

Charles Dickens names his Characters*

KELSIE B. HARDER

NOVELISTS, AS WE KNOW, USE MANY METHODS to develop character and tone. Perhaps the simplest, say Wellek and Warren, is through the use of allegorical or quasi-allegorical names.¹ Practically all great novelists, including, surprisingly enough, even the moderns,² have given names to their characters that tell us about, predispose us toward, the characters and, as a by-product, the mind of the author. Charles Dickens was a master at concocting names with tonal and allegorical qualities; to be sure, he was following a long and honorable tradition in his method of choosing names when he chose them consciously, sometimes with malice aforethought.³

A study of names in Dickens's novels can take any one of several approaches: (1) Each novel can be considered separately and in chronological order; (2) linguistic studies of the names can be continued from the basic and excellent study by Elizabeth Hope Gordon; and (3) patterns in the names can be investigated to see

* This paper, in essentially its present form, was read before the Sixth Annual Meeting of The American Name Society, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, September 10, 1957.

¹ René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, New York, 1949, pp. 226-7.

² Note especially William Faulkner's Sartoris and Snopes families. Also Faulkner's allegorizing of names can be seen in the names of Reverend Hightower, Christian, Wallstreet Snopes, Vardaman, Bilbo, and I. O. Snopes, among others. James Joyce, Nelson Algren, Virginia Woolf, and John Dos Passos, as well as others, have used type-names.

³ See Elizabeth Hope Gordon, "The Naming of Characters in the Works of Charles Dickens," University of Nebraska, *Studies in Language, Literature, and Criticism*, No. 1, 1917, a work that deserves wider circulation as an illustration of applying linguistics to a study of names. Three compilations of Dickens's names are available: Gilbert Ashville Pierce, *The Dickens Dictionary*, Boston, 1872; Arthur Lawrence Hayward, *The Dickens Encyclopaedia*, New York, 1924; and the best and most usable, Alexander John Philip, *A Dickens Dictionary*, London, 1928.

if they give insight into Dickens's attitudes toward objects, groups, and professions. I have arbitrarily chosen the third for this paper. The danger in this approach is obvious. The names are divorced from their settings, and the method may smack of intuitive holism, hasty generalization, or of plain arbitrary selectivity. But I will take the chance if only with the modest hope of indicating that an analysis of the name-patterns selected by a novelist will illuminate a few of his attitudes, otherwise not apparent.

Before proceeding to more serious name-groups, I should like to indulge in the ridiculous for a moment. In his novels Dickens has given names to at least twenty-three pet birds and to one bird fancier, Paul Sweedlepipe. With a name like Sweedlepipe, Sweedlepipe could hardly have been anything other than a bird watcher — he was, by the way, also a barber. The name is not without derogatory connotations. Now what names does Dickens give to the caged pets? Precedent, Rest, Ruin, Sheepskin, Spinach, Want, Waste, Wigs, Youth, Ashes, Folly, Gammon, Grip (a raven), Hope, Jargon, Life, Peace, Madness, Plunder, Cunning, Dust, Despair, and Death. Rather strange names for birds! I will say, superficially, that Dickens was not sentimental about birds. And to those who fancy the sweetness, tenderness, cuteness of birds, Dickens may have slipped a notch. Certainly this pattern does not coincide with our sometime picture of Dickens as a maudlin Victorian lachrymatory who pulled out all tear ducts at the sight of cuteness. The pattern seems to reveal that Dickens felt something occult about birds. Perhaps we should remember that it was the Age of the Raven though. It would probably be more appropriate to skip this estimate and proceed to the almost sublime, the realm of lords, ladies, and knights, English and otherwise.

The pattern here is not surprising, for lords never come off successfully in the hands of Dickens. But he is not merely derogatory; he is malicious in Mencken's or Pegler's best vituperative, pugnacious manner. I have tried to weed out the real lords, who, just the same, don't do well in the novels either. A fairly complete list follows: Sir Matthew Pupker, Sir Charles Rampart, Sir Giles Scroggins, Lord Slang, Baron Slappenbachhausen, Count Smorltork (literary man), Lord Snigsworth, Hon. Wilmot Snipe, Sir Tumley Snuffim, Lord Lancaster Stiltstalking, Lord Stumpington, Baron von Swillenhausen, Lord Tenterden, Sir Thomas Tippins,

Lord Verisopht, Abadeen The Addled (Lord Aberdeen), Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle, Lord Boodle, Sir Dingley Dabber, Earl of Boozle, Sir Thomas Clubber, Lady Coldveal, Lord Coodle, Lord Dash Blank, Sir Leslie Dedlock, Lord Feenix, Sir Thomas Glumper, Sir Thomas Grimble, Sir James Hogg, Lord Knowswhom, Duke of Linseed, Baron Koëldwethout, Sir W. Jolterhead, Sir Arrogant Numskull, and Lord Mutanhead. Humorous, yes, but humorous in a pernicious way that brooks no love for the aristocratic class. The caricatures are not done with the rapier; the caveman's club is at work here. There is no subtlety or ambiguity in this pattern. It tells us in roundhouse language that lords are ignorant, arrogant, cold, sadistic creatures, and no mistaking it. The reaction is violent in the extreme, and takes on qualities of a phobia.

Pages from numerous commentators could be quoted to cite Dickens's love and concern for the lowest classes, such as servants, maids, waiters, slaves, hostlers, and the like. The name-pattern does not bear out this assumption. One would think that an author who indulges in characterizing-names for things he has a violent antithesis for would do the same for those he is supposed to love. As far as the lower classes are concerned, however, he does not. He does go beyond Jane Austen's habit of never mentioning names in this class, but not much beyond. Dickens condescends to give them the names that they probably had: Louis, George, Towlinson, Simon, Peak, Polly, Emmeline, Richard, Charles, Thomas, William, Sam, Dick, Hugh, etc. Little concern is manifested in this pattern. He is simply indifferent or neutral, indicating no special love or hate for this group as a whole. A close reading of the novels would prove this, I'm sure. Occasionally a servant will be given a revealing name, but then we find that he is a tradesman, professional man, criminal, or intelligent orphan fallen into misfortune. Dickens, if this view is accepted, despite his socialistic leanings, is strictly a novelist of the lower-middle and middle classes. One maidservant is named Phibb, another Snap, and still another Neckett, but these are the only three that seem to arouse any curiosity. No conclusions could be drawn validly from these occurrences as far as pattern is concerned.

Some groups do not figure too prominently, although the names seem to reflect Dickens's attitude to some extent. I shall explore a few of these. With Podder, Struggles, and Dumkins of the All-

Mugglestonians, Dickens was having fun. Actresses — Miss Vining, Mrs. B. Wedginton, Miss P. Horton, Mrs. Mowatt, Miss Petowker — are not typed, and only Mowatt and Petowker have forms that might possibly make them memorable. Since the names probably reflected originals, actresses at that, Dickens used discretion. Similarly, actors also fare passably well, although Mr. Snittle Timberry, Mr. Waldengarver, and maybe Mr. Glavormelly indicate that Dickens found actors not without faults. But such names as Mr. Anderson, Mr. Baines, and Mr. Blackmore speak more for the general, unassuming name given to actors. The actors appear as human beings, not caricatures. On the whole, the attitude is a pacifistic one.

Artists and literary people are named humorously, if not scornfully: Spiller (painter), Jingle (sometime poet), Spoker (sculptor), Chiggle (sculptor), Overs (novelist), Crumlinwalliner and Dibdin (bards), Toppitt and Miss Codger (literary ladies), Mr. Curdle (literary man), John Spine (novelist), Mrs. Leo Hunter (bluestocking poetess), and there are, of course, Thomas Idle, Lawrence Boythorn, and Harold Skimpole, who are identified as Wilkie Collins, W. S. Landor, and Leigh Hunt respectively. The attitude here is definitely directed. Dickens perceived something a bit spurious, mercenary, and also pathetic in this field.

Several single names are revealing:⁴ Sampson Titbull, founder of an almshouse; Seth Pecksniff, architect and land surveyor; Prince Bladud, founder of a public bath; Blackey, a beggar; The Bigwig family, a family of bigwigs; Brogley, a broker; Bumble, a brawler; Cherryble Brothers, cheerful people; Mrs. Distinguished Pardiggle, charity worker; Sloppy, a love-child; Banjo Bones, a comic; Prosee, a counsel; Pickles, fishmonger; Miss Knag, forewoman; Ebenezer Scrooge, a grasping man; Mr. Truefitt, hairdresser; Mr. Mopes, hermit; Mr. Mould, undertaker; O'Boodleom, Irish Member of Parliament; John Safe, engine-driver; Mr. Sunderland, mesmeriser; Mrs. Gamp, midwife; Thomas Gradgrind, millowner and educationist; Arthur Gride, moneylender; Mr. Monomaniacal, patriarch; Old Mr. Honeythunder, philanthropist; Parkes, ranger; Mr. Krook, dealer in rags and bones; Scarli Tapa, red tape, and Cashim Tapa, the money it costs; Mr. Grewgious,

⁴ The descriptions following the names are in the main taken from Philip, *op. cit.*

rent-receiver; Mr. Pyke, a sharp-faced gentleman; Chevy Slyme, slimy person; Tom Smart, a smarty; Gruffshaw, great speaker; Bilkins, taster; Hubble, wheelwright; Reefawm, sultan's wife; and so on. These names mirror occupations and characteristics of the people; in addition, the spelling is akin to what we now call advertising spelling. The names, by their oddities in spelling and pronunciation, or by their pinpointing of caricaturing elements, attract the reader and are made memorable. They are not easily forgotten; they serve to keep serial magazine installments tied together — no need to search through back numbers to look for identifications for Mr. Krook, Mrs. Gamp, Podsnap, or Bumble. They carry themselves forward.

Bankers, bailiffs, and beadles aroused Dickens's ire. Mr. Merdle and Mr. Meagles, both bankers, have names that are not associated with dignity. Pomposity, fraud, and vulgarity gather force in the high-sounding names of Deedles, Bounderby, Maj. Banks, and Mr. Robbins. Bankers are not among Dickens's loves. Bailiffs are scorned with the names of Mr. Scaley, Mr. Fix, and Old Fixem. And beadles bring out direct hatred.⁵ Ten times he pointedly omits giving a name to a beadle. When he does name them, they get something like this: Spruggins, Blogg, Bumble, and Bung. Beadles obviously do not rate high in Dickens's canon.

Girls do, however. Unfortunately they have the last names of type characters (men) already created by Dickens. Just the same, they manage to acquire Morleena, Angela, Carlotta, Julia, etc. Dickens was fond of the *-a* ending. In the Tapkins family are Antonia, Euphemia, Frederica, and Malvina. On the whole, Dickens bestows conventional names on the younger female sex, whether or not the characterization in the novel is favorable. By name, at least, Dickens never mistreats the young ladies. To misquote him: "Admiration of the fair sex is his ruling passion."⁶

On the other hand, dowagers and elder women have names that are often broadly satirical: Dowager Marchioness Publicash,

⁵ *Little Dorrit*, ii: "If there is anything that is not to be tolerated on any terms — a type of Jack-in-office insolence and absurdity — that represents in coats, waist-coats, and big sticks, our English holding-on nonsense, after every one has found it out, it is a beadle."

⁶ *Pickwick Papers*, i: "but the soul of Tupman had known no change — admiration of the fair sex was still its ruling passion."

Lady Snorflerer, and Lady Snuphanuph are indicative, along with Mrs. Bluebottle, Mrs. Alicumpaine, Howsa Kummauns, Mrs. Sagers, Mrs. Whimple, and Mrs. Wooden Leg Walk Blores. These are names attached without accidental connection to males whom he wanted to characterize. Elder women do not appeal to Dickens. He seldom gives them first names; when he does he calls them Abigail, Betty, Henrietty, Caddy, and Bidy, names calculated to connote overbearing, cantankerous old women.

The names of groups, societies, and companies always called upon Dickens's caricaturing power. There seems to be a persistent distrust of all organizations, a touch of malicious humor, a lot of broad satire, and a great deal of puncturing of pomposity and pretentiousness. First, there is the Mudfog Association and the Mudfog Papers, names based it is said on the Association of British Science and the abstract, obscure, pedantic, foggy, and learned papers read before it. Reflecting on this name, I wonder how Dickens would have pinioned current scholarly papers? "Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead Ponds, with some Observations of the Theory of Tittlebats," found in *Pickwick Papers*, may be indicative. The United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company is the name of a little outfit making up for its smallness with its big name. Then there is the Great Parochial Joint Stock Bank of Balderdash. Some titles are descriptive: Sheen and Gloss (mercers), Blaze and Sparkle (jewelers), while others reflect attitudes, such as Bilson and Slum (commercial house) and Charitable Grinders (a worshipful company). Societies of dogooders, censors, and fanatics are named sarcastically, perhaps to highlight the nonsensical characteristics of such organizations: Pre-Henry-the-Seventh Brotherhood, Society for the Suppression of Vice, Society of Welldoing, Teetotal Society, Grand Amalgamated Abstinence Society, and Child-Bed Linen Society, as though it seems certain that the abstinence society will fail. Anyway, might as well have the Child-Bed Linen Society available for emergencies.

Realizing the impossibility of exhausting the patterns here, I shall restrict the remainder of this paper to lawyers, medical men, schools, and professors. The pattern for lawyers, barristers, and solicitors reflects indignation and hatred for, what was apparently to Dickens, a grasping, hypocritical timeserving crew that meddled

in and entangled for selfish reasons the affairs of innocent people. Among solicitors are Peddle and Pool, Scroggins and Payne. Lawyers and barristers are discriminatingly named Snitchy and Craggs, Spithers, Snubbins, Stryver, Perker, Phunkey, Gulpidge, Vholes, Lightwood, Serjeant Buzzfuzz, Dodson and Fogg, Mr. Fips, Mr. Gablewig, and Mr. Grimwig. Only one, Mr. Wickfield, is drawn sympathetically. The names seem to connote pettiness, busyness, and, to play on one of the names, snitchiness.

Doctors, physicians, and surgeons draw humorous names, broadly caricatured without overtones of sarcasm or indignation. Conventional cartoon appellations are the order in this pattern. Among the surgeons are Sawbones, Sawyer, Slammer, Slasher, and Payne. In the doctor group are Sleek, Tumley Snuffem, Pilkins, Moon, Lumbey, Locoek, John Jobling, Dr. Knight Bell, Dr. Porker Peps, Clatter, Callow, Buffer, Bayham Badger, Arnott, Toorell, Snagglewood, Dr. Soemup, Dr. Chillip, Dr. Fee, Dr. Foxey, Mr. Lewsome, and Dr. Kutankumagen.

A writer with imaginative sweep and poetic ability usually treats school and masters patronizingly. Dickens, however, goes beyond condescension; he sees schools as institutions perpetuating cruelty and schoolmasters as practitioners of sadism, bogey-men who clutch, maul, and beat helpless youngsters. Dotheboys' Hall, a bleak school, is aptly named, and the master is cruel Mr. Wackford Squeers, the whacking scourge of all ill-used boys. Gradgrind tells us much about the man and the vocational school he supervises. Dr. Blimber's School, Mr. Cripple's Evening Academy, Creeble's Boarding and Day Establishment, Ragged School, Nun's House, and even Dr. Strong's School, are schools whose names would not inculcate love for academic life. Schoolmasters and schoolmistresses have such names as Miss Pupford, Miss Brobity, Mr. Creakle, Bidy, Old Cheeseman, B. A. Feeder, Mr. Sharp, Miss Grimmer, Headstone, Mr. Humm, Mr. John Ketch, and M'Choakumchild, not lovable names but ones certain to inspire and instill terror in the most intractable. The School inspector, especially suitable, is Mr. Tufnell. This pattern suggests a naive, childish attitude that the author never grew out of. These are people seen from the child's point of view, a child who is probably sensitive and who cannot endure the restraint imposed by strict, indifferent masters.

The professor name-pattern is a non-academic conventional one. According to Dickens, professors are less than harmless drudges, cut ridiculous figures, are absent-minded, dozing fuddy-duddies. The pattern reflects middle-class sentiment: Professors Piper, Nogo, Grime, Dingo, Rummun, Queerspeak, Pumpkinskull, Wheezy, and Doze. Professor Mullit is a professor of education.

Dickens's names as units are interesting more or less as curiosities. In their settings they obviously type a character or object, or they give tone and atmosphere to the situation. Individually, they reflect an Al Cappish sort of waggery, often vulgar and grotesque. But when they are placed in clusters they exemplify something more serious, an unconscious attitude that works out and repeats itself over and over. The names, in a way, are analogous to spokes in a wheel, each different, but always leading out from the hub, a stable obsession or belief. Names, then, are Dickens's images and are metaphorical. In clusters they take on symbolic properties and can be justified as enriching the emotions of the reader when he becomes aware that the names not only type a character or occupation but also add to the understanding of the position of the novelist, in this case Dickens. Also pertinent to this conclusion, the names reflect the wit of the author, a point, although obvious, not usually credited to Dickens, who is displayed by critics as the ultimate in gross sentimentality.

Further conclusions can be inferred. The characterizing aptness of the names strikes the reader as a result of the context, and, in addition, predisposes the reader toward the character. Dickens could not have been the novelist he was without these names, which contributed so much to his popularity and somehow fixed forever in the English language such names as Gradgrind, Pickwick, Bounderby, Scrooge, Podsnap, Pecksniff, etc., names surviving as vocabulary through a period when his novels are not often appreciated critically or pleasurably. His novels may be out of step, but his names are not.