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Editorial

Welcome to the second edition of *Mesh: The Journal for Undergraduate Work across English Studies*. This international online journal is designed to showcase some of the interesting and excellent research that students create as undergraduates studying English.

This is the first of our special issues. This special issue is on the theme of the work of the nineteenth century British author Charles Dickens. We are pleased to bring together and present two articles by undergraduate students at universities in Scotland and one by a student at a university in the USA.

In 'Dickens and Dress: Clothing and Class Identity in *Oliver Twist*', Lynnette Hendrie, University of Dundee, UK, explores relationships between characters' clothing and perceptions and performance of social class and criminality. Hendrie explains the particular significance of clothing as a reflection and reinforcement of social strata in the context of the nineteenth century British industrial revolution and the increasing class consciousness it created. Discussing Oliver, Fagin, the Artful Dodger, Nancy and Mr. Bumble, Hendrie draws out the ways in which some characters learn to exploit clothing to perform class positioning, while others are more consistently trapped by their clothing and the class associations entailed. Hendrie illustrates Dickens's sometimes comedic, sometimes sinister, but always strategic use of clothing in his characterisation, highlighting its role in the social commentary behind his novel.

In 'Accessing the Essence: An Exploration of the Link between *Actus Reus* and *Mens Rea* in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*', Rowan Anderson, Edinburgh Napier University, UK, also discusses criminality. Anderson, however, focuses on Victorian attitudes to criminal intent and criminal behaviour as explored in Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Collins's *The Moonstone*. The paper draws a relationship between Pip's initial descriptions of and reactions to Magwitch and the scientific phrenology of the era and discusses the changes in Pip's perceptions of Magwitch as Pip grows in empathy and understanding. Anderson proposes that Dickens's depiction of Magwitch, through the lens of Pip's changing perceptions, serves to express the author's underlying socially determinist argument that that Victorian judgments about criminal intent are problematised by the dire conditions in which the poor are raised. The paper also discusses Collins's probing of the reliability of witness testimony and the legal complexities around state of mind through the characters of Franklin Blake and Gabriel Betteredge.

In 'A Balancing Act: Gendered Spheres in Charles Dickens's *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings*', Abby Clayton, Brigham Young University, Utah, USA, writes about gender roles and stereotypes in the 1893 Christmas portmanteau tale *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings*. Clayton examines the portrayals of characters at the extremes of Victorian notions of gender stereotypical behaviours, whose stories do not end well, and Mrs. Lirriper, who, Clayton argues, represents an unusually successful balancing of masculine and feminine traits. Clayton also draws out the stylistic significance of Mrs. Lirriper's rambling, intimate first-person narration, anticipating stream-of-consciousness narratives.

We are delighted to showcase this impressive work in English studies and hope that you enjoy reading this issue.

Dickens and Dress: Clothing and Class Identity in *Oliver Twist*

Lynnette Hendrie
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Abstract:

This essay focuses on Charles Dickens' 1838 novel *Oliver Twist* and discusses the importance of clothing as a marker of social class. Drawing on the works of theorist Catherine Spooner, this essay explores the ways in which material objects such as hats or neckties can convey a person's worth and social standing in a Dickensian society. Dickens' fiction, as Spooner argues, 'pits clothing against inner worth in the process of constituting the gentlemanly subject' (Spooner, 2004: 120). The essay shows how social class identity is imposed on Oliver in the early sections of the novel based partly on his clothing. As the novel develops Oliver realises the power of clothing, which he then begins to harness. My analysis of the novel also looks at other characters, particularly Fagin, the Artful Dodger, Nancy and Mr. Bumble, discussing how clothing is shown to be intricately related to the performance of social class.

Keywords:

Dickens, clothing, performativity, social class, *Oliver Twist*

An advocate of political and social reform, Dickens used his novels to comment on the problems that plagued the heavily divided society of nineteenth-century Britain. Tackling issues such as poverty, the treatment of the poor, and the inequalities created by the utilitarian philosophy employed by successive governments throughout the Victorian era, Dickens' novels provided a voice for the lower classes (Cazamian, 1973). His novel of 1838, *Oliver Twist*, offers a probing analysis of the role of clothing in the performance of class identity. As theorist Catherine Spooner has argued, 'the mid Victorian period saw an increasing preoccupation with social mobility as expressed [...] through dress codes' (Spooner, 2004: 81). Dickens' characters' clothing plays a significant part in their performance of social class and identity. In this essay I explore the ways in which clothing relates to class identity and social mobility for characters such as Oliver and Bumble. I also investigate how clothing is used in a comic sense in the characterisation of Fagin and Dodger and additionally discuss Nancy's role in Dickens' examination of the ways in which clothing can be used to perform social class and identity.

Although British society had always been divided along class lines, industrialisation and the impact of the Reform Act of 1832 (which provided some property-owning men with a parliamentary vote) meant that the traditional ruling classes, the landed aristocracy, had to hand at least an element of political power to the burgeoning bourgeois class. As the new middle classes developed, they became increasingly aware of their higher status in society. As E. P. Thompson argued in *The Making of the English Working Class*, 'a class was formed

and formed itself as a group conscious of its own identity as a class and antagonistic to other classes, and [...] class relations were the most important shaping force in British political and social life thereafter' (Hall, McClelland and Rendall, 2000: 18). This class consciousness further separated the rich from the poor and encouraged the development of a socio-economic underclass.

In *Oliver Twist* the relationship between class and clothing plays a vital role in the characterisation of many characters. As Juliet John states, Dickens 'understood the potential of clothes in a world of social role playing' (2001: 144). In a Dickensian society, clothing was capable of defining one's social identity. In the case of *Oliver Twist*, Dickens focuses a great deal of attention on the descriptions of the poor, who he largely defines by their appearance. With regards to the protagonist, Oliver, the character's clothing from a baby to a young boy is intertwined with his social standing. Through Oliver, Dickens expresses ideas about the superficiality of both the class system and associations between appearance and class. This is evident from the first introduction of baby Oliver. The novel reads: 'And what an excellent example of the power of dress young Oliver Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar;- it would have been for the haughtiest stranger to have fixed his station in society' (Dickens, 2009: 5). Through this statement the reader is given a strong impression that clothing is a definitive part of an individual's class identity. Dickens uses the phrase 'power of dress', the word choice here suggesting that, even as a baby, Oliver's clothing will define where he fits in the social order. The word 'power' suggests the strong influence a simple blanket has in masking and making ambiguous Oliver's social class. For now, the blanket shields Oliver from a class identity being imposed upon him, leaving his social identity unable to be outlined. However, when his blanket is swapped for robes of the workhouse he becomes assigned to the lowest rank in society as a poor orphan. In this seemingly minor detail, *Oliver Twist* hints at the importance of clothing, in that soon Oliver's clothing and appearance are all that is needed to determine his class status (Schlicke, 2011: 111). Through Oliver, Dickens mocks a world of trivial class rules which would estimate a child's social standing based on something as inconsequential as his or her clothes. It is in this way that Dickens demonstrates that, in the class-conscious society of Victorian Britain, clothing means everything and nothing at the same time. When swaddled only in a blanket, Oliver's character and morality is shown to readers to be independent of such superficial trivialities.

As the novel develops, Dickens further probes the issue of clothing in relation to the dehumanisation of the poor. For example, the narrator states, 'now [Oliver] was enveloped in the old calico robes, that had grown yellow in the same service' (Dickens, 2009: 5). The use of the term 'calico robes' is interesting as it refers specifically to the robes supplied to those who lived in the workhouses. To live in the workhouses in the nineteenth century labelled a person as the poorest of the poor: only the most desperate lived there. The workhouses were the only option for those who could not afford to feed themselves and their families. They would live there to work hard labour in exchange for very little nourishment (Richardson, 2014). Dickens depicts, with brutal imagery, the harsh utilitarian system in which Oliver is placed. Dickens writes: 'he was badged, ticketed, and fell into his place at once – a parish child – the orphan of a workhouse – the humble, half-starved drudge – to be cuffed and buffeted through the world, despised by all, and pitied by none' (Dickens, 2009: 5). The word choice here presents the image of Oliver as nothing more than a cog in a machine or a working animal

on a farm. He is 'ticketed' as one would imagine cattle would be. The animalistic nature of this description allows the reader to see just how inferior the poor were considered to be. Dickens also uses the words 'cuffed' and 'buffeted' which suggests to the reader that the poor like Oliver were struck and beaten. The reader gains a sense that the poor are abused and mistreated. Dickens also comments that the poor are 'despised' by society; the poor are loathed and looked down upon. As Juliet McMaster comments, Oliver's clothes 'determine his treatment and his destiny' (1987: 46). Here Oliver's early clothing place him in the lowest class possible.

Throughout the novel, Dickens also portrays Oliver's developing awareness of the power of clothing as a social marker. As Oliver grows and becomes a young boy he realises how his clothing symbolises his social standing. When Oliver is given a new suit from Mr Brownlow he becomes relieved that the clothes of his old life are gone. The young Oliver realises the implications that come with wearing the outfit that Fagin gave him. Those clothes associated Oliver with the criminal underworld of Fagin and his gang, and symbolised his social status as lower class. The narrator states: 'as Oliver looked out of the window, and saw the Jew roll them up in his bag and walk away, he felt quite delighted to think that they were safely gone, and that there was now no possible danger of his ever being able to wear them again' (Dickens, 2009: 106). In ridding himself of the rags, Oliver is elated. He describes the clothes as being 'safely gone' and there no longer being a 'danger' from them. This gives the impression that the clothes were part of a threat to Oliver which, in the case of his social standing, they were. Oliver is no longer pigeonholed by his appearance and has the ability to develop his own social identity by harnessing the power of dress. Removing the rags, he seems to escape some of the power his low social class has had over him.

As Oliver's appearance and dress change, so does the way he is seen in society. When Oliver is given his new suit from Mr Brownlow, it makes him look as if he belongs to the middle class. This is made clear on Oliver's first meeting with Mr Grimwig when we are told 'Grimwig was strongly disposed to admit that Oliver's appearance and manner were unusually prepossessing' (Dickens, 2009: 112). The word 'prepossessing' helps the reader to understand that Oliver, who was once dressed in workhouse robes, is now attractive to look at. This new-found attractiveness comes largely from his 'appearance' - the change in his clothes. Therefore, it is clear to see how powerful clothing can be to a person's identity and to others' perceptions of them. Dickens implies that clothing can be a powerful tool in developing a chosen social identity. As Catherine Spooner discusses in her book on clothing and class, in *Great Expectations*, 'Pip's induction into the role of gentlemen is dependent on him wearing the right clothes' (2004: 81). Dickens points out that just like Pip, Oliver has to look the part of a middle class boy to assume this social identity; it matters less who Oliver is as an individual. Just like Pip, Oliver's perceived class is significantly established by the clothes he wears. Dickens emphasises the performativity behind social class and clothing: wearing the right clothes becomes part of a conscious act to portray a particular persona and status to the world. Just like Oliver in his blanket at the beginning of the novel, clothing can act as a shield to hide a person's true identity, thereby satirising the importance placed on clothing throughout the Victorian era.

Oliver continues to become aware of his appearance and how his clothes associate him with different levels of class. As Malcolm Andrews states, 'Dickens' emphasis on the arbitrary

'power of dress' in this novel reinforces the sense that identity is a social construct, where agreed codes of signification rather than any inherent individual identity becomes paramount' (2006: 106). Oliver slowly becomes conscious of these codes. When Oliver is kidnapped from Mr Brownlow and returned to the seedy criminal underworld of, his attention to his clothing is notable. The novel reads, '[Bates] produced the identical old suit of clothes which Oliver had so much congratulated himself upon leaving off at Mr. Brownlow's' (Dickens, 2009: 133). The word 'congratulated' suggests to the reader that Oliver had celebrated being freed from the power these rags had over him. Now, by returning Oliver's old rags and taking away his new suit, Fagin has stripped Oliver of his new identity. This furthers the impression that Oliver's new clothes were a symbol of his moving up the ranks of society. Being forced into the dress code of the criminals, Oliver is yet again constructed as one.

Given the way that criminals, even those guilty of very minor offences, were treated in Victorian society, it is no surprise that Oliver is so concerned with his appearance. As Robert Kanigel argues, '*Oliver Twist* is a social document, and a troubling one. Keenly aware of social ills, it launches frequent barbs at the treatment of the poor' (1998: 28). In this novel, Dickens focuses on the descriptions of the poor to establish how Victorian society created an often unjust link between poverty and criminality. For instance, the poorer, lower classes of the novel are associated with London's criminal underworld. Kanigel continues, 'criminals, bumbler and hypocrites seem drawn exclusively from the lower classes, while Oliver's benefactors are invariably from the soul of the upper middle class' (1998: 28). This suggests that the poor were predestined for a life of crime. People of the lower classes like Fagin are imagined as particularly nasty and unattractive individuals. This is communicated in the ghastly description of Fagin in the following quotation, who 'with a toasting-fork in his hand, was a very shrivelled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair' (Dickens, 2009: 64). The reader is given the image of Fagin as some sort of monster. The words 'villainous' and 'repulsive' give the impression that this man is wicked and hideous. Just as Mr Grimwig sees Oliver in his suit as having the appearance of respectability and of middle class society, Fagin's ghastly appearance symbolises his lower class. Through the description of Fagin, Dickens comments on views of the poor as less attractive and unkempt beings and on the relationship between their appearance and their social position.

Like Oliver, Fagin is also aware of the importance of dress with regards to social class. For the character of Fagin, it is not simply his own description and clothing which are linked to class but also the items he steals from the rich. Fagin's chief method of making money is by stealing clothes and fashion accessories from the upper classes - items such as handkerchiefs and neck ties. As Juliet McMaster states, 'a single item of clothing such as a handkerchief [...] gathers its own heavy freight of symbolic association' (1987: 48). The items which Fagin steals are accessories which would be associated with the upper classes: these were items upper class men wore with their expensive suits. This puts further emphasis on clothing as a representation of class status. However, it is important to note that Fagin does not steal these items in order to wear them himself. He sticks to his rags, suggesting that he understands the frivolity of wearing certain items to perform a better social standing. Fagin is not concerned with his own social standing but only with making money at the expense of those of the middle and upper classes who look down upon him. In taking these items, he takes away a piece of their superior social class, just as he does with Oliver when he takes away the suit Mr

Brownlow gives him. Fagin steals the luxurious accessories because he knows the importance of owning and wearing them: he steals them to sell to conmen who wish to perform gentility in order to keep under the radar of the law and steal from the upper class circles they involve themselves with. Fagin is perhaps shown to be the most astute character within the novel. He understands that a necktie or handkerchief has nothing to do with a person's character. These items are merely props in a performance which might make a person pass as upper class for an afternoon. Here Dickens mocks the importance the upper classes placed on clothing and possessions, and points out that a triviality such a piece clothing can allow a person to change their purported class and identity. Through Fagin, Dickens comments on the vanity of the social class system and the upper classes' narcissistic attention to dress.

The issue of changing one's clothes to assume a different identity is raised on a number of occasions throughout the novel, especially with reference to Nancy and the Artful Dodger. Both characters wear outfits which place them suddenly at a different social level of in society, making it abundantly clear how costume becomes an ironic form of social class (1995: 73). Just like Oliver, these are characters who have the ability to portray a different class partly through the performativity of clothing. For example, the first time Oliver encounters the Dodger he states, 'He was a snub-nosed, flat-browed, common-faced boy enough, and as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see; but he had got about him all the airs and manners of a man' (Dickens, 2009: 60). It is clear Oliver is very confused by the appearance of the Dodger. His unclean face suggests that he may be a poor orphan like Oliver, but his manners make it impossible for Oliver to pinpoint his social class. The fact that the Dodger wears clothing which would be associated with an adult man makes it harder for Oliver to distinguish his identity in society. The narrator continues, 'He wore a man's coat, which reached nearly to his heels. He had turned the cuffs back halfway up his arm to get his hands out of the sleeves, apparently with the ultimate view of thrusting them into the pockets of his corduroy trousers' (Dickens, 2009: 60). As Michael Paterson states, 'the aspirational poor, though their clothes no doubt showed a good deal of patching and mending, would also try to dress neatly, since people were summed up according to the presentability of their appearance' (2011: 51). The description of the Dodger and his outfit emphasises the ambitions of a young boy who attempts to be seen as anything other than a poor, young criminal. The Dodger's clothing becomes a necessary, even comical feature of the novel and gives insight into the terms of an individual's social standing in nineteenth-century England. The Dodger must wear the clothes to play a part and he knows wearing the right clothes and performing correctly will enable him to fit into certain strata of society. The real comedy comes from the fact that he, like Fagin's conmen customers, can wear the clothes of the upper classes in an almost caricatured way, satirising the upper-middle classes' performance of gentility. It is also interesting that Dickens named him the Artful Dodger. This playful word choice gives the impression that the young boy finds creative ways to dodge the law, for example, by dressing like a middle class man. Appearing presentable to others, particularly those in positions of authority or of a higher class, allows him to blend into the lives of the wealthy in order to steal from them and not be caught. Although his dirty, juvenile face gives away his trouble-making nature, the clothing of the Dodger helps him disguise himself and avoid being defined by his poverty. Dickens presents the appearances of the poor as rough and unclean but clearly shows how dress can impact perceptions of a person's social position.

While the Dodger's use of clothing is somewhat comedic, Nancy's attempts to dress differently seem almost tragic and are arguably reflective of her desire to break from the constraints imposed on her by her economic situation. The first time the reader is introduced to Nancy, the novel reads, 'They wore a good deal of hair, not very neatly turned up behind, and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings. They were not exactly pretty' (Dickens, 2009: 71). As Susan Rintoul states, 'working-class identity involves rough physicality' (2015: 55). With regards to Nancy, Dickens puts emphasis on her dishevelled physicality here in order to convey to the reader the harsh fact that the way she looks distinguishes her as poor, especially compared to the lovely, feminine character of Rose Maylie. However, Dickens uses Nancy's unrefined appearance later in the novel to make a point about clothing as a social marker. When Nancy is ordered to recapture Oliver, she is given a new outfit to do so. The dirty look she has upon Oliver's first meeting with her would draw too much attention to her lower class identity and suggested involvement with the criminal underworld of London. In fact, as Fagin states, "'looks convict 'em when they get in trouble, and I lose 'em all'" (Dickens, 2009: 160). As Elaine Hadley states, in this novel 'all "working-class" people are members of a criminal class, not primarily because Dickens thought poor people were all thieves and swindlers, but because once people are classed according to their market functions, as the poorer classes were by the utilitarian reformers, the connections among them are perceived as mercenary, confrontational, radically anticomunal, and inevitably, criminal' (1995: 123). With reference to Nancy and the lower class characters, they need only look dirty, rough and dressed in old clothing for them to be classified as offenders against the law. Their appearance defines them, therefore in order for Nancy to appear less conspicuous, she must disguise herself in a costume of better clothes. She is described as having 'a clean white apron tied over the red gown, [...] the yellow curl-papers tucked up under a straw bonnet, - both articles of dress being provided from the Jew's inexhaustible stock' (Dickens, 2009: 101). Here Nancy is given new items from Fagin's stock of stolen middle class goods. We gain the impression that by simply adding a few decent accessories to her outfit and tidying up her appearance, Nancy will appear less like a criminal and more middle class. After handing Nancy a straw basket Fagin even states, 'Carry that in one hand; it looks more respectable, my dear' (Dickens, 2009: 101). The word choice here is interesting as it suggests that by carrying the basket, Nancy will suddenly be well thought of because she no longer looks like a poor prostitute. This reflects what McMaster describes as 'Dickens' vision of clothes as having power, as sometimes taking precedence over the wearer' (1987: 49). Again, just from commenting on these simple items of clothing, Dickens portrays a world where an individual can perform a different class role by changing their appearance. Nancy's true social status is hidden under these new clothes, emphasising the importance of dress with regards to how others perceive her social class. In a sense, these new clean clothes have the power to make Nancy appear respectable. This sudden appearance of respectability is all the more ironic given that readers by now know Nancy is one of the most moral characters of Dickens' novel, no matter how she is dressed.

Whereas the poor treatment of Nancy because of her appearance is tragic in nature, the character of Mr Bumble offers, like the Artful Dodger, a comic consideration of class performativity. Mr Bumble is the beadle and the symbol of utilitarian thought and order. It is his job both to manage the institutions which house the poor to maintain social hierarchies. Bumble is not of the lower class poor like Oliver, yet he is not quite of the same standing as the novel's middle class characters. He could best be described as a socially aspirational

character whose uniform becomes key to his self-definition. Through Bumble the ideas of utilitarian philosophy are evident in the descriptions of his character and his clothing. Bumble's coat is a direct reference to his utilitarian identity. The novel describes Bumble dwelling on his coat: "I think it is rather pretty" said the beadle, glancing proudly downwards at the large brass buttons which embellished his coat. "The die is the same as the parochial seal, - the Good Samaritan healing the sick and bruised man" (Dickens, 2009: 29). Through his dress, Dickens parodies the figures of authority behind the enforcement of the Poor Laws (2003: 80). This image of Bumble is very symbolic to the rather ironic role he plays in society. The brass buttons on his coat identify his role in society, however there is irony in this description. His coat and its buttons which he so proudly wears indicate his role as enforcer of law and order, but his coat also mocks the idea that his role as the beadle makes him a charitable person. As the beadle, Bumble is supposed to be carer of the sick and poor, however we see from his treatment of Oliver that he is anything but caring. The outfit he wears does not somehow make him a decent or better person. In fact, he is potentially one of the cruellest people in the book and is no better than Fagin in his mistreatment of Oliver. The only difference is Fagin does not attempt to hide his bad nature under a respectable uniform. Arguably, it is not the image of the Good Samaritan that he wears that Bumble is so proud of, but the jacket itself and the sense of authority and social standing that it brings him. Just like his much-loved cocked hat and cane, Bumble wears these items because he knows their true worth in a society ruled by class and focussed on appearance. As Juliet McMaster argues, 'Bumble *is* the beadle, and the beadle *is* his uniform' (1987: 46): these items of clothing define his social and personal identity. Dickens uses Bumble as the joke of the book, a man who is unable to see beyond his own arrogance and belief that clothing can define who you are.

Dickens's description of Bumble as the beadle characterises him as an authority figure, however it is key to note that Bumble has no other identity. When Bumble marries Mrs Corney, it becomes evident how his clothing is a part of his utilitarian authority and identity. In the earlier parts of the story, Dickens comments several times on Bumble's hat and jacket. These two elements are indicators of his role in society and his job as supervisor of the poor in his care. His uniform is also an indication of where he fits in within the class system: without his uniform he would be stripped of his class. With this in mind, it is vital to note what happens to Bumble's identity and social status after his marriage. The narrator states,

The laced coat and the cocked hat, where were they? He still wore knee-breeches and dark cotton stockings on his nether limbs, but they were not *the* breeches. The coat was wide-skirted, and in that respect like *the* coat, but, oh, how different! The mighty cocked-hat was replaced by a modest round one. Mr Bumble was no longer a beadle. (Dickens, 2009: 295)

Here Dickens puts great emphasis on the importance of Bumble's new clothing. As Paul Schlicke points out, 'Dickens delights in the idea of clothes which seem to have a life of their own' (2011: 111). He gives a detailed description of what Bumble's new attire looks like. While his jacket and his hat do look similar to his uniform, Dickens points out they are not '*the*' coat or '*the*' hat. The outfit of the beadle is very specific and defines his identity, therefore without his beadle's hat and coat it is obvious he has lost his identity. Dickens makes direct comment on the influence of dress and appearance as marker of social standing and as core to identity. The novel reads, 'A field-marshal has his uniform, a bishop his silk apron, a counsellor his silk gown, a beadle his cocked hat. Strip the bishop of his apron, or the beadle of his cocked hat

and gold lace, what are they? [...] Dignity, and even holiness too, sometimes are more questions of coat and waistcoat than some people imagine' (Dickens, 2009: 295). Dickens makes clear the loss of Bumble's outfit conveys his lost identity. The role of the beadle was the only aspect which kept Bumble in the ranks of middle class society. Without his uniform and role, he is nothing. He is no longer in a position of power or authority therefore he has no power to remain in the middle class. Bumble's story is one of great irony as it mimics Oliver's in the way that his blanket was swapped for the workhouse robes. In this passage there is a strong sense of mockery of the class system. Dickens points out that the ranks of social class are more often than not defined by coats and waistcoats. Through this very comical yet powerful statement Dickens highlights the power of uniforms, dress and appearances to social class.

Charles Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist* develops a fascinating tale of social class identity through the key descriptions of the characters. Dickens's emphasis on the images of the poor as dirty and dishevelled, and in calico robes or rags, stresses the association between an individual's appearance and their rank on the class ladder. Each character's attention to clothing, whether it be Oliver's dislike of his rags, Fagin's stock of stolen handkerchiefs or Mr Bumble's pride in his beadle's uniform, illustrates the power of dress in determining a person's place in Victorian English society.

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Accessing the Essence: An Exploration of the Link between *Actus Reus* and *Mens Rea* in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*.

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Abstract:

This essay suggests that both Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* and Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* challenge Victorian notions of a criminal class and the nature of criminality. It explores how reliably character, and therefore *mens rea* (criminal intent - the mental component of a crime) can be determined via external means.

Keywords:

criminality, *mens rea*, *actus reus*, conduct, character

The Victorian period saw 'sensation fiction' appear and rise to dominate popular fiction. Sensation fiction is a plot-driven form which 'combined elements from gothic fiction, the Newgate novel, and Victorian stage melodrama' (Thomas, 2012: 179). Criminal activity was central to the genre, 'with almost every Victorian novel [...] [having] at its heart some crime that must be uncovered, some false identity that must be unmasked, some secret that must be revealed' (169). The modern detective novel has its roots in sensation fiction. Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* has been credited as being the first detective novel, with T. S. Eliot describing it as 'the first, longest and best of the modern English detective novels' (Eliot, 1960: 413). Questions surrounding identity were a key facet of detection fiction, and Ronald R. Thomas claims that one of the functions of the detective novel was to 'provide a potent set of discourses and techniques for identifying the individual in the modern world' (Thomas, 2012: 170). Thomas claims that one way in which detective fiction achieves this is by converting 'every character into a suspect, and by doing so, render suspect the categories by which the character is defined' (170). Sensation fiction brought the intrigue and mystery of the Gothic into the realm of the home and family, and Collins brings this uncertainty still closer in *The Moonstone*, in which criminal and detective are housed in one character, that of Franklin Blake. Charles Dickens, meanwhile, had a lifelong fascination with the penal system, critiquing prison regimes in non-fiction articles such as 'Pet Prisoners', published in *Household Worlds* periodical, as well as exploring the issue in his fiction (Schwan, 2011). According to Anne Schwan, 'Dickens embodies the Victorians' contradictory responses to crime in a time of great social transformation' (2011: 301) and, rather than focusing on the detection of crime, is more interested in how 'deprivation, social inequality and conditioning lead to a downward spiral that is hard to escape' (307). In *Great Expectations*, Dickens explores, via the character of Magwitch, how criminal nature can be shaped by socio-economic factors rather than being inherent to the individual. This essay suggests that both Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*

and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* challenge Victorian notions of a criminal class and the nature of criminality. It explores how reliably character, and therefore *mens rea*, (the mental, intentional component of a crime) can be determined via external means.

Since any action must have a motivating thought, a crime must necessarily consist of more than just the criminal act itself; therefore, the thought which precedes the act is crucial in determining whether the act is indeed a crime. In her book *The Crime in Mind: Criminal Responsibility and the Victorian Novel*, Lisa Rodensky explains how a crime is divided: 'Crimes consist of two elements: an *actus reus* and a *mens rea*. The *actus reus* comprises the external element of crime – the act and its consequences – and the *mens rea* is concerned with the internal elements' (2003: 26). Closer to Dickens's era, James Stephen explored what comprises a criminal act in more detail, saying that 'every such action [crime] involves the following elements: knowledge, motive, choice, volition, intention, and thoughts and feelings and motions adapted to the execution of the intention' (1890: 68-69). The majority of the elements Stephen lists are psychological with only 'motion' being physical, which runs counter-intuitively to the belief that a crime is fundamentally an action. By this interpretation of what crime involves, the greater part of the crime is *mens rea* rather than *actus reus*. This leads to a problem, which Rodensky identifies, in that 'the law cannot put on trial that to which it has no access' (2003: 27). The greater part of the crime is rendered almost impossible to divine, as there is no reliable way to have definitive access to a person's thoughts and feelings.

According to Nicola Lacey, 'by the end of the nineteenth Century, attributions of responsibility in English criminal law rested primarily and unambiguously on factual findings about the defendant's state of mind' (2010: 111). Since we only have direct access to the external facets of a person, the law requires that there be a link made between conduct and character if *mens rea* is to be reliably established or disproven. Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* both explore and question how character is constructed and accessed, and reveal how determining someone's essential nature is a problematic process. *Great Expectations* challenges the assumptions held about the criminal classes, and *The Moonstone* explores the process by which criminality might be determined or disproven.

In *Great Expectations*, Dickens offers a 'socially determinist account of criminality' (Lacey, 2010: 111), implying that poverty and social class are factors in unlawful behaviour, centred round the character of Abel Magwitch, who is undoubtedly a criminal. When asked about his past, Magwitch says, unflinchingly, that he was "'in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail. There, you've got it. That's my life pretty much'" (Dickens, 2000: 284). He reduces himself, "'short and handy'" (284), to his criminality, never claiming that he did not carry out the acts which resulted in his incarceration. He admits to having been a thief and a poacher, and later being involved in Compeyson's forgery and swindling activities. *Actus reus* was never questioned, nor denied, but *mens rea* is more complicated to determine, even in this deceptively straightforward case.

The character of Magwitch comes to us only via the narrator, Pip, who, as a small boy under duress, stole food for Magwitch when he was an escaped convict. Magwitch repays his debt to Pip many times over, becoming Pip's anonymous benefactor when his own financial luck changed after deportation. Magwitch, when telling his story to Pip, paints a grim picture of his early childhood. He says, "'I first became aware of myself, down in Essex, a thieving turnips

for my living. Summun had run away from me – a man – a tinker – and he'd took the fire with him, and left me wery cold" (284). The implication is that he was a criminal by circumstance before he could even choose to be something other than that, agency being denied him right from the outset. Victorian beliefs about the criminal classes generally require that the criminal makes a choice to live this way. A. L. Beier describes it thus: 'There is widespread agreement that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the articulation of a concept of a "criminal class" – a group of offenders allegedly drawn to crime because of moral degeneracy rather than being driven to it by their material circumstances' (2005: 499). Since Magwitch's first memory is of being deserted, cold, hungry and desperate, he was not in a position to make a moral choice, or indeed, any choice at all. It seems counter-intuitive to ascribe criminal intent, and therefore a criminal state of mind, where there was scant opportunity for a different course of action. The character of Magwitch challenges the notion of moral degeneracy, a key feature of the supposed criminal classes.

When Magwitch was initially admitted to prison as a child, he is treated as a specimen under observation rather than a human being: he tells Pip "then they looked at me, and I looked at them, and they measured my head" (284). No opportunity is given for Magwitch to speak for himself; rather, they talk over him, calling him 'hardened' (284), and predicting that he will spend his life in and out of jail. Magwitch himself is aware of the folly of their actions, stating that they "they had better a measured my stomach" (284) to find the source of his criminality. Physiognomy, and the related discipline of phrenology, were popular 'sciences' in the 19th century, and share the same 'key assumption' that 'fixed aspects of bodily appearance could reveal something of a person's inner nature' (Collins and Sokal, 1999: 255). According to Collins and Sokal, 'a range of European novelists from the late 19th and early 20th centuries constructed links among physical appearance, personal qualities and various forms of identity' (1999: 275). By 1851, George Combe's treatise on phrenology had sold over 90,000 copies (Parssinen, 1974: 9). Dickens, despite writing at a time when these disciplines were widely regarded as scientific, asks us, via the character of Magwitch, to consider other factors which might influence a person's actions and character.

Pip, despite Magwitch's generosity and care towards him, struggles to see Magwitch as other than a criminal, even after dressing him in new clothes, saying 'I believe too that he dragged one of his legs as if there were still a weight of iron on it, and that from head to foot there was Convict in the very grain of the man' (277). This suggests that Pip believes that criminality is somehow essentially woven into the fabric of Magwitch, adding weight to David Trotter's view that Pip characterizes 'criminality not as a moral lapse, but as a psychological, even a genetic, predisposition: an encompassing and pervading taint' (1996: 3). In this, Pip encompasses the contemporary social attitude towards criminality, and makes judgements about character based on Magwitch's conduct:

In all his ways of sitting and standing, and eating and drinking – of brooding about, in a high-shouldered reluctant style – of taking out his great horn-handled jack-knife and wiping it on his legs and cutting his food – of lifting light glasses and cups to his lips, as if they were clumsy pannikins – of chopping a wedge off his bread, and soaking up with it the last fragments of gravy round and round his plate, as if to make the most of an allowance, and then drying his fingers-ends on it, and then swallowing it – in these ways and a thousand other small nameless instances arising every minute in the day,

there was Prisoner, Felon, Bondsman, plain as plain could be. (Dickens, 1999: 278)

Pip studies Magwitch at length, concluding from his mannerisms that he is inherently criminal, even though he acknowledges that Magwitch is a 'dreadful mystery' (278) to him. Despite spending considerable time 'wondering what he had done' (278), Pip takes an astonishingly long time to arrive at the solution of asking Magwitch 'point-blank' (283). This ties in with Magwitch's entire experience, as he is well aware that he has always been denied a voice, saying "Muzzled I have been since that half a minute when I was betrayed to lowness, muzzled I am at the present time, muzzled I ever will be" (280). Magwitch is aware that he will never be allowed to show his true, inner self. The fact that it takes so long for Pip to arrive at this simple conclusion about the means by which character might be accessed speaks to how deeply ingrained Victorian conceptions of criminality are in his make up, and how they might prevent him reliably judging character.

It is only after Pip has spent time with Magwitch and listened to his tale that he begins to have affection and understanding for him. By the time Magwitch is dying in prison, Pip has fully revised his opinion of him:

For now, my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted wounded shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe. (367)

Here, 'creature', which is typical of the language which has been used to describe Magwitch throughout and positions him as subhuman, is juxtaposed with 'man', which is how Pip now sees him. Pip also positions Magwitch as an animal, describing him as 'hunted wounded shackled', showing an awareness of how poorly treated Magwitch has been. Finally, it is Magwitch's generosity and affection that he sees and he is shamed into admitting that Magwitch has been a better man than he himself has been. By allowing Magwitch both a voice and an audience, and via Pip's change of heart, Dickens has questioned Victorian assumptions about the criminal classes, and the existence of *mens rea* therein.

In Wilkie Collins's 1868 novel, *The Moonstone*, the narrative structure is that of a witness testimony, centred around the determination of good character. Franklin Blake, the driving force behind the narrative, believes 'that the whole story ought, in the interests of truth, to be placed on record in writing—and 'the sooner the better, lest the memories of innocent people [may] suffer, hereafter, for want of a record of the facts' (1998: 5). Franklin describes the process thus:

"We have certain events to relate," Mr. Franklin proceeded; "and we have certain persons concerned in those events who are capable of relating them. Starting from these plain facts, the idea is that we should all write the story of the Moonstone in turn—as far as our own personal experience extends, and no farther." (5-6)

Although not in a courtroom setting, the compilation of the different testimonies and the narrative produced has legal legitimacy, in that it will be held by the family lawyer, Mr. Bruff. Here, Franklin is speaking to Gabriel Betteredge, the house-steward of Lady Julia Verinder, who is a major contributor to the tale, and the first person called upon to relate events. Although Franklin emphasises that 'plain facts' and 'personal experience' (5) are what the

narrators should restrict themselves to, his claim that 'the characters of innocent people have suffered' (6) indicates that he believes that character can be determined from an examination of conduct. It is interesting to note that, unlike Magwitch, Franklin, being upper class, has the privilege of being listened to and also does not suffer from the stigma of being automatically considered a criminal.

In this tale, the presence of *actus reus* is not in question, with Franklin himself coming to the realisation 'it is certain that I took the Diamond', but protests 'I did it without my own knowledge' (294), rendering *mens rea* impossible to definitively prove or disprove via his memory of events (as Franklin had unknowingly been given a dose of morphine on the evening in question, rendering him unable to recall his actions). In her exploration of criminal responsibility in *Jekyll and Hyde*, Nicola Lacey explains that:

Even when the defendant's mental state was unavoidably at issue, attributions of responsibility were based on judgements about the quality of character displayed in conduct, rather than on careful investigation of whether the defendant's cognitive and volitional capacities were fully engaged in the relevant action. (2010: 117)

Franklin is eager to clear his own name, and willingly calls into question his own mental state at the time, making this the main issue which he is attempting to resolve. Lacey does not comment on how a 'defendant's cognitive and volitional capacities' might be carefully investigated at all. Franklin's problem, the same problem which faces both prosecutors, defendants and jury, is that his state of mind at the time cannot be examined, therefore the only recourse left to him is to attempt to prove the quality of his character via others' judgements based on his conduct. Lacey states that 'the key variable in most criminal trials was the defendant's capacity to gather together credible people willing to speak for her' (2010: 117), describing how character might be determined in a legal context. It seems that Mr. Bruff and Franklin's conclusion that the compilation of witness testimony as being 'the right way of telling' (Collins, 1998: 5) reflects the legal discourse of the time. It is interesting to note that Franklin retains control over this telling, acting as both defendant and defence and positioning the reader as judge and jury.

An examination of a portion of Betteredge's testimony reveals how this process can be problematic. Here, Betteredge relays his first sighting of Franklin since Franklin left to be schooled abroad as a child:

There, coming out on us from among the hills, was a bright-eyed young gentleman, dressed in a beautiful fawn-coloured suit, with gloves and hat to match, with a rose in his button-hole, and a smile on his face that might have set the Shivering Sand itself smiling at him in return. Before I could get on my legs, he plumped down on the sand by the side of me, put his arm round my neck, foreign fashion, and gave me a hug that fairly squeezed the breath out of my body. "Dear old Betteredge!" says he. "I owe you seven-and-sixpence. Now do you know who I am?" (19)

From Betteredge's point of view, it is as if the land has parted to reveal Franklin. 'Bright-eyed' and 'young' suggest, at the very least, an open enthusiasm and perhaps even a naivety. He has already been established as 'the innocent means of bringing that unlucky jewel into the house' (11), and this description adds weight to that statement. 'Innocent means' produces a tension between *actus reus* and *mens rea*, implying that a person could innocently carry out

an activity which could have negative, unforeseen consequences, consequences which might have been the intent of another.

Betteredge employs the accepted method of determining social status, seen throughout *Great Expectations*, of reading the clothing of an individual, and declares Franklin a gentleman before he even recognises him. He gives Franklin almost divine powers, suggesting that even the inhospitable landscape might respond favourably to his smile. Franklin, despite his lofty status, is very quickly brought back down to earth, literally, when he lowers himself to Betteredge's level and sits with him on the sand, showing his magnanimity. He is even physically affectionate towards the old servant, putting his arm around his shoulder and drawing him close. His first utterance is of a debt unpaid - a debt from childhood, from which he could reasonably be excused for forgetting, which foreshadows his later financial issues. Betteredge builds up a layered portrait of an honourable young gentleman, who is fond of the narrator. The layers are presented from outward appearance inwards, the final few lines describing conduct from which good character can be inferred. Although a gentlemanly picture is presented, we can see how quickly, and with how little substance, Betteredge forms an opinion and how his opinion is, in part at least, influenced by assumptions resulting from his class position and societal preconceptions of the time.

As Lacey has already pointed out, the *credibility* of the witness is key, and Betteredge's own reliability as a narrator is important if his account is to be of any value to Franklin. Betteredge's position as house-steward raises questions about his impartiality, given that he is effectively employed by Franklin when the narrative is constructed. Betteredge is introduced as a 'house-steward in the service of JULIA, LADY VERINDER' (5), without any mention of the fact that Franklin Blake and Julia Verinder are husband and wife at the time of writing, although not at the time of the theft of the moonstone. This has the effect of masking Betteredge's economic position in relation to Franklin. Franklin repeatedly names Betteredge as a 'friend', rather than 'servant', subtly guiding the reader in positioning him. In an interesting reversal, Franklin himself is used to establish Betteredge as trustworthy. Franklin takes Betteredge into his confidence about his reason for his early arrival:

"I have a reason for coming before you expected me," answered Mr. Franklin.

"I suspect, Betteredge, that I have been followed and watched in London, for the last three or four days; and I have travelled by the morning instead of the afternoon train, because I wanted to give a certain dark-looking stranger the slip." (20)

This honourable young gentleman who seeks the truth trusts Betteredge, so the reader should also, but this network of trust is not supported by anything definitive. In terms of reliably determining character, questions are raised over both Betteredge's own process, which is hampered by similar preconceptions which are problematic for Pip and his impartiality. Under scrutiny, it is difficult to show that Betteredge's assessment of Franklin is reliable, even though it might be accurate. In examining a crime where there is *actus reus* but, arguably, no *mens rea*, *The Moonstone* questions the accepted dual-faceted nature of crime from the outset. In exploring character via witness testimony based on conduct, the work explores how *mens rea* might be adequately established, if it exists at all.

Both novels look at criminality and question how character is determined via conduct and appearance. Dickens's *Great Expectations* questions Victorian assumptions about the

existence of a criminal class and illustrates how criminal behaviour can be the result of socio-economic pressures, rather than an inherently criminal mind. Collins's *The Moonstone* calls into question the construction of character via witness testimony, showing how this process can be problematic and unreliable. In both cases, definitive access to the internal aspects of character prove difficult and *mens rea* remains elusive and ephemeral.

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A Balancing Act: Gendered Spheres in Charles Dickens's *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings*

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Abstract:

The 1863 Christmas edition of *All the Year Round* features stories by Charles Dickens and other authors which together make up the portmanteau tale *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings*. Extreme masculinity and extreme femininity are condemned via characters in contributions by Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Alston Collins, but Dickens's Mrs. Lirriper controls the overall framework and successfully illustrates a more balanced perspective on gendered spheres. This suggests that women can expand their role in society through increased responsibility and independence, as long as they also maintain traditional feminine qualities. The balanced intersection of masculine and feminine spheres demonstrates how men and women can overcome the disillusionment that can result from failed romantic relationships and broken families. Mrs. Lirriper is arguably one of Dickens's most successful female figures because she takes on power with her business and other responsibilities but also maintains more conventionally feminine, endearing and maternal characteristics.

Keywords:

Dickens, Mrs. Lirriper, gendered spheres, power, romance

'Whoever would begin to be worried with letting Lodgings that wasn't a lone woman with a living to get is a thing inconceivable to me,' says Mrs. Lirriper, breaking Victorian female norms from the very first line of *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings* (Dickens, 1863: p.1). She is old and widowed, but she is vocal and she runs a business. She uniquely and simultaneously acts as a landlady and as a mother figure to all of her customers, uniting them as part of her own makeshift family. In this portmanteau tale for the 1863 Christmas edition of *All the Year Round*, Charles Dickens and his five other co-authors tell the story of Emma Lirriper and her lodgers. Mrs. Lirriper, in a warm and inviting manner, takes control and narrates the overall frame through a rambling monologue. The inner chapters read more disjointedly, the only connecting thread being that of hyperbolically dramatised, unrequited love. With this piece, Dickens purposefully abandons 'the interrelationship of the earlier numbers,' instead employing 'self-contained frameworks' whose 'introduced stories [serve] no thematic or structural purpose' (Glancy, 1980: p.67). However, although initially they may appear unrelated, an exploration of the female characters in each of these chapters reveals a shared theme; they each showcase the gendered 'sphere' (McKnight, 2015; Sussman, 1995) in which Victorian women were confined, a confinement which was most often enforced by the men around them.

Aesthetic and cultural representations suggest that the ideal Victorian woman was passive, pure, and the object of male affection; any woman who was not characterised as such ultimately fell. The ideal woman was isolated in the domestic realm and chained to her home,

husband, and children. Most literature of the era propagated this stereotype both by affirmation and negation. Angelic women were worshipped by those around them, whereas eccentric women who stepped outside of this prescribed gendered sphere were represented as lunatic and as destroying men, families, and love in general. According to Catherine Golden, Dickensian female characters can be categorized into 'angels, fallen sisters, and eccentrics' (2000, p.6), but all of them are dissatisfying heroines to modern readers because of these extreme characterisations and the unrealistic stereotypes involved. Women are either lauded for maintaining heavenly, domestic refuges, or punished for their promiscuity.

The authors of *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings*, including Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Alston Collins, and Dickens himself, further explore these extremes. Gaskell's female characters are either overtly masculinised or overtly feminised. Collins's male characters are masculinised beyond human rationale, and the women are objectified as a result. In contrast, Dickens's Mrs. Lirriper represents a marked evolution of social ideas surrounding women, as well as the evolution of Dickens's own artistic genius. With Mrs. Lirriper, Dickens breaks the gendered dichotomy and demonstrates how women can expand their role in society through increased responsibility and independence, as long as they also balance that expansion with traditional feminine qualities. The gender imbalances in Gaskell's and Collins's characters cause those characters to succumb to the disillusionment that results from failed romantic relationships and broken families, whereas Mrs. Lirriper's successful blending of male and female spheres allows her to overcome the same challenge.

In his earlier literature, Dickens presents a more stratified gendered spectrum and a fear of women stepping out of their prescribed function in society. His novels propagate Golden's aforementioned female categories, and Peter Scheckner even notes how the eccentric women who are masculinised are frequently compared to rioting workers, all of whom are ultimately unsuccessful in their insurrections. Dickensian female characters who do not 'sit by the hearth darning their men's socks' subsequently become 'crazy or crazed, cold, calloused, or criminal' (Scheckner, 2000: p.237), thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes of women as domestic and heavenly or powerful and demonic. Similarly, the landlady of Victorian literature was widely represented by male authors as the enemy: cruel, aggressive, and calculating, acting as 'the antithesis of the ideal mid-century wife' (Boggs, 2018: p.310) because she was too masculine and had amassed too much power outside of the feminine sphere. Mrs. Lirriper shows a distinct evolution from this polarized manner of thinking because she is honoured and loved despite her expanded influence outside of the stereotypical female sphere.

Mrs. Lirriper maintains and expands a powerful realm of influence despite the boundaries that her age, marital status, and gender dictated in Victorian culture. Leah Grisham explains how, while young heroines began to gain a little more mobility in literature of the era, 'elderly characters and their real-world counterparts were still expected to fit into narrow social roles' (2017, p.38). This is because, for most women, as they age, the domestic sphere they cultivated in younger years empties. Children grow and move away from home, husbands die, and there is often nobody left to nurture. Older women also lose the physical appearance that once stereotypically defined them as the object of men's desires; thus it follows that 'a physically unattractive spinster is given a negative significance' (Ingham, 1992: p.67). While Mrs. Lirriper is 'an old woman now and [her] looks are gone' (Dickens, 1863: p.5), she does

not fall into these conventions because she is still revered by the community for her saintly and motherly nature. Her lodgers even refer to her as a 'kind motherly old thing' (Dickens, 1863: p.13), never demonising her because of her age or status. This shows how she combats the loss of influence that aging Victorian women typically experienced: by creating a makeshift family.

Mrs. Lirriper fulfills prescribed feminine characteristics and responsibilities despite her single status through her treatment of her lodgers as family members. Her lodging house is full of servants and tenants, the majority of whom are also single and have ended up there because of failed relationships. She is motherly in her care for them, disciplining or nurturing as need be. When her servant girl Caroline loses her temper, Mrs. Lirriper chases after her, but 'couldn't bear to see the poor young creature roughly handled and her hair torn when [the police] got the better of her' (Dickens, 1863: p.13). Although Mrs. Lirriper knew Caroline's behavior needed to be corrected, she exhibits empathy and compassion, pained to see her hurt, just as a mother would be. She fits Patricia Ingham's definition of true mothers because her 'disinterested kindness, [. . .] enforcing an equation with the Christian term charity, unfolds into a universal explanation of womanly merit' (1992: p.114).

This maternal image is further perpetuated as Mrs. Lirriper creates even stronger familiar bonds with two specific lodgers, the Major and Jemmy, who fulfill the roles of pseudo-husband and son respectively. The Major functions like a husband in several ways but Mrs. Lirriper's feelings for him, and his for her, remain purely platonic throughout the course of the short story. He becomes a close friend and confidant, and immense respect and love exists between them. Neither could be as active or as successful in business and familial responsibilities as they are without the other. Their union is completed as they adopt Jemmy, the son of Mrs. Edson, their lodger who passed away. Mrs. Lirriper's long-repressed desires for a family are finally fulfilled and she comforts the dying Mrs. Edson because her baby "'is sent to a childless old woman. This is for me to take care of [. . .] me and the Major'" (Dickens, 1863: p.33). Their godson bears the Major's first name and Mrs. Lirriper's last in a reversal of the traditional patriarchal naming system: he is called Jemmy Lirriper. Mrs. Lirriper's domestic sphere can thus be seen as completed because she has a male counterpart with whom she is raising a child. She selflessly looks after every need of one who cannot care for himself. With this new addition, the three-person unit becomes a cohesive, functioning family.

Together, Mrs. Lirriper and the Major successfully co-parent Jemmy and confront whatever problems arise in the rearing of their child, united by a deep but unromantic love for each other as well as for Jemmy. They balance each other well, as demonstrated in particular scenes on the issue of Jemmy's education. Mrs. Lirriper instinctually worries about the way the Major is teaching Jemmy mathematics, for as in most Dickens works, 'the more [the children's] brains were stuffed with information, the less food went into their stomachs' (De Stasio, 2010: p.300). However, she consents because the Major continues teaching Jemmy in unconventional ways through 'playful use of familiar objects', being seen by some as 'a sort of Montessori before his time' (De Stasio, 2010: p.304). Later, the Major consents to Mrs. Lirriper's decision that Jemmy must go to boarding school (Dickens, 1863: p.45). They counsel with and concede to each other on important familial issues because of the purely platonic nature of their relationship. Mrs. Lirriper does not let the lack of romantic love in her life prevent her from being a fully integrated and influential member of society. She fulfills

demands of the traditional domestic female sphere but in a non-traditional manner, having a stronger voice than many of her predecessors and transitioning from a passive to active nurturer.

Mrs. Lirriper breaks the old feminine mould and creates a successful intersection of previously separate male and female spheres because her family exists within the context of a male-dominated, business world. She confidently and independently opens a lodging business and claims responsibility before her deceased husband's creditors, saying, "Gentlemen I am acquainted with the fact that I am not answerable for my late husband's debts but I wish to pay them [. . .] every farthing that my late husband owed shall be paid" (Dickens, 1863: p.4). She proceeds to pay off the debt with the profit from her lodging business. This confidence and reliability is rewarded with the creditors' respect, in contrast to the reaction that characters of the era frequently had to women stepping outside of their prescribed boundaries. She also has the final say in the business and financial decisions regarding the lodging house, such as how to deal with competitors, to whom to let the rooms, and which offers to accept. Mrs. Lirriper establishes herself at the head of a successful business but is simultaneously viewed as a maternal figure, navigating the 'gap between service and intimacy' that others found 'impossible to maintain' (Boggs, 2018: p.328). She and her business represent a new and unique overlap of the male and female spheres because customers from a typically male-dominated sphere become part of a family in a typically female-dominated sphere.

While critics have analysed the structure of Mrs. Lirriper's rhetoric and her comedic nature, her narrative has not been considered in the context of these overlapping gender spheres. Her free and wandering monologue can also serve as the medium through which she is freed from the confines of the Victorian female stereotype. Mrs. Lirriper's monologue has been seen as the best example of an interior monologue form that Dickens refined over years, for her 'increasingly complex, private, and convincing' consciousness is more advanced than those of his previous works (Stone, 1959: p.57). This was Dickens's fresh and impressive experiment: it did not just reflect, but rather transcended and shaped, the voices of his period, as well as later voices with respect to the creation of modern stream-of-conscious novels. According to Wolfgang Müller, there is no other Dickensian work comparable to the style of *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings* because its intimate, oral communication with a silent listener creates an empathetic communion with a fictional speaker — a new style of 'you-narration' (2014: p.54). Similarly, Deborah Thomas suggests that Mrs. Lirriper is one of Charles Dickens's most remarkable female characters because she is a unique blend of the serious and comic character, and is 'the clear result of an evolutionary process in Dickens's art' (1977, p.156). Mrs. Lirriper's worries and associations within her uniquely first-person monologue 'are more consistently rooted in her everyday experience' than Dickens's earlier portrayals of women (Thomas, 1977: p.161). Thus her narrative allows her to uniquely and freely connect the traditionally masculine responsibilities of the business world with feminine everyday tasks and items, down to the placement of a mantlepice.

Characters in the inner chapters of *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings* arguably reach their demise due to their extreme stereotypical gendered reactions in the face of unrequited love and unrealised dreams. Gaskell, writing as a member of Dickens's outer circle of contributors (Stone, 1968: p.15), explores the destructive nature of stereotypical female gender moulds in

her chapter 'How the First Floor Went to Crowley Castle'. Women who are too aggressive as well as women who are too passive are ruined. Victorine, a French maid, is given charge over Theresa's life. However, as Theresa grows up and the plot progresses, Victorine tries to control her and amass more and more power for herself. Eventually, she poisons and kills innocent Bessy, the wife of Theresa's love, the Duke, in an effort to control destiny and allow Theresa and the Duke to be united. Instead, Victorine dies of guilt, Theresa dies of heartbreak, and the Duke runs off alone. Thus these socially problematic and/or extreme gendered behaviours trigger death and misery.

By paralleling Victorine's increasing power with increasing insanity, Gaskell demonstrates how women who step out of their domestic and passive spheres are punished and, arguably, she suggests through negation that a better balance of gendered traits is needed. Victorine, the spinster maid, has taken care of Theresa since a young age and fills the place of her parents, her mother having died and her father Sir Mark being 'an easy and indolent man' (Gaskell, 1863: p.55) who does little to help his daughter. This initial expansion of Victorine's role from maid to mother remains harmless, that is until Victorine begins 'ordering and arranging almost what she liked', winning power struggles against Sir Mark, and becoming accustomed to getting her way in everything. Aside from Theresa, the other characters view her as an enemy and she often has episodes of rage 'blazing with passionate fire' (Gaskell, 1863: p.56). Her growing temper, insanity and ultimate death show how women who step out of the roles dictated by their gender or age, or both, and try to assert more rights, are 'maligned because of it' (Grisham, 2017: p.38). Although she is supposed to nurture those in her care, Victorine loses those stereotypically selfless feminine characteristics in favor of the stereotypically masculine, selfish desire to exercise greater and greater influence over others. Such women are degraded by the degree of masculinity they adopt. Gaskell's representation suggests that, because Victorine's attempts to gain power and break out of her sphere are not balanced by a maintenance of feminine qualities, Victorine implodes, and destroys those around her as well.

Theresa's unrequited love spurs this hyperbolic end to her own life in addition to Victorine's and Bessy's, showing how the lack of positive, platonic relationships leads to a doomed surrender of gendered sensibility and responsibility. Theresa's relationships with men are all unsuccessful. Her first husband turns to gambling, and when she is later reunited with her long-time love, the Duke, discovery of Victorine's murder destroys them both. Gaskell describes Theresa's state repeatedly as 'wretched' (1863: p.78), her misery resulting from this crushing disillusionment of love. She becomes more and more isolated; she 'shut herself up in her rooms, and allowed no one to come near her' (Gaskell, 1863: p.89). She can no longer fulfill the role her gender prescribes, either as caretaker, nurturer, or lover, and thus withdraws from her old self and from society. Theresa 'drooped and drooped in this dreadful life' and eventually dies of heartbreak (Gaskell, 1863: p.105). In comparison to Mrs. Lirriper, Theresa is arguably destroyed because she is not anchored by healthy platonic and/or familial relationships, being too obsessed with notions of romantic love. Through the dramatisation of this failed quest for love, Gaskell arguably demonstrates by negation the necessity of the familial and the platonic within the female gendered space.

At the other end of the spectrum, Gaskell's Bessy is overtly feminised and passive, and she is also destroyed because of it. Bessy is the angelic girl, 'the daisy of an English maiden; pure

good to the heart's core,' whose life mostly passes within a 'narrow range of knowledge and experience' (Gaskell, 1863: p.76). Her life is noticeably limited to the home. She is often ridiculed for her goodness, especially by the envious Theresa. In one conversation between the two, Bessy laments, "'I wish I was cleverer; but you know, Theresa, I was never clever in anything but housewifery'" (Gaskell, 1863: p.92). Because her life and experience is so limited, Bessy is isolated, even from her husband the Duke, who is so intellectually ambitious that the two cannot create a healthy romantic relationship. Her passivity hampers her ability to influence even those within the domestic realm, which is further accentuated when her baby dies, preventing her from fulfilling her desire to be a mother, which is potentially the only active role she could have. Bessy suffers because her role and her influence are so diminished, both by herself and at the hands of others who take advantage of her, specifically Theresa and Victorine. Gaskell juxtaposes passive and aggressive women, but all end up dead by the end of the chapter, potentially suggesting that a woman must have a better balance of feminine and masculine traits in order to succeed.

Charles Alston Collins's story, 'How the Best Attic was Under a Cloud', also condemns the polarising gendered reactions spurred by dramatically romanticised courtship. The narrator Mr. Shrubsole is broken by his inability to win the contest for Mary Nuttlebury's hand. He distractedly interrupts his own narration with 'Love—Woman—Vertigo—Despair' (Collins, 1863: p.183), and thereby directly showcases the disillusionment that comes from unrealised romantic ideals. He is dizzied and untethered, wandering and trying to find purpose because his dream remains unachievable. He also dehumanises his opponent Mr. Huffell, referring to him throughout the narration as 'the Beast' (Collins, 1863: p.185). He and Huffell act on extreme masculine impulsivity, deciding the only appropriate course of action to determine who will marry Mary Nuttlebury is a duel, for if 'the other side declines to apologise [. . .] consequently the other side must be bowled down; — shot' (Collins, 1863: p.192). Collins uses this false dichotomy of surrender or death to criticise the hyperbolic dramatisation of romantic courtship, in which extreme masculinity overpowers normal rationale.

The dehumanisation and animalistic behavior of Collins's male characters also reinforce the objectification and silence of his female character, further perpetuating this stratified gender spectrum. Collins does not give Mary Nuttlebury dialogue or any text space beyond a short, surface-level description, written from a male perspective. Shrubsole mentally dismisses Mary Nuttlebury's rights, wondering, 'what right had she to go and fig herself out like that, in all her finery for Huffell? She never did so for me' (Collins, 1863: p. 186). The woman is solely viewed in terms of serving male status and male desires rather than having desires of her own. Shrubsole and Huffell's duel effectively objectifies Mary Nuttlebury. Thus Collins's narrative also suggests that platonic love and relationships are better than romantic love for both men and women.

Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings thus at first seems to present contradictions. Bookend chapters present a charitable woman who has no romantic entanglements but manages a successful makeshift family and a successful business. Gaskell's and Collins's pieces, among inner chapters, explore the dangers of unrequited love. Yet Dickens thought the pieces were successful enough, and testified to the purpose of his frame enough, to connect them in this way. Greater insight into Dickens's logic is gained by looking at Mrs. Lirriper's outer frame, and then determining how the inner chapters support its purpose. In juxtaposition, the

chapters of the collection arguably promote the expansion of the woman's role with a moderate balance of masculine and feminine traits, and encourage platonic, positive and charitable relationships over the disillusionment of unrealised romantic dreams.

Mrs. Lirriper is one of Dickens's most successful female characters because she responds to failed romantic expectations in a realistic and productive way. She is anchored by a family founded on platonic but meaningful love, whereas when the other women's romantic hopes are dashed, they lack a foundation to fall back on. Gaskell's three female characters end up dead: Bessy because in her purity she is too passive and taken advantage of, Theresa because of her heartbreak and disillusionment, and Victorine because she broke too far out of the bounds of conventional feminine behaviour and attempted to take too much power for herself. The voiceless Mary of Collins's chapter causes one of her male admirers to become isolated because his extremely masculine reaction fails and his dreams of romantic love are also destroyed. In contrast, Mrs. Lirriper succeeds in her continued sociability and familiarity with her male counterpart and the rest of her lodgers because of the prosaic nature of these relationships. These relationships are key to her success and enable her to fulfill female responsibilities in a male-dominated business sphere. She stretched the boundaries of gender, age, and class, and the public loved her because of the warm and homely manner in which these ideas were fed to them. The first Lirriper text sold 220,000 copies (Drew, 2003: p.148) and was Dickens's only Christmas tale that merited a sequel. Mrs. Lirriper is a refreshing and unusual female character, changing what could have been a stereotypical boarding house fiction into an unexpected exploration of gendered spheres.

Dickens uses the lodging house to create a unique space where business, domestic and family spheres, conventionally masculine and conventionally feminine, can successfully intersect, where customers can become loved ones. This space allows Mrs. Lirriper to bridge the old female voice and the new. She is angelic, but she is also powerful. She has control over her relationships because of expanded gendered rights and responsibilities. She is no longer the pawn of affection or romance, but an equal partner in a platonic and positive relationship. Defining a new gendered space in this way breaks the expectation that women could only have a say in a specific, domestic realm because of their angelic, nurturing, or attractive natures. A woman, as portrayed in *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings*, can create a newly individualised role, balanced in gendered responsibilities and balanced in the nature of her relationships. While not completely rewriting conventional female social identity, Mrs. Lirriper's success in expanding the definition of female roles and identities had an impact on the social consciousness of the late nineteenth century, and arguably influenced the role of female heroines in the decades to come.

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