

DICKENS AND HIS GERMAN RELATIVES

By HELMUT VIEBROCK

IN his comprehensive two-volume biography of Dickens, Edgar Johnson has printed the pedigrees of both Dickens' father and mother, and even the most suspicious scrutiny cannot detect any foreign flaw in the long list of ancestors going back to John Dickins of Hazelwood and to Richard Warde, Cofferer to Queen Elizabeth. There are no indications of family members intermarrying with people of foreign extraction. So I have to disappoint those who might expect some sensational discovery or divulgence of family connections of the Dickens family in Germany, by immediately stating that what I mean by German relatives must be taken as a metaphorical hint at relations of a purely literary kind, whether these relations be definite influences of Dickens on German writers (or even vice versa), or whether they are just strange and striking analogies and similarities due to analogous or similar personal dispositions and social circumstances. I wish to confess – knowing that Germans are given to personal confessions – that I am more interested in analogies and similarities, in types and patterns of attitude and artistic expression, than in source hunting and influence tracing.

As far as Germany is concerned, Dickens seems to have gratefully acknowledged and reciprocated the friendly applause and even high esteem of his German readers, a popularity that started very early. As early as 1837/38, the 'Pickwick Papers' were a great success in Germany; the 'Brochhaus Conversations-Lexikon' and the 'Tauchnitz Verlag' helped to spread Dickens' fame quickly, and Edgar Johnson reports that the favourable reception of the famous English author made him exclaim 'that next to his own people he respected and treasured the Germans' (Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens, His Tragedy and Triumph, vol. II, p. 592). Now with all due respect to Dickens and the genuineness of his spontaneous effusions, I would not overestimate such an exclamation, knowing how easily success and amiable criticism provoke similar quick assertions.

But there is certainly more to the story of Dickens and Germany than just his growing fame and an unflagging interest in his works. There certainly were writers in Germany who were profoundly moved and influenced in their art by Dickens, and if on the other hand no palpable influence by any of the earlier German writers on Dickens can be traced, there certainly have been conditions and situations both in England and

Germany, when, in spite of obvious dissimilarities, the spirit of the age manifested itself in similar, though not identical, ways on both sides of the Channel.

Of the three German relatives of Dickens whom I have singled out for a comparative study of 'motif' — although many more might be discovered — namely Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, Franz Kafka and Thomas Mann, the former, E.T.A. Hoffmann, is of course by far the oldest and probably the least well known. He was Dickens' contemporary for ten years, as he died in 1822. Having been born at Königsberg, Kant's birth-place, in 1776, he really belonged to an older generation than Dickens, that of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and like these two English bards he is called a 'romantic' writer, which, in his case, stands for his 'Gothic' fascination by, and expression of, the horrible, grotesque, and supernatural within a perfectly real and recognizable picturesque bourgeois world. Hoffmann's career is a most interesting example of an East Prussian being at the same time a conscientious judge, poet, painter, and musician, and successful in all of these, a perfect example of Romantic synaesthetics.

Of him I want to speak first, and I would like to say by way of explanation of the method I have chosen, that in this as in the other two cases, comparison came to me after I had been struck by certain similarities. The point from which a work of art strikes you is probably the point where you can enter the citadel which each work of art represents.

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In the year that Charles Dickens was born, in 1812, Hoffmann wrote a fantastic story of the adventures of a poor young student, a story which later was to form part of a series of 'Fantasias à la Callot' ('Phantasiestücke nach Callots Manier'), published in four volumes in 1814/15 with a preface by Jean Paul Richter. Hoffmann had invented a literary second self, the mad musician and conductor called Kreisler and had attributed these stories to him. His reference to Callot, the famous French designer of grotesque *Commedia dell'arte* figures, is most illuminating; it shows that Hoffmann, like Callot, was under the spell of the 'grotesque'.

The story I have referred to is called 'The Golden Pot' (*Der Goldene Topf*). It is divided into twelve chapters or 'vigils', thus preparing the reader for a series of events, partly real, partly imaginary, proceeding from a wakeful brain battling with midnight thoughts and fantasies. It is the story of Anselmus, a poor young student, in the once beautiful German city of Dresden. He is introduced by a worthy friend, Konrektor Paulmann, to a wizard-like scholar, Archivarius Lindhorst, for whom he undertakes copying work; he falls in love with Lindhorst's beautiful

daughter *Serpentina* who, in the spiritual realm of ideal, elementary beings, is a beautiful snake, as her father is the fire-born salamander. Anselmus is torn between his love for the ideal *Serpentina* and the very real, down-to-earth *Veronica*, Paulmann's eldest daughter; on account of his temporary unfaithfulness to *Serpentina* he is imprisoned in a glass bottle whence he watches the fight between *Lindhorst*, the fiery spirit, and his opponent, an old witch, who, in the real world, is an ugly old apple-woman. It is, in short, a story of a young man, dissatisfied with his narrow world, who is capable of rapturous visions and ecstasies and spends most of his time and of his heart's energies in the constructing of an ideal dream-world, where ordinary, Spitzwegian burghers in a picturesque, Spitzwegian Dresden have their spiritual and ghostly counterfeits, in the guise of elementary beings, spiritual symbols or symbolic spirits. There is a continuous strange metamorphosing from real life in a romantically domestic little world into a visionary, ideal elementary world and back again.

The story opens with Anselmus, the maladroit day-dreamer ('*Pechvogel*'), running down an old apple-woman and her apple-stand. The old woman's curses and ominous prophecies follow the scared young man. When, a little while after, he finds himself facing the door of the old house of *Archivarius Lindhorst*, who has offered him a post of clerk, this is what happens:

"Notwithstanding the long way to the solitary lane and the old house of the *Archivarius Lindhorst*, the student Anselmus succeeded in reaching the front-door of the house before twelve o'clock. There he stood, gazing at the large, imposing bronze door-knocker; but when he was just about to touch it, on the last stroke of the clock in the tower of the Holy Cross Church, which resounded through the air, the bronze face contorted itself into a broad grin with a ghastly interplay of blue-burning beams of light. Oh, it quite clearly was the apple-wench from the Black Gate! Her pointed teeth chattered within her slack snoutish mouth, and the snarling noise seemed to say: "du Narre-Narre-Narre warte, warte! warum warst hinausgerannt! Narre!" (Thou fool-fool-fool, wait, wait! Why didst thou run away, fool!) Horrified, Anselmus the student staggered back, he wanted to clutch the door-post, but his hand happened to grasp the rope of the door-bell and pulled at it, whereupon it rang, harder and harder, in shrill, piercing sounds, and throughout the desolate house the echo rang and scoffed: "Bald dein Fall ins Kristall!" ("Soon thou wilt fall into crystal, i.e. into a glass bottle."). The student Anselmus was seized by a feeling of horror that made all his limbs tremble in feverish spasms.' — And the story goes on to tell how the bell-rope transformed itself into a gigantic, white, transparent snake, that came wriggling

down and started to coil round poor Anselmus' limbs, till he had the breath crushed out of him and swooned — and how he awoke in his miserable room on his rickety bedstead, with his friend, the Konrektor Paulmann, leaning over him saying: "In heaven's name what mad things are you doing, my dear Herr Anselmus!"

Let us, for a moment, consider the passage in which the transformation of the bronze door-knocker is described. It is hardly a 'description', rather an imaginative and suggestive inducement to follow the narrator's fantastic flights. The passage has all the fantastic dream qualities of German romanticism, which, when it is not more theoretically abstract than its British counterpart, certainly is more fantastically abstruse, and excessively extravagant. Anselmus' terrifying Phantasmagoria might be explained as a nightmarish dream, if the end of the story in the fairy-land did not belie any such rational interpretation. There are for Hoffmann two worlds, a real and an imaginary one, and the latter is the more real, because it is ideal. But the story starts and restarts in the 'real' every-day world, a world of significant, suggestive details, such as door-knockers, bell-ropes, and glass-bottles, that cast a strong spell over a sensitive mind unwilling to be controlled by the disillusioning power of reason or will.

'Things cannot to the will

Be settled, but they tease us out of thought,'

(Ep. to J.H. Reynolds, 76 f.),

John Keats would say; and Rainer Maria Rilke, the most sensitive and finely organized of neo-romantic German poets, was painfully aware of the power things can gain over a sensitive mind; their power that may become an irresistible fascination, an aggressive tyranny, and sometimes an obsession.

Anselmus is, like his creator Hoffmann, a dreamer, and though our day-dreaming, if ever we allow ourselves day-dreaming, may be more streamlined, yet we are made to feel, by a kind of strong suggestion or imaginative contagion, how the excitable senses and sensibility of a naive and candid poetic young man are affected by suggestive forms and physiognomies of things around him. When Duke Theseus in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' eloquently rails at this fearful fancy which makes a bush appear like a bear, we may, with regard to Anselmus, exchange bush for knocker and bear for apple-witch. What happens is that an imagination like Hoffmann's, if once fired by the impression of a thing pregnant with potential analogies, starts working, gaining momentum, until it becomes completely subservient to the impressive object and draws the breathless mind along a more and more fantastic flight that, like an hyperbole, soon

loses touch with the firm ground of reason and like a meteor disappears into the unlimited spaces of uncontrolled fancy, 'brought beyond its proper bound' (Keats, a.a.O. 78 f.).

Notice the description of the bell: the student rings it – he is still the active, controlling part; – then it rings and continues ringing – he is out of control now, passive, helpless; it rings harder and harder until the whole desolate place echoes hideously – he is now at the mercy, or rather at the mercilessness, of the thing he has started. The thing has got the better of him, has got beyond his control, he is made 'subject' to the object he touched, the natural and reasonable roles of the subject, man, and the object, thing, are inverted, we are facing a situation that E.Th. Vischer, the German aesthetic philosopher, has characterized by the term 'the maliciousness of the object' – 'Die Tücke des Objekts'.

And why is this so? Obviously, because the mind is so full of the liveliest forms, so seething and teeming with oppressive impressions and visions, that a small outward sign or token, an ordinary thing, suffices, to 'ring the bell', or to tick it off.

Now, a door-knocker is not really an ordinary thing; not even was it so at a time when it was more in the use than today. Charles Dickens knew this. It is unlikely that Dickens knew Hoffmann's tale of 'The Golden Pot'; but he knew his London door-knockers, for he must have been fascinated by them at a very early date. So, in spite of lacking evidence for a direct motif-contact or motif-chain, there is quite indisputably a certain 'elective affinity' between Hoffmann and Dickens, an affinity, but also a difference to which the door-knocker may bear testimony.

You will all the time have thought of the famous 'door-knocker' – passage in Dickens' 'Christmas Carol'. It is hardly necessary to quote it, and yet for the sake of a close comparison, we had better remember it. Scrooge is returning to his house on Christmas Eve:

'Now, it is a fact that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact that Scrooge has seen it night and morning, during his whole residence in that place, ... And then let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock at the door, saw in the knocker, *without its undergoing any immediate process of change* – not a knocker, but Marley's face.

Marley's face. It was not in impenetrable shadow, as the other objects in the yard were, but had a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look; with ghostly spectacles turned up on its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot air; and,

though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That, and its livid colour, made it horrible; but its horror seemed to be in spite of the face, and beyond its control, rather than a part of its own expression.

As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again.' (Ch.D., *A Christmas Carol*, London 1954, Macmillan, p. 12 f.)

Dickens carefully prepares us for Scrooge's hallucination. He emphasises the ordinariness of the knocker, so much so and with such hammering in of its factuality, that we become a little incredulous and apprehensive. Indirection for a writer like Dickens is the way of intentionally introducing the supernatural. The author stresses that what happens is a man's sudden hallucination and not a slow change in the object itself. The transformation is a process within Scrooge. By a seemingly perplexed question, the narrator succeeds in drawing the reader's imagination to Scrooge, with whom he establishes a reluctant sympathy. The horribleness of Scrooge's (and the sympathising reader's) experience is stressed but also made slightly ironical by the lobster simile. The word 'ghostly' is repeated for its magically compelling effect, and the mentioning of the 'curiously stirred hair' as if by breath or hot air', which has no longer any relation to the knocker, is certainly a purposefully veiled allusion to purgatorial fires that poor Marley, like the ghost of Hamlet's father mentioned a little earlier, has temporarily escaped. Dickens can be terrifying when he draws images out of a deeply hidden store of nightmare visions and impressions; when he contrives supernatural effects like that of Marley's ghost in a story for small and great children, he is rather amusing, and probably wants to be. But he knows how far to go with his mildly enlightened, strongly susceptible middle-class readers: there is no point in denying that a knocker is a knocker. But a knocker *is* a strange magical thing after all!

Just to discover *what* associations the knocker as a 'magical detail' had for young Dickens, let us look at the 'Sketches by Boz' and 'The Pickwick Papers'.

In the early part of the 'Sketches', 'Our Parish', Ch. VII, he describes 'Our Next-Door-Neighbour'. He idly speculates on people's characters and pursuits; the various expressions of the human countenance suggest to him the physiognomies of street-door knockers affording just as much interest, and the fanciful idea crops up that 'between the man and his knocker, there will inevitably be a greater or lesser degree of resemblance and sympathy.' Having enumerated various types, he constructs an absurd but amusing 'new theory', like the one based on the observation that a man always resembles his dog, that if a man's disposition is altered, he will find himself a more suitable knocker or even move to another house.

In the 'Pickwick Papers', Chapter VI, the 'Bagman's Story' is inserted, and in it an old chair presents itself to Tom Smart awaking from a confused bibulous dream: 'Tom gazed at the chair; and suddenly as he looked at it, a most extraordinary change seemed to come over it. The carving of the back of the chair gradually assumed the lineaments and expression of an old, shrivelled human face; the damask cushion became an antique, flapped waistcoat...', in short, he beholds an ugly old man...

There is a traceable line of development in Dickens' description of an object assuming human traits: from a physiognomic interest ('Sketches'), through a hallucination of a drunken man ('Pickwick') to a vision stirred up by a deeply hidden conscience ('Christmas Carol'). There is no evidence of Dickens' having known the 'Golden Pot'. There is a significant difference between Hoffmann, who gives his visionary world a shape and a reality of its own, making man a 'wanderer between two worlds', and Dickens, for whom reality is the real world and its reflection in man's soul, the boding forth of his own imagination that may distort reality into caricatures but nevertheless remains bound in by the shapes of the things of this world. But there is one important common denominator: Both Hoffmann and Dickens lived and wrote at a time when small things of every-day bourgeois life like door-knockers had become wonderfully poetic and when writers had become more than ordinarily affected by, and sensitive to, the spell of small things and suggestive details. It is this poetisation of the middle-class world with its interest in small things that establishes a relation between Hoffmann and Dickens, but also a common sense of the horrible and grotesque.

It would be interesting to gauge the effect of Dickens' 'Christmas Carol' on Wilhelm Raabe's sketch (written 'long before the "Children of Finkenrode"' in Oct. 1857) called 'Christmas Spirits', where a doll that the narrator has brought, seems to become alive for him after a terrific bout with a friend. It would probably show how there is an influence on Raabe by both Hoffmann and Dickens. But this is not our business. As a result of our comparative study of motif in Hoffmann and Dickens we may conclude and note that both writers work the metamorphosis of a dead thing into a human being by the effort of a grotesquely animating and distorting fancy.

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It would be daring to suggest, or speculate about, a relationship between Dickens and Kafka, if this had not been done already by Kafka himself. In his diary (F.K., Tagebücher, New York 1951, p. 535/6; The Diaries of F.K., 1914-23, ed. Max Brod, Tr. Martin Greenberg with the

coop. of Hannah Ahrendt, New York 1949, p. 188/9) Kafka invites a comparison of his novel 'America', or rather its first chapter, 'The Stoker', publ. 1913, with Dickens' 'David Copperfield'. This chapter was called by Kafka himself in 1917 'a sheer imitation of Dickens, even more so the novel as planned'. This hint has been taken up as a challenge by scholars as eminent as Professor E.W. Tedlock, Jr., ('Kafka's Imitation of David Copperfield', *Comparative Literature*, vol. VII, 1955, p. 32-62) and Professor Roy Pascal (*The German Novel*, Manchester UP 1956).

E.W. Tedlock passes criticism on two previous attempts at analysis, in his opinion abortive, one by Jlaus Mann (in his preface to Edwin Muir's translation of 'America'), who, on the assumption of a strong philosophical and religious dichotomy between Dickens and Kafka, dismisses the alleged resemblance, and the other by Rudolf Vasata, "America" and Charles Dickens' (in: *The Kafka Problem*, ed. Angel Flores, New York 1946, p. 134-139) who overemphasizes his criticism of an oppressive social system from the Marxist point of view as a common ground between Kafka and Dickens.

Instead, Tedlock undertakes to discuss the points of similarity mentioned by Kafka himself: 'the story of the trunk, the boy who delights and charms everyone, the menial labour, his sweetheart in the country-house, et al., but above all the method,' and he comes to the conclusion 'that what interested Kafka most was Dickens' achievement of certain qualities of experience that cannot be completely reduced to systematic religious or social 'explication', and that are particularly compatible with Kafka's own sensibility'. (op.cit., p. 53). These qualities of experience Tedlock calls 'moral and emotional ambiguity and perplexity'. And he finds an appropriate term for the peculiar distortive method of both Dickens and Kafka for the expression of their experience in the word 'grotesque'.

Roy Pascal on the other hand passes criticism on C. Neider (Kafka, *His Mind and Art*, p. 93/94), who thinks that 'the similarity lies in the technique, while Kafka's theme is "original and mature"'. (see Pascal, *The German Novel*, p. 224); for Pascal 'the reverse seems nearer the truth' (ibid.); he claims that Karl Rossmann, Kafka's young hero, is another David Copperfield or Oliver Twist and 'moves through hostile environments and maintains his goodness intact — and as a reward he enters a sheltered refuge.' (Pascal, op.cit., p. 224).

It is E.W. Tedlock who goes furthest into detail. Let me sum up the argument by enumerating the five points of alleged similarity with the conclusions drawn: (1) the 'trunk' or 'box' episodes, revealing an experience of frustration; (2) the 'delightful boy' episodes indicating the ambiguity of powerful charm and social and moral hypocrisy; (3) the 'sweetheart-in-the-country motifs representing a pathetic pantomime;

(4) the 'menial work' motifs stressing mechanisation and degredation of human labour, and, lastly (5) the 'dirty houses' scenes suggesting what Tedlock calls 'the mood of decayed isolation from the main currents of life' (Tedlock, *op.cit.*, p. 59).

Hence, frustration, hypocrisy, pathetic pantomime, mechanized life and labour, decayed isolation: those are the prevailing qualities and moods of an all pervading sense of outraged innocence and homelessness by exposed to injustice in an ambiguous world.

Roy Pascal, in a more condensed argument, assesses both the absolute and relative meaning of 'America' by judging it in the context of Kafka's complete achievement. He concludes that 'More explicit and optimistic than the later novels, 'America' shows us a world which is bewildering and hostile to the hero, yet not ultimately senseless and not absolutely impervious to effort'. (Pascal, *op.cit.*, p. 225)

It seems that for Professor Pascal the main issue of the alleged similarity between Dickens and Kafka is man's social position in the world, whilst Tedlock's argument is rather more concerned with the novels' aesthetic aspect.

Professor Pascal very happily illustrates Karl Rossmann's confusion of brain and senses as a result of the moral confusion of the world by the episode in which Karl, at his uncle's, 'gropes his way in the dark along endless corridors past dark doorways' (Pascal, *op.cit.*, p. 225).

Now this groping one's way along endless corridors has an early counterpart in the first chapter, 'The Stoker', where Karl, on board the ship entering New York harbour, tries to find his way to the exit. This is how this quite unobtrusive passage is framed: 'He hastily begged his acquaintance, who did not seem particularly gratified, to oblige him by waiting beside the box for a minute, took another survey of the situation to get the bearings for the return journey, and hurried away. Below decks he found to his disappointment that a gangway which made a handy short cut had been barred for the first time in his experience, probably in connection with the disembarkation of so many passengers, and he had painfully to find his way down endlessly recurring stairs, through corridors with countless turnings, through an empty room with a deserted writing table, until in the end, since he had taken this route no more than once or twice and always among a crowd of other people, he lost himself completely. In his bewilderment, meeting no one and hearing nothing but the ceaseless shuffling of thousands of feet above him, and in the distance, like faint breathing, the last throbbings of the engines, which had already been shut off, he began unthinkingly to hammer on a little door by which he had chanced to stop in his wanderings.' (F.K., 'America', New York 1946). It is the stoker's cabin he enters.

There is a passage curiously similar to this in a novel by Dickens utterly dissimilar: 'Pickwick'. (Dickens, 'Pickwick Papers', Chapt. XXII.) Mr. Pickwick, on his journey to Ipswich, before getting involved in a romantic adventure with a middle-aged lady in yellow curl-papers, discovers that he has lost his watch, remembering, however, to have left it in the inn's bar-room. And this is what follows: 'Now, this watch was a special favourite with Mr. Pickwick, having been carried about, beneath the shadow of his waistcoat, for a greater number of years than we feel called upon to state at present. The possibility of going to sleep, unless it were ticking gently beneath his pillow, or in the watch-pocket over his head, had never entered Mr. Pickwick's brain. So as it was pretty late now, and he was unwilling to ring his bell at that hour of the night, he slipped on his coat, of which he had just divested himself, and taking the japanned candle-stick in his hand, walked quietly downstairs.

The more stairs Mr. Pickwick went down, the more stairs there seemed to be to descend, and again and again, when Mr. Pickwick got into some narrow passage, and began to congratulate himself on having gained the ground-floor, did another flight of stairs appear before his astonished eyes. At last he reached the stone hall, which he remembered to have seen when he entered the house. Passage after passage did he explore; room after room did he peep into; at length, as he was on the point of giving up the search in despair, he opened the door of the identical room in which he had spent the evening, and beheld his missing property on the table.'

On his way back, same confusion, same multiplying of stairs, doors, — till, again, he is 'reduced to the verge of despair' when at last he finds what he considers his door.

Again, this seems to be a case of analogy rather than 'influence'. What happens in either case is almost identical: the search of a man for a door or an exit, the losing of the way en route, stairs and corridors multiplying, bewilderment and confusion, that are on the point of, or actually growing into, panic and despair, a relief in the end that entails new complications.

What really happens is that both characters, single-mindedly in search of a forgotten object, are abstracted from their purpose and involved in fighting their way through a labyrinth. The more they feel given up to the mercilessness of the object, stairs and corridors, the more narrow-minded, almost hysterical they get, until, their wills completely frustrated and their instincts baffled, they seem to be lost and become subject to the 'law' of stairs and corridors, and a prey to the trickiness of things, diabolical monsters, — an experience that E.Th. Vischer had termed 'the maliciousness of the object'. It is this malice of the object,

the stairs and the corridors, that both Mr. Pickwick and Karl Rossmann experience, as in other comic situations the malice of the object subjects the will to its own malicious law or principle, filling the mind entirely and monomaniacally with one panicky idea: how to get out of a situation that seems without end or exit. It is a grotesque scene in either case, a minor form of psychosis or monomania; it is what Vischer calls the 'vortex', well known from Edgar Allan Poe, another distant relative of both Dickens' and Kafka's.

The experience described by Dickens and Kafka en passant, and therefore the more revealing, because caught unawares, I would, therefore, call:

'the malice of the object, and the puzzled will.'

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If, thirdly and finally, I venture to point to a certain relationship between Dickens and Thomas Mann, it is with one single aspect of this complex relationship in mind. Twice have I mentioned Ernst Theodor Vischer, the German philosopher. I shall quote him again, because he has been aware of both the phenomenon of the grotesque and the malice of the object. In his 'Aesthetics' he deals (in § 742) with 'The Grotesque Interlacing of Forms' and with 'Mechanisms, Plants, Animals, turning into man and vice versa'. Vischer is sensitively aware of the dangerous perversion lurking in such an exchange of living beings with dead things, the effect of which may range from humorous laughter to an effect of 'alienation', anxiety, or even terror. The effect of 'alienation', used with a particular meaning by Bertold Brecht, is involved. It seems that both Dickens and Kafka were intensely aware of the terrifying danger arising for the individual as well as for society when men are being treated as objects assume the role of living beings. But their reaction to the looming danger, a very real social situation, was different: Dickens conformed to an ultimately optimistic attitude of his social environment, whilst for Kafka there was no such anodyne as optimism or conformism.

It seems that Thomas Mann, more highly intellectual than either Dickens or Kafka, and advocating a superior rationalism by which to detect, even in Kafka, the more innocuous forms of humour, nevertheless shared Dickens' satirical view of people who are determined to 'play a role' in society up to the point of a grotesque marionette-like attitudinising.

In Dickens' Sketches by Boz (Tales, Chapt. V, 'Horatio Sparkins'), the elegant Sparkins, who is really a scoundrel, 'attitudinised with admirable effect'. When the Maldertons had crossed the room, he then started up, with the most natural appearance of surprise and delight; accosted Mrs. Malderton with the utmost cordiality; saluted the young ladies in the

most enchanting manner; bowed to, and shook hands with, Mr. Malderton, with a degree of respect amounting almost to veneration; and returned the greetings of the two young men in a half-gratified, half-patronising manner, which fully convinced them that he must be an important, and, at the same time, condescending personage.

'Miss Malderton,' said Horatio, after the ordinary salutations, and bowing very low, 'may I be permitted to presume to hope that you will allow me to have the pleasure —'

'I don't think I am engaged,' simpered the interesting Teresa, at last. Horatio's countenance brightened up, like an old hat in a shower of rain... ' (op.cit.)

In Thomas Mann's novel 'Buddenbrooks' it is Herr Grünlich, Consul Buddenbrook's future son-in-law, who is Sparkin's counterfeit. Like him, Grünlich, early in the novel, enters a family circle, and this is what happens:

'With a final, lengthy stride he arrived, the upper part of his body describing, in the process, an all-embracing semi-arc which thus paid his reverence to the whole assembled company.

'I intrude, I am breaking in on a family gathering,' he uttered in a voice which contained just the right balance of sensitivity and delicate reserve, 'good books have been opened, there is animated conversation. I must hasten to offer my most humble apologies.'

Herr Grünlich, as the reader soon finds out, is an impostor, a hypocrite, like Horatio Sparkins. It is obvious that Thomas Mann's performance of characterising and caricaturising him, is more subtle than Dickens' method. But the very movements of both figures, impelled by one central, predominant impulse: hypocritical adaptation, are almost those of a marionette, and in this are very much alike.

* * *

Dickens often exploits this potential mechanism in human beings and the potential dynamism in mechanical things. In his story 'Mugby Junction' (1850), the hero, Barbox Brothers, looking down from a railway bridge, observes this scene:

'There was heard a distant ringing of bells and blowing of whistles. Then, puppet-looking heads of men popped out of boxes in perspective, and popped in again. Then, prodigious wooden razors, set up on end, began shaving the atmosphere. Then, several locomotive engines in several directions began to scream and be agitated.' (Mugby Junction, Chapt. I, 2)

The comic, almost grotesque effect is here produced and neatly demonstrated in two consecutive sentences, the first changing men, signal-

men, into puppets, or automata, the next animating and personifying railway signals into strange beings doing monstrous things in a surrealist way.

There is in Dickens, as there was in Hoffmann, who created the famous figure of the dancing doll Olympia, as there is in Kafka and Thomas Mann, a strong sense of the possible perversion of the relation between human beings and dead things. This perversion of the established natural order is both comic and terrifying, it is 'grotesque'.

The late Professor Wolfgang Kayser of Göttingen has left us a book entitled *Das Groteske* ('The Grotesque') in which he tries to establish the term 'grotesque' as a valid literary aesthetic category, tracing the development from the early grotto ornaments in Italian catacombs through literature and the fine arts. In this connection he mentions what he calls the quality of 'mechanical dynamism' in Dickens:

'Dickens' characters,' Kayser writes, 'are throughout flatter than those of Raabe, they are more mechanical, but in so being, are thus more dynamic, always 'running down' (like a clock), always in action. The energy with which they are activated is no personal quality of their character, but works rather like a spring of an impersonal force that propels them. The narrator has a peculiar gift of observation for the driving and exaggerating force (das Treibende und Ubertreibende), of this elementary power, otherwise quite unbroken, that moves his universe.' (Wolfgang Kayser, *Das Groteske*, Oldenburg & Hamburg 1957, p. 133)

Kayser calls this grotesque world 'the self-alienated world' ('die entfremdete Welt') (op.cit. p. 198). Surely, this is the fashionable, Brecht-born slogan and jargon, but Kayser's diagnosis seems to me remarkably poignant and suitable for the emotional elements that constitute a relationship between Dickens and some German writers: 'Mechanical things alienate themselves, or: lose their nature and identity, *gaining life*; human beings, lose their identity, *losing life*. Bodies stiffened into puppets, automata, marionettes, and faces hardened into larvae and masks, are recurrent motifs.' (op.cit., *ibid.*) This is the third result of our comparative experiment.

This inversion of men and things is not only, I think, an expression of anxiety in our age of growing technology, bureaucracy and general mechanisation; it is, rather, the ever possible perversion of the natural order of things, of which Dickens, like his 'German relatives', was so strongly aware.