Thaumodynamics: Making a Living in *Great Expectations*

Steven Connor

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The opening of Hilda Hulme's *Explorations in Shakespeare's Language* explains that her purpose is to bring together 'the common currency of Elizabethan speech, and the heightened language of dramatic art' (Hulme 1962, 2). She makes it clear it was as a linguist that she first became concerned with 'the less literary English of Shakespeare's time'. But this involves a kind of co-creation between dramatist and audience – and she focusses on Shakespeare's drama, she says, because there is more at work 'in the cut and thrust of dramatic dialogue in a way in which they are not there in the more musically organised, or more secret language of the poems and sonnets' (Hulme 1962, 1). In a sense she teaches us to apprehend the pressure on Shakespeare's work of ''an audience trained to strenuous listening and quick response', which Shakespeare could also assume to be 'an audience-in-training' (Hulme 1962, 6).

Hilda Hulme was more than usually aware of Shakespeare's extraordinary receptiveness to forms of popular language, remarking that his memory and recomposition of classical proverbs 'entered living into "the quick Forge and working-House' of his thought: his memory diversifies and recomposes' (Hulme 1962, 182). The allusion she swiftly strikes out here is to the prologue to Act V of *Henry V*, in which the Chorus invites the audience themselves to forge in thought the scene of the King's triumphant return to London, having refused the invitation of his lords 'to have 'borne/His bruised helmet and his bended sword/Before him': When we are exhorted 'now behold,/In the quick forge and working-house of thought,/How London doth pour out her citizens!' (Shakespeare 2009, 334), it is the playhouse that is the working-house of thought, the thought of the citizens pouring out of their workplaces into the street-theatre of pageant. Dickens inherits from Shakespeare this sense of language as a kind of workshop, and in the process works away at the question of what

work is and does. In *Great Expectations*, Dickens not only responds to the urgent Gospel of Work of which the Victorians made so much, he also anticipates the metaphysical conundrums that have come more and more to attach to the question of work in our day.

It is said that to live one day of Dickens's life would be enough to kill most people, and many people assume that it was indeed the unrelenting will-to-work of Dickens's life that hastened his own death. Dickens is not the only nineteenth-century writer or artist to preoccupy himself with work. But in perhaps no writer is there so marked and sustained a communication between the representation of work and the work, Dickens's own work, of representing it, Dickens is concerned obsessively, which is to say, he works at it without being able to stop working at it, meaning that in a sense it works at him, with the meaning of the 'means of production', to fall into the lingo of a vanished time. It is easy to see in Dickens, as G.K. Chesterton does, a one-man embodiment of industrial capitalism:

> Dickens suffered from a sort of premature Big Business, though the term is unworthy of him at his worst, since it was the business of making things and not of buying and selling them. But he did set himself far too much to be a sort of Universal Provider; to keep a huge factory of fiction roaring night and day; to 'keep in touch' with his public like a big business with its customers. (Chesterton 1930, 227)

We must imagine Pip being born around 1803 and reaching maturity perhaps some twenty years before 1861, when *Great Expectations* was published, and the novel seems largely set in a world not only 'before the age of photographs' (Dickens 1993, 3) but also before the age of the huge heavy industry that features in *Hard Times*. But it is marked by a concern with the nature of work that comes from what might be called the industrialisation of the soft work of government and administration, with writers poised ambiguously between the anvil and the desk.

Great Expectations is built around the mystery of the fact that there is a profound, appalling discontinuity between the realms of physical and mental work, honest toil and fiction, forgery and fabulation, even as there is an unbreakable chain of links that connects them one to the other. The nineteenth century, as the high

point of the industrial revolution, marked a parallel rise in the work of bureaucracy that ghosted and mimicked those corporeal process of plying, smelting, shovelling and welding. The effort to extract the maximum of work and to understand the thermodynamic laws that governed it would lead William Thomson to a formulation of the laws of thermodynamics that would make the hard work of physical transformation, and the soft work of sorting, counting and statistical arrangement, uncannily equivalent, in what would come to be known in the middle of the twentieth century as information theory.

Hard work is thought of as a virtue because work is a necessity, even though it is unique to human animals. Many animals play, and an influential theory of play in the animal world construes it as a rehearsal of the skills required for work, which is mostly to say, various kinds of fighting. Cats, birds, termites and beavers can and do perform all the actions that among human animals passes for work. But the idea that animals can work at their work, subjecting themselves thereby to an unnecessary necessity, would be a considerable philosophical embarrassment.

The reason that animals cannot without sentimentality be thought to work is that work is the action of work informed by the idea of work, where the idea of work is no more than the idea that work can transform action into idea. There is no easy and once-and-for-all dénouement in this loop of recursion. This introduces into work the question – which must always be in play when it is a matter of work – of whether it is really work – honest toil rather than dishonest simulation. We do not ask ourselves often enough why the test of work is not whether or how well it works, but rather whether it is real, a matter therefore not of physics but of metaphysics, a strange riddle given that work is often taken to be the opposite of metaphysics. In fact, we must recognise that that trickery, pretence and simulation are welded together with the idea of work right from the beginning: honest toil can always allow for glib and oily art.

The principle of the Gospel of Work was articulated by Carlyle: 'properly speaking, all true work is Religion' … Older than all preached Gospels was this unpreached, inarticulate, but ineradicable, forever-enduring Gospel: Work, and therein have wellbeing' (Carlyle 1843, 250). The Gospel of Work is usually

understood to mean that working is a kind of worship, or corporeal prayer: the *orare* of *laborare*. For Carlyle and others, it seems that work is the means to a life devoted to the principles of Christian morality, and even that work might play the role once played by religion, in the medieval world in which 'our Religion is not yet a horrible restless Doubt, still less a far horribler composed Cant; but a great heaven-high Unquestionability, encompassing, interpenetrating the whole of Life' (Carlyle 1843, 84).

In fact, though, we may see the industrialised prayer-mills into which monasteries in Europe were transformed as an anticipation of just the kind of mechanisation that the renewed religion of work in the nineteenth century was intended to combat. The idea of the Gospel of Work can be taken at once literally, and in a stronger, stranger sense that Carlyle cannot have meant: that work is identical with something like a devotional, even perhaps a positively mystical principle. Work is devotional, not because it is an indirect form of religious fidelity: it is devotional because it involves a form of devotedness that is analogous to that found in religions and may even lie obscurely at their origin. One devotes oneself to the devotional action that work is. The physics of work becomes imbued with the metaphysics of work, as an unknowable, inarticulable mystery. Ever since Houghton asserted in *The Victorian Frame of Mind* that 'the essence of religion for Christians – and for agnostics the "meaning of life" – came more and more to lie in strenuous labour for the good of society' (Houghton 1957, 251), the Gospel of Work has been seen as a kind of stay against religious doubt. From our position, the inverse must seem to be the case: namely, that religion is invoked as a reassuring substitute and foundation for the essential emptiness of the mythos of work. One must work to keep at bay the emptiness of one's work and one's striving to devote oneself to it. Honest toil is intended to boil away the mists of doubt and uncertainty, but instead brews up a kind of ergological apparatus of smoke and mirrors, that is already fully apparent in Carlyle's assertion of the continuity of the hard and the soft:

> All true Work is sacred; in all true Work, were it but true hand-labour, there is something of divineness. Labour, wide as the Earth, has its summit in Heaven. Sweat of the brow; and up from that to sweat of the brain, sweat of the heart;

> which includes all Kepler calculations, Newton meditations, all Sciences, all spoken Epics, all acted Heroisms, Martyrdoms,—up to that 'Agony of bloody sweat,' which all men have called divine! (Carlyle 1843, 251)

In what follows, I want I want to try to make out the shape of a sort of argument that Dickens constructs in *Great Expectations*, but it is, as so often, an argument forged, not through propositions or exemplary instances but the abuttings and adjacencies of physical objects, and especially in *Great Expectations*, objects subject to physical working. In many other writers, items from the material world are made to carry or bear out thematic concerns, often introduced in the form of emblems or motifs in the narration: the web in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, the motif of the cracked bowl in Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*. But in Dickens's work, the vagrant argument of things is much less governed by novelistic theme or meaning, seeming to emerge through chains of delinquent insistence and sometimes insidious intent, always like something almost being said, that go beyond thematic government. The pen that should order and subdue the world of mute things is subject to the transformations wrought by those things, becoming at one point one of them, in 'the pen with which a celebrated forgery had been committed' among Wemmick's collection of criminal curios. As Joe moralistically affirms, ' "life is made of ever so many partings welded together" ' (Dickens 1993, 224).

Livings

More than any other writer of the nineteenth century, Dickens is concerned with the process of what had come to be known as 'getting a living'. The phrase occurs right at the beginning of *Great Expectations*, at a point when there can be no reasonable expectation that the young Pip can have any thoughts of getting any such thing, when Pip tells us that

> To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine – who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle – I am indebted for a belief I religiously entertained that they had all been born on their backs with

> their hands in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence. (Dickens 1993, 3)

The universal struggle seems to make for the interchangeability of simply living with 'getting a living'. Death, by contrast is identified, not, as is conventional, with restful sleep, but a kind of idle malingering, waiting perhaps for something to turn up – with that extraordinary conceit of having been born and buried with your hands in your trousers' pockets. Later in the novel, Dickens will share a joke about the crossed legs of the memorial representations of Crusaders as a reminder of this chaste comportment (Dickens 1993, 22). On the one hand, being born with your hands in your pockets implies being disinclined to be born at all, since the posture seems to dispose you in in advance with the horizontal inclination of the grave. On the other hand, so to speak, the idea of being buried in this posture implies a kind of shifty detachment even from one's postmortem condition, making 'this state of existence' (which?) no existence, or settled state, at all.

The verbal noun 'living' recurs through *Great Expectations*, often in association with the idea of pockets. Dickens allows himself, or at least the character he named Herbert Pocket, a feebly evasive joke on the word, when Herbert is telling Pip of his fiancée's invalid father:

> "Her father had to do with the victualling of passenger-ships. I think he was a species of purser."
>
> "What is he now?" said I.
>
> "He's an invalid now," replied Herbert.
>
> "Living on – ?"
>
> "On the first floor," said Herbert. Which was not at all what I meant, for I had intended my question to apply to his means. (Dickens 1993, 251)

We hear little more of this man, or rather we hear much more of him than we come to know about him, in the fact that he ' "makes tremendous rows,—roars, and pegs at the floor with some frightful instrument" '. The mad, menacingly empty sonority of this histrionic strutting and fretting conveys the narrative immediately to another embodiment of vacuously imperative business, and

oddly enough via the filling of an awkwardly vacant moment with the searching of a pocket:

> As we contemplated the fire, and as I thought what a difficult vision to realise this same Capital sometimes was, I put my hands in my pockets. A folded piece of paper in one of them attracting my attention, I opened it and found it to be the playbill I had received from Joe, relative to the celebrated provincial amateur of Roscian renown. "And bless my heart," I involuntarily added aloud, "it's to-night!" (Dickens 1993, 252)

Living on the first floor, and on no manner of business but stage business, does indeed seem apt for Mr Wopsle, whose chaotic performance of Hamlet Pip and Herbert will straightway take themselves off to see. Indeed, the roaring, but spectral Bill Barley is paralleled by Mr Wopsle's theatrical endeavours during the dinner at the Blue Boar that follows Pip's indenturing: 'rather late in the evening Mr. Wopsle gave us Collins's ode, and threw his blood-stain'd sword in thunder down, with such effect, that a waiter came in and said, "The Commercials underneath sent up their compliments, and it wasn't the Tumbler's Arms" ' (Dickens 1993, 105-6). This chain of associations also seems to include Miss Havisham, who deploys her crutch-stick as she limps up and down her room in Satis House in a kind of pantomimic parody of the hammer blows struck in the forge. And hammer and crutch are brought together in the enigmatic rune that the brain-damaged Mrs Gargery inscribes on her slate:

> Again and again and again, my sister had traced upon the slate, a character that looked like a curious T, and then with the utmost eagerness had called our attention to it as something she particularly wanted. I had in vain tried everything producible that began with a T, from tar to toast and tub. At length it had come into my head that the sign looked like a hammer, and on my lustily calling that word in my sister's ear, she had begun to hammer on the table and had1 expressed a qualified assent. Thereupon, I had brought in all our hammers, one after another, but without avail. Then I bethought me of a crutch, the shape being much the same, and I borrowed one in the village, and displayed it to my sister with considerable confidence. (Dickens 1993, 122-3)

This pseudo-ergodic chain of sticks and hammers extends to the location of Pip's education, at the hands of his tutor Matthew Pocket, as well as of the disorganised tumbling and general perplexity, in – where else could it be? – Hammersmith.

The word 'living' returns in the first interchange Pip has with Magwitch on his return to London, as Pip asks "How are you living?" (Dickens 1993, 315). And then it recurs again in Magwitch's way of beginning his narrative of his life: ' "I first become aware of myself down in Essex, a thieving turnips for my living." ' (Dickens 1993, 344) The idea that your life, or your living of it, might begin, not with your unremembered existence, but with your growing aware of yourself, is what animates the long, self-authoring sentence framed by the words: 'At such a time I found out for certain … that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip.' The simple words which Pip speaks in the closing interchange with Estella establish the condition which he has laboriously achieved: ' "I work pretty hard for a sufficient living, and therefore – yes, I do well" ' (Dickens 1993, 479).

Although Joe is marked by Joe's 'strong sense of the virtue of industry', *Great Expectations* resembles other Dickens novels in the abundance of its evocations of lethargic indolence, the counterpart to the forge being Miss Havisham's Satis House, or rather the disused brewery that is the permanent reminder of the ruined business of her life and inheritance: Dickens takes care to have Herbert Pocket tells us that Miss Havisham's father ' "Her father was a country gentleman down in your part of the world, and was a brewer. I don't know why it should be a crack thing to be a brewer; but it is indisputable that while you cannot possibly be genteel and bake, you may be as genteel as never was and brew. You see it every day" ' (Dickens 1993, 178). The gentility of brewing for Dickens seems to have much to do with its condition of haunted, languid ruin, not quite lifeless, but the sour simulacrum of life, on which the text insists:

> To be sure, it was a deserted place, down to the pigeon-house in the brewery-yard, which had been blown crooked on its pole by some high wind, and would have made the pigeons think themselves at sea, if there had been any pigeons there to be rocked by it. But, there were no pigeons in the dovecot,

> no horses in the stable, no pigs in the sty, no malt in the storehouse, no smells of grains and beer in the copper or the vat. All the uses and scents of the brewery might have evaporated with its last reek of smoke. In a by-yard, there was a wilderness of empty casks, which had a certain sour remembrance of better days lingering about them; but it was too sour to be accepted as a sample of the beer that was gone. (Dickens 1993, 64)

Indeed, though brewing is the counterpart to the ardent hammering that takes place in the forge, Dickens carefully contrives a continuity between them, in the heat that is at the centre of the process both of smelting and brewing. An essay entitled 'The Chemistry of a Pint of Beer', which Dickens commissioned and co-wrote with Percival Leigh for *Household Words* in 1851, identified the principal effects of fermentation as 'sinking of the dregs; a going off of flighty volatile gas; and strength communicated to the good stuff in the barrel' (Leigh 1851, 498). Estella seems literally to be subject to the volatile part of this process:

> For, when I yielded to the temptation presented by the casks, and began to walk on them, I saw *her* walking on them at the end of the yard of casks. She had her back towards1 me, and held her pretty brown hair spread out in her two hands, and never looked round, and passed out of my view directly. So, in the brewery itself—by which I mean the large paved lofty place in which they used to make the beer, and where the brewing utensils still were. When I first went into it, and, rather oppressed by its gloom, stood near the door looking about me, I saw her pass among the extinguished fires, and ascend some light iron stairs, and go out by a gallery high overhead, as if she were going out into the sky. (Dickens 1993, 65)

The thermodynamic logic of Dickens's imagination makes for a perverse reversal between language and explosion, and Miss Havisham's final eruption into flame is a parallel to Krook's spontaneous combustion in *Bleak House*.

The link established in Pip's opening fancy between making a living and the institution of the pocket produces variations throughout

the novel (it seems that Dickens, who made lists of names for possible use in his fiction, may have encountered the name in 1858, when he stayed at the George Hotel in Nailsworth, where the landlord was a Mr Pockett; Dickens 1993, xvi). Pockets are implicated in the tableau-vivant Dickens provides of the languorous business transacted in the village street:

> Mr. Pumblechook appeared to conduct his business by looking across the street at the saddler, who appeared to transact *his* business by keeping his eye on the coachmaker, who appeared to get on in life by putting his hands in his pockets and contemplating the baker, who in his turn folded his arms and stared at the grocer, who stood at his door and yawned at the chemist. The watchmaker, always poring over a little desk with a magnifying glass at his eye, and always inspected by a group in smock-frocks poring over him through the glass of his shop-window, seemed to be about the only person in the High-street whose trade engaged his attention. (Dickens 1993, 55)

In its reticulation of vacancies, the novel gives us also Miss Havisham's parasitic relative Sarah Pocket, and her husband Matthew, engaged as Pip's tutor in London. 'Highly ornamental, but perfectly helpless and useless', who, when all of her 'six little Pockets' are 'in various stages of tumbling up' (Dickens 1993, 185), Sarah Pocket seems unable to keep track even of her own pocket-handkerchief, which she keeps dropping, and having to have handed to her by the maid Flopson. The first description of the slouching, workshy Orlick informs us that 'on working-days [he] would come slouching from his hermitage, with his hands in his pockets and his dinner loosely tied in a bundle round his neck and dangling on his back'. The drowned Compeyson ends up 'so horribly disfigured that he was only recognisable by the contents of his pockets' (Dickens 1993, 445). Bentley Drummle is also characterised by the hands in pockets posture; and pockets are also implicated in the business of financial speculation, or the pseudo-industrious indolence enacted by Herbert Pocket:

> "I think I shall trade, also," said he, putting his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, "to the West Indies, for sugar, tobacco, and rum. Also to Ceylon, specially for elephants' tusks."

> "You will want a good many ships," said I.
>
> "A perfect fleet," said he.
>
> Quite overpowered by the magnificence of these transactions, I asked him where the ships he insured mostly traded to at present?
>
> "I haven't begun insuring yet," he replied. "I am looking about me."
>
> Somehow, that pursuit seemed more in keeping with Barnard's Inn. I said (in a tone of conviction), "Ah-h!"
>
> "Yes. I am in a counting-house, and looking about me."
>
> "Is a counting-house profitable?" I asked.
>
> "To – do you mean to the young fellow who's in it?" he asked, in reply.
>
> "Yes; to you."
>
> "Why, n-no: not to me." He said this with the air of one carefully reckoning up and striking a balance. "Not directly profitable. That is, it doesn't pay me anything, and I have to – keep myself." (Dickens 1993, 182-3)

Pockets are also the sign of the keeping of secrets, as enacted in Jaggers, who is described as putting his hand in his trousers pocket, 'as if the pocket were full of secrets' (Dickens 1993, 241). Jaggers's subordinate, Wemmick, has the same self-enclosing gesture: 'His personal recognition of each successive client was comprised in a nod, and in his settling his hat a little easier on his head with both hands, and then tightening the post-office, and putting his hands in his pockets'. Wemmick is even turned into a version of the horizontally-disposed deceased siblings:

> Mr. Jaggers stood, according to his wont, before the fire. Wemmick leaned back in his chair, staring at me, with his hands in the pockets of his trousers, and his pen put horizontally into the post. The two brutal casts, always inseparable in my mind from the official proceedings, seemed to be congestively considering whether they didn't smell fire at the present moment. (Dickens 1993, 406)

There is another inaugurating source for the chain of pockets. In a joke that is as absurdly physical as it is metaphysical, if a pocket is a positive space of absence about your person, Pip has to cope with the absence even of the positive space of the pocket. It is this absence of a pocket, or at least one large enough to conceal a crust of bread and a file, which requires Pip to secrete them down his own trouser-leg, thereby in a sense making a pocket of his entire person. Dickens cannot have believed his luck when he realised he could contrive a scene in which, hastily hiding the crust of bread while Joe momentarily looks away at the table, Pip is accused of having 'bolted' his food, meaning swallowed it down hastily without chewing (Dickens 1993, 52). The primary meaning of the simple but vastly adaptable word *bolt* seems to be that of a projectile, as in a crossbow bolt, which than is transferred to any sudden impulsive or convulsive movement, as in a lightning bolt, or one who sits bolt upright. But the word had come by the fourteenth century to be applied to the shackle or fetter applied to the leg of a captive, as it is in Magwitch's case. Pip's sense of guilt will come to be focussed in the sense of a load on his leg, as though he were fettered by his dishonesty. The two opposed meanings of bolting, of sudden, spasmodic movement and the constraint that prevents it, are drawn enigmatically together in the proverb about shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted, which is so often subject to awkward error, in which the speaker trips themselves up in speaking of bolting the door after the horse has bolted. In fact, for many centuries, the idea seems to have been, not that the horse has galloped away, but rather has been stolen: a MS of 1350 has "When the hors is stole, steke the stabull-dore' (Simpson and Speake 1982, 300).

Indeed, horses are caught up in the play of appearance and apparition in *Great Expectations*. Shoeing horses is of course a principal part of Joe Gargery's trade, but horses prove to be strangely phantasmal, or caught up in the process of fabulation throughout the novel. Partly in desperation, partly in mischievous revenge during his interrogation by his sister and Pumblechook, Pip conjures up a Gothicised Cinderella-scene involving Mrs Havisham sitting in a black velvet coach:

> "Where *was* this coach, in the name of gracious?" asked my sister.

> "In Miss Havisham's room." They stared again. "But there weren't any horses to it." I added this saving clause, in the moment of rejecting four richly caparisoned coursers which I had had wild thoughts of harnessing. (Dickens 1993, 69)

Pip tells us that, in the night before his departure for London, 'there were coaches in my broken sleep, going to wrong places instead of to London, and having in the traces, now dogs, now cats, now pigs, now men,—never horses'. The blending of the actual and the spectral in the idea of the horse returns in Magwitch's account of his great expectations for Pip:

> "I mustn't see my gentleman a footing it in the mire of the streets; there mustn't be no mud on his boots. My gentleman must have horses, Pip! Horses to ride, and horses to drive, and horses for his servant to ride and drive as well. Shall colonists have their horses (and blood 'uns, if you please, good Lord!) and not my London gentleman? No, no. We'll show 'em another pair of shoes than that, Pip; won't us?" (Dickens 1993, 330)

Forging

The ambivalence of the bolt is tied up with the inherence of opposites in the name of the building that adjoins the house that Pip occupies, and the occupation that constitutes the expectation in which he has been raised: the forge. The work of forging is associated early in the novel with the work of making links or ligatures, when Joe is set to work by the soldiers to repair a defective set of handcuffs, that are intended to constrain the escaped convict. Forging is the process of making things, but is more particularly the process of making them up, in the sense of pretending to make them, or joining them together. The two meanings existed in even parallel until the beginning of the seventeenth century, after which 'forgery' usually meant what it always seems to in Shakespeare's usage, the tautologous 'false forgeries' of *The Passionate Pilgrim* (Shakespeare 2007, 387). Indeed, since about the middle of the sixteenth century, the word forge, meaning to make, frame or construct, has rapidly narrowed its semantic range, retaining its primary meaning only in application to the specific kind of labour represented by the

blacksmith's occupation, to which the action of 'forgery' could no longer be applied. Thomas Heywood's reference in 1624 to a statue of Ceres holding in its right hand 'the image of Victorie most curiouslie forged', still implies honest design rather than deceit (Heywood 1624, 1.17), but this would not long continue after this date

Not only is the devil associated with idleness, proverbially making work for idle hands, one might reasonably surmise that the long career of the devil consists essentially in nothing but the personification of the imposture of work that the oxymoron of idle work might be: not idling, but working idly. Medieval doctrine indeed avoided the troubling limitation on the powers of God implied by the antagonism of the devil by insisting that the devil could only perform his work by permission of God, meaning that his power was not real but simulated: but this allows in the idea – and perhaps even necessitates it – that there may nevertheless be a power in simulation itself that may not be entirely governable. The 'observant and neat-fingered being' who tormented J.C. Maxwell with the possibility that it might be possible to perform work without the expenditure of any physical energy, simply by sliding a shutter to set fast-moving molecules apart from slower-moving molecules, is aptly known as Maxwell's demon, the name given to the conception by William Thomson (Knott 1911, 214). Maxwell's notion is a thought-experiment of a particularly knotted kind, since it in a sense asks if thought, of the kind involved in the thought experiment itself, could indeed perform action.

Vilém Flusser gives reason to think that deception might be at the heart of the idea of design, observing that, in English, design has connotations of cunning and deceit: to design is to have designs or be designing, just as to be an artist is to be artful, and there is artifice in every artefact. This meaning may have been slow to develop. Charles II praised Christopher Wren's design for St Paul's Cathedral when he saw it 1675: 'among divers Designs which have been presented to Us, We have particularly pitched upon one, as well because We found it very artificial, proper, and useful' (Wren, 1750, 281). As its pairing with propriety and utility makes clear, Charles II's praise of Wren's artifice does not yet imply artfulness. Flusser's Aristotelian example of design trickery is the lever, by means of which we might be able to lift ourselves to the stars: 'This

is the design that is the basis of all culture: to deceive nature by means of technology, to replace what is natural with what is artificial and build a machine out of which there comes a god who is ourselves' (Flusser 1999, 19).

Indeed, the figure of the blacksmith in folklore is characterised by the curious intimacy between virtue and vice, honesty and imposture, with the devil a frequent visitor in disguise to the blacksmith's forge. The fact that the devil is so frequently outwitted by the smith, for example in the story of St Dunstan nipping the nose of the devil with a pair of pliers, suggested that the power of guile is part of the operations of the forge. The smoky imagery of hell, which for the Mediterranean Dante was a place of excruciating frigor, has much of the blacksmith's forge about it. Dickens allows these diabolical associations in to Joe Gargery's forge, in the person of Orlick, who teases Pip 'that the Devil lived in a black corner of the forge, and that he knew the fiend very well: also that it was necessary to make up the fire, once in seven years, with a live boy, and that I might consider myself fuel' (Dickens 1993, 112). Following the recapture of Magwitch, it is assumed that the convict has come down the chimney to steal a pie and Joe's file, though it has in fact been his temporary confederate Pip. The devil is invoked when Pip's desperate, defiant inventions about what has happened in Miss Havisham's house are solemn-comically reproved by Joe:

> "There's one thing you may be sure of, Pip," said Joe, after some rumination, "namely, that lies is lies. Howsever they come, they didn't ought to come, and they come from the father of lies, and work round to the same. Don't you tell no more of 'em, Pip. *That* ain't the way to get out of being common, old chap." (Dickens 1993, 71)

The Möbius strip twisted by Dickens's own confabulation with the first-person narrative of Pip makes it clear that, indeed, the act of writing, though it begins with A and works through to Z, is precisely the means of becoming uncommon.

Dickens takes care to remind us of the deceitful action of forgery throughout *Great Expectations*. The young Pip is told that ' "People are put in the Hulks because they murder, and because they rob, and forge, and do all sorts of bad" ' (Dickens 1993, 15). As a young

man in London, Jaggers's clerk Wemmick described the career of one of the criminals of whom he keeps a bust:

> "He forged wills, this blade did, if he didn't also put the supposed testators to sleep too. You were a gentlemanly Cove, though" (Mr. Wemmick was again apostrophising), "and you said you could write Greek. Yah, Bounceable! What a liar you were. I never met such a liar as you!" (Dickens 1993, 200)

Magwitch describes the speciality of his criminal partner Compeyson in similar terms: ' "Compeyson's business was the swindling, handwriting forging, stolen bank-note passing, and such-like. … He'd no more heart than a iron file, he was as cold as death, and he had the head of the Devil afore mentioned" '(Dickens 1993, 346).

Dickens makes the link between authentic and deceitful manufacture difficult to avoid noticing, and many have indeed taken careful note of it, among them Mark Osteen who, in an essay on James Joyce's debt to *Great Expectations*, writes:

> it is clear that although it ostensibly contrasts the forge of Joe Gargery to the forgeries of Compeyson /Magwitch/ Pumblechook/Pip, the novel actually chains them together by implying that the very nature of "expectations" – that is, the ability to imagine and fabricate new selves – welds together "true" and "false" identities, blurs "real" and "fabulous" fathers, and requires our collusion in dubiously authorized creations. We are left with the sense that, in *Great Expectations*, writing is inevitably a brand of forging. (Osteen 2003, 173)

Joe Gargery's account of his own exercise in monumental composition leaves us in no doubt as to the attention Dickens hopes we will pay to the meanings of honest and dishonest forging:

> "I made it," said Joe, "my own self. I made it in a moment. It was like striking out a horseshoe complete, in a single blow. I never was so much surprised in all my life – couldn't credit my own ed – to tell you the truth, hardly believed it *were* my own ed." (Dickens 1993, 48)

The song 'Old Clem' is caught up in this rhyme between the framing of poetic measure and the forging of metal. The song 'that imitated the measure of beating upon iron' is sung in the forge, awkwardly and deliberately out of time by Orlick, and also sung by Pip to Estella and Miss Havisham, who strangely catch the contagion of the song, as though in parody of the trade of fabrication they are engaged in:

> I was surprised into crooning this ditty as I pushed her over the floor. It happened so to catch her fancy that, she took it up in a low brooding voice as if she were singing in her sleep. After that, it became customary with us to have it as we moved about, and Estella would often join in; though the whole strain was so subdued, even when there were three of us, that it made less noise in the grim old house than the lightest breath of wind. (Dickens 1993, 96)

The open metonymic chain of hands, pockets, bread, bolts, cuffs, files, sticks, hammers, pens, papers, handkerchiefs, snaps together in the return of Magwitch, whom Pip instantly recognises: 'No need to take a file from his pocket and show it to me; no need to take the handkerchief from his neck and twist it round his head'. A file meant a rogue or rascal from 1300, and, in seventeenth-century canting slang, a pickpocket. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens has Dodger use the word to mean somebody artful or cunning, in referring to 'them two old files as was on the bench' We need not assume that Dickens knew anything of the links surmised by the OED between Old Germanic *fihlâ and 'the Aryan *pink*, nasalized form of the root *peik*, to which the primary sense 'to scratch, mark' is assigned; compare Old Church Slavonic *pisati* to write, Latin *pingĕre* to point', but the rhyme between scratching, abrading, engraving and pointing seems sufficiently at work in *Great Expectations*. Not to need to be spoken out loud. The closeness of *file* to French *fil*, thread suggested a link to the thread or course of a story: the OED gives as an example of this usage Shletton's 1612 translation of Don Quixote, which includes the phrase 'You must promise me that you will not interrupt the File of my doleful Narration'. From the idea of a thread or wire on which documents could be suspended derives the idea of a file of documents and in extended usages in publishing, computing, and the sciences of information.

Blacking Factory

The struggle from which Dickens makes his own living is that between fiction and manufacture. Though work is a recurrent theme throughout Dickens's writing, in no other novel is the process whereby Dickens is making his own living acted out in such close parallel to the events of the novel. In mid-April 1861, when he was embarking on the final stage of writing the novel, Dickens wrote to Forster of 'the general turn and tone of the working out and winding up', concluding 'All the iron is in the fire, and I have "only" to beat it out' (Slater 2009, 493)

Dickens allows himself a knockabout but poignant comic scene of Joe the blacksmith engaged in the labour of writing, a scene that seems almost to be a dramatisation of the near identity of the words *handwriting* and *manufacture*:

> At my own writing-table, pushed into a corner and cumbered with little bottles, Joe now sat down to his great work, first choosing a pen from the pen-tray as if it were a chest of large tools, and tucking up his sleeves as if he were going to wield a crowbar or sledge-hammer. It was necessary for Joe to hold on heavily to the table with his left elbow, and to get his right leg well out behind him, before he could begin, and when he did begin, he made every down-stroke so slowly that it might have been six feet long, while at every up-stroke I could hear his pen spluttering extensively. He had a curious idea that the inkstand was on the side of him where it was not, and constantly dipped his pen into space, and seemed quite satisfied with the result. (Dickens 1993, 460-1)

Working has associations throughout *Great Expectations* of mechanical operations, proceeding as it were automatically. Perhaps the most brilliant of these suggestions is the sound that Magwitch makes in his throat: 'Something clicked in his throat, as if10 he had works in him like a clock, and was going to strike' (Dickens 1993, 19). The striking is suggestive of a kind of clockwork, in a sense that will be transferred to the workings of the book itself we hold in our as-it-were hands. Dickens encourages us at various points to see the working out of his plot as a similar process, at once contrived and mechanical. This is perhaps most emphatically the case in the comparison that Pip draws between

the shattering of his hopes and the elaborately murderous stratagem of a sultan 'in the Eastern story':

> In the Eastern story, the heavy slab that was to fall on the bed of state in the flush of conquest was slowly wrought out of the quarry, the tunnel for the rope to hold it in its place was slowly carried through the leagues of rock, the slab was slowly raised and fitted in the roof, the rope was rove to it and slowly taken through the miles of hollow to the great iron ring. All being made ready with much labour, and the hour come, the sultan was aroused in the dead of the night, and the sharpened axe that was to sever the rope from the great iron ring was put into his hand, and he struck with it, and the rope parted and rushed away, and the ceiling fell. So, in my case; all the work, near and afar, that tended to the end, had been accomplished; and in an instant the blow was struck, and the roof of my stronghold dropped upon me. (Dickens 1993, 309-10)

Timothy A. Spurgin remarks that 'By emphasizing the deliberation and care with which the sultan's doom was "wrought," Dickens reminds his eager readers of "all the work, near and afar," that he has invested in *Great Expectations*' (Spurgin 1998, 199). But among Dickens's contrivances is the reflexivity he introduces into the story he remembered from 'The History of Mahoud' in James Ridley's *Tales of the Genii* (1764). As Stanley Friedman observed, where Ridley's narrative involves a fiendish device to murder two enchanters who have conspired against the vizier Horam, but Dickens makes the contrivance an elaborate deception practised by Pip on himself (Friedman 1989, 217). In being permitted or compelled to participate in the working out of Pip's self-understanding, the reader, any reader, is compelled to flick or click through the gearings of Dickens's plot.

A final link in the chain of these substitutions for actual chains is provided by a little joke about his own upbringing that Dickens includes when Joe Gargery arrives in London to visit Pip and is asked whether he has had time to see anything of the city:

> "Why, yes, Sir," said Joe, "me and Wopsle went off straight to look at the Blacking Ware'us. But we didn't find that it come up to its likeness in the red bills at the shop doors; which I

> meantersay," added Joe, in an explanatory manner, "as it is there drawd too architectooralooral." (Dickens 1993, 222)

In fact, this is not the mythical blacking factory owned by Jonathan Warren, which represented for the young Dickens the death of all his hopes of making a fine and eminent living for himself. That establishment was a rat-infested building at Hungerford Stairs, while Joe has been to visit the rather grander establishment owned by Robert Warren in the Strand, with whom Dickens's employer had what John Forster described as 'a rivalry … carried to wonderful extremes in the way of advertisement' (Forster 1872-4, 1.50). Dickens records having to cross to the other side of the Strand when he passed the latter establishment to avoid inhaling the pungent smell of the glue applied to the corks (Forster 1872-4, 1.49-50). Once again, the writer's craft is associated with a certain self-disguising as well as self-betraying guile. A blacking warehouse might aptly be regarded as a parodic, parergic designation of the writer's trade, equivalent to Chesterton's 'huge factory of fiction'. Readers would not be in a position fully to appreciate Dickens's joke until the appearance of the short retrospect of Dickens's childhood in the first volume of John Forster's biography in 1872, which concludes with the words 'I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am' (Forster 1872-4, 1.49).

Work is a serious affair. Indeed, the most serious thing about work may be that it is a kind of ultimate test of seriousness itself. Walter Houghton's discussion of the Victorian gospel of work is part of his chapter on 'Earnestness', which is nowadays not the sort of topic that people are intellectually disposed or equipped to count as serious. But it seems likely that both religion and work themselves are best, or most absorbingly, understood as earnests – pledges or place-holders – of the importance of being earnest. Work is important, of course, because it appears to get things done in the way that is necessary to sustain very large numbers of human beings in the ways they take it for granted that it is important they are sustained. As one would expect, academic work on work in universities is concentrated in broad-daylight, sobersides subjects like physics, politics, economics, social history and, latterly, the data studies that seem destined greyly and grindingly to pervade the field of academic enquiry. But the topic of work is more properly the province of subjects equipped to pay attention to

faith-operations, and the importance accorded to forms of importance, which is to say literature, philosophy and whatever other kinds of enquiry might make it their business to make sense of the workings of collective psychopathology: or might sometimes be able to throw light on that phantasmal fusion of the thermodynamic and the thaumaturgic we should name thaumodynamics.

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