“BY THE EXPRESS PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR”:
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND
THE AUTHORIZED ADAPTATIONS OF CHARLES DICKENS

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ABSTRACT

MARC COHEN: “By the Express Permission of the Author”: Intellectual Property and the Authorized Adaptations of Charles Dickens
(Under the direction of John McGowan and Beverly Taylor)

Charles Dickens, who believed in the concept of literary property, considered the theatrical adapters who legally appropriated his work without permission to be thieves. These “thieves” produced four types of adaptation based on Dickens’s *The Bloomsbury Christening* and *The Pickwick Papers* for which I have given the following labels: the Seed Adaptation, the Potboiler Adaptation, the Reverential Adaptation, and the Embellished Adaptation. Powerless to stop such plays, Dickens adopted a never-before-identified extra-legal defense strategy that can be broken up into phases: During the first phase Dickens created an authorized adaptation commodity that he would grant to one theater in exchange for a play characterized by fidelity to the book. During the second phase Dickens established, with his award of authorization, a pattern of alternating back and forth between two theaters every time a new book was to be published. This allowed him to exert control over two productions per book. The third phase was to write a play-disguised-as-a-tale that, based on its design, almost forced the adapters to write a play characterized by fidelity to the book. This third-phase strategy and the resulting plays were so successful—Dickens plays took over the London theaters and ten to seventeen were characterized by fidelity—that critics who considered themselves to be defenders of
the British drama took umbrage and, during that season, made Dickens, in their criticism, the symbol of the drama’s decline. For each of the authorized adaptations, Dickens superintended at least one rehearsal in which he illustrated for the actors how to read their parts. Dickens authorized plays based on seven of his works: *A Christmas Carol* (1844), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), *The Chimes* (1844), *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), *The Battle of Life* (1846), *The Haunted Man* (1848), and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1860).

Although there exists little if any record of a Victorian theory of adaptation, inferences based on dramatic criticism of these authorized adaptations reveal a coherent theory that critics both promulgated and policed, as well as a vivid picture of what it was to sit in the audience and see a typical theatrical adaptation.
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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation comes about at a time when the subjects of copyright and, more broadly, intellectual property have become important areas of study and debate in the field of English literature. No doubt interest in these subjects has come about as a result of, among other causes, the digital revolution and globalism: The digital revolution has made the unauthorized copying and sharing of copyrighted materials an everyday occurrence, possible for not just the technological savvy but by any individual with a personal computer; and globalism, which, like the digital revolution, has been, in part, fueled by the development of the internet, has opened up emerging markets that are either not legally bound to respect international intellectual property law or that are legally bound but either refuse to or are unable to enforce such laws. Perhaps the beginning of the recent trend of literary scholars choosing intellectual property as an object of study is Mark Rose’s Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright (1993).

In that book, Rose presents historical evidence to illustrate how an eighteenth-century struggle between London booksellers and provincial/Scottish booksellers resulted in the birth of the idea of literary property and copyright. Rose explains that the struggle, which was fought in the setting of the courts, was over a simple question: For how long should the exclusive right to publish a book, acquired by a London bookseller from an author, be allowed by law to extend? The provincial/Scottish booksellers, who wanted to re-print books without having the pay the London booksellers for the right to do so,
argued that such exclusive rights should expire after a set term; the London booksellers,
on the other hand, argued that the rights that they had acquired from the author were akin
to physical property, and therefore, their exclusive right to publish these books should
last in perpetuity. In order to support this legal argument that a book is more than a
physical object but also an abstract literary property, the legal representatives of the
London booksellers made a variety of novel analogies between physical property and
literary property that ultimately resulted in the birth of the concept of literary property as
well as a battle over that concept that has continued to this day—whether there truly is
such thing as “literary property,” and if so, whether literary property should be protected
by copyright as “an absolute right of property,” in the same manner that real estate is
legally protected.¹

In his book, Rose makes it clear that his purpose is not to enter the debate over
what is an author, a subject on which Foucault and others have made powerful
arguments.² Furthermore, although he comments in the book about the weaknesses of the
analogies made by the London booksellers and other advocates of literary property
rights—that it should, like other forms of property, be allowed to remain the exclusive
possession of the acquirer in perpetuity, he refrains from traveling down the path where
such stances often lead—to argue that the legal, political, and social structures that
perpetuate the ideas of literary property and copyright be in part or wholly dismantled.
Instead, Rose sticks to his primary purpose to show what historical events and conditions

¹ Mark Rose, Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993), 8. Print. Hereafter this work is cited as Rose.

resulted in the formation of the concept of literary property and the legal structures of copyright during the eighteenth century.

Like Rose’s book, this dissertation refrains from entering the debate over what is an author, and furthermore, it refrains from taking a position on whether the legal, political, and social structures that perpetuate the notions of literary property, copyright, and intellectual property ought to be, in the present moment, dissolved, weakened, left as they are, or strengthened. In fact, this dissertation refuses to even comment on the merits of the analogy between cultural production through a writer’s labor and the acquisition of physical property through labor—the analogy that was made by the advocates of the London booksellers’ position; as stated previously, Rose does denigrate this analogy at various places in his book. This dissertation, on the other hand, attempts to illustrate how Charles Dickens—a single, nineteenth-century British author who believed in the concept of literary property—used an ingenious extra-legal business strategy to “protect” his books from the London theater industry with the legal right to appropriate and adapt his books for the stage without the permission of, or compensation to, the author.

To understand the cultural context, particularly the legal context, as it pertains to copyright in Great Britain from the 1830s to the 1860s—the years covered in this dissertation—one of the best resources is John Russell Stephens’s The Profession of the Playwright: British Theatre 1800-1900, particularly his chapter “Piracy and the Defence of Dramatic Property,” in which he explains why Dickens had no legal recourse to defend himself from the theater industry that sought to adapt his work for the stage:

Until the 1860s neither legislation nor case law did anything to alleviate an area of copyright obscurity which was the cause of much ill-feeling between novelists and playwrights, namely, dramatised versions of novels, which were in effect immune from the law of copyright. Novels had
copyright protection neither from those hack dramatists who, recognising
their complete defencelessness, plundered them for all they were worth,
nor from managers who were tempted by their cheapness in dramatic
form. All popular novelists from Walter Scott onwards were victims of
this form of piracy . . . 3

Stephens goes on to describe a number of indignities—indignities, that is, in the view of
both Dickens and Stephens—that were visited upon the author and his books. One
notable event, recounted by Stephens and others, is how Dickens avenged himself on one
of the appropriating, hack playwrights, William Thomas Moncrieff, by basing the
satirical “literary gentleman” in Nicholas Nickleby on Moncrieff himself. This incident
and a number of other related events are touched upon in Chapter 1 of the dissertation,
which explains in full the provocations—four types of unauthorized theatrical adaptations
based on Dickens’s The Bloomsbury Christening and The Pickwick Papers—that
apparently caused Dickens to adopt his extra-legal strategy for co-opting the major
players in the Dickens adaptation industry.

The other essential critic besides Stephens who writes about the legal context that
allowed theaters and adapters to appropriate any published book for the stage without the
permission of, or compensation to, the author is H. Philip Bolton, whose book Dickens
Dramatized presents a remarkably well researched handlist of nineteenth- and twentieth-
century adaptations of the works of Dickens. His chapter “Playmakers: Playwrights”
explains that, in the 1832 Act of Parliament, the government for the first time extended
copyright protection to the “owners” of plays—be they playwrights, theater managers, or
publishers—by legislation that protected the copyright holder not only from those who
would make copies of the published play without permission, but also from those who

3 John Russell Stephens, The Profession of the Playwright: British Theatre 1800—1890
would produce the play at their theaters without paying for performance rights. Bolton asserts, and Stephens would agree, that this piece of legislation may have been a boon for the writers or acquirers of published plays who believed that they owned a “property,” but not for authors of books—such as Dickens—who believed that the theatrical adapters were stealing their literary property. Thus, authors of books who sought to prevent the unauthorized adaptation of their narratives by the British theater industry made no gains as a result of the 1832 Act.

This dissertation builds on the work of a number of scholarly inquiries, perhaps most importantly on the stance expressed by Stephens and Bolton that before 1860 Dickens did not take action to defend his reputation (which he felt was being harmed) or the integrity of his books (that he felt were being violated) from the adaptation teams of the London theater industry. Both Stephens and Bolton agree that Dickens’s first strategic action to defend what he considered to be his literary property took place in 1860-61. These scholars explain that in order to protect A Message from the Sea, a short story that he co-wrote with Wilkie Collins and published in his periodical All the Year Round, Dickens penned his own adapted play and registered it with the Stationers’ Hall, an action that according to the 1842 Copyright Act, a playwright (as opposed to a novelist) must perform in order to protect his performance rights.4 When the manager of the Britannia Theatre did what managers had been doing for decades and produced an unauthorized adaptation of the story on his stage in 1861, Dickens threatened legal action against the man, citing his play registered with the Stationers’ Hall; the upshot is that the

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4 Stephens 98.
disputants ultimately settled out of court, and the theater paid Dickens £50 for the performance rights.

This dissertation argues that Dickens’s defense of *A Message from the Sea* in 1860 did not represent his first strategic attempt to defend his books from the unauthorized adapters. In fact, contrary to the assertions of Stephens and Bolton, in fact, Dickens’s first strategic defense began as early as 1844 with *A Christmas Carol* and concluded in 1860 with *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens’s strategy, never articulated but clear from his documented actions, was to invent (and exploit) a commodity—authorized adaptations—which he would market to the adapters for a price. Dickens’s system worked this way: In exchange for guarantees from the theater management, the playwright/s, and the actors (what I call the “adaptation team”) that the adaptation would grant authority to the novel or tale (i.e., produce a play characterized by fidelity to the book), Dickens would, in the case of the tales, give early proof sheets to the adapters, thus enabling them to beat the competing adapters to the stage, and, in the case of six out of seven of the authorized adaptations, he would allow his sanction to be advertised, thus giving those adaptations a commercial advantage.

Finding success with his initial strategy, Dickens apparently became more ambitious: In a desire to co-opt more than one adaptation team at a time for a single book, Dickens began to grant his authorization to more than one theater, alternating his authorization back and forth between the two each time a new book was published; this approach worked well because, once Dickens’s back-and-forth pattern was established, each theater had a reason to believe that, so long as, when it was not their turn, they produced an unauthorized adaptation of the latest book as if it were authorized—that is,
so long as they produced a play that granted authority to the book—then they would most likely be awarded Dickens's authorization the next time. The evidence shows that, with one exception, a case in which Dickens was paid to remain at the Lyceum for two adaptations in a row, Dickens never awarded his authorization to the same adaptation team for two books in a row. Chapter 2 of this dissertation documents the first two phases of Dickens's defense strategy.

Once Dickens found that the first two phases of his strategy worked, he then went a step further. He wrote a Christmas tale that many critics agreed was a kind of a play-disguised-as-a-tale, with a structure, dialogue, plot, and characters that seemed in every way except in the outward form, to be a play. This time, though, in addition to having control over two adaptations of his latest book, Dickens seemed to desire to co-opt all of the London adaptation teams that sought to adapt his next book. The book in question is *A Cricket on the Hearth*, and as a result of the popularity of the play, the popularity of the book, and the successful model established by that book's authorized adaptation team, Dickens essentially co-opted every adaptation team in London—an estimated seventeen theaters during the winter season of 1845-46. Dickens's apparent strategy with this book was so successful that some of the London theater critics—those who considered themselves defenders of the British legitimate drama—during that winter season made Dickens, in their reviews, the symbol of the decline of the drama. Dickens's apparent strategy for co-opting all of the adaptation teams in London and the ensuing "Cricket-on-the-Hearth Mania," "contracted" by nearly every theater manager in London, is recounted in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.
Having, in Chapter 1, established the impetus for Dickens’s strategic response to the unauthorized theatrical adaptation of his works; having, in Chapter 2, explicated and shown the results of the first two phases of Dickens’s strategy; and having, in Chapter 3, done the same with the third stage of Dickens’s strategy; Chapter 4 offers yet another set of important findings that emerge as a result of the study of the authorized adaptations of Charles Dickens. The important findings referred to are 1) a clear explication of the Victorian theory of adaptation; and 2) a reproduction of the making of, and the audience experience of watching a typical Victorian adaptation. This explication and the reproductions are producible as a result of an analysis of the dramatic criticism in the newspapers and periodicals that covered the authorized adaptations of Charles Dickens between 1844 and 1860.

This dissertation covers a variety of texts written between 1834 and 1860 that are relevant to the authorized adaptations of Charles Dickens. These texts include but are not limited to Dickens’s books, the adapters’ plays, Dickens’s letters, miscellaneous diary entries, theatrical memoirs, and dramatic criticism written in response to the authorized adaptations. The authorized adaptations are based on two novels and five Christmas tales by Dickens: *A Christmas Carol* (tale, 1844); *Martin Chuzzlewit* (novel, 1844); *The Chimes* (tale, 1844-45); *A Cricket on the Hearth* (tale, 1845-46); *The Battle of Life* (tale, 1846-47); *The Haunted Man* (tale, 1848-49); and *A Tale of Two Cities* (novel, 1860).

For the purposes of my study, I identify a theatrical adaptation as authorized when Dickens took at least two out of the following three actions: 1) he gave early proof sheets of the book to the adaptation team; 2) he allowed the theater manager to publicize his sanction; and 3) he superintended at least one full-cast rehearsal, illustrating through a
dramatic reading of either the book or the play how the dialogue should be recited by the actors.

Another important note is that although the authorized adaptations were written between 1844 and 1860, this dissertation concentrates more narrowly on the years 1844-46 for two reasons: First, these were the years when Dickens introduced all three of his defense strategies; and second, the winter season of 1845-46 represents the climax of his overall strategy. Never again, after the “Cricket-on-the-Hearth Mania,” would Dickens achieve all the goals that he had apparently set for his authorized adaptations; for this reason, although Chapter 4 of the dissertation makes use of the dramatic criticism written in response to the authorized adaptations of books published after 1846—*The Battle of Life, The Haunted Man, and A Tale of Two Cities*—the circumstances of these adaptations and the plays themselves receive relatively little attention in this study compared to the authorized adaptations produced between 1844 and 1846 (*A Christmas Carol* through *The Cricket on the Hearth*).

In addition to the scholarship of the previously mentioned John Russell Stephens and H. Philip Bolton, this dissertation contributes to and builds upon the work of the following scholars, all of who have made invaluable direct or indirect contributions to the study of the nineteenth-century theatrical adaptations of the works of Charles Dickens: Peter Ackroyd, S. J. Adair Fitz-Gerald, Philip V. Allingham, Philip Cox, F. Dubrez Fawcett, John Forster, Richard Fulkerson, Madeline House, Fred Kaplan, Fred G. Kitton, Carol Hanbery MacKay, Martin Meisel, Malcolm Morley, Allardyce Nicoll, Robert L. Patten, T. Edgar Pemberton, Ernest Reynolds Paul Schlicke, Michael Slater, Grahame Smith, Graham Story, Kathleen Tillotson, and Alexander Woollcott.
CHAPTER ONE

DICKENS VICTIMIZED: FOUR TYPES OF THEATRICAL ADAPTATION
BASED ON THE BLOOMSBURY CHRISTENING AND THE PICKWICK PAPERS

INTRODUCTION

Charles Dickens believed in the “concept of literary property,” which, according to Mark Rose, came into being during the eighteenth century in England when a business dispute arose between the London printers and publishers and Scottish/provincial printers and publishers\(^1\); in this dispute, which played itself out in the courts, the advocates on behalf of the London parties argued that when they acquired the rights to a literary work from an author, it was theirs in perpetuity or until such time as they sold it to a third party, at which time it would become that third party’s property in perpetuity (until that the third party sold it, and so on). The Scottish/provincial printers and publishers, on the other hand, argued that such printing and publishing rights should not last in perpetuity but instead should expire after a set term. The Scottish/provincial parties ultimately won the dispute, but an argument made by the advocates of the London parties gave birth to the concept of literary property: these advocates argued that literature, because it was produced by labor, should be considered similar to physical property that has been produced by labor and which is owned by the property holder in perpetuity (until ownership rights are transferred). Therefore, argued these advocates, ownership rights to literary property should also be owned in perpetuity. Copyright, which according to

\(^1\) See Rose, chapter one.
Mark Rose is "the practice of securing marketable rights in texts that are treated as commodities," came about as a direct result of the advent of the concept of literary property.\(^2\)

There exists a great deal of evidence that Dickens was a believer in both the concept of literary property and copyright. One text that shows Dickens's belief in these two concepts comes from his letter to Sergeant Thomas Noon Talfourd, in which the author expresses his appreciation to the lawyer for his advocacy of a copyright law in 1837 that would secure for authors the publishing rights to their works until their deaths, at which time those rights would transfer to their heirs for seven years. The book dedicated to Talfourd, to which Dickens refers in his letter below, is *The Pickwick Papers:*

My Dear Sir,

If I had not enjoyed the happiness of your private friendship, I should still have dedicated this work to you, as a slight and most inadequate acknowledgement of the inestimable services you are rendering to the literature of your country, and of the lastling benefits you will confer upon the authors of this and succeeding generations, by securing to them and their descendants a permanent interest in the copyright of their works.

Many a fevered head and palsied hand will gather new vigour in the hour of sickness and distress from your excellent exertions; many a widowed mother and orphan child, who would otherwise reap nothing from the fame of departed genius but its too frequent legacy of poverty and suffering, will bear, in their altered condition, higher testimony to the value of your labours than the most lavish encomiums from lip or pen could ever afford. . . .\(^3\)

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\(^2\) Rose 3.

As Dickens well knew, the legal process of Britain moved slowly, and the Copyright Act of 1837 was no exception; although the bill passed that year, it did not receive royal approval until 1842.

A second proof attesting to Dickens’s belief in the concept of literary property and its institutional support in the form of copyright may be found in speeches delivered by the author during his tour of America in 1842. During that tour, when Dickens gave speeches, he typically reserved a portion of each one to making arguments on behalf of the enforcement of what he termed “international copyright protection” for British authors in America and American authors in Britain. In short, Dickens wanted the same copyright protections afforded to him in Great Britain to be in effect on American soil, where the publishers were making large profits on reprints of his works for which they paid Dickens little or nothing. The following excerpt, from a speech delivered in Boston on February 1, 1842, at a public dinner, communicates Dickens’s continued advocacy of literary property and copyright protection for authors:

. . . before I sit down, there is one topic on which I am desirous to lay particular stress. It has, or should have, a strong interest for us all, since to its literature every country must look for one great means of refining and improving its people, and one great source of national pride and honour. You have in America great writers—great writers—who will live in all time, and are as familiar to our lips as household words. Deriving (as they all do in a greater or less degree, in their several walks) their inspiration from the stupendous country which gave them birth, they diffuse a better knowledge of it, and a higher love for it, all over the civilized world. I take leave to say, in the presence of some of those gentlemen, that I hope the time is not far distant when they, in America, will receive of right some substantial profit and return in England from their labours; and when we, in England, shall receive some substantial profit and return for ours. Pray do not misunderstand me. Securing for myself from day to day the means of an honourable subsistence, I would rather have the affectionate regard of my fellow men, than I would have heaps and mines of gold. But the two things do not seem to me incompatible. They cannot be, for nothing good in incompatible with justice. There must be an
international arrangement in this respect: England has done her part, and I am confident that the time is not far distant when America will do hers. It becomes the character of a great country; firstly, because it is justice; secondly, because without it you never can have, and keep a literature of your own.  

in both his letter to Talfourd and in his Boston speech, Dickens links the establishment of strong copyright laws to the establishment of strong and flourishing national literatures in England and America. Furthermore, it is important to note that in both venues Dickens refers to his works as the product of “labours” an identification that echoes the analogy made by the London booksellers advocating for ownership in perpetuity—that a literary work is like physical property in that both have been made as a result of physical “labour” and thus both should be treated the same way: as property. Not without an understanding of Dickens’s belief in the concept of literary property can one appreciate the degree to which Dickens was bothered by the four types of unauthorized theatrical adaptations of his prose fiction that were produced in London between 1834 and 1837.

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Not long after the publication of Dickens’s sketch, The Bloomsbury Christening (1834), and during the publication of his serialized novel The Pickwick Papers (1836-37), playwrights and managers of the London theatrical industry appropriated these works and adapted them for the stage. The resulting plays, when analyzed, can be classified into four categories—the Seed Adaptation; the Reverential Adaptation; the Potboiler Adaptation; and the Embellished Adaptation. Dickens liked none of them.

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Some of the reasons Dickens felt victimized by the adaptations based on the sketch and the novel have nothing to do with their content. First, he authorized none of the adaptations. Second, he received no compensation from any of the managers or playwrights in exchange for the right to adapt his work. Third, he received no share of the revenue brought in by the theaters from the paying audiences. Fourth, in the case of *Pickwick*, three of the four types of adaptation were produced while the serialization of the book was still yet unfinished. Fifth, at least one of the playwright-adapters published statements claiming credit for having made what is an inherently “undramatic” narrative into something “dramatic.” Sixth, Dickens did not want any interlopers contaminating his special relationship with readers—especially before or during the time they were reading the book. Seventh, he had no say in the casting of actors or their performances, which were sometimes terrible. And eighth, the law in Great Britain provided him with no recourse against what he considered theft.

Then there was the content. From Dickens’s point of view, each of the four types of adaptation represented a set of abuses of him and his work. This chapter is about the characteristics of the four types of adaptations based upon *The Bloomsbury Christening* and *The Pickwick Papers*. Dickens did not see each of the types as equally egregious—some were more reverential to him and his works than others; however, he disapproved of each in its own way. This chapter will clarify the reasons why Dickens felt exploited by the British theater industry during the period in which he published these two works, and explain why Dickens felt motivated to co-opt his most frequent adapters.
TYPE I: THE SEED ADAPTATION

The Christening adapted by John Baldwin Buckstone

The first ever adaptation of a Dickens work was based on one of the Sketches by Boz, entitled The Bloomsbury Christening. That adaptation, the one-act farce The Christening, which opened at the Adelphi Theatre on October 13, 1834, was written by John Baldwin Buckstone, one of the most beloved theater people in nineteenth-century Britain. This low comedian-manager-playwright, who would go on to earn a reputation as a master producer of comedy at the Haymarket, had a knack for writing and adapting literary and dramatic works by other authors, particularly French authors—transforming them into melodramas, burlettas, pantomimes and farces for the British stage. In the course of his career he wrote approximately 160 plays, including the important domestic melodrama, Luke the Labourer, and hit melodrama vehicles, such as The Green Bushes, for actor-manager-Dickens interpreter Madame Céleste. Céleste, incidentally, will come up later as she would produce several, and act in one, of Dickens’s authorized adaptations.

The play in question here, The Christening, centers on Nicodemus Dumps, a fifty-year-old neurotic bachelor who takes a certain pleasure in seeing the dark side of life and passing on his gloomy perspective to whomever might cross his path. When the financially secure Dumps is asked by his nephew, Charles Kitterbell, to serve as his coming baby’s godfather, the children-hating uncle agrees to do it. However, after the baby boy comes, Charles regrets his choice when, at the evening party following the christening, Dumps delivers the gloomiest of possible toasts, implying that there is a

good chance that the baby will die young of a horrible illness, and if not that, he will someday visit misery on his devoted parents by ungratefully forgetting his filial duty.

While unfaithful to the story and the plot of the original sketch, Buckstone’s play is indeed faithful to the spirit of the work by Boz. In that regard, Buckstone’s very first adaptation of Dickens’s work was successful in a way that few nineteenth-century adaptations would be. Capturing the spirit of a Dickens story was and is a very difficult task, because, as many adapters have found, much of the spirit of Dickens’s books seems to be located in the words spoken by the tale’s narrator, as opposed to the story, plot, dialogue, and characterizations. In “Principles of Comedy and Dramatic Effect” Percy Fitzgerald is one of those who attributed Dickens’s effect, in part, to the narration.⁶

Another feature [of Dickens’s effect] lies not so much in making the characters, as in “bringing them out” by the curious comments, hints, and remarks of the novelist himself. It is as though we were witnessing all the scenes of the story, with a mysterious spirit by our side, who had privileged and Asmodean access to secret interiors of house and mind. Thus is given, for behaviour and speech and deportment, otherwise unmeaning, a secret key, which makes all intelligible. Now it is obvious that on the stage all this must be lost.

The idea expressed above, that Dickens’s effect might be located in the narration, will surprise some readers who see Dickens’s characterization as his defining genius.

However, as is clear even in the most faithful of theatrical adaptations, when Dickens’s characterizations, story and plot are presented as written, the play still lacks the spirit of the original text and, thus, feels hollow. Buckstone, on the other hand, captured that complex spirit.

Perhaps the most important thing Buckstone did, as a playwright, to capture the spirit of the sketch was to embrace Dickens’s telling details, which bring Dickens’s

representations to life. Buckstone included even secondary details, which could seem expendable to an adapter looking to trim unnecessary elements, but which in fact reveal themselves to be among the secret ingredients to capturing the spirit of Dickens in an adaptation. One such telling detail, which would seem to be easy to discard, but which Buckstone retained, is the verbal representation of what happened at the christening in the church (which, in both the sketch and the adaptation, are not dramatized). In the original sketch, the reader is told that the godfather character fumbled the baby into the baptismal font; and, likewise, in Buckstone’s adaptation, the audience is told the identical thing—that the godfather dropped the baby. This detail of characterization, seemingly secondary, is truly valued by the reader even though it has no causal connection to any of the major events in the plot. All it does is further underscore the characterizations of the baby and the godfather: the baby, who is the object of all this fussing, keeps getting injured by careless adults; and this godfather is the most inappropriate of the men to be a godfather. Perhaps, like critic Dorothy Van Ghent, Buckstone-the-reader recognized that an essential element of Dickensian description is the “dehumanizing of the human”—the godfather, of all people, is the one who drops the baby, and the baby, despite being dropped, seems to have survived the fall without injury.\footnote{Dorothy Van Ghent, “The Dickens World: A View from Todgers’s,” \textit{The Sewanee Review} 58.3 (1950): 419-38. Print.} Buckstone arguably valued a narrative’s secondary details; beyond these telling details, however, Buckstone felt no need to write a faithful adaptation.

In his re-working of the sketch for the stage, Buckstone changed the story’s point of view from that of the uncle-godfather Dumps (called “Grun” in this adaptation) to that of the new father (Charles Kitterbell in the sketch; Hopkins Twiddy in the farce). Not
coincidentally, Buckstone himself played the part of the new father, the character with whom the audience is expected to identify. In addition to the point-of-view change, Buckstone changed the identity of the nightmare godfather from that of a misanthrope uncle to a misanthrope lodger who is corralled into acting as godfather when the original godfather cannot or will not show up. New characters were added as well, most importantly, Mrs. Dolly Lovechild, perhaps the most charming feature of the adaptation. Lovechild is a funny dynamo of a godmother who acts as a kind of enforcement officer for the cultural traditions of godparenthood, including those of expensive gift-giving and speeches. Unlike in the original sketch, the gloomy godfather of this story has a worthy opponent with whom he can struggle. Lovechild’s tag-line, which is provoked whenever the godfather claims he will not fulfill a godfatherly duty, says it all: “You think you won’t, but you will.”

Buckstone made other story changes Buckstone in order to accommodate the conventions of farce and to maximize the drama. For example, Buckstone wrote in the appearance of a second child, for whom Grum is also needed as a godfather. Unlike the playwrights who wrote the authorized adaptations, Buckstone saw himself as obligated to the theater and audience, not to Charles Dickens. Because Buckstone saw the original story as merely a grab bag from which to gather usable elements, and because he made no use of Dickens’s name in promoting it, this type of Dickens adaptation can be categorized as a Seed Adaptation.

Buckstone neither asked for Dickens’s permission to adapt his story into a farce, nor was he granted it. Dickens publicly responded in a Letter to the Editor of the

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8 Buckstone 26; emphasis is original.
*Monthly Magazine*, published in the November 1, 1834 issue. The Editor precedes the letter with an introduction:

The following letter has been sent by our much-injured friend Boz; a learned gentleman with whom most of our readers have been tolerably intimate these last twelve months. We know that he already prepared a farce on the subject, which Mr. Buckstone has so unceremoniously appropriated...

The letter itself then follows:

My Dear Editor,

I celebrated a christening a few months ago in the *Monthly*, and I find that Mr. Buckstone has officiated as self-elected godfather, and carried off my child to the Adelphi, for the purpose, probably, of fulfilling one of his sponsorial duties, viz., of teaching it the vulgar tongue.

Now, as I claim an entire right to do ‘what I like with my own’, and as I contemplated a dramatic destination for my offspring, I must enter my protest against the kidnapping process.

It is very little consolation to me to know, when my handkerchief is gone, that I may see it flaunting with renovated beauty in Field-lane; and if Mr. Buckstone has too many irons in the fire to permit him to get up his own ‘things’, I don’t think he ought to be permitted to apply to my chest of drawers.

Just give him a good ‘blow up’ in your ‘magazine’,—will you?

I remain, your’s,

Boz.

According to the editors of *The Letters*, no manuscript of a Dickens-authored farce based on *The Bloomsbury Christening* has been located. However, that play need not be found in order to conclude the following—that Boz felt victimized by Buckstone because the playwright had appropriated his sketch without permission. And to express his discontent, he characterized Buckstone as a kidnapper.

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TYPE 2: THE REVERENTIAL ADAPTATION

*The Pickwick Club* adapted by Edward Stirling

The second adaptation of a Dickens work in history, and the first adaptation of any Dickens novel ever, was also the first Dickens adaptation to be produced on the stage before the work had been finished by Dickens or distributed by the publisher. This play, *The Pickwick Club; or, The Age We Live In, A Burletta in Three Acts*, was adapted by Edward Stirling from *The Pickwick Papers* for the City of London Theatre, and it opened on March 27, 1837.\(^{10}\) At the time that Stirling was writing the adaptation, Dickens had only released to the public between ten to thirteen numbers out of the twenty he had agreed to write. In fact, the last two numbers of the completed serialization, nineteen and twenty, would not be distributed by the publisher, Chapman & Hall, until November 1837. The obvious consequence is that the adaptation being written by the playwright would exclude any narrative elements yet-to-be-born of Dickens' imagination. Some of those yet-to-be-born elements include the Bardell vs. Pickwick trial and Pickwick's ordeal in Fleet Prison. Another consequence of adapting a serialization-in-progress is that a great number of changes would need to be made the available text in order to adapt it to the form of a three-act burletta. And such changes, because they would be made without Boz's consent, probably caused Dickens to feel victimized in yet another way.

Edward Stirling, according to a journal of the day, was an Oxford-born theater man who started his stage career acting in a London loft, but through diligence and a willingness to work in theaters far from the Metropolis, rose to a position of stage

manager and acting manager in a number of prominent London theatres. As an actor, he would occasionally share the stage with likes of an Edmund Kean or another star, but he would never achieve acting stardom himself. Perhaps his greatest talent as an actor was his ability to “double” other actors, such as O. Smith (a Dickens interpreter who will be discussed later). He was so good at studying other men’s parts, and the manner in which they played their roles, that he could step in on short notice without the audience catching on. His wife, Fanny Stirling, who before marriage went by the stage-surname Clifton, was a different case; she had the necessary stuff to become a star. For more than fifty years the comic actress with an exaggerated, French acting-style landed various prominent parts at most the name theaters of London. It is a testament to her talent that William Charles Macready recruited her to work with him at the Haymarket in 1840.

More than as an actor or stage manager, Edward Stirling is remembered as the most prolific nineteenth-century playwright-adapter of the works of Charles Dickens. These plays, two of which were authorized adaptations and the rest of which were not, include *The Pickwick Club* (unauthorized, City of London Theatre, 1837); *Oliver Twist; or, The Workhouse Boy* (unauthorized, City of London Theatre, 1838); *The Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (unauthorized, Adelphi, 1838); *Horatio Sparkins* (from *Sketches by Boz*, unauthorized, Olympic Theatre, 1840); *The Old Curiosity Shop; or, One Hour from

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Humphrey’s Clock (unauthorized, Adelphi, 1840); Barnaby Rudge; or, The Riots of London in 1780 (unauthorized, New Strand Theatre, 1841); A Christmas Carol; or Past, Present & Future (authorized, Adelphi Theatre, 1844); Martin Chuzzlewit (authorized, Lyceum Theatre, 1844), The Chimes: A Goblin Story; or, Some Bells that Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year In (unauthorized, Lyceum Theatre, 1844); The Cricket on the Hearth; A Fairy Tale of Home (unauthorized, Adelphi Theatre, 1845); The Battle of Life (unauthorized, Surrey Theatre, 1846)\textsuperscript{14}; and The Haunted Man; or, The Compact with the Ghost (unauthorized, Olympic Theatre, 1848).\textsuperscript{15}

In the spring of 1837, when The Pickwick Club opened, Edward Stirling was the stage manager for Mrs. Honey at the City of London Theatre, a house known for melodrama. Under pressure to churn out new plays weekly or even nightly for an audience that expected variety and novelty, Stirling presented a work, based on Boz’s The Pickwick Papers, which he hoped would capitalize on the current rage for all things Pickwickian. He admired both Boz and the serialization-in-progress, and thus wrote an adaptation that, in many respects, granted authority to the work being serialized. It is likely that he recognized in Boz a superstar in the making, and thus chose to be more respectful to the man and his creation than Buckstone had been to Boz and the authority of The Bloomsbury Christening.

Unlike Buckstone, who cherry-picked Boz’s situation, character types, and telling details, but discarded the rest in order to write his seed adaptation based on The Bloomsbury Christening, Edward Stirling wrote a new, reverential type of Dickens

\textsuperscript{14} Bolton suggests that George Dibdin Pitt may have written most of this play.

\textsuperscript{15} Most of the above information comes from Bolton’s hand-list.
adaptation. A reverential adaptation is one that respects the original literary work as having some authority, and attempts to mirror it as much as possible on the stage, both materially and spiritually. Yet, while a reverential adaptation strives for fidelity, it does not ignore stage conventions or audience expectations. The reverential adaptation is a form that also grants authority both to the theater manager and to the audience that attends his theater. The reverential adapter, for example, knows that the law is on his and the manager’s side, not the novelist’s, when it comes to appropriating the work, and so he does not scruple to produce an adaptation of a serialization-in-progress and he feels no obligation to pay the novelist for the right to use his or her work or to share the profits. The reverential adapter also knows that a famous author’s name can be exploited in order to increase theater attendance and, thus, revenue. Therefore, he does not hesitate to use the author’s name (without permission) in the play’s title and in the advertising copy. Lastly, a reverential adapter knows that some theater patrons come to a show, not as book readers expecting a duplicate reading experience, but as playgoers expecting a theatrical experience. For this reason the reverential adapter is willing to condense, omit, add, and invent in order to please and meet the needs of the theater and its playgoers. However, let it be reiterated that because the reverential adapter also grants authority to the book, he attempts to limit the number of changes made, and whenever making a change is unavoidable, he attempts to make it conform to the spirit of the original work.

What Stirling did with his adaptation *The Pickwick Club*, first and foremost, was retain most of the major story events, in the first ten numbers of Dickens’s orginal, involving Pickwick, his three fellow Pickwickians—Mr. Snodgrass, Mr. Winkle and Mr. Tupman—, Mr. Wardle, Aunt Rachael, and Jingle. In the first act Stirling introduces the
club and puts Pickwick into conflict with the cockney cab driver; he has Jingle cause Winkle to be unwittingly dragged into a duel; and then, in the act’s climax, he has Jingle elope with Aunt Rachael. Then, in the second act, Stirling begins with Wardle and company recovering Aunt Rachael and Pickwick hiring Sam Weller; he then shows the election in Eatonswill and has Emily test Snodgrass’s character while disguised as a fortune teller; and then in the climax, he has Pickwick thrown into the pound for supposedly trespassing on the girls’ boarding school. Finally, in the third act, Stirling begins by having Sam and Old Weller confront Stiggins; then he establishes that there will be a wedding at Christmas; after that, Stirling has Pickwick arrested and cleared for (unwittingly) entering a lady’s room at night; and then, in the climax, he represents the Christmas/wedding celebration at Manor Farm in Dingley Dell.

While it may appear that Stirling merely omitted certain matter from the story and plot of the first ten numbers of the novel in order to condense it into three acts, upon closer examination, it is clear that he made certain additions and inventions to the story and plot in order to make such concision possible. For now, though, note the other ways in which Stirling shows reverence to the original novel. In this adaptation he invents no new characters, and, with the exception of the omission of certain personality traits in secondary characters (such as Snodgrass), most of the major traits of characters are dramatized in a way that is consistent with the original work. What is more, Stirling sets all of the events in the locations where they occur in the book. And finally, the ending—the wedding/Christmas party—is made to be remarkably consistent with the ending of number 10, a rare achievement among adapters of Dickens’s serialization-in-progress, who often had to radically alter the endings because the last event depicted in the
serialization-in-progress would not work in the play as written. Indeed, on the surface it would seem that, regarding this particular adaptation, Dickens had little about which he could complain regarding the content.

However, Stirling did rework several elements in order to make the novel work for the theater. First and most obviously, Stirling included songs in the play. In particular, the character of Emily Wardle, played by Miss Mears at the City of London Theatre, is given a number of singing opportunities. In fact, Stirling does a great deal to enhance the character of Emily for the purposes of the dramatization. In addition to Emily Wardle, the mobs of the story are also given special opportunities to sing as a chorus. The reason that Stirling included these songs has to do with the burletta genre, to which the playwright was trying to make The Pickwick Papers conform. Since the year was 1837 and minor theaters would not attain a license to stage legitimate plays until 1845, the City of London Theatre could not present an adaptation as a comedy or tragedy. Only Covent Garden and Drury Lane had a royal patent to present those. Therefore, if it wanted to show an adaptation of Dickens’s book, its management had several choices of form acceptable to the Lord Chamberlain: melodrama, farce, pantomime, or burletta. Perhaps because it came closest to the tone of comedy, Stirling chose the burletta, a dramatic form which differed from legitimate theater in that it was made up of a maximum of three acts, and that music is regularly integrated into the play. Thus, Dickens had to endure the insertion of music and lyrics—lyrics that he did not write—into his narrative. As the writer of an operetta, The Village Coquettes, which played only four months prior, Dickens would have been especially irked to see somebody else’s lyrics attached to his narrative.
The mention of *The Village Coquettes* calls for a summary of Dickens's brief career as a professional playwright (which should not be confused with the work Dickens did as a writer, producer, and actor for amateur theatricals). According to Paul Schlicke, the first of Dickens's attempts to write for the professional stage was produced at the St. James's Theatre in 1836. 

Dickens's burletta, *The Strange Gentleman*, is a farcical adaptation of one of his sketches, entitled "The Great Winglebury Duel." Although, Schlicke reports, Dickens treated *Gentleman* as a mere trifle, he seemed to have taken much more seriously *The Village Coquettes*, which he wrote that same year in collaboration with noted composer John Hullah. To Dickens's disappointment, neither his libretto nor the operetta, in general, was well received; it gave up the stage after a run of sixteen performances. Only one other play penned by Dickens for the professional theater would make it to the stage, another farce for the St. James's called *Is She His Wife?*, produced in 1837, and that play, too, had a short run. Although Dickens, in an attempt to establish a collaborative working relationship with William Charles Macready at Covent Garden, wrote a farce, *The Lamplighter*, and proposed to write an adaptation of his very own *Oliver Twist*, both in 1838, neither attempt led to a play. Thus, Dickens apparently abandoned his project to write for the professional stage in 1838.

A second major change made to *Pickwick* by Stirling was the elaboration of the youthful Emily Wardle character in order to provide a role for a young leading lady who could sing in a burletta. In the novel, the comic middle-aged character Aunt Rachael is the only female who plays an absolutely essential role in the story leading up to and including the tenth number; her love affair with Tupman and her elopement with Jingle.

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in addition to providing a wonderful source of humor, exist at the very spine of the plot. Other than Rachael, however, the only important female character in the novel through number ten is Mrs. Bardell, who, the serial reader knows, is suing Pickwick for breach of promise, because she believes (incorrectly) that he has reneged on a marriage proposal. Her part could have been developed by the adapter, but not for a youthful leading lady. Since Mrs. Bardell is a widow and a contemporary of Pickwick’s. In addition to the age problem, there is also the problem that the breach-of-promise storyline had not yet been resolved in the serialization. If Stirling had included this storyline in the adaptation he would have had to invent a resolution that would re-write the novel to such a degree that his would no longer be a reverential adaptation. Finally, while both Emily and Isabella Wardle are the right age for a young leading lady, Dickens wrote them as flat types, not as round, developed characters, thus leaving the novel as written with no obvious characters who could be brought to life by a young, singing leading lady.

Because of the lack of developed, youthful female characters in the first ten numbers of the novel, the adapter seeking to meet the needs and expectations of the acting company, the genre, and the audiences had the five following options: (1) keep the female roles as they are and cast the leading lady in a small supporting role, such as that of Emily or Isabella; (2) age the leading lady with makeup and ask her to play Aunt Rachael; (3) have the leading lady play a breeches part in the adaptation, such as the youthful role of Sam Weller; (4) change the age of Rachael, making her much younger than she is in the novel; or (5) develop a pre-existing female role and create/enhance a story line to accommodate her. Edward Stirling went with choice number five and developed the part of Emily Wardle.
With his version of Emily, Stirling came very close to violating the authority that he had, in most ways, granted the book. He enhanced Emily’s role by making her a major plotline protagonist, driving her own scenes through her strong will. The Emily of the adaptation desires to evaluate and test Snodgrass as potential husband-material. Of course, the Emily of the novel also has this desire, but not to the degree that her storyline becomes equal in importance to Pickwick’s. Stirling’s version made Emily the prominent Wardle sister and alternated scenes depicting her testing Snodgrass with scenes in which the protagonist is Pickwick. Another way of explaining the above to say that, with Emily, Stirling turned someone who is a minor protagonist (at best) in the novel into a major protagonist in his adaptation. As will be illustrated in Chapter 2, Stirling never made a minor character a protagonist in one of his authorized adaptations.

By making Emily Wardle a protagonist, Stirling came close to the borderline that separates a reverential adaptation from an embellished adaptation. The latter type of Dickens adaptation will be explained in detail in a coming section, but for now, let it just be understood that an embellished adaptation does not scruple to make changes to the content of the original novel if the change is deemed by the adapter to be an improvement (i.e., a better idea). In contrast, a reverential adaptation holds the original novel and its author in far too high regard to consider making changes for reasons other than to conform to the basic needs to the theater, the genre, and the audience. However, Dickens or some audience members might have considered the enhancement of Emily’s role as characteristic of an embellished adaptation because such a change was arguably not essential to make the play conform, and promoting Emily to a major protagonist improves the content of the novel.
A closer look at this adaptation also reveals several other characteristic traits of a reverential adaptation. The first is that, whenever possible, and wherever it would not overtly violate the authority of the novel, secondary characters were replaced by primary characters, not only for the sake of unity, but also to keep certain characters on the stage (thus limiting the *dramatis personae*). For example, in this adaptation Stirling replaces Stiggins, the humbug of a Methodist preacher who has latched himself onto Mrs. Weller, with Jingle, who is playing yet another role in his actor’s repertoire (a minister whom he has made up, conveniently named Stiggins). In doing so, Jingle’s character remains consistent—that of a disguise-wearing con man; and the actor playing Jingle, E. Macarthy, is given more stage time. The result is a greater sense of unity in the staging without having to alter Jingle’s character.

A second characteristic of a reverential adaptation and of Stirling’s work in particular is a willingness to make small changes to the narrative for the sake of condensation. One kind of small change is a willingness to alter the nature of characters’ relationships to one another. For example, in the adaptation Stirling made Jingle and Aunt Rachael old lovers with a past (right out of a romance), unlike the novel, in which Jingle must earn Rachael’s trust by tricking Mr. Tupman into paying attention to Emily so that the jealous Rachael will see that Jingle’s charges of Tupman’s infidelity are true. By giving the couple a history, Stirling was able to drop the scene in which Rachael watches Tupman dote on Emily, and, therefore could move directly to Rachael’s impulsive elopement with Jingle.

Another kind of small change that Stirling and other reverential adapters made was to drop plotlines and episodic digressions that could be withdrawn without altering
the novel’s spirit, the narrative logic, or the deferential stance of the adapter. One such
element of this approach that has already been mentioned is the dropping of the Bardell
vs. Pickwick storyline. As for episodic digressions, it is well known that *The Pickwick
Papers* has a great many of them. Some of the examples that appear in the first ten
numbers include *The Stroller’s Tale*, the contents of the lunatic’s manuscript, and the
Bagman’s story. To a writer of an embellished adaptation, such digressions are a creative
temptation (as will be seen with the *Pickwick* adaptation by William Leman Rede), but to
a reverential adapter for whom fidelity and condensation are high priorities, the decision
to drop them is an easy one.

**TYPE 3: THE POTBOILER ADAPTATION**

*The Peregrinations of Pickwick* by William Leman Rede

On April 3, 1837, on the night of the seventh performance of Stirling’s reverential
adaptation at the City of London Theatre, playwright William Leman Rede presented the
first ever potboiler adaptation of a Dickens novel. This play, *The Peregrinations of
Pickwick; or, Boz-i-a-na*, was presented at the Adelphi Theatre by actor-manager
Frederick Yates, the same man who produced the very first dramatic adaptation of a
Dickens work, Buckstone’s seed adaptation *The Christening*, as previously discussed.
Rede, who had been forced to give up acting in 1834 as a result of an accident, had been
writing plays for the minor theaters for about five years, with some success.\(^{17}\) In addition
to having written *The Rake’s Progress*, a hit in 1832, he made a name for himself writing
for Madame Vestris and Charles Mathews (the younger) during the former’s progressive

\(^{17}\) See John Russell Stephens, “Rede, William Leman (1802-1847),” *Oxford Dictionary of
management of the Olympic Theatre. In particular, he gained praise for helping introduce Mathews to London with *The Old Stager and the New*.

Despite his achievements as a playwright at the Olympic, Rede was not above risking his reputation by dashing off a quick adaptation for money. Certainly, he could not have been motivated to write *The Peregrinations of Pickwick* for any other reason, such as an opportunity to bring Dickens’s popular serialization to life, because the quality of the play is just too inferior. It exhibits all the signs of a rush job—poor dialogue, weak characterization, a shabbily constructed plot, a slapdash third act, etc. Had Rede put more effort into writing a work of quality, the innovations he made might have pushed his play into the category of embellished adaptation. However, this play cannot be classified as such because writers of embellished adaptations took delight and pride in the creative additions they made, and no delight is evident in the writing of this play, nor, indeed, are there any signs of reverence for Dickens’s authority; instead, this play communicates resignation—that there simply was not time to write a proper adaptation. Instead of making an earnest attempt at a proper adaptation, Rede entirely surrendered to the demands of the acting company’s star actors, and thus, their audiences. In other words, like all writers of potboiler adaptations, Rede primarily granted authority to the theater manager and his acting company, and secondarily granted authority to the audience.

One way that Rede delivered for the actors was in the creation of the role of Norah, a sentimental, romantic Irish servant working for Miss Rachael in the Wardle home. Rede invented this character in order to provide the Adelphi’s popular actress Fanny Elizabeth Fitzwilliam, professionally known as Mrs. Fitzwilliam, with a role in
which she could do what she did best—play a lower class Irish girl who could charm the audience by singing sentimental songs and nostalgic ballads about Irish lovers and Ireland. Throughout her career, Mrs. Fitzwilliam continually played such roles, and here, with this rush job, Rede viewed writing such a role as a way to guarantee a certain level of acceptance from those who had hired him: the actor-manager Frederick Yates and his stars. One Irish song sung by Norah is “Crooskeen Lawn”; another is an adaptation of “Patrick’s Day,” with new lyrics by Rede. Although there is no evidence that Dickens saw this play, if he did, he most likely would have felt victimized by the playwright’s insertion of a singing Irish servant girl into his narrative, and giving her a role at least as prominent in the play as the servant born of his own imagination, Sam Weller.

Rede further pandered to the actors by inflating Jingle’s character to dominant protagonist. There are several interesting aspects to Rede’s having given Jingle such prominence. First, although this is a potboiler adaptation, Rede stumbled upon an approach that would become a characteristic of some notable Pickwick adaptations of the future—that is, the inflation of Jingle’s importance in the play over that of Pickwick and his fellow club members. For example, in an adaptation written by James Albery, Henry Irving, the first English actor to be awarded a knighthood, would take this approach with his own Pickwick adaptation. Second, Rede wrote the part especially for the man who adapted and starred in The Christening—John Baldwin Buckstone—who unsurprisingly would himself be associated with a self-serving potboiler. Finally, it is also interesting that the two roles of standout importance in The Peregrinations of Pickwick, Norah and Jingle, were played by a couple—Mrs. Fitzwilliam and Mr. Buckstone—who would eventually become engaged to marry. Thus, with his adaptation, Rede seemingly set out
to please two of the theater’s stars, both individually and as a couple; the parts are nearly identical as showcase roles.\textsuperscript{18}

As is the case with many plays, major cuts were required to the original version of the potboiler due to problems that became apparent when it was presented before early audiences. An advertisement written by Rede that accompanies the printed play shows:

\ldots this piece was originally written with the episode of the Queer client worked into it as a serious plot; in this the talents of Mrs. Yates and Mr. O. Smith and others were employed. The consequence of this introduction was that the drama was rendered an hour too long. After the twentieth night the serious scenes were cut out, and the piece was played as a farce in the shape in which it now appears in print. The unfitness of the Papers for the purpose of the drama, I believed ere I began this task, and now know. This version was written when only the eighth number of the Papers was published. At the Adelphi, and in Liverpool, Manchester, &c. this adaptation has been very favourably received, a circumstance entirely attributable to the fact that Messrs. Yates, Buckstone, Reeve, and Mrs. Fitzwilliam played the principal characters.\textsuperscript{19}

The story of the Queer client is one of the stand-alone tales of the \textit{Pickwick Papers} which gives the novel’s first half the characteristics of a journalistic miscellany.\textsuperscript{20} It is told to Pickwick and others by a bitter old man who has spent his life working in London’s Inns of Court, where much of the legal work of the Metropolis was transacted. The tale is about a man whose wife and child die while he unnecessarily rots away in debtors’ prison, and who, upon release, hires a lawyer to help him ruin and take vengeance upon the man who destroyed his life. Although he was writing a potboiler, Rede’s approach

\textsuperscript{18} The evaluation above is based on the second version of the play presented on the boards at the Adelphi.


\textsuperscript{20} See chapter 21 of Dickens’s \textit{The Pickwick Papers}. 

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might have been characteristic of an embellished adaptation, had he not written a potboiler, and had he taken some delight in the source material; he creatively inserted this tale-within-a-tale into the story world in which the Pickwickians, Jingle, and Aunt Rachael live their lives. In other words, the Queer client episode, in Rede’s first version at the Adelphi, is utilized not as a tale-within-a-tale, one step removed from Pickwick’s story world, but rather is made part of Pickwick’s story world.

This approach to the tale-within-a-tale helps explain the existence of the first scene of the revised adaptation, in which miser Old Clutchley, played by Adelphi melodrama favorite O. Smith, lends money to Snodgrass so that the young man can join his friends on their adventures as a corresponding member of the Pickwick Club. No doubt, this scene in which a moneylender transacts business with a borrower can be traced to the Queer client plotline. So, why, after the other plotline was dropped, did Rede retain the scene in the play? The answer is twofold: Rede did not have time (or make time) to write a revision to a scene involving a character, Clutchley, who would not again appear in the play; and second, the adaptation retained a role, albeit a small one, for O. Smith, one of the well known stars of the Adelphi company. This choice was consistent with Rede’s decisions to invent the role of Norah for Mrs. Fitzwilliam and to inflate the role of Jingle for Buckstone. Once again, as a writer of a potboiler, Rede saw pleasing the actor-manager and his stars as his primary obligation.

Before moving on, one final point about Rede’s advertisement applies also to the next playwright who will be discussed, W. T. Moncrieff. Rede, in the advertisement, implied that he knew that the play was not a good one: “[T]his adaptation,” he wrote, “has been very favourably received, a circumstance entirely attributable to the fact that
Messrs. Yates, Buckstone, Reeve, and Mrs. Fitzwilliam played the principal characters.” By giving the actors credit for the success of the piece in the manner that he does, Rede signals more than his own humility; he also reveals his own doubts about the quality of the play. Rede, who had received payment from the play’s publisher—W. Strange—for the right to print it, was in fact very aware that he had written a bad play, as is clear from the subtle attack he made on the source novel in the advertisement: “The unfitness of the Papers for the purpose of the drama, I believed ere I began this task, and now know.” By calling the play undramatic, Rede tried to suggest a culprit for the shoddy rush-job that followed—the book itself, and by extension, the author of the book, Charles Dickens. Such shifting of the blame to Dickens for any faults found in the adaptation is a trait not only associated with potboiler adaptations, but with all types of adaptations by playwrights who did not reverence Dickens and the original work.

If Edward Stirling, with his direct and indirect praise of Dickens and his novels, exists somewhere on the respectful end of a continuum that measures the respect felt and shown by the adapter toward Charles Dickens and his books, then William T. Moncrieff may be found somewhere in the middle. On July 10, 1837, approximately three months after Stirling’s and Rede’s plays opened at their respective theaters, Moncrieff presented his adaptation, *Sam Weller: or the Pickwickians, a Farcical Comedy, in Three Acts.*

*Arranged from Charles Dickens’s Work.* The New Strand Theatre’s actor-manager, W. J. Hammond, saw in the craze for all things Pickwickian a chance to produce a potential moneymaker that would provide him with a showcase role—and to secure showcase roles was, after all, the only good reason to become a theater manager; otherwise, why take on an enterprise that had lost many a man’s fortune? And so Hammond hired Moncrieff, an
experienced dramatist for the minor theaters with a background in writing exciting spectacles and adaptations of novels. Two of the notable adaptations written so far in his career were *Tom and Jerry*, a hit play for the Adelphi in 1821, based on the Pierce Egan novel, *Life in London*; and *Eugene Aram*, a play based on the Bulwer-Lytton novel, written for the Surrey Theatre in 1832.  

When *Sam Weller* first opened at the Strand, Moncrieff included a special note with the playbills that no longer survives, but the content of which can be inferred by what John Forster, Dickens’s relatively new friend and champion, wrote about it in his dramatic review of the production for *The Examiner*:

New Strand Theatre  
An attempt has been made to dramatise the celebrated Pickwick Papers here, and Mr Moncrieff is the adapter. In a very modest address affixed to the playbills, this gentleman, with many eulogiums and panegyrics on the author of the work, expatiates on the extreme difficulty of his self-imposed task, and apologises for the liberties he has been compelled to take with the characters which “Boz” has delineated, and the ideas he has embodied. It would have been well if Mr. Moncrieff had acted a little more in accordance with the spirit he professes, and if, when the insertion of his own sheer nonsense and vulgarity could serve no dramatic purpose, he had been content to let the characters say something a little more resembling in wit and humour what has been set down for them by their successful originator.  

The review continues, acknowledging that this is the best of the *Pickwick* adaptations produced so far, praising the particular performances of Hammond (as Weller), Hall (as

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21 For my information about the back-and-forth struggle between Moncrieff, on the one hand, and Forster and Dickens on the other hand, that erupted as a result of a special note that Moncrieff appended to the Sam Weller playbills, I am entirely indebted to Philip Cox, *Reading Adaptations: Novels and Verse Narratives on the Stage, 1790-1840* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 121-162. Print. I am also indebted to Cox for reprints of some difficult-to-access archival texts exchanged between the parties.

Old Weller) and Attwood (as Job Trotter), and reporting that the play has been continually well received by large audiences, yet sticking to Forster’s main argument, that Moncrieff had harmed Dickens by replacing what was so valuable in the novel with rubbish. Namely, Forster accuses Moncrieff of having replaced the “wit,” “humour,” “delicate satire,” “deep meaning,” “simplicity,” “delicate feeling,” “kindness of heart,” and the “rare and original compound” that is Mr. Pickwick, with “nonsense,” “vulgarity,” “coarse caricaturing,” “[a] jumbling together of scenes and incidents,” unrecognizable recreations of characters and incidents, “boisterous pantomime,” a much-too-long running time, horrible acting by Mr. Lee as Jingle, and a third act full of “mawkish sentimentality.” If only Moncrieff had trimmed the adaptation to two acts, suggests Forster, keeping just the scenes featuring Sam Weller, Old Weller and Job Trotter, the play might have been a worthwhile production; but Moncrieff had done no such thing. Instead, says Forster, the play has been presented before the public with all the deficiencies listed, which for Dickens is “one of the penalties of a great popularity” which he must try to “be content to bear.”

Moncrieff did not like being singled out for special criticism and so, when the time came to advertise the published version of his Sam Weller play, he used the opportunity to respond to Forster:

Mr. Dickens has, by far, too much genius, to nourish any of the petty feelings evinced by his Fostering friends! whose articles, being those of the ‘High Intellectual’ Sunday-school of criticism, are greatly too genteel and abstruse, for every day reading, but must be kept for Lord’s day examination only! Why these gentry should object to my having dramatised Mr. Dickens, I cannot conceive. Sir WALTER SCOTT – a name, I humbly submit, of sufficient merit, to be mentioned in the same page with the writer of the ‘Pickwick Club,’ always looked upon Mr. Pockock’s and Mr Terry’s stage versions of those immortal fiction, ‘Rob Roy’ and ‘Ivanhoe’ rather as a compliment than otherwise, and I had
undoubted precedent, for what I did, in the instance of the first dramatic writer of all time – SHAKESPEARE! who has scarcely a play, that is not founded on some previous drama, history, chronicle, popular tale, or story. What then means the twaddle of these ‘high intellectuals’, in so pathetically condoling with Mr Dickens, on the penalties he pays for his popularity, in being put on the stage? Let these ‘high intellectual’ speak to Mr Dickens’s publishers, and they will learn, it has rendered them, by increasing the sale, the most fortunate Chapman and dealers!  

Moncrieff proudly compares his practice of adaptation to what Shakespeare did to compose his plays. It can be imagined that this comparison alone was enough to get Dickens to step out from behind the protective shield of Forster.

This time Dickens decided to take on Moncrieff himself, albeit through a satirical character, the “literary gentleman,” who is among the guests at the farewell dinner for the Crummles family in Nicholas Nickleby. This character, an unscrupulous, thieving hack writer who has made an unethical career out of writing slapdash plays based on newly published novels, at the expense of the novelists on whose backs he rode, was based on Moncrieff, or so many believed, and with good reason. The following excerpt from the pertinent scene in the novel illustrates why:

The company amounted in number to some twenty-five or thirty, being composed of such members of the theatrical profession, then engaged or disengaged in London, as were numbered among the most intimate friends of Mr. and Mrs. Crummles . . .

. . . there was a literary gentleman present who had dramatised in his time two hundred and forty-seven novels as fast as they had come out—some of them faster than they had come out—and who was a literary gentleman in consequence.

This gentleman sat on the left hand of Nicholas, to whom he was introduced by his friend the African Swallow, from the bottom of the table, with a high eulogium upon his fame and reputation.

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23 Qted. in Cox 133-34.
"I am happy to know a gentleman of such great distinction," said Nicholas, politely.

"Sir," replied the wit, "you're very welcome, I'm sure. The honour is reciprocal, sir, as I usually say when I dramatise a book. Did you ever hear a definition of fame, sir?"

"I have heard several," replied Nicholas, with a smile. "What is yours?"

"When I dramatise a book, sir," said the literary gentleman, "that's fame. For its author."

"Oh, indeed!" rejoined Nicholas.

"That's fame, sir," said the literary gentleman.

"So Richard Turpin, Tom King, and Jerry Abershaw have handed down to fame the names of those on whom they committed their most impudent robberies?" said Nicholas.

"I don't know anything about that, sir," answered the literary gentleman.

"Shakespeare dramatised stories which had previously appeared in print, it is true," observed Nicholas.

"Meaning Bill, sir?" said the literary gentleman. "So he did. Bill was an adapter, certainly. So he was—and very well he adapted too—considering."

"I was about to say," rejoined Nicholas, "that Shakespeare derived some of his plots from old tales and legends in general circulation; but it seems to me, that some of the gentlemen of your craft at the present day, have shot very far beyond him—"

"You're quite right, sir," interrupted the literary gentleman, leaning back in his chair and exercising his toothpick. "Human intellect, sir, has progressed since his time, is progressing, will progress."

"Shot beyond him, I mean," resumed Nicholas, "in quite another respect for, whereas he brought within the magic circle of his genius, traditions peculiarly adapted for his purpose, and turned familiar things into constellations which should enlighten the world for ages, you drag within the magic circle of your dulness, subjects not at all adapted to the purposes of the stage, and debase as he exalted. For instance, you take the
uncompleted books of living authors, fresh from their hands, wet from the press, cut, hack, and carve them to the powers and capacities of your actors, and the capability of your theatres, finish unfinished works, hastily and crudely vamp up ideas not yet worked out by their original projector, but which have doubtless cost him many thoughtful days and sleepless nights; by a companion of incidents and dialogue, down to the very last word he may have written a fortnight before, do your utmost to anticipate his plot—all this without his permission, and against his will; and then, to crown the whole proceeding, publish in some mean pamphlet, an unmeaning farrago of garbled extracts from his work, to which you put your name as author, with the honourable distinction annexed, of having perpetrated a hundred other outrages of the same description. Now, show me the distinction between such pilfering as this, and picking a man’s pocket in the street: unless, indeed, it be, that the legislature has a regard for pocket-handkerchiefs, and leaves men’s brains (except when they are knocked out by violence) to take care of themselves.”

“Men must live, sir,” said the literary gentleman, shrugging his shoulders.

“That would be an equally fair plea in both cases,” replied Nicholas; “but if you put it upon the ground, I have nothing more to say, than, that if I were a writer of books, and you a thirsty dramatist, I would rather pay your tavern score for six months, large as it might be, than have a niche in the Temple of Fame with you for the humblest corner of my pedestal, through six hundred generations.”

The conversations threatened to take a somewhat angry tone when it had arrived thus far, but Mrs. Crummles opportunely interposed to prevent its leading to any violent outbreak...  

The degree of Nicholas’s resentment over the literary gentleman’s manner of making a living has prompted a number of critics to comment that Dickens seems to temporarily break down the barrier that separates author from character and, like a spirit, he takes possession of Nicholas; Michael Slater says that the young man’s anger, and the degree to which he castigates the hack dramatist, is improbable.

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25 Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009), 134. Print. Hereafter references to this work are cited as Slater.
If, when reading the novel, Moncrieff had any question whether he was the object of ridicule that is literary gentleman, he had to know with certainty when he came to the part where the gentleman compares himself as an adapter to Shakespeare. Once again, Moncrieff’s response in an advertisement dated June 5, 1839, is consistent with his playbill address written for Sam Weller in that it seemingly praises Dickens and his work while actually criticizing both and offering himself as the answer to the novelist’s deficiencies:

NEW STRAND THEATRE
“Nicholas Nickleby.”
To the Public.

Some of the newspapers having named me as the person intended to be the representation by an intemperate and vulgar caricature in the last published number of NICHOLAS NICKLEBY, which without such information I should certainly never have suspected, it may perhaps be necessary to say a few words in order to set the public right upon the matter.

MR. DICKENS complains that I have, in the present very successful adaptation of ‘Nicholas Nickleby,’ ‘finished’ his ‘unfinished work;’ have ‘anticipated his plot,’ ‘which had caused him many thoughtful days and sleepless nights;’ that I am a Richard Turpin, a Tom King, and a Jerry Abershaw (that is, presuming he really means me). In fact, that I am nothing more or less than a species of Novel Highwayman, an universal Robber of Romance, having dramatised no less than two hundred and forty-seven novels, as fast as they came out, and very often, mirabile dictu, even ‘faster than they came out,’ though I know not well how that could be. That I have stolen his brains (it would certainly appear that he had lost them), an act which he considers equal in turpitude to stealing his pocket-handkerchief, valuing the one at the same rate as the other, and I know not what other atrocities besides. I certainly plead guilty to having dramatised his work, which I should not have done till it had been completed had not two other playwrights dramatised it before me, a circumstance that did not seem displeasing either to Mr. Dickens or his proprietors, Messrs. Chapman and Hall, as the latter themselves actually published one of the adaptations alluded to, and thus made themselves parties to it. (Note: This was expressly done by Dickens’s consent with a desire to combat the pirates.) Independent of which I did not commence my version till the original work had been nearly fifteen
months before the Public, and the *dénouement* was obviously in view—that I should unfortunately have hit upon the same ending of the history as that projected by Mr. Dickens, and thereby have caused him annoyance, I really regret; but there is a very easy way of making me ‘hide my diminished head.’ Let Mr. Dickens—and he has five months before him—set his wits to work again and finish his ‘Nicholas Nickleby’ better than I have done, and I shall sink into the primitive mire, from which I have for a moment attempted to emerge by catching at the end of his garment, a fate I shall deserve for my Quixotic foolhardiness for continuing, as he says, ‘to drag into the magic circle of my dulness subjects not at all dramatic, cutting, hacking, and carving them to the powers and capabilities’ of my ‘theatre,’ and ‘persuading the innocent public, night after night, to admire and applaud him.’ I could wish it were generally agreed that no original Novel, Romance, or Tale should be made use of for dramatic purposes, without the original Author having an interest in such appropriation, but as such is not the case, and the works of novelists, etc., have at all times been considered fair game to the dramatist, without any complaint from their Authors, I do not perceive why I should be expected to become a solitary exception, and be debarred an advantage allowed to others. I never dramatised but five novels in my life—Mrs. Opie’s beautiful ‘Father and Daughter,’ Sir Walter Scott’s matchless ‘Ivanhoe,’ Sir Edward Bulwer’s masterly and complete ‘Eugene Aram,’ the ‘Pickwick Miscellany,’ and, lastly, Mr. Dickens’s very clever ‘Nicholas Nickleby.’ Had the slightest intimation been conveyed to me, either by Mr. Dickens or his proprietors, that my using his work would be disagreeable or inimical, I should immediately have desisted; but the fact is, as in the case of ‘Sam Weller,’ had the work been less successfully finished, not a word would have been uttered in depreciation of my using it by Mr. Dickens.

I willingly admit that the common practice of dramatising works before their original authors have completed them is an unfair and vexatious one; but it did not originate with me. I regret Mr. Dickens should have lost his temper, and descended to scurrility and abuse, where a temperate remonstrance alone was needed, but has suffered his irritability to make him forget the good breeding of a gentleman and lose sight of that sense which should ever characterise a man of letters. As one of his admirers, I lament he should have so far committed himself. Mr. Dickens is at perfect liberty, if it will at all satisfy his spleen, to call me the veriest blockhead that ever catered to the stage; the Public have too often decided upon my very humble pretensions to be swayed by his *ipse dixit* now. Great as his talents are, he is not to fancy himself ‘Sir Oracle,’ and when he speaks no dog should ‘bark’; he should not attempt to ‘bestride us like a Colossus’ and grumble that we ‘poor petty mortals should seek to creep between his legs.’ With all possible good feeling, I would beg to hint to Mr. Dickens that deprecating the talents of another is but a shallow
and envious way of attempting to raise one’s own—that the calling the offending party a thief, sneering at his pecuniary circumstances, and indulging in empty boasts of tavern treats, are weapons of offence usually resorted to only by the very lowest orders. Nothing is more easy than to be ill-natured. I confess I write for my living, and it is no discredit to Mr. Dickens to say that those who know him best are aware he is as much indebted to his pen for the dinner of the day, as I can possibly be. With respect to the ‘six hundred generations’ through which Mr. Dickens expects his ‘pedestal should remain in the Temple of Fame,’ I can assure him I have never anticipated that any credit I might derive from dramatising ‘Nicholas Nickleby’ would more than endure beyond as many days. Having himself unsuccesfully tried the drama, there is some excuse for Mr. Dickens’s petulance towards its professors; but it is somewhat illiberal and ungrateful that, being indebted to the stage for so many of his best characters—Sam Weller, from Beazly’s ‘Boarding House,’ for example—he should deny it a few in return. In putting his present Novel upon the stage, there was no intention to injure him, or annoy him; and if it will be any satisfaction to him, I promise him that whatever offence I have committed in the present instance shall not be repeated in the future—at least, by me.

I cannot avail myself of the liberal offer of ‘paying the tavern bill,’ as a long and severe illness of nearly five years, with its consequent deprivation of sight, has, during almost all that period, wholly prevented my ‘taking my ease in mine inn,’ however I might have wished it. And now, hoping that Mr. Dickens may speedily regain his good humour, and indulge in a little more generosity of feeling towards his humbler brethren of the quill, I cordially bid him farewell.

‘Let the galled jade wince,
My withers are unwring.’

William Moncrieff.

June 5, 1839. 25

True to his word, Moncrieff never again adapted a Dickens book for the stage.

26 Quoted in S. J. Adair Fitz-Gerald, Dickens and the Drama (London: Chapman & Hall, 1910), 121-26. Print. Hereafter, references to this work are cited as Fitz-Gerald.
TYPE 4: THE EMBELLISHED ADAPTATION

How it Compares to the Reverential Adaptation

In addition to disparaging Dickens and his novel as being undramatic, Moncrieff also has the distinction with *Sam Weller; or, The Pickwickians* for having written the first ever embellished adaptation of a Dickens work. Among other things, an embellished adaptation is an adaptation that respects the name of the author and his or her work for the power that they have in the theatrical marketplace. That is to say, the embellished adaptation acknowledges the importance of filling the theater with large crowds and knows that the author’s name and his book title have the ability to draw such crowds; therefore, the adapter uses the author’s name and the novel’s title in the advertising, the playbills, and the text of the published play in order to attract an audience and readership. At first glance, this type of Dickensian adaptation seems to have a lot in common with a reverential adaptation, which also respects the name of the author and his or her work. However, these two adaptation types differ in the degree to which they grant authority to the original story, plot, characters, dialogue, and settings. Whereas a reverential adaptation strives to only make changes and innovations to the author’s work when absolutely necessary, in order to conform to the requirements of the theater form, the genre, and the audience, an embellished adaptation feels itself much less obligated to the authority of the original text. While it admires the novel and the novelist, it does not grant either authority. If there is any reverence for authority in an embellished adaptation, it is directed toward three parties—to the theatrical management, the theater’s stars, and the imagination of the adapter himself.

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If reverence for the theater’s management and its stars is one characteristic of an embellished adaptation, then another is the way the adapter sees himself as the central artist of the adaptation process, ahead of the novelist himself. Indeed, unlike the seed adapter John Baldwin Buckstone, who does not exploit the author’s name or the work’s title, but who, instead, desires to make use of whatever situations, character types, and telling details that can be appropriated in order to craft a nearly original work, the writer of the embellished adaptation acknowledges the importance of the novelist’s name, the book’s title, and the content and form of the novel. But the embellished adapter feels in no way bound to retain any single trait of the original work with the possible exception of the illustrations that he might reproduce in tableaux. If that means inflating the role of Jingle far beyond the relative importance of the character in the novel, for the sake of pleasing a star, so be it; if that means inventing new dialogue, because it seems funnier than the dialogue found in the corresponding scene in the novel, so be it. The novelist, namely Dickens, is not a god to the writer of an embellished adaptation, nor is the original novel holy writ. The author’s name, his book’s title, and the content of the novel are low hanging fruits to be picked by the playwright at will.

One way to think about the four types of Dickensian adaptations presented so far is to imagine the adaptation situation as a solar system, with the sun at the center of that solar system as the adaptation’s primary authority. The writer of the embellished adaptation considers his imagination, the theater management, and its audience, to be the sun around which all else revolves; the writer of a reverential adaptation considers Dickens, the book, the theater, and the audience to be the sun around which all else are satellite; the writer of the potboiler adaptation considers the theater management and its
stars to be the sun; and the writer of the seed adaptation considers the theater, its
audience, the management and its leading cast members to be the sun around which all
else is a satellite. It is important to note that for the writer of the seed adaptation,
Dickens, the author, is not a satellite, nor is he even a permanent part of the solar system,
but rather he is a comet briefly passing through, letting off some “fiery dust” to be
collected by the adapter.

So what makes Sam Weller an embellished adaptation? First, note the full title, as
found in the printed play text published by John Dicks: Sam Weller; or the Pickwickians,
a Farcical Comedy, in Three Acts. Arranged from Charles Dickens's Work, by W. T.
Moncrieff. Mark how both the title of the novel and the novelist’s name is referenced
explicitly. Readers and audience members who are fans of the novel and/or Dickens are
meant to be drawn into the audience as a result of this information. And, yet, notice at
the same time, how Moncrieff asserts Sam Weller as the play’s main character in the title.
This is important because in no Pickwick adaptation yet written had Sam Weller been set
forth as the main character. With this full title Moncrieff is inviting Pickwick and
Dickens lovers to see a creative adaptation of the popular work as interpreted by an
innovative and original artist; the title is emblematic of the paradoxical combination of
shackled dependence and headstrong independence that can be found in an embellished
adaptation.

In some ways Moncrieff and his play Sam Weller show as much reverence for
Dickens and the priority of The Pickwick Papers as Stirling in The Pickwick Club. For
one thing, let it not be forgotten that Sam Weller was presented on the stage later than the
Stirling adaptation—about three months later. Yes, it is true that, as was the case with
the Stirling adaptation, the Moncrieff adaptation opened while the writing and the publishing of the serialization was still in progress; but still, Moncrieff allowed Dickens significantly more time than Stirling did to establish his narrative in the minds of his readers. Of course, five numbers still had yet to be published at the time of the Sam Weller opening; but, on the other hand, consider in what ways the embellished adaptation shows greater fidelity to *The Pickwick Papers* as a whole than did Stirling’s reverential adaptation: For example, because his adaptation came later, Moncrieff was able to represent the Bardell v. Pickwick trial as well as Pickwick’s incarceration in Fleet Prison—two events which would come to be considered among the most important in the novel. Stirling simply could not dramatize these two events because of the early opening of his play.

A second way that Moncrieff showed as much or more reverence for Dickens and the authority of the novel than did Stirling was by refusing to eliminate events for the sake of simplification, condensation, and causal connection. For example, when Moncrieff is realized he could not dramatize both the scene of Pickwick’s legal hearing before Nupkins the magistrate and the Bardell v. Pickwick trial, he chose to dramatize the former and have characters verbally report on the latter. Similarly, finding insufficient time to dramatize the revenge taken upon the hypocrite Methodist preacher Stiggins by Old Weller, Moncrieff instead had Old Weller verbally report the act of revenge. By including such exposition, Moncrieff demonstrated his commitment to the original story and plot (especially when he believed that he could not imagine something better).

Stirling, on the other hand, almost never had a character report an event that occurred off stage. As a follower of Eugéne Scribe, who established the principles of a
"well constructed play," Stirling believed that all important events in a play should be
dramatized, and if they cannot be, then they should be eliminated. Stirling, for example,
did not select the Rochester military review scene from the novel for the adaptation
because that scene is difficult to link causally to the scenes that precede and follow it; the
military review, as written by Dickens, is more of an isolated episode than a link in a
causal chain. Instead of selecting the military review, Stirling selected the Rochester ball
for adaptation because it can be causally linked to the scene which precedes it (Jingle
learns there is going to be a ball), and the scene that follows it (the duel between Winkle
and Dr. Slammer). Thus, Moncrieff, in addition to having selected events from the novel
for his adaptation because they link causally, also selected events from the novel that
offer something else of value.

By having adapted scenes that do not necessarily link causally, Moncrieff wrote a
plot more episodic than Stirling’s, with greater fidelity to Dickens’s. In other words, The
Pickwick Papers novel has a meandering, episodic plot, and because Moncrieff included
events in his adaptation that do not causally link together as cleanly and as simply as the
events selected by Stirling, the Moncrieff plot has a greater fidelity to the feel of the plot
of the novel. Stirling’s plot construction, on the other hand, is very linear, simple and
clean—unlike Dickens’s.

A fourth way that Moncrieff showed as much reverence for Dickens and his novel
as did Stirling was by allowing the characters as much or more freedom to express
themselves verbally than Stirling did. In his adaptation, Moncrieff gave the characters
almost the same verbal liberty that Dickens gave them in the novel—especially in the
cases of Sam Weller and Jingle. An example of Moncrieff’s indulgence with dialogue
comes in his adaptation of chapter 10 of the novel, in which Sam Weller gives Jingle
directions on how to find the Doctors' Commons, so that he may acquire a marriage
license for Aunt Rachael and himself. Giving these directions reminds Sam of a story
about his father—how the older man once got things out of order and purchased a
marriage license before he had a woman to marry. It is an amusing story that helps flesh
out the characterizations of both Sam Weller—because of the way he tells the story—and
Old Weller, because of what it tells us about his marriage’s back story. However, the
telling of the story has no causal impact on any of the events currently taking place in the
narrative. Despite this side story’s lack of causal connection to any past or impending
event, Moncrieff granted Sam the following monologue:

SAM. [...] My father, sir, was a coachman—a widower he was—land fat
enough for anything—uncommon fat to be sure—his missus dies, and
leaves him four hundred pound—down he goes to Doctors' Commons, to
see the lawyer, and draw the blunt; very smart—top boots on, nosegay in
his button-hole—broad-brim'd tile—green shawl—quvite the gen'lman.
Touter gets hold on him, and axes him if he wants a license. Dash my
vestkit, says my father, I never thought of that—but ain't I too fat. Not a
bit of it, sir—says the Touter, ve married a gent'man twice your size last
week,—you're but a baby to him. Vell, away he follows the Touter, like a
tame monkey after a organ. What's the lady's name, says the lawyer.
Blest if I knows, says my father, put down Mrs. Clarke, Susan Clarke, 
Markiss of Granby, Dorking—she'll have me, I knows, if I axes her. Vell,
the license was made out—and she did have him—and vat's more—she
got him now—and I ha'nt never had any of the four hundred pounds—
[...] (2.1)

One of Moncrieff's motives for including the above monologue in the adaptation was to
enhance the characterization of one of his play's central characters, Weller. Additionally,
he saw it as an example of Dickensian inspiration at its best, and Moncrieff seized such
moments of inspiration, even if they contributed in no way to the plot. Stirling felt much
more pressure to make the contents of the novel conform to the principles of the well
constructed play than Moncrieff. Thus, although Stirling occasionally utilized an element from the novel that did not contribute to the central plotlines of the adaptation, he was less likely to do so than Moncrieff.

Moncrieff shows further reverence for Dickens and his work by embracing Dickensian details, thus helping his adaptation capture the spirit of the original—a rare achievement for an adaptation. Both Stirling and Buckstone incorporated these details, too.

A way to illustrate that Moncrieff embraced secondary details as much as Stirling did is to look at the way each adapter treated the details in Dickens’s novel about the voter buying and voter suppression taking place in Eastanswill at the time of the Parliamentary election. The following, an excerpt from Dickens’s chapter 8, is the model from which both of the adapters worked:

“And what are the probabilities as to the result of the contest?” inquired Mr. Pickwick.

“Why doubtful, my dear Sir; rather doubtful as yet,” replied the little man.

... “We are pretty confident, though,” said Mr. Perker, sinking his voice almost to a whisper. “We had a little tea-party here, last night—five-and-forty women, my dear Sir—and gave every one of ’em a green parasol when she went away.”

“A parasol!” said Mr. Pickwick.

“Fact, my dear Sir, fact. Five-and-forty green parasols, at seven and six-pence a-piece. All women like finery,—extraordinary the effect of those parasols. Secured all their husbands, and half their brothers—beats stockings, and flannel, and all that sort of thing hollow. My idea, my dear Sir, entirely. Hail, rain, or sunshine, you can’t walk half a dozen yards up the street, without encountering half a dozen parasols.”

In the preceding scene Pickwick has tracked down his solicitor, Mr. Perker, in Eatonswill, where the lawyer is using every trick at his disposal to get his client, Samuel

Slumkey, re-elected to Parliament. Dickens included this verbal account of the dirty campaign tactics in this backwater not to forward the plot, but rather because the details offer some fun, satirical jabs at democracy as it was sometimes practiced in England.

The account given by Perker could easily have been dropped by Stirling, if he were to follow his usual habit of prioritizing those narrative elements that are causally connected to events occurring in the central plotlines. And yet, Stirling did not drop these details, despite their independence from the plot. Note how his version (in which Snodgrass has been made to be Slumkey’s agent, and Tupman is present) retains some of the telling details from the original:

TUPMAN. And what are the probabilities as to the result of the contest!

SNODGRASS. Doubtful at present, though we are pretty confident; we had a little tea party here last night, five and forty women, and gave every one of them a green parasol when she went away.

PICKWICK. A parasol!

SNODGRASS. Fact my dear, sir—a fact; five and forty green parasols at seven and sixpence a piece, all women like finery; extraordinary the effect of those parasols—secured all their husbands, and half their brothers. Hail, rain or sunshine, you can’t walk a half dozen yards up the streets without encountering half a dozen green parasols. (2.3)

What one notices is that the dialogue spoken by Snodgrass is almost a direct transcription of the words spoken by Perker in the novel. Such “cutting and pasting” is a common characteristic of reverential, embellished, and potboiler adaptations; it is also characteristic of the authorized adaptations, a type that will be discussed in chapter 4.

As one would expect from a writer of embellished adaptations, Moncrieff went much further than Stirling with his character switches and changes of circumstance. While Stirling changed the identity of Slumkey’s agent from the minor character Perker,
to the Pickwickian of medium importance, Snodgrass, Moncrieff more boldly made Pickwick himself the agent for Slumkey. He adopted this change in part to put Pickwick up on the hustings so that he might give a speech to the voters, who might then respond to him in kind. This change creates several problems that no doubt Dickens and his defender, Forster, disliked. The first is that by making Pickwick a politician’s agent in a dirty election, Pickwick’s good character is sullied by association; and the second is that Pickwick no longer enters the setting as a wide-eyed innocent, taking notes for a Pickwick Club report.

Despite the characterization problems created by making this change, Moncrieff believed it to be an improvement over the situation originally conceived by Dickens in the novel: Namely, the Pickwickians enter Eatonswill and thereby witness and hear about all of the dirty tricks that go along with a so-called democratic country election between two equally contemptible candidates. Moncrieff’s “improvement,” on the other hand, is to put Pickwick and Jingle in direct conflict by making each of them the agent for a candidate. He thought this was a good idea because the rivalry between Pickwick and Jingle would then be thematically emphasized by making them literal opponents, doing the same job for competing politicians, during an election. Thus, the outcome of the election would matter more than it does in the novel, because it would also represent a victory for either Pickwick or Jingle in their ongoing war. In the end, Moncrieff resolved the conflict by making Pickwick’s man beat Jingle’s man, thus giving Pickwick an important victory.

Since in his adaptation, Pickwick does not enter Eatonswill as an innocent, Moncrieff had to decide whether to drop the satirical details about the parasols which are
reported by Perker in the novel (and by Snodgrass in Stirling’s adaptation). If Moncrieff dropped them, the plot would not have to change, because the parasol story has no bearing whatsoever on the causally connected events that make up the central plotlines. And yet, Moncrieff saw that if he retained such details, the adaptation would gain in other ways. For example, he may have known from watching Buckstone’s *The Christening* that a key to retaining the spirit of a Dickens novel is to retain as many telling details as possible. Or, he may have wanted to retain as much of the novel’s satirical content as possible. Whatever his reasoning, Moncrieff decided to keep the details of the parasol story in his play.

So how did Moncrieff keep them? He gave Job Trotter, Jingle’s lying sidekick, the role in the scene formerly played by Pickwick—that of the new visitor to Eatanswill: and he gave Jingle the role in the scene formerly played Perker/Snodgrass—as the person reporting about the successful parasol venture. In this new version, Job Trotter enters town and takes in the sights of community in the throes of a heated election. (This should sound familiar). Then, after reflecting admirably on the master villain Jingle, who traded Aunt Rachael for Mr. Wardle’s money, and who, as the Methodist preacher Stiggins, has tricked a group of pious women into following him (another big change made by Moncrieff), he encounters the villain himself. When Job finds Jingle, the con artist is dressed as “Captain Fitztory,” agent for Horatio Fizkin, Esq.:

**JOB TROTTER.** Well, Jingle, how do you get on?

**JINGLE.** Capital—very!—opened public-houses—Goat in Boots—Cat in Pattens—Hog in Armour—only left Slumkey, beer shops!—famous move that—very!—not all though—last night, got up tea-party—voters’ wives, forty-five—served up green parasols, seven and sixpence each—one a piece—parting present—great effect—got votes—all their husbands—half their brothers—beats flannel—ribbons—stockings!—wet or dry—can’t go
out—High Street—green parasols—half a dozen—politic—warn’t it—very! (2.2)

Jingle’s speech, in addition to absorbing the words spoken by Perker/Snodgrass (with Jingle’s characteristic syntax applied), also absorb other details that originate in the novel, all of which serve a satirical end, and none of which have any implications for the central plotlines. Thus, Moncrieff showed as much reverence toward Dickens and his telling details as did Stirling.

Sixth and finally, it can also be said that, like Stirling, Moncrieff showed reverence to Dickens by paying homage to him within the text of the play itself—specifically, through complimentary allusions to the author and his works. A good example of Stirling paying homage in The Pickwick Club may be found in act 1, scene 6, when Tupman returns wounded from the hunting expedition, having accidentally shot himself (a change of circumstance from the novel). Aunt Rachael, who fainted when she first heard the news about his accident, wishes to attend to the man with whom she is smitten, without the prying and mischievous eyes of her nieces looking on. Therefore, after muttering in an aside, “I wish these giddy girls would leave us,” she calls out, “Emily dear, I wish you would walk with your sister, down to the library, and ask for ‘Sketches by Boz.’” A second example of this kind of thing may be found in act 2, Scene 4 of Stirling’s play, in which Sam Weller makes a clear reference to chapter two of Oliver Twist, which was released to the public as part of the serialization’s first number, just about a month prior, in February 1837. “Allow me to propose Horatio Fizkin, Esq., of Fizkin lodge, as your representative,” says the elector on the hustings in Eatanswill, to which Sam Weller, whose governor is supporting the other candidate, yells out, “Who walloped the poor workus [workhouse] boy for asking for more gruel—ha?” No doubt,
Weller alludes to Oliver Twist’s famous request for more gruel, which earns him an escort by Mr. Bumble to the board room, where the gentleman in the white waistcoat predicts, “That boy will be hung.” ²⁹ Furthermore, Stirling makes an homage to Dickens in his play’s conclusion, when Mr. Wardle, played by Mr. Anderson, follows the denouement tradition of “breaking through the fourth wall” in order to address the audience, saying, “Pickwick, your hand, you’re a fine fellow, and may your club and its founder—Boz, with the approbation of our kind friends here, continue to be the watchword to fun[,] frolic, and good humour for many a year” (3.7). And finally, there are the tableaux, in which the characters form themselves into pictures resembling some of the novel’s forty-three illustrations drawn by Robert Seymour and Phiz (Hablot K. Browne). One example from Stirling is the tableau formed at the end of act 3, scene 4 in which Sam Weller takes on Grummer and the rest of those who have arrested Pickwick for having invaded a lady’s room in the night. Stirling’s play presents tableaux such as this one in a manner faithful to the original illustrations, thereby showing yet another way in which this playwright grants authority to Boz and his book.

Moncrieff was also reverential toward Dickens, paying homage in the play text. The first example of this has already been discussed—that is, the advertisement for Sam Weller in which he made certain compliments to the author. Additionally, Moncrieff embedded a compliment to Dickens in the dialogue of the social climber Mrs. Leo Hunter, the character who is hosting a breakfast costume party following the Eatanswill election. As she surveys the crowd of guests who have come, the hostess delivers the following monologue:

MRS. LEO HUNTER. Delightful—delightful! one foreign lion, Count Smorltau, who's come expressly, from Germany, to write visiting notes on England—two London lions—the celebrated Tobacco Pipe Player, and the great Kentucky Tragedian—all our country lions—two or three lionesses, one a lady that has been up in a balloon, and another, a lady who has fall'n down in one, and then the King of all the Lions, the president of the Pickwickians and his associates!—why we shall be the envy and admiration of the whole world—only want Boz to complete it—pity he wouldn't suffer himself to be caught. (2.6)

Moncrieff invented this entire speech, though, it is in keeping with the characterization of Mrs. Hunter found in the novel. Dickens would come to identify this type of embellishment among the kinds he most disliked. For now, it can be concluded that in many ways Moncrieff in his embellished adaptations was just as reverential to Dickens and his novel, as was Stirling in his reverential adaptations.

So, why is Moncrieff not considered a writer of reverential adaptations? As stated previously, more than being a worshipper of Dickens, he was a worshipper of the imagination, inspiration, and the “good idea.” What this means is that if he came up with an idea for a situation, a scene, a characterization, or some dialogue, and he thought that this idea represented an improvement to the narrative, he made the change or addition. Likewise, if Moncrieff found a better idea in another adaptation based on The Pickwick Papers—say, for example, one written by Edward Stirling or William Leman Rede—he appropriated (or some might say “stole”) that idea from the other adapter’s work and made it a part of his new work. To Moncrieff and all writers of embellished adaptations, inspiration was a sacred thing, a good idea being the most valuable of commodities, and both of these things had greater importance to him than did Dickens or his works. However, if Dickens had a better idea in his novel than either Moncrieff himself or any of the other adapters, then Dickens’s idea took priority.
Before listing the ways in which Moncrieff exceeded Stirling in his deviations from the text, the following is a review of the main ways in which Stirling deviated from Dickens’s original work: (1) Stirling based his adaptation on a novel-in-progress (for business purpose); (2) he adapted the novel into a burletta, adding songs and music to the narrative (for audience effect and legal purpose); (3) he elaborated certain characters (for casting and dramaturgical purposes); (4) he replaced secondary and minor characters with primary and secondary characters (for dramaturgical, casting, unity, and condensation purposes); (5) he combined more than one event or scene into a single scene (for unity and condensation purposes); (6) he dropped expendable or unresolved plotlines (for unity and condensation purposes); (7) he dropped episodic digressions (for unity and condensation purposes); (8) he altered characters’ relationships to one another (for dramaturgical purpose); (9) he made occasional topical allusions, such as having Sam Weller sing “Jump Jim Crow” (for audience effect); and (10) in general, he strove to make the novel conform to the principles of Scribe’s “well constructed play.”

In his adaptation of Pickwick, Moncrieff engaged in all of the above adaptation practices. However, the reason that he is considered a writer of embellished adaptations and not reverential adaptations is because he engaged in the above ten practices to a much greater degree, as well as additional practices. Because he went further, Moncrieff’s embellished adaptation is, generally, less faithful to the original novel than is the reverential adaptation.

The first way that Moncrieff went further is in the utilization of topical allusions. Stirling rarely departed from the text to make his own topical allusion, but he did sometimes engage in the practice. An example comes from act 3, scene 4 of Stirling’s
play, when an intoxicated Sam Weller is walking down a street in Ipswich, wearing a woman’s shawl and bonnet, having just come from what must have been a wild party. What is topical is not Sam’s situation, nor his costume, but the song that he is singing. It was inserted into Sam’s dialogue by the playwright, not Dickens, and it would have had special meaning to the audience:

    SAM. (Sings.)
    Push along, drive along, run just so,
    All the world’s a jumping and singing Jim Crow.

These words come from a version of the international hit song “Jump Jim Crow,” which American blackface performer T. D. (Thomas Dartmouth) Rice first made famous in his home country in 1830, and now was making famous in England as a guest performer. Since July 1836, at several theaters in London, but especially at the Royal Surrey Theatre where Moncrieff’s Sam Weller would run, Rice had been filling houses, performing his famous singing and dancing trickster character, and sharing his controversial representation of black America. Among the ways that London audiences became acquainted with Rice’s character were through variations of the “Jump Jim Crow” song, as well as performances of Rice-authored plays such as Bone Squash Diavalo and Virginia Mummy, two works in which Jim Crow is the central character. Audience members who had seen the Jim Crow performance at the Surrey or elsewhere would have instantly recognized this comic allusion, and if they loved the Jim Crow character as much as the rest of London did, they would have laughed and cheered in response to Mr. Wilkinson’s portrayal of Sam Weller impersonating Jim Crow.

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Moncrieff was always on the lookout for good ideas, and in practice would have given these ideas primacy over Dickens and his original work without hesitation, no matter their provenance, be it another adapter or himself. Therefore, unsuprisingly Moncrieff appropriated Stirling’s idea for a topical allusion to Rice’s Jim Crow character. However, in his version of *Pickwick*, Moncrieff did something different: Instead of putting the “Jump Jim Crow” chorus in the mouth of a drunken Sam Weller in Ipswich, he gave Weller a full Jim-Crow-style song-and-dance number that parodied “Jump Jim Crow” and included the structure and some of the words from Rice’s song. The song-and-dance number comes at the end of act 1, scene 3, in the scene of the military review, in which (in Moncrieff’s version) the ladies of the Wardle house meet the men of the Pickwick Club for the first time, and Aunt Rachael and Mr. Tupman discover their attraction to one another. After the paired-off couples exit, Sam is left with Mr. Wardle’s servant, the sleepy fat boy, Joe. The two of them get acquainted and Sam suggests they have a beer before going to “see what ve can do to frighten the Rooks, and astonish the Crows, a bit!”—in other words, before they act as beaters, scaring birds from the bushes for the hunting party. At this point, Sam breaks into a song:

SAM. Rooks and daws must look out, whin
Rook-shooting, Cockneys go,
For those who shoot at pigeons
Wery often kills a crow!
Hop about, and skip about,
And jump jist so,
Keep for Rooks, a sharp look out—
Nor kill the Crow!

Of all the birds that make a noise,
There’s no one like the Crow,
He’s mock’d by all the little boys,
Still as he does, they do!
Vheel about, and turn about,
And jump jist so,  
Laughing at their silly rout,  
He jumps Jim Crow! (1.3)

The song continues, but with this excerpt the point is made: Moncrieff was not only willing to embed a topical allusion in an adaptation, but he was willing to go further, by foregrounding the allusion in a burletta song-and-dance number—one that is so independent of the central plotlines that it could be labeled an episode. This “Jim Crow” song straddles the line between serving Dickens’s narrative, and serving an audience full of fans of T. D. Rice’s blackface act (which, of course, had nothing to do with Dickens’s narrative). On the one hand, the song-and-dance serves Dickens’s narrative by metaphorically foreshadowing what will happen on the hunt with Mr. Wardle: namely Mr. Winkle, who falsely advertises himself a sportsman, will shoot at a pigeon, but will instead hit a “crow” (his fellow hunter and Pickwickian, Mr. Tupman); but on the other hand, the song-and-dance distances the play from Dickens’s narrative and puts the audience in a position to compare-and-contrast this song parody with the original “Jump Jim Crow” song—one that they could have heard at this very theater, as sung by T. D. Rice. Because of this distraction from the narrative, the audience, for at least a few moments, would have become emotionally distanced from the narrative. For Moncrieff, though, this was a minor drawback—laughter and applause were much more important to this popular playwright than anything else.

Another example of Moncrieff going further than Stirling in his use of topical allusions comes in the last scene of the adaptation—act 3, scene 6. This scene is not a resolution of the play’s major plotlines; rather, the play’s denouement is in fact located in the scene prior. Scene 6 is actually a kind of a post-script or addendum to the play, with
one minor plotline resolution inserted in order to tenuously link it to the plot. In the play, the scene includes such characters as the Pickwickians, the Wellers, the Wardles, and Wardle’s servants, and the scene’s subject is the ascension of the youthful Queen Victoria to the throne of Great Britain. Moncrieff’s description calls for great throngs of people, including the aforementioned characters from Pickwick, to fill the London streets, singing a celebratory song in her honor. And, at the very end, following a brief exchange between Pickwick and Sam, and an address by Sam to the audience, a “Procession of Heralds, Guards, &c., are seen passing through Temple Bar to proclaim the accession of Her Majesty Queen Victoria.” Moncrieff’s inclusion of this overtly allusive scene, would have been particularly meaningful to the audience, since Victoria’s actual accession on June 20, 1837 took place just about three weeks prior to the play’s opening. Most assuredly, Moncrieff’s Sam Weller, played by actor-manager Mr. Hammond, caused a great roar of shouting and applause in the Surrey Theatre when he asked that “every true Englishman will join with me, heart and voice, in shouting ‘God save the queen’.” Moncrieff included this extra-narrative accession scene not only for applause, but also to earn goodwill from the monarch and her supporters for himself, the theater management and theater itself. The scene also helped to reinforce the theme of nationalism that Moncrieff added to the narrative (which will be discussed later).

A second way that Moncrieff made the same changes as Stirling, but then went further, was in the adoption of minor theater genre conventions. Stirling, in The Pickwick Club, limited himself by focusing on accommodating the burletta genre only. He did this by writing song lyrics for his performers, some of which are sung to well known, popular tunes. There are ten musical interludes in Stirling’s play, many of which are sung by a
lower-class mob chorus. Other songs are sung by Emily, Wardle, and Jingle. By making this creative choice, Stirling’s play stays safely out of the territory reserved by the patent theaters—the legitimate drama. In other words, were this play to be performed at either Drury Lane or Covent Garden, Stirling would not have had to write it as a burletta, but since it ran at the Surrey Theatre, he had to do so—write it as a farce or melodrama.

Moncrieff accommodated the burletta genre as well. However, as usual, in this respect he went further than Stirling, offering up around thirty musical interludes, most of which are complete songs, and some of which are fragments. Moncrieff’s adaptation includes about three times the number of songs as Stirling’s. But Moncrieff also accommodated two other genres acceptable to the Lord Chamberlain—melodrama and farce. Moncrieff’s motive for accommodating melodrama and farce, the generic conventions of which could be counted on to provoke certain emotional responses in the audience.

It is probable that Moncrieff, reading the scenes in The Pickwick Papers in which Aunt Rachael is introduced, recognized a parody of the virtuous heroine of “classical” melodrama that Peter Brooks writes about in The Melodramatic Imagination. According to Brooks, the classical melodrama of France between 1800 and 1830, as exemplified by the plays of René Charles Guibert de Pixérécourt, was “the dramaturgy of virtue misprized and eventually recognized” (27). Certainly the spinster Aunt Rachael, who insults her nieces behind their backs in an attempt to increase her own attractiveness to a potential lover, is not the paragon of virtue that traditionally fills the heroine role of melodrama, but because she is a spinster, and therefore presumed to be a virgin, and

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because she lives under the “protection” of her brother, Mr. Wardle, she comes close enough to assume the classical melodramatic role of the virtuous heroine, if only in parodic form.

Brooks goes on to explain that in classical melodrama, right away in the first act “there supervenes a threat to virtue, a situation—and most often a person—to cast its very survival into question, obscure its identity, and elicit the process of its fight for recognition” (29). The person who casts the survival of virtue into question is, of course, the villain. The villain then takes over as the narrative’s protagonist, as Brooks explains:

In the typical case . . . melodramatic structure moves from the presentation of virtue-as-innocence to the introduction of menace or obstacle, which places virtue in a situation of extreme peril. For the greater part of the play, evil appears to reign triumphant, controlling the structure of events, dictating the moral coordinates of reality . . . The play ends with the public recognition of where virtue and evil reside, and the eradication of one as the reward of the others. (30-31)

Given Aunt Rachael as the parodic symbol of virtue, Moncrieff saw that, if he could identify a villain in the narrative, or even a parody of the villain, that could represent a threat to Rachael’s ideal virtue, he could make that character represent the moral extremes of melodrama—what Brooks calls the “Structures of the Manichaean” (28). Dickens, of course, did provide a character that could fit the role of the parody of a villain, and as a result, Moncrieff is given the option to structure his adaptation on the model of classical melodrama.

Moncrieff ultimately chose to build his adaptation on the classical structure of melodrama, making Jingle, who in the book is a scoundrel but not evil, fulfill the structural role of the evil villain, without going so far as to make him evil. In doing so, Moncrieff made Jingle a kind of parody of a villain, one whose actions drive the play
toward its conclusion. The first thing that Moncrieff did to put Jingle in the structural space normally reserved for a villain of melodrama was to make his actions central to the outcome of the play's opening scene as well as the denouement. In the opening scene of the adaptation, Jack Rackstraw (the name given by Moncreiff to Dickens's cabman) wants to fight Pickwick because he believes that the pudgy man taking copious notes is a police informant, and it is Jingle who saves Pickwick's hide. And, likewise, in Moncrieff's denouement, it is Jingle who reveals the crucial information that will release Pickwick from having to pay the fine awarded by the Court to Mrs. Bardell (a fine Pickwick refuses to pay on principle), which, furthermore, will cause Pickwick to be released from Fleet Prison.

Moncrieff used two other devices to make Jingle take on the structural role normally filled by an evil villain. Moncrieff's Jingle is responsible for more bad deeds than is Dickens's. For example, in Moncrieff's adaptation, Stiggins, the hypocritical humbug of a Methodist preacher who takes advantage of Old Weller's wife, is actually Jingle in disguise. In the novel, on the other hand, Stiggins is not Jingle, but rather a different villain altogether. And Moncrieff had other characters, such as Jingle's sidekick and admirer Job Trotter, describe Jingle as a melodramatic villain. Take, for example, the following speech by Job, delivered at the opening of act 2, scene 2, as he enters Eatonswill during the election, where Jingle, disguised as Captain Fitztory (another malefactor whose identity Moncrieff has made Jingle assume) has opened the public houses in order to buy off voters with free drinks:

TROTTER. Oh! the depravity of mankind—as that worth[y?] shepherd Stiggins piously remarks—a public house is the devil's own mousetrap—gin is his toasted cheese—and human mortals his warmints—and he no sooner sets his bait than he catches the rats like winking—there certainly
never was such a clever rogue as that Jingle—he ought to play Iago, Stukely, Joseph Surface, and all the first rate melo-dramatic villains, by patent.

For Jingle to be named alongside Iago (Othello’s persecutor), Stukely (the seducer in The Gamester), and Joseph Surface (Sheridan’s villain), was a very new way to present the rascal of The Pickwick Papers.

Besides burletta and melodrama, Moncrieff also sought to utilize the conventions of farce in order to get a laugh from the audience; thus, in addition to taking advantage of the farcical elements in the book, he added some clowning, born of his own imagination. One of the best examples may be found in Moncrieff’s adaptation of the scene in chapter sixteen in which Pickwick attempts to prevent Jingle (pretending to be Mr. Fitz-Marshall) from abducting yet another virtuous female from the safety of her protectors—in this case, a rich girl living in the Westgate House Establishment for Young Girls in the town of Bury Saint Evans. In the novel, the only Pickwickian present at the boarding school is Pickwick himself, accompanied by Sam, who must hoist the heavy older man over the garden wall, where he plans to capture Jingle before the rascal can follow through on the scheme revealed by a “repentant” Job Trotter. In his adaptation, on the other hand, Moncrieff tinkered with the scene in order to make it farcical. He put Isabella and Emily in the boarding house by coincidence—visiting Miss Tabby, the owner of the school, who happens to be their former governess. When the cook delivers a letter to Miss Tabby from “Anti-Tarquin” (Pickwick), warning that a “libertine” intruder intends to kidnap a girl tonight, the two Wardle sisters call for Mr. Wardle, Mr. Snodgrass, Mr. Winkle, and the fat boy Joe to help defend Miss Tabby’s boarding house. Little do Mr. Wardle and his friends realize that they will not be defending the house from a libertine,
but rather from their esteemed friend Pickwick. Thus, after Pickwick scales the garden wall, just as he does in the novel, he prepares to capture whom he thinks is Jingle, and Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle prepare to capture whom they think is a libertine. Then, at the climax of a playful musical exchange of song between the two parties, Snodgrass and Winkle jump out and give Pickwick a sound thrashing, which is then made worse when Mr. Wardle, his daughters, Miss Tabby, and the boarders join in, hitting Pickwick with pans. This tumult awakens the sleepy boy Joe, who then accidentally shoots the cook in the bustle. Finally, the violence ends when Pickwick identifies himself to the house’s surprised defenders.

Moncrieff’s imaginative adaptation of the scene described above indulges in a number of conventions of farce: chaos, a bloodless beating of an innocent man, a series of coincidences, several mistaken identities, and a character punished in the hindquarters—all included for the sake of provoking laughter. Thus, with the above examples, it has been shown that beyond engaging in the conventions of burletta, Moncrieff also made use of the conventions of melodrama and farce. And, in addition, the preceding section has shown that while Moncrieff made the same kind of narrative changes that Stirling made, he went further than Stirling with them. However, Moncrieff further set himself apart from Stirling by practicing two kinds of invention in his adaptation that the writer of reverential adaptations never did: incorporating new themes and writing an entirely new ending.

In Sam Weller Moncrieff imposed the theme imposed is that of nationalism, as, previously discussed, with the staged procession celebrating the accession of Queen Victoria and the call for the audience to join those on stage in shouting, “God save the
Queen!" A second example may be found in a scene already referred to—the act 1, scene 3 representation of the military review where Moncrieff's Pickwickians meet the women of the Wardle household for the first time. In this scene, Isabella Wardle watches the soldiers march by, and before breaking into song, utters a compliment that is in keeping with the theme imposed by Moncrieff on Dickens's work: "It certainly has been a grand sight! this review—and does honour to the troops." Moncrieff's nationalistic theme is reflected in the songs sung in Eatanswill during the election. Rather than taking unstinting satirical aim at dishonest electioneering practices, as Dickens did with this portion of the novel, Moncrieff had Isabella and Emily Wardle sing a nationalistic song in act 2, scene 2 which serves as a kind of counter-balance to the ridicule Dickens builds into the corresponding chapter in the novel:

DUET.—Isabella and Emily

Air—"Hurrah! for the Red and Blue."

Hurrah! for the Buff and the Blue,
May they both to their Monarch prove true,
Be staunch to the cause,
Of our Charter and Laws,
And while raising the glories,

Of Whigs and of Tories
Still keep England's welfare in view!

In the Pickwick novel, Dickens never made compliments to the monarch, the military, the nation, its Charter or its laws; not only would he have considered such grueling inartistic, but, in addition, he would have considered satire a form of nationalism—since its aim was the correction of faults. Such explicit expressions of nationalism as exemplified above would no doubt have irked Dickens, who preferred subtleties and ironies to the direct expression of a thematic message. And, in addition, Dickens would
probably have disliked how the impact of the satire was lessened as a result of this
attempt at watering down the criticism with a counter-representation. As Philip Collins
has pointed out, the general view, articulated by George Orwell and others, is that
Dickens was, through-and-through, a proud Englishman; however, he was not in any way
a chauvinist—a trait that Orwell associates with Thackeray. 32 Dickens probably would
not have liked the heavy handedness of the nationalistic final scene, but probably more
than that, he would have disliked the imposition of any Moncrieff-authored scene,
regardless of its content.

In addition to the theme of nationalism, Moncrieff also explicitly pushed the
theme of domesticity upon the narrative, likewise, through song. However, because an
argument can be made that domesticity is an important theme which may be found in
Dickens's original narrative (whereas overt nationalism may not), let Moncrieff's
imposition of a nationalistic message serve as an example of how a writer of an
embellished adaptation makes certain changes that a writer of reverential adaptations will
not. As a final note on this point, Moncrieff added the theme of nationalism to the play
not only to please the monarchy, politicians, soldiers, and the patriotic, but also audience
members who have enjoyed the more patriotic forms of melodrama at the minor theaters
over the years—particularly nautical and military melodramas. 33 Indeed, it could be said

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33 For extended treatment of the themes of nationalism and patriotism in nineteenth-
that the imposition of the nationalism theme on Dickens's narrative is yet another way that Moncrieff accommodated melodrama into Dickens's work.

A second kind of change commonly seen in an embellished adaptation that is rarely if ever made by a writer of reverential adaptations is the invention of an entirely new ending to the narrative. The reason for the imposition of this new ending is either because the adaptation is based on a work-in-progress (and the ending is, therefore, unknowable by the adapter), or because the adapter has found or invented what he or she considers to be a better ending. Upon initial consideration, it might seem that all adaptations based on serializations-in-progress must then be embellished adaptations, but this is not true. First, an adapter might be able to access the finished work before the public does; or second, an adapter might be able to find a way to resolve the plot where the published work has paused in its progress, making only small changes to the story and plot in order to stop there. This is what Edward Stirling did with his conclusion to The Pickwick Club.

Again, Stirling had only the first ten numbers of The Pickwick Papers to work with when he produced his adaptation—ten numbers out of an eventual twenty. Given this situation, he could have brainstormed an ending that not only resolved the problem of Pickwick being arrested for invading a lady's room in the middle of the night, but in addition, resolved the problem with Mrs. Bardell, who has decided to sue Pickwick for breach of promise, believing that he has reneged on a wedding proposal. To resolve both plotlines in a conclusion would have required a great deal of imaginative invention, the kind of invention for which writers of embellished adaptations are known. However, Stirling revered Dickens and his narrative too highly to invent a new ending. Instead, he
chose to drop the Bardell v. Pickwick storyline altogether and focus on resolving
Pickwick’s other legal problem with as few alterations as possible. Stirling did so
without making any major changes, with the exception of the manner in which Pickwick
gains his freedom: In the novel, Pickwick gains his freedom by telling the magistrate
Nupkins that Captain Fitz-Marshall is actually Jingle in disguise; in Stirling’s adaptation,
Aunt Rachael (whom Stirling has inserted in Miss Witherfield’s place) withdraws her
charges after recognizing Pickwick as the invader.

Once Pickwick’s hearing in front of the magistrate Nupkins is finished, and the
mix-up is amicably resolved, Stirling could conclude his adaptation with a denouement
very much in keeping with the spirit of the Christmas party depicted in chapter twenty-
eight (number ten) of the novel—that is, the Wardles and the Pickwickians coming
together to celebrate both the holiday and the wedding of two minor characters. In the
novel, the united couple is Trundle and Bella Wardle, sister to Emily and Isabella; in the
Stirling adaptation, the couple is Emily Wardle and Snodgrass, whose romance, in the
corresponding scene in the novel, has only just begun. Though Stirling did in fact make
changes to Dickens’s narrative, these changes cannot be considered bold, inventive, or
major, unlike Moncrieff’s ending to Sam Weller.

Moncrieff wrote his adaptation at the point in which Dickens and his publishers
had presented fifteen out of an eventual twenty numbers to the public. Thus, like Stirling,
he was faced with the decision whether to invent a resolution to the major unresolved
plotlines, or to be more reverential and only make small changes in order to conclude the
narrative at the point where it had currently paused. The choice he made was the choice
that writers of embellished adaptations usually make—he chose to invent a new ending,
one that he hoped would be as good as or better than the ending that Dickens would eventually present to the public.

One part of his invented ending—the last scene of the play—has already been discussed. It is the procession scene in which Queen Victoria’s accession to the throne is celebrated. As stated previously, this ending relates in no way to Dickens’s narrative and was mainly included 1) in unity with the theme of nationalism interwoven into the play; 2) to be topical, since Victoria took the throne only a few weeks prior; 3) to endear the theater to the monarch, her supporters, and the Lord Chamberlain; and 4) to provoke enthusiasm and applause at the end of the play. That this last scene in the play is bold, inventive, and major there can be no dispute. And, yet, this scene is actually preceded by a scene that also has these traits.

At the end of Pickwick number fifteen, the most important plotline that is not resolved relates to Bardell v. Pickwick: Namely, as a result of refusing to pay Mrs. Bardell and her lawyers the penalty imposed by the court for his so-called “breach of promise,” Pickwick has been thrown into Fleet Prison. There, among a sea of unfortunates, including Jingle and Job Trotter, Pickwick finds himself without a protector—until Sam Weller, ever the loyal servant and friend, concocts a trick to get himself also thrown into the prison. Desirous to resolve this problem, Moncrieff invented a resolution that was both bold and major: He came up with a surprise revelation—that, in fact, Mrs. Wardle is Jingle’s wife, and that she and the attorneys Dodson and Fogg conspired together to defraud Pickwick. As a result of this revelation, the court frees Pickwick and awards him £300 in damages, which he then gratefully transfers to Jingle and Job Trotter so that they, too, can be released from Fleet.
CONCLUSION

Having now established the four major types of unauthorized theatrical adaptations of *The Pickwick Papers* that Dickens encountered, this dissertation now turns to Dickens’s experiences of these plays; his emotional reaction to them; the initial, extra-legal strategy of defense that they apparently inspired in him; and the second, more ambitious phase of that strategy, which Dickens seems to have adopted when he found his initial strategy to have been a success.
CHAPTER TWO

THE VICTORIAN BOOK CURSE: DICKENS'S ATTEMPT TO TAKE
CONTROL OF THE DICKENS ADAPTATION INDUSTRY

INTRODUCTION

As established in the previous chapter, Dickens felt himself victimized in multiple ways by the playwrights, managers, and actors of the Victorian British theater industry; and because, as stated in the introduction, he had no legal protection from those who would appropriate what he considered to be the product of his labor, and therefore his literary property, Dickens felt he had to take matters into his own hands. Whether conscious of this or not, Dickens dusted off and embraced a practice from the Middle Ages—the medieval book curse, which attempted to play on the fears and conscience of those who would “steal” one’s book. A medieval book curse was, in most cases, an inscription inserted at the beginning of a medieval book with a threat of anathema—either excommunication or a general curse—to anyone who would harm the book; write in the margins of the book; lend out the book; borrow the book and not return it; or steal the book. The following is a translation from the Latin of the oldest-known book curse that specifically refers to excommunication:

Therefore I entreat . . . God and the Angels and . . . every nation of mankind, whether near or far, that no hindrance presumes against my work. If [anyone] acts against my work with his hands, would that the Eternal King [take] this cursed person and lower [him] into the lowest level of Hell [to be] tortured with Judas, and anathema and maranatha. [Let him also receive] by the hand of God the cruelest plague [and both he
and his] sons struck with leprosy so that no one inhabit his house. [However, if he pays] double the value of [this work] in money, let him be absolved.¹

Though a medieval monk inscribed the above in a book approximately twelve centuries before Dickens wrote *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Nicholas Nickleby*, there can be little doubt that Dickens would have understood how the medieval author felt. Although the invention of the printing press made an individual book much less valuable than one produced during the medieval period, there were still book thieves—book thieves of a different kind, but book thieves nonetheless—who would steal the product of countless hours of hard labor.

Although the “book thieves” in the nineteenth century valued books for a different reason than their medieval counterparts, Dickens and others considered their actions to be the equivalent of lifting a codex off a monastery bookshelf and absconding with it to another monastery. It is unknown to what degree Dickens was aware of the concept of the book curse: He may have been aware of the concept and adapted it to fit his needs; he may have stumbled upon it unconsciously through instinct; or he may have found it as a result of conscious reasoning in pursuit of a solution. What is known is that Dickens’s response was the Victorian equivalent of a medieval book curse. Dickens’s world, while certainly faithful in segments of the population, was not one generally living in fear of God. As numerous scholars and historians have recounted, faith in God and religious institutions had been eroding over time, as a result of weak religious leadership, the Industrial Revolution and other factors. Suffice it to say that Dickens could not count on God’s anger and the threat of eternal damnation as an effective deterrent against potential

thieves. These playwrights, managers, and actors could simply not be counted on to fear such things. However, as a man who had found enormous success as a popular author, he could assert himself as a kind of god-among-gods in the world of popular culture—a god with powers, who might exert them if angered.

Just as belief in God and his anger at sinners had waned over the centuries, so too had the power of the Church as an institution. Indeed, in the nineteenth century it was still a powerful role player in society, but it was not the center of community life, sharing power with the day's secular leadership, as it was during the Middle Ages. It was the omnipresence and power of the Church during the medieval period that had made excommunication—the severing of a person from the Church, its sacraments, and therefore its punishments—such a powerful threat. Therefore, Dickens needed to identify an institution where his limited power as god-among-gods would have an influence. The institution he identified was, of course, the world of British theater. For surely, in the metaphorical sense, Dickens knew himself to be a god-among-gods; his amazing early popular success confirmed this self-perception in his mind.

And, finally, if Dickens, as god-among-gods in the world of British theater, were to exert his power, he would need to be perceived as having powers at his disposal—powers which could invoke fear, the way that an anathema, the curse of excommunication, once did. Dickens presented himself to those in the world of British theater who might "steal" his "books" (that is, his narratives) as a god-among-gods in the world of popular culture, endowed with the power to evoke fear in the hearts of members of the community through curses that he could visit upon them if provoked.
When the first unauthorized adaptation of *Pickwick* appeared on the stage in March of 1837, Dickens refrained from protesting or fighting back. It was the end of the 1836-1837 theater season, the very same season that Dickens worked for two gods of the theater—John Braham, the internationally famous tenor and theatrical manager, and John Harley, the star comedian who worked for Braham. He wrote three original plays for them at the St. James’s Theatre. The first of those pieces was *The Strange Gentleman, A Comic Burletta in Two Acts.*² It opened there on Thursday, September 29, 1836. The second was *The Village Coquettes*, which opened on Tuesday, December 6, 1836. This work was an operetta, and featured musical compositions by John Hullah. It was supposed to be the first of Dickens’s plays produced at the theater, but it wasn’t ready in September, and so its opening was delayed. The third, *Is She His Wife?, or Something Singular*, opened on Monday, March 6, 1837. It was a farce and the least successful of the three. For Dickens to protest against or fight the theater industry at the same time that he was attempted to establish himself as a playwright did not seem prudent, so he held off.

It was during this season that Dickens began to meet the gods of the theater. Among them was John Braham. Prior to producing the above Dickens-authored plays, Braham was for thirty years the most famous tenor in Great Britain and an international star. Born with the surname “Abraham,” the Jewish boy’s life path was radically altered when his father died. John’s uncle, the singer Michael Leoni (Myer Lyon), took over responsibility for raising the boy and, in addition, trained him as a singer. Somewhere

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between ages ten and twelve John would go on to perform at Covent Garden under the name “Braham.” Noted more for his singing than his acting, he could and did play a wide variety of roles in operas and other musical entertainments. In 1835, probably due to the influence of his much younger wife, Francis Elizabeth (Fanny), Braham contradicted his stated belief that theatrical management was a losing business, and entered into a (short-lived) proprietorship and management at the Colosseum in Regent’s Park with Frederick Yates. It is believed that Dickens anonymously reviewed several plays produced there in 1835 for the Morning Chronicle. Then, several months later, Braham built and installed himself as sole manager of the new St. James’s Theatre on King Street in Westminster. If it is true that he was born in 1777, Braham was about 58-years-old at the time he built the theater. By then the famous singer possessed a large fortune, had leased an impressive estate, and had extensive contacts with high society and royalty. Braham would end up losing his fortune as a result of the above two theatrical ventures, and the St. James’s itself would become known as “Braham’s Folly.”

However, his failure did not come about as a result of low aspirations. In addition to producing original plays by the rising star Boz, and commissioning the talented John Hullah to compose music, Braham hired such popular actors as Fanny Stirling, Robert Strickland, Charles Selby, Clara Selby, Henry Forester, Madame Sala, Alfred Sidney (Wigan), John Mitchell, and John Pritt Harley.

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3 Letters, Vol. 1, 76.

In 1836 John Pitt Harley, another god of the theater whom Dickens met early on, played the eponymous hero in Boz's *The Strange Gentleman* for Braham at the St. James's. Apparently his acting so pleased Dickens that he dedicated his next play, the operetta *The Village Coquettes*, to the multi-talented actor/singer/comedian:

My dear Sir,

My dramatic bantlings are no sooner born than you father them. You have made my "Strange Gentleman" exclusively your own; you have adopted Martin Stokes [a lead role in *The Village Coquettes*] with equal readiness; and you still profess your willingness to do the same kind of office for all future scions of the same stock.

I dedicate to you the first play I ever published, and you made for me the first play I ever produced: —the balance is in your favour, and I am afraid it will remain so.

That you may long contribute to the amusement of the public, and long be spared to shed a lustre, by the honour and integrity of your private life, on the profession which for many years you have done so much to uphold, is the sincere and earnest wish of, my dear Sir,

Yours most faithfully, Charles Dickens.

December 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1836\textsuperscript{5}

In that drama Harley played a comical farmer, a role that exploited the special talents of the notably thin man.\textsuperscript{6} Then, three months later, Harley once again "fathered" a role born of Dickens—that of Felix Tapkins in *Is She His Wife?, or Something Singular*. Harley, in addition to starring in all three plays, served as the stage manager of the theater.

Dickens respected and admired Harley for a number of reasons besides the skillful way that the actor impersonated Stokes, Tapkins, and the Strange Gentleman. First, Dickens liked the man's talent for singing comic songs (an art form Dickens much

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\textsuperscript{5} *Letters*, Vol. 1, 212.

\textsuperscript{6} Duncan 33.
indulged in as a boy); second, in Harley young Boz saw a worthy participant in the tradition of the stage comedian, which Boz had studied since childhood (see Dickens's editorship of the Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi); and third, because in 1833 Harley had taken responsibility for the treasury of the Drury Lane Theatrical Fund, which helped to fund the retirement of aging players, Dickens saw a fellow advocate of actors (see Dickens's work for the General Theatrical Fund and the Guild of Literature and Art). To Dickens, Harley was both a skillful stage artist and an honorable member of society, a society which Dickens saw as indebted to professional actors for their contributions both to the culture and to human happiness.

In March of 1838 Charles Dickens faced a new but familiar problem: Bentley's Miscellany had only published half of the twenty-four numbers of his new novel Oliver Twist, and the theater managers of London were already licking their lips, eager to produce unauthorized adaptations of it. Actually, Dickens did not know this for a fact, but his experience with The Christening (from Sketches by Boz), and The Pickwick Papers prepared him to be made a victim again. In 1838 British law still provided no protection to authors from the playwrights, managers, and actors who appropriated their work, but that did not mean that such thieving had to go unchallenged. The law was an evolving thing, after all, and the Members of Parliament whose charge it was to make laws governing copyright had simply not yet made a law pertaining to this particular issue. Charles Dickens believed that the products of his imagination and labor—the situations, stories, plots, characters, dialogue and settings of his narratives—were his, and nobody else’s, and, like a medieval book painstakingly copied by a scribe in the cloister

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of a monastery, were produced at great mental and physical cost to himself; therefore, he was convicted that his fiction was his own rightful property and that no theater managers, playwrights, or actors should be able to appropriate his property without a contract granting them a license, requiring certain compensation, and imposing certain limitations on the licensee. Because Dickens believed that fiction should be protected from opportunistic theater people, and because it had been a while since his attempt at becoming a professional playwright, he felt capable of taking action.

Thus, inspired to act, Dickens reached out to Frederick Yates, the actor-manager at the Adelphi Theatre, in a letter likely written in mid-March, 1838:

My Dear Sir,

Supposing we arrange preliminaries to our mutual satisfaction, I propose to dramatize Oliver for the first night of the Season.

I have never seen Mrs. Honor to the best of my recollection, but from the mere circumstances of her being a Mrs, I should say at once that she was “a many sizes too large” for Oliver Twist. If it be played by a female, it should be a very sharp girl of thirteen or fourteen—not more, or the character would be an absurdity.

I don’t see the possibility of any other house doing it before your next opening night. If they do, it must be done in a very extraordinary manner, as the story (unlike that of Pickwick) is an involved and complicated one. I am quite satisfied that nobody can have heard what I mean to do with the different characters in the end, inasmuch as at present I don’t quite know myself; so we are tolerably safe on that head.

Any way, I am quite sure that your name as the Jew and mine as the author would knock any other attempts quite out of the field. I do not however see the least possibility of any other Theatre being able to steal a march upon you.

Believe me always
Truly Yours

Frederick Yates Esqre.

CHARLES DICKENS

The above letter is remarkable in a number of respects: First, in making his proposal to Yates, Dickens was engaging in a friendly confrontation with a man who he knew was

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one of the major "thieves" of his narratives. Not only had Yates produced the very first unauthorized theatrical adaptation of a Dickens narrative, *The Christening*, a seed adaptation based on the sketch *The Bloomsbury Christening*, but, in addition, Yates had produced *The Peregrinations of Pickwick*, the potboiler adaptation by William Leman Rede, based on the novel-in-progress *The Pickwick Papers*.

Second, this letter represents Dickens's first attempt to make a deal with a theater manager to adapt one of his works that had originated in another form. As will be confirmed later, Dickens had never tried to do such a thing before because he found that adaptations of novels generally made weak theater, and because he snubbed the practice of writing adaptations. To write an adaptation was to deny oneself the intoxication of creating characters and a narrative for the first time. In short, the act of condensing a large work to fit the scale of adaptation paled in comparison to the act of creating an original. Furthermore, to Dickens the novel and the theater were drastically different forms, both wonderful in their own right, but awkward and often unsatisfying when mixed. So why did he relent? One reason, no doubt, was his general sense, previously mentioned, that adapters were ready to pounce on his works-in-progress. Second, if the "thief" Yates were to co-opt his work anyway, he might as well assert some control over the final product in order to prevent a monstrosity like Rede's *The Peregrinations of Pickwick*. Third, he wanted to do whatever he could to postpone the openings of adaptations until after the completed novel had been released. Fourth and finally, the very manager who had produced his original plays, John Braham, now had plans to produce an adaptation of *Oliver Twist*.
Whether Dickens knew about Braham’s and Harley’s plan to adapt Dickens’s serialization-in-progress for the stage is not documented, but, for several reasons, it is likely that he did know. For one thing, as a result of his work on *The Strange Gentleman*, *The Village Coquettes*, and *Is She His Wife?*, Dickens would have spent a great deal of time with Braham, the acting company, and the house playwright, Gilbert Abbott à Beckett, in the green room of the St. James’s Theatre. Furthermore, it would have been unlikely for collaborators of Dickens to be secretive about such plans unless they were both ruthless and duplicitous—characteristics Dickens never attributed to these men at that time or in the future. Instead, it is more likely that Braham and Harley, as admirers of Dickens’s work, proposed a collaborative adaptation of the author’s serialization-in-progress, and when Dickens tried to talk them into waiting until he had completed the novel, they went ahead anyway in an attempt to beat the competition to the market.

Despite the plans afoot at the St. James’s, Dickens went to Yates at the Adelphi and made a proposal for an adaptation based on the completed novel.

Braham and Harley’s adaptation for the St. James’s, without Dickens’s involvement, was a disaster. The advertisements in the newspapers, which notified audience members that the 1837-1838 season would soon be drawing to a close (at Easter), promised three plays on the evening of March 27: *The Ambassadress*, a popular opera featuring John Braham; *Oliver Twist*, a new “dramatic drama” featuring John Harley; and *Monsieur Jacques* featuring Morris Barnett. In the *Oliver* adaptation Harley cast himself as Mr. Bumble, the beadle thus telegraphing to the audience that this adaptation would emphasize Mr. Bumble’s character in order to exploit Harley’s talents.
Indeed, à Beckett, Braham’s house playwright, inflated the Bumble role to be as prominent as, or more prominent than the roles of Oliver and Fagin. In addition, he made several major story changes: In order to punish Fagin, the adapter puts him at the scene of the break-in so that he takes the bullet that, in the book, strikes Oliver. This bullet kills Fagin, satisfying the expectations of an audience used to melodramas. As for the necessity of inserting Harley-as-Bumble into the conclusion, the adapter handles this by changing the identity of the woman Mr. Bumble is thinking of marrying from Mrs. Corney, the workhouse matron, to Mrs. Bedwin, Mr. Brownlow’s housekeeper. Then the adapter switched the owner of the burglarized home from the old lady, Mrs. Maylie, to Mr. Brownlow, Oliver’s gentleman-rescuer. With this change, Mr. Bumble is present, paying attention to Mrs. Corney, when the burglary occurs, as is Mr. Brownlow and his cynical but good-hearted friend Mr. Grimwig.

The adaptation received an extraordinarily poor reception from the audience—the worst of any adaptation of Dickens had yet produced, including Rede’s *Peregrinations of Pickwick*. *The Town* called the piece “a very lame production”\(^9\); the *Literary Gazette* said, “a thing more unfit for any stage except that of the Penny Theatre we never saw”\(^10\); and *The Penny Satirist* said,

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\text{[It] was consigned by the audience to the lowest deep of Tartarus. It had not the slightest claim to favour, and we cannot but wonder at the blind fatuity which could induce any management to produce a piece so utterly destitute of all that can interest the imagination, or engage the reason.}\]


\(^10\) Qtd. in Fitz-Gerald 99.

Few positive reviews that appeared in the press focus on Harley’s performance rather than the play. For example, another review in *The Town* praised Harley “who embodied it [the role of Bumble] with the fullest drolleries of the prototype.”12 In fact, the play died in childbirth—it opened and closed at the St. James’s on the same night.

Another threat to Dickens and to the characterizations and narrative of *Oliver Twist* came in May of 1838, when the second of the unauthorized plays based upon the novel, *Oliver Twist; or, The Parish Boy’s Progress* by C. Z. Barnett, opened at the Pavilion Theatre. But this play also had a short run—only a week. Might Dickens have felt relieved? Such a short run meant the damage inflicted on *Oliver Twist* and his own reputation would be minimal. Also, one of the things he certainly wanted was to successfully release the entire novel without one of these unfaithful adaptations becoming a hit, upstaging the release of his book, and thereby giving the wrong impression to large numbers of the public about the characters and story that he had created.

In the main, Dickens was getting what he wanted—a lot of his readers were getting their first impression of *Oliver Twist* from the novel instead of the stage. On November 9, 1838, five months before the serialization was completed, Bentley published the three-volume novel, and, up until that moment, not a single theatrical adaptation had managed to successfully upstage Dickens and *Oliver Twist*. However, whatever relief Dickens might have felt was short-lived. On November 19, 1838, ten days after Bentley released the three-volume first edition of the novel, George Almar’s unauthorized adaptation of *Oliver* opened at the Royal Surrey Theatre. It was the very house where Moncrieff had presented his embellished adaptation of *Pickwick*.

Remembering well what had happened the last time the Surrey had adapted his work, Dickens gathered his strength and visited the playhouse in order to see what Almar had done with his book. According to Dickens’s friend and biographer John Forster, “in the middle of the first scene he [Dickens] laid himself down upon the floor in the corner of the box and never rose from it until the drop-scene fell.”²\textsuperscript{13} Knowing Dickens’s attitude toward adaptations of his work, it is not surprising that he lay down without giving Almar’s adaptation a chance. The play was already a certifiable hit and would continue to run indefinitely. The audiences that packed the house night after night were experiencing a second-hand representation of his characters and narrative before they would have had time to read the just published novel or the not-yet-finished serialization. Indeed, as far as Dickens was concerned, those reading the serialization were also being cheated; five numbers in the serialization still had yet to be published. What is more, Dickens did not have to watch Almar’s play to know what was happening on the stage; during the Pickwick rage he had seen, read about, or heard about, every type of adaptation that could be produced by the “thieves” of the theater. He knew all the approaches adaptors could take, and not a single one pleased him. Much to Dickens’s chagrin, the Almar adaptation would have a very good run—86 performances in all.²\textsuperscript{14}

In addition to all of the above, there are two other probable reasons why Dickens laid down on the floor of his box during the Almar adaptation of Oliver Twist. First, he probably felt upset that his proposal to adapt Oliver for the Adelphi had not been


\textsuperscript{14} Bolton 110.
accepted. Sometime between the writing of the above-referenced letter and November 1838, the deal with Yates had died. In fact, it is not clear if the deal ever had a life in the first place. Why the two parties were not able to work out an arrangement is not documented, but it is probable that Yates had heard the positive buzz about Dickens’s latest serialization-in-progress, Nicholas Nickleby—perhaps he had even read some of the numbers—and had decided to take advantage of the free publicity that the book was receiving in the press. Furthermore, Yates knew Dickens would not write the adaptation for Nickleby until after the serialization was complete. Boz consistently refused to cooperate with adaptations while the book was yet unfinished, and his stance was not about to change. Yates probably understood Dickens’s position, but felt had to do what was best for his theater and himself. To produce an adaptation while the serialization of Nicholas Nickleby was in its early stages, and while people buzzed about the book, was a better business move. So, on November 19, 1838, the same day that Almar opened his unauthorized adaptation of Oliver Twist at the Royal Surrey, Frederick Yates opened an unauthorized adaptation of Nicholas Nickleby at the Adelphi. That play, adapted by the writer of reverential adaptations, Edward Stirling, and starring Yates, Mrs. Keeley, and O. Smith, also was a hit, but an even bigger one than Almar’s play—it would go on to have an exceptional run of 160 performances.\textsuperscript{15} To Dickens, it must have felt as if Yates had given him a double slap in the face.

The second probable reason why Dickens laid on the floor of his theater box was that he was most likely disappointed over having failed in his second attempt to set up an authorized adaptation of Oliver Twist. When Dickens found out that Yates at the Adelphi

\textsuperscript{15} Bolton 156-57.
did not wish to hire him to write an authorized adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, but instead meant to produce an unauthorized adaptation of the unfinished *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dickens sent their mutual friend, John Forster, over to see the powerful actor-manager William Charles Macready with the same proposal—to write an authorized adaptation of the (now) completed novel for Covent Garden.

At the time of this offer, Dickens’s and Macready’s friendship was only about eighteen-months-old, but the two of them had developed an instant liking for one another, and socialized and corresponded with one another regularly.\(^{16}\) In his letters, Dickens greeted the actor with “My Dear Macready.”\(^{17}\) The two formed a kind of mutual admiration society. Each saw the other as an artistic genius, and recognized what was best in the other. What is more, in a theater world full of toadies, Macready felt that Dickens was a true friend. During the 1838-1839 season in question, Macready was in the thick of his ambitious management experiment at Covent Garden, one in which he attempted to re-animate the British drama through revivals of Shakespeare and the staging of plays by serious dramatists such as Bulwer-Lytton. Of all the gods of the theater that Dickens knew, including Braham and Harley, the Shakespearean Macready was by far the most powerful. If he could make a deal with him, Dickens would have secured at least one quality adaptation based on the finished novel. The problem was that, like Dickens, Macready had no great love for adaptations of novels. What follows are several excerpts from Macready’s 1838 diary:

November 8. Forster came into my room and proposed on the part of Dickens the dramatization of *Oliver Twist*, with Dickens’s name.


\(^{17}\) For an example, see *Letters*, Vol. 1, 468.
Nothing can be kinder than this generous intention of Dickens, but I fear it is not acceptable.

November 9. . . . The skimming over *Oliver Twist* occupied me more than the whole day.

November 10. Forster and Dickens called; and I told them of the utter impracticability of *Oliver Twist* for any dramatic purpose. 18

Clearly, Macready held both Dickens and Forster in high regard, but he did not see the book as in any way adaptable—at least according to his personal standard. The explanation given by Macready was persuasive, and it probably reinforced for Dickens what he already believed: that novels do not adapt properly into good theater and that both forms give up more than they gain when forced together.

Thus, as Dickens lay on the floor of his box at the Surrey Theatre, it was the Almar adaptation of *Oliver Twist* that made him prostrate, but also much more. The cumulative impact of all that had happened probably made him feel defeated and powerless. He had tried to stave off the adaptations of *Oliver Twist* while it was a serialization-in-progress, but it was only out of sheer luck that the two attempts were both weak and short-lived. Given the low standards of theater audiences, the outcome could just as easily have been disastrous for Dickens. Furthermore, in his attempt to produce a faithful, authorized adaptation to coincide with the publication of the completed novel, both of his efforts had failed. As a result, his just published *Oliver Twist* novel was forced into an unwanted marriage with George Almar’s unauthorized adaptation. People around London would be talking about Dickens’s novel and Almar’s adaptation in the same breath. The very idea of it must have made Dickens feel ill. Furthermore, if that

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were not bad enough, the "thieves" Yates and Stirling had produced an unauthorized adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby* while the serialization was still in its infancy.

Despite the fact that he most likely felt wronged, Dickens refrained from burning any bridges and wrote a gracious letter to Frederick Yates sometime after he had seen *Nicholas Nickleby*, possibly Nov. 29, 1838:

My Dear Sir.

I am very glad indeed that *Nickleby* is doing so well. You are right about the popularity of the work, for its sale has left even that of *Pickwick* far behind.

My general objection to the adaptation of any unfinished work of mine simply is, that being badly done and worse acted it tends to vulgarize the characters, to destroy or weaken in the minds of those who see them the impressions I have endeavored to create, and consequently to lessen the after-interest in their progress. No such objection can exist for a moment where the thing is so admirably done in every respect as you have done it in this instance. I felt it an act of common justice after seeing the piece, to withdraw all objection to its publication, and to say thus much to the parties interested in it, without reserve.

Would you think me very unreasonable if I asked you not to compare *Nickleas* with *Tom and Jerry*?

If you can spare us a private box for next Tuesday, I shall be much obliged to you. If it be on the stage so much the better, as I shall really be glad of an opportunity to tell Mrs. Keeley and O Smith how very highly I appreciate their Smike and Newman Noggs. I put you out of the question altogether, for that glorious Mantalini is beyond all praise.

Faithfully Yours

Fredk. Yates Esquire

CHARLES DICKENS\(^{19}\)

Despite Dickens’s carefully worded compliments, it is clear that, in addition to being unhappy that yet another unauthorized adaptation had been produced of a serialization-in-progress, Dickens was not pleased that his serialization-in-progress, *Nicholas Nickleby*, then had to compete with a published version of Stirling’s play, which some readers might choose to purchase over his serialization or, eventually, the novel itself. Instead of lashing out at Yates, all Dickens asks is that in that the published version of the play the

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\(^{19}\) *Letters*, Vol. 1, 463-64.
prefatory notes and promotional blurbs make no comparison between Stirling’s *Nickleby* and *Tom and Jerry*, the 1821 hit adaptation written by W. T. Moncrieff. However, what is also important about this letter is that it records Dickens’s sincere appreciation for the performances of two actors who would eventually play a major role in Dickens’s authorized adaptations—Mrs. Keeley and O. Smith. Despite their association with an unauthorized adaptation, Dickens did not hold them responsible for the act of “thievery” of which they were a part. Instead, Dickens aimed his quiet resentment in the direction of the minor theater managers and their hack dramatist allies.

That evening that Dickens lay on the floor in the Royal Surrey Theatre was a turning point for him; he had learned a lesson. Whereas he had passively sat by as the “thieves” of the theater had stolen his *Pickwick Papers* during its serialization, he had actively tried to direct the adaptation of *Oliver Twist*. Having unsuccessfully attempted to defend himself and his work from the adapters and he now knew how powerless he really was to do so. In the end, Dickens had to endure watching the management of the Royal Surrey Theatre make money off of Almar’s unauthorized adaptation, while members of the audience were fed an unwholesome imitation of his novel. There was nothing Dickens could do about it. In the end, Dickens had not even succeeded in getting a rival adaptation off the ground, which could compete with the production at the Surrey. Lying on the floor of his box, Dickens most likely absorbed a lesson taught to him by Frederick Yates. What the manager of the Adelphi taught him was that he, Charles Dickens, was respected in the world of the theater, but not feared. Indeed Yates, the prototypical actor-manager of the minor theater, respected Dickens, but only for what the novelist could do for him. Dickens, after all, wrote *The Bloomsbury Christening*,

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Nicholas Nickleby, and Oliver Twist, the last of which Yates also adapted—without Dickens’s authorization—on February 15, 1839. Yates respected but feared not Dickens; none of the theater people feared him. This, Dickens realized, would have to change, if he were to protect his literary works.

For about five years Dickens mulled over his three Oliver Twist failures: to prevent adaptations before the serialization’s completion; to prevent unauthorized adaptations from misrepresenting the characterizations and narratives of his novels; and to guide a faithful authorized stage adaptation to accompany the release of his novel. Based on the record his actions between 1844 and 1860, it appears that he came to the following conclusion: If he wanted to achieve his primary goals pertaining to the theatrical adaptations of his work, the theater people must not only respect, but also fear him. He had watched a seemingly endless string of unauthorized adaptations of his books hit the minor theater stages: Nicholas Nickleby adaptations beginning in 1838; Master Humphrey’s Clock in 1840; The Old Curiosity Shop in 1840; and Barnaby Rudge, in 1841. In response, he developed a multi-phased strategy that he began implementing in 1844. Based on Dickens’s Letters and other evidence, I have mapped out the first two phases of Dickens’s strategy to participate in the process of turning his novels into authorized stage adaptations.

**PHASE ONE**

1. Target the theater managers and playwrights who have previously produced or acted in unauthorized adaptations of works-in-progress—specifically, those who a) intend to continue doing so; b) who reverence you; c) who want to be your friend; and/or d) who seek the status of being a part of your circle.
2. Ignore the managers and playwrights who have dominated you or gone against your will in the past. Also, ignore those who are indifferent to your friendship and your circle.

3. Start by making an offer to one or more of the targeted managers and playwrights:
   a) promise early proof sheets of the literary work to be adapted; b) offer to consult on the development of the play and the casting; c) if there is time, superintend one or more of the rehearsals; d) finally, promise that, if the play meets your requirements of high quality, and fidelity to the original work, you will grant the manager(s) the right to promote the play as an authorized adaptation.

4. In exchange for the offers listed above, require that the targeted managers and playwrights a) in no way publicly connect you with the production, either in the adaptation’s promotional materials, or in the press, unless you grant them the right to call the play an authorized adaptation; b) refrain from ever adapting a Dickens serialization-in-progress again; and c) produce a play that grants sole authority to the original book.

5. Once an adaptation with one of the targeted managers and playwrights has come to its conclusion, finish the collaboration on good terms with the targeted manager and/or playwright, keeping open the possibility that you will collaborate again one day.

PHASE TWO

6. Then, when your next literary work comes along, make the same deal with another targeted manager and playwright, at a different theater. The reason that you must move on to a second adaptation team is because it will help you achieve
your goals: Instead of guaranteeing that one theatre will produce a faithful adaptation after the work has been published, there will now be a possibility of two adaptations characterized by fidelity. This step is where the element of fear begins to play a role: If the authorized adaptation team from the first adaptation "misbehaves" and produces an unfaithful adaptation based on this second literary work, then that first adaptation team will lose any opportunity to collaborate with you on future adaptations; that adaptation team will have angered an artist whom they reverence; they will lose your friendship; and they will no longer benefit from the status of being considered a part of your circle.

7. Once the first authorized adaptation is established and it is successful, it will become a powerful commodity. Furthermore, once competing managers and playwrights see from the evidence that no one manager or playwright has an exclusive right to this commodity, but rather that it moves from theater to theater, from manager to manager, and from playwright to playwright, they may begin to desire this asset for themselves. Once they have a desire for this asset, they will learn that to be considered by you as a potential collaborator—to be considered a "targeted manager or playwright"—one must not take any action, such as producing an adaptation based on a work in progress, that will disqualify them from consideration by you as a potential collaborator. In other words, out of fear of losing their chance to be considered for a future collaboration, they will follow the rules of the agreement that they hope to one day make with you.

8. So long as you continue to move from targeted manager and playwright to targeted manager and playwright, and so long as the asset that is the authorized
adaptation has value, and so long that past collaborators continue to believe that there is a chance that they will collaborate with you again in the future, and so long as non-targeted managers and playwrights desire to get their hands on that asset, and so long as you continue to make an example of those who break the deal or go against your wishes;—so long as all of these things continue to happen, you will have an increasingly better chance of a) ending adaptations of works-in-progress; b) ending seed-, embellished-, reverential- and potboiler adaptations; and c) assuring that one or more high-quality faithful adaptations will open on a date coinciding with the publication of the work, thereby increasing book sales and reflecting positively upon the literary work.

The First Authorized Adaptation:

*A Christmas Carol* adapted by Edward Stirling

In an Adelphi Theatre playbill published on January 22, 1844, an announcement is made for the first-ever authorized adaptation of a Dickens play:

In Active Preparation, a NOVELTY of PECULIAR CHARACTER and CONSTRUCTION, (by Permission of Charles Dickens, Esq.), to be called A CHRISTMAS CAROL [...] MONDAY, Feb, 5th, will be produced a NOVELTY, of a Peculiar Character, entitled A CHRISTMAS CAROL: Or, PAST, PRESENT and FUTURE. Founded on the Celebrated Work of the same name, now attracting universal attention, by Charles Dickens, Esq. It will be produced with that strict attention to Scenery, Costume, and Incidents that have hitherto rendered adaptations so popular at the Adelphi. The whole Strength of the Company will be engaged in its Representation. 20

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Indeed, the advertised play is a novelty in several ways. First, it is a novelty because it is not a repertory piece, but in fact something new to this theater, and all theaters everywhere. Second, it is a novelty because never before had Charles Dickens personally sanctioned an adaptation.

The manager at the Adelphi during the week in question was Thomas Gladstane, not Frederick Yates. This is because on June 21, 1842, Yates died after suffering a broken blood vessel while on a tour stop in Dublin. Though Yates’s widow held onto her share of the Adelphi property, she had no intention to take over the creative management of the theater, a job that was always her husband’s responsibility in his co-propriortorship with Gladstane. Therefore, Gladstane had to either take over as the chief creative force of the theater, or hire somebody who could fulfill that role in his stead.

Prior to the 1843-1844 season, Gladstane had hired Edward Stirling, the reverential adapter of Dickens, who had written adaptations of such Dickens serializations-in-progress as *The Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, The Old Curiosity Shop, and Barnaby Rudge*; who had written the unauthorized theatrical sequel to *Nicholas Nickleby* called *The Fortunes of Smike*; and who had written an embellished adaptation based on *American Notes for General Circulation*. Stirling’s official title under Gladstane was Stage Manager.

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A number of theater historians speak of the death of Frederick Yates as the end of the Yates Management Era and the beginning of the transition into the Benjamin Webster Management Era, and this is valid; but for this purposes of this argument, the significance of Yates's death is that it represents Dickens's first opportunity to board and take over the helm of the pirate ship that was Yates's tradition of unauthorized adaptations of unfinished serializations by Dickens. With this bold act of sanctioning an adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* at the Adelphi, Dickens effectively lowered the pirate flag and steered the ship in a new direction, one that he had probably been imagining ever since his failure to secure an authorized adaptation of *Oliver Twist* with Yates at the Adelphi in 1838. Now that Yates was dead, Dickens began to follow a new set of habitual procedures in regard to the theater industry when a new book of his was about to be published—procedures that collectively fit the strategy described.

Because, unlike Yates, Gladstane never had creative control at the Adelphi, little is known about him. He was a property co-owner who stayed behind the scenes, and this suited Dickens just fine. This meant that he could work directly with the adapter who, with the exception that he made his living off of Dickens's unfinished serializations, had always been reverential to him. In the previous chapter it was explained how, in numerous ways, Stirling showed his reverence for Charles Dickens in the text of his adaptation, *The Pickwick Club*. This habit of showing reverence did not end with that adaptation. In fact, it continued throughout his career. As a writer struggling with the same craft, he openly admired "the inimitable" in a way that many of his adaptation-writing peers did not. One example of Stirling's reverence in the years following *Pickwick* was his dedication in the printed edition of his *Nicholas Nickleby* play:
TO CHARLES DICKENS, ESQ.

Dear Sir,

Allow me to dedicate to you your own *Nicholas Nickleby* in his dramatic garb. The exceeding popularity that you have already invested him with must plead by apology for the attempt.

Your sincere admirer, EDWARD STIRLING

By now it should be clear that when Stirling signed his dedication "your sincere admirer," he really meant it. Though Dickens held a private grudge against Stirling for the "thievery" in adapting *The Pickwick Club*, he made an exception to his principle to never work with a manager, even a stage manager, who had once gone against his will, and worked with Stirling. Dickens broke his own rule because he truly appreciated Stirling's reverence; because such reverence meant that he would probably submit to Dickens—as an authority on how the play should be written, and as a possible superintendent of rehearsals; and because it was probably more important to Dickens to take over the adaptation enterprise at the Adelphi, where Stirling was a fixture, than to exact revenge on a relatively powerless, poorly paid adapter.

Dickens’s judgment about Stirling turned out to have been correct. Their initial collaboration on *A Christmas Carol* went well, from both Stirling’s and Dickens’s points of view. In his memoir, Stirling recalls their positive collaboration, though he gets the year wrong (it should read 1844):

1845.—Engaged to manage the Adelphi for Gladstone [sic]. Among the many dramas that I produced and wrote, ranked first Dickens’s ‘Christmas Carol,’ dramatised by his sanction. Dickens attended several rehearsals, furnishing valuable suggestions. Thinking to make Tiny Tim (a pretty child) more effective, I ordered a set of irons and bandages for his

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supposed weak leg. When Dickens saw this tried on the child he took me aside:

‘No, Stirling, no; this won’t do! remember how painful it would be to many of the audience having crippled children.’\textsuperscript{24}

Following the excerpt printed above, the “1845” entry continues with a re-printing of a letter sent to Stirling by Dickens. Stirling published the letter in order to illustrate for readers on what good terms he and Dickens remained for the rest of Dickens’s life. Its inclusion, once again, reveals how reverential Stirling felt toward the novelist:

\begin{flushright}
Gadshill Place,
Higham by Rochester, Kent.
Wednesday, Fourteenth November, 1866
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushleft}
Dear Sir,
I shall be happy to come to “Faust” next Saturday evening. My address in town is (as I dare say you know) 26, Wellington-street.
Faithfully yours,
CHARLES DICKENS.
\end{flushleft}

Edward Stirling, Esquire.\textsuperscript{25}

Indeed, the above excerpts from the memoir show that Stirling and Dickens maintained a steady but not intimate acquaintance, for many years starting with the year of their first collaboration. Dickens, it should be recalled, did not address his inner circle as “Dear Sir” in his letters, but rather with more intimate greetings, such as “My Dear Macready.” Dickens always kept his relationship with Stirling strictly professional.

The surviving record of the collaboration from Dickens’s point of view, on the other hand, entirely lacks the hero-worship element that is so notable in Stirling’s memoir. In fact, in an undated February letter to John Forster, Dickens devotes his reflections on the production of \textit{A Christmas Carol} solely to the production, and particularly to the acting:


\textsuperscript{25} Stirling, \textit{Old Drury Lane}, Vol. 1, 187.
I saw the Carol last night. Better than usual, and Wright seems to enjoy Bob Cratchit, but heart-breaking to me. Oh Heaven! if any forecast of this was ever in my mind! Yet O. Smith was drearily better than I expected. It is a great comfort to have that kind of meat underdone; and his face is quite perfect. 26

In the surviving records, Dickens rarely if ever acknowledges the managers and playwrights with whom he works on the authorized adaptations. This is because he expected both parties to submit to his will during the development stage of the play—the manager would defer to Dickens as superintendent of one or more rehearsals; and the playwright-adapter would write the play according to Dickens’s requirements. If each did what was expected of him, Dickens had nothing to say. Instead, when Dickens wrote about the authorized adaptations, the subject of his commentary was almost always about the acting.

Since the critical reviews of the authorized adaptations will be analyzed in Chapter 4, their texts will not be examined here. Suffice it to say that the reviews were mostly enthusiastic and positive. Though a “shadow” manager who always made sure to be absent on the opening night of his authorized adaptations, Dickens cared about the critical reviews—a fact attested to by his habit of jumping ship for another theater whenever the reviews for a sanctioned adaptation of a novel or tale were less-than-enthusiastic or were better for a rival production. Likewise, if the reviews for an authorized adaptation were good, he would return to it again in the future. Thus, it should be no surprise that during the following summer, Dickens agreed to a second collaboration with Stirling. A surviving playbill, published in the spring of 1845, reads as follows:

Theatre Royal, Lyceum,  
(Late English Opera House) opposite Waterloo Bridge, Strand.  

Under the MANAGEMENT of  
Mrs. KEELEY.  

[...]

103rd 104th 105th and LAST NIGHTS of  
MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT  

In obedience to the wishes and numerous inquiries of their patrons, the Management announce Three more Representations of this highly popular Drama, when it must be withdrawn for the production of forthcoming Novelties.  

This Evening, Thursday, April 3rd, 1845, Friday 4th, & Saturday, 5th, will be performed (for the 103rd 104th and Last Times) the popular Drama, compressed into Two Acts, adapted by Mr. Edward Stirling, called The ADVENTURES of  
MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT  

[...]

After which, (10th 11th and 12th times) a New Farce, entitled The LOWTHER ARCADE  

[...]

To conclude with (for the 10th 11th and 12th times) an entirely New EXTRAVAGANZA,  

Founded on a questionable extract taken from "THE TIMES" for 1419, entitled  
WHITTINGTON AND HIS CAT.  

BY Messrs. ALBERT SMITH and Taylor.  

[...]

The Piece Produced under the superintendence of Mr. EDWARD STIRLING  

[...]*

There are a number of notable facts to be learned about this adaptation, all of which are alluded to in this playbill.

One is that, unlike the case of the Adelphi Carol adaptation, Dickens did not allow Mrs. Keeley to use the phrase "by permission of Charles Dickens" on the playbill. A reason he did not allow his sanction to be advertised is probably that he had a habit of

withholding his name whenever a collaborating author, even a reverential one, made substantial changes to his work. For an example of Dickens’s habit in this regard, consider the following letter, written in early April, 1837, to star John Pitt Harley in reference to changes made to Dickens’s original play *The Village Coquettes* by the management of the St. James’s Theatre:

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My Dear Sir

Have the goodness in the bills of the *Village Coquettes* to omit all mention of our respectable friend “Boz”. After the choppings and changings which this most unfortunate of all unfortunate pieces has undergone, I am not anxious to remind the Public that I am the perpetrator.

Faithfully Yours

CHARLES DICKENS
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In Stirling’s defense, there was no way to adapt a novel the length of *Martin Chuzzlewit* without “choppings and changings”; that novel has at least three-times the original material to assimilate into a play of the same length. No doubt Dickens understood that adapting such a long novel as *Chuzzlewit* into a workable, approximately two-hour stage presentation would require condensations, omissions, and additions; by that standard, any adaptation of a novel would be unfaithful and, therefore, beyond his approval; nevertheless, he still refused to allow the play to be publicized using his name because of those changes. At the same time, though, Dickens gave Stirling’s play his tacit authorization.

Besides the fact that Dickens granted Stirling permission to adapt the novel, the other reason that it can be said that the author tacitly authorized the adaptation is because he still superintended a rehearsal. In his biography of Dickens, John Forster quotes a letter from Dickens that illustrates how, during this rehearsal, in response to requests

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made by the Lyceum acting company, Dickens recited some speeches that he had
memorized as a young man, when he had thoughts of pursuing an acting career:

This was at the time when I was at Doctors’ Commons as a shorthand
writer for the proctors. It wasn’t a very good living (though not a very bad
one), and was wearily uncertain; which made me think of the Theatre in
quite a business-like way. I went to some theatre every night, with a very
few exceptions, for at least three years: really studying the bills first, and
going to where there was the best acting: and always to see Mathews
[Frederick Yates’s future co-manager] whenever he played. I practiced
immensely (even such things as walking in and out, and sitting down in a
chair): often four, five six hours a day: shut up in my own room, or
walking about in the fields. I prescribed to myself, too, a sort of
Hamiltonian system for learning parts; and learnt a great number. I
haven’t even lost the habit now, for I knew my Canadian parts
immediately [when he helped put on an amateur theatrical in Montreal],
though they were new to me. I must have done a good deal: for, just as
Macready found me out, they used to challenge me at Braham’s: and
Yates, who was knowing enough in those things, wasn’t to be parried at
all. It was just the same, that day at Keeley’s, when they were getting up
the Chuzzlewit last June. 29

Dickens’s letter has relevance to a study of Dickens’s authorized adaptations because it
paints a picture of yet another objective of Dickens’s authorized adaptation project. What
Dickens wanted, besides his goal to exert control over the Dickens adaptation industry,
was to be at the literal center of an acting company, showing the actors “how it is done.”
At rehearsals like this one, in addition to reciting parts that he had memorized as a young
man, he would also read from either work being adapted or the adapted play itself in
order to show how the character’s part should be read. This, of course, is a
foreshadowing of Dickens’s future as a touring reader, “performing” excerpts from his
works. 30

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29 Qtd. in Forster, Vol. 1, 373-4. See Letters, Vol. 4, 244-46.

Thus, in the back-to-back adaptations Stirling produced with Dickens’s input; for the first, Dickens allowed the manager to publicize his name and authorization, and for the second, he refused to let his name be promoted, but still gave his tacit sanction. What has not yet been addressed is Dickens’s switch from the Adelphi Theatre to the Lyceum. Although Dickens moved with Stirling to continue his collaboration with the stage manager/adapter, this was not Dickens’s only reason for making the switch. As a business strategist, Dickens knew he did not need Stirling anymore, because he had now “trained” the adapter to do what he needed to do in order to get working a relationship with Dickens. So long as Stirling produced no more adaptations of serializations-in-progress and wrote his adaptations, as much as possible, characterized by fidelity to the book, then Dickens would continue to associate with him, and consider working with him again.

On the contrary, Dickens’s two main reasons for moving to the Lyceum were (1) to co-opt another manager who had just ascended to the management helm of an important theater (the way that Stirling had become the acting manager at the Adelphi); and (2) to work with an actress (and her husband, also an important actor) whom he found to be talented, charming, and personally likable. It so happens that the manager and the actor were the same person—Mary Anne Keeley, known formally to theater audiences as “Mrs. Keeley.” Mrs. Keeley proved to be a relatively pliable manager and allowed Dickens to act as a kind of shadow manager in exchange for the right to call the play an authorized adaptation. That Dickens refused to allow her to publicize the fact that the Lyceum’s *Martin Chuzzlewit* was an authorized adaptation, and yet she still allowed him to superintend a rehearsal at her theater, says a lot about distribution of
power in their relationship. Among the reasons that she submitted to Dickens is that, in addition to admiring him for his genius, and counting herself and her comedic actor husband Robert Keeley among Dickens’s friends, the diminutive actress owed Dickens for the creation of one of her signature roles, Smike in Stirling’s hit adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby*, and its unauthorized theatrical sequel, *The Fortunes of Smike* (1840). By collaborating with Dickens, she hoped for more great parts—parts that would translate into big box office numbers and ever-more signature Dickensian roles.

One motive that it appears did not motivate Dickens to move to the Lyceum was money. It is generally agreed that Robert Keeleys paid Dickens £100 for the right to produce an authorized adaptation based on *The Battle of Life* in 1846.\(^{31}\) Also, there is a gossip piece in *The Satirist* that refers to the purchase and re-sale of the right to produce an authorized adaptation of *The Haunted Man* in 1848: “The right of dramatising the work, was originally purchased by Mr. Wilmot, but that gentleman having no outlet at present for such a speculation, sold it to Webster, who employed Mark Lemon to adapt it for stage representation.”\(^{32}\) Besides these two cases, however, no records have been located indicating that Dickens was paid for the right to produce any other authorized adaptation.

In the summer of 1844, Dickens made a business arrangement with the 38-year-old actor-manager for a *Martin Chuzzlewit* production, and in doing so, he tied up yet another habitual adapter of his work. Indeed, she had never managed a theater in which


an unauthorized adaptation of a serialization-in-progress had been produced (like Yates and Stirling had), and she had never written an adaptation associated with such a production (like Stirling and Moncrieff had), but she had an unrivaled list of acting credits in such adaptations. In fact, by the summer of 1844, she had played a starring role in the six adaptations detailed in the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptation</th>
<th>Theater</th>
<th>Authorized?</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Serialization complete?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barnaby Rudge; or, The Riots of London in 1780, 1841</td>
<td>Strand</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Barnaby Rudge</td>
<td>Henry Hall</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Old Curiosity Shop; or, One Hour from Humphrey's Clock 1840</td>
<td>Adelphi</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Nell</td>
<td>Frederick Yates</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Nickleby; or, Doings at Do-The-Boys Hall, 1838</td>
<td>Adelphi</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Smike</td>
<td>Frederick Yates</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Twist; or, The Parish Boy's Progress 1838</td>
<td>Adelphi</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Oliver Twist</td>
<td>Frederick Yates</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Weller; or the Pickwickians, 1837</td>
<td>Theatre Royal, Liverpool</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Nell Gwynne</td>
<td>Not known.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christening, 1834</td>
<td>Adelphi</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mrs. Dolly Lovechild</td>
<td>Frederick Yates and Charles Mathews</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bolton 67-458.

Knowing all of the above credits, Dickens had reason to believe that Mrs. Keeley was likely to continue presenting adaptations in her new title as Manager. Therefore, if Dickens wanted to have a say in how those plays were to be staged, it was in his best interest to get to know her.

The Keeleys were very pleased to have Dickens associated with their theater, and though it was quite unusual to have a novelist play such a powerful role in the adaptation
of his own work, the benefits of his involvement outweighed the costs. One potential benefit that Mrs. Keeley and her husband wanted to exploit was to have Dickens write a prologue that either he or one of the actors could deliver to the audience before the play. To be able to publicize such a thing in the newspapers and the playbills would be a coup for the production, an alternative way to signal to the audience that this was an authorized adaptation. The Keeleys probably knew that the chances of getting Dickens to agree to such a thing were not good; but as theatre managers with a great many bills and salaries to pay, they would be remiss if they did not ask. So, Robert Keeley acted as agent for his wife and proposed a special prologue. Dickens responded with the following letter, dated June 24, 1844:

My Dear Sir.

I have been out Yachting for two or three days; and consequently could not answer your letter in due course.

I cannot, consistently with the opinion I hold, and have always held, in reference to the principle of adapting novels for the Stage, give you a Prologue to Chuzzlewit. But believe me to be quite sincere in saying that if I felt I could reasonably do such a thing for anyone, I would do it for you.

I start for Italy on Monday next; but if you have the piece on the Stage, and rehearse on Friday, I will gladly come down at any time you may appoint, on that morning; and go through it with you all. If you be not in a sufficiently forward state to render this proposal convenient to you, or like to assist your preparations, do not take the trouble to answer this note.

I presume Mrs. Keeley will do Ruth Pinch. If so, I feel secure about her. And of Mrs. Gamp, I am quite certain. But a queer sensation begins in my legs, and comes up to my forehead, when I think of Tom.

Faithfully Yours always

Robert Keeley Esquire

CHARLES DICKENS

This letter is one which requires some commentary. First, there is the line about “the principle of adapting novels for the stage.” Though Dickens does not say what his

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33 Letters, Vol. 4, 150.
principle is, he implies that it is negative in nature—namely that such adaptations do not work because they neither do justice to what is best about novels nor to what is best about theater. He confirmed this view by sanctioning only one other adaptation of a novel during his entire career, *A Tale of Two Cities* in 1860. The rest of the authorized adaptations are all based on shorter works—his Christmas tales, to be specific. In the case of *A Tale of Two Cities* he agreed to sanction an adaptation because his playwright, Tom Taylor, was a “real” dramatist and the top artist in the profession at the time. If anyone could do a proper adaptation—an adaptation characterized by fidelity to the book, that is—perhaps it was Taylor. However, even while collaborating with Taylor, Dickens nurtured doubts about whether an adaptation could be done well, could be done faithfully, and, indeed, because the answer to both questions was most likely negative, whether one should be attempted at all.

Another important part of the letter that requires commentary is the fact that Dickens was responding to two invitations by the Keeleys. At first glance it appears that there is only one invitation—to write a prologue; but, in fact, there was a second invitation—for Dickens to superintend rehearsals. Dickens responds that he is about to leave town, but would come to the theater to “go through it with you all.” There are a number of possible reasons why the Keeleys extended this invitation. First, if Dickens agreed to both write a prologue and superintend rehearsals, he might change his stance and agree to publicly sanction their *Martin Chuzzlewit*. That would give the production prestige and draw in audiences. Second, if Dickens were given a chance in advance to “correct” elements of the production, the chances were better that he would be happier with the final result and continue to authorize Lyceum adaptations in the future. Third
and finally, Dickens was a genius of characterization who understood storytelling like few others. If he were to go through the script with the actors, as he had done on *A Christmas Carol*, it is likely that performances might be better than otherwise, and the critical reception might be as strong as that for the first sanctioned adaptation.

A third and final aspect of the letter that deserves commentary is Dickens's ignorance about the casting that the Keeleys had in mind. His assumption that Mrs. Keeley would take the part of Ruth Pinch, the good and angelic sister of Tom Pinch, was wrong. In fact, Mrs. Keeley would, like her husband, play a character of the opposite sex—that of "the boots" at Todger's boarding house, Bailey Junior. What this reveals is that although Dickens must be considered a kind of "shadow" manager of these authorized (and tacitly authorized) adaptations, he was never the manager.

Dickens only superintended one rehearsal of *Chuzzlewit*, and the play opened at the Lyceum on July 8, 1844. In short, it was a hit with audiences, and the production ended up running 105 performances. Also, as a result of this success, other theaters used Stirling's play to produce their own adaptations, including the Garrick, London; the Theatre Royal, Hull; and the Theatre Royal, Liverpool. In their reviews, the critics generally made four consistent points about Stirling's adaptation: First, although Dickens's name was nowhere present on the playbills, it was understood that Dickens had sanctioned the piece. For example, *The Era* reports, "Mr. Edward Sterling [sic], the clever adapter of the works of Dickens, has arranged, with the author's special consent, 'Martin Chuzzlewit,' for the English Opera House [the old name of the Lyceum]."

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34 Bolton 224-5.

They drew this conclusion because they knew that Dickens had superintended a rehearsal, which is what he did for the sanctioned adaptation, *A Christmas Carol*.

Second, the critics praised the performances, consistently complimenting Mr. Keeley in the role of the comical nurse-for-hire, Sairey Gamp. Words used by critics to describe his performance include “immense,” and “irresistibly comic” and “a style that convulses the audience.”

Third, all of the critics agreed that the play was successful with the opening night audience, with a strong audience response to the concluding address by Mr. Keeley. As the critic for *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper* reported, for example, “At the fall of the curtain, Mr. Keeley announced the piece for repetition amid thunders of applause. We did not even hear *one hiss*.”

Fourth and finally, critics said that this play was unintelligible to audience members unacquainted with the novel:

Dramas of this kind owe their success to a very peculiar cause. The incidents that fill six hundred closely-printed pages being forced into three hours, the chain of events must necessarily be unintelligible to all who see the play without reading the novel. Indeed, it is not such a class [of audience] that the dramatist addresses himself; he knows the novel is popular, and he assumes that its features are perfectly familiar to the bulk of his audience. The development of the plot he does not study, for he presupposes that his audience can fill up every gap from the stores of their own knowledge. The drama, therefore, does not rest on its own merits, but on the interest which a large reading public will feel at seeing how a favourite story will look on the stage.

This last observation is very important because it is refers to the typical Victorian theory of adaptation, which is covered extensively in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. Whereas this approach to adaptation works for an audience that has read the book, non-readers

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often find such adaptations to be impossible to understand. Theater purists, and
especially those who considered themselves defenders of the drama, hated such plays,
and they would rail against them in their reviews. However, such adaptations were not
produced with theater purists in mind, but rather for the readers of Dickens.

Dickens might have “shadow” managed an authorized adaptation of his next
literary work, *The Chimes*, with Mrs. Keeley at the Lyceum, because the *Martin
Chuzzlewit* adaptation went so well, but he knew this was not necessary. Dickens’s
apparent goal, it must be remembered, was to co-opt as many adaptation teams at as
many theaters as possible, so that he could both prevent adaptations of his works-in-
progress while also make sure that as many adaptations as possible treated his book at
authoritative. At least, in the short term, Dickens knew that he had successfully co-opted
Mrs. Keeley.

Several were the reasons that Dickens knew he had co-opted her (and her
husband). The first and most obvious reason is that, with Master Bailey and Sairey
Gamp, Dickens had once again provided the Keeleys with starring roles that made them
shine. As managers who had theater seats to fill and actors’ vanities to feed, they would
most likely do anything in their power to encourage the gift that was Dickens to keep on
giving. In addition, when Dickens politely declined to write a prologue for Stirling’s
*Martin Chuzzlewit*, Mrs. Keeley commissioned Albert Smith, the comic journalist and
playwright who had co-authored the extravaganza *Whittington and his Cat* for the
Lyceum, to write a paean to Dickens as a prologue for her to read each night:

> No ghostly legend from some mould’ring page
> And “carefully adapted to the stage;”
> No grand romantic drama, deep and dire,
> Filled with “terrific combats” and red fire,
Boast we to night. No flimsy plot shall trench
Upon our scene “translated from the French;”
But one in deep emotions far more rife,
The powerful romance of common life.

We owe this story of the present hour
To that great master hand, whose graphic power
Can call up laughter, bid the tear-drop start,
Or find an echoing chord in every heart.
Whom we have learned to deem an household friend,
Who, ’midst his varied writings, never penn’d
One line that might his guileless pages spot,
One word that “dying he would wish to blot.”

We know there is around his simple name
A prestige thrown, your sympathies to claim;
But our poor playwright, feeling well his task,
Has sent me forth your clemency to ask.
And some old friends, selected from the rest,
Of human kind the sweetest and the best,
Crowd forth, your patient hearing to implore,
Presuming on the fellowship of yore.

Good Mr. Pickwick first with smiling face,
And kindly heart implores your patient grace:
Then arm in arm, led onwards by one will,
The Brothers Cheeryble endorse our bill,
And warm by kindness ever both alike,
The timid hopes of poor neglected Smike,
Whilst not unmindful of your past kind deeds,
Oliver Twist next for indulgence pleads.

Dick Swiveler, who has crept here quite by stealth,
‘Passes the rosy’ e’er he drinks your health;
With all those kindred friends we knew so well,
Watch’d over by the shade of Little Nell.
Next, laughing at Joe Willett in her train,
Dear Dolly Varden flirts and laughs again,
And hopes your pleasure will not be alloyed,
Because she knows that Miggs will be annoyed.

And lastly, whilst around both cot and hall,
The echoes of the Christmas Carol fall,
Bob Cratchet, on raised wages, spruce and trim,
Leads forward, with his crutch, poor Tiny Tim.
The others are to come. In anxious state
Behind the scenes your flat they await.
Be satisfied, for yours and their behoof,
They’ll do the best they can; now to the proof.38

Much like Stirling’s dedication for the printed version of his Nicholas Nickleby, this prologue probably helped give Dickens reassurance that he could move on from the Lyceum without fear that Mrs. Keeley would produce a play that took liberties with his book. Dickens probably believed that if she was as honorable as he held her to be, then she could be counted on in the future not to produce what in this dissertation are called seed-, embellished-, potboiler-, or reverential adaptations, but rather adaptations characterized by fidelity to the book.

Mrs. Keeley’s, however, was motivated by not only her sense of honor, but also her fear. The publication of Dickens’s next book, The Chimes, would be the first major test of his “book curse,” because this was one of the first times he left one of his “acolytes” behind. If Mrs. Keeley considered Dickens to be a god-among-gods in the theater, and if she reverenced him for this reason, and feared retribution in the form of metaphorical “excommunication” and “damnation” for breaking his rules, then this updated form of the book curse that Dickens seemed to have imagined could be considered an initial success, and he would have achieved some of the goals that motivated the curse. If, on the other hand, Mrs. Keeley failed to follow Dickens’s “rules”—out of resentment for having lost the asset of an authorized adaptation, out of a yearning for independence, or out of an absence of fear and awe for Dickens—then the second phase of his strategy would have failed.

This test of the second phase of his strategy was necessitated by an important theatrical event: Prior to the opening of the 1844-1845 season, Benjamin Webster, the esteemed actor-manager of the Haymarket Theatre, leased the Adelphi Theatre for his companion to manage—the French dancer/actress, Madame Céleste. It was an arrangement that would make sense for both of the pair’s careers. For Webster, the relatively profitable Adelphi would provide supplemental income for his much more prestigious but less profitable Haymarket, where hiring stars and commissioning original plays could be expensive. For Céleste, moving over to the Adelphi meant she would have creative control at a theater where she had achieved her biggest London hit, *St. Mary’s Eve*, just years prior. Furthermore, it put her at the head of a theater which could be counted upon to provide her with leading roles, the kind of roles Webster would have difficulty providing at the Haymarket: roles amenable to her thick French accent.

In order to relieve Céleste of some of the production responsibilities that would not interest her, Webster made a deal with Edward Stirling to continue on as Stage Manager. However, very notably, Stirling was not hired as the house playwright. The responsibility for providing a large proportion of the Adelphi’s dramatic material was to be shared among Webster himself, John Baldwin Buckstone (who wrote the seed adaptation *The Christening*), Charles Selby, Albert Smith (who wrote the paean to Dickens for Mrs. Keeley), and Gilbert Abbott à Beckett, who wrote the short-lived potboiler adaptation of Dickens’s serialization-in-progress *Oliver Twist*, which opened and closed on the same night. Though Dickens had apparently decided not to make a fuss about à Beckett’s *Oliver* production, it was not because he approved of it; rather, he probably chose to not protest because John Braham, the St. James’s manager, was
helping Dickens pursue a playwriting career by producing *The Strange Gentleman, The Village Coquettes*, and *Is She His Wife?* In other words, Dickens had a strong motive to be an agreeable collaborator. Now that the new manager of the Adelphi had brought aboard Buckstone and Beckett, the first two adapters who had ever “victimized” him, Dickens knew he had to get involved with them. He did not want to give the Adelphi back to the “thieves.”

Therefore, Dickens made a deal with Céleste and Webster to produce an authorized adaptation of his new Christmas story *The Chimes* at the Adelphi. Thankfully for Dickens, he had good reason to believe that Webster would be an agreeable partner.

For one thing, Webster was also well acquainted with two of Dickens’s best friends, John Forster and W. C. Macready, the latter of whom had worked for Webster at the Haymarket. Forster and Macready probably did not consider Webster an artist, but they respected him as a professional and a man. Their respect meant something to Dickens.

However, in addition, Webster had also written something very gracious about Dickens in his “Remarks” preceding Stirling’s *Nicholas Nickleby* in the *Acting National Drama*, the collection of British plays published by Chapman & Hall that he edited:

> This dramatic combination of the most popular points of one of the inimitable works of “Boz” is most cleverly put together, and as cleverly acted, though we think it hardly fair to attempt to finish was it as yet unfinished in the original. By chance or in consequence of some indistinct hints during the progress of the plot the counterfeit coinage of Mr. Stirling’s brain might have borne the impress of the true gold so nearly as to have rendered it necessary to alter and remodel the denouement of the source whence he derived the piece, to the great annoyance and trouble of the inventor and constructor of the whole. Such however, we are happy to find is not the case. We are equally happy to learn that the skill and tact of the adapter, and the excellence of the acting by which this little piece is sustained, have in this particular instance certainly removed from the mind of Mr. Dickens those objections which, as a general principle, he naturally entertains to the adaptation of his unfinished works to theatrical purposes.
The interest to know the real end of this eventful history will now rather be increased than lessened and that the conclusion of “Boz” will surpass that of all others we are well convinced, for “none but himself can be his parallel.”

B.W. 39

As has been seen before, Dickens liked it when the men and women of the theater industry showed him respect, even if they did so as an apology for an unauthorized adaptation. Remember what an impact that Stirling’s and Mrs. Keeley’s kind words made on him in the past: They made him feel better about the adaptations that he so disliked, and cemented professional relationships that might otherwise have been strained. What Benjamin Disraeli said to Matthew Arnold is true: “Everyone likes flattery, and when it comes to royalty you should lay it on with a trowel.” 40

At some point during Dickens’s time in Italy, when he was writing The Chimes, two things happened: First, Adelphi Stage Manager Edward Stirling found out that he would not be adapting Dickens’s next Christmas tale for Dickens, Madame Céleste, and Benjamin Webster; and second, Dickens made a plan assuring that the Adelphi production would be the only theatrical adaptation to accompany the publication of The Chimes. It must have been a great disappointment to Stirling to discover that he would not be the authorized adapter of Dickens’s next work, since he had apparently done everything Dickens had wanted during the productions of A Christmas Carol and Martin Chuzzlewit, both of which were successful with audiences and critics. If Stirling felt snubbed, however, he neither complained nor sought revenge, probably out of a desire to


keep open the possibility that Dickens would return to work with him again. In other words, phase two of Dickens’s strategy was having its effect. Instead, Stirling made a deal to write an adaptation for the other target of the “book curse,” Mrs. Keeley at the Lyceum. Webster in no way restricted Stirling from working as a freelance playwright for other houses.

Unfortunately for Stirling, writing an adaptation for Mrs. Keeley would be a much more difficult task than it would be for whichever of Webster’s favorite playwrights would be chosen to adapt the next Christmas tale at the Adelphi. This is because Stirling found himself disadvantaged in three ways: First, as previously mentioned, both he and Mrs. Keeley desired to work with Dickens again, and because they knew that the author would most likely never do that if they produced an adaptation that went against his principles of adaptation, they had to produce an adaptation as if Dickens were overseeing it; second, since the next Christmas tale would be as short as *A Christmas Carol*, they would have to wait until the entire work was published before they could get to work on the adaptation; and third, since the Lyceum was not Dickens’s chosen theater this time, they would not have the benefit of Dickens’s insights and assistance in rehearsal.

It turns out that the assistance provided by Dickens to the chosen playwrights at the Adelphi, Gilbert Abbott à Beckett and Mark Lemon, gave the adaptation team a great advantage over the competition. Dickens not only granted Benjamin Webster the right to promote his play as an authorized adaptation, but, in addition, Dickens offered early proof sheets of the tale when they returned to him from the printer, Bradbury and Evans. In other words, nobody in London knew the contents of the coming book besides Dickens’s most inner circle, and à Beckett and Lemon. In a letter to his wife, who had
remained back in Italy, Dickens records à Beckett’s emotional reaction to the new Christmas tale:

Anybody who has heard it [the tale read aloud], has been moved in the most extraordinary manner. Forster read it (for dramatic purposes) to A Beckett—not a man of very quiet feeling. He cried so much, and so painfully, that Forster didn’t know whether to go on or stop; and he called the next day to say that any expression of his feeling was beyond his power. But that he believed it, and felt it to be—I won’t say what.41

Let it be assumed that the words à Beckett ascribed to Dickens’s latest tale are something akin to “a work of genius.” No doubt, whatever the words were, they were highly complimentary, and just the kind of reverential words that the author wanted to hear from one of his authorized adapters. What those words meant, of course, was that Dickens had control over yet another “thief,” one who had written a potboiler adaptation based on his serialization-in-progress *Oliver Twist*. It is also possible that Dickens knew à Beckett to be the anonymous pirate who had written a cheap serialized knockoff based on *The Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist*, entitled respectively, *The Posthumous Papers of the Wonderful Discovery Club* and *Oliver Twiss*, both by “Poz.”42 Though modern critics have credited à Beckett with these two knockoffs, there is no indication that Dickens knew it at the time.

If, before à Beckett’s emotional response to *The Chimes* Dickens doubted his ability to co-opt the former house playwright of the St. James’s Theatre, he nonetheless likely identified had an ally in à Beckett’s sometimes collaborator, Mark Lemon. Lemon, at the time of this production, had a day job as the editor of *Punch*, the comic periodical


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founded in 1841; and he had a night job as a writer of farces, melodramas, extravaganzas, and burlesques for the minor theaters. Part of the reason Dickens felt good about Lemon may have had to do with their similar personalities—both men were affable, ambitious souls with a talent for friendship and a sense of humor; part of the reason may have had to do with Dickens's respect for the editorial policy of *Punch*, which from the beginning never printed anything that would make a lady blush; and part of the reason may have had to do with their brief collaboration when Dickens was the editor of Bentley's *Miscellany* and Lemon a contributor. However, the main reason Dickens probably felt confidence in Lemon is because *Punch*, Lemon's comic journal, was owned by the Bradbury and Evans, the printing and publishing firm.

The reason why it mattered to Dickens that Bradbury and Evans owned *Punch* is because, as the editor of *Punch*, Lemon was highly dependent on the firm for operating capital, his salary, and, in general, the very survival of the journal. One must remember that the history of nineteenth-century British journalism, and especially the comic journalism of that era, is littered with the corpses of bankrupt periodicals and newspapers. Without a strong firm to back it up, with deep pockets and a belief in the publication, the editor of a comic journal might find himself the former editor of a dead publication.

Therefore, Lemon had a strong inclination to please Bradbury and Evans, a firm that had kept the journal afloat, and would continue to do so. The reason why it mattered to Dickens that Mark Lemon was dependent on Bradbury and Evans, his publishers, is because, in the first half of 1844, the firm had made a deal with Dickens to become his new publishers as well.
On June 1, 1844, about six months prior to the publication of *The Chimes* and the opening of the staged adaptation at the Adelphi, Dickens signed a deal with the firm Bradbury and Evans to replace Chapman and Hall as his publishers.⁴³ Although in the end, Bradbury and Evans would back away from *The Chimes* and allow Chapman and Hall to distribute it, the company would eventually go on to publish a number of important Dickens works, commencing with the next Christmas tale, *The Cricket on the Hearth*, in 1845. In addition to the newly signed agreements between Bradbury and Evans and Dickens, another sign of Dickens’s importance to the firm was one of the provisions to which both parties agreed—that Bradbury and Evans would pay a generous advance of thousands of pounds to Dickens. This advance would allow the exhausted author to take a year off from writing. Bradbury and Evans gave Dickens a generous deal, especially considering that Dickens had yet to write a single work for them, but Dickens was now an international literary star. He used this advance to travel with his family to Genoa, where he wrote *The Chimes*.

After Dickens had signed his deal with them to become his new publishers, Bradbury and Evans hosted a “printers party” attended by important players associated both with Dickens and with *Punch* (Patten 156). On behalf of *Punch*, both the editor Mark Lemon and the contributor Gilbert Abbott à Beckett attended; on behalf of Dickens, both Forster and some of Dickens’s family attended. What this web of business motives and obligations reveals is that in the hiring of Mark Lemon and à Beckett (through Madame Céleste) to adapt his new Christmas tale, Dickens was bringing aboard a pair of

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⁴³ For information related to Dickens’s business dealings, particularly as they relate to publishing, I rely on Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (Santa Cruz: The Dickens Project, 1978). Print.
men who, if they did not feel personally obligated to submit to his authority, felt
obligated to do so because it was the will of the owners of their magazine. It is significant
that Lemon and à Beckett helped celebrate Dickens's new association with Bradbury and
Evans, since both men, (Lemon especially) served Bradbury and Evans, and Bradbury
and Evans served Charles Dickens. Such was chain of command, and everybody at the
party knew it.

Two days after the publication of *The Chimes*, the Adelphi presented a playbill to
its patrons from which the following excerpt is taken:

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Theatre Royal, Adelphi
(Lessee, Mr. B. Webster, Old Brompton)
Under the Direction of Madame Celeste
First Night of a New Drama.

UNPARALLELED ATTRACTION & NOVELTY!
THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER AT SECOND PRICE.

On this occasion the Free List will be suspended, the Public Press
excepted.

This Evening, WEDNESDAY, December 18th, and DURING THE
WEEK,
WILL BE PRODUCED,
BY THE ESPECIAL PERMISSION OF
CHARLES DICKENS, Esq.,
An entirely new Drama, which had been a long time in preparation, taken
from the new Christmas
Tale, and called
THE
CHIMES
A GOBLIN STORY
OF SOME BELLS THAT RANG AN
OLD YEAR OUT and a NEW YEAR IN.
IN FOUR QUARTERS.44
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This playbill represented a major success for Dickens, for although the management of
the house had changed from Gladstane to Céleste and Webster, he had succeeded in his

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goal to continue influencing the adaptation of his work at a theater where two of the favored playwrights had written unauthorized adaptations in the past (Buckstone and à Beckett), and where the Stage Manager (Stirling) had written seven unauthorized adaptations in the past, five of which were based on serializations-in-progress.

The second reason that this Adelphi production represented a success for Dickens was because his decision to grant à Beckett and Lemon early access to the proof sheets enabled him to achieve two goals: He managed to coincide the opening of his authorized adaptation with the publication of his book; and he managed to prevent the opening of any unauthorized adaptations that would coincide with the publication of the book. In other words, Dickens gave his authorized adaptation a temporary monopoly over the Dickens adaptation market during the period of time that readers were purchasing the new book and reading it for the first time.

The third reason why this adaptation represented a success was in the way that à Beckett and Lemon fulfilled their duties as adapters. By direction of John Forster, who represented Dickens while the author lived abroad, the two comic journalists wrote an adaptation that granted authority to the book. This choice by the adapters pleased Dickens, and it helped form the basis of a strong friendship among the three men for years—especially between Dickens and Lemon, who would collaborate again both on authorized adaptations and amateur theatricals. However, at the time, Dickens’s relationship with these men was still young, and he had to know that part of the reason that the playwrights were such agreeable adapters was because of their dependence on Bradbury and Evans. Their beloved magazine *Punch* would never be a big money maker, and so they needed to please the firm whenever possible—and being good to Dickens
meant being good to Bradbury and Evans. Their fidelity to Dickens's original was noted by the critic from *The Morning Chronicle*:

The adapters, MARK LEMON and GILBERT A'BECKETT, have kept pretty closely to the original, the only instance in which anything like a variation was made being in an extra first scene, in which the drummer of a street band, in the course of a conversation with Mrs. Chickenstalker (Mrs. F. MATTHEWS), gives a little convenient information to the audience touching the domestic matters of the household of the Vecks.45

The critic from *The Times* also described the play as faithful: "In the adaptation produced last night at this theatre, the text of the work has been closely adhered to, the dialogue being, with very few exceptions, drawn word for word from it, and it is divided in the same manner into four quarters, between which an act-drop falls."46 This cut-and-paste approach to adaptation will be described in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. It can be inferred that Dickens believed his dialogue to be essential to the original tale, especially in its contribution to characterization, and, therefore, he probably insisted that it be retained exactly, whenever possible.

A fourth way that the Adelphi adaptation of *The Chimes* represented a success for Dickens was in the enthusiastic reception from early audiences. The response on the first night caused the critic for *The Era* to write,

"The Chimes," we firmly believe, are not only commencing a joyous peal for the treasury of the Adelphi, but that they will ring and make merry music far and wide, at the very least, throughout our Christmas carollings and holidays. The curtain, at its final dropping, re-ascended for an ovation to all the parties on the stage, celebrating the merry nuptials, which was making short work of a very silly custom. We quite agree with *Punch*, in his late number, that bouquets should be ready made in the house for any impromptu impulse of laudation, as that scene-painters, scene-shifters,

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dress-makers, call-boys, and candle-snuffers, should show themselves as subsidiary links in the grand-chain of the drama. After this hearty meal, the public appetite was a hungered, and ceaselessly clamors for “Boz” arose, the pit looking up at the gallery, and the gallery looking down upon the pit, and marveling where the “Dickens” the author could have shrouded himself.47

This critic has a bit of good-natured fun at the expense of the enthusiasts in the audience who seemed to applaud for every actor, no matter his or her importance to the production; nevertheless, this critic’s bemusement does not blur the image of a play well received by this opening-night audience—an audience apparently predisposed to like the piece because of its association with Dickens. Of course, Dickens was not there to hear the calls for his appearance, nor would he ever hear such calls, because he studiously avoided being in the theater on opening night for any of his authorized adaptations. Not only is this behavior consistent with his desire to strictly remain a kind of “shadow” manager, but in addition, it is also consistent with his habit of leaving town before the publication of a new book. During critical moments such as these, he preferred to make himself scarce.

It would turn out that the early audiences for this adaptation—those who had read the book or who had come to support Dickens—were of a different mind than the more traditional theatergoers of the Adelphi, who came to the show after the initial uproar subsided. These latter audiences cared much less about Dickens and his book and more about theater; what they wanted was a good, entertaining play, and based on the reports of the critics, the play was lacking in several ways, especially when compared to

A Christmas Carol. For one thing, the book itself was deemed to be undramatic. The critic of The Morning Chronicle writes, “It is one of the established features of literary

popularity, that when an author enjoying it writes a work of fiction—no matter how well or how ill-suited for dramatic representation—it straightway becomes the subject for dramatic representation.”

The same critic goes on to cite other faults in the original work that, in sum, point to a general inferiority of this book: “In truth, the story is too undramatic, too vague, and too meager in delineation of character, to furnish anything like a telling play.” According to Bolton, the play was performed twelve times.

Despite the lack of success that The Chimes found with Adelphi loyalists, Dickens’s accrued many personal successes from the production. Dickens likely felt gratified in this regard. According to John Forster, the Adelphi adaptation of The Chimes gave Dickens “pleasant experiences.”

However, the most rewarding theatrical success for Dickens in the month of December came the day after Christmas (Boxing Day), 1844, when the audiences at the Lyceum came to see an adaptation of The Chimes. The Lyceum playbill devoted to that play would have been similar to the following excerpt, which comes from the playbill printed about twelve days later:

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Theatre Royal, Lyceum,
(Late English Opera House,) opposite Waterloo Bridge, Strand.

Under the MANAGEMENT of
Mrs. KEELEY.

The New Extravanza,
VALENTINE AND ORSON!
Was one DEVOURING FLAME of TRIUMPH throughout its entire Performance, and, in consequence thereof it will be performed EVERY EVENING.

This Evening, Monday, Jan. 6th, Tuesday 7th, and Wednesday 8th,
Will be presented, The New Drama, founded on the last New Work of

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This play, which was praised by both audience and critics, represents one of the high points of Dickens’s strategy for defending from the theater industry what he considered to be his literary property. Motivated by reverence and fear, the management (Mrs. Keeley), playwright (Edward Stirling), and cast (Mr. Keeley and company) delivered an adaptation that, although unauthorized, was produced as if Dickens, a god-among-gods in the theater, had authorized the adaptation: (1) They did not produce an adaptation of a serialization-in-progress (which, of course, would have been impossible); (2) They did not open their play in the days preceding and the week following the publication of the book; (3) They did not produce a play with the traits of a seed-, potboiler-, reverential-, or embellished adaptation; and (4) They did produce an adaptation that granted authority to the book, even though the word “permission” appeared nowhere on the playbill. With his publication of *The Chimes*, Dickens managed to co-opt two of the major “thieves” who had appropriated his work without permission in the past (Stirling and à Beckett) and both of the minor theater managers who had the intention to adapt this work in the present (Mrs. Keeley and Céleste/Webster). Besides these two theaters, only the Albert Saloon and the Apollo Saloon produced adaptations of *The Chimes*, and these were small.

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enough venues to be beneath Dickens’s notice. All in all, Dickens had to feel good about what he had accomplished since his low point, prostrated on the floor of a box at the Theatre Royal, Surrey.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to illustrate that, prior to 1860, Charles Dickens did, in fact, take strategic action to defend his books from a British theater industry with the legal right to adapt his books without permission or compensation. With what this dissertation has labeled the “first phase” of his strategy, Dickens was able to co-opt a major adaptation team by offering them the right to publicize his authorization in exchange for guarantees that the play would grant authority to his book. Having seen this first phase of his strategy succeed, Dickens then enacted a “second phase” strategy that enabled him to co-opt two adaptation teams per book. This second phase strategy, based on the same principle of the medieval book curse—fear—was also successful, thus encouraging Dickens to become even more ambitious in his strategy to “protect” the next book. The next chapter explains the third discernable phase of Dickens’s strategy, through which he managed to co-opt every adaptation team in London.
CHAPTER THREE

"CRICKET-ON-THE-HEARTH MANIA" AND THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

INTRODUCTION

Jacky Bratton, the contemporary theater historian, argues in her influential book *New Readings in Theatre History* against the traditional view expressed by so many nineteenth-century British theater critics and endorsed by most theater historians ever since—that the British drama during the nineteenth century, and, in particular, the first half of the nineteenth century, was in a state of decline. According to her argument, when in the 1830s theater historians established their discipline, they utilized a historiography structured on binaries. For example, this historiography separated high forms of theater from low forms. The primary effect on theater history when historians adopt such a binaries, she says, is that commercial theater becomes associated with the “Other,” and therefore, numerous theatrical subjects including genres (melodrama), performance settings (music hall), and contributors (women) are denigrated and/or ignored. Bratton says that this approach to historiography has, since the 1830s, continued to argue that “the 19th century suffered from ‘the Decline of the Drama’ and its theatrical culture was disastrously undermined by a lack of good writing for the stage” (14).

However, says Bratton, if the drama was in decline, how do we explain that, in general,

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the British theater was “thriving,” “multiplying,” and “serving ever-increasing number of spectators?” Bratton calls for a new theater historiography: one that refuses to adopt the traditional binaries; one that seeks to inaugurate a new approach to the historical study of British theater; and one that refuses to promulgate the traditional narrative of decline during the nineteenth century.

This chapter asks that theater historians postpone moving on to a new historiography just a bit longer, because there is something new and unexpected to the historical narrative of the decline of the British drama during the nineteenth century—particularly the historical narrative as it has been told by twentieth-century critics. Allardyce Nicoll, Ernest Bradley Watson, Ernest Reynolds, Victor Emeljanow, and Anthony Jenkins each have made important contributions to the writing of the history of the decline of the nineteenth-century British drama. Perhaps for today’s scholars the foundational contributor to this history is Allardyce Nicoll’s chapter “The Reasons of Decline” in *A History of Early Nineteenth Century Drama 1800-1850*, which lists a myriad of causes of decline to which the rest of the listed historians have made contributions. Chapter 3 of this dissertation attempts to join Watson, Reynolds, Emeljanow, and Jenkins in building upon the foundation established by Nicoll.

So what significant gap exists in our knowledge of the decline of the nineteenth-century British drama? This chapter argues that, for a brief moment in time, Britain’s most popular novelist, Charles Dickens, became for some critics the symbol of that decline. How he briefly became such a symbol relates to the larger subject of this dissertation—what Dickens did in response to a theater industry with the legal right to adapt his books for the stage without his permission. The first and second phase of
Dickens’s strategic response was explained in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. This chapter picks up where the last chapter leaves off—in the year 1845. At this point Dickens had exerted control over adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* (1844, Adelphi Theatre), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844, Lyceum Theatre), and *The Chimes* (1844, Adelphi Theatre) through the creation of an authorized adaptation commodity (phase one) and an established pattern of never awarding his authorization to the same theater for two books in a row (phase two). Although the third production, *The Chimes*, had a disappointing reception with critics and non-reading audiences, it was as successful from the perspective of Dickens’s goal to protect what he considered to be his literary property.

As a result of meeting his objectives with the first three authorized adaptations, Dickens decided to authorize an adaptation of his next book, *The Cricket on the Hearth*. However, the third phase of his strategy would be even more ambitious than the first two. Dickens had a strategy for his next Christmas book that could give him influence over not just two adaptation teams but over every theatrical adaptation team in London.

Dickens followed through on his strategy and it, too, was enormously successful—both in terms of its positive critical and audience reception, and in terms of achieving Dickens’s goal to co-opt all of the adaptation teams in London. In fact, Dickens’s approach to writing *The Cricket on the Hearth* resulted in a virtual takeover of the London theaters during the winter season of 1845-1846—by productions faithful to the book. Holiday revelers could not get enough of the tale and critics called the phenomena “Cricket-on-the-Hearth Mania.” The only party that seemed to be bothered by the Cricket craze was a certain sub-set of the theater critics who believed that the British drama was in decline, and who felt frustrated at not seeing signs of its recovery.
It was these critics who, for a brief time, made Dickens the symbol of the decline of the British drama.

ARGUMENT

The story of the birth, development, and publication of Dickens’s *The Cricket on the Hearth* has been told previously by literary historians, so what follows is a brief summary of the main events in that history.² Citing evidence from a letter sent to him by Dickens around July of 1845, John Forster tells us that before Dickens applied his Cricket-idea to the writing of his third Christmas tale, he thought of it as the basis of a new journal that he would edit and to which he and other journalists would contribute materials:

I really think I have an idea, and not a bad one, for the periodical. I have turned it over, the last two days, very much in my mind: and think it positively good. I incline still to weekly; price three halfpence, if possible; partly original partly select; notices of books, notices of theatres, notices of all good things, notices of all bad ones; *Carol* philosophy, cheerful views, sharp anatomization of humbug, jolly good temper; papers always in season, pat to the time of year; and a vein of glowing, hearty, generous, mirthful, beaming reference in everything to Home, and Fireside. And I would call it, sir,—

THE CRICKET

A cheerful creature that chirrups on the Hearth.

*Natural History.*³

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² See Patten 162-63.

However, this idea of Dickens’s would continue to evolve.

To illustrate the change that the idea underwent in the mind of Dickens, Forster quotes from a letter sent to him by Dickens within weeks of the first letter, estimated to have been written around July 26, 1845: “What do you think of a notion that has occurred to me in connection with our abandoned little weekly? It would be a delicate and beautiful fancy for a Christmas book, making the Cricket a little household god—silent in the wrong and sorrow of the tale, and loud again when all went well and happy.” This Christmas book, which the editors of the Pilgrim Letters say that Dickens did not begin writing at Devonshire Terrace until October, 1845, had the author’s intermittent attention between that month and December 20, the publication date (not coincidentally, also the opening day of the theatrical adaptation).

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The book, divided into three “Chirps” instead of chapters, tells the melodramatic story of two modest, working-class, domestic households—the Peerybingle household, made up of the May-December couple Dot and John, their baby girl, their dog Boxer, and their clumsy nursemaid Tilly Slowboy; and the Plumpters, composed of widowed toymaker Caleb, his blind daughter Bertha, and the memory of Bertha’s brother, Edward, who died in South America. Both families are trying to establish a happy home despite obstacles: Dot and John Peerybingle are trying to overcome their doubts about compatibility, given their substantial age difference, and are succeeding through the pleasure each takes in the other, as well as the joy inspired by the new baby; Caleb Plummer, the toymaker, desperately tries to keep his daughter Bertha happy, despite the loss of a mother and a

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brother, his near destitution, and her blindness, and succeeds by telling her well meaning lies about the prosperity of their family and the generosity and goodness of his miserly, children-hating boss, the toy merchant Tackleton.

These two happy-but-vulnerable domestic situations are endangered by two events: when a strange white-haired old traveler, asks to spend the night in the Peerybingle home, since his attendant has failed to collect him; and, when Tackleton informs John that he intends to wed the much younger May Fielding, Dot’s childhood friend. In the former case, the old man turns out to be a young man in disguise, who may be cuckolding John with Dot; and in the latter case, the news of the engagement crushes the spirit of Bertha Plummer, who reveals that her father’s idealized descriptions of Tackleton has caused her to fall in love with him.

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As recorded by Michael Slater and others, Dickens wrote this third Christmas book during the same period of time that he was staging amateur theatricals (featuring the comedy *Every Man in His Humour* and the farce *Past Two o’Clock in the Morning*), preparing as editor to launch *The Daily News*, and welcoming the birth of his sixth child, Alfred D’Orsay Tennyson Dickens.⁵ His chosen illustrators were Doyle, Leech, Maclise, and Stanfield; also contributing art to the book was Edwin Landseer, whose specialty, drawing animals, made him the perfect choice to depict John Peerybingle’s dog, Boxer, considered by Slater to be “by far the best character in the Dickensian pastoral” (238). The book would be dedicated to *The Edinburgh Review*’s Lord Jeffrey, whom Robert Douglas-Fairhurst reminds us was both godfather to one of Dickens’s sons,

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⁵ Slater 238-39.
Francis Jeffrey, and an enthusiastic supporter of the social messages on behalf of the poor, addressed by Dickens in *The Chimes*.6

Sometime during the writing of *The Cricket on the Hearth*, Dickens chose to sanction an authorized adaptation produced by Mrs. and Mr. Keeley and Albert Smith at the Lyceum Theatre. It is not known for certain why Dickens switched back from the Adelphi to the Lyceum, but he likely wanted to continue the phase two strategy that gave him influence over two adaptations per published book. If Dickens had awarded his authorization to Madame Céleste and Benjamin Webster for two authorized adaptations in a row (*The Chimes* and *The Cricket on the Hearth*), the Keeleys might have interpreted this action to mean that Dickens had no intention to work with them again and, therefore, they might have felt free to once again take liberties with his narratives.

Additionally, Dickens wrote the tale not only with a theatrical adaptation in mind but, specifically, with the acting company of the Lyceum in mind. In his review of the play’s opening, the critic from *The Era* was the first to notice that the tale has many traits of a play: He wrote, “The piece divides itself into three ‘Chirps,’ or acts, and we shall merely glance at the outline of the story, which is so artistically constructed that it tells itself upon the stage, in unintermitting incident, from the first to the last scene of the drama.”7 In other words, unlike previous books that Dickens had written, this one observed the principle of the unity of time—a characteristic of the drama more than of

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prose fiction; furthermore, the book had as many “Chirps” as a typical entertainment play had acts—three.

The next day, in a sometimes angry review, the critic of *The Times* wrote that Dickens was just as much a theatrical adapter of this narrative as the playwright:

The story falls so exceedingly well into the drama, that it is evident there has been adapting on both sides; and that if the dramatist has read the book with the view of dramatizing, the romanticist [Dickens] has written it with the view of its being dramatized. The fact that Mr. Albert Smith wrote the play, from proofs furnished by Mr. Dickens, prior to publication, confirms this view, and another also—that the book was not only written for the stage in general, but also for the particular company at the Lyceum Theatre. No company could have acted it better... The book has been very well adapted by Mr. Albert Smith, who has taken great care not to omit a point, but when he has found one in the description has transferred it to dialogue. In fact, the piece is the complete book, and there is scarcely anything in the three chapters, or “chirps,” as the author calls them, which may not be found in the three acts.  

Reading the above excerpt, one discovers two additional characteristics of the tale’s narrative that support the argument that Dickens wrote the tale with theatrical adaptation, and specifically at the Lyceum, in mind.

First, the *dramatis personae* of the book (an appropriate term, considering how like a play is this tale) are perfectly suited to the acting company at the Lyceum. The play’s two storylines seemed custom-written for the stars of the Lyceum’s company. In the secondary plotline, the lead role is for an adult male, Caleb Plummer, who is old enough to have a marriageable daughter—a role perfectly suited to Robert Keeley. Then, in the primary plotline, the lead role calls for a spirited, little actress to play Dot—a part perfectly suited to Mrs. Keeley. Then there was the role of the despicable toymaker Tackleton, ideal for the acting company member who specializes in melodramatic

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villains. At the Lyceum this part would be played by Mr. Vining, but at another theater the casting of the role would be obvious—the part would go to the actor who always plays the villain. Finally, there is the character Tilly Slowboy, who has two traits that the low comedian of any acting company would love to play (whether the actor be male or female)—she is constantly crashing into furniture with the baby, and she talks to Dot’s baby in a hilarious, nonsensical manner. So long as a theater has an actor who specializes in low comedy, another part is immediately cast-able. The Times reviewer observed that Mrs. Keeley “was the very ‘Dot’,” and the evidence is strong that Mrs. Keeley was Dickens’s model.

Second, like a play, the tale is characterized by economy—every element of the plot and every character in the book are usable by the playwright—and the adapter finds no cause to omit any scenes or minor characters. On the contrary, Cricket was designed in such an economical way, like one of Scribe’s “well constructed plays,” that if an adapter had left something out in the play, the narrative would have fallen apart. Economy is not traditionally considered a genre-defining characteristic of prose fiction, especially prose fiction written by Dickens, but it is considered a genre-defining characteristic of the drama. Therefore, Cricket’s narrative economy provides yet another piece of evidence that Dickens wrote this piece with dramatic adaptation in mind.

Why Dickens chose playwright Albert Smith instead of Edward Stirling to adapt Cricket is related to a transformation in Dickens’s attitudes toward his authorized adaptations that began sometime after Martin Chuzzlewit. Dickens apparently had begun to wonder if he could raise the quality of the authorized adaptations. Specifically, he seemed to want to find a playwright who, paradoxically, could both write a faithful
adaptation, and, at the same time, infuse the play with some spirit. Stirling’s first two authorized adaptations, while well received by audiences and critics, lacked a certain “spirit.”

When Dickens authorized à Beckett and Lemon to adapt *The Chimes* for the Adelphi, he was doing more than hiring comic journalists/hack playwrights whom he knew from the world of Bentley’s *Miscellany*, the St. James’s Theatre, and *Punch*; in addition, he was collaborating with playwrights who possessed a skill set that was remarkably different from those possessed by Edward Stirling. The playwright of the *Carol* and *Chuzzlewit* was a hack, but he was also a craftsman—that is, he possessed an expert ability to cut-and-paste Dickens’s narratives, no matter the length, into well constructed, act-able plays that could satisfy audiences. Furthermore, if asked to, he would willingly withhold from making his own imaginative additions and revisions to Dickens’s narratives, for the sake of fidelity. À Beckett and Lemon, on the other hand, were wits who specialized in parodic genres such as burlesque and extravaganza.

Michael R. Booth describes the burlesque as “part of the Victorian cultural phenomenon of parody. In cartoons, in prose and poetry, in comic journalism, comic opera and in plays, Victorians relentlessly parodied any possible and well-known target they could find,” including Shakespeare, melodrama, novels, English history, classical legends, novels, Ibsen, and famous performers giving famous performances. According to Booth, playwrights who wrote burlesques tried “to reduce . . . plots and characters to a low level of grotesque domestic comedy and to write ingenious comic paraphrases of the

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verse [if the material parodied had verse segments],” to infuse the play with topical allusions, to have fun with language, to create opportunities for eccentric dancing, to write scenes calling for the projection of colored fire, to offer songs for the actors to sing, and to dress up young actresses in alluring costumes (197).

The other parodic genre that Lemon and à Beckett wrote, extravaganza, had many characteristics in common with Victorian burlesque; in fact, some say these two generic labels were considered interchangeable. However, although both shared the mode of parody, extravaganza was a narrow sub-category of burlesque, deserving of its own definition. An extravaganza, simply, was a witty, graceful, parodic genre that made burlesque appear crude by comparison. Another simple definition of extravaganza is that it is the type of burlesque that J.R. Planché wrote for the Madame Vestris’s Olympic Theatre in the 1830s.¹⁰ At the structural core of an extravaganza is a parody of either a classical myth or a fairy story. As Booth explains, a fairy extravaganza, which is one of the sub-types of extravaganza that Planché wrote, could almost be confused with a Victorian pantomime, except that such pantomimes always transform from a fairy story into a harlequinade at some point in the play. Otherwise, Planché’s fairy extravaganzas share all of the following traits with the pantomime:

[it was] written in graceful couplets, the plot concerned with fairy intervention in the human world, a strong element of contemporary social and domestic reference blended in with the fantasy, transformations of characters and scenery and increasingly elaborate spectacle. New lyrics were written to music from popular airs and English, Italian and German opera, not to mention the songs from the black-faced minstrel craze that swept London in the 1840 and was a strong influence on popular music and entertainment for two generation. (Booth 194)

¹⁰ Booth 194.
In general, says Booth, for a Victorian audience member to fully appreciate an extravaganza required that he possess a greater knowledge of high literature, current events, and language than was required to fully appreciate a burlesque; the extravaganza genre targeted the educated.

While it could be argued that Dickens chose to authorize Lemon and a Beckett to write the play for _The Chimes_ because they had successfully adapted the French novel-cum-play _Don Caesar de Bazan_ during the summer of 1844, it is more likely that he authorized them because they expertly delivered the spirit of the burlesque genre with their 1844 play _Open Sesame; or, A Night with the Forty Thieves_. This play established the pair’s unique talent for witty parody, one to which they had plenty of exposure as founding writers of the comic periodical _Punch_. Whereas it could be said that the unremarkable but competent adaptation of the _Don Caesar_ play probably gave confidence to Dickens that the two comic journalists knew how translate a prose fiction narrative into a drama, the burlesque showed that that the pair knew how to capture that ephemeral quality—spirit—by applying their voices as wits to a pre-existing story. In fact, an admiring review of the play published in _The Era_ twice mentions the playwrights’ wit and indirectly credits it with capturing the spirit of burlesque:

> We . . . hasten with great satisfaction to that which is of first-rate excellence in its kind, THE NEW EASTER ROMANTIC EXTRAVAGANZA, for which we are indebted to the pungent wit and pregnant fancy of Mr. G. A. Becket [sic] and Mr. Mark Lemon . . . There is a continuous spring of wit sparkling throughout—a wilderness of fun which would seem interminable—a succession of “arrowy words” which attract all possible subjects. The moral is never missed—the wound inflicted may be deep, but no poison follows to fester or corrode. This is the true spirit of burlesque. 11

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In no genre besides the burlesque and extravaganza did these two playwrights ever earn such high praise. Perhaps Dickens had established a causal connection between parodic wit and the ability to bring “spirit” to pre-existing material and decided that playwrights such as these might be better suited to adapt *The Chimes* than the craftsman Stirling.

That Dickens chose to work with Lemon and à Beckett primarily for their talent for “spirit” (not their track record with adaptation) finds confirmation the next year when Dickens authorized the comic journalist and burlesque playwright Albert Smith to write the play based on *The Cricket on the Hearth*. Two of Smith’s burlesques had recently opened in rival theaters—*Aladdin: or, The Wonderful Lamp* at the Lyceum and *Fair Star; or, The Singing Apple and the Dancing Waters* at the Princess’s Theatre—and had attracted attention for their spirit. In reviewing *Aladdin*, for instance, the *Era* critic wrote the following:

> On Monday evening, the long-expected “Aladdin” of Mr. Albert Smith and Mr. Charles Kenney, made its appearance on these boards, and achieved a great, long, and decided success. There is a season for all things; “Tom and Jerry,” “Used Up,” “The Mysteries of Paris,” “Martin Chuzzlewit,” “The Polka,” each in turn captivated the town in every point of its compass, and the present is the shining night of lamps... What with the fun and what with the magnificence, the Keeleys must find that their Lamp is worth all the midnight oil, and that they have played their cards for a winning “rubber;” the dialogue, too, like the agency, is replete with “spirit.”

Once again, a parodic wit, this time Albert Smith, had written a burlesque that, among its many successful traits, was its “spirit.” To have seen the word associated with yet another former writer for *Punch*, who had also written burlesques to rave reviews,

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Dickens very likely chose Smith for that dose of spirit he could add to a faithful adaptation of *Cricket*.

Dickens, very naturally, sought popular and critical success in the third phase of his strategy in guiding authorized adaptations. The emergence of this new goal is supported by the fact that any time one of his seven authorized adaptations received mixed reviews or a disappointing popular reception, Dickens never again worked with that playwright (or one of the playwrights, if the play was the product of a collaboration). The authorized adaptations that had mixed critical reviews were *The Chimes*, *The Battle of Life*, *The Haunted Man*, and *A Tale of Two Cities* (four out of the seven plays that Dickens authorized).

The mixed critical reviews of The Adelphi’s *The Chimes* suggests the tale did not live up to *A Christmas Carol*; however, as was established in Chapter 2, there is general agreement that the book did not adapt easily to the stage. The fact that Dickens never again worked with Beckett after this production could be interpreted a number of ways, but when it is considered that Dickens always abandoned a playwright (or one of the two playwrights) after a production with mixed reviews it seems clear that, during this third phase of his strategy, Dickens focused on good reviews and popular success.

For the authorized adaptation of *The Cricket on the Hearth*, Dickens once again gave early proof sheets to the authorized playwright. As in the previous cases, this would give the adaptation team a head start over the competing, unauthorized adaptation teams that would have to wait for the book to be published to get their hands on it. The editors of *The Letters of Charles Dickens* point out that in the case of this production, Dickens’s
delivery of the *Cricket* proof sheets gave the Lyceum a ten-day head start over the competition.  

Another of Dickens’s consistent business practices in regard to all of the authorized adaptations was to superintend at least one rehearsal, usually performing a reading either the book or the play. In the case of *Cricket* it seems that he read the play, a fact attested to by the following item from a theatrical gossip column: “Mr. Charles Dickens, we are informed, gave a *soirée* to Mr. Keeley, Mr. Strutt, and Mr. Willmot, his partners, Mr. Albert Smith, Mr. Foster [sic?] and others; . . . on Tuesday evening last [December 9], when the new drama of *The Cricket on the Hearth* was read by him to the assembled company.”  

The record confirms that Dickens also superintended a rehearsal the day before the opening of the play. His attendance is referred to in his letter to Thomas Fraser, a correspondent for the *Morning Chronicle*, dated December 19, 1845: “I am obliged to run away this morning for an hour or two, to save myself from being more direfully slaughtered than is absolutely necessary, at the English Opera House [aka The Lyceum].”  

Based on what has been established thus far in the chapter, Dickens was consciously or unconsciously pursuing new objectives during the pre-production period of *Cricket*. This leads one to conclude that he may have had these objectives in mind during the writing of the book. As stated previously, based on the content and form of the book and the play, many critics concluded that Dickens most likely wrote *Cricket* with the theater, and specifically the Lyceum company, in mind. Because the evidence

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strongly supports the Lyceum's position, Dickens's characterization of his sole motive in attending rehearsal was to avoid "being . . . slaughtered" seem disingenuous; the evidence suggests that Dickens had a much more ambitious set of objectives.

The authorized adaptation of *The Cricket on the Hearth* starring Mary Ann Keeley and Robert Keeley opened on December 20, 1844, the same date that the book was published by Bradbury and Evans. This coincidence is important because it is the first time in the history of the authorized adaptations that readers were given the opportunity by Dickens's sanction to see the play before they had read the book. For example, the firm of Chapman and Hall published *A Christmas Carol* on December 19, 1843 and the authorized adaptation opened at the Adelphi Theatre on February 5, 1844. Therefore, readers had about seven weeks to read that Christmas tale before the opening of the authorized adaptation.

Dickens's decision to allow his readers to see the authorized adaptation of *Cricket* before they had been given an opportunity to read the book is significant considering that one of Dickens's major complaints about the adaptations of his early books (e.g., *Pickwick* and *Oliver Twist*) is that the adaptors were interfering in his special relationship with readers, altering the mental conceptions of his characters and stories that he had labored so hard to sculpt with his words.\(^{16}\) Recall, for example, the following words of Dickens, excerpted from a letter that in Chapter 2 is quoted in full: "My general objection to the adaptation of any unfinished work of mine simply is, that being badly done and worse acted it tends to vulgarize the characters, to destroy or weaken in the

\(^{16}\) Andrews 9-49.
minds of those who see them the impressions I have endeavored to create, and consequently to lessen the after-interest in their progress." The letter referenced was written by Dickens to Frederick Yates, then the manager of the Adelphi Theatre, in response to Yates's request that Dickens withdraw his objection to the publishing of Edward Stirling's unauthorized Nicholas Nickleby.

While Dickens smarted at the way that characters are "vulgarized" and the fact that "the impressions [he] . . . had endeavored to create" are "destroy[ed] or weaken[ed] in the minds of those who see them" as a result of productions "gotten up" before the serialization was yet complete, it is reasonable to conclude that he would be equally incensed by a bad or unfaithful adaptation that appeared before his readers could read his book.

There are two possible explanations why Dickens consented to allow readers to get their first impression of Cricket from the play: That Dickens felt so assured of the Lyceum play's fidelity to the book that he was willing to make an exception, and that as a play-disguised-as-prose-fiction, Cricket-the-play really was Cricket-the-book. Both explanations are reasonable: First, it has already been established that Dickens considered the Keeleys to be trusted friends—people willing to adapt The Chimes according to Dickens's requirements even though Dickens had awarded his authorization to another theater; and second, as has already been established, everybody who read it agreed that the book has play-like qualities, making it both easy to adapt and difficult to alter. The coincidence between the date of the opening of the play and the date of the publishing of the book, which allowed audiences to get their first impression of his

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narrative based on the play, was not a change from Dickens’s original position: the author believed the play and the book to be nearly identical—an outcome that he had designed.

It is one of the arguments of this chapter that given all the evidence at their disposal, including the coincidence of the play’s opening and the book’s publishing, the defenders of the drama considered Dickens, for the first time, to be a true collaborator in the production of a Dickens adaptation. In other words, the critics had cause to believe that Dickens was no longer a “victim” of the appropriating “thieves” of the theater industry, but, instead, was now a willing collaborator in the adaptation of his work and could be share responsibility for the staged results.

In the days prior to the opening of the Lyceum production, a host of London theaters announced that they, too, intended to mount adaptations of the forthcoming book. The following was written by one of the journalists who saw what was coming:

“This theatre [the Lyceum] opens on Monday with the first of the dramatized versions of ‘The Cricket on the Hearth,’ with which the town will speedily be inundated.”18 Whether the managers of the other theaters had heard a positive buzz about the new Christmas book is not known; what is known is that they made explicit announcements in their playbills that they intended to produce their own adaptations during the winter season.

Besides Dickens’s writing style for Cricket, his delivery of early proof sheets to Albert Smith, and his apparent personal investment in the production, the other feature of the production that was creating some interest among the theatrical journalists was the professional debut of a certain actress to play the daughter of the toymaker Caleb

Plummer: Miss Mary Keeley, daughter of Mrs. and Mr. Keeley. Typical of the mentions of this novice’s participation is the following line from The English Gentleman: “Miss Mary Keeley, the elder daughter of the manager, makes her debut in the character of Bertha, the blind girl, and if talent be hereditary, as malgré a popular prejudice, it often is, this young lady will achieve a triumph.”19 Judging from the reviews, Miss Mary’s acting was less than a triumph; nevertheless, the journalists, desirous not to offend her esteemed parents, found subtle ways to communicate this judgment. As an aside, it is interesting to note that, just over thirteen years later, Albert Smith married Miss Keeley.

It is apparent that popular audiences responded to the play in the way that Dickens had hoped: the general public fell in love with Cricket. At the conclusion of the play, writes the journalist from The Era, “The house rose ‘en masse,’ cheering until the roof resounded again to the plaudits, and, after a little coyness, Mr. Albert Smith, the kindredly-endowed adapter, from a private box, bowed his acknowledgement to one of the excited tribunals which ever stamped public opinion.”20 No doubt it was the news of this popular reception that convinced the other managers of the Metropolis to proceed with their announced adaptations, despite the circulation of a few mixed reviews.

Happily for those managers that followed Mrs. Keeley, the plays based on Cricket succeeded in their theaters as well. On January 3, 1846, a letter supposedly written by an American about his visit to London was published in The English Gentleman. The

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20 “Lyceum Theatre,” The Era (28 Dec. 1845): 6. 19th Century British Library Newspapers. Web. 25 Nov. 2008. Albert Smith, who, like Dickens, wrote novels, worked as a journalist, and gave popular public readings to large audiences, is often described by his contemporaries as an artist of “kindred” sensibilities to Dickens, though not, like Dickens, a genius.
supposed tourist writes, “The theatres here [in London] appear to be doing very well: they are all crowded every evening; in fact, people go to see a Christmas-piece as they eat a mince pie—because they believe they ought . . . the treasuries are overflowing, like the houses; and so the great end appears to be answered.”21 One cannot help but wonder if the editor of The English Gentleman felt that attributing the popularity of the plays to custom and not quality, was so harsh that it could result in retaliation against the periodical, and, therefore, it was decided that the words should be attributed to a “tourist.”

By the end of January popular demand for Cricket-plays prompted managers to stage adaptations on just about every available stage in England. A journalist for The Theatrical Journal humorously compares the phenomenon to a spreading pestilence:

THE RIDICULOUS CRICKET-ON-THE-HEARTH MANIA.

A dreadful plague has lately broke out in the theatrical world, very similar in nature and character to the plague of locusts, which distressed the world long ago, in distant days of yore. It is the “Cricket” pestilence we allude to, which is now flying in all directions, seizing upon theatre after theatre with a frightful rapidity, setting all the town agog after it, and the wonder is now where it is to stop, or what establishment is to be the next victim of its fearful ravages. Medical advice has been called in but proved unavailing, and the fever it is said must be left to die off of itself, and end in a natural death. The symptoms of its approach are both conspicuous and curious. It first appears in rather small characters, underlined at the bottom of the bills, but gradually mounting up and augmenting in dimensions, it breaks out in flaming red capitals at the top, and continues at fever heat for several weeks, the plague then raging at its height. Unfortunately we are unable to give the symptoms of the decline of this now oppressing malady, no such symptoms having yet made their appearance, but we apprehend it will by slow degrees sink into an after-piece, linger out a few days, and die a natural death. There has been a tremendous run upon wax-dolls lately, for the representatives of the

Peerybingle babies at the various theatres, and those which open and shut their eyes, and possess the additional qualities of wax calves and feet, are literally at a high premium. The Lowther Arcade has been actually stripped of its toys to furnish the toy-maker’s apartment, and the prices of horses and drums have risen to an enormous height in consequence of the fearful demand. The beadle of the Arcade was found in a deadly swoon in his chair in consequence of the dreadful fatigue the patriot has undergone in attempting to keep the gangway clear, and upwards of 300 children have been taken ill in consequence of their coming off short of toys as new year’s gifts, the price being found rather too expensive for the givers’ pockets—all the result of this terrible “Cricket-on-the-Hearth” mania had produced. Tilly Slowboys are as plentiful as blackberries, and of all shades and colours, while an unfortunate red-haired charity boy was found by a parish beadle to have been scalped by some resident Ojibbeway, to furnish a natural carroty wig for that character. When is there to be an end to this atrocious tomfoolery? how long will it be before managers will know their own folly in giving too much of a good thing, in causing a ridiculous competition to inundate the town with the same pieces, or rather when will the public cease to run after some certain piece poor in itself, and only because its author bears a name for talent and popularity, giving praise where little is due, and giving entertainment really deserving their esteem and patronage, to run after such poor wishy-washy stuff. “Tis there where the folly lies after all—not in the manager, who feels that he is called upon to do as his rivals do, and who is competing other houses, only does it to attract the crowd to his own: but in the public who, having by their folly induced each house to bring out the one popular drama, afterwards cry out that there is no theatre left to which they can go, without seeing the same piece over again. How ridiculous! how must our continental neighbors laugh at our madness, and despise our folly.

EPIGRAM ON THE THEATRICAL FUROR FOR
“THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH.”

The theatres stirring all their stumps,
Quick in their bills to stick it;
Forget they’re like to be bowled out
Playing a game of Cricket?

This above article is notable for several reasons: First, if the satire is to be taken as reflective of actual events taking place, London doll and toy manufacturers exploited this theatrical phenomenon and sold products associated with the role of Tilly Slowboy, the

narrative’s clumsy nurse, much like the “merchandising” based on characters in *The Pickwick Papers* that flooded the market years earlier. Second, the article writer blames the public for the wholesale take-over of the London theaters by *Cricket*, thus rewarding a bad or mediocre play just because it was an adaptation of a work by Dickens. This act by the public, says the journalist, caused other managers to offer up their own *Cricket* productions out of the fear of having an empty theater and of missing out on a chance to produce a reliable money-maker. While it is true that this critic makes statements that Dickens likely found offensive—namely, that *Cricket* was not a good piece of work—he does not directly blame Dickens for the takeover of the theaters. Finally, it is important to note that this critic does not identify adaptations, in general, as a cause of the decline of the drama, as others do.

Contributing to the “mania” was Benjamin Webster, who, one will recall, held the lease on two theaters at the time—the Haymarket and the Adelphi. While it was expected that Webster, when he took over the management of the Adelphi with Madame Céleste, would continue the Adelphi tradition of presenting authorized and unauthorized adaptations of Dickens books, nobody would have expected the *Haymarket* to produce Dickens adaptations. Nevertheless, on January 10, 1846, *The Theatrical Journal* reported that “Mr. Webster has not thought it sufficient to give the town ‘The Cricket on the Hearth’ at the Adelphi, but has brought it forward at this house [the Haymarket], a speculation which, we fear, will be found not to answer.”

The reason that a production of *Cricket* at the Haymarket might have been considered a scandal by theater purists is because the Haymarket had been, during the

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monopoly system, a licensed summer home of legitimate theater in London; and, after the break-up of the monopoly system, it continued to prominently feature legitimate theater on its stage. In his book *Sheridan to Robertson*, Ernest Bradlee Watson describes the Haymarket of the period:

Next in rank to the monopoly houses, and often superior to them in dramatic quality, was the “Little Theatre in the Haymarket” as it was fondly called. Of all the London playhouses it was, perhaps, the most loyal to the traditions of legitimacy during the period . . . let us recall at this point that it was the only house in London besides the two monopoly theatres where the law allowed the performance of anything but “burlettas” and melodramas, and that it enjoyed this privilege only for the summer months . . . Under the management of Webster from 1837 to 1853 . . . it “kept the banners of the legitimate flying.”

The already battered legitimate drama was now, in the eyes of the defenders of the British drama, giving up the stage, for a period of time, at one of the last strongholds of the legitimate stage. The defenders must have wondered if this production at the Haymarket represented the first step in the invasion of the popular drama into the few remaining strongholds of legitimate theater.

Following his phase two strategy, Dickens once again managed to co-opt the adapters at two theaters: the Lyceum and the Adelphi. Of the *Lyceum* production, the critic at *Lloyd’s Weekly London Newspaper* writes, “Mr. Smith, in his adaptation, has closely followed the original, and not a line is spoken that does not appear in Dickens’s work.”

As for the fidelity of the unauthorized production at the Adelphi, it is apparent that Dickens again achieved his primary strategic aim:

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The second adaptation of Mr. Dickens’s book was brought out at this house on Wednesday evening, the dramatic version having been arranged by Mr. Edward Stirling. Having already given the plot, it is not necessary to repeat it: we will merely allude to the acting and the manner in which the drama has been produced, premising, however, that from the dramatic construction of the original work, there is necessarily very little variation, in the course of the incidents, from the version already given at the Lyceum.  

This review is consistent with other reviews of the Adelphi adaptation in several ways.

One, not indicated in the above excerpt, is the verdict that Edward Stirling’s unauthorized adaptation is better than the authorized version at the Lyceum. This outcome must have felt like vindication for Stirling, who had been passed over for the last two authorized adaptations.

Most of the reviews of *Cricket* adaptations observed that Dickens’s latest Christmas tale was like a play disguised as prose fiction. Almost universally, critics such as the one from *The Era* speculated that even if the unauthorized adapters had wished to deviate from the book’s content and form, to do so would have been difficult, since the book’s characteristics were already those of a play; to make changes was to risk making it less like a play. Therefore, even the other unauthorized adapters of *Cricket*—the ones with no hopes of landing a future authorized adaptation—had a motive to construct a play characterized by fidelity.

There is no direct evidence in Dickens’s letters to prove that he considered his third Christmas tale to be a play-disguised-as-prose-fiction, nor whether he considered this new approach to writing a Christmas tale to be part of his overall strategy to defend his literary property. However, Dickens’s achievement, as a result of writing his tale this

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way, is indisputable. When one considers that Dickens’s next Christmas tale, *The Battle of Life*, was also notable for having traits of a play, and that Dickens’s original plan for *Battle* was, for the first time, to authorize two adaptations instead of one—it becomes clear that with each authorized adaptation, Dickens was experimenting with new ways to maximize the number of theaters producing faithful adaptations of his work. Therefore, it is concluded that the play-like design of *Cricket* was the third phase of Dickens’s ingenious strategy to co-opt his theatrical adapters.

Although, as will be seen, certain critics had problems with the circumstances of the authorized adaptation of *Cricket* the production received few bad reviews. Again, Albert Smith and Mrs. Keeley both received good notices and Miss Mary Keeley received kindly ones. Beyond these trends in the criticism, one of the critics’ favorite aspects of the play was Miss Turner’s creation of the role of Tilly Slowboy, the clumsy nurse. As has already been established, this performance may have been responsible for the sale of a great deal of *Cricket* merchandise in London. The critic from *The Athenaeum* refers to this character’s contribution in his review:

> In our recent notice of the work, there is one subordinate character which we did not mention, but which, although it fell not then within the plan of our outline, deserves remark, as perhaps being the only new portrait of the group,—we mean Tilly Slowboy, the gaping, wondering, untidy, and clumsy nurse-girl of the Carrier’s baby. This character, performed by Miss Turner, though having but few sentences in all to say—mere nonsense prattle uttered to the baby, constructed from fragments of general dialogue, with all the nouns converted into plurals—told remarkably well in performance, exciting uproarious mirth.²⁷

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Thus, it would seem that if any one collaborator brought “spirit” to the play, it was the actress Miss Turner, who had the opportunity to embellish her part with first-rate low comedy antics.

It has now been established that with the authorized adaptation of *The Cricket on the Hearth* at the Lyceum, Dickens once again achieved the objectives of the first two phases of his apparent strategy: First, he managed to cause the authorized adaptation team, the Lyceum, to produce a play characterized by fidelity; and second, he managed to cause a second adaptation team, the Adelphi, motivated by a desire to win the next authorized adaptation, to also produce a play that was true to the book. However, this time, as a result of writing *Cricket* as a play-disguised-as-prose fiction, Dickens managed to cause all of the other adaptation teams (with the exception of the creators of the burlesque version of *Cricket* at the Olympic Theatre) to produce adaptations characterized by fidelity.\(^{28}\) There were at least seventeen productions in London alone\(^{29}\): whether or not this wholesale takeover of the London theaters was Dickens’s intent is unknown; however, judging from the pattern of his actions, it is likely that it was his intent to co-opt all of the adapters. As for achieving the apparent objectives that emerged during the third phase of his strategy, he achieved two out of three. While there can be no doubt that the authorized adaptations achieved popular and mostly critical success, it is less clear if Albert Smith was able to bring his trademark spirit to the play. Though he


\(^{29}\) Slater 239. Print.
earned positive reviews, it was the actress Miss Turner who seems to have brought “spirit” to the play.

Again, the reviews for Cricket at the Lyceum were almost good; however, there was a group of critics who reserved space in their reviews to point an accusatory finger at adaptation, and specifically at adaptations of Dickens’s books. For a brief moment in time, these frustrated defenders of the drama made Charles Dickens the symbol of the decline of the British drama. In order to understand what motivated these critics to write these things, first consider the reasons that the theater purists had to be angry about the Cricket production: First, they preferred legitimate drama over melodrama and Cricket is melodrama. Second, if they could not have legitimate drama, they at least wanted novelty; however, for three winter seasons in a row, the theaters had repetitively adapted a Christmas tale by Dickens. Third, if they had to watch adaptations, they at least wanted to see plays that were “dramatic”; but many of these critics did not consider Dickens’s narrative style to be dramatic. Fourth, if there had to be Dickens adaptations, these critics felt they should be relegated to the minor theaters; however, Benjamin Webster decided to break tradition and adapt Cricket at the Haymarket, one of the lone strongholds of legitimate drama. Fifth and finally, if those adaptations of “undramatic” Dickens took over the stage at additional theaters, these critics hoped that at least some managers would resist; but, in the case of Cricket, all of the theaters produced a version, which is why its contagious nature was compared to an illness.

For all of these reasons, defenders of the drama had reason to be annoyed by all of the Cricket plays staged during the winter theater season of 1845-46. They might have blamed the actor-managers or even the public, as one quoted critic did, but this group of
critics turned on Dickens because they most likely saw his new level of personal investment in adaptations of his work, and concluded that he bore responsibility: First, the critics knew that Dickens wrote the tale—without the tale, there would be no adaptation. Second, by authorizing an adaptation, Dickens had made himself a collaborator on that production. Third, it was reasonable to assume that in exchange for giving early proof sheets to the authorized playwright(s), Dickens expected the play to be characterized by fidelity to his book. Fourth, by utilizing his strategy of switching back-and-forth between adaptation teams at the Adelphi and the Lyceum, he had made himself partially responsible for the productions at both theaters. Then there was Dickens’s habit of superintending rehearsals—this is the fourth reason why, to these critics, Dickens appeared responsible. His superintendence, of course, meant that he influenced the performances of the actors. Fifth, Dickens wrote Cricket as a book-disguised-as-a-play, which made him a kind of co-writer of the play. Sixth and finally, by publishing his book on the same day as the opening of the play, he made it likely that audience members would form their first impressions based on the play rather than the book—something that he probably would not have allowed unless he considered himself to be the co-author of the play.

The theater critics for The Times and The Morning Chronicle, in their reviews of the opening night of Cricket at the Lyceum, both make it clear that they considered themselves defenders of the British drama. They established this identity by characterizing themselves as experts in the art form with the authority to define what is “dramatic.” Although neither critic defined the word in his review, each used the word to indirectly shoulder Dickens with some blame for the low state of the drama in the
contemporary theater. The critic from *The Morning Chronicle* says, “All plays founded on novels are more or less hashes, and unpalatable warmings-up of the original. Plays founded on Mr. DICKENS’S novels, which are in very few respects suited for the stage, are peculiar hashes, and very often not remarkably palatable réchauffés. Boz is not dramatic. He never was, and never will be.”

When this premise is established—that Dickens’s work is not dramatic, the reader of the article recalls another premise delivered at the beginning of the article: “Christmas is coming round again, and with it comes Mr. DICKENS with a new Christmas story. The ‘Carol’ has been sung—the ‘Chimes’ have been rung; and we are now introduced to a new domestic muse—that of the blithe cricket.” The “us” referred to is the theater audience. Having been given these two premises, the reader is put in a position to complete the syllogism so that the critic does not have to explicitly state the conclusion himself: Dickens delivers an undramatic story to us every holiday season, whether we like it or not.

This critic even goes so far as to name the relentless form of transportation by which Dickens delivers his undramatic work each December: “The simultaneous appearance of a book, and a play founded on the book, is quite in accordance with the railway rate at which matters now-a-days move.” Dickens delivers his non-theatrical material with the power, speed, and regularity of a train. The message, once again, is that the audience is helpless and victimized. In addition to comparing Dickens’s unwanted delivery to a train, the critic explains what Dickens has done to usurp the only power that the audience has to defend itself: “Time should be allowed for the public to become

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acquainted with the novel. If they read it, approve of it, admire it—then dramatise it.”

According to this critic, by authorizing the play to open on the same day as the publishing of the book, Dickens has given the audience no opportunity to decide if it wants such a play.

The critic from *The Times* uses the occasion of the opening of the *Cricket* play not to attack Dickens’s latest Christmas tale nor its adaptation but rather to attack the practice of adapting novels, especially those written by Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens. In a different but equally effective way, this critic makes Dickens, for this brief moment in time, a sharer in the responsibility for the decline of the drama. This critic’s method in doing so is to once again set forth premises for a syllogism that a reader may use to come to a damning conclusion. The first premise set forth by this journalist is the following: “It is an unhealthy state of the drama when a piece succeeds from grounds totally unconnected with its own merit, or that of its performers.”

The reader then recalls that earlier in the article, the reviewer sets forth a premise that has relevance to the one just presented: “The dramatic versions of *Pickwick*, of *Chuzzlewit*, &c. could not have been tolerated for a single night by an audience made acquainted with them for the first time through a theatrical medium.” The reader is then left to draw the logical conclusion that the success of the *Pickwick* and *Chuzzlewit* adaptations is a reflection of the low state of the theater. Note that the critic names one of the authorized adaptations—that of *Chuzzlewit*—as a reflection of the low state of the theater. A theatergoer with the worst of memories, one that extends only a year into the past, will recall the fact of Dickens’s sanction, and his well publicized superintendence of rehearsals. Furthermore, because

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the Keeleys and Edward Stirling are not mentioned by the critic as being associated with the Chuzzlewit play, Dickens is made into a symbol of the decline of the drama.

In a similar way, this critic makes Dickens in part responsible for conditions that were preventing the next generation of dramatists from being properly educated in their art form. In other words, the above rhetorical construction makes Dickens a symbol of the low state of the drama as the reviewer believed existed then; and a second rhetorical construction makes Dickens an obstacle standing in the way of a rebound or recovery. The first step in making Dickens an obstacle is by setting forth the following premise: “It is an unhealthy education for the dramatic author to be able to dispense with all the ordinary requisites of his art, and yet to be sure of 100 nights’ `run’.“ Although the critic does not explicitly name the Pickwick adaptation or the Chuzzlewit adaptation, both of which fell into the category of adaptations with long runs, these adaptations are implied. The critic likely had in mind Moncrieff’s adaptation of Pickwick at the Strand Theatre, which had an impressive run of about eighty performances.\(^32\) The Keeleys’ Chuzzlewit adaptation at the Lyceum had a run of about 105 performances. Once again, the reader is left to draw the logical conclusion—that the next generation of playwrights is not being properly educated in their art and craft because plays based on Dickens’s books are guaranteed to have a long run, regardless of whether or not they are well constructed.

Once again, if the reader wishes to look for a party to blame for adaptations of the type mentioned—based on novels like Pickwick and Chuzzlewit—Dickens and Sir Walter Scott are the only authors named, and since no title by Scott is mentioned, this leads the reader to associate Dickens’s titles alone with this state of affairs—one that is preventing

\(^{32}\) Bolton 80.
the next generation of dramatists from being properly educated. However, it must be noted that the critic from *The Times* does not single out Dickens to quite the same degree as the critic from *The Morning Chronicle*; the critic from *The Times* apportions some of the blame on the audience. Explaining at the beginning of his review why adaptations of novels frequently meet with box office success despite having been poorly written, he writes, “The public being already perfectly familiar with a set of fictitious personages, through the medium of the letterpress, become anxious to see how the same personages will look when brought into the semi-reality which the stage affords.” Described in this manner, these curious audience members are much less presumptuous and threatening than the Dickens characterized in the *Morning Chronicle* review.

CONCLUSION

Chapter 2 of this dissertation explains how, in an attempt to protect what he considered his literary property from the London theater industry in 1844, Dickens used authorized adaptations to successfully co-opt one adaptation team for *A Christmas Carol* (the first phase of his strategy), and two adaptation teams each for *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *The Chimes* (the second phase of his strategy). This chapter has explained the third phase of Dickens’s strategy wherein he co-opted all of the adaptation teams in London. In addition, this chapter has shown how, for a brief moment in time, some critics who considered themselves defenders of the British drama made Dickens a symbol of its decline. Chapter 4 will look at critical reviews of the seven authorized adaptations of Charles Dickens in order to make inferences that show there was a coherent Victorian theory of adaptation. Furthermore, inferences based on these criticisms in the
newspapers and periodicals reveal what it was to both produce, and experience as an audience member, a typical Victorian adaptation of prose fiction.
CHAPTER FOUR

PERIODICALS AND THE VICTORIAN THEORY OF ADAPTATION

INTRODUCTION


Olmsted says that, at the time he was assembling his anthology, a new view about the existence of theory of the novel was emerging; in periodical criticism of the period in question, some contemporary scholars saw “a remarkable concern for the techniques of fiction” and they found “embryonic Jamesians everywhere in the pages of Fraser’s, the Athenaeum and other important journals of the time.” Olmsted, in introducing his anthology, refuses to definitively side either with Wellek and Schorer or the contemporary critics who disagreed with them; he says that “an attentive reader of book reviews [both in this anthology and elsewhere] finds himself swinging from day to day to one side or the other in the controversy.” In the end he states that the articles in the

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1 John Charles Olmsted, ed. *A Victorian Art of Fiction* (New York: Garland, 1979), XIII. Print. Hereafter, references from this work are cited as Olmsted.
anthology offer “evidence of a coherent aesthetics of fiction” but he refrains from attempting to tie together what he finds to be coherent into a whole. What Olmsted determines is that there are, indeed, theoretical discussions of the novel to be found during the period, and much of this offers “interesting critical commentary,” but that an examination of the plot summaries and excerpted quotations used by period critics offers critical commentary that is just as valuable as the theories of the novel found in the articles that he selects.\(^2\) Ultimately, he says, the value the excerpts he anthologizes such as his is that “they send us back to the novels of the period with new insights and new questions to enhance our pleasure and enrich our understanding.”\(^3\)

Just as Wellek, Schorer, and Olmsted represent a general interest in understanding the novel, there is a great deal of interest amongst today’s critics in better understanding adaptation. Laurence Raw, in his book review in Literature/Film Quarterly entitled “Anatomizing Adaptations,” says that Robert Stam’s, Linda Hutcheon’s, and Thomas Leitch’s books, published between 2005 and 2007, together initiated a contemporary scholarly discussion that has continued to the present moment.\(^4\) The four books reviewed by Raw—Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities, a collection edited by Rachel Carroll; Beyond Adaptation: Essays on Radical Transformations of Original Works, an anthology of essays edited by Phyllis Fruth and Christy Williams; Adaptation Studies: New Approaches, edited by Christa Albrecht-Crane and Dennis Cutchins; and Screen Adaptation: Impure Cinema, by Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan—were

\(^2\) Olmsted XIII.

\(^3\) Olmsted XXXV.

all published in 2009 and 2010, and though they focus mainly on film adaptations of literature, the recent general interest in adaptation is not limited to this one type. Other evidence of increased interest is the co-existence of three contemporary academic journals on the subject: *Film/Literature Quarterly* (Salisbury University); *Adaptation* (Oxford University Press); and *Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance* (University of Glamorgan). Furthermore, the International Association of Adaptation Studies now hosts an annual conference. One way to classify all of the above publications, journals, and the professional organizations, besides their primary interest in adaptation of literature to film, is their generally common interest in contemporary adaptation. Those interested in a historicized understanding of adaptation, such as during the early- and mid-Victorian period in Great Britain, must look elsewhere.

Although there are numerous historians of adaptation, the number of scholars who have attempted to study Victorian theories of adaptation are few. H. Philip Bolton, in his essential book *Dickens Dramatized*, devotes the five-part introduction to providing the historical context for the handlist of adaptations that he has compiled. At various points in this introduction, Bolton describes the conventions followed by the adapters. What follows is typical of the kind of claims that Bolton makes about the aesthetic principles followed by adapters: “The early nineteenth century entertainment industry generally followed certain empirically tested principles in manufacturing products for public consumption: among these was the distillation of a novel to its lowest common emotive denominator, its most elemental appeal” (26). Bolton follows this claim by explaining how one of Bulwer-Lytton’s novels, *Paul Clifford*, was reduced to a single song for an adaptation at the Garrick Theatre in 1836. What Bolton does not do is quote from the
texts in which theorists prescribe certain principles of adaptation. This dissertation chapter attempts to fill that gap by providing textual evidence of a coherent Victorian theory of adaptation.

In his monumental work *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*, Martin Meisel devotes a chapter, “Novels in Epitome,” to a study of theatrical adaptations of serially published, illustrated novels; Meisel describes how certain novels by Pierce Egan, William Harrison Ainsworth, and Charles Dickens were adapted for the stage in early nineteenth-century London. The general argument is that the theatrical adapters applied the principles of a “pictorial dramaturgy” to their adaptations, treating the novels as a series of pictures (already illustrated by artists such as Cruikshank and published alongside the serial numbers) with legible “situations,” to be “realized” on the stage, for the purpose of creating “effect.”

To understand what is meant by the quoted terms requires an explanation of the introduction to Meisel’s book as well as the section that he classifies as Part I, entitled “Coordinates.” In this opening section of the book, Meisel argues that, in nineteenth-century Britain, the art forms of painting, the novel, and drama mutually informed and transformed each other. Artists working in each of these art forms sought to discover if it would be possible to increase the total expressive power of their particular art form by finding ways to compensate for the particular art form’s limitations; specifically, they sought to compensate for their limitations by borrowing techniques from their sister art forms.

Painters, for example, saw that their pictures, which captured their subjects in moments of stasis, seemed to lack the ability to show sequential, causally connected
moments over time (i.e., narrative), in the way that the drama and the novel could; therefore, painters invented a new visual language of "situation," as well as other techniques in an attempt to overcome this limitation. Authors, on the other hand, felt comfortable with the serial novel's ability to represent a narrative, but they envied the capacity of painting to go beyond verbal picture-making and to show visual pictures; therefore, authors made use of illustrations in their serial fiction, and in particular, illustrations that could exploit the new visual language of "situation." Then there were the dramatists, who, like the novelists, felt comfortable in their art form's ability to represent a narrative, but who felt constrained by the classical principles of drama that promote action and denigrate stasis. Like the novelists, the dramatists wanted to make use of the narrative power of pictures, particularly the narrative power of "situation," which paradoxically communicates narrative through stasis; therefore, dramatists adopted the practice of freezing action in tableaux, allowing the audience to read the static configuration, as well as other signs in the language of "situation," as narrative. To summarize, each of the above three art forms—the novel, drama, and painting—sought to make use of (1) the temporal power of narrative; and (2) the narrative power of picture imbued with "situation," even if a narrative or picture does not naturally lend itself to the particular art form.

Again, Meisel's name for the new aesthetic adopted by dramatists who wanted to make use of the power of picture imbued with "situation" is the "pictorial dramaturgy." In the nineteenth century this new dramaturgy, says Meisel, replaced the former building blocks of the drama—a unit of action or passion, with a new building block—the picture (38). Whereas the old dramaturgy required that the units of action or passion be causally
linked to what came before it as well as what follows, the pictorial dramaturgy made less stringent demands upon the playwright to connect a picture with the picture that preceded it and the picture that follows it. This dramaturgy, says Meisel, is characterized by the use of the *tableau*, in which “the actors strike an expressive stance in a legible symbolic configuration that crystallizes a stage of the narrative as situation, or summarizes and punctuates it.”

This frozen, symbolic arrangement of actors, the *tableau*, that Meisel says communicates narrative as “situation,” is one of the key ways that the drama sought to borrow from a sister art form in order to make up for its limitations. In this particular case the drama is borrowing from painting. In his introduction Meisel explains that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the painter David Wilkie transformed the art world by introducing domestic genre painting, which had the effect of dethroning what had been the most prestigious of genres—history painting (3-11). Wilkie’s painting style set out to communicate narrative by conceiving of painting as language; using a language made up of iconography, he sought to make the narrative “legible” through the symbolic arrangement of the icons of this “language.” An example of Wilkie’s symbolic iconography, cited by Meisel, is the painter’s desire to make the beholder “read” that one of the subjects of the painting *The Rent Day* is not just a mother but a widow; in order to communicate this “situation,” the painter came up with the idea to have her baby chewing on a house key, which would have been in her husband’s possession were he alive.

The word “situation,” says Meisel, had a very particular meaning in the context of the “pictorial dramaturgy.” His definition comes from Edward Mayhew’s treatise *Stage Effect: or, The Principles which Command Dramatic Success in the Theatre*:
To theatrical minds the word “situation” suggests some strong point in a play likely to command applause; where the action is wrought to a climax, where the actors strike attitudes, and form what they call “a picture,” during the exhibition of which a pause takes place; after which the action is renewed, not continued; and advantage of which is frequently taken to turn the natural current of the interest. In its purposes it bears a strong resemblance to the conclusion of a chapter in a novel. (qtd. in Meisel 39)

Judging from this definition, it can be seen that a “situation” is the subject of a tableau.

As stated previously, the situation is meant to be “read” like language by the audience; the audience takes in the iconographic elements that compose the picture, and it is able to read them collectively as narrative, even though, paradoxically, nobody present in the tableau is moving.

A tableau serves an additional purpose—it is also meant to produce an “effect.” Just as “situation” has a very particular meaning in the context of the pictorial dramaturgy, so too does “effect.” What this term refers to is what happens to a beholder or audience member when a work of art is created in such a way so that it will have an immediate impact on his emotions; in other words, “effect,” in the context of the pictorial dramaturgy, is about an instantaneous emotional reflex in response to a “situation.” If the “effect” has done its job, the beholder will become emotionally excited and will respond with spontaneous applause. Such an approach to art-making—producing art with the intent to directly target the emotions—was controversial during the nineteenth century because it denied the beholder of the “situation” time both to digest the moral implications of what he is seeing and to its interpret meaning. Like music, the “art of effect” sought to bypass the rational mind and work directly on the emotions. Some did not like such art because they felt it to be manipulative: an effect without a cause.5

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5 Meisel 71.
Having set forth Meisel’s definitions for several key words in the pictorial
dramaturgy—*tableau*, situation, and effect—it becomes possible to return to the subject
of nineteenth-century theatrical adaptations of illustrated, serially published novels. In
his chapter “Novels in Epitome,” Meisel explains that the adapters of such books
followed the principles of the pictorial dramaturgy when they wrote and produced their
plays. In other words, the adapters attempted to dramatize novels by authors such as
Ainsworth and Dickens through pictures; indeed, they selected pictures from the novels
and sought to recreate them in *tableaux*; the *tableaux*, of course, would be composed in
such a way that it would be “readable” as “situation,” causing an “effect” in the audience.
Meisel’s explanation of how the pictures from the serialized novel were selected to
become *tableaux*, expressive of situations and producing “effects,” leads to the
introduction of a final critical term—“realization.”

According to Meisel, “realization,” in the context of a pictorial dramaturgy, is the
“materialization” of a picture; in other words, it is the making “real” of a picture created
by an artist. Thus, a *tableau* based on an illustration by Cruikshank from a serial novel is
a “realization” of Cruikshank’s illustration; instead of hand-drawn figures in an
illustration arranged meaningfully in a situation, in a “realization” real men and women
are meaningfully arranged on the stage in a situation. If the “realization” works as it
should, it should create an “effect.” As it happens, this is exactly how pictures were
selected to be the basic building blocks of theatrical adaptations of serial novels—the
adapters built their plays with realizations of the original illustrations of the novels as the
basic dramatic unit. To do so was consistent with the principles of the pictorial
dramaturgy. Meisel argues that for the full “effect” to be achieved by a “realization,” in
addition to finding the “situation” legible, the beholder would also need to recognize the
*tableaux* as coming from the novel’s original illustrations.

Meisel’s treats theatrical adaptations of illustrated, serialized novels from the
point of view of the pictorial dramaturgy; in other words, he sees such theatrical
adaptations as one type of enactment of that dramaturgy. In contrast, this chapter
considers such theatrical adaptations from the point of view of the culture of adaptation—
those who made them and those who watched them; that is to say, this chapter does not
attempt to make any broad statements about nineteenth-century British dramaturgy, in
general, but rather to more fully characterize what shall be called in this paper “the
Victorian theory of adaptation.” This chapter argues that, while the Victorian theory of
adaptation absorbed the pictorial dramaturgy, there was a separate nineteenth-century
theory of adaptation, with principles and conventions that applied more narrowly to plays
adapted from Victorian novels and tales.

To be more specific, the argument of this chapter is that the Victorian theory of
adaptation absorbed the principles and conventions of the pictorial dramaturgy, but that it
had additional principles and conventions that would not necessarily apply to plays that
are not adaptations, even if these plays were designed in accordance with principles and
conventions of the pictorial dramaturgy. In general this chapter has four goals: (1) to
describe the Victorian theory of adaptation; (2) to show that this theory absorbed the
principles and conventions of the pictorial dramaturgy; (3) to introduce additional
principles and conventions that were a part of, and unique to, the Victorian theory of
adaptation; and (4) to show the important role that drama critics working in the
periodicals had in theorizing about, and policing, the playmakers who worked on
adaptations. It would rightly be concluded, therefore, that this chapter generally builds upon Martin Meisel’s *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* and, more narrowly, the chapter “Novels in Epitome.”

Meisel, in his search for roots of the key concepts of the pictorial dramaturgy, is able to trace the intellectual history of the key concepts listed above. For example, Meisel traces the concepts of “situation” and “effect” to such writers and artists as William Hazlitt, August von Kotzebue, Richard Wagner, David Cox, Edgar Allen Poe, Edward Mayhew, Percy Fitzgerald, and Frank Archer; furthermore, Meisel traces ideas about the interplay of narrative and picture to writers and artists like Denis Diderot, William Hogarth, and David Wilkie.

In contrast, this chapter makes no attempt to trace the intellectual history of the key concepts of the theory of adaptation any further back than to the drama critics writing reviews of adaptations in nineteenth-century periodicals. These critics, who wrote anonymously, both explicitly and implicitly communicate the principles and conventions of the theory of adaptation, some of which are borrowed from the pictorial dramaturgy and some of which are unique to the theory of adaptation. Rather than attempting to review all the periodical reviews of theatrical adaptations for the century, this study is limited to reviews of the authorized adaptations of Charles Dickens—that is, the theatrical adaptations of novels and tales by Dickens that Dickens personally sanctioned. These reviews were written in London between 1844 and 1860. Therefore, a more accurate label for the subject of this chapter might be The British Theory of Theatrical Adaptation: 1844-1860. It should be noted that the Victorian theory of adaptation does not only apply to the adaptation of illustrated, serialized novels; in this study the label
“theory of adaptation” refers to theatrical adaptation based on any form of prose fiction, including novels and tales.

A study of the Victorian theory of adaptation as implied and policed by anonymous drama critics writing for periodicals requires a review of all relevant studies on Victorian dramatic criticism in the periodicals. In short, neither of the major books that cover nineteenth-century dramatic criticism in Great Britain directly address the subject of theatrical adaptation. Although George Rowell’s anthology of representative nineteenth-century dramatic criticism, *Victorian Dramatic Criticism*, includes periodical reviews of adaptations based on prose fiction, Rowell never addresses adaptations in his introduction. Another relevant text, Charles W. Meister’s *Dramatic Criticism: A History*, has a chapter entitled “19th Century French and English Criticism.” However, as is the case with Rowell, the chapter makes no mention of theatrical adaptation. In general, it has been found that most historical studies of nineteenth-century dramatic criticism are critic-centered rather than genre- or subject-centered. Thus, it appears that this chapter may represent the first and only comprehensive study of the Victorian theory of adaptation as communicated and policed by the anonymous drama critics writing for the periodicals.

Therefore, this chapter should be thought of as a project similar to that pursued by Olmsted in his *Victorian Art of Fiction*—it is an attempt to locate the Victorian theory of adaptation as both implied and explicitly stated by the critics, in this case writing anonymously, in the periodicals. Reading the critical reviews of the authorized adaptations of Charles Dickens reveals that there was, indeed, a coherent Victorian theory
of adaptation, one that can be understood by imaginative readers, practiced at making inferences, more than 100 years later.

ARGUMENT

The first thing needed for a Victorian adaptation to be produced was a theater manager who wanted to make money, because many critics in their reviews liked to speculate on the chances the adaptation would make a lot of money for the theater. For example, the critic from Lloyd’s Weekly wrote the following during the Christmas season run of Dickens’s *The Chimes* in 1844:

... of all the metropolitan managers, none are more assiduous or successful in catering for the public amusement, than Mr. Webster, for within two days after the issue from the press of The Chimes, we find it dramatised, and brought out at the Adelphi. No time has been lost, and, so far as the manager is concerned, we hope much money will be gained, and that these Chimes will ring him in a merry and happy new year.\(^6\)

Thus, just as it is well known that pantomimes during the winter season were meant to be money makers, so too were adaptations intended to be.

If a book, be it a novel or a tale, proved to be popular, it became a candidate for adaptation at one of the minor theaters, like the Adelphi, which specialized in adaptations. “Originality is quite out of the question with the dramatists of the minor theatres,” said the drama critic for *The Satirist*, “a genus that may be fairly said to exist by pilfering from the field of literature, and making the stage the repository of their stolen goods.”\(^7\) The critic is referring to the ten theaters that were producing Dickens’s *The


Chimes without compensating him or asking permission. While this critic may have felt that such appropriations of Dickens’s narrative was akin to thievery, there was in fact no law between 1845 and 1860 preventing a theater manager from doing so.

Another way for a manager to attract theatergoers, and thus make money, was to present an adaptation by an author with a prestigious name. Perhaps the finest example of a theater using the prestige of an author’s name in order to sell tickets was the commissioning of Albert Smith to write a verse prologue for the Lyceum’s authorized adaptation of Martin Chuzzlewit—a prologue that was either made available for reprinting by the house or copied by the reviewers in the audience. Either way, the following brief excerpt, which was quoted in full in Chapter 2, shows how much Lyceum theater manager Mrs. Keeley believed in promulgating the linkage of the present adaptation to the prestige of Charles Dickens’s name:

We owe this story of the present hour  
To that great master hand whose graphic power  
Can call up laughter, bid the tear to start,  
And find an echoing chord in every heart :  
Whom we have learned to deem an household friend ;  
Who, midst his varied writings, never penned  
One line that might his guileless pages spot,  
One word that, dying, he would wish to blot.8

Of course, the most common way that managers would exploit the prestige of the author was by printing the author’s association, whether just as the author of the book or as presented by his sanction, on the playbills and in published advertising notices. If, in addition, the author collaborated in the “getting up” of the production, this prestigious association would be publicized as well.

Although popularity of the book or the prestige of its author alone might have prompted a theater manager to commission an adaptation, the critics list other traits that contributed to the success of an adaptation. For example, it was considered a good thing if a book had the reputation of moving readers emotionally. The critic from *The Illustrated London News* disparaged the authorized adaptation of *The Chimes* for lacking, "those touches of nature which went home to the hearts of all with such force [as the Carol]." Some critics argued that books with "striking effects" on the page transitioned to the dramatic form more easily. The critic from *The Theatrical Journal* made this point when explaining the inherent difficulties of adapting a book such as Dickens's *The Cricket on the Hearth*: "The Author [of the play, Albert Smith,] has done ample justice to a work which has not given great scope for the stage; the first two acts are commonplace situations, and no particular opportunity occurs in the novel to produce any striking effect before the audience."

Still other critics argued that shorter books made better plays, both because playmaking was arguably supposed to be an "enlarging"—not a "condensation"—process, and because of the losses that must necessarily accrue when one attempts to adapt a long novel for the stage. In his review of the authorized adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities*, one critic wrote, "It is the office of the true dramatist rather to enlarge than condense ... the genuine dramatist must be a poet ... if he means to give not only vitality to his work, but immortality, he must form it of that stuff which is of an everlasting nature; and the only product of that kind that we know of is the result of

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imagination.” As this implied, unless the adapter’s source material was short or condensed, he would be prevented from applying his imagination and, therefore, would not be able to create a work of lasting value.

Finally, adaptable books needed to be dramatic in nature. The critic for the Age and Argus joined a chorus of critics complaining about the undramatic nature of the books by Dickens that theaters kept adapting, a problem compounded when an adaptation hit the stage before the public had time to read the original book:

Mr. Dickens’s new Christmas book has been hastily dramatized, or rather thrown upon the stage, almost simultaneously with the publication of the volume. We do not think this very judicious, inasmuch as none of Charles Dickens’s works are at all dramatic, and all owe their theatrical success to the intimate acquaintance which the public has with the written tale.

In other words, if the adaptation team refused to give the public time to read the book before mounting an adaptation, then the play had to stand on its own as drama, and since none of Dickens’s novels are dramatic, the play was inclined to fail. Once a playwright, perhaps the house playwright, was given instructions by the manager to adapt the popular book, it became his job to write a play following a fairly standard procedure. The first step that such a playwright would follow was to select the essential incidents and scenes for adaptation. “The dramatist . . . has no easy task in picking his way so as to be perspicuous,” wrote a critic for The Era. “He must not depart from the ground, and may only select the principle landmarks to guide him, for a play is not a book.”

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selected these events—events often also selected by the book’s illustrator—the adapter then planned the order of these incidents in the play. Describing an organizational plan utilized by Albert Smith, who adapted two of Dickens’s Christmas tales, a critic from *The Daily News* wrote, “He has thrown the incidents into a series of scenes, precisely as they occur in the tale; and, with slight exception, has confined himself to the original dialogue.”\(^\text{14}\) With a general plan mapped out, the adapter then drafted the play.

Most commonly, in the drafting plays, adapters used what some called the “paste and scissors” approach: transferring dialogue without alteration from the pages of the book to the pages of the play.\(^\text{15}\) Reviewing the Adelphi’s adaptation of *The Chimes*, the critic from *The Times* wrote, “. . . the text of the work has been closely adhered to, the dialogue being, with very few exceptions, drawn word for word from it.”\(^\text{16}\) Adapters also tended to transfer some of the narration to the dialogue, in a word-for-word fashion. Recall the following excerpt from a review quoted in Chapter 3: “The book has been very well adapted by Mr. Albert Smith, who has taken great care not to omit a point, but when he has found one in the description has transferred it to the dialogue.”\(^\text{17}\) Adapters could transfer to dialogue all expository information necessary for the audience to understand what is happening. This technique also allowed adapters to retain the tone of the piece—Dickens’s humorous tone, for example—which is conveyed in his narration. Finally, the


“paste and scissors” approach is literally cutting out or omitting the parts of the book’s narrative that will not fit into such a condensed form as a play. The critic for The Times refers to this part of the method in his review of the 1860 adaptation of A Tale of Two Cities: “... by divers omissions and transpositions he [playwright Tom Taylor] has made the whole visible action take place on French soil, and, finally, that, having got rid of Miss Pross, he causes Madame Defarge to struggle with her own husband, when the time comes for exterminating her with the shot of a pistol, accidentally discharged.” Note that in this excerpt, the reviewer observed how a character, a setting, and we can assume a number of scenes that took place in that setting had been omitted by the playwright.

Adapters using the “paste and scissors” method faced a few challenges. Some felt pressure to retain certain dialogue, even if that dialogue was lengthy (thus, bogging down the scene’s action) or disconnected from the “situation” in the scene. Some adapters retained dialogue, even when there was no accompanying action to perform. As one reviewer of The Haunted Man noted, “Redlaw, the haunted man—a very up-hill part, with a great deal to say—and no situation is acted by Mr. Hughes with an assiduity that does him infinite credit.” Perhaps dialogue such as that spoken by Mr. Hughes was not discovered to slow down the drama until it was recited on the stage, or perhaps the dialogue did not seem wordy in the book but the adapter felt that he had to burden it with additional dialogue taken from the narration. Whatever the motive, a common criticism

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of these types of adaptations was that slowed down the play’s forward progress with long speeches transferred verbatim from the book.

Plays written according to the principles of the “paste and scissors” method could also be excruciatingly long. As shown above, the twin practices of faithfully transferring dialogue from the text of the book and translating narration into additional dialogue had the effect of drawing out scenes far longer than was the norm. Furthermore, if the author had influence over the form and content of the play, such as was the case with Dickens’s authorized adaptations, the playwright might feel pressured to keep material in the play that would probably be omitted were he not obliged to the book’s author. The anonymous reviewer for *The Critic* described this latter phenomenon in his negative review of the Lyceum’s *A Tale of Two Cities* in 1860:

Mr. Tom Taylor [the playwright] is both too good and too bad to be able to effect such a transformation. Had he indeed had to handle, or we may say rifle, the unknown production of an unknown author, he would have had no compunctionous visitings of politeness; he would have worked away in secret, and defied alike the remonstrances of his victim and the detection of the critic; and we might have had as good a stage play as “The House and Home.” As it is, we have a series of evident compromises. The great author very properly refuses to lay his offspring on the anatomical dissecting-table, or rather, the cook’s chopping-board; and objects to have the arms, legs, and other limbs of the victim minced up so as to produce an entirely new dish. He shudders when this incident is to be altered, that dialogue to be entirely crushed, and sees that all his fine conceptions are undergoing a total change, to fit them to the taste of course audiences, who expect a sensation every five minutes and an event every ten. Being a popular author, his remonstrances are deferentially listened to; and if the adapter, who thoroughly understands his business, even explains his motives of work, and shows their necessity, he is overruled by the manager, who, caring nothing for real dramatic principles, only knows that the original author is beyond compare successful in writing, and therefore imagines he must be in acting.20

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Of the authorized adaptations of Charles Dickens, two come from novels, and, in both cases, the critics complained about an over-long play on opening night.

It has been established that adapters using the “paste and scissors” method omitted narrative materials from the book and still oftentimes wrote overlong plays. Such plays would have been longer, though, if adapters had not been, at times, ruthless with their cuts, particularly, when the books being adapted were novels. As stated earlier, adapter Tom Taylor dropped the minor servant character Miss Pross, thus radically changing Madame Defarge’s death scene in the Lyceum’s *A Tale of Two Cities*. Similarly, Taylor ruthlessly cut all scenes set in England. “It [The book] is emphatically a Tale of Two Cities, and as represented in its present form at the Lyceum it is nothing more than a disjointed episode in the tale of one,” observed the critic from *The Era*.21

Omitting a setting could mean, by extension, the dropping of plotlines, characters, and dialogue. Edward Stirling, in his authorized adaptation of *Martin Chuzzlewit* for the Lyceum, cut the entire plotline set on American soil, thus eliminating most of the scenes that had made young Martin Chuzzlewit’s traveling assistant, Mark Tapley, one of the most beloved and important characters in the book, as well as some of the book’s most charming dialogue. Having, thus, downplayed Tapley’s role, Stirling transformed the character to a silent one that could be played by one of the company’s “walking gentlemen.” For some in the audience, this omission of Tapley’s role in all but the “realization” of the illustrations was a major loss. As the *Morning Chronicle* reviewer noted, “There was but one omission—which derogated somewhat from its completeness—and that was not bringing out sufficiently the favourite Mark Tapley.

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This character was all but suppressed, although so well adapted for the stage.”

Besides the losses described above in association with the “paste and scissors” method, there is another—coherence—that will be dealt with in relation to the common practice of “realizing” the book’s illustrations in tableaux.

In their adaptations, playwrights often turned novels into melodramas. The critic from The Morning Chronicle referred to this practice in his review of the authorized adaptation of Dickens’s The Battle of Life in 1846: “The play is in three acts; and, according to the modern style of melodrama, there is a lapse of three years between the first and second, and of twice three years between the second and third.”

The minor theaters, where most adaptations were produced, had repertory acting companies designed around the stock characters of melodrama; this situation, of course, reinforced the practice of adapting books as melodramas. For example, at the Adelphi Theatre the actor O. Smith specialized in playing melodramatic villains and ghouls. Playwrights writing adaptations for that theater would try to identify a character in the book suited for O. Smith’s talents. Thus, when the critic for The Morning Chronicle, in his review of The Haunted Man, reported that it “was brought out for the first time, with all the usual accessories of the Adelphi effect,” contemporary readers understood that it was an


adaptation based on a Dickens book with the actors playing the character types common to melodrama, for which the Adelphi was obviously known.24

Additionally, adapters followed a principle described in Meisel’s pictorial dramaturgy: the “serial discontinuity” of pictures. It will be recalled that the basic unit of a drama in the Victorian period’s dramaturgy was the picture; this is in contrast to eighteenth century drama’s unit of passion or action, which was causally connected to what preceded and followed it. According to the principles of the pictorial dramaturgy, the pictures in a play were not required to be causally connected to what preceded and what followed them. As Meisel describes it, “Each picture, dissolving, leads not into consequential activity, but to a new infusion and distribution of elements from which a new picture will be assembled or resolved. The form is serial discontinuity, like that of the magic lantern, or the so-called ‘Dissolving views’” (38). As will be seen, playwright adapters followed the principle of “serial discontinuity” in the weaving together of the book’s pictures into a draft. In his review of the Lyceum’s adaptation of Martin Chuzzlewit, the drama critic from John Bull wrote, “There is no attempt at a regularly constructed plot; the playwright (we use the phrase without any disrespect) knows that all his audience have read the tale, and, therefore, very properly picks out the most ‘telling’ incidents without much regard to their coherence.”25 Such comments, including the sarcastic insult, are very common in such reviews, especially reviews of adaptations of novels.


The influence of pictorial dramaturgy on the Victorian theory of adaptation inspired the presence of *tableaux* in plays, based on the illustrations in the books. To copy the illustrations faithfully, down to the minutest detail, was perhaps the most important requirement of an adapter. The following excerpt from the review of the authorized adaptation of *The Haunted Man* shows just how closely the critics and the audience were judging the *tableaux* for faithfulness: “The piece is introduced by a view of the college in which the chymist resides, taken from a vignette in the book. The subsequent scenes are all minutely copied from the other illustrations, the greatest attention being paid to every painting and to every group.”  

Although the playwright would have nothing to do with the arranging of the situation that would take place during the “getting up” of the play, he would still plan his play around such *tableaux*, making the play truly pictorial.

While the traditional “paste and scissors” method required the omission of certain narrative elements from the book—plotlines, characters, settings, scenes, etc.—the Victorian theory of adaptation required that the illustrations from the book be reproduced with fidelity. The following excerpt from a review of the Lyceum’s production of *The Cricketer on the Hearth* explains what happens when a character whose plotline has been omitted from the narrative for the adaptation is present in one of the illustrations that must and will be “realized” in the adaptation:

> Frequently the boards have been covered with characters utterly without dramatic significance; and the bill has been lengthened with a tremendous list of theatrical nonentities, simply that the persons described in the book might not be without a niche in the stage-structure. Mr. This and Miss That, standing among a host of figures, would appear, to a spectator who

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had not read the book and acquainted himself with the peculiar erudition of the audience, merely so many useless supernumeraries; but every one of them has represented some pleasant description or some suppressed adventure to the initiated.27

The “niche” referred to in this excerpt is the symbolic place of a character in the overall situation depicted in the illustration. It will be shown later that the one and only aspect of the adaptation requiring fidelity to the book was the resemblance of the tableaux, and, therefore, the characters and scenery in the tableaux, to the book’s illustrations.

Though coherence was not a guiding principle for adapters in the writing of their plays, the adapters did prioritize creating emotional “effects” for their audiences. The creation of “effects,” it will be remembered, is also one of the guiding principles of the pictorial dramaturgy. Specifically, playwrights writing adaptations sought to move their audiences emotionally through the power of pathos and humor. Whereas the powerful effects of pathos would most likely emotionally impact the audience at the moment the cast froze into a tableau representing an illustration from the book, humor would most often produce laughter during less intense moments, when characters fulfilling the low comedy requirement of melodrama were on stage. Note how the drama critic from The Illustrated London News judged the level of pathos and humor of an adaptation of The Chimes: “...as a whole—although possibly a deeper object was aimed at than in last year’s Christmas offering—it is certainly inferior to the ‘Carol’ in pathos, humour, and interest.”28 Although the reviewer included “interest” with pathos and humor as desirable qualities in an adaptation, there is disagreement among Victorian critics about


whether “interest” was a required trait in adaptations; furthermore, interest, unlike pathos and humor, does not make “effects.”

“Interest” was the word Victorian drama critics used to describe the attachment of an audience to a character or characters facing adversity or a problematic “situation”; when created successfully, the attachment lasted until the end of the narrative, when the adversity or problematic situation was resolved. Ideally, such “interest” caused audience members to sit on the edge of their seats until the final curtain dropped. It is clear from the reviews that drama critics felt that regular plays should have been characterized by interest but they disagreed about whether adapters should. “A play founded on a popular book should never be regarded apart from its source,” wrote a reviewer of the Lyceum’s authorized adaptation of A Tale of Two Cities, “inasmuch as the dramatic adapter rehes upon the interest which certain incidents have already created, when presented in type, to the very persons who afterwards witness them in visible action.”29 This critic felt that although he and his colleagues had every right to criticize an original play lacking “interest,” adapters, on the other hand, should not be scolded for failing to create interest in the fates of characters because it is assumed that the audience’s interest had already been captured by the book.

Whereas contemporary critics disagreed about whether the plot of a play should be faithful to the plot of the source book, they agreed that a play must be written (and performed) with total fidelity to the book’s characters. The following excerpt from a

review of the Lyceum’s production of *The Cricket on the Hearth* provides an example of an often expressed opinion among the critics:

When . . . we are treated to a drama founded upon one of his [Dickens’s] admirable stories, we love best to see it, not with the view of learning the tale from the stage—not to get our first impressions of the story and its characters through the glare of the footlights; but to enjoy or criticise the impersonation of characters we are already familiar with, to see scenes the pencil has already dealt with reproduced by flesh and blood, to gratify a perhaps unprofitable curiosity as to how men and women we have laughed with or at, or sorrowed with or over, may appear in that semi-real garb with which the stage can invest them.  

This attitude is, of course, consistent with the idea that it is the priority in adaptations to produce “realizations” of the book’s illustrations in *tableaux* that are characterized by fidelity. This attitude is also in keeping with the “paste and scissors” method practiced by adapters, because so much of Dickens’s characterizations depend on the traits communicated through dialogue. By cutting and pasting the dialogue from the book into the play, dialogue-communicated traits are not lost in translation.

The critics writing in the periodicals would reinforce this fidelity to characterization by applauding the members of the adaptation team—most notably the actors—who achieved it. Actors, such as Mr. Vining in the Lyceum’s adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities*, received the following kind of positive reinforcement for his faithful performance: “The acting of Mr. James Vining, who represents Dr. Manette with scrupulous adherence to the instructions of the story, is in this scene devoted to the elaboration of that phase of mental obscurity which Mr. Benjamin Webster has made

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such an artistic feature of in *The Dead Heart.*” Such encouragement often came in two forms—applauding the actors for the fidelity of their performances and also praising them for not being unfaithful to the characterization in the text. Comments praising such restraint were often directed at the members of the acting company who specialized in low-comedy and clowning from which they refrained during a given adaptation. “Mr. Wright’s performance is a piece of rich humour throughout, with little or no exaggeration, though the character is a tempting one,” commented a reviewer of the actor’s portrayal of Tetterby in the Adelphi’s *The Haunted Man.* There are exceptions in a Victorian adaptation when the critics indulge an actor altering his character from the model in the book, but such occasions are rare.

The critics also encouraged fidelity to the physical appearance of the character in the book, described in the book’s text and shown in its illustrations. “Mr. Frank Matthews as Pecksniff, with his hair standing up in three separate ‘Brutus’s,’ was the engraving animated for the occasion,” reported the reviewer of the Lyceum’s *Martin Chuzzlewit* for *The Manchester Times.* A reviewer of the Adelphi’s *A Christmas Carol* likewise commented on Mrs. F. Matthews’s likeness to Mrs. Cratchit: “As for the Mrs. Cratchit of Mrs F. Matthews—she was sworn sister to the Mrs Cratchit of Mr Dickens. There was never such a likeness.” Since Victorian actors were often held responsible


for their costumes and makeup, praise from a critic for an actor’s fidelity to the appearance of his character would redound favorably on the actor.

Occasionally, divergence from the characterization in the book was considered acceptable by the critics. The first is the case when the adapter made a certain character’s role more prominent in the play than it is in the book. Such was the case in Albert Smith’s adaptation of Dickens’s Christmas tale *The Battle of Life*; in his authorized adaptation he greatly enhanced the relative importance of the Clemency Newcome character. In addition to the motive that is attributed to Smith by the critic from *The Era* in the excerpt below, Smith was likely motivated by the need to provide actor-manager Mary Ann Keeley with a meatier role than the other female characters of the book could offer; furthermore, he probably felt the need give the melodrama-lovers in the audience a comic plotline, which is a generic convention:

He [adapter Albert Smith] seems to have foreseen that the interest attached to the two sisters was not strong enough to risk the success of any piece upon, and he has consequently thrown all the weight of the plot upon Clemency Newcome, in whom nearly the whole sympathies of the audience are centred, cutting down the long dialogues between Marion and Grace Jeddler, which, however beautifully written in the book, would have altogether failed in fixing the attention of the house.35

While this excerpt seems to indicate that the Clemency part only grew by subtraction, because so much of the Jeddler girls’ dialogue was cut, further down the review the same critic opined that Mrs. Keeley made judicious additions to the characterization: “Not only was every point in the individuality studied with singular care, but she carried the portraiture almost beyond the quaint stretch Mr. Dickens has given of the simple awkward maid-servant.” Another review in the same paper (perhaps written by the same

critic) went further. "The artists . . . have made the characters their own, especially Mrs. Keeley."36 It is notable that there is no trace of contempt in the critic’s words for her choice to do so.

Critics also forgave actors who veered from their precise fidelity to the character described in the book when in doing so they contributed “humour” to the characterization, thus pleasing the “vulgar” crowd. A character in the authorized adaptation of A Tale of Two Cities that most of the critics agree had been embellished by the actor was Jerry Cruncher, the messenger at Tellson’s Bank who moonlighted as grave-robbber. The reviewer from The Daily News complimented “Mr. Rouse who, if he did not entirely realise the author’s notion of Jerry Cruncher, presented a very humourous reading of his own.”37 Had Rouse’s “reading” not produced audience laughter, his divergence from the original character would not have been appreciated. Perhaps a clue why such an exception would be made may be found in another review of the same play, in which the critic refers to the vulgar audience members in the theater gallery: “The Jeremiah Cruncher of Mr. Rouse is broad and forcible, and his ‘strong exit’ and significant leering occasioned much hilarity among ‘the gods’.”38 It must be remembered that in the popular theater the demands of the galleries were expected to be met; therefore, the lovers-of-fidelity-in-characterization could be persuaded to look the other way in a rare case, in order to appease “the gods.”


The question of whether the adapter should show fidelity to the plot of the book he was adapting was open to debate during the years in question. Reviewers typically noted whether the actors achieved fidelity to their models in the book, observing any variation from the plot and recording the reaction of the audience. A prominent example of such a response may be found in a review of the Lyceum’s authorized adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities*, a play in which Madame Defarge’s death comes about as a result of circumstances different than those narrated in the book:

... having got rid of Miss Pross, he [playwright Tom Taylor] causes Madame Defarge to struggle with her own husband, when the time comes for exterminating her with the shot of a pistol, accidentally discharged. Strange to say, this last-named incident elicited a few sounds of disapprobation from an audience who seemed otherwise well pleased with the production.39

The performance about which this review was written was given on opening night, which would have been full of patrons who had read the book. This explains their preference for total fidelity.

It has been established by now that the Victorian theory of adaptation borrowed a great deal from the pictorial dramaturgy described by Meisel. What follows is a list of specific staging practices through which pictures were traditionally created in adaptations. In each case it can be assumed that the playwright and manager mutually agreed that the written play would need to provide suitable arrangements for all of the following picturesque practices.

One of the common practices to produce a picturesque effect in adaptation was to seek out an opportunity for a dance exhibition to be performed by the theater’s best

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dancers. Perhaps the most famous of the many dance exhibitions presented in the 
authorized adaptations of Dickens was in the Lyceum’s adaptation of *A Tale of Two 
Cities*:

It is the second act that the great feature of the drama is exhibited. We are 
now brought to the year 1793, and the excitement of the revolution is 
pourtrayed in vivid colours. The rousing of the sections is made to take 
place outside the wine-shop of Defarge. The fiendish dance of the 
Carmagnole, for which the original music has been procured from the 
*Bibliothèque Imperiale*, is performed, with all its traditional 
accompaniments of fantastic movements and shrieking curses. The stage 
is filled by the infuriated populace, and the *tableau* at the conclusion is 
well arranged and impressive.40

The critic’s praise of the “colours” and “movements” as well as the dance’s linkage to the 
*tableau* reinforce the picturesque nature of the dance.

If the book’s narrative has settings that could be adapted into elaborate, realistic 
set pieces with moving parts, then the manager and the playwright found a place to 
exploit them. There are references to such picturesque set pieces in critical reviews of all 
of the authorized adaptations; two such set pieces that receive particular praise are 
features of the Lyceum’s *Martin Chuzzlewit*:

Mr. Stirling has very skilfully mixed his materials together, of broad farce, 
sprightly comedy, deep pathos, and stirring melodrame, and has been well 
seconded for all due effect by the highly successful efforts of the scene-
painters. The London-bridge Wharf, with the steamers departing, was 
capitally represented; and the wood, where the deed of death was done, 
was most invitingly true to nature, with its rustic stile, and its varied 
unranging paths, and dense timber.41

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Such picturesque set pieces were designed to look realistic. To earn applause and draw the interest of the audience away from the actors were the primary goals of the expense, design, and labor that went into the creation of such a picture.

The excerpt above alludes to the two most common types of picturesque set pieces used in theatrical adaptations between 1844 and 1860: reproductions of familiar/real and unfamiliar/fictional settings, as well as romanticized depictions of idealized settings. The first type—realistic renderings of places known to be real, whether local or remote (either spatially or temporally)—may be grouped together with the period’s dioramas and panoramas in that all three art forms offer an opportunity to see and experience a real contemporary setting without having to physically visit it. The London-bridge wharf, represented in the authorized adaptation of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, was, of course, local—a place that most of the audience had seen before, so the pleasure experienced in viewing this picture would came about in part from personal recognition. However, such realistic renderings could also depict spatially or temporally remote locations not pictured in one of the book’s illustrations, locations inaccessible to most members of the audience. The picturesque set piece referred to by a critic in his review of *A Tale of Two Cities* is an example of a picturesque, realistic set piece, which is both temporally and spatially remote: “Very effective, too, was the Revolutionary Tribunal, with its sans-culotte jury, the Republican dandyism of its President, and the howling congregation of the galleries.”\(^{42}\) In contrast to the set piece at the London-bridge Wharf, this remote setting would give pleasure to the audience by realistically transporting them

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to a place that they have read and heard about but have never before seen, except,
perhaps, in their imaginations.

The other type of picturesque set piece with moving elements was more romantic
in nature, and while it sought to describe a place represented in the book, it was just as
much designed to represent an ideal—what the romantic imagination might have
imagined such a place to be. “The Wood” created for the authorized adaptation of Martin
Chuzzlewit was just such a set piece. The audience experienced pleasure not because the
picture produced was realistic but rather because it corresponded to the ideal wood where
a murder could have been committed without witnesses. Another example of such a
romantically ideal set piece featuring moving elements was described by a reviewer of
the authorized adaptation of The Battle of Life:

In the second act we have the ball at Dr. Jeddler’s to welcome the young
man’s return, with the blazing fire, the mistletoe, and the hoops of candles,
decked with bright holly. There is a quaint cotillion danced by some of
the visitors, and thus a good stirring old English country dance, by
everybody, at the conclusion of which one of the most clever scenic
effects takes place that we have for a long time witnessed. The company
dance off, and the moment the last couple are out of sight, the ball room
sinks away, the lights disappear, and we see the exterior of the old house
and orchard, with the lights gleaming from its windows, the snow falling
heavily, and the entire back ground of wintry landscape represented with
admirable effect.43

The critic reported that this set piece received a great deal of applause from the audience.

Once again, the intrinsic effect of this picture is of equal or greater value to the audience
than the picture’s contribution to any unifying goal of the drama.

Based on the descriptions provided by the critics, audiences relished seeing
presentations of beautiful meals featuring real, steaming dishes. Therefore, if an incident

in the book's narrative provided an opportunity to feature a picturesque meal, the playmakers exploited it. "The Christmas dinner at the house of Bob Cratchit, with its roast goose, smoking potatoes, indispensible sauces, and the never-failing plum-pudding, was admirably well portrayed," relayed a reviewer of the authorized adaptation of the Carol. While it could be argued that it was the "situation" that motivated the "realization" of the meal, the critics' consistent listing of the items served at the meal in this adaptation and others leads to the conclusion that the presentation of the picturesque meal had an intrinsic appeal that went beyond the pleasure of recognition that occurred when an illustration was reproduced with fidelity.

Additionally, if the book's narrative featured supernatural elements, managers and playwrights sought to exploit them, utilizing the illusionistic powers of the machinists and other experts in stagecraft. Many adapted Charles Dickens books featured ghosts, goblins, or spirits that, on the stage, had the potential to create striking, picturesque effects. Appropriately, one such book was The Haunted Man. In the adaptation, O. Smith, a specialist in the impersonation of monsters and villains, played the Phantom. The Daily News's anonymous reviewer of the 1848 authorized adaptation exemplified the desire of audiences to see picturesque effects associated with supernatural themes: "Mr. O. Smith is as ghostly a phantom as one would desire not to see; and the sliding machinery by which he makes his unearthly way over the boards is extremely ingenious and effective; and so is the manner in which his in-comings and out-goings are managed.

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Indeed the whole of the mechanism is admirable.⁴⁵ As this review suggests, the pictures achieved by the playmakers were appreciated as much and perhaps more for their intrinsic effects than for their contribution to any overall effect, at the scene-, act-, or play-level.

Actresses, especially actresses in minor roles, were recognized for their beauty. Sometimes the critics use the word “pretty”: “Miss Fortescue is pretty and interesting as Mary Graham.”⁴⁶ Sometimes the critics used the word “graceful”: “Miss Fortescue enacted Meggy Veck, Toby’s daughter, in a graceful and natural manner, the part being exactly suited to her.”⁴⁷ Minor actors, too, were commended for the picturesque pleasure that their physical being brought to the audience: “Mr. Leigh Murray, from the Princess’s Theatre, is a manly, sensible actor, who reads very well, and has the advantage of a good figure.”⁴⁸

Costumes, in general, always attracted the attention of critics seeking the picturesque. In plays set in the contemporary period, the most talked-about costumes were those worn by the comic or villainous characters. Of Mrs. Keeley’s costume in the comic role of Clemency Newcome, the same critic for The Times wrote, “The awkwardness of the attire alone produced a perfect picture”; and the reviewer for The

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Athenaeum wrote, “Her costume was picturesque.”49 Praise for a performer’s costumes was praise directed at the actress herself, because, in many cases, the actress selected her own costumes.

Period costumes also garnered special attention from the critics implying that historical costumes could be enjoyed for their own intrinsic beauties, separate and apart from how they functioned in the play. In reviews of the adaptations of Dickens’s The Battle of Life and A Tale of Two Cities, critics reviewed the historical costumes. Of the former play, The Daily News noted, “The costumes, of the time of George the Second, were rich and becoming.”50 A notice in The Morning Chronicle told readers that, for the “getting up” of the latter play, the Manager, Madame Céleste, had gone to the expense of, among other things, buying new costumes.51

Scenery, too, had intrinsic picturesque appeal. Note, for example, how Madame Céleste and Benjamin Webster were criticized for inappropriate scenery in The Chimes:

“... whenever the opportunity was given, the tableaux have been followed. We would suggest, however, that another background be found for the fête scene at Bowley Hall. Trees are not accustomed to be in full leafy summer luxurience upon New Year’s Day, nor are tables laid in the open air at such a season.”52 Since the most important requirement of a realization of an illustration in a tableau was the likeness of the

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characters to their models and the truthfulness to the original, the above excerpt shows that, although the nature of the background of the picture was of secondary importance, it assumed primary importance when it drew negative attention to itself.

It has already been mentioned that adapters who followed the “paste and scissors” method when writing their plays were accustomed to importing a great deal of original dialogue from their books and then further burdened the dialogue of their plays with excerpts from the books’ narrations. These practices resulted in long, drawn-out scenes and overly long plays. These long scenes and plays caused some but not all of the critics to complain that adapters should stop following the “paste and scissors” method and instead, be guided by the general principles of the drama when adapting. To feel obligated to import so much content from the original books, just for the sake of fidelity, argued these critics, made it hard for theater purists to enjoy the play. Many of the same critics also disliked the importation of moralistic, didactic, and descriptive elements from the book. These elements, argued a number of critics, were associated with authorial narration, a component of prose fiction that is not shared by the drama. A critic writing about the authorized adaptation of The Haunted Man addresses the problem of trying to adapt a moralistic, descriptive tale into a play:

The incidents that have befallen the principal character have long preceded the time when the story begins, and this is made up of a number of scenes little connected with each other, and merely introduced to work out a moral problem proposed by the author. As a certain definite purpose, a complete connexion of incidents, is required in dramatic works more than in any others, it could be mathematically demonstrated that the Haunted Man and dramatic effect move in two diverging lines. The best details in a book fall flat on a stage, when an audience cannot distinctly see whither they tend. In a word, the dramatic and the descriptive are two different
As has been seen in a number of reviews, critics who disliked the importation of such moralistic, descriptive elements into an adaptation or, for that matter, the very choice to adapt a moralistic, descriptive book at all, sometimes labeled the results “undramatic.”

Another complaint about the transplant of moralistic description from a book to a play was that doing so was sometimes a political act—that is, the imported moral might have been aligned with a controversial political stance. Critics who viewed the adaptation in question as a rhetorical tool of a politically motivated author, rather than as a play meant to amuse an audience that enjoyed the source book, sometimes expressed their displeasure in the way that the following critic from The Satirist did in his review of the authorized adaptation of The Chimes:

The interest, some good scenes excepted, is of too painful a kind, and the under-current of political feeling which runs through it is not the kind of teaching we prefer to receive in a drama, perhaps because we are apt to be over-dosed with it in other forms. We do not know whether Mr. Dickens is a student of the “six points”; many of the “noble sentiments” uttered would, nevertheless, do no discredit to the disciples of the Charter. The moral of his “Chimes” is a one-sided one; the drift of his work is certainly so; and we fear that he gives the poor, and toiling, and distressed credit for finer feelings and juster sentiments than they often express.

Clearly this reviewer had some strong opinions about Chartism and resented being made to sit through what he believed to be a Parliamentary harangue; in his mind, and in the mind of other critics of the period, to moralize was to intentionally or unintentionally take


a political stance, and political stances were meant to be expressed in other, more
descriptive, literary forms—not the drama.

As stated previously, traditionally, opening night would be scheduled in such a
way as to give the audience time to read the book and examine the illustrations on which
the adaptation is based. One critic made this clear when he reported how one adaptation
broke with tradition:

On Saturday night . . . we had an adaptation under circumstances entirely
new. Mr. Dickens's new Christmas work, The Cricket on the Hearth was
only published on the Saturday morning, and on Saturday evening the
Lyceum opened for the season with a dramatized version of the book. The
audience, therefore, far from coming to see a dramatic illustration of a
work already read, for the most part derived their knowledge of the book
from witnessing the drama.\footnote{
"Lyceum Theatre," The Times (22 Dec. 1845): 5. The Times Digital Archive 1785-

Besides the usual practice of giving the audience time to read the book, there were other
scheduling considerations, such as the seasons of the year when adaptations and
pantomimes were sought out by audiences. Traditionally, though certainly not always,
thearies presented these alternative genres during the Christmas holiday, the Easter
holiday, and during the summer months.

On opening night, assuming that the source book was popular, the author was
prestigious, and the adaptation had been publicized in playbills, periodical notices, and
theater gossip columns, the manager could expect to welcome a big crowd. In addition, if
the audience had been given sufficient time to read the book and examine the
illustrations, a large portion of that crowd would have been composed of readers. The
critic from John Bull said that, although the opening night audience had not been given

\footnote{"Lyceum Theatre," The Times (22 Dec. 1845): 5. The Times Digital Archive 1785-
time to read *The Cricket in the Hearth* in advance, audience members still brought their just purchased books along in order to compare the tableaux to the illustrations: “Though we saw, on the first night, many copies of the book in the hands of the audience, yet it could have been known to but a small proportion of the crowd who filled the theatre.”

The pleasure of the comparison process sometimes began while waiting for the play to begin: “A new drop scene [curtain] has been painted, which is a skilful transcript of Maclise’s fantastic frontispiece,” reported the critic from *Lloyd’s Weekly London Newspaper* in his review of the Adelphi’s *The Chimes*. Through the painting of the book’s frontispiece on the curtain, the management linked the adaptation to the authority of the book in an additional way.

If given time to read the book, most opening night audiences came having read it. Some in attendance were friends of the management; some were friends of the author of the book; others were avid readers; and still others were theater critics. In general, opening night audiences tended to give the play the benefit of the doubt, if not to enjoy it thoroughly. The following excerpt from *The Morning Chronicle’s* review of the Lyceum’s *The Battle of Life* is consistent with all of the other reviews of authorized adaptations that attempted to characterize the opening night audience: “The piece, though obviously presented to an audience largely predisposed in its favour, went off

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very heavily.” Certain less-than-satisfying adaptations gave the audience few reasons to show its approval, and their initial enthusiasm waned; nevertheless, the audience, at minimum, indulged with applause at the beginning.

Enthusiastic first-night audiences energetically applauded at certain conventional moments. When the drop scene went up and the play commenced, the audiences applauded in order to celebrate the play, to welcome the actors on the stage, and to acknowledge whatever picturesque set piece had been constructed and decorated for the scene. There might even be an opening tableau to applaud. Then, when certain stars of the play entered the scene, the audience gave them a special welcome. “O. Smith’s Toby Veck was capital, as were Hudson’s Will Fern, Selby’s Richard, and Miss Fortescue’s Meggy Veck,” wrote the critic from The Theatrical Observer in his review of The Chimes. “This young lady’s sweet acting gave general satisfaction, and on her appearance she was cordially greeted.” Probably even more cordial than the greeting given to Miss Fortescue was that given to the actor-managers of the theater.

Audiences also broke into applause, whenever “effects” were presented in the middle of the play, an act, or a scene. Once again, such effects might come about as a result of a variety of stimuli including a picturesque set piece, the appearance of a favorite actor, or the realization of an illustration from the book in a tableau. Additionally, audiences applauded exceptionally fine bits of comic acting, an actor’s moving pathos, and “points” made by the actor. Michael R. Booth defines a “point” as

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“a moment of intense physical or emotional action which was momentarily frozen in a powerful attitude or tableau—a kind of individualising of the group ‘picture’ that frequently concluded an act but was much older.”\(^{60}\) In their reviews of the acting in the authorized adaptations of Charles Dickens, critics often commented upon the commendable points made by the performers: “Mr. Vining has adroitly taken the points in the character of young Martin Chuzzlewit,” wrote a reviewer from *The Penny Satirist*.\(^{61}\) Each one of these points in Vining’s performance, then, likely prompted applause. Points made an effect with the audience were labeled by critics as “telling,” as in the following line from a review of the authorized adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities*: “As it progressed the audience exhibited an increasing satisfaction, greeting cheerfully and with enthusiasm every telling point.”\(^{62}\) Modern playgoers are unaccustomed to plays characterized by the stops and starts common in these adaptations: part of what Meisel calls “serial discontinuity.”\(^{63}\)

Finally, just as beginnings and middles provided opportunities for applause, so, too, did endings—the endings of scenes, acts, and the play itself. Sometimes, if an act met with approval, the audience applauded with extra enthusiasm to beseech the actors to return for a bow, as one critic described it in the authorized adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities*:

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\(^{63}\) Meisel 38.
The meeting of *Lucy Manette* with her father—who, from his long incarceration in the Bastille, has lost his senses, and who, on being restored to freedom, lives by making shoes in a garret in the Rue St. Antoine—is rendered with a pathos deserving of particular notice. It was a painful scene, and drew tears from the eyes of many. It was very difficult to perform; but Mr. James Vining exerted his powers to their utmost, and in conjunction with the efforts of Miss Kate Saville, whose displays of emotion were very natural, succeeded in bringing down the curtain at the close of the first act amidst thunders of applause; these plaudits being continued unabated long after the fall of the drop scene, both actor and across [sic] had the honour of coming forward between the acts to bow their acknowledgements to the audience for the ovation of their universal and genuine approbation.\(^{64}\)

It is imagined that a scene characterized by a combination of intense *pathos* and an act-ending *tableau* had the potential to create an effect of particular power, and this is the reason why the audience called forth the actors.

Of course, at the conclusion of the play, it was conventional for the drop scene to be lowered. What happened next was described in many of the reviews:

> At the fall of the curtain, a storm of applause burst from all parts of the house, which was densely crowded. We have not often witnessed such excitement. Mr. and Mrs. Keeley, Mr. Leigh Murray, and Miss Daly, with Mr. Frank Mathews and Miss May, appeared before the drop, and were greeted with bouquets and cheers; and then, in answer to another call, Mr. Albert Smith was led forward by Mrs. Keeley, amidst renewed acclamations, and bowed his acknowledgments in return for the compliment thus paid to him. There was also a general call for Mr. Dickens; but he was not in the theatre.\(^{65}\)

Among the conventions followed by this critic from *The Era* include a characterization of the manner of the applause, a mention of whether bouquets were given to the actors, and identification of those receiving special attention from the audience. In this case, in


\[^{65}\text{"Lyceum," } The\text{ Era} (27 Dec. 1846): 10. Print.\]
addition to Albert Smith, Dickens received special attention from the audience—probably because he had sanctioned the adaptation; however, because the author made it a custom never to show his face at a theater presenting one of his authorized adaptations, he never emerged for special recognition. Although it does not happen in this review of *The Battle of Life*, critics usually also note whether the managers, before sending the audience home, announce that the play will continue to run at the theater and, if so, how the audience reacted to this announcement. “A dramatized version of Mr. Dicken’s [sic] *Martin Chuzzlewit* was brought out at the Lyceum on Monday night with the most triumphant success,” says the reviewer from *The Manchester Times*, “the curtain, falling amid a clamour of applause that could not be excelled, and Mr. Keeley announcing the piece for repetition amid echoes of one cheer more.”

Victorian theatrical adaptations typically had a two-part run: one part primarily attended by readers and one part primarily attended by theatergoers. If the book was a popular one, the first part lasted for many weeks; however, if the book was less popular, the first part ended quickly. The drama critics, in general, identified with one audience or the other. Predictably, critics tolerant of the “paste and scissors” method of adaptation identified with the reader-dominated audiences who had come to the play to see the characters from the book come to life on stage; on the other hand, critics who disliked the “paste and scissors” method and found its characteristic “serial discontinuity” incoherent, identified with the latter audience, dominated by theatergoers. In general, critics who identified with theatergoers were associated with big daily newspapers such as *The Morning Chronicle* and *The Times*, or with specialty periodicals such as *The Era*, which

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catered to connoisseurs of the drama. Because the early, reader-dominated audiences tended to be more forgiving of the play's faults, changes made by the adaptation team to the play-text and actors' performances could be executed relatively early, before the audience dominated by theatergoers and connoisseurs of the theater had begun to attend.

According to Michael R. Booth, a “long run” in the 1860s and 1870s could range from four hundred to fourteen hundred consecutive nights, but it is clear from the writings of these critics that between 1844 and 1860 a run of 100 nights was considered a smashing success. Of the authorized adaptations of Charles Dickens only one play achieved that mark—Bolton counts 105 performances of the Lyceum’s Martin Chuzzlewit (223). The authorized adaptation of The Cricket on the Hearth probably would have easily broken that record had not approximately seventeen other London theaters set up their own productions in the wake of the Lyceum’s success; its total run, according to Bolton, was 61 performances (274). Since the purpose of producing an adaptation of a book was to make money, both of these productions surely were considered successful by the managers, the Keeleys.

If an adaptation was based on a book that was not popular, attracting an audience was more difficult. In such cases it was required that, to a much greater degree, the play must earn its own audience, such as through standout performances that became the “talk of the town.” A wonderful and exciting example was the surprising “hit” made by a relatively unknown actress in the minor role in the authorized adaptation of The Cricket on the Hearth. The critic from John Bull said of this unknown actress, “Miss Turner absolutely astonished the audience by her inimitable personation of Tilly Slowboy.

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67 Booth 13.
Though she had only a few sentences to speak, yet she never opened her lips without producing peals of laughter and thunders of applause. Her acting of this very small part, in short, is an exhibition of real genius."68 Although Mrs. Keeley deserved a major portion of the credit for the “Cricket-on-the-Hearth Mania” described in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, evidence suggests that Miss Turner’s performance helped turn the book, which had hardly been read on the day that the authorized adaptation opened, into a sensation that took over the London theaters.

Again, the Lyceum’s authorized adaptation of *The Cricket on the Hearth* had to compete with approximately seventeen other productions in the Metropolis. This phenomenon surely was considered a sign of success for the Lyceum, because the number of other theaters with plans to adapt this Christmas tale over the holidays had been nowhere near seventeen. The more cautious managers remembered the disappointment experienced by Madame Céleste and Benjamin Webster when their production of *The Chimes* turned out to be much less popular than *A Christmas Carol*, and these cautious managers did not want to devote their resources until they knew what they had in the tale—a *Carol* or a *Chimes*. Seeing that the tale was popular and that the Lyceum’s interpretation worked, the cautious managers joined the party.

Also, if members of the Royal Family, personages of the upper classes, and people of fashion attended an adaptation, this was a sure sign that an adaptation had become fashionable, and was therefore, a success. In both the authorized adaptation of *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *The Battle of Life*, people of rank attended performances, a fact that the drama critics noted in their reviews. In his review of *Chuzzlewit*, the critic for the

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Age and Argus wrote, “We have observed that there is but one theatre of any pretentions left open to the public—need we say it is the Lyceum, which, under the management of Mrs. Keeley, has risen at least one hundred per cent in the estimation of the nobility and the general patrons of the theatre.” Likewise, the critic reviewing the latter play for The Era noted the attendance of important people: “The boxes, public and private, have, during the week, been occupied by several of the nobility, and first families of London.” Based on a general overview of the reviews, it appears that these people of rank generally did not attend early performances, waiting instead to learn the verdict of the critics and the public before reserving a box. Observations such as those made above were, of course, valuable to the management, because they attracted the kind of patrons who sought to be in the company of fashion and nobility.

However, more than any of the above-listed signs of success, the primary sign of the success of an adaptation was the extent of the applause it earned. If an adaptation managed to earn consistent applause throughout all performances—those dominated by readers as well as theatergoers—then this adaptation achieved all of the subsidiary goals of the adaptation and then delivered on the manager’s primary reason for staging an adaptation in the first place: to make money.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that with this chapter the Victorian Theory of Adaptation has been indirectly established through the writings of the theater critics responding to the


authorized adaptations of Charles Dickens. Furthermore, it is hoped that the reader now has a good understanding of the experience of making and watching theatrical adaptations of prose fiction during the period. Just as John Charles Olmsted’s *A Victorian Art of Fiction* found a great deal of theorizing about the novel by British journalists, some of which was coherent, so too does this study find that British journalism reveals a coherent theory of adaptation. The key difference between the journalists quoted by Olmsted and the critics quoted in this study is that, by and large, Olmsted’s critics explicitly theorized about the novel, whereas the anonymous critics cited in this study reflect the theory of adaptation that was, most likely, never written down. Why it was never written down is probably because the critics considered adaptation to be an alternative form of theater. Until the adapters began to follow what these critics considered to be the principles of drama, as opposed to the un-dramatic theory of adaptation, the critics would reserve their attentions for traditional theater genres.
WORKS CONSULTED


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