

The Dickens Fellowship at Komazawa Univ., 8 June, 2002, Ueki

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* *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, / Earnest Jones, edited and abridged by Lionel Trilling & Steven Marcus. Basic Books, 1961

* *Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey*, Chatto & Windus, 1965

* *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-nineteenth Century England*, Basic Books, 1966

* "Reading the Illegible", in *The Victorian City*, 1973

* *Engels, Manchester, and the Working Class*, Random House, 1974

* *Representations: Essays on Literature and Society*, Random House, 1975

* *Art, Politics, and Will: Essays in Honor of Lionel Trilling*, edited by Quintin Anderson, Stephen Donadio, Steven Marcus, Basic Books, 1977

. . . the committee salutes Marcus' "lifelong commitment to the college, a place where he has worn many hats, including student, administrator and teacher."

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/record/archives/vol22/vol22_iss19/record2219.16.html

p. 2.

Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey

1. The means Dickens employs, in *Pickwick Papers*, to achieve the idealization of the relation of father and son is not unfamiliar to us in the literature of a later age: he provides Sam with two fathers, a plenitude in which, like Kipling's Kim but unlike Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, Sam luxuriates. On the one hand there is the actual father, Tony, with whom Sam is altogether intimate and direct, for over him Tony holds only the authority of affection: when he and Sam initially meet in the novel, it is the first time in more than two years that they have seen each other. Sam addresses Tony as "corpulence" (ch. 33), and it is at once clear that he is free to behave just about as he pleases in regard to him. Sam has, moreover, voluntarily undertaken the responsibility of protecting his father's interests, of guiding him around the traps and deadfalls of law and finance, and he accomplishes this superintendence with the same imperturbable coolness with which he does everything else. Tony's very incompetence to grasp even the simplest practices of the world in which money is as real as appetite - another infirmity he shared with John Dickens - allows Sam the rare privilege of filial love and protectiveness. But the most impressive quality of Sam's feeling for his father is that it is so thoroughly penetrated with insight. Sam is in fact the center of intelligence in the novel, and Dickens's surrogate.

'I am very glad to see that you have so high a sense of your duties as a son, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick.

'I always had, sir,' replied Mr Weller.

'That's a very gratifying reflection, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, approvingly.

'Wery, sir,' replied Mr Weller; 'if ever I wanted anythin' o' my father, I always asked for it in a wery 'spectful and obligin' manner. If he didn't give it me, I took it, for fear I should be led to do anythin' wrong, through not havin' it. I saved him a world of trouble in this vay, sir.'

'That's not precisely what I meant, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, shaking his head, with a slight smile.

'All good feelin', sir - the wery best intentions, as the Gen'l'm'n said yen he run away from his wife 'cos she seemed unhappy with him,' replied Mr Weller. (ch. 27)

It is Sam who holds together a skeptical judgment of experience and Mr Pickwick's absolute and ideal morality, in which principle and action must never even appear to contradict each other. The result is almost always a paradox, an enlargement of our awareness of variety and complexity. And the superb liveliness and discrimination of Sam's mind are demonstrated again and again in these paradoxes, since he never allows them to fall apart into contradictory, abstract attitudes. Although *Pickwick Papers* celebrates the virtues of simplicity, innocence and directness in the relations of men, it could not have done so

successfully had it not incorporated some dramatic awareness that it is doing precisely this. Sam Weller is that awareness, and without it, without his constant commentary, we would not be convinced of the validity of the celebration. (33-5)

2. Throughout Dickens's later career, the problems of being a "gentleman" and their relation to the actual and symbolic facts of inheritance will command a central place in his imagination - a subject which Sam's intelligent assessment and management of his station in life enable him to circumvent. (35)

3. In the Preface to the 1838 edition Dickens wrote that he trusted "that, throughout this book, no incident or expression occurs which could call a blush into the most delicate cheek or wound the feelings of the most sensitive person." And we can see that his appropriated material is regularly transformed in the direction of circumspectness and propriety of language and allusion: indeed Mary Mitford felt free to put her own inimitable *imprimatur* on the novel, declaring that "It is fun - London life - but without anything unpleasant: a lady might read it all *aloud*."* *Pickwick Papers* must be understood, then, as - among other things - a record of the revolution in public manners that took place in both the lower and middle classes during the last quarter of the eighteenth and first quarter of the nineteenth centuries. (The first proclamation ever to forbid the public circulation of indecent literature was issued in 1787.) In point of fact it is itself part of the emergence of large classes of people into literate, self-respecting and respectable life. That this represented an upward movement in English life, indeed a considerable cultural advance, is of course a peculiar idea for us to accommodate today when the decisive tendency of literature is toward an increased liberty of expression, a more generous inclusiveness, and the license to deal literally with any of the facts of human experience. (27-8)

* *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford*, ed. A. C. L'Estrange (London, 1870), III, 78. In the *Pickwick Advertiser*, a pamphlet of miscellaneous advertisements which was sewn into the successive monthly numbers, there were already appearing announcements of books and magazines in which such familiar phrases recurred. Bernard Darwin, *The Dickens Advertiser*, pp. 34-5; ch. 4.

4. The prose of *Martin Chuzzlewit* was all bugles and trumpets, and represents one of the few instances of successful bravura in the history of the novel. The prose of *Dombey and Son* is by contrast subdued. The voice that speaks in it is older and more tempered; it moves with greater deliberation, with a measured, ponderous directness, and its range seems purposefully restricted. Here for the first time in Dickens is a voice that seems to be listening to or overhearing itself; its tone reverberates inwardly, and though the prose is direct, it is not simple nor without subtlety. In *Martin Chuzzlewit* Dickens had composed an opera, which he also conducted, while simultaneously playing all the instruments in the orchestra and singing all the parts, including the chorus. In *Dombey and Son* there is in the main but one voice. This voice modulates, develops and shows considerable variation, but in general it speaks to us in one character, the voice of one man who understands that lie is saying something very seriously. (293)

5. The tendency to epigram of Dickens's best prose is in *Dombey and Son* characterized by an increased terseness and spareness; Paul's christening party, for example, is received by a portentous beadle, and Dombey, standing next to him, "looked like another beadle. A beadle less gorgeous but more dreadful; the beadle of private life" (ch. 5). Again, when Miss Tox undertakes to befriend Rob the Grinder, she makes an effort to draw him out. "He drew out so bright, and clear, and shining, that Miss Tox was charmed with him. The more Miss Tox drew him out, the finer he came - like wire" (ch. 38). If there is still an interest in the question of where and how the rhythms of the industrial revolution came to be a part of the living language, the answer, I think, will be found in the prose of the great Victorian novels. Finally, there is the description of Carker coming "with his gleaming teeth, through the dark rooms, like a mouth" (ch. 54). He approaches like a luminescent, predatory mouth, like a shark swimming out of the darkness, and the rooms from whose perspective he emerges are like a dim, subaqueous maw. (294-5)