

## Reading Dickens's Three Novels:

### *David Copperfield, A Tale of Two Cities and Great Expectations*

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#### *The Personal History of David Copperfield*

##### 1 The Germ and Autobiographical Character

In February 1849 Dickens was 'revolving a new work,' i.e., *The Personal History of David Copperfield*, and began to write it by February 27. In March he was 'much startled' by Forster's commenting that the initials of David Copperfield were his own reversed, but he did not alter them into others, protesting that it was 'just in keeping with the fates and chances which were always befalling' him. He wrote in April the first three chapters, i.e., the first installment in the monthly serial, published 30 April 1849, interweaving 'truth and fiction' very intricately and laying 'something of the author's life' underneath the fiction (Butt 115; *Letters* 5: 569 and n; Forster 2: 78, 98). David Copperfield, surely, was Charles Dickens's alter ego in whom some fiction was contained.

##### 2 David's Flirtatious Disposition

David Copperfield, articulated to the proctor's office of Spenslow and Jorkins in London, fell in love with Mr. Francis Spenslow's only daughter Dora at first sight, and got engaged to her. He wrote to Agnes, the lawyer Mr. Wickfield's only daughter and David's 'adopted sister' in Canterbury (Ch. 39), informing her that Dora was such a darling and was very blest; but he, while writing so, remembered Agnes's 'clear calm eyes and gentle face' (Ch. 34). He, it may be considered, is neither devoted to Dora nor single-minded in his affections.

When David suddenly learned that that his great-aunt Miss Betsy Trotwood, who was his guardian, was ruined, he told Dora that he was 'a beggar,' asking her if her heart was still his. 'Oh, yes, it's all yours,' cried Dora, though in a childish way (Ch. 37). She, it could be said, was simple-hearted, generous and gentle.

Mr. Spenslow, when told by David of his engagement with Dora, would never accept it; but he was to die soon.

David visited Agnes and told her of his troubles, kissing her hand, which she had given him looking up 'with such a Heavenly face!' After discussing their worries, David said, 'Much more than sister!' and Agnes parted 'by the name of Brother' (Ch. 39).

David and Agnes, it could be considered, trust each other affectionately. How would Dora feel, we wonder, if she looked on this sight?

Dora, introduced by David to Agnes, found her 'too clever' and was 'afraid of her.' She asked David, 'what relation is Agnes to you?' 'No blood-relation, but we were brought up together, like brother and sister,' replied he. Dora said, 'I wonder why you ever fell in love with me?' (Ch. 42). Dora, surely, did know of his flirtatious disposition and she could have left him forever, but she did not. As for David, he himself chose and married Dora, who was 'a Fairy, a Sylph' (Ch. 26), not Agnes, who had 'a very placid and sweet expression' and was her widower father's 'little housekeeper' (Ch. 15).

Soon David often quarreled with Dora over trifles. He said, 'Dora, my darling!' 'No, I am not your darling. Because you must be sorry that you married me, or else you wouldn't reason with me!' returned she. Dora, it is clear, was seeing a shadow of Agnes behind him.

However, after such altercations, Dora reflectively told him she would be 'a wonderful housekeeper,' polishing the tablets, pointing the pencil, buying an immense account-book, etc., though the figures would not add up. Now David was beginning to be known as a writer, and his 'child-wife,' as she asked him to call her, was trying to 'be good' (Ch. 44).

It might be considered that at this moment David should have said, 'Dora, my darling, I love you cordially and am very happy; even if you are not good at housekeeping and figures, you should not mind it at all because you are earnestly endeavoring to be good; as you know, I too am "a boyish husband as to years"' (Ch. 44).

David, without saying such things, tried to 'form Dora's mind,' but in vain, remembering 'the contented days with Agnes' (Ch. 48), he even considered that his own heart was 'undisciplined' when it first loved Dora, and that there could be 'no disparity in marriage, like unsuitability of mind and purpose.' His own heart, it can be suspected, *was* even now 'undisciplined' because he would have been attracted by Agnes's 'clear calm eyes and gentle face' more than by Dora's efforts to be good; he can be regarded as flirtatious, not as devoted.

Such being the case, he was much happier in the second year, the year that Dora fell ill (Ch. 48). She, with 'nothing left to wish for,' wanted very much to see Agnes, not her two spinster aunts, adding that she always was 'a silly little thing' and 'too young' not merely 'in years' but 'in experience, and thoughts, and everything,' and that she had begun to think herself 'not fit to be a wife' to her 'very clever' husband. She died leaving Agnes 'a last charge' that only Agnes 'would occupy this vacant place' (Chs. 53 and 62).

Was Dora 'silly' or 'not fit to be a wife'? By no means! Though she might have been childish and poor at housekeeping and figures, she was blessed with many respectable and lovable virtues; for example, she did not abandon David as a beggar, nor desert him despite her father's will and David's suspicious relationship with Agnes. She tried earnestly to be a good wife, accepted Agnes' and David's cleverness without defying them, looked down humbly on herself as silly and immature, and left her husband with Agnes foreseeing her death. How serious, benign, gentle and sympathetic!

On the other hand, David, even though 'very clever,' was obviously flirtatious, intolerant, and cold-hearted. He should not have introduced Dora to Agnes; far from it he should have broken off his relation with Agnes in choosing Dora, should have expressed his gratitude to her for her not abandoning him and for her trying to be good, should have been generous to her faults as Dora had been to his. He should have known that he had much of the responsibility for her feelings of insecurity when she said, 'I was too young' and 'you are very clever and I never was' (Ch. 53).

After Dora's death, David set out to travel to Europe, and 'mourned for [his] child-wife, taken from her blooming world, so young.' He tried to be 'a better man,' thinking that he 'might possibly hope to cancel the mistaken past, and to be so blessed as to marry' Agnes (Ch. 58). Whether or not he marries her, it can be said, depends on him, but he would have to humble himself and repent, not merely 'cancel,' 'the mistaken past' or his flirtatious mind.

He returned home after three years, and confided to Agnes, 'I went away, dear Agnes, loving you. I stayed away, loving you. I returned home, loving you.' How inconsistent! He had said that he 'mourned' for Dora when going away! As for Agnes, she replied, 'I have loved you all my life' (Ch. 62). How would Dora feel if she lived to hear the conversation? Dora, it may be considered, should have left David when she first met Agnes; it might have been because of Agnes's covert love for him that Dora was afraid of her!

Within a fortnight David married Agnes, after which she confided to him Dora's 'last request' and 'last charge' as mentioned above, and they wept together but they would not imagine with what feelings Dora had died; also, David did not utter any words of remorse and repentance for having been unable to make Dora happy (Ch. 62).

Ten years after the marriage, they had three children, and David had high income and renown as an eminent author. At this happy home, Dora was not talked of at all (Ch. 63).

It can be concluded that David was a man of a flirtatious disposition for which reason he lacked complete devotion to Dora. As will be discussed, that very disposition

was also Dickens's at that time.

### 3 Dickens's Flirtatious Disposition

Dickens had been looked upon as 'a very Joseph in all that regards morality, chastity, and decorum' as *Reynolds's Weekly News* wrote on 13 June 1858 (*Letters* 8: 745n.). He had been accepted as such a man publicly but was rather flirtatious-minded in his private life; in this section it will be revealed how flirtatious Dickens was.

Dickens was a serious Christian-minded man, but naturally he was 'a man' in the sense that 'there is no man that sinneth not' (1 Kings 8: 46; 2 Chron. 6: 36; see also John 8: 37, etc.). He was rather flirtatious; as he said, not so long after his marriage, to his wife Catherine, 'if either of [us] fell in love with anybody else, [we] were to tell one another' (Storey 96), and he did show 'an archly flirtatious attitude towards congenial girls and women of his acquaintance' (Slater, *D & W* 122).

Six of the 'girls and women' are taken up below. First, there was Mrs. David Colden, daughter of a banker of New York, wife of a lawyer and philanthropist of New York, and fourteen years Dickens's senior, with whom Dickens became acquainted during his first visit to America in 1842. Dickens was 'deeply in love with' her, and wrote a love-letter to her (Slater, *D & W* 122; *Letters* 3: 30n., 160, and also 242 and n, 219-20).

Second, there was Eleanor Emma Picken, a lithographer and a winner of the Society of Arts silver Isis medal in 1837, by whom Dickens was attracted. He flirted with her on the pier at Broadstairs on an evening in September 1841:

Dickens seemed suddenly to be possessed with the demon of mischief; he threw his arm around me and ran me down the inclined plane to the end of the jetty till we reached the tall post. He put his other arm around this, and exclaimed in theatrical tones that he intended to hold me there till 'the sad sea waves' should submerge us....I implored him to let me go, and struggled hard to release myself. (Slater, *D & W* 115)

Third, there was Christiana Jane Weller, a beautiful eighteen-year-old concert pianist in Liverpool, for whom Dickens conceived an 'incredible feeling' in 1844 (Slater, *D & W* 88-89; *Letters* 4: 53n., 55, etc.).

Fourth, there was Madame Emile de la Rue, wife of a Swiss banker, resident in Genoa, whose nervous disorder Dickens began to treat with his mesmerism from 23 December 1844 with so much fascination as to make Catherine very unhappy. This continued for a period of years afterwards (Schlicke 375; *Letters* 4: 243 and n, 534n.;

*Letters* 5: 11n.; *Letters* 7: 224 and n).

Fifth, there was Miss Anne Romer, actress and singer. Dickens performed with her, on 20 July 1848, the farce of *Used Up*, in which Dickens played the bored hero Sir Charles Coldstream, and she played his lover Mary. In Act II, Sir Charles, who is in distress, asks her to say, 'you love me.' She replies, 'Love you!' Then he 'seizes her in his arms, and kisses her'; they marry at the play's end (Thomson 46-49; *Letters* 5: 362n.).

Two days after the play, Dickens wrote a letter to Mrs. Cowden Clarke, member of his Amateur Theatricals:

I have no energy whatever--I am very miserable. I loathe domestic hearths. I yearn to be a Vagabond (i.e. as Coldstream, disguised as a ploughboy, is called by Farmer Wurzel in Act II).

Why can't I marry Mary! [. . . . .]

I am deeply miserable

A real house like this, is insupportable after that canvass farm wherein I was so happy (i.e. Wurzel's farm). What is a humdrum dinner at half past five, with nobody (but John [i.e. CD's servant John Thompson]) to see me eat it, compared with *that* soup [i.e. the pea-soup that Coldstream is given by Mary in Act II], and the hundreds of pairs of eyes that watched its disappearance!

(*Letters* 5: 374 and n; emphases added)

In this quotation there can be read not only Dickens's flirtatious mind but also his loathing for domesticity. In the letter of 13 January 1849 quoted below, he even shows his dislike for Catherine:

My Dear Mrs. Clarke.

I am afraid that Young Gas [i.e. Dickens's name as manager of the Amateur Theatricals Company in 1848] is forever dimmed, and that the breath of calumny will blow henceforth on his stage management, by reason of his enormous delay in returning you the two pounds non forwarded by Mrs. G. [i.e. Catherine]. The proposed deduction on account of which you sent it, was never made.

--But had you seen him in "Used up",  
His eye so beaming and so clear,  
When on his stool he sat to sup

The oxtail--little Romer near

&c &c

--you would have forgotten and forgiven all.

(*Letters* 5: 476 and n; emphases added)

Sixth, there was Miss Mary Boyle, daughter of Vice-Admiral the Hon. Sir Courtenay Boyle, second son of the 7th Earl of Cork and Orrery; she was a distant cousin of Mrs. Watson's and a miscellaneous writer and renowned amateur actress, whom Dickens first met at the Watsons' Rockingham Castle on 27 November 1849. On the 29th he and Boyle played, as part of the house-party entertainments in the Hall, Sir Peter Teazle and Lady Teazle from Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, and also acted, from chapter 41 of *Nicholas Nickleby*, some scenes of the mad neighbour's [i.e. Dickens's] throwing a shower of vegetables to Mrs. Nickleby [i.e. Boyle] to display his affection (*Letters* 5: 662 and n; Boyle 231-32; Ackroyd 606).

On November 30 Dickens wrote a letter to Mrs. Watson: 'Plunged in the deepest gloom, I write these few words to let you know that, just now, when the bell was striking ten, I drank to H.E.R. [i.e., Mary Boyle]!' adding a picture of a heart shot through by Cupid's arrow (*Letters* 5: 663).

Three days later he sent to Miss Mary Boyle a parody by him of Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, 'inspired by Mary Boyle's graces in the Rockingham Castle Amateur Theatricals' (*Letters* 5: 665 and n, 708-09), part of which is as follows:

No more the host, as if he dealt at cards,

Smiling deals lighted candles all about:

No more the Fair (inclusive of the Bard's)

Persist in blowing all the candles out.

\_\_\_\_\_

No more the Fair prolong the cheerful tread

Of dancing feet until the lights low burn:

No more the host, when they are gone to bed,

Quickly retreats, foreboding their return.           (*Letters* 5: 708)

Mary Boyle joined in his theatricals on 15 January 1851 at Rockingham Castle, where she acted Mary, the lover of Sir Charles Coldstream, again played by Dickens in *Used Up* (*Letters* 6: 163n., 225 and n, 261n.; Slater, *D & W*404).

Dickens wrote a joking, flirtatious letter, based on the play in which he disguised himself as a ploughman, to her on 25 December 1852:

My own darling Mary.

[.....]

you ant no cause to be jealous for all that I am certain beforehand as I shall a Door her O Mary wen you come to read the last chapter of the next number of Bleak House I think my ever dear as you will say as him what we knows on as done a pretty womanly thing as the sex will like and as will make a sweet pint for to turn the story on my heart alive for such you are [...].

(*Letters* 6: 835-36)

Dickens ended this letter with an 'x' which represented a kiss and the closing of 'This is a Kiss my dear' with the blot of a fingerprint between 'Kiss' and 'my.'

In a series of letters from Dickens to Boyle, Ada Nisbet finds 'a gradual increase in intimacy from "My Dear Miss Boyle" (in 1850) to "Beloved Mary" (in 1856)' and 'something of Dickens's restless dissatisfaction with the domestic hearth *before* he fell in love with Ellen' (Nisbet 81; Fielding 323).

One of the letters which he, with a cold, wrote to Mary on 15 March 1856, was somewhat like one to his wife: 'Then it is my dear that I wish you were with me, occupying Tavistock House and forgetting mankind' (Nisbet 82; *Letters* 8: 72).

These instances illustrate Dickens's flirtatious temperament sufficiently, so it may be deduced from them that David Copperfield's flirtatious disposition was a reflection of Dickens's own.

#### **4 Dickens and Catherine in the Years 1847-51**

Dickens married Catherine in 1836 and separated from her in 1858; Catherine bore 10 children and had 2 miscarriages over 16 years (i.e. from 1836 to 1852). She had a hard delivery of the seventh child Sydney in April 1847, followed by a miscarriage in a railway carriage in December, after which she was not well for over two weeks. She would be pregnant with the eighth son Henry around March 1848, and was not very well for some days of July and August. Dickens promised her that she should have Chloroform for her confinement, which was 'almost as bad a one as its predecessor,' though its use was rather opposed in London and Catherin's doctors were 'dead against it'; it 'did wonders' for the birth on 16 January 1849 (*Letters* 5: 486-87 and nn.). Three days before that, i.e. on January 13, he had written the letter as quoted above, which

makes us feel his dislike for Catherine; in fact, his wife's younger sister Miss Georgina Hogarth might have been a more substantial housekeeper for him, as he wrote 'my little housekeeper Miss Hogarth' in a letter of 29 August 1850.

In September 1849, while he was writing *David Copperfield*, Dickens was cementing his weekly periodical *Household Words*, whose first issue was published on 30 March 1850. The periodical made him, its 'Conductor,' very busy; he wrote 'about a fourth' of it, did 'extensive' editorial revision, and 'condensed' the material to make each number twenty-four pages (except for nineteen numbers with twenty pages) (Lohrle 14-15, 19).

He was often overworking, 'getting on like a house afire in point of health' and 'not being very well' on 10 July 1849; he had 'so many to write every day' and his 'state of mind' was 'not a wholesome one [...] not a natural one' on 1 February 1850; he worked 'like a Steam Engine' on March 14, and was 'as busy as a bee' between 'Copperfield and Household Words' on June 11. He was off with Daniel Maclise to Paris for 'having again broken [his] head with hard labor' and for undergoing 'so much fatigue from work' from June 23 to July 1.

Catherine, who would have been pregnant around October 1849, bore, on 16 August 1850, the ninth child who was named 'Dora' after David Copperfield's wife. Dickens wrote to Catherine on August 21, 'I have still Dora to kill—I mean the Copperfield Dora.' That Dora was killed in Ch. 53 of the monthly No. 17 (Chs. 51-53) which had been completed on August 22 or 23 (Butt 167-68).

Dickens had been working 'nine hours at a stretch' on August 19, 1850 and did the same also on 20th, and wrote on 23rd about Catherine and the baby, 'Kate, brilliant! Ditto, little Dora!' (*Letters* 6: 155). He had been working for 'eight hours at a stretch' and for 'six hours and a half' on Ch. 55 of *Copperfield* on September 14 and 15 respectively, and had been in the 'tremendous paroxysm of Copperfield' from September 16 to 22 or 23. On September 20 he had '[his] eye on "Household Words"—[his] head on Copperfield—and [his] ear nowhere particularly.' He finally finished writing *Copperfield* on October 23.

Apart from this work, by September 3 he had begun preparations for the Dramatic Festival in Knebworth, and his amateur theatrical company played three performances in the Festival on November 18, 19 and 20 (rescheduled from the original plan of 'the last week of October').

He had been 'so very unwell' since December 1 that he could hardly hold up his head during 'a bilious attack' on December 4. Still he performed three plays at Rockingham Castle on 15 January 1851; but on January 24 he was 'still feeble, and liable to sudden outbursts of causeless rage, and demoniacal gloom' (*Letters* 6: 266).



His daughter Dora was 'very ill' on February 3; Catherine, being 'very unwell' and suffering from her 'violent headaches' for some time before March 11, was ordered to go to Malvern to treat a nervous illness on March 13 (*Letters* 6: 309n.). Her illness is interpreted as 'probably abnormally long-lasting attacks of migraine combined with post-natal depression' (*Letters* 6: ix), but it would be probable that Dickens's 'attack' and 'liab[ility] to sudden outbursts' as well as Dora's illness had something to do with it.

### 5 Dickens's Home Dissatisfactions

Dickens's loathing for domesticity and dislike for Catherine has already been touched on above; certainly, he entertained such feelings. He expressed it as 'a vague unhappy loss or want of something' in *Copperfield* (Chs 35, 44, 58). John Forster called it a 'sad feeling' for Dickens, and Forster associated it with the kind of 'home dissatisfactions and misgivings' that Dickens manifested in letters in 1854:

the so happy and yet so unhappy existence which [...] finds its dangerous comfort in a perpetual escape from the disappointment of heart around it. [...].

I have had dreadful thoughts of getting away somewhere altogether by myself. If I could have managed it, I think possibly I might have gone to the Pyrenees [...] for six mouths!

(Forster 2: 196; *Letters* 7: 354, 428 and n, 523-24n.)

Later in February 1855, Dickens alluded to some home dissatisfactions, relating David Copperfield's sense of loss with his own in a letter to Forster:

You will hear of me in Paris, probably next Sunday, and I may go on to Bordeaux. Have general ideas of emigrating in the summer to the mountain-ground between France and Spain. Am altogether in a dishevelled state of mind--motes of new books in the dirty air, miseries of older growth threatening to close upon me. Why is it, that as with poor David, a sense comes always crushing on me now, when I fall into low spirits, as of one happiness I have missed in life, and one friend and companion I have never made? (Forster 2: 197; *Letters* 7: 523 and n)

Hence, it may be considered that David's 'unhappy loss or want of something' was Dickens's; furthermore, David's view that 'There can be no disparity in marriage, like

unsuitability of mind and purpose' (Ch. 48) would have been Dickens's, too, as Dickens wrote in the letters of May 9 and May 25, 1858:

I believe my marriage has been for years and years as miserable a one as ever was made. I believe that no two people were ever created, with such an impossibility of interest, sympathy, confidence, sentiment, tender union of any kind between them, as there is between my wife and me. (*Letters* 8: 558)

Mrs. Dickens and I have lived unhappily together for many years. Hardly any one who has known us intimately can fail to have known that we are, in all respects of character and temperament, wonderfully unsuited to each other. I suppose that no two people, not vicious in themselves, ever were joined together, who had a greater difficulty in understanding one another, or who had less in common. (*Letters* 8: 740; Violated Letter)

Dickens would have imparted to Dora Spenslow some image of Catherine. Actually he might have regarded Catherine as a poor housekeeper as he wrote, 'she has never attached one of them [her children] to herself' (*Letters* 8: 559), and might have considered Georgina Hogarth as his 'little housekeeper' as he called her 'the best, the most unselfish, and the most devoted of human Creatures' in a letter of 1858 (*Letters* 8: 559-60). Though he had a 'tender concern for his wife' (*Letters* 6: ix), it is certain that Dickens had some home dissatisfactions.

## **6 Dickens's Frivolity**

On 14 April 1851, when Catherine was still at Malvern, Dora died suddenly, as if doomed by the letter in which Dickens wrote about having 'Dora to kill.' As his carelessness with his daughter's name reveals, he was frivolous as well as flirtatious.

Indeed, he was frivolous also in his technique in creating *David Copperfield*, in which he should not have included an autobiographical element. Since David was an alter ego of Dickens, some readers would associate Dora with Catherine in such scenes as when David calls his wife 'child-wife' and says, '[t]here can be no disparity, like unsuitability of mind and purpose' (Ch. 48), and Dora says, 'I have begun to think I was not fit to be a wife' and 'you are very clever, and I never was' (Ch. 53), and dies of illness, saying to Agnes, 'only [you] would occupy this vacant place' (Ch. 62).

Could we suppose that this story failed to sadden Catherine? Catherine, it seems, shared Dora's grief for years before the separation, as we know from a letter which Dickens wrote in 1858:

For some years past Mrs. Dickens has been in the habit of representing to me that it would be better for her to go away and live apart; that her always increasing estrangement made a mental disorder under which she sometimes labours -- more, that she felt herself unfit for the life she had to lead as my wife and that she would be better far away. (*Letters* 8: 740)

In short, this novel was written 'just in keeping with the fates and chances which were always befalling [Dickens].'

## **7 What Advanced Dickens's Secularity**

Dickens, though a serious Christian man, was not perfect in morality. His Christianity would have been able to control his secularity in 1846 when he was so earnest an Anglican as to assert, 'religion [...] must be the basis of the whole system' and as to write a little version of the New Testament for his own children, the version which he himself called 'the children's New Testament' (*Letters* 4: xii, 554, 573). But that control was clearly weakening in 1849 as David's flirtatious disposition reflects. Probably one of the factors which advanced his secularity would be his amateur theatricals, which debuted in September 1845 and whose activity intensified in 1848, so enabling him to get familiar with young actresses during his sexual abstinence for the term of Catherine's pregnancy (*Letters* 4: xxii; Forster 1: 376; *Letters* 5: xix-xx).

Three more factors may be considered: the first is his overwork, which would have robbed him of his calm faculty of reason and self-control; the second is his rapidly increasing popularity and income, which would have made him tend to overconfidence, self-conceit and faithlessness. Last is the existence of scandalous, gossipy friends, who would have had an influence on his morality, like George Henry Lewes (who, along with his wife Agnes, liked free-love, but who separated from her for bearing her lover's children and chose to live with Mary Anne Evans or George Eliot from 1855)(Haight 179), Wilkie Collins (who lived with a widow of Caroline Graves and her five-year-old daughter from 1856)(*Letters* 8: 105 & n., 651n.; Clarke 109, 111), John Everett Millais (who married John Ruskin's wife and Millais's model Effie in 1855 after her marriage was annulled)(*Letters* 7: 517 & n.), Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton (who separated

legally from his wife Rosina in 1836 but was continually denounced by her)(*DNB*, 'Bulwer-Lytton'), etc.

Thus, Dickens tended to be flirtatious, frivolous, and deficient in his faithful sympathy for Catherine.

## **8 Conclusion**

David Copperfield was an alter ego of Charles Dickens, and the former's flirtatious, frivolous dispositions were the latter's. David's character and the autobiographical element in the novel make us readers very uncomfortable; in this sense *David Copperfield* can not be recognized as a masterpiece. The novel gives off an odious smell foreboding Dickens's later peripetia.

### ***A Tale of Two Cities***

#### **1 Dickens in the Year 1858**

##### **(a) Dickens's Ingratitude**

Dickens, through the separation, made an ungracious, unthankful breach with the Hogarths except Georgina Hogarth, and with friends like William Bradbury, Frederick Evans, Mark Lemon, William Thackeray, etc., and lost most of Miss Burdett Coutts' confidence in him. Some details are as follows.

George Hogarth, who met Dickens in summer 1834, 'continued to help Charles Dickens in his career' and frequently invited him to his house (*Letters* 1: 54-55n), through which Dickens got intimate with his eldest child Catherine, marrying her in April 1836. He was 'proud of his in-laws' connection with the highest cultural circles in Edinburgh' (Schlicke 270).

As to Catherine, she, who bore Dickens 10 children, no doubt played 'a vital role in domestic and social existence' for 'upwards of seventeen years' (Slater, *D & W* 162); it is quite natural that she should have said right before death, 'he [Dickens] loved me once' (Storey 164). Despite these facts, Dickens referred, in a letter to Miss Burdette Coutts dated 9 May 1858, to their 'miserable' married life 'for years and years' and to Catherine's perfect want of 'confidence' from her children. Further it was in a letter of 25 May 1858 to Arthur Smith, which was to be disclosed later both in America and the United Kingdom, that he wrote of a large unsuitability in Catherine's 'character and temperament,' 'the peculiarity of her character' and her 'mental disorder,' and he even denied his connection with Ellen Ternan in the letter (*Letters* 8: 648n., 740-41, 746 and n).

Bradbury and Evans, as mentioned above, had been Dickens's publishers since 1844,

and Mark Lemon was a prime member of Dickens's Amateur Theatricals. Evans and several of his sons also joined the Theatricals and worked for Dickens (*DNB*, 'Evans' 697).

As for Miss Burdett Coutts, she had been Dickens's close friend since around the year 1838 and been working together with him for social improvements; she even helped his eldest son Charley's education financially around 1845-52 and assisted Catherine concerning the separation (*Letters* 4: 373-74; *Letters* 6: 4 and n; *Letters* 7: 3 and n).

Unthankfully and ungraciously Dickens broke relations, quite or almost completely, with these people along with his wife.

### **(b) Dickens's Defeats**

Dickens seems to have considered the separation too lightly; according to Catherine's belief, he 'expressed a wish that we should meet in society, and be at least on friendly terms' (*Letters* 8: 749). However, he had to suffer many miserable defeats for the breakup. Four of them are presented below.

First, his relation to Ellen was leaked to the public on May 14, 1858, and so he was exposed to dreadfully disgraceful gossip and scandal; second, he was so much shocked as to be 'like a madman' when Catherine left him in May 1858 (Storey 94).

Third, he could not anticipate that Frederick Evans and Mark Lemon, who both served as Catherine's co-trustees in the separation, would reject to print the 'Personal' statement he wrote to justify the separation in their weekly magazine *Punch* for June 16 despite his wish to get 'their aid to the dissemination of my [Dickens's] present words,' although *The Times* had published it on June 7, 1858 (*Letters* 8: 608n).

Fourth, he was very much 'shocked and distressed' to find that *New York Tribune* for August 16 disclosed his 'private and personal' letter to Arthur Smith mentioned above and that British newspapers for August 30 and 31 reprinted the article' (*Letters* 8: xxv, 568n., 648 and n, 746n.).

The disgraces and defeats Dickens encountered would have worked to make him conscious of and regret his crime, and to lead him to recover his sincere Christian mind within him, since he was so serious a Christian as to have never abandoned his 'own private prayers, night and morning' (*Letters* 12: 188).

## **2 Reflections of Dickens's Mind in the Novel**

It was at the scene of the grave of the protagonist Richard Wardour Dickens was playing in *The Frozen Deep* that the first notion of *A Tale of Two Cities* occurred to him

(CD, *TTC* xiii; *Letters* 8: 510n.). The notion is believed to have been 'Representing London—or Paris, or any other great city—in the new light of being utterly unknown to all the people in the story,' as he wrote down on the night of Friday, September 4, 1857 in 'a little book,' viz. his Book of Memoranda (*Letters* 8: 432 and n; Kaplan 14).

He touched on a vague idea of falling to work on 'a new book' in a letter of 27 January 1858 to John Forster, and wrote to him about three days later that he decided to 'get to work' on a new story with the temporary title of *One of These Days* which might possibly be published 'next October or November' (*Letters* 8: 510-11 and nn). He asked him, on 15 March 1858, for advice on the title of the story presenting three new titles including *The Thread of Gold*, which was to be adopted as the title of Book II of *TTC* (*Letters* 8: 531 and n).

Such being the case, most of the image of the story would have been formed in his mind, but he could not begin writing until Feb 1859 because there had happened in the meantime a peripetia in his life, i.e., the separation by which he was exposed to scandal and gossip.

It was in a letter to Forster dated 11 March 1859 that he wrote that the name for the story was *A Tale of Two Cities*; and he placed the first installment in his newly-published weekly magazine *All The Year Round* for April 30.

During the year's postponement, the characterization of Sydney Carton, who was the successor to Richard Wardour, would have inevitably been influenced by the events of that year, the year when Dickens, though having a covert mistress in Ellen Ternan, denied the fact, when he was criticized by people for the event, and when he repeated ingratitude and had to endure his own defeats. He was a serious Christian as he made a little version of the New Testament for his children and as he wrote in a letter of 1868, 'I have never abandoned it [the practice of saying prayers at night and morning] myself, and I know the comfort of it' (*Letters* 12: 188; see also *Letters* 12: 202). Through the prayer he could not help evoking his consciousness of a crime or of the violation of two of Moses' Ten Commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery' and 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour' (Exod. 20: 14, 16).

Thus Carton, a barrister with 'deep wounds' in his heart, was created to take on a self-depreciative, remorseful, conversional, redemptive disposition. Below, these aspects of Carton's disposition will be exemplified.

Firstly, the self-depreciative disposition can be found in words like 'wine' (p. 77; page references are to CD, *TTC*), 'drinking' (79), 'sensuality' (144), 'profligate' (143), 'dissolute' (197), 'degradation' (144), 'worthless' (197), 'my misdirected life' (145), 'he has a heart he very, very seldom reveals, and that there are deep wounds in it' (198), 'dog' (197), 'As to

me, the greatest desire I have, is to forget that I belong to it (i.e., this terrestrial scheme)' (77), etc.

Secondly, the remorseful and conversional one can be represented by two examples: first, Sydney Carton, who saw 'a mirage of honourable ambition, self-denial, and perseverance' before the morning blast, and who shed the tears of remorse on the bed of his own chamber, the remorse that he thought would never reproach him again and that could not help evoking a feeling of conversion within him (Bk. 2, Ch. 5).

The 'mirage' Sydney Carton saw may be considered an allusion to 'the wonders of an equinoctial dawn' which Dickens saw in the 'night so completely at odds with morning' on a long walk from London to Gad's Hill after turning out of his bed at two in the morning of October 15, 1857, the long walk Dickens recalled in 'The Uncommercial Traveller (Ch. 13)' of *All the Year Round* for 21 July 1860 and in *Great Expectations*, Ch. 44, published on 1 June 1861 (*Letters* 8: 466-67n., 489; *Forster* 2: 232; *Storey* 97, 229).

The other of the two examples of remorse can be found in Carton's own words, as follows:

"I fear you are not well, Mr. Carton!"

"No. But the life I lead, Miss Manette, is not conducive to health. What is to be expected of, or by, such profligates?"

[ . . . . . ]

Looking gently at him again, she was surprised and saddened to see that there were tears in his eyes. There were tears in his voice too, as he answered:

"It is too late for that. I shall never be better than I am. I shall sink lower, and be worse."

He leaned an elbow on her table, and covered his eyes with his hand. The table trembled in the silence that followed.

[ . . . . . ]

"I know you would say this to no one else. Can I turn it to no good account for yourself, Mr. Carton?"

He shook his head.

"To none. No, Miss Manette, to none. [...] Since I knew you, I have been troubled by a remorse that I thought would never reproach me again, and have heard whispers from old voices impelling me upward, that I thought were silent for ever. [...]. "

(Bk. 2, Ch. 13)

Lastly, as to Carton's redemptive or conversional disposition, it may be detected in

his three times-and-a half repetition of the teaching of Jesus Christ, Who 'died for our sins' (1 Cor. 15: 3; Matt. 20: 28, 26: 28; Gal. 1: 4, etc.): 'I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die' (The Order for the Burial of the Dead in *The Book of Common Prayer*; John 11: 25-26).

Carton, who had 'deep wounds' in his heart, had redemption on his mind, and the mind itself was Dickens's own.

Dickens must have been made to suffer guilty, remorseful, conversional, and redemptive feelings, have sought salvation in Jesus Christ, and have been determinately conscious of being a resurrectionist, as he had once identified himself back in the early 1830s (*Letters* 1: 76-77n.; Sanders 37). He continued to maintain that identification from then on, and died a resurrectionist, as we can know from the fact that he had written down 'the resurrectionist and the life' in his last writing on 8 June 1870, i.e., Chapter 23 of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (cf. Schlicke 492)

*A Tale of Two Cities* is the first novel Dickens wrote after committing a high sin. It is sure that, ironically, his sin worked to give a certain grave reality and tight tension to Sydney Carton's guilty, remorseful, conversional, and redemptive disposition.

### ***Great Expectations***

#### **1 Dickens in the Years 1859-60**

##### **(a) Dickens's Defeats**

Dickens's defeats continued in 1859 as well; first, he wrote in a letter of 1 February 1859, 'My affairs domestic [...] flow peacefully,' and also touched on the education of all his sons proudly, but his third son Frank, who was at school in Germany to study 'Medicine,' gave it up at the end of May for his stammering and returned home by the end of August 1859; second, his second son Walter had a great debt in Calcutta, some of which his eldest son Charley refunded for him around October or November 1860 on his way back from China (*Letters* 9: 21 and n, 71, 120); third, Dickens's second, beloved daughter Kate got engaged to Charles Allston Collins, twelve years older and delicate, by October 1859, though she never loved him and Dickens objected to the betrothal. She married him on 17 July 60, only to find 'an escape from "an unhappy home"' (Storey 105). After the couple left Gad's Hill for France for their honeymoon, Dickens sobbed, 'But for me, Katey would not have left house' (*Letters* 9: 309; Storey 106).

The case mentioned next has no direct relation with the separation, but it is no doubt that it gave a further blow to his damaged mind; that is, Dickens's youngest brother Augustus, whom Dickens loved and cared for, calling him Bob, deserted his wife



who had lost her eyesight after the marriage in 1848, emigrated to America with another woman in 1857, and offered a monetary support to Dickens through another brother's wife in November 1859; which Dickens rejected by writing to her, 'I despaired of his ever being right. [...] I have no hope of him' (*Letters* 9: 160).

Incidentally, Alfred Dickens, the second of Dickens's three living younger brothers and the most reliable of them, died of disease after lying in bed for only three weeks on July 27, which was ten days after Kate's marriage.

### **(b) Dickens's Conversion**

Dickens made his own character Scrooge go through 'conversion' in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) (*Letters* 7: 704). He would not have supposed at all that the time would come when he himself must be converted. The time did come, soon after he sobbed for Kate's marriage in 1860; he was resolutely and wholeheartedly converted. Three grounds for the conclusion are provided below.

First, he decided to sell the Tavistock House on around 2 June 60, and accepted 'the Money' from the purchaser on August 21 (*Letters* 9: 286, 291).

Secondly, he burned 'the accumulated letters and papers of twenty years' in the field at Gad's Hill on September 3, saying, 'Would to God every letter I had ever written was on that pile' (*Letters* 9: 304; Storey 106-07). On that day he would have gained a fresh start in life or performed his regeneration or new birth.

Lastly, Dickens's fifth son Sydney passed the examination as a Naval Cadet on 14 September 1860, and Dickens took 'the Admiral' down to Portsmouth to make him join HMS *Britannia* on September 24 (*Letters* 9: 315-16, 318, 320). It would be this time that Dickens urged him to keep the practice of saying a prayer night and morning and to follow the teachings of the New Testament not to go wrong. The proof can we get from his letter of 28 May 1865 to his fourth son Alfred, in which he wrote 'in parting from you, as in parting from Sydney & Frank I tell you that if you humbly try to guide yourself by the beautiful new testament, you can never go wrong: also that I hope you will never omit under any circumstances to say a prayer by yourself night & morning' (*Letters* 11: 48; *Letters* 12: 734). The same directions did he give to his seventh son Edward and his sixth son Henry both in 1868, too (*Letters* 12: 188, 202). It is quite natural that we should not be able to detect the directions to his second son Walter Dickens, because he had left for India one month before the final performance of *The Frozen Deep*, namely on July 20, 1857.

## **2 A Recasting of *David Copperfield***

It was in a letter of 8 August 1860, viz. 22 days after Kate's marriage, that Dickens referred to the germ of *Great Expectations*: 'I am prowling about, meditating a new book.' He wrote on October 4 to Forster, 'Last week I got to work on the new story. [...]. The name is GREAT EXPECTATIONS.' In early October, he wrote again to him, 'The book will be written in the first person throughout [...]. I read *David Copperfield* again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe' (*Letters* 9: 325).

From this we should know, for one thing, that the original idea of *Great Expectations* occurred to Dickens immediately after his thorough conversion, and, for another, that the work was created as though it was a sequel or recasting of *David Copperfield*.

If we take *Great Expectations* as the recasting, in what points would it have been recast? There may be counted three: first, the main faulty characters in *Great Expectations* accomplished deep conversion while no villains in *David Copperfield* went through it; in other words a non-conversional novel was replaced by a conversional one. Details are as follows.

In *David Copperfield*, Edward Murdstone, who, along with his sister Miss Jane Murdstone, bereaved his wives of prosperity through marriages, remained a fraudulent person of religion (Ch. LIX); Steerforth, vicious seducer, was drowned after sinking in the sea with a wreck; Uriah Heep, fraud and conspirator, and Littimer, seducer and robber of his master's money, were both arrested and put in a prison with the system of 'making sincere and lasting converts and penitents,' but they only pretended to be 'penitents' and remained 'perfectly consistent and unchanged' (Ch. LXI).

In *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham, who left the orphan Pip mistaken and fostered the orphan Estella into a revenger on all the male sex for her, in spite of her original intention to 'save her [Estella] from misery like her [Havisham's] own,' was made aware of her fault by Pip and fell down upon the ground, crying over and over again, 'What have I done! What have I done!' 'Take the pencil and write under my name, "I forgive her!"' (Ch. XLIX). In short, she was praying, 'Father, forgive me; I knew not what I did' (Dickens, *Life of Our Lord* 102; Luke 23: 34).

Magwitch, who was transported for life to Australia for prison-breaking, succeeded in trades there and became Pip's patron secretly. He came back to see Pip at the risk of death by the rope. Pip was shocked by his appearance, but he decided to save him who was blessed with a disinterested mind though still rough enough to carry pistol and knife. When he and Magwitch were about to take a foreign ship on the Thames, they were checked by the men of the Custom House on a galley. Magwitch, who found on the ship Compeyson, informer and the worst of scoundrels, jumped at and fought with

him in the river. While Compeyson was drowned, Magwitch was rescued with severe injury and was removed to the infirmary for his serious illness. He, who was so much softened as to be 'humble and contrite' by Pip's daily visit to read the Bible, said at the court, 'My Lord, I have received my sentence of Death from the Almighty, but I bow to yours' (Ch. LVI). Finally he died, though not by hanging, thanks to Pip's writing out petitions, hearing of the existence of his daughter Estella from Pip; instantly Pip remembered a passage in the Bible they had read together: 'two men who went up into the Temple to pray,' and he prayed, 'O Lord, be merciful to him a sinner!' (Ch. LVI; Luke 18: 10, 13).

Both Miss Havisham and Magwitch died completely converted or repentant Christians (cf. Parker 292-93).

### **3 Pip's Ingratitude, Defeats and Penitence**

Pip, who may be regarded as the successor to David Copperfield, is in a sense an alter ego of Charles Dickens's. He goes, like Dickens, through ingratitude, defeats and penitence.

Pip set his benefactor Joe down as coarse, common and ignorant, and felt 'disgusted with' Joe's calling and life and 'ashamed of' his home (Ch. XXXIX; Ch. XIV); he 'deserted' Joe as well as the clever orphan Biddy ungraciously under the 'delusion' that he could be a gentleman by marrying Estella and inheriting Miss Havisham's fortune, though Joe and Biddy both expressed much wonder at his notion; Pip, in coming to the finger-post at the end of the 'very peaceful and quiet' village, broke into tears, being 'more sorry, more aware of (his) own ingratitude' than before (Ch. XIX).

Afterwards he encountered many defeats: he had to accept the escaped convict Magwitch as his patron; his heart was broken by Miss Havisham and Estella; he was arrested in a severe illness for his debt after Magwitch's death, and was helped out of prison by Joe's clearing off the debt for him. Eventually Pip apologized to Joe, saying penitently, 'Strike me, Joe. Tell me of my ingratitude. [...] O God bless this gentle Christian man!' (LVII).

Still more defeats ensued; Joe left him after his recovery since Pip grew cold to him as he got stronger. Pip followed Joe and returned to him down and out like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-31), to propose to Biddy, but she had just finished marrying Joe. Pip, in a great shock, congratulated them and apologized to them cordially for having been 'thankless,' 'ungenerous and unjust,' and he begged them to 'pray tell me, both, that you forgive me!' (Ch. LVIII). Pip was now a contrite Christian man.

#### **4 What the Two Partings Symbolize**

Pip left the village twice; at the first parting he broke into tears at the finger post, saying, 'Good-bye, O my dear, dear friend!' (Ch. XIX). The tears symbolize Dickens's remorseful parting from the Hogarths including Catherine and his close friends, and also his uneasy, covert life he would have to spend with the young Ellen Ternan. At the second departure, Pip asked Joe and Biddy to go to the finger-post before saying 'good-bye' (Ch. LVIII) and the silent farewell there symbolizes Dickens's fresh start in life, regeneration or new birth after obliterating the past days through the burning as related above.

#### **5 Estella's Conversion**

Pip returned to Joe and Biddy after working in the East for eleven years, and walked over to the spot where Satis House had been, where he ran into Estella. She, who had been separated from her brutal husband Bentley Drummle, became so much softened and friendly as to ask him to repeat what he had said to her when she had broken his heart: 'God bless you, God forgive you!' (Chs. XLIV, LIX). In her we could find a well-converted Christian mind, too.

#### **6 Reflections of Dickens and Catherine in the Novel**

We could find in Bentley Drummle some image of Charles Dickens, who treated Catherine cruelly as shown in the letters to Miss Coutts and Arthur Smith from him in 1858, and to Mrs. Stark from Miss Helen Thomson in 1858 (*Letters* 8: 559, 632, 740-41, 746, etc.).

Analogously we could detect in Estella some image of Catherine, who could not have been perfect as a housekeeper as no woman is. One of her inconsiderate behaviours might be considered her acceptance of 'an annual income of £ 600' concerning the separation, by rejecting, after having once accepted, Dickens's term of '£ 400 *p.a.* and a brougham,' the change of which Dickens was to accept with fury: 'Whoever there may be among the living, whom I will never forgive alive or dead, I earnestly hope that all unkindness is over between you and me' (*Letters* 8: 578), and with dissatisfaction: 'as generous as if Mrs. Dickens were a lady of distinction, and I a man of fortune' (*Letters* 8: 566n., 741). He referred to it as a burden later in his letter of 6 June 1867 and in his Last Will (*Letters* 11: 377; *Letters* 12: 732).

#### **7 What Pip's Reconciliation with Estella Symbolizes**

Pip responded to Estella's asking, 'God forgive you!' with 'We are friends.' 'And will

continue friends apart' was Estella's reply. This reconciliation might be taken as Dickens's message to Catherine; he, who clearly went through a complete conversion, would have been repeating in his mind, 'Forgive me, ...,' as Miss Havisham did. So he could be reconciled with Catherine psychologically, but not physically, because he was with Ellen: 'No man can serve two masters.'

In association with this, we should remark that he referred to Catherine, in a letter of 11 Mar 1861 to W. H. Wills, as 'my Angel Wife,' in which we might feel consideration as well as irony, because he was already living as a penitent Christian, because at about the same time he mentioned Joe, who appeared to care for Pip under arrest for his debt (Ch. LVII, published in *All the Year Round* on 27 July 1861), as 'Ministering Angel Joe' in his Working Note (Stone 323), and because he was never behaved by her with hostility unlike Bulwer-Lytton, whose separated wife Rosina continued to hate him in public after the separation. Besides we should also notice that he never deserted Catherine, as we know from the fact that he called her 'my wife' while he called Ellen Lawless Ternan 'Miss Ellen Lawless Ternan' in his 'Last Will' (*Letters* 12: 730, 732). We should not think little of this description, because there were near him persons who forsook their wives: Dickens's youngest brother Augustus Dickens (1827-66) abandoned his wife around 1850 (*Letters* 5: 445n.), and George Henry Lewes (1817-78) did his in July 1854 (Haight 127). Furthermore we should pay attention to the fact that Dickens repeated the idea of 'never desert' in Pip's relation to Magwitch; namely, Pip, though having 'once meant to desert' Magwitch, eventually 'never deserted' him, only to be tied with him like a true parent and child (Ch. LVI) as Magwitch had once said to Pip, 'I'm your second father. You're my son' (Ch. XXXIX). Hence we might gather that Dickens might have resolved never to desert Catherine during his conversion, although he might have meant to desert her once.

Thus Pip and Estella changed their 'errant' hearts into their 'innocent' ones by going through their wholehearted conversion; viz., they became penitent, contrite Christian men. The transition from the non-conversional novel of *David Copperfield* to the conversional one of *Great Expectations* could not be accomplished without Dickens's own conversion; the greatest reason that *Great Expectations* may be specified as a masterpiece is that Dickens's truth was woven superbly into it; as a result *Great Expectations* forms a great *Bildungsroman*.

## Conclusion

*David Copperfield* cannot be classified as a masterpiece due to David's flirtatious, frivolous character and the autobiographical element of the work; his dispositions are

suggestive enough to make us anticipate Dickens's breakup in 1858. *A Tale of Two Cities*, the first work written after Dickens's being exposed to gossips and scandals concerning the separation, had the protagonist Sydney Carton in whom Dickens's self-depreciative, remorseful and redemptive mind was mirrored. The germ of *Great Expectations* occurred to Dickens soon after his wholehearted conversion around July 1860; the novel was created as if a recasting of *David Copperfield*; and all the main characters in the work went through a thorough conversion, growing into penitent, contrite Christian men, though no villains in *DC* were converted.

Each novel evidently reflected Dickens's reality or mentality at the times when it was written; therefore, all the novels are serious, deep in thought, and full of a sense of tension, and no one of them could be satisfactorily understood unless Dickens's reality or mentality of the times was grasped; *Great Expectations* naturally forms a splendid *Bildungsroman*.

#### Note

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