action of his own will—which would impenetrably veil, not only from those tellers of tales, but from his face at large, every expression save one of attention” (570). The parenthetical clause here is essential: the film over Obenreizer’s eyes is a physiological response that he controls. Somewhat similarly, Dickens’s frequent references in Edwin Drood to “the Jasper face” (7) in Jasper’s initial reunion with Edwin hint that Jasper is intentionally hiding something from his nephew, that the face he presents is but a mask. Note, too, Jasper’s encounter with Rosa in the garden of Miss Twinkleton’s—we see there quite clearly Jasper’s ability to put forward a respectable face to the outside world while engaged in devilish scheming. Rosa, it seems, has been right to fear him. It is also difficult to avoid reading Jasper’s warning to Edwin as carrying an intentional double meaning. Moreover, we might wonder why Jasper goes to such lengths to provoke words between Edwin and Neville, if not to lay the blame for Edwin’s murder upon the latter. Why does he travel through the Cathedral crypt with Durdles, and then apparently drug the stonemason? Such preparations for the murder surely could not be the work of one who committed the crime unconsciously. It is also hard to read Jasper’s subsequent efforts to find the killer as anything more than the efforts of a criminal to deflect suspicion from himself. Finally, if

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440 Jacobson also notices this parallel (Companion 44).
441 This scene, like Jasper’s encounters with Deputy, also reveals the violent passion within his breast.
Jasper is not aware that he has murdered Edwin, why does Grewgious’s revelation that Edwin and Rosa had broken their engagement strike him unconscious?\footnote{The arguments put forth in this paragraph are well-worn ones. Among those who take this or similar lines are the following: Hark, who argues that “Jasper, from his actions, certainly must believe he has murdered his nephew” (164); and Philip Collins, who insists that Jasper appears “a consciously wicked but careful and clever murderer—planning where to hide the body, how to prevent its identification if it is found, how to cast suspicion on someone else, and so forth. He seems to be no more a ‘divided personality’ . . . than any other sinner, or murderer, who takes pains not to be suspected” (\textit{Dickens} 303). See also Grass 229-32 and Frank, \textit{Charles Dickens}, who dismisses the idea of Jasper’s double consciousness out of hand (203).}

Because of the novel’s unfinished state, there is of course no way to solve this riddle; we can only speculate. But might the ambiguity of Jasper’s mental state—is it double consciousness or not?—be intentional? Dickens gives us ample evidence for both sides of the argument: as I have shown, one can make a solid case either for or against Jasper’s double consciousness, although both perspectives leave us with nagging details that cannot be integrated into one or the other reading. Even if Forster were right, and the novel concluded with Jasper’s telling his story as though it were another’s, we would be left with doubts whether or not Jasper was merely playing a part, presenting another aspect of the Jasper face. My suggestion, then, is this: Dickens attempts to cast doubt on the validity of the concept of double consciousness by keeping his readers constantly unsure of its validity in this novel. Is the split really so rigid? How different is the somnambulic state from mere dissimulation, from presenting a false face to the world? Is opium for Jasper only a handy tool by which to disavow blame for his wrongdoing?

The point of all this seems to be that the attentive reader of \textit{Edwin Drood} will subsequently approach descriptions of these alternate states in the psychological literature with a healthy dose of scepticism. This may strike the modern reader as a peculiar statement, for we no longer take it as a given that a reader of fiction will also be a reader of psychological texts. But considering the generalist culture of Victorian Britain that I
have discussed throughout this project, and the publication of psychological essays in widely-circulating periodicals, this assumption is a fair one to make of the Victorian reader: novels and psychological works were part of a single textual economy in the nineteenth century. In this novel, then, double consciousness becomes another ghost story for Dickens, another popular belief at which his readers must be taught to scoff. But why not attack the disorder more explicitly? Why leave the novel’s criticism of double consciousness—and, by extension, physiological psychology—so opaque? Here, once again, we seem to see evidence of Dickens’s conviction that his readers ought to work his meaning out on their own, his desire—which I mentioned in Chapter Two—“to tempt and entice people to think, instead of taking them by the throat” (Letters 6: 142). After all, if novels represented a legitimate way of intervening in psychological debate, the aesthetic demands on the novelist were nevertheless far different from those made on the writer of dry and dense psychological tomes.

Still, such subtle criticism of double consciousness is not Dickens’s only response to the malady in *Edwin Drood*. At the same time as he seeks to teach his readers to be sceptical of double consciousness, Dickens, as I mentioned above, is eager to cordon off Jasper’s mental state from that of the novel’s other characters, to offer his mentality as unique, as a horrible wonder apart. It is as though Dickens is hedging his bets: he seems to want both to cast doubt on the concept, yet also to isolate it—to deny that, even were double consciousness real, it would have anything to tell us about the structure of the

443 Some readers might demur at this claim, considering Dickens’s well-documented interest in mesmerism—which, as I have explained, was considered closely related to double consciousness. But Dickens was interested in a particular construction of mesmerism, as Fred Kaplan argues, one that was anti-materialistic and anti-mechanistic (Kaplan 17). By 1870, as I argue below, most theories of double consciousness were founded on a very different model of mind.
mind in healthy individuals. But what is it about double consciousness that might drive Dickens to such lengths?

**Physiology, Reflex Action, and the Threat of Materialism**

To answer the question I posed in the last section, we must turn to the source from which so many critics believe Dickens drew the Combe passage that I cited earlier: John Elliotson. Elliotson, as I have explained in earlier chapters, was Dickens’s friend and physician, and he had died only two years before the publication of *Edwin Drood.*

Although when he and Dickens met, Elliotson had been one of the bright lights of British medicine, his mesmeric experiments at University College London had cost him both his job and his reputation.444 His views came to be considered “notoriously materialist,” to borrow Alison Winter’s phrase (327), and although he had become devoutly religious and a believer in spiritualism by the time of his death, it would seem likely that it was by these earlier views that he was still known in 1870. It is therefore my contention that Dickens cites Elliotson because the latter stands as an apt icon for a particular strain of Victorian psychological writing, one that I have been arguing Dickens was working to undermine: the group of psychologists I have been calling psycho-physiologists.

Elliotson’s extremism and the tattered state of his reputation made him an especially easy target for attacking the shortcomings of such theories.445

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444 The story of Elliotson’s fall is well told by both Kaplan and Alison Winter.
445 It is also significant that Elliotson had died by 1870. Dickens states numerous times in his letters that he would not want to hurt Elliotson by seeming to criticize his psychological views. For instance, writing to Charles Lever on 21 February 1860 to discuss his editorial changes to Lever’s “Whistology,” Dickens explains: “You will not mind my having taken out the strictures on Phrenology . . . because I really believe that Elliotson, who has suffered for it, would break his heart if he thought that I, an old friend, girded at him through it” (9: 215-16).
What I am suggesting is that Elliotson here stands for—and Dickens is responding to—the increasingly physical understanding of double consciousness that had taken hold by 1870. Earlier studies, in contrast, had seen the closely related mesmeric state as evidence of an immaterial soul: John C. Colquhoun’s *Isis Revelata, An Enquiry Into the Origin, Progress, and Present State of Animal Magnetism* (1836), is a case in point, as is Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling’s *Theory of Pneumatology* (1834), a copy of which, it bears repeating, Dickens owned. But Elliotson mocked Colquhoun’s spiritualist thesis at great length:

The soul in the mesmerized has disconnected itself from the brain! the fluid (is the fluid the soul? is not fluid still matter?) has gone out in search of objects! Where is it? and when out, how happens it to learn so little? . . . The soul flies out under the manipulation of the magnetiser, and then flies away home again, knowing its way to the original skull, like a little material dickybird. Mr. Colquhoun’s views are fit only for old divines and nursery maids. (*Human* 692n)

Elliotson, of course, offered instead both a material understanding of mesmerism and a material depiction of the self, grounded in and explained by the physical body. Just before the passage above, for example, he writes:

Any person of common discernment, unbewildered by fancies and unfettered by the intolerance of conceit and prejudice, must perceive that all the phenomena of sleep-waking are the effects of disorder of the matter called nervous system; coexist or are variously interchanged with all kinds of disorders of this part of the animal body; and are often attended by

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446 For a valuable discussion of both Jung-Stilling’s and Colquhoun’s books, see Kaplan 16-19.
common bodily symptoms—heat, pain, throbbing, flushing of the head, &c.; and arise from the same causes as other nervous diseases,—mechanical injury, derangement of some distant part, &c.; and are sometimes hereditary. Brutes are influenced by mesmerism like human beings; and even vegetables, and inanimate matter. (Human 692n)

Unless one is willing to grant souls to beasts and inanimate matter, mesmerism must work on the body—on matter. It is only those deluded by wild fancies who imagine that the mind contains anything else on which the mesmerist might play.

Double consciousness seemed especially ripe for equivalent physiological explanations. From the beginning doctors had suspected physical causes of the disorder, such as epilepsy or another bodily disease. Moreover, the parallels between the two states experienced by the sufferer of double consciousness and the two halves of the brain proved too inviting for many physiologists to resist. Although others—especially phrenological writers—had made the connection before him, it was Henry Holland, in his chapter “On the Brain as a Double Organ” from Medical Notes and Reflections (1839), who seems to have given the idea impetus. Holland suggested that an inequality or incongruity between the two hemispheres might lead to mental disease (102-4), and he toyed with the idea that such incongruity could cause double consciousness (105).

Arthur Ladbroke Wigan subsequently took Holland’s suggestions many steps further. In a Lancet article and in his subsequent book, A New View of Insanity: The

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447 See, for instance, Azam 611, Mitchell 387, and Plumer 812.
448 As Hacking points out, “Terminology has consequences. The word double makes it hard to notice more than two. But it invites analogies with things that are known to come in pairs—the two hemispheres of the brain, for example” (“Double Consciousness” 136). To my mind, the best discussion of the double brain hypothesis throughout the nineteenth century is that offered by Anne Harrington in her Medicine, Mind, and the Double Brain.
449 For a discussion of such writers, see Carlson 77-78.
Duality of the Mind (1844), he argues that each hemisphere constitutes a complete and distinct organ, capable of independently performing all the actions of thought and volition. Mental health, for Wigan, depends on one hemisphere’s exerting control over the other, creating a unity of consciousness as the two eyes, in the healthy individual, create a unity of sight; insanity is the consequence of a diseased hemisphere’s defying the control of its twin. One could thus avoid mental disease by strengthening one’s powers of moral discipline and self-control, which would lead each hemisphere to serve as “a sentinel and security” for the other ("Duality" 40; New View 23). Wigan’s text was given a rough ride in the periodicals, yet perhaps for the reason Ian Hacking suggests, a number of others nonetheless adopted this model, so that double consciousness was persistently explained in relation to the brain’s two hemispheres. In an essay such as Buchanan’s “Duality and Decussation” (1850), then, the idea that the hemispheres are each complete seems no longer in need of proof, and Buchanan can confidently begin by

450 Consider, for example, the largely negative discussion of his argument by the Westminster Medical Society on 16 March 1844, reported in The Lancet; the ambivalent unsigned review of Wigan’s book in the Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology; or the critical letter of one Michael Ryan to The Lancet (published in an April 1844 issue). Holland, too, later distanced himself from Wigan’s views (Chapters on Mental Physiology 199n). In a slightly different vein, both James G. Davey and Elliotson skewered Wigan for what they saw as his unfamiliarity with phrenology. Both men point out that Gall had anticipated Holland’s and Wigan’s arguments (Davey 377-78; Elliotson, “Joint” 211-12), and Davey demonstrates that in fact phrenology allows for many more than two competing volitions (377-78). Elliotson accepts the notion that the hemispheres are distinct and complete (“Joint” 209-12; Human Physiology 366n); he merely dismisses Wigan’s claim to have discovered this. Macnish, for one, understood the somnambulic states according to this phrenological model: he explains such phenomena according to the activity of some phrenological organs and the suspension of others (151; 199).

451 See, for instance, Carpenter, Principles of Human Physiology (1842) 232n; A. T. Myers 600, 603; and Frederic Myers 651. Dr. Henry Hartshorne, in response to S. Weir Mitchell’s description of Mary Reynolds before the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, suggested just this double brain hypothesis (Mitchell 386). See also Brown-Sequard, “The Brain Power of Man,” “Dual Character of the Brain,” and “Have We Two Brains or One?” who argues that we must educate both halves of our brain to perform fully all brain functions. Brown-Sequard in fact claims to have improved upon Wigan by showing that each cerebrum, in addition to being capable of thought and volition, is able to control all movements on both sides of the body and possesses all the powers of perception (“Dual” 2, “Have” 627). Not all adopted Wigan’s view, though. Crichton Browne, for one, opts instead for the more measured argument of Holland (540-41). E. S. Dallas dismisses outright the idea that double consciousness can be explained by the action of the two hemispheres (I: 235).
asserting, “At the first glance we perceive that the brain is not a single, but a double organ. Each hemisphere is a complete brain, possessing all the organs that belong to man” (513). Later in the century, when physiological research into the brain had made great strides, and the cerebral localization movement had begun to see results, this view persisted, even among those writers who also put forth more refined and physiologically informed descriptions of the operations of the brain.\textsuperscript{452}

As should be obvious, the reason why such explanations of double consciousness might be troubling for Dickens is their participation in the (perceived) physiological tendency to reduce the mind to the physical brain. As Davey’s and Elliotson’s criticisms of Wigan suggest, and as I have discussed in earlier chapters, the idea that the brain was the organ of the mind was a foundational tenet of phrenology; the later efforts of physiologists to localize cerebral function also worked to establish this doctrine, as I argued in my first chapter. Of course, as I have pointed out numerous times, most who studied psychology were by mid-century willing to concede that the brain served as the organ of the mind, and most were willing to admit that physical factors could affect mental states. This is the sort of uncontroversial view that in Edwin Drood underlies Crisparkle’s efforts to preserve “his own sound mind in his own sound body” (123), for example. Once again, such views only became problematic when the theorists who advanced them insisted that the brain was the mind—when they reduced the mental to the physical. By 1870, however, an increasingly large number of theorists had taken this step,

\textsuperscript{452} See, for example, Henry Maudsley, “The Double Brain” (1889). One still hears in Maudsley the traces of Wigan’s hypothesis. See Maudsley, “Double” 179, 182-84. Interestingly, Azam offers Felida X.’s disorder—which, again, he insists is periodical amnesia—as potential evidence for the localization of memory, suggesting that her disorder stems from a lack of circulation to that part of the brain (608). On the history of cerebral localization, see especially Harrington and Robert M. Young, \textit{Mind, Brain, and Adaptation in the Nineteenth Century}. 
and for them mind became not the force that influenced the body, but rather the result of the organization of the brain, as I have explained in previous chapters; by the time *Edwin Drood* appeared, that is, ever more psycho-physiologists insisted, as W. K. Clifford does in his essay “Body and Mind” (1874), that a physical change in the brain is both “the invariable antecedent” and “the invariable concomitant of sensation, thought, and emotion” (717). Indeed, the argument put forward by Clifford here, if slightly extreme, is representative of this camp: working from the law of the conservation of energy, Clifford insists it is impossible that mental events could influence the physical world, for no extra energy enters the chain of events from stimulus to reaction (“Body and Mind” 727); after all, only matter could influence matter (Jacyna, “Physiology” 128). As Douglas A. Spalding puts it, articulating a common position in the 1860s and 1870s, “all movements must be the consequents of purely physical antecedents; . . . the amount and direction of every nervous discharge must depend solely on physical conditions” (261). Many in this group therefore argued for psycho-physical parallelism, the notion that neither the mental nor the physical caused the other; consciousness was merely a coincident phenomenon of bodily changes. I discussed in my first chapter the way that Clifford, following T. H. Huxley, thus suggests that the body is an automaton, a machine that is “wound up by putting food into the mouth” (729); consciousness in this model is merely “parallel to and simultaneous with” the action of the body (729).

As I have suggested, particularly in Chapter Three, the advantage of such a view was that it allowed the psycho-physiologist to restrict himself to studying the physical body and its alterations. In some sense, then, these positions were a consequence of—at the same time that they helped to justify—these writers’ methods: as Daston points out
(196), by adopting empiricism in place of the “unscientific” introspection of earlier psychologies, they limited what they could study.\footnote{See also Roger Smith, “Physiological” 78-79.} For in Clifford’s words—which reinscribe the claims for introspection that I discussed in Chapter Three—“the state of a man’s consciousness is known to him only, and not to any other person. . . . We have no possible ground, therefore, for speaking of another man’s consciousness as in any sense a part of the physical world of objects or phenomena” (726-27) which science could examine. But then neither did one need to account for mental facts to explain the phenomena of the physical world; the physical facts were sufficient if physical and mental were only coincidents (Clifford 727). Once again, the consequent devaluation of the mental in this view—of the spark rather than the cable or wire, to borrow Dickens’s analogy in the speech with which I began—should be obvious. If few theorists entirely abandoned introspection, as I have explained in previous chapters, such positions as I have been describing challenged its centrality to psychological research and called into question how much of mind it could reveal.

But the material taint of double consciousness—the way its construction both drew upon and fed into reductionist theories of mind—goes beyond merely the double-brain hypothesis. During the years about which I am writing, many of these same physiologists ascribed an increasing amount of bodily action to the reflex system, as I suggested in my last chapter. The first key figure in this movement was Marshall Hall in the 1830s: his theory of reflex action, which suggested that the body could act independently of the mind or consciousness in response to certain stimuli, was a starting
point, although the number of actions that his theory covered was relatively minimal; his work would hardly have been threatening to someone like Dickens. As their notions of the structure of the brain changed, however, physiologists ascribed reflex action to increasingly higher portions of the nervous system and then brain, and they described as reflex (and thus mechanical, controlled by the physical body) increasingly complex actions. Most significantly for the current discussion, and as I pointed out in the last chapter, Thomas Laycock and William Carpenter—the former more sweepingly than the latter—finally suggested that much of our thought was a reflex action. These theories took vastly different forms: Carpenter’s mode of reflex thought was—all things considered—relatively unthreatening and situated the reflexes safely under the control of the (immaterial) will. By the fourth edition of his Principles of Human Physiology (1852), he suggests merely that thought can go on automatically either in response to the directions of the will—that is, once set in motion by the will—or when the will ceases to exercise control over it, as in reverie or in mental disease; even in the latter cases, however, Carpenter sees thought as proceeding along the lines formed by habit and education (“Physiology” 212). One type of automatic mental action for Carpenter was unconscious cerebration (although, as I have said, Laycock insisted that he had first thought of the idea [“Reflex” 490]), which he defines as “the Automatic action by which intellectual results are evolved whilst the conscious mind is otherwise engaged” (“Physiology” 202; Mental 516). The subordinate quality of such cerebration is aptly

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454 Jacyna, “Somatic” 235. For an explanation of the phenomenon, see Clifford’s “Body and Mind” (720-21), where he describes how a sensation can bypass the mind on the way to eliciting a physical response.

455 On this, see Jacyna, “Somatic” 235-40, and Roger Smith, “Physiological” 83-86. Once again, for discussion of a somewhat similar phenomenon in Dickens—habit—see Vrettos’s article, “Defining Habits: Dickens and the Psychology of Repetition.”

456 By 1889, Maudsley was going so far as to suggest we should “think of all intellectual action as fundamentally a simple reflex act, or as a combination and series of such acts, the aim of which is to effect
captured in Francis Power Cobbe’s description: she explains the phenomenon as being as though “we were possessed of an obedient secretary or librarian, whom we could order to hunt up a missing document, or turn out a word in a dictionary while we amused ourselves with something different” (25). Elsewhere she reaches for a safely domestic metaphor, suggesting that the unconscious ordering of thought can be thought of as akin to how, “in a well-appointed household, the chairs and tables are put in their places before the family come down to breakfast” (26).

Not all theories of reflex thought were so reassuring, however, as I suggested in the previous chapter. Laycock recounts that he had argued as early as 1845 that the states of consciousness, “including ideation and volition, are not causes but coincidences of the acts, and themselves due to cerebral conditions or functions excited reflexly” (“Reflex” 486), thereby offering a physiological latency that feeds into the physical model I described above and in Chapter Five.457 Yet surely even Carpenter’s model could be disconcerting: it, too, was founded on a physiological latency, and it ceded considerable ground to a force within us yet other than either our conscious selves or our immortal souls. I mention these potentially threatening aspects of reflex thought because numerous theorists drew upon reflex phenomena or unconscious cerebration to understand somnambulic phenomena. Some merely ascribed somnambulic phenomena to physical reflexes: thus William A. Hammond, for instance, explains that somnambulism and mesmerism were due to “a condition of the organism in which through profound sleep the action of the encephalic ganglia is so materially lessened that the spinal cord becomes a profitable adjustment of the individual to his environment and of his environment to him, and in the end as complex machinery or agency for that purpose driven by the organic life” (“Double” 176).

457 Whether Dickens was aware of Laycock’s theories depends on whether he read the books on his shelf. Laycock’s theory of reflexion in the brain is at least mentioned on p. 136 of the second volume of Lewes’s *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859).
able to control and direct the body in its movements” (qtd. in Edward M. Brown 574; see also Hammond’s “The Brain Not the Sole Organ of the Mind” 17). But others placed the reflex action behind somnambulism higher up the nervous system: Cobbe, for example, argues that “[s]omnambulism is an unmistakable form of unconscious cerebration” (30). The point is that double consciousness worked for certain theorists as evidence of our brain’s ability to think without us, as proof of the way the mind could go on beyond the reach or control of the will or consciousness. Despite Cobbe’s efforts to domesticate the concept, then, surely double consciousness could be seen as evidence of the potentially overwhelming power of this (bodily) internal other.

What Cobbe makes clear, however, is that not all were convinced that the connection of mind and brain or the ascription of an increasing amount of control to reflex action undermined belief in the immaterial and immortal aspect of humankind. Carpenter’s work is perhaps the best example of this harmonization of reflex thought with an immaterial mind. As I have mentioned, despite finally allowing for unconscious cerebration, Carpenter argued that it, and all other reflex action, was ultimately controlled—or at least could be controlled—by the will, which had the power to set automatic action in motion. As he puts it in “The Physiology of the Will” (1871):

[T]he physiologist sees quite as clearly as the metaphysician that there is a power beyond and above all such mechanism—a will which, alike in the Mind and in the Body, can utilize the Automatic agencies to work out its own purposes; repressing them when too strong, fostering and developing them when originally feeble, directing all healthful energy into the most
fitting channel for its exercise, and training and disciplining the entire combination to harmonious and effective action. (192)

To describe this relationship, as I have explained, Carpenter elsewhere reaches for what appears to be a favourite metaphor of his, that of a skilful rider controlling a horse (“Physiology” 199). He thus maintains some aspect of the self that cannot be reduced to the mere physical entity, just as he elsewhere writes that the soul operates in this world by means of “corporeal mechanism” (Human Physiology [1842] 55). This is a position we have seen often in this study: Carpenter’s is much the same stance as that taken earlier by John Abercrombie, who admits the influence of physical factors on mental ones, but argues that the brain and senses are merely the means by which the immaterial mind holds intercourse with the world (24). Of course, Carpenter’s and Abercrombie’s views in this regard are hardly surprising, considering that both find in the study of the physical world evidence of the hand of God. So also does Cobbe, who deduces from unconscious cerebration some indirect proof of immortality: “Admitting that our brains accomplish much without our conscious guidance, will help us to realize that our relation to them is of a variable—an intermittent—and (we may venture to hope) of a terminable kind” (“Unconscious” 37). That is, if brain and consciousness can be separated in this world, surely our souls can part from their corporeal habitations at death as well.

As we might expect of one who dubbed himself a Medical Philosopher—as he did in the inscription to the first edition of Principles of Human Physiology (1842)—Carpenter was thus among those who argued against the idea that the metaphysical and physiological perspectives were mutually exclusive. In Mental Physiology (1874) he
insists that the controversies between spiritualists and materialists are a product of seeing only one side of the relations between mind and body; these controversies are in themselves almost as absurd as that mortal contest, which (as fable tells us) was once carried on by two knights respecting the material of a shield seen by them from opposite sides, the one maintaining it to be made of gold, the other of silver, and each proving to be in the right as regarded the half seen by himself. (2)

Again, as I explained at the outset of this project, Carpenter was not alone in this view. There were a number of essayists who published suggestions as to how the two camps could be brought together, or who insisted that psycho-physiology need not eliminate belief in a soul or immortal essence. Others, as we have seen, maintained that physiology alone could not explain all the aspects of our minds.

Even by the time Edwin Drood appeared, however, not all were reassured. Indeed, such positive responses to psycho-physiology were still in 1870 far from the norm. The psychological essays in the periodicals remained full of hand-wringing about the threat of materialism, and Christian psychologists continued to cast insults at their physiological opponents: Frederic Harrison in 1877 describes those who “cry out that civilisation is in danger if the workings of the human spirit are to become questions of physiology, and if death is the end of a man, as it is the end of a sparrow” (630), a state of affairs that seems little different from that I described in the 1840s. Of course, not all reactions from those made nervous by psycho-physiology were so extreme. Those anti-materialists who

458 By no means, though, was the negative response to “materialism” confined to the religious writer or to the spiritualist. Turner’s Between Science and Religion studies a number of Victorians who cannot be placed in the metaphysical camp but who nonetheless offered many of the same objections to materialism as those in that camp did.
offered more measured responses continued to criticize the physiological reliance on empiricism and induction at the expense of any other methods, insisting that the cost of such methods was an incomplete view of the human mind. Thus Alfred Barry writes in 1869:

Men observe what are the processes of mind in the sphere of physical investigation, and assume that these, and these only, display its whole power of operation in every sphere—that, for example, because the primary impressions in the physical department are those of sense, therefore no primary impressions in any other department are capable of being referred to any other process—that because Induction is supposed to be the only fruitful method of procedure in Physics, therefore no other method can lead to truth and bear fruit in other spheres of experience.

(233)

The “materialist” thus reduces “all creation to one dead level, over which Material Laws shall reign supreme” (Barry 240). These charges are little different from those expressed by Richard Simpson more than a decade earlier: recall that, writing anonymously in The Rambler in 1856, he lamented “the gross materialism of a batch of modern philosophers, who judge of acts only by their permanent results impressed on the material world, and capable of being tested by the senses” (453). Orthodox thinkers, in other words, continued in the 1870s to insist on the distinctness of mind from matter and to lament the reduction of complex psychological experiences to the explanations of physiologists.

More to the point, however—and in less measured tones—critics continued to insist that, by refusing to investigate or simply ignoring God, First Causes, and the
spiritual side of man, these physical theorists had as good as denied them. As Barry writes, once again, the developments of “materialism”

will not merely affect every department of abstract thought, but they must involve, if not the destruction, at least the reconstruction, of the whole system of Morality; and they appear, at least, to militate against every idea of Theology, and almost every practice of Religion, as these words are now understood. (242)

Physical psychology had lost little of its sting since the earlier part of the century, and, among those committed to a Christian psychology, it continued to arouse anxieties similar to those I discussed in earlier chapters. Hence the potential fears surrounding double consciousness. The disorder had progressively become a site for the expression of material constructions of the mind: because of the way those who theorized the malady situated it along the same continuum as ordinary consciousness, physical explanations of double consciousness—as owing to the brain’s two hemispheres, or as evidence of the reflex nature of thought—threatened to undermine the Christian dualism that I have been arguing Dickens sought to defend in his novels.

**Earthly Selves and Introspective Alienation**

To be clear, it is my suggestion that *Edwin Drood* finds Dickens still responding anxiously to the threat of materialism, here bound up in the discourse of double consciousness. I have to this point located the materialist threat of the malady in Dickens’s representation of John Jasper; of course, it is not Jasper whom Dickens describes as possessing “two distinct and separate phases of being,” but Miss Twinkleton.
How are we to understand this displacement of Elliotson’s description of double consciousness from Jasper onto her? I read it as a further effort to deflate the threat represented by the disorder and the physical conception of mind that I have argued was attached to it by 1870. Twinkleton’s split identity is of a sort we find frequently in Dickens: she hardly differs from such characters as Wemmick or Mr. Dorrit, who also possess discrete private and public selves. Such a split is exaggerated and distanced from the real world, is the stuff of fiction, and thus offers no serious threat to a soul-based understanding of the self. Something similar is at work in Dickens’s representation of the Landlesses, in whom the threat of split identity is defused by being safely spread between the two twins.\(^{459}\)

But I would argue that the displacement of double consciousness onto Miss Twinkleton has just the opposite effect to that I have suggested Dickens was aiming at: it works instead to suggest the universality of Jasper’s condition and thus to undermine the novel’s efforts to insulate his psychology. As many critics have noted, internal divisions can be found in nearly every one of the novel’s characters: in Durdles, for example, who speaks of himself in the third person, “perhaps being a little misty as to his own identity when he narrates” (29). Yet the critics who have noted the splits in Edwin Drood’s characters have either discussed them in terms of such vague generalities as the inner and outer man or through the paradigm of psychoanalysis;\(^{460}\) in other words, earlier readers of

\(^{459}\) In this light, consider the following comments about Mr. Crisparkle: “He thought how the consciousness had stolen upon him that in teaching one [of the twins], he was teaching two; and how he had almost insensibly adapted his explanations to both minds” (78). Kaplan calls the Landlesses “the single psychological self divided, each incomplete alone, two parts of a metaphor of wholeness” (122). By no means is this spreading of the aspects of a single self among multiple characters unique to Edwin Drood, however. Recall Karen Chase’s assertion in Eros and Psyche that Dickens’s characters generally are a series of fragments that together construct a whole.

\(^{460}\) For the former, see Hark 157, and Mitchell, who seems to have initiated this trend. For the latter, see Connor; DeWind, to some degree; Frank, Charles Dickens; Stanley; and Ronald Thomas.
the novel have failed to recognize the contemporary psychological discourse to which Dickens was responding, regardless of the novel’s explicit allusion to nineteenth-century discussions of double consciousness. Double consciousness, however, is in some ways perfectly fitted for such a universalizing move as that we see in the proliferation of internal divisions in the novel’s characters. As I have argued, after all, many of those who wrote about the malady stress its similarity to more normal states of consciousness: it is simply a further gradation on the same continuum, meaning that the particular construction of selfhood that underlies discussions of double consciousness cannot be contained within that particular malady.\textsuperscript{461} If fractured selfhood is to be found everywhere in Dickens, then, that fracturing assumes a more ominous tone in this novel precisely because of the way it is inflected by the novel’s invocation of the concept of double consciousness.

Indeed, it is easy to see the picture of subjectivity that this novel offers us as deeply tainted by materialism. Cloisterham, the site of most of the novel’s action, derives “an earthy flavour throughout, from its Cathedral crypt” (14), for the dust of decaying corpses covers the city. Human beings are reduced to little more than organic matter:

Cloisterham children grow small salad in the dust of abbots and abbesses, and make dirt-pies of nuns and friars; while every ploughman in its outlying fields renders to once puissant Lord Treasurers, Archbishops, Bishops, and such-like, the attention which the Ogre in the story-book desired to render to his unbidden visitor, and grinds their bones to make his bread. (14)

\textsuperscript{461} See, for example, Frederic Myers’s comparison of the extremes of double consciousness to more familiar mental states (652-53; 656-60), or Abercrombie’s similar gesture (317).
As much as the recycling of matter in this passage gestures towards the concerns about the resurrection that I discussed in Chapter Four, missing from *Edwin Drood’s* treatment of the imagery of dust is any clear sense that some part of human identity transcends the merely physical, particularly in light of the novel’s problematic treatment of double consciousness. If it appears that, had the novel been completed, Dickens’s (as it stands, deeply ambiguous) treatment of this malady would have represented his most explicit endorsement of a Christian psychology, what is there in such a passage as the one I have just cited to encourage readers to understand its rhetoric of dust as pointing to the immortality of the soul? The final allusion to the world of fairytale, perhaps, which works in Dickens’s representation of Louisa Gradgrind (although again not unambiguously) to suggest some inborn quality of mind—imagination or “fancy”—that transcends experience and our current plane of existence. On its own, though, this is hardly an adequate foundation for faith. That is to say that, as *Edwin Drood* stands—unfinished—Dickens’s inclusion of double consciousness in the novel seems to push readers towards the contrary conclusion, that we are nothing more than our bodies, nothing more than the matter that rots in the grave. I would also suggest that descriptions like this one of the Cloisterham children further threaten to cast a materialist shadow on such dry and dusty figures as Durdles or Grewgious as well.

If not mere dust, the characters in this novel threaten to become automatons.\(^{462}\) That “Angular man” (95) Grewgious speaks mechanically and as if by rote, and his face is at one point compared with the face of a clock (92); the journeymen in Durdles’s yard are compared to mechanical emblems of Time and Death (29); the waiters that

\(^{462}\) Once again, my point here closely parallels Vrettos’s discussion of habit in Dickens. But she largely omits consideration of the implications of habit for the existence of a religious or immaterial aspect of humankind.
Grewgious hires for his dinner with Edwin operate in a most machine-like fashion. We are told of Jasper, too, that he has only a “mechanical harmony” (203) with those around him, and Princess Puffer’s ability to “play” him, to adjust his body in order to make him speak, also calls into question the degree to which human life is mechanical, simply a matter of reflex. Of course, this also is a standard criticism of Dickens’s characters: Mark Tapley or Mr. Micawber are hardly less mechanical than any character, minor or major, in Edwin Drood. Dickens also often describes characters with such metaphors: Mr. Lorry in A Tale of Two Cities, Flora Finching’s aunt in Little Dorrit (1855-57), or Mr. Morfin in Dombey and Son—to name only a few—are all described in terms of clockwork or mechanism. Dr. Manette’s shoemaking is utterly mechanical. And then there is Bradley Headstone:

He had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher’s knowledge. He could do mental arithmetic mechanically, sing at sight mechanically, blow various wind instruments mechanically, even play the great church organ mechanically. From his early childhood up, his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse, so that it might be always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers—history here, geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left—natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics, and what not, all in their several places—this care had imparted to his countenance a look of care; while the habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner, or a manner that would be better described as one of lying in wait. (217)
If with Manette and Headstone Dickens seems to be making a more serious point, in most of the novels such mechanized figures can be dismissed as the tools of comedy. Once again, however, my suggestion is that *Edwin Drood*’s inclusion of the physical discourse of double consciousness works to invest these figures with new meaning, apparently turning them into symbols of a humanity drained of its immaterial essence, going on merely as a matter of reflex.463

*Edwin Drood* even seems to represent the anxieties that might be aroused by the automatic operations of the body and mind. Note, for example, Crisparkle’s resistance to the unbidden thoughts that haunt him after his abstracted walk to Cloisterham Weir:

He often [walked to the Weir], and consequently there was nothing remarkable in his footsteps tending that way. But the preoccupation of his mind so hindered him from planning any walk, or taking heed of the objects he passed, that his first consciousness of being near the Weir, was derived from the sound of the falling water close at hand.

‘How did I come here!’ was his first thought, as he stopped.

‘Why did I come here!’ was his second.

Then, he stood intently listening to the water. A familiar passage in his reading, about airy tongues that syllable men’s names, rose so unbidden to his ear, that he put it from him with his hand, as if it were tangible. (142)

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463 In this regard, consider Frederic Myers’s description of the human body as a factory and Felida X.’s ailment as merely the improper operation of her machinery: “[T]he hidden part of the machinery is subject to certain dangerous jerks or dislocations, after which the gearings shift of themselves and whole groups of looms are connected and disconnected in a novel manner” (655-56).
Crisparkle can neither explain why his body led him to the Weir nor control the thoughts—the almost tangible thoughts—that fill his head. If the aura of mystery that surrounds this scene (in which, of course, Crisparkle discovers Edwin’s missing watch and shirt-pin) might in other novels have suggested the ineffable aspects of identity—or even the heightened perceptive powers of which the unfettered soul might be capable—such is hardly the effect here. According to the model of the mind this novel appears to endorse, the model that underwrote contemporary conceptions of double consciousness, Crisparkle’s automatic actions are guided by nothing more profound than his body’s reflex-arc. And his response—as might be the Christian reader’s response, and (all things considered) one certainly befitting a member of the clergy like Crisparkle—is one of fear: fear at the thoughts some part of his mind will force to the surface, perhaps even the means by which these unbidden (or, unwilled) thoughts do surface.

As should furthermore be clear, the insertion of Edwin Drood into the discursive field of psycho-physiology also has implications for the introspective view that has been at the centre of this project. After all, if in the passage I have just quoted Crisparkle struggles to parse his own motives, the scene with which Forster suggested the novel was to end, Jasper’s third-person confession, represents the ultimate breakdown of the inner view. Even if it were to turn out that Jasper was merely playing a part, that his prison-house disavowal of a coherent identity was a ploy, such a final scene could not help but

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464 Elsewhere the novel does seem to push in this direction, suggesting the heightened powers of perception to be experienced as we approach death (powers I discussed in my last chapter): describing those who left Cloisterham in their youth, the narrator writes, “[I]t has happened in their dying hours afar off, that they have imagined their chamber floor to be strewn with the autumnal leaves fallen from the elm trees in the Close: so have the rustling sounds and fresh scents of their earliest impressions, revived, when the circle of their lives was very nearly traced, and the beginning and the end were drawing close together” (120). I consider below how the novel attempts in other ways, too, to endorse the Christian orthodox psychology we have found in the earlier novels. My argument is that, regardless of Dickens’s intentions, Edwin Drood’s invocation of the discourse of double consciousness works to make its treatment of automatic action seem aligned with the physical conclusions some drew from theories of reflex thought.
call into question the centrality of introspection—and consciousness—to psychological research. For Jasper’s failure to know himself, in light of the way double consciousness infects the representation of the novel’s other characters, would only draw out the implications of the material, reflex-based model of the self about which I wrote above. In a sense, according to this model our selves are all “unintelligible” (3), as Jasper says of those among whom he finds himself in the opium den. The immaterial, coherent essence that once grounded and gave meaning to identity is replaced by some other within, a (bodily) force that operates outside of both our knowledge and our control.

It is therefore the sense of alienation in double consciousness that I want to highlight here. If the disorder was but an exaggerated form of ordinary consciousness—as was so often stressed in contemporary discussions of the malady—and if it was connected to reflex action, as those writers cited above argued, then we can see in it an icon of the anxiety that could be bound up in the discovery that ever-wider swathes of our lives go on, in a sense, without us. In this light, consider Mary Reynolds’s explanation of the fear she was in whenever she felt a change between states coming on:

My mental sufferings in the near prospect of the transition from either state to the other, but particularly from the first to the second (for I commonly had a presentiment of the change for a short time before it took place), were very great, for I feared I might never revert so as to know again in this world, as I then knew them, those who were very dear to me. My feelings, in this respect, were not unlike those of one about to be separated from loved ones by death. (qtd. in Plumer, 808)
I want to stress the sense here of losing oneself, of the second state as a kind of death.

This feeling makes sense. After all, our experience of life, of the self: both are connected—and had been since Descartes and the cogito—with consciousness. Note Crichton Browne’s point:

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\text{[A]mongst the most fundamental principles of mind, is the conviction \ldots that a man continues to be always himself; that he is at any given moment the same person that he was the moment before, and that he has always been, since he came into existence. This belief is, in fact, the very essence of mind, and arises necessarily out of the succession of momentary conscious states. (386)}
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The continuity of consciousness is identity, according to this line of thinking. It is easy to see, then, how the ever-receding limits of consciousness at mid-century, comprising less and less of physical and mental function, could threaten the essentialist, “small-r” religious Victorian’s—in a word, Dickens’s—sense of self.\(^465\)

We do not need Jasper’s pseudo-confession, however, to find examples in Dickens’s later work of the apparent questioning of introspection as a mode of understanding the mind. Might Edwin Drood’s discourse of double consciousness, in other words, have the power retrospectively to inflect the instances of self-alienation that came before this final novel? To some degree, we saw such failures of self-knowledge in Great Expectations—the sense that significant portions of the self lay outside

\(^{465}\) Not all, however, seem bothered by the limits of consciousness. Note Dallas’s rather optimistic description of the same situation: aligning the transcendental with the unconscious, he writes, “[B]ut that consciousness is not our entire world, that the mind stretches in full play far beyond the bourne of consciousness, there will be little difficulty in proving. Outside consciousness there rolls a vast tide of life, which is, perhaps, even more important to us than the little isle of our thoughts which lies within our ken.” (I: 207). He goes on to describe consciousness and unconsciousness as the illuminated and dark parts of our mind, respectively, and he argues that there are trains of thought forever passing between the two parts.
consciousness—but I would argue that Dickens’s last complete short-story, “George Silverman’s Explanation” (1868), offers an even more telling case. From his impoverished youth in a Preston cellar to his work in the living he accepts from the “managing woman” Lady Fareway, Silverman views (and represents) himself as perpetually misunderstood and misrepresented. Even his greatest sacrifices—such as organizing the marriage of the love of his life, Adelina, to a younger man—are construed by those around him as selfish acts of worldliness, and it is to lay bare the truth about himself that Silverman writes. Yet there is something unconvincing in the picture Silverman paints of himself. How, then, are we to understand the apparent gap between Silverman’s actions and his explanation of them? Are his constructions mere pretence, or is his an honest failure in self-analysis? Might the duplicity of which the world accused him have been really owing to his inability to know his own motives—to know himself? His narrative’s two false starts—the latter accompanied by the assurance, “[I]t is not my design to conceal any of my infirmities, whether they be of head or heart” (729)—certainly point to a failure to analyze his own mind, but in light of the praise heaped upon his powers of explanation by the College Don this failure begins to seem like a problem even for those who come to the task well-prepared. That is, the gaps and bits of misdirection in Silverman’s narrative come to look like a product of introspection’s failure to grasp the self in its entirety, its failure as a methodological approach. Even he with the greatest powers of explanation must ultimately fail to account for the self through this approach, the narrative seems to say.

\[466\] Incidentally, Thomas argues for a connection between Silverman and Jasper (131).
\[467\] Among those who take Silverman at his word are Bart, Butterworth, and Stone. Bock, Forsyte, Thomas, and Ullman are more suspicious.
To put my point another way, the slipperiness of Dickens’s psychological point here means this story is open to being read as working against a Christian psychology, particularly in light of the way *Edwin Drood* only two years later also lays itself open to being construed as a critique of the introspective mode. To go further with this hypothetical reading, it is worth noting that when he is discovered alongside his dead parents in his cellar, Silverman—that “worldly little devil” (730) in his late mother’s apt phrase, that “stupid savage” (734) or “young Vampire” (735) in his own words—limits the round of human feelings to those of cold, hunger, thirst, and pain (733). He is no more than his senses, than his responses to the physical world around him, and thus there is nothing to distinguish him from the beasts. Silverman, in other words, *is* his animal instincts—instincts, psychology had sought to show by the 1870s, that essentially were made up of reflex actions. Silverman is therefore easily read as leading an entirely material existence. No wonder his introspection yields so little.

These comments about the way *Edwin Drood* might inflect Dickens’s late fiction apply to the more symbolic assertions of internal splits or self-alienation in the late works, too—Wardour’s claims, in the final moments of *The Frozen Deep* (1857), about the internal tempter who urged him to murder Frank (158-59), or, in “No Thoroughfare,” Wilding’s lament upon learning that he was an accidental substitute for his mother’s actual son, “I am not myself” (563). Again, such moments, when reread in light of the physical slant given *Edwin Drood* by Dickens’s use of double consciousness, echo the alienation that could be read as a necessary product of the reflex-based picture of the self. If a great deal of our bodily activity, even a great deal of our thought and memory, is controlled by some force outside consciousness, a bodily force that operates without our
control, there is a real and frightening sense in which, at least for the Victorians to whom such ideas were new, we are not ourselves.

**The Resurrection and the Life**

Yet as the preceding chapters of this project have shown, this picture of a materialist self is surely not the narrative that the novel wishes to offer. We can safely assume—and most critics have—that the novel, had it been completed, would, like Dickens’s other novels, have worked towards redemption and resolution, towards eliminating the fragmentation and dispelling the materialism on which I have been focusing. Perhaps Jasper would have been redeemed, as is suggested by the fragment of Ezekiel 18:27 that is being sung as he rushes to the Cathedral at the end of Chapter I: “When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.” As Dickens wrote to John Makeham only a few days before he died, “I have always striven in my writings to express veneration for the life and lessons of our Saviour” (12: 547-48), and the novel he was writing was clearly to be no exception. Even in the portion Dickens completed, the novel gestures at some element of existence that transcends the here and now. Note, for example, this typically Dickensian description of Mr. Grewgious gazing at the heavens, which with the simple word “yet” offers the promise of a future life:

[H]is gaze wandered from the windows to the stars, as if he would have read in them something that was hidden from him. Many of us would if

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468 This has been suggested by Flynn.
469 These were not just public sentiments, either: they differ very little from those expressed to his son Edward on [?26] September 1868 (12: 187-88), those to be found in his letter to his son Henry on 15 October of that year (12: 201-2), or his mention of the New Testament in his will.
we could; but none of us so much as know our letters in the stars yet—or
seem likely to, in this state of existence—and few languages can be read
until their alphabets are mastered. (160)

An even more telling attempt to deny the merely physical understanding of existence is to
be found in the final chapter that Dickens wrote:

A brilliant morning shines on the old city. Its antiquities and ruins are
surpassingly beautiful, with the lusty ivy gleaming in the sun, and the rich
trees waving in the balmy air. Changes of glorious light from moving
boughs, songs of birds, scents from gardens, woods, and fields—or, rather,
from the one great garden of the whole cultivated island in its yielding
time—penetrate into the Cathedral, subdue its earthy odour, and preach
the Resurrection and the Life. (215)

In other words, the novel asserts that the regeneration of dead organic matter into the
basis for future life—that is, the growing of small salad in the dust of abbots and
abbesses—is not the only form of resurrection on offer, but rather a symbol of the greater
“Resurrection” to come, our immaterial ascension to heaven at death. If human beings are
dust, they are dust in the terms of the burial service of the Church of England, dust
inspired with an immaterial spiritual essence. How else are we meant to understand the
distinction drawn in the novel between “dust with the breath of life in it” and “death out
of which the breath of life has passed” (105)?

Moreover, if double consciousness had acquired a particularly physical taint by
1870, I should nevertheless reiterate that the disorder was not dealt with by physiological
psychologists alone. As mentioned above, all those critics who have named a source from
which Dickens could have drawn the passage on somnambulism in *Edwin Drood* have pointed to Elliotson. But Combe’s story appears in at least three other books on Dickens’s shelves: Abercrombie’s *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth*, Dallas’s *The Gay Science* (1866), and the 1840 edition of Macnish’s *The Philosophy of Sleep*. Because of Collins’s explicit mention of Elliotson in *The Moonstone*, I suspect these critics are right in attributing Dickens’s use of the passage to Elliotson’s *Human Physiology* (although none of these critics acknowledges the variety of sources from which Dickens *could* have drawn). I point to these other sources, however, in order to highlight the way such anecdotes were adopted by those outlining very different, even opposing, theories: Abercrombie, for instance, as I have shown numerous times in the preceding pages, is nearly antithetical to Elliotson, making sure to preserve in his psychology an immaterial mind and immortal soul.

Something similar to this recycling of Combe’s Irish porter story occurred with one of the early explanations of double consciousness. In describing one of his three cases of the disorder in 1818, Dwight writes that “she appeared as a person might be supposed to do, who had two souls, each occasionally dormant, and occasionally active, and utterly ignorant of what the other was doing” (433).\[^{470}\] The metaphor became a popular one: James Cowles Prichard cites it in his work, italicizing the words “two souls,” and both Crichton Browne (537) and John Addington Symonds (23)—among others—quote Prichard’s quotation of Dwight. Plumer, without citing Dwight, writes of Mary Reynolds: “The phenomena presented were as if her body was the house of two souls, not occupied by both at the same time, but alternately, first by one, then by the other, each in turn ejecting the other, until at last the usurper gained and held possession,

\[^{470}\] Hacking suggests Dwight was likely the first to use this metaphor (“Double Consciousness” 135).
after a struggle of fifteen years” (812). Clearly we are dealing here with a very different conception of the self from that to be found in Elliotson’s work. This point is only borne out by Plumer’s inclusion in his account of Mary Reynolds’s revelation in a dream of all the scripture she had forgotten (811), even if Plumer does not explicitly ascribe the revelation to any supernatural or divine force.

But the metaphor of “two souls” is also to be found in the works of physical psychologists. Elliotson employs the explanation derisively, writing that double consciousness “ought to prove two souls to exist” (Human 659)—we may finish his sentence by articulating the implied “but does not”—and sneering that Combe’s Irish porter “must have had two souls, one for his sober state, and one for him when drunk” (646). Other physical mental scientists offer the metaphor in perfect earnestness—as stated, Crichton Browne quotes Dwight’s explanation without any hint of derision. Despite appearances, this is not a capitulation to a soul-based psychology. On the contrary: in a move familiar from my earlier chapters, psycho-physiologists appropriated this explanation of double consciousness but redefined “soul” to support their own view

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471 Elliotson’s sneer is clear from a fuller reading of his text, a sense this quotation struggles to capture. But the following excerpt from an 1841 letter he wrote in response to a request that he serve as the godfather of Dickens’s son Walter perhaps better expresses his controversial style and his disdain for orthodoxy:

I shall be delighted to become father in God to your little bopeep: you still retaining your title of his father in the flesh, with all the rights, privileges, perquisites & duties thereto annexed, from the moment you determined to construct him to the end of life. I should, however, have been compelled to forego this delight had you not absolved me from religious duties and everything vulgar—For nothing could I consent to teach him in the vulgar tongue—nor would I have spoiled him for arithmetic by teaching him that three are one & one are three, or defaced his views of the majesty of God by assuring him that the maker of the Universe once came down & got a little jewess in the family way, & so gave himself up to fun as to manage that he himself should be the little master she produced when in the way she was because she loved her Lord & was favoured beyond all other damsels. (Letters 2: 210n)
of mind. Thus Lewes’s “organicist” hypothesis in “Spiritualism and Materialism” (1876) that the soul is no more than a logical subject:

The subject is determined by its predicates—is, indeed, nothing but their synthesis. Hence the nature of the Soul is to be sought in the concrete facts of Consciousness; and since these facts are only known in dependence on organic conditions, it is irrational to seek beyond the organism, and its relations to the medium, for the causes of these concrete facts. (491)

In a pair of sentences, Lewes transforms the soul from immaterial and immortal essence to mere consciousness, as known through—indeed, apparently dependent on—the physical body. Elsewhere he is more explicit, calling the soul the personification of the states of consciousness (“Consciousness” 166). Lewes, however, is not alone: when materialists employ the term “soul,” it has inevitably been reduced to a synonym for consciousness. Harrison’s definition, for instance, is hardly more reassuring to a religious believer than Lewes’s, even though Harrison supports his definition by citing St. Paul: the soul, in “The Soul and Future Life,” is “the conscious unity of our being culminating in its religious emotions” (635).

This move on the part of the psycho-physiologists, like the reinscription of Combe’s story of the drunken Irish porter, is part of that larger strategy by which, I have argued throughout this project, they worked to undermine the Christian dualist orthodoxy. As I explained in my first chapter, time and again we find in the writings of

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In this sense, then, I agree with Hacking when he claims that nineteenth-century psychology sought to secularize the soul (Rewriting 5). But I differ from him in how I understand this as having happened. Hacking argues that these writers replaced the soul with memory; he does not explore how they redefined the very word “soul.” Indeed, to some degree Hacking participates in this redefinition, describing the soul in terms that would have suited the most materialist Victorian psychological writer. See his Rewriting the Soul, 6, or consider the title of his article “Two Souls.”
those who ascribed to the tenets of scientific naturalism a lament that the terms used in psychological writing are not precise enough, are too vague, and thus prevent a proper and exact understanding of the human mind. Laycock writes of the “ambiguous meanings attached to phrases and terms derived from the ‘old metaphysics’” (478); Bain longs for greater precision in these terms (“Introspection” 52) and laments the “previously established modes of speech” (“Common Errors” 172) that prevent the popular acceptance of scientific hypotheses; Wakley insists that “[t]he accurate classification of mental phenomena, involving, necessarily, precise and logical definitions of the terms by which they are to be designated, is absolutely essential to the successful study of psychical medicine” (937); Lewes, finally, writes that the obscurities surrounding discussions of sensibility “would vanish if that strictness of nomenclature . . . were adopted in physiology, as in chemistry and physics” (Physiology 2: 14). Each of these quotations implicitly gestures at the nature of the imprecision to be found in psychological language: as it stands, that language precludes a material understanding of identity, allows space for such prejudices as that our consciousness is indistinguishable from our immaterial and immortal soul. The language of mental science therefore needed to be made to accord with the language of the other sciences, but with those sciences as understood in a particular way: as reductionist bodies of thought that dealt only with that which could be seen and measured. As I have argued in the preceding pages, under the guise of sharpening the meaning of words these psychologists were thus engaged in emptying these words of their metaphysical meaning, only to reinscribe them with a meaning that precluded metaphysics. The point, in other words, was to reduce the language of psychology until it could only describe the physical.
So, too, with these scientists’ descriptions of the hereafter. I argued in Chapter Three that many of those who outlined even the most material ideas of double consciousness still insisted on their belief in the Christian Resurrection. Elliotson, again, is perhaps the most interesting spokesman for this position; I want, then, to return to his claims about the resurrection. In the passage I cited in Chapter Four, for example, Elliotson insists:

[M]aterialists may not only believe in God, but in the divine authority of Scripture; and more honour Scripture by looking implicitly in full faith to it alone, as God’s authority, for their belief in a future state, than those who endeavour to make its declarations more probable by fancying a soul immortal in its own nature and independent of matter, when the Scripture tells us we shall rise as matter,—with bodies, and go to heaven with bodies, where Christ, God himself, sits bodily,—as matter, flesh, blood, and bones, in the words of the Church of England. (Human 691)

To repeat: unorthodox as they might be, Elliotson’s views in this regard were not unique. Yet his specific construction of the future life carries a particular weight in this novel, because of Dickens’s apparent allusion—in the reference to Combe’s Irish porter—to Elliotson’s physiological means of understanding double consciousness. There were, as I have said, numerous other sources from which Dickens could have drawn that story, but surely the unanimity among critics that he got it from Elliotson is telling: if these critics have leapt to this conclusion, what would have prevented Dickens’s readers from doing the same? Certainly Collins’s explicit reference to Elliotson in The Moonstone would have made it difficult for readers not to make such a leap. And if Dickens is to be
understood as pointing readers to Elliotson in the passage describing Miss Twinkleton, why not also in his discussion of resurrection?

That is, I suggest that the allusion to Elliotson’s physiological model of double consciousness brings with it the traces of his model of resurrection, so that the novel’s efforts to preach the Resurrection and the Life are in danger—as Dickens’s descriptions of resurrection in Bleak House were in danger—of suggesting the purely physical resurrection envisioned by him. This would seem especially to be the case since Elliotson employs in his defence of the materiality of self and soul the very language of dust we find in Edwin Drood:

The physical enquirer, finding the mind a power of the brain, and abstaining from hypothesis, must conclude that, in the present order of things, when the brain ceases to live the power necessarily ceases,—that, in the language of scripture, Dust we are, and unto dust we all return,—that our being is utterly extinguished, and we go back to the insensibility of the earth whence we were taken. (Human 41)

As I suggested above, human dust is everywhere in Edwin Drood. In addition to the examples I have already cited, consider Grewgious’s comment to Edwin, in giving the latter Rosa’s mother’s ring, that the eyes of the ring’s former owner “have been ashes among ashes, and dust among dust, some years!” (97). Then there are the wayfarers who travel through Cloisterham, “looking as if the were just made out of the dust of the earth, so very dusty are they” (168). My point is that Elliotson works to lend Dickens’s Christian rhetoric of dust a particularly material resonance—that dust we are, but that dust is also all we are. In Elliotson, in other words, we witness the language of
resurrection being reinscribed to support a reductionist psychology. With this physical model in mind, then, I would like to conclude by turning to the clearest images of resurrection that the novel offers: Durdles’s work as a “Resurrection Man” of sorts, his constant unearthing of the remains of those he calls the “old ’uns.”

We are told of Durdles that “[w]ith the Cathedral crypt he is better acquainted than any living authority; it may even be than any dead one” (28). With his hammer and two-foot rule, he incessantly sounds every corner of the crypt, announcing his discoveries to the chief verger as he makes them. His encounters with the dead are all reiterations of the same scene. In his words:

“Durdles come upon the old chap,” in reference to a buried magnate of ancient time and high degree, “by striking right into the coffin with his pick. The old chap gave Durdles a look with his open eyes, as much as to say ‘Is your name Durdles? Why, my man, I’ve been waiting for you a devil of a time!’ And then he turned to powder.” (29)

This prosopopeia of the corpses he finds ironizes the harrowing of hell: Durdles, like Christ, rescues from their subterranean—if not quite hellish—prisons the dead who have been impatiently awaiting his arrival. More significantly, the utter physicality of the old ’uns here seems to work to call up Elliotson’s picture of a material resurrection. Yet this material resurrection is of course no resurrection at all: the physical forms Durdles unearths only last long enough to acknowledge his presence; no sooner are they released from their graves than they disappear into the dust that is everywhere in Cloisterham. In place of a resurrected self, we are left with only absence, a cloud of dust instead of either an immortal soul or a material body.
Here, then, is the novel most troublingly inflected by the physical resonances of double consciousness. Judging from the other novels I have discussed in this study, it seems clear that Dickens’s point in his treatment of Durdles is to suggest the fragility and insignificance of flesh: dust we are, again, and to dust we shall return, but some part of us transcends the physical, transcends mortality. The figure of a corpse that disappears upon contact with the air was, after all, one Dickens had used before. Describing Lady Dedlock’s response to Guppy’s goading in *Bleak House*, for example, he writes “that her exclamation and her dead condition seem to have passed away like the features of those long-preserved dead bodies sometimes opened up in tombs, which, struck by the air like lightning, vanish in a breath” (362). I discussed in Chapter Four the dualist implications of putrefying matter in *Bleak House*; surely Dickens’s similar employment of this image of rapid decomposition in *Edwin Drood* would have become clear had he lived to finish the novel. But as it stands, his efforts to endorse a Christian psychology and resist the encroachment of “materialism” in his final novel—figured most clearly in his efforts to cast scepticism on double consciousness as both a malady and a model of the mind—ultimately fail to guide his readers unambiguously, precisely because of the varied and contradictory meanings loaded by 1870 onto the shared language of psychology. Whatever his intentions in his representation of Durdles’s unearthing of the old ’uns, their decomposition at the moment of resurrection therefore comes to look like a suggestion that death is the end of being, the ultimate negation, rather than a rebirth into a new world. In this light, consider Grewgious’s difficulties in describing for Rosa the end of life: “‘Life is pounds, shillings, and pence. Death is——’ A sudden recollection of the death of her two parents seemed to stop him, and he said in a softer tone, and evidently
inserting the negative as an after-thought: ‘Death is not pounds, shillings, and pence’” (68). My point is that because *Edwin Drood* was never completed, its position on the nature of death is no more definite than Grewgious’s. Indeed, the initial interruption of Grewgious’s speech stands as a particularly apt figure for the novel’s own incomplete message. It, too, merely tells us that “Death is——.” In *Edwin Drood*, however, Dickens never had a chance to finish the thought.

Thus, while *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* attempts to preach the Resurrection and the Life, these efforts are ultimately as empty as Durdles leaves the coffins he discovers. Despite Dickens’s professed confidence that the progress of science need not come at the expense of religious faith, we can see that the novel he left incomplete at his death threatens to contradict him. Dickens, it seems, cannot finally square the psychological discourse he borrows for his final work with the religious narrative he wishes that work to tell. The easy religious assurances we find in a work like *David Copperfield* simply no longer hold up. The point, once again, is that this difference is not owing to a change in Dickens. What we see in *Edwin Drood* is Dickens attempting to make the same metaphysical gestures he has made throughout his career; here, as before, he tries to express his veneration—as I noted earlier—“for the life and lessons of our Saviour.”

What I have been trying to show throughout this project is that what had changed was not Dickens, but the psychological discourse by which the Victorians understood themselves. The naturalist demand that explanations of the self be grounded in that which could be empirically observed and measured meant that psychology had become increasingly focused on the here and now, on what could be known. The language of mental science, meanwhile, had slowly been made in many ways inconsistent with the Christian
assumptions of an earlier theory of mind; even the soul, the foundation of Christian dualism, had been reinscribed in material terms by the 1870s. What I have tried to show in this chapter, then, is how difficult it had become by the time of Dickens’s death to marshal the language of psychology in the service of the transcendent, of that which went beyond mere earthly understanding.
CHAPTER SEVEN:  
Afterword

The preceding pages have traced the influence of mid-century psychology on Charles Dickens’s first-person fictions. I have argued throughout this project that, from at least the 1840s onwards, Dickens was engaged in endorsing an orthodox Christian mental philosophy, attempting in his introspective fictions to prop up a model of the mind that was beginning to face increasingly powerful opposition from reductionist, physiological theories. Dickens’s position in these pages, in other words, has been relatively static: in the more than 20 years covered by this study, he can hardly be said to have done much to alter his strategy for resisting materialism. Dickens responded to refinements in the Christian psychology I have argued he supported—such as Hamilton’s theory of latent mental modifications—but he was never an innovator in this regard; the little psychological theorizing he did was far from groundbreaking—was perhaps most remarkable for its orthodoxy. If this has been a story of development, then—a story with a plot—it owes credit for that plot to the psychological science itself. In Dickens’s stasis, that is to say, this project has found a valuable place from which to observe the slow march of mental science away from its Christian roots and towards a physiological model of mind that looks more familiar to the twenty-first-century reader.

At an essential level, Mind Reflected on Paper has also been an attempt to complicate the popular picture of Dickens’s intellectual life. The idea that Dickens was no philosopher—to paraphrase the Lewes essay with which I began—has been remarkably persistent since the nineteenth century; critics of Victorian literature and culture continue to construct Dickens as an imaginative genius, perhaps, but not a thinker,
not a reader. Yet as I have demonstrated, Dickens was both more interested and more widely read in the intellectual debates of his age than he has ever been given credit for, and those debates occupy a significant place in the fiction. I would suggest that they ought also to occupy a more significant place in the criticism of that fiction. I have focused on Dickens’s engagement with psychology in the novels, but what of his interest in the other sciences, for instance? I suspect that once criticism begins to take seriously Dickens’s intellectual concerns, our readings of the novels will come to look very different from those we currently put forward.

Again, however, we ought not to mistake interest or wide reading in the intellectual debates of the period for a deep and astute understanding of them. We as critics of the Victorian period need to take Dickens’s reading and thinking more seriously, but we must not lose sight of his intellectual shortcomings. Dickens, as I have said before, was no George Eliot, and it would be a mistake to approach the two novelists in the same way. What has been particularly fruitful about Dickens’s engagement with Victorian psychology in this study, in fact, are his struggles with the finer points of psychological thought, his inability at times to keep straight the orthodox mental philosophy he has endeavoured to endorse. In his wide reading on a wealth of topics, Dickens offers us a valuable glimpse of the generalist intellectual culture of Victorian Britain. Might his struggles with his readings do the same? Surely many a middle-class reader who turned from the latest number of *David Copperfield* to a complex essay on the association of ideas was in danger of failing to wind his way through the tortuous and nuanced arguments of the latter. Can Dickens, then, tell us something about the way the
average Victorian reader responded to the wealth of reading material—on a massive variety of topics—with which he or she was faced?

My boldest claims in this project, however, have not necessarily been about Dickens. Perhaps the primary argument I have made concerns the resonances of the first-person form in the middle of the nineteenth century: I have argued that we must consider this narrative mode in light of the centrality of introspection to Victorian psychology. To my knowledge, no critic has yet proposed such a means of understanding first-person narration, despite the generally accepted notion that novels and psychological texts were part of a shared textual economy in the nineteenth century. The parallels between introspective modes are inescapable, however, particularly when we consider a novel like *David Copperfield* which borrows the language as well as the form of psychological research. I have suggested in the preceding pages that the first-person form was marked by its use in both Christian and physical psychologies; it bears stating explicitly that this narrative mode was also marked by those novels that employed it to intervene in psychological debate—novels like those I have discussed in this study. As Nicholas Dames has pointed out, there was a surge in first-person fictions between 1847 and 1860. Dames calls these “fictional autobiographies” (127), but to what degree would these texts be more usefully read as *psychological* works, as introspective texts? What more might these novels tell us about the way psychology became a (particular type of) science in the second half of the nineteenth century?

My own reading of the way the first-person mode was marked by its several uses in Victorian mental science has of course been part of my broader discussion of what I

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473 As I pointed out in my first chapter, Sally Shuttleworth’s *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* offers an especially valuable discussion of this textual economy.
have suggested was a rhetorical means by which psycho-physiology rose to ascendancy. Throughout this project, I have traced the ambiguities written into several key psychological terms and concepts: the association of ideas, mental latency, double consciousness, and so forth. More precisely, I have suggested that reductionist mental scientists were actively engaged in redefining the existing language of an orthodox Christian psychology, and that this redefinition was a strategic move. Again and again, we have witnessed the way that later theorists have drained these terms of their metaphysical or religious denotations, redefining them so that they point to a material understanding of the mind. Not only was a reductionist mental science thus couched in the (reassuring and uncontroversial) language of orthodoxy, but even orthodox theories came to seem as though they, too, conceptualized the mind as a product of the body. By no means should I be understood to suggest that physiology’s ascension can be entirely explained through this rhetorical strategy. Yet the redefinition of the language of an earlier psychology certainly played an important and heretofore underestimated part in the fate of mental science in the mid- to late-Victorian period.

Of course, the very necessity of such rhetorical moves as I have traced in nineteenth-century psychological writing offers a check to—or at least demands that we complicate—the secularization hypothesis, the idea that Christianity held a progressively diminished place in Victorian society and culture. Reports of God’s death in the nineteenth century, in other words, have been greatly exaggerated. Physical psychology was driven to couch its theoretical pronouncements in the language of orthodoxy precisely because of the persistent belief during the period that science must accord with religion—a belief that in turn owed much to Christianity’s continued centrality in late-
Victorian culture. If a greater number of theorists after the 1860s and 1870s felt free to declare their atheism (or at least agnosticism) publically, many readers were still appalled by such claims. Thomas Dixon has done excellent work on the place of Christian psychology during the final years of the century, but literary criticism has to this point been slow to incorporate such scholarship.

Above all, *Mind Reflected on Paper* has been an attempt to focus attention on the place of the psychological soul in the Victorian novel. Despite its utter centrality to nineteenth-century theories of mind, the soul has been almost entirely absent from literary critical studies of the period, an absence that tells us more about our own largely secular critical practice—and perhaps even about the success of physiological efforts to erase the soul—than about how the Victorians understood and experienced identity. Much, in other words, has been written on embodied selfhood in the period; almost nothing has been written on that part of the self that most Victorians imagined as transcending the body. If this project has tried to show the importance of the latter focus for an understanding of the Victorian novel, there is, obviously, still much that remains to be done. Rather than glossing over nineteenth-century invocations of the soul—dismissing such invocations as empty forms, as paean to a worldview that had passed away with the God who leant the soul meaning—we as literary critics and as scholars of the period need to recognize and take seriously the sincerity of such language. If we are to understand the Victorian novel, in short, we need to see the soul’s place at the heart of contemporary debates about what it meant to be human.
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