

Plagiarizing *Pickwick*: Imitations of Immortality

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Will the perennial bachelor Samuel Pickwick ever marry? Will he travel abroad? Will he die? Will he be mistaken for a lunatic and locked in an asylum? These and other questions remain unanswered by *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*. Into this narrative void hastened a league of imitating authors, with imitative names such as Bos and Quiz and Poz; they knew the answers and were keen to share them in exchange for shillings and pence. Commentators from Edgar Johnson to John Bowen have identified this Pickwick “mania” or “phenomenon,” and diligent Dickensians have produced annotated lists of various plagiaristic publications.¹ Although Dickens himself could complain, in the fiery *Nickleby* proclamation, of “cheap and wretched imitations of our delectable Works” (781), critical writing on the subject is not extensive. One can find sustained analysis in Louis James and Mary Teresa McGowan, but contemporary readers have generally accepted Dickens’s dismissal of the “wretched imitations.” Without exonerating their malfeasance (which may be real), I want to argue that early imitations of *The Pickwick Papers* can be illuminating – and strange. Anonymous, hackneyed and cheap publications such as *Posthumous Papers of the Cadgers’ Club* and *Pickwick in America* will each offer a *reading* of Dickens’s text.

Despite the title appended above, *plagiarism* is in some ways an imperfect description of the Pickwickian excrescences, which flourished from 1837 to 1842 and range from novel-length sequels to aborted serial publications to songbooks, jest books and theatrical adaptations.² According to the *OED*, *plagiary* derives from *plagiarius*, a kidnapper, someone who abducts children

1 Johnson 1: 156; Bowen 48 n. 13. For lists of Pickwickiana, see (among others) Kitton; Miller, *Catalogue of the Pickwick Exhibition*; Miller, *Dickens Student and Collector*; Engel.

2 I exclude from this account Pickwick hats, canes, cigars, something called “Pickwick Sauce,” and publications that merely emulate the form of *Pickwick*: shilling monthlies with illustrations and green paper wrappers, such as *Effingham Hazard, the Adventurer* (1838–1839) and *Godfrey Malvern* (1842–1843). See Sutherland, ch. 4.

or slaves. Dickens certainly may have experienced a paternal pang at the loss of his intellectual progeny, but Peter Shaw further defines *plagiarism* as “the art of using the work of another *with the intent to deceive*” (327). It is not clear the degree to which deception was intended in works that are Pickwick-branded. Many Pickwickian spinoffs are forthright about their imitative status. In the incomplete *Droll Discussions and Queer Proceedings of the Magnum-Fundum Club* (1838), the narrator admits that “the glorious achievements which ‘Boz’ has recorded of the Pickwickians, gave rise to the foundation of the Magnum-Fundum Club” (2). Of course, lax nineteenth-century copyright laws made such creative intervention possible. By today’s standards, some of the more enthusiastic *Pickwick*-inspired works might be read as forms of fan fiction.

A tension emerges between two views of a literary text. D. F. McKenzie explains that in the first view, a text is “authorially sanctioned, contained, and historically definable”; according to the second view, a text is “always incomplete, and therefore open, unstable, subject to perpetual re-making by its readers, performers, or audience” (45). Writing *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens perhaps imagined that he was composing text No. 1, but the Pickwickian successors decided that his book was, in fact, No. 2. Rather than compel the imitations of *Pickwick* into an existing category (such as plagiarism or fan fiction), one might consider this unwieldy batch as “prostheses” – artificial extensions to the *Pickwick* corpus.³ Pickwick prostheses make available aspects of the original that are omitted, muted, implied, curtailed, forgotten, repressed, or secreted to distant corners. They interpret and interpenetrate with *The Pickwick Papers* and stand, alongside reviews and newspaper extracts, among the earliest and most vivid responses to Dickens’s text. Two categories emerge: works that retain the Pickwickian innocence and those that draw on darker, hidden energies and discover instances of anti-Semitism, racism and sexual desire.

By way of introduction, it will help to foreground a specimen from the field, one that is emblematic of the Pickwick prostheses. *The Penny Pickwick*, by “Bos,” may or may not be the best of the lot, but it is certainly the longest; it was published weekly, from 1837 to 1839, and was gathered into twenty-eight monthly parts. In June 1837, Chapman and Hall sought to restrain publication, but the Vice-Chancellor decided against them.⁴ The defendant in the case, Edward Lloyd, a bookseller and eventually a publisher, maintained offices in Wych Street and, later, Broad Street, Bloomsbury. He

3 A few prosthetic limbs appear in *The Pickwick Papers*. Readers learn about a wooden-legged man named Thomas Burton, and Sam Weller refers to “number six, with the wooden leg” (198; ch. 10). Of course, a later S. W., Silas Wegg, graces the pages of *Our Mutual Friend*.

4 “Vice-Chancellor’s Court, Thursday, June 8.” Cf. Carlton.

paid his literary laborers very little: sometimes 10s. for the contents of an eight-page weekly number (James 33). By this reckoning, a worker might receive £2 a month, in contrast to Dickens's £14 3s. 6d. in the original agreement for *Pickwick* (Ackroyd 177).

One of Edward Lloyd's most prolific authors was the inimitable Bos. His collected works include *The Sketch Book by "Bos,"* *The Penny Pickwick*, *Oliver Twiss*, *Nickelas Nickelbery* and *Mister Humfries' Clock*. By general consensus, Bos is taken to be the nom de guerre of Thomas Peckett Prest, "a shadowy figure," according to Mary Teresa McGowan (366). Prest later turned to penny dreadfuls, and he may have written *A String of Pearls* (the story of Sweeney Todd). In April or May 1838, while *The Penny Pickwick* was still appearing weekly, Prest began *Pickwick in America* (1838–1839).⁵ It has also been suggested that Prest is the anonymous author of *Posthumous Papers of the Cadgers' Club* (1837?–1838). So it is possible that he generated two *Pickwick* imitations simultaneously for most of 1838 and some of 1839. Dickens, we recall, wrote only one *Pickwick* at a time. For his service to literature, Thomas Peckett Prest "died a pauper in a cheap lodging house" (James 33).

The Penny Pickwick was offered weekly, in eight-page numbers, with cramped double-column print and two crude illustrations; later, the work was issued in two volumes with a revised title, *The Post-Humourous Notes of the Pickwickian Club*. Bos deviates from Boz in that the principal characters' names are vaguely corrupted. Christopher Pickwick leads Arthur Snodgreen, Percy Tupnall and Matthew Winkletop. Mr. Pickwick's trusty servant is one Samivel Veller. Jovial Mr. Wardle, for instance, appears as Mr. Warner, of Mushroom Hall, Violet Vale. Mrs. Bardell is transposed to Mrs. Pardell; Mrs. Rogers becomes Mrs. Dodgers; Cluppins is Tuppins; and Raddle is Faddle. Mr. Jingle is absent from the proceedings, presumably replaced with Simon Shirk (aka Horatio Brutus Guff), who speaks in broken, Jingle-like utterances.

Appropriately, for a work that is so double-voiced, *The Penny Pickwick* is itself filled with doubles and replicas. On one occasion the narrator admits that his text is merely the copy: "The annexed speech is but a phantom of that splendid harangue" (126). *The Penny Pickwick* also reproduces the Pickwick phenomenon itself. For instance, the Royal George is redubbed the Pickwick Arms, and tradesmen offer Pickwick hats and "Patent Double-Sighted Pickwickian Spectacles" (124) ("double-sighted" here is an apt term). More significantly, Christopher Pickwick, that doppelgänger to his namesake Samuel, is often mistaken for others within the pages of *The Penny Pickwick*. Bos's Mr. Pickwick is chased by two men who believe that he is an escaped lunatic. In the echo chamber of Bos's universe, one of the

5 When published in volume form, this work gained an exclamation point: *Pickwick in America!*

pursuers is even named Sam. The image of a Pickwickian loon roaming the English countryside is an inspired metaphor for a *Pickwick* imitation. In any case, the forces of law/social control pursue and then incarcerate the errant being. Once imprisoned, Christopher Pickwick is about to receive shock treatment when the “shocking mistake” is suddenly rectified and the real lunatic captured (23).

Repetition forms an important part of Bos’s elongated art. Nearly two hundred pages later, Christopher Pickwick is mistaken for one Humphrey Crisp, who abandoned his wife and six children (not unlike Jinkins, Tom Smart’s rival in “The Bagman’s Story”). Pickwick reads the description of Crisp in a posted notice – “sixty years of age, rather stout, bald of head,” plus green spectacles and “black cloth gaiters” – and he experiences the uncanny. “What a strange thing!” he remarks (192). Three officers find the anti-Crisp and arrest him. When Pickwick insists that he is Pickwick, the officers laugh: “Pickwick! ha! ha! a very good name to adopt!” (194). In other words, Christopher Pickwick, like an imitating author, is stealing someone else’s name.

But this is only one of many Pickwick prostheses. The effort of all these works is to extend *The Pickwick Papers* beyond the already copious limits that Dickens offered the world from 1836 to 1837. Each prosthesis marks an intervention, a coming-to-terms with that which Dickens had wrought. Some texts insist on extending Mr. Pickwick into the past and the future. For a novel published over twenty months, with many instances of what David M. Bevington dubbed “Seasonal Relevance,” *Pickwick* is strangely atemporal. The very first sentence mentions “that obscurity” which shrouds “the earliest history” of the book’s hero (67; ch. 1). Philip Rogers pursues this notion and argues that “Pickwick represents a triumph over time.” Indeed, Mr. Pickwick lacks “relations that link him to the past” (28); he has no nephew Fred and no Cheeryble brother. Steven Marcus agrees that “Pickwick is a man without a history, created, as it were, entirely in the present” (25). In W. H. Auden’s famous essay on the novel, he notes, “In our minds Mr. Pickwick is born in middle age with independent means” (416).

The *Pickwick* prostheses disagree. Either they misunderstand Dickens’s purpose in concealing Pickwick’s past or they willfully ignore this choice in an attempt to make the protagonist more palpable, more subject to the laws of biography and biology. *The Penny Pickwick* informs its readers that Christopher Pickwick’s ancestors were “mercantile men” (96) and that they hailed from Guzzelton, England (112). “I had the distinguished honour to serve in the Guzzelton Royal Volunteers, in 1804,” announces the *Penny Pickwick*. Bos is alert to the novelty of the occasion: “This was the very first intimation that Mr. Warner, or any of the Pickwickians, had received of Mr. Pickwick’s military exploits” (158). In “Winkle’s Journal (Omitted in

The Pickwick Papers),” which was published in the *Metropolitan Magazine*, in 1838, readers learn that Pickwick received a gentleman’s education. Both he and Winkle “conversed in Latin and Greek” while reposing in the Angel Inn, Oxford. Their Greek is a bit rusty, as Winkle admits: “Mr. Pickwick and myself had quite forgotten that mellifluous language” (164).

But the question that most piques the Pickwick prostheses is, of course: where did Samuel Pickwick get his money? George Orwell notes that Pickwick “had ‘been in the city,’ but it is difficult to imagine him making a fortune there” (52). Rather, we can imagine him giving one away. The indefatigable Percy Fitzgerald, who wrote or edited at least seven books on the subject of *Pickwick*, mentions that its hero was “an export merchant apparently” but cites no evidence for this.⁶ *The Penny Pickwick* offers another possible profession for its Pickwick, Christopher, when Rosa Dupps (the Rachael Wardle figure) threatens to expose him as “A BODY SNATCHER!” “How did you get your wealth, sir?” the woman demands. “[R]ecall the silent graves, robbed of their ghastly tenants!” (94). Bos’s subsequent spinoff, *Pickwick in America*, suggests that Pickwick (now Samuel once again) is a colonist of sorts. The narrator boasts that he has access to information that “escaped the notice of the former clever historian of this distinguished gentleman.” Indeed, Pickwick owns property in the United States that “devolved to [him] on the death of his father” (2). It also escaped the notice of Boz that Samuel Pickwick ever had a father. All these prostheses delineate Pickwick’s emptied-out past and link him to inexorable time.

Corresponding to Samuel Pickwick’s obscure past is his cloudy future. Anny Sadrin argues that “Pickwick has no future; except, of course, the simplest of futures, which is death” (25). Such a suggestion contradicts Dickens’s triumphant opening sentence, which introduces “the immortal Pickwick” (67; ch. 1). Yet the prostheses attempt to make the immortal mortal; drawing Mr. Pickwick closer to the race of ordinary men narrows the gap between an emulating author and Charles Dickens. “Mr. Pickwick’s Hat-Box,” which appeared serially in *The New Monthly Belle Assemblée*, in 1840, offers a dose of mortality. This work opens with “the decease of ... Mr. Pickwick” (June 1840: 305). In the next installment, a quasi-literate “correspondent” counters that Pickwick is still alive and cites “Master humfrey’s klok” as proof (Dickens reintroduced Pickwick in *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, in May 1840). The editor of the “Hat-Box” refers his correspondent to “Johnson’s Dictionary for the word ‘posthumous’” and argues that Master Humphrey does not indicate when exactly “Mr. Pickwick

6 *Pickwickian Studies* 70. Fitzgerald is the author or editor of *The History of Pickwick*, *Pickwickian Manners and Customs*, *Pickwickian Studies*, *The Pickwickian Dictionary and Cyclopaedia*, *Bardell v. Pickwick*, *Pickwick Riddles and Perplexities*, as well as the anthology *Pickwickian Wit and Humour*.

paid him a visit" (August 1840: 83). In "Hat-Box," the Pickwickians proceed to ransack the earthly remains of the late Pickwick, in a mode that anticipates the death of Scrooge, also without issue, in the vision of the third Christmas spirit (although the affect is reversed). "Mr. Tupman seized his defunct leader's coat, Mr. Winkle his long-to-be remembered tight unmentionables, Mrs. Bardell rushed to secure Mr. Pickwick's shirts (being that article of apparel which is placed the nearest to the heart)" (June 1840: 305). This scene also suggests the efforts of Dickens's literary successors, who divest *The Pickwick Papers* for their own use and benefit.

Other visions of Pickwick's future appear in Percy Fitzgerald's *Pickwickian Studies* and the anonymous work *Pickwick in India*. Fitzgerald, besides writing multiple books on *Pickwick*, felt compelled to generate his own prosthesis on the subject of Pickwick Yet To Come. Upon retirement in Dulwich and the demise of his eponymous club, Samuel Pickwick joins yet another society, the "Dulwich Literary and Scientific Association" (107). "Literary" is a telling term in that, after the publication of *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens's hero is a creature of literature as well as science. At one meeting, the inevitable Mr. Blotton makes an appearance and disputes with his old nemesis – an example of eternal recurrence. But Fitzgerald's primary aim is to illustrate the death of Pickwick. Unlike the ignominious affair in "Mr. Pickwick's Hat-Box," Fitzgerald's version is a glorious coda: "The funeral *cortège* left the Dell at ten o'clock, and was one of the most striking displays of public feeling that Dulwich has seen for many years" (112). In contrast, *Pickwick in India* awards its hero a harsher end. This prosthesis appeared from 1839 to 1840, in *The Madras Miscellany* – a title that evokes *Bentley's Miscellany*. After seven installments, the serial abruptly stopped and left its protagonist literally at sea. A later note informs the concerned reader that "Mr. Pickwick *has* been devoured by a Shark!" That Mr. Pickwick, who consumes so much in the course of his peregrinations, ends his immortality as luncheon for a carnivore is, somehow, apt. However, the note qualifies that "the Shark is but a figurative one" ("Preface to the Volume").

Besides representations of Pickwick's past and future, the prostheses also contain alternate versions of the self. These redescribe not only Mr. Pickwick but other characters as well. Some of these rewrites are subtle shifts, mere emendations. For instance, *Pickwick's* Sam Weller is assigned no particular age, but *The Penny Pickwick's* Samivel Veller is twenty-four (Dickens's age at the commencement of his book). Further, Sam Weller's initial employer, the White Hart, "used Day and Martin" for blacking (199; ch. 10); Samivel Veller, by contrast, "gave the indifferent boots an indifferent dash of Warren's" and later insists, "[N]othing but Warren's unadulterated" (86–87). Samivel, unlike Samuel, thus evinces a preference for a brand with strong Dickensian

connotations.⁷ Augustus Snodgrass, in *The Pickwick Papers*, is ostensibly a poet, but the reader is spared his poetic effusions. Seizing this opportunity, several prostheses quote directly from Snodgrass's poetry. In George W. M. Reynolds's *Pickwick Abroad; or, The Tour in France* (1837–1839), Snodgrass is something of a plagiarist as well; he drafts Pickwick's life and adventures into a *Pickwickiad*, "in twenty cantos written" (re: twenty monthly numbers) (101). Sometimes, the alternate versions of the Pickwickian selves are not merely different but better – removed from Regency roughhouse and elevated to Victorian virtue.⁸ In "An Omitted Pickwick Paper," published in an American gift annual, in 1841, Samuel Pickwick and Tony Weller are discovered walking from church (51). While Mr. Stiggins's flock attends chapel, no one in *Pickwick*, it seems, ever goes to a *church*. Further, in "Noctes Pickwickianae" (1840), Reynolds casts the lot of imbibing Pickwickians as teetotallers, whereas temperance, in *Pickwick*, is associated with the hypocrisy of Stiggins ("all taps is vanities!" [725; ch. 45]).

Of course, alternate versions of Pickwick himself appear in many prostheses. The genial old man turns nasty, vengeful, ambitious. In *The Penny Pickwick*, he pursues an opportunity to stand for Parliament and is "dazzled by the prospect of becoming an M. P." (113). He stands as a liberal against the Tory, Sir Gregory Graspall. Yet Pickwick's politics are ineffable: "we cannot say whether he was radical, whig, conservative, or destructive; but we are inclined to think he must be a beautiful combination of all four" (122). Fortunately, he loses the election, or Thomas Peckett Prest would have been obliged to start yet another serial, "Pickwick in Parliament." Further, distinctions between Pickwick and his fellow corresponding members blur. At times he transforms into a Winkle-like coward, in particular when challenged to a duel. In *Pickwick in America*, he flees rather than run the risk of killing his opponent, and in *The Penny Pickwick*, on the way to the field of honor, he complains of the cold air and suddenly limps with gout.

All of these examples are relatively benign. The Pickwick prostheses are more instructive and their readings more pointed when they animate the darker energies of Dickens's text and illuminate absences. Call it the return of the repressed: the seemingly un-Pickwickian trinity of anti-Semitism, racism and sex. There is an element of topsy-turvy at work – a dose of Bakhtinian "carnival laughter" (11). *The Penny Pickwick*, for instance, turns the noble fool Samuel Pickwick into the ignoble fool Christopher Pickwick. But the prostheses also offer, in many cases, working-class readings of a middle-class text. To turn Dickens's novel into a penny serial or theatrical production

7 *Droll Discussions and Queer Proceedings of the Magnum-Fundum Club* also makes some pointed allusions to Warren and Co., Strand. For more on Warren's, see Douglas-Fairhurst 30–31.

8 Cf. Bowen 67: "a last gasp of Regency England."

increases its access to a wider public – and to that public’s tastes and cultural biases. The efforts of Bos, in particular, seem to want to ascribe lower-class foibles to the bourgeoisie. A banker may be “intoxicated” and a pauper “drunk,” but they both have the same blood alcohol level.

Anti-Semitism might seem an unlikely feature to find in the descendants of *Pickwick*. Is it a random mutation? In fact, this feature derives from the repressed Jewish origins of Samuel Pickwick. When Dickens “thought of Mr Pickwick,” he may have been referring to an actual person.⁹ Moses Pickwick was a “celebrated coach proprietor,” who later owned the White Hart Hotel in Bath (Pugh 85). Percy Fitzgerald quotes a Mr. Peach who lived in that city and claimed that the Pickwicks “must have been a Jewish family” (*History of Pickwick* 14). Peach’s evidence is mainly the family’s preference for Biblical names: Moses and Eleazer, his grandfather. (Not to mention Samuel.) Legend held that Eleazer was a foundling, picked up in the village of Wick, hence “Pick-Wick” (Matz 173). Fitzgerald confuses the legend by stating that it was the *grandson* who was the foundling, although Fitzgerald may have conflated Moses of Bath with Moses of Egypt (*Pickwickian Dictionary* 178). Furthermore, the name Moses Pickwick would have doubly signified for Charles Dickens. Besides the acoustic connection between *Dickens* and *Pickwick*, young Charles ascribed to his brother Augustus the nickname Moses (“in honour of the *Vicar of Wakefield*,” according to Forster). Through childish jesting, “Moses” became “Boses,” which was adopted into Dickens’s pseudonym, Boz (bk. 1; ch. 4).¹⁰ So when Dickens thought of Moses Pickwick, he thought of a successful, possibly Jewish businessman for whom he would have had at least linguistic affection.

George Orwell, writing in 1939, when one would have been sensitive, argues that Dickens “shows no prejudice against Jews” (71). At least in *Pickwick*, references to Jews are few and innocuous. In chapter 2, the narrator quotes from the notebook of Samuel Pickwick and finds “soldiers, sailors, Jews, chalk, shrimps, officers, and dockyard men” (83; ch. 2). Mr. Leo Hunter later reports that “Solomon Lucas, the Jew in the High Street, has thousands of fancy dresses” (276; ch. 15). Again relying on Old Testament names, Percy Fitzgerald suggests that Solomon Pell, Tony Weller’s legal friend, “was likely a Jew solicitor” (*Pickwickian Dictionary* 268). Memorably, Moses Pickwick himself is represented in his namesake novel. When Sam is affronted to find “Moses” attached to the “magic name” Pickwick on the Bath coach, the very next Wellerism is a telling one: “as the parrot said ven they not only took him from his native land, but made him talk the English langwidge arterwards” (582; ch. 35). This is a parable of the immigrant,

9 Dickens, 1847 preface to *Pickwick Papers*, 44. On the ambiguity of this phrase, see Marcus 20.

10 Ruth Richardson challenges this origin story. Cf. Long.

the exotic outsider (such as an eastern European), who must learn English and assimilate. Later, Sam complains to Mary that he has been “walkin’ about like the wandering Jew – a sportin’ character you have perhaps heard on” (639; ch. 39). So here the Jew is associated with perambulating, that favorite Pickwickian pastime, and he is a sporting character as well, a fitting figure for the “Sporting Transactions” of the Pickwick Club.

Imitations of *The Pickwick Papers* exploit the novel’s Jewish undercurrent in unsurprisingly crass ways. A standard riff in nineteenth-century comedy seems to be the Jewish figure breaking the rules of *kashrut* and consuming pork. In “Winkle’s Journal,” a Welshman tells an anecdote of two Jews who try bacon; heaven responds with violent thunderclaps (168–69). *Sam Weller’s Budget of Recitations* (1838) includes a poem entitled “Jewish Mutton.” An accompanying illustration depicts a Jewish-looking waiter serving “Roast Pork” to a black-bearded Semite, who smiles in anticipation (161). One theatrical version of *Pickwick* adds a Jewish reference not found in the original. Mrs. Bardell’s attorneys, Dodson and Fogg, are affiliated with no particular religious group; yet in T. H. Lacy’s *The Pickwickians; or, The Peregrinations of Sam Weller* (1837), Mr. Pickwick bemoans that “[a] couple of roguish lawyers, of the Jewish tribe, have got hold of her and persuaded her to commence proceedings” (38). Typically, *The Penny Pickwick* descends to the lowest level. The narrator refers to Holywell Street as “[t]hat dirty receptacle for old clothes, old books, impudent Jews, and indefatigable ‘barkers!’” Further, “Jews are perfect savages in their anxiety to do business at any place” (108–9).

If the Jew is the other to the European Christian, then a dark-skinned non-European is subject to more prejudice. In *Posthumous Papers of the Wonderful Discovery Club* (1838), when Sir Peter Patron and his Wonderful Club members are set upon by the police, he remarks on the swarthy “complexion” of the newcomers and asks, “Are we in Algiers?” (11). An angry character called Black-Berry, in *The Cadgers’ Club*, is described uncharitably as a “black pudding in revulsions” (16). Imitative Wellerisms also take up the theme, as in this example from *Pickwick Abroad*: “as the vite man said to his-self ven he got among the selvidges vich made a fire to eat him” (4). *The Penny Pickwick* delights in a grotesque description of Christopher Pickwick’s seventy-year-old servant, a black man named John White:

His skin was a beautiful Day and Martin hue, his nose, upon moderate calculation, measured eight inches across – entirely monopolized the extent of his face. ... Beneath his nose was a gap – we cannot call it a mouth ... this awful cavern was environed by two immense rolls of flesh – which nature had probably intended for lips ... (6–7).

While the anti-Semitism of the prostheses can claim at least a possible Pickwickian provenance, such “comedy” as the above seems far from Dickens’s work. Certain intervening culture-texts may be responsible. In 1836, T. D. Rice presented the character Jim Crow in London, and it was a popular success.¹¹ By 1837, W. T. Moncrieff’s play *Sam Weller; or, The Pickwickians* allowed its title character to sing the song “Jim Crow,” not to advance the narrative, but simply because the number was a specialty of the role’s performer, W. J. Hammond.¹²

For obvious reasons, *Pickwick in America* offers the most robust array of Pickwickian racism. Besides the shallow laughter derived from stereotypes, this prosthesis is compelling in that it offers African-American doubles to elements in Dickens’s book. Sam Weller meets his counterpart in a boots figure named Sambo. According to Sam, Sambo “gets his livin’ by aggrawatin’ boots an’ shoes into a polish equal to his own phiz” (78). This last bit of whimsy suggests physiognomy as well as the *Pickwick* illustrator Hablot K. Browne (aka “Phiz”). The fat boy, Joe, finds a fat facsimile of himself in an African-American waiter named Maximilian Jupiter: “he was in fact, a second edition, (*black letter* edition,) of that ponderous and somniferous juvenile!” (33). Even the Pickwickian urge to socialize in clubs has its equivalent in the New World. Sam attends a meeting of the so-named “*Society for the protection and cultivation of the morals of the infant Niggers!*” (98). Further, like some of Dickens’s imitators, African-American businessmen employ elevated, polysyllabic terms. “[D]irty shops and cellars” are rechristened “Emporiums” or “Establishments” (102). Because Prest was ignorant enough to fail to notice that slavery was illegal in New York State by 1838, a delegation of black men calls upon “Mishter Pickvicky” to assert their rights (230). Pickwick’s compassionate speech in response borrows abolitionist language (“are we not all brothers”), and he grants the petitioners £20 (231). Yet in *Pickwick in America*, as in the America of the 1830s, the issue was unresolved.

It can certainly be argued that the racism found in these prostheses ranges beyond Dickens’s original and owes more to the wider culture’s stereotypical assumptions and modes of “ethnic” humor. In the case of *Pickwick* and sex, the situation is more imbricated. To begin with, for a protagonist in an English novel, Samuel Pickwick is strangely uninterested in courtship. Such

11 Curiously, Rice was also considered to be inimitable: “He is, in fact, the only real representative of the character he professes to play that has yet appeared on the stage, and as he is the copyist of no predecessor, so will his imitators find it difficult to give any translation of his peculiarity and originality” (rev. of *A Flight to America*).

12 In an early instance of product placement, the printed version of the play includes a note: “This song is Published with the Music, and a Likeness of Mr. HAMMOND, by Limbard & Co., 143, Strand” (21 n.)

a function is outsourced to his fellow corresponding members: Tupman, Winkle and Snodgrass. Indeed, the late chapters of *Pickwick* evolve (or devolve) into Roman New Comedy; obdurate fathers (and brothers) stand in the way of true love, and love prevails. (Note that the name of forbidding Mr. Winkle, Sr., appears on a brass plate in “fat Roman capitals” [803; ch. 50].) In terms of Mr. Pickwick and sex, the experts agree: “Sex, for example, is no temptation for him”; “even sexual love is almost outside his scope”; and “the almost complete extinction of sex.”¹³ Then there is Peter Ackroyd’s pithy summary: “No sex” (197). Appropriately for a novel thus scrubbed of romantic affect, the female characters appear as “predatory spinsters” and “husband-hating wives”; there is a “deep anxiety about sexuality” (Bowen 62). Samuel Pickwick would rather go to *jail* than enjoy the nuptial favors of Martha Bardell.

There is a counterview to this. Fitzgerald asks, “[W]hat is the chief note of this immortal work? *Kissing*” (*Pickwick Riddles* 30). He argues that Mr. Pickwick “seized every opportunity of kissing the young ladies” (*Pickwickian Studies* 14). John Glavin offers a more nuanced observation: “repeatedly, Pickwick blunders into erotically pregnant situations” (89). In Eatanswill, Pickwick is mistaken for a voyeur. “Putting on his spectacles to look at a married ’ooman!” wails an alarmed female. Another complains of his “wicked old eye,” as if Pickwick were a cyclops, capable of seeing only one thing, through monocular vision (251; ch. 13). Fitzgerald suggests a Freudian reading of Pickwick’s nocturnal encounter with Miss Witherfield (*Pickwickian Studies* 15). In looking for his watch, the old bachelor is really looking for something (or someone) else. Once entrapped with the lady in the double-bedded room, “[i]t was quite impossible to resist the urgent desire to see what was going forward. So out went Mr Pickwick’s head again” – thus piercing the membrane of the bed curtains (391; ch. 22).

If sex in *Pickwick* is a loaded but unfired pistol, then the Pickwick prostheses pull the trigger. Samuel Pickwick must learn about human fallenness from his more-knowing servant; Christopher Pickwick needs no such instruction. In *The Penny Pickwick*, he plays the conventional lover to the widow Rosa Dupps and asks, “But what are roses compared to the blossom of your lovely cheeks ...?” (50). In a most un-Pickwickian manner, he competes with his friend Tupnall for the widow’s affections. The narrator reports that “the too fascinating Pickwick had completely clouded all [Tupnall’s] prospects of bliss!” (40). Dickens’s Pickwick, who “burst like another sun” (72; ch. 2), is recast as a cloud. A hundred pages later, Christopher Pickwick again turns sexual aggressor – now with a married woman, Mrs. Charlotte Squib, wife of the editor of the *Guzzelton Mercury* (a revision of Winkle’s tangle with Mrs. Pott). Unlike Boz’s Pickwick,

13 Auden 416; Orwell 98; Kincaid 23.

who would not endure the artifice of a costume, Bos's Pickwick attends a masquerade as Cupid. He points his arrow towards Mrs. Squib, who is in the guise of Pysche (Prest's consistent spelling). "Cupid and Pysche found themselves alone!" (154). Nestled in a bower, they kiss and are discovered. The result is a lawsuit in which Mr. Squib claims damages of £2000. It is a fascinating rewrite of the Bardell case. Dickens's character is sued for what he does not do (marry his landlady); Prest's is called to account for what he *does*.

Other prostheses also make available the subterranean sexuality of *The Pickwick Papers*. In *Pickwick in America*, the hero pursues adultery once more: he "felt himself in love to the eye-brows with the wife of another man!" (72). The Miss Witherfield encounter is then reworked in a way that reveals the sexual longing implicit in the original. Resting in bed, Pickwick sees a ghost enter his room. "[D]etermined to fathom the awful mystery," he follows the spirit and grabs it – only to find himself embracing the married woman of his desire, Mrs. Major Peterkin Mucklebuddy (93). (She is prone to sleepwalking.) What is an unfortunate error in Dickens's account becomes a moment of wish-fulfillment. The protagonist of *The Magnum-Fundum Club*, Matthew Magnumfundum, romances two ladies at once. Caught in this "duplex courtship," he considers suicide (11). Non-Pickwick characters are also sexualized. The Stiggins figure in *The Penny Pickwick*, named Smirkins, boards with Mrs. Veller and craves more than her pineapple rum. We find the good lady "embraced by Smirkins, who was imprinting a thousand sweet 'kisses of peace' upon her lips!" (173). Mr. Veller disposes of his faithless bride by selling her to Smirkins "for two and sixpence," plus expenses (179) – a moment that anticipates *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886).

George W. M. Reynolds presents a more wholesome vision. In "The Marriage of Mr. Pickwick," which appears in *Master Timothy's Book-Case* (1842), Pickwick indeed gets married. This narrative finds a young lady separated from her friends one night. When a policeman seizes her for walking the streets unchaperoned, Pickwick intervenes and is arrested himself. Again, the Bardell plot is inverted: Reynolds's hero is punished for aiding, rather than abandoning, a female. Chaste Pickwick is soon aflame with desire: "his imagination conjured up, amid his slumbers, the graceful form and fascinating countenance of Miss Teresina Hippolyta Sago" (495). After improving his relations with her family, he proposes to the twenty-year-old girl: "I have decided upon a step which I ought to have taken twenty years ago!" (529). (At which point she would have been zero years old.) Even more inappropriately, on the wedding day, Pickwick wishes that he married "some thirty years previously" (she would have been negative ten) (540). While inept at mathematics, Reynolds generates a Pickwick that Dickens did not foresee: the bourgeois house-husband.

In other instances race impinges on Pickwickian sex, and gender boundaries are tested. *Pickwick in America's* Mr. Tupman fancies a "brown lady," and we find him "in the very act of forcibly purloining from her chocolate physiognomy [*sic*] a delicious kiss" (39). So Tupman's sexual exploits now raise questions of miscegenation, rape and possible cannibalism (since her "chocolate" is "delicious"). The Miss Witherfield fiasco, a favorite among imitating authors, is revisited several pages later. Sleeping in a hotel, Pickwick is attacked by a rat, and he runs into another room, where he finds himself in the presence of a "hideous, fat, unwieldy black lady" (52). She screams at the intrusion and loses consciousness. The gentleman tries to restore her and "bathe[s] her dark temples with a basin of water" – an exchange of fluid that suggests sexual contact (52). But the interracial affairs that are merely suggested here are fully developed in *The Penny Pickwick*. John White, the black servant, loves Betty Bodger, the "red-armed, scarlet-faced maid of all work" (32). Yet it is not their different races, but age that is the impediment. Betty argues that "we are both on us too YOUNG to marry yet" (34) (although we learned that John is seventy). Later, when she relents, Bos allows the interracial marriage to proceed.

Finally, the subtext of an all-male club, with its "potential for transgressive behavior" (in Marie Mulvey-Roberts's formulation), is made manifest in a few of the prostheses (50). In *Pickwick Abroad*, Tupman confesses to (again) falling in love. His leader asks if the object is "female sex." "What other sex would you have me select?" exclaimed the astonished Mr. Tupman" (79). "Winkle's Journal" holds one answer. This anonymous work offers a gay reading of *The Pickwick Papers*. Winkle, narrating his own story, seems attracted to a lively newcomer named Springer. Winkle "found his dancing perfection"; "I made up my mind that if I danced, I would dance opposite Mr. Springer" (172). During the figures, Mr. Winkle ignores his ostensible, female partner, whom he dismisses with the cognomen "Terpsichore"; and he admits, "I was too busy watching the manoeuvres of the officers" (173). Winkle avoids dancing with a number of aggressive Irishwomen, and he somehow ends up on the floor with Samuel Pickwick. Miss Janette scolds Winkle "for being 'so naughty a boy'"; undisturbed by this critique, he pays more attention to the Marquis of Worcester, whom Winkle describes as "handsome as the statue of Apollo" (175). Winkle is finally compelled to take a turn with Mrs. Fitzherbert O'Toole: "I suffered myself to be conducted to the sacrifice" (175). Dancing with a female, he is now clumsy. "I fell flat on my waistcoat and nose" (176) – that is, the crushed nose of sexual impotence. Pickwick demands that Winkle return home and "expose" himself no more (176). By delineating Winkle's perspective, this brief work reinterprets his character and suggests something about the nature of homosociality.

Like the devil, who can quote scripture for his own ends, the Pickwick

prostheses offer sometimes radical revisions of Dickens's work. They uncover the *Pickwick* that they want to read or need to believe or desire. The trajectory is often one of elevation or degradation. In Reynolds's hands, alcoholic Pickwickians turn water-drinkers, and a wayward bachelor eases into marriage. Prest's work draws closer to Bakhtin's notion of "grotesque realism." An already-earthly text is made more so; in Bakhtin's terms, "it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of the earth and body" (19). Pickwick prostheses defamiliarize; they alienate and estrange. Despite such interventions, the prostheses profess continuity with *The Pickwick Papers*. They fill temporal gaps; they are the stories that Boz forgot to relate.

George Saintsbury writes, "There is no book like *Pickwick* anywhere; it is almost ... worth while to read the wretched imitations in order to enjoy the zest with which one comes back to the real, though fantastically real, thing" (345). It is a truism that Dickens's imitators reify the Inimitable Dickens. Yet many of the Pickwick prostheses, rather than slavishly following a predecessor, seem strangely liberated: it is as if Dickens stole Promethean fire, and his imitators shared, briefly, in the glow.

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