Satire and Dickens

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Abstract

People have a fundamental need to feel good about themselves, and sometimes we can achieve this at the expense of others. If I can laugh at someone who does something stupid, or feel superior to someone who does something unjust, or rebel against an institution which violates some natural law, then so much the better for me. Essentially, this is why I read satire. Until recently this sort of approach does not seem to have appealed to literary critics—perhaps because it demeans their subject matter—but there are many essential human needs which are satisfied by a reader’s imaginative response to satire, and there is nothing ignoble in that.

Satire allows us to escape the constrictions that society places on us. When we read satire we can behave badly: we laugh at other people, cackle at their stupidity, and snigger at their pomposity or hypocrisy; we revenge ourselves upon people who have bored, annoyed, or cheated us. All of this misbehaviour is sanctioned by moral propriety, and by the figure who establishes what is proper and what is not, the satirist. It is the satirist who sets up little moral victories for us, made possible by satiric attack.

However, when satire becomes part of a novel, it must there vie for ascendancy with other guises of the author. The satirist must compete with the moralist, the comic, or the sentimentalist, and when this happens the reader too must evaluate their satiric victories alongside the other emotions they feel when they read other parts of a novel. Charles Dickens has many such guises, and consequently he particularly challenges the reader to cope with many different responses. This is where satire becomes even more interesting, because the victories are tempered by other, perhaps more noble emotions. The novels of Dickens present the reader with a constant battle between good and bad: both the author’s and the reader’s.
Preface

This thesis grew out of the questions raised by a fourth year paper on satire co-ordinated by Dr. Shef Rogers. Although many of these questions were left unanswered by that course, I would like to thank Dr. Rogers for providing me with the impetus to explore satire more fully. I would also like to thank Dr. John Watson, a supervisor with much patience and many helpful suggestions, and yet the good grace to allow me to choose which advice I followed and which I did not. Finally, I would like to thank Catriona and my family, especially my father whose constant nagging to finish this thing will finally end. And to all those others who doubted this thesis would ever be complete I merely say: “Ha.”
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Introduction

People have a fundamental need to feel good about themselves, and sometimes we can achieve this at the expense of others. If I can laugh at someone who does something stupid, or feel superior to someone who does something unjust, or rebel against an institution which violates some natural law, then so much the better for me. Essentially, this is why I read satire. Until recently this sort of approach does not seem to have appealed to literary critics—perhaps because it demeans their subject matter—but there are many essential human needs which are satisfied by a reader’s imaginative response to satire, and there is nothing ignoble in that.

Traditionally, literary critics have considered satire from the point of view of the satirist. Ronald Paulson, for instance, considers that there are two aims of satire: it must first expose, then convince. This sort of view considers the satiric author as a literary figure, consciously writing as part of the great literary tradition handed down from classical times to the Augustan age. When I read satire, though, it does not seem to convince me of anything, or prompt me to do something. Readers of satire seem to take very little notice of grandiose claims of satirists to change or convince. What is more, satire exists in many different forms that would not be called “satire.” When we discuss classical or Augustan literature satire can be considered as a genre, with many formal implications and restrictions, but it undoubtedly exists in novels, poetry, theatre, music, art, television, film. We would hesitate to label many of these things “satire,” and therefore the generic application of the word is hopelessly restrictive. So satire is not so much a form (though we can distinguish formal verse satire by its individual characteristics), but rather it is a feeling, an essence common to all these different forms of expression. The first section of this thesis is an attempt to discover what that essence is, how readers respond to satire, and to analyse the relationship between reader and satirist.

I chose to analyse novelistic satire because its presence in that form supports my notion that satire is not simply a highly individual literary genre, but a feeling or essence. Moreover, satire exists alongside many other impulses and tones in the novel, and the way in which these different modes interact and conflict with each other enriches our understanding of them individually, and as an artistic whole. Few novelists have so wide a range of modes, suggesting different ways of perceiving the world, as Dickens. He was a complicated man, and this is reflected in his works. He may have portrayed himself to his readers as an upright Victorian gentleman, defender of the good and right, champion of the people, but his private life contradicted this image. While he advocated the rewards of a stable, happy home he had a mistress and kept his wife in a separate house. He satirized social climbers like the Veneerings, yet he was desperate to rise above the shame he felt his childhood poverty and degradation had heaped upon him. Satire is a very important strain in his works, but is often disregarded by critics as less inspired and conventional; or it is treated as entity in itself, to be viewed out of the overall context the work as a whole. I was interested in how the satiric elements of his novels affected the reader's perception of the non-satiric parts of his novels.

Dickens knew the work of the great satirists who had preceded him. As early in his career as *Oliver Twist* he places himself, in his preface, in the company of Fielding, Hogarth, Gay, Voltaire, Defoe, Goldsmith, Smollett, and Cervantes. He often referred to Swift and Pope, and cited them as precedent with which he could defend his own attacks which had been criticized. His early work shows his acceptance of this tradition, and his attempts to continue and become a part of it (to the point of imitation). Despite this acceptance, his natural exuberance inspired him to take the spirit of earlier satirists and develop satire in his own, peculiarly Dickensian ways. Through his career, he significantly develops the way in which he uses satire, and the effects that are achieved as satire inter-relates with other parts of the novel. The three novels I examine in detail are useful points from which to analyse this development, where satire begins as incidental.

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2 Only one critical text has been solely devoted to Dickensian satire: Sylvia Bank Manning's *Dickens as Satirist* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1971).
and gradually becomes the major structural principle of his work. *Oliver Twist* demonstrates Dickens’s satire in perhaps its purest form: some of it is very good, but much of it evokes responses from the reader which conflict with other responses aroused by other modes of presentation. By *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the most self-consciously satiric of his works, Dickens has integrated his satire more effectively into the moral scheme of the novel, but the reader still feels that the response to satire conflicts with other things the author wants us to feel. *Bleak House* combines the best of the two earlier works, and finally the response aroused by satire contributes to, and enriches, the overall effect of the novel.
The Essence of Satire
The Essence of Satire

It has been remarked that Mr. Pecksniff was a moral man. So he was. Perhaps there never was a more moral man than Mr. Pecksniff; especially in his conversation and correspondence. It was once said of him by a homely admirer, that he had a Fortunatus's purse of good sentiments in his inside. In this particular he was like the girl in the fairy tale, except that if they were not actual diamonds that fell from his lips, they were the very brightest paste, and shone prodigiously. He was a most exemplary man: fuller of virtuous precept than a copy-book. Some people likened him to a direction-post, which is always telling the way to a place, and never goes there: but these were his enemies; the shadows cast by his brightness, that is all. His very throat was moral. You saw a good deal of it. You looked over a very low fence of white cravat (whereof no man had ever beheld the tie, for he fastened it behind), and there it lay, a valley between two jutting heights of collar, serene and whiskerless before you. It seemed to say, on the part of Mr. Pecksniff, "There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen, all is peace: a holy calm pervades me." So did his hair, just grizzled with an iron-gray, drooped in kindred action with his heavy eyelids. So did his person, which was sleek though free from corpulence. So did his manner, which was soft and oily. In a word, even his plain black suit, and state of widower, and dangling double eye-glass, all tended to the same purpose, and cried aloud, "Behold the moral Pecksniff!"

The brazen plate upon the door (which being Mr. Pecksniff's, could not lie) bore this inscription, "PECKSNIFF, ARCHITECT," to which Mr. Pecksniff, on his cards of business,
added, “AND LAND SURVEYOR.” In one sense, and only one, he may be said to have been a Land Surveyor on pretty large scale, as an extensive prospect lay stretched out before the windows of his house. Of his architectural doings, nothing was clearly known, except that he had never designed or built anything; but it was generally understood that his knowledge of the science was almost awful in its profundity. (Martin Chuzzlewit, Chapter 2)

Take that, says Dickens. A fine piece of satire, we might say. Pecksniff’s hypocrisy is revealed, at first by implication, through the insistence on his morality, the especial morality of his “conversation and correspondence” (with no mention of actions), the mock-heroic discrepancy between diamonds and shiny paste, the subtle revelation that he has enemies, and the ridiculousness of a moral throat. The reader’s suspicion of irony in “There is no deception” is confirmed by the following paragraph that explicitly reveals the incompatibility of Pecksniff’s sentiments and his actions. In fact, he is “a direction post, which is always telling the way to a place, and never goes there.”

This is the traditional view of literary satire as a weapon used by the satirist to bludgeon, and hopefully pacify or convert, the corrupt target. Satire is the juxtaposition of two incongruous things (here Pecksniff’s words and his actions), where the incongruity is not merely amusing, but where the incongruity implies a judgement; we are shown the difference between the way things are (as presented in the text), and the way things should be (the implication of the text, the standard against which we are to judge the target). Allied to this dual vision of the world is the traditional claim of the

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1 All quotations from Martin Chuzzlewit are taken from the World’s Classics edition, edited by Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
satirist that they are exposer of truth behind appearance:

Take the poets Eupolis, Cratinus, and Aristophanes, and also
the other men who go to make up the Old Comedy.
If any person deserved to be publicly exposed for being
a crook and a thief, an adulterer or a cut-throat, or for being notorious
in some other way, they used to speak right out and brand him....

Yet if I’m a little outspoken or perhaps
too fond of a joke, I hope you’ll grant me that privilege.
My good father taught me the habit; to warn me off
he used to point out various vices by citing examples.
(Horace, Satires I.iv.1-5, 103-106)\(^3\)

Lucilius first had the courage
to write this kind of poetry, pulling off the glossy skin
in which people were parading before the eyes of the world and concealing
their ugliness... (Horace, Satires II.i.62-65)

But when fiery Lucilius rages with satire’s naked sword
His hearers go red; their conscience is cold with crime,
Their innards sweat at the thought of their secret guilt. (Juvenal, Satire I, ll.
166-68)\(^4\)

[I admire Lucian, Cervantes, and Swift...] not indeed for their wit
and humour alone which they all so eminently possessed, but
because they all endeavoured, with the utmost force of their wit
and humour, to expose and extirpate those follies and vices

\(^3\) All verse translations of Horace from the Latin are from Niall Rudd, The Satires of Horace and Persius (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).
\(^4\) All translations of Juvenal are by Peter Green, Juvenal: The Sixteen Satires (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).
which chiefly prevailed in their several countries. (Fielding, *Covent Garden Journal*, 1752)

Yes, I am proud; I must be proud to see
Men not afraid of God, afraid of me:
Safe from the Bar, the Pulpit, and the Throne
Yet touched and shamed by Ridicule alone.
O sacred weapon! Left for Truth's defense,
Sole Dread of Folly, Vice and Insolence!
(Pope, "Epilogue to the Satires: Dialogue II," ll. 208-213, 1738)

It appeared to me that...to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid misery of their lives; to show them as they really are...would be to attempt a something that was needed, and which would be a service to society.
(Dickens, Preface to *Oliver Twist*, 1838)

Yes indeed, thank goodness for satirists, upholders of truth and moral order, revealers of reality behind appearance. The implied author created by the excerpt from *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a figure of obviously high morals, condemning hypocrisy, greed hiding behind a guise of morality. The implied Dickens is able to get away with this literary bludgeoning because his criticism of something so immoral implies a high morality for himself. In effect he embodies the standard by which Pecksniff should be judged, a tactic employed by satirists throughout the ages; and through our ability to see that what Pecksniff does (or does not) we join the implied Dickens on this higher moral plane, paying ourselves and the implied Dickens a compliment. And just in case his readers
missed this when reading *Martin Chuzzlewit* in serial form, his preface to the first complete edition states:

I set out, on this journey which is now concluded; with the design of exhibiting, in various aspects, the commonest of all the vices.

By which he means selfishness. But as the preface continues he acknowledges one of the central problems which the satirist must encounter:

It is almost needless to add, that the commoner the folly or the crime which an author endeavours to illustrate, the greater the risk he runs of being charged with exaggeration; for, as no man ever yet recognised an imitation of himself, no man will admit the correctness of a sketch in which his own character is delineated, however faithfully.

In which he is, of course, paraphrasing Swift's famous definition of satire:

SATYR is a sort of Glass, wherein Beholders do generally discover every body's Face but their Own. (Preface to *The Battle of the Books*, 1704)

In effect Dickens acknowledges that his satire of Pecksniff is more complicated than a piece of literary attack on a particular human vice (which he develops throughout the rest of the novel, spreading various incarnations of this vice about various characters). The

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5 Although this is not a satirical observation, it exemplifies the spirit Dickens shares with satirists. All quotations from *Oliver Twist* are taken from the Penguin English Library edition, edited by Peter Fairclough (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).
Pecksniff passage exudes moral uprightness. Through ironic implication an author-reader relationship is set up which establishes a moral code: ‘people should behave as they seem to be and not be deceptive’ or some such similar summation.

Traditionally, morality is an essential element of English satire. An author can not be seen to be attacking merely for the pleasure of the attack, or to exact revenge on an enemy, but to be doing so for a reason: otherwise we regard them as a ‘bad person’ and consequently not worth listening to. As Swift’s “quite indifferent” observer “his [Swift’s] Character impartial draws”:

Perhaps I may allow, the Dean
Had too much Satyr in his Vein;...
Yet, Malice never was his Aim;
He lashed the Vice but spared the Name.
No individual could resent,
Where Thousands equally were meant.
(“Verses On The Death Of Dr. Swift”)

To be accused of descending to mere invective is possibly the worst fate that can befall satirists, for it belittles their intentions and questions their motives. So they must maintain the implicit morality: that is, they must adhere to an agreed code by which human beings should act, because it is usually this norm from which the target is shown to be deviating; and of course where this multifarious, undefined code is not universally agreed upon is where satire runs into problems, and is challenged. For satire to ‘succeed’ there must be agreement between author and audience, based on these objective moral judgements.
Yet beneath the ethical correctness of satire, there lies a darker side, carefully hidden from view by the satirist, and only sub-consciously acknowledged by the reader. Although Pecksniff assumes a 'life' of his own as a literary creation he was based upon a real person, one Samuel Carter Hall, editor of the Art Union Monthly. Even years after Martin Chuzzlewit was written, Dickens, describing Hall in a letter to Wilkie Collins, said he could feel his bile begin to shake and swell, like Green's balloon with the gas turned on....Being on the salt Sea you probably did not see a speech of Samivel Carter Hall's....The snivelling insolence of it, the concentrated essence of snobbery in it, and the Philogullododgeitiveness where it was steeped have so affected me that I have flown to Cockle for succour.  

This, it seems to me, is the essence of satire: the basic human emotion that lies beneath the carefully constructed rhetoric and literary devices; the subjectivity beneath the objectivity. Yet, we see no hint of Dickens's utter repulsion towards S. C. Hall in the portrait of Pecksniff. George Eliot apparently saw satire in this light when she said "The baser part of the multitude delight in degradations, apart from any hatred; it is the satire they best understand." Satiric ethics, rather than providing a justification for attacking something which does not conform to an 'accepted' moral code, fulfil our need to justify our darker side, the side which needs to attack that which opposes the values that we personally hold important. Under this view, the satiric target is not so much wrong, as it is different or opposite, and this is why a target will never see its reflection in the satiric

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Recent criticism has moved away from the traditional emphasis upon the moralistic element in satire:

It is most fascinating, of course, if we see satire as a legitimate aesthetic expression of basic human emotions—anger, shame, indignation, disgust, contempt—emotions that are aroused by universal human behaviour—stupidity, greed, injustice, selfishness—(need we go on?).

I would suggest that if satire originates as rhetoric, or attack, it only matters...or survives as literature...as mimesis, exploration and analysis. Like comedy or tragedy, satire is a form which gives a compelling poetic representation of a certain area of experience.

Dickens’s letter to Wilkie Collins is witness to the intensity with which he disliked S. C. Hall; such that he was moved to attack, creating a pompous hypocrite of epic proportions. It contains the same emotion that is channelled into the portrait of Pecksniff, where it is metamorphosized into satire—"a compelling poetic representation of a certain area of experience," that is, the negative, critical side of human nature. This accords with R. C. Elliot’s influential theory that satire has ancient roots in primitive rites, spells and curses. Dickens may have been almost universally viewed by his contemporaries as a giant-hearted, benevolent figure, but he certainly could hate as

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10 The theory is convincingly argued by Elliot in The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art (Princeton: 1960). Viewing the satirist as a sort of witch-doctor, it seems, has a certain attraction for literary scholars.
strongly as he loved. After his death, his daughter, Kate Peregini, wrote to George
Bernard Shaw:

If you could make the public understand that my father was not a
jolly, jocose gentleman walking about the Earth with a plum
pudding and a bowl of punch, you would greatly oblige me.11

Dickens was the sort of person who never forgave people he felt had wronged him: G. K. Chesterton said he “hated by instinct.”12 Satiric attack was his means of revenge—witness the number of ‘real’ people savaged in his works (even his mother was not exempt). I do not mean to insinuate that all satire is founded this deeply in dislike or hatred—you could say so of Juvenal or perhaps Swift, but not of Horace or Fielding—but it is a useful exemplification of the point that satire has its basis in negative human characteristics.

The need to attack that which opposes our ideals is one of the fundamentals of human existence. One needs only to read a letters column in a newspaper or magazine, and it becomes immediately apparent from the number of letters that disagree with another point of view that people are moved more strongly by the need to attack than to support (or, at least, that the letters of support are less interesting, and therefore not printed). Satire is not an investigation in the way that comedy or tragedy may be. Rather, it is concerned with personal opinions and its method is attack. Yet, despite this narrowness, it is still about people and their feelings and ideas, and especially about the relation of one person to his or her surroundings. The consistency of the employment of

11 As quoted by English actress Miriam Margolyes in her performance “Dickens’s Women.”
the satiric persona since the earliest models is remarkable. Certainly, satire is a nebulous form: the term is used to describe verse, prose, or drama; it can be direct, or subtly ironic; raging or mild; humorous and entirely serious; and the intention to reveal, reform, or simply abuse. But the strong sense of an implied author\textsuperscript{13} behind the literary ‘front’ trying to tell us that something is wrong with the target persists. This is how a Swift scholar describes his response to satire:

We do so (it seems to me) by constructing a literary self for the author, the self we feel we are meeting when we read his [or her] best work. By this term I mean the emotional, moral and aesthetic nature of the person who seems to be speaking...

The literary self is different from but related to the author as a human being. From the doctrines, style, and tone of a writer, the reader evolves his [or her] notion of a character...

The literary self is a construction by the reader, but I think it matches a projection by the author; for it corresponds to the idealization of aspects of his [or her] whole nature.\textsuperscript{14}

Satiric literature consistently projects a “literary self” not only because it expounds “emotional, moral, and aesthetic” values, but because it criticizes something for not adhering to these values. To repeat Paulson:

if satire originates as rhetoric, or attack, it only matters...or survives as literature...as mimesis, exploration and analysis. Like comedy or tragedy, satire is a form which gives a compelling poetic representation of a certain area of experience.

\textsuperscript{13} The term “implied author” was, of course, first put forward by Wayne C. Booth in \textit{The Rhetoric of Fiction} (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961).
Yes, indeed, but it is a representation which is highly individualized. Everything we see in satire is absolutely biased, as seen through the invective-red tinted spectacles of the satirist.

This bias is reflected in the classical roots of the genre. Classical satirists concentrated on attack:

When a flabby eunuch marries, when well-born girls go crazy
For pig-sticking up-country, bare-breasted, spear in fist;
When the barber who rasped away at my youthful beard has risen
To challenge good society with his millions; when Crispinus
That Delta-bred house-slave, silt washed down by the Nile—
Now hitches his shoulders under Tyrian purple, airs
A thin gold ring in summer on his sweaty finger

Why then, it is harder not to be writing satires. (Juvenal, Satire I.22-30)

Juvenal's satires are rolling, ranting catalogues of evils and wrongs. He takes each in turn—whether poets, the city of Rome, foreigners, or women be his target—and lashes them with his acerbic tongue. He propounds no actual message of reformation; any "emotional, moral, and aesthetic" values are inferred from our image of the speaker. Juvenal is the perfect example of attacking what he is opposed to: he is direct, angry, conservative, traditional, prejudiced.

Classical satire exhibits the essence of satire in its purest form, for there is no

agenda for the satirist other than criticism and mocking.\textsuperscript{15} However, once a satiric vein appears in English literature (perhaps first in Chaucer, although he may never have called it that himself) satire becomes assimilated into other forms. As Augustan writers adopted satire as their main vehicle a new concern for morality was introduced. Thus the essence of satire blended with new ideas: Dryden’s \textit{Absalom and Achitophel} not only attacked the enemies of the King, but provided support for his proposed successor in a quasi-epic style. The advent of the novel, and its search for a greater literary realism, saw the eventual disappearance of satire as an individual form (with the Byronic exception of \textit{Don Juan}):

...the ‘realism’ of the novels of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding is closely associated with the fact that Moll Flanders is a thief, Pamela a hypocrite, and Tom Jones a fornicator.

This use of ‘realism,’ however, has the grave defect of obscuring what is probably the most original feature of the novel form. If the novel were realistic merely because it saw life from the seamy side, it would only be an inverted romance; but in fact it surely attempts to portray all the varieties of human experience, and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective: the novel’s realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it.\textsuperscript{16}

Satire is one of these “varieties of human experience,” and takes its place in the novel as the spirit of attacking that to which we are opposed. But the coexistence of satire and other literary perspectives has had the effect of blurring the very individual nature of the

\textsuperscript{15} This is not to say that Juvenal is without morality. His morality is assumed; it is implied rather than explicitly voiced.
form, and the essence of attack.

So if satire is a subjective expression of the negative, attacking side of human nature, as comedy is of the positive, where does this leave us in terms of the purpose of satire? Dryden summed up the view typical of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century satirists, who searched for a definition which gave purpose to their occupation:

if [the satirist] works a cure on folly, and the small imperfections in mankind, by exposing them to public view, that cure is not performed by an immediate operation. For it works first on the ill-nature of the audience, they are moved to laugh by the representation of deformity; and the shame of that laughter teaches us to amend what is ridiculous in our manners. (My italics)

Again the satirist is responsible for “exposing [“folly” and “imperfections”] to public view,” but, according to modern theory, the reading of satire stops short of shameful laughter teaching us to amend our ridiculous manners, and is left at the “ill-nature” causing us to laugh at “the representation of deformity.”

Certainly the portrait of Pecksniff contains nary a hint of reformation. Dickens makes no external stab which creates the moment of self-realization in the spectator-reader: “You know, I’m like Pecksniff sometimes, in my own small way—Gosh, I’d better do something about it.” Here is not the moralistic reformer, corrector of wrongs, defender of truth. No, here is the braggart, the show-off, deriding what he cannot stand; and we are more than spectators to the attack, for we are entirely with him, marvelling at his verbal feats of daring. Sure enough, we are pleased when Tom Pinch and Mary

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16 Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding (Harmondsworth:
Graham leave the scene and Pecksniff takes over, for we know Pecksniff will steep himself in more “concentrated essence of snobbery” and “Philogullododgeitiveness” (whatever that may actually be). As far as we are concerned Pecksniff is a purely literary creation with no existence beyond the text and therefore of no threat to anything or anyone in the real world. We can avoid the possibility that our enjoyment of the drubbing he receives at the hands of Dickens derives from “ill-nature” in ourselves by the justification that he deserves it, but this is not why we read this type of satire:

The traditional ‘ethical justification’ that the reader looks for, like the pieties loosely tacked on to the end of Moll Flanders, are not as much fun as the banging around of the enemies in the body of the satire. 17

Reformation and ethics may be the furthest thing from the reader’s mind. Surely we read satire because the act gives us some sort of pleasure. To concentrate on the moralistic end of satire in no way explains what happens when I read Dickens’s descriptions of Pecksniff. I do not laugh at Pecksniff because of the rigidity of his selfishness, and I do not amend my manners after I have finished laughing at him. Rather, I laugh because of the virtuosity of his selfishness, his ability to find morality in everything, however amoral or immoral:

“Even the worldly goods of which we have just disposed,”
said Mr. Pecksniff, glancing round the table when he had finished, “even cream, sugar, tea, toast, ham,—”

"And eggs," suggested Charity in a low voice.

"And eggs," said Mr. Pecksniff, "even they have their moral. See how they come and go! Every pleasure is transitory. We can't even eat, long. If we indulge in harmless fluids, we get the dropsy; if in exciting liquids, we get drunk. What a soothing reflection is that!"

"Don't say we get drunk Pa," urged the eldest Miss Pecksniff.

"When I say, we, my dear," returned her father, "I mean mankind in general; the human race, considered as a body, and not as individuals. There is nothing personal in morality, my love." (Chapter 2)

The pleasure I obtain from a passage such as this lies in Pecksniff’s ability to transcend social codes of acceptability ("even cream, sugar, tea, toast, ham,—...And eggs" do not "have their moral"), and my pleasure is heightened by the fact that I can see that Dickens, in describing Pecksniff thus, makes the hypocrite condemn himself even in the midst of glorious outpouring. "What you don’t see, Mr. Pecksniff," I say smugly to myself, "is that there is everything personal in morality. How foolish you are." Pecksniff survives today in the imagination of modern readers, not because Dickens wished to exhibit in him one variety of "the commonest of all vices," but, even though it originated "as rhetoric, or attack," because the portrait is significant as a "compelling poetic representation" of the human characteristics that satire embodies. Dickens offers us his own, individual, biased view of this character, and says: "Don’t you agree that this sort of person is immoral? Well, let's have some fun at his expense."
The Psychology of Satire

While it is fine to suggest that satire is the literary expression of negative, critical human characteristics, this is still rather vague. What exactly are these characteristics? What do we feel when we read satire?

The core of satire can be understood by approaching it on an everyday level. Everybody at some time or other becomes angry at or indignant with people or events. When that happens, we may grin and bear it, or we may let our feelings out—immediately or later, at the person or event or at a substitute. One form of letting out our feelings is to attack verbally the conditions so as to change them or at least to get rid of the anger and frustration. We call people names, we insult them, we are sarcastic, we mock them, we ridicule them.1

Literary satire is a formal expression of these sorts of feelings and impulses. As these are emotions which are suppressed by society, it must be supposed that satire provides us with some sort of liberation from these constraints, and therefore that it is in some way therapeutic.

Modern critics, then, have moved away from morality towards 'fun,' that we read satire because it gives us pleasure. Freud comes to a similar conclusion when considering the "humorous process."2 Humour resembles jokes and the comic in that they are all "liberating." That is, the mind is freed from some form of restraint put upon

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it, and the release is expressed in laughter. He considers the process of yielding pleasure in a listener for whom humour is produced: the listener sees a situation in which he or she expects the object of humour to produce a certain emotion (anger, fear, pain, etc.); he or she is prepared to follow the object’s lead and produce the same emotion; but

this emotional expectancy is disappointed; the other person [the object] expresses no affect, but makes it a jest. The expenditure on emotion that is economized turns into humorous pleasure in the listener.

But humour also contains a grandeur and an elevation lacking in the other two ways of “obtaining pleasure from intellectual activity”\(^3\):

The grandeur of it clearly lies in the triumph of narcissism, the victorious assertion of the ego’s invulnerability. The ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. It insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world; it shows, in fact, that such traumas are no more than occasions for it to gain pleasure.

Only the first sentence is directly relevant to my considerations here. The remainder relates not to the satiric but the humorous. Freud’s example is that of a criminal being taken to the gallows on a Monday who says: “Well, the week’s beginning nicely.” Here the criminal takes on the role of both humorist and object of humorous contemplation. But he might have said much the same thing without humour: “It doesn’t worry me.


\(^3\) Freud’s phrase nicely sums up another reason to disregard the traditional view of satire as moralistic weapon to the writer: satire is read as a way of “obtaining pleasure from intellectual activity.”
What does it matter if a fellow like me is hanged? The world won't end because of it.”
The latter version displays the same superiority over his situation as the first, and may
even be regarded as wise and true:

Indeed, it is based on an appraisal of reality which runs directly
counter to the appraisal made by humour. Humour is not
resigned; it is rebellious. It signifies not only the triumph of the
ego, but also of the pleasure principle, which is able to assert
itself against the unkindness of the real circumstances.

Humour is one of the mind’s constructions to avoid suffering, and therein lies the dignity
of the process.

So if humour may be described as a rebellious, narcissistic pleasure through which
we avoid discomfort, what psychological value can we ascribe to satire? Here again is
part of Freud’s description of humour: “The grandeur of it clearly lies in the triumph of
narcissism, the victorious assertion of the ego’s invulnerability.” This, I think, is what
satire has in common with humour. Satire remains a rebellious, narcissistic pleasure, but
where it differs is the means by which the response is achieved. Let us follow the above
method employed by Freud and apply it to our reading of Pecksniff from the quotation
at the head of this chapter. We (the ‘audience’) see a situation (Mr. Pecksniff is offered
for our contemplation, described for us by the narrator as “a moral man”); in fact the
morality of Pecksniff is insisted upon so greatly (and, of course, we receive clues along
the way, his “enemies” saying that he is a signpost, for instance) that an expectation is set
up; but we do not prepare to produce any similar emotion ourselves because what we
expect is not disappointed, but, in fact, Pecksniff obliges us by turning out to be precisely the ‘im-moral’ man we thought he would be. So it seems no “emotional expectancy is disappointed” in satire—indeed our expectancy is vindicated. Therefore perhaps satire can be regarded as the ultimate “triumph of narcissism,” as there is never any fear that the ego of the listener will be injured. All we do is inflict suffering onto others. Pecksniff does not conform to correct social codes, which enables me to laugh at him, which, as Freud would say, is one way of “obtaining pleasure from intellectual activity.” Through this process we can “fend off the possibility of suffering” for ourselves, which Freud says represents the ultimate triumph of our ego.

This feeling of superiority runs counter to the assertions of satirists throughout the ages to be expositors of folly and vice, and improvers of humankind, as Edward Rosenheim points out:

Many generalizations about satire imply that its characteristic effect is inevitably persuasive. Of this sort are the assertions, often advanced apologetically by satirists themselves, concerning the moral power of the art. And it is quite true that the concept of satire as a kind of uniquely effective rhetorical weapon is entirely just in many cases—including some of Swift’s most notable writings.

At the same time, there are many works which we are prepared to regard as satiric but which, if we are to be candid, do not seem to ‘persuade’ us, in any reasonable sense of the term. In such works, the object under satiric treatment emerges, to be sure, in an unfavourable light, but it is a light which is accepted a

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4 In applying Freud’s theory of humour to satire I do not, by the way, intend to presume that all satire is humorous, but merely to use his analysis as a useful starting point to the psychological effects of satire in the reader.
priori by the audience. No new judgement is invited; no course of action is urged; no novel information is produced. The audience, rather, is asked chiefly to rejoice in the heaping of opprobrium, ridicule, or fancied punishment upon an object of whose culpability they are already thoroughly convinced.\(^5\)

So either the intentions of the satiric audience are entirely different from those of the satirist, or the satirists have been fibbing all along. Certainly satire has been written from noble intentions. Time and again, publicly and privately, Dickens proclaimed his desire to "be a service to society"\(^6\). One suspects, though, that in the case of Pecksniff Dickens is fibbing. We are convinced of Pecksniff's scurrility from the very first chapter in which he appears (Chapter 2), yet Dickens manages to spread him out over another fifty or so chapters. This can not be to convince us of the evils of "the commonest of all vices," because we already agree on this point to accept the satire of Pecksniff in the first place. This is the sort of predictability which is reassuring because of that very predictability.\(^7\)

Even if we do accept that satire sometimes originates from noble authorial intentions, in these cases the effect on the audience is one of release rather than provocation to action. We know that Dickens was genuinely appalled at the Yorkshire schools he saw and translated into the fictional Dotheboys Hall of \textit{Nicholas Nickleby}. Yet, in exactly the manner described above by Edward Rosenheim, the triumphant overthrow of Squeers at the end of the novel, the escape of the boys, not to mention the enjoyment we attain through Dickens's gleefully anarchic "heaping of opprobrium, ridicule, [and] fancied punishment," serve to undermine any uneasiness we may feel at


\(^6\) This particular instance is from the preface to \textit{Oliver Twist}. 
the treatment the boys receive, because we are in agreement with the satirist—someone of obviously high moral fibre, like ourselves, and an important figure in society. Satire, then, may also be said to fulfil a human need for vindication.

Yet, as Patricia Meyer Spacks contends, this may not be the only response to satire:

If satire sometimes generates self-satisfaction and complacency... a more important satiric response is, I would suggest, uneasiness—the kind of uneasiness Brecht wished to induce in his audiences by refusing them the security and satisfaction of emotional release in the theatre. In satire, as in the Brechtian theatre, one is not allowed to identify with the characters; one does not wish to identify with them. The satiric plot, as Professor Kernan has demonstrated, does not provide the satisfaction of completion. The reader is left insecure, unanchored; if positive standards have been by implication reasserted, they have been shown as seriously threatened by reality.8

Such a view reaffirms the complacency we feel toward Pecksniff and Dotheboys Hall, because the plot punishes them, but I disagree with the assertion that the lack of completion often present in the satiric plot eradicates complacency and breeds insecurity.

Dickens attacks the legal profession in Bleak House:

The one great principle of English law is, to make business for itself. There is no other principle distinctly, certainly, and

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consistently maintained through all its narrow turnings. Viewed by this light it becomes a coherent scheme, and not the monstrous maze the laity are apt to think it. Let them but once clearly perceive that its grand principle is to make business for itself at their expense, and surely they will cease to grumble. *(Bleak House, Chapter 39)*

And we are left with the final image:

It appeared to be something that made the professional young gentlemen very merry, for there were several young counsellors in wigs and whiskers on the outside of the crowd, and when one of them told the others about it, they put their hands in their pockets, and quite doubled themselves up with laughter, and went stamping about the pavement of the Hall. (Chapter 65)

The hilarious "something" is of course the news that the eternal case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce has dissolved itself in costs. The lawyers literally have the last laugh, and Mr. Vholes is the last to leave the scene looking "as if he had swallowed the last morsel of his client." Consequently all Ada and Richard's hopes are dashed, and Richard, like Gridley and Miss Flite, is finally destroyed. Thus Dickens here provides the lack of completion that Spacks speaks of, as it seems as though lawyers will perpetually eat their never ending supply of clients. Yet I believe we are still able to feel complacency, because we see that we are above the satiric target. The various incarnations of the law in *Bleak*

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House reveal its rigidity, as Bergson would call it, in its ability “to make business for itself” out of nothing, and to scavenge off the laity. We can be sure as we move through the novel that law will always behave according to its “grand principle.” It is a target of huge proportions, one that is insurmountable for the characters in the novel itself, but in the act of reading the novel the satiric spectator can see that this institution, in its utterly inhuman treatment of people, is wrong, and thus at least the problem seems tolerable, because we are above it. And that ‘we’ is very important, for the audience can see that someone agrees with them, someone of great wisdom and importance, who commands respect. Even though the corrupt institution will apparently continue on its merry way in the fictional world of Bleak House, we are provided with security by the figure of the satirist. The lack of satiric completion serves only to strengthen our association with the satirist, which in turn increases our distance from the satiric world portrayed.

Even though the positive standards which are implicitly asserted by the novel—in the satiric attacks of the third-person narrator on all forms of inertia and stagnation, and in the contrast provided by Esther Summerson’s practicality and active benevolence—appear to be seriously threatened by the victory achieved by the law, its victory is not so complete. In allowing us to be above the unchanging satiric world, which even the characters of the novel must avoid or face destruction, the satirist allows us to exact a sort of revenge.

Satire, finally, liberates the reader.

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10 Henri Bergson, Comedy, intro. and trans. Wylie Sypher (New York: Doubleday and Anchor, 1956) 117: “The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, or automatism, of movement without life.”

11 I will expand on this issue in my chapter on Bleak House.
...anyone who has seen an audience roar its approval of the anti-establishment or anti-social jokes of a stand-up comedian, or individuals leaping to their feet with clenched fists waving in the air in support and agreement, can still sense a very strong rapport between the performer and the audience that suggests communication at a very basic level.¹²

Not only does satire allow us to rebel by venting feelings which are normally taboo or anti-social, it is frequently anti-establishment. Dickens attacked social systems throughout his career: the law, baby farms, workhouses, inadequate schooling, parliamentary circumlocution, over-industrialization, or whatever, in his view, repressed the rights of the individual. Delighting in the virtuosity of the attack of the satirist the masses can—if only in a verbal form—be liberated from the constraints put upon them by society.

We are drawn to the satirist. He or she shows many admirable qualities—imagination, perception, intellect, wit, skill in making us laugh or making us think, and perhaps most importantly satirists are on our side, they make us feel good about ourselves. They do all this by singling someone else out, and herein lies a problem for the satirist. We may still shy away from those who show too much anger, are vindictive, or self-seeking. Therefore the satirist must have a defense mechanism, and this is where the morality of satire plays its part.

¹² Test 50.
Morality Regained

Thus far I have argued that satire is concerned with human characteristics rather than black and white morality. However, the morality of traditional satiric theory should not be discounted entirely, for the need for codes by which to order our existence is fundamental. Morality still plays a pivotal role in the satiric process, even if it is not the reason why we read or enjoy satire. For one thing, it remains a way for satirists to keep their hands clean. More importantly it is what readers use to reconstruct the satirist’s intention, and it is through this process that they can achieve superiority over the satiric target.

Here again is the traditional position, this time from Fielding, as an invocation to the comic muse:

Teach me, which is to thee no difficult Task, to know Mankind better than they know themselves...Come thou, that hast inspired thy Aristophanes, thy Lucian, thy Cervantes, thy Rabelais, thy Moliere, thy Shakespear, thy Swift, thy Marivaux, fill my Pages with Humour: 'till Mankind learn the Good-Nature to laugh only at the follies of others, and the Humility to grieve at their own.

(Tom Jones, XIII.i)

Despite assigning the opposite to Dryden’s “ill-nature” as the catalyst, Fielding too maintains that laughing at folly can inspire an audience to look at themselves and amend their manners. He is closer to the heart of the issue, I feel, in his hope “to know Mankind better than they know themselves,” as through his art we see a reflection of
human beings, a reflection which we may not have the capacity to see in the same way. The actual role of morality, I would suggest, lies in the fact that the objective judgement is the means rather than the end. In my analysis of Pecksniffian satire using Freud’s theory of humour, I made an objective judgement based upon accepted moral codes. However, the end result (my narcissistic intellectual pleasure) is an entirely subjective response.1 If we follow Fielding’s process we see beyond our ‘dislike’ of Pecksniff, and our enjoyment of the way Dickens deals with him, and judge Pecksniff (and, he hopes, ourselves) against the codes implied by the text. But surely the process happens the other way around. Reconstructing the ethical ‘image’ created by the satirist is the first step, rather than the last. We judge Pecksniff against these norms and by this process gain pleasure by feeling superior. We avoid any discomfort at this narcissistic triumph by recourse to the moral grounds upon which the attack is based. We tell ourselves that Pecksniff deserves it. It is on this level that we communicate with the satirist—we share Dickens’s feelings about this hypocrite, and revel in the skill with which he puts him in his proper place.

The role of morality is, I think, rather similar to the way in which Wayne C. Booth describes our reconstruction of stable irony.2

Reading irony is in some ways like translating, like decoding, like deciphering, and like peering behind a mask. But these all, in my view, underplay the complexity of what the reader is required to do. Conscious of a loss in grace and warmth, then, I turn to the

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1 I have noticed with great curiosity that only certain types of people seem to like reading satire. The subjectivity of satire is, of course, apparent in the way some people dislike the art itself because of its negativity (George Eliot, for instance), and consequently do not enjoy it. Those of us with a more cynical bent are, naturally, more likely to enjoy ourselves. This in itself, it seems to me, is good reason to say that the ‘enjoyment factor’ is the end of satire, not the means.
building trades, to ‘reconstruction,’ implying the tearing down of one habitation and the building of another one on a different spot.  

...the process is in some respects more like a leap or climb to a higher level. ...Since there is always a sense in which part of the new view is a look back upon the old inferior dwelling, the moving van is perhaps better described as travelling upward to a nicer part of town.  

He uses this concept of buildings or structures to represent a whole system of beliefs which may be implicated in a particular statement, and that the statement is necessarily a reduction which is merely the “roof, or perhaps capstone” of the building. Thus, if I reject a system of beliefs or ‘building’ which is attacked by a satirist, then this is not all I do. I must also, in the process of joining the satirist in tearing down that building, be asserting or assembling my own ‘building.’ So there may be a whole ‘building’ of values which go to make up the ‘Pecksniffian rejection building’ in which I choose to dwell with the satirist: people should not lie, greed is bad, lying for personal gain is terrible, breeding bad values in your children is abhorrent, and so on. Each time Pecksniff appears in Martin Chuzzlewit he contravenes one or other of these values, which I use to “leap or climb to a higher level” from which I may look down upon the satiric target, thus gaining my narcissistic triumph.

These norms are not necessarily all moral values, but rather rules of common-sense. Frequently satirists alienate their target by associating with the reader as a person  

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3 Booth 33.  
4 Booth 36.
of like mind, and of good sense, hence their perpetual appeals to "truth." Horace is "content with a small circle of readers" (I.x.74). In *Oliver Twist* Dickens characterizes his audience as "ordinary folks" who regard his values as self-evident truths. We use these truths to associate ourselves with the satirist, to climb above our common enemy. Thus morality still plays its role in satire, but is the means to the end, rather than the end itself. This is not to say that satirists incorporate morality in their works merely to justify their hatchet work. Moral indignation may well be the starting point in the satirist's imagination, and this provokes the attack. Ultimately, though, this indignation is less important to the reader, who uses the ethical image to gain superiority, and to collude with the figure of the satirist.
Dialogue with the Satirist

It seems, then, that the target of satire is not the reader’s central interest. Alvin Kernan implies this when he says “in no art form is the complexity of human existence so obviously scanted as in satire.”¹ This is true of the fictional world portrayed in satire (there are not characters but caricatures, and, Kernan asserts, “the most striking quality of satire is the absence of plot”²), but this is not necessarily true of the satirist. The shift away from the concern for morality transfers our conception of the audience’s imaginative participation from the characters in the fiction to the character of the person who is speaking to them through these characters.

Much modern criticism concentrates on satire as a type of performance,³ where the persona assumed by the author is a dramatic ‘character.’ That is, not just an implied author behind the text, but an active part of the fiction, whether an “I” appears in the scene presented or not. This character may or may not be reliable as a direct mouthpiece of the author’s views. If we perceive flaws in the satirist’s argument or character then we must determine whether or not they are there for a purpose. (Swift’s Modest Proposal has definite flaws of character; critics are still not unanimous as to whether Juvenal intended his persona as a genuine expression of his beliefs or not.) And there is always the sense that, as satire is an expression of personal opinions, someone is trying

² Kernan 270: “We seem at the conclusion of satire to be always at very nearly the same point where we began.”
to tell us something.

I turn to Shakespeare to illustrate my own conception of the dramatic nature of satire. Malvolio is a character who the audience feels is satirized. He has his faults: self-love, gullibility, and (horror) he is "a kind of Puritan," and these are traits with which we do not wish to identify ourselves. We laugh at him, and feel that Shakespeare criticizes his fatuous and hypocritical Puritanical nature, and this is confirmed when he receives the greatest punishment comedy can hand out as he is excluded from the re-established social order with which the play concludes. Consider how the other characters in *Twelfth Night* perceive and treat him:

*Maria* Get ye all three into the box-tree. Malvolio's coming down his walk....Observe him, for the love of mockery; for I know this letter will make a contemplative idiot of him. Close in the name of jesting! Lie thou there: [*Throws down a letter.*] for here comes a trout that must be caught with tickling. [*Exit.*]

*Enter Malvolio*

*Malvolio* 'Tis but fortune; all is fortune. Maria once told me she did affect me....What should I think on't?

*Sir Toby* Here's an over-weening rogue!

*Fabian* O, peace! Contemplation makes a rare turkey-cock of him: how he jets under his advanced plumes!

*Sir Andrew* 'Slight, I could so beat the rogue!

*Sir Toby* Peace! I say.

*Malvolio* To be Count Malvolio!

*Sir Toby* Ah, rogue!

*Sir Andrew* Pistol him, pistol him.

*Sir Toby* Peace! Peace!
There is an example for’t: the lady of the Strachy married the yeoman of the wardrobe.

Fie on him, Jezebel!

O, peace! now he’s deeply in; look how imagination blows him. (II.iv.18-49)

Not only does the audience enjoy this scene for the magnificent way Malvolio’s mind latches onto the mistaken idea that Olivia may love him (and runs maniacally off into fantastic imaginings as he pictures himself receiving his ‘kinsman’ Sir Toby in stately splendour), but the enjoyment is increased by the comments of the malefactors hiding in the box-tree behind him. The predicament Malvolio is now “deeply in” has been designed by the onlookers, and their malicious comments provide a biased commentary to the action. In effect, they play the role of the satirist—as Maria says “Observe him, for the love of mockery.” Their purpose, as Fabian reiterates several times as he strains to hear Malvolio, is to make a “contemplative idiot of him.”

Moreover, it is not merely the reactions of the three bystanders, or their witty responses (Malvolio, trying to reason out the order of the letters M, O, A, I in the letter, says: “And then I comes behind.” Fabian responds: “Ay, an you had an eye behind you, you might discover more detraction at your heels than fortunes before you.”) that entertain us, but that their reactions are in character. Sir Andrew Aguecheek’s “I could so beat the rogue!” is funnier because he is a confirmed coward, and more so in contrast to Sir Toby Belch’s violent exclamations along the same lines (he destroys Malvolio’s imagined stately reception of him “I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my familiar smile with an austere regard of control—” with “And does not Toby take you a blow o’ the lips then?”). The scene provides an apposite image of satire: a scene is presented for
our contemplation (the character of Malvolio) by another character(s) (Maria and the others as the ‘inventors’ of this scene—the role of the satirist) who has a biased critical view of that scene; and the scene is augmented by the personality of that character(s) (the persona of the satirist—represented here by Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian, and their comments are an invitation for us to join their critical viewpoint by laughing with them). The audience in the theatre is exactly like the satiric audience. They sit watching the satiric target, and they also ‘see’ the satirist standing behind him, laughing at his foolishness.

This scene also reminds us of the dangers that face the satirist inherent in satire. *Twelfth Night* is renowned for its ambiguities. While we may laugh with Sir Toby et al. at Malvolio in the scene above, we soon wonder whether we should have. When Malvolio is imprisoned we may begin to question the malicious behaviour of the on-stage satirists. This depends on our interpretation of various ambiguities. If we feel that Malvolio “hath been most notoriously abused” (Olivia V.i.366) in the way Sir Toby and Feste torment him as a madman in his dark prison then our standpoint may shift. In the final scene Fabian reveals that it was “sportful malice”:

_Fabian:_ Most freely I confess, myself and Toby
   Set this device against Malvolio here,
   Upon some stubborn and uncourteous parts
   We had conceived against him. (V.i.355-6)

Any stage production of the play can accentuate or play down the various elements to achieve the desired tone. Olivia’s “He hath been most notoriously abused” could well be parodying Malvolio’s use of “notorious” twice previously in the final scene (V.i.308,
and yet it could easily be played sincerely. What we decide determines whether Malvolio’s final promise of revenge is to be taken seriously, and whether we consider that we, in empathizing with the satirists in criticizing him, may have abused him ourselves. In any case, the point is that satire is a delicate balance of sport and malice. The satirist must not emphasize one at the expense of the other. If there is not enough sport and too much malice then the satirist risks the audience sympathizing with the target.

This dramatic analogy of satire can be equally applied to the portrait of Pecksniff. Pecksniff takes the part of Malvolio, as satiric target. We, the satiric audience, sit like the audience in the theatre, watching Pecksniff, but also seeing the satirist, our implied image of Dickens, laughing at him in the background. Our enjoyment of the scene is enhanced by the narrator—the ‘character’ of the satirist like the characters through which Shakespeare shapes the attack on Malvolio—who ‘unconsciously’ reveals Pecksniff’s hypocrisy, in an ‘unconsciously’ witty manner. Certainly there is no danger of our sympathizing with Pecksniff, for Dickens provides a superabundance of sport at his expense.

The maximum narcissistic pleasure is gained from either scene if we share the critical viewpoint of the onlookers. In effect, then, satire is an invitation by the satirist for us to empathize with his or her point of view, where our pleasure is enhanced by the character of the satirist. But not only that, it is enhanced by the interaction of that character with our own. A type of reader-author dialogue is established.

The drama-satire analogy is also useful because it acknowledges the very active

role of the satiric audience. Just as a play is written to be performed in front of a live audience, so satire is written with an audience in mind, one that exists beyond the fictional world presented by the satirist. If we accept Wolfgang Iser’s assertion that

the literary text presents reactions to and attitudes toward the real world, and it is these reactions and attitudes that constitute the reality of a literary text,

then this is peculiarly true of satire. If some forms of literature in some way seek to escape from reality, then the satirist seeks to remind us of it. For something to be regarded as satire there must be a conscious movement signalled by the author from the unreality of the fictional world to the reality of the world beyond the text, and this movement is a part of the process of the satiric dialogue.

The term “dialogue” is used by K. J. H. Berland in his essay “Satire and the Via Media: Anglican Dialogue in Joseph Andrews.” Henry Fielding is of course an author who maintained a strongly characterized narrative persona in his novels, who often talks directly to his audience. Berland contends that Fielding’s treatment of the issue of temperance in Joseph Andrews presents the reader with “the spectacle of a variety of characters whose behaviour tends to miss the desirable mean in some ridiculous fashion or another,” and his method is that of the classical writer he often referred to as an influence, Lucian. He not only adopted some of Lucian’s structural and rhetorical methods, says Berland, but more importantly, it was in Fielding’s

7 Berland 85.
adaptation of Lucian’s strategy, by which the moral intelligence of the reader is tried, undermined, chastened, and corrected, that his most profound influence lies—in the adaptation of the questioning spirit of the philosophical dialogue to useful, challenging, reader-implicating game. The question is built into Fielding’s novels: whenever the reader is called upon to make a judgement, to select an alternative in an ostensibly ambiguous statement, to share information not available to the novel’s characters, and to use such information to penetrate the mists surrounding the full meaning of words or actions without explicit instructions, to decide which character is capable of providing reliable information, or to recognize the ludicrous distance in affectation from religious or ethical standards—in each case, the reader is being asked a kind of question, and participates in a dialogue with the author (or his fictional representative). 8

All satire has this strong sense of reader-implication.

The dialogue between reader and author is evident in the earliest satiric models. Horace begins the first satire of his first book with the question:

How is it, Maecenas, that no-one is content with his own lot—
whether he has obtained it by an act of choice or taken it up
by chance—but instead envies people in their occupations? (I.i.1-3)

Persius’s opening satire begins with a dialogue between the satirist and an anonymous adversarius:

8 Berland 85.
Ah, the obsessions of men! What an empty world we live in!

"Who will read this?"

Are you asking me? Why, no-one.

"No-one?"

Well, perhaps one or two.

"Disgraceful! Pathetic!"

But why?

(Persius, I.1-3)

Juvenal’s programme piece begins with a similar evocative questioning:

Must I always be stuck in the audience at these poetry readings, never
Up on the platform myself, taking it out on Cordus
For the times he’s bored me to death with ranting speeches
From that Theseid of his? Is X to get off scot-free
After inflicting his farces on me, or Y his elegies? Is there
No recompense for whole days wasted on prolix
Versions of Telephus? And what about that Orestes—
Each margin of the roll crammed solid, top and bottom,
More on the back, and still it wasn’t finished! (Juvenal, I.i.1-9)

In effect, Juvenal asks us to empathize with him: we have all been bored in this way at
some time in our lives (especially those of us with a University education), and so by
initiating the dialogue with this series of questions he immediately has his audience
actively empathizing with his point of view.

This questioning spirit is at the heart of all satire, for it is through this that the
satirist attempts to gain empathetic collusion with his or her audience.
Horace sets up an empathetic understanding with his audience in his first satire, by incorporating, from the opening line, a series of questions:

How is it, Maecenas, that no-one is content with his own lot—whether he has obtained it by an act of choice or taken it up by chance—but instead envies people in their occupations? (I.i.1-3)

Although it is specifically directed to his patron Maecenas the question is directed equally at us, inviting our participation in this dialogue. Then, as he lists occupational types from rhetorical tradition—soldier, merchant, lawyer, farmer, none of whom are content in their various occupations—we are forced to ask ourselves the same question. (Susan Braund notes that the satire, in its exploration of a variety of aspects of a particular theme, is typical of Hellenistic diatribe—a form of popular philosophy, like a sermon, used since the third century BC—which places Horace in the role of a street-corner preacher, addressing anyone who will listen.)

The reader’s empathy is further gained through the easy, conversational style, typical of Roman verse satire. Niall Rudd’s translation of *Satire I.i* contains no fewer than sixteen questions, many of which are aimed directly at the audience:

Furthermore, not to skip over the subject with a laugh like someone telling a string of jokes—and yet what harm can there be in presenting the truth with a laugh, as teachers sometimes give their children biscuits to coax them into learning their ABC? (I.i.23-6)

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9 This quotation from Persius is also from the translation of Niall Rudd, *The Satires of Horace and Persius* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).
10 Braund 17.
11 Braund 18.
Why have a huge mass of silver and gold if it makes you
so nervous that you dig a hole in the ground and furtively bury it? (I.i.41-2)

Tell me, if a man lives within the limits
of nature, what matter whether he has a hundred or a thousand acres
of ploughed land? (I.i.49-51)

As he offers us each of these questions, Horace tests our values against his. And he
makes the ‘correct’ response to each very plain: there is no harm in “presenting the truth
with a laugh”; there is no point in hoarding “a huge mass of silver and gold”; and it does
not matter if a person has “a hundred or a thousand of ploughed land.” (We might falter
at the third question, arguing that one need not have a hundred either, although this is
probably what Horace meant to imply anyway.) Each question rhetorically builds our
expectation of what our position should be in relation to the satiric target, and the satirist
himself.

Horace often places questions in structural cruxes of his satires, using a question to
initiate a thought in the reader’s mind and then illustrating it by example.

Tantalus strains thirstily at the waters which ever elude
his lips—what are you laughing at? Change the name and the story’s
about you. (I.i.68-70)

The final questions of Satire I—put into the mouth of the imaginary adversarius, the
“you” of the above quotation—set up Horace’s concluding summation:

“Well then, what do you want me to do? Live like Naevius
or Nomentanus?” (I.i.101-2)
which enables his rejection of the “things which are at opposite poles” (103) represented by Naevius and Nomentanus, and to declare that “Things have a certain proportion” (106). But we certainly do not associate ourselves with the “you” of “Change the name and the story’s/about you,” for we can see exactly where Horace wants us to stand in relation to the satiric target: to be above it. And this position is achieved through the dialogue through which Horace tests our values against his own. Therefore, his questioning is an invitation to his audience to empathize with his critical viewpoint of the target (greedy people who suffer unhappiness as a consequence of that greed), so that we may gain narcissistic pleasure through our collusive superiority to that target.

The same technique is repeated in I.ii. Horace lists two examples of his general theme—the “generous” Tigellius and the rich but miserly Fufidius—and the structural crux of the satire is reached at:

If anyone now asks “What’s the point of all this?” I’ll tell him:
In avoiding one moral fault fools rush into its opposite. (I.ii.23-4)

Which is exactly the question we have been asking ourselves by this point. Horace concludes his first book with a satire which defends his earlier criticism of Lucilius (I.iv.6-13), and espouses some of his own conceptions of satire:

If you want to write anything worth a second reading you must often use the rubber at the end of your pencil. Don’t seek mass adulation.
Be content with a small circle of readers—or are you mad enough to want your poems dictated in shabby schools? Not me.
“I’m happy if the better classes applaud me,” as the dauntless Miss Tree
I remarked when hissed off the stage—she had nothing but contempt for the rest.

I should like these poems to win the approval of Plotius and Varius, Maecenas and Virgil, Valgius, Octavius, and the admirable Fuscus; and I hope that the two Viscus brothers will think well of them: I can mention you Pollio, without incurring any suspicion of flattery, you, Messalla, and your brother, and also you, Bibulus and Servius, and you too, Furnius, with your candour, and several other accomplished friends whose names I purposely omit. I should like them to find my poetry attractive, such as it is; and I should be sorry if their pleasure proved less than I hoped. (I.x.72-7, 81-90)

Obviously this is cajolery of the highest order (even though he 'knows’ he can avoid “any suspicion / of flattery”!), but it conveys Horace’s realistic view of the limitations of his genre, and his conscious acknowledgement that he is working within those boundaries: “be content with a small circle of readers.” Even as he recounts an amusing anecdote about a bad actress he implicitly flatters his audience as part of the “better classes.” One fancies that any reader who accepts his invitation to empathize might be included in the intentionally vague “other accomplished friends whose names I purposely / omit.” (We, as modern readers, may associate ourselves with the future emperor no less!) His ideal audience, he tells us, is a small group of like-minded friends.12 The image, I think, holds true for all satire, and again this is why the satiric target never sees itself in the satiric glass, because it never accepts the invitation to empathize with the satirist.

12 Braund 22.
Horace’s second book of satires is decidedly different from his first, as his persona, in many cases, takes a back seat and lets another character do the bulk of the speaking, or makes no appearance at all. His development of the satiric adversarius in this book signals Horace’s movement towards a more dramatic, and therefore less direct method of interaction with his audience. The characters are not judged by Horace’s persona, he merely lets them speak or asks them questions, and thus they present themselves to the audience to make up their own minds about how reliable their opinions are. *Satire II.i*, for example, presents Catius who repeats, at some length, a lecture he has just heard of “subtle material presented in a subtle manner”: the best way to choose eggs, and grow cabbage, and other matters of import in cooking and dining. Thus Catius reveals his foolishness by his obsessive elevation of food to the level of philosophy (just like Pecksniff). But Horace, after enduring some seventy-seven lines of cooking tips, merely congratulates Catius: “What a knowledgeable chap you are!” (88). But he makes his ironic mockery plain enough in his ‘earnest’ desire to see this culinary guru:

*You* don’t think it important
to see him because you, happily, have had that privilege, but I
have a passionate longing to find my way to that far-off mountain
and from there to draw instructions for a truly happy life. (I.iv.92-5)

Now the invitation to participate in the satiric dialogue has altered. The sense of superiority we gain over Catius, because we judge him to be foolish, is mirrored by the process of reconstructing irony. As Wayne Booth would say we must now “leap or

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13 Braund 24.
climb” to the “higher level” of the ironist.¹⁴

I conclude, then, that when the questioning of the author yields a critical superiority in the reader above the satiric target, then the ideal end of satire has been achieved.

Now the reader must participate even more in the satiric dialogue. The explicit questions of Horace’s earlier satires have become implicit. His presentation of Catius forces us to ask ourselves what we think of him through his words and actions, but Horace achieves this through irony rather than rhetoric. No longer are we told what to think of this character, we must work it out for ourselves. In effect our bond with the satirist has been strengthened by our increased role in the attack. Our intimate association with the satirist allows us to feel superior to the satiric target, and the pleasure of the narcissistic triumph of the ego.

Satire and the Novel
The Dialogue of *Oliver Twist*

Dickens wrote with such an energetic style, and so great a variety of tones, modes, and perspectives that readers of his works must forever be on their toes.

Those critics who, early and late, have talked of Dickens's “energy of conception” or his “energy of presentation” are quite right to perceive energy as a large component in the Dickens world. But the great amount of energy that radiates from Dickens's novels is actually in part our own. Reading Dickens, finally, is a participatory sport.¹

The vibrant nature of his writing, and the eminence of his implied authorial figure was particularly suited to satire. It was one of his favourite modes of presentation—witness the number of his novels that begin with a satiric attack, whether it be workhouses, schools, or the law—and as I have shown above satire demands that both satirist and satiric audience must actively participate in a sort of dialogue. Dickens may not have ever conceived an actual plan to involve his readers in his fiction, but that reading Dickens is a “participatory sport,” and that satire plays a very important part in this, I hope to prove in this chapter by examining the satire with which Dickens began *Oliver Twist*.

Charles Dickens was more than just a writer or artist. He was an icon of his age, a Victorian pop star. The immense success of *Pickwick Papers* shot him to instant

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stardom, a position he never relinquished until his death in 1870. Such was the popularity of his serial publications that Wordsworth, in a letter to a friend, lamented:

Pray tell me what you think is the main cause of the great falling off in the sale of books. The young men in the Universities cannot be supposed to be straitened much in their allowance, yet scarcely any books are sold them. Dr. Arnold told me that his lads seemed to care for nothing but Bozzy’s next No., and the classics suffered accordingly. Can that Man’s public and others of the like kind materially affect the question? ²

In March 1850 Dickens published the first issue of his weekly magazine *Household Words*, attaching the following “Preliminary Word”:

The name that we have chosen for this publication expresses generally, the desire we have at heart in originating it... We seek to bring into innumerable homes, from the stirring world around us, the knowledge of many social wonders, good and evil... ³

This is the spirit which informs Dickens’s writing from the outset of his career some fifteen years previously: his fervent desire to occupy a place in the hearts of his audience. And this was some audience: from almost the lowest (anyone who could read, read Dickens) to the highest (Dickens was apparently the favourite writer of Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales). He did more than entertain his public, he took upon himself the mantle of educator of the nation. Mrs. Oliphant, in a not particularly complimentary

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³ From “A Preliminary Word,” *Household Words* no. 1, 30 March 1850, as quoted in Spender (90).
article, described how she thought Dickens saw his role in society—

he has assumed a leader's place not only in literature, but in the world, in morals, in philanthropy, in questions of social interest.⁴

—which makes him sound rather like his own satiric character Mrs. Jellyby. However Dickens quickly realized that his position gave him great power, and again and again he expressed his eagerness to have an effect on his audience. This is evident from the very beginning of his career:

If any of his [the author's] imperfect descriptions, while they afford amusement in the perusal, should induce only one reader to think better of his fellow men, and to look on the brighter and more kindly side of human nature, he would indeed be happy to have led to such a result. (Preface, *Pickwick Papers*, 1837)

His claims for *Oliver Twist* were rather more bold in their scope:

It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really did exist; to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid misery of their lives; to show them as they really are, for ever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great black ghastly gallows closing up their prospect, turn them where they might; it appeared to me that to do this, would be to attempt something which was needed, and which would be a service to society. (Preface, *Oliver Twist*, 1838)

Whether instinctively or by design, he also realized the best way to achieve these goals. In the *Oliver Twist* preface he goes on to point out the contrast between the romantic portrayals of criminals in recent popular fiction and his criminals in *Oliver Twist*:

> ...where are the attractions of these things? Have they no lesson, and do they not whisper something beyond the little regarded warning of an abstract moral precept?

This is something he hints at in the *Pickwick Papers* preface: "while they afford amusement in the perusal." He recognized that he must dramatize his 'precepts,' and in so doing he drew his readers into his dramas.

This is what Susan Horton means when she says that "reading Dickens...is a participatory sport." In her excellent study *The Reader in the Dickens World: Style and Response* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1981) she discusses the ways in which Dickens involves his readers in his fiction. She notes that "Whether brilliant or bad, Dickens' 'stuff' is always complex and contradictory," and examines the ways in which the complex richness of a Dickens novel is achieved. Her thesis is that Dickens reconciled the conflicting demands of his audience and his own conflicting attitudes—his need both to entertain and to provide an acceptable and accessible moral—by using a variety of different modes of presentation for those intentions and feelings. Each different mode calls upon the reader to make a different response, and it is the interaction of these different responses which creates the richness we perceive in the Dickens world.

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5 Horton xii.
6 Horton 12.
Satire may be regarded as one of these modes of presentation. The satiric dialogue is one way in which the reader of Dickens becomes involved in the fictional world, and it provokes certain responses. It may be regarded as a series of questions or statements offered by the satirist for contemplation by the reader. If it is a question (as in many of the examples I cited from Horace in the previous chapter) then the reader is directly invited to answer that question, in which the satirist is inviting a critical viewpoint of his or her target. The same can be achieved through other means than direct questioning. Reconstruction of irony calls on the reader to make a judgement. The satiric dialogue consists of a series of these judgements, this series combines to make a cumulative statement (in the manner in which Wayne C. Booth describes as a 'building' of values⁷), and this should produce a superior view of the satiric target.

Dickens has his narrator open *Oliver Twist* with intentional vagueness:

> Among other public buildings in a certain town which for many reasons it will be prudent to refrain from mentioning, and to which I will assign no fictitious name, it boasts of one which is common to most towns, great or small, to wit, a workhouse.

The effect of the vagueness is twofold: first, Dickens does not have to restrict himself to any actual reality, giving his subject a universality; secondly, and more importantly, the reader is involved from the first sentence. Immediately we encounter the word "boasts," which is then applied to a workhouse, we decide that the satirist intends that we interpret the narrator's remarks as ironic. The ironic process acts as the first invitation to empathize with the author, initiating the satiric dialogue. The discrepancy of the remark

⁷ See my first section pp. 30-31.
that implies workhouses are to be boasted of creates a conflict in the mind of the reader. "Workhouses are not to be boasted of," we say to ourselves, "rather they are places of hard work and suffering, a last resort for the impoverished and unemployed." We resolve this conflict by assuring ourselves that this must be interpreted as ironic. Not only does the process act as both the initial invitation to join the implied author on his higher plain, but it also implies a criticism of workhouses. The author (Dickens, or, more properly, the implied Dickens) makes a statement through a fictional representative (his ironic narrator). The 'correct' response is made very plain (that workhouses are not to be boasted of), and as we are called upon to interpret this, it acts as a kind of statement by the satirist to us, his audience. The expected response as yet does not provide us with a critical viewpoint of the target, as no specific criticism has yet been implied, but it does give us the first step in achieving this.

As the narrator goes on, we continue our attempts to decipher his character:

...and in this workhouse was born, on a day and date which I need not take upon myself to repeat, inasmuch as it can be of no possible consequence to the reader, in this stage of business at all events, the item of mortality whose name is prefixed at the head of his chapter. For a long time after he was ushered into this world of sorrow and trouble, by the parish surgeon, it remained a matter of considerable doubt whether the child would survive to bear any name at all; in which case it is somewhat more than probable that these memoirs would never have appeared, or, if they had, being comprised within a couple of pages, they would have possessed the inestimable merit of being the most concise and faithful specimen of biography extant in the literature of any age or country.
What first strikes the reader is the distance of the narrator from his subject matter. He still seems unwilling to be specific about anything. Amid the wandering sub-clauses and Latinate verbiage are references not to the wonders of Oliver, the new-born baby boy, but to "the item of mortality" and "the child." In addition, he blathers on more about the difficulties he might have faced as a biographer had the mortal item died, rather than concerning himself with the potentially tragic loss of new life. Susan Horton claims that

the narrator of much of *Oliver Twist* remains apparently unaffected by the suffering he reports, [and in doing so] he creates a reader who surely feels utterly alone in his outrage at the conditions described. 8

But I do not feel alone at all: I recognize the 'meaning' or 'criticism' of the implied author or satirist above the 'ignorant' narrator; I recognize that we are in a satiric mode and that the satirist is on my side. As a result of the narrator's distance we, too, are kept at a safe distance from potential suffering. Any guilt I might feel at the apparent indifference of the narrator to the suffering he describes is tempered by my knowledge that he is the tool of the satirist, who agrees with me that these things are deplorable. The one odd phrase is the reference to "this world of trouble and sorrow." We may well be unsure exactly how to react to this: is this an explicit revelation of the author's hidden agenda, or is it, in keeping with the tone of the remainder, merely rhetorical bluster on the part of the narrator? Certainly the authorial position (and therefore the one with which we are supposed to collude) becomes certain in what follows:

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8 Horton 11.
Although I am not disposed to maintain that being born in a workhouse is in itself the most fortunate and enviable circumstance that can possibly befall a human being, I do mean to say that it was the best thing for Oliver Twist that could by possibility have occurred.

The understatement in the first part of the sentence is obvious. The rest strikes us as odd, but it allows Dickens his subsequent stabs at “careful grandmothers, anxious aunts, experienced nurses, and doctors of profound wisdom” and at those actually present at the birth, “the old pauper woman, who was rendered rather misty by an unwonted allowance of beer, and a parish surgeon who did such matters by contract.” But it is important to note that the first stab is comic, the second satiric. The first makes a joke out of the discrepancy between the care taken and the end result: “he would most inevitably and indubitably have been killed in no time.” But we do not judge these people as immoral because they have shown the love and care expected during birth (and we suspect that this does not usually kill babies anyway). The second, however, does imply a judgement: the nurse is drunk while delivering a baby (although Dickens still manages to make this comic through the narrator’s very polite way of relating the fact), and the fact that the surgeon does “such matters by contract” implies a lack of humanity on his part, that he would not be doing it without financial remuneration. These are the first instances of implying a specific criticism of the target through the satiric dialogue.

And so Oliver survives, at once advertising “to the inmates of the workhouse” that “a new burden” has been “imposed upon the parish” by crying lustily using “that very useful appendage, a voice.” Here again the word “burden” seems at odds with the
otherwise facetious tone of the narrator. The reader is once more faced with the task of fitting this into our image of the narrator's character, and how this might affect our conception of the satirist himself. The word—as with "this world of sorrow and trouble" earlier—seems a more explicit reference to the 'correct' response which the satirist is inviting us to make.

An extraordinary sequence of juxtapositions follows. The terrible pathos of Oliver's nameless mother feebly uttering, "Let me see the child, and die" is succeeded by:

The surgeon had been sitting with his face turned towards the fire, giving the palms of his hands a warm and a rub alternately; but as the young woman spoke, he rose, and advancing to the bed's head, said, with more kindness than might have been expected of him—

"Oh, you must not talk about dying yet."

The critical judgement implied by the satirist is blatantly obvious. At a time when the woman who has just given birth feels as if she will die, the surgeon has been gratifying his own more pressing needs, warming his cold hands. The narrator rams the point home with the ironic "with more kindness than might have been expected of him." We do expect more of him, and his professional attitude is epitomized by the medical platitude, which is as much as he can be bothered to do to help his patient. Yet the effect is still largely comic because of our distance from the mother. This, of course, also has the effect of concentrating our attention on the satiric attack upon the inhumanity of the surgeon. In our mind we store this with the earlier implications of lack of humanity on the part of the workhouse workers as another part of the satiric dialogue.
Dickens might have made the nurse a female equivalent to the surgeon, but, while she too is a comic creation, a different tone is achieved. Like the surgeon, she too has been satisfying herself with her “green glass bottle,” and recounts some biographical details of her own to comfort the suffering mother:

“Lor bless her dear heart, when she has lived as long as I have, sir, and had thirteen children of her own, and all on ‘em dead except two, and them in the workus with me, she’ll know better than to take on in that way, bless her dear heart! Think what it is to be a mother, there’s a dear young lamb, do.”

She too shows a selfish lack of humanity, and she provides an obvious contrast to Oliver’s mother. “Think what it is to be a mother” forces readers to ask themselves the same question, and we come to the conclusion that Oliver’s mother—in her desire to see her child before she dies, which is the only thing we know about her—is closer to knowing the answer to the question than the nurse, who has become desensitized to death, having had eleven of her own children perish. This is a peculiar mix of the macabre and the comic. We hesitate in judging her: she is ‘inhuman’ but we see why she has become this way. Her comically blasé attitude to personal tragedy deflects criticism from herself towards the conditions which made her that way. She may have been exactly like Oliver’s mother at the birth of her first child.

Dickens has not yet finished with his juxtapositions:

The surgeon deposited [the child] in her arms. She imprinted her cold lips passionately on its forehead, passed her hands over her face, gazed wildly round, shuddered, fell back—
and died. They chafed her breast, hands, and temples; but the blood had frozen forever. They talked of hope and comfort. They had been strangers too long.

"It's all over, Mrs Thingummy,..."

This is almost ludicrous. The death of the mother is a moment of great poignancy despite the melodramatic tone. Again the non-ironic strain reappears: "They talked of hope and comfort. They had been strangers too long." Then the unnamed surgeon addresses the unnamed nurse as "Mrs Thingummy"! Her inhumanity is emphasized: she is a 'thing' rather than a person. His inhumanity is emphasized too: he does not know her name, he treats her as a thing. This also keeps our attention fixed on the satiric attack. We are not allowed to contemplate the tragedy of the situation; instead we focus on the ridiculous callousness of the health professionals, aided by the startling contrast.

The next paragraph has the surgeon reinforcing his inhuman professional attitude:

"You needn't mind sending up to me, if the child cries, nurse," said the surgeon, putting on his gloves with great deliberation. "It's very likely it will be troublesome. Give it a little gruel if it is."

This is his attitude to children: they are troublesome, and Dickens develops this in the second chapter in the figures of Mrs. Mann, Mr. Bumble, and the Board. And so the doctor goes off to have his dinner, and the nurse goes back to her bottle. Both leave the scene returning to their own selfish needs. Thus, the satirist calls on the reader to make another set of judgements, which combine with those already made. Dickens also introduces his ironic cure-all, gruel, which he will, of course, develop as the novel
continues.

The cumulative statement of criticism made by the satirist through the narrator has, by this stage, become clear enough. Each of the judgements which the reader has been called upon to make has yielded a response which in some way reflects the inhumanity, the desensitization to human suffering in the surgeon and the nurse. This has been achieved mostly through use of an ironic narrator, with occasional more explicit references to help guide the reader in the desired direction. Just to make sure, however, that the reader has not somehow gone wildly astray in his or her judgement, the narrator concludes the chapter with the following outburst:

What an excellent example of the power of dress young Oliver Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar;—it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have fixed his station in society. But now that he was wrapped in the old calico robes, which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once—a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world,—despised by all and pitied by none.

The sarcasm of the first sentence sustains the narrator’s previous tone; the rest, however, removes any hint of irony. Direct criticism of workhouses and those that run them is avoided, but criticism is implied in the list of complaints from which Oliver is destined to suffer. Such a one, says the satirist, is not to be despised, and should be pitied, for he has no control of the destiny that awaits him. The blatant criticism of those who run these institutions is left for the final paragraph, the final statement in the satiric dialogue
of the opening chapter:

Oliver cried lustily. If he could have known that he was an orphan, left to the tender mercies of churchwardens and overseers, perhaps he would have cried the louder.

Thus the dialogue of the first chapter is nicely concluded with confirmation of the satirist’s position, as we know that the mercies will not be so tender. The various incarnations of inhumanity we have encountered have each been stated in a series of incidents in the opening chapter, each of which forms a sort of statement by the satirist. These are probably not conceived of by the reader in any concrete form, but for my purposes they may be stated as: shirking of proper occupational responsibilities (the uncaring attitude of the surgeon and nurse), lack of sympathy for suffering (the medical platitudes “Oh, you must not talk about dying yet,” and the nurse’s words of comfort), putting one’s own needs above those of others in greater need (the surgeon warming his hands, the nurse and her bottle), desensitization to suffering (the nurse’s blasé attitude to death). Each of these statements calls on readers to make a response based upon our shared assumptions. The ‘correct’ response in each case is made obvious, and in making each one the reader accepts the satirist’s invitation to associate with his point of view: that an institution such as a workhouse and those that work in them are contrary to natural laws of humanity. The process of ironic reconstruction forces the reader to participate actively in the satirist’s dialogue. Here is one contemporary critic’s response to Dickens’ early work:

We have said that his satire was not misanthropic. This is
eminently true. One of the qualities we most admire in him is his comprehensive spirit of humanity. The tendency of his writings is to make us practically benevolent...  

We are made “practically benevolent” by the process whereby we collude with the satirist. Every time Dickens’ narrator presents us with a situation in which we are called upon to resolve an ambiguous statement, to distinguish the ironic from the straight, to realize the effect of juxtapositions, to determine what we should take to be the satirist’s position behind his narrator, we are actively participating in the satiric dialogue. Each of these instances implies a criticism of the target because each depends on our recognition of the assumptions of the satirist upon which his attack is based. If we share these moral assumptions (which might be equated with the “comprehensive spirit of humanity”) then we join the satirist on his ‘higher plane’ above the target. It is this that allows us to feel “practically benevolent,” because we join the satirist in his denunciation of something which contravenes our shared assumptions, and it is through this that we feel the narcissistic triumph of superiority over the satiric target.

The same process of dialogue is continued in the second chapter. Satiric themes introduced earlier are further developed, and the satiric criticism is more keenly focused on the authorities who run the workhouse system.

For the next eight or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception—he was brought up by hand.

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9 T. H. Lister (anonymously), from a review of *Sketches by Boz, Pickwick Papers, Nicholas Nickleby, and Oliver Twist*, *Edinburgh Review*, vol. 68, October 1838, as reprinted in Wall (47).
The opening sentence is, once again, a mixture of explicit criticism ("treachery and deception") and irony (being "brought up by hand" should have nothing to do with "treachery and deception"). Dickens then moves into a more specific critical dialogue with the reader:

The hungry and destitute situation of the infant orphan was duly reported by the workhouse authorities to the parish authorities. The parish authorities inquired with dignity of the workhouse authorities, whether there was no female then domiciled in 'the house' who was in a situation to impart to Oliver Twist the consolation and nourishment of which he stood in need. The workhouse authorities replied with humility that there was not. Upon this, the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be 'farmed,' or, in other words, that he should be despatched to a branch-workhouse some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing...

The theme of inhumanity, embodied in the surgeon and nurse in the first chapter, is reinforced by the mechanical to-and-froing of the parish authorities and the workhouse authorities, mirrored by the repetitive syntactical patterns and overly pompous language. The narrator's putting 'the house' in inverted commas hints at the 'house-lessness' of a place such as the workhouse. The word 'mother' is not used, but the euphemisms of the authorities—"there was no female then domiciled in 'the house' who was in a situation to impart to Oliver Twist the consolation and nourishment of which he stood in need"—allow the reader to make a connection with the "Think what it is to be a mother" of the
first chapter. Again the reflection casts a negative light on the 'mother-lessness’ of the workhouse. Dickens, as satirist, also has his narrator use the keyword in our dialogue: "the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be 'farmed’" (my italics). The implication is, of course, that baby farming is utterly ‘inhumane,’ as it involves inadequate amounts of food and clothing, and, as Dickens goes on to point out, is open to large scale corruption.

Here Dickens also further develops the notion that the system regards children as "juvenile offenders against the poor-laws." As with the mother-dialogue there are repeated references to the authorities’ view of children: the surgeon regards them as "troublesome" (p. 47); they are "culprits" (p. 48); Oliver and two others receive a "sound thrashing" and are locked in the coal-cellar “for atrociously presuming to be hungry” (p. 49); to Mr. Bumble they are merely a part of the great machinery, “the porochial orphans” connected with the “porochial business” of “parish officers” (p. 50). At the close of the first chapter the satirist made the point that Oliver has no control over his future, that he was “badged and ticketed” as soon as he was born. This is reiterated here: babies can not be criminals, even though the poor laws seem to regard them as such, in their desire for the most basic necessity in life, food.

Another strain of dialogue concerns the workhouse authorities as “philosophers.” This is one of Dickens’ favourite methods of criticism, portraying people as over-wise, putting facts and figures before human feelings. He describes the “elderly female,” Mrs. Mann, who is placed in charge of the infants:

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10 Dickens attacked this type of self-seeking, hard-hearted ‘philosophy’ in the character of Mrs. Jellyby in *Bleak House*, and more pervasively in the novels *Dombey and Son* and *Hard Times*. In a letter to Charles Knight (30 January 1855) he wrote: “My satire [in *Hard Times*] is against those who see figures and averages and nothing else—the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time” (as reprinted in Wall, 96).
The elderly female was a woman of wisdom and experience; she knew what was good for the children, and she had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself. So, she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use, and consigned the rising parochial generation to even shorter allowance than was originally provided for them; thereby finding in the lowest depth a deeper still, and proving herself to be a very great experimental philosopher.

The reader should realize that behind her guise of “wisdom and experience” she is totally self-seeking, even though the narrator applies an impressively euphemistic title to her position. But her foolproof system, the narrator tells us, contains some inexplicable flaws:

...the very moment when a child had contrived to exist upon the smallest possible portion of the weakest possible food, it did perversely happen in eight and a half cases out of ten, either it sickened from want and cold, or fell into the fire from neglect, or got half smothered by accident.

The irony is hardly subtle, but makes its point effectively. The reader identifies that “eight and a half cases out of ten” is a gibe directed at figures-based childcare. That the children should die as a result of such treatment is plain to the reader, but seems to utterly baffle the philosopher herself. This is also plain to the satirist, and thus he puts us both in a position superior to the professed woman of “wisdom and experience.” Dickens further signals that the philosopher does not have the slightest regard for the welfare of the children by following the logical cause of death (sickening “from want and
cold”) with children falling “into the fire from neglect,” or ‘accidentally’ being “half smothered.”

Following the introduction to the satiric stage of Mrs. Mann, the “experimental philosopher,” we meet the members of the board, who are “very sage, deep, philosophical men.” Immediately the connection is made for the reader between these men and the earlier philosopher:

...and when they came to turn their attention to the workhouse, they found out at once, what ordinary folks would never have discovered—the poor people liked it! It was a regular place of public entertainment for the poor classes; a tavern where their was nothing to pay; a public breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper all the year round; a brick and mortar elysium, where it was all pay and no work. “Oho!” said the board, “We are the fellows to set this to rights; we’ll stop this in no time.”

As Mrs. Mann is apparently baffled by the results of her ‘experiments,’ the board similarly contravene what we “ordinary folks” regard as self-evident truths (the satirist once again makes a connection between himself and his audience, implying that we are superior in our ‘ordinary’ common sense, to these ‘philosophers’). Previously we assumed babies could not survive if inadequately fed and clothed, and here we provide the shared assumption that a workhouse is not a “brick and mortar elysium, where it was all play and no work.” The nobility of the board’s benevolence in providing an “alternative” for the poor is deflated by the implication that they are merely delaying the inevitable (that the poor either starve “by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it”) rather than providing any necessary relief. The satirist then has his
They made a great many other wise and humane regulations having reference to the ladies, which it is not necessary to repeat; kindly undertook to divorce poor married people, in consequence of the great expense of a suit in Doctor's Commons; and, instead of compelling a man to support his family, as they had theretofore done, took his family away from him, and made him a bachelor!

And again “humane” is used ironically to refer to the measures that the Board so “kindly” put in place. The reader, by concluding that the separation of families is unnatural, again corrects the ironic “humane” to ‘in-humane,’ and thus the warped logic of the authorities once more allows us to assume that the satirist intends that we join him in his superior position to the target. This we promptly do, and enjoy the snug security of our position.

Mr. Bumble becomes the walking and talking embodiment of these values. The moment he enters the scene the satirist sets us against him.

Now Mr Bumble was a fat man, and a choleric one; so, instead of responding to [Mrs. Mann's] open-hearted salutation in kindred spirit, he gave the little wicket a tremendous shake, and then bestowed upon it a kick which could have emanated from no leg but a beadle's.

The first thing we learn about the beadle is that he is “a fat man.” Immediately he has contravened the code of conduct established by the satiric dialogue; his corpulence signifies an inhuman insensitivity to his surroundings. Not only that, he is a “choleric”
man, a sure sign that we are not to like him, who has no qualms about performing acts of violence on a defenseless “little wicket.” In his character we are provided with satiric treatment of a real identifiable figure in the workhouse hierarchy. He displays a fatal flaw in the satiric world: “a great sense of his oratorical powers and importance,” further symbolized by the cocked hat, gold-laced coat, and cane. Mrs. Mann offers him gin, which Mr. Bumble refuses as far too much a self-satisfying luxury, but, upon Mrs. Mann emphasizing its medicinal qualities, he accepts. His truly self-satisfying nature is exposed: he follows “with his eyes the interesting process of mixing” water and gin (which of course is not interesting at all unless you desperately want to taste that mixture) as he inquires of Mrs. Mann whether or not she gives the children this medicine.

“Ah, bless ‘em, that I do, dear as it is,” replied the nurse.

“I couldn’t see ‘em suffer before my very eyes, you know sir.”

“No,” said Mr Bumble approvingly; “no you could not.

You are a humane woman, Mrs Mann.”

And as he calls her “humane” she sets the glass of gin down in front of him. So this episode, too, allows the reader to identify the warped sense of humanity of the workhouse authorities. The point is even further hammered home: “You feel as a mother Mrs. Mann.” Mr. Bumble guzzles down half the glass in one go, not to his own, but to Mrs. Mann’s health. Something is only humane, it seems, if there is some sort of personal benefit to be gained from it.

The chapter, and Dickens’s first number, reaches its dramatic climax, as Oliver asks for more. This most famous of scenes has been much discussed, but the most
relevant point to my considerations here is our distance from Oliver at the time. The boy, as Dickens's "principle of Good," is "intentionally generalized so that we care little about him as a person." The absence of any individuality in his character gives his cry an allegorical quality: he is hunger crying out for sustenance. Consequently, as Oliver utters his cry, we do not care about him so much as we care about the injustice and inhumanity of the situation. Joseph Gold describes Oliver as a sort of moral mirror whose passivity is an essential part of Dickens' satiric purpose:

the reader is almost totally prevented from involving himself emotionally with Oliver. Satire calls for a cerebral reader-response, not a visceral identification. This is its overriding characteristic. This neutrality of the reader's response to Oliver throws into relief the attitudes to those whom the hero encounters on his journey. 12

This is very true—we judge the various characters in the novel by the way that they treat Oliver. But Gold does not mean to imply that this extension of emphasis on others includes the satirist. Because of our lack of involvement with Oliver, or any other character, our empathy with the satirist—the 'Dickens figure' above the fictional world of Oliver Twist—is encouraged. The satirist establishes a dialogue in which we 'discuss' the stupidity and inhumanity of various philosophers. Consequently we emphasize both the satirist’s and our own intelligence and compassion even while we laugh together at their faults—we feel better about ourselves at the expense of others.

The shop-boys in the neighbourhood had long been in the habit of branding Noah, in the public streets, with the ignominious epithets of 'leathers', and 'charity', and the like; and Noah had borne them without reply. But, now that fortune had cast in his way a nameless orphan, at whom even the meanest could point the finger of scorn, he retorted on him with interest. This affords charming food for contemplation. It shows what a beautiful thing human nature may be made to be; and how impartially the same amiable qualities are developed in the finest lord and the dirtiest charity boy. (Chapter 5)

The last is a bold statement, but indicative of one of Dickens's most fundamental beliefs. It is noted by Forster as a theme on which Dickens especially liked to dwell, and few things moved his fancy so pleasantly. The world, he would say, was so much smaller than we thought it; we were all so connected by fate without knowing it; people supposed to be far apart were constantly elbowing each other; and tomorrow bore so close a resemblance to nothing half so much as to yesterday.¹

And so it is with a Dickens novel—all parts are inter-connected. Satire does not stand alone, but affects and is affected by other parts of a novel. In Oliver Twist the satiric dialogue established in the first two chapters can not be considered out of context, because it affects the way in which we view the narrative that follows it, whether it be satiric or non-satiric.

¹ John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, 1872-1874 (London: Chapman & Hall, no date) I.v: 64.
In saying earlier that satire is one of the "varieties of human experience," I have implied that there are others.

There is hardly a function peculiar to other literary genres which [the novel] has not, partially at least, absorbed. The epic, history, tragedy, comedy, satire—all have contributed to feed this insatiable, growing organism.²

When we read a novel, we naturally expect to see reflections, refractions, comments, and different points of view on the theme presented to us by satire. In a Dickens novel there is commonly an overriding moral theme with many different aspects. Oliver meets many people, who all treat him differently: the Workhouse treats him as a burden, an extra mouth to feed; the criminal underground have evil designs for him; and the Maylies want to hug him to death. *Martin Chuzzlewit* contains a plethora of degrees of selfishness (Pecksniff, Gamp, Jonas), selflessness (Ruth and Tom Pinch, Mary, John Westlock, Mark Tapley), and those who move from the former to the latter (both Martins). *Bleak House* shows the different ways that different people react to the all encompassing Court of Chancery. Only some of these elements are satirical, and therefore we must consider our response to satire in the context of an entire novel if we are to gain a full understanding of meaning.

To talk only about Dickens's rhetoric, or only about his plots, is to lose this perception of meaning altogether.³

Indeed it is a point often made about Dickens's novels that the important structure to bear in mind is not the cause and effect of plot, but more of an 'imaginative' structure:

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the thematic links between the different responses and judgements we make in the course of reading.

...you cannot give priority to any one element at the expense of another, certainly not to plot.⁴

But it is not only contrasting generic modes that provoke different responses, but tones, styles, devices, narrative voices, and patterns. The way we react to one part of a novel interacts with our responses to other parts. If satire allows us to feel superior, then that superiority may be reinforced or contradicted by another feeling. I have argued that satire is not an 'investigation', but that it is rather an expression of personal opinions, and a means of feeling superior by agreeing with those opinions. Satire may, however, become an investigation when it comes into conflict with other responses, as it does in the novel. This is why Oliver Twist evokes such a complex response from its readers.

It is in keeping with the improvised nature of Dickens's early works that the satire in Oliver Twist is episodic. He confines his attack on the Workhouse to the first seven chapters: once Oliver has run away from the Sowerberrys, the Workhouse is forgotten, and when Bumble returns much later he is no longer a symbol of the institution, but a hen-pecked husband.

The satiric dialogue established in the first two chapters continues through the opening episode of Oliver's life, and as Oliver begins to 'move about' in the wider world this enables Dickens to attack other institutions beyond the Workhouse. For his "profane and impious offence of asking for more," Oliver is kept "a close prisoner in

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dark and solitary room to which he had been consigned by the wisdom and mercy of the board” (Chapter 3). He is eventually put up for sale, and Gamfield, the chimney-sweep, expresses interest in him. The “half-blind, half-childish” magistrate demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the law. He pronounces Gamfield “an honest, open-hearted man,” when his “villainous countenance was a regular stamped receipt for cruelty.” The law cannot “reasonably be expected to discern what other people did,” since it is an antiquated system ignorant of the plain facts of ordinary life, and therefore of no help to the poor. Once more we can feel superior. The magistrate only avoids consigning Oliver to certain death by accident. Fumbling about for his inkstand (“But, as it chanced to be immediately under his nose, it followed, as a matter of course, that he looked all over his desk for it, without finding it”) he catches sight of “the pale and terrified face of Oliver Twist.” Bumble confirms their incompetence (and his own): “juries is ineddicated, vulgar, grovelling wretches....They haven’t no more philosophy nor political economy about ’em than that” (Chapter 4). In contrast to the ‘philosophers’ the law is simply stupid (a fact later reinforced by the antics of Blathers and Duff). Although they do not actively attack the poor, their incompetence means they are a hindrance. Chapter 4 sees Oliver bound to Sowerberry, and he sets upon the dog scraps he is offered. The narrator enters in the first person, closing the chapter with a moralistic rant:

I wish some well-fed philosopher, whose meat and drink turn to gall within him; whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron; could have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the dog had neglected. I wish he could have witnessed the horrible avidity with which Oliver tore the bits asunder with all the ferocity of famine. There is only one thing I should have liked better; and that would be to see the Philosopher making the same sort of meal himself, with the same relish.
This is quite an outburst. Up to this point the narrator has remained aloof; where he
does appear in the first person his tone has been light-heartedly facetious. Here we
glimpse the seething hatred previously hidden beneath the ironic tone. This is more akin
to firebrand preaching than satire, but it does contribute to the dialogue.

The church, too, is included in the conspiracy against the poor. The clergyman is
more than an hour late for the funeral of the pauper woman (Chapter 5). He is guilty of
the same professional inhumanity exhibited by the doctor in chapter 1: "the reverend
gentleman having read as much of the burial service as could be compressed into four
minutes, gave his surplice to the clerk, and walked away again." The focus is not on the
suffering of the deceased's next of kin, but on the inhumanity of the authorities. Oliver
expresses his distaste for his new occupation, and Sowerberry reassures him: "Ah, you'll
get used to it in time, Oliver... nothing when you are used to it, my boy." The connection
is made between the different elements of a system which dehumanizes the poor.

The taunting of Noah Claypole incites Oliver to rebel, which Mrs. Sowerberry
proclaims to be madness. Bumble's verdict about the cause of this behaviour brings the
satiric dialogue attacking the system to a marvellous climax:

"It's not Madness, ma'am," replied Mr Bumble, after a few
moments of deep meditation. "It's meat."

"What?" exclaimed Mrs Sowerberry.

"Meat, ma'am, meat," replied Bumble, with stern
emphasis. "You've over-fed him, ma'am. You've raised an
artificial soul and spirit in him, ma'am, unbecoming a person of
his position: 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. If you
had kept the boy on gruel, ma'am, this would never have
happened."
The dialogue ends with a brilliant self-condemnation from the chief representative of the system, condensing the attitude of the 'philosophers'. This exemplifies the best kind of dramatic satire where we can laugh uproariously at the offender, whilst maintaining our sense of moral propriety.

There is one notable deviation in tone in this early part of the novel. Amidst the comic and satirical scenes Sowerberry takes Oliver with him as he goes to measure the corpse of a dead pauper woman.

They walked on, for some time, through the most crowded and densely inhabited part of the town; and then, striking down a narrow street more dirty and miserable than any they had yet passed through, paused to look for the house which was the object of their search. The houses on either side were high and large, but very old, and inhabited by people of the poorest class: as their neglected appearance would have sufficiently denoted, without the concurrent testimony afforded by the squalid looks of the few men and women who, with folded arms and bodies half doubled, occasionally skulked along. A great many of the tenements had shop-fronts; but they were fast closed, and mouldering away; only the upper rooms being inhabited. Some houses which had become insecure from age and decay, were prevented from falling into the street, by huge beams of wood reared against the walls, and firmly planted in the road; but even these crazy dens seemed to have been selected as the nightly haunts of some houseless wretches, for many of the rough boards which supplied the place of door and window, were wrenched from their positions, to afford an aperture wide enough for the passage of the human body. The kennel was stagnant and filthy. The very rats, which here and there lay putrefying in its rottenness, were hideous with famine. (Chapter 5)
There is nary a hint of comedy here. This immediately follows a short satirical scene involving Bumble, and the change of tone is striking. The tone is deadly serious, the language impersonal; the literal imagery is intended to shock the reader by contrast with what preceded it. It is the sort of description that Michael Slater has called “documentary”:

From chapter eight onwards it seems to me that the novel ceases to be satirical and becomes a strangely powerful mix of the fabular or visionary, with Oliver as “the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance,” and of the documentary, showing criminals “as they really are.”

Oliver and Sowerberry grope their way “cautiously through [a] dark passage” to reach the house.

There was no fire in the room; but a man was crouching mechanically over the empty stove. An old woman, too, had drawn a low stool to the cold hearth, and was sitting beside him. There were some ragged children in another corner, and in a small recess, opposite the door, there lay upon the ground, something covered with an old blanket. Oliver shuddered as he cast his eyes toward the place, and crept involuntarily closer to his master; for though it was covered up, the boy felt it was a corpse.

The man’s face was thin and very pale; his hair and beard were grizzly; his eyes were bloodshot. The old woman’s face was wrinkled; her two remaining teeth protruded over her underlip; and her eyes were bright and piercing. Oliver was

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afraid to look at either her or the man. They seemed so like the rats he had seen outside.

These passages are not satirical, yet we feel that the description of these people and their hovels is connected to the satire. We are still distanced from the scene by the narrator’s remote point of view and impersonal diction. We learn nothing about these people—except that the dead woman’s surname is Bayton—for they are not important. They are only referred to as “the man,” “the old woman,” and the “ragged” or “terrified” children. It seems, though, that these people are victims of the system, that they are what Oliver could become. So, although the satiric target does not appear in the scene, the satirist implies that they are responsible for what he shows us. In inferring this the reader is making a similar jump to the ‘higher position’ of the satirist in the process of the satiric dialogue, and the concentration is still on attack because of our distance from the victims.

The implication is confirmed by what transpires. The man breaks into a melodramatic tirade:

“Ah!” said the man, bursting into tears, and sinking at the feet of the dead woman; “...mark my words! I say she was starved to death....I begged for her in the streets: and they sent me to prison. When I came back, she was dying; and all the blood in my heart has dried up, for they starved her to death. I swear it before the God that saw it! They starved her!” He twined his hands in his hair; and, with a loud scream, rolled grovelling upon the floor, his eyes fixed, and the foam covering his lips.

We might think this rhetorically skilful outburst particularly unsuitable for a pauper, but nevertheless the man’s insistence that “they” are responsible strengthens our belief that
the system is at fault. The connection between these people and the satiric attack is further confirmed when their distress is "relieved with a half-quartern loaf and a piece of cheese, left with them by Mr Bumble himself." The ironic 'relief' is given them by Bumble, the representative of the system.

The episode is not satire. It does offer collusion with an authorial figure, who criticizes something so that we can feel superior, but this is achieved in a different manner. We are not shown something we want to destroy, or laugh at, so that we can revel in our 'darker side'. However, the episode obviously contributes to the satire. It allows us to see the damage that the system engenders. Previously we have been able to laugh off any discomfort we felt, but not here. This episode darkens the mood. We must take the attack more seriously, because the scene is portrayed in a more realistic, 'documentary' mode. So, this is one way in which non-satiric parts of a novel may interact with the satire.

Satire ceases to be the dominant mode as Oliver heads off "to seek [his] fortune, some long way off," at the end of Chapter seven. This is not to say that there are not instances of satire or references to the satiric dialogue. There are isolated verbal quips:

"He's a rum dog. Don't he look fierce at any strange cove that laughs or sings when he's in company!" pursued the Dodger.

"Won't he growl at all, when he hears a fiddle playing! And don't he hate other dogs as ain't of his breed! Oh, no!"


This was merely intended as a tribute to the animal's abilities, but it was an appropriate remark in another sense, if Master Bates had only known it; for there are a great many ladies and gentlemen, claiming to be out-and-out Christians, between whom, and Mr Sikes' dog, there exist strong and singular points of resemblance. (Chapter 18)
The diligent reader may connect this with an earlier ironic use of "Christian," spoken by another character who is 'unaware' of the aptness of the term for the situation. A Board member castigates Oliver: "I hope you say your prayers every night...for the people who feed you and take care of you—like a Christian." The narrator remarks: "The gentleman...was unconsciously right. It would have been very like a Christian, and a marvellously good Christian too, if Oliver had prayed for the people who fed and took care of him. But he hadn't, because nobody had taught him." The Board castigate in the name of Christians, but they do not fulfil any of the duties of a Christian. This is, however, an isolated example, not part of an extended dialogue.

There are also short satiric episodes. Mr. Fang (Chapter 11) is a magistrate, who makes every attempt to ignore the truth. His "face was stern, and much flushed. If he were really not in the habit of drinking rather more than was exactly good for him, he might have brought an action against his countenance for libel, and have recovered substantial damages." Mr. Bumble reappears briefly (Chapter 17), remarking that "a parochial life...is a life of worrit, and vexation, and hardihood; but all public characters...must suffer prosecution." Blathers and Duff, the incompetent Bow-Street runners, investigate the break-in at Mrs. Maylie's (Chapter 31). They eventually determine that the culprit was either an unrelated notorious criminal or the family pet. These episodes allow the satirist to make witty stabs, and thereby allow us to collude with him, and feel superior to the target. They also add to the satire on systems, but they too are isolated instances, not part of a sustained attack.

However, although satire largely disappears from the novel, the satiric dialogue established in the early part of the novel casts reflections on the subsequent narrative.
As Oliver nears London he meets the Artful Dodger (Chapter 8). The Dodger leads him through a series of winding, real London streets on their way to Fagin’s, and Oliver makes his first observations of the city.

A dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours. There were a good many small shops; but the only stock in trade appeared to be heaps of children, who, even at that time of night, were crawling in and out at the doors, or screaming from the inside. The sole places that seemed to prosper amid the general blight of the place, were the public houses; and in them, the lowest orders of Irish were wrangling with might and main. Covered ways and yards, which here and there diverged from the main street, disclosed little knots of houses, where drunken men and women were positively wallowing in filth...

The reader, whether consciously or unconsciously, recalls the earlier documentary description of the paupers’ hovels in Oliver’s home town. The description is strikingly similar. Compare the first two sentences above to: “...striking down a narrow street more dirty and miserable than any they had yet passed through...” (Chapter 5). Both places are dirty, narrow, and enclosed. Both portray people who move like animals or beasts: in the first passage the people are of “the poorest class,” they look “squalid” and “neglected,” and they “skulk along” with “folded arms and bodies half doubled”; in the second the “heaps of children” crawl and scream, the Irish “wrangle,” and the drunken men and women “wallow.” Both scenes are described from the same detached point of view—although above the narrator claims that this is what Oliver saw as he bestowed “a few hasty glances on either side of [his] way,” the young orphan would not make judgements such as “the lowest orders of Irish” or “positively wallowing in filth.” It is
obvious that the two places are connected in the mind of the author, and the imagery, point of view and people also connect the two worlds in the reader's mind. So, the reader expects that the same criticism is going to be made—that the system is responsible for the way these people live too.

As the Dodger leads Oliver into Fagin's house, we further connect the world of the satiric part of the novel with this new one. Just as he and Sowerberry had earlier, Oliver and the Dodger grope their way up "dark and broken stairs." They step into Fagin's lair: "The walls and ceiling of the room were perfectly black with age and dirt." The dirt and dark which are Oliver's first impression of Fagin's world are its overriding characteristics. Sikes waits for Fagin in "a low public-house, in the filthiest part of Little Saffron Hill; a dark and gloomy den, where a flaring gaslight burnt all day in the winter-time; and no ray of sun ever shone in the summer" (Chapter 15). When Oliver is re-kidnapped by Nancy and Sikes, they take him across Smithfield toward Fagin's den.

The night was dark and foggy. The lights in the shops could scarcely struggle through the heavy mist, which thickened every moment and shrouded the streets and houses in gloom; rendering the strange place still stranger in Oliver's eyes, and making his uncertainty the more dismal and depressing. (Chapter 16)

They travel by "little frequented and dirty ways" and eventually turn into "a very filthy narrow street" until they reach the "ruinous" untenanted house. Oliver is held captive here for some time, and examines his surroundings. It is "very dirty," with panels which "were black with neglect and dust." It is "dismal and dreary," with "mouldering shutters" which admit some light, but only enough to make "the rooms more gloomy, and filled with strange shadows." Fagin only moves about under cover of this darkness.
It was a chill, damp, windy night, when the Jew...emerged from his den....

The mud lay thick upon the stones, and a black mist hung over the streets; the rain fell sluggishly down, and everything felt cold and clammy to the touch. It seemed just the night when it befitted such a being as the Jew to be abroad. As he glided stealthily along, creeping beneath the shelter of the walls and the doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved: crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal. (Chapter 19)

The imagery links the satiric world with the new one—both are cloaked in darkness and smeared with dirt. Oliver’s youthful existence is constantly filled with dirt and gloom: he is locked up in the coal-cellar (chapter 2); when the Beadle comes to visit Oliver has “the outer coat of dirt, which encrusted his face and hands” scrubbed off (chapter 2); the baby farm was a “wretched home where one kind word had never lighted the gloom of his infant years” (chapter 2); after asking for more he is kept “a close prisoner in a dark and solitary room” where he cries as the “dismal night came on” and “spread his little hands before his eyes to shut out the darkness...drawing himself closer and closer to the wall, as if to feel even its cold hard surface were a protection in the gloom and loneliness which surrounded him” (chapter 3); at Sowerberry’s he eats in “a stone cell, damp and dark, forming the ante-room of the coal-cellar” (chapter 4), and is later locked in the “dust-cellar” (chapter 6). The other victims of the philosophers, the paupers, inhabit a similar world. The streets are “dirty and miserable,” the shops-fronts are “fast closed, and mouldering away,” and some of the houses are “insecure from age and decay.” The room which the family of the deceased woman inhabit has no fire and they gather around the “cold hearth.” The notion of imprisonment also provides a link. Oliver is constantly locked up by his overseers in the satiric part of the novel, and he is
similarly confined in dark and dismal places in this new world. So, as these new characters on the scene inhabit a strikingly similar world, we infer that they too are victims of the system which creates such conditions.

However this is where things become confused. From the first moment Oliver meets Fagin we have cause to doubt our suspicions. For the next two chapters the narrator's irony shifts and Oliver becomes the naïve hero, the butt of many jokes.

Oliver was rendered the more anxious to be actively employed, by what he had seen of the stern morality of the old gentleman's character. Whenever the Dodger or Charley Bates came home at night, empty-handed, he would expatiate with great vehemence on the misery of idle and lazy habits; and would enforce upon them the necessity of an active life, by sending them supperless to bed. On one occasion, indeed, he even went so far as to knock them both down a flight of stairs; but this was carrying out his virtuous precepts to an unusual extent. (Chapter 10)

Oliver is "so jolly green" (as Charley says) that the characters have much fun at his expense, and we laugh with them. These criminals are not passive victims, they laugh, they are active and intelligent. More importantly we, being wiser than Oliver, recognize that they are not as "virtuous" and full of "stern morality" as the narrator, mimicking Oliver's perspective, ironically suggests. The Dodger and Charley pick Mr. Brownlow's pocket, and we discover why Oliver will not survive in this world: "although Oliver had been brought up by philosophers, he was not theoretically acquainted with the beautiful axiom that self-preservation is the first law of nature." The Dodger and Charley are able to escape because they have
a very laudable and becoming regard for themselves, and forasmuch as the freedom of the subject and the liberty of the individual are among the first and proudest boasts of a true-hearted Englishman, so, I need hardly beg the reader to observe, that this action should tend to exalt them in the opinion of all public and patriotic men, in almost as great a degree as this strong proof of their anxiety for their own presentation and safety goes to corroborate and confirm the little code of laws which certain profound and sound-judging philosophers have laid down as the mainsprings of all Nature's deeds and action: the said philosophers very wisely reducing the good lady's proceedings to matters of maxim and theory: and, by a very neat and pretty compliment to her exalted wisdom and understanding, putting entirely out of sight any considerations of the heart, or generous impulse and feeling. (Chapter 13)

And so now we are being told that the criminals are philosophers, and therefore must be reviled along with the Board, Mrs. Mann, Mr. Bumble, and the other targets of the satiric dialogue. But can they be both instigators and victims?

The dark imagery and the notion of imprisonment links the two worlds in the reader's mind, and implies that the criminals are victims of the system. But they, too, have a system, through which they attempt to corrupt Oliver. The idea conveyed, then, is that they are victims of the system, but they also perpetuate its values, as Nancy points out:

"I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old as this!" pointing at Oliver. "I have been in the same trade, and in the same service, for twelve years since. Don't you know it? Speak out! Don't you know it?"

"Well, well," replied the Jew, with an attempt at pacification; "and if you have, it's your living!"
“Aye, it is!” returned the girl; not speaking, but pouring out the words in one continuous and vehement scream. “It is my living; and the cold, wet, dirty streets are my home; and you’re the wretch that drove me to them long ago, and that’ll keep me there, day and night, day and night, till I die!” (Chapter 16)

Fagin is the perpetuator; he has done it to Nancy, and will do his utmost to do it to Oliver. We eventually discover that the darkness and imprisonment are as much a part of the system as any philosophical theory:

the wily old Jew had the boy in his toils. Having prepared his mind, by solitude and gloom, to prefer any society to the companionship of his own sad thoughts in such a dreary place, he was now slowly instilling into his soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it, and change its hue forever. (Chapter 18)

So the earlier satiric dialogue evokes a complex response from the reader as the novel changes modes. The unequivocal superiority we felt earlier colours the way we respond now. Rather like Mrs. Thingummy, the nurse in the opening chapter, we know that what these people do is wrong, but we can see why they are what they are. More importantly, we see this not just because we are told by a narrator that there are reasons for the way they live, but because we have ‘experienced’ what it is like to be a victim and denounced the perpetrators through the satiric dialogue.

The complexity is enhanced by the fact that we enjoy the criminals’ behaviour. The narrator’s point of view means that we laugh with them, not ‘at’ or ‘above’ them, as we would if they were being satirized. Usually we laugh with them at Oliver, and at times even the “principle of good” can not help himself.
From this day, Oliver was seldom left alone; but was placed in almost constant communication with the two boys, who played the old game with the Jew every day: whether for their own improvement or Oliver's, Mr Fagin best new. At other times the old man would tell them stories of robberies he had committed in his younger days: mixed up with so much that was droll and curious, that Oliver could not help laughing heartily, and showing that he was amused in spite of his better feelings. (Chapter 18)

Yet, elsewhere Dickens denies this complexity. To further define his satiric attack on mean-spirited philosophers he contrasts the satiric and criminal worlds with the 'bright' world of the Maylies and the Brownlows. Their generous and benevolent treatment of Oliver obviously contrasts with the scheming of the various philosophers. But the contrast is one of black and white morality: their goodness, or 'rightness' from a moral viewpoint, apparently dismisses the criminals as bad or 'wrong'. However we must agree with Bill Sikes when he denounces them as "soft-hearted psalm-singers." In the satiric world we laugh with the satirist, and in the criminal underworld we associate with both the criminals and the satirist at different moments. We admire both because they have imagination. We do not imaginatively participate with the 'bright' characters because they ask us to judge objectively characters with whom we are subjectively involved. We can see the obvious moral contrast, but, like Oliver, we ignore our "better feelings"—they do not interest us as much.

Ultimately the plot directs us towards the bright world. The criminals are punished (Fagin is hanged, Sikes hangs himself, and the Dodger is transported) or converted (Nancy and Charley). Oliver is safe with the Maylies, and the regeneration of the bright society is promised by the marriage of Harry and Rose. But our imaginative response to the darker parts of the novel is so much greater and more complex that we feel that the
plot forces us against our will to dwell in the bright world. So, *Oliver Twist* creates problems for the reader, and it is these 'problems' that give the novel much of its power. The satiric dialogue of the first seven chapters works well in itself and helps to evoke a complex response to Fagin and his cohorts. However the pallid presentation of the bright world conflicts with the depth of our response to the other worlds because the satiric dialogue is not fully integrated into the overall scheme of the novel. This is a skill Dickens was to learn as his career progressed.
Martin Chuzzlewit

In the fervour of his early career, Dickens wrote much of Oliver Twist concurrently with the concluding numbers of Pickwick Papers and the opening ones of Nicholas Nickleby, so it is hardly surprising that its design was loose. Nevertheless the inconsistencies of satire and non-satire impart some of the richness of the novel, complex and contradictory as it is. Martin Chuzzlewit was Dickens’s sixth novel, and by this stage he felt that he was beginning to realise his powers as novelist more fully. After completing the novel he declared in his preface that “I have endeavoured in the progress of this Tale, to resist the temptation of the current Monthly Number, and to keep a steadier eye upon the general purpose and design.” Certainly the satiric dialogue of Martin Chuzzlewit is far more consistently worked out than that of Oliver Twist. However, while the dialogue effectively establishes our relationship with the satirist, we still sense a conflict between the imaginative lure of the satire and the direction of the plot.

Shortly after young Martin Chuzzlewit arrives in the United States, Mr. Bevan explains the literary climate of his country to him:

I believe no satirist could breathe this air. If another Juvenal or Swift could rise up among us to-morrow, he would be hunted down. If you have any knowledge of our literature, and can give me the name of any man, American born and bred, who has anatomised our follies as a people, and not as this or that party, and has escaped the foulest and most brutal slander, the most inveterate hatred and intolerant pursuit; it will be a strange name in my ears, believe me. In some cases I could name to you,
where a native writer has ventured on the most harmless and
good-humoured illustrations of our vices or defects, it has been
found necessary to announce, that in a second edition the
passage has been expunged, or altered, or explained away, or
patched into praise. (Chapter 16)

This is obviously a thinly disguised reference to Dickens’s own experiences in the United
States and customary feeling of persecution, but it provides an insight into his concept of
satire. It is a traditional view, where the satirist is an anatomiser of folly and vice, the
moral catchwords of classical and Augustan satirists. Indeed, Martin Chuzzlewit is an
anatomisation of a particular vice, selfishness, which is proliferated through a plethora
of characters, most notably Seth Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp. So dominant is the satiric
vein that it has even been described as a satire, rather than a novel. Certainly the novel
contains much satire, but it does much else besides.

Like Oliver Twist, Martin Chuzzlewit opens with satire, and it too inter-relates
with the novel’s other strands. The narrator introduces the theme of selfishness at the
end of the opening chapter as he makes two concluding remarks. First, he says, “men do
play very strange and extraordinary tricks,” and secondly “some men certainly are
remarkable for taking uncommon good care of themselves.” These remarks do not seem
to bear much relation to the rest of that chapter, but it soon becomes apparent that these
are the two ‘vices’ that are going to be satirized. Pecksniff enters, as we have seen, as
the “moral man.”

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1 The preface to the Cheap Edition (1850) begins: “My main object in this story was, to exhibit in
a variety of aspects the commonest of all vices; to show how selfishness propagates itself; and to what a
grim giant it may grow, from small beginnings.”
101. Russell cites Martin Chuzzlewit as one of three Victorian novels “so strongly saturated as to
deserve the name satires” (88), the other two being Vanity Fair and The Egoist (101).
“Playful—playful warbler,” said Mr. Pecksniff. It may be observed in connexion with his calling his daughter “a warbler,” that she was not at all vocal, but that Mr. Pecksniff was in the frequent habit of using any word that occurred to him as having a good sound, and rounding a sentence well, without much care for its meaning. And he did this so boldly, and in such an imposing manner, that he would sometimes stagger the wisest people with his eloquence, and make them gasp again.

His enemies asserted, by the way, that a strong trustfulness in sounds and forms, was the master-key to Mr. Pecksniff’s character. (Chapter 2)

Time after time the satirist gives the reader the opportunity to feel superior to Pecksniff and to revel in the skill with which he puts him down, and indeed to enjoy Pecksniff’s infinite capacity for turning any situation to his moral advantage.

“A gentleman taken ill upon the road, has been so very bad upstairs, sir,” said the tearful hostess.

“A gentleman taken ill upon the road, has been so very bad upstairs, has he?” repeated Mr. Pecksniff. “Well, well!”

Now there was nothing that one may call decidedly original in this remark, nor can it be exactly said to have contained any wise precept theretofore unknown to mankind, or to have opened any hidden source of consolation: but Mr. Pecksniff’s manner was so bland, and he nodded his head so soothingly, and showed in everything such an affable sense of his own excellence, that anybody would have been, as Mrs. Lupin was, comforted by the mere voice and presence of such a man; and, though he had merely said “a verb must agree with its nominative case in
number and person, my good friend,” or “eight times eight are sixty-four, my worthy soul,” must have felt deeply grateful to him for his humanity and wisdom.

“And how,” asked Mr. Pecksniff, drawing off his gloves and warming his hands before the fire, as benevolently as if they were somebody else’s, not his: “and how is he now?” (Chapter 3)

Many of the characters are taken in by Pecksniff, but obviously the reader is not. We are convinced from the moment he appears that he is the embodiment of deception, and everything he subsequently does reinforces this notion. The first number ends with old Martin inveighing against “A new plot, a new plot! Oh self, self, self! At every turn, nothing but self!” He, too, reveals his selfish nature when he says “Every man for himself, and no creature for me!” and the narrator reiterates the point one more time: “Universal self! Was there nothing of its shadow in these reflections, and in the history of Martin Chuzzlewit, on his own showing?”

The reader is introduced to a myriad of characters who elaborate on the theme of the satiric dialogue. Montague Tigg is “very much like a man who might have been something better, and unspeakably like a man who deserved to be something worse” (Chapter 4). Chevy Slyme possesses “great abilities [which] seemed one and all to point towards the sneaking quarter of the compass.” Their skill, or more accurately Tigg’s, is employing ‘rhetoric’ to try to get something for nothing:

“As Hamlet says, Hercules may lay about him with his club in every possible direction, but he can’t prevent the cats from making a most intolerable row on the roofs of the houses, or the dogs from being shot in the hot weather if they run about unmuzzled.” (Chapter 4)
The rest of the Chuzzlewit clan are introduced without a hint of irony as a "jealous, stony-hearted, distrustful company, who were all shut up in themselves." Anthony Chuzzlewit's old face is "so sharpened by the wariness and cunning of his life, that it seemed to cut him a passage through the crowded room," and his son Jonas has "so well profited by the precept and example of the father that he looked a year or two the elder of the twain." There is a "strong minded woman" who is "almost supernaturally disagreeable...having a dreary face and a bony figure and a masculine voice," her masculinity a sure sign that Dickens satirizes her as an anti-woman. These characters contrast with the ironically portrayed Pecksniffs: "What words can paint the Pecksniffs in that trying hour? Oh, none: for words have naughty company among them, and the Pecksniffs were all goodness." Mercy and Charity Pecksniff receive much mock adulation:

Oh blessed star of Innocence, wherever you may be, how did you glitter in your home of ether, when the two Miss Pecksniffs put forth, each her lily hand, and gave the same, with mantling cheeks, to Martin! How did you twinkle, as if fluttering with sympathy, when Mercy, reminded of the bonnet in her hair, hid her fair face and turned her head aside: the while her gentle sister plucked it out, and smote her, with a sister's soft reproof, upon her buxom shoulder. (Chapter 5)

The hyperbole casts the sisters as romantic heroines, but we suspect that beneath the delicate language Mercy might not be quite so guileless, and that the 'smiting' might not be quite as "soft" as the narrator suggests. Even Pecksniff's horse becomes part of the
satiric dialogue, as he resembles his master not in his “outward person,... but in his moral character, wherein... he was full of promise, but of no performance.”

To contrast with the selfish, there are the selfless. These are not as profuse as the satirically portrayed characters, but they provide moral contrast:

Blessings on thy simple heart, Tom Pinch, how proudly dost thou button up that scanty coat, called by a sad misnomer, for these many years, a “great” one; and how thoroughly as with thy cheerful voice thou pleasantly adjurest Sam the hostler “not to let him go yet,” dost thou believe that quadruped desires to go, and would go if he might! (Chapter 5)

The pseudo-archaic laudatory language facetiously raises Tom on a pedestal. The tone is very similar to many of the satiric passages, like one cited above praising Mercy and Charity, yet we think Tom deserves the praise because of the way he treats the people he meets (and because he has an unpretentious coat). As Tom rides through the sunshine to Salisbury he meets Mark Tapley, who has a pathological desire to get into trying circumstances so that he can demonstrate his ability to be “jolly.” Tom offers him a ride, which Mark grudgingly accepts “seating himself on the very edge of the seat with his body half out of it, to express his being there on sufferance.” All of this prepares for the entrance of young Martin:

“Very hard frost to-night, sir,” said the new-comer, courteously acknowledging Mr. Pinch’s withdrawal of the little table, that he might have place. “Don’t disturb yourself, I beg.”

Though he said this with a vast amount of consideration for Mr. Pinch’s comfort, he dragged one of the leather-bottomed
chairs to the very centre of the hearth, notwithstanding; and sat
down in front of the fire, with a foot on each hob. (Chapter 5)

Martin's first act is selfish, even if his language is polite. So are his subsequent
ones: he 'allows' Tom to drive (so that he can keep his hands warm in his pockets) and,
in contrast to Mark Tapley, he sets his box on Tom's side of the carriage so that he is
protected from the cold wind by "a perfect wall of box and man." As Mark and Tom
contrast with the satirically portrayed Martin, so at every turn the reader is faced with a
myriad of other such contrasts: Ruth with Charity, Mary with Mercy, Mrs. Lupin with
Mrs. Gamp, Tom with Pecksniff, Mark with Mrs. Gamp, Chuffey with Jonas, and so on.
By means of these contrasts the satirist calls on the reader to differentiate between the
selfish and the selfless, even between different types of selfishness (the 'honestly' open
guile of Anthony and Jonas as opposed to the hypocrisy of Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp).
The satiric dialogue questions the moral sense of the reader so that he or she can collude
with the satirist's higher viewpoint and feel morally superior to young Martin, or any of
the other satiric characters.

In this sense, then, Martin Chuzzlewit is a very traditional satire, an anatomisation
of a particular vice. The simplicity of the satiric dialogue makes it easy to determine
which view the satirist wants us to take. The plot works slowly from this point: we see
young Martin take off to the United States, his ensuing education, and the various
machinations of Pecksniff, old Martin, and Jonas, culminating in the discovery and
punishment of evil doers, and reward for the good, with marriages all round. However,
there is very little tension in the plot. We know as early as the third chapter that old
Martin is all too aware of Pecksniff’s true nature, and we can predict the socially regenerating marriages of Mary to Martin and Ruth to John Westlock long before they become possible. Only Jonas’s plot to murder Tigg Montague and his ensuing madness creates dramatic tension. Mrs. Gamp is of central interest to the reader in the latter two-thirds of the novel, but she has very little to do with the movement of the plot. So the plot does not seem very important, for it is not what interests the reader, or even the author.

So where does our interest lie in *Martin Chuzzlewit*? The satiric dialogue establishes the simple contrast between the selfish and the selfless. This is not so interesting in itself, but the means by which it is established is. In *Oliver Twist* Dickens sets up his attack on the hard-hearted by reiterating the important concepts of inhumanity, motherliness, and philosophy to establish his readers’ superiority to the workhouse authorities. He employs the same technique here to achieve a different effect. In the world of *Martin Chuzzlewit* it is not so much each character’s self that is important, but the way that they each manifest that self in their words and actions. The reader begins to see beyond the simple moral contrast of who is ‘wrong’ or ‘right’, to see the patterns of behaviour of those characters; that how a character behaves makes them what they are.

One such pattern is appetite, that “what we like makes us what we are.” Pecksniff and Gamp are the obvious targets here. It is remarkable how often these two are

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3 Martin tells Pecksniff of the “latent corruption” he sees in all the people he encounters. “Treachery, deceit, and low design; hatred of competitors, real or fancied, for my favor; meanness, falsehood, baseness, and servility, or,’ and here he looked closely in his cousin’s eyes, ’or an assumption of honest independence, almost worse than all.”

devouring food, imbibing various liquids, or pursuing other less than noble temptations. Yet they both possess a remarkable ability to turn this gluttony to their advantage.

Alcohol is the essence of Mrs. Gamp's character: "The face of Mrs. Gamp—the nose in particular—was somewhat red and swollen, and it was difficult to enjoy her society without becoming conscious of a smell of spirits." She is able, however, to use this to impress the nobility of her character upon others, and her quality of service. Mr. Pecksniff, when they first meet, inquires whether she is used to dealing with death:

"You may well say second natur, sir," returned [Mrs. Gamp]. "One's first ways is to find sich things a trial to the feelings; and so is one's lasting custom. If it wasn't for the nerve a little sip of liquor gives me (I never was able to do more than taste it) I never could go through with what I sometimes has to do. 'Mrs. Harris,' I says, at the very last case as ever I acted in, which it was but a young person; 'Mrs. Harris,' I says, 'leave the bottle on the chimley-piece, and don't ask me to take none, but let me put my lips to it when I am so dispoged, and then I will do what I'm engaged to do, according to the best of my ability."
(Chapter 19)

Pecksniff can see the moral in cream, sugar, toast, ham, and eggs: "See how they come and go! Every pleasure is transitory." (Chapter 2) Drinking brandy on the coach is an expression of the "sacred flame of gratitude in his breast," which he feels because "it is always satisfactory to feel, in keen weather, that many other people are not as warm as you are. And this, he said, was quite natural, and a very beautiful arrangement; not confined to coaches, but extending itself into many social ramifications" (Chapter 8). It
satisfies him to know that his digestive processes are so wonderful that when he eats he is "doing a public service."

"When I have wound myself up, if I may employ such a term...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!"

The rather less noble appetites beneath his loquacious morality surface as he talks with Mrs. Todgers at the great dinner (Chapter 9). He has spilt coffee over his legs and has muffin stuck to his knee (which, we are told, he shakes his head at "as if he regarded [the muffin] as his evil genius"). Having had too much to drink his appetites begin to assert themselves over his words. He admits to Mrs Todgers that "My feelings...will not consent to be entirely smothered, like the young children in the tower." He begins to make amorous advances, comparing her to his departed wife:

"Mr. Pecksniff?" cried Mrs. Todgers, "What a ghastly smile! Are you ill, sir?"

He pressed his hand upon her arm, and answered in a solemn manner, and a faint voice, "Chronic."

"Cholic?" cried the frightened Mrs. Todgers.

"Chron-ic," he repeated with some difficulty. "Chron-ic. A chronic disorder. I have been its victim from childhood. It is carrying me to my grave.... You are like her, Mrs. Todgers."

"Don't squeeze me so tight, pray, Mr. Pecksniff. If any of the gentlemen should notice us."

"For her sake," said Mr. Pecksniff. "Permit me—in honour of her memory. For the sake of a voice from the tomb. You are
very like her, Mrs. Todgers! What a world is this!...Give me your other hand, Mrs. Todgers."

That lady hesitated, and said "she didn’t like."

"Has a voice from the grave no influence?" said Mr. Pecksniff, with dismal tenderness. "This is irreligious! My dear creature."

"Hush!" urged Mrs. Todgers. "Really you mustn’t."

"It’s not me," said Mr. Pecksniff. "Don’t suppose it’s me; it’s the voice; it’s her voice."

But obviously it is him, and it is "irreligious," and that is the point which provides us with much fun at his expense. The satirist emphasises the point by pricking Pecksniff’s bubble of pretension:

Mrs. Pecksniff deceased, must have had an unusually thick and husky voice for a lady; and rather a stuttering voice; and to say the truth somewhat of a drunken voice; if it had ever borne much resemblance to that in which Mr. Pecksniff spoke just then. But perhaps this was delusion on his part.

He can repress his appetites verbally, but not physically. Regardless of what he says there is still, figuratively as well as literally speaking, muffin on his knee. He makes one final lunge at Mrs. Todgers, who shrieks in desperation:

"Bless my life, Miss Pecksniffs!" cried Mrs. Todgers, aloud, "your dear Pa’s took very poorly!"

Mr. Pecksniff straightened himself by a surprising effort, as every one turned hastily towards him; and standing on his feet, regarded the assembly with an ineffable wisdom. Gradually it
gave place to a smile; a feeble, helpless, melancholy smile; bland, almost to sickness. "Do not repine, my friends," said Mr. Pecksniff, tenderly. "Do not weep for me. It is chronic." And with these words, after making a futile attempt to pull off his shoes, he fell into the fire-place.

This is one of several occasions where Pecksniff’s appetites get the better of his moralistic demeanour. Similarly, after Mary rejects his ‘love’ for her, he becomes “hot, and pale, and mean, and shy, and slinking, and consequently not at all Pecksniffinian.” The reader interprets this as an ironic stab from the satirist, and infers that this sort of behaviour is singularly Pecksniffinian.

Another pattern formulated by the satiric dialogue is that behaving selfishly physically divides the self. Pecksniff warms his hands in front of a fire as benevolently “as if it were a widow’s back, or an orphan’s back, or an enemy’s back.” It is not him making lewd advances towards Mrs. Todgers, “Don’t suppose it’s me; it’s the voice; it’s her voice.” When he says “We,” he means “mankind in general” for “there is nothing personal in morality.” Mrs. Gamp invents an alter-ego, dividing herself into the visible modest half and the invisible self-centred half. Montague Tigg and Tigg Montague are one and the same person, yet remarkably different in how they present themselves to the world. Even Jonas, who is openly cunning and therefore not hypocritical, suffers from a sort of schizophrenia after he murders Tigg. This division of the self also separates people from each other: old Martin will have nothing to do with anyone except Mary, young Martin cannot marry Mary until he has changed, Jonas and Mercy are married yet

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live isolated from each other, Mrs. Gamp's closest friend does not exist, and Pecksniff will never find another Mrs. Pecksniff, try as he might.

The satiric dialogue also suggests that the way in which characters use language reflects their essential self. Pecksniff is obviously the archetypal figure in this respect, but many of the characters of the novel realise the ways in which language may be used to achieve selfish ends. Pecksniff uses "any word that occurred to him as having a good sound, and rounding a sentence well, without much care for its meaning." He can comfort Mrs. Lupin with his "mere voice and presence," even though he merely repeats what she has said. Mrs. Gamp issues forth her confused scriptural wisdom: "Rich folks may ride on camels, but it an't so easy for 'em to see out of a needle's eye," and cites the 'wisdom' of "Mrs. Harris" as evidence of her good character to others. Her imaginary friend is in fact the perfect vehicle for self-adulation, while seeming virtuous. Montague Tigg, too, is a skilful orator. He can 'quote' Hamlet, and he exalts his friend Chevy Slyme as "without an exception, the highest-minded, the most independent-spirited; most original, spiritual, classical talented; the most thoroughly Shakespearian, if not Miltonic; and at the same time the most disgustingly-unappreciated dog I know." The satirist reveals the reality behind his rhetoric, informing us that Slyme "looked rather unwholesome and uncomfortable than Shakespearian or Miltonic." Even the Eden real-estate agent Scadder, in his ability to avoid Martin's queries about the 'city', and the undertaker Mould, who can make the 'right' impression, show how language can be manipulated to achieve selfish ends.

The greatest manipulator of language, though, is the narrator himself. Martin Chuzlewewit is remarkable for the variety of tones and modes which the narrator employs. He can switch from the comic to the serious with one incisive remark; he is a ranting
moralist, a melodramatist, or a sentimentalist, as well as a satirist. He remarks, in satiric mode: "What words can paint the Pecksniffs in that trying hour? Oh, none: for words have naughty company among them, and the Pecksniffs were all goodness." Effectively he acknowledges that words can be false, and used to achieve devious ends. This is exactly what a satirist does, and we use satire to feel good about ourselves at the expense of others (which, to use Pecksniffian logic, would ignite "the sacred flame of gratitude in [our] breast"). The satirist is, like many of the characters he satirizes, a kind of language-shapeshifter.

The satirist changes his language to achieve different effects, and the reader must be alert to these shifts, as the same tone may convey entirely different meanings. This is demonstrated by two passages I quoted earlier, one praising the two Miss Pecksniffs, the other praising Tom. Both 'blessings' are similar in tone. The syntax is convoluted, the diction elevated—ridiculously so. The first is mock-heroic (the "star of Innocence" glittering in its "home of ether," the Miss Pecksniffs with "lily" hands and "mantling cheeks"), the other pseudo-biblical (with the "thous" and "thys," "scanty," "adjurest," "quadruped"). In each case we must look beneath the language—for we know that language can be deceiving—to discover the truth. We infer that the satirist intends to criticise the Miss Pecksniffs, and that the language he uses to describe them says something about their behaviour. His 'act' of praise reflects their 'act' of innocence. In Tom's case the language qualifies the praise. We know that Tom is "one of the best fellows in the world" (as John Westlock calls him), and the facetious tone makes the praise more palatable than something direct or sentimental. The ridiculousness of the

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6 See above pp. 91-92.
passage also hints that we should think Tom is ridiculous for believing that Pecksniff is good.

The satirist also alters his imagery to reflect the characters he describes. In *Oliver Twist* imagery of imprisonment, dirt, and darkness link the workhouse to the criminal underworld, suggesting, with mixed results, that the two were somehow linked by similar philosophies. In *Martin Chuzzlewit* imagery adds to characterisation, as well as establishing important contrasts. The following two passages describe the same thing—arriving in London—but from the perspective of two different characters:

Very soon afterwards the coach stopped at the office in the city; and the street in which it was situated was already in a bustle, that fully bore out Mr. Pecksniff's words about it being morning, though for any signs of day yet appearing in the sky it might have been midnight. There was a dense fog too—as if it were a city in the clouds, which they had been travelling to all night up a magic beanstalk—and a thick crust upon the pavement like oil-cake; which, one of the outsides (mad, no doubt) said to another (his keeper, of course), was snow. (Chapter 8)

The beauty of the night is hardly felt, when Day comes leaping up. Yoho! Two stages, and the country-roads are almost changed to a continuous street. Yoho, past market-gardens, rows of houses, villas, crescents, terraces, and squares; past waggons, coaches, carts; past early workmen, late stragglers, drunken men, and sober carriers of loads; past brick and mortar in its every shape; and in among the rattling pavements, where a jaunty seat upon a coach is not so easy to preserve! Yoho, down countless turnings, and through countless
mazy ways, until an old Inn-yard is gained, and Tom Pinch, getting down, quite stunned and giddy, is in London! (Chapter 36)

Pecksniff arrives in London much the worse for wear after “tumbling” against old Anthony and crushing his head in corners of the coach, and the darkness of the city reflects this, and perhaps the fog suggests the fogginess of Pecksniff’s self. The outside passenger dismissed as “mad, no doubt” is a sort of Pecksniffian rejection of the less fortunate, perhaps meant ironically by the narrator, but similar to Pecksniff’s proclaiming gratitude to be “one of the holiest feelings of our common nature” while he shakes his fist at a beggar who wants “to get up behind” the coach. It is one of the few dark narratorial comments which obtrude from the vitality of the novel. But where Pecksniff is tumbled and crushed, Tom has a “jaunty seat.” In the second passage London is described entirely through Tom’s eyes. For him the night is beautiful, but day is even more so. The rustic exultation of “Yoho!” and the catalogue of people and things that rush by reflect Tom’s enthusiasm and his utter bewilderment.

One might even suggest that some of the characters change to suit the narrator’s needs. Tom Pinch is remarkably mild, especially when he withers in the presence of the awesome Pecksniff. Shortly after he arrives in London, however, he visits his sister, Ruth and is incensed by the way her employers treat her. He transforms from mild-mannered organist to outraged castigator. He censures the parents of the young girl Ruth teaches, the “syrup” (as Mrs. Todgers calls her, meaning seraph), exclaiming that “the young lady yonder is the child of your teaching, and not my sister’s,” and that “no man can expect his children to respect what he degrades.” (Chapter 36) The narrator

7 Manning 85-86.
explains that “Tom’s blood was rising” because “he could bear a good deal himself, but he was proud of [Ruth], and pride is a sensitive thing.” However, we realise that Tom is transformed into a mouthpiece for the satirist, as we see the parallel between this parental precedent and old Anthony’s raising Jonas after his own philosophy, which ultimately brings about his own death. Furthermore Tom shows his good sense compared to Pecksniff, his daughters, and Mrs. Todgers who are satirized for the way in which they dote upon the “syrup.”

Young Martin undergoes a similar transformation when he reaches the United States. He is the target of satire in England, yet when he leaves he takes on the traditional satiric role of innocent observer. He becomes a sort of embodiment of English values, and like Gulliver, Don Quixote, or Joseph Andrews his ignorance of the places and people he sees allows him to compare their values and customs to his own. The conclusions he draws are, of course, largely unfavourable, even though many of the faults he recognises in the American people are faults he was satirized for having himself. Their selfishness is national insularity, and pig-headed hypocrisy: they espouse the virtues of freedom and liberty, yet vindicate slavery, forgery, and all the things that reinforce their chief maxim of ‘everyone for themselves.’ The satire of the American chapters is generally regarded by critics as far less impressive than the English parts, because the characters are far more generalised than their English counterparts, and less imaginative in the way that they express their faults. Their faults are blindingly obvious, from the point of view of Dickens’s English value system, and so allow us to feel superior. They do, however, obviously contribute to the dialogue of the self—both in that they act selfishly and in the ways that they express that self.
Each of these instances makes us admire the skill of the satirist all the more. He is the controlling figure, putting down the people who we think are stupid or wrong, it is not Tom or Martin. When we are told of Ruth's humble domestic economies or Tom's 'yoho'-ing through the countryside the vitality is the satirist's, not the characters'.

The imagery in *Oliver Twist* linked the satiric and non-satiric worlds, but with confusing results. *Martin Chuzzlewit* is more successful: the satiric criticism of selfishness, along with appropriate non-satiric contrasts, establishes a dialogue between the author and the reader concerning the nature of the self. However, there are still problems because the figure with whom we collude is no better than the characters he satirizes. When the chief satiric targets, Pecksniff and Gamp, are punished at the end of the novel we do not like it. In their immense oratorical prowess they possess the same vitality as the satirist with whom we collude, and in being part of that process we are selfish ourselves, having fun at the expense of others. So our own satiric energies are apparently denied by the plot when we are forced to dwell in the happy world of the 'good' characters, who punish the 'bad' and marry each other. The novel is bound together by plot, but the important structure is really the inter-relationship of its various parts built around the unifying notion of self: *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a satire with a plot imposed upon it, rather than a novel with satiric elements. Hence it seems to us that the impulse of the satirist is at odds with that of the novelist, and in *Bleak House* Dickens finally found a solution to the problem.
Dickens's early works seem to be a kind of battleground for the fight between the good Dickens and the bad Dickens. The good Dickens is the novelist, the sentimentalist, the bringer of bad to justice and rewarder of the good. The bad Dickens is the satirist: nasty, seething, arrogant. In *Oliver Twist* and particularly *Martin Chuzzlewit* the narrator changes to suit the varying needs of the author, sometimes with confusing and conflicting results. In these earlier works the good side triumphs, in that both Oliver and Martin can retire from the evils that they faced to their own sheltered society of friends and family. Yet the reader is left unsatisfied by the manner of these victories, as our imaginative participation in the bad things of the world is apparently denied by the resolutions of plot and punishment of evil. In *Bleak House* the battle continues, but at last these two forces are harmonised. Dickens achieves this harmony by developing the satiric techniques of *Oliver Twist* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and by embodying these urges in two distinct narrators: Esther Summerson and the satiric third-person narrator.

Fittingly it is the satiric narrator who introduces the reader to the world of *Bleak House*, and, as we know, he finds it in a sorry state. There is mud everywhere.

Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better, splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot-passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke). (Chapter 1)
London is covered in soot, and "crust upon crust of mud." There is "fog everywhere" and "gas looming through the fog." As each of these successive layers is penetrated, the narrator leads the reader to where "the raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest" to the High Court of Chancery "at the very heart of the fog." The entirely negative imagery prepares us for the satire that now begins. The Chancellor presides over his court in a "foggy glory," and the court is

mistily engaged in one of the ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities, running their goat-hair and horsehair warded heads against walls of words and making a pretence of equity with serious faces, as players might.

It seems that, just as it was difficult for the inhabitants of London to get about without being covered in something, it is similarly impossible for the lawyers to achieve anything. The court itself is "dim" and the "fog hang[s] heavy in it" shutting out the light of day. The lawyers' moral turpitude is suggested by the fact that "you might look in vain for Truth" in this place. Perhaps worst of all Chancery "has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire." So the imagery and the satire are interrelated from the outset, and the images used reflect the themes of the satire.

Next we meet some of the actual lawyers, and, while we may have already felt superior to the people who are perpetuating these wrongs, now we are given the opportunity to exact some satiric revenge upon them. We are introduced to Mr. Tangle, his name itself a reflection of legal 'tangles', and to
Eighteen of Mr Tangle’s learned friends, each armed with a little summary of eighteen hundred sheets, [who] bob up like eighteen hammers in a pianoforte, make eighteen bows, and drop into their eighteen places of obscurity.

The satiric jabs, reducing them to small objects, inflate our self-importance by popping theirs. The Chancellor struggles to correctly guess the exact relation between the wards in Jarndyce and their new patron when

Suddenly a very little counsel with a terrific bass voice, arises, fully inflated, in the back settlements of the fog, and says, “Will your lordship allow me? I appear for him. He is a cousin, several times removed. I am not at the moment prepared to inform the Court in what exact remove he is a cousin; but he is a cousin.”

Leaving this address (delivered like a sepulchral message) ringing in the rafters of the roof, the very little counsel drops, and the fog knows him no more. Everybody looks for him. Nobody can see him.

Again the fog helps us to understand the satire of legal fogginess and to feel ‘bigger’ than the “fully inflated” “very little counsel.”

The imagery is strikingly similar to that of *Oliver Twist*. Just as the baby farm, the Workhouse, the paupers’ hovels and the criminal underworld were begrimed with dirt, so too are London and the people who live and work in it. The fact that Dickens originally called the town in which Oliver was born Mudfog demonstrates how close the worlds of
the two novels were in his imagination. Although in *Bleak House* the fog is more pervasive, the idea is the same; it signifies a kind of moral fogginess and the difficulty in seeing things properly. Like *Oliver Twist* this imagery is used to connect different parts of the novel's world; however, unlike *Oliver Twist* now the mud and fog settle on more than one isolated institution.

At the beginning of the second chapter the narrator whisks us away from Chancery to

the world of fashion... on this same miry afternoon. It is not so unlike the Court of Chancery, but that we may pass from the one scene to the other, as the crow flies. Both the world of fashion and the Court of Chancery are things of precedent and usage.

(Chapter 2)

Having consciously drawn our attention to the link between the two worlds, he then reinforces it by using similar imagery to satirise it: "It is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air." The world of fashion is oppressive and unhealthy, just as the inside of the Court of Chancery is dim and foggy. The location is completely different but the imagery connects the two worlds.

The waters are out in Lincolnshire. An arch of the bridge in the park has been sapped and sopped away. The adjacent low-lying ground, for half a mile in breadth, is a stagnant river, with melancholy trees for islands in it, and a surface punctured all over, all day long, with falling rain. My Lady Dedlock’s 'place'
has been extremely dreary. The weather, for many a day and night, has been so wet that the trees seem wet through, and the soft loppings and prunings of the woodsman’s axe can make no crash or crackle as they fall. The deer, looking soaked, leave quagmires, where they pass. The shot of a rifle loses its sharpness in the moist air, and its smoke moves in a tardy little cloud towards the green rise, coppice-topped, that makes a background for the falling rain.

Lincolnshire has the same primeval air of the opening paragraph of the novel, and is even described with a similar listing effect. This place is “stagnant,” and it is difficult to move without becoming bogged down, as the deer show. Any movement that is possible is abnormal, so the woodsman’s axe, the rifle, and the smoke are unable to function naturally. This, the satirist is suggesting, is what “things of precedent and usage” breed: the stagnant and unhealthy atmosphere prevents any progress from being made.

As in the opening chapter, the natural imagery creates the tone and introduces the key ideas of the satire, so that the satirist can then begin his assault on characters. Seen through the eyes of the satirist, Sir Leicester Dedlock suffers a particularly scathing attack.

Sir Leicester Dedlock is only a baronet, but there is no mightier baronet than he. His family is as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable. He has a general opinion that the world might get on without hills, but would be done up without Dedlocks. He would on the whole admit Nature to be a good idea (a little low, perhaps, when not enclosed with a park fence),

but an idea dependant for its execution on your great country families... He is an honourable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man.

We see Sir Leicester from a great distance. His opinions, related from the distant third-person perspective, are portrayed as absurdly arrogant and stupid. He might be mightiest baronet in England but we can still feel superior to him. He is the sort of old fool, we feel, who is responsible for perpetuating stagnancy, the genteel counterpart to the Chancellor.

So the satiric dialogue is established in the early part of the novel, and in *Bleak House* it is maintained consistently throughout the remainder of the novel. In *Oliver Twist* the dirt and dark imagery associated with the victims of ‘the system’ was also used to describe the criminal underworld, and this created an ambivalent view of Fagin and his cohorts. In *Bleak House*, though, any time we encounter fog, or any of the myriad of other ideas suggested by the ‘bleak’ title—cold, wet, filth, rot, decay, dark, mud—we associate it with the ideas established by the satiric dialogue in the opening chapters of the novel, the notion of a society wrapped in precedent, unable to progress or achieve, even regressing into primeval ooze. Any object, building or character described in such terms is identified as a part of this foggy society—whether as a victim or part of its machinery, or indeed both.

We see it in Krook’s shop, with its countless rags, bags, bottles, books, and papers, all “shabby” and “dirty,” “a dirty hanger-on and disowned relation of the law” (Chapter 5). Both the shop and its owner are, of course, a parody of the Court of Chancery and the Chancellor himself: “As it was still foggy and dark, and as the shop was blinded besides by the wall of Lincoln’s Inn, intercepting the light within a couple of
yards, we should not have seen so much but for a lighted lantern that the old man in spectacles and a hairy cap was carrying about the shop.” Krook himself is so covered in white hair that he looks “frosted” and covered in “snow,” his “breath issuing in visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire within.” We see it in Mrs. Jellyby’s house, which is in “a narrow street of high houses, like an oblong cistern to hold the fog.” The house itself is “not only untidy, but very dirty” and has “a marshy smell.” (Chapter 4). We see it in the houses of the brickmakers, “a cluster of wretched hovels” with “stagnant pools” of water, broken windows, and mud. (Chapter 8) We are told that Tom Jarndyce shut himself up in Bleak House

day and night pouring over the wicked heaps of papers in the suit, and hoping against hope to disentangle it from its mystification and bring it to a close. In the meantime the place became dilapidated, the wind whistled through the cracked walls, the rain fell through the broken roof, the weeds choked the passage to the rotting door. (Chapter 8)

We see it, perhaps most of all, in Tom-all-Alone’s.

It is a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people; where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced, by some bold vagrants, who, after establishing their own possession, took to letting them out in lodgings. Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so, these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and
goes, fetching and carrying fever, and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years—though born expressly to do it. (Chapter 16)

Tom-all-Alone’s epitomises Dickens’s increased ability to use satiric imagery to connect the different parts of his work and suggest links between them. None of these passages cited above are satire (with the exception of the reference to Coodle and Doodle), but the imagery relates them to the satiric dialogue, the confusion, the dirt, and the inability to achieve anything. The above passage casts reflections on all of the novel’s most important strands. Most obviously the blackness, dirt, rot, and decay signify that Tom-all-Alone’s is caught up in the system of Chancery. It is another victim of precedent, as Coodle, Doodle, and Foodle and “five hundred years” remind us. It, too, is regressing: decaying, rotting, crashing to the ground, returning to dust. Its inhabitants are “maggots,” just as the lawyers who prey on the system “lie like maggots in nuts” (Chapter 10). The “fever” that the people fetch and carry further hints at the spreading of smallpox from Jo, through Charley, to Esther. In *Oliver Twist* the narrator noted, as he considered Noah Claypole’s gleeful mistreatment of Oliver, “how impartially the same amiable qualities are developed in the finest lord and the dirtiest charity boy.” The earlier novel, as noted by Alan Horsman, asks the same question as *Bleak House*, but the later work makes this more explicit:

What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the

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whereabout of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that
distant ray of sunlight upon him when he swept the church-yard
step? What connexion can there have been between the
innumerable people in the innumerable histories of this world,
who, from opposite sides of great guls, have, nevertheless, been
very curiously brought together! (Chapter 16)

The difference in Bleak House is that the "connexions" are more successfully managed
by Dickens; his satiric imagery clearly, and powerfully, points the way. Tom-all-Alone's
is at the centre of the satire of political and social torpor. There has been "much mighty
political speech-making...concerning Tom, and much wrathful disputation how Tom shall
be got right," but "Tom only may and can, or shall and will, be reclaimed according to
somebody's theory but nobody's practice." However, in the satirist's view, all things are
connected, and so these theorists will pay for their procrastination:

But [Tom] has his revenge. Even the winds are his
messengers, and they serve him in these hours of darkness.
There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates
infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute, this very
night, the choice stream (in which chemists on analysis would
find the genuine nobility) of a Norman house, and his Grace shall
not be able to say Nay to the infamous alliance. There is not an
atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in
which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not
an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing,
but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up
to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high.
Verily, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his
revenge. (Chapter 46)
Interestingly, although the satiric narrator speaks of “every order of society,” he concentrates his talk of “retribution” on the ‘high’ end. Thus readers can exclude themselves from this, because it is the higher orders of society which have been satirised throughout, and it allows them to participate in the promised revenge against the Sir Leicester Dedlocks, and the Lord Chancellors of the world of the novel. It is the ultimate rebellion against institution, the satiric revenge of the lowly against the high. The satiric narrator allows the reader to participate vicariously in Tom’s revenge, as the connections point to the fact that we are the equal of, indeed better than, any so-called noble.

Significantly many of the examples of darkness I have quoted above are not seen through the eyes of the satiric narrator, but through the first-person perspective of Esther Summerson. In character she is the complete opposite of the satiric narrator, and she relates her experiences in the past tense. One of Dickens’s many paragon women, Esther travels through the world of the novel relentlessly helping anyone she can, tidying and organising dirty and disorganised places and people. Where the satiric narrator is scathing and merciless in his criticism, she is generous and forgiving. She tells us that her “godmother” “was so very good herself, I thought, that the badness of other people made her frown all her life,” and that “Mrs. Rachael was too good to feel any emotion at parting, but I was not so good, and wept bitterly.” At such moments she seems rather too naive, and more an innocent tool of a satiric author. Her character has, of course, prompted much critical discussion, many critics finding her too good to be believable.3

3 Robert Garis says Esther is “empty” and “has no convincing inner life,” The Dickens Theatre (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) 141. John Carey suggests that Esther’s smallpox has little effect on the reader because “she has no face,” The Violent Effigy (London: Faber & Faber, 1973) 61.
However good she might be, though, she is not immune to mud and muddle. The first thing that she notices about London is the fog, “a London particular.” She describes the coachride to London through the dirtiest and darkest streets that ever were seen in the world (I thought), and in a such a distracting state of confusion that I wondered how people kept their senses. (Chapter 3)

This is remarkably similar to Oliver’s first impressions of London (“A dirtier more wretched place he had never seen.”), and even to those of Pecksniff (who also experiences “dense fog” and the madness of the inhabitants). More importantly, it is the same world described by the satiric narrator. It is Esther who describes Mrs. Jellyby’s street as “an oblong cistern to hold the fog.” In a poetic turn of phrase she notes “the purblind day was feebly struggling with the fog, when I opened my eyes to encounter those of the dirty-faced little spectre fixed upon me” (Chapter 4)—even Peepy Jellyby is begrimed in the mud which his mother creates, by focusing her attention on Africa rather than her home. Just as the satiric narrator remarked upon the dimness of the courtroom, Esther observes that “the fog still seemed heavy—I say seemed, for the windows were so encrusted with dirt, that they would have made Midsummer sunshine dim” (Chapter 5).

The mud of the so called ‘satiric world’ is an ever-present part of the world in which the characters have to live, and so the ideas established by the satiric dialogue permeate the first person narrative of Esther. Thus the satire is broadened by its encroachment on the consciousness of the non-satiric narrator. In the same way satiric characters, like Miss Flite, are related to non-satiric characters, like Richard Carstone. Miss Flite is reduced by her involvement in Chancery: from a young woman with youth, hope, and beauty, to a
"M—" old woman, jabbering about signs and her expectation of a judgement. She is a fixed figure who prefigures Richard’s descent, as he desperately seeks his own judgement. As he gets deeper into the case (preyed upon by Vholes with his “devouring look”) his room becomes “a great confusion of clothes, tin cases, books, boots, brushes, and portmanteaus, strewn all about the floor…and he looked as wild as his room” (Chapter 45). The images signify that he has been sucked into the world of muddle, and it ultimately kills him. Thus, the concerns of the novel—of plot—do not conflict with satiric urges, as in *Oliver Twist* and *Martin Chuzzlewit*. In *Bleak House* they work as mirrors to each other, the novelistic enriching the satiric, and *vice versa*.

The double perspective of *Bleak House* also enabled Dickens to achieve new effects. The two narrators see the world in different ways, and at those points at which the two narratives overlap once again the one deepens the other. In the opening chapter the third-person narrator attacks the Chancellor, belittling his “foggy” importance. Esther meets him just two chapters later, and she is impressed by the pleasant courtesy he extends to her, Richard and Ada. While this is a minor episode, spanning a mere page or so, Esther’s view tempers the harsh one of the satiric narrator. It also adds to the satire, because it suggests that, although the Lord Chancellor is head of the detestable system, he may privately be a decent man, but so great is the menace of this system that it makes no difference who is at its head. Lady Dedlock, too, is initially a satiric character, an idle patrician, hotly pursued wherever she goes by “the fashionable intelligence,” bored because she has nothing to do. Doing nothing is, apparently, her role in society, one she performs with distinction.
How Alexander wept when he had no more worlds to conquer, everybody knows—...My Lady Dedlock, having conquered her world, fell, not into the melting, but rather into the freezing mood. An exhausted composure, a worn out placidity, an equanimity of fatigue not to be ruffled by interest or satisfaction, are the trophies of her victory. She is perfectly well-bred. If she could be translated to Heaven tomorrow, she might be expected to ascend without any rapture. (Chapter 2)

Her affectations deny natural human impulses and her aristocratic facade is another instance of social torpor. The impersonal, high register diction, almost mock-heroic, mirrors her "freezing mood." Seen from this distance, she is utterly disagreeable. Yet at the close of the chapter she cannot help but belie her principles when she recognises Hawdon’s handwriting in one of Tulkinghorn’s legal documents. She covers by ‘taking ill,’ but this incident foreshadows her humanisation in the eyes of the reader. Presented to us through satiric eyes she is a stock figure of aristocratic fashion, one we can feel superior to. As the novel progresses, however, we learn more about her past, and see Tulkinghorn pursue her. Her initial facade becomes understandable, and what we initially scorned becomes human, because we see her through Esther’s eyes, and thus sympathise with her suffering. As an individual, who certainly cannot deny natural human impulses, she “escapes satire.” Unlike Tom Pinch her character does not change to achieve a certain effect; she remains constant, but the mode through which we see her changes. The same is true of her husband, but his transformation in our eyes is the more remarkable as he does not shift from one narrator to the other. Sir Leicester Dedlock is presented by the satiric narrator for much of Bleak House as the pontificating nobleman

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we are shown in the second chapter. Yet Dickens uses this to sound a note of sympathy when he discovers the secrets of his wife's past:

His formal array of words might have at any other time, as it often has had, something ludicrous in it; but at this time it is serious and affecting. His noble earnestness, his fidelity, his gallant shielding of her, his generous conquest of his own wrong and his own pride for her sake, are simply honourable, manly, and true. Nothing less worthy can be seen through the lustre of such qualities in the commonest mechanic, nothing less worthy can be seen in the best-born gentleman. (Chapter 58)

The emotions previously aroused in us by the satire of Sir Leicester are used against us. When he says something we expect to see it as ridiculous, but this skilful transition changes the way we see him; and the narrator once more reminds us that there is no difference between the seemingly diffuse strands of society.

_Bleak House_ is a peculiarly satiric work, and, while Dickens developed new ways of using satire, there is still much of the traditional satire around which his earlier works, particularly _Martin Chuzzlewit_, revolved. There are many satiric portraits, which can be broadly categorised into three groups: lawyers, the nobles, and misguided philanthropists. Like the early portraits of Lady and Sir Leicester Dedlock, these offer us much opportunity for feeding our egos at their expense. Taken on their own they are conventional, and do not change throughout the novel. As usual the best are those whom Dickens characterises by some sort of pompous verbosity, like Conversation Kenge (who appears "to enjoy beyond everything the sound of his own voice....He listened to himself with obvious satisfaction") and Reverend Chadband (with his great
oratory skills and trite rhetorical questions: "What is peace, my friends? Is it war? No...”). Others are dangerous, like the repulsive Vholes, who has a “fixed way of looking at Richard,” “looking at him as if he were looking at his prey and charming it,” although his dangerousness to us is lessened by our superior view of him. Many are, unfortunately, repetitive and uninspired, like Mrs. Jellyby, Volumnia Dedlock, and Mr. Turveydrop. However, taken in context, even the more predictable satire is invested with a greater importance because they are inter-connected with so many other parts of the novel, and enriched by the satiric dialogue and imagery. As in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, there are rich connections for the reader to discover between the satiric characters. Like Inspector Bucket, the reader searches for the relationships in the world of the novel: between chancery suitors, Tom Jarndyce, Miss Flite, Gridley, and Richard; between bad parents, like Mrs. Jellyby, Mr. Turveydrop, Mrs. Pardiggle, and Lady Dedlock; between institutional predators, like Tulkinghorn, Kenge, and Vholes; between zealots of religion or ‘cause,’ like Mrs. Jellyby, Reverend Chadband, Mrs. Pardiggle; even between places, like Chancery and Krook’s shop, or Tom-all-Alone’s and Bleak House. Thus the satire attains a depth greater than any of Dickens’s previous works, for each stands not only for itself but for a myriad of other characters, ideas, suggestions, and values. *Bleak House* has the satiric imagery of *Oliver Twist* and the thematic unity of *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

The darkness of the world of *Bleak House* certainly predisposes readers to seek revenge and collude with the satirist. Indeed we are given many opportunities for narcissistic triumph, but just who is it that we are colluding with? The satiric narrator

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5 Albert J. Guerard, while pointing out that some of the repetitive characters might have appeared months apart in the original publications, goes so far as to say that “the repetitiousness of the more
keeps a low profile for one who influences the reader so greatly. He is not a character in
the world of the novel, and seldom directly reveals his own thoughts, but he naturally
establishes his characteristics through everything he tells us. He is our guide through the
novel, a "roving conductor," taking us where he wants: as at the beginning of the
second chapter where he travels "as the crow flies," and is able to point out connections
of which we are unaware between Chancery and the world of fashion. The present tense
of his narrative gives it an immediacy: he watches as we watch, and responds as we
respond, our shared experience creating an intimacy. Yet he also possesses knowledge
we do not, hinting at things without letting us in on the secret: "Has Mr. Tulkinghorn
any idea of this himself? It may be so, or it may not." Certainly it is only natural for us
to collude with such a powerful figure when he gives us the opportunity to associate with
him above his satiric targets. The power of the narrator invests the reader with a kind of
power too. As J. Hillis Miller notes "the spectator is granted a kind of omnipresence."
Most significantly he provides an embodiment of order and knowledge, the antithesis of
what he describes.

The all-pervading darkness leaves us feeling particularly pessimistic about the
world by the end of the novel. In plot terms the Court of Chancery triumphs and the
lawyers are last seen laughing maniacally as Jarndyce and Jarndyce finally consumes itself
in costs. The satiric world is left unchanged, the present tense of the satiric narrator
suggesting that it will continue as it is: Vholes will continue to devour clients, the

obvious satirical routines is, nevertheless, appalling." Bleak House (New York: Holt, Rinehart &

6 The famous outburst when Jo dies is famous because it is so rare in the novel. It would seem
less out of place, stylistically speaking, in many of Dickens's other works.
7 Guerard 845.
8 J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels (London: Oxford University Press,
1959) 160.
philanthropists will carry on as they are, and Chesney Wold sits in "dull repose." We are offered a final image of happiness, but it is an ending that seems weak compared to the powerful, apocalyptic vision of the satiric narrator. Barbara Hardy declares that "the reconciliation is too tiny, too unrepresentative, to emerge from this novel."\(^9\) Esther's view of the world is, by its first-person nature, contained within the omniscient third-person perspective of the satiric narrator. She can only present us with her limited view, and this reflects the limits of the good she can achieve. Like Oliver and the Chuzzlewit clan, and many others in Dickens's works besides, she and her loved ones can only cope with the problems and threats of the world by withdrawing from it to their own sheltered home and hearth. She and Allan Woodcourt marry and establish their own small ordered society, the new rustic version of Bleak House, where "the wind seemed never in the east." But if this conclusion seems dissatisfyingly tepid, it does not clash with our imaginative response to the satiric vision, as did the withdrawals of Oliver and Martin. Rather it is mirrored by it, for just as Esther withdraws from this world, so do we when we collude with the satiric narrator. He offers us the order and power that is lacking in the world of the novel; he manifests creative rather than destructive energy, like the sort possessed by a Tulkinghorn or a Vholes. If we collude with him then we are better off than even Esther. She must dwell in this world, and cannot completely escape the mud and fog, as Caddy Jellyby's deaf and dumb child demonstrates—she can only try to minimise its harmful effects. In a way, we can withdraw from this world by feeling superior to it.

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Conclusion

Like many satirists, Dickens often claimed that his satire did real good in the real world, whether he wished to induce "only one reader to think better of his fellow men,"1 or to be "a service to society."2 In a letter of February 18663 he asserts that "my knowledge of the general condition of the sick poor in workhouses is not of yesterday, nor are my efforts in my vocation to call merciful attention to it." Forster, informing us of a discarded introduction to American Notes, praises Dickens's "honest purpose in the use of satire."4 In an 1867 preface to Pickwick Papers Dickens reflects upon "what important social improvements have taken place about us...since they were originally written." Indeed his confidence appears to be vindicated by many letters and diaries of his readers:

When Oliver Twist came out...the most striking thing about the book was that it disclosed...an unsuspected gradation of ranks in the great mass which is commonly spoken of as the lower orders.5

Sir Francis Burdett, a Member of Parliament for forty years, wrote to his daughter of the living conditions of these "lower orders," as described in Oliver Twist:

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1 Preface to Pickwick Papers (1837).
2 Preface to Oliver Twist (1838).
3 This letter was sent to the Secretary of the Association for the Improvement of the Infirmaries of the London Workhouses, of which Dickens was a member. I have quoted it as reprinted in the Penguin English Library edition of Our Mutual Friend (1864-65. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 911.
5 This is the reaction of a contemporary critic (Cornhill X, 411) as quoted in K. J. Fielding, Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction (London: Longmans, 1965) 35.
It is very interesting, very painful, very disgusting, and as the old woman at Edinburgh, on hearing a preacher on the sufferings of Christ said, Oh dear I hope it isn’t true. Whether anything like it exists or no I mean to make enquiry for it is quite dreadful, and, to society in this country, most disgraceful.\(^6\)

Although some obviously had their eyes opened, others were rather less impressed:

I know there are such unfortunate beings as pickpockets and street walkers. I am very sorry for it and very much shocked at their mode of life, but I own that I do not much wish to hear what they say to one another.\(^7\)

All these comments seem to indicate that it was not so much Dickens’s satire that affected his audience, but the ways in which he developed it. The parts of his novels that reveal things of which his audience was unaware—like the paupers' hovels in *Oliver Twist*, or Tom-all-Alone’s—are linked to his satiric dialogue by striking, forceful satiric imagery, and these are the parts that have affected these readers.

While Dickens may have had the noblest of intentions in engaging in a satiric attack, this has little effect on me. When I read of the machinations and declamations of Bumble, Pecksniff, or Sir Leicester Dedlock I revel in the victory over institution, hypocrite, or pompous social superior that the satirist offers me. I may well experience conflicting emotions when I read other parts of the works that this satire lies within, but when I collude with the satirist I achieve the ultimate aim for readers of satire: I am

\(^6\) Also quoted from Fielding 36.

certainly not disposed to "think better of [my] fellow men" because I can feel better about myself at the expense of others.
Selected Bibliography

Works by Charles Dickens

In general I have used the Penguin English Library Edition complete works of Dickens, and in particular I have used these three main texts:


Additional Primary Texts


Critical Works


**Articles, Journals and Periodicals**

