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JASPER PACKLEMERTON, VICTORIAN FREAK

By Kelly Hager

ONE OF THE *OED*'S DEFINITIONS of the word "freak" is that of a freak of nature, "a monstrosity, an abnormally developed individual of any species; a living curiosity exhibited in a show." The freak of nature I wish to focus on in this essay is marriage, and specifically, marriage as it is "exhibited" in Dickens's novel *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41). To refer to marriage in a Victorian novel as a freak of nature is perhaps surprising. To refer to the sacred institution as freakish in a Dickens novel may seem to border on heresy. After all, Dickens is the self-appointed novelist of hearth and home, the creator of conservative domestic plots that celebrate marriage as the institution that establishes closure for the novel and for the society it represents. Despite this apparent conservatism and despite our vague sense that most marriages in Dickens are as happy as David and Agnes's, Esther and Allen Woodcourt's, Biddy and Joe's, it is in fact the case that in all his novels, from *The Pickwick Papers* to *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens is fascinated – in a multiplicity of ways both large and small, in a manner that is alternately comic, tragic, melodramatic, ironic – with marriage's discontents. In fact, the disintegration of the institution is one of the things that Dickens makes fictions from, giving the failure of marriage a surprisingly high degree of visibility and presenting the breaking of the matrimonial bond with remarkable clarity and persistence. Dickens novels are full of wives who leave their husbands (Edith Dombey, Lady Dedlock, Louisa Gradgrind), breach of promise suits (in *Pickwick* and *Our Mutual Friend* most famously) and characters who try to find legal ways of escaping their marriages (Stephen Blackpool, Betsey Trotwood, *Nickleby*'s Madame Mantalini). This essay, then, is an analysis of how Dickens undermines the institution early in his career, and of how the comic and grotesque display of the body, the sprawling, teeming physical surfaces of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, both conceal and reveal a story of marital skepticism.

The story that Dickens both does and does not want to draw our attention to in *Curiosity Shop* (but always, I would argue, wants to tell), is one that we have been trained to ignore. Ever since Ian Watt's enormously influential *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), we have accepted the theory that marriage is the goal of the domestic novel. As Ruth Yeazell reminds us, the period of courtship is traditionally viewed as "the special province of the English novel" (50). And because we subscribe to that traditional view, because we accept Watt's assertion that "the great majority of novels written since *Pamela* have continued its basic pattern and concentrated their main interest upon a courtship leading to marriage," we ignore the significance of all the other stories of marriage contained within the pages of a novel and all the novels that tell another story (148–49). More broadly, then, this essay seeks to contest

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the privilege students of fiction have accorded the courtship plot. While the courtship plot certainly emerges in the eighteenth-century novel, that plot has been inaccurately established as a critical paradigm, valorized as pattern for the novel in general. Thus, critics of the British novel tend to abstract as a norm a version of union that the texts themselves everywhere put in jeopardy, and our attention has been deflected from the prevalence of failed marriages in the pages of domestic novels. Dickens is an especially telling site for this study of what I call the failed-marriage plot because, just as the novel tradition is simplistically flattened into the courtship tradition, Dickens is misread as the novelist of hearth and home, while the grotesqueries of marriage he describes are elided and repressed.

In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Dickens surveys British popular culture, canvassing it for images of marital fracture. He discovers and establishes a repertoire of images for expressing marital discontent, a pool of images that will find their fullest expression in the Parliamentary debates over the legalization of divorce in the late 1850s, in Caroline Norton's stories of matrimonial cruelty, and in the more explicit divorce novels of Thomas Hardy and Arnold Bennett toward the end of the century. As the parade of dwarves and miniatures in *Curiosity Shop* might suggest, marriage becomes increasingly denaturalized as the century progresses. Metaphors like "the angel in the house" and Ruskinian queens in their gardens compete with Eliza Lynn Linton's description of husbands as "marriage gaolers" and Queen Victoria's assessment of marriage as a lottery.[1] The popularity of Punch and Judy shows in the early part of the century, a popularity that Dickens relies on in the construction of his plot, suggests how visible – and how amusing – the figure of the wife-beater was in Victorian culture. Marriage had also become an increasingly secularized affair. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the standard procedure for marriage was a church ceremony, but in 1836, the Civil Marriage Law made marriage by a public registrar legal, and in 1857, the Matrimonial Causes Act legalized divorce, thus effectively turning what had once been a sacrament into a juridical matter. In 1840, then, Dickens at once responds to this less reverent view of marriage, participates in the interrogation of the institution that will culminate in the legalization of divorce and the several Married Women's Property Acts later in the century, and anticipates the cynical attitude toward marriage that will predominate in novels at the end of the century.

Dickens's cynicism toward the institution at this point in his career (and at this point in cultural history) is perhaps most tellingly revealed by the fact that the bad marriages to which he treats the reader in *The Old Curiosity Shop* are, quite literally, monstrous. They are composed of ill-assorted parts (much like the harpy or the minotaur), made up of a man and woman who are so ill-matched that their union is as freakish and aberrant as the mythological creatures they metaphorically resemble. Good marriages are presented as just as much of an aberration in that they are portrayed as curiosities, as objects on display. They are literally curiosities in that they are, to quote the *OED* again, depicted as "odd, rare, strange, novel." Appropriately enough, both the monstrosities and the curiosities, both the unhappy and the happy couples are put on display, in a kind of freak show or curio cabinet, respectively. The happy couples – Kit and Barbara, the Garlands, both Senior and Junior, Dick and the Marchioness – are not only comic characters (a status that suggests they are not to be taken seriously), but they are also miniatures, perfectly posed little figures of preciousness or of strangely appealing quirkiness. They are made much of as specimens or rarities. By the same token, unhappy marriages are exhibited in a kind of freak show. Consider how the women of the neighborhood congregate in the Quilps' parlor to gawk

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over "pretty little, mild-spoken, blue-eyed" Mrs. Quilp and her "strange infatuation" for her misshapen and equally misanthropic husband (73; ch. 4). Or for a more literal example of this kind of display, consider Jasper Packlemerton, the freak that gives this essay its title. Jasper Packlemerton is a serial killer and a serial husband. He is a curiosity in that he is one of the figures in Mrs. Jarley's waxworks, and he is a monster in that he merits his place in the waxworks for having tickled his fourteen wives to death. That their deaths are no laughing matter is suggested by the story Mrs. Jarley teaches Nell to tell about this freak of a husband: "on being brought to the scaffold and asked if he was sorry for what he had done, he replied yes, he was sorry for having let 'em off so easy, and hoped all Christian husbands would pardon him the offence. Let this be a warning to all young ladies to be particular in the character of the gentlemen of their choice" (285; ch. 28). The fact that this warning could serve as the moral of all the novel's stories of marriage leads me to nominate Jasper Packlemerton as the emblematic freak of *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

I want, therefore, to concentrate on Mrs. Jarley's warning, to take Jasper Packlemerton's story as a cautionary tale, and to see what happens to our reading of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (and, by extension, to our reading of the Victorian novel) if we look carefully at the story of marriage it tells. As Chris Baldick reminds us in his study of the myth of the monster in the nineteenth century, the word "monster" comes from the Latin *monstrare*, the French *montrer*, the English *demonstrate*. A monster is something to be shown; its purpose is "to reveal visibly the results of vice, folly, and unreason, as a warning to erring humanity" (10). Or as Marie-Hélène Huet succinctly puts it, "monstrosity always reveals a truth" (128). I want to argue that the real monster, the most chilling freak of nature in *The Old Curiosity Shop* is not so much Quilp, or the waxworks, or any of the performers we see at the Jolly Sandboys (the giant, the "little lady without legs or arms," Sweet William, who puts "leaden lozenges into his eyes and brings[s] them out at his mouth"), but rather the institution of marriage (203; ch. 19). I want thus to suggest that this monster – this institution – which is at the heart of the novel, which we are accustomed to thinking of as the goal of the domestic novel, functions as a warning, that the story of marriage (as opposed to the story of courtship) is as often a cautionary tale as it is a story of happily-ever-after. Such an approach will not only enable us to find what is perhaps the most monstrous marriage of all in *Curiosity Shop*, but will also help us see that it is this miserable marriage that sets the plot of *Curiosity Shop* in motion and that provides the novel with its narrative energy. By extension, then, this approach will suggest the importance of the failed-marriage plot in the English novel more generally as a prevalent and fecund narrative device.

The first marriage I want to examine, the one that generates the story that is *The Old Curiosity Shop*, is hidden, appropriately enough, at the center of the novel's maze-like plot. Like the minotaur at the center of the maze Minos has Daedalus construct to hide the shame of his wife's infidelity, it is a monstrosity of betrayal and of uncontrolled appetites. This marriage is the wretched union of Nell's parents, a marriage the novel asks us to believe is so miserable that it warps Nell's grandfather's mind and turns him into a miser desperate enough to steal from his own granddaughter, to endanger her life and her virtue, and to fall prey to Quilp. While few readers even remember Nell's mother's marriage, much less the fact that it is crucial for making any sense of the plot, this kind of forgetfulness has everything to do with the monstrosity of marriage, with the fact that we refuse to take seriously the tragic consequences of a failed marriage and blame Nell's plight instead on Quilp, a monster we can more easily countenance. Rather than acknowledge the far-reaching and ultimately

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fatal consequences of Nell's parents' marriage (rather than link the reason Nell and her grandfather have to leave their home and the events that account for Quilp's hold over them to that marriage), we let Quilp shoulder all the blame, as we turn the novel into a familiar story of threatened innocence and overwhelming greed.[2]

It is true that we are not told about Nell's mother's marriage until late in the novel, and it is also true that we are given few details about this marriage, and that this story is presented as one of only marginal significance, of interest to the single gentleman more than anyone else. But when we learn about the marriage of Nell's mother, we also learn why her grandfather is so obsessed with money and how and why Quilp can exercise such terrifying control over her grandfather. In chapter 69 we are given the prehistory of the novel: we learn that the single gentleman who has been so tirelessly searching for Nell and her grandfather is actually her great-uncle, her grandfather's long-lost brother, and we hear – finally – the grandfather's story, which establishes the connection between his love for Nell and his miserliness, explaining both Nell's iconic status in his heart and his obsession with money. Here, then, is that story.

Nell's grandfather and the single gentleman are in love with the same woman, but when he discovers their rivalry, the single gentleman leaves the country so as not to compete with his older brother. The older brother marries this "Good Angel," who then dies in giving birth to their daughter (637; ch. 69). That daughter is her mother all over again, and thus she is loved by her father both for her sake and for the sake of her dead mother. The story of her life is told succinctly: "She grew to womanhood, and gave her heart to one who could not know its worth." Her father is thus condemned to watch "the misery which followed this union" and also to suffer from the poverty her husband brings upon them all (637; ch. 69). Broken-hearted and beggared, he is left twelve years later with his two orphaned grandchildren: a boy who is the image of his cruel, improvident father and who soon abandons what is left of his family; and a girl who is the image of her mother and her grandmother. Left alone with this little girl, whom he loves with all the love he had for "the two dead people who had been nearest and dearest to his heart," and who serves as a constant reminder of her mother's sufferings, he falls prey to the obsession that will dictate the course of his life and bring him under Quilp's power (638; ch. 69). That is, he can think of nothing but the "gloomy dread of poverty and want," not as it might affect him, but insofar as it might touch Nell, the image of everything he holds dear. This fear is a "spectre in his house, and haunted him night and day" (638; ch. 69).

With the revelation of this story, everything suddenly snaps into place: Nell's status in the novel in general, and in her grandfather's heart in particular, as an angel, an icon, something not of this world; her grandfather's sickening greed; and the hold Quilp has over him; not to mention the logic behind the proliferation of bachelors and the barely disguised hysteria with which even the happiest of marriages is depicted in this novel. We are told that it is precisely because he had to stand by and see the "misery" of his daughter's marriage from day to day, because he was powerless to prevent "her ill-usage and unhappiness," because Nell's face reminds him "of all the suffering he had watched and known, and all his child had undergone" that he loses his wits and becomes a man so obsessed with money that he will even steal from Nell in his pathetic attempt to protect her (637–38; ch. 69). Watching what the narrator calls "the struggles of their daily life, too mean and pitiful to tell, but dreadful to endure" has, we are given to believe, broken his spirit and warped his mind (637; ch. 69). Having to witness the failure of marriage up close and day-to-day has created a monomaniac and a plot of monomania. In short, the marriage of Nell's mother and father has put the plot

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of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, surely one of the most perverse and violent of Dickens' novels, into motion.

Yet the failure of marriage functions as something of a mystery in this novel. Not only does the revelation of the failed marriage that is at the heart of the plot come late in the narrative (we do not learn about Nell's mother's marriage until five chapters from the end of the novel), but it is also information that is only revealed after a long investigation into what seems like an entirely unrelated mystery. The single gentleman, after chapters and chapters of searching for Nell and her grandfather and mysteriously protecting his identity, tells the story of Nell's mother's marriage only to the benevolent Mr. Garland and only when it seems certain that they have discovered his great-niece and his long-lost brother. But the most curious thing about the failure of marriage at the heart of this plot is that its revelation does not have the spectacular effect we usually associate with full disclosure. While we may be surprised to learn that Nell's grandfather and the single gentleman are brothers and that it is the degradation and misery of Nell's mother's marriage that so perverts her grandfather's reason, none of these revelations comes as a bombshell. The failure of marriage neither comes as much of a surprise nor has much of an impact on our sense or our memory of this novel.

In order to understand why this is so – why and how the monster at the heart of this novel remains so effectively hidden – I turn to what the novel so brazenly puts on display: to the monstrous and curious marriages I alluded to at the beginning of this piece, and to the displays of marriage we get throughout the novel in the shape of the Punch and Judy show and the traveling waxworks. I turn, then, to what the novel so desperately wants to show us and to what Dickens uses to distract us from the failed marriage of Nell's nameless parents, to keep us from attending to its significance – for Nell and for the novel.

As I posited in beginning this essay, both the rarity, the curiosity, of the happy marriages and the monstrosity of the unhappy ones suggest that marriage is an unnatural state of affairs in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. For instance, the fact that the narrator feels compelled to make it clear that Kit and Barbara's story does end in matrimony suggests that such a happy ending is not to be counted upon. And while he gives us this news in a series of rhetorical questions, questions that insist the answers go without saying, the answers to these questions suggest they are more grammatical than rhetorical, that there is more than one possible answer: "Did Kit live a single man all his days, or did he marry? Of course he married, and who should be his wife but Barbara?" (671; ch. 73). That Kit might indeed "live a single man all his days" is very much a possibility in this novel so overrun with bachelors. And to the question "who should be his wife but Barbara?" we might answer: Little Nell, if she had not died. This is certainly Barbara's fear. Thus, in trying to present their marriage as a foregone conclusion, the narrator betrays his anxiety about the outcome of their courtship, even as he tries to insist that these sorts of things always work out just as they are supposed to.

The narrator's description of the Garlands' cottage suggests that their marriage is, like Kit and Barbara's, unnaturally serendipitous, that it too represents an almost unbelievable kind of happily-ever-after:

> To be sure, it was a beautiful little cottage, with a thatched roof and little spires at the gable ends, and pieces of stained glass in some of the windows, almost as large as pocket-books. On one side of the house was a little stable, just the size for the pony, with a little room over it, just the size for Kit. White curtains were fluttering, and birds, in cages that looked as bright as if they were made of gold, were singing, at the windows; plants were arranged on either side of the path, and clustered about the door; and the garden was bright with flowers in full bloom, which shed a sweet odour all round, and

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> had a charming and elegant appearance. Everything, within the house and without, seemed to be the perfection of neatness and order. In the garden, there was not a weed to be seen, and to judge from some dapper gardening-tools, a basket, and a pair of gloves which were lying in one of the walks, old Mr. Garland had been at work in it that very morning. (232–33; ch. 22)

This is a cottage straight out of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," a cottage where everything is "just the [right] size" and even the mess that Mr. Garland has left in the garden is pleasing to the eye. Or perhaps this is more Martha Stewart than Goldilocks; those "dapper gardening tools," the white curtains, and the "pieces of stained glass in some of the windows" suggest the sustained effort that goes into the appearance of easy charm that is her trademark. Like Martha Stewart's creations, too, Garlands' cottage is unnatural. No weeds, "the perfection of neatness and order" – we disbelieve the picture as too good to be true even as we enjoy it. This is precisely Kit's reaction to the house and to his new life with the Garlands, and it's also our reaction to their cheerful benevolence and their unfailingly cheerful state of mind. So while their marriage (indeed, their life) is undoubtedly happy, it is too much so for us to take seriously. They are Kit's fairy godparents, characters from an entirely different genre; so while we enjoy the charming picture they present, we do not make any connection between their story and the other more sordid and realistic plots of *Curiosity Shop*. The Garlands are so picturesque that we immediately discount them, even as we admire them and all that belongs to them.

The fairy-tale continues into the next generation and the happy marriage of the junior Mr. and Mrs. Garland. When young Abel Garland enters into a business partnership, his parents host a party in celebration of the event, a Cinderella-like affair that sets in motion another fairy-tale story of true love:

> Unto this ball there happened to be invited the most bashful young lady that was ever seen, with whom Mr. Abel happened to fall in love. *How* it happened, or how they found it out, or which of them first communicated the discovery to the other, nobody knows. But certain it is that in course of time they were married; and equally certain it is that they were the happiest of the happy; and no less certain it is that they deserved to be so. (666–67; ch. 73)

The proliferation of absolutes in the narrator's depiction of this marriage ("the most bashful young lady that was ever seen"; "the happiest of the happy") suggests not only the state of perfection Abel and his bashful wife share with the Senior Garlands, but these descriptions also seem like captions or titles, as if young Mrs. Garland were perhaps an exhibit in a circus, alongside the fat lady and the world's tallest boy. These are the storybook versions of the freaks Nell meets at the Jolly Sandboys, just as their marriage is the antithesis of Daniel and Betsy Quilps'. That the young Garlands deserve to be put on display is underscored by the way the narrator announces the rather unsurprising fact that they not only marry, but have children: "And it is pleasant to write down that they reared a family; because any propagation of goodness and benevolence is no small addition to the aristocracy of nature, and no small subject of rejoicing for mankind at large" (667; ch. 73). The raising of a family, while certainly not an unusual occurrence (especially not in Dickens) is here valorized as "no small subject for rejoicing"; having children is iconized as the "propagation of goodness and benevolence" and a sizeable contribution to "the aristocracy of nature." This is no ordinary marriage, and the Garlands are no mere happy family. They are extolled as public benefactors and national heroes.

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After all this hyperbole, the happy ending rewarded to Dick and the Marchioness seems positively down-to-earth:

> Sophronia was ever a most cheerful, affectionate, and provident wife to him; and Dick (excepting for an occasional outbreak with Mr. Chuckster, which she had the good sense rather to encourage than oppose) was to her an attached and domesticated husband. And they played many hundred thousand games of cribbage together. And let it be added to Dick's honour, that, though we have called her Sophronia, he called her the Marchioness from first to last. (669; ch. 73)

The parenthetical admission that Dick still swivels on occasion comes as something of a relief, just as the not insignificant detail of their cribbage games suggests a realistic dailyness about their marriage. And, happily, Dick honors his wife. She is neither the stereotypical angel of his house nor the domineering queen of his castle. Rather, she is the Marchioness of his heart. But even here, the absolutes claim our attention. The Marchioness "was ever a most cheerful, affectionate, and provident wife," while her husband honors her with her royal title "from first to last." What is more, the Swiveller has been "domesticated."

All of these marriages, then, are brought out for display, put on parade, marveled over and remarked upon as if they were each as miraculous and unusual a state of affairs as you could ever hope to come across. They are like nothing so much as tchotchkes in a curio cabinet, almost unbelievably adorable matched pairs of knickknacks. They are little and they make you smile and they are not meant to be taken seriously. It is, in fact, no accident that all of the couples I have been describing are small.[3] Not dwarves, like Quilp, but miniatures or midgets. As Susan Stewart makes clear in *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection,* "the contrast between dwarf and midget, between the grotesque and the model" is crucial. "The dwarf," she reminds us, in a passage that seems to be written explicitly about *The Old Curiosity Shop*, "is assigned to the domain of the grotesque and the underworld, the midget to the world of the fairy – a world of the natural, not in nature's gigantic aspects, but in its attention to the perfection of detail" (111).[4] Stewart's concept of the "miniature" is an especially accurate term for the world that contains the baby cottage of the Garlands, with its kitchen that looks like it belongs in a toy-shop, the diminutive Marchioness, and coy little Barbara. It is a realm that Stewart associates with the model, a connection that Dickens also makes when he displays these happy little marriages as curios or rarities. According to Stewart, "the miniature always tends toward tableau rather than towards narrative, towards silence and spatial boundaries" (66). By virtue of its size, the miniature is something on display, something that fascinates us and holds our gaze. We are transfixed by the tiny picture of perfection we see in the Garlands' cottage and by Barbara's demure prettiness, ensconced as it is in the dollhouse kitchen, just as we are charmed by the Marchioness's small form and by the curiously appealing picture she makes when Dick first sees her – "Dick leant over the table and descried a small slipshod girl in a dirty coarse apron and bib, which left nothing visible of her but her face and feet. She might as well have been dressed in a violin-case" (332; ch. 34). But because we look upon these characters as objects on display rather than as characters that participate in and propel the plot, as "tableau" instead of "narrative," we unconsciously distance ourselves from them and refuse to them the kind of status we grant to other fictional characters. Because they are so small, they afford us what Stewart calls "a transcendent and simultaneous view," yet it is this bird's eye view that "traps [us] outside the possibility of a lived reality of the miniature" (66). Unlike those plots

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we find "absorbing," those novels that, to borrow Richard Brodhead's intuitively accurate terms, we "get into," that "open up a world-within-a-world with the power to enclose the reader within [their] projected horizons," unlike the kind of reading that is a "going-out of oneself into intersubjective space," the way we respond to these characters would be more accurately described as gazing or looking or viewing (46).

Our reading of the miniature, then, is not participatory but detached; we do not enter into it as we do when we "read for the plot," as Peter Brooks would put it. We are more like shoppers or tourists than Brooks's plot-obsessed novel readers. That kind of engaged reading is highly participatory; Brooks describes it as "a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text." The miniature does not "arouse and make use of [the reader's] desire" but rather presents us with what Stewart calls "a world of arrested time" (Brooks 37, Stewart 67). Stewart associates this "stillness" with the structure of fantasy, and the precise nature of that fantasy is, like those pictures of marital bliss I have collected from *Curiosity Shop*, one of domestic tranquility. Similarly, Andrew Miller argues that "the representation of the miniature . . . creates an imaginary space away from the fragmenting urban environment in which one feels 'more at home"' (138). Like the little fortified Walworth of *Great Expectations*, where Wemmick feels most at home, the "miniature world [tends] to present domesticated space as a model of order, proportion, and balance . . . a diminutive and thereby manipulatable, version of experience, a version which is domesticated and protected from contamination" (Stewart 68–69).

We have only to think about the other version of smallness – the dwarf, the grotesque – to understand the importance of the protection afforded by the tableau and to be reminded of precisely what threatens to contaminate the happy domesticity of these little couples. For while they are all, ultimately, protected and even somewhat removed from the novel's other, more immediate and "absorbing" plots, that is not to say that these pictures of marital bliss are not threatened or that the world of the novel does not, from time to time, penetrate the boundaries of their picturesque existence. Daniel Quilp represents, both literally and figuratively, the dangers that threaten the peace of the Garlands, the Nubbles, and the Swivellers. Literally, Quilp imprisons Kit and tries to use Dick to entrap Nell. Figuratively, the monstrosity of his marriage contaminates the portrayal of these other, determinedly happy marriages the novel depicts, creating a tension, which the novel never resolves in anything but a provisional fashion, between the fictitiousness of the happy marriage and the grotesquerie of marital failure. The one drives the other almost completely out of sight. Thus we find it hard to consider the marriage of the miniatures alongside that of the dwarf. We find it almost unfathomable that the relationship between Betsy and Daniel Quilp belongs in the same category as that of Kit and Barbara. Yet thinking about them together enables us to see that marriage in *Curiosity Shop* – whether happy or unhappy, a pretty little picture or an appalling sight – is not only an unnatural state of affairs, but one that the novel is invested in displaying to its readers in all its different forms.

A sinister version of "Beauty and the Beast," the Quilps' marriage is both a fairy tale gone wrong and a rather literal monstrosity, composed as it is of a couple that is ill-matched both in temperament and appearance. This monstrosity functions as a warning or a demonstration not only because Quilp is so cruel to his wife that her mother and all her friends encourage her to rebel, but also because the narrator encourages us to believe that Mrs. Quilp "performed a sound practical penance for her folly [in marrying the dwarf] every day of her life" (73; ch. 4). This action brings to mind the ritual lamentations of *David Copperfield*'s Mrs. Micawber,

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another wife who meditates on her marriage on a daily basis. But whereas Mrs. Micawber revisits her marriage vows and comes to the conclusion that she cannot leave her husband, turning that realization into a *faux* pledge of allegiance to her husband ("I will not desert Mr. Micawber!"), Mrs. Quilp actually does the opposite. That is, while Emma Micawber wants to leave her husband and only insists that she will not because she cannot, Betsy Quilp does not want to leave her husband and is continually threatened by women who insist that she must.

She thus has more in common with another Betsy, also in *Copperfield*, David's great-aunt Betsey Trotwood, a woman who leaves her husband because of his cruelty but never stops loving him, who is by his side at his death-bed, and who remains a faithful, generous, loving (ex-)wife throughout the novel.[5] Like Betsey Trotwood, Betsy Quilp inexplicably loves her abusive husband. When we first meet Mr. Quilp, he tells us that this is the case: "obedient, timid, loving Mrs. Quilp . . . will be anxious and know not a moment's peace till I return. I know she is always in that condition when I'm away" (68–69; ch. 3). Of course we do not believe him. But in this case we are wrong to mistrust the dwarf, for when he returns to her after he has been presumed dead, she is, much to our surprise, genuinely relieved to see him, though the narrator still has difficulty accepting her devotion: "In truth Mrs. Quilp did seem a great deal more glad to behold her lord than might have been suspected, and did evince a degree of interest in his safety which, all things considered, was rather unaccountable" (463; ch. 50). The narrator has not considered exactly everything, though, nor is Mrs. Quilp's attachment to her husband really "unaccountable." She accounts for it herself the very first time we meet her. In that first scene, when her mother and all her friends are encouraging her to stand up to Quilp, to resist his control, and as they pity her for being married to such a tyrant, she sets them all straight:

> "It's all very fine to talk," said Mrs. Quilp with much simplicity, 'but I know that if I was to die to-morrow, Quilp could marry anybody he pleased – now that he could, I know! . . . Quilp has such a way with him when he likes, that the best-looking woman here couldn't refuse him if I was dead, and she was free, and he chose to make love to her. Come!" (75–76; ch. 4)

This declaration surely points to the most perverse way in which the Quilps' marriage is unnatural and unusual, to the clearly sexual nature of their relationship and to Quilp's "unaccountable" but irresistible ("the best-looking woman here couldn't refuse him") sex appeal. Again, the Betsys have this in common, for as Betsey Trotwood admits to David, her attraction to her husband was largely sexual, and it is an attraction she still feels: "'he was a fine-looking man when I married him,' said my aunt, with an echo of her old pride and admiration in her tone" (562; ch. 47).

At this point it sounds very much like I am arguing that a marriage based on sexual attraction is unnatural and unusual, and while it is tempting to argue that in Dickens those who marry for sex are always suspect (think of David's unmistakable but disastrous sexual attraction to Dora or of Pet Meagles and Henry Gowan in *Little Dorrit*), my point here is both more complex and perhaps more perverse. All of Betsy Quilp's friends "bridle up" when she insists on their susceptibility to Quilp's attractions (76; ch. 4). They immediately spring to the defensive, "as much as to say, 'I know you mean me. Let him try – that's all'" (76; ch. 4). But they also become strangely jealous. When a widow insists that she "should stab him if he hinted at it," Mrs. Quilp's friends are, oddly enough, more enraged by the widow's threat than they are by Betsy's assertion of Quilp's charms: "for some hidden reason

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they were all angry with the widow, and each lady whispered in her neighbour's ear that it was very plain the said widow thought herself the person referred to, and what a puss she was!" (76; ch. 4). Three elements of this reaction seem important: first, the fact that the woman all the others are resentful of is a widow (and thus more available to Quilp than they are); second, that she sets herself above them and insists on a higher – and more violent – degree of resentment; and third, that the ladies call the widow "a puss" for thinking that Quilp would be any more attracted to her than to the rest of them. When combined with her availability, the fact that she wants to stab Quilp is suggestive. When we go on to consider what it means that the other women call her "a puss," a term that has connotations not only of slyness but also, more literally, suggests that she is something of a cat, that she is, as the *OED* would have it, "one who scratches like a cat; a spiteful or backbiting woman," then we are left with the overwhelming sense that Mrs. Quilp is right and that all these women have already, albeit unconsciously, begun their maneuvers to become the second Mrs. Quilp. Finally, and perhaps most relevant here is the fact that "puss" also has a sexual connotation; it is, as Eric Partridge so delicately puts it in his *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, slang for "the female pudend" (671). Taken in this register, then, the conversation among the women points unmistakably to the very physical relation they would all like to enjoy with Quilp.

My point is not so much that sex plays an unnaturally important part in the Quilps' marriage, but rather that Dickens has created a figure that is unnaturally sexual. Quilp is both an unlikely sex object because he is so physically repulsive (Paul Schlicke calls him a "freak-show creature let loose"), and he is overly (and overtly) sexed in that every woman in this scene (and every woman in the world, according to his besotted Betsy) finds him attractive (101). I hope I am not being normative when I say that this is monstrous. Remember, the *OED* defines a freak of nature as "an abnormally developed individual of any species," and this scene suggests that it is not only Quilp's head that is oversize. Indeed, when we first see Quilp, the narrator takes pains to inform us that while he is "so low in stature as to be quite a dwarf," "his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant" (65; ch. 3). Again, we see the proliferation of absolutes that characterizes the miniatures and that suggests that these characters and their marriages are on display; here Quilp is presented as both the world's sexiest man, and given that he is "quite a dwarf," the world's smallest dwarf. Further, his head is not just big, but gigantic. And while I am not aware of any theories as to the sexual significance of a big head, I am reminded of the connotations of a big nose. Quilp insists that his nose is "aquiline"; that is, that it is long and bony, a detail Cattermole's illustrations bear out. In fact, it is hooked and long, and it looks a great deal like Punch's nose both in terms of shape and of proportion. Punch is also a violent husband, perhaps even the archetype of an abusive husband, and he is also a figure that has everything to do with the monstrosity of marriage and with *Curiosity Shop*'s continuing fascination with putting the institution of marriage on display. We might argue that just as Betsy Quilp responds to her friends' criticism of her marriage by parading her enviable sex life in front of them, just as she displays the intimacies of her marriage in a deliberate fashion, and just as the narrator exhibits the charms of the little marriages of the miniature characters in such loving detail, so too does the Punch and Judy show perform a marriage in public and broadcast the private details of the institution for the most general of audiences.

There are many reasons to move from Quilp to a consideration of the Punch and Judy show, to consider the novel in the context of the show, and to consider the puppet show as

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it appears in the context of the novel. Paul Schlicke reminds us that both Quilp and Punch are comic characters most interested in satisfying their own appetites, that both are "little, ugly, violent and frenetically mirthful," and that Quilp, like Punch, "delights in surprises, pops up unexpectedly, feigns death, torments his wife, fights with a dog, and hurls verbal and physical abuse at everyone in sight" (125). Sue Zemka reads the novel as a sentimental, middle-class version of the puppet show's spectacular, carnivalesque lowbrow appeal, while Rachel Bennett argues that the novel is divided between the two opposing motifs of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which she links to the novel's "lament for the inevitability of death," and *Punch*, which she associates with the novel's "celebration of life" (423). But the parallels between the novel and the puppet show do not end there. I want to elaborate on these comparisons, to consider Quilp and Punch as abusive, yet sexually attractive, husbands, and to explore the ramifications of the Punch and Judy show for the novel's pervasive concern with the unnatural institution of marriage. Punch and Judy are, indeed, of the greatest significance to *Curiosity Shop* because they shed a bright light on its obsessions, things with which it is perversely concerned but which we do not attend to as matters of the first importance in terms of plot and theme. But, like Jasper Packlemerton, the novel's emblematic monster, the Punch and Judy show provides us with a metaphor for interrogating the novel and for uncovering its deepest anxieties.

There are many variations on the Punch and Judy show, but the version Dickens's audience would have known best begins with Punch singing, appealing to the audience with his wit and charm. He then calls to Judy, pats her affectionately (to which she responds with a slap), and they kiss. Judy brings out their baby, who cries, so Punch throws it out the window. This leads to a rough-and-tumble fight between Punch and Judy that culminates when Judy leaves the stage to fetch the beadle. At this point, a succession of characters (the beadle, the clown, a Jim Crow character or a foreign gentleman) come on stage, and Punch fights with them all, fights that are a combination of verbal raillery, slapstick, feints, and dodges, and some violent punching and kicking. Then Judy's ghost appears behind Punch (we are led to believe that Punch gave her a fatal wound, but that she lived long enough to go for the beadle), which causes him to tremble and quake, and finally to fall down in a fit, calling for the doctor. The doctor arrives, which leads to more verbal and physical antics, culminating in the entrance of several other characters we have seen before (the beadle and usually the Jim Crow character) who drag Punch off to jail. In jail, we have the famous scene between Punch and the hangman, where Punch manages to convince the hangman to hang himself by imploring him to demonstrate the workings of his noose. The clown comes back, and he and Punch perform the usual antics, culminating in a scene rich in slapstick and hide and seek which ends with Punch's routing of the clown. Left alone on stage, Punch begins to sing before the devil appears for one last fight, one that Punch wins in most versions, but as the Punchman whom Henry Mayhew interviews makes clear, the outcome of the play (as well as the length and the degree of violence) is always determined by the nature of the audience. But in every version Punch murders his wife, his baby, and the hangman.[6]

This, then, is the show that runs throughout the novel, both literally and figuratively. Literally, the puppet show is continually playing in the background. We see a show soon after Nell and her grandfather meet the Punchmen Codlin and Short, and we learn that on the road to the races Codlin and Short stop and put on a show whenever they come to a little town or even to "a detached house of good appearance" (191; ch. 17). "Sometimes they played out the toll across a bridge or ferry, and once exhibited by particular desire at a turnpike,"

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practices which make it seem as if the puppet show is an ongoing performance, a sideshow endlessly enacted in the margins of the novel as we watch Nell try to beg for money at the races or keep watch over her grandfather. After Nell and her grandfather escape from Codlin and Short, we (and they) are always looking over our shoulders for the Punchmen, always listening nervously for the sound of the trumpet that advertises their show. In this sense, Nell is hunted and haunted by the monstrosity of marriage. She is continually pursued by Quilp and by Punch, by men who routinely beat their wives as a form of entertainment, just as she is in the midst of a nightmare journey because of her father's abuse of her mother.

The novel's obsession with the puppets continues in London with the single gentleman's "most extraordinary and remarkable interest in the exhibition of Punch" (353; ch. 37). The single gentleman has discovered that Nell and her grandfather have been seen in the company of a Punch and Judy show, and so "if the sound of a Punch's voice, at ever so remote a distance, reached Bevis Marks, the single gentleman, though in bed and asleep, would start up, and hurrying on his clothes, make for the spot with all speed" (353; ch. 37). Because the single gentleman brings all the Punch and Judy shows he finds back to Bevis Marks, the show is as much a presence in Dick Swiveller's and Sampson and Sally Brass's daily existence as it is in Nell's. Just as we are aware of the puppets in the background as we watch Nell and her grandfather, we are made mindful of Punch and Judy as an accompaniment to the routines of Bevis Marks: to the quarrels of Sampson and Sally, the verbal raillery between Quilp and Sally, and the mutual rescue-cum-courtship of Dick and the Marchioness. And just as it seems as if Nell is forced to watch an endless Punch show on her travels with Codlin and Short, it is amazing to see how many Punchmen the single gentleman unearths. In a passage from the manuscript of the novel, the narrator ponders this incredible proliferation of Punches:

> what an enormous family of Punches there must be in the land, since no Punch appeared twice – or if he did, was never encouraged by the single gentleman – and yet these performances were constantly taking place by special desire and gave no signs of exhaustion. It must be left to political economists to deduce a new theory of supply and demand from these facts, or to cite them in support of an old one; but certain it is that as every day the single gentleman was ready for a new Punch, so a new Punch was every day ready for the single gentleman. (701 n. 2)

The concept of a Punch and Judy show every day is, as Dick might say, "a wunner," and as such deserves to be examined at length and in context, for as the narrator hints, it is crucial to the sexual, marital, and visual economies of the novel.

The daily Punch and Judy show at Bevis Marks mirrors the Punch and Judy shows going on inside the office between Sampson and Sally Brass and between Sally and Quilp, while it provides a counterpoint to Dick's curious courtship of the Marchioness. These stories of monstrous marriages and curious courtships alternate with each other; they come forward and recede almost at the same time. This doubling and reversal makes Punch and Judy serve as figures for the novel's implicit, covert, almost furtive interest in the monstrosity and curiosity of marriage. On the one hand, the quarrelsome relationship between Sampson and Sally Brass is an intriguing variation of Punch and Judy in that it reverses their gender roles. In this version, it is Sally who plays Punch and "delight[s] in nothing so much as irritating her brother," while Sampson is the Judy in that he "was at heart in great fear of his sister" (322, 323; ch. 33). The daily puppet show thus mocks Sampson's fear of a female, while

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it apes the aggression they exhibit towards each other. We can thus understand Sampson's irritation with the show ("nobody was rendered more indignant by these proceedings than Mr. Sampson Brass," the narrator tells us), even as we recognize that his anger causes him to behave even more like the frenzied and violent puppets (354; ch. 37). Because he does not dare to offend his paying lodger, he resorts "to annoy[ing] the audiences who clustered round his door by such imperfect means of retaliation as . . . trickling down foul water on their heads from unseen watering-pots, pelting them with fragments of tile and mortar from the roof of the house, and bribing the drivers of hackney cabriolets to come suddenly round the corner and dash in among them precipitately," antics which have much in common with the way Punch baits the doctor, plays hide and seek with the landlord, and throws his baby out the window (354; ch. 37). In this respect, Sampson looks more like Punch than Judy, and perhaps even more like Quilp, for here he resorts to what become routine acts of violence and trickery upon everyone in his vicinity.

While Sally behaves more like Punch with respect to her brother, she is a Judy when it comes to Quilp. Quilp and Sally's constant sparrings are, in fact, notably accurate versions of Punch and Judy. The first scene we see between them consists of Quilp "ogling the fair Miss Brass" and exclaiming "There she is, there is the woman I ought to have married – there is the beautiful Sarah – there is the female who has all the charms of her sex and none of their weaknesses." Sally offers him a "grim smile" and a "hold your nonsense" in response (325; ch. 33). This scene repeats almost exactly the first scene between Punch and Judy as Mayhew records it. In Mayhew's version, Punch calls to his wife "Judy, Judy! my pratty creetur! come up stairs, my darling! I want to speak to you . . . Here she comes, bless her little heart!" And Judy responds with a slap and a "Keep quiet, do!" (55). The accuracy of the parallel between Quilp and Sally and Punch and Judy not only suggests the very conscious way in which Dickens is using the puppet show as a counterpoint to the plots it plays alongside, but it also makes us wonder where Betsy Quilp fits into the picture. That is, if Sally is such an accurate Judy, then how do we account for Betsy?

In an earlier version of Punch and Judy, Punch has a mistress, Pretty Polly. After throwing his baby out the window and killing Judy, Punch dances with Pretty Polly, kisses her, and holds her in his arms singing "I love you so, I love you so, I never will leave you; no, no, no: If I had all the wives of wise King Sol, I would kill them all for my pretty Poll" (Landes 16).[7] If we try to align *Curiosity Shop* with this version of Punch and Judy, we would no doubt begin by identifying Quilp with Punch, Mrs. Quilp with Judy, and Nell with Pretty Polly. This version of Punch and Judy would suggest a jealous Mrs. Quilp (not unlikely if we take her attachment to Quilp seriously) and a Nell that satisfies Quilp's fantasies and occupies the position of his mistress (again, an irresistible possibility given the similarity between Punch's "pretty Poll" and Quilp's "pretty little Nell"). This version is, in fact, the version Quilp would be most happy with for it is the dream he masturbates to in Nell's bed come true. It is a useful version for my argument, too, for it emphasizes Quilp's sexual attractiveness and it suggests both how cruel he can be to his wife and how dangerous he is to Nell and to all the other little people in the novel. It suggests the threat he poses to the model behavior of the happy miniatures and diminutive figures of benevolence. But we could just as easily assign Sally Brass the role of Judy and make Betsy the pretty mistress, for if we take seriously the novel's implication that Quilp and Sally are the marchioness's parents, then Betsy is, like Pretty Polly, a kind of replacement wife.

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The similarities between Punch and Quilp in both versions are overwhelming and overwhelmingly suggestive. The one notable difference between Punch and Quilp is that Quilp does not murder his wife. While it is true that Dickens originally had him contemplate murdering Betsy, this is both a passage that does not find its way into the novel and a murder that is, even in manuscript form, only a fantasy.[8] The only husband who literally murders his wife (Nell's father, of course, could be said to have figuratively murdered Nell's mother) is the waxwork Jasper Packlemerton, who murders all fourteen of his wives by tickling them to death. But the way in which Packlemerton kills his wives suggests that he and Quilp do, in fact, have much in common. Packlemerton serves to illustrate the perversity of marriage in a way that illuminates, even as it violently exaggerates, the marriage of Betsy and her dwarf. For tickling, as Adam Phillips has brilliantly pointed out, is always erotic and potentially humiliating. Like Betsy's desire for Quilp, it is sexually exciting and potentially degrading. In his essay "On Tickling," Phillips reminds us that "the tickling narrative, unlike the sexual narrative, has no climax. It has to stop, or the real humiliation begins" (10). But tickling is like sex, Phillips makes clear, in that it is a "form of sensuous excitement," and it's better when someone else does it to you. Being tickled, Phillips explains, is a way of being "initiated in a distinctive way into the helplessness and disarray of a certain primitive kind of pleasure" (10). Referring to the *OED*, Phillips reminds us that "the word speaks of the precarious, and so of the erotic. To tickle is, above all, to seduce" (10). As its potentially humiliating nature, the fact that it makes you helpless, and its association with the "precarious" all suggest, tickling renders the tickled powerless.

Dickens exaggerates, then, the powerlessness of the tickled in his creation of Jasper Packlemerton. Packlemerton is a tickler who does not stop before "the real humiliation begins," but rather goes on to exploit his power to its extreme. We would think that this extreme would be incontinence or perhaps, as Phillips suggests, hysteria. But it is in fact death. This is no figure of speech, as in "you scared me to death" or "I died laughing." Nor is it a figure for sexual satisfaction, as in "the little death" that connotes orgasm. This is, as Mrs. Jarley makes clear when she tells Packlemerton's story, murder.

The waxwork figure of Packlemerton is, then, both the literalization of these figurative expressions and the embodiment of a figure of speech. What is more, Jasper Packlemerton is reminiscent of and also a more literal version of a figure commemorated in Madame Tussaud's waxworks. In the category of "Remarkable Characters," Madame Tussaud includes "An old Coquette, who teased her Husband's Life out."[9] Like Dickens's Jasper, the coquette has killed her spouse, and is memorialized in wax for so doing. Further, the coquette is a strange figure to find in Madame Tussaud's, not only because she is a type, rather than an actual character, but also because, judging from posters for the exhibition in 1812 and 1814, she is placed alongside historical figures, most of whom would be considered heroes of the French Revolution. The company the coquette keeps emphasizes the fact that she is not, like most waxworks figures and like most of the figures in Mrs. Jarley's collection, the recreation of an actual person. She is not even given a name, only a descriptive label. She is a generic figure, not an actual one. Thus, she is, like Packlemerton, the figure of a figure of speech, the embodiment of a familiar phrase. The similarity between a husband who tickles his wife to death and a wife who teases the life out of her husband is remarkable, but even more striking is the fact that both Tussaud and Dickens have commemorated and embodied these figures of speech for conflict in marriage. These images bring to the fore the violence implicit in these colloquial expressions for relationships between the sexes; in making figures out of

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figures of speech, Dickens and Tussaud have made the figure of speech literal. Dickens's figure is in fact doubly literal: not only has he turned the figure of speech into a figure, but his created figure is itself one who turns a metaphorical expression into a literal action. By the same token, in placing her coquette among historical figures like Marat and Robespierre and Charlotte Corday and her tickler among personages including George the Third and Mary Queen of Scots, Madame Tussaud and Mrs. Jarley suggest that the stereotype of a dominating spouse is to be taken literally. That both Packlemerton and the coquette are waxworks figures underscores this move of literalization and embodiment, for not only do these figures embody the colloquial, but they are also grisly manifestations of proverbial language. Unnaturally realistic figures of wax and grotesque manifestations of proverbial language, they are mimetic as well as linguistic exaggerations. They are also figures in an exhibition.

My point here has to do both with the peculiar properties of waxworks and with the nature of an exhibition. That is, I want both to survey other instances of waxworks in Dickens, together with theories about their effect on the viewer, and to gesture towards the way in which the novel itself is a gallery of waxwork figures (just as it is a freak show, a curio cabinet, and a Punch and Judy show). I will explore the nature and effect of waxworks, and then go on to make a larger point about the nature of a display, about what it means to direct an audience's attention towards a collection of objects. This latter point will take us back to my original question, to my concern with the plot we do not read and to the curious marriages we attend to instead, the marriages the novel so proudly and noisily parades before us and to the way in which that series of collections keeps us from seeing that the marriage of Nell's parents should be front and center in any and all of them.

There are scattered references to waxworks throughout Dickens. When Ralph Nickleby introduces Kate to Lord Verisopht, he replies "Well, then my ears did not deceive me, and it's not wa-a-x work," a remark that suggests both how hard he has been staring at her and how paralyzed with fear and shame she is at being put on display by her uncle (306; ch. 19). When Peggotty comes to London, David takes her sightseeing: they visit the Tower of London; they go to the top of Saint Paul's, they visit Miss Linwood's Exhibition; and they go to see "some perspiring Wax-work, in Fleet Street," an exhibit the older David cannot help parenthetically disparaging: "melted, I should hope, these twenty years" (388; ch. 33).[10] As this litany of tourist attractions suggests, a trip to the waxworks is a customary part of seeing the sights, something to gaze and gawk at, a curiosity worth a special trip and a prolonged look. These associations come to the fore in a macabre manner in *Great Expectations*. But in this instance, the allusion is purely figurative. While David and Peggotty go to see an actual waxworks exhibition, and while Lord Verisopht pretends to be surprised that Kate is real and not a model figure, the young Pip's response to Miss Havisham suggests that while he knows full well that she is alive and no effigy, he can only describe the effect her appearance has on him by comparing it to his visit to "some ghastly waxwork at the Fair" (87; ch. 8). While Lord Verisopht's response to Kate is the kind of reaction that Madame Tussaud must have fantasized about, and while David's description is no doubt the kind she most dreaded,[11] it is Pip's that captures most precisely the uncanny nature of a waxwork figure and that helps pinpoint the significance of the waxwork figure Jasper Packlemerton for *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

Here is Pip's response: "Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been

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taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress, that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could" (87; ch. 8). Pip is afraid that he is about to see the dead (or something that never even was alive) come (back) to life. He is afraid, not because Miss Havisham looks dead or artificial, but because, looking as she does, she moves. And she looks at him. What he is experiencing is what Freud would come to describe, seventy years later, as the uncanny. What he focuses on is the aspect of waxworks that the art historian David Freedberg identifies as the most important element in their composition and the element that has the most power to unnerve the viewer, regardless of the quality of the figure or the degree to which it achieves a kind of imitation or verisimilitude: the eyes.

Freud defines the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). Naomi Schor describes it as a "shock effect," as "the thrilling terror, the frisson universally produced by" an ultrarealistic figure (134).[12] For Pip, the uncanny effect of Miss Havisham does not have as much to do with her ultrarealism – she is, after all, an actual woman – but rather with her resemblance to a corpse. We might say that she is a kind of waxwork figure in reverse, not an inert artificial figure which looks like it's alive, but a living, organic figure which appears to be artificial or dead. This confusion between what is real and what is not, what is alive and what might come to life, which is at issue for Freud in his investigation of the uncanny, is also what terrifies Nell when she works for Mrs. Jarley.[13] Sleeping in the waxworks (a strange thing to do, but something of a topos in the annals of wax museums[14]), Nell becomes possessed by the fear that Quilp is lurking among the figures: "she never retired to this place at night but she tortured herself – she could not help it – with imagining a resemblance, in some one or other of their death-like faces, to the dwarf, and this fancy would sometimes so gain upon her that she would almost believe he had removed the figure and stood within the clothes" (288–89; ch. 29). That Nell cannot help entertaining this "fancy" is perverse enough, and the fact that she thinks the eerie effigies look like Quilp suggests yet another way in which the novel continually obtrudes him before our eyes and yet another collection of curiosities to which he might be said to belong. But most interesting here is the contagious effect of Nell's disturbed "fancy," her nightmare imaginings of Quilp in the clothes of a waxwork which give rise to a more pervasive fear of the figures themselves: "Then there were so many of them with their great glassy eyes – and, as they stood one behind the other all about her bed, they looked so like living creatures, and yet so unlike in their grim stillness and silence, that she had a kind of terror of them for their own sakes" (289; ch. 29). The eyes of the waxworks are again implicated, as is the indeterminate nature of the figures ("so like living creatures, and yet so unlike"), but most important to explore here is the fact that Nell's fear of Quilp – the defining and overpowering fear that shadows her throughout the novel, spurring her on the journey that leads to her death – here gives way to another kind of fear, to a "terror of them for their own sakes."

At this point I want to explain why, following David Freedberg, I have been focusing on the eyes of the waxworks (or, perhaps more accurately, why Pip and Nell have been drawn to these figures' eyes) and why it is the eyes that suggest, more than any other element in their makeup, that the waxworks occupy a sort of liminal status between the living and the dead, and thus have the power to terrify viewers who know full well that these are only objects put on display for their enjoyment.[15] Freedberg reasons that "we suspect the inertia of the material of which the image is made, but we cannot discard the impression of liveliness

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that it makes," a liveliness he argues has much to do with the ways in which the eyes are represented in a statue – whether they are painted or represented by metal or crystal, or even left as blanks or holes. There is something about "the tension implicit" in our perception of the eyes in the context of the artificial that "may, at the very least, cause anxiety; at the most it may cause a terror that is not assuaged by the consciousness of the manmade status of the image or object . . . fear of the lifelike haunts the warring perceptions of the image as reflection and the image as reality" (220–21). In other words, the eyes make the image uncannily hover between "reflection" and "reality," just as the contrast between the materials that make up the statue and the materials that represent the eyes makes the eyes the particular site of fear, creating what Freedberg so accurately terms the "fear of the lifelike." While we know that the figure is made of inorganic material, that it is constructed – made not begotten, we might say – the eyes create a sense of doubt in our minds because they look back at us. They reflect our vision and so suggest that they too can see. This suspicion leads to our strongest fear, which is that these images "might just come alive, just open their mouths, just begin to move. We fear the lifelike because the dead substance of which the object is made may yet come alive" (Freedberg 231). This is precisely Nell's fear and precisely why she is afraid of them "for their own sakes."

It is also important to remember that this is Nell's nighttime fantasy, that it is "their dusky figures" that arouse this fear (and that Pip first sees Miss Havisham in a room dimly lit with candles). The passage from the German psychologist Ernst Jentsch's 1906 essay on the uncanny that Freud alludes to also focuses on the effect of lighting on our perception of waxworks figures: "The disagreeable impression easily aroused in many people upon visiting wax-museums, wax-works, and panoramas is well-known. It is often difficult, especially in the half-darkness, to distinguish a life-size wax figure or similar figure from a person" (Schor 138).[16] The emphasis on dusk and half-darkness not only helps explain the preponderance of nightmares about sleeping among the waxworks and accounts for Madame Tussaud's preoccupation with the lighting in her exhibition rooms (wax museums were illuminated by gas or candlelight well into the nineteenth century), but it also helps us understand another way in which waxworks occupy a liminal status. Just as they are both lifelike and not alive (what Marie-Hélène Huet calls "not life itself, but a lifelikeness"), and just as it's hard to determine in the dusk or the half-darkness of candlelight whether or not they are actual figures or figures of wax, the arrangement of most wax museums (like the placement of Duane Hanson figures in art museums) is designed to confuse us (128).[17] Madame Tussaud herself was an especially confusing figure during her lifetime when visitors to her Baker Street museum would pay the actual Madame Tussaud at the entrance, only to be confronted by her wax image further down the hall; similarly, the carefully positioned figure of a bobby or a guard made of wax is a staple in such museums. Because, as Freedberg reminds us, the wax figure is designed to "arouse [our] wonder at the skill of the artist in approximating life so closely," the wax museum needs to be designed to exploit that wonder. Therefore, although we always know we are in a wax museum, we sometimes do not (immediately) know which figures are wax and which are real.

Mrs. Jarley exploits this confusion when she sends Nell out to advertise her show. As a part of what the narrator approvingly calls her "inventive genius," she arranges for Nell and a waxwork figure to be driven throughout the town in a little cart "gaily dressed with flags and streamers" advertising the show (286; ch. 29). Much of this tactic's success arises from the fact that Nell becomes even more of an object of curiosity and delight than the

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wax figure she sits beside. This is, of course, a technique we see throughout *Curiosity Shop* and one that Dickens consciously set out to emphasize and exploit; "I had it always in my fancy to surround the lonely figure of the child with grotesque and wild, but not impossible companions, and to gather about her innocent face and pure intentions, associates as strange and uncongenial as the grim objects that are about her bed when her history is first foreshadowed," he tells his readers in his preface to the 1848 edition of the novel (42). The technique of arrangement by contrast also provides us with a way of better understanding the figure of Jasper Packlemerton, both as a figure of wax and as a figure for the monstrosity of marriage.

Jasper is, like those dusky figures that frighten Nell, a figure of some indeterminacy. It is hard to know what to make of him, both because he is the only figure Mrs. Jarley describes in detail and because he is taken up at length, only to be absolutely forgotten – by Mrs. Jarley, by Nell, by the narrator, by the novel. Most readers forget him, too, reading right over his story's emblematic significance just as they fail to respond to the story of Nell's parents' marriage. Jasper Packlemerton occupies a very small moment in the novel (one paragraph in a novel of seventy-three chapters), but that moment is wholly characteristic of *Curiosity Shop* in its uncanniness.The way in which readers tend to read right over his story is an instance of the uncanny because the keynote figure is fully glimpsed and immediately forgotten. That is, just as Freud defines the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar," in attending to Jasper Packlemerton we are returning to a moment in the novel the significance of which we initially ignored, or perhaps even repressed. In homing in on the waxwork figure of Jasper Packlemerton, I mean to make explicit the link between the way in which he – or any other waxwork figure or uncanny object – is seen and the way in which we read his story, a story that is tucked into the plot much like a waxwork guard is tucked into a corner of Madame Tussaud's. In a very general sense, I am connecting a way of seeing to a way of reading as I look at the way these various displays of marriage structure our readerly attention. Specifically, I mean to suggest that the kind of response a visitor to Mrs. Jarley's exhibition would have to the waxwork Packlemerton has much in common with the kind of response a reader of *Curiosity Shop* would have to his placement in the text. In both cases, Packlemerton is an uncanny figure.

The secret of Nell's parents' failed marriage is also tucked into the plot; as I argued at the outset of my analysis, it is buried so deeply and revealed so circumspectly that it barely causes a ripple on the novel's surface, though it has everything to do with the shape and the nature of the novel's plot. I suggested that in taking a closer look at what the novel encourages us to consider in lieu of this marriage we might come to understand how the novel manages to keep its secret so well. One way the novel keeps its secret has simply to do with the understated way in which it is revealed and the fact that it is presented to the reader as an old, old story: one "known of old and long familiar" to the single gentleman, and one that is of interest only to him. That is, while we are given the details of Nell's mother's marriage and thus provided with the context we need for understanding the novel's plot and its thematic concerns, this story is not presented to us as important information but rather as something very familiar, something we have always known and paid little heed to. That is, the novel suggests that the story of Nell's parents' marriage – and the story of marriage in general – is non-narratable, or, more specifically, not worth narrating, something that goes without saying.

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This is uncanny in the way that the very familiar is at the root of that phenomenon. In this sense, it has much in common with the other marriages in *Curiosity Shop* we are encouraged to gaze upon and marvel at and take a lesson from. That is, one reason we are so fascinated with these marriages is that they follow the contours of old, familiar stories. Implicit in the narrator's comparison of the young Garlands to Cinderella and her Prince and in my comparison of Kit and the elder Garlands to Goldilocks and the Three Bears and of the Quilps to Beauty and the Beast is the fact that they are all fictions come to life, fairy tales come true. When, in a long, complex novel with some claims to realism, events start to accord quite markedly with the dictates of the fairy tale, we have a textbook example of the Freudian uncanny. Freud holds that "an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality," and precisely this effect is produced when a plot from the world of fairy tale appears before us in a realistic novel (244). Because these miniature marriages are uncanny, because they are figures of fiction come to life, marital bliss comes to seem like a familiar story that's very much a story, a fairy tale, a fantasy. Indeed, our emphasis on the courtship plot reveals a nostalgia for the fairy tale.

These marriages, like the Punch and Judy show that runs throughout the novel and Mrs. Jarley's waxworks exhibition, function as the novel's cultural unconscious. That undercurrent of deep skepticism over the institution of marriage is manifested in the embodied colloquialisms of the waxworks, the proliferation of bachelors, and the depiction of husbands that are either perfect or perfectly cruel. These elements are what Fredric Jameson would call the novel's "indispensable preconditions" (17). The reiteration of these very familiar images clues us in to the novel's ideological position vis-à-vis marriage, even as it presents them as context rather than as event. Thus these old familiar plots are displayed for the reader even as they are made so familiar and so frequent as to be of little moment. Because they are put on display, we are supposed to look at them. But because they are so prominently displayed we also do not bother to take a closer look, to analyze them. We think we know what we are seeing because these are plots we immediately recognize. Because these stories are literally uncanny, then, we fail to grasp their import or the import of the story they screen even as they anticipate and repeat its plot and its characters. Similarly, the etiology of the novel's plot is hidden from us even as it is reproduced all around us in a multiplication of uncanny images that suggest that marriage is either fictitious or monstrous, that it is either a story we do not quite believe in or a relationship of such exaggerated cruelty we do not take it seriously. Marriage in *The Old Curiosity Shop* is, then, an old, familiar story, and thus one to which we assign little significance. Were we to give it heed, to take that second look, we would find it frighteningly uncanny – even monstrous – or simply unbelievable.

It is just that second look that I am arguing for, that I have tried to demonstrate in this essay, and that would open up a very different view of this novel and of the novel as a genre. If we would take seriously those stories of marriage the novel so often tells, if we would direct our attention away from the fairy tales of courtship and the blushing brides-to-be, we would begin to notice all the husbands and wives clamoring for our attention, all their stories of marriage and its discontents, all the warnings their plots give and the ramifications of their plots for the genre. In other words, if we concentrate on the stories of marriage as much as we have attended to the stories of courtship, we would begin to put together a very different history of the novel, a very different sense of the genre, and, perhaps, a very different sense of the culture that produced that object, that told such distressing stories and

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so often sounded the alarm over the institution. It was, in fact, the Victorians who brought us both the popularization of the novel form and the legalization of divorce; my reading of *The Old Curiosity Shop* suggests that coincidence is no accident.

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NOTES

My thanks to Peter K. Garrett, Deidre Lynch, Thomas J. Otten, Lowry Pei, and Katharine Weber for enormously helpful readings of and conversations about this essay.

1. See Linton's essay "Marriage Gaolers" which was published in *Household Words* in 1856. On May 3, 1858, the Queen wrote in her journal, "I think people really marry far too much; it is such a lottery after all, and for a poor woman a very doubtful happiness." On May 16, 1860, she again expressed her conviction that "all marriage is such a lottery – the happiness is always an exchange – though it may be a very happy one – still the poor woman is bodily and morally the husband's slave. That always sticks in my throat. When I think of a merry, happy, free young girl – and look at the ailing, aching state a young wife is generally doomed to – which you can't deny is the penalty of marriage" (Hibbert 104–05).
2. Critics have not entirely overlooked Nell's mother's marriage. In *Dear Reader*, Garrett Stewart points to the importance of this marriage for the novel's plot, though his larger argument has to do with the novel as elegy for Mary Hogarth. Accordingly, he is more interested in the single gentleman's renunciation of Nell's grandmother, which he parallels to Dickens's renunciation of his own sister-in-law, than in the failed marriage of Nell's mother. But I do want to acknowledge that in drawing out this parallel, Stewart does implicitly point to the importance of the failed marriage in making sense of the novel's plot. As he puts it, "the long-withheld (and autobiographically occulted) family structure behind the story – providing its very mainspring both as quest (via the single gentleman's searches) and as postmortem evocation (via Dickens's elegiac motives) – has in fact been thrown into unique relief by our longtime (though unacknowledged) narrator's one explicit 'narrative"' (194).

   Dianne Sadoff also acknowledges the importance of the single gentleman's story, though she is most interested in this story because of the way in which it simultaneously "discloses and disguises the facts of genealogy" (14). She does mention that Nell's mother "married unwisely" and that her husband "beggared both herself and her father," but her emphasis is on this story as the tale of Nell's origins (20).
3. The senior Garlands are described as "a little fat placid-faced old gentleman" and "a little old lady, plump and placid like himself," while their son bears a "wonderful resemblance" to his father "in face and figure" (164, 168; ch. 14). Kit thinks of them as "the little old lady, and the little old gentleman, and the little young gentleman" (220; ch. 21). Barbara is first introduced to us as their "little servant-girl," and she lives in a little kitchen that looks like it came out of a "toy-shop window." She has her own "little work-box" and a "little looking-glass" (233, 234; ch. 22). And we imagine that Kit is small, too, given that his "little" room over the stable is "just [his] size." Finally, the Marchioness, routinely described as "the small servant," is so small that Quilp, a dwarf, has to look down ("it was something quite new to him") in order to see her (473; ch. 51).
4. For another approach, see the compelling reading Schor develops of *The Old Curiosity Shop* by means of Susan Stewart's notion of the souvenir.
5. For a more detailed analysis of these wives and the implications of their failed marriages, see my "Estranging *David Copperfield*: Reading the Novel of Divorce."
6. I am indebted to Leach's *The Punch and Judy Show: History, Tradition and Meaning* for the information in this paragraph.

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7. It is, of course, highly suggestive that this Punch offers to do exactly what Jasper Packlemerton has done: that is, kill all his wives. The parallels between the characters of the Punch and Judy show and the characters of *Curiosity Shop* thus come to seem, like the proliferation of Punches that so irritates Sampson Brass, infinite and infinitely flexible. The following juxtaposition will do nothing to lessen that impression, but will rather, I hope, serve to underscore the way in which Dickens uses Punch and Judy as a figure for the master plot of this novel.
8. The manuscript for chapter 61 includes this passage:

> "Humph!" said the dwarf, looking round. 'Gloomy and dark! If I took it in my head to be a widower, now, I need only invite Mrs. Quilp to take tea here one foggy night – the water's very near the door to be sure. If she took the wrong turning and her foot slipped – Ah!"
>
> He stood musing for a minute or two on the very brink of the wharf, holding the lantern so that its light was reflected downward on the water, and resting one foot upon the great iron ring, sunk into the coping.
>
> "Yes," said Quilp, knocking this ring with his heels, "it's a tempting spot. If anybody I hate had fallen over, and was hanging by one hand to this, and screaming to me while I sat and smoked in Bachelor's Hall there, how very deaf I should be! I should hear the splash that followed though, for all that. Ha, ha, ha! I think I should hear the splash." (713–14, n.4)

   That Dickens decides to assign this very death to Quilp instead and a happy remarriage to Betsy (financed by Quilp's ill-gotten gains, no less) is yet another way in which he manages to cover up his interest in the perversity of marriage. By erasing the perversity of the Quilps' marriage and substituting a more seemly version of matrimony at the end of the novel, Dickens warns us away from the monstrosity he has so delighted in depicting, gesturing instead towards the happy couples in the curio cabinet of the *Curiosity Shop*.
9. Posters for Madame Tussaud's 1810 exhibition in Edinburgh, her 1812 show in Hull, and her 1814 visit to Bristol make mention of this figure, listing it in a group that also includes Charlotte Corday, Marat, and the head of Robespierre after he had been guillotined. The coquette is thus associated with the bloody violence of the French Revolution, an association that suggests Tussaud's embodiment of a familiar phrase may be as literal and as chilling a figure as Dickens's Packlemerton. These posters are reproduced in Chapman's *Madame Tussaud in England* and in Chapman and Leslie's *Madame Tussaud: Waxworker Extraordinary*.
10. Miss Linwood's exhibition is a gallery of needlework paintings, "one of the standard sights of early nineteenth-century London" according to Richard Altick (400). The waxworks in Fleet Street is probably Mrs. Salmon's exhibition, a collection she inherited from her husband and which went through several changes of management after her death; this display enjoyed great popularity from the end of the seventeenth through the beginning of the nineteenth century. Dickens probably had Mrs. Salmon as much as Madame Tussaud in mind when he created Mrs. Jarley, not only because we see him gesture towards her show ten years later in *Copperfield*, but also because her exhibit contained a figure much like Packlemerton. Altick cites a visitor to Mrs. Salmon's in 1793 who makes special mention of the figure of "Renwick Williams, called the Monster, cutting the Miss Porters" (53). Renwick Williams was a famous eighteenth-century predator who was indicted for attacking a woman in the street. According to the transcript of his trial, he "wilfully, maliciously, and feloniously did tear, spoil, cut, and deface" several layers of Ann Porter's clothes (Hodgson 5). We might call Williams "the cutter," and his crime is like Packlemerton's in that it seems petty, but is (as evidenced by the fact that he cuts through Porter's cloak, her stays, three petticoats, and her shift) rather extreme, not to mention sexual and intrusive. That he is popularly called "the monster" both in the waxworks exhibition and in the transcript of his trial suggests not only a linguistic affinity with the husbands of *Curiosity Shop*, but also that he is put on display as a figure of warning.
11. In an 1860 *All the Year Round* piece entitled "Our Eye-Witness in Great Company," Dudley Costello describes Madame Tussaud's as "a large room, handsomely decorated, with the oddest-looking people in the oddest-looking dresses, and in the strangest attitudes, standing round about it" (249).

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This article disparages Madame Tussaud's for its emphasis on costume, the anachronism of the groupings, and the curious poses of the figures. In this respect it has much in common with the *Household Words* essay he wrote about Madame Tussaud's six years earlier, "History in Wax." But whereas in "History in Wax" Costello is more interested in critiquing the style in which the catalogue of Madame Tussaud's was written, in "Our Eye-Witness" he delights in reporting that the figures are all leaning precariously, that the King of Hanover "looks as if he had been drinking," and that the figures who are "supposed to be in motion" look like they are "skating" (251, 252).

12. Naomi Schor's subject is the sculpture of Duane Hanson, but I would argue that Hanson is our Madame Tussaud. Constructed out of fiberglass and polyester, dressed realistically and completely, and outfitted with accessories like beer cans, newspapers, grocery carts, and hair curlers, his lifesize and highly detailed sculptures look so much like real people that they frequently fool the unsuspecting viewer into thinking that they are alive. The fear that Schor talks about in seeing a Hanson has to do not so much with being afraid that the skeleton will come to life or that the waxwork is watching you, but rather with the shock of realizing that something you thought was alive is not. But in either case, the effect of the uncanny has to do with the confusion between the natural and the constructed, with the blurring of the boundary between real and artificial.
13. Freud begins the second section of his essay, where he takes up instances of the uncanny, with this very uncertainty: "When we proceed to review the things, persons, impressions, events and situations which are able to arouse in us a feeling of the uncanny in a particularly forcible and definite form, the first requirement is obviously to select a suitable example to start on. Jentsch has taken as a very good instance 'doubts whether an apparently inanimate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate'; and he refers in this connection to the impression made by waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata" (226).
14. Nell sleeps with the waxworks "for their better security," but it's harder to understand the other instances of this phenomenon (288; ch. 29). Pauline Chapman notes that when Madame Tussaud's exhibition was being moved from one location to another, a "stupendous task" that took a week, "exhausted workers stretched out to sleep between the sheeted wax figures laid out on the floor awaiting transportation to their palatial new home" (91). This strange practice is also depicted in Cruikshank's 1847 cartoon, "I dreamt I slept at Madame Tussaud's," which ran in the 1847 *Comic Almanac* and was accompanied by a verse that has much in common with my argument here. It runs in part:

> I dreamt that I slept at Madame Tussaud's
> With cut-throats and Kings side by side;
> And that all the wax figures in those abodes
> At midnight became revivified. (qtd. in Chapman 79)

Finally, and more understandably, Thackeray, in his *Sights of London*, insists that "rather than be left alone in *that* Gallery at night with those statues, I would consent to be locked up with one of the horrid lions in the Zoological Gardens" (qtd. in Chapman 84).

15. That I bring in the idea of pleasure at this point may seem strange, but it is worth thinking about the fact that waxworks are a form of entertainment. That this is a form of entertainment that does not give pleasure is astutely pointed out by Costello in his *All The Year Round* essay on Madame Tussaud's when he refers to "the profound and awful misery of the place which provides the Englishman with an entertainment that does not make him happy" (250).
16. I am indebted to Naomi Schor's chapter both for her translation of this passage from Jentsch and for her recuperation of his essay for a consideration of the uncanny. Freud alludes to this piece, but as Schor makes clear, he does not play fair with it. He paraphrases it and quotes from it selectively, but he gives his readers neither an accurate nor a comprehensive sense of Jentsch's essay. See the "Freud/Jentsch/Cixous" section of Schor's chapter (134–39).

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17. Like the figures of museum guards, bobbies, and Madame Tussaud in the nineteenth century, Duane Hanson's figures are carefully placed and chosen. So the figure of a derelict drug addict will be placed in the stairwell of a museum, while the figure of a woman collecting for a charity will be found in the hallway between galleries. Such figures and their placement are even more disturbing than the deliberately planted displays at Madame Tussaud's, for not only do they make you wonder whether they are alive or not, but they also make you wonder how such people got in the museum, thus causing you to feel offended and slightly superior, and then, when you realize you have been fooled, embarrassed and perhaps a little anxious and irritated. In other words, they make the viewer very aware of the prejudices and preconceptions about art, about display, and about class and connoisseurship she brings with her to the museum.

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