illusions are by definition elusive. This study provides a springboard for examining James's transitional position as a novelist between nineteenth-century Realism and the more self-aware strategies of Modernism. Professor Flannery undoubtedly makes a substantial contribution to current debates on James, and makes one look again at novels such as *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Princess Casamassima.* A study which returns one to the text is always worth reading.

Clair Hughes

***Other Dickens: Pickwick to Chuzzlewit*, by John Bowen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.**

Restoring to the novel the full title that accompanied its serialisation in *Bentley's Miscellany – The Adventures of Oliver Twist, or the Parish Boy's Progress* – John Bowen asks "What is at stake in that title?" before teasing out the choices of name and identity and the questions of narrative trajectory it involves. What is at stake in the title of his own book, *Other Dickens*, is a challenge to the canonisation of Dickens's later fiction – the "Dark Novels," so-called by Lionel Stephenson in a 1943 essay – and a determination to offer a fresh account of the earlier novels in the light of recent developments in critical theory and practice. Eschewing the descriptor "early," with its implied developmental model of writing, Bowen pursues the "otherness" of the Dickens that emerges in a reading of all of the novels and some of the minor writing published between the appearances of *Pickwick Papers* (1836-37) and *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44). Disclaiming the adoption of any single, coherent, theoretical approach, the book is nevertheless distinguished throughout by the influence of Derrida, Bakhtin and Freud. These influences fuel its pervasive delight in linguistic play and the carnivalesque – in punning, hyperbole, excess, hybridity – and its focus on the transformational energies of Dickens's writing. But in utilising these broadly deconstructive approaches, Bowen never allows them to outplay the writing itself. Reading the novels in sequence, his aim is to "witness to each text's singular force" (2) while showing the various ways in which these novels "enact one of the more sustained projects of textual experimentation in the language" (3). And he succeeds.

As the first two chapters point out, common readers over the decades (and many of Dickens's contemporary reviewers) have admired Dickens's early novels, valuing their humour and pathos. The higher value placed upon the later novels largely emerged in the context of twentieth-century literary criticism's preoccupation with questions of imaginative unity, aesthetic form and symbolic complexity. But the impact of poststructuralist theory in recent decades – with its interest in the proliferation of signification, teasing out of textual contradictions and undoing of binary oppositions – has made the early novels of Dickens ripe for re-reading. Thus while witnessing to the "singular force" of each text considered, the readings offered in *Other Dickens* find a recurrence of linguistic play and a common pattern in the

undoing of oppositions: between popular and high culture, speech and writing, past and present, life and death, self and other.

Taking the uncanny as an exemplary effect of binary subversion, Bowen shows how Dickens "can be both familiar and strange at the same time, and often in the same words" (2). The book's deconstructive approach yields some fresh and incisive readings of the novels: for example, *Oliver Twist* as a novel concerned with epistemological questions about truth in fiction, questions linked to the figure of a desiring and transgressive woman and nineteenth-century scientific discourses on hysteria; *The Old Curiosity Shop* as "one of the more radical and sustained encounters with the otherness of the child" (134); *Barnaby Rudge* as a novel questioning some deep assumptions about historical narrative – about causal sequence, the relationship between public and private events and the possibility of their truthful representation; and *Martin Chuzzlewit* as "a key harbinger of modernism" (184). Bowen's account faithfully conveys the anarchic humour of these early fictions, their exorbitant vitality and the intense pleasure of reading them. Particularly illuminating is his use of the concept of "transcoding" – adopted from Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (and ultimately Bakhtin) – to analyse the grotesque, transgressive effects produced in the transposition of serious and parodic material. For example, he savours the farcical reworking of the Oedipal material that *Barnaby Rudge* elsewhere takes so seriously in the delicious episode where Sim Tappertit is met at the door to the Apprentice Knights by the blind Stagg, who falls to his knees and "gently smooths the calves of Tappertit, exclaiming: 'That I had but eyes [. . .] that I had but eyes, to look upon these twin invaders of domestic peace! [. . .] When I touch my own afterwards [. . .] I hate 'em. Comparatively speaking, they've no more shape than wooden legs, besides these models of my noble captain's'" (180).

Bowen's precise and detailed attention to the imaginative power of rhetorical figures produces some of the most richly suggestive criticism in the book. For example, the structure of Sam's Wellerisms, which twist proverbs to give both a sense of the singularity of the event comically described and its part in "some wider pattern or order" (65) is shown to account not just for the novel's humour, but its capacious figuring of time, space and what it means to be human. While the "transposition of attributes,"[1] such as the animation of the inanimate, has long been recognised as a Dickensian signature, Bowen extends the discussion in his analysis of *Martin Chuzzlewit* to consider the ways in which tropes, such as prosopopoeia and apostrophe, disturb deeper epistemological and ethical distinctions: "Dickens is often thought to be a great humanist writer, but *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a text persistently troubled by the limits of the human, by people who may be monsters or animals or machines" (211).

Of course, it is not accidental that these particular distinctions are questioned by Dickens at this particular historical moment. The undoing of oppositions between the human and non-human, life and death, self and other, occurs in the context of a

[1] The phrase is Dorothy Van Ghent's in "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's," *Sewanee Review* 58 (1950), 419-38, reprinted in *Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Price (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1967), 24-38.

rapidly developing commodity culture. In concluding his analysis of these disturbed dualisms, Bowen rightly emphasises the deconstructive, affirmative force of the incomparable Mrs. Gamp, who "compels our desire, makes us her familiars and *fetches* us, like one of the unborn, or one of the dead, or some of her old clothes" (218). Mrs. Gamp's clothes attest to the changing role of the commodity; for rather than bearing the traces of the congealed labour of their producer, they express the superabundant life of their former owner and reproduce her subjectivity in a perverse kind of propagation: "the very fetch and ghost of Mrs. Gamp, bonnet and all, might be seen hanging up, any hour in the day, in at least a dozen of the second-hand clothes shops about Holborn."[2] While the commodity-form here awaits its later theorisation by Marx, this is a world in which its power is already manifest in new relations between subjects and objects. As Bowen argues, *Martin Chuzzlewit* is indeed one of the "most prescient of modern novels" (184). His study as a whole compellingly demonstrates the extent to which Dickens's early fictions – "these other, wilder, freer ethical texts" (219) – anticipate the theoretical developments both of his day and our own.

Catherine Waters

***The Reading Lesson. The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, by Patrick Brantlinger. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998.**

This is an important book. It is important because the ability to read, the spread of mass literacy, is probably the single most significant phenomenon in the Victorian age. Contested by conservatives as disrupting the status quo, even as unnecessary for the working classes, reading was nevertheless advocated, promulgated and encouraged by many social radicals, and in the 1830s and 1840s the steady growth of cheap periodicals designed to help and encourage reading skills changed the publishing industry. Publishers saw opening before them a market of such proportions they must have been dazzled by the sight. Not surprisingly, it is in this precise period that serialised fiction first appeared and the shift from a focus on "useful knowledge" as distributed by the *Penny Magazine* and the Chambers Brothers in *Chambers's Journal*, both of which, not surprisingly, commenced operations in the reform year, 1832, to less useful knowledge in the form of fictional tales, brought about another round of debate producing very similar arguments to those put forward decades earlier, as critics and commentators dealt with the manifestation of the Gothic novel in the late eighteenth century. Critics generally were anxious about the corruption of the mind, and believed that the excitement of reading novels turned readers away from works that would improve the mind and the morals. As

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[2] Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ed. Margaret Cardwell, World's Classics (1843-4; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984), 269.