

“Vigorous Reality”: *Matter-ness* or Corporeal Presence in Dickens

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[Alice] called out “Waiter! Bring back the pudding!” and there it was again in a moment, like a conjuring trick. *It was so large that she couldn’t help feeling a little shy with it, as she had been with the mutton...*

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, Chapter IX

[italics mine]

Indubitable presence of matter is often represented in the corporeality of the substance in Dickens; presence is assured by some bodily or bulky representation. In this essay, it is my main purpose to first demonstrate the peculiarly protruding presence of/as matter, or the sense of matter-ness; and then show how it co-works with the ‘*fort!*’ - ‘*da!*’ movement seen in Dickens’ texts, especially with its moment of discovery (‘*da!*’), making the impact of disclosure all the more decisive and dramatic.⁽¹⁾

The sense of matter-ness or material substance works both joyously vigorous and annoyingly protruding. A case of the former can be found in Chap. 37 of *Great Expectations* where Pip visits Wemmick at his ‘Castle’; while an example of the latter can be seen on the Podsnap’s dinner-table in *Our Mutual Friend*. The preparation for the tea-time at the Walworth ‘Castle’ is presumably one of the most joyful meal scenes in

Dickens as Pip describes: “It was no nominal meal that we were going to make, but a vigorous reality. The Aged prepared such a haystack of buttered toast, that I could scarcely see him over it as it simmered on an iron stand hooked on to the top-bar....” (315) The food is just there, undeniably present before Pip as matter or mass, with such concrete materiality and in such amazing abundance as to be almost imposing. It is, however, exactly this presence of matter-ness that is the substratum of the ‘vigorous reality.’ The plenitude of substance of the food seems to overwhelm the substantive ‘toast’ as Pip says it is ‘not nominal meal.’ Accumulated in ‘a haystack,’ the buttered toast makes so voluminous display of its presence that it almost absorbs that of the Aged. The representation of the inanimate object bears so bulky corporeality that it overwhelms the character(s). In *Our Mutual Friend* the plate on the Podsnap’s dinner-table, with its protruding sense of presence, overwhelms the characters sitting around it:

Hideous solidity was the characteristic of the Podsnap plate. Everything was made to look as heavy as it could, and to take up as much room as possible. Everything said boastfully, ‘Here you have as much of me in my ugliness as if I were only lead; but I am so many ounces of precious metal worth so much

an ounce; - wouldn't you like to melt me down?' (177)

The plate is undeniably *there*, so radically substantial and plenitudinous in its inorganic materiality that its self-presentation assumes animation. Not that it is lively nor vigorous but that it is so solidly and corpulently dead or inanimate that it comes to be embodied as some inexplicable existence. It is not alive, but is still provokingly *there*. It is an improbable presence of inorganic animation, a literal *still life*, that is represented here.

Both in the two scenes above, things are irresistibly *there*, popped up or in relief, as it were, from among the flatly represented *characters*. These cases are the moments of discovery of the corporeal presence of things: in both scenes there is intense focus on specific objects which summons their existence to the foreground. This is a peculiarly photographic representation of objects which has strong directivity; it *points to* their bodily presence, it stands them out, in relief, in their irreducible matter-ness:

[En la photographie], l'événement ne se dépasse jamais vers autre chose: elle ramène toujours le corpus dont j'ai besoin au corps que je vois; elle est le Particulier absolu, la Contingence souveraine, mate et comme bête, le *Tel* (telle photo, et non la Photo), bref, la Tuché, l'Occasion, la Rencontre, le Réel, dans son expression infatigable. Pour désigner la réalité, le bouddhisme dit *sunya*, le vide; mais encore mieux: *tathata*, le fait d'être cela; *tat* veut dire en sanskrit *cela* et ferait penser au geste du petit enfant qui désigne quelque chose du doigt et dit: *Ta, Da, Ça!* Une photographie se trouve toujours au bout de ce geste; elle dit: ça, c'est ça, c'est tel! mais ne dit rien d'autre...Montrez

vos photos à quelqu'un; il sortira aussitôt les siennes: Voyez, ici, c'est mon frère; là, c'est moi enfant, etc.; la Photographie n'est jamais qu'un chant alterné de Voyez, Vois, Voici; elle pointe du doigt un certain *vis-à-vis*, et ne peut sortir de ce pur langage déictique.

Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire*⁽²⁾
[italics in the original]

In this quotation from Barthes it is interesting that he refers to a child's gesture of pointing accompanied by inarticulate utterances to call attention, for it resembles the moment of discovery (*da!*) in '*fort!*' - '*da!*' game which Freud describes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.⁽³⁾ Associated with Freud, Barthes' argument on a photograph tells us that a *tableau* - may it be a table or a representational surface, i. e. a picture, a photograph, or a passage of written text - can be the locus of once-for-all discovery of some corporeal presence.⁽⁴⁾

In Dickens the *tableau* is not only the locus of '*da!*' experience but also that of '*fort!*' - '*da!*' movement. Actually *Great Expectations* begins with a description of a stone *tableau*, the inscription on Pip's family tombstone. He even names himself in the authority of the inscription on it: "My father's family name being Pirrip, and my christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip" (35). Here Pip demonstrates his infant articulation as if it were an arithmetic subtraction - it is actually a contraction - on a slate. In terms of his name he found himself (*da!*) from the inscription on the tombstone which signifies the '*fort!*' state of his parents and brothers who passed away. He brings his *present* name out of the inscribed absence of his

father. Through this rearticulation of the characters on this *tableau* of tombstone he transforms absence into presence, thereby emerging himself as a *character* of the novel. But even without the act of articulation Pip can conjure up the live presence out of those traces which refer to the now dead bodies:

As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape of the letters on my father's, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, '*Also Georgiana Wife of the Above,*' I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. (35) [italics in the original]

In Pip's fanciful reading of this tableau the letters literally take their lives; the inscribed characters are transformed into live *characters* protruding, as if in relief, from the two-dimensional surface. This is the *tableau* as the locus of bodily representation.

On another tableau in *Great Expectations* which calls the attention of readers as well as that of the characters, a most simple 'fort!' - 'da!' play of writing is observable:

Again and again and again, my sister had traced upon the slate, a character that looked like a curious T, and then with the utmost eagerness had called our attention to it as something she particularly wanted. I had in vain tried everything producible that began with a T, from tar to toast and tub. At length it had come into my head that the sign looked like a hammer, and on my lustily calling that word in my sis-

ter's ear, she had begun to hammer on the table and had expressed a qualified assent. Thereupon, I had brought in all our hammers, one after another, but without avail. Then I bethought me of a crutch, the shape being much the same, and I borrowed one in the village, and displayed it to my sister with considerable confidence. But she shook her head to that extent when she was shown it, that we were terrified lest in her weak and shattered state she should dislocate her neck.

When my sister found that Bidley was very quick to understand her, this mysterious sign reappeared on the slate. Bidley looked thoughtfully at it, heard my explanation, looked thoughtfully at my sister, looked thoughtfully at Joe (who was always represented on the slate by his initial letter), and ran into the forge, followed by Joe and me.

'Why of course!' cried Bidley, with an exultant face. 'Don't you see? It's him!' Orlick, without doubt! She had lost his name, and could only signify him by his hammer. (151) [italics in the original]

Mrs. Gargery's slate is a *tableau* on which the mysterious sign is conjured up and erased and then conjured up 'again and again.' Her reign of mastery and control is now reduced into this small square surface. Her faculty literally *flattens* out. In response to this persistent sign, there is 'fort!' - 'da!' -like movements of objects in which various materials are presented to her in vain and cleared away again. Most curiously and significantly it is Bidley, and not Pip, who finally *articulates* what Mrs. Gargery means by 'T' like sign, for this is, in its nature, exactly the same kind of reading with the infantile reading of the inscribed letters on the tombstone which Pip has demonstrated

at the beginning of the novel. They are the same in that they lead to some bodily representation. Somehow Pip has lost that particular fanciful reading which he used to have in his infancy. In gaining one sort of reading ability (literacy) he seems to have given up another more primitive sort of reading.

A literal table can also be the place of 'fort!' and 'da!' A dinner-table is the place where the host/hostess can demonstrate his/her power to make the meal appear and disappear. It is most magically shown in the table which Alice shares with Red Queen and White Queen in *Through the Looking Glass*:

'May I give you a slice?' [Alice] said, taking up the knife and fork, and looking from one Queen to the other.

'Certainly not,' Red Queen said, very decidedly: 'it isn't etiquette to cut any one you've been introduced to. Remove the joint!' And the waiters carried it off, and brought a large plum-pudding in its place.

'I won't be introduced to the pudding, please,' Alice said rather hastily, 'or we shall get no dinner at all. May I give you some?'

But the Red Queen looked sulky, and growled 'Pudding-Alice: Alice-Pudding. Remove the pudding!' and the waiters took it away so quickly that Alice couldn't return its bow.

However, she didn't see why the Red Queen should be the only one to give orders; so, as an experiment, she called out 'Waiter! Bring back the pudding!' and there it was again in a momnet, like a conjuring-trick.⁽⁵⁾

It is crucially significant that Alice is trying to gain control over the table, which is to hold the command to make the meal 'come'

and 'go' freely at her will. Therefore when "all sorts of things" happen and the table becomes the anarchic and boisterous jumble of growing objects and already shrinking guests which Alice has no hope of taking under control, she has no way but to forcibly cancel everything: "I can't stand this any longer!" she cried, as she jumped up and seized the tablecloth with both hands: one good pull, and plates, dishes, guests, and candles came crashing down together in a heap on the floor." This radical 'fort!' of Alice starts to bring her back again to the everyday world where she belongs to. No less significant and, without doubt, equally radical 'fort!' is seen in *Our Mutual Friend* which is practiced by the sweeping arm of Mr. Podsnap:

Thus happily acquainted with his own merit and importance, Mr. Podsnap settled that whatever he put behind him he put out of existence. There was a dignified conclusiveness - not to add a grand convenience - in this way of getting rid of disagreeables which had done much towards establishing Mr. Podsnap in his lofty place in Mr. Podsnap's satisfaction. 'I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!' Mr. Podsnap had even acquired a peculiar flourish of his right arm in often clearing the world of its most difficult problems, by sweeping them behind him (and consequently sheer away) with those words and a flushed face. For they affronted him. (174)

He abandons everything that is beyond his control. Naturally his world becomes "not a very large world, morally; no, nor even geographically: seeing that although his business was sustained upon commerce with other countries, he considered other

countries, with that important reservation, a mistake, and of their manners and customs would conclusively observe, 'Not English!' when Presto! with a flourish of the arm, and a flush of the face, they were swept away" (174). Thus he radically puts away everything disagreeable. Then it is only natural for the 'Podsnappery' that he tries to abandon any ineligible topic at the dinner-table because of the danger of calling "a blush into the cheek of a young person." And this ineligibility perfectly corresponds to the incredibility of the dinner on his dinner-table on which the 'adjuncts' are displaced with, or rather, have become the main *body* of the dinner itself.⁽⁶⁾

Transubstantiation of the main body of the dinner on the Dickensian *tableau* goes even further. When a corpse displaces the food, it makes a most grotesque scene of disclosure as it is seen in *Great Expectations* when Miss Havisham talks to Mrs. Camilla, the wife of one of her relatives Mr. Camilla, responding to the name of Matthew Pocket which she mentioned:

'Matthew will come and see me at last,' said Miss Havisham, sternly, 'when I am laid on that table. That will be his place-there,' striking the table with her stick, 'at my head! And yours will be there! And your husband's there! And Sarah Pocket's there! And Georgiana's there! Now you all know where to take your stations when you come to feast upon me.' (117)

This grim theme of cannibalism is taken over to the novel's successor *Our Mutual Friend*, at the beginning of which it is revealed that Gaffer Hexam and his son and daughter are symbolically fed on corpses, by fishing dead bodies in the Thames and taking the money belonging to them, where the dead body is only referred to as

unnamable 'it.' It is this impersonification and materialization that make presence of corpses most grim and horrible. The most striking scenes of corpses in Dickens are found when they are represented as a lump of inanimate matter, or mass. Undoubtedly the most horrible and curious instance is when the dead body of Krook, who died of Spontaneous Combustion, is found by Mr. Guppy and Tony Jobling in *Bleak House*:

Mr. Guppy takes the light. They go down, more dead than alive, and holding one another, push open the door of the back shop. The cat has retreated close to it, and snarling - not at them; at something on the ground, before the fire... The chairs and table, and the bottle so rarely absent from the table, all stand as usual. On one chair back, hang the old man's hairy cap and coat.

'Look!' whispers the lodger, pointing his friend's attention to those objects with a trembling finger. 'I told you so. When I saw him last, he took his cap off, took out the little bundle of old letters, hung his cap on the back of the chair - his coat was there already, for he had pulled that off, before he went to put the shutters up - and I left him turning the letters over in his hand, standing just where that crumbled black thing is upon the floor.'

Is he hanging somewhere? They looked up. No.

.....
They advanced slowly, looking at all these things. The cat remains where they found her, still snarling at the something on the ground, before the fire and between the two chairs. What is it? Hold up the light.

Here is a small burnt patch of

flooring, here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, but not so light as usual, seeming to be steeped in something; and here is - is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal? O Horror, he *is* here! and this from which we run away, striking out the light and overturning one another into the street, is all that represents him. (511) [italics in the original]

In contrast to the boastful challenging of the Podsnap plate (“[W]ouldn’t you like to melt me down?”), Krook has spontaneously melted down, by burning internally, into an unnamable heap of black waste. Although Dickens seems to have demonstrated an impossible chemical experiment, this spontaneous combustion happens in this novel as an inevitable consequence of his literary combination of moral deterioration and chemical combustion; the process of which is not described but only intimated by what it leaves on the spot where Krook was. Now he is transformed or reduced into ugly black substance which exists, in the passage of the text, as so unreadable mass that it is hard to identify what or who it originally was. It is even difficult to find that it is there, so hard is the task to discern it. Most of what was Krook is already diffused into the air and into the interior of the room and therefore can be felt but is invisible; “a smouldering suffocating vapour” which is given off from combustion of his body fills the atmosphere, like a fog prevalent in the novel, all the more obscuring the sight in the dark close room, and blurs the presence of this strange matter. As a consequence of all these, there is, in this scene, a heightened tension between presence and absence. We are all sure of presence of the objects, but Krook is apparently absent, when Tony

reports to Cuppy: “And the burning smell is there - and the soot is there, and the oil is there - and he is not there!” (510) He is seemingly unseen; his figure is lost. When the two guys go down into the dark, dingy room to seek him, it is possibly with this question: *Is* he there? Or *not* there? While they look for Krook, the readers’ eyes are made to skim over, as their eyes do, the interior objects in the room. Here Dickens’ text represents the room in a *tableau* of inanimate adjuncts to his existence. Krook’s personality is inscribed in the interior of the room; the text invites us to read it for the clues of his presence/absence. It is annoying therefore to see that all those *interior-ized* traces — for what they tell us at the most is that he *was* there — of him are *there* but the main body of his existence is *not* there. As they follow the marks of Krook closer to the substantial core of his presence, there lies something ominous in finding those objects ‘all stand as usual’ perfectly still and indifferent to their misgivings. It culminates to a horror when their search comes to Krook’s apparel, the metonymical traces which were the closest adjunct to his corporeal body as Tony points to them “with a trembling finger,” saying in a suppressed voice, “Look!” It is most intriguing that they even look up at the ceiling to see if he is *there*, for, in their trying every corner of the room in this way makes it appear as if they were looking for some lost object, which would reduce Krook to *something* to be hung from the ceiling, perhaps like a lump of mutton to which Captain Joey reduces Riderhood’s body. Then Tony points to another trace on the very spot where he is supposed to be present. The pointing or directivity in the text gradually takes a right focus on the very thing on the floor. They actually see it there,

even referring to it as “that crumbled black thing,” but just don’t recognize it as Krook. It is visible but peculiarly transparent to their eyes at first. The narrator has also plainly suggested its strange presence as he mentions “something on the ground” at which the cat snarls. Gradually the narrator seems to draw closer, in a circumventive, metonymical way, toward the inexplicable object, preparing the readers for the striking disclosure. But even after their eyes have finally settled on the curious heap, it is so alien and unfamiliar that it is hard to find appropriate expression for it. The narrator demonstrates his(their) difficulty to articulate what it is: “... and here is - is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal?” It seems impossible to represent it, for there is no direct description of this black mass. This crumbled something intimates the limit of representation and reading. Even if it is possible to call it the remains of Krook, it would be totally impenetrable even for the keen eyes of Venus the professional articulator, because it is beyond all representation, i.e. nominals. It can be only directly referred to as Nothing. But the most striking thing in this scene is this undeniable presence of Nothing which is beyond all representation. This is an embodiment of the representational black hole in the text.

There is no knowing how they could recongnize this Nothing as Krook, but there is a sudden cognitive leap for them to cry out: “O Horror, he *is* here!” The most horrible fact that made them flee was not simply the death of Krook. It is the presence of this substance into which both his presence and absence are symbolically dissolved. It is this peculiar sense of presence of nullified Krook, and his apparent and

logical absence, that horrified them. This is presumably supported by their cry: “He *is* here!” What is striking about this moment of discovery is that it includes both impacts of ‘*fort!*’ and ‘*da!*’: he is now dead and gone but this inanimate thing is overwhelmingly and irresistibly *there*. His death would not have been as grim and horrible as this, if the spontaneous combustion had burned him out all clear and left nothing behind. It is the matter-ness of his reduced corporeality that is abhorred. Because it is completely beyond control: concurrence of ‘*fort!*’ and ‘*da!*’ makes it perfectly inorganic and still, for then there can be no movement. Krook is now irretrievably dead. Dying of a most radical entropy, he can be no more degenerated than this.

I have demonstrated above a couple of instances in Dickens’ texts where things are, depicted with peculiar matter-ness, just *there*. They all seem to testify the inherent excess in the Dicken’s world; and each bodily representation of objects makes their mere existence something singular and extraordinary. This is a sort of alienation which reevaluates the *presence* of things itself. Not that those objects bear any value but that the mere fact that they *are there* comes into focus. With their corporeal presence, each encounter with those bulky things is presented as a scene of discovery or a moment of ‘*da!*’ simply because they are indubitably and irresistibly - i.e. beyond mastery - *there*.

Notes

The following are the works of Charles Dickens cited in this essay. All references to each novel are to the Penguin edition.

Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Angus Calder (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971)

Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Angus Calder (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965)

Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971)

- (1) For the original 'fort!' - 'da!' play, see Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 269-338. Dickens' last complete novel *Our Mutual Friend* can be read, I believe, as a novel of (self-)mastery, where the characters' struggles to gain or maintain their control over their own lives or those of others are depicted as movements of 'fort!' and 'da!' i.e. of coming and going, of death and re-birth, or of disappearance and return, etc. See Yasuhiko Matsumoto, "'The End of a Long Journey': Mastery, Abandonment, Vacillation in Betty Higden's Flight from/to Death" in *Studies in Language and Culture*, X (1992), pp. 39-47.
- (2) Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Gallimard, Seuil, 1980), pp. 15-16.
- (3) See Freud, p. 284.
- (4) I owe the enlarged concept of table/tableau to Hiroshi Takayama's dealing with the idea, though my main concern is on the 'table' as the locus of 'fort!' - 'da!' - of coming and going, or of disappearance and (re)appearance. See Hiroshi Takayama, "'Kozo' wa teburu-suru," ("The structure tables") *is*, xxviii (1985), pp. 22-27.
- (5) Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* in *The Annotated Alice*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 331-332.
- (6) The word 'adjuncts' is found in Chap. 33 of *Great Expectations* where Pip and Estella have a tea together. I find the scene particularly interesting, for this 'tea,' with all the unnecessary 'adjuncts' and without the main *body*, is only a nominal one, which presents a striking contrast to the 'vigorous reality' of the food at Wemmick's 'Castle.'

「ものすごい本物」*：ディケンズにおけるモノ・モノしさ、あるいは物質的存在

松本靖彦

チャールズ・ディケンズの作品の端々に顔をのぞかせる実に「モノモノしい」としか言いようのない場面の検証が本稿のねらいである。「モノ」— 物体であれ食べ物であれ、また人間の肉体であれ— がただそれ自体として圧倒的な存在感をもってどうしようもなく「そこにある」という状態。生気がなく、モノらしくあればあるほどそれがなおさら我が物顔でそこに存在するというこの不可思議な現象は、ひとつにはディケンズの世界の基底にある過剰の表われであろうが、それはまた単純に「あ、あった」とそのモノを指し示す経験によってそのひとつひとつの場面を(再)発見の瞬間と化してもいるのである。

*この語は山西英一氏の訳語による。

チャールズ・ディケンズ著、山西英一訳『大いなる遺産(下)』(新潮社, 1951), p. 88 参照。

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正誤表

訂正箇所	誤	→	正
p.22/右/19行目	にそれぞれ	→	はそれぞれ
p.23/左/27行目	・・・愛し、憎み、	→	・・・愛し、憎み、
p.23/右/24行目	sttovoce	→	sottovoce
p.23/右/27行目	... Messina》	→	... Messina》)
p.24/右/24-25行	“漠然”と	→	“漠然と”
p.26/右/11行	効功	→	有効
p.26/注の5)	《Costruzion con <i>si</i> 》	→	《Costruzioni con <i>si</i> 》
p.27/18行目	... parcegu'il	→	... parce qu'il
p.55/下から2行目	・・・あった。」 ⁴⁾ 人物や・・・		
→	・・・あった。」 ⁴⁾ <u>という一節がある。</u> 人物や・・・		
p.59/参考文献	<i>Chroniques italiennes</i> (Béatrice Didier), Flmmarion. . .		
→	<i>Chroniques italiennes</i> (Béatrice Didier), Flammarion. . .		
p.73/左/20行目	S.Seve	→	S.Severin
p.80/Table 1	s h z m n N y w	→	s h z m n N r y w
p.87/左/Rule A	$V_i/$	→	$\tilde{V}_i/$
p.87/右/12行目	$Q \rightarrow [p, t, k, s,]$	→	$Q \rightarrow [p, \underset{\cdot}{t}, \underset{\cdot}{k}, \underset{\cdot}{s}]$
p.87/右/20行目	tt→t	→	t→ $\underset{\cdot}{t}$
p.89/左/Rule 1	[-syl]__	→	[-syl]+__
p.91/Table 6	waida	→	waita
p.92/Table 9	t ^s uwda	→	t ^s uwida
p.92/Table 9	[kasita]	→	[kašita]
p.101/左-右	redundent	→	redundant
p.102/右/25行目	acer	→	acre
名簿夕什ル	<u>同人</u> 名簿	→	<u>会員</u> 名簿