DICKENS AND FOOD:

REALIST REFLECTIONS IN A PUDDLE OF CHICKEN GREASE

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ABSTRACT

Food has a near-ubiquitous role in the fiction of Charles Dickens. From the action that does and does not take place, to the appearance and essence of the characters, and to the language and style in which they were written, virtually every aspect of Dickens's novels and short stories is, to some extent and at one time or another, connected with food. This thesis explores the nature and implications of food in Dickens and, in addition to its introduction and conclusion, it has been divided into three chapters: (a) Language, Style, and Subject/theme; (b) Plot and Setting; and (c) Characterization. As well, the parallel between food's omni-presence in Dickens's fiction and its centrality in the so-called 'real world' has meant that the literary concept 'realism' is a recurrent concern.

RESUME

La nourriture porte un role quasi-omnipresent dans la fiction de Charles Dickens. De l'action qui se deroule et qui ne se deroule pas, jusqu'au semblant et l'essence des personnages, et du language et le style dans lesquels les oeuvres ont ete ecrites, presque chaque aspect des romans et des conte de Dickens est, dans une certaine mesure et a un moment quelconque, lie avec la nourriture. Cette these explore la nature et les implications de la nourriture dans les travaux de Dickens et, en addition, a son introduction et sa conclusion, ce projet est devise en trois chapitres: (a) language, style, et sujet/theme; (b) intrigue et mise en scene; et (c) personnification. En outre, le parallele entre l'omnipresence de la nourriture dans les ouvrages de Dickens et sa position centrale dans le soi-disant 'monde actuel' cree une inquietude periodique dans le concept literaire du 'realisme'.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

It has long been held that what differentiates human beings from animals is the former's ability to think rationally. Recently, however, a different line of thought has begun to emerge: that it is food that ultimately creates the distinction between man and beast. Indeed, some modern scientists and philosophers claim that dietary concerns predate, and may even have been the primary stimuli for, the inception of rational thought. Similarly, some cultural anthropologists - in what seems to echo James Boswell's eighteenth-century definition of man as the "Cooking Animal" (quoted in Watt 180) - assert that food played a vital role in the formation and solidification of human civilization. They explain that while all living things must eat in order to survive, only men and women use food as a cultural implement: people cook their food; propitiate their gods with it; plan their calendars around it; and even, sometimes, base their literary preferences on it. In The Rituals of Dinner, Margaret Visser writes:

> Only people actively, regularly, and continuously work on the portioning out of their food.
>
> This activity presupposes and probably helped give rise to many basic human characteristics, such as kinship systems (who belongs with whom; which people eat together), language (for discussing food past, present, and future, for planning the acquisition of food, and deciding how to divide it out while preventing fights), technology (how to kill, cut, keep, and carry), and morality (what is a just slice?). The basic need of our stomachs for food continues to supply a good deal of the driving force behind all of human enterprise... (1-2)

Food, then, can be construed as one of the basic influential forces in the lives of human beings; and since reading and writing are both affected by the environments in which they are

performed, it should not be surprising that food often plays an important role - though not necessarily a deliberate or obvious one - in literature.

Food is a fundamental element of Charles Dickens's fiction and, in a sense, it plays a galvanizing role in the fictional worlds that he created. His narratives revel in alimentary particulars, insisting upon and delighting in the specifics of what, when, and how food is consumed or digested, and its role in the characters' lives, minds, and environments. In fact, food functions as a metaphor for virtually every aspect of the fictions: the sights, the sounds, the appearances, and the behaviour - all are, at one point or another, portrayed in gastronomic terms. Some of Dickens's works, however, are more food-oriented than others. A Tale of Two Cities, Hard Times, and Bleak House for instance, while they do make use of food imagery, are less saturated than, for example, Great Expectations; and a comprehensive look at the novels would reveal a disparity with respect to the symbolic, metaphoric, and diagnostic use of food in each.[1]

The fact that Dickens the man was more than ordinarily interested in food makes it unsurprising that his fiction abounds in food references and details. He seems to have conceived of his own existence in terms of food - as such of his alleged comments as "If I went to a new colony...I should force myself to the top of the social milk-pot, and live upon the cream" (Carey 207) show - and his letters and other non-fiction consistently focus on descriptions of food and invitations to dine. Whether

this food-steeped atmosphere was self- or externally-imposed is impossible to verify; but it appears to have influenced the nature of his creative output and his fiction gives the impression of having been conceived and constructed according to a distinctly food-oriented frame of reference. This thesis will explore the extent to which Dickens's narratives take up alimentary issues, how this manifests itself, and how these fit into the context of literary criticism. Because Dickens's oeuvre is so vast, though, I have limited the amount of primary material that I took into consideration and focussed on only 10 of his 18 novels. These, in chronological order, are: The Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist, The Old Curiosity Shop, Martin Chuzzlewit, David Copperfield, Bleak House, Hard Times, Little Dorrit, Great Expectations, and Our Mutual Friend.

I first thought of organizing this thesis into sections corresponding with the four basic food groups. This proved to be neither practical nor feasible - perhaps because this dietary taxonomy is a post-Victorian construct. The thesis has instead been divided into chapters according to basic literary components. Chapter 1 deals with language, style, and subject/theme; Chapter 2 addresses plot and setting; and Chapter 3 focuses on characterization - and all three are concerned, to varying degrees, with the concept of "realism". "Realism" is, however, a notoriously slippery term, and a brief discussion of its meanings and connotations will be useful.

The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory prefaces its definition of "realism" with the assertion that it

is "An exceptionally elastic critical term, often ambivalent and equivocal, which has acquired far too many qualifying (but seldom clarifying) adjectives" (772). In The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, Chris Baldick further emphasizes the difficulty of concretely defining the concept:

> [realism] refers, sometimes confusingly, both to a literary method based on detailed accuracy of description (ie. verisimilitude) and to a more general attitude that rejects idealization, escapism, and other extravagant qualities of romance in favour of recognizing soberly the actual problems of life. Modern criticism frequently insists that realism is not a direct or simple reproduction of reality (a 'slice of life') but a system of conventions producing a lifelike illusion of some 'real' world outside the text. (184)

"Realism" is obviously an enigmatic term; but its essential mutability - and hence its adaptability - make it a useful concept with which to work. One can - and indeed must - select from the variety of meanings and connotations associated with the term, and compile a 'singular' definition to suit the purpose at hand. As John Romano points out in Dickens and Reality, "Discussions of [realism] sometimes founder because it is assumed that we cannot discuss what we cannot define - a sensible-sounding assumption that is not always just" (5-6). He goes on to explain that "'Realism', as it happens, is one of many important and useful terms that defy methodical definition, and become, in fact, less useful as the diversity of their possible meanings is restricted" (6).

Keeping in mind Romano's additional caution "against too easy an equation of realism with the presentation of concrete, material details, an equation to which we are dangerously prone" (6), I want to indicate those aspects of "realism" that will, and

will not, be being referred to in this thesis. For one thing, this thesis will not be addressing issues of social or historical realism. Although Dickens's fiction is often critically evaluated in terms of the social and historic situations of Victorian England - such as the Poor Laws, the degraded conditions of the working class, the justice and prison system, and the management or mismanagement of government and administration - these are not areas into which I will be delving.

In terms of how the concept of realism is being used in the thesis, there is one point - albeit a somewhat vague one - upon which I and the various dictionaries of literary terms tend to agree: namely, that realism, unlike idealism and romanticism, is focused upon "natural, everyday events" (Coles 164), or what could be called "the problems of ordinary people in unremarkable circumstances" (Oxford 185). As far as this thesis is concerned, "realism" refers not to descriptions of the quotidian that are scientifically or photographically accurate - what often goes by the designation of "literary naturalism" - but to those that are brought about through the presentation of generally indicative characters, events, and language. It is not meant to connote a verisimilar-ly accurate presentation of life - which, in the context of food would necessitate a concern for what foods were 'actually' consumed in the times and places where the fictions are situated, and what were their quality, preparation, and presentation. Rather, the realist issues that are meant to be addressed herein concern the plausibility and the vitality of

characters and events that Dickens created· the possibility of their existing not in our own real world, but in a fictional one parallel to ours. Basically, my idea of "realism" is something that could be called 'presentational realism' or 'what could be real life'; and as far as this thesis is concerned, "realism" is meant to connote the idea of a fictional something's likeness to a putatively generic or normative concept of reality.

One of the key factors inspiring this study was the fact that Dickens is not usually considered to be one of the realist novelists of the nineteenth century although he does, at least in my opinion, create life-like characters and situations. To be more specific, this thesis came into being as a reaction to Dickens's fiction being described, often by well-reputed and well-known novelists and critics, as far-fetched and unbelievable - that is, as a collection of freaks and caricatures taking part in mechanized plot confabulations. Henry James, George Eliot, and George Orwell are among those who, while not condemning Dickens's work as a whole, claim that his fiction is too artificial and, as Orwell puts it, comprised of "monstrosities" residing in a "never never land" (134). Modern critics too, make similar assessments and John Gross, for one, writes that "to the world at large, Dickens is still Mr. Popular Sentiment, and his novels a compound of high-spirited caricature, rudimentary social protest, and sickly pathos" (ix).

While the grounds for unrealistic readings of some of Dickens's incidents and persons may be well-founded, as general conclusions about the narratives and the characters, assertions

of unrealistic-ness do not do Dickens justice. "Reality" is an open-ended construct and the fictional worlds that Dickens created are more true-to-life and plausible than such appraisals of the fiction allow. As Stephen Gill asserts with respect to Henry James' and George Eliot's comments about Dickens' lack of realism, there are many different facets to reality and, therefore, to the description of realism:

> there is a sense in which both [James] and Eliot are right. Dickens doesn't generally embody nature in the sense that they demanded and which we have come to expect. What we have to ask ourselves is: just what is it that Dickens does achieve that makes us feel that, in a highly personal way, he does help us to understand more fully the recesses of human personality. (12)

The perception of reality is subjective and there are endless possibilities of what could be real; and so it seems reasonable to assert, as Romano does, that "the novel of reality is, indeed, the novel Dickens is always writing" (5).

Dickens's narratives repeatedly remind the reader that fictional characters eat; and this idea influenced me in writing this thesis. Food, in addition to occupying the thoughts of human beings, is also the means by which they literally sustain their lives. When I realized that Dickens's fictional people are similarly preoccupied, one dimension of the fictions' realism was clarified for me. Granted, a concern for food does not in itself make for either a solid or a complete explanation of why and how Dickens' fictions are realistic. The characters' protracted concerns for food, though, were what prompted me to look to what could be called the gastro-trope to test my hypothesis; and in terms of evoking ideas about how and why Dickens's fictional

worlds come by their vitality and lifelike-ness, the results of my research have been fruitful. In fact, researching this idea has culled enough evidence to make what seems to me a reasonable sounding assertion out of the statement that 'the realistic-ness of Dickens's characters and the worlds they live in is, to an appreciable degree, due to the prominent and powerful presence of food in his narratives'!

CHAPTER 1

LANGUAGE, STYLE, AND SUBJECT

The link between food and language - and food and text, to be specific - is not a recent discovery. Henry Fielding, for instance, made this connection several centuries ago and sub-titled the opening chapter Tom Jones (1749)[1] "The Introduction to the Work, or Bill of Fare to the Feast". He also wrote that "An author ought to consider himself, not as a gentleman who gives a private or eleemosynary treat, but rather as one who keeps a public ordinary, at which all persons are welcome for the money" (51).

Charles Dickens makes explicit reference to Fielding's analogy in his Preface to The Old Curiosity Shop, referring to his own novel as a dish that "smokes upon the board" (OCS 39), and inviting his guests to partake[2] of the victuals. This suggests not only that Dickens believed that literature and meals had much in common, but also implies that Dickens may have been aware of, and possibly deliberate in, incorporating the plethora of food images into his fiction.

The rhetoric that Dickens uses, as the author of the fictions, and that which he puts into the mouths of his characters, points out the similarity between food and language/ literature. Sustenance and discourse are, as concepts, rendered virtually interchangeable insofar as that references to both spoken and written communication are made in terms of alimentary matters. Food is likened to language; and vice versa. In Martin Chuzzlewit alone, for instance, a conversation is described as

being "rather highly spiced and strongly seasoned" (MC 524); there is some "good, strong, peppery doctrine" (MC 357) preached among the characters; and food metaphors such as "the honey of eloquence" (MC 392) are frequently invoked. Similarly, Mr Brass, in The Old Curiosity Shop, philosophizes about how "words were but spoon-meat for babes and sucklings, and that oaths were the food for strong men" (OCS 546); David Copperfield comments that an acquaintance of his spoke "as if [his] words were something real in his mouth, and delicious to taste" (DC 225); characters make comments that are described as being "bitter", "tart", or "sweet"; and, in what may be the ultimate equation of food and discourse, the act of eating is, at one point in The Pickwick Papers, explicitly described as "discussing":

> Mr Bob Sawyer was seated: not in the dickey, but on the roof of the chaise, with his legs as far asunder as they would conveniently go, wearing Mr Samuel Weller's hat on one side of his head, and bearing, in one hand, a most enormous sandwich, while, in the other, he supported a goodly-sized case bottle, to both of which he applied himself with intense relish...and Mr Samuel Weller, decorated with Bob Sawyer's hat, was seated in the centre thereof, discussing a twin sandwich, with an animated countenance, the expression of which betokened his entire and perfect approval of the whole arrangement. (PP 796, emphasis added)

In addition, Bleak House's Inspector Bucket takes the identification of language with food to the extreme and refers to food's potential as a tangible medium for communication when he tells Esther that without setting foot in his house, he has "communicated with Mrs Bucket, in the baker's loaves and in the milk" (BH 796).

In many ways, food's presence and influence in language and

literature can be traced back to the fact that patterns of communication are, first and foremost, cultural phenomena. Essentially, language both reflects and influences - it would be difficult, if not impossible, to determine which comes first - the beliefs, values, and traditions of any given community. As an illustration of this phenomenon, anthropologists cite the presumed fact of there being many words for "snow" in the language of the Eskimo, and the preponderance of war and combat imagery in the North-American vernacular, to point out the focus of these cultures. In other words, studying a community's language - and its idiomatic language, in particular - can indicate what sort of concepts and/or objects are important to that society, and how and why this is so. In the case of many English speaking communities, for example, sustenance - and the very idea of sustenance - is so pivotal that food is used as a metaphor for items and concepts that are actually edible, and even those that are not. Colloquialisms such as "food for thought" or "having an appetite for knowledge or destruction" have been incorporated into the pool of linguistic resources of such communities.

There is no reason to believe that this method of cultural exploration ought to be limited to the study of real, or non-fictional, communities though, and it seems perfectly reasonable to use this idea to try to understand fictional communities as well. Examining the language of Dickens's fiction, and looking at how it has been used and manipulated, can help to explain the importance and function of food in the Dickens worlds.

One reason it is particularly appropriate to look at the language patterns of Dickens's fiction in terms of their internal cultural significance is that the narratives themselves make reference to how environments can influence language. One such instance occurs in Our Mutual Friend, when Eugene Wrayburn is delivered a message while dining at the home of the Veneerings. In this scene, the narrator points out that Blight, the messenger, is guided in his choice of words by the sumptuous array of eatables in the hall-way:

> Eugene looks 'Excuse me at,' towards Mrs Veneering, goes out, and finds Young Blight, Mortimer's clerk, at the hall-door.
> 'You told me to bring him, sir, to wherever you was, if he come while you was out and I was in,' says that discrete young gentleman, standing on tiptoe to whisper; 'and I've brought him.'
> 'Sharp boy. Where is he?' asks Eugene.
> 'He's in a cab, sir at the door. I thought it best not to show him, you see, if it could be helped; for he's a-shaking all over, like-' Blight's simile is perhaps inspired by the surrounding dishes of sweets-'like Glue Monge'. (OMF 693)

Blight has evidently confused (or blighted) the name for "blancmange" - a dessert described in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as an "opaque white jelly of isinglass, gelatine, or corn-flour, and milk" (122) - but the situation nevertheless emphasizes the connection between language and environment and how one's surroundings may be incorporated into even a fictional individual's thoughts and speech.

In general, it may be said that narrative language exists on two distinct levels: the intrinsic and the extrinsic. In Dickens's fiction food plays a role in both of these linguistic dimensions. On the one hand, all the language used in a piece of literature

is ultimately attributable to the author of the piece; but one can look at particulars such as 'food and language in Dickens' at the internal level of the fictional worlds, since not only Dickens but the characters that he created use language that is inundated with food imagery and references.

The narrators of Dickens's fiction have a tendency to incorporate alimentary conceits into their thoughts and speech. Among other things, they talk of "food for contemplation" (OT 78), "starved imagination[s]" (HT 57), having "a strong appetite for contradiction" (OT 149), and of the "mustard seed" of life's mechanizations (LD 238). They also refer to persons being "shaken to yeast" (LD 405), emerging "hot from the model oven" (MC 435), and to their moving not inches or steps but "morsel[s] farther" (OT 221). Similarly, the terms "ruminating" and "fruitless" are repeatedly used in reference to both alimentary and non-alimentary matters.

In addition to the narrators, Dickens's characters also use language that is peppered with food imagery and idiom. Some of the more delectable utterances that have been made in the Dickens worlds include: Rogue Riderhood's remark that he is off to "pick the bones of his night's rest" (OMF 772), Wemmick's description of Jaggers's hard work as his having "put in all the salt and pepper" (GE 405), Pancks calling Casby a "boiling-over old Christian" (LD 461), and Bounderby's description of himself as being "like a maggot into a nut" (HT 196). As far as the intrinsic dimension of the narratives is concerned, and insofar as Dickens's creations represent a fictional culture, the

preponderance of alimentary references and allusions in their language suggests that food is an important element in their communities. This, in turn, makes it probable that the characters' actions and beliefs - which can be equated with "plot" and "characterization", respectively - will also be food-oriented, and these possibilities will be explored in the second and third chapters of this thesis. Lexical issues - such as how words and language are used by the author - are connected with the extrinsic and author-central dimension of the narratives, and these are the general concerns of this chapter.

"Food" is not a completely unambiguous term. Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines "food" as, basically, 'a material consisting primarily of various substances, which sustains growth and repair, [and] supplies or nourishes' (453), and the Concise Oxford Dictionary adds that "food" could be equated with such concepts as "provisions", "edibles", or "nourishment" (472). It seems that although the various dictionaries make frequent reference to the metaphorical potential of the term, the general impression they give is that "food" is typically a salutary concept. This is not always the case though, and ambivalent images such as the one suggested by Dickens's reference to "contagious disease and death [being] busy with the living crops" (OCS 424) emphasize this ambiguity. Essentially, food has almost as much potential to be harmful as it does to be nourishing; it can give life, but it can just as easily take it away! In fact, defining food as "an edible" ultimately forces one to realize

that the true nature of food depends on the circumstances in which it is ingested. In other words, the image of "food" is highly versatile and the term itself needs to be contextualized in order to be accurately defined.

Dickens takes full advantage of the variety of ideas evoked by the idea of "an edible". On one hand, the fictions are saturated with references and allusions to what can be called the conventional idea of food - its existence as a necessary and salubrious commodity - and the characters are often portrayed eating for sustenance and nourishment. One may even note that Dickens tends to portray the nutritious dimension of his characters' eating habits in a conspicuously realistic manner - having them eat realistically well-balanced meals - unlike the characters of some other novelists, such as Disraeli, whose Stephen Morley reputedly "only drinks water and only eats herbs and fruits" (134) - a diet which, if accurate, would not sustain him for long.

But Dickens also writes prodigiously about the ominous potential of food and eatables frequently appear in his novels and stories in forms that are distinctly non-nutritive. This is precisely the case with the "composition cakes" that Bill Sikes comes across in Oliver Twist, to point out just one example. As the following passage shows, these "cakes" are indeed edible, but by no means nutritious or delicious:

> If a lady stains her honour, she has only need to swallow one cake and she's cured at once - for it's poison. If a gentleman wants to prove this, he has only need to bolt one little square, and he has put it beyond question - for it's quite as satisfactory as a pistol-bullet, and a great deal nastier in the flavour, consequently the more credit in

taking it. (OT 426)

The poisonous substances that Dickens created are not always obviously toxic and the narratives, emphasizing this, frequently draw attention to the fine line that distinguishes the nutritious from the noxious. Not only do the fictions portray victuals that are edible-but-toxic, but there are several episodes which convey the ambivalent idea that too much of a good thing is a bad thing. One such incident takes place in The Pickwick Papers, and describes a gentleman who has eaten "four crumpets, ev'ry night for fifteen year" and insists that "Crumpets is wholesome" (PP 708). The gentleman's doctor, however, takes the opposite stance and asserts that "Crumpets is not wholesome, sir" and that "Four crumpets a night...vill[sic] do your business in six months!" (PP 708). As this scene points out, an item of food can have antithetical properties, and its true nature depends on the perspective from which it is looked at.

Because food can appear to be good for you when, in fact, it isn't, it makes an excellent instrument for committing certain crimes, particularly murder. Jonas Chuzzlewit, for one, realizes this and plots to kill his father by mixing poison in "with some sweetmeat in a jar" (MC 862) and, similarly, the Veneerings' "melancholy retainer" repeatedly alludes to the potential trauma involved in partaking of his employers' feasts: as the narrator describes it, the butler's announcement that "Dinner is on the table!" is tantamount to an invitation to "Come down and be poisoned, ye unhappy children of men" (OMF 51) and this same "retainer" goes round the table "like a gloomy Analytical

Chemist: always seeming to say, after 'Chablis, sir?' - 'You wouldn't if you knew what it's made of'" (OMF 52)'.

Food, then, is not always the wholesome and life-giving substance that it appears or is thought to be. As a concept, it has ambiguous connotations and its inherent versatility allows it to be widely and variously incorporated into Dickens's fiction.

In regards to literature, the concept of "style" is closely related to that of language. In fact, typical definitions of "literary style" refer to 'the way that language has been used or manipulated in the creation of a text' and The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory states that "style" is, predominantly, "how a particular writer says things" (922).

There are several categories of ideas that are conventionally used to describe and evaluate an author's or a work's style. These include the diction and/or words that have been used in the text(s); the types of devices, imagery, and figures of speech; the tone, rhythm, or voice of the narrative(s); and the syntax and shape of the sentences and paragraphs. Given the range of elements available, it is not surprising that an author's literary style is generally not something that can be adequately summed up in a few words or phrases; and Dickens's narrative style is no exception. Dickens makes use of all sorts of literary devices, conceits, and tropes - sometimes in conventional ways and sometimes in unconventional ones. An almost invariably consistent feature of his style, though, is the spectre of food: at one point or another, and in

some shape or form or presence, food is incorporated into virtually all of his linguistic and thematic manipulations.

One aspect of narrative style in general could be characterized as how rhetorical devices are used to create striking and/or innovative imagery. Figures of speech such as metaphors and similes can transform the familiar into the unfamiliar or, conversely, make the unknown known. As John Carey explains in an evaluation of Dickens's use of simile, such devices are useful in creating unique fictional worlds out of the standard and commonly accessible material that is the so-called "real world":

> [Dickens's] similes, however fantastic, have the power of conveying instant visual truth...Through simile, too, his violent imagination can thrust unguessed energies into the most somnolent of objects...The exuberance of the similes is equalled only by their precision...His similes remake the world... (130)

This idea of remaking reality through the use of figures of speech is an apt analogy for the fiction-making process because fiction is, ultimately, elements of reality that have been modified or reshaped in some way, and metaphors and similes, in the same way, convey the sense of something in terms of something else. Depending on the author's creative vision and abilities, fictional worlds may differ either nominally or greatly from the real world and may be either trite or unusual.

As I've mentioned, one of the notable features of Dickens's fictional worlds is that they tend to be formulated according to an almost completely food-oriented frame of reference. In the context of figures of speech and the simultaneous similarity and dissimilarity of fiction to reality, food may be considered a

familiar real-world-concept. The way that food is incorporated into Dickens's fictional worlds, though, makes these worlds exceptional. From the universal structures of society, politics, and government, to the individual objects, people, and places, the various components of Dickens's worlds are portrayed, at one time or another, in terms of food. Political tenets, for example, are 'food-ly' described in Hard Times as "little mouldy rations" (HT 157), and the "Circumlocution Office" of Little Dorrit - which reputedly represents the "whole Science of Government" of this world - is represented as a gormandizing institution that has "Its finger...in the largest public pie, and in the smallest public tart" (LD 145). Similarly, the individualized aspects of Dickens's fictional worlds and the single images underlying the structure of these worlds - which could be called the fictional-building-blocks - are also often food-based and created through figures of speech. Similes such as a group of people being described as "seated, a lady and gentleman alternately, like the layers of bread and meat in a plate of sandwiches" (SB 279), and metaphors like the one describing what a fixture Pecksniff had become in Tom Pinch's life - "Tom had so long been used to steep the Pecksniff of his fancy in his tea, and spread him out upon his toast, and take him as a relish with his beer that he made but a poor breakfast on the first morning after his expulsion" (MC 629) - demonstrate the extent to which Dickens's fictional worlds have been built with - and upon - images of food. Indeed, one particularly original metaphoric food reference in Little Dorrit has the dilettante

painter Henry Gowan speaking of his desire to wed and provide for his lover, Pet Meagles, in terms of his hoping to "settle a crust of bread and cheese" (LD 458) upon her.

Whereas the rhetorical devices of metaphors and similes are generally straightforward in the way that they persuade the reader to see a fictional world in a particular way, similar results can be achieved in a more subtle and/or complex manner through the manipulation of certain narrative techniques. One notable and frequently discussed technique used by Dickens in the construction of his fictional worlds - and one which greatly contributes to the alimentary atmosphere of the narratives - is his superabundant use of detail. The scenes, situations, props, and people that Dickens created are almost invariably portrayed in intricate - and what George Orwell calls "unnecessary" (128) - detail. Even the stereotypical bare prison cell becomes, in a Dickens text, a meticulously evoked setting. The chamber holding Rigaud and Cavaletto captive in the opening chapter of Little Dorrit, for example, is stocked with not only "the two men", but "a notched and disfigured bench, immovable from the wall, with a draught-board rudely hacked upon it with a knife, a set of dominoes, two mats, and two or three wine bottles...rats and other unseen vermin" (LD 40). Even the architecture and atmosphere of this cell is minutely depicted (LD 40-41). Granted, this profusion of detail 'doesn't do much to advance the story' - as Orwell also asserts - but it is one of the key factors producing that inimitable "special Dickens atmosphere"

(Orwell 129). As John Wain has commented, Dickens's "greatness lay in his inexhaustible imaginative fertility [and] his promptness with dabs of unforgettable detail" (186, emphasis added).

The detail which inundates and characterizes Dickens's narratives is not an ordinary sort of detail. It is literally extra-ordinary, in so far as that many of the things that Dickens describes are those which would, in all probability, remain unnoticed in another circumstance or text. Essentially, Dickens remarks on the unremarkable and this, in turn, renders these details not only remarkably obvious but emblematically and unforgettably so. What is also important to note, though, is that these odd and endearing details are the ones that tend to be remembered by Dickens's readers. John Carey makes the following observations - and other critics such as Orwell and John Holloway make similar comments - about Dickens's method of description:

> What makes [Dickens] unique is the power of his imagination and, in Kafka's phrase, its 'great, careless prodigality' - careless, because extending itself typically into odd angles and side-alleys of his subject. To take a single example, when Mrs. Jarley's caravan rolls into town one sultry afternoon, Dickens' narration passes swiftly over houses, inns and bystanders and lights on some insects: 'the flies, drunk with moist sugar in the grocer's shop, forgot their wings and briskness, and baked to death in dusty corners of the window.' Festive and forlorn in rapid succession, they are very Dickensian flies, and it took Dickens to notice them at all. (7)

Something that is especially interesting about the various accounts of Dickens's use of detail is the fact that the narrative examples used to support the various opinions often concern food: Carey makes use of the food-drunk-flies in the grocer's window; Orwell's primary exemplum is a Pickwickian

episode about a child eating a necklace and a family having a supper of "baked shoulder of mutton and potatoes under it" (129); and Holloway focuses on, among other things, "mother-of-pearl fish" (23). This may seem to be a simple coincidence but there is reason to believe otherwise. The undeniable fact that Dickens "writes endlessly about food" (Orwell 115) means that much of the detail pervading Dickens's narratives is alimentary detail. As Orwell writes, "the kind of things [Dickens] notices are inn-signs, brass door-knockers, painted jugs, the interiors of shops and private houses, clothes, faces, and above all, food" (118, emphasis added). It logically - rather than coincidentally - follows from there being such a profundity of food-detail, therefore, that an episode exemplifying Dickens's use of detail will more than likely also mention his use of food imagery.

In The Personalist, J.A. Ward notes that "Dickens catalogues dishes and courses; he describes the bulk, the texture, the color, the smell, and the taste of the foods served" (401). Similarly, and picking up on Orwell's observation about the lack of connection between the profusion of detail and the plot (cf p.21), Sylvere Monod comments that Dickens "can seldom mention a meal without describing the menu in detail even when the menu has no part to play in the plot" (11). Indeed, the gastronomical detail in Dickens's narratives is both profound and profuse, and Dickens, unlike some of his characters, is not discriminating in his tastes; he just as faithfully records the minutiae of elaborate gourmet repasts as he does the specifics of so-called "coarse" meals. Among the more conspicuously particularized

repasts of his oeuvre is the Sunday dinner served at the Todgers' Commercial Boarding House - a highly detailed event that spans several pages and begins with Bailey's prognostications about the menu:

> 'I say', he whispered, stopping in one of his journeys to and fro, 'young ladies, there's soup to-morrow. She's a-making it now. An't she a-putting in the water? Oh! not at all neither!'
>
> In the course of answering another knock, he thrust in his head again.
>
> 'I say! There's fowls to-morrow. Not skinny ones. Oh no!
>
> Presently he called through the key-hole:
>
> 'There's fish tomorrow. Just come... (MC 200)

When dinner is actually served, it proves to consist of more than expected, and all of it is meticulously described:

> Mr Pecksniff said grace...This done, they fell to with less ceremony than appetite; the table groaning beneath the weight, not only of the delicacies whereof the Miss Pecksniffs had been previously forewarned, but of boiled beef, roast veal, bacon, pies, and abundance of such heavy vegetables as are favourably known to housekeepers for their satisfying qualities. Besides which, there were bottles of stout, bottles of wine, bottles of ale, and divers other strong drinks, native and foreign. (MC 204)

Still more food is consumed by the characters and detailed by the narrator:

> The dessert was splendid. No waiting either. The pudding-plates had been washed in a little tub outside the door while cheese was on, and though they were moist and warm with friction, still there they were again, up to the mark, and true to time. Quarts of almonds; dozens of oranges; pounds of raisins; stacks of biffins; soup-plates full of nuts. Oh, Todgers's could do it when it chose! (MC 205)

In a Dickens novel, even the most meagre meals are depicted with great care and detail, despite their not having the same amount of descriptive potential inherent in a sumptuous feast. The repast prepared by Stephen and Rachel - two of the poor Coketown "hands" in Hard Times - for example, although it is

simple in means, is minutely and precisely described:

> He lighted a candle, set out his little tea-board, got hot water from below, and brought in small portions of tea and sugar, a loaf, and some butter from the nearest shop. The bread was new and crusty, the butter fresh, and the sugar lump, of course. (HT 186)

Evidently, Dickens's depictions of food, and the food-related scenes he created, incorporate a great deal of detail and, as some feel is the case with his use of detail in general, these descriptions could be described as "florid" (Orwell 129) or "indescribably trivial" (Gissing 231). In fact, what could be described as 'vividly odd' (Holloway 23) food specifics can be found throughout the tales: a shop-window in Hard Times, for example, houses "wretched little toys, mixed up...with cheap newspapers and pork (there was a leg to be raffled for tomorrow night)" (HT 106); and the recuperating Oliver Twist is given no simple bowl of soup, but "a basin full of broth: strong enough...to furnish an ample dinner, when reduced to the regulation strength, for three hundred and fifty paupers, at the lowest computation" (OT 128). These sorts of incidents may jar the reader's sensibilities with their almost absurd specificity and, as a result, such images are particularly memorable - and particularly "Dickensian".

Another feature of Dickens's propensity for prodigiously minute description is that it often results in what are essentially lists or catalogs of detail. As J. Hillis Miller explains, "Dickens sought an ever closer approach to the truth hiding behind the surface appearance of things...not so much by going behind the surface as by giving an exhaustive inventory of

the surface itself" (xvi). Not surprisingly, Dickens's itemizations tend to be comprised predominantly of edibles and the narratives frequently act as an inventory of what is on the dining table or what is in the pantry, picnic basket, grocery bag, or market-bins. In fact, even when the lists aren't fully comprised of things to eat, at least one or two food items find their way into the chaos - even, and especially, in the most unexpected of places. In Bleak House, for example, Esther and Caddy find a surprising amount of once-edible items in the cupboards of the Jellyby household:

> Such wonderful things came tumbling out of the closets when they were opened - bits of mouldy pie, sour bottles, Mrs Jellyby's caps, letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes of children, firewood, wafers, saucepan-lids, damp sugar in odds and ends of paper bags, footstools, blacklead brushes, bread, Mrs Jellyby's bonnets, books with butter sticking to the binding, broken candlesticks, nutshells, heads and tails of shrimps, dinner-mats, gloves, coffee-grounds, umbrellas... (BH 476)

Similarly, the assortment of 'stuff' cluttering Mr Pickwick's prison accommodations is unusually food predominant, including the "remnants of loaves and pieces of cheese, and damp towels, and scrags of meat, and articles of wearing apparel, and mutilated crockery, and bellows without nozzles, and toasting-forks without prongs" (PP 683); and the metaphysical mantra that Mrs General recommends as being "serviceable, in the formation of a demeanour" (LD 529) is also comprised primarily of edibles - namely "Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes, and prism" (LD 529).

The profusion of detail in the novels and short stories - particularly that of a trivial or gratuitous sort - marks Dickens's fiction as uniquely his and, at the same time,

contributes to the realistic quality of the narratives. As will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 3, one of the contexts in which the realism of Dickens's writings can be looked at is in how the fiction is related to the hypothesis that "the truth is often stranger than fiction" - which relationship is the subject of Angus Calder's comment that "Dickens's preposterous additions to normality give 'artistic verisimilitude to otherwise bald and unconvincing facts'" (20-21). In other words, the bizarre-yet-ordinary details that inundate Dickens's fiction are frequently effective in creating an atmosphere that is realistic because of its distinctiveness.

Another of the outstanding, frequently discussed, and ultimately food-related stylistic features of Dickens's fiction is the comic dimension of his writings. It may be said that Dickens's literary humour was so effective, and so often critically commented on, because of the great variety of humour in the narratives. The humour didn't get stale, and this seems to be because Dickens was successful in incorporating so many different <u>types</u> of comedy into his work: there are characters and scenes that are - to label only a few - morbidly ironic, darkly sardonic, or just plain silly. As is the case with so much of Dickens's writing though, one of the factors of consistency within the multiplicity is the element of food, and much of Dickens's humour is conveyed in conjunction with the act of eating and the appearance of eatables. One could say that in so far as Dickens created comic characters, scenes, and worlds, they

tend to be at their most amusing when situated either literally or figuratively near food.

One of the reasons food works so well as a medium for humour is that food and eating are linked with a number of societal and ceremonial conventions - such as when, how, where, and how much people are expected to eat. Defying these conventions is easy to do - especially within the realm of fiction - and tends to have ironic and comic effects. "Taking" lunch, for example, is a conventional thing to do. When it is said, therefore, of Mrs Sparsit's function in the Bounderby household that "It was a part, at once of Mrs Sparsit's dignity and service, not to lunch. She supervised the meal officially, but implied that in her own stately person she considered lunch a weakness" (HT 109), the episode strikes an ironic chord. Similarly, the description of Oliver Twist and his fellow orphans as "atrociously presuming to be hungry" (OT 49), and the idea of someone consuming a "slight lunch of two or three pounds of cold beef and a pot or two of porter" (PP 201, emphasis added) may be seen as comic because they subvert the conventional ideas of hunger and consumption in moderation. As well, the noxious aspect of food (a subject that was explored earlier in this chapter), by defying the conventional expectations of the salutary, is a good instrument for conveying humour - especially that of a morbid or "black" type.

Another type of food-oriented humour that often appears in Dickens's fiction is what is known as "slapstick". Dickens's characters frequently eat and drink to excess and, either in the

process or as a result of doing so, behave inanely. This is particularly true of The Pickwick Papers, a novel where the feasting and festivities are both frequent and amusing. On one occasion, for instance, Mr Pickwick gets drunk at a picnic, passes out in a wheelbarrow, and wakes up in the Pound with the pigs and goats (Chapter 19). Similar instances can be found elsewhere in this novel, and in Dickens's other novels and short stories.

It sometimes happens that an author is so taken - either consciously or subconsciously - with a particular subject or theme that it is repeatedly manifest in an individual work, or in the author's entire oeuvre - something that is obviously the case with Dickens and food. One of the results of the preponderance of the food conceit is its ability to over-shadow other aspects of the fictions, and food frequently appears as the co- or sub-focus of other recurrent Dickens topics.

Children - the concern for them, and the concerns of them - are frequently the subject of Dickens's fiction and Philip Collins is one of the critics who comments on this phenomenon. "Charles Dickens" he writes, "was the first English novelist in whose stories children are frequent and central, instead of sustaining merely minor roles in the background"(1)[4]. The subject of food frequently appears in conjunction with the topic of children and one of the similarities among Dickens's fictional children - and the several simple-minded characters who are likened to children - is that they are almost unwaveringly

preoccupied with things to eat. There is Oliver Twist, for one, who is often characterized as 'the child who asks for more porridge'; and the young David Copperfield, the simple-minded Mr Dick, and Little Dorrit's physically and emotionally stunted Maggy, each display an extreme fascination with the edibles that they have, or do not have.

To be specific, the scenes in David Copperfield that concern David's work in the counting house are almost wholly caught up in particulars of the food that he buys and what, when, and how he eats[5] (DC 214-216). His food-likes and dislikes, the special treats he rewards or consoles himself with, and the daily meals that he takes are all remembered and described - in great detail - by the grown-up David who narrates the tale. As Watt comments, tapping the presumed biographic connection between David and Dickens, "Dickens' vivid recall of how the world looks to the hungry child produces several memorable scenes" (169).

The character of Mr Dick represents a similar type food-preoccupied existence, in so far as that he does not seem able to understand the world around him unless it involves his diet. This becomes particularly apparent when, until he is forced to realize "that ruin meant distress, want, and starvation" (DC 561, emphasis added), he fails to comprehend the relevance of his benefactress' financial devastation. The seriousness of the situation finally dawns on him, though, and he proceeds, with child-like intensity, to pocket "fragments of his bread and cheese" (DC 562) in order, presumes David, that they have a means to revive themselves "when we should have reached an advanced

stage of attenuation" (DC 562).

Maggy's concern for food is of a somewhat more specific nature than either David's or Mr Dick's. Although she finds food, in general, to be a wonderful thing, the principal source of her preoccupation are hospitals and the wonderful food that she believes can always be found there. As the story of Maggy's life makes clear, her experiences and memories of hospital food make up the most enjoyable and meaningful part of her life:

> 'When Maggy was ten years old,' said Little Dorrit, watching her face while she spoke, 'she had a bad fever, sir, and she has never grown any older ever since.'
> 'Ten years old,' said Maggy, nodding her head. 'But what a nice hospital! So comfortable, wasn't it? Oh so nice it was. Such a 'Ev'nly place!'
> 'She had never been at peace before, sir,' said Little Dorrit, turning towards Arthur for an instant and speaking low, 'and she always runs off upon that.'
> 'Such beds there is there!' cried Maggy. 'Such lemonades! Such oranges! Such d'licious broth and wine! Such Chicking! Oh, AIN'T it a delightful place to go and stop at!' (LD 143)

In each of these cases, the child or simpleton perceives the world almost entirely in terms of food and this, in turn, echoes the way that Dickens's fictional worlds, in general, are focused - a similarity that could, perhaps, be explained by the frequently asserted connection between David Copperfield's 'life' and Dickens's own[6].

Sex and violence are staples, subject-wise, not only of literature, but of virtually all forms of entertainment. In Dickens's fiction, though, each of these motifs is often depicted within the context of food and the resulting imagery is worth noting.

Violence and food are linked in Dickens's fiction in several ways. For one thing, as I've noted earlier in this chapter, "food" is potentially synonymous with the concept of "poison" and can, therefore, be used to inflict pain or commit murder. It may be noted, though, that while one might assume that causing harm means the occurrence of violence, poisoning someone is a rather passive action. Acts of poisoning aside, there are many active and explicit expressions of violence to be found in Dickens's fiction. Some of the nastier of Dickens's creations, for instance, show a proclivity for taking their rage out on their food'. The inimitable Quilp is one such character, and he is at one point described as an individual who "approaches meals with horrible ferocity" (Carey 25). His alimentary-focused anger is displayed throughout The Old Curiosity Shop, and in one scene he ferociously attacks his food and utensils: the narrator relates that he "ate hard eggs, shell and all, devoured gigantic prawns with the heads and tails on, chewed tobacco and water-cresses at the same time and with extraordinary greediness, drank boiling tea without winking, bit his fork and spoon till they bent again, and in short performed...many horrifying and uncommon acts" (OCS 86). In fact, this scene acts as a reminder that all articles of cutlery - which are themselves obviously food-related objects - can essentially be considered instruments of violence and, in this sense, it could be said that food is almost invariably acted upon in a violent manner.

In general, situations of violence in Dickens tend to involve food. Sometimes this means that small food details or

images are incorporated into a scene - like the appearance of the dried-currant-like flies that swarm Tigg Montague's dead body (MC 853) - but sometimes the whole context of the violence is food-related. One example of the latter sort of food-and-violence subject that appears frequently in Dickens's fiction - and one that is both "amusing" and "exotic"(22), according to John Carey - is cannibalism. Quite a few of Dickens's fictional creations display cannibalistic tendencies. Again, Quilp is an outstanding example of nastiness, and his cannibalistic mannerisms have a serious, if not a realistic, undertone. There are descriptions of him as one who cooks "in somewhat of a savage and cannibalistic-like manner" (OCS 614); he is said to 'smack his lips' at his wife "as if...she were actually a sweetmeat" (OCS 81); and his exclamation that "I don't eat babies; I don't like 'em" (OCS 223) seems to carry the implication that he would eat people if they were more suited to his tastes. Cannibalism is also a characteristic attributed to Bleak House's Mr Vholes. In Vholes' case, it is evidenced in descriptions of him looking "as if he were making a lingering meal of [his client, Richard] with his eyes as well as with his professional appetite" (BH 607) and in the fact that his entire family is compared to a bunch of "minor cannibal chiefs" (BH 605).

Other outlets of Dickens's interest in cannibalism are the eponymous Oliver Twist and Great Expectation's Pip - two characters who exhibit a pervasive fear of being eaten by their fellow characters. Oliver, for one, construes the fact of his being given more than the usual ration of bread and gruel to mean

that "the board must have determined to kill him for some useful purpose or they never would have begun to fatten him up in this way" (OT 63), and the story of Pip's great expectations is so interspersed with anthropophagic imagery that John Carey observes of Pip - without much exaggeration - that "It's unusual to find a hero who has such difficulty keeping himself out of the stomachs of the other characters" (24).

Great Expectations is a novel that makes use of a great deal of food imagery in general, and Pip's obsession with cannibalism is a recurring subject in the narrative. Interpreting the novel according to a Freudian line of thought could lead one to speculate that Pip was traumatized at an early age by Magwitch's threats of eating him: "[W]hat fat cheeks you ha' got...Darn Me if I couldn't eat em" (GE 36), says the convict at one point, while "licking his lips" (GE 36); and Magwitch also warns that if Pip doesn't do as he is told, then his "heart and [his] liver shall be tore out, roasted and ate" (GE 38). Pip seems never to have gotten over this life-threatening ordeal, and he is haunted by the idea of people desiring to eat either him or one another. If one relies on Pip's perceptions - which the reader tends to do, since Pip is the narrator of the tale - then one will likely surmise from the evidence presented that Pip cuts an especially toothsome figure: his sister and Pumblechook stand him in front of the fire as if to cook him (GE 124-125), and Orlick looks at him "as if his mouth watered for me" (GE 436). In fact, even Pip describes himself as if he were a piece of food being prepared for someone's supper, and at one point states that his injured

arm felt "as if, having been burnt before, it were now being boiled" (GE 434). As well, and perhaps because the story is related through Pip and, therefore, subject to his interpretations, cannibalistic fears and proclivities are also attributed to other of the novel's characters. There is Miss Havisham, for example, who is repeatedly said to feel that her relatives look at her predatorily - they supposedly wish to 'feast upon her' (GE 116) - and she is herself accredited with voracious mannerisms and described in the act of kissing Estella "with a ravenous intensity" (GE 261).

In some contexts of Dickens's fiction, the cannibalism imagery has been given humourous, rather than sinister, connotations. The lighter side of man-eating tendencies is represented, for one, by Joe-the-fat-boy in The Pickwick Papers - a character who consumes food at an absurdly voracious and gluttonous rate. Joe's habits and excesses are depicted as comic and amusing - particularly in those descriptions which mention his giving "a semi-cannibalistic leer at Mr Weller, as he thought of the roast legs and gravy" (PP 473), and when he is said to have 'a bit of the cannibal in his eyes' as he looks at Mary (PP 857-8). Interestingly, despite the fact that cannibalism appears throughout Dickens's oeuvre, and although much of the non-fiction written in Dickens's lifetime seems to have taken the issue quite seriously - something that Dickens reputedly took into consideration when he included a controversial subject in his fiction[8] - there is no incident in his novels in which a character actually gets consumed by one of his or her fellows.[9]

Sex is a subject that is often paired with that of violence; but in Dickens's fiction it also frequently linked with food. This is not, however, a phenomenon that is unique to Dickens's writing. Sexuality has always had a place in fiction, but changing social norms have dictated that such concerns be textually manifest in different ways. Victorian fiction written for a family-type audience, for example, could not deal with the subject openly and explicitly. Instead, sexual encounters were portrayed through implicit and metaphorical means. Thus, although 'sex in Dickens' is generally not considered to be an especially lucrative topic for study - Carey observes that sex is often thought to comprise "the biggest gap in Dickens's achievement"(154) - one could surmise that it is not so much that sex has been "banished" from the novels, but that it has been "driven underground, to emerge in perverted and inhibited forms" (Carey 155). To this same effect, Orwell comments that "Actually [Dickens's] books are not so sexless as they are sometimes declared to be, and considering the time in which he was writing, he is reasonably frank" (135).

One of the typical ways in which sex was implicitly portrayed in Victorian literature was through the juxtaposition of gastronomic appetites with sexual ones. Carey makes some interesting observations about sexuality in the writings of some of Dickens's contemporaries, and these comments seem relevant to the study of Dickens. Of Thackeray, for example, Carey comments that "his writing taps, through food, a reservoir of sensuousness

which would have been unthinkable, in the Victorian period, had he dealt directly with sexual experience" (Thackeray 85). Given the similarity of the environments in which Dickens and Thackeray wrote, and the ample food references that each make, it seems possible that Dickens used a technique similar to Thackeray's when he portrayed sexuality - and examining the narratives reveals evidence to support this idea.

Food-and-sex imagery can be found in quite a few of the scenes that Dickens created and a particularly notable one occurs in The Pickwick Papers. In this novel Sam Weller first meets his love, Mary, at the supper table and during the course of dinner the two exchange what is called a "kiss by deputy" (PP 434), wherein a drinking glass comes into contact with both characters' lips. Mary then experiences a bout of coughing brought on by the combination of food and laughter, and from this "alarming crisis" it is said that she "was only recovered by sundry pats on the back and other attentions, most delicately administered by Sam Weller" (PP 434) - a description that carries quite a bit of sexual innuendo.

The meeting between Ruth Pinch and John Westlock, in Martin Chuzzlewit, is similarly rife with both food and the intimations of sexuality - although the latter are of a somewhat less bawdy nature than those depicted in the meeting between Mary and Sam (as described above). The description of Ruth preparing a beefsteak pudding, despite the scene's inherent homeliness, is imbued with about as much sexuality as Dickens ever used in the portrayal of a female character: the scene begins with Ruth

slowly putting on her apron, which must

> be carefully smoothed down beneath - Oh, heaven, what a wicked little stomacher! and to be...tapped, rebuked, and wheedled, at the pockets, before it would set right, which at last it did, and when it did - but never mind; this is a sober chronicle. And then, there were her cuffs to be tucked up, for fear of flour; and she had a little ring to pull off her finger...and during the whole of these preparations she looked demurely every now and then at Tom, from under her dark eye lashes... (MC 676)

John Westlock appears in the midst of this disarray, is "transfixed in silent admiration" (MC 678), and extends his hand to the flushed lady. The proffered hand cannot be taken "by reason of the flour and paste upon her own" (MC 678), but John is asked to join Ruth and Tom for supper. At this point, Ruth is "seized with a palpitation of the heart...for she felt that if the dish turned out a failure, she never would be able to hold up her head before John Westlock again" (MC 678). All together, it seems that more is meant to be at stake - or 'at steak' - in this situation, than simply a meal. Granted, nothing <u>explicit</u> happens between Ruth and John - or Sam and Mary - but the undertones of sexuality certainly add flavour and bite to these scenes[10].

Sex and violence are subjects that seem to go well together and, interestingly, some of the most sexually explicit situations in Dickens's fiction are those which combine aspects of the sensual with images of violence. As Pamela Hansford Johnson comments, "the sexual by-way most persistently, if tentatively, explored in the novels [of Dickens] is sadism" (179). In particular, the juxtaposition of sex and <u>cannibalism</u> provides some titillating imagery. Pecksniff's attentions to Mary Graham, for example, show how eating can metaphorically represent ideas

of carnality. In the scene which describes their affair, the lecherous Pecksniff seizes Mary's hand - against her will - and is said to have "employed himself in separating the fingers with his own, and sometimes kissing them" (MC 551). Pecksniff continues to hold onto Mary's hand, "tracing the course of one delicate blue vein with his fat thumb" and is said to have "slapped the hand to punish it; but relenting, folded it in his waistcoat to comfort it again" (MC 552). Pecksniff's embrace of Mary - which is likened to a boa-constrictor squeezing its supper-to-be (MC 551) - adds to the scene's atmosphere of eroto-cannibalism, and the whole episode culminates when the two finally part company and it is said that Pecksniff "stopped, and holding up [Mary's] little finger, said in playful accents... 'Shall I bite it?' / Receiving no reply he kissed it instead" (MC 554). All together, Pecksniff treats Mary as if she were some sort of edible delicacy; his sexual and gastronomical appetites are conjoined with one focus - Mary - and the added seasoning of threats of violence and predatory feasting are thrown in for good measure. Indeed, this scene is a showcase for Dickens's ability to create fictional situations that just barely escape the necessity of being censored for the mass public, and it proves not only that he was capable of portraying sexual relationships, but that he was capable of doing so in a sordid manner.

Evidently, many of the linguistic, stylistic, and thematic elements in Dickens's fiction are linked with food; and eatables are a consistent and an emblematic dimension of his work. It

should not be surprising, therefore, that other of the basic components of Dickens's fictions - namely, plot, setting, and characterization - have a similar focus. What might not be expected, though, is the extent to which food, in its various forms and with its many connotations, pervades the texts. The following chapters will explore the magnitude - indeed, the virtual ubiquity - of the food references and allusions in Dickens's narratives, and the extent to which the fictions' frames of reference depend upon alimentary imagery.

CHAPTER 2

PLOT AND SETTING

This thesis has put forth the idea that, as regards so-called "reality", food is one of the primary forces motivating human activity and that it has, presumably, been doing so since before the development of civilization. Using literary terms to describe history, one could say that food provokes the plot of real life. As regards the subject of Charles Dickens's fiction, Ian Watt has claimed that "food and drink are a vital part of plot structure" (167) and that his novels are "largely organized through scenes of eating and drinking" (168). Evidently, there is a similarity between how food effects reality and how it effects Dickens's story-lines: food motivates the plot of each. This chapter will discuss not only whether food <u>should</u> be typified as something that drives the progression of narrative events in Dickens's fiction, but also <u>how</u>, and <u>to what extent</u>, this can be considered a truism, and what this means in the context of Dickens's realism.

Two types of narrative movement can be discerned in Dickens's fiction: one concerns the individual characters' actions at particular moments in the narratives; the other has to do with the progression of incidents in each work as a whole. The former type can be further sub-divided, and the most rudimentary type of individual action is the kind of action that the characters take to obtain the makings for their meals. In terms of immediate, or relatively immediate, action, for example, it is said that when

the time had come "when [Nell and her grandfather] must beg their bread" (OCS 210), Nell puts together some makeshift nosegays to sell to the fancy ladies who pass by. Similarly, "almost every morning" (DC 220) the Micawbers sell off some of their "more portable articles of property" (DC 220) to buy their daily provisions; and David himself, presumably taking his cue from the Micawbers' example, refuses to budge from the second-hand clothing shop until the owner offers him enough money to buy a meal (DC 241-242).

In fact, the intrinsic need for sustenance not only functions as the direct impetus for action or inaction; it is also frequently invoked by the characters as the reason or justification for their behaviour. As a result, the concept of hunger is imbued with moral implications. When Magwitch describes the thieving wretch he was as a child, for instance, he hypothetically asks "But what the Devil was I to do? I must put something into my stomach, mustn't I?" (GE 361), and this need to eat invokes feelings of pity, understanding, and forgiveness. Rigaud, on the other hand, when he avows that "One must eat...but by Heaven I must eat at the cost of some other man to-morrow!" (LD 171), turns the fact of human appetite into a means for justifying evil ends; but when Joe Gargery says to the as-yet-unnamed-convict Magwitch, "God knows, you're welcome to [the pie]...we wouldn't have you starved to death" (GE 71), he is interpreting the premise that man needs to eat as the basis for humanitarian action. Essentially, the need to eat seems universal among both real and fictional humanity, and the sorts

of behaviour that this need inspires can take many forms.

In terms of food having the effect of inspiring action, one can interpret the individual's desire for sustenance as the basis for their taking up a job or a profession. An occupation, after all, is really just individual action that is sustained over a relatively long period of time. Interestingly, this hypothesis is not only supported by the vernacular tendencies of many real speech communities, but textually substantiated by the speech patterns of Dickens's characters. This latter idea refers to Dickens's phrasing of the occupations of his characters in terms of their need 'to put food on the table', to 'earn ones bread', or to live 'from hand to mouth'. Examples include the scene wherein Bella Wilfer avows that she would love John Rokesmith even if he were so lowly employed as to have to 'sweep the street for bread' (OMF 664) - which is precisely how Bleak House's Jo gets his food; the expostulation framed in The Pickwick Papers about the law profession typically "never yield[ing]...a morsel of bread" (PP 361); and Tom Scott's being determination "to go through [life] upon his head and hands" and his subsequent commencement to "tumble for his bread" (OCS 666).

While food can compel many types of figurative or mental activity, the need or desire for sustenance can also be the cause of physical movement - that is, the quest for food often literally moves Dickens's characters from one location to another. This is the case in the tour of grocery shops that the young David Copperfield makes as he gathers together the various ingredients for breakfast: the 'journey' begins at a bakery,

where David buys "a nice little loaf of brown bread"; he then moves to a grocer's to purchase "an egg and a slice of streaky bacon"; and finally, he ends up at an old woman's house where he finds milk and a fire to cook the meal (DC 125-126). Similarly, Nell's and her grandfather's journey through England while they avoid Quilp could be characterized as a search for one meal, after another, after another. It is worth noting here that although much of the physical and mental activity in Dickens's narratives occurs because of the want of food, just because a character takes action does not necessarily mean that food will be acquired. Oliver Twist, for instance, asks for more gruel (OT 56), but he never receives the wanted bowlful.

Food and eating effect the narrative action in Dickens not only in terms specific to the individual characters, but also in the context of more general phenomena: food is, for instance, a force that can propel whole sequences of events. Oliver Twist's involvement with Fagin's gang of thieves can, for instance, essentially be traced back to the fact that he was hungry and Jack Dawkins ("The Artful Dodger") offered him a meal: "you want grub, and you shall have it" (OT 101), says Jack, and he immediately comes through with a "ready dressed ham and a half quartern loaf", as well as "a pot of beer" (OT 101). In a similar situation, the Marchioness' discovery of the Brass' plans to ruin Kit and Dick - which discovery sets in motion the downfall not only of the Brasses but of Quilp, as well - comes about because the so-called "small servant" is hungry and

searching the house for food (OCS 587-588). In fact, the idea that food can prompt the turn of a whole series of events is taken to its extreme in Great Expectations, wherein the entire plot of the novel is, in a sense, set in motion by a single item of food - namely, the turnips that the young Magwitch 'thieves' and which propel him into his future life of crime. In a nutshell, it could be said that groceries are a basic ingredient of Dickens's fiction, and that tracing any line of action to its starting point almost inevitably reveals the presence and/or influence of food.

"Time" is a concept that is linked with many other ideas, including "movement", "progression", and "sequence". In Dickens's fiction the notion of time is also interwoven with the idea of food. Time is a basic contextualizing force both in reality and in fiction - and one reason for this is that time is a medium with which events can be measured and compared with one another. In Dickens's novels time - and the various concepts that are associated with it - are consistently depicted in alimentary terms, and this emphasizes the extent to which the fictions are contextualized in food.

For one thing, the particular increments in which time is measured are typically described in their relation to food and eating. The smallest and most specific measurements of time mentioned in the novels are the individual hours of the day. Rather than referring to precise o'clocks, though, the narratives tend to temporally situate events in terms of dining: it is said

that Pip and Magwitch go for a walk with Herbert "before breakfast" (GE 453, emphasis added) and embark upon their longer journey "soon after breakfast" (GE 453, emphasis added); Mr Dorrit refers to the "untoward and unpleasant circumstance which [have] occurred since tea-time" (LD 429, emphasis added); Young John Chivery sets forth to propose to Little Dorrit "one Sunday after an early dinner of baked viands" (LD 258); a particular silence is said to have "remained unbroken...until supper time" (MC 178, emphasis added); and Young Barnacle appears "about an hour or so after dinner time" (LD 251, emphasis added).

Large increments of time also undergo this meal-oriented type of interpretation. David Copperfield, for instance, defines the passage of whole days by explaining that he and Steerforth "went our several ways after an early breakfast, and met again at a late dinner" (DC 378). Similarly, in Little Dorrit the passage of several days is described such that the "Next day, and the day after, and every day, [were] all graced by more dinner company" (LD 678); while a week in The Pickwick Papers is summed up as involving "lunches to be taken, and dinners to be eaten, and so many profitable things to be done" (PP 871); and David Copperfield, with his especially noticeable proclivity for seeing the world in terms of food-issues[1], measures an entire semester at school in terms of the food that is eaten during that time:

> The rest of the half-year is a jumble in my recollection of the daily strife and struggle of our lives...of the alternation of boiled beef with roast beef, and boiled mutton with roast mutton; of clods of bread-and-butter, dog's-eared lesson books, cracked slates, tear-blotted copy-books, canings, rulerings, hair-cuttings, rainy Sundays, suet-puddings... (DC 159)

Not only time itself, but concepts that are time-relevant are referred to by Dickens in the context of alimentary issues. "Waiting" is one such concept, and a scene that illustrates how it can be defined in terms of food occurs in The Old Curiosity Shop: first it is explained that Kit has been "desired by Mr Abel to sit down and wait, for the gentleman who wanted him had gone out, and perhaps might not return for some time" (OCS 386); then, to convey the idea of how much time is spent in expectation of this gentleman, the narrator specifies the number of meals that have passed during the wait and it is stated that Kit has "had his dinner, and his tea, before the gentleman...came in" (OCS 386, emphasis added).

"Age" - and "youth", in particular - is a temporal construct that is also expressed in terms of food in Dickens's fiction. Mrs Jarley, for instance, theorizes that part of the happiness of being young is that "You always have your appetites" (OCS 270), while the narrator of Little Dorrit describes "boyhood" as a time when one "is prone to wear [ones] boots unlaced and is happily unconscious of digestive organs" (LD 255, emphasis added). In fact, the whole idea of digestion - itself a food-related concept - is used in at least one instance as the frame of reference for indicating the passage of time: Mrs Veneering's passion for giving dinner parties is described such that she is said to have "dined with five-and-twenty bran-new[sic] faces over night; calls upon them all to day; sends them every one a dinner-card to-morrow, for the week after next; [and] before that dinner is digested, calls upon their brothers and sisters, their nephews

and nieces, their aunts and uncles and cousins, and invites them all to dinner" (OMF 683, emphasis added).

While food is evidently a motivating and measuring factor within the sequences of Dickens's plots, it may be acknowledged that all sequences are made up of individual situations. It should not be surprising, therefore, to find that many of the individual narrative events that Dickens writes about involve - and revolve around - food. In fact, the eatables in Dickens's narratives tend not simply to be adjunctory features of events, but their main focus. Food is, in a sense, the life-source of all that happens in the Dickens worlds.

M.F.K. Fisher notes that man has a "fundamental need to celebrate the high points of his life by eating and drinking" (xiii). Illustrating her sentiment is the fact that important events in Dickens's stories tend to be marked by, or with, food. Births, deaths, marriages, graduations, meetings with loved ones, or the occasion of someone's leaving home - these are all events that are, at some point in the various narratives, observed or celebrated in the presence of food. Depending on the particular event and the characters involved though, the specifics of the food and/or the event vary: the refreshments are either simple or elaborate, sparse or plentiful; and the occasions are either spontaneous or formally planned. As paragons of social formality, for instance, the Veneerings of Our Mutual Friend are typified by the saying that "whatever befals, the Veneerings must give a dinner upon it" (OMF 683). Their parties, unlike those

thrown by some of the other characters, are the kind where formal invitations are extended and acknowledged, and these affairs are elaborate and gaudy, with vast amounts of food displayed and served. In contrast, spontaneous and down-to-earth kinds of celebrations can also be found in Dickens's fictions - and one example is the casually organized affair that marks Mr Weller Sr.'s inheritance, in The Pickwick Papers:

> 'What should you say to a drop o' beer, gen'l'm'n? suggested the mottled-faced man.
> 'And a little bit o' cold beef,' said the second coachman.
> 'Or a oyster,' added the third, who was a hoarse gentleman, supported by very round legs.
> 'Hear, hear! said Pell 'to congratulate Mr Weller, on his coming into possession of his property... (PP 872)

There are countless numbers of food-marked occasions in Dickens's stories, and it is no great exaggeration to state that whenever something of even the remotest note occurs in the lives of the characters, there is a morsel consumed, a drop taken, or both. In addition to those mentioned above, some of the more memorable of Dickens's food-events are the large dinner that Pumblechook has round from the Boar to celebrate Pip's good fortune and during which the fowl is "apostrophized" (GE 180) for its great luck in attending the event, the great "occasion of feasting and festival" (BH 721) that is Mrs Bagnet's birthday in Bleak House (BH 721-724), and the Wilfer anniversary in Our Mutual Friend, at which a pair of fowls are sacrificed and subjected to a variety of terrible culinary ministrations (OMF 510-514).

In general, the presence of food is responsible for making many of Dickens's scenes worthy of notice; and what is

particularly remarkable is that the eatables tend to outshine the reputed causes of the celebrations. There are many instances in the narratives in which food would conventionally occupy a secondary or relatively insignificant role in the proceedings, but Dickens instead allows the food to reach beyond its traditional boundaries and usurp the focus of the scene.

Generally speaking, Dickens's weddings are narrative events at which food is portrayed both focally and hyperbolically: a Dickens wedding seldom, if ever, consists solely of a religious rite or legal proceeding. Rather, the formal ceremony is almost inevitably accompanied by some sort of celebratory repast - typically a breakfast - and it is this meal that is often the centre of attention. Sometimes the account of the wedding is divided somewhat equally between the details of the ceremony and the meal - as is the case with Wemmick's and Miss Skiffins' wedding in Great Expectations (GE 464-465), Bella's and Rokesmith's in Our Mutual Friend, and David Copperfield's marriage to Dora (DC 797-799) - but it is not unusual for the wedding spread to be the highlight of the affair. The ceremony uniting Arabella and Trundle in The Pickwick Papers, for instance, is dispatched in a short paragraph, while the discussion of the proceeding breakfast and dinner take up several pages (PP 467-471). Similarly, the rite joining Louisa Gradgrind and Josiah Bounderby, in Hard Times, is described in a few terse and dismissive sentences:

> So the day came, as all other days come to people who will only stick to reason; and when it came, there were married in the church of the florid wooden legs...Josiah Bounderby Esquire of Coketown, to Louisa eldest daughter of Thomas

> Gradgrind Esquire of Stone Lodge, M.P. for that borough. And when they were united in holy matrimony, they went home to breakfast at Stone Lodge aforesaid. (HT 142)

In contrast, the wedding-meal seems to be extremely important and the guests who attend the festivities - though not the readers - are informed of all the specifics concerning "what everything they had to eat and drink was made of, and how it was imported or exported, and in what quantities, and in what bottoms, whether native or foreign, and all about it" (HT 142).

Each of the above examples illustrates the minimized importance of the wedding ceremony in Dickens. The virtual synonymity of the wedding and the meal, however, is probably most clearly realized in Our Mutual Friend. Here, in the union of the Lammles, the text tersely dispenses with formalities:

> Ceremony performed, register signed, Lady Tippins escorted out of sacred edifice by Veneering, carriage rolling back to Stucconia, servants with favours and flowers, Veneerings house reached, drawing-rooms most magnificent... (OMF 165)

The narrative detail is saved for the account of the reception and the meal, and just one of the outstanding features is the "Splendid cake, covered with Cupids, silver, and true-lovers' knots" (OMF 166). In fact, this cake is particularly worthy of notice because, in its frosted over indigestibility (OMF 167), it seems to represent or symbolize the larger scope of facade and sourness which the whole wedding embodies. In other words, the nature of the cake parallels the nature of the party, which is not the joyous and enjoyed occasion it is meant to be but, rather, both "dismal" and "objectionable" (OMF 167) beneath its Veneer[sic]; and the entire married life of the Lammles - a curdled love affair which is based on "false pretences" (OMF 169)

and misconceptions - turns out to be far less blissful and harmonious than the stereotype of conjugal bliss would dictate.

Marriages are not the only type of situation in which food's conventional role is distorted and blown out of proportion; it is worth noting that food need not be a typical feature of the event in order for Dickens to include and exaggerate its presence seems to strike a discordant note. Anthony Chuzzlewit's funeral, for example, is both remarkable and memorable as an absurdly comic - albeit macabre - occasion of feeding: "In short", the narrator reports, "the whole of that strange week was a round of dismal joviality and grim enjoyment; and everyone, except poor Chuffey, who came within the shadow of Anthony Chuzzlewit's grave, feasted like a ghoul" (MC 385).

Although Dickens's fiction is grounded in reality, it is not restricted to portrayals of what is realistic or expected. One of the effects of food playing a focal-role in the narratives is that its importance may, at times, seem exaggerated and inflated. According to some modes of thought, though, food is always the most important part of the event - or of existence as a whole. Indeed, perhaps this was how Dickens's mind worked and food was, for him, the highlight and focus of life. Margaret Lane writes that "Dickens developed and retained to the end of his life a markedly emotional attitude to the whole study of food" and went on to say that food "was a symbol of well-being and security...It appears not only in his novels...but in innumerable letters, described with the zest and detail of genuine feeling" (165-166).

Sylvere Monod makes similar observations about Dickens's early experiences of hunger and she writes that "Dickens seems never to have forgotten this aspect of his apprenticeship to life" and he "was at times obsessed by food" (11, emphasis added). Regardless of how Dickens may have perceived his own world, it should be clear that according to certain frames of reference the extravagance with which food is represented in Dickens's fiction is not wholly unrealistic. As far as the conventional role of food goes, though, there are many situations in Dickens's narratives in which food plays an extraordinary role; and this, in turn, has resulted in many of Dickens's greatest scenes being characterized and made memorable by the presence of food.

All together, the relationship between food and its role in Dickens's narratives may be described as being such that food exhibits varying intensities of influence on the narratives: in other words, sometimes food marks events, but often it is their focus. In fact, there are also instances in which food becomes the event. Essentially, food has such a vital and dominant role in Dickens's fiction that it is often, in the absence of any acknowledged occasion, what makes the scene. In other words, the occasion of eating, in and of itself, can be enough to create a momentous event. As J.A. Ward puts it, "In the Dickens world the massive meal is the paramount social occasion" (401), and it seems true that Dickens's narrators and characters - and even, in a sense, the texts themselves - take enormous pleasure in gathering together to feast.

The dining-house meal that is shared by Smallweed, Guppy,

and Jobling in Bleak House (BH 329-333), for instance, is just one example of an occasion that is essentially no more than a celebration of hunger being satisfied. The descriptions of the food, the physical environment, the atmosphere, and the banter are all remarkable: Smallweed comes into his own amidst the steaming plates of food and the people who know and defer to him; Guppy and Jobling are marvelously urbane; and between the members of "the legal triumvirate" (BH 331) - though with an especial contribution on the part of Jobling - an impressive quantity of veal, ham, french beans, stuffing, summer cabbage "without the slugs" (BH 331), marrow pudding, beer, Cheshire, and rum is consumed; while all around chime the "clatter of crockery" (BH 331), the voices of people, and the sounds of food being prepared and eaten. The scene is unquestionably an event - and not one that is simply marked by food, but one that is made by it!

Basically, most of what happens and what develops in Dickens's fiction does so in conjunction with food and the occasion of its consumption. As the narrator of Little Dorrit notes, all action is fundamentally based on whether one has food or does not; and supper time can be described as "that hour when most of the people who have anything to eat at home are going home to eat, and when most of those who have nothing have hardly yet slunk out to beg and steal" (LD 586). At a certain level of interpretation, it seems reasonable to state that the events Dickens writes about are compelled by, consist of, and lead to food. In fact, at a basic level of plot organization, each of

the novels - from the picaresque earlier works to the more fluidly and cohesively structured later ones - could be looked at as being a series of successive repasts. Consider G.K. Chesterton's comments about the essential meaningless-ness of distinguishing Dickens's oeuvre into separate and distinct pieces of fiction:

> Dickens work is not to be reckoned in novels at all. Dickens' work is to be reckoned always by characters, sometimes by groups, oftener by episodes, but never by novels. You cannot discuss whether Nicholas Nickleby is a good novel, or whether Our Mutual Friend is a bad novel. Strictly, there is no such novel as Nicholas Nickleby. There is no such novel as Our Mutual Friend. They are simply lengths cut from the flowing and mixed substance called Dickens. (110)

What Chesterton is advocating here is the delineation of Dickens's writings according to character - "the primary elements" of the narratives, he writes, "are not the stories, but the characters who affect the stories--or, more often still, the characters who do not affect the stories" (111). Why not, then, reckon Dickens's oeuvre in terms of meals? One could, after all, look at the whole of Dickens's creative output as an almost endless series of repasts which have been arbitrarily distinguished into separate fictions. In a sense, all that happens in Dickens's fiction is that people eat; of course, they eat with other people, in a variety of environments, in different sorts of circumstances, and as a part of larger schemes of events, etcetera - but no matter what else may be the case, food is virtually guaranteed to be present in some literal or figurative shape or form.

The fact that events in Dickens's plots are typically, and seemingly inextricably, intertwined with food and eating has several effects on the organization of the narratives. For one thing, because of the narrative focus on food, meals tend to be the settings at which important information is communicated amongst the characters and/or to the reader(s) - a phenomenon which, since morsels of information are being exchanged and ingested, picks up on the similarity between discourse and consumption (see Chapter 1).

"Narrative information" can refer to knowledge about the story that is related over, or at, a meal - as is the case with the details of Miss Havisham's history (GE 200, 203-205) and the story of the Harmon affair (OMF 53-59), both of which are related over the characters' dinner. "Narrative information" can also refer to occurrences - such as the introduction of a new character or the reappearance of an old one, etcetera - that further the story and take place while the characters are at table. Some examples of meal-situated narrative occurrences are Mr Weller Sr.'s appearing in The Pickwick Papers in a tavern where the characters are drinking and smoking (PP 351-352); Mark Tapley's and Martin Chuzzlewit's (the younger) reappearance in London during Tom's and Ruth's breakfast (MC 808); Fagin's being "took...Just at dinner-time" (OT 444); Father Dorrit's momentous mental failing at a formal dinner party (LD 707-708); and the evidence showing that Mr Tupman is interested in Emily Wardle - not the spinster aunt, Rachael Wardle - being produced "that very day at dinner" (PP 184). Indeed, much of the literal and

figurative action in Dickens's fiction occurs while the characters eat and drink, and frequently interrupts their meals.

The fact that narrative information is frequently divulged in the presence of food reflects one of the frequently noted characteristics of civilization - namely, that the cooking fire, or "hearth" is the spiritual and figurative centre of the home and family. In Margaret Lane's words, the hearth is "the domestic numen" (161). Essentially, the cooking fire is a physical place where food is cooked, but it is also where the members of the household convene to eat and to discuss their lives. "The hearth" refers, in a sense, to a food-based environment, and it is the focal point of existence not only for humans, but also for Dickens's fictional characters. What this suggests is that although the consumption of food is important to the narratives, the alimentary environs or atmosphere of the novels and stories also deserve some attention.

In at least one sense, the terms "environment" and "setting" are synonymous, since both refer to some sort of surrounding - though this may be something either specific or vague, tangible or not. "Plot" and "setting" are also fundamentally related as literary concepts - in that the events that make up a plot must take place in some sort of an environment. Food is something that is virtually ubiquitous through Dickens's plots and something that appears in, or as, the settings of the stories - not only in terms of the physically visual, but also in the context of several other of the senses, as well.

"Setting" often refers to the physical environment where an

action takes place and Dickens's fictions are frequently situated in pubs and taverns that are literally strung up with food and drink. This tendency, in conjunction with Dickens's love of detail (a stylistic feature discussed in Chapter 1), results in mouth-watering settings like that of The Six Jolly Fellowship Porters - a tavern where several scenes of Our Mutual Friend take place:

> The bar of the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters was a bar to soften the human breast. The available space in it was not much larger than a hackney-coach; but no one could have wished the bar bigger, that space was so girt in by corpulent little casks, and by cordial-bottles radiant with fictitious grapes in bunches, and by lemons in nets, and by biscuits in baskets, and...by the cheese in a snug corner... (OMF 105)

Among the many other alimentary-garnished establishments that Dickens created, there is the "famous Inn" where Tom Pinch and John Westlock have their reunion supper - wherein "the hall [is] a very grove of dead game, and dangling oints[sic] of mutton; and in one corner [is] an illustrious larder, with glass doors, developing cold fowls and noble joints, and tarts wherein the raspberry jam coyly withdrew itself, as such a precious creature should, behind a lattice work of pastry" (MC 257-258); and there is a particular "road-side inn" (PP 261) where one of the characters finds himself contemplating "delightful rows of green bottles and gold labels, together with jars of pickles and preserves, and cheeses and boiled hams, and rounds of beef, arranged on shelves in the most tempting and delicious array" (PP 262). Similarly food-ornamented physical environments can be found in Dickens's many kitchens, hearths, and market-places.

A setting can also refer to something of a broad nature,

like a general locale and its scenery; and these, too, are often depicted by Dickens in terms of food. The Alps mountain scene through which the newly wealthy Dorrits travel, for instance, is inundated with grapes (LD 482); the city of Coketown is described - in much the same terms as someone's dinner would be - as "frying in oil" and being "baked at a fierce heat" (HT 146); and, with an interesting use of simile, David Copperfield describes the town of Yarmouth and its aqueous environs as being "like toast and water" (DC 77).

Even the olfactory settings of the novels are redolent of food, and variously rank and savory smells permeate the fictional atmospheres. There is a "rather overpowering smell of meat pervad[ing] the steps and entry" (PP 750) of Mr Perker's establishment in The Pickwick Papers; a "balmy fragrance of tea hovers in Cook's Court" (BH 183), where Snagsby of Bleak House resides; and the smell of Todgers' Inn in Martin Chuzzlewit is immortalized in the following manner:

> There was an odd smell in the passage, as if the concentrated essence of all the dinners that had been cooked in the kitchen since the house was built, lingered at the top of the kitchen stairs to that hour, and, like the Black Friar in Don Juan, 'wouldn't be driven away.' In particular, there was a sensation of cabbage; as if all the greens that had ever been boiled there, were evergreens, and flourished in immortal strength. (MC 181-182)

Every kind of setting imaginable, it seems, is at one point or another depicted in terms of eatables. Certainly the characters' eyes, noses, and even ears, are gratified - the latter with the sounds of cauldrons bubbling (OCS 196), slices of mutton "sputtering on..the fire" (DC 474), and bacon sizzling in hot pans. But it is not only the fictional creatures who basque in

these delectable environments - to the extent that the reader is able to project him/herself into the world of the fiction, he/she also takes up residence in these variously delectable or nauseating environments. Indeed, with all of the senses focused on the same type of stimuli - food - a reader may almost be able to taste what the characters are eating.

Language, style, and subject; plot and setting - these are some of the primary literary elements of Dickens's fiction and each is fed, so to speak, with food. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the one other essential ingredient of the narratives - the characters! - is similarly nurtured and developed with alimentary conceits.

CHAPTER THREE

CHARACTERIZATION

Evaluating fictional characters in terms of how realistic they are is a common practice in literary criticism; and because Dickens's characters are often considered to be the most outstanding feature of his fictions, they frequently come under this type of scrutiny. The question of whether Dickens's fictional characters deserve to be described as 'realistic' evokes two types of credible response: either that they are lifelike, or that they are not'. The opinion that seems to have dominated literary discussions, though, seems to be the latter - the negative one - and readers and critics alike tend to regard Dickens's characters as being unrealistic and easily defined 'types' or caricatures. George Orwell, for example, condemns Dickens's characters to the status of 'unrealistic' in so far as their having human-like qualities was concerned. "Dickens is always thought of as a caricaturist" (134), he claims, "the people who remember [the characters] hardly think of them as human beings. They are monsters..." (135). To the same effect, Trevor Blount remarks that "Dickens's primary mode of characterization... consists in 'labelling' his characters with, for instance, a saying..., an object..., a gesture..., an image..., or a permutation of such things" (30-31); while other assessments of the characters typify them as being static in nature, predictable in behaviour, and lacking in psychological depth and complexity[2]. One must realize, though, that the issue of the characters' life-likeness requires a subjective response

and has, therefore, never been unanimously resolved. Consequently, despite the tendency to dismiss them as being unrealistic, one can find critics who assert the characters' human-like vitality and animation. G.K. Chesterton, for instance, admonishes readers that "those who see in Dickens unchanging characters and recurring catch-words a mere stiffness and lack of living movement miss the point and nature of his work" (116). Similarly, P.N. Furbank cites Martin Chuzzlewit as, in his opinion, "the kind of novel that one would select to refute the old and outmoded cry that Dickens invented fixed little caricatures, creating them from the outside', and then setting them to repeat themselves" (26); and Blount remarks that "characters rise from [Dickens] pages with unbounded vigour" (14).

Of the theories advocating the realism of Dickens's characters, there is one - based on the idea that 'truth is often stranger than fiction' - that is particularly worthy of notice. Angus Calder summarizes the basic tenets of this theory:

> Dickens's imagination...inspired comic creations and his daemonic villains have often been dismissed as mere gargoyles and monsters, crudely enjoyable though unreal. But, as Lionel Trilling says, 'We who have seen Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels put on the stage of history, and Pecksniffery institutionalized in the Kremlin, are in no position to suppose that Dickens ever exaggerated in the least the extravagance of madness absurdity, and malevolence in the world - or, conversely, when we consider the resistance to those qualities, the goodness'. (11)[3]

Essentially, the idea asserted here is that human beings are, obviously, the archetype for human realistic-ness and they are unpredictable, both singly and collectively. The fact that Dickens's characters are also unpredictable - some of them are,

as individuals, static in nature, but on the whole, they tend to be inconsistent with one another as well as in and of themselves - shows them to be, at least in this respect, more human-like than not.

This line of reasoning is one that Dickens himself invoked and sanctioned. As John Bayley points out, "Dickens frequently defends himself against the charge of using literary devices and conventions by pointing out their similarity to real life" (52). In fact, Dickens incorporated this theory of realism into the text of Oliver Twist, in what Bayley calls a "brilliant apologia for his whole creative method" (55):

> It is the custom on the stage, in all good murderous melodramas, to present the tragic and the comic scenes, in as regular alternation, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky bacon...Such changes appear absurd; but they are not so unnatural as they would seem at first sight. The transitions in real life from well-spread boards to death-beds, and from mourning weeds to holiday garments, are not a whit less startling; only, there, we are busy actors, instead of passive lookers-on, which makes a vast difference. The actors in the mimic life of the theatre, are blind to violent transitions and abrupt impulses of passion or feeling, which, presented before the eyes of mere spectators are at once condemned as outrageous and preposterous.... sudden shiftings of the scene, and rapid changes of time and place, are not only sanctioned in books by long usage, but are by many considered as the great art of authorship... (OT 168-169)

Several things are accomplished in this passage. One is simply that a rational argument explaining why and how Dickens's fictional characters and situations ought to be regarded as realistic is put forward. What is also worth noting, though, is that the excerpt employs an alimentary analogy, which in itself emphasizes how well-suited the concept and image of food is for discussions of Dickens's realism. And, also in its turn, this

means that food is an appropriate context for examining the question of how realistic are Dickens's characters. Oliver Twist's Mr Grimwig sets the example for looking at Dickens's characters in alimentary terms when he makes the sweeping generalization that divides the entire population of boys into two basic food-like groups: "I only know two sorts of boys", he asserts, "Mealy boys and beef-faced boys" (OT 148). This chapter will takes up the cue, and will explain how it is that Dickens's characters have a degree of lifelike-ness that is greater than what is typically granted them by critics, and how the characters' relationships with food have helped them acquire this life-like status.

For the most part, Dickens's characters are internally and externally 'fleshed out' by food - in all the literal and figurative and literal implications of the phrase. Indeed, John Carey provocatively comments that "From the start Dickens found it a problem to keep meat and people distinct" (Effigy 206) - and his observation is substantiated by the fact that almost every aspect of the characters' existence - including their physical appearances, emotions, psychological depths, morality, and their relationships with others - are, at some point or another, depicted in reference to food.

There are some Dickens characters, however, who are less 'true-to-life' than others. Generally, these are minor or 'incidental' characters - like the Veneerings and their assorted dinner guests in Our Mutual Friend; the Merdles' and their entourage in Little Dorrit; the monotonously similar Americans in

Martin Chuzzlewit; and the Dedlock relations of Bleak House, to name only a few - about whom it would be foolish and 'fruitless' to assert realistic-ness. These are the exceptions to the majority, though, and as Edmund Wilson put it, the unrealistic characters "stick out in an unnatural relief from a surface that is more quietly realistic" (44, emphasis added). Essentially, there are some Dickens characters who are less-than-optimally-realistic, but they are not completely 'flat' and caricaturized, either. They do have some degree of human-like animation and, in fact, they are the ones who seem to benefit most from food-associated reality, since they derive a large part of their limited humanity from their relation to food.

In order for a character in a novel or a short story to have a fictional existence, he or she needs some sort of fictionally physical reality, like physical features. In the case of Dickens's fictions, this 'outer aspect' of the characters is frequently related in alimentary terms and, as a result, the 'people' often literally look like items of food.

Groups of Dickens's characters tend to bear a resemblance to bulk food: the prisoners of the Marshalsea in Little Dorrit, for example, are several times referred to as "blighted fruits" (LD 883; LD 895); the spectators who witness Bill Sikes' demise in Oliver Twist are likened to "a field of corn moved by an angry wind" (OT 450); and the children of The Old Curiosity Shop are, at one point, described collectively as being "brown as berries" (OCS 177).

The individual characters tend to look like individual items of food: Edward Dorrit, for one, makes an apparently appetizing figure as he stands before the fire "with his back to the blaze and his coat tucked under his arms, something as if he were of the poultry species and were trussed for roasting" (LD 488); there is a gentleman in The Pickwick Papers who is said to be "like an ill-conditioned cherry preserved in brandy... artificially dried and withered up into a state of preservation" (PP 693); and Mr Pecksniff appears at one point "as pale as a muffin" (MC 375). Even individual body parts are described in terms of their similarity to comestibles. In David Copperfield alone, the eponymous David has a "Face like a peach" (DC 389); Tommy Traddles is said to wear a "tight sky-blue suit that made his arms and legs like German sausages, or roly-poly puddings" (DC 143); Mr Chillip has a hand like a "tepid little fish-slice" (DC 904); and Mr Peggotty's visage is described as having much "in common with the lobsters, crabs, and crawfish, - that it went into the hot water very black and came out very red" (DC 82).

Separately and collectively, the characters of Dickens's fictions appear as all manner of foodstuffs. There are - or 'they are' - fruit salads and vegetable salads; a variety of hot and cold meats, fish, and seafood; plenty of bread, muffins, and toast; all sorts of condiments; and numerous desserts. There is even the inevitable profusion of inedible and rotting vegetal refuse - people as food stuffs who/that have 'fallen into disrepair' - like those characters who wear "stale vapid rejected cabbage-leaf and cabbage-stalk dress...[and] damaged-orange

countenance[s]", and who are appositely described as being the "squashed pulp of humanity" (OMF 799). In a sense, each of the narratives is an elaborate meal: various character-groceries mixed together according to different plot-recipes.

Dickens's characters don't just passively and arbitrarily look like food; frequently their alimentary appearances are due to the physical effects of food consumption. The characteristics of Mrs Lupin's countenance, for example, are a result of her diet: she has a "face of clear red and white, which, by its jovial aspect, at once bore testimony to her hearty participation in the good things of the larder and cellar, and to their thriving and healthful influences" (MC 79).

Sometimes what the characters look like is correlated and parallel to what they consume, and they literally embody Brillat-Savarin's maxim 'you are what you eat'. Mr Casby, for instance, after "taking tea, anchovy paste, and hot buttered toast" (LD 745) with his daughter and Mrs Clennam, soon thereafter begins to look like what he has so recently ingested: he is said to be "beaming near the hob, with his benevolent nobs shining as if the warm butter of the toast were exuding through the patriarchal skull, and with his face as ruddy as if the colouring matter of the anchovy paste were mantling in the patriarchal visage" (LD 745). A similar situation takes place with Mr Weller, Sr., who is found seated at table with a "cold round of beef" (PP 396) and 'exhibiting a complexion' that resembles "that peculiarly mottled combination of colours which is only to be seen in gentlemen of

his profession, and in underdone roast beef" (PP 396). Basically, while it is not unusual to be able to discern what some one has had to eat from the evidence of the crumbs on the table, face, or clothes - and the fact that Pecksniff wears a spilt "cup of coffee over his legs" and a muffin "on his knee" (MC 208) is indicative of what he had for breakfast - the reader can often figure out what a character has had to eat from the description of his or her physical appearance.

Another way in which the effects of the characters' diet is made manifest is through their weight. The reader is continually reminded that the characters have a fictional body mass, and Dickens's propensity for detail (see Chapter 1) means that weight distinctions are specifically indicated and the characters are variously described as being fat, flabby, stout, corpulent, thin, or scrawny, etcetera. Even changes in the characters' weights are noted and in a typically picturesque fashion, for example, Silas Wegg is described as having grown "So gaunt and haggard...that his wooden leg showed disproportionate, and presented a thriving appearance in contrast with the rest of his plagued body, which might almost have been termed chubby" (OMF 850).

Weight is such an important part of the characters' appearances that they are often identified primarily according to the amount of their body fat. Sometimes they are described in other respects as well, but frequently a character is identified only as 'the fat man' or 'the thin man', etcetera. Sometimes the seemingly generic 'fat man' or 'thin man' turns out to be a

previously introduced and well-known character - as when, in The Pickwick Papers, "two plump gentlemen and one thin one" (PP 201) make their appearance, and it is not until several pages later (PP 204) that they are revealed to be the already-familiar main characters - Pickwick, Wardle, and Perker. Similarly, potentially ambiguous descriptive phrases like 'the fat man' are often not ambiguous at all, but enough of a description to identify the characters to the reader. By the time "the fat boy" has made his second appearance in The Pickwick Papers, for instance, it is clear who is being referred to: Joe, the Wardles' gluttonous servant.

Identifying characters only, or predominantly, by their weight can, however, be a cause of confusion. At one point in The Pickwick Papers, for example, Mr Pickwick is described conversing with some un-named gentlemen about the environs of Manor Farm, the Wardle family home:

> 'There an't a better spot o' ground in all Kent," said the hard-headed man...after a pause.
> ''Cept Mullins's Meadows, 'observed the fat man solemnly.
> 'Mullins's Meadows!' ejaculated the other, with profound contempt.
> 'Ah, Mullins's Meadows', repeated the fat man.
> 'Reg'lar good land that,' interposed another fat man.
> 'And so it is, sure-ly,' said a third fat man.
> 'Everybody knows that,' said the corpulent host. (PP 141)

In this scene, the reader is able only to distinguish the speakers as a "hard-headed man" and several 'fat men' - and is given no means by which to differentiate among the latter. The episode points out the comic potential of describing characters only by their fatness, but it also shows that further character elucidation - in both inner and outer respects - is necessary to

create unique and animated fictional beings. Pip's explanation of his first impressions of Miss Havisham is just one example of how a physical description can combine details of body-size with other external features to create an individual:

> I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone. (GE 87)

Joe in The Pickwick Papers is another individual who can be used as an example to demonstrate how useful it is to develop characters in ways additional to literal weighty-ness. Joe's identity is solidly connected with his weight and he is repeatedly referred to as "the fat boy", or some variation on the theme. These factors alone would have made him a rather lackluster entity, indistinguishable from many other of Dickens creations. Joe has, however, been given some other physical and psychological characteristics which, although they are generally food-related qualities, are other than weight: he has a "dumpling face" (PP 181), some interesting food preferences, an ability to perform amazing feats of 'gormandizing', and he even periodically wakens from his food-induced stupor to speak of non-food-related matters - and all of these features save Joe from fading into the obscurity of being a caricature 'fat-boy'.

Juliet McMaster - who also puts the subject of Dickens's characters' weighty-ness to critical use - also emphasizes the importance of describing characters in terms which, although they may be based on weight, include other qualities as well. What she does is take the distinction between fat and thin and show

how this issue of weight is linked to the characters' personalities. First, she explains, in a section labelled "Bodies", that no simple equation can relate weight to personality - fatness can't simply be equated with being good-natured, or thinness with wickedness. Then she extrapolates the initial duality far enough to acknowledge two sub-categories of personality for each of the 'thin' and 'fat' classifications. In terms of fatness, she says that "there are two kinds...in Dickensian physiology...Besides Pickwickian fatness, which one might call the fat-cheery, there is the fat-bloated" (25); and in terms of thinness, she explains that Dickens also "offers two modes of thinness, which I shall call the thin-vicious and the thin-pathetic" (30). All together, McMaster's ideas explore some of the implications of the connection between food and appearances but, by tying in the issue of personality, she draws attention to there being a link between food and the characters' psychology. This latter issue will be explored in the following section of the thesis and, because psychological issues are generally more complex than physically-oriented ones this next section will be of greater length than this one.

If a fictional character is to be more than a two-dimensional figure he or she must be developed internally, as well as externally. The question of whether Dickens's characters attain 'realistic psychological depths', therefore, is a relevant issue in trying to determine their life-likeness. The whole idea of fictional characters having inner existence, however, is

problematic and controversial and, as a result, there has been a great deal of debate over how, and to what extent - if any - Dickens's characters have psychological reality.

As is the case with so many of the aspects of Dickens's fiction, one of the more effective ways of studying and evaluating the inner existence of Dickens's fictional creations is within the context of food. Mr Veneering, of Our Mutual Friend, set a food-metaphor precedent when he described the workings of his and his fellow characters' inner beings in terms of their having a "profusion of gammon and spinach in our emotional larders" (OMF 473); and to similar effect, M.F.K. Fisher comments that Dickens "used [his] characters' gastronomical habits as an intrinsic part of their being" (156). As well, Barbara Hardy refers to some of the specific internal qualities of the characters and asserts that "Food is used [in Dickens's narratives] to define various aspects of love, pride, social ambition, and gratitude" (140). These ideas give only a superficial intimation of the variety of issues that can arise in reference to food and psyche and overall, analyses of this nature can be divided into two types: those that are literally and extrinsically food-oriented, and those that are figurative or allusively.

One of the more intriguing ways in which food can be used to understand the inner dimension of Dickens's characters also concerns one of the important stylistic features of his writing - namely, the profusion of fastidiously detailed objects in his

fictional worlds (this idea is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1). There is a surfeit of 'stuff' inundating Dickens's fictional environments and it cannot simply be dismissed as "unnecessary" or "rococo" (128, 130) as Orwell would have it. This is because, as several critics have attested, many of these objects are instrumental in illuminating the personalities of Dickens's characters. Various studies concerning how particular types of objects - such as clothing, houses, or furniture - contribute to the psychological makeup of Dickens's fictional creations have been proposed and developed, but, to date, none have focused specifically on how food objects contribute to the development and understanding of their personalities and psyches. Some of the ideas proposed in the existing theories, however, can be used in the elucidation of this new idea.

Juliet McMaster argues that Dickens's characters derive their inner existence, at least in part, from their association with objects. She asserts that the characters' possessions - along with their external appearances - are indicative of their personalities and inner thought processes. The identities of the characters, she says, "are expressed not just in their faces and bodies, but also in their clothes, homes, and appurtenances" (20). As has been noted (in Chapter 1), the objects which permeate Dickens's texts tend to be of an edible nature. Juxtaposing this fact with McMaster's idea that objects-in-general contribute to the inner lives of Dickens's characters results in the hypothesis that the 'things' that lend psychological life to the characters are often food-objects.

Take, for example, Miss Havisham's mouldy wedding-cake - an object which, to a certain extent, is the physical-object counterpart of her state of mind insofar as that both the cake and the rejected bride's mind decay at the same rate and from the same cause. In Hardy's words, Miss Havisham "has been gnawed by pain as the food has been gnawed by mice, she has worn away with the meal, and when she is dead she too will be laid out on that table" (154), and all together, Miss Havisham's psyche and person are elucidated through their parallelism with the cake.

The character of Mrs Sparsit, in Hard Times, is another example of a Dickens character who derives a large part of her personality from an identification with certain items of food. In her case, the viands in question are sweetbreads - reputedly her especial favourite. Not only does Mrs Sparsit eat them often - the reference to her "nocturnal sweetbreads" (HT 157) being 'ready', implies that they are frequently a part of her evening repast - but this particular delicacy is also used to typify various aspects of her fictional existence. Indeed, Miss Sparsit herself speaks of her employment in Bounderby's household in terms of food and drink - unctuously saying to her employer that "trouble in your service is to me a pleasure, and hunger, thirst, and cold a real gratification" (HT 278). It is the narrator of the novel, though, who makes the connection between Miss Sparsit's work and her sweetbreads explicit, through the description of the new living-and-employment arrangements that are being established between the two characters:

> 'Sir,' rejoined Mrs Sparsit, 'say no more. In yielding up my trust here, I shall not be freed from the necessity of

> eating the bread of dependence:' she might have said the sweetbread, for that delicate article in a savoury brown sauce was her favourite supper... (HT 141)

What may be the most striking sweetbread-relative aspect of Mrs Sparsit's shallow and insincere personality is the fact that her mental equanimity is described in reference to her favourite meal: she undergoes a great fright towards the end of the novel and her recovered composure is signified only "when her nerves were strung up to the pitch of again consuming sweet-breads in solitude" (HT 226). Essentially, Mrs Sparsit's very being - what she does, says, and thinks - is contextualized in terms not simply of food in general, but of sweetbreads in particular!

In regard to the examples of both Miss Havisham and Mrs Sparsit, the connection between food and personality is of a basically one-to-one type. Each of these fictional women are relatively minor characters who have been psychologically developed only to a limited extent, and are linked with single food objects. Such 'singular' correlations make good sense, though, since the less complex a character or concept is, the easier it will be to 'sum it up' in a few images - or, in this case, a few food items. Dickens's relatively more complex characters - who, virtually by definition, elude quick summation - are, in contrast to Miss Havisham and Mrs Sparsit, apt to be identified not with individual food objects, but with types or groupings of foods - such as gourmet or country fare, or whole diets, such as vegetarianism.

Mrs Gamp, the umbrella wielding harpy of Martin Chuzzlewit, is a character who could be described as being situated in the

middle ground between minor and main characters, in that her personality is well developed, but she has a rather small role in the novel. Appositely, she is also associated with a modicum of different gastronomical issues. For one thing, Mrs Gamp is often recognized by her food-like accessories - in particular, her cabbage-shaped night-cap (MC 481) and the lettuce-like umbrella that is "in colour like a faded leaf" (MC 376). As well, she proves to be "choice", "punctual and particular" (384) in her eating and drinking habits, and craftily plots and plans how to get herself 'fed and watered' to the utmost of her enjoyment and the minimum of her own expense. Performing nursing duties with her 'partner' Mrs Prig, for example, the two cronies exchange information not about the status or the treatment of their patient, but about how best to take advantage of their employer's larder. "The pickled salmon...is quite delicious" recommends Mrs Prig, but she advises "Don't have nothink [sic] to say to the cold meat, for it tastes of the stable" (MC 478). Mrs Gamp responds by urging Prig to "try the cowcumbers [sic], God bless you!"(MC 484). Almost every time Sairey Gamp makes an appearance in the novel, she is either eating, preparing to eat, or discussing the general merits of food and digestion. The whole of her - especially her slyness and her greediness - and the various eccentricities that make her a unique and animated character - seem based in food and, as her limited role in the novel seems to dictate, this connection is not extremely complex.

As far as Dickens's more fully developed characters are concerned, David Copperfield stands out as having an extensive

and complicated food-based psychology, and an in-depth look at him will provide some insight into the some of the more unique ways that food can be used to develop and elucidated the personalities of fictional characters.

Some of the more noteworthy aspects of David's food-focused personality are his food-related fears and inadequacies, and evidence of these can be found early in his childhood. For one thing, David's early educational experience with Mr Murdstone is terrifying in itself but, as David relates, "Even when the lessons are done, the worst is yet to happen, in the shape of an appalling sum" - and the whole of this final demoralizing ordeal revolves around the concept of food:

> This [sum] is invented for me, and delivered to me orally by Mr Murdstone, and begins, 'If I go into a cheesemonger's shop, and but five thousand double-Gloucester cheeses at fourpence-halfpenny each, present payment'...I pore over these cheeses without any result or enlightenment until dinner-time, when, having made a Mulatto of myself by getting the dirt of the slate into the pores of my skin, I have a slice of bread to help me out with the cheeses, and am considered in disgrace for the rest of the evening. (DC 104-105)

David's innocence and ingenuousness are also established early in his life, through what becomes a virtual custom of his being swindled in matters concerning food. This 'tradition' commences with the journey which first takes David away from his mother, when he is duped out of his lunch and spending money, and is made a figure of ridicule, by an opportunistic waiter (DC 116-121). Similar incidents occur throughout David's early life and continue into his marriage - at which latter point David and Dora are portrayed as being taken advantage of by all of the servants and tradespeople with whom they come into contact:

> Everybody we had anything to do with seemed to cheat us. Our appearance in a shop was a signal for the damaged goods to be brought out immediately. If we bought a lobster, it was full of water. All our meat turned out to be tough, and there was hardly any crust to our loaves. In search of the principle on which joints ought to be roasted, to be roasted enough, and not too much, I myself referred to the Cookery Book, and found it there established as the allowance of a quarter of an hour to every pound, and say a quarter over. But the principle always failed us by some curious fatality, and we never could hit any medium between redness and cinders. (DC 707)

Possibly as a result of his many food-related short-comings - which reveal such of his personality traits as passivity, naivete, and a lack of authority - David early on develops what could be called an 'alimentary-anxiety' and becomes obsessed with food. As is explained in great detail in the depiction of the time he spends working in the counting house, David's mind is constantly occupied with food - he not only obsesses about what to eat, but how and where to get it, and how, where, and when to eat it (DC 214-216)[3]. Indeed, the precision and specificity with which David relates his dining habits during this and other periods of his life indicate an inordinate amount of attention being paid to the subject of food and drink.

As David gets older, his preoccupation with food continues to effect his mind and manners. This is made evident, for one thing, through the style of the narrative - in so far as that the grown-up David relates the food experiences of his childhood-self with the same obsessive attention to detail that he supposed felt as he lived through them. Other evidence attesting to the fact that food continues to affect the adult David may be found in the way that food influences the way that he conceives of, and expresses, his feelings for other people. In terms of his

dislikes, for instance, David describes Uriah Heep "as if he had been a great walnut put there to be cracked" (DC 687), and at one point in the narrative, David expresses his repugnance for Uriah in a desire to scald him with - or perhaps like - a pot of coffee (DC 437). Other of David's antagonistic relationships are also gastronomically framed, as is evident from the fact that his first encounter with physical violence is with a young butcher who anoints his hair with beef suet (DC 324), and from the outcome of this the incident having the defeated David being "taken home in a sad plight" to have "beef-steaks put to [his] eyes, and [to be] rubbed with vinegar and brandy" (DC 325) to ease his scrapes and bruises.

Not only David's aversions and animosities, but also his amicable relationships are related in terms of food. Peggotty is probably David's closest companion throughout his fictional life, and one of the ways in which she is portrayed is as a constant source of food - she prepares meals, bakes special treats, and gives David packets of food to ease his troubles. Additional proof of David's food-oriented friendships is his particular fondness for dining with Steerforth and Traddles, and the fact that his reminiscences about the Micawbers are almost always about the meals they have shared.

Even David's love affairs - the ultimate form of friendship - are, essentially, matters of food. Indeed, he seems preternaturally disposed to confuse 'sweethearts' with 'sweetmeats'. In David's case, this seems to be a matter of heart- or literally 'gut-felt' emotion and, if fictional

characters may be psychologically analyzed, David's behaviour could be said to indicate just how deeply and sub-consciously ingrained is his preoccupation with food. Evidence of the subliminal connection between food and love may found in the fact that to his first sweetheart, Miss Shepperd, David gives "twelve Brazil nuts for a present" (DC 323) although he is admittedly unsure why he does so because "they are not expressive of affection, they are difficult to pack into a parcel of any regular shape, they are hard to crack, even in room doors, and they are oily when cracked" (DC 323). David also gives to Miss Shepperd some "Soft, seedy biscuits... and oranges innumerable" (DC 323). Another of David's love interests, "The eldest Miss Larkins", is also conceived of by him in terms of food, and this is apparent from the albeit enigmatic assertion that Miss Larkins is "not a chicken" (DC 326) and David's professing a passion for her that "takes away [his] appetite" (DC 326). In fact, this latter sentiment, about the connection between love and appetite is re-phrased at several other moments in David's life: at one point he says that he is so enamored of his future wife that he has "dined off Dora" (DC 452, 471), and he later explains that he has been "swallowed up in an abyss of love" (DC 450). Indeed, life, love, and marital bliss are, to David Copperfield, all matters of food. This, at times, has negative repercussions and, for example, Dora's inability to cook is consequently perceived by David as an overwhelming character flaw which he tries to correct - though is unsuccessful. Even the final important event in the story of David Copperfield's life and loves - his marriage

to the ever-steady Agnes - has an element of the alimentary to it, being appropriately and finally announced to all of their loved ones at the dinner table (DC 937).

Objects - of food and of other things - are of central importance to Dickens's narratives, as the discussion above should have made clear. Dorothy Van Ghent's writings on Dickens's characterization take this into consideration. As Angus Calder notes, some of Van Ghent's comments "answer those who accuse Dickens of neglecting to endow his characters with the complex inner life which we know that men and women have" (21), and her ideas are, therefore, relevant to this examination of Dickens's characters' inner lives. A brief discussion of these ideas will help elucidate some additional ways in which Dickens's fictional characters derive their inner lives from objects in general, and food in particular.

At one point in her exposition, Van Ghent asserts that Dickens's characters are essentially <u>made into</u> objects - they are "thinged", as she puts it:

> ...people are described by nonhuman attributes, or by such an exaggeration of or emphasis on one part of their appearance that they seem to be reduced wholly to that part, with an effect of having become 'thinged' into one of their own bodily members or into an article of their clothing or into some inanimate object of which they have made a fetish. (129)

Replacing the idea of <u>general</u> objects with that of <u>food</u> objects - since so many of the 'things' in Dickens's narratives are food things (again, see chapter 1) - turns Van Ghent's hypothesis about characters being made into generic objects, into a theory

about how characters are made into items of food. One could say that Dickens's characters are food-objectified!

Van Ghent also theorizes that in addition to the characters being 'thinged' a reciprocal process also occurs, such that the objects - food and other-wise - are given animation and psychological depth. As proof of this latter assertion, she notes "Dickens' fairly constant use of the pathetic fallacy (the projection of human impulses and feelings upon the nonhuman, as upon beds and houses and muffins and hats)" (129). As the texts make evident though, Dickens didn't just create animated muffins; he brought to life a virtual pantry full of kicking and screaming foodstuffs. 'Pleased potatoes' (MC 661), 'coy raspberry jam tarts' (MC 258), and 'tearful legs of pork' (LD 283) are just a few of the 'vitalized' comestibles that 'people' the narratives. In fact, in several of Dickens's scenes the emotional and obstreperous viands are more animated than the fictional people. When Lizzie Hexam and Eugene Wrayburn meet at a country fair, for example, the articles of food are more outspoken than the lovers:

> Fearful to relate, there was even a sort of little Fair in the village. Some despairing gingerbread that had been vainly trying to dispose of itself all over the country, and had cast a quantity of dust upon its head in its mortification, again appealed to the public from an infirm booth. So did a heap of nuts, long, long, exiled from Barcelona, and yet speaking English so indifferently as to call fourteen of themselves a pint. (OMF 757)

Combining the idea of character animation with that of character objectification, Van Ghent asserts that the two phenomena occur according to a sort of 'law of conservation of energy' wherein objects only gain vitality when, and to the extent that, characters lose it. It can, therefore, be surmised

that Van Ghent believes that Dickens's characters have a limited amount of vitality and inner life because a large part of the available animation is being 'usurped' by the objects. Essentially, Van Ghent admits that an animating process is taking place - she says that "there is a great deal of 'inner life'" (131) - but she argues that this vitality is being "transposed to other forms than that of human character" (131, emphasis added). In other words, she is saying that the things in Dickens's fiction - not the people - are being made lifelike; and she consequently maintains that Dickens's characters have a "characteristic lack of complex 'inner life'" (131).

While Van Ghent's insights are useful, her conclusion - which is in direct opposition to what this thesis is asserting - is neither the only nor the best one to follow from her postulations about animation and objectification. It is just as reasonable, if not more so, to infer that Dickens's characters derive vitality and psychological depth from their identification with animated-inanimate-objects - than to conclude that they are being enervated by this 'transposition of attributes'. A simple logical equation illustrates this hypothesis: if Things are made Lifelike [T=L], and Characters are like Things [C=T], then by the process of association, the Characters are also made Lifelike [C=L]. (If T=L, and C=T, then C=L). This line of reasoning is more plausible than Van Ghent's, in part because her premises are slightly unsound: her idea that the characters must lose their vitality in order for the objects to gain it, problematically necessitates that the characters must have started out with a

relatively significant amount of animation - or else they would have none to lose. As well, her assertions seem largely unsubstantiated: there is no proof or reason to believe that vitality is exchanged between people and things, or that things only gain animation when, and as a direct result of, characters losing their vitality.

All together, Van Ghent's proposals and conclusions don't stand up to scrutiny, and it seems more logical to conclude that the hypothesis that Dickens's characters gain depth, vitality, and life-likeness from their identification with animated inanimate objects. Some of Van Ghent's comments, however, when they are looked at in isolation, also seem to support this latter conclusion - which they oppose, overall. She stats, for example, that "Without benefit of Freud or Jung, Dickens saw the human soul reduced literally to the images occupying its 'inner life'" (131) - a comment that could be construed as meaning that the characters' psyches are literally made up of inanimate objects - an idea very similar to what I am proposing as the alternative to Van Ghent's.

All together, Van Ghent's ideas are somewhat problematic and don't fully accord with the tenets of this thesis. Her proposals are, nevertheless, relevant to the study of food in Dickens and, in fact, are also useful as guidelines for analyzing the fictions. Indeed, her animation-objectification ideas provide the grounds for establishing a thought-provoking set of propositions: (a) one can use her comments to establish that within Dickens's texts, items of food are virtually synonymous

with Dickens's people; and (b) one can also establish the reverse - that Dickens's people are virtually synonymous with items of food. Together, these complementary propositions describe the inter-relationship between Dickens's characters and Dickens's foodstuffs - and they also provoke some additional insights about the personalities of the characters.

It may be opined, for instance, that the manner in which people treat their inanimate surroundings says a lot about their inner personality. How people treat <u>other people</u>, though, is often even more revealing since there are greater moral repercussions associated with what <u>people</u> endure than with what <u>objects</u> experience. Van Ghent's ideas about the 'transposition of attributes' grant objects - including, and especially, food objects - a level of humanity that is equal, or at least similar, to that of the characters - an idea that is echoed in Angus Calder's comment that "people and meat, people and greens have come to seem to inhabit the same moral level" (29). What this means is that the way the characters interact with their food is tantamount to 'inter-person' communication, and this, in turn, suggests that situations in which food and people come into contact with one another can further elucidate and emphasize various aspects of the characters' personality. In other words, if this hypothesis is valid, then the fact that Noah Claypole is said to have "commenced a voracious assault on [his] breakfast" (OT 403), and that Mrs Clennam eats according to strict diets and schedules, would be indicative not only of their respective attitudes towards food, but also of their respective attitudes

and behaviour towards people - and, indeed, this is so. Noah treats Oliver and Charlotte as cruelly and abusively as he treats his viands, and Mrs Clennam is as distant, sparing, and regimented in dealing with people - particularly her son, Arthur - as she is in taking her meals.

Similar insights into, and verifications of, the characters' personalities can be evidenced from such situations as Mr Jaggers' 'bullying' his sandwich (GE 194) as well as many of the people - like Pip, Wemmick, and his housekeeper - with whom he comes into contact; from the fact that one of the representatives of Little Dorrit's Circumlocution Office - "the Noble Refrigerator" - not only "struck cold into the stomachs of foreigners who had the distinguished honour of remembering him" (LD 361) but also "shaded the dinner, cooled the wines, chilled the gravy, and blighted the vegetables" (LD 361); and from such occasions as Little Dorrit's sister treating her food - she "threw the table implements about and was angry with her bread" (LD 290) - in much the same way that she behaves towards her friends and family.

Up until this point, the discussion of the inner workings of Dickens's characters has focused on how food functions in literal, external, and obviously food-like ways in the elucidation of personality. In other words, it is the idea of food qua tangible food, or food as quantitative object(s) - having a shape and form - that has been the basis of the theories and examples that have been examined. The metaphoric and

qualitative aspects of food, however, are also a rich source of analytic material and looking at them can provoke some additional insights into the personalities of Dickens's characters.

One of the simpler allusive ways in which the characters' personalities have been developed in connection with the 'natures' of various edibles, is through their having been given names which are also food signifiers. Cherry Pecksniff, Mrs Hominy, and Mr Mould, of Martin Chuzzlewit; Ham and Mealy Potatoes, of David Copperfield; Mr Kibble, of The Pickwick Papers; Miss Peecher, of Our Mutual Friend; and Rokesmith's temporary incarnation as "Artichoke" (OMF 472) are just a few examples of this phenomenon. In terms of these names alluding to the natures of both the food and the person, Cherry's name could be interpreted as referring to both the sweet and the sour varieties of the fruit and the similarly antithetical sides of her personality. In the same sort of way, Mr Mould's name may refer to mould itself, and may also be some sort of indirect reference to his profession as undertaker; and Miss Peecher's name may refer to her 'peachy-goodness' and her ripe-for-matrimony state of mind. In each of these cases the correlation between food-nature and person-nature are neither obvious nor exact and, as a result, this food-name hypothesis can only be of limited use in analyzing the characters' personalities.

A more straightforwardly illuminating narrative device, with respect to revealing or clarifying personality through an identification with the 'behaviour' of food, is the way that the characters' conduct and mien is frequently described in terms of

food flavours. Sometimes this can occur randomly, in a non-specific fashion - as with Our Mutual Friend's Miss Abbey, who is variously described as being "short and sweet - or short and sour, according as it may be and as opinions vary" (OMF 499) - or it can be random and specific, as is the case when, with no food 'in sight', Mr Boffin behaves towards John Rokesmith in a butter-like manner, "warming [to him] (as fat usually does)" (OMF 135). Sometimes though, the characters' food-like behavioural patterns occur non-randomly - that is, in direct relation to what they are, or have been, eating. Just as Brillat-Savarin's maxim could be used to describe the characters' physical appearances - 'they look like what they eat' (see the discussion of food and external appearances, earlier in this chapter) - it can also be descriptive of their behaviour, such that the characters sometimes act like what they eat. Miss Murdstone and Mrs Hominy, for example, each take on the 'personality' of the pickles that she ingests (DC 189-190 and MC 436, respectively); and Josiah Bounderby - as would be expected from one who self-reputedly lived out part of his life by eating garbage (HT 197) - is said to "nauseate all healthy stomachs" (HT 312). Essentially, the characters take on the nature, and at times even the texture, of the foods that they consume and in one scene, "[T]he eaters of the dinner" are described in terms of their having taken on the qualities of the food in front of them - and "like the dinner itself, [they] were lukewarm, insipid, [and] overdone" (LD 252).

All foods have a definite 'presence', insofar as that every edible thing has 'a taste' - whether it be subtle or obtrusive,

pleasing or not. Identifying the characters with distinctively flavoured foods can, therefore, have the effect of imbuing these characters with definite, and sometimes distinctive, identities. Some foods are conventionally - and almost by virtue of definition - associated with particular food-and-person behavioural qualities: milk, for example, is equated with wholesome-ness, while oiliness is identified with unctuousness. Describing a character's conduct in terms of these foods, therefore, will almost automatically transfer these behavioural qualities to the character. The description of Mr Venus as habitually acting "milk and watery" (OMF 721; 722; 726; 727), for instance, evokes the image of a character who is 'good' or wholesomely natured, but in a diluted or 'wishy-washy' fashion - and this is an apt description of him, since he has moral qualms about deceiving the Boffins but ruminates over the situation for a long while before he takes action. Similarly, Mr Pecksniff's being described not only as a "man of oil" (MC 368) but as being virtually created out of butter (MC 91), accurately pinpoints him as having an unctuous and greasy or slimy personality; and, when James Harthouse's heart is likened to a "nest of addled eggs" (HT 254), the conventional image of the rotten or empty egg appositely conveys for him the image of a heartless and unfeeling man. Not all foods are as conventionally associated with specific tastes and behaviour as are milk and oil, however, and this means that looking to the type of food a character is identified with will not always be a precise and/or accurate indication of the character's personality.

Although tastes and food preferences are subjective phenomena, there are certain fundamental, and reasonably predictable, good and bad taste sensations. Rotten or spoiled food, for example, generally has a bad taste, while fresh food usually tastes good. As approximate truths or assumptions, these generalizations can function, at least to a certain extent, as basic guidelines in the analysis of personality, such that characters aligned with good tasting and healthy foods tend to be good-natured and likable, while those identified with bad tasting or rotten food tend to be evil-natured and unlikable. The "Pickled" (OMF 792) mess that is "Fascination" Fledgeby is an excellent illustration of this phenomenon because, despite the text's sometimes ambiguous portrayal of him, and although he tries to hide his true nature, Fledgeby is portrayed as the embodiment of an unappetizing dish: he is salted and peppered, dosed with snuff, plastered with vinegar and brown paper, and generally seen to suffer "every mortal disease incidental to poultry" (OMF 790). Essentially, he is as unpalatable and nasty as character as he would be as something to be eaten. A reversed illustration of this phenomenon may be found in the references to characters being "sauces". Tom Pinch's sister Ruth is described as "the best sauce for chops ever invented" (MC 661); and Pip speculates about "what terrible good sauce for a dinner my fugitive friend [Magwitch] on the marshes was" (GE 64). Since sauces typically make food taste good or better and, in terms of character behaviour, such identifications tend to highlight good or enriching behaviour or personality.

Emphasizing the division of characters into generic classifications of good and bad - as the preceding paragraphs do - could be interpreted as adding substance to the hypothesis that Dickens's characters are statically natured - a critical evaluation that this thesis is trying to disprove (see the discussion at the beginning of this chapter about some popular ways of analyzing Dickens's characters). Being firmly associated with either good-ness or bad-ness, though, signifies neither absolute predictability nor unchanging-ness of behaviour - and, even if it did, this would not necessarily detract from the characters' realistic-ness. A life-like character may very well also be a consistent one, and he or she need not undergo a drastic or radical moral catharsis in order to be deemed realistic. Moreover, a character or a food can maintain a fundamentally static nature, and still undergo minor fluctuations of personality as caused by the influence of different experiences, circumstances, and seasonings.

Overall, it seems that as the food side of the food-personality equation becomes more indirect, qualitative, and metaphorical, the inferences drawn from this relation continue to be fruitful, with respect to illuminating various aspects of the characters' inner personalities. Essentially, the figurative atmosphere of food in Dickens's narratives, as well as the food itself, is instrumental in illuminating certain qualities of Dickens's characters; not only are the particulars of what, when, and how characters eat revelatory, so are the circumstances surrounding

these occurrences. Other indirect food issues such as food preferences, table manners, and the general idea of hospitality are all connected with the concept of food and can also be revealing as regards the characters' personalities.

The concept of hospitality - 'the way in which guests or strangers are received'(588), according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary - is particularly illuminating with respect to personality and has an undeniably food-oriented dimension, in terms of whether and how food is offered, given, or shared with others; and with what, if any, ulterior motives these actions are performed. To be even more specific, hospitality is linked with the ideas of personal integrity and moral depth, and the extent of a character's hospitable-ness is an indicator of how good, kind, evil, or selfish they are. Fine distinctions and variations in the degree of hospitality are discernible and, therefore, help to determine and explain some of the more subtle aspects of Dickens's characters' psychological being.

Barbara Hardy's critical analysis of Great Expectations is an excellent framework to use in explaining how food-oriented hospitality is related to the inner-qualities of Dickens's characters. Although in general she is making specific reference to Great Expectations, Hardy's observations are relevant and applicable to all of Dickens's work, and in terms of the whole oeuvre, she says that "the same moral values are attached to meals - to the giving, receiving, eating, and serving of food" (139).

In her analyses, Hardy stresses the fact that hospitality

isn't simply the satisfaction of physical needs - it "is not the mere provision of food, important though this is" (142) - but also involves the emotions and attitudes that show up in accompaniment to the presence of food. To clarify her ideas, Hardy has come up with a sort of moral scale, such that "These [moral] values might be summed up as good appetite without greed, hospitality without show, and ceremony without pride or condescension" (139-140). A more detailed explanation of how she associates hospitality and morality is as follows:

> The meals themselves are charged with no more than the moral significances of everyday life, where good mothers feed their children lovingly but not excessively or demandingly; where meals are sociable occasions; where good manners are desirable but not all that important; where theft may be condoned if the thief is starving; where there is something distasteful about the host or mother or cook whose meals are merely boasts; where there is something distasteful about the host or mother or cook whose meals are merely boasts; where there is something meretricious in the splendid feast which is strikingly different from the routine meals of the same household; where abstinence may be either unhealthy or unselfish. (141)

Essentially, it seems that Dickens's novels invoke a wide spectrum of ways in which hospitality relates to personality; and the characters and scenes of Great Expectations exemplify a variety of different points on this scale. There are several characters, for instance, who exemplify the inhospitable end of the spectrum. There is Estella, for one, who ungraciously treats Pip as if he were an animal: "She came back, with some bread and meat and a little mug of beer", relates Pip, "She put the mug down on the stones of the yard, and gave me the bread and meat without looking at me, as insolently as if I were a dog" (GE 92). Similarly, Mr Pumblechook is uncharitable and resentful when it

comes to giving food to others, as can be evidenced from the fact that he feeds Pip a rather thin breakfast comprised of crumbs and watery milk, while indulging himself with bacon and hot rolls (GE 84). And then there is Mrs Joe, who is Only slightly more open-hearted and open-minded than Estella and Pumblechook: she is a stringent and "unloving mother-surrogate who feeds her family unceremoniously" (Hardy 149) but, at least, prepares home-cooked meals for Pip and Joe.

At the opposite end of spectrum from these sorts of characters are those who feed others with the sometimes limited means that are available to them, and get pleasure out of doing so. Still using Great Expectations for illustration, a completely warm and wholesome standard of hospitality is, for instance, displayed by Wemmick who is explicitly identified with "ordered, warm, and unpretentious hospitality" (152-153). Also representative of good hospitality is Magwitch who, despite his 'heavy grubbing', is honest and willing to share whatever he has - when he has it - and who devotes a large part of his life to making sure that Pip is well-fed and well-educated. Then, another step up the ladder of hospitality is the character of Joe, who is almost unnaturally and unhealthfully giving and who shows his affections literally by means of food: as Pip explains it, Joe "always aided and comforted me when he could, in some way of his own, and he always did so at dinner-time by giving me gravy, if there were any" (GE 57). Several other scenes in the novel depict gravy virtually over-flowing Pip's plate - and indeed there are instances in which Pip would be made quite ill

off of Joe's good intentions, if he were to eat them all.

Great Expectations also harbours at least its fair share of characters who typify a middle-ground sort of hospitality - characters who lean slightly to the positive or negative side of good, heart-felt giving. There is Mr Jaggers, for one, who is representative of both "good food and ruthless hospitality" (GE 152-153), and there is Herbert Pocket, for another, who is happy to feed others, but seldom has the means to do so because he is so easily swayed by Pip into squandering his earnings on lavish and pretentious dining and housekeeping.

Great Expectations may be the most obviously and consistently food-occupied of Dickens novels - as Watt has commented, "Great Expectations (1861) offers perhaps the supreme example in Dickens of a comprehensive integration of eating and drinking into every aspect of the novel" (170) - but there are characters whose identities are elucidated through food-oriented hospitality in all of Dickens's fiction. In fact, there are probably enough persons and situations, in all of the novels and short stories, to illustrate the entire gamut of the hospitality-personality spectrum. One of the more conspicuous figures on the positive side of the relation is Martin Chuzzlewit's Mark Tapley who, with his ever-present good humour and food-oriented resourcefulness, seems the epitome of hospitable food providers. Similarly outstanding in generosity, though in a somewhat trite and sickly-sweet manner, are Nell and Little Dorrit - both of whom embody a self-effacing type of hospitality, giving food to their respective father and grandfather while they themselves go

hungry.

Representatives of what Hardy calls "false hospitality" - characters who make an elaborate show of giving, but whose actions are insincere - also abound in Dickens work. Indeed, given Dickens's recurrent theme of society's lack of sincerity, this is not surprising. Of this type, though, the Veneerings of Our Mutual Friend and the Merdles of Little Dorrit are probably the most blatantly false and showy, since both families place an inordinate amount of importance on the showy aspect of their elaborate dinner parties - which affairs, as a result, tend to be indigestible in respect to both food and atmosphere.

The concept of hospitality inherently carries with it the implications of its opposite - inhospitableness - and, as the conventional punishments of being sent to bed without supper or being starved in prison on bread and water illustrate, food can be a means with which to inflict pain and hurt (see also the discussion of food as murder weapon, in Chapter 1). As a result of this negative potential, food makes an excellent medium for displaying evilness and uncharitabiltiy - and it is in this respect that Dickens has created some of his most brilliant characters. The whole Smallweed family, for example are deliciously petty and nasty, living by the maxim that 'the only use for a friend is to dine at his expense' (BH 345-6); and begrudgingly allowing their maid, Charley, a saucer of 'tea-scrapings' and the "outside fragments and worn-down heels of loaves". Similarly, Sally Brass makes a surpassing figure of cruelty and stinginess, keeping her illegitimate daughter/servant

alarmingly undernourished by feeding her minuscule morsels of meat and such unappetizing repasts as "cold potatoes, looking as eatable as Stonehenge" (OCS 351). Indeed, even without being the immediate source of distress or hurt, food is often the means by which Dickens's characters' immorality is made obvious, and Mr Pecksniff's corrupt nature, for example, is in a sense cemented when he commits the ultimate act of anti-hospitable-ness and steals port wine and biscuits from the vestry (MC 565) - of all places!

As an index for evaluating personality, what could be called the 'hospitality factor' can reveal, as well as accentuate, some interesting and often over-looked qualities in Dickens's characters. Both the Artful Dodger and Fagin, for example, are generally considered to be figures of unconscionable and undeniable wickedness. Taking into consideration their periodic displays of hospitality, though - they give food to Oliver and the other young thieves - reveals them to be capable of small acts of goodness, even though these may be ulteriorly motivated.

The implications and ramifications of hospitality are not easily summarized and one should take into consideration that, as Hardy also points out, the concept of hospitality involves not only the giving, but the receiving, of food. How the characters accept what is offered, and what they make of it, therefore, can also be revealing about their personalities. Truly good-hearted individuals, for instance, are able to appreciate even the most meagre and insincerely given sustenance. Martin Chuzzlewit's Tom Pinch is one of these sorts of persons, and his enjoyment of the

left-overs from the false-feast given by the Pecksniffs is expressed in his "surpassing appreciation of the husky sandwiches, which crumbled in his mouth like saw-dust; the unspeakable relish with which he swallowed the thin wine by drops, and smacked his lips, as though it were so rich and generous that to lose an atom of its fruity flavour were a sin" (MC 147). Little Dorrit's John Baptiste Cavalletto displays a similar type of hospitable and good-natured acceptance of his lot, and when Rigaud asks him how he finds his plain, dry loaf of bread, he responds that with his knife his stale food becomes what he wishes it to be: "I can cut my bread so - like a melon. Or so - like an omelette. Or so - like a fried fish. Or so - like a Lyons sausage" (LD 46).

Essentially, there are a variety of ways in which the notion of hospitality is linked to food and they are efficacious in elucidating the identities of Dickens fictional creations. In fact, the characters seem to relate to food at an elemental or instinctual level and, as a result, aspects of their true natures - as opposed to the behaviour they put on for show - are often revealed within the context of food.

What makes, by anyone's standards, a perfect piece of literature, probably does not exist. Interestingly though, some of the criticisms and shortcomings of Dickens's work - particularly those concerning the characters' psyches - can be answered or qualified in the context of food. As a result, it may be said that food helps Dickens's narratives approximate perfection.

Take, for example, J. Hillis Miller's charge that although love is an intrinsic part of Martin Chuzzlewit, it is not well presented. He observed that "at this stage of Dickens' career, love is shown from the outside, as a mystery. It brings the story happily to a close, but Dickens cannot really show how that happens" (139). Miller has a point here, insofar as that although food helps to develop and reveal the inner dimensions of Dickens's characters, psychological portraiture is, nevertheless, neither the strongest nor the most completely realized aspect of Dickens's fictions, in general. In some respects, and in some cases, Dickens's depiction of internal qualities and emotions is not optimally presented and, indeed, it is relatively easy to be convinced that love in Martin Chuzzlewit is not a thoroughly developed concept. Looking at some of Dickens's other work, though, shows that when he used food and appetite to portray this emotion, he was much more successful. As evidence of this, one can look to the example of David Copperfield, whose emotions and love affairs are largely conveyed through the food conceit (as has been noted earlier in this chapter). Other Dickens's characters are similar proof of this hypothesis: Our Mutual Friend's Bella Wilfer, for instance, is a character whose personality and capacity for love - for herself, her father, and John Rokesmith - is quite remarkable in regard to how it is developed in the context of food. For one thing, Bella is introduced into the novel - and into the whole Harmon story-line - essentially as a food-object: in her own words, she has been "left to [John Harmon] in a will, like a dozen of spoons, with

everything cut and dried before-hand like orange-chips" (OMF 81), and her first appearance in the novel shows her to be a fussily-appetited ornamental character whose dietary whims must be catered to by the rest of her family. She does not help prepare meals but, instead, amuses herself by using the dining utensils to beautify her own and her father's hair (OMF 84-85). In addition, Bella's love for her father is consistently depicted in terms of food and they are several times portrayed dining together: at first, almost like lovers, they eat in expensive restaurants according to Bella's fancy and discriminating tastes, but later, as she becomes less pretentious and particular, they share more basic meals. In fact, almost the whole of Bella's metamorphosis from spoiled brat to down-to-earth character is connected with food: not only does she become willing to eat simple kinds of food, but she condescends - and in fact desires - to take part in its preparation.

> 'Now, Ma,' said Bella, reappearing in the kitchen with some remains of a blush, 'you and Lavvy think magnificent me fit for nothing, but I intend to prove the contrary. I mean to be Cook today.'
> 'Hold!' rejoined her majestic mother....'You cook?' said Mrs Wilfer. 'You, who never cooked when you were at home?'
> 'Yes, Ma,' returned Bella; 'that is precisely the state of the case.' (OMF 511)

There is one scene in particular which epitomizes, through food, not only Bella's love for Rokesmith and her father, but her changed nature: this is when the three lovers share - and thoroughly enjoy - a simple meal of cottage loaves and milk "set forth on a sheet of paper on the window seat" (OMF 668) and exchange kisses which are, significantly and appropriately, equated with drops of milk (OMF 671). Even Bella's and John's

entrance into the state of matrimony is portrayed in terms of eating - the two are said to be "swallowed up" (OMF 732) by the church porch - and Pa Wilfer's continued inclusion in the circle of love seems to be signified by the fact that following the marriage ceremony all three go home to a little cottage with a 4well stocked pantry (OMF 733) and have a wedding breakfast at which "Pa must taste everything" and has "all sorts of things poked into his mouth" (OMF 733). All together, it seems that Dickens's depictions of love, tend to be well effected when depicted in conjunction with food.

CONCLUSION

Opening a Dickens novel is something akin to opening a picnic hamper - something that itself occurs frequently in the narratives. In either case - be it a literal or a figurative one - when it comes to unpacking the basket, a seemingly endless array of foodstuffs, in all shapes and forms, is divulged. While an actual picnic-er is, of course, able to satisfy the literal hunger for food, the reader of fiction has a unique opportunity: he or she is in a position to satisfy an appetite for literature while also, in a sense, able to indulge vicariously through the characters!

As far as the food in Dickens's fiction goes, edibles are the ultimate metaphor of the stories. A Dickens world is one in which plot, character, events, and actions, themes, and language tend all to be contextualized in terms of food: things happen because of food, look like food, behave like food, and result in food! Dickens's fictional characters are born to eat, they live their lives seeking out and enjoying food, and usually come to their demise either notably well sated or explicitly because of the want of food. As Ian Watt puts it, "In the richness and variety of his treatment of food and drink Dickens is the indisputable master among the Victorian novelists" (165). Who else but Dickens would or could create a tale about a man who is literally made into sausages (PP 509-510); a character, notably by the name of Mr Kibble, who is described as "an unctuous broad man of few words and many mouthfuls" (OMF 835, emphasis added); or specify such items of detail as a hat "which had a greasy and

fatty surface like cold broth" (GE 281)? As was touched on at the end of Chapter 2, given the right frame of mind, the reader of Dickens's fictions can almost taste the food that he or she is reading about.

Dickens's fictional worlds are indisputably food-oriented and, for the most part, this preoccupation typifies real life, as well. Human beings tend to spend their lives eating and worrying about the inexorable need to eat. For some individuals, needing constantly to deal with food is a hassle - an inconvenience that distracts them from other concerns. For others, though, the subject of food - what to eat, where to get it, how to prepare it, etcetera - is an endless source of delight: something to ponder, cater to, and enjoy as much as, or perhaps more than, the actual act of consumption. And in this regard, Dickens's fiction is as alluring to those who are looking for a good read, or a classic piece of literature, as to those who just like to read about food. Indeed, for those who are stymied by the subject of food, Dickens's novels make prime fodder. This is fiction written by a man who "love[d] feasts and scorn[ed] fasts" (Hardy 140), and food plays a tantalizing and ubiquitous role in it - and among others, it would surely be appreciated by those who appreciate a good meal!

ENDNOTES

Introduction

[1]Ian Watt, evidently of the same opinion, has outlined in "Oral Dickens" what he sees as the three distinct 'gastric phases' of Dickens' work.

[2]Thomas Pavel explains the idea of parallel worlds - and other fictional-world terminology - in Fictional Worlds.

Chapter One

[1]The narrator of Fielding's novel likens the writer of a book to the keeper of a restaurant and compares the novel to fare served. Fielding's analogy is particularly appropriate to the discussion of Food and Dickens because he emphasizes the artist's preoccupation with portrayals of human nature - which idea corresponds to the ever-present but variously addressed fiction-themes of realism and characterization which, in turn, are the sub-focus of this thesis.

[2]Dickens's contemporaries were also given to looking at his work and literary style in gastronomic terms. Robert L. Patten, for instance, states that "Long before the novel [The Pickwick Papers] was complete, the Athenaeum published its version of the recipe: 'two pounds of Smollett, three ounces of Sterne, a handful of Hook, a dash of grammatical Pierce Egan - incidents at pleasure, served with an original sauce piquante'"(20).

[3]An additional dimension of irony attaches itself to Dickens's references to the noxious qualities of food if one takes into consideration the very real problem of the adulteration of foodstuffs that was rampant in Victorian England. Bruce Haley's The Health of the Body in Victorian Culture, 1978 (see especially p.12) and the article entitled "Food and Diet", in Victorian Britain, each contain descriptions of how diseased meat, rancid dairy products, watered-down beer, and other deliberately tainted food were passed off to the Victorian public at large.

[4]For further discussion of the subject, see Angus Wilson's "Dickens on Children and Childhood", and the chapter in The Violent Effigy entitled "Dickens' Children".

[5]See Chapter Three for more about how David sees his world in terms of food.

[6]Angus Calder, for one, claimed that in David Copperfield, Dickens "explored his own childhood and youth, thinly disguised"(8). John Forster's biography of Dickens makes similar assertions, which are especially notable with respect to David's counting house experience and Dickens's work in the blacking house.

[7]A discussion of how food-directed anger relates to the elucidation of personality can be found in Chapter Three.

[8]The Preface to Bleak House, for example, attempts to vindicate the narrative occurrence of spontaneous combustion with such reasoning.

[9]For a more thorough discussion of cannibalism in Dickens's fiction, see John Carey's The Violent Effigy, (espec. p.22-24). As well, Ian Watt theorizes about how "many of the basic conflicts in Dickens' novels can be reduced to the simple primitive choice between eating and being eaten"(179) and Deborah Thomas speculates on the reasons for Dickens's interest in the subjects of cannibalism and poison in "Dickens and Indigestion".

[10]For more about the role of food in the love affairs of Dickens's characters - particularly with respect to David Copperfield - see Chapter Three.

Chapter Two

[1]The subject of David's food preoccupation comes up in Chapter One, in reference to Dickens's theme of children, as well as in Chapter Three, in the context of general character development.

Chapter Three

[1]E.M. Forster did propose a theory that amalgamated the two stances - he hypothesized a simultaneously flat and round 'bubble-type' character' - but this idea depends on the enigmatic premise that Dickens performed a "conjuring trick" (76) when creating his characters and, therefore, this compromise does not present itself as a viable option in the debate.

[2]Such opinions have been expressed by, among others, Henry James - in "The Limitations of Dickens" - and by George Eliot - in "The Natural History of German Life"(see p.271-272).

[3]A similar idea is expressed in John Bayley's comment that "[Dickens's] imagination makes nonsense, just as life does, of theories of how human beings will or will not behave in a given environment"(52-53). See also John Holloways's Introduction to Little Dorrit(espec. p.23-25) and John Romano in Dickens and Reality(espec. p.24).

[4]See, in addition to Juliet McMaster's text, John Carey in reference to his comment that Dickens "relates people to objects, and gives people objects which immediately colour them - flutes, umbrellas, grindstones...viewing people as objects is one of his main occupations"(129); P.N. Furbank in reference to his observation that "Dickens's way of evoking a character's history and personality from his appearance and clothes"(25); and Trevor

Blount on how "things [in Dickens] become an expansion of people"(31).

[9]A similar point and reference is made in Chapter One, in the context of Dickens's fictional children being preternaturally concerned with food.

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All references to Dickens's novels are to the Penguin editions (London: Penguin, 1966-87). The excerpt from Sketches By Boz is from a reprint of the first edition (London: MacMillan and Co., 1892). A chronological list of the texts used is as follows:

Sketches By Boz. (1837)
Pickwick Papers (The). (1836-37)
Oliver Twist. (1837)
Old Curiosity Shop (The). (1840-41)
Martin Chuzzlewit. (1843-44)
David Copperfield. (1849-50)
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