THE DICKENS NOVEL ON THE VICTORIAN STAGE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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1970

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the kind assistance of numerous librarians in the United States and England, especially Mrs. Jane Gatliff of The Ohio State University inter-library loan office, this project could never have been begun.

Without the painstaking criticism of my adviser, Professor R. D. Altick, and the encouragement and effort of my wife, Sharon, it would never have been completed.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When Nicholas Nickleby has the honor of attending a farewell dinner for theatre impresario Vincent Crummies he meets a most unusual "literary gentleman," a man "who had dramatized in his time two-hundred and forty-seven novels as fast as they had come out--some of them faster than they had come out." He is introduced to Nicholas with "a high eulogium upon his fame and reputation." To the casual modern reader this "literary gentleman" probably seems to be merely another member of Dickens' great gallery of comic humbugs who live well on credit they do not deserve. Such a reader, however, is likely to be surprised by the vehement verbal attack Nicholas makes on the man, for it is consistent with neither Nicholas' character nor Dickens' usual practice. In the course of his denunciation Nicholas calls the man's adapted plays "unmeaning farrago[s] of garbled extracts" and "outrages," and he equates the practice with "picking a man's pocket in the street."

Actually this passage is more important than it appears to most modern readers, for Dickens is here putting into his hero's mouth his own bitter reaction to a common
dramatic practice of the age. At that time no copyright law protected a novelist from having his works adapted for the stage, with or without his permission, by anyone who wished. The assumption, carried over from the eighteenth century, was that a novel and a play were completely different literary forms, so that no theft was involved in using the plot and characters from one form to create a new work in the other. As a result, few if any of the really popular nineteenth-century novels escaped the larcenous pen of the dramatic adapter. As soon as a novel became widely read, the chances were good that a dramatist writing for a particular company and playhouse would reshape it for the stage. Although Scott and Dickens provided the greatest treasures for adapters, even such minor but popular authors as Mrs. Henry Wood, Bulwer-Lytton, Pierce Egan, and Harrison Ainsworth had their works plundered for the stage. Some dramatists indeed, like the "literary gentleman" in Nicholas Nickleby, made whole careers of adapting novels (as well as French plays) for the British theatre; between 1830 and 1870 "the stage was swamped with secondhand plays."4

One can easily understand why this practice of borrowing novels for the stage frequently aroused Dickens' wrath. He had already seen each of his first three novels appear on the London stage, not once but several times, in spite of his expressed wishes. Since his novels were all published serially, the adapter's desire to be the first to seize on a
popular work (so that his play could run at least temporarily without competition) frequently meant that dramatic versions of a Dickens novel, usually complete with a happy ending, would appear on the London stage before Dickens had even finished writing the book, "hot-haste" adaptations as William Archer called them.\(^5\) (This explains how the "literary gentleman" could dramatize some works "faster than they had come out.") Add to this practice the frequent liberties the adapters took with their sources, such as interpolating songs and dances or putting absurdly inappropriate speeches into the mouths of Dickens' favorite characters, and it is not at all hard to understand the anger Dickens frequently felt and on one occasion uttered through Nicholas.\(^6\) John Forster even records that Dickens was so offended when he attended an early adaptation of *Oliver Twist* that, "In the middle of the first scene he laid himself down upon the floor, in a corner of the box and never rose from it until the drop-scene fell."\(^7\)

But despite Dickens' frequently dim view of the practice of dramatic adaptation, it is surely some kind of testimony to the novelist's great and enduring popularity that his works have been so frequently reproduced, not only on the stage but, in modern times, on the motion picture and television screens as well. In the case of no other novelist, not even Scott, has the vogue to dramatize his works been so great or so long lasting. An anonymous critic
in 1871 was even moved to remark:

What will become of the English stage when the public has grown weary, if it ever does grow weary, of dramatic versions of the stories of the late Mr. Dickens? The number of new theatres increases, but the number of these stories must always remain the same. 8

Although it is extremely difficult to trace all the adaptations between the first (Edward Stirling's The Pickwick Club, March 27, 1837) and the most recent (such as the movie version of the musical Oliver! which won the Academy Award as the best picture of 1968, and the BBC telecast of David Copperfield shown in March 1970, to commemorate the centennial of Dickens' death), a study of various separate lists of such plays, none of them complete, reveals that there have been "well over 400," 9 some of them performed many times. F. Dubrez Fawcett, author of Dickens the Dramatist, is probably correct, therefore, in concluding that "Dickens has been the most prolific source of dramatic entertainment in all our literature." 10

Surely whether seen from the viewpoint of the literary critic, the dramatic critic, or the social historian, this persistence of Dickens' fiction on the stage is of considerable interest. It has received a fair amount of discussion in the past. A number of works on the subject, such as the chapter entitled "Plays founded on the works of Charles Dickens and on incidents therein" included in Frederick Kitton's Dickensiana (London, 1886), and more recently
Dorothy Pierce's "Special Bibliography of the Stage Versions of Dickens' Novels" (1936),¹ have attempted merely to list all the known adaptations. Others have tried to go somewhat deeper into the subject. T. Edgar Pemberton was the first to go beyond the listing of plays when in one chapter of Charles Dickens and the Stage (London, 1888) he brought together a number of miscellaneous comments from Dickens, Forster, some reviewers, and the adapters themselves and combined them with the known bibliographical facts and his own theatrical experiences. The result was an interesting collection of anecdotal material together with some shrewd intuitive insights. In the same vein the first full length study, S. J. Adair Fitz-Gerald's Dickens and the Drama (London, 1910), pulled together nearly all of the then available information about dramatists, production dates, casts, and reviewers' reactions, as well as the author's frequent dogmatic evaluations.

Unfortunately Fitz-Gerald's work is full of factual errors, and in a more recent effort to clarify, broaden, and correct it, Malcolm Morley produced a series of some twenty-five articles (Dickensian, 1946-1964) which make up the single most useful source for the student of Dickensian drama. They are, however, like Fitz-Gerald's work, written primarily to provide an accurate, descriptive stage history for each of the novels and short stories and thus include only incidental interpretive comments. Still another modern
study, by F. Dubrez Fawcett, misleadingly entitled *Dickens the Dramatist* (London, 1952), attempts to give a more understandable portrait of the history of adaptations by treating the whole group chronologically instead of novel by novel. Fawcett's study, however, is necessarily somewhat superficial since it tries to cover not only plays but radio scripts and movies as well, all in 230 pages. Finally, the most recent major study is Walter Lazenby's "Stage Versions of Dickens's Novels in America to 1900" (unpublished dissertation, Indiana University, 1962), a thorough and frequently perceptive study of its limited area.

Thus a great deal of work has been done which need not be repeated here. This study does not purport to be a complete stage history of Dickensian adaptations. It does not include historical materials on such matters as casts or production techniques except when such details help show what the adapters emphasized or how they treated particular scenes and characters. The reader interested in such materials cannot do better than consult Morley's *Dickensian* articles and Lazenby's exhaustive study of nineteenth-century American adaptations, which are by far the most complete and accurate sources of data.

Neither does this study attempt to cover the closely related subject of Dickens' lifelong interest in the theatre. That he nearly became a professional actor, wrote several plays, acted in amateur theatricals all his life, attended
the theatre regularly, knew personally many of the dramatists and major actor-managers, and finally found some outlet for his dramatic impulses in his public readings are well-known biographical facts which have been dealt with many times in the studies mentioned above, in the standard biographies by Forster and Johnson, and in such works as Marvin Rosenberg's "The Dramatist in Dickens" and Alexander Woollcott's *Mr. Dickens Goes to the Play.*

Unfortunately all the previous studies dealing with Dickens and the theatre are limited in two ways. First, the conclusions drawn about Dickens and the plays based on his novels are frequently either unsound or of dubious value owing to frequently poor scholarship, an imprecise use of key terms, or the willingness to generalize broadly from very limited evidence. Second, they fail to go far enough in drawing useful and legitimate conclusions about Dickens' novels themselves.

The first limitation manifests itself not only in numerous factual errors, but more importantly in frequent contradictions among various writers when they generalize either about the plays or about the nature of Dickens' art. S. J. A. Fitz-Gerald writes, for example, that "If there is any one author who most strongly appeals to the instinct of the actor and the dramatist, it is Dickens," yet Ernest Reynolds in *Early Victorian Drama* says flatly, "the genius of Dickens was essentially that of the novelist. Works such
as *The Pickwick Papers* and *Nicholas Nickleby* were not suited to the stage.\(^{16}\) On the subject of his characters, one finds such contradictions as, "His characters have the melodramatic tinge and strike one easily and forcibly . . . . for stage purposes they suit admirably an actor with a frank liking for caricature,"\(^{17}\) and "Dickens is very difficult to act . . . . to realize absolutely Charles Dickens' characters on the stage is extremely rare."\(^{18}\) Of Fagin specifically one writer says he is a "regulation stage type," a definite imitation of a character in a play by William Moncrieff;\(^{19}\) yet, says another, "there is no actor living can depict the agonies, the clinging to life, the stupor, the rage, and the sickening but just end of Fagin."\(^{20}\) Of Dickens' dialogue, "it was the gift of the dramatist rather than the novelist which enables Dickens to express the ramblings of a Mrs. Gamp";\(^{21}\) yet his dialogue in general was "not right for the stage."\(^{22}\)

In fact the writers on the subject cannot even agree about whether the plays succeeded. Forster wrote that "with a few rare exceptions, they were never very successful";\(^{23}\) and a more recent writer echoes him: "these Dickens plays have practically never been successful."\(^{24}\) On the other hand, Fitz-Gerald maintains that "a good majority . . . were quite substantial successes and drew crowded audiences for many months together,"\(^{25}\) and George Rowell says, "Dickens's novels emerged on the Victorian stage as melodrama, crude,
sensational—and tremendously successful." 26

The major source of these manifest inconsistencies is that the statements in conflict are usually not based on any thorough study of the plays or their performance histories, but upon the prejudices of the writers. This subjectivity shows up in an extreme form when Fitz-Gerald, for example, dismisses versions which modify the original too much, even if they were quite successful, with such comments as "a most villainous concoction, and not to be endured." 27

A more important limitation of all the previous studies is that, valuable as they sometimes are from the point of view of the stage historian, they are not designed to produce soundly-based critical insights into Dickens' artistry or his popularity. Most of them are descriptive rather than critical and are intended to show one facet of Dickens' great popularity while criticizing dramatists who tampered too extensively with the master's works. Even Professor Lazenby's work is written from a theatrical point of view rather than a literary one and thus puts much of its emphasis on the nature of the adaptations themselves rather than on what they imply about the nature of the novels.

Thus the several previous studies, because of their impressionistic and descriptive nature, are virtually useless to anyone interested in what the nature and popularity of the dramatic adaptations may show about Dickens' works and the Victorian public's response to them. A large body
of potentially valuable evidence about Dickens and his audience has, therefore, not been made use of. This work, therefore, is a systematic comparative study of some fifty plays whose texts are now available, as well as of several others whose texts have not been found, but whose major features can be reconstructed from reviews and other secondary sources. I have not, except in a few instances, attempted to extend this study beyond the 1870's, partly for practical reasons and partly because I am primarily interested in the nature of Dickens' appeal to his own age. Nor, largely for the same practical reasons, have I attempted to discuss the many plays adapted during this period from the novelist's short fiction.

Such a study of both the stage versions of Dickens' novels and contemporary comments on them can, I think, lead to some valuable insights into Dickens' popularity and the dramatic qualities of his novels. By comparing a given adaptation with its source and by comparing various adaptations drawn from a single source, then bringing to bear such knowledge as we have about each play's critical and popular reception, I expect to reach some concrete conclusions about what features of Dickens' works the Victorian mass public found most appealing and about the extent to which his audience was aware of and interested in his artistry and intellectual concerns. 28

Perhaps more important, such an investigation will, I
believe, throw considerable light upon the meaning and accuracy of the many critical references, contemporary and modern, to the dramatic nature of Dickens' novels. Even in 1913, Edgar Shannon was almost apologetic about discussing the matter because, "To say that Charles Dickens is one of the most dramatic of our English novelists is no doubt a trite statement." Like many clichés, Dickens' "manifest theatricality" means different things to different writers, but has rarely, if ever been discussed thoroughly. Yet it has been repeated so long and so often that it has the solid ring of established truth. To my knowledge, John Cordy Jeaffreson in 1858 was the first critic of Dickens to compare his novels to works written for the theatre: "Of the dramatic power of his scenes, it is needless to speak. All his novels . . . seem written with a view to their being put on stage . . . . His genius is eminently dramatic." Then in 1862 Ruskin said Dickens chose to speak in a "circle of stage fire"; in 1883, the well-known dramatic critic Dutton Cook said Dickens' books "abound in dramatic qualities"; and George Gissing in 1898 referred to "the dramatic conduct of his stories."

Several early twentieth-century critics continued to apply the cliché. Alexander Woolcott wrote in 1923 that "scene after scene in his tales is a-tingle with the electricity of the dramatic," and in 1927 the French literary historian Louis Cazamian referred to Dickens' "somewhat
crude dramatic sense" and declared his creative process "identical with that which one can find in the masterpieces of the stage." Then in 1941 Edmund Wilson made probably the most often-quoted use of the stage metaphor when he asserted boldly that Dickens was "the greatest dramatic writer that the English had had since Shakespeare."37

Nor has the comparison been less common among critics of our own day. In a discussion of Hard Times, John Holloway mentions "the hint of theatricality that is never quite absent in Dickens."38 Richard Stang says Dickens' novels "were meant to be dramatic, to have the same impact on a reader as a swiftly moving play,"39 and Gilbert Highet asserts that "Dickens conceived many of the most striking parts of his novels in terms of drama."40 Earle Davis writes that "he developed his action as dramatists approach the art of organizing a play,"41 and Martin Fido calls his treatment of evil "strongly theatrical."42 Most recently E. D. H. Johnson opens a chapter on the novelist's characters by saying they "are real in the same way that characters in plays are real."43

Clearly not all of these remarks, some centering on the term dramatic, some on theatrical (and many more using such terms as melodramatic and stagey), mean the same thing. Some are obviously pejorative, others laudatory, and still others simply interpretive. They refer to a multitude of different elements in the novels, and some are probably
unjustified. If such comparisons have any useful meaning, however, they must somehow relate Dickens' works to the real world of the stage. One way to test this cliche is to compare the novels themselves with their Victorian stage versions.

Stage historians agree that the drama of Dickens' day had virtually no artistic merits. Most new plays were written by ill-paid hacks who turned them out at great speed—hoping the fast-moving, suspenseful plots, exciting scenes, and broad comedy would attract the public. To the extent that effort was put into the creation of a play, it came from the managers who knew what the audience would like, actors who were skilled in playing the stock parts, and theatre technicians able to reproduce on the stage waterfalls, burning houses, and other sensational scenes. Whether one attributes the state of the drama to government regulation of the stage (through licensing and censorship), or to the crudeness of the audience, or to the temper of the age, it is clear that the English drama, which had declined into sentimentality and didacticism in the eighteenth century, sank to perhaps its lowest level in the nineteenth and remained there until approximately the last three decades of the century. Thus one should not be surprised that the dramatic versions of Dickens which were created in this context lack sufficient artistic merit to justify serious examination in their own right, interesting though
they are as reflections of both popular taste and the dramatic history of the age. These adaptations are not, however, all of a piece. They show great variety in emphasis and in the skill with which they are pieced together; nevertheless they generally reflect the shortcomings common to most of the serious drama of the age.

Besides the many forms of comic theatre (such as burlesque, pantomime, farce, and even animal extravaganza), the major dramatic form in Dickens' lifetime was melodrama, a notoriously ill-defined genre fully capable of including plays ranging from The Miller and his Men and The Silver King to Macbeth and The Conquest of Granada. As employed in relation to the early and mid-nineteenth century theatre, however, and as I shall employ it in this study, the term melodrama is somewhat more limited, though still flexible enough to include a wide variety of plays. The essential characteristic of Victorian melodrama is that its plot grows out of the conflict between pure good and pure evil, absolutes whose nature needs no examination. Almost without exception, such a play ends happily, with good triumphing over evil. In this sense, one can reasonably talk about a melodramatic plot structure: the good characters, usually including a handsome hero who loves the attractive heroine, undergo great vicissitudes at the hands of the villains; all obstacles are somehow overcome; the villains are defeated and punished; and the good characters "live happily ever
after." Only the playwright's ingenuity limits the superficial permutations he can construct within the formula.

The essential traits of characters within such a plot structure are designed to be easily and quickly grasped; because the villain, hero, and heroine must be immediately distinguished by the audience, the signs of their personalities (such as speech, gesture, and dress) are boldly exaggerated. Since the characters need have no more personality than is consistent with the black or white roles they have to play, no attempt is made to provide them with individuated personalities or to show their inner selves, and, in pure melodrama, they are consistently all good or all bad. Strictly melodramatic characters also seldom change, but when they do, the shift is sudden and obvious (illustrated by the conversion of a vicious and hateful father to a kind and loving one in a single short scene). In addition to the basic characters, the hero, heroine, and villain, melodrama in the nineteenth century frequently introduced such types as the pathetically mistreated child, the hero's comic assistant, the fallen woman, or the old man or woman who bewails the terrible plight the good characters are in. Because such simply-conceived characters are endemic to pure melodrama, it is both common and justifiable to describe characters drawn in this manner as melodramatic, but we must recognize that an essentially melodramatic plot can on occasion involve more fully drawn characters and that
melodramatic characters can appear in works without melo-
dramatic plots.

The effects melodrama in its purest form is designed
to create are elementary ones; tears over the plight of the
good characters, suspense about how they will escape it,
excitement over the spectacular action it involves, and joy
at their eventual success. One is not meant to gain any in-
sight into human nature or human existence from such a pro-
duction. Melodrama, which includes "almost all serious
nineteenth-century plays . . . to a greater or lesser ex-
tent,"50 aims to stir the emotions of the moment; to use an
old formula, it delights but it does not teach. To the ex-
tent that the genre implies any moral view at all, it is the
reassuring one that justice and virtue will triumph and gain
their deserved rewards. Melodrama thus offers the viewer a
temporary escape from his own world and sends him back to it
unchanged. Once again the term melodramatic is frequently
and legitimately applied to works which may not have melo-
dramatic plots, but which, either as wholes or in individual
episodes rely on stimulating such rudimentary emotional
responses.

The formula for melodrama, usually attributed to
Wilkie Collins, "Make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make 'em
wait," embraces not only sentimentality and suspense but
comedy as well. Dickens was being facetious, but accurate,
when in Oliver Twist he wrote, "It is the custom on the
stage, in all good murderous melodramas, to present the tragic and comic scenes, in as regular alternation as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky bacon" (chap. xvii). The comedy, like the serious action with which it frequently had little connection, was of the broadest, most widely comprehensible kinds. The comedy was frequently unrelated to the action; it often resulted from the antics of a supernumerary character who played no role in the melodramatic plot.

Since novels transferred to the Victorian stage usually received the melodramatic treatment described above, comparing Dickens' novels to the plays based on them highlights both the ways in which they were already susceptible to such treatments and those in which they required major modifications to fit the dramatic conventions of the popular Victorian stage. The following study, however, not only examines the melodramatic features or the lack of them in Dickens' works, but also deals with the broader but related subject of the fundamentally dramatic aspects of Dickens' approach to the novel. Comparing Dickens' novels to the melodramas (as well as to the few farces) his works inspired should yield some useful conclusions about Dickens' use of dialogue, his conception and presentation of character, his narration of single incidents, and his plot construction, as well as about the changes in his technique throughout his career. By examining Dickens' works from the perspective
of their dramatic mirror images, this study should at least deepen our understanding of the novelist's technique, his development, and his achievement.
Chapter I Notes

1 Chapter xlvi II. (Because pagination varies in different editions, all citations to Dickens' works will be by chapter. All quotations are from the Everyman edition.)


6 Ironically a few pages earlier Nicholas himself had played the role of intellectual pickpocket in "adapting" a French play for the use of Crummles' company. As we shall see, Dickens was not consistently opposed to the principle of adaptation. Some versions of his novels pleased him. Most, especially those produced while the novel was still being serialized, did not.


9 Walter S. Lazenby, Jr., "Stage Versions of Dickens's Novels in America to 1900" (unpublished dissertation, Indiana University, 1962), p. vi. (Hereafter cited as Lazenby.) In comparison, only some 250 plays have been based on the works of Scott. (H. A. White, Sir Walter Scott's Novels on the Stage, Yale Studies in English, LXXVII [New Haven, 1927], passim.)


11 Bulletin of Bibliography, XVI, 10, 30-32, 52-54.

12 JEGP, LIX (1960), 1-12.

13 (London, 1922).
Barry Duncan, for example (The St. James’s Theatre: Its Strange and Complete History 1835-1957 [London, 1954]) refers to "a study published since 1952" (no doubt Fawcett’s) which has "eight errors in twelve lines" about the first stage version of Oliver Twist. And my research has frequently shown that various sources give three or more dates for the first production of a play or give as many as three different authors for it.

"Dickens and the Stage," The Dickensian, XIII (1917), 125.

p. 142.


William Farren, "Charles Dickens Plays I have Seen," Cornhill Magazine, n.s. IX (1926), 85.


Actors By Daylight, I (1838), 334.


Marvin Rosenberg, 9.

I, 305.

Dickensian, I (1905), 164. (An anonymous review of a new Dickens play.)

"Dickens and the Stage," 124.


Oddly enough I have found no study of the critical or popular response to a single novel which considers the plays based on it. See, for example, Walter Dexter, "How Press and Public Received 'The Pickwick Papers,'" The Nineteenth Century and After, CXIX (1936), 318-329, and Arthur A. Adrian, "David Copperfield: A Century of Critical and Popular Acclaim," MLO, XI (1950), 325-331. Nor does George Ford’s Dickens and His Readers (Princeton, N. J., 1955) contain a single reference to the plays based on Dickens’ work.

30 The phrase is William Axton's, Circle of Fire (Lexington, 1966), p. 3.

31 Novels and Novelists, From Elizabeth to Victoria (London, 1858), II, 323.

32 See Unto this Last (1862) in Works, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London, 1903-1912), XXXVII, 31n.


35 Mr. Dickens Goes to the Play (London, 1922), p. 223.


45. Ibid.


47. See Reynolds, pp. 3-24.

48. See Reynolds, pp. 94-127.

49. For a discussion of these and other character types, see Michael R. Booth, English Melodrama (London, 1965), pp. 15-36.

CHAPTER II

THE PICKWICK PAPERS: EPISODIC COMEDY

Dickens' first novel, The Pickwick Papers, began monthly serialization in April 1836, and before it was completed in November 1837, it had become so popular that three full-length versions of it had already appeared on the London stage, much to Dickens' disgust. The first was probably Edward Stirling's The Pickwick Club, originally performed at the City of London Theatre on March 27, 1837. That Stirling was the very first adapter seems appropriate inasmuch as he was destined to be the most prolific of Dickens' adapters, producing versions not only of Pickwick, but also of Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby (two different ones), The Old Curiosity Shop, and Martin Chuzzlewit.

At the time of the play's production, the novel, whose sales had increased greatly after Sam Weller's introduction in the fourth monthly issue, was in its twelfth month, a little over half finished, but the play makes use of material in only the first ten numbers. There was quite enough in them to tempt, but perhaps bewilder, any adapter. The Pickwickian's deliberations had led to the journey of Pickwick, Tupman, Wardle, and Snodgrass on which they met the
vagabond actor, Jingle, and later the Wardles. After several comic misadventures, Jingle's elopement with Aunt Rachael had brought Pickwick back to London where he had met and quickly hired Sam Weller, and in consequence accidentally misled Mrs. Bardell into believing he was proposing. Before the eleventh issue, Pickwick, now accompanied by Sam, had left London again, and his travels had taken him to Eatanswill during the election, to Mrs. Leo Hunter's gala affair (where Jingle had reappeared in disguise and tricked Pickwick into an embarrassing appearance at the school for young ladies), to Ipswich and a strange lady's bedroom and hence a magistrate's court, and to Dingley Dell for a Christmas wedding. All this, not to mention the interpolated short stories.

Any dramatist attempting to adapt a play from these incidents obviously faced two basic problems: sheer bulk and episodicity. Stirling more or less solved the first by using a number of tricks that would prove common to nearly all Dickens adaptations: telescoping several scenes into one, omitting non-essential segments, cutting all but the minimum necessary dialogue, and summarizing some essential action in the speeches of characters not involved in it. The amount of material that could be compressed into a play by using these and other techniques is frequently amazing. Stirling and the other adapters of Pickwick, however, had little success in unifying the materials they selected from
the episodic story, which Brander Matthews once used, along with *Huck Finn*, as a paradigm of the kind of novel dramatizations of which "are foredoomed to failure."³

Ignoring the interpolated tales, Stirling produced a play of three acts and twenty-three scenes which "seemed to attract the public."⁴ Act I opens, as does the novel, at the Pickwick Club's deliberations, and then follows the Pickwickians on their travels, sticking closely to the book, through their meeting with Jingle. The first significant changes occur in the fourth scene, set at the dance. As in the novel, Jingle is wearing Winkle's coat so that his insolence is attributed to the Pickwickian and leads to Winkle's being challenged to a duel. But Stirling saves a scene by having the challenge take place at the dance instead of the next morning. He also economizes by introducing the Wardles at the dance and omitting the Military Day events. Thus three scenes from the novel are conveniently telescoped into one.

After a brief presentation of the near duel and the discovery of the mistaken identity, the action shifts to Dingley Dell where Tupman, who, in a shift from the novel, has accidentally shot himself, suddenly proposes to Aunt Rachael while the others are away at the Muggleton cricket match. Soon, however, the others return with Jingle, whom Rachael recognizes as the actor she was enamored of six months earlier. Making clear in an aside that he is
Interested only in her money, he soon persuades Rachael to elope with him, and the act ends in general uproar as their flight is discovered. The complex business of Jingle's duping Tupman is left out, again for economy, thus Jingle's villainy becomes less calculated.

Clearly much as been put into the act, primarily by the simple avoidance of elaboration. Dickens extends dialogue, comments on it, describes, at length, settings and gestures, piles detail on detail; his writing is, in short, always richly developed. Stirling's Pickwick is, in contrast, quite bare. One minor section from the near duel in chapter ii illustrates this nicely. Dickens devotes some time to the following dialogue, in which Winkle tries indirectly to get Snodgrass, his second, to have the duel stopped without the admission of cowardice a direct appeal would involve:

"Snodgrass," said Mr. Winkle . . . "Snodgrass, my dear fellow, can I rely upon your secrecy?" As he said this, he most devoutly and earnestly hoped he could not.
"You can," replied Mr. Snodgrass. "Hear me swear—"
"No, no," interrupted Winkle, terrified at the idea of his companion's unconsciously pledging himself not to give information; "don't swear, don't swear; it's quite unnecessary."
Mr. Snodgrass dropped the hand which he had, in the spirit of poesy, raised towards the clouds as he made the above appeal, and assumed an attitude of attention.
"I want your assistance, my dear fellow, in an affair of honour," said Mr. Winkle.
"You shall have it," replied Mr. Snodgrass clasping his friend's hand.
"With a Doctor—Doctor Slammer, of the Ninety-seventh," said Mr. Winkle, wishing to make the matter appear as solemn as possible; "an affair with an officer, seconded by another officer, at sunset this evening, in a lonely field beyond Fort Pitt."

"I will attend you," said Mr. Snodgrass. He was astonished, but by no means dismayed. It is extraordinary how cool any party but the principal can be in such cases. Mr. Winkle had forgotten this. He had judged his friend's feelings by his own.

"The consequences may be dreadful," said Mr. Winkle.

"I hope not," said Mr. Snodgrass. "The Doctor, I believe, is a very good shot," said Mr. Winkle.

"Most of these military men are," observed Mr. Snodgrass, calmly: "but so are you, an't you?"

Mr. Winkle replied in the affirmative; and perceiving that he had not alarmed his companion sufficiently, changed his ground.

"Snodgrass," he said, in a voice tremulous with emotion, "if I fall, you will find in a packet which I shall place in your hands a note for my— for my father."

This attack was a failure also. Mr. Snodgrass was affected, but he undertook the delivery of the note as readily as if he had been a Twopenny Postman.

"If I fall," said Mr. Winkle, "or if the Doctor falls, you, my dear friend, will be tried as an accessory before the fact. Shall I involve my friend in transportation—possibly for life!"

Mr. Snodgrass winced a little at this, but his heroism was invincible. "In the cause of friendship," he fervently exclaimed, "I would brave all dangers."

How Mr. Winkle cursed his companion's devoted friendship internally, as they walked silently along, side by side, for some minutes each immersed in his own meditations! The morning was wearing away, he grew desperate.

"Snodgrass," he said, stopping suddenly, "do not let me be baulked in this matter—do not give information to the local authorities—do not obtain the assistance of several peace officers, to take either me or Doctor Slammer, of the Ninety-seventh Regiment, at present quartered in Chatham Barracks, into custody, and thus prevent this duel;—I say, do not."
Mr. Snodgrass seized his friend's hand warmly, as he enthusiastically replied, "Not for worlds!"

A thrill passed over Mr. Winkle's frame as the conviction that he had nothing to hope from his friend's fears, and that he was destined to become an animated target, rushed forcibly upon him.

In the play, condensed and shorn of Dickens' commenting voice, the one and one-half pages (in the Everyman edition) become eight short lines:

Win. Snodgrass, can I depend on your secrecy?
Snod. You can hear me swear!
Win. No don't swear! It's quite unnecessary.

I—I want your assistance in an affair of honour!
Snod. (Taking his hand.) You shall have it.
Win. The consequences may be dreadful— I may be shot!
Snod. I hope not.
Win. Snodgrass, do not give information to the local authorities— do not obtain the assistance of the police, to take me to custody, and thus prevent the duel— do not, I say.
Snod. Not for the world.

Without the elaboration and authorial comment, it is not at all clear that Winkle's unrepeated request for secrecy is ironic, although a good comic actor might make the point by inflection and gesture. In adapted plays, extended humor just is not possible.

Act II, after introducing Sam Weller, complete with his idiosyncratic speech, and showing Jingle being bought off by Wardle, suddenly shifts to the Eatanswill episode, omitting any reference to Mrs. Bardell. Apparently realizing that the events at Eatanswill were insufficiently connected to the previous action, but wanting to include them for their humor, Stirling modifies the story by using the
time-worn device of disguise. He has Emily and Isabella Wardle show up at Eatanswill dressed as a maid and a servant girl, ostensibly to keep watch over their sweethearts. This shift elaborates the meagre love interest and provides a species of continuity between the Dingley Dell material in Act I and the Eatanswill material in Act II.

After the hustings are shown comically as Slumkey and Fitzkin strive to outpromise each other, the action shifts to Slumkey’s victory celebration (a substitute for Mrs. Leo Hunter’s ball) at which there is some comic business between the disguised Wardle girls and their sweethearts, before Jingle shows up. As in the novel, he is recognized but escapes, and Job Trotter tells the story of his master’s planning to elope that night, which soon leads to Pickwick’s embarrassment outside the ladies’ school. Pickwick is tied up and wheeled off in a barrow (a detail borrowed from another scene in the novel in which Pickwick drinks too much on a hunting expedition), later to appear locked up with a live donkey to end the act. Except for the disguised Wardle girls, Stirling is here following the novel closely despite the necessity for selection and condensation.

But the third and final act is a less faithful patchwork of some of the individually comic scenes from the novel. Included is a version of Sam’s visit to his newly-acquired stepmother and his meeting with her evangelical minister Stiggins, who turns out to be Jingle in disguise. Such a
shift tightens the plot somewhat by keeping to only one comic villain, but it also virtually disposes of Dickens' satire on ranting ministers since Jingle is not really a clergyman but merely a rogue disguised as one. The episode ends with an uproarious fight when Sam recognizes his old enemy.

The act also includes Pickwick's misadventures at Ipswich, but in another move for economy and perhaps continuity, Stirling has the woman whose room Pickwick enters by mistake turn out to be Rachael Wardle, who withdraws her charges as soon as she realizes whom she has accused. While Pickwick and the others are at the mayor's, Jingle again appears, once more disguised, and now called Fitzball, but Sam recognizes him and has him arrested for absconding with church funds. After such a tidy disposal of the villain, the play ends in traditional comic fashion at the Christmas wedding feast for Snodgrass and Emily.

Stirling called his work a "Burletta in three acts," which meant that it was not legitimate drama, but a play accompanied by music. The songs (twelve of them are interspersed including some unrelated popular tunes) were added because until 1843 only the two patent theatres, the Theatre Royal Drury Lane and the Theatre Royal Covent Garden, and (in the summer) The Haymarket, could legally put on straight, unembellished drama. This not only caused a tremendous increase in the seating capacity of these two legitimate
theatres, it also forced dramatists for the many other theatres to the subterfuge of adding songs to otherwise legitimate plays, thereby making them legally presentable at the other theatres. Many favorite comedies and tragedies, including Othello, Macbeth, and Hamlet were shown illegitimately via this stratagem, although the rule was not by this time strictly enforced.

Beyond its being an example of the burletta, however, Stirling's play is difficult to classify. Lazenby suggests that several genres are mixed: "Leanings toward melodrama in a story primarily meant as comedy of manners are evident." But the play is more aptly described as broad farce than as comedy of manners; with its comic songs, its slapstick fights, the disguises, and Pickwick in jail with a donkey, the emphasis is on broad visual (and verbal) comedy. Throughout the play, Stirling has de-emphasized the Pickwickians as a group, keeping only Snodgrass around for a comic romantic lead. Pickwick himself is of little importance and is shown as a flat, good-natured, humorous bumbler. What little unity the play has and most of its interest result from Stirling's emphasis on the broad humor of the two colorful low characters: Jingle (who is hardly sinister enough to be the villain of a melodrama) and the popular cockney, Sam Weller. In both cases the dramatist merely selected a few specific scenes from the novel and preserved parts of the dialogue. For characters as simply-conceived
as Sam and Jingle, such a technique is quite adequate since Dickens has already provided them with distinctive, humorous speech patterns sufficient to characterize each one the first time he opens his mouth. As the following pages will indicate, transferring the dialogue of such characters to the stage, while giving them proportionately enlarged roles, was to become a standard adapter's technique especially applicable to the earlier novels. It was to become, in fact, the primary cause of the great success of a number of Dickens adaptations. For Stirling's *Pickwick*, though, the attractiveness of Sam and Jingle was not sufficient to overcome for long the obviously unsatisfactory tying together of unconnected episodes. The play had only a moderately successful run of just over a month.

The second version of the novel, entitled *Peregrinations of Pickwick; or Boz-i-a-na*, appeared at the Adelphi Theatre on April 3, 1837, exactly one week after Stirling's version began its run. Apparently, however, it was written before Stirling's since the author, William Leman Rede, says, in an advertisement to the printed text, that it was created when only eight numbers of the book were out. Rede thus had less of the novel to cope with, but he produced in three acts and eleven scenes a less popular and less unified version than Stirling's.

Rede's play begins with a scene between Snodgrass and Clutchley, a moneylender, who does not reappear in the
printed text, although during the first twenty performances Clutchley must have been present in several scenes. Rede was trying to use one of Dickens' interpolated tales, "The Episode of the Queer Client," to provide the play with a serious plot involving Clutchley's daughter and her sweetheart. Although it is difficult to see how such a plot could harmonize with the other adapted materials, a Times reviewer said it was "introduced with tolerably good taste"; Rede explains in the advertisement to the printed play that this original version was "an hour too long.

After the twentieth night the serious scenes were cut out, and the piece was played as a farce in the shape in which it now appears in print." No explanation is offered, however, of why a vestigial Clutchley is allowed to remain in the opening scene only. At any rate, Snodgrass needs a loan to finance the Pickwickians' trip and gets it at 27% interest. Later Pickwick appears, reading the cabman's tall tale as he has recorded it, and the fight follows. Jingle, with his characteristic spasmodic speech, intervenes and all leave for Rochester. Aunt Rachael is introduced along with the non-Dickensian character, Norah, a stage Irishwoman provided as a confidante and singer of Irish ballads (including Wallace's Killarney). Only then is the dance shown, and although Jingle is wearing Tupman's coat, the resulting mistake in identity leading to the near duel is not used. In Rede's play Jingle meets Aunt Rachael here and almost
immediately convinces her to elope. He dupes a rather pompous Pickwick (who has made him a member of the club) into lending him £10, and as the company dance, the act ends with the fat boy’s announcement that the pair have eloped.

By introducing the Wardles at the ball (as Stirling had also done) and having Rachael meet and elope with Jingle in one night, Rede has, so far, condensed the plot even more than Stirling. Obviously missing is most of Dickens’ humor and the credibility the novelist had given the elopement by basing it on a previous courtship and developing Jingle’s machinations at length. About the only bright spot in the act is the insolent rogue, Jingle.

Like Stirling, Rede chose to begin his second act with the introduction of Sam in the inn yard, which is soon followed by the buying off of Jingle. Sam is a welcome addition, but Pickwick here appears as a pompous old fool capable of such lines as "Let me tell you, sir, I look upon you as a very great scoundrel; and, moreover, a man of very indifferent character." Soon Pickwick hires Sam, and after an intervening scene between Rachael and Norah, the act ends with a comic hodge-podge. Sam and Pickwick discuss for the audience their experiences at the election (such discussion is undramatic, but more economical than direct presentation, and Rede’s big problem was to condense the play sufficiently); Sam tells the story of veal pies made from cats; Pickwick, in a wheelbarrow because of lameness, gets drunk
and passes out; and, left alone, he is discovered by the irate landowner (Rachael's beloved Dr. Slammer!). As the act closes Rede outdoes Stirling in not only having Pickwick in jail, but in showing him, freed by Sam, ride away on the donkey.

A similar potpourri is Act III; Sam flirts with Norah, Pickwick announces a visit to Dingley Dell, Rachael and Slammer are to marry, and Tony Weller is brought in to tell about his son's education in the streets of London and about his wife's dealings with Stiggins. The second and last scene is the wedding party at Dingley Dell with which Stirling also had ended his play. All the characters are here, including Tony Weller, and for no good reason, Jingle, who shows up and is forgiven; Rede wanted a final tableau, and it would not do to omit Jingle who had been really the main character.

Rede had difficulty in managing his selections from the less than half-finished novel. He left out large blocks of material (including the near duel, the boarding school incident, the Ipswich Inn episode, and the Wardle girls) and moved others around in an attempt to fuse a love plot, in which Aunt Rachael becomes the leading lady, with the unconnected comic material. The love plot itself is jerky and much less convincing than Dickens had made it: Rachael loves Slammer (Act I, scene iii), but elopes with Jingle (Act I, scene iv); however, the elopement is stopped (Act II,
scene ii), and Slammer loves Rachael (Act III, scene i); so Slammer and Rachael marry (Act III, scene ii). To fuse the comedy with this plot, Rede selected a group of humorous speeches (as the Times review noted, most of the dialogue came out of the novel, especially that of Sam, Tony, and Jingle) and a few comic events, and glued them into a scene. As in Stirling's version, songs were also introduced to make the play legal, and the reviewer remarked, "Mrs. Fitzwilliams, as Norah ... amused the audience both by her acting and singing. In the last act a somewhat incongruous interpolation of Jim Crow was introduced." And like Stirling's version, Rede's omitted all satire and de-emphasized Pickwick himself in favor of the more overtly comic characters.

The Times praised the play, noting that "the difficulty of dramatising a series of adventures, of which the principal merit exists in the subdued humour of the style in which they are told [Certainly the play's humor was anything but subdued.], has been overcome: and if the piece be shortened at least one third, it will be the best thing that has been brought out at the Adelphi this season." Yet the play ran at the Adelphi for less than a month before being transferred to the Surrey for a last few days. Rede was aware of his play's defects and recorded his frustration as an adapter in the advertisement to the printed play: "The unfitness of the Papers for the purposes of the drama, I
believed ere I began this task, and know now." Unfortunately, he did not explain why he chose to adapt The Pickwick Papers when he suspected, from the start, it was not dramatizable. There is no record that he ever again adapted a Dickens novel for the stage. The Adelphi Theatre continued to stage such versions, but most of them were to come from Stirling's pen.

By the time the third version of Pickwick appeared on the London stage on July 10, 1837, the novel was in its fifteenth monthly number, so a good deal more material was available than either Stirling or Rede had had to work with. William Thomas Moncrieff, the author of Sam Weller, or, the Pickwickians, also had the examples of Rede's and Stirling's not very successful plays before him as he wrote. As the title implies, Moncrieff had hit upon what was later to become a major adapting device, focusing a piece drawn from Dickens on a secondary character. Stirling had come close to this when he de-emphasized Pickwick and made Jingle and Sam the more important roles, but it was Moncrieff who saw that the story of Pickwick could be made more unified and comically appealing by introducing Sam at the start rather than in Act II as both Stirling and Rede had done. Moncrieff also attempted to include nearly everything from the novel, the result being a long published text (3 acts, 18 scenes—over 150 pages) in which many offstage events are merely summarized in dialogue. A warning accompanies
the text; "Some of the Parodies in this Drama are omitted on
the Stage, on account of the length of the representation."

Moncrieff opens his play with the popular Sam Weller,
shown in the inn yard talking in his accustomed manner to a
chambermaid, and singing a song. The dramatist then re­
turns to an earlier point in the novel to show Pickwick's
altercation with the cabman, which is broken up by both Sam
and Jingle. Sam suspects Jingle immediately, thus setting
up one of the major plot lines, and Jingle verifies Sam's
suspicions in an aside before coming to Pickwick's aid.
Soon both Sam and Jingle have joined the Pickwickians on
their journey, and Moncrieff must face the problem of how to
work Sam into the Dingley Dell episodes. The action shifts
to the military review where the Pickwickians, who have lost
Jingle, meet Wardle and the ladies, and all pair off as in
the novel. To give Sam something to do, Moncrieff trans­
plants from later in the novel a comic exchange with the fat
boy and has Sam sing *Jim Crow.*

Only later does the audience learn of Jingle's having
left the others as a result of the borrowed coat incident
which Jingle summarizes for Job Trotter. Continuing his
practice of clarifying and elaborating Jingle's villainy,
Moncrieff has him explicitly outline his plans to "pluck"
the Pickwickians and marry a rich heiress. Jingle soon puts
his plan in motion as he rejoins the Pickwickians, goes with
them to Dingley Dell, rationalizes his long absence for the
captivated Rachael, and lies to her that Tupman, her other suitor, has been tried for bigamy. Like his predecessors, but with much more detail (mistletoe kissing and dancing all around, Job Trotter disguised as Rachael to fool Tupman), Moncrieff ends his first act with news of the elopement, leading to frantic preparation for pursuit. It is clear, even from such a summary, that despite the author's attempt to play Sam up by introducing him early, what unity the act has comes from the antics of Jingle and the flirtations between Wardle women and Pickwickian men.

Unlike his predecessors, Moncrieff chose not to dramatize the climactic paying off of Jingle. Instead he summarizes it as Sam talks to Pickwick when Act II opens. No doubt Moncrieff felt a demand for economy here as he began to include a line of action which neither Stirling nor Rede had touched. Both of them had had available the humorous scene in which Pickwick, in telling his landlady Mrs. Bardell that he has hired Sam, misleads her into thinking he is proposing, but because Dickens had not yet shown his hand, neither adapter had known where this was to lead, so both simply omitted Mrs. Bardell. Dickens having meanwhile given his latest adapter more to work with, this material becomes the major action of Moncrieff's Act II, scene 1, complete with Mrs. Bardell's swooning into Pickwick's arms just as Sam and the others come in. Pickwick then announces to them that he is to nominate a friend for the Eatanswill election
and invites them to come along since the Wardles will be there.

The Eatanswill election incidents are then merged into one long scene. Jingle as Captain Fitztory shows up as Fizkin's campaign leader; Pickwick, who, of course, supports Slumkey, and the Wardles and Sam are here as well. As the scene ends, Slumkey wins in the oral balloting and a melee breaks out between the factions. Since he had introduced Jingle in this scene and had Pickwick recognize him as an impostor, Moncrieff could have afforded to omit Mrs. Leo Hunter and her party altogether. But apparently unwilling to leave out the spectacle of a masquerade party with dancing and waste the possibilities involved in disguise, he devotes the next scene to an invitation to the party and the various plans the characters make. As in Stirling's version the Wardle girls are a good deal more vivacious, pert, and lively than in the novel (Isabella, for example, is even given a mildly bawdy aside about the horns her sweetheart is wearing as part of his costume). Also in this scene Trotter and Jingle plan the boarding school episode to get back at Pickwick for having led their political opposition. This is in marked contrast to Stirling's version in which Trotter conceives the whole trick on the spur of the moment when Sam collars him at the masquerade.

Immediately Moncrieff shows his audience the garden of Miss Tabby's boarding school, where Wardle, Snodgrass, and
Winkle have been summoned to protect the ladies from a "notorious libertine's" scheme to elope with one of the girls. The men hide in the garden and hear Pickwick, actually waiting for Jingle, incongruously allude to the breach of promise suit Mrs. Bardell has brought against him. Thinking that they have an accomplished rascal to deal with, Winkle, Snodgrass, and Tupman ambush him in the dark and thrash him, to the accompaniment of Haydn's *Surprise Symphony*. (In the course of this slapstick scene, the cook accidentally gets the seat of his pants riddled with bird-shot.) When the Pickwickians find out they have pummeled their leader, they pretend to believe Pickwick has really been involved in an affair of the heart and twit him, but Wardle recognizes that there has been a hoax. Thus Stirling's and Rede's rather gross ending of the scene with Pickwick in jail is avoided by having his real identity known. Moncrieff's version is closer to the book in this respect and is also more sophisticated in its comic appeal than is having Pickwick jailed with an ass. Moncrieff either did not try, or could not find a way, to introduce his title character, Sam, into this scene. The following one does include him, although it is essentially unconnected to anything else and could easily be left out of the play. In it Sam merely talks to his father about the new Mrs. Weller's involvement with "the shepherd."

The last scene of the act finally gets to the party
prepared for several scenes earlier. Its primary action, beyond the introduction of all the characters in their costumes, shows Emily and Isabella Wardle, unrecognized in their disguises, flirting with Snodgrass and Winkle. During the general dance, Emily recognizes Jingle in his costume, and Sam redeems himself for letting Trotter con him by collar- ing both rascals as the act ends. In his use of Emily and Isabella in this scene, Moncrieff has not only adapted Dickens, but has adapted Stirling's adaptation of Dickens.

Continuing to preserve as much of the novel as possible, Moncrieff works into his third and final act a lengthy version of Pickwick's misadventures at Ipswich (using Aunt Rachael as Stirling had done for the woman whose room Pickwick enters by mistake). Jingle shows up as the judge's prospective son-in-law, Fitztory. He is recognized but, as in the novel, must not be punished because of the embarrassment it would cause the judge. Then the action shifts to Pickwick's misfortunes with Mrs. Bardell, but Moncrieff chose not to show the trial scene itself, the scene which decades later became a staple of Dickens' public readings as well as of several one-act plays. The play follows the novel closely in that Pickwick chooses jail instead of paying the damages and Sam connives to have himself jailed too. In the Fleet, Pickwick once again encounters Jingle and Trotter, now reduced to real poverty and deprived of much of their former flamboyance.
At this point comes Moncrieff's most creative touch. He did not yet know how Dickens was going to end the novel, but he could not end his play with Pickwick in jail. Like many adapters to follow him, he showed great ingenuity, if no genius, in providing a pat conclusion: Jingle simply tells Sam that Mrs. Bardell is actually his wife and hence cannot possibly sue anyone for breach of promise! She, thinking he was dead, had plotted with the lawyers Dodson and Fogg to fleece Pickwick. Immediately Sam and Jingle leave, soon to return with the news that Dodson and Fogg are in Newgate for conspiracy to defraud and that Pickwick is not only free but is to receive £300 damages. This he graciously gives to Jingle and Trotter who are properly contrite and ready to reform. The Wardles and Pickwickians have all arrived just in time to escort Pickwick home. Coincidentally in the final scene they walk through the London streets just after Victoria's accession. All the couples are to wed, including Sam and Mary, and the play ends in a pageant of Beefeaters and populace as Sam leads the singing of God Save the Queen. What the last two scenes perhaps show is that Moncrieff without Dickens is distinctly inferior to Moncrieff stealing from Dickens.

Moncrieff himself was certainly pleased with his exertions as he made clear in a long "Advertisement" prefixed to the printed text; it well illustrates the temper of a man who, as we shall see, was later to engage in a brief but
vicious war with Dickens over the propriety of adapting novels for the stage:

It will be quite supererogatory to point out the numerous instances in which I have been obliged, for the purposes of the Stage, to depart from my original, as the Papers are in every body's hands, and the deviations speak for themselves; it may be sufficient to say, that I have, in no instance, I trust, departed from the spirit of my prototype, however greatly I may have been compelled to vary their form and bearing; and that I have endeavoured to make the quantity of original matter, I was necessitated to write, amalgamate, not unworthily, I trust, with the materials borrowed from MR. DICKENS. It would have been a much more easy and genial task for me, to have written an entirely original work . . . . The Papers had been pronounced to be wholly undramatic;--two very talented gentlemen, to use a newspaper term, had both attempted the task, and failed--the one, from sticking too closely to his original--the other, through departing too widely from it. It struck me, they were to be made dramatic. I knew well their author had never contemplated the production of them in a dramatic shape, or he would have formed a regular plot, and given a continuity to his work, which alone is wanting, to rank it with the finest comic fictions of any age or country. The success of my undertaking has justified my judgment. Some apology is due to Mr. Dickens, for the liberty taken with him, in finishing his work before its time; but the great increase of popularity, which it must have received, from my putting it on the stage, will, I think, more than excuse a step, to which I was urged, rather by circumstances than desire . . . . he had never contemplated his matter could have been so compressed, and his incidents put in so connected a form, as they assume in "SAM WELLER!"

Despite Moncrieff's satisfaction with his adaptation, and despite the fact that it is a more thorough, and, perhaps consequently, a more unified version than either Rede's or Stirling's, it was severely criticized in the Examiner by a writer who noted the play's inherent flaws and its basic
failure to duplicate the novel's tone. After referring to Moncrieff's apologia the writer continued,

It would be well if Mr. Moncrieff had acted a little more in accordance with the spirit he professes, and if, when the insertion of his own sheer nonsense and vulgarity could serve no dramatic purpose, he had been content to let the characters say something a little more resembling the wit and humour what [sic] has been set down for them by their originator.

Although far superior to any similar attempt that has yet been made, this piece presents exactly the same fault as its predecessors. There is the same jumbling together of scenes and incidents; the same broad coarse caricature of some of the happiest touches in the original book; the same total absence of perception, both on the part of the dramatist and the actors, of that delicate satire and deep meaning—often hid below the surface—in which the author of the Pickwick Papers, in common with all great comic writers, is so eminently and peculiarly happy.18

He elaborated rhetorically: "what third-rate actor in nankeen pantaloons and a cotton nightcap with a narrow fringe of black hair behind, can realize our idea of that mixture of simplicity, delicate feeling, and kindness of heart—that most rare and original compound of artlessness, shrewdness, benevolence, and oddity—which beareth the name of Pickwick."19 By the end of the novel, Pickwick himself becomes, by the slow accretion of innumerable details, a thoroughly developed character who can neither be summed up easily in words nor shown effectively in the brief confines of the stage.

Apparently, however, the displacement of Pickwick as the main character did not bother the audience who crowded the house every night,20 primarily drawn by the portrayals
of Sam, his father, and Job Trotter. These are admittedly more immediately striking characters than Pickwick both in their relative simplicity and in their distinctive dialogue. The Examiner's reviewer noted that "the scenes between Sam and his father, in which the dialogue is taken nearly verbatim from the original work—and especially that in which the valentine is read—are among the best and richest specimens of low comedy we have ever seen." These characters work better than Pickwick himself on the stage because, while he impresses one gradually through slowly developing acquaintance, the others strike one forcibly and immediately by being drawn with a few brilliant strokes. It is the difference in nature that, I believe, explains why the introduction of Sam Weller in the fourth monthly number was largely responsible for the increase in the book's sales from 400 to 500 when it began to 40,000 in the end. In the novel Sam is no finer a creation than Pickwick; he may, in fact, be inferior, but his appeal is much more immediate and obvious. As a result he was the more effective character on the stage (as well as in the serialized novel), at least as far as the common readers or viewers, who made up most of the audience in the theatre, were concerned.

This analysis is borne out by the strong trend present in the first two plays, carried further in Moncrieff's, and taken still further later in the century, to shift emphasis away from Pickwick himself and onto the more striking Sam
or Jingle. And Moncrieff's approach to the adaptation led to practical results: the play initially ran four months, until the season ended on October 12, "a long run in those days," and when the Strand reopened on April 16, 1838, the play, revised somewhat as a result of the novel's having been concluded, was still the main attraction, as it ran for another six weeks.

In large measure these three adapters agreed about what was likely to succeed on the contemporary stage. All of them used Pickwick's altercation with the cabman and the consequent introduction of Jingle; all used (although Moncrieff only by dialogue summary) the borrowing of Winkle's coat; all included the elopement of Rachael and Jingle (Stirling and Moncrieff preserved the whole love triangle) and the payoff of Jingle (although Moncrieff again only alluded to it); Moncrieff and Stirling included Mrs. Leo Hunter's ball, Pickwick at the girls' school, Pickwick's "proposal" and the bedroom confusion at Ipswich. All attempted to structure the plays with a traditional comic love story. On the other hand, none made any reference to the two young medical students, the humbugging newspaper editors, the Pickwickians' comic confusions over horseback riding, the finding of the curious engraving, Pickwick's meeting with Dodson and Fogg, or the interpolated tales (although Rede had originally tried to do so). In all the versions, Sam and Jingle, for reasons already explained, are
the major parts. Apparently the adapters were not wrong in judging their public's taste in the matter, although only Moncrieff's version gained wide popularity.

A fourth immediately contemporary version of Pickwick is of some interest in showing both the popularity of the novel and the ethics of the adapting playwright: The Pickwickians; or, The Peregrinations of Sam Weller "Arranged from Moncrieff's Adaptations of Charles Dickens' Works by T. H. Lacy" (a sometime author and publisher of a well-known series of plays which began in 1849). According to the printed text it was "Performed at the Belfast, Cork, Athlone and Norwich Theatres, 1837" with Lacy as Jingle. It is nothing more than a condensed plagiarism of Moncrieff's play, accompanied by a prologue, borrowed from the opening scene of Stirling's version, which "may be omitted, without injury to the Story." From then on it is Moncrieff's play with some dialogue and episodes (Mrs. Hunter's masquerade, Pickwick's misadventures at the girls' school and bedroom blunder at Ipswich, and the final romantic pairing off) omitted. Interestingly there is one addition to the play: the by then famous trial of Bardell vs. Pickwick, complete with the long opening speeches by Buzfuz and the testimony of Mrs. Cluppins, Winkle, and Sam. If indeed this play was produced on a provincial tour, Lacy apparently felt that Moncrieff's successful version would thus be made even more appealing. If, on the other hand, the play was never
produced but merely created so that it could be published in volume one (new series) of Lacy's Acting Editions, as I suspect for reasons that will be clarified in the following chapter, then Lacy must have felt the play would be more acceptable to readers and amateur theatrical groups with the trial scene included.

Performed or not, Lacy's "arrangement" of Moncrieff's version was the first of many Pickwicks largely based on these early adaptations. Pickwick was frequently performed throughout the century, but there were no new versions until much later. This suggests that once the "Pickwick mania" was "quite blown over,"26 while the story still had enough appeal to be performed occasionally, it was no longer of enough interest to encourage new adapters to do a better job. It may also mean that the dramatic intractability of the material was finally accepted. In either case, it seems to have been the novel's popularity, especially Sam's and Jingle's, rather than any real stage-worthiness that attracted the adapters. "It was the craze of the moment, and so it was dramatized."27

No other adaptation of any importance appeared until John Hollingshead produced Bardell versus Pickwick at the Gaiety Theatre, January 24, 1871: the printed text28 bears the legend, "Arranged for the Stage from the author's special reading copy." It is simply a one-act rendering of the scene including Buzfuz's opening address and the testimony
of Mrs. Cluppins, Winkle, and Sam, much as in the book. Pickwick, found guilty and assessed damages of £750, ends the play with his only line, "I won't pay one d____d farthing." It is apparently assumed that the audience knows of the incident which led Mrs. Bardell to bring the suit, since no mention of it is worked into the play. Except that the prosecuting attorney is obviously a self-interested humbug, nothing in the sketch implies that Pickwick is the victim of a miscarriage of justice. This playlet was performed only once at a matinee benefit for the Dramatic College. It is entirely possible that such snipping would have offended an audience during the Pickwick craze, but forty years later the dramatist apparently felt free to choose only one scene which he (and Dickens) saw as dramatically effective, no matter how much of the novel he ignored in the process. In fact, this is one technique used by many adapters of later novels to seize on the appealing Dickens creations without having to cope with the whole complicated structure of plot.

Not until three decades after the original adaptations did a new full-length version appear as one of a large second generation of adaptations in the seventies, which apparently were partly a reflection of the new interest Dickens' death aroused. Fine acting eventually made it the most successful version of all. Written by James Albery, Jingle was first performed at the Lyceum Theatre on October 23, 1871. The young Henry Irving scored the first
major success of his long career in the title role. No text of this first version of the play is known to exist, but the Daily Telegraph reviewer, who found the play distinctly distasteful, gave a thorough summary. The first act was set at Wardle's, implying that the action begins later than in the novel or the early plays, but it still dealt with the elopement of Jingle and Rachael. The reviewer sarcastically described the high point of the act:

Before they elope they secure themselves from arrest by locking a five-barred wicket gate, over which a child could easily leap; and we are asked to cheer the tableau of Jingle and the old maid driving past in a real carriage and real horses, and the spectacle of a dozen strong men thwarted by the locked five barred gate. Nevertheless, the curtain fell upon loud applause.

Act II, like the early plays, shows Jingle's being paid off and Pickwick's misfortunes at the boarding school. The third act emphasizes the bedroom misadventures at Ipswich, with one major change in character. Said the reviewer, when we see the two tent beds and the dimity curtains, and Mr. Pickwick rolling about on the bed, our thoughts are carried on to pantomime time, and we cannot resist the thought that the clown and the warming-pan would be far better fun. We had suffered enough from screaming at the termination of the second act, considering that the whole of Miss Witherfield's seminary--mistress, cook, and all--brought the curtain down with a yell; but we get it again when Miss Witherfield as the lady in curl-papers, goes into violent hysterics, and brings the whole Pickwick Club, servants, landlord, waiters, Sam Weller, Jingle, and all, into her bedroom.

Apparently the plot was brought to a rather lame conclusion in which Tupman is made Miss Witherfield's sweetheart and
"Jingle is unmasked but is forgiven and provided for by Pickwick; . . . the play terminates with grog and glasses all round in the magistrate's room, and a feeble imitation of the celebrated speeches at the wedding breakfast at Dulwich."\(^{32}\)

Albery's version resembled closely the first generation of Pickwick plays in its use of farcical episodes from the first half of the book and in its emphasis on Jingle. Like the 1837 versions it evidently had two main faults. According to the Telegraph reviewer, it lacked "the slightest thread of continuous narrative"\(^{33}\) (although another reviewer noted that introducing Jingle almost constantly "connects the scenes together after a manner not contemplated by Mr. Dickens").\(^{34}\) And, more importantly, the play failed to capture the depth and subtlety of the book's humor:

Lovers of Dickens . . . must have shuddered when they saw scene after scene from their beloved book torn to ribands by the greedy adapter, his best points missed, the essence of his fun gone, his characters misunderstood, and his rare humour supplemented by wretched attempts at imitative wit and frequent instances of vulgarity.\(^{35}\)

Apparently even more than its first-generation predecessors, Albery's play depended on slapstick visual comedy. The reviewer illustrated what he meant by "vulgarity" with the scene which caused the most laughter, in which Pickwick "pulls off his coat and waistcoat and commences to undo his nether garments."\(^{36}\) He was also offended by such comic business as Jingle's stuffing sandwiches into his battered hat
and his "playing leapfrog over the back of lankhaired Job Trotter." 37

Despite the reviewer's attack, the piece was a great success, running from October 23, 1871, to March 25, 1872. 38 Fitz-Gerald, however, notes that it had been quickly revised in response to the reviewers' censure of the play itself but praise of Irving. It was revived for a single matinee at the Crystal Palace on November 21, 1876, 39 and then reappeared, extensively revised, as a farce in six scenes entitled *Jingle* at the Lyceum, July 8 to August 3, 1878, during Irving's first year as manager of the theatre. 40 By now the emphasis had been completely shifted to the strolling rascal, and the piece had been converted into what was frankly a star vehicle for Henry Irving. It was condensed further into five scenes and performed again at the Lyceum from April 23 to May 14, 1887, 41 and was then taken by Irving on a successful American tour.

In its final form Albery's farce is still close to the novel for the first three scenes, although much of the material in the 1871 version is omitted. These scenes show Pickwick's initial meeting with Jingle, the action at Wardle's leading up to the elopement (still in a real horse-drawn carriage), and the paying off of Jingle at the White Hart Inn. Scene iv, however, is an original creation set in the coffee room of the Angel Inn at Bury St. Edmunds. Snodgrass and Jingle meet by accident, and the rogue convinces
the Pickwickian that Tupman had actually requested him to take Rachael away. Pickwick soon undeceives Snodgrass, but is himself duped into thinking Jingle honest, when the rascal ostentatiously turns Pickwick's watch over to the waiter when it is found lying on the table. Soon Jingle manages to relieve Pickwick of £25 as a loan to help his infirm mother.

The final scene is also largely made up, but it is grounded on Jingle's attempt to marry the rich Nupkins' daughter. To tighten the action and provide an interesting conclusion to Jingle's hijinks, the playwright makes Emily (whom Jingle had met at the Wardle's) not Wardle's daughter, but his niece Emily Nupkins. Consequently, when Jingle arrives to woo the rich lass he has only heard Snodgrass speak of, he realizes he must change his plans and quickly pretends to Emily that he has merely brought a message from Snodgrass, even though he has already made a contract with Nupkins to marry her. He shifts his interests to swindling Nupkins, but is foiled by the timely arrival of the Pickwickians. After his sins have been summarized, he changes character suddenly, throws himself on Pickwick's mercy, and begs to be allowed to repay all that he has stolen. 42

Carrying still further the approach of its much earlier predecessors, Albery's play in its final form shows the same attempt to unify and condense the extremely diverse materials of the novel both by changing the relations of
characters, focusing on a broadly drawn minor character, and adopting a frankly farcical tone. Unlike the only successful early version, this play emphasizes Jingle instead of Sam and omits much of the novel that cannot easily be connected to the entertaining rascal (such as the material involving Mrs. Bardell). Still, the materials proved impossible to tie together effectively. The play is frankly termed a farce, and its appeal is simply in the disconnected slapstick scenes built around the escapades of Jingle.

Thus *Pickwick* was never very successful on the stage, but *Sam Weller* and *Jingle* were. There survives in print from this period an interesting playlet showing the use of the same principle of selection just discussed, but emphasizing Sam Weller, the early favorite, and omitting both Jingle and Pickwick. Frank Bason's *The Weller Family* illustrates how a number of episodes and details from various places in the novel could be worked into a more or less unified one-scene sketch. Set at Tony Weller's Inn, it first shows Sam meeting his stepmother (who does not know his identity) and hearing her spiritual adviser, Stiggins, criticize Tony for refusing to contribute for flannel waistcoats and moral pocket handkerchiefs to be sent to children in the West Indies. Sam's writing his valentine to Mary is interpolated, and she is brought in as a maid at the inn for Sam to flirt with. Later the dialogue between Tony and Sam about Mrs. Weller's being a good widow but a bad wife, and a
conversation between Sam and Stiggins, which had originally occurred at the Fleet prison, are used. After reading some temperance tracts to the others, Stiggins drinks too much rum punch and accuses the others of being drunk, whereupon Tony finally loses his temper, thrashes the minister, and throws him out. Mrs. Weller is distressed but becomes pleased at the turn of events when Mary informs her that Stiggins had been accusing her of purloining some of the red flannel. Mrs. Weller turns contrite about her shrewishness, and Sam proposes to Mary, as Stiggins, ejected from his quarters, asks for help, and is once more thrown out. Apparently, however, this sketch which emphasizes broad humor, both verbal and physical, was never performed professionally.

This tendency to focus dramatic versions not on Dickens' main characters but on his secondary ones will also show up occasionally in the stage versions of the later novels. It results both from the need for a selective principle to allow economy and unity (especially in the case of the episodic *Pickwick*), and from the fact that, in many cases, Dickens' secondary characters, quickly and vividly marked, seem to be easier to put on the stage and more effective once there. And the pattern, so soon developed, of several adaptations capitalizing on the novel's initial popularity, followed by a long period of virtual absence from the stage, and eventual return, usually in a more carefully constructed form, in the seventies and eighties, will
be seen over and over again in the following pages.
Chapter II Notes

1Published in Duncombe's Acting Edition of the British Theatre (London, n.d.), No. 202. Stirling himself created a scholar's bramble patch when he misdated the play in his memoirs (Old Drury Lane [London, 1881], I, 162). He said it was performed at the opening of the City of London Theatre on April 27, 1837. No doubt following him, Pemberton, S. J. A. Fitz-Gerald, and other major sources accept this date and consequently credit Rede with being the first adapter of Pickwick. The City of London Theatre actually opened on March 27, and a playbill verifies that Stirling's play was part of the show (See Alexander Woollcott, Mr. Dickens Goes to the Play [London, 1922], p. 321).

2See Walter Dexter, "How Press and Public Received 'The Pickwick Papers,'" The Nineteenth Century and After, CXIX (1936), 318-329.


5Most of the songs are apparently original creations of eight or ten lines, more or less appropriate to the singer(s). They include a drinking song by the Pickwick Club, a duet between Jingle and Emily, a sea ditty by Snodgrass, and a festive finale of separate verses by Emily, Snodgrass, and Sam.


7Lazenby, p. 12.

8According to daily listings in the Times.

9(London, 1837).

10(April 4, 1847), p. 5.

11Since the wedding party occurs after the eighth issue one must conclude that either Rede was in error in saying he had only eight numbers to draw from or that the published text represents some revisions done to incorporate more of the novel as it appeared.

12(April 4, 1847), p. 5.
According to daily listings in the *Times*.

(London, 1837).

His lyrics: With von boot here, and t'other boot there,
Every kipple vill make a pair!

The reader will notice that some of these later incidents had not been introduced in the novel by the time Moncrieff's play first appeared. The explanation is that the published text represents the play as it was revised to keep abreast of the serialization.

(August 27, 1837), p. 454.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Dexter, 318-329.

Malcolm Morley, "Pickwick Makes His Stage Debut," *Dickensian*, XIII (1946), 214. (Morley says, however, that the success was not due so much to good writing as to the "much better cast.")

My discussion is based on the play text published in 1837; I have been unable to determine whether the 1838 production imitated Dickens' ending or whether, as seems more likely, Moncrieff's own more efficient denouement was preserved.

Published in French's Acting Editions (London, n.d.), No. 315. (Also published in *Lacy's Acting Plays*, Vol. I. French's series grew out of Lacy's at a later date.)

*Actors by Daylight*, I (April 21, 1838), 62.


(London, n.d.).

(October 24, 1871).
In its revival in the seventies and eighties Pickwick spawned an interesting variety of stage entertainments which certainly testify to its appeal to a new generation. Most of them, like Hollingshead's and Emson's sketches, were dramatizations of only limited pieces of the novels. In March, 1879, Gabriel Grub, a play based on one of Dickens' interpolated tales, was performed at the Masonic Theatre, Lincoln, and there was a musical version of this tale "quite popular in 1881 and onwards." The trial scene also gave rise to two musicals: Bardell versus Pickwick at Leamington in 1881 and The Great Pickwick Case "arranged as a comic operetta" with songs by Robert Politt and music by Thomas Rawson (Manchester, 1884). And the well-known F. C. Burnand was responsible for Pickwick: a Dramatic Cantata (with music by Eric Solomon) presented at the Comedy Theatre, February 7, 1889. In a completely different form is Jenny Marsh Parker's An Evening with Pickwick, "a literary and musical Dickens entertainment" published in 1889.
CHAPTER III

OLIVER TWIST AND THE THRILLER

The early dramatic history of Oliver Twist is a good deal fuller and more varied than that of The Pickwick Papers. Oliver Twist, in fact, is one of the two or three most widely dramatized Dickens novels. Dickens himself wanted to dramatize the novel, although nothing came of his proposal. Sometime in March of 1838 he wrote to his friend Frederick Yates, manager of the Adelphi, indicating that a major motive was to protect himself from plagiarized dramatic versions:

My Dear Sir:

Supposing we arrange preliminaries to our mutual satisfaction, I propose to dramatize Oliver for the first night of next Season [sometime in September] . . . .

I don't see the possibility of any other house doing it before your next opening night. If they do, it must be done in a very extraordinary manner, as the story (unlike that of Pickwick) is an involved and complicated one. I am quite satisfied that nobody can have heard what I mean to do with the different characters in the end, inasmuch as at present I don't quite know myself.¹

But Dickens underestimated the ingenuity of the adapters; the novel’s dramatic career started—abortively, as we shall see—on March 28, 1838, at the St. James’s Theatre when the novel was half-way through its
twenty-four-month serialization in Bentley's Miscellany. This first adaptation was probably by the house dramatist Gilbert A. a Beckett, a friend of Dickens and later one of the founders of Punch. The earliest record of the play is an interesting pre-performance notice in a minor periodical of which a Beckett was an editor.

We are surprised that this inimitable work [Oliver Twist] has not already fallen into the adapting hands of the dramatists. The idea is an excellent one, and the St. James's Company is . . . well adapted to sustain the powerfully drawn characters of the original.

The modern reader is probably more surprised that anyone would consider adapting the novel at this point since it was too soon to tell the overall shape of the main plot, and even Dickens had not decided what to do "with the different characters in the end." By this time in its serialization, the novel had included the workhouse scenes (introducing Oliver, Mrs. Bumble, and Mrs. Corney), Oliver's stay at Sowerberry's, his falling into Fagin's clutches, his happy days at Brownlow's, his recapture by the gang, and the unsuccessful Chertsey robbery. Left at this point, a Beckett had to finish the action for himself. He did so with great economy but very little plausibility.

The play has two acts and twelve scenes in which are shown Bumble's proposal to Mrs. Corney, Oliver's meeting the Dodger and Fagin, the picking of Brownlow's pocket, Mr. Fang's court, Oliver's happiness at Brownlow's, his recapture by
Nancy, and the robbery. In outline, the play is fairly like the novel (without the workhouse and Sowerberry sections) until the end; but since the robbery had appeared in Bentley's in February 1838, the dramatist, apparently writing in early March, was left largely to his own resources in extricating Oliver from the predicament the February installment had left him in. A cliff-hanger, it had stopped just after Bill Sikes and Toby Crackit had pulled the wounded Oliver out of Mrs. Maylie's house through the window. The adapter avoided introducing new characters and simplified his denouement, by moving the robbery, improbably, from Mrs. Maylie's home at Chertsey to Brownlow's mansion in London. As Oliver is put through the window, Brownlow's housekeeper and Bumble, who, as in the novel, has brought information about Oliver in order to get the reward, are playing cards. Bumble is frightened at a crash offstage and decides to scurry for bed; reassured when Oliver enters, Bumble hastens to reassert his authority until he learns the thieves are outside. Brownlow and Grimwig, awakened by the noise, enter. Ambush is decided upon, over Bumble's objections, so the group hide as Oliver goes to admit the rogues. When they enter Sikes smells a trap and starts to drag Oliver away when, without explanation, the police arrive. In the ensuing melee Sikes accidentally shoots Fagin dead before he is overpowered and removed.4

The play set an unbeatable record for the brevity of
its run— one night. For once both public and critics agreed on the work's wretchedness. The audience "hissed and booed" and "howled down" the stage manager when he tried to announce it for repetition two days later. The Literary Gazette reviewer said, "a thing more unfit for the stage, except that of a Penny Theatre we never saw." Another reviewer commented, "How any one could think of dramatising the story at this early stage, we cannot imagine. As played here, it is a very meagre and dull affair."

There are several possible explanations for the play's failure. Barry Duncan asserts that "the play is no more badly written than others of the period so that the audience . . . must have been antagonized more by deviations from Dickens than by bad dialogue, construction, or acting." The audience may, for instance, have objected to such "deviations from Dickens" as the exclusion of the workhouse and Sowerberry sections, or the magnification of Bumble's role. Perhaps they were disappointed in the changes in Brownlow and Bumble: Brownlow's outstanding humor is his comic irascibility and Bumble is a lecherous sot (who almost proposes to Mrs. Corney under the influence of gin and later flirts with Mrs. Bedwin). But Duncan's explanation of the play's failure is not satisfactory for two reasons. First, the play is fairly faithful to the novel (until the end) as far as plot is concerned. Second, as the rest of this study will illustrate at length, theatre audiences have frequently
been willing to accept significant "deviations from Dickens" (as they did in some of the plays based on Pickwick).

More likely the audience was bored with the flatness of the characters à la Beckett offered them. Nancy appears in only one scene to recapture Oliver (whom she recognizes on a London street even though she has not met him before); there is no suggestion of the conflict she feels between protecting Oliver and loyalty to the gang. Fagin and Sikes undergo a like simplification into mere bickering crooks. And Oliver becomes an insipid prig capable of such speeches as the following (the play's single and very awkward reference to his arduous journey to London):

Oh, dear, I'm sure I've walked a long way—but anything rather than go to that horrid chimney sweep. But what shall I do to live—I must hope for the best.—It will be hard indeed, if I can't live as well as I did in the workhouse—I think the water I drank at the last pump was quite as strong as the gruel they used to give us. (I, ii)

Possibly these character changes are merely part of what Duncan meant by the play's unfaithfulness to the novel; the play's defect is not so much, however, that à la Beckett's characters are so different from Dickens', but that they differ in being so poorly developed—dull and unindividualized.

Moreover, flaws in the play's construction no doubt contributed to its failure. Mrs. Corney, for instance, abruptly leaves to attend Sally's death, never to reappear; she is merely an improbable sounding-board, awkwardly allowing Bumble to tell the audience that Oliver the foundling
was apprenticed to a sweep and has run away (à Beckett's simplified version of why Oliver shows up in London). When the audience first sees Oliver he is already in London; they are only told briefly of his suffering and do not see any of his painful life at the workhouse or on the long road to London. The viewer is unlikely to be strongly moved by the hardships he has not seen of a character he has just met.

Finally, the ending is incredible, since the thieves allow Oliver to roam the house freely and inform the inhabitants of the robbery before he opens the door. Bumble is irrelevantly in at the conclusion which breaks up a comic tete-a-tete between him and Mrs. Bedwin, and the police arrive in the nick of time even though no one has sent for them. And Fagin's accidental shooting by Sikes is just too pat. The play as a whole is an improbable, shallow, comic-pathetic thriller, an "execrable hotch-potch" as one contemporary writer called it.10

In spite of the failure of à Beckett's version, the novel continued to attract adapters. The second dramatist to try his hand, however, waited two more months. Thus C. Z. Barnett's Oliver Twist, or, The Parish Boy's Progress at the Pavilion Theatre, May 21, 1838,11 had a bit more of the novel to work with; both the wounding of Oliver in the robbery and the shadowy figure of Monks were now available. Still the playwright had to work out his own ending.

Choosing to plunge into the underworld sooner and to
heighten the evil forces aligned against Oliver, Barnett opens his play, not at the workhouse, but at the Three Cripples Inn. Here Fagin tells the story of a watch he has bought from a pauper woman who had taken it from a dying girl fourteen years ago. Her child, Oliver, the Jew adds, still lives in the workhouse. Monks, who has been sitting nearby from the start, recognizes the story, as well as the initials on the watch, and offers Fagin £100 to get the boy in his power. With the antagonistic forces introduced and set in motion, Barnett's next scene shifts back to the workhouse portion of the novel, including such details as a song about the new poor law and Oliver's asking for more gruel. Oliver is then nearly apprenticed as a chimney sweep to Sikes (the whole business is part of the plot to get the boy into Fagin's hands). But in quick succession in the following scene, Bumble mentions the need of an apprenticeship for Oliver to Sowerberry, the undertaker says he'll take him, Oliver is brought in, Noah Claypole insults his mother, Oliver attacks him, is locked up, and escapes out the window. Nothing, of course, is made of his dismal life as a professional mourner.

In Act II, Oliver, on the road to London, meets the Dodger who recognizes the runaway and "befriends" him to help further Fagin's plotting. Later, with many of the novel's details included, Fagin and his gang are shown in their den, when Nancy enters and is immediately struck by
Oliver's resemblance to someone. Monks, too, enters and is about to seize Oliver when Nancy intervenes, to the villains' (and perhaps the audience's) surprise. Dialogue exposes the fact that Nancy and Monks knew each other five years before, and calling Monks Richard, Nancy passionately warns him not to harm Oliver or she will talk. Some skeptical viewers might wonder why the hardened Nancy would be willing to jeopardize her own life for a poor waif she has known for only two minutes, but such a criticism is no doubt irrelevant in view of the opportunity for histrionic display the scene allows.

The action then proceeds to an accurate presentation of Bumble's comic proposal, followed by a dialogue summary between the Dodger and Charley Bates, of Oliver's being mistakenly arrested for picking Brownlow's pocket. Why Barnett, unlike his predecessor à Beckett, chose not to show the arrest is unclear; perhaps he felt Bates and the Dodger's gleeful retelling would be more interesting than the scene itself, or perhaps he was merely trying to economize. Soon Oliver has convinced Brownlow of his innocence and, as in the novel, gone home with him (Fang's court is omitted). Here, making use of clues in the novel as à Beckett had not tried to do, Barnett begins to set up his solution to the mystery of Oliver's parentage. Oliver, as in the novel, strongly resembles the girl whose portrait hangs on Brownlow's wall, but Dickens had not yet identified
her. Barnett, drawing his own conclusions, makes her Brownlow’s daughter who had disappeared fourteen years before, after having married a soldier instead of her cousin Richard to whom she was betrothed. (All this Brownlow explains in his musings after noticing Oliver’s resemblance to his lost daughter.) Oliver is left alone momentarily, only to be kidnapped at gunpoint (by Monks, not Nancy). But in the next scene, it is Sikes who, without any explanation, drags Oliver into Fagin’s den. The boy is about to be beaten for trying to escape, but again Nancy intervenes, almost hysterically denouncing them for trying to corrupt the boy as they did her. Furious, Fagin strikes at her, but Oliver jumps in the way and falls unconscious from the blow in a suitably heart-rending end to the act.

Act III opens as Fagin and Sikes plan to use Oliver in the robbery of Brownlow’s house, as in a Beckett’s version; Nancy implies in an aside that she will help the child. Monks is understandably upset when told of the plan, since he alone among the thieves knows that Oliver is Brownlow’s grandson, and Nancy says in an aside that she has “acted for the best,” which is the only allusion in the play to whatever Nancy has done to save Oliver. (This is an interesting detail, since in the novel it is indeed Nancy who later saves Oliver by telling Rose of the thieves’ plans to kidnap him, but this episode was not published until several months after Barnett’s play. Dickens had, of course, been setting
up Nancy's sympathy for the waif throughout a number of the scenes.

In the next scene Sikes puts Oliver in through the window and the boy says in an aside that he is determined to warn the family; but the scene closes here, as Barnett for some reason chose to avoid the spectacle of the robbery's being foiled, and instead has Sikes summarize it for Fagin and Monks in the following scene. Nothing in their dialogue implies that the family had been prepared for the robbery; it simply went awry as in the novel. What Nancy did is never clarified. Bumble happens to overhear their conversation, including Monks' plan to kidnap Oliver again. Monks and Sikes then enter the room where Oliver lies wounded, but with a strange sense of timing, Sikes refuses to carry out the kidnapping until Monks explains why he is so concerned about Oliver. Now Brownlow is seen eavesdropping as Monks says mysteriously that Oliver stands between him and riches. Nancy, however, clarifies things by formally identifying Monks as Richard Brownlow, the old man's nephew who had turned Brownlow against his daughter after her marriage and intercepted money sent her by her husband. Destitute, Brownlow's daughter was on her way to her husband, whom Monks apparently killed, when she died. Once Nancy has explained everything (except how Oliver stands between Monks and wealth) a struggle ensues in which Oliver himself seizes Fagin's gun and shoots Monks, just as Bumble enters with the
In several ways Barnett’s play is a real improvement over Beckett’s attempt. Nancy is a more important and better developed character, though her motivation is scarcely credible and there is considerable confusion about what, if anything, she does to help Oliver. Monks, too, though pretty much of a stereotyped villain whose motivation remains unclear, is at least more vivid in his snarling viciousness than any of Beckett’s characters. But Bill is irrelevant and the other main characters are still unindividualized. The ending is too pat and improbable. Some viewers might have been surprised to find innocent little Oliver wrestling a gun away from one thief in order to shoot another. Finally, Barnett’s frequent use of summary dialogue for scenes he did not show must have made for a pretty talky performance without much action until the end.

Both Beckett’s version and Barnett’s show some interesting thematic variations from the novel. Both, for example, avoid any social criticism. The workhouse is not shown, nor is Oliver’s mistreatment at Sowerberry’s; Bumble is merely comic relief, neither selfish nor cruel; nor are the sordid London slums that breed vice dwelt on (although Beckett did show Fang’s court). In short, Oliver Twist on the stage is not recognizable as a piece of social protest (in spite of the Oxford Companion to the Theatre’s statement to the contrary). Instead, the whole emphasis is on the
melodramatic. While Virtue is frequently endangered, it clearly will triumph; Evil is doomed from the outset. Admittedly, at this point in Dickens' career, his novel itself embodied the melodramatic shape, but readers, unlike theatre-goers, could not ignore the often dominant note of gloom. In the novel's world, few of Oliver's friends (typified by little Dick) would be able to escape their workhouse existence and few children, once fallen into the clutches of a Fagin, would be able to escape. For in Oliver Twist, and especially in the portions of it available to a Beckett and Barnett, evil is not just the product of men like Fagin, but of a whole social atmosphere which allowed mistreatment of the unfortunate and thereby encouraged their falling in with such scoundrels. None of this comes out in the plays. Oliver in Barnett's play is not at all the victim of society but of a sinister private plot unleashed against him from the start. Significantly Barnett, not knowing what Dickens intended, made Oliver a legitimate child brought up in the workhouse by accident who thus merely assumes his rightful place in the end. There is no suggestion that it might be wrong, even for illegitimate children, to be treated as Oliver was. Although later adaptations of Twist differ in several ways from these first two, all show the same tendency to avoid social criticism and the darker sides of the novel's themes.

Apparently Barnett's version of Twist was not much of
a practical success: "The piece did not last long and evidently made no great impression on the managers [Frederick Yates and his partner Gladstone], for when they brought the Parish Boy to their more fashionable theatre in the Strand [the Adelphi--see below, p. 81], nine months later, it was not the Barnett extraction." 

The third version was produced at the Surrey Theatre, November 19, 1838. Its author, George Almar (who played Toby Crackit), had the whole story to work with, including the sensational murder of Nancy, Sikes' accidental hanging, and Fagin's last night alive, as well as the Rose and Harry love plot and Dickens' own explanation of Oliver's parentage. These episodes helped provide the vivid onstage action, which Almar, who was a good deal more skillful at his task than either of the predecessors, capitalized on. In three acts and thirty-three scenes, he imitated the novel closely.

Almar's play opens as Bumble, while Mrs. Corney is out attending old Sally's death, musingly tells the story of Oliver's birth and announces that the boy has already been apprenticed. The audience then sees Oliver's life with Sowerberry at some length, followed by his farewell, as he leaves for London, to the pathetic little Dick. Soon Oliver meets the Dodger and is taken to the underworld den where Fagin is literally cracking a whip to keep his crew in line. After waking later, as in the novel, to see the stealthy fence fondling his hoard of stolen baubles, Oliver leaves
with the others to learn the trade, watches as they are shown picking Brownlow's pocket, is captured and injured by the mob, and brought to the kindly gentleman who is already struck by the boy's face. The act then ends with a fairly accurate representation of the scene in Fang's court, culminating when Oliver faints.

When Act II opens, Oliver has recovered sufficiently to be up and around. Grimwig is introduced, Oliver's resemblance to the picture is mentioned, and the boy is sent to return the books. Nancy, with Sikes, kidnaps Oliver by pretending, for the sake of passers by, to be his sister, but at the den she protects the boy from a beating, denounces Fagin for making her what she is, and faints trying to attack him. The action then shifts to Mrs. Mann's where Bumble has seen Brownlow's advertisement of five guineas reward for news of Oliver, so he soon arrives at Brownlow's and, as in the book, takes a cue from Grimwig's remarks and portrays Oliver in the worst light. Shifting back to Oliver and the thieves, the act culminates with the fireworks of the robbery itself, shown from outside the house, as Oliver is put in the window, the boy is shot, and Sikes pulls him back outside as they flee.

Act III returns to the workhouse parlor to show Bumble, now married, conquered by his wife in their first and precedent-setting fight. The scene is not included merely for its comedy, however, since it also introduces the
sinister Monks, who is seeking information about Oliver and pays Mrs. Bumble £20 for the locket and wedding ring old Sally had stolen from Oliver's mother. In two expository scenes, Toby Crackit arrives at the thieves' den alone to inform the audience that he and Sikes left the wounded Oliver lying in a ditch, and Monks informs the audience that he has destroyed the ring and locket but kept some papers identifying Oliver. Nancy happens to overhear Fagin and Monks and learns that the Jew has agreed to turn the boy into a criminal for £500. Oliver is identified as Monks' brother, but the details are not given, and, as in the book, the conspirators end their conference hastily upon seeing Nancy's shadow.

Following the novel so closely requires Almar to violate a common dramatic principle in the next scene and introduce a whole group of new characters, when Oliver makes his way to the Maylies'. Later as Sikes lies ill in his garret, Nancy tells the audience she has been to see Rose. Fagin is suspicious of Nancy's attempts to go out, so he directs Noah Claypole (who has paid the fence to be taught) to follow her. He sees the tense meeting on London Bridge in which Nancy, having drugged Bill, discloses Monks' villainy to Brownlow and Rose. As in the novel, this is a powerful scene in which Nancy is nicely set in contrast to Rose. Nancy then returns to the garret where Sikes, having heard from Fagin of her duplicity, drags her offstage despite her pleas of
love, and the sounds of the club are heard. This is followed quickly by the great unmasking (done twice in the novel) in which Monks is identified by Brownlow as Edward Leeford, Oliver's half-brother and the son of Brownlow's old friend. In an economical variation from the novel, Brownlow already has the elder Leeford's will (which Nancy had stolen from Fagin). Somewhat awkwardly, Almar then has Oliver bring news that Fagin has been tried and condemned, and to wrap everything up Rose is revealed to be Oliver's cousin. Incongruously, the Bumbles enter with news that the murderer of a young woman is being hunted down at the river, so the scene shifts to the Jacob's Island hideout where the half-crazed Sikes has been chased by the police and a mob. Brownlow is heard outside, offering a reward for his capture. After fighting with the other thieves in the hideout, Sikes climbs out the window onto the roof, ties his rope to the chimney, puts the coils around his neck, sees before him Nancy's accusing eyes, and falls away from them to hang himself.

After this spectacular instance of poetic justice, the final scene is distinctly anti-climactic. Bumble shows up at Brownlow's wanting a reward, but instead is deprived of his position for having concealed evidence. The play ends with an interchange between Oliver and Mr. Bumble; Oliver delivers the final lines of the novel which belonged originally to the narrator himself:
Mr. B. And what is now wanted to complete the happiness of Oliver Twist?

Oli. First that you will erect a small white tablet in the church near which my poor mother died, and on it grave the names of Agnes. There might be no coffin in that tomb; but if the spirits of the dead ever come back to earth to visit spots hallowed by their love, I do believe that the shade of my poor mother will often hover about this solemn nook though it is a church, and she was weak and erring.

Mr. B. The next request I will make for you dear Oliver myself, and will make it here—to you (to audience.) Our hero is but young; but if his simple progress has beguiled you of a smile, or his sorrow of a tear, forgive the errors of the orphan boy Oliver Twist. (III, xiii)

As this summary makes obvious, Morley is justified when he describes the play as "trudging after the novel," and an early reviewer was also right in calling it too long. But the play was much more coherent than its predecessors. One notices that the only main sections omitted are Oliver's life in the workhouse, his long stay with the Maylies, the love plot between Rose and Harry, and the half-crazed wanderings of Sikes after the murder. Like the original, the play preserves some material that is unconnected to Oliver's story and not tonally consistent with it, such as the comedy of Bumble's courtship.

Some evidence of this play's superiority to the earlier versions of Twist may be seen in the praise it received in Actors by Daylight, the same periodical which had called à Beckett's work "that execrable hotch-potch": "Almar has shown great skill in the adaptation, and . . . the piece itself is produced with care . . . . with a
judicious curtailment we think 'Oliver Twist' is destined to a long and pleasing journey." A week later, "'Oliver Twist' has improved on acquaintance." On the other hand, the play received a poor review in the more critical Examiner, although the two young men playing Oliver and Noah were praised. Dickens shared the Examiner's distaste since this is the version of Oliver at which he lay down in protest during the opening scene.

In spite of Dickens' disgust, Almar's play became quite a favorite. One source suggests it initially ran for 140 nights during which over 600,000 people saw it; this, however, is quite an exaggeration since the play is only listed in the Times bills from November 19, 1838, to February 25, 1839, when it was performed for its "eightieth night." It was also transported across the Atlantic in a slightly shorter four-act form; "later American versions grew out of Almar's rather than from the novel directly."

The play's success can be attributed to the pathos of poor Oliver, the effectiveness of Nancy and Fagin, and the recreation of the sensational deaths of Nancy and Sikes. Oliver, Fagin, and Nancy had, of course, been available to the earlier adapters, but they had been so far simplified when put on the stage as to lose most of their interest. By showing a number of the early scenes, Almar made his audience much more aware of, and sympathetic toward, poor mistreated Oliver. By showing Fagin at more length in his
initial appearance, as well as his conniving with Monks without his cronies' knowledge, Almar managed to preserve the sinister love of deceit which is Fagin's essence. By developing in several scenes Nancy's dilemma, whether to try to save Oliver or to remain completely loyal, and by showing her beside Rose Maylie, the adapter was able to transfer to the stage Nancy's fairly complex motivation, her anguish, and her innate humaneness despite the life she leads—attributes which together make her an essentially credible and sympathetic creation in the romantic mold. This is not to imply that Almar's is the better play merely because it is closer to Dickens in its portrayal of character; but staying close to the original by retaining certain scenes and speeches and the same motivating forces is one way to provide the characters in the play with sufficient individuality and complexity to make them interesting and credible. To achieve a similar depth of characterization without remaining faithful to the novel would require that the adapter reconceive the characters and create their personalities on stage himself. This, few adapters, at least before the eighties, were able or willing to do, so that most adaptations show either the deadly simplification of Barnett or Almar's careful, but troublesome, reliance on the novel.

No doubt Almar's play was helped most, however, by the addition of the gory deaths; the transpontine audience could first howl and weep over Nancy's end, then roar with
satisfaction over the violent retribution meted out to Sikes. Early and mid-Victorian playgoers were much impressed with such sensational presentations even though they were sometimes difficult to make convincing on the stage. Surely Sikes' hanging could not be shown very believably (one reviewer noted it "might have been managed better" but did not specify how), and the text of Almar's play specifically directs that Nancy be killed offstage without her body being shown. Later the urge to gory visual action must have been even greater; Hollingshead describes how the murder was later played by the same actor, E. F. Saville, at the Old Vic:

The "murder of Nancy" was the great scene. Nancy was always dragged round the stage by her hair, and after this effort Sikes always looked up defiantly at the gallery, as he was doubtless told to do in the marked prompt copy. He was always answered by one loud and fearful curse, yelled by the whole mass like a Handel Festival chorus. The curse was answered by Sikes dragging Nancy twice around the stage, and then, like Ajax, defying the lightning. The simultaneous yell then became louder and more blasphemous. Finally when Sikes, working up to a well rehearsed climax, smeared Nancy with red-ochre, and taking her by the hair (a most powerful wig) seemed to dash her brains out on the stage, no explosion of dynamite invented by the modern anarchist, no language ever dreamt of in Bedlam could equal the outburst.

A most interesting dramatic version of *Twist* is that frequently attributed to Thomas Hailes Lacy, the man who had published his own "arrangement" of Moncrieff's adaptation of *Pickwick*. Lacy published the play in his own series with the claim that it had been seen at both the Pavilion and Surrey theatres (the dates are those of Barnett's and Almar's
plays respectively) and that George Almar had been in the cast, but no author is listed and the edition is not dated. It is, however, no more than a scissors-and-paste plagiarism using scenes from Barnett's play for Act I and the first half of Act II, and then using only slightly abbreviated scenes from Almar's play for the end of Act II and all of Act III. The edition even reprints at length the bill for Almar's play at the Surrey. I suspect Lacy merely wanted an appealing version of Twist for his own dramatic series, since Almar's play had been published as number 293 in a competing series, Dickens' Standard Drama. If my conjecture is sound, Lacy's desire to have a play based on Twist in his series provides a kind of evidence of Dickens' popularity. Lacy was unlikely to put out the energy of stealing a play unless he expected it to sell.

There were three more early adaptations after Almar's, one at the City of London Theatre, December 3, 1838, another at Sadler's Wells on the same date, and the third at the Adelphi, February 25, 1839. Previous writers agree that the Sadler's Wells version was by Honner, the manager; he played Fagin, and his wife, Oliver. But there is some confusion over the authorship of the other two. Probably the Adelphi play was the work of J. S. Coyne and the City of London version was Stirling's. Coyne (if the surviving first two acts are typical) profited from the five earlier adaptations and produced a piece rather like the novel, but with
considerable economy. Its major weakness is the insipid
dialogue created by the author when forced to rely on his
own invention rather than merely copy the novel. Unlike the
earlier versions, the Adelphi play puts the emphasis immedi­
ately on poor Oliver by showing him at Sowerberry’s, even
though the workhouse scenes are still omitted. His opening
soliloquy, upon awakening in Sowerberry’s kitchen, is typi­
cal of Coyne’s original contributions: "it is day—clear
day—Oh what a terrible thing it is to be alone and desolate
in the world—to feel that everyone hates and despises the
unfortunate workhouse boy." And he continues at some length
to explain the circumstances of his birth and his wish to be
at rest with his mother. The scene then proceeds quickly
through Noah Claypole’s insults, the fight, Bumble’s wrath
over Oliver’s ungratefulness, and the waif’s decision to
flee. In scene ii, like all the previous adapters, Coyne
shows Bumble’s flirting with Mrs. Corney until she is called
out, but the scene stops here. It is used for humor, but no
longer has any connection to the plot as it had in the
novel. In fact Bumble does not appear again (at least in
the two preserved acts). Oliver then meets the Dodger in
one scene, and enters Fagin’s den in the next. Having met
Sikes and wondered over Charley Bates’ finely-made pocket-
books, Oliver is soon sent out with the boys, only to be
falsely arrested. The first act ends, as a Beckett’s and
Almar’s had, with a fairly faithful rendition of the scene
Again paralleling Almar's play, when Act II opens, Oliver has already recovered at Brownlow's and, after meeting Grimwig, is sent out to return the books. Scene ii at Fagin's den is perhaps the epitome of condensation through the use of summary dialogue. First Fagin explains in soliloquy that he must have Oliver back because of his deal with Monks and that Nancy is out trying to find him. Then the Dodger brings word that Nancy has, in fact, just found Oliver and gleefully summarizes the scene in which she pretends to be his sister. At this point Sikes and Nancy drag Oliver in, he temporarily gets away, and Sikes is about to sic the dog on him, but Nancy intervenes. Fagin's boys do bring Oliver back, and Nancy prevents Fagin from beating the boy and threatens to expose what she knows if they harm him. Oliver is taken out, Nancy faints, and while she lies unconscious, the two thieves plan the Maylie robbery. She awakens in time to learn that Oliver will be used in the robbery and that she will have to take the boy to Sikes later. Sikes leaves and Monks appears for the first time. Nancy pretends to go upstairs but stays to eavesdrop and learns all about Oliver, for Monks has already purchased whatever evidence about his parentage was still to be found at the workhouse. As in the book, the interview ends abruptly when Monks sees Nancy's shadow.

In the next scene, the robbery goes awry just as in
the novel, except that, for economy, the wounded Oliver does not get away (Barnett earlier had worked the scene in this way). Later Nancy is caring for Sikes when Fagin and the boys arrive, and, as in the novel, she wants to leave to see Rose Maylie (in the novel this was a prearranged meeting, but in another move toward economy, the play has them meet only once). Bill will not let her leave, but she soon slips out anyway, apparently having drugged him, only to have the Dodger follow her at Fagin's direction. In the next scene, a synthesis of the novel's two meetings between Rose and Nancy, Rose learns Oliver's full history including his relation to Monks and decides to consult Brownlow; Nancy refuses to give up her underworld life and takes Rose's handkerchief as a memento. Nancy leaves promising to walk on London Bridge that night if she is alive.

Here Act II and the Lord Chamberlain's manuscript end. Presumable, since no further meeting between Rose and Nancy is needed, Nancy's reference to walking on the bridge if she is alive is a foreshadowing of her murder which, with Sikes' death, will make up most of the last act. Probably, it also includes a scene in which Monks is unmasked and confronted with his villainy by Brownlow, leaving Oliver to reap his deserved reward.30

Like the other plays, this one eliminates the workhouse sections and the love plot, but preserves (less extensively) the comedy of Bumble and Mrs. Corney. As in previous
versions Oliver is not the center of attention. Instead, Fagin, played by Yates the manager, and Sikes are well developed, and Nancy, played by Mrs. Yates, is the leading character. The play received a moderately warm review in the *Times*, but it ran for no more than three weeks; perhaps the previous five adaptations had satisfied the public's interest, which was now shifting to *Nicholas Nickleby*.

If nothing else, the existence of six separate adaptations on the London stage within a year is impressive evidence of the immense popularity the young Dickens had. After the initial surge of interest, however, "the novel was shown but little on the stage for the next sixteen years." Then a new version of the novel by J. Mordaunt was performed without notable success at the Marylebone Theatre on June 9, 1856. After this, the play again was absent from the London stage for over a decade but this is at least partly because it was forbidden by William B. Donne, examiner of plays in the Lord Chamberlain's Office from 1857 until 1874. Donne relented, however, in 1868, when he allowed two versions of the play to be performed, one by John Oxenford (drama critic for the *Times*) at the Old Queen's Theatre and one by J. B. Johnstone at the Surrey.

Texts of these versions are not available, but one gets an idea of Oxenford's production from a lengthy review in the *Examiner*. It opens with the almost obligatory scene between Bumble and Mrs. Corney into which first
Sowerberry and then Monks are introduced. Apparently Oliver's background is established and Monks' plotting against him is introduced in a rather garbled form. Later Oliver meets Fagin and the Dodger (played by the comedian J. L. Toole who was to become famous in the role), and the act ends with Oliver's arrest and Fang's court into which the Dodger is introduced as a witness.

The second act opens at Sikes', where Fagin and Sikes persuade Nancy to kidnap Oliver. When she returns with him a bit later, Oliver attempts to obtain help by crying out at the window to the passers by in the street, which incident brings about the most striking situation in the play. Nancy having interposed to save Oliver, is about to receive the blows that were intended for him, when she snatches up a loaded pistol . . . and thereby saves herself and the orphan.

The second scene introduces Brownlow and Rose, who has received a letter from Nancy urgently requesting an interview. Then the act ends with the usual London Bridge scene with the Dodger doing the spying.

In Act III, Fagin tells Sikes of the meeting and then, to wind up the plot lines, Monks is brought on stage to tell the audience that he has exposed Fagin to the police and compromised on his dispute with Oliver so that he is ready to leave England with an annuity promised him. This is, no doubt, the most improbable denouement any adapter conceived. Saved for the final scene are the spectacular deaths of Nancy and Sikes, but the reviewer's remarks show how much
was changed since the early adaptations: "On Saturday [Nancy] was shot ... but she now only swoons, while Sikes, perceiving the house to be surrounded, attempts escape and is shot apparently in the venture, or at all events he dies leaping from the housetop."

The play thus shows the same tendency to emphasize the criminal characters that the early versions did (Brownlow and Rose appear in only two or three scenes), but it gives the bloody deaths much less emphasis, eventually leaving Nancy only in a faint and evidently not showing precisely how Sikes met his end. The plot is simplified (if made less convincing) by the complete elimination of the robbery and the awkward end given to Monks' plotting. The play was not well received, but it did run for about a month.35

Ten years later, after Donne had retired as examiner of plays, an American actor named Cyril Searle brought his version of *Oliver Twist* to the Olympic Theatre (July 9, 1878) where it ran for about four weeks.36 It apparently revived the practice of showing in great detail the whole gory murder and gave it the emphasis of putting it in the last scene. Two reviewers at least were appalled by the bloody spectacle. One even hinted that a return to the earlier censorship was necessary.

[Nancy Sikes] is a play the whole effect of which is depraving; and if ever the interference of authority to prevent the employment of the stage as a means of national debasement could be justified, it would be justified with regard to such
a work. A spectator in whom the horrible details of massacre at the close of the play do not inspire nausea must have strong nerves. The whole exhibition is about as healthy and as much of an entertainment as the sight of a public execution. 37

Yet another American import, by George Collingham, was seen in London at the Olympic Theatre, December 21, 1891. 38 While the existence of these several adaptations provides still more evidence of the novel's persistent attractiveness, their texts are not available for any detailed study. Secondary sources indicate that these later adaptations use primarily the same materials which had brought varying degrees of success to the earlier versions. One might well describe these elements as the essentially dramatic features of Oliver Twist and, as will be seen, most of Dickens' later novels as well.

All the adapters agreed that Dickens' social criticism, in this case his protest over the treatment of the poor, had no place on the popular stage. Instead, they concentrated on the melodramatic plot that fills the later pages of the book—material which, unlike the satiric sections of the book, makes virtually no demands on the intellect, but excites the audience's rudimentary emotion by its strong conflict between the clearly-marked forces of good and evil. Such a formulation allows for considerable variety, and Oliver Twist and the plays based on it do not follow the favorite plot for domestic melodrama in which a virtuous and beautiful heroine is separated from her lover and subjected to the evil
scheming of a wily villain who is then foiled by the stout-hearted young hero who marries the girl. Rather, Twist puts Oliver in the heroine's position, provides a whole gang of villains, and turns Brownlow, with Nancy's help, into the rescuer. The stereotyped hero and heroine, Harry and Rose, are introduced late and awkwardly, so that nearly all of the adapters were willing to dispense with their love affair. Still, Oliver Twist and its dramatic progeny, with the standard emotional attractions of innocent virtue endangered and nearly overcome before being rescued and rewarded, are essentially melodramatic.

Melodrama has, of course, long been a pejorative term, but in fairness the adapters can scarcely be attacked for carrying over to the stage the spirit of what they found in Dickens. And while the term has traditionally implied superficial and completely unindividualized stock characters resulting from the genre's simple contrast between good and evil, this need not be the case. It is entirely possible for a writer to concentrate on the conflict between strongly marked good and bad characters without their being shallow or uninteresting. Ironically, the more traditionally melodramatic characters in Oliver Twist (Rose, Harry, Oliver, and Monks) are precisely the ones who are made the least of in the stage melodramas. On the other hand, the most effective characters in the Twist plays have always been the more complexly drawn characters of Nancy and Fagin with Sikes a
step or two behind. Nancy stands out as an anomaly in pure melodrama in that she is a member of and committed to the criminal element but works with the forces of good. Although in the novel the sordid side of her life is not stressed, she is clearly caught in a dilemma between gang loyalty (and her love for Sikes) and her instinctive sympathy for Oliver. Nancy is more than a "prostitute with a heart of gold," a stock character who is always pure in spirit and aligned with the good forces. She is deeply involved in evil: she kidnaps Oliver; she assists her cronies in involving him in a robbery; and, although she hates Fagin, she will not desert her underworld friends. Yet she courageously extricates Oliver from the gang's clutches, even though she risks her life by violating the underworld code. In novelistic terms, all this does not make her character particularly complex, although she is more deeply developed than such figures as Monks and Brownlow. Yet in the more limited confines of the stage, Nancy's emotional conflict and the anguish it causes her are sufficient to allow a talented actress to make the part seem quite credible, indeed impressive.

Moreover, because Dickens habitually presents most of his characters from an external, but extremely vivid point of view, characters like Nancy and Sam Weller are easily taken out of the novel and put on the stage. Whatever complexity and attractiveness the character has is shown in
Dickens, as it is not so often shown in, say, Thackeray and George Eliot, in dialogue and actions. The adapter has but to copy them with judicious selectivity and the actor or actress to fill them out following the cues for gesture, facial expression, and make-up provided in the novel in order to bring the character to life on the stage. Thus Nancy emerges on the stage, in the hands of the better adapters, as sufficiently human and moving to interest any but the most critical of theater audiences.

One can say much the same thing of Fagin. In the novel, he is, like Nancy, a vividly seen and heard character whose inner personality is not delved into very deeply. Everything a reader learns about him is easily inferred from the externals of action and speech, which show him to be considerably more than a stereotyped stage Jew. He is not only a cunning miser but a ruthless leader. He is not only a fence, but a man of rhetorical power. He is not only a thief, but an artist who takes pride in the skill with which he manipulates others and protects himself. As an anonymous reviewer of a twentieth-century play described it, his is "an intellectual villainy playing with the pawns of mere brutality and ignorance." Dickens was often at his best in such portraits of evil, portraits which are simultaneously melodramatic and complex. Perhaps he never drew a greater villain than Fagin, and perhaps this is why, even in the twentieth century, Fagin has been the most successful of
all Dickens characters when translated to the stage.

In several ways, then, *Oliver Twist* (and not the atypical *Pickwick*) becomes a paradigm of this study. Over and over again in the following pages, the reader will see, among others, this same pair of dramatic elements: a melodramatic, frequently sensational, plot and vividly-drawn, externally presented characters, often representing the forces of evil. It is, in fact, when Dickens moves away from the simple melodramatic pattern in his later novels that his works become, if the frequency and success of the adaptations is any measure, less suitable for the stage.
Chapter III Notes

1. The Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. Madeline House and Graham Storey, I (Oxford, 1965), 388-389. Dickens was still interested in dramatizing his novel seven months later when he had Forster propose it to William Charles Macready, but after carefully looking the novel over, the famous actor-manager "told them of the utter impractibility of 'Oliver Twist' for any dramatic purpose." (Macready's Reminiscences, ed. Frederick Pollock [New York, 1875], p. 462.


3. A manuscript of the play is available in the Lord Chamberlain's collection in the British Museum.

4. Fawcett's description of the play is one of the more flagrant examples of the inaccuracy with which this whole subject has been treated. After mistakenly assigning the play to J. S. Coyne, Fawcett writes "the accent here was on the humour in the thieves' kitchen, at the undertaker's, and among the ludicrously pompous parish officials." This of a play which is predominantly a "serious" thriller and which includes not even a reference to an undertaker. (See Dickens the Dramatist [London, 1952], p. 54.)


6. Duncan, p. 47.


8. Actors by Daylight, I (March 31, 1838), 36.

9. p. 47.

10. Actors by Daylight, I (June 9, 1838), 117.


26 One of the other versions is certainly by Edward Stirling. No less authoritative sources than Allardyce Nicoll and the Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum: Plays Submitted to the Lord Chamberlain 1824–1851 give Stirling as the author of the Adelphi version. Morley, Fawcett and S. J. A. Fitz-Gerald all credit Stirling with the December version at the City of London, yet his version of Nicholas Nickleby (1840) was produced at the Adelphi and his own "diary" unfortunately does not mention a play based on Twist at all. The only way out of this tangle, it seems, is to trust the Times reviewer of the Adelphi play, who said J. S. Coyne was its author, and thus take Stirling to have created the City of London piece. The question would be unimportant except that a manuscript of part of the Adelphi version is extant in the Lord Chamberlain’s collection. In the catalogues of this collection the other two plays are not listed; thus apparently no texts exist. The manuscript, dated February 21, 1839, lists no author, but the play is catalogued under Stirling’s name. Apparently either Nicoll or someone at the Museum made the erroneous attribution and the others picked it up.

29 Only this much exists in a manuscript in the Lord Chamberlain’s Collection.

30 Apparently the missing acts contained no surprises inasmuch as one reviewer said he would neglect to summarize the play since it paralleled the novel so closely. (Times [February 26, 1839], p. 5.)

31 (February 26, 1839), p. 5.

32 Morley, "Early Dramas of Oliver Twist," p. 79.

33 Information about the censorship is scant. It is mentioned in Hollingshead (p. 188) and in an article in the Leeds Intelligencer for March, 1868, which is partly reprinted in the Dickensian, XXIII (1927), 160. The Lord Chamberlain banned the play not because it showed sordid characters which might corrupt innocent viewers but because scenes like the murder of Nancy had caused near riots at lower class theatres.

34 (April 18, 1868), p. 249. All descriptions of the play are quoted from this source.

35 According to daily listings in the Times.

36 According to daily listings in the Times.
• Athenaeum (July 13, 1878), p. 60. See also the
Times (July 11, 1878), p. 8.

According to daily listings in the Times.

But Edgar Rosenberg explains why the basic melodrama
is somewhat less obvious in the novel than on the stage:
"Dickens' fiction is not really translatable to the stage
at all. In the novel Oliver Twist spectacular coincidences
may, retrospectively, look outrageous; but Dickens' genius
for concealment, which is practicable in the novel medium,
was so surpassing that one does not mind them in the read­
ing." (From Shylock to Svengali [Stanford, 1960], p. 136.)

Brownlow, in contrast, is more like Pickwick.
Genial elderly men, they are not strikingly individualized
by external detail but are more slowly built up by accretion.
Thus neither is likely to be very effective on the stage.

Dickensian, VI (1910), 12.
CHAPTER IV

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY AND DOMESTIC MELODRAMA

Before the serialization of *Oliver Twist* had been completed in Bentley's (March, 1839), *Nicholas Nickleby* had begun appearing in monthly numbers. Long before the new novel was finished, in fact while the early dramatic versions of *Oliver Twist* were still at the height of their popularity, *Nickleby* too made its way to the London stage. Like *Twist* it had at its heart the conflict between innocent virtue and cunning villainy, and like *Twist* it quickly became an effective domestic melodrama when put on the stage. But unlike *Twist*, *Nickleby* was turned into a stage melodrama with a minimum of character modification, for the novel's main characters were much more like typical stage hero, heroine, and villain than those of *Twist* had been.

In contrast to the stage history of *Oliver Twist*, that of *Nicholas Nickleby* does not begin in failure; the first adaptation of the novel, by the prolific Edward Stirling, was also the most successful one. This indicates at once how close *Nickleby* is to stage melodrama to start with, since there was no initial need for experimentation and failure before appropriate adapting techniques were found.
Stirling's play began its run at the Adelphi, November 19, 1838 (coincidentally the same date on which Almar’s version of *Oliver Twist* was first produced at the Surrey); at this point the novel was a bit more than one third finished, so Stirling had not merely to adapt the novel but to supply it with an ending. To unify his play and make full use of the novel's pathos, Stirling focused on Smike as played by Mrs. Keeley, a well-known actress who had already played Oliver and who would recreate a number of Dickens' later characters, but he also tried to preserve the basically unrelated story of Kate's trials at the Mantalinis'. The play alternates between these two plot lines until they are joined near the end.

In the first of two acts Stirling shows Nicholas meeting Squeers and later arriving at Dotheboys Hall, where Smike is introduced lamenting his loneliness and cruel treatment. Nicholas is immediately sympathetic, and after a comic scene introducing Tilda Price and John Browdie at Fanny Squeers' card party, the act culminates in Nicholas' thrashing of the cruel schoolmaster for his injustices to Smike. In between these episodes, Stirling shows briefly Kate's going to work as a dressmaker and receiving the unwelcome attentions of the fop, Mantalini (as played by Dickens' friend, the stage manager, Frederick Yates).

In Act II the emphasis is even more heavily on Smike as Stirling goes outside the novel in order to supply his
With Browdie's help, Nicholas and Smike make their way to London and the garret of Newman Noggs, as in the book. Soon, however, Noggs learns, by finding Ralph's wallet, which the villain has accidentally dropped, that Ralph had secretly sent young Thomas Smike to Squeers hoping the boy would die of mistreatment, because Ralph is to inherit Mr. Smike's fortune if the boy cannot. The details of the will are not particularly clear, but it is sufficient to cause Ralph's complete undoing in the climactic confrontation, which Stirling sets at Ralph's dinner party for Lord Frederick Verisopht and Sir Mulberry Hawk. Nicholas bursts into the party when he hears Kate shriek (as a result of Mantalini's advances) and is scolded by his uncle for his disreputable behavior in Yorkshire. Nicholas, sterling hero that he is, denies the charges passionately and refuses to send Smike back. Fortunately for the hero, at this point Noggs enters with Smike, who identifies Ralph as the man who left him with Squeers. The villain unmasked, Smike receives the will from Noggs and promptly gives it to his savior Nicholas.

Allowing for its condensation (which means, among other things, omitting most of the comic characters not directly related to the plot), Stirling's play follows the novel closely for the early portions, even to the point of including the irrelevant bankruptcy at Mantalini's. In a sense, Stirling was fortunate in writing when he did, since the
available portion of the novel provided a fairly unified plot without taxing his powers of selection. And the play thus produced is a near-perfect example of Victorian domestic melodrama. Like Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby provides a melodramatic plot in which the forces of good triumph almost miraculously at the last minute over the villains. But Nickleby is an even better example of melodrama than Oliver Twist, because with little modification its characters all fall into well-known melodramatic types. Nicholas is a suitable unblemished hero, while Kate, beautiful daughter of a poor widow, is a quite typical heroine. Also in the camp of the virtuous are Smike, who comes from a long line of mistreated pathetic children, and the bibulous Newman Noggs, who plays almost exactly the role that Michael Booth assigns to the comedian at large in this genre: "His job is to stick loyally by the hero and heroine and frustrate villainy . . . usually of humble station [he] is much more helpful in foiling the villain than the hero: he overhears his plots, insults him, and intervenes in the nick of time." In Stirling's play Noggs gives heroic Nicholas and Smike temporary refuge, watches Ralph's knavery, helpfully informs Nicholas of the charges Fanny levels against him, finds the will the villainous Ralph has kept secret, and finally unmasks him in the nick of time. It must be admitted, however, that Stirling's Noggs is a good deal more comic than Dickens'.
On the side of evil are the minor characters, Hawk and Mantalini, as well as Squeers and, most important, Ralph. Quite a typical stage villain, Ralph is a crudely-developed usurer whose motives are the simplest combination of greed and a desire for revenge against his nephew.

The only way in which the materials Stirling selected from Dickens did not quite fit the conventions of melodrama is that in the novel neither hero nor heroine had, at this point, a suitable romantic partner. It is surprising that Stirling did not find a way to provide a love interest, but this would have meant working a new main character into the play and fitting a love plot in with the Smike plot (which Dickens himself, as it turned out, was not conspicuously successful in doing). Stirling, of course, did not know that Smike was to die, and he chose the more conventional ending in which villainy is foiled and the good live happily and richly ever after.

Several other features of Stirling's play are noteworthy because they set a pattern which adaptations of *Nickleby* even much later in the century followed. All of them are also pure domestic melodramas, and following Stirling's lead, all took from crucial scenes in the novel, more or less verbatim, some of its most melodramatic dialogue. A prime example is the scene in which Nicholas is at last driven to rebel against Squeers. The cruel schoolmaster is about to cane Smike for having run away. After the first
stroke, Nicholas yells out, and the following passionate exchange (complete with "stage directions") ensues:

"Who cried stop?" said Squeers, turning savagely round.
"I," said Nicholas, stepping forward. "This must not go on."
"Must not go on!" cried Squeers, almost in a shriek.
"No!" thundered Nicholas.

Aghast and stupefied by the boldness of the interference, Squeers released his hold of Smike, and, falling back a pace or two, gazed upon Nicholas with looks that were positively frightful.

"I say must not," repeated Nicholas, nothing daunted; "shall not. I will prevent it."

Squeers continued to gaze upon him, with his eyes starting out of his head; but astonishment had actually, for the moment bereft him of speech.

"You have disregarded all my quiet interference in the miserable lad's behalf," said Nicholas; "you have returned no answer to the letter in which I begged forgiveness for him, and offered to be responsible that he would remain quietly here. Don't blame me for this public interference. You have brought it upon yourself, not I."

"Sit down, beggar!" screamed Squeers, almost beside himself with rage, and seizing Smike as he spoke.

"Wretch," rejoined Nicholas, fiercely, "touch him at your peril! I will not stand by, and see it done. My blood is up, and I have the strength of ten such men as you. Look to yourself, for by Heaven I will not spare you, if you drive me on!"

"Stand back," cried Squeers, brandishing his weapon.

"I have a long series of insults to avenge," said Nicholas, flushed with passion; "and my indignation is aggravated by the dastardly cruelties practised on helpless infancy in this foul den. Have a care; for if you do raise the devil within me, the consequences shall fall heavily upon your own head!" (Chap. xiii)

This is perhaps the worst of many climactic scenes in which Dickens has often been accused of resorting to inflated speeches, but it was naturally a favorite with the adapters.
Stirling condenses the scene greatly by having Nicholas interrupt Squeers with a single speech, a combination of the hero's last two speeches quoted above:

Wretch! I will not stand by and see it done. I have a long series of insults to avenge, and my indignation is aggravated by the dastardly cruelties practised on helpless infancy in this foul den. Have a care, for if you do raise the devil with me, the consequences shall fall heavily on your own head. (I, vi)

Later adapters frequently selected different snatches of the exchange, but whenever the scene was used, the playwrights found their dialogue ready made.

Some of the materials in the novel, however, did not fit so easily into the melodramatic pattern, and Stirling's play was typical of those to follow in what it omitted or modified. Because there was so much humor unconnected to the plot, as great deal of it, such as the Crummles and Kenwigs materials, was left out. Omitting Dickens' comedy, even when it is largely unconnected to the plot, is not a common feature of adaptations of other novels, but in *Nickleby* the humor is so spread out over a variety of characters that to include much of it on the stage would leave no time for developing the plot. As we shall see, the novels from *The Old Curiosity Shop* to *David Copperfield* tend to have one or two outstanding comic creations which the dramatist could focus on, but this is not the case with *Nickleby*, unless Squeers or Mantalini is thought a likely candidate for the role. Squeers, in fact, was played
largely for the comedy Dickens had combined with his viciousness, evidently at least partly because the satire on the Yorkshire schools was too biting and disturbing to be preserved. To further weaken the satire, the play makes no suggestion that Squeers’ brutality may be shared by other schoolmasters. And apparently Dickens’ portrayal of Smike as having been reduced to near idiocy by Squeers’ harsh treatment was considered too painful for the melodramatic stage, so Smike in the plays, while mistreated, ignorant, and pathetic, is always in full possession of his faculties. This helped to deemphasize the satire further by lessening the effects of Squeers’ brutality.

A decided stage success, the play was mentioned favorably in *Actors by Daylight* for five weeks in a row: “we had no idea that Nicholas could have been dished up so well.” The *Times* reviewer, calling it an unprecedented success, noted the play’s episodic structure, but believed the “slender thread of incident” was “sufficient to keep up the interest and explain the plot.” Stirling himself records that the play ran 160 nights, which is not too much of an exaggeration since it, in fact, ran from November 19, 1838, to March 23, 1839. And in 1842 Thackeray fondly recalled the play in an article discussing a French version of the novel:

who . . . does not remember the pathetic acting of Mrs. Keeley in the part of Smike, as performed at the Adelphi; the obstinate good-humour of Mr.
Wilkinson, who, having to represent the brutal Squeers, was according to his nature, so chuckling, oily, and kind-hearted, that little boys must have thought it a good joke to be flogged by him; finally, the acting of the admirable Yates in the kindred part of Mantalini? Can France, I thought, produce a fop equal to Yates?

Perhaps most interesting of the recorded reactions is that of Dickens himself, who apparently saw the play on its third night. He wrote to Frederick Yates, Manager of the Adelphi,

My general objection to the adaptation of any unfinished work of mine simply is, that being badly done and worse acted it tends to vulgarize the characters, to destroy or weaken in the minds of those who see them the impressions I have endeavoured to create, and consequently to lessen the after-interest in their progress. No such objection can exist for a moment where the thing is so admirably done in every respect as you have done it in this instance. I felt it an act of common justice after seeing the piece to withdraw all objections to its publication . . . .

I shall really be glad of an opportunity to tell Mrs Keeley and O Smith how very highly I appreciate their Smike and Newman Noggs. I put you out of the question altogether, for that glorious Mantalini is beyond all praise.

Perhaps in response to these kind words, the play when published by Dickens’ own publishers, Chapman and Hall, actually included a dedication to the novelist, which several critics have mistaken for effrontery on Stirling’s part.

Dickens’ favorable reaction to the play virtually destroys the contention, made by his son and others, that Stirling was the dramatic adapter alluded to so vehemently in chapter xlviii of the novel (I will discuss the true occasion for the tirade below). Nor does it harmonize
very well with Forster's description of the novelist's reaction: "He had been able to sit through 'Nickelby,' and see a kind of merit in some of the actors." Dickens, in fact, recorded his liking for the play and his only apparent objection to it in a letter to Forster. In praising various features of the production, including the way in which tableaux were formed to imitate Browne's illustrations to the novel, he singled out Mrs. Keeley, whose Smike "was excellent; bating sundry choice sentiments and rubbish regarding the little robins in the fields which have been put in the boy's mouth by Mr. Stirling." Clearly Dickens was not so uniformly offended by dramatizations of his novels as his biographer indicates.

The second adaptation of Nickelby for which a text survives is W. T. Moncrieff's Nicholas Nickelby and Poor Smike, first performed at the New Strand Theatre, May 20, 1839. With fourteen of the monthly numbers now published, Moncrieff had much more of the novel to work with than had Stirling, but this proved more of a problem than a windfall since Moncrieff seems to have felt strong pressure to include everything. The result is an episodic and erratic play shorn of humor and tufted with songs.

Moncrieff had to jam together in his first act nearly all the materials of which Stirling had made his whole play, except, of course, Stirling's created ending. As in the earlier version, much emphasis is on Smike, who appears
alone as the curtain rises. Moncrieff, however, stresses not only his pathos but also the mystery of his birth. To heighten this interest he interpolates into the scene in which Nicholas and Smike meet Browdie while escaping, a dialogue between Nicholas and Smike regarding Smike's faint memory of a garret with a clock in it and of a wrinkled man. Trying to include so much in one act, Moncrieff shows less of the Mantalini plot than Stirling had, but is unwilling to omit Mantalini's humor completely.

The second act, much more a patchwork even than the first, includes Nicholas' arrival in London, a comic scene in which Mantalini tries to borrow money from Ralph, and the Browdies' visit to London. The big scene is Nicholas' accidentally overhearing Hawk make free with Kate's name and the beating Hawk receives when he brushes off the hero's challenge to duel.

In the third act Moncrieff resorts largely to his own invention as he tries to wind up the Smike plot. Since Brooker, with his undefined knowledge of Ralph's past, had been introduced in the novel by this time, Moncrieff includes him. He also uses Ralph's scheme to get Smike away from Nicholas with the aid of a forged note from Smike's "father" approving the boy's return to Squeers. When Nicholas refuses, they have him arrested for assaulting Hawk, and this allows them to take Smike and lock him in an upstairs room at Ralph's. Coincidentally, it is the room Smike remembered
from his childhood, and it is also the room in which Noggs has secreted Brooker. The two soon recognize each other and escape across the roof to show up at Sir Mulberry's where everyone else gathers. In the final undoing, Smike turns out to be Ralph's son and Hawk's nephew, as well as the rightful owner of the mansion. Ralph is glad to admit the boy is his son now that he has inherited £20,000, but somehow the Cheerybles, who have gotten Nicholas out of jail by this time, have been made Smike's legal guardians.

In this same scene the trials of Kate are brought to an end as Lord Verisopht forces Hawk to withdraw the charges against Nicholas and then proposes to Kate. She refuses, preferring to devote her life to her cousin Smike, although this is not, I believe, to be taken as a romantic attachment as Morley asserts.²⁷ Earlier in the act Moncrieff even makes a gesture toward a love interest for Nicholas as well; the hero proposes, the second time he meets her, to a lovely girl, who turns out to be the Cheerybles' niece.

Moncrieff's play is unsatisfactory in many ways, most of which result from his attempt to include all the serious action thus far available in the novel. Although he omitted the Crummleses, Mr. Lillyvick, the Kenwigses, and Miss LaGreevy, he was not willing to leave out Kate's problems with either Mantalini or Hawk, Ralph's attempts to retrieve Smike, the Browdies, or the Cheerybles. He omitted comic supernumeraries as Stirling had done, but no one who was at
all connected with the plot.

The result is a play too crammed with events. Little development of character is possible and events are unmotivated and unexplained. At one point, for example, John Browdie summarizes for Nicholas the stratagem by which he rescued Smike from Squeers, but this rests too heavily on the audience's familiarity with the novel since they had never been told that Smike and Nicholas were separated. And surely no one was able to figure out how the Cheerybles could have become Smike's legal guardians. More common are gross inconsistencies in character such as the sudden conversion of Lord Verisopht from lecherous rake to admiring suitor. Similarly, Ralph's calm admission that he is indeed Smike's father is hardly consistent with his belief that the boy had been dead for years; he hears Brooker's story of having kidnapped his son to get revenge without batting an eye.

But perhaps the best illustration of the shallowness and incredibility that resulted from having too much novel to cope with is the scene in which Nicholas meets his sweetheart for the second time. He is at the Cheeryble brothers' office asking Tim Linkinwater about a girl he saw there yesterday when she enters. She asks if the brothers are in, and Nicholas replies with no less ardor than directness, "Yes Lovely girl. Mr. Cheeryble is within but first say at least that the few short words which passed between us at
our first meeting were not all indifferent to you." She can only stammer in response, but this is apparently enough for the ardent young hero who declares (in what is at most the fifth sentence he has ever uttered to her), "Without you life is a blank. I lay at your feet a world of hopes" (III, iii). Fortunately, she does not have to reply, because the Cheerybles enter in time to hear Nicholas, and they heartily approve of their niece's marrying him after the two come to know each other better. She does not reappear on the stage, and her lack of importance is symbolized by her never being given a name.

Melodramatic as the novel was to begin with, it was hardly warrant for anything as shoddy as Moncrieff's adaptation. But even such patent absurdity did not keep the play from a degree of success since it ran from mid-May to mid-July. Apparently in the heat of the novel's popularity, many were willing to take their Dickens any way they could get him.

Dickens, however, was so infuriated by Moncrieff's play that in the last chapter of the novel's next number, which came out twelve days after Moncrieff's play opened, he included the "literary gentleman . . . who had dramatized . . . two hundred and forty-seven novels" as a direct attack on Moncrieff. Nicholas angrily tells the gentleman,

You take the uncompleted books of living authors . . . . cut, hack, and carve them . . . . hastily and crudely vamp up ideas not yet worked out by
their original projector . . . . all this without his permission, and against his will; and then . . . . publish in some mean pamphlet, an unmeaning farrago of garbled extracts from his work, to which you put your name as author . . . . Now, show me the distinction between such pilfering as this, and picking a man's pocket in the street; unless, indeed, it be, that the legislature has a regard for pocket-handkerchiefs, and leaves men's brains (except when they are knocked out by violence) to take care of themselves. (chap. xlviii)

Although one would like to impute Dickens' tirade to artistic integrity alone, it seems reasonable to conjecture, as Moncrieff did, that he may have been disturbed that the dramatist had by accident made known Smike's true origins before they had been revealed in the novel and thus taken the edge off the interest in the final numbers.

Moncrieff was quick to defend himself four days later, with an equally acrimonious counter-attack on Dickens:

Mr. Dickens complains that I have, in the present very successful adaptation of "Nicholas Nickleby," "finished" his "unfinished work," have "anticipated his plot," "which had cost him many thoughtful days and sleepless nights" . . . . That I have stolen his brains (it would certainly appear that he had lost them), an act which he considers equal in turpitude to stealing his pocket-handkerchief, valuing the one at the same rate as the other . . . . I certainly plead guilty to having dramatised his work, which I should not have done till it had been completed had not two other playwrights dramatised it before me, by a circumstance that did not seem displeasing either to Mr. Dickens or his proprietors, Messrs. Chap- man & Hall, as the latter themselves actually published one of the adaptations alluded to, and thus made themselves parties to it; independently of which I did not commence my version till the original work had been nearly fifteen months before the Public, and the denouement was obviously in view:—that I should unfortunately have hit upon the same way of ending the history as that
projected by Mr. Dickens, and thereby have caused him any annoyance, I really regret; but there is a very easy way of making me "hide my diminished head," let Mr. Dickens—and he has five months before him—set his wits to work and finish his "Nicholas Nickleby" better than I have done, and I shall sink into the primitive mire, from which I have for a moment attempted to emerge.20

The novel was completed before any new adaptations appeared, so that these two are the only extant nineteenth-century versions that provide a happy ending for Smike. The versatile Stirling, however, showed his ingenuity when he produced a second play based on the novel with an even greater emphasis on Smike. The Fortunes of Smike, performed at the Adelphi, March 2, 1840, with most of the cast of the earlier production repeating their roles, is subtitled A Sequel to Nicholas Nickleby,21 but it is not a sequel in the usual sense, because it does not begin where Stirling's earlier play had ended, but starts over somewhere in the middle and thenceforward tells a different story.

Skipping the Yorkshire materials altogether this time, Stirling opens the play with Nicholas and Smike at Portsmouth with Crummles' troupe.22 How they came here is not explained, but since Smike has never met Kate, the implication is that they have not yet been to London. Nicholas receives Noggs' letter warning him of the plot against Kate, but while this motivates him to go to London, he does not have to intervene on his sister's behalf because she has already expressed her feelings to Ralph, who has agreed that
she will not have to see Hawk again. This line of action is then dropped, and the rest of the play concentrates on Ralph's and Squeers' attempts to get Smike away from Nicholas and on the Gride-Madeline Bray intrigue. This is handled in the second act largely as it was in the novel. Ralph connives to have Madeline marry Gride, who will pay him £1400 for arranging the match. Noggs, however, overhears the plot and tells Nicholas, who tries to prevent the impending marriage. He succeeds, as in the novel, only because Madeline's invalid father dies at precisely the right moment and this somehow frees her from having to marry Gride. Eventually Squeers dupes Peg Sliderskew out of some papers she has stolen from Gride, but they are immediately stolen from him by Noggs and Cheeryble who have been following. One of the documents is a will giving Madeline £12,000 when she marries, so that she and Nicholas can live happily ever after.

In the Smike portions of his play Stirling includes the boy's temporary recapture by Squeers and his subsequent release by John Browdie. Later Ralph tries to get Smike back by means of the forged note, but Nicholas refuses. Before any more plotting can go on, Smike, who has been languishing, partly because his dear Kate loves Frank Cheeryble, sees Brooker watching from behind a tree and dies touchingly in Nicholas' arms. It only remains for Brooker to tie everything up by exposing Ralph's marriage and his relation to
Smike. In conventionally melodramatic fashion, the bad are punished (word comes that Squeers is in jail and that Dotheboys Hall has fallen in a student rebellion) and the good, except Smike, are rewarded (in this version, there is even plenty of romantic reward as Nicholas will marry Madeline and Kate will marry Frank).

Stirling's second adaptation of *Nickleby* is closer to the original than his earlier one, but judged as drama, the sequel is distinctly inferior. The two Mantalini scenes that are preserved have no connection to the other scenes in the play; there is not even a suggestion that Kate once worked at the dressmaker's. The scenes were apparently included for their humor and to capitalize on the great success Yates' original portrayal of the simpering lecher had had (but Yates did not play the part in the sequel). The Mulberry Hawk portion of the plot is merely alluded to without any use being made of its dramatic possibilities; it looks like a false start from which the adapter recovered in time to start over. Two marriages are in the offing without any development (Frank and Madeline never even appear). And while Ralph is a little more complex than in Stirling's first play, Stirling's portrayal of him shares with Moncrieff's a failure to make sense of his actions in regard to the loss and return of his son. Strangely, after the gory successes of *Oliver Twist*, Ralph's death is not used. Finally, the new materials from the Grinde segment turn on the worst kind
of coincidence and improbability.

Nevertheless, the play did show handsome young virtue conquering grotesque old evil, and it was like the novel in its grosser outlines. Hence, the Times reviewer was delighted with the play. After commenting that the later parts of the novel had not been previously dramatized either because of the "difficulty of getting the various characters effectively performed" or because audiences are so used to "vulgarity and exaggeration . . . that they would feel little pleasure in beholding anything natural," he concluded, "Whether one or both, or neither of these reasons has prevented this sequel to Nicholas Nickleby from having been before brought forward, it is of no moment to inquire, suffice it that the experiment was tried last night, and was completely successful." He was particularly impressed with the play's major new feature, the death of Smike:

Of Mrs Keeley, who played the hero, Smike, it is impossible to speak in terms of too high praise. She is so identified with the part, that it is difficult to remove the illusion that the scene is a reality, and not a mimic representation of real horrors and real suffering. In the last scene she dies upon the stage, and seldom has so complete a piece of domestic tragedy been played so true. Consequently, he predicted the play would become a "lasting favourite."

Whether the popular playgoers had merely seen enough of Nickleby and Smike by this time or whether the play's defects were more clear to them than to the reviewer, one
cannot say, but his prediction was not realized since the play ran only three weeks, less than one-fifth as long as its more limited predecessor. It is even possible that theatregoers were dissatisfied with the play precisely because they were forced to view the death of a most sympathetic character.

These three are the only full early versions of *Nichleby* that have survived, although several others are recorded. Apparently it was not as popular on the stage as *Twist*, although such comparisons are risky. Conforming to the pattern set by both *Pickwick* and *Twist*, however, *Nichleby* too was to reappear on the London stage many years later when its initial popularity had subsided into the steady admiration of those who read more than the current best seller. For several reasons the two later adaptations for which texts are available (only one played in London, the other at Brighton) are much superior to the early versions. They are by more skillful playwrights, and they reflect the general realistic awakening of the English drama in the seventies, but perhaps more important, they are built with an eye more on the construction of a whole effective play rather than on such individual scenes from the novel as were either popular or stageworthy.

The treatment of Mantalini is a striking illustration of this shift. The early Victorian theatre audience liked the absurd dandy immensely, and each succeeding adapter was
thus moved to include him, no matter how little he had to do with the reconstructed plot. Thus Stirling's first play includes him in four of its eleven scenes, and the sequel includes the cad, who is not completely out of the plot, in two of the thirteen scenes. Moncrieff shows him in five of his fifteen scenes. Even though in the novel Mantalini is related to the plot somewhat more directly than the other comic characters (Crummles and Miss LaCreevy, for example), his fairly extensive use on the stage while they are ignored is too obvious a contrast to overlook, and Mantalini's popularity is further borne out by Dickens' and Thackeray's praise for Yates' playing of the role. Evidently the early adapters were right in seeing Mantalini as a character who could with some ease carry his popularity over to the stage, and what difference did it make if his best comic scenes had nothing to do with the action? In light of all this, then one cannot help being struck by the fact that the two later adapters (both writing in 1875) could find no room in their plays for Mantalini. This is only one concrete illustration of the changes that had occurred in the Victorian dramatic standards by the seventies. A certain degree of unity of impression as well as a measure of psychological credibility were now demanded.

The adapter who first revived Nickleby was Andrew Halliday, who will figure prominently later in this study. Halliday, who worked for Dickens on the staff of All the
Year Round, played a large role in the revival of Dickens drama later in the century, and his versions—Little Em'ly (1869), The Old Curiosity Shop (1870), Heart's Delight based on Dombey and Son (1873), and Nicholas Nickleby (1875)—are frequently regarded as the best adaptations of these four novels.

Halliday begins his adaptation of Nickleby (Adelphi, March 20, 1875) somewhat earlier than the previous adapters in order to elaborate the character of Ralph and the Nicklebys' need for help from him. Also set up early are the relationships between Ralph and Noggs, who soliloquizes on his own weakness for the bottle, and between Ralph and the mysterious Brooker, who arrives destitute and threatens Ralph in scene ii even before Nicholas has left for Yorkshire. The rest of the first act is spent introducing Squeers and Snawley and getting Nicholas off to Yorkshire on a real stagecoach pulled by real horses, a "great 'realistic' feature." Halliday's play thus opens more slowly than the earlier versions, but the adapter can afford the time since he has eliminated the Mantalini episodes and thus the alternation between the two plot lines. I suspect he also felt it more necessary to show the nature of the Nicklebys' reliance on Ralph for an audience surely not as familiar with the novel as, say, Stirling's had been.

Halliday opens Act II by compressing into one scene almost all of Nicholas' Yorkshire experiences including his
meeting and becoming concerned with Smike, the brimstone and treacle morning, Squeers' reading the boys' letters to them, the search for Smike, and the comic card party. To emphasize the mystery of Ralph's past, Halliday also includes in this act a wholly made up scene in which Smike, having run away in the snow, encounters Brooker, who knows him and tells him to return as he says in an aside, "Now Mr. Ralph Nickleby, we shall see what the secret is worth" (II, ii). Smike is soon captured and returned so that Halliday can end the act as Stirling had ended his first one, with the beating of Squeers and Nicholas' escape with Smike.

Halliday continues to emphasize the mystery of Ralph's past as Noggs reveals early in Act II all he has been able to learn from Brooker, that Ralph was once married. Nicholas and Smike show up, and to heighten the mystery further, Smike recognizes a picture of Ralph and under prodding describes the garret upstairs. In the only reference to the whole Kate plot, Halliday shows her repudiating Ralph's friends. The unneeded business of Smike's being captured by Squeers and freed by Browdie is omitted, but the Browdies are brought in to be present at the confrontation and unmasking scene with which Halliday carefully ends. As Snawley claims to be Smike's father, Noggs enters to expose the plot and denounce his employer. With him, of course, is Brooker, who identifies Smike as Ralph's son (whom Ralph had believed dead) just before the waif dies asking for a lock of Kate's
In contrast to the earlier adaptations, Halliday's play has a much more unified plot, achieved by omitting the Mantalinis, Cheerybles, Brays, and Gride, and referring only briefly to the Mulberry Hawk episodes. Thus it is closer to Stirling's first play than to the others, but the important point is that Halliday chose to omit what Stirling had no knowledge of. Apparently Halliday accepted the now widespread critical position that the later portions of the book are far less successful than the Yorkshire sections, and less successful even than those telling Smike's sentimental story.

What Halliday did select emphasizes the relation of Smike, Ralph, and Nicholas and carefully builds up to the climactic unmasking by having Brooker appear early to connect Smike to Ralph and by divulging part of Ralph's secret before the final scene. The confrontation scene, always made much of, is thus less of a surprise than in earlier versions but seems much less gratuitous. Such a scene (between Brownlow and Monks) had earlier been played up in the Oliver Twist adaptations, and Gilbert Highet suggests that the existence of such scenes in the novels themselves is one of their essentially "dramatic" features:

Dickens and his characters love scenes: terrific crises in which all the suspense of months or years comes to a head in fifteen minutes, drastic decisions are taken, and violent alterations of the balance of power take place. In life itself
(if we are to judge by the practice of most novelists) things move more slowly, and there is no single point of crisis, but rather a successive group of tensions. But Dickens' characters, like those of the stage, often remain silent for a long time [e.g. Noggs], and then utter all their emotions so violently that nothing is left to say, and we expect only a quick curtain.29

Using such a scene in which the hero (with considerable help) thwarts the villains in the nick of time and using clearly marked good or evil characters, the play continues in the pattern of domestic melodrama. But with some deepening of Ralph's character (involving a motive for his malignity in the loss of his son and his anguish at learning S'pike is the boy), the conversion of Noggs back to a serious, brooding character, the careful motivation of the climactic scene, and the de-emphasis of the pure heroine, the play shows some major differences from its predecessors. Significantly, even the minor attempts to give depth to such characters as Ralph are not original, but are drawn from details in the novel which the earlier adapters had simply chosen to ignore. Melodramatic as the novel was, it had been still simplified, made less thought-provoking and more black and white, if that is possible, when put on the early Victorian stage. Although the Examiner reviewer was displeased with Halliday's play ("though arranged with skill and acted with efficiency, [it] would not have made [Dickens] less anxious for the amendment of the copyright laws"),30 other reviewers were highly impressed, especially with the tight construction.
Said the *Times*,

Mr. Andrew Halliday has acted on a very sound principle. Instead of wandering all over the book and bringing together a number of striking scenes not closely connected with each other, so as to produce less a drama than a series of Tableaux vivants illustrating rather than telling a story [a pretty good description of the earlier versions], he has confined himself to a single episode, which he has put upon the stage as an organized work, thoroughly complete in itself.31

The *Athenaeum* reviewer was less impressed, but after carefully comparing the play to Stirling's first adaptation, he concluded, "the representation of 'Nicholas Nickleby' is higher than any that has previously been given."32 Certainly the London audiences approved since it ran from March 2, 1875, until October 30, a total of 192 performances.33

Taken together the reviews show an interesting lack of concern over the softening of the Yorkshire satire. The *Athenaeum* commented that "the scenes at Dotheboys Hall are amusing,"34 and the *Times* merely noted that "Miss Lydia Foote does not attempt to portray the semi-idiotic side of Smike."35 Only the *Examiner* recognized the effect such shifts had on the work's meaning: "Squeers himself is at no time presented as the revolting monster of the book [one recalls Thackeray's comment about how good-natured and comical Squeers had appeared in an 1840 version]; and this concession to public sentiment serves no less to weaken the hearer's sympathy with Smike than to diminish their pleasure
in the schoolmaster's discomfiture." This merely continues the treatment of the earlier adaptations of *Nickleby* as well as *Twist* and illustrates again the general avoidance in the plays of Dickens' more severe social criticism. The Victorian playgoer much preferred Halliday's realistic stagecoach to Dickens' realistic brutality. 

Considering both early and late adaptations, it is clear that considerable agreement existed among the dramatists on how to treat *Nickleby*, and on what materials were suited for the stage. The comic creations, except for Mantalini and Browdie, are always avoided or played down. The plays all need Mrs. Nickleby in a few scenes, for instance, but she is distinctly unimportant, and there is no hint of her characteristic speech. Dickens' Mrs. Nickleby is simply too big for any play in which she is not a main character. Similarly the Cheerybles appear in only two of the five plays and are merely Nicholas' employers, with no hint of their devotion to helping others. Crummles and company appear only briefly in one of the five full versions, and, as noted, Miss LaCreevy, the Kenwigses, and Mr. Lillyvick never appeared on the stage at all.

In all cases the novel is translated on the stage as a conventional domestic melodrama with histrionic dialogue, no intellectual demands and some simplification of character, although the original characters fit the melodramatic mold so well that they are hardly done any injustice on the stage.
Even looking at the novel only for its melodrama, the adapters, once the book was complete, still had three different plots to select from: that centering on Smike, that emphasizing Kate, and the one involving Madeline and Gride. In every case the Smike plot was recognized as the most dramatically appealing, but each of the early plays included one of the other plots (Moncrieff's play tried to use all three), while the later adaptations chose Smike's story exclusively. This is significant for several reasons. Dickens had already become famous and loved for his portrayals of mistreated children, and Smike, like Oliver, is one of the pathetic figures Victorian audiences loved most. On the other hand, even as a melodramatist Dickens suffered from the inability to present an attractive heroine. A melodramatic heroine need have no individualizing character traits at all, but even her stock personality has at least to be outwardly manifested in order to be superficially appealing to both audience and hero. In other words, her virtue and desirability need to be shown. But with few exceptions (Nell and perhaps En'ly and Agnes), Dickens was unable to present such a girl until late in his career. As with the *Oliver Twist* plays which made the least of Rose Maylie, the *Nichleby* plays all avoid as much as possible both Kate and Madeline, the two candidates for heroine. Later Emma Haredale, Mary Graham, and Florence Dombey will receive similar treatment on the stage.
The fact that the two heroines and the plots centering on them can be so easily omitted points to the separability of Dickens' plots at this point in his career. Not only are the comic characters in *Nickleby* detachable, but so are the three melodramatic plots whose only relation is that Nicholas and Ralph happen to be involved in each. This separability is a great aid to the dramatic adapter who must compress his materials, for it makes selection easy without having to change any one plot very much. Unfortunately for the adapters, as Dickens' plots became more unified throughout his career, they became, as a general rule, harder to transfer to the stage.

Once disentangled, the Nicholas-Smike plot which all the plays focused on has several dramatic appeals. It has tension as Nicholas, aided by Noggs and Browdie, vies with Ralph, aided by Squeers and Snawley. It has suspense over Ralph's past and Smike's identity. It has pathos in the waif's suffering and eventual death. And though *Nickleby* has much less physical action than *Twist* it does have at least Nicholas' drubbing of the cruel schoolmaster which is used in all the plays except Stirling's sequel (in which Nicholas beats Hawk instead). Finally, it has the climactic confrontation in which Smike's identity is made known and the villain foiled so that the audience could depart secure in the knowledge that once again good had miraculously come out on top in the end. *Nickleby* lacks, however, two of the
features which had made *Twist* so very popular on the stage. It has not the violent action that the earlier adapters had so capitalized on, nor has it the individually memorable characters of the earlier novel. Squeers is perhaps as strongly defined as Sikes, but Ralph is nothing compared to Fagin. Smike is perhaps as appealing as Oliver, but no one in the *Nickleby* plays has the attractiveness of Nancy. By being a more typical melodrama than *Twist*, *Nickleby* becomes, ironically, a less effective one.
Chapter IV Notes

1 Published in Webster's Acting National Drama (London: Chapman and Hall, n.d.), Vol. V.


3 (November 24 and December 1, 8, 15, and 22, 1838).

4 I (November 24, 1838), 310.

5 (November 20, 1838), p. 5.

6 Old Drury Lane (London, 1881), I, 95.

7 According to daily listings in the Times.

8 "Dickens in France," Fraser's, XXV (1842), 342.


10 See John Suddaby, "The Dramatic Piracy of 'Nicholas Nickleby,'" Dickensian, VII (1911), 66.


12 Such as Malcolm Morley, "Nicholas Nickleby on the Boards," Dickensian, XLIII (1947), 137.


14 Such positioning and costuming of the characters to reproduce the actual illustrations from the novel is a common feature of many of the plays studied. These tableaux were frequently emphasized in the playbills and sometimes held while a short melody was played to give the audience the full effect. This suggests that the illustrations were considered a much more integral part of the novel by the original readers than they are now.
The line he objected to was, "I've heard that good people that live away from this place feed the pretty harmless robins when the cold days and dark nights are on—perhaps they would feed me too, for I am very harmless—very. I'll run to them at once, and ask them."

Mrs. Keely later recalled his response: "I shall never forget Dickens's face when he heard me repeating these lines. Turning to the prompter he said, 'Damn the robins; cut them out!'" [Westminster Gazette [March 13, 1899]. Quoted in Letters, I, 460n).

A manuscript of the play is in the Lord Chamberlain's collection in the British Museum.

According to daily listings in the Times.

No text of this second adaptation survives, but Morley mentions it (p. 138).


Stirling's sequel is the only full adaptation to include Crummles, but the comic actor-manager did eventually find himself a place on the London stage. On May 31, 1844, an American play originally performed in 1840, based only on the Crummles chapters of the novel, appeared at the Grecian Saloon. It was originally called The Savage and the Maiden, but later became The Infant Phenomenon. Its author, Henry Horncastle, played Nicholas at the Grecian but took the lead as Crummles when the play was revived in 1848. As one might expect on the basis of the novel, it has no plot and merely uses Nicholas as a sounding board for the comic pretensions of the various members of the troupe. Nicholas and Smike meet and join Crummles in the first scene and meet the remaining members of the company in the second and last. These include Mrs. Gudden, complete with Shakespearean allusions; Mr. Folair who praises the Phenomenon to her father and criticizes her to Nicholas; and Lenville, who hopes for a good part in the play Nicholas is to write. The piece ends with the rehearsing of a ridiculous dance between the Phenomenon and Folair, playing the savage who first pursues the maiden, then falls in love when he finds her asleep, and offers her a twig as a token of affection when she awakens.

(March 3, 1840), p. 6.
According to daily listings in the *Times*.

See Morley, "Nicholas Nickleby on the Boards."

Pemberton, p. 137.

A manuscript of the play is in the New York Public Library.

Pemberton, p. 150.


(March 27, 1875), p. 362.

(March 22, 1875), p. 8.

(March 27, 1875), p. 435.

(March 22, 1875), p. 8.

(March 27, 1875), p. 435.

(March 27, 1875), p. 362.

Very much like Halliday's, the fifth surviving adaptation, by Harry Simms, was performed at Brighton sometime that same year (1875). As a whole it has perhaps the least simplified characters of any Nickleby play. There are only two significant structural differences from Halliday's play. In Act II when Smike accidentally meets Brooker, Brooker tells him almost the whole story (i.e., that he brought a rich man's son to the school fourteen years ago). This lessens the suspense about Smike's identity and Ralph's past, since it does not take a genius to make the connection. Then in Act III Simms preserves the recapturing of Smike by Squeers and his release by Browdie. It is an unneeded complication which Halliday had not bothered with, but it did expand Simms' own part (Squeers). The schoolmaster even gets to knock Nicholas down with a cane during the kidnapping.
THE OLD CURIOUSITY SHOP: A BREAK FROM THE PATTERN

The Old Curiosity Shop, serialized weekly in Master Humphrey's Clock from April 25, 1840, to February 6, 1841, has some of the same dramatic attractions we have noted in Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby. It has a pure, innocent persecuted child in Nell, a wicked and grotesque villain in Quilp, a comic pseudo-villain in Dick Swiveller, a comic female in the Marchioness, two deaths (one grisly and one pathetic), and a plot full of hair-breadth escapes. But the novel differs from its predecessors in that the melodramatic conflict set up by Quilp's eviction of Nell and her grandfather is not suddenly and inspiringly resolved to show once again that goodness will finally triumph. Instead, the dominant mood of melancholy becomes deeper by slow wearing degrees until it culminates in Nell's death. Neither the darkness nor the gradualness of the decline made the book suited for the nineteenth-century stage or perhaps any stage. As a result, the novel was distinctly less appealing to dramatic adapters than Dickens' preceding works. Popular as the novel was with the reading public, only the experienced Stirling attempted to stage it in its own day. This time
even he waited until the novel was two-thirds finished before mounting his version, The Old Curiosity Shop or, One Hour from Master Humphrey's Clock at the Adelphi on November 9, 1840.²

In his first act, while introducing his main characters, Stirling sets up the main melodramatic conflict very much as in the novel. Master Humphrey himself shows Nell the way to her grandfather's shop where he meets Kit and, shortly thereafter, Fred and Swiveller. Quilp (played by Yates, who already had Fagin and Mantalini to his credit) is introduced in another scene, and his delight in others' pain is shown by the detail of his making his wife sit unmoving beside him all night while he smokes. By the end of the act Fred and Swiveller have hatched their plot to get Trent's money by having Swiveller marry Nell, and Quilp has foreclosed on the shop, sending Nell and Trent into the world penniless.

Up to this point Stirling has deviated from the book in only minor ways necessitated by condensation, for the novel is so far conventionally melodramatic in both conflict and characterization. The rest of the play, however, has to telescope the action of the novel if its conclusion is ever to be reached. Consequently, Stirling preserves only one incident from the long wanderings of Nell and her grandfather, the meeting with Codlin and Short. Soon Nell recognizes that the two itinerant showmen are plotting against
them and that they must escape, but they do not do so until Trent has lost what little money he had to Codlin and Short in a card game. This incident occurred much later in the novel and involved a new group of characters; Stirling apparently felt its pathos was too good to omit but he could not afford to introduce the new characters needed to set it up. Evidently he also felt unable to include the connected scene in which Nell watches silently as her grandfather steals her last coin in order to gamble. Until he brings the plot to a conclusion, this is all Stirling shows the audience of the wanderings of little Nell. Also in the second act the adapter includes the joining of the evil forces as Quilp and Fred agree to help each other track down Nell and her grandfather.

Stirling's only reference to the extensive line of action involving Kit comes when he tells the audience that he is now happily working for Mr. Humphrey. At this point Stirling begins to draw his tale to a most improbable close. Just as Kit finishes his summary, a knock is heard at the door, and here is little Nell (with her grandfather) praying to be let in. Pursued by Quilp, she has knocked at a strange house and is (rightly) amazed to find her old friend Kit there. The next scene shifts to Quilp and his cronies outside the house. Hearing Nell within, he outlines a kidnap scheme for Fred and Swiveller, the latter, in the rain and wind, caring little for the whole business. In the
climactic scene, which the novel proved not to imitate, Nell and Trent are asleep in the cottage when Quilp and his cronies climb in the window; Quilp grabs Nell, who screams and breaks loose. Humphrey, his wife, and Kit hear the screams and enter. Kit grabs Quilp, and Fred thoroughly regrets their plot. Humphrey declines to prosecute them since Nell still loves her brother, so Quilp climbs back out the window in order that Nell and her grandfather can live happily ever after with the Humphreys. Morley comments that "Such anticipation of her fate by the dramatist is said to have annoyed Dickens so much that, having still several more chapters of the work to write, he reversed the Stirling pronouncement and killed the poor girl off."¹

Like most early adaptations Stirling's play is severely episodic, and this general tendency of the dramatized novel is intensified by Stirling's inclusion in each of his thirteen scenes of a living tableau imitating one of the illustrations that accompanied the weekly installments. "The play progressed, as it were, from one illustration to the next."⁵ But one is perhaps most struck by all the material Stirling felt it necessary to leave out. Some of it he surely omitted because it had only been recently introduced in the novel and he had no way of knowing what was to come of it. The Brasses, the Marchioness, the mysterious boarder all fall in this category. But more important, Stirling chose not to use a number of incidents, both comic and
pathetic, which had already been fully developed in the novel. These include Nell's and Trent's temporarily living with the schoolmaster (in chapter xxiv), the pathetic death of his pupil (in chapter xxv), the episodes involving Mrs. Jarley, and Nell's and Trent's dismal journey after they leave the Waxworks. These are interesting incidents in themselves and all are relevant to the decline of Little Nell. But except for Mrs. Jarley, they are essentially not dramatizable, especially not in the melodramatic conventions with which both novel and play began. For the many sections dealing with the wanderings are very different in tone and structure from the rest of the novel. Dickens is showing, in almost a dream sequence, a whole series of events which individually are rather tame but which taken cumulatively weigh upon Nell a heavier and heavier burden, one which lessens occasionally only to be increased. Dickens tries to show in Nell, for the first time, a character who changes not suddenly as the result of anything climactic, but slowly as her environment weighs on her. She loses neither her purity nor any other of her virtues, but she is slowly beaten down. Nell after her eviction is presented in a way which reminds one of the slow decline of Clarissa Harlowe and which the stage has neither the time nor the form to imitate. This is, I believe, why *The Old Curiosity Shop* has always been a problem to the dramatic adapter and has only succeeded on the stage when adapted quite "creatively."
From a modern point of view, the most surprising thing about Stirling's play is that it pleased several of the critics and managed to stay on the stage for a month and a half. The Times said it was "dramatised with great skill and effect . . . the pathos and the humour are preserved and the tediousness got rid of," and the usually more critical Examiner, while admitting that the play could not be really like the original, said it consisted of "good fragments of its stock, and excellent snatches of its flavour."

Apparently the play's success depended almost entirely on Frederick Yates' powerful portrayal of Quilp, the latest in Dickens' line of fierce villains. According to the Times, "The great feature of the piece . . . was Mr. Yates, who seemed on this occasion to have completely stepped out of himself and taken possession of the body and limbs of Quilp." And the Examiner was even more enthusiastic:

That is a performance of such amazing skill, and all things considered, of such portentous relish and gusto that the tens of thousands who read Master Humphrey's Clock should do their best to see it. They will there see Mr. Yates suddenly shrunk down to four feet nothing in his shoes; his face wrinkled up into about one third of its usual size; his legs twisted into forms which no mathematician could describe; in a word, his voice, gait, look and whole appearance, changed . . . for those of the notorious Daniel Quilp.

If anything or anyone in The Old Curiosity Shop is dramatic, it is Quilp, who stands in much the same position as Fagin, a grotesque, hideously evil but vitally alive, active, and oratorical creation who may lose scope on the stage but
almost necessarily gains power. And Stirling found little difficulty in presenting Quilp in a stage melodrama since, as one modern writer notes,

In all externals [and these, of course, were all the play could use], Quilp has stepped straight from the popular lowbrow theatre: he is villainously deformed; hatred and suspicion are his most characteristic emotions, and he expresses them without reserve; his tastes as exemplified in the boiling run, are unnatural and alarming; and other characters, even evil accomplices like Sampson Brass, visibly cower before him.¹³

Yates himself was pleased with the stir his acting in such a role was creating; he wrote laconically to Stirling, "Quilp's up in public estimation; Nell's down—I'll keep her there."¹⁴

No new adaptation of The Old Curiosity Shop is recorded in London for the next thirty years,¹⁵ although versions of the novel were played in some of the provincial towns. Several adaptations were to achieve various degrees of success in London later in the century, but by and large The Old Curiosity Shop has proven to be the least popular of Dickens' early novels for the stage.

Not long after Stirling's play the novel reached its completion with a very different ending. Stirling, treating the story in traditional melodramatic terms (as it had begun), had ended it suddenly and happily with the reversal of fortune for both heroine and villain. But once Little Nell died in print, she would almost surely have had to die on stage as well. Adapters, I believe, especially mid-Victorian adapters, shied away from a novel in which the major figure
died; although a pathetic death could be a great attraction, nineteenth-century domestic drama almost had to end happily. It was one thing for readers and playgoers to shed tears over Smike, who had gone from misery to happiness before his death, because they knew that for Nicholas and Kate, the central characters, everything would now be fine. But it was quite another thing for them to face the equally pathetic death of the central character, their darling Little Nell, who was once pleasant and gay but has been worn down by her cares. Nicholas, in spite of Smike's death, ends happily; The Old Curiosity Shop, in spite of the righting of wrongs, the destruction of evil, and Nell's and Kit's finding true friends, ends unhappily. Dickens' readers, who had been with him for nine months, had little choice but to accept the painful ending, but potential dramatic adapters probably suspected that few Victorian theatregoers would be willing to submit themselves to what they knew ahead of time would be a depressing experience, reminding them that goodness and virtue were not always triumphant in their world.

Eventually, Andrew Halliday, by shifting emphasis away from Nell and using both comic characters and spectacular scenic effects, managed to make The Old Curiosity Shop a stage success. Nell, the second of his four successful adaptations of Dickens novels, appeared at the Olympic Theatre on November 19, 1870. Unfortunately, no text of it is available, but the reviews give some idea of how Halliday
dealt with a work which heretofore had seemed unsuited to the dramatic medium.

Halliday included all the characters in Stirling's play and added six more, from which we can infer confidently what materials he chose to use. The appearance in the *dramatis personae* of Tom Scott and Mrs. Jarley indicates that Halliday used a second train of events from Nell's wanderings, involving Grandfather Trent's being nearly enticed into robbing Mrs. Jarley, for whom he and Nell are working. One reviewer noted a major shift to tie this episode to the basic conflict: "the introduction of Quilp in the scene in which the robbery upon Mrs. Jarley is attempted, and the imposing upon him [of] the apparent guilt, strengthen the interest, and give a species of cohesion to some of the scenes." And the inclusion of Sampson and Sally Brass and the Marchioness probably means that Halliday retained the Brasses' attempt to frame Kit for theft. Halliday was better off than Stirling in having available the two boldly drawn portraits of comic women, Mrs. Jarley and the Marchioness. Both are likely to have had broad appeal on the stage.

Halliday also had two sensational deaths to play up which had not been available to Stirling. And he made full use of them. Instead of having Quilp drown, which is difficult to stage effectively, Halliday turned the dwarf's death into a standard sensation scene in which his house burns down around him and he is trapped. Such a scene gave the
stage technicians a chance to display their craft and thrill the audience. The *Times* reviewer, only lukewarm over the scene, said merely that it could "hold its own among theatrical conflagrations."¹⁸ To further impress his audience Halliday must have shown Nell's pathetic and protracted death, but he outdid his source in allowing his audience to view the "destiny of Nell beyond the point at which human observation ordinarily ceases."¹⁹ In short, he included an apotheosis, "a vision of angels at the end" which was "remarkably effective."²⁰ This, in a sense, gave a happy celestial ending to the play and perhaps sent the audience home less depressed about the dismal earthly one than they might otherwise have been.

Although reviewers admitted that the play was done with "tact and ability"²¹ and that the author "has fairly enough succeeded,"²² they also agreed that the nature of the novel and Halliday's attempt to include so much of it led to the same episodicity and shallow characterization that have been discussed so often in connection with plays based on the previous novels. The *Athenaeum* reviewer complained of "the loss of fullness and colour" resulting from showing a character "in outline" and "the want of apparent connection between the different scenes"; he added that "at the end, accordingly, Mr. Halliday is obliged to leave unfastened many of the threads he has taken up."²³ And the *Times* reviewer made essentially the same criticisms:
The scenes hang loosely together. Many personages appear and vanish to appear no more, and those of the audience who do not retain a lively remembrance of the novel will find a difficulty in reducing the several fragments to one harmonious whole. Nell, indeed, is less a play than an exhibition of characters, each to be accepted as a subject for separate observation.

The theatre audience was quite willing to accept the play on this ground because it ran for over five months. Its popularity can be traced to four sources. First, there was still the impressive figure of Quilp, played now by John Clarke, who once again dominated the play. He is "the chief point of attention" and "the most prominent figure on the canvas." To go along with him, Halliday also selected two new comic figures to lighten the mood, the Marchioness and Mrs. Jarley. Along with Dick Swiveller, these three characters are the most dramatic in the novel in that they are the most strongly, and at the same time not very subtly, delineated. Their personalities, therefore, can be quickly exposed and easily grasped by the audience in a single scene. Vivid villainy and uncomplicated comedy, then, are two of the play's appeals, the melodramatic Kit sub-plot is a third, and the scenic effects discussed above, a fourth. All this shows a shifting of the emphasis away from the trials of Nell, which are apparently only effective on the stage in small slices leavened with comedy and special visual effects. Halliday's recipe for combining these diverse ingredients worked and made dramatically palatable what no one else
had ventured to serve in thirty years.

The only other nineteenth-century play\textsuperscript{28} based on The Old Curiosity Shop for which a text is available is George Lander's version produced at the Theatre Royal, York, on May 14, 1877.\textsuperscript{29} Although not performed in London, Lander's play deserves to be included in this study because it represents a further step in the direction taken by Halliday; it makes the story theatrically effective by shifting emphasis away from the central characters and onto the more sensational and comic elements of the novel. Lander adopted Halliday's use of a fire for Quilp's death, he carried further the emphasis on the comedy of Swiveller and the Marchioness, and he did what he could to make The Old Curiosity Shop into a standard melodrama by focusing only on the early parts of Nell's story and then shifting to the story of Kit's experiences with the Brasses. He also used the crowd-pleasing device of casting his leading actress, Katie Logan, in the double roles of Nell and the Marchioness.\textsuperscript{30}

His play opens somewhat later and more effectively than Stirling's play had, with Quilp forcing his wife to pump Nell about her grandfather's strange behavior, thus preparing for the sharp contrast between the pure innocent heroine and the evil villain. To introduce some immediate action and establish Quilp's hatred of Kit, Lander also preserves in the first scene Kit's reference to "an uglier dwarf than can be seen anywhere for a penny." It follows a
fight between Kit and Quilp himself (in the novel Kit fights Quilp's apprentice). Also in the first act is the one incident from Nell's wanderings which the playwright found worth including: her grandfather's attempt to steal her last coin while she sleeps. The scene is less poignant than in the novel, however, since Nell, no longer intent on protecting the old man's pride, does not allow Trent to steal the money and gamble it away; the scene occurs before they have left the shop, and Nell stops her grandfather from making off with the money. The first act also introduces Dick Swiveller, but his role has been shifted from what it was in Stirling's play to make it fit with what he grew into in the later part of the novel. Lander's play contains no suggestion that he has ever been in league with any of the disreputable characters; Fred is eliminated, and Swiveller, although working for Sampson Brass, makes his "good" nature known early when he declines to go with Quilp to take over the Old Curiosity Shop. Recognizing the pathetic power of Nell's and Trent's ejection, as Stirling and Halliday had done before him, Lander reproduces it faithfully to end the act.

From here until the end of the play, however, Little Nell is almost forgotten. One weak scene in Act III shows Nell and her grandfather walking wearily in the country, but it is only a reminder that they still exist to an audience who by this time may have forgotten about them. Instead the
rest of the play emphasizes, with a fairly accurate retell-
ing, the story of Quilp's attempt with the Brasses' aid to
have revenge on Kit. The business of the "stolen" five
pound note is preserved to end the second act climactically
with Kit's impending arrest, and the boy is saved as in the
novel by the Marchioness' revelation of the frame-up after
she has nursed Swiveller through his fever. This soon leads,
as in the novel, to Quilp's undoing as well. The scene in
which the dwarf makes Brass drink boiling rum is effectively
preserved and leads to Brass's disclosure of Quilp's part in
framing Kit. At this point Lander borrows from Halliday and
ends Act III with the spectacular death of Quilp by fire in-
stead of water. Then Lander quickly ties up the loose ends
by showing Kit freed and Swiveller preparing to marry the
Marchioness before he moves to the final pathetic scene of
the deaths of Little Nell and her grandfather just after the
arrival of Kit with Trent's brother.

Lander and Halliday attempted to make an intractable
story effective on the stage by shifting their emphasis away
from its main plot, which was the most difficult portion to
cope with, and onto the subsidiary plots and characters,
which were punctuated with vivid scenic effects. While they
were able to deemphasize the statl wanderings of Nell and
Trent (Lander even more than Halliday), the dramatists could
not afford to sacrifice their story completely; it was the
essence of the novel. The resulting play, assuming
Halliday's is like Lander's, has the beginning and end based on one plot with a different one in the middle. And what remains of the Nell plot in the plays makes little sense, because once she and her grandfather are gone from London nothing suggests that Quilp pursues them ferociously or that they meet hardships on the way. In Lander's play, it is mentioned at one point that Quilp has tried to trace the wanderers and failed, but he makes no further attempt to find them, nor is any reason given why he should want to. The result is that Nell's pathetic death, with which any play based on the whole novel was practically forced to end, becomes completely unmotivated, and unless the viewer is familiar with the novel, incomprehensible. Ironically, the sincere attempts of the adapters to make the story more dramatic than it was resulted only in even worse drama.

The next time the novel was seen on the London stage, these structural problems, while still present, became less important because the same adapting trend had been carried so far that the play was a comedy with a serious sub-plot. This is how American playwrights had been able to make it acceptable to audiences across the Atlantic. Consequently, when Charles Dickens the younger wrote a version of the novel for Lotta Crabtree, the famous American actress, he naturally imitated the American play which she had made famous. The American version, also written especially for the actress, had been by the prolific John Brougham and had
had its premiere in Boston in 1866. It had included a number of invented characters and had omitted Kit and his sub-plot. It was frankly a starring vehicle designed to show off Lotta’s virtuosity in the contrasting roles of Nell and the Marchioness, and it made her reputation as she played it all over the United States for twenty-one years. Probably the most episodic of all the adaptations of The Old Curiosity Shop, the younger Dickens’ was apparently not so much a play as a musical review with separate sketches hung on a very thin plot line. With the doubled role and the songs and dances, this version of the novel perhaps carried to the logical extreme the attempt to sell The Old Curiosity Shop on stage.

No text of the play is available, but fortunately, the Times reviewer saw fit to include a thorough, if slanted, summary of it:

In the first act the principal dramatis personae are introduced in the Old Curiosity Shop. Here pretty Mrs. Quilp betrays the confidence of the child Nell; [Quilp] tells the old gambler he has discovered his secret, falsely charges Kit with having betrayed his master, and threatens to put in the brokers and to take possession of the stock. Grandfather Trent and Little Nell leave and begin their wanderings to be seen but three more [sic]—first when they enter Mrs. Jarley’s service; again, when the child overhears the rogues Jowl and List tempting her grandfather to rob the proprietress of the waxworks and at once hurries the old man away from temptation; and, for the last time, in an elaborate and highly effective set scene in the fourth act representing the church and churchyard, where Little Nell dies on the motherly bosom of Mrs. Jarley . . . .

In no fewer than six scenes the Marchioness
appears and takes a more or less prominent part in the proceedings, the scene in the kitchen of Sampson Brass's house, for which the adapter acknowledges his indebtedness to a version of the story by the late John Brougham, being made the occasion for the introduction of some comic business ending with the dancing of a minuet.

Having thus broke bounds and freed themselves from the trammels of the story and of dramatic propriety, this young couple, on Mr. Dick's recovery from his illness, delay their efforts to clear the character of Kit and rescue him from the imminent risk of transportation while the Marchioness dances a breakdown to the music of Mr. Swiveller's piping on a penny whistle. Encouraged by the reception of this absurdity the pair in a subsequent scene sang a comic medley and raised the enthusiasm of the house to Boxing-night heat by such eccentricities of dance that an occupant of the gallery, not at all impertinently, after one recall of the performers, demanded a hornpipe. This brief sketch of the adaptation, which concludes abruptly with Quilp's fall into the river, may serve to soften the shock any lover of Dickens would experience if unprepared for the liberties which are taken with his work.

Somewhat ironically in a play which gives such freedom and emphasis to the Marchioness and Dick Swiveller, this version of the novel also contains as much of Nell's and her grandfather's trek as any of the others discussed. The result was almost bound to be the usual episodic structure and shallow character development. The Athenaeum reviewer noted,

Mr. Dickens has supplied a rather shapeless version of his father's story. . . . Two separate interests conflict with each other, single scenes are so short as not to be self-explanatory, and the various ends of the story are not tied up at the conclusion. All Mr. Dickens can claim to have done is to present many of the most prominent characters of the novel, and to have supplied some striking if disconnected scenes.

The Illustrated London News said it would be impossible to
make of the novel "more than a series of more or less dis-
connected scenes," and the Times reviewer said this led
to "producing upon the mind an impression like the strange
and inconsequent combinations of a dream." The reviewers
agreed that Robert Pateman's Quilp was quite good, as was
Lotta's Marchioness, but her Nell was "too feeble and
colourless" and "deficient in pathos." Again in the
active, pert Marchioness we see an example of one of
Dickens' peripheral characters appearing more appealingly
on the stage than the less vigorously drawn major character
of patient, suffering, quiet Nell.

Charles Dickens the younger may not have been respon-
sible for including all the comic dances. He complained
bitterly that the play "was deprived of any merit it may
have possessed by the interpolation by the American lady for
whom I wrote the piece of a preposterous act from a ridicu-
loous version by Mr. John Brougham, which she had been accus-
tomed to play in the States." The Athenaeum noted, how-
ever, that the two Brougham scenes "are far from the worst
in the play." The novelist's son may merely have been
trying to avoid accepting responsibility for the play. In
spite of its poor construction and less than enthusiastic
critical reviews, however, it was a practical success, run-
ning from January 28 until May 5, 1884.

Judging both from the limited number of stage versions
that appeared in London and from their widely diverse tones
and emphases, playwrights found *The Old Curiosity Shop* much less dramatically feasible than any previous Dickens novel, even the episodic *Pickwick*. The reasons are not, I think, too difficult to see, and they are indicative of what makes a novel "dramatic," or at least what did in Dickens' time. *The Old Curiosity Shop* lacks several of the standard melodramatic elements that had made *Nickleby* especially appealing to the dramatic adapters. It is deficient in vivid action in that it has no robberies, shootings, kidnappings, or vigorous beatings. Moreover, it lacks the strong confrontation scene in which the villain is suddenly and permanently overthrown by the hero (or his helper), leading to the happy ending. Perhaps most important, *The Old Curiosity Shop* has neither a hero in the normal sense, nor a happy ending for all the good characters (although any adapter working before the novel was completed would be blissfully unaware of this problem). In addition the novel lacks a love interest between major characters, and the main characters are largely a dull lot. The forces of good are blandly portrayed by Nell, who suffers but does not act, by Kit and his employer, and by Grandfather Trent's mysterious brother, all of whom are pretty uninteresting. Of the main characters, Quilp stands out as at once colorful, active, and vocal enough to be pretty good on the stage, but the other interesting, vivid characters (the Brasses, Swiveller, the Marchioness, Mrs. Jarley) are not necessary to telling
the story of Nell's persecution and can be preserved in
detail only if their appeal is sufficient to warrant some­
what digressive episodes or if their parts can be modified
to be of more importance.

To lead from the eviction slowly through the deadening
struggles on the journey, as Dickens tried to do in his main
plot, is a more subtle task than the nineteenth-century
stage, or perhaps any stage, could handle. The main plot is
by nature too slow, too unspectacular, too unexciting, and,
for the Victorian audience, too depressing, to show on a
stage (although the flexibility and quick cutting of the
modern cinema might be able to give an effective view of the
progressively more painful journey). The playwrights could,
of course, have omitted Nell's story completely, merely pre­
serving the antagonism between Quilp and Kit; this might
have made a better play, but it would not have had the pathos
inherent in the death of Little Nell, and for hundreds of
potential viewers, it would not have been The Old Curiosity
Shop.
Chapter V Notes

1 When his play appeared the novel had reached chapter xliv, but Stirling used no material beyond chapter xxvii.


3 A note in the published text implies that this may be an emendation by T. H. Lacy to improve the play's unity.

4 "Plays in Master Humphrey's Clock," Dickensian, XLIII (1947), 203. This is a fascinating conjecture but highly unlikely for two reasons. First, Forster says that Dickens agreed, about half way through the novel, when Forster suggested that death was the only possible end for Nell. Moreover, Dickens actually assisted at a rehearsal of the play and records no anger when discussing it. (See The Letters of Charles Dickens in The Nonesuch Dickens, ed. Walter Dexter [London, 1938], I, 277.)

5 Ibid.

6 This slow wearing down of Nell is, I believe, something quite new in Dickens' development. He had not before shown any major character change gradually over a long period. I would not, however, go so far as to argue that this was intentional or that Dickens was even aware it was different from his previous work.

7 According to daily listings in the Times.

8 (November 10, 1840), p. 5.

9 (November 8, 1840), p. 726.

10 This is in accord with Dickens' own impression of the play based on rehearsals. He refused to accompany his wife to the opening because except for Yates as Quilp he had "no faith in it at all" (Letters, I, 277).

11 (November 10, 1840), p. 5.

12 (November 8, 1840), p. 726.


14 Quoted in Edward Stirling, Old Drury Lane (London, 1881), I, 175.
A version of the novel was performed at a benefit for one night at Drury Lane on October 4, 1853, but it is unlikely that a new version was made for the occasion; Morley is probably correct in saying that it was Stirling's play again.

Which is merely to say that on the whole The Old Curiosity Shop is not structurally a melodrama. It does have one purely melodramatic subplot in the conniving of the Brasses to frame the hero Kit and his being saved at the last instant by Swiveller, the comic man. But this is not the major plot line, and no adapter was willing to build his play around it (it was not fully available to Stirling). Later adapters do, however, include it at some length. Walter Lazenby comes to similar conclusions about the problem of adapting the novel once Nell's death had been written, based on the book's American dramatic history (pp. 120-121).

Athenaeum (1870), p. 697.

(November 21, 1870), p. 10.

Athenaeum (1870), p. 697.


Athenaeum (1870), p. 697.


(1870), p. 697.

(November 21, 1870), p. 10.

According to daily listings in the Times.


Athenaeum (1870), p. 697.

Sometime in 1873 one of the strangest theatrical entertainments ever based on Dickens made its way to London from America. Intended for amateur performances, G. B. Bartlett's Mrs. Jarley's Far-Famed Collection of Waxworks is mostly pantomime in which the one speaking character, Mrs. Jarley, delivers her spiel about each of her "mechanized" wax figures as two helpers carry it to center stage to "perform" some appropriate motion. This is surely evidence of the great desire felt to put Dickens' work on the stage in one way or another.
I do not mean to imply that this was the first time the roles had been doubled to show off an actress' versatility. Lotta Crabtree had made an immense hit with such a performance in America, and Virginia Blackwood, the Surrey manageress, had doubled the roles with some success in her theatre on November 23, 1872.

Lazenby, pp. 120-121.
Lazenby, pp. 125-133.
(January 14, 1884), p. 7.
Athenaeum (1884), p. 98.
(January 19, 1884), pp. 54-55.
(January 14, 1884), p. 7.
Ibid.
Athenaeum (1884), p. 98.
(1884), p. 98.
According to daily listings in the Times.
BARNABY RUDGE: SCENES FROM THE NOVEL

Barnaby Rudge, the second and last novel to appear in Master Humphrey's Clock, ran from February 13 to November 27, 1841. The difference in the stage histories of the two novels is eloquent testimony to how different they were. Whereas The Old Curiosity Shop was dramatized only once during its serialization and then ignored by the adapters for the next thirty years, Barnaby Rudge appeared on the London stage in at least five different forms by the end of the year.

Since Rudge was distinctly less popular with readers than its predecessor, the adapters' rush must indicate that instead of (or in addition to) attempting to capitalize on the book's popularity, they saw it as essentially more dramatizable than The Old Curiosity Shop. The spate of early plays reinforces S. J. A. Fitz-Gerald's assertion that Rudge "from the very beginning, with the Lord George Gordon riots as a grand background, is, apart from 'A Tale of Two Cities' the most dramatic of all the master's conceptions." I discussed in the last chapter why The Old Curiosity Shop did not appear so dramatic; the present chapter will discuss the
Fitz-Gerald's coupling of *Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities* is significant because it suggests that to him the spectacular portrayal of the revolutionary force with its strong conflict and great chance for spectacular action is the most dramatic writing Dickens ever did. Actually *Barnaby Rudge* provides two melodramatic plot lines in which circumstances conspire to separate pairs of young lovers, a thrilling, eerie murder mystery, full of suspense and heightened by the pathos of an idiot boy and his poor widowed mother, and the historic narrative of the rise and fall of Lord George Gordon. However, the earliest adaptations of *Rudge* appeared before the rioting had been introduced in the novel; as more of the book, including the riots, became available, the adapters experienced a progressively increasing difficulty in making the novel suitable for the stage. The earliest dramatists handled easily what they had to work with, in the conventionally melodramatic form which had served previous adapters so well. Adapters later in the year, however, found much of the novel's most powerful material difficult to fit into the melodrama. They were clearly drawn to the sensational events connected with the rioting, but including these led to three problems: the sheer bulk resulting from including everything that was potentially dramatic in the novel, the difficulty of divorcing the action of the rioting from its thematic significance,
and the tenuousness of the connections between the melodramatic action and the riots. Thus as more was included in later plays, they became more episodic and more reflective of the disparity between Dickens' domestic and historical materials. These plays actually caricature the novel and accentuate what many critics have felt to be flaws in structure and characterization.

The first dramatic incarnation of *Rudge* appeared at the English Opera House (better known by its later name of the Lyceum, acquired after the new licensing act of 1843). The joint effort of Charles Melville and Charles Selby, who played Mr. Chester, it was first produced June 28, 1841, when the novel was less than half way through its serialization and before Lord George Gordon and his followers had been introduced.²

Like other early adaptations Selby's and Melville's is choppy with fifteen scenes in three acts,³ but it is faithful to the book (as far as it had gone) both in plot and in the use of the novel's dialogue. Perhaps more than any Dickens novel to this point, *Rudge* develops its main plots with fully elaborated, dramatically appealing scenes, that is, scenes which mark major stages in the actions and which are presented in the novel almost solely through dialogue.

In their first act Selby and Melville used accurate though condensed versions of the opening scene at the Maypole and of Gabriel Varden's mysterious chance encounter with
the threatening stranger which is interrupted by Barnaby's shouts that someone has been murdered. They omit the actual rescue of the assaulted Edward, and instead show Varden bringing him to Barnaby's house. For economy, a much later scene is incorporated here in which Varden is surprised to find Mrs. Rudge mysteriously visited by the same man who stopped him in the woods. As in the novel, Varden wishes to follow the man, but Mrs. Rudge's strange pleas halt him. In the same scene the "Stranger" comes in after Varden leaves, hides in a closet when Barnaby enters, and exits threatening Mrs. Rudge while Barnaby sleeps. Virtually all the dialogue in the last two-thirds of the scene is taken directly from chapter xvii of the novel.

The melodramatic pattern in all this is clear. Already the two young heroes, Edward and Joe, have been briefly introduced, and Edward's deep and abiding love for Emma has been alluded to. Also aligned with the forces of good are Varden (a comic man who saves the hero's life) and the poor but honest widow with her pathetically deranged son. As yet the nature of the threat to these good folk is unclear, but the sinister stranger who has returned after twenty-two years has already attacked Edward, fought with Barnaby, had a verbal altercation with Gabriel Varden, and ended by fiendishly threatening some kind of blackmail against Mrs. Rudge, thus providing a suitably suspenseful ending to the first act.
The second act introduces the Varden household, informs the audience that Edward is not seriously wounded, then moves to its two major scenes, both of which are drawn directly from the novel. One is the Maypole meeting between the arrogant Sir John Chester and the lowering Haredale in which, though they hate each other, they agree that the romance between their respective children must be stopped. This tense, angry dialogue is followed by the even more rousing scene in which Maypole Hugh assaults thepert Dolly Varden.

Again the events taken from the novel are presented with little change, and one can see the melodramatic pattern extending. The forces of evil have now been strengthened with the addition of two more villains, Sir John Chester and Maypole Hugh, while the coquettish Dolly Varden is added to the good characters as a love interest for Joe. Except for the minor comic characters (Mrs. Varden, Miggs, and Simon Tappertit are all introduced briefly) only Geoffrey Haredale offers any difficulty in classification. He is obviously a virtuous, steadfast fellow and thus belongs on the side of good, but something has made him oppose the match of hero and heroine and league with the devil's disciples. Clearly, however, the alliance is a painful one for him, and the audience is no doubt sure that he will ultimately repudiate it.

For a time Act III continues to duplicate the novel by simply highlighting its major scenes. Hugh's visit to
Sir John Chester's shows the joining of two evil forces. Also shown are the goodbye scene between the Rudges and the Haredales, and Sir John's stratagem to make Emma believe Edward has deserted her. One notices the common melodramatic motif in which true lovers are separated by the evil forces which they must overcome just before the ending.

At this point, however, Selby and Melville had just about run out of novel to work with—the serialization, as has been said, was only half completed when they wrote their adaptation—and were forced to provide a suitable ending to the melodrama. To simplify one chain of events they used but modified the scene in which Joe confesses his love to Dolly and says he will leave and join the army if she does not accept his proposal. As in the novel, Dolly is a spirited and somewhat selfish coquette who pretends indifference to the hero's entreaties. Unlike the novel's scene, however, this one ends with Dolly's acceptance of Joe, which allows the writers not to send Joe away (as the novel had done) and then find some way to bring him back (as the novel was to do).

From here on the scenic structure of the play changes as coincidental meetings follow one after the other. When Dolly and Joe leave the stage, Simon, who has been eavesdropping, appears, to lament his loss of Dolly. Hugh happens by in time to hear Simon in soliloquy threaten revenge on him and Joe and begins choking the apprentice. But Simon
escapes just as the mysterious Stranger from Act I appears. Somehow the Stranger knows that Hugh is working for Sir John, and oddly enough, so is he. Thus in a complete change from the novel, as it would eventually develop, the adapters managed to join the villains. The mysterious Stranger is to kidnap Emma that night, and Hugh may have Dolly in the bargain if the Warren should happen to catch fire. All this leads to the final spectacular scene with the Warren on fire and more of the same improbable meetings. Hugh carries Dolly away from the mansion (why she is there is not explained), but Joe is seen following. The Stranger is abducting Emma, but Mrs. Rudge, who had said goodbye several scenes earlier, suddenly appears to stop him. Edward Chester follows her and shoots the Stranger to save his love. Haredale enters, and Mrs. Rudge identifies the Stranger as her husband and the real murderer of Reuben Haredale. The Stranger not only confesses to the murder but gratuitously explains he was even then acting under Sir John Chester's orders. Having clarified the mystery and provided another link between the villains, Rudge falls dead.

One need not dwell on the shortcomings of these last two scenes. They serve their function of providing a pat ending to a melodrama with gothic overtones. Selby and Melville anticipated Dickens in explicitly identifying the Stranger as Mr. Rudge (although admittedly this was pretty clearly implied in the novel) and in having the Warren go up
in flames. Unlike most melodramatic conclusions, this one leaves some loose ends. Edward and Emma are not actually joined (Haredale may still oppose the match), and the chief villain, Sir John, is not explicitly punished. The adapters, no doubt feeling that tying up such strands would detract from the sensational fiery ending, left the audience to complete the melodramatic pattern.

Selby and Melville's play was a practical success, although for once the reviewers seem to have been more impressed than the public, which accorded the play a moderate run of seven weeks. The usually critical Examiner was effusive: "this particular drama of Barnaby Rudge is the best imagined, best executed, and, in some few characters, best acted adaptation we can remember to have seen. The admirably dramatic marking of character in the original, tended to this effect no doubt." The scene between Hugh and Sir John was particularly praised, but Miss Fortescue's portrayal of Barnaby (which was not a major role in terms of plot) "was the performance of the night. It must have satisfied Dickens himself, had he seen it." This is indeed high praise, and turned out to be justified when Dickens later saw the play (evidently on July 20); Forster records, "more or less satisfied as he was with individual performances, such as Mr. Yates's Quilp . . . there was only one, that of Barnaby Rudge by . . . Miss Fortescue . . . on which I ever heard him dwell with a thorough liking." And no
less a man of the theatre than Macready recorded in his diary his immense pleasure at the performance. 8

As testimony to the novel's appeal, before Selby and Melville's version had completed its run, at least three more versions of the novel appeared in the London theatres: one at Sadler's Wells (no text of which has apparently survived), one at the New Strand, and one at the Olympic. 9 The New Strand version, Barnaby Rudge or the Riots in London in 1780, was the work of Edward Stirling, who for once lost the race to be the first adapter. 10 It began its run on August 9 and had Mrs. Keeley in the role of Barnaby. Trying to use much more of the novel than Selby and Melville had done, Stirling was forced to economize wherever possible. Throughout Stirling tried to emphasize the more sensational qualities of the novel and at times even to create similar attractions of his own.

Stirling begins his condensation in the obligatory opening scene at the Maypole by getting rid of the character of Solomon Daisy and having old Willet tell the story of Reuben Haredale's murder. Into the opening scene the adapter incorporated the much later scene (from chapter xxx of the novel) in which young Joe at last rebels against his father and cronies for considering him a child. Stirling also leaves out the encounters of Gabriel and the Stranger on the way home from the Maypole and later at Mrs. Rudge's, as well as the scene between Sir John Chester and Haredale
which had been praised in Selby's and Melville's play. He substitutes for the latter a brief soliloquy by Chester explaining the agreement he will get Haredale to make. In a later move for economy, Stirling omits the character named Stagg and has Mrs. Rudge and Barnaby located in hiding by the Stranger himself, disguised as a blind beggar.

Throughout the play Stirling goes to great pains to exploit the novel's action. In the first scene Joe knocks over a table and attacks one of his father's cronies before he leaves home. In the next scene Stirling actually shows what Dickens had not, the murderous attack on Young Chester. By merely having him found beaten, Dickens had left an element of mystery which Stirling sacrifices in favor of a good fight and a knifing. Stirling, of course, includes Hugh's assault on Dolly, but since he has already sent Joe packing he uses Barnaby for Dolly's defender. Unwilling to miss the chance of showing a struggle, Stirling has Barnaby hear Dolly's screams and arrive on the scene before Hugh escapes, so that the two can fight it out. Barnaby knocks Hugh down and keeps him at bay while Dolly escapes to bring the first act to a powerful close as Barnaby raves, "Ha! ha! ha! which is best now Hugh--brave-Hugh--the strong man or the fool."

Stirling is apparently unconcerned with the rather serious inconsistencies his shift here creates: since Hugh is known to be the attacker it is only reasonable to expect that he would face some legal penalty, and it is unlikely that
Barnaby, knowing Hugh for what he is, would so eagerly join him as a follower of Lord George later.

The Lord George material in the novel provides the greatest source of sensational action, and Stirling had enough of this plot line available to make some use of it. He combined it with his own notions of how the tale should end to form two final scenes whose action would top anything in the rest of the play. Modifying an incident from the novel, Stirling begins his last scene when Haredale and Sir John happen to meet on Westminster Bridge. Chester sides with the mob which can be heard in the background, and this angers Haredale into a diatribe against Chester and the other leaders for deceiving their ignorant followers. The mob, including Hugh and Dennis, enters, and Hugh hits Haredale with a rock. Haredale draws his sword and grabs the nearest rioter. He calls Chester responsible, however, and challenges him to a duel. When Chester refuses, Haredale knocks him down, and Varden slips to Haredale's side to drag him away in the confusion. Chester warns the audience that Haredale will pay for the blow and directs Hugh and Dennis to destroy both Haredale and the Warren in the coming struggle. (Here Stirling economizes again, since in the novel both Chester and Gashford are knocked down and it is Gashford who gives the order for revenge.)

The scene, however, does not end here. Barnaby and his mother appear; the mob returns, and Barnaby is quickly
persuaded to accept a blue cockade and join Simon's troop. As the scene closes, Hugh pushes Mrs. Rudge aside when she tries to cling to her half-witted son.

All this has some basis in the novel, but the final spectacular scene is Stirling's own contrivance to bring the plot to a tidy conclusion. Dolly Varden has fainted without explanation on the steps of the Rudges' house, when the mob enters just long enough to identify the house as Haredale's. When the mob exits, Hugh remains and picks up the unconscious girl who awakens and screams. None other than Joe Willet, now a handsome dragoon, answers her cries and shoots Hugh while gallantly and acrobatically catching Dolly when the villain falls. Joe quickly avows his love, and they leave Hugh to die in soliloquy. Mrs. Rudge returns, having somehow retrieved Barnaby, and they hide in the house as Haredale enters fighting the mob in general and the evil Stranger specifically. He is down and about to be killed when once again young Barnaby comes to the rescue, delighted to have caught the robber at last. The Stranger is about to hit Barnaby when the kerchief falls from his head, and Haredale recognizes him. Mrs. Rudge quickly confirms that the man is her husband, and Joe leads in a troop of soldiers just in time to seize him.

I have described these last two scenes at length because they show both the surfeit of coincidences that resulted from trying to cram too much into play, and the
dominant principle of the adaptation, the showing of violent physical action. No doubt the numerous fights were carefully staged in the Crummies manner, although the manuscript largely omits stage directions, merely having the cryptic "bus" inserted where necessary. I do not mean to imply, however, that this is the play's only source of interest. Stirling also introduced various other attractions to please his audience without demanding much of them: quite a bit of the comedy of Higgs and Simon, several love songs, and a number of tableaux imitating the illustrations to the novel.

It is superfluous to point out that Stirling's adaptation of *Barnaby Rudge* is much inferior to Selby and Melville's. Its characterization is extremely shallow (even Dolly loses most of her vivacity), it depends on amazing coincidence, and it is full of loose ends (Chester is not mentioned at the close, nor are the separated lovers, Edward and Emma). Both critics and public recognized the play's defects. It ran for only two weeks, and the *Examiner* was severe but accurate: "Its chief difference from the English Opera House version is in the introduction of the Riots, and this is not an improvement." The scenery was impressive but the "whole thing was distasteful."

Perhaps the most noteworthy feature of the play is its use of the riots solely to provide scenes of mob violence with no attention given to their thematic importance. Whereas Dickens had been at pains to portray Lord George as
sincere but misguided, and Gashford as a self-serving liar, and to show that their followers included both types, Stirling does not even introduce the two leaders, and he merely generalizes the mass of rioters into a rabble. Most important, Dickens, we know, poured out his finest writing in the novel to portray the public dangers of mob action, perhaps as a direct criticism of some elements of the Chartist movement; but Stirling suggests none of this social concern. Although his subtitle alludes to the riots, to Stirling they had no meaning beyond the spectacle they could provide. His play never even refers to the reason for the rioting. This is merely further evidence of the trend already noted, especially in stage versions of *Twist*, for adapters to omit or deemphasize Dickens' social criticism or indeed anything requiring intellectual involvement.

The next version of the novel on the London stage made no use of the riots but concentrated on the murder story and its effects on Barnaby. It appeared two weeks later, on August 17, at the Olympic Theatre. Although the British Museum catalogue of the Lord Chamberlain's Manuscripts lists the play as anonymous, it was actually the work of one Charles Dillon, who played Barnaby.

Dillon constructed a tight play emphasizing the pathos in Barnaby and his poor mother. For one and one-half of its two acts it parallels the early portions of the novel closely, in some cases imitating the two previous adaptations.
It opens as usual with the Maypole scene, and moves quickly through Varden's meeting with the villainous Stranger and on to the attack on young Edward. As Stirling had done, Dillon emphasizes this action by actually showing it instead of bringing the audience in after the fact. Also in the first act are Varden's visit to Mrs. Rudge, which is interrupted by the appearance of the Stranger, and Mrs. Rudge's fainting in Varden's arms. After Mr. Chester announces his intention to conspire with Haredale to keep their children apart (thus making it unnecessary to show their interview), Dillon ends the act with the now standard scene of the Stranger's visit to Mrs. Rudge.

The second act, also drawing heavily from the novel, includes the attempt of Edward and Emma to communicate, the assault on Dolly, Hugh's interview with Sir John, and Mrs. Rudge's painful leavetaking. At this point, however (II, v), Dillon's play goes on a course all its own, paralleling neither the novel nor any other stage version of it. It is the only one of the more than sixty plays examined for this study to have a less happy ending than its source. On a country road Mrs. Rudge tells her son that she is weary of their trek and is dying, and she gives him a box containing a full disclosure of the true details of Reuben Haredale's murder. When Barnaby leaves to get her some water, the Stranger, who has apparently been listening, enters. Terrified as he approaches, Mrs. Rudge pleads, "No, no! oh touch
me not, there's blood upon your hands—I saw it there, I—I—oh horror! horror!" and "shuddering from him she falls dead" (II, v). He makes off with the papers, and Barnaby goes into a hysterical fit when he finds the corpse.

The last scene opens with the demented Barnaby alone in a cemetery sitting on a rude grave which, according to his wandering speech, he has dug with his bare hands and buried his mother in. Hearing footsteps, he crawls out of sight, and who should enter but the Stranger carrying the box of papers. He sits on a tombstone to read, but, overcome by his own villainy, lets the papers fall one by one. Then, in what must have been one of the play's technical highlights, "The Raven descends from the tree and taking up the papers exclaims 'I'm a Devil I'm a devil' and ascends in the air with them" (II, vii), whereupon the villain draws his pistol and shoots the bird dead. Enraged, Barnaby rushes in and grabs the man's throat but receives a cut on the hand and must let him go. Barnaby staggers off after him, clearing the stage for Hugh to arrive for a meeting with Emma. When she arrives he grabs her. She screams. They struggle. The Stranger returns and watches, but only interferes when Hugh drops a bag of jewels he has stolen from the Warren. The Stranger holds a pistol on them as he scoops up the loot, but Hugh rushes him. The shot misses. They fight. Joe and Edward rush in to save Emma, and Haredale follows with the police, whom he directs to arrest Edward and "his
accomplice." Emma corrects the mistake, and the Stranger asserts he merely came to aid Emma. But Barnaby staggers in as the man tries to leave, and grabs at him but falls. Picked up, Barnaby incoherently identifies the man as Edward's attacker. The villain admits it and also confesses to the murder of Reuben Haredale as he hands over Mrs. Rudge's documents. The Stranger identified as his father, Barnaby lovingly leads the man to one side and in a pathetic close lies down on his mother's grave and dies.

Whether Dillon chose this ending (uncommon at least in terms of usual Victorian domestic drama) because he thought tears might be more effective than smiles, or whether he expected, on the analogy of Nell and Smike (and their parents) in the last two novels, that Dickens had a somber end in store for Barnaby, is impossible to say. At any rate, Dillon's ending harmonizes with his consistent emphasis on Barnaby and the generally gloomy atmosphere drawn by careful selection from the novel. In addition to the riots, Dillon also excluded the love plot between Joe and Dolly. And though he retained the Emma-Edward love affair, it is subordinated to the Barnaby plot. Furthermore, the predominantly dark tone is sustained by playing down the domestic humor. Varden's part is small; Miggs' smaller still; and Simon is out altogether. Having thus limited his materials Dillon was able to include more detail in his scenes than the previous adapters, chiefly long speeches helping to
round out characterization. Barnaby and his mother are the chief beneficiaries of such detail, the two pairs of lovers and Haredale remaining mere pasteboard.

But the play evidently had no appeal to the Victorian audience. It received no reviews in the main periodicals and was not listed in the bills after its initial showing. Thus, despite its unconventional emphasis and ending, its reception yields further support to the argument that what Victorian theatregoers wanted in a Dickens adaptation was usually the thrill of conventional melodrama. I suspect those who saw the play found it both un-Dickensian and depressing. Dillon's play, the adaptation which focused most heavily on Dickens' hero, thus became the least successful play drawn from the novel, a curious false step in the history of the dramatized Dickens novel.

The next dramatization of Barnaby Rudge to appear in London, the first play to be based on the whole novel, represents a return to the main road. It appeared at the Adelphi on December 20, 1841 (less than a month after the novel was completed), and allowed Frederick Yates to add to his extensive Dickensian portrayals the dual roles of Sir John Chester and Miss Miggs. Some confusion exists about the authorship of this piece. Fitz-Gerald and Fawcett both assert that this (rather than the New Strand play discussed earlier) is Stirling's adaptation, but Nicoll and Morley disagree. Nicoll lists the play as anonymous; only Morley
suggests another possible author, one George Herbert Rodwell. Whoever wrote it attempted to show the whole novel, including the narrative of Lord George's movement, the murder mystery, and both love affairs. The result is an unwieldy play with seventeen long scenes and twenty-one speaking parts.  

Rodwell's play—if it is indeed his—resembles its predecessors primarily in that it includes a number of the scenes which by this time are almost standard: the opening Maypole scene, the interview between Hugh and Sir John, the Stranger's "blackmail" of Mrs. Rudge, her sad and mysterious farewell to Haredale, and Joe's goodbye to Dolly. But to make room for the complicated action arising out of the Gordon riots, considerable condensation—more than in previous plays—was required. So necessary was economy that Rodwell was willing to omit and merely summarize in dialogue several of the most "dramatic" scenes in the earlier plays, including the rescue of young Chester and Hugh's assault on Dolly. Even the burning of the Warren is left out. Still the play does not lack spectacle. It has the mob sacking the Maypole and freeing the Newgate prisoners as well as several fights, including one between Haredale and the Stranger in the ruins of the Warren, which ends Act II as "Haredale holds him suspended over the ruin walls." And tableaux based on the illustrations are freely interspersed to heighten the visual interest.
The need to economize frequently also leads Rodwell into combining widely separated incidents into the same scene. Thus in scene ii, which shows the Varden household at breakfast and includes summaries of Edward's rescue and Hugh's attack, Joe is brought in to tell Dolly he is leaving. Similarly the second act opens with a triply composite scene in which Sir John first banishes his son for not doing his duty, then has his standard interview with Hugh, and finally is visited by Simon Tappertit. Simon suggests that Chester can help break up the love affair between Edward and Emma by flattering Mrs. Varden, who will keep Dolly from carrying the lovers' messages. As a third example, when the Gordon riots are first shown the near duel between Haredale and Chester occurs in the same scene in which Barnaby is persuaded to join the rioters against his mother's wishes.

Such condensation has a number of unfortunate results, but it does allow the adapter to work in the Gordon riots at some length. Included are the meetings of the United Bulldogs, the confrontation of Haredale and the mob, the sacking of the Maypole, the kidnapping of Gabriel Varden, the successful attack on Newgate, the arrest of Hugh and Barnaby, and the final freeing of the kidnapped girls by Haredale, Joe, and Edward. Thus, the love and murder plots which dominated in earlier stage versions of the novel are pushed to one side to allow the more spectacular treatment of the Gordon riots.
But in this presentation, as in Stirling's, one notices a major contrast to Dickens' treatment of the riots. The dramatist had neither the time nor the inclination to delve into the causes of the riots or the nature of the mob, but merely wanted the sensational action and the melodramatic plot which Dickens had built around them. Thus the confrontation of Haredale and the rioters, the storming of Newgate whose doors fall to reveal a fire within, and the nick-of-time rescue of the girls (including a fight between Edward and Gashford) are selected as suitable for the stage. But scenes such as those centering on the character of Lord George are avoided. The dramatist does not introduce the Gordon materials with Lord George at all (as Dickens does) but with Gashford and Dennis' appearance to warn the United Bulldogs to be prepared to go into action soon. With this deemphasis of Lord George himself (he appears only fleetingly in one scene) comes the complete sacrifice of Dickens' attempt to explain to the reader the workings of such a revolutionary movement. The play ignores Dickens' careful efforts to show, from the moment he introduces Lord George and his followers, that the movement consists of both sincere but misguided zealots like Lord George himself and absolute scoundrels like Gashford; the horror of such a movement is that it brings about the most terrible destruction out of the perversion of honest, sincere motives. (Dickens was to handle this theme more effectively in A Tale of Two
Moreover, Dickens took pains to castigate the authorities, those charged with preserving order, for being both blind and cowardly in their response. But none of this comes across in the play. The authorities are never shown, the religious origin of the riots is scarcely mentioned, and the fanaticism of Lord George and many of his followers is never referred to. Instead the rioters, typified by Hugh, Dennis, Stagg, Cashford, and Simon, are reduced to mere selfish plunderers who are en masse the melodramatic villain which Joe, Edward, Haredale, and Varden must combat in order to save their womenfolk.

One of the main effects of trying to jam so much into one play is that most depth of characterization is lost since none of the twenty-one different members of the cast can be before the audience for long. Even when a character does appear there is not time for the small details that bring out personality, because everything must go toward advancing the rapid action. The loss of any notion of the character of Lord George has already been mentioned. And Barnaby, who had been seen at length in earlier versions, is less distinct in this play because his best scenes are omitted or cut short. There is not time for his witless wit, his discourses on his raven, the clouds, the windblown clothes hanging on a line. Nor is there time for Dolly to be coquettish, and only one scene shows the sparring between
Mrs. Varden and her husband. Sir John is his infuriating self, but he appears in only two scenes. And because the riots are treated only insofar as they effect the main characters, the play lacks Dickens' fine portrayal of Hugh as the ferocious leader of an attack on a world which has never had a place for him. In fact, the only well-drawn character in the play is the fierce, half-insane Rudge, who comes across more powerfully than in earlier plays because several speeches on his mental anguish and bloody visions and the terrible attraction the Warren has for him are preserved from the novel.

The play was hardly a box-office success, running only a month and receiving two reviews highly critical of the structure forced onto it by the complexity of its materials. The Examiner reviewer noted that while the play may have pleased the audience, it "was little to our taste; and as little as possible must be said of it." He went on, however, to criticize its disjointedness caused, to some degree, by the inclusion of tableaux based on the illustrations. "The general effect [of these unconnected tableaux] was as though a man should undertake to tell a tale of humour, character, and pathos, in a certain number of grins through a horse collar." And the Era agreed, saying that although this fourth version was based on the completed novel, it was "wanting in consecutiveness."

A fifth early dramatic version of Rudge is extant,
written by Thomas Higgle and published by T. H. Lacy. The published version gives a cast list (including Lacy) but mentions neither the theatre nor the date of original production. Nor does it bear a date, although it appeared before June 5, 1856, the date stamped on the British Museum copy. Fitz-Gerald reasons from the cast that it was probably produced at the Old Strand or the Surrey; Morley disputes this and suggests instead the Queen's Theatre or the City of London. Both agree, however, that the play was produced at some theatre in 1841, even though no record of the appearance exists. But the absence of any manuscript of the play in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection at the British Museum, the lack of any date or theatre in the published version, the lack of any reviews or listings in the Times, and the obscure bibliographical chicanery that previous chapters have shown Higgle and Lacy to be involved in, all make me suspect that this published play was never performed and that the cast list is a fabrication.

Whether performed or not, the play has some interesting features. Even though it was written after the novel's completion (since it includes material from the last installment), the play is more like the earliest adaptations than the Rodwell one because it makes no use of the Lord George material and emphasizes the love and murder plots. And it uses many of the same scenes that these plays had: the Maypole opening, the Stranger's blackmail of Mrs.
Rudge, the interview between Sir John and Haredale, that between Sir John and Hugh, Hugh's assault on Dolly, and Mrs. Rudge's goodbye. The play also uses Stirling's technique for simplifying the Joe-Dolly love story by having Joe stay around and Dolly accept his proposal. There is, however, somewhat more emphasis on the comic characters connected with the Varden household, including a fight between Varden and Simon after the latter has returned from an all-night drunk.

The play as usual provides plenty of action although it does not show the attack on Edward Chester or the burning of the Warren. The first is summarized at the Vardens' breakfast table, and the second is merely alluded to as a rumor, the allusion being the cue for the sky to redden in the distance and the alarm bell to begin ringing. The loss of these incidents is more than made up for by the final scene with the Warren in ruins. Sir John Chester is looking smugly at the ruins when Haredale enters, accuses him of having caused the destruction (whether he has or not the play does not say), and knocks him down. In a character-destroying switch, Higgie then has Chester challenge Haredale to a duel which ends in the villain's death as in the book. In Higgle's play, the stage clears after the duel, and Barnaby yells as he meets the Stranger who is about to shoot him when he is instead shot from offstage by Haredale. Recognized, the wounded villain flees into the ruins only to
have the walls fall in on him in a suitably spectacular and melodramatic ending.

One hardly knows what to make of this early dramatic history of Barnaby Rudge. The existence of at least four plays based on the novel in the year of its publication (assuming the last-discussed was actually written in 1841) would seem to testify both to its dramatic interest and to its popularity (especially when one remembers that The Old Curiosity Shop had been dramatized only once). Yet the fact that none of the plays was outstandingly successful would seem to argue that the novel only appeared to be suitable for the stage. I suspect, however, that the real reason for the lack of overwhelming success is that the first version (Selby and Melville's with Miss Fortescue as Barnaby) was quite clearly superior to the later versions (three of which appeared while it was still running). Moreover, the longer the novel continued, the less likely it was that anyone could effectively reduce its complex group of dramatically appealing plots to stage dimensions. Thus Selby and Melville were successful both because their play appeared fairly early and because it was relatively well-written and performed. The later plays must have suffered by comparison.

After this flood of early adaptations, the novel was not seen on the London stage for twenty years. Possibly the early versions' lack of real success discouraged adapters, who soon had Martin Chuzzlewit to deal with anyway.
But the more reasonable explanation of the novel's absence is that in its completed form it offered real problems to adapters; as I suggested, the several plots were dramatic indeed, but hardly suited to presentation in two or three hours.

Such an explanation is, I think, borne out by an examination of the second generation of Rudge plays, which appeared in the 60's and 70's. In order to make the novel fit the stage the later adapters took far greater liberties with it than their forerunners, sometimes shifting the interest completely and producing plays quite unlike their earlier counterparts. Unfortunately none of these plays is preserved in print, so only glimpses of their nature drawn from secondary sources can be seen.

The novel was first returned to the London stage by Watts Phillips and George Vining at the Princess's Theatre on November 12, 1866. If the reviews can be trusted, it had two notable features. First it owed much of its appeal to an expanded use of spectacular staging. The Illustrated London News said "the scenic appointments were magnificent," and the Times described two admirable pictures in Barnaby Rudge. One of these is a landscape illuminated by the rays of the setting sun, after a fashion entirely new to the stage... suggesting reminiscences of blood to Barnaby Rudge who watches the successive phenomena from a stile. The other scene represents the destruction of the mansion called the "Warren" by Lord George Gordon's rioters. Here the gradual demolition of the house, huge fragments of which
come crashing to the ground, the rise of the flames, and the picturesque massing together of the mob into a living pyramid, of which Barnaby, flag in hand, is the apex, produce an imposing effect not easily to be surpassed.28

Although the early adaptations had all made use of the novel's built-in visual attractions, none had gone to such lengths.

But this new play is even more distinctive in its total shift of the emphasis away from the serious melodramatic characters29 and onto the secondary comic characters who had been used only sparingly in the early versions. In fact, as several reviewers noted, the principal character of the new play was Miss Miggs as played by an American actress, Mrs. John Wood. The Times suggested that the shift in emphasis was tantamount to "an effort so to vary the importance of the characters in Hamlet as to give the longest portion of the dialogue and the most conspicuous position to the first grave digger."

Not only was the restructuring unsound in principle, the reviewers also agreed that Mrs. Wood's portrayal, "however it may have satisfied the people of the United States,"31 was intolerable. Said the Times, "Depriving the dreadful original of all her native repulsiveness, so as to render the loathing of Simon Tappertit perfectly unaccountable, Mrs. Wood presents us with one of those Yankee 'gals,' angular and bold in movement, with whom we have been familiarized . . . ,,32 and the Athenæum maintained that one could not recognize "the splenetic spinster
of Mr. Dickens's novel" in "the Yankee girl" of Mrs. Wood.\textsuperscript{33}

The opening night audience was displeased with the performance ("considerable sibilation was audible"),\textsuperscript{34} and the tone of the whole performance is reflected in the Illustrated London News' description of the manager's response:

Mr. George Vining was displeased with the audience for expressing their dislike, and addressed the house in vindication of the lady. This . . . is an obvious indiscretion; but one, nevertheless which he has found will bear repetition. It forms part of the evening's amusement, and gives rise in the stalls to remarks which are far more lively than the conversation prevailing on the stage.\textsuperscript{35}

While perhaps showing some anti-American bias, all the critics agreed that the play was awful. "The scenes are uniformly tedious, and the general action uninteresting, if not almost unintelligible."\textsuperscript{36} The more restrained Times said, "the scenery disposed of, there is not much to commend,"\textsuperscript{37} and the Athenaeum remarked, "it is very clumsily constructed so that it gives no clear outline of any story at all."\textsuperscript{38} E. L. Blanchard wrote succinctly in his diary: "To Princess's: see Barnaby Rudge--a failure."\textsuperscript{39}

But if it was a bad play in critical terms, it was still quite an evening's entertainment (including at least two songs), and the London audience was sufficiently pleased to allow the play to run for ten weeks (longer than any of the early versions).\textsuperscript{40}

The only other Victorian adaptation of the novel about which any information is available appeared at the Surrey on
October 8, 1872, when the theatre reopened under the management of Miss Virginia Blackwood. This play too must have shown quite a shift in emphasis if the title Dolly Varden is at all indicative. (She is called the heroine in one review.) The play still made use of the spectacular burning of the Warren, but apparently its main appeal was the virtuoso performance of Miss Blackwood in doubling the starring roles of Miggs and Dolly. It probably ran for just over a month, after which Miss Blackwood began to double the roles of Nell and the Marchioness in a new adaptation of *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

In a way the modern reader can sympathize with the adapters' shifting of the spotlight to Miss Miggs or Dolly Varden in these two later plays; they are more interesting and more vivid characters than the melodramatic stereotypes who had been the center of the early plays. Like many of Dickens' previous comic characters (Bumble, Sam Weller, the Marchioness) Miss Miggs is ideally suited for the stage. She speaks at length in a style all her own, and she is simple enough to be quite fully characterized in her first appearance. And since she does not change, this same comic character can simply be recalled in a new speech whenever she comes on. Similarly, Dolly Varden's real vacuousness is easily overcome on the stage by her coy looks and pert speeches.

This is not to say that none of the serious characters
is interesting. Some, including Barnaby, Hugh, and Sir John, are more than flat melodramatic types. The important critical point, however, is that these characters are not so easy to portray on stage because they demand an accumulation of detail to be understood. Instead of comprehending them readily or merely enjoying their appearances, the reader must grow to understand them as more details are added. One could disagree with this for Barnaby (the perceptive idiot) and Sir John (the rotten aristocrat), but Hugh is a less questionable example. The reader first sees him as a rough, lazy, sullen hostler. Only gradually as he sees more of the man does he learn the depth of Hugh's hatred for mankind, and its sources. In fact, one has to see him in action in the riots to understand the peculiar combination of rebellion, alienation, violence, and lack of self-concern which make Hugh what he is. Such a character might be feasible on the stage, but only in a play built around him and designed specifically to make him understandable. Such a play, however, would no longer be *Barnaby Rudge* (nor, perhaps, were the plays centered around Miss Miggs and Dolly Varden), for Hugh's role in the novel is too small to allow an adaptation of the novel to show him in any depth. Once again many of the central characters in Dickens' melodrama are so unindividualized as to lack even dramatic attractiveness, while for various reasons several of the more complex ones have to be so flattened that they, too, are less than adequate on
the stage. But the unchanging, eccentric, comic characters
have almost built-in stage appeal. Even a play that makes
Miggs the main character and considerably changes her
appealed to the public at least partly because she still
said what Miggs in the novel had said and sided with her
irascible mistress and pursued the cocky apprentice, as the
Miggs in the novel had done.

The whole dramatic history of Barnaby Rudge consists
of attempts to use certain clearly dramatic features while
coping with a sprawling plot that could not, as a whole,
work on the stage. This is why the earliest version by
Selby and Melville could be fairly successful, when slightly
later versions which tried to include all the main elements
of a much enlarged plot (such as Stirling's and Rodwell's)
were doomed not to work. Then when the second generation
of adaptations occurred, the new playwrights found it neces­
sary to distort the story violently before it could be made
to yield at least part of its innate dramatic power.

Successful or not, true to the novel or not, the dra­
matic versions of Rudge together form a striking reminder of
just what stage appeal the early Dickens novel almost always
provided. First, the adapters all recognized that the novel
has a wealth of individual events, some appealing through
their pathos and suspense and some through their spectacular
action; such a treasure troubled the adapters more with what
to omit than what to include. Rudge is replete with fights,
both physical and verbal, attacks, escapes, rioting and pillaging, fires and noise, and the other spectacular features so appealing to the popular audience.

Moreover, these events occur within a melodramatic matrix made up of several plot lines which the adapters could count on (once they were disentangled and simplified) to produce all of the ruder emotions, especially pathos, suspense, fear, and broad humor. The adapters all saw that Rudge, like Dickens' previous novels, could easily provide the clear conflict that is the essence of any dramatic plot, as well as the suddenly resolved conflict between obvious virtue and equally obvious vice that marks the specifically melodramatic plot. And I need hardly reiterate that most of the characters are unchanging and easily summed up on the basis of their first appearance. A number of them are indeed standard dramatic types (the quick-witted, active youth; the garrulous old man; the pathetic widow; the mysterious furtive Stranger; as well as the usual faceless hero and heroine).

All this I have already pointed out about previous novels, but the adaptations of Barnaby Rudge offer one further insight into the dramaticity of the Dickens novel. One is struck, as he reads the various Barnaby plays, by how many scenes they have in common and how much alike these scenes are. All five of the plays for which texts are available, for example, open with quite similar renditions
of the Maypole scene which opens the novel. Allowing for some condensation, the details of action and dialogue, virtually identical in all of them, are drawn directly from the novel. Similarly, three show Varden's accidental meeting with the Stranger just as in the novel. Four show the Vardens at breakfast the next morning. Four show Varden's visit to Mrs. Rudge interrupted by the Stranger's appearance. Four show the Stranger's later visit in which he hides in the closet when Barnaby returns and only emerges when the boy falls asleep. Four show Sir John Chester's arrival at the Maypole and his sending Barnaby to fetch Haredale. Four show Hugh's attack on Dolly. And all five show both Hugh's visit to Sir John and Mrs. Rudge's mysterious and pathetic goodbye to Haredale. 43

One could, of course, explain this impressive degree of concurrence by pointing out that these scenes are essential to the plot and would have to be included. But such an explanation overlooks the facts that other equally crucial scenes, such as the rescue of Edward, are not common to all the plays, and that any of these scenes could be merely summarized in dialogue; and it equally overlooks the great similarity in detail between the scenes in the plays and their originals in the novel. This, of course, is the key: these scenes were seized upon as dramatic precisely because they were not only relevant to the plot, but are presented as drama in the novel. Each of these scenes in the novel
consists primarily of theatrically credible dialogue that contributes directly to carrying the plot forward or to developing a main character. What little dialogue in a scene which is not required for these reasons is dropped from the plays. The speeches are usually short and vividly phrased in the characteristic manner of the speaker. They are not introspective, or abstract, or syntactically complex. Consequently they are easily understood even when presented orally, with no chance for the auditor to stop and ponder them and no opportunity for the author to explain or comment on them. Moreover they show a clear causal pattern of the response of one speaker to another, and the dialogue in the novel is accompanied by sufficient description to serve as a very precise promptbook outlining movements, gestures, facial expression, and bodily attitude. (Frequently, the prompt book is even supplemented by a carefully-drawn illustration, an immense aid to costume and set designing.)

The tendency to carry the story forward through such scenes (working almost completely through direct dialogue) is probably the single most dramatic feature of the Dickens novel. It is certainly the one which made it easiest for a dramatic hack to borrow from Dickens and frequently produce a fairly effective play.
Chapter VI Notes


3 According to the playbills it made use of fifteen tableaux based on the illustrations from the book. This no doubt contributed to the choppiness.

4 According to daily listings in the *Times*.


6 *Ibid*.


9 See Malcolm Morley, "Plays in Master Humphrey's Clock," *Dickensian*, XLII (1947), 204-205.

10 A manuscript of the play in in the Lord Chamberlain's collection in the British Museum. Fitz-Gerald (and Fawcett following him) is quite wrong in saying that a later version at the Adelphi (to be discussed below) was Stirling's work, and that the Strand play was by Moncrieff. And I can find no support for his assertion that George Almar produced a play based on Rudge for the Surrey.

11 According to daily listings in the *Times*.

12 (August 14, 1841), p. 520.

13 *Ibid*.

14 The evidence for this attribution is that the manuscript is identical to the text published as Dillon's in Oxberry's *Budget of Plays* in 1844, which lists the Olympic as the place of production but does not give the date. Previous commentators have either overlooked the play or assumed it was actually put on in 1844. (A search of the *Times* theatre listings for 1844 turns up no play based on Rudge in that year.)
15. But he soon relinquished both parts to two other members of the company.

16. A manuscript of the play is in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection in the British Museum.

17. According to daily listings in the *Times*.


19. Ibid.

20. Quoted in Fitz-Gerald, p. 165.


22. "Plays in *Master Humphrey's Clock*," 204-205.

23. The quality of prior scholarship on this subject is well illustrated by Fawcett's assumption that this play is two plays, one by Higgle in 1841 and one by Lacy in 1856.

24. Timing also argues that it could not have appeared in 1841 since Rodwell's play, advertised as the first one based on the whole novel, did not appear until December 20.

25. The scene forms the suspenseful ending to Act I as in the earliest adaptations. After Barnaby falls asleep, the Stranger emerges from hiding and tells Mrs. Rudge she is in his power. When Barnaby stirs, the man quickly raises his knife as a chord is struck to end the act.

26. Curiously, the only other playwright who had this scene available to him, Rodwell, chose not to use it. The play does not specify what eventually happens to Sir John.

27. (November 17, 1866), p. 490.


29. Barnaby, for example, must have been made considerably less developed and individualized, for the *Times* reviewer recorded disdainfully "he has his wits and he has not his raven." ([November 15, 1866], p. 7.)


31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.
33 (November 17, 1866), p. 651.

34 Ibid.

35 (November 17, 1866), p. 490.

36 Ibid.

37 (November 15, 1866), p. 7.

38 (November 17, 1866), p. 651.


40 According to daily listings in the Times.

41 Illustrated London News (October 12, 1872), p. 358.

42 Another version of the novel by Joseph Arnold Cave is said to have been played at the Marylebone Theatre on November 4, 1876, but not even discussions of it are available.

43 These are all scenes from fairly early in the novel, since only one play appeared after the novel's completion. This play omits some of the standard scenes for economy. Both plays that make use of the riots include the scene in which Haredale confronts Chester and the mob and the one in which Barnaby joins the rioters.
CHAPTER VII

MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT: COMEDY IN MELODRAMA

In his study of American dramatizations of Dickens' novels Professor Lazenby discusses both Barnaby Rudge and Martin Chuzzlewit under the heading "Two Seldom Seen Novels." As the previous chapter indicated, however, Rudge was not "seldom seen" in England, nor as this chapter will show, was Martin Chuzzlewit. Five full dramatic versions of the book have survived in print, as have several sketches based on or indirectly derived from individual episodes.

Chuzzlewit, serialized in monthly numbers from January 1843 to July 1844, was the first Dickens novel not to appear on the London stage during the course of its serialization. Two possible explanations are reasonable: the novel may not have appeared so dramatic as the earlier novels since it is, by comparison, not so full of spectacular action; but, more important, the adapters were probably not so attracted by a novel that was having considerably less popular success than Dickens' previous efforts (sales of The Old Curiosity Shop and Barnaby Rudge in numbers had ranged from 50,000 to 70,000, but no part issue of Chuzzlewit sold over 23,000 copies).
Not long after the book's completion, though, the adapters apparently saw the great effectiveness the novel might have on the stage if adapted to emphasize the comedy of Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp within the framework of the usual melodramatic plot. Within six weeks of the novel's completion at least three different versions of it (and perhaps five) appeared in the London theatres, and at least two of them were definite commercial successes.

Edward Stirling was the first dramatist to put the new novel on the stage, as he had been with *Pickwick, Nickleby,* and *The Old Curiosity Shop.* His version, one rehearsal of which Dickens probably attended, appeared at the Lyceum on July 8, 1844, only a week after the novel's final number had appeared. According to Stirling's reminiscences, when he first proposed adapting the novel to Robert Keeley, the Lyceum manager, he received no encouragement. Keeley wrote him, "Mary [his wife] and I have read carefully Dickens's work; we cannot see our way in a piece from it. But if you like to go on, do. You have done so much with Dickens's works, try again." Never one to lack confidence, Stirling went ahead, and the play he produced must have impressed the Keeleys favorably, for Robert himself took the part of Sairey Gamp while his wife played young Bailey.

In three acts and eighteen scenes Stirling tries to show all the major action of the novel except the American portions. The first act emphasizes Pecksniff while setting
up the complicated business of young Martin's estrangement from his grandfather. Pecksniff's oily hypocrisy and Tom Pinch's myopic reverence for him are shown very early in the scene in which John Westlock leaves Pecksniff's. Between scenes Martin arrives at Pecksniff's, but stays only long enough to tell Pinch about his disagreement with his grandfather in one scene, and to say goodbye to Mary as he leaves for America in the next. All this (except for Pecksniff's early appearances) is dull though necessary exposition; to liven up the play, however, Stirling devotes almost the last third of the act to a highly selective presentation of the broader comedy at Todgers' boarding house. Young Bailey with his ingenious complaints about his position is played up, and Pecksniff completes the comedy by stealing a kiss from Mrs. Todgers and getting roaring drunk at dinner. In the play, this material perhaps plays a small role in characterizing Pecksniff, but it is no longer even distantly connected to the plot.

In the second act both melodramatic plot lines (the Jonas-Tigg line and the Pecksniff-Martin-Mary one) are carried rapidly forward. The act begins after a lapse of eight months, allowing Stirling to skip over the death of Jonas' father and his courtship of Mercy Pecksniff. By the end of the act Jonas has married Mercy, been blackmailed by Tigg, and tried unsuccessfully to leave the country. In the other plot Pecksniff, no longer a comic character,
proposes to Mary Graham who in turn tells Tom Pinch, and Martin returns from America only to be "rejected" by his grandfather (speaking through Pecksniff as in the novel) and sent away with Pinch.

The act also includes at length the irresistible Sairey Gamp. Introduced first as Jonas' housekeeper, she is taken over from the novel with her loquacity and frequent malapropisms intact as she chats with young Bailey who is now working for Tigg. Later she is included in the serious scene of Jonas' near escape from England, as, talking all the time, she bumps into Bailey on a London wharf and accidentally hooks Tom Pinch around the neck with her umbrella. Keeley, no doubt, made much of such crude business to supplement the comedy of Mrs. Gamp's dialogue and character.

Act III shows the same combination of comedy and melodrama as both plot lines come to a conclusion in a single final scene. Two scenes show Jonas preparing for the murder and trailing Tigg (although Stirling does not show the attack itself). Then in a grand reversal of the kind Highet refers to as inherently dramatic both plots are resolved. Jonas is accused of murdering his father but somehow Martin knows this is not true. Nadgett, however, enters with the police to arrest Jonas for the murder of Tigg, and Old Martin at last knocks Pecksniff down and denounces him for the hypocritical scoundrel he is.

Mrs. Gamp is included briefly in this final scene, but
her major moment comes earlier in the act when Stirling includes virtually verbatim the comic dispute between Mrs. Gamp and Betsey Prig culminating in Betsey's audacious assertion that Sairey's sage and admiring Mrs. Harris is not real.

As a specimen of dramatic art Stirling's *Chuzzlewit* is inferior even to his earlier efforts, probably because this is the first of his adaptations that had to include so much. The result is an episodic structure and lack of development which give an impression similar to what might be gained from reading every fourth chapter of a novel. Depth of characterization and motivation, not outstanding virtues of the novel, are nonexistent in the play. Martin, for example, who arrives at Pecksniff's in between scenes i and ii, is sent away two scenes later without any explanation. When he returns in Act III he is contrite, as in the novel, but since the play did not show him as self-centered to start with, his contrition is absurd unless one knows the book. Similar failures to motivate events which had been more or less clearly explained in the book show up in Old Martin's charade and in Pecksniff's visit to Todgers'. No explanation is given for Tigg's belief that Jonas murdered his father, and for that matter whether he did or not is never specified (in the final scene Martin says Jonas is really innocent but fails to explain the confusion). The *Times* reviewer assumed this lack of clarity to be an inescapable
attribute of an adapted play: "The incidents that fill 600 closely printed pages being forced into three hours, the chain of events must necessarily be unintelligible to all who have not read the novel."^9

Yet none of these defects kept the play from being a major box office success. Stirling boasted that it ran for 280 nights and made a profit of £8000 for the Keeleys.\(^10\) This is exaggerated; several more disinterested sources suggest the play ran for some three months or closer to ninety nights.\(^11\) On the basis of previous chapters one could easily explain this popularity in two ways. He could merely accept H. B. Baker's comment: "Dickens was then in the very zenith of his popularity and dramatic versions of his novels were sure cards. *Martin Chuzzlewit* scored a great success."\(^12\) But he could go on to point out that like Dickens' earlier novels *Chuzzlewit* has two suspense-filled melodramatic plot lines, each with its own vividly drawn villain. Although these two explanations are both sound to a point, the first overlooks the novel's poor sales and the second ignores both some complexities in the novel and its lack of the vivid visual action that melodramatic adaptations of previous novels had made use of.

Actually the reviews, most of which praise the play highly, make clear that its real attraction lay in the comic scenes in which Robert Keeley performed as Sairey Gamp and his wife as young Bailey, and secondarily in the more comical
manifestations of Pecksniff's personality. The Athenaeum reviewer, recognizing the play's shortcomings, commented that "the stage dressing makes people overlook the mutilations [the novel] has undergone . . . . Keeley's personification of Sairey Gamp is a richly comic study of character; humorous without coarseness or exaggeration."\textsuperscript{13} The Illustrated London News, after praising several of the serious characters said, "Master Bailey . . . is irresistibly impudent and droll as performed by Mrs. Keeley. Keeley himself was immense in the part of Old Mother Gamp."\textsuperscript{14} And the Examiner wrote, "a great popular excitement is going on at the Lyceum Theatre, in Mr. Keeley's nightly appearance as the well-known Mrs. Gamp."\textsuperscript{15} Even Crabb Robinson, who saw the play near the end of its run and called it a "miserable drama," admitted "Keeley as Mrs. Gamp was however delightful and Mrs. Keeley very good as the boy Bailey."\textsuperscript{16} In this light, one is tempted to say the plot was irrelevant to the comedy rather than the other way around, but only the perspective is changed. The point is that on the stage the melodramatic plot and the comedy were unconnected, and the comedy made the whole succeed.

One wonders whether Stirling's play was successful because it made use of Dickens' comic characters or because the parts were played by two fine comic actors who could turn even weak roles into successes. Such a question cannot be fully answered without having seen the performances, but
if the printed text gives any indication at all, then it is safe to say that the comic speeches that delighted readers were also the main source of comedy on the stage. Scarcely a line of dialogue is invented for Sairey, Betsey, or Young Bailey, and the comic portions of Tigg's and Pecksniff's talk are also lifted directly from the book. Much of the humor of the novel is so easily and quickly comprehended that it loses less than it gains when moved from page to stage. 17

The same mixture of comedy and melodrama appears in the second London adaptation of *Chuzzlewit*, by Charles Webb. 18 The drama opened at the New Strand a week after Stirling's play (July 15, 1844) and ran almost concurrently with it, closing a week or so sooner in October after running about seventy nights. 19 In broad outline Webb's play does not differ much from Stirling's, though the *Illustrated London News* was right in saying, "it is a less disjointed version than that lately produced at the Lyceum, and accordingly the plot is rendered more intelligible to those persons who have not read the novel." 20 Instead of opening at Pecksniff's, the play begins at the Blue Dragon where a number of characters can be introduced at once, the effect being to lessen the emphasis on Pecksniff and to get the Martin plot underway faster. The Todgers' scenes too are less humorous but better integrated since Webb makes clear that Pecksniff has come to London to see Old Martin and uses
the scene to show Jonas beginning to court Mercy. Webb also clarifies his play by including Anthony and setting up his son's jealous hatred of him and by showing Pecksniff deliberately insulting Martin to make him leave. Later, to make Pinch's enlightenment more credible, Webb has Tom respond to Mary's screams, see his master's knavery for himself, and knock Pecksniff down. And to simplify the denouement Webb eliminates Lewsome and uses Nadgett, who turns out to be Chevy Slyme in disguise, to incriminate Jonas.

On the whole Webb's serious characters are a little more fully and understandably presented than Stirling's, especially Old Martin, whose motivation for withdrawing from society is clarified in the opening scene, and Tom Pinch, whose hopeless love for Mary is allowed to show in several scenes. Young Martin is also somewhat more fully characterized, but there is still no attempt to show his early selfishness. To have a hero change from less than perfect to perfect may have been too far outside the melodramatic convention; or perhaps both Webb and Stirling felt it was simply more trouble than it was worth.

For comedy the play includes Young Bailey, both at Todgers' and later, as well as Poll Sweedlepipe and Sairey. There is, however, less comedy than in Stirling's play even though Webb's has three more scenes. The scene between Sairey and Betsey Frig is omitted; instead, Sairey is shown off in a scene with Bailey.
There is less contemporary evidence about the play's reception than about that of Stirling's, but what there is suggests it was also "very successful," and that even though reduced, the more comic scenes were still a major attraction; the stage manager Henry Hall kept for himself both of the main comic parts, Gamp and Pecksniff. The Illustrated London News said he played Pecksniff with much talent, and the Examiner said, "Mr. H. Hall's Mrs Gamp may be seen without disadvantage, even after Mr. Keeley's version of that popular character. It is broad and massive." Some three years later Edmund Yates wrote that his first memory of the Strand was of "a dramatic version of 'Martin Chuzzlewit,' with a clever, jolly-looking man named H. Hall who doubled the characters of Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp, and one Roberts, who made an excellent Tigg." Even in her somewhat diminished role, Mrs. Gamp was still the bright light of the play as she was of the novel.

The third surviving dramatic adaptation of Martin Chuzzlewit was by Higgin and Lacy, and as usual with plays connected with either name, there is some confusion about it. The published version lists four original production dates at four theatres with four different casts, but two of them are clearly falsified since they are the dates and cast lists for Stirling's and Webb's plays. The problem remaining is whether the other two references (Victoria Theatre, July 15, 1844, and Queen's Theatre, July 29, 1844) are
accurate. Morley suggests that the play performed at the Victoria was actually Webb's, a different production of which opened on the same day at the Strand. Morley gives no source for his information, but he does offer a number of details about the Victoria production which imply that he is not merely conjecturing about it. By a process of elimination, it seems more or less reasonable to conclude that the Higgie-Lacy play, which was approved for performance by the Lord Chamberlain's office, probably was produced at the Queen's Theatre on July 29, 1844.

Although much like its predecessors, the Higgie-Lacy work, *Martin Chuzzlewit; or, His Wills and His Ways, and What He Did and What He Didn't*, differs from them in that it makes much less use of the comic portions of the novel and develops the serious plots and characters in more depth. The Todgers' scenes, for example, are shorn of their humor and used primarily to show Jonas' growing interest in Mercy. Mrs. Gamp does appear in two patchwork scenes with Bailey, who is given Betsey Prig's famous line on the possible non-existence of Mrs. Harris. But the other sixteen scenes are predominantly serious except for touches of comedy from Pecksniff and Mark Tapley.

Higgie and Lacy condense the novel so much that young Martin arrives at Pecksniff's and leaves there in the same scene, yet by preserving several details from the novel in the scene, the writers are the first to show Martin's
Far from being an agreeable young hero, when Martin first enters he curses the food and complains of boredom, and soon monopolizes the fire as he tells Tom Pinch about his grandfather's selfishness. Then he indolently allows Pinch to read him to sleep and continue until he wakes. All this is directly from the novel, but the two previous adapters had chosen to make no use of it, thereby leaving Martin completely unindividualized. Higgle and Lacy make use of this preliminary portrayal later when Martin returns and announces to his grandfather that America has changed him. He is no longer as he was but is cognizant of others' wishes, and he desires to make his own way. To clarify Old Martin's reaction more than previous plays had, the adapters use an aside in this scene to show that the old man sees both his grandson's change for the better and Pecksniff's attempts to hide it.

Similar characterization of Mercy and Jonas is provided in the scene in which Jonas sets up his alibi for the murder of Tigg. Instead of simply having Jonas enter and tell Mercy he wants uninterrupted sleep, as both Stirling and Webb had done, Higgle and Lacy preserve a number of details from earlier in the scene which help develop both characters while rather heavy-handedly calling attention to Jonas' earlier "crime." Mercy is much changed from her carefree self as the scene opens. Jonas berates her when he enters and says he is sorry they ever married. Trying to
salvage what she can and smooth things over, Mercy makes small talk as in the novel about a book she has been reading. Unfortunately, the book's plot involves the murder of a father by a son. Jonas, infuriated, presumes Mercy has learned of his "crime" and given the information to Tigg to blackmail him with. He knocks her down and finally announces his intention of having a long sleep. Again none of the details is original, but simply by preserving the novel's dialogue in the one scene the adapters can present the characters more fully than either of the preceding plays had done.

Unlike the earlier plays, this one does not use Jonas' tense attempt to escape from England, but it actually shows the murder of Tigg and the suicide of Jonas onstage. 28

Apparently the play was not a box-office success. 29 Nor was it considered important enough to warrant a review in any of the major periodicals. Yet, it does have the virtue of individualizing several main characters and is hardly less of a play than Stirling's. There are three possible explanations for its unpopularity. First, by the time the Higgie-Lacy play appeared both Stirling's and Webb's plays had been on and well received for several weeks. Consequently the public demand may have already been satiated, and few playgoers were likely to go to an unacclaimed version of Chuzzlewit when two much praised ones were available. 30 Secondly, the public may indeed have preferred the more typically melodramatic treatment of Martin and Jonas in
the first two plays to the slightly more complicated portrayal in the new version. Finally, however, and I suspect most important, the play simply had too little of Sairey Gamp, the great attraction in the earlier versions.

These three adaptations are the only ones which survive from the initial flurry, although Morley (as mentioned) argues that there were two more. Paradoxically, as a novel Martin Chuzzlewit was distinctly not a popular success (at least until later, when one volume editions were published), yet the early plays based on it were, on the whole, as successful as those based on either of the two preceding novels. Although Rudge at least had more physical action, these more popular novels were, I think, less dramatic in two ways. First, they were not built around such traditionally melodramatic plots. Rudge has at least five interwoven plots, and The Old Curiosity Shop, as I explained in chapter five, has both a darkening movement and a journey structure which make its main plot much different from that of normal melodrama. Chuzzlewit, on the other hand, is more like Nickleby in its melodramatic-picaresque framework, although it lacks some of that novel's physical action and tense confrontations (Martin is even less effectual in thwarting evil than Nicholas).

Second, Chuzzlewit is more dramatic than its predecessors in that is has Sairey Gamp and Pecksniff, two characters of universal attractiveness who (like Sam Weller,
Fagin, and Quilp) can be translated to the stage with comparative ease. Real complexity is lost, but both the hypocrite and the descendant of Mrs. Malaprop succeed on the stage because Dickens has already created brilliant comic dialogue for them. The dialogue of each immediately characterizes him fully in his first appearance, and the audience can simply relax and enjoy each further appearance as a slight variation on a known and well-loved theme. Partly because she is unencumbered by the plot and thus is strictly comic on the stage, Sairey, although seen less, is the more effective of the two.

Unlike its predecessors *Martin Chuzzlewit* did not completely disappear from the London stage immediately after the initial flurry of adaptations, for two years later there appeared an interesting series of attempts to make use of the novel's popularity without actually adapting it. Three playlets produced in rapid succession in the fall of 1846 all tried to use Sairey Gamp as a stepping stone to popularity.

First came *Mrs. Harris* at the Lyceum on October 22, 1846, by none other than Edward Stirling. As the *Examiner* explained, the play was "a translation from the French, apparently very literal in everything but the introduction of the celebrated woman. The *Sick Nurse* is the name of the French piece, and the nobody of the original is replaced in the English adaptation by the more illustrious nobody of
Mrs. Gamp's imagination. Way the mythical Mrs. Harris is combined with the earthly Sairey Gamp (she has a few of Sairey's lines from the novel) is unclear, but the fusion is of little importance since the plot has no connection at all with Chuzzlewit. The farce turns on the efforts of a character named Masker to avoid being sent away from his beloved Fanny by feigning illness. Mrs. Harris, of course, is called in to nurse him. Robert Keeley played the title role "much to the satisfaction of the audience," no doubt repeating some of the business from his original successful portrayal of Mrs. Gamp herself, at least as much as the hackneyed plot and lines would allow.

Four days later a "rival farce" by Benjamin Webster appeared at the Adelphi under the title Mrs. Sarah Gamp's Tea and Turn Out. Trying to capitalize on Mrs. Gamp's fame, Webster too had actually adapted a French burlesque, Madame Pochet et Madame Gibou, and turned the two French gossips into Sairey Gamp and Betsey Prig. As Morley summarizes the plot,

there was Charley Muff, an engaging reprobate, ensconced for no apparent reason under Mrs. Gamp's bed. So placed, he hears his father, Magnus Muff, recounting the freaks and follies of his boyhood days to Sairey and Betsey. Whereupon Charley emerges from the hiding place, confronts Magnus and demands forgiveness for his own peccadilloes. He is taken to his father's heart and it is arranged that he marry Sairey's daughter Selina.

Finally, Mrs. Gamp appeared on the London stage that same year in Frederick Fox Cooper's Dealings with the Firm
of Gamp and Harris, at the Queen's Theatre on November 16, 1846. It too has nothing to do with Dickens but merely borrows the names for two nurses called in to the bedside of one Mr. Carroway who is going to fake his own death to preserve an inheritance he has received on the condition that he never marry a widow. This he has already done, but he hopes to die officially "unmarried" and then assume a new identity. As it happens, however, Mrs. Gamp and Mrs. Harris attended Mrs. Carroway's first husband when he died after falling into the Thames, and they inform the Carroways that unknown to them Mrs. Carroway's husband lived until four days after her remarriage, thus invalidating it and allowing Carroway to keep his £3000 legacy without the subterfuge.

These three farces have only one connection with the present study. None of them is really an adaptation from Dickens. What each author apparently tried to do was to attract an audience by importing into his play the magic name of one of the novel's most popular characters. In these cases the dramatic possibilities of Dickens' characters are irrelevant since none of the garrulous old women in these plays shares anything with Mrs. Gamp except her name. But the apparent belief in the drawing power of that name (or, in Stirling's case, of Mrs. Harris') is strong evidence of the popularity Dickens' creation had among the theatre-going public. No character from his earlier novels had met such favor at this point.
After 1846, following the familiar pattern, the novel disappeared from the London stage until Horace Wigan revived it at the Olympic Theatre on March 2, 1868, with himself as Jonas. No text of the play is available, but apparently like the early versions it put more emphasis on the murder plot than on the adventures of Martin, and it, too, made extensive use of Mrs. Gamp. "The hit of the piece . . . was the Sairey Gamp of John Clarke, hard-voiced, ingratiating, and logically illogical." The play ran for only a month, but the scenes involving Mrs. Gamp were extracted and played as a farce by Clarke (who had starred as Quilp in Halliday's Nell in 1870) at the Princess's Theatre in 1872 and the Adelphi in 1873.

Knowing of all this attention to Mrs. Gamp, one is consequently surprised when he turns to the two later adaptations of the novel for which texts are available, because in neither of them does he find Mrs. Gamp, Mrs. Prig, or even young Bailey. Both plays avoid comedy and concentrate instead on the serious action, thus forfeiting what had always been the chief interest of plays based on Chuzzlewit. Like other "second generation" adaptations examined in this study they reflect a different dramatic age and, at times, differ from the novel much more than did their ancestors.

The first of the two seems worth examining for these reasons even though it was produced not in London but at the Theatre Royal, Oxford, on April 22, 1878. It was the work
of Harry Simms (who had also put *The Old Curiosity Shop* on there), and treated the novel's two melodramatic plots without humor, giving the emphasis to the murder plot (Simms himself played Jonas). Within this framework it is more craftsmanlike than the earlier plays both in the clarity of the plot and the portrayal of character.

The first act is devoted entirely to the Martin-Pecksniff plot, but puts more emphasis on Young Martin and less on Pecksniff than had been common in the earlier plays. The play does not open by introducing Pecksniff as had the earlier versions, but instead shows Martin already at Pecksniff's using Tom Pinch as a confidant for his love story. Martin immediately shows himself to be offensively self-centered as he mentions that he could have married someone with more social standing than Mary and that they must postpone their marriage for a while since he could not endure poverty. By the end of this scene Pecksniff and Old Martin have been introduced (Old Martin making his disdain for Pecksniff clear from the start in an aside) and Martin has been sent from Pecksniff's as the action starts in a hurry.

The rest of the act continues to emphasize Martin as he is shown meeting Mark Tapley in one scene, telling Mary of his plans in another, and leaving as she faints in still another. In contrast to the earlier plays Martin dominates the first act and is relatively well developed while Jonas, the main figure of the other plot, has yet to appear and
Pecksniff has appeared only in the first scene.

Even Mark Tapley is shown more than Pecksniff. In fact, he appears almost as much as Martin and is given some complexity by his admission to Mrs. Lupin that he loves her but is too footloose to be a good husband—shallow motivation for going to America perhaps but much better than merely wanting bad conditions under which to be jolly. One of the highlights of the act, in fact, grows out of this attention to Tapley since scene v, making use of the fancy visual effects so characteristic of late nineteenth-century drama, is a dream sequence in which both Tapley and Mrs. Lupin imagine a happy married future, ironically on the night before Martin's and Mark's departure. The dreams somehow dissolve into a village scene as everyone gathers to see the travellers off.

The second act switches to a clear and rather thorough presentation of the Jonas plot, including his dislike of his aging father, his attempts to poison him, of which the old man is clearly aware, Jonas' collusion with Tigg, and the death of Anthony. The more detailed characterization seen for Martin is apparent in this act for Jonas: his comments about his father's having outlived his allotted time, his insolence to the old man, his pleasure at finding the bottle of poison gone, and his exultant showing of the will just after his father's last convulsion all work together to show the viciousness of his pursuit of wealth.
The same viciousness is developed as the third act details Jonas' proposal to Mercy and his soliloquized threat that once married he will pay back her flippancy. Like Mark Tapley earlier, Mercy is another minor character who is drawn in some detail. She is first seen as foolishly self-centered and proud as she explains to Old Martin that she hates Jonas but does not mind marrying him because she expects to rule the roost. She is even so deluded about his character that she warns him not to press her about setting a date or she will call the wedding off, totally oblivious of her prospective spouse's brutality. A later scene shows a much sadder but wiser Mercy being reviled and beaten by her husband as he prepares for the murder which, set now in a churchyard and no doubt staged elaborately, ends the act.

The last act shows the return of a much-changed Martin, his public acceptance by his grandfather and the corresponding downfall of Pecksniff, and the undoing of Jonas including his suicide in Detective Nudgett's arms. The two exposure and reversal scenes are combined as they had been in Stirling's play, but the order is significant. In the novel and the earlier plays, Jonas is unmasked first and then Pecksniff, thus ending on the adventures of Martin, but Simms reverses this order and finishes the Martin plot in order to end on the murder plot and give himself the big suicide scene to end the play.

The absence of Sairey Gamp makes the play totally
dependent on its two hackneyed plots, which are apparently what Simms felt his audience wanted. But the plots are handled smoothly with some attention to motivation and in such a way that they could be easily followed by an audience unfamiliar with the novel. To tighten the plot Simms not only omits all the comic characters, but dismisses the Tom Pinch sub-plot by never having him leave Pecksniff's. This allows him to omit Ruth Pinch and John Westlock, so that his play has only fourteen characters compared to about twenty in the earlier ones.

The play serves to remind one that Dickens' most carefully constructed novel so far still has a plot of pure melodramatic claptrap and that many of its finest comic touches are completely unconnected to that plot. But it also shows how much Dickens does at this juncture to flesh out the bare bones of such a plot and how he uses it to support an elaborate study of the many manifestations of greed. The early adaptations ignored the thematic implications of the novel as much as possible but preserved the great comedy. Simms gave up the comedy, and (except for Pecksniff) filled in the characters enough to hint at the theme of greed, but his play is still only the skeleton of the novel, easier to understand and making no intellectual demands.

This simplification is another, more serious manifestation of the tendency already seen to remove the satiric
elements of a Dickens novel when putting it on the stage. *Chuzzlewit* satirizes not a specific social evil (such as in the early portions of *Twist* or *Nickleby*) but rather a moral disposition. The criticism is thus a bit more subtle and more pervasive than the specific satiric thrusts in his earlier work. This helps to make *Chuzzlewit* a major step forward, but it also makes the disparity between its overall impact and that of the plays based on it so great. And it may not be frivolous to suggest that such a disparity helps explain why paradoxically the early plays based on the novel were popular when the novel itself was not. What got on the stage was *Martin Chuzzlewit* with its complexity surgically removed.

The last adaptation of the book to be discussed is interesting because it takes a wholly new view of the novel, yet improves upon Simms's economic tightening. Written by Joseph Dilley and Lewis Clifton, *Tom Pinch* was performed at the Vaudeville Theatre on March 10, 1881; the play's approach is clear from its title. Not only are the comic characters missing but so is the whole Jonas plot line. Using only nine characters from the Pecksniff-Martin plot, Dilley and Clifton focus on the humble and much abused Tom Pinch and deal deftly with his recognition of Pecksniff's true nature and his dilemma in remaining true to Martin while in love himself with Mary.

The first act is much like that of the other plays
since the complicated business of Young Martin's falling out with his grandfather and then being sent away by Pecksniff must be included. All the necessary material is put into one scene at Pecksniff's in which Pinch is largely an observer. Pinch's respect for Pecksniff is shown in his argument with the departing John Westlock, and his feeling for Mary is hinted at when he describes for Martin the lovely girl he had seen while practicing the church organ, only to have her enter and be identified as Martin's sweetheart. The act ends with Martin foreshadowing events to come as he predicts that some day Pinch, too, will be forced to see through Pecksniff's hypocrisy as he has.

The bulk of Act II, which takes place in Pecksniff's garden, is an interview between Mary and Pinch shortly after Pecksniff has threateningly proposed to her. Tom chides Mary for not confiding her worries about Martin to him, but she explains she has avoided doing so out of a fear of hurting him in Pecksniff's eyes. Pinch's immediate defense of his master nicely motivates Mary's revelation that the old hypocrite wants to marry her. Tom is overcome and weeps. Pecksniff has overheard the conversation, and, as the act ends, Tom is trudging toward Salisbury, disillusioned, after having been evicted by Pecksniff on the grounds that he had himself made advances toward Mary.

By the time Act III opens, showing Tom's new lodgings with his sister, his fortunes and his spirits have already
improved. He has a job (provided by an unknown benefactor), and John Westlock is courting Ruth. To add to the domestic bliss Martin and Mark suddenly appear. Soon, however, Martin learns of the accusations Pecksniff made about Pinch and charges him with having courted Mary behind his back. Tom denies it, but Martin storms out angrily. A touching exchange between Ruth and Tom follows in which she tries to comfort her distressed brother, she alone understanding that while he does love Mary he has been true to Martin and considered his own emotions as if they were dreams. Soon all the other characters arrive for the obligatory showdown in which Mary affirms that Tom has never made advances and in which Pinch himself finally denounces Pecksniff.

Dilley and Clifton were well aware that their play was unusual as dramatic versions of Dickens went; they explained on the playbills, "The Authors think it desirable to state that they have not attempted to dramatise the novel of 'Martin Chuzzlewit.' They have simply taken one thread of the story and have converted that into an acting play, making alteration in incident and dialogue only where they have been found necessary, or for the sake of Dramatic effect." The result is a well-built play emphasizing throughout the contrast between the reserved, shy honesty of Tom Pinch and the noisy false honor of Pecksniff. Among Dickensian adaptations it is an extremely "quiet" play devoid of both boisterous comedy and sinister adventure, using instead
restrained analysis of character wholly in domestic settings. The play, except for Old Martin's charade, reminds one more of Jane Austen than Dickens.

It is difficult to judge just how popular the play was. S. J. A. Fitz-Gerald calls it a "considerable success," yet it received a scathing satiric review in Punch and noncommittal ones in the Athenaeum and the Times. And its initial run was a moderate one of six weeks. On the other hand, a well-known American actor, E. S. Willard, "secured it for his repertoire, and has played the title role all over the world and particularly throughout the length and breadth of America. During his season at the St. James's Theatre in 1903, Mr. Willard revived the piece with gratifying results." Perhaps Lewis Strang, an American critic, best summed up and explained the mixed reaction to Tom Pinch:

The play, in which this Dickens creation has its being is not a good one,—it is fragmentary, episodical, incoherent. But these marring faults, oddly enough, do not prevent it from being an interesting, even, at times, an absorbing entertainment. That, too, to one for whom the novel "Martin Chuzzlewit," is unexplored territory. The interest that one found in "Tom Pinch" was due entirely to the presence of Pinch, and of the ever dramatic Mr. Pecksniff. What the other persons in the play did was absolutely of no consequence... The events recorded in the play were equally unimportant... But with the simple, foolish, exasperatingly spiritless Tom Pinch, and with the marvellously well-poised and eminently self-centered Pecksniff one was still concerned.

Finally, then, the plays based on Martin Chuzzlewit
form a mixed group representative of the whole range of Dickens adaptations from those emphasizing only the broadest and most obvious comedy and melodrama to those delving more deeply into character, from those adhering as closely as possible to the original to those having only distant connections with it, from those obviously thrown together to take advantage of the book's sales (relatively slow as they were) to those carefully put together to make use of what was dramatic in the novel. One common feature, however, stands out in the Chuzzlewit plays as well as other adaptations: almost invariably those which succeeded did so primarily because they were able to transport one or two attractive characters from the Dickens world to the world of the stage.

Adaptations of earlier novels, as has been shown, had stressed Sam Weller, Fagin and Nancy, Smike and Mantalini, Quilp, and to a lesser extent, Barnaby and later Miggs. Similarly, Chuzzlewit plays first depended on Sairey Gamp and Pecksniff and finally on Pecksniff and Pinch. Chuzzlewit adaptations provide additional evidence for the conclusion that the vividly drawn, easily understood, extremely vocal, famous characters are one of the most dramatic features of Dickens' works.
Chapter VII Notes

1 Chapter v.

2 See Ada Nisbet, "The Mystery of 'Martin Chuzzlewit,'" California University Publications: English Studies, I (1930), 201-218. S. J. A. Fitz-Gerald asserts that Dickens had "some understanding with various theatrical managers" which kept his novels from all but "the minor houses." He offers no evidence for the comment, and I have found no corroboration for the inherently improbable claim. (Dickens and the Drama [London, 1919], p. 174).

3 The Lord Chamberlain's collection of manuscripts includes only three versions of the play, but Morley, whose work is generally to be trusted, lists five. ("Martin Chuzzlewit in the Theatre," Dickensian, XLVII [1951], 98-102).

4 The novelist wrote to Keeley the stage manager on June 24, 1844, graciously refusing to write a prologue for the production but offering to attend a rehearsal the following Friday. (Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. Walter Dexter).

5 Old Drury Lane (London, 1881), I, 180-181.

6 Published in Cumberland's British Theatre (London, n.d.).

7 See chapter iv, note 28.

8 Stirling's work does not include Jonas' suicide because it occurred in the final number when the play was already in rehearsal.

9 (July 9, 1844), p. 5.

10 Old Drury Lane, I, 181.

11 See Morley, 98.


13 (July 13, 1844), p. 653.

14 (July 13, 1844), p. 44.

It is clear that Dickens recognized the dramatic possibilities of Sairey Gamp since he later chose her famous last meeting with Betsey Prig for one of his stock of public readings.

According to daily listings in the Times.

(October 24, 1846), p. 678.

One should also remember that if most of the audience for such plays came from that segment of the public which had read the novel, then the potential audience for Chuzzlewit plays was smaller than for the preceding novels.

Published in Duncombe's British Theatre (London, n.d.), Vol. LVII.
Published in *The Acting National Drama* (London, n.d.), Vol. XIII.

Morley, 100.

A manuscript of the play is in the Lord Chamberlain's collection in the British Museum.

Morley, 100.

According to daily listings in the *Times*.

Morley, 100.

Published in *Dicks' Standard Plays* (London, n.d.), No. 738.

The one bit of humor in the scene is perhaps a measure of Pecksniff's loss of stature. As it ends Pecksniff in the midst of denouncing Martin falls down, grabs a tablecloth sending the dishes on it clattering to the floor, and ends up with his head in the fireplace. Verbal comedy has been replaced by slapstick.


Quoted in Fitz-Gerald, p. 180.


Quoted in Fitz-Gerald, p. 180.

(March 19, 1881), p. 400.

(March 12, 1881), p. 10.

According to daily listings in the *Times*.

Fitz-Gerald, p. 182.

*Famous Actors of the Day*, 2nd series (Boston, 1902), pp. 299-301.
DOMBEY AND SON: A NEW CHALLENGE TO ADAPTORS

Dombe and Son marks a fairly clear turning point in the history of theatrical versions of Dickens, for in spite of the book's high sales, the adapters seemed decidedly less interested in putting it on the stage than they had been in the case of the five novels preceding it. Even The Old Curiosity Shop, the least popular of the early novels as a source for adaptations, gave rise to four London versions, two of which were commercially successful. In contrast, only three adaptations of Dombey appeared in London before 1900, and only the last, appearing twenty-five years after the novel, succeeded.

This reception, however, proved fairly typical of that received by Dickens' later works. The reason, as I hope to demonstrate, seems to be that the adapters found the novels beginning with Dombey more difficult to transfer to the stage and less satisfactory when produced, and consequently avoided them. It may be indicative of the playwrights' attitudes that Edward Stirling, who had adapted each of the first six novels, did not dramatize any after Martin Chuzzlewit.
The first play based on the novel, by Thomas P. Taylor, opened at the New Strand Theatre probably on August 2, 1847, when the novel was only half through its serialization. In the Lord Chamberlain's manuscript it has only one act with eighteen scenes and makes use of fifteen tableaux based on the illustrations. The play starts a bit later than the novel and omits Paul's schooling; otherwise it follows the plot closely except for its unsatisfactory denouement.

Opening just after Mrs. Dombey's death, the play devotes two scenes to introducing first the Dombey characters and then those at the Little Midshipman before the story of Florence becomes dominant. After several scenes refer indirectly to Dombey's coldness to his daughter, the first main action is her being kidnapped and robbed by Good Mrs. Brown and rescued by Walter. Soon the nautical shop is taken over for debt and Walter and Cuttle are shown asking Dombey for a loan. As in the novel, the money is given them, but Walter is also told he must go to the West Indies for the firm. Villain that he is, Carker explains in soliloquy that he suspects Walter is in love with Florence and he wants to marry her himself so that he can some day take over the firm.

Soon the audience is told that Paul is ill, and Florence warns that he is talking of death. Apparently he dies before the next scene, but Taylor chose not to show either
the sick boy or his death. The audience is briefly told that the *Son and Heir* has foundered and that Sol Gills has disappeared before the action quickly shifts to Brighton where Dombey meets Edith and her mother and they plan for the marriage.

At this point Taylor launches on the uncharted portion of his journey as he shows Carker reading a note from Walter which explains how he survived the shipwreck. Carker resolves again to get rid of the boy, this time by forging his name to a document involving £5000. As he writes Walter's name "a voice exclaims 'Indeed,'" but Carker assumes it was merely a passerby and soon gives Walter a packet which he is not to open. The lad is on his way to visit Florence, and Carker plans to have him arrested with the evidence in his pocket. In the final confused scene Walter is with Florence, who is now referred to as his sweetheart, when Susan Nipper brings word that Carker and a mob are outside and Mrs. Brown appears to announce that she has had her revenge. The implication is that she had been spying on Carker and turned him in for forgery. Everything then ends happily as Edith overcomes her dislike of Dombey and he suddenly cares for his daughter.

No direct evidence about the popularity of the play has been found, but the work was apparently abortive since it was not reviewed in the major periodicals and all the commentators agree that the play did not "remain in the bill
The foregoing summary, although it is unfair to the play in not mentioning the verbal comedy of such supernumeraries as Polly Toodle, Miss Tox, and Captain Cuttle, still makes clear several reasons for the play's failure.

The clumsiness of the supplied ending is most obvious, since it is both difficult to follow and unmotivated. With Dombey married again, there is little reason for Carker's desire to get Walter in trouble, nor is any reason even hinted at for Mrs. Brown's wanting revenge on Carker. Florence's sudden love for Walter, whom she has only met twice, as well as Edith's changed attitude toward Dombey and his toward Florence are all equally unmotivated.

A second defect is that the playwright consistently avoids showing the crucial scenes and either implies that they will occur or summarizes them afterwards in the dialogue of the minor characters. Thus the audience is told of, but does not see, the death of Little Paul, the courtship and marriage of Dombey, his dislike of his daughter, and Carker's arrest. The only interesting events shown onstage are the robbery of Florence by Good Mrs. Brown, which in the novel is only incidental, and Carker's forgery.

For such faults, only the adapter is to blame, but one can sympathize with his problems in staging the novel at this point when its most gripping action—Florence's flight from her father, the elopement, Edith repudiation of Carker, and his death—had not appeared. But, as I shall argue
below, the play has other, more basic shortcomings which result from the nature of the novel's characterization and construction rather than from Taylor's incompetence.

When a second dramatist tried to adapt the novel, two years had passed and the serialization had already been finished for a year. No text is available, but the play, written by one W. Sidney and performed at the Marylebone Theatre on June 4, 1849, seems to have imitated Taylor's version in omitting Paul's childhood and death and in concentrating on the serious plot while de-emphasizing the comic characters. The novel was followed to its end, including the elopement, Edith's rejection of Carker and Dombey's transformation.

As in the novel the confrontation between Edith and Carker in Dijon was one of the play's high points, and the portrayal of Dombey was of primary interest. An actor named Lee was as stern and pompous as one could wish . . . [and] the hard outline of the original was . . . preserved . . . . [Lee's] natural tendency is to the pathetic, and there was an undercurrent of this even in the part of Dombey: by the time that his season of repentance arrived, we had accordingly learned to pity him.7

Besides Dombey, Edith, and Carker, Alice Marwood and her mother were important characters. Apparently Rob the Grinder was the most important of the several comic characters. The reviewers praised the play,8 and unlike Taylor's it ran for about a month.9
Compared to early adaptations of previous novels, however, neither of these was successful. One might easily attribute their lack of success to sheer inability on the part of the adapters, but the novel's failure to attract other dramatists (at this time) seems to argue against such a simple explanation. The experienced adapters apparently were not interested in dramatizing this popular novel. The overall lack of dramatic success resulted at least partly from features within the novel, features which distinguish Dombey from Dickens' earlier novels and align it instead with those to follow.

If my analysis in preceding chapters has been sound, the success of dramatic versions of Dickens' first five novels had nearly always resulted from a combination of a melodramatic plot with plenty of action and suspense, and fairly simple but individually appealing, vivid, distinctive characters. In Dombey and Son, however, neither the plot nor the characters is developed in such a way as to provide the adapter with materials as suitable for the stage as those found in the preceding novels.

Unlike most of the early novels, Dombey and Son is not really a melodrama, and this immediately lessens its appeal to the adapter who was used to the convention and knew his audience was also. Granted, Dickens still provided a stereotyped hero and heroine to marry and live happily ever after, and there is a suitably vicious villain. Granted
also, the plot moves through trials and tribulations to ultimate happiness in which virtue is rewarded and evil destroyed. Superficially these traits make the novel look like a typical melodrama, but the supposed hero is so unimportant that he is removed from the scene for half the book. And Carker, the villain, is not, except briefly, a menace to the heroine but instead directs his attentions at Edith. Moreover, the real threat to Florence, and the conflict which shapes the tale, is the result of her father's rejection. Thus the causes of the heroine's distress, not to mention that of the characters at the Little Midshipman, are much more complicated than the machinations of an evil man. To oversimplify, the sources of unhappiness are not villainy but Dombey's rigid pride, his devotion to the firm, and his consequent failure to understand or care for the feelings of those around him. Dombey is, in fact, a mixed character, neither angel nor devil, and consequently would be inappropriate in a pure melodrama.

To adapt for the stage a plot that stresses fairly complicated abstract themes, for example that agony and despair can result from essentially desirable personal and social attitudes if these are not tempered with human concern, is a difficult task for any playwright. It is an especially difficult one when the potential audience has been long accustomed to nothing but the less cerebral concerns of melodrama.
It is interesting in this connection that when Taylor had to supply his own ending to the novel, he took the plot to be the conventional melodrama it seemed to be early in the book: the villain, Carker, was bent on keeping the hero, Walter, from the heroine, Florence. Even halfway through the novel, though, he ran into serious trouble trying to make such a pattern fit. Not only was his melodrama unexciting because Florence was never seriously endangered, but the extensive material involving the heroine's father did not fit the framework.

In addition, the novel's plot probably was unattractive to the adapters because it was more tightly put together than the previous ones had been. No great skill had been required to separate various elements (sub-plots, incidents, characters, or groups of characters) in Dickens' earlier novels; thus they were fairly easy to condense for the theatre simply by omitting the less stageworthy sections. But as John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, among others, have observed, Dickens planned Dombey ahead of time, more carefully than any previous novel, in such a way that the parts would work together to form an almost indivisible unit. This meant that the adapter either had to tell virtually the whole story, and thus cram his play full of incidents at the expense of character development, or omit sections at the risk of weakening other materials he had selected. For example, all the adapters chose to play down or omit the story
of little Paul, but this must have made it difficult for the viewer to comprehend the depth of Dombey's loathing for his daughter, who not only lives but had won the boy's love. Similarly, one could not cut out the Little Midshipman segments, because they were tightly connected with the Dombey segments, especially by Florence's fleeing from her home. Almost inevitably the playwright faced such a problem when he tried to cut anything, and this made adapting a much harder process than it had been for the early novels.

Moreover, in conjunction with his more intricate plot, Dickens' characters became more complicated than they had been in previous books. On the whole, only a few, mostly minor, comic characters in *Dombey and Son* are conceived in the colorful, external terms which make them easily stageable. Admittedly Susan Nipper, Miss Tox, Toots, Captain Cuttle, and Mrs. Skewton, to name only a few, are presented with the same bold strokes which had earlier been used to create Squeers and Mrs. Gamp. But in *Dombey*, except for Cuttle, they are so minor that when the novel was staged, with its complicated plot intact, these characters were either dropped completely or given such limited room to move in that they could provide little interest. In Taylor's play, for instance, Miss Tox, Susan Nipper, and even Cuttle, who has an important function in the plot, are not onstage long enough to make any great impression.

On the other hand three features of Dickens' portrayal
of his major characters make several of them less amenable to stage presentation than were the corresponding figures in the early novels. First, they are given somewhat more psychological depth. Second, they are treated in such a way that their internal states cannot be so readily deduced from their behavior. And third, they change as a result of their experiences.

Even Florence, who is frequently dismissed as a typically insipid and undeveloped heroine, matures in the course of the novel as she comes to understand and forgive her father's coldness. Certainly her emotional flight to the Little Midshipman is evidence of a depth of feeling that one would never expect from Rose Maylie, Madeline Bray, or Mary Graham. Edith is a better example as she is driven, by Dombey's constantly treating her as a possession, from her original cold resignation to her impassioned escape. Even Carker, one could argue, changes as his attitude toward Dombey develops from avaricious envy to hatred. At first he merely wants a part of his master's wealth, but by the time he persuades Edith to run away he is clearly not after financial or social reward, but wants only to destroy and humiliate the man who has been so superior, so cold, so proud for so many years. ¹³

Here an interesting irony arises, because both Edith and Carker have frequently been attacked as melodramatic. ¹⁴ It is true that Edith is given to long, emotional speeches
in critical situations, accompanying them with carefully visualized, exaggerated gestures. She thus superficially resembles the "stagey" or "histrionic" figures in melodrama, but she is hardly drawn from the world in which good character and bad are always sharply divided and where no one changes. Such a world has no place for a young, attractive, disdainful widow who marries a man she does not love and finally runs away with another only to reject him. Carker, on the other hand, is clearly evil, although he is not so tagged when he is first shown simply as Dombey's efficient, deferential assistant. But his evil nature changes until his motivation is no longer only avarice or lust or any other form of self-interest, but hatred, and understandable hatred at that. In a curious reversal of sympathies, the audience (readers or viewers) find that they share this villain's deepest desire, to see Dombey toppled from his perch.

Admittedly the critics are right in their argument that viewed in perspective Carker and Edith are not particularly effective fictional characters. But I believe their relative ineffectiveness (compared to, say, many of Thackeray's characters) results not so much from a shallowness in their conception as from Dickens' inability to develop that conception by his usual techniques. Edith's intense passion becomes ineffective ranting when developed by explicit speeches in which she announces her agony, but it
is the technique which is at fault, not the concept. Dickens is here using a dramatic method to portray a more complex character than any but the finest dramatist could draw. As a result Edith and, to a lesser degree, Carker are though stagey, less suited to the stage than many of Dickens' earlier creations. As a stage villain Carker is pale in comparison to Ralph Nickleby or Jonas Chuzzlewit, two characters whose internal states were accurately manifest in their external actions and who, in addition, did not change in the course of the plot.

Dombey himself is no doubt the outstanding example in the novel of an individualized character. He is gradually destroyed by a combination of his own rigid pride and the loss first of his son and heir and then of his wife. More than just a severe man devoted to his business, Dombey, as a result of his son's death, becomes a melancholic. When, at last, events combine to destroy him, he realizes, alone and in agony, what he has done to his daughter. Few if any of Dickens' earlier serious characters are conceived in such a fashion. Unlike, say, Nicholas, Ralph, Sikes, or Haredale, Dombey is not only a changing character, and a combination of good and evil, he is also a character whose reserve keeps him from externalizing all that he feels. Thus he is a hard character to know fully and a very difficult one to put on the stage.

After Dombey, more and more of Dickens' serious
characters will be presented in similar ways, the result being that from this point on, an adapter will not be able merely to steal and piece together what Dickens had written: he will be forced either to shift the emphasis away from the main characters or to use his own skill to expose the complicated and changing characters through the highly confined dramatic medium.  

Still a third reason for difficulty in adapting *Dombey and Son* and the later novels to the stage is that Dickens in *Dombey* begins to use extensively and consciously such non-stageable elements as symbols and image patterns presented via his narrator's voice. The dramatist could merely ignore all such devices, but ignoring them moved the dramatizations further away from the original and destroyed the elaboration of characters and themes provided by the novel's imagery. Kathleen Tillotson and others have pointed out the symbolic use of the sea and the railroad, but since this use is primarily by the narrator rather than by the characters it is lost from the dramatic versions. So are such subtle narrative devices as the music-staircase imagery which Harry Stone has pointed out, and the symphonic imagery identified by William Axton.  

Also lost are the continuous references to Carker's flashing teeth, and the more obvious metaphor of the cat for Carker, which, with its connotations of stealth, secrecy, and coldness, helps fill out his portrait.
Eventually *Dombey and Son* was to achieve a fair success on the London stage, but when this happened more than twenty years after Sidney’s play, the difficulties were overcome and the old appeals regenerated by the stratagem of moving Edith and Dombey out of the limelight. Instead Captain Cuttle, one of the old-style comic characters, who had been peripheral in the early adaptations, was made the central figure. Unfortunately no text of the play, Andrew Halliday’s *Heart’s Delight*, first performed at the Globe Theatre on December 17, 1873, is available, but quite a bit can be learned about it from various secondary sources.

Both the Edith-Carker-Dombey and the Gills-Cuttle-Gay plots were preserved, but Little Paul was omitted entirely. This last no doubt improved the play’s coherence, but it must have reduced the motivation for Dombey’s coldness toward Florence. Also omitted were a number of the minor characters such as Good Mrs. Brown, Miss Tox, Mr. and Mrs. Chick, and Bagstock. Toots and Bunsby were, however, retained. The English version of the play had five acts which were condensed to four when it was taken to America in the following years. Only five different settings were used (three rooms in Dombey’s house, the parlor at the Wooden Midshipman, and the hotel room in Dijon), and they were probably staged with elaborate realistic detail. The shifting of the emphasis to Captain Cuttle is partly indicated by the fact that the first and last scenes occur at the Little Midshipman.
The play has two big scenes, each of which took up an entire act. Act IV, set in Dijon, emphasized the separation of Edith and Carker and led up to the villain's death, which Halliday turned into a suicide by poison. As one reviewer observed, "some self-denial must surely have been exercised by a management which had the chance of presenting a man killed by a railway train and neglected to take advantage of it." With one plot line thus sensationally concluded, the stage was left clear "for the Captain and the young folk" in the last act, the chief feature of which was Cuttle's gradually informing Florence that her sweetheart had returned. As one reviewer described this most memorable scene from the play, "In reading the newspaper which told him of the supposed death of Walter, and in relating the story which was to prepare the mind of Florence for her lover's return, [Samuel Henry as Cuttle] displayed remarkable pathos."

Judged by usual dramatic standards, the reviewers agreed, the play was not well done. It was "less a drama than a series of scenes to which the audience supplies the connecting links." "Two distinct threads of plot run side by side, scarcely ever intertwining . . . . The former furnishes whatever serious interest or powerful scenes the piece contains, and the latter serves chiefly as a frame for the immortal Captain Cuttle and Mr. Toots."

But the reviewers also agreed that usual dramatic
standards were inappropriate. Such a play should be evaluated on "the extent to which the actors can reproduce characters of which a preconceived notion has been formed by the public." "Not by the development of a plot, but by the exhibition of a number of marked and, to most persons, familiar characters must a drama founded on *Dombey and Son* appeal to the public." And the play certainly did appeal to the public. It ran initially for three months, was performed in America in the following year, and was revived at the Globe five years later.

What made the play work, the commentators agree, was the performance of Sam Emery in the central role of Cuttle. The reviewers were lavish in their praise. "A more perfect specimen of impersonation can scarcely be conceived." Emery's performance was "an absolute realization of the famous mariner," and "about as true and powerful a representation as was ever realized on the boards." "It is impossible to imagine a finer conception or truer execution of the character of the loyal rollicking, tender-hearted old tar."

In finding a way to make *Dombey and Son* dramatically successful, Halliday was forced to treat the novel in the same manner that other adapters had used in staging other novels, even though it meant a major shifting of the novel's emphasis. Like Stirling, Moncrieff, and others before him Halliday selected one or two attractive, but simple
characters, whose dialogue was idiosyncratic and comic, and
played them up. Usually such characters were easy to find
and could easily be integrated into or simply used beside
the simple main characters whose actions made up the melo-
dramatic plot. But *Dombey* was much more difficult to adapt
because it had neither a simple melodramatic plot nor a
wealth of simply portrayed appealing characters, and because
the complicated plot when transferred to the stage tends to
crowd out or restrict the more flamboyant characters.

This analysis is also supported by an American version
of *Dombey* which appeared in London; John Brougham’s *Dombey
and Son* (called *Captain Cuttle* in England)\(^{32}\) was produced
for two matinees at the Gaiety Theatre, the first on
November 20, 1880.\(^ {33}\) Brougham’s play had originally been
presented at Burton’s Theatre in New York in 1848 and had
become a standard American attraction, appearing during at
least twenty-seven of the next forty New York seasons with
a succession of three famous actors (William Burton,
S. J. Florence, and Brougham himself) playing the lead role
of Captain Cuttle.\(^ {34}\) The play much resembles Halliday’s (it
opens and closes at the Little Midshipman, for example) and
received similar though more hostile comments from its
English reviewers. The *Athenaeum* said Brougham “has appar-
ently had two ideas—to crowd into a species of dramatic
picture as many of the best-known characters as his canvas
can hold, and then to place Capt. Cuttle in the centre.”\(^ {35}\)
After an extensive study of the play Lazenby concludes that "instead of writing a good melodrama, Brougham concentrated on the comic characters and treated the humorous scenes more carefully than the melodramatic ones. Cuttle, Toots, Bunsby, Bagstock, Susan, and Mrs. Skewton were fine creations in the novel; and he allowed them to take over the play and supplant any melodramatic effect he may have intended."36 This is exactly what Halliday, who may well have been influenced by Brougham's play, also did when putting Dombey on the stage. The evidence thus suggests that such treatment was the key to making dramatically appealing a novel which in essence was not so.
Chapter VIII Notes

1 Only three English versions, that is. A fourth play based on Dombey was performed for two matinees later in the century, but it was an American importation (see p. 237).

2 David Copperfield is an outstanding exception in one sense because it gave rise to more plays than any other Dickens novel. I shall try to explain this seeming contradiction in the following chapter.

3 Thomas Proclus Taylor should not be confused with the more famous Tom Taylor, author of The Ticket of Leave Man and a version of A Tale of Two Cities.

4 This date is given by Morley, who is usually trustworthy ("Enter Dombey and Son," Dickensian, XLVIII [1952], 128). The date on the Lord Chamberlain's manuscript, however, which should be about a week or two before the production, is August 14.

5 Morley asserts that this play was actually published, but he describes it as a two-act drama whose central incident is the death of little Paul. Earlier S. J. A. FitzGerald referred to a published version of a Dombey play which sounds like the Strand play, but he believes it to be the Marylebone version discussed next. I have not been able to reconcile these contradictions since my research has turned up no copy of the published Dombey play. To complicate matters more, T. Edgar Pemberton, writing in 1888, claims to have seen "an adaptation of 'Dombey and Son' in which poor Paul is stolen by Mrs. Brown, and meets with his death while endeavoring to escape, by way of the roof, from that good lady's house." (Charles Dickens and the Stage [London, 1888], p. 165n.) No other source mentions such a play, nor have I located one, yet Pemberton is unlikely to have imagined such a production. It might, however, have been performed somewhere besides London.

6 Morley, 128.

7 Athenaeum (June 9, 1849), p. 606.

8 See the Times (June 6, 1849), p. 7.

9 According to daily listings in the Times.
One reviewer said of Dombey and Son, "a more difficult story for the purposes of the playwright could scarcely have been selected" (Theatrical Times [August 14, 1847], quoted in S. J. A. Fitz-Gerald, Dickens and the Drama [London, 1910], p. 223), and a reviewer of a later adaptation called the book "not essentially of a dramatic nature" (Times [December 20, 1873], p. 10).

I will argue below, however, that both Florence and Carker are somewhat too complicated to qualify as the heroine and villain in a typical melodrama.


Steven Marcus is one of the few critics to have recognized that Carker is not a simple melodramatic villain (Dickens: from Pickwick to Dombey [New York, 1965], p. 346).

Such critics as Kathleen Tillotson and Edgar Johnson have made the charge. (See Novels of the 1840's [Oxford, 1956], p. 179, and Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph [New York, 1952], II, 642.)

Obviously the lack of dialogue as Dombey wanders in agony through his empty mansion contributes to the difficulty of showing such a change on the stage.

Lazenby, after studying American adaptations of Dombey, draws a similar conclusion: "Dramatists hardly depicted Dombey himself at all, probably because Dickens probed his mind more deeply than the others' minds, and partly because it was difficult for them to show his inner state on the stage" (p. 162).

pp. 189-191.

"Dickens and Leitmotif: Music-Staircase Imagery in Dombey and Son." College English, XXV (December 1963), 217-220.

"Tonal Unity in Dombey and Son," PMLA, LXXVIII (1963), 341-348.

Athenaeum (December 20, 1873), p. 824.

Examiner (December 20, 1873), p. 1272.

Athenaeum (December 20, 1873), p. 824.

Ibid.
27. According to daily listings in the Times.
32. Published as French's American Drena (New York, n.d.), No. 126.
33. Morley, 131.
34. Lazenby, p. 181.
35. (November 27, 1880), p. 719.
36. p. 171.
CHAPTER IX

DAVID COPPERFIELD: A BILDUNGSROMAN TRANSMORPHIFIED

As Morley and others have noted, "next to Oliver Twist... the most dramatised of all Dickens's novels is David Copperfield." In all, at least eight different versions appeared in London, and the novel was equally attractive to American adapters. This would seem to conflict with my argument in the previous chapter that after Dombey and Son Dickens' novels, because of their more complicated characters and better integrated plots, became significantly less appealing to potential adapters. I hope, however, to show from the nature of these plays that in a curious way the many adaptations indicate precisely why David Copperfield is almost impossible to adapt successfully.

Once again two early dramatic versions of the novel appeared in London, one shortly before and the other shortly after the novel's completion, but they were neither artistically nor commercially successful. The first adaptation, at the Strand, October 21, 1850, was George Almar's Born with a Caul. This time Almar, who had created one of the most successful plays based on Oliver Twist, produced an incoherent hodge-podge of scenes and characters from the...
novel mixed up with some totally gratuitous additions of his own. It is safe to say that of all the Victorian dramatizations of Dickens this one is the most outlandish, and since only one number of the novel remained to appear, the play cannot even be partially excused on the grounds that Almar had to create much of the plot himself.

The framework is the story of Emily's seduction and Peggotty's quest, and taken alone the scenes dealing with this plot are not badly done. David and Steerforth are introduced in a scene with Miss Mowcher, and soon the whole seduction scheme is carried out, including Steerforth's brooding and his warning David not to judge him too harshly, Em'ly's aiding the fallen Martha, her note to Ham, his fury, and Peggotty's pain at learning the news together with his resolve to seek out his poor girl. Later a scene is included in which the worn old man rescues Martha from her attempt at suicide; he is no longer so quick to judge her and asks her help in finding Em'ly. Soon word comes that Em'ly has left Steerforth, and a touching but not sugary scene shows Martha and Peggotty reunited with the repentant girl and keeping Rosa Dartle from hysterically berating her. To round out this plot Steerforth's drowning is not shown but summarized by Peggotty for David, and in the final scene the emigrant ship leaves for Australia. Here is perhaps the most surprising sequence in a surprising play, for on board are Rosa Dartle, who has been driven insane by news of
Steerforth's death, and Ham, whose survival is not explained. Em'ly begs his forgiveness, and then to top all the actions of the play, Peggotty reveals that he actually revived the supposedly drowned Steerforth, who immediately casts off a disguise and claims his sweetheart Em'ly. A happy ending, if not a credible one.

But into this plot, which is fairly well developed and constructed except for its denouement, Almar awkwardly wove an incongruous and distracting conglomeration of both original and adapted scenes. Briefly he included the Uriah Heep plot beginning with Uriah, already Wickfield's partner, indicating his intention to marry Agnes which leads to his threatening the old man and being knocked down by David. Very soon, however, Micawber exposes Heep's infamy only to have the villain escape by jumping out the window. Later as he tries to escape two detectives by swimming out to a boat in the Thames, the gold in his pockets causes him to drown as a fortuneteller had predicted.

Also drawn from the book are some scenes involving Aunt Betsey and Mr. Dick (who proposes to Miss Mowcher), Mr. Murdstone, and Traddles. Most of these are broad farce, but Almar used Murdstone to construct yet another subplot entirely of his own. Murdstone turns out to be Martha Endell's lover, and as she sits reading Pamela, he bursts in to tell her he has had to turn King's evidence against his underworld partner, one Hurricane Flash. When Hurricane,
played by Almar, shows up, a gunfight ensues between him and Murdstone aided by the detectives Tipkins and Bullock, who chase in and out of the play like Keystone Kops. Murdstone is killed in the exchange and Hurricane captured. A contemporary reviewer surely understated when he said, "the incidents of the novel have, perhaps, too evidently been worked up with a view to stage effect."\(^4\)

Much more evidence, especially slapstick comedy introduced in the middle of serious scenes, as well as confusing alternations between the various plot lines, could be cited to illustrate the play's incoherence, but surely this is enough to demonstrate both the play's distance from Dickens in plot and spirit and its absurdity.

Ridiculous and un-Dickensian as the play is, it nevertheless offers a few valuable insights into the difficulties in adapting *Copperfield* and foreshadows things to come. Like its successors, *Bora with a Caul* largely avoids relating any of the plots to David; he is a fairly unimportant figure, a host on a variety show who connects the diverse performances but only rarely takes any part in them. He does introduce Steerforth to the Peggotty family (before the play opens), but his guilt over having been deceived by his "friend" is never developed. And, between acts, he does acquire a foolish wife, but she does not die nor does he learn anything by having made the mistake. Instead, like most of its successors, the play elevates to major importance the two
melodramatic plots that had been subordinate in the novel. Em'ly's seduction forms the main action, as it would in all the succeeding plays, but intertwined with it is the Heep-Wickfield business with its eminently loathsome villain, its pure heroine, and an outstanding comic man in Micawber.

The introduction of Hurricane Flash, the shooting of Murdstone, Uriah's escape and drowning, his fight with David, and Martha's near suicide are all, I suspect, evidence that Almar felt the novel itself lacked sufficient action to appeal to his audience. But his remedy, like his other innovations, is an artistic failure, and it is something of a tribute to his London audience that apparently the play was performed only once, although they may have been less upset by the play's dramatic faults than by the liberties taken with Dickens.

In either case the second stage version, David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery, which appeared at the Surrey on November 13, 1850, shortly after the novel's completion, should have been much more appealing. Attempting to follow the novel more closely, its author, probably one J. Courtney, began earlier and put more emphasis than Almar had on the line of action involving the Wickfields, Heep, Micawber, and David.

Except for the first scene which shows the young ragged David arriving at Aunt Betsey's, the first act is a smooth presentation of the seduction of Em'ly. Beginning
with David's first introducing Steerforth to the Peggottys, Courtney makes the story even more melodramatic than in the novel by showing Steerforth as a lustful villain consciously trying to seduce the girl from the start. Lest there be any confusion, the rake makes his plans known to the audience with such asides as, "I think I have capital hopes here" on meeting Ham and hearing of the engagement. Included are the comic scene with Miss Mowcher cutting Steerforth's hair, several scenes with Martha (whose seducer, as in Almar's play, was Murdstone), and several with Em'ly. The act leads to its obvious climax as Em'ly leaves, Ham brings the fateful news to the party, and Peggotty prepares for his search.

The second act takes place some time later, since David is already engaged to Dora and Peggotty has returned from his futile search in France. Except for the scene in which Peggotty and David keep Martha from drowning herself, used briefly for its sensational value and not related to the characterization of Martha or Peggotty, Act II is devoted to the Wickfield-Heep plot including Aunt Betsey's loss of her fortune, Uriah's rise in the firm, and his public disclosure that he wishes to marry Agnes. This scene provides a suitably exciting close for the act as Heep drunkenly threatens to let the truth out if Wickfield protests the marriage and so angers David ("Villain what do you mean?") that he knocks Heep down. Agnes and her father embrace to recall one of the book's illustrations as the
With each act having set forth one of the plots, it remains only for both to be concluded in the last act. Again much time has passed between acts. David wears mourning for his dead wife, he has been abroad, Emily is known to have left Steerforth, and Ham and Steerforth are dead. Most of the act is devoted to the second plot as David's reunion with Agnes shows him considering her now as more than a sister, and Micawber is shown vowing to crush Heep. One scene in the middle of the act is used to conclude the Emily plot, however. It shows Emily, now back in England, being accosted by Littimer when Peggotty happens to come across them. A fight ensues in which Peggotty is prevented from choking the villain by the arrival of the police. Forming another tableau, he and Emily stand reunited as Martha looks on.

With the seduction plot finished, all that remains is the big unmasking scene. Courtney begins it by showing Agnes lamenting to David that she must marry Heep to save her father. As in the novel David argues against this but his motivation is obscure. He first reverts to advising her as a brother, then implies that he would be more to her but knows she loves another. The reference makes no sense outside the novel, but Agnes clears up his mistake by declaring she has always loved him. As they embrace, Micawber leads the others in, preparatory to reading his indictment.
against Heep. Heep at first brazenly denies the accusations, but realizes he is caught when Traddles produces his account books. He tries to run away from the blows of Aunt Betsey only to be tackled by Miss Mowcher (who had paid Littimer the same attention in the novel).

Measured either as a specimen of dramatic art or as an imitation of Dickens, Courtney's play is an improvement over Almar's. It is closer to having a unified plot, and it attempts to include more of David's story. Nevertheless the drama only ran for ten performances. The reasons for its failure are numerous, and nearly all reflect the changing nature of the Dickens novel.

The play shares most of the defects of the early Dombey plays, lacking both features that had accounted for the success of plays based on the pre-Dombey novels: one or two outstanding characters and exciting action. In this case the novel lacked neither element. Although it does not have any murders, robberies, or raging infernos, it does have two exciting, suspenseful sub-plots with quite satisfactory villains, not to mention a stormy shipwreck, and therefore came up to specifications. And although some would maintain it does not have a comic character to rival Quilp or Mrs. Gamp, it does have Aunt Betsey, Miss Mowcher, and Micawber. What happened, however, was that Courtney tried to include so much of the novel that neither the plots nor the characters were shown in enough detail to be
Interesting.

Both plots, instead of being shown developing, are only summarized. By the time the audience sees Em'ly, for example, she has already made her fatal appointment with Steerforth, but none of the events which bring it about are shown. Similarly Uriah Heep is already a partner in the Wickfield firm when he first appears, and surely few viewers could have been very involved in Agnes's plight since her father's decay and Heep's rise to power are not shown. The effect in both cases is to skip over what might be the most interesting scenes and to reduce the audiences' interest in the threatened characters. One reviewer quite properly described the play as "a series of tableaux by which the novel is symbolised, rather than represented." 10

In addition the play shares with early versions of Dombey the lack of any particularly appealing characters; so many characters are crowded into the play that none of them can be shown in any detail. The novel has a wealth of finely-drawn comic characters, but they are either omitted from the adaptation or reduced to shadows of themselves. Miss Mowcher can be volatile in only one scene; Aunt Betsey can be loudly indignant only once or twice; and the eloquent Micawber scarcely has room to stretch his legs in his appearances. Even the important serious characters have to be diminished in order to be crammed into the play. I have already mentioned that there is no time to show Wickfield's
decline, and even Steerforth and Em'ly, not particularly complicated in the novel, are flattened more. Steerforth loses the complexity developed in the novel by his having no father, a too fond mother, too much money, and good looks. On the stage he shows no doubts, no moroseness, no momentary guilt. He is merely a "seducer" and not a powerfully presented one at that. The same simplification happens to Em'ly, since on the stage there is no time to develop her old desire to rise in the world, or her long wait before accepting Ham. The point is that at this time in his career, Dickens was giving even such relatively simple main characters some psychological intricacy partly by providing them with carefully conceived histories. He had done so less often in the novels before Dombey, and once he began he created new and difficult problems for the adapters.

In addition to these inadequacies, however, Courtney's play has two serious problems which result not from Copperfield's general complexity, but from the nature of its construction. The play has a badly bifurcated plot in which the two lines of action have no connection except incidentally in the end. David, to be sure, is present in the scenes related to both plots and in a few of his own which generally seem in the way, but he hardly connects the plots since in the play he has no role in the seduction episodes and only a minor one in the Wickfield action. Both Steerforth and Heep could easily perform their villainy without
him, and as far as the play goes, both plots would be improved. Standing as he does with no real importance in either plot, David also fails as a character. Like Em'ly and Steerforth, he is simplified and consequently uninteresting. He has some personal history, but the scenes devoted to it seem irrelevant to the play's real interests as well as unconnected to his personality as an adult. He seems to be included solely as a suitable match for Agnes when her troubles are over and he is given little more individuality than is consistent with such a role. The awkward plotting of Courtney's play and its failure to portray David in any depth result from two structural traits which make the novel in essence impossible to transfer to the stage.

First, it is a novel of growth, a *Bildungsroman*, and the nature of such a story is that the change in character does not occur suddenly but gradually as events (some important, some trivial), occurring throughout the character's life, have a cumulative effect on him. David's love for Agnes does not arise suddenly as it does in Courtney's play (and must in any play which preserves his change), but gradually as the result of years of observations by which David finally comes to know himself. And it is this growth of the central character which gives the otherwise unconnected materials of this novel their unity. One need not ask what David is doing in relation to the various plots; instead one
asks what the various sub-plots are doing in relation to David. The real importance of the Em'ly and Wickfield plots (as well as the school episodes, the marital difficulties of the Strongs, and David's marriage to Dora) lies in how they affect and reflect the growth of David from romantic, self-deluded child to responsible, perceptive adult. This theme of David's growth, of his recognition of his "undisciplined heart" is finally the novel's major concern, the one thread which ties all the disparate materials together. But such a structure is impossible to reproduce on the stage. It is too long and too complicated, and many of the details which combine to make it are individually too trivial and too subtle to show to a theatre audience.

Making the task of dramatising Copperfield even more difficult is the fact that it is not only a Bildungsroman, but one told from a first-person point of view. And the point of view is crucial in two ways. First, the narrator's voice, by providing a retrospective view of events, allows the significance of those seemingly unimportant events to be made clear. It can both explain the effect on David at the time and put an event in perspective by commenting on its long term importance. "It is as though we were witnessing all the scenes of the story, with a mysterious spirit by our side, who had privileged and Asmodean access to secret interiors of house and of mind. Thus is given for behavior and speech and deportment otherwise unmeaning a secret key,
which makes all intelligible. Now it is obvious that on the stage all this must be lost."[12

Secondly, the first person point of view is crucial to David's portrayal because it tells the reader the last and perhaps most important truth he knows about David: that as a mature man, happily married and a successful writer, David chooses to tell his own life story. This is the final conclusive evidence of what he has learned in the whole course of the novel. He now believes he understands himself both as child and man clearly enough that he can tell the story and show what has made him what he now is. Of course the dramatist, even if he tried to emphasize the Bildungsroman theme, could not avail himself of the retrospective point of view, could not show David commenting on his own earlier misjudgment and later wisdom.

More than twenty years later, two playwrights found ways not to solve but to circumvent these difficulties. Francis Burnand, the next adapter, realized, as Almar and Courtney had not, the futility of trying to dramatize David's story. He chose to use only the melodrama of the seduction plot and eliminated David entirely. His play The Deal Boatman, produced at Drury Lane on September 21, 1863, is an unusual one in this study since although it explicitly borrowed the situation and the characters from the seduction plot of Dickens' novel, it gives the characters different names and works the plot out quite differently.13
The situation, as set up in Act I, is that Mary Vance, who has been raised by Jacob Vance, a boatman, since he saved her from a shipwreck when she was an infant, is engaged to Matt Bramber, a pilot's apprentice. She has recently met and fallen in love with Edward Leslie. In a tearful scene, Burnand actually shows Leslie persuading Mary to come away with him the day before she is to get married. She wants him to avow his love openly, but he explains this is impossible because his uncle, Sir John Houghton, would disinherit him. As in the original, the boatman's festive party is broken up when Mary's farewell note is found.

One character not drawn from the novel is introduced, Edward's cousin and tutor George Prescott, who is to play a fairly important role. Pretending to be Edward's friend, he actually wants to discredit him with his uncle and guardian because Prescott himself is next in line for the inheritance. After considerable intrigue Burnand works the play out so that Edward is unable to keep his romance secret from his uncle. But he has married Mary, so the problem is not her loss of honor but his loss of an inheritance. This eventuality too is avoided when Mary turns out to wear a locket containing her mother's picture which is identical to a picture on her new uncle-in-law's desk. She is his long lost daughter by a wife beneath his station. This makes her a suitable match for Edward (her cousin), and all ends happily.

The play is a workmanlike society drama using the
tried conventions of the well-made play to produce a happy ending. The use of such a device as the locket to establish a character's real identity was so common in English plays of the period that Rowell says audiences knew better than to count on relations between characters as set down in a playbill. What Burnand did was to seize upon the situation created by Dickens as well as his characters, but he converted these materials into a standard melodrama by reversing the role Edward-Steerforth appeared to play, and making him into the hero, and by supplying an extra character as a villain trying selfishly to prevent the happiness of the lovers.

In choosing the situation and the characters from the novel, and the scenes to present, Burnand showed a pretty sure hand. And his play, not the main attraction of the evening but an afterpiece, achieved a moderately successful run of one month. Of course any significance the original story may have had is removed when the seducer is made into a husband and the poor fisher-girl into a long lost noblewoman. The play has little to offer, but it presents that it has efficiently.

One reviewer saw clearly the play's superficiality as well as its main strength, the portrayal of Vance-Peggotty's grief over the (supposed) loss of his adopted daughter. After referring to "the despair and wrath of the old man" as well shown, the writer dismissed the rest of the play: "The
conclusion is not so stirring, and indeed, with a passionate scene or two, consists of the reconciliation of all parties. The attractiveness of Peggotty-Vance is not too surprising since the portrayal of Peggotty (as drawn directly from the novel) was one of the strengths of the earlier productions and was to become one of the high points of the best-known adaptation several years later.

To this point, no play based on Copperfield had had more than a moderate success. But nine years after Burnand's version, Little Em'ly, which opened at the Olympic Theatre on October 9, 1869, pleased the public and the critics alike. It was the first and most popular of the four Dickens adaptations written by Andrew Halliday. Despite the implication of its title, Little Em'ly includes more of the novel than its seduction plot. Of the play's fourteen scenes, seven develop only the Em'ly plot and five only the Wickfield plot. The play is something like Courtney's David Copperfield the Younger since it subordinates David but preserves both the seduction plot and the Micawber-Heep-Wickfield plot. But Courtney had made some attempt to duplicate the novel's concern with David by using a scene from his childhood, referring to his marriage, and showing his realization that he loved Agnes. Halliday, in contrast, recognized the impossibility of telling David's story on the stage, and pragmatically chose to reduce his role to almost nothing. Consequently, when David first appears, at
Yarmouth shortly before Em'ly's "elopement," he and Agnes are already sweethearts, and this allows Halliday to avoid entirely the complications of David's marriage to Dora and his late recognition of his true love. The matter is never brought up again except that in the final scene, as the ship leaves for Australia, Agnes wears a wedding gown. Such a simplification obviously was economical since it eliminated the need for several later scenes devoted to David's life and love. To economize further, Halliday omitted the previously attractive grotesques Mr. Dick and Miss Mowcher, leaving Micawber as the only comic character.

Such pruning allowed Halliday to preserve more fully and effectively the two plots he chose to work with. He had time, for example, to show briefly Steerforth and Em'ly's common bond of having only one parent, and he gave each character some depth by preserving Em'ly's desire to be a lady in order to help her friends and Steerforth's warning to David to think well of him. In one fairly important shift, Halliday chose to avoid the heavy irony of having Em'ly's farewell note given to Peggotty in the middle of the party. The author showed both skill and confidence in his willingness to sacrifice the visual effects of the celebration and the obvious irony; his restrained treatment is most effective and in keeping with the melancholy tone of the whole.

On the other hand Halliday played up two scenes that
earlier adapters had avoided in the Em'ly plot. Awkwardly
the play places Em'ly and Rosa Dartle together on Em'ly's
return, thus allowing use of the dialogue in which Rosa
hysterically berates the weeping girl for "the home you have
laid waste" just as Peggotty bursts in to take his repentant
child in his arms. This leads into the second big scene of
the Em'ly plot as word comes that a ship is foundering. The
following segment shows the sea coast and a crowd of con-
cerned onlookers, including the distraught Rosa, who watch
as Ham prepares to swim to the wreck. Then the wreck itself
is shown with Steerforth clinging to the mast as Ham swims
toward it, only to have the ship break apart. Halliday con-
trived carefully for this spectacular scene to end his third
act and the Em'ly plot powerfully. One reviewer called it a
"badly represented wreck," but it undoubtedly appealed to
the audience.

Halliday's treatment of the other plot was similar in
that he preserved enough detail to individualize Uriah Heep,
Micawber, and Wickfield. Like his predecessors, he felt it
necessary to begin the action fairly late with Heep already
well up in the firm. Micawber is the central figure of the
action, and much of his eloquence on his pecuniary diffi-
culties is preserved. One reviewer noted the shift: "In
the comic portion of the plot some licence has been taken
with the original. Micawber is not a mere agent in the ex-
posure of Heep and the preparation of the domestic happiness
of Copperfield. On the contrary, the crimes of Heep and the loves of Agnes and Copperfield seem mere episodes in the career of Micawber. "As always the biggest scene is his unmasking of Heep's villainy in the last act. Halliday, however, saw a chance to indulge his and his audience's love of spectacle by carrying the action one step further than earlier adapters. To end his play grandly he actually showed the emigrant ship leaving Gravesend with David and Agnes following in a rowboat to say goodbye. 21

Measured by any standards, Halliday's version is superior to the earlier ones, and it had much greater success. It initially ran at the Olympic Theatre for six months. 22 The play was later performed in the provinces and America and was revived in London at the Victoria on November 28, 1870, at the Olympic on March 13, 1873, at the Adelphi on October 30, 1875, at the Standard on March 1, 1880, at the Olympic on March 27, 1880, and at the Crystal Palace on November 7, 1882. Although the play inspired quite a group of imitations, it "held theatrical honours for some thirty years." 23 Even Dickens gave "cordial and cheery congratulations" 24 to the author and the producer.

Several reasons for the play's success are plausible. Most important, Halliday was much more skillful than his predecessors in preserving whatever individuality the original characters had, in making use of whatever spectacular scenes the novel provided, and in shifting the emphasis to
play up the most theatrically attractive characters, no matter how far this carried the play from the novel. The two characters he selected to carry the drama were Peggotty, as impersonated by Samuel Emery, and Micawber, played by a well-known American actor, George Fawcett Rowe. Both characters are static and strongly delineated, just like the characters who had always been played up when Dickens' earlier novels were staged. Conversely, the characters who change (like David) or whose personalities do not so readily manifest themselves in telling words and actions (such as Agnes) are played down: David himself is "about as purposeless as one of Madame Tussaud's images." 26

It is interesting to notice that in three of his four Dickens adaptations Halliday used the technique of emphasizing secondary but vivid characters: Micawber and Peggotty in Copperfield, Cuttle in Dombey and Son, and Swiveller and the Marchioness in The Old Curiosity Shop. His other adaptation was of Nicholas Nickleby, whose simple melodrama required no major shifting.

In spite of the popular success of Little Em'ly, however, when measured not against its predecessors, but against more abstract principles of dramatic art, the play (like Halliday's others) is seriously defective. It has two distinct lines of action which are never connected, either thematically or structurally. David, who in the novel linked the two plots and gave them their importance, is an
excrescence. The plots themselves make only the most elementary appeals, one pathetic and sentimental, the other to the simple desire to see villainy foiled. And much of the play's popularity surely resulted from the fancy stagecraft which could show ships, shipwrecks, and "a view of Canterbury Cathedral by night, elaborately set, with massive tombstones in the foreground [which] caused a burst of admiration." Percy Fitzgerald, who admitted that he found the play entertaining, said its success was "owing not to its being a presentation of Mr. Dickens's story, but to some good scenery, the amusing acting of an American player, and the level merit of the actors." 

Halliday seems to have recognized, as the earlier adapters had not, the impossibility of adapting for the stage a novel built like *Copperfield*. But he recognized also the possibility of seizing on the individual sub-plots, powerful situations, and attractive characters and, most important, divorcing them from their context to make a play not so much based on *Copperfield* as drawn from it.

S. J. A. Fitz-Gerald once asserted that at least four plays could be built out of *Copperfield*: one dealing with his childhood and flight to Aunt Betsey's, one with Em'ly and Steerforth, one with David's marriage, and one with the Wickfields and Heep. Ironically, Fitz-Gerald was in effect admitting that only pieces of the novel, not the novel as a whole, are suitable for the stage. However, while two
of the four sections he lists were used over and over again in the plays, the other two have never been emphasized. This is no doubt because these two involve David as a major character and would force any dramatist using them to emphasize him, his character, and his growth. Precisely because the novel is a carefully unified Bildungsroman, however, in which all the pieces fit together, and because several characters in it, notably David, are complex and changing, the only way to make an effective play from the novel, as the adapters eventually discovered, is to ignore David and focus on one or two of the secondary stories which are interesting in their own right. In short, the only way to stage Copperfield is not to stage Copperfield.
Chapter IX Notes


2. See Lazenby, chapter vi.

3. A manuscript of the play is in the Lord Chamberlain's collection in the British Museum.


5. According to daily listings in the Times. Morley, however, says that after its initial failure the play was performed again on November 18th by the stock companies at both the Queen's and Standard Theatres (77).

6. A manuscript of the play is in the Lord Chamberlain's collection in the British Museum.

7. This, at least, is the name assigned to the manuscript by the British Museum's index to the Lord Chamberlain's collection. Morley, however, conjectures that the play "was probably the contrivance of H. Rivers" (77). I have arbitrarily chosen to refer to the work as Courtney's.

8. One notices that several of Dickens' novels when put on the stage have produced a similar structure in which two separate plots are begun, one in Act I and one in Act II, to be resolved in Act III. Nicholas Nickleby and Martin Chuzzlewit, in addition to Copperfield, seemed to lend themselves easily to this structure.


Even though the Wickfield-Micawber action occupies much of the play and most of the last act, the work still gives the dominant impression of being about Emily as the following summary as given by a reviewer shows: "The first [act] represents the flight of the heroine with Steerforth; the second the determination of Martha Endell to discover the fascinated girl; and the third her repentance. . . . The fourth act is a striking picture of the ship on board which Mr. and Mrs. Micawber and family, and Daniel Peggotty and Emily are embarked." (Illustrated London News [October 16, 1869], p. 391).

Morley lists nine different versions of Copperfield produced between 1870 and 1877 in London and the provinces (81).

Charles Dickens, Jr., "Introduction" to the MacMillan edition of Copperfield (London, 1892), p. xxv. It will be remembered that Halliday was also a writer for Dickens' periodical All the Year Round.

One may conjecture from the popularity of such a play that the Victorian theatregoer was not upset by the diminution in David's role. This would imply also that such a reader was largely unaware of the complex interconnections which David gives to the novel's various elements.
CHAPTER X

TWO NOVELS OF SOCIAL PROTEST

1

Bleak House appeared serially from March 1852 to September 1853, and as usual, to cash in on its popularity, several dramatic versions were produced in London before the novel was completed. Morley records a Bleak House; or, The Wandering Spirit of the Ghost Walk at the Pavilion on June 4, 1853, and another version of the novel at the City of London on June 6, 1853. A third appeared at the Strand for one week beginning on May 29, 1854, several months after the novel was completed.

Little is known about these plays, however. They had only short runs and were not reviewed in the major periodicals. S. J. A. Fitz-Gerald and Fawcett do not even mention them. Some evidence indicates, however, that in one important way these adaptations presaged the later successful ones. Morley says of the first adaptation, "Joe [sic] was the principal character and the play chiefly concerned with the sorrows of the poor crossing-sweeper played by S. Sawford, the leading man pro tem at the Pavilion." Apparently the Strand version put a similar emphasis on Jo,
because it was later subtitled The Adventures of Joe the Crossing-Sweeper. The novel must not have had much dramatic appeal, since after these three unsuccessful attempts, the story "virtually vanished from the stage in Britain and America for twenty years." When it finally reappeared, however, it was popular enough to set off a host of imitators. The second-generation plays indicate that the earlier adapters had been on the right track when they focused on poor Jo.

The story of the novel's return to the London stage begins, in a sense, in San Francisco on June 7, 1875, when a famous German actress, Fanny Janauschek, was appearing in an anonymous version of the novel entitled Chesney Wold. Madame Janauschek had scored a hit in New York the previous year by doubling the contrasting roles of Lady Dedlock and Hortense and had made the play part of her repertoire. In the supporting cast, made up of local stock company players, was a young British actress, Jennie Lee, as Jo; "despite the fact that the part was confined to three short scenes, this young Actress, much to the annoyance of the star, made a decided hit as the waif." The well-known British dramatist Dion Boucicault, who was in the audience, afterwards gave Jennie Lee the following advice: "see here, tell that man of yours [her husband J. P. Burnett] to take the book Bleak House and write a play making Jo the part, and you'll never want a penny, and you can play Jo until you're..."
seventy—if you don't get too fat." Eventually Burnett acted on Boucicault's suggestion, but he and his wife were unable to persuade anyone to produce their play in either New York or London. After a one week showing in Liverpool in November 1875 which convinced them that their faith in their vehicle was justified, Jennie Lee and her husband invested their savings of £1000 in renting the Globe Theatre for a short time and producing the play themselves. With Jennie Lee as Jo and Burnett as Inspector Bucket, Dickens' tale, now simply called Jo, thus returned to the London stage, "and for something like a quarter of a century Jennie Lee as Jo was familiar theatrical billing the world over." No text of the play is available, but its general form can be inferred from an American playbill. The first act had five scenes, in three of which Jo was prominent. The play opened at the inquest which simultaneously introduced Jo and gave the background of Hawdon's death. After a scene introducing Guppy, the third one began Lady Dedlock's story, probably with Tulkinghorn's telling her of the death of the obscure scrivener whose handwriting had interested her. The last two scenes of the act showed Lady Dedlock meeting Jo and being led to the burial ground.

The first two scenes of the second act were devoted entirely to Jo as he was told to "move on," first from Snagsby's back parlor and then from his crossing. The final scene of the act showed Lady Dedlock at Chesney Wold
revealing her secret to Esther, Tulkinghorn talking to Hortense, and probably the murder. The final act unravelled the murder mystery quickly in one scene, then devoted two final scenes to the pathetic crossing-sweeper: in the first Bucket had him "move on" once more and in the last he died at Tom-All-Alone's.

Much more of the novel is included than its title would imply; apparently, though, the play created a unified impression out of the disparate materials. A trustworthy English reviewer and critic, Joseph Knight, says explicitly,

To this story [of Jo] the whole action of the play is subordinated. There is no pretence of a love interest, for Guppy's impertinent advances to Esther can no more claim the title than the freely accorded kiss bestowed by "Guster" upon the hero when the end is at hand. The melodramatic portions of the novel, the disappearance and death of Lady Dedlock, the death of Sir Leicester, the murder of Mr. Tulkinghorn, the arrest of Hortense, and the inquest upon Jo's mysterious benefactor are only introduced for the apparent purpose of showing how they affect the waif.  

In other words, the work's unity resulted not only from the selection of materials, but from the way in which they were combined to focus on Jo. Some hint of the shift in emphasis is gained merely from recognizing that when the novel was serialized, Jo's death in chapter xlvii preceded Lady Dedlock's in chapter lix by three months, while in the play Lady Dedlock's death precedes Jo's by several scenes.

Since another play had already been scheduled for the Globe, Burnett's adaptation initially ran for only three
weeks, but it met such an enthusiastic response that it was brought back in September of 1876 and ran for over a hundred performances. The early reviewers were unanimous in their praise of Miss Lee's performance. The *Examiner* said it was "excellent for its pathos," and the *Times* reviewer, who disliked the play itself, wrote, "There are many who will not agree with us, and who will be pleased to shed a tear without inquiring why or at what they weep. To such we can honestly recommend *Jo*, and can, moreover, assure them that they will be much pleased with the acting of the young lady who represents the crossing sweeper." The *Athenaeum* reviewer (Joseph Knight) was more impressed: "Miss Jenny [sic] Lee . . . plays the part with a realism and a pathos difficult to surpass . . . In get-up and in acting the character was thoroughly realized; and the hoarse voice, the slouching dejected gait, and the movement of some hunted animal, were admirably exhibited." Without a text, of course, it is impossible to estimate the extent to which Miss Lee's acting was responsible for the play's success and how much of it resulted from Dickens' artistry. Certainly she must have acted the part well, but the moving conception of the "hunted animal" and his intensely pathetic death were the novelist's creations.

After its initial London success, Jennie Lee and her husband took their production on a tour first of the provinces, then, in 1881, of the United States. *Jo* reappeared
at the Strand in 1885 and, after Australia, Africa, India, and China, at Drury Lane in 1896, still with the now famous Jennie Lee in the title role. 19

Perhaps the best evidence of the play's popularity is the host of imitations that followed it. Having been shown one way in which Bleak House, or part of it anyway, could be made effective on the stage, other adapters lost no time in imitating Burnett's version. If one includes adaptations performed outside of London "never at one time were so many played based on the same Dickens story being performed." 20

The Jo craze lasted several years, and the titles alone indicate the dominant emphasis in the plays. 21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bleak House or Poor &quot;Jo&quot;</td>
<td>Pavilion</td>
<td>March 25, 1876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe the Waif</td>
<td>Greenwich Theatre</td>
<td>April 24, 1876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Life and Death of Jo</td>
<td>Theatre Royal Coventry</td>
<td>May 15, 1876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>Britannia</td>
<td>September 13, 1876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Little Jo</td>
<td>Park Theatre</td>
<td>July 2, 1877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Jo</td>
<td>Theatre Royal Southampton</td>
<td>February 25, 1878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe the Poor Waif</td>
<td>Liverpool Rotunda</td>
<td>July 4, 1881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move On: or, The Crossing Sweeper</td>
<td>Islington Grand</td>
<td>September 1, 1883</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This list is not exhaustive, but it serves to show the imitative outburst which Jennie Lee's performance in Burnett's play produced. One of these plays found its way into print,
and perhaps a more detailed study of it will clarify what was done to make *Bleak House* appealing to the British audience.

George Lander, whose adaptation of *The Old Curiosity Shop* has already been discussed, was the author of *Bleak House; or, Poor Jo* which appeared at the Pavilion on March 26, 1876.22 His play is enough like *Jo* in scenic structure to be clearly derivative. Whereas *Jo* had only eleven scenes in three acts, Lander’s play has sixteen scenes in four acts; but nearly every scene in *Jo* has a corresponding scene in Lander’s version with only a few shifts in order. Lander’s additional five scenes are used to give more background about Nemo’s death, to elaborate the characterization of Tulkinghorn, and to develop briefly an unsuccessful conspiracy between Chadband, Smallweed, and Guppy to get hold of Nemo’s papers. The overall effect is still to emphasize Jo, but less than in Jennie Lee’s play: he is the main figure in five of the sixteen scenes including the last two.

Assuming that *Jo* and Lander’s *Bleak House* are much alike, in both plays the roles of Lady Dedlock and Tulkinghorn are simplified. There is little time for the development of Lady Dedlock’s cold, seemingly haughty reserve. She lays her whole story before the viewer in a soliloquy in her first appearance. And she is, from then on, “a woman with a past,”23 a stage type later to become very popular. In her
big scene, a composite one, she tearfully reveals her identity to Esther and tells her she must now leave Chesney Wold. Tulkinghorn, who is not clearly motivated in the novel, is made unambiguously evil in the play. He resents Lady Dedlock's not having trusted him with her secret and chides Bucket who has some reservations about exposing a woman for a mistake made long before. When the lawyer finally has the evidence he needs, he gloats, "Now I have her. With these, and what I know besides, I need no more to crush and humble her" (III, 1).

More interesting is the fact that in Lander's play, and presumably in Jennie Lee's as well, Jo is different from what he was in the novel. In Lander's adaptation, Jo frequently speaks more directly and confidently and with a clearer perception of his plight than in the novel. The following is part of the dialogue at the coroner's inquest, which well illustrates the reconception of Jo; part of it is taken directly from the novel, but the last two speeches especially show a kind of wit and awareness that Dickens' Jo never had:

Cor. What were you christened?
Jo. What, sir?
Cor. Christened—given a name and sprinkled with holy water.
Jo. I've often been splashed with muddy water, sir.
Cor. I want none of that. Don't you know that Jo is short for a longer name?
Jo. Long enough for me, sir; I don't find no fault with it.
Cor. Spell it.
Jo. Can't, sir.
Cor. Where, and who, are your parents?
Jo. Never had any, sir.
Cor. Amusing young rascal this. Come!—no more of this nonsense! Who were your father and mother?
Jo. Don't know. Parish is father, and a hard old one too. Charity is mother, and a stingy old gal she is, I can tell you.
Cor. Where were you brought up?
Jo. Brought up, did yer say?—generally by the perlice—been brought up twice before the beak. (I, ii)

Later when Jo arrives weak and ill at Snagsby's, he gives the following rudely perceptive analysis of his plight:

Snags. It's a fever.
Jo. That's it, and it's why they moves me on. Oh! they have moved me on. "You ain't a goin' to stop here and breed fevers," says one. "You're poisonin' our place," says another. "You're a hideous rogue, and a wagabond," says another. When I goes to the workhouse, they says—they says, "We're full; go somewhere else." Yes, the workhouse chucks me out; and the bobbies won't run me in—they only moves me on. And so I wanders about like a dog—like a dog. (IV, ii)

Presumably Lander (and probably Jennie Lee's husband, Burnett) felt that Jo, as Dickens presented him, was not suitable for the main character of a play even though the story Dickens had built around him would be powerful on the stage. In the novel he is uncomprehending, inarticulate, almost numbed by his plight. The stage, however, demands a registering consciousness aware of its circumstances to make up for the lack of authorial voice which in the novel can substitute for a character's self-awareness.

Despite the speech quoted above, these two Bleak House
plays put little emphasis on the social criticism implicit in Jo's story and made explicit in Dickens' commentary on it. One reviewer of Jo, to be sure, stressed that "In a sense this story of Jo's sufferings is an idyll of our streets. As the sound of Consuelo's kisses still clings to the walls of Venice, Jo's hoarse and plaintive murmurs, as he is driven forth along his restless path, may yet be supposed to echo through our courts and byways." But his context hints, and studying the plays verifies, that he was referring as much to Dickens' telling of the story as to Burnett's. As far as the play itself is concerned, the Times reviewer was more accurate in attacking its shallowness:

we . . . see . . . a dirty little boy in an artistic combination of rags and sores, being perpetually "moved on" for no apparent reason . . . till he eventually "moves off" for good and all, with his hand on the knee of an Inspector of Police who has been chiefly instrumental in these enforced ramblings . . . The little chords of pathos, which in the novel are touched comparatively but occasionally, and with the delicacy of a hand cunning to discern how much the ears of his audience could hear, are in the play struck again and again till we begin to grow somewhat weary of the strain.

The lack of attention in the plays to Jo's social significance is only a small indication of the way in which the novel, a sweeping criticism of English attitudes and institutions, was robbed of its thematic intricacy when staged. Appealing only to the audiences' sympathy for Jo and their interest in a murder mystery involving a villainous
persecuter of an innocent woman, the *Bleak House* plays are the most prominent illustrations of the practice, already seen in regard to *Twist* and *Rudge* especially, of avoiding staging the social criticism in Dickens' works. Granted, the adapters had no choice but to ignore some of the major elements of the novel's social criticism. Nor could the sustained imagery be transferred to the stage. Similarly the *bildungsroman* of Esther's gradual growth toward understanding her identity had to be avoided, for the reasons discussed in connection with *Copperfield*. Possibly the same is true for the negative *bildungsroman* of Richard Carstone's decay.

But the dramatic medium itself does not prevent a play based on *Bleak House* from preserving at least part of the novel's concern with social ills. A dramatist could build a play around the effects of the Chancery suit. He could show the dehumanizing effects of blind or self-interested charity, of self-righteous ministers, of unconcerned parents. He could pillory greedy money lenders, calculating lawyers, and irresponsible parasites. Naturally, unless he selected carefully from the wealth of materials he might produce a very episodic play, since the stage does not have the room for interconnecting disparate materials that the novel does. But then the adapters had never worried about episodicity. Apparently the adapters of *Bleak House*, like most Victorian playwrights, were not interested in trying to present
probing social criticism to the theatregoing audience. The public wanted something less challenging from the drama, and less disturbing. With some melodrama and suspense on the side, the story of Jo, treated only for pathos without social overtones, filled the bill.

Both the melodrama and suspense of Lady Dedlock's story and the pathos of Jo's were in the novel, but they were embedded in a criticism of social ills affecting all the related levels of society, and thus these appeals to the simpler emotions received less emphasis than they did on the stage. As Dickens handles these evils in the novel, building them slowly with minute detail and carefully weaving them together into a single scathing presentation of the befogged inhumaneness of human institutions, they are not dramatic. They involve the slow growth of some characters and the decay of others as the system grinds inexorably on. As we have seen, the limitations of the dramatic medium, and the demands of the Victorian theatre, make it unable to deal effectively with such slow and complicated development. The intricacy of Bleak House consequently forced the adapters to distort it much more than they had most of the previous novels.27

One other play based on Bleak House survives, which shows an interesting deviation from the practice of making Jo the main character. Lady Dedlock's Secret is a workman-like piece by J. Palgrave Simpson.28 It was first performed
by an amateur group in 1876, but was not produced profes-

sionally until March 26, 1884, when it appeared at a matinee

at the Opera Comique. As the title implies, Simpson's play

uses some of the same materials (the conflict between Lady

Dedlock and Tulkinghorn) as the other plays, but it shifts

away from the pathos of Jo and does more with the murder

mystery.

In the first act, as a result of meeting Esther and

Jarndyce, talking to Guppy about her resemblance to Esther,

and recognizing Nemo's handwriting, Lady Dedlock recognizes

the imminent danger of her past's being exposed and faints

in Tulkinghorn's presence. Act II centers on the search for

the dead man's papers as first Guppy, then Lady Dedlock

(guided by Jo), then Tulkinghorn and Bucket show up at

Krook's shop. Krook says there were no papers, but makes an

appointment to see Tulkinghorn later.

In Act III, set in the lawyer's office, Krook appears

to sell Hawdon's letters, which he has hidden. Tulkinghorn

takes them, but angers Krook by refusing to pay and threat-

ening him instead. Knowing Lady Dedlock's secret, Tulking-

horn gleefully soliloquizes, "I have her fully in my power

now. I can humble your insolence to me now, my lady!" Lady

Dedlock, when confronted with his knowledge, is prepared to

be exposed, but Tulkinghorn chooses to enjoy his hold: "It

may suit my views to keep the secret for awhile, and share

the concealment with your ladyship. (he comes to her side
Lady Dedlock refuses to be so humiliated and leaves, saying she has a way out. As the lawyer puts the incriminating letters away he hears a noise in the next room, turns, and is shot dead as the curtain falls.

Having left the viewer in suspense, as the earlier adapters did not, Simpson opens Act IV with the tender scene in which Esther gradually learns that Lady Dedlock is her mother. The secret must be kept to protect the Dedlock name, but soon another scandal threatens as Jo warns Lady Dedlock that she is suspected of murdering Tulkinghorn. She leaves just before Bucket exposes her past and tells Sir Leicester that her letters to Nemo were stolen by the murderer. Coincidentally at this point, when Lady Dedlock's guilt seems obvious, Krook shows up trying to sell the letters to Sir Leicester, and in an ending which must have amazed Dickens lovers (as it did Charles Dickens, Jr.), Bucket arrests Krook for the murder. Sir Leicester is relieved that his wife is cleared of murder, but it is too late. Jo brings her in from wandering in the storm outside, and she deliriously embraces Esther and tells Sir Leicester to look after her daughter as she dies in "a regular, conventional, knockabout, stage death-scene, while Jo ... weeps by her side to form a picture."29

Once it borrows the situation and characters from the novel, the play follows Dickens even less than its predecessors. Jo lives, Krook is the murderer, and Tulkinghorn is
a melodramatic villain whose motive is at least partly sexual. Lady Dedlock, though, emerges as a fairly well-developed main character. One reviewer especially praised "Lady Moncton [who] played the part of Lady Dedlock with a degree of tragic intensity which enables her to hold the house throughout and at times to touch a note of true pathos." He singled out as the finest scene in the play the one in which Lady Dedlock identifies herself to Esther: "marked by great delicacy and truth, her maternal tenderness seeming to assert itself in spite of, and even to contribute to, the humiliation of her position, while at the same time she expressed her sense of infinite relief at being able to lay aside the mask she had worn for years." Of the play's "well-constructed" plot, he noted, "the adapter's modification of the novel has merits of its own from the stage point of view, though it misses the exquisite tenderness of the original" (but not a word that it missed anything else!).

Another reviewer praised the play as "neatly constructed" and said it had "interest sufficient to recommend it to the regular bills of any theatre on the look out for a piece of this class." Apparently no theatre was looking for such a play, because no further performance of it is recorded. Evidently a Bleak House without the sentimental emphasis on Jo held little interest for the Victorian theatregoer.

Whatever approach the adapters chose, it is clear that
they regarded only limited portions of *Bleak House* as suitable dramatic fare. And they agreed that considerable modification and shifting of emphasis were needed to prepare these segments for the stage. Lazenby records a similar situation in regard to American versions of the novel:

The popularity of the plays seems not to have stemmed from the appeal of the novelist's material so much as from the opportunity for stardom which it provided; the interest was not inherent in the story or in the playwright's handling of it, rather in the acting... [The dramatists] explored several of the possibilities for adapting this novel but none of them dealt with its central concern over legal delay.34

Nor was there any attempt to dramatize the more complicated, changing characters. *Bleak House* was, on the whole, even less suitable for the stage than *Copperfield* or *Dombey*.

One might expect that Dickens' next novel, *Hard Times*, would have attracted adapters, if for no other reason than that its length made it less cumbersome to adapt than its predecessors. This is not, however, the case, for *Hard Times* was one of the three or four least frequently staged Dickens novels. Only four versions of it are recorded in nineteenth-century London and only one in America. Perhaps adapters were discouraged by the book's strident anti-utilitarian theme or perhaps they simply thought the novel and its characters less interesting than Dickens' previous works.
Nevertheless, some playwrights did attempt to stage the book. The first version of it was by Frederick Fox Cooper at the Strand on August 14, 1854, only two days after the novel’s final installment had appeared in Household Words. The play is most unlike its source in that it emphasizes what comedy there is in the novel and largely eliminates its thematic implications.

The opening scene presents both Gradgrind and Bounderby as comic figures. Gradgrind is orating, in front of an alehouse, on the value of facts. Here he questions poor Sissy Jupe on the definition of horse, but his own "model" children are soon shown to be poor illustrations of his theory since they are caught peeping at the circus. Bounderby enters at this point, talking to Mrs. Gradgrind on his favorite subject, his having been born in a ditch. The action becomes more sober as Sissy’s father is discovered to be missing and Gradgrind agrees to take the girl in. The rest of the act sets up the play’s pathetic sub-plot based on Stephen Blackpool’s unfortunate marriage from which he can find no escape.

By Act II Tom is working for Bounderby, who has asked for Louisa’s hand. After Harthouse has entered, a jubilant wedding breakfast is presented emphasizing once again Bounderby’s loud-voiced pride in the tales of his youth. Soon Bounderby also has the bank robbery to complain about, and he vociferously accuses the missing Stephen of the crime.
Louisa is worried about Tom and his debts in Act III, but Harthouse, whom she confides in, agrees to pay them. Louisa is delighted until the villain tips his hand by trying to kiss her. Instead of being unnerved as in the novel, the stage Louisa denounces Harthouse who, on his own, decides he should leave Coketown. Louisa soon shows up at her father's and faints. She is followed by the snooping Mrs. Sparsit whom Gradgrind makes walk back to Coketown. Bounderby then arrives with Rachael and bellows about his wife's behavior. His insults anger Gradgrind and the two engage in a knockabout comic fight.

To end his play Cooper had Sissy and Rachael discover the abandoned mine shaft as in the novel and bring help. But either he wrote before Dickens' ending to the novel was available or he did not like it, for his play has a happy ending virtually the opposite of Dickens'. Stephen, unharmed, is rescued from the mine, and Bounderby's noise about arresting Stephen is cut short when Mrs. Pegler is brought in and reveals what a liar he is. Gradgrind then clears Stephen of the robbery by saying Tom was responsible, in that he moved the money to another spot in the bank. Louisa agrees to return to Bounderby provided he brings his mother to live with them, and Bounderby will now allow Stephen to marry Rachael (everyone ignores the fact that he is already married) and the unstolen £150 will be her dowry. The happy outcome will be celebrated by a week's holiday.
with pay for all the workers.

The ending and the deemphasis of Sissy Jupe and the circus destroy the novel's carefully contrived moral fable, which F. R. Leavis and others have noted. Instead of leading to the destruction of Tom, Louisa, and Stephen, "utilitarian" coldness, rigidity, and self-interest in the play apparently create happiness. Louisa can be content married to Bounderby, and no Sissy is needed to persuade Harthouse to leave. Tom's upbringing may have made him a thief (the play is not clear), but he can be easily redeemed without any aid from circus folk. Stephen Blackpool has temporary trouble (though it has nothing to do with unionization), but this too can be overcome, and with a wave of the magic wand he can even marry his true love. The play did preserve one thematic concern from the novel in its sub-plot: "The denial of the privilege of divorce to the lower orders proved to be the weightiest topic and certainly made the most permanent impression." One reviewer rationalized the happy ending on the ground that the stage could have too powerful an impact to risk showing the bitter truth: "Many things in narrative fiction which are profoundly pathetic become when presented to the eye and ear with histrionic appliances, exceedingly dangerous."

The play was a fair box-office success. It initially ran for two months and was revived at the Strand on October 6, 1856, and at the Marylebone on March 23, 1858.
(for a single benefit performance).\textsuperscript{41} Both the text and a note in the \textit{Examiner}\textsuperscript{42} imply that the play's major attraction, beyond the suspense over how good would triumph, was the loudmouthed buffoonery of Bounderby as played by an actor named Tilbury. On stage the play must have been considerably more entertaining than it is in print or in summary. One reviewer even said the novel "makes a better drama than a tale."\textsuperscript{43}

Two more versions of the play are recorded which have apparently not survived, one at the Pavilion in 1854, and one at the Grecian on September 20, 1866 (for a single benefit performance).\textsuperscript{44} The only other available text of a play from \textit{Hard Times} was that used at Astley's on April 22, 1867. Entitled \textit{Under the Earth; or, The Sons of Toil}, it was the work of W. H. C. Nation, the stage-manager.\textsuperscript{45}

Though more elaborate it is so much like Cooper's adaptation as to be obviously derivative. The act by act structure is almost the same, as is the happy ending. Nation went beyond Cooper in eliminating Sissy altogether. He developed Tom and Louisa more fully by preserving some of the details and speeches from the novel, and he clarified the ending by having Tom explain in an aside that he really did steal the money but has replaced it with a loan from Louisa. Even the fight between Gradgrind and Bounderby is kept from Cooper's version.

But whereas Cooper had made comedy the chief attraction
of his play, Nation, in accord with Astley's reputation for emphasizing sensational scenes, with elaborate staging, made Stephen's stay in the pit the high point of the play. In scene vi of Act III the interior of the mine shaft is shown with Stephen lying bruised and injured at the bottom. As he tries to climb out by himself he falls and breaks his leg. Then as he lies there helpless, the light filtering down from far above him is suddenly gone, and he believes the shaft has been covered and himself entombed. Shortly, however, darkness gives way to light as Rachael comes down a rope to help her beloved, she being the only one of the group at the top with enough courage to enter the shaft. After their emotional reunion both are hauled up to end the act.

Morley suggests with considerable evidence from other plays being produced at about this time that Nation wrote his play specifically to take advantage of a current vogue of plays about miners and their problems, and to create this impressive "sensation scene." Such scenes had become a chief feature of the drama in the sixties. Even though Nation's play was much like Cooper's earlier one, and more fully developed, it was on the stage for less than a month, "not a very profitable run in view of the expenditure on scenery." This relative unpopularity may have resulted from Nation's not having the novel's currency to increase the public interest, or it could have come from his
downplaying of the often boisterous comedy in the earlier version.

Comparing the adaptations of *Bleak House* and *Hard Times* emphasizes some important differences in Dickens' characterization in the two novels. As mentioned, a number of major characters from *Bleak House* were avoided on the stage at least partly because in the novel they changed slowly. Richard Carstone, who changes from a likable but irresponsible young man to a tormented and helpless husband as a result of his obsession with the chancery suit, is one case in point. On the other hand, both Jo and Lady Dedlock were easier to reproduce on stage and powerful when played: they do not change although their situations in the world do, and whatever inner complexity they may have can be conveniently ignored if one is interested only in the tears each could provoke. Their interest in the plays thus results not so much from their personalities as from the buffetings they suffer.

In *Hard Times*, however, nearly all the characters are simply drawn to begin with. Louisa Bounderby, with her calm and distant exterior masking inner turmoil, is much like Lady Dedlock. Louisa does change in the course of the story, but the change, unlike Carstone's, is dramatic in that it comes suddenly and violently as the result of long building pressure released by her relations with Harthouse. (The endings in which she goes back to her husband, however,
make nonsense of her actions.) Louisa's father undergoes a similar dramatic change when forced to confront the ruined lives of his children as symbols of the failure of his system, but this portion of the plot is not dealt with, no doubt because of its "intellectual" implications. Except for these two, the characters in *Hard Times* are all unchanging and simply but clearly defined by external details. Bounderby with his continual references to his rough upbringing and the unreasonable demands of the factory hands is such a creation, primarily in the comic vein, as are Stephen, Rachael, and Tom, in the serious. While such portrayal, as we have seen before, made the characters in *Hard Times* fairly easy to put on the stage, they were not as effective on the Victorian stage as those in *Bleak House* or in most of the earlier novels.

In *Hard Times*, as in *Twist*, *Nickleby*, *Rudge*, and *Bleak House*, one finds still another instance of the tendency to ignore Dickens' social criticism and other thematic emphases, and to make his works simpler and more hopeful for the stage. This goes far toward explaining why, as Dickens' novels became more thematically oriented and more gloomy, they became less and less popular as sources for plays.
Chapter X Notes

1 "Bleak House Scene," Dickensian, XLIX (1953), 175.
2 According to daily listings in the Times.
3 Dickens and the Drama (London, 1910).
4 Dickens the Dramatist (London, 1952).
5 175.
6 For a performance at the Bower Saloon on September 2 (Morley, 175).
7 Morley, 176.
8 Told in the Dickensian, XVI (1920), 173.
9 Morley, 177.
10 Dickensian, XVI (1920), 173.
11 Morley, 177.
12 Morley, 178.
13 Discussed at more length in Lazenby, pp. 234-235.
14 Athenaeum (February 26, 1876), p. 307. Reprinted in Knight's Theatrical Notes (London, 1893), pp. 108-109. This review shows that the play did not, as Lazenby conjectures (p. 235), omit Lady Dedlock's death in the interests of making a unified impression.
15 According to daily listings in the Times.
16 (February 26, 1876), p. 244.
17 (February 25, 1876, p. 4.
18 (February 26, 1876), p. 307.
Still further evidence of the play's, and Miss Lee's, popularity is found in the many references to it in the memoirs of constant theatregoers. Henry Barton Baker referred to "the powerful, wonderfully pathetic, and haunting performance of the street arab, that must ever linger in the memory of those who saw it." (History of the London Stage [London, 1904], p. 331.)

E. L. Blanchard recorded in his diary, "See Jo (Jenny [sic] Lee very good) at Globe." (Life and Reminiscences, ed. Clement Scott and Cecil Howard [London, 1891], II, 460.) And Pemberton wrote "No more deservedly successful Dickens impersonation has been seen than that of the world wide known Jo of Miss Jennie Lee." (Dickens and the Stage [London, 1888], p. 179.)

Morley, 178.

Ibid.

Published in Dickens' Standard Plays (London, n.d.), No. 388.


Taken as directly as possible, that is, from Dickens' indirect discourse which omits the coroner's questions and gives Jo's answers to them in the third person but with characteristic syntax and diction.

Athenaeum (February 26, 1876), p. 307. M. Wilson Disher suggests that Bleak House was not a stage success when it first appeared precisely because the moral and social implications of Jo's story were "too near home. Half-starved children were still sweeping crossings in all but the main thoroughfares where the new horse drawn rollers had done them out of a living." (Melodrama: Plots That Thrilled [London, 1954], p. 22.)

(February 25, 1876), p. 4. At least one reviewer of the novel felt that Dickens had presented Jo only for his pathos; he "is a very effective picture, though we fail to discover a sufficient reason for his introduction." ([Margaret Oliphant], "Charles Dickens," Blackwood's, LXXVII [1855], 463.)
Surely it is ironic that Jo, the most successful nineteenth-century adaptation of Dickens, is so unlike its source. The adapting technique was the one seen so often in this study, focusing on a well-defined but secondary character. While most of these had been comic characters, the emphasis on the pathetic had also been common (as in plays based on Smike). But such a technique did far less damage to novels like Nickleby than it did to Bleak House, which on the stage lost virtually everything that has made many modern critics regard it as one of Dickens' most mature novels.


Times (March 27, 1884), p. 6.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Athenaeum (March 29, 1884), p. 419.

p. 237.

Published in Dicks' Standard Plays (London, n.d.), No. 785.

"The new bill for closing the public houses creating great excitement and discussion at the time, Mr. Gradgrind was made to exhibit strong animosity and hostility to the proposed measure." ([John Camden Hotten], Charles Dickens: The Story of His Life [New York, 1870], p. 68.)


Athenaeum (August 19, 1854), p. 1022.

Ibid.

According to daily listings in the Times.


(October 7, 1854), p. 633.

Athenaeum (August 19, 1854), p. 1022.
Morley, 72.

Published in Dicks' *British Drama* (London, n.d.), No. 59.

Morley, 72.
CHAPTER XI

FOUR SELDOM-SEEN NOVELS

The sales of Dickens' novels, which had been erratic in his early career, stabilized at about 40,000 for the works after Dombey. But while his later works were popular with the reading public, they became distinctly unpopular with the dramatic adapters. The beginning of this trend was noted in the previous chapter in regard to Hard Times especially, but it becomes even more marked as one studies the adaptations of the last four completed novels. Stage versions of them were rare in London and not conspicuously successful (though A Tale of Two Cities is a partial exception). The crucial question, which I will attempt to answer in this chapter, although I have already suggested a number of the answers, is why the Dickens novels lost much of their attraction for the dramatists while they lost none for the reading public.

Little Dorrit is the most striking example of the dramatic unpopularity of these last novels: only one play based on it was performed in nineteenth-century London, and no American performances are recorded. No text of the
London version, which was by Frederick Fox Cooper and appeared at the Strand Theatre on November 10, 1856, is available, but a lengthy review in the *Era* gave a general account of it. In three acts with thirteen scene changes, Cooper told the story of the "Father of the Marshalsea" up to the point at which his property is restored. Because the serialization was only a bit more than half-way complete, the agonies Dickens had in store for Dorrit were not yet known. The performance included several tableaux based on the serial illustrations and accompanied by "melodramatic music."

It was evidently a cumbersome and boring play, especially in the first act. The *Era* reviewer explained,

As the novelist especially contrived to render his earlier chapters as undramatic as possible, it will be easily imagined that the adaptation of them to the stage has not imparted to the plot the spirit that is infused into the description rather than the incidents.

The first act hangs fire very much, and the humour of the Circumlocation-office requires to be read, rather than represented, to make it intelligible, so that with the absence of strong dramatic situations and the retention of long undramatic speeches, there is a dearth of that excitement which is the means of sustaining, as well as creating, an interest in the progress of the plot.

E. L. Blanchard saw the play on its fourth night and called it "very slow." Cooper's play ran for only seventeen performances, and no other playwright in the century was interested enough to adapt the novel for the London stage.
A Tale of Two Cities, however, fared somewhat better on the stage. It appeared in London in three dramatic forms; the first two versions were moderate successes while the third, became the most famous play ever drawn from a Dickens novel. The first dramatic version of the novel was by Tom Taylor, "one of the most popular dramatists of his day." It was produced at the Lyceum on January 30, 1860, some two months after the novel had been completed in All the Year Round. It was, as the bills emphasized and the published text notes, authorized by Dickens himself, who had "in the kindest manner superintended the production." Although condensed, simplified, and somewhat reorganized, the play was fairly faithful to the novel. Perhaps its most interesting feature is that it is a tale of only one city, Paris; there are no scenes in London.

To open his play, Taylor chose to show (in a prologue) the action leading to Dr. Manette's imprisonment in the Bastille. Manette, having been kidnapped, is brought to a bedroom in the St. Evremont chateau and left to to treat the dying Colette Dubois, who regains consciousness just long enough to tell him her story. The episode is somewhat simpler than in the novel where it takes several days and where the story of Colette's ravishing is summarized by her dying brother. Instead of sending Manette home and later seizing him again, as in the novel, the brothers
St. Evrémonde, having failed in a bribery attempt, direct their coachman to take the doctor directly to the Bastille.

Such an opening sacrifices the suspense built up in the novel about the cause of Manette's imprisonment. Dickens had withheld this story until Darnay's second trial before the Revolutionary tribunal and there had it brought out in the document Manette had hidden in his cell. The effect in the novel is powerful because the disclosure suddenly explains much of Manette's past behavior such as his shock on learning Darnay's real name. But such details may be overlooked or merely confusing on the stage, so Taylor chose clarity in preference to suspense and exciting revelation; he followed what Winton Tolles calls "the law of the drama, inoperative in fiction, that essential information concerning the basis for plot development or for motivation of characters should never long be withheld from the audience." Besides, as several reviewers noted, most members of the audience could be expected to know how the suspense would be resolved, and the stormy scene did make a powerful opening--more effective than if it had been merely summarized when Manette's letter was read later.

When the play proper begins, twenty-five years, and much of the novel, have passed. Darnay has returned to France. He is, the audience is told in a soliloquy by the Marquis de St. Evrémond, in love (already) with a penniless little French orphan and has recently escaped a carefully
contrived trial. Thus briefly are major portions of the novel summarized so that one can get to the main action. In a major violation of the novel's chronology, which saves a whole act, Dr. Manette has only now been freed from the Bastille.

After all this is set up the act dramatizes three main episodes from the novel. Awkwardly transplanted from London into the residence of the Marquis de St. Evrémonde is the conversation from early in the novel in which Sydney Carton expresses his dislike of Darnay. Also shown is the emotional scene in which Carton declares what he knows is an unreturned passion for Lucie Manette, including his willingness to lay down his life to keep those she loves around her. Later, after Lorry has indirectly explained to Lucie why they have come and after the Defarges have been introduced (in a scene which refers to the death of the peasant child), the act ends climactically as Lucie meets her father and recalls him to life in a tearful scene. Taylor was careful to include here Lucie's "weep for it" speech (Book I, chapter vi), which Edgar Johnson used as an example of Dickens' tendency to excess in such scenes. Excessive or not, Taylor seized on such carefully rhetorical speeches wherever he found them including the famous closing non-speech of Sydney Carton's.

When Act II opens, eleven years have passed, and the characters have once again returned to Paris, Lorry and Jerry Cruncher to destroy Tellson's records and Lucie,
Manette, and Carton to follow Darnay who had returned secretly at his old servant's request. Darnay is already in prison, and Carton visits the Defarge's shop where he meets Barsad and threatens to expose him unless he agrees to aid in Carton's plan. Here Taylor emphasizes the grim revolutionary ardour of Madame Defarge and uses the revolutionaries to provide a spectacular scene, the dancing of the Carmagnole. Apparently the several scenes showing the revolutionaries en masse were one of the play's main attractions. One reviewer wrote that "in putting the piece on the stage great pains have been taken with the scenes that represent the tumult of the 'Reign of Terror.' The mob that burst upon the audience to dance the 'Carmagnole' was wonderfully organized, and the dance itself, executed to the correct tune, was as frantic as could be desired."  

After various pleas by Manette and Lucie have been useless, the act moves to its high point, Darnay's trial, which is an economical composite of his two French trials in the novel. As Darnay is about to be freed, having defended himself successfully against the charge of being a returned emigrant, Madame Defarge identifies herself, links Darnay to his father's evil deeds, and produces Dr. Manette's prison narrative as evidence. After Darnay is sentenced to hang, Lucie first pleads on her knees, then faints in Carton's arms. He carries her out bestowing a kiss. This scene with the suspense of a courtroom, the sudden reversals, and the
frequent interjections from the mob of onlookers was also a favorite: "Very effective . . . was the Revolutionary Tribunal, with the sans-culotte jury, the Republican dandyism of the president, and the howling congregation of the galleries." ¹³

The next scene, which is taken whole from the novel, is Carton's switching places with the drugged Darnay. Taylor chose not to show Carton actually going to the scaffold, so he inserted in this scene the famous closing farewell which Dickens says Carton would have spoken had he been permitted to express his last thoughts on earth. After this, the last scene back at the bank comes as an anticlimax. In it Defarge has come to warn Lucie and her now insane father to escape before his wife can have them arrested too. She, however, arrives too soon and goes after Darnay with a knife. Her husband restrains her, she pulls a pistol, they scuffle, and she is killed with her own gun. The tumbrils are heard, and Carton's head can be seen (by the audience) as he rides by the bank window. Luciepronounces the curtain line, "Oh noble heart! Husband--a prayer for him!"

Granted that the novel had necessarily been condensed and reordered, Taylor's play did a pretty good job of transferring the novel's plot to the stage. After whatever summary-exposition is needed in each act to make up for the time lapse and the omission of English scenes, the play
concentrates on the most exciting incidents. It thus operates with a continual intensity as it moves from high point to high point, referring only briefly, if at all, to the less exciting events which lead up to the climactic moments.

Not only is the plot unrelievedly tense, but it is also tightly unified without any major changes from the novel, because *A Tale of Two Cities*, unusually for a Dickens novel, has what may be called a quintessentially dramatic main plot. Brander Matthews even used *A Tale of Two Cities* along with *Jane Eyre* to illustrate his comment that "only those novels can be successfully dramatized which happen to present an essential struggle and to display the collision of contending volitions." *A Tale of Two Cities*, built around the opposition between the revolutionary forces seeking to destroy Darnay and the loving English trying to save him, is the only Dickens novel to focus tightly on a single "collision of contending volitions." Thus Taylor faced less difficulty in adapting it for the stage than did the adapters of Dickens' more sprawling novels.

*A Tale of Two Cities* was also easily adaptable because it was thematically unusual for Dickens: the book's social view is not particularly complex, and it specifically lacks any social criticism that might disturb an English audience. *Dombey* had criticized, among other things, English pride and materialism. *Hard Times* attacked what Dickens conceived of as utilitarianism in industry and in the rearing of children.
Our Mutual Friend would attack English chauvinism and greed, and the catalogue extends to all of Dickens' later novels except A Tale of Two Cities. Instead of criticizing the foibles of the English, this novel attacks the horrors of a French revolution and shows the noble self-sacrifice of an English hero to secure the happiness of the French girl he loves. Admittedly Taylor's play, like its successors, de-emphasizes the revolution and concentrates on the more romantic themes of love and self-sacrifice. All revolutionary scenes not directly connected to the Darnay plot—such as the spilling of the wine cask, the murder of the Marquis, the hanging of Foulon—are omitted or merely alluded to briefly. The effect, in spite of the reviewers' praise for the revolutionary scenes which were included, is to reduce Dickens' presentation of the mob to the story of Madame Defarge's desire for revenge. Nothing of Dickens' study of mob psychology and the evil that grows out of revolutionary zeal comes across in the play (except insofar as they are illustrated at Darnay's trial). One is reminded of the plays based on Barnaby Rudge which also used an uprising for spectacle, but did not preserve Dickens' presentation of the causes and effects of the would-be revolutionaries' actions. But such a thematic shift in adapting A Tale of Two Cities was less necessary and easier to make than a similar shift in, for example, Hard Times. With its main theme flattering rather than attacking the audience's natural will to believe
in human, and specifically English, nobility, even under a mask a debauchery, *A Tale of Two Cities* was a natural for the popular stage: it "provided about as fine a theme for dramatic exposition as could fall to the lot of any playwright to handle."¹⁵

If Taylor found little difficulty in adapting the novel's plot and theme for the stage, he had scarcely more trouble with the characters. While shown at less length, most of the main characters in the novel are done little injustice in the play. Lucie in the novel is an unindividualized but attractive romantic heroine with several emotional scenes, and she remains so on the stage. Darnay, in Taylor's play, is still a generous young hero, sympathetic with the peasants' condition, but ineffectual. And Madame Defarge preserves on the stage her implacable knitting and her unswerving desire for revenge. Apparently Madame Celeste, the stage manageress, who played both the murdered Colette and Madame Defarge took full advantage of the two roles' powerful speeches and situations. One reviewer said, "The main strength of the presentation lies ... in the fact that Madame Defarge, who is a central figure in the story, has the best representative that the stage of our day could furnish."¹⁶ Another called her acting "remarkably effective,"¹⁷ and both writers noted that some members of the audience made known their displeasure at her death; whether they were dissatisfied that she died in a fight with her
husband or whether they merely wished a woman with such strength to live, neither reviewer conjectures.

The techniques used in characterization in the novel which make these three main figures easily adaptable we have seen often in previous chapters. First, the characters do not change. Second, they are simply conceived (Lucie and Darnay are stereotyped devoted lovers and Madame Defarge is almost a Jonsonian humour character defined by her commitment to revenge). Third, their dialogue is carefully contrived to be as effective as possible whether the desired effect in a given scene is pathos, terror, or adoration. Fourth, Dickens portrays them externally; that is, he does not describe or analyze their feelings for a reader but exhibits them in gesture, speech, and action.

Not all of the characters, however, were so easily and completely transferred to the stage; Taylor found himself forced to modify two main characters, Manette and Carton. Manette is given little emphasis in the play, partly because his story is more relevant to Dickens' view of the revolution than to the love and sacrifice theme. But Manette is also deemphasized because in the novel he changes; it would have taken considerable time, as well as the audience's willingness to interpret many minor details, for the dramatist to show the slow process by which Lucie recalls her father to life. Then too the playwright would have had to show precisely the tenuous ascendancy that Manette the loved and
respected old doctor maintains over Manette the imprisoned cobbler, an ascendancy rendered always precarious by the chance of references to his past. This Dickens shows with frequent details about Manette's faltering speech as well as the reappearances of his cobbler's tools. Even had he wanted to characterize Manette fully, Taylor would have been unable to do so within the structure he had chosen. The chronological reorganization removed most of the instances Dickens had used to show the long-range effects of Manette's imprisonment, and the limitation to French scenes removed the rest. Without such careful portrayal, Manette's final return to insanity comes as something of a shock on the stage, whereas in the novel it had been carefully prepared for.

The problem of portraying Carton on the stage is a quite different one, since he does not change; he remains throughout precisely the same brilliant but dissolute figure, caring for nothing except Lucie and her happiness. A static character, he is nevertheless a good deal more complicated than many of Dickens' creations. Taylor either found it too time-consuming or subtle to include any scenes showing Carton's frequent despair, his self-hatred, or his ambivalence toward his double. Thus Carton emerges on the stage as appealing, but most simply drawn.

Granting that A Tale of Two Cities has an almost ideal dramatic plot, subject-matter likely to attract a popular
audience, and a number of dramatically attractive characters, one wonders why Taylor's version of it achieved only the moderate success of running two months, when plays based on much less suitable novels had frequently been great successes. The explanation could, of course, be that the individual production was not outstanding or that dramatic taste was changing. But it seems reasonable to conjecture that part of the play's relative lack of success is attributable to its not having one element which had frequently seemed to account for other adaptations' popularity: an outstanding comic character. Miss Pross is left out of Taylor's play, and Jerry Cruncher, the novel's only other comic figure, is included so briefly that his revelation of his nighttime career seems gratuitous. Taylor probably realized that these characters were not only irrelevant to the plot, like many of the novelist's great comic characters, but that they were also of little interest, unlike such great creations as Mrs. Gamp, Pecksniff, Micawber, and Cuttle. Neither Miss Pross nor Cruncher had sufficient brilliance to warrant interrupting the play to let them shine.

On July 7, 1860, six months after Taylor's version appeared, the second play based on the novel, *A Tale of Two Cities: or, The Incarcerated Victim of the Bastille*, was produced at the Victoria theatre. It was probably the work of Frederick Fox Cooper, whose adaptation of *Hard Times* has already been discussed. Although more detailed,
Cooper's play is much like Taylor's, and thus it lends further support to the analysis above of the novel's dramatic qualities. Although the two writers largely agreed on what episodes to emphasize, Cooper preserved more of the novel, including a number of scenes set in London and the comic characters. Thus his play is closer to the novel than Taylor's, closer at least until the denouement.

Like Taylor, Cooper puts the events leading to Manette's imprisonment in a prologue but he devotes two scenes to it instead of Taylor's one. The first shows Manette being kidnapped by St. Evrémonde's men, one of whom is Barsad. The second scene, including Colette's death, is handled just as in Taylor's play. The first full act is then set at Defarge's wine shop where Gaspard summarizes the killing of his child just before the Marquis enters and flings him some coins. The story of Darnay's trial is summarized as Madame Defarge eavesdrops and knits the names of all involved. The rest of the act, following Taylor's alterations in chronology, shows Lorry and Lucie arriving and the tearful reunion with old Manette.

Cooper's Act II switches to London and uses extensively material that Taylor omitted or only summarized, including the interview between Carton and Darnay (which Taylor had shortened and transplanted to Paris), some comic digression as Jerry Cruncher, drunk, is questioned by his son about his late-night fishing, Darnay's request to marry Lucie
(including Manette's refusal to hear his real name), Carton's telling the story he has heard about a manuscript having been found in the Bastille, and Carton's profession of love to Lucie including his promise. The act is pretty jumbled, but one main effect is to characterize Manette more fully than Taylor, restricting himself to the Paris scenes, had done.

Act III corresponds to Taylor's Act II with all the characters in Paris eight years later. Tellson's records are burned and Darnay is contrasted to his uncle in the scene which Taylor had moved to the opening of the play. The high point of the act grows out of this scene, but is based on matter that Taylor chose not to use, perhaps because it is not tightly related to the Defarge-Darnay-Carton story. Cooper, however, recognized an opportunity for some good spectacular action. After Darnay departs, Madame Defarge enters through the window, terrifies the Marquis by identifying herself, and leaves him for Gaspard to murder. The act ends as Darnay rushes into the room, now in flames, and the revolutionaries seize him.

The final act opens with the frenzied dancing of the Carmagnole, shows Jerry Cruncher and Miss Pross recognizing Barsad as her brother, and sets up Carton's plan to let Darnay escape. One big scene is made of Darnay's two trials, just as in Taylor's play. After Darnay is found guilty, Cooper adds a twist all his own to the plot. After Carton
has exchanged clothing with Darnay and drugged him. Barsad drags him out to the waiting carriage, but when the jailer returns, Carton drugs him too. The action then shifts immediately to the escape scene which uses Miss Pross to stand up to Madame Defarge as in the novel. To heighten the emotional effect, however, Cooper does not have Madame Defarge die from her wound immediately. Instead she wanders about in hysterics because she will miss seeing Darnay's execution. The shot had been heard, however, by the escaping party who return, and Madame Defarge makes one last effort to grab Darnay as she dies. Immediately Carton enters wearing Barsad's clothes, having left the spy to go to the guillotine in his place, as any viewer would surely have expected after the previous scene.

Although most of my comments on Taylor's play apply here as well, Cooper's version is more spectacular and thrilling than Taylor's with more emphasis on the revolutionary activities. It is less tightly unified but has better character development, and it lacks the straining to include certain necessary scenes which in Taylor's play results from transplanting essential scenes to Paris.

But whatever virtues one finds in Cooper's play are largely vitiated by the banal happy ending which includes not only Carton's return but a sane Dr. Manette. One remembers that Cooper was the adapter who first wrote the happy ending to *Hard Times* as well. As in that adaptation, the
happy ending here is wholly inconsistent with several of the novel’s themes. The depth of Carton’s love and the courage it gives him are largely undercut by changing him from a man willing to lay down his life to improve Lucie’s to a mere master of intrigue, a sort of eighteenth-century James Bond. And in the novel, Manette's final insanity serves to symbolize both the viciousness of the aristocracy, which had caused it initially, and the excesses of the revolution which brought it back. If Cooper even realized how destructive of the book’s thematic pattern his ending was, he evidently assumed his audience would be unconcerned with such subtleties and delighted by an ending which allowed their hero to live.

True to the previous pattern, dramatic interest in the novel waned for almost forty years, and when it did return to the London stage as The Only Way in February, 1899, it had undergone some major alterations. Its history, however, is more of the twentieth century than the nineteenth, and thus falls largely outside the present study.

The story behind The Only Way is fascinating and could easily be the basis of a romantic play illustrating the time-honored theme that persistence and talent pay off. As the story goes, Martin-Harvey, then a young actor touring America with Henry Irving, was looking forward to the time he would be a manager as well as an actor. He told his fiancée, Nina de Silva, “What we want is a play with a
character in it which will appeal to all humanity." She immediately replied, "Then you must do *A Tale of Two Cities* and play Sydney Carton." Her suggestion seemed right to Martin-Harvey, and eventually, after they had planned out the scenes, they turned to a Reverend Freeman Wills (an Englishman) to supply the dialogue. He, in turn, called in another clergyman named Langbridge (who remained anonymous to Martin-Harvey during most of the collaboration), and the four of them painfully put together the play that made the actor's reputation.

A modern text of the play is readily available, so it needs no lengthy summary here. In a prologue and four acts, the play emphasizes Carton, who is characterized quite thoroughly in the first act set in his chambers and in the second, at the Manettes' house. To heighten the portrayal several of the strong attractions of earlier plays are left out. The emotional meeting between Lucie and her father is not shown, and there is no Madame Defarge. The revolutionaries (except for Defarge, who comes to England seeking revenge for his sister's death) are shown only in the trial scene. Carton has not only his usual big scenes (the declaration to Lucie and the switch in the jail), but is also allowed a brilliant performance as Darnay's defense attorney and several moving scenes on the way to the scaffold, where he is last seen as he delivers the famous closing lines from the novel.
The play was not an immediate box-office success. Its reviews ranged from lukewarm to cold, and Martin-Harvey was worried about all the money he and his wife were losing. Its popularity grew, however, and it was on in London for almost a year (shifting to another theatre after a while). The play made Martin-Harvey's reputation as both manager and romantic actor, and was continually revived in both England and America until in 1921, Martin-Harvey (now Sir John) recorded his two-thousandth performance as Sydney Carton. Thus *A Tale of Two Cities* eventually emerged as the only one of Dickens' last eight novels to be dramatically viable as a whole. (*David Copperfield* and *Bleak House* both gave rise to successful plays, but these were based on segments of the novels rather than on the whole main plot.)

The pattern of dramatic adaptation for *Great Expectations* differs markedly from that of the previous novels, at least partly because Dickens had a dramatic version of sorts published in his name. The play was never performed, nor apparently was it intended to be, but theoretically it guaranteed that no dramatic pirate would seize the work, because it made Dickens the possessor of the copyright not only for the novel but for a play based on it as well. Dickens may at one time even have intended to work the "play," which is more a synopsis than a workable drama, into presentable...
form, since he told the well-known comic actor, J. L. Toole, "I haven't time to write plays . . . but it will interest you to know that when I was writing 'Great Expectations,' with a view to the possibilities of a dramatic version of the story, I had you in my eye all the time for 'Joe Gargery' and Ben Webster for 'the convict.'"27

Although several American adaptations of the novel appeared shortly after its serialization was completed, the effect of Dickens' possession of the copyright was to prevent any adaptations from appearing in England until after his death. Even then the novel did not prove popular with the English adapters; only one version of it, by the not yet famous William Schwenk Gilbert, appeared in London in the nineteenth century. Gilbert's *Great Expectations* in a prologue and three acts appeared at the Royal Court Theatre on May 29, 1871. 28 It shows the now familiar pattern for adapting the later novels: omitting most of the humor and complexity while emphasizing the suspense plot (which was much modified).

A prologue allows the play to open with a shortened version of the novel's first scene, in which Magwitch, hungry and ferocious, does nearly all the talking. Several scenes are then telescoped as Pip brings the food and file, Magwitch—hearing someone—hides, Mrs. Joe enters to berate Pip, and the soldiers enter looking for Magwitch. Almost immediately Magwitch is seen behind a wall fighting, not
with Compeyson as in the novel, but with Orlick. Joe enters just as the convicts are captured, as in the novel.

With most of the main characters introduced (Pumblechook and Wopsle are eliminated), the play, in Act I, jumps over ten years and shows Orlick and Pip, writing to Miss Havisham as he always does on his birthday, at the forge. Joe's good nature and his illiteracy are shown in his pride that Pip can write a whole letter while he can only pick out "a J and an O and a J-O Jo." Biddy enters the scene frightened of Orlick's advances, which anger Pip even though he is not himself interested in her. Pip confides to her that he wants to be a gentleman because Estella has made him aware of his commonness, but as in the novel, Biddy tries gently to discourage his daydreaming. Somewhat awkwardly, Gilbert than introduces Estella who has come to the forge to pay Pip for his visits to Satis House, and ironically, to undeceive him of any notion he may have formed about their future paths coinciding. Estella is, if anything, more haughty and cruel than in the novel. The act also includes the fight between Joe and Orlick, who vows to get even as he leaves; Jaggers' informing Pip of his great expectations; and Pip's interpreting in an aside that Miss Havisham is going to make him suitable for Estella.

The act thus serves two purposes. It characterizes Joe—who fumbles through his talk with Estella—Pip, and Estella briefly but clearly, and it sets up the main source
of suspense (will Pip become a gentleman and win Estella?) as well as the secondary one (what will come of Orlick's hatred of Joe, his wife, and Pip?). This sub-plot is given a dimension not present in the novel since Joe has befriended Orlick knowing him to be the ex-convict he had felt sorry for years before.

The second act is set one year later at Pip's and Herbert's London lodgings, as a series of characters visit Pip. Jaggers arrives first to discuss the young men's finances and tell them he has been instructed to pay their debts. Biddy enters next to explain that Orlick is suspected in Mrs. Joe's death (nine months earlier), and Pip vows to devote his life to hunting the villain down. Then Joe enters, and the fine interview in which he cannot keep from calling Pip "Sir" is shown in some detail. Although the whole performance of Joe by one Edward Righton was praised, his comic antics in this scene, perhaps warranted on the basis of the novel, were criticized: "Some of the tricks he performs with his hat would be excellent in pantomime, but are out of place in a drama." Included after Joe leaves is Pip's request to Biddy that she work to improve Joe's manners, and her quiet but firm response that Joe is too proud to leave his natural station. Pip briefly soliloquizes that he has treated Joe badly and must apologize. But Estella soon appears, and somewhat surprisingly tells Pip about Miss Havisham's unhappy love affair and her
having been brought up to wreak revenge. Pip avows that he loves her anyway. The final visitor is Magwitch who, to Pip's disgust, discloses his role as Pip's benefactor, as in the novel. Pip and Herbert realize the danger he is in if he stays in England, and resolve to row him to a ship to avoid being seen.

Having so far stuck closely to the novel's plot, in the last act Gilbert moves far away from it to provide a traditional melodramatic ending. Pip first visits Jaggers' office to verify Magwitch's story and there meets Estella, who reveals that Miss Havishem's plan to make Pip Estella's first victim has failed, because she could not avoid loving him. She loves him even now, although Jaggers has told her Pip owes everything to a convict who was her father, and who was Orlick's accomplice in swindling Miss Havisham. As they vow to bear their great grief, Joe and Biddy enter, having just been married. Pip briefly apologizes for his snobbery, and this ends the portrayal of his ingratitude and matur­ation. Since Joe has brought word that Pip is to go to the old lime kiln for a message about Magwitch, Pip decides to go there and meet Herbert, Magwitch, and Joe when they row by.

This sets up the sensational last scene in the sluice house illuminated by the dull red of the kiln. When Pip enters Orlick captures him, admits he killed Mrs. Joe, and as he fiendishly attacks Pip with a hammer, Joe, Herbert,
and Magwitch rush in. Magwitch, who still hates Orlick for turning King's evidence against him, kills him in hand-to-hand combat. Estella and Biddy enter, along with the river police. Magwitch draws a gun, but is shot himself. As the criminal lies mortally wounded, he learns from Pip that Estella is his daughter and Pip's future wife. "Magwitch makes a violent effort to embrace Estella. He kisses her, places her hand in Pip's, and dies."

The play was fairly popular in that it initially ran for two months at the Royal Court Theatre and was considered worth reviving at the Aquarium Theatre on March 19, 1877. The reviewers, however, were justifiably cool toward the play, and one offered an interesting explanation of the inconsistency between the play's popularity and its glaring defects: although it was "but a common place melodrama," "a large portion of the audience, being familiar with the novel are in a position to supply the deficiencies of the drama, while remaining unconscious how far they themselves contribute from memory to the illusion." This may well explain how mere hints at characterization can be satisfactory in an adapted play, but a greatly changed dénouement is an even greater anomaly if one presumes the audience is interested in such a play for providing the guide points in a mental connect-the-dots drawing. Moreover, if their acceptance of plays like Gilbert's was conditioned by their fuller knowledge of the book, one has to suspect
the depths of their understanding, since the play severely distorts the book. As one reviewer noted, Gilbert "broadly surveyed the whole story as presented by Mr. Dickens, and detaching therefrom the scenes which best mark its progress and afford the best opportunities for characteristic acting, he has tacked these together in craftsmanlike fashion."^33

Gilbert's attempt to present the story using only four settings, for example, forces him to omit some of the novel's most interesting materials, to create some awkward improbabilities, and destroy most of the book's thematic depth. Gone are the grim fairy tale episodes at Satis House, the boisterous Finches of the Grove, the comic scenes at the Pockets', Wemmick, the aged P. and the castle, and the antics of Trabb's boy. Because of the use of a single scene per act (except in act three), the first two acts consist of a series of visits to Pip's residences: in Act II Jaggers, Joe, Estella, and Magwitch all come to Pip's London lodgings in the course of, at most, a few hours. Such improbabilities is not necessarily a severe defect; the real problem is that such a structure allows almost no time for any character, Pip especially, to respond to his experiences, to be changed by them.

Gilbert's divisions directly parallel the main sections in the hero's growth: the prologue and Act I show the country Pip, Act II shows a dandified city Pip, and Act III shows the outcome of Pip's expectations. But Gilbert's
Act III in no way realizes the complex implications of the early portions of Pip's life which the final section of the novel concentrates on. In the novel one sees a deeply humbled Pip, temporarily beaten down (both physically and psychologically), aware that his hope of winning Estella is baseless and that his monetary expectations are tainted, a Pip who symbolically returns to the simplicity and honesty of the country. But on the stage, one sees instead a typical melodramatic, formula ending: the hero, after about four seconds of guilt over his treatment of Joe, quickly learns that Estella is his in spite of her upbringing. Then he is captured by the villain, only to be saved in the nick of time. He emerges from all this unchanged and with no guilt over his ungenerous treatment of Joe and Biddy. Thus the play is yet another example of the dramatists' tendency to make the Dickens world a happier if simpler place, and to destroy whatever thematic unity the novel had.

Of the characters in this uninspired plot the reviewers liked two: ignorant, good-hearted Joe and shrewd, cross-examining Jaggers (even though the latter had only a small part which omitted any study of his motives or his legal practices besides those related to Pip). That these two characters were the most interesting on stage should come as no surprise at this point in my study, for of the *dramatis personae* Gilbert chose, they are the most typically Dickensian: that is, they are the characters most easily
summed up yet individualized by their marked (some would even say eccentric) gestures and speech patterns. Joe's heavy dialect, his bewilderment in the presence of his betters, and his innate kindness all come across easily, if the actor is competent. So do Jaggers' finger biting, his accusatory tone, and his nearly occult perception of what others are thinking.

On the other hand, most of the other characters suffer severely in being moved to the stage, some because Gilbert chose to simplify their presentation, others because he had no choice but to do so. The two convicts were not very impressive, since as one reviewer put it, they were played "as thoroughly transpontine villains, about whom there can be no mistake." As the reviewer went on to admit, Magwitch's portrayal had to be moderated in the later scenes to suit his sympathetic position, but nothing in the play makes any allusion to Dickens' fairly careful study of how Magwitch was virtually forced into a life of crime. Nor does the play involve any discussion of Magwitch's dual motivation (gratitude and the desire to create a gentleman, a respectable surrogate). Furthermore, Estella is shown so briefly and given so little history that no viewer unfamiliar with the novel would feel anything but minor distaste at her haughtiness to Pip, and no attempt is made to prepare for the disclosure that she has really loved Pip all along.

But the play finally does the greatest injustice to
Pip himself. The simplification of Pip is an almost automatic result of the dramatic infeasibility of the first person point of view. Thomas E. Connolly has said of Dickens' presentation of Pip

It is a full portrait. The reason for the realistic presentation of his hero is to be found in the fact that we are taken within the hero's mind. We are no longer external observers, left to judge the character of the observed solely from the evidence of his speech and actions. But when Pip is put on the stage, it is precisely on "the evidence of his speech and action" that one must interpret him. This parallels the problem the adapters of Copperfield faced; finding other materials in the novel more attractive anyway, they chose to avoid the growth plot. But Great Expectations is a more confined novel as well as a more tightly organized one, and it did not allow the sub-plot approach. Gilbert chose to solve his problem partly by emphasizing (and changing) the melodramatic and sensational portions of Pip's story, and partly by showing Pip's development after it has occurred. Each main stage of Pip's personality development could be shown statically in a scene which included some brief references to how it had come about, but the coming about was lost and with it most of Pip's complexity.

Gilbert's is the only version of the novel produced in nineteenth-century London. This contrasts sharply with the four or five versions (many of which ran much longer than
Gilbert's play) that commonly resulted almost immediately when the earlier novels appeared. While many thoughtful modern readers and critics believe Great Expectations to be one of Dickens' finest novels, it was of almost no dramatic interest compared to, say, Nicholas Nickleby or Barnaby Rudge, which are usually regarded as much inferior novels. This is simply one striking illustration of my belief that tightly constructed novels in which plot, theme, and depth of characterization reinforce each other are difficult to dramatize and that, in consequence, Dickens' works grew less dramatic.

iv

Like Great Expectations, Our Mutual Friend, serialized from May 1864 to November 1865, met no immediate rush to adapt it for the stage (and in this case there were no copyright restrictions to ward off dramatic adapters). Eventually, however, it became more popular on the stage than its predecessor; in all, four versions, one of which was an American import, appeared in London in the nineteenth century.

The first English adaptation, H. B. Farnie's The Golden Dustman, was produced at Sadler's Wells, June 16, 1866. As its title implies, the play deals primarily with the John Harmon-Boffin plot; the Lizzie-Eugene plot is also used, but the Veneerings, the Podsnaps, the Lammles, Riah,
and Jenny Wren are all omitted.

To avoid later confusion and take advantage of the blood and thunder action, Farnie chose to open with a prologue showing what really happened to Harmon. The alternative was to keep the attempted murder and the change of identity secret and have them disclosed by Harmon in a retrospective summary. This would waste the theatrical impact of a brutal murder and a savage beating, however, so Farnie chose the same technique that the adapters of *A Tale of Two Cities* had used for relating Manette's story. The prologue is set at Rogue Riderhood's cheap boarding house and includes a fight between Rogue and Gaffer Hexam as well as the attempted murder of Harmon by Radfoot and Riderhood and the actual bludgeoning of Radfoot by Rogue after they have disagreed over dividing their spoils. Worked into the dialogue are enough expository speeches to reveal Gaffer's "trade" and his daughter's aversion to it as well as the conditions in old Mr. Harmon's will which have brought his son back to England. By the end of the prologue Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn have been introduced (they enter looking for their client), and the body of Radfoot has been carried in by the police to be mistaken for that of Harmon. Even the secondary plot of Wrayburn's attraction to Lizzie has been hinted at in their meeting at Riderhood's.

With the premises thus clearly set forth, the first scene of the play itself shifts to comedy as Wegg makes his
first visit to Boffin's bower to read to the Dustman. Most of the humorous dialogue is drawn from the corresponding scene in the novel, but Boffin's unsuccessful attempt to haggle with the one-legged bandit in their first meeting in the novel is worked in. The next scene, returning to melodrama, shows Eugene with a distraught Lizzie. Much has happened since the audience first saw them: Lizzie wears mourning and thanks Eugene for the kind way he disclosed her father's death, and she is visibly frightened, believing that Headstone is following them. After they leave the stage, Lizzie's fears are verified when Bradley Headstone comes "stealthily" out of hiding. His first line typifies the portrayal given him throughout: "Ha! it is she! and with him! Oh! curses on that silly empty coxcomb! But he shall never have her!" Farnie neither desired nor had time to show the causes or the anguish of Headstone's passion for Lizzie. The adapter instead simplified the schoolmaster into a typical melodramatic villain. The same portrayal is carried out in the next scene based on Headstone's raging interview with Wrayburn and in the following one in which, "striking his breast," the schoolmaster proclaims his uncontrollable passion to Lizzie. Rejected, he becomes furious and threateningly mutters, "I hope I may never kill him!"

With the Lizzie-Eugene-Headstone plot well underway, Farnie then uses the last two scenes of the act to introduce the heroine of his other plot line, Bella Wilfer. The
scenes occur at the Wilfers', but the family are shown quite briefly with little use of their comic potential. But Bella is developed at some length when left alone with Rokesmith-Harmon after arrangements have been completed for their joining the Boffins' household. As in the novel, Bella is bored, scornful, and openly mercenary.

The first act having emphasized the Wrayburn-Lizzie-Headstone plot, the second act avoids this material altogether to further the Harmon plot. When it opens, Rokesmith-Harmon and Bella have both been living at Boffin's new mansion for some time since Harmon subtly reminds Bella that she has been neglecting her family. The interchange, a close imitation of the corresponding one in the novel, further develops Bella's materialism. In the same scene, Farnie, once again compelled to keep things clear for his audience, shows a crucial interview that Dickens had saved until much later and only summarized: the one in which Mrs. Boffin informs Noddy that she has recognized their boarder and learned of his love for Bella and in which Noddy resolves to so mistreat Harmon in Bella's presence that she will side with the secretary. The result, in the next scene, is that after Rokesmith-Harmon has proposed to Bella, Noddy enters, warns the audience that he is going to be fierce, and insults the secretary for shirking his duties. This has its desired effect as Bella chastizes Noddy for being tyrannical and spoiled by his wealth.
The last scene of Act II, which returns to the comic elements of the Harmon plot, somehow showed both the Bower and the mounds outside. As Wegg (with Venus watching) reads *Lives of the Misers* to Boffin, the "literary gentleman" grows more and more agitated and finally refuses to "pander" to Boffin's depravity by reading any more, especially since he has found a later will of Harmon's to threaten with. Boffin, held in a chair on top of a table, agrees to Wegg's demands but wants to walk out among the mounds a last time. Wegg allows it, then realizes he had better follow, but is too late to keep Boffin from digging up a bottle and escaping. A major comic attraction, according to a reviewer, "The scene . . . was capitally managed: and the chase between the wooden-legged ruffian and the rather obese Boffin for the possession of the mysterious bottle which contains the real last will of the eccentric testator was abundantly amusing."37

Act III, returning to the Wrayburn-Lizzie-Headstone plot, opens with a long, patchwork scene which was the spectacular high point of the play. In brief outline, Wrayburn meets Lizzie at Flashwater Weir and forces her to admit she loves him. But when she leaves, Headstone, who has been following disguised as Riderhood, now the lock-keeper, grabs a handspike and clubs Eugene into the river. Riderhood himself sees the attack and realizes he is being framed. The two men grapple and, as in the novel, meet their deaths when
they fall into the lock. Then Lizzie, having heard the cries, rows across the stage and grabs Eugene as he floats by. In the novel, of course, Headstone's attack on Wrayburn and his fatal fight with Riderhood are widely separated and Dickens goes to great pains to portray the mingling of guilt and fear of exposure that makes Headstone lead a life of terror. Farnie's combining of the scenes is both economical and in keeping with his simpler presentation of the character.

Left in suspense about whether Eugene is alive, the audience is taken back to the Boffins' in the next scene for an equally complicated denouement. In this one final scene are included Noddy's dismissing his secretary for having dared aspire to Bella's hand, Bella's sudden realization that Noddy's money has made him a monster and that she has mistreated Harmon, and the revelation of the ruse to Bella who is already in Harmon's arms. The women are sent out, and the scene progresses to the final undoing of Wegg, who enters insolently only to be thrown out by Harmon. To complete the happy ending Bella returns with her family and the weak Wrayburn enters with his dear Lizzie. Harmon gives Lizzie the confession he secured from Riderhood (in the middle of the lock scene), and Lizzie pronounces the play's main sentiment in a suitably saccharine speech.

Ah! Eugene! let us humbly trust that brighter days will dawn on us, for I feel assured that a woman, be she ever so poor, and ever so lonely,
may be with Heaven's help, the cause of happiness to a noble-minded man, if she possesses that best of all treasures—a loving heart.

With its thirteen long scenes, *The Golden Dustman* originally took four and one-half hours to perform. Although the opening night audience was displeased, one reviewer felt the length was justified because it resulted from the use of extensive dialogue to develop the characters in contrast to the more usual sacrificing of "dialogue to rapidity of action." The play was soon shortened, but it remained quite massive. The reason, I believe, is that Farnie tried to make clear a pair of quite complicated plots. He chose three kinds of materials: the Boffin-Bella-Harmon intrigue, the comic sub-plot built around Wegg, and the melodrama involving Lizzie, Eugene, and Headstone. And once these materials were chosen, much had to come with them. Farnie could not get Bella to love Harmon without also showing and explaining Boffin's treatment of his secretary, which could not be done without explaining who the secretary really was, and this in turn necessitated an explanation of how he came to be masquerading at all. Similarly Lizzie could not marry Eugene until he had been nearly killed; consequently Headstone had to be included, and Riderhood as well, to provide the means of getting rid of him. Either plot line could have been divorced from the other and the comedy of Wegg could have been omitted, but given the initial decision that these were the portions of the novel that would be most
effective on stage, the intricacy of the novel's plots compelled a lengthy play.

In spite of all that Farnie included, a critical viewer would notice unresolved problems in the adaptation which had been worked out in the novel. The play does not explain, for instance, how Headstone came to be infatuated with Lizzie, nor how Eugene tracked Lizzie down when she left London, nor why Harmon chose to masquerade as Rokesmith, nor why, at last, Lizzie and Eugene visited the Boffins and Harmon and Bella, since the two groups of characters have never met (in the play). These are minor problems of course, easily overlooked by a viewer familiar with the novel, but they illustrate the kinds of difficulties even a careful adapter is likely to find insoluble: "the dramatist has a hard task to perform," said one reviewer, "and with whatever skill he may condense, omit, and transpose he will never construct a play that is perfectly intelligible to those who are unacquainted with the source."^39

But these matters are really unimportant compared to the superficiality of a number of the play's characters. In Our Mutual Friend, as in perhaps no other novel, Dickens tried to show several important characters who change, slowly but distinctly, as the result of many individually trivial events in their lives. Eugene's coming to love Lizzie may be the least plausible change in the novel, but at least Dickens was able to show him gradually becoming
more interested in Lizzie before his near drowning and to allow her nursing him through his long illness to account for his change from playboy to earnest Victorian suitor. In the play Wrayburn meets Lizzie in one scene, offers her help in the next, declares his passion in a third, and after she saves him from the river, becomes a perfect fiancé in their next scene.

Similarly, Bella in the novel, unlike most of Dickens' heroines, changes as she slowly comes to see the shallowness of the material values she professes. Her change is motivated both by a complexity within her (witness her non-material affection for her father) and by her long association with Boffin as he "becomes" a miser. The reader, unaware that Boffin is acting a part, can hardly help sharing Bella's growing distaste and realizing that the values Bella professes are precisely those responsible for Boffin's "change." Onstage, of course, no such extensive development is possible; it takes only a pair of incidents in which Boffin plays the snob toward Rokesmith to make Bella renounce her values.

Finally, as mentioned, the decay of Headstone, one of the most effective portrayals in the novel, is hardly shown at all. He is never presented as an able but tortured schoolmaster. When he first appears, he is already psychotically attracted to Lizzie. Almost immediately after Lizzie rejects him, he vows to have his revenge, and when he gets
it, instead of showing the self-torment of the once proud schoolteacher obsessed with whether the attack could have been better carried out and the inner nightmare of worry as he goes about his duties outwardly calm, the play immediately has him killed off. Dickens' fine portrait of the effects of combined guilt and fear is simply ignored.

No doubt it was the simplified portrayal of these three characters (and perhaps of Harmon) which prompted one reviewer to write that an adapter may be said to have done his best when he has succeeded in tacking together a few of the more striking situations from the novel, so as to effect something like coherency, and allowing us to take a passing glimpse at the external peculiarities of a number of fictitious personages, who owe their celebrity to the mastery with which their internal nature has been delineated by Mr. Charles Dickens.

It is almost an immediate corollary of the relative weakness of the complicated characters that the two most attractive characters in the play are the comic ones, the eccentric, colorful, larcenous Wegg and good-hearted, simple Noddy Boffin.

Thematically the play is somewhat closer to the novel than many adaptations (for example, Gilbert's version of Great Expectations or Cooper's of Hard Times). It at least preserves, in a simple form, the shallowness of material values that Bella comes to recognize. However, without the satiric pictures of the English middle classes, the play presents this theme more optimistically because it does not
suggest, as the novel does, that "success" in the Victorian world is in fact measured by the false values of the Veneerings rather than by the simpler human values of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin. Nor does the play show much of the sordidness of life among the London poor: Betty Higden and Jenny Wren are omitted, and the life Lizzie and her father lead is only briefly referred to early in the play. The Lizzie-Wrayburn affair is treated so that little if any criticism of artificial class values can be seen in it. The dominant impression left by the play is the standard one of melodrama, that simple human goodness and love will triumph over whatever evil forces life possesses—surely not the main impression left by the novel.

What appeal the play had resulted, then, from the elementary desire catered to by all melodrama, to see all the complications worked out so that the lovers get together, thus affirming the basic justness of the human world; from the pleasure created by the antics of Wegg and Boffin; and from the play's emphasis on exciting action. Among other things, the viewers were treated to a fight between Gaffer and Rogue, the murder of Radfoot and attempted murder of Harmon, the comic chase over the mounds, the attack on Eugene followed by the drowning of Riderhood and Headstone, and the thrilling rescue of Eugene. Such attractions were sufficient to give the play a "considerable measure of success," but nothing compared to some of the long-running
adaptations, which it resembles, based on some of the early novels. It initially ran for thirty performances at Sadler’s Wells, and when the lessee, W. H. C. Nation, moved, he took the play with him to Astley’s where it ran from October 27 to December 15, 1866. On March 9, 1878, it was revived at the Surrey.

Two other adaptations of Our Mutual Friend also appeared shortly after Farnie’s, no doubt in response to the success his version was having. On July 16, 1866, The Dustman’s Treasure; or, Wegg and the Boffins, by house dramatist C. H. Hazlewood, appeared at the Britannia. No text is available; however, Morley notes that the play was much shorter than Farnie’s but less effective. It made a sensation scene of the deaths of Headstone and Riderhood, and Wegg must have been fairly important since he was not only mentioned in the title but played by the stock company’s leading man Joseph Reynolds. The play ran less than a month, but it was revived at the same theatre on August 27, 1866. A month later, on August 11, 1866, The Dustman’s Golden Mound; or, The Will of John Harmon in the Old Dutch Battle appeared at the Marylebone. It was the work of one Felix Rogers who played Wegg, and it ran for only a week.

Neither of these two could be called very popular, but the last adaptation to appear in London during the century was a very successful American import. Found Drowned appeared at the Opera Comique on December 26, 1870, and was
the work of the American actor George F. Rowe, who had made such a hit in London as Micawber in Halliday's Little Em'ly. His play had actually been the first adaptation of Our Mutual Friend to appear anywhere, since it had appeared in New York on June 4, 1866, eleven days before Farnie's play had been seen in London. These two plays, written simultaneously on opposite sides of the Atlantic, show almost complete agreement between the two authors on what materials in the novel were to be selected as dramatically effective.

Rowe selected the same main plot lines as Farnie, but he tried to stay even closer to the novel; thus, his play is even longer. Like Farnie, Rowe used a prologue to explain what had happened to Harmon, but he did not dramatize the attempted murder. Instead he has Harmon as Rokesmith arrive at the Hexams' and tell the story in a soliloquy drawn from the internal monologue that Dickens used at a much later point. It is not very dramatic, but it serves its purpose, and the opening puts more emphasis on the triangle of Lizzie and her two lovers anyway. Rowe also followed the novel in not warning his audience that Boffin's turning into a miser is all a ruse: this fact does not come out until the final scene in which Harmon, now married to Bella, returns to Boffin's to take his rightful place. And Rowe followed the novel in making separate episodes of the attack on Eugene and the drowning of Headstone and Riderhood. This makes a
longer play but it allowed two sensational scenes instead of one. Most of the extra length in Rowe's play came from merely showing more of the two plots, especially Lizzie's love plot. An important result, however, is that both Bella and Headstone, being shown at more length, become more fully developed.

Rowe and Farnie agreed that to make a play from Our Mutual Friend, the serious social criticism should be jettisoned, but the melodrama and humor preserved. Thus both omitted the characters from the upper levels of "society" as well as Betty Higden, but preserved the comedy of Wegg (a part which Rowe played in America; in London, however, he doubled the parts of Harmon and Riderhood) and the two love plots. The two playwrights also agreed that sensational action was to be made the most of. Rowe chose to end his second act with Lizzie's rowing out to save Eugene, but he made the lock scene the sensational high point of his last act. The lengthy stage direction gives some notion of the stress put on the scene (it begins inside the lock-keeper's hut):

Music. A struggle in which Headstone throws Rider, and escapes out of the door--Rider rises and seeing Headstone on the lock gate, lets the wheel fly suddenly--The gates open slowly and the water rushes through--Rider draws a knife from his belt to follow. Headstone turns at the center of the first gate and fires at Rider who falls but recovers--Headstone who has hesitated at leaping the chasm, seeing Rider following him jumps--Rider leaps after him and seizes him stabbing Headstone with his knife--they struggle madly but Riderhood
cries "I'll hold you living and I'll hold you dead!"

A. Nicholas Vardac explains how the water flowing through the lock gates was simulated on the stage:

This spectacular scene was managed with the traditional sea cloths behind the dam two or three feet above the stage. The locks opened toward the audience at the center and the escaping cascade was represented by the conventional waterfall machine, an endless belt of canvas working from a roller at dam level to a roller below the stage door through a trap. Riderhood and Headstone fell through this same trap.53

For humor, Rowe’s play makes some use of the Wilfers but less of Wegg, and the comedy in both cases is frequently slapstick of the adapter’s own invention. In the final scene, for instance, John Harmon chases Wegg around the stage with a stick and Wegg’s wooden leg falls off; the servants throw the would-be blackmailer out and toss the leg after him. Perhaps the overall tone of the play’s humor is best indicated by a stage direction from Act I, scene iii, in which Mrs. Wilfer has fainted at the antics of her daughters: "Sampson brings salts in a hurry—Bella stumbles against [him] upsetting jug of water over him—He chokes—Mrs. W. suddenly recovers and stalks off majestically—all laugh except Sampson who chokes with stick." The more extensive use of comedy and the embellishment of it with the playwright’s own broad additions is a common tendency of American dramas drawn from Dickens.54

It is not surprising that, being so much like Farnie’s
play, Rowe's also had a measure of success when it came to London, running from December 27, 1870, to February 25, 1871. It received only a lukewarm review in the Times which alluded to the effectiveness of the lock scene and praised the adapter for giving "dramatic connexion and sequence to the story," but concluded, "the piece, however, will bear considerable curtailment."56

One is above all struck by the fact that these later novels were so much less attractive to dramatists (only one version of Dorrit, one of Great Expectations, three English versions of Our Mutual Friend) than were the early novels, which frequently had three or four adaptations staged within a year of the novel's appearance and more later. One might reason that this shows the later novels to have been generally much less popular, but the sales figures do not allow such a conclusion. The only other reasonable explanation is that the later Dickens novels are harder to dramatize, either because they are more intricately put together or because they make increasing use of characters and themes that are less likely to succeed in the dramatic medium.57
Chapter XI Notes


2 Lazenby, pp. 243-244.


5 Ibid.


8 Published in *Lacy's Acting Editions* (London, n.d.), No. 661.

9 Title page of published text.


13 Ibid.


15 Lewis O. Strang, *Famous Actors of the Day in America*, 2nd series (Boston, 1902), p. 238. Dickens too must have sensed his work's dramatic potential for he wrote one Monsieur Regnier about the chance of doing a play drawn from it in Paris. Regnier replied he believed the French officials would not allow such a portrayal of the Revolution, and Dickens abandoned the idea. See Dickens' letter of November 16, 1869. (Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. Walter Dexter.)
16 Examiner (February 4, 1860), p. 70.
17 Athenaeum (February 4, 1860), p. 179.
18 According to daily listings in the Times.

21 Ibid., p. 186.
22 Ibid., p. 186.

25 One other play, All for Her performed on October 18, 1875 at the Mirror, is sometimes listed as an adaptation of A Tale of Two Cities because the authors, J. Palgrave Simpson and Herman C. Merivale, acknowledged that they had borrowed their chief incident, in which the main character replaces his half-brother on the scaffold, from Dickens. See Malcolm Morley, "The Stage Story of A Tale of Two Cities," Dickensian, LI (1955), 37.


28 A typescript of the play is available in the British Museum.

29 Examiner (July 15, 1871), p. 707.
30 According to daily listings in the Times.
32 Examiner (July 15, 1871), p. 707.
33 Times (June 2, 1871), p. 5.
A manuscript of the play, dating from June, 1873, is in the Dickens Collection at the University of Texas.

Malcolm Morley, "Enter Our Mutual Friend," Dicken-
sian, LII (1956), 40.

According to a notation on the University of Texas manuscript.

According to daily listings in the Times.

Ibid., p. 42.

Ibid.


Ibid., p. 42.

Ibid.

Ibid.

According to daily listings in the Times.

Morley, "Enter Our Mutual Friend," 42.

Ibid.

Ibid.

A manuscript is in the Harvard Theatre Collection.


Stage to Screen: Theatrical Method from Garrick to Griffith (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), pp. 56-57.
There is even an American comic sketch based on Jenny Wren. It centers on a May Day spectacle at which Jenny is elected queen. Veneering has hired Headstone to write his political speeches, but the writer disappears and Veneering can only remember the first line of his speech. The would-be politician ends up running through the woods with Jenny's wheel chair caught in his coat tails as the crowd pursues him. Word is brought in that Headstone has drowned, and a double marriage (Jenny Wren and Sloppy, Lizzie and Eugene) is planned. The playlet Jenny Wren, The Dolls-Dressmaker and her Friends was written as a starring vehicle for one Alice Kingsbury by Chandos Fulton. A manuscript is in the Harvard Theatre Collection.

Morley, "Enter Our Mutual Friend," 42.

Times (December 27, 1870), p. 4.

I have chosen not to discuss the many adaptations of the unfinished Mystery of Edwin Drood on the grounds that such a study would almost necessarily reduce itself to an analysis of how various playwrights attempted to finish the book. See K. J. Fielding, "The Dramatization of Edwin Drood," Theatre Notebook, VII (1952-1953), 52-58.
CHAPTER XII

DENOUEMENT

While everyone knows of Dickens' popularity with Victorian readers, the commercial success his works enjoyed on the Victorian stage is not so widely recognized. One is immediately tempted to use the frequency and the popularity of these dramatic versions of Dickens' works as a measure of a novel's popularity with the reading public, and to conclude that the materials emphasized on the stage were the elements within the work which were most popular with its readers. Such arguments, however, assume that the playgoing and reading publics, although different in size, were nearly identical in composition. That the two audiences overlapped is no doubt true: Dickens' novels were, after all, widely read by members of all classes. But the audiences for the minor theatres, where Dickens' works were usually dramatized, may have been quite unlike the reading audience as a whole.

According to the major theatrical historians, in the early years of Dickens' career the audiences, in the minor theatres especially, came largely from the lower classes and thus did not include certain large segments of the reading audience; playgoing was not respectable. The theatre
audience changed throughout the period, however, and
teatregoing became socially acceptable among almost all
classes by the seventies. One might reasonably conjecture
that the audiences for plays after the middle of the century
were thus closer to reflecting Dickens' reading audience
than were those attending early productions of *Pickwick* and
*Oliver Twist*.

One would also like to distinguish the essentially
dramatic features of Dickens' fiction by their success on
the stage. But a particular character or episode in a play
may have been popular with viewers and critics not because
it was somehow dramatically conceived or presented, but be­
cause it delighted the reading public, many of whom came to
the theatre specifically to see recreated, material that
they knew and liked.

Thus a novel's success on the stage may have resulted
either from its popularity with readers or from its dramatic
suitability. It is difficult, sometimes impossible, to make
a convincing case for either, and the analysis is further
complicated by the existence of the many possible external
causes of a play's success or failure: the dramatist's com­
petence or lack thereof, the quality of the actors, the
technical effectiveness of the staging, or even the theatri­
cal competition of the moment.

If, to shift the emphasis from what worked in the
theatre to what was omitted, one tries to draw conclusions
on the basis of what was left out of the stage versions, he confronts the same plethora of possible explanations: the omitted materials might have been seen as potentially less popular with the theatregoing public, they might have been seen as less feasible for the stage, they might have been both popular and feasible but simply crowded out, they might have been omitted through pure bad judgment on the adapter's part, or they might have been unsuited to dramatic conventions in vogue at the time.

All these, not to mention the sheer variety within Dickens' novels, present major obstacles to drawing any very sound conclusions from the plays based on Dickens. Time and again in writing these chapters, I have found myself generalizing about such matters as Dickens' plot structure or characterization, or the dramatic possibilities of an episode or character, and then being pulled up short, either by recognizing one of the complicating difficulties outlined above or simply by noticing clear counter-evidence from other incidents, characters, novels, or plays. Frequently, I have eliminated the original statement or qualified it greatly; at other times I have allowed it to stand as being more true than false despite the exceptions.

Nevertheless, if one is cautious and recognizes these difficulties, this study of the available Victorian plays based on Dickens' novels yields some conclusions on two broad subjects: (1) the relation between Dickens' novels
and melodrama and, in consequence, what Victorian playgoers liked best in Dickens, and (2) the often-mentioned dramatic nature of the novels. In each case, the study both supports and qualifies long-standing clichés of Dickens scholarship.

1

It has often been remarked that unlike, say, Jane Austen and George Meredith, Dickens was less a conscious artist than a popular entertainer. Much criticism, however, especially since Edmund Wilson's "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," has discredited this cliché by showing the pains Dickens took to plan many of his novels, the depth and breadth of his social criticism, the complexity of the rhetoric with which he strove to communicate his vision, and the intricacy of his imagined world.

However, the conventions of nineteenth-century drama and the theatre's role as a provider of momentary excitement and amusement (that is, of melodrama and farce as discussed in chapter 1) militated against any transference to the stage of Dickens' subtler intellectual or artistic concerns. In consequence, comparing plays and the novels they were drawn from highlights both how much there was in the Dickens novel that could be treated within the melodramatic conventions of the serious Victorian theatre and, in contrast, how much in it could not be effective without an audience's serious intellectual and emotional involvement. As the
plays show, Dickens did "Make 'em laugh, Make 'em cry, Make 'em wait," but he did much besides, much that though technically stageable, was not susceptible to the black and white, rudimentary presentation required by the canons of Victorian drama.

The overall historic pattern of adaptation shows that, with certain exceptions, the earlier novels were more dramatically popular than the later ones, which were less frequently adapted and less commercially successful as plays. The novels fall into three groups on the basis of their dramatic popularity. Very popular as sources for plays were *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Barnaby Rudge*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *David Copperfield*, and, solely because of Jennie Lee's play *Jo*, *Bleak House*. The *Old Curiosity Shop*, *Dombey and Son*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Our Mutual Friend* were moderately popular, while *Hard Times*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Great Expectations* were distinctly unpopular.

One notices immediately that the three novels least popular as sources for stage versions are from late in Dickens' career, and that five of the seven very popular ones are from the first half of his career. The pattern is fairly striking, even though two of the later novels, *Bleak House* and *David Copperfield*, were very popular as sources of plays and thus are exceptions to the rule. The decline in dramatic popularity of the later works cannot be explained
either by the growing sophistication of the Victorian drama in the sixties and seventies or by the audiences' having become tired of seeing Dickens on the stage; for when Dickens' later novels were appearing and were not often staged, many of the early novels were still very popular in the theatres and continued to attract new adapters. The most satisfactory explanation of the decline in theatrical interest in later novels is that the playwrights and their audiences found in the later novels less material amenable to the melodramatic treatment almost required in the popular drama of the day.

As I have tried to demonstrate throughout, on the Victorian stage the melodramatic plots or sub-plots of Dickens' novels received the emphasis. The theatre audiences thrilled to see Dickens' pure-hearted heroines endangered by his black-hearted villains and saved (usually) by stout-hearted heroes. Nicholas, for example, thwarts (with considerable help) both Hawk's designs on Kate and Gride's on Madeline, not to mention Ralph's persecution of Smike, who is essentially a long-suffering heroine despite his sex. Martin Chuzzlewit and David Copperfield provided similar melodramatic plots for the adapters to use. Martin interrupts Pecksniff's schemes to trap Mary; although Steerforth succeeds with Em'ly, David, with Micawber's aid, saves Agnes from the clutches of Uriah Heep.

Even when his novels did not offer a plot or sub-plot
constructed along precisely these lines, they still provided the adapters with a wealth of individual scenes striving to evoke precisely the same responses that a good melodrama aroused. As Ernest Reynolds points out, "Melodrama, in its essential form, demands . . . spectacular effect. It must appeal directly to the most elementary feelings of the audience, and it must take the shortest route to do so. Speed and excitement are necessary to its success." Speed the adapters could, indeed almost had to, supply, and excitement the Dickens novel provided in abundance. An adapter could choose a murder (Nancy, Tigg, Colette, Tulkinghorn, or Riderhood), a violent death (Carker, Carton, Quilp, Sikes, Jonas, Magwitch), or a pathetic death (Nell, Jo, Lady Dedlock). Or he could choose any number of tense scenes in which sparks fly from the friction between opposing wills, often specifically between good and evil: Nicholas topples Squeers and confronts Ralph; Edith renounces Carker; Bucket accuses Hortense; Micawber unmasks Heep; Haredale denounces Sir John; Old Martin exposes Jonas. In all these instances the theatre audiences could thrill to the powerful (some would say theatrical) speeches drawn from the novels, and rejoice at the defeat of evil. They could return home having been pleasantly frightened at the spectacle of virtue endangered, yet satisfied that eventually justice had triumphed.

The more difficult it was to find a melodramatic plot
line, and sensational or pathetic incidents, in a Dickens novel, the less likely the novel was to be adapted successfully or the more it had to be twisted to fit, as illustrated by the decline in dramatic popularity of the later novels. *Hard Times*, for example, did not provide a melodramatic plot line to work with. Louisa and Stephen were both victims and thus could provoke sympathy, but they were victimized by a system, not a villain. The lack of an outstanding villain robbed *Hard Times* of a major melodramatic attraction, and the tragic ending took away another. The answer, from the dramatist's point of view, was to preserve what pathos he could, emphasize the humor, and provide a happy ending. But such modifications demand some skill and creativity on the adapter's part and are unlikely to harmonize with the unchanged material. Adapters faced similar problems with the plots of *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*, and *David Copperfield*, and in each case their solution was to emphasize such melodramatic portions as there were: two subplots in *Copperfield*, the persecution of an innocent (Jo or Lady Dedlock) in *Bleak House*, the separation of lovers and Orlick's attempt to get revenge in *Great Expectations*.

Frequently, even when he did not use a strictly melodramatic plot, Dickens employed melodramatic character types in some variation of that plot which nevertheless involved the thrill of vicissitude for the good characters and the satisfaction of the happy ending. Thus Nell, Rose Maylie,
Mrs. Rudge, Emma Haredale, Lucie Manette, and Florence Dombey are all enough alike in the novels to emerge on the Victorian stage as virtuous, long-suffering, and nearly interchangeable heroines. For male leads, Dickens provided Pip, Sydney Carton, Walter Gay, Joe Willet, Edward Chester, and John Harmon. While Pip and Carton, especially, are more subtly conceived in the novels than are the melodramatic heroes, on stage even these two became simplified.

As has often been recognized, Dickens' villains were frequently his most interesting and forceful characters, which helped make them, once simplified for the stage, suitable to melodrama. "What intelligence, design, and thought there is in melodrama is resident in the villain." Dickens' gallery of evil includes out-and-out criminals like the elder Rudge, Sikes, Hugh, and Orlick, as well as the more respectable, and more subtly vicious, villains like Ralph Nickleby, Tulkinghorn, Sir John Chester, and Carker. And it includes the more vividly-defined grotesque and semi-comic villains like Squeers, Fagin, Quilp, and Pecksniff. Clearly, these characters are frequently drawn with great care and distinctness in the novels; seen at length, many of Dickens' villains manifest considerable psychological depth. But so far as the plot is concerned, they share similar motivation (lust, greed, the desire for revenge) and play similar roles; they all love taking advantage of others, even if only for the thrill and ego-satisfaction of it. Thus when put on the
stage, although their external individuality was preserved, they were easily comprehensible within the melodramatic framework.

Frequently, Dickens' fine comic creations were used to complement his effective melodrama or, in some cases, to make up for plots that were ineffective on the stage. Sam Weller (and later Jingle) seemed to be the key to making *Pickwick* suit the stage. Sairey Gamp, Cuttle, and Micawber were all given major roles on the stage and were largely responsible for the popularity their plays achieved. When Rudge proved difficult to adapt, one answer was to make a comedy of it with Miggs as the main attraction. The same principle was applied when Swiveller and the Marchioness became the leads in plays based on *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

One can safely conclude from reading both the plays based on Dickens and contemporary discussions of them, that Dickens' heroes and heroines usually were not as effective or popular as his villains and comic characters. Dickens' villains and comic characters, while showing the blackness or whiteness of the standard melodramatic types, are frequently something more than melodramatic. Although they are not so complicated that they are difficult to understand on the stage or that their personalities conflict with the melodramatic roles the plot required them to play, the comic and villainous creations are often individualized and original enough to be outstanding on the stage. Fagin, as I
pointed out in chapter iii, is one good example. So is Quilp, who was much more popular than Nell on the stage and who is not an undifferentiated villain (like Monks). Pecksniff, a mixture of comedy and villainy, is a similar extension of the melodramatic type. Micawber, too, who plays the melodramatic role of comic assistant to the hero, is certainly not likely to be mistaken for a comic character in any other play. Dickens' genius for inventing and particularizing characters (not including most of his heroes and heroines) frequently accounted for much of the popularity of an adaptation just as it did for that of the novel. Perhaps this is what Ernest Reynolds meant when he admitted that Dickens' novels "called forth, in their dramatized form, a new type of character acting which was ultimately to influence the work of such playwrights as Robertson, Tom Taylor, Albery and H. J. Byron." 

Sometimes, especially in the later novels, Dickens went even further and created main characters who did not fit any of the established melodramatic types, either because of the part they played in the plot or because their individuality involved more psychological depth. Lady Dedlock is not a typical melodramatic heroine. Nor are Louisa Gradgrind, Estella, Lizzie, and Bella, although each is involved in a plot with melodramatic elements. These later novels also lack suitable melodramatic heroes. *Bleak House* and *Hard Times* did not have any, and Pip and Sydney Carton
had to be much changed to play the role. Even on stage Wrayburn is not a typical dashing hero. Harmon comes close, yet he deceives the girl he is eventually to marry, then saves her not from a villain but from her own materialism.

As Dickens' serious characters became less appropriate for melodramatic treatment, his humorous ones also became considerably less attractive in the eyes of the adapters. A Tale of Two Cities gave only Miss Pross to the stage; from Bleak House only Guppy was chosen: neither had a major role. On the stage, Great Expectations had Joe, but he was not designed primarily to be comic. In Hard Times adapters saw Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit. And Our Mutual Friend had only Wegg as far as the dramatists were concerned. After Cuttle, Wegg was the closest Dickens came to creating a leading comic character of the old style, but on the stage he did not rival those from early in Dickens' career.

Thus in many of the novels after Dombey, the adapters faced a harder job in suiting Dickens' works to the reigning dramatic conventions. They found the plots more somber and structurally less melodramatic (although suspense, spectacle, and happy endings were still provided), the good characters less static, more psychologically individualized, the villains less exciting, the comedy less attractive. It took far greater ingenuity and skill to make Bleak House or Great Expectations effective in the Victorian theatre than to make dramatic fare of Nickleby.
Although Dickens' novels, especially the earlier ones, provided adapters with a wealth of materials which they utilized, a brief examination of what the adapters did not select is revealing. Dorothy Van Ghent suggests that, "Two kinds of crime form Dickens's two chief themes, the crime against the child, and the calculated social crime."8 The more blatant injustices to children, because they can be used to illustrate villainy, provoke tears, and provide evils to be remedied in the end, can fit well with the melodramatic pattern and goals, and one finds plenty of mistreated children in the plays, including Oliver, Smike, Jo, Florence, and Nell.

But one searches in vain in the plays for anything more than the slightest hint that society and social institutions are often the cause of crime. If one had only the plays to go by, he would see little indication that Dickens was interested in social reform. Pickwick was hardly a novel with a social thesis, but even it contained criticism in the form of comic satire of yellow journalism and humbugging politicians and clergymen. And its presentation of life in the Fleet was more biting. Virtually none of this material reached the stage. Oliver Twist's main social attack was against the English poor laws, but this material was either played solely for laughs or omitted from dramatic versions of the novel. Hard Times was in large measure an attack on what Dickens conceived industrial utilitarianism
to be, but this was excised from the plays, as was the criticism of rabble-rousing labor agitators. Bleak House attacked the Chancery court, the treatment of the poor, the clergy, and misguided charity, but these concerns were absent from the few plays drawn from the novel. Little Dorrit and A Tale of Two Cities both developed the effects of long incarceration, but Dorrit did not appeal to the adapters and stage versions of Two Cities made almost nothing of the long-range effects of the Bastille on Dr. Manette. Our Mutual Friend attacked many features of English society including meaningless elections, usury, chauvinism, snobbery, and the falseness of purely material values, but only the last received even passing consideration on the stage.

The conventions of Victorian drama simply allowed no room for social criticism, or for any other serious theme for that matter. One modern writer exaggerated only slightly in saying, "Victorian drama did not concern itself with any of the subjects about which intelligent people think and feel." The more Dickens dealt with such matters and the more obtrusive they became in his fiction, the less dramatically feasible were his works from the age's point of view. Moreover, when one notices the reviewers' frequent assumption that theatregoers had already read a novel before they went to see it on the stage, the lack of protest over the many omissions, and the commercial success many of the plays had, it seems likely that a large proportion of the
reading public were drawn to Dickens by precisely the same elements that the adapters emphasized.

The second question a study of plays adapted from Dickens helps answer is the more complicated one of the extent to which certain features of his novels justify the clichés about their being dramatic or theatrical. In many ways this overlaps the above discussion of melodrama and the novels, but there are, in addition, some technical elements of Dickens' presentation of his plots and characters which indeed warrant the cautious use of words like dramatic and theatrical.11

Certainly the phrase "dramatic novel" could legitimately refer to a novel with a "dramatic" plot, that is, a novel in which everything contributes to the progress of a single conflict which grows in intensity until a climactic resolution is reached. It would be quite difficult to find in Dickens' novels evidence of any such simplification, although many, especially of the early, novels actually had such a plot in their melodramatic skeletons. But as the plays show, and all readers must realize, the rigidly simplified dramatic plot is not normally the dominant structural device. It could be excised and made use of on the stage, but only if much of what was most interesting in the novel was forgotten. Only A Tale of Two Cities, and perhaps
Great Expectations, actually provided a tightly built plot in which everything contributed to the progress of the main conflict.

On the other hand, although Dickens' plots viewed as wholes are not essentially dramatic, they are presented to the reader by several dramatic methods. Dickens' primary narrative technique, for example, is the use of vividly pictured scenes rather than summary. As Phyllis Bentley notes, Dickens' "general method is to keep summary to the barest essential minimum, a mere sentence or two here and there between the incredibly fertile burgeoning of his scenes." His presentation of plot can legitimately be called dramatic in this sense.

That Dickens accepted in a rough and ready form the value of scenic or "dramatic" presentation is shown not only by the novels themselves but in several of his editorial comments to contributors to his periodicals. He refused a novel by Mrs. Brookfield, telling her,

It strikes me that you constantly hurry your narrative (and yet without getting on) by telling it, in a sort of impetuous breathless way, in your own person when the people should tell it and act it for themselves. My notion always is that when I have made the people play out the play it is, as it were, their business to do it and not mine.

To a Miss King, he wrote, "The people do not sufficiently work out their own purposes in dialogue and dramatic action. You are too much their exponent; what you do for them they ought to do for themselves."
One of the chief reasons that portions of Dickens could be adapted to the stage with such apparent ease even by shoddy craftsmen (as I emphasized in the chapter on *Barnaby Rudge*) was that so much of his work was written from this "objective" point of view and hence was complete and understandable without any authorial commentary. One needs only to read, for example, the opening scene of *Barnaby Rudge* or *Great Expectations* to see that Dickens carefully visualizes the setting, describes the action even down to the detailed "stage" business of removing one's pipe or wiping his mouth on his sleeve, and provides fast moving dialogue appropriate to each character.

Eventually the intricacy of his plots and characters forced Dickens to supplement scenic narration more since "the scene method alone cannot give an extensive background, cannot give a long stretch of past history, cannot give explanations." Even in these later novels, however, the adapters still found many fully written scenes, complete with dialogue and directions for gestures, which could be transferred to the stage virtually intact. They could choose such fully constructed scenes as the one in which Walter Gay and Cuttle ask Dombey for a loan, or the one in which Cuttle gradually informs Florence that Walter is alive, not to mention Edith's repudiation of Carker. In *David Copperfield* they found the scene in which Peggotty learns of Em'ly's departure, and the one in which Micawber exposes
Heep. In Bleak House were Jo at the inquest, Jo's death, and Hortense threatening Tulkinghorn, to mention only a few. Hard Times provided Gradgrind's advice to his daughter about her marriage, Stephen's appeal to Bounderby for advice about his marriage, and Louisa's climactic exchange with Harthouse. A Tale of Two Cities was full of memorable scenes including Lucie's reunion with her father, Darnay's trial before the Paris tribunal, and, of course, Carton's taking the condemned man's place. Great Expectations gave such memorable scenes as Pip's meeting Magwitch, Joe's jumbling his syntax when forced to talk to his betters, Joe's visit to Pip's London lodging, and the scenes with Jaggers. Our Mutual Friend had scenes like Boffin's meeting Wegg, Headstone's visiting Wrayburn, Harmon's disclosure of his identity, and the death of Headstone and Riderhood.

Many of Dickens' scenes are also theatrically climactic; in a matter of moments pressure builds to an unendurable level, something gives way, and the whole situation (involving the relations between characters) is changed. One thinks of the scene in which Oliver is put in the window of the Maylie's house by Sikes, but the robbery goes awry and the boy's whole future is reversed. Or of Nicholas' beating of Squeers, or old Martin's repudiation of Pecksniff and the joining of the lovers in Chuzzlewit. The dramatists' problems were always those of selection and condensation; almost never did they have to supply in dramatic
form action which Dickens had merely summarized.

I do not mean to imply, however, that Dickens wrote from an objective (or dramatic) point of view at all times. He felt quite free to speak directly to his reader whenever he deemed it desirable. Wayne Booth has classed him with Fielding and George Eliot as the novelists who engage in "the most obtrusive direct comment," and anyone who remembers his rhetoric on the death of Jo, or his description of melodrama in Oliver Twist, or the blunt thematic statement that begins chapter viii of Hard Times knows that Booth is correct. The point is that, while Dickens felt free to use such non-dramatic direct address, he did so sparingly and usually only to reinforce what he was showing scenically as well.

Furthermore, Dickens' novels can justifiably be called dramatic because this primarily scenic method is used both to introduce and develop character. When first introducing a character Dickens normally either restricts himself to a physical description or goes in medias res into a scene in which the character can develop himself for the reader, just as he would do on the stage. One first meets Sam Weller, after a careful description, as he blackens the guests' shoes, talks to himself, and banters with the chambermaid. He is already complete with accent and Wellerisms, and his shrewdness and practical self-confidence are apparent in his remarks. The reader meets Dombey, with no introduction, when
his wife is dying after the birth of little Paul, and his first few speeches are sufficient to give one a pretty fair idea of his personality: his coldness, his pride, his interest in his son and business are all shown. After setting the scene and describing Dombey's appearance, Dickens begins to portray him in action:

Dombey, exulting in the long-looked-for event, jingled and jingled the heavy gold watch-chain that depended from below his trim blue coat, whereof the buttons sparked phosphorescently in the feeble rays of the distant fire. Son, with his little fists curled up and clenched, seemed, in his feeble way, to be squaring at existence for having come upon him so unexpectedly.

"The house will once again, Mrs. Dombey," said Mr. Dombey, "be not only in name but in fact Dombey and Son; Dom-bey and Son!"

The words had such a softening influence, that he appended a term of endearment to Mrs. Dombey's name (though not without some hesitation, as being a man but little used to that form of address): and said, "Mrs. Dombey, my--my dear."

A transient flush of faint surprise overspread the sick lady's face as she raised her eyes towards him.

"He will be christened Paul, my--Mrs. Dombey--of course."

She feebly echoed, "Of course," or rather expressed it by the motion of her lips, and closed her eyes again.

"His father's name, Mrs. Dombey, and his grandfather's! I wish his grandfather were alive this day!" and again he said "Dom-bey and Son," in exactly the same tone as before. (chapter 1)

Even here such phrases as "exulting in the long-looked-for event" and "being a man but little used to that form of address" show the author's hand. But having allowed Dombey to dramatize himself, Dickens feels quite free to elaborate on the scene's significance:
Those three words [Dombey and Son] conveyed the one idea of Mr. Dombey's life. The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre. Common abbreviations took new meaning in his eyes, and had sole references to them: A. D. had no concern with anno Domini, but stood for anno Dombey—and Son. (chapter i)

The commentary develops and emphasizes the portrait of Dombey, but it is not really necessary: Dombey's personality is shown quite fully in this and succeeding scenes, scenes which, had any dramatist wished, could have been moved whole onto the stage. A similar doubling of presentation is used to introduce Gradgrind as he visits his school in the opening of Hard Times:

"Now what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to the Facts, Sir!"

The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom, and the speaker's square forefinger emphasized his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarrage in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's voice, which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all
covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders,—nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was,—all helped the emphasis. (chapter i)

After this "objective" portrait of Gradgrind from the outside Dickens then moves into his mind by indirect discourse, showing essentially the same trait, concluding, "In such terms Mr. Gradgrind always mentally introduced himself."

Having shown his character and gone into his thoughts, Dickens becomes even less the "objective" narrator as he describes Gradgrind from the children's point of view:

Indeed, as he eagerly sparked at them from the cellarage before mentioned, he seemed a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge. He seemed a galvanizing apparatus, too, charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away. (chapter ii)

Then follow four pages of dialogue in which the same traits are shown at more length as Gradgrind questions the pupils. Again the authorial commentary serves not so much to supplement the dramatic presentation as to emphasize or reinforce it.

Often Dickens' adapters did not introduce a character in the same scene in which he first appeared in the novel, but the chances were quite good that many other major scenes would also portray him satisfactorily, because his relatively
simple and unchanging character would manifest itself time and time again. This is especially true of the great comic characters early in Dickens' career. Sam Weller, Sairey Gamp, Pecksniff, could all be introduced in a number of different scenes, in which, with their idiosyncratic dialogue preserved, they could be quickly and forcefully characterized. That many of Dickens' creations are caricatures, exaggerations, Jonsonian humours characters, or flat characters in E. M. Forster's terms is borne out by studying several plays based on a single novel which frequently use different scenes or different details within scenes to arrive at the same portrayal of a character. This method of creating characters, however, in no way keeps them from being unique and effective, so long as the novelist does not rely on the same kind of characteristic detail that others have used to the point of satiety. When Dickens drew Kate Nickleby he was relying wholly on the conventional concept of a heroine; in creating Estella he was carving an individualized figure still within the humours tradition; in portraying Lizzie Hexam he went beyond it.

Let me emphasize that Dickens' dialogue in the scenes I have been discussing was used in the plays without notable difficulties. It had to be condensed, of course, but it did not have to be changed. One reviewer of Gilbert's *Great Expectations* exaggerated only slightly in saying the dialogue of the novel "is followed with closeness that defies the
attempt to discover more than a narrative phrase or two which have been inserted by the adapter."¹⁷ And a modern scholar noted that in Taylor's *A Tale of Two Cities*, "fully three-fourths of the dialogue is taken directly from Dickens."¹⁸

Much of the dialogue in the plays would seem appropriate, I believe, even to modern viewers, as is well illustrated when modern versions, such as the 1970 television production of *Copperfield*, also rely heavily on it. The relatively few scenes in which Dickens has been accused of resorting to inflated rhetoric in an attempt to portray intense passion were seized upon by Victorian adapters, who found them quite acceptable according to the current stage conventions. Thus, unless he refers to twentieth century notions of drama, Rosenberg is wrong in saying Dickens' dialogue is "not right for the stage."¹⁹ R. C. Churchill, on the other hand, recognized the excellence of Dickens' dialogue, especially that of the comic characters: "It was the gift of the dramatist rather than the novelist which enabled Dickens to express the ramblings of a Mrs. Gamp."²⁰

As I argued in chapters nine through twelve, when Dickens' portrayal of character became more complex later in his career, when he attempted to show characters who changed slowly as the result of experience, the novels became much more difficult to adapt for the stage. Because drama can only "gradually disclose how a character has become what it
is," whereas "the novel can show the change occurring," adapters faced with characters like David, Pip, and Headstone were forced either to twist the plot to avoid them or to distort them violently. This, too, partly explains why the later novels were so much less attractive to the adapters than the early ones had been.

The cliché that Dickens was an extremely melodramatic novelist, at this point, seems justified—if the term melodramatic is used with precision and not applied to the whole Dickens canon. There are certainly melodramatic features in most of his novels, but the frequent modifications adapters felt called upon to make in emphasis, in endings, in character portrayal, highlight how much of Dickens, especially in the later novels, it is unfair to sum up as melodrama.

Despite the fallacy of claiming that a novel's commercial success on the stage must indicate its dramatic quality, when one views the frequency with which Dickens' works were adapted and the success the plays often had with critics and public alike, and when he sees in the plays whole sections taken over word for word, he is forced to recognize that in at least two ways Dickens' genius was essentially dramatic: his novels abound in individual scenes written as if for the stage, and nearly all provide brilliant, self-creating characters. There were other very popular novels in the Victorian age and most of them led to dramatic versions, but plays based on no other novel
succeeded on the stage as those based on Dickens' did.
Chapter XII Notes


2See Nicoll, V, 13-14; Reynolds, p. 54; Hudson, p. 45.

3The Wound and the Bow (Boston, 1941).


One writer observed of the deaths of Dickens' villains, "most of their deaths are so dramatized, dwelt upon in such loving detail to horrify us and chill our blood, that at their deaths our impulse is to cheer! This is, of course, in the tradition of the melodrama of the Victorian theatre." (Irving W. Kreutz, "Sly of Manners, Sharp of Tooth: A Study of Dickens's Villains," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XXI [1967-1968], 332.)


9R. D. Altick has shown this to be true also of a dramatic version of Mary Barton. ("Dion Boucicault Stages Mary Barton," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XIV [1959-1960], 135.)


11For a more detailed discussion of these techniques, based only on the novels, see J. B. Von Amerongen, The Actor in Dickens (New York, 1927), pp. 194-258.


14Quoted in Stang, p. 100.
The traits I have been discussing as peculiarly dramatic may very well be bound up with Dickens' mode of serial publication. Unchanging, self-dramatizing characters complete with identifying tags of dress, gesture, and speech were ideally suited to a method of publication in which the reader had to remember a single character for a month or more until his next appearance. And much scenic rather than summary narration seems highly desirable when each unit of three or four chapters has to be interesting not only as a part of the whole but in itself as well; three or four chapters of summary would very likely have guaranteed that circulation of the following number would drop. Moreover, to make each issue interesting in itself, Dickens made a practice of dispersing the more compelling events of his works throughout each monthly or weekly number. This virtually required each novel to have a whole sequence of individually powerful scenes, precisely the kind of scenes dramatic adapters were most likely to seize on. One has to be careful about pushing such an argument too far, however, since other novelists, like Thackeray, whose works were not nearly so attractive to the playwrights, also published them serially. But then Thackeray's serialized novels were not nearly the popular successes that Dickens' were. (Arthur Clayborough has discussed this matter at more length in "Dickens: A Circle of Stage Fire," The Grotesque in English Literature [Oxford, 1965], pp. 206-237.)
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ADAPTATIONS DISCUSSED

This list does not include all the known adaptations but only those discussed at some length. For other plays as well as other printed versions than those given, the reader should consult the several bibliographies referred to in chapter i. The place of publication is London if no city is given. The date is that of the first London production, not of printing. Under each novel the plays are in chronological order.

The Pickwick Papers


William T. Moncrieff. *Sam Weller, or, the Pickwickians.* 1837. T. Stagg.


**Oliver Twist**


J. S. Coyne. *Oliver Twist*. 1839. Incomplete ms. in the British Museum.

Thomas H. Lacy. *Oliver Twist; or, The Parish Boy's Progress*. 1838 [?]. *Lacy's, No. 494*. (Apparently a plagiarism based on Barnett's and Almar's versions. No record of its having been performed.)


**Nicholas Nickleby**


**The Old Curiosity Shop**

Edward Stirling. *The Old Curiosity Shop, or, One Hour from Humphrey's Clock*. 1840. *Lacy's, Vol. 77*.


**Barnaby Rudge**


Charles Dillon. *Barnaby Rudge*. 1841. *Oxberry's Budget of Plays [1844]*.


Thomas Higbie. *Barnaby Rudge; or, The Murder at the Warren*. 1841 [?]. *Lacy's*, No. 1470. (No record of its having been performed.)


**Martin Chuzzlewit**


Frederick Fox Cooper. *Dealings with the Firm of Gamp and Harris*. 1846. Ms. in British Museum.

Joseph Dilley and Lewis Clifton. Tom Pinch. 1881. French's, No. 1803.

Dombey and Son


Andrew Halliday. Heart's Delight. 1873. No text located.

David Copperfield

George Almar. Born with a Caul. 1850. Ms. in British Museum.

J. Courtney. David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery. 1850. Ms. in British Museum.

Francis C. Burnand. The Deal Boatman. 1863. Lacy's, No. 888.


Bleak House

J. P. Burnett. Jo. 1876. No text located.

George Lander. Bleak House or Poor Jo. 1876. Dicks', No. 388.


Hard Times

Frederick Fox Cooper. Hard Times. 1854. Dicks', No. 785.

Little Dorrit
Frederick Fox Cooper. Little Dorrit. 1856. No text located.

A Tale of Two Cities
Frederick Fox Cooper. The Tale of Two Cities; or, The Incarcerated Victim of the Bastille. 1860. Dickens', No. 750.
Freeman Wills and Canon Langbridge. The Only Way. 1899. (Published in 1942.)

Great Expectations

Our Mutual Friend
Henry Brougham Farnie. The Golden Dustman. 1866. Ms. in University of Texas Dickens Collection.
George Fawcett Rowe. Found Drowned; or, Our Mutual Friend. 1870. Ms. in Harvard Theatre Collection. (An American import.)