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Norbert Lennartz / Dieter Koch (eds.)

## **Texts, Contexts and Intertextuality**

Dickens as a Reader

With 9 illustrations

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## 1. Introduction

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Matthias Bauer (Tübingen)

## 2.1 Dickens and Sir Philip Sidney: Desire, Ethics, and Poetics

While Dickens has been studied frequently as a reader of Shakespeare<sup>1</sup> and, to a somewhat lesser extent, of Ben Jonson,<sup>2</sup> his relationship to other Early Modern writers has obviously been regarded as a comparatively unrewarding field of critical enquiry. A possible exception is Sir Philip Sidney, to whom some critical attention has been paid,<sup>3</sup> but whose significance for Dickens has not yet been fully recognised. The relationship deserves further study not so much because Sidney is an important 'source' of Dickens or has in some more or less indirect fashion 'influenced' him but because Sidney, in the nineteenth century, became a kind of legend or myth<sup>4</sup> and could thus be used by Dickens as a point of reference in making certain (fictional) statements about issues connected to that myth. Sidney, to Dickens, served as a means of giving voice both to the frustration of desire and to ways of sublimation; he helped him articulate the realisation of self-denial and charity as forms of Christian nobility and thus contributed to establishing Dickens's own poetological convictions. Reading Sidney, in this context, does not just mean reading his works but also his life and even the visual images that became part of the legend and with which the image of Dickens himself, as I hope to show, became associated.

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1 See e.g. Gager, Valerie L. (1996), *Shakespeare and Dickens: The Dynamics of Influence*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP; Poole, Adrian / Scott, Rebekah (2011), 'Charles Dickens' *Scott, Dickens, Eliot, Hardy. Great Shakespeareans*, vol 5, ed. Adrian Poole, New York: Continuum, pp. 53–94.

2 See e.g. Martino, Mario (2000), 'On Dickens and Ben Jonson' *Dickens: The Craft of Fiction and the Challenges of Reading*, ed. Rossana Bonadei et al. Milan: Unicopli, pp. 140–52; Tambling, Jeremy (2012), 'Dickens and Ben Jonson' *English* 61, pp. 4–25.

3 See Endicott, Annabel (1967), 'Pip, Philip and Astrophel: Dickens's Debt to Sidney?' *Dickensian* 63, pp. 158–62. LeVay, John (1987), 'Sidney's Astrophel 21 and Dickens' *Great Expectations' Explicator* 45, pp. 6–7; Reed, Jon B. (1990), 'Astrophil and Estella: A Defense of Poesy' *SEL* 30, pp. 655–78.

4 See Gouws, John (1990a), 'Fact and Anecdote in Fulke Greville's Account of Sidney's Last Days' *Sir Philip Sidney's Achievements*, ed. M. J. B. Allen / Dominic Baker-Smith / Arthur F. Kinney / Margaret M. Sullivan, New York: AMS Press, pp. 62–82, who does not, however, refer to Dickens.

## 1. Astrophil and Pip

In 1967, Annabel Endicott (Patterson), modestly phrasing the title of her essay as a question, pointed out a number of remarkable links between *Great Expectations* and Sir Philip Sidney. In ‘Pip, Philip and Astrophil: Dickens’s Debt to Sidney?’ she suggests that “Sidney seems to have been the inspiration, in more ways than one, for Dickens’s own study of what it means to be a gentleman” (p. 158).<sup>5</sup> To Dickens, the very notion of the gentleman must indeed have been associated with Sidney, since he referred to him in *A Child’s History of England* (1851–53) as “one of the best writers, the best knights, and the best gentlemen, of that or any age.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, when Pip, the protagonist of *Great Expectations*, “want[s] to be a gentleman” (p. 116), it is by no means surprising that Sir Philip Sidney appears in the background as a model. The relationship is not entirely based on comical contrast, especially when we consider Sidney’s persona Astrophil. Endicott points out that even the title of Dickens’s novel establishes the connection to Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*. In Sonnet 21, Astrophil agrees with his friend, who has accused him of disabusing his mind by devoting himself to the “vain thoughts” of his love, and who has reminded him that “to [his] birth [he] owe[s] / Nobler desires, lest else that friendly foe, / Great expectation, wear a train of shame” (ll. 6–8). Stella, the “star of heavenly fire” and “loadstar of desire” (8th song, ll. 31–32) in Sidney, has her counterpart in Estella, whose “light” comes “along the dark passage” in Satis House towards Pip “like a star” (p. 54).

Furthermore, Endicott sees the “chirp of ‘Philip Pirrip,’” abbreviated as Pip, as an allusion to Philip-Astrophil, who poses (in Sonnet 83) as the jealous rival of the bird, “that Sir Phip,” cherished by Stella. Pip/Phip/Philip is a name that evokes a whole row of literary ladies’ pet sparrows, marked by Skelton’s *Philipp Sparrow* and Gascoigne’s *The Praise of Phillip Sparrow*; especially in the latter case the bird represents lecherous desire.<sup>7</sup> Sidney’s Astrophil, who sees the bird lie “In lilies’ nest, where love’s self lies along” takes up this association. In *Great Expectations*, the whole complex of bird imagery, jealousy and desire is evoked in parody by the Finches, a kind of drinking and quarrelling club of young men, of which both Pip and Bentley Drummles are members. This is where Pip ex-

5 For the concept of the gentleman in Victorian society and literature, see Gilmour, Robin (1981), *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel*, London: Allen & Unwin, who does not, however, refer to Sidney.

6 Dickens, Charles (1958), *Master Humphrey’s Clock* and *A Child’s History of England*, intr. Derek Hudson, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 426, quoted by Endicott (1967), p. 158.

7 The background to this is formed by Catullus’s elegy on Lesbia’s sparrow; cf. Duncan-Jones’s note in Sidney, Sir Philip (2002), *The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. 367.

periences the fiercest pangs of jealousy, as Drummles toasts a lady and calls “upon the company to pledge him to ‘Estella’ [...] of Richmond” (p. 281). The place is another hint. There is a parallel between Bentley Drummles and the “Rich fool” (Sonnet 24) to whom Stella is married, which is assumed to be an allusion to Robert, Lord Rich, the husband of Penelope Devereux, the model of Astrophil’s desired lady. Endicott (p. 160) stresses that “Estella is in [Pip’s] mind inevitably ‘Lady Rich’ [...] for when sent away to Richmond to break other hearts than his, she tells Pip: ‘I am to write to her [Miss Havisham] constantly and see her regularly, and report how I go on – I and the jewels’” (p. 247).

The jewels evoke and transform an image traditionally connected to the admired lady of the Petrarchan lover; thus in the second song of *Astrophil and Stella*, Astrophil, who spies Estella sleeping, makes up his mind to teach his “heavenly jewel” “that she, / When she wakes, is too too cruel” (l. 1, ll. 3–4). Sidney’s alter ego in this song famously ventures to steal not more than a kiss before Stella wakes up and he flees (chiding himself “for not more taking,” l. 28). One single kiss is also all that Pip gets from an intensely cruel Estella, marking their closest physical contact, but this very similarity in Astrophil’s and Pip’s stories of desire and renunciation also points to a crucial difference. Whereas the kiss is stolen from Stella, with Astrophil being mainly defeated by his own timidity (cf. 2nd Song, l. 16), the kiss is granted by Estella in chapter 11 as a mark of condescension and contempt:

[...] she stepped back into the passage, and beckoned me.  
‘Come here! You may kiss me if you like.’

I kissed her cheek as she turned it to me. I think I would have gone through a great deal to kiss her cheek. But, I felt that the kiss was given to the coarse common boy as a piece of money might have been, and that it was worth nothing. (p. 84)

Endicott stresses that the “Petrarchan mistress is cold and heartless in the mind of her lover, and in so far as she rejects *him*. But Estella believes herself to be heartless in actuality, and cold to all. Is this the Petrarchan idea come alive, Pygmalion fashion, and made psychologically credible because of our belief in indoctrination?”<sup>8</sup> (i. e. Miss Havisham’s indoctrination). The crucial difference between *Great Expectations* and *Astrophil and Stella*, I think, consists in the fact that Astrophil is truly convinced of Stella’s beauty reflecting her worth; he suffers, begs Stella: “treat not so hard your slave” and exclaims that “No doom should make one’s heaven become his hell” (Sonnet 86, ll. 9, 14), but all this is because her virtue as a married woman, and his own moral convictions as well as the great expectation connected with his noble birth, are in conflict with his desire, his “rage of longing” (10th Song, l. 24). Pip, by contrast, cannot locate

8 Endicott (1967), p. 160.

nobility anywhere: Estella is brainwashed and he himself does not recognise any truly noble standards to live up to; he conceives of great expectations only in terms of money and an elevated social position being bestowed upon him, as he vaingloriously thinks, by the good fairy Miss Havisham. The conflict consists in a clash between his own version of the rage of longing, when “poor I lay burning and tossing on my bed” (p. 427) and the fact that there is nothing really worth longing for.

In Sonnet 71, Astrophil describes Stella as an example of “How virtue may best lodged in beauty be;” “And not content to be perfection’s heir / Thy self, dost strive all minds that way to move, / Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair; / So while thy beauty draws the heart to love, / As fast thy virtue bends that love to good” (l. 2; ll. 9–13). Astrophil’s problem, if one may put it that way, is that this purely rational refinement does not fully work, as he realises and makes us realise when he exclaims in the last line of the sonnet: “But ah, desire still cries: ‘Give me some food.’”<sup>9</sup> Dickens evokes this Sidneyean context in order to make us see more clearly the kind of love figured forth by what Pip feels for Estella. In chapter 29 (II.10), Pip the narrator gives us a “clue by which [he is] to be followed into [his] poor labyrinth” when he stresses that he did not “invest [Estella] with any attributes save those she possessed.”

According to my experience, the conventional notion of a lover cannot be always true. The unqualified truth is, that when I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. Once for all; I knew to my sorrow, often and often, if not always, that I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be. Once for all; I loved her none the less because I knew it, and it had no more influence in restraining me, than if I had devoutly believed her to be human perfection. (p. 212)

A few lines before, Pip dreams that Miss Havisham “reserved it for me to restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a going and the cold hearths a blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin – in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess.” In other words, Pip’s illusion about himself is what lies at the heart of his frustrated love. If there is no “great expectation” by others connected with his birth and no early promise of valour and talent that he has to live up to like Astrophil, this is the very point of Dickens’s response to Sidney. When Dickens regards Sidney as “one of the best knights [...] of that or any age,” he implicitly acknowledges the timelessness of the role; but this role is not to be played as he has Pip daydream it. The great expectation of which Pip, for such a long time, remains unaware, is the promise given by his fear-inspired but still valorous act

9 Cf. *Great Expectations*: “Been bolting his food, has he?” cried my sister,” p. 11.

of solidarity as a very young child, when he helped Magwitch survive and escape by providing him with food and a file; this is underscored by the brotherly solidarity of Joe, which also forms a part of his childhood and remains similarly unacknowledged until Pip has undergone severe pain and suffering. It is, in the main, an expectation of nobility which has little to do with any form of (public) acknowledgement by others or with social position.<sup>10</sup>

But where does this leave us with regard to Pip’s desire, Pip’s “love of a man”? The novel, as we know from the ambiguity of its many endings,<sup>11</sup> has no real answer to this. Meaning and fulfilment are shown to be possible in the act of brotherly love (or act of care on the most fundamental level of human existence) but not in sexual desire. The only hint at such a meaning is, as far as I can see, Pip’s very “ecstasy of unhappiness” in chapter 44 (p. 334), when he takes leave of Estella. He exclaims that “[y]ou have been the embodiment of every graceful fancy that my mind has ever become acquainted with. [...] in this separation I associate you only with the good, and I will faithfully hold you to that always” (p. 333). I take this to mean that Pip’s desire, in all its frustration, is a sign of that very humanity which enables him to be “good” and enables his mind to produce a “graceful fancy.”<sup>12</sup> In a certain way, ethics and aesthetics transcend desire, but this is not an act of sublimation like the one of which Astrophil despairs. Desire is rather shown to be the human condition which must be acknowledged in order to realise what is good and imaginative.

## 2. The Sidney Myth

Dickens’s use of Sidney as a foil to his story of a young man’s frustrated desire and his wish to become a gentleman is part of a larger picture which includes the image of Dickens himself and the ideals with which his work has been associated.

10 Reed regards the reference to *Astrophil and Stella* in *Great Expectations* as the evocation of a “chivalric code” which is to be recognised as outmoded and has to be overcome. “Attempts to justify the conflicting claims of an honourable ambition and a devotion to an unchanging social order created many examples of twisted logic in the nineteenth century. For Dickens, however, once the Petrarchan model is discarded, this conflict is no longer a problem, for what is to be expected is a far more flexible social order, one which allows ambition and ability to be rewarded” Reed, Jon B. (1990), ‘Astrophil and Estella: A Defense of Poesy’ *SEL* 30, pp. 655–78, p. 675. Whereas Reed thus reads Dickens as ultimately dismissing Sidney, I think that the evocation of Sidney throughout Dickens rather shows the adaptation and transformation of the ethos he represents to him.

11 See Rosenberg, Edgar (1981), ‘Last Words on Great Expectations: A Textual Brief on the Six Endings’ *Dickens Studies Annual* 9, pp. 87–115.

12 This may be compared to Sonnet 45 of *Astrophil and Stella* (*Major Works*, p. 170), in which “fancy drawn by imaged things” (l. 9) is said to be more productive of grace than real life (“with free scope more grace does bring / Than servant’s wreck;” ll. 10–11).

A perhaps somewhat surprising approach to this is opened up through one of the most traumatic events of Dickens's later life. "On Friday 9 June [1865]," Michael Slater writes, "he was returning to London by the so-called 'tidal train' from Folkestone, having left Paris at 7 a.m. Nelly [Ellen Ternan] and an older lady, presumably her mother, were returning with him."<sup>13</sup> At Staplehurst, the train crashed, leaving ten people dead and "many others seriously wounded." Dickens, after taking care of the Ternans, "turned to helping other survivors, and clambered back into his wrecked carriage to fetch his brandy-flask for the purpose."<sup>14</sup> A picture of the accident appeared in the *Illustrated London News*, showing one of the carriages dangling in mid-air,<sup>15</sup> and this is the version that appeared in the weekly *Penny Illustrated Paper* on June 24, 1865 (fig. 1).<sup>16</sup>



Figure 1: The Staplehurst Railway Accident, *Penny Illustrated Paper*, 24 June 1865.

I would like to suggest that this illustration in one of the first illustrated papers for the masses deliberately fused the public image of Dickens with that of "one of the best writers, the best knights, and the best gentlemen, of that or any age," for

<sup>13</sup> Slater, Michael (2009), *Charles Dickens*, New Haven: Yale UP, p. 534.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 535.

<sup>15</sup> See the picture e.g. at [http://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Staplehurst\\_rail\\_crash.jpg](http://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Staplehurst_rail_crash.jpg); cf. also the photograph at <http://www.kentishpeople.co.uk/article.php?id=1>.

<sup>16</sup> Reprinted courtesy of The British Library.

it evoked the most famous story about Sir Philip Sidney, fuelling the myth of the poet-knight, which Dickens himself retold (it goes back to the biography by Sidney's friend Fulke Greville)<sup>17</sup> in *A Child's History of England*, namely the story of his wounding and death at the battle of Zutphen in the Netherlands:

This was Sir Philip Sidney, who was wounded by a musket ball in the thigh as he mounted a fresh horse, after having had his own killed under him. He had to ride back wounded, a long distance, and was very faint with fatigue and loss of blood, when some water, for which he had eagerly asked, was handed to him. But he was so good and gentle even then, that seeing a poor badly wounded common soldier lying on the ground, looking at the water with longing eyes, he said, 'Thy necessity is greater than mine,' and gave it up to him. This touching action of a noble heart is perhaps as well known as any incident in history—is as famous far and wide as the blood-stained Tower of London, with its axe, and block, and murders out of number. So delightful is an act of true humanity, and so glad are mankind to remember it. (p. 426)

The ethical dimension of Sidney as a model writer, knight and gentleman is epitomised in this story, which to Dickens, in his quite unchild-like history of atrocities and abuses, is a thoroughly exceptional one. This interpretation of Sidney's act of self-denial as counterbalancing a history of cruelty is Dickens's own,<sup>18</sup> whereas other additions to Fulke Greville's original account, in particular the emphasis on Sidney as a 'gentleman,' goes back to David Hume's *History of England* (1754–62),<sup>19</sup> which was frequently reprinted.<sup>20</sup> Hume also seems to be the source of specifying the nature of the drink in question as water.<sup>21</sup> Apart from Hume, the legend (and Sidney's chivalry in general) was taken up in numerous popular publications throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On Fulke Greville's account, see Gouws, John (1990).

<sup>18</sup> Thus Dickens's use of Sidney is not example of using "the nineteenth-century myth of the gentleman as a manifestation of ruling class strategy." Gouws, John (1990b), "The Nineteenth-Century Development of the Sidney Legend" *Sir Philip Sidney's Achievements*, ed. M.J.B. Allen / Dominic Baker-Smith / Arthur F. Kinney / Margaret M. Sullivan, New York: AMS Press, pp. 251–60, p. 259.

<sup>19</sup> Hume speaks of "the most perfect model of an accomplished gentleman." Hume, David (1819), *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*. Vol 6. London: Christie et al., p. 113; cf. Gouws, John (1990b), p. 253.

<sup>20</sup> Gouws (1990b), p. 253.

<sup>21</sup> "After this last action, while he was lying on the field mangled with wounds, a bottle of water was brought to him to relieve his thirst; but observing a soldier near him in a like miserable condition, he said, *This man's necessity is still greater than mine*: and resigned to him the bottle of water." Hume (1819), p. 114; cf. Gouws (1990b), p. 253.

<sup>22</sup> Gray's edition of Sidney's *Works* in 1829 included a biography that refers to the scene (pp. 44–45). Cf. also Zouch's biography (first published 1808), in which Sidney is called "the most accomplished gentleman" Zouch, Thomas (1808, 2nd ed. 1809), *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Sir Philip Sidney*, York: Thomas Wilson, p. 371. The appearance of biographies by Davies (1859), Bourne (1862) and Lloyd (1862) confirms that interest in Sidney was high at the time of Dickens's later works. Sidney as a model gentleman and/or the story

Dickens, who had been shaken by the crash himself, handing a hatful of water (rather than brandy) to a beautiful young woman clearly suggests that the reader is to see him as the heir of the Elizabethan poet. I think that this was an allusion to be grasped by a broad readership, for it is just evoked by the story told by the picture but by the composition itself that subtly works on the spectator's memory. When one looks at popular pictorial representations of the story of the common soldier's greater necessity, one notices the similarity to the picture in the *Penny Illustrated Paper*. Representations of Sidney's act of generosity at the battle of Zutphen frequently show a central semi-recumbent figure in white dress in interaction with a darker figure to the left, before a background of confusion and turmoil. Benjamin West painted the scene in 1806 "in the *exemplum virtutis* tradition;"<sup>23</sup> he has two persons interacting with Sidney; one who hands him the water and one who is pointed out by Sidney as its more needful recipient. When the picture is inverted (as it frequently happens when a painting turned into a print) the similarity to the scene in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* becomes quite obvious.<sup>24</sup>

Gouws notices the "slightly effeminate, sentimentally Christlike face" of West's Sidney.<sup>25</sup> However that may be, both the unbearded face and the whiteness of the dress certainly evoke a notion of femininity; the 'male' heroic valour of the soldier is meant to go together with the 'female' virtue of self-denial. This is what we can also observe, in varying degrees, in other nineteenth-century representations of the scene; the whiteness, for example, can be observed in this print

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of Sidney's resigning the water to the dying soldier were also frequently referred to in periodical articles during Dickens's lifetime. Examples are *The Sheffield Mercury* of 26 February 1831, in which the "true definition of a gentleman" is exemplified by Sir Philip Sidney, or *The Morning Chronicle* of 5 October 1855, in which Sidney is called "the model of what noble, chivalrous, gently, and high-hearted man should be." The author adds, though, that Sidney's "great reputation in his own days has hardly survived to ours." This was soon to change in the later 1850s and the 1860s. Further examples are "The Death of Sir Philip Sidney" in *The Manchester Times* of 16 March 1861 and 'Sir Philip Sidney's Last Charge' in *The Manchester Times* of 13 December 1862 (the latter a reprint from Lloyd, Julius [1862], *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney*. London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, pp. 199–202). Cf. also the imaginary conversation of Sidney and Fulke Greville by Charles Knight, which was published in *Household Words* (1852; cf. Endicott [1967], pp. 161–62). For further references to Sidney's reputation in the nineteenth century, see Gouws (1990b) and Garrett, Martin, ed. (1996), *Sidney: The Critical Heritage*, London: Routledge.

23 Gouws (1990b), p. 257. Zouch, in retelling the story, stresses that "[f]ew incidents can afford a more animating and affecting subject to the historical painter," p. 257.

24 Woodmere Art Museum Philadelphia. The Wikimedia Commons file of the painting is to be found at [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin\\_West\\_-\\_The\\_Fatal\\_Wounding\\_of\\_Sir\\_Philip\\_Sidney.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin_West_-_The_Fatal_Wounding_of_Sir_Philip_Sidney.jpg). Gray in his 1829 edition of Sidney's works speaks of West's "celebrated historical painting" (44; he may possibly refer to an earlier painting of West's).

25 Gouws (1990b), p. 257.

that was made by John Rogers after the 18th-century history and portrait painter John Francis Rigaud (fig. 2).<sup>26</sup>



Figure 2: John Rogers (after John Francis Rigaud), *The Death of Sir Philip Sidney* (circa 1830).

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26 Reprinted courtesy of The British Museum. See [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=3095122&partId=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3095122&partId=1). Dickens used the name of the painter for a character (one of his worst criminals) in *Little Dorrit*.



The impression is even stronger in this illustration from *Cassell's Illustrated History of England* of 1858,<sup>27</sup> which, partly because of the long coat and the cushion or flag on which Sidney is seated, is not entirely unlike the picture of the woman in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* (fig. 3).



Figure 3: Death of Sir Philip Sidney at the Battle of Zutphen, *Cassell's Illustrated History of England* (1858).

A few years after the Staplehurst accident, a similar example appeared in Laura Jewry Valentine's anthology of texts, accompanied by images, representing 24 human virtues called *The Nobility of Life* (1869).<sup>28</sup> The picture of Sidney appears as the representative of 'Self-denial' (pp. 129–36) (fig. 4).

When seen in the context of visual representations of Sidney's death, it seems plausible to say that the picture of Dickens at Staplehurst in *The Penny Illustrated Paper* fuses the representation of the noble youthful poet with a Victorian version of the (elderly) knight caring for the damsel in distress.

The composition itself, I think, goes further back, as the recumbent, illuminated figure of a wounded person or corpse takes up the pictorial convention of representing the lamentation of Christ, of which I have selected just one more or less random example, a seventeenth-century painting by Anthony van Dyck. Especially when inverted (like a print) the similarity of composition is striking (fig. 5).<sup>29</sup>

The use of this pictorial motif for the death of Sidney corresponds to the perception of his similarity to Christ in his act of selflessness.<sup>30</sup> To the average

27 Cassell, John (1858), *Illustrated History of England*, Vol. 2. London: W. Kent & Co, p. 511.

28 Reprinted courtesy of The Bridgeman Art Library. The 24 'graces and virtues' also include religion and the four ages of life (childhood, youth, manhood, age).

29 Reprinted courtesy of Lukas – Art in Flanders. The painting is in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp.

30 An example of this perception can be found in 'St Paul's Cathedral – Story of Sir Philip Sidney' by Grace Greenwood (i.e. Sara Jane Lippincott), which is one of her *Stories and*

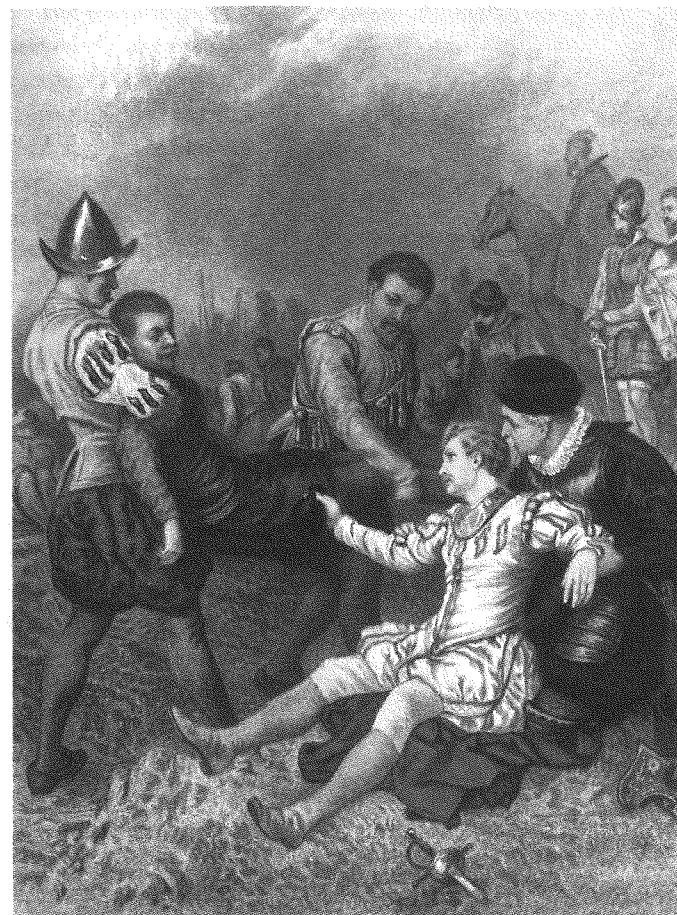


Figure 4: Self-Denial: Sir Philip Sidney at Zutphen, *The Nobility of Life* (1869).

*Legends for Travel and History*: "Oh, in all his noble life, Sir Philip Sidney had never done so grand a deed as this! It was, in truth, a Christ-like act, though performed upon a bloody battle-field, – and it will be remembered and honored while the world endures. [...] we may feel assured that, for the gift of that 'cup of cold water' to the dying soldier, his soul drunk deep of 'the waters of life that now from the throne of the Lamb,' and make beautiful forever the Paradise of God' Greenwood, Grace [Sara Jane Lippincott] (1857), 'St Paul's Cathedral – Story of Sir Philip Sidney' *Stories and Legends for Travel and History*, Boston: Tricknor and Fields, 1857, pp. 25–41, pp. 40–41. On notions of likeness to Christ in Dickens, see Bauer, Matthias (2013), 'Werk und Ebenbild: Religiöse Paradigmen bei Dickens' *Heilige Texte: Literarisierung von Religion und Sakralisierung von Literatur im modernen Roman*, ed. Klaus Antoni / Matthias Bauer / Jan Stievermann / Birgit Weyel / Angelika Zirker, Münster: LIT, pp. 59–84.



Figure 5: Anthony van Dyck, *The Lamentation of Christ* (circa 1629) (mirror-inverted).

reader of the *Penny Illustrated Paper* the aesthetic and literary suggestiveness of the water-giving Dickens need not have been a matter of conscious reflection. Nevertheless, the illustrator and the editors of the paper subtly create an icon of Dickens by establishing a sort of subconscious link to a popular pictorial tradition. In doing so, they take up the notions of the literary artist, the knight, and the selfless Christian that were fused in the representation of Sidney and rearrange them by making Dickens hand the water to the angelic but suffering young woman, who assumes the position of the writer-hero. We are thus reminded that the feminine virtue of selflessness, presented by Dickens himself in such characters as Agnes (in *David Copperfield*) and Little Dorrit, but also in Joe (in *Great Expectations*) is a human quality pertaining to men and women alike.<sup>31</sup>

31 The example may also help us see that Dickens's representations of women are by no means attempts to simply buttress an ideology of the 'angel in the house' but are part of a moral concept in which the 'feminine' virtue of selflessness is part and parcel of the (male) writer's own role. For a recent rebuttal of stereotypical views by critics as regards the representation

The perception of Sidney's and Dickens's cultural role as secular saints has served to contextualise the fact that in *Great Expectations*, Pip's process of recognising his only true 'great expectation(s)' is connected with an act of solidarity, and that the model of Sidney's Astrophil is to make us realise this through similarity and difference. In *Great Expectations*, Dickens thus came to explore the potential of Sidney's poems, whereas before (in *A Child's History*) Sidney had mainly been evoked as a cultural icon. The link is the act of selflessness associated with the name of Sidney, which is integrated into the story of unfulfilled desire. A move into this direction can already be observed in the novel written before *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities*. In this book, a notion of Sidney as an ethical model seems to be at work in the character of Sydney Carton, who is the double and counterpart of Charles Darnay, the latter having assumed a name (his real name is Charles St. Evrémonde), as critics have noticed,<sup>32</sup> which makes him share his initials with Dickens, their first name being the same anyway. Dickens obscured the allusion to Sidney a little (and may have fuelled other associations into the name that way)<sup>33</sup> by choosing to spell the name with two 'y's, which confirms the assumption that the naming of this character is part of a complex game of allusions. The characters were originally named as Charles Darnay and Dick Carton,<sup>34</sup> their first names together forming 'Charles Dick.' Sydney and Charles are closely linked, with Sydney performing the ultimate deed of valour which turns him into an image of Christ himself, as by choosing to die in Charles's stead he puts into practice Jesus's words that "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The picture is completed by the fact that Sydney Carton's story is one of unfulfilled love and renunciation.<sup>35</sup>

of women in Dickens, see Zirker, Angelika (2012), 'Weak, sexless, one-dimensional, boring? Reading Amy Dorrit' *Dickens's Signs, Readers' Designs: New Bearings in Dickens Criticism*, ed. Francesca Orestano / Norbert Lennartz, Rome: Aracne, pp. 169–89.

32 See Sanders' introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens, Charles (1988), *A Tale of Two Cities*, ed. Andrew Sanders, Oxford: Oxford UP, p. xviii.

33 See Sanders, *Companion*, to whom Carton "appear[s] to have been named after Algernon Sydney (1622–83), the republican who was arrested for complicity in the Rye House Plot in 1683 and who was tried on three charges of treason before Judge Jeffreys in November of that year. He was executed on Tower Hill after being found guilty despite his able self-defence. In court and the petitions he drew up setting forth the illegality of his trial." Sanders, Andrew (1988), *The Companion to A Tale of Two Cities*, London: Unwin Hyman, p. 70.

34 For their mirroring, see e.g. Elliott, Kamilla (2009), 'Face Value in *A Tale of Two Cities*' *Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities and the French Revolution*, ed. Colin Jones, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 87–103, p. 100.

35 For the notion of sacrifice in *A Tale of Two Cities*, see Bauer, Matthias / Zirker, Angelika (2013 forthcoming), 'Dickens and Ambiguity: The Case of *A Tale of Two Cities*' *Dickens, Modernism, Modernity*, ed. Christine Huguet / Nathalie Vanfasse, Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire.

The transformations and disguises which mark Dickens's identificatory game with Sir Philip Sidney at least partly hide the fact that it gives expression to a somewhat dangerous kind of desire, as there is the danger of ridiculous self-aggrandisement in the identification with one of the best writers, the best knights, and the best *gentlemen* of any age. The very recognition of this danger and its exorcism by means of satiric contortion shows how acutely present the model must have been to Dickens's mind. No one was more ready to see than Dickens that the nobility of self-denial, like every other virtue, was prone to being perverted (as a parallel case, one thinks of Mrs Skewton in *Dombey and Son* and her praise of natural behaviour). Thus in *Bleak House*, written at the time of *A Child's History*, Dickens scathingly castigates a character who adopts Sidney's famous phrase only to hide his sheer egotism. Mr Turveydrop is a man who coolly accepted that his wife worked herself to death for him and now expects every service from his daughter-in-law, Caroline (Caddy Jellyby).

'Charming! We must take care of our dear Caroline, Miss Summerson. We must spare nothing that will restore her. We must nourish her. My dear Caroline,' he would turn to his daughter-in-law with infinite generosity and protection, 'want for nothing, my love. Frame a wish and gratify it, my daughter. Everything this house contains, everything my room contains, is at your service, my dear. Do not,' he would sometimes add, in a burst of Department, 'even allow my simple requirements to be considered, if they should at any time interfere with your own, my Caroline. Your necessities are greater than mine.' (p. 603)

### 3. A Poetological Point of Reference

This image of perversion in alleged imitation (or allusion) takes us to a third stage in the relationship between Dickens and Sidney. And this is Dickens's recognition of Sidney as the first English writer of an important treatise on literary art. As far as I can see, he never mentioned the title of Sidney's work, but Sidney's blending of Platonic and Aristotelian elements in *An Apology for Poetry* with its characteristic emphasis on teaching not as an alternative to delight but as part and parcel of delight must have had a great appeal to him.<sup>36</sup> Only think of a

<sup>36</sup> Sidney's poems and the *Apology* (or *Defense of Poesy*) could have been known to Dickens through Gray's edition of 1829; William Stigant devoted an essay in the *Cambridge Essays* of 1858 to Sidney and the *Apology* in particular; this was reviewed e.g. in the *Daily News* of 28 December 1858 and in *The Examiner* of 1 January 1859; the latter regrets that "Mr Stigant has omitted to present to his readers" that the *Defense of Poesy* "treats of the soul of poetry rather than of its substance" [Anonymous.] (1859), 'The Literary Examiner' [Review of *Cambridge Essays* (1858)] *The Examiner* (1 January), p. 4. Less likely is Dickens's familiarity with the *Arcadia*, even though a motif like the disfigurement of Esther's face in *Bleak House*, which prevents her from accepting Woodcourt's attentions, is surprisingly like Parthenia's story in

statement like the following and its possible application to Dickens: "For these [i. e. the poets] indeed do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach: and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger, and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved."<sup>37</sup>

Dickens's prevalent method in doing so, however, is to supply that goodness with foils, of which we have seen a sample in Mr Turveydrop. Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* is another and more complex one. She also serves to show that, to Dickens, the poetological dimension of his relationship to Sidney transcends the ethical one or rather integrates it into a wider notion of what literary creation may be and do, that is, its specific epistemological function. In Sidney's view (and, I hold, in Dickens's view, too), the writer must be regarded as the creator of a microcosm that gives us an idea of what life is meant to be. In Dickens, especially his later novels, this is rarely shown as an image of perfection but is rather presented so as to make us see truth in its false image and corruption. This is most strikingly done when the creative faculty itself is presented in its perversion:

I knew not how to answer, or how to comfort her. That she had done a grievous thing in taking an impressionable child to mould into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection, and wounded pride, found vengeance in, I knew full well. But that, in shutting out the light of day, she had shut out infinitely more; that, in seclusion, she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences; that, her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must and will that reverse the appointed order of their Maker; I knew equally well. And could I look upon her without compassion, seeing her punishment in the ruin she was, in her profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed, in the vanity of sorrow which had become a master mania, like the vanity of penitence, the vanity of remorse, the vanity of unworthiness, and other monstrous vanities that have been curses in this world?

'Until you spoke to her the other day, and until I saw in you a looking-glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done. What have I done! What have I done!' (*Great Expectations*, pp. 364–65)

The arch-vanity of Miss Havisham consists in her attempt to become a Maker in such a way that she perverts or reverses the natural or divine creation by reproducing her own despair and hurt pride in another human being. By contrast, the creative writer who presents this process makes visible the unfallen human

Book 1 of the *Arcadia*. Parthenia, after her face has become disfigured (in her case, by the poison of "the wicked Demagoras") rejects Argalus: "for truth is, that so in heart she loved him as she could not find in her heart he should be tied to what was unworthy in his presence." Sidney, Sir Philip (1977), *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 90–91.

<sup>37</sup> Sidney, Sir Philip (2002), *An Apology for Poetry* (or *The Defence of Poesy*), ed. Geoffrey Shepherd and R.W. Maslen, Manchester: Manchester UP, p. 87.

nature in the fallen one. Dickens gives expression to this in a contribution to *Household Words*, in which he ironically speaks of “the truly contemptible conceit of finding in poor humanity the fallen likeness of the angels of God,” which is the artist’s prime achievement.<sup>38</sup> It is in this sense, I think, that Dickens’s deepest affinity to Sidney comes to be noticed:

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison, to balance the highest point of man’s wit with the efficacy of nature: but rather give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man to His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature, which in nothing he showeth so much as in Poetry; when with the force of a divine breath, he bringeth things forth surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam: since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it. (pp. 85–86)<sup>39</sup>

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38 ‘Old Lamps for New Ones’ p. 244. See Bauer (2013), p. 64.

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## 2.2 Dickens and the Commedia dell'arte

### 1. Introductory

I begin with George Sand and her son Maurice. In January 1856 the great French singer Pauline Viardot (the love of Turgenev's life) arranged a dinner party in Paris for Dickens and George Sand to meet. They may have got along rather better than the often-quoted account in Forster's biography would suggest, for in another letter to Wilkie Collins Dickens is surprised and impressed by her domesticity and ordinariness: "she has nothing of the Bas bleue about her, and is very quiet and agreeable."<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the hoaxer A.D. Harvey who regaled us with an imaginary conversation between Dickens and Dostoevsky, I do not know what they talked about that evening. But since her son Maurice was also present, it is possible to speculate that one of the three might have steered the conversation towards a number of shared enthusiasms – for amateur theatricals, perhaps, or marionettes. Amongst George Sand's favourite 'motherly' domestic activities was the making of costumes for her son's puppets to wear – Edith Wharton, visiting Nohant le Rotrou in 1907, imagines her at work: "Here, one likes especially to fancy, Maurice Sand exercised his chisel on the famous marionettes for the little theatre, while his mother, fitting their costumes with skilful fingers, listened, silent *comme une bête*, to the dissertations of Gautier, Flaubert, or Dumas," and goes on to describe some of the products, still to be seen there today: "There they stand in wistful rows, the duenna, the Chimène, the *grande cocotte*, Pantaloon, Columbine, and Harlequin."<sup>2</sup>

For the wider point to stress about George Sand and her son's domestic marionette labours in the years when Dickens met them is that they were focussed around a project of renewal and rediscovery of the tradition of *commedia*

1 Dickens, Charles (1995), Letter to Wilkie Collins 19 January 1856, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 8, ed. Graham Storey / Kathleen Tillotson, Oxford: Clarendon, p. 29.

2 Wharton, Edith (1908), *A Motor-Flight through France*, New York: Scribners, p. 81, p. 83.