DICKENS AND ROMANTIC PSYCHOLOGY

DICKENS AND ROMANTIC PSYCHOLOGY

The Self in Time in Nineteenth-Century Literature

Dirk den Hartog

Palgrave Macmillan

ISBN 978-1-349-18578-8 ISBN 978-1-349-18576-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-18576-4

© Dirk den Hartog, 1987
Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1987

All rights reserved. For information, write:
Scholarly & Reference Division,
St. Martin's Press, Inc., 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

First published in the United States of America in 1987

ISBN 978-0-312-19989-0

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
Den Hartog, Dirk, 1945–
Dickens and romantic psychology.
Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Dickens, Charles, 1812–1870—Knowledge—
Psychology. 2. Psychology in literature. 3. Self
in literature. 4. Romanticism—England. I. Title.
PR4592.P74D46 1987 823'.8 86–13006
ISBN 978-0-312-19989-0

*To the late Harry and Margaret den Hartog and the
late Alan Hughes*

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
1 Introductory: Dickens, Romantic Psychology and ‘the Experience of Modernity’	1
2 The Ideal of Victorian Manliness in <i>Dombey and Son</i> : Radicalising Wordsworthian Psychology.	34
3 Wordsworthian Psychology and <i>Little Dorrit</i> : The Unresolved Dialogue	80
4 <i>Great Expectations</i> : ‘Working Things Through’	123
<i>Notes and References</i>	156
<i>Index</i>	172

Preface

In this book I have attempted in a variety of ways to strike a balance between a number of opposing emphases. First of all, I have focused on Dickens in particular, whilst also attempting to locate him as a representative figure of his age. I have pursued a specific interest in the shaping presence within the major novels of a preoccupying theme of Wordsworth's, and in the developing resistance to and dialectical engagement with this presence. But I have also tried to examine this complex relationship as paradigmatic of the contradictions within post-Romantic literature and culture as a whole, in line with the conception of those recently set out in Marshal Berman's *All that is Solid Melts into Air: the Experience of Modernity* (1981).

In doing this I have proceeded along a path that is to some extent in accord with the contemporary critical emphasis upon the 'de-centred' author, but whilst continuing to insist upon the significance of individual authorial creativity. Both the acquiescence to and the reaction from the Wordsworthian presence are seen as inexplicable without recourse to the conflicting ideologies and sundry anterior textual 'presences' by which Dickens and his artistic expression are in general terms constituted. Nevertheless, I have equally worked on the assumption that the transformation of these into the individual acts of imagination and insight which in sum make up Dickens's novels, derives from a positively active authorial centre that we can meaningfully persist in talking of as 'genius', without thereby reproducing the fallacy of the divinely transcendental artist.

Finally, and somewhat in line with the above, this book has hopefully taken the point of recent developments in Dickens criticism, whilst resisting the full-scale inversion of approach these have announced. A unifying thread links the three most stimulating books about Dickens to have appeared in the last decade: John Carey's *The Violent Effigy* (1973), Garrett Stewart's *Dickens and the Trials of Imagination* (1974), and, most recently,

S. J. Newman's *Dickens at Play* (1981). These have all sought to overthrow that conception of the most interesting Dickens as a maturely insightful novelist, deeply and intelligently critical of Victorian civilisation and responsible to the task that this imposed upon him. With some notable exceptions this was the orthodox Dickens of the several decades before 1970, when it reached its apotheosis in that centenary year with the Leavis's *Dickens the Novelist*. It is perhaps as a reaction to this excellent though only partially adequate book that we should see the bent of Carey and others, with their celebration of the anarchic and irresponsible in Dickens's imagination, and their sense of comic play as itself the bearer of central meanings, rather than as the rhetorical adjunct of meaning, as it had unfortunately become in much previous commentary. The current drift towards France in English-speaking literary criticism has possibly been influential as well, in that the 'new wave' Dickens criticism, whilst lacking French conceptual rigor and elaboration, has markedly shared its canonisation of the playful and the subversive. In writing the present book I have hoped to combine an acknowledgement of the value of such a re-orientation with a thus modified continuation of the previous mode. A professional colleague has commented on my *Dombey* chapter (read in shortened, article form) that it represents a 'renovated left-Leavisism'. I am happy to lay claim to that label.

One aspect of all this is that I have concentrated on works within the New Critical/'Leavisite' canon of Dickens's novels: I have written on *Dombey and Son*, *Little Dorrit* and *Great Expectations*, in contrast to the current re-emphasis upon the early novels and denial of a significant line of development in terms of maturation. It would also have been very much within the terms of my argument to have said much more than I have about both *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*. However, to have done so would have entailed an unnecessary restatement of accounts already quite adequately given by others, most notably Robin Gilmour on *Copperfield*,¹ and William Axton and Alex Zwerdling on *Bleak House*.² Anyone curious as to how these two novels might be said to fit into my general argument more than my brief references to them suggest, should find these essays very helpful, and the alignment of their particular readings to my overall framework not too difficult.

This book originated as a Ph.D. thesis undertaken at the

University of Leicester, and its gradual transformation into its present state has been marked by a number of articles appearing in the Australian literary journals, *The Critical Review* and *Meridian*. Foremost amongst those to whom I owe acknowledgement for help with it are thus the sponsors and administrators of the Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme, who made the study for the thesis possible, and my Leicester University supervisor, Professor P. A. W. Collins, who patiently did his best to induct me into the procedures of scholarship, besides commenting helpfully upon the intellectual content of work in progress. The greater part of the work involved in rewriting the thesis into a book was done whilst on leave from the Footscray Institute of Technology, and I am grateful to the Institute for giving me this opportunity. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my former teachers within the English Department at Melbourne University for the rigorous and stimulating training in literary criticism they gave me; in particular Sam Goldberg and Jock Tomlinson, who in their postgraduate seminar on nineteenth-century Literature and Thought threw out a number of suggestions that led me to my particular subject. I am also grateful to Mr Goldberg in his capacity as editor of *The Critical Review*, as I am likewise to John Barnes as editor of *Meridian*. I also owe thanks to Mr Graham Burns, of La Trobe University English Department, who read some of the first draft at short notice and made valuable suggestions, and to my father, the late Harry den Hartog, who made detailed and helpful criticisms of the prose of that draft. Mrs Susan Letts and Mrs Rosemary Lovett were invaluable as typists of the original thesis, and made many sacrifices of their personal comfort in the process. Finally, I am deeply grateful to my wife for her cheering support, despite the innumerable pressures upon her which the completion of my work has involved.

I have used and quoted from the Penguin English Library editions of Dickens's works. John Forster's standard biography, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1872-74) is cited in the Everyman edition. Wordsworth's *Prelude*, which I frequently refer to, is cited in the 1850 version.

DIRK DEN HARTOG