

## Dickens and Walking : The Brisk Treatment of Restless Mind in "Night Walks"

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### I

Charles Dickens was a great walker. His walking habit was something which was indispensable in his life, and it continued from his youth to the end of his life.<sup>1</sup> In *The Life of Charles Dickens*, John Forster summarize what "walks" meant to the novelist's life: "To all men who do much, rule and order are essential; ... But his daily walks were less of rule than of enjoyment and necessity. In the midst of his writing they were indispensable" (653; Bk. 11, Chap. 3). Usually, he did his writing work in the morning, and his daily walk took place in the afternoon (although later he developed the habit of walking at night).

His walks were marked by their extraordinary length. They were long walks, and might sometimes seem excursion on foot. Henry Fielding Dickens recorded: "I have myself walked with him [Dickens], over and over again, for two or three hours at a stretch" (Collins 159). Mary Boyle and Georgina Hogarth accompanied the novelist in one of his walks, and Boyle remembered him saying, after finishing the "feat": "Well done! — ten miles in two hours and a half!" (Collins 86). The walk with him was an "ordeal": not many friends of this brisk walker were willing to accompany him in what was to him a daily routine, because "the distance traversed was seldom less than twelve miles, and the pace was good throughout" (Collins 209). When he fully developed his habit of excursion, the distance could be twenty-eight miles (Collins 221). In *The Uncommercial Traveller*, Dickens boasts of his strength in walking, declaring himself as "Elastic Novice," with a challenge to walking competition; his "last special feat was turning out of bed at two ... and walking thirty miles into the country to breakfast" (94). Even during his American tour in 1867 when he was not in good health, he did at least eight-mile distance everyday (Collins 298, 310).

Walking was a good exercise for health, and this was part of the reason why it seems necessary for the life of the novelist who spent much of his time in deskwork. Henry Burnett recalls Dickens as a young novelist: when his strong devotion to his work caused "many friends to fear he was beginning to burn his candle at both ends," he would take "a portion of the daytime ... for what he, laughingly, called his 'daily constitutional.'" And this was a ten miles' walk, if possible (Collins 24).

Long walks in the afternoon were "his chief delight" (Collins 139). While walking had a significance in itself as is shown in this essay, there were several forms of fun which were incidental to the exercise. We can assume that he took many of his daily walks alone and that they provided food for thought. As has been suggested, however, he was sometimes accompanied by other people; and in his later years he often walked with his favourite dogs (Forster 515). Henry Fielding Dickens used to walk with his father, without a word being exchanged between them, although, he writes, "I believed my companionship was a source of

consolation to him" (Collins 159). Dickens was not often silent when he had a company: Edmund Yates, Dickens' close friend, was delighted with "his most charming talk" about his books during one of the long walks which might otherwise be felt fatiguing (Collins 209). As to this point, Charles Kent remarks, "If you were bent upon enjoying a chat with him to the very uttermost ... your wisest plan was to start with him upon one of his vigorous walks" (Colling 248).

One other point should be added to Dickens' fun in talking with his walking-companion. Sometimes his excitement in discussing the characters of his own creation brought him to "act out, on the road, dramatic situations, where Nickleby or Copperfield or Swiveller would play distinguished parts" (Collins 310).

Walking was more than a good exercise for keeping health: bodily exercise caused mental energy to be employed effectively, so that his writing life would keep balance. According to G. A. Sala, it was one of the novelist's maxims that "a given amount of mental exertion should be counteracted by a commensurate amount of bodily fatigue" (Collins 199).

His determination to do a long distance in his walks has been mentioned earlier. Furthermore, he was vigorous and brisk in employing himself in his everyday routine. Many people noticed his usual "swinging," or "rapid" pace (Collins 23, 248, 277).

The "daily constitutionals" may have taken effect in one way or other with the novelist, who was very productive throughout his working life. Aside from working at literary writings, Dickens was busy as an editor of *Household Words* and, later, *All the Year Round*; making speeches at various occasions on social issues; and presenting himself before the public in his Readings which tremendously fascinated him in his later years. Walking habit was not forsaken at his busiest: city streets and country roads were places where he seems to have got vigour in stead of fatigue. He wrote to Forster in 13 December 1856, "Calm amidst the wreck, your aged friend glides away on the Dorrit stream, forgetting the uproar for a stretch of hours, refreshing himself with a ten or twelve miles' walk" (Dexter 2: 815; letters of this edition are hereafter cited as Nonsuch). But the question is why he was engaged in them with such persistence as shown particularly later in his life. We cannot regard them merely as something done for a practical purpose. It is not difficult to find in his long walks a passion for something other than a regular exercise; it was something dissociated from daily necessities, pursued regardless sometimes of his health. John Hollingshead saw his walking habit as "a mania ... which almost assumed a form of a disease," and added that his death was hastened by "his mechanical walks," besides his devotion to the public Readings in his latest years (Collins 222-3). His passion for walking often urged him to go out in bad weather. Marcus Stone observes, "his constant daily habit of taking long walks [were made] in all weathers" (Collins 182). Sala witnesses Dickens "would made appearance ... in the most inclement wheather" (Collins 198). Forster points out that Dickens' walks were indispensable especially "at night." And this last point is worth noting when we consider the deviation of the mode of his walking habit and its effect on his life, and it is the point to which we shall come later.

## II

We have seen to some extent the significance of walking in terms of the effect that it has on Dickens' personal life: excursion into country as a refreshment; daily constitutional walks taken regularly in the afternoon after his daily works in the morning; and the subsidiary conversation with the company. The materials that illustrated these have been from other people's recollections. There are indeed numerous number of people who noticed the novelist's peculiar habit — abnormal as some have seen it. We have to go a little further now and consider what it meant to him and also to his art as a manifestation of the inner qualities of the man whose personality seems to reject an easy approach. Outside-evidence is still needful to our consideration; yet we have to turn often to Dickens' own comments on walking and its subsidiary effects. We have to understand what influence walking has on his engagement in writing novels.

The scenes he met along the city streets and country roads may have provided materials for his novels. There a number of outside-evidence convincing enough to support this assumption. Marcus Stone records Dickens' own confirmation on the veracity of a certain scene of *Oliver Twist*:

One day I recollect we came down to Cooling. Dickens said, "You see that church? That is where I saw the pauper's funeral in *Oliver Twist* exactly as it is written in the book. Here is something more interesting still. A few months afterwards I received a letter from the clergyman who behaved in an unseemly way on that occasion, asking me whether I conceived it possible that such a thing could ever occur. I wrote back to him and said, 'Thou art the man.'" (Collins 185)

It is easy then to suppose that in the course of walking Dickens came across many such scenes as to be reproduced in the forms of art. Dickens was the keenest observer of London, and many of the depictions of the London scenes in his novels are made almost directly from his observations of the actual scenes. Obviously Dickens saw and heard a great deal on the way of his daily pursuits of his long walks. The wooden mid-shipman in Chapter 4 of *Dombey and Son*<sup>2</sup> could be seen in Leadenhall Street, and it lay on his way from Covent Garden (where his office of *All the Year Round* was) to East End, as he says, in *The Uncommercial Traveller*: "I... had got past my little wooden mid-shipman, after affectionately patting him on one leg of his knee-shorts for old acquaintance' sake" (18). Similar cases are abundant in all the novels of Dickens. If Dickens' works are full of descriptions of street-scenes that he met in his walks, it is easy then to suppose that Dickens' imagination is evoked by the actual scenes he met in his life. The real perception is important in the formation of fictional images, fanciful or true to the model. I will not go into the distinction between faithful descriptions and artful reproductions as found in Dickens, but we may here bear in mind that Dickens does not seem to be interested in the so-called faithful descriptions; he has such a genius that what he touches is turned instantly into art. This does not deny, however, that the real perception often comes first. Many of the memorable scenes of his fictions are the imaginative products of the impressions made through real perception. Henry Fielding Dickens writes, "I have ac-

accompanied him [Dickens, his father] through the *Great Expectations* country ; I have stood by his side in the churchyard where Pip was turned upside down by the convict ; I have looked down with him upon the tombstone of 'Pirrip', also 'Georgiana, wife of the Above'" (Collins 159).<sup>3</sup>

We may particularly notice passages in Dickens' novels which seem to suggest that they are descriptions peculiar to the observation of a walking man. The following description of the shop window in Chapter 20 of *Little Dorrit* suggests that the whole scene is seen by Little Dorrit with her pedestrian view, and it is the scene that might have been witnessed by the novelist himself in his pedestrian observation :

They [Little Dorrit and Fanny] walked on ... until they came to a dirty shop-window in a dirty street, which was made almost opaque by the steam of hot meats, vegetables, and puddings. But glimpses were to be caught of a roast leg of pork bursting into tears of sage and onion in a metal reservoir full of grave, of an unctuous piece of roast beef and blustering Yorkshire pudding, bubbling hot in a similar receptacle, of a stuffed fillet of veal in rapid cut, of a ham in a perspiration with the pace it was going at, of a shallow tank of baked potatoes glued together by their own richness, of a truss or two of boiled greens, and other substantial delicacies. Within, were a few wooden partitions, behind which such customers as found it more convenient to take away their dinners in stomachs than in their hands, packed their purchases in solitude. Fanny opening her reticule, as they surveyed these things, produced from that repository a shilling and handed it to Uncle. Uncle, after not looking at it a little while, divined its object, and muttering "Dinner? Ha! Yes, yes, yes!" slowly vanished from them into the mist. (237)

There is the sensation here which one might feel when one comes across animated scenes, walking the street full of vivacity of human life. There are many other examples of the vivid description of shops in London streets throughout Dickens' works. Most of them are so precise and minute that one might believe that in his daily walks in the streets Dickens often stopped to apply himself to the observation of shop windows which came on his way. One remarkable example of this is the depiction of the shopwindow of Tetterby's in *Haunted Man*.

While Tetterby's shop-window was obviously viewed by a man who is at standstill, some cases show us a series of glimpses caught by a passer-by. *A Christmas Carol* provides an example. The street-scenes are the busiest and the most cheerful on Christmas days, and Dickens' walk does not fail to make its course in market-places at that time of the year. The scenes are felt to be cheerful the more because it is the season when merriment is most longed for — the month in December whose weather is the coldest and the most dreary. The Christmas scenes at streets which are shown to Scrooge (and to the reader alike) by the Ghost of Christmas Present are assumed to be derived in part from Dickens' pedestrian observations. In the following description of street shops we can see some phrases which reveal the pedestrian view of the describer :

The poulterers' shops were still half open, and the fruiterers' were radiant in their glory. There were great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats of jolly old gentlemen, lolling at the doors, and tumbling out into the street in their apoplectic opulence. There were ruddy, brown-faced, bread-girthed Spanish Onions, shining in the fatness of their growth like Spanish Friars, and winking from their shelves in wanton

slyness at the girls as they went by, and glanced demurely at the hung-up mistletoe. There were bunches of grapes, made in the shopkeepers' benevolence to dangle from conspicuous hooks, that people's mouths might water gratis as they passed; there were piles of filberts, mossy and brown, recalling, in their fragrance, ancient walks among the woods, and pleasant shufflings ankle deep through withered leaves; ...

The Grocers'! oh the Grocers'! nearly closed, with perhaps two shutters down, or one; but through those gaps such glimpses! ... (41)

These are the observations which are likely to be obtained in series from the spectator with the pedestrian position. They are, in fact, series of spectacles coming out one after another as if to the eyes which are constantly moving along the pathway. Glimpses at many of them are caught through the gaps of the half closed shops. The goods of the shops "tumbling into the street" and "winking from their shelves ... at the girls as they passed by" are presumably the views from the walker. The vivid description of grapes dangling from the hooks at the shop front seems to be rendered possible when the mouth of the describer himself water gratis as *he* passes by. There are further points which confirm the pedestrian point of view: one can safely assume that it might be when one is in his walk that the fragrance of the filberts at the shop is associated with "ancient walks among the woods, and pleasant shufflings ankle deep through withered leaves." One other remarkable example of the market-place scenes of London springs to mind in relation to the serial views from the passer-by, and it is the morning scenes of the market in Smithfield in Chapter 21 in *Oliver Twist*. We need here only say that the sights and sounds of the busy and lively activities at the market are presented in a stunning and bewildering manner mainly because of the swiftness with which Oliver is guided through them by Sikes: Dickens' London is a city full of wonder and amazement — the more so through the child's eye which passes through them in a fast walk.

It is certain that objects of Dickens' observation is not restricted to the inanimate objects: street scenes, of course, include people. His interest in encounters with people in the streets is shown clearly in the essays of *The Uncommercial Travellers*, and we shall go into it later. At the moment attention may be paid to the obvious fact that walking forward means meeting with people on the way — people who have been out of sight coming up into sight. There are several works of Dickens which are concerned with this aspect of movement. *The Old Curiosity Shop* comes to mind in the first place. Most part of the book is made up of a long journey in which the two solitary travellers make their travelling on foot in the country, meeting various kinds of people, some hostile, others benevolent. Apart from the vicissitudes of the life of the heroine and the old man, the journey itself forms a beautiful story; it is a kaleidoscope of the encounters with people, coming up to them and then going away. Chapter 13 of *David Copperfield*, in which the hero makes a long way trip on foot to meet his aunt in Dover, shows an impressive journey. The boy's hardships are unavoidable because they are prepared, as it were, on his way; he can, however, escape from them (after some disturbances) and try to keep up his travel. The whole chapter is presented in a beautiful prose with a tempo relevant to the walking steps of the child who has no other means of transportation than his feet. The encounters — or the confrontations — with people on the road are the tests to David's early

resolution to reach the destination ; and the journey, after all his despair and disappointment, is rendered impressive because he must anyway resume it, and keep walking just as he did before. Similarly, *Oliver Twist*, after escaping from Snowberry's, keeps walking for seven days until he comes across the Artful Dodger on his way into London.

People appear and disappear along the road that lies before the traveller. One may feel that the characters of Dickens' novels are people who come out of somewhere in his sight rather than people who are created out of his imagination. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that Dickens does not feel the characters of his creation fictitious : they are alive, as real as the passers-by whom he meets in his walks. There was a curious relationship between the writer and the creatures of his own creation. J. T. Fields writes :

Sometimes he [Dickens] would pull my arm while we were walking together and whisper, "Let us avoid Mr. Pumblechook, who in crossing the street to meet us" ; or, "Mr. Micawber is coming ; let us turn down this alley to get out of his way." (Collins 311)

### III

In this section, let us concentrate our attention to a particular work which tells us much about Dickens' real feelings of his walks. Some parts of *The Uncommercial Traveller*, particularly an essay titled "Night Walks," offer a great deal to suggest what his walks would be like. First of all, we must have a glance at the brief self-introduction of the narrator in the opening chapter of the book to see what Dickens means by "uncommercial traveller" and to what extent the concept of travelling is associated with that of walking. The narrator identifies himself as a traveller who travels "for the great house of Human Interest Brothers" (1). It is clear that his life is here compared to a travel. The metaphor seems to imply that to the man who sees his life as a travel, it becomes essential that he should wander about without any worldly purpose. In "Shy Neighbourhoods," the traveller groups walking into two kinds : "one, straight on end to a definite goal at a round pace ; one, objectless, loitering, and purely vagabond" (95) and he declares that he is a greater vagabond than any gipsy on earth. His "literal" — not "figurative" — statement clearly explains the point :

Literally speaking, I am always wandering here and there from my rooms in Covent-garden, London — now about the city streets : now, about the country by-roads — seeing many little things, and some great things, which, because they interest me, I think may interest others." (2)

The notion of walking — "wandering here and there" — is here at the outset of the book, and we also find the suggestion of the intention (the only intention in the "wandering" which is generally supposed to have no intentions) of observing something interesting — "seeing many little things, and some great things." The traveller declares that "so much of my travelling is done on foot" (94), thus implying the significance of the act of walking in travelling for Human Interest Brothers. Walking is not merely a movement on foot : it has some influence on walker's mind and feeling, by the action of walking itself and also by the observations that he gets on the road.

Beyond other essays collected in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, "Night Walks" describes in the most vivid manner the whole course of a walk that Dickens might have actually taken at night. The walk represented in it is not specified as a particular walk of a particular night; it is made up of a mixture of the outline of a series of his unusual night-walks during a certain period of his life, and of the impressions and meditations that came out of them. This is a significant piece of work in the sense that it is a compact manifestation of the relationship between Dickens and walking.

First we must examine the opening paragraphs of the essay to see the important correlation between Dickens' personal life and the content of the essay:

Some years ago, a temporary inability to sleep, referable to a distressing impression, caused me to walk about the streets all night, for a series of several nights. The disorder might have taken a long time to conquer, if it had been faintly experimented on in bed; but, it was soon defeated by the brisk treatment of getting up directly after lying down, and going out, and coming home tired at sunrise. (127)

The night walks took place "some years" before the writing of the essay. Deduced from the date of publication (the essay first appeared in the July 21 issue of *All the Year Round* in 1860), we can assume the time of their occurrences to lie somewhere in the years from around 1855 to 1858. The question is, When did Dickens suffer from sleeplessness which he ascribed to "a distressing impression." Specification of this becomes difficult when we consider the references made by many people to his general inclination to get depression.<sup>4</sup> Biographers have noticed that in his forties and fifties there were a number of periods in which Dickens' suffering from restlessness drove him to the unusual night walks. In 7 December 1857, he writes in a letter: "After all, it would be better to be up and doing something, than lying here."<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that the depression in this case points to the disorder in the most tumultuous period of his life — around the period of his separation from his wife in 1858.

There are statements, on the other hand, that seem to suggest that his restless resort to night streets would be an outflow of his extraordinary eagerness for artistic expression. It can be termed "an energetic restlessness," as he puts in a letter (15 March 1858) to W. C. Macready to describe the state of his mind busily engaged in the public activities (Nonsuch 3: 11). Hollingshead writes about a mania for long walks which, he believes, Dickens developed during the Tavistock House years (which covers almost all the 1850s): "When he was restless, his brain excited by struggling with incidents or characters in the novel he was writing, he would frequently get up and walk through the night" (Collins 220-1). His devotion to drama was so great that in preparing for Wilkie Collins' play *The Frozen Deep* he found his long walk best fit for his practice of his part, which caused "the great terror of Finchley, Neasdon, Willesden, and the adjacent country."<sup>6</sup> Back in his early thirties, we read in his letter (2 January 1844) telling about the composition of *A Christmas Carol* that he "wept and laughed and wept again"; and being excited by the theme of the story, he "walked about the black streets of London, fifteen and twenty miles many a night, when all the sober folks had gone to bed" (Nonsuch 1: 553). A glimpse at these extracts from his letters is enough to show us that his passion for walking is something which correlates with the craving of his creative mind for effusion.

We can presume that the "night walks" took place in March 1857, because in the essay "Night Walks" we find, together with the specification of the month ("The month was March" [127]), a remark on a real incident (a murder case) that seems to suggest that the date of the "night walks" is before 9 October 1857,<sup>7</sup> and that not long before. Dickens' reference to his restlessness is sometimes found in his letters before and after 1857, and not that year alone, often without attributing it to any distinct cause. It is worth noting in this connection that 1858 was one of the most tumultuous years of his life because his discordance with his wife, which had been drawn out for several years, was coming to the sad end (they separated in May 1858) and also because of the affair with Ellen Ternan whom he met in the preceding year. Here are his own statements to suggest the two main causes of his restlessness: "The domestic unhappiness remains so strong upon me that I can't write, and (waking) can't rest, one minute. I have never known a moment's peace or content, since the last night of *The Frozen Deep*."<sup>8</sup> None of these things came to him suddenly; they overshadowed the state of his mind of the preceding years. There is no question about the domestic unhappiness; it went back several years. The question is with Ellen Ternan; obviously she does nothing to do with the novelist's "distressing impression" referred to in the essay, because his encounter and infatuation with the young actress do not date back so early as March 1857. In January of the same year, however, Dickens had played the part of the disappointed lover of the heroine in the performance of *Frozen Deep* at Tavistock House — the play which, in its second performance, happened to bring Dickens and Ellen together, the former resuming his previous part, the latter as one of the leading actresses. His part as an unrequited lover stirred him deeply: "I derive a strange feeling out of it," he wrote to Sir James Emerson Tennent, 9 January 1857 (Nonsuch 2: 825). It is not unnatural to think that the "strange feeling" is something which prepared for the equivalent feeling strangely excited in the real situation of the novelist as unrequited lover.

It is reasonable to assume therefore that the domestic misery, multiplied by Dickens' sense of "one happiness that I have missed in life," and his eagerness to search for the unattainable realities,<sup>9</sup> accumulated itself into the main cause of his constant restlessness, which sometimes drove him to go out during the unusual hours.

No other mention of Dickens' personal anxiety can be found than that of "a distressing impression" at the outset of "Night Walks," but the biographical detail summarized in the preceding paragraph may well be kept in mind when we are going to look into the mood with which he took those walks. In the first place, Dickens regards the night walks as "education of a fair amateur experience of houselessness" (127) and he often refers to himself as houseless,<sup>10</sup> thus representing the dominant feeling of loneliness, instability, hopelessness. As often in Dickens' walks, he is inclined to resort to places which induce him to grim, dreary, and ghastly contemplation: cemeteries, the Newgate Prison, the old King's Bench Prison, Bethlehem Hospital. (This tendency is clearly shown in the essay "The City of the Absent," chapter 23 of *The Uncommercial Traveller*, in which he shows himself strangely attracted by dismal churchyards, among which "the chuchyard of Saint Ghastly Grim" comes as "one of my best beloved" [234].) There is, as Dickens sees it, "attraction of repulsion" in the "Ghastly Grim" church (234). Even the spots with far less ominous aspects present themselves in different ways at night: the view of the river from the Waterloo Bridge looks awful, with the buildings on the



banks "muffled in black shrouds," and the reflected lights seeming to originate in the spectres of suicides deep in the water (129); the theatres, "grim and black within," look "great dry Wells" (129). Many of the images that are provoked in those night walks are associated with death, misery and loneliness. There is a solemn consideration of the number of the dead buried in one great city and a fanciful images of them being raised to overflow the streets, hills and valleys (133); there is a contemplation of the story of a certain "poor Horace Kinchi" affected by the curious fatal disease of "Dry Rot in men" (130-1).

The dismal feature of *The Uncommercial Traveller* is here in its typical aspect, almost epitomizing, together with many other essays of the same book, what recent critics consider the dark side of Dickens' later years. K. J. Fielding recognizes that although the dark side of his later works is sometimes exaggerated, it is almost unrelieved in the book (207). We must note that his dark side is found occurring from time to time even in his earlier works, but it seems merely to from interludes between the predominant overflows of humour.<sup>11</sup> One can see in the collected essays the deep dark mood grows almost to submerge the abundant energy previously directed (notably in *A Christmas Carol*) toward the effusion of warm-hearted feelings. It is noteworthy nevertheless that Dickens' later novels are not entirely void of humour. Take, for example, *A Tale of Two Cities* (BK. 2, Chap. 14) in which Jerry Cruncher's boy is frightened by the animated vision of a coffin coming up over him. The same is true of *The Uncommercial Traveller*. There is a delicate, deliberate touch of inward humour which is employed to describe Dickens' feeble laugh at himself and odd situations in which he happens to fall. The following quotation will illustrate this point.

Now and then in the night — but rarely — Houselessness would become aware of a furtive head peering out of a doorway a few yards before him, and coming up with the head, would find a man standing bolt upright to keep within the doorway's shadow, and evidently intent upon no particular service to society. Under a kind of fascination, and in a ghostly silence suitable to the time, Houselessness and this gentleman would eye one another from head to foot, and so, without exchange of speech, part, mutually suspicious. (128)

This passage takes its utmost effect when we understand the whole manner of description of his unexpected encounter with a stranger on his way. First of all, Dickens presents himself as a personification of houselessness, not without a comical effect. Besides, the switch from the first-person to the third-person serves to make him melt into the scene which he witnesses himself and to make a picture of the two people coming face to face in the dark street in the dead of night. Furthermore, the man, presumed to be a thief, is called "gentleman" and described as "intent upon no particular service to society." There is nothing here suggestive of the night pedestrian being really tormented with houselessness, or with the restlessness which drove him out into the dark streets of the great city. What we find here is the personal suffering eager to get something which fills up the vacancy of the houseless mind — something related with human life. Dickens finds "sympathetic relations with people who have no other object" than that of getting through the night. The sympathetic relations with people in the streets seem to give the most notable remedy for the houseless mind of the tormented man. Many of the roadside scenes are considered to be his "company." And thus for the lonely pedestrian, Covent-garden Market becomes "wonderful company" (133); early coffee, "warm

company" (134); a railway station with the morning mails coming in, "remunerative company" (135). Dickens' attention is almost magnetically directed toward anything which is associated with comfort, warmth, liveliness, and human lives. The following quotations illustrate what Dickens liked to see at his loneliest (note here again the occurrences of the word "company."):

... the yearning of the houseless mind would be for any sign of company, any lighted place, any movement, anything suggestive of any one being up — nay, even so much as awake, for the houseless eye looked out for lights in windows. (128)

... [the bridge tool-keeper's] brisk wakefulness was excellent company when he rattled the change of halfpence down upon that metal table of his, like a man who defied the night, with all its sorrowful thoughts. (129)

There was plenty going on at the brewery; and the reek, and the smell of grains, and the rattling of the plump dray horses at their mangers, were capital company. Quite refreshed by having mingled with this good society, I made a new start with a new heart. (130)

The passionate manner of expression in the first quotation seems to underline the tender desire for any sign of waking life. In the second quotation, one can find a contrast between Dickens' distressing sleeplessness with the brisk wakefulness of the tollkeeper. The contrast is interesting because it seems that Dickens, distressed by the night, tries to overcome his suffering by looking at the man who seems to defy the night. Now, "briskness" is the key word in Dickens' attitude toward life, in times of hardship as well as success. In fact the Night Walks is considered to be a "brisk treatment" to defeat the disorder of his sleep (127). In spite of the grim, dreary background of the London streets, Dickens' lonely mind does not faintly wear its loneliness away. Instead, it resolves itself into a kind of pathetic awareness of one consolation that he can find among the signs of human life at work latent in the darkness of London's night. Total vivacity of the active world exists even in the dead of night: the view of the brewery (in the third quotation above). No one would overlook how Dickens appreciates the view as a refreshment to make his walk newly resumed with a new heart. (It is worth noting that three senses are summoned here in the appreciation of the scene: sight, smell, and hearing.)

It is interesting to note that the strength of Dickens' yearning of a company is most manifest in his disappointment at finding out that what he expected to be a company turns out to be false. Loneliness is multiplied when he feels the missing of a company. The following is a beautiful representation of the feeling:

When a church clock strikes ... it may be at first mistaken for company and hailed as such. But as the spreading circles of vibration, which you may perceive at such a time with great clearness, go opening out, for ever and ever afterwards widening perhaps ... in eternal space, the mistake is rectified and the sense of loneliness is profounder. (133)

#### IV

The view of later Dickens as dark and sombre, as opposed to earlier Dickens as exuberant and sanguine, holds true to a considerable extent, but one may not deny that many of

Dickensian qualities which are dominant in his earlier works still remain in his later ones: and animism is one quality which we should not ignore in that respect. No one will fail to notice Dickens' use of animism throughout his works, and *The Uncommercial Traveller* merely shows some stock examples. London has "expiring fits and starts of restlessness" (127) as if it were imitating the suffering of the novelist. The locomotive at the railway-terminus blows and heaves and perspires, and it looks as if it were "wiping its forehead and saying what a run it had had" (136). The "conscious" gas knows that daylight is coming, and begins to grow pale (136). To take another example from other parts of the book: the skulls at the gate of Saint Ghastly Grim "grin aloft horribly, thrust through and through with iron spears," and seemed, "as the lightning flashed, to wink and grin with the pain of the spikes" ("The City of the Absent" 234).

Dickens' use of animism, most of all, may be seen as his favourite device for creating an atmosphere in which we are irresistibly driven to feel his world — what is often called the Dickens world — as alive. It is important to note, however, the occurrence of animism in such sombre writings in the *Uncommercial Traveller* essays — it is important particularly in the pages of "Night Walks" because the dominant mood of loneliness and the longing for company as disclosed in it is not irrelevant to the eagerness to find out human forms in the inanimate objects. This leads us to spare our simplified view of the novelist who was worn out by domestic unhappiness and by the overstrain caused by his persistent Readings. The question of split personality also deserves reconsideration in this respect, although it can not be examined here in detail. It is true that there is evidence either in or outside his works that seems to show complex, inconsistent manifestations of his personality, and Dickens' strong interest in the macabre, the dreary, the evil. We have seen, however, that in spite of dreary and macabre sights observed in those lonely nightwalks Dickens is refreshed by the animated sights of anything active at night, admiring people who seem to defy the darkness and loneliness of the night. Moreover, we have seen Dickens keeps a mild complacency in describing himself comically in such an awkward situation as mentioned earlier about his meeting with a thief in the darkness; and it is not very difficult to find out in the *Uncommercial* essays similar examples with the same tone of humorous self-ridicule.<sup>12</sup> Humour is one thing which should not be neglected in this collection of essays, though it is presented in the strained atmosphere in which the author's dark mood is prevailing.

One further thing should be added to this. That is Dickens' whole artistic effort to represent the life and the people of London. "Night Walks" is a product of long years' observation and affection of the city in which he lived. Everything which is seen through the eyes of the Houselessness — everything which has been touched by the hand of the novelist — come to life in a remarkable way. Among the rest, the description of London sinking to rest in the evening, and of the waking life beginning to be rekindled with the coming of daylight are beyond explanation — there is no doubt about his genius which breathes life into the inanimate world. Life and liveliness are the key-words of Dickens. Although one would find the recurrent death images (and its associations with murder and hanging) in his writings, it is misleading to generalize this aspect into the whole shape of his thought. His art itself is the product of his appreciations of liveliness and creativity. If it were not for the affections for the

life of London which he shares with his fellow-citizens, there would not be the effort to turn it into art. Longing for vivacious life need to be found deep in the kernel of his "dark" works because it is hidden under the darkness. His devotion to public readings should be seen in the light of his eagerness to live among people sharing emotions, either horror or warm-hearted feelings. It should not be regarded merely as a desperate effort to relieve himself from his restlessness, or simply as an abnormal conduct which eventually made him worn out to death. Although walking through the night in the London streets is tiring, we are told that it is a "treatment" — and a brisk one — for his sleeplessness. And "the disorder ... was soon defeated" (126). In spite of some of its grim aspects, Dickens' night walks should not be seen in a negative sense. Although we may admit there is room for interpreting his passion for night walks as mania driven by some serious trauma which seems sometimes to have overwhelmed him in his later year, consideration of Dickens' walking habit and night walks has shown an important aspect of the untiring novelist: the brisk attitude toward life.

### Notes

1 In his latest years his walking power was greatly reduced by the attack in his left foot — caused in part by overwork and tention, in part by nothing short of overwalking. Dickens, however, continued this life-long habit up to a few days before his death. According to Forster, he walked with his dogs for the last time into Rochester on the 6th of June, 1870; and two days later he had the intention of taking a walk after dinner, which he would have undoubtedly carried out if he had not had the fatal stroke (Forster 666; Bk. 12, Chap. 1).

2 In Chapter 4 we read "little timber midshipmen in obsolete naval uniforms, eternally employed outside the shop doors of nautical instrument-makers in taking observations of the hackney coaches" (32).

3 Forster confirms Henry's statement, and illustrates how nature is represented by the artist's own hand:

[To a] drearier churchyard he often took friends to show them the dozen small tomb-stones of various sizes adapted to the respective ages of a dozen small children of one family which he made part of his story of *Great Expectations*, though, with the reserves always necessary in copying nature not to overstep her modesty by copying too closely, he makes the number that appalled little Pip not more than half the reality (Forster 516; Bk. 8, Chap. 3).

To what extent Dickens changed actual sights to take them into his fiction is a question which requires a full study, but it is not our present concern.

4 Henry Fielding Dickens writes that Dickens "had strange fits of depression, from time to time" (Collins 159).

5 Dickens to Mrs. Watson, uncollected in Nonsuch, quoted in Johnson (912). Johnson adds to the quotation, "So up he rose, and at two o'clock in the morning dressed, and tramped all the thirty miles to Gad's Hill through the dead of night" (912).

6 Dickens' letter to Wilkie Collins, 26 October 1856 (Nonsuch 2: 809). Dickens' part in the play was Richard's, the unrequited lover of the heroine, and he writes in the letter that he took twenty miles' walk that day.

7 There is a comment on the chopped-up body of a murdered man (*The Uncommercial Traveller* 129), which was found out on the date over the parapet of Waterloo Bridge.

8 Dickens' letter to Wilkie Collins, 21 March 1858 (Nonsuch 3: 14). The last part of the quotation refers to Ellen Ternan's influence on his mind.

9 In Dickens' letter to Forster (January 1855), he writes, "Why is it, that as with poor David, a sense

comes always crushing on me now, when I fall into low spirits, as of one happiness I have missed in life, and one friend and companion I have ever made?" (Nonsuch 2 : 621) ; in his letter to Mrs Richard Watson (7 December 1857), he writes, "Realities and idealities are always comparing themselves before me, and I don't like the Realities except when they are unattainable — *then*, I like them of all things" (quoted in Johnson 911).

10 Examples are "us houseless people" (126), "houseless night-walks" (132), "houseless eyes" (132), "houseless circuit" (134), "houseless wanderer" (135).

11 See, for example, "The Convict's Return," and "Tale of Queer Client" in *Pickwick Papers*.

12 A notable example can be seen again in "The City of the Absent" in which Dickens shows himself as an eccentric visitor to St Ghastly Grim in a thunderstorm at midnight. His recognition of both the abnormality of his taste for the ghastliness and the strange attraction he feels in the dreary place resolves itself into a comical description of the embarrassment of the cab-driver who is hired : the ornamental skulls at the gate pleases the uncommercial traveller very much, and

having no other person to whom to impart my satisfaction, I communicated it to the driver. So far from being responsive, he surveyed me — he was naturally a bottle-nosed, red-faced man — with a blanched countenance. And as he drove me back, he ever and again glanced in over his shoulder through the little front window of his carriage, as mistrusting that I was a fare originally from a grave in the churchyard of Saint Ghastly Grim, who might have flitted home again without paying. (234)

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