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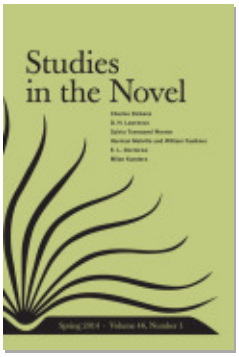
Studies in the Novel, Volume 46, Number 1, Spring 2014, pp. 1-19 (Article)



Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: 10.1353/sdn.2014.0026

Studies in the Novel ISSN 0039-3827
Vol. 46 No. 1 (Spring), 2014 Pages 1–19

SLEEP AND SLEEP-WATCHING IN DICKENS: THE CASE OF *BARNABY RUDGE*

MICHAEL GREANEY

When William Powell Frith unveiled his portrait of Charles Dickens at the Royal Academy in May 1859, his fellow artist Edwin Landseer was taken aback by the sense of uncanny wakefulness that the author's image seems to radiate: "I wish he looked less eager and busy, and not so much out of himself, or beyond himself. I should like to catch him asleep and quiet now and then" (Forster 162). But the alternative portrait that Landseer sketches in his mind's eye, in which the preternaturally wakeful novelist would be restored by sleep to the proper confines of his body, seems almost unthinkable. A lifelong insomniac and hyperactive nocturnal *flâneur*, Dickens is the last novelist you would expect to find "asleep and quiet." What is more, Dickens understands nights spent "glaringly, persistently, and obstinately, broad awake" ("Lying Awake" 89) to be among the formative conditions of possibility of his writing. It is with a certain rueful exuberance that in such essays as "Lying Awake" and "Night Walks" he becomes a founding member of the writer-as-insomniac school of modern literature, a school whose illustrious alumni include Proust, Kafka, and Nabokov, all of whom are grimly happy to trade the collective mediocrity of slumber for solitary privileges of high literary style.[1] One of those privileges is the vantage point that insomnia gives the writer on the sleep of others. Somnolent bodies are everywhere in Dickens, simultaneously taunting the author with glimpses of the restful state from which he is excluded and flattering him with confirmation of his tenaciously unbroken sentience.

Critics have had relatively little to say about Dickens's quirky obsession with sleeping bodies.[2] It took a scientist, the neurologist J. E. Cosnett, to notice that Dickens is a systematic "Observer of Sleep and its Disorders" whose evocations of human slumber are remarkable for their physiological vividness and accuracy. Cosnett treats Dickens's fiction as a veritable sleep laboratory in which all the clinical symptoms of disturbed slumber—hypnic jerks, restless leg syndrome, sleep paralysis, obstructive sleep apnea—are exhibited by his

somnolent characters several decades before the discourse of modern sleep medicine began to take shape. Of course when Dickens observes sleep and its disorders he does so with a decidedly unscientific emphasis on what is funny rather than what is empirically observable or measurable in the sleeping body. Exemplary in this regard is the heroically somnolent Joe, the so-called "Fat Boy" in *The Pickwick Papers*, a kind of narcoleptic anti-Dickens who marks his entrance into the novel by falling asleep seven times in as many pages (46-52). Joe typifies Dickens's sense of sleep as an affair of farcical nontranscendence in which our higher faculties submit, bumblingly and bathetically, to the primitive needs of our bodies. The comedy lies not simply in the banal triumph of the body over the mind, but in what you might call the unexpected social life of the sleeper, the idiosyncratic social presence that we may continue to have in our own psychological absence. The mysterious psychological vanishing-act of sleep has long puzzled philosophers, but the sleeper is still undeniably *there*, stranded at the "complicated cross-roads of choke and snore" ("Night Walks" 134), where s/he is dumbly available for inspection by a writer who is no respecter of the privacy of slumber—and there for the taking as a potential object of laughter or figure of fun.

Typical of Dickens's sense of the comic possibilities of sleep is his satirical *jeu d'esprit* "Snoring for the Million," which appeared in the *Examiner* in December 1842. A parody of the government's "Singing for the Million" initiative of the 1840s, "Snoring for the Million" sets out detailed recommendations for a nationwide program in which the British people would be systematically educated in the art of sleeping. Sleep, Dickens proposes, will be taught by experts in "hypnology"—his facetious term for the art of inducing sleep without recourse to mesmerism or narcotics—based at a central "school of Snoring for the Million" that will operate six days per week (with Sunday as a rest day) to impart sleeping skills to everyone from establishment grandees to the affluent middle classes to impoverished laborers and artisans. In a sleeping Britain, he triumphantly concludes, "there will be forgetfulness for those who have nothing, and undisturbed enjoyment for those who have everything" (55). The joke is obvious enough, though no less effective for that. An academy for sleep is a self-evidently ludicrous proposition because sleep is the least specialized thing that we do: it requires no expertise, no application, no practice. For these very reasons, it is conventional to idealize sleep as a democratizing force that brings kings and beggars together on the same plane of creaturely existence. But the sleep ironically prescribed by Dickens in "Snoring for the Million" is anything but egalitarian: it will preserve cultural hierarchies by draping a blanket of false consciousness across the social and economic divisions of Victorian Britain. Clearly, the purpose of his essay is to function as a satirical wake-up call about those very divisions: Dickens is writing "against" sleep in the name of political awareness and social justice. But "Snoring for the Million" also provides Dickens—a writer with a more

than passing interest in mesmerism[3]—with the incidental pleasure of indulging in hypnological fantasy on a grand scale; it grants its author permission to dream of Britain as a sedated nation, a kingdom of sleep whose solitary waking citizen is the arch-hypnologist, Dickens himself.

The opportunities available to a hypnological novelist in a somnolent world are partly voyeuristic and partly comic. A world fuddled in its sleep is one that can't return the sleep-watching gaze that pores so intently over Dickens's characters, a gaze that has a sometimes affectionate and sometimes cruel sense of the unconsciously comic qualities of the sleeping body. Nowhere are the operations of this comically masterful gaze more conspicuous than in *Barnaby Rudge*, a novel whose extraordinarily sustained attention to sleep and sleepers, though it has gone largely unnoticed by readers, makes it a primary exhibit in any discussion of Dickens's credentials as a hypnological author. In tracing the representations of sleep in this novel, I want to pursue two parallel lines of argument. First, I want to offer a new reading of *Barnaby Rudge* as a novel in which sleep, especially the sleep of servants, is an object of narrative comedy, visual mastery, perceptual uncertainty, and political anxiety. My focus on the masterful practice of sleep-watching is particularly designed to highlight the importance of master–servant relations in a novel that has so often been approached from a psychoanalytic perspective as a study of father–son relations.[4] Second, I want to offer this new reading as the opening move in a larger inquiry into surprisingly under-explored territory: the politics and poetics of somnolence in the literary career of an irrepressibly counter-soporific stylist who was nevertheless a connoisseur of sleep in all its varieties.

The comedy of sleep in Dickens is a comedy of bodies, or, rather, a comedy of re-embodiment. In falling asleep, as our higher faculties are temporarily but irresistibly suspended, we find ourselves downgraded from active sentience to a condition of dumb embodiedness. Dickens often represents this fall from consciousness into oblivion as a process of temporary species-reassignment. Quilp, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, sleeps "round as a hedgehog" (375) on his desk, whilst somnolent customers in a Paris wine-shop in *A Tale of Two Cities* resemble "slumbering bears or dogs" (282). Clearly, the dumb creatureliness of sleep is not likely to appeal to those Dickens characters who stake everything on dignity and upright self-possession. For them, the fall of sleep is an unavoidable but outrageously demeaning nightly pratfall. In *Barnaby Rudge*, when the Vardens' humorless maidservant Miss Miggs *almost* falls asleep in front of her employers, she provides us with a two-page set-piece of physical comedy as her earnestly perpendicular self tilts, dangerously but laughably, on its axis from vertical to horizontal. The sleep that threatens to upend her is a force that makes her body do the satirist's work for him: drooping "lower—lower—lower" (406) she involuntarily travesties the prim formalities of her official waking identity. As Miggs flounders in her pantomime of compromised dignity, we might recall Vladimir Nabokov's famous allegation that sleep is

"moronic" (73)—which is to say that for Nabokov we become flaccid, second-rate versions of ourselves in our sleep. For Miggs, it is the fear of *looking* moronic in sleep that makes her futile battle to stay awake such a choice comic spectacle. What is more, it is a spectacle that we are privileged to witness from the point of view of her wide-awake employers. Here and elsewhere in his fiction, Dickens grants us a master's-eye-view of sleepy servants whose helplessness in the face of slumber seems to naturalize their social station as inescapably "lower—lower—lower" than that of their masterfully wakeful employers.

And Miggs has every reason to harbor anxieties about the spectacle of her sleep, since she is by no means the only character in *Barnaby Rudge* whose slumber is a source of comedy. The landlord of the Black Lion inn, a character so minor that he hardly qualifies as a character, puts in an appearance in this novel only so that we may learn that his "faculties were utterly drowned and washed away, except the one great faculty of sleep, which he retained in surprising perfection" (249). The notion of sleep as a faculty—as something we *do*, as opposed to a negative state in which there is no doing and no doer—this notion is floated here only whimsically; it is a joke, not a serious proposition. This haplessly self-marginalizing publican is a bit of a joke too. With nothing to contribute to *Barnaby Rudge* other than the comic spectacle of his drunken somnolence (sleep is often a Dickensian code-word for inebriation), he has managed to sleep through his opportunity to become a named character with a speaking part in a Dickens novel.

But what kind of positions can sleepers hope to occupy in Dickensian narrative other than as peripheral figures of fun? Does sleep always represent a state of servitude, marginality, or narrative disenfranchisement? In *The Pickwick Papers*, disenfranchisement is the literal fate of the fourteen constituents who sleep through the Eatanswill by-election after reportedly having their brandy and water dosed with laudanum (151-52). This obscure political scandal raises the question of a Dickensian politics of sleep in notably literal terms, but we must turn to *Barnaby Rudge* for a more sustained engagement with issues of sleep, power, and powerlessness. To read this novel as, in some important sense, a novel about sleep and its politics is, of course, quite contrary both to the text's official sense of its own priorities and to its reception by readers and critics since its publication in 1840–1841. Subtitled *A Tale of the Riots of 'Eighty*, it is a novel of violent civic unrest, depicting the anti-Catholic "Gordon Riots" that swept through London in early June 1780. It is also a riotous novel, animated by the violent collective energies of the mob that surges so destructively through its pages, setting London ablaze, flooding into the corridors of power, and spilling beyond the city limits in an orgy of murderous mayhem evoked with such gusto that some critics have suspected Dickens's imaginative affiliations to be very much "on the side of the rioters" (Carey 13). What is more, it is also a Gothic whodunit, the story of a crime that

causes sleepless nights some two decades after its perpetration, and the story of a criminal—Rudge *père*, the steward who murdered his master, the landowner Rueben Haredale—whose guilt excludes him from the "happy forgetfulness" of sleep (150).

On the face of it, then, the sleep that matters in *Barnaby Rudge* is the sleep that *doesn't* happen—the sleep that is lost to the pangs of a murderer's guilt, sacrificed to round-the-clock vigilance, or brutally shattered by civic unrest. And it is certainly true that the sleep that can longer be slept—the sleep that modernity has cancelled—becomes a major element of the novel's symbolic language. But genuine physical acts of slumber remain vitally important too. For all its turbulent energies and overdetermined insomnia, the novel is startlingly rich in images of physical somnolence and continually lingers over its characters in their sleep (though not, on the whole, in their beds—Dickens, as Northrop Frye observes, rarely intrudes on the "bedroom and bathroom world of ordinary privacy" [235]). Sprawled as they are across the landscape of the narrative—in parlors, fields, inns, barns, fireside nooks, stables, lanes, haystacks, and prison cells—the sleepers of *Barnaby Rudge* are a disarmingly public bunch. They also occupy prominent positions in the original illustrations by Hablot Browne and George Cattermole that accompanied installments of the novel in *Master Humphrey's Clock*, which significantly include two representations of the sleep of Hugh, the novel's most physically intimidating rioter.

But why would a novel of riot find so much time to contemplate the spectacle of sleep? One ready answer to this question is that sleep is the opposite of riot. Being asleep is just about the most law-abiding thing that we can do: slumber, a defenseless and eminently breakable state, seems to function in the novel as shorthand for everything that riot destroys. Evocations of sleep and images of sleepers let the text dramatize mob violence in all its brutal and gratuitous disruptiveness as an onslaught on the placid, defenseless equilibrium of everyday life before the riots. Modernity in *Barnaby Rudge* is apprehended as a violent awakening from an almost prehistoric slumber into a generalized insomnia of which the Gordon Riots, which ominously prefigure not only revolutionary violence in France but also the mass political protests of Dickens's own time, are but one marker.[5] Nor does Dickens especially mourn or idealize the vanishing world of cultural torpor evoked by the early chapters of this novel. If pre-riot life is defined primarily by its sleepiness then perhaps we shouldn't be surprised by its fragility, nor by its lack of readiness for dealing with the discontent that may quietly ferment while society slumbers.

Dickens's robustly unsentimental view of sleep is principally evident in his portrait of John Willet, the stubbornly somnolent landlord of the Maypole inn in Chigwell. Willet is a virtuoso sleeper, a kind of English Rip van Winkle: he smokes in his sleep, sleeps with his eyes open, and somehow manages to synchronize his naps with the arrival of the stage-coach. Sleep is his reaction

both to good news (such as that of his son's wedding) and to bad news (he falls into a catatonic state when the Maypole is vandalized); in fact, sleep is his default reaction to newness, to novelty itself. The unquenchable appetite for oblivion that Willet displays throughout this novel illustrates with exaggerated comic perfection Freud's observation that "[t]he state of sleep does not wish to know anything of the external world; it takes no interest in reality" (234). Sleep is the primary symptom of Willet's sublime incuriosity about anything other than the picturesque pre-industrial traditions commemorated by his crazily ramshackle sixteenth-century inn, a structure that itself appears to be "nodding in its sleep" (11), as though in sympathy with its proprietor's somnolent body language. Indeed, we may take its "nodding" as semaphoring Willet's listless acquiescence in the status quo—a nod of assent in whatever happens to be happening in the wider world, so long as it doesn't interfere with his sleep.

Willet presides drowsily over the early chapters of *Barnaby Rudge* as a comic personification of the prehistoric sleepiness of eighteenth-century rural England. Famously, and controversially, the novel finds a new and vigorous lease of life when it moves decisively away from Willet's sleepy fiefdom to chart the outbreak of mob violence in central London. Critical debates on *Barnaby Rudge* frequently revolve around the "problem" of this transition and the awkwardly broken-backed narrative structure that it produces. Ever since John Forster went on record with his misgivings about Dickens's management of the plot, critics have wrangled over the question of whether *Barnaby Rudge* successfully negotiates the transition between the Gothic family saga that seems to be unfolding in Chigwell and the historical and political panorama that opens up when the focus shifts to London. A curious, unnarrated five-year interval between chapters 32 and 33 marks this transition, as though the novel itself has slept for half a decade and woken up as a different kind of text. Interpretations of this hole in the storyline vary notably. Forster, rather back-handedly, compliments Dickens for spinning a tale whose compelling onward momentum does enough to distract us from some clumsy gear-shifts along the way (220-21). A more generous reader, on the other hand, might want to ask whether the novel is in some sense *about* the rupture in its own narrative fabric, which is a rupture between two distinctive chronotopes—the cozy neighborhood and the unsleeping modern city—that are formally differentiated by the gap in the storyline but violently reunited when the rioters pour into the Maypole and its environs. For James R. Kincaid, Willet and his somnolent time-warp of a pub embody regressive fantasies of impregnable coziness that are shattered by a mob of which Dickens has effectively become an honorary member and whose violence represents a "symbolic attack on the very desire for snugness" (107). The novel thus bridges the chasm in its narrative, but it needs the sleepless energies of the mob to do so.

Sleep in *Barnaby Rudge* is thus a marker of the kinds of cultural space—the timeless backwaters of pre-industrial England—that modernity obliterates.

Mob violence, for Dickens, is not simply a terrible aberration but a frenzied rehearsal of the relentless urban expansion that will have annexed sleepy Chigwell to the insomniac modern metropolis between the time of the novel's setting and the time of its publication. The fields in which its titular hero once roamed and slept will have become the houses, streets, and pavements of the sleepless city of which Barnaby's insomniac creator was such an exemplarily restless inhabitant.

The sleep-destroying fires that spread through London and beyond in *Barnaby Rudge* testify to the uncontainable energies of the modern metropolis. Dickens's London is a combustible city in which would-be sleepers are gripped by performance anxiety. In *David Copperfield*, Betsy Trotwood finds it virtually impossible to sleep in London, so convinced is she that the place is liable to go up in smoke at any moment. Imagery of fire is no less prevalent in *Barnaby Rudge*, as John Willet seems to intuit when he encourages his son to visit Christopher Wren's Monument to the Great Fire, which razed the medieval quarter of the city to the ground in 1666 (112). Itself a literary monument to London fires past, present and yet-to-come, *Barnaby Rudge* exhibits a dual sense of fire as both destructive of sleep and productive of the modern cultural space of the city and the insomniac subjectivities that haunt it day and night. At the height of the riots, we get to eavesdrop on the frantic thoughts of the old vintner who keeps vigil at Geoffrey Haredale's bedside, where he is "unable even to doze…too much disturbed by his own fears; by the cries of the mob, the light of the fires, and the firing of the soldiers" (532). A feverish poetry jangles through the fearful vintner's thoughts, an impromptu anti-lullaby of fears and fires and cries whose sing-song paranoia safeguards him from the gravest danger of all: the defenselessness of sleep in a burning city. When the mind ignites with this kind of anxious poetry, we begin to glimpse what Clark calls the "bad infinity" (37 n.28) of Dickensian insomnia, the ordeal of permanent wakefulness and historical simultaneity in a city that can never fully extinguish itself in slumber.

The vintner's bedside vigil is one of many scenes in *Barnaby Rudge* where Dickens juxtaposes watchfulness with somnolent oblivion. Sleepers in this novel are nearly always accompanied by sleep-watchers, whether they be vigilant companions, droll spectators, or stealthy voyeurs. The novel alerts us, with a certain casual pointedness, to the importance of the figure of the watched sleeper in chapter 33, when storms batter Chigwell on a bitter winter night and local residents huddle together to swap ghost stories and spine-tingling tales, including ones about people who have "gone to sleep in old churches and being overlooked had found themselves alone there at the dead hour of the night" (264). We can take the primary sense of "overlooked" in this sentence to be "carelessly missed" or "inadvertently disregarded," but we shouldn't overlook the possibility of taking "overlook" to indicate "looked-over" or intently supervised. The novel certainly gives us strong grounds for

reading the sentence against the grain in this way, since its scenes of sleep-watching encourage us to suspect that the figure of the overlooked sleeper, closely observed but paradoxically unnoticed and dangerously underestimated, may qualify as the unsung hero in its drama of frantic sleeplessness.

It would certainly be difficult to imagine a text that provides more ample corroboration than *Barnaby Rudge* of Hamlet's assertion that "some must watch while some must sleep." It is a novel in which Dickens looks most intently at *looked-at* sleeping bodies, continually asking what the outside world wants from those who want nothing from it: Haredale is watched over in his sleep by the vintner; Hugh by the regulars at the Maypole, by his father Sir John Chester in the latter's house, and by his cellmate Ned Dennis in Newgate prison; Rudge senior by Stagg in his cellar; and Barnaby himself by his parents in his mother's house. In his repeated staging of sleep-watching scenes, Dickens assesses the claims that sleepers might have on our attention, and the pleasure or power that we might enjoy at their expense, and he makes this give-and-take between those who watch and those who sleep a principle by which currents of power and meaning are circulated in *Barnaby Rudge*.

Barnaby's hat, with its array of peacock feathers, provides a quirkily eye-catching mascot for this novel of sleeping and watching. The hat signifies the monstrous insomnia of the hundred-eyed Argus of myth, but also recalls the capacity of that monster to fall comprehensively and disastrously asleep under the spell of Hermes. Just as the Argus encompasses contradictory extremes of wakefulness and slumber, so too does Dickens's hero. Barnaby embodies madcap irrepressibility—he never goes to bed—but in his sublime naiveté, he "sees" precious little of the truth of his own life-story: Barnaby Rudge would be the worst possible person to ask for an account of the plot of *Barnaby Rudge*. The novel's hero is in a sense always-already asleep, happy to delegate the responsibilities of sentience to another inhumanly and masterfully watchful creature, his pet raven Grip. "He's the master, and I'm the man…Him, who never goes to sleep, or so much as winks!" (62). Barnaby proudly claims of Grip: "He watches all the time I sleep" (143). Pleasure rather than paranoia is Barnaby's response to the idea of being watched in his sleep because, uniquely in this novel of hidden agendas, family secrets, and artful duplicity, he has absolutely nothing to hide.

Sleep-watching, in Dickens, provides us with intimate access to characters when they are not "in character," that is, when they are incapable of dissembling or striking a pose. His fiction shares with Freudian psychoanalysis the perception of sleep as an "undressing" of the mind, a state of uncensorable self-disclosure (222). Where Dickens parts company from psychoanalytic thought is in his emphasis on the unguarded body language of slumber rather than on the involuntary self-revelations encoded in the riddles of the dreaming mind. Irrepressibly candid, the body language of Dickensian slumber seems to be incapable of telling anything but the truth that has been obscured by

circumstance or camouflaged by deliberative, premeditated waking behavior. We have seen that there is a vein of facetious scopophilia in Dickens's comic scrutiny of the hapless indispositions of sleep, but there is redemptive comedy, too, in those moments where hidden traits of kindness and decency become visible in the sleeper. Rose Maylie's fears about Oliver Twist's criminality are instantly dispelled when she glimpses his angelic sleeping countenance (230-31). A humane side to the oppressively saturnine Paul Dombey is discerned for the very first time by his daughter Florence when she steals into his bedroom while he dozes (643-44). Similarly, Little Nell sees a core of innocent kindness in her criminally feckless grandfather while he sleeps (235). In these cases of adult–child sleep-watching, the self disclosed in and by sleep is not a second-rate self at all but a manifestation of what Matthew Arnold calls the "best self," a prelapsarian subjectivity achieved not through the addition of culture, as Arnold supposed, but through its significant absence in the pure, uncultivated state of slumber. Even Ebenezer Scrooge, the frostily intimidating master of the counting-house, is humanized by this redemptive state, restored to moral health by the three ghosts who conspire to renew all the sympathetic attachments that he has so conscientiously sundered in his waking life.

But Dickensian sleep can also disclose a worst self. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the sight of Quilp virtually breaking through the confines of his own sleep—"hanging so far out of bed that he almost seemed to be standing on his head…gasping and growling with his mouth wide open and the whites (or rather the dirty yellows) of his eyes distinctly visible" (102)—is one that confirms our instinctive verdict on his monstrous daytime behavior. Sleep represents neither innocence nor guilt in Dickens's eyes; rather, it is a medium in which one or the other will present itself for visual confirmation. Slumber thus functions as one of Dickens's favorite shortcuts to embodied truth, providing him with unambiguous physical corroboration of his moral perceptions of such nebulously inward matters as personality or character; it is a state in which inwardness is externalized, in which the body confesses all the secrets of its absentee host. Which is to say that Dickens—a writer whom nothing disgusts more than hypocrisy—attaches special value to sleep because he regards it as a state of nonperformative authenticity, a state in which we can only be ourselves. Embodied in the figure of the sleeper is a powerful Dickensian fantasy of irresistible readability, according to which we can glean all that we would wish to know about a given person simply by paying a visit to his or her bedside.

This fantasy of readability is, of course, also a fantasy of power. When we contemplate Dickens's sleeping characters, their loss of consciousness is our gain, because in their sleep we get to know them better than they know themselves. Sleepers can't return the sleep-watcher's gaze, they have no inkling of what goes on around them, and their oblivious passivity unresistingly confirms narrators, authors, and readers in their position of watchful mastery.

Unchallenged in their one-way optical relationship with sleep, Dickens's sleep-watchers thus bask in the "*fantasy of power over the body*" that Steven Connor associates with the hypnotist's gaze in the culture of Victorian mesmerism (16). Himself an enthusiastic amateur mesmerist, Dickens seems to have had a healthy fear of being looked at while asleep, and refused ever to let himself be mesmerized (Kaplan 65).

We have seen that the spectacle of Dickensian sleep easily—perhaps too easily—becomes an object of visual mastery, or even a spectator sport, as it does for the villagers who pelt Mr Pickwick with turnips, potatoes, and eggs after he falls drunkenly asleep in a wheelbarrow (234-35). But the games of cognitive one-upmanship between Dickensian watchers and sleepers are not always so farcically one-sided. Sleep in his fiction can be a posture of abject submission, supine candor, or good-natured passivity, but there are other, altogether less cooperative "styles" of Dickensian slumber. The sleep of Sir John Chester, the urbane villain of *Barnaby Rudge*, is improbably stylized: he sleeps with a smile (201), an expression so diligently practiced and expertly performed that it survives even the obliteration of waking consciousness in slumber. William Hazlitt once said that "[w]e are not hypocrites in our sleep" (20), but Chester proves a creepy exception to this rule. Hypocrisy as consistent as Chester's acquires its own bizarre kind of integrity, not to mention the power to resist the compulsory candor of Dickensian sleep. No sleep-watcher is present to witness Chester's slumber, but his bed still functions as a stage for the nightly performance of his emollient daytime persona.

To witness Chester's complacent mastery of his own slumber is to begin to appreciate why Barnaby has such an instinctive aversion to the artificiality of beds and bedrooms. Alone among the Dickens heroes who go through the ordeal of sleeping rough, Barnaby positively relishes sleeping outdoors: "I don't like bed" (146), he says, as though he recognizes that in bedrooms—especially the luxuriously upholstered bedrooms occupied by Chester—sleep and sleepers are a little too comfortably sequestered from authentic nature. Chester's sleeping quarters are sites of artifice, of well-groomed formality and even theatricality in which we witness not the "undressing of the mind" but the costume changes and redressings that maintain all the refined fakery of his waking behavior.

If there are times when Dickensian sleep doesn't tell the whole truth, there are others when it tells us truths we would rather not hear: the "worst self" that sleep discloses can be that of the watcher rather than the watched. The notion of sleep-watching as involuntary and unflattering self-revelation is one of the lessons that has been derived from critical work on the aesthetics of somnolence in the visual arts, notably in Leo Steinberg's work on the hundreds of drawings and paintings in which Picasso obsessively revisits scenes of watched sleep. Steinberg's analysis shows how the artist's sleep-watching scenes depart from conventional representations, in ancient and renaissance

art, of objectified sleepers caught napping by violent or lascivious intruders. The sleeper's self-contained repose, he argues, points up a deficiency in the waking state, which condemns Picasso's sleep-watchers to "the avid intake of experience and data, a restlessness which in its need to be continually feeding betrays incompleteness" (102).

Dickens's sleepers, like Picasso's, are often sublimely and provokingly indifferent to the obsessive attentions of their waking counterparts. The sleep of Uriah Heep, for example, has a positively mesmeric effect on David Copperfield: "There I saw him, lying on his back, with his legs extending to I don't know where, gurglings taking place in his throat, stoppages in his nose, and his mouth open like a post-office...I was attracted to him in very repulsion, and could not help wandering in and out every half-hour or so, and taking another look at him" (374). There is comedy, here, in the incredulous disgust of David's response to Heep's grotesque bodily quirks: the infinitely extendable limbs, the compellingly awful siren music of his orifices, and the post-office mouth betraying gormlessness on an institutional scale. There is also something just faintly obscene about the spectacle of Heep's sleeping body. In contemplating Heep's over-exposed intimacies, we may recall Nabokov's contention that sleeping in public is on a par with defecating in public. With its powerful oscillations between attraction and repulsion, this scene makes sleep the center of a Dickensian erotics of disgust—or rather self-disgust, since Heep is David's bad double, the rival, shadow, and despised alter ego who resurfaces with demoralizing, clockwork regularity throughout the novel, sketching his own rival *Bildungsroman* in the margins of the hero's official life-story. Even in his sleep Heep is busy playing *fort–da* with his host, reeling him in at regular intervals for another queasy once-over. The sleeper functions in this scene as an unconscious mesmerist, whilst the sleep-watcher has become a hypnotized insomniac, uncannily repetitive in his nocturnal behavior. For one desperately uncomfortable night, David seems to have become a minor character in an alternative version of the novel whose protagonist is Uriah Heep.

Heep's minor victory over David reveals that Dickensian sleep can do more than simply confirm marginal characters in their marginality; in some circumstances, it provides a means for secondary characters to gain a temporary ascendancy over central ones. Sleep may seem to represent a nonnegotiable limit to self-conscious agency, but that does not limit Dickens's characters—notably servants, underlings, and comparable bit-part players—from doing remarkable things *in* sleep and *with* sleep. Dickens's representations of "active" or oddly empowered sleepers may have been partly inspired by the work of the Glasgow physician and phrenologist Robert Macnish, whose anecdotal study *The Philosophy of Sleep* (1827) enjoyed considerable popular success in the period. David McAllister surmises that Dickens read Macnish's book in May or June 1837, and convincingly

argues for its influence on *Oliver Twist*—notably on Oliver's famously enigmatic waking dream of Fagin and Monks, which seems to have been inspired by Macnish's discussion of dreams that absorb ambient noise into their storylines. It seems fair to assume that the tremendous impact of *The Philosophy of Sleep* on Dickens, and on other Victorian readers, was at least partly connected with the fact that its scientific and medical content is often rather perfunctory. Outlandish sleep-related stories, including tales of sleep-walking, sleep-talking, sleep-preaching, sleep-riding, sleep-climbing, and sleep-fishing, receive pride of place in Macnish's narrative; indeed, *The Philosophy of Sleep* can be read as a proto-Dickensian text in which the figure of the sleeper features as a phenomenally versatile multi-tasker whose skills are in no way inhibited by the state of slumber.

Dickensian narratives of slumber often seem to operate on the Macnish-style hunch that sleep may entail not the cessation of waking behavior but its virtuoso continuation after dark. Sometimes his minor characters parlay quirky sleeping habits into bizarre talents: Sloppy's ability to sleep standing up becomes crucial to the exposure and humiliation of Silas Wegg in *Our Mutual Friend*, whilst Deputy Winks, the impish stone-throwing urchin in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, owes his pervasive and all-seeing presence to an ability to sleep with one eye open. The sleeping habits of both Sloppy and Deputy seem to qualify as examples of what Marcel Mauss calls "techniques of the body"—his catch-all term for pseudo-spontaneous, culturally conditioned "uses" of the human body, such as swimming or marching, that become naturalized through custom, practice, and repetition. Though his evidence for this claim is hardly overwhelming, Mauss also classes sleep as a "use" of the body rather than a spontaneous, natural bodily state. Whatever its limitations as an anthropological hypothesis, Mauss's perception of sleep as something we *do* resonates strikingly with Dickens's sense of sleep as a state that has a job to do—the naturalizing of power relations—even as it camouflages other kinds of work, other forms of agency that have no official sanction in the social worlds of his novels.

With the examples of Sloppy and Deputy in mind, we can return to Mr Wardle's servant in *The Pickwick Papers* and ask whether his sleep might also be classed as a technique of the body. Joe is probably literature's most famous narcoleptic, and it is customary to read his sleepiness medically. Indeed, an article of February 1851 in *Household Words* by Dr Thomas Stone cites Joe as an entirely realistic representation of excessive sleepiness. Alternatively, we may choose to read Joe's sleepiness symbolically: it makes him a definitively incompetent servant, the dozy antithesis of Pickwick's unflaggingly alert and supremely resourceful manservant, Sam Weller. But we can also potentially read this symbolism politically. Joe's sleep is like a subversive party trick: he discharges his duties with a kind of insolent minimalism, as though his default position is so profoundly off-duty that the very job of summoning him

from sleep becomes a repetitive chore for his master, who has no choice but to become his servant's factotum in the process.

The minor comic power struggles between Joe and his master reveal sleep to be one form in which Dickens can imagine disloyalty, insubordination, or subversion without assigning them a conscious or concerted political motivation. All of which makes Dickensian slumber intriguingly comparable to the pseudo-sleep of swooning or fainting that is as common in his writings as it is in much nineteenth-century fiction. Literary swooning is by no means an exclusively female occupation—Oliver Twist is notably given to periodic losses of consciousness—but female fainting is associated with a couple of rather tired patriarchal clichés in the literature of this period. The first is the assumption that fainting denotes psychological vulnerability and delicacy (an assumption to which Charlotte Brontë pays indirect tribute when Jane Eyre congratulates herself on having fainted on only two occasions in her life). The second is the suspicion that fainting is often an entirely phony display of attention-grabbing helplessness. In *Barnaby Rudge*, Gabriel Varden despairs of his wife's all-too-punctual fainting habits, whilst Pickwick, the irreproachable bachelor who gets into some terrible scrapes in the vicinity of female bodies, is nearly ruined by the litigation that is set in train when Mrs Bardell "faints" into his arms. The narrator of *Dombey and Son*, meanwhile, comments with arch exasperation on what he calls women's "freemasonry in fainting" (441). The Dickensian swoon, a bodily technique in which the subject performs sleep rather than being performed by it, is a performance that fools no one—but its effects have nothing to do with its plausibility. To "faint away," as the saying goes, is to open up an elsewhere in the here and now, disrupting a given social situation in such a way that it must reconstitute itself with the fainter either safely on the outside or repositioned as the center of attention that can only be benign and solicitous.

Those who swoon in Dickens usually aim to profit in some way from a histrionic performance of their own cultural, social, or economic helplessness, but such victories as they win are decidedly temporary. His scenes of swooning and fainting are comparable in some ways to those in which classrooms of schoolchildren sleep through their lessons or congregations doze through church services.[6] There is nothing bogus about these collective sleeps: they signify an entirely blameless human response to institutional authority at its most soporifically oppressive, a resistance that is achieved and expressed not through raised consciousness but through its collective absence in sleep. Resistance to patriarchal authority in Dickens is thinkable, it seems, only when it is divorced from thought—only when it takes the form of the unthinkingness of sleep, blackout, or swoon.

The idea of a subversive politics of sleep is one that plays around the edges of much Dickensian narrative. It comes closer to full articulation in *Barnaby Rudge*, which is haunted by the suspicion that sleep may not simply be the

benign antithesis or passive victim of mob violence but also in some ways its shadowy origin, a state of disreputable idleness and obscurely menacing torpor in which unknown destructive potentialities take shape. It is significant in this regard that the novel's rioter-in-chief, the Maypole's illiterate stable-hand Hugh, is initially defined by his relationship with sleep. Like the narcoleptic boy in *Pickwick*, he is a member of the serving classes who flits disconcertingly between active presence and somnolent absence. And like Barnaby he is fond of sleeping outdoors, though whereas Barnaby's *al fresco* naps exhibit his madcap personality in all its unguarded candor, Hugh is an altogether more devious kind of sleeper, one whose sleep, partly because it is often feigned, lays down a powerful challenge to the novel's many sleep-watchers.

Those who watch Hugh in his sleep are variously charmed, startled, and intimidated by what they see. Our first glance of his sleeping form is through the eyes of the regulars at the Maypole:

> The light that fell upon this slumbering form, showed it in all its muscular and handsome proportions. It was that of a young man, of a hale athletic figure, and a giant's strength, whose sunburnt face and swarthy throat, overgrown with jet black hair, might have served a painter for a model. Loosely attired, in the coarsest and roughest garb, with scraps of straw and hay—his usual bed—clinging here and there, and mingling with his uncombed locks, he had fallen asleep in a posture as careless as his dress. The negligence and disorder of the whole man, with something fierce and sullen in his features, gave him a picturesque appearance, that attracted the regards even of the Maypole customers who knew him well, and caused Long Parkes to say that Hugh looked more like a poaching rascal to-night than ever he had seen him yet. (96-97)

What do we learn about Hugh from this picture of his sleep? For Stigant and Widdowson, Hugh is "passive.…and strangely 'pure'" (17) in his sleep until his capacity for violence is activated by society in general and Chester in particular. Surely, however, the "negligence and disorder" of his sleeping body are premonitions of the ferocious enthusiasm with which he will pitch into the city-wide disorder of the riots? This scene of sleep-watching is not so much a representation of apolitical innocence, purity, and passivity as a preemptive restoration of order. Aestheticized in his sleep as a "picturesque" figure safe for popular consumption, Hugh offers a pleasingly harmless spectacle for the Maypole regulars, for whom the dozing stable-hand is nothing more than a reassuringly familiar local character, a somnolent creature of the farmyard—"I look upon him as a animal" (98), says John Willet—with an air of tolerable lawlessness about him. This is a picture of watched sleep that clearly tells us as much about the spectators as it does about the object of their gaze. Hugh can't read, but the Maypole crowd are satisfied that they can read him, and are happy to be charmed by the spectacle of his sleep. What these amateur connoisseurs can't see or read in their "model" is the potentially politicized Hugh who

reveals himself in the riots through his transformation of the Gordon slogan 'No Popery!' into "'No Property'" (305) —a declaration of self-ownership that implicitly shrugs off the proprietorial gaze to which the stable-hand has been subject in the Maypole.

The gaze of the Maypole regulars "frames" and places Hugh in the cozy fireside nook that they deem to be his natural habitat. Elsewhere in the novel he escapes that frame and is found sleeping in some altogether less picturesque contexts. After a day of rioting, Hugh sleeps with the mob whose bodies are sprawled through stables, outhouses, fields, lanes, haystacks, and brick kilns near their headquarters at the Boot inn.[7] If it is possible to sleep aggressively, then the rioters manage to do so, as they wallow "like some obscene animals, in their squalor and wickedness" (416). For Michasiw, the collective violence of *Barnaby Rudge* is a politicized manifestation of the death-drive, a means by which individual subjectivity can find the oblivion it secretly craves in the mindless collectivity of the mob. This last he defines, in psychoanalytic terms, as "an unconscious mass the basic end of which is the temporary, and the later the permanent, erasure of consciousness" (582). In Michasiw's terms, the unconscious goal of violence is the oblivion of sleep, but it seems possible to reverse this logic and ask whether the goal of sleep in *Barnaby Rudge* might be violence. After all, a sleeping mob is still a mob: its power to intimidate is by no means dispelled in sleep, and the capacity for sleep itself—especially the sleep of Hugh—to be intimidating is something that frequently subverts the customary Dickensian balance of power between sleepers and their watchers.

In his reading of Picasso, Steinberg observes that in the visual arts sleep is the "opportunity of the intruder" (99) *par excellence*, the state in which the self is at its most vulnerably open to the unscrupulous attentions of the waking world. Dickens has a comparable appreciation of the vulnerabilities of the sleeper, but there are some remarkable moments in his fiction where sleep itself is imagined as that which intrudes onto unsuspecting wakefulness. The sleeper-as-intruder model is established in *Barnaby Rudge* in the scene where Chester comes home to find Hugh snoring noisily on his staircase. Nothing could be more provokingly insouciant than to enter someone's house unannounced—and fall asleep. To make yourself at home in this way, with such an unquestioning sense of entitlement and nonchalant belonging, is to exhibit a kind of casualness that a casual visitor would never exhibit, one that undermines the official homeowner's sense of at-homeness. Chester's candlelit inspection of Hugh, in which he passes the light "across and across" (227) the sleeping face of his illegitimate son, is as nervily compulsive as David Copperfield's nocturnal scrutiny of Uriah Heep. Here, it is not a case of Hugh being caught napping but of Chester being captured *by* napping as he stumbles into the sleeper's booby-trapped personal space. When Chester recognizes himself in the sleeping face of a stranger, a son he didn't know

he had, Dickensian sleep has completed its journey from *heimlich* to *unheimlich*—which is of course no journey at all because, as Freud famously points out, the two terms are etymologically interchangeable. Though Hugh will in due course perform abject obeisances to Chester, in this scene the sleeping servant displaces and unnerves his "master": Sir John's sleep is ruined that night.

Nor is this the only scene in which Hugh's uncanny sleeping presence torments one of the novel's secretive villains. Later, in chapter 74, he lies asleep in a Newgate cell that he shares with Ned Dennis, the Tyburn hangman and *agent provocateur* who has thrown himself into the riots with suspiciously wholehearted enthusiasm. The lolling bodies of sleepers and the dangling bodies of hanged men have been strangely interconnected throughout the novel, ever since John Willet's vote of confidence in public execution as a way of "'showing how wide awake our government is'" (98). With complacent cruelty, Willet thinks of a vigilant nation-state as a place in which some must hang that others may sleep, but in the course of this tragic-comic two-hander between Hugh and Dennis, the blithe sleep of a condemned man makes a mockery of paranoid watchfulness. The sleeper's mastery of the scene is nicely captured in Browne's illustration, with Dennis cowering behind a chair while the man whom he has betrayed to the authorities slumbers on a stone bench. All the comedy, here, is at the sleep-watcher's expense. It is a scene that gives sleep the last laugh, the ability to out-last laughter and make it "rebound" onto the sleep-watcher's supposedly masterful gaze. No longer an anachronistic throwback or an ahistorical figure of fun, the Dickensian sleeper has become a veritable time-bomb poised to explode into a present that has betrayed it. But when Hugh wakes up, rather than assaulting Dennis he does something even more disconcerting—he goes back to sleep. Even more terrifying than the aggression or hostility that Dennis expects from Hugh is the insouciant dignity with which the condemned sleeper leaves the hangman, the very personification of the system's unsleeping vigilance, dangling "in a state of very uncomfortable suspense" (593).

Repeatedly, in *Barnaby Rudge*, sleep gives those who watch it a lesson about their own perceptual limitations. Of all the novel's sleep-watchers, the only one who displays anything like expertise is a blind man, the villainous innkeeper Stagg. When Stagg briefly plays host to Barnaby's father, he contemplates the mysteries of his slumber with tactful patience:

> But directly he fell asleep—and he noted his falling into a slumber, as readily as the keenest-sighted man could have done—he knelt down beside him, and passed his hand lightly but carefully over his face and person.
>
> His sleep was checkered with starts and moans, and sometimes with a muttered word or two. His hands were clenched, his brow bent, and his mouth firmly set. All this, the blind man accurately marked; and as if his curiosity were strongly awakened, and he had already some inkling of his mystery, he

> sat watching him, if the expression may be used, and listening, until it was broad day. (154)

This uncanny encounter between a blind sleep-watcher and an unseeing sleeper reads like a strange Dickensian revision of the myth of the Sandman. In Hoffmann's version—immortalized by Freud in "The 'Uncanny'"—the Sandman brings dreams to one and all but maintains a brutal monopoly on sleep-watching. Just as those who fail to close their eyes in sleep are punished by the Sandman with blindness, so those who "overlook" sleep in Dickens are fated to discover a blind-spot at the heart of their fantasies of visual mastery. Already blind, Stagg harbors no such fantasies. Rudge's troubled conscience flickers restlessly just below the surface of his sleep, but despite Stagg's literally hands-on relationship with the sleeper, the subjective interiority of the novel's mystery man remains "untouchable," a private region of experience that lies beyond the innkeeper's fingertips. What makes Stagg a better sleep-watcher than his sighted counterparts is his tactful reluctance to take ownership of the sleeper's sleep: having gleaned an inkling of Rudge senior's mystery, he does what other Dickensian sleep-watchers fail to do, and waits with circumspect patience for sleep to reveal its secrets.

What secrets will Stagg ultimately glean from his sleeping guest? He will begin to glimpse, indirectly, the novel's primal scene, which is the murder of a master by his servant. And he will begin to grasp that what troubles this text's political unconscious most is not the prospect of sons without fathers but rather of servants without masters. The specter of masterlessness haunts *Barnaby Rudge*, and accounts for the pleasure it takes—or tries to take—in the comic spectacle of servants who have been mastered by sleep. Even when Dickensian sleep enacts submission to punitive vigilance, however, it harbors the possibility of unthinkable forms of insubordination that his fiction, for all its acute observation of somnolent bodies, cannot finally reckon with.

Dickens's relationship with sleep—which he is prone to idealize as a state of uncomplicated bodily candor—is never less than complex and ambivalent. On the one hand, he wants sleepers to sleep on, in order that they may play out their unconscious comic turns under his masterful gaze; on the other, he wants to take ownership of their sleep, often—as in the frenzied violence of *Barnaby Rudge*—by abolishing its very conditions of possibility. This ambivalence is, in part, a reflection of the unthinkability of sleep. "I *will* think about Sleep" (90), Dickens doggedly promises himself in "Lying Awake," in the full knowledge that sleep resists the grasp of, and marks a limit to, rational thought. Likewise, the Dickensian sleep-watching gaze can never take full ownership of the sleep of others, the unthinkable absence that subtly but powerfully redefines the circumstances from which the sleeper withdraws. His sleepy servants and swooning heroines are not simply harmless figures of fun but embodiments

of unpredictable and unreadable dormancy: their sleep is a potent metaphor for the powerlessness of those who behold it—a class of persons that includes Dickens himself. For Dickens, this problem is managed if not solved by redirecting the comedy of sleep squarely at his sleep-watchers, the complacent voyeurs who can't help overlooking that which they overlook, blind as they are to all the potentialities of the figure who lies with such obliging passivity in their field of vision, defining and defying the limits of their nervous laughter and masterfully myopic gaze.

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NOTES

[1] See Clark for a detailed analysis of Dickensian insomnia via the phenomenology of Maurice Blanchot.

[2] Stoehr's psychoanalytic study reads the later novels "as if they were dreams" (65) but has almost nothing to say about Dickensian sleep beyond a dismissive glance at the author's interest in mesmerism (272-74). Two of the only critics to address Dickensian sleep in sustained ways both focus their attention on *Oliver Twist*. Andrade shows how an oscillation between states of sleep and wakefulness is crucial to the novel's narrative structure, and notes that "Oliver undergoes too many levels of unconsciousness, semi-consciousness, and consciousness, for the reader to be able to distinguish one from the other" (23). McAllister also focuses on the hero's curious passivity and uncanny dreams, but concludes, rather misleadingly, that Dickens's preoccupation with sleep begins and ends with that novel ("never again would his fascination with these topics spill over into his fiction" [15]).

[3] See Kaplan for a book-length study of Dickens and mesmerism.

[4] The pioneering analysis of father–son relations in the novel is by Marcus. See also Sadoff and Michasiw.

[5] Paul Stigant and Peter Widdowson read *Barnaby Rudge* against the backdrop not only of the Chartist campaigns of the 1830s but also

> the agitation to secure the Reform Bill, including in 1831 the great urban riots of Bristol, the bitter trade union conflicts of 1833 and 1834, the campaign from 1830 to 1836 to establish a free and radical press, the struggle to inaugurate some measure of Factory reform, the numerous local campaigns against the creation of the New Police, and finally after 1836 the battles, particularly in Lancashire and the West Riding, against the implementation of the New Poor Law. (27)

[6] See, for example, *The Old Curiosity Shop* 309-10; *Our Mutual Friend* 214.

[7] This chaotic deprivatization of sleep runs counter to the "story of privatization" (32) that Crook reads in the history of Victorian sleeping space. Crook's broadly Foucauldian discussion focuses on the Victorian bedroom as a "bio-sociological problem space" (34) and on the regulation, disciplining, and individuation of the sleeping body in nineteenth-century medical discourse, domestic arrangements, and institutional architecture.

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