Dickens on Screen

Edited by

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The Dickens novel, modern psychology, and film line up from past to present, with the Dickens novel of the mid-nineteenth century followed by the invention of psychoanalysis at century's end, followed in the twentieth century by the evolution of film and film theory. If (*pace* David Hume) we buy into a unidirectional thesis of past cause to present effect, we might then affirm that the earlier discourse may in some measure have affected the later. That is to say something like: the family structure within a Dickens novel is one of the primary determinants of modern psychological, or at any rate psychoanalytical, theory. (We remember that Freud named his famous Dora after David Copperfield's child bride.) And in turn, the Dickens novel and the psychological tradition initiated by Freud contributed in some combination or other to the technical, narrative and psychic structures of film, as Kamilla Elliott's and Garrett Stewart's chapters on Sergei Eisenstein and D. W. Griffith show.

Conversely, influence may be said to flow from present to past. The past is arguably always in some measure a back-formation of the present moment, a function of the present reader or viewer's "horizon of expectations," what Freud would call a "screen memory" writ large of something irrecoverable in full historical actuality. Thus, the way we nowadays read Dickens is crucially informed by classical psychoanalytic theory, Freudian, Jungian, Eriksonian, Lacanian, Kleinian, or Kohutian, to name a small sample. As to the back-formation of Dickens by film, can we ever again read *A Christmas Carol* without remembering Alastair Sim's wide-eyed comic terror, or re-encounter Sikes murdering Nancy without envisioning David Lean's projection of her brutal end, the horrified dog frantically yowling and scratching at the closed door?

Or we can ignore thinking of historical connections running in either direction, and think instead of synchronic, theoretical links that have nothing to do with temporal sequence or influence. We can, that is, try to calibrate the conceptual analogues, the similarities and differences among the three areas, Dickens, psychoanalysis, and film, with respect to such matters as how stories of lives begin and end, how narrative continuities

and ruptures alternate, how the coder and the decoder – author/reader, analysand/analyst, auteur/audience – transfer with and affect one another.

To follow up these suggestions we brought together in January 2001 a group of literary scholars, experts in film, and psychoanalysts and psychotherapists, sharing only a common enthusiasm for Dickens, on the page and on the screen. The work of the literary critics, Rob Polhemus and Murray Baumgarten, and the film experts, John Romano and Kamilla Elliott, is also represented elsewhere in this collection. The representatives from psychology and psychoanalysis, Estelle Shane, Muriel Brotsky, Jane Jordan, and Greg Bellow, are all practicing analysts and/or therapists. We provided a common starting point for our discussion by viewing together one of the indelible moments in the entire spectrum of Dickens adaptations, the murder of Nancy in David Lean's masterwork *Oliver Twist* (1948).

Kamilla Elliott: Ninety percent of the things written on film today in academia, unless they're historical, are written by feminists responding to Lacan's idea of the mirror stage, combining that with Freud's theory of voyeurism and castration anxiety. This began in the late 1970s when Laura Mulvey wrote an article on the male gaze in cinema. Basically her argument was that –

Greg Bellow: When you say that, I –

Kamilla Elliott: Want to cringe?

Greg Bellow: No, I want to say that I can't quite even half understand what you are saying.

Kamilla Elliott: OK. Let me introduce my question differently. It's for the psychoanalysts and psychotherapists in the group. We have shifted from a Victorian morality of Good and Evil, sometimes associated with class, sometimes not. And obviously psychoanalytic theory has also changed from a Freudian idea that what is bad is what is damaging or destructive for an individual, or for society. How then does this trajectory – from Dickens through film and psychoanalysis, from a world of good guys and bad guys – seem to strike you when you look at this scene from David Lean's *Oliver Twist*?

Estelle Shane: Lean's film is told in a much more complex way than just a simple opposition of good vs. bad or good vs. damaging. You see a complex configuration of "She's bad, I'll kill her" moving to "Maybe she's not bad. Maybe I've been lied to. Maybe I've killed the wrong person." And this is accompanied by a cluster of connections, configured with the dog's howl. You're not sure where it comes from, the dog, the man, this *conscience howl*. There is guilt, whether it's his conscience howling or it's the evil he's done coming back to him. It's brilliant. I love that scene.

John Romano: About the conscience: it's prepared for by both Lean and Dickens very carefully in the conversation with Fagin. Fagin is a philosopher. He's always laying out the principle of self-interest. And he takes Bill through a litany very carefully. "What would you do if I did it [betrayed the gang]? What would you do if Dodger did it... And so forth. Therefore, if Nancy did it, you must kill her." Sikes sees the inexorable logic and he goes out, and he does it. And he himself does not understand why, if his ideas commit him to this act, there is something else in him that objects. So, this scene, it's almost like a discovery of conscience. Except that I find this Bill Sikes, Robert Newton, wooden compared to Oliver Reed, the Sikes in Carol Reed's musical version (1968), who always carries, from the beginning, this anxiety.

Gerhard Joseph: When Fagin, just before Bill goes out to do the killing, says "Don't be too violent, Bill," does he really mean don't be too violent? Or –

John Romano: He says "Don't be violent beyond safety." So as violent as necessary. Fagin's ever the Benthamite, really, always saying "Do just as much as will get us there, but don't go beyond that, that would be foolish."

Estelle Shane: This is the harnessing of the superego and the id by the ego, because – to go back to Kamilla's question – it's really the ego that is the instrument of evil here. He says "If this is true then that, but do it in a way that doesn't get us into trouble." That's not id, that's ego.

Greg Bellow: It's a conscious decision, a rational decision.

Kamilla Elliott: So ego isn't the good guy all the time?

Greg Bellow: Not at all!

Kamilla Elliott: It's not just a mediator between superego and id?

Muriel Brotsky: It's a compromise formation.

Greg Bellow: The ego, to use John's term, is the utilitarian, the pragmatist.

John Romano: Whereas Dickens represents the English objection to Cartesian rationalism. The same in Hume. There's something in us that makes us, that will innately object to having to kill. Why would someone kill? Even if logic takes you there, Dickens is saying to the rationalist tradition among the utilitarians, that even in a Sikes, there is a part of us that cries out against this. That's where we look for the answer to Kamilla's question. Dickens is not just interested in giving us evil, he wants to say what makes a person evil, the way that David must be made the hero of his life, *by events*. That's not complete in the early novels, but there's a striving toward it even then, and Lean fills it out.

Estelle Shane: It's this complexity, latent in the Dickens text, that Lean points out, makes explicit in the film.

Greg Bellow: Does Sikes seem to have pangs of conscience in the book?

John Romano: "The eyes, the eyes."

Others: Yes.

Muriel Brotsky: In the book I felt that he was experiencing this sense of loss. Does that come out at all in the film?

Greg Bellow: Is it conscience or is it something more selfish like "What am I going to do without her?"

Gerhard Joseph: What about the focus on the bed? All that the bed means, with Nancy that's also lost.

Kamilla Elliott: And the flowers that she put in the pot. It's like the trace of her presence.

Gerhard Joseph: And the shot that moves from her hand to her dressing table. I think there's a humanization. What's great about the scene is that Lean doesn't emphasize it, but I think those shots do something to make us feel the loss and to show us that Sikes also feels it.

Estelle Shane: And the emptiness that comes from that extended silence with the lushness of natural imagery.

Muriel Brotsky: The sunrise. The whole deal. Yes, I agree.

Murray Baumgarten: One of the things the episode does so well is something that I like in Dickens a lot, and that's part of his vision of the city, what he called the attraction of repulsion. You look at that scene and you're repulsed, but you're also fascinated – you're deeply attracted. And Sikes has the same experience in looking at the dead body. At least in my memory both of the rest of the film but also of the book, there is an echo of the crucifixion issue, the attraction of repulsion, looking at the crucified body. So we have a kind of fundamental moment.

Kamilla Elliott: Which reminds me of something I also want to bring up. There's a whole sense in which Lean psychologizes through – not just things like the dog howling – but through all sorts of externals. So he shows you that shadow of the curtain, the family touch that Nancy's put into the house. And so one of my questions about this idea of Dickens, film, and psychoanalysis has to do with what happens between the book and the film.

For the most part I'd say that film cuts language and in the process it reduces the complexity of the psychological patterns in the books it adapts. But what happens with Lean is this consistent externalizing of things that aren't made explicit or revealed in the book. A great example comes from his *Great Expectations* (1946) where the boy Pip (Anthony Wager) is running terrified across the moors, being chased, but we see

he's actually being chased by his own shadow. And also in the clip we just watched, right before Bill kills Nancy, Lean does something with the lighting that creates a facial psychology that doesn't have to do with the actor's expression nearly as much as it has to do with the movement of the lighting. And there's no language. So, again a question for psychoanalysts: narrative apart, this kind of externalizing of the unrepresented and the unspoken, does it reveal ways in which film suggests you may not actually need language to encounter the psyche?

Estelle Shane: Right. It's the nonverbal, the paraverbal, that we have become so interested in nowadays.

Kamilla Elliott: But Freud and Lacan are absolutely insistent: the bottom line is language. Lacan says the unconscious is structured like a language. Freud claims you interpret the dreams, get those visuals into words, then you've got it. So are you saying there is now a new movement?

Estelle Shane: Definitely: nonverbal, paraverbal, non-linear.

Kamilla Elliott: Oh good! I'm so excited!

Estelle Shane: Now change is conceptualized as nonverbal. There is a whole school –

Kamilla Elliott: Psychoanalytic? A new branch?

Estelle Shane: Well, yes. Daniel Stern and the Boston Change Group. They began to publish in the late 1970s. They focus on what they call the "now moments," the moments of meaning which have nothing to do with verbal interaction. But they have everything to do with what they call procedural knowing or implicit knowing, where it's not put into words at all, and it never needs to be. Stern's idea is: interpretation is nice, but it's irrelevant when it comes to change, because change occurs in that nonverbal moment. That's arguable. Lots of people don't agree, but –

Gerhard Joseph: But that's the brilliance of this scene. It doesn't expound with sounds, it does everything not only in but with silence. There's no music. There's nothing. It's not too long, but it's very powerful.

Rob Polhemus: The relationship between picture, vision, and image is a very complex one and it shifts from novel to novel and from film to film as well as from specific novel to specific film. But, in general, this idea of externalized psychology is I think, what, tends to draw people to Dickens. And that's one of the reasons why people who are interested in vision, in pictures, find these books so rich and so suggestive. If we talk about that dog in *Oliver Twist*, the external psychology there, you could write volumes on the complexity of that image. If you take

Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*, Dickens's or Lean's. What is a neurotic who lives in the past like? She's like those ruins, those surroundings. And somehow this not only strikes us, it convinces us.

Greg Bellow: But this business that Estelle is talking about, that we associate with Stern and the Boston Change Group, isn't just about the external elements telling us the story. It's really more concerned with a shift which emphasizes the relationship as curative as opposed to interpretive. With this emphasis on the paraverbal and the nonlinear, you get away from the literal, from the word, from some sign standing for something else, and you get more interested in relationship and the transactions that go on between the patient and the therapist. It's the relationship that explains the cure, as opposed to what you learn verbally, or what you say verbally, or what emerges from the unconscious into consciousness through language. And so therapy gets away from the idea that all you need to do is get the thing worded right. "Aha! That's why I hate my mother," and having said it you're a changed person.

Estelle Shane: Which means that repression is kind of out and association is in. Things aren't kept *down*, they're just kept *out*. They can be conscious, or non-conscious, or unconscious, but coherence comes not just from naming, or seeing, but from bringing all of that stuff that's been outed not just into awareness or consciousness, but into the larger notion of "Who I am." *I am all of these things as well as these things that I want to focus on.*

Greg Bellow: Which also connects to the issue of the split between affect and idea. You can be aware of these things as items in a narrative but you're not aware of the emotional implications of them. And so you can go along in a kind of a robot-like or zombie-like existence, which is admittedly an extreme way to describe it. Knowing but not changing. Now the emphasis is bringing about a closer connection between what the self knows about itself and what it feels as a result of that knowing. You can live a great alienation from your feelings and still have awareness of what are the sources of these difficulties.

Gerhard Joseph: Which brings us right back to what Sikes feels when he kills Nancy.

Kamilla Elliott: And to Nancy herself.

Greg Bellow: Exactly. It's why for Dickens Nancy has redeeming features and Fagin does not. Throughout the novel, Dickens keeps saying that she has something of the woman in her, that sentimentality. She's touched by Oliver's looks, etc., and she saves his life at the cost of her own. And those are very redeeming qualities without a doubt, because she integrates her feelings with her life even at the cost of her life. But

Bill brings us back to the whole issue of disassociation. In order for Bill to kill Nancy, he's got, at least temporarily, to forget how important she is to him. He's got to eradicate the power of the relationship, in order to destroy her. And that's what people mean by disassociation, from a psychoanalytical point of view. The moment has to escape that emotional connection in order to do that sort of evil. Even though you know it you can't feel it. And then after she dies he says "Holy cow, what did I do?"

John Romano: And that's what Lean manages to register so perfectly through that long silent sequence, through the nonverbal choice and editing of his images.

Estelle Shane: But it's crucial that you realize that this kind of disassociation is not something you do deliberately. Disassociation is not something you can control. It is something that happens to you.

Greg Bellow: But we've also agreed that Bill was under the sway of Fagin's logic in the earlier scene. So there is some element of rational deliberation here.

John Romano: He's like those paid state executioners one reads about. They're pro-death penalty but their question is: "Why do I feel so guilty?" But they do, and their logic can't provide an answer.

Estelle Shane: What happens in this scene is this: what Bill does, what the ego does, invokes a certain side of him, and he has no control over that. It just happens to him. And when he sees the dead body and all of the paraphernalia Lean so beautifully depicts for us, he can't help it, the other part, the part that has an emotional tie to Nancy, comes to the fore. It's not that he says, "Let me sit and think and remember" or "I can now give up this other side."

Greg Bellow: It's not the return of the repressed, either.

Estelle Shane: No, it's not the return of the repressed. You can see how out of control he is because he couldn't stop where Fagin said to stop. If it were just "She put us at risk and I will get rid of her," he would have been able to stop without the brutality of the killing.

John Romano: And there is something about the way in which editing works in film – and we have to remember that David Lean was the premier film editor in the UK for a whole decade before he became a director – there is something about editing that makes this process of disassociation even more striking when we watch the scene than when we read it.

Kamilla Elliott: Because editing is based on disassociation. It relies on splicing together connections between things that are actually not connected. I shoot some film. And then I shoot some more film. And then in the editing process I take a bit from the first piece and snip it

together with a bit from the second. So editing associates but it also keeps pointing toward disassociation.

John Romano: And when it's presenting an experience of disassociation, as it is here, then the technique really comes into its own.

Rob Polhemus: As opposed to coherent prose narrative, which is always, syntactically and in other ways, making an ordered, coherent whole out of things.

Murray Baumgarten: Which is why, as Garrett Stewart argues, Dickens is always working against the cohering tendency in language, in favor of the ellipses. Which is what makes him – what? Proto-cinematic?

Jane Jordan: But I want to get back to Fagin. We keep on referring to him but we haven't really discussed him yet. Why does Lean depict Fagin with the huge nose prosthesis? Why is he depicted in a way that mobilizes such an anti-Semitic caricature?

Kamilla Elliott: This film was not allowed to be released for three years in the United States because of what they considered to be anti-Semitism. In the US we still see the cut version. There are other scenes where Fagin is even more clearly racialized. And the defense that Lean and Alec Guinness, who played Fagin, used was that they were copying George Cruikshank's original illustrations. Of course, if you go to Cruikshank's illustrations, you encounter a whole physiognomical tradition where the middle class including Monks are all depicted with these wonderful Grecian aquiline noses, and the lower classes, even lovable good people or mixed people like Nancy, all have that kind of lower physiognomy. This tradition of racial representation, with its class-based notions of nobility and morality, gets changed in the twentieth century, particularly after World War II. And this is further complicated in Hollywood with a significant number of Jewish filmmakers. But it was comfortably released in England without any question.

Gerhard Joseph: And of course the musical version, *Oliver!*, gives us a pretty attractive Fagin.

John Romano: Although it's well known that Sir Carol Reed stole shot for shot from Lean's version for the narrative portions of the musical. The storyboards are the same. If it were a world in which you could copyright shot selections and storyboards, this would be actionable, because in so many places he used exactly the same decision: we will shoot the scene by tracking Oliver this way, then we'll get the girl, then we'll cut broad.

But with Fagin, we have to realize there are at least hints of likeability in the Dickens. Dickens is giving us a charmer, but it's still an anti-Semitic portrait, for which he apologizes with the creation of Mr. Riah in *Our Mutual Friend*.

Kamilla Elliott: And Guinness's Fagin is also comical, a little bit. He makes Oliver laugh quite a bit in the scene. So you've got the seeds of Ron Moody in the musical.

Murray Baumgarten: But what's very interesting, both in the novel and in Lean's version of it, is that in the scene of Nancy's murder there is none of this guilt, or punishment, or sadness that Sikes imagines when he's "killing" Fagin. Fagin is clearly outside. As the Jew he's outside that Dickensian world of the attraction of repulsion. He's off the page, the positive evil other. Fagin should have been the one Sikes killed; instead, Fagin, the evil Jew, makes Sikes kill Nancy. And that seems to me a dreadful moment in terms of the history of this film and it seems to me a dreadful moment for western culture in its mythological articulation of the Jew as outside of the human realm of disassociation, repression, feeling.

John Romano: I certainly agree, what a disgraceful moment this is for all of us, but I also think that as viewers we get to choose. Jane referred to his nose. Whenever you look at the character on film, you are looking at his nose. That is, the anti-Semitic figure representation is always present to you in film. But when you are reading a book, you get to choose among the many aspects that we are speaking to. But there is a sense that Fagin's Jewishness is ever present in the film in a way it is not in the novel.

Murray Baumgarten: Well it is in the later editions, where he is called "The Jewish Devil." Not in the first edition.

John Romano: But Dickens's point is that Fagin has taken himself out of the human equation by asking Sikes to think according to a calculus of benefit and loss, the Benthamite calculus. So in a way the death of Fagin is not guilt-causing because he asked to be seen that way. Nancy is saying "Ah Bill, Bill, see me in our interpersonal way." That's what leads to the later attack of conscience.

But here we are also close to observing something very important about Dickens in films. My experience of adapting novels for the movies, and of comparing others' adaptations to the originals, suggests that what film always does is call the novelist's bluff. You called him a Jew, you've made him a Jew, you could have made him anything, but you made him a Jew. Which means that every time you see him, he will have this nose. Film says to the novel: Are you really willing to stand by the ever-present consequences, because I have no other way of shooting him? He's always who he is. A novelist can screen out other valences according to a context.

A wonderful example is in the version of *Women in Love* that was made by Ken Russell, where you are asked to remember the German lover

when he was a young skier in a sweatshirt instead of a soldier. If you are shooting it you don't get to see him as a skier, you can only see him as a soldier. But the novel can take you to the hilltops by saying "I was a boy in these hills," while the filmmaker is saying "I'm sorry, you put him in a uniform, sir. Whenever I show him he must be a soldier." So that kind of literalization means that, no matter how creatively inventive you are, novels get asked to show their cards. Of course films can screw it up too.

Gerhard Joseph: Except that this is the perfect example of the way in which that doesn't happen. In Ron Moody's Fagin you get a totally different interpretation from Alec Guinness's, so that Lean didn't have to go to the extreme that he did in the portrayal of Fagin as a Jew. In doing it, by totally racializing the face, the choice is made. So it's Lean's choice, not Dickens's.

John Romano: Well, Ron Moody is arguably less unpleasant, but his characterization is no less Jewish, to my mind. He does the song about the money. He uses Yiddish comedy. He uses Yiddish theater, which Ron Moody came out of.

Gerhard Joseph: But he does it through language, whereas your argument has to do with the visual.

John Romano: You're right. It's a visual argument.

Kamilla Elliott: And often in film, too, anybody who is a performer, who's entertaining, is inevitably going to be better received by the audience. Even in Lean's film, where Guinness can be funny and make people laugh. And by the time you get to the musical, the audience is valuing performances not so much for their morality or even for their ethnic status but because you value people you see on screen for how they entertain you. It's different from ethics and morality, from good guys and bad guys. And it's probably more marked in musicals.

Greg Bellow: What do you mean by entertain?

Kamilla Elliott: Singing, making jokes, making you laugh, engaging your attention in a way that in a book might not leap out at you any more than some deep and psychological introspection or some kind of description would. But in a performance medium, a theatrical film, the more entertaining character is the more engaging. That's why Pip in *Great Expectations* becomes this kind of lifeless, dull character surrounded by a pack of lively ones, because you lose that wonderful narrative voice.

Rob Polhemus: But it's also the casting. John Mills, who is so good so often, he's just terrible as Pip. Estella as Jean Simmons is perfect, but then she turns into Valerie Hobson, who is just dopey. On the screen we have responses that are not to Dickens's characters but to the actors

playing those roles and that can produce a very different impact than the text does.

Jane Jordan: But isn't anyone else haunted by the scene at the end of this movie, where the crowd swoons, and there's a sense of mob violence, particularly at the point where they say they've got Fagin? Murray, can you speak to this? It goes back to the latent anti-Semitism, only it's not so latent.

Murray Baumgarten: No, it seems to be very explicit there and very directly visualized for us, the whole response of the mob. Sikes ends up hanging himself, so the mob doesn't get him. But they get Fagin as the just punishment of the monster, if you will, who's the cause of all of this.

Greg Bellow: That speaks to the whole issue of group fantasia, to mob psychology.

Murray Baumgarten: But that violence is not seen as a bad thing at the end of the movie. It's like a football game: we're cheering the victors.

Muriel Brotsky: The contagion of the virus.

Rob Polhemus: But we need to separate out all the different things we are talking about here. We're talking about *Oliver Twist* in the Victorian era. Then we're talking about *Oliver Twist* at the end of World War II. And in addition this big subject of adaptation, and the relations between film and novels. And in this film by Lean there are many different and maybe even contradictory elements going into it, anti-Semitism, the mob, violence, all of these things which have been settled out for us since 1946 but were still jumbled in the wake of the war.

Gerhard Joseph: Exactly, because even with the anti-Semitism in Fagin, there is also, of course, in those early scenes, where the orphans are in the hall, a kind of concentration-camp effect. And that has to be intentional. Talk about a contradiction. The concentration camp being depicted in its gruesomeness and the anti-Semitic portrayal of Fagin: how do you get those two things into the same film?

John Romano: Let me add to that. I think we have to register deeply the anti-Semitism of Dickens's creation of Fagin. I agree with everything that's been said about that. But if one is trying to gauge the flow of our sympathies at the end of this movie, there's a real difference in how we feel about Sikes coming off that roof and how we feel about the cornered Fagin, victim of the mob. And I think that's a turn that we really have to mark. When you call Fagin the cause of Sikes's evil, I don't think that's a very good description of our sense of Sikes. Fagin may be the cause of the Artful Dodger's corruption. But we are looking at a certain very psychologically thick portrait of adult evil in Sikes. In Fagin we're seeing someone victimized by their own game: evil, a Jew,

many things to say. But I don't think our sympathy is with the mob as it turns on Fagin. It's about saving Oliver, and it's about killing the bad guy. And the bad guy of this moment isn't Fagin. It's Sikes.

Estelle Shane: You know I saw Fagin as very appealing at the beginning. I did. I thought he was a rescuer of those kids, like a Pied Piper. He sends these guys out to pick pockets, but what would have happened to Oliver had he not been saved by Fagin? Fagin took care of him, fed him at the beginning, in order to make him a useful member of his gang. I suppose that's the utilitarian aspect of it, but still – I liked him.

Kamilla Elliott: Until he shoves the poker in Oliver's face.

Estelle Shane: Well that wasn't nice.

Greg Bellow: They're what you would call non-violent criminals, Fagin's gang, other than Bill, what you would call non-violent criminals in today's metaphors.

Kamilla Elliott: Even philosophical non-violent criminals.

Estelle Shane: Yes.

John Romano: In a sense, you know, it's a shame that the Lean movies are so good as movies, both *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*. They are better films than, let's say it, Cukor's *David Copperfield*. As a result, a certain interpretation of Dickens got the best film outing, an interpretation Lean shared with 1940s literary critics like Edmund Wilson and Lionel Trilling and (someone a little later) Steven Marcus – very Germanic, angst-ridden, Freudian. Posit a Frank Capra, posit a genius of David Lean's order with a more humanistic, more J. S. Mill view of the world, which in many respects we might agree is closer to Dickens's own, you would have an equally great movie with a different color, because we are really getting the dark valley, the film noir, the Freudian driven, Edmund Wilson Dickens in Lean, where anxiety is cooler than resolution.

Rob Polhemus: And when Lean goes into and tries to do the Capra stuff, when he does the dances and so forth in *Great Expectations*, it's terrible, it's just terrible.

Gerhard Joseph: Well, of course, Capra's *It's A Wonderful Life* is a version of Dickens, isn't it, an adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*?

John Romano: Right. And that's what makes you wish Capra had actually done an adaptation of one of the novels.

Gerhard Joseph: My point is that *It's A Wonderful Life* is a version of Dickens, as much an adaptation of a Dickens story as any of the *Oliver*s or *Copperfield*s.

John Romano: Yes, that's right. But you also have to remember that it's only for the convenience of discussion that we talk about Lean's *Oliver* or Carol Reed's. Lean's film is different from Reed's because – to give

just one reason – of Arnold Bax's great score, for which, of course, there is no equivalent in Dickens's novel. A great filmmaker welcomes in the parts of the other filmmakers that are not parts of himself or parts of Dickens, and folds them all in together.

Greg Bellow: But W. C. Fields is exactly the way you expect Micawber to look and behave.

Gerhard Joseph: But isn't that because Fields based his earlier performance persona on Micawber, so that when he did finally come to play Micawber he was, in a sense, playing "himself"?

Greg Bellow: Except that Fields includes in Micawber things that Fields could do – he was an acrobat and a juggler – that aren't in Dickens.

Rob Polhemus: But now they have become so identified with Micawber that if we see a new performance from an actor who doesn't use Fields's stuff we'd think the performance wasn't accurate.

Greg Bellow: And we don't want Micawber ever to change. Is that, in part, what makes Dickens Dickens, this experience of repetition? Is that what we want from him, a guarantee against change?

Murray Baumgarten: Another way to put that question would be to ask whether reading a Dickens novel parallels the therapeutic experience. Do the ways in which Dickens impacts the reader parallel the analytic "work"? Is the moral discourse of Victorian society what we can now see and use as a therapeutic discourse?

Kamilla Elliott: We can see that question clearly with the ending to Lean's *Oliver*. There's a sequence that leads up to that ending, with Monks and Bill, where there's a lot of different people spying on other people, and it's particularly layered. It seems to me a place where all of it: psychoanalysis; uncovering secrets; watching to find out, to know; the narrative coming out, in film and in the novel – all of it happens, but happens here in a specifically kind of filmic way. You start out with Nancy watching Monks and Fagin, and Dodger is watching her and keeping an eye on her. And then they get some women singing and all the eyes go to the performing women, which is a sort of commune. Nancy's able to spy but then she is being spied on. The Dodger gets paid to watch her. We're paying to watch the film. But at the end, this mob comes and breaks down the barrier between the masses, the audience, and the characters who were doing the secret, bad deeds. And this again is what Murray called the attraction of repulsion. We're allowed to have this sort of catharsis because we watched and we were kind of implicit in the bad deeds, and now we can join the punishing mob.

Greg Bellow: One of the interesting things about both Dickens and psychotherapy has to do with the need for secrecy. In both the film and

the novel the gang is secret, and it has to stay secret to survive, and one of the things that Nancy did is that she betrayed the gang's secret, she publicized them. She opened them up to the view of respectable society because they made the mistake of trying to corrupt a respectable child. Had they just stuck to their own kind they would be in business to this day, because they were below the threshold of capital law. And so there is this whole idea of how looking at things and learning about them can get you into a whole lot of trouble.

Rob Polhemus: And a whole lot of pleasure.

Kamilla Elliott: It's like those scenes where Sikes pulls down the "man wanted" posters. Which have to remind a film audience of film posters. In film, there's this tension between wanting to tell that someone did a crime and hiding them so that we stay the audience, until –

Greg Bellow: Until, finally, everyone knows. By the time the mob gets there at the end everybody knows everything there is to tell.

Estelle Shane: But not everybody tells.

Gerhard Joseph: Or wants to.

Rob Polhemus: Or should.

Look at the two endings for *Great Expectations*. Which is the preferred ending? The "healthy" one: Pip's obsessions are removed and he is no longer interested in Estella. But "no," Bulwer-Lytton tells him, "you can't print that, Charles." So Dickens writes the other ending. Everything stays the same including the obsession with Estella. Does the fact that everyone prefers the second ending – and that's the one that gets filmed –

Kamilla Elliott: I've now seen five different versions of *Great Expectations* and they all end differently.

Rob Polhemus: But they also use the with-Estella ending, right, not the without-Estella.

Kamilla Elliott: Yes.

Rob Polhemus: Which seems to mean that we actually prefer repetition to change.

Gerhard Joseph: And with all the reading I have done, I have to ask myself: has it changed anything, has it made a difference? And if so, what kind of a difference has it made? Reading is a deeply vicarious experience, not just reading but moviegoing too, a way of not dealing with your experience, but giving yourself over to fantasies. Books, films, aren't they ways of evading living? You pay more attention to the pain on the page or the screen than to the pain in your life.

Muriel Brotsky: But you have to distinguish reading – books or films – when you are young from reading as a adult. For adults, yes, it is a way

of trying to remove yourself. But for young people, it can have a very different outcome.

John Romano: Well Dickens certainly tries not to be guilty of providing a leisure activity that would not change his readers.

Jane Jordan: There's a joke about how many therapists it takes to change a lightbulb. Only one, but the lightbulb has to be willing to change. One can read a book or view a film, and be transformed, or not be transformed. Films, novels, or therapy, it all depends on the readiness to take in the new experience.

John Romano: Yet I know that when I sit down to read a book, any book, I do it with a different frame of mind than the one I assume when I go out to see a film. And I think that contributes toward a different readiness for mutability.

Kamilla Elliott: When you read, the cognitive process moves from the symbol on the page to the perceptual world you create in the mind. In film, you are looking at all these extremely vivid perceptual stimuli, and you are reading meaning into them. Reading is the inverse process to viewing.

But with Dickens it becomes much more complicated because of the long history of adaptation of Dickens to the screen, virtually as long as the history of film itself. When we come to a Dickens text we are likely to come with the concrete images already predetermined. It's what we were saying a while back about W. C. Fields and Micawber. We may not have seen this particular novel adapted, but we have seen lots of Dickens and we know what Dickens, what Victorian, looks and feels like.

Murray Baumgarten: But there's also the other issue you raised earlier: entertainment. We take books more seriously than films because we treat film as entertainment. And maybe that ties film to therapy in a different way. I have friends who have told me, quite seriously, that the reason they started psychoanalysis was for entertainment.

Kamilla Elliott: To be entertained, or to entertain others?

Murray Baumgarten: How much should we see moviegoing, and at least some reading, and therapy as forms of entertainment?

Estelle Shane: Our patients today are very different from Freud's. Now they speak of a kind of emptiness, a sense that life is not complete or meaningful. The neurotic symptoms that confronted Freud are not what we see. Emptiness, I'm sure, is the reason you read a book, or go out to see a film, or go to an analyst.

Greg Bellow: To get your life to become more entertaining.

Gerhard Joseph: To make my experience something that interests me.

John Romano: And therefore gives me pleasure.

Murray Baumgarten: So is that why we should continue to teach Dickens to undergraduates, because Dickens is the first place they get to see the seriousness of Freud?

John Romano: And therefore the seriousness of pleasure.