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The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

Date 20\textsuperscript{th} April, 1994
THESIS ABSTRACT

"The Anatomy of Charles Dickens: A Study of Bodily Vulnerability in his Novels"

by Adrienne E. Gavin

This thesis examines the pervasive presence of the vulnerability of the human body in Charles Dickens’s writing. It demonstrates, through a collection and discussion of bodily references drawn from the range of Dickens’s novels, that the body’s vulnerability is, in conjunction with the use of humour and the literalizing of metaphorical references to the body, a crucial and fundamental element of both Dickens’s distinctive style and of his enduring literary popularity.

Chapter one provides evidence for the contention that a sense of physical vulnerability was particularly intense in the Victorian era and that Dickens shared this awareness as his social and humanitarian interests and activities illustrate. The following chapter focuses on Dickens’s more private concerns with the body, particularly upon his personal physical fears and experiences, the public attention given to his body as a result of fame, his continual denial of his own physical frailties, and the interplay between his body and his writing all of which provided impetus to his literature.

Chapters three, four, and five examine consecutively the ways in which physical vulnerability—to damage, disease, and death, but most importantly to dismemberment—function in the novels. They do so on three broad levels: Character, Conversation, and Expression which depict in ascending order increasing bodily insecurity in Dickens’s texts.

The Character level concerns the bodily forms and fates of Dickens’s characters. We see here that the more a player’s body is described the more vulnerable it will become, thus good-hearted heroes are virtually “bodiless” and suffer little physical pain while evil characters are described in great anatomical detail and come to bodily harm. Dickens metes out “bodily justice” on this level in that he ensures that characters who have transgressed
the rules of good conduct in his fictional world are physically punished for their misdeeds and that bodily punishment is in direct proportion to the "crime" committed.

On the Conversational level Dickens depicts extreme physical horrors by expressing these things humorously, by putting descriptions of them in mouths variously and interestingly accented, and, most significantly, by playing on the dual literal and metaphorical meanings of bodily references. Most of this anatomical dialogue is anecdotal and therefore unverifiable, hypothetical and therefore unlikely to happen, or professional, i.e., spoken by "bodily experts" such as doctors or undertakers, and therefore irrefutable. Here exaggeration and extremes attract readers who are simultaneously fascinated and repelled by what characters say of the body.

Dickens's methods of Expression reflect physical reality—all bodies are vulnerable to sudden damage just as Dickens can dismember a body suddenly either with the stroke of a pen or by delaying its complete description. We see that on this level the body is at it most vulnerable and is damaged by methods of expression rather than by narrative. Dickens here plays most intensively with the literalization of metaphor, linguistically insisting that if a head appears around a doorway we can no longer assume that a body will follow. The novels are filled with dictionally decapitated heads and severed limbs, but through the use of humour and by reanimating these members Dickens ensures that his style elicits not simply a reaction of horror in his readers but elicits a response to the grotesque—a strong instinctual attraction to his work which is rooted in the body, not in the intellect.

This dissertation concludes that the body's vulnerability is not only a continual presence in Dickens's novels but is an under-examined yet fundamental element in what makes his writing style distinctive and what makes his work continually popular.
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<td>AN</td>
<td>American Notes</td>
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<td>AYR</td>
<td>All the Year Round</td>
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<td>LD</td>
<td>Little Dorrit</td>
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<td>Lett.P</td>
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<td>MC</td>
<td>Martin Chuzzlewit</td>
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<td>NN</td>
<td>Nicholas Nickleby</td>
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<td>OCS</td>
<td>The Old Curiosity Shop</td>
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<td>OMF</td>
<td>Our Mutual Friend</td>
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<td>OT</td>
<td>Oliver Twist</td>
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<td>A Tale of Two Cities</td>
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<td>UT</td>
<td>The Uncommercial Traveller</td>
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References to Dickens’s novels are to The Clarendon Dickens where editions have been published. Quotations from novels not yet available in the series are from The World’s Classics edition (NN, TTC), the Penguin edition (BR, OCS, OMF), and the Norton Critical Edition (BH, HT). Because of the varied accessibility of editions, chapter numbers have been indicated as well as page numbers.

References to Dickens’s letters are from the Pilgrim Edition where available (vols. 1-7 covering the years 1820-1855); the Nonesuch edition is used for letters not yet published in the Pilgrim Edition.
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INTRODUCTION

Of all the objects in the world, the human body has a peculiar status: it is not only possessed by the person who has it, it also possesses and constitutes him.... Our body is not, in short, something we have, it is a large part of what we actually are: it is by and through our bodies that we recognise our existence in the world, and it is only by being able to move in and act upon the world that we can distinguish it from ourselves.... Each of us ... has two images of the bodily self: one which is immediately felt as the source of sensation and the spring of action, and one which we see and sometimes touch (Jonathan Miller, The Body in Question 14).

The human body was central to Dickens's life and to his art. In life he shared many of the anatomical fears and concerns of his contemporaries. In art his use of the body's variabilities and vulnerabilities is unique. No other element in Dickens's writing is as distinctive as the way in which he treats the body, and nothing more signals a work as Dickensian than the constancy with which he keeps anatomy before us. The body Dickens uses in his work is, preeminently, a vulnerable one; it appears deformed, damaged, dismembered and yet, despite such horrors, it is an essential element of his humour. It is in the continual conjunction of comedy, the literalization of metaphor, and the vulnerability of the human physical form that one of Dickens's greatest literary achievements lies; this achievement is not only the power and singularity of his writing style but his ability to connect viscerally, immediately, and fundamentally to his readers. This dissertation will demonstrate, by collecting and discussing significant bodily references over the range of Dickens's novels, that the vulnerability of the body is of crucial and cardinal importance in defining what is most distinctive and enduringly popular in Dickens's work.

The "body" of course is currently much in critical vogue, for those researching the nineteenth century as for those studying our own. Much recent theory and discussion of the subject centres on historico-medical models of anatomy or on the body as a basis for economic or political thought. Michel Foucault's examinations of the body in terms of discipline, clinical medicine, and the history of sexuality have been highly influential. Other
studies, by writers such as Bryan Turner and Mike Featherstone have focussed on the body from a sociological perspective. Feminist theory, too, has formed a powerful impetus to “writing the female body,” and, as in Helena Michie’s work, has provided a basis for examination of the body in light of issues such as illness, sexuality, and textuality. Elaine Scarry has also focussed on analyzing pain and the body while other writers have examined the body as a social metaphor; Chris Baldick, for instance, examines the myths and use of the monstrous body in nineteenth-century discourse.

There is at the moment a ready assumption that any work on the use of the body in literature will be aligned with one of these proliferating schools of bodily theory and will, in particular, have as its chief focus sexuality or the portrayal of women’s bodies. It is wise to state at the outset, therefore, that this dissertation has no theoretical affiliation for a number of reasons. First, while sexuality in Dickens’s novels is briefly discussed in terms of threats of sexual violence, his depiction of sexuality is not notably different from that of other writers of his era. Secondly, while there are, inevitably, some differences in his portrayal of female and male bodies, this again is not an area in which Dickens’s writing is distinctive. Thirdly, Dickens’s own literary use of the body is rooted in the physical not the philosophical; indeed, he ridicules characters who philosophize about the body.

Because no comprehensive or systematic study of the body in Dickens’s work has before now been attempted, this study takes an empirical approach based on a close reading of his novels. What this examination demonstrates is not something peculiar to two or three of the novels but a consistent anatomical element throughout his work, therefore, all of his novels are considered rather than only a select few. The research methods used for this dissertation include a historical overview of the vulnerability of the body in the nineteenth century, a biographical analysis of Dickens’s personal dealings with the body, and the extraction of bodily references from Dickens’s novels. These anatomical references and examples show the constancy with which Dickens keeps the body before his readers and provide a basis for analysis of the ways in which he uses the body in fiction.
It is perhaps because anatomy is such an inherent part of Dickens’s fictional world and technique, and so obviously important to it, that no study has yet examined the aspect fully. Work that has considered the body in Dickens’s work has usually concentrated on the physical appearances of his characters or seen the prevalent use of dismemberment in the novels as a metaphor for social breakdown or change. Perhaps the most sustained examination of the Dickensian body to date is Juliet McMaster’s *Dickens the Designer* which discusses the importance of flesh to the visual nature of Dickens’s writing and shows that external appearance is an index to the souls and natures of characters. She examines the “iconography of physical appearance” (xiii), in order to “extract the terminology of his body-language” (xiii) and points to the physiognomical and phrenological signalling inherent in Dickens’s bodily descriptions of his characters. McMaster’s focus is “on what Dickens sees, rather than on the means by which he writes it down” (xi). My focus, however, while taking into consideration the visual appearances of Dickens’s characters, is precisely on how he writes things down. Dickens’s constant use of the body and of the debilities and damage that can harm it is not confined to the physiques of his characters but pervades the language with which they speak and the methods of expression that he as a writer stylistically chooses. In Dickens’s world there is more to the body than meets the eye.

Dickens’s imagination goes beyond the visual, and transcends anything that can be translated into film or other visual medium, this is why, for example, television adaptations of his novels, even when admirable in point of historical accuracy, costuming, and casting, can never capture the essence of his art. All aspects of the body in Dickens’s novels are rooted in language, in the literalizing of the metaphorical or figurative, and it is through this use of language that his bodies, or more usually parts of bodies, attract readers in a subconscious, emotional, and visceral way. No film could ever successfully portray, for example, the common motif in Dickens’s writing of a “linguistically decapitated” head coming into a room. We, as bodies ourselves and accustomed to the ways of our world, expect a head entering a room to be followed by the rest of the body, but Dickens deliberately subverts our expectations by
literalizing the figurative and implicitly insisting, at least for a paragraph or two, that only a head has entered the room—a head animate enough to carry on pages of conversation. The attraction, repulsion, humour and horror of such a scene connects the reader bodily to Dickens’s texts and anything (such as a film) that attempts to intervene between our imaginations and the language in which Dickens’s bodies are presented on the page will inevitably destroy the effect, just as seeing a fat person is not at all the same thing as reading the language in which Dickens chooses to describe one.

In transforming into literature the fears and imaginings that he shares with us all about what can happen to the body, Dickens emphasizes the comic, uses “extreme” examples and grotesque descriptions, perhaps allowing us to feel, as he puts it in “Lying Awake,” “temporary superiority to the common hazards and mischances of life” (436). The attraction-repulsion, for it is inextricably both, of Dickens’s use of the body operates on the reader directly, immediately, even unconsciously, and it works unimpeded by a need to learn anything or to think anything out. Dickens does not philosophize about the body but cuts straight to the quick. If a leg is cut off in a Dickens novel, we feel, mind and body, what that means—we know instinctively and emotionally rather than intellectually that this is not just something that can happen to a character in a book; we know, just as Dickens does, that it could just as easily and randomly be our leg that is severed.

We can think about our bodies as being separate from our “essence,” but at the same time we know that there can be no “essence” without a body and that we also are our bodies; if our body dies, we die. This conflicting view of ourselves creates a tension which is inherent in our lives and in Dickens’s work. Because of his own particular fears, Dickens capitalizes on this tension, granting his novels immediate appeal to readers who to varying degrees share the same fears or can without much difficulty be provoked into sharing them. In his texts Dickens both reveals and controls the vulnerability of the human form and appeals to readers’ innate interest in the body.
The following examination considers aspects of bodily vulnerability such as disease and death, and, to a greater extent, deformity and disfigurement, but Dickens’s primary literary brand of physical insecurity is dismemberment. Dismemberment in his writing includes not only the prevalence of wooden legs or the violent end of a character such as Carker, but also the existence of stylistically animated body parts which are an important component of Dickens’s methods of expression. This dismembering is not primarily a metaphor for the break down of beliefs or other changes and upheavals in society as it was for other writers of his time, but is personal, individual, and private, reflecting the innate risk of our own bodies being maimed or dismembered. It is something that Dickens was well aware of and used to the fullest in his fiction. Just as Fanny Squeers records that she is “screaming out loud all the time [she] write[s]” (NN 175; ch. 15), Dickens has metamorphosed his (and our) personal pains and fears into literary pleasure.

This study begins in chapter one with an examination of the vulnerability of the body in the nineteenth century. It will show that Dickens shared contemporary social concern with the body as well as entertainment based fascination with it. Above all, the Victorian body was a vulnerable one and the sections in this chapter will discuss some of the changes, threats, and experiences that nineteenth-century anatomy saw or had to endure. Changes in medical thought and practice, the dangers of disease, and issues of public health are discussed together with the scandalous attractions of dissection, resurrection, and murder. Advances in surgery, the types of accidents faced and cures tried are examined in addition to a brief look at Victorian penal techniques. The era’s enjoyment of entertainment which centred on the body, for example waxworks and freak shows, is shown as is the popular appeal of executions. Dickens’s social and public concerns with the body are used as examples of both his own reaction to the physical perils of the age and as typical of the response of many civicly minded Victorians. The chapter concludes by looking at the use of the body in the work of other nineteenth-century writers in order to determine how Dickens’s
use of it is distinctive and by asking whether Dickens’s civic and humanitarian concerns with
the body in life mark him out as a social anatomist in his use of the body in art.

The second chapter is a biographical examination of aspects of Dickens’s life and
thought concerning the body and illustrates the private side of his bodily experiences as
chapter one does the public. It shows that Dickens was aware of threats to the body from an
early age and that these fears and concerns remained with him throughout his life. Early
horror stories of cannibalism and dismemberment told to him by his nurse together with his
own reading influenced him as did his own physical hardships in the blacking factory and other
life experiences such as bereavements and lifelong illness. His early fame, too, meant that his
body quickly became subject to public scrutiny and comment, and the chapter examines how
other people reacted to Dickens’s body as well as how he reacted to his own—by denying its
illnesses and driving it forward at all costs leading eventually to his own death. For Dickens
the physical was often connected to the fiscal and he wrote in part to protect himself and his
family from the hazards and bodily insecurities of debt or financial loss. The chapter’s final
comments move into a discussion of Dickens’s literary use of the body focusing primarily on
the toll of his work on his own body, the physical methods by which he wrote, his use of
humour, and the interplay of literal and metaphorical in his art. By using comedy and
literalizing metaphor Dickens imaginatively transforms his own bodily fears into art. At the
same time he simultaneously attracts and repels readers, drawing them into his literary world
on an emotional, visceral level rather than on an intellectual one.

Chapters three, four, and five examine consecutively the ways in which the body
functions on three broad levels in Dickens’s novels, namely, the levels of Character,
Conversation, and Expression. The Character level concerns the bodily forms and fates of the
characters in his novels. Conversation refers to characters’ comments and anecdotes about
the body, and Expression refers to non-conversational diction, at the level of words and
sentences, through which the body is dismembered or vulnerably described. These levels, in
Character—Conversation—Expression order, increasingly reveal the vulnerability of the body.

Chapter three examines the bodies of Dickens’s characters and shows that the more a body is described in the world of Dickens the more vulnerable that character’s body will become. On this level anatomy and what happens to it are closely related to the inner natures and external behaviours of characters and are controlled for such purposes. The chapter demonstrates that Dickens uses “bodily justice” in depicting his characters—they will be physically punished for transgressing the moral and physical laws of his literary world. The sexuality of Dickens’s characters is briefly discussed here in terms of physical vulnerability and this examination reveals that sexual threateners are punished physically while their victims will end unharmed. Similar patterns prevail when other groups of characters are analyzed. “Heroes” and “gentlemen,” whose bodies are scarcely described at all, undergo very little bodily vulnerability and what damage is inflicted upon them is generally for redeeming or noble purposes, increasingly so as Dickens’s career progressed. Children, however, face widespread physical insecurity. Deformed characters, it is shown, are often motivated by their anatomical insufficiencies to seek control over other people’s bodies. “Evil” deformed characters like Quilp who are described in great physical detail inevitably meet with situations that reveal fully to them the vulnerabilities of their flesh. “Good” deformed characters like Phil Squod demonstrate acceptance of their bodies, find fulfilling occupations near those with “perfect” bodies, and are not repeatedly physically described by Dickens. Those characters who are physically damaged during novels show Dickens’s bodily justice at its clearest—the worse the behaviour the harsher the corporeal punishment he will hand down. He ensures, for example, that a villain like Carker gets the violent, dismembered end that he deserves or that Pecksniff’s self-centred “moral” behaviour is undercut by slapstick bodily ignominy. This chapter also discusses the sites Dickens favours for anatomical description and injury and looks at illnesses suffered by characters including the possibility of laughing oneself to death. Descriptions of dead bodies, particularly those of
murder victims are examined before the chapter ends with a summary of changes in Dickens’s depictions of characters’ bodies over his novel-writing career.

The conversational use of the body is examined in chapter four. In dialogue a higher degree of physical vulnerability is revealed than in character description. Dickens uses interesting and varied accents and speech patterns to create humour on this level and plays on the double literal and metaphorical meanings of his references to the body. Bodily comments fall into three main categories, those that are anecdotal, those that are hypothetical, and those that are professional. Anecdotes are miniature bodily tales in which the speaker is relating events that have happened to a third party’s body, i.e. they are hearsay evidence; “hypotheticals” include comments such as threats or oaths that are unlikely to be carried out in fact, and professional conversation is that spoken by “bodily experts” such as doctors, undertakers, or resurrectionists and thus, on the surface at least, irrefutable. Dickens takes the fear of an event such as a sausage maker falling into a sausage machine and being made into sausages himself and, through the language in which his characters tell the story, turns it into comedy. We, as bodies ourselves, are fascinated by such tales just as Dickens’s characters are and we are drawn into his world by our delight in laughing at what in other mouths would sound horrific. Dickens’s increasing play on the literal and metaphorical which is a key element of his “anatomical art” means that, on this level, means of expression as well as narrative begin to dismember the body. The chapter finishes by briefly considering changes in “bodily dialogue” over the course of the novels, moving from the more purely comic and ridiculous of the early novels to the darker or more realistic, but nevertheless still humorous, of the later novels.

Chapter five considers Dickens’s methods of Expression. It is on this level that his writing is at its most grotesque and the body is at its most vulnerable. It is here, too, that Dickens most consistently plays on the double literal and metaphorical meanings of words, and methods of expression rather than narrative become the chief source of dismemberment. The chapter shows that for Dickens the body’s vulnerability is frequently connected with
language. All bodies are vulnerable to death, dismemberment, or destruction at any moment just as Dickens can dismember a body suddenly either with the stroke of a pen or by delaying its complete description. The fragmentation of the body that occurs through his diction undercuts and subverts the sense of bodily security that he maintains to varying degrees on the other levels and reflects the reality of the body’s precarious situation. The chapter shows that his writing style proliferates with severed heads and other body parts which enter rooms unattached to torsos or float dismembered through his novels. By linguistically insisting that it is only a head that enters a room, Dickens creates rhetorical suspense by forcing the reader to wait to discover whether the rest of the body will follow or whether a head will remain just a head, an arm just an arm. His diction and style reflect his own fears and the innate bodily anxieties of his readers who are thus drawn physically into his work, even if only subconsciously, and feel instinctually rather than intellectually the impact of his playing with the body. The discussion shows, however, that he does not let us grimace in pure horror at his dismembering but introduces comedy and reasserts control over the body by reanimating the physical parts he has severed and by giving them an independent life of their own.

The body’s vulnerability and its connection with language and humour in Dickens’s novels is a central and significant element of his art. He draws readers in who are both attracted and repelled by his use of anatomy because they have bodies and physical fears themselves. By transforming his body and his physical fears into his novels, Dickens has not only assured himself of a large readership but has in a sense preserved his own body, or parts of it, in perpetuity between the covers of his texts. And from time to time, his body is taken out, re-dressed, and brushed up for fresh public appearance as he is re-published and re-edited, a thought that would probably, in the words of Mr. Venus, “equally surprise and charm” him. We are thus left not only with pieces of Dickens’s mind but also with pieces of his body articulate enough to reveal the innate vulnerability of all our bodies.
NOTES

1 The essays in Gallagher and Laqueur, for example, discuss aspects of the body in the Victorian period such as sexuality, social discourses including medicine, and perceptions of the female body. Sociological considerations include Feher, et al; Turner; O’Neill, who includes a chapter on medical bodies; Featherstone, et al, who includes the overview “Recent Developments in the Theory of the Body” by Bryan S. Turner 1-35; Kern contains much on sexuality. The essays in Scarry, ed., Literature and the Body take a variety of approaches. On the philosophy of the medical body see, for example, Gadow.

2 See, for instance, Juliet McMaster. A series of articles by Hollington also discuss characters’ bodies from a physiognomical perspective.

3 See, for example, Newsom, “Embodying Dombey”; Hutter; Gibbon.
CHAPTER ONE: VULNERABILITY AND THE VICTORIAN BODY

‘dead and buried, and resurrected and dissected, and hung upon wires in a anatomical museum’ (NN 780; ch. 60).

The vulnerability of the human body was as ubiquitous in the nineteenth century as the sexuality of it is today. Victorians did not have to look far for evidence that their hold on life or limb was tenuous. Their bodies were, in general, smaller than bodies are today; they were shorter, lighter, suffered more unalleviated pain, aged faster, and died sooner. Physical deformities were less easily “remedied” by operation or institutionalization and so were more commonly seen. Disease was a major risk and longevity a comparative rarity. Infant mortality was high, standards of health care often low. The number of possible ends a body could come to seemed to be multiplying. It could be murdered “most foully.” It could be dismembered alive or dissected dead. It could be squashed into an overflowing graveyard, in as many pieces as would best fit, or dug up after burial and sold to anatomists. It could be watched by the multitudes as it writhed in operative pain. It could be hanged by the neck until dead before an excited crowd and then be dissected. It could be put on display, in flesh or wax. It could starve or sicken in numbers or conditions that were a direct product of Victorian society. All of this pain, dismembering, cutting, disease, and anatomical excess could be seen and investigated by anyone who chose to look or listen in the streets. It is not surprising then that Charles Dickens, with pairs of the keenest ears and eyes of his time, should be influenced artistically by the anatomical elements that were so pervasive around him.

Although the way in which Dickens uses the human body in his novels, its constant presence in his work, and the sheer importance of the body to his writing style are distinctive, he shared many of the physical fears and concerns of his contemporaries. It is, therefore, important to examine aspects of the vulnerability of the nineteenth-century body, including medical practices, disease, public health, dissection and resurrection, surgical procedures,
accidents, health treatments, penal techniques, the "popularity" of murder, and the fascination with exotic or unique body types, in order to picture more clearly the anatomical melee in which Dickens was working and out of which features of his own work sprang. The discussion focuses primarily on general Victorian physical fears and anatomical interests and uses examples of Dickens's own social interests and actions regarding the body as illustrative of reactions (at least middle-class ones) of the age. The chapter will conclude by briefly examining some of the uses the body was put to in the work of other novelists of the period, and by considering whether the constant presence of the vulnerable body in Dickens's work can be seen as a metaphor for the social anatomy of the age in which he lived.

The first aspect to comment on is the development of innovative medical practices during the Victorian age. Modern medicine was born in the nineteenth century when medicine changed from an empiric art to a rational science. Dramatic advances were made in discovering the causes of disease and in its prevention and treatment. The agonies of surgery were, for the first time, reduced. Nevertheless, hospitals, which were the basis for teaching, learning, clinical observation, and dissection—for cutting open and revealing the body—turned away whomsoever they chose, and at times only the most unusual or abnormal cases were treated or, as dead bodies, sought after. Not infrequently people desperately seeking urgent medical attention were bureaucratically shunted away and left to die unattended in the streets.

Two key elements of nineteenth-century clinical medicine were the physical examination of the living body and the dissection of the dead. The living body was considered in a new way. It was now "examined" by doctors: tested, touched, compared to the abnormal and, with Laennec's invention of the stethoscope in 1819, listened to, and no longer merely observed. As Foucault discusses in The Birth of the Clinic the medical gaze changed. In fact, it was no longer a gaze, but a touch, an awareness of anatomy and physiology, learned
through dissection, of what was beneath the surface. The humoral theories and to some extent the patient-diagnosed medicine of previous decades were disappearing. Despite the general Victorian concern with health, however, the new emphasis on pathological anatomy meant that bodies, in a medical sense, were defined more in terms of normality versus deformity than of healthiness.

Several articles in Dickens’s *Household Words* discuss specific anatomical organs or systems, thereby reflecting the increasing knowledge of anatomy and physiology even among the general public. “Man Magnified,” for instance, describes human skin, hair, fat, teeth, and blood as seen under a microscope (*HW* 4 [1851]: 13-15). “The Laboratory in the Chest” discusses respiration in the human body (*HW* 1 [1850]: 565-69), while “Our Own Temperature” (*HW* 6 [1852]: 11-12) examines bodily temperature making, in light of Dickens’s career, the interesting comment that “Original writing or study, or any intellectual effort, raises the temperature of the body even more decidedly than bodily exertion” (12).

A rise in temperature could also, of course, mean disease, and it was to disease above all that the nineteenth-century body was vulnerable. Typhoid fever, smallpox, cholera, typhus, influenza and other ailments ravaged the population in waves. The years 1831-33 saw epidemics of influenza and the first of four pandemics of cholera (recurring in 1848-49, 1853-54, 1866-67). During 1836-1842 there were major epidemics of influenza, typhus (gaol fever), smallpox, and scarlet fever. 1846-1849 brought the return of typhus and cholera, as well as cases of typhoid (Ackerknecht, “Anticontagionism” 575; Cartwright, *Social* 79; Haley 6).

Typhoid fever was a bacterial, intestinal disease, spread, like cholera, by the ingestion of particles from the faeces of a human disease carrier, often through contaminated water or milk. This malady was not clearly distinguished during Dickens’s lifetime from typhus fever, a rickettsial blood disease, spread by fleas (McMurtry 131; Wohl 127; Mitchell 270). Typhoid
caused listlessness, a continuous high fever, loss of appetite, and diarrhoea; “it not only
continued as a major disease throughout the nineteenth century ... it also affected all classes”
(Wohl 127). Indeed it was from typhoid fever that Prince Albert died in 1861, and Dickens,
summering in Boulogne in 1856, rushed family members home when warned of a typhoid
epidemic there:

The townspeople ... had suppressed the news ‘for the sake of their own interests.’ ... In June, twenty children had died.... When Katie developed a cough and lost her
appetite, she and Mammie [Dickens’s daughters] were sent home. Fortunately, it
turned out to be only the whooping cough (Kaplan, Biography, 350-51).

Dramatist and *Punch* staffer Gilbert à Beckett and his son, however, died in the epidemic
(Kaplan, Biography 351).

Dickens, like almost everyone in the nineteenth century, was fully aware of the
dangers of the spread of disease. Three years earlier he had written of malaria attacking
Rome:

Rome has been very unhealthy, and is not free now. Few people care to be out at the
bad times of sunset and sunrise, and the streets are like a desert at night.... Imagine
this phantom knocking at the gates of Rome; passing them; creeping along the streets;
haunting the aisles and pillars of the churches; year by year more encroaching, and
more impossible of avoidance (*Lett.P 7*: 202-03).

*Bleak House* clearly reflects the inescapability of disease by focussing on the
“democratic” nature of smallpox, a disease, like typhoid, which “did not afflict the poor and
spare the rich like ... typhus fever” (Major, *Destiny* 114). Although the nineteenth century
saw a decline in deaths from smallpox, the incidence was high, and the many who, like Esther
Summerson, survived were usually marked for life with facial disfigurement, a stigma of the
body’s vulnerability (Cartwright, *Social* 79).

Cholera,8 “like typhoid, [was] spread by the ingestion of contaminated particles of
human waste but it [was] more virulent” (McMurtry 131) and struck greater terror into
people because of the high death rate among those contracting the disease, the ostensibly
healthy people who died from it, and the speed of its attack. In 1832 thirty cholera-related
riots broke out in Britain, most
were inspired by fears that medical students and doctors were taking advantage of the cholera to obtain bodies for their anatomy classes, and it was rumoured that they were murdering cholera victims. ‘Choleraphobia’, which could strike miles from the centre of the epidemic ... was almost always linked with fears of body-snatching (‘Burking’), premature burial, or burial in unconsecrated ground (Wohl 119).

Millions in Europe died from cholera and Dickens wrote in 1849: “The cholera has been, as no doubt you know, very bad in London—chiefly among the poor and badly lodged. I am happy to say we are all well, and have not lost any friends by the dire disease” (Lett. P 5: 630). Dickens was aware, however, just as those he corresponded with were, that all people, not just the poor, were vulnerable to the disease. He had recently learned, for instance, that Thackeray had contracted cholera, and Mamie Dickens, his daughter, was to catch the disease in Boulogne in 1854: “Mary was taken very ill. English Cholera. She was sinking so fast, and the sickness and diarrhoea were so exceedingly alarming that it evidently would not do to wait for Elliotson. I caused everything to be done that one had naturally often thought of” (Lett. P 7: 424).

Disease was a constant subject of both discussion and fear for the Victorians. Some threw their anxiety into working towards preventative measures. Dickens, for instance, campaigned vigorously for proper city sanitation, and when cholera broke out in England, particularly affecting the poor, “he attacked Parliament and the Law with a ferocity which was altogether new” (Ackroyd 709). In “To Working Men” (HW 10 [1854]: 169-70) he writes that “the authorities who had allowed cholera to spread unchecked ... ‘are guilty, before GOD, of wholesale murder’” (in Ackroyd 709) and advises workers to unite and turn such leaders out of office.

Despite, however, the great publicity surrounding cholera and the dread it invoked, it was ‘fever’ which throughout the nineteenth century stimulated the most action from both central and local authorities. Cholera came and went, but, as the Privy Council noted in 1864, ‘typhus fever appears never to be wholly absent....’ Frequently rising to epidemic proportions, the various fevers were always endemic. Fever drew attention to filth and to poverty and so forced authorities to come to terms with public health, that is, with social and environmental conditions, with living standards broadly construed (Wohl 125).
Typhus epidemics occurred in 1837-1839, 1847-1848, and 1862-1865 (Mitchell 270), accounting for deaths of 19,000 in 1837 and 17,000 in 1847 (Walvin 28). Other diseases cut equally dramatic swathes: “Whooping cough alone killed 10,000 each year at mid-century.... Similarly scarlet fever struck most severely in towns; between 1859 and 1875 it was the cause of 4-6 per cent of all deaths in England and Wales” (Walvin 28). Influenza was always hovering in the wings and erupted into pandemics “in 1830-1, 1836-7, 1843, 1847-8, 1855, 1870, and again in 1889-92. In the outbreak of 1847-8 there were 50,000 deaths in London alone from influenza, a figure some five times greater than that for cholera deaths in 1849” (Wohl 128). Dickens wrote in December 1847:

> London is in a very hideous state of mud and darkness. Everybody is laid up with the Influenza, except all the disagreeable people, and they are very punctual in coming and talking about it. I was at the Theatre (the Shakespeare House benefit) on Tuesday, and a most extraordinary effect was produced by the whole audience being in a paroxysm of sniffing, during the whole of the entertainments (Lett.P 5: 207).

The editors of the Pilgrim edition of Dickens’s letters note that he was not exaggerating: “In the week ending 11 Dec London had an increase of 130% in the average mortality rate for the season, mainly from influenza, pneumonia and respiratory diseases” (Lett.P 5: 207 n. 3). Diptheria became pandemic in 1855-1856 (Mitchell 271), and twenty to twenty-five percent of those who contracted diptheria or scarlet fever died (Wohl 130). Dickens’s fiancée and future mother-in-law both survived attacks of scarlet fever in 1835, as did his eldest son Charley in 1847.11

Frederick Cartwright writes that “Three major evils, alcohol, syphilis and tuberculosis, damaged the people of industrial Britain to an extent even greater than smallpox or cholera” (Social 114).12 Consumption was indeed the number one killer of the Victorian era; it “every year killed more people in nineteenth-century Britain than smallpox, scarlet fever, measles, whooping cough and typhus fever put together” (Cartwright, Social 123). It caused probably “one-third of all deaths from disease in the Victorian period” (Wohl 130)
and killed "one Briton in six throughout the nineteenth century.... In 1838 alone 59,000 people died from the disease in England and Wales" (Walvin 28).

Although hitting hardest in poorer, ill-ventilated areas, tuberculosis reached all levels and was thought during Dickens's lifetime to be hereditary. Dickens worried at times that it had entered his own bloodline, and with some reason. His elder sister Fanny died of the disease in 1848 aged thirty-eight, as did various sons and brothers. Dickens worried at times that it had entered his own bloodline, and with some reason. His elder sister Fanny died of the disease in 1848 aged thirty-eight, as did various sons and brothers. 

Death rates and life expectancies reveal just how vulnerable the nineteenth-century body was to disease. Figures in Edwin Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, which Dickens read, "show that in 1839 for every person who died of old age or violence, eight died of specific diseases" (Haley 8). For adults, the "average age of death stood at forty-five years in 1850" (Cartwright, *Social* 188), but for "labourers, mechanics, and servants, &c." it was only fifteen (Haley 8). Forty-five was also the age at which "Middle age settled into old age" (Smith 316), and when "the morbidity rates showed a sharp increase" (Smith 320). This is certainly true of Dickens's contemporaries, as even a cursory glance through the letters he wrote from about the age of thirty-five on quickly reveals, for, although Dickens was only fifty-eight when he died, many of his friends pre-deceased him.

Various explanations about the causes of disease were favoured as the century progressed and new discoveries were made. One of the most popular beliefs and one whose influence can be seen in Dickens's work, especially in *Bleak House*, was the theory of miasma, or pythogenic theory. This view held that disease was caused by a poisonous effluent or gas which rose from damp rotting material, overcrowded graveyards, cesspits, sewers and other filthy areas, and, as a miasma, was carried by air into people's lungs or open wounds, causing disease and, eventually, leading to epidemics.

A debate raged between the contagionists who believed in quarantine and the anticontagionists, many of whom were miasmatists, including Dickens's friend and ally Thomas Southwood Smith, who believed that most diseases were not contagious and thus
could not be prevented by quarantining. The real problem was lack of sanitation, and contaminated water supplies, and one benefit of the dominance of the anticontagionist view during Dickens’s writing years was that its followers, in order to prevent disease, fought against filth and tried to improve sanitation.

iii

Another aspect of Victorian physical vulnerability centred on the acutely substandard living conditions of the urban poor and the concomitant problems associated with this. The death rate was high in cities in large part due to diseases caused by the unavailability of proper sewage disposal, paucity of clean drinking water, presence of polluted air, unhealthy living and working conditions among the lower classes, and malnutrition from tainted or adulterated food. The high death rate, in turn, accelerated the cycle; graveyards began to overflow, leading to more disease, a ghastlier environment, and a keener awareness of what might become of the body. These were problems that public health reformers, sanitationists, and concerned civically minded figures like Charles Dickens tried to remedy.

Perhaps the greatest problems were caused by the quantities of sewage in densely populated areas combined with inadequate sewerage; these led to contaminated water supplies that in turn led, although not fully realized at the time, to the virulent spread of disease. By merely drinking a glass of water in London during the early half of the century one became vulnerable to disease and death:

In cities, human wastes went into cesspools dug under the houses or courtyards, from which seepage through the soil into nearby wells was easy: The more crowded the housing, the more likelihood of a merger between cesspool and well. The sewers that had been built simply poured raw sewerage [sic] into the nearest body of water—water dipped up in buckets by the poor and carried, untreated, into their houses. In the poorest sections, human waste was simply dumped into the streets (McMurtry 133).

It was not just the poor that were affected, however, for although a wealthy city-dweller might have more light, better ventilation, a more nutritious diet, less physical exhaustion, and simply more personal space in which to exist, he or she still might have to
drink contaminated water and travel through places in the city that were rife with infection. This said, it was the poorest of the poor, in their cramped and filthy rookeries or slums, who were most affected by this lack of sanitation and who were considered by many a great nuisance if not the cause of the whole problem. It was not only living conditions that put people at risk; the working environments of, and hours spent by, labourers, especially children, in factories, mills, and mines became matters of concern as the century progressed, and, stage by stage, Acts were passed to improve these situations. It was true, though, that in the nineteenth century a body, even if only a child’s, could be little more than factory fodder:

The long hours, the dust, the fumes, dangerous belt-drives, badly geared, ill-protected power machinery, heavy weights, the inexorable pace of power-driven looms, the miles children walked in a day in textile mills and brickyards, and gratuitous brutality from overlookers and compeers, together overtaxed child operatives, sometimes maimed or killed them, and commonly made them old before their time (Smith 170-71).

We are, of course, used to hearing such stories about working children in the Victorian period, just as most are familiar with Dickens’s boyhood experiences working in a blacking factory. The two facts, however, have not been connected explicitly enough, inasmuch as we need to realize that Dickens as a boy actually was one of these “labouring hind[s],” who were not merely characters created by his fiction or recorded in social commentary. Dickens’s vulnerability during his period in the warehouse must naturally be seen as one important source for his pronounced literary and personal awareness of the precarious existence of the human form.

In his adult years, Dickens took a great interest in public institutions concerned with the body, wandering through “freak shows” of his own choosing with a remarkable lack of bureaucratic prevention. Prisons, workhouses, hospitals, insane asylums, institutes for the deaf and blind, the Paris Morgue, the slums and rookeries of London, all crammed with bodies in precarious situations, were easy entertainment for the interested or compassionate like Dickens and others who were concerned with improving physical welfare. Essentially, he was observing bodies, seeing what the body could come to and the conditions it might have to
endure: the squalor, dirt, unhealthiness, crowdedness, the dangers of attack by criminals or disease—in short, its vulnerability and the causes of its vulnerability. He was much involved, novelistically, journalistically, and practically in moves to improve public health, believing that

Sanitary improvements are the one thing needful to begin with;—and until they are thoroughly, efficiently, and uncompromisingly made (and every bestial little prejudice and supposed interest contrariwise, crushed under foot) even Education itself will fall short of its uses (Lett. P 7:236).

Dickens knew what he was writing about in this regard for not only did his night walks through the slums and poor areas of London reveal it but, early in his career, Dickens in fact lived

alongside one of the most squalid areas in the whole metropolis. A short stroll would have taken him to Saffron Hill, and the neighbourhood of Field Lane where ‘excrement was thrown into a little back yard where it was allowed to accumulate for months together’; and there, beside it, Fleet Ditch, which was no more than an open sewer of fetid water (Ackroyd 219).

He was also a member of a number of sanitary associations such as the Metropolitan Sanitary Association and the Association for the Improvement of London Workhouse Infirmaries. He was interested in the Children’s Employment Commission, and with Angela Burdett Coutts established Urania Cottage for the reformation of prostitutes. He “even went so far as to graft some of [Southwood] Smith’s report [on the sanitary conditions of the poor] verbatim into [Oliver Twist’s] text” (Gaskell, “Reform” 115). Although he refused more than one request to stand for Parliament, he had an unfulfilled

ambition for some public employment—some Commissionership, or Inspectorship, or the like.... On any questions connected with the Education of the People, the elevation of their character, the improvement of their dwellings, their greater protection against disease and vice—or with the treatment of Criminals, or the administration of Prison Discipline.... I think I could do good service, and I am sure I should enter with my whole heart. I have hoped, for years, that I may become at last a Police Magistrate (Lett. P 4:566-67).

Apart from friendships with public health reformers such as Southwood Smith, Dickens had even closer ties to the “movement.” Henry Austin, Edwin Chadwick’s
“favourite Engineer” (Ackroyd 381), had married Dickens’s youngest sister, Letitia, and was appointed secretary to the Health of Towns Association in 1844, to the general Board of Health in 1848, to the Sanitary commission in 1847 and retained under the Sanitary Act.27 Dickens’s brother, Alfred, “also a civil engineer, became one of the sanitary inspectors” (Forster 2: 12).

Dickens also wrote journalistically about public health; four articles by him were published in the Examiner in 1849 on the subject of the Tooting Scandal which concerned a child-farm run by Bartholomew Drouet at which one hundred and fifty children had died of cholera because of the appalling conditions in which they lived.28 He sought “to promote the Sanitary cause” (Lett. P 6: 132) in Household Words, writing to Henry Austin in 1850, “You will see that I have done something Sanitary this week. Also in the next No. but one, I have kept the subject alive” (Lett. P 6: 219).29 Industrial health was, too, an important issue to Dickens:

Fierce even beyond [his] attacks on slums and the neglect of public health, however, was the campaign Household Words carried on against factory accidents. Since 1844 there had been a law that dangerous machines must be fenced in, but it had been very largely ignored. “Ground in the Mill” detailed dozens of hideous deaths and mutilations: boys caught in a piece of belting and smashed a hundred and twenty times a minute against the ceiling, men wedged in a shaft getting battered to pulp, their lungs broken, their heads scalped, their skulls smashed. There were two thousand of these victims killed or mutilated by machinery in a half-year (Johnson 2: 716).30

Dickens’s novels had a great impact on public awareness about sanitation and public health, but it was often the provocation of a single case or specific incident that encouraged Dickens to action.31 His novels, too, are given piquancy by singling out individual bodies, by giving particularity to the body as we all know it—our own. Bodies en masse were not as significant to Dickens unless the one example, the little Jo, could be brought forth, his skin stepped into and the threats against his body felt.32

There were, of course, in the Victorian period, many visible reminders of death and its possible causes. Indeed, when graveyards in London began literally to overflow, the dead
body often became a threat to the living. Both the sanitary disposal of dead bodies and the illegal disinterment of the same by avaricious resurrectionists were difficulties during the century. Reports were written on the issue, and Dickens, like many others, was keenly interested in the debate surrounding these problems. Together with other works on the subject he possessed a copy of the surgeon G. A. Walker's *Lectures on the Actual Condition of the Metropolitan Grave-yards, 1846-47*, and in 1850 he thanked Henry Austin for a copy of the *Report on a General Scheme for Extramural Sepulchre* prepared by the general board of Health “which is extraordinarily interesting. I began to read it last night, in bed—and dreamed of putefraction (sic) generally” (*Lett.P 6*: 47). The overcrowding of burial grounds was a much noticed phenomenon when Dickens introduced it into *Bleak House*; articles in *Household Words* reflect public concern and propose resolutions to the situation. In “Heathen and Christian Burial” (*HW 1* [1850]: 43-48), for example, alternative methods of burial such as embalming, cremation, extramural burial, and even the “curious expedients of savage life,” such as “exposing the bodies of the dead to be devoured by dogs, and beasts and birds of prey” (46) are discussed because, the writer comments, “in no age and in no country have the dead been disposed of so prejudicially to the living as in Great Britain” (43). The satirical “Address from an Undertaker to the Trade (Strictly Private and Confidential)” (*HW 1* [1850]: 301-04) opens “I address you, gentlemen, as an humble individual who is much concerned about the body” (301), punning on the dual meaning—“living anatomy” and “dead body”— of the word body, a pun Dickens similarly and repeatedly puts into the mouth of Mr. Mantalini in *Nicholas Nickleby*. The undertaker defends his profession by attacking science as the enemy:

[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 (302).
If people really believe that the dead have gone to a better place, the speaker continues, 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). We know that Silas Wegg at least cared considerably for his missing limb after it was cut off and was prepared to go to some lengths to "collect" himself, but others in the nineteenth century also held bodily intactness to be of crucial importance on religious grounds.

The idea of bodily resurrection was a common Christian belief for the Victorians and became during the century the subject of heated and extensive debate in conjunction with the issues of dissection and cremation which respectively disembowelled or dismembered the human body after death or destroyed it. The key issue was whether, in such a fragmented or non-existent state, a person who had died could be resurrected. Burial, therefore, was an important aspect not only of public health but of Christian religion.

Dickens's own Christianity, as Andrew Sanders discusses in *Charles Dickens: Resurrectionist*, was sincere and simple, based on "broad Anglican Christian orthodoxy which drew its moral and spiritual principles from the New Testament rather than the Old, from a commitment to an active life in this world rather than from a contemplation of the next" (xi). His will exhorted his children 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 and there" (in Forster 2: 422). Unlike many other Victorians Dickens found the excesses and elaborate trappings of nineteenth-century funerals extremely distasteful, but he shared the general belief in resurrection after death, indeed Sanders argues that part of Dickens's dislike of what he saw as the artificiality of Victorian funerals was derived "from the perception that a semi-pagan celebration of death negated a belief in the resurrection" because such funerals were concerned more with "ritualised despair" than with "eternal hope" (38).

Belief in bodily resurrection was not simply for Dickens's contemporaries an issue of religious doctrine but served as a form of personal solace in a society faced with widespread
physical vulnerability which often resulted in death. The Victorians took great comfort in the spiritual idea that they and their loved ones would experience a better environment in a more wholesome body after death. It also served to console them amidst the deaths of friends and family members which left very few families unscathed. Death in this sense could be seen not as a finality but as an event that led to resurrection and life.

In other respects neither death nor burial could be viewed positively. "The Registrar-General on 'Life' in London" (HW 1 [1850]: 330-333) presents mortality statistics: "On an average, a thousand persons die in London weekly, and are, as a rule, buried under the ground on which they fall" (330). They did not, however, always stay peacefully buried. Bodies might be dug up and taken out of their coffins a few weeks after burial, the wood used for firewood and the bodies cut to pieces, mixed up and crammed back into the smallest locatable space.37 G. A. Walker, in the second of his lectures, published in 1847, discusses the notorious Portugal Street burial-ground, "known also by the singular name of the "Green-ground":"

'As the numbers annually buried in this ground are nearly ten times as many as they ought to be, you will not be surprised to hear that it is saturated with human putrescence.... William Chamberlain, who was connected with this same ground for many years, enables us to reveal its secret still more completely....

"I have taken up", says Chamberlain, "the children and moved them within a week after they were buried, and placed them in a different spot, not above a foot-and-a-half-deep; sometimes I have placed them nowhere. It was done by orders."

This placing "nowhere" consisted in breaking up the coffins, cutting the flesh into pieces, and then burying it wherever a hole could be found. For the horrid purpose, there were, as I have informed you, suitable instruments provided, instruments never required for digging a grave....

Such is the condition of the "Green-ground",—such the deeds perpetrated in a so-called sanctuary of the dead. Yet at one extremity of this ground, so situated that the living invalids are compelled to breathe the putrid miasmata of this charnel-house, has an hospital been established for the cure of disease' (in Flint 158-161).

"Most dreadful of all sepulchres was Enon Chapel in Clare Market, where, it is said, between the years 1823-42 more than twelve thousand bodies were buried in a vault 60 feet long, 30 feet broad, and 6 1/2 feet deep" (Christie 89). It was the sheer numbers of dead that caused the problem, as well as the Victorian preference for burial over cremation. Cremation
itself did not in fact come into general practice until after Dickens's death. Dead bodies were almost as vulnerable as the living; if they were not dissected in order to help science they might be dismembered simply to make way for similarly dismemberable relatives, and few preparations on the part of the living could prevent this fate for themselves when dead.

On the Continent, however, a Victorian might come across, even seek out, dead bodies. Dickens returned frequently to the Paris Morgue “until shocked by something so repulsive that he did not have the courage for a long time to go back” (in Kaplan, Biography 215). Yet he was not so indulgent with other people’s distaste, writing to Catherine, his wife, of having visited the Morgue in June 1850 with his friend Maclise:

We looked in at the Morgue just now, where there was a body horribly mutilated with a musket ball in the head, and afterwards drowned. It made [Maclise] so sick, that to my infinite disconcertment, he sat down on a doorstep in the street, for about ten minutes, resting his cheek (like Juliet) on his hand (Lett.P 6: 120).

The Morgue “infected [Dickens] with a state which he liked to call ‘the attraction of repulsion’” (Ackroyd 518):

‘Whenever I am at Paris, I am dragged by invisible force into the Morgue. I never want to go there, but am always pulled there ... with its ghastly beds, and the swollen saturated clothes hanging up, and the water dripping, dripping all day long, upon that other swollen saturated something in the corner, like a heap of crushed over-ripe figs’ (in Kaplan, Biography 215).38

This is a scene reminiscent of Wilkie Collins’s description at the end of The Woman in White of the corpulent Count Fosco’s body, having been stabbed and dragged out of the Seine, lying, clothes hung above him, in the Paris Morgue “unowned, unknown; exposed to the flippant curiosity of a French mob!” (581). It may seem unusual to us today, but visiting the Morgue was for many Victorian travellers an almost essential stop on any sight-seeing expedition in Paris.39

Dickens was concerned, particularly when travelling in Europe, by neglect of the body after death.40 Sanders argues that the the public nature of the death revealed by places such as the Morgue where unclaimed bodies lay awaiting identification disturbed Dickens: “The naked bodies were, as he noted, like waxworks viewed without catalogues; they were
displaced and lacking in any human context” (48). Yet Dickens, like others, sought them out. In 1846 he saw dead bodies in Switzerland at the Great St. Bernard convent which he went on to describe in *Little Dorrit*:41

Beside the convent, in a little outhouse with a grated iron door which you may unbolt for yourself, are the bodies of people found in the snow who have never been claimed and are withering away—not laid down, or stretched out, but standing up, in corners and against walls; some erect and horribly human, with distinct expressions on the faces; some sunk down on their knees; some dropping over on one side; some tumbled down altogether, and presenting a heap of skulls and fibrous dust (*Lett.* P 4: 619).

Dead bodies were sought out for more specific reasons by medical students and teachers, who, with the new emphasis on dissection in the early part of the nineteenth century, needed cadavers: “It was a merit advertised by each professor that in this regard he ‘kept a good table’” (Barzun 26). There was, however, a shortage of dead bodies to be had for the purpose. Wax models were used, but were understandably far less instructive. Part of the problem was that

... to the English mind dissection was not only a revolting idea, clearly a desecration of the dead, but was troubling from a religious standpoint: How was one to assemble one’s body for the Last Judgment if parts of it had been pickled in different bottles? Could the burial services medical schools said they gave to the remnants of the bodies actually be valid? Further, the old [pre-1832] law in effect allowed dissection only of the bodies of persons executed for murder; the shame of dissection was in a sense added to the punishment for the crime, and this combination of ideas added to the average Englishman’s horror of the whole prospect (McMurtry 128).

Even in death one’s body was vulnerable, perhaps ending up sliced and diced, exhibited as a curiosity, or used as a teaching tool. Despite iron fences erected around graveyards, iron grilles or “mort-safes” installed about caskets, and posted guards, the grave robbing business flourished in the pre-1832 era. In order to obtain bodies, medical students and professors often paid black market prices to “resurrectionists” like Dickens’s Jerry Cruncher or even indulged in some furtive grave robbing themselves. “The surgeon Robert Liston, with the aid of a well-known ‘resurrectionist’ ... named Crouch, is said to have stolen the body of a hydrocephalic boy within a space of thirty minutes, even though a grave watcher was on duty” (McMurtry 128). This is the self-same Liston who Forster describes...
in his biography of Dickens as “our excellent friend” (Forster 2: 85). The more monstrous or unusual a body was, the more valuable it became.

The trade in illegally disinterred bodies went a step further, and received sensational attention throughout the country, with the case of Burke and Hare in 1828. William Burke and William Hare were two Irish resurrectionists based in Edinburgh who, with their common-law wives, decided to simply murder people and deliver these bodies (by tea chest) to their purchaser, the Anatomist Robert Knox, who apparently asked few questions. Eventually, Burke and Hare were caught and the case “generated throughout the nation a hysteria which was seldom equalled during the long remainder of the century” (Altick, Scarlet 31). The duo acknowledged killing sixteen people in nine months, and selling them each for between eight and fourteen pounds. Hare turned King’s evidence in exchange for immunity; only Burke, and his paramour Helen who was found “not proven,” were tried, for the final murder. Burke was found guilty and sentenced to hang. “Hare, who had joked through his testimony and virtually danced at his partners’ downfall, barely escaped the fury of the mob” (Barzun 29). Knox’s career was fatally tainted by the scandal.

After being publicly hanged, Burke’s skin was tanned and sold in strips, and his body dissected by Dr Alexander Monro “in what was probably the premier autopsy in history” (McDade 105). Monro lectured upon the body for two hours before a huge throng. “Those left outside rioted until arrangements were made that allowed some 30,000 to file through the dissecting room and see the remains” (Barzun 30). Sculptors made casts of his head and brain and phrenologists studied them and his skull for evidence of innate criminality in accordance with criminological thinking of the time. The case fired the public imagination and echoes of it reverberate throughout the century. One can today still see Burke’s skeleton, casts of his head made immediately after execution—“with marks of the hangman’s rope visible”—and a cast of his brain made at the time of his public dissection, together with a cast of Hare’s head, at the museum of the Department of Anatomy at the University of Edinburgh. Nearby, at the Sir Jules Thorn Historical Museum at The Royal College of
Surgeons of Edinburgh one can see a further cast of Burke’s head, together with an object that is fascinating both innately and in light of the connection between the body and writing in Dickens’s work which I discuss in later chapters. This item is a notebook bound in Burke’s skin, made after he had been dissected. The front cover is labelled quite simply

BURKE’S SKIN
POCKET BOOK

The nineteenth-century fashion for making mementos and other objects out of human hair it seems, extended in a different way to this type of “art form” which reflected both the complete vulnerability of a body and the fact that a body could be seen to be not only punishable by death but even after death. It also demonstrates people’s desire to own a piece of sensation, and many sensations of the time were centred on the body, whether dissected, resurrected, murdered, or hanged. The Burke and Hare case, providing all four, was a bonanza for broadsheet sellers and other marketeers alike.

This case was followed in 1831 by the less notorious London murder of the “Italian boy,” Carlo Ferrari, by Bishop and Williams. After being enticed to Bishop and Williams’s lodgings, the boy was drugged, suffocated in a well, and his teeth were extracted and sold to a dentist. The murderers were caught because a surgeon suspected the “freshness” of the body they attempted to sell him. There was great excitement and tremendous crowds at their execution, and newspaper accounts of the condemned men’s last confessions were sold extensively (McDade 105-06).

These two cases, pressure from medical schools, and increased public awareness of the need for medical students to gain knowledge of the human body through dissection led to the passing of Lord Warburton’s Anatomy Act of August 1832 which greatly eased the situation (McMurtry 129). The act meant that unclaimed bodies were made available to anatomy students, and it authorized legal custodians of dead bodies to deliver them to medical schools;43 despite this, however, “The popular image of the medical student and the experiment-prone doctor remained in the public mind a diabolical or even atheistic figure”
The image is one that is central to *Frankenstein*, but discussion among characters wary about doctors' habits and intentions also appear in works such as George Eliot's *Middlemarch* or Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders*. Nineteenth-century unease is similarly reflected in Dickens's highly comic portrayal of medical students, Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen, in *The Pickwick Papers*.

Dickens was fully aware of resurrection and dissection, indeed took great delight in jokes regarding the topic. In 1835, for example, he sent his name over to Vincent Dowling the editor of *Bell's Life*, as Sanders reprints (*Resurrectionists* ix):

CHARLES DICKENS,  
RESURRECTIONIST,  
*In search of a subject*.45

He is, in a sense, exactly that; indeed, he stands at both ends of the trade, for he gets his return on the subject through publishing the bodies of his characters; also, he is the surgeon whose art is dismembering and dissecting the same.

Dickens must at times have considered that this end, being resurrected and dissected, might come to himself, both as a young man terrified of destitution and as the lionized king of the literary world—surely some keen anatomist would have been more than eager to dissect him. Indeed, Dickens wrote of Shakespeare: "If he had had a Boswell, society wouldn't have respected his grave, but would calmly have had his skull in the phrenological shop-windows" (*Lett.P 3: 512*). Dickens had something resembling a Boswell in his friend John Forster, and took fitting delight in repeating a friend's joke that "Madame Tussaud intends to do Forster next ... he is to be put next Burke, in the Chamber of Horrors" (*Lett.P 4: 646*). Fitting because, as biographer, Forster was, in a sense, the next thing to a resurrectionist. He was also in a sense a surgeon, patching Dickens together in glowing terms.

The negative publicity generated by the often nefarious practices of dissectionists and resurrectionists did not, however, cast the entire medical community into disrepute. Despite
the abysmal state of hospitals in general, some advances were made in surgical procedures during the Victorian period which helped to preserve lives while at the same time reminding people of the physical hazards of life. The Napoleonic Wars had increased the need for surgeons and provided a good practical training ground for them, evidenced by the prevalence of wooden legs in Dickens’s youth, images of which later found recurrent entry into his work. London was a centre of world surgery during Dickens’s writing career (Cartwright, Surgery 8-9).46 When he was born in 1812 “neither anaesthesia nor antiseptic procedures were known, and to present-day sensibilities a Victorian operating room would have many of the qualities of a sadistic nightmare” (McMurtry 129). Death rates were high: “Of the so aptly named ‘capital’ or major operations, amputation was that most commonly performed and carried a mortality in the region of 40 per cent” (Cartwright, Surgery 13). Limbs were amputated because they were crushed, gangrenous, or tumorous. Road accidents led to many amputations, without which the patient would swiftly die from infection; on average four or five people were killed each week in the streets of London during the 1860s (Cartwright, Surgery 13). Operations that involved opening body cavities were less frequent and usually attempted only when the patient would have otherwise died. Success was rare because peritonitis frequently set in (McMurtry 129-30). All operations were performed on fully conscious patients who were held down by attendants, often themselves medical students; speed was the mark of a successful surgeon and was naturally what patients most desired. “Robert Listo …. a determined dissector, was famous for the swiftness with which he could take off a limb” (McMurtry 129), but not all operations were fast, and difficult or unusual ones could take from two to eight hours (Cartwright, Surgery 14).

It was not only medical students or other surgeons who came to watch operations, but also the public:

A Times account of 1842 records that William Fergusson removed the whole of one side of the upper jaw from a twelve-year-old child, without any form of anaesthesia whatsoever, in the presence of over two hundred spectators. In 1830 Aston Key of Guy’s, by the advice of his uncle Astley Cooper, excised an enormous tumour,
Weighing fifty-six pounds, from a Chinaman who had travelled to London from Canton for the operation. The operation took two hours and was witnessed by a crowd of six hundred and eighty people; in fact the death of the unfortunate patient was attributed to prolonged exposure in an atmosphere so poisoned by human exhalations that many onlookers fainted (Cartwright, Surgery 12).

We find it quite chilling today to think of people walking in off the streets to watch, as if it were a spectator sport, not merely dissections, or even operations on anaesthetized patients, but excruciating operations and amputations on living, breathing, fully conscious bodies writhing before them in agony. There is no evidence that Dickens himself was a spectator at a live operation, although he may well have been, as he knew Robert Liston and many other leaders of the medical profession: “most of our skilful doctors are my friends”47 he wrote in 1841 (Lett.P 2: 341).48

What could hurt the body and what could help the body were fascinations of his age, and in a time of physical precariousness new advances in medicine, physiology, and science were of close personal interest to every thinking person. Dickens clearly knew, for example, that the first thing to be done after an amputation was to tie the arteries in order to curtail the bleeding, and indeed identified himself to some extent with the role of surgeon, often “dismembering” the living characters in his novels with great finesse but with far less blood and pain. In Martin Chuzzlewit he most explicitly describes his art as story-teller as akin to that of the surgeon:

As the surgeon’s first care after amputating a limb is to take up the arteries the cruel knife has severed, so it is the duty of this history, which in its remorseless course has cut from the Pecksniffian trunk its right arm, Mercy, to look to the parent stem, and see how in all its various ramifications it got on without her (469-70; ch. 30).

Dickens’s identification also extended to patients, who usually showed great fortitude when undergoing surgery, as shown by the following account, written by a man who in 1811 at the age of “about forty,” had a stone removed from his bladder. The operation is almost certainly the same as that endured by Dickens’s father, without anaesthesia,49 a few days before his death in 1851. John Dickens’s reaction seems to have been in many ways similar to this man’s:
‘My habit and constitution being good, it required little preparation of body, and my mind was made up... I was prepared to receive a shock of pain of extreme violence, and so much had I overrated it, that the first incisions did not even make me wince, although I had declared that it was not my intention to restrain such impulse, convinced that such effort of restraint could only lead to additional exhaustion. At subsequent moments, therefore, I did cry out under the pain, but was allowed to have gone through the operation with great firmness.

The forcing up of the staff, prior to the introduction of the gorget, gave me the first real pain. (The staff was a curved director upon which the surgeon made his incision, and the gorget a sharp tubular instrument.) But this instantly subsided after the incision of the bladder was made, the rush of urine appearing to relieve it, and soothe the wound.

When the forceps was introduced, the pain was again very considerable, and every movement of the instrument, in endeavouring to find the stone, increased it. After several ineffectual attempts to grasp the stone, I heard the operator say, in the lowest whisper, “it is a little awkward, it lies under my hand. Give me the curved forceps:” upon which he withdrew the others. When the other forceps was introduced, I had again to undergo the searching for the stone, and heard Mr Cline say, “I have got it.” I had probably by this time conceived that the worst was over; but when the necessary force was applied to withdraw the stone, the sensation was such as I cannot find words to describe. In addition to the positive pain, there was something most peculiar in the feel. The duration, however, of this really trying part of the operation was short; and when the words “now, sir, it is all over!” struck my ear, the ejaculation of “thank God! thank God!” was uttered with a fervency and fulness of heart which can only be conceived. I am quite unable to describe my feelings at the moment.... Upon the whole, should I be again similarly afflicted, I should not hesitate in again submitting to the same mode of relief, provided I could place myself in equally able hands’ (in Cartwright, Surgery 23-24).

Cartwright comments on this extraordinary measure of acceptance of some patients by saying that, in “a world which regarded fortitude as a desirable virtue and which counted suffering of small importance, the pain of rarely performed surgical operations aroused little interest and no protest” (Surgery 24-25). This may be something of an exaggeration, but Dickens himself seems to have protested little before undergoing an operation in 1841.

The advent of anaesthesia changed the surgical experience for the nineteenth-century body. Alcohol and opium had been used for dulling pain for centuries, and ether and nitrous oxide had been used to produce amusement at “frolics” since the early years of the century, but it was in 1846 that anaesthesia, recently discovered in America, was first used in England. Anaesthesia freed patients from pain, gave surgeons longer to operate, and reduced
the number of deaths from shock. Cartwright notes that “the steel-nerved Liston ended his first painless operation with tears in his eyes” (Surgery 35).

Chloroform\textsuperscript{50} was announced only ten months after ether, and both were accepted into amputation and other surgical procedures fairly rapidly, although anaesthesia was not used for operations on a widespread basis until the 1860s (McMurtry 130). There was much debate over the appropriateness of relieving the pain of childbirth on both religious grounds, “in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children” (Genesis 3:16), and on the grounds that chloroform encouraged “lewdness” and sexual excitement in women under its influence.\textsuperscript{51} Dickens was swift, however, to insist that his wife Catherine use it during her next delivery as she had had difficult births before, and he later reports that both were very pleased with the anaesthetic’s effects when this birth proved also to be difficult.

Anaesthesia quickly increased the amount, range, and survival rates of surgery undertaken; patients “were said to be readier to submit to the knife and ‘promising young men’ quickly found that they could ‘carve their way into practice’” (Smith 272). The next major advance in surgery was to be antiseptic procedures which, although antisepsis had its origins in the 1860s, were not widely adopted until after Dickens’s death.

That a body warranted medical attention was no guarantee, in the nineteenth century, that it would receive it. Most people underwent their illnesses and medical treatment at home; they were born at home and died at home, especially the middle and upper classes. Home was, in fact, often the safest place to be, as there the risk of cross infection was low and a patient could suggest certain treatments. Hospitals were generally charitable or voluntary and dealt mainly with the poor. To be admitted one usually required a letter of reference from a subscriber or governor which for many people was impossible to obtain.\textsuperscript{52} Being in a hospital was considered by genteel folk a disgraceful thing, almost tantamount to being in the workhouse. Betsey Trotwood’s husband, for example dies “‘in the hospital’” (DC 670; ch. 54). Conditions in medical hospitals ranged from bad to abysmal, and infection was rife. The eighteenth century had seen a number of municipal hospitals built to treat the
poor sick along with "fever" hospitals to treat specific illnesses, and these continued to increase in the nineteenth century (McMurtry 131).

For a white-collar worker, who was "too wealthy to merit admission to voluntary hospitals, too proud to enter an infirmary, and too poor to afford expensive home nursing," hospital treatment was hard to get (Cartwright, Social 163). It was to help people in exactly this situation that Dickens became involved with Southwood Smith in the founding of a "Sanatorium, or Sick House for Students, Governesses, Clerks, Young Artists, and so forth, who are above Hospitals, and not rich enough to be well attended in illness in their own Lodgings" (Lett. P 4: 116).

For those at the lower reaches of society things could be quite desperate."In 1834 about 10,000 workhouse inmates needed medical care and the number had risen to over 50,000 in 1861" (Cartwright, Social 158). Increasing numbers of people and illnesses meant that by 1861 most 'general' hospitals were no longer admitting

children, the chronic sick, or patients suffering from epilepsy, mental disorders, syphilis, advanced tuberculosis and skin disease. The Fever Hospital, Islington, and two workhouses were the only London institutions willing to accept patients suffering from infectious disease (Cartwright, Social 158).

Dickens was a great voice in declaring the need for children's hospitals, and in the early 1850s the first were opened in London, Liverpool, Norwich, and Manchester. As Maggie's refrain in Little Dorrit indicates these were great improvements upon previous facilities:

"But what a nice hospital! So comfortable, wasn't it? Oh so nice it was. Such a Ev'nly place!... Such beds there is there!... Such lemonades! Such oranges! Such d'licious broth and wine! Such Chicking! Oh, AIN'T it a delightful place to go and stop at!" (LD 99; 1: ch. 9)

As a hospital patient one's body was at times, however, more vulnerable than if one had remained without treatment. "Dissection rooms stank and ... were rarely cleaned. Rats were numerous. They were said to be boldest at the Little Windmill Street medical school, where they took pieces off the dissecting tables during demonstrations" (Smith 268). Before the advent of antisepsis a doctor might come directly and uncleaned from such a room to treat
patients. Mortality rates varied from hospital to hospital, and with no follow up statistics it is hard to gain an accurate reflection of what percentage survived. “Research ... suggest[s] that over a third of patients released from hospital as cured after surgery died within two years” (Smith 271). Cures both of disease or by surgery in the Victorian era were, for most physical ailments, never sure to heal a patient and, as deathbed scenes in nineteenth-century literature frequently reveal, were often palliative efforts before almost certain death.

vi

Surgical practices could lead to death or dismemberment for the Victorian body as could accidents from industrial mishaps, transportation collisions, and drownings as a result of shipwreck. Industrial accidents not infrequently caused fatal maimings and loss of limbs. To see this, one can examine such a work as Narrative of the Experience and Sufferings of William Dodd, Factory Cripple, London, 1841 (extracts in Flint 92-96). Dickens wrote to Forster in 1841 “I subscribed for a couple of copies of this little book” (Lett.P 2: 346), and, even though Dodd was an “exposed scoundrel,” (Flint 93) his writing reveals the dangers of breathing in lime dust and other “pernicious ingredients” (in Flint 93), of over-exertion leading to tiredness and machine accident, of the loss or paralyzation of hands, of strangulation and death by machine and of the stunted growth of children working in the factories.

Not all accidents were industrial; in 1861 Dickens wrote of “a horrible accident in Edinburgh. One of the seven-storey old houses in the High Street fell when it was full of people” (Lett.N 3: 260). He, like others, went to see the ruins while people were still being dug out (Lett.N 3: 261). More frequent accidents were, however, caused by means of transport, whether carriage or train.57 Catherine Dickens escaped unharmed from a carriage accident in 1848 but the footman who had jumped from the carriage was “greatly cut and bruised from head to heel” (Lett.P 5: 387) and was, Dickens wrote “like Mr. Squeers—‘a brown-paper parcel chock full of nothing but groans’” (Lett.P 5: 389). In 1854 the thirteen
year old son of Dickens's “man Cooper” did not return home one night from his job as
Dickens relates:

Father conferring with Policeman on disappearance, up comes strange boy saying that
how he as eerd tell, as a boy is a lyin in the ‘Bonus,’ as was run over. Wretched father
goes to the Bonus ... and finds his child with his head smashed to pieces! He was
walking on some planks by the roadside, a plank tilted, he fell under a coal waggon as
it was advancing, and was picked up as Dead as Adam. I cannot get it out of my mind
(Lett. P 7: 319).

The accident which had the greatest impact on Dickens, revealing harshly and
unhesitatingly the body’s vulnerability to instantaneous distortion, dismemberment, or death
was the Staplehurst train disaster on the 9th of June 1865, five years to the day before his
death and a memento mori from which he never truly recovered. “I was in the terrific
Staplehurst accident yesterday,” he wrote, “and worked for hours among the dying and dead.
I was in the carriage that did not go over, but went off the line, and hung over the bridge in an
inexplicable manner. No words can describe the scene” (Lett. N 3: 423). His letters repeat
that he was more shaken by the ghastly work among the dying and dead than by the
“dragging of the carriage” (see series of letters Lett. N 3: 423-29 some of which were, he
wrote, “not all in my own hand, because I am too much shaken to write many notes” [424,
425]; “I write two or three notes and turn faint and sick” [427]). Ten people were killed,
seven women and three men, and forty more were injured (Hill, “Staplehurst” 148). As
Walter Dexter, editor of the Nonesuch edition of Dickens’s letters notes, “His escape was
miraculous” (423). Dickens crawled out of the carriage and

Looking down, he saw that the side of the viaduct was gone. Below was a sheer ten-
foot drop, at the bottom a scene of bloody, mangled bodies and traumatized grief. The
first quiet crying and moaning for help had begun. Dickens ‘could not have imagined so
appalling a scene’ (Kaplan, Biography 459).

In a letter written four days after the accident Dickens tells of his experience. After helping
empty his carriage, he writes

‘I got into the carriage again for my brandy flask, took off my travelling hat for a basin,
climbed down the brickwork, and filled my hat with water. Suddenly I came upon a
staggering man, covered with blood (I think he must have been flung clean out of his
carriage), with such a frightful cut across the skull that I couldn’t bear to look at him. I poured some water over his face, and gave him some to drink, then gave him some brandy, and laid him down on the grass.

He said 'I am gone,' and died afterwards. Then I stumbled over a lady lying on her back against a little pollard tree, with the blood streaming over her face (which was lead color) in a number of distinct little streams from her head. I asked her if she could swallow a little brandy, and she just nodded, and I gave her some and left her for somebody else. The next time I passed her she was dead. [A] man ... came running up to me and implored me to help him find his wife, who was afterward found dead. No imagination can conceive the ruin of the carriages, or the extraordinary weights under which the people were lying, or the complications into which they were twisted up among iron and wood, and mud and water' (in Mamie Dickens, Recall 109-10).

He recollected the presence of mind he had immediately after the accident: “I instantly remembered that I had the MS. of a number with me, and clambered back into the carriage for it. But in writing these scanty words of recollection I feel the shake and am obliged to stop” (Lett.N 3: 426). He did, indeed climb back in for his number of Our Mutual Friend, and must have realized at that moment that his words were as vulnerable as his body; perhaps that is why, after finishing that novel (that specific number ended too short “’a thing I have not done since Pickwick!’” [in Forster 2: 294]), he did not begin another until the last year of his life but instead relived his old words through his readings as if trying to bolster his body with them, trying to transform it from mere breath and blood into the invulnerability of variegated and immortal characters, and, at the same time, preserve his words by repeating them, securing them to his body, making the two one invincible creation.

Forster says that “with characteristic energy he resisted the effects upon himself ... [which] were [thereafter] perhaps never wholly absent” (2: 294). Mamie Dickens concurs:

he never recovered entirely from the shock. More than a year later he writes:... ‘to this day there sometimes comes over me, on a railway and in a hansom-cab, or any sort of conveyance, for a few seconds, a vague sense of dread that I have no power to check’

she recalls an instance of this:

my father suddenly clutched the arms of the railway carriage seat, while his face grew ashy pale, and great drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead, and though he tried hard to master the dread, it was so strong that he had to leave the train at the next station (Recall 111-12).
Dolby, Dickens's readings manager, writes of another near accident in Ireland on Dickens's farewell reading tour: "Possibly having the recollection of the dreadful Staplehurst accident in his mind, Mr. Dickens threw himself to the bottom of the carriage, and we all followed his example" (Dolby 367). For Dickens it was a second lucky escape.59

Drowning was another accident that could befall the nineteenth-century body which was more vulnerable to this disaster than our own because the lifesaving techniques so widely known today had not yet been developed nor had widespread teaching of swimming been instituted. The Royal Humane Society had been established in 1774 in order to set up lifesaving stations60 equipped with ropes and poles and the society gave out medals to those who tried to rescue drowning people (McMurtry 137). Experiments with bellows and resuscitation tubes were tried in the late eighteenth century but by "1832 the Royal Humane Society had abandoned the use of these bellows and tubes and had reverted to rubbing and warming their drowned patients" (D. J. Wilkinson 350). Various chest compression methods were also tried. Although mouth to mouth resuscitation was used on at least one occasion in 1732 it "was to be 1959 [sic] before expired air, mouth to mouth, ventilation was shown to be effective for resuscitation and reintroduced" (D. J. Wilkinson 351).

It is not surprising, then, that one reads of a number of drowning victims in Dickens's novels, such as Ham and Steerforth (DC) or Bradley Headstone and Rogue Riderhood (OMF).61 Dickens almost saw his own brother, Frederick, drown in the Bay at Albaro, Italy,62 and recounts other incidents of actual drownings in Europe.63 Much of the nineteenth century discussion regarding resuscitation techniques centered on the body's appearance of being dead when still alive, and on how, if at all, one could tell if a "drowned" person were really dead.

Other discussion surrounded the aftermath of shipwrecks. A number of articles in Household Words, for instance, discussed the unfairness of "coastal rescuers" being able to get salvage fees for property saved from shipwrecks, while rewarded with nothing, or a
pittance, for saving drowning people from the same wreck. The number of shipwrecks, off the coast of England as well as in distant oceans, was high:

there is ... a loss of life, on our coasts, amounting to between seven and eight hundred human beings every year—few of which can be ‘insured,’ but most of which leave behind them widows, mothers, sisters, and orphans.

Last year [1850], six hundred and eighty-one English and Foreign vessels were wrecked on the coasts, and within the seas, of the British Isles.... In the disastrous gale of the 13th of January, 1843, one hundred and three vessels were wrecked on the shores of the United Kingdom (“Life and Luggage” HW 4 [1851]: 153).

Dickens himself had both an avid interest in tales of shipwreck and legitimate fears that he might be the victim of one. Travelling in America in 1842 he writes: “I have fitted out the whole of my little company with LIFE PRESERVERS, which I inflate with great solemnity when we get aboard any boat, and keep ... ready for use upon a moment’s notice” (in Forster 1: 230). His trans-Atlantic crossing by steamer in January 1842 was doubtless a stimulus to this caution. He wrote of a storm at sea: “For two or three hours we gave it up as a lost thing.... I never expected to see the day again, and resigned myself to God as well as I could” (Lett.P 3: 11). In the same letter he describes the steamer running aground coming into Halifax harbour:

the ship STRUCK! A rush upon deck followed of course. The men (I mean the crew! think of this) were kicking off their shoes and throwing off their jackets preparatory to swimming ashore; the pilot was beside himself; the passengers dismayed; and everything in the most intolerable confusion and hurry (Lett.P 3: 13-14).

Dickens decided to sail back from America rather than face the dangers of the new steamer technology a second time.

Escaping from the undesirable consequences of a sudden and unexpected accident was one thing, but keeping in good health generally was another and one that obsessed the middle classes. Treatments like bleeding, the indiscriminate use of narcotic drugs such as
opium and morphine, and alternative medical approaches such as mesmerism, water cures and homeopathy constituted common practices for preserving one’s health.

No topic more occupied the Victorian mind than Health—not religion, or politics, or Improvement, or Darwinism.... Literary critics thought of Health when they read a new book of poems; social theorists thought of Health when they envisioned an ideal society (Haley 3).

The second half of the century saw a measurable improvement in general health, but throughout Dickens’s lifetime the “constant threat of illness in the Victorian home made people conscious of their bodies, anxious to know how their bodies worked, and prepared to see a moral significance in the laws of life” (Haley 5-6). Even feeling “off colour” could cause great anxiety because the “beginnings of such a disease as typhoid were so mild and gradual as to be subjectively indistinguishable from, say, a cold or a moderate case of influenza, or from any number of nonfatal complaints” (Haley 11). Many famous Victorians “were, or thought they were, constantly afflicted” (Haley 12), and “Memoirs of Victorians are often preoccupied with details about physical complaints.... John Stuart Mill, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and George Henry Lewes all admitted to chronic debility” (Mitchell 355). Dickens in letters frequently mentions suffering from colds, sleeplessness, biliousness, rheumatism of the face and so on, though in other letters he mentions fabricating a cold to avoid a social engagement. It seemed to have been “form” in a society bedevilled with disease that in letters one mentioned slight or major changes in one’s health and was interested in the details of other people’s sicknesses. It was also a way of speaking about the body in literal rather than metaphorical terms; in other ways, such as sexually, the body was generally excluded from common discussion by Victorian delicacy or relegated to the highly metaphorical.

But what cures for the body did people discuss if they become ill? Although medical treatments were improving, “the ‘lowering treatment’ was still much in vogue, that is—bleeding, emetics and purging. This often was enough to kill the patient when vitality flowed feebly and at low ebb” (Ward 523). Bleeding, in fact, remained a common treatment
throughout the century. Dickens often writes in his letters of having been or having to be “cupped” (bled): “I was very unwell all last night, and my head though better is far from being in its usual state to-day. Should it not be quite well tomorrow, I think I will make up my mind to be bled without delay” (*Lett.P* 1: 99). He describes his friend John Leech as having “twenty of his namesakes on his temples this morning” (in Forster 2: 55).

Other commonly used cures were wine and narcotic drugs, the latter then legally and fairly cheaply obtained. Godfrey’s Cordial and Batley’s Sedative Solution, respectively preparations of morphine and opium, were popular, and babies were often given narcotic syrups to keep them from crying (McMurtry 134-35). Between 1800 and 1840 morphine, quinine, atropine, digitalin, codeine, and iodine were discovered or developed (Haley 5). By the second half of the century, however, some drugs were controlled, particularly poisons which, through an Act in the late 1860s, could not be sold by pharmacists to persons unknown or “unintroduced,” and for which purchases had to be signed (McMurtry 135).

There were many other self-help methods or curative fads to choose from. Dickens travelled with a medicine chest and ordered a sea-going chest for his second journey to America in 1867:

> I take four men with me, and want bottles of a proportionate size, the only medicines I care to have are those I usually carry for neuralgic touches, namely Laudanum—Ether—Sal Volatile, and those pills of Dr. Brinton’s with which Dolby plays at ball down his throat when he has nothing else to do (*Lett.N* 3: 559).

Although one could treat oneself from a medicine chest and its guidebook, an article in *Household Words* (“Hints on Emergencies” 2 [1850]: 47-48) warns against do-it-yourself surgery. Standard recommendations were cleanliness, quiet, and a change of air, all of which Dickens heartily approved of, along with plenty of cold water, both bathed in, or in his case showered in, and taken: “I have faith in Hydropathy myself—drink cold water night and morning—and pour it down my back besides” (*Lett.P* 4: 28). In another fad, however, he was less convinced:
I have never had any faith in the homoeopathic system and therefore have never tried it. I am inclined to think that it is principally successful with people who have nothing the matter with them, and that active diseases where there is a vigorous action for evil going on, require more decided remedies (Lett. P 7: 647).

The curative craze of the period that most impressed Dickens was mesmerism.

Mesmerism attracted many people interested in physiognomy or phrenology which were both popular theories which sought to decipher character based on physical appearance, particularly from examining the shape and prominence of certain carefully defined “organs” of the head. Although mesmerism had quite a popular following, it was not mainstream medicine. It did, however, attract many literary figures for example, “Coleridge, Wordsworth, Browning, Tennyson, Arnold, Clough, Collins, Thackeray, Trollope, and both Carlyles”;

Tennyson, like Dickens, actually mesmerised others (Kaplan, Mesmerism 26). Often called animal magnetism, mesmerism was a precursor of hypnotism and ostensibly used the power of the mesmeriser’s mind to cure a patient’s various physical or mental ailments. Dickens’s good friend, John Elliotson (1791-1868), a professor of clinical medicine at University College in London (1831-38), was one of mesmerism’s chief proponents, and it was from Elliotson that Dickens learned the art, “against all [his] preconceived opinions” (Lett. P 3: 23). This power of mind over body appealed to Dickens, as did the idea of being able to cure the body through sheer force of will. Ironically, it was in large part his own excess of work, stubbornly pursued as a matter of “will,” that eventually killed him.

Dickens’s interest in, and practice of, mesmerism seems to have continued until the end of his life, but “he would never allow himself to be mesmerised, not on any account” (Ackroyd 245). “I am horribly hard at work” he once wrote “and dare not be mesmerized, lest it should damage me at all. Even a day’s head ache would be a serious thing just now” (Lett. P 2: 342). The mention of “damage” is revealing; he did not want to be vulnerable in body or in mind through another’s agency, wanting always to assert his own control over the bodies of his “patients,” his characters, and himself: “what a thing it is to have Power” (Lett. P 4: 235) he once wrote of his writing, but the feeling extends to all areas of his life, and
his mesmerism was merely his most literal exertion of power. Dickens showed the same obsessive enthusiasm over his “patients” as Elliotson did, but mesmerism certainly did not have the negative effect on his career that it eventually had on Elliotson’s, who was driven from the medical establishment because of it.78

viii

Penal reform, with its new techniques of dealing with crime and punishment, also underwent pervasive reevaluation in the nineteenth century. Modifications respecting the treatment of criminals, the institution of life imprisonment for capital offences, the cessation of public executions, and the sensationalized public perception of “murder,” all indicate changes of one sort or another with regard to the body itself. Considering criminals as a group, Dickens’s views could be harsh; however, with the individual criminal, he was more sympathetic. His later characters, such as Bradley Headstone and John Jasper, show Dickens’s increasing interest in and identification with the criminal mind, but even earlier scenes, like the flight of Bill Sikes, are not unsympathetic. Indeed, near the end of his life Dickens became obsessed with his reading “Sikes and Nancy.”

Although a “multiplicity of capital crimes lasted till Dickens’s day” (Christie 24), after 1832 murder was, in practice, nearly the only crime to be punished by death. The year 1820 saw the last beheading after hanging, and the public dissection of the bodies of particular hanged criminals was stopped in 1832. Transportation to Australia for criminals like Dickens’s Abel Magwitch did not totally cease until 1867 (Avery 234-35). The last public hanging took place on May 26, 1868.

It was in the nineteenth century that imprisonment for long periods, up to life, was first used as a punishment. It was not only criminals who were imprisoned. Imprisonment for debt continued until the 1860s, and John Dickens’s family suffered this when Charles was a boy. In the criminal prisons, flogging was fairly often still used, and hard labour was a common part of a sentence. Around the middle of the century interest grew in encouraging penitence among
the convicted through long sentences, silence, and solitude (McMurtry 182). Dickens had seen the "Separate System" of prisons in America, which was of current interest to penal reformers in England, but did not himself like the system, preferring the "Silent System" under which "prisoners worked on the treadmill, or picked oakum, while rigid silence was maintained... he preferred a regime which relied more upon punishment than upon moral improvement" (Ackroyd 377). Dickens's "lifetime coincide[d] with the greatest period of legal and penal reform in our history" especially of criminal law and institutions (Collins, Crime 2), and Dickens's own views on these subjects did not remain static. Philip Collins suggests that, as his views towards criminal offenders became more severe in later years, Dickens's fictional criminals became more fully understood and closer to him in social position and character (Crime 22):

In the '40s, too, he had advocated the abolition of capital punishment; by 1859, he was threatening to hang any Home Secretary who stepped in between one particular 'black scoundrel' and the gallows. 'I doubt the whipping panacea gravelly,' he wrote in 1852 during a wave of brutal assaults; sixteen years later, during a similar outbreak, he writes of the street ruffian—'I would have his back scarified often and deep' (Collins, Crime 17).

Dickens frequently visited prisons, and prisons recur often in his work, representing the restriction and incarceration of the body. He was interested in crime, detection, and the police, but he did not "throng" as so many people did to see executions after having seen two of the more famous ones. The reaction of spectators to executions deeply disturbed him; in September 1860 he wrote

Coming here from the Station this morning, I met, coming from the Execution of the Walworth Murderer, such a tide of ruffians as never could have flowed from any point but the Gallows. Without any figure of speech, it turned one white and sick to behold them (Lett.N 3: 176).

By the time he wrote this, Dickens had seen all he needed to see and had expressed his views on capital punishment in the press. In July 1840 he witnessed the hanging of François Benjamin Courvoisier. Almost spontaneously deciding to attend the execution, he was accompanied by his brother-in-law Henry Burnett and his friend Maclise:
‘Just once,’ [Dickens] said, ‘I should like to watch a scene like this, and see the end of the Drama.’ So he went into a nearby house and found one upper room still to let, from the window of which they watched the crowd beneath and the building of the scaffold (Ackroyd 313).

At eight in the morning the body swung, the neck broke and

there was a moment of complete silence at that ‘sight of helplessness and agony.’... Dickens could not get the ‘horrible sight’ out of his mind.... The onlookers disgusted him as much as the execution itself. ‘I did not see one token in all the immense crowd ... of any one emotion suitable to the occasion. No sorrow, no salutary terror, no abhorrence, no seriousness; nothing but ribaldry, debauchery, levity, drunkenness, and flaunting [sic] vice in fifty other shapes’ (Kaplan, Biography 199).85

Dickens wrote two letters to the Morning Chronicle86 concerning the conduct of the trial itself, but did not write publicly on the death penalty until six years later when he published a series of five letters in the Daily News87 in which he advocated abolishing capital punishment.88

On 13 November 1849, after initial reluctance, he attended the Mannings’ execution outside Horsemonger Lane Gaol.89 Again appalled by the behaviour of the crowds90 he wrote a letter to The Times the same day, followed by another four days later.91 “He withdrew none of the arguments against Capital Punishment of his five Daily News articles of 1846,” (Lett.P 5: viii), but limited his condemnation of the practice to public hangings and urged that in future executions be conducted privately and solemnly. The letters, and the retrenchment, provoked controversy, and were even “printed as handbills and distributed in the streets” (Ackroyd 575). Forster credits them with beginning “an active agitation against public executions which never ceased until the salutary change” (2: 87).92 In 1864, he re-confirmed his Times stance:

I should be glad to abolish both [Public Executions and Capital Punishment], if I knew what to do with the Savages of civilization. As I do not, I would rid Society of them, when they shed blood, in a very solemn manner but would bar out the present audience (Lett.N 3: 378).

In Pictures From Italy he wrote of a murderer’s beheading he had witnessed in Rome in 1845:
He immediately kneeled down, below the knife. His neck fitting into a hole, made for the purpose, in a cross plank, was shut down, by another plank above; exactly like the pillory. Immediately below him was a leathern bag. And into it his head rolled instantly.

The executioner was holding it by the hair, and walking with it round the scaffold, showing it to the people, before one quite knew that the knife had fallen heavily, and with a rattling sound.

When it had travelled round the four sides of the scaffold, it was set upon a pole in front—a little patch of black and white, for the long street to stare at, and the flies to settle on. The eyes turned upward, as if he had avoided the sight of the leathern bag, and looked to the crucifix. Every tinge and hue of life had left it in that instant. It was dull, cold, livid, wax. The body also.

There was a great deal of blood.... A strange appearance was the apparent annihilation of the neck. The head was taken off so close, that it seemed as if the knife had narrowly escaped crushing the jaw, or shaving off the ear; and the body looked as if there were nothing left above the shoulder.... It was an ugly, filthy, careless, sickening spectacle.... The speculators in the lottery, station themselves at favourable points for counting the gouts of blood that spirt out, here or there; and buy that number. It is pretty sure to have a run upon it (PI 391).

Dickens also details in a letter the hanging in Genoa of two men who had robbed a priest and throttled to death his woman servant. He refused to attend the hanging, knowing he should be "horrified," but still manages, from his man Roche’s description, to paint a picture almost as vivid as if he had:

It was very dreadful, I understand: one man standing by, while the other was hanged: and Jack Ketch dangling with his arms on the cross beam, and dancing on the quivering body! Roche went—and could eat nothing for a long time afterwards (Lett.P 4: 307).

From the numerous prayers given up for the two men hanged, Dickens inferred that “a morbid sympathy for criminals is not wholly peculiar to England, though it affects more people in that country perhaps than in any other” (in Forster 1: 363).

Murder, both "real life" and fictional was of greater interest than any other crime to the Victorians. It was an abiding popular fascination, perhaps as a form of emotional release, almost a "festivity," in lives restricted by economic and social circumstances. The Victorian response to murder seems to have been not so much a shudder as a feeling of frisson (Altick, Scarlet 10). The expanding press meant that news of murders and hangings could be spread more quickly and widely and accounts of these were great selling points with the public (Altick, Deadly Encounters 6-7). “Penny dreadfuls,” “shilling shockers,” and other murder
filled broadsheets were sold about the streets “by street vendors who shouted the headlines, startling the populace95 with ‘Dreadful Murder’, ‘Pool of Blood’, ‘Female Body’, ‘Eaten by Rats’, ‘Missing Head’” (McDade 100), while large numbers of people attended executions in a spirit of great revelry. The most memorable tale of this type, indeed of Victorian murder, is that of Sweeney Todd the demon barber who makes pies out of his customers.96

Dickens’s writing career spanned the period from the Newgate novel to the sensation novel, and as Philip Collins states, murder “is prominent ... only in the first eight years of his career, up to Martin Chuzzlewit, and in its last six years, when he produces Our Mutual Friend, the Sikes and Nancy reading, and Edwin Drood” (Crime 283). It should be noted then that

If it is true that no other Victorian novelist relied as often as Dickens did upon man’s homicidal proclivities, it is also true that no popular or would-be popular novelist of the sixties and early seventies wholly overlooked the possibilities of the subject (Altick, Scarlet 75).97

Many people, including Dickens, set off on jaunts to visit the sights of recent real life murders.98

Poisoners were also fairly numerous at the time,99 one of whom was “Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, the forger and poisoner,” whom Dickens “later drew upon for Julius Slinkton in Hunted Down and Rigaud in Little Dorrit” (Lett.P 1: 277 n. 3).100 No poisoning case, however, captured the imagination of the public like the most notorious case of dismemberment of the time, the crime of James Greenacre:

On December 28, 1836, a London policeman discovered on a building site near the Pine Apple toll bar, Edgeware road, a sack containing a quantity of bloody clothing and the torso of a woman, lacking head and legs. Ten days later, the head was found jammed in the sluice of the Ben Jonson lock in the Regent’s Canal, Stepney: after another interval a pair of legs, which perfectly fitted the torso, came to light near Camberwell (Altick, Scarlet 37-38).

The body could not be immediately identified so the head was preserved in spirits of wine, and in March someone finally recognized it as Hannah Brown, a widow missing since Christmas. Greenacre, her fiancé, arrested along with his paramour, Sarah Gale, confessed
that he had killed her, claiming that they had quarreled (a case of the cheater cheated over what each person would bring property-wise into the marriage like the Lammles), and in anger he had knocked her down. He said that he believed that he had killed her, but, although senseless, she was still alive when he cut off her head, after which he proceeded to dismember the rest of her body (McDade 104).

This is, of course, ghastly enough, but what captured the public mind even more were the perambulations Greenacre took as he disposed of the various body parts, the journey of the head being the most chilling and original. Greenacre wrapped the head in a silk handkerchief, and carrying it under his coat, boarded an omnibus, transferring once during the trip. Presumably apocryphal stories soon went the rounds, one being that Greenacre drolly said to the conductor that “by right he ought to pay for two passengers,” and another being that he nearly fainted with fright when, being asked the fare, the conductor replied “sixpence a head.” This is the kind of conjunction involving humour, dismemberment, and literalization that Dickens himself was to refine and use repeatedly in his fiction. Greenacre disposed of the legs in a marsh, and wrapped the torso in sacking and carried it on his back through the streets, before resting his burden on the tailboard of a cart, and then completing this disposal by cab (Altick, Scarlet 39-40; McDade 104). The case provoked great public interest, and it has been “estimated ... that over 1,650,000 broadsides were issued describing the crime, trial, confession, and execution” (McDade 104).

Other dismemberment-murders of the time included that committed by Daniel Good, who in 1842 sawed apart his paramour Jane Jones, “burned the head and limbs ... and buried her trunk beneath a pile of hay” (Altick, Scarlet 40 n. 48). The Waterloo Bridge mystery of 1857 concerned a body, missing a head, which had been found chopped into twenty pieces, and in 1851, in Norwich, a body was virtually diced up and strewn all around the town. It was not until 1869 that the case was solved when William Sheward confessed that he had killed his first wife and alone distributed her body, which had taken a week of full time work (Altick, Scarlet 222-23). One wonders if these minuscule pieces of flesh discovered in 1851, at a time
when Dickens had just visited Norwich in order to see in the surrounding area the site of another murder, added some impetus to his description of Krook’s fleshly remains, such as they were, in the following year.

There were other aspects of the body’s vulnerability to murder that were not as widely discussed. Infant mortality was not solely caused by disease. A Privy Council investigation in the 1860s “discovered the frightful truth that excessive mortality was caused by drugging” (Cartwright Social 111). This was often accidental, but infanticide was not infrequent, and many indeed felt a sneaking sympathy with it (including Dickens with his ever burgeoning fleet of children) in the sense of understanding how the wretchedly poor could be driven to it. In The Chimes the seamstress, Meg Veck, sets off to drown herself and her child in the Thames, a situation Dickens based on the case of Mary Furley.103 Hers was a desperate though not untypical case of the body’s vulnerability to poverty, distress, ill-treatment and the hardship of the workhouse:

‘on going to Bethnal-green workhouse the eldest child became ill from some affection of the head.... The barber who [shaved the child’s head] was drunk, and in consequence he cut pieces of flesh from the head of the child. The wounds became very bad ... and on their being cured the child’s eyes became sore. An eruption also appeared all over its body, which she attributed solely to the child being fed at the workhouse on hard beef. She requested that this might be changed to mutton but this was refused. She then came to the determination of leaving the house’ (The Times, 17 April 1844, 8 in Flint 197).

She left the workhouse, and decided to lay out all her money and set up as a maker of dress caps, but her money was lost, or stolen. Preferring death to a return to the workhouse, she attempted to drown herself and her youngest child in the river; she was picked up by a boatman but her child had drowned and she was tried for the murder. “Her death sentence caused a public outcry, in which Dickens joined: it was subsequently commuted to seven years’ transportation” (Flint 196). George Eliot’s Hetty Sorel in Adam Bede is another literary example of the woman driven to commit infanticide.

Dickens also wrote in letters of murders abroad; on his second trip to America in 1868 he wrote of a murder which greatly intrigued him. He learned that Dr. Webster, a Harvard
Professor of chemistry whom he met on his earlier visit, had been hanged for the murder committed in his laboratory of a friend, Parkman, who had lent him money. Parkman’s body had been dissected, parts of it had been put in the space beneath a privy, the head and hands burned in a furnace and the torso placed in a tea chest, both in Webster’s laboratory (Garner 455).

‘Being in Cambridge,’ Dickens wrote... ‘I thought I would go over the Medical School, and see the exact localities where Professor Webster did that amazing murder, and worked so hard to rid himself of the body of the murdered man. (I find there is of course no rational doubt that the Professor was always a secretly cruel man) They were horribly grim, private, cold, and quiet; the identical furnace smelling fearfully (some anatomical broth in it I suppose) as if the body were still there; jars of pieces of sour mortality standing about, like the forty robbers in Ali Baba after being scalded to death; and bodies near us ready to be carried in to next morning’s lecture. At the house where I afterwards dined I heard an amazing and fearful story; told by one who had been at a dinner-party of ten or a dozen, at Webster’s, less than a year before the murder... Webster suddenly told the servants to turn the gas off and bring in that bowl of burning minerals which he had prepared, in order that the company might see how ghastly they looked by its weird light. All this was done, and every man was looking, horror-stricken, at his neighbour; when Webster was seen bending over the bowl with a rope round his neck, holding up the end of the rope, with his head on one side and his tongue lollled out, to represent a hanged man!’ (in Forster 2: 328-29).

It has been interestingly argued by Garner that this murder was Dickens’s source for The Mystery of Edwin Drood.

The body in the nineteenth century was subject to a variety of exhibitions. The Victorians were insatiably intrigued with seeing, in any medium, physical specimens that were atypical in form. This partly accounts for the popularity of attending waxwork exhibits, viewing anatomical shows, examining preserved pathological specimens, listening to tales of cannibalism, ogling midgets or exotic ethnic bodies and visiting “freak shows” at circuses.

“As the nineteenth century began, Mrs. Salmon’s old-established ‘perspiring waxwork,’ as Dickens called it in David Copperfield, was still doing business at Prince Henry’s house in Fleet Street” (Altick, Shows 332). Waxworks in fact remained a common
attraction throughout the century wherever cheap amusement was offered. In March 1835, Madame Tussaud, who had been touring Britain and Ireland with her waxworks for thirty years, in much the same manner as Mrs. Jarley in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, settled her exhibition in Baker Street (Altick, *Shows* 333). Her chamber of horrors was very popular and flourished, despite objections that it encouraged vice. In this chamber patrons could view not only replicas of murderers but also authentic relics, such as the clothes someone was hanged in, or the knife with which another committed a grisly murder (Altick, *Shows* 336-38).

As a result of Burke and Hare’s cadaverous exploits; the word “anatomical” also suddenly became endowed with delectably horrid connotations and “turned to gold in the show-business vocabulary” (Altick, *Shows* 339) leading to the revival of a line of waxworks, that Richard Altick describes as:

> the persistently ambiguous exhibition of anatomical waxworks, which in some cases had genuine scientific credentials and purposes and in others used its purported educational value to add a gloss of respectability to what was actually a raree show for the prurient (*Shows* 339).

These models of the human body which could be disassembled to reveal the internal organs, were used as teaching tools, but they also promised the public all the trappings of dissection and resurrection which they had been hearing so much about.

In 1847, a Florentine named Sarti set up a museum of Pathological Anatomy. It included a “Pathological Room” which contained “three full-length figures and specimens illustrating sixty different diseases,” and a “Physiological Room” which held “a full-length model of a Moorish woman which was divisible into seventy-five sections” (Altick, *Shows* 340). A later famous anatomical showman was Dr. Joseph Kahn, who operated in London in the 1850s. His collection was of both wax models and specimens preserved in spirits, and included “a unique embryological exhibit” and examples of the effects of syphilis and tight lacing; he also gave very popular lectures (Altick, *Shows* 340). He exhibited waxworks of a rumoured race of people with tails, along with real monstrosities, such as, in 1857, the “Heterodelph, or Duplex Boy, a monstrosity recently born in Lancashire consisting of the
normal one head and chest plus a duplicated torso and legs as well as a rudimentary second pair of arms.... announced as being 'alive and in good health'" (Altick, *Shows* 341). Kahn, along with a number of the other such showmen and showwomen, later moved into displaying medical instruments (Altick, *Shows* 341).

It was not just waxwork models of the human body that attracted the Victorian in need of a thrill, but human bodies themselves. In the 1830s, Ackroyd writes, "it was common for a deformed or crippled person to be openly mocked in the streets" (209); unusual bodies received attention of many forms. The nineteenth century was of course the age of the freak show, the popular display of bodily oddities as curiosities to attract and repel eager audiences.

It was the age of expansion, colonization, exploration, and strange tales of cannibalism; bodily rituals in foreign lands were the common fare of magazines and journals. The nineteenth century was, indeed, a shipfaring age and one of exploration, the dangers of which meant that some explorers never returned home. The loss of the Franklin expedition, for instance, struck deeply at Dickens's own bodily fears and provoked responses from him more virulent than the norm. Sir John Franklin's expedition to discover the northwest passage through the arctic left England in May 1845 and was last heard of in July, "an event which agonized the nation" (Marlow, "Sir John Franklin" 97). Searches begun in 1848 were unsuccessful. In October 1854 Dr. John Rae published a report on the fate of Franklin, to the effect that Eskimo testimony indicated that the now-dead expedition had resorted to cannibalism

It had strong resonances for Dickens. Dismemberment and cannibalism had been powerful images in his life from childhood on and had been direct and indirect motifs in his fiction, the self feeding on itself, the world broken into animistic fragments, the society engorging the individual (Kaplan, *Biography* 352-53).

Dickens's response to the report was a categorical, consistent, almost hysterical refusal to believe that a "gentleman" could under any circumstances be induced to eat another human being:
Dr. Rae’s account of Franklin’s unfortunate party is deeply interesting—but I think hasty in its acceptance of the details—particularly in the statement that they had eaten the dead bodies of their companions. Which I don’t believe. Franklin on a former occasion was almost starved to death—had gone through all the pains of that sad end and lain down to die—and no such thought had presented itself to any of them. In famous cases of Shipwreck, it is very rare indeed that any person of any humanizing education or refinement, resorts to this dreadful means of prolonging life. In open boats, the coarsest and commonest men of the shipwrecked party have done such things; but I don’t remember more than one instance in which an officer has overcome the loathing that the idea has inspired. Dr. Rae talks about their cooking these remains too. I should like to know where the fuel came from (Lett. P 7: 455-56).

In December 1854 two articles of Dickens’s were published in Household Words on “The Lost Arctic Voyagers” in which he cites evidence to show that cannibalism is very rare and then only performed by those of “an inferior class” and in the very few cases human flesh was usually “rejected by the stomachs of all” (Marlow, “Sir John Franklin” 100). He argued that no British gentleman could be guilty of cannibalism. Dickens obviously on some level feared being eaten; on at least two different occasions he described himself as feeling “like cold meat in a safe” (Johnson 1: 515) or “like something good to eat being kept cool in a larder” (in Dolby 65). James Marlow argues that, although seen throughout his novels, “cannibalism finds more explicit and realistic manifestation in Dickens’s work after the disappearance of Sir John Franklin’s Arctic expedition” (“Sir John Franklin” 97). In 1857 Dickens himself acted in Wilkie Collins’s drama, The Frozen Deep, a play concerning a lost Arctic expedition in which cannibalism is excluded. Dickens’s character, Richard Wardon, dies heroically after restoring his rival to the woman he himself loves. The play in part inspired A Tale of Two Cities. In his preface to the novel Dickens wrote: “A strong desire was upon me ... to embody it in my own person.... Throughout its execution, it has had the complete possession of me” (TTC xxvii).

The nineteenth century was also a time in which natives of “exotic” countries were exhibited as bodily monstrosities along with the physically deformed. There was much exaggeration and creativity in Freak Show owners’ patter, but real human bodies ultimately lay behind most of their claims. In the first half of the nineteenth century “There
was no lack of giants, whether measured horizontally or vertically” (Altick, Shows 253). Chang and Eng, the siamese twins, were exhibited at the Egyptian Hall in 1829 (Altick, Shows 260). General Tom Thumb (b. 1838) had his career in England (1844-46) under Barnum’s management and was a great celebrity, resulting in “a plague of midgets” visiting London and little people became the latest craze109 (Altick, Shows 255-56).

Exhibitions of “stunted or malformed children were perennially popular. Sometimes the specimens were living, sometimes dead; in the latter case, the publicity usually suppressed the fact. Caveat spectator” (Altick, Shows 260). What carnival people termed “pickled punks,” embryological specimens and foetuses preserved in jars, were also very popular.

Leslie Fiedler makes the interesting point that

No notable author dealt with [“freaks”] directly, however, before Charles Dickens.... Dickens was a Freak fancier, who on his first trip to America insisted on being taken to Barnum’s American Museum. It is not surprising, then, that one of the Sketches by Boz by which he first became known is devoted to the show Freaks at Greenwich Fair (267).110

Freak Show proprietors and the public may have been more eager to see “freaks” alive, but eager anatomists with dissecting tools poised for the slice would go to extraordinary lengths to acquire their bodies when dead. The giant Patrick Cotter, in the eighteenth century, “arranged to be buried in a lead coffin in a grave hewn twelve feet down into solid rock” and “protected by iron bars, and arched over carefully with brickwork” (Fiedler 111), fearing “the fate suffered by so many of his freakish peers, ripped from their graves by ‘resurrection men’ in the pay of doctors eager, in the first flush of medical experimentation, to lay hands on any human anomaly” (Fiedler 111).

Another giant, James Byrne, was hounded all his life by doctors, “who as he lay dying surrounded his house, in the simile of a contemporary journalist, ‘as Greenland harpooners would an enormous whale’” (Fiedler 112). Despite Byrne’s careful plans, he was not able to
escape the renowned surgeon John Hunter and his “faithful troupe of body snatchers” after death (Fiedler 112). Hunter had

resolved to have [Byrne’s] body at all costs, setting on his trail the most notorious resurrection man in his employ. Scared half out of his scant wits by that malign presence, who sat patiently at each of his shows, like a living memento mori among the merely curious onlookers, Byrne made careful plans. He provided himself with a leaden coffin, and a group of presumably loyal Irish boatmen pledged to row it out to sea once his corpse had been sealed into it and sink it too deep for recovery even by the medical students who were preparing a diving bell for this purpose.

But Hunter suborned Byrne’s fellow countrymen, who submerged the coffin containing only the Giant’s clothes and transported his naked body to the doctor’s laboratory. Within minutes Hunter had chopped his remains into pieces and boiled away the flesh from the bones in his infamous kettle. Both kettle and bones (the latter turned brown by intense heat) can still be seen in the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons in London (Fiedler 112).

Dickens, like many others, went to see displays of exotic bodies brought back alive from overseas: Kaffirs, Ojibway Indians, Bushmen. He found little noble about “the noble savage” and wrote as much in an article in Household Words “His virtues are a fable; his happiness is a delusion; his nobility, nonsense” (in Altick, Shows 283). He was, however, appalled by slavery in America.111

*Tableaux vivants* or *poses plastiques* were theatrical attractions of the time which were much in vogue and which involved the posing and positioning of the body.112 Circuses, such as the horse-riding in *Hard Times*, were another place where the body could be actively displayed in ways not allowed elsewhere in society. Acrobats were proud of their bodies and lived by them, and bodies were part of the attraction of the Circus—seeing the body revealed and doing unusual things. Generally, however, as *Hard Times* indicates, the circus was considered low.

Attractions such as circuses and freak shows were all part of the intense interest in the human form in the Victorian era. Much was discovered about the body during the nineteenth century and much was seen to happen to it, but despite medical advances during the period and legislation passed to cover aspects of public health and issues such as the control of dead bodies for dissection, the Victorian body was, preeminently, vulnerable.
This chapter has thus far examined a number of the physical concerns of the period in which Dickens lived and wrote. Dickens was very much a writer of his century, his surname now of course commonly adjectivalized into an encompassing term for the times in which he existed, but how distinctive was his literary use of the body? Naturally enough it was not only Charles Dickens among Victorian authors who used human anatomy or its vulnerability in his work.

Many of the aspects of the nineteenth-century body which have been discussed in this chapter figure fictionally in novels of the period. Victorian writers, who frequently themselves suffered from ailments, were concerned both with health (as Haley discusses in detail) and with physical appearance as an indicator of character. References to resurrection, dissection, and medical advances also appear in their work together with more frequent depictions of disease and accident or of deaths and the deathbed scenes that are almost a hallmark of Victorian fiction.

Richard Gordon writes that “[medicine] is a microscope trained upon life’s fundamentals, eagerly focused by novelists since the 1820s. Readership is guaranteed. There may be doubters about the soul, but no one can deny the existence of the body, and everyone wants to know the terrible things that can happen to it” (2). Fictional doctors, who appeared quite commonly in literature of the time, provided nineteenth-century authors with opportunities to describe such “terrible things” as well as to discuss the body or reveal characters’ physical fears. Over the course of the century as medical practice changed doctors began to emerge as literary heroes, one thinks here in particular of Tertius Lydgate in Middlemarch with his interest in Fever and his desire to perform post-mortems. George Eliot, herself “an absorber of medical textbooks and encyclopaedias” (Gordon 107), includes much medical discussion in the novel, but it is intellectual and scientific rather than the more exaggerated and humorous kind we would see in its place in Dickens. Discussion about Lydgate by other characters points to fears about the practices of “new” doctors, and he
suffers hostilities from neighbourhood medics just as Trollope’s Dr. Thorne does. *Middlemarch*, written in 1871-72 but set in 1829-32 at the height of the resurrection-dissection scandals, does provide some moments reminiscent of Dickens. Mrs. Dollop for instance asserts that Lydgate wants to let people die in hospital, even poison them himself, because he wants to dissect them: “there was a prevalent feeling in her audience that her opinion was a bulwark, and that if it were overthrown there would be no limits to the cutting-up of bodies, as had been well seen in Burke and Hare with their pitch-plaisters” (482). Similar distrust emerges over Dr. Fitzpiers’s “anatomical ardour” in Hardy’s *The Woodlanders* particularly when he offers Grammar Oliver ten pounds for the use of her brain after death. Victor Frankenstein of course goes further by gathering and studying corpses which he collects from charnel-houses and dissecting rooms and then animating the monster he has created out of human fragments. This use of the dismembered body in literature is the material Dickens also liked to use in his fiction, but his methods are different and his constant references are rooted more in language than in plot, character development, or theme.

Disease and death occur in almost every Victorian novel and Dickens was not markedly different from other writers in his depiction of basic deathbed scenes. He was, however, attracted to both the humorous side of death and to more unusual styles of deaths, both of which are less common in other novelists. The sudden death of Mrs. Proudie in Trollope’s *The Last Chronicle of Barset* is the sort of death that would appeal to Dickens (and was the result of Trollope’s overhearing negative comments about her by two clergymen at the Atheneum whom he told then and there that he would kill the character within the week). Most of Trollope’s descriptions of characters’ bodies, diseases, and deaths are fairly standard, and even with this more unusual death he does not expend nearly the words nor delight that Dickens would have done:

The body was still resting on its legs, leaning against the end of the side of the bed, while one of the arms was close clasped round the bed-post. The mouth was rigidly closed, but the eyes were open as though staring at him. Nevertheless there could be no doubt from the first glance that the woman was dead (726; ch. 66).
In nineteenth-century fiction, as in much of today’s, faces and figures are often described as a prelude to plot action; beauty or imperfection of appearance, usually accompanied by comment as to stage of life and dress, frequently introduce a character.  The popular belief in or remnants of belief in phrenology or physiognomy and related concerns often meant that appearance was a signal to character. The Brontës, like Gaskell and many other novelists, frequently mention phrenology in their work. Jane Eyre, for instance, discusses the subject with Rochester. *Jane Eyre* is a novel that also shows the vulnerability of the body in many ways: typhus sweeping through Lowood school, Rochester being flung from his horse, Jane’s own descriptions of her body’s weaknesses and hunger, the fire at Thornfield hall bringing deformity and disability to Rochester and making him bodily dependent upon Jane. *Villette*, too, includes a horse accident and the invalid Lucy originally attends is physically suffering pain. The novel’s ending—Lucy waiting for Paul Emanuel to return while news of shipwrecks roll in—deeply reveals the perils of corporeal existence. But neither the gothicism of Charlotte Brontë nor the violence, passion, and death of *Wuthering Heights* use the body in the way Dickens does.

Dickens is, of course, no different in using physical description to introduce characters and reveal their natures, as Juliet McMaster discusses in terms of physiognomical signals, but he is unique in the style he uses. Often his description dismembers a character, a head may enter a room and then the rest of a body may or may not follow, and humour is always skittering around behind the words he chooses to describe a body.

His friend, Wilkie Collins, uses the body in his own way by subverting bodily expectations and in doing so drawing attention to the physical forms of his characters. In *The Woman in White* for instance Collins makes Count Fosco, who is an “evil” character interested in medical and chemical science, excessively corpulent rather than the skinny villain of tradition: “I had begun to write my story, when it struck me that my villain would be commonplace, and I made him fat in opposition to the recognised type of villain” (vii). Fosco ends laid out in the Paris Morgue, his corpulence vulnerable for all to see. Marian Halcombe,
in the same novel, who is in figure beautiful and elegant is in face ugly, as Walter Hartright notices, "(with a sense of surprise which words fail me to express).... never was the fair promise of a lovely figure more strangely and startingly belied by the face and head that crowned it" (25). This reaction is followed by details of the masculinity of her face which to Hartright, not yet knowing her, is extremely distasteful, and disqualifies her, despite her attractive body, from sexual interest. Marian is, however, a "good" character. The extremely gender-defined ideas of the body and its beauty in the nineteenth-century meant that moments of extreme discomfort could be caused to readers, as to characters, by an androgynous looking person or by forms of transvestism. In Jane Eyre there is a similar moment of shock when the text reveals that a Gypsy woman is in fact Rochester dressed up, pretending to be a fortune-teller. In Cranford Peter Jenkyns’s exile from the town follows as a result of his dressing up as his sister nursing a baby. This type of gender reversal, however, is not so apparent in Dickens’s work.

The passion for crime seen most clearly in the Newgate novels of the 1830s and the sensation novels of the 1860s used the body as both the site for crime and as a symbol of criminality. Sensation novels in particular connected the sexuality and bodily attractiveness of their villainesses with their criminal natures. Thus Lydia Gwilt in Armadale, and Lady Audley are physically attractive women who murder or attempt to murder. Earlier “heroines” like Thackeray’s Becky Sharp or Catherine, and Bulwer-Lytton’s Lucretia are similarly described. Interestingly the many “fallen women” of Victorian fiction, defined societally by what they have “chosen” to do with their bodies, suffer from what Nina Auerbach calls the “radical sexlessness [that] distinguishes British representations of fallen women” (178). Descriptions of prostitutes and of the poor, including the industrial working classes, whose bodies are vulnerable to sexual or economic exploitation, appear often in the novels of the 1840s such as Gaskell’s Mary Barton or Disraeli’s Sybil but are fairly standard during the era in most writers work including Dickens’s.
Dickens's use of the body is, perhaps surprisingly, more similar to the way the body is used in the work of now lesser read Victorian writers. Frederick Marryat, for example, often associates humour with damage to the body. In *Mr. Midshipman Easy*, for instance, Nicodemus Easy's interest in craniology is treated satirically as is his and his wife's concern over a minor cut on their son Jack's thumb: "'I'm sure that a nerve is divided, and then the lockjaw'" Mrs. Easy expostulates to the doctor (15; ch. 4). Mr. Easy's disapproval of physical punishment ironically results in his son being sent to a school reminiscent of many in Dickens's work. Mr. Bonnycastle, the schoolmaster, it is true does not use flogging as a punishment, but this refusal to flog is not based on the same humanitarian grounds in which Easy senior believes. Bonnycastle, who has "a series of canes, ranged up and down like billiard cues" (28; ch. 5) prefers caning: "'Now, when once the first sting of the birch is over, then a dull sensation comes over the part, and the pain after that is nothing; whereas a good sound caning leaves sores and bruises in every part, and on all the parts which are required for muscular action'" (25; ch. 5).

Harrison Ainsworth's *Old Saint Paul's*, a historical romance set at the time of the plague and fire of London, also provides elements reminiscent of Dickens. The coffin maker Anslem Chowles with his hideous, cadaverous, yellow-skinned appearance carouses and dances about his coffins with almost Quilpian glee at the money he is making from the plague. His cohort, Judith Malmayns, is a nurse who robs, infects, and kills patients. The novel also contains gruesome descriptions of the hundreds of plague dead, similar to Dickens's portrayals of mass deaths in *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Ainsworth delights in describing the symptoms of plague, the quack cures attempted to ward it off, the ghastly pest houses where the infected went to die, and above all the repulsive attraction of the plague-pits, overflowing like Victorian graveyards, into which the dead bodies were finally flung. One scene describes a man leaping into a plague pit after a load of bodies has been tipped into it crying "'She is here! she is here!—I shall find her amongst them!'' (225). Then, repenting of his action, he screams for help which Chowles is not readily willing to afford him on the
grounds that this happens to someone almost every night and the man will be back there dead within a few hours anyway.

Decapitation jokes were not infrequent in the literature of a century that still had the French Revolution comparatively fresh in its mind. In the *The Mikado*, for example, Pooh Bah tells of an unattached head bowing to him, and in Bulwer-Lytton’s play *Money* Mr. Graves complains that if he were a hatter boys would probably be born without heads. But no writer made such constant reference to these humorous horrors as Dickens did.

In many ways the writer whose use of the body was most like Dickens’s was Lewis Carroll. Alice’s body is constantly under threat just as the body in Dickens’s work is, not only from the usual accidents and chances of life however strange, but from language itself. Carroll, like Dickens, plays on the dual literal and metaphorical meanings of words and develops other imaginative ideas—Alice is told, for example, that she is merely a figment of a dream and will not exist when the dreamer wakes. Carroll combines humour with bodily vulnerability and frequently uses death jokes just as Dickens does. Alice’s world is in many ways the world to which Dickens opens his bodies. If a mock turtle can actually exist, then too, a dismembered head can move into a Dickensian room and carry on a conversation.

Disease, descriptions of the poor, deathbeds, and doctors—this much Dickens descriptively and thematically shares with other Victorian writers who depict the body. It is not in subject matter that Dickens is distinctive but in his style, in the way he uses and describes the body and, above all, in the frequency with which he uses anatomy in his novels. Dickens repeatedly conjoins dismemberment or damage with humour and his characters not only usually look physiognomically appropriate in a way the nineteenth-century reader was familiar with, i.e. their appearance reflects their inner natures, but the bodies of Dickens’s characters can in many cases be seen as the driving force behind their behaviour and the physical damage they incur can be seen as a type of “bodily justice” Dickens inflicts upon them for evil deeds. The constant literalization of metaphor is a key element in Dickens’s writing style, no where more evident than in his use of the body and rarely, if ever, more
evident in Victorian fiction than in his work. No other writer’s work in his century displays such a pervasive and constant use of the body, nor are the susceptibilities of human anatomy, particularly to dismemberment, so integral an element of style in other novels of the era. The vulnerable body is fundamental to Dickens’s art in ways that are distinctive both because of its constant appearance at all levels of his writing—Character, Conversation, and Expression—and because it is the essential core of his attraction for, and his bond with, readers, a bond few other writers can so immediately provoke.

The uses the nineteenth-century body could be put to were a stimulus to both Dickens’s public interests and his artistic creations. Because of his civic and humanitarian concerns we might therefore expect Dickens in his novels to use the body as a metaphor for the ills, fragmentation, breakdown, or dissatisfaction in his society—as a reflection and analysis of the social anatomy of the age. This is an attractive and comparatively straightforward theory and one that might quite neatly and adequately be argued, but it does not ultimately tell us much that is new about Dickens’s work nor indicate what is most essential, interesting, or distinctive about his use of the body or where the importance of anatomy to his work lies.

It would of course be wrong to say that Dickens never uses the body in this way or that he was not aware of the social elements of the body both in his novels and to his readers. He was aware, for example, that death in literature could console readers. Of letting Little Nell die he wrote that he “resolved to try and do something which might be read by people about whom Death had been,—with a softened feeling, and with consolation” (Lett.P 2: 188). He was obviously making social comment in his descriptions of the living conditions and bodily travails inherent in a place like Tom-All-Alone’s or within various prisons, workhouses or schools such as Creakle’s or Squeers’s.
On a broader level Dickens periodically, like other writers, uses the body as a metaphor for society or for the family. Leonard Barkan, in the context of a discussion of Renaissance poetry, writes that: “The most important attribute of the body as a metaphoric vehicle is that it is a complete and finite system, highly complex but at the same time familiar and immediate” (3). Dickens, not unusually for his century, presents this system as diseased or damaged as he makes thematic points. In Bleak House, for instance, society is ridden with disease which moves through all classes and spheres just as disease progresses through the organs of the body. The image of a diseased state is of course a common one in literature. The individual bodies who grow sick and, as a result, are scarred like Esther Summerson or die like Jo, are microcosms of what happens to such a society and are indicators of greater more pervasive ills at the heart of a culture that allows disease to spread, whether that disease is literal, as in this novel, or a metaphorical representation of thematic concerns such as selfishness, pride, injustice, lack of caring, greed and so on.

The theme of selfishness in Martin Chuzzlewit and the division in families is represented in this sense by the dismembered body. Mercy Pecksniff having been cast out of her home becomes the “right arm” severed from “the Pecksniffian trunk” by the storyteller surgeon (MC 469-70; ch. 30). One argument about the prevalence of dismemberment in Dickens’s writing is that it is a metaphor for the breakdown of belief or the fragmentation of society. A novel like Our Mutual Friend is, for example, full of fragmentation, and articulation both literal and figurative, from Venus’s shop to the inter-class union of Lizzie and Eugene at the end of the novel.115

One could suggest many further examples where the body is used to reflect social or familial concerns. Curious and threatening bodies surround Nell as she moves through the old curiosity shop which is both her old home, English society, and life in general. Resurrection has both thematic and specific resonances in A Tale of Two Cities. Mr. Dombey’s stiff rigid body is a reflection of his unbending coldness as Florence’s parent and a reflection of the stiff pride that is thematic in the novel.116 The structures of society and
the inescapable circumlocution of *Little Dorrit* may be paralleled in the image of the imprisoned body, or, as Barrett argues, the metaphor of infection and disease in the same novel can be seen as reflecting the "condition of England."

We know that the themes of many of Dickens's works concern weaknesses and injustices in society or point to conditions of the neglected poor and to the lack of care many in society face. Social comment is an integral part of his work and the body is a useful metaphor for society so it is one which he inevitably uses, but what is far more distinctive and important about Dickens's use of the body is stylistic rather than thematic and is based not upon metaphorical use of the body but on its complete reverse—the literalization of the metaphorical body. Thus Wegg's desire to "collect himself" is in Dickens's world not the commonly spoken metaphor, but a quest for actual repossession of his lost limb. Throughout his novels Dickens's primary use of the body is not as a large metaphor for something else, but as a constant reminder of the literal body and the vulnerable situations it is always in. By literalizing what we expect to be a metaphorical use of language, he creates both humour and a visceral, immediate connection with his readers. The importance of the body to Dickens's writing lies in the constant minutiae of reference that continually brings the body before us in a dismembered but glorious conjunction of humour, language, and anatomy.

xii

This chapter has demonstrated aspects of Victorian experience regarding the body and has indicated that Dickens was very much of his time in being concerned about and fascinated with the body's vulnerability. His literary use of human anatomy is, however, his own. His novels reflect neither the comparatively sporadic use of the body by other Victorian writers nor the use of the body as solely a simple metaphor for the social anatomy of his era.

The following chapters will show that Dickens's depictions of the vulnerability of the body are an essential part of what is inherently Dickensian about his work. The chapters will also show that by combining extremes of bodily damage with humour, incorporating a
“dismembering” style, and literalizing the metaphorical, Dickens creates a visceral, emotional, and unconscious bond with his readers. Before turning to the novels themselves, however, it is important to understand something of Dickens’s personal experience of, as opposed to public interest in the body, because even though he shared concerns of his day and suffered the physical trials and bereavements common to his century, not everything that occurred to him was necessarily experienced by others nor was reacted to in the same way. Dickens’s personal vision of the body influenced his work just as his more societal one did, probably to an even greater extent, and so it is relevant to see how he as a private individual handled the physical vulnerabilities of his day. Dickens’s personal anatomical thought and experience is, therefore, the subject of the next chapter.
NOTES

1 For the history of medicine see, for example, Cartwright, *A Social History of Medicine*; Garrison, Haagensen and Lloyd, and Shryock. Many of the topics covered in this chapter have entries in Mitchell ed. under such headings as “Medical Practice,” “Cemeteries,” “Public Health,” and listings for various diseases.

2 This attitude is satirized by Dickens in *Little Dorrit* when the surgeon examining Cavalletto’s injured leg comments:
   ‘There’s a compound fracture above the knee, and a dislocation below. They are both of a beautiful kind.’ He gave the patient a friendly clap on the shoulder again, as if he really felt that he was a very good fellow indeed, and worthy of all commendation for having broken his leg in a manner interesting to science *(LD* 157; 1: ch. 13).

3 For examples of women in labour unable to find medical attention and dying in the streets as a result see F. B. Smith, *The People’s Health* 47-55.

4 See also “The Nerves” *(HW* 15 [1857]: 522-25) and “The Circulation” *(HW* 15 [1857]: 561-65). “Legs” *(HW* 9 [1854]: 209-212) in a less serious vein complains at the lack of attention legs (one of Dickens’s favourite pieces of anatomy) have received compared to other body parts: “we might as well, for the mental attention we bestow upon our legs and feet, be so many Miss Biffins.... From neglect they have even fallen into opprobrium; and we cannot find a baser term for a swindling gambler than to call him a ‘Leg’” (210).

5 See generally George Rosen, “Disease, Debility, and Death” in Dyos and Wolff eds. 2: 625-67. For historical descriptions of various diseases including a number from the nineteenth century see Major, *Classic Descriptions of Disease*, and Hudson who includes a chapter on “Specific Prevention” of diseases such as cholera and smallpox 169-92.

6 Ackroyd indicates cholera (772).

7 Although “By 1812, public vaccination was in general use.... It is recalled that only 16 years previously hardly anyone in the Western world was without some pock-marks. Indeed a person was often identified by the fact that he was not so marked” *(Ward* 521).

8 Ivor Brown points out that “Jacob’s Island, where Bill Sikes made his last stand ... was called ‘the very capital of cholera’” *(Charles Dickens* 3). Pelling examines theories of cholera and its treatment. Also see Morris.

9 In England “Roughly 32,000 people died from cholera in 1831-2, 62,000 in the epidemic of 1848-9, another 20,000 in 1853-4 and about 14,000 in 1866-7” *(Wohl* 118). In early September 1849 deaths from cholera in London rose as high as three to four hundred per day *(Lett.P 5: 630 n. 3)*.

10 The editors of the Pilgrim edition of Dickens’s letters note:
   Thackeray [fell] seriously ill on 17 Sep [1849]. Fever set in, the illness was finally diagnosed as cholera, and his life was in danger. On Forster’s insistence, he was treated, and by mid-Oct cured, by Elliotson.... His illness caused a gap in the monthly publication of *Pendennis*, which he dedicated to Elliotson, thanking him for his ‘constant watchfulness and skill’ in this illness *(Lett.P 5: 616 n. 2)*.
Ackroyd points out that Charley’s illness occurred soon after Dickens had killed Paul Dombey (523).

Dickens believed drunkenness to be “the ‘national horror’” but that many causes, physical and moral made it so which were left out of count by the temperance associations (Forster 2: 39-40).

Wohl points out, however, that “It is difficult to chart the course of t.b. with any confidence, for it was often confused with other diseases, including cancer” (130). For an examination of tuberculosis in the nineteenth century see Dubos and Dubos who include literary and diary sources and conclude “that tuberculosis is not, as Dickens believed, a disease that ‘medicine never cured, wealth never warded off.’ It is the consequence of gross defects in social organization, and of errors in individual behaviour” (xxxviii). See also Sontag for its use in nineteenth-century literature.

Dickens saw the ravages it brought to other families also; Mrs. Macready, a close family friend, died of tuberculosis and at least five of her seven children also suffered from the disease (Lett.P 5: 263 n. 3). He writes in 1856 of itinerant Hop-pickers:

I find it is a superstition that the dust of the newly picked hop, falling freshly into the throat, is a cure for consumption. So the poor creatures drag themselves along the roads, and sleep under wet hedges, and get cured soon and finally (Lett.N 2: 878).

Woods and Woodward, eds., contains essays on the decline of mortality during the nineteenth century from demographic, geographic, and historical perspectives.

Not surprisingly, infants under the age of one year consistently had the highest death rate, and “still represented 20 to 25 per cent of all deaths even up until 1900” (Woods and Woodward preface). Also see the chapters “The Massacre of the Innocents” in Wohl 10-42 and “Infancy” in Smith, The People’s Health 65-135. Additionally, because of shocking living conditions, the poor were always more ravaged by disease than any other class. For conditions of the poor generally see Mayhew. For a comparison of Mayhew and Dickens’s methods of depicting the poor see Anna Humpherys, “Dickens and Mayhew on the London Poor.” Industrial diseases were also increasing, as might be expected in an era of vast industrial development. Household Words commented on these ills in such articles as “One of the Evils of Match-Making” (HW 5 [1852]: 152-55) concerning phosphorus disease or the more general “Workmen’s Diseases” (AYR 12 [1864]: 272-75).

Sir David Wilkie the artist died at sea in 1841 “following a stomach attack some weeks earlier” (Lett.P 2: 299 n. 7). Douglas Jerrold died unexpectedly of illness in 1857 (Forster 2: 187). In 1848 Frederick Marryat died some months after “a rupture of internal blood-vessels” (Lett.P 5: 260 n. 1). In March 1854 Thomas Noon Talfourd died unexpectedly of a stroke, “While summarizing an appeal on behalf of the accused” (Kaplan, Biography 314-15). In October 1864 John Leech, “five years younger than Dickens” died, having “struggled for the last year with angina” (Kaplan, Biography 450-51). “The sudden death of Thackeray” from a cerebral stroke at the age of fifty two “on the Christmas eve of 1863 was a painful shock to Dickens” (Forster 2: 247). In November 1859 his neighbour Frank Stone “suddenly died of an aneurism, a ‘spasm of the heart’” at fifty-nine (Kaplan, Biography 455). Augustus Egg, four years younger than Dickens, died while travelling in Algiers (Kaplan, Biography 455). “It is a tremendous consideration that friends should fall around us in such awful numbers as we attain middle life. What a field of battle it is!” (Lett.P 6: 736) Dickens wrote on the death of Alfred D’Orsay from cancer in 1852 merely a week after Richard Watson,
“taken suddenly ill with violent inflammation of the bowels ... died (quite easily) in four days” (Lett. P 6: 725-26). As early as 1844 Dickens had written “There are old fairy-tales about men being changed into stones; but the men I know are changed into Gravestones, with terrible rapidity and reality” (Lett. P 4: 92). Having lost Daniel Maclise in April 1870 and Mark Lemon a month later, Dickens and Forster spoke on their last meeting before Dickens’s own death in June of all who had died since their early plays together, of being “left almost alone. ‘And none beyond his sixtieth year,’ [Dickens] said, ‘very few even fifty’” (Forster 2: 413).

18 For an account of this debate see Ackerknecht, “Anticontagionism Between 1821 and 1867.”


20 On water specifically see chapter “Clean Water” in Walvin 53-66.

21 See, for example, E. Gaskell, “Dickens and Medicosocial Reform.”

22 On one such walk on a rainy, stormy night Dickens saw, leaning against a workhouse, what “seemed to be seven heaps of rags: ‘dumb, wet, silent horrors’ he described them.” These rag-heaps turned out to be girls, one of whom “had been without food a day and night. ‘Look at me,’ she said, as she clutched the shilling [Dickens gave her and the others after ascertaining for himself that the workhouse was full], and without thanks shuffled off” (Forster 2: 131).
23 Formed in 1849 with the aim of bringing London under the provisions of the Public Health Act (Gaskell, “Reform” 115).

The association first met in March 1866 to examine the problems caused because the Poor Law Act of 1834 had failed to legislate for the sick pauper, and workhouses did not have adequate medical care facilities, if any. The association urged that sick paupers had the same claim to medical care as those in voluntary hospitals (Gaskell, “Reform” 116). The Lancet, in its obituary of Dickens, praised the changes he greatly helped in making in social institutions and conditions of the time, especially the “amelioration of workhouse infirmaries” (June 18, [1870]: 882).

25 Anthony Ashley Cooper, Lord Ashley, sent Dickens a copy of his speech in Parliament (Hansard, 3rd series, LV, 1260-1274) moving the Children’s Employment Commission (“Commission for Inquiring into the Employment and Condition of Children in Mines and Manufactories”) and “later thanked [Dickens] for his warm interest in the commission” (Lett.P 2: 165 n. 4; see generally Lett.P 2: 165 and n. 3, n. 4, n. 5). Ivor Brown points out that “Until [Dickens] was twenty-one children had worked twelve hours a day in mills and factories” (Charles Dickens 4).


27 Brice and Fielding comment:

Austin would turn to Dickens, asking for help with publicity in the cause of Public Health, and Dickens would use Austin to give him information about causes of this kind that he wanted to support. The story of their collaboration has yet to be told, but it is clear that as well as Dickens’ being very widely experienced in social work, he was also frequently extremely well-informed through official channels (“Tooting Disaster” 232-33).


29 Dickens attacked the window tax in “Red Tape” (HW 2 [1851]: 481-4). In “A Walk in a Workhouse” (HW 1 [1850]: 204-07) he describes his visit to a workhouse and “his sense of the pauper world as a prison is strongly brought out” (Lett.P 6: 99 n. 6). His Household Words subeditor W. H. Wills wrote “Health by Act of Parliament” (HW 1 [1850]: 460-63) which argues that prevention of disease is much cheaper than a cure and urges that The Public Health Act apply to London, saying that “an unusual number of deformed people” (462) are caused by lack of air and light and pointing out that the labouring community’s “bodily strength constitutes their wealth, and oftentimes their only possession” (462). “Smoke or no Smoke” (HW 9 [1854]: 464-66) discusses the problem of excess smoke in London, leading to lung disease, uncleanness and unpleasantness. “Epidemics” (HW 13 [1856]: 397-400) describes the spread of epidemics and how these could be prevented by better sanitation and food. The danger of adulterated food is taken up in “Death in the Teapot” (2 [1850]: 277), “Death in the Bread-basket” (2 [1850]: 323), and “Death in the Sugar Plum” (2 [1851]: 426-27), a concern which is also inherent in attacks on the slaughterhouses which also had disease-causing and animal cruelty concerns provoking
them: “Nice White Veal” (*HW 1* [1850]: 467-68) is about slaughter-house torture; “Torture in the Way of Business” (*HW 1* [1850]: 587-88) is on plucking feathers from live ducks with half-broken necks and cruelty to a bullock. “The Cattle-Road to Ruin” (*HW 1* [1850]: 325-30) traces the dreadful journey of an ox to Smithfield and its subsequent brutal slaughter by an unskilled slaughterer. The “best of the diseased bullocks or ‘choppers’” we are told “are taken to the sausage machine, to be advantageously mixed with the chippings of horse-flesh (to which latter ingredient the angry redness of so many ‘cured’ sausages, *saveloys*, and all the class of *polonies* is attributable)” (327). Dickens attacked the English and praised the French slaughtering systems in “A Monument of French Folly” (*RP* 589-600):

> Into the imperfect sewers of this overgrown city, you shall have the immense mass of corruption, engendered by these practices, lazily thrown out of sight, to rise, in poisonous gases, into your house at night, when your sleeping children will most readily absorb them, and to find its languid way, at last, into the river that you drink (*RP* 591).

30 See also “Fencing with Humanity” (*HW 11* [1855]: 241-44), “Death’s Cyphering-Book” (*HW 11* [1855]: 337-41), “A Coal Miner’s Evidence” (*HW 2* [1850]: 245-50) which concerns colliery explosions, and “Preventible Accidents” (*HW 9* [1854]: 105-06) which discusses accidents from toppling bricks and buildings, explosions in collieries, shipwrecks, and typhus.

31 Ivor Brown notes: “He liked the poor as individuals but distrusted them in the mass” (*World* 20).

32 Laqueur examines eighteenth and nineteenth-century humanitarianism, arguing that it was engendered through narratives (such as the novel, parliamentary reports, inquest and autopsy notes and medical case studies) about the suffering bodies of others coming into practice. The specific body, he points out, because it is a locus of pain and a common bond with the reader, causes compassion and moves to action where statistics and masses do not.


34 He was to attend, for example, the Metropolitan Sanitary Association meeting in May in 1850 in support of the Metropolitan Interments Bill, but the bringing forward of the meeting meant he was too busy to do so: “If I get fierce and antagonistic about burials, I can’t go back to *Copperfield* for hours and hours” (*Lett. P* 6: 99).

35 The editors of the Pilgrim edition of Dickens’s letters provide useful information on the report and its background including the fact that it “may have occasioned an alteration in Ch. 54 of *Copperfield* ... Betsey Trotwood’s husband is buried ‘out of town’ at Hornsey, substituted in manuscript for ‘the little burial ground of Saint Martins’” (*Lett. P* 6: 47 n. 4). In a letter to Southwood Smith Dickens describes the report as “a monument of good sense” (*Lett. P* 6: 51).
In “Trading in Death” (HW 6 [1852]: 241-45) he comes out against the show and expense associated with funerals, particularly the state funeral given for the Duke of Wellington. In his own will, which is reprinted in Forster (2: 419-23), he wrote:

I emphatically direct that I be buried in an inexpensive, unostentatious, and strictly private manner; that no public announcement be made of the time or place of my burial; that at the utmost not more than three plain mourning coaches be employed; and that those who attend my funeral wear no scarf, cloak, black bow, long hat-band, or other such revolting absurdity (Forster 2: 421).

On death and the Victorians generally, including “the fat atmosphere of funerals” (MC 323; ch. 19), see Curl; Morley. For the spiritual, specifically Christian, side of death see Sanders (Resurrectionist) who in also provides a useful introduction on the prevalence of death in the nineteenth century.

These activities are borne out by fascinating accounts given by gravediggers interviewed in April 1842 for the Reports from Select Committees on the Health of Towns and the Effect of Interment of Bodies in Towns with Minutes of Evidence Appendices and Indices 1840-42. Irish University Press Series of British Parliamentary Papers. Shannon, Ireland: Irish UP, 1970. Health General vol. 2. One might speculate that Dickens was at times tempted to use material similar to some of the gravedigger’s answers to queries about particular burial grounds had he not feared offending his readers. He does incorporate not unsimilar visions in his portrait of Jerry Cruncher. All the gravediggers report feeling ill at work from the foul air, having to drink alcohol to get through their task, and knowing of the burning of coffin wood and stealing of lead from coffins. They also reveal dangers other than death, disease, or faintness. One Bartholomew Lyons, erstwhile grave-digger at St. Martin’s-in-the-Fields, provided the following extraordinary answers to questions:

In digging this depth [20 feet] and taking away the wood of these coffins, has it ever occurred to you that any bodies have fallen upon you?—I never had one in a deep grave, but I had one once; before I was there a man of the name of Fox had the ground; I succeeded him; he is now dead; he was a bad character; he is dead about three weeks. I dug a grave on a Sunday evening on purpose to get ready for Monday; that Sunday evening, and it rained, I was strange in the ground at that time; and when I went to work on Monday morning I finished my work, and I was trying the length of the grave to see if it was long enough and wide enough, so that I should not have to go down again, and while I was in there the ground gave way and a body turned right over, and the two arms came and clasped me round the neck; she had gloves on and stockings and white flannel inside, and what we call a shift, but no head.

The body came tumbling upon you?—Yes, just as I was kneeling down; it was a very stout body, and the force that she came with knocked my head against a body underneath, and I was very much frightened at the time.

You were at the bottom of the grave, and as you were digging at the bottom, the body of this woman without a head fell upon you?—Yes.

From the side?—Yes, from the side.

Out of the coffin?—It had never been in a coffin; it is supposed that they took the head off for the purpose of sale.

What depth were you down when this body fell upon you?—About nine feet.

Might they not have cut through the head as they dug down?—No, this body was taken out of the coffin before; she only lay just on the top of the earth a little covered over; if she had been buried at any depth at all, three of four feet, she could not have fell on me, the shoring of the earth would have kept it up.
You did not find the head anywhere?—No.
You say that this body fell upon you; do you suppose that this body had been put in a leaden coffin, and that both the leaden coffin and the other had been stolen, and that the body was left there?—I cannot say that.
What do you suppose?—I suppose that she was buried in wood, in the green ground, and that something affected the head; and the man that I mention as dead, is the very man that did the deed, after the other men left the ground.
He took away the wood of the coffin?—He took away the wood of the coffin, and took away the head, it appears, and then covered the body over as well as he could
Do you suppose that he took away the head for the purpose of conveying it to some surgeon?—I think so (362, questions 1070-81).
The above-mentioned Fox seems to have had a reputation of utter ruthlessness, disliked even among his brethren, Lyons commenting “he had such power; he had more power than ever I had” (363, question 1084) [one recollects Dickens’s “what a thing it is to have power”] and saying
the man that is dead has done most wonderful things in the vaults; he stripped the lead off the coffins in the vaults; he has been the biggest brute of any grave-digger in this earth, and he suffered for it at last; he died in the Strand Union Workhouse at last; he died actually rotten
Did he drink a great deal?—He could not get it to drink latterly; somebody turned against him (363, questions 1087-88).
Another gravedigger, John Eyles commented “I [once] emptied a cesspool, and the smell of it was rose-water compared with the smell of these graves” (368, question 1183) and spoke of being ordered to chop through coffins and bodies, even seeing them chopping the head of [his father’s] coffin away; I should not have known it if I had not seen the head with the teeth; I knew him by his teeth; one tooth was knocked out and the other was splintered; I knew it was my father’s head, and I told them to stop, and they laughed, and I would not let them go any further, and they had to cover it over. It is time that something was done to stop it; and there is a slaughter-house close by, in St. Clement’s-lane, which is enough to breed any fever (368, question 1188).
He was asked if he had ever hesitated when ordered to dig a grave in cutting down through coffins?—Yes, I have said, “There is not room to put down;” but it is said, ‘You must make room:’ but the sexton will not stop over the grave while that is being done; our sexton I know is fonder of pastry than standing over the top of a grave; he goes and has a shilling’s worth of pastry while it is being done (369, question 1198).
Michael Pye, gravedigger at this St. Clement Danes burial ground says of (presumably the same sexton) “when we have been at work and said that we could not get a grave, the expression has been, ‘Damn your bloody lazy eyes, you shall get it and make it;’ that is an expression he has frequently used to me” (370, question 1223).
Charles Copeland of St. Ann’s, Soho burial ground when asked “Do you think the occupation of grave-digging is very unhealthy?” Answered I am sure it is; and I have seen them play at what is called skittles; put up bones, and take skulls and knock them down; stick up bones in the ground and throw a skull at them as you would a skittle-ball
Who has done that?—Fox and a party who used to go there to assist him in digging (379, questions 1376-77)....

Are you sure of your statement, that after a coffin has lain in the ground only three weeks it has been cut to pieces?—Yes

Do you think that is a common occurrence?—Yes; it was in that ground, by Fox the grave-digger (380, questions 1400-01).

William Miller another gravedigger added further information:

Did you ever use a rope in removing the bodies from one part of the ground to another?—Yes; we used to get a rope, and put it round the bodies’ necks, having first taken off the lid of the coffin, and then we dragged them by the rope, and sometimes the head would come off, and the trunk would fall down again, then we used to go down and fix it round the body and haul it up that way; and sometimes it was so tight we could not get it off again

Has it ever occurred to you, when a man has been digging a grave, to have seen him up to his knees in slush and bloody matter?—Yes; I have seen an old sexton up to his knees in blood and slush, and so on, and I have come down and said, for God’s sake get out, it will kill you (394-95, questions 1690-94).

38 In “Dead Reckoning at the Morgue” (HW 8 [1853]: 112-16) a writer describes the place in more detail:

The body itself is placed on a dark slab, slightly inclining towards the spectator, with the head resting upon a sort of desk or low block covered with zinc; so that the features are clearly to be seen.... There is a tap in the wall for turning on water, which runs off by a small gutter at the foot of the slab. This is all.... [Next to the salle d’exposition was a salle d’autopsie] in which were two dissecting tables, one of them supplied with disinfecting apparatus [and the salle de lavage used for washing the dead person’s clothes] served also for sluicing the bodies.... [The salle de degagement or private room was] where temporarily deposited on stone tables—out of the reach of insects, from whose attacks they were protected by a covering of prepared cloth—lay the bodies of those who had been identified, such as were in too advanced a stage of decomposition to admit of recognition, and such as were destined for interment.... The average number per annum amounted to three hundred and sixty-four.... including the separate fragments of dead bodies, which [the clerk of the Morgue] rated at eleven entries (113-14).

39 Sanders writes:

[The Morgue] was recommended ... by the standard guidebooks to the city and remained the object for outings both casual and considered until it was closed to the general public in the early 1900s. The three expatriate English artists in du Maurier’s Trilby, for example, ‘cross a bridge to the Cité, and have a look in at the Morgue’ as part of a normal Saturday afternoon walk around the centre of Paris, while Thomas Hardy took his new bride to see it, without any sense of inconsistency, during their honeymoon trip through France (Resurrectionist 47).

40 He described pauper burials in Naples this way:

the burying place of the poor people is a great paved yard with three hundred and sixty-five pits in it: every one covered by a square stone which is fastened down. One of these pits is opened every night in the year; the bodies of the pauper dead are collected in the city; brought out in a cart ... and flung in, uncoffined. Some lime is then
cast down into the pit; and it is sealed up until a year is past, and its turn again comes round. Every night there is a pit opened.... About Naples, the dead are borne along the street, uncovered, on an open bier (Lett.P 4: 266).

See also "Village Funerals in Naples" (HW 5 [1852]: 19-20).

41 See LD 421; 2: ch. 1; Lett.P 4: 619 n. 1-2; “Some Recollections of Mortality” (UT 188-98); “Travelling Abroad” (UT 61-72); “Lying Awake” (RP 431-37).

42 The series “Old Stories Re-told” in AYR which recounts past crimes includes a rendition of the famous events in “Resurrection Men. Burke and Hare” (AYR 17 [1867]: 282-88).

43 For a detailed examination of dissection, resurrection, and the passage of the Anatomy Act 1832 see Richardson.

44 Holmes writes,

Incidents which inflamed public opinion against anatomists continued until well past the middle of the nineteenth century, and as late as 1862 an incident in Sheffield gave rise to overt hostility. This was occasioned by the sale, by a vicar and sexton, of newly buried subjects for dissection; the affair gave rise to rioting in the cemetery and necessitated a guard being placed at the Medical School (15-16).

“Use and Abuse of the Dead” (HW 17 [1858]: 361-65) praises the Anatomy Act but claims that more restrictions are still needed so that if a person object in life or a grieving relative or friend object then a body cannot be dissected (but otherwise can be): “In this country let no man alive or dead be denied bodily freedom” (364).

45 J. C. Hotten, an early Dickens biographer said of this:

Some recent cases of body-snatching had then made the matter a general topic for public discussion, and Goodwin [from whose oyster shop he had sent it] pasted up the strange address-card for the amusement of the medical students who patronised his oysters. It was still upon his wall when ‘Pickwick’ had made Dickens famous (Sanders, Resurrectionist ix).

46 Cartwright writes that “the reputation of London stood higher than that of any other centre during the years 1840-70, which is the formative period of modern surgery” (Surgery 9).

47 There is some truth in this. He knew, for example, Thomas Wakley, coroner, M. P. and founder of the Lancet in 1832 in whose pages Dickens’s far closer friend and for many years family doctor, John Elliotson, was villified for his mesmerist activities. Dickens knew Frederic Harvey Foster Quin “the first homoeopathic physician in England” (Lett.P 1: 489 n. 1). Forster writes of his knowing “Watsons, Southwood Smiths, Lococks, and Elliottsons” (Forster 2: 83) and “our excellent friend Liston the surgeon” (Forster 2: 85). Liston is a particularly interesting person for Dickens to have known, and one can only speculate about what conversations they had or bodily tidbits the ever curious Dickens solicited out of him. It is not surprising that Dickens would be interested by such a man who had total control over the bodies he operated on, just as Dickens had over the bodies in his books. It has been pointed out that “Dickens’s doctor friends tended towards the unorthodox. Some of them favoured ... fringe branches of medicine” (Smithers 3). He knew Dr. John Conolly who wrote a book on “non-restraint” in asylums and he worked with Ernest Hart, the secretary of the Association for the Improvement of the London Workhouse Infirmaries (Smithers 10-11). He
had a number of dealings with Thomas Southwood Smith, Unitarian minister, doctor, and avid sanitationist including the formation of a sanatorium (Lett. P 2: 164-66 and 165 n. 1). “Jeremy Bentham left his body to Southwood Smith to be dissected and preserved and Dr. Smith duly dissected and lectured over it in 1832. He kept the skeleton dressed in Bentham’s clothes in his Finsbury Square consulting room. It is now with his many manuscripts in University College, London” (Smithers 11). Dickens’s most intensive fictional use of doctors is in the Anatomy and Medical Section Meetings of the Mudfog Association for the Advancement of Everything a satirical commentary on the Annual Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science which was founded in 1831.

At the Mudfog Association meeting a curious case was ... reported of the medical student who was tried and executed for committing a burglary to a large amount under unusual circumstances. He attended the post-mortem examination of a man who had inadvertently swallowed a door-key which had left such a true representation on his stomach mucosa that the student was able to take an impression of it. He made a duplicate key, entered the man’s house and robbed it, leaving us to wonder (amongst other things) how a key which had been swallowed ‘in early life’ was still the one used to open the man’s front door (Smithers 25-26).

48 He wrote thanking T. J. Pettigrew for what was probably a copy of his book On Superstitions connected with ... Medicine and Surgery, 1844 a widely noticed book which Dickens says he has read “with very great pleasure” (Lett. P 3: 611 and n. 4).

49 Surprisingly, because Dickens himself already knew “all about” chloroform and had insisted it be used on Catherine during the birth of their eighth child.

50 Discussed in Household Words in “Some Account of Chloroform” (HW 3 [1851]: 151-55) which praises chloroform for its pain relieving qualities in “the process of being dissected alive, commonly called a surgical operation” (151). Now, a patient “may be carved without caring about it more than if he were a leg of mutton; may have a limb removed with no greater inconvenience than he would suffer from having his hair cut” (153). See also “Chloroform” (HW 7 [1853]: 179-81) and “Chloroform” (HW 19 [1859]: 249-52).

51 See, for example, Poovey.

52 Dickens exerted himself on behalf of his travelling man Roche when he became ill in 1848 writing to ask Angela Burdett Coutts to help get him speedily into St. George’s Hospital by nominating him as a patient (Lett. P 5: 433). Also see Dickens’s own letter of recommendation to the Hospital Governors (Lett. P 5: 436).

53 Dickens visited many hospitals and other institutions for the care of the sick and afflicted. In America in particular he made the then not uncommon rounds of institutions of all kinds. In Boston, for example, he went to the Perkins Institute for the Blind where he “met Dr. Howe who had achieved a miraculous feat of education with Laura Bridgman, an intelligent child who was blind and deaf, had no sense of smell and little taste” (Smithers 13). Dickens wrote about her in chapter three of American Notes.

54 Details on medical relief for the poor: parish and workhouse sizes, illnesses, medicine and diet, costs of medical treatment, physician and surgeon attendance on the poor, workhouse conditions, costs and medical facilities, can be found in First Second and Third Reports from the Select Committee on Medical Poor Relief with Minutes of Evidence Appendices and Indices, 1844. Irish University Press Series of British Parliamentary Papers, Health General
vol. 1. Shannon, Ireland: Irish UP, 1968, and in the same series Reports from Select Committees on Medical Relief and Public Health with Minutes of Evidence and Appendices and Indices 1854-62 vol. 8, 1970. Also see Hodgkinson, The Origins of the National Health Service, Crowther, and “Medical Practice Among the Poor” (HW 10 [1854]: 217-21) which points out that the “whole mass of the poor in this country is thrown upon the almost unassisted charity of the medical profession; a charity to the support of which the public contributes scarcely a tithe” (217).

55 See his speech as chairman at the dinner on behalf of the Hospital for Sick Children in Great Ormond Street, 9 Feb. 1858, in Fielding ed. 246-53 also reprinted with editorial comment in the Journal of Pediatrics 49 (1956): 607-18. It was “as a direct result of his efforts, in fact, [that] the Hospital for Sick Children was properly endowed for the first time” (Ackroyd 801). See also “Drooping Buds” (HW 5 [1852]: 45-48) co-written by Dickens about the recent opening of a Hospital for Sick children in London, the great need for such hospitals and describing the hospital.

56 Nursing reform really began only in the late 1840s and the 1850s with moves for reform by Sister Mary Jones and the more famous Florence Nightingale. Dickens, stirred by indignation at reports of the cruel and unnecessary suffering of troops in the Crimea, wrote articles in protest as Florence Nightingale launched her own attack against the appalling nursing conditions she found there. In 1859 she wrote in Notes on Nursing: “It may seem a strange principle to enunciate as the very first requirement in a Hospital that it should do the sick no harm. It is quite necessary, nevertheless, to lay down such a principle” (in Walvin 30). “Bedside Experiments” (AYR 2 [1860]: 537-42) advises on nursing and on how nurses should behave in the sick room.

57 Dickens portrays this danger in his novels. A child is run over and killed, for example, by the carriage of the Marquis St. Evremonde (TTC 130; 2: ch.7). In Little Dorrit Cavalletto is also run over, a witness protesting, “Why, a native Englishman is put to it every night of his life, to save his life from them Mails ... and he knows when they’re a coming round the corner, to tear him limb from limb. What can you expect from a poor foreigner who don’t know nothing about ‘em!”” (LD 155; 1: ch. 13).

58 “Need Railway Travellers be Smashed?” (HW 4 [1851]: 217-21) urges railway companies to test out a new invention to prevent collisions. On his second American tour Dickens writes of a train coming off a steamer “we were banged up such a height that the rope broke, and one carriage rushed back with the run down-hill into the boat again. I whisked out in a moment, and two or three others after me; but nobody else seemed to care about it”” (in Forster 2: 325).

59 In an intervening year, 1868, he had written from America that the “great subject in England for the moment” was of a ghastly accident to an Irish mail train:

It is now supposed that the petroleum (known to be a powerful anaesthetic) rendered the unfortunate people who were burnt almost instantly insensible to any sensation. My escape in the Staplehurst accident of three years ago is not to be obliterated from my nervous system. To this hour I have sudden vague rushes of terror, even when riding in a hansom cab, which are perfectly unreasonable but quite insurmountable. I used to make nothing of driving a pair of horses habitually through the most crowded
parts of London. I cannot now drive, with comfort to myself, on the country roads here; and I doubt if I could ride at all in the saddle (Lett. N 3: 665-66).

60 One of the first of which was on the Serpentine, a favourite suicide spot. “Life in Danger” (AYR 2 [1860]: 506-08) urges that the Serpentine be cleaned out—the unhealthy and dangerous mud removed from the bottom of it to prevent drownings. Dickens, in “Down with the Tide” (HW 6 [1853]: 481-85) describes his night trip with the Thames police on which he learned that Waterloo Bridge was a favourite for suicides, but that all did not die by drowning, many “are smashed ... they dash themselves on the buttress of the bridge” (482).

61 Captain Joey’s swiftly rejected advice about resuscitating Rogue Riderhood is the “sagacious old-scholastic suggestion that the body should be hung up by the heels, ‘sim’lar ... to mutton in a butcher’s shop,’ and should then, as a particularly choice manoeuvre for promoting easy respiration, be rolled upon casks” (OMF 503-04; 3: ch. 3). See also O’Day.

62 “He swam out into too strong a current, and was only narrowly saved by the accident of a fishing-boat preparing to leave the harbour at the time” (Forster 1: 330). Dickens wrote to Forster: “It was a world of horror and anguish ... crowded into four or five minutes of dreadful agitation; and to complete the terror of it, Georgy [his sister-in-law], Charlotte [the nurse] ... and the children were on a rock in full view of it all, crying, as you may suppose, like mad creatures” (in Forster 1: 330).

63 During his year in Switzerland 1846-47 he records

‘While we were sitting at dinner, one of the prettiest girls in Lausanne was drowned in the lake.... M. Verdeil, with three or four other doctors, laboured for some hours to restore animation; but she only sighed once.... last night ... a boatman acted to me the whole scene: depositing himself finally on a heap of stones, to represent the body’

(Forster 1: 390).

Earlier from Europe he wrote: “A Monk was drowned here on Saturday evening. He was bathing with two other monks, who bolted when he cried out that he was sinking—in consequence, I suppose, of his certainty of going to Heaven” (in Forster 1: 463 n. 38).

64 For example “Lives and Cargoes” (HW 3 [1851]: 18-19) and “Life and Luggage” (HW 4 [1851]: 152-56) which makes the further point:

As if to make this inhuman anomaly perfect,—when a boatman picks up a dead body and brings it safe ashore, he receives for this important service, five shillings; but if there be a spark of life in it—nothing. Does not this really look like a premium for murder, or a quiet knock on the head of an insensible person just out of the water, by way of ‘settling the difference?’ (152).

65 Dickens was at one time the chairman of a committee to help the orphaned children of a actor who had been drowned in a shipwreck (Lett. P 3: 527).

66 For a discussion of the Victorian interest in shipwreck, facts and literature about shipwreck, and Dickens’s literary use of shipwreck, see Palmer.

67 While he was in America there were fears for the steamer Caledonia thought shipwrecked as there was an awful gale on the night of the Fourteenth, and the coast hereabouts is strewn with wrecks.... When I think of the passengers, and the fine fellows in
command of the vessel, and how recently we have been exposed to the same dangers, my heart grows sick and faint within me (see Lett. P3: 93).

“For myself, I have hardly any hope of her; having seen enough, in our passage out, to convince me that steaming across the ocean in heavy weather is as yet an experiment of the utmost hazard” (Lett. P3: 95). Imagining the letters he had been expecting from home lost with the ship he was “as full of sorrow as if they had once been living creatures” (Lett. P3: 96).

68 Dickens wrote:

I never will trust myself upon the wide ocean, if it please Heaven, in a steamer again.... Meanwhile, consider two of their dangers. First, that if the funnel were blown overboard, the vessel must instantly be on fire, from stem to stern.... Secondly, each of these boats consumes between London and Halifax 700 tons of coals; and it is pretty clear, from this enormous difference of weight in a ship of only 1200 tons burden in all, that she must either be too heavy when she comes out of port, or too light when she goes in. The daily difference in her rolling, as she burns the coals out, is something absolutely fearful. Add to all this, that by day and night she is full of fire and people, that she has no boats, and that the struggling of that enormous machinery in a heavy sea seems as though it would rend her into fragments (Lett. P3: 88-89).

69 See generally Pfeiffer, Jackson.

70 Opium dens, however, were considered seedy because, though legal “they were associated with low life and certainly did not fit the Victorian ideal of hard work, alertness, and vigor” (McMurtry 134).

71 The serial production of Dickens’s novels included pages for advertising. At the end of February 1852 the first number of Bleak House appeared, for example, and the advertising space—the “Bleak House Advertiser”—included advertisements for items such as “Rowland’s Macassar Oil, for Life Pills, for Chrystal spectacles, for Cough lozenges, Pulmonic wafers” and so on (Ackroyd 654).

72 See Crellin for specific ingredients in Victorian medicine chests.

73 And also for his first, which he describes using to Thomas Beard:

if you could only have seen me, Beard, endeavouring (with that impossible pair of scales, and those weights, invisible to the naked eye) to make up pills in heavy weather, on the rolling Atlantic! If you could only have seen me,—when Kate and Anne were deadly fearful of Shipwreck,—bent on raising their spirits by means of calomel, and ringing the changes on all the bottles in that Mahogany box, to restore their peace of mind! Anne struck at last. She objected to take any more pills, powders, or mixtures, ‘unless she knew what was inside of ’em.’ This stipulation did not please me by any means for two reasons—firstly, because it implied the absence of that blind reliance and faith which are essential to all great cures; and secondly, because I didn’t always know, myself (Lett. P3: 226).

74 “Believing that they did wonders in preventing seasickness, [Dickens] began to eat baked apples frequently” on the voyage over and “Fortunately, he was not seasick at all” (Kaplan, Biography 515).
75 F. Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), considered a quack by his contemporaries, believed that he had found a specific magnetic force in humans that matched a similar force or fluid in the universe; because of this, he claimed, the unaided mind was capable of transmitting influences from one person to another, a transmission he called ‘Animal Magnetism’ (Ackerknecht, History 207; Jonathan Miller 75). Mesmerism became all the rage in Paris until a French Royal Commission investigating the claim “almost unanimously agreed that the results, such as they were, could all be explained as the outcome of suggestion and that there was no need to invoke the agency of a cosmic fluid” (Jonathan Miller 76).

76 Elliotson was largely responsible for establishing University College Hospital. Founder of the Phrenological Society. His Lumléian Lectures on diseases of the heart were published 1830; his Principles and Practice of Medicine 1839.... Was later, for many years, CD’s family doctor; also Thackeray’s, Macready’s, Forster’s and Wilkie Collins’s (Lett.P 1: 461 n. 1). He published A Memoir of Courvoisier (the murderer) in 1841 (Lett.P 2: 109 n. 5). Elliotson also “experimented brilliantly with the use of drugs in disorders of the liver and kidneys” (Kaplan, Biography 182). It was through Elliotson that Dickens met The Rev. Chauncy Hare Townshend who among other things was also very interested in mesmerism, dedicating Facts in Mesmerism, 1840 to Elliotson; Dickens later dedicated Great Expectations to Townshend (Lett.P 2: 110 n. 1).

77 Kaplan, Dickens and Mesmerism provides a full account of Dickens’s experiences with mesmerism. His daughter, Mamie, wrote “I know of many cases, my own among the number, in which he used his [mesmeric] power ... with perfect success” (Recall 18). After successfully mesmerizing Catherine in America, he became fascinated with his own powers and “began regularly to mesmerize friends and members of his family, sometimes for their social amusement, sometimes to alleviate illness” (Kaplan, Biography 183). He even accidentally mesmerized Catherine once while attempting a long distance mesmerism on the “patient” who most intrigued him, Augusta de la Rue (Lett.P 4: 253), who was “Deeply distressed by a mysterious neurological illness ... spasmodic muscular contractions of the face and extremities and convulsive seizures” (Kaplan, Biography 182). Dickens described her once as “rolled into an apparently impossible ball, by tic in the brain, and I only knew where her head was by following her long hair to its source” (in Ackroyd 451). Terming himself “her anxious physician” (Lett.P 4: 249), Dickens began regularly to mesmerize her in Geneva, 1844, and became obsessed with trying to relieve her of her ailment and of a “Phantom” which troubled her thoughts. See Lett.P 4: 247-49 for Dickens’s account of mesmerizing Augusta de la Rue and his letters to Emile de la Rue in 1845, for example, Lett.P 4: 257-50, 260-61, 262-65, 323-25. Dickens also mesmerized his friend John Leech, unable to rest after a concussion: ‘Accordingly in the middle of the night I fell to; and, after a very fatiguing bout of it, put him to sleep for an hour and thirty-five minutes. A change came on in the sleep, and he is decidedly better. I talked to the astounded little Mrs. Leech across him, when he was asleep, as if he had been a truss of hay.... What do you think of my setting up in the magnetic line with a large brass plate? “Terms, twenty-five guineas per nap”’ (in Forster 2: 55).

Dickens owned “At least fourteen volumes on [mesmerism and ‘the occult’]” on his death, including Elliotson’s Human Physiology (1840) and his On Numerous Cases of Surgical Operations Without Pain in the Mesmeric State (1843) (Kaplan, Mesmerism 4-5).
Elliotson was one of the leaders of his profession. Respected as a physician and medical writer, he had published a highly regarded medical textbook and had introduced the stethoscope into England. After meeting one of Mesmer’s successors, Elliotson decided to use Mesmerism as a treatment for his hospital patients. It was not long before “The Lancet ... turned against Elliotson and mesmerism, as did most of the medical establishment” (Andrews 811); he resigned to avoid further embarrassment. Elliotson did not renounce mesmerism, however, and for twenty years edited The Zoist, a successful journal of phrenomesmerism (Jonathan Miller 77-79). Mesmerism did become more respectable in the 1840s and Elliotson was invited in 1846 to give the Harveian oration at the Royal College of Physicians (Lett.P 4: 243-44 n. 2). His most famous case was that of two sisters, Elizabeth and Jane Okey [sometimes written O’Key], who suffered from “fits.” Elliotson found that by inducing them into a magnetic trance their symptoms would disappear, a treatment which had to be repeated several times a day, however, as the cure was not permanent. Elliotson and his patients excited attention, becoming what Jonathan Miller calls “a three-headed monster of magnetic exorbitance” (78). The Okeys eventually began to exhibit clairvoyant powers, and by “the end of 1838 Elliotson claimed that they were able to visualise their own innards, and as he deepened their trance the clairvoyance extended to the interiors of other people” (Jonathan Miller 78). He was soon using them as a diagnostic tool on other patients. Elliotson’s behaviour brought complaints from hospital colleagues concerned about the effect his demonstrations would have on the growing scientific credibility of their profession.

For a number of reasons: In “Pet Prisoners” (HW 1 [1850]: 97-103) Dickens objects on economic grounds, when paupers are starving outside the prison walls, to the costly system of separate confinement of prisoners seen at the Pentonville Model Prison. Eight years earlier, after visiting Eastern Penitentiary near Philadelphia which imposed solitary confinement on all prisoners for the duration of their sentences, he wrote, “I looked at some of [the prisoners] with the same awe as I should have looked at men who had been buried alive, and dug up again.” And while thinking the system might perhaps work reformation if used for short terms “say two years for the maximum,” longer sentences he considered “cruel and unjustifiable” (Lett.P 3: 124). Dickens wrote in American Notes “I hold this slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain, to be immeasurably worse than any torture of the body” (99, and see generally AN; ch. 7).

He also visited related confines, in 1842 he wrote of a New York “‘place of police-imprisonment. A man is found drunk in the streets, and is thrown into a cell below the surface of the earth.... If he die (as one man did not long ago) he is half eaten by the rats in an hour’s time (as this man was)” (in Forster 1: 207).

He was journalistically aware of how often he could write about them “You cannot throw the interest over a years imprisonment, however severe, that you can cast around the punishment of death. The Tread-Mill will not take the hold on men’s feelings that the Gallows does ... the insertion of another Prison Paper would decidedly detract from the ‘hit’ of the first” (Lett.P 1: 103) he wrote regarding “A Visit to Newgate” being the only prison paper in SB. Curiously, he was once accused of being a felon himself:

A dozen years after the appearance of Oliver Twist, Dickens and Mark Lemon were walking in the Edgeware Road when the latter caught a pickpocket feeling in his coat; their captive accused them in court of being ‘swell mob-men’ and Dickens of being a ‘fence’ who had been sentenced to jail (Johnson 1: 279).
Dickens was, though, angered at being termed a Newgate novelist on the basis of *Oliver Twist*.

"What he liked to talk about was the latest new piece at the theatres, the latest exciting trial or police case, the latest social craze or social swindle, and especially the latest murder and the newest thing in ghosts’" wrote George Augustus Sala (in Collins, *Crime 1*). Sala also recalled that "Dickens had a curious and almost morbid partiality for communing with and entertaining police officers" (Collins, *Recollections 2*: 203). Philip Collins comments: His concern with crime was, however, more persistent and more serious than most men’s. Extraordinary in character as well as in literary skill, he had strong and conflicting feelings about criminals. He readily identified himself, in imagination, with their aggressive activities, but would also strongly repudiate this sympathy by extolling their adversaries, the police, and by demanding severe punishment for offenders against the law. At one period he even contemplated becoming a paid Metropolitan Magistrate (Collins, *Crime 1*).

He was fascinated by the police and their work and went on expeditions with the Metropolitan police, and "One of the very first fictional detectives is Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*, modelled to some extent on Inspector Field of Scotland Yard" (Altick, *Scarlet* 127). From New York he wrote "I have been tempted out at three in the morning to visit one of the larger police stations-houses, and was so fascinated by the study of a horrible photograph-book of thieves’ portraits that I couldn’t shut it up" (Forster 2: 326).

A Swiss-born valet, 23, who had robbed and murdered his employer Lord William Russell, 73, by slitting his throat while he lay in bed early on the morning of 6 May 1840. A sensational trial at the old Bailey on 18-20 June resulted in conviction and an equally sensational public execution followed on 6 July. Dickens’s second letter to the *Daily News* advocating the abolition of capital punishment, published 28 Feb. 1846, “contains his horrified account of the experience, which clearly affected his description of the public executions in *Barnaby*” (Lett.P 2: 87 n. 1).

See Burnett’s reminiscences, quoted in Kitton 142-43.

The crowd was estimated at 40,000 (Lett.P 2: 87 n. 1). Thackeray wrote an impassioned article recording his disgust at the event and calling for the abolition of capital punishment “Going to See a Man Hanged” (*Fraser’s Magazine* 22 [1840]: 150-58).


February 23 and 28 and March 9, 13, and 16 1846. The latter three letters are reprinted in *Miscellaneous Papers 1*: 30-51. His main points were:

1) Death has a great fascination for all people because of 'the Dread and Mystery surrounding' it; 2) Those who are 'criminally disposed' are influenced by such a psychologically fascinating sight, which, among other things, 'engenders a diseased sympathy'; 3) The ignorant mass of people in general, seeing the state murder but not the crime for which it is a punishment, 'will almost of necessity sympathize with the man who dies before them'; 4) Since 'all exhibitions of agony and Death have a tendency to brutalize and harden the feelings of men,' such public spectacles tend to make death less rather than more corrective (Kaplan, *Biography* 200).
He concluded “I beg to be understood as advocating the total abolition of the Punishment of Death” (Lett. P 4: 342 n. 3).

88 Kaplan writes that by the time Dickens wrote these letters to the press, capital punishment:

had been on his mind for many years, beginning with its indirect depiction in the accidental death by hanging of Bill Sikes, watched by a taunting, angry crowd, in *Oliver Twist*, the suicide hanging of Ralph Nickleby, and the dramatic, extended presentation of the hangman and his work in *Barnaby Rudge*. With a strong touch of the obsessive voyeur, he found the highest drama in assaults on the body, in the depiction of the vulnerability of the human creature, who could be brought from wholeness to dismemberment, from life to death, in a moment of individual violence or state-sanctioned murder (*Biography* 198).

89 One of the most famous crimes of the century was committed in 1849. Maria Manning, a Swiss-born lady’s maid, had lived sporadically with an Irishman, Patrick O’Connor, a customs officer and petty usurer, despite being already married to Frederick Manning, a railway guard. In August of 1849, the Mannings invited O’Connor to dine, and murdered him, Maria apparently starting the procedure with a pistol and her husband finishing it up with a chisel. They then buried O’Connor in quicklime under the kitchen floorboards. The trial generated much publicity (*Altick, Scarlet* 45). It was what Dickens terms in *Great Expectations* “a highly popular murder [that] had been committed” (*GE* 132; 1: ch. 18). Hortense of *Bleak House* is generally held to be based in part on Maria Manning. It was one of the biggest crowd-drawing executions of the century, and it was after attending this event that Dickens wrote for the press his blistering attacks on public executions.

90 “According to *The Times*, 14 Nov, probably more than 30,000 people were present, kept in order by 500 police” (Lett. P 5: 644 n. 2).


92 The last public execution was in 1868.

93 In his second letter to the *Times* Dickens had complained of the hangman’s behaviour: “Mr. Calcraft, the hangman ... should be restrained in his unseemly briskness, in his jokes, his oaths, and his brandy” (Lett. P 5: 653). Dickens “may have drawn on him for Dennis in *Barnaby Rudge* “(Lett. P 5: 653 n. 3).

94 “At mid-century the ‘penny dreadful’ was joined by the ‘shilling shocker,’ which in effect embraced the serialized or separate thrills of the dreadful between a single set of covers” (*Altick, Scarlet* 70).

95 It was not just the masses who revelled in murder: the *Newgate Calendar* went through several nineteenth-century editions and even Thomas De Quincy at the very time Burke and Hare were joining forces, was composing “Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts”, an epoch-making essay that lifted the tale of crime out of the street-vendor’s hands to deposit it in the more manicured but not less feverish ones of the novelist, the psychologist, and the critic (*Barzun* 32).
Malcolm Morley shows that words from “The Madman’s Manuscript” in the *Pickwick Papers* are included “in one of the many versions of this hoary old melodrama” (92).

See also Dickens’s “The Demeanour of Murderers” (*HW 13* [1856]: 505-07). “Street Terrors” (*AYR 8* [1863]: 533-38) looks at fashions through history in methods of murdering and committing other crimes in the streets, mentioning the new fashion for garrotting.

In January 1849 he went with friends to visit Stanfield Hall in Norfolk the site of the Rush murders of November 1848 which had captured the public imagination. James Blomfield Rush (who Richard Altick suggests Dickens may have drawn hints from for his portrait of Uriah Heep [*Scarlet* 140-41]), a farmer, had shot and killed the owner of Stanfield Hall, Isaac Jermy, Recorder of Norwich, and his son Isaac Jermy Jermy, and had gravely wounded two women (Mrs Jermy Jermy lost an arm). His motives were sympathy with other claimants to the ownership of the Hall, and revenge for an action for breach of contract won by Jermy in Mar 48. He was arrested 29 Nov; committed for trial 15 Dec; tried at Norwich 29 Mar-4 Apr (he conducted his own defence; a damaging witness was his mistress, his accomplice in forgeries, whom he had employed as governess). Hanged there 21 Apr, ‘a monster in human form’ (*Times*, 23 Apr). CD mentions him in his second *Times* letter on public executions, published 19 Nov 49, and in ‘The Demeanour of Murderers’, *Household Words*, 14 June 56, xiii, 506 (*Lett.P 5* 5: 473 n. 4).

Dickens wrote that the Hall had nothing attractive about it except “a murderous look that seemed to invite such a crime” (*Lett.P 5*: 473).

Ackroyd writes that Dickens had an obsession which went beyond the conventional morbidity of his time. He once wrote that ‘in seasons of pestilence, some of us will have a secret attraction to the disease’, and it is in this same sense that he seems always implicitly to sympathise with the act of killing. He liked to visit the scenes of murder and to dwell upon the events of the crime itself; he even had a pamphlet of murder, one of the “last confessions” which were commonly hawked about the streets at the time of an execution, which he had carefully marked and annotated (518).

A writer in *Household Words* commented:

> The exciting extent to which murder has been recently done by poison fills a column of every newspaper and furnishes a topic for general conversation.... A parliamentary return states, that, in the ten years which ended with 1849—putting aside accidental poisonings, which were countless—the appalling number of two hundred and fifty nine persons were murdered by poison (chiefly by arsenic), yet the practical difficulties of detection were so great that no more than eighty-five convictions took place (“Poison Sold Here!” *HW 2* [1850]: 155).

That article urged that restrictions be placed on sales of poison as did others, for example, “Household Crime” (*HW 4* [1851]: 277-81), “Strychnine” (*HW 13* [1856]: 420-24) and “Poison” (*HW 13* [1856]: 220-24).

Forster mentions Wainewright when describing a tour of prisons he made with Dickens in 1838-39:

> We made together a circuit of nearly all the London prisons; and, in coming to the prisoners under remand while going over Newgate, accompanied by Macready and Mr.
Hablot Browne, were startled by a sudden tragic cry of ‘My God! there’s Wainewright!’ In the shabby-genteel creature, with sandy disordered hair and a dirty moustache, who had turned quickly round with a defiant stare at our entrance, looking at once mean and fierce, and quite capable of the cowardly murders he had committed, Macready had been horrified to recognise a man familiarly known to him in former years, and at whose table he had dined (1: 106).

Dickens also knew Doctor Locock who “had attended the poor girl, Miss Abercrombie, whose death by strychnine led to the exposure of Wainewright’s murders” (Forster 2: 80), and Henry Porter Smith, an actuary who had investigated Wainewright’s affairs. The AYR series “Old Stories Re-Told” includes an account of “Thomas Griffiths Wainewright (Janus Weathercock) the Poisoner” (AYR 17 [1867]: 34-41).

101 Hutter discusses the case in his examination of dismemberment and articulation in Our Mutual Friend.

102 In “Night Walks” (UT 127-35) Dickens refers to the “Chopped-up Murdered Man.” See also Matchett.

103 A case he was more directly involved with had been four years earlier, in 1840, when he was called as a jury member “at an inquest on the body of a little child alleged to have been murdered by its mother; of which the result was, that, by his persevering exertion, seconded by the humane help of the coroner, Mr. Wakley, the verdict of himself and his fellow-jurymen charged her only with the concealment of birth” (Forster 1: 131). Dickens described viewing the body in the parish workhouse:

In one kind of crypt devoted to the warehousing of the parochial coffins, and in the midst of a perfect Panorama of coffins of all sizes, it was stretched on a box.... It had been opened, and neatly sewn up, and regarded from that point of view, it looked like a stuffed creature. It rested on a clean white cloth, with a surgical instrument or so at hand, and regarded from that point of view, it looked as if the cloth were ‘laid,’ and the Giant were coming to dinner (“Some Recollections of Mortality” UT 196).

The day after the inquest he wrote:

Whether it was the poor baby, or its poor mother, or the coffin, or my fellow-jurymen, or what not, I can’t say, but last night I had a most violent attack of sickness and indigestion which not only prevented me from sleeping, but even from lying down. Accordingly Kate and I sat up through the dreary watches (Lett.P 2: 10).

In one infanticide induced letter he writes of the power words about murder have to hold people’s attention, almost as much as an actual murder would:

‘Great excitement here about a wretched woman who has murdered her child. Apropos of which I observed a curious thing last night. The newspaper offices (local journals) had placards like this outside:

**CHILD MURDER IN BRIGHTON**
**INQUEST. COMMITTAL OF THE MURDERESS.**

I saw so many common people stand profoundly staring at these lines for half-an-hour together—and even go back to stare again—that I feel quite certain they had not the power of thinking about the thing at all connectedly or continuously, without having something about it before their sense of sight. Having got that, they were considering the case, wondering how the devil they had come into that power. I saw one man in a
smock frock lose the said power the moment he turned away, and bring his hobnails back again' (in Forster 2: 430-31 n. 90).

104 On “Freaks” see generally Fiedler. See also “Tall People” (AYR 12 [1864]: 489-93), “Little People” (AYR 14 [1865]: 376-80), “Giants their Own Killers” (AYR 3 [1860]: 477-80), and “A Great Idea” (exhibiting the physically abnormal) (HW 5 [1852]: 546-48). “What There is in the Roof of the College of Surgeons” (HW 1 [1850]: 464-67) describes the Hunterian Museum.

105 Reprinted in “Sir John Franklin and His Crews” (HW 11 [1855]: 12-20).

106 Ackroyd reveals:

This story can be completed with the news that, in 1986, the corpses of some members of that same Franklin expedition were found preserved in permafrost. And Dickens was right, after all: they appear to have died of tuberculosis and starvation. In the newspaper photographs they are to be seen preserved in their icy beds, their faces and clothes clearly visible; the contemporaries of Dickens returned to our own time (713).

Books continue to be written on the subject see for example David Woodman. Unravelling the Franklin Mystery: Inuit Testimony McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991.

107 In “1853 [Dickens] wrote an article called “The Long Voyage” [RP 369-78],” which tells of a ‘solitary monster,’ one of a group of convicts who escape from a penal colony: ‘Famine, as they must all have foreseen, beset them early in their course. Some of the party die and are eaten; some are murdered by the rest and eaten. This one awful creature eats his fill, and sustains his strength, and lives on to be captured and taken back’ (Marlow, “Sir John Franklin” 97-98). Later he induces another prisoner to escape with him

‘In his former journey,’ the reader is told, ‘he acquired an innapetable relish for his dreadful food. He urged the new man away, expressly to kill and eat him.’ Dickens finishes off this degenerate creature with sentences like rifle volleys: ‘He is taken back, and he is hanged.’ But the story still haunts the narrator, for, as he says, ‘I shall never see that sea-beach on the wall or in the fire, without him, solitary monster, eating as he prowls along, while the sea rages and rises at him’ (Marlow, “Sir John Franklin” 98).

By following this tale with one of a shipwrecked child whom sailors guard sacredly “Dickens had anticipated the question of cannibalism, and had already laid the groundwork for the defense of Franklin he is to use” (Marlow, “Sir John Franklin” 98). On the Franklin incident and cannibalism see also, “Six Years Among Cannibals” (HW 7 [1853]: 134-38), “The Lost Arctic Voyagers” (which is two articles by Dickens) (HW 10 [1854]: 361-65, 385-93), and “The Lost English Sailors” (HW 15 [1857]: 145-47).

108 In August 1836 Dickens, in fact, agreed to write a children’s book “to be called Solomon Bell the Raree Showman,” but the book was never written (Lett.P 1: 163 and n. 2).

109 Fiedler comments: “It took the Victorian era to complete the process of dymythification [of dwarfs] by converting them into public exhibits, subjects for medical study, and occasions for pity—like orphans, abused animals, or the deserving poor” (48).
Dickens one night after “attend[ing] a Royal Academy Dinner ... [went on] to see a performance of General Tom Thumb, the celebrated midget, in Albert Smith’s Hop o’ My Thumb” (Ackroyd 495).

See Lett. P 3: 140-42. He recounts in another letter the following incident, ‘It is not six years ago, since a slave in this very same St. Louis being arrested (I forget for what), and knowing he had no chance of a fair trial be his offence what it might, drew his bowie knife and ripped the constable across the body. A scuffle ensuing, the desperate negro stabbed two others with the same weapon. The mob who gathered round (among whom were men of mark, wealth, and influence in the place) over-powered him by numbers; carried him away to a piece of open ground beyond the city and burned him alive. This, I say, was done within six years in broad day; in a city with its courts, lawyers, tipstaffs, judges, jails, and hangman; and not a hair on the head of one of these men has been hurt to this day’ (in Forster 1: 237-38). See also “A Lynch Trial in California” (HW 3 [1851]: 611-12) and “North American Slavery” (HW 6 [1852]: 1-6) the latter coauthored by Dickens.

See Altick, Shows 342-349.

Brightfield usefully extracts descriptions from hundreds of nineteenth-century novels many of them lesser-known works and arranges them in subject groups which provide plenty of evidence for the prevalence of doctors, illness and treatment in literature of the time (2: 207-26) as it does for depictions of “daughters of the night” (2: 138-54), “fallen women” (4: 66-76) and dying and burial (4: 480-97).

See Brightfield 2: 349-402 for extracts from Victorian novels of descriptions of female beauty or lack thereof, the particular features described such as hair, eyes or feet and see 2: 423-53 for male beauty.

Hutter, for example, discusses dismemberment and and articulation as metaphors for elements of society and for various plot strands in Our Mutual Friend. In particular he sees the Victorian fascination with crimes of dismemberment as linked to a desire to see the world set to rights, the case solved, the body re-articulated and order re-established. Gibbon sees mythic and symbolic importance in Our Mutual Friend, “based on the notion of the dismemberment and attempted reassembly and reanimation of human corpses” (14). He discusses the novel in terms of the Egyptian myth of Osiris, arguing that myths of dismemberment can be used to explore psychic and social division in the novel and the hope of restoration.

Newsom discusses the threats and fears of going to pieces or being torn to pieces in the novel and relates them to larger concerns such as the fall of the House of Dombey. He also interestingly points out that “Dombey” is an anagram of “embody” (199).
CHAPTER TWO: VULNERABILITY AND CHARLES DICKENS’S BODY

‘Sairey,’ Mrs. Harris says, ‘you are but poorly. Don’t deny it, Mrs. Gamp, for books is in your looks. You must have rest. Your mind,’ she says, ‘is too strong for you; it gets you down and treads upon you, Sairey. It is useless to disguise the fact—the blade is a wearing out the sheets’ (in Forster 2: 7).¹

Dickens’s obsession with the body was a product not only of the crowded London in which he lived, but also of the powerful influence of stories both heard and read, personal experiences, acute observations, and a vivid imagination sharpened by a deep sense of his own vulnerability. He was not merely an aware Victorian, but a man with his own obsessions, predilections, and fears, many of which centred on the body, and most of which, like our own, can be traced back to childhood. Childhood stories and experiences instilled in him a fear of and fascination with cannibalism, death, the dead coming back to life, dismemberment and illness, and taught him of the precariousness of childhood alone in the world without security or sufficient food. His adult life was spent obsessively and exhaustively constructing a body of work to shore up against an always feared ruin, and it is through his writing that he found a measure of the literary eternal life. To achieve his literary success he exploited both his and his audience’s actual bodily fears, concretely representing the vulnerable in his characters, and subversively implying their animated dismemberment in his prose, moving an arm in stylistic contradistinction to moving a body. Yet, even as he did so in his novels, his everyday adult life was filled with continuous denial of his body’s susceptibility to fatigue and illness, and also filled with continuous exertion, in the form of work and “relaxing” exercise which was designed to overcome any hint of bodily weakness. This denial of bodily vulnerability, however, did not make him any less obsessed with his, or any, body.

This chapter examines aspects of Charles Dickens’s life, namely, childhood, youth, early career, adulthood, familial relations, personal health, the causes of his own death, and
the interconnection of his body with his art in order to demonstrate that his private experiences regarding the body even more than his more social concerns can be seen as an influence on his manipulation of the body in his fiction.

On the night of Dickens's birth on the 7th of February, 1812, his mother, who, like Dickens, loved to dance, was said to have attended a ball. The tale is fitting, if not strictly factual, since vigorous bodily activity was to be just as important a part of her son's adult life as vigorous mental or imaginative activity. He was the second of eight children, two of whom died in infancy, and in the end Dickens, himself dying at the hardly advanced age of fifty-eight, outlived all but one of his siblings. During childhood, Dickens saw, above all, what could happen to the body, and his childhood experiences, thoughts, and observations pervade his fiction. John Forster, Dickens's first biographer and closest friend, wrote that David Copperfield's comment about himself: "If it should appear ... that I was a child of close observation, or that as a man I have a strong memory of my childhood, I undoubtedly lay claim to both of these characteristics," was also "unaffectedly true of Charles Dickens" (in Forster 1: 4).

His childhood environments were neither salubrious nor sheltered. Portsmouth, for example, where he spent his first three years, was a place where prisoners of war, as Great Expectations depicts, were held on hulk ships, and where there was danger close at hand:

The local newspapers give many instances of sailors brawling, of robbery in the streets and of housebreaking. There seems to have been a plethora of road accidents, with many people, particularly children, being crushed by wagon wheels (Allen, Childhood 16).

His happiest childhood years were at Chatham where he lived from the age of four or five till the age of ten, returning to settle in the area as an adult. This was not only the place in which his imagination burgeoned, but also:
a rough and dirty place, the haunt of the sailors and soldiers who were stationed there at a time when the Napoleonic Wars had just come to an end, leaving the inheritance of wasted lives, maimed bodies, popular discontent and a repressive domestic government. A place known for being 'as lawless as it is squalid'.... We can be sure that the young Dickens noticed all of this; how much he understood is another matter (Ackroyd 23).

He would instinctively have understood “maimed bodies,” and it was probably here that his obsession with one form of dismemberment, that symbolized by a wooden leg, began.

It was at Chatham that Dickens began to write and put on plays, encouraged by his Aunt's stepson James Lamert. Elizabeth Dickens's sister Fanny, whose first husband had drowned, married a Doctor Lamert, an army surgeon, who had quarters at the ordnance hospital in Chatham where his son James also got up plays and entertainments (Forster 1: 9). Verbal and surgical performance, therefore, already had a tenuous link in Dickens's early life. Dickens himself was, even in childhood, a good entertainer, and his father would put him up on tables to sing for people—physically “display” him as it were.

Stories told to him by an early nurse, “Her name was Mercy, though she had none on me,” had a profound effect on Dickens (UT 153). In “Nurse’s Stories” (UT 148-58), he recalls the “utterly impossible places and people, but none the less alarmingly real—that I found I had been introduced to by my nurse before I was six years old, and used to be forced to go back to at night without at all wanting to go” (UT 150). He posits: “If we all knew our own minds (in a more enlarged sense than the popular acceptation of that phrase), I suspect we should find our nurses responsible for most of the dark corners we are forced to go back to, against our wills” (UT 150). Dickens more than suspects this, he knows it; these early tales embedded themselves in the darker recesses of his mind and were there compounded by other childhood fears about the body. Here, as in “Lying Awake” (RP 431-37), he stresses the unbidden and unwanted nature of certain thoughts.

One “nurses’s story” is of “Chips,” a shipwright who sells himself to a devil for “an iron pot and a bushel of tenpenny nails and half a ton of copper and a rat that could speak” (UT 153). After trying unsuccessfully to kill the rat, Chips becomes inundated with rats.
Chips meets his end at sea when the rats chew a hole in his ship's hull, drowning all the crew: “And what the rats—being water-rats—left of Chips, at last floated to shore, and sitting on him was an immense overgrown rat, laughing, that dived when the corpse touched the beach and never came up” (UT 157). What caused Dickens “inexpressible horror” (UT 155) about this story, indeed he says “deprive[d] [him] of [his] senses for some moments,” was the Devil rat’s refrain, which ended “‘And I’ll have Chips!’” (UT 154). He adds that what made the memories of these “ghost stories,” as with earlier ones probably told to him by his maternal grandmother,² so much more inescapable was that the tellers of them each maintained that the events had all occurred to her own friends or relations, if not to herself: “and I couldn’t say ‘I don’t believe you;’ it was not possible” (UT 158).

The story Dickens mentions first, however, is of a “diabolical character” called Captain Murderer who, he says, “intruded himself on my peaceful youth” (UT 150). Various aspects of the tale also introduce themselves into his novels. The sharp-toothed, cannibalistic Captain Murderer is frequently widowed. On “the day month” after each of his marriages he has his wife bake a pie-crust in a “silver pie-dish of immense capacity.” When the lovely bride [says] ‘Dear Captain Murderer, I see no meat.’ The Captain humorously retort[s], ‘Look in the glass.’ She looked in the glass but still she saw no meat ... when she had lined the dish with crust and had cut the crust all ready to fit the top, the Captain called out, ‘I see the meat in the glass!’ And the bride looked up at the glass, just in time to see the Captain cutting her head off; and he chopped her in pieces, and peppered her, and salted her, and put her in the pie, and sent it to the baker’s, and ate it all, and picked the bones (UT 151).

The night before the Captain is to marry a fair-haired twin, her dark-haired sister, suspicious, “climb[s] his garden wall, and ... s[ees] him having his teeth filed sharp” (UT 151-52). After her sister is duly killed and eaten, the dark-haired twin seeks revenge. Marrying the Captain herself, she in turn is cooked in a pie:

But before she began to roll out the paste she had taken a deadly poison ... and Captain Murderer had hardly picked her last bone, when he began to swell, and to turn blue, and to be all over spots, and to scream. And he went on swelling and turning bluer, and being more all over spots and screaming, until he reached from floor to
ceiling and from wall to wall; and then, at one o’clock in the morning, he blew up with a loud explosion (UT 152).

Dickens tells us that he heard this story hundreds of times in his early youth.

I sometimes used to plead I thought I was hardly strong enough and old enough to hear the story again just yet. But, she never spared me one word of it, and indeed commended the awful chalice to my lips as the only preservative known to science against ‘The Black Cat’—a weird and glaring-eyed supernatual Tom, who was reputed to prowl about the world by night, sucking the breath of infancy, and who was endowed with a special thirst (as I was given to understand) for mine (UT 153).

Dickens argues that his body cannot endure hearing the story again, but is told that unless he hears it he will be dead anyway, the breath having been sucked from his body; either way, he will be breathless. As a child he is not the teller of the tale and so cannot control it or its effects upon him, but, in relating this story as a famous novelist, he knows he has the ability to distance its effect, introducing humorous action or felicitous turns of phrase at moments when his deepest fears threaten to become most evident. Still, the idea that what is seen in the mirror is suddenly, fatally happening must have always been disturbing to Dickens, a discomfort conveyed to the reader, who, used to identifying with the resourceful young women of fairy and folk tales, is caught by surprise by the “heroine’s” sudden dismemberment, even though it results in “justice.” Mirrors were important to Dickens’s methods of writing, demonstrating his awareness of the connection between his body and those of his characters; “the meat is in the glass” has very personal overtones. Such tales doubtless served as subconscious stimulants to Dickens’s later fictional use of the body; he knew first hand the effectiveness of the body sliced and diced in gripping an audience.

Despite the ironic tone and probable artistic refurbishment of these adult-told and controlled tales, it is no more than conjecture to argue, as Ackroyd does, that these stories are simply the result of Dickens “making up little narratives for the delectation of his audience” (30-31). Most biographers accept that these stories were told to Dickens by a nurse or by nurses; his memory was, as Ackroyd himself emphasizes, excellent, and these are just the sort of chilling tales that most of us carry into adulthood. Dickens’s memory was
both visual and aural, and aspects of these stories, although somewhat light-hearted and swiftly told in his journalism, become more sustained subtextual elements of his novels.

Ackroyd, questioning the authenticity of the nurse behind the tales, does, however, suggest that

we can believe a strange episode that his sister seems to have confirmed, when, for reasons that he could not remember, and in a period about which he is vague, ‘... we stealthily conducted the man with the wooden leg—whom we knew intimately—into the coal cellar, and that, in getting him over the coals to hide him behind some partition there was beyond, his wooden leg bored itself in among the small coals’ (Ackroyd 33).

Dismembered and wooden legs have a curious life in Dickens's work, and are discussed in the following chapter, here, however, it is important to note that in his novels Dickens emphasizes that characters possess a wooden leg rather than lack a leg of flesh and blood. It is this unmentioned absence that creates tension, curiosity value, attraction and repulsion, and which attempts to hide in humour the knowledge that the owner of such a leg has had to go through the all too imaginable, or perhaps all too unimaginable pain of a dismemberment, an ever present danger for the author and his readers.

“Nurse’s Stories” demonstrates how, however unwillingly, Dickens’s mind returns him bodily to the two worlds of his childhood, the actual world of odd-bodied and vulnerable humanity around him, and the world of the childhood tales which, although “unreal,” seemed tantalizingly on the edge of reality. We should certainly not, however, over-emphasize stories at the expense of what the young Dickens saw everyday. Mary Weller, the nurse who may have told him the stories, also seems to have fed his bodily obsessions in other ways, taking him, for example, to a series of lyings-in, including one where quadruplets (or quintuplets), as Dickens writes, were lying dead “side by side, on a clean cloth on a chest of drawers; reminding me by a homely association ... of pigs’ feet as they are usually displayed at a neat tripe-shop” (“Dullborough Town” UT 118-19).

Dickens’s own body was of course a fundamentally important part of his awareness of physical vulnerability. In childhood he “was a very little and a very sickly boy. He was
subject to attacks of violent spasms which disabled him for any active exertion” (Forster 1: 5). In his first letter to Washington Irving, Dickens mentions that he was a “very small and not over-particularly-taken-care-of boy” (Lett. P 2: 268). It is a slight, passing comment, but it is significant that at the age of twenty-nine such a personal recollection flows so readily from his pen; it shows his constant awareness of his insecurity as a child, especially being small for a child his age, and being, quite simply, a small child.

He suffered, in childhood, and throughout his adult life at times of pressure, from a variety of renal colic, which sent him into incapacitating paroxysms of pain. His left side in the region of his kidney was his body’s literal, obvious, undeniable point of weakness, a constant reminder of bodily presence and defenselessness against disease. Dickens’s illness and his slightness probably exacerbated his feelings of loneliness and abandonment as a child. Despite the fact that others often recalled his good spirits, great energy, quick movement, and fondness of fun, he felt himself to be not only “Friday’s child” but, as Kaplan puts it, “nightmare’s child,” the victim of what he called acts of “boyslaughter” (Biography 28). Despite this, however, Dickens “had always the belief that this early sickness had brought to himself one inestimable advantage, in the circumstances of his weak health having strongly inclined him to reading” (Forster 1: 6). In other words, his body and its vulnerability set him to reading, and to literature; it connected him to words when he was just a child. Reading and writing were themselves, for Dickens, physical acts; he was, Mary Weller recalled, “a terrible boy to read,” (in Ackroyd 44) and would “sit with his book in his left hand, holding his wrist with his right hand, and constantly moving it up and down, and at the same time sucking his tongue ... reading as if for life” (Kaplan, Biography 25). And just as reading for Dickens is explicitly connected with bodily vulnerability, so writing would be in one sense a way of escaping from and controlling it by transforming the inherent insecurities of the body that his readers shared into art of humour and language play.

In 1822 his family moved to a London which still had the air of the eighteenth century about it. There were “no railways and urban sanitation did not exist” (Ackroyd 93). There
were cockfights, hangings, pleasure gardens, and chophouses: "It would be true to say, in fact, that the London of his novels always remains the London of his youth," he always "goes back to his first vision of the terrible river, the wretched buildings around it, the fetid alleys and the bright, bewildering life of the streets" (Ackroyd 93). He was, Forster tells us, "all this time ... still subject to continual attacks of illness, and, by reason of them, a very small boy even for his age" (Forster 1: 14).

These early London years provided one fascinating connection between literature and the dismembered body. His mother's elder brother, and father's colleague, Thomas Culliford Barrow, had broken his leg in 1814 in a fall while alighting from a Hackney coach, and although the break was set, another fall resulted in a compound fracture in the same place, which incapacitated him for several years and eventually resulted in a necessary amputation of the leg. It was during this period of incapacity that Charles was taken to see him (Allen, Childhood 77). 7

The "operation would have been performed without anaesthetic and it is recorded that, when Thomas Barrow recovered from his swoon of pain, he asked 'Where's my leg?' and was told that it was 'Under the table'" (Ackroyd 61). Dickens later wrote to Barrow, "I cannot forget that I was once your little companion and nurse, through a weary illness" (Lett.P 1: 144). Barrow lodged in the upper part of a house owned by a widow named Manson, who carried on her husband's trade as a bookseller. On his visits to his "de-membered" uncle, Mrs. Manson lent Charles books, notably Jane Porter's *Scottish Chiefs*, Hans Holbein's "Dance of Death," and George Coleman's *Broad Grins*, which particularly seized his fancy (Kaplan, *Biography* 35). Dickens, at a time when his education had been cut off after the move from Chatham, was now getting books indirectly through an amputee, indeed through an amputation.

This was shortly before Dickens's early life took its worst turn. A few weeks after "another attack of fever" (Forster 1: 15), Dickens was made to start at Warren's Blacking Factory. His father, who always walked the precariously fine financial line followed by his
fictional counterpart Mr. Micawber, was soon afterwards arrested for debt: “the last words said to him by his father before he was finally carried to the Marshalsea, were to the effect that the sun was set upon him forever. ‘I really believed at the time,’ said Dickens to me, ‘that they had broken my heart’” (Forster 1: 16). His father was confined bodily by the walls of the Marshalsea debtor’s prison, and here starts Dickens’s own obsession with never being in debt and with needing to earn money in order to have security (along with, no doubt, his lifelong interest in prisons). His own vulnerability, and the sense that he must fend for himself, were also brought physically home to him. Nearly everything the family owned was pawned or sold, and Charles undertook many of the transactions: “Such books as had been brought from Chatham, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Roderick Random*, *Tom Jones*, *Humphrey Clinker*, and all the rest went first” (Forster 1: 17). These were the very books that Dickens had read so avidly as a child, and the selling of them was a sign that even the protection they represented could be stripped from him. Visiting his father at the Marshalsea for the first time, Dickens received his father’s immortalized piece of advice “‘that if a man had twenty pounds a year, and spent nineteen pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence, he would be happy; but that a shilling spent the other way would make him wretched’” (in Ackroyd 70-71). It was a message Dickens took to heart.

Dickens’s personal vulnerability and insecurity were, meanwhile, being made frighteningly real to him as a youth at the blacking factory, which he entered, at James Lamert’s suggestion, just after he turned twelve. He worked there for some months, not knowing if he would ever leave. It would be hard to over-emphasize the often discussed impact of this solitary, friendless, desperate, hungry time. Although he escaped the dangerous machine mills that appeared in novels such as *Hard Times*, he was now a factory “hand,” a “labouring Hind,” breathing fumes and working by a window for better light, with his life-expectancy both literally and figuratively falling the moment he stepped within those
doors. He had to provide for himself out of his own wages and in most respects had to shift for himself, alone and away from his family who were all soon, save his sister Fanny, at the Marshalsea.

On the streets he could easily have fallen prey to the criminal element, to child prostitute rings, to disease or to robbery. He was above all mortified by his being cast down among such low company, devastated by the thought that his education had ended; a blacking factory was, for all he knew, his lot for the rest of his life. His experiences at this time left a permanent emotional wound and he never spoke of them to anyone, except (perhaps) his wife Catherine, and to Forster, to whom he gave his “autobiographical fragment,” written twenty five years after he entered Warrens’s, at about the time when Charley, his eldest son, was of a similar age. Dickens made use of his experience in David Copperfield, of course, but the world was not to know the truth until after his death on publication of Forster’s biography. A sense of his own defencelessness and an awareness of his own lost potential riddle the fragment:

‘It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age.... 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’ (in Forster 1: 21).

Disease was near at hand, and filth was everywhere; it is not surprising that Dickens became fanatically clean and neat in adulthood. Initially kept separate from the other lads, and always called “the young gentleman,” he was, however, soon working along with the others:

‘No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these everyday associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my earlier hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my breast’ (in Forster 1: 22).

He kept silent, however, worked hard, and kept his “own counsel,”” (in Forster 1: 25). He had, he writes, “‘No advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no support, from anyone’” from Monday morning until Saturday night; Sundays were spent in the prison (in
Forster 1: 24). He suffered attacks of his spasms during this period both at his lodgings and at work:

‘Bob Fagin was very good to me on the occasion of a bad attack of my old disorder. I suffered such excruciating pain that time, that they made a temporary bed of straw ... and I rolled about on the floor, and Bob filled empty blacking-bottles with hot water, and applied relays of them to my side, half the day’ (in Forster 1: 27).

His entertainment at this time, not unusually for the era, centred on the body: a freak show of a Saturday evening, when he was “‘seduced more than once ... by a show-van at a corner; and [had] gone in, with a very motley assemblage, to see the Fat Pig, the Wild Indian, and the Little Lady’” (in Forster 1: 28), or a cheap periodical, the Portfolio, “essentially a compendium of horror stories, fables, executions, disasters (‘All Of Us In Danger of Being Buried Alive’), murders, and sketches of London life” (Ackroyd 91).

Out of this dark period in his youth Dickens brought a determination “never again to be placed in such a detestable, powerless situation; a determination to succeed, always to have sufficient money, be properly organised; a determination to be secure” (Allen, Childhood 104). Forster points to the negative aspects of the determination to be non-vulnerable and the “resistless energy” that Dickens brought out of this experience by saying that he also had “A too great confidence in himself, a sense that everything was possible to the will that would make it so, [which] laid occasionally upon him self-imposed burdens greater than might be borne by anyone safely” (1: 34).

After leaving the blacking factory Dickens attended school for approximately two years beginning in Autumn 1824 at Wellington House Academy, whose proprietor delighted in corporal punishment. Schoolmates recollect him as “‘a healthy-looking boy, small but well-built, with a more than usual flow of spirits.... He usually held his head more erect than lads ordinarily do,’” a habit that would stay with him throughout his life (in Forster 1: 38). Dickens’s second extant letter, a note to a schoolmate, dates from this time. His punning on “Leg,” (either a legend of some sort or “school slang for a lexicon” [Lett.P 1: 1 n. 3]) and “leg” shows for the first time on paper the fascination that wooden legs had for him:
I am quite ashamed I have not returned your Leg but you shall have it by Harry tomorrow. If you would like to purchase my Clavis you shall have it at a very reduced price. Cheaper in comparison than a Leg.

Yours &c
C DICKENS

PS. I suppose all this time you have had a wooden leg. I have weighed yours every Saturday Night (Lett.P 1: 1).

Dickens, as he would be throughout his life, was at this school a leader in putting on plays. He also once “led his companions in pretending to be beggars, staggering the old ladies by the impudence with which he asked for charity, and then exploding with laughter and taking to his heels” (Johnson 1: 50). He had recently, of course, come close to beggary himself, and here, as in his novels, he takes what is most close and frightening to him and turns it into comedy.

His time at Wellington House is also significant for his constant devouring of the “Terrific Register” and other penny and Saturday magazines:

‘I used, when I was at school, to take in the Terrific Register, making myself unspeakably miserable, and frightening my very wits out of my head, for the small charge of a penny weekly; which considering that there was an illustration to every number, in which there was always a pool of blood, and at least one body, was cheap’ (in R. McMaster 37).

This was a magazine he purchased primarily to read of, and see illustrated, the horrors that could occur to the human body, and, as George Gissing pointed out, “‘Those which he read first were practically the only books which influenced Dickens as an author’” (in R. McMaster 37). As Rowland McMaster says, Dickens’s “obsession with ghastliness is so constant, indeed, and so profound, that one hesitates to accept Edmund Wilson’s view that it resulted from one emotional experience, even so devastating a one as he suffered at Warren’s blacking warehouse” (38). All the elements of Dickens’s early years are woven together in his own literary use of the body, and his portrayal of the ghastly or horrific things that can happen to it. The impact of early stories and of his own experiences were consolidated, or rather exacerbated, by his reading at this period, and just as his nurse and Grandmother had claimed of their stories, these terrific tales purported to be true. The stories
did not, however, merely confine themselves to murder, but ventured into “torture, incest, the
devouring of decayed human bodies, [and] physical details of various horrible methods of
execution” (R. McMaster 38), executions such as, Ackroyd says, immolation and
disembowelling (109).

The body was the focus of the “terror” the register hoped to invoke. Rowland
McMaster cites “The Monster of Scotland” (*Terrific Register* 1: 161-63), as a truly
representative example, a tale which
tells how an ‘idle and vicious hedger’ and an ‘idle and profligate’ young woman, from
their seaside cave, maraud the countryside with ghoulish economy and ghastly self-
reliance, concealing their robberies by murdering the victims, and feeding themselves
by devouring the bodies (38).

They quarter the bodies, salt and pickle the members, and dry them out for food. The
dwindling local population eventually get the King’s help and find the cave, and are horrified
by what it reveals: “‘a sight unequalled in Scotland.... Legs, arms, thighs, hands and feet, of
men, women, and children, were suspended in rows like dried beef. Some limbs and other
members were soaked in pickle’” (in R. McMaster 39). McMaster says that stories such as
this “have no direct relation to Dickens’s novels,” (39) but this dismembering is in fact the
most central aspect of Dickens’s use of the body in his novels though unlike here it often
appears in a comic guise.9 Even if not chopped up and baked in a pie, quartered, pickled, and
hung up for storage, or merely crushed under a street wagon, bodies are just as vulnerable in
his work as they are in a terrific tale.

By the time he left Wellington House Academy, most of Dickens’s bodily concerns
had been triggered off. The years between leaving school and the commencement of his work
as a novelist saw him casting about for a career, always busily attempting to improve his
prospects. He first became a law clerk, and was later remembered by his clerking colleagues
as an excellent mimic. He became a regular reader at the British Museum for a year and
taught himself shorthand with the aim of earning some money; “a few years later he was generally credited with being the best shorthand reporter in Parliament” (Ackroyd 124). His uncle, John Henry Barrow, appointed him in either 1831 or 1832 to the staff of the *Mirror of Parliament* as a parliamentary reporter. Barrow had started the newspaper in 1828 as a competitor to *Hansard*: “This remarkable publication purported to furnish a full record of the parliamentary debates, and had earned a high reputation for the accuracy of its reports” (Carlton, *Shorthand* 74).

It is likely, and hitherto unnoticed, that Dickens was sitting in the gallery recording at least some of the debate which led to the passing of the Anatomy Act of 1832. Because there is no record of reporters in the *Mirror*, there is no way of conclusively identifying Dickens as present at a discussion on the Anatomy Bill, neither can we attempt to distinguish his style from any other, because, the reports being verbatim, he was not free to inject his own style into what he recorded. Ironically, however, if he were present, even in such a workaday atmosphere as this he was inundated with debate and discussion concerning bodily parts. He might have heard such arguments as that of Mr. Hunt M. P. who on 15 December 1931 opposed the terms of the bill:

> Dr. Hunter, the great dissector of the age, expressed his abhorrence at the bare idea of being dissected. Something must be done to put an end to the dreadful practices which have recently occurred. Can anything be more horrible than the exposure of dead bodies which takes place? I know a young lady whose brother took home a man's arm the other day; the youngster laid down a parcel on the table, she did not know what it contained, and on opening it, what must she have felt at seeing a man’s arm? This cutting up and mangling of the bodies of human beings is done with as little concern in these human shambles as the bodies of beasts are cut up in Newgate, Smithfield, or any other market (*Mirror of Parliament* 1832 [vol. 1: 118).

Dickens began as a Political reporter for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1834, which took him racing around the country by coach in all weathers, which appealed to him, as did the need for speed and accuracy, even though

> ‘Often and often this work would make him deadly sick,’ he told an American woman just two years before his death, 'and he would have to plunge his head out of the
window to relieve himself; still the writing went steadily forward on very little slips of paper which he held before him’ (in Ackroyd 156).

Dickens also seriously thought of an acting career in the years after he left school, and attended the theatre, he says, ‘‘every night, with a very few exceptions, for at least three years: really studying the bills first, and going to see where there was the best acting ... I practised immensely’’ (in Ackroyd 120). He modelled himself on Charles Mathews, a comic actor of great fame, to whom he was later compared and whose skill lay in his ability to change swiftly to represent: ‘‘seven or eight different, and very varied, characters in an evening’’ (in Ackroyd 139). Dickens even got an audition at Covent Garden Theatre, but, fittingly, his body prevented him from attending: ‘‘I was laid up when the day came, with a terrible bad cold and an inflammation of the face’’ (in Forster 1: 50). His acting, frequent as it was from then on, was generally amateur. He often, too, as he wrote, acted out the roles of the characters he was creating, and, of course, during his readings, which did become professional, he stepped into their skins both bodily and mentally.

Dickens’s description of his reaction to seeing his first publication in print characteristically displays dismembering, here plucking his eyes from their sockets and animating them, as if it were they and not he who was so reacting: ‘‘I walked down to Westminster Hall, and turned into it for half an hour, because my eyes were so dimmed with joy and pride that they could not bear the street, and were not fit to be seen there’’ (in Forster 1: 50-1).

Dickens’s willingness to admit weakness in his childhood body contrasts with his adult reluctance to see that his body was vulnerable, that it was suffering from exhaustion, gout, and serious illness. It was as if, having written himself into fame and financial security, he felt that he had also written himself into some sort of bodily security. He spent his later years living in Gad’s Hill Place, the very house so redolent of Shakespeare that his father had pointed out to him as a child and ‘‘promised that [Charles] might himself live in ... when he
came to be a man, if he would only work hard enough" (Forster 1: 5). He had worked hard enough and was now a large, invincible, publicly adored figure—why should his body not also be invulnerable? His work, however, demonstrates his inner knowledge that it was not. Examining Dickens's adult years, I shall concentrate on his body and character and the "bodily influences" of his family, friends, interests and experiences, health and illnesses, and the effect on him of his public readings, as well as physical aspects of the act of writing.

Although his early novels brought him fame and intimations of fiscal comfort, it was not until mid-way through his novel-writing career with the publication of *Dombey and Son* (1846-48) that Dickens reached an objectively secure financial position, although even then his subjective need for security, both financial and physical, continued. He never escaped what he felt were the "cannibalistic" demands of his family, both nuclear and extended, and always feared that his creativity might evaporate. He turned his body to visible use by managing and acting in plays with a troupe of friends, and increasing requests and monetary inducements for him to read publicly led to his turning what had been occasional charitable readings into a highly lucrative but physically exhausting series of reading tours in Britain and America. By physically presenting his own words, so much written out of his own bodily fears and observations, he, for those glittering hours, achieved invincibility on the stage by becoming a persona of himself, while earning off-stage the money which he felt would bring him true invulnerability. By merely appearing on the stage, however, he was physically exhausting his own body and hastening his death.

His precocious literary success, however, opened his body up to public inspection and meant that even early in his career everyone wanted to see what the famous Boz looked like. Most people had a preconceived notion of what his body should be, and many testified to initial disappointment. Thomas Trollope, for example, wrote of first seeing Dickens in 1845:

'We were at first disappointed, and disposed to imagine there must be some mistake! No! that is not the man who wrote *Pickwick*! What we saw was a dandified, pretty-boy-looking sort of figure, singularly young looking.... I do not think he was below the average middle height.... but curiously enough, I find on looking back into my memory,
that if I had been asked to describe him, as I first saw him, I too [like Carlyle] should have said that he was very small’ (Collins, Recollections 1: 71-72).

Marcus Stone, illustrator of Our Mutual Friend and son of one of Dickens’s friends, wrote “When I first looked upon him [in 1851] ... I thought him a short man. I had imagined him previously to be a sort of giant” (Collins, Recollections 2: 182). In fact, many accounts of his body and dress reveal disappointment, as if the enormous, perhaps Pickwickian, expectations of the viewer are dashed when he appears, fairly slight and not tall.

It seems, nevertheless, that the more time one spent around Dickens the more one felt the animating force of his figure; he literally “grew” on one. Marcus Stone’s later opinion of Dickens’s form is

‘of middle height, 5 feet 9 inches, lean with beautiful limbs and well-developed arms, and an erect carriage made for activity. His face was singularly handsome ... nose almost perfect beauty ... eyes also were the most impressive and wonderful eyes I ever saw’ (in Bowen 23).

Forster, with the pen and eye of a friend, describes Dickens’s face as he was at the time of Pickwick (1836-37):

He had a capital forehead, a firm nose with full wide nostrils, eyes wonderfully beaming with intellect and running over with humour and cheerfulness, and a rather prominent mouth strongly marked with sensibility. The head was altogether well formed and symmetrical, and the air and carriage of it were extremely spirited. The hair so scant and grizzled in later days was then of a rich brown and most luxuriant abundance.... Light and motion flashed from every part of it. ‘It was as if made of steel,’ ... said ... Mrs. Carlyle.... ‘It has the life and soul in it of fifty human beings’ [wrote Leigh Hunt] (Forster 1: 65-66).

But compare these descriptions with an initial reaction by Richard Henry Dana Jr. in 1842:

‘He is of the middle height, (under if anything) with a large expressive eye, regular nose, matted, curling, wet-looking black hair, a dissipated looking mouth with a vulgar draw to it, a muddy olive complexion, stubby fingers & a hand by no means patrician, a hearty, off-hand manner, far from well bred, & a rapid, dashing way of talking.... You admire him, & there is a fascination about him which keeps your eyes on him, yet you cannot get over the impression that he is a low bred man’ (Lett.P 3: 39 n. 7).18

Dickens’s face and physique were discussed with opinionated passion during his first North American tour in 1842, and many comments were particularly anatomical, even
cannibalistic: "‘People eat him here!’" (Collins, *Recollections* 1: 53). One of the many newspaper reports which Philip Collins says "annoyed Dickens" included these remarks:

Dickens stands very straight, is of medium length, and has a good figure.... His head shows large perceptive faculties, a large volume of brain in front of the ears, but not large causality. His eye is, to our perception, blue, dark blue,\(^{19}\) and full; it stands out slightly, and is handsome—very beautiful. It is the striking feature of his physiognomy.

His hair has been described as very fine. We did not find it so; it is slightly waxy, and has a glossy, soft texture. It is very long, with unequivocal soap-locks, which to our eye looked badly. We had thought from his portraits that it was thick, but did not find it so.... His whole appearance is foppish, and partakes of the flash order (Collins, *Recollections* 1: 54).

He was also inspected, one woman reportedly asking him when he was about to sit for an artist if he would "‘be kind enough to walk entirely round the room, so that we can all have a look at you?’" (in Ackroyd 344). In other reports of the time the detailed dismembering is even more extraordinary:

‘His forehead retreated gradually from the eyes, without any marked protuberance, save at the outer angle, the upper portion of which formed a prominent ridge a little within the assigned position of the organ of ideality.... The whole region about the eyes was prominent, with a noticeable development of nerves and vessels, indicating, say the phrenologists, great vigor in the intellectual organs with which they are connected. The eyeballs completely filled their sockets. The aperture of the lids was not large, nor the eye uncommonly clear or bright, but quick, moist, and expressive. The nose was slightly aquiline—the mouth of moderate dimensions, making no great display of the teeth, the facial muscles occasionally drawing the upper lip most strongly on the left side, as the mouth opened in speaking’ (Collins, *Recollections* 1: 55-56; emphasis added).

These remarks, which their author describes as an "‘off-hand description,’” seem remarkable in our film and video ridden age and read like a description of something we might expect to purchase from the anatomical emporium of Mr. Venus, but their personal nature was, for that period, the price of fame.

Dickens felt his body singularly beset on his first American trip as his description of Martin Chuzzlewit’s obligatory levee reveals. The decapitations he so liberally strews through his own fiction he almost witnessed in life, one contemporary noting:
'Wherever the [railway] cars stopped' ... 'heads were incontinently thrust in bawling out, 'Is Mr. Dickens here?'... No less than six people came within a hair’s breadth of losing their heads, by keeping them thrust in too long—not taking them out until the cars had been in motion several seconds' (in Johnson 1: 379).

Someone satirically asked in the press why “some shrewd enterprising Yankee’ did not ‘put [Dickens] in a cage, and take him about the country for a show?’” (in Johnson 1: 384). At times Dickens must have felt as if someone had. A train he was travelling on stopped in the

market place in Baltimore and

Instantly the windows were dark with staring heads thrust in and conveniently hooked on to the sills by elbows. ‘I never gained so much uncompromising information with reference to my own nose and eyes,’ wrote Dickens, ‘and various impressions wrought by my mouth and chin on different minds, and how my head looks when it is viewed from behind’ (in Johnson 1: 397).

He was not only looked at but handled, in every town shaking hands, he writes, “on an average with five or six hundred people, who pass on from me to Kate, and are shaken again by her” (Lett.P 3: 161). He refused requests for locks of his hair as the precedent would be “likely to terminate before long in my total baldness” (Lett.P 3: 47). He began to feel

so beset, waylaid, hustled, set upon, beaten about, trampled down, mashed, bruised, and pounded, by crowds, that I never knew less of myself in all my life, or had less time for those confidential Interviews with myself whereby I earn my bread (Lett.P 3: 225).

I can do nothing that I want to do, go nowhere where I want to go, and see nothing that I want to see. If I turn into the street, I am followed by a multitude. If I stay at home, the house becomes, with callers, like a fair. If I visit a public institution, with only one friend, the directors come down incontinently, waylay me in the yard, and address me in a long speech. I go to a party in the evening, and am so inclosed and hemmed about by people, stand where I will, that I am exhausted for want of air. I dine out, and have to talk about everything, to everybody. I go to church for quiet, and there is a violent rush to the neighbourhood of the pew I sit in, and the clergyman preaches at me. I take my seat in a railroad car, and the very conductor won’t leave me alone. I get out at a station, and can’t drink a glass of water, without having a hundred people looking down my throat when I open my mouth to swallow (Lett.P 3: 87).

On his second American tour (1867-68) “Dickens’s legs ... met with widespread disapproval ... ‘as mean looking a pair of legs as I ever saw’” (Collins, Recollections 2: 303 n. 5). Dickens, who has a fictional leg obsession, states in a letter of 1840 inquiring about court
dress: “I have no confidence in my legs, and should be glad to hear that the etiquette went in favor of trowsers” (Lett.P 2: 95-96). Yet, this did not seem to translate into true public bodily reticence, as the journalist and author Kate Field observed: “‘No drapery conceals the table, whereby it is plain that Dickens believes in expression of figure as well as of face, and does not throw away everything but his head and arms, according to the ordinary habit of ordinary speakers’” (Collins, Recollections 2: 250-51). Dickens dressed, presented himself, and acted so that his dandified public body image would hide his private bodily concerns; as we have seen, this did not always work initially, and one had to be mesmerized by those sparkling eyes before one began to see Dickens’s body in the “right” way. The more demands put on Dickens to sit for paintings or photographs, the more he resisted them, partly because he detested wasting time sitting still, and partly because “stillness” could never represent the “real Dickens,” as contemporary comment confirms: “‘There is not one [print] that does not give an entirely incorrect impression of [Dickens’s] appearance’” stated one newspaper in 1842 (Collins, Recollections 1: 55). Just after David Copperfield “He had been sitting to the portrait-painter, William Boxall, but he broke off the sessions when he found that on the canvas he ... resembled ... [the] murder, Greenacre” (Ackroyd 612-13). Most paintings and pictures of him were judged quite unlike their subject.

A bust made of him by Angus Fletcher was exhibited in 1839 and of it Dickens writes “no other part of the bust was cast but the throat, which is a facsimile of my own property.... My friends, artists and otherwise, tell me that it is not like—especially about the head” (Lett.P 1: 574). Mary Boyle, a friend and actress, wrote that “‘at all periods of his life I feel sure that his was a countenance most difficult to arrest ... from its extreme mobility, and constant change,’” adding that she had “‘never be[en] fully satisfied with any likeness [she had] ever seen of him’” (Collins Recollections 1: 84). Much of his appearance and the impression he gave came from Dickens’s self animation—it was not just his characters’ bodies he animated.
His eyes, and their ability to light up his face are almost universally praised, negating for many all the initial negativities of his physical form. The painter W. P. Frith recalls Dickens, who sat for him in 1859, speaking of the disappointment, even dismay, of people who saw him for the first time: “and then they look at you as if it was your fault—and one for which you deserve to be kicked—because you fail to realize their ideal of what you ought to be” (Collins, Recollections 1: 49). Of a 1856 painting of him by Ary Scheffer Dickens wrote “I doubt if I should know it, myself—but it is always possible that I may know other people’s faces pretty well, without knowing my own” (Lett.N 2: 727). But if he did not know his own unanimated face, he did realize much about the personality that drove his animation.21 He wrote in 1856, when his marriage was evidently falling apart: “I have always felt of myself that I must, please God, die in harness.... It is much better to go on and fret, than to stop and fret. As to repose—for some men there’s no such thing in this life.... I find that the skeleton in my domestic closet is becoming a pretty big one” (Lett.N 2: 765).

Dickens was energetic, restless when not active, and perfectionistic about every detail of his work, surroundings, and person. Methodical, tidy, clean, and fastidious of habit, he was punctual to a fault and expected others to be so, his invitations either stating “x o’clock precisely” or underscoring the time. He liked to be in charge and to exert control over everything that concerned him, and wanted things done or settled “immediately”: “‘negotiation and delay are worse to me than drawn daggers,’ he wrote later in life; any kind of suspense destroyed ‘rest, sleep, appetite, and work’ until matters were ‘definitely arranged’” (in Ackroyd 236). He wrote regularly in the mornings from about nine till two, walked (or, earlier on, rode) in the afternoons and spent time with family and friends or at the theatre in the evenings.

Although often remembered as a wonderful person to have around a sick room,22 possessing “according to one who saw it, a ‘curious life-giving power’” (Ackroyd 535), he was at times, particularly towards the end of his life, wilfully blind about his own health. “When he grew older he [also] refused to believe that he had in any sense aged and forbade
his grandchildren to call him ‘Grandfather’” (Ackroyd 519), having them call him
“Venerables” instead. Much of the energy, infectious laughter, and ceaseless activity he was
known for seemed also to be ways of avoiding his deeper demons: fears of abandonment,
impoverishment, or bodily vulnerability. His obsession with money was a matter of security,
for, as he wrote to his brother Frederick: “No one knows better than you (except myself, in
my own conscience) that there is not a successful man in the world who attaches less
importance to the possession of money, or less disparagement to the want of it, than I do”
(Lett. P 5: 22). The shattering of security that a lack of money could bring was, however, a
constant gnawing fear, which in large part led to his financially induced periodical23 and
reading careers.

Like many other Victorians, George Meredith, for example, Dickens was a fanatical
walker and came to believe that he should walk for as many hours a day as he wrote.

His notion of finding rest from mental exertion in as much bodily exertion of equal
severity continued with him to the last; taking in the later years what I always thought
the too great strain of as many miles in walking as he [in his earlier writing years]
took in the saddle, and too often indulging it at night (Forster 1: 74-75).

John Hollingshead who wrote for Dickens’s journals remarked: “‘[his walking] almost
assumed the form of a disease.... the determination to do a certain distance every day,
generally from two in the afternoon till seven in the evening, one mile every quarter-of-an-
hour, measured by the milestones’” (Collins, Recollections 2: 220). He habitually walked
“twelve miles in two and a half hours, with only a five-minute break” (Ackroyd 930), walking
to both exercise and exorcise, exhaust his restlessness, make sure his body was under the
control of his will and, probably, think out his novels.24 Forster quotes from a letter typical of
Dickens’s periods of hardest work:

‘I performed an insane match against time of eighteen miles by the milestones in four
hours and a half, under a burning sun the whole way. I could get’ (he is writing next
morning) ‘no sleep at night, and really began to be afraid I was going to have a fever.
You may judge in what kind of authorship-training I am to-day. I could as soon eat the
cliff as write about anything’ (in Forster 1: 280).
Although not one for games as a boy, in adulthood he did participate in holiday athletic activities.\textsuperscript{25} He was not, however, athletic in a "team-event" sense, though he was keen on dancing.\textsuperscript{26} A fanatic about fresh air, he was adamant that windows be open: "I cannot stand a total absence of ventilation" \textit{(Lett.P 7: 342)}. In America in 1842 he complained of the heat and lack of ventilation in all buildings and in trains:

'From the constant use of the hard anthracite coal in these beastly furnaces, a perfectly new class of diseases is springing up in the country. Their effect upon an Englishman is briefly told. He is always very sick and very faint; and has an intolerable headache, morning, noon, and night' \textit{(in Forster 1: 206)}

He was equally insistent on fresh, clean water.\textsuperscript{27} His daughter Mamie writes:

He was a firm believer in the hygiene of bathing, and cold baths, sea baths and shower baths were among his most constant practices.... During his first visit to America ... he wrote: 'I am considered very hardy in the morning, for I run up barenecked and plunge my head into the half-frozen water by half-past five o'clock' \textit{(Recall 72-73)}.

Dickens was explicit when ordering improvements for his houses, demanding: "a \textit{Cold Shower of the best quality, always charged to an unlimited extent}... this is what has become a positive necessary of life to me" \textit{(Lett.P 6: 520)}.\textsuperscript{28} He not only bathed in water but drank "each morning and evening a pint of water, convinced that it was good for his health and that he had been free from illness because of the practice" \textit{(Kaplan Biography 247)}.

Dickens was very fond of "the coincidences, resemblances and surprises of life" \textit{(Forster 1: 59)}, always delighted, for example, by the coincidence that all the important events in his life from birth onwards seemed to fall on a Friday. He also seemed to believe that unusual incidents occurred more often to him than to others: "He used to say that he never went for more than a couple of days from his own home without something befalling him that never happened to anyone else" \textit{(Forster 2: 45)}. He simultaneously appeared to think that strange things frequently happened in London when he was away from it: "there will be plenty [of news in London] next week, for I am going away, and I hope you'll send me an account of it.... it will be something remarkable no doubt" he writes in 1840, almost as if he
wants to be connected with anything unusual, to be recollected in the minds of people should anything happen (Lett. P 2: 75). The previous year he had written:

What a strange thing it is that all sorts of fine things happen in London when I’m away! I almost blame myself for the death of that poor girl who leaped off the Monument—she would never have done it if I had been in town; neither would the two men have found the skeleton in the Sewers. If it had been a female skeleton, I should have written to the coroner and stated my conviction that it must be Mrs. Sheppard. A famous subject for an illustration by George—Jonathan Wild forcing Mrs. Sheppard down the grown-up seat of a gloomy privy, and Blueskin or any such second robber cramming a child (anybody’s child) down the little hole—Mr. Wood looking on in horror—and two other spectators, one with a fiendish smile and the other with a torch, aiding and abetting (Lett. P 1: 582).

This is not a scene his propriety would allow him to depict in a novel but it shows his macabre or grotesque side and his desire to demonstrate his control over the body by either preventing its death by staying in town, or by showing it fictionally disposed of by methods of his own choosing. He was attracted to macabre or violent scenes and would return to them and even act events out, for example, he “liked to point out the stile in Cobham Park near which the painter, Richard Dadd, had killed his father in 1843. ‘Dickens,’ one guest remembered, ‘acted the whole scene with his usual dramatic force’” (Ackroyd 931).

He was quick to see ludicrousness in even the most solemn occasions. A memory of attending a funeral with George Cruikshank was to him

a scene of mingled comicality and seriousness ... which has choked me at dinner-time ever since.... [George] makes the strangest remarks the mind of man can conceive, without any intention of being funny, but rather meaning to be philosophical. I really cried with an irresistible sense of his comicality, all the way [to the funeral].... I was really penetrated with sorrow for the family, but when George (upon his knees, and sobbing for the loss of an old friend) whispered me [in reaction to the behaviour and comments to him by the clergyman] ‘that if that wasn’t a clergyman, and it wasn’t a funeral, he’d have punched his head,’ I felt as if nothing but convulsions could possibly relieve me (Lett. P 3: 453-54).

The incident may have been “improved” for purposes of the letter, but it shows Dickens’s particular perspective and the conjunction of emotion that stimulates his pen. He even manages to find humour in a scene he admits is carnage after a steamer laden with cattle ... was wrecked.... Yesterday, the shore was strewn with hundreds of oxen, sheep, and pigs ... in every state and stage of decay—burst open,
rent asunder, lying with their stiff hoofs in the air, or with their great ribs yawning like the wrecks of ships—tumbled and beaten out of shape, and yet with a horrible sort of goblin humanity about them. Hovering among these carcasses was every kind of water-side plunderer, pulling the horns out, getting the hides off, chopping the hoofs with pole axes &c&c.... I never beheld such a demoniacal business! And if you had seen Horne facetiously flying from one carcass, tumble over another, you would have laughed yourself as faint as his wife, Georgina, and I did (Lett. P 6: 488-89).

Dickens was often the subject of rumour, "with madness and imprisonment for debt tending to be the two favourite scandals" (Ackroyd 233). In a letter of September 1840 Dickens expressed his anger over rumours that he was mentally deranged and in an asylum in typically physical terms: "I have been grinding my teeth all the morning" (Lett. P 2: 126). Indeed, he frequently wrote of emotion, particularly fear, in physical terms, making it comic by exaggeration or through use of extreme examples. As early as 1835, anxious about having to drive himself alone in a gig, he writes: "It strikes me I shall be spilt before I pay a Turnpike. I have a presentiment, I shall run over an only child before I reach Chelmsford, my first stage" (Lett. P 1: 52). Even irritation is expressed physically; when Chapman and Hall suggested invoking a lack of profit clause for low sales of Martin Chuzzlewit, Dickens wrote: "I am so irritated ... so rubbed in the tenderest part of my eyelids with bay-salt, by what I told you yesterday, that a wrong kind of fire is burning in my head, and I don’t think I can write" (in Forster 1: 286).

He had a lifelong love of acting, pantomime, and theatre and carried on quasi-public theatricals in which he usually took the lead in organization, direction, and acting, travelling with his troupe of friends at times for weeks on end. Near the time of his separation from Catherine in 1858 he flung himself into professional readings: "I have now no relief but in action. I am become incapable of rest. I am quite confident that I should rust, break, and die, if I spared myself. Much better to die, doing" (in Forster 2: 196).

Forster writes that Dickens "seemed to be always the more himself for being somebody else, for continually putting off his personality" (2: 399-400). Dickens knew this was so: "Assumption has charms for me so delightful—I hardly know for how many wild
reasons—that I feel a loss of Oh I can’t say what exquisite foolery, when I lose a chance of
being someone not in the remotest degree like myself” (in Forster 2: 400).

Assumption had charms, but it also served as protection; acting or mimicking meant that his
body was no longer his own, no longer vulnerable unless he chose, in character, to be so.

Noted for his good cheer among friends, Dickens was more reticent than his
performing and literature might indicate:

His seeming good spirits ... did not mean self-exposure, confidences, intimacy. In that
regard, he kept a narrow company, mostly Forster and Georgina, sometimes Collins
and a few others, probably Ellen.... Only appropriate, carefully censored feelings were
allowed verbal expression other than in the disguised forms of his fiction (Kaplan,
Biography 536).

He would walk around at night into strange zones, the what-might-have-been’s of his life
and the fodder for his novels:

Vague thoughts of a new book are rife within me just now; and I go wandering about
at night into the strangest places, according to my usual propensity at such a time—
seeking rest, and finding none. As an addition to my composure, I ran over a little dog
in the Regents Park yesterday (killing him on the spot) and gave his little mistress—a
girl of thirteen or fourteen—such exquisite distress as I never saw the like of (Lett.P
4: 510).

He did not like to live alone; “though he often talked of shutting himself up in out of the way
solitary places, he never went anywhere unaccompanied by members of his family” (Forster
2: 395). There was, however, increasingly in him an “unhappy loss or want of something”
(in Forster 2: 196) which Forster notices particularly in Dickens’s letters from abroad in
1854, 1855, and 1856, in which he writes of a desire to get away by himself to “inaccessible
places” and of the terrible restlessness which beset him and seemed only to increase as his
life went on: “I have rested nine or ten weeks, and sometimes feel as if it had been a year—
though I had the strangest nervous miseries before I stopped. If I couldn’t walk fast and far, I
should just explode and perish” (in Forster 2: 197).
Despite his own broken marriage, other family discord in his life, and the imperfect or incomplete families presented in his novels, Dickens always extolled and believed in the virtues of family. Yet, from childhood on, however necessary family was to him, he also felt the burden financially of both the family he was born into and the family which he fathered. The marriages or deaths of family members often added the support of in-laws to other constant requests for money which threatened his own sense of security, making him feel “cannibalized.” As early as 1838, in response to a comment that he was balding, Dickens answered, “And no wonder ... for my little ones have contracted a habit of, day by day, feeding on their father’s brains, and you are marking the result” (Collins, Recollections 1: 22). All who depended on him were feeding off his brain, the source for his creations and his income. “And so it always is” he wrote, “directly I build up a hundred pounds, one of my dear relations comes and knocks it down again” (Lett.P 1: 454).

His father’s borrowing against his name was particularly trying to Dickens, so much so that he inserted an advertisement in all the main London newspapers on 8 March 1841 repudiating any debts made in his own name save by himself or Catherine (Lett.P 2: 225 n. 1). Part of Dickens’s frustration with these financial aggravations was that it was something he could not control, and because he could not control it he felt his body, the seat of his vulnerability, under attack by “blood-petitioners” (Lett.P 3: xvii). His brother, he wrote “is rasping my very heart just now, by trading on my name” (Lett.P 6: 263). In fact he felt he was being torn apart: “he [his father], and all of them, look upon me as something to be plucked and torn to pieces for their advantage. They have no idea of, and no care for, my existence in any other light” (Lett.P 3: 575).

Dickens similarly felt under bodily siege by the sheer number of children he had. In 1863 he writes, “This place [Gad’s Hill] is at present pervaded by boys to a tearful extent. They boil over (if an affectionate parent may mention it) all over the house” (Lett.N 3: 360). Having been more than content with four children, he was only to complete his family with
ten, of which nine survived infancy. Catherine, too, frequently had difficult pregnancies, at least two miscarriages, and suffered quite severely from what we would now term postpartum depression. Each birth was attended with the inevitable hazards of Victorian childbed, but Dickens, perhaps to disguise his fears, could be remarkably insensitive or comic on paper:

Mrs. Dickens perversely and obstinately took it into her head to fall ill [before the birth of Mamie] at 7 O’Clock this morning ... but as I am advised ... that I may safely absent myself from home ... I have ordered dinner for us at the Garrick at 5 precisely (Lett. P 1: 383).

A babby is to be christened and a fattened calf killed on these premises on Tuesday the 25th. Instant. It (the calf; not the babby) is to be taken off the spit at 6 (Lett. P 2: 117).

Dickens was, in fact, free, almost dictatorial, with medical advice for any ailment and to any person, writing to Catherine in 1836: “If you have not [taken any medicine], I positively insist on a three grain calomel instantly, and a draught two hours hence” (Lett. P 1: 119), and to Wilkie Collins in 1862:

It is pretty clear to me that you must go in for a regular pitched battle with that rheumatic gout. Don’t be satisfied with Frank Beard’s patching you, now that you have leisure, but be set up afresh. I don’t like that notion of the eight and forty hours. It’s not a long enough time, and the treatment in the time must be too ferocious. Nature does not proceed in that way, and is not to be proceeded with in that way. With all respect for my Hon. friend M.R.C.S., I think it a demonstrable mistake, and I hope you will arrive at the same conclusion (Lett. N 3: 275).

He believed in his own power to heal, both mesmerically and “traditionally,” and at times expressed little faith in doctors, once advising Catherine not to “be patched up, by that humbug, Gaskell” (Lett. P 1: 141).

He was also, of course, touched deeply by the illnesses and deaths of family members, which brought home to him personally the vulnerability of the body and the tenuous nature of life, and can be seen as informing his literary descriptions of death and illnesses. In May 1837, the death that perhaps affected him most, and which many Dickens commentators see as almost as crucial a determining factor in his life and art as his early warehouse experiences, occurred when his beloved seventeen year old sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, the angelic sister-figure of his novels, “died with a terrible suddenness that for the time
completely bore him down. His grief and suffering were intense, and affected him ... through many after years” (Forster 1: 66-67). His reaction both at the time of her death and subsequently seems excessive even by nineteenth-century standards.40

Five years after her death, Dickens, who desperately wished to be buried in Mary’s grave, felt that he must give it up when there were further deaths in her family:41

‘It is a great trial to me to give up Mary’s grave; greater than I can possibly express. I thought of moving her to the catacombs, and saying nothing about it; but then I remembered that the poor old lady is buried next to her at her own desire, and could not find it in my heart, directly she is laid in the earth, to take her grandchild away. The desire to be buried next to her is as strong upon me now, as it was five years ago.... I cannot bear the thought of being excluded from her dust’ (in Forster 1: 174).42

This morbid desire to be buried in Mary’s grave and the macabre scheme to secretly move her corpse around show Dickens’s unusually intense reaction to her death and the importance to him of not only spirit but body. In 1854, three years after her death, he had his daughter Dora’s coffin moved: “I have just been arranging a very small freehold ... where my little child Dora, of the ill-omened name, is to lie under the sun instead of remaining in a Vault; and whither my many walks in that neighbourhood will take me, I suppose, at last” (Lett. P 7: 337).

His daughter Dora did have an “ill-omened” name; he named her after Dora Copperfield shortly after that heroine’s fate had been decided but before he killed her off. It was a fatal inter-twining of the bodies in his fiction which he could control and those in his life which he could not. Dora Dickens died in 1851, an ill-fated year for Dickens, as he enumerated in April:

I have been in trouble, or I should have written to you sooner. My wife has been, and is, far from well. Frederick caused me great vexation and expense [sic]. My poor father’s death caused me much distress—and more expense—but of that, in such a case, I say nothing. I came to London last Monday to preside at a public dinner [for the General Theatrical Fund]—played with little Dora my youngest child before I went—and was told, when I left the chair, that she had died in a moment. I am quite myself again, but I have undergone a good deal (Lett. P 6: 359).43
Having suffered from a urinary tract complaint for many years, John Dickens, at sixty-five, after a horrendous and painful operation to alleviate what was probably a complete blockage, died on 31 March. Dickens wrote to Catherine:

He was in that state from active disease (of the bladder) which he had mentioned to nobody, that mortification and delirium, terminating in speedy death, seemed unavoidable. Mr. Wade was called in, who instantly performed (without chloroform) the most terrible operation known in surgery, as the only chance of saving him. He bore it with astonishing fortitude, and I saw him directly afterwards—his room, a slaughter house of blood.... All this goes to my side directly, and I feel as if I had been struck there by a leaden bludgeon (Lett. P 6: 333).

A few years before these sudden tragedies Dickens had faced the slow death of his elder sister Fanny from tuberculosis. He gave her financial help and moved her and her family to London for better treatment and advised her to take “advantage of actual bodily and mental rest” (Lett. P 5: 302), which is of course, with sad irony, the advice Dickens himself would never take in his later years. He wrote optimistically to Fanny (Lett. P 5: 355-56), but he knew she was dying “and not by very slow degrees” (Lett. P 5: 358). Nor was hers the beatific death of a fictional character. “No words,” he wrote Kate [in August 1848], “can express the terrible aspect of suffering and suffocation—the appalling noise in her throat—and the agonizing look around’ followed repeatedly by a lethargy of exhaustion” (in Johnson 2: 651). Fanny’s death may well have been a stimulus to his writing most of his autobiographical fragment during the autumn or winter of 1848 (Lett. P 5: xii). Dickens justifiably feared that the disease would not die out of his bloodline.

Dickens’s mother survived until she was seventy-three. She was, Dickens wrote, “also left to me when my father died (I never had anything left to me but relations), [and] is in the strangest state of mind from senile decay” (Lett. N 3: 172). She “died quite suddenly at last. Her condition was frightful” (Lett. N 3: 362). Dickens describes her during her illness in grimly humorous terms

‘the impossibility of getting her to understand what is the matter [her son Alfred’s death], combined with her desire to be got up in sables like a female Hamlet, illumines
the dreary scene with a ghastly absurdity that is the chief relief I can find in it’ (Kaplan, Biography 424).48

Dickens’s son Walter Landor died in Calcutta, suffering similar symptoms to Richard Carstone’s when, talking “‘about his arrangements for coming home.’ He ‘became excited, coughed violently, had a great gush of blood from the mouth, and fell dead ... in a few seconds’” (Kaplan, Biography 457), probably from an aneurism of the Aorta (Ackroyd 943).

Dickens became “An expert at funeral arrangements” (Kaplan, Biography 421), but he did not seem to believe in excessive indulgence of grief, rather, he believed in forging ahead with life. He was a man who liked to evoke and provoke emotion in his novels but resisted over-display of it himself,49 despite the fact that many of his family and most of his friends predeceased him. His experience of relatives’ deaths, whether sudden or expected, is not, of course, distinctive in the period, but these examples serve to illustrate more particularly what Dickens himself had to suffer due to the hazards of his time.

Dickens could become irritated with illness in others, believing himself that one could “will” oneself out of it. He was particularly irritated by the sickliness of his son-in-law Charles Collins who eventually died from stomach cancer in 1873:

as far as Dickens was concerned, his demise could not come a moment too soon. This was partly because of his resentment at Collins marrying his daughter [Kate] in the first place ... but partly because of his deep dislike of constitutional weakness of any kind. Collins was now [1868] vomiting a great deal, remained very feeble, and could not leave his room at Gad’s Hill Place—‘totally unfit for any function of this life,’ Dickens told Wills (Ackroyd 1028).

Dickens’s attitude soured his own friendship with Collins’s brother Wilkie. Ironically, Wilkie Collins, who often suffered from gout and rheumatic fever and other ailments such as “obesity, arthritis, digestive disorders, fainting spells, and heart palpitations” (Kaplan, Biography 486) was a person whose illness “did not in any sense strain their relationship, as illness was wont to do in other cases with Dickens, ‘... my old Patient’ he called him once, as if his position were that of doctor as well as friend” (Ackroyd 760). “Mr. Collins,” he once wrote almost gleefully, “never goes out with me on any expedition, without receiving some damage or other” (Lett.N 2: 889).50
He knew many medical minds of the time, but that did not mean that he relied on their views or accepted what they told him about his body or those of others. He generally preferred his own diagnoses and, as above indicated, freely dispensed his own medical advice. He did not reserve his denial of gout for himself either: “Mark has got something in his foot—which is not Gout of course, though it has a family likeness to that disorder” (Lett.P 7: 348). One of his firmest beliefs was that “There’s more philosophy in ‘never say die’, than most people suppose” (Lett.P 2: 364).

There was some ambivalence in his attitude to his “closest friend” John Forster, as “bodily threats” in letters to mutual friends reveal. Of Forster’s acting Dickens once wrote “I have always a vicious desire to electrify [him] ... violently, in some sensitive part of his anatomy” (Kaplan, Biography 281), and “When I am bullied through those Four Acts,—always regard me as being ready (in serious earnest) to stab Forster to the heart. It makes me so damned savage that I could rend him limb from limb” (Lett.P 4: 463). The other side of this ambivalence is also, however, revealed in terms of dismemberment; he writes from Italy in July 1844: “Losing you and Forster is like losing my arms and legs; and dull and lame I am without you” (Lett.P 4: 162). The editors of the Pilgrim edition of Dickens’s letters have shown that Forster, in his life of Dickens, sometimes “improved” on Dickens’s original letters: “For instance, Dickens must be typically racy as often as possible. So Dickens’s ‘Being utterly unable from intense stupidity to write a line’... became ‘Not knowing whether my head was off or on, it became so addled with work’” (Lett.P 1: xii).

This is a fascinating emendation, given Dickens’s own penchant for stylistically decapitating characters, and indicates that Forster’s role as biographical resurrectionist went beyond merely “embalming” the facts of his life to re-articulating the language in which he wrote.

Dickens’s own personal health naturally affected both his views on the body and his use of it in fiction. As a child he had felt his body threatened, and, despite his adult
determination to exert his will\textsuperscript{51} over his body and his denial of its aging or ailing, his fiction is drenched with the realization of vulnerability.

He was willing to admit to some illnesses, though not always to their seriousness. He suffered from his kidney complaint throughout his life which periodically resulted in excruciating pain in his left side which was, as it were, a physical manifestation of extreme emotion. In his novels the pattern is reversed; Dickens uses the body, at times brutally and painfully, though often comically, to provoke emotional response in his readers. By fictionally-inducing laughter or even grimaces Dickens achieves temporary solace and invulnerability, artistic satisfaction, and financial security. In order to gain these things, however, he drove his mind and body exhaustively, which in turn increased the vulnerability of his own physique.

His kidney ailment began, as we have seen, in childhood and recurred at times of stress. Early in 1836, for example, we hear:

I wrote till 3 oClock this morning ... and passed the whole night ... in a state of exquisite torture from the spasm in my side far exceeding anything I ever felt. It still continues exceedingly painful and my head is aching so from pain and want of rest, that I can hardly hold it up. Whether I caught cold from sitting in the open air yesterday, or not, I do not know, but I have not had so severe an attack since I was a child.... My side is so bad however that I can scarcely stir. Don't mind on my account: I am so used to suffer from this cause that it never alarms me (Lett.P 1: 119-20).

Dickens signed too many agreements early in his career and exhausted himself, as in 1837, "Working regularly on Pickwick, writing for the Miscellany, selecting, revising, and proofreading articles and corresponding with authors, he became 'extremely unwell'" (Kaplan, Biography 101):

I have been labouring for two days past, under a violent attack of God knows what, in the head; and in addition to all my other worry, am experiencing the debility, sickness, and all the other comfortable symptoms consequent upon about as much medicine as would be given to an ordinary-sized horse. Although I have perhaps the best subject I ever thought of, I really cannot write [Oliver Twist] under these combined circumstances (Lett.P 1: 227).
His blaming illness on medicine, as his blaming extreme pain and exhaustion on sitting in the cold in the previous example, are typical of Dickens's denial of serious causes. Touring the Midlands in 1838 he wrote to Catherine:

My side has been very bad since I left home.... I suffered such an ecstasy [sic] of pain all night at Stratford that I was half dead yesterday, and was obliged last night to take a dose of henbane. The effect was most delicious. I slept soundly and without feeling the least uneasiness, and am a great deal better this morning.... I suppose all this is the penalty for sticking so close to Oliver; whatever the cause is, the effect is a very sad one (Lett.P 1: 448).

Sometimes he would refer to the pain that was probably caused by his renal colic as rheumatism, writing on one occasion from Italy: "I have had a return of rheumatism in my back, and knotted round my waist like a girdle of pain" (in Forster 1: 336). Fourteen or fifteen years later, in 1860, "forgetting" as he often does that he has ever suffered from an ailment before, he writes, "I have been (a strange thing for me) so very unwell since Sunday" (Lett.P 6: 224) and "I have had an attack of rheumatism—quite a stranger to me—which remains hovering about my left side" (Lett.N 3: 163).

Just at the time "he was writing the chapter in which David Copperfield is placed in the crumbling warehouse" (Ackroyd 570) he penned the following:

I got an awkward fall on Sunday on my weak side (the only 'weak side' I have, is the left, where there is an inflamed kidney sometimes) and yesterday I was obliged to be cupped ... and today—for a change—I am being blistered. A touch of caustic tomorrow, will make it quite a merry-go-rounder (as Mr Peggotty says) (Lett.P 5: 563).

In June 1853, he became seriously ill, and left London for Folkestone, writing from there that he had spent the last six days in bed for the first time in his life "where I underwent great pain and became extremely weak" (Lett.P 7: 95):

And what was the matter with me? Sir—I find this reads like Dr. Johnson directly—Sir, it was an old, afflicted KIDNEY

—once the torment of my childhood, in which I took cold— (Lett.P 7: 108).

He could not recognize himself in the mirror at this time, more because of bodily illness than fictional creativity:
I have been shaving a man every morning—a stranger to me, with big gaunt eyes and a hollow cheek—whose appearance was rather irksome and oppressive. I am happy to say that he has at last retired from the looking-glass, and is replaced by the familiar personage whom I have lathered and scraped these twenty years (Lett.P 7: 95).

By early July, “he felt fully recovered, though there had been rumors he had been near death’s door and had aged terribly” (Kaplan, Biography 288).

Exhaustion provoked these attacks, as did emotions, such as the grief he felt on the death of his father, “this goes to my side directly,” or of a friend: “Poor dear Jeffrey! I bought a Times at the station yesterday morning, and was so stunned by the announcement, that I felt it in that wounded part of me, almost directly; and the bad symptoms (modified) returned within a few hours” (Lett.P 6: 20).

In 1841 Dickens writes that he will avoid illness by “living abstemiously,” (Lett.P 2: 252), although in fact Dickens was naturally quite abstemious, which often surprised those impressed by the culinary and quaffable contents of his novels. He drank in moderation, and, as his office boy recalled, “wasn’t but a light eater himself” (Collins, Recollections 2: 196). His American publisher wrote “He was accustomed to talk and write a good deal about eating and drinking, but I have rarely seen a man eat or drink less” (Forster 2: 329).

Dickens suffered, almost perpetually, from colds, as even a cursory glance at his letters indicates. Having a bad cold, Ackroyd suggests, was “always a sure sign with Dickens that he was either depressed or overworked” (Ackroyd 846). It was also one illness that he was not only prepared to reveal, but also to use, as a practice point for verbal flourishes:

I have got such a cold! I have been crying all day, and upon my word I believe that my nose is an inch shorter than it was last Tuesday, from constant friction (Lett.P 2: 150).

I should not mind a bad cold, but I have the additional pleasure of a swelled face, which is too large even to be amusing—to look at—otherwise I should certainly have presented it in its deformity, despite all injunctions to the reverse (Lett.P 2: 189).

I hope you may be able to read this, but I can’t see it as I write it for a tremendous cold, which has shut up my right eye—made a mere steel button of my left—communicated the lively expression of a codfish to my mouth—muffled my voice—
rasped the inside of my chest with a rough file—and reduced my mental condition (as you may perceive) to one of mere drivel and imbecility (Lett. P 6: 532-33).

I am ornamented at present with one of my most intensely preposterous and utterly indescribable colds. If you were to make a Voyage from Cape Horn to Wellington Street, you would scarcely recognise in the bowed form, weeping eyes, rasped nose, and snivelling wretch whom you would encounter here, and the once gay and sparkling &c., &c. (Lett. N 3: 176).

If he would admit to colds, he would not always admit to the frequency with which they attacked him:

In direct opposition to all my established usages and customs, I have such a violent and annoying cold upon me to-day, that I am compelled to nurse it and stay close at home. My usual course of treatment it to set such things at defiance, but I am in such a sneezing, winking, weeping, watery state as to be quite unfit for public inspection (Lett. P 1: 594).

He would also on occasion fabricate a cold to save himself from an engagement: "[I c]ouldn't go to the Academy Dinner—felt it impossible to bear the speeches—pleaded Influenza at the last moment" (Lett. P 7: 614).

Most of the colds he mentions in letters we have little reason to doubt, particularly as his susceptibility to them was clearly shown during his second American tour (1867-68), when, soon after arriving he caught "a frightful cold (English colds are nothing to those of this country)" (Lett. N 3: 588). This "American catarrh" as he termed it stayed with him for at least four months: "I am nearly all right, but cannot get rid of an intolerable cold in the head" (Lett. N 3: 596). "I have tried allopathy, homoeopathy, cold things, warm things, sweet things, bitter things, stimulants, narcotics, all with the same result. Nothing will touch it"" (in Forster 2: 333). "My cold sticks to me, and I can scarcely exaggerate what I sometimes undergo from sleeplessness" (Lett. N 3: 606).

Sleeplessness was common with Dickens. In "Lying Awake" (RP 431-37) he describes the things that crowd unbidden into his mind when he cannot sleep, many of which concern bodies and their terrors: the Mannings hanging on the wall of Horsemonger jail (434), "a man with his throat cut, dashing towards me" (435) the Morgue (436), "the late brutal assaults" (437). "It is probable," he writes, "that [lying awake] we have all ... committed
murders and hidden bodies” (433). He remembers a figure from childhood “chalked upon a door in a little back lane near a country church.... it horrified me so intensely—in connection with the churchyard, I suppose” (433-34); not innately terrifying, it was, however, “alarming to me to recall (as I have often done before, lying awake) the running home, the looking behind, the horror of its following me” (434). When “the very dead beg[ing] to wake too, and to crowd into [his] thoughts most sorrowfully” (437), he leaves his bed and goes out for a night walk. This shows the way Dickens’s mind operates regarding the body—he cannot prevent himself thinking about it and once thought of it is inevitably written about. In one letter he writes that he himself “was dead all day yesterday, being first aware of the circumstance at ten minutes past 11 oClock [sic] A.M. Slight symptoms of returning animation have manifested themselves this morning, but the ‘wital spark’ requires a deal of bellows” (Lett. P 1: 507-08).

He also regularly suffered from a type of facial neuralgia or tic douloureux:

I am myself kept within doors by the doctor for a kind of rheumatism in the face, which penetrates into the depths of my ears, and makes me feel as if a beehive had been upset in the intricacies of my brain. But as divers small tortures are to be inflicted on me this morning, I look for a release into the open air tomorrow (Lett. P 3: 475).

In 1840, he writes

I am suffering,—and have suffered all night, and during the greater part of yesterday—insupportable torture from some complaint in the face—whether rheumatism, tic douloureux [sic], or what not, Heaven knows. I have had fomentations of various kinds, but with little or no relief, and am desperately beaten in consequence. I am as bad as Miss Squeers—screaming out loud all the time I write (Lett. P 2: 130-31).

Dickens’s repeated association of conscious pain with the act of writing inevitably leads us to speculate on the extent of the subconscious, emotional pain that writing also involved. He can, however, ensure security for himself by turning his fears to laughter, as he has done in Miss Squeers’s famous line from Nicholas Nickleby. That he repeats the line in other letters shows its significance to him.55

Dickens also regularly suffered from seasickness, or, as he termed it, “that dismal extremity of qualmishness into which I am accustomed to sink when I have ‘the blue above
and the blue below’’ (Lett. P 1: 280). A fellow “channel-crosser” once noted that he carried with him “‘a box of homeopathic globules,’” and he also habitually took laudanum as a palliative (Ackroyd 772).

Another repeated ailment was waking in the night “with the sensation that he was choking, which he recognized to be the result of ‘disordered nerves,’ and for which ‘oppressive and painful sensation’ he took a pinch of snuff” (Kaplan, Biography 272), and advises a fellow sufferer to do the same: “I recommend it, from an experience so oppressive and shocking to the spirits that I shudder to think of it” (Lett. P 6: 699).

According to Forster, the following is typical of Dickens’s sufferings in 1845-46: “I have been so very unwell this morning, with giddiness, and headache, and botheration of one sort or other, that I didn’t get up till noon.... I am as giddy as if I were drunk, and can hardly see’” (in Forster 1: 379). Forster comments: “I gave far from sufficient importance at the time to the frequency of complaints of this kind, or to the recurrence, at almost regular periods after the year following the present, of those spasms in the side” (Forster 1: 379). He suffered haemorrhaging from the bowel on a number of occasions, which may have been, as Dickens thought, due to piles, but Bowen believes “it was due to a local vascular degeneration leading to rupture of a small vessel” (151).

On 8 October 1841 Dickens underwent, without anaesthetic, an operation for a fistula in ano: “a gap in the rectal wall through which tissue had been forced.... The rectum would have been opened up, and then held apart by some kind of surgical appliance, while the tissue was cut away and the sides of the rectal wall then sewn together” (Ackroyd 335-36). “The operation was performed by Frederick Salmon.... Macready called on him the same evening and recorded in his diary: ‘I suffered agonies, as they related all to me, and did violence to myself in keeping myself to my seat. I could scarcely bear it’” (Lett. P 2: 401 n. 3). Ackroyd notes that it was while Dickens was recuperating that “all the comedy breaks through again” in Barnaby Rudge “in particular the comedy of Miss Miggs” (336). Dickens, dictating his
correspondence, but not Barnaby Rudge, to Catherine while convalescing, wrote of his operation:

    You will hardly believe it I dare say, for I cant [sic], but I have been very ill for a week, and last Friday Morning was obliged to submit to a cruel operation, and the cutting out root and branch of a disease caused by working over much which has been gathering it seems for years. Thank God it's all over and I am on the Sofa again—rather lean but filling the Doctor with boundless astonishment notwithstanding (Lett. P 2: 401).

In another letter Dickens makes clear the constant connection between his body and his writing when he says, “the Surgeon’s knife is a bad sharpener of the pen; and I have been acutely nibbed, I do assure you” (Lett. P 2: 425).

In May 1847 Dickens was shaken badly when, as he describes, a horse made

    a sudden attack upon me in the stable, tear[ing] my coat sleeve and my shirt sleeve off, and very nearly tak[ing] the great muscle of my arm with it. As it was, however, he merely struck the arm with his teeth and head, but bruised it so, that I have worn a poultice ever since (Lett. P 5: 65).

Four days later he writes of having been “very unwell ... with a low dull nervousness of a most distressing kind—a rare complaint with me” (Lett. P 5: 66). “I am still queer—was, on getting up, hideously queer—but hope I am turning the corner” he wrote to another friend (Lett. P 5: 66). Ackroyd suggests that

    The nervous prostration may have had entirely physical origins but it is also possible that he had an underlying fear of being attacked, and that even the sudden violence of an animal provoked those fears. In addition he told his sister, dying of consumption, that at times of great anxiety or exhaustion he was sometimes gripped by ‘dreadful’ ideas and oppressive mental ‘sufferings’ (529).

Dickens undoubtedly feared attack, but Dickens’s nervous ailment, similar to what he would suffer after the Staplehurst incident, is more simply and generally attributable to the fact that his body’s vulnerability was revealed on each occasion so starkly to him; as his reaction to a mere (if painful) animal bite indicates, he was shaken more than most by such revelations.

Dickens had also undergone a period of nervous querulousness, even a minor nervous breakdown or deep depression, which he insisted on stating was due to the climate of
Bonchurch on the Isle of Wight where he was staying. Bonchurch was then fashionable for health and good air; Dickens, however, wrote of:

the results of the climate of Bonchurch after a few weeks' residence.... [are] an almost continual feeling of sickness, accompanied with great prostration of strength, so that [the patient’s] legs tremble under him, and his arms quiver when he wants to take hold of any object. An extraordinary disposition to sleep (except at night, when his rest, in the event of his having any, is broken by incessant dreams).... Extreme depression of mind, and a disposition to shed tears from morning to night.... a ball of boiling fat appears to be always behind the top of the bridge of his nose, simmering between his haggard eyes.... I find, from all sorts of hints from Kate, Georgina, and the Leeches, that they are all affected more or less in the same way, and find it very difficult to make head against. I make no sign, and pretend not to know what is going on (Lett. P 5: 604-05).

Much of this seems to have been Dickens’s own illusion, particularly his almost paranoid assumption that others feel as he does, yet he typically will not reveal his own weakness. Later in the letter he criticizes the doctors for their “folly of looking at one bit of a subject,” which is, of course often his own method in his novels. His illness did have some physical impetus to it; he went to see a doctor and was stethoscoped for a fierce cough he developed. Probably, as Kaplan suggests, “he feared consumption, concerned that Fanny’s illness was an indication of a general family propensity toward tuberculosis.” Kaplan also raises the significant point that Dickens was, at this time, writing fictional variants of some of his childhood’s most painful experiences (Biography 247).

Indeed, Dickens’s “bodily situation” is almost exactly revealed in Mrs. Gamp’s partially completed fictional account of an actual acting expedition that Dickens and his friends undertook. Just as Mrs. Gamp knows that there really is no Mrs. Harris, so Dickens knew that it was he who here revealed the truth about himself to himself. Typically, though, the language and characters of the “two” women give more than adequate defence against any direct assertion that he is confessing his own bodily weakness, as the epigraph to this chapter—“books is in your looks”—reveals.

Books were increasingly in Dickens’s looks, despite the fact that he averred in 1858: “I habitually keep myself in the condition of a fighting man in training” (Lett. N 3: 10). Writing
Great Expectations (1860-61), he suffered ill health of various kinds and realized the damage his books were causing him physically:

I have just finished my book of Great Expectations, and am the worse for wear. Neuralgic pains in the face have troubled me a good deal, and the work has been pretty close. But I hope that the book is a good book, and I have no doubt of very soon throwing off the little damage it has done me (Lett.N 3: 224).

Having finished the novel in June 1861, he noted the effect: “The subsidence of those distressing pains in my face the moment I had done my work, made me resolve to do nothing in that way for some time if I could help it” (in Forster 2: 238). Indeed, his last nine years saw only one and a half novels, a rate substantially reduced from a previous rough average of one novel every two years. As early as 1853 he had admitted: “Hypochondriacal whisperings tell me that I am rather over worked. The spring does not seem to fly back again directly, as it always did when I put my own work aside, and had nothing else to do” (Lett.P 7: 55). He felt he needed to escape: “What with Bleak House and Household Words and Child’s History and Miss Coutts’s Home, and the invitations to feasts and festivals, I really feel as if my head would split like a fired shell if I remained [in London] (Lett.P 7: 34).

His list of commitments reveals much of the problem. Dickens was not just a novelist, but among other things a journalist, editor, letter-writer, famous figure and organizer of a home for the reformation of prostitutes. The quantity of tasks he undertook dismembered him; he described himself once as “having my pen on the paper, and my eye on “Household Words”—my head on Copperfield—and my ear nowhere particularly” (Lett.P 6: 174-75).

Commentators argue over the causes of Dickens’s death, some emphasizing his kidney condition while others refer to the physical exhaustion of his readings and other excessive undertakings. A combination of the two, exacerbated by ailments of his heart, foot, and arterial system probably provide the best answer. All suggested causes were physically evidenced before his death, and were largely denied by Dickens. In the last years
of his life “his task ... self-imposed, was [also] to make the most money in the shortest time without any regard to the physical labour to be undergone” (Forster 2: 250). This was a desperate attempt to find the bodily and financial security for which he so much longed, the supposedly temporary physical inconvenience to be outweighed by the substantial gains to be made. Though he left an estate worth £93,000, his body’s final vulnerability caught him at fifty-eight, when, with a novel left uncompleted, in which a body was missing, he succumbed to a stroke, externally the lightest of bodily blows, but internally fatal. Or, as he had fascinatingly put it in 1836, at the very beginning of his career, he was “compressed into [his] last edition—one volume, boards, with brass plates” (Lett. P 1: 189).

In May 1865 Dickens had written: “Work and worry, without exercise, would soon make an end of me. If I were not going away now, I should break down. No one knows as I know to-day how near to it I have been” (Lett. N 3: 422). It was returning from this break that he was in the Staplehurst crash, and it is 1865 that must be looked upon as the critical year in ... the medical history of Charles Dickens. In this year he had a transient ‘stroke’ which as far as is known was overlooked, but which ... was a warning of the inevitable end.... His first manifestations of gout also appeared in 1865, though he sought no special advice until two years later (Bowen 141).

He wrote of his heart in February 1866, admitting the effects of his work on his body, presenting doctors’ opinions (as usual preferring the lesser evil or, where conflict arose, preferring his own opinion), showing his control over the situation and revealing that his condition would encourage him to do more rather than less:

For some time I have been very unwell. F. B. wrote me word that with such a pulse as I described, an examination of the heart was absolutely necessary. ‘Want of muscular power in the heart,’ B said. ‘Only remarkable irritability of the heart,’ said Doctor Brinton.... Of course I am not so foolish as to suppose that all my work can have been achieved without some penalty.... But tonics have already brought me round. So I have accepted an offer, from Chappells of Bond-street of £50 a night for thirty nights to read ‘in England, Ireland, Scotland, or Paris’ (Lett. N 3: 463).

Gout returned off and on for the rest of his life, but he dogmatically refused to admit it, writing in August 1867: “I cannot get a boot on—wear a slipper on my left foot, and
consequently am here under difficulties. My foot is occasionally painful, but not very.... I make out so many reasons against supposing it to be gouty, that I really do not think it is” (Lett.N 3: 540). The same month he found medical support for his denial:

I am laid up with another attack in my foot, and was on the sofa all last night in tortures. I cannot bear to have the fomentations taken off for a moment. I was so ill with it on Sunday, and it looked so fierce, that I came up to Henry Thompson [an eminent surgeon]. He has gone into the case heartily, and says that there is no doubt the complaint originates in the action of the shoe, in walking, on an enlargement in the nature of a bunion. Erysipelas has supervened upon the injury (Lett.N 3: 540).65

Incensed by rumours circulating both in England and America at this time about his ill health, on 3 September 1867 he wrote the press a letter which contains at least two patent lies:

This is to certify that the undersigned innocent victim of a periodical paragraph disease which usually breaks out once in every seven years ... is NOT in a critical state of health, and has NOT consulted eminent surgeons ... and has not had so much as a head ache for twenty years (Lett.N 3: 544).

He was determined that no vulnerability of body be attributed to him by doctors, the press, or himself. His son Charley writes: “If there was one thing more than any other that my father resented it was any suggestion from anybody else that his health was failing, or that he was undertaking anything beyond his strength” (Collins, Recollections 1: 136). Ackroyd notes that “there was also a part of Dickens that truly believed he was not, could not be sick—a man who had triumphed over the agonies of childhood must also be able to triumph over the ailments of the flesh” (1002).

In 1858, the year after he had met Ellen Ternan, he was soon to separate from Catherine and was “an international celebrity whose photograph appeared prominently all over England” (Kaplan, Biography 369). His life was in a painful state of flux. The readings were something he could fling himself into: “I must do something, or I shall wear my heart away. I can see no better thing to do that is half so hopeful in itself, or half so well suited to my restless state” (in Forster 2: 204). Demand there was: “several large towns ... have a
claim upon me, and ... are all tearing at me like so many Zoological creatures before dinner” (Lett.P 7: 480). He wrote to Forster:

‘I was thinking the other day that in these days of lecturings and readings, a great deal of money might possibly be made (if it were not infra dig.) by one’s having Readings of one’s own books. It would be an odd thing. I think it would take immensely’ (in Forster 1: 421).

Forster did think it infra dig. and it did take immensely, both in Dickens’s mind and that of his audience. He undertook paid readings during 1858-59, 1861-63, 1866-67, and 1868-70, in total giving “about 472 public readings, of which 27 were ‘charity’ ones” (Collins, Readings xxv). In total “the Readings earned Dickens about £45,000—nearly half of the estate (of £93,000) which he left in 1870” (Collins, Readings xxix). He trained himself hard for them, constantly improving upon them and learning all by heart: “You have no idea how I have worked at them” he wrote in May 1867 (Lett.N3: 527). He did not merely read but flung himself bodily into his roles, and they involved fatigue even at the outset; he often, early on, lost his voice (Forster 2: 218). During the scene of the Fezziwigs’ party one observer noticed, his hands “actually perform[ed] upon the table, as if it were the floor of Fezziwig’s room, and every finger were a leg belonging to one of the Fezziwig family” (in Ackroyd 983). He “would in one evening both be narrator and take on the voice and visage of as many as twenty characters in an item (and his programme generally consisted of two, and sometimes three, items)” (Collins, Readings xvii).

The money offered in America was a great inducement to go and read there; in New York “queues for tickets to his readings stretch[ed] down the streets, with all ‘the shouting, shrieking and singing ...’ suggesting, Dolby said, ‘...the night before an execution at the Old Bailey’” (Ackroyd 1014). Dickens himself wrote:

To get that sum (£10,000) in a heap so soon is an immense consideration to me. I shall never rest much while my faculties last.... I don’t want money.... Still, at 55 or 56, the likelihood of making a very great addition to one’s capital in half a year, is an immense consideration (Lett.N 3: 531).
His reading tour of America was cut short due to his ill health, as was his final reading tour of Britain. America was a terrible strain on him, but the financial gains possible meant that he was determined to earn for as long as he could physically bear it. He did, however, shorten his tour by a month, against public preference as, on 23 Jan. 1868, he relates: "'Good heavens sir,' the great Philadelphia authority said to me this morning, 'if you don’t read in Chicago the people will go into fits!' Well, I answered, I would rather they went into fits than I did. But he didn’t seem to see it at all" (Lett. N 3: 607).

He was suffering from sleeplessness, exhaustion and loss of appetite, and turned to a menu that can only have exacerbated his condition:

I cannot eat (to anything like the ordinary extent), and have established this system: At seven in the morning, in bed, a tumbler of new cream and two tablespoonsful of rum. At twelve, a sherry cobbler and a biscuit. At three (dinner time), a pint of champagne. At five minutes to eight, an egg beaten up with a glass of sherry. Between the parts, the strongest beef tea that can be made, drunk hot. At a quarter-past ten, soup, and anything to drink that I can fancy. I don’t eat more than half a pound of solid food in the whole four-and-twenty hours, if so much (Lett. N 3: 642-43).

Bowen writes that

To a man with damaged kidney, high blood-pressure, and attacks of gout, the excess of alcohol and concentrated protein (beef tea) was definitely harmful. Fortunately, he was a man who took a lot of exercise, unless crippled with gout. This active life was the reason why his gout was in part controlled and did not reduce him to chronic invalidism (152).

Bowen argues, however, against the readings as the cause of death, but the wearing down of the "bodily mechanism" through constant travelling and performing cannot have been slight.

Dickens could use quite extraordinary reasoning to convince himself that any ailments were merely minor, temporary, or local:

I think there is some strange influence in the atmosphere. Twice last week I was seized in a most distressing manner—apparently in the heart; but, I am persuaded, only in the nervous system (Lett. N 3: 483).

I am not by any means knocked up, though I have, as I had in the last series of readings, a curious feeling of soreness all round the body, which I suppose to arise from the great exertion of voice (Lett. N 3: 509).
Writing *Dombey* and Christmas story "The Battle for Life" together in 1846 while in Europe, he suffered more nervous illness and created other quite remarkable reasons for it: "There are no streets and crowds of people here, to divert the attention. My head suffers. And that is very unusual, as you know, with me" (*Lett.P* 4: 623-24). Going to Geneva for a rest he writes,

I have been greatly better at Geneva, though I still am made uneasy by occasional giddiness and headache: attributable, I have not the least doubt, to the absence of streets. There is an idea here, too, that people are occasionally made despondent and sluggish in their spirits by this great mass of still water, Lake Leman.... I am horrified at the idea of getting the blues (and bloodshots) again (*Lett.P* 4: 627-28).

He was impressed in October 1858 with the power of his own form, with "How the densest and most uncomfortably-packed crowd will be hushed in an instant when I show my face," (*Lett.N* 3: 61) and he adds that, unlike others, "the fatigue, though sometimes very great indeed, hardly tells upon me at all" (*Lett.N* 3: 62). Dickens willingly or willfully denies his own vulnerability.

The physical dangers of readings were not only from exhaustion: "the packed halls, the excitement of the crowd (often seeming to amount to hysteria), the difficulties of exit, the fragility of the gas equipment, meant that such occasions carried a constant risk of fire or fatal crushing" (Ackroyd 906-07). In America the danger of fire was not only on the stage. In December 1867 Dickens was awoken in the place he was staying by the information that it was on fire, but this was a common occurrence and did not appear to worry him much (Forster 2: 326). A more individualized fire-related incident haunted him. He dined with Longfellow in "his old house, where his beautiful wife was burned to death.' Dickens ... could not get out of his mind the vivid image of her being 'in a blaze in an instant' and rushing 'into his arms with a wild cry'" (Kaplan, *Biography* 517).

On 5 Oct. 1862 he had written, "If it was not for the hope of gain that would make me more independent of the worst, I could not look the travel and absence and exertion in the face" (*Lett.N* 3: 306). He did though look it "in the face," and embodied it, though the
readings told on him; ill and exhausted, he collapsed after each performance and had to spend increasingly long periods lying down, summoning strength for “the needful two hours” (in Forster 2: 333) for his stage appearance. In this sense his art was killing him; his characters were killing him, sapping his strength by the enormously energetic demands placed upon his body as he displayed it as a commercial item and turned it into literature. That he was “taken so faint afterwards that they laid [him] on a sofa at the hall for half an hour,” however, he stubbornly attributed to sleeplessness “and to nothing worse,” and he was also fond of blaming his condition on “an effect of the railway shaking” (in Forster 2: 255). He was often thankful that he could summon up strength at all:

‘That afternoon of my birthday ... my catarrh was in such a state that Charles Sumner, coming in at five o’clock, and finding me covered with mustard poultice, and apparently voiceless, turned to Dolby and said: “Surely, Mr. Dolby, it is impossible that he can read to-night!” Says Dolby: “Sir, I have told Mr. Dickens so, four times to-day, and I have been very anxious. But you have no idea how he will change, when he gets to the little table.” After five minutes of the little table I was not even hoarse. The frequent experience of this return of force when it is wanted, saves me a vast amount of anxiety; but I am not at times without the nervous dread that I may some day sink altogether’ (in Forster 2: 342-43).

But even he realized that the two hours were as much as he could do: “However sympathetic and devoted the people are about one, they CAN NOT be got to comprehend, seeing me able to do the two hours when the time comes round, that it may also involve much misery” (in Forster 2: 350). Dickens in a sense fed his body to the public in the form of his characters and denied the rest of himself. For relief he eventually turned to laudanum: “it is the only thing that has done me good, though it made me sick this morning” (in Forster 2: 349).

Although very drained by his American experience, he did undergo some recovery on the voyage home: “My doctor was quite broken down in spirits on seeing me for the first time last Saturday. Good lord! seven years younger! said the doctor, recoiling” (in Forster 2: 355). Forster comments that Dickens credited the fine days at sea rather than the rest from his labours for his recovery. Indeed, Forster was
never without the impression that America had told heavily upon him.... the wonderful brightness of eye was dimmed at times. One day, too, as he walked from his office with Miss Hogarth to dine at our house, he could read only the halves of the letters over the shop doors that were on his right as he looked. He attributed it to medicine. It was an additional unfavourable symptom that his right foot had become affected as well as the left, though not to anything like the same extent, during the journey from the Canada frontier to Boston (Forster 2: 357).

One particular reading, “Sikes and Nancy,” was thought by some contemporaries, such as Wilkie Collins, to have done “more to kill Dickens than all his work put together” (Collins, Readings 471): “It is what killed him—according to his son.... And Dolby has agreed” (Ackroyd 1040). Certainly the reading became an obsession with Dickens. He acted out both his characters, murderer and victim; he killed himself. He pondered over actually doing the reading: “I have no doubt that I could perfectly petrify an audience.... But whether the impression would not be so horrible as to keep them away another time, is what I cannot satisfy myself upon” (in Collins, Readings 466). It was, also, significantly different from his other readings: “None of the other Readings involved violence and horror; comedy had predominated in them, though often with a substratum of pathos” (Collins, Crime 265). Philip Collins suggests that in this reading there was “a higher degree of identification than is usual between a performer and his role. Certainly Dickens generally referred to the Reading as if he were Sikes: ‘I ’m ... murdering Nancy ...’ ‘I do not commit the murder again ... until Tuesday’” (Collins, Crime 267-68), which is, as Collins points out, “the normal mode of discourse and banter among actors” (269), but Dickens’s “addiction to the Reading was excessive, and cannot be accounted for entirely in terms of a keen actor’s enjoyment of creating a striking effect.... An addiction it certainly was. He gave it as many as ten times in a week” (Collins, Crime 269-70).

His manager George Dolby related that the only time that he had ever seen the “Chief” use angry words to anyone was when he flew into an irritated rage at Dolby’s suggesting that perhaps he had programmed too many murders for performance in one week.

The effect of the Reading upon Dickens himself was remarkable, and is indisputable. His desire to repeat it became a fierce obsession.... having [as Dolby writes] ‘worked himself up to a pitch of excitement’ over the murder, this mood ‘invariably recurrent
later on in the evening after the audience had left, either in the form of great hilarity or a desire to be once more on the platform, or in a craving to do the work over again' (in Collins, Readings 470).

Physically, the reading exhausted him, and his pulse rate, “normally 72, would be as high as 124, and he would often have to lie on a sofa, quite unable to speak a word, for an interval of ten minutes before gathering his strength and staggering back to the platform to read another item” (Collins, Readings 470). Nor did he reserve it for the stage: “It is reported ... that a day or two before his death he was discovered in the grounds at Gad’s Hill re-enacting the murder of Nancy “ (Collins, Readings 471). He knew of his obsession, once remarking to Dolby that it was “worse than madness’ to have given this Reading with such frequency” (Collins, Crime 270). He was, however, thrilled with the powerful effect his reading had on his audience:

I don’t think a hand moved while I was doing it last night, or an eye looked away. And there was a fixed expression of horror of me, all over the theatre, which could not have been surpassed if I had been going to be hanged to that red velvet table. It is quite a new sensation to be execrated with that unanimity; and I hope it will remain so! (Lett.N 3: 718-19).

He soon realized, however, that “the Oliver Twist murder [was] driving all the breath out of [his] body” (Lett.N 3: 708): “I shall tear myself to pieces,’ he whispered to a friend, as he walked towards the platform for his final public performance of the ‘Murder’, and it is clear that this is what he had been doing, with dangerous regularity, for months past” (Collins, Crime 270-71).

His farewell tour of Britain had to be cut short because of increasingly serious symptoms of bad health. In February 1869 he wrote in dismay to Forster: “My foot has turned lame again!... Henry Thompson will not let me read to-night, and will not let me go to Scotland to-morrow” (Lett.N 3: 703). His foot was preventing his readings, limiting his income and interfering with his security: “‘Heaven knows what engagements this may involve in April! It throws us all back, and will cost me some five hundred pounds’” (in Forster 2: 360).
In March, after a self-limited rest, he wrote: "The foot goes famously.... I feel the fatigue in it (four Murders in one week) but not over much. It merely aches at night; and so does the other, sympathetically, I suppose" (in Forster 2: 361). But all was not well. In April he wrote to Georgina

'My weakness and deadness are all on the left side; and if I don’t look at anything I try to touch with my left hand, I don’t know where it is. I am in (secret) consultation with Frank Beard, who says that I have given him indisputable evidences of overwork which he could wish to treat immediately; and so I have telegraphed for him' (in Forster 2: 361).

Dickens inclined to his railway shaking theory again:71

'I told Henry Thompson (before I saw his old master Syme) that I had an inward conviction that whatever it was, it was not gout. I also told Beard, a year after the Staplehurst accident, that I was certain that my heart had been fluttered, and wanted a little helping. This the stethoscope confirmed; and considering the immense exertion I am undergoing, and the constant jarring of express trains, the case seems to me quite intelligible' (in Forster 2: 361-62).72

Frank Beard stopped the readings at once and brought Dickens to London, where he was seen by a distinguished physician Sir Thomas Watson73 who wrote the following of Dickens's condition:

'After unusual irritability, C. D. found himself, last Saturday or Sunday, giddy, with a tendency to go backwards, and to turn round. Afterwards, desiring to put something on a small table, he pushed it and the table forwards, undesignedly. He had some odd feeling of insecurity about his left leg, as if there was something unnatural about his heel; but he could lift, and he did not drag, his leg. Also he spoke of some strangeness of his left hand and arm; missed the spot on which he wished to lay that hand, unless he carefully looked at it; felt an unreadiness to lift his hands towards his head, especially his left hand—when, for instance, he was brushing his hair.... The state thus described showed plainly that C. D. had been on the brink of an attack of paralysis of his left side, and possibly of apoplexy. It was, no doubt, the result of extreme hurry, overwork, and excitement, incidental to his readings.... He told me he had of late sometimes, but rarely, lost or misused a word; that he forgot names, and numbers, but had always done that' (in Forster 2: 362-63).74

He was given a certificate containing a placatory railway reference, and was allowed twelve readings without railway travel.75 Frank Beard attended each of the final readings in London in the early months of 1870. "His ordinary pulse on the first night was at 72; but never on any subsequent night was lower than 82, and had risen on the later nights to more than 100" and
up to 124 more than once (Forster 2: 409-10). In reading he “literally forgot himself in the excitement of taking on the very characters he himself had created. He could forget his own mortality” (Ackroyd 1035); those close to him, however, could not. Frank Beard told Charley Dickens during the final performances:

‘I have had some steps put up against the side of the platform, Charley. You must be there every night, and if you see your father falter in the least, you must run up and catch him and bring him off with me, or, by Heaven, he’ll die before them all’ (in Ackroyd 1063).

He did not in the event “die before them all,” although part of Dickens would have seen a kind of triumph in the effect, on an audience, of a “real” stage death. In fact, however, he died of a cerebral haemorrhage at his home after a day of writing longer than usual on *Edwin Drood*. Even in his final hours he was denying the seriousness of his condition, though he must at heart have known it. He wrote two letters before sitting down to dinner with Georgina:

she noticed a change both in his colour and his expression. She asked him if he were ill, and he replied, ‘Yes, very ill; I have been very ill for the last hour.’ She wanted to send immediately for a doctor but he forbade her to do so, saying that he wanted to go to London that evening after dinner. But then something happened. He experienced some kind of fit against which he tried to struggle—he paused for a moment and then began to talk very quickly and indistinctly, at some point mentioning Forster. She rose from her chair, alarmed, and told him to ‘come and lie down’.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘On the ground’ (Ackroyd 1077).

He lived on for twenty-four hours, “stertorous breathing continu[ing] all night,” and through the next day, but there was no “gleam of hope during the twenty four hours,” and he died at ten past six on Thursday June 9, 1870, aged fifty-eight (Forster 2: 416). Before his quiet burial in Westminster Abbey on the 14th of June, his daughter Mamie writes: “I made it my duty to guard the beloved body as long as it was left to us” (*Recall* 124).

“How I always have given my work the first place in my life” Dickens wrote in 1865 (*Lett.N* 3: 415), and, at whatever cost to his own body, it is his body of work that remains.
Although he avoided revealing his awareness and fear of bodily vulnerability in life, in his art he used it to the fullest. His actual methods of writing were physical. Mamie Dickens recounts watching her father work when, as a child, she lay convalescing in his study:

my father wrote busily and rapidly at his desk, when he suddenly jumped from his chair and rushed to a mirror which was hung near, and in which I could see the reflection of some extraordinary facial contortions which he was making. He returned rapidly to his desk, wrote furiously for a few moments, and then went again to the mirror. The facial pantomime was resumed, and then turning toward, but evidently not seeing me, he began talking rapidly in a low voice. Ceasing this soon, however, he returned once more to his desk, where he remained silently writing until luncheon time.... he had thrown himself completely into the character that he was creating, and... for the time being he had not only lost sight of his surroundings, but had actually become in action, as in imagination, the creature of his pen (Recall 48-49).

Dickens was later given a replica of a Swiss chalet in which he worked during his final years at Gad's Hill and had it lined with mirrors; Mamie Dickens writes that "as he had ... a passion for looking-glass, so were there looking-glasses placed in every possible corner of the house" (Collins, Recollections 1: 143). His penchant for mirrors is significant; he knew that the "meat was in the glass," not only in the sense of his writing providing sustenance for himself and a "cannibalistic" family, but also because it was from his body that his characters sprang.

Dickens did not just invent the bodies in his work, he inhabited them, and that, he thought, was as it should be: "It seems to me as if it were written by somebody who lived next door to the people, rather than inside of 'em" he commented negatively on another writer's work (Lett.P 6: 453). Asked once if he ever dreamed of his characters, he replied:

'Never; and I am convinced that no writer (judging from my own experience, which cannot be altogether singular, but must be a type of the experience of others) has ever dreamed of the creatures of his own imagination. It would,' he went on to say, "be like a man's dreaming of meeting himself, which is clearly an impossibility. Things exterior to one's self must always be the basis of dreams" (Collins, Recollections 2: 311).

By transforming his body into his characters he was momentarily ensuring its invulnerability and perpetually ensuring its presence in art. Much of what happens to his characters' bodies is comic or poetically justified or the result of poverty, cruelty, or neglect.
Dickens was, of course, working himself away from the latter three, and the more comical a situation is the less likely the character is to be a "gentleman" like Dickens. His characters' bodies are, unlike his own, fully under his control, and the dialogue his characters speak indulges freely in violence to the body, dismembering, and comedy. To point to Dickens's work in order to demonstrate a fear or morbid obsession of his would be to invite the rebuttal that these things are said by his characters, not by him, and that in any case they are usually hearsay evidence. Nonetheless, it is stylistically in the very structure of sentences and words Dickens chooses to use that the body is at its most vulnerable. Here it can be dismembered with the stroke of a pen just as any of us can be dismembered with the stroke of a knife, and can be re-membered, or have its bodily wholeness implied just as easily. Nor are the words just "there" or metaphorical; he was always aware of literal meanings. For Dickens it was not the idea of something that was important, but the thing itself, not the figurative but the literal. A story, possibly apocryphal, has him refusing to go on any route other than his usual on his daily walk because the Bible says "we must walk in the same path all the days of our life."...the man fascinated by literal meaning who was also the author who effortlessly transcended such meanings" (Ackroyd 53). Acknowledging his fascination with literal meanings makes us, almost "suddenly," aware of their use in his work. If he writes that "a head was thrust out the window," then we must assume that he means us not only to read the metaphorical but to see (or better, feel) the literal.

Phrases that couch this literal dismemberment, or otherwise show the body's vulnerability, not only pervade his novels, but are also evident in his letters. He describes a Glasgow reading hall as "already full to the throat" (Lett.N 3: 263). He brings an extra guest to dinner: "In the hope and belief that an extra knife and fork will not pierce your heart" (Lett.P 2: 74). To another person he wrote: "your handwriting last night had as startling an effect upon me as though you had sealed your note with one of your own eyes" (Lett.P 2: 290). "To seize by the throat is one of his favourite expressions; another is to lay violent hands upon" (Ackroyd 236).
He was not averse to comically altering his own body: "Surrounded by strange and perfectly novel circumstances ... I feel as if I had a new head on side by side with my old one" he writes of arriving in Marseilles (in Forster 1: 314). Sitting for a friend, he writes: "To save you further trouble in the matter of my head.... It shall be forwarded to you with care, and with the proper side upwards" (Lett.P 2: 497). To Forster he muses, "I wonder, if I went to a new colony with my head, hands, legs, and health, I should force myself to the top of the social milk-pot and live upon the cream! What do you think? Upon my word I believe I should" (Lett.P 2: 358). In mentioning "with" these appendages he automatically conjures up images of a body "without" them, just as he writes of characters "with" a wooden leg.

Dickens can use extended bodily metaphors if he chooses: "The Nation [America] is a body without a head; and the arms and legs, are occupied in quarrelling with the trunk and each other, and exchanging bruises at random" (Lett.P 3: 176). He knows, however, that such "large" concepts are not nearly as effective as writing of an individual's heart being pierced by a fork. He knows his readers can all identify with the pain of being "forked" and have an instantaneous imaginative grasp of such a scene (not necessarily at all realistically "visual"). He aims for our most vulnerable point, through his own, the body. He wanted to affect his readers even more than he wanted to effect changes in society: "If you had seen Macready last night—undisguisedly sobbing, and crying on the sofa, as I read ['The Chimes']—you would have felt (as I did) what a thing it is to have Power" (Lett.P 4: 235).

Dickens also describes his methods of writing in bodily terms. He describes writing Oliver: "just as I had fallen upon him tooth and nail" (Lett.P 1: 387). He is "tied by the leg to [his] book" (Lett.N 3: 431), in a "paroxysm of Copperfield" (Lett.P 6: 169, 170, 171, 179), "rigid with Copperfield" (Lett.P 6: 175) or "In convulsions of Dombey" (Lett.P 5: 59, 60). He cannot go out to dine "until [his] February work has had its throat cut" (Lett.P 3: 437). "I have just burnt into Newgate, and am going in the next number to tear the prisoners out by the hair of their heads" he says of writing Barnaby Rudge (in Forster 1: 143). He advises Forster: "If in going over the proofs you find the tendency to blank verse ... too strong, knock
out a word’s brains here and there” (in Forster 1: 437). It is also interesting to note that from about 1844 on Dickens frequently refers to himself in letters in the third person, calling himself for example, “the Inimitable B” (Lett. P 4: 8, 9), “Dick” (Lett. P 4: 55), “Dick, the energetic Dick” (Lett. P 4: 89), “the prolix Dick” (Lett. P 4: 306).

He is most dramatic when writing of killing off characters. Of Nell: “‘I am slowly murdering that poor child, and grow wretched over it’” (in Ackroyd 318). Of Paul Dombey: “‘Paul, I shall slaughter at the end of number five’” (in Forster 2: 30); “I am slaughtering a young and innocent victim—and it takes a deal of time” (Lett. P 5: 3); “Between ourselves—Paul is dead. He died on Friday night about 10 o’Clock; and as I had no hope of getting to sleep afterwards, I went out, and walked about Paris until breakfast-time next morning” (Lett. P 5: 9). His walking around Paris reveals his grief over the deaths of characters, just as he sorrowed after completing his books. “He had his own creations always by his side. They were living, speaking companions. With them only he was everywhere thoroughly identified” (Forster 2: 194). Once again, his “literary work was so intensely one with his nature that he is not separable from it, and the man and the method throw a singular light on each other” (Forster 2: 263). He needed the stimulus of bodies when he was writing: “as the love of nature was as much a passion with him in his intervals of leisure, as the craving for crowds and streets when he was busy with the creatures of his fancy” (Forster 1: 387). Dickens uses a circulatory mode when discussing Miss Wade: “‘In Miss Wade I had an idea, which I thought a new one, of making the introduced story so fit into surroundings impossible of separation from the main story, as to make the blood of the book circulate through both’” (in Forster 2: 185). It is scarcely necessary to observe that Dickens’s stylistic skill was such that this circulation rarely slowed or clogged to mere ‘Circumlocution.’ Nonetheless, it is not circulation with which Dickens is most intrigued, or for which he intrigues; it is dismemberment. Like a butcher, he must chop up his characters before he is able to feed himself, his family and society; and, like an assailant, he must attack the bodies of his
characters before he can remain intact himself. Dickens can, like Scheherezade, only maintain bodily security by continually creating fictions.

Dickens’s exhaustive use of his own body in life was made, not only for his body’s sake, but also for his mind’s. In art, as in life, his interest was not in physiology or in how his body or other bodies worked, but in anatomy, in the body’s parts and in the fact that these parts worked when safe from external, and, to a lesser extent, internal attack. Perfect physical form did not interest Dickens, as he makes clear in a *Household Words* article of 1858 about artists’ models:

I am tired to death of that young man with the large chest, and ... I would thankfully accept a less symmetrical young man with a smaller chest, or even with a chest in which the stethoscope might detect a weakness. Immaculate as that other young man’s legs are, I am sick of his legs.... [He should] be promptly taken into custody, and confined in Greenwich Hospital; and ... his legs be there immediately amputated (under chloroform), and decently buried within the precincts of the building ("An Idea of Mine" *HW* 17 [1858]: 289).

Perfect physiques were to be reserved only for “gentlemen” characters in his fiction; anything less was dismemberable at Dickens’s will.

In “Lying Awake” Dickens expresses, in passing, some ideas that show how he saw and used the body:

anything in the form of accidental injury, or any kind of illness or disability is so very serious in their own sphere. I will explain this seeming paradox of mine. Take the case of Christmas Pantomime. Surely nobody supposes that the young mother in the pit who falls into fits of laughter when the baby is boiled or sat upon, would be at all diverted by such an occurrence off the stage. Nor is the decent workman in the gallery, who is transported beyond the ignorant present by the delight with which he sees a stout gentleman pushed out of a two pair of stairs window, to be slandered by the suspicion that he would be in the least entertained by such a spectacle in any street in London, Paris, or New York. It always appears to me that the secret of this enjoyment lies in the temporary superiority to the common hazards and mischances of life; in seeing casualties, attended when they really occur with bodily and mental suffering, tears, and poverty, happen through a very rough sort of poetry without the least harm being done to any one—the pretence of distress in a pantomime being so broadly humorous as to be no pretence at all (*RP* 435-36).

Dickens uses comedy as a means of transcending the physical perils of life and of enjoying extreme damage or danger in fiction because he, like his readers, is not immediately
threatened. At the same time, however, being a body like all of us, he has an instinctive visceral feeling for what is happening. Dickens depicts characters humorously; however, unlike pantomime, a very fine sort of poetry and a humour far more particular than “broad” emerge which do not allow the reader to pretend complete immunity, though we are, briefly, tricked into “thinking it so.”

In writing, Dickens is butcher, surgeon, and dissector, turning the fear he carried with him from childhood into an imaginative reality. In his work dismemberment does not always mean death, body parts can exist animated. In this sense surgery is closer to Dickens’s methods than dissection, as surgical patients, like his characters, are dismembered while alive, and will hopefully remain alive, which makes the attraction of repulsion that much stronger, and our identification more intense.

Dickens’s skill with the scalpel is not in cutting out canker or cauterizing pustular growths on society’s massed appendages. His skill is in the swift, clean, clear cut that needs no diagnosis. He does not dismember as Swift does, to satirize, nor as Sappho does, to accomplish sublimity, but to achieve, in many cases, the intentionally ridiculous, ridiculous because he literalizes our worst fears. In doing so Dickens does not appeal to the intellect but to the gut, to the emotions, and to our sense of language. We can perhaps pretend intellectually that dismemberment does not interest us, but we are innately intrigued by it and Dickens taps into this fascination as he does into our desire for comedy. We read his novels with an “attraction of repulsion,” consciously or not, and with an insatiable need to feel emotion, to laugh at the body, and to know, or rather feel, something instantaneously. The more we enter Dickens’s world, however, and the more we enter, as readers, the bodily space left by the animating author, the less comfortably our flesh sits on us, however well our eyes fill our sockets as we observe.
NOTES

1 Also reprinted in MC appendix G: 859.

2 Dickens recounts these stories in “The Holly-Tree Inn” (HW 12 [Christmas 1855]: 1-36).

3 This account, see “New Year’s Day” (HW 19 [1859]: 97-102), further emphasizes the fascination wooden legs held for Dickens and “believing” it scarcely stretches credulity less than “believing” in a nurse who told chilling stories. Ackroyd points out that there “were a lot of gentlemen with wooden legs in this naval port (it was, you might say, an occupational hazard)” (33). This stump image recurs in Dickens’s description of Silas Wegg among the dust heap and in Mrs. Gamp’s account of her husband’s wooden leg.

4 In 1848 Dickens writes to a friend:
   There is rather a good Britannia Saloon Bill out announcing a gentleman with a wooden leg to dance the Highland Fling. There is a portrait of him in the bill, with his wooden leg highly ornamented with rosettes.
   It appears to me that this demands our attention (Lett.P 5: 429).

5 Ackroyd expresses similar ideas this way:
   in later life, he always looked back upon his childhood with something very close to self-pity. He was, he said, ‘a very queer small boy’, ‘not a very robust child’, ‘once a lonely boy’. A friend later recalled how ‘... he used to say he always was a puny, weak youngster’, and never used to participate in games ‘... with the same zest that other boys seemed to have’. He never was remarkable, according to his own account, during his younger days, for anything but violent spasmodic attacks, which used to utterly prostrate him, and for indomitable energy in reading—cricket, ‘chevy’ top, marbles, ‘peg in the ring’, ‘tor’, ‘three holes’, or any of the thousand and one boy’s games, had no charm for him, save such as lay in watching others play ...’ His daughter, Mamie, described how ‘... his knowledge of games was gained merely from long hours of watching others while lying upon the grass’. This idea of ‘watching’ others was clearly very important to him, and it suggests both passivity and anxiety, the security of being bound up in one’s self and a concomitant separation from the ‘real’ world (49).

6 Charles was in fact left at Chatham a little longer, probably to finish his school year and so left for London alone. “He never forgot, he tells us, ‘the smell of the damp straw in which I was packed—like game—and forwarded carriage-paid’” (in Johnson 1: 25).

7 See also Carlton, “The Barber of Dean Street.”

8 See “Our School” (RP 566-73).

9 McMaster, himself, actually draws more explicit parallels: A Tale of Two Cities, for example, uses material from the Terrific Register’s “many a bloodthirsty tale” from the French Revolution (39-42), and a story about spontaneous combustion McMaster argues influenced Dickens’s depiction of Krook’s end (42-46). Dickens’s memory of these stories was good, and “it is reasonable to assume that the periodical encouraged an already active interest in the gruesome, an interest that continued and is reflected throughout his works.
The kinship between the sensationalism of the popular press and the ghastliness and brutality in his novels is quite clear” (R. McMaster 46).

10 The chronology of these events is uncertain. Norman Page and Edgar Johnson have Dickens joining the Mirror in early 1832, Kaplan suggests early 1831, Forster prior to 7 Feb 1832, and Ackroyd some point early in 1831; Dickens himself, however, describes “a boy not eighteen,” which means 1830 or early 1831. Whenever it was, all are agreed that he was a parliamentary reporter from early 1832, a date which has great significance with regard to nineteenth-century attitudes to the body. Carlton in Charles Dickens: Shorthand Reporter provides the following information: “Dickens’ first session on behalf of the Mirror, a brief autumnal one, was marked by the meeting of the Reformed Parliament on 7 August, 1832. The Grey Ministry had already been in power for two years and was to remain in office for a like period” (79). “In the Upper House sat the Prime Minister, Earl Grey, for whose style of oratory Dickens conceived an intense dislike. “The shape of his head (I see it now) was misery to me and weighed down my youth,” he wrote thirty years afterwards” (80). “For three sessions, from 1832 to 1834, Dickens plied his pencil in the Gallery of the House of Commons on behalf of the Mirror” (88). “The Mirror continued to appear regularly until January, 1837, when it suspended publication until the following November. Lack of public support led to its final demise in October, 1841” (Carlton 100 n. 1). He says that Dickens’s connection with it terminated at end of session on the 15th August 1834 (100). Dickens then moved to Parliamentary reporting for the Morning Chronicle. In March 1836 Pickwick began publication and at the close of the parliamentary session in August Dickens’s reporting of Parliament, which had been waning as his star began to rise with the Sketches, ended (Carlton 132).

11 As Ackroyd does in conjecturing that Dickens did more than Parliamentary reporting at this time:

in the Dexter collection of Dickens material, housed in the British Library, there is a report of the trial of a certain Williams, Bishop and May for the murder of ‘the Italian boy’. It took place on 12 February, 1831, and on the frontispiece it is stated that the court proceedings were ‘taken in shorthand’. There is no direct evidence to link it with Dickens, but in the descriptions of the murderers there is something which seems very close to the kind of prose Dickens was writing only a few years later (134).

12 Discussion of the Bill often came on late in the evening and was often postponed for this reason. Dickens’s later friend the writer Edward Lytton Bulwer later Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Baron Lytton, a liberal M. P. at the time, on 17 January 1932 presented a petition to Parliament on the Bill on behalf of “surgeons, and students of surgery, and William John Stewart, and other private person, for removing the existing impediment to the cultivation of the science of anatomy” (Mirror of Parliament 1832 [vol. 1]: 194). One member of Parliament states that the House “had it in evidence [in 1828] from Sir Astley Cooper and others that nine or eleven subjects only could legally be procured [by anatomists] per annum, whilst 1100 were annually wanted, of which 900 were actually obtained” (Mirror of Parliament 1832 [vol. 1]: 203).

13 Dickens recollected,

When I was about twenty, and knew three or four successive years of Mathews’s At Homes from sitting in the pit to hear them, I wrote to Bartley who was stage manager at Covent-garden, and told him how young I was, and exactly what I thought I could
do; and that I believed I had a strong perception of character and oddity, and a natural power of reproducing in my own person what I observed in others (Lett. P 4: 244).

14 Forster writes,

His accounts for the first half-year of Domby were so much in excess of what had been expected from the new publishing arrangements, that from this date all embarrassments connected with money were brought to a close. His future profits varied of course with his varying sales, but there was always enough, and savings were now to begin (2: 12).

15 For Dickens's acting career, interest in acting and its influence in his work see for example Van Amerongen, Eigner.

16 For a full account of the readings and the readings themselves see Philip Collins, ed., The Public Readings.

17 For contemporary accounts of Dickens's body and appearance see Philip Collins, ed., Dickens: Interviews and Recollections.

18 Dana's view did change after dining with Dickens and he came to share, as Kaplan points out (Biography 131), Dana Sr.'s view that Dickens's "whole countenance speaks life and action.... You cannot tell how dead the faces near him seemed" (Collins, Recollections 1: 53).

19 Argument continues in the 1990s about his eye colour.

20 In 1858 he wrote "I am under positive refusals and conditional promises, which altogether exclude my visage from Photography! It is a melancholy fact,—but I don't see the remotest chance of my interesting countenance being ever photographed, of my own knowledge and consent, again. If I were to begin, I could never leave off" (Lett. N 3: 11). Photographs seemed always to have annoyed him; on the 23 May 1841 he wrote: "If anybody should entreat you to go to the Polytechnic Institution and have a Photographic likeness done—don't be prevailed upon, on any terms.... I speak from experience, having suffered dreadfully " (Lett. P 2: 284).

21 Others draw quite remarkable conclusions about his personality on a glandular basis: "Dickens and his wife ... were radically different in glandular organization and consequent behaviour" and were not biologically or psychologically suited (Squires, "Case" 469). Everything about him furnished "the raw materials for his psychological laboratory. His own home contributed its quota. Perhaps he derived a sort of sadistic pleasure in subjecting his wife to the dissecting process" (Squires, "Case" 473). "The sickliness and spasms of Charles Dickens' childhood were probably due to inefficient functioning of his parathyroids" (Fantham 225); "he was very ambitious, with determination, despite his miserable [childhood] circumstances, to do something and to force his way upwards. In this ... he was aided by his thyroid which gave energy and by his adrenals which supplied the necessary driving power" (Fantham 223); "In [his reforming zeal] he was fortunate in being able to draw on his well-developed adrenals" (Fantham 224).

22 He "would give up any amount of time and spare himself no fatigue if he could in any way alleviate sickness and pain" (Mamie Dickens, Recall 18). "In illness, whether of the children
or any of the servants, he was better than a doctor” (Forster 2: 395). His granddaughter, Mary Angela Dickens, recollects his ability to “make her better” after she was badly scalded after falling over a saucepan of boiling water (Collins, Recollections 1: 174). In Genoa in 1844 a “sharp attack of illness befell his youngest little daughter, [five-year-old] Kate, and troubled him much “ (Forster 1: 320); it involved a “swelling in her neck” (Lett.P 4: 163-64). Kaplan informs us that Dickens had “With his usual seriocomic self-definition ... for a few years already been referring to himself as ‘the physician’” (Biography 173) and his daughter recovered, Dickens writes, letting “nobody touch her; in the way of dressing her neck or giving her physic; when she was ill; but her Papa. So I had a pretty tough time of it” (Lett.P 4: 177). Ackroyd writes:

> And there is a description, too, of his behaviour when a friend badly injured his hand. ‘Before the arrival of the medical man, Dickens took charge of the patient himself, doing everything that was necessary—bathing the injured part with vinegar, binding it up and performing to perfection ... He even appeared on the scene at midnight, provided with medicines and liniments ordered by the doctor...’ This is all the more remarkable in a man who always tried by an effort of will to dispel any sickness from which he suffered, to work through it, and who in his fiction is often alarmingly sharp about permanent invalids whose condition he generally castigates as self-inflicted (535).

23 *Household Words* “A Weekly Journal conducted by Charles Dickens” (30th of March 1850 to 27th of August 1859) and its successor *All the Year Round* (under Dickens’s editorship 30th of April 1859 to 18th of June 1870; it was continued after his death) were an important ongoing part of the last twenty years of his life and reflected as the first chapter indicates, many of his bodily interests and concerns. In September 1848 Dickens spoke to Forster about starting a periodical in order to earn more money: “‘I am writing under the depressing and discomforting influence of paying off the tribe of bills that pour in upon an unfortunate family-young man on the eve of a residence like this’” (in Forster 2: 56). A month later he writes propounding his idea of a periodical “‘Now do you make anything out of this? which I let off as if I were a bladder full of it, and you had punctured me’” (in Forster 2: 64).

24 His daughter Mamie also refers to “the constant indoor walking which formed a favorite recreation for him after a hard day’s writing” (Recall 49).

25 Forster comments, for example, on a holiday at a cottage Dickens had taken in 1839: [there was] much athletic competition ... Dickens for the most part held his own even against such accomplished athletes as Macrise and Mr. Beard. Bar-leaping, bowling and quoits were among the games carried on with the greatest ardour; and in sustained energy, or what is called keeping it up, Dickens certainly distanced every competitor (1: 105).

26 Mamie Dickens tells of her father’s determination that his children be taught to dance: “He always encouraged us in our dancing, and praised our grace and aptness, although criticized quite severely in some places for allowing his children to expend so much time and energy upon the training of their feet” (Recall 27). Although very keen on dancing “except at family gatherings in his own or his most intimate friends’ homes, I never remember seeing him join in it himself... Graceful in motion, his dancing, such as it was, was natural to him” (Recall 29). She also mentions his very energetic style of dancing and his adding extra movements in (Recall 31).
On 12 June 1859 Dickens writes: “My experience of that treatment [water at Malvern] induces me to hold that it is wonderfully efficacious where there is great constitutional vitality; where there is not, I think it may be a little questionable” (Lett. N 3: 106).

From Naples he writes in November 1853 to Catherine about going for a warm bath after arriving: “There was an odd Neapolitan attendant—a steady old man.... He was as much disappointed (apparently) as surprised, not to find me dirty, and kept frequently ejaculating under his breath ‘O Heaven how clean this Englishman is!’ He also remarked that the Englishman was as fair as a beautiful woman” (Lett. P 7: 183).

“In London, at a later date, he was to have a shower bath of such strength that it was known as ‘The Demon’” (Ackroyd 571).

He warns one hopeful writer about propriety: “Beware of writing things for the eyes of everybody, which you would feel the smallest delicacy in saying anywhere. Mrs. Scutfidge may have stripped in public—I have no doubt she did—but I should be sorry to have to tell young ladies so in the nineteenth Century, for all that” (Lett. P 2: 177).

He also wrote mock seriously of doing violence to himself. When Queen Victoria married in February 1840 he wrote a series of letters regarding the suicidal extent to which he would go for love of her:

I begin to have thoughts of the Serpentine, of the regent’s-canal, of the razors upstairs, of the chemist’s down the street, of poisoning myself at Mrs.—’s table, of hanging myself upon the pear-tree in the garden, of abstaining from food and starving myself to death, of being bled for my cold and tearing off the bandage, of falling under the feet of cab-horses in the New-road, of murdering Chapman and Hall and becoming great in story (SHE must hear something of me then—perhaps sign the warrant: or is that a fable? (Lett. P 2: 24).

I think she will be sorry when I am gone. I should wish to be embalmed, and to be kept (if practicable) on the top of the Triumphal Arch at Buckingham Palace when she is in town, and on the north-east turrets of the Round Tower when she is at Winsdor (Lett. P 2: 26-27).

In America, 1842 he wrote to a newspaper objecting to an inaccurate “life” of him that had appeared:

If I enter my protest against its being received as a strictly veracious account of my existence down to the present time, it is only because I may one of these days be induced to lay violent hands upon myself—in other words attempt my own life—in which case, the gentleman unknown, would be quoted as authority against me (Lett. P 3: 61).

Ackroyd also records that “there was one reported occasion when [Dickens] placed two skeletons in a cupboard, locked it, and then asked a local carpenter to force open the door, with predictable results” (359).

And, Ackroyd writes “mad people were very much attracted to him; they would write letters, they would seek interviews, and even mistook themselves for characters in his books…. When the son of a certain Basil Hill lay dying, Hill exclaimed, ‘Oh, here’s a point for Dickens’” (Ackroyd 260).

“In later life he enjoyed nothing so much as imitating the postures and the manner of the clown; on one occasion, he ‘began playing the clown in pantomime on the edge of a bath’ and
then by accident tumbled into the warm water, and, on another, he demonstrated on a train journey how the clown ‘flops and folds himself up like a jack-knife’” (Ackroyd 37).

34 For the break up of the marriage see Dickens’s letters Lett.N 3: 15-16, 22-23, 23. He wrote to Forster “if I were sick or disabled to-morrow, I know how sorry she would be, and how deeply grieved myself, to think how we had lost each other” (in Forster 2: 198). Of those who wrote scandal of the break up he was angry “to know that any man who wants to sell anything in print, has but to anatomicize my finest nerves, and he is sure to do it” (Kaplan, Biography 407).

35 As well as various in-laws including two of his wife’s sisters, first Mary Hogarth and then her sister Georgina who at fifteen joined the Dickens household in 1842 and remained part of it for the rest of Dickens’s life. Although she was more than worth her keep and her role as Dickens’s closest friend has been consistently underestimated, the Hogarth family in general “seemed another family burden, an exploitation, a cannibalizing of his substance, even the more painful because he had at times encouraged their dependency” (Kaplan, Biography 378).

36 The following year he was irate with his parents: “I do swear that I am sick at heart with both her and father too, and think this is too much” (Lett.P 1: 560). In 1842 he wrote from America “I am vexed to hear that that father of mine [is ‘in trou]ble’—again. How long he is, growing up to be a m[an!]” (Lett.P 3: 191). Dickens also feared that his brothers would end up indebted and dependent on him like their father, and his fear was justified. By mid-century his brother Frederick was in constant debt, and after the collapse of his marriage in the late 1850s, he periodically turned up, requesting financial favours from Charles. His youngest brother, Augustus “deserted [his wife and child] when she became blind [in the late 1850s], leaving his eldest brother to support both wife and child” and asked for money and favours from America where he had fled (Kaplan, Biography 422). Dickens was also disappointed in most of his seven sons, seeing in their adulthoods this same familial streak of improvidence. He wrote of expecting an award “‘for having brought up the largest family ever known with the smallest disposition to do anything for themselves’” (in Johnson 2: 1063). He also had hereditary reasons to be concerned about money; his maternal grandfather had embezzled money reportedly because of “‘the very heavy expenses of a family of ten children, increased by constant illness’” (Kaplan, Biography 21).

37 Low profits also caused him to think in terms of bodily vulnerability. Very distressed at the low profits of “A Christmas Carol” he wrote

   Such a night as I have passed! I really believed I should never get up again, until I had passed through all the horrors of a fever. I found the Carol accounts awaiting me, and they were the cause of it.... What a wonderful thing it is, that such a great success should occasion me such intolerable anxiety and disappointment! My year’s bills, unpaid, are so terrific, that all the energy and determination I can possibly exert will be required to clear me before I go abroad; which, if next June come and find me alive, I shall do (Lett.P 4: 42).

38 November 1843 “We think of keeping the New Year, by having another [the fifth] child. I am constantly reversing the Kings in the Fairy Tales, and importuning the Gods not to trouble themselves: being quite satisfied with what I have. But they are so generous when they do take a fancy to one!” (Lett.P 3: 597). On the birth of his tenth child he writes “I am happy to
say that Mrs. Dickens and the seventh son—whom I cannot afford to receive with perfect cordiality, as on the whole I could have dispensed with him—are as well as possible" (Lett.P 6: 627). Naturally he was not the only Victorian parent inundated with children. In March 1846 he wrote to Clarkson Stanfield "Let me congratulate you on Mrs. Stanfield’s safety—if not on the new boy. I suppose you are (like me) past all congratulations on that score" (Lett.P 4: 527). On the 14th of April he writes to Macready:

I am having engraved on a brass plate to be fixed up over the street door, and on another brass plate to be inlaid in the door steps, the following words (with a prospective reference) selected from that surprising combination of wit, wisdom, humour, fancy, and pleasantry, The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby:

‘We want no Babbies here,’ said Mr. Kenwigs. ‘Take ‘em away to the Fondling!’

Let me recommend it to you and Mrs. Macready.... Is it true that you are to be examined before the House of Commons Committee on Population? (Lett.P 4: 532).

39 In late December 1847 journeying from Edinburgh to Glasgow, Catherine, about six months pregnant, ‘was taken very ill... a miscarriage... coming on, suddenly, in the railway carriage.’ Though she seemed better within a few days, ‘she was again taken violently ill.’ [A] second ‘famous Doctor’ countermanded the orders of [a] first ‘famous Doctor’. She was put to bed again immediately (Kaplan, Biography 234).

It was then that Dickens learned about chloroform which he insisted be used at the birth of his and Catherine’s eighth child in January 1849, after which he writes with physicianly self-congratulation:

He did not... come into the world as he ought to have done... and we had to call in extra counsel and assistance. Forseeing the possibility of such a repetition of last time, I had made myself thoroughly acquainted in Edinburgh with the facts of chloroform—in contradistinction to the talk about it.... The doctors were dead against it, but I stood my ground.... It spared her all pain... and saved the child all mutilation. It enabled the doctors to do, as they afterwards very readily said, in ten minutes, what might otherwise have taken them an hour and a half; the shock to her nervous system was reduced to nothing; and she was, to all intents and purposes, well next day. Administered by some one who has nothing else to do, who knows its symptoms thoroughly, who keeps his hand upon the pulse, and his eyes upon the face, and uses nothing but a handkerchief, and that lightly, I am convinced that it is as safe in its administration, as it is miraculous and merciful in its effects. Thus the Edinburgh Professors assured me [it was opposed in London], and certainly our experience thoroughly confirms them (Lett.P 5: 486-87).

Dickens’s most detailed letters on this incident are Lett.P 5: 215-16, 216-17, 221. The popular belief in the motion of train carriages bringing on labour or miscarriage seems not to have been so ill-founded. On an earlier acting tour Dickens and his friends had been accompanied by three pregnant wives, one of whom, Annie Leech, shocked everyone by going into labour at a London railway station (Kaplan, Biography 232 and see Lett.P 5: 134, 137-38, 147-48). Shortly after this Dickens began writing an account of the expedition in the character of Mrs. Gamp along on the journey because she hears that a number of the women concerned are in an “interesting” situation.” As the editors of the pilgrim edition of Dickens’s letters note, the proposal “was extraordinary in view of Mrs. Leech’s near-mishap at Euston.... One or more of Leech’s artist-friends possibly conveyed to [Dickens]
that the humour of birth-pangs in a non-corridor train was doubtful and undignified. In fact, Leech made a sheet of sketches ... and Cruikshank a trial sketch” (Lett.P 5: 141 and n. 2).

40 See Lett.P 1: 256ff for his series of letters breaking the news to friends. In one Dickens writes, “The medical men are of opinion that her heart had been diseased for a great length of time. Her general state of health, and above all the awful suddenness of her death induce me to think they are right” (Lett.P 1: 257). Of Catherine he writes: “I should have said that the affliction we have suffered brought on a miscarriage but that she has perfectly recovered from it “ (Lett.P 1: 264). Mrs. Hogarth stayed with them “in a state of total insensibility for a week afterwards” (Lett.P 1: 263). Catherine said, “I never saw [Mary] look so lovely and the next morning she was dead!” (Kaplan, Biography 93)

41 See his letter to Mrs. Hogarth Lett.P 2: 408.

42 The next day he wrote “there is no ground on either side to be had. I must give it up. I shall drive over there, please God, on Thursday morning, before they get there; and look at her coffin” (in Forster 1: 174).

43 Dickens, only moments before he heard the news, had been speaking: “the actor sometimes comes from scenes of affliction and misfortune—even from death itself—to play his part before us” (Kaplan, Biography 259). That he is “quite [him]self again” merely five days after his daughter’s death coming on top of everything else must be taken with some sympathetic skepticism. All these things happened while Dickens was frantically trying to organize Bulwer Lytton’s Play “Not So Bad as we Seem” for performance before the Queen at Devonshire House in aid of the Guild of Literature and Art, a feat involving much time, organization, and correspondence. The performance, after postponement, took place on 16 May 1851. That Dickens was most concerned not to let anyone, particularly the guild, down is shown by his letter to Forster on the very day of his father’s death: “I must not let myself be distracted by anything—and God knows I have left a sad sight!—from the scheme on which so much depends” (Lett.P 6: 343).

44 His death certificate reads “Rupture of the Urethra from Old Standing Stricture and consequent Mortification of the Scrotum from infiltration of Urine” (Allen, Childhood 90). See also Easson.

45 The next day he writes that his father has slept well and is as well “as anyone in such a state, so cut and slashed, can be” (Lett.P 6: 334).

46 And on the 5th of July:
A change took place in poor Fanny about the middle of the day yesterday.... Her cough suddenly ceased almost, and, strange to say, she immediately became aware of her hopeless state; to which she resigned herself.... The irritability passed, and all hope faded away.... She is greatly changed.... She showed me how thin and worn she was; spoke about an invention she had heard of that she would like to have tried, for the deformed child’s back [her son Henry Augustus, 8].... I cannot look round upon the dear children here, without some misgiving that this sad disease will not perish out of our blood with her; but I am sure I have no selfishness in the thought, and God knows now small the world looks to one who comes out of such a sick-room on a bright summer day (Lett.P 5: 362-63).
On the first of September he "‘found poor Fanny in one of those paroxysms described by my father.... Sleep seems quite gone, until the time arrives for waking no more.’ The next morning she died” and early the next year her eldest crippled son died, Dickens feeling “‘that the mercy of God [had] removed’ him” (Kaplan, Biography 239).

“It is a sad thing to see the little deformed boy whom my sister has left half unconscious of his bereavement” (Lett.P 5: 402). This nephew has often been suggested as a model for both Paul Dombey and Tiny Tim. On the boy’s death Dickens wrote that it was “good and merciful for the poor dear child’s sake, that he should be seen of men no more” (Lett.P 5: 483).

His midshipman son died “in 1872, at the age of twenty-five, probably of consumption” (Kaplan, Biography 497), and his brother Alfred died of it quite quickly in 1860; like Fanny, he was thirty-eight. Bowen suggests that the deaths of Dickens’s sons Walter and Sidney also had features suggesting lung disease (136). See McLeod for the theory that Dickens himself suffered tubercular infection as a child.

In November he finds: “mother yesterday much better that I had supposed. She was not in bed, but down-stairs. Helen and Letitia were politicing her poor head, and, the instant she saw me, she plucked up a spirit and asked me for ‘a pound’!” (Lett.N 3: 192-93).

Forster’s “‘display of grief’” on the death of one of Macready’s infant daughters “irritated him” (Lett.P 2: xii). He also mocked Forster’s grief on the death of Macready’s adult daughter Katie in 1869: “I have had a letter from Forster about poor Katie: ‘You may imagine the shock and blow it was to ME’—and all that. Me! Me! Me! as if there were no poor old broken friend in the case” (Lett.N 3: 716).

Dickens could sometimes imperil the bodies of his family or friends: in 1845 when the mountain was extremely icy he ascended Vesuvius with Georgina and Catherine, showing extraordinary recklessness in insisting on going himself to the very brim. On the descent at least three people in the party plummeted down the icy slopes, see Lett.P 4: 267-71.

Thomas Trollope, for example, wrote that:

‘Very few persons, even among those who knew him well, were aware [that Dickens was short-sighted], for Dickens never used a glass. But he continually exercised his vision by looking at distant objects, and making them out as well as he could without any artificial assistance. It was an instance of that force of will in him, which compelled a naturally somewhat delicate frame to comport itself like that of an athlete’ (Collins, Recollections 1: 72).

For example: “What I principally want to know is, whether your medicine irritates my skin. In other respects, I hope I am certainly better” (Lett.N 3: 109-10); “I don’t feel quite so well today, but I think it is the medicine” (Lett.N 3: 143).

The editors of the pilgrim edition of Dickens’s letters point out the interesting fact that the “First example given in OED of [henbane’s] use as a narcotic is in Barnaby, Ch. 9” (Lett.P 1 448 n. 8)].

But despite his frequent colds, Dickens always had a keen sense of smell—William Edrupt, who at eight began as Dickens’s office boy, recalled: “I think Mr. Dickens was a man who lived a lot by his nose. He seemed to be always smelling things. When we walked
down by the Thames he would sniff and sniff—"I love the very smell of this", he used to say" (Collins, *Recollections* 2: 194-95).

55 In October 1843, for example: "A hideous cold has taken possession of me to an almost unprecedented extent. I am not exactly, like Miss Squeers, screaming out loud all the time I write; but I am executing another kind of performance beginning with an s, and ending with a g; perpetually" (*Lett.P* 3: 581).

56 He wrote to Frank Beard in 1857:

Occasionally, as you know, I have some slight inconvenience (but not much) from piles. Yesterday night, having travelled hard and been much fatigued, I took one of Brinton’s pills. This morning I have lost a considerable quantity of blood. Will you tell me: shall I do anything except take a gentle aperient? If yes, what shall I do?... My ‘treatment’ on my own hook will be (as usual) regularity of bowels, cold baths and good regular living. But I shall declare off claret until you instruct me (*Lett.N* 3: 509).

57 Frederick Salmon (1796-1868), surgeon,

Appointed surgeon to the General Dispensary, Aldersgate Street, 1827; acquired the premises despite professional opposition, and opened the ‘Infirmary for the Relief of the Poor afflicted with Fistula and other Diseases of the Rectum’ 1835.... Salmon worked for over 20 years almost single-handed, carrying out more than 3500 operations without a fatal result (*Lett.P* 2: 404 n. 5).

58 “I find it so irksome, lying on the Sofa to write my weekly matter [BR], that I dictate my correspondence” (*Lett.P* 2: 406). He also stood to write some of it. He writes to Salmon on the 7th of November:

I don’t know whether it was because I had caught my wife’s cold; or because of my being weak, and having stood too long, finishing Barnaby; but yesterday and the evening before, all manner of queer pains were floating about my person: now twitching at the calves of my legs—now sticking shadowy pins into the soles of my feet—now entertaining themselves with my knees—now (but not often) shooting through that region which you have made as tender as my heart—and now settling in the small of my back; but particularly favoring the back; and the calves before mentioned (*Lett.P* 2: 419).

59 A friend responded to Dickens that “he had had the same operation himself three times (twice ‘bungled’, the third time successfully), and his ‘flesh still [crept] at the recollection’” (*Lett.P* 2: 406 n. 3).

60 “Dickens never allowed anyone to sit behind him; partly no doubt from some half-superstitious, half-obsessive, fear that he might be attacked, and partly because much of the power of his reading lay in his eyes and in his gestures” (Ackroyd 717).

61 Ironically a subsequent owner of Dickens’s Tavistock House, Georgina Weldon, suffered a nervous collapse within its walls and subsequently issued a pamphlet entitled ‘The Ghastly Consequences of Living in Charles Dickens’s House’, in which, among other things, she claims that her fate was ‘that of a sane person shut up in a lunatic asylum, put there for the purpose of being slowly or ‘accidentally’ murdered’ (Ackroyd 634).
62 He exerted total control over his journals and was constantly editing, re-writing, etc. Douglas Jerrold pointed to the disadvantageousness of HW’s policy of anonymity of authorship “reading aloud the words that appeared at the top of every page, ‘Conducted by Charles Dickens.’ I see it is—mononymous throughout” (in Johnson 2: 704).

In 1852, for example, “on his own estimate he read nine hundred manuscripts (of which only eleven were suitable for publication, and that after substantial rewriting by himself), as well as receiving and answering over two thousand letters” (Ackroyd 591).

63 Doggart, for example writes:

Charles Dickens’ early death was almost certainly due to disease of his left kidney. From the age of nine he had suffered from recurrent left-sided renal colic, but there is no story of a stone being passed. Probably a stone became impacted at the point where the kidney passes into the ureter. The effect of a stone would be to set up chronic pyelonephritis. If both kidneys had been involved he would probably have died much earlier (452).

Ackroyd emphasizes that Dickens enjoyed his readings and therefore does not follow the line started by Forster of believing they hastened his death, and believes indeed that they may even have been beneficial (Ackroyd 988). While this might have been true for his earlier readings, it was not for his American ones which he longed for an end to, as his letters reveal. Ackroyd is, however, probably right in saying that “The minor strokes and the swollen limbs suggest that he was in any case a marked man, for whom the medical practice of the time could not afford a cure” (Ackroyd 988). Bowen writes:

It is no exaggeration to say that [Dickens] was foredoomed from his youth. From early days he suffered from two ailments, the one, which persisted practically throughout his life from about nine years of age onwards, due to a calculus (stone) in the kidney passage, and the other due to a fistulous opening from the bowel known as a fistula-in-ano (137-38).

“Charles Dickens had manifestations of heart trouble and of incipient paralysis before his final fatal stroke” (Bowen 140). Bowen stresses that, however much strain and exhaustion his readings caused him, they did not of themselves shorten his life (140).

A recent theory by Canadian medical researcher Carl Abbott disagrees with the renal colic diagnosis and believes that Dickens’s “spasms were most likely the result of tuberculous renal (kidney) infection that may ultimately have led to Addison’s disease—a condition caused by underactive adrenal glands” (McLeod 77). This early tubercular infection he also suggests explains Dickens’s vulnerability to bronchitis.

64 Forster, staunchly of this view, began the line. See also Smithers, who criticizes what he terms Bowen’s insistence “that the trouble with Dickens’s left foot during the last five years of his life was due to gout” and Bowen’s minimizing of the effect of the readings on his health, which Smithers sees as high (Smithers 94).

65 Carl Abbott suggests “‘There is no doubt Dickens had inflammatory arthritis affecting his ankles.... The swelling and redness of the ankles only remotely resembled erysipelas. I believe he had gouty arthritis’” (in McLeod 78-79).

66 He was at the time, Ackroyd reminds us supporting three establishments now, that of his family, that of his estranged wife, and that of the Ternans. His son’s firm was about to be declared bankrupt, his other male children were as unsettled and unreliable as ever (with the sole exception of Henry,
who had gone up to Cambridge), and now he was being forced to support his son-in-law, Charles Collins, whose ill-health and general debility made it almost impossible for him to earn his own living (1004).

67 Dickens actually ended up earning nearer to £20,000.

68 Dickens writes of reading in Newcastle:

The room was tremendously crowded and my gas-apparatus fell down. There was a terrible wave among the people for an instant, and God knows what destruction of life a rush to the stairs would have caused. Fortunately a lady in the front of the stalls ran out towards me, exactly in a place where I knew that the whole hall could see her. So I addressed her, laughing, and half-asked and half-ordered her to sit down again; and, in a moment, it was all over. But the men in attendance had such a fearful sense of what might have happened (besides the real danger of Fire) that they positively shook the boards I stood on, with their trembling when they came up to put things right (Lett. N 3: 261).

69 Dickens had, even at the time it was published, wanted to dramatize Oliver Twist and had offered to do so for two managers, Macready and Yates. Nothing came of these proposals, but soon he saw how the adaptations made by other hands excited audiences to such a frenzy of horror and of anger towards Sikes that for a long period the Lord Chamberlain banned all performances (Collins, Crime 265).

70 Ackroyd points out that "he never read from his later novels, and ... even from his earlier books he cut out anything which was not directly and immediately entertaining or pathetic. No social polemic. No apostrophes. Only sadness and humour and drama" (986).

71 "After arrival at Edinburgh in December, he had been making a calculation that the railway travelling over such a distance involved something more than thirty thousand shocks to the nerves" (Forster 2: 359).

72 Smithers tells us:

Sir Henry Thompson was a most versatile man: surgeon, artist, connoisseur, writer and social reformer.... he was the founder of the Cremation Society.... [held] Octave dinners, to which he invited eight people [including many famous names such as Dickens] and served eight courses .... wrote a novel called Charley Kingston’s Aunt (the Aunt arriving as a corpse for dissection by Charley, a student in a Medical School) (92). "James Syme, a controversial figure, Professor of Surgery in Edinburgh" (Smithers 92). Dickens delighted in the contradictory views of his doctors: "The foot conducts itself splendidly.... Syme saw me again yesterday ... and repeated ‘Gout!’ with the greatest indignation and contempt, several times" (Lett. N 3: 708). By 1869 Dickens had had symptoms of coronary illness "For over three years.... Beginning in 1866, in response to ‘degeneration of some functions of the heart,’ he had been taking a combination of iron, quinine, and digitalis, prescribed by Beard, ‘to set [the heart] a-going, and send the blood more quickly through the system’" (Kaplan, Biography 539).

73 "Sir Thomas Watson was president of the Royal College of Physicians from 1862 to 1867 and one of the most outstanding physicians of his day. His book entitled Lectures on the
Principles and Practice of Medicine was the chief English textbook of medicine for more than thirty years" (Smithers 94).

74 “In fact, he [now] did so regularly, dyslexically reversing syllables and stumbling over consonants, occasionally while reading before an audience.... For over three years, he had been willfully deceiving himself” (Kaplan, Biography 540).

75 The certificate reads

‘The undersigned certify that Mr. Charles Dickens has been seriously unwell, through great exhaustion and fatigue of body and mind consequent upon his public readings and long and frequent railway journeys. In our judgement Mr. Dickens will not be able with safety to himself to resume his readings for several months to come’ (in Forster 2: 362-64).

76 One of many improvements he made to Gad’s Hill was to line the walls and doors of the drawing-room with mirrors, prompting his daughter Katie to say: “‘I believe papa, that when you become an angel your wings will be made of looking-glass and your crown of scarlet geraniums’” (in Mamie Dickens, Recall 115). Dickens, in fact, would die in a room “surrounded by mirrors” (Ackroyd 925). Ackroyd points to Dickens’s love of elegance and brightness as a reason why he always installed mirrors in the houses where he lived, and suggests that vanity may have contributed as certainly he was very particular about his appearance and had a mania for combing his hair (Ackroyd 222).

77 Trotter discusses the metaphor of circulation in Dickens.
CHAPTER THREE: CHARACTERIZING THE BODY

Mr. Quilp now walked up to the front of a looking-glass, and was standing there putting on his neckerchief when Mrs. Jiniwin, happening to be behind him, could not resist the inclination she felt to shake her fist at her tyrant son-in-law. It was the gesture of an instant, but as she did so and accompanied the action with a menacing look, she met his eye in the glass, catching her in the very act. The same glance at the mirror conveyed to her the reflection of a horribly grotesque and distorted face with the tongue lolling out; and the next instant the dwarf, turning about with a perfectly bland and placid look, inquired in a tone of great affection, ‘How are you now, my dear old darling?’ (OCS 85; ch. 5).

We cannot imagine a Dickens novel without Dickensian characters; their presence is fundamental and their physicality evident. The sheer numbers of people in Dickens’s work and his emphasis on the quirks and singularities of their anatomies, mean, it is almost too plain to state, that the body has a primary place in how we understand the natures and fates of his players. It is on this level of Character that Dickens most obviously controls the body and what happens to it whether he deforms, damages, dismembers, diseases, kills, or in some cases grants literary invulnerability to it. He here metes out “bodily justice”; the uncontrollable and arbitrary physical vulnerabilities of our world are pre-empted in the Dickensian realm where Dickens, having the body totally under his literary control, reassuringly ordains that characters “get” what they corporeally deserve. Transgressing Boz’s rules for good conduct will invariably result in a character being physically punished by a sentence ranging from a slapstick bump on the head, to a redemptive illness to a horrendous death by dismemberment. The reader is attracted both by seeing revealed the horrors of what can happen to the body and by the comedy and sense of “poetic justice” with which they are dealt. It is as if we are, as Dickens wrote in “Lying Awake,” given “temporary superiority to the common hazards and mischances of life” (RP 436).

This chapter examines the ways in which Dickens presents and uses the body’s vulnerability in depicting the natures and fates of his characters. The twentieth century’s
central concern with the body, is, arguably, with its sexuality. Therefore, although the sexual nature of human anatomy is not central to the present discussion of Dickens, it will nevertheless be useful to begin with a brief discussion of this aspect of the way in which the bodies of his characters are drawn. Of particular interest where vulnerability is the issue are the threats of sexual violence evident throughout his novels. The remainder of the chapter will argue that what is of crucial importance in making a character physically vulnerable in Dickens’s work is the amount of bodily description devoted to its creation.

The bodies of “bland and placid” look—Dickens’s heroes—are scarcely described at all and are essentially anatomically secure. A handsome or beautiful body, belonging to a character who is good in heart and behaviour is not going to be gruesomely dismembered within the pages of a Dickensian novel. These heroic or “good” characters survive any bodily hazards they face with fortitude and, for the most part, are improved by them; even where death is the result, it is in some way ennobling and inevitable. The bodies of Dickens’s literary children are, however, almost universally vulnerable. If bodiless heroes stand at one end of the Dickensian spectrum of bodily vulnerability, at the other end crouch the characters created out of the mirrored Dickens, the Dickens of “extraordinary facial contortions” and high imagination. These are the characters to which Dickens fascinatedly returns; they are the most physically described and the most susceptible to bodily ills and attacks. Some of these characters are deformed, either congenitally or before the action of a novel, and have innately insecure bodies. These characters, it is argued, are motivated largely by the physical impediments with which they have to cope and they fight in various ways to gain control over their bodies and to obtain power and acceptance. If “evil,” they attempt to gain power over others through financial control or knowledge, if “good,” they demonstrate an acceptance of their infirmity and often find a fulfilling occupation and a position in life proximate to people with strong, attractive bodies.

Dickens’s “bodily justice,” it will be demonstrated, is nowhere more evident than in the damage he does to characters’ bodies; the more insidious and distasteful a character’s
behaviour is the more corporeal punishment Dickens will inflict upon it. If characters are good at heart or if goodness of a kind can be forced upon them, they may be allowed to survive, alive and uninjured, and Dickens will reduce the attention he pays to their bodies. If they are distasteful, evil, or underhand in behaviour, Dickens will repeatedly describe their physical attributes piece by piece, often as a preamble to some bodily violence, in order to make their corporeal precariousness extremely real both to the reader and to the characters themselves.

He also has favourite sites for deformity and injury and for flexing his creative obsessions; the masses of peculiar-bodied minor characters reveal his anatomical fascinations, in particular with legs, flesh or wooden, and eyes fixed and rolling. Physical hazards are not inflicted in a purely external manner in Dickens's work either, and this discussion will show that he also creates characters who demonstrate the risks of seemingly innocuous activities such as laughing. Within Dickens's literary world, as within the world of his readers, killing jokes mean that one can laugh. Of course death and disease are important signs of bodily insecurity in Dickens and, it will be shown, he makes use of both typically ethereal Victorian deaths and more idiosyncratic illnesses which reveal his acute observation of the body in life and art. Finally, the chapter examines the presence of the dead body in his work, in particular, attention is paid to the weight on the minds of murderers of the corpses they have created.

The body is vulnerable not only to the physical risks of accident, dismemberment, or disease, but also to threats of a sexual nature. Some critics, Foucault most notably, have begun to examine the significance of the body to nineteenth-century discourse and have pointed to the central importance of sexuality in such discourse. The nineteenth century, as Helena Michie suggests, is now being seen "as an important period in the transition to the articulation of the sexual" (Flesh 4). The essays in Gallagher and Laqueur's book on the nineteenth-century body similarly aim to show "how the Victorians managed to win for
themselves the reputation of the most sexually, and indeed physically, repressive society in history precisely by bringing the body ever more fully into discourse” (vii). Much of such discussion involves Victorian definitions of female sexuality and reproductive roles, but much of it also concerns social, medical, and economic discourses rather than the purely literary.

Victorian sexuality and the translation of that sexuality into nineteenth-century fiction have often been considered the apogee of prudery or guilty of an extreme delicacy amounting to hypocrisy in not alluding more plainly to things of a sexual nature.1 Steven Marcus has of course written of the “other Victorians” who indulged in double lives of prostitution and pornography, and other critics such as Barry Smith have warned that we should not accept myths, prejudices, and stereotypes about Victorian sexual inhibitions too readily because, quite simply, we do not know enough about Victorian sexual practices. Practices being what they may, it is clear that in most mainstream fiction of the time sexuality was comparatively taboo and was expressed for the most part only sub-textually or metaphorically.

Certainly a writer like Dickens accepted Victorian thinking that sex was not a subject for novels; he was concerned, as he states in his preface to *The Pickwick Papers* that “no incident or expression occurs which could call a blush into the most delicate cheek, or wound the feelings of the most sensitive person” (*PP*; c). At the same time, however some aspects of sexuality, particularly threats of sexual violence, can be seen in his work.2 He admits openly in his preface to the third edition of *Oliver Twist*, for example, that Nancy is a prostitute and defends his portrayal of her on the grounds that “IT IS TRUE” (*OT*; lxv). In accord with contemporary morality, however, he does not mention Nancy’s profession in the novel itself. Pamela Johnson argues that Dickens becomes even primmer in later novels failing “more and more to use even those liberties Thackeray and Trollope found available” (173). It is indeed often thought that Dickens’s works are, even for their era, remarkably sexless, but some critics such as John Carey say that this is not strictly so, sexuality is merely “driven underground” or subverted into other forms such as the relationship between David and Steerforth (154).
There are a number of ways we might examine the nexus between sexuality and bodily vulnerability in Dickens’s novels. We might, for example, examine the obvious presence of prostitutes in his work, or look at the position of women’s bodies generally as subject to “sale” in marriage. We could look at Freudian analyses of general physical damage which relate such injury to sexuality through psychoanalytical readings. We could reiterate the argument that many of Dickens’s angelic, spiritualized girl characters die when they reach adolescence or sexuality enters their lives. Looking for examples or intimations of happy sexual couplings would be less fruitful, but threats of sexual violence are easily found. Before focussing on sexual threats and Dickens’s infliction of bodily justice upon their perpetrators, we will look briefly at some of these other arguments.

Prostitution is an extreme form of bodily vulnerability and one Dickens himself was concerned with both in life and literature. He was the co-founder of Urania House, a home for the reformation of fallen women, and his depiction of prostitutes such as Martha Endell, Alice Marwood, and Nancy are well known. Prostitutes were common in Victorian fiction and Dickens’s portrayal of them was not by any means unique. The bodies of prostitutes are not, however, actually described in Dickens’s novels. Martha in David Copperfield Michie argues, moves in and out of the text like a spectre, a “flitting figure” who follows David through the storm leaving no footprints in the snow. Her body leaves no marks, no traces; she is already in a world beyond the body where she can serve only as a sign for other women not to follow in her curiously unmarked path (Michie, Flesh 72).

While Dickens sympathizes with the plight of prostitutes, they are invariably also bodily removed from his texts before the end of the novels either through death—murder in Nancy’s case, spiritually redemptive illness in Alice’s—or by emigration as in Martha’s situation. The message is that these literary exits, either death or leaving England, are to be preferred over life as a fallen woman. Women who have fallen, but not yet as far as prostitution, are similarly physically removed from Dickens’s world; Little Em’ly, for example, is taken to Australia by her Uncle while Lady Dedlock is killed by disease that emanates from the graveyard where her dead lover lies.
Sexuality is also significant to the middle-class respectable woman who hopes to marry. In a society defined by separate spheres for male and female, economic security for women was often dependent upon finding a husband. The result of this is that many women, like Edith Dombey or Louisa Gradgrind are forced to “sell” their bodies into wedlock. Again in Dickens’s novels as in those of other novelists of the time, the virtuous, beautiful woman will be described physically only in those terms:

Although many, even most, Victorian novels center on a physically beautiful heroine and trace the disposition of her body in either marriage or death, the body itself appears only as a series of tropes or rhetorical codes that distance it from the reader in the very act of its depiction (Michie, Flesh 5).

Edith Dombey is, for example, one of Dickens’s most sexualized creations and Carker’s sexual pursuit of her reveals not only her unhappiness in her marriage but the fire that burns beneath. She hurts herself physically and deliberately just as Bradley Headstone in frustrated passion beats his hand upon stone until it bleeds.

If we investigate the injuries and vulnerabilities of Dickens’s bodies in more Freudian terms, we might argue that all physical damage is in some way sexual and that all physical abnormality, in the same way as Freak shows, has some level of sexual titillation inherent within it. The plethora of wooden legs in the Dickens corpus become, through this reading, symbols of both the phallus and fears of castration. Arthur Brown for instance discusses the sexual significance of wooden legs in Dickens’s work, noting that they are present at the weddings of Florence Dombey and Bella Wilfer and at the Bounderby-Gradgrind wedding betokening, he argues, sexual excitement. A wooden leg he says “represents simultaneously a castration and the rigid phallus that has been cut off. In either event it is not an accident that Wegg enlists the aid of a man with the name of the goddess of love to seek for the bones of the leg he lost” (47). In the Dickensian world of physical vulnerability, however, it is significant that both the metaphorical is literalized and that the literal is literal, that a wooden leg indicates a leg that has been amputated—it is in this way that Dickens connects bodily and immediately with his readers.
Another common theory relating to sexuality in Dickens’s fiction concerns his spiritualized, girl-like, women who often die within his novels once they reach adolescence or emerge sexually, as if their bodies in some way cannot stand the negative shocks of adult sexuality. Both David Copperfield’s mother and his child bride Dora die relatively soon after their marriages, probably as a result of miscarriage in Dora’s case and the strains of pregnancy and giving birth in Clara’s. Both deaths can be easily read as the outcome of sexual unions which have been entered into out of physical attraction rather than prudence. Admittedly this is a second marriage for David’s mother, but it is one she is inveigled into through the sexual wiles of the unpleasant Murdstone, who, after her death proceeds to re-marry, again no doubt on the strength of his sinister sexual attractiveness. Little Nell, of course, is never even allowed to emerge into sexuality but dies on the implicit cusp of her womanhood. Many critics also see Nell’s death as the only way she can ultimately avoid the sexual machinations of the repulsive Quilp.

The difficulty in including sexuality within an examination of the vulnerability of the body in Dickens’s writing is twofold. In the first place sexuality in his work is not markedly different from sexuality as portrayed in the work of other Victorian writers unless we argue that it is even less pronounced. The second problem is that sexuality in Dickens’s work is neither rooted in humour nor expressed in grotesque or visceral language which are the two distinctive elements of his style that encompass his use of bodily vulnerability in all other areas under discussion. Nevertheless we can see patterns consistent with his use of “bodily justice” when we look at sexual threatening in his novels which is a subject both pervasive and significant enough to warrant its own full length study.

What is fruitful here is to examine sexual violence or more often threats of sexual, and thus bodily, violence which do strike a chord of immediacy particularly with readers whose bodies are potential subjects for the same types of threats. One cannot read the description of Dolly Varden being waylaid in the woods by Hugh without a chill of horror if one is/inhabits a female body. It dawns rapidly upon us that she is not under threat of having her purse
snatched as Dickens and the dialogue would have us believe but is, as she herself knows, under threat of sexual attack and rape; being sworn to secrecy about Hugh’s identity only makes her more vulnerable.

Those who sexually threaten in Dickens’s novels are generally men at the more grotesque end of his bodily scale who are therefore likely to be physically punished for their crimes, sexual or otherwise; indeed, probably no characters exist for whom physical violence is the only negative trait provided. The characters threatened are generally women of the bodiless and angelic company, and, because their bodies are not described in anything but the sketchiest form, they will not, as the following sections of this chapter reveal, ultimately be physically vulnerable in the Dickensian realm. Whatever they have to go through emotionally or physically, they will survive. The sexuality of Dickens’s characters of good standing is severely subdued but lasciviousness emerges more strongly in the evil or fallen like Quilp.

In reality, any of Dickens’s literary children who we see venturing into or living off the streets alone would be prey to sexual attack or induction into pedophile rings—Florence Dombey, for example, is captured by “Good Mrs. Brown” whose threats are not merely physical or financial; her threats to cut Florence’s hair have sexual overtones. As Juliet McMaster notes, “Another sinister figure who deals in girls’ hair, as though it were a substitute for their bodies and their life-blood, is old Krook in Bleak House” who looks greedily at Ada’s hair (34).

Kate Nickleby, too, is almost prostituted by her uncle to the highest bidder when he asks her to be his hostess at dinner. She is not only harassed verbally at the table by Sir Mulberry Hawk and the other rakes in attendance, but is also physically tracked down by Hawk as she reads alone in a room after finally re-gaining her composure. He proceeds to harass her and when she tries to leave “[catches] her dress, and forcibly detain[s] her” (NN 241: ch. 19). When she demands that he “unhand her this instant,” he refuses and attempts to push her back into her chair; as she struggles to escape he slips and falls and she makes her getaway. She is vulnerable not only to Hawk, but economically and out of familial
loyalty to her Uncle who abuses his position in allowing this attack to occur. In the Dickens world she, like Dolly Varden, will escape because she is fair of face and her body is only sketchily described. Those who sexually threaten or abet such threats will end by being punished bodily. Hugh is hung, Ralph Nickleby commits suicide, and Hawk is thrashed by Nicholas before later fleeing the country and eventually dying in prison.

This pattern is consistent in other cases. Little Nell, for instance is threatened sexually by Quilp who asks her if she wishes to become the next Mrs. Quilp though she is young and fresh and he is elderly, deformed, and already married. Quilp already holds his current wife in both sexual and physical thrall and she, like the reader, senses his sexual energy; she tells her friends that Quilp could marry any woman he chose. Quilp, as this chapter will go on to discuss, meets a horrible end, in part as punishment for his inappropriate and grotesque sexual designs. Nell, though she dies, escapes his clutches. Agnes Wickfield also in the end escapes the grasp of the serpent-like and physically repulsive Uriah Heep who wants her sexually as a bonus to his financial power. Her father seems powerless to stop the marriage just as none in the Gradgrind family help stop Louisa’s horrific marriage to Bounderby. David Copperfield, like the reader, is horrified at the idea of Heep touching Agnes, but it is not until the end of the novel that he sees her as his “proper” wife. These examples reveal what Kaplan writes of as the

world of indirect eroticism [in Dickens’s work] the passions, the manipulations, and the potential violence of a sexuality deeply embedded in power relationships. Individuals of strong will and aggressive energy seek to impose themselves on others, to control the psyches and the bodies of those to whom they are attracted (Mesmerism, 187-88).

John Jasper threatens Rosa Bud sexually and, if we believe the most common version of the ending of Edwin Drood, he is driven to murder Edwin because of his desire for her. He is punished, we assume, by being condemned to death. Further characters also present sexual threats to others and end punished for them: Flintwinch to Affery for example, Carker to Edith, Pecksniff to Mary Graham, Arthur Gride to Madeline Bray, Sikes to Nancy. Juliet
McMaster points out that snake imagery often attaches to some of these characters: “There is clearly some sexual suggestion in this prominent snake imagery. Stiggins, Pecksniff and Uriah are the sexual rivals of the hero” or important character “and the particular hostility that attaches to them has a strong sexual impulse” (29-30). She also points to the physiognomical signalling that suggests a sexualthreatener: “Exploiters of women are characteristically hairy” (31) often with luxurious dark hair and whiskers: Mantalini, Hugh, Rigaud, Murdstone, Jasper, and Steerforth (who is luxuriously fair-haired) all possess this characteristic.

Most of this sexual threatening is presented almost sub-textually. We do not tend as readers to feel bodily involved in the process. Nor does Dickens indulge in the humour or word play that marks his “dismemberative” prose in creating other aspects of the body except perhaps in the early incorporated story of “The Bagman’s Uncle” which involves the abduction and threatened “marriage by violence” in the manner of eighteenth century fiction of a beautiful woman. She and the Bagman’s uncle eventually run her two abductors through with swords and they die “jerking their arms and legs about in agony” (PP 763; ch. 49). It is only in punishing his threateners that Dickens reveals his relish for bodily damage and description and without exception those physically punished are punished for a list of Dickensian crimes of which sexual threatening is only one item. Essentially “Sexuality ... is much more a process of the will in the Dickens world than it is of the body” (Kaplan, Mesmerism 201).

The main argument of this chapter is that the more Dickens describes a body the more vulnerable it will become to his own brand of bodily justice. This holds true for sexual threateners as it does for those threatened. Those who threaten, like Hugh or Quilp, are described in physical detail and meet ends that reveal to them their own physical weaknesses. Those who are threatened, like Dolly and Kate Nickleby, are not described in great bodily detail and escape physical peril in the end. Sexuality, apart from this aspect of Dickens’s bodily justice, provides no intrinsic contribution to Dickens’s fictional use of the
body which is characterized by his unique blend of style, humour, and the literalization of metaphor.

ii

The heroes and heroines of Dickens's novels are the characters whose bodies are least vulnerable. They meet any bodily threat with fortitude and either overcome it or are in some way redeemed by it. These figures do not suffer from inherent bodily vulnerability; in fact, they cannot, for it is hard to create a sense of physical pain or bodily fear in a body that is barely described. "Heroines" are generally depicted as "beautiful," "bright," and "small."³ Dora, for instance, is "captivating, girlish, [and] bright-eyed.... What a form she had, what a face she had" (DC 334; ch. 26). Further information? Well, she is "rather diminutive altogether" (DC 335; ch. 26).⁴

These and other stock characteristics tell us very little about the "form" or "face" of such characters, and, as with most main characters, we rely on the illustrations to round out our sense of what their bodies are like. Mr. Pickwick, for example, is described more in terms of character than physical appearance: phrases such as "this extraordinary man," (PP 177; ch. 12), "that great man" (PP 177; ch. 13) exclaim about his nature, but virtually all we know about his appearance from the text itself is that he is older than his co-travellers and is a bald, "plump gentlemen, who in addition to a benevolent countenance, possessed a pair of spectacles, and a pair of black gaiters" (PP 142; ch. 10).⁵ Less and less is said about the bodies of male heroes or gentlemen as Dickens's career progressed,⁶ until of Dickens's final hero, Edwin Drood, we know nothing physically; he is simply a "young fellow" (ED 7; ch. 2). There are also, admittedly, a few important, "non-gentlemanly" characters who do not have bodies either, but such characters are invariably very good hearted and loyal, and, like Sam Weller, are bodied forth by their speech which, as chapter four discusses, is often filled with anatomical reference.
Frederick Busch argues that as the Novel “is about the movement from birth to death” (149), “the body of the book is concerned with the breadth and weight of the body of the protagonist; the novel suggests, with its own size, a sense of the duration of a human life” (150), and that “Just as Dickens often begins with birth, so he often ends with death. But the death is of others, not his protagonists, since he insists on defeating death in his novels” (150). To defeat death is of course to conquer vulnerability, and Dickens’s novels are specifically and deliberately not concerned with the protagonist’s body, almost as if he feels that if he anatomizes gentlemanly figures on the page he is doing the unforgivable that was done to him in the press, so he reserves anatomization for characters he can provoke more vulnerability in and who are not like himself such as Quilp or a dastardly gentleman or a lower class character. Martin Chuzzlewit is one hero who is anatomized, not by Dickens but by characters within the text, and his experience reveals Dickens’s distaste for having his body, or perhaps implicitly the body of any gentleman, discussed, dismembered, and made vulnerable in print.

Martin is told he must hold a levee or the “Gazette could flay [him] like a wild cat” (MC 365; ch. 22). Improbable in terms of plot—Dickens inserts the excuse that Martin must hold it because no one ever returns alive from Eden—but realistic in terms of what Dickens himself experienced on his first American trip, the hero’s body is beset:

One after another, one after another, dozen after dozen, score after score, more, more, more, up they came: all shaking hands with Martin. Such varieties of hands, the thick, the thin, the short, the long, the fat, the lean, the coarse, the fine; such differences of temperature, the hot, the cold, the dry, the moist, the flabby; such diversities of grasp, the tight, the loose, the short-lived, and the lingering! (MC 365; ch. 22).

Once introduced to Martin, people stay “bolt upright and staring” (MC 366; ch. 22); he is anatomized both by their eyes and by the press:

Two gentleman connected with the Watertown Gazette had come express to get the matter for an article on Martin. They had agreed to divide the labour. One of them took him below the waistcoat; one above. Each stood directly in front of his subject with his head a little on one side, intent on his department. If Martin put one boot before the other, the lower gentleman was down upon him; he rubbed a pimple on his nose, and
the upper gentleman booked it. He opened his mouth to speak, and the same gentleman was on one knee before him, looking in at his teeth, with the nice scrutiny of a dentist. Amateurs in the physiognomical and phrenological sciences roved about him with watchful eyes and itching fingers, and sometimes one, more daring than the rest, made a mad grasp at the back of his head, and vanished in the crowd. They had him in all points of view: in front, in profile, three-quarter face, and behind. Those who were not professional or scientific, audibly exchanged opinions on his looks. New lights shone in upon him, in respect of his nose. Contradictory rumours were abroad on the subject of his hair. And still the captain’s voice was heard—so stifled by the concourse, that he seemed to speak from underneath a feather-bed—exclaiming, ‘Gentlemen, you that have been introduced to Mr. Chuzzlewit, will you clear?’ (MC 366; ch. 22).

Dickens here reveals to us exactly what he will not do to his “gentleman” characters’ bodies, which are not to be treated as “figure[s] of stone, purchased, and paid for, and set up there, for [people’s] delight” (MC 366; ch. 22). For all this description of what can happen to an unfortunate gentleman’s body, Martin’s body is not actually described. We as readers have no more sense of what Martin’s beset body looks like than we did to begin with; Dickens has in a sense protected Martin from our adding our own opinions “in respect of his nose.”

It is hardly necessary to point out that Dickens does have the language to describe such bodies further, and John Carey suggests that its non-employment is simply a matter of what is funny:

clothes and bodies, not only boots and legs, are inherently funny for Dickens. His noble characters are not visualized: they have no bodies or clothes at all. Once he starts to visualize, he starts to observe comic details. Esther Summerson’s smallpox means nothing to us because, as far as we are concerned, she has no face. When Dickens considers what pimples look like, he instantly finds it amusing (Carey 61).

But is it not also because the more that is said about a body, the more vulnerable it becomes? David Copperfield mentions his plumpness as a boy which he immediately connects with being slashed by Creakle. Esther Summerson, although she may have no face to begin with, implicitly gives herself one when she describes how the terrible scars inflicted have left it; a “scarred face” means much more than a “beautiful” one. In Bleak House, unusually, overriding thematic concerns such as the interconnectedness of disease and the sins of the
mothers being visited upon their children, have made a "gentlewoman's," and a narrator's, body vulnerable, and once vulnerable, real.

Esther's face becomes real to us once it is scarred; she almost straddles the categories between a bodiless "hero" character and an embodied vulnerable mirror character. She herself must look in the mirror to reveal her deformed self, to try and recognize it, and the pain is evident. Close to Dickens in being a first person narrator, she is distanced from him by being a woman; nor is she an angelic Ada, whose beauty she constantly, and significantly refers to. Unlike other main characters who undergo and survive physical vulnerability, her scars stay with her. As a narrator, however, she is in charge of the way she presents them, and, like Dickens, controls her vulnerability by putting it on paper: "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" (BH 27; ch. 3). In fact, her once invisible body comes so much to the foreground after her illness that the book closes with her unspoken thoughts about her changed face. In narrating she attempts to hide her vulnerability by projecting herself as the central-to-everyone's-lives, dearly-loved Dame Durden: "I hope any one who may read what I write, will understand that if these pages contain a great deal about me, I can only suppose it must be because I have really something to do with them, and can't be kept out" (BH 102-03; ch. 9).

Esther's mother, Lady Dedlock, "has beauty still.... She has a fine face" (BH 13; ch. 2), so implicitly, because of the similarity between mother and daughter noticed by Mr. Guppy, Esther must have some beauty, but her mother's face appears "like a broken glass to [Esther]" (BH 225; ch. 18). When she recovers from smallpox Esther notices that her looking-glass has been removed, "but what I had to bear, was none the harder to bear for that" (BH 433; ch. 35). "I had thought of this very often. I was now certain of it. I could thank God that it was not a shock to me now" and she tells Charley ""It matters very little, Charley. I hope I can do without my old face very well"" (BH 433; ch. 35).
Esther, as Dickens’s heroes often do, has survived the bodily vulnerability of illness. Now recovered from that further vulnerability, blindness, she reveals her face to us as she sees it, and, as one with sight, must see it, and her altered self in the mirror:

My hair had not been cut off, though it had been in danger more than once. It was long and thick.... I was very much changed—O very, very much. At first, my face was so strange to me, that I think I should have put my hands before it and started back.... Very soon it became more familiar, and then I knew the extent of the alteration in it even better than I had done at first. It was not like what I had expected; but I had expected nothing definite, and I dare say anything definite would have surprised me. I had never been a beauty, and had never thought myself one; but I had been very different from this. It was all gone now. Heaven was so good to me, that I could let it go with a few not bitter tears, and could stand there arranging my hair for the night quite thankfully (BH 444-45; ch. 36).

We cannot help feeling her acceptance of this change is her “writing herself better.” She admits to pangs at overhearing comments about her appearance, but conquers this as she finds love around her. As a baby she “had been laid aside as dead” (BH 452; ch. 36), and this is a second vulnerability she has had to face but overcomes it by telling it her way and by surrounding herself with good people, such as Woodcourt and Jarndyce, who will protect her. Esther’s returning to the subject at the end of the novel, however, reveals that she still feels vulnerable, that her narrative has not quite vanquished this vulnerability:

I did not know that [I was prettier than I ever was]; I am not certain that I know it now. But I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is very handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen; and that they can very well do without much beauty in me—even supposing— (BH 770; ch. 67).

Although she has the scars of bodily precariousness written upon her face, she has survived, composed her face, and conquered; but, unlike Dickens, she admits, though does not get the chance to express, a continued sense that her body is vulnerable. Whatever her thoughts on her vulnerability are, Dickens prevents her from expressing them by cutting her narrative, and the novel, off in mid-sentence.

Other heroes experience physical damage but it is usually either slapstick, nobly gained, or redemptive illness. Pickwick suffers pain and buffeting, and some rheumatism, but
this is largely comic; Nicholas gets involved in fisticuffs more than once; Martin falls ill but recovers; David as a child is badly beaten up by the young butcher (DC 228; ch. 18) but he fights him again when he is older and wins, knocking out one of the butcher's front teeth in the process. After passing through such physical tests, these heroes achieve an almost total bodily invulnerability however many people die around them. It is this invulnerability that means, for example, that David is "the hero of [his] own life." Pip, who survives attack by Orlick, also undergoes a redemptive illness just as Eugene Wrayburn undergoes a redemptive near-drowning. John Harmon survives an attack and a presumed drowning and can walk about while thought dead to his own advantage; he is not one of the bodies to be found in the river but alive well and in charge of his body. The only time that a test of bodily vulnerability in a "hero" actually ends in death, it is quite literally "a far, far better thing ... than [he] h[as] ever done" (TTC 466; 3: ch. 15) and, by implication, than most people could do.

Mr. Dombey, at his most physically precarious moment, goes through a painful process. Undoubtedly a gentleman, Dombey does not begin as the generous spirited, strong but kind, caring person or father that Dickens demands a gentleman be. Like other such negative-natured characters, both major or minor, he must undergo some physical persuasion at the hands of Dickens the author. If such characters are redeemable they will survive their bodily ordeals, but if unredeemable they will, like Ralph Nickleby or Carker, be killed or badly damaged. Once a character's body begins to succumb to description, that character is in increasing bodily danger, which can be fended off only by "good" behaviour and the absence of unpleasant personality traits. Punishment increases in proportion to "crime," which usually amounts to Dickens's objective distaste for the character's behaviour whatever his subjective delight in describing it. Dombey's body is described along with his undesirable behaviour from the beginning. The novel opens with a comparison of Dombey senior's body with that of his newborn son:
Dombey was about eight-and-forty years of age. Son about eight-and-forty minutes. Dombey was rather bald, rather red, and though a handsome well-made man, too stern and pompous in appearance, to be prepossessing. Son was very bald, and very red, and though (of course) an undeniably fine infant, somewhat crushed and spotty in his general effect, as yet. On the brow of Dombey, Time and his brother Care had set some marks, as on a tree that was to come down in good time ... while the countenance of Son was crossed and recrossed with a thousand little creases, which the same deceitful Time would take delight in smoothing out, and wearing away with the flat part of his scythe, as a preparation of the surface for his deeper operations (DS 1; ch. 1).

Dombey, “handsome” and “well-made,” has potential in the Dickensian world, but that he is going “to come down in good time” becomes clearer and clearer with every description of his unnaturally stiff, cold, upright and corpse-like body. He turns in his chair “as one piece, and not as a man with limbs and joints” (DS 17; ch. 2). At Paul’s christening breakfast he looks as if “He might have been hung up for sale at a Russian fair as a specimen of a frozen gentleman” (DS 61; ch. 5). He lays “himself on a sofa like a man of wood without a hinge or a joint in him” (DS 367; ch. 26), and becomes more and more like a cadaver.10

Eventually, with the death of his son, departure of his wife and fall of his business, his public and personal worlds crash around him, and after many days alone in his room he reaches a crisis point, when

sitting thinking in his chair [he sees], in the glass, from time to time, this picture:

A spectral, haggard, wasted likeness of himself, brooded and brooded.... Now it lifted up its head, examining the lines and hollows in its face.... Now it rose ... passed into the next room, and came back with something from the dressing-table in its breast. Now, it was looking at the bottom of the door, and thinking.... It was thinking that if blood were to trickle that way, and to leak out into the hall, it must be a long time going so far. It would move so stealthily and slowly, creeping on, with here a lazy little pool, and there a start, and then another little pool, that a desperately wounded man could only be discovered through its means, either dead or dying. When it had thought of this a long while, it got up again, and walked to and fro with its hand in its breast. He glanced at it occasionally, very curious to watch its motions, and he marked how wicked and murderous that hand looked.

After more thinking “Suddenly it rose, with a terrible face, and that guilty hand grasping what was in its breast. Then it was arrested by a cry ... and he only saw his own reflection in the glass, and at his knees, his daughter!” (DS 801; ch. 59).
This moment of extreme bodily vulnerability, when Dombey is about to watch himself slit his throat like a victim of Captain Murderer, is all seen in the mirror, and he is only driven back to his invulnerable and gentlemanly self by the cry of the daughter he has earlier struck on the breast and driven from his house. The moment is reminiscent of Dickens's writing, as he dashed to the mirror without being startled by a silent daughter. Dombey now goes through a redemptive illness, becoming "A shade, already, of what he had been, shattered in mind, and perilously sick in body" (DS 817; ch. 61). He recovers, of course, and his body is no longer described; he becomes "a white-haired gentleman" strolling on the beach with his child and grandchildren, invulnerable to everything but a natural old-age and redeemed by realizing the importance of his family (DS 833; ch. 62).

The fate of the title figure in Dickens's uncompleted last novel is not so clear. Edwin Drood, while perhaps seeming to be Dickens's most vulnerable protagonist, is in another sense his least vulnerable. What we have of the novel ends with Drood's body missing. His creator had of course met the ultimate vulnerability of body, but, at the same time as Dickens's body went missing from the world, his hero's body remained lost from the novel, creating an immortal piece of bodiless art and an undecaying body for which Droodians have been searching ever since.

Drood himself has no real body to begin with; he is simply a "young fellow," and in this sense is almost totally invulnerable because he is given no concrete physical presence; if a body is not described, it is hard for it to be damaged. At the same time, however, he may have met death in any number of extreme ways. Rosa Budd asks Edwin the interesting, if petulant, question, "'And as to Belzoni, I suppose he's dead;—I'm sure I hope he is—and how can his legs, or his chokes concern you?'" (ED 22; ch. 3). It is generally accepted that Belzoni does concern Drood, most critics pointing to the fact that Belzoni, like Edwin, trained as an engineer and was connected to Egypt, or indicating the significance of choking if they subscribe to the view that Jasper has choked Edwin to death and perhaps also buried him in a
But there is a more fascinating possibility that it is Belzoni's legs that concern Edwin.

Giovanni Battista Belzoni (1778-1823) trained as an engineer in Rome and later became an eminent Egyptologist. He was a man Dickens admired, and alluded to, as a person who had triumphed over his poor origins (his father was a barber). It is what he did between his early training and his later eminence that is most intriguing; fleeing to England when Napoleon invaded, he was unable to get work in hydraulics. Of great size and strength, in fact a borderline giant (just under seven feet tall), he worked as a strong man in Astley's circus and at Sadler's Wells, but later severed connections between himself and this type of display which he had resorted to in desperation (Fiedler 122; Jacobson 60).

Dickens admired Belzoni not only for taking charge of his life and making something of himself out of humble beginnings, but probably also for taking complete control over his body. A person who had been exhibited because of his body, and thus was vulnerable, rose above this exposure and achieved some bodily security, with legs, no longer on display, that were now used to enter pyramids. And if Belzoni does concern Edwin, perhaps Edwin has taken control of his body and his legs and has walked away. Perhaps he has taken so much control over his body that he has made it invulnerable; he will not, in a sense, even let Dickens kill him on paper, in that his death, if there is one, is not written. His body is less vulnerable than Dickens's own, and this time it is Dickens who must be put out of the way.

Perhaps Drood has achieved the ultimate invulnerability of a fictional character, leaving the text and taking complete control over his own life. If so, he embodies Dickens's dreams of security in having so much control over his own body that it is not even capable of being written about. Drood has become the beast in the mirror, but a beast retaining the bodiless "bland and placid look" of a gentleman. If Dickens, therefore, is to look at Drood in the mirror in order to describe his death, he will in effect, like one of Captain Murderer's wives, watch himself die. Drood, in this sense, has killed Dickens before Dickens can put pen to paper in order to kill him.
Edwin could certainly claim justice at a Dickensian court, for he has not done anything drastic enough to warrant being killed, but *Drood* was written after a break in novel-writing of five years that was in part the product of Dickens’s own deteriorating health and the Staplehurst railway disaster, both of which set his bodily vulnerability in front of him. His interest in the murdering mind was also increasing, and his fanaticism over depicting on stage the murder of Nancy, another undeserving victim, may have caused his guard to slip and the results were fatal. Dickens, at his most bodily vulnerable, produced a hero who was physically invulnerable and who remains so until his body is found.

If Dickens will not allow the bodies of his protagonists to be vulnerable in adulthood, he will admit their vulnerability in childhood. He expresses the bodily fears and physical hazards of children of all classes and stations, and he was of course, “the first major novelist to place children at the centre of novels” (Schlicke 14). Dickens repeatedly stresses the smallness of his child characters; Pip, for example, is “undersized for [his] years, and not strong” (*GE* 5; 1: ch. 1), at nine Oliver is “a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference” (*OT* 5; ch. 2). Similarly, many of his children are, or become, orphans;13 to be an orphan is to be especially vulnerable. It was his sense of compassion and the desire to provoke change that drove his depictions of the vulnerability of children’s bodies whether those of young heroes like David or Oliver or of the waifs of the streets like Jo.14

Dickens’s most prominent children meet further physical peril through beatific spiritualized illness which, unlike in the case of adult “heroes,”15 leads to death (Little Nell, Paul Dombey), wretched neglected lives and living conditions (Jo, Oliver), physical abuse and maltreatment at the hands of adults or institutions (David, the Marchioness, the boys at Dotheboys Hall), or everyday neglect (the Jellybys).

Perhaps Dickens’s most pathetic creation is Jo the crossing sweep, also known as “Toughie” or the “Tough Subject,” the archetypal bereft child left to live alone off his wits: “Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common
streets.... Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him” (BH 564; ch. 47). He is homely and homeless, and is repeatedly told to “move on.” Even Josiah Bounderby, who “would not allow his own youth to have been attended by a single favourable circumstance,” cannot imagine for himself as wretched an existence as Jo’s (HT 37; 1: ch. 7). Jo’s lifestyle and proximity to disease from the “berryin’ ground” and Tom-all-Alone’s mean that it is almost inevitable that he will die, as he does, from contagious disease. His death is successfully used to drive home thematic points (“and dying thus about us everyday”) because the reader has a good sense of this individual “subject,” and what he has been through “in body.”

David Copperfield, the child most ostensibly “like” Dickens, begins his account of his life by telling us of a more unusual bodily insecurity. A “posthumous child” on his father’s side (DC 2; ch. 1), he is born with a caul which is advertised for sale as a protector against the peril of drowning, but no one initially buys it. Ten years later it is put up in a raffle: “I was present myself, and I remember to have felt quite uncomfortable and confused, at a part of myself being disposed of in that way” (DC 2; ch. 1). To recall seeing part of one’s body auctioned off and having no power to retain it is a significant reflection on the vulnerability of a child’s body. An adult is not likely to wish to part with any of his or her body; for instance, Wegg is desperate to get his amputated leg back, yet children’s bodies are vulnerable to barter beyond their control.

Oliver’s body is similarly offered to anyone, who will, for payment, “undertake” it, even someone like Gamfield who “did happen to labour under the slight imputation of having bruised three or four boys to death already” (OT 15; ch. 3). Having been flogged every other day in the workhouse for asking for more, he is then “flogged” in the other sense to Sowerberry, the undertaker, in “a nice sickly season.... coffins were looking up.... The oldest inhabitants recollected no period at which measles had been so prevalent, or so fatal to infant existence” (OT 34-35; ch. 6).
In attempts to escape bodily vulnerability, both Oliver and David make long journeys on foot, penniless, hungry, tired, and beset on the way. David's escape is a successful move; once he reaches his Aunt's house and recovers from illness, he only has to fight successfully against the young butcher before he achieves physical security. Oliver's journey initially leads him into a different type of vulnerability, where, for a change, his body has some value and becomes alternatingly the object of pity or a useful instrument for crime; both reactions are due to his diminutive size and his innocent, golden-haired, appearance: "'His mug is a fortun' to him'" (OT 141; ch. 22). He is small enough to fit through a window in a burglary, and small enough to be pitied by the non-criminal world when he gets shot. David, working in the warehouse, has thought "[he] might easily have been, for any care that was taken of [him], a little robber or a little vagabond" (DC 139; ch. 11), and this is what Oliver has unwittingly and unwillingly become. Through his survival of the very dangerous vulnerability of being shot, however, he is rescued from his criminal existence, and doubtless will go on to live an adult life every bit as gentlemanly and bodiless as David Copperfield's.

Just as Dickens as a child developed or had exacerbated bodily fears through what he read or was told, so too do his literary children suffer from written and oral tales that reinforce physical fears. Pip, who is physically tilted upside down by Magwitch, is also terrified that Magwitch will eat his fat cheeks or that his "'heart and [his] liver shall be tore out, roasted and ate'" (GE 6; 1: ch. 1). David is terrified by the story of Lazarus rising from the dead. Oliver, who has repeatedly been told in the workhouse that he will end up hanged, is threatened by Fagin and Sikes with death and bodily injury, and is told to read:

a history of the lives and trials of great criminals.... Here, he read of dreadful crimes that made the blood run cold; of secret murders that had been committed by the lonely wayside: and bodies hidden from the eye of man in deep pits and wells: which would not keep them down, deep as they were, but had yielded them up at last, after many years, and so maddened the murderers with the sight, that in their horror they had confessed their guilt, and yelled for the gibbet to end their agony. Here, too, he read of men who, lying in their beds at dead of night, had been tempted (as they said) and led on, by their own bad thoughts, to such dreadful bloodshed as it made the flesh creep, and the limbs quail, to think of. The terrible descriptions were so real and vivid, that the sallow pages seemed to turn red with gore; and the words upon them, to be
sounded in his ears, as if they were whispered, in hollow murmurs, by the spirits of the dead (OT 129-30; ch. 20).

References to the Arabian Nights and to Scheherezade, to Blue Beard and the blue chamber where all his dead wives are piled up and allusions to Scheherezade also recur in Dickens’s work. 20 David Copperfield, for instance, writes of being obliged to tell Steerforth stories in a manner that might well be the voice of Dickens writing for his life:

The drawback was, that I was often sleepy at night, or out of spirits and indisposed to resume the story; and then it was rather hard work, and it must be done; for to disappoint or displease Steerforth was of course out of the question. In the mornings, too, when I felt weary and should have enjoyed another hour’s repose very much, it was a tiresome thing to be roused, like the Sultana Scheherazade, and forced into a long story before the getting-up bell rang (DC 80; ch. 7).

Children who are alone in the world, neglected in the streets, or simply lost are highly vulnerable as victims of crime even if they survive the perils of disease and hunger. Florence Dombey, lost and alone, is robbed of her clothes by Mrs. Brown, who threatens to kill her if she vexes her and barely resists cutting off her hair: “Florence was so relieved to find that it was only her hair and not her head which Mrs. Brown coveted, that she offered no resistance or entreaty” (DS 75; ch. 6). Hair, of course, has sexual overtones symbolizing both physical attractiveness and, when loosened, abandonment. Although Florence is not killed here, there are plenty of children in Dickens’s novels who are physically maltreated by adults as a means of ensuring obedience or simply for the thrill of exerting bodily control over another being. 21 Dotheboys Hall is the epitome of institutionalized physical violence towards children, just as Oliver’s workhouse is of their starvation. 22 The bodies at Dotheboys are all physically vulnerable, even when sleeping:

There were some, who, lying on their backs with upturned faces and clenched hands, just visible in the leaden light, bore more the aspect of dead bodies than of living creatures; and there were others coiled up into strange and fantastic postures, such as might have been taken for the uneasy efforts of pain to gain some temporary relief, rather than the freaks of slumber (NN 146; ch. 13).

Every kind of bodily weakness is present among them:

Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others
whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect.... And yet this scene, painful as it was, had its grotesque features, which, in a less interested observer than Nicholas, might have provoked a smile (NN 88; ch. 8).

There is nothing innately funny in this description at all, but Dickens is always aware of the body’s potential for comedy. We might find this scene amusing because of the typically Dickensian piling up of detail and the extremes that cannot be believed—every type of physical deformity confronts us. It might also make us smile because, as Dickens says in “Lying Awake,” we are temporarily “superior” to it.

Dickens does express some aspects of bodily injuries to children comically. Squeers, for instance, who uses violence in part to ensure that his own vulnerable, deformed, one-eyed face is never mocked, “throwing himself into the most favourable attitude for exercising his strength, beat[s] [a boy] until the little urchin in his writhings actually roll[s] out of his hands, when he mercifully allow[s] him to roll away, as he best could” (NN 148; ch. 13). A crying boy he “knock[s] ... off [a] trunk with a blow on one side of his face, and knock[s] ... on again with a blow on the other” (NN 32; ch. 4). Biler, “made a Charitable Grinder on,” is vulnerable because of his uniform:

He had been stoned in the streets. He had been overthrown into gutters; bespattered with mud, violently flattened against posts. Entire strangers to his person had lifted his blue cap off his head, and cast it to the winds. His legs had not only undergone verbal criticisms and revilings, but had been handled and pinched. That very morning, he had received a perfectly unsolicited black eye on his way to the Grinders’ establishment, and had been punished for it by the master (DS 69-70; ch. 6).

Much of what Pip suffers at the hands of his sister is similarly comic: “I soon found myself getting heavily bumped from behind in the nape of the neck and the small of the back, and having my face ignominiously shoved against the kitchen wall, because I did not answer those questions at sufficient length” (GE 66; 1: ch. 9); “I may here remark that I suppose myself to be better acquainted than any living authority, with the ridgy effect of a wedding-ring, passing unsympathetically over the human countenance” (GE 54; 1: ch. 7).
Dickens, particularly in his earlier novels, uses humour in describing children who are being hit or injured because of an adult’s need to mask embarrassment or insufficiency. Mrs. Mac Stinger, for example, “never enter[s] upon any action of importance without previously inverting Alexander Mac Stinger, to bring him within the range of a brisk battery of slaps, and then sitting him down to cool” (DS 532; ch. 39). Mr. Winkle, inspired by Sam Weller’s knocking down of a man, “ma[kes] a terrific onslaught on a small boy who st[ands] next him” (PP 366; ch. 24). Because Miss Kenwigs’s hair needs trimming, “Mrs. Kenwigs first slap[s] Miss Kenwigs for being the cause of her vexation, and then shed[s] tears” (NN 683; ch. 52). In making such scenes comic, Dickens transforms the feelings of personal pain they engender into a more palatable form; and, although he provokes laughter, he always empathizes with the child victim.

Some of his children, those who escape vulnerability neither through death nor adulthood, he allows to strike back and seek physical security on their own. Bailey, the physically beset boy at Todgers’s, is interesting in this respect. Just as Dickens did when writing, Bailey, who expresses things in ghastly-faced dumb-show, makes “hideous faces at himself in the glass” (MC 463; ch. 29). He also, “being of a playful temperament, and contemplating with a delight peculiar to his sex and time of life, any chance of dashing himself into small fragments” (MC 132; ch. 9), dances precariously along the top of Todgers’s roof. By deliberately imperiling his body in this way and overcoming the danger, he can maintain enough control over his body to put up with the volleys of cookware flung at him and develop confidence enough to find a new employer where he can strut his body about as a horsey young man, confidently requesting Poll Sweedlepipe to shave him even though he is far too young to need it. Bailey even manages to survive his own death. After being “thrown sheer over [a] hedge or [a] five-barred gate” in a carriage accident, he lies “in [a] neighbouring field, to all appearance dead” (MC 649; ch. 42) with only “a faint and fitful beating of the heart,” the surgeon “g[iving] it as his opinion that the boy [is] labouring under a severe concussion of the brain, and that Mr. Bailey’s mortal course [is] run” (MC 650; ch. 42).
Bailey's death gets into the paper, but in fact he makes a full recovery having achieved
mastery over his body, and in doing so belies the written word.

If Bailey, a man-boy, just as Jenny Wren is a woman-girl, demands to be treated as
an adult and achieves bodily invulnerability, the opposite is true for adults who pretend to be
children. The Infant Phenomenon, for example, who has gone through some bodily pains as a
child to keep looking like one ("kept up late every night, and put upon an unlimited allowance
of gin-and-water from infancy, to prevent her growing tall" [NN 290; ch. 23]), is violently
handled by real children who

proceed[ed] to poke their fingers into her eyes, and tread upon her toes, and show her
many other little attentions peculiar to their time of life ... [one] young gentleman ...
pinching the phenomenon ... apparently with a view of ascertaining whether she was
real.... The phenomenon was really in a fair way of being torn limb from limb; for two
strong little boys, one holding on by each of her hands, were dragging her in different
directions as a trial of strength (NN 313-14; ch. 24).

Other Dickensian children, despite having two parents and a home to live in, are
simply physically neglected. Our first sight of the Jellybys is of Peepy "fixed by the neck
between two iron railings, while a milkman and a beadle, with the kindest intentions possible,
were endeavouring to drag him back by the legs, under a general impression that his skull
was compressible by those means" (BH 36; ch. 4). The Jellyby children are repeatedly
injured,27 and, though they seem to survive, the long term results are thematically seen in
Caddy's deaf and dumb, ink-spotted baby.

Dickens allows that all types of children suffer bodily vulnerability whether caused by
illness, smallness, neglect, or punishment. He will use the physical helplessness of children
for thematic purposes but is always clearly on the side of the child. At the same time he is not
afraid of using humour to describe some of their situations, because, like young Bailey, he has
himself survived the perils of youth.

Dickens has a penchant for bodies deformed, damaged or in some way physically
peculiar. The deformed body, with its attraction-repulsion appeal for readers instinctively
fascinated by the physically "curious," is also an open invitation for Dickens's descriptive pen to carry itself to comic or exaggerative extremes. Almost ironically for a person who denied physical weaknesses so vehemently in life, Dickens, in creating his "grotesque" fictional figures, shows an extraordinary understanding of the vulnerability of "deformed" bodies, and usually treats them both with humour and with inherent respect, giving them an accepted and natural place in the thick of his fictional world, and not, as one might perhaps expect, on the extremes of it. He was, as Leslie Fiedler observes, the first writer to incorporate "freaks" into his literature as a normal part of the fabric of society (267). 28 Dickens was able to achieve this understanding out of a genuine humanitarian sensibility and a powerful imagination, but even moreso because he knew and feared his own bodily susceptibility.

Naturally in such a world of comparative anatomy as Dickens's novels there are degrees even to "deformity." At one extreme are those characters whose bodies, in addition to being liable to all dangers flesh is heir to, are also vulnerable through sheer appearance: characters who are congenitally deformed or who have been permanently physically damaged or altered before their introduction into Dickens's texts. These are the bodies that Dickens describes in greatest detail, and not just upon first entry. Dickens's focus upon key physical characteristics of such characters during their subsequent appearances keeps their bodies continually in the reader's mind as a stream of various members, or cuts them down to size.

Pre-eminent among characters whose bodies are vulnerable to the universal external vagaries of life, and Dickens's king of congenital deformity, is Daniel Quilp. Quilp's body is the fundamental body in Dickens's novels, and in many ways he epitomizes the sense of physical vulnerability and the quest for bodily security and control that Dickens sought in his own life. 29 Quilp's deformity goes beyond a traditional association with villainy, and his malignancy is far from motiveless. He is motivated by his own sense of corporeal insecurity, and strives to exert control over his own body and the perceptions people have of it, as well as over the figures of others. He is so far successful in this that he almost achieves perfect
bodily invulnerability, but in the end, both because there is no such thing as perfect physical security and because his nasty personality can no longer be tolerated in the Dickens world, he is made to slip, drown, and die.

Quilp is described as

an elderly man of remarkably hard features and forbidding aspect, and so low in stature as to be quite a dwarf, though his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant. His black eyes were restless, sly, and cunning; his mouth and chin, bristly with the stubble of a coarse hard beard; and his complexion was one of that kind which never looks clean or wholesome. But what added most to the grotesque expression of his face, was a ghastly smile, which, appearing to be the mere result of habit and to have no connexion with any mirthful or complacent feeling, constantly revealed the few discoloured fangs that were yet scattered in his mouth, and gave him the aspect of a panting dog.... His hands, which were of a rough coarse grain, were very dirty; his finger-nails were crooked, long, and yellow (OCS 65-66; ch. 3).

Elderly now, although still surprisingly sprightly, Quilp, “quite horrible with his monstrous head and little body” (OCS 69; ch. 3) has undoubtedly spent much of his life grappling with the innate insecurities of his peculiar body and striving to overcome them. Having started life with a body more vulnerable than other people’s, he intends to end it with one less vulnerable, even if only by making others’ bodies more so.

Quilp can do amazing things with his body, and has probably trained himself to do so in compensation for his other physical drawbacks. He

[eats] hard eggs, shell and all .... [drinks] boiling tea without winking, bit[es] his fork and spoon till they bend[again], and in short perform[s] so many horrifying and uncommon acts that the women [are] nearly frightened out of their wits, and beg[i]n to doubt if he [is] really a human creature (OCS 86; ch. 5).

He drinks scalding rum (OCS 567; ch. 62) and “carr[ies] great weights up and down with no apparent effort” (OCS 159; ch. 13). He can cling upside down to the side of a moving coach, and enters smoking competitions which he always wins. He rolls on the ground with delight and gets out of his hammock “in an instant; not with his legs first, or his head first, or his arms first, but bodily—altogether” (OCS 571; ch. 62). Quilp is bodily altogether, and can do things that other bodies cannot, often using the uniqueness of his body to intimidate:
Mr Quilp planted his two hands on his knees, and straddling his legs out very wide apart, stooped slowly down, and down, and down, until, by screwing his head very much on one side, he came between his wife’s eyes [which were fixed upon the ground] and the floor (OCS 81; ch. 4).

He perpetually threatens others with physical violence and indulges in it freely; even the slightest knock or pinch is used to remind people that he is not to be taken lightly or his body slighted, as if to reacquaint them with their own vulnerability to physical pain, which in himself he has all but conquered. He “kick[s] the boy from the wharf whenever he c[an] get near him; and inflict[s] with his loads a great many sly bumps and blows upon the shoulders of Mr Brass” (OCS 159; ch. 13). He keeps his wife in thrall by making her sit up all night, threatening to bite her or scratch her, and pinching her whenever he can: “her arms ... were seldom free from impressions of his fingers in black and blue colours” (OCS 156; ch. 13).30

Even the dirt off his body is described as a weapon; he “rub[s] his hands so hard that he seem[s] to be engaged in manufacturing, of the dirt with which they were encrusted, little charges for popguns” (OCS 78; ch. 4).

One of Quilp’s favourite weapons is smoke. He smokes in his “Bachelor’s Hall” “until nothing of him [is] visible through the mist but a pair of red and highly inflamed eyes, with sometimes a dim vision of his head and face, as, in a violent fit of coughing, he slightly stir[s] the smoke” (OCS 470; ch. 50). Quilp makes other people smoke also, saying to his boy and Sampson Brass that it “is the way to keep off fever ... this is the way to keep off every calamity of life. We’ll never leave off all the time we stop here—smoke away, you dog, or you shall swallow the pipe”’ (OCS 139; ch. 11). The constant smoking not only wards off “fever,” but also causes great physical discomfort to others, making them cough and choke, and proving them more physically helpless than Quilp. At the same time, Quilp’s smoke makes their eyes water so that they cannot see his body clearly. Quilp’s smoking is a literal smoke-screen behind which he can shield his body, can both attack and defend. Similarly his main reason for drinking half a pint of rum that “had been but a moment before, when he took
it off the fire, bubbling and hissing fiercely" is so that he can force Brass to drink some, causing Brass “unspeakable agonies” (OCS 568; ch. 62).31

Quilp’s extraordinary hatred of Kit is based squarely on his anger at vulnerability revealed, for Kit has attacked Quilp at his weakest point by referring to his body. Quilp breaks up a fight between Tom Scott, who is his boy, and Kit with his usual violence and a cudgel,

treading upon them and skipping over them, in a kind of frenzy, [Quilp] laid about him, now on one and now on the other, in a most desperate manner, always aiming at their heads and dealing such blows as none but the veriest little savage would have inflicted....

‘I’ll beat you to a pulp, you dogs.... I’ll bruise you till you’re copper-coloured, I’ll break your faces till you haven’t a profile between you, I will’ (OCS 94; ch. 6).

He discovers that the fight began when his boy lashed out in defence of his master, whom Kit had called “‘an uglier dwarf than can be seen anywhere for a penny’” (OCS 95; ch. 6).

‘Do you mean to say, I’m not, you dog?’ returned Quilp. ‘No!’ retorted the boy (OCS 95; ch. 6).

Quilp, significantly, is not a dwarf who is shown anywhere for a penny. By using his wit, wiles, attractive-repulsive charisma, and villainy to get ahead, he has not in fact accepted the side-show fate to which his body might, in that era, have condemned him; his body is only on display when it is shown to be superior to others, usually through violence. By either hurting other people’s bodies or controlling them through such activities as money lending, Quilp gains both power and security; he has gained a good deal more than pennies through his own exhibition and concealment. Kit’s insult is thus doubly hurtful to Quilp, especially as most other people, in public and to his face, show him respect, and he determines to avenge his injury and get Kit’s body into his power.

Gaining bodily control over Nell’s ill Grandfather, Quilp also falsely accuses Kit of betraying the old man. It does not of course matter to Quilp that Kit is an innocent, innocuous person and he furthers his revenge against him by buying a figure-head effigy which he batters with an iron bar, in an attempt to physically brand Kit as his own through extreme
vicarious violence and through the ultimate interplay of body and language—carving his name into Kit’s body:

‘Is it like Kit—is it his picture, his image, his very self?’ cried the dwarf, aiming a shower of blows [with a rusty iron bar] at the insensible countenance, and covering it with deep dimples. ‘Is it the exact model and counterpart of the dog—is it—is it—is it?’ And with every repetition of the question, he battered the great image until the perspiration streamed down his face with the violence of the exercise....’ I bought the dog yesterday. I’ve been screwing gimlets into him, and sticking forks in his eyes, and cutting my name on him. I mean to burn him at last’ (OCS 566; ch. 62).

This measure, the traditional resort of those with little actual “physical” power, contrasts with the false robbery he arranges, which results in Kit being sentenced to bodily transportation out of England. Apprehended, Kit sees

the face of Quilp.... It was from the open window of a tavern that it looked out; and the dwarf had so spread himself over it, with his elbows on the window-sill and his head resting on both his hands, that what between this attitude and his being swoln [sic] with suppressed laughter, he looked puffed and bloated into twice his usual breadth (OCS 548; ch. 60).

With this appearance of increased size and thus lessened vulnerability Quilp chortles,

‘Kit a thief! Kit a thief! Ha, ha, ha! Why, he’s an uglier-looking thief than can be seen anywhere for a penny. Eh, Kit—eh? Ha, ha, ha! Have you taken Kit into custody before he had time and opportunity to beat me! Eh, Kit, eh?’ And with that he burst into a yell of laughter (OCS 550; ch. 60).

Quilp’s plot represents his successful control over the body of one who has pointed so directly at his own vulnerability, but Kit’s beaten effigy also represents Quilp’s fears and anger at the vulnerability he cannot finally overcome. Even after he frames Kit, he keeps up his work on the figure-head:

The face, horribly seared by the frequent application of the red-hot poker, and further ornamented by the insertion in the tip of the nose of a tenpenny nail, yet smiled blandly in its less lacerated parts, and seemed, like a sturdy martyr, to provoke its tormentor to the commission of new outrages and insults (OCS 613; ch. 67).

Quilp’s only real comrade, Tom Scott, though subject to much of Quilp’s verbal and physical abuse, is case-hardened and willingly stays with him. He accepts Quilp’s body as Quilp wants it to be seen and fights Kit because of the insult to his master’s body. He treats Quilp just as he would a normal sized assailant by crying, “‘Why don’t you hit one of your
Where is there one of my size, you dog?" Quilp answers (OCS 87; ch. 5). Quilp has attacked Tom for standing on his head, threatening: "Stand upon your head again, and I'll cut one of your feet off" (OCS 88; ch. 5). The boy continues his "tumbling," walking about on his hands, but not where Quilp can spot him which is prudent, for in point of fact the dwarf, knowing his disposition, was lying in wait at a little distance from the sash armed with a large piece of wood, which, being rough and jagged and studded in many parts with broken nails, might possibly have hurt him (OCS 88; ch. 5).

They know each other's dispositions; both unusual in body, Quilp in appearance and Tom in his tumbling, there is a degree of mutual respect between them. Tom can "take" Quilp's violence and thus Quilp cannot make Tom's body vulnerable, and Tom can "[revenge] himself by dancing on his head at intervals" (OCS 95; ch. 6). Their grudging détente with each other is cemented by physical blows.

With those who see his body as he does not want it to be seen, however, Quilp is not tolerant. Presumed drowned, he eavesdrops on what is, in effect, his own post-mortem:

'It would be a comfort to have his body; it would be a dreary comfort....'

'With regard to the descriptive advertisements,' said Sampson Brass, taking up his pen. 'It is a melancholy pleasure to recall his traits. Respecting his legs now—?'

'Crooked, certainly,' said Mrs Jiniwin.

'Do you think they were crooked?' said Brass, in an insinuating tone. 'I think I see them now coming up the street very wide apart, in nankeen pantaloons a little shrunk and without straps. Ah! what a vale of tears we live in. Do we say crooked?'

'I think they were a little so,' observed Mrs Quilp with a sob.

'Legs crooked,' said Brass, writing as he spoke. 'Large head, short body, legs crooked—'

'Very crooked,' suggested Mrs Jiniwin.

'We'll not say very crooked, ma'am,' said Brass piously. 'Let us not bear hard upon the weaknesses of the deceased. He is gone, ma'am, to where his legs will never come in question.—We will content ourselves with crooked, Mrs Jiniwin'.

'Our faculties must not freeze with grief. I'll trouble you for a little more of that, ma'am. A question now arises, with relation to his nose.'

'Flat,' said Mrs Jiniwin.

'Aquiline!' cried Quilp, thrusting in his head, and striking the feature with his fist. 'Aquiline, you hag. Do you see it? Do you call this flat? Do you? Eh?' (OCS 459-60; ch. 49).
Quilp walks in on his own dissection, reappearing from the supposed dead and reasserting the power, and his definition, of his own anatomy. He punishes his wife for thinking him vulnerable enough to die by living down at the wharf and refusing to see her, delighting in the physical manifestations of her grief: "I'm glad your eyes are red with crying. It does my heart good to see your little nose so pinched and frosty.... Did she think I was dead!" (OCS 615; ch. 67). Mrs. Jiniwin, hearing his battering on her door with a poker, awakes "in inexpressible terror, thinking that her amiable son-in-law surely intended to murder her in justification of the legs she had slandered" (OCS 464; ch. 50).

In the end, of course, Quilp does drown; he is punished physically for his evils and is proved as susceptible to death as any other body, and, lying dead, is undistinguished from any other drowned body. His corpse is carried along by the water, totally vulnerable in death:

It toyed and sported with its ghastly freight, now bruising it against the slimy piles, now hiding it in mud or long rank grass, now dragging it heavily over rough stones and gravel, now feigning to yield it to its own element, and in the same action luring it away, until, tired of the ugly plaything, it flung it on a swamp—a dismal place where pirates had swung in chains, through many a wintry night—and left it there to bleach.

And there it lay, alone.... The place the deserted carcase had left so recently, a living man, was now a blazing ruin. There was something of the glare upon its face. The hair, stirred by the damp breeze, played in a kind of mockery of death—such a mockery as the dead man himself would have revelled in when alive—about its head, and its dress fluttered idly in the night wind (OCS 620; ch. 67).32

It is not the peculiarities of his living body that are dwelt on now, but the vulnerability of the dead.

Quilp is not the only deformed "controller" in The Old Curiosity Shop, and perhaps one reason for the plethora of body-related scenes in this novel is that the whole story is ostensibly told, and controlled, by Master Humphrey, himself deformed, as he confesses at the opening of Dickens's magazine Master Humphrey's Clock in which The Old Curiosity Shop was published:

I wish [my readers] to know—and I smile sorrowfully to think that the time has been when the confession would have given me pain—that I am mis-shapen, deformed, old man.
I have never been made a misanthrope by this cause. I have never been stung by any insult, nor wounded by any jest upon my crooked figure (OCS Appendix 675).

Quilp clearly seems a match, but unlike Humphrey, Quilp is a misanthrope and is stung by comments. At the end of the novel Humphrey reveals himself to be the single gentleman, yet no deformity is mentioned in the text. As narrator he is able to make himself into the perfect "bodiless hero," and can also forget his own deformity as he narrates and creates that of another.

Quilp's may be the most unusual and most described body among Dickensian evil-doers, but his is not the only body in the list of Dickensian deformed. Miss Mowcher, Phil Squod, Grandfather Smallweed, and Uriah Heep all have their own "coping mechanisms" for dealing with the immediate and obvious aspects of their physical vulnerability. In many ways their bodies are the motive for or provide impetus to their behaviour.

Miss Mowcher, like Quilp a dwarf, has learned to overcome her bodily vulnerability by making herself indispensable, or at least, like Esther, representing herself as indispensable, to the bodily perfection of others by tending to their bodily vanities. A chiropodist, manicurist, general beautician and "a scientific cupper" (DC 286; ch. 22), she can deflect attention from her body by making others feel better about their own. Her fast paced banter and volatility give nobody time to mock her. She acts as if "perfect" bodies rely on her for their perfection, and as if she holds bodily perfection in her kit bag and hands. She is well aware, however, that she plays tricks, that we are all "humbug." She is first described as

a pursy dwarf, of about forty or forty-five, with a very large head and face, a pair of roguish grey eyes, and such extremely little arms, that, to enable herself to lay a finger archly against her snub nose, as she ogled Steerforth, she was obliged to meet the finger half-way, and lay her nose against it. Her chin, which was what is called a double-chin, was so fat that it entirely swallowed up the strings of her bonnet, bow and all. Throat she had none; waist she had none; legs she had none, worth mentioning; for though she was more than full-sized down to where her waist would have been, if she had had any, and though she terminated, as human beings generally do, in a pair of feet, she was so short that she stood at a common-sized chair as at a table (DC 279; ch. 22).
For interesting extra-textual reasons, however, her body soon disappears from the text and she is referred to merely as Miss Mowcher or "little Miss Mowcher." Originally intended as a negative character, a procuress with possible Quilpian attributes, she becomes a positive, almost heroic (but necessarily still comic), figure. She brings Littimer to ground before he can flee the country: "[she] ran betwixt his legs to upset him—and held on to him like grim Death.... He cut her face right open, and pounded her in the most brutal manner, when she took him; but she never loosed her hold till he was locked up" (DC 732-33; ch. 61). These positive trials of body and behaviour mean that Miss Mowcher will not suffer further vulnerability within the pages of Dickens. Her body is no longer dismembered by repetition of its characteristics as Quilp's or Uriah Heep's are, and she even becomes a spokesperson for bodily integrity, telling David: "'Take a word of advice, even from three foot nothing. Try not to associate bodily defects with mental, my good friend, except for a solid reason'" (DC 396; ch. 32). She also tells him not to be surprised that she can be serious: "'If there are people so unreflecting or so cruel, as to make a jest of me, what is left for me to do but to make a jest of myself, them, and everything?'" (DC 394; ch. 32). Like her creator, she uses humour as a defence against bodily insecurity.

Uriah Heep represents a different form of deformity; nominally "whole," his body is so repulsive to other characters that they recoil from it. Naturally body and character are interrelated, and Dickens might be seen as simply using physical appearances as the index to the soul as in Quilp's case. Similarly, Mr. Brownlow describes Monks: "'in whom all evil passions, vice, and profligacy, festered, till they found a vent in a hideous disease which has made [his] face an index even to [his] mind'" (OT 336; ch. 49). Dickens, however, had too keen an understanding of the body to rely simply on stereotyped images or uses of it. Stagg, for instance, tells Mrs. Rudge that she has no right to expect a blind person to be any more virtuous than anyone else and that, having a harder life, it is perhaps more forgivable for him to turn to a life of crime. The natures of Dickens's "deformed" characters can be seen more accurately as emerging from their own individual experiences of bodily insecurity and from
their own attempts to control it, just as, in creating these characters, Dickens is attempting to control his own. Thus Uriah, who must always have sensed that people are repulsed by his “serpentining,” clammy, cadaverous body, seeks to overcome his physical vulnerability by gaining control over others, however “‘umble” he presents himself as. He exerts increasing power over Wickfield and over Wickfield’s business and monetary matters; like Quilp, Smallweed, Silas Wegg and Dickens himself, he sees money as a solid source of power and bodily security. He also mirrors Quilp’s sexual pursuit of Nell in planning to marry the similarly young, beautiful, and physically bodiless Agnes.

The more a body is described in a Dickens text, the more vulnerable it becomes and the more prone it becomes to physical attack by its creator as he doles out bodily justice. As with Quilp and the early Mowcher, Dickens repeatedly describes and elaborates on pieces of Heep’s anatomy, dismembering with language the character whose nature is distasteful, however much power that party begins to wield in the text. Our first sight of Uriah is a dismembered one; David sees

a cadaverous face appear at a small window on the ground-floor ... and quickly disappear. The low arched door then opened, and the face came out. It was quite as cadaverous as it had looked in the window, though in the grain of it there was that tinge of red which is sometimes to be observed in the skins of red-haired people. It belonged to a red-haired person—a youth of fifteen, as I take it now, but looking much older (DC 187; ch. 15).

He is like a reptile or a particularly cold and unpleasant fish with his

hair ... cropped as close as the closest stubble ... hardly any eyebrows, and no eyelashes, and eyes of a red-brown; so unsheltered and unshaded, that [David] remember[s] wondering how he went to sleep. He was high-shouldered and bony ... and had a long, lank, skeleton hand (DC 187; ch. 15).

He is a repulsive being with eyes like “red suns” who, nevertheless, fascinates David just as Rosa Dartle’s scar does: “I was attracted to him in very repulsion” (DC 328; ch. 25).

Uriah’s clammy hands with their “grisly” fingers are repeatedly mentioned, as are his thin and pinched nostrils with their sharp dints, and his serpentining movements: “He had a way of writhing ... which was very ugly ... snaky twistings of his throat and body” (DC 201; ch.
David feels physical distaste for him: “He professed so much emotion, that I could joyfully have scalded him” (DC 322; ch. 25), and, based on his ghastly physical undulations, David “decide[s] in [his] own mind that [he] dislike[s] him intensely” (DC 323; ch. 25) and feels like running him through the body, later in fact striking him, “hard enough to give him the toothache” (DC 531; ch. 42). There are of course sexual overtones to Heep’s serpent-like body and David is repulsed by the idea of Heep physically touching Agnes. It is when Uriah receives further physical injury that his fall occurs. Micawber fends off Uriah’s dart for the letter denouncing him by catching “his advancing knuckles with the ruler, and disabl[ing] his right hand. It dropped at the wrist, as if it were broken. The blow sounded as if it had fallen on wood” (DC 642; ch. 52). Micawber then threatens to break Uriah’s head “‘if ... [it’s] human’” (DC 642; ch. 52). Uriah’s realization of physical vulnerability coincides with his fall, and his body is imprisoned, even though he sycophantically begins again by coiling himself up the ladder of Pet Prisoners.

Fagin, who also ends as a prisoner, though one about to be hanged, is not deformed, but is, like Heep, extremely unpleasant to look upon, and shares some of the same bodily characteristics. His “shrivelled body” “creep[s] ... like some loathsome reptile” (OT 120-21; ch. 19). He has “toothless gums [with] a few such fangs as should have been a dog’s or rat’s” (OT 317; ch. 47), and a “repulsive face ... obscured by a quantity of matted red hair” (OT 50; ch. 8). Red hair in Dickens is often associated with distasteful or unusual bodies; it graces the heads, for example, of Sampson Brass, Mr. Venus, Barnaby Rudge, Fanny Squeers, as well as Heep and Fagin. Rigaud’s hair is similarly “shot with red” (LD 5; 1: ch. 1). Dickens draws attention to Fagin’s hands just as to Heep’s; Fagin has black nails, “yellow fingers” (OT 160; ch. 25), and “bony hands” which he busies “in the folds of his tattered garment ... as though there were a hated enemy crushed with every motion of his fingers” (OT 306; ch. 44). Having heard about Nancy talking with strangers his “eyes [become] so red and bloodshot, that he looked less like a man, than like some hideous phantom: moist from the grave, and worried by an evil spirit” (OT 317; ch. 47). His body is
vulnerable because of his criminal life and his fear of meeting his destined fate. In order to maintain what security he can, he exerts control over the bodies of Nancy and his other prostitutes and over Oliver and his boys, but once he can no longer control what his cohorts do, his body is increasingly vulnerable to any of them who may choose to kill him or turn King's evidence against him. The criminal world of Fagin and Sikes is a world in which each member of the web holds the bodies of others in his or her hands and where even the slim measure of control that Fagin gains by remaining one step away from the actual commission of crimes is illusory.

Grandfather Smallweed, “in a helpless condition as to his lower, and nearly so as to his upper limbs” (BH 257; ch. 21), is the ferocious patriarch of a family which gives birth not to children but to “complete little men and women ... [who] have been observed to bear a likeness to old monkeys with something depressing on their minds” (BH 258; ch. 21). He has “spindle legs,” and when he exerts himself bodily by throwing a cushion at his senile wife who is even more physically immobile than he is, he is thrown back into his chair “like a broken puppet” (BH 259; ch. 21). Whenever he slides down his chair he has to be shaken, punched and poked into a proper sitting position and “does not present a very animated appearance” until this is done (BH 259; ch. 21). Smallweed is almost totally defenceless in body and is highly aware of his physical dependency. Like Quilp, his ineffectual rage at his debility is shown in his attempts to hit his wife who is a perpetual, inadvertent goad, almost an effigy of the characterless person, and, again like Quilp, he exults in overcoming his physical vulnerability by acting as a money lender, achieving power over the strongest, most muscular and physically developed body in Bleak House, that of Trooper George. Smallweed hides his money, deeds, and documents in a drawer in the base of his chair right behind his spindly shanks which are the weakest, most useless part of his anatomy; the denial of insecurity and the physical fact of it are side by side. He has a habit of rubbing his legs to help the circulation, both physical and fiscal; furthermore, it seems certain that
Smallweed and his dynasty are safe while he holds power. Unusually, he is not punished further by Dickens, and he ends by taking over the potentially power-laden effects of his brother-in-law, the gruesomely combusted Krook.

In *Bleak House* connections between physical vulnerability and bodily strength cluster around the strong, healthy-bodied George, who has survived a soldier’s life and now stays in shape running a shooting gallery. He shows compassion for those with bodies weak or maimed, save, of course, for Smallweed who has no compassion for him. Both Gridley and Jo die of illness at the shooting gallery after being allowed to hide there by George. His closest link is with Phil Squod, who has been severely injured repeatedly during his life, and has been left “a little grotesque man, with a large head” and “a face all crushed together, who appears, from a certain blue and speckled appearance that one of his cheeks presents, to have been blown up, in the way of business, at some odd time or times” (*BH* 271; ch. 21):

> it appears that he is lame, though able to move very quickly. On the speckled side of his face he has no eyebrow, and on the other side he has a bushy black one, which want of uniformity gives him a very singular and rather sinister appearance. Everything seems to have happened to his hands that could possibly take place, consistently with the retention of all the fingers; for they are notched, and seamed, and crumpled all over. He appears to be very strong, and lifts heavy benches about as if he had no idea what weight was. He has a curious way of limping round the gallery with his shoulder against the wall, and tacking off at objects he wants to lay hold of, instead of going straight to them, which has left a smear all round the four walls, conventionally called ‘Phil’s mark’ (*BH* 272; ch. 21).

Squod has battled against his deformities and has overcome his vulnerability both by being, like Quilp, very strong and quick—he terrifies Smallweed for example by snatching him up with ease and speed—and by gaining the admiration and protection of George whose body he admires. Phil is aware of the deficiencies of his figure and reveals that his appearance prevented him in younger life from becoming a successful tinker in his own right:

> ‘I was too ill-looking, and [the tramping tinker’s] wives complained of me.’
> ‘They were mighty particular. You would pass muster in a crowd, Phil!’ says the trooper, with a pleasant smile.
> ‘No, guv’ner,’ returns Phil, shaking his head. ‘No, I shouldn’t. I was passable enough when I went with the tinker, though nothing to boast of then: but what with blowing the fire with my mouth when I was young, and spileing my complexion, and
singeing my hair off, and swallowing the smoke; and what with being nat’ rally
unfort’ nate in the way of running against hot metal, and marking myself by sich means;
and what with having turn-ups [fist fights] with the tinker as I got older, almost
whenever he was too far gone in drink—which was almost always—my beauty was
queer, v ery queer, even at that time. As to since; what with a dozen years in a dark
forge, where the men was given to larking; and what with being scorched in an
accident at a gas-works; and what with being blow ed out of winder, case-filling at the
firework business; I am ugly enough to be made a show on!’ (BH 327; ch. 26).

Phil is all burnt up from the outside just as Krook will be all burnt up from the inside.

Unlike Quilp and Smallweed, he is, however, content in his body and he does not mind being
thought of as “ugly enough to be made a show on.” Like Miss Mowcher he has found a role
in life next to a person with a “perfect” body and satisfies himself with serving that ideal. He
is grateful to George for taking him in and is willing to go through any other damage for his
sake:

‘I was took with surprise, that a person so strong and healthy and bold as you was,
should stop to speak to such a limping bag of bones as I was. But you says to me,
says you, delivering it out of your chest as hearty as possible, so that it was like a
glass of something hot, “What accident have you met with? You have been badly hurt.
What’s amiss, old boy? Cheer up, and tell us about it!’... If a mark’s wanted, or if it
will improve the business, let the customers take aim at me. They can’t spoil my
beauty. I’m all right. Come on! If they want a man to box at, let ’em box at me. Let ’em
knock me well about the head. I don’t mind! If they want a light-weight, to be throw ed
for practice, Cornwall, Devonshire, or Lancashire, let ’em throw me. They won’t hurt
me. I have been throw ed, all sorts of styles, all my life!’ (BH 328; ch. 26).

George, compassionate, but not himself unvain, needs perhaps subconsciously to
reassure himself after hearing Phil reminisce over his physical imperfections and “takes a
turn at the dumb-bells; and afterwards weighing himself, and opining that he is getting ‘too
fleshy,’ engages with great gravity in solitary broadsword practice” (BH 328-29; ch. 26).

Other large, strong, healthy-bodied characters like John Browdie, Lawrence Boythorn,
Tartar, and Joe Gargery are, like George, good at heart and ready to help and defend the
bodily vulnerable. Other weak and deformed characters like Maggie, who accept their
condition, find useful and rewarding lives near those like Little Dorrit who will care for them
and for whom they care.
Mrs. Clennam, paralysed for years and unable to walk, is, in reverse of the usual, given a brief bodily reward before she dies in that she, redeemed in heart, is enabled to walk to the Marshalsea and deliver the truth to Little Dorrit. Her body starts to move as she reveals the truth in telling her story to Rigaud in her own way instead of having him recount it his way. In creating and narrating her own experience through her own language she gains control over her body. Her muscles begin to work again almost unnoticed by her—bodily control equates to narrative control and narrative is created in response to threats both narratorial and monetary as Rigaud is attempting to blackmail her. She will not have herself seen in the glass of Rigaud but in her own glass. She rises when she learns that papers will be read by Arthur and the truth revealed in a way not written by her. Her body rises and she goes off physically to prevent her own narrative getting out of her control and, in doing so, controls what has been for so long her uncontrollable body. After fulfilling her task, she collapses when she sees her house collapse; her narrative and body power fail at the same time and she spends three years dumb and paralyzed before she dies.

Dickens’s deformed characters all struggle against the vulnerabilities of their bodies in their own ways and this forms much of their natures. If “bad,” like Quilp, Smallweed and Heep, they attempt to gain power through money and control over others, if “good,” like Mowcher and Squod, they accept their deformity, often living or working in proximity to perfect bodies and leading useful, honest lives.

If deformity is a driving force behind personality, damage to the body is Dickens’s most potent method of handing down bodily justice. Damage may amount to a slapstick fall, a missing limb, or a gruesome death, but in all cases, Dickens’s judgement upon a character is made evident in a very physical although often comic way.

Damage suffered by “good” characters is often either endearing or positive and, interestingly, tends to affect body parts such as arms and hands which were less problematic
and personal to Dickens than legs. We are, for instance, told in a perfectly straightforward manner that Captain Ned Cuttle has “a hook instead of a hand attached to his right wrist” (DS 43; ch. 4). The hook is simply part of his endearing nature; he bites it as he would his nails, and “unscrew[s] his hook at dinner-time, and screw[s] a knife into its wooden socket, instead” (DS 119; ch. 9). Cuttle is perfectly comfortable with his hook, perhaps his “enormous” (DS 233; ch. 17) other hand is big enough for two. While Cuttle accords himself no honours for having lost a hand, and gives us no history of its loss, he is ironically convinced of the wonderful sagacity of Bunsby on the basis of his bodily tribulations in that he is “‘a man as has had his head broke from infancy up’ards, and has got a new opinion into it at every seam as has been opened’” (DS 530; ch. 39).

Cuttle’s hook is written about with affectionate humour, and even one of Dickens’s most seriously and heroically treated limb losses, that of Joe Willet’s loss of his left arm which has been “taken off between the elbow and shoulder” (BR 530; ch. 58), involves comic description. Dickens textually admits the fascinations of Willet’s lost limb: “It was probably this circumstance which gave him an interest beyond any that his companion could boast of, and attracted Barnaby’s attention” (BR 530; ch. 58); the loss is made ennobling, creating a worthier man out of Joe. Comedy creeps in, however, through John Willet’s difficulty in accepting that his son has lost his arm. He fears that his son may now “withdraw to China or some other remote and unknown region, there to dwell for evermore, or at least until he had got rid of his remaining arm and both legs, and perhaps an eye or so, into the bargain” (BR 649; ch. 72). To convince himself the disfigurement is real he took the strangest means of resolving his doubts: such as feeling the sleeve of his son’s greatcoat as deeming it possible that his arm might be there; looking at his own arms and those of everybody else, as if to assure himself that two and not one was the usual allowance; sitting by the hour together in a brown study, as if he were endeavouring to recall Joe’s image in his younger days, and to remember whether he really had in those times one arm or a pair; and employing himself in many other speculations of the same kind.... At other times he resorted to such small devices as asking him for the salt, the pepper, the vinegar, the mustard—anything that was on his maimed side—and watching him as he handed it. By dint of these experiments, he
did at last so satisfy and convince himself, that, after a longer silence than he had yet maintained, he ... said, as he looked all round the board:

'It's been took off!' (BR 649-50; ch. 72).

Willet senior in effect acts out the psychological processes that any friend or family member in such a situation would be going through internally; Dickens makes it appear funny by denying the fact that there are others, like himself and his readers, who would also be feeling any sort of physical difficulty in accepting this loss of a limb.

Dickens often uses physical damage or pain to deflate or to ridicule characters who are too pompous, self-obsessed, or otherwise negative. He literally cuts Simon Tappertit down to size in a comic but at the same time quite horrific manner. Sim is introduced as

an old-fashioned, thin-faced, sleek-haired, sharp-nosed, small-eyed little fellow, very little more that five feet high, and thoroughly convinced in his own mind that he was above the middle size; rather tall, in fact, than otherwise. Of his figure, which was well enough formed, though somewhat of the leanest, he entertained the highest admiration; and with his legs, which, in knee-breeches, were perfect curiosities of littleness, he was enraptured to a degree amounting to enthusiasm (BR 79; ch. 4).

Like Dickens a fastidious washer and hair comber, possessing, he believes, magnetic powers that can “quell and subdue the haughtiest beauty” (BR 79; ch. 4), he is also, like Dickens, obsessed with legs but in his case with his own. The only instance of agreement in Tappertit’s taste in limbs is when his are praised falsely by the blind Stagg:

'That I had but eyes!' he cried, 'to behold my captain’s symmetrical proportions! That I had but eyes, to look upon these twin invaders of domestic peace!' ‘Get out!' said Mr Tappertit, glancing downward at his favourite limbs. 'Go along, will you, Stagg!’ ‘When I touch my own afterwards,' cried the host, smiting them reproachfully, ‘I hate ’em. Comparatively speaking, they’ve no more shape than wooden legs, beside these models of my noble captain’s.’ ‘Yours!' exclaimed Mr Tappertit. ‘No, I should think not. Don’t talk about those precious old toothpicks in the same breath with mine; that’s rather too much’ (BR 111; ch. 8).

After hours a “roving blade, who would rather kill a man than otherwise, and eat him too if needful” (BR 108; ch. 8), Sim is the leader of the 'Prentice Knights which he hopes will return to the glory of its past when it had “broken people’s heads by scores, defied their masters, nay, even achieved some glorious murders in the streets” (BR 115; ch. 8). Although
Sim wants power over those who control him in employment, his "violence" against them is ineffective, and his sceptre, a human thigh bone, represents the actual physical point of his own vulnerability. Five years later, having grown "smaller with years (particularly as to his legs, which were stupendously little)" (BR 364; ch. 39), he is injured during the riots and lies in hiding "burnt and bruised, and with a gun-shot wound in his body; and his legs—his perfect legs, the pride and glory of his life, the comfort of his existence—crushed into shapeless ugliness" (BR 647; ch. 71). Dickensian justice is harsh and not only are Sim's legs crushed, but lost; after time in hospital and jail, Sim is "discharged by proclamation, on two wooden legs. Shorn of his graceful limbs, and brought brought down from his high estate to circumstances of utter destitution, and the deepest misery" (BR 734; ch. 82). This extreme shock to his body reforms him somewhat, but his new world, even his employment as a shoeblack, mocks him. Whenever Tappertit is inclined to exert manual control over his wife "with a brush, or boot, or shoe" she "(but only in extreme cases) .... retaliate[s] by taking off his legs, and leaving him exposed to the derision of those urchins who delight in mischief" (BR 734; ch. 82). An uneasy mixture of humour and severe physical damage combine in the bodily justice Dickens has seen fit to bestow on him, but Sim is left alive with a chance of becoming a better person for the experience.

Dickens physically "undercuts" other characters with varying degrees of severity. Pecksniff's bodily pains and injuries, for instance, constantly deflate his self-serving hypocrisy and make him appear ridiculous, yet do not permanently injure him corporeally in more than his dignity, though he does lose position, money, and Heep-like humble power. His "very throat [is] moral" (MC 11; ch. 2) and his body is "sleek though free from corpulence" (MC 12; ch. 2). In his Pecksniffian projection of himself he treats his body as if it were not his own, and as if he himself were above bodily hazards: "drawing off his gloves [he] warm[s] his hands before the fire, as benevolently as if they were somebody else's, not his" (MC 33-34; ch. 3), and "warm[s] his back (as he had warmed his hands), as if it were a widow's back, or an orphan's back, or an enemy's back, or a back that any less excellent man would
have suffered to be cold" (MC 34; ch. 3). He “keep[s] his hand in his waistcoat as though he were ready, on the shortest notice, to produce his heart for Martin Chuzzlewit’s inspection” (MC 37; ch. 3), and replies to a question “by a shrug of his shoulders and an apparent turning-round of his eyes in their sockets before he opened them” (MC 38; ch. 3). Looking “as if any quantity of butter might have been made out of him, by churning the milk of human kindness, as it spouted upwards from his heart” (MC 38; ch. 3), Pecksniff’s body is represented as being in almost hubristic detachment from vulnerability, and, therefore, his disembodied morality/mortality must come sharply down to earth in an almost slapstick manner.

We are introduced to Pecksniff, slammed to the ground by his front door, lying on his back for “rather a lengthy and unreasonable time, without so much as wondering whether he [is] hurt or no ... nor ... d[oes] he offer any remark, or indicate in any manner the least hint of a desire to be picked up” (MC 9; ch. 2). The narrator comments that “a gentleman’s looks, in such a case of all others, are by no means under his own controul [sic]” (MC 10; ch. 2); his injuries are demeaningly described as “being limited to abrasions on what the eldest Miss Pecksniff called ‘the knobby parts’ of her parent’s anatomy” (MC 10; ch. 2). He trips over the roots of a tree while lost in plans to marry Mary Graham, and, about to eavesdrop at Old Martin’s door, brings “his head into such violent contact with another head, that he c[an] not help uttering in an audible voice the monosyllable ‘Oh!’ which was, as it were, sharply unscrewed and jerked out of him by very anguish” (MC 43; ch. 4).

Eavesdropping and spying in the church on the conversation between Mary Graham and Tom Pinch, Pecksniff looks “like the small end of a guillotined man” (MC 487; ch. 31). Linguistically decapitated, he is turned into a comical head puppet, diving up and down behind the pew “like the intelligent householder in Punch’s show, who avoids being knocked on the head with a cudgel” (MC 491; ch. 31). He cannot forever avoid being knocked on the head by a cudgel, as he realizes when old Martin at the end of the novel, “flashing out of every line and wrinkle in his face, r[ises] up, and str[ikes] him down upon the ground.” Again Pecksniff
does not get up quickly but lies “there, looking about him, with a disconcerted meekness in his face so enormously ridiculous” (MC 799; ch. 52). Denounced, “his figure appear[ing] to have shrunk” (MC 806; ch. 52), he tries to re-muster some stature by making a “sublime” address, saying that he “forgives” Martin: “‘I have been struck this day,’ said Mr. Pecksniff, ‘with a walking-stick, which I have every reason to believe had knobs upon it: on that delicate and exquisite portion of the human anatomy, the brain’” (MC 807; ch. 52). Departing in a “dignified” manner, he is “immediately afterwards run against, and nearly knocked down by, a monstrously-excited little man” (MC 808; ch. 52). Pecksniff loses all he holds dear, is made to look physically ridiculous, and ends a “drunken, begging, squalid-letter-writing man,” thanklessly begging from Tom Pinch whose own body he had underfed and controlled for so many years (MC 832; ch. 54). Dickens’s bodily punishment is clear here and ridicules the moral pomposity and superiority to things physical which Pecksniff projects.

The grand but bogus Christopher Casby “possessor of ‘that head’” (LD 140; 1: ch. 13) which shines a Patriarchal light upon all who see it, with its blue eyes, “and the long grey hair at its sides and back, like floss silk or spun glass, which looked so very benevolent because it was never cut” (LD 139; 1: ch. 13) also behaves like Pecksniff; he eats “an immense quantity of solid food with the benignity of a good soul who was feeding some one else” (LD 150; 1: ch. 13) and smiles “at the fire as if he were benevolently wishing it to burn him that he might forgive it” (LD 522; 2: ch. 9). He loses all respect and power, which have both been based solely on his appearance, when the “steaming” Pancks sheers off his locks and he is revealed as neither wise, virtuous, nor benevolent.45

Some damage is a very mild punishment for characters who suffer from little other than weak appearances and wills. Mr. Sparkler, for example, who suffers from “absence of mind—perhaps in a more literal absence of mind than is usually understood by the phrase” (LD 673; 2: ch. 24), is involved in a gentle gondola collision which “tip[s] that gentleman over like a large species of ninepin, and cause[s] him to exhibit the soles of his shoes to the object of his
dearest wishes: while the nobler portions of his anatomy struggle[d] at the bottom of his boat, in the arms of one of his men" (LD 485; 2: ch. 6).

Perhaps the most dramatic bodily justice Dickens metes out to any of his characters’ anatomies is Carker’s ghastly dismemberment. Like Sim Tappertit’s amputations, it is a severe punishment in part for disloyalty to an employer on both a business and a personal level (i.e., Sim’s intentions towards Dolly and Carker’s towards Edith), but Carker’s crimes are more insidious, and thus he must come to an extreme end, not killed by Dombey in a duel, nor shot or stabbed by Edith, but torn limb from limb just as he has metaphorically torn Dombey, private and public, limb from limb. “Mr. Carker [is] a gentleman ... with two unbroken rows of glistening teeth, whose regularity and whiteness were quite distressing.... he showed them whenever he spoke” (DS 172; ch. 13). He is described as feline, his hair and whiskers deficient in colour at all times, but feeble than common in the rich sunshine, and more like the coat of a sandy tortoise-shell cat; with long nails, nicely pared and sharpened; with a natural antipathy to any speck of dirt, which made him pause sometimes and watch the falling motes of dust, and rub them off his smooth white hand or glossy linen (DS 292; ch. 22).

Fastidiously clean like a cat and with teeth like a cat, he does not have the lives of a cat.

Carker, like Heep and Quilp, seeks control; he may not be deformed in appearance, but he is so reduced in description that he is almost pre-dismembered. When Dombey is laid up through debility consequent on a bad fall from a horse, Carker takes advantage of the chance to anatomize the business:

Mr. Carker, with the whole anatomy of the iron room laid bare before him, would explore the mysteries of books and papers, with the patient progress of a man who was dissecting the minutest nerves and fibres of his subject (DS 605; ch. 46).

He does essentially dissect Dombey, by causing his bodily collapse which almost results in him taking a razor to himself. Carker himself, however, does not end neatly dissected or cleanly cut but in violently dismembered chunks.

There are some hideously specific forebodings of his end, such as when Mr. Morfin says to Carker’s brother and sister that Dombey’s domestic upheavals and unhappinesses
“‘have left us no head but your brother for this long, long time. And it would have been better for us,’ said the visitor, dropping his voice. ‘to have been a lifeless trunk’” (DS 713; ch. 53).

Carker himself imagines such a death as his just before it happens; watching a train he “think[s] what a cruel power and might it had. Ugh! To see the great wheels slowly turning, and to think of being run down and crushed!” (DS 741-42; ch. 55). As one might argue of Dickens himself “these ideas and objects assumed a diseased importance in his thoughts” (DS 742; ch. 55).

In the instant before he dies, Carker sees Dombey eye to eye, and then

[is] beaten down, caught up, and whirled away upon a jagged mill, that spun him round and round, and struck him limb from limb, and licked his stream of life up with its fiery heat, and cast his mutilated fragments in the air (DS 743; ch. 55).

Dombey, recovering from a swoon,

s[ees] them bringing from a distance something covered, that lay heavy and still, upon a board, between four men, and s[ees] that others dr[i]ve some dogs away that sniff[ed] upon the road, and soak[ed] his blood up, with a train of ashes (DS 743; ch. 55).48

This is the limbless, probably headless trunk mentioned before, the anatomized Carker dissected by his own schemes. This is not a comic dismemberment, as many in Dickens are, but severe physical justice, in part no doubt so harsh because Carker, though not a gentleman in the sense of Mr. Dombey, is also not such a deformed creature as Quilp or Heep; nor is he of the comic category lower classes, so his death cannot be comic. Dickens deems Carker’s behaviour unforgivable and his nature unredeemable; he must die as he lived by taking things apart, and must realize his bodily vulnerability in an extreme but blinding flash, like the spring of a cat or the flash of a tooth.49

Rigaud similarly comes in for severe punishment. Having left the reader unsure whether Rigaud has been beheaded or not at the end of chapter one, Dickens reserves due punishment for himself. He reveals Rigaud’s underhand attempts to gain power and money and dismembers him on the page by constantly referring to his eyes being too close together and to his ugly defining characteristic when he laughs: “His moustache went up under his
nose, and his nose came down over his moustache, in a very sinister and cruel manner” (LD 7; 1: ch. 1). Rigaud ends crushed by the house he thinks he has gained power over and it is two nights before people find “the dirty heap of rubbish that had been the foreigner, before his head had been shivered to atoms, like so much glass, by the great beam that lay upon him, crushing him” (LD 772; 2: ch. 31).

With less evil or more minor characters, Dickens still expresses his views physically. Barnacle Junior, for example, is punished for heredity and circumlocuity in two of Dickens’s favourite anatomical sites. He is first described as “singeing the calves of his legs at the parental fire” (LD 103; 1: ch. 10), and then we are told that because he has “such flat orbits to his eyes, and such limp little eyelids” his “superior eye-glass” will not stick and “Pausing for a reply, he open[s] his right eye with his hand, st[icks] his glass in it, in such an inflammatory manner that his eye beg[ins to] water[ing] dreadfully” (LD 104; 1: ch. 10). Dickens makes his punishment even more ridiculous when, unsuccessful again on a subsequent occasion, young Barnacle “applie[s] spoons to his eye, forks, and other foreign matters connected with the furniture of the dinner-table” (LD 203; 1: ch. 17).

Certain characters also indulge in self-damage to punish themselves as an outlet for their fiery passions: Tattycoram and Edith Dombey both strike themselves; Ralph Nickleby and Merdle commit suicide because this is the gentlemanly thing for gentlemen crooks to do. Merdle’s death is harbingered by descriptive signs of violence and dismemberment; he “ooze[s] sluggishly and muddily about his drawing-room” (LD 553; 2: ch. 12), just as he will ooze in his fatal bath and “There [are] black traces on his lips where they met, as if a little train of gunpowder had been fired there” (LD 594; 2: ch. 16). He “suddenly get[s] up, as if he had been waiting in the interval for his legs, and they had just come” (LD 596; 2: ch. 16).

What is also interesting about Merdle’s suicide, in light of the connection between the body and language in Dickens’s work, is that he kills himself with a pen-knife. A pen-knife in the nineteenth-century was used for making and sharpening quill pens. Merdle, a forger and robber, is punished for his false use of the pen by killing himself with the instrument that
repairs the tools of his crime, almost as if he writes his own sentence upon his body. He has borrowed the penknife, preferring a dark handled one, from Fanny, and promised her that he will not "ink it." Of course strictly he has kept his promise but he has covered it in the ink of the body, a far more essential source, and has been "acutely nibbed" Dickens does assure us.

The sheer length of Dickens's cast lists means that the bodies of minor characters are often swiftly sketched. Yet we often learn more of even very minor characters' physiques than we do of heroes' forms, and physical curiosities are rife amongst the plethora of bit players. Any bodily deformity gives Dickens an opportunity to indulge in expressing his bodily fears and fascinations. They also act as handy labels; thus, a "one-eyed man" or "red-nosed woman," an "apoplectic butler" or, as in Martin Chuzzlewit, a "nephew with the outline of a countenance" (MC 60; ch. 4), need not necessarily even be granted names—that they appear bodily is enough, as in life. His use of synecdoche has been commented on by a number of critics—Mrs. Merdle becomes "the bosom," for instance, while a number of characters are, at least for a time, simply "the head." Physical deformities, damage, and curiosities also attract the reader fascinated by what can happen to the body, and, as most readers are innately so interested, this in turn helps the popularity of Dickens's novels.

Dickens did not treat, or weigh the importance of, all body parts equally. In art, as in life, Dickens did a lot of "leg work"; legs both flesh and wooden fascinated him and were objects of bodily fear and comic description. In part, of course, his focus on legs continued the previous century's tradition of the beautiful male leg, ideally straight with a nicely developed calf. Mr. Lorry, for example, dressed historically accurately "ha[s] a good leg, and was a little vain of it, for his brown stockings fitted sleek and close, and were of a fine texture" (TTC 19; 1: ch. 4). Although the trousers' eclipse of stockings and tights in the nineteenth century reduced the power of legs to garner such praise, an awareness of them was still at large, and
Dickens often has his older characters, such as Pickwick or Twemlow, wear old-fashioned, leg-revealing clothes. In *Barnaby Rudge*, a novel dealing with an earlier period of history, Dickens could not resist the leggy possibilities, as the portrait of Sim Tappertit shows.\(^{50}\)

Even in *Nicholas Nickleby*, however, we hear the “hungry servant,” enthusiastically telling Fanny Squeers about Nicholas with “many laudatory remarks touching his beautiful dark eyes, and his sweet smile, and his straight legs—upon which last-named articles she laid particular stress; the general run of legs at Dotheboys Hall being crooked” *(NN 101-02; ch. 9)*. Miss Squeers, after seeing these limbs for herself, exclaims “I never saw such legs in the whole course of my life!” *(NN 103; ch. 9)*. Naturally, it almost goes without saying, a young gentleman in Dickens will have reasonable specimens of these appendages and will have them in duplicate.

While wooden legs are nearly always treated comically in Dickens, legs of flesh are also singled out for humorous description: Doctor Blimber has “round turned legs, like a clerical pianoforte” *(DS 557; ch. 41)* which are “learned” *(DS 555; ch. 41)*. Miss La Creevy’s street-door display includes “a charming whole length of a large-headed little boy, sitting on a stool with his legs fore-shortened to the size of salt-spoons” *(NN 19-20; ch. 3)*. Alfred Jingle and Noah Claypole have long legs which are often described as being weak, while Steerforth and David are waited upon by a waiter “who had got the fidgets in his legs, and was twisting them, and hitting them, and putting them through all kinds of contortions, in his small pantry” *(DC 245; ch. 19)*.\(^{51}\)

A series of wooden legs hobble their way through Dickens’s novels.\(^{52}\) Most of them appear only briefly and, interestingly, over the course of Dickens’s career, a number begin to be seen at weddings.\(^{53}\) At Florence and Walter’s wedding “A man with a wooden leg ... looks in to see what is going on; but finding it nothing entertaining, stumps off again” *(DS 769; ch. 57)*. Louisa Gradgrind and Josiah Bounderby are “married in the church of the florid wooden legs—that popular order of architecture” *(HT 83; 1: ch. 16)*, and Bella Wilfer is attended on her wedding day by “a gruff and glum old pensioner” with two wooden legs
Sexual connotations can of course be read into this conjunction, but it might also show that the hazards of the human body cannot be forgotten even on “happy” days. Noah Claypole’s father was “a drunken soldier: discharged with a wooden leg” (OT 28; ch. 5). Mrs. Gamp’s husband had a wooden-leg. Most of these “wooden-leggers” appear and then leave swiftly, or are briefly mentioned as some sort of “momento dismembermenti” stumping through the plots, by their presence reminding readers not to forget their own bodily vulnerability and allowing Dickens to comically express his sense of his own.54

Of course Dickens’s pre-eminent wooden-legged character is Silas Wegg who is “so wooden a man that he seem[s] to have taken his wooden leg naturally, and rather suggest[s] to the fanciful observer, that he might be expected—if his development received no untimely check—to be completely set up with a pair of wooden legs in about six months” (OMF 89; 1 ch. 5). Although presented comically, Wegg represents real bodily concerns and a real sense of physical precariousness. He is also a wooden-legged character who speaks for himself, not one who exists in the conversation of others, like Mrs. Gamp’s husband, or who just arrives and departs on the edge of view. Like other “deformed” characters he becomes attracted by money in a quest to gain control over his vulnerable body,55 but comes to an ignominious end by being thrown into a dust-cart. Most of what we learn about Wegg and most of what is fascinatingly revealing about him in terms of Dickens’s art of the vulnerable body is created not through descriptions of his body as it is with other such characters, but, as the next chapter discusses, revealed through his own conversation.

Another form of altered anatomy that Dickens favours is the one-eyed or “one fixed and one rolling eyed” characters. Bunsby, for instance, has “one stationary eye ... one revolving one, on the principle of some light-houses” (DS 325; ch. 23), and Sleary has “one fixed eye, and one loose eye” (HT 32; 1: ch. 6). In Nicholas Nickleby both Squeers and Newman Noggs fall into this category, and both are interesting cases.

Mr Squeers’s appearance was not prepossessing. He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two. The eye he had was unquestionably useful, but
decidedly not ornamental: being of a greenish grey, and in shape resembling the fan-light of a street door. The blank side of his face was much wrinkled and puckered up, which gave him a very sinister appearance, especially when he smiled, at which times his expression bordered closely on the villainous (sic).... He was about two or three and fifty, and a trifle below the middle size ... he appeared ill at ease in his clothes, and as if he were in a perpetual state of astonishment at finding himself so respectable (NN 30-31; ch. 4).

Squeers, suffering from this obvious disfigurement, exerts total control over the boys in his “care” and governs them with violence, lack of food, and appalling medical treatment.56 When Squeers is thrashed by Nicholas he is made to feel his own bodily vulnerability to the full; this, however, does not improve him, as evidenced by the exaggerated bodily damage that both he and his daughter Fanny bewail.57 She has also inherited from him “a remarkable expression of the right eye, something akin to having none at all” (NN 98; ch. 9). His final punishment is bodily transportation out of England, but not before he is reminded again of his vulnerability by being smashed to the ground with a pair of bellows by Newman Noggs, and thus brought to justice.

Newman Noggs, “a tall man of middle-age, with two goggle eyes whereof one was a fixture, a rubicund nose, [and] a cadaverous face” (NN 8; ch. 2), has once been a gentleman, but, as Ralph says of him, he “‘made first a thorough [monetary] fool of himself, and then a beggar. He took to drinking and had a touch of paralysis’” (NN 11; ch. 2). Indeed, his face is curiously twisted as by a spasm; but whether of paralysis, or grief, or inward laughter, nobody but himself could possibly explain. The expression of a man’s face is commonly a help to his thoughts, or glossary on his speech; but the countenance of Newman Noggs, in his ordinary moods, was a problem which no stretch of ingenuity could solve (NN 19; ch. 3).

Noggs’s most idiosyncratic habits are

cracking the joints of his fingers, and squeezing them into all possible distortions.... and the communication of a fixed and rigid look to his unaffected eye, so as to make it uniform with the other, and to render it impossible for anybody to determine where or at what he was looking (NN 9; ch. 2).

His bodily vulnerability, including a “paralytic limb” (NN 403; ch. 31) has come upon him as he fell from his position as a gentleman, and he is strongly aware of it, and cracks his fingers to, at some level, remind himself of it, at the same time expressing himself bodily in an
attempt to overcome it. He has some control over his body; revealing what he knows, in front of Ralph with great bodily movement, he finishes and “becomes, without passing through any intermediate stage, stiff, upright, and motionless” (NN 775; ch. 59). He does, over the course of the novel, gain power over his body, when his shadow boxing and shadow thrashing culminate in the actual beating of Squeers over the head with a pair of bellows; in doing this he reasserts his bodily control and begins to redeem himself.

Some characters develop physical traits because of their natures. “From a long habit of listening admiringly to everything that was said in her presence,” Miss Tox’s “head has quite settled on one side,” (DS 6-7; ch. 1). Mr. Perch who “bends his body at every step as if it were the delight of his life to bow” similarly “deferentially puts his head on one side, like a man who felt he had no business to hold it up in such a presence, and would keep it as much out of the way as possible” (DS 295; ch. 22). Others are just curious or repulsive; Mr. Serjeant Snubbin has a “dull-looking boiled eye” (PP 470; ch. 31). Solomon Pell’s “nose is all on one side.... Being short-necked and asthmatic, however, he respires principally through this feature” (PP 663; ch. 43). Mrs. Brown “munches her jaws, as if the Death’s Head beneath her yellow skin were impatient to get out” (DS 370; ch. 27), and Mrs. Pipchin, “ogress and child-queller” (DS 100; ch. 8) is

a marvellous ill-favoured, ill-conditioned old lady, of a stooping figure, with a mottled face, like bad marble, a hook nose, and hard grey eye, that looked as if it might have been hammered at on an anvil without sustaining any injury.... She was such a bitter old lady, that one was tempted to believe there had been some mistake in the application of the Peruvian machinery, and that all her waters of gladness and milk of human kindness had been pumped out dry, instead of the mines (DS 100; ch. 8).

What Dickens says of Mr. Grimwig can equally be said of himself while creating characters: “the variety of shapes into which his countenance is twisted, defy description” (OT 86; ch. 14). Each of these short-hand physical traits he uses makes us aware of the physical presence of Dickens’s characters which is fundamental to his work. As these corporeal attributes are described, the precariousness of the character’s body to which they belong increases. Dickens delights in noting the body’s weak and intriguing spots, and vulnerable
aspects are not just evident externally, but also internally, engendered through behaviour or disease.

v

Dickens frequently connects bodily vulnerability with comedy, but some of his characters almost literally kill themselves laughing. They laugh over things they find individually amusing, usually things that no one else is laughing at, and fall into actual fits of silent, suffocating, internal laughter, swelling and choking their bodies into extreme vulnerability. Mr. Weller recognizes the potential risks of this deadly humour, telling Sam: “I’m afeerd that vun o’ these days I shall laugh myself into a appleplexy, my boy” (PP 690; ch. 45) especially from a body-swelling “kind o’ quiet laugh as I’m trying to come” (692). Weller laughs inwardly and his fat figure swells and convulses: “The internal laughter ... convulsed not only Mr. Weller’s face, but his arms, legs, and body also” (PP 862; ch. 56).

John Browdie, otherwise strong and healthy, also suffers from this body-weakening disorder; laughing over his rescue of Smike, he “[gets] into Mr. Squeers’s bed, once more, and drawing the clothes over his head, laugh[s] till he [is] nearly smothered” (NN 509; ch. 39). The illness he feigned to get upstairs into Squeers’s bed is, in another and perhaps more dangerous form, coming to pass.58 Charley Bates is a fellow sufferer: “Master Bates saw something so exquisitely ludicrous in this reply, that he burst into another laugh; which laugh, meeting the coffee he was drinking, and carrying it down some wrong channel, very nearly terminated in his premature suffocation” (OT 54; ch. 9). On another occasion he “l[ays] himself flat on the floor: and kick[s] convulsively, for five minutes, in an ecstasy of facetious joy” (OT 100; ch. 16).

Dickens is, in a sense, warning us of the contagious disease of laughter, and the bodily threat inherent in catching it. Just as Dickens’s own mirrored body was involved in writing his novels, so our bodies are drawn physically into them, and one way Dickens induces this bodily connection between readers and his work is by making us laugh, and, like
all physical actions, laughing contains an element of bodily danger. In these portraits of swelling, choking, self-referential laughers, Dickens gives us a subtle warning that we make our bodies vulnerable by opening his novels. As the desire to laugh is part of the attraction of his novels, in fulfilling that desire we also have to accept the risk of "death by laughter"; the grotesque and the real stand very close in Dickens.

The most "deadly" laugher of this sort is Major Joey Bagstock, "a wooden-featured, blue-faced, Major, with his eyes starting out of his head" (DS 85; ch. 7) who "ha[s] arrived at what is called in polite literature, the grand meridian of life, and [is] proceeding on his journey downhill with hardly any throat, and a very rigid pair of jaw-bones, and long-flapped elephantine ears" (DS 86; ch. 7). He suffers from a disorder that turns him blue or even black and gives him lobster eyes when at all excited; he apoplectically swells and swells, like the poisoned Captain Murderer. After he makes declarations about himself "wheezing sounds would be heard; and the Major's blue would deepen into purple, while his eyes strained and started convulsively" (DS 87; ch. 7). Even "winking over his shoulder at the ladies, [brings] a frightful tendency of blood to [his] head" (DS 380; ch. 27), and after eating and drinking he is "altogether so swollen and inflamed about the head" (DS 270; ch. 20), that "in a state of repletion ... essence of savoury pie ooz[es] out at the corners of his eyes, and devilled grill and kidneys tight[en] his cravat" (DS 272; ch. 20). He walks with Dombey "with his cheeks swelling over his tight stock, his legs majestically wide apart, and his great head wagging from side to side, as if he were remonstrating with himself on being such a captivating object" (DS 280; ch. 21).

Bagstock attempts to overcome his bodily vulnerability by constantly referring to himself in the third person as "old Joe Bagstock, old Joey Bagstock, old J. Bagstock, old Josh. Bagstock," or "Joey B" (DS 87; ch. 7),59 and by exerting control over the body of his native servant, whom "he maintain[s] ... about his person as a counter-irritant against the gout, and all other vexations, mental as well as bodily" (DS 362-63; ch. 26). He throws things at this servant and threatens him, and by keeping the Native's "sensitiveness to bodily knocks and
bumps ... continually on the stretch” (*DS* 775; ch. 58), gives vent to his own physical insecurity and in a sense overcomes it. His riskiest physical attribute, however, is his suppressed internal laughter, which literally almost kills him. Hearing of Miss Tox’s secret devotion to the smashed Dombey, he “nearly choke[s] himself dead with laughter. He is permanently bluer from that minute, and constantly wheezes to himself, his lobster eyes starting out of his head” (*DS* 795; ch. 59). In his hotel room, he

fell] into a silent fit of laughter, with which he [is] sometimes seized, and which was always particularly awful. It held him so long on this occasion that the dark servant, who stood watching him at a distance, but dared not for his life approach, twice or thrice gave him over for lost. His whole form, but especially his face and head, dilated beyond all former experience; and presented to the dark man’s view, nothing but a heaving mass of indigo. At length he broke into a violent paroxysm of coughing, and when that was a little better burst into ... ejaculations (*DS* 130; ch. 10).

Bagstock has a friendly relationship with Mrs. Skewton, a borderline corpse who thinks she is young and fetching. These two accept each other, on the surface at least, for what they wish to appear to be; younger and less tenuously alive. Mrs. Skewton dresses juvenileely, though about seventy years old; her palsy is offset by “false curls and false eyebrows,” her “false teeth, set off by her false complexion” (*DS* 283; ch. 21). A descendant of eighteenth-century satires upon the artifice of feminine “beauty,” she is punished severely for bodily vanity. Dickens deals with her unmasking in Swiftian fashion:

The painted object shrivelled underneath [the maid’s] hand; the form collapsed, the hair dropped off, the arched dark eye-brows changed to scanty tufts of grey; the pale lips shrunk, the skin became cadaverous and loose; an old, worn, yellow, nodding woman, with red eyes, alone remained in Cleopatra’s place, huddled up, like slovenly bundle, in a greasy flannel gown (*DS* 381; ch. 27).

She “appear[s] to have taken off her manner with her charms, and to have put on paralysis with her flannel gown”; and her maid “collect[s] her ashes ... and carry[s] them away ... ready for to-morrow’s revivification” (*DS* 383; ch. 27).

Trying on the dress she will wear to her daughter’s wedding Mrs. Skewton “smirk[s] at her cadaverous self in the glass, as she thought of its killing effect upon the Major” (*DS* 417; ch. 30). Bagstock, given his propensities, might conceivably die laughing; but in fact Mrs.
Skewton, admiring herself in the glass on another occasion, is the one to be struck down:

“Paralysis [is] not to be deceived, had known her for the object of its errand, and had struck her down at her glass, where she lay like a horrible doll that had tumbled down” (DS 507; ch. 37). Taken to pieces, she does rally from this stroke, and regains her vanity, but in due course dies—as she deserves to in the Dickens world for pretending to be something she is not.60

Mrs. Skewton’s is of course merely one of many illnesses and deaths in Dickens’s work. Illness and disease in his novels are sites for bodily justice, curiosity, and vulnerability, and also, naturally, carry thematic overtones. Dickens was a great denier of illness in himself, and a great sympathizer over it in others unless it was chronic in which case he lost patience. His descriptions of disease and medical disorders are almost universally praised by medical readers as being highly accurate and sometimes even in advance of medical thought or discovery of his time,61 which confirms Dickens’s acute interest in the human body and his precise observation of the physical changes illnesses cause. Some characters, like Bagstock, suffer on-going medical conditions, while others become ill within a novel and either recover completely, recover scarred like Esther, or die from their illnesses. Sickness for male heroes is redemptive; both Martin Chuzzlewit and Pip recover from illnesses as better people. Martin learns a second lesson when he nurses Mark Tapley back to health after barely recovering himself.

“Heroes” can learn from illness but are not scarred by it. “Heroines” can die as Dora and Nell do (but often such deaths are seen as child-like), and can, like Esther, be scarred. The spread of small pox through Bleak House seems to affect mainly women and children, while Gridley and Richard’s deaths are caused in large part by their own self-induced obsession with Jarndyce and Jarndyce and money; in other words it is partially their own fault that they get ill, regardless of attacks Dickens is making on Chancery.
The diseases, conditions, and deaths Dickens describes fall into two broad categories, those which are idiosyncratically fascinating to Dickens and those which are traditional Victorian revealers of the body’s insecurity. The latter class are clearly of less interest when considering Dickens as an individual, though reflect solidly his sense of the concrete vulnerabilities of the world around him. These deaths or illness include the often undiagnosable ones, such as Dora's which is generally thought to be consumption or the result of complications following a miscarriage. Oliver's mother dies after giving birth to her son as does the first Mrs. Dombey. David's mother fades away, perhaps from tuberculosis, which claims Smike and probably also Nell. Tuberculosis, as Susan Sontag discusses, was the favoured way for nineteenth-century authors to create refining, noble, painless, symptomless, slow deaths. The lack of symptoms for some diseases was perhaps acceptable to “the Victorian reader [who] simply took what Providence dispensed in the way of bodily malfunctions in literature as in life” (McMurtry 138). Although, and probably because, he is a minor character, the Chancery Prisoner, is allowed to suffer specific consumptive pain, “His breathing was hard and thick, and he moaned painfully as it came and went” (PP 687; ch. 44). Rose Maylie, Oliver, Dick Swiveller, and Madeline Bray, all suffer from generally termed “fevers.” More comically, a number of women characters, such as Mrs. Corney, Mrs. Snagsby, Mrs. Crupp suffer from convenient “spazzums,” and Guster suffers from fits.

Other diseases, disorders, and deaths are more unusual. Mrs. Clennam and Mrs. Crewler suffer from hysterical paralyses. Miss Havisham, heart-broken, is frozen in time and place and has become corpse-like; she is “ghastly waxwork” and skeleton in one, and Pip even has “an alarming fancy that Estella and [he] might presently begin to decay” (GE 89; 1: ch. 11) in her room. In trying to save her burning body Pip is injured and his redemption begins; his hands, the symbol of his false great expectations are burnt and his bad arm is further hurt in his nearly deadly encounter with Orlick. His redemption is complete when, falling ill, he is nursed back to health by Joe whose true worth he then recognizes. Pip's sister, Mrs. Joe, herself violent, does not escape so successfully from Orlick's attack and is
permanently and severely injured; thereafter, incapable of further violence or of coherent
language, she dies a better person. Mr. Dorrit suffers a collapse shortly before his death
and reverts to memories of his time in the Marshalsea, just as Manette, who has eventually
remembered his daughter, has spells of reverting to his time in the Bastille. Dorrit forgets his
more recently attained wealth, and still insists that his brother, not he, is feeble and must
rest. This is strangely like Dickens's own denial of bodily weakness and hides within it a
connection between monetary and bodily security. Dickens, before he became a denying
sufferer of the ailment himself, gives gout to Weller senior, who is “compelled to retire”
because of it (PP 876; ch. 57), and who tells Pickwick that it is “a complaint as arises from
too much ease and comfort. If ever you’re attacked with the gout, Sir, jist you marry a widder
as has got a good loud woice, with a decent notion of usin’ it, and you’ll never have the gout
again. It’s a capital prescription” (PP 300; ch. 20).
Leicester Dedlock, too, has gout, receiving it
as a troublesome demon, but still a demon of the patrician order. All the Dedlocks, in
the direct male line, through a course of time during and beyond which the memory of
man goeth not to the contrary, have had the gout. It can be proved, sir. Other men’s
fathers may have died of the rheumatism, or may have taken base contagion from the
tainted blood of the sick vulgar, but the Dedlock family have communicated something
exclusive, even to the levelling process of dying, by dying of their own family gout.... It
is among their dignities.... Hence, Sir Leicester yields up his family legs to the family
disorder, as if he held his name and fortune on that feudal tenure. He feels, that for a
Dedlock to be laid upon his back and spasmodically twitched and stabbed in his
extremities, is a liberty taken somewhere; but, he thinks, 'We have all yielded to this;
it belongs to us; it has, for some hundreds of years, been understood that we are not
to make the vaults in the park interesting on more ignoble terms; and I submit myself
to the compromise' (BH 196; ch. 16).
Dickens, of course, made no “compromise,” and when his turn came would not allow his
malady such a name.

Death, of course, represents the ultimate vulnerability of the body and is the end
result of many illnesses in Dickens’s novels, but it is also not infrequently in his texts the
outcome of murder. Over his novel-writing career Dickens became increasingly interested in the minds of murderers; and murder, which had always had a role in his world, is increasingly dealt with in a more psychological fashion. The corollary to this is that it is necessarily dealt with in a less bodily fashion, though the minds of murderers are always haunted in graphically physical terms by the corpses they have created, and their own bodily punishment is death, meted out not by the law but by fate. By creating "a body," in the sense of a corpse, they over-flex their own bodily invulnerability and seal their own ends. Sikes, who has exerted violent control over Nancy's form when she was alive, is vulnerable to her body once it is dead:

There had been a moan and motion of the hand; and, with terror added to hate, he had struck and struck again. Once he threw a rug over it; but it was worse to fancy the eyes, and imagine them moving towards him, than to see them glaring upward, as if watching the reflection of the pool of gore that quivered and danced in the sunlight on the ceiling. He had plucked it off again. And there was the body—mere flesh and blood, no more—but such flesh, and so much blood! (OT 323; ch. 48).

He washes himself and prepares to leave, "never once, turn[ing] his back upon the corpse; no, not for a moment" (OT 324; ch. 48), but he imagines her dead body following him: "At his head it stood, silent, erect, and still—a living grave-stone, with its epitaph in blood" (OT 327; ch. 48). Helping people escape a fire, it seems as if "he b[ears] a charmed life" (OT 329; ch. 48), but his crime is unredeemable and "the eyes" cause him to slip and fall at a crucial moment, self-lynched in front of the enormous crowd:

The noose was at his neck. It ran up with his weight, tight as a bow-string, and swift as the arrow it speeds. He fell for five-and-thirty feet. There was a sudden jerk, a terrific convulsion of the limbs; and there he hung, with the open knife clenched in his stiffening hand (OT 347; ch. 50).

Jonas Chuzzlewit, who meets his end by self-administered poison after we think he has been too cowardly to kill himself, is haunted by two dead bodies. The first is his father's, whom he thinks he has killed: "The weight of that which was stretched out stiff and stark, in the awful chamber above stairs, so crushed and bore down Jonas, that he bent beneath the
The second is Montague Tigg’s, whom he has murdered, and Jonas is terrified of hearing that the body has been found:

He tried—he had never left off trying—not to forget it was there, for that was impossible, but to forget to weary himself by drawing vivid pictures of it in his fancy: by going softly about it and about it among the leaves, approaching it nearer and nearer through a gap in the boughs, and startling the very flies that were thickly sprinkled all over it, like heaps of dried currants.... And the more his thoughts were set upon the discovery, the stronger was the fascination which attracted them to the thing itself: lying alone in the wood.... If he had been condemned to bear the body in his arms, and lay it down for recognition at the feet of every one he met, it could not have been more constantly with him (MC 771; ch. 51).

Perhaps the most famous found body, or parts of a body, in Dickens’s novels is that of Krook, and although Dickens is not the only writer in the nineteenth century to have used spontaneous combustion, Krook’s death is in many ways, like Quilp’s body, fundamental to Dickens’s use of the body’s vulnerability.71 Ironically, Dickens was just as ferocious in defending the realistic possibility of spontaneous combustion in his fiction, which George Lewes among others attacked as not credible, as he was about denying that a gentleman could be a cannibal in life or that his own body was in any way weak or sick. He went so far as to introduce “experts” into the number following that of Krook’s death and wrote a defence of his use of it in his preface to the novel.72

Krook himself is an

old man in spectacles.... short, cadaverous, and withered; with his head sunk sideways between his shoulders, and the breath issuing in visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire within. His throat, chin, and eyebrows [are] so frosted with white hairs, and so gnarled with veins and puckered skin, that he looks, from his breast upward, like some old root in a fall of snow (BH 49; ch. 5).

Krook is an alcoholic73 and a buyer of all things from bones to hair, but especially of documents. Claiming to be unable to read, he also distrusts others’ efforts to teach him to read, believing that they might teach him wrongly. He guards all his papers jealously, believing that they may be a source of riches and power. On the evening that he is about to reveal the contents of one of his letters, he spontaneously combusts, almost as if the language is stronger than he is and will destroy him before he makes it known. Paper of
course, is especially vulnerable to combustion and Krook’s body is revealed as more vulnerable than the letters.

Krook’s death represents the ultimate nightmare of individual bodily vulnerability; a person simply sitting in a chair can die and be consumed almost utterly, betrayed by a bodily action for which there is no conceivable defence or remedy. Krook almost completely vanishes into thick air, part of him becoming “A thick yellow liquor ... which is offensive to the touch and sight and more offensive to the smell. A stagnant, sickening oil, with some natural repulsion in it” (BH 401; ch. 32), which “slowly drips, and creeps away down the bricks; here, lies in a little thick nauseous pool” (BH 402; ch. 32). Guppy, touching this liquid, is sickened: “Give me some water, or I shall cut my hand off” (BH 402; ch. 32). Guppy and Weevle, however, do not initially find Krook, and wonder if he is hanging somewhere, but soon discover

a small burnt patch of flooring; here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, but not so light as usual, seeming to be steeped in something; and here is—is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal? O Horror, he IS here! and this from which we run away, striking out the light and overturning one another in the street, is all that represents him (BH 403; ch. 32).

Dickens immediately links this discovery with the Chancery theme by saying that it is the death of “all Lord Chancellors in all Courts.... it is the same death eternally—inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only—Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died” (BH 403; ch. 32). It is clear, though, that the weight of this death cannot really be linked solely to the theme. It is fascinatingly and repulsively tactile, odoriferous and pervasive; essence of Krook floats through the air and slides down the walls and it cannot be washed away. The neighbourhood is fascinated; experts swarm in, children act out the death, and the court is “is particularly anxious ... that the fiction of a full-sized coffin should be preserved, though there is so little to put in it” (BH 413; ch. 33), demonstrating people’s reluctance to accept such a drastic bodily event, even in the dead body.
Krook is gone, and only a remnant, “the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes,” is left. The letters, however, have not been burnt. Dickens demonstrates that combustible, undeciphered words are still more powerful than bodies, as he knew his were. What is left after most of Krook’s anatomy has burnt resembles a broken log of wood, the basic stuff of paper, on which one writes, and on which one can literally create new bodies. While Krook’s body combusts, Dickens’s brain burns, the one becoming totally vulnerable, the other becoming totally enduring, preserved like the yellowing, hardy documents of a Victorian hoard, amidst the Krook’s house of literature.

The preceding sections of this chapter suggest the uses Dickens makes of the vulnerability of his characters’ bodies in depicting their natures, in punishing their misdemeanours, and in revealing aspects that most interest him about the body. While what happens to characters’ bodies follows basically the patterns here suggested, we can see some changes occurring in his use of the body if we examine the novels chronologically. Generally we might say that the comedy surrounding characters’ bodies is reduced in the later novels as is the comic content of characters’ conversation regarding the body as the next chapter discusses. Of course it would be willful blindness to say that comedy disappears totally from Dickens’s writing even in the later, so-termed “darker” works, because, particularly where threats to the body are concerned, humour is his most potent method of expressing what really “gets to him” most. At all three levels of his writing, those of Character, Conversation, and Expression, Dickens is concerned with relating his fears and fascinations concerning the body, and with controlling these fears by transforming them into fiction that follows rules and reaches outcomes determined by himself.

Dickens ends his career with a character in extreme bodily vulnerability, but we cannot say there is a steady progression towards this. His heroes, if admittedly a little more psychologically developed, remain largely bodiless and invulnerable even late in his career.
just as his children remain vulnerable. Deformed characters do become a little more ambivalent; Jenny Wren, for example, with her beautiful long fair hair and her twisted back and legs is not as immediately “readable” from sheer appearance as Quilp or Heep are, particularly since her language can at times be harsh and because unlike Phil Squod or Maggie, although she deals with her infirmity and makes a reasonable living at her artistic trade as doll’s dressmaker, she wishes she were not deformed. She constantly refers to her “crooked back and weak legs,” and speaks fondly of the peacefulness of “being dead.” We cannot say that she accepts her bodily infirmity in the sense that we might earlier have expected the “good” deformed character in Dickens to do. Like Miss Mowcher, however, she has her moment of glory in making another body vulnerable when she peppers Fledgeby’s eyes.

Dickens’s historical novels *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, set respectively at times of riot and revolution, hanging and guillotining, enable him to depict more vulnerability on a larger scale and in a more serious manner. In *A Tale of Two Cities* we watch Madame Defarge animatedly tread on the freshly murdered governor’s “body to steady it for mutilation,” and “with her cruel knife—long ready—hew[ed] off his head” (*TTC* 268; 2: ch. 21). The twice acquitted Darnay still lives in threat of his life by guillotining. Madame Defarge herself is killed by gunshot during her fight with the faithful Miss Pross, while Darnay, of course, a true gentleman, cannot die within the Dickensian realm and is saved by his bodily mirror, Carton, who for the first time in his life does a thing worthwhile; his Dickensian redemption consists of giving up his body for another. In both novels Dickens introduces ghastly accounts of bodily damage, lost in the crowd so that they are not too individualized; people, for example, are “sucked and drawn into the burning gulf” of the Warren (*BR* 507; ch. 55), and there are men who cast their lighted torches in the air, and suffered them to fall upon their heads and faces, blistering the skin with deep unseemly burns. There were men who rushed up to the fire, and paddled in it with their hands as if in water; and others who were restrained by force from plunging in, to gratify their deadly longing. On the skull of one
drunken lad—not twenty, by his looks—who lay upon the ground with a bottle to his mouth, the lead from the roof came streaming down in a shower of liquid fire, white hot; melting his head like wax. When the scattered parties were collected, men—living yet, but singed as with hot irons—were plucked out of the cellars, and carried off upon the shoulders of others, who strove to wake them as they went along, with ribald jokes, and left them, dead, in the passages of hospitals (BR 508; ch. 55).

He describes bodies that, unlike Quilp's, cannot tolerate drinking burning liquor:

The gutters of the street, and every crack and fissure in the stones, ran with scorching spirit, which being dammed up by busy hands, overflowed the road and pavement, and formed a great pool into which the people dropped down dead by dozens. They lay in heaps all round this fearful pond ... and drank until they died. While some stooped with their lips to the brink and never raised their heads again, others sprang up from their fiery draught, and danced, half in a mad triumph, and half in the agony of suffocation, until they fell, and steeped their corpses in the liquor that had killed them. Nor was even this the worst or most appalling kind of death that happened on this fatal night. From the burning cellars, where they drank out of hats, pails, buckets, tubs, and shoes, some men were drawn, alive, but all alight from head to foot; who, in their unendurable anguish and suffering, making for anything that had the look of water, rolled, hissing, in this hideous lake, and splashed up liquid fire which lapped in all it met with as it ran along the surface, and neither spared the living nor the dead (BR 618; ch. 68).

Quilp’s quaffing of boiling liquid leaves him unscathed and perhaps shows that, while the individual can conquer his or her own individual body, masses, as here, are out of control and vulnerable because not vigilant in remaining secure. They behave according to animalistic passions rather than strong fortitude and power of mind.

Another thing Dickens increasingly did as his novel-writing career progressed was to introduce characters whose occupations concern the body, more particularly the dead body.75 Jerry Cruncher, for example, another violent wife-queller like Quilp and Flintwinch, is a resurrectionist; he goes on “fishing expeditions” at night and calls in to see a distinguished surgeon after attending the funeral of “a young 'un and a straight made 'un”’ (TTC 190; 2: ch. 14). We see him through his son’s eyes on one of his expeditions and read of him sucking rust off his finger, but we are never explicitly shown either coffin or dead body; instead we are given young Jerry’s fearful race home filled with thoughts that the coffin is chasing him.76 Cruncher is redeemed in time by seeing the mass destruction of the body in Paris and decides that he will renounce resurrection.77 Mr. Venus runs a business articulating the bones of
animals and "humans warious" while Gaffer Hexam and colleagues drag the river for what they can garner from the bodies of the floating dead. Hexam dies one night out working. Although he is innocent of the murders Riderhood accuses him of, he cannot survive within Dickens's fiction because Dickens will not tolerate tampering with dead flesh, particularly for pecuniary gain. Things seen in a "bony light" are, however, a little different and the body more decomposed is somehow less decomposing to Dickens. Venus, initially an ambivalent character but one articulate in bones as Dickens is articulate in words, becomes a clearly positive party when, feeling remorseful, he acts contrary to Wegg's avaricious schemes. He is also "gentleman" enough to let Wegg "collect himself" by selling him his leg back. Wegg himself, as the next chapter discusses, is revealed more by conversation than description. Wegg, "a literary gentleman with a wooden leg," wishes to regain and maintain bodily integrity and gain financial security through reading to the Boffins; he is a character who embodies many of Dickens's anatomical concerns.

Characters are inextricably part of Dickens's physical world. In depicting their bodies on the level of Character, he is free to indulge in many aspects of bodily oddity. Deformed, "evil" characters can be punished summarily with physical damage, ignominy, or death. While children are always vulnerable, and while those whose bodies are described in great detail are at increased bodily risk, he is always careful to keep bodies like his own, those of "gentleman heroes," undescribed and therefore inviolate.
NOTES

1 On Victorian sexuality see, for example, Foucault *The History of Sexuality*; Marcus *The Other Victorians*; Pearsall, Trudgill, Gallagher and Laqueur, Walkowitz.

2 On sexuality in Dickens's works see, for example, Geoffrey Carter who argues “that there is a great deal more sadism and related perversities in Dickens than might have been supposed” (143). John Kucich in *Repression in Victorian Fiction* deals with the dilemma of the passion displayed in scenes such as the death of Nancy when contrasted with Dickens's “careful repression of desire in his heroes and heroines” (201). Arthur Brown analyzes Dickens's props from a Freudian perspective. Pamela Johnson discusses Dickens's lack of sexual content and absence of sexual “couples” arguing that this was because he was extremely aware of his “family audience.” Carey includes a chapter on “Dickens and Sex” (154-73). Fred Kaplan in *Dickens and Mesmerism* discusses the connection between mesmerism and sex and the fears and reports of the period about mesmerists forcing themselves sexually upon their patients and discusses sexual domination and submission in Dickens’s novels.

3 Nell, for example, is a “slight figure” (*OCS* 45; ch. 1) who Dick Swiveller says is a “Fine girl of her age, but small” (*OCS* 103; ch. 7). Kate Nickleby is “a slight but very beautiful girl” (*NN* 23; ch. 3). Florence Dombey has curls and is beautiful and blooming, while Agnes Wickfield has a “placid and sweet expression” (*DC* 191; ch. 15). Ada is “such a beautiful girl! With such rich golden hair, such soft blue eyes, and such a bright, innocent trusting face!” (*BH* 30; ch. 3).

4 Lucie Manette, whose physical characteristics are generally thought to be based on those of Ellen Ternan (*TTC* 479 n. 23), is given a little more description and her physical habit of knitting her “curiously roughened forehead” (*TTC* 26; 1: ch. 4) is repeatedly mentioned early in the novel.

5 Dickens does not seem to have considered Pickwick’s body unduly important. James Kinsley, editor of the Clarendon edition of the novel notes: It was Dickens himself who ‘thought of Mr. Pickwick’; Seymour’s drawing ‘made him a reality’.... We owe the embodiment of Mr. Pickwick to Edward Chapman, who wrote to Dickens on 7 July 1849: ...I may as well claim what little belongs to me in the matter, and that is the figure of Pickwick. Seymour’s first sketch was of a long, thin man. The present immortal one he made from my description of a friend of mine at Richmond, a fat old beau who would wear, in spite of the ladies’ protests, drab tights and black gaiters. His name was John Foster.

It appears that the forming of Mr. Pickwick began with Seymour’s tall thin sportsman, replaced by the design suggested by Chapman, introduced so by Dickens in tights and gaiters in chapter i, and ended in Seymour’s ‘happy portrait’ drawn ‘from the proof-sheets’ but resembling one of his own favourite types (*PP* xxiii).

James Kincaid in “Fattening Up on Pickwick” argues that *Pickwick* is filled with the erotic appeals of fat, of “cushiony flesh” that childhood loves: “The reader ... is the erotic reader gliding blissfully backwards into full childhood sexuality” (237), the novel being “a kind of porno film we can run in the head” because of all the fat flesh in it (241).
6 “His figure was somewhat slight, but manly and well-formed” describes “handsome” Nicholas Nickleby (NN 24; ch. 3). Martin Chuzzlewit is “young ... and handsome; with a keen dark eye, and a quickness of look and manner” (MC 73; ch. 5). We know very little of the adult David Copperfield or Pip. Richard Carstone is “a handsome youth, with an ingenuous face” (BH 30; ch. 3), John Westlock “a good-looking youth, newly arrived at man’s estate” (MC 19; ch. 2). John Jarndyce is accorded slightly more description, no doubt in honour of mature age; his face “was a handsome, lively, quick face, full of change and motion; and his hair was a silvered iron-grey. I took him to be nearer sixty than fifty, but he was upright, hearty, and robust” (BH 60; ch. 6). Darnay is “well-grown and well-looking, with a sunburnt cheek and a dark eye” (TTC 71; 2: ch. 2). Arthur Clennam, however, is simply “a grave dark man of forty” with a pleasant smile (LD 16; 1: ch. 2).

7 Michie argues that heroines’ bodies in Dickens “occupy the place of the unrepresented, the unspoken,” but that sickness, pain, and scarring provide “one means of textual entrance for their bodies.” Pain, she argues “focuses the reader’s gaze on the female body and on the processes that render that body in language.” Esther and Jenny Wren are special cases in that they “turn their ailments into specifically narrative power” (“Who is this in Pain?” 199-200).

8 “Dickens ... did manage to contract a very bad cold at the time he was consigning Esther Summerson to a bout of smallpox; although, curiously enough, W. H. Wills became, like Esther, temporarily blind at the time that particular episode was published” (Ackroyd 661). Dickens wrote in December 1852: “I am suddenly laid by the heels in consequence of Wills having gone blind without any notice—I hope and believe from mere temporary inflammation” (Lett.P 6: 833). In 1838 he had written to Madame Sala in July 1838 who had just suffered an “unusually violent attack of smallpox, which temporarily blinded her” (Lett.P 1: 420 n. 1).

9 Reed discusses the redemptive power of illness in Victorian fiction in Victorian Conventions:

    Martin Chuzzlewit discovers through physical illness and pride’s abasement, the utter selfishness of his early life, and acquires the virtues of “humility and steadfastness.” (ch. 33) Dick Swiveller undergoes a similar experience. Redemptive suffering in Great Expectations cleanses Pip of his selfishness and pride, opening for him a life of humility and steadfastness. In Our Mutual Friend, Dickens used the moral design in Eugene’s salubrious illness and apparently redemptive recovery, but he also treated it ironically in the unredemptive recovery of Rogue Riderhood and the mimic baptism of Wegg in his own dust cart (15).

Arthur Clennam also emerges from his illness as a better person.

10 A dining-room is described as

    so funereal as to want nothing but a body in it to be quite complete.

    No bad representation of the body, for the nonce, in his unbending form, if not in his attitude, Mr. Dombey (DS 415; ch. 30).


12 Fiedler writes: “Dickens, who remembered Belzoni from his early days with Astley’s circus, sought to emphasize the long way he had come, writing, ‘The once starving mountebank became one of the most illustrious men in Europe!’—an encouraging example to
those who have not only sound heads to project, but stout hearts to execute” (122). What Fiedler quotes was not actually written by Dickens. It appears in a HW article on Belzoni (see n. 5), but Dickens would undoubtedly have agreed with these sentiments.

13 For example, Jo, Nell, Oliver, David, Pip, and the Neckett children.

14 In literature, as in life, he was a passionate advocate of better lives for children: “‘We should be devilish sharp in what we do to children’” he wrote to Forster. “‘Shall I leave you my life in MS. when I die? There are some things in it that would touch you very much’” (in Forster 2: 29).

15 Dora and Smike’s deaths are in a sense child-like deaths because both are treated like children within the texts and by the “hero” most closely connected to them; Dora is a “child-wife” and Smike, son of a gentleman by birth, through neglect is “simple.”

16 The subjects of two of the most famous deaths in Victorian literature, Little Nell and Paul Dombey, also die slowly from disease, despite, at least in Paul’s case the best of medical treatment, and are seen as innocent victims. Paul has a constantly vulnerable body, with “a want of vital power ... and great constitutional weakness” (DS 190; ch. 14):

Every tooth was a break-neck fence, and every pimple in the measles a stone wall to him. He was down in every fit of the hooping-cough, and rolled upon and crushed by a whole field of small diseases, that came trooping on each other’s heels to prevent his getting up again. Some birds of prey got into his throat instead of the thrush; and the very chickens turning ferocious—if they have anything to do with that infant malady to which they lend their name—worried him like tiger-cats (DS 91; ch. 8).

His life begins in vulnerability when his mother dies shortly after his birth; he requires a wet nurse, just as other motherless children including Pip and Oliver are “brought up by hand.” Virginia Phillip’s article discusses the high risks of artificial feeding in the Victorian period and the moral attitude towards it which was shared by Dickens. Breast feeding by the mother was considered best, a wet nurse if must be, then worst of all artificial feeding.

17 In fact he puts his fears in “literary” terms, when, on his perilous journey by road to his aunt’s, he feels more vulnerable than ever: “I began to picture to myself, as a scrap of newspaper intelligence, my being found dead in a day or two, under some hedge” (DC 154; ch. 13).

18 Smithers comments,

Cauls were then being sold for as much as £30, a considerable sum in the middle of the nineteenth century.... The superstition of the lucky caul and its powers to prevent death by drowning was commonly held from early times.... The Times was still carrying advertisements for the sale of caul when Dickens was writing David Copperfield (54-55).

19 Pip describes Magwitch’s body in terms of fears of dismemberment and of the dead coming back to life: “he hugged his shuddering body in both his arms—clasping himself, as if to hold himself together—and limped towards the low church wall.... he looked in my young eyes as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people, stretching up cautiously out of their graves, to get a twist upon his ankle and pull him in” (GE 7; 1: ch. 1).
20 Tom Pinch looks at a shop where children's books are sold, "the rare Arabian Nights—with Cassim Baba, divided by four, like the ghost of a dreadful sum, hanging up, all gory, in the robbers' cave" (MC 71; ch. 5).

21 We are told that "the fist had been too often impressed upon [Oliver's] body not to be deeply impressed upon his recollection" (OT 7; Ch. 2), and that "there was but little inducement, beyond the powerful impulse of fear, for any pupil, provided with the usual number of legs and the power of using them, to remain [at Dotheboys]" (NN 152; ch. 13).

22 Of course Dickens is attacking the poor law in Oliver Twist and Yorkshire schoolmasters in Nicholas Nickleby, but it is the individual body, as he writes in his 1848 preface to the latter novel, that gave him impetus:

I know that my first impression of [Yorkshire schoolmasters] were picked up [when a child], and that they were somehow or other connected with a suppurated abscess that some boy had come home with, in consequence of his Yorkshire guide, philosopher, and friend having ripped it open with an inky pen-knife (NN xliii). This example, while not factually accurate, describes what Dickens perceived and how.

23 In a letter of 29 December 1838 Dickens wrote, "Depend upon it that the rascallys of those Yorkshire schoolmasters cannot easily be exaggerated, and that I have kept down the strong truth and thrown as much comicality over it as I could, rather than disgust and weary the reader with its fouler aspects" (Lett.P 1: 481 and see n. 5).

24 The Pocket baby perplexes its mother because "having been accomodated with a needle-case to keep him quiet.... more needles were missing, than it could be regarded as quite wholesome for a patient of such tender years either to apply externally or to take as a tonic" (GE 270; 2: ch. 14).

25 Three of the Pardiggle boys, strike back by pinching Esther after demanding money from her:

they all pinched me at once, and in a dreadfully expert way: screwing up such little pieces of my arms that I could hardly forbear crying out. Felix, at the same time, stamped upon my toes.... I never underwent so much, both in body and mind, in the course of a walk with young people (BH 97; ch. 8).

These Pardiggle children are striking back at being "forced" to do things regarding bodies in foreign lands, and they know that Esther will not hurt them so take this occasion to use her as an outlet. David Copperfield strikes back by biting Murdstone (who has ill-treated him both psychologically and physically) after Murdstone has initially "cut him heavily" with his cane:

I caught the hand with which he held me in my mouth, between my teeth, and bit it through. It sets my teeth on edge to think of it.

He beat me then, as if he would have beat on me to death (DC 50; ch. 4).

The result of this beating is that, although David is sent to further vulnerability at Creakle's school, he is no longer physically beaten by Murdstone whom he has literally scarred for life.

26 At Todgers's "sounds [are] occasionally heard indicative of small articles of ironmongery and hardware being thrown at the boy" (MC 143; ch. 9). This same boy, Bailey, also "receive[s] a manual compliment on the head, which sent him staggering against the wall" (MC 144; ch. 9).
27 Peepy soon falls “down a whole flight [of stairs] ... with a great noise,” which Mrs. Jellyby pays no attention to: “the dear child’s head recorded its passage with a bump on every stair—Richard afterwards said he counted seven, besides one for the landing” (*BH* 37; ch. 4). He is then taken “into the back kitchen, where somebody seemed to stifle him” (*BH* 37; ch. 4). Caddy’s brother’s and sisters “[tumble about, and [notch] memoranda of their accidents in their legs, which were perfect little calendars of distress” or they fall off the back of a barouche and are “scattered over the surface of Thavies Inn” (*BH* 57; ch. 5).

28 In life his attitude was a little more ambivalent; he expressed some relief when his crippled nephew (the original of Paul Dombey and Tiny Tim) died (*Lett.* P5: 483). Perhaps real-life deformity was too much a reminder of his own body’s vulnerability. He also refused money to Miss Biffin whose body he had often used for minor humorous remarks in his novels (e.g., *NN* 481; ch. 37; *MC* 452; ch. 28). One might have thought that for this reason alone, if not for genuine compassion for her bodily vulnerability, he might have helped her. The editors of the Pilgrim edition of Dickens’s letters provide the following information about her:

Sarah Biffin (1784-1850; *DNB*), miniature-painter; born in Liverpool, without arms or legs and only 37 inches tall, she taught herself to draw, paint and sew by using her mouth. From 1812 exhibited by her teacher, Mr Dukes; awarded a medal by the Society of Arts and kindly received by the Royal Family 1831. Later she returned to Liverpool and fell into poverty; her last years were brightened by a public subscription (*Lett.* P5: 177 n. 4).

It is a request to contribute to this subscription that Dickens refuses, declining “because of the enormous number of similar applications, of which he is in the continual receipt” (*Lett.* P5: 177).

29 Critics have often seen Quilp as a reflection of Dickens in various ways: “Quilp the dwarfish figure ... has been seen as a simulacrum of Dickens in his savage state—even down to the detail, which the author later removed in manuscript, of the dwarf taking a shower bath in true Dickensian fashion” (Ackroyd 316). Dickens makes a Quilpian comment in a letter of 26 Oct. 1847: “I have seen your pretty protegé and like her extremely.—Indeed I have some idea of booking her for the reversion of Mrs. Dickens’s place, in case of her leaving it vacant by accident” (*Lett.* P5: 176). In another he implies that he has kept Kate sitting up all night after he, but not she has attended an inquest, see *Lett.* P2: 10.

30 Jeremiah Flintwinch is, like Quilp, old, crafty, and crooked-bodied: “His head was awry, and he had a one-sided, crab-like way with him” (*LD* 33; 1: ch. 3); he also smokes like Quilp and keeps his wife in thrall with violence (he “screws” himself at her) and psychological power as he, like other deformed distasteful characters, worms his way into other people’s business affairs in order to gain power and money. Unlike many of the others, however, Flintwinch, although presumed buried under the collapsed Clennam house, has actually absconded from the country, and though Dickens has thus removed his body from fair England, it has not met the hanging that his twisted neck might have preordained: “altogether, he had a weird appearance of having hanged himself at one time or other, and of having gone about ever since halter and all, exactly as some timely hand had cut him down” (*LD* 37; 1: ch. 3).

31 Having drunk, it is the now clearly, if temporarily invulnerable Quilp who warns the departing Brass that “‘all the rusty nails are upwards’” and that “‘There’s a dog in the
"who" bitaman last night, and a woman then the night before, and last Tuesday he killed a child—but that was in play" (OCS 571; ch. 62).

32 Where "pirates had swung in chains" was "The Execution Dock, Wapping, where pirates were executed at the low-water mark and remained until three tides had flowed over them." The Duke of Clarence as Lord High Admiral ordered down the pirates' gibbets from the riverside in 1827" (OCS 717 n. 4).

33 The reason for the change in Mowcher is that Dickens had stepped beyond the bounds of fictional propriety by using the vulnerability of an original's body in creating fiction. The original of Miss Mowcher was a Mrs. Jane Seymour Hill, who was a manicurist, chiropodist, and dwarf who lived near Dickens. She had attended on Catherine, and wrote to Dickens very upset about her portrayal as Miss Mowcher. Dickens responded, apologizing for giving her distress, but denying (none too plausibly) that Mowcher was drawn very much from her: "I never represent an individual but always a combination of individuals in one." He promised, thenceforth, to use Miss Mowcher to the good: "I do not mean it to be a very good character now, but I will make it so, and oblige the Reader to hold it in a pleasant remembrance" (Lett. P 5: 675 and see 674 n. 4-5; 675 n. 1-3). In a later letter he wrote: "I am at present repairing Miss Mowcher's injury—with a very bad grace, and in a very ill humour" (Lett. P 6: 35). He may have been in ill humour at having to change the design of his "favourite child," but part of him must have realized that he had almost "Quilped" in making her feel bodily vulnerable, and that he'd mirrored her body for his own concerns. She wrote to Dickens:

If you had attacked me in the full time of health wealth and happiness I think perhaps I could have borne it with patience but now widowed in all but my good name you shew up my personal deformities with insinuations that by the purest of my sex may be construed to the worst of purposes. All know you have drawn my Portrait—I admit it but the vulgar slang of language I deny. May your Widow and Children never meet with such Blighting wit as you have poured on my miserably nervous head. Should your book be dramatised and I not protected madness will be the result.... I have suffered long and much from my personal deformities but never before at the hands of a Man so highly gifted as Charles Dickens and hitherto considered as a Christian and Friend to his fellow Creatures.

Now you have made my nights sleepless and my daily work tearfull (sic). Tell me how I have deserved your anger (Lett. P 5: 674-75 n. 5).

Forster recalls it this way:

Thinking a grotesque little oddity among his acquaintance to be safe from recognition, he had done what Smollet did sometimes, but never Fielding, and given way, in the first outburst of fun that had broken out around the fancy, to the temptation of copying too closely peculiarities of figure and face amounting in effect to deformity. He was shocked at discovering the pain he had given, and a copy is before me of the assurances by way of reply which he at once sent to the complainant (Forster 2: 99).

34 In an 1841 letter Dickens comments of Stagg: "My intention in the management of this inferior and subordinate character, was to remind the World who have eyes, that they have no right to expect in sightless men a degree of virtue and goodness to which they, in full possession of all their senses, can lay no claim" (Lett. P 2: 336). In the Old Curiosity Shop "he had decided against associating virtue with deformity in the 'good' furnace keeper, and carefully cancelled in proof all references to his being a cripple. (It was a theme he avoided until he could do it justice in Tiny Tim, 1843)" (Lett. P 2: 337 n. 2). Arthur Clennam thinks:
many people select their models, much as the painters ... select theirs; and that, whereas in the Royal Academy some evil old ruffian of a Dog-stealer will annually be found embodying all the cardinal virtues, on account of his eyelashes, or his chin, or his legs (thereby planting thorns of confusion in the breasts of the more observant students of nature), so, in the great social Exhibition, accessories are often accepted in lieu of the internal character (LD 142; 1: ch. 13).

35 Rigaud’s hands, like Jagger’s, are also frequently described: “There had been something dreadful in the noiseless skill of his cold, white hands, with the fingers lithely twisting about and twining over one another like serpents. Clennam could not prevent himself from shuddering inwardly, as if he had been looking on at a nest of those creatures” (LD 729; 2: ch. 28).

36 Alexander argues that Grandfather Smallweed was based on the poet Samuel Rogers who “In June of 1850, shortly before his eighty-seventh birthday ... was struck by a carriage. His thigh bone was shattered in the socket, and he—who had been a great walker right up through his eighties—never walked again. More, the slightest effort on his part, or nothing at all, sent him slipping down in his chair, so that he needed constant rescuing” (67). “In the spring of 1852, at the very time that he was creating Grandfather Smallweed, Dickens wrote a friend about how Samuel Rogers was transported everywhere in his armchair, “lifted in and out of his carriage, wheeled to his table, carried upstairs with him in it ... and put to bed with him I suppose” (68). Rogers’s sister Sarah “had been confined to a chair before her brother (and rendered speechless besides) by a paralytic stroke in 1848,” and Rogers was apparently not “gentle or forbearing” with his sister. “[Dickens] took for Grandfather Smallweed chiefly the contrast between Rogers’s extreme physical decay and his ferocity. Dickens was struck by that contrast” (69). “Rogers’s negative characteristics strengthened as his body weakened” (70).

37 The bodily comparison is explicitly made by Dickens between [George’s] developed figure, and their stunted forms.... As he sits in the middle of the grim parlour, leaning a little forward, with his hands upon his thighs and his elbows squared, he looks as though, if he remained there long, he would absorb into himself the whole family and the whole four-roomed house, extra little back-kitchen and all (BH 264; ch. 21).

When George is at Smallweed’s house Smallweed asks him to shake him up, almost as if daring George to try exerting his physical strength over him, and George takes his venerable acquaintance by the throat on receiving this request, and drag[s] him upright in his chair as easily as if he were a doll, appears in two minds whether or no to shake all future power of cushioning out of him, and shake him into his grave. Resisting the temptation, but agitation him violently enough to make his head roll like a harlequin’s, he puts him smartly down in his chair again (BH 267; ch. 21).

38 Pitying the boys at Dotheboys Hall, Browdie is delighted that Nicholas has thrashed Squeers, though he shows concern for Nicholas’s own injuries: “‘but wa’at be the matther wi’ thy face, mun? it be all brokenk loike’” (NN 157; ch. 13). He asks Smike, whom he takes great delight in himself rescuing from Squeers, “‘Why didn’t ’ee punch [Squeers’s] head, or lay thee’self doon and kick, and squeal out for the pollis? I’d ha’ licked a dozen such as him when I was yoong as thee.’” He then shows his pity for Smike’s genuine vulnerability and answers his own question “But thee be’est a poor broken-doone chap,’ said John, sadly, ‘and God forgi’ me for bragging ower yan o’ his weakest creeturs!” (NN 508; ch. 39). He can
even pity Fanny and Mrs. Squeers and wish to prevent bodily harm coming to them when the news of Squeers's fall gets out: "If this news aboot 'un has reached school to-day, the old 'ooman wean't have a whole boan in her boddy, nor Fanny neither" (NN 824; ch. 64). "If them as is left, should know waat's coom tiv'un, there'll be sike a revolution and rebel!—Ding! But I think they'll a' gang daft, and spill bluid like wather!" (NN 824-25; ch. 64). He, it is rumoured, helps some of the boys who are finally escaping from Dotheboys.

Lawrence Boythorn of "stalwart chest" (BH 105; ch. 9) has beaten someone who threatened Jarndyce as a boy ("our friendship began in his knocking two of my head tyrant’s teeth out (he says six) before breakfast" [BH 106; ch. 9]), and the broad-shouldered, strong-armed Tartar, Crisparkle’s old fag, who saved him from drowning ("when he was the smallest of juniors, diving for me, catching me, a big heavy senior, by the hair of my head, and striking out for the shore with me like a water-giant!" [ED 184; ch. 21]). They both show pity for anyone in bodily distress, Boythorn by throwing open his house for the convalescing Esther and Tartar by showing concern for Neville Landless’s distress and taking Rosa Budd under his wing. Jarndyce and Crisparkle, once having been bodily saved in boyhood, become more bodily aware, Crisparkle becoming a “muscular Christian” and Jarndyce sleeping in a sparse bedroom with his windows wide open throughout the year, and himself taking constructive pity on the bodily vulnerable, such as Jo.

Maggie, who when ten had a bad fever “has never grown any older ever since” (LD 99; 1: ch. 9) is first described as about eight-and-twenty, with large bones, large features, large feet and hands, large eyes, and no hair. Her large eyes were limpid and almost colorless; they seemed to be very little affected by light, and to stand unnaturally still. There was also that attentive listening expression in her face, which is seen in the faces of the blind; but she was not blind, having one tolerably serviceable eye. Her face was not exceedingly ugly, though it was only redeemed from being so by a smile; a good-humoured smile, and pleasant in itself, but rendered pitiable by being constantly there (LD 95-96; 1: ch. 9).

She says to Flintwinch “Have I suffered nothing in this room, no deprivation, no imprisonment, that I should condescend at last to contemplate myself in such a glass as that! [Rigaud]” (LD 753; 2: ch. 30).

Cuttles suffers further bodily vulnerability through wearing “such a hard glazed hat as a sympathetic person’s head might ache at the sight of, and which left a red rim round his own forehead as if he had been wearing a tight basin” (DS 44; ch. 4).

His other hand leaves upon Carker’s “smoother flesh a proof impression of the chinks and crevices with which the Captain’s palm was liberally tattoo’d” (DS 234; ch. 17).

When he is behaving at his worst, as when he tells Mary Graham of his intentions toward her, his body seems to shrivel: “he seem[s] to be shrunk and reduced; to be trying to hide himself within himself; and to be wretched at not having the power to do it. His shoes look[ed] too large; his sleeves look[ed] too long; his hair look[ed] too limp; his hat look[ed] too little; his features look[ed] too mean; his exposed throat looked as if a halter would have done it good” (MC 483; ch. 30).

Indeed that he will be damaged is typically hinted at in terms of dismemberment: “he remained old Christopher Casby ... and with that head, he now sat in his silent parlor. Indeed
it would be the height of unreason to expect him to be sitting there without that head” (*LD* 139; 1: ch. 13).

46 Descriptions of Carker focus most often on his teeth. He “grin[s] ... like a shark” (*DS* 296; ch. 22) and

bestow[s] his teeth on a great many people. In the office, in the court, in the street, and on ‘Change, they glistened and bristled to a terrible extent. Five o’clock arriving, and with it Mr. Carker’s bay horse, they get on horseback, and go gleaming up Cheapside (*DS* 300; ch. 22).

His entire anatomy becomes encompassed in his teeth as he “look[s] down upon the Captain with an eye in every tooth and gum” (*DS* 231; ch. 17). Heading to meet Edith in Dijon he is only teeth: “coming, with his gleaming teeth, through the dark rooms, like a mouth” (*DS* 721; ch. 54). His teeth represent his predatory nature and foreshadow his death, as the only visible survivors of bodily decay.

47 Like Quilp, Carker finds a boy victim, Biler, to do his bidding, and when Carker “takes” him by the throat, and shakes him until his head seem[s] loose upon his shoulders” (*DS* 296; ch. 22), Biler asks a question similar to that which Deputy asks Jasper and Tom Scott asks Quilp when each boy is in such a moment of bodily vulnerability: “why didn’t he strangle somebody of his own size and not him” (*DS* 297; ch. 22).

48 Oddly, and perhaps unrealistically, Dombey does not appear to dwell on Carker’s dismemberment though it occurred before his very eyes and though he is alone in his rooms for days on end. If he considers it then, however, Dickens appears to have no desire to investigate this quite natural, given the circumstances, mental dwelling.

49 Part of Carker’s problem is that, unlike Dickens, he cannot see things clearly enough in the mirror; he thinks, for instance, that Edith is running away with him:

There was a faint blur on the surface of the mirror in Mr. Carker’s chamber, and its reflection was, perhaps, a false one. But it showed, that night, the image of a man, who saw, in his fancy, a crowd of people slumbering on the ground at his feet, like the poor Native at his master’s door: who picked his way among them: looking down, maliciously enough: but trod upon no upturned face—as yet (*DS* 368; ch. 26).

50 Crummles’s troupe, before acting in the evening, also alter the form of their legs: “all the people were so much changed, that he scarcely knew them. False hair, false colour, false calves, false muscles—they had become different beings” (*NN* 302; ch. 24).

51 In *Pickwick* a man is described thus: “His legs, which, being long, were afflicted with weakness, graced a pair of Oxford-mixture trousers, made to show the full symmetry of the limbs” (*PP* 640; ch. 41). Toby Crackit, “a trifle above the middle size,” is also “apparently rather weak in the legs” (*OT* 141; ch. 22). Grandfather Smallweed’s legs are spindly, while Gridle wears “such scanty trousers as displayed his shrunken spindle-shanks in their full ugliness” (*NN* 610; ch. 47). Bill Sikes possesses “a very bulky pair of legs, with large swelling calves;—the kind of legs, that in such costume, always look in an unfinished and incomplete state without a set of fetters to garnish them” (*OT* 76; ch. 13). Bolter, in the same novel, is arrested because of his legs: “Bolter got into the empty water-butt, head downwards; but his legs was so precious long that they stuck out at the top, and so they took him too” (*OT* 340; ch. 50). Mr. Bumble “take[s] a view of his legs in profile, with much seeming pleasure and interest” (*OT* 174; ch. 27),
V. R. and A. W. F. list a number of examples. V. R. writes in “A Few Words More on ‘Pickwick,’” for instance: “In particular, [Dickens] has a fondness for the wooden leg, which becomes for him, as the novels proceed, an unconscious obsession, and apparently began early” (386). Edward Forse reminds us that “it must be remembered how common—and popular!—were wooden legs in early Victorian days” (427).

I am indebted to John Harvey for bringing to my attention a story called “The Leg” which as he pointed out, was published in Bentley’s Miscellany 3 (1838): 480-84 when Dickens was sole editor and which brings wooden legs and marriage together. Ostensibly “A Tale from the German,” the story is anonymous at a time when much of the fiction in Bentley’s was credited with an author or at least connected with “the author of x or y,” which leaves open the possibility that Dickens may have had some involvement in it. The story concerns a young handsome Englishman who demands that a surgeon in France amputate his perfectly healthy leg because he wishes to woo a woman who herself has a wooden leg. Eventually he wins her and enjoys early married bliss in his own wooden-legged state. Some years later, however, meeting the surgeon again he admits that the surgeon was right in telling him he would regret the loss of his limb and that it was foolish of him to have demanded it be cut off for now he deeply regrets it.

Dickens uses an unusual image in describing tourists in Rome: “Everybody was walking about St. Peter’s and the Vatican on somebody else’s cork legs, and straining every visible object through somebody else’s sieve” (LD 498; 2: ch. 7). Forse points out that cork legs were not made of cork but were best quality wooden legs made in Cork Street, London (427).

“When Stone asked [Dickens] which of Silas Wegg’s legs was wooden ... he did not know, ‘I do not think I had identified the leg.... It’s all right—please yourself’” (Ackroyd 942).

Mr. Creakle, a fellow child-controller, slashes boys to overcome his weakness of voice; he “sp[eaks] in a whisper. The exertion this cost[s] him, or the consciousness of talking in that feeble way, ma[kes] his angry face so much more angry, and his thick veins so much thicker, when he sp[eaks]” (DC 70; ch. 6).

She is almost a Dickens in reverse: “Miss Squeers, looking in her own little glass, where, like most of us, she saw—not herself but the reflection of some pleasant image in her own brain” (NN 135; ch. 12).

On Nicholas’s asking to be a Godfather when the first need arrives, Browdie almost doesn’t live to see such a day:

He chuckled, roared, half-suffocated himself by laughing large pieces of beef into his windpipe, roared again, persisted in eating at the same time, got red in the face and black in the forehead, coughed, cried, got better, went off again laughing inwardly, got worse, choked, had his back thumped, stamped about (NN 543; ch. 42).

Something Dickens also did.

Brain writes that

the Honourable Mrs. Skewton ... evidently suffer[s] from cerebral arteriosclerosis, and [Dickens’s] account of her illness is remarkable not only for the accuracy of his description of individual symptoms but even more, perhaps, for the skill with which he
conveys the relentless progress of the disease, with insidious onset and catastrophic exacerbations ("Diagnoses" 126). Besides giving an accurate picture of the course of cerebral arteriosclerosis Dickens shows that he knows that loss of speech is associated with paralysis of the right side of the body, and that in such cases there may also be agraphia. The closeness of his observation is shown by the accuracy of his description of the agraphic patient’s attempts to write, and by the amalgamated words "Grangeby" and "Domber" which he puts into Mrs. Skewton’s mouth ("Diagnoses" 128).

An unsigned obituary notice “Charles Dickens” (BMJ 18 June 1870, i, 636), runs: ‘none, except medical men, can judge of the rare fidelity with which he followed the great Mother [Nature] through the devious paths of disease and death. In reading Oliver Twist and Dombey and Son, or The Chimes, or even No Thoroughfare, the physician often felt tempted to say, ‘What a gain it would have been to physic if one so keen to observe and so facile to describe had devoted his powers to the medical art.’ It must not be forgotten that his description of Hectic (in Oliver Twist) has found its way into more than one standard work, in both medicine and surgery (Miller’s Principles of Surgery, second edition, p. 46; also, Dr Aitken’s Practice of Medicine, third edition, vol. i, p. III; also several American and French books); that he anticipated the clinical researches of M. Dax, Broca, and Hughlings Jackson, on the connection of right hemiplegia with aphasia (vide Dombey and Son, for the last illness of Mrs. Skewton); and that his descriptions of epilepsy in Walter Wilding, and of moral and mental insanity in characters too numerous to mention, show the hand of a master.... his sympathies were never absent from the sick and suffering of every age’ (in Collins, Critical Heritage 514).

When [Dickens] lived, the visible effects of disease were much more obvious than they are to-day. This is partly because the progress of medicine has fortunately eliminated many of its grosser manifestations, and partly because in Dickens’s day there were few facilities for the segregation of people seriously afflicted in body or mind. What is surprising, however, is that he should have given such detailed and accurate descriptions of the disorders from which his characters suffered [ed]. He was not content with vague diagnoses like brain fever, which figure in the works of some of his contemporaries, and even those who wrote later. Dickens looked on disease with the observing eye of the expert clinician, and he recorded what he saw, and what the patient told him, so that he often gives us accounts which would do credit to a trained physician (Brain, “Diagnoses” 123-24).

Brain writes that “at a time when medicine itself was only just beginning to recognize the importance of physical signs, the characters in the world of Dickens’s imagination are so real that they have recognizable diseases of body and mind, described with the accuracy and insight of a great clinical observer” (“Diagnoses” 136).

The “unctuous” fat and red-faced boy in Pickwick who eats almost cannibalistically and constantly falls asleep only to be woken by physical pain—“Be good enough to pinch him, Sir—in the leg, if you please; nothing else wakes him—thank you” (PP 62; ch. 4)—represented connections between sleep apnia and obesity which had not been medically linked before, in honour of which observation the disorder from which he suffers is now known as “Pickwickian Syndrome.” A medical curiosity extra-textually, within the novel his employer, Mr. Wardle also recognizes his value as an oddity, however inefficient he might be as a servant, and will not part with him: “damme, he’s a natural curiosity!” (PP 65; ch. 4).
first described in 1936 merely as a cardiorespiratory syndrome. 20 years later, [when] a group of internists noted somnolence as part of the syndrome, the image of the sleepy gluttonous red-faced fat boy of Dickens’ *Pickwick Papers* ... proved irresistible and the internists of record ... suggested “Pickwickian” as a substitute for the several names previously used. The term was quite obviously provocative but received only tentative acceptance until a number of pediatricians discovered the syndrome in children. At this point its identification with Dickens’ fat boy became complete and its acceptance no longer tentative (London 450).

62 Dickens describes tuberculosis in *Nicholas Nickleby*:
There is a dread disease which so prepares its victim, as it were, for death; which so refines it of its grosser aspect, and throws around familiar looks, unearthly indications of the coming change; a dread disease, in which the struggle between soul and body is so gradual, quiet, and solemn, and the result so sure, that day by day, and grain by grain, the mortal part wastes and withers away, so that the spirit grows light and sanguine with its lightening load, and, feeling immortality at hand, deems it but a new term of mortal life; a disease in which death and life are so strangely blended, that death takes the glow and hue of life, and life the gaunt and grisly form of death; a disease which medicine never cured, wealth never warded off, or poverty could boast exemption from; which sometimes moves in giant strides, and sometimes at a tardy sluggish pace, but, slow or quick, is ever sure and certain (*NN* 637-38; ch. 49).

63 His illness is described:
Smike bec[omes] alarmingly ill; so reduced and exhausted that he c[an] scarcely move from room to room without assistance, so worn and emaciated, that it [is] painful to look upon him. Nicholas [is] warned ... that the last chance and hope of his life depend[s] on his being instantly removed from London.... this advice [is] cautiously coupled with the information that whoever accompanied him thither, must be prepared for the worst; for every token of rapid consumption had appeared, and he might never return alive (*NN* 731-32; ch. 55).

Smike never does return alive:
There was little pain, little uneasiness, but there was no railing, no effort, no struggle for life, He was worn and wasted to the last degree; his voice had sunk so low, that he could scarce be heard to speak; Nature was thoroughly exhausted, and he had lain him down to die (*NN* 762; ch. 58).

64 Travelling through a manufacturing town Nell feels “Much weaker, diminished powers even of sight and hearing.... She felt a ... dull conviction that she was very ill, perhaps dying; but no fear or anxiety” (*OCS* 426; ch. 45). She becomes “exhausted, though with little fatigue” as her illness encroaches (*OCS* 507; ch. 55).

65 In *Illness as Metaphor*.

66 Dickens writes of Madeline Bray’s illness something that might well apply to his own health:
When the delicate physical powers which have been sustained by an unnatural strain upon the mental energies and a resolute determination not to yield, at last give way, their degree of prostration is usually proportionate to the strength of the effort which
has previously upheld them. Thus it was that the illness which fell on Madeline was of no slight or temporary nature (NN 723; ch. 55).

A similar awareness is shown in The Old Curiosity Shop in which the sick scholar whom Nell watches dying is, although a minor character, perhaps an interesting one for Dickens in that the boy’s Grandmother is convinced he is dying because of all his learning: “This is what his learning has brought him to” (OCS 259; ch. 25). This may be a very slight admission that Dickens realized exhaustion caused by intensive mental activity could damage the body.

67 Pip writes:

my sister lay very ill in bed. Her sight was disturbed, so that she saw objects multiplied, and grasped at visionary teacups and wine-glasses instead of the realities; her hearing was greatly impaired; her memory also; and her speech was unintelligible. When, at last, she came round so far as to be helped down stairs, it was still necessary to keep my slate always by her, that she might indicate in writing what she could not indicate in speech (GE 121; 1: ch. 16).

“However, her temper was greatly improved, and she was patient” (GE 122; 1: ch. 16).

68 One of the descriptive headings Dickens added to this chapter in 1867 after he did have gout was “Infallible Prescription for the Gout” (PP 891; appendix C).

69 Interestingly, unlike Dickens, Sir Leicester Dedlock survives after his collapse into “stertorous breathing.”

70 Or in Merdle’s case of suicide:

There was a bath in that corner, from which the water had been hastily drained off. Lying in it, as in a grave or sarcophagus, with a hurried drapery of sheet and blanket thrown across it, was the body of a heavily-made man, with an obtuse head, and coarse, mean, common features. A skylight had been opened, to release the steam with which the room had been filled; but, it hung, condensed into water-drops, heavily upon the walls, and heavily upon the face and figure in the bath. The room was still hot, and the marble of the bath still warm; but, the face and figure were clammy to the touch. The white marble at the bottom of the bath was veined with a dreadful red. On the ledge at the side were an empty laudanum-bottle and a tortoise-shell handled penknife—soiled, but not with ink.

‘Separation of jugular vein—death rapid—been dead at least half an hour.’ This echo of the physician’s words ran through the passages and little rooms, and through the house, while he was yet straightening himself from having bent down to reach to the bottom of the bath, and while he was yet dabbling his hands in water; redly veining it as the marble was veined, before it mingled into one tint (LD 687; 2: ch. 25).

71 A “case occurs in Marryat’s Jacob Faithful (Ch. 1); and in Gogol’s Dead Souls (I, Ch. 3)” and De Quincey wrote of how the thought of it scared him (R. McMaster 45).

72 See on combustion Perkins, Haight, Blount, Denman, Gaskell. Haight recounts that George Henry Lewes attacked Dickens’s use of it “In his ‘Literature’ column [in the Leader], as overstepping the limits of fiction and giving currency to a vulgar error” (53-54). Haight indicates that Dickens’s response was to cite authorities at the beginning of chapter 33, the inquest. Lewes responded by examining Dickens’s authorities and citing his own authorities as well as by corresponding privately with Dickens on the matter. Lewes summed
up the subject without mentioning *Bleak House* in "Spontaneous Combustion," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 89 (Apr. 1861): 385-402 (Haight 63 n.1).

Rowland McMaster suggests an article in the *Terrific Register* (ii: 340) concerning an alcoholic who died by spontaneous combustion may well have provided inspiration for the death of Krook and quotes from it:

>'At the distance of about four feet from the bed was a heap of ashes, in which could be distinguished the legs and arms untouched.... The furniture and tapestry were covered with a moist kind of soot of the colour of ashes, which had penetrated into the drawers, and dirtied the linen. This soot having been conveyed to a neighbouring kitchen, adhered to the walls and utensils. A piece of bread in the cupboard was covered with it, and no dog would touch it. The infectious odour had been communicated to other apartments' (in McMaster 42-43).

On 8 Feb. 1853 Dickens wrote to Elliotson:

I am very truly obliged to you for the loan of your remarkable and learned lecture on Spontaneous Combustion; and I am not a little pleased to find myself fortified by such high authority. Before writing that chapter of Bleak House, I had looked up all the more famous cases you quote (as I dare say you divined in reading the description); but three or four of those you incidentally mention—two of them in 1820—are new to me. And your explanation is so beautifully clear, that I could particularly desire to refer to it several times before I come to the last No. and the Preface.... It is inconceivable to me how people can reject such evidence, supported by so much familiar knowledge, and such reasonable analogy (Lett.P 7: 22-23).

One wonders whether a part influence for Krook might be traced to John Poole, a dramatist and miscellaneous writer Dickens knew, who suffered from nervous shaking: "Poole is staggering about like a bad automaton" (Lett.P 6: 119). Although Krook does not shake, a letter Dickens wrote in 1850 to the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, seeking a literary pension for Poole is interesting: "For three years, I have been in the constant expectation of receiving a letter from the Portress of the house, to say that his ashes, and those of his wood fire—both of a very shrunken description—had been found lying together on the hearth" (Lett.P 6: 240). Years later in 1869 (when Poole, who perhaps to Dickens’s amazement and irritation, was still alive), and naturally after *Bleak House*, Dickens wrote “I went to see old Poole yesterday.... He was so dirty, smelt so ill, and scratched himself so horribly, that he turned my stomach.... N.B. I have scratched myself ever since, and am doing so now" (Lett.N 3: 715).

73 Although Krook is an alcoholic, and the authorities Dickens cites on spontaneous combustion link the occurrence with alcohol, not much is made of this link; Dickens simply has Krook combust.

74 Wallinss suggests that critics have too readily accepted spontaneous combustion as the explanation for Krook’s death and argues that Krook’s death can be seen as “the process of bodily decomposition, but immeasurably speeded up” (69), and that given the centrality of the graveyard in *Bleak House* and what emanates from it, decomposition is therefore a realistic element of the social criticism of the novel.

75 There are, of course, throughout Dickens’s novels, a number of physicians and some nurses, such as Mrs. Gamp, most of whom do not reflect well on the medical profession or on standards of care, but some, like Woodcourt , are positive models.
Young Jerry’s experience reflects well the terrors of childhood that Dickens never forgot and literalizes imaginative fears:

By slow degrees the weight broke away the earth upon it, and came to the surface. Young Jerry very well knew what it would be; but, when he saw it, and saw his honoured parent about to wrench it open, he was so frightened, being new to the sight, that he made off again.... He had a strong idea that the coffin he had seen was running after him; and, pictured as hopping on behind him, bolt upright, upon its narrow end, always on the point of overtaking him and hopping on at his side—perhaps taking his arm—it was pursuer to shun.... It hid in doorways too, rubbing its horrible shoulders against doors, and drawing them up to its ears, as if it were laughing. It got into shadows on the road, and lay cunningly on its back to trip him up. All this time it was incessantly hopping on behind and gaining on him, so that when the boy got to his own door he had reasons for being half dead. And even then it would not leave him, but followed him up-stairs with a bump on every stair, scrambled into bed with him, and bumped down, dead and heavy, on his breast when he fell asleep (TTC 194-95; 2: ch. 14).

When Cruncher starts to reveal himself to Lorry, Dickens uses an image interesting in light of Jerry’s selling dead bodies for dissection: “Mr. Lorry looked at Jerry in considerable doubt and mistrust. That honest tradesman’s manner of receiving the look, did not inspire confidence; he changed the leg on which he rested, as often as if he had fifty of those limbs, and were trying them all” (TTC 378; 3: ch. 9).
CHAPTER FOUR: SPEAKING OF THE BODY

'She calls me cruel—me—me—who for her sake will become a demd, damp, moist, unpleasant body!' (*NN* 430; ch. 34).

after a great quantity of tears and talking, and several attempts on the part of Mr. Mantalini to reach the door, preparatory to straightway committing violence upon himself, that gentleman was prevailed upon, with difficulty, to promise that he wouldn’t be a body (*NN* 431; ch. 34).

When Dickens turns from depicting his characters’ bodies to creating their dialogue, he at once allows a broader and more extreme range of anatomical peril to enter his work, and he expresses his bodily obsessions in language as multifarious, graphic, and idiosyncratic as any his characters could devise. Two overriding techniques that Dickens employs on the level of Conversation are the use of accents or dialects, particularly lower-class ones, and the use of humour, both of which “exaggerate” communication and make it distinctively Dickensian. Accents varied and curious intrigue readers and individualize characters who speak in anatomical language whether ridiculous or horrific. Humour involves the reader emotionally in the text and shields both Dickens and his readers from the many potentially horrific encounters with the body in his art. Most importantly Dickens here begins to play on the double metaphorical and literal senses of his references to the body in order to create comedy—a practice which will become, on the level of Expression, increasingly and subversively pervasive. The body on this level as on the level of Expression is more vulnerable to dismemberment and damage than to disease.¹ It is in conversation that language, rather than narrative, begins to dismember the body which is a move from the comparative safety of the level of Character towards the insidious pregnability of the level of Expression.

Bearing in mind the two umbrella techniques of accent and humour, this chapter examines consecutively three common forms of dialogue—the hypothetical, the anecdotal,
and the professional, i.e. that conducted by “experts” in some body-associated field such as medicine—which Dickens uses to express the vulnerabilities of the flesh. The most common of these methods is the use of hypothetical statements both comic and serious about the body. These range from bodily oaths and threats of damage to death wishes either suicidal or directed at other characters. These “hypotheticals” can be extreme because what they speak of is unlikely to happen. Anatomical anecdotes, discussed second, are usually comic and range from personal incidents to urban legends. Anecdotes are hearsay evidence and thus unverifiable. The more outrageous or ridiculous an anecdote is, the more likely it is to be at third or fourth hand. Putting physical vulnerabilities into the mouths of “bodily experts” is Dickens’s third main technique. Such speakers have specific physical knowledge; therefore what they say of the body is irrefutable however disreputable these experts are professionally.

After discussing these three methods of speaking, this chapter will conclude by examining changes in Dickens’s conversational use of the body. It will be shown that, as Dickens’s novels progress from the early “comic” novels to the later “darker” works, what characters say about the body also tends to “darken” or become more “realistic,” though not necessarily always un-comic. Such dialogue also becomes more directly related to the speaker’s own body. Silas Wegg’s asking for his leg back is, for example, humorous, and still involves play on metaphorical and literal meanings, but it is rooted in a much more realistic situation, of personal concern to the character speaking, than an early statement such as Sam Weller’s simply saying “‘There; now we look compact and comfortable, as the father said ven he cut his little boy’s head off, to cure him o’ squintin’’” (PP 419; ch. 28). Dickens’s later novels also reveal an increasing use of conversational rumours about the body.

Hypothetical bodily dialogue is common in Dickens’s work, and is usually marked by an “if” in the sentence: if x happens then y will occur, y being some form of severe bodily damage or dismemberment. These physical hazards, being hypothetical, are unlikely actually
to occur and reflect characters' exaggerated thoughts and fears about the body. Hypothetical statements include threats both comic and serious, oaths and exaggerations, and the use of a range of bodily perils as a means of expressing the emotions of characters. The play between literal and metaphorical meanings of bodily language adds humour or at times extra threatening emphasis to the conversation of Dickens's citizens and enables Dickens himself to create images that are at the same time ridiculous and fundamentally frightening.

Death and threats of killing or suicide are common sources of speculation and oath among Dickensian characters and provide moments of either high humour or serious intent. One of Dickens's most significant and humorous suicide threats is an extended "hypothetical" involving a play on the word "body." A body can, of course, be either a frame of vital, tactile, living stuff, or a cold, rigid, lifeless cadaver. Because of this double meaning Mr. Mantalini, paramount among comic suicide threateners in Dickens, is made ridiculous when he insists that he will "become ... a body."

Mantalini, who has married on the merits of his body, or at least of his whiskers, uses suicide threats to gain forgiveness and pecuniary benefits from his wife. He has no intention of killing himself but uses an inflated sense of his own bodily vulnerability to appeal for money in order to support his profligate habits. Mantalini repeatedly threatens to do away with himself; he is discovered, for example, by Madame Mantalini and Kate Nickleby in typical throes,

with his shirt-collar symmetrically thrown back: putting a fine edge to a breakfast knife by means of his razor strop.

'Ah!' cried Mr. Mantalini, 'Interrupted!' and whisk went the breakfast knife into Mr. Mantalini's dressing-gown pocket, while Mr. Mantalini's eyes rolled wildly, and his hair floating in wild disorder, mingled with his whiskers.... At the crisis of his ravings Mr. Mantalini made a pluck at the breakfast knife, and being restrained by his wife's grasp, attempted to dash his head against the wall—taking very good care to be at least six feet from it.... Mr. Mantalini did not think proper to come to, all at once; but, after calling several times for poison, and requesting some lady or gentleman to blow his brains out, gentler feelings came upon him, and he wept pathetically. In this softened frame of mind he did not oppose the capture of the knife—which, to tell the truth, he was rather glad to be rid of, as an inconvenient and dangerous article for a skirt pocket (NN 262-63; ch. 21).
His visit to Ralph Nickleby in an attempt to raise more money is interrupted by his wife, giving rise to marvellous bodily conversation when she says that she has decided to put him on an allowance. Mantalini tries to placate his wife by praising her body: "'There is the graceful outline of her form; it cannot be mistaken—there is nothing like it. The two countesses had no outlines at all, and the dowager’s was a demd outline'" (NN 430; ch. 34). When this is not effective he realizes that he must turn to his one infallible ally—the vulnerability of his own physical form—which he here pathetically links with his fiscal insecurity by promising that small change will be the death of him:

'I am a demd villain!' cried Mr. Mantalini, smiting himself on the head. 'I will fill my pockets with change for a sovereign in halfpence and drown myself in the Thames; but I will not be angry with her, even then, for I will put a note in the twopenny post as I go along, to tell her where the body is. She will be a lovely widow. I shall be a body' (NN 430; ch. 34).

This picture brings his wife to tears, and, quickly perceiving the power of "'I shall be a body,'" he repeats these words, saying that "'for her sake [he] will become a demd, damp, moist, unpleasant body!'" (NN 430; ch. 34). Knowing that intellectual arguments are hopeless in getting him the money and easy life he wants, he decides to "be a body," in the sense of an organism that will "live or die" ostensibly on the good opinion of Madame Mantalini and on her financial goodwill. He plays further on his body’s vulnerability by describing the pain it has gone through in loving her:

'Can I live to be mistrusted?' cried her husband. 'Have I cut my heart into a demd extraordinary number of little pieces, and given them all away, one after another, to the same little engrossing demnition captuator, and can I live to be suspected by her! Demmit, no I can’t' (NN 430; ch. 34).

He returns to his most effective and ridiculous phrase to ensure that, at least for a while longer, he is not put on an allowance: "'I don’t want any sum,’ replied her disconsolate husband; ‘I shall require no dem’d allowance. I will be a body’" (NN 431; ch. 34). He is eventually, after much persuasion and placation, "prevailed upon ... to promise that he wouldn’t be a body" (NN 431; ch. 34). Dickens plays humorously here on the triple meaning of "body," referring to what is, and what encases, the living person, as well as to the corpse.
it threatens to become. Persuading Mr. Mantalini not to “be a body” is, of course, impossible; he stands there as a body in the first place, and in the second place he never intended to become “a body” in any other sense.

Later on, after a few more attempts on his life, Mantalini starts to feel the impact of being a body. As he “poisons” himself: “a little bottle in his right hand, and a little tea-spoon in his left, and his hands, arms, legs, and shoulders ... all stiff and powerless,” his wife no longer weeps over him but scolds (NN 577; ch. 44). His head is supported by a footman, who on the entrance of Ralph Nickleby, “drop[s it] upon the floor with a pretty loud crash, and then, without an effort to lift it up, gaze[s] upon the bystanders, as if he had done something rather clever than otherwise” (NN 578; ch. 44). This is the sign to by-standers and readers that Mantalini is to reap the bodily consequences of the seeds he has so delightedly sown. His wife separates from him, and Mantalini is left again to live upon his whiskers. He ends, after a spell in prison, turning a mangle under the direction of the next woman he charms who is not herself averse to making him feel physically vulnerable through threats and deeds of physical violence; we last see him kicking furiously under a counterpane and having his head “extinguished” by a “pretty heavy clothes-basket” which his latest love has flung at him (NN 822; ch. 64).

Suicide threats are nearly always comically presented in Dickens’s novels. There are of course those such as Merdle or Ralph Nickleby who do commit suicide, and those like Martha and Nancy who realistically think it will be their fate, but these all follow the traditional Victorian stereotypes, comically alluded to in Oliver Twist by a pedlar selling an invaluable stain remover: “If a lady stains her honour, she has only need to swallow one cake and she’s cured at once—for it’s poison. If a gentleman wants to prove his, he has only need to bolt one little square, and he has put it beyond question” (OT 325; ch. 48). Those who commit suicide in Dickens’s novels do not talk about it, or as in Jonas Chuzzlewit’s case do not talk about it directly, and mislead as to their methods of performance.
The following clutch of examples reveals the comic effect produced by most suicide "hypotheticals" in Dickens's works. Biler says, for instance, "'I wonder ... that I haven't been and drowned myself over and over again'" (DS 298; ch. 22). Mr. Chuckster threatens, "'if I hadn't more of these qualities that commonly endear man to man, than our articled clerk has, I'd steal a Cheshire cheese, tie it round my neck, and drown myself. I'd die degraded, as I had lived. I would upon my honour'" (OCS 515; ch. 56). Miggs declares that "'if she could only have good security for a fair, round number—say ten thousand—of young virgins following her example, she would, to spite mankind, hang, drown, stab, or poison herself, with a joy past all expression'" (BR 103; ch. 7). Mr Weller gives his son more specific advice as to method: 6

'If ever you gets to up'ards o' fifty, and feels disposed to go a marryin' anybody—no matter who—jist you shut yourself up in your own room, if you've got one, and pison yourself off hand. Hangin's vulgar, so don't you have nothin' to say to that. Pison yourself, Samivel my boy, pison yourself, and you'll be glad on it arterwards' (PP 345; ch. 23). 7

Threats range from the highly ridiculous death by Cheshire cheese to other types of exaggeration. Miss Mowcher, for example, hyperbolically threatens: "'If either of you saw my ankles ... say so, and I'll go home and destroy myself'" (DC 281; ch. 22). 8 One of Mrs. Quilp's friends develops a reckless "plan" of revenge suicide: "'before I'd consent to stand in awe of a man as [Mrs. Quilp] does of [Quilp], I'd—I'd kill myself, and write a letter first to say he did it!'" (OCS 76; ch. 4). 9 All of these hypothetical self-destructions allow Dickens to indulge in expressing the body's vulnerability not just to the hands of another or of an author, but to what is most fundamental—to one's self. The body is revealed as insecure not merely from without but, in an extremely comical manner, because intensely disconcerting, from within.

Hypothetically killing other people is just as much a source of verbally pleasurable threatening as suicide is, but, because not quite so "close" to a speaker, these statements do not have to be, like suicide threats, expressed solely comically. The Pickwick Papers and
Oliver Twist demonstrate the stark differences between humorous death threats or “hypotheticals” and serious ones. Generally in Dickens’s novels it is the comic sense of death that prevails, because in large part that is a safer way to deal with the fear of death, but Oliver Twist contains more serious death-threat content because of the criminal world that is realistic enough to carry out its threats.

In The Pickwick Papers, humour is widespread: “‘No living boy shall carry me upstairs,’ sa[y]s Mr. Pickwick, stoutly” (PP 117; ch. 8); “‘You mustn’t handle your piece in that ’ere way ... ‘or I’m damned if you won’t make cold meat of some on us’” a gamekeeper admonishes Mr. Winkle (PP 271; ch. 19). When the gamekeeper insinuates that Winkle’s gun will kill something of its own accord “‘afore long,’” Winkle angrily demands to know what the man means: “‘Never mind, Sir—never mind,’ replie[s] the long gamekeeper;—‘I’ve no family myself, Sir; and this here boy’s mother will get something handsome from Sir Geoffrey, if he’s killed on his land. Load again, Sir—load again’” (PP 275; ch. 19). Dickens again plays on the semantic permutations of “body” when Sam Weller comments on habeas corpus by literalizing and transforming “body” (corpus) into “corpse”: “‘I wish they’d bring out the have-his-carcase.... I’d ha’ got half a dozen have-his-carcases ready, pack’d up and all, by this time’” (PP 624; ch. 40).

Because Pickwick is largely humorous does not mean that it is totally so, just as the reverse is true of a less comic work such as Oliver Twist. In the former novel, within a few pages of each other, Dickens gives a pathetic and a comic account of the road to death in prison, the first by the Chancery prisoner:

‘If I lay dead at the bottom of the deepest mine in the world, tight screwed down and soldered in my coffin, rotting in the dark and filthy ditch that drags its slime along beneath the foundations of this prison, I could not be more forgotten or unheeded than I am here. I am a dead man—dead to society’ (PP 653; ch. 42).

The second is by Alfred Jingle, out of work actor and money-seeking charlatan, whose body has been brought low as punishment within the Dickensian system of bodily justice:
Jingle here takes staccato, narratorial control over his own hypothetical death, which means that he will not actually die because, like Dickens, he can control his death as he has controlled his life, through words. The Chancery prisoner, however, who is destined to die in the Dickensian world for thematic reasons, does not ward off his own death by seizing narrative control; his narrative speaks only of death in a hypothetical sense, not grasping the actual fact of death, as Jingle’s does.

In *Oliver Twist*, the pathos of Oliver’s condition and the harsh worlds of workhouse, undertaker’s shop, and criminal vice through which he is buffeted mean that most bodily threats or “hypotheticals” are more serious and more possible, particularly those concerned with death. Oliver escapes being apprenticed to a cruel sweep by begging “that they would starve him—beat him—kill him if they pleased—rather than send him away with that dreadful man” (*OT* 18; ch. 3). The result of this is that he is returned to the workhouse where he is told that his future lies not only in being “hung, but that he would be drawn and quartered into the bargain” (*OT* 19; ch. 3). When Oliver enters the criminal world, this threat of being hanged has in reality increased, but is spoken of less or with wry humour; instead, Bill Sikes threatens to shoot him: “‘if you speak a word when you’re out o’doors with me, except when I speak to you, that loading will be in your head without notice’” (*OT* 133; ch. 20); at another point he says “‘get up, or I’ll strew your brains upon the grass’” (*OT* 143; ch. 22). Toby Crackit backs Sikes up by threatening to kill Oliver himself “‘with a crack on the head. That makes no noise; and is quite as certain, and more genteel!’” (*OT* 143; ch. 22). Monks similarly hypothesizes upon Oliver’s death: “‘If you buried him fifty feet deep, and took me across his grave, I should know, if there wasn’t a mark above it, that he lay buried there. I should!’” (*OT* 228; ch. 34).
Serious hypothetical death threats do recur throughout Dickens’s fiction, for example Sampson Brass thinks quite rightly of Quilp: “I don’t believe he’d mind throttling me, and dropping me softly into the river when the tide was at its strongest, any more than he’d mind killing a rat—indeed I don’t know whether he wouldn’t consider it a pleasant joke” (OCS 563; ch. 62). In Barnaby Rudge the dangers of the roads and the riots make carrying out hypothetical bodily threats powerfully possible as are threats to such as Lord George Gordon: “I desire [the crowd] to hear this, from me—Colonel Gordon—your near relation. If a man among this crowd, whose uproar strikes us deaf, crosses the threshold of the House of Commons, I swear to run my sword that moment—not into his, but into your body!” (BR 457; ch. 49). A Tale of Two Cities carries similarly realistic hypotheticals. A man tells Jerry during Darnay’s first trial that “he’ll be drawn on a hurdle to be half hanged, and then he’ll be taken down and sliced before his own face, and then his inside will be taken out and burnt while he looks on, and then his head will be chopped off, and he’ll be cut into quarters. That’s the sentence” (TTC 70; 2: ch. 2).

It is generally comic threats, however, that carry the day: Mrs Kenwigs, full of motherly feeling, exclaims of her children “oh! they’re too beautiful to live, much too beautiful!” causing the said children to set up “a hideous cry,” alarmed at this “presentiment of their being doomed to an early death in the flower of their infancy” (NN 167; ch. 14). Rob the Grinder says to Carker “And if you ever find me out, Sir, doing anything against your wishes, I give you leave to kill me” (DS 565; ch. 42). The “youngest gentleman in company” tells Mrs. Todgers that he cares not a jot for Jinkins and would “think no more of admitting daylight into the fellow ... than if he was a bull-dog” (MC 167; ch. 10), while John Willet demands to know of Solomon Pell why he looks so terrified: “Tell us what’s the matter, sir ... or I’ll kill you. Tell us what’s the matter, sir, or in another second I’ll have your head under the biler. How dare you look like that?” (BR 320; ch. 33).

Death is not the only damage the body hypothetically undergoes in the speech of Dickens’s characters, and a number of characters indulge in exaggerative oaths or comments
that reveal many types of bodily vulnerability. Lawrence Boythorn, for example, to whom people are drawn by "the very fury of his superlatives, which seem[ed] to go off like blank cannons and hurt nothing" (BH 107; ch. 9) is full of threatening oaths. Physically capable of carrying them out, he is good at heart, and unlikely ever to do so. His threats are comic because they are so exaggerated. A fellow who has given him wrong directions should be "shot without the least remorse!" (BH 106; ch. 9); he would "infinitely rather destroy [him]self—infinitely rather!" than keep any lady of the house up waiting for his arrival (BH 107; ch. 9). He advises Jarndyce "if I were in your place, I would seize every Master in Chancery by the throat to-morrow morning, and shake him until his money rolled out of his pockets, and his bones rattled in his skin" (BH 108; ch. 9). Of his dispute with Sir Leceister Dedlock he vows "he should not shut up my path if he were fifty baronets melted into one, and living in a hundred Chesney Wolds" (BH 109; ch. 9). Even the occasional fulfilment of some threats in this regard is hardly severe:

'The fellow sends a most abandoned villain with one eye, to construct a gateway. I play upon that execrable scoundrel with a fire-engine, until the breath is nearly driven out of his body.... He sends his myrmidons to come over the fence, and pass and repass. I catch them in humane man traps, fire split peas at their legs, play upon them with the engine—resolve to free mankind from the insupportable burden of the existence of those lurking ruffians.... He brings actions for assault and battery; I defend them, and continue to assault and batter' (BH 109; ch. 9).

Injuring someone with a pea-shooter is not what we normally expect of "assault and battery," but Boythorn is inexorable. When Richard decides to become a surgeon, he expresses his belief that it is a noble profession but that "the treatment of Surgeons aboard ship is such, that I would submit the legs—both legs—of every member of the Admiralty Board to a compound fracture, and render it a transportable offence in any qualified practitioner to set them, if the system were not wholly changed in eight-and-forty hours!" (BH 152; ch. 13). Boythorn's threats may be comically excessive but through them Dickens can express various irritations that a "gentleman," as opposed to a lower class character, can legitimately feel.
Comic exaggeration or understatement is a way in which Dickens can create extraordinary images by the conjunction of extremes. Mr Gunter, for instance, formally warns "'I'm afraid I shall be under the necessity of alarming the neighbours by throwing the person who has just spoken, out o' window'" (PP 487; ch. 32). Miggs says that she cannot stop her tears "'if [she] was to be drownded in 'em'" (BR 206; ch. 19), and "'though she were to be hanged, drawn, and quartered for it next minute'" cannot prevent herself expatiating on the positive attributes of Mrs. Varden (BR 229; ch. 22). Some bodily hypothesizing is hilarious simply because so surprising; Spenlow, hearing that David has had some disheartening news from his Aunt says, totally without grounds for suspicion, "'Dear me! Not paralysis, I hope ?'" (DC 432; ch. 35).

While Dickens spends much time expressing bodily fears through comic exaggeration, he also deals, more expectedly perhaps, with the comic physicality of love. Florence Dombey, loved in different ways by Mr. Toots and Susan Nipper, provokes bodily language from them both. Toots speaks of his love for Florence in very physical terms: "'It's the sort of thing with me, Captain Gills, that if I could be run over—or—or trampled upon—or—thrown off a very high place—or anything of that sort—for Miss Dombey's sake, it would be the most delightful thing that could happen to me'" (DS 448-49; ch. 32). He sees physical vulnerability as a sign of love and even seeks it as a solace to his inner turmoil:

'I'm in such a state of mind, and am so dreadfully in earnest, that if I could swear to it upon a hot piece of iron, or a live coal, or melted lead, or burning sealing-wax, or anything of that sort, I should be glad to hurt myself, as a relief to my feelings.' And Mr. Toots looked hurriedly about the room, as if for some sufficiently painful means of accomplishing his dread purpose (DS 524; ch. 39).

He feels "'night and day, exactly as if somebody was sitting upon [him]'" (DS 524; ch. 39), and is even pleased that his emotion is wasting his body away: "'I'm in that state of thinness. It's a gratification to me. I—I'm glad of it. I—I'd a great deal rather go into a decline, if I could'" (DS 644; ch. 48); "'If you could see my legs when I take my boots off, you'd form some idea of what unrequited affection is. I have been prescribed bark, but I don't
take it, for I don’t wish to have any tone whatever given to my constitution’’ (DS 647; ch. 48). Although he cannot attain his heart’s dearest joy, he marries Susan Nipper, who expresses similarly body-related threats and oaths in respect of Florence, telling Mr. Dombey “‘that she’s the blessedest and dearest angel is Miss Floy that ever drew the breath of life, the more I was torn to pieces Sir the more I’d say it though I may not be a Fox’s Martyr’” (DS 588; ch. 44). Taking the opportunity to speak her mind to Dombey, she again uses a devastating bodily parallel to stress the strength of her feelings: “‘I may not be an Indian widow Sir and I am not and I would not so become but if I once made up my mind to burn myself alive, I’d do it! And I’ve made my mind up to go on’” (DS 589; ch. 44). The body is used in such oaths and exclamations as Toots’s and Nipper’s because it is the most fundamental thing they can offer up as a guarantee for anything, in this case as a metaphor for and verifier of strong feelings.

The body’s insecurity is also used as a vital emphasis in many serious threats, notably those of criminals or “evil” authority figures. Rigaud’s favourite exclamation is “‘Death!’” (LD 125; 1: ch. 11) while “‘burn my body!’” (OT 266; ch. 39) and “‘Cut my limbs off one by one!’” (OT 303; ch. 44) are two of Bill Sikes’s preferred oaths, no doubt in part because, unlike being shot or hanged, these are two of the least likely things he fears for his body.24 Like Rigaud and Sikes, authority figures frequently put forth corporeal threats which they can generally follow through on: “‘Let any boy speak a word without leave,’ said Mr. Squeers mildly, ‘and I’ll take the skin off his back’” (NN 92; ch. 8), while his wife demands, “‘Do you want your head broke in a fresh place, Smike?’” (NN 147; ch. 13). Creakle similarly warns the young David: “‘Come fresh up to the lessons, I advise you, for I come fresh up to the punishment. I won’t flinch. It will be of no use your rubbing yourselves; you won’t rub the marks out that I shall give you’” (DC 76; ch. 7). The hope of permanently “marking” another character is one Dickens repeats; Mulberry Hawk, for instance plans to “‘put a mark on [Nicholas] that he shall carry to his grave. I’ll slit his nose and ears, flog him, maim him for life’” (NN 492; ch. 38). Nicholas, as hero, is of course not maimed, but leaves his own imprint
on Squeers "‘You bear upon your body certain marks I gave you ... and may talk in acknowledgment of them as much as you please. You’ll talk a long time before you rub them out, Mr. Squeers’’" (NN 588; ch. 45). This is like Quilp’s carving his name into his effigy of Kit—a permanent sign of bodily power.

Dismemberment, the most important bodily “mark” in Dickens’s novels, appears not only in Dickens’s methods of expression which the following chapter examines and as a bodily punishment for characters such as Carker and Sim Tappertit, but is also used as a topic of hypothetical conversation or threat. In advising Pip not to reveal to Estella the truth of her parentage, Jaggers uses dismembering language: "‘I tell you that you had better—and would much sooner when you had thought well of it—chop off that bandaged left hand of yours with your bandaged right hand, and then pass the chopper on to Wemmick there, to cut that off, too’" (GE 411; 3: ch. 12). In using dismemberment in speech, Dickens frequently plays with the metaphorical and literal alternatives in a word’s meaning. Mr. Jon Smauker, for example, after asking Sam Weller "‘Will you take my arm?’" is answered, "‘Thankee, you’re wery good, but I won’t deprive you of it.... I’ve rayther a way o’ puttin my hands in my pockets, if it’s all the same to you’’" (PP 572; ch. 37).25 Sam, by answering in this way, explicitly plays on the way language can sever the body, as Dickens both explicitly and implicitly does in his work for attractive-repulsive and comic effect. In his characters’ speech the effect of dismemberment is generally comic and figurative, although there are occasional serious or literal threats, such as Fagin’s, "‘Bolter’s throat, Bill; never mind the girl—Bolter’s throat as deep as you can cut. Saw his head off!’” (OT 363; ch. 52).26 A conversation provoked by Mr. Dombey’s comment on his son’s health: "‘What on earth has anybody to do with the—with the—Bones of my son? He is not a living skeleton, I suppose’” (DS 97; ch. 8), reveals characters’ awareness of the power of bodily language. Mrs. Chick speaks to her brother:

‘If the dear child ... is a little weakened by that last attack, and is not in quite such vigorous health as we could wish; and if he has some temporary weakness in his system, and does occasionally seem about to lose, for the moment, the use of his—’
Mrs. Chick was afraid to say limbs, after Mr. Dombey's recent objection to bones, and therefore waited for a suggestion from Miss Tox, who, true to her office, hazarded 'members.'

'Members!' repeated Mr. Dombey.

'I think the medical gentleman mentioned legs this morning, my dear Louisa, did he not,' said Miss Tox.

'Why, of course he did, my love,' retorted Mrs. Chick, mildly reproachful. 'How can you ask me? You heard him. I say, if our dear Paul should lose, for the moment, the use of his legs, these are casualties common to many children at his time of life, and not to be prevented by any care or caution' (DS 97-98; ch. 8).

Mrs. Chick's casting about for the least offensive word to describe Paul's weak legs leads her to accept and use the more elemental word “members” which naturally shocks Dombey, the word “members” being more typically associated with dead or severed limbs than with live ones. One might also of course point to the sexual connotations of the word.

The most frequent dismembering comments, however, resemble the comic observation of the tollman, when he hears that Tom Pinch has left Pecksniff: “‘I should as soon have thought of his head leaving him!’” (MC 502; ch. 31). A coachman's imprecations upon Squeers are a more direct example: “‘What are you pulling a man's arm off for?... Couldn't you say that, without wrenching a man's limbs off his body?’” (NN 498; ch. 38), as is Captain Cuttle's oath, “‘If so be I didn't know ... as Wal'r was [Florence's] true love, Brother, and she his, I'd have these here blue arms and legs chopped off, afore I'd let her go [to China]’” (DS 748; ch. 56). It is normally, as these examples reveal, heads or limbs that “come off” in Dickens’s novels; Rob the Grinder, injured that his father has been speaking of him behind his back, even requests his own decapitation: “‘I wish somebody’d take and chop my head off. Father wouldn’t mind doing it, I believe, and I’d much rather he did it than t’other’” (DS 514; ch. 38). Sometimes more unusual dismemberments verbally occur; Gabriel Varden, when refusing to pick the Newgate lock, says, “‘When I do ... my hands shall drop off at the wrists, and you shall wear them, Simon Tappertit, on your shoulders for epaulettes’” (BR 574; ch. 63). Uriah Heep asks in a similarly literal manner: “‘Has that Copperfield no tongue?... I would do a good deal for you if you could tell me, without lying, that somebody had cut it out’” (DC 649; ch. 52). Stryver ejaculates “‘Says it with his head on!’ ... remark[ing] upon the
peculiarity as if it would have been infinitely less remarkable if he had said it with his head off" (TTC 173; 2: ch. 12). If we have become accustomed to "merely" losing the main limbs in Dickens’s world, these unusual cuttings serve as a reminder about what is actually happening in the text.

Other permutations of the body are hypothesized through literalizing language, as when Mrs. Nickleby says to a guest "‘I am so sorry Nicholas is not at home.... Kate, my dear, you must be both Nicholas and yourself’" (NN 642; ch. 49). Bailey, opening the door at Todgers’s, says "‘I thought you was the Paper, and wondered why you didn’t shove yourself through the grating as usual’" (MC 125; ch. 8). Mrs. Pipchin’s husband broke his heart "‘In pumping water out of the Peruvian Mines,’” but Mrs. Chick quickly tells Dombey that this was metaphorical, not literal: "‘Not being a Pumper himself, of course ... but having invested money in the speculation, which failed’" (DS 98-99; ch. 8). While Dombey might find this, metaphorically, a respectable way of breaking one’s heart, Mrs. Chick’s explanation does not remove the literal image from the reader’s mind; saying that something is metaphorical does not make it so. Mr. Weller, speaking of Mr. Pickwick being in prison, exclaims "‘Vy, they’ll eat him up alive, Sammy.... He goes in rayther raw, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller metaphorically, ‘and he’ll come out done so ex-ceedin’ brown, that his most formiliar friends won’t know him. Roast pigeon’s nothin’ to it, Sammy’” (PP 668; ch. 43). Other types of literalizing damage are expressed more through turns of phrase. David, for example, warns Mr. Micawber not to let Mr. Peggotty learn of Ham’s death: "‘If it penetrates to him, sir,’ said Mr. Micawber, striking himself on the breast, ‘it shall first pass through this body!’” (DC 687; ch. 57). Sam Weller similarly speaks of "‘Sights, Sir ... as ‘ud penetrate your benevolent heart, and come out on the other side’” (PP 231; ch. 16), and Bagstock tells Cleopatra, "‘He is touched, is Dombey! Touched!... He is bayonetted through the body’” (DS 357; ch. 26).

Dickens plays extensively on literal and metaphorical meanings when David Copperfield recalls the conversation at a dinner party of "‘sanguine complexion’" (DC 319; ch. 25); "‘Other things are all very well in their way, but give me Blood!... Blood is not [an
intangible point]. We see Blood in a nose, and we know it. We meet with it in a chin, and we say, “There it is! That’s Blood!” It is an actual matter of fact. We point it out. It admits of no doubt” (DC 320; ch. 25). The conversation continues the play:

‘we can’t forego Blood, you know. We must have Blood, you know. Some young fellows, you know ... may go a little wrong, you know, and get themselves and other people into a variety of fixes—and all that—but deuce take it, it’s delightful to reflect that they’ve got Blood in ’em! Myself, I’d rather at any time be knocked down by a man who had got Blood in him, than I’d be picked up by a man who hadn’t!’ (DC 320; ch. 25).

Susan Nipper expresses a different sanguinity: “we’re a-coming to such passes that it turns all the blood in a person’s body into pins and needles, with their pints all ways” (DS 580; ch. 43). Sometimes literal damage to the body is indicated; Mrs Sowerberry sending Noah for Mr. Bumble tells him, “‘You can hold a knife to that black eye, as you run along; and it’ll keep the swelling down’” (OT 38; ch. 6). At other times meaning is clearly supposed to be more metaphorical; thinking Quilp dead and pondering on whether he might be looking down from above, Sampson Brass says

‘I can almost fancy ... that I see his eye glistening down at the very bottom of my liquor. When shall we look upon his like again? Never, never! One minute we are here’—holding his tumbler before his eyes—‘the next we are there’—gulping down its contents, and striking himself emphatically a little below the chest—‘in the silent tomb’ (OCS 459; ch. 49).29

Here Brass figuratively swallows Quilp’s eye and equates his own body with a tomb.

Explicitly cannibalistic comments occur during an argument between George Chuzzlewit and “the strong-minded woman”: “If Mr. George Chuzzlewit has anything to say to me ... I beg him to speak out, like a man; and not to look at me and my daughters as if he could eat us” she says, to which he replies

‘As to eating, I beg to say, whatever bitterness your jealousies and disappointed expectations may suggest to you, that I am not a cannibal, ma’am.’

‘I don’t know that!’ cried the strong-minded woman.

‘At all events, if I was a cannibal,’ said Mr. George Chuzzlewit, greatly stimulated by this retort, ‘I think it would occur to me that a lady who had outlived three husbands and suffered so very little from their loss, must be uncommonly tough’ (MC 60; ch. 4).30
Sometimes threats are dismembering but leave the specifics to the reader, which in a sense makes the reader responsible for whatever image flies into his or her mind: “Roker turned somewhat fiercely upon Mr. Pickwick ... and moreover muttered ... certain unpleasant invocations concerning his own eyes, limbs, and circulating fluids” (PP 630; ch. 41); a prison sergeant damns the jailed Barnaby “and with many disinterested imprecations on his own eyes, liver, blood, and body, assure[s] him that if it rested with him to decide, he would put a final stopper on the bird, and his master too” (BR 531; ch. 58). Sir Mulberry similarly “garnishe[s] [a] speech with a hoarse laugh, and terminate[s] it with a pleasant oath regarding Mr. Nickleby’s limbs” (NN 236; ch. 19).

*Oliver Twist*, which contains some of the most serious threats and “hypotheticals” about the body uttered by Dickens’s characters, also includes some of the funniest. These proceed from the mouth of Mr. Grimwig, who fears death by orange-peel and repeatedly offers to “eat his head”: “I’ve been lamed with orange-peel once, and I know orange-peel will be my death at last. It will, sir; orange-peel will be my death, or I’ll be content to eat my own head, sir!” (OT 87; ch. 14). The narrator elaborates on the literal application of Mr. Grimwig’s oath:

This was the handsome offer with which Mr. Grimwig backed and confirmed nearly every assertion he made; and it was the more singular in his case, because, even admitting for the sake of argument, the possibility of scientific improvements being ever brought to that pass which will enable a gentleman to eat his own head in the event of his being so disposed; Mr. Grimwig’s head was such a particularly large one, that the most sanguine man alive, could hardly entertain a hope of being able to get through it at a sitting—to put entirely out of the question, a very thick coating of powder (OT 87; ch. 14).

On occasion he offers to eat more than just his own head; spotting Oliver he vows, “that’s the boy who had the orange! If that’s not the boy, sir, who had the orange, and threw this bit of peel upon the staircase, I’ll eat my head, and his too” (OT 87; ch. 14). This reveals an extraordinary degree of bodily vulnerability for Oliver, particularly if he has to have his head eaten for a trivial act that he has *not* done, simply because somebody else has made an oath about his body. Grimwig is convinced that the orange-peel which is always on his street’s
pavement is "'put there by the surgeon's boy at the corner'"; the surgeon he calls "'an assassin! A man-trap!'" rounding off his execrations on the subject with "a great knock on the ground with his stick; which was always understood, by his friends, to imply the customary offer, whenever it was not expressed in words" (OT 87; ch. 14).

Grimwig uses this oath as an offer, emphasis, and solution to practical problems: "'I had serious thoughts of eating my head to-night,' said Mr. Grimwig, 'for I began to think I should get nothing else'" (OT 357; ch. 51). This head of Grimwig's returns uneaten throughout the novel, adding humour to "dark" sections by presenting something so much more horrific and so much less credible than the bodily vulnerability that confronts Oliver and others within the disparate worlds of the novel.31

Hypothetical statements about the body create humour in Dickens's work and express in extreme and ridiculous form those corporeal vulnerabilities which most intrigued him. He plays here, too, with dismemberment and with the fascinations of the dual metaphorical and literal meanings which the same anatomical terms can contain. While hypothetical conversation can be extreme because what it speaks of is unlikely to in fact occur, anecdotes, which serve the same creative and exaggerative ends, and to which we now turn, are effective because they are largely hearsay evidence and thus unverifiable.

Anecdotal statements about the body are generally comic and range from recounts of personal histories and incidents to stories that amount to urban legends. Anecdotes give Dickens more space in which to work; they are miniature tales of the body in which he can expand and expound upon points of injury or anatomy. It is not usually "gentlemen" who tell such tales, but those of a lower class or more questionable respectability, and we have only the speaker's word for the veracity of the story. The more outrageous or revelatory of extreme bodily vulnerability a story gets, the more removed from the original teller it
becomes. Thus Sam Weller tells Pickwick about the disappearance of "a respectable tradesman" at a "Celebrated Sassage factory" (PP 464; ch. 31):

'You don't mean to say he was burked, Sam?' said Mr. Pickwick, looking hastily round.

'No I don't indeed, Sir,' replied Mr. Weller, 'I wish I did; far worse than that. He was the master o' that 'ere shop, Sir, and the inwenter o' the patent-never-leavin-off sassage steam 'ingine, as ud swaller up a pavin' stone if you put it too near, and grind it into sassages as easy as if it was a tender young babby' (PP 464; ch. 31)

After this man disappears, Sam continues, "all the canals was dragged, and for two months afterwards venever a body turned up, it was carried, as a reg'lar thing, straight off to the sassage shop" (PP 465; ch. 31). Eventually, a customer complains of finding buttons in his sausages which are recognized as the sausage manufacturer's: "'I see it all," says the widder, "in a fit of temporary insanity he rashly converted hisself into sassages!" And so he had, Sir,' said Mr. Weller, looking steadily into Mr. Pickwick's horror-stricken countenance" (PP 465; ch. 31).

This story, reminiscent in tone to our own classic friend of a friend of a friend who once found a human finger in a meat pie, is clearly an urban legend that Sam has heard or invented himself rather than one he has experienced at first hand, and the bodily vulnerability revealed within it is both extreme and extremely funny as is Pickwick's shocked reaction. Rumours and urban legends in general proliferate the more believable they are or the more they touch upon current areas of concern. Today stories spread quickly about impossible and unusual ways people have contracted AIDS, just as jokes about animals and babies being cooked soon followed the introduction of the microwave oven. Sam's story here, for similar reasons, leaves the fairly intelligent and clear-headed Pickwick aghast; at first he has assumed the story would be, topically, about a "burking," but in fact it is, like the microwave oven stories, about a new invention the dangers of which are not yet known and thus imaginable for all bodily risks. Is has also of course the popular Sweeney Todd elements of bodies being made into tasty comestibles. The story expresses horrific aspects of the body's vulnerability: sudden grotesque death, dismemberment, and the threat of cannibalism, whether dining or
being dined upon. Sam’s story is more effective and comic both because it is not a first hand anecdote and because it is told by Sam himself, who is an uneducated servant with a lower class accent.

Just as we can exclude their bodies from suffering fatal or too drastic bodily damage, so too can “heroes” be excluded from the category of tellers of anatomical tales. These “gentlemen” are, however, capable of powerful comments. John Jarndyce recalls: “‘When I brought what remained of [Tom Jarndyce] home here, the brains seemed to me to have been blown out of the house too; it was so shattered and ruined’” (BH 89; ch. 8). Edward Chester relates how he came by his injuries after a lone galloping horseman stopped to ask him for directions: “[he] rode upon me furiously, as if bent on trampling me down beneath his horse’s hoofs. In starting aside, I slipped and fell. You found me with this stab and an ugly bruise or two, and without my purse” (BR 96-98; ch. 6). These comments are straightforward, simple, and non-comic; they are also placed near the beginning of novels, when slight vulnerability is allowed in heroes or gentlemen. A “bad” gentleman, however, may say more, and later. When Mr. Mantalini, for example, tells Ralph Nickleby of Hawk’s injuries (“‘Don’t you know ... that it wasn’t an accident at all, but a demd, furious, manslaughtering attack made upon him by your nephew?’” [NN 432; ch. 34]), Dickens allows Ralph to open up his own bodily vulnerability by mentioning that he hopes Nicholas is dead, or has at least “‘broke a leg or an arm, or put his shoulder out, or fractured his collar-bone, or ground a rib or two? His neck was saved for the halter, but he got some painful and slow-healing injury for his trouble?’” Mantalini, however, tells him that “‘Unless he was dashed into such little pieces that they blew away, he wasn’t hurt, for he went off as quiet and comfortable as—as—as demnition’” (NN 433; ch. 34).

Some personal anecdotes are patent fabrications, such as Fanny Squeers’s letter, which attempts to prey on the sympathy bodily injury normally induces, but which does so with such an exaggerated manner that she is made the butt of her own language:
'My pa requests me to write to you, the doctors considering it doubtful whether he will ever recuver the use of his legs which prevents his holding a pen.... my Pa is one mask of brooses both blue and green likewise two forms are steepled in his Goar.... When your nevew that you recommended for a teacher had done this to my pa and jumped upon his body with his feet and also langwedge which I will not pollew my pen with describing, he assaulted my ma with dreadful violence, dashed her to the earth, and drove her back comb several inches into her head. A very little more and it must have entered her skull. We have a medical certifiket that if it had, the tortershell would have affected the brain.

Me and my brother were then the victims of his feury since which we have suffered very much which leads us to the arrowing belief that we have received some injury in our insides, especially as no marks of violence are visible externally. I am screaming out loud all the time I write and so is my brother which takes off my attention rather and I hope will excuse mistakes' (NN 175; ch. 15).

What she does is reveal physical vulnerability through language, and in a sense Dickens is, like Fanny, “screaming out loud all the time [he] write[s]” from his own internal injuries, both physical and psychological, which, in his earlier career at least, left no external marks.

Mrs. Gradgrind’s querulous statement: “‘I think there’s a pain somewhere in the room ... but I couldn’t positively say that I have got it’” (HT 149; 2: ch. 9) also reflects Dickens’s situation, but he, unlike Mrs. Gradgrind, does know that he feels such pain. He refuses in life to “positively say” so through an unwillingness to admit vulnerability, but in art he will, under shield of comedy, make tentative statements towards it just like Mrs. Gradgrind.

Fanny Squeers, however, unlike Dickens, gains no control over her body by expressing her fears; Dickens would never for example say, in a novel, that he was screaming in pain as he wrote, as she does in her letter. He would also never allow an excessive exaggeration of woes to create comedy if he were to write of his own genuine suffering, as Josiah Bounderby does in inventing tales of past perils to gain respect as a “self-made man.”

Bounderby—“‘you may force him to swallow boiling fat, but you shall never force him to suppress the facts of his life’” (HT 18; 1: ch. 4)—claims that he was born, and also celebrated his tenth birthday, in a ditch:

‘As wet as a sop. A foot of water in it.... I was born with inflammation of the lungs, and of everything else, I believe, that was capable of inflammation.... For years ... I was one of the most miserable little wretches ever seen. I was so sickly, that I was always moaning and groaning. I was so ragged and dirty, that you wouldn’t have touched me with a pair of tongs’ (HT 17; 1: ch. 4).
He claims that his mother "bolted" and he was brought up by an alcoholic grandmother who kept him in an egg-box until he ran off and became a vagabond, "and instead of one old woman knocking me about and starving me, everybody of all ages knocked me about and starved me. They were right; they had no business to do anything else. I was a nuisance, an incumbrance, and a pest" (HT 18; 1: ch. 4).

Joe Bagstock, while probably not greatly exaggerating when he recalls the literal torture of his public school days, nevertheless demonstrates a humorously perverse pride in the positive results of his "iron" endurance:

'We put each other to the torture there, Sir. We roasted the new fellows at a slow fire, and hung 'em out of a three pair of stairs window, with their heads downwards. Joseph Bagstock, Sir, was held out of a window by the heels of his boots, for thirteen minutes by the college clock' (DS 128; ch. 10).

Surviving this vulnerability is traditionally supposed to give a body some old-school security and influence in later life. Simply relating the facts of suffering, however, whether endured or not, can give someone some control over another. A Yarmouth waiter scares David with invented horrors concerning the school he is headed to, telling him that a little boy just David's age had his ribs broken there "'with whopping'": "He was eight years and six months old when they broke his first rib; eight years and eight months old when they broke his second, and did for him" (DC 59; ch. 5). This same waiter appeals for a tip by saying his family has "'the cowpock'" (DC 59; ch. 5) and tricks David out of his drink by telling of a man who "ordered a glass of this ale—would order it—I told him not—drank it, and fell dead. It was too old for him. It oughtn't to be drawn; that's the fact" (DC 58; ch. 5).

Mrs. Nickleby is full of confused and amusing anecdotes bearing on the body; pondering whether the man next door might do something rash if she rejects him, she recalls "a case ... about a journeyman shoemaker who was jealous of a young girl in an adjoining village, because she wouldn't shut herself up in an air-tight three-pair-of-stairs and charcoal herself to death with him; and who went and hid himself in a wood with a sharp-pointed knife, and rushed out, as she was passing by with a few friends, and killed himself first and then all the friends, and then her—no, killed all the friends first, and then herself, and then himself—which it is quite frightful to think of" (NN 483; ch. 37).36
Dickens's most successful and earliest bodily anecdotalist is, of course, Sam Weller. The introduction of Sam in Chapter Ten of Dickens's first novel *The Pickwick Papers* sent flagging sales flying and was largely responsible for the huge popularity the novel gained. Sam's attraction for readers was, and is, partly due to "Wellerisms," the miniature, invented anecdotes with which he strews his speech. Many of these Wellerisms, and indeed much of Sam's comic dialogue, concerns anatomy and its vulnerability which is of course a fundamental reason for the appeal his talk has for readers who are bodies themselves. With Sam, Dickens found, early in his career, a way to express a variety of bodily concerns in a highly comic and exaggerated manner. One of the first things Sam says is about wooden legs, and is followed up by a deathly Wellerism: "'Look at these here boots—eleven pair o' boots; and one shoe as b'longs to number six, with the wooden leg.... No, no; reg'lar rotation, as Jack Ketch said, ven he tied the men up. Sorry to keep you a waitin'" (*PP* 138; ch. 10).

Unusually for a non-gentleman character, Sam does not seem to possess a body of his own, at least one described in the text; he is self-animated through his irrepressible conversation. Perhaps Dickens does not grant him a body because to do so, in light of the quantity of bodily damage and destruction that fills his language, would be to put any body he possessed at extraordinary figurative risk. Similarly Sam was a character Dickens was determined should endure bodily intact; his own literary and financial security depended upon it.

The largest category of anatomical damage and destruction that Sam speaks of humorously connects unusual deaths with bland or common preceding statements: "'It's over, and can't be helped, and that's one consolation, as they always says in Turkey, ven they cuts the wrong man's head off'" (*PP* 345; ch. 23); "'Business first, pleasure arterwards, as King Richard the Third said ven he stabbed the t'other king in the Tower, afore he smothered the babbies'" (*PP* 371; ch. 25); "'Wery sorry to 'casion any personal inconvenience, Ma'am, as the housebreaker said to the old lady when he put her on the fire'" (*PP* 394; ch. 26). Sam treats these simple turns of phrase like legitimate anecdotes, stories of real bodies all. He
also phrases basic information around bodily vulnerability, telling, for instance, of how his father was bribed to upset his coach full of voters into a canal: "I rather think one old gentleman was missin'"; I know his hat was found, but I a'n't quite certain whether his head was in it or not" (PP 188; ch. 13). He presents himself before Pickwick thus: "Here's your servant, Sir. Proud o' the title, as the Living Skellinton said, ven they show'd him" (PP 229; ch. 15).

He has other tales to tell, too, such as the one about the man "as killed his-self on principle" (PP 676; ch. 44), who, after eating "four crumpets ev'ry night for fifteen year on principle" (PP 677; ch. 44) was, after taking ill, told not to by his doctor, then

> 'Next mornin' he gets up, has a fire lit, orders in three shillins' vurth o' crumpets, toasts 'em all, eats 'em all, and blows his brains out.... in support of his great principle that crumpets was wholesome, and to show that he wouldn't be put out of his vay for nobody!' (PP 677-78; ch. 44).

38 Sam's anecdotes concentrate on the extraordinary things that "might" happen to the body, but, although the most prominent, he is not the only early character to repeatedly speak of the body's perils. Alfred Jingle, who Dickens thought would "make a decided hit" (in Johnson 1: 119), fills his fast and staccato language with advice and anecdote about the injured body:

> 'accidents will happen—best regulated families—never say die.... eye damaged, Sir? Waiter; raw beef-steak for the gentleman's eye,—nothing like raw beef-steak for a bruise, Sir; cold lamp-post very good, but lamp-post inconvenient—damned odd standing in the open street half an hour, with your eye against a lamp-post' (PP 13; ch. 2).

As the coach to Rochester goes under a low archway, Jingle cries

> 'Heads, heads, take care of your heads.... Terrible place—dangerous work—other day—five children—mother—tall lady, eating sandwiches—forgot the arch—crash—knock—children look round—mother's head off—sandwich in her hand—no mouth to put it in—head of a family off—shocking, shocking. Looking at Whitehall, Sir,—fine place—little window—somebody else's head off there, eh, Sir?—he didn't keep a sharp look-out enough either—eh, sir, eh?' (PP 14-17; ch. 2).

39 The dangers of decapitation are made explicit to characters and readers by this early Dickens character who, like his creator, plays with the literal and metaphorical potential of language and similarly enjoins us to "never say die." Like his creator, Jingle's volubility is a
cover for the person he really is and through his use of words he creates the image he wishes to project, at the same time preventing others from discovering the truth by questioning too closely. He tells his own stories about himself, including one which explicitly connects bodily vulnerability with the art of writing, when he describes himself writing an epic poem on the revolution of July: "‘fired a musket,—fired with an idea,—rushed into wine shop—wrote it down—back again—whiz, bang—another idea—wine shop again—pen and ink—back again—cut and slash—noble time’" (PP 17; ch. 2). This account of physical peril is soon followed by another personal anecdote in which a narrative power over the body is briefly exerted when Jingle speaks of his conquest of a Spanish beauty: "‘Donna Christina in despair—prussic acid—stomach pump in my portmanteau—operation performed—old Bolaro in ecstasies—consent to our union.’" A few lines later, however, we learn that his curative powers were not so great, just as he is not the wealthy item of nobility he presents himself as; the Spanish beauty is "‘Dead, Sir—dead.... Never recovered the stomach pump—undermined constitution—fell a victim’" (PP 18; ch. 2). He adds a rider for bodily interest, consciously connecting himself, again, like Dickens, to extraordinary happenings. Donna Christina’s grieving father suddenly disappears:

‘public fountain in the great square suddenly ceased playing—weeks elapsed—still a stoppage—workmen employed to clean it—water drawn off—father-in-law discovered sticking head first in the main pipe, with a full confession in his right boot— took him out, and the fountain played away again, as well as ever’ (PP 18; ch. 2).

Clipped speech of the Jingle strain seems to cluster about, and snip off, body parts in Dickens’s novels, as if to edit language were to threaten the reality that language describes. Mr. Dowler, for instance, relating that he had vowed to "skin" a competitor for Mrs. Dowler’s hand, finishes his tale by verbally decapitating his wife as she pulls up in coach:

“‘He fled. I married her. Here’s the coach. That’s her head’” (PP 540; ch. 35). Mr. Tangle similarly reminds the Lord Chancellor of the fate of the wards’ grandfather by saying, "‘Begludship’s pardon—victim of rash action—brains’” (BH 10; ch. 1).42
Meetings are good opportunities for Dickens to express bodily anecdotes for a gathering of bodies often stimulates anatomical exaggeration just as it does verbal excess. The “Report of the Committee of the Brick Lane Branch of the United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association,” for instance, includes news of the conversion of three physically injured people: a man who has lost the use of his right hand through a rusty needle being stuck in him, a one-eyed woman who “Thinks it not impossible that if she had always abstained from spirits, she might have had two eyes by this time” (PP 505; ch. 33), and a man with a wooden leg who used to wear second-hand wooden legs and have a drink or two each evening, but

‘Found the second-hand wooden legs split and rot very quickly; is firmly persuaded that their constitution was undermined by the gin and water.... Buys new wooden legs now, and drinks nothing but water and weak tea. The new legs last twice as long as the others used to do, and he attributes this solely to his temperate habits’ (PP 505; ch. 33).

At a meeting to move the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company, we hear of the “cruelties inflicted on muffin boys by their masters,” including the “case of an orphan muffin boy, who, having been run over by a hackney carriage, had been removed to the hospital, had undergone the amputation of his leg below the knee, and was now actually pursuing his occupation on crutches” (NN 15; ch. 2). The ridiculous and incredible circumstances of these accidents, bodily injuries, and recoveries makes them comic however horrific they would be if real. The author, a law clerk in his earlier days, has given us essentially “hearsay evidence”; we are almost encouraged to disbelieve it while at the same time Dickens is free to revel in the language of expressing it.

On the Conversational level Dickens is nowhere freer to express his bodily concerns in an extended manner than when he puts speech about these matters into the mouths of bodily “experts.” Here we do not listen to unverifiable hearsay evidence but to irrefutable
professional opinion, or at least that is what Dickens's "experts" would have us believe. In taking on the persona and language of those involved in bodily concerns such as medicine, the circus, acting, wax works, freak shows, the funeral business, hanging, or simply those who pompously claim bodily knowledge, Dickens is free to express specific and sometimes horrific ways of seeing and using the body as well as experiment with professional bodily jargon. This type of speech adds vitality and the power of attraction-repulsion to what might in another novelist's work be a flat description of things such as an anatomical emporium (Venus), or hanging statistics (Dennis). In choosing to portray characters involved in bodily activities Dickens insists on keeping anatomy before us. What these characters say about their work, and in what "bony" or other light they see it, reveals various and select ways in which the body is vulnerable. Although these experts largely exist within the novels for their conversation and are listened to by other characters, there is a general move through Dickens's career from characters just listening to professionals and perhaps interjecting a question or gasp to characters having a real interchange with the bodily expert.

Ben Allen and Bob Sawyer are an early pair of "bodily experts." These "'couple o' Sawbones'" (PP 445; ch. 30) in training are full of the wiles and tales of their trade:

'Nothing like dissecting, to give one an appetite,' said Mr. Bob Sawyer, looking round the table.
Mr. Pickwick slightly shuddered.
'By the bye, Bob,' said Mr. Allen, 'have you finished that leg yet?'
'Nearly,' replied Sawyer, helping himself to half a fowl as he spoke. 'It's a very muscular one for a child's.'
'Is it?' inquired Mr. Allen, carelessly.
'Very,' said Bob Sawyer, with his mouth full.
'I've put my name down for an arm, at our place,' said Mr. Allen. 'We're clubbing for a subject, and the list is nearly full, only we can't get hold of any fellow that wants a head. I wish you'd take it.'
'No,' replied Bob Sawyer; 'can't afford expensive luxuries.'
'Nonsense!' said Allen.
'Can't indeed,' rejoined Bob Sawyer. 'I wouldn't mind a brain, but I couldn't stand a whole head.'
'Hush, hush, gentlemen, pray,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I hear the ladies' (PP 447-48; ch. 30).
Having these two discuss their stomach-turning work gives Dickens a legitimate chance to talk about dissection, which a few years prior to the publication of *Pickwick* was highly topical due to the exploits of resurrectionists and the passing of the 1832 Anatomy Act; the public ear, in other words, had been prepared for the topic. Dickens also again puns on live and dead body parts, as he has with live and dead “bodies”; for a dissector a “head” is an expensive luxury, for a living person the most basic necessity. They do not just talk of individual parts, but dismember a “whole” person, with students “clubbing for a subject” they are immediately going to sell off piece by piece. That it is a “muscular” child’s leg that Sawyer is working on, adds further grotesqueness to the already attractive-repulsive mix. Bob Sawyer, not content with mere speech, “relate[s] with much glee an agreeable anecdote, about the removal of a tumour on some gentleman’s head, which he illustrate[s] by means of an oyster-knife and a half-quartern loaf, to the great edification of the assembled company” (*PP* 448-49; ch. 30), essentially achieving what the fat boy desires when he says “‘I wants to make your flesh creep,’” (*PP* 119; ch. 8). The whole scene is of course comic, but also realistic, coming only a few years after dissection had become more accessible for such students by legal methods, and the body, totally dismembered, is gleefully valued for being so, by both surgeons and the dissecting author. Allen and Sawyer also, like Dickens, do not only dissect the dead body, but are, “young cutters and carvers of live people’s bodies” (*PP* 481; ch. 32).

They and their colleagues delight in anecdote. Jack Hopkins tells of “‘Rather a good accident brought into the casualty ward.... Only a man fallen out of a four pair of stairs’ window,’” which will be fruit for “‘a splendid operation ... to-morrow—magnificent sight if Slasher does it’” (*PP* 482; ch. 32). Pickwick hazards some polite questions as they talk about live subject matter, something he refrained from when they talked of the dead, but receives responses which deliberately focus on his gentlemanly discomfort with the subject:

‘You consider Mr. Slasher a good operator?’ said Mr. Pickwick.
‘Best alive,’ replied Hopkins. ‘Took a boy’s leg out of the socket last week—
boy ate five apples and a gingerbread cake—exactly two minutes after it was all over,
boy said he wouldn’t lie there to be made game of; and he’d tell his mother if they
didn’t begin’ (PP 482-83; ch. 32).

In order to amaze Pickwick, Hopkins outdoes this story by telling of a child who swallows a
necklace bead by bead and in hospital “‘makes such a devil of a noise when he walks about,
that they’re obliged to muffle him in a watchman’s coat, for fear he should wake the
patients’” (PP 484; ch. 32). These tales become increasingly unbelievable and exaggerated,
but, because they are told to us by experts, just as Dickens’s nurse’s and grandmother’s
stories were about people they knew “personally,” these bodily accounts must be believed
by other characters or at least given the benefit of a discomfited doubt. Sam Weller expresses
his belief that anything is possible with the body, living or dead, when he cries, “‘but there’s
another experiment here, Sir. Here’s a wenerable old lady a lyin’ on the carpet waitin’ for
dissection, or galwinism, or some other rewivin’ and scientific inwention’” (PP 741; ch. 48).

Some of the most interesting professional bodily phraseology comes from characters
like Miss Mowcher and Mrs. Gamp. Miss Mowcher’s speech mainly turns upon her clients;
she tells, for example, of Charley Pyegrave, the Duke’s son: “‘What a man he is! There’s a
whisker! As to legs, if Charley’s legs were only a pair (which they ain’t), they’d defy
competition’” (DC 282; ch. 22). The body is also definitely at the centre of Mrs. Gamp’s
world, though her comments are often described as being the opinions of the bodiless Mrs.
Harris. Mrs. Gamp is concerned with the birth, sickness, and death of the body. She
mentions that “‘if [she] could afford to lay all [her] feller-creeturs out for nothink, [she]
would gladly do it; sich is the love [she] bears ’em’” (MC 316; ch. 19). Mr. Mould, with
similar altruism and very impressed with Mrs. Gamp, says “‘She’s the sort of woman now ...
one would almost feel disposed to bury for nothing: and do it neatly, too!’” (MC 407; ch. 25).
Satisfying her own bodily comforts before she tends to those of her patients, she has
undergone her own vulnerability in the past: she has “‘tender teeth, and not too many of ’em;
which Gamp himself ... at one blow, being in liquor, struck out four, two single, and two
double, as was took by Mrs. Harris for a keepsake, and is carried in her pocket at this present hour” (MC 705; ch. 46).

Mrs. Gamp’s children and husband have suffered the ultimate vulnerability of unusual death, as she informs Ruth Pinch:

“‘My own,’ I says, ‘has fallen out of three-pair backs, and had damp door-steps settled on their lungs, and one was turned up smilin in a bedstead, unbeknown.’... mine is all gone.... And as to husbands, there’s a wooden leg gone likeways home to its account, which in its constancy of walkin into wine vaults, and never comin out again till fetched by force, was quite as weak as flesh, if not weaker’ (MC 625; ch. 40).

Of her husband’s death, she says “‘Ah dear! When Gamp was summonsed to his long home, and I see him a lying in Guy’s Hospital with a penny-piece on each eye, and his wooden leg under his left arm, I thought I should have fainted away. But I bore up’” (MC 316; ch. 19).

She bears up, it is rumoured, by disposing of his body for the benefit both of science and her finances. Dickens also continues to stress the important place held by the wooden leg in the Gamp family’s bodily consciousness. Mr. Gamp, we are told, used to send his son to “‘sell his wooden leg for any money it ’ud fetch as matches in the rough, and bring it home in liquor’”; this child, however, would spend the money on pies and “‘come home arterwards quite bold, to break the news, and offering to drown himself if sech would be a satisfaction to his parents’” (MC 404; ch. 25).

Far more important, however, to Mrs. Gamp than any family member, alive or deceased, is the fictional Mrs. Harris. With the help of Mrs. Harris, Mrs. Gamp has created her own fictional world which she uses to corroborate her sense of self and to affirm publicly her personal and private good qualities. Her anecdotes extend beyond reporting conversations she has had with Mrs. Harris to anecdotes of Mrs. Harris’s family, in which she, like Dickens, lets her fancy run free. She recalls, for instance, attending “‘Mrs. Harris’s own father [who was “‘took so strange’”] ... it took six men to hold [him] at sech times, foaming frightful’” (MC 714; ch. 46).
Mrs. Gamp has developed for herself a profound bodily confidence, in which death, birth, and even pre-birth are put in their place and contained, and in which any comment she wishes to make on herself can be instantly attributed to the good Mrs. Harris. Being so confident, nearly everything she says can have some bearing on the body’s vulnerability, whether it be a strong professional opinion: “Them Confugion steamers ... has done more to throw us out of our reg’lar work and bring ewents on at times when nobody counted on ’em (especially them screeching railroad ones), than all the other frights that ever was took” (MC 626; ch. 40), or a personal observation, as when she sees Jonas taking Mercy onto a steamer: “If there’s any illness when that wessel gets to sea ... it’s murder, and I’m the witness for the persecution” (MC 626; ch. 40). Dickens was clearly much attracted by the possibilities of Gamp, returning to her on stage and in a later written fragment.

Dickens returns to the cuttings and anecdotes of the medically inclined in Martin Chuzzlewit with his portrait of Dr. Jobling who is a medical officer for the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Insurance Company. Like Sawyer and Allen, Jobling holds forth on the body over food and shows his knowledge of anatomy by making others feel vulnerable in their own. He illustrates his point that people must eat lunch or face illness, by using Mr. Crimple’s leg:

The resident Director gave an involuntary start, for the doctor, in the heat of his demonstration, caught it up and laid it across his own, as if he were going to take it off, then and there.

‘In Mr. Crimple’s leg, you’ll observe,’ pursued the doctor, turning back his cuffs and spanning the limb with both hands, ‘where Mr. Crimple’s knee fits into the socket, here, there is—that is to say, between the bone and the socket—a certain quantity of animal oil.’

‘What do you pick my leg out for?’ said Mr. Crimple, looking with something of an anxious expression at his limb. ‘It’s the same with other legs, an’t it?’

‘Never you mind, my good sir,’ returned the doctor, shaking his head, ‘whether it is the same with other legs, or not the same.’

‘But I do mind,’ said David (MC 435; ch. 27).

Crimple has been brought directly to face the possibility that his leg might come off, by being, in a sense, shown the “dismembered” limb along with the other viewers, which goes beyond
the "comic turn" the paragraph at first seems to take, and he becomes more vulnerable as
Jobling's language and expertise become expansive over him:

'If Mr. Crimple neglects his meals, or fails to take his proper quantity of rest, that oil
wanes, and becomes exhausted. What is the consequence? Mr. Crimple's bones sink
down into their sockets, sir, and Mr. Crimple becomes a weazen, puny, stunted,
miserable man!'

The doctor let Mr. Crimple's leg fall suddenly, as if he were already in that
agreeable condition (MC 436; ch. 27).

As if dismemberment were not enough, Crimple's body plays host to an anatomy
lesson:

'We know a few secrets of nature in our profession, sir.... It's extraordinary how little
is known on these subjects generally. Where do you suppose, now ... where do you
suppose Mr. Crimple's stomach is?'

Mr. Crimple, more agitated than before, clapped his hand immediately below
his waistcoat.

'Not at all,' cried the doctor; 'not at all. Quite a popular mistake! My good sir,
you're altogether deceived.'

'I feel it there, when it's out of order; that's all I know,' said Crimple.

'You think you do,' replied the doctor; 'but science knows better' (MC 436; ch. 27).

Jobling completely undercuts Crimple's sense of bodily security, both by threatening to
dismember his body externally and by showing that he has no knowledge of how it all
operates internally. Crimple is told these things by a doctor who medically "passes"
everyone he sees and who is more interested in lunch than in a fine diagnosis. Jobling's
patients undeniably keep him busy, however, for he excuses himself from this lunch by a pun
on the literal and metaphorical meanings of "life": "several lives are waiting for me in the
next room, and I have a round of visits to make after—after I have taken 'em" (MC 440; ch. 27). As a "bodily expert" however Jobling does hold secret power over the body—only if
patients let him exercise it. Nadgeett, who, in writing, recording, and learning about the secret
lives of many characters in order to weave together the complete story, is clearly closer to
Dickens the author, insists that he has a liver complaint and will adamantly not take Jobling's
word for it that he has not, asserting, as Dickens did in life, what he believes about his own
body.
Jobling is, however, put in a physically precarious position of his own during his conversation with Jonas Chuzzlewit. Jonas has taken up one of Jobling's lancets and is asking about its effectiveness and frequency of use in opening veins, and whether "you [could] cut a man's throat with such a thing." The doctor replies positively, provided "you took him in the [jugular]." Then "Jonas, in his vivacity, makes a sudden sawing in the air, so close behind the doctor's jugular, that he turn[s] quite red" (MC 639; ch. 41). The doctor, frightened that his own power over other people's bodies is so nearly turned against his own, immediately turns into a Scheherezade, and recounts an instance of "the skilful use of edge-tools" (MC 639; ch. 41) that he recalls or invents. The story he tells immediately captures Jonas's attention and prevents any other attack, whether comic or serious; he fends Jonas off with an anecdote, turning the situation from violent action to controlled, recounted language to ensure his bodily safety. The story fascinates Jonas, just as Dickens's stories fascinate us; it concerns a bloodless killing and Jonas is preparing to commit a murder himself. The story also reasserts the medical profession's power over the body, warning Jonas off from attack: "I'm afraid it was a case of murder, committed by a member of our profession; it was so artistically done" (MC 639; ch. 41). Jobling tells the tale, and his throat, though probably never in any real danger, is saved by anecdote:

'A certain gentleman was found, one morning, in an obscure street, standing upright in an angle of a doorway—I should rather say, leaning, in an upright position, in the angle of a doorway, and supported consequently by the doorway. Upon his waistcoat there was one solitary drop of blood. He was dead, and cold; and had been murdered, sir' (MC 639-40; ch. 41).

This single drop amazes Jonas; it is blood which frightens him about the murder he intends to commit and he has, earlier in the novel, started back horrified when red ink came out of a pen he was using. He asks Jobling to explain further:

'[he] had been stabbed to the heart. Had been stabbed to the heart with such dexterity, sir, that he had died instantly, and had bled internally. It was supposed that a medical friend of his (to whom suspicion attached) had engaged him in conversation on some pretence; had taken him, very likely, by the button in a conversational manner; had examined his ground, at leisure, with his other hand; had marked the
exact spot; drawn out the instrument, whatever it was, when he was quite prepared; and—’

‘And done the trick,’ suggested Jonas (MC 640; ch. 41).

The story uses the bolt-upright dead body that, like the frozen corpses he saw in Switzerland, always fascinated Dickens. Jobling reveals that he was called in to look at the wound, and tells Jonas that he had “no hesitation in saying that it would have reflected credit on any medical man; and that in an unprofessional person, it could not but be considered, either as an extraordinary work of art, or the result of a still more extraordinary, happy, and favourable conjunction of circumstances” (MC 640; ch. 41). Jobling is not let off with merely a story, however, and Jonas presses him to actually turn it into a play by acting it out with him, “standing up in one corner of the room, and alternately representing the murdered man and the murderer; which he did with great effect” (MC 640; ch. 41).

The world of the circus and the world of acting both contain bodily expertise though of different sorts, and both, in part because of their display of the body, were often in Victorian times considered “low.”48 Dickens, however, with his lifelong love of popular entertainment presents both favourably in his novels though aware of their foibles. The body is both displayed and risked at Sleary’s Horse Riding. It is, indeed, the resistance of the body to vulnerability, achieved through skill and practice, that attracts people to the circus, as well as to see often scantily clad49 bodies in unusual or amazing feats and poses. It is a world where the body can be controlled, harnessed to do that which most bodies cannot, but it is also a world where the body is all; Sissy Jupe’s father takes himself off after he has failed in his feats as a clown too many times. The pains of failure are not merely emotional but physical.50 Sissy tells Bounderby and Gradgrind that her people always use “‘the nine oils.... when they get any hurts in the ring.... They bruise themselves very bad sometimes’” (HT 25; 1: ch. 5). Bounderby naturally tries to undercut this real vulnerability with an invented one of his own: “‘when I was four or five years younger than you, I had worse bruises upon me than ten oils, twenty oils, forty oils, would have rubbed off.... There was no rope-dancing for me; I danced on the bare ground and was larruped with the rope’” (HT 25; 1: ch. 5). The Horse Riding, the
site of high and positive imaginative wonder in *Hard Times*, is also a physically dangerous site. It is as if in promoting the imaginative world, Dickens turns automatically to the wonders and insecurities of the body.

Acting is another profession which relies upon the body and in which, as Dickens increasingly and personally knew, a measure of bodily protection could be gained by becoming a different person. Some anatomical traits are, however, innately useful; Vincent Crummles is impressed, for instance, with Smike's unhealthy appearance, saying to Nicholas:

'but what a capital countenance your friend has got!'
'Poor fellow!' said Nicholas, with a half smile, 'I wish it were a little more plump, and less haggard'
'Plump!' exclaimed the manager, quite horrified, 'you'd spoil it for ever'
'Do you think so?'
'Think so, sir! Why, as he is now,' said the manager, striking his knee emphatically; 'without a pad upon his body, and hardly a touch of paint upon his face, he'd make such an actor for the starved business as was never seen in this country. Only let him be tolerably well up in the Apothecary in Romeo and Juliet with the slightest possible dab of red on the tip of his nose, and he'd be certain of three rounds the moment he put his head out of the practicable door in the front grooves O. P.' (*NN* 281; ch. 22).

Smike literally looks as wretched as the characters he so successfully plays, and just as Dickens describes actors walking around merrily after they have "died," Nicholas plays on the literal when he tells Mr. Lenville the tragedian of his role in a play:

'You turn your wife and child out of doors ... and in a fit of rage and jealously, stab your eldest son in the library.... After which ... you are troubled with remorse till the last act, and then you make up your mind to destroy yourself. But, just as you are raising the pistol to your head, a clock strikes—ten' (*NN* 300-01; ch. 24).

This play with literal meanings continues in the words of the actors. "'Mrs. Crummles was the original Blood Drinker,'" Mr. Crummles informs Nicholas, "'Look at her, mother of six children, three of 'em alive, and all upon the stage!'" (*NN* 318; ch. 25).

Crummles realizes his profession is not endless, and hopes the child they are expecting will "'have a turn for juvenile tragedy.... as he and Mrs. Crummles could scarcely hope to act for ever (not being immortal, except in the breath of Fame and in a figurative sense)’" (*NN* 629;
ch. 48). It is through depicting the vulnerabilities of the body in intertwined literal and metaphorical senses and thus creating comedy that Dickens himself largely ensures his own famous and figurative immortality.

In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Nell’s experiences meeting both the side-show folk and Mrs. Jarley and her wax-works reveal the frailties and peculiarities of anatomy, and even when, like Punch and the waxwork, they are not living bodies but effigies of them, Dickens makes the connection with the bodies we inhabit clear. Mrs. Jarley praises wax-work because it has

‘No low beatings and knockings about, no jokings and squeakings like your precious Punches, but always the same, with a constantly unchanging air of coldness and gentility; and so like life, that if wax-work only spoke and walked about, you’d hardly know the difference. I won’t go so far as to say, that, as it is, I’ve seen wax-work quite like life, but I’ve certainly seen some life that was exactly like wax-work’ (*OCS* 272; ch. 27).

Wax-work is of course not “like life” but like death; part of our fascination with it is that it is like the human corpse, dressed up and, in line with Dickens’s fascinations, standing up.

Dickens uses the image of wax-work to describe a number of characters, usually in a death-like light. Mrs. Jarley sees this deathly stillness as better than the animation of Punch, but both forms attract and repel. Wax-works attract through life-like appearance but repel through deathly stillness and invulnerability to pain. Puppets attract us by their humour and lively animation, but repel or frighten us in that they are inanimate objects behaving as though they were animate; both display something dead as animate or re-animate. Mrs. Jarley ironically insists that her “‘stupendous collection of upwards of One Hundred Figures ... is the only collection in the world; all others being imposters and deceptions’” (*OCS* 319; ch. 32); in other words, all others are deceptions of deceptions, while hers are “true,” closer representations of bodies which have died unusual deaths or done terrible deeds:

‘A Maid of Honour in the time of Queen Elizabeth, who died from pricking her finger in consequence of working upon a Sunday.... Jasper Packlemerton of atrocious memory, who courted and married fourteen wives, and destroyed them all by tickling the soles of their feet when they was sleeping in the consciousness of innocence and virtue....
the fat man ... the thin man, the tall man, the short man, the old lady who died of dancing at a hundred and thirty-two, the wild boy of the woods, the woman who poisoned fourteen families with pickled walnuts' (OCS 283-85; ch. 28).

Mrs. Jarley includes "freaks" within her wax-works, but Nell and her Grandfather also meet "freak-show" proprietors on the road, and others who make their living through distorting the body, by stilt-walking for example. The most fascinating conversation on this subject is that between Short and Vuffin at the Jolly Sandboys regarding Vuffin's source of income—giants and dwarves. Being himself proprietor of all his own characters who have their own bodily peculiarities and liabilities, Dickens revels in the details of this type of bodily expertise. Giants, perhaps surprisingly, are presented as the most vulnerable. Vuffin tells Short "'I begin to be afraid [my giant's] going at the knees.... Once get a giant shaky on his legs, and the public care no more about him than they do for a dead cabbage-stalk'" (OCS 203-04; ch. 19). A body, therefore, is valued for abnormal deformity such as gigantism from which an audience is safe, but of no value for "normal deformity" such as aging which reflects the viewer's own vulnerability. This is a factor in Dickens's plenitude of "abnormal deformities"; they both attracted him and attract his readers while their very abnormality distracts from, conceals, or denies the "normal" bodily vulnerabilities of his and our own daily-lives. Old giants, we learn, are "'usually kept in caravans to wait upon the dwarfs,'" because although their upkeep is expensive "'It's better that, than letting 'em go upon the parish or about the streets,'" sa[ys] Mr Vuffin. 'Once make a giant common and giants will never draw again. Look at wooden legs. If there was only one man with a wooden leg what a property he'd be!'" (OCS 204; ch. 19). Playing again on his favourite deformity, Dickens here, as elsewhere, connects wooden-legs to literature: "'if you was to advertise Shakespeare played entirely by wooden legs, it's my belief you wouldn't draw sixpence'" (OCS 204; ch. 19). One can always overplay a novelty, but Dickens knew that a scattering of wooden legs in a literary work do have attractions for an audience, and that his audience was prepared to pay for the privilege of viewing them. There are very few giants in Dickens's texts, but he knows, like Vuffin, that "'The older a dwarf is, the better worth he is ... a
grey-headed dwarf, well wrinkled, is beyond all suspicion” (OCS 206; ch. 19). This, Dickens knows, is the value of his own elderly dwarf, Quilp, who is, however, beyond all suspicion in nothing save his power to attract and repel both characters and readers.

Vuffin’s Shakespearean comments remind us, however, that there are other types of bodily expertise beyond merely displaying or dissecting. Miss La Creevy, the miniaturist, has a professional interest in the body, and dismembers it both as she paints it and as she talks about it: “What with bringing out eyes with all one’s power, and keeping down noses with all one’s force, and adding to heads, and taking away teeth altogether, you have no idea of the trouble one little miniature is” (NN 114; ch. 10). Nicholas questions her about her art and she gives answers that might well be those of the Dickens who needed crowds around him as stimulus when he was writing:

‘the great convenience of living in a thoroughfare like the Strand [is that w]hen I want a nose or an eye for any particular sitter, I have only to look out of window and wait till I get one’

‘Does it take long to get a nose, now?’ inquired Nicholas, smiling.

‘Why, that depends in a great measure on the pattern,’ replied Miss La Creevy. ‘Snubs and romans are plentiful enough, and there are flats of all sorts and sizes when there’s a meeting at Exeter Hall; but perfect aquilines, I am sorry to say, are scarce, and we generally use them for uniforms or public characters’ (NN 43; ch. 5).56

Other professionals in Dickens’s novels cluster around the dead body. Undertakers like Sowerberry, Omer, and Mould look at the body objectively whether it is dead or still alive and their speech involves funereal humour. Mr. Mould, for example, who has to check his face in the mirror to ensure that it is not looking too merry before a funeral, goes with his wife to take a secret peek at the body of the still alive Lewsome: “The gentleman that Mrs. Gamp thought likely to suit us, is in the coach, my love.... You can stand upon the door-step ... and take a look at him” (MC 468; ch. 29). This is going one ghastly step beyond being dismembered by a viewing public, though it combines well with the fact that Mrs. Gamp’s fingers have already itched to lay Lewsome out. Ironically this specimen turns out to be a doctor, with some power of the body, proven perhaps by the fact that, despite these “loving”
attentions, he does in fact survive his illness. Dickens, in satirizing Victorian funerals, also pads the seriousness of death with humour by introducing details of the practical and mundane aspects of such bodily businesses; thus Sowerberry says that he has “to contend against one very great disadvantage: which is, that all the stout people go off the quickest ... three or four inches over one’s calculation makes a great hole in one’s profits” (OT 21; ch. 4).57

Mr. Omer, reluctant to send a message to Mr. Barkis who is ill lest he be thought self-interested, is a positive member of his profession and tells David a little of what his father was like, at least as a corpse. Omer, an asthmatic, is by the end of the novel close to death, both professionally and personally, but he is acceptingly aware of his frailty and thankful for the life he has;58 he even deals with his own body objectively: “I say [self-interestedness] ain’t likely, in a man who knows his wind will go, when it does go, as if a pair of bellows was cut open; and that man a grandfather” (DC 374; ch. 30).

Dennis the hangman is a bodily expert who sees bodies as they are dying and himself dies by the art that feeds him. He expounds mightily and frequently on the merits of “working people off,” and sees his job as a cornerstone of the English constitution,59 considering suicide “tantamount to a man’s working himself off without being overtaken by the law, than which he could imagine nothing more ridiculous or impertinent” (BR 547; ch. 60). He fears Catholics for his own professional reasons:

‘If these Papists gets into power, and begins to boil and roast instead of hang, what becomes of my work! If they touch my work that’s a part of so many laws, what becomes of the laws in general, what becomes of the religion, what becomes of the country!... I musn’t have no biling, no roasting, no frying—nothing but hanging’ (BR 355; ch. 37).

Dickens extends Dennis’s interest beyond the professional; it is, like Dickens’s art, an obsession. Dennis is on the look-out for particularly suitable necks,60 and is willing to perform impromptu hangings at a moment’s notice as he explains to John Willet:

It [is] an experiment which, skilfully and dexterously performed, would be over in five minutes, with great comfort and satisfaction to all parties ... that he had practical
knowledge of the subject, and, being naturally of an obliging and friendly disposition, would work the gentleman off with a deal of pleasure (BR 573; ch. 63).

This is the same tone of delight in deathly expertise that Mr. Venus uses when he says he can articulate a person with an ease and skill that would "equally surprise and charm [him]" (OMF 128; 1 ch. 7). Dennis himself is both performer of and audience to his art form: "I've heerd a eloquence on them boards—you know what boards I mean—and have heerd a degree of mouth given to them speeches, that they was as clear as a bell, and as good as a play. There's a pattern!" (BR 591; ch. 65). The popularity of the boards of both theatre and gallows, as the Victorian age was very much aware, lay in the spectacle of the body, but when his turn comes to stand centre stage Dennis does not act with grace.61 Begging for time in case a reprieve is granted, he creates anecdotal precedents for delay: "[a messenger] may have fallen dead. I saw a man once, fall down dead in the street, myself, and he had papers in his pocket" (BR 686; ch. 76). His death demonstrates, however, the failure of his narrative to convince an audience that it is worth more attention than his body's vulnerability.

In the Dickensian realm, Dennis's over eagerness to exploit his power over the physiques of other people must be punished with summary bodily justice. Dennis must now realize that his philosophy of the body is only "workable" when one is in control of one's own body; without this control, everything literally "falls through."

Certain Dickensian characters who are not professional "experts" on the body also insist on philosophizing about it in order to exert their control over it, but such opinionated pronouncements regarding the body are almost always shown negatively, and these characters, most notably Pecksniff, Squeers, and John Chester all end in physically insecure situations. Pecksniff, for example, believes he is a "bodily expert" and speaks as if anatomy, his own in particular, were under his control and understandable on a purely objective level:

"The process of digestion, as I have been informed by anatomical friends, is one of the most wonderful works of nature. I do not know how it may be with others, but it is a great satisfaction to me to know, when regaling on my humble fare, that I am putting in motion the most beautiful machinery with which we have any acquaintance. I really feel at such times as if I was doing a public service. When I have wound myself up, if I may employ such a term," said Mr. Pecksniff with exquisite tenderness, "and know
that I am Going, I feel that in the lesson afforded by the works within me, I am a Benefactor to my Kind!" (MC 124; ch. 8).

When drunk at Todgers’s he exclaims on Dickens’s favourite limb:

‘This is very soothing.... Extremely so. Cool and refreshing; particularly to the legs! The legs of the human subject, my friends, are a beautiful production. Compare them with wooden legs, and observe the difference between the anatomy of nature and the anatomy of art. Do you know ... that I should very much like to see Mrs. Todgers’s notion of a wooden leg, if perfectly agreeable to herself!’ (MC 153-54; ch. 9).

Bumble and his fellow parochials philosophize over their charges’ bodies; Bumble, for instance, tells Mrs. Sowerberry that she has overfed Oliver and thus:

‘raised a artificial soul and spirit in him, ma’am, unbecoming a person of his condition: as the board, Mrs. Sowerberry, who are practical philosophers, will tell you. What have paupers to do with soul or spirit? It’s quite enough that we let ’em have live bodies’ (OT 41; ch. 7).

Others express strong opinions on the metaphorical breaking of the heart, believing the term should only be used literally. Mr. Chester expostulates on this with his son:

‘About to speak from your heart. Don’t you know that the heart is an ingenious part of our formation—the centre of the blood-vessels and all that sort of thing—which has no more to do with what you say or think, than your knees have? How can you be so very vulgar and absurd? These anatomical allusions should be left to gentlemen of the medical profession. They are really not agreeable in society’ (BR 309; ch. 32).

Chester has himself indulged in anatomical allusions earlier when he has literalized the metaphorical in telling his son not to marry Emma Haredale, though again he claims any such allusions are unseemly:

‘The very idea of marrying a girl whose father was killed, like, meat!... Consider the impossibility of having any respect for your father-in-law under such unpleasant circumstances—think of his having been “viewed” by jurors, and “sat upon” by coroners.... It seems to me such an indelicate sort of thing that I really think the girl ought to have been put to death by the state to prevent its happening’ (BR 176; ch. 15).

Ralph Nickleby similarly rebukes Mrs. Nickleby for saying that her husband died of a broken heart: “‘Pooh!’ said Ralph, ‘there’s no such thing. I can understand a man’s dying of a broken neck, or suffering from a broken arm, or a broken head, or a broken leg, or a broken nose; but a broken heart!—nonsense, it’s the cant of the day’” (NN 23; ch. 3). Gradgrind, who has
encouraged a literal, factual use of language, has his old philosophy flung back in his face at the end of *Hard Times* when he asks Bitzer if has a (metaphorical) heart: “‘The circulation, Sir ... couldn’t be carried on without one. No man, Sir, acquainted with the facts established by Harvey relating to the circulation of the blood, can doubt that I have a heart’” (*HT* 210-11; 3: ch. 8).

Figurative anatomical language, as Dickens shows in humorous literalizations, automatically toys with bodies and displays them. Dickens also uses the differences and similarities between mental and physical philosophy in a similar way. Squeers, who fattens his own son’s body up and exhibits him as a specimen of Dotheboys feeding, and who otherwise controls the bodies of his school pupils, becomes philosophical about the body and wonders why things go wrong with it. When he asks Peg Sliderskew how her rheumatism are, he waxes forth

‘what’s the reason of rheumatism? What do they mean? What do people have ’em for—eh?’

Mrs. Sliderskew didn’t know, but suggested that it was possibly because they couldn’t help it.

‘Measles, rheumatism, hooping-cough, fevers, agers, and lumbagers,’ said Mr. Squeers, ‘is all philosophy together; that’s what it is. The heavenly bodies is philosophy, and the earthly bodies is philosophy. If there’s a screw loose in a heavenly body, that’s philosophy; and if there’s a screw loose in an earthly body, that’s philosophy too; or it may be that sometimes there’s a little metaphysics in it, but that’s not often. Philosophy’s the chap for me’ (*NN* 751; ch. 57).

Philosophy is not the chap for Dickens, however, when he is discussing the body. He inherently knows that to philosophize about anatomy is to distract from it, to make it something merely cerebral when it is fundamentally, obviously, and vulnerably physical. He ensures that those who are unwilling to play with the literal and metaphorical in speaking of the body as well as those who attach philosophy to it will come to their end having felt their bodies physically or ignominiously challenged.

iv

On the level of Conversation Dickens uses humour, speakers of different accents and, above all, the interplay of meanings literal and metaphorical. Through using hypothetical
statements, anecdotes, and the "wisdom" of bodily experts, he reveals increased bodily vulnerability on this level. Examining his anatomical conversation chronologically shows that generally, as Dickens's novels proceed, threats, anecdotes, and statements about the body become more serious, more directly related to the speaker's own body, and involve characters in a greater and more serious interchange with bodily experts. Rumours are also increasingly used to suggest strings of anatomical possibilities in a condensed manner. Most significantly, however, Wegg's conversations with Boffin and with Venus reveal a new openness on the part of Dickens in discussing dismemberment.

Characters such as Quilp, Miss Mowcher, or Phil Squod are physically deformed and aware of their deficiencies. Although Quilp reacts violently to other people's statements about his form, Miss Mowcher indicates that she does not want to be judged upon hers, and Phil explains how he acquired his, these characters from Dickens's early and mid-career do not actually talk very much about their own bodies at all. By the time we reach Little Dorrit, however, characters are introduced who are much more willing to reveal, simply and often angrily, their physical infirmities and vulnerabilities. Mrs. Clennam, for example, wears her paralysis as a badge of righteous affliction, perversely proud that "with [her] rheumatic affection, and what with its attendant debility or nervous weakness ... I have lost the use of my limbs. I never leave my room. I have not been outside this door for [a dozen years]" (LD 34; 1: ch. 3). She also threatens Arthur with the dark hypothetical "if, after all, you were to come into this darkened room to look upon me lying dead, my body should bleed, if I could make it, when you came near me" (LD 51; 1: ch. 5). Miss Havisham, similarly darkly, tells her relatives "where to take [their] stations when [they] come to feast upon [her]" after her death (GE 88; 1: ch. 11).

Jenny Wren is an ambivalently presented character, at least in bodily terms. At first we do not quite know what to make of her, she is "a child—a dwarf—a girl—a something" (OMF 271; 2: ch. 1). She has beautiful long fair hair, but is crippled and is sharp of eye and manner. Well aware of her infirmity, she constantly tells people "my back's bad, and my legs
are queer’” (*OMF* 271; 2: ch. 1). She attempts to exert power over her bodily situation by referring to herself as “the person of the house,” by treating her father as her “bad child,” by sharp-tongued comments to those she dislikes, and by working in the world of appearances in creating beautiful clothes for dolls. Unlike other deformed characters, she does speak of her illness relatively frequently and openly, and too, her conversation reveals that she wishes she had a perfectly healthy body. She dislikes children because of their cruelty to her and she plans bodily punishments for them such as locking them in a dark church vault, blowing pepper through the keyhole to set them sneezing, and then mocking them through the keyhole as they have mocked her. Dickens here openly reveals the pain, rather than simply the comedy or character-revealing nature of physical deformity. Jenny recollects angelic children she used to imagine as a child who came down “in long bright slanting rows, and s[aid] all together, ‘Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!’” who made her light and swept her up to play when she said that she could not (*OMF* 290; 2: ch. 2). She longs for the tranquility of death, which she partially finds in learning to read on Mr. Riah’s roof from where she beckons “‘Come up and be dead!’” (*OMF* 335; 2: ch. 5). When Lizzie say she does not believe Jenny would or would like to pour boiling liquor down her hypothetical husband’s throat in order to blister and choke him if he were an alcoholic, Jenny tells her: “‘Not even like to? Well, you generally know best. Only you haven’t always lived among it as I have lived—and your back isn’t bad and your legs are not queer’” (*OMF* 294; 2: ch. 2).

Rumours, which Dickens begins to use with increasing frequency in later novels, enable him to express within compact paragraphs various risks to the body, and to demonstrate the attraction of such vulnerabilities for a general audience, and to show examples of the extreme anatomical speculations people will indulge in when given a free range. Thus on Merdle’s death:

The report that the great man was dead, got about with astonishing rapidity. At first, he was dead of all the diseases that ever were known, and of several bran-new maladies invented with the speed of Light to meet the demand of the occasion. He had concealed a dropsy from infancy, he had inherited a large estate of water on the chest
from his grandfather, he had had an operation performed upon him every morning of his life for eighteen years, he had been subject to the explosion of important veins in his body after the manner of fireworks, he had had something the matter with his lungs, he had had something the matter with his heart, he had had something the matter with his brain. Five hundred people who sat down to breakfast entirely uninformed on the subject, believed before they had done breakfast, that they privately and personally knew Physician to have said to Mr. Merdle, ‘You must expect to go out, some day, like the snuff of a candle,’ and that they knew Mr. Merdle to have said to Physician, ‘A man can die but once.’ By about eleven o’clock in the forenoon, something the matter with the brain, became the favorite theory against the field; and by twelve the something had been distinctly ascertained to be ‘Pressure’ (LD 689; 2: ch. 25).

Dickens’s private bodily concerns thus circulate through the lively publicly related tales of his characters. Rumours are common in Little Dorrit; they escalate over Flintwinch still being alive and in communication under the collapsed Clennam home, and Mr. F’s Aunt becomes the subject of “an idle rumour which circulated among the credulous infants of the neighbourhood, to the effect that an old lady had sold herself to the pie-shop, to be made up, and was then sitting in the pie-shop parlor, declining to complete her contract” (LD 795; 2: ch. 34). In A Tale of Two Cities rumours flourish over the expected execution of a prisoner for parricide:

‘One old man says at the fountain, that his right hand, armed with the knife, will be burnt off before his face; that, into wounds which will be made in his arms, his breast, and his legs, there will be poured boiling oil, melted lead, hot resin, wax, and sulphur; finally, that he will be torn limb from limb by four strong horses’ (TTC 205; 2: ch. 15).

In a similar manner jokes and speculation expand about what people most physically dread:

[La Guillotine] was the popular theme for jests; it was the best cure for headache, it infallibly prevented the hair from turning grey, it imparted a peculiar delicacy to the complexion, it was the National Razor which shaved close: who kissed La Guillotine, looked through the little window and sneezed into the sack. It was the sign of the regeneration of the human race. It superseded the Cross.... It sheared off heads so many, that it, and the ground it most polluted, were a rotten red (TTC 336; 3: ch. 4).66

Discussions with bodily experts, particularly those which involve the dead and dismembered body, become increasingly less superficial and more personally related as Dickens’s career progressed. Young Jerry Cruncher, for example, asks his father seriously about the profession of resurrectionist:

‘What’s his goods, father?’ asked the brisk Young Jerry.
'His goods,' said Mr. Cruncher, after turning it over in his mind, 'is a branch of Scientific goods.'

'Persons' bodies, ain't it, father?' asked the lively boy.

'I believe it is something of that sort,' said Mr. Cruncher.

'Oh, father, I should so like to be a Resurrection-Man when I'm quite growed up!'

Mr. Cruncher was soothed, but shook his head in a dubious and moral way. 'It depends upon how you dewelop your talents. Be careful to dewelop your talents, and never to say no more than you can help to nobody, and there's no telling at the present time what you may not come to be fit for' (TTC 197; 2: ch. 14).

Cruncher himself reveals more about his profession to Mr. Lorry, indicating that there is not much of a living to be gained by it, "'wot with undertakers, and wot with parish clerks, and wot with sextons, and wot with private watchmen (all awaricious and all in it)'" (TTC 379; 3: ch. 9). Influenced in part by the horrors he has seen in France, he says that he wants to get out of this field and into the other bodily related "'line of the reg'lar diggin', and make amends for what he would have un-dug—if it wos so—by diggin' of 'em in with a will, and with convictions respectin' the futur' keepin' of 'em safe.'" He explains: "'A man don't see all this here a goin' on dreadful round him, in the way of Subjects without heads, dear me, plentiful enough fur to bring the price down to porterage and hardly that, without havin' his serious thoughts of things'" (TTC 380; 3: ch. 9). The interesting thing about Jerry's speech here is that it is essentially comic relief but is about the same subject, dead bodies, which are so horrifically described in the pages surrounding it about the French Revolution. The discussion also takes place as Carton is talking secretly with Solomon in the next room, primarily about the means that will lead to Carton's own head coming off. Dismemberment at three removes, the ghastly, the comic, and the noble is simultaneously hinted at as Dickens prepares to use all three.

Mr. Venus who is himself introduced as a dismembered head67 is a taxidermist and articulator in whose shop articulation is possible of both the human body and concerns about human anatomy. Through the characters and bodily expert language of Venus and his customers, Dickens daringly attempts to re-member a body, a body not caught in the dismembered diction that pervades the level of Expression, but one that speaks for itself.
Venusthemightful himself indulges in verbal hypotheticals that have the force of artistic competence behind them. He tells a boy messenger "'You've no idea how small you'd come out, if I had the articulating of you'" (OMF 126; 1: ch. 7). Telling Wegg of his expertise in anatomy, he hypothesizes: "'if you was brought here loose in a bag to be articulated, I'd name your smallest bones blindfold equally with your largest, as fast as I could pick 'em out, and I'd sort 'em all, and sort your wertebrae, in a manner that would equally surprise and charm you'" (OMF 128; 1: ch. 7). He later seriously threatens Wegg over the found will, again commenting on his anatomical skills and, pointing to the French gentleman, says: "'It still wants a pair of arms. I don't say that I'm in any hurry for 'em'" (OMF 559; 3: ch. 7). In such speeches, changes and threats to the body become frighteningly real and, unlike other earlier threats, we can feel the truth behind them.

Silas Wegg is, of course, the owner of the body Dickens tries to put back together, and nowhere is dismemberment more openly discussed by a character or dealt with by Dickens than in the conversation of Silas Wegg. Stephen Gill in his introduction to Our Mutual Friend says Wegg's ending in the dung cart is "a suitably two-dimensional ending to a story that is never meant to be taken more seriously" (OMF 13). In light of Dickens's concern with the body, however, there is much that can be seriously seen in the portrait of Wegg. He is more than an example of Dickens's comic style; he serves to connect and express three of Dickens's most fundamental concerns: literature, bodily vulnerability, and the quest for financial security.

Wegg's body is revealed under guise of humour in his conversations with Boffin and with Venus. Boffin is attracted to Wegg by his wooden leg and by his literary "skill" and first asks him questions both Dickens and readers would like to ask the wooden-legged: how he came by his wooden leg and whether he likes it. Wegg responds that he got it through an accident and, as for liking it, in "a sort of desperation occasioned by the singularity of the question," he says "'Well! I haven't got to keep it warm'" (OMF 91; 1 ch. 5). Wegg's body, unlike bodies used as the site of oaths, threats, or anecdotes in earlier novels has actually
been damaged and he has undergone a hospital amputation. Boffin is impressed by Wegg, terming him "A literary man—with a wooden leg—and all Print is open to him!" (OMF 93; 1 ch. 5). Of course all print is not open to Wegg just as his body is incomplete, and his mutilation of the language he stumps through aloud reflects his own bodily maiming. Like Dickens he refers to language in physical terms: "'I believe you couldn't show me the piece of English print, that I wouldn't be equal to collaring and throwing'" (OMF 93; 1 ch. 5).68

In speaking with Venus about the possibilities of buying his limb back, Wegg euphemistically and in an attempt at reanimation refers to his leg as "I," a practice Venus continues:

'And how have I been going on, this long time, Mr Venus?'
'Very bad,' says Mr Venus, uncompromisingly.
'What? Am I still at home?' asks Wegg, with an air of surprise.
'Always at home.' (OMF 124; 1: ch. 7).

Venus tells Wegg that he has been unable to work "him" into any other body. Wegg, chagrined that he cannot be worked into a "miscellaneous one," and told that he might have value "'as a Monstrosity,'" is glad nevertheless that he can persuade Venus to hold him over long enough so that he can find the money to buy himself back. Literalizing the metaphorical he says that he wants to "'collect [him]self like a genteel person'" (OMF 127; 1: ch. 7). Wegg has tracked his limb down because he wishes to collect himself. An avaricious and money-seeking person in all his other endeavours, he still finds it important to buy back his remains. Having his limb offers him more security than money—the body being of fundamental importance and money being only the means to keep body together. Like Dickens, he reads aloud in order to gain the money bodily security needs. By the time he wrote Our Mutual Friend Dickens himself did have sufficient money to keep his own body together, though during the course of writing the novel the Staplehurst accident69 showed him that even fame and financial security were no real physical protectors.

Wegg can in many ways be seen as a simulacrum of Dickens in his quest for bodily wholeness and in his worth to Boffin as a "literary gentleman—with a wooden leg." Dickens
himself is a multi-faceted author with many wooden legs and the added attraction is the same for readers as it is for Boffin, a little bodily oddity never goes amiss. Interestingly when Wegg begins to lose power, in that Venus retains the will and begins to correct his reading pronunciation, Wegg’s ability to stump through language is affected: “Of the slightest anatomical reference he became particularly shy, and, if he saw a bone ahead, would go any distance out of his way rather than mention it by name” (OMF 639; 3: ch. 14). Dickens conversely, by the time of Our Mutual Friend is almost going consciously out of his way to mention such things.

Since we all instinctively share at least some of Dickens’s fears, we too are attracted by his characters’ often unselfconscious conversation about the fleshy object of those fears, and the opportunity of laughing at them also appeals to us. In giving his characters speech, Dickens gives his characters life, and, in the panorama of his “freak show,” in return for the power of life and death that he, as proprietor, has over them, his subjects are given voice, allowed to speak as well as be displayed. In creating each of them, Dickens, the author incarnate, speaks a little piece of his mind and preserves a little piece of his body.
NOTES

1 One of Dickens’s favourite lines, however, concerns disease and appears on this level: “Gout flying upwards soared with Mr. F to another sphere” (LD 278; 1: ch. 24).

2 She mentions that he has “poisoned himself in private no less than six times within the last fortnight ... her not having once interfered by word or deed to save his life” (NN 578; ch. 44).

3 See generally Anderson who discusses

The age-old contrast between male and female suicide [which] depicted suicide as an escape from sexual dishonour for women, but from worldly dishonour for men; [in the 1840s] it was emphasized and elaborated and given a distinctive emotional, moral, and symbolic twist. Among women, suicide by drowning was shown as the reluctant last resort of the seduced and abandoned (and therefore starving and despairing); whereas among men, suicide by shooting, throat-cutting, or hanging was presented as the quickly chosen escape of the proud, the weak, or the wicked from financial ruin, disgrace, or retribution.... Dickens’s earlier novels perfectly expressed (and no doubt reinforced) this application of the sexes’ separate spheres to suicidal behaviour. Thus the villains Ralph Nickleby and Jonas Chuzzlewit are both made to take their own lives when they find themselves ‘grovelling in the dust’; and in The Chimes there is baffled amazement when the wealthy banker Deedles shoots himself with no such provocation: ‘No motive. Princeley circumstances!’.... Male suicide was thus most often shown simply as the fitting end of a villain or a weakling which was quite different from the romantic stereotype of a drowning girl or a woman flinging herself from a bridge (196-97), which are the watery fates Nancy and Martha believe await them. Anderson points out that “For the middle class, the female suicide was essentially a sinner; for the working class, she was a victim” (199). She further comments on two other ways suicide was seen in the early Victorian period, the first “presenting suicides among the poor as the result of cruel wrongs” in order, through examples, to “bridge the gulf between ‘the Two Nations’” (202), the second comically in ballads and popular songs (Anderson 207-08).

4 The traditional “death for honour” is humorously invoked by a Dedlock “Mercury in powder,” who says “that if this sort of thing was to last [an empty house]—which it couldn’t, for a man of his spirits couldn’t bear it, and a man of his figure couldn’t be expected to bear it—there would be no resource for him, upon his honour, but to cut his throat!” (BH 197; ch. 16).

5 Nancy speaks of what she believes awaits her: “‘Look at that dark water. How many times do you read of such as I who spring into the tide, and leave no living thing, to care for, or to bewail them. It may be years hence, or it may be only months, but I shall come to that at last’” (OT 316; ch. 46). She will not, of course, come to that; talking about it, like Dickens creating it, means that she has taken control over at least that hypothetical aspect of her own story, and it will not be her fate, even if what awaits her is a far more violent end.

6 Wilkins Flasher, Esquire and Mr. Simmery similarly consider methods when making a bet over one Boffey killing himself within ten days:

‘I’ll bet you ten guineas to five he cuts his throat....
‘Stop! I bar.... Perhaps he may hang himself....’
‘I’ve no objection to take you that way. Say—makes away with himself”
‘Kills himself, in fact’ (PP 854-55; ch. 55).

7 Suicide is further comically connected to matrimony in the case of Augustus Muddle who when he tells Tom Pinch that “there are some men ... who can’t get run over,” worries Tom so much that he keeps a tight grip on Augustus’s arm “lest he should fly into the road; and making another, and a more successful attempt, should get up a private little Juggernaut before the eyes of his betrothed” (MC 699; ch. 46). His betrothed, Charity Pecksniff, has just expressed thoughts about his suicide also: “Think ... what my feelings would have been, if I had goaded him to suicide, and it had got into the papers!” (MC 698; ch. 46). She little realizes the aptness of what she has said and is later shocked to read his jilting letter “Frequently—when you have sought to smooth my brow with kisses—has self-destruction flashed across me. Frequently—incredible as it may seem—have I abandoned the idea” (MC 828; ch. 54).

8 Soon after, however, she threatens to kill: “‘Now, ducky, ducky, ducky, come to Mrs. Bond and be killed!’” (DC 282; ch. 22).

9 Mr. Rugg in a similarly convoluted way states: “‘If I was to outlive my own feelings, I’d leave fifty pound in my will to the man who would put me out of existence’” (LD 292; 1: ch. 25).

10 Gabriel Varden similarly plays on the word. After Mrs. Rudge tells him that the unnamed Rudge’s “shadow has been upon [this house] and me, in light and darkness, at noonday and midnight. And now, at last, he has come in the body!” He replies “‘But he wouldn’t have gone in the body ... if you had left my arms and legs at liberty’” (BR 92; ch. 6).

11 Also in a legal context, a chemist attempting to get out of jury duty in Bardell v. Pickwick says “‘there’ll be murder before this trial’s over,’” because his errand boy “‘is not much acquainted with drugs; and I know that the prevailing impression on his mind is, that Epsom salts means oxalic acid; and syrup of senna, laudanum’” (PP 513; ch. 34).

12 A similar incident occurs in The Old Curiosity Shop when the bachelor introduces the new schoolmaster to his boys: “‘That boy, my good sir, would break his neck with pleasure, and deprive his parents of their chief comfort.’” Another “‘will come to a bad end; he’ll never die in his bed’” (OCS 488; ch. 52). As he leaves for Sowerberry’s, Oliver is more comically told “that if he complain[s] of his situation, or ever [comes] back to the parish again, he w[i]ll be sent to sea: there to be drowned, or knocked on the head, as the case might be” (OT 22; ch. 4).

13 Bill Sikes makes most of the serious threats in this novel and he possesses the body most capable of fulfilling them as he demonstrates when he murders Nancy. He similarly threatens the distastefully bodied Fagin:

   ‘I wonder [the boys] don’t murder you; I would if I was them. If I’d been your 'prentice, I’d have done it long ago; and—no, I couldn’t have sold you afterwards, though; for you’re fit for nothing but keeping as a curiosity of ugliness in a glass bottle, and I suppose they don’t blow glass bottles large enough’ (OT 77; ch. 13).

14 “‘I speak of one’” he says on another occasion, “‘who was apprenticed down here, to a coffin-maker: I wish he had made his coffin, and screwed his body in it’” (OT 246; ch. 37). He is also interested in the hypothetical results of killing a person:
‘If you flung a man’s body down there, where would it be to-morrow morning?’ said
Monks, swinging the lantern to and fro in the dark well.

‘Twelve miles down the river, and cut to pieces besides,’ replied Bumble,
recoiling at the very thought (OT 255; ch. 38).

15 John Willet desperately asks Hugh under his breath: “Are you tired of your life, sir, that
you go a-trying to provoke three great neck-or-nothing chaps, that could keep on running
over us, back’ards and for’ards, till we was dead, and then take our bodies up behind ’em,
and drown us ten miles off?” (BR 331; ch. 35).

16 Characters’ thoughts also turn seriously to the hypothetical death of the body. Ralph
Nickleby, for instance, thinks and mutters to himself:
‘I am not a man to be moved by a pretty face.... There is a grinning skull beneath it,
and men like me who look and work below the surface see that, and not its delicate
covering. And yet I almost like the girl .... If the boy were drowned or hanged, and the
mother dead, this house should be her home. I wish they were, with all my soul’ (NN
400; ch. 31).

Nell does not wish for, but fears, the death of her Grandfather, thinking alone at night in the
curiosity shop,
If he were to die—if sudden illness had happened to him, and he were never to come
home again, alive—if, one night, he should come home, and kiss and bless her as
usual, and after she had gone to bed and had fallen asleep and was perhaps dreaming
pleasantly, and smiling in her sleep, he should kill himself and his blood come
creeping, creeping, on the ground to her own bed-room door—(OCS 120-21: ch. 9).

17 Her husband is similarly infanticidal after discovering that Mr. Lillyvick is married, saying
of his new baby, “‘Let him die! He has no expectations, no property to come into. We want
no babies here,’ said Mr. Kenwigs recklessly. ‘Take ’em away, take ’em away to the
Fondling!” (NN 465; ch. 36).

18 Dick Swiveller warns the single gentleman about sleeping so long: “if ever you do that
again, take care you’re not sat upon by the coroner and buried in a cross road before you
wake. We have been distracted with fears that you were dead, sir”” (OCS 343; ch. 35).

19 And the hypothetical question should not be ignored. Mr. M’Choakumchild, for example,
asks Sissy Jupe, “‘in a given time a hundred thousand persons went to sea on long voyages,
and only five hundred of them were drowned or burnt to death. What is the percentage?’”
(HT 48; 1: ch. 9).

20 Sir Leicester himself describes Boythorn in hypothetical terms as a “‘person who, fifty
years ago, would probably have been tried at the Old Bailey for some demagogue proceeding,
and severely punished—if not ... if not hanged, drawn, and quartered’” (BH 148; ch. 12).

21 And as to those who pay physicians a pittance, he would “‘have the necks of every one of
them wrung, and their skulls arranged in Surgeons’ Hall for the contemplation of the whole
profession—in order that its younger members might understand from actual measurement, in
early life, how thick skulls may become!’” (BH 153; ch. 13).

22 Other hypotheticals reveal unusual risks to the body: “‘Well, if I knew as little of life as
that, I’d eat my hat and swallow the buckle,’ said the clerical gentleman” (PP 651; ch. 42).
Newman Noggs “‘should like to have [Ralph] compelled to swallow one of every English
23 He expresses his willingness to die to please Florence: "If I could be at all useful in a pecuniary point of view, I should glide into the silent tomb with ease and smoothness" (DS 675; ch. 50), and says that he is "well aware that the most agreeable thing [he] could do for all parties would be to put an end to [his] existence, which can only be regarded as an inconvenience" (DS 672; ch. 50).

24 Indeed, after murdering Nancy he helps people fleeing from a fire and survives. Sikes threatens anyone and everyone, particularly Nancy: "put on your own face" he tells her, "or I'll alter it so, that you won't know it again when you do want it" (OT 267; ch. 39); "if I hear you for half a minute longer, the dog shall have such a grip on your throat as'll tear some of that screaming voice out" (OT 303; ch. 44). Another time he shouts, "Speak, will you! ... or if you don't, it shall be for want of breath" (OT 319; ch. 47). If he ever discovers a peacher, he will, he threatens Fagin "grind his skull under the iron heel of [his] boot into as many grains as there are hairs upon his head" (OT 319; ch. 47). And if Fagin were that peacher, he says:

'I'd do something in the jail that 'ud get me put in irons; and if I was tried along with you, I'd fall upon you with them in the open court, and beat your brains out afore the people. I should have such strength,' muttered the robber, poised his brawny arm, 'that I could smash your head as if a loaded waggon had gone over it' (OT 319; ch. 47).

Sikes does have strength, and while he is only swearing oaths it serves him well, but when he uses it to kill Nancy he is undone by it; his strength only gains him a precarious rooftop position, and he dies by slipping over, haunted by the eyes of the murdered Nancy.

25 Bagstock similarly offers an arm: "it's an extraordinary thing to me that no one can have the honour and happiness of shooting all such beggars through the head without being brought to book for it. But here's an arm for Mrs. Granger if she'll do J. B. the honour to accept it" (DS 372; ch. 27). Seeing Job Trotter "contorting his face into the most fearful and astonishing grimaces that ever were beheld" (PP 346; ch. 23), Sam Weller again hypothesizes about bodily alteration, telling him "'Come, none o' that 'ere nonsense. You ain't so wery 'ansome that you can afford to throw away many o' your good looks. Bring them 'ere eyes o' you'n back into their proper places, or I'll knock 'em out of your head. D'ye hear?" (PP 347; ch. 23).

26 Another example concerns Rigaud, who, being escorted out of his prison cell by a guard of soldiers is told "unless you [depart in state] ... you might depart in so many pieces that it would be difficult to get you together again. There's a crowd, Monsieur Rigaud, and it doesn't love you" (LD 13; 1: ch. 1). Miggs also refers to actual dismemberment, though more humorously, when she says "'I wouldn't have a husband with one arm, anyways. I would have two arms. I would have two arms, if it was me, though instead of hands they'd only got hooks at the end, like our dustman!'" (BR 721; ch. 80).

27 Louisa Gradgrind, also, who has been rubbing red the cheek which Bounderby has kissed, is warned by her brother: "'You'll rub a hole in your face,'" to which she replies "'You may cut the piece out with your penknife if you like, Tom. I wouldn't cry!'" (HT 21; 1: ch. 40).
28 He also describes Solomom Pell as "‘a limb o’ the law ... as has got brains like the frogs, dispersed all over his body, and reachin’ to the very tips of his fingers’" (PP 670; ch. 43).

29 Flora similarly mentions to Clennam “that they had drained the cup of life to the dregs; and further to hint mysteriously that the late Mr. F was at the bottom of it” (LD 268; 1: ch. 23).

30 One co-sufferer of Oliver Twist’s in the workhouse cannibalistically, hint[s] darkly to his companions, that unless he ha[s] another basin of gruel per diem, he is afraid he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age. He had a wild, hungry, eye; and they implicitly believed him (OT 11; ch. 2).

31 In his next novel Nicholas Nickleby, Dickens combines Grimwig’s two fetishes by putting comic words into the mouth of the otherwise serious and distasteful Ralph Nickleby, who says: “‘If [Mr. Bray] is not booked to make the long voyage before many months are past and gone, I wear an orange for a head!’” (NN 714-15; ch. 54).

32 Marlow, “English Cannibalism,” discusses this aspect of Dickens’s novels: “Although Freud assumed that the ‘dread of being eaten’ is universal, we have seen that the dread of being one at the ‘cannibal feast’ is equally strong a motive in Dickens’s writings and in many of his strongest characters” (665).

33 Mr. Weller says of his son’s education “‘I took a good deal o’ pains with his edication, Sir; let him run in the streets when he was very young, and shift for his-self. It’s the only way to make a boy sharp, Sir’” (PP 298; ch. 20).

34 Public speculation on missing people is also comic because crowd-induced; Gride’s neighbours, for instance, put forward theories as to why Peg Sliderskew does not answer the door: “some, held that she had fallen asleep; some, that she had burnt herself to death; some, that she had got drunk; one very fat man, that she had seen something to eat which had frightened her so much (not being used to it) that she had fallen into a fit” (NN 736; ch. 56). Gride himself asks:

‘Suppose she should be murdered. Lying with her brains knocked out by a poker, eh?’
‘Suppose she were,’ said Ralph. ‘I tell you, I wish such things were more common than they are, and more easily done. You may stare and shiver. I do!’ (NN 737; ch. 56).

35 Non-heroic characters often talk about death, damage, or disease, but these tales nearly always breathe the air of comedy, even if the subject is quite serious. Mr. Weller senior tells Sam that his wife has died after catching cold, the “consekeens of imprudently settin too long on the damp grass in the rain a hearin of a shepherd”’ (PP 802; ch. 52). Mr. Bumble tells Mrs. Corney about a pauper who pleaded for relief and, when he did not get what he needed, said “‘Then I’ll die in the streets!’... [and] he went away; and he did die in the streets. There’s a obstinate pauper for you!” (OT 148; ch. 23). Mark Tapley tells Martin Chuzzlewit about the ex-slave he has met:

‘Why, when that man was young ... he was shot in the leg; gashed in the arm; scored in his live limbs, like pork; beaten out of shape; had his neck galled with an iron collar, and wore iron rings upon his wrists and ankles. The marks are on him to this day. When I was having my dinner just now, he stripped off his coat, and took away my appetite’ (MC 284; ch. 17).
He continues by telling Martin that the slave’s first master died and “so did his second master from having his head cut open with a hatchet by another slave, who, when he’d done it, went and drowned himself,” and that having finally bought his freedom, he was saving up to buy his daughter (MC 284; ch. 17).

36 She tells her children that their father (like Dickens),

‘could never bear the sight of [pigs] in the shops, and used to say that they always put him in mind of very little babies, only the pigs had much fairer complexions; and he had a horror of little babies, too, because he couldn’t very well afford any increase to his family, and had a natural dislike to the subject’ (NN 529; ch. 41).

She recalls a former beau who “was going to be hung, only he accidentally choked himself, and the government pardoned him” (NN 531; ch. 41). A footboy she once had “had not only a wart, but a wen also, and a very large wen too, and he demanded to have his wages raised in consequence, because he found it came very expensive” (NN 583; ch. 45). She also parodies both Dickens’s minor ailments and his eclectic interest in cures, when she reveals herself to be very subject to colds.

37 Other equally effective examples abound: “If you walley my precious life don’t upse: me, as the gen’l man said to the driver, when they was a carryin’ him to Tyburn” (PP 277; ch. 19); “I only assisted natur, Ma’am; as the doctor said to the boy’s mother, arter he’d bled him to death” (PP 730; ch. 47).


39 He warns the Fat boy against becoming too fat by telling him of “the old gen’l’m’n as wore the pig-tail” (PP 424; ch. 28) who had not seen his shoes for forty five years, “and if you’d put an exact model of his own legs on the dinin’ table afore him, he wouldn’t ha’ known ’em” (PP 425; ch. 28). This same man, says Sam, eventually had his fob watch stolen by pickpockets getting a “little boy with a very large head” to butt him in the stomach and double him over “and what’s worse than that, the old gen’l’m’n’s digestion was all wrong artewards, to the very last day of his life” (PP 425; ch. 28).

40 The Pickwick Papers also of course includes the more obviously interpolated tales such as “The Stroller’s Tale” or “The Old Man’s Tale about the Queer Client” which are connected to the body through such elements as death, illness, violent revenge, or methods of description. “The True Legend of Prince Bladud,” for example, describes the Prince escaping from prison and “considerately leaving his dinner knife in the heart of his gaoler, lest the poor fellow (who had a family) should be considered privy to his flight, and punished accordingly by the infuriated king.” The King, venting anger on the Lord Chamberlain “str[ikes] off his pension and his head together” (PP 559; ch. 36).

41 Mr. Weller also warns of the dangers to heads when driving his coach: “Take care o’ the archvay, gen’lm’n. ‘Heads,’ as the pieman says” (PP 329; ch. 22).

42 A fuller and proser relating of the bodily facts, however, often “preserves” a body in a grotesque way. Jack Bamber, in The Pickwick Papers, the most bodily anecdotal of Dickens’s novels, tells of a friend who “died one morning of apoplexy, as he was going to open his outer door. Fell with his head in his own letter-box, and there he lay for eighteen montis”
until his lock was forced, "‘and a very dusty skeleton in a blue coat, black knee-shorts, and silks, fell forward in the arms of the porter who opened the door’" (PP 307; ch. 21). He also tells of the "‘Tenant of a top set—bad character—[who] shut himself up in his bed-room closet, and took a dose of arsenic’" (PP 307; ch. 21); a new tenant, made uneasy for some time, eventually notices the locked closet, breaks it open, "‘and there, sure enough, standing bolt upright in the corner, was the last tenant, with a little bottle clasped firmly in his hand, and his face livid with the hue of a painful death’" (PP 308; ch. 21).

Smith notes that "‘Medical students ... were regarded as cads for the first sixty years of the century’" (264). The Apothecaries Act of 1815 gave Apothecaries the "‘power to prosecute anyone who practised without their licence’" (Cartwright, Social 52) and also made half a year’s experience in a dispensary, hospital, or infirmary compulsory for all apprentices. This led to "‘a proliferation of private schools which were nothing but cramming establishments for the Apothecaries’ exam.... Lack of supervision produced ‘the medical student’, exemplified by Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Benjamin Allen in Dickens’ Pickwick Papers’" (Cartwright, Social 53).

These two students are keen about every aspect of their work and frequently offer to bleed people; for example, when Mr. Pickwick falls through the ice, "‘Mr. Benjamin Allen ... hold[s] a hurried consultation with Mr. Bob Sawyer, on the advisability of bleeding the company generally, as an improving little bit of professional practice’" (PP 456; ch. 30). Mrs. Raddle wishes they would "‘confine [themselves] to breaking the arms and legs of the poor people in the hospitals, and keep [themselves] to [themselves]’" (PP 480; ch. 32). Indeed, Sawyer threatens bad medical treatment for any object of Arabella’s affection: "‘I’d put a bullet in him if I found him out.... If that didn’t do his business, I’d extract it afterwards, and kill him that way’" (PP 736; ch. 48).

Mrs. Gamp’s reassuring of Chuffey reveals her level of medical expertise: "‘If you should turn at all faint, we can soon revive you, sir, I promise you. Bite a person’s thumbs, or turn their fingers the wrong way ... and they comes to, wonderful, Lord bless you!’" (MC 708; ch. 46).

Her philosophy on death is that "‘it’s what we must all come to. It’s as certain as being born, except that we can’t make our calculations as exact’” (MC 315; ch. 19).

She puts herself forward as a prospective midwife for Mercy Chuzzlewit with the extraordinary recommendation that she is

‘well beknown to Mrs. Harris as has one sweet infant (though she do not wish it known) in her own family by the mother’s side, kep in spirits in a bottle; and that sweet babe she see at Greenwich Fair, a travellin in company with the pink-eyed lady, Prooshan dwarf, and livin skelinton, which judge her feelins wen the barrel organ played, and she was showed her own dear sister’s child, the same not bein expected from the outside picter, where it was painted quite contrairy in a livin state, a many sizes larger, and performing upon the Arp, which never did that dear child know or do: since breathe it never did, to speak on, in this wale!’ (MC 809-10; ch. 52).

The impecunious Mr. Micawber expresses fears of lowness when he states that "‘it is still probable that [his] children may be reduced to seek a livelihood by personal contortion’” (DC 606; ch. 49).
49 The women tight-rope walkers at Sleary's, for example, are described as not seeming to mind that their Victorian legs are on display.

50 Kidderminster's wife "'wath Tightrope, thee wath, and now thee'th nothing—on account of fat.'" Another in the circus lost her husband after "'He wath throw'd a heavy back-fall off a Elephant in a short of a Pagoda thing ath the Thultan of the Indieth'" (HT 206; 3: ch. 7). Nor is it only sudden or accidental injury that affects the troupe, as Sleary explains of himself: "'My voithe ith a little huthky, Thquire, and not eathy heard by them ath don't know me; but if you'd been chilled and heated, heated and chilled, chilled and heated in the ring when you wath young, ath often ath I have been, your voithe wouldn't have lathed out, Thquire, no more than mine'" (HT 32; 1: ch. 6).

51 Pumblechook also uses this literalizing technique when he rhetorically asks the young Pip: "'If you had been born [a Squeaker], would you have been here now?'":

'You would have been disposed of for so many shillings according to the market price of the article, and Dunstable the butcher would have come up to you as you lay in your straw, and he would have whipped you under his left arm, and with his right he would have tucked up his frock to get a penknife from out of his waistcoat-pocket, and he would have shed your blood and had your life. No bringing up by hand then. Not a bit of it!' (GE 28; 1: ch. 4).

52 Jenny's dead baby in Bleak House is described as looking like wax-work, as are the rigid Mr. Murdstone, and the corpse-like Miss Havisham. People also wonder whether Nell herself is a wax-work, a prefiguration of her "perfect" death.

53 Pancks also connects wooden legs with finances just as Mrs. Gamp has done with her husband's when he points out metaphorically that a wooden leg is useless as a reference:

'A person who can't pay, gets another person who can't pay, to guarantee that he can pay. Like a person with two wooden legs, getting another person with two wooden legs, to guarantee that he has got two natural legs. It don't make either of them able to do a walking-match. And four wooden legs are more troublesome to you than two, when you don't want any' (LD 267; 1: ch. 23).

54 This is not the only time Dickens connects Shakespeare with the body, particularly with legs. A theatre dresser warns Wopsle: "'You're out in your reading of Hamlet when you get your legs in profile'" (GE 257; 2: ch. 12). Mr. Pip, a "theatrical man," recounts "the Viscount's" comments to him:

"'Shakespeare's an infernal humbug, Pip!... There's a lot of feet in Shakespeare's verse, but there an't any legs worth mentioning in Shakespeare's plays, are there, Pip? Juliet, Desdemona, Lady Macbeth, and all the rest of 'em, whatever their names are, might as well have no legs at all, for anything the audience know about it, Pip.... What's the legitimate object of the drama, Pip? Human nature. What are legs? Human nature. Then let us have plenty of leg pieces, Pip, and I'll stand by you, my buck!' And I am proud to say,' added Pip, 'that he did stand by me, handsomely' (MC 452; ch. 28).

Mrs. Wititterly says of herself to Mrs. Nickleby: "'I'm always ill after Shakespeare.... I scarcely exist the next day; I find the reaction so very great after a tragedy, my lord, and Shakespeare is such a delicious creature'" (NN 352; ch. 27). Mrs. Nickleby, whom Dickens based on his own mother, explains her own Shakespeare-related illness with a nice touch of
unconscious irony. On a visit to Stratford she says "I was in the family way with my son Nicholas at the time, and I had been very much frightened by an Italian image boy that very morning. In fact, it was quite a mercy, ma'am ... that my son didn't turn out to be a Shakespeare, and what a dreadful thing that would have been!" (NN 353; ch. 27).

55 Magwitch, in recounting his life reveals that he was taught to write by "‘a travelling Giant what signed his name at a penny a time’" (GE 345; 3: ch. 3).

56 Mrs. Nickleby, to get the conversation flowing on the topic of Frank Cheeryble, asks Nicholas

‘What may you call his nose, now, my dear? ... what style of nose? What order of architecture, if one may say so. I am not very learned in noses. Do you call it a Roman or a Grecian?’

‘Upon my word, mother,’ said Nicholas, laughing, ‘as well as I remember, I should call it a kind of Composite, or mixed nose. But I have no very strong recollection on the subject. If it will afford you any gratification, I'll observe it more closely and let you know.’

‘I wish you would, my dear,’ said Mrs. Nickleby, with an earnest look (NN 727; ch. 55).

57 Sowerberry combines financial dissatisfaction with funereal humour, when he complains to Bumble over the small price he is given for parochial coffins:

‘The prices allowed by the boards [for coffins] are very small, Mr. Bumble’

‘So are the coffins,’ replie[s] the beadle at which "Mr. Sowerberry ... laugh[s] a long time without cessation" (OT 20; ch. 4).

58 He comments:

‘my limbs are rather out of sorts, and I am wheeled about. With the exception of my limbs and my breath, hows’ever, I am as hearty as a man can be.... If it had been my eyes, what should I have done? If it had been my ears, what should I have done? Being my limbs, what does it signify? Why, my limbs only made my breath shorter when I used ’em'.... His supreme contempt for his own limbs, as he sat smoking, was one of the pleasantest oddities I have ever encountered (DC 626-27; ch. 51).

59 Dennis is impressed with the dignity of the Law of England and its not distinguishing between men and women ‘‘If you was to count up in the newspapers the number of females as have been worked off in this here city alone, in the last ten year,’ said Mr. Dennis thoughtfully, ‘you’d be surprised at the total—quite amazed, you would. There’s a dignified and equal thing; a beautiful thing! But we’ve no security for its lasting’’ (BR 542; ch. 59).

60 He says of Hugh’s neck “with a horrible kind of admiration, such as that with which a cannibal might regard his intimate friend, when hungry,—‘did you ever ... see such a throat as his? Do but cast your eyes upon it. There’s a neck for stretching, Muster Gashford!’” (BR 360; ch. 38).

61 Before his fate is certain, he manages a little philosophy: “‘Even if we shouldn’t [get off], and the chances fail, we can but be worked off once: and when it’s well done, it’s so neat, so skilful, so captivating, if that don’t seem too strong a word, that you’d hardly believe it could be brought to sich perfection’” (BR 668; ch. 74).
62 Squeers expresses related views in another speech: 

'I'm pretty well. So's the family, and so's the boys, except for a sort of rash as is a running through the school, and rather puts 'em off their feed. But it's a ill wind as blows no good to nobody; that's what I always say when them lads has a wisitation. A wisitation, sir, is the lot of mortality. Mortality itself, sir, is a wisitation. The world is chock full of wisitations; and if a boy repines at a wisitation and makes you uncomfortable with his noise, he must have his head punched. That's going according to the scripter, that is' (NN 740; ch. 56).

63 Humour of course does not disappear. In Great Expectations, for example, Camilla uses fictional bodily vulnerability in an attempt at worming her way into Miss Havisham's good graces:

'Raymond is a witness what ginger and sal volatile I am obliged to take in the night. Raymond is a witness what nervous jerks I have in my legs. Chokings and nervous jerks, however, are nothing new to me when I think with anxiety of those I love. If I could be less affectionate and sensitive, I should have a better digestion and an iron set of nerves' (GE 86; 1: ch. 11).

Her husband concurs: "'Camilla, my dear, it is well known that your family feelings are gradually undermining you to the extent of making one of your legs shorter than the other'" (GE 87; 1: ch. 11). Camilla continues, "'I have taken to the sofa with my staylace cut, and have lain there hours, insensible, with my head over the side, and my hair all down, and my feet I don't know where—'

('Much higher than your head, my love,' said Mr. Camilla)" (GE 87; 1: ch. 11).

64 This, of course, does not mean that the comic anecdote disappears. Sparkler's companions conjecture that

his brain had been frozen up in a mighty frost which prevailed at Saint John, New Brunswick, at the period of his birth there, and had never thawed from that hour. Another byword represented him as having in his infancy, through the negligence of a nurse, fallen out of a high window on his head, which had been heard by responsible witnesses to crack (LD 242; 1: ch. 21).

65 Dickens uses this image again in Our Mutual Friend when Mr. Inspector speaks of dead bodies found in the Thames "'Pity there was not a word of truth in that superstition about bodies bleeding when touched by the hand of the right person; you never got a sign out of bodies.... you got nothing out of bodies if it was ever so'" (OMF 69; 1: ch. 3).

66 After discussing decapitation in this manner Dickens describes Manette: "Among these terrors, and the brood belonging to them, the Doctor walked with a steady head" (TTC 336; 3: ch. 4).

67 Venus first appears when Wegg goes to visit him:

Mr. Wegg nods to the face, 'Good evening.'

The face looking up is a sallow face with weak eyes, surmounted by a tangle of reddish-dusty hair. The owner of the face has no cravat on.... His eyes are like the over-tried eyes of an engraver (OMF 122; 1: ch. 7).
Juliet McMaster discusses the actual dismemberment (or cutting off in the wrong places) of words and phrases in *OMF*, particularly in Wegg's language (193-221; for Wegg specifically see 216-18).

On 9 June 1865 Dickens underwrote number 16 by two and half pages (August 1865 part IV chaps 1-4) part of which at the risk of his own body he had rescued from the crash. In his postscript to the novel, literalizing his characters and thus increasing their vulnerability and connection to himself, just as Boffin personalizes books by calling them “him,” Dickens writes:

Mr. and Mrs. Boffin (in their manuscript dress of receiving Mr. and Mrs. Lammle at breakfast) were on the South Eastern Railways with me, in a terribly destructive accident. When I had done what I could to help others, I climbed back into my carriage—nearly turned over a viaduct, and caught aslant upon the turn—to extricate the worthy couple. They were much soiled, but otherwise unhurt. The same happy result attended Miss Bella Wilfer on her wedding day, and Mr. Riderhood inspecting Bradley Headstone’s red neckerchief as he lay asleep. I remember with devout thankfulness that I can never be much nearer parting company with my readers for ever, than I was then, until there shall be written against my life, the two words with which I have this day closed this book:—*THE END* (*OMF* 894).
CHAPTER FIVE: THE DICTION OF DISMEMBERMENT

'There's only one objection to the style—it's apt to give an author a tendency towards bodies.... And when you've once had recourse to the stimulant of bodies, you're like a man who's accustomed to strong liquors, and to whose vitiated palate simple drinks seem flat and wishy-washy' (Mary Elizabeth Braddon, The Doctor's Wife 1: 99-100).

It is exactly a "tendency towards bodies" that distinguishes Dickens's style from that of other writers and which, rather than being an objection to his work, serves as an attractant for readers. His methods of Expression do not so much damage or inflict disease upon the body through narrative as they do on the level of Character or in anatomical dialogue, but rather dismember the body through syntax. Dickens here increasingly plays with the literalization of figurative language and linguistically insists that if a head appears around a doorway we have no right to assume that a body will follow it. This chapter examines the prevalence in the novels of dictionally dismembered pieces of anatomy which insist on reflecting the inherent dangers of physical existence and reveal the body at its most vulnerable in the Dickensian literary world.

Dickens the author is in a sense like Mr. Dick whose name is the dismembered head syllable of his own surname. Aunt Betsey says of Dick's obsession with King Charles the First's head that "'That's his allegorical way of expressing it. He connects his illness with great disturbance and agitation, naturally, and that's the figure, or simile, or whatever it's called, which he chooses to use. And why shouldn't he, if he thinks proper!'" (DC 175; ch. 14). In the same way dismembered heads and limbs and other distortions of the body are the "figure" Dickens chooses to use to express his own (and our) sense of the vulnerability of the body. Mr. Dick asks David: "'if it was so long ago [that King Charles the First had his head cut off], how could the people about him have made that mistake of putting some of the trouble out of his head, after it was taken off, into mine?'" (DC 173; ch. 14). Although
frequently rumoured mad himself, Dickens would not have been bothered by anything that King Charles the First might have thought or troubled over, but would have been attracted and repelled by the fact that his head had come off, and unlike Mr. Dick who desperately attempts to keep King Charles's head out of his memorial, Dickens deliberately places and retains such dismembered heads in his own.²

While Dickens does make use of this "figure" of dismemberment on the levels of Character and Conversation, it is on the level of Expression that it is most significant. At this level of diction, word order, and style, the body is at its most insecure, and Dickens's means of expression show literally that the pen is as mighty as the sword in revealing dangers to the body. With a slip of his pen Dickens can and does cut off a head or pluck out an eye, simultaneously both attracting and repelling his readers. On the level of Character he exerts great control over the body through his use of bodily justice while on the level of Conversation he indulges in describing more extreme anatomical hazards. It is, however, on the level of Expression that Dickens, through his "diction of dismemberment," reflects most insistently the innate insecurities of the body, while at the same time he re-exerts control over the body by artistically reanimating dismembered body parts.

His diction dismembers, but in order to keep his work from becoming sentence after sentence of bloodied, leaden limbs or still, bloodless heads, he uses humour and allows, indeed insists, that whatever he severs he animates. By giving members life, he ensures that we are not seeing exactly the ghastliness of damaged flesh. For instance, little blood is described. In his fictional world limbs and heads can exist animated; they are not "killed" by the surgeon-author's pen. In clear relief they become more fascinating and assume an importance greater than if they were merely part of a corporeal being; they become articles of anatomy in their own right.

Dickens, of course, does not literally describe the dissection of his characters, but plays with literal and metaphorical description and with our innate sense of the body as a complete, autonomous, and integrated system. If an arm moves in life, we mentally connect it
to a body and to a brain that has directed it to move; on a physical plane, however, if an arm moves, an arm moves, and that is all there is to it. On this level in particular Dickens is not appealing to our intellects; he is not saying "what if I were to depict an arm moving by itself, unattached to a body—what are the philosophical implications of this?" Squeers, Pecksniff, and other "bodily philosophers" might attempt to think it through, but Dickens simply depicts it, and we as readers feel what it means; he demands in effect that we do not ponder upon anything anatomical and ensures we do not by making us laugh, smile, or grimace.

Dickens's characters or the things they say are often described as grotesque, but it is in his methods of Expression that Dickens is in fact most grotesque and where the response we give to his language is instinctively emotional, however much we might later intellectualize about it. We respond with the emotional irresolvability between laughter and horror that the truly grotesque elicits. In insisting upon such a response, Dickens ensures that his readers are bodily connected to his novels, aware that they themselves are bodies and that they can be vulnerable.

If we know, as Dickens does, that we are vulnerable-bodied creatures and if this is made clear to us in his work, it is also true that he does not simply point out such vulnerability and leave us to survive as best we can. Dickens, for the time that we exist as readers of his novels just as for the time he existed as writer of them, makes not only himself but his readers also believe that bodily insecurity can be expressed and can be controlled. He does this on all levels by displaying that vulnerability and by showing it to be comic. In addition, on the level of Expression he shows that bodily vulnerability is controllable by a process of de-animating body parts through dismemberment and simultaneously re-animating them by describing them as animate. Even if one is to be stylistically dismembered in a Dickens novel, one's members can have a life of their own, and are, like their creator, not easily stilled. It is, of course, not new to say that Dickens animates the inanimate and de-animates the animate, but these processes have been approached in terms of individual novels, social metaphor, or attached to thematic theory; they have not been seen clearly
enough as relating to the physical nature of human anatomy. Dickens, in dismembering, reveals the body’s vulnerability and shows that he as author has control over the body; dismemberment or death in other words can be conquered by language. 4

As chapter two discusses, reading and writing were physical acts for Dickens and the body and language were closely connected in his mind. He writes in his preface to The Old Curiosity Shop for instance that his “pen winces” (41) and suggests after his rectal operation that he has been “acutely nibbed.” The close interconnection of body and word almost make Dickens seem like Manette writing in ink made from “scrapings of soot and charcoal from the chimney, mixed with blood” (TTC 394; 3: ch. 10). In his novels, too, language and physicality are closely linked, nowhere more consistently than in the discomfort caused to Pip by literalized language and literature in Great Expectations. Pip consistently equates language with the body, either with anatomical appearance or with physical pain. He speaks, for example, of the physical impressions the writing on gravestones conjures up for him:

The shape of the letters on my father’s [tombstone], gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, ‘Also Georgiana Wife of the Above,’ I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine—who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle—I am indebted for a belief I religiously entertained that they had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence (GE 3; 1: ch. 1).

He also takes for granted the literal meaning of language: “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” (GE 44; 1: ch. 7). He similarly reasons on the literal meaning of being brought up “by hand”: “knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand” (GE 8; 1: ch. 2). This assumption of literal meaning or of what seems literal is exactly what Dickens continually forces his readers to do through his stylistic use of the body, particularly when,
like here, a figurative meaning would normally be the more obvious explanation of a word or phrase.

Language, too, is often connected with physical pain in Pip's early life: "I struggled through the alphabet as if it had been a bramble-bush; getting considerably worried and scratched by every letter" (GE 45; 1: ch. 7). Words seem to literally attack him; at Christmas dinner he is

squeezed in at an acute angle of the tablecloth, with the table in my chest, and the Pumblechookian elbow in my eye.... They seemed to think the opportunity lost, if they failed to point the conversation at me, every now and then, and stick the point into me. I might have been an unfortunate little bull in a Spanish arena, I got so smartingly touched up by these moral goads (GE 25-26; 1: ch. 4).

As he grows older the result is the same as Mr. Wopsle reads aloud, wanting Pip "only ... for a dramatic lay-figure, to be contradicted and embraced and wept over and bullied and clutched and stabbed and knocked about in a variety of ways, I soon declined that course of instruction; though not until Mr Wopsle in his poetic fury had severely mauled me" (GE 108-09; 1: ch. 15). Pip's experiences reveal the power of language over the body just as Dickens's writing reveals that diction can both damage and imaginatively reanimate the human form.

*Great Expectations* is of course not the only novel where language intertwines with the corporeal. The Jellyby children, we are told, "[tumble] about, and [notch] memoranda of their accidents in their legs, which were perfect little calendars of distress" (BH 57; ch. 5), while the young David Copperfield on his journey to his Aunt's imagines himself becoming "a scrap of newspaper intelligence" (DC 154; ch. 13). Other aspects of bodily and literary connection might also be considered; for example, fragmented bodies in Dickens's fiction can in some cases be seen as mirroring the fragmented language those characters use. Jeremiah Flintwinch, for example, is described as saying something "with a twist, as if his words had come out of him in his own wry shape" (LD 178; 1: ch. 15). Or the wooden-legged Silas Wegg chops words and syntax in the wrong places and fragments history as he reads to Boffin as both Juliet McMaster (216-18) and Hutter (154-55) have pointed out.
It is, of course, dismemberment that is most significant to Dickens's style and a few examples from his novels show that he is conscious of the decapitational consequences of seeing or describing a head alone. He depicts, for instance, a window scene: "Grinde looked out again [from the garret window], so cautiously that no part of the old man's body was visible. The sharp features and white hair appearing alone, above the parapet, looked like a severed head garnishing the wall" (NN 770-71; ch. 59). This description, like that of Pecksniff, "Looking like the small end of a guillotined man, with his chin on a level with the top of the pew" (MC 487; ch. 31), shows that Dickens was clearly aware of what he was doing with his heads. These bodily "figures" have thematic overtones of course, but they also give Dickens's readers an implicit direction as to how his work is to be read. By describing these heads explicitly as decapitated, Dickens linguistically insists that any head not clearly described as attached to a body need not necessarily be so attached. In fact he can rarely resist employing the image of a head thrust through a doorway or window, particularly in his first five novels. Mr. Pickwick, for example, frequently "thrust[s] his head out of the lattice, and look[s] around him" (PP 93; ch. 7). Tim Linkinwater's sister and the housekeeper "both ke[ep] thrusting their heads out of the second-floor window to see if the boy [is] 'coming'" (NN 474; ch. 37). "Mrs. Mann, thrust[s] her head out of the window in well-affected ecstaticies of joy" (OT 5; ch. 2) and "it [is] no female head that [is] thrust in at a partially opened door, but the long black locks and red face of Mr. Stiggins" (PP 810; ch. 52).6

These are typical of a common pattern Dickens uses, and reveal to whom the head belongs, whether situate on that person or not. Another method he uses is more humorously disconcerting; a head will be described, descriptively dismembered, but will not for some lines or even pages be revealed as belonging to anyone. Shorter examples of this include a knock at Mr. Pickwick's prison door, followed "by the appearance of a head of hair and a cotton-velvet cap, both of which articles of dress he had no difficulty in recognising as the personal
property of Mr. Smangle" (PP 681; ch. 44). Similarly, Pickwick's arrest in Ipswich is preceded by this scene:

the door opened, and a somewhat forbidding countenance peeped into the room. The eyes in the forbidding countenance looked very earnestly at Mr. Pickwick, for several seconds, and were to all appearance satisfied with their investigation; for the body to which the forbidding countenance belonged, slowly brought itself into the apartment, and presented the form of an elderly individual in top-boots—not to keep the reader any longer in suspense, in short, the eyes were the wandering eyes of Mr. Grummer, and the body was the body of the same gentleman (PP 362; ch. 24).

This technique is indeed used to keep the reader "in suspense," a suspense both physical and rhetorical. We do not know to whom the head will belong, and we fear subconsciously that it will belong to no one, so the textual tension has a physical element. While consciously we await the identity and significance of the entering character, subconsciously we need to know that this is in fact an embodied character. By being able to animate head, eyes, and body here, however, Dickens reassures the reader that he is in control.

This technique's delay can also be used to create mystery. In Barnaby Rudge, for example, "[a footstep] came beneath the window, and a head looked in.... A pale, worn, withered face; the eyes ... unnaturally large and bright; the hair, a grizzled black. It gave a searching glance all round the room" (BR 502; ch. 55). This head belongs to Rudge, but the reader does not discover this until considerably later. Other examples demonstrate a comically sustained suspense. Pickwick, visiting the offices of Dodson and Fogg for the first time, speaks with a voice behind a partition:

'Mr. Dodson ain't at home, and Mr. Fogg's particularly engaged,' replied the voice; and at the same time the head to which the voice belonged, with a pen behind its ear, looked over the partition, and at Mr. Pickwick. It was a ragged head, the sandy hair of which, scrupulously parted on one side, and flattened down with pomatum, was twisted into little semi-circular tails round a flat face ornamented with a pair of small eyes, and garnished with a very dirty shirt-collar, and a rusty black stock (PP 287-88; ch. 20).

The comic details here given are heightened by the fact that the head is still unbodied; what interest, in a sense, can there be in the details of a decapitated head beyond the fact that it
has been decapitated? Such tension increases when such a head “chooses” to converse.

Martin Chuzzlewit and Tom Pinch are, for example,

not a little startled by the unexpected obtrusion into that sanctuary of genius, of a human head, which although a shaggy and somewhat alarming head, in appearance, smiled affably upon them from the doorway, in a manner that was at once waggish, conciliatory, and expressive of approbation.

‘I am not industrious myself, gents both,’ said the head, ‘but I know how to appreciate that quality in others’ (MC 101; ch. 7).

It is a further paragraph before this talking head is revealed to be that of Montague Tigg, and yet more conversation ensues before “Tigg, kissing his hand ... begin[s] to follow his head into the room” (MC 102 ch. 7). Mr. Sparkler also appears head-first: “The door of the room had opened, and Mrs. Merdle now surveyed the head of her son through her glass.... Mr. Sparkler, who had merely put in his head and looked around the room without entering ... followed up his head with his body, and stood before them” (LD 389; 1: ch. 33).

Sim Tappertit, who ends his days with his legs amputated, frequently also meets with stylistic dismemberment; interestingly here, however, Dickens’s dictional dismemberment does not involve the legs so freely mocked and damaged on his other levels. It is perhaps rarer to see a leg than a head or arm enter a doorway or protrude through a window alone; and just because Dickens is playing with the metaphorical and literal, he is not going to unnecessarily distort the realistic.7 The lack of leg amputations on this level may also, of course, be due to Dickens’s peculiar attachment to legs. Sim “follows” his head by some paragraphs a number of times: “While [Gabriel’s] eyes were closed, the door leading to the upper stairs was partially opened; and a head appeared, which, at sight of him, hastily drew back again” (BR 106; ch. 7). After Gabriel retires for the night “the head again appear[s], and Sim Tappertit enter[s], bearing in his hand a little lamp” (BR 108; ch. 7). Arriving at the den of the 'Prentice Knights on the same evening, he is met by another head: “The ground seemed to open at [Sim’s] feet, and a ragged head appeared” (BR 109; ch. 8). This head is not given a body until almost two pages later: “The proprietor of this charming retreat, and owner of the ragged head before mentioned” is Stagg (BR 110; ch. 8). Part of the grotesque
effect of these descriptions of heads is the simple title "the head" that Dickens grants these speaking objects. 8

Heads that are presented as decapitated represent perhaps the most common dismemberment within Dickens, and are often the funniest, there is, however, also, an inevitable undertone of seriousness in these fleshy animate death’s heads that Dickens “thrusts” into rooms whenever he can. A head is one piece of anatomy that cannot be amputated without loss of its owner’s life. Yet, even as we are again reminded of that extreme vulnerability, the word “thrust” implies the control exerted over these animations; again, Dickens releases tension by playing with the literal and the figurative. He literalizes descriptions of what the eye sees but the brain knows cannot be. He plays with the bodily hazards that we normally decline to view. Seeing a head pop through a doorway reminds him of a head that can come off, so that is what he paints for us. On occasion he even stresses this literalization by stating that it is not literal; for example, Tom Tootle describes Rogue Riderhood’s accident as follows:

‘He was slinking about in his boat,’ says Tom, ‘which slinking were, not to speak ill of the dead, the manner of the man, when he come right athwart the steamer’s bows and she cut him in two.’ Mr Tootle is so far figurative, touching the dismemberment, as that he means the boat, and not the man. For, the man lies whole before them (OMF 503; 3: ch. 3).

When Dickens describes the Chuzzlewit clan’s descent on the Blue Dragon, the literalization is similarly stressed: “there was such a ... snapping off of heads, in the metaphorical sense of that expression” (MC 52; ch. 4). His “reminder” indicates that he has hastily stepped back from a literal “snapping off,” and also implies that where he does not “warn” of a metaphorical sense we are to take his images at least in one sense literally.

Some heads, far from getting a metaphorical reprieve, are not only “cut off” but have violence inflicted upon them afterwards. 9 Quilp, for instance, chases Tom Scott’s head as if it were a ball: “he clenched his hand again, and dexterously diving in between the elbows and catching the boy’s head as it dodged from side to side, gave it three or four good hard
knocks" (*OCS* 87; ch. 5). Sam Weller behaves similarly towards an "unnamed" head: "seeing a man's head peeping out very cautiously, within half a yard of his own, [he] gave it a gentle tap with his clenched fist, which knocked it with a hollow sound against the gate" (*PP* 613; ch. 39). The same thing happens in a more affectionate fashion to Traddles's head: "I am sure ... I thought I had never seen an obstinate head of hair, or any other head of hair, rolling about in such a shower of kisses" (*DC* 710; ch. 59). In each of these examples the head is treated not only as if dismembered, but also as if it never really had a body to begin with. Though strangely or latently animate, it often seems to struggle for self-generated or self-defensive movement in response to external force.

One head that conversely is drawn as horribly animate and self-propelling is Uriah Heep's. Heep is first described as a face, and, as frequently in Dickens's dismembered diction, this face appears at a window: "I saw a cadaverous face appear at a small window on the ground-floor ... and quickly disappear" (*DC* 187; ch. 15). David soon sees Uriah's face in that other common place of Dickensian dismemberment, a doorway: "Uriah Heep put in his red head and his lank hand at the door," but then a voice behind him speaks and "as Uriah's head [is] pushed away ... the speaker's [is] substituted" (*DC* 197; ch. 16). Uriah's head appears to be more vulnerable than other heads and is here easily pushed aside, but he does not give up his desire to get "ahead," even in this dismembered state, and later in the novel his head reappears in a ghastly image: "then ... came struggling up the coach side, through the mingled day and night, Uriah's head" (*DC* 495; ch. 39). A suitably serpentine image for Heep, this also represents a lone head in an extraordinarily animate state. Bradley Headstone's head is a similarly unattractive, linguistically decapitated specimen described first in terms of simile: "he went by them in the dark, like a haggard head suspended in the air: so completely did the force of his expression cancel his figure" (*OMF* 608; 3: ch. 10). It then becomes representative of Headstone himself: "the haggard head suspended in the air flitted across the road, like the spectre of one of the many heads erst hoisted upon neighbouring Temple Bar" (*OMF* 610; 3: ch. 11).
Faces like Heep’s are as much separate entities as heads; Harriet Carker, for instance, starts seeing “Close to the glass, a pale scared face gaz[ing] in; vacantly, for an instant, as searching for an object; then ... eyes rest[ing] on herself, and light[ing]up” (DS 716; ch. 53). David Copperfield too, arriving at Salem House, notices that “through a grating in [the door] we were surveyed when we rang the bell by a surly face, which I found, on the door being opened, belonged to a stout man with a bull-neck, a wooden leg, overhanging temples, and his hair cut close all round his head” (DC 66; ch. 5).

Dickens is primarily interested in the individual head or face severed from the individual body, as this has a more direct impact on the single-bodied reader, but he also makes use of crowd scenes to demonstrate “mass” dismemberments, not only of heads but of faces, eyes, and other pieces of anatomy. By the time he is a “pet prisoner,” for example, Uriah’s head is not knocked out of the way by others, but other heads knock further heads out of their way in order to see him: “There was such a rush of heads immediately, to see Number Twenty Seven reading his Hymn Book, that the little hole was blocked up, six or seven heads deep” (DC 728-29; ch. 61). At Fagin’s trial the “court [is] paved, from floor to roof, with human faces. Inquisitive and eager eyes peer[ed] from every inch of space.... Before [Fagin] and behind: above, below, on the right and on the left: he seemed to stand surrounded by a firmament, all bright with gleaming eyes” (OT 358; ch. 52). Sampson Brass’s office, after the single gentleman has invited the proprietors of a Punch show upstairs, is surrounded by crowds: “the office-window was rendered opaque by flattened noses, and the keyhole of the street-door luminous with eyes” (OCS 354; ch. 37). In Barnaby Rudge a coach going past the gibbet is described as having “coach-windows ... stuck full of staring eyes” (BR 690; ch. 77), and as the time approaches for the executions “Every window [is] now choked up with heads; the house-tops teem[ed] with people—clinging to chimneys, peering over gable-ends, and holding on where the sudden loosening of any brick or stone would dash them down into the street.... every inch of room—swarmed with human life” (BR 691; ch. 77). Ironically embodied in this swarm of life risking life and limb to watch a death is Dickens’s sense of
masses of disembodied eyes and heads, the uniformity of vulnerability presented by a crowd, and the inherent danger that members of a crowd pose to each other.

Dickens is very fond of plucking eyes from their sockets, as these crowd scenes demonstrate, and novels such as The Old Curiosity Shop, Bleak House, and Barnaby Rudge, the latter being especially eye-full, make particular use of this dismembered image. There is much gazing and glancing in Barnaby Rudge and many disembodied eyes; early in the novel we are shown the eyes of the Maypole Inn:

The sturdy landlord had a large pair of dull fish-like eyes, and the little man who had hazarded the remark about the moon ... had little round black shiny eyes like beads; moreover this little man wore at the knees of his rusty black breeches, and on his rusty black coat, and all down his long flapped waistcoat, little queer buttons like nothing except his eyes; but so like them, that as they twinkled and glistened in the light of the fire ... he seemed all eyes from head to foot.... to say nothing of the eyes belonging to short Tom Cobb ... and long Phil Parkes (BR 48; ch. 1).

Collectively these eyes comprise, we are told, a “raking fire of eyes” (BR 48; ch. 1). These eyes are plucked but also made very evident and numerous, while in other cases eyes are merely plucked. In describing what the body goes through in waiting up for someone to come home, Dickens terms eyes “mere personal inconveniences” (PP 562; ch. 36). Job Trotter, who has “deeply-sunken eyes in the best of times,” as a prisoner looks “as if those features had gone out of town altogether” (PP 659; ch. 42). On other occasions eyes are seen plucked and singularly: “the day-light which had been shining through the keyhole was intercepted on the outside by a human eye” (OCS 153-54; ch. 13); “Looking intently that way one night ... [Dick Swiveller] plainly distinguished an eye gleaming and glistening at the keyhole” (OCS 526; ch. 57); walking upstairs to Traddles’s place David is “conscious ... that [he is] surveyed by a mysterious eye” (DC 343; ch. 27). Head and eye dismemberments are combined when “The tail of Mr. Snagsby’s eye becomes conscious of the head of Mrs. Snagsby looking in at the shop-window” (BH 122; ch. 10).

An eye coming out is as visceral an image as a head coming off, and like heads, eyes can suffer further damage. Sampson Brass, for instance, is described as having “his eye
curiously twisted into [a] keyhole” (OCS 341; ch. 35). Other eyes become representative of a character, or all that exists of a character, and these eyes are generally allowed a pair. Mr. Tulkinghorn, for example, pacing at Chesney Wold, “is suddenly stopped in passing the window by two eyes that meet his own.... These eyes that meet his own, are looking in through the glass from the corridor outside. He knows them well” (BH 507; ch. 41).13 In the same novel “Two pairs of eyes not unused to such people look after [Richard], as ... he crosses the square.... Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle are the possessors of those eyes” (BH 489; ch. 39). This observation is structured similarly to David’s “I meet a pair of bright eyes, and a blushing face; they are Dora’s eyes and face” (DC 538; ch. 43).14 An eye-plucking that seems almost too unwitting is Dickens’s description of the corneal mirror in Ruth Pinch’s eyes:

> Looking into them for but a moment, when you t[ake] her hand, you s[ee] in each such a capital miniature of yourself, representing you as such a restless, flashing, eager, brilliant little fellow—
> Ah! if you could only [keep] them for your own miniature! (MC 616; ch. 39).

This really is quite an extraordinary image. First, it does not praise Ruth’s beauty, as we might expect, but that of the person looking into her eyes; this we may imagine to be John Westlock, but the passage is not told from his but from the narrator’s point of view. So, with dictional logic and narrative impossibility, it is Dickens looking into her eyes, and he certainly sees what he wishes himself to be, and indeed what many contemporaries saw him as, “a restless, flashing, eager, brilliant little fellow.” Dickens is looking into a mirror that does not reflect deformity; perhaps, however, because this mirror is itself a piece of anatomy, it reflects back the “ideal” Dickens. It is as if Dickens, looking into an inanimate mirror, sees reflected the deformity he creates of his body in creating his characters while when looking into an actual bodily mirror he sees his ideal or best self reflected back. Because he likes what he sees so much, he wishes to preserve it, and the only way he can do this is, of course, by plucking out Ruth Pinch’s eyes and keeping them as a “miniature.”
Dickens employs stylistic dismembering in part to overcome the most mundane artistic and logistic problems incumbent on a novelist, from how to introduce a character into the text to how to have a character enter a room. He slowly “dismembers” a character's body or, even more commonly, slowly “members” it in the first place. Mr. Pickwick, for instance, is literally animated before our eyes, beginning his fictional life as a bald head, and circular spectacles, which [are] intently turned towards his (the secretary’s) face.... To those who knew that the gigantic brain of Pickwick was working beneath that forehead, and that the beaming eyes of Pickwick were twinkling behind those glasses, the sight was indeed an interesting one (PP 2-5; ch. 1).

As if we have not seen the switch thrown and volts of literary electricity bringing this brain to life, Dickens makes this activation explicit: “And how much more interesting did the spectacle become, when, starting into full life and animation ... that illustrious man slowly mounted into the Windsor chair” (PP 5; ch. 1).

Just as Dickens often animates in this way, he also frequently dismembers through listing body parts; just as Pickwick is animated into life when we first see him, so too are other characters cut up and re-introduced piece by piece, even if we have already met them embodied. The much severed body of Sim Tappertit, for instance, undergoes a process of membering which implies initial dismemberment:

there cautiously peered out from behind the chimney of the forge, a face which had already emerged from the same concealment twice or thrice, unseen, and which, after satisfying itself that it was now alone, was followed by a leg, a shoulder, and so on by degrees, until the form of Mr. Tappertit stood confessed, with a brown-paper cap stuck negligently on one side of its head, and its arms very much a-kimbo (BR 307; ch. 31).

Dickens also dismembers through more straightforward listing, such as when “Sam, [looks] with a comprehensive gaze, which took in Mr. Smangle’s cap, feet, head, face, legs, and whiskers, all at the same time” as if he were “inspecting a wooden statue, or a straw—embowelled Guy Faux” (PP 644-45; ch. 42). If Sam is looking at all these parts of Smangle at the same time, then why does Dickens not just say “body,” unless to brandish the dismembering pen? As Michie writes in discussing the fragmented portrayal of women's
bodies in Victorian literature, “It is, of course, in the nature of description to be synecdochal. No matter how committed to the realist enterprise, an author cannot name or describe every bodily part” (Michie, *Flesh* 97). Dickens, however, is often deliberately synecdochal; thus Mrs. Merdle of the “broad unfeeling handsome Bosom” (*LD* 233; 1: ch. 20) becomes referred to as “the bosom,” just as Georgiana Podsnap, the literalized blushing “cheek of the young person” (*OMF* 181; 1: ch. 11) becomes simply “the cheek.”

Another interesting example of Dickens’s dismembering technique is a description of Sam’s father: “the London coach deposited Mr. Weller senior at the door, his legs deposited him in the bar, and his eyes shewed him him (sic) his son” (*PP* 403; ch. 27). Dick Swiveller, who often notices dismembered eyes, notices two more after he has been drinking with Quilp, and from there goes on to put together the other parts of the body:

Mr Swiveller ... looking into a kind of haze which seemed to surround him, at last perceived two eyes dimly twinkling through the mist, which he observed after a short time were in the neighbourhood of a nose and mouth. Casting his eyes down towards that quarter in which, with reference to a man’s face, his legs are usually to be found, he observed that the face had a body attached; and when he looked more intently he was satisfied that the person was Mr Quilp (*OCS* 236-37; ch. 23). 

Methods of introducing characters into rooms can be similarly un-whole; often characters in such contexts are initially represented by one item of their anatomy. Noah Claypole is introduced as a pair of legs, waking Oliver with

a loud kicking at the outside of the shop-door.... When he began to undo the chain, the legs desisted, and a voice began.

‘Open the door, will yer?’ cried the voice which belonged to the legs which had kicked at the door.... Then I’ll whop yer when I get in,’ said the voice (*OT* 26; ch. 5).

A servant is introduced as an arm:

The door was opened, but nothing came in except a soapy arm and a strong gush of tobacco. The gush of tobacco came from the shop down stairs, and the soapy arm proceeded from the body of a servant girl, who being then and there engaged in cleaning the stairs had just drawn it out of a warm pail to take in a letter, which letter she now held in her hand (*OCS* 106; ch. 7).

Tony Jobling is similarly introduced when “Mr. Guppy becomes conscious of a manly whisker emerging from the cloistered walk below, and turning itself up in the direction of his face”
Dickens here both literalizes what is seen or heard by characters already present and delays the introduction of the rest of the new bodies. This delay reverberates subconsciously in the reader's and Dickens's own mind so that physical tension is created and lasts until we discover whether a body will be fully membered or not. In a sense Dickens shows the power of language; in charge of the scene, he could just stop and leave these legs or this arm floating, forever unjoined, just as he has left the entire body belonging to Edwin Drood missing. He consistently subverts our expectations of the body by delaying embodiment and by describing it by parts which in turn keeps the body's physicality constantly before us.

Other dismembering techniques are also used to describe characters' bodies. Miss Miggs, for example, is casually made serpent-like: "a lean neck was stretched over the parapet, and Miss Miggs, indistinctly seen in the gathering gloom of evening, screeched in a frenzied manner" (BR 570; ch. 63). Benjamin Allen is described as having "black hair cut rather short, and a white face cut rather long" and "the usual number of pepper-and-salt coloured legs" (PP 446; ch. 30). Of course, "the usual number," like Dick Swiveller's "proper complement" of toes, is a simple reminder of less than usual numbers, and that all who have the usual should look to keep them:

There is another pump-room, into which infirm ladies and gentlemen are wheeled, in such an astonishing variety of chairs and chaises, that any adventurous individual who goes in with the regular number of toes, is in imminent danger of coming out without them (PP 554; ch. 36).

Sam's landlord in prison appears as if he has lost more than toes: "a little man, and being half doubled up as he lay in bed, looked about as long as he ought to have been without his legs" (PP 679; ch. 44).

Dickens also periodically endows particular body parts with thought or emotion; David Copperfield feels that Littimer's "very elbows, when he had his back towards me, seemed to teem with the expression of his fixed opinion that I was extremely young" (DC 354; ch. 28). At Tulkinghorn's funeral the "calves of so many legs [are] all steeped in grief" (BH 627; ch. 36).
53). Miss Murdstone “look[s] at [David] out of the pickle-jar, with as great an access of sourness as if her black eyes had absorbed its contents” (DC 117; ch. 10). If these parts feel emotion they can also risk individualized damage. Ada and Esther upstairs at Mrs. Jellyby’s are, for instance, “distracted by the constant apparition of noses and fingers, in situations of danger between the hinges of the doors” (BH 40; ch. 4). Oliver, on the run, finds that “when he shewed his nose in a shop, they talked about the beadle: which brought Oliver’s heart into his mouth,—very often the only thing he had there, for many hours together” (OT 45; ch. 8).

Dismemberment is the primary method by which Dickens expresses the body’s vulnerability on this level, but it is not the only one; a brief consideration of a variety of less common methods shows that he is constantly drawn to physical depiction and passes up few chances to suggest and express bodily damage. Death by execution, for example, is a not infrequent simile in Dickens’s work. Mr. Wardle “tak[es] as affectionate a leave of the whole family as if he were ordered for immediate execution” (PP 117; ch. 8), and Ralph Nickleby “had put a great command upon himself; but he could not have suppressed a slight start, if he had been certain to be beheaded for it next moment” (NN 774; ch. 59). Joe Willet is similar: “If there had been an executioner behind him with an uplifted axe ready to chop off his head if he touched [Dolly’s] hand, Joe couldn’t have helped doing it” (BR 226; ch. 22). The Crummles family are described on both sides of an execution; in bidding a “theatrical” farewell to Nicholas and Smike, “Master Percy Crummles ... stood by, in the attitude of an attendant officer, waiting to convey the two victims to the scaffold” (NN 399; ch. 30), while earlier “Mrs. Crummles [has] trod the pavement as if she were going to immediate execution with an animating consciousness of innocence, and that heroic fortitude which virtue alone inspires” (NN 296; ch. 23). Dickens is here of course joking with death, invoking the humorous extreme of execution, even though Ralph Nickleby will in fact face his own self-execution. Yet even mentioning death in this way declares an ever-present and ultimate vulnerability that the body constantly faces. These fears, and fears of the dead re-animating, also pervade such descriptions as these in Nicholas Nickleby: “if the dead body which lay
above, had stood, instead of [Ralph], before the cowering Gride, it could scarcely have presented a spectacle which would have terrified him more" (NN 735; ch. 56); “in came Sir Matthew Pupker, attended by two live members of Parliament” (NN 12; ch. 2). The idea of suddenly dying, or being “extinguished,” is humorously embodied on such occasions as Jingle’s cutting in to dance with a rich widow: “Doctor Slammer was paralyzed. He, Doctor Slammer of the 97th, to be extinguished in a moment, by a man nobody had ever seen before” (PP 27; ch. 2). Similarly, in the Nubbles’s home: “The baby in the cradle woke up and cried, the boy in the clothes-basket fell over on his back with the basket upon him and was seen no more” (OCS 136; ch. 10).

Dickens frequently describes physical pain or the possibility of pain as a means of rounding out the description of a character’s experience, especially when the physical act described is extreme or ridiculous. In a crushing crowd at the military field-day, Mr. Snodgrass is “squeez[ed] ... into the very last extreme of human torture” (PP 54; ch. 4) while Mr. Winkle bestows a look on Mr. Grummer “which, if he had had any feeling, must have pierced his brain, and come out on the other side” (PP 363; ch. 24). Mr. Micawber looks similarly pierced: “humming a tune, to show that he was quite at ease, [he] subsided into his chair, with the handle of hastily-concealed fork sticking out of the bosom of his coat, as if he had stabbed himself” (DC 354; ch. 28). Miggs “holds [Varden’s] cap and sword at arm’s length, as if mistrusting that the latter might run some one through the body of its own accord” (BR 391; ch. 41), and the Artful Dodger “snatch[e]s up [a] toasting-fork, and ma[kes] a pass at the merry old gentleman’s waistcoat; which, if it had taken effect, would have let a little more merriment out, than could have been easily replaced in a month or two” (OT 76; ch. 13). Sampson Brass, writing one morning, “viciously dig[s] his pen deep into the paper, as if he were writing upon the very heart of the party against whom it was directed” (OCS 322; ch. 33). Other pain devolves descriptively upon the calves; Doctor Slammer suddenly addresses Mr. Tupman “in a tone which made that gentleman start as perceptibly as if a pin had been cunningly inserted in the calf of his leg” (PP 50; ch. 3), and Charity
Pecksniff cries "'But what can any one expect from Mr. Pinch!'... with as strong and scornful an emphasis on the name as if it would have given her unspeakable pleasure to express it, in an acted charade, on the calf of that gentleman's leg" (*MC* 15; ch. 2).

Some of Dickens's descriptions, such as the sustained metaphor of Twemlow as an extendible dining-table, use the body in metaphorical ways which yet derive so powerfully from the physical that we easily enter into Dickens's imaginative side by side placement of the metaphorical and literal consequences of a phrase. These images are much rarer in Dickens's work than common dismemberments, which repeatedly fill his pages, but the vulnerability they represent is hardly less impressive. Thus Dickens describes a "prospect [that] could hardly have been more desolate if animated nature had been dissolved in water, and poured down upon the earth again in that form" (*MC* 213; ch. 13). He describes Tom Pinch after he has realized what Pecksniff is: "Tom had so long been used to steep the Pecksniff of his fancy in his tea, and spread him out upon his toast, and take him as a relish with his beer, that he made but a poor breakfast on the first morning after his expulsion" (*MC* 556; ch. 36). Mr Mell, in *David Copperfield*, "took out his flute, and blew at it, until I almost thought he would gradually blow his whole being into the large hole at the top, and ooze away at the keys" (*DC* 69; ch. 5). Here Mell's "being" is clearly his body rather than his soul or any other dimension of his existence. Cannibalistic imagery returns in a description of the patriarch of Bleeding Heart Yard: "Mr. Casby too, was beaming near the hob, with his benevolent knobs shining as if the warm butter of the toast were exuding through the patriarchal skull, and with his face as ruddy as if the coloring matter of the anchovy paste were mantling in the patriarchal visage" (*LD* 661; 2: ch. 23). Even if a description like that of Pecksniff or Casby provokes no more than repulsion, then one element of it has a close bodily connection with ourselves, perhaps because, like the oozing essence of Krook, a species of fluid or easily spreadable extract is most closely aligned to the fluid ooze of decomposing human remains.
On the level of Expression, Dickens writes his own version of Mr. Dick’s memorial, a memorial in which severed heads are not only allowed in but encouraged to enter and even say a little about themselves while there. Heads are the main target for Dickens’s dictional dismemberment, followed by eyes both plucked and unplucked. His use of dismemberment serves as a method by which he can express severe bodily fears and fascinations while shading their depiction with humour. In dismembering, he reveals fears that most of us instinctively feel, but the animate nature of his dismembered anatomy declares his control over the body triumphantly as we see his “power of life” work limb by limb. Dickens reassures himself and his readers that the fears he has expressed in dismembering are controllable, and through writing he has proof written down in perpetuity. He creates tension, both physical and fictional, by delaying the embodiment of his characters, introducing them through an initial piece of anatomy, and then delaying their significance in terms of plot and identity to parallel the reader’s tension over whether the body will be membered. In doing this, Dickens elicits an emotional, grotesque response and creates a bodily connection with his readers which is a fundamental source for the continuing literary attractions of his work.
NOTES

1 A similar image occurs in a description of one of the contents of Sampson Brass's office: "a second-hand wig box, used as a depository for blank writs and declarations and other small forms of law, once the sole contents of the head which belonged to the wig which belonged to the box, as they were now of the box itself" (OCS 320; ch. 33).

2 The decapitation allusion, so suitably Dickensian, may originally have been provoked by Forster: "I have acted on [your suggestion]. I have also, instead of the bull and the chineshop delusion, given Dick the idea, that, when the head of King Charles the First was cut off, some of the trouble was taken out of it, and put into his (Dick's)" (in Forster 2: 54-55). The editors of the Pilgrim edition of Dickens's letters suggest that this was "A topical reference to the bicentenary commemoration of King Charles's execution" (Lett.P 5: 598, n. 3).

3 See Fawkner who examines animation and reification in relation to Dickens's thematic denunciation of inhuman society. Priscilla Gibson discusses Dickens's "unique vision of the inanimate world as animated, self-directing, and even endowed with human feeling and responses" (283).

4 Dickens expresses much of what Ackroyd calls a "primal fear" from his childhood, even when trying to conceal it, through his use of the body: fears for the fate of the body are the most primal of all. Indeed, in writing of what might have been Dickens's earliest infant memories or experiences, Ackroyd asks: "And is there not in his constant description of parts of the body—the face, the hand, the leg, seen in distinction to other limbs—some mark of the first stages of infant perception?" (3). This "primality" is part of Dickens’s attraction for readers, the solid core around which all the many other layers of his bodily concerns collect and compress.

5 Compare young David Copperfield's happier experience: "To this day, when I look upon the fat black letters in the primer, the puzzling novelty of their shapes, and the easy good-nature of O and Q and S, always seem to present themselves again before me as they used to do." (DC 45; ch. 4).

6 There are of course numerous other examples: Oliver looks out from Fagin's second den from where "Sometimes, indeed, a ragged grizzly head might be seen, peering over the parapet-wall of a distant house: but it was quickly withdrawn again" (OT 115; ch. 18); "[Mrs. Jarley] thrust[s] her head out of the window [of her caravan] again" (OCS 274; ch. 27); "the street-door open[s], and Mr Brass thrusting out his nightcapped head call[s] in a surly voice" (OCS 143-44; ch. 11). "Mr Swiveller had scarcely sprung off his seat and commenced the performance of a maniac hornpipe, when he was interrupted, in the fullness of his joy at being again alone, by the opening of the door, and the reappearance of Miss Sally's head" (OCS 329; ch. 34); "the door was hastily opened too, and the head of Sampson Brass was thrust into the room" (OCS 604; ch. 66).

'Areyouathome?'askedNewman,suddenlypoppinginhishead.

'No,'repliedRalph,withequalabruptness.

Newmanwithdrewhishead,buttursthitinagain(NN 434; ch. 34).

7 He will, however, describe inanimate objects as if they were dismembered limbs; rioters in Barnaby Rudge, for example, are described: "some with great wooden fragments, on which
they spent their rage as if they had been alive, rending them limb from limb, and hurling the scattered morsels high into the air” (BR 465; ch. 50).

8 Several heads in Nicholas Nickleby demonstrate another comic aspect of these floating heads—their connection with clothes. Their countenances are described almost in terms of facial decoration. Ralph with Kate Nickleby at Madame Mantalini’s is about to pull the bell, when a gentleman suddenly pop[s] his head into the room, and, seeing somebody there, as suddenly popped it out again.... At the sound of Ralph’s voice, the head reappeared, and the mouth, displaying a very long row of very white teeth, uttered in a mincing tone the words, ‘Demmit’ (NN 123; ch. 10). In a later scene this same Mr. Mantalini enters a room “put[ting] the tips of his whiskers, and, by degrees, his head, through the half-opened door” (NN 258; ch. 21). Kate Nickleby, when the house and contents are re-possessed, “start[s] to hear a strange man’s voice in the room, and start[s] again, to observe, on looking round, that a white hat, and a red neckerchief, and a broad round face, and a large head, and part of a green coat were in the room too” (NN 259; ch. 21).

9 Other types of hypothetical violence to heads are illustrated by Mr. Winkle’s accidentally shooting “over the boy’s head, exactly in the very spot where the tall man’s brain would have been, had he been there instead” (PP 275; ch. 19), and the Marchioness’s “suddenly beg[inning] to shake [her head] from side to side with a vehemence which threatened to dislocate her neck” (OCS 531; ch. 58).


11 Dickens includes other similar descriptions; of the history of hangings at Newgate he writes,

when the scene has been rendered frightful with excess of human life; when curious
eyes have glared from casement, and house-top, and wall and pillar; and when, in the mass of white and upturned faces, the dying wretch, in his all-comprehensive look of agony, has met not one—not one—that bore the impress of pity or compassion (NN 29-30; ch. 4).

Of the scene of hanging that the released condemned prisoners expected he writes that the next time they had expected to see streets had been when “the streets and houses should be built and roofed with human faces, not with bricks and tiles and stones” (BR 594; ch. 65).

12 The rest of the description is as follows:

First, something tickles your right knee, and then the same sensation irritates your left. You have no sooner changed your position, than it comes again in the arms; and when you have fidgeted your limbs into all sorts of queer shapes, you have a sudden relapse in the nose, which you rub as if to rub it off—as there is no doubt you would, if you could (PP 561-62; ch. 36).

13 This is similar to Jonas Chuzzlewit’s seeing “A face on the other side of the glass partition looking curiously in: and not at him but at the paper in his hand. For the eyes were attentively cast down upon the writing, and were swiftly raised when he cried out. Then they met his own, and were as the eyes of Mr. Pecksniff” (MC 301; ch. 18).
14 One eye image Dickens was very pleased with was that of Nell looking into a river and seeing stars reflected “in the same majestic order as when the dove beheld them gleaming through the swollen waters, upon the mountain tops down far below, and dead mankind, a million fathoms deep” (OCS 397; ch. 42).

Forster had suggested altering the passage, but Dickens refused, writing to him: “You must let it stand now. I really think the dead mankind a million fathoms deep, the best thing in the sentence. I have a notion of the dreadful silence down there, and of the stars shining through upon their drowned eyes—the fruit, let me tell you, of a solitary walk by starlight on the cliffs [at Broadstairs]” (Forster 1: 120; Lett. P 2: 131).

15 Other examples of “membering” the body which express or imply dismemberment occur in Martin Chuzzlewit and Nicholas Nickleby: Arriving at the “National Hotel” in America it was rather startling, when the train stopped, to behold a great many pairs of boots and shoes, and the smoke of a great many cigars, but no other evidences of human habitation. By slow degrees, however, some heads and shoulders appeared, and connecting themselves with the boots and shoes, led to the discovery that certain gentleman boarders, who had a fancy for putting their heels where the gentleman boarders in other countries usually put their heads, were enjoying themselves after their own manner, in the cool of the evening (MC 349; ch. 21).

Kate and Mrs. Nickleby watch as an old black velvet cap ... by slow degrees, as if its wearer were ascending a ladder or pair of steps, rose above the wall dividing their garden from that of the next cottage ... and was gradually followed by a very large head, and an old face in which were a pair of most extraordinary grey eyes: very wild, very wide open, and rolling in their sockets, with a dull languishing leering look, most ugly to behold (NN 533; ch. 41).

16 A further example of a “heard” dismemberment occurs in The Old Curiosity Shop: “At first there was a great shaking of hands and shuffling of feet, succeeded by the presentation of the nosegay ... and a nose, also supposed to be the property of that gentleman, was heard to inhale the scent with a snuffle of exceeding pleasure” (OCS 165; ch. 14).

17 In the summing up at the conclusion to The Old Curiosity Shop Little Jacob’s child legs are made to bear, dismembered, quite a weight of prospective plot: “[Kit was] married so soon that little Jacob was an uncle, before the calves of his legs, already mentioned in this history, had ever been encased in broadcloth pantaloons” (OCS 671; ch. 73).

18 Other cannibalistic imagery includes Sam Weller noticing a valentine: “a highly coloured representation of a couple of human hearts skewered together with an arrow, cooking before a cheerful fire, while a male and female cannibal in modern attire ... were approaching the meal with hungry eyes, up a serpentine gravel path leading thereunto” (PP 493; ch. 33).
CONCLUSION

The body! It is the lawyer's term for the restless whirling mass of cares and anxieties, affections, hopes, and griefs, that make up the living man (PP 705; ch. 45).

In life Dickens denied his own body's vulnerability, but in art he transformed it into one of the most important elements of his work. This anatomical content has been underexamined but is crucial to any understanding of what makes Dickens's writing distinctive. The body is a key both to his popularity and his style, and, as this dissertation has shown through the collection and examination of some of the myriad examples of bodily reference in his novels, anatomy is a persistent presence in his work. He uses the body's vulnerability as a means not only of expressing his own fears and fascinations about the body but also as a fundamental source of appeal to readers who are drawn either consciously or subconsciously to his writing through the innate understanding they have as "bodies" themselves and through the same "attraction of repulsion" which worked so forcefully on Dickens himself. Readers become "bodily connected" to his novels, responding to them, as he wished them to, emotionally rather than intellectually. To Charles Dickens "the body" is not a legal or philosophical concept standing for a "whirling mass of cares" or for anything else so corporeally distant. The body to Dickens in life and art was the very physical, insecure, and fundamental site for the hazards of life.

Living in a period in which the body was being looked at in a new way and in which it was everywhere visibly vulnerable, Dickens could not fail to be influenced by the anatomical melee around him. He lived during a time when medicine and surgery were transforming themselves into early replicas of the systems we have today, but in which unanaesthetized operations, at least during his earlier life, were still the norm. It was a time of hangings and dissections, of overflowing graveyards and resurrections, of freak shows and "popular" murders, of disease and masses "dying thus around us everyday." Ever observant, Dickens
was profoundly aware of and publicly active in arenas of bodily vulnerability he saw in his society, such as those he gives expression to in the thematic concerns of novels such as *Bleak House* or *Hard Times*. Although many writers of the time shared his awareness of physical insecurities, none used the body in their novels as consistently as Dickens did nor did any play as constantly with the humour inherent in literalizing bodily metaphors. Dickens, too, did not dismember the body primarily as a reflection of social anatomy but almost the reverse—he insisted on making literal and individual even the broadest figurative use of anatomy.

His private experiences concerning the body probably influenced his writing even more than his public concerns, just as our own personal sense of anatomy affects the way we read Dickens’s work more than our more socio-historical interest in the physical perils of nineteenth-century life. As chapter two explained, an awareness of his body’s vulnerability began early in Dickens’s life and remained with him throughout it. Childhood fears and obsessions acquired through early experiences and from stories remained with him in adulthood and provided a significant impetus to his bodily concerns. His face and figure became publicly known early in his career, and photographs and likenesses of him spread widely as his writing career and performances increased, meaning that he was himself vulnerable to public comment on his physique and appearance. As his body aged and ailed, his denial of his own vulnerability became ever stronger. Dickens had both internal and external bodily weaknesses to contend with, which he did by denying them, by forging ahead with all he believed he could do, by becoming a gentleman and eminent author, and above all by both expressing and controlling these fears of death, dismemberment, or sudden bodily damage in his fiction. Physical vulnerability is everywhere evident in and essential to his novels, but it is only the “Dickens in the mirror,” the embodied result of his unique imagination, in which he admits bodily vulnerability.

In his writing, Dickens ensures that the body dies, or is used, in a way that its character “deserves,” rather than in the more random ways of real life. On the level of
Character he makes sure that sexual threateners are physically punished while their victims ultimately escape harm. He also determines that the bodies of those such as good-hearted “gentlemen heroes,” are kept safest and are least described. While most of these “heroes” do have to endure some bodily test, an illness perhaps or a fist fight, they nevertheless emerge as better people for it, and on the conquering side. Children, however, are almost universally bodily insecure in Dickens’s work. Characters who are “deformed,” are described most physically; “evil” deformed characters struggle to gain power in spite of, and to spite, their deformity, which in turn shapes their natures. While some such characters do gain power, in the sense of money or influence over others, their bodies are eventually made to feel their vulnerability because the Dickensian scales of “bodily justice” encode that “bad” characters must be bodily undercut or punished, while “good” ones may remain bodily whole. “Good” deformed characters are less described and, accepting their deformities, they lead useful and positive lives. The more a character’s body is described in a Dickens novel the more susceptible to injury it will become, and physical damage to a character is nearly always the end result of negative behaviour. In creating his characters, Dickens also describes some of his bodily fascinations such as wooden legs and indulges in depictions of deaths and diseases that are either pathetic or highly unusual. On the Character level Dickens keeps the body tightly under his control and narrative is the source of bodily vulnerability.

When anatomy is the subject of Conversation in his novels, language itself as well as narrative damages the body as Dickens plays with the dual literal and figurative meanings of references to the body. One of the crucial techniques in Dickens’s use of the body is this literalizing of metaphor which serves to create comedy which in turn attracts and draws in readers fascinated and repelled by the physical damage to and perilousness of the body in his work. As chapter four reveals bodily vulnerability is a frequent component of Dickensian dialogue, and Dickens distances himself and his readers from the horrors expressed in such conversation both through humour and by making much of this anatomical discourse hypothetical, and therefore unlikely to happen; anecdotal, and therefore unverifiable: or
"professional" and therefore irrefutable. He also uses different speech patterns and dialects in revealing physical precariousness on this level, putting such speech in differently accented mouths, often those of the lower class, to create variety and humour. All of these techniques have an exaggerative effect on speech and make it typically Dickensian.

As his novel-writing career progressed, Dickens's use of the body, particularly on the levels of Character and Conversation, changed somewhat. In his later novels the representation of bodies is no longer as rigidly reflective of the natures of characters, and, by the time he comes to write Our Mutual Friend, Dickens articulates more openly his and our own fears about the body, at least while in the articulator's shop, where such talk is fitting. In Mr. Venus's shop, fears no longer appear only in diction. Silas Wegg can be seen as symbolic of Dickens in his seeking of bodily wholeness and in his literary endeavours. Wegg talks neither anecdotally nor hypothetically; rather, he speaks of his own dismembered leg, and seeks to restore his own body. It is possible to get his leg back because it has been preserved and because it cannot be incorporated into any other body. Venus is reluctant to sell because the leg might be valuable as a "monstrosity." In the same way, Dickens the author has become a "monstrosity"; he has achieved a style and position in the literary canon and a fame in his own time peculiar to himself. His body, in part at least, has been preserved, and he has earned the right to ask that it be fully membered.

Yet while Dickens dismembers on the levels of Character and Conversation, it is on the level of Expression that he most consistently and dictionally fragments the body. His methods of Expression subvert both the idea of "bodily justice" which he uses on the level of Character and our expectations that in fiction, unlike life, the body can be controlled. It is here, in stylistic methods, that the body is most vulnerable in his novels, vulnerable no longer to narrative but to syntax. Yet even while showing the body's complete vulnerability to the stroke of a pen, which reflects the inescapable realities of physical life, Dickens also reasserts control over anatomy by reanimating the severed limbs and heads he strews through his work. In doing so, he exerts textual omnipotence and reassures both himself and
his readers that he can control the body. Creating physical and fictional tension by delaying
the embodiment of characters, and by placing them before us piece by piece, he elicits from
readers a response to the grotesque—an emotional irresolvability between horror and
laughter which ensures a reader's bodily connection to his art. It is exactly this immediate,
emotional, non-intellectual impact upon his readers that Dickens sought and that he achieved
through his use of the body in his writing.

The body's vulnerability is not only a constant presence in Dickens's novels but an
essential part of how he writes and of what makes his work so enduringly attractive to
readers. Dickens, no matter what methods, such as humour, he uses to conceal the fact, is
directly, actively, and personally connected to the bodily incidents in his novels and to the
diction that describes them. A phrase lives for Dickens with as much animation as a body
that takes a page to describe, and he is profoundly involved in and involves his readers in the
life of his work at all levels, body by body, limb by limb, word by word.
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