

**Milly Swidger in *The Haunted Man*:
The Bridge as a Form of Media**

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Abstract : Charles Dickens used bridges in his works effectively. What interested him was the functions of the bridge: linkage, connection, transmission, and intermediation. Among all of his novels, *The Haunted Man* is outstanding in representing the author's awareness of the bridge as a form of media. Milly Swidger who is likened to a bridge plays the part of a mediator in the work. This paper focuses on her character to clarify how Dickens perceived the bridge and thereby determine how he understood the media. Re-reading the novel from this perspective is critical to the study of other works of fiction written by Dickens who had an excellent sense of the media.

First, this paper will examine descriptions of bridges in Dickens's other works in order to provide evidence that he had a keen interest in them. This section will not include analysis of *The Haunted Man*, but will clarify the significance of this study. Second, this paper will analyse depictions of the character Milly Swidger. Both the description and function of the character define her as a bridge. Finally, this study will verify that Milly serves as a representation of Jesus Christ in her association with the image of a bridge. In this novel, the figure of Christ, no less than Milly, is symbolized by a bridge. This article will assert that Dickens consciously uses the image of the bridge in this work. In addition, this paper will explore the meaning and the function of the word "bridge" as a connection.

Keywords : Charles Dickens, *The Haunted Man*, bridge

Introduction

It was in 1851 when the first undersea telegraph cable connected England and France thus enabling telegraphic communication between the two countries. This was also the year in which the first London Great Exhibition was held, with the electric telegraph among the latest technologies displayed. Five years prior to these events, in 1846, Charles Dickens had already made a plan for the construction of a wire beneath the Strait of Dover. Although this project was never achieved,

Richard Menke assessed it to be “probably the first serious plan to connect England and Europe via an undersea telegraph cable. The electric telegraph had only recently begun to prove itself on land, but for Dickens the prospects of an undersea link from Dover to Calais seemed encouraging” (2008: 1). Of course it was not Dickens who discovered the method of laying cables underwater, but still it was outstanding to see how early he noted the most useful method for connecting the British Isles with the continent.

Dickens’s practical sense for media seems closely related to his interest in bridges. More precisely, he was concerned with links, connections, networks and information transmission even before electric communication technologies made their appearances. A bridge, more than simply a transmission structure, is actually a symbol of such structures. Moreover, a bridge spanning two points is a predecessor of information technology in its function. According to *OED*, the word “span” is defined, “Of the rainbow, a bridge, etc.: To form an arch across or over (the sky, a river, etc.); to cross from side to side” or alternatively, “To reach or extend over (space or time).” The word “bridge” itself can also be used to refer to an intermediary between people. Precisely because of the fact that bridges are a form of media, Dickens was interested in them. Even aside from their literal meanings, without question, Dickens was aware of the function of bridges.

Beginning with Westminster Bridge in 1750, one after another bridges were built over the River Thames in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Dickens had seen four bridges opened to traffic in central London by the writing of *The Haunted Man*: Vauxhall Bridge (1816), Waterloo Bridge (1817), Southwark Bridge (1819), and Hungerford Bridge (1845). This rapid infrastructural expansion in the city increased accessibility, allowed for a greater circulation of people, and increased commercial exchange, thereby transforming the concept of the city.

This study will focus on Milly Swidger, a character depicted as a bridge in *The Haunted Man*, to clarify how Dickens understood bridges. It will also examine the author’s attitudes and observations relating to other forms of media. First, this paper will examine descriptions of bridges in Dickens’s other works in order to provide evidence that he had a keen interest in them. This survey does not cover *The Haunted Man*, but will clarify the significance of this study. Second, this paper will analyse depiction of the character Milly Swidger. Both the description and function of the character define her as a bridge. Finally, this study will verify that Milly serves as a representation of Jesus Christ in her association with the image of a bridge. In this novel, the figure of Christ, no less

than Milly, is symbolized by a bridge. This article will assert that Dickens consciously uses the image of the bridge in *The Haunted Man*. Additionally, this paper will explore the meaning and the function of the word "bridge" as a connection.

1. Background Research: Dickens's Interest in and Understanding of Bridges

Dickens effectively made use of bridges in his works. In one example, bridges link different types of worlds in *Oliver Twist*, one of his early works. In chapter 22, Bill Sikes, the villain, took Oliver to a house to make the boy assist him in criminal activity. On their way there, they "crossed the bridge, and kept on towards the lights which he had seen before" (161). During a robbery Oliver was discovered and shot by a building occupant, only to be abandoned by Sikes. Consequently, he came under the protection of the Maylies. From this moment on, he became free of criminals such as Fagin and Sikes. The bridge he walked over was a crossing between two worlds: the one of good and virtuous people, and the other of evil villains. This bridge was not simply a road but a connection between these two worlds. In a sense, Oliver passed through death and resurrection by his crossing of the bridge. Consequently, the bridge is seen to mediate between the world of the dead and the world of the living, or, possibly between Heaven and Hell.

Oliver, now taken care of by the Maylies, went out in a carriage with Mr. Losberne in chapter 32. "When they came to Chertsey Bridge, Oliver turned very pale, and uttered a loud exclamation" because he had found the criminals' lair (233). Again, at one end of the bridge is the place where "Oliver's benefactress" lived (233), and at the other is the place where the "devil" lived (233).

It is noteworthy that Nancy surreptitiously talks with Oliver's benefactors on a bridge. "Every Sunday night, from eleven until the clock strikes twelve ... I will walk on London Bridge if I am alive," said Nancy to Rose Maylie (306). They had a chance to meet there in chapter 46. When Rose and Mr. Brownlow came to London Bridge, Nancy requested that they change their location. Accordingly, their meeting resumed on the steps of the river. A commemorative plaque forms in that place in the present day is inscribed with the words "Nancy's steps," referring to the novel and particularly stairs which "are a part of the bridge" (348). Although this particular phrase might seem unnecessary, the author apparently decided that the meeting between Nancy and Rose had to be on the bridge since the former was one of the rogues and the latter was a benevolent person.

There is another noteworthy point to note in regard this meeting. Noah Claypole, one of

Fagin's subordinates was following Nancy while she was with Rose. Sikes heard the report from him, became angry, and beat her to death. Unlike Oliver's metaphorical death and resurrection, the bridge linked Nancy with death in a very real sense. As mentioned before, bridges not only connect points in the real world, but they connect the worlds of the living and the dead, as well.

Daniel Strack, a specialist on bridge metaphor in literature, published a study on depicted bridges in *A Tale of Two Cities*. In the analysis, he mentions a scene which depicts Sydney Carton's self-sacrifice. Strack notes that the "bridge Carton stands upon finds its ethereal double in the bridge extended to him as a beam of light from Heaven," this evidencing that "God has approved of the plan he is about to carry out and will extend a similar spiritual bridge to his eternal soul after his death" (2008: 34). As the title of his study, "Bridges to Heaven and Hell," indicates, bridges in Dickens's works can symbolically function as passages either to eternal paradise or to the underworld.

Strack also points out that "the metaphor and images found in *A Tale of Two Cities* work not locally but in concert" and that this "coherence may be analysed within the story's greater context to reveal aspects of Dickens's overall stylistic strategy, or figuratively instantiated ideological viewpoint, or both" (2008: 22-23). Thus, the use of metaphor is seen to be rooted in Dickens's artistic consciousness. Garrett Stewart makes the same assertion while exploring Dickens's metaphors and the names of his characters: "Language, then, isn't just something Dickens mobilized or remodelled. Language *per se* is a way of reading him, a way of staying with him through the farthest stretches of invention – and of confronting there his unique place in Victorian letters" (2001: 138). Consequently, bridges and rhetoric, both important in reading Dickens, are mutually illuminating.

As opposed to the careful analysis of Dickens's metaphorical strategy mentioned above, Milly Swidger in *The Haunted Man* has not been investigated. She is the one who is likened to a bridge in Dickens's novel. She plays an important role in the story in that she is not affected by Redlaw's "gift" and cures those who are infected. Her significance, however, is found in her name. Her husband William introduced her as follows:

There ain't one of our students but appears to regard Mrs. William in that light. Every day, right through the course, they puts their heads into the Lodge, one after another, and

have all got something to tell her, or something to ask her. 'Swidge' is the appellation by which they speak of Mrs. William in general, among themselves Let'em call her Swidge, Widge, Bridge – Lord! London Bridge, Blackfriars, Chelsea, Putney, Waterloo, or Hammersmith Suspension – if they like. (323)

While his phrase “Let'em call her Swidge, Widge, Bridge” seems to be nothing more than a word association game, in fact, the repeated invocation, “Bridge,” metaphorically implies her interactions with all the students in the lodge. But this issue is more complicated than it would first appear. The second word “Widge,” also, cannot be ignored. The old English word “wicg” means “to carry” or “a steed” according to *OED*. By way of this connotation, she is seen to be a person who both accomplishes some sort of “transmission” and “connects” people from her very first mention. This is the reason that the author chose to call her Swidge.

The Haunted Man was first published in 1848, two years after the submarine cable scheme occurred to Dickens. As we confirmed, Dickens already had an interest in both transmission and transport-related media in his early novels. Considering the year of publication, however, *The Haunted Man* would appear to be a key work for the investigation of how Dickens recognized the media. Moreover, analysing Milly Swidger's identity will be essential to understanding this work.

2. Milly Swidger as a Bridge

Milly functions as a symbolic bridge in the novel; she mediates between people and information. As we saw in the previous section, she is amiable to everyone. Her husband explained to Redlaw that she was “a sort of mother to all the young gentlemen” and these students “came up from a variety [*sic*] of parts, to attend your courses of lectures at this ancient foundation” (323). People of various family situations and backgrounds were gathered there. If there are any connections between them, these would seem to be Redlaw and the dormitory. These, however, are not effective enough to be termed “mother”-figures. Denham, one of Redlaw's students, does not live in the lodge but rather boards at the Tetterby's home. The dormitory does not always unify the students. In addition, Denham is confined to bed due to illness. His instructor Redlaw never learned about his situation until William informed the Chemist about it. William would not have known if there had been no accident because Denham “would never have made his situation known to one of

his own sex. Mrs. William has got into his confidence, but that's quite different. They all confide in Mrs. William; they all trust *her*" (328, italics in original). All students rely on and open their hearts to only one person: Milly Swidger. While Redlaw gathers students through his knowledge and education, he never becomes a bridge to them.

Milly mediates between other people in the novel, as well. She is a welcome guest at the Tetterby's home. She visited there when discord was brought to the family by Redlaw's "gift." "Don't cry, dear. Father and mother will be comfortable again, to-morrow, and home will be comfortable too" said Milly to Tetterby's son Adolphus (357); and, in fact, she fulfilled this prediction later. Additionally, she protected a street urchin. According to Redlaw's ghost, "this wretched mortal from his birth [had] been abandoned to a worse condition than the beasts" (378), but he had opened his mind to Milly in response to her protection, feeding, keeping him warm, and taking care of his wounds. Thus, there is a mental bridge between them. Moreover, she is a mediation for him from "a worse condition than the beasts" in human life (378).

Analysis presented above demonstrates that Milly's character is that of a "bridge." Let's move on to detail her function as a bridge. When two or more things are connected by a bridge, they become a unity or an integration. That is to say, the bridge medium has integrative function. The bridges which William listed: "London Bridge, Blackfriars, Chelsea, Putney, Waterloo, or Hammersmith Suspension" are all built over the River Thames. They link the City of London with the other side of the river to effectively integrate Greater London.

Redlaw refers to the importance of a medium. "In the material world, as I have long taught," the Chemist says, "nothing can be spared; no step or atom in the wondrous structure could be lost, without a blank being made in the great universe" (374). Human relations as well as chemical structure are bound up by indispensable elements. Redlaw's "gift" takes those bonds away and causes a void. Milly in contrast, substitutes for the lost ties and brings harmony back to the people she interacts with.

At the Tetterby's home for instance, family members became selfish because of the "gift," and this condition lasted until the next day. They had no sooner found Milly was approaching than Mr. Tetterby became ashamed of his deeds and asked God for forgiveness. The scene continues as follows:

“Hurrah! Here’s Mrs. William!” cried Johnny.

So she was, and all the children with her; and as she came in, they kissed her, and kissed one another, and kissed the baby, and kissed their father and mother, and then ran back and flocked and danced about her, trooping on with her in triumph. (385)

It is not insignificant that the children kissed Milly first of all at this family reunion. The restoration of their relations was achieved only through the help of their intermediator.

The same situation is found in the relations between Philip Swidger and his son. They were affected by the “gift” too. When Milly came to see Philip’s son, George “who had lain for hours in a state from which no effort could rouse him, rose up in his bed, and, bursting into tears, stretched out his arms” to her (386), he kept holding her hand even when she tried to leave. He had needed her as a medium so that he could have her “ask his poor old father for his pardon and his blessing” (386).

Milly mediates even between people who are not affected by Redlaw’s uncanny power. Denham is engaged to a woman, but they are unable to see each other because of financial difficulties. His fiancée, however, came to the dormitory in the last chapter of the story, and Denham heard about it from Milly. In this way, it is Milly who intermediates between them. Milly also arranges a meeting between Redlaw and Longford. They had been the best friends before but they had not seen each other since Longford betrayed the Chemist and his sister. They would never have met again, “had it not been for this blessed hand” of Milly (395).

Milly is hence depicted as a character who brings harmony. She intercedes for those who are experiencing strife either due to Redlaw’s “gift” or for other reasons. When a bridge overcomes a span, it integrates; Régis Debray, mentioning the unifying power of symbolic images, points out that the word “‘Symbolic’ comes from the Greek *syμβallein*, ‘to put back together,’ ‘reunite,’ or ‘bridge’: such a function is to our eyes synonymous with the mediative function” (1996: 138). In light of this fact, Dickens’s appreciation for the role of bridges as a medium, and his consequent depiction of Milly as a bridge, seems less an incidental detail of depiction than an interanimating dynamic for the work as a whole. Without Milly, the various characters in the work are no more than unrelated individuals who share physical proximity while lacking community. As the families become infected by the “gift,” even social units with blood bonds display a crucial need for an intermediator.

3. Jesus as a bridge: Milly as Christ Figure

Milly bridges not only the gap between individuals, but also the divide that separates individuals from God. As Valentine Cunningham states in “Dickens and Christianity,” because “Dickens is, of course, a Christian writer” (2008: 255), the author frequently incorporates Christian themes into his works. *The Haunted Man*, however, is one story in a series of Dickens’s Christmas Books inaugurated by *A Christmas Carol*. For this reason, it would be unwise to attempt to understand this novel while neglecting the possibility of a connection with Christianity.

Stanley Tick explains, “Milly is made to offer the appropriate Christian explanation for her good deeds” (2005: 33-34). In fact, readers are likely to associate Milly’s personality and behavior with Christianity. It is no wonder, considering her role in the story, that she is compared to Jesus. Her role as a bridge, however, has yet to be discussed in such a context.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God’s salvation has taken on an image somewhat like a bridge. After the Old Testament Flood, “God said, This *is* the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that *is* with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth” (Gen. 9:12-13 italics in original). Thus, the rainbow is a bridge of promise between Heaven and the earth.

In the same way, Christ is a mediator: “For there *is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5 italics in original), and “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Accordingly, Christ is the rainbow in the book of Genesis, intermediary, and the bridge between God and human beings at least in Christian culture. In the following part of this paper, we will classify bridges and rainbows in Christianity as playing a similar role in their function as media.

The rainbow has been the symbol of God’s forbearance in paintings from antiquity. George Ferguson, in his book *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* states the following:

The Rainbow is a symbol of union and, because it appeared after the flood, it is also the symbol of pardon and reconciliation given to the human race by God. In art, the rainbow is used as the Lord’s throne, and in representations of the Last Judgement, Christ is often seated upon it. (43)

As has been demonstrated, Milly's character has integrative function; consequently she accomplishes "reconciliation" in the same way that Christ does. It is assumed, however, that "pardon" of sins is a more important factor when seeing Christ as a bridge. Since Christ fulfilled God's will in offering pardon on earth, it may be useful to focus on Milly's mediation of forgiveness in the story.

In the beginning of chapter 3 in the novel, Redlaw and his ghost are portrayed as having a conversation. The spirit at this time "was not alone, but in its shadowy hand it held another hand" (376); in fact, the hand turns out to be Milly's. The ghost told the Chemist that only she could restore the memories which Redlaw, using his "gift," had gotten rid of from him and other people. As was the case in the Tetterby's reunion, she actually cures people by simply approaching them. Redlaw's "gift," however, is "beyond human reparation" (377). Milly does not have any supernatural power; she does not save people all by herself. Since she cannot overcome the "gift," but has only a certain ability to deal with the results of it, it is presumed that she conveys metaphysical forgiveness to humans.

The phrase "Lord, keep my memory green" is repeatedly mentioned in this novel. Obviously, memories are kept by God. "O thou," Redlaw said, "who through the teaching of pure love, has graciously restored me to the memory which was the memory of Christ upon the cross, and of all the good who perished in His cause, receive my thanks, and bless her [Milly]" (396). He was convinced that God restored his memory. He got memories back not only of his own past, but also of "Christ upon the Cross." The Crucifixion of Jesus is the ultimate redemption. Redlaw gave his thanks to God for redemption through Christ, the pardon of God, and thereafter wished Milly blessed. His identity apparently overlaps with Milly in terms of offering forgiveness and being a figure of Christ.

It is Milly that occasions more forgiveness even though they are on the same human level. She mentioned to Redlaw that it seemed to her "a good thing for us to remember wrong that has been done us" because "we may forgive it" (393). It is notable that Redlaw prayed for pardon to "great Heaven" (393), but there is more to this scene than his prayer. The Chemist met Longford for the first time in a while. Due to the past betrayal, Redlaw thought the meeting would not go well. In the end, Redlaw, following Milly's words, told her, "I trust to [sic] you to do it for me, now and secretly; and to tell him that I would forgive him" (394). Then Milly "turned her beaming face

towards the fallen man, implying that her mediation had been successful” (394). It is thus emphasized in the novel that Milly intermediates forgiveness. Although she was a bridge between humans in this scene, it confirms her status as a figure of Christ the intercessor since she conveyed forgiveness between people who were unlikely to see each other.

To regard Milly as a figure of Christ based on their similar role as “bridges” amounts to an important meaning in the title of the novel. *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* would at first seem to be referring to Redlaw and the contract he makes with his specter. However, “the Ghost's Bargain” might also be interpreted as the promise of the Holy Ghost. The advent of the Holy Spirit is covenant of God with human beings just like the rainbow in Genesis. Also, prophecies concerning the birth of the Christ might also be thought of as “the Ghost's Bargain.” Since Jesus is the only mediator between God and humans, any promise made by Holy Ghost and God will be fulfilled on earth with the help of Christ. The title represents the day Christ was born, namely Christmas, when humans first glimpsed God's salvation through Christ.

As verified above, Christian aspects of the work reflect the author's consciousness relating to mediation. Milly brings unity and forgiveness to people just as Christ does. The Bridge which Dickens had in his mind is not simply a road, but a medium which links places, people, information, spirits, and Heaven.

Conclusion

Milly Swidger is consistently depicted as a bridge in *The Haunted Man*. As her husband noted, she is both a “Widge” who transfers things from one place to another and also a “Bridge” who brings union and pardon to people. In this sense, this woman is a representative of “media.” Dickens definitely uses bridges both physically and metaphorically in his other works but, in contrast to these other works, Milly represents an incarnation of a bridge, and thereby may be seen as the most significant character through which to grasp the author's idea about bridges.

Milly, being an intermediator, helps people enter into harmony. Even though the characters in the novel seem to have mutual interactions, they never truly have union without her aid. They all need her to maintain positive relationships with others. Her role then becomes clearest when Redlaw's “gift” collapses human relations; the bridge brings reunion to those who have been separated.

In addition, Milly mediates forgiveness. In this way, she is a bridge between Heaven and earth. Because Christ is the only person who can truly express God's will in Christianity, Milly is seen to function as a figure of Christ in the story. The characters in the novel are not saved or forgiven without her, just as human beings remain separated from Heaven without the help of Jesus. Moreover, on the human level, although there is no possibility for Redlaw and Longford to see each other again, the Chemist finds a way to forgive the other through her reconciliation. Unlike Christ who is perfectly human and divine at the same time, Milly is just a human. She does not save people and pardon the sin of others in any strictly religious sense, but since she plays the role of a bridge just like Christ, she serves to convey forgiveness to people in the context of the story.

The personality and character of Milly Swidger is expressed by the concept of the bridge for Dickens. The analysis in this paper has clarified that Dickens does not regard bridges as mere material or roads. He is interested in their function of linking, connecting, uniting, integrating and reuniting people or even places and metaphysical modes of existence. In short, he regards bridges as a media: information media as well as spiritualistic media. To elucidate how Dickens understands bridges reveals how he understands the media, at least the basic foundations of his ideas concerning them. Re-reading *The Haunted Man* while focusing on Milly's function as a bridge is hence critical to the study of other novels written by Charles Dickens, an author that has an excellent sense and understanding of the media.

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