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***The Old Curiosity Shop* and the Limits of Melodrama**

Charles Dickens's interest in melodrama shows both in his biography and in his works. Not only do his novels reflect features of this form, but his interest in drama and in productions of drama, his strenuous public readings later in his life, the reports of what his public liked to hear him read, and the way in which he read to it, help to show the extent to which his view of the world, at least in terms of his literature, is colored by features we associate with the form. Yet the attributes of melodrama apparent in his work are not simple ones. They show themselves in a variety of ways and with a complexity that reflects how diverse is the manner in which good and evil can expose themselves. Though often neatly tagged in the end, some of his plots leave questions of victory or defeat not fully resolved. Good figures, male or female, are not always diagrammatic in their goodness, nor are wicked ones. Even those seemingly whole in nature can raise questions. In this regard, *The Old Curiosity Shop* is of special interest because the central representatives of good and evil, drawn at the outermost boundaries of human measurement, cannot be comfortably fixed among the human actors of the everyday world. Nell Trent and Quilp fall outside the limits within which melodrama customarily operates.

In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the sacred and numinous still adhere. According to Peter Brooks's probing study, both melodrama and the Gothic novel are a response to a process of desacralization that has reached completion. Melodrama is dealing with a world in which "the traditional Sacred" is lost, whether demonic or angelic (14).¹ In a different

context, Peter L. Berger has put the case this way: "with the onset of secularization . . . the divine fullness began to recede, until the point was reached when the empirical sphere became both all-encompassing and perfectly closed in upon itself. At that point man was truly alone in reality" (*Rumor* 180). The kinds of accommodations melodrama makes to the loss of the Sacred as it follows the "urge toward resacralization" Brooks describes as follows:

Melodramatic good and evil are highly personalized: they are assigned to, they inhabit persons who indeed have no psychological complexity but who are strongly characterized. Most notably, evil is villainy; it is a swarthy, cape-enveloped man with a deep voice. Good and evil can be named as persons are named—and melodramas tend in fact to move toward a clear nomination of the moral universe. The ritual of melodrama involves the confrontation of clearly identified antagonists and the expulsion of one of them. It can offer no terminal reconciliation, for there is no longer a clear transcendent value to be reconciled to. There is, rather, a social order to be purged, a set of ethical imperatives to be made clear. (16–17)

Such a description of evil fits many of Dickens's major villains—Jonas Chuzzlewit, James Carker, Rigaud, and others. Those whom the description does not fit have features that make them less stagelike in their evil. They are too comic (Mr. Jingle), they are set too firmly into a human or social milieu (Rogue Riderhood), or their villainy has features removing them from a too simple judgment (Uriah Heep and his likeness in some ways to David Copperfield). The power of these others comes from working from within a system, from knowing how to use or manipulate secrets or social forces or other kinds of power to their advantage.

But in considering Nell Trent and Quilp, a reader finds a different situation. *The Old Curiosity Shop* lies within a region still covered by what Peter L. Berger, in the title of one of his books, calls "the sacred canopy": good and evil are still numinously inherent in the moral structure of the universe. True, the two figures, especially Nell, bear some of the features of melodrama popular at the time. (See Vicinus.) Although Quilp knows how to use forces within the system, his is still mainly a power of brute strength and cunning made demonic by its excess and by the man's grotesque figure. Yet in the treatment of both figures, a reader

recognizes an attempt to hold to the last vestiges of the Sacred, demonic or angelic, and to show these forces operating in the everyday world. The departure of these figures from the novel, to the extent that their departure seems inevitable and necessary, moving to regions Hellish or Celestial in nature, dramatizes in some sense the loss of noumenal influence. What is left then? Less the ploys of melodrama that we find in the other novels than the workings of a realist, albeit comic, mode.

I am not, I should point out, trying to suggest that a reader can trace these effects chronologically through Dickens's fiction, that only in those novels following *The Old Curiosity Shop* can one find the structures and devices peculiar to melodrama. In some ways, *The Old Curiosity Shop* is an anomaly among Dickens's works. The actions of the novel are performed through an intertwining of what Angus Fletcher calls the two main allegorical actions in literature—the *progress*, which Nell's activities follow, and the *battle*, which characterizes the activities of Quilp (Fletcher ch. 3). Although I don't believe the novel is strictly allegorical, I do, like other readers, believe the waters of allegory lap at its edges.² For both Nell and Quilp, the main focus of activity is to find the Happy Place, whatever form it takes—the place that each longs for, consciously or unconsciously, the place to which each, in some sense, belongs. Ideally, for Nell, that should be the world itself, that enormous shop of wide-ranging curiosities, the broad stage of human activity. But instead, the world is a harsh setting in which one struggles with incipient calamity, with overthrow, either on one's own account or on the account of others. Or, as with Quilp, it is a place that, however degraded it sometimes becomes, cannot accommodate such primordial meanness as his. Each of these figures must find a stopping place elsewhere, a place lying outside the edges of the world drawn for us in the novel.

Though Nell holds no secure position in such an earthly region, she does have a modest presence. From Mr. Trent, her grandfather and her main burden, we form our central impressions of her. The old man carries a condition of the past that she is not aware of and a weakness in the present she cannot help but be attentive to. Through his presence, she evades to a degree the radical simplification of innocence, a stylization that makes of her an illustration of a "moral essence" (Thro 363).³ She performs with quiet energy. Her feelings, her compassion and endurance, rise from a purity not besmirched by the greed, brutality, selfishness that,

among other qualities, contaminate the personalities of other figures. Her capacity for endurance and her powers of exertion carry her to the end of her short life's journey across a landscape populated with curiosities, to the Place that is rightfully hers.

What Nell seeks she explains to herself when she and her grandfather leave the curiosity shop in London—"a return of the simple pleasures they had once enjoyed, a relief from the gloomy solitude in which she had lived, an escape from the heartless people by whom she had been surrounded in her late time of trial, the restoration of the old man's health and peace, and a life of tranquil happiness" (Dickens 148). The terms of the Happy Place are given out in key words in the passage—"return," "escape," "restoration," "a life of tranquil happiness." The condition is further clarified by what Nell tells the schoolmaster after he rescues her from collapse:

She told him all—that they had no friend or relative—that she had fled with the old man, to save him from a madhouse and all the miseries he dreaded—that she was flying now, to save him from himself—and that she sought an asylum in some remote and primitive place, where the temptation before which he fell would never enter, and her late sorrows and distresses could have no place. (435)

If Nell's progress takes her from the wilderness of the city across a normal landscape populated by curious characters—by Codlin and Trotters and their Punch and Judy figures, by Grinder with his "lot" travelling about on stilts, by Jerry and his dancing dogs, by retired giants (or stories about them) who wait upon dwarfs at meals—that same progress carries her later across a more phantasmagoric backdrop. There she passes factory cities where she felt "a solitude which has no parallel but in the thirst of the shipwrecked mariner" (413). Even so, in this bleakest part of her journey, she finds figures who extend kindness, a metaphoric drop of moisture for the "burning tongue" (413). The kindness is offered to a Nell, steadily weakening, whose failing health takes her closer to the final—Heavenly—domicile, reaching before she does so her last site of pause, what is her earthly Happy Place.

The site of heavenly peace—that celestial place that is rightfully Nell's—we cannot know since it lies beyond human accessibility. But we get a good approximation of it, we can assume, through the church and

its landscape. That world is characterized by three objects. The first is the house in which Nell comes to live, a place associated with death whether in the graveyard near it or through the elderly people who are associated with it. The house becomes a kind of curiosity shop when "a little old gentleman, [the bachelor] who lived in the parsonage-house" and is "the active spirit of the place" (486) sends her some needed furnishings—a "supply from a certain collection of odds and ends he had at home, and which must have been a very miscellaneous and extensive one, as it comprehended the most opposite articles imaginable" (487). The second feature of the place is the graveyard itself, a place so innocent and peaceful that children play among the graves. The old sexton, who prepares the graves, calls himself "a gardener. I dig the ground, and plant things that are to live and grow. My works don't all moulder away and rot in the earth" (491). Finally, the church itself, for which Nell acts as a tour guide, is another kind of curiosity shop—with its old well that is a symbol of life (492, 512–513); with its peacefulness that seems partly a result of actions wrought by Time (493); with the "effigies of warriors," the reminders of "violent deeds" (494). Though this place might be thought Nell's New Jerusalem, further consideration suggests the spot is more Edenic. If Eden holds a position somewhere between heaven and earth, between immortality and mortality, a place where human beings are not subject to time, then this region makes up her earthly Happy Place, a place blending things mutable and immutable. It is more helpful, though, to look at the place with a certain "geography of heaven" in mind, in particular the "geography" presented in some Renaissance drawings of that region. The geography I am thinking of is that of "a twofold heaven," described in *Heaven: A History* by Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang.

This twofold heaven is composed of "God's holy city and the saints' paradise." Although the division is not made in these specific terms in Dickens's novel, the division describes what we find in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. What is comparable to God's holy city lies outside the bounds of the novel. This is the place to which Nell's spirit goes after death. But the lesser spot—paradise, the place of the saints—is something very much akin to the place of the graveyard and the church. The church and its landscape stands in relationship to Nell's heavenly afterlife as paradise does to the holy city. For Nell, the borders between the two realms, the

paradisaal and the heavenly, are so tenuous that the peace of her passing rivals that of Donne's virtuous men.⁴ While Renaissance artists presented paradise in pastoral terms with "[t]rees, birds, flowers, and meadows" of a "domesticated" nature, as a place where "[p]eople touch, play, listen to music, and pass eternity in pleasure" (McDannell and Lang 142-3), Dickens presents his paradise with related but transformed details. If in Renaissance presentations, the erotic is absent, whether the saints are clothed or unclothed, because of the purified nature of paradise, in Dickens it is absent because the "saints" are people of either extreme age or of childish youth. In place of the common fountain of love is the well of mortality. Nell's is "another world, where sin and sorrow never came; a tranquil place of rest, where nothing evil entered" (498). But whatever the similarities and the differences, such a comparison points up that this paradisaal place, the end of Nell's earthly journey, is but one part of a twofold scene. Nell cannot remain here for she has no place on earth, not even in such a paradise, time-bound as it is.

Nor does Quilp find an earthly spot. A grotesque figure, this dwarf with the head of a giant, who snarls and growls like a dog, who eats hard-boiled eggs with their shells and bites and scratches and drinks "boiling water without blinking" (86) calls to mind Mr. Beaver's warning to the children in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*: "[I]n general, take my advice, when you meet anything that's going to be human and isn't yet, or used to be human once and isn't now, or ought to be human and isn't, you keep your eyes on it and feel for your hatchet" (Lewis 79). Indeed, the women who act as Betsy Quilp's Job-like comforters "doubt if [Quilp] were really a human creature" (86), even though this mutant has attracted a wife and carries out the business of his world, gathering money, bullying Sampson Brass in the process, and plotting against others. Quilp's progress is the reverse of Nell's, moving in the direction of the primordial, of Chaos or Hell, taking him—as Nell's progress takes her—to the place for which he was meant.

The man is a loner. Except for those weak enough for him to bully, he depends upon no one for what today is prosaically called "emotional support." The only associate treated with any kind of equality is his boy, Tom Scott. Between the two, there exists "a strange kind of mutual liking. How born or bred, or how nourished upon blows and threats on one side, and retorts and defiances on the other, is not to the purpose" (88).

The boy seems to be a younger Quilp. Shortly before Quilp's death, for example, as he crouched over the fire "after the manner of a toad . . . from time to time, when his master's back was turned, [the boy] imitated his grimaces with a fearful exactness" (613). The nature of both boy and dwarf is to be, simply, what it is.

Quilp's progress can be traced through the places he occupies. The first is the home where he torments his wife. The next is his counting-house across the river. Still a third, "[t]he summer-house," is part of a tavern, "a rugged wooden box, rotten and bare to see, which overhung the river's mud, and threatened to slide down into it," its setting one of the ugliest in that great "wilderness" of the city—"a piece of wasted ground, blighted with the unwholesome smoke of factory chimneys, and echoing the clank of iron wheels and rush of troubled water" (225). The "box" is itself termed "the Wilderness" (236). It stands "within rifle-shot of his bachelor retreat," the counting-house (474). There, Quilp muses: "I've got a country-house like Robinson Crusoe . . .; a solitary, sequestered, desolate-island sort of spot . . . Nobody near me here, but rats, and they are fine stealthy secret fellows" (465). There he remains, in spite of his wife's plea that he return home, enjoying "the congenial accompaniments of rain, mud, dirt, damp, fog, and rats" (472). It becomes, according to his own naming, "the ogre's castle" (614), characterizing both place and resident, turning him back into a creature only partly human. It is also "his lair" (618). From there, trying to escape those who have come for him, he falls into "the cold, dark water," which is indifferent to "its ghastly freight" and its human qualities. In the end, "it flung [his body] on a swamp . . . and left it there to bleach" (620)—as though the carcass is at last, indeed, in its own element. "The dark places of the earth," says Psalm 74, "are full of the habitations of cruelty."

From wilderness to ogre's castle to lair to river—the movement takes the reader into an area where the buildings seem scarcely to hold against disintegration, maintaining themselves as though through the dwarf's presence. "To go against society as religiously legitimated," writes Peter L. Berger, "is to make a compact with the primeval forces of darkness" (*Canopy* 39). We have no history of the representation of hell. But if such were written, as has been of the representation of heaven, we would certainly find there the objects and relationships between them peculiar to that world. They would likely be drawn from the patterns of imagery

that Northrop Frye has sketched out—the terrifying monsters and beasts of prey; the forest, the desert, the sinister garden; constructions assembled that are compatible with the city of Dis. We find them in the presentation of Quilp's world, especially the London waterfront area and its dwellings. As in old mythologies, Quilp's habitat has a life of its own—"negative, chaotic, ultimately destructive of all who inhabit it, the realm of demonic monstrosities" (Frye 147–50). These stand to Quilp's afterworld as the church and its vicinity stand to Nell's heaven. We can, in other words, posit a twofold hell just as we posit a twofold heaven. Again, we see only the first part. But although the second lies beyond human ken, our imagination is stirred. While we tend to draw the structures of Nell's heaven through the stratagems of art, the primordial chaos that lies outside human existence we tend to associate mainly with evil and madness. The border between the mud and ooze of the river and the black chaos of Quilp's hell is just as obscurely drawn as that between Nell's earthly and heavenly resting places, the boundary just as vague.

No more than Nell—embodying a kind of definitive purity and goodness—can this creature, representing definitive wickedness, be accommodated in the world. In him is too much of the demonic, in both characters too strong an embodiment of "[t]he traditional Sacred." In a novel balanced on the edge of the realist mode, only those who have within themselves a kind of mixture of qualities, something that allows for change and growth or that allows for social reward or punishment, hold a secure place in the novel and a secure future in its world. Kit finds deserving reward, the Brasses deserving punishment. Dick Swiveller finds change. To try to accommodate Nell and Quilp too fixedly would take the novel to the extremes of melodrama, a position the novel itself does not support.

If the good and the wicked in such absolute form do not fit such a world, it does not mean that neither the good nor the wicked operate there. But they are found in a more balanced, though frequently colorful, human mixture, sometimes to be noticed in situation, sometimes in character. In situation, that mixture of the good and the bad, the happy and the sorrowful, is best represented in the homes of the Nubbles and the Garlands. In each instance, peace and happiness are compromised. In some sense, each appears partly exempt from time and the changes that time brings. Kit Nubbles might provide "the comedy of Nell's life" (49),

but he takes active part in his own life's struggles and sorrows. With his brimless hat, "extraordinary leer" (49), his "remarkable way of standing sideways as he spoke" (50), he is himself, in appearance, a curiosity—but a kind one. Though he might return to his home and family tired and ill-humored, he can note his mother's uncomplaining hard work and decide "it would be a better and kinder thing to be good-humoured" (131). Though the Nubbleses' home, like the Garlands', seems to carry with it part of that physical and mental suffering we expect of earthly life, Dickens skirts a portion of that condition. Though the youngest Nubbles is seemingly little more than a toddler, we read little of Mr. Nubbles, nor does Dickens invite us to ask about any of his features. According to Kit, his mother would never think of marrying again (218), of imagining a replacement for the man "who was the best of husbands and the best of fathers besides" (221). Yet what suffering the family went through on account of his death shows itself in physical circumstance, the family's poverty, and in an ability to endure. It does not—so far as a reader can tell—show in any increase of wisdom that might come out of human suffering. The father's absence is represented more through a sentimental longing than through an exposed sorrow.

In some ways and to some degree, as he cuts the Nubbles free of the past, Dickens cuts the Garlands free from the future. Their home and their life there are carefully guarded against outsiders. The old couple would hire Kit, they tell Mrs. Nubbles, "if we found everything as we would wish it to be." As they tell Kit's mother, "we're only three in family, and are very quiet regular folks, and it would be a sad thing if we made any kind of mistake, and found things different from what we hoped and expected" (221). They would not, in other words, wish to admit the Serpent into their midst. Yet the potential problem is not Kit but their son Abel. This overgrown child has not moved far inland from the Wordsworthian shore of eternity; shades of the prison house may have begun to close, but Abel's parents are much more aware of that closure than the son. Although at the end of the novel, Dickens gives the man a bride in the form of "the most bashful young lady that was ever seen" (666), and although the two have a family, Dickens's comment about the marriage sets up a goodness and innocence so absolute that a reader might wonder how the younger pair will survive without the older: "any propagation of goodness and benevolence is no small addition to the aristocracy of

nature, and no small subject of rejoicing for mankind at large" (667). Still, if the reader is not encouraged to look to the Nubblese's past, neither is the reader urged very strongly to think about the Garlands' future. In neither case is existence idyllic, or the threats demonic.

That figure who deals with his past, changing as he moves toward the future, who notes and deals in an influential way with suffering in the fallen world, who undergoes a moral progress through his activities in the novel, is Dick Swiveller. This genial ne'er-do-well calls himself in an inebriated moment "a miserable orphan" (236). He is the novel's hero, but a very earthly one. Casting himself as that figure on the stage of his own life, performing at times as "is the custom of heroes" (330), he is his own most absorbed audience. Although he is left out of Fred Trent's confidence when that young profligate forms a pact with Quilp, more of "a mere [innocent!] tool" in Fred's hands (243), he is close enough to such chicanery that he has a firm base in wrongdoing. Noting his movement away from that base gives a measure of how much he improves himself morally. Still, his role is more traditional than he might know. A passage revealing of his character is one in which he muses on the condition Fred and Quilp have gotten him into:

Quilp offers me this place [with Sampson Brass], which he says he can ensure me . . . Fred, who, I could have taken my affidavit, would not have heard of such a thing, backs Quilp to my astonishment, and urges me to take it also—staggerer, number one. My aunt in the country stops my supplies, and writes an affectionate note to say that she has made a new will, and left me out of it—staggerer, number two. No money; no credit; no support from Fred, who seems to turn steady all at once; notice to quit the old lodgings—staggerers three, four, five, and six. Under an accumulation of staggerers, no man can be considered a free agent. No man knocks himself down; if his destiny knocks him down, his destiny must pick him up again. Then I'm very glad that mine has brought all this upon itself, and I shall be as careless as I can, and make myself at home to spite it. So go on, my buck . . . and let us see which of us will be tired first." (330-31)

With its echo of heroic forebears—"Lead on, Macduff!"—the passage reveals a number of features about this hero: (1) though Swiveller can be led, he can also question; (2) his questioning shows perhaps more canny about the ways of the world than he knows he is aware of; (3)

his introspection, however comic, shows an ability for self-analysis that can suggest an ability to change, though at the moment he is prepared to take himself simply as an agent of fate, relieving himself of responsibility; (4) finally, though he professes to be "careless" in the wake of his loss of agency, his later actions suggest otherwise, suggest that the forces in control are more those of Providence than of Destiny and that he does act in part as his own moral agent. His further assessment, echoing the world of romance, introduces still another kind of curiosity shop: "She dragons in the business, conducting themselves like professional gentlemen; plain cooks of three feet high appearing mysteriously from under ground; strangers walking in and going to bed without leave or licence in the middle of the day! If he should be one of the miraculous fellows that turn up now and then, and has gone to sleep for two years, I shall be in a pleasant situation" (334). His situation, as matters turn out, is double: he is both rescued (by the Marchioness) and rescuer (in assisting the Marchioness and helping to bring about Kit's release).

Much of Swiveller's life has been a life of play and, in his case, a variety of escape. If "[o]ne aspect of play . . . is the fact that play sets up a separate universe of discourse, with its own rules, which suspends, 'for the duration,' the rules and general assumptions of the 'serious' world," then Swiveller, through his role-playing, has spent much of his life in that "separate universe," in that "enclave within the 'serious' world of everyday social life" that play creates for itself (Berger *Rumor* 65).⁵ The intention of play is joy. But for Swiveller, it is also a means of evading responsibility. He shuns the charge of earning a living, hopes for a handout from his aunt, all as a part of his game-playing, trying to preserve his "enclave." But as his name suggests, he can change direction and does so when the rules of play begin to impinge on his ordinary life. When "[s]he dragons" and "plain cooks of three feet high" shift from the speculations associated with a story and become a part of his own life's narrative, when the lines between the "enclave" of play and "the 'serious' world of everyday life" fade, then Swiveller shows that he can perform with a kind of heroism, mundane and prosaic, that is effective in everyday social life.

From the beginning, Dickens is careful to keep Swiveller at some tangible remove from the centre of criminal activity. He is kept segregated from the Brasses, people with whom he cannot ally himself, and so

kept innocent in their efforts to frame Kit. He shows baffled sympathy for the Marchioness. He sends beer to Kit each day Kit is in prison. He is excoriated by Quilp: "The fellow is pigeon-hearted, and light-headed" (370)—a statement that, considering its source, can only be construed as a compliment. He looks after Mrs. Nubbles when she faints in the jail. He is let go, scathingly, by Sampson Brass. And then—like heroes of other novels—he falls into a raging fever, metaphorically burning away his moral dross.⁶

Set between Quilp's universe of supreme wickedness and Nell's of supreme good, his Happy Place is one of changing hues, blending the everyday markings of good and bad. Although his progress echoes mythic patterns of heroic behavior—a confrontation with a wickedness embodied in dragons, a dealing with the calamities, or "staggerers," of life, a descent into the underworld—Swiveller is a figure of *this* world, a figure of the milieu in which he moves. Quilp and Nell are, in W. H. Auden's terms, mythic, "their existence . . . not defined by their social and histori[c]al context" (Auden 407). But Dick Swiveller conforms to the specific localities of Dickens's London, and more particularly to the London of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Little Nell and Quilp are still covered by "the sacred canopy," a shading that would allow them to find a place in a Dantesque world, Quilp in one of the bolgias of Hell, Nell among the inhabitants of Paradise.

Given such emphasis on Swiveller and the man's dealings with his curious fellow mates in London, the novel has less of melodrama than one might at first glance suspect. Less a villain than he is a monster, more an angel than she is an angelic child or maiden, neither Quilp nor Nell learns or develops significantly from encounters with the world. Neither can find suitable placement within it. Neither can belong to the everyday, to the trivial, the mundane, the mutable, as Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness do. In this novel, good and evil presented in such purified form reflect remnants of that Sacred whose loss melodrama is a response to. Yet those elements of the Sacred have little of import in the way the life of other figures is presented. Instead, *The Old Curiosity Shop* has much of the comic, more of the realistic, and fewer glimpses of the kind of melodrama that Dickens uses elsewhere.

NOTES

1. Elsewhere, in "Virtue and Terror: *The Monk*," Brooks uses the more explicit phrase, "the Sacred in its traditional Christian form" (250).
2. For a review of some earlier responses to the work's allegorical features, see Lorelee MacPike's two-part article in *Dickens Studies Newsletter*. Though I argue for different roles for some of the characters than he does, see, too, Monroe Engel's discussion. Elsewhere, Ned Lukacher is quite specific about the subject: "The allegory is . . . that of the Christ-Child in the manger at the Adoration, and Little Nell's pilgrimage, suffering, and death present a transparent version of a secular Calvary" (302). On the possible impact of nineteenth-century religious writings on the novel, see Samuel Pickering, Jr. Michael Schiefelbein discusses Dickens's troubled use of Catholic material.
3. See also Paul Schlicke in *Dickens Quarterly*, in particular his discussion of "the essentially melodramatic nature of Dickens's vision" and Nell's "idealistic nature" (197).
4. Note Dickens's instructions to George Cattermole about the illustration for Nell's death: "I want it to express the most beautiful repose and tranquillity, and to have something of a happy look, if death can" (House and Storey 172).
5. For his discussion of play, Berger draws on Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens—A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Swiveller's "staggerers" carry some of the feel of riddles. To draw on a statement of Huizinga's, Swiveller in this instance, though comic, is not unlike that "poet-priest [who] is continually knocking at the door of the Unknowable" (Huizinga 129). The "staggerers" rouse him to a recognition of opposition, and he accepts the challenge. Monica Feinberg presents a different and fully detailed analysis of Swiveller's split world in her article in *Dickens Quarterly*.
6. For a good analysis of Swiveller's illness and of his relationship with the Marchioness, see chapter 4, "The Pivotal Swiveller," of Garrett Stewart's *Dickens and the Trials of Imagination*.

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