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Man and Dog: Text and Illustration in Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop*

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*The Old Curiosity Shop* evolved as a serial in Dickens’s own threepenny weekly miscellany, *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, the pages of which it entirely took over from its ninth chapter until its completion.\(^1\) From the outset, a crucial element in Dickens’s vision for his periodical was that it should be enhanced by ‘woodcuts dropped into the text’,\(^2\) an idea to which he remained committed when the *Clock* became solely a vehicle first for the *Shop*, and then for *Barnaby Rudge*, with which it ended its run. Accordingly, 75 wood engravings (as they in fact were) were integrated with the text of the first story, and 76 with the second. George Cattermole produced 14 illustrations for the *Shop*, and 17 for *Rudge*, while Daniel Maclise and Samuel Williams provided just one apiece for the *Shop*, each featuring Nell, but Hablot K. Browne (Phiz) designed no fewer than 59 for each novel. He also drew every one of the periodical’s illuminated capital letters.

Although it was over Cattermole’s essentially still, architectural scenes that Dickens tended to rhapsodize, he routinely left it to Browne to create a visual correlative for the more energized or bizarre emanations of his fancy. As the story outgrew the frame of the miscellany, Browne responded with a series of drawings that – as John Harvey has shown – increasingly reveal his extraordinary ability both to penetrate, and to conspire with, Dickens’s imagination.\(^3\) Furthermore, he developed ways of using the exigencies of instalment publication to complement Dickens’s narrative. This collaboration of artist with author is exemplified in Browne’s acclaimed representations of Quilp; but it is also demonstrated in his depictions of Jerry, who, though less prominent and certainly less fantastic, is the dwarf’s moral counterpart. One is conceived by Dickens as a kind of dog, the other is a master of dogs.

Quilp has clear and widely-acknowledged affinities with a range of fairy-tale monsters or lawless vice figures, pre-eminently Punch.\(^4\) Brutal, preternaturally frenetic, and as gleeful in destroying others’ well-being as
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Punch is in despatching his fellow puppets, Quilp – like Punch – is nevertheless a great comic creation. Unlike Punch, however, his tyranny is charged with a potent animalism that both repels and compels. While Punch is amorous, Quilp is licentious. He is also a devouring, imbibing, fume-exuding, bodily organism, which Punch, manifestly, is not. With his surreal appetites and manner of indulging, displaying, and inflicting them, Quilp is a grotesquely self-exaggerating, overwhelming life-force; and it is this force from which his evil – as distinct from Punch’s entertaining anarchy – draws its potency. To whatever extent he owes his origin to Punch, then, the source of his animality is not the puppet, whose body can only dangle ‘all loose and limp and shapeless’ (131) when it is not being manipulated by his exhibiter. With an extensive range of creatures from the ferret and the hawk to the lion and the monkey contributing, as their only function in the novel, the defining characteristics of their genera to the creation of his singularity, exceptional among them is the dog – the creature to which, as Paul Schlicke has pointed out, Quilp is ‘systematically linked’.5 However, it is not merely the connection itself, but the ways in which it is developed and exploited, that most reveal the nature of Quilp’s vital peculiarity. It is through specifically canine metaphor and canine mimesis that, paradoxically, Quilp fascinates as both humanly credible and superhumanly fanciful.

The chief mannerism to identify him as belonging to the canine species – the habitual ‘ghastly smile’ (as distinct from Punch’s ‘usual equable smile’ [128]) that exposes the ‘few discolored fangs’6 that were yet scattered in his mouth, and gave him the aspect of a panting dog’ – is registered with his first entry into the story, which occurs in the opening paragraph of chapter 3 (Clock, VIII), the chapter in which Master Humphrey detaches himself from the narrative ‘to leave those who have prominent and necessary parts in it to speak and act for themselves’ (33). Expressly ‘dog-like’ by chapter 4; maintained as Quilp smokes and drinks throughout the night while forcing his meek wife to sit sleepless throughout the night as punishment for daring to participate in her mother’s tea-party; and called up ‘in full force’ when he hears that mother, Mrs Jiniwin, denounce him as ‘a little hunchy villain and a monster’ (45), the smile becomes associated with an ever-extending range of canine performances and impressions. These include shaking himself in a ‘very doglike manner’ (45); coiling himself into Nell’s little bed; rolling himself onto his feet; leaping out of his hammock ‘not with his legs first, or his head first, or his arms first, but bodily – altogether’ (467); his snarling threat to bite his wife in chapter 4; the ferocity with which he eats and drinks and chews (which prefigures the criminal’s voracity in chapter 18 of Barnaby Rudge, which in turn prefigures Magwitch’s attack on the food and drink Pip brings him in chapter 3 of Great Expectations);7 and his capacity for ‘entertaining himself with a melodious howl, intended for a song, but bearing not the faintest resemblance to any scrap of any piece of