Toward a New Transatlanticism: Dickens in the United States

Amanda Claybaugh

In the first half of the nineteenth century, nearly two hundred British men and women toured the United States and then wrote books about their travels. Their books did much to set the terms for the period's articulation of national differences. Through their description of American manners, they established an array of still-familiar oppositions: American openness and British reserve, American energy and British leisure, American merchants and British gentlemen. But in describing the differences between the United States and Great Britain, they also threw into relief the many connections that continued to exist between the two nations. In particular, they illuminated a shared Anglo-American culture of social reform. Nineteenth-century reform has long been seen as taking place within the bounds of the nation, but it actually depended, I will show, on transatlantic imitations and exchanges. The Atlantic was crossed and recrossed by reformers paying visits to one another, going on lecture tours, and attending Anglo-American conventions against slavery and for temperance or world peace; it was also crossed by writings about reform, including pieces by corresponding societies; reform petitions and "Friendly Addresses"; as well as pamphlets, periodicals, and novels. In this context, it makes sense that a number of the British travelers who came to the United States did so to advocate certain reformist causes and that their travel books furthered this work.

The Anglo-American scope of social reform points to the need for a transatlanticism that is as attentive to the connections across national boundaries as to the differences between nations, as attentive to the concrete collaborations of individuals and groups as to the imaginings of nations as a whole. In this essay, I will elaborate such an approach by first placing this new transatlanticism in the context of earlier attempts to read American and British works alongside one another, and then by using it to reconsider the most famous of the

American tours, that which Charles Dickens made in 1842 and subsequently described in *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842). During this tour, Dickens lent his support to the reform campaigns for suffrage and against slavery. He also joined a number of American and British authors in campaigning for an international copyright law to regulate the transatlantic circulation of published writings. In this way, Dickens's tour participated in some Anglo-American networks (suffrage and anti-slavery reform) while attempting to regulate another (the literary marketplace). But his travel book shows that social reform and the literary marketplace cannot be separated so easily. Dickens's advocacy of reform in *American Notes* was made possible by the same acts of reprinting against which he was campaigning elsewhere. Without authorization and at times without attribution, *American Notes* reprints lengthy passages from Samuel Gridley Howe's reports on the Perkins Institute for the Blind and from Theodore Weld's *American Slavery As It Is* (1839). In reprinting these passages, Dickens contributed to a specifically Anglo-American public sphere, one in which nations were formed and reformed by the pressure of a public opinion that transcended national boundaries.

Toward a New Transatlanticism

Nineteenth-century novelists and critics took for granted what present-day scholars have only recently begun to acknowledge: that the literatures of Great Britain and the United States should not be read in isolation from one another. These novelists and critics could hardly do otherwise, given the scope of the nineteenth-century literary marketplace. In the absence of an international copyright law, books written and published in one nation were very often freely republished in another. To be sure, this transnational literary world was overlaid by both national prejudice and national self-assertion. National prejudice can be found in the common presumption of British preeminence. Voiced explicitly in Sidney Smith's notorious question, "In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?" (79), the presumption was more commonly expressed through silence, in literary reviews that devoted little or no space to works by American or Canadian authors. As for national self-assertion, it can be found in the efforts made by American authors to create a distinctive literature. In the antebellum period, the authors associated with what would come to

be called the American Renaissance sought to create such a literature by renouncing their cultural inheritance from Europe. "Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close" (53), announces Ralph Waldo Emerson's "American Scholar" in 1837, while the preface to Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855) opens with an image of European literature being carried, like a corpse, out the door (5). In the postbellum period, by contrast, a number of American authors sought to align themselves with continental literary movements in order to distinguish themselves from their nearer British rivals. The chief architect of this strategy was William Dean Howells, the period's most influential man of letters. Unusually cosmopolitan for a literary nationalist, Howells famously claimed, in an 1882 review of Henry James, that the United States had superseded Britain in novel writing and that this new American preeminence was made possible in large part by the recent influence of the French (28). But these statements of American self-assertion, like the statements of British prejudice, were powerless to stop the transatlantic circulation of texts, which would not be regulated in any way until the 1891 ratification of an international copyright law.

As a consequence, the nineteenth-century literary world took for granted the existence of what I will call "literature in English." This category is never fully articulated or defended, but it underwrites most contemporary reviews. From time to time, reviewers would remark on national differences, but their more usual practice was to discuss at least some American works interchangeably with British ones. This is true, for instance, of George Eliot's reviews during the 1850s. In one, she notes in passing that American literature is characterized by "certain defects of taste" and "a sort of vague spiritualism and grandiloquence" (200), but in many other reviews she reads British and American authors alongside one another without alluding to national difference at all, pairing Henry Wadsworth Longfellow with Robert Browning and Walt Whitman with Alfred Lord Tennyson. Thirty years later, critics continued to do much the same thing. Indeed, their reliance on the category of literature in English is the one way which critics as different as Walter Besant and Henry James agree. In their famous debate over the "art of fiction," Besant does not address nationality at all, referring as a matter of course to Oliver Wendell Holmes as well as Charles Reade, to Nathaniel Hawthorne as well as Eliot (35). And James, for his part, alludes to the category in a magisterial parenthesis that seeks

neither to justify nor to defend: "In the English novel (by which of course I mean the American novel as well)" (204).

In the twentieth century, however, discussions of literature in English largely gave way to the study of literature nationally defined. American self-assertion would ultimately lead to the establishment of American literature as a separate field and American studies as a separate discipline, a change that reinforced the British indifference to all but the most distinguished American writers. To be sure, a few critics continued to read across national borders. For F. R. Leavis, the "great tradition" of what he calls the "English novel" includes Henry James and Joseph Conrad, as well as George Eliot and Jane Austen (1). And F. O. Matthiessen, in his field-defining study of the American Renaissance, emphasizes the connections between Herman Melville and William Shakespeare, Nathaniel Hawthorne and John Milton, Walt Whitman and Gerald Manley Hopkins. But such approaches became increasingly rare. For a host of reasons, institutional as well as intellectual, the study of British literature and the study of American literature proceeded along separate tracks for much of the twentieth century.

Only in the past two decades have literary scholars returned to the nineteenth-century practice of reading American and British works alongside one another. They do so at a moment when historians have themselves been rediscovering the significance of transatlantic ties. Indeed, in both fields the transatlantic has become a dominant paradigm. The historian David Armitage begins his already seminal essay, "Three Concepts of Atlantic History" (2002), by announcing that "we are all Atlanticists now" (11). And Lawrence Buell, one of the founders of transatlantic literary studies, surveys the present state of the field in a 2003 review essay and determines that "these days . . . look like boom times for trans-Atlantic studies" ("Rethinking" 66). And so, the critical scene is newly hospitable to those scholars who follow Matthiessen and Leavis—as well as Eliot, James, and Besant—in taking the English language as their boundary. Focusing on a transatlantic array of texts, these scholars are not primarily interested in accounting for or speculating about the transatlantic relation. On the contrary, the crossing of national boundaries is largely incidental to their arguments, whether about literary movements (Richard Gravil and Leon Chai), literary genre (George P. Landow), philosophical traditions (Susan Manning), or the interrelations of literary and social phenomena (Jonathan Arac).

Other scholars have taken the transatlantic relation itself as

their object of study. Some focus on the whole Anglo-American world, which includes those Caribbean islands under British control and ports in Africa and Latin America as well as Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, and the United States. Others focus on the relations between two nations within that world, most commonly the United States and Great Britain. This difference in focus has tended to entail a difference in method. Those scholars who focus on the Anglo-American world have tended to excavate the material networks that constituted it, such as the slave trade (Paul Gilroy and Joseph Roach) and black newspapers in the United States, Europe, and Africa (Brent Edwards). Those scholars who focus on the relations between Great Britain and the United States have tended, by contrast, to focus on relations that are imagined, not material. For Robert Weisbuch, the relevant paradigm is Freudian, by way of Harold Bloom. He finds in nineteenth-century American literature a tendency to imitate and revise British writings that bears witness, he argues, to the literature's felt belatedness. For Buell, the relevant paradigms come from post-colonial theory. He finds in the condescension of British reviewers and the rebelliousness of American writers the first iteration of what would become a familiar relation between former colonizer and former colony ("American" 417-23). More recently, Paul Giles has taken a different approach, proposing that what he calls "the trans-Atlantic imaginary" is not structured in any stable way (1), but is rather a space of projection and free play into which any author, British or American, can enter at will.

The imagined relations between Great Britain and the United States were importantly shaped by the material networks that connected them; this, in my view, is what studies of relations between the United States and Britain can gain from studies of the Atlantic world. In what follows, I will be focusing on two of these networks, print culture and social reform, in order to throw into relief the many sub-national connections between persons and groups on both sides of the Atlantic—and the complexities of the power relations between the two nations. Critics who speculate about the transatlantic imaginary without attending to these material networks often emphasize British cultural authority (Weisbuch; Buell) or downplay the importance of cultural authority altogether (Giles). Between these two poles, however, there exists a range of other possibilities that acknowledge authority, but see it as dispersed, with influence flowing in many directions at once. In a literary marketplace created by unregulated reprinting, British authors were more celebrated and

British reviewers more influential, but American readers were more numerous and American publishing houses increasingly powerful. Something similar is true of reform. At times, one nation served as an example for reformers in the other nation to follow; at other times, reformers in both nations worked in tandem.

We can see this dynamic most clearly in the campaigns against slavery and for suffrage reform. The campaign against slavery began in the 1760s when a group of Quakers from Philadelphia appealed to the British government to abolish slavery in the colonies, and it remained importantly Anglo-American until its end. Antislavery activists in one nation were routinely invited to be corresponding members of antislavery societies in another, and, in this way, activists on each side of the Atlantic were able to learn from the very different manifestations of slavery on the other. In the 1780s and 1790s, for instance, the lives of freed slaves in the United States, as described by members of the New York and Massachusetts antislavery societies, were held up by British activists to argue for the thoroughgoing emancipation of slaves in the British colonies. In the 1830s, antislavery groups became even more tightly intertwined. The American Anti-Slavery League was founded one year after the British league of the same name, and, in 1833, William Lloyd Garrison traveled to London to meet the president of the British League, who in turn traveled to Boston the next year—with galvanizing effects on both nations. Nor did the 1833 abolition of slavery in the British colonies put an end to these collaborations. On the contrary, British antislavery activists offered their American counterparts moral example, financial support, and practical advice (see Turley). This support peaked in the early 1840s, at the moment when Dickens made his tour of the United States.

In the campaign for suffrage, the transatlantic connections were less institutional, but no less significant. The United States had long served as an inspiration for British radicals, most famously William Cobbett, and it continued to do so for the Chartists. "The Chartist movement was reared," the historian George Lillibridge has argued, "on the American destiny" (41). Indeed, Chartist newspapers frequently evoked the United States as proof that universal manhood suffrage could be achieved. And for the more radical Chartists, the United States also exemplified the separation of church and state. In 1839, when the first People's Charter was rejected by Parliament, a number of leading Chartists emigrated to the United States, which became a real refuge from, as well as an imagined alternative to, Great

Britain.[1] Despite these defections, Chartism continued in Britain for nearly a decade more. A second Charter was presented to Parliament in May of 1842, again coinciding with Dickens's visit to the United States.

These contemporary reform campaigns made possible a number of different relations between Great Britain and the United States. At times, writers from the two nations used reform to articulate the differences between them. Democracy had long been crucial to American self-understanding, while, as Christopher Brown has argued, the antislavery campaign enabled Britons to conceive of their nation as the moral alternative to its former colony (27). These processes are at work in the writings of British travelers describing American slaves—and American travelers describing British servants. When he attends a slave auction, Thomas Grattan expects the bidding to stop when he, an Englishman, arrives (413; 417). Fanny Kemble expresses a similar presumption more forcefully, announcing, before she travels to the Southern states that "assuredly, I *am* going [south] prejudiced against slavery, for I am an Englishwoman, in whom the absence of such prejudice would be disgraceful" (11). In much the same way, American travelers to Britain expressed shock at the existence of a permanent serving class, as Christopher Mulvey has shown.

At other times, however, the Anglo-American scope of these two reform movements enabled groups within one nation to appeal to the other for help. Some fugitive slaves found refuge in Britain, and some of the more radical Chartists considered petitioning the president of the United States to intervene on behalf of the British working class (Boston 16). And the antislavery movement produced factions within each nation that imagined transformation of both. As Elisa Tamarkin has shown, black antislavery activists aligned their own past with that of Britain, conjuring up an imaginary archaic England to claim, astonishingly enough, as their true mother country. And working-class British men identified their own future with the Republican Party in the United States, which was providing working men with land while seeking to free the slaves.

Travelers and Reformers

On the eve of departing for the United States in 1842, Dickens was interviewed by a reporter, who found him surrounded by travel books, among them Basil Hall's *Travels in North America* (1830), Frances

Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), and Harriet Martineau's *Society in America* (1837)—and Dickens owned twenty-four other such works (Ackroyd 337). Clearly, he was quite familiar with this unusually standardized genre. The topics taken up in the period's travel books are conventional, mostly concerning American manners, and the itinerary followed in them is conventional as well. The standard tour included the principal cities of the United States (Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington DC) and the principal natural sites (the Mississippi River, the prairies of the West, and, above all else, Niagara Falls), but they also included institutions of reform: the poor houses of Boston, the asylums of Long Island, and the prisons of Philadelphia. So conventional was this itinerary that it was followed not only by those travelers we now think of as reformers, such as Martineau and Dickens, but also by those travelers who had little to do with reform at all. Upon arrival in New York, the naval explorer Basil Hall may have first visited the Brooklyn naval yard, but his second destination was the juvenile Home of Refuge.

This itinerary ensured that British travelers would be drawn into the Anglo-American culture of reform no matter what their own commitments to reform might be. This happened most obviously in face-to-face exchanges, as when Hall lectured New York firefighters on new innovations in fire hoses. Such exchanges, which were made possible by travel, were then preserved and disseminated through subsequent travel books. *American Notes* follows such a pattern. At times, Dickens records his impressions of various reform institutions because he thinks aspects of them should be adopted in Britain: he particularly admires the child-sized furniture used in the Boston orphanages, for instance, and the rules allowing the inmates of Boston almshouses to retain a few small comforts of their own. At other times, Dickens records his impressions so that the people of the United States will see all that is still in need of reform, such as the provisions for black children in the juvenile prisons of Philadelphia.

The extensive exchanges possible within this shared culture of reform are most clear with respect to prisons. In describing the Boston House of Corrections, Dickens notes that the United States invented the silent system, which sought to prevent the spread of criminal influence by prohibiting the prisoners from speaking to one another. He then goes on to remark, in a footnote, that the system had since been perfected in two particular London prisons, which he identifies and

whose governors he names. More generally, Dickens urges the United States not to be so quick to rely on prison labor, which allows prisoners opportunities to conspire with one another, and drives noncriminal laborers out of work. And his description of reform institutions culminates in an impassioned attack on the solitary system pioneered at Philadelphia's Eastern Penitentiary, which confines the prisoners in solitary cells for the entire length of their term. Yet he also holds up the panopticon-like arrangement of the new prison in Boston as a model for future British prisons.

The reformism of travel books is not limited to those moments when they describe obvious sites of reform. These books also engaged with the two most highly contested reform movements of the era, suffrage reform and the antislavery campaign. Some travelers engaged these questions deliberately. Martineau, for instance, came to the United States fully committed to the abolition of slavery abroad and radical politics at home; she therefore gathered evidence in support of these positions during her travels and disseminated this evidence through her travel books once she returned to Britain. But all travelers ended up contributing, whether intentionally or not, to these reform debates, insofar as any reference to American manners necessarily touched on status, as defined by race and class, and therefore also provoked questions about slavery and democracy. It was impossible, for instance, for a British observer to praise the self-respect of American servants or to condemn the too-promiscuous mixing of classes, to praise the graciousness of plantation culture or to condemn the indolence of poor Southern whites, without entering into a debate about whether suffrage should be expanded in Britain and slavery abolished in the United States.

Dickens was no exception. He came to the United States fully alive to the reform possibilities of the tour and the travel book. He saw in the nation's republicanism a peaceful alternative to what he took to be the violence of the Chartists. And the people of the United States, in turn, saw in Dickens their own rebellion against British authority; for them he was, as John Forster later described him, an "embodied protest" against the British institutions the United States had themselves rebelled against (196). But Dickens's experience of American manners famously turned him against democracy. The letters that he wrote during his tour were increasingly filled with complaints about the ignorance and the touchiness of the people around him, their tacitur-

nity and their brag, their lack of cleanliness and, above all else, their habit of spitting. He recorded many of his complaints in *American Notes* and, in doing so, contributed to discourse opposing suffrage reform.

But while Dickens's faith in democracy was shaken, his abhorrence of slavery only grew stronger. He became more and more committed to writing against it, but he also redefined the requirements for such writing. In *American Notes*, he confesses to a fear that he will not be able to reveal any of slavery's horrors. In particular, he fears that he will not be able to see beneath the "disguises" in which slavery will surely be "dressed" (174), and, indeed, during his visit to a Virginia plantation, he was not permitted to witness the slaves at their noontime meal or to inspect their cabins. But if Dickens doubts his ability to gather evidence, he also doubts the need for more evidence. When he admits that he may not be able to add to the "host of facts already heaped together on the subject" (174), he implicitly reminds us that those "heaped facts" have not managed, on their own, to abolish slavery.

What is needed, Dickens recognizes, are not only texts that reveal, but also texts that defamiliarize—and he intends *American Notes* to become the latter. In this way, *American Notes* differs from Dickens's great reform novels, such as *Bleak House* (1852-53) and *Dombey and Son* (1846-48). Those novels are devoted to revelation: to the realist representation of what often goes unseen, such as Tom-all-Alone's; and the metaphorical representation of what cannot be seen at all, such as the Circumlocution Office. Such representations are capable of persuading persons who have never encountered a given social problem; they would be useful, for instance, in persuading Northerners and Englishmen to oppose slavery. But they are not capable of persuading those persons who are responsible for the problem itself—in this case, the slaveholders. Revelation is of no use to those who know the realities of slavery, who are surrounded by those realities in every plantation house, in every field, in every public square. Where slavery is familiar, it no longer shocks, and Dickens recognizes that to live in the South is to have one's "senses blunted to its wrongs and horrors in a slave-rocked cradle" (184). What will be valuable about his perspective is not its capacity to reveal what slavery would hide (the interior of the slave cabin, the contents of the daily meal), but rather its capacity to be horrified by what everyone else has too often seen. What is valuable about Dickens's perspective, then, is its capacity to defamiliarize, a capacity that Dickens identifies as specifically British. When a Southern man

told Dickens that the British are ignorant of the reality of slavery, Dickens replied that that the British are much more "competent to judge of its atrocity and horror" than those who have been reared in its midst (Forster 251).

As it turned out, Dickens never became the kind of witness he had intended to be. Although he planned to travel through the slave-holding states as far south as Charleston, he ended up limiting his Southern tour to a few days in Virginia and then traveling through the western states instead. He gives conflicting accounts of this change of itinerary. In his letters to friends at home, he explains it by saying that a Southern acquaintance, Henry Clay, had told him that the roads were bad, that the fever season was arriving, and that there was nothing to see in South Carolina anyway. In *American Notes*, by contrast, Dickens implies that his own sensitivity to the evils of slavery kept him away. Throughout the text, he presents himself as haunted by the thought of slavery. As far north as Boston, the subject of churches leads Dickens to think of one of the city's most prominent ministers, William Ellery Channing, which leads him to think of Channing's antislavery activism and "that most hideous blot and foul disgrace—Slavery" (76). As he travels south, his dread increases. In Baltimore, he is waited on by a slave for the first time and is filled with "a sense of shame and self-reproach" (161). Pausing in Washington DC, he balances his desire to witness plantation realities against "the pain of living in the constant contemplation of slavery" (174). It is at this point that he alters his itinerary, and this alteration is thus presented as proof of Dickens's sensitivity. Where slaveowners live with "senses blunted" to the suffering around them, Dickens cannot even bear to see it.

American Quotations for Transatlantic Circulation

Although Dickens limited his initial descriptions of slavery to a few brief pages on Virginia, he appended a full chapter on the topic to the end of *American Notes*. Except for this final chapter, *American Notes* follows the order of Dickens's tour, moving from north to south, then west, then north again; the "Slavery" chapter is the only one to appear out of place. The penultimate chapter of the book, it is placed between "The Passage Home" and "Concluding Remarks," a location that emphasizes the fact that it could have been written anywhere. And indeed, it could have been, since it does not represent Dickens's own

experiences of the United States, but reprints an influential pamphlet by Thomas Weld, *American Slavery As It Is*.[2]

While such a reprinting is at odds with Dickens's copyright campaign, it is in keeping with the norms of contemporary reform writing. Weld is not the only author whose writing Dickens reprints in *American Notes*: the book's description of the education of deaf and blind children is taken verbatim from one of the annual reports written by Samuel Gridley Howe for the Perkins Institute for the Blind. Nor was Dickens the only author to reprint Weld. A decade later, Harriet Beecher Stowe would borrow some situations from his pamphlet for her plotting of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851-52), and she would then reprint portions of its text in her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853). All of these reprintings were viewed with total equanimity, even indifference, by the original authors. In their biography of their father, Howe's daughters describe Dickens's visit to their father's school by quoting excerpts from *American Notes*, interpolating into these excerpts a bland reference to Dickens's reprinting: "[Here follow extracts from Dr. Howe's Reports]" (107). As for Weld, there is no record of him ever protesting, or even remarking upon, the use that Stowe and Dickens made of his pamphlet. And it makes sense, of course, that they would not protest, since reprinting disseminated their writings to a wide audience. *American Notes* extended the geographic circulation of the writings of Weld and Howe, just as *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* would later preserve text from a pamphlet that had otherwise gone out of print. But if reprinting was a common practice in reform circles, Dickens and Weld were nonetheless rare in recognizing that it had rhetorical possibilities as well.

Weld's pamphlet is divided into two parts: a description of the realities of slavery, and a rebuttal to the objections of those who insist that slavery cannot possibly be that bad. The first half describes the food the slaves must eat; the labor they must do; the clothing they must wear; the housing in which they must live; and the "privations and inflictions" they must endure (10). Interspersed between these sections are narrative testimonies that touch on topics from all five categories. The second half of the pamphlet, the rebuttal to the objections, takes up a number of different objections in turn, from the claim that such cruelties are simply incredible to the claim that they are surely prohibited, if not by law, then certainly by public opinion.

Weld's method of description is announced in his pamphlet's subtitle: "With testimony from a thousand witnesses." These witnesses

can be divided into two groups. One group is made up of firsthand witnesses to slavery, a group that includes travelers, as well as Southerners who left the South because they opposed slavery, such as Weld's own wife and sister-in-law, Angelina and Sarah Grimké. The other group is made up of those who know slavery even more closely, namely the slaveholders themselves. These witnesses are made to testify against themselves, and they do so unwittingly, through the advertisements they post in Southern newspapers for the return of their runaway slaves. At Weld's request, the Grimké sisters had spent months reading these newspapers, culling advertisements from which Weld selected evidence such as this:

WITNESSES	TESTIMONY
Mr. Micajah Ricks, Nash County North Carolina, in the Raleigh "Standard," July 18, 1838	"Ranaway, a negro woman and two children; a few days before she went off, *I burnt her with a hot iron*, on the left side of her face, *I tried to make the letter M*"
Mr. Asa B. Metcalf, Kingston, Adams Co, Mi in the "Natchez Courier," June 15, 1832	"Ranaway Mary, a black woman, has a *scar* on her back and right arm near the shoulder, *caused by a rifle ball.*"
Mr. William Overstreet, Benton, Yazoo Co. Mi. in the "Lexington (Kentucky) Observer," July 23, 1838.	"Ranaway a negro man named Henry, *his left eye out*, some scars from a *dirk* on and under his left arm, and *much scarred* with the whip." (77).

These are the first three entries in a subsection of "Punishment" entitled, "Brandings, Maimings, Gun-Shot Wounds, &[c]." One hundred and sixteen more entries follow these three before a new subsection begins: "The Mutilation of Teeth" (83). Through excerpting and reprinting, Weld transforms Southern newspapers into a grim catalogue of injury.

Although there is a nice irony in the slaveowners being made to bear witness against themselves, this effect is not the most important reason for Weld's reprintings. His primary concern, evident in the pamphlet's opening pages, is to confirm the veracity of his claims. The pamphlet is framed by a "Note" from its publishers, the American Anti-Slavery Society, announcing their intention of publishing more such pamphlets and inviting readers to submit new testimony. They caution, however, that any testimony must be certified. Those witnesses not

known personally to the society should submit their testimony with an affidavit from "some person or persons of respectability" (iv). And indeed, the narrative testimonies that punctuate the first half of the pamphlet are invariably certified by an entire committee of ministers, town clerks, and justices of the peace. Appearing even prior to the publisher's note, Weld's own "Advertisement to the Reader" notes the superiority of the slaveowner's unwitting testimony even to testimony with affidavit. It is highly improbable, he dryly observes, that such men would lie or exaggerate in order to "proclaim their own infamy" (iii). Reprinting thus functions as a technique of veracity. It enables Weld to remove statements from the context of an advertisement, in which slaveowners have every motivation to tell the truth so that their runaway slaves will be properly identified, and to place them in the context of an antislavery pamphlet, in which slaveowners have every motivation to lie so as to minimize the brutality of slavery.

In his chapter on "Slavery," Dickens excerpts many of the same passages from Weld in turn, including two of the ones quoted above. But for him, the passages function somewhat differently. Whereas Weld uses them to confirm the violence of slavery, Dickens uses them to confirm that the public opinion of the Southern states offers no defense against a violence that has become all too familiar. Weld, too, had asked whether public opinion could limit the abuses of slavery, but Dickens focuses on this question almost exclusively. Public opinion, he observes, is not always benevolent, as a quick glance at the Southern newspapers confirms. Dickens describes these newspapers thus:

> "Cash for negroes," "cash for negroes," "cash for negroes," is the heading of advertisements in great capitals down the long columns of the crowded journals. Woodcuts of a runaway negro with manacled hands, crouching beneath a bluff pursuer in top boots, who, having caught him, grasps him by the throat, agreeably diversify the pleasant text. The leading article protests against "that abominable and hellish doctrine of abolition, which is repugnant alike to every law of God and nature." The delicate mamma, who smiles her acquiescence in this sprightly writing as she reads the paper in her cool piazza, quiets her youngest child who clings about her skirts, by promising the boy "a whip to beat the little niggers with."—But the negroes, little and big, are protected by public opinion. (273)

With the child promised a whip by his "delicate mamma"—recalling the "slave-rocked cradle" of hardened sensibility—it is clear that Dickens takes the Southern newspapers to be key texts that his own writings must defamiliarize.

These newspapers constitute, after all, a public sphere deformed by a too-familiar violence. What shocks Dickens about the slave advertisements is not so much the scar on the "negro woman's cheek" as the fact that the woman's owner is willing to publish under his own name the statement, "I burnt her with a hot iron . . . I tried to make the letter M." The fact that he would have no compunction about announcing this aim signals that the force of opinion has grievously failed. Yet Dickens does not reprint the man's name himself. On the contrary, he strips away the local identifications that Weld had been so careful to preserve. There is no reference, in *American Notes*, to Mr. Micajah Ricks, or Kingston, Mississippi, or the *Lexington Observer*. There are only generalized references to brandings and shootings and dirkings, acts that could have taken place in any slaveholding state: the local is thereby regionalized.

In this way, Dickens demonstrates that public opinion has failed across the South. But he does more than that: he also attempts to constitute a new, larger public sphere to take its place. He does so through a series of reprintings so complex that it is worth pausing to reiterate their sequence. "Slavery" is a chapter composed by an author (Dickens) who has reprinted, in Britain, a pamphlet first published in New York, whose author (Weld) had himself reprinted excerpts of articles drawn from newspapers and magazines across the South. And with the publishing of *American Notes*, this transatlantic circuit is made complete. For Dickens's huge popularity ensured that *American Notes* would be reprinted at once by publishers all over the United States—even in the Southern states, which had outlawed the circulation of anti-slavery texts. In this way, the "Slavery" chapter returns the slaveowners' words back to the Southern states, but only after passing them through the defamiliarizing perspective of the quite different, non-slaveowning public of the Northern states and Great Britain. And this tactic had its effect. Southern readers were shocked to see what their own newspapers looked like through unfamiliar eyes, as their indignant reviews of Dickens's book made clear. Reprinting proved to be the ultimate technique of defamiliarization.

The Retreat from Anglo-America and the Turn to National Reform

Although *American Notes* attacked the United States, its reception did not divide entirely along national lines, as Sidney Moss has shown (80-97). To be sure, many United States citizens were outraged

by the book and some British subjects were amused. But working-class readers in Britain, who had hoped that Dickens would champion their cause, were very disappointed by his conclusions, and the book received critical reviews in a number of liberal British magazines. At the same time, American publishers were leery of voicing their criticisms of the book for fear that Dickens would punish them for doing so when it came time to make informal arrangements for reprinting his next novel; some of them waited to reprint critical reviews from Britain, rather than issue their own. In this way, a number of Dickens's readers and reviewers found transatlantic ties to be more potent than national affiliations.

But not Dickens himself. Over the course of his tour, he had grown more and more disillusioned with the United States, until he famously proclaimed, "this is not the country that I came to see; this is not the republic of my imagination" (Johnson 404). His disillusionment was increased and made bitter by the many hostile reviews of his travel book. As a consequence, Dickens began to withdraw from the very Anglo-American networks that his tour and travel book had exemplified. He first removed himself as much as he could from the Anglo-American literary marketplace, refusing to negotiate any more with American publishers over the terms of reprinting. He also withdrew from Anglo-American reform: he abandoned his commitment to suffrage and, as Andrew Sanders has shown, became even more hostile to Chartism (130–31). And he became quite skeptical of the antislavery campaign as well, so much so that he failed to support the Union during the American Civil War.

The withdrawal from Anglo-America structures Dickens's next novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–44). *Martin Chuzzlewit* had been advertised as a story of "English Life and Manners," but the very weak sales of its first numbers prompted Dickens to send its eponymous hero to the United States. The sections of the novel that take place in the United States draw heavily on *American Notes.* But while these sections repeat many of the criticisms Dickens had already made of the United States, they repeat them with a difference. The novel posits an absolute separation between the two nations that Dickens knew did not exist. It denies the very Anglo-American networks on which his own tour and travel books had relied and had thrown into relief.

In *Martin Chuzzlewit,* Dickens attacks the American press, for instance, without acknowledging what he well knew—that it was

embedded in an importantly Anglo-American print culture. The first voices that Martin Chuzzlewit hears in the United States are those of newsboys, hawking the "New York Sewer," the "New York Stabber," the "New York Family Spy," the "New York Private Listener," the "New York Peeper," the "New York Plunderer," and the "New York Keyhole Reporter" (220). The joke is clear. Dickens, who had been harassed by American newspapers at every turn, now accuses them of being intrusive, sensationalist, and rapacious. So much we would expect. But Dickens denies the many connections between the literary marketplaces in Britain and the United States—even those connections that he had protested and those of which he himself had made use. No reprinting happens in the United States he describes, nor is there much reading of texts from Britain. Indeed, the novel mocks an American newspaper editor for imagining that his articles are read in London, and it also mocks a man who claims to have visited Britain extensively, if only through his reading, and who then insists that Queen Victoria lives in the Tower of London.

In much the same way, Dickens attacks slavery in the United States without acknowledging that he himself had participated in the Anglo-American campaign for its abolition. On the contrary, he suggests that there can be no fellowship between antislavery activists in Britain and the United States. Martin is strongly opposed to slavery, and his manservant has an instinctive resistance to it as well. Indeed, Martin must keep the manservant away from all slaves for fear that he will forment some kind of rebellion. Martin is at first pleased, then, to be introduced to some American abolitionists, but they quickly shock him by the lightness with which they speak of slavery. One abolitionist tells him that "the negroes were such a funny people" that it was impossible "to associate any serious ideas with such a very absurd part of the creation" (246), and all the other abolitionists agree. The scene is a striking contrast to Dickens's tribute, in *American Notes*, to the antislavery William Ellery Channing.

Dickens further ignores the Anglo-American scope of reform by denying that the political rhetoric of the United States might ever serve as a resource for reformers in Britain. Instead, Dickens joins conservative British observers in mercilessly parodying American rhetoric. Twice, the narrator imitates the high-flown celebration of democracy only to have the passage fall flat through a reference to slavery. As Martin's ship approaches the New York harbor, the narrator describes

the passengers as breathing "the air of Freedom which carries death to all tyrants, and can never (under any circumstances worth mentioning) be breathed by slaves" (218). Later, the narrator will inaugurate a new number by apostrophizing those who "dreamed of Freedom in a slave's embrace, and waking sold her offspring and his own in public market" (292). Worst of all, in the novel's view, is the fact that the people of the United States often make similar pairings of freedom and slavery without even realizing how odd such pairings might sound. When a newspaper editor wishes to praise the press, he refers to it "as much one of the ennobling institutions of our happy country as . . . " but breaks off, unable to complete the sentiment. His companion, however, quickly finishes it for him: "as nigger slavery itself" (227). Passages like these admit no possibility that the language of freedom might be appropriated by antislavery activists, British and American alike, in order to argue for a more perfect freedom, even though such appropriations had long been a staple of antislavery reform.

This withdrawal from the transatlantic appears thematically in the novel's plot. Martin and his manservant remain isolated from the people of the United States. The elite shun them for their lack of money, while the manners of the rest are more than Martin can bear; their only friend is a cultivated old gentleman, who conveniently voices Dickens's own criticisms of the United States even more vehemently than Martin himself. But while Martin is isolated in the United States, he is nonetheless changed by it. It is in the United States, after all, that he is transformed from a monster of selfishness to a paragon of generosity. In this transformation, however, the United States functions only as a site of ordeal; it has nothing to teach but offers much to endure. Only when Martin has lost all his money on a parcel of swampland; when he has wrecked his health by fever; and when he fears that his only companion, the manservant, will die, leaving him alone in the wilderness, only then does Martin transform. Once he has done so, and once his manservant has recovered, he immediately arranges for the two of them to return home. Before they leave, however, Martin makes sure to gather up the emigrants he had met on the passage to the United States, all of whom are suffering, and to shepherd them back home as well. And he carries with him the Dickensian novel of reform.

American and British reformers would continue to collaborate through the rest of the century, but Dickens would never again engage with Anglo-American reform. After his return from the United States,

the reforms he advocated were almost always local in scope. In the 1840s, after helping to establish Urania Cottage, a home for fallen women, he remained its inspector, visiting once a week for the next ten years. In the 1850s, when his interest shifted to the sanitation of London, he commissioned a number of articles on public health for *Household Words.* From time to time thereafter, he advocated a reform that was not exclusively local, such as the abolition of capital punishment or the spread of ragged schools, but he did so within an exclusively national context.[3] During these same years, Dickens also wrote his great novels of reform. But these novels tend to ridicule any attention to the world beyond the nation. *Bleak House*, for instance, sets the proper actions of charitable women acting locally over and against the ludicrously global imagination of reformers whose focus is on an Africa that the novel dismisses as Booriboola-Gha. It is through local attention, *Bleak House* insists, that the nation as a whole will be remade.

Dickens was hardly alone in connecting reform to the nation. A longstanding tradition of associating the two has given rise to the most compelling theories of reform in our own day. During the nineteenth century, many observers saw reform as characteristic of particular nations, namely Great Britain or the United States. Edward Bulwer-Lytton famously declared, in *England and the English* (1833), that "the question of Reform came on . . . [and] was hailed at once by the national heart" (288). While Bulwer-Lytton is referring specifically to the Reform Bill of 1832, which extended suffrage to middle-class men, he is also underscoring the English difference from France, whose revolutions had tried to achieve similar effects through violence. A few years later, Ralph Waldo Emerson made a similar claim in his essay "Man the Reformer" (1841): "the doctrine of reform had never such scope as at the present hour," he proclaimed, aligning the "hour" with a particular place, namely the United States (228). A similar focus on the nation persists into the present day. Brian Harrison has recently argued that it is Britain's commitment to reform that has distinguished it from other nations, while historians of American reform make similar claims. Long seen as characteristic of particular nations, reform is now also seen as constitutive of them: not only did Britain and the United States view themselves as reformist, they were also, in large part, built by reform. Recognizing that nations form when cognitive and affective connections are made among persons and events, Mary Poovey has powerfully argued that reform established such connections in Britain. By identi-

fying certain persons and problems as worthy of the nation's concern, reform sustains national identity.

The conception of reform as nation-forming can account for the Dickens of *Bleak House*, but not for the Dickens of *American Notes*. If the later Dickens used reform to constitute national boundaries, the early Dickens participated in reforms that crossed and recrossed these borders with ease. A larger significance of Dickens's tour of the United States and subsequent travel book, then, is their reminder that nation-forming phenomena—including print culture and social reform—were importantly transatlantic in scope. They therefore prompt us to recognize that the United States and Great Britain defined themselves in a specifically transatlantic context. Meredith McGill has made this argument with respect to print culture. Departing from the many critics who follow Benedict Anderson in arguing that newspapers and novels create a national consciousness, McGill has shown that the United States took form as a nation in large part through the strategic reading and reprinting of British writings.[4] The same is true, I contend, of social reform. Dickens's brief engagement with the Anglo-American campaigns against slavery and for suffrage reform is merely one episode in a long history of transatlantic collaborations in reform. But this episode demonstrates with particular clarity that the most fundamental questions of national identity—Who has the suffrage? Who is free?—were explored and resolved in the transatlantic public sphere.

Columbia University

NOTES

[1]Boston offers a thorough account of Chartists in the United States.

[2]McGill provides the richest account of this borrowing and, indeed, of Dickens's American tour more generally. But while McGill is most interested in what Dickens took to be the structural parallels between defenses of slavery and defenses of unauthorized reprinting, I am more interested in the role that such reprintings play in his own campaign against slavery.

[3]For a fuller discussion of Dickens's reform activities during these years, see Kaplan.

[4]Gruesz has shown a similar pattern of reprinting among the Spanish-language presses in the Americas between the 1840s and the 1880s.

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