

ADVERTISING AND FICTION IN *THE PICKWICK PAPERS*

By Andy Williams

IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT MANY of Dickens's novels were published in monthly serial parts. Not so commonly known is that each of these monthly numbers consisted not only of Dickens's words and his illustrator's pictures but also a substantial advertising supplement. In the original serial numbers of *The Pickwick Papers*, the presence of advertising cannot escape notice. Before reaching the illustrations that precede the novel in each serial part, the Victorian reader would have encountered "The Pickwick Advertiser," a paratextual supplement that consisted of page upon page of advertisements for all manner of commodities. At the end of the last chapter of the serial number were usually around ten further pages of advertising stitched in before the back cover (which was also filled with publicity material). Almost one third of the material text of *Pickwick* in parts consisted of advertising material (Hatton and Cleaver xiii).¹

Within the growing corpus of work dealing with what Thomas Richards has dubbed the "commodity culture of Victorian Britain" (Richards, McClintock, Loeb), some criticism elucidates the relationships between nineteenth-century fiction and consumer culture (Bowlby, Miller, Lindner), some specifically addresses the production, dissemination, and consumption of literary texts as commodities (Feltes, Sutherland, Patten, Roberts), and a small number of critical texts look at the relationship between advertising and fiction in the Dickensian novel (Wicke, Steinlight, Curtis). Until now, however, there has been little sustained close reading of the advertising material in the Dickensian serial text.

Building on the insights of previous criticism, this essay will pay sustained and close attention to the relationship between two of the dominant discourses that constituted *The Pickwick Papers* as it was first published: advertising and fiction. Reading the novel in the immediate context of its supplement, I will chart how these seemingly discrete cultural forms continually blend and clash in the monthly serials. Interpretation always relies on a certain discrimination between the important and the marginal, the central and the relatively inconsequential. I aim to disrupt this discrimination when analyzing *The Pickwick Papers* by deconstructing the traditional hierarchical opposition between fiction and advertising and by showing that while advertising (fiction's "other") continually invades the novel, fiction (its ideological structures, vocabulary, and lexicon) also importantly contributes to the existence of advertising as a cultural form.

I will begin with this description from the famous valentine scene in *The Pickwick Papers*:

Sam Weller sat himself down in a box near the stove, and pulled out the sheet of gilt-edged letter-paper, and the hard-nibbed pen. Then, looking carefully at the pen to see that there were no hairs in it, and dusting down the table, so that there might be no crumbs of bread under the paper, Sam tucked up the cuffs of his coat, squared his elbows, and composed himself to write. To ladies and gentlemen who are not in the habit of devoting themselves practically to the science of penmanship, writing a letter is no very easy task, it being always considered necessary in such cases for the writer to recline his head on his left arm so as to place his eyes as nearly as possible on a level with the paper, and while glancing sideways at the letters he is constructing, to form with his tongue imaginary characters to correspond. (432; ch. 33)

Where does the text that makes up Sam's valentine come from? If we take the narrator at his word, the answer is simple. The words that Sam so scrupulously prepares to set down are purely his own; they are, we read a little later, an "original composition" (432; ch.33). The narrator might ironically mock Sam's excessive preparation for the act of writing, but the act itself is not problematized. Despite his unconventional posture, the episode represents a very conventional scene of writing. The image of the autonomous author at his desk committing his original thoughts to paper is not so different from the many later portraits of Dickens that served to fetishize the figure of the author as an originary source of meaning. As far as Sam is concerned, the words on the paper represent the spontaneous overflow of his heartfelt and powerful feelings for Mary, the housemaid.

But is any text really this simple? Closer attention to the signifier in the valentine reveals that, like all texts, it is complex and polysemous. As Roland Barthes has said, "to interpret a text is . . . to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it" (Barthes 5). It is this plural to which I would like to pay attention in Sam's message. The valentine is a conventional form with a textual history that I do not want to ignore when reading the scene. When Sam sits down and rolls his sleeves up to write, he positions himself, however unwittingly, at a specific point in that textual history, and finds himself in the midst of a whole ensemble of signifying practices. But I am pre-emptively articulating what the text will clearly display.

First Sam's work is subjected to certain prohibitions. After writing for a short while, he is disturbed by his father, who, as the chapter heading proclaims, will deliver "some Critical Sentiments respecting [his son's] Literary Composition" (429; ch.33). The slightly embarrassed son starts to recite his text. "Lovely creetur," he begins, but is immediately interrupted:

"Tain't in poetry, is it?" interposed the father.

"No no," replied Sam.

"Werry glad to hear it," said Mr. Weller. "Poetry's unnat'ral; no man ever talked in poetry 'cept a beadle on boxin' day, or Warren's blackin' or Rowland's oil, or some o' them low fellows; never you let yourself down to talk poetry, my boy. Begin again, Sammy." (435; ch.33)

A primary characteristic of valentine messages is, of course, hyperbole. They deliberately use elaborate and exaggerated language in order to flatter and compliment the addressee.

Hyperbole is also important in the textual composition of love poetry, and hyperbolic poems were, as they still are, the primary textual mode of address in valentine greetings.² Tony Weller's comments, then, are of no small importance to his son's "literary composition." The father intervenes to cut off the valentine from its most likely source of textual nourishment. But what is the reason for this paternal prohibition? Ironically, Weller senior identifies poetry with the "low" advertising outpourings of contemporary businessmen, such as Alexander Rowland (a seller of patent cosmetics) and Robert Warren (a manufacturer of boot-polish). To the modern reader, the statement simply implies that he finds both advertising and poetry equally untrustworthy because they refuse to tell it like it is. Advertising, like poetry, is "unnat'ral" because of its hyperbolic tendency to exaggerate. The reader is invited to laugh at the speaker's lack of knowledge, yet also to sympathize with his distrust of the truth-value of both cultural forms.

Nevertheless this is not simply an ironic comment on the innocence of Sam's father. Tony's confusion of these different textual practices rests on a real set of contemporary intertextual relations. Early-nineteenth-century advertising writers were undoubtedly the innovators, and to some extent the inventors, of what we would recognize today as the advertising system. Like Sam with his Valentine, however, they were not stable and originary producers of meaning. These early advertisers did not simply give birth to a fully formed signifying practice with a complete set of textual conventions. The advertising poem was very common in the early nineteenth century. It is not very surprising that early-nineteenth-century advertising, with its tendency to exaggerate and embellish, should borrow from poetry in this way. Equally unsurprising is the fact that *The Pickwick Papers* should single out the textual historical exchange between these cultural forms as a point of interest.

John Drew has argued that Dickens's first known publication in any genre was precisely such an advertising poem for none other than Warren, the manufacturer of boot-blackening, of whom Tony Weller so disapproves (15–20). As the well-known autobiographical fragment (reproduced in John Forster's biography of the author) attests, the miserable young Dickens was employed by the blackening manufacturer Jonathan Warren to paste labels onto bottles in his small, squalid factory (20–33). Drew claims that, a little later, while an aspiring journalist, Dickens made much-needed money writing advertising verse in praise of Jonathan's cousin, that "low fellow," the blackening advertiser Robert Warren.³

One such poem, printed on the front page of the newspaper the *True Sun* in 1832, is told from the perspective of a man sitting outside, contemplating the shine on his boots and listening to the song of a dove:

As lonely I sat on a calm summer's morning,
To breathe the soft incense that flow'd on the wind;
I mus'd on my boots in their bright beauty dawning,
By Warren's Jet Blacking – the pride of mankind.
...
On a maple-tree near sat a turtle bewailing,
With sorrowful cooings, the loss of her love;
Each note that she utter'd seem'd sadness exhaling,
And plaintively echo'd around the still grove. (Drew 18)

The dove looks at the boots, too, and mistakes its own reflection for its lost love. Briefly happy, it soon realises it has been duped by the extraordinary shine given off by the speaker's footwear. The poem ends,

I pity'd the dove, for my bosom was tender –
 I pity'd the strain that she gave to the wind;
 But I ne'er shall forget the superlative splendour
 Of Warren's Jet Blacking – the pride of mankind. (Drew 18)⁴

Tony Weller's mistake (confusing advertising with poetry) not only refers to the general practice of advertisers using poetic form to sell products: it also has a more specific intertextual antecedent in Dickens's supposed short career as the writer of puff poetry.

Just as important as this biographical story, however, is the fact that "The Pickwick Advertiser," which was bound in with every serial monthly number, contains many more such poetic advertisements. The physical proximity between the novel and its supplement invites the critical reader to trace a shared textual thread between the two and gives a further insight into the relationship between poetry and advertising alluded to by Tony Weller. This piece, entitled "How to Get a Good Dressing," appeared in serial edition seventeen, and starts,

REFORM the State, with voice elate, let Politicians shout;
 Reform the Lords, Reform the Church, Reform the Land throughout;
 Reform your house, your plans, your purse, your ailments and your ills;
 But oh! above all things, cry we, "REFORM YOUR TAILORS' BILLS!!"

 Perhaps you say, in sore dismay, "How can the thing be done?"
 Whereat we cry, most easily, with DOUDNEY AND SON,
 Of *Lombard Street*, at *Forty Nine*, the number's on the door; –
Established Anno Seventeen Hundred and Eighty Four.

How is this poem constituted? What textual threads are woven together to give it meaning?

The first line clearly refers to the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832, which sought to change the voting system by taking more account of industrialised cities, eradicating rotten boroughs (very small depopulated rural constituencies which were easily corrupted and controlled by unscrupulous members of parliament), and extending the franchise more widely to the rising middle-class. A very contentious contemporary political issue, this Act was seen by the ruling Whigs (led by Earl Grey) as vital to the continued stability of English society and to the avoidance of revolution. The second line, about reforming the church, the lords and the land, refers more generally to the contemporary mood of social change that would characterize the Victorian era. By the third line, the reader has been taken from specific politics, through various ideological state apparatuses like the church and the aristocracy, straight into the directly personal realm of the home ("your house, your plans, your purse"), and of the individual body ("your ailments and your ills"). In the final line of the first stanza, after references to elements of the whole spectrum of social life, the reader is told what really matters. "But oh! Above all things, cry we, 'REFORM YOUR TAILORS' BILLS!!'". The advertisement, unlike the watered-down Reform Act, seems effective at enfranchising those it addresses and at providing a version of democracy – albeit not in the political sense. Even after the heavily amended Act was eventually passed, only one-thirtieth of the population

could vote. The advertisement, on the other hand, by means of its clever rhetorical strategy, downplays the importance of any cultural or political participation other than shopping. Readers of the poem might be completely powerless to reform voting rights – they are probably also unable to change religious or social hierarchies – but they have control over their own homes and finances, and they can definitely choose where they buy their clothes. The quite-possibly politically powerless reader is interpellated by the advertisement as a free, consuming individual.

But this kind of ideological reading fails to explain perhaps the main characteristic of the advertisement: its humour. Where does it come from? While the poem offers the reader an obfuscatory subject position of free choice in consumption, it is also clearly meant to be funny. The comedy comes from its complex blend of irony, wordplay, and intertextuality. The homographic pun which exploits the word bill used in different contexts (Parliamentary Reform Bill and the tailor's bill) is obviously important, but it is the mixture of discursive registers accompanying this word play that interests me most. The way that poetic verse, political acts, and tradesmen's bills are bathetically treated in the same way and in the same space creates comedic textual anarchy. Such parodic discursive hybridity, premised on the mixing up of very different cultural forms, does not only make for good jokes: it also playfully performs and displays the principle that all texts, be they advertisement, poem or novel, rely on previously existing texts for their own composition and existence.

This principle is displayed in an even more marked fashion in a *Pickwick* advertisement for Rowland's cosmetics, one of the companies so distrusted by Sam's father. Rowland was an innovator in the field of advertising verse. To supplement the various tall tales told in his advertisements, his company even released short books with titles such as *A Treatise on the Human Hair*, extended puffs that were littered with a number of poems extolling the virtues of his product. Found in "The Pickwick Advertiser" for serial edition number ten, this full-page advertisement mixes distinct textual forms, the title immediately fusing together literary and advertising signifiers ("Literary Announcement"). The title of this full-page advertisement immediately fuses together literary and advertising signifiers. In declaring itself a "Literary Announcement," the advertisement uses a common convention in book advertising, which was widespread in journals and periodicals. This playfully draws attention to the literariness of the advertisement – to its own citationality – but the text also emphasises the commodification of fiction in its burgeoning consumer culture. Unlike the last two advertising poems, this one has a direct intertextual relationship with a particular poem: Byron's *Don Juan*. In a small prose preface, the reader is told that the following verses, which form a part of the description of Don Juan's mother, were omitted from all published versions of the first Canto "much against the will of the noble poet."

Each of the three stanzas describes an element of Donna Inez's beauty. They all start with ironic superlative praise for the lady, then suggest that some unscrupulous enemies think otherwise, and end by stating that in order to quell such rumors, the Donna bought the relevant product from Rowland, just in case. The first deals with her hair:

THE HAIR! – her lovers swore that it was black –
Her enemies half-hinted it was gray!
Until she sent to London for a pac-
-quet of MACASSAR OIL, to steal away
That venerable colour, and bring back

The glossy ringlets of her early day;
 When curling tresses, jetty, thick, and long,
 Soon proved her foes were weak, and ROWLAND strong! (“Literary Announcement”)

The other stanzas deal with her skin, which is made undeniably white by Rowland’s Kalydor; and her teeth, whose “Æthiop specks” are vanquished by the toothpaste, Rowland’s Odonto. The mischievously disrespectful tone of the description of Donna Inez remains quite true to the original poem, in which she is satirised at every opportunity, and the same *ottava rima* scheme is used throughout. The poetry might not consistently stretch and contort the English language to the extent that the original does, but the rhyming of “KALYDOR/and more” in the second stanza and “sinful/pin. –Full,” and “wont –o!/ODONTO” in the third certainly emulates Byron’s playfully comic rhyme schemes.

These parallels between the parodic advertisement and its poetic predecessor show a clear intertextual relationship. But there is a more important aspect of the affiliation. A significant element of *Don Juan*’s famously mock-heroic epic story is the bathetic mixture of high tragedy or romance with earthy levity. This aspect of the piece was heavily criticised for its moral profligacy at the time of its publication. The anonymous reviewer for *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* found this feature of the shipwreck episode in Canto two so distasteful that he “dare not stain our pages with quoting any specimens of the disgusting merriment with which he has interspersed his picture of human suffering” (“Remarks on Don Juan” 518). Particularly offensive was a couplet describing the feelings of those who survived the shipwreck, yet the reviewer clearly overcame his disgust sufficiently to quote these lines at the end of the review: “They grieved for those that perished in the cutter/ And also for the biscuit, casks, and butter” (“Remarks on Don Juan” 518). This is a good example of the way the text creates comic effect by blending tragic suffering with more banal concerns. The oxymoronic “disgusting merriment” that so shocked many contemporary readers was clearly caused by combining satire and epic narrative.

Such blending of high with low is also structurally integral to the humour of the Rowland’s advertisement. In textually weaving together an advertisement for hair oil, toothpaste, and skin lotion with one of the most notable long poems of the age, it mocks the heroic in a similarly shocking and amusing way. The advertisement is truly Byronic in its scandalous textual association of exalted love poetry with the base materiality of hair oil. But if the advertisement cites Byron, Byron also draws on advertising. The whole Rowland’s poem is nothing more than an extended citation, or a logical extension, of an already existing couplet from Canto I of Byron’s poem. While mockingly describing Donna Inez, the epic poem briefly turns advertising puff as the narrator observes, “In virtues nothing earthly could surpass her./ Save thine ‘incomparable oil’ Macassar” (Byron 382). Boot-polish advertisements like those of Robert Warren also find their way into Byron’s *Don Juan* (Strachan xvi). It testifies to the textual ubiquity of Warren’s (and others’) advertising poems that when Juan picks up a London newspaper in Canto XVI, “He read an article the king attacking, / And a long eulogy of ‘Patent Blacking’” (850).⁵

Advertising is textually essential to the make-up of the poem, just as the advertisement relies on its textual kindred poetry in order to fulfil its function. Like Dickens’s valentine scene, both Rowland’s and Doudney’s poems address the reader ironically by juxtaposing seemingly incongruous cultural forms. And just like the scene in the novel, they demonstrate the way that all texts are constituted through intertextual practice.

Meanwhile, back at the Blue Boar, Tony Weller continues to express his critical sentiments about his son's literary production. After many interruptions from his father, Sam eventually manages to tell him how he wants to begin his valentine. "Lovely creetur," it goes, "i . . . feel myself ashamed, and completely circumscribed in a dressin' of you, for you *are* a nice gal and nothin' but it" (435; ch.33):

"That's a wery pretty sentiment," said the elder Mr. Weller. . . .

"Wot I like in that 'ere style of writin' . . . is that there ain't no callin' names in it, – no Wenuses, nor nothin' o' that kind; wot's the good o' callin' a young 'ooman a Wenus or a angel, Sammy?"

"Ah! What, indeed?" replied Sam.

"You might jist as vell call her a griffin, or a unicorn, or a king's arms at once, which is wery vell known to be a col-lection o' fabulous animals." (435–36; ch.33)

This statement includes a subtle shift between textual registers. Firstly there is a continuation of his earlier advertising/poetry confusion. Sam pleases his father by avoiding the kind of "unnat'ral" exaggeration Tony sees as inherent in both of these cultural forms. His language certainly shuns "callin' names," and it is void of any obvious intertextual influence. The same cannot be said for Tony's. He starts off by referring to love poetry's tendency to inflate falsely the virtues of its object. It is simply illogical to call a young lady anything so ridiculous as a Venus or an angel. There is now a playful break as the textual heritage of his discourse shifts mid-sentence. "You might jist as vell call her a griffin, or a unicorn." These words are no longer drawn from love poetry but from mythology though they remain supernatural "fabulous animals." Until this point it is possible to understand the speaker's naïve confusion. Not until the reader reaches the last example, that of the "king's arms," however, can one fully follow Tony's transtextual odyssey. He has moved from using the language of advertising to love poetry, to the names of public houses, all without changing his subject matter – the description of young women. As well as being funny, this passage also illustrates and lays bare its own reliance on other texts. Just as Tony did with advertising and poetry, he again conspicuously moves between radically different signifying practices.

This, though, is not the end of the scene's play with intertextuality. Sam continues, "Afore I see you I thought all women was alike. . . . But now . . . I find what a reg'lar soft-headed ink-red'lous turnip I must ha' been for there ain't nobody like you though *I* like you better than nothin' at all" (436; ch. 33). Despite Sam's continued efforts to speak plainly, and to avoid those textual influences of which his father so disapproves, such unadorned language is insufficient for the convention of the valentine message. As Mr. Weller nods approvingly, his son proceeds to the end of his composition:

The first and only time I see you your likeness was took on my hart in much quicker time and brighter colours than ever a likeness was took by the profeel macheen (which p'r'aps you may have heard on Mary my dear) altho' it *does* finish a portrait and put the frame and glass on complete with a hook at the end to hang it up by and all in two minutes and a quarter. (436; ch. 33)

The profile machine was a rudimentary ancestor of photography which sketched the outline of the subject's silhouette on paper (Miller 111). Ironically, when he searches for hyperbole, what he comes up with is not the forbidden poetry, but the equally forbidden advertising. Tony dubiously replies, "I am afeerd that werges on the poetical, Sammy" (436; ch. 33).

Despite all efforts to repress the advertising signifier from the text of his valentine, it just keeps returning. As Jennifer Wicke puts it in her reading of this scene, “Despite being vigilant about eschewing poetry, for its low associations with advertising, Sam inadvertently creates a miniature advertisement. . . . The encroachments advertising is making on the common stock of language, especially when pressed into the artifice of representation, makes its unbidden appearance almost unavoidable” (34–35).

The scene can be read as emblematic of the relationship between the novel itself and advertising. Just as advertising draws on fiction, the intertextual relations that constitute the novel make sure that advertising (the textual manifestation of nineteenth-century commodity culture) is one of the key elements of which *The Pickwick Papers* is composed. Even in sections of the novel that do not explicitly mention advertising, it is still possible to trace the influence of the commodity culture from which it was formed (and of which it was a constituent part).

Take the interpolated tale “The Bagman’s Story” from chapter fourteen. The famous fairytale chair that comes alive and gives the lascivious Tom Smart advice on how to win the landlady might also be seen as an allusion to a culture in which the commodity has taken center stage.⁶ This chair, which has the ability to move by itself, is not the only item of animated furniture in the serial text of *The Pickwick Papers*. “The Pickwick Advertiser” for serial edition thirteen includes an advertisement for Minter’s patented self-adjusting reclining and elevating chairs. Below three illustrations of these marvellous products, the text claims that the inventor “begs to inform the Nobility, Gentry, &c., that he has invented an EASY CHAIR, that will recline and elevate, *of itself*, into an innumerable variety of positions, *without the least trouble or difficulty to the occupier*.” This is no innovation of machinery, it claims: “there being no . . . rack, catch, or spring, *it is only for the persons sitting in the chair merely to wish to recline or elevate themselves*, and the seat and back take any required inclination, without requiring the least assistance or exertion whatever” (“Minter’s Patented Chairs,” my emphasis). Like the novel, this text tells of chairs that lead a life of their own. The story’s flight of fancy is not as fanciful as it might at first seem. On the contrary, in revitalising the folk-tale for the commodity culture of the 1830s, this part of “The Bagman’s Story” finds intertextual sustenance in the advertisements that make up the “The Pickwick Advertiser.”⁷

This advertisement was not the only one to form an integral part of the textual heritage of the episode with the “queer chair.” One of the first advertisements to appear with the novel dealt with another such mystical object. Like the Minter advertisement, this one, for Rowland’s Macassar Oil, imbues an inanimate object with a life of its own. And like the story in the novel, this advertisement gives an inanimate commodity autonomous story-telling subjectivity. In “The Auto-Biography of an Oil Bottle,” however, the living commodity is not just one character among many; it is at once the narrator and protagonist of the tale. This very strange four-page narrative advertisement tells the life story of a bottle of Rowland’s Macassar Oil. Starting with her manufacture in a glass factory, the story moves through her time on the shelf of Rowland’s shop, and her service at the hands of many owners, and ends (after many adventures) with her being fished out of the Thames and being put on sale in a marine store shop. Fairy tales form part of the intertextual heritage of this story. That the bottle is a conscious sentient individual is not its only magical attribute. Its powers of hair restoration are comparable to the powers of many of the supernatural objects in the Grimms’ tales. Her first master’s hair “had withered away through sickness.” It was, states the bottle,

“thin, scattered, husky, straight, dreadfully locked, and altogether in want of culture.” The effect of the oil, once it has been applied, does indeed seem magical: “I was truly astonished and gratified by the instantaneous change I had effected: for the hair that before was dull and dry, immediately assumed a dark, rich, glossy appearance; and by a few turns of the brush, became clear and shining.”

The fairy tale is only one of the textual influences on the advertisement. Much more substantially, the text borrows from those eighteenth-century novels that were regarded as classics by the early Victorians. Although less explicitly than the *Don Juan* advertisement, this example offers a parodic repetition of the style of such novels as Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* and, to a lesser extent, Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*. An early paragraph begins,

To the depôt of Messrs. ROWLAND and SON I was accordingly sent, by whom we were soon filled with a rich crimson and odoriferous liquid, which, by a certain instinct in me, I know to possess most surprising virtues. After being neatly corked, sealed, and wrapped up, with a pamphlet explanatory of my virtues, I was labelled £1. 1s.

The gender of this first-person narrator is suggested and developed from the start. The repeated later reference to her “virtues” becomes a double entendre which allows the protagonist to be read as female. The way she constantly refers to those who own her as “master” or “patron,” clearly signifies her economic position as a member of the lower or servant class. These distinguishing features, along with the confessional tone of the piece, the digressive sentence structure, and the close attention to economic and monetary matters, can be seen to derive from the mode of address of the low-born heroine of Defoe’s novel.

After miraculously transforming the hair of the rich bachelor, the protagonist is taken by her new master on a trip to Italy. The following passage illustrates more textual parallels with *Moll Flanders*:

I shall pass over our journey through France, with other minor things, that diffuse chroniclers might have thought not unworthy of their notice, and merely proceed to my adventures, which without much egotism, I have some cause to be proud of. We had traversed a great part of Italy, when . . . we stopped at a very pleasant city, called Retsina.

If one compares this paragraph with one from the early life of Moll, certain common features are clearly visible:

I WAS now about ten Years old, and began to look a little Womanish, for I was mighty Grave and Humble; very Mannerly, and as I had often heard the ladies say I was very Pretty, and would be a very handsome Woman, so you may be sure, that hearing them say so, made me not a little Proud.
(14)

In the paragraph before this one the narrator was eight years old. Such geographically and temporally peripatetic prose is a distinguishing feature of both Defoe’s formal realism and the parodic advertisement. There is an obvious similarity in the self-aware and frank honesty with which these narrators describe their pride. Both Moll and the oil bottle are candid in describing their youthful vanity, and both can be seen to employ the narrative device

of attributing the observation of their virtues to others in order to avoid the impression of improper pride.

Another intertextual link between these two texts resides in the sharply marked vicissitudes of the two narrators' existence, especially their tempestuous sexual encounters. *Moll Flanders* is famous for her early sexual fall, followed by a life of sexual promiscuity. As the title page of the novel states, she lived a "Life of continu'd Variety for Threescore Years, besides her Childhood, was Twelve Years a *Whore*, [and] five times a *Wife* (whereof once to her own Brother)," as well as a thief, a kidnapper, and a transported felon. The oil bottle's progress through the hands of various owners is heavily sexualised and is described with the language of the novelistic amatory encounter. The first owner of the Macassar Oil is described as a "Gentleman of very dignified manners," who treated her very well. When they go to Italy, for example, he places her in the carriage beside him. Explaining how he was attacked by robbers and left for dead, her language is that of a concerned lover: "Never did bottle feel more than I did in perceiving my excellent master close to me, bleeding profusely from his wound; at the same time his hair, which had grown long and curly, and what he had learned to pride so much, lay mingling with the dust and blood on the road." Her next male owner is the honourable young grandson of an old lady, who saves her master from the road. The young man had been unable to join the army for lack of facial hair, but the bottle of miraculous oil soon gave him "a huge pair of whiskers."

Following his leaving to fight for his country, his dastardly brother, a sailor, returns and uses up the rest of the Macassar Oil. The narrative continues:

After frequently making use of me to contain wine, spirits, &c. he took such a fancy to me, that I was carried with him on his next voyage from Leghorn to England. My life became now almost insufferably degrading. Filled with spirits, I was constantly subject to the rude salutes of a dozen greasy lips. This, to me, who had been brought up for the society of the elegant and refined, and had hitherto fared luxuriously, was a most odious and disgusting state of vassalage I longed to be freed from.

The comic satire on the narrative of the female sexual fall is very effective here, as talk of physical degradation and the lips of the drunken sailors on the bottle clearly evoke images of sexual license and lecherous kisses. The moral framework inhabited by the oil bottle, emphasised by her repeated concerns over her virtue, might seem rather more derivative from Richardson's *Pamela* than Defoe's novel. Her progress through a number of sexualised relationships with men of varying moral character and material wealth certainly reminds one of *Moll Flanders*, however. At this point the narrative takes a turn that belongs much more to the nineteenth century than the eighteenth. Her corrupt and corrupting owner falls overboard on his way to visit a prostitute in Wapping, with the bottle in his pocket. The fallen heroine of the story thus anticipates so many later Victorian stories of lost innocence and sexual depredation by being "found drowned." After she is fished out of the water, she is sold to the marine store shop, where she makes a final melodramatic plea which doubles as a closing advertising slogan: "Oh, Rowland! sole cause of all my virtuous actions, grant that I may once more be taken into thy service, to repeat those deeds . . . it was once my pride to do with thy incomparable Oil – MACASSAR."

Like the *Don Juan* advertisement, this text relies on the comic intertextual mixing of classic fiction with "low" advertising copy for its appeal. The effective parody of the various

conventions of the early novel, mixed with the easily recognizable conventions of early advertising, makes for very funny reading. Take, for example, this juxtaposition of the two cultural forms:

I could not but be aware that all the attention which had been paid me arose from a desire to warrant my being *the Original*; because, as I also afterwards learnt, in conveyance of my owner's celebrity, base impostors and forgers had endeavoured to foist on the public a *spurious imitation* as the "GENUINE MACASSAR OIL" which I, in reality, contained. ("The Auto-Biography of an Oil Bottle")

The novelistic parody of a Defoean narrative voice is here mixed with the almost universal nineteenth-century advertising tactic of positing one's own product as the "original" and decrying all of the products of one's competitors as base imitations. The comedy of this paragraph does not end here. This is a self-reflexive piece of prose that satirizes contemporary advertising language as much as it parodies the language of the novel. Who could miss the irony of an advertisement that is itself a parodic duplicate, a "spurious imitation" of an earlier text, warning others to be watchful of further "base impostors" of the product it is advertising?

There is one other important literary precursor to this text. Just as this advertisement, along with the one for Mr. Minter's self-adjusting chair, forms part of the textual heritage of "The Bagman's Story," the previous interpolated tales in *The Pickwick Papers* are part of the intertextual history of this advertisement. "The Auto-Biography of an Oil Bottle" was published in part three of *Pickwick*. Parts one and two had already set a pattern of including stories not immediately connected to the novel's narrative. The reader had encountered dismal Jemmy's "Stroller's Tale," "The Story of the Convict's Return" told in the Parlour of the farm at Dingley Dell, as well as many of Mr. Jingle's short staccato stories. Is there really so much difference between these tales and the Rowland's novelistic advertisement? They are of comparable length; the advertisement is similarly dark, funny, and entertaining; its links with narratives such as "The Bagman's Story" are clear; the "literary" or "novelistic" nature of the advertisement is indisputable; and, of course, they appear in the same text. The position of the advertisement within this text is also suggestive: as soon as readers finished the last page of the monthly number, they encountered the start of this story on the opposite page. Apart from a short space at the end of the text, there is no marker that states *Pickwick* has ended for the month and the advertising messages have begun. "The Auto-Biography of an Oil Bottle," like many of the other advertisements, is a disruptive textual presence that occupies a liminal space in the novel. Its narrative allies it with the interpolated tales, and its advertising content displays its kinship with the paratextual supplement. It is neither wholly part of the novel, nor completely exterior to it.

When one examines the novel alongside its supplement, the distinction between internal and external starts to break down. The advertisements and advertising practices seem to bleed into the novel at the same time as novelistic narratives and structures seep into the advertisements. The very stuff of the novel, its textual raw material, includes and draws on the advertising vocabularies that were in circulation at the time of its production. Like Sam with his Valentine, the novel cannot help but incorporate advertising signifiers. "The Bagman's Story" shows how *Pickwick*, like all novels, draws on the textual forms available in its culture. It also shows, more specifically, how *Pickwick* draws on the narratives available in its own advertising supplement. Such novelistic citation of the "Advertiser" occurs, for

example, in the trial scene between Bardell and Pickwick, when Sam Weller is questioned by the bombastic Sergeant Buzfuz.

By a series of language games and a process of twisting the words of his opponent to fit his own means, the blustering prosecutor dupes Mr. Winkle into testifying against, rather than for, his friend Pickwick. Sam then takes the stand and these tactics are repeated, but the servant's verbal dexterity is too much for the lawyer. After a while Buzfuz tries to trick Sam into stating that he saw Mrs. Bardell in the arms of Mr. Pickwick. "You were in the passage and yet saw nothing of what was going forward," he states incredulously, asking, "have you a pair of eyes, Mr. Weller?" Advertising again inflects Sam's speech as he replies, "yes, I have a pair of eyes . . . and that's just it. If they wos a pair o' patent double million magnifyin' gas microscopes of hextra power, p'raps I might be able to see through a flight o' stairs and a deal door; but bein' only eyes you see, my wision's limited" (464; ch. 34). Just as advertising enters his discourse when he needed to impress his loved one in the valentine, here Sam is able to use "the inflated advertising ploy" to sardonic effect to outwit and disarm the lawyer (Wicke 33). His utterance has the double effect of criticising and deflating both the duplicitous motives of legal jargon and the verbal mendacity of contemporary advertisers.

This criticism of false advertising claims is blunted, however, by the fact that the advertising pages of Dickens's monthly serials were the hawking ground for a whole range of optical commodities, including glasses, cameras, telescopes, projection devices, binoculars, and, of course, microscopes (Curtis 217). Gerard Curtis states that "observation became commodified by these products," as in advertisements for microscopes, all sorts of things were magnified to unthinkable proportions. Illustrated insects were enlarged to look like monsters and water was magnified to show malicious disease-carrying organisms (217). In this new visual world, nothing was as it seemed. Indeed, one might say the same thing about Sam's comment at the expense of the ad-man. Through no fault of its own, the signifying force of his words changes completely when viewed in the context of the "Advertiser." Two serial numbers after that in which this striking appropriation of advertising language appeared, one finds a quarter-page advertisement for "compound microscopes" ("Compound Microscopes"). What was previously a disinterested and distanced comment on a contemporary phenomenon now becomes implicated in that which it critiques.

The signifying functions of Sam's use of advertising language are multiple. One could read Sam's words as evidence of his subversive carnivalesque verbal dexterity in the face of a repressive legal discourse. The episode can alternatively be seen as parodic of Sam's unknowing use of discourses that are beyond his control, in the same manner as Tony Weller's comments in the Blue Boar. In the context of the advertisements that frame it, however, Sam's words can also be seen to have (a perhaps unconscious) advertising function. The novel contains more such examples. Explaining that Mr. Pickwick must have made up the fictitious name "Eatanswill" in order to save the embarrassment of the inhabitants of the real town, the narrator states how he had examined in vain "every corner of the Pocket County Maps issued for the benefit of society by our distinguished publishers" (165; ch. 13). The travelling and hunting "Maps of the English Counties . . . mounted in cases and adapted to the waistcoat pocket" were being sold and widely advertised by Dickens's publishers Chapman and Hall at the time. They were present in the form of a half-page advertisement in almost every issue of "The Pickwick Advertiser" ("Maps of the English Counties"). Other such examples include an episode towards the end of the novel in which Mr. Perker's clerk Lowten offers a double plug for Bramah's patent door locks (700; ch. 53); the scene in

which the reader first encounters Sam Weller cleaning boots when the narrator refers to the rival blacking companies Warren's and Day and Martin (135; ch. 10); and, of course, Tony Weller's comments on the advertising exploits of Rowland and Warren (435; ch. 33).

It is entirely plausible that these are examples of what is known today known as product placement, especially when one considers that most of these businesses paid for space in the novel's advertising supplement. The lack of corroborating secondary evidence, however, means that we will never be able to know for sure if Dickens was using his novel to promote his advertisers (or in the case of Chapman and Hall's maps, his publishers).⁸ But whether there was a conscious decision taken to endorse these products or not, it cannot be denied that their very presence in such a popular work of fiction serves to advertise them to a very wide audience. When I suggest that these are advertisements, I do not mean to claim that this is their only (or even primary) function. Such use of contemporary brands is clearly also a part of the realism of the text. In order to create verisimilitude, to portray his subject realistically, Dickens understandably deemed it necessary to include these signifiers of nineteenth-century commerce. Either way, the presence of these branded goods further shows how the advertising signifier was woven into the realist textual fabric of *The Pickwick Papers*.

The presence of the supplementary advertising deconstructs the boundaries between the novel and its "Advertiser" and shows that the novel would not be what it is without the presence of the advertisements. Far from being a frivolous or unimportant external addition to the sealed plenitude of the novel, the advertising alerts the reader to points within Dickens's text at which the idea of the purely "fictional" in isolation from popular commodity culture can be seen to break down and unravel.

Nowhere is this more visible than in the Phiz illustration that accompanies the valentine scene. At the heart of the episode that explores the relations between advertising and fiction most effectively, one also finds what is possibly the most visible product placement in the novel. As Diana and Geoffrey Hindley (and later, Jennifer Wicke) have pointed out, in an advertising coup that this company's prodigious marketing department would find impressive even today, on the wall above the mantelpiece in the Blue Boar is a poster that proclaims: Guinness Dublin Stout (Hindley 160, Wicke 35). Guinness did not pay for space in "The Pickwick Advertiser," but a number of its rivals did. One finds, among others, advertisements for Brown Stout Porter, and Barclay's Best Porter. In a sense, however, it is irrelevant whether this is a paid advertisement or not. It is very likely that the illustrator Phiz was simply realistically portraying the interior of a contemporary pub: the advertisement could be nothing more than an artistic flourish, a realist supplement to the scene. But this advertising supplement has become an integral part of the cultural form of novel illustration. Phiz had to include this signifier of contemporary commodity culture.

Dickens considers the contents of outdoor advertising posters while addressing the "ubiquitous nature" of advertising in nineteenth-century commodity culture in a *Household Words* article called "Bill-Sticking" (341). The narrator of the piece muses:

What an awful thing it would be, ever to have wronged – say M. JULIEN for example – and to have his avenging name in characters of fire incessantly before my eyes. Or to have injured MADAME TUSSAUD, and undergo a similar retribution. Has any man a self-reproachful thought associated with pills, or ointment? What an avenging spirit to the man is PROFESSOR HOLLOWAY! Have I sinned in oil? Cabburn pursues me. Have I a dark remembrance associated with any gentlemanly garments, bespoke or ready made? MOSES and SON are on my track. (341)

In this article, the narrator wanders the streets like a perverse version of Walter Benjamin's *flâneur*. Instead of revelling in the profusion of advertising signifiers, he finds them potentially oppressive and overwhelming.

At one point he describes in intricate and unremitting detail an abandoned building covered in such overlapping posters. It was a shell of a building of which "it would have been impossible to say, on the most conscientious survey, how much of its front was brick and mortar, and how much decaying and decayed plaster" (340–41). He goes on:

It was so thickly encrusted with fragments of bills, that no ship's keel after a long voyage could be half so foul. . . . The building was shored up to prevent its tumbling into the street; and the very beams erected against it, were less wood than paste and paper, they had been so continually posted and reposted. . . . I thought the building could never be pulled down, but in one adhesive heap of rottenness and poster. (341)

This evocative description of rot and decay clearly functions as a derogatory metaphor for the invasion and spread of advertising in the city and throughout nineteenth-century culture. Despite this, the building also stands as a metaphor for the intertextual infusion of advertising and commodity culture into the text of Dickens's monthly serials. "Infusion" is perhaps a misleading word, implying as it does some anterior mixing of an external agent with some previously pure or self-sufficient entity. I would argue that the advertisements, the signifiers of nineteenth-century commodity culture, are a constitutive element of these texts. Closely reading the novel alongside its "Advertiser" makes it more and more difficult to maintain the rigid borders between them. As with the building, it is at times difficult to tell where the novel proper begins and the presence of advertising ends. Unlike the narrator of the article, however, in analyzing this set of textual relations, I do not want to pull down the imposing structure that is *The Pickwick Papers*. In pointing out that the text, like the old building, is a palimpsest of advertising signifiers, I do not wish to make a judgement of value or literary worth. I merely want to show some of the various ways in which the Dickensian serial is thoroughly entangled with the commodity culture of Victorian Britain.

Cardiff University

NOTES

1. Unfortunately, when the serial parts were bound by their original or subsequent owners, the advertisements were often ripped out and discarded. The "Advertiser" was issued only with the earliest printed copies of the serialised novel and appeared in none of the reprints or later editions. It is unlikely that there would have been much variation between versions of the same edition because the wrappers, the illustrations, the text, and the advertisements were all printed as a set (Hatton and Cleaver 30). It is possible that the examples of trade advertising insets, which were stitched in at the back of each number, varied somewhat more. However, ascertaining how much variation there was is very difficult because when one encounters discrepancies between copies, it is usually impossible to tell if a missing advertisement was omitted by the publishers, or if it had been removed by one of the owners of the book in subsequent years. Where I discuss examples of these insets, the copy of the text I refer to is the British Library's J. F. Dexter Collections *Pickwick* in parts, which is generally regarded as the most complete version we have, and the closest to the text bought by the first readers of the novel.

2. For a discussion of the publishing history of the valentine, see J. Hillis Miller's essay "Sam Weller's Valentine."
3. Robert Warren is credited by Raymond Williams with selling "probably the first nationally advertised" product (174). Warren's advertisements were innovative not only in their use of poetry but also in their combination of the written word with especially designed illustrations. The most famous advertisement contains a picture of a cat admiring its reflection in a newly polished boot. In another twist on the relationship between advertising and fiction, this graphic was the work of George Cruikshank, who would go on to provide illustrations for many of Dickens's books. For more on the advertising campaigns of Robert Warren see Strachan's introduction to volume four of his *Parodies of the Romantic Age* (xi–xix); Wicke (21–26); and Turner (55–56).
4. John Drew's argument that this anonymous advertising poem was written by Dickens is largely based on a diary entry from the *Morning Chronicle* journalist John Payne Collier, whom Dickens's uncle John Henry Barrow had approached in the hope he might be able to find his relative a job. Collier writes that to prove his nephew's ability as a writer, Barrow had referred him "jocosely to the rhymes (possibly his) which accompanied the wood-cut advertisements of Warren's blacking, containing the figure of a dove . . . looking at a polished boot, and mistaking the reflection of itself for the real appearance of its mate." The verse was published in the radical evening newspaper the *True Sun* on March 13th 1832, either just before, or during Dickens's brief stint as a parliamentary reporter on this paper (Drew 17–20).
5. In another example of the intertextual relationship between poetry and advertising, Byron himself was accused of writing advertising poems for Warren's chief rival. An anonymous article recounts "seriously that I 'receive five hundred pounds for the writing of advertisements for Day and Martin's blacking!.' This is the highest compliment to my literary powers which I ever received" (Strachan, introduction, *Parodies* xvi). For more on alternative versions of this story see Mason (411–14).
6. As well as evoking familiar aspects of fairy tales, this part of the tale pre-empted another fanciful description of a wooden object of furniture. Thirty years after *Pickwick* was written, Karl Marx would famously write about an animated wooden table in his chapter on commodity fetishism in *Capital* (Marx 319–29).
7. Murray Roston provides a reading of Tom Smart's talking chair by comparing it with a number of illustrations of ornately decorated chairs from the catalogue of the Great Exhibition of 1851. He sees Dickens's fictional living chair as a response to the way Victorian designers tailored their goods to allow owners to assert "their identity through their possessions" (Roston 82).
8. If this was an act of conscious advertisement Dickens was not the only nineteenth-century classic realist to indulge in such practices. Walter Benjamin explains this practice as it relates to Balzac in *The Arcades Project*:

Balzac is one of the first to have divined the power of the advertisement and, above all, the disguised advertisement. . . . The tradesmen named by Balzac . . . are clearly his own. . . . No one understood better than the author of *Césaire Birotteau* the unlimited potential of publicity. . . . To confirm this, one need only look at the epithets . . . he attaches to his manufacturers and their products. Shamelessly he dubs them: the *renowned* Victorine; Plaisir, an *illustrious* hairdresser; Staub, the *most celebrated* tailor of his age; Gay, a famous haberdasher . . . on the Rue de la Michodière (even giving the address!); . . . "the cuisine of the Rocher de Cancale, . . . the premier restaurant in Paris . . . which is to say, in the *entire world*." (54)

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