Wulgarity and Witality: On Making a Spectacle of Oneself in Pickwick

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> [H]e was alone in the coarse vulgar crowd ….
>
> --Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers* (669)

> "Cos ugliness and svindlin' never ought to be formilier vith elegance and wirtew," replied Mr.. Weller. "Ought they, Mr.. Muzzle?"
>
> "Not by no means," replied that gentleman.
>
> --*The Pickwick Papers* (434)[1]

In her recollection of "Old Bloomsbury," Virginia Woolf narrated one of modernism's primal, self-defining scenes – though she confessed herself uncertain whether she had "invented it [the memory] or not." It was the moment when the Bloomsbury group learned to talk dirty.

> Suddenly the door opened and the long and sinister figure of Mr. Lytton Strachey stood on the threshold. He pointed his finger at a stain on Vanessa's white dress.

[1] References to *Pickwick* will henceforth be cited parenthetically, the first time as "Dickens, *Pickwick* page #" and thereafter simply by page number.

"Semen?" he said.

Can one really say it? I thought and we burst out laughing. With that one word all barriers of reticence and reserve went down.

"It is strange," Woolf adds, "to think how reticent, how reserved we had been and for how long." Having grown up under the governance of Leslie Stephen's fearful propriety, she had blushed at references to the lavatory and, needless to say, had avoided the topic of sex like the plague. But now – thanks to Strachey - "we talked of nothing else." "We discussed copulation with the same excitement and openness that we had discussed the nature of good." Two syllables had broken the vice-grip, so that "there was now nothing that one could not say, nothing that one could not do, at 46 Gordon Square. It was, I think," Woolf concluded, "a great advance in civilization" (Woolf 173-174).

The memory, authentic or not, has its place alongside other of modernism's signature moments – Leopold Bloom's trip to the outhouse in the Calypso episode of *Ulysses*, Pound's "old bitch gone in the teeth" in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly*, Wyndham Lewis's broadsides in *Blast*, Eliot's "apeneck Sweeney" and "young man carbuncular," Lawrence's lewd Lady Chatterley, Strachey's own *Eminent Victorians*, and many others – gestures in which modernism loudly and rudely proclaimed its liberation from straitjacketing Victorian mores. And criticism on the modernists, as is so often the case, has long been inclined to take on board a great deal of the self-promotional rhetoric and strategies of its subjects, with the result that a Stracheyite anti-Victorianism has tended to seem an essential, indispensable element in any reputable account of the modernists and their project.

Yet just as students of Romanticism have learned to distrust the "romantic ideology" informing some of the most influential, indeed paradigm-making criticism on the subject, so too ought students of both Victorian and modernist literature resist the characterizations of the former by means of which the latter argued itself into being(see McGann). (It is striking how reticent and decorous Woolf's own published work remained, in spite of the revolution that took place within the confines of 46 Gordon Square.) Tendentious differential self-definition is a common self-licensing strategy and ought not to set the boundaries on our understandings of the past. And while it is true that one may look in vain, in the canon of mainstream, bourgeois Victorian writing, for shitting or pissing or fucking or other such billboards for modernist emancipation (though one will find these aplenty among the texts of the "other Victorians" Steven Marcus long ago brought to light), one should blind oneself neither to the possibilities of what Herbert Marcuse called a "repressive desublimation" (Marcuse 56-83) in modernist writing – D.H. Lawrence would be the case in point here – nor to the styles of vulgarity of which Victorians were themselves capable, and with which some of them even made their most vital contributions. And no account of a Victorian "Vulgar Streak"[2] would be complete without consideration of the striver and arriviste, the consummate narcissist, the wearer of loud clothing, the shockingly histrionic public reader of his work, the shameful self-promoter who made himself central to Victorian literary culture: Charles Dickens. Though he had published *Sketches by Boz* in 1836, his career effectively commenced with his embrace of serial publication for *Pickwick Papers*, a mode, he delighted in recalling ten years later, in the preface to the 1847 "Cheap Edition," that his friends

[2] The title of a Wyndham Lewis novel of 1941.

warned him "was a low, cheap form of publication, by which I should ruin all my rising hopes …." Nor did he shrink from adding, with an unseemly smugness, "and how right my friends turned out to be, everybody now knows" (Dickens 45).

It has often been noted how, in the extraordinary improvisational feat he pulled off in *Pickwick*, Dickens liberally borrowed from, but generally softened and toned down, the picaresque comedy of such eighteenth-century precursors as Smollett, Fielding, and Sterne (see Marcus, *Dickens* 23-24). And we have contemporary comments like that of Mary Russell Mitford, who declared Dickens' serial to be "fun – London life – but without any thing unpleasant:; "a lady might read it all aloud," she added, and though "the boys in the streets" were mimicking the book's language and repeating its jokes, "they who are of the highest taste like it the most" (quoted in Dickens 17-18). But no one reading *Pickwick* then or now could seriously be led by such observations into the folly of locating all or even the most highly charged of the young author's energies on the side of rectitude and decorum. Nor could we realistically imagine the animating spirit of the book at peace with its ostentatiously tranquil, irritatingly hortatory ending, in which Pickwick settles down at (the aptly named) Dulwich, on a property where "[e]verything was so beautiful, so compact, so neat, and in such exquisite taste, … that there really was no deciding what to admire most" (895), and where he earns the reward of "one of those moments of unmixed happiness, of which, if we seek them, there are ever some, to cheer our transitory existence here" (896). Here and there throughout *Pickwick Papers* Dickens's narrative engine gets gummed up for a time, while its narrator somewhat wearisomely extols "snug" domestic togetherness, most notably in the Dingley Dell passages ("All this was very snug and pleasant" [Dickens 464]), or while he moralizes

over its antithesis, the enforced and degrading togetherness of the Fleet prison, with its ironically titled system of assigning roommates, known as "chummage" (679). In between, whatever narrative interest and imaginative spark Dickens manages to generate owes everything to the disreputable outsiders, the parasites on good society, the sharp operators, the out-for-themselves, the uncouth: Jingle, Sam and Tony Weller, Bob Sawyer, the fat boy – a group of male characters existing in dogged opposition to codes of behavior mainly identified with and enforced by women. While these characters serve some different functions, together they form a kind of unofficial, insubordinate committee everywhere determined to derail the official aims and ideologies of the Pickwick Club and its founding member. What is more, that Club and that founding member – in spite of the latter's apparent embodiment of propriety, principle, and disinterested benevolence – turn out to evince a deep-seated attachment to some of the shiftless, predatory, and appetitive tendencies of their vulgar opposites.

At the outset, we are confronted by what appears a fairly stable set of contrasts between the protagonist and the antagonistic world into which he ventures. Pickwick begins the book committed to the bourgeois ideal of a disinterested scientific inquiry and promptly falls foul of a cabman and of an instantly-congregated mob pugnaciously unsympathetic to and paranoically suspicious of that ideal. In language which the spread of Enlightenment ideology, incarnated in encylopedias and bodies such as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, had made extremely familiar by 1836 (see Rauch 1-59), the Club envisions "the inestimable benefits which must inevitably result from carrying the speculations of that learned man into a wider field, from extending his travels, and consequently enlarging his sphere of observation, to the advancement of

knowledge, and the diffusion of learning" (67). Disinterestedness is carried so far by the Club, in fact, as to leave utterly vacant any conceptual space in which criteria for judging the significance or worthiness of this or that subject of inquiry might be formed: witness Pickwick's previous work, the earth-shaking "Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead Ponds, with some Observations on the Theory of Tittlebats" (67). Nor can perfect disinterestedness admit of anything so compromising to bourgeois serenity as a particular question to be posed or a hypothesis to be tested. As Michael Cotsell puts it, Pickwick's expedition is "highly un-end-orientated," evincing "very little investment in arriving at a specific destination" (Cotsell 7). The club members are merely given the charge "to forward, from time to time, authenticated accounts of their journeys and investigations, of their observations of character and manners, and of the whole of their adventures, together with all tales and papers to which local scenery or associations may give rise" (68). An epitome of positivism, Pickwick carries a telescope and a notebook "ready for the reception of any discoveries" – on any subjects whatever – "worthy of being noted down" (73), as if knowledge came ready-made from the domain of experience and the worthiness of an observation were never anything but entirely self-evident.[3]

[3] One can trace, recurring throughout Dickens' career, the highly tendentious characterization of Enlightenment universalism – enshrined in its peculiar textual form, the encyclopedia – as a wholly undiscriminating openness to data of all varieties, a boundless hunger for information that will always tend to bite off more than it can chew. In *Pickwick*, the essential passage in this connection concerns the "copious review of a work on Chinese metaphysics" which Mr. Pott has commissioned from his critic on the Eatanswill Gazette. "He *crammed* for it," says Pott: "he read up for the subject … in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*." To Pickwick's comment "I was not aware that that valuable work contained any information

Furthermore, and in keeping with his high-minded, dispassionate approach to knowledge acquisition, Pickwick is associated with a perspective of comfortably detached "overview" on his field of observation: on the morning he commences his journeying, he "burst[s] like another sun from his slumbers, thr[ows] open his chamber window, and look[s] out on the world beneath" (72-73). What meets his gaze is a comprehensive view of "Goswell Street … at his feet, Goswell Street … on his right hand – as far as the eye could reach, Goswell Street … on his left; and the opposite side of Goswell Street … over the way" (73). Having mastered his own little world, he prepares to seek out "the truths which are hidden beyond," to "penetrate the hidden countries which on every side surround it" (73): to follow Dr. Johnson's advice, in other words, and let his "observation with extensive view / Survey mankind, from China to Peru" – or, at least, from Rochester to Birmingham (Johnson 47). One major variety of Dickens's comedy, obviously, involves dunking this self-styled detached and unseen seer into a domain where a passionate *interestedness* rules and in which he becomes the object of a hostile gaze. The cabman whose tall tales he has been transcribing in his notebook protests that Pickwick has been "not only takin' down his number, but ev'ry word he says into the bargain," and demands to know the one thing Pickwick most surely cannot tell him – to what end (75). In a flash, the crowd is denouncing Pickwick and his disciples as "Informers!" (75). Where bourgeois scientific respectability eschews interested motives and segregates the spaces of observer and observed, at street level the subjects swarm the investigator and presume that his activities serve the interests of the state. This will not

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respecting Chinese metaphysics," Pott replies, "He read, sir, … for metaphysics under the letter M, and for China under the letter C, and combined his information, sir!" (815).

be the last time that, rather than taking a leisurely view through his telescope, the bespectacled Pickwick gets made a spectacle of (in a dog-pound, in the garden of a girls' school, when "sitting for his portrait" in the Fleet, and in many other locations).

Out of this mob, of course, springs Jingle, Pickwick's nemesis and a major driver of the plot, in his single person amounting to something like that mob's concentrated essence (see Woloch 137). Indeed, "making his way through the crowd by the infallible process of elbowing the countenances of its component members" (75), Jingle exhibits the leading quality of those aggregates known as "mobs," that feature that makes them indispensable to upright Victorian imaginations as potent figures for what I have elsewhere called *anticulture*: a model of human collectivity animated by a plurality of selfish motives, thus diametrically opposed to the tacit consensus which modern cultural anthropology has tended to ascribe to "genuine cultures" (see Buzard 20-22). Jingle's know-how for successfully navigating reality at street level stands in opposition to Pickwick's fantasy of comprehensive overview and is driven by nothing but self-interest – if it is not driven by something even lower than that, mere unconstrained appetite.[4] Indeed, for all intents and purposes, that which is low or vulgar in *Pickwick* might conveniently be located at the frontier where "interest" shades over into "appetite" – on which more later. Jingle's particular skill is also, as his syncopated pattern of speech makes manifest, definitively an art of improvisation, not unlike the one practiced by the author who dreamed him up. In this self-inventing and opportunistic character, the one getting by on making it up as he goes along, Dickens created a portrait of the artist as a

[4] My remarks here owe an obvious debt to Michel de Certeau's classic "Walking in the City": see de Certeau, *Practice* 92, e.g.

young man, long before the more presentable David Copperfield. Jingle is immediately put forward as an oral poet of the most fecund imagination, a wish-fulfillment dream for a young writer contemplating the prospect of many installments to complete. Captivating Snodgrass with a tale of his romantic exploits, Jingle says he has "fifty more" like it, a claim it would be foolish to doubt (81). In the course of a coach journey to Rochester, the notebooks of Pickwick and Snodgrass get "completely filled with selections from his adventures" (82). It's Jingle who provides Pickwick's journeys with a motive – to track him down – and whose defining opposition pushes Pickwick into ever more solidly embodying the man of principle and propriety. It is Jingle of whom Pickwick speaks when he tells Mr. Magnus, in Ipswich, "I have come down here, sir, to expose the treachery and falsehood of an individual, upon whose truth and honour I placed implicit reliance" (387). It's Jingle who, in a chapter titled "Clearing up all Doubts (if any existed) of the Disinterestedness of Mr. Jingle's Character" (Chapter 10), negotiates with consummate sangfroid the very best deal he can manage for not marrying Miss Rachel Wardle and who skips town with an insolent remark about how the marriage license he had planned to use will "do for Tuppy" – that is, for Pickwick's disciple, the affectedly lovelorn Mr. Tupman. His insouciance on this occasion explodes the customary self-possession of Pickwick, reducing the "philosopher" to a "frenzy of …rage" and provoking him to threaten physical violence (210).

As antagonist, Jingle brings together an assortment of qualities that define Pickwickian respectability by opposition, qualities shared by other of his unruly fellows in the novel. Where decency, like disinterested inquiry – and like Civilization itself – institutes and enforces boundaries, Jingle and the mob he stands for are all about excess,

trespass, the blurring of boundaries, the refusal of limits. As Alex Woloch notes, "[j]ust as Jingle's thoughts can't fit into the regular flow of language, his body …strains against his clothing" (Woloch 138). Jingle's speech is "a lengthened string of … broken sentences, delivered with extraordinary volubility"; his "soiled and faded sleeves scarcely reach[] to his wrists"; his signature green tail-coat is "buttoned closely up to his chin, at the imminent hazard of splitting the back"; and his "long black hair escape[s] in negligent waves from beneath each side of his old pinched up hat" (77-78). Jingle also introduces himself as someone who combines in one person all the talents that are separately (and fraudulently) exemplified by Pickwick's disciples Tupman (the lover), Winkle (the sportsman), and Snodgrass (the poet). As a "strolling player" or itinerant actor, Jingle travesties the role of the gentleman or "man of parts," for he presents us with a man of *too many* parts, scandalously protean and impossible to pin down.[5] Of him too could it be said, as Job Trotter says of his brother, Dismal Jemmy, "He could assume anything" – play any role or counterfeit any sentiment in the pursuit of gain (842).

None of Jingle's roles are actual, of course; but as Georg Lukàcs said somewhere, so much the worse for the facts. Jingle is potential. As such, he is right to identify himself, as he does to the Wardle party, as "Alfred Jingle, Esq., of No Hall, Nowhere" (167). As Dickens would later write of Bucket in *Bleak House*, "time and place cannot bind" him (Dickens, *Bleak* 769). He represents the first of Dickens's explorations into the meaning, the limitations, and the limiting power of names. In later works like *Bleak*

[5] Sam Weller shares this tendency: when Pickwick hires him, he wonders "whether I'm meant to be a footman, or a groom, or a gamekeeper, or a seedsman. I looks like a sort of compo of every one on 'em" (236).

House, Dickens will come to treat the name as "nothing more than a device of an individuating principle that distributes across the social field the human matter that would merge into muddy senselessness if not partitioned" (see Buzard 139-41). "Jingle" (or "Fitz-Marshall" [286], or whatever) is the force that prefers "[n]o names at all,"; for him, "[n]ames won't do…*incog.* the thing" (87), because anonymity confers the power to elude *location* by the pervasive social law that "hails" or "interpellates" us as subjects (see Althusser 170-77). And Jingle would answer the law's question of "Where do you live?" just as Sam Weller does: with the blunt "Vare-ever I can" (423). Like *dirt* as Mary Douglas famously defined it, Jingle is the definitively out-of-place (Douglas). He tends to appear suddenly and unexpectedly: magically excreted by the angry mob that gathers around Pickwick's altercation with the cabman (Chapter 2); announced as "Charles Fitz-Marshall" at Mr.s. Leo Hunter's "fancy dress déjeune" (Chapter 15); dejected and miserable in the debtor's prison whose name makes a mockery of the freedom with which he once went about the world: the Fleet (Chapter 42). One would be tempted to call his Fleet appearance his most out of place, were it not that the excruciatingly proper wrap-up to *Pickwick Papers* requires us to witness his ultimate bringing-to-heel – the distasteful spectacle of a reformed Jingle "without one spark of his old animation – with nothing even of the dismal gaiety which he had assumed when Mr. Pickwick first stumbled upon him in his misery – bow[ing] low" to Pickwick (735).

But before this humiliating submission, Jingle heads a cast of vagabond figures defined, if they can be fenced in by any sort of defining power, by nothing so much as by constant, elusive movement. In fact, Dickens regularly resorts to "vagabond," both noun and adjective, when he wants to characterize the low, improper, or criminal. We hear of

"lazy and reckless vagabonds" in the interpolated tale of "The Convict's Return" (147); Wardle chastises his sister for "running away with a vagabond [Jingle]" (206); a magistrate declares the impudent Sam Weller "a vagabond on his own statement" (423); a lawyer's clerk deplores having to "wast[e] one's time with such seedy vagabonds" as the lawyer's unfortunate clients (511). All the Fleet prisoners exhibit "a listless jail-bird swagger, a vagabondish who's-afraid sort of bearing" (666), one of them in particular "a rakish, vagabond smartness, and a kind of boastful rascality" (672) – a good description of Jingle himself. There seems a vindictive edge to the solicitor Perker's reference to Jingle as "one of our vagabond friends" (840), just at the moment when Perker and Pickwick are packing him off to Demerara, where he will wander no more. The coachman Tony Weller is something of a professional vagabond, dividing his world between the security he can feel only when out on the road and the dismal prospect of retirement to the confined situation of a turnpike-keeper, a class of humankind he characterizes as all having "met with some disappointment in life … [c]onsequence of vich, they retires from the world, and shuts themselves in pikes; partly vith the view of being solitary, and partly to rewenge themselves on mankind, by takin' tolls" (384). Tony declares that he "ain't safe anyveres but on the box" because only there can he escape the clutches of the "widders" seeking to ensnare him in domesticated respectability. Every man runs the perpetual risk of becoming a "wictim o' connubiality" (355), although Tony considers himself "a privileged indiwidual," since "a coachman may be on the wery amicablest terms with eighty miles o' females, and yet nobody think that he ever means to marry any vun among 'em" (832). Although Jingle first shows his colors by running away with Rachel Wardle, the footloose men in *Pickwick* are really all

on the run from those man-traps of marriage, family, property, vocations, institutions, responsibility, and probity overseen by women seeking mates. They chafe under confinement, like the Fleet prisoners, who, "restless and troubled," are always "crowding and flitting to and fro, like the shadows in an uneasy dream" (737).

The errant mobility displayed by Jingle and his cohorts, that quality that underwrites their oneness with the "mob," manifests itself not only in continuous traveling from place to place but also in bodily motion. They must always be *doing* something, which tends to lead them to violate decorum by calling attention to themselves. Jingle is usually to be found "eating, drinking, and talking without cessation" (164). Bob Sawyer is described as having "that sort of slovenly smartness, and swaggering gait, which is peculiar to young gentlemen who smoke in the streets by day, shout and scream in the same by night, call waiters by their Christian names, and do various other acts and deeds of an equally facetious description" (493). While in church Bob kills time by carving his name in the back of the pew "in corpulent letters of four inches long" (495), and while awaiting the arrival of Mr. Winkle senior, Bob "proceed[s] to divert himself by peeping into the desk, looking into all the table-drawers, feigning to pick the lock of the iron safe, turning the almanack with its face to the wall, trying on the boots of Mr. Winkle, senior, over his own, and making several other humorous experiments upon the furniture, all of which afforded Mr. Pickwick unspeakable horror and agony, and yielded Mr. Bob Sawyer proportionate delight" (804). And such fussing may give way to frenzy. The greater the enclosing pressure, the more apt such characters may be to explode into manic movement, like that of the hornpipe danced so wildly by a drunken prisoner sharing Pickwick's room that "the windows rattled in their frames, and

the bedsteads trembled …" (670). The narrator of *Pickwick* even characterizes the human body itself as "the restless whirling mass of cares and anxieties, affections, hopes, and griefs, that make up the living man" (736). All in all, Dickens' heavy imaginative investment in men's inalienable mobility makes *Pickwick Papers* into something of a panegyric on that proverbial cornerstone of English liberty, the right of habeas corpus. As Sam Weller memorably puts it, "[t]he have-his-carcase, next to the perpetual motion, is vun of the blessedest things as wos ever made…" (701).

In his classic of Victorian social reportage, *London Labour and the London Poor*, Henry Mayhew would write with fascinated dread about the alien value system of the British underclass, remarking in one arresting passage that

> [v]ery few of the children receive the least education. The parents, I am told, "never give their minds to learning, for they say, "What's the use of it? ..." Everything is sacrificed – as, indeed, under the circumstances it must be – in the struggle to live – aye! and to live *merely*. Mind, heart, soul, are all absorbed in the belly. The rudest form of animal life, physiologists tell us, is simply a locomotive stomach. Verily, it would appear as if our social state had a tendency to make the highest animal sink into the lowest. (Mayhew 44)

Thumbing their noses with brio at Mayhew's exhortation from the pulpit ("Verily …"), Jingle and his fellows seek to justify the ways of the locomotive stomach to the god of bourgeois respectability. Tony Weller proudly informs Pickwick that he "took a good deal o' pains with [Sam's] eddication …; let him run in the streets when he was wery

young, and shift for his-self. It's the only way the make a boy sharp, sir" (353) – and sharp is what one needs to be, in a world where disinterestedness and altruism have no place. Tony later rebukes Sam for letting himself be "gammoned" by Job Trotter, saying Sam "[o]ught to ha' know'd better! why, I know a young 'un as hasn't had half nor quarter your eddication – as hasn't slept about the markets, no, nor six months – who'd ha' scorned to be let in, in such a vay; scorned it, Sammy" (397). For the most part, of course, Sam succeeds admirably at looking out for his interests, every ready to gammon others lest they gammon him. In contrast, Pickwick's unworldly innocence prompts Sam to caution him, "You raythe want somebody to look arter you, sir, wen your judgment goes out a wisitin'" (395). It is one of Sam's most important functions to "eddicate" Pickwick in the ways of an interest-driven world, as he often does by satirizing or exploding his master's cherished Augustan chimeras. Sam's peculiar gloss on Pope, for instance, puts paid to quietistic disinterestedness. "Wotever is, is right, as the young nobleman sveetly remarked wen they put him down in the pension list 'cos his mother's uncle's vife's grandfather vunce lit the king's pipe with a portable tinder-box" (810).

In his essay "Language into Structure: *Pickwick Papers*," Steven Marcus contended that in the writing of his first novel "Dickens was able to abandon himself or give expression to what Freud called the primary process in a degree that was unprecedented in English fictional prose" (Marcus, "Language" 225). It is certainly the case that Jingle, whom Marcus called "an approximation of uninflected linguistic energy," customarily behaves in a manner suggestive of a presocialized or very minimally socialized psyche, his speech, for example, "proceed[ing] rapidly and by associations; his syntactical mode … abbreviatory and contracted; his logic … elliptical,

abstractly minimal, and appositional" (Marcus, "Language" 228). Appropriately, higher-order linguistic processes such as syntactical subordination seem unknown to him. As locomotive stomach, he is not surprisingly fixated on food and drink. "[B]roiled fowl and mushrooms – capital thing!" he will exclaim (82), or "this way – capital fun – lots of beer – hogsheads; rounds of beef – bullocks; mustard …" (162). Or again, "anchovy sandwiches – devilled kidneys – splendid fellows – glorious" (163). The similar figures of Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen are introduced into the novel by Sam's noting that "one on 'em's got his legs on the table, and is drinking brandy neat, vile the tother one … has got a barrel o' oysters atween his knees, wich he's a openin' like steam …" (492). Talking of their meal the previous night, Bob and Ben "resume[] their attack upon the breakfast, more freely than before, as if the recollection of last night's supper had imparted a new relish to the meal" (494). Together they form something of a miniature gorging society, urging each other to greater feats of consumption.

> "Peg away, Bob," said Mr. Allen to his companion, encouragingly.
>
> "So I do," replied Bob Sawyer. And so, to do him justice, he did.
>
> (494)

Sam and Tony Weller are also given plenty of opportunity to demonstrate their zeal in taking nourishment. Learning to tuck in with vigor, especially whenever someone's buying, is evidently part of a boy's "eddication": watching his son suck down a prodigious draft of ale, Tony compliments him with "Werry good power o' suction, Sammy" (397). Bob, Jingle, Sam, and Tony, like Dick Swiveller in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, are men of boundless appetite and verbal self-invention who love the wide world for its ample provision of more and more places in which to contract new obligations and

escape having to repay them.[6] Their hunger evidently a variant of their unconstrained orality, such men issue forth an outflow of chatter proportionate to the amount of free food and drink that goes in. As they see it, other people exist for the almost exclusive purpose of affording them what Swiveller is looking for when he makes his first appearance in Dickens' later novel: "The watch-word" he gives to Nell's grandfather upon meeting him "is – fork" – as in *fork over*, or provide the means of feeding me (Dickens, *Old* 68). *La forchette, c'est les autres*: the other is a utensil.

We have noted the way Jingle's body testifies to his excessive nature by straining against and spilling out of his tight clothing; it is this nature that links him, the skinny con-artist, to the corpulent figures of the fat boy and Tony Weller. In them, vulgarity appears in the guise of the importunate body, of rampant matter, denying preeminence to Mayhew's "mind, heart, soul." Tony Weller "demonstrates a physiognomy which has succumbed to sheer substance: he is a massively irrational material fact" (Cotsell 8). As Lord of Misrule, he espouses and epitomizes brute matter's dogged anti-philosophy: "Vidth and visdom, Sammy, alvays goes together" (868). The fat boy, too, has a kind of "visdom" beneath and belonging to his inert stolidity. He catches Tupman and Rachel Wardle embracing in the arbor and, to them, with their higher ideas, appears not even to grasp what is taking place, to be beneath the sway of affect, in fact. "There was the fat boy, perfectly motionless, with his large circular eyes staring into the arbour, but without the slightest expression on his fact that the most expert physiognomist could have referred to astonishment, curiosity, or any other known passion that agitates the human breast"; they note "the utter vacancy of the fat boy's countenance" (172). But the

[6] As with Swiveller, Sam's slogan might be "Avay vith melincholly" (714; Dickens, *Old* 535).

narrator assures us that the fat boy was in truth "awake – wide awake – to what had been going on" (175). The fat boy's sexual awakening makes up one of the mostly implied rather than narrated subplots of *Pickwick Papers*; he is not entirely in the dark about the drives that might make the flesh of a prim and proper "old lady" (such as the duenna of the Wardle household) "creep," and he even confesses to the desire to transgress against good manners so far as to produce that result (179-80). But since Dickens' vulgarians are above all consummate blurrers of boundaries, it comes as little surprise when we discover, much later in the novel, that the first dim flickers of the fat boy's own sexual desire are hopelessly entangled with his lust for food, as is generally the case with overgrown infants (see *Pickwick* 856-60, including Phiz's illustration "Mary and the fat boy").

When Sam enters the novel in Chapter 10, we see Pickwick through his eyes as "one of the plump gentlemen, who in addition to a benevolent countenance, possessed a pair of spectacles, and a pair of black gaiters" (203). Sam isolates the details that set Pickwick off from him and his kind: the benevolence of one who can afford it, because he has never truly knocked against a hard world; the gaiters of unimpeachable propriety; the spectacles of the would-be, though in actual fact very flawed, unseen observer. Yet Pickwick is not so far removed from that past of his in "business" (alluded to a couple of times in the novel, e.g. *Pickwick* 893) as not to know that a direct appeal to self-interest will serve him best with Sam: "my friend here," he bluntly declares, indicating Wardle, "will give you half a guinea, if you'll answer one or two" – at which point the professional man Perker cuts him off, demanding the opportunity to practice his expertise. It is true that Sam comes to regard his master as "a reg'lar thorough-bread

angel" (734), his choice of "thorough-bred" asserting Pickwick's embodiment of a pure, unmixed nature. But much of Dickens' humor works toward the end Bakhtin found in "Rabelaisian laughter," which, he claimed, "not only destroys traditional connections and abolishes idealized strata [but] also brings out the crude, unmediated connections between things that people otherwise seek to keep separate, in pharisaical error" (Bakhtin 170). The comic geniuses of *Pickwick* can be counted on to call our attention to conditions of scandalous mixture, perhaps most fundamentally whenever Jingle blurs the line between mine and yours, but also when Sam tells his master about the street piemen who can make cat taste like "beefsteak, weal, or kidney, 'cordin to the demand" (335), or about the butcher who, "in a fit on temporary insanity … rashly converted his-self into sassages" (510), or when he shocks Pickwick by revealing that servants know all their masters' secrets and readily divulge them to each other (292), or when Bob Sawyer declares there is "[n]othing like dissecting, to give one an appetite" (494), or when Sawyer uses his apothecary mortar to "brew a reeking jorum of rum-punch therein" (627), or when Tony Weller, we read, "had been much struck with [his son's fiancée] Mary's appearance; having, in fact, bestowed several very unfatherly winks upon her, already" (885).

We see one striking "pharisaical error" in the act of commission during the sections of *Pickwick* focused on the fierce election contest between the Blues and Buffs for the right to represent the town whose name declares it the very capital of vulgar appetitiveness: Eatanswill. (Appropriately, much of the electioneering labor Pickwick learns about from his informant Mr. Perker consists of bribing the electorate with comestibles.) Each candidate, in his speech from the hustings,

> expresse[s his] opinion that a more independent, a more enlightened, a more public-spirited, a more noble-minded, a more disinterested set of men than those who had promised to vote for him, never existed on earth; each darkly hint[s] his suspicions that the electors in the opposite interest had certain swinish and besotted infirmities which rendered them unfit for the exercise of the important duties they were called upon to discharge. (254-55)

The passage serves as a good introduction to the second major source of the novel's comedy: the revelation that the protagonist's claim to embody precisely those values which each candidate flatters his supporters they possess amounts to just so much "humbug" (71). Time and again, the boundaries collapse that were constructed to demarcate the "thorough-bred" Pickwick from the low and fraudulent – boundaries including the word "humbug," which Pickwick is apt to use against his followers when *their* purported virtues are revealed as shams (see *Pickwick* 498). Pickwick's efforts to so demarcate himself come to look not dissimilar to the furious strivings of Eatanswill's rival newspaper editors, Pott and Slurk, each of whom assails his opponent and opponent's newspaper with "'absurd,' 'wretched,' 'atrocity,' 'humbug,' 'knavery,' 'dirt,' 'filth,' 'slime,' 'ditch-water,' and other critical remarks of the like nature" (820).

While Jingle represents vulgarity in its adversarial guise, and Sam and Tony Weller the power of the low as helper and instructor, Bob Sawyer, who comes to the fore in the second half of the book, presents us with a spectacle far more radical in its implications: the vulgar man as secret sharer.[7] Bob enters the novel at a point at which it

[7] See Herbert for a rich discussion of "divided identity" and "converging worlds" in *Pickwick*.

desperately needs narrative energy: immediately after the lengthy Christmas chapters, with their glutinous cheerleading about the joys of the domestic circle at Dingley Dell. ("Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days …" [45].)[8] From a spot all too snugly located, in Chapter 28, amidst the band of merry-makers chez Wardle, we move, in the next chapter, outside, in the interpolated "Story of the Goblins who stole a Sexton," to confront a character, Gabriel Grub, who is antithetical to hearthside jollity, a dark version of Jingle as antisocial man. We get an alienated perspective on the Yuletide revelries we have just been subjected to.

> As he went his way, up the ancient street, he saw the cheerful light of the blazing fires gleam through the old casements, and heard the loud laugh and the cheerful shouts of those who were assembled around them; and he marked the bustling preparations for next day's cheer, and smelt the numerous savoury odours consequent thereupon, as they steamed up from the kitchen windows in clouds. All this was gall and wormwood to the heart of Gabriel Grub. (481)

The tale is a dreary rehearsal for "A Christmas Carol," disciplining the misanthrope with alternating goblins' kicks and the compulsory viewing of what amount to propagandistic home movies celebrating family life and social solidarity (in this latter detail the story seems like a rehearsal for *A Clockwork Orange*). Grub is brought "to the conclusion that it was a very decent and respectable world after all," and he carries the bruises from his

[8] One notes the word "delusions" here, a brief demystifying flicker amid the murk of sentimentality. The veil of delusion is similarly parted when we read that the song Mr. Wardle sings is "tumultuously applauded – for friends and dependents make a capital audience – and the poor relations, especially, [are] in perfect ecstacies of rapture" (479).

drubbing as a reminder not to sin against sacred domesticity again (489). Thank goodness the next chapter brings us, in Bob Sawyer, another unsocialized fellow, this one disreputably "overflowing with … animal spirits" and never to be subdued (492).

Even before Bob makes his appearance, of course, we have encountered plenty of evidence suggestive of the idea that the illustrious protagonist is actually drawn to certain Jingle-like tendencies, as if Pickwick's pursuit of Jingle, on the level of plot, is matched on the characterological level by the disavowed desire to become him.[9] The advertisement for the novel that appeared in *The Athenaeum* on 26 March 1836 described a protagonist full of wanderlust and tending to infect others with it: "This remarkable man," it stated, "would appear to have infused a considerable portion of his restless and inquiring spirit into the breasts of other members of the Club, and to have awakened in their minds the same insatiable thirst for Travel which so eminently characterized his own" (see *Pickwick* 899). With "restless" and "insatiable thirst," we are well on the way to a description of Jingle, and so it seems fitting that Captain Boldwig should regard Pickwick as one of "the vagabonds" who has been trespassing on his land – although Boldwig catches Pickwick only because the latter has been pushed to the spot in a wheelbarrow and is sleeping off an excess of punch (339). As in a number of other scenes, someone or something else's agency acts out for him the vagabond impulses which the noble Pickwick strives to suppress. There is no shortage of passages showing the hero's hearty appetite and, especially, his tendency to over-imbibe. On the occasion

[9] At times, Jingle's characteristic speech pattern can appear to be "catching." Taking off in pursuit of the eloping Jingle and Rachel, Pickwick thinks "Pretty situation for the General Chairman of the Pickwick Club. Damp chaise – strange horses – fifteen miles an hour – and twelve o'clock at night!" (189).

just mentioned, inebriation brings on an almost literal regression to infancy: one who normally prides himself on his power or oratory (and introduced in the novel in the act of making a speech), Pickwick "beg[ins] to forget how to articulate any words at all" and, "rising to his legs to address the company in an eloquent speech," drops straightway into the barrow that is turning before our very eyes into a cradle and falls "fast asleep, simultaneously" (337). Another time, after a bibulous evening following a cricket match, Pickwick is seen "producing a constant succession of the blandest and most benevolent smiles without being moved thereunto by any discernible cause or pretence whatsoever" (175) – an exaggeration of his customary demeanor – and it is Jingle who ingratiates himself with the ladies in speaking along with them for outraged decorum.

> "What a shocking scene!" said the spinster aunt.
>
> "Dis – gusting!" ejaculated both the young ladies.
>
> "Dreadful – dreadful!" said Jingle, looking very grave: he was about a bottle and a half ahead of any of his companions. "Horrid spectacle – very!" (178)

Pickwick's imperfect self-mastery also displays itself in several outbursts of rage. He prevents Sam Weller from taking violent retribution against Job Trotter (439), but elsewhere has to be prohibited from inflicting it on others. In the previously mentioned scene in which Jingle takes his bribe for leaving Rachel a maiden, the villain's insolence is a "shaft" that "penetrate[s] through his philosophical harness, to his very heart"; "he hurl[s] the inkstand madly forward, and follow[s] it up himself," though Jingle absconds and Pickwick is restrained by Sam (210). His capability for physical violence may be linked, as well, to his liability to forget, in the most proper of settings, that politesse

renders the body a subject to be avoided. When the master of ceremonies at Bath asks him, "Mr. Pickwick, do you see the lady in the gauze turban?" he replies, "The fat old lady?" only to be told "Hush, my dear sir – nobody's fat or old in Ba – ath" (590).[10]

Then there is the question of his dealings with the opposite sex. Of course Pickwick's asexuality and permanent bachelorhood are givens: they account for the ridiculousness of his advising Mr. Magnus on how to propose marriage, of his being suspected of toying with Mrs. Bardell's affections or of meaning anything more than "Chops and Tomata sauce" in his note to her on the subject (see *Pickwick* 562). They guarantee the perfect impunity with which he can be assaulted under the mistletoe ("It was a pleasant thing to see Mr. Pickwick in the centre of the group, now pulled this way, and then that, and first kissed on the chin, and then on the nose, and then on the spectacles …" [476]). We need not fear his becoming a "wictim o' connubiality." And yet, at the very moment when he is berating "the indiscretion, or worse than that, the blackness of heart" of his disciples, who "beneath whatever roof they locate … disturb the peace of mind and happiness of some confiding female" (324-25), he receives Dodson and Fogg's notice that Mrs. Bardell is suing him for breach of promise. Rather than acknowledge that his charge against the others has stuck to him, he opts to exonerate them all as "victims of circumstances" (327). But he has an uncanny knack for such

[10] His sojourn at Bath might have taught Pickwick the folly of excessive propriety. Even the servants put on airs, as Sam observes when he attends a servants' "swarry" (607). On the way there, Sam shocks his host by whistling in the street – an "exceedingly ungenteel sound," he is told (609). The other guests insult the greengrocer who supplies their food and drink as "a wulgar beast" and sympathize with one of their number who has huffily resigned a good position because "he had been required to eat cold meat" (612, 615).

victimization. A little later, Pickwick is to be seen disturbing the peace of mind and happiness of an unmarried woman in whose hotel bedroom he has undressed and got in bed. Miss Witherfield is a sort of female Minotaur at the heart of the labyrinthine White Horse Inn, but the maze to focus on here would appear to be the one constituted by the twists and turns in Pickwick's own nature, which repeatedly leads him into circumstances offensive to the eye of propriety.

"Pickvick and principle!" Sam Weller shouts out at one point (425); but just as our hero sometimes shows traces of his past commercial experience, he is also, now and then, capable of a Weller- or Jingle-like caginess. We might have been prepared for this by our introduction, in the very first chapter, to the phenomenon of the "Pickwickian sense" of words, a sort of anti-principle principle at the heart of the Club's operations. By invoking the Pickwickian sense, one can disavow one's own utterances (and perhaps deeds as well?). The device is a legal fiction efficiently providing us with what we have always dreamed of: a way out of history and memory, a way to start over from scratch, available to us precisely so long as we decline to stick to our guns. Order and amity are restored when Mr. Blotton admits that he has called Pickwick a "humbug" only "in a Pickwickian point of view," and the latter "beg[s] it to be understood" that his own calumnies poured upon Blotton's head were "merely intended to bear a Pickwickian construction" (72). Later in the book, of course, he submits to imprisonment in the Fleet for a principle – and gets tutored by Sam on the folly of taking principle too far, in Sam's anecdote of the man who killed himself in order to prove that "crumpets was wholesome" (709) – but in Eatanswill he counsels doing "what the mob do." "But suppose there are two mobs?" Snodgrass presses him, to which he instantly replies, "Shout with the

largest" (239). Indeed, Pickwick's position with regard to mobs vacillates radically. Whereas, in Chapter Two, he is, as we have seen, the disinterested man of science set upon by a crowd mistrustful of highfalutin claims to disinterestedness, he later (in Chapter 24) becomes something like a Jacobin demagogue stirring a mob into frenzy. This comes about because Miss Witherfield has had Pickwick arrested for planning to duel her fiancé. Placed with Tupman under the extreme constraint of a single sedan-chair, Pickwick bursts its boundary, "manag[ing] to push open the roof; and mounting on the seat, and steadying himself as well as he could … Mr. Pickwick proceeded to address the multitude; to dwell upon the unjustifiable manner in which he had been treated …" (419).[11]

Phiz's illustration of the scene (420) bears close comparison to the later one (797) showing "Mr. Bob Sawyer's mode of traveling": in each, a figure escapes confinement in a vehicle, to the celebration of an unruly crowd in the street, but in the second image we see Sawyer's more customary relationship to Pickwick, who rides inside. Beginning the journey from Bristol, where Bob has his medical practice, to Birmingham, he rides alongside Sam in the carriage's "dickey," keeping "his professional green spectacles on, and conduct[ing] himself with becoming steadiness and gravity of demeanor" so long as there is any chance of passing a client in the street. "But when they emerged on the open

[11] Sam's link to Jingle as concentrated essence of the mob is strengthened when we discover how ready he is to join one without the slightest idea what cause animates it: "he beheld a crowd pouring down the street, surrounding an object which had very much the appearance of a sedan-chair. Willing to divert his thoughts from the failure of his enterprise, he stepped aside to see the crowd pass; and finding that they were cheering away, very much to their own satisfaction, forthwith began (by way of raising his spirits) to cheer too, with all his might and main" (418).

road," Dickens writes, "he threw off his green spectacles and his gravity together, and performed a great variety of practical jokes, which were calculated to attract the attention of the passers-by, and to render the carriage and those it contained, objects of more than ordinary curiosity …" (795). The passage, and Phiz's picture, afford the uplifting tableau of vulgarity's *ecce homo*.

> Mr. Bob Sawyer was seated: not in the dickey, but on the roof of the chaise, with his legs as far asunder as they would conveniently go, wearing Mr. Samuel Weller's hat on one side of his head, and bearing, in one hand, a most enormous sandwich, while, in the other, he supported a goodly-sized case bottle, to both of which he applied himself with intense relish: varying the monotony of the occupation by an occasional howl, or the interchange of some lively *badinage* with any passing stranger. (796)

Here is a striking representation of Tony Weller's "I feel I ain't safe anyveres but on the box" (355), as appetite on the loose refuses even the confinement of a vehicle. The hats are exchanged because, after all, Sam and Bob are versions of one another, and the former smiles on the latter's exhibition with "entire and perfect approval of the whole arrangement" (796). And, as if to indicate vagabond energy's tendency to resist sequestration within the bounds of a single character, Dickens and Phiz add another avatar, one somewhat more troubling to their contemporary Britons: "an Irish family … who were keeping up with the chaise, and begging all the time" offer "congratulations …of rather a boisterous description; especially those of its male head, who appeared to

consider the display as part and parcel of some political, or other procession of triumph" (796). As indeed it is.

During Bob's shenanigans, Pickwick sits on the other side of the pertinent boundary in the scene, inside the chaise and cordoned off in his zone of good breeding. Bob's behavior is "enough to irritate a gentleman with Mr. Pickwick's sense of propriety" (796). Pickwick calls out the window, urging the young man to "[t]hink of the look of the thing …[and] have some regard to appearances" (798). But when Bob expresses his repentance by sending a bottle of punch to the inside passengers, Pickwick rapidly talks himself into draining it. Bob acts out, for all the world to see, what Pickwick does covertly and hides from himself. Elsewhere, we may find inanimate objects performing much the same function. In Chapter 39, for example, Pickwick accompanies Winkle and Sam on a secret night visit to Winkle's beloved Arabella, whose brother and guardian Ben Allen wants her to wed Sawyer. Pickwick is motivated by unimpeachable sentiments. As he informs Arabella, "I merely wished you to know, my dear, that I should not have allowed my young friend to see you in this clandestine way, if the situation in which you are placed, had left him any alternative; and lest the impropriety of this step should cause you any uneasiness, my love, it may be a satisfaction to you, to know that I am present" (646). But a certain "dark lantern" he has brought along on this occasion, "the great mechanical beauty of which, he [has] proceeded to explain to Mr. Winkle as they walked along" (643-44) appears to have other ideas. Pickwick cannot seem to get the knack of handling it properly, so that it keeps shooting beams of light every which way, as if inhabited by some Sawyerish imp determined to expose the mission Pickwick aims to carry out in secret. Sam calls such

lanterns "Wery nice things, if they're managed properly" (644) – and we note the adverb in noting how Pickwick's actions diverge from it. The object in his hands betrays him, becoming the embodiment of his alienated agency and permitting the accomplishment of effects which the protagonist, in order to preserve his sense of self, necessarily foreswears: effects stemming from Pickwick's own inadmissible compulsion to "overflow[] with … animal spirits" (492). "That 'ere blessed lantern 'ull be the death on us all," Sam declares. "Take care wot you're a doin' on, sir; you're a sendin' a blaze o' light, right into the back parlor winder" (644). Pickwick's reply is: "Dear me! … I didn't mean to do that" (645).

Throughout his narrated career Pickwick enacts the struggle between husbanding the capital of his reputation for correctness and, in more than one sense, giving himself away. When he does the latter, he pulls down the walls of self and merges with the common human stream. When he goes into to the Fleet, Pickwick is imprisoning himself, as has long been recognized (see Marcus, *Dickens* 47). He is like Tony Weller's pike-keepers, someone who has met disappointment and chooses to shut himself up, refusing to contaminate himself by touching the pitch of the world, that commodity everywhere in ample supply. Shortly after he arrives there he takes "to wondering what possible temptation could have induced a dingy-looking fly that was crawling over his pantaloons to come into a close prison, when he had the choice of so many airy situations – a course of meditation which led him to the irresistible conclusion that the insect was mad" (670). As is so often the case, his spectacles fail him here, for he doesn't see the madness of his own choice and can't be made to do so until Mrs. Bardell lands in the Fleet too, whereupon Pickwick permits himself to be argued into paying off Dodson and

Fogg, freeing himself so he can free her too. More generally, though, Pickwick's is the madness of Pentheus, denier of Dionysian unity and doomed to suffer for it. Clinging to "delusion" – not only to the fable that he possesses extraordinary gifts (for surely he is but "a foolish and erring mortal like the rest of us, not an exemplar of virtue" [Herbert 15]), but also to the figment that Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* called the Apollonian *principium individuationis* – he takes himself out of circulation and surrounds himself with "rigid, hostile barriers" against the criminal and low (Nietzsche 36, 37). What ensues is the death of comedy.

There is, though, one type of "vulgar" behavior *Pickwick Papers* disparages. Dismal Jemmy says that "poetry makes life what lights and music do the stage – strip the one of its false embellishments, and the other of its illusions, and what is there real in either to live or care for?" (104). We have seen, in the Christmas chapters, Dickens celebrate and long to hold onto our "delusions of childhood," the callow fictions we permit ourselves to subscribe to, such as the belief that the world is full of benevolent disinterested people. From the start of the novel, we find signals of Dickens's preference for the cause of human solidarity, even if it is constructed around a delusion, over that of the misanthropic truth-seeker. So great are the rewards of our banding together around an idea, so disastrous the results of undermining our common faith, Dickens seems to think, that it is wiser to let well enough alone and not go casting skeptical light on all our first principles – such as the notion that Mr. Pickwick is an extraordinary man. The Pickwick Club is a miniature of all societies; it undergoes a crisis of faith when Mr. Blotton blots its founder's escutcheon by calling him a humbug; harmony is reinstated through the magic of the "Pickwickian sense." Later, though, Blotton is at it again, in the

affair of "Bill Stumps His Mark" (216-17; 227-29). Here too is an anecdote relating the victory of collective delusion over niggling and (strange to call it so) Quixotic insistence on fact. Blotton's determination to prove that the carved stone Pickwick has unearthed is a common, prosaic object rather than a piece of mysterious and valuable antiquity displays "the doubt and caviling peculiar to vulgar minds" and deserves "the undying contempt of those who cultivate the mysterious and the sublime" (228). It would seem similarly vulgar and churlish to read such moments, to my mind the most *Quixote*-like in the novel, as mocking Pickwick and the "seventeen learned societies" that join forces to defend his good name against Blotton, and whose triumph preserves the stone in the condition of "an illegible monument of Mr. Pickwick's greatness …" (239). On the contrary, such portions of *Pickwick* seem devoted to championing the self-confirming nature of collective belief and the meaning-making alchemy whereby we turn the crudest dross into the most glittering of golden icons, in order to organize a culture around their worship.[12]

[12] The "Bill Stumps His Mark" anecdote sandwiches the interpolated tale of "The Madman's Manuscript," which focuses on delusion as practiced by an individual rather than a group and thus as fruitless and self-destructive. One notes as well that Chapter 39 (the "dark lantern" chapter) ends with something of a repetition of the episode, although with another now in the scientist's role and Pickwick himself as part of the object of scientific inquiry. An "elderly gentleman of scientific attainments" catches sight of the lantern's beam and instantly converts it in his zealous imagination into "[s]ome extraordinary and wonderful phenomenon of nature, which no philosopher had ever seen before; something which it had been reserved for him alone to discover, and which he should immortalize his name by chronicling for the benefit of posterity" (647). As in the "Stumps" passages, the discoverer and his co-believers disdain the vulgar mind (here represented by a servant, Pruffle, who ventures to "say it was thieves") that contents itself with sublunary explanations. The scientific gentleman reimagines the lights and Sam's knocking him

When, in the middle of the book, Pickwick is brought before the magistrate Mr. Nupkins, the door is "slammed … in the faces of the mob, who," we read,

> indignant at being excluded, and anxious to see what followed, relieved their feelings by kicking at the gate and ringing the bell, for an hour or two afterwards. In this amusement they all took part by turns, except three or four fortunate individuals, who, having discovered a grating in the gate which commanded a view of nothing, stared through it with the indefatigable perseverance with which people will flatten their noses against the front windows of a chemist's shop, when a drunken man, who has been run over by a dog-cart in the street, is undergoing a surgical inspection in the back-parlour. (422).

Throughout the run of *Pickwick*, Dickens managed to keep his own particular mob, his readers, flattening *their* noses against the window behind which he worked away, even though, as he seemed strongly to suspect, there was ultimately nothing much there for them to see; and arguing the virtues of not looking too closely became part of his labor. His comedy drives toward the destruction of those boundaries dividing "Pickvick and principle" from the vulgar and mean, yet *Pickwick Papers* also scorns and seeks to rise above that other vulgarity, the commitment to truth at all costs, that would leave us alone

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unconscious as "the effect of electricity," and his "masterly treatise" on the subject "delight[s] all the Scientific Associations beyond measure, and cause[s] him to be considered a light of science ever afterwards" (649).

and leave untapped the boundless potential residing in all the matter surrounding us and constituting us.

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