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Dickens and Industrialism

PHILIP COLLINS

The historian John Vincent recently began a review with this downright statement: "There is history, and there is Eng. Lit. history. The latter genre . . . exists in a world all its own." Its professors, he continued sardonically, have clear ideas on this and that historical topic—"ideas so clear that they have been reached without any process of study known to historians, and they [these professors] have all passed through a traumatic experience of reading that implausible melodrama, *Hard Times*."¹ It behoves us to notice that neither *Hard Times* nor the observations of such Eng. Lit. historians as myself impress this distinguished Victorianist as contributing much to our understanding of the past, though this is not the occasion for me to take on Professor Vincent, or cry *nostra culpa*, over his emphatic judgment. My aim in this essay is to enquire how much Dickens knew about industrialism (and about which of its disparate manifestations), how he apprehended, understood, and judged it, and what bearings this has on his art. Certainly he claimed, a dozen years before he wrote *Hard Times*, his one novel centered on an industrial town, that he had a fair amount of relevant knowledge. Seeking to add weight to his judgment upon the factory system that he had observed in Lowell, Mass., he remarked: "I may add that I am well acquainted with our manufacturing towns in England, and have visited many mills in Manchester and elsewhere in the same manner" (*American Notes*, 4:66).²

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¹*Listener*, 22 March 1973, p. 385.

²References to Dickens's published writings are given in the text: Book (if any), chapter, and page, most page-references being to the New Oxford Illustrated edition (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947-1958). The exceptions are: *MP* = Miscellaneous Papers, ed. B.W. Matz (Biographical Edition, London: Chapman & Hall, 1908); *N* = *Letters*, ed. Walter Dexter. Vols. 13-15 in *The Nonesuch Dickens* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1938); *Pilgrim* = *The Pilgrim Edition of the Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Madeline House et al. 4 vols. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965-); *Speeches* = *The Speeches of Charles Dickens*, ed. K.J. Fielding (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1960).

Fairly well acquainted, he might more justly have said, and acquainted only as an occasional, though intelligently observant, visitor. For notoriously no significant Victorian authors, with the solitary exception of Mrs. Gaskell, had a long-term or intimate knowledge of an industrial town: and this must be one reason, though not the only one, for the remarkably sparse and feeble literary response to a phenomenon so evident and momentous as England's becoming the first predominantly industrial and urbanized community in the history of mankind. For, like the Great American Novel, the great industrial novel never got written. Few novelists, and fewer poets, seriously attempted the topic at all; hence the disproportionate attention given to the few who did. Such a lamentable fiction as Mrs. Trollope's *Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* (1839-1840) would never have been heard of, had it entered a competition more severe than this "industrial novel" class. Sheer flabbergastedness, incomprehension, and distaste must have discouraged authors from tackling this theme, besides a sense of their ignorance of its inner workings, for there is some point in C.P. Snow's large generalization that "Intellectuals, in particular literary intellectuals, are natural Luddites." This, he continues, is specially true of England, where the industrial revolution happened "earlier than elsewhere, during a long spell of absent-mindedness."³ Dickens, however, was not absent-minded about what was happening in this area of economic and social development, nor was he a Luddite. Indeed he included Luddite activities in a long list of the social evils formerly afflicting his age which had now, in 1865, happily disappeared—"the destruction of machinery which was destined to supply unborn millions with employment" is how he described these activities (*Speeches*, p. 340). He was of course a Southerner by birth and lifelong residence, so he never lived in or near an environment ostentatiously industrial. London, indeed, is and always has been the greatest industrial city in Britain (a fact which, to grant Professor Vincent a point, is sometimes overlooked by Eng. Lit. historians over-impressed by Cobbett's indictment of "the Great Wen" as non-productive and all-consuming), but London is so many other things also—the nation's political, cultural, social, commercial center—that Dickens very reasonably concentrated on these non-industrial aspects. Daniel Doyce's is the only recognizable factory in Dickens's London.

³C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1959), p. 21. Snow's provocative lecture was responded to by, among others, F.R. Leavis in his *The Two Cultures? The Significance of C.P. Snow* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962). Ivanka Kovačević's admirable survey and anthology, *Fact into Fiction: English Literature and the Industrial Scene 1750-1850* (Leicester: Leicester Univ. Press, 1975) confirms my assertion that little major literary effort went into the exploration of the industrial theme.

Of the great industrial cities, he probably knew Birmingham better than Manchester, and this, as will be seen, may be significant. Certainly it was the first such city he visited (in 1834) and the last (he was speechifying there again in 1870), and "the great working town of Birmingham" was the subject of his first presentation of industrialism in his fiction (*Pickwick*, 50:705). His first visit was as a young reporter covering a political Reform meeting, and he recorded, with an air of pleasant surprise, that "perfect order was preserved throughout, and the appearance of the vast body of persons, who were all respectably and cleanly dressed, was most imposing" (*Pilgrim*, 1:46n). The description in *Pickwick* is brief and non-committal; there are positives ("great" twice, "earnest occupation," "hum of labour," streets "thronged with working-people") and negatives (smoke "blackening and obscuring everything around," the "harsh music" of hammers and engines, the "lurid sullen light" of the furnaces), with no attempt to coordinate these superficial impressions. But a year after writing this, he was in the area again, en route to a holiday in North Wales, and he had to make a detour "by way of Birmingham and Wolverhampton, . . . travelling . . . through miles of cinder-paths and blazing furnaces and roaring steam-engines, and such a mass of dirt gloom and misery as I never before witnessed" (*Pilgrim*, 1:447). This is all that he says, in his correspondence, but the scene impressed him. It inspired the description of Little Nell's terrifying journey through this "cheerless region" (*Old Curiosity Shop*, chs. 44-45), and Dickens returned to describe a railway journey through it, in "Fire and Snow" (*Household Words*, 21 January 1854; *MP*, 417-23). It remains, in the 1970s, a notably dreary scene. Meanwhile, and to the end of his life, he revisited Birmingham many times, giving five speeches there on adult-education occasions, and giving indeed the first of his Public Readings there in aid of an adult-education institute. And in these speeches he praised Birmingham: in 1844, for instance, "the name and fame of its capitalists and working men; . . . the greatness and importance of its merchants and manufacturers; . . . its inventions, which are constantly in progress; . . . the skill and intelligence of its artisans, which are daily developing; and the increased knowledge of all portions of the community."⁴

That was said in Birmingham, of course, and might be regarded as flattery or courtesy. But Dickens was a sincere man, and there was conviction behind these and other such remarks. Indeed one way of register-

⁴*Speeches*, p. 60. This is one of the quotations which, inevitably, is also cited by Patrick Brantlinger in his admirable "Dickens and the Factories," *NCF*, 26 (1971): 270-85. I agree with most of Brantlinger's conclusions, though I arrive at them differently. His essay complements mine (and mine, I hope, his). On Dickens and Birmingham, see the series of items in *Dickensian*, 3 (1907); similarly, on Dickens and Manchester, *Dickensian*, 34 (1938).

ing Dickens's stance on industrialism is to contrast him (speechifying as well as in his writings) with his contemporary John Ruskin. For Ruskin, too, often gave speeches in the great industrial cities, but he, unlike Dickens, often used such occasions for his most vigorous attacks upon industrialism, attacking indeed, very explicitly, the intellectual honesty and the moral standards of his audiences. Recall for instance that disconcerting lecture "Traffic" which he delivered in Bradford Town Hall: "Your ideal of human life," he told his audience, was exhibited in their worship of the "Goddess of Getting-on."⁵ From Ruskin's point of view, Dickens was similarly tainted by a happy acquiescence in shabby modern ways. On his death in 1870, Ruskin wrote: "Dickens was a pure modernist — a leader of the steam-whistle party *par excellence*. . . . His hero is essentially the ironmaster."⁶ This, though not the whole truth about Dickens, reminds us that he was more modernist, more steam-whistleish, than some of his intellectual contemporaries. And, to return to his apprehension of Birmingham, there is a notable passage in his fiction which seeks to reconcile those warmly favorable public-speech sentiments with his sense of the "dirt gloom and misery" along the Birmingham/Wolverhampton road. In *Dombey and Son*, there is a striking description of the approach to Birmingham by rail from London. Mr. Dombey, lately bereaved and embittered by this blow to his family hopes, and with his mind still full of Death, sees from his carriage window everything blackened in this squalid urban scene: "dark pools of water, muddy lanes, and miserable habitations . . . wretched rooms are seen, where want and fever hide themselves in many wretched shapes, and distorted chimneys, and deformity of brick and mortar penning up deformity of mind and body, choke the murky distance. . . . It was the journey's fitting end, and might have been the end of everything; it was so ruinous and dreary. . . . All things looked black, and cold, and deadly upon [Mr. Dombey], and he on them." But, Dickens remarks, Mr. Dombey's view is badly incomplete and imperceptive. He never recognizes that "the monster [the train] who has brought him there has let the light of day in on these things: not made or caused them" (for indeed the railways' thus opening up urban areas previously unseen by the genteel helped to stimulate reformist activity). Moreover, Mr. Dombey, finding "a likeness to his misfortune everywhere," is "tinging the scene of transition before him with the morbid colours of his own mind" — it is what Dickens might well have charged Ruskin with doing —

⁵Bradford, 21 April 1864, printed in *The Crown of Wild Olive* (1866): here quoted from 9th edn. (London: George Allen, 1895), pp. 95, 105.

⁶Letter to Charles Eliot Norton, 19 June 1870, quoted in *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Philip Collins (London: Routledge, 1971), pp. 443–44; *q.v.* for further passages from Ruskin including his surprisingly fulsome comment on *Hard Times*.

"and making it a ruin and a picture of decay, instead of hopeful change, and promise of better things" (20:281-82).

Dickens has of course less cheerful judgments than this to pass upon industrialism, but this passage reminds us of his sensible and constant awareness that his was a period of transition, of what here he regards as "hopeful change." We must never forget that his was a long writing career—over a third of a century, during which he, and his England, changed greatly: so generalizations about his political and social attitudes are perilous. Also he was not a man with carefully thought-out positions on such matters. To put this favorably, he had a healthy suspicion of *isms* and of tidily complete theories about complex issues; to put it less favorably, he could be muddled and inconsistent, "a wobbler" as his colleague John Hollingshead remarked.⁷ On industrialism, as I shall argue, he took up neither a consistent lifelong position nor a series of positions along which a clear development can be discerned. But also, as the *Dombey* passage reminds us, industrialism was a mixture—of pollution, "ruin and decay," and of promise of better things. Moreover it was not monolithic, but bore a different face and had different prospects from one industrial center to another. Thus, Asa Briggs in his *Victorian Cities* contrasts the economic and social structures, and the political movements, of Manchester and Birmingham, and makes the intriguing suggestion that "If Engels had lived not in Manchester but in Birmingham, his conception of 'class' and his theories of the role of class in history might have been very different. In this case Marx might have been not a communist but a currency reformer. The fact that Manchester was taken to be the symbol of the age in the 1840s and not Birmingham . . . was of central political importance in modern world history."⁸

Now I am not at all suggesting that Dickens formed a relatively cheerful view of industrialism, generalized from Birmingham, and Ruskin a cheerless one based on Manchester. Dickens knew both cities, though neither of them intimately. He got around the whole country, as a young reporter, and later as a literary eminence, whether on investigatory trips, on holidays, for public functions, or as a performer. That tour in 1838 from Birmingham via Wolverhampton to North Wales had indeed

⁷He was "a 'sentimentalist' in finance and taxation . . . a Liberal by impulse, and what the 'DRYASDUST' school would have called a 'wobbler' " (John Hollingshead, *My Lifetime*, 2 vols. (London: Sampson Low, 1895), 1:72, 100).

⁸Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams, 1963), p. 113. Briggs, in an interesting discussion (pp. 95-108) of the "industrial novels" of the 1840s-1850s, notes the stabilizing forces in the industrial towns which were generally ignored by the novelists. See also Steven Marcus, *Engels, Manchester and the Working Class* (New York: Random House, 1974), which mentions Dickens frequently and which is very germane to the present essay.

ended in Manchester where, he claimed, "I . . . saw the *worst* cotton mill. And then I saw the *best*. . . . There was no great difference between them." He continued: "I am going down again, . . . and then into the enemy's camp, and the very head-quarters of the factory system advocates. . . . So far as seeing goes, I have seen enough for my purpose, and what I have seen has disgusted and astonished me beyond all measure. I mean to strike the heaviest blow in my power for these unfortunate creatures, but whether I shall do so in the 'Nickleby', or wait for some other opportunity, I have not yet determined."⁹ He was writing to an associate of the factory-reformer Lord Ashley (later Lord Shaftesbury), whose assistance he invited. "And yet, strange to say," Shaftesbury wrote of Dickens in 1871, "he never gave me a helping hand — at least, I never heard of it."¹⁰ Certainly no "heaviest blow" on behalf of mill-workers appeared in *Nickleby* nor in the novels which followed.

Then, curiously, a few years later he again undertook and again failed to write an attack on the abuses of the factory system. One of the most remarkable and shaming documents about this was the First Report of the Commission for Inquiring into the Employment and Condition of Children in Mines and Manufactories (it concerned women as well as children), which caused a national outcry when it was published in May 1842. During the two years of its preparation, Dickens had been in touch with Ashley's close associate Dr. Southwood Smith, who kept him primed with information and clearly hoped for his support. In December 1840 Dickens was "cursing the present system and its fatal effects in keeping down thousands upon thousands of God's images, with all my heart and soul," and later he promised to review the Report, when it appeared, in the *Edinburgh Review*: "from what I know of [the facts] already," he told its Editor, "I am sure the subject is a most striking and remarkable one."¹¹ But when it came to the point he was poorly, and then off to America, and the *Edinburgh* article never got written. On his return from America, however, he did make two effective, though anonymous, contributions to the controversy resulting from the Report and from the consequent proposals for legislation. In a long letter (signed "B.") to the *Morning Chronicle*, he attacked "the Colliery Lords" for their fierce

⁹*Pilgrim*, 1:483–84. At the time of writing this letter, 19 December 1838, he had just completed No. X (chs. 30–33) of *Nickleby*. Brantlinger, p. 275, reasonably casts doubt on whether Dickens could have obtained entry into "the *worst* cotton mill": why ever should its owners have admitted such an eminent publicist and reformer?

¹⁰Quoted in *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, p. 567.

¹¹*Pilgrim*, 2:165, 353–54. For Lord Ashley's welcoming of Dickens's support, see *Pilgrim* 2:165, note 4, and for Dickens's failure to fulfil his promise on this and later occasions see Philip Collins, "Dickens and the *Edinburgh Review*," *RES*, N.S. 14 (1963):167–72.

opposition to Ashley's Mines and Collieries Bill, and three months later he wrote a blistering review, "sub rosa," of a pamphlet by Lord Londonderry, the leader of this opposition in the House of Lords.¹² But in his fiction, apart from an odd sentence here and there — an incidental reference to factory children in *Nickleby* (50:653) and a brief satirical hit at the subject in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (31:235–36) — he has nothing about industrialism until *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*, and even there he makes no reference to the particularly striking, and eminently dramatizable, scandal of child-labor. This is the more surprising because these were highly topical issues (and he was so topically-inspired a novelist), and other novelists were taking them up. Also of course he specialized, at this period, in the pathetic depiction of children, and always had a great feeling for juvenile suffering, so industrial child-labor might have been expected to attract him, as a topic: but even in his journalism he writes nothing about it after the *Morning Chronicle* items of 1842.

In the Murdstone and Grinby episode of *David Copperfield*, based verbatim of course upon Dickens's autobiographical fragment, there is no protest against child-labor as such, only David's anguish, as a genteel little boy with middle-class expectations, on finding himself working in such a place: "No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sank into this companionship. . . . I worked from morning until night, with common men and boys, a shabby child" (11:155, 161). Moreover this bottling-warehouse, like its original in Dickens's childhood, was a pre-industrial establishment, using non-mechanical methods to prepare, fill, and label containers. Most readers of Dickens's fragmentary autobiography must have felt that his account of the Warren's Blacking episode — which, unlike the corresponding passage in *Copperfield*, cannot be subtilized as the naive view of a child, which the adult reader is expected to recognize as such — fails to get much beyond the natural and justifiable self-pity of a twelve-year-old: that the issues are more complex than Dickens realizes, that his parents' predicament and the servitude of Bob Fagin and Poll Green and the other children deserve more attention than they get. Perhaps it was these profound but uninspectable emotions surrounding this traumatic event of his childhood that somehow made Dickens shy away from writing, journalistically or in fiction, on the topic of child-labor, despite promises so emphatic ("strike the heaviest blow in my power," "cursing the present system . . . with all my heart and soul"). I can think of no better reason.

I have remarked that Dickens's apprehensions of industrialism and his judgments upon it are various — inconsistent, it might be said, or contradictory, or ambivalent — and I want to illustrate this further by contrast-

¹²*Morning Chronicle*, 25 July and 20 October 1842, respectively repr. in *Pilgrim*, 3:278–85 and *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 18 (1934): 182–91.

ing two passages from his fiction, one early and one late (though I do not present them as typifying the younger and the older Dickens). The later passage comes from his 1866 Christmas story, *Mugby Junction*. This opens with a vivid account — not to be discussed here, though relevant to my theme — of a favorite subject of Dickens's, the working of a great railway: here the transit and shunting of trains during the night at a busy junction. Later in the story, the hero takes another railway journey (again the “crashing and clashing” of the train and the passenger's rapidly-changing view are expertly indicated) to “the great ingenious town” (unnamed but almost certainly Dickens has in mind Birmingham, an easy day-trip from Mugby/Rugby Junction). There, Mr. Jackson goes out for “a walk in the busy streets”:

How the many toiling people lived, and loved, and died; how wonderful it was to consider the various trainings of eye and hand, the nice distinctions of sight and touch, that separated them into classes of workers, and even into classes of workers at subdivisions of one complete whole which combined their many intelligences and forces, though of itself but some cheap object of use or ornament in common life; how good it was to know that such assembling in a multitude on their part, and such contribution of their several dexterities towards a civilising end, did not deteriorate them as it was the fashion of the supercilious Mayflies of humanity to pretend, but engendered among them a self-respect, and yet a modest desire to be much wiser than they were (the first evinced in their well-balanced bearing and manner of speech when he stopped to ask a question; the second, in the announcements of their popular studies and amusements on the public walls); these considerations, and a host of such, made his walk a memorable one.

(*Christmas Stories*, 2:501)

This is indifferent Dickens, exclamatory and generalizing; his rhetoric is functioning but his imagination is not at work, and neither is his eye nor his ear (try reading this sentence aloud, as I have had to do, using it in a lecture). The passage must be regarded at the level of opinion, not art — but, to forestall the simple-solution comment upon the clumsy inertness of the prose that, in accordance with one of the current thought-saving assumptions of literary criticism, such technical ineptitude must proceed from the disregardable top of its author's head, I would interject a reminder that though Dickens was a very positive man, a robust believer in many verities and jollities, he was often inept in expressing, let alone dramatizing them. He may be imagined as paraphrasing Ovid's “*video meliora*” to his own purposes: “I see and approve the better, but in my fiction I pursue the worse with greater ease and expectation of success.” This *Mugby Junction* passage, then, regarded as opinion, may usefully

be contrasted with Ruskin, whose *Crown of Wild Olive* was published in the same year. This contained the lecture "Traffic" mentioned above and, in another lecture, "The Future of England," one of Ruskin's onslaughts upon "the principle of machine labour." I doubt whether Dickens felt impelled to read Ruskin's latest book, but he must have had him and his sympathizers in mind when he referred in this passage to "the supercilious Mayflies of humanity" (with that capital-letter sneer at the Mayfair society which could make such views fashionable), for this turgidly-expressed rejoicing in the separation of workers into classes "and even into classes of workers at subdivisions of one complete whole," though the end-product be "but some cheap object of use or ornament in common life" is intelligible only as a direct challenge to Ruskin's basic tenet about such "division of labour." "It is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided," Ruskin argues in *The Stones of Venice* (2, 6:16); "but the men:—Divided into mere segments of men." Or "deteriorated," as Dickens summarized the argument of these "supercilious" observers whom he dismissed: and, to support my guess that he had Ruskin in mind here, I would remark that Dickens's instancing "some cheap object of use or ornament in common life" seems to recall Ruskin's "For instance" (in his next section, 2, 6:17), "glass beads."

A year before this *Mugby Junction* passage, Dickens had made the speech, quoted above, rejoicing that Luddite activity was a thing of the past: machinery was "destined to supply unborn millions with employment." So it was: but in the short run it was more likely to produce unemployment, and Dickens surprisingly displays no interest in this fact. As the *Mugby Junction* passage shows, he was fascinated and thrilled by many aspects of industrialism, and further passages in this vein will be quoted. But this was not his only reaction. The earlier passage which I want to juxtapose with this *Mugby Junction* one comes from *The Old Curiosity Shop*—a passage from chapters 43–45 (written in 1840), which is too familiar to need lengthy quotation. It is inspired by memories of that 1838 journey from Birmingham to Wolverhampton, a scene (it will be recalled) of "such a mass of dirt gloom and misery as I never before witnessed." That such scenes had never before been witnessed in human history is finely expressed in the novel: Little Nell and her grandfather, arriving at "some [unnamed] great manufacturing town," feel "as strange, bewildered, and confused, as if they had lived a thousand years before, and were raised from the dead and placed there by miracle." I know of no better image of the culture-shock experienced by such newcomers to the industrial scene. They have passed through a landscape of smoke and ashes—"the . . . buildings trembling with the working of engines, and dimly resounding with their shrieks and throbings; the tall chimneys vomiting forth a black vapour, which hung in a dense, ill-favoured cloud above the house-tops, and filled the air with

gloom" (43:325)—and they take refuge beside the furnace in a great foundry, which is described in terms of demoniac savagery ("a hundred strange unearthly noises never heard elsewhere," men "moving like demons . . . laboured like giants," the red-hot metal emitted "an insupportable heat, and a dull, deep light like that which reddens in the eyes of savage beasts" (44:329–30)). This note is maintained as they continue their journey towards that "distant country place remote from towns or even other villages" where Nell is to end her days, "along a strange black road [they are warned], and one that would frighten you by night" (44:332)—as indeed it does. It is a blighted landscape, where vegetation "sickened and sank under the hot breath of kiln and furnace," "a cheerless region" which fills them with "a dismal gloom": and Dickens warms to the task of presenting this phantasmagoria: "the horror of oppressive dreams, . . . strange engines spun and writhed like tortured creatures, . . . brick towers, never ceasing in their black vomit, blasting all things living or inanimate, shutting out the face of day, and closing in on all these horrors with a dense black cloud." The workers and their families, "wan in their looks and ragged in attire," have enjoyed none of the profits of mechanization: they "scowled half-naked from the doorless houses." A paragraph yet more terrifying follows: "But night-time in this dreadful spot!"—"who shall tell the terrors of the night to the young wandering child!" (45:335–36)

As these final words remind us, Dickens is writing a novel, not a report upon industrial England. Certainly he wants here to use those memories of an actual shocking scene, and to make (however irrelevantly to this novel) his note of protest and warning, but also, as novelist, he needs a terrifying penultimate experience through which Little Nell must pass on her way to an idyllic village of peace and rest. Another kind of experience is needed for the hero of *Mugby Junction*. Mr. Jackson, a despondent and ingrown middle-aged man, is to regain faith in himself and in humanity, and so his walk through the "great ingenious town" is "memorable" in providing him with healthy reflections: "I too am but a little part of a great whole; and to be serviceable to myself and others, or to be happy, I must cast my interest into, and draw it out of, the common stock" (*Christmas Stories*, 2:501–502). Dickens's presentations of industrialism in his fiction often, and quite legitimately, correspond with such varying local exigencies. But also, as has been noted, he was in two minds about industrialism: or, to put this more positively, he saw both good and bad in it. Moreover, Birmingham was not Manchester, as we have seen, and Wolverhampton was not Birmingham, either. Such a contrast as the two passages above presents occurs also in the two successive novels which most fully address themselves to the industrial theme, *Bleak House* (1852–1853) and *Hard Times* (1854).

When Ruskin said that Dickens's hero was "essentially the ironmas-

ter" he must have been thinking of Mr. Rouncewell of *Bleak House*, the only character in the novels who follows that occupation. He is indeed presented in surprisingly favorable, indeed almost awestruck terms—plastered with approving adjectives on his first appearance: "a good figure, . . . a clear voice, a broad forehead . . . , a shrewd, though open face, . . . a responsible-looking gentleman . . . , strong and active . . . , a perfectly natural and easy air, . . . a strong Saxon face [top marks for that, in 1852!], . . . a picture of resolution and perseverance" (28:393–94). The description of his work-town is dominated by good-employer and romance-of-industry notes: and, it should be remembered, ironmasters had a very good reputation as employers, just as millowners generally had a bad one.¹³ But partly because Dickens's "good" characters are less vividly presented than his knaves, fools, and eccentrics, Rouncewell and his trade are not imagined with much vigor. Also he is a relatively minor character. His main function is to confront the ominously-named Sir Leicester Dedlock—all but one of Rouncewell's appearances are in juxtaposition to him—first on personal and family grounds, when he is seeking to promote his son's courtship of Lady Dedlock's maid. (The fact that Rouncewell has a son and heir, whereas Sir Leicester has none, is one of Dickens's indications of where the future of England lies; and the name of Rouncewell's son, Watt, recalls of course that of Wat Tyler, the symbol for Sir Leicester of whatever disturbs his class's peace of mind or threatens its predominance; thus Dickens hopefully links industrialism, typified by James Watt, with another just assertion of the rights of the underprivileged and the under-represented.) Mr. Rouncewell, rebuffed in his approach to Sir Leicester on his son's behalf, opposes him politically, and with success. This political episode is sketchy and takes place offstage, but it is Dickens's dramatization of the historic challenge by the middle-class urban manufacturing interests to the land-based interests that had traditionally dominated British politics. The Repeal of the Corn Laws in

¹³See John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work* (London: Methuen, 1957), p. 199. Much of my next paragraph is borrowed from my out-of-print booklet *A Critical Commentary on Dickens's Bleak House* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp 47–49. There has indeed been some controversy about how favorably Dickens intends Rouncewell to be taken: see *ELC*, 15 (1965):414–27; 17 (1967):64–74; 21 (1971):159–69, 429–36; 22 (1973):218–20; and Harvey Peter Sucksmith, "Sir Leicester Dedlock, Wat Tyler, and the Chartists: the Role of the Ironmaster in *Bleak House*," *DSA*, 4 (1975):113–31. Briefly, I agree here with Anne Smith and H.P. Sucksmith who argue against Trevor Blount's contention that Dickens regards Mr. Rouncewell ("the New Acquisitiveness") as socially no improvement upon Sir Leicester Dedlock and the landed interests. For a general survey of this new class, see Ivan Melada, *The Captain of Industry in English Fiction 1821–1871* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1970). See also Robin Gilmour, "Dickens and the Self-Help Idea," in *The Victorians and Social Protest*, ed. J. Butt and I.F. Clarke (Newton Abbot, Devon: David & Charles, 1973).

1846 had been the most symbolic recent victory in this long and continuing challenge; and Dickens, it will be remembered, had been founder-editor of the *Daily News*, established early that year by an Anti-Corn-Law group. Manifestly he welcomes, as well as expects, the diminution of the power of the aristocracy and squirearchy; the "deadlock" in British political and social development must be broken, and the most likely means is the vigorous, independent, and socially useful class of the self-made "iron gentleman." Dickens was perhaps trying to express some such hopes about the new industrial North when he made Woodcourt and Esther settle—and as a reward, not as a penance or a missionary gesture—in a Yorkshire town—"a thriving place, pleasantly situated; . . . streams and streets, town and country, mill and moor" (50:816), a "cheerful town," as Esther discovers on her first visit, for which even the weather is made specially cheering ("A most beautiful summer morning" (54:855-56)). An improbable idyll: but it is not insignificant that Dickens specified Yorkshire as its location.

The location of *Hard Times* (1854) is deliberately unspecified—Dickens gave it the made-up name of Coketown to prevent the story's significance being over-localized—but, as Stephen Blackpool's lingo indicates, the industrial North is intended (probably Lancashire rather than Yorkshire). *Bleak House* had been completed less than a year earlier, but now the presentation of the industrial scene, the captains of industry, the workforce, the spirit of the town, is very different. Very different, too, from his continued panegyrics of Birmingham, in 1853: "I have seen in the factories and workshops of Birmingham such beautiful order and regularity, and such great consideration for the work people provided, that they might justly be entitled to be considered educational" (*Speeches*, p. 160). In Coketown, rather, the educational establishments might justly be entitled to be considered factories. The opening scene of *Hard Times* is the "plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom" (1, 1:1), and adjectives of similar tenor recur in the ensuing description of Mr. Gradgrind—*square* (four times), *hard*, *dry*, *inflexible*. This emphasis recurs in the famous passage "Let us strike the keynote, Coketown, before pursuing our tune," in which the piston of the steam-engine works "monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness," and which ends with the onomatopoeic rendering of this central attribute of the town ("at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work" (1, 5:22)). "Monotonous" is the word which links school, town, and work: and this is the main point that Dickens is making about this civilization. Obviously the schoolroom not only introduces this point, but also helps to make it explicit as the town's adopted or enforced philosophy. The school defends as well as exemplifies monotony; it excludes, and attacks as a matter of policy, whatever might mitigate that

monotony—the flowers and horses mentioned in the school interrogation, the “fancy” in which the dissident pupil Sissy Jupe and her father find solace (stories “About the Fairies, Sir, and the Dwarf, and the Hunchback, and the Genies,” she is explaining when Mr. Gradgrind interrupts her: “Hush, that is enough. Never breathe a word of such destructive nonsense any more” (1, 7:48)).

John Holloway, challenging F. R. Leavis’s interpretation of *Hard Times*, argues that “It does not seem to be anything even remotely Lawrentian. . . . In fact, the creed which Dickens champions in the novel, against Gradgrind’s, seems in the main to be that of ‘all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.’” Dr. Leavis continues to disagree with him.¹⁴ But, though the simple diagnosis which Professor Holloway imputes to Dickens may be found disappointing, it is truer to the novel than Leavis allows. As Patrick Brantlinger says, “It is a largely practical and moderate approach to the ‘factory system’—more parks, more time off, less smoke, and so on—which, it must be conceded, seems very anticlimactic. . . . But how great Dickens thinks the value of humble fun to be!”¹⁵ Certainly Dickens accepts the industrial town and the industrial system and seeks to mitigate rather than destroy them. He is far from that latter-day Ruskin, D.H. Lawrence, who ends his essay on “Nottingham and the Mining Countryside”: “Do away with it all, then. . . . Pull down my native village to the last brick. . . . Make a new England.”¹⁶ Dickens had no vision of a New England, socially, economically, or politically. His common sense told him that industrialism was here to stay, and, as has been and will be seen, there was much about its operation and consequences that he approved. Industrial pollution, indeed, and accidents caused by unfenced machinery should be reduced through legislation and the vigilance of Factory Inspectors: but his reference to this in *Hard Times* (2, 1:110) is brief, and curiously he deleted before publication the only lengthy passage in the novel about such industrial accidents.¹⁷ Much more prominent and emphatic is the contention “That exactly in the ratio as they worked long and monotonously, the craving grew within them for some physical relief—some relaxation, encouraging good humour and good spirits, and giving them a vent—some recognised holiday . . . —which craving must and would be satisfied aright, or must and would inevitably go wrong” (1, 5:25). This notion is reiterated by the narrator; he starts Book 1, chapter 10,

¹⁴Holloway, in *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 168; F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, *Dickens the Novelist* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), pp. 209–10.

¹⁵Brantlinger (above, note 4), p. 282.

¹⁶*Phoenix*, ed. Edward D. McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1936), p. 140.

¹⁷See the Norton Critical edition of *Hard Times*, ed. George Ford and Sylvere Monod (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 252.

for instance, with heavy irony: "I entertain a weak idea that the English people are as hard-worked as any people upon whom the sun shines. I acknowledge to this ridiculous idiosyncrasy, as a reason why I would give them a little more play." And of course the presence of the circus, with its reflective owner Mr. Sleary, provides further occasions for this message to be enunciated. The chapter in which Sleary finally repeats his defense of "amusement" (3, 8) is indeed dignified, as is no other chapter in Dickens, with the title "Philosophical."

John Vincent, it will be recalled, dismisses *Hard Times* as "that implausible melodrama." Harriet Martineau used similar terms, in 1855, when — arguing against Dickens's "mis-statements" in his journalism and fiction about industrial accidents, etc. — she tartly remarked that at least *Hard Times* was the less likely to do harm because "the Tale, in its characters, conversations, and incidents, is so unlike life, — so unlike Lancashire and English life, — that it is deprived of its influence. Master and man are as unlike life in England, at present, as Ogre and Tom Thumb: and the result of the choice of subject is simply, that the charm of an ideal creation is gone, while nothing is gained in its stead."¹⁸ Manifestly *Hard Times* does not pretend to be a naturalistic study of provincial life (the point is often made by comparisons between it and Mrs. Gaskell's Manchester novels). It is "a moral fable" (F.R. Leavis), "less imaginative observation than imaginative judgment, . . . an analysis of Industrialism rather than an experience of it" (Raymond Williams), "A Fairy Tale interspersed with Realistic Elements" (Koichi Miyazaki) — and many variants on this approach have been argued.¹⁹ It hammers hard its few points, about monotony and "fancy," and is unconcerned with much else about the detail and texture of industrial life. Curiously, the emphasis on the monotony of industrial work and its environment is at odds with the dismissal of such complaints by the "supercilious Mayflies of humanity," in *Mugby Junction* a dozen years later. We meet no industrial workers except Stephen and Rachel, and are never taken inside the "Fairy palaces," as Dickens sardonically calls the factories.

¹⁸*Special Legislation: the Factory Controversy* (1855), cited in *Dickens: the Critical Heritage*, p. 235. See K.J. Fielding and Anne Smith, "Hard Times and the Factory Controversy: Dickens vs. Harriet Martineau," *NCF*, 24 (1970):404-27. In this important essay, the authors contend both that Dickens was more intelligent in his apprehension of industrialism than has often been recognized, and that his views of it underwent a crucial change in 1853-1854 (i.e., between *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*). I am unconvinced by the latter contention; Dickens, I think, continued to "wobble." See also Anne Smith's "Hard Times and The Times," *Dickensian*, 69 (1973):153-62.

¹⁹F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1947), p. 227; Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1880* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), pp. 92-93. For references to Miyazaki and other such recent interpreters see the *Hard Times* section in my Dickens chapter in *Victorian Fiction: A Second Guide to Research*, ed. George Ford (New York: M.L.A., 1978), pp. 99-101.

Ivanka Kovačević, indeed, in her thorough survey of such fiction, remarks that "Of all the condition-of-England novels known to me, *Hard Times* places the least emphasis on the effect upon the poor of their degrading living conditions."²⁰ Many other features common in such novels are unmentioned, or barely mentioned, here: child-labor, un- or under-employment, political or industrial unrest and violence, industrial diseases. "The amount of detail" in Dickens's novels, wrote Walter Bagehot in 1858, "is something amazing, — to an ordinary writer something incredible" — but this scarcely applies to *Hard Times*. There, the small streets, very "like one another," are "inhabited by people still more like one another" (1, 5:22); in Dickens's London, the people, however humble, are highly individualized, and it is London that Bagehot went on to specify in his splendid phrase, "He describes London like a special correspondent for posterity."²¹

There is a factory, in London, in the novel next after *Hard Times*, Daniel Doyce's in *Little Dorrit* (1855–1857), and clearly we are meant to give it our approval and to regard Doyce's having to go abroad to make full use of his expertise as yet another black mark against the Circumlocution Office which stifles such useful energies in Britain.²² Doyce of course is a more responsible and approachable employer than Bounderby of *Hard Times*; also he is an engineer, and engineers like ironmasters had a better reputation than millowners such as Bounderby. Moreover, Doyce is an inventor and, as F.R. Leavis points out, he becomes, very interestingly, a type of the creative mind.²³ But there is a peculiarity about one of the passages which Leavis quotes. Clennam, as partner in the firm, one day (rather belatedly, one might think) asks Doyce to "explain the invention to him," and to make things simple to such a mechanical ignoramus as himself. Doyce obliges, and Dickens highly praises the moral and intellectual qualities which Leavis admires in this inventor-artist:

He had the power, often to be found in union with such a character, of explaining what he himself perceived, and meant, with the direct force and distinctness with which it struck his own mind. His manner of demonstration was so orderly and neat and simple, that it was not easy to mistake him. There was something almost ludicrous in the complete irreconcilability of

²⁰Kovačević (above, note 3), p. 115.

²¹Cited in *Dickens: the Critical Heritage*, pp. 393–94.

²²Brantlinger (pp. 272–73) argues, however, that Doyce and Clennam's can be seen "in too positive a light" and points to some sinister imagery about its machinery, the negative implications of which "are hardly incidental." I regard them as incidental and as not qualifying our approval of the enterprise, but Brantlinger's argument is worth consulting.

²³*Dickens the Novelist*, pp. 231, 238–40.

a vague conventional notion that he must be a visionary man, with the precise, sagacious travelling of his eye and thumb over the plans, their patient stoppages at particular points, their careful returns to other points whence little channels of explanation had to be traced up, and his steady manner of making everything good and everything sound, at each important stage, before taking his hearer on a line's-breadth further. His dismissal of himself from his description, was hardly less remarkable. He never said, I discovered this adaptation or invented that combination; but showed the whole thing as if the Divine artificer had made it, and he had happened to find it.

(2, 8: 515-16)

Clennam is "quite charmed by this investigation," for several evenings running—but *what* had Doyle "happened to find"? Dickens could hardly be vaguer about what kind of invention Doyce's was, or indeed about what his and Clennam's factory actually produced. The "clink of metal upon metal" (1, 12:135) was involved in the process, but otherwise Dickens is as unspecific as Henry James has been reproached for being about such matters. Dickens's vagueness about the end-product, in the passage quoted, is the more striking both because of the moral fuss he is making about Doyce's exemplary qualities as an expositor and because on most fictional occasions he is so exact about the nuts and bolts of daily life, including its occupational hours. Maybe he felt incompetent to indicate, even broadly, what Doyce was doing, or maybe he felt that his readers would not be interested.

Some industrial processes, however, certainly engaged his interest and he delighted in communicating this interest, in some detail, to his readers. Particularly in the early years of *Household Words* (1850-1859), he published many "process-articles," as Harry Stone has called them—essays describing industrial processes, fancifully and picturesquely rather than in literal or technical terms. He wrote, sometimes in collaboration, several such articles, on the manufacture of glass, paper, pottery, and other commodities.²⁴ The prevailing tone is quite uncritical of industrialism; rather, there is a romance-of-industry note—how marvellously ingenious these machines are! what a clever civilization ours is, to have devised such wonders! A good example is his essay "Chatham Dockyard" (1863): "What on earth is this?"—it's an armor-plated warship in the making, and here's a machine "of tremendous force" which effortlessly bites a rivet-hole through iron plates four inches and a half thick! Another workshop, and "what is this? Two rather large mangles with a swarm of butterflies hovering over them?"

²⁴See Charles Dickens's *Uncollected Writings from Household Words 1850-1859*, ed. Harry Stone, 2 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968).

No, "not mangles, but intricate machines, set with knives and saws and planes," and whizz-whizz, rumble-rumble, they shove a bit of wood in at one end and at the other end out comes a regulation naval oar! "A whirl and a Nick! Handle made. Oar finished. The exquisite beauty and efficiency of this machinery need no illustration." There, surely, is a man sold on mechanization; by contrast, a Ruskin or a William Morris would have pined for a loving old artisan to create so traditional an object as an oar, with the handfelt and heartfelt skillful satisfaction of a craftsman who delighted in shaping a natural material. "Ding, Clash, Dong, BANG," is Dickens's response to such notions in this essay, "Boom, Rattle, Clash, BANG, Clink, BANG, Dong, BANG, Clatter, BANG BANG BANG!" (*Uncommercial Traveller*, pp. 262-66).

The most obvious and quotidian symbol of the industrial revolution, and the one machine that everyone had seen and had experienced the effects of, was of course the railway engine, and Dickens wrote more, and more effectively, about it than any of his contemporaries. The railway indeed must constitute the firmest and most abundant evidence for Herbert L. Sussman's contention that "Alone among the industrial novelists, indeed among English writers of prose fiction up to Wells and Kipling, Dickens's imagination had . . . absorbed machine technology."²⁵ His rendering of railway-journeys in *Mugby Junction* and *Dombey and Son* has been mentioned, and all discussions of *Dombey* note the prominence of the railway in it.²⁶ The railway is of course destructive: it kills Mr. Carker and, after its progress through North London, "There was no such place as Staggs's Gardens" (15:217). But it is, surely, to the moral credit of the railway that it gives the villain his comeuppance — and such a timely accident was hailed by reviewers as a novel and topical solution to the perennial problem of how to dispose of villains. Duels, as one wrote, are "very vulgar in novels, and happily very much out of fashion in society — the railway is new and handy; and Mr Dickens made a very tolerable use of it, all things considered."²⁷ Staggs's Gardens, the disruption and transformation of which are so brilliantly described, is a

²⁵ *Victorians and the Machine: The Literary Response to Technology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p. 41. Sussman's useful chapter on Dickens contains many observations relevant to my topic: e.g., his remarks (p. 67) on Dickens's attempts in *Hard Times* "to describe the psychological state of a machine-minder," citing, *inter alia*, "the old sensation upon him" felt by Stephen Blackpool "which the stoppage of the machinery always produces — the sensation of its having worked and stopped in his own head" (1, 10:64). For "old sensation" here, Ford and Monod (above, note 16), pp. 49, 250, read "odd sensation."

²⁶ For references see the *Dombey* section in the *Second Guide to Research* (above, note 19), and for an argument contradicting mine see Harland S. Nelson, "Staggs's Gardens: The Railway through Dickens' World," *DSA*, 3 (1974):41-53. Nelson regards Dickens as more ambivalent about, or antipathetic to, the railways than I do.

²⁷ *Sharpe's London Magazine*, May 1848, p. 202. W.L. Burn comments upon the incidence of death by railway-accidents in Victorian life and novels, *The Age of*

more complicated matter. The first description ends with the sentiments appropriate to the founder-editor of the *Daily News*, a year earlier (its main backers were the railway-interests): "In short, the yet unfinished and unopened Railroad was in progress; and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement" (6:63). "Civilisation and improvement": one is here irresistibly reminded of Matthew Arnold's remark in "My Countrymen" (*Cornhill Magazine* (February 1866)): "Your middle-class man thinks it the highest pitch of development and civilization when his letters are carried twelve times a day from Camberwell to Islington, and if railway trains run to and fro between them every quarter of an hour. He thinks it is nothing that the trains only carry him from an illiberal, dismal life at Islington to an illiberal, dismal life at Camberwell; and the letters only tell him that such is the life there." Dickens, a couple of years after Arnold wrote this, was contemplating the probability—as he regarded it—that the penny-post would soon be supplemented or outmoded by the threepenny-telegram: and, he said, he "could not imagine anything more calculated to *advance education* than this facility for conveying ideas."²⁸ *Italics mine.*

The second great railway description in *Dombey* ends, however, "But Staggs's Gardens had been cut up root and branch. Oh, woe the day! when 'not a rood of English ground'—laid out in Staggs's Gardens—is secure!" (15:219)—Dickens's allusion being a conflation of Goldsmith's "When every rood of ground maintain'd its man" (*The Deserted Village*) and, very aptly, Wordsworth's "Is there no nook of English ground secure / From rash assault?" ("On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway," 1844). But this reservation is tacked on to a delighted description of the splendid new scene and of the local inhabitants' having taken the railway to their hearts. Dickens was far more "modernist," to use Ruskin's term, than Wordsworth, and the "old rotten summer-houses" and "miserable waste ground" of Staggs's Gardens (15:217–18) were much less worthy of preservation than the peace and natural beauty of the Lake District. The tone of the description preceding Dickens's brief "woe the day!" exclamation is wholly favorable ("palaces . . . wholesome . . . healthy," etc.). The engines, anthropomorphised in the Dickens fashion, may be "monsters" but they are

Equipoise (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), p. 30. Reviewers of *Dombey* noted and welcomed Dickens's up-to-dateness in giving prominence to the railway: "Dickens has an eye open to everything. . . . In this age of iron it is necessary he should bring a stoker on the scene, and, accordingly, Mr. Toodle is introduced" (*Economist* (10 October 1846): 1325).

²⁸George Dolby, *Charles Dickens as I knew him* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1885), p. 342.

"tame" and smooth and wise: "Night and day the conquering engines rumbled at their distant work, or, advancing smoothly to their journey's end, and gliding like tame dragons into the allotted corners grooved out to the inch for their reception, stood bubbling and trembling there, making the walls quake, as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers yet unsuspected in them, and strong purposes not yet achieved" (15: 219). The final phrase is a good indication of Dickens's intelligent awareness that the implications of the railway age were not, in 1847, fully apparent. To mention one other railway reference in *Dombey*: it is obvious that the reader is expected to rejoice that good Mr. Toodle achieves his ambition to go "on one of these here railroads when they comes into full play" (2: 18), an occupation which he follows with such zest that he gets into the tiresome habit (but Dickens does not see it that way) of speaking in railway-imagery—"What a Junction a man's thoughts is, to-be-sure," and so on (38: 534). He is rewarded with promotion, from stoker to "ingein-driver," and thus ends up "well to do in the world" (59: 836).

Certainly, as industrial jobs go, an engine-driver's is more glamorous and independent—like his non-technological predecessor's, the coach-driver's—than, say, a machine-minder's in a cotton mill: still, Dickens seems conspicuously excited by railways and their personnel. Not all of his contemporaries were. William Morris, who, like Ruskin, may stand as an antithesis, regretted having to travel, in 1855, "by a nasty, brimstone, noisy, shrieking railway train . . . verily railways are ABOMINATIONS."²⁹ Dickens of course delighted, creatively, in locomotion, but his descriptions of railway-travel are as vivid and as loving as his yet more celebrated coach-journeys. The most brilliant example is his little-known essay "A Flight" (*Household Words* (30 August 1851)), too long to quote here. It should be (re-)read, preferably aloud, for it offers, with great technical virtuosity, an onomatopoeic rendering of the sound in a railway-carriage; it also describes the curious optical effects as the townscape or the countryside flashes past the edge of the passenger's eyes. The comfort, ease, and amazing speed of the eleven-hour boat-train "flight" from London to Paris are stressed: it is a huge improvement on the old journey from Boulogne to Paris in the *Diligence* ("the two-and-twenty weary hours of long long day and night journey, sure to be either insupportably hot or insupportably cold"). The essay ends with a classic expression of the sense we still feel after flying thousands of miles in a few hours: "I wonder where England is, and when I was there last—about two years ago, I should say. . . . When can it have been that I left home? . . . It seems to have been ages

²⁹J.W. Mackail, *Life of William Morris* (London: World's Classics edition, Oxford Univ. Press, 1950), 1:79.

ago." He can scarcely believe that he is in Paris: "I feel enchanted or bewitched." "So, I pass to my hotel, enchanted; sup, enchanted; go to bed, enchanted; pushing back this morning (if it really were this morning) into the remoteness of time, blessing the South-Eastern [Railway] Company for realising the Arabian Nights in these prose days" (*Re-printed Pieces*, pp. 481-84).

That final phrase, invoking the magic carpet as a simile for this "flight" to Paris, and juxtaposing the fantastic world of the *Arabian Nights* and the quotidian one of the South-Eastern Railway Company, is highly typical of Dickens: typical of an important element in his apprehension of industrialism (the sheer wonder of it), and typical of his creative union of the imaginative with the familiar and contemporary and topical — of fact and "fancy." He was not much given to theorizing about his art, but this notion occurs in many of his manifestoes.³⁰ In his "Preliminary Word" to *Household Words*, for instance, while proclaiming himself "faithful in the progress of mankind" and "thankful for the privilege of living in the summer-dawn of time," he writes that "No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of the mind to grim realities, will give a harsh tone to our *Household Words*"; but this, he explains, does not mean turning one's back upon contemporary reality, including its industrial manifestations, because

in all familiar things, even in those which are repellent on the surface, there is Romance enough, if we will find it out. . . . The mightier inventions of this age are not, to our thinking, all material, but have a kind of souls in their stupendous bodies which may find expression in *Household Words*. The traveller whom we accompany on his railroad or steamboat journey, may gain, we hope, some compensation for incidents which these later generations have outlived, in new associations with the Power that bears him onward; . . . even with the towering chimneys he may see, spiriting out fire and smoke upon the prospect. The Swart giants, Slaves of the Lamp of Knowledge, have their thousand and one tales, no less than the Genii of the East.
(*MP*, pp. 167-68)

³⁰See my "Queen Mab's Chariot among the Steam Engines: Dickens and Fancy," *ES*, 42 (1961):1-13. Leigh Hunt has an exceedingly interesting passage, very relevant to Dickens's imaginative habits, on the seeming paradox that the *Arabian Nights* had suddenly become enormously popular, and "fairy tales never so honoured with republication and embellishment," in this age of the railway, "the most practically and stupendously scientific in the history of the world" (*London and Westminster Review*, 33 (1839-1840):101). It is quoted and discussed by John Killham, *Tennyson and "The Princess": Reflections of an Age* (London: Athlone Press, 1958), pp. 268-69.

Again, the machine age is seen in *Arabian Nights* terms: and the successor to *Household Words* (*All the Year Round*) would, it was promised, continue to provide "that fusion of the graces of imagination with the realities of life, which is vital to the welfare of any community" (*MP* (28 May, 1859):170). Similarly, in his speeches at adult-education institutions, most of them delivered in great industrial centers—Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, etc.—he often, while applauding the energy and achievements of local industry, argued that "it surely cannot be allowed that those who labour, day by day, surrounded by machinery, shall be permitted to degenerate into machines themselves," and that therefore the intellectual, artistic, and social "graces" furnished by adult education were of especial value in such cities.³¹ In *Hard Times* terms, he saw Mechanics' Institutes as the circus, the "relaxation, encouraging good humour and good spirits, and giving a vent" for the more seriously-inclined machine-minder.

Of course, as has been seen, he was in two minds about industrialism, as any sensible man would be, confronted with this enormous, unprecedented, and many-faced phenomenon. If one part of him rejoiced in "the privilege of living in this summer-dawn of time," another part reacted strongly against its brutalities and "muddle," and—contemptuous though he was of anyone who sought to put back the clock—occasionally permitted his imagination to "do a little Toryism by the sly" (as George Eliot confessed to doing, in the opening paragraphs of *Scenes of Clerical Life*). Perhaps we should amend Ruskin's phrase and call him "an impure modernist." But the coach and coaching-inn side of Dickens has been much exaggerated: as his remarks on that *Diligence* attest, he was a railway man. Edmund Wilson, no coaching-buff, was as wide of the mark as the Christmas-card Dickensians when he pronounced that "Of all the great Victorian writers, he was probably the most antagonistic to the Victorian Age itself."³² Amazing that so sensible a critic as Wilson could present, with no explanation of the paradox, the most popular and beloved of Victorian authors as the author most antagonistic to that age!—but such was the force of mid-twentieth-century critical fashion on even so intelligent a reader (a great author, if modern or neo-modern, *had* to be "antagonist" to the age). By the late 1970s, we have discovered more scrupulous ways of discussing and recommending the Victorian masters. The poet of the period who most resembled Dickens in status and centrality, however much they differed in cast of mind and in opinions, is Tennyson, whose

³¹*Speeches*, p. 61; cf. pp. 45-46, 81, 160, 284; also, arguing against the accusation that this was a "material age," p. 404. I have discussed this concern in *Dickens and Adult Education* (Leicester: Vaughan College Papers, 1962).

³²*The Wound and the Bow*, revised edn. (London: W.H. Allen, 1952), p. 26.

"Locksley Hall" is a classic statement of the ambivalence of their generation to the satisfaction to be found "in this march of mind, / In the steamship, in the railway, in the thoughts that shake mankind." But if Dickens was a "wobbler" about industrialism and other major characteristics of their age, the hero of "Locksley Hall" (whose attitudes are not distanced from his creator's) is of switchback volatility, veering from an apostrophe to his "wondrous Mother-Age!" through hopeful visions of the future to fears of the "hungry people" of today, to—missing a switchback or so—his rejection of the momentary "dream, the fancy!" of escaping to "some retreat" (warm, sexy, uneffortful, and excused from that "march of mind"), to his eventual pride in recognizing his privilege—as Dickens was to put it—of living in this summer-dawn of time: "I the heir of all the ages, in the foremost ranks of time." And, inevitably, the hero of "Locksley Hall" expresses his final affirmatory sentiments in railway-imagery: "Forward, forward let us range, / Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change." Or rather in what Tennyson intended to be railway-imagery, for he wrote that phrase when, very enterprisingly, he "went by the first train from Liverpool to Manchester (1830) [and] thought that the wheels ran in a groove. It was a black night, and . . . we could not see the wheels. Then I made this line."³³ The line was published in 1842: twelve years of train-journeying, presumably sometimes in daylight, did not disabuse Tennyson of his "grooves" notion, and the poet who prided himself on his accuracy of natural observation (those black ashbuds and suchlike) did not feel it necessary, in the fifty years between the 1842 *Poems* and his death in 1892, to extrude this elementary technological howler. Dickens, prolific in his railway reference and imagery, does not slip up in such basic "realities of life." He looked at the wheels, before bringing "the graces of imagination" to bear on such processes as their being cooled and greased: "porter with watering-pot deliberately cooling a hot wheel, another porter with equal deliberation helping the rest of the wheels bountifully to ice cream" ("A Flight," *Reprinted Pieces*, p. 477). As *The Times* said in his obituary, "even irrespective of his literary genius, he was an able and strong-minded man."³⁴ His literary genius, indeed, was that of a man strong-minded as well as abundantly "fanciful," and his strong-mindedness included the recognition that literature must not be "behind-hand with the Age," but must bear "the impress of the moving age."³⁵ His attention to industrialism was a part of this

³³*The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969), pp. 694–99. Kovacević deals with this theme in her chapter entitled "The Ambivalence of a Generation."

³⁴*Dickens: the Critical Heritage*, p. 508.

³⁵1847 Preface to *Pickwick*; *Bleak House*, 12:160.

awareness. A final comment from him upon its spirit may come from a letter of his about *Hard Times*, the concluding phrase of which is another happy instance of his yoking together the quotidian and the highly imaginative. He is commenting upon Mr. Sleary's antagonist as the "philosopher" of this novel, Mr. Gradgrind: "I often say to Mr. Gradgrind that there is reason and good intention in much that he does — in fact, in all that he does — but that he overdoes it. Perhaps by dint of his going his way and my going mine, we shall meet at last at some halfway house where there are flowers on the carpets, and a little standing-room for Queen Mab's Chariot among the Steam Engines."³⁶

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³⁶Letter to Henry Cole, 17 June 1854, cited by K.J. Fielding, "Dickens and the Department of Practical Art," *MLR*, 48 (1953):274.