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**“A thread of War in the peaceful skein”: Friendship and Tensions in  
“The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices” by Charles Dickens and Wilkie  
Collins (1857)**

**Isabelle HERVOUET**  
**CELIS, UCA**

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When Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins met in 1851, Dickens was already established as the most popular English novelist, whereas Collins was little more than an aspiring writer. Six years later, in 1857, Collins had written his first successful novels: *Basil* (1852), *Hide and Seek* (1854) and *The Dead Secret* (1856); he was a staff-member of *Household Words*, the magazine “conducted by Charles Dickens”, and as such a professional writer whose name Dickens had even agreed would appear in the magazine in recognition of his authorship of certain pieces (an unusual favour for Dickens to grant). The two men’s relationship was of course still that of “unequal partners<sup>1</sup>”, which it remained, arguably, until Dickens’s death in 1870. There is no doubt however that Dickens acknowledged Collins’s market value, and, on a more personal level, also greatly appreciated Collins’s ability to provide easy relaxation during their joint expeditions to London or Paris.

The summer of 1857 marked the successful completion of the two novelists’ collaboration on the melodrama of *The Frozen Deep*, officially written by Collins, but which Dickens had both imagined<sup>2</sup> and heavily revised. *The Frozen Deep* was performed in Manchester at the end of August, and immediately afterwards Dickens suffered another attack

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<sup>1</sup> Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, & Victorian Authorship*, Ithaca & London, Cornell University Press, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> The “mighty original notion” of the play had been “[his] in the beginning”. Charles Dickens, *The Pilgrim Edition of The Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol. 8, 1856-1858, Graham Storey & Kathleen Tillotson (eds.), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 81.

of the anxiety and misery attending the end of each bout of feverish activity. His unhappiness, this time, was increased by difficulties at home which would lead to his separation from his wife in 1858. On August 29<sup>th</sup>, he wrote to Collins:

Partly in the grim despair and restlessness of this subsidence from excitement, and partly for the sake of *Household Words*, I want to cast about whether you and I can go anywhere – take any tour – see any thing – whereon we could write something together. Have you any idea, tending to any place in the world<sup>3</sup>?

Dickens was therefore “in a Collinsian state<sup>4</sup>” i.e. ready for the kind of distraction he associated with Collins, always a cheerful and tolerant companion. It would be an easy and misguided conclusion to draw from Dickens’s urgent letter that it was up to Collins to decide which “place in the world” the two friends would visit. As early as September 3<sup>rd</sup>, Dickens booked lodgings at the Angel Hotel, Doncaster<sup>5</sup>, where he had already planned they would spend a week during the St Leger Races. The journey would in fact give him the opportunity to spend time in Doncaster with Ellen Ternan, the young actress he had met while acting in *The Frozen Deep* and with whom he was infatuated. The journey was to provide Dickens with a welcome period of respite but was not quite meant to be travel for leisure purposes only: on the professional front, Dickens had only written one short piece for *Household Words* in three months and was worried about the current drop in circulation<sup>6</sup>. “The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices”, this “something” written by the two friends, was therefore the result of their travelling together specifically to provide entertaining newspaper copy (it was serialised in *Household Words* in October 1857).

Both novelists had written travel narratives before, but separately. Dickens, of course, had published his two famous travelogues, *American Notes* in 1842 and *Pictures from Italy* in 1846; and Collins had published *Rambles Beyond Railways*, the narrative of a trip through Cornwall, in 1851. There had been other shared trips before (to Italy notably, France, and London). But this time, they turned their attention more prosaically to the North of England where they would find Ellen Ternan. They left London for Carlisle on September 7<sup>th</sup>, then quickly toured Cumberland, stopping at several villages like Hesket, Wigton, and Allonby (on

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 423.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 429.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 423, n. 1.

the coast) then in Lancaster, before spending the week of the 14<sup>th</sup> in Doncaster. The trip lasted two weeks, and the corresponding travelogue is a rather short one, of about 40,200 words.

Given Dickens's formidable and constraining influence, as well as his position as literary mentor to the younger, less experienced novelist, the question of authorship is one that inevitably comes to mind. What were the terms of the collaboration that gave rise to "The Lazy Tour"? The indications provided in Dickens's correspondence and the shifts in the narrative view-point show that "The Lazy Tour" is a juxtaposition of parts each written by one of the novelists or the other. Even though it is reasonably easy to attribute each portion to its rightful author<sup>7</sup>, the overall seamless structure makes it difficult at times to know exactly where one section ends and another begins, which probably bears witness to the friendly nature of their collaboration.

On September 4<sup>th</sup>, Dickens wrote whimsically: "I am off, on a wild tour with Wilkie Collins to write a gossiping description of all that we see and all that we don't see ... we have not the least idea where we are going to<sup>8</sup>." Since it is focused notably on "all that [the writers did]n't see", it is no wonder to find that "The Lazy Tour" serves little descriptive or didactic purpose – although one finds perhaps even *fewer* descriptions of the writers' surroundings than could be expected. In "The Lazy Tour" (as I intend to show first), the two novelists obviously enjoy playing with the conventions of travel writing, which they more or less followed in their previous travel narratives. They provide such an impressionistic account of their expedition that its interest quickly shifts to the travellers' responses to the places they visit, responses which in turn are revealing of their personalities. One of the most remarkable aspects of the short narrative, therefore, is that it offers insight into the two novelists' professional and personal relationship. In her captivating analysis of their "unequal partner[ship]", Lillian Nayder explains that "The Lazy Tour" stages both Dickens's desire to downplay their differences and Collins's attempts to challenge Dickens's authoritative voice<sup>9</sup>. It is clear that the misleading portrait of the two friends as "idle apprentices" suggests an identity of temperament which is scarcely borne out by the travelogue. The radical differences between their dispositions indeed lead to the emergence of tensions which the narrative at times barely hides. The present analysis aims however to question Nayder's rather definite view of a rebellious Collins opposed to a conciliatory Dickens, by paying close attention to the textual inscription of the tensions between the two novelists.

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed attribution of authorship, see Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners...*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Dickens, *Letters*, *op. cit.*, p. 430.

<sup>9</sup> See Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners...*, *op. cit.*, p. 100-115.

### *Travel Writers or Travelling Writers?*

It is necessary to adopt quite a broad definition of travel writing in order to include the otherwise promising “Tour” within the loose boundaries of the genre, based as it is on a trip whose main purpose was not the discovery of new places or a referential discussion of well-known spots. In Dickens’s own words, “The Lazy Tour” “contains some descriptions (hem!) remarkable for their fanciful fidelity, and two grim stories – the first [...] by the cripple [Collins], the second [...] by your present correspondent<sup>10</sup>”. Dickens here mentions the most strikingly unconventional feature of the travelogue, i.e. the inclusion of fiction with the two “grim stories”: Collins’s “The Dead Hand”, and his own “The Bride’s Chamber”. Such obviously anti-generic inclusion can however be easily explained by the readers’ horizon of expectation: *Household Words* was a widely popular magazine which, like many others in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, offered its readers a miscellany of fiction and journalism, which accounts for the juxtaposition of scenes inspired by the real trip (in which the writers are the focus of attention) and pieces of fiction.

Even leaving the two tales aside, the first impression is that literal truthfulness is not essential to the narrative, since the highly subjective account often resorts to the conventions of fiction. The travelogue is contaminated by fiction most conspicuously when the two writers decide to adopt fictional personae – and third-person narration: “They took to themselves (after Hogarth), the names of Mr. Thomas Idle and Mr. Francis Goodchild<sup>11</sup>.” Dickens is Francis Goodchild, Collins Thomas Idle. The resort to aliases had already been used, notably by Collins himself, who two years before had written a comic travelogue based on a trip to the Scilly Islands undertaken with his friend Edward Pigott. This travelogue, entitled “The Cruise of the Tomtit”, featured two men, Jollins and Migott<sup>12</sup>. In “The Lazy Tour”, the writers’ wish to turn themselves into characters of fiction does not necessarily mean that they are not telling the truth about their trip, or about themselves. The fictionality of their names is indeed made explicit (“they took to themselves...”) and the two novelists are, as we will see, only thinly disguised. As Dickens’s correspondence shows<sup>13</sup>, “The Lazy Tour”, far from being an imaginary travelogue, is a reasonably honest account of the circumstances of his and Collins’s

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<sup>10</sup> Charles Dickens, *Letters, op. cit.*, p. 458.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins, “The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices” (1857), Cirencester, The Echo Library, 2005, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> “The Cruise of the Tomtit”, however, is narrated in the first person by Jollins.

<sup>13</sup> See Charles Dickens, *Letters, op. cit.*, p. 438-51.

September trip, from the mention of Collins's "new shooting-jacket"<sup>14</sup> to that of the Lancaster inn forever serving bride-cake in Chapter 4.

Although the experience recounted in "The Lazy Tour" is real and the details relatively accurate, the two "apprentices" promptly define themselves against the figure of the dedicated traveller in search of uncharted territories or earnestly interested in the places he visits. The centrality of travel is quickly contested: "They had no intention of going anywhere in particular; they wanted to see nothing, they wanted to know nothing, they wanted to learn nothing, they wanted to do nothing"<sup>15</sup>. Their shared lack of enthusiasm as tourists is the source of the very funny initial scene: in order to "[walk] down into the North of England"<sup>16</sup> as idly as possible, Thomas Idle refuses to walk and Francis Goodchild starts walking south. From then on, the rhetoric of paradox becomes the basic principle of travel writing as conceived by Dickens and Collins for their "Lazy Tour". The travellers' wish "to see nothing" is almost granted: they see little and learn less, there is no mind-broadening exploration of unfamiliar territory – there was very little exploration on Collins's part, since he sprained his ankle on the second day of the expedition and spent most of the fortnight inside a hotel room. But otherwise, most of the scenic locations prove very disappointing to the apprentices. The Lake District is overrated: "old Skiddaw [...] has vaunted himself a great deal more than his merits deserve; but that is rather the way of the Lake country"<sup>17</sup> and Carrock Fell "is but a trumpery little mountain of fifteen hundred feet, and it presumes to have false tops, and even precipices, as if it were Mont Blanc"<sup>18</sup>. The climbing of Carrock Fell in particular, a challenging peak in the Lake District and one of the rare places Dickens was keen to explore, proved, as Collins's narrative shows, both a disaster precisely because he sprained his ankle in the descent, and a waste of time because a torrential rain prevented them from seeing anything:

The scene of the moorland and the fields was like a feeble water-colour drawing half sponged out. [...] Idle, drenched and panting, stands up with his back to the wind, ascertains distinctly that this is the top at last, looks round with all the little curiosity that is left in him, and gets, in return, a magnificent view of – Nothing<sup>19</sup>!

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins, "The Lazy Tour...", *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9-10.

The village of Allonby isn't the "delicious piece of sea-coast"<sup>20</sup> imagined by Goodchild:

"A watering-place," retorted Thomas Idle, with the pardonable sharpness of an invalid, "can't be five gentlemen in straw hats, on a form on one side of a door, and four ladies in hats and falls, on a form on another side of a door, and three geese in a dirty little brook before them, and a boy's legs hanging over a bridge (with a boy's body I suppose on the other side of the parapet), and a donkey running away"<sup>21</sup>."

Faced with unwelcoming places often shrouded in the unrelenting rain, the writers display their disregard for the referential quality of traditional travel writing by remaining particularly unspecific in their descriptions: "The great towns [of Yorkshire] were neared, and [...] looked, in the cinderous wet, as though they had one and all been on fire and were just put out – a dreary and quenched panorama, many miles long"<sup>22</sup>." Dickens in particular (who soon becomes the only writer capable of describing their surroundings<sup>23</sup>) is more interested in the rapid changes in the scenery than in the specificities of that scenery:

The pastoral country darkened, became coaly, became smoky, became infernal, got better, got worse, improved again, grew rugged, turned romantic; was a wood, a stream, a chain of hills, a gorge, a moor, a cathedral town, a fortified place, a waste<sup>24</sup>.

Indeed, if "The Lazy Tour" is unusual as travel writing (to say the least), as Dickensian writing it isn't. What fascinates Dickens is the act of travelling itself, and particularly, here as elsewhere<sup>25</sup>, travelling by train. Dickens was delighted by speed at a time when the development of the railways made travelling so much faster. In his study of Dickens's "Mechanical Style", John Kucich analyses the novelist's ambiguous attitude towards machinery. Besides "the horror he expresses in the novels over the reduction of human beings to the status of machines"<sup>26</sup>", Dickens, Kucich explains, fully shared in "the popular Victorian fascination with the locomotive", a fascination attributed to "the fully automated, self-regulating, and therefore seemingly independent life of energy in the

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>23</sup> After the narrative of the ascension of Carrock Fell in Chapter 1, Collins only authors "The Dead Hand" in Chapter 2, a retrospective account of Idle's love of idleness in Chapter 3, and a long diatribe against the slyness of horses in Chapter 5.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins, "The Lazy Tour...", *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> See for example Dickens's "A Flight", published in *Household Words* in 1851.

<sup>26</sup> John Kucich, *Excess and Restraint in the Novels of Charles Dickens*, Athens (Georgia), The University of Georgia Press, 1981, p. 202.

locomotive. For the Victorians, the concepts of machine and of life began to merge<sup>27</sup>”. In “The Lazy Tour”, the anti-romantic railway theme is dealt with in a highly imaginative, again almost impressionistic, manner, especially in the final section of Chapter 3, where the motif of mechanical life triggers an apparently uncontrolled surge of imagination, which Kucich would describe in terms of the “narrative energy in Dickens [...] [which] seems to enjoy consuming itself before the reader’s eyes, without necessarily leaving the trace of a meaning<sup>28</sup>”. The two apprentices establish themselves “at a station where there [is] an Inn” and where “other people will travel for [them], as it were<sup>29</sup>”. Dickens’s description of the station would be quoted in full, were it possible. The initial section will give an idea of its unrestrained energy:

[There] were only two [contrasts], but they were Lethargy and Madness. The Station was either totally unconscious, or wildly raving. By day, in its unconscious state, it looked as if no life could come to it, – as if it were all rust, dust, and ashes – as if the last train for ever, had gone without issuing any Return-Tickets – as if the last Engine had uttered its last shriek and burst. One awkward shave of the air from the wooden razor, and everything changed. Tight office-doors flew open, panels yielded, books, newspapers, travelling-caps and wrappers broke out of brick walls, money chinked, conveyances oppressed by nightmares of luggage came careering into the yard, porters started up from secret places, ditto the much-injured women, the shining bell, who lived in a little tray on stilts by himself, flew into a man’s hand and clamoured violently. The pointsman aloft in the signal-box made the motions of drawing, with some difficulty, hogsheads of beer. Down Train! More beer! Up Train! More beer! Cross junction Train! More beer! Cattle Train! More beer. Goods Train! Simmering, whistling, trembling, rumbling, thundering. Trains on the whole confusion of intersecting rails, crossing one another, bumping one another, hissing one another, backing to go forward, tearing into distance to come close. People frantic<sup>30</sup>.

As is so often the case in his writings, Dickens’s excessive energy is channelled into the narrative and is a source of delight to the reader. The episode of “Lethargy and Madness” shows that there is more sheer pleasure to be derived from exuberant writing than from strictly referential writing<sup>31</sup>. Dickens definitely appears more as a travelling writer than a travel writer (as does Collins, for different reasons), especially since besides the station, a place undoubtedly central to travelling *per se*, but an unlikely place to visit, Dickens’s imagination is triggered by the inside of British houses, another unexpected location for a British travel writer to muse on. The very detailed description of the upstairs drawing room of

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6-7.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins, “The Lazy Tour...”, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44-5.

<sup>31</sup> On this, see John Kucich, *Excess and Restraint...*, *op. cit.*, p. 197-242.

the Heskett Inn, in Chapter one, bears witness to Dickens's well-known passion for all forms of domesticity.

If the apprentices themselves often neglect to look at the countryside, they are the constant objects of a great deal of staring. Everywhere human activity is brought to a halt so that people can look at Idle and Goodchild: "in the sight of people looking up<sup>32</sup>", "clean children coming out to look, [...] [w]omen pausing in washing, to peep from doorways and very little windows<sup>33</sup>", etc. It is thus possible to conjecture why Dickens and Collins opted for narration in the third person: paradoxical as it may seem, since it would be logical to think that the narrator's centrality is guaranteed by narration in the first person, third-person narration displaces the focus from the places visited onto the two travellers. They are now seen from outside, objects to look at and describe. This again participates in the reader's delight. Dickens, for example, having changed into dry clothes, describes himself as "a shining frontispiece to the fashions for the month, and a frightful anomaly in the Cumberland village<sup>34</sup>".

### *Portraits of the Artists as Idle Travellers*

Third-person narration and the adoption of fictional personae indeed generate some very funny self-portraits, which are informed by a great deal of self-derision. Here are two vignettes, the first one authored by Collins, the second, by Dickens:

Mr. Idle, farther and farther in the rear, with the water squeaking in the toes of his boots, with his two-guinea shooting-jacket clinging damply to his aching sides, with his overcoat so full of rain, and standing out so pyramidically stiff, in consequence, from his shoulders downwards, [...] felt as if he was walking in a gigantic extinguisher – the despairing spirit within him representing but too aptly the candle that had just been put out<sup>35</sup>.

Moreover, said Mr. Goodchild, with his finger on the map, this exquisite retreat was approached by a coach-road, from a railway-station called Aspatria – a name, in a manner, suggestive of the departed glories of Greece, associated with one of the most engaging and most famous of Greek women. On this point, Mr. Goodchild continued at intervals to breathe a vein of classic fancy and eloquence [...], until it appeared that the honest English pronunciation of that Cumberland country

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<sup>32</sup> Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins, "The Lazy Tour...", *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

shortened Aspatria into “Spatter.” After this supplementary discovery, Mr. Goodchild said no more about it<sup>36</sup>.

It quickly becomes apparent however that the motif of idleness is central to the portraits. The narrative starts by describing the two apprentices as equally idle: “They took to themselves (after Hogarth), the names of Mr. Thomas Idle and Mr. Francis Goodchild; but there was not a moral pin to choose between them, and they were both idle in the last degree<sup>37</sup>”, but a distinction is immediately established:

Between Francis and Thomas, however, there was this difference of character: Goodchild was laboriously idle, and would take upon himself any amount of pains and labour to assure himself that he was idle; in short, had no better idea of idleness than that it was useless industry. Thomas Idle, on the other hand, was an idler of the unmixed Irish or Neapolitan type; a passive idler, a born-and-bred idler, a consistent idler, who practised what he would have preached if he had not been too idle to preach; a one entire and perfect chrysolite of idleness<sup>38</sup>.

Idleness for Goodchild is thus “useless industry”, a type of energy similar to that described by Kucich as pertaining to the level of narration, i.e. excessive and utterly disengaged. Dickens is immediately identified, and from this first page onward, the adjective “lazy”, when applied to Goodchild/Dickens, becomes its own antithesis. To be lazy is to be industrious: “Mr. Goodchild, [...] in the fatigues of such labours, congratulated himself on attaining a high point of idleness<sup>39</sup>”; “[h]aving done nothing to fatigue himself for a full quarter of an hour, Francis began to fear that he was not in a state of idleness<sup>40</sup>.” Dickens draws on the paradox so often in the course of his portions of the travelogue that the comic effect, though undisputable, is arguably marred by the reader’s suspicion that such repetitions signal an obsessive motif: “Goodchild, who had been walking round his companion in a circuit of twelve miles for two days, [...] had begun to doubt whether it was reserved for him ever to be idle in his life<sup>41</sup>.”

The interchangeability of the two apprentices suggested in the title is therefore strongly contradicted, and the contrast between Dickens and Collins established. As Nayder

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

explains<sup>42</sup>, Collins probably played along with Dickens's description of him as "a born-and-bred idler, a consistent idler", though his portrait is less faithful than that of Dickens. To render one's true degree of idleness accurately is definitely less an issue with Collins than with Dickens. Chapter 3 contains a very long section written by Collins, a portrait of Thomas Idle's past life and ill-advised bouts of activity. There is biographical truth in the portrait: as a child, Collins was considered as a good-for-nothing by his headmaster<sup>43</sup> (as Idle is), though he was punished for rebelling in the face of excessive authority, not because he was lazy. As a young man, Collins also did indeed select the law as a profession, though in his case not to remain idle, but because he thought it would give him enough free time to write novels<sup>44</sup>.

Lillian Nayder explains why the motif of idleness is the central defining characteristic of the two travellers. First of all, in spite of its endotic exploration of the North of England, "The Lazy Tour" was written mainly, she argues, to express Dickens's support of British imperialism and profound hatred of the Sepoy mutiny of 1857 in India. The travelogue is destined more specifically to voice Dickens's anxieties concerning class differences, in the light of the reluctance of young men from the lower classes to join the ranks and fight in India for the defence of the Empire, when "the class divisions in the army and the elitism of its officers [were made] particularly apparent<sup>45</sup>". Indeed, in spite of the light holiday atmosphere pervading his narrative, Dickens cannot refrain from alluding to the war: "Through all these bargains and blessings, the recruiting-sergeant watchfully elbowed his way, a thread of War in the peaceful skein<sup>46</sup>." In this context, laziness is crucial because, Nayder says,

Representing his characters as the members of an all-inclusive idle class, a nation gone on holiday, Dickens solves the problem of resentment in the rank and file. [...] Transforming industry into idleness and work into play, Dickens represents Englishmen as members of a leisure class, whether they are high or low born, wealthy or impoverished<sup>47</sup>.

Secondly, and simultaneously, "Dickens identifies Goodchild and Idle as fellow apprentices on vacation, obscuring the authority he wields in their working relationship<sup>48</sup>". Idleness is therefore doubly important to Dickens, Nayder convincingly argues, since he uses the motif to elide two sources of resentment, one national, the other personal. However, as

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<sup>42</sup> See Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners...*, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>43</sup> See Andrew Lycett, *Wilkie Collins: A Life of Sensation*, London, Windmill Books, 2014, p. 46.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65 & 92.

<sup>45</sup> Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners...*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins, "The Lazy Tour...", *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners...*, *op. cit.*, p. 107-109.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

suggested above, Dickens, being desperately industrious himself, is never quite comfortable with the motif of idleness, an aspect of “The Lazy Tour” Lillian Nayder generally ignores. The examples she gives of the “nation gone on holiday<sup>49</sup>” are taken from descriptions authored by Dickens in which laziness is anything but pleasant. In Allonby for example, there are “plenty of fishermen who never fished”, true, but “their children [...] [are] always hurting themselves”, “the houses [...] [are] all more or less cracked and damaged [...], and all empty<sup>50</sup>”. Goodchild’s description of two idle men met in Wigton is also quite troubling:

“They are mysterious men,” said Brother Francis, “with inscrutable backs. They keep their backs towards me with persistency. If one turns an inch in any direction, the other turns an inch in the same direction, and no more. [...] They are looking at nothing – very hard. Their backs are slouched, and their legs are curved with much standing about. Their pockets are loose and dog’s-eared, on account of their hands being always in them. [...] Now, they turn, and I see [...] that they have no expression at all<sup>51</sup>.”

The two men have their hands in their pockets, a phrase Dickens uses five times in “The Lazy Tour” to describe three different groups of people<sup>52</sup>, two of them clearly unsettling (the Wigton men and the Doncaster “Lunatics and Keepers” of Chapter 5). Idle people keeping their hands in their pockets are more disturbing than otherwise, especially when one thinks of Pip’s dead brothers in the first page of *Great Expectations*<sup>53</sup>. In “The Lazy Tour”, Dickens’s discomfort with idleness gradually pervades the portions authored by him, to the climax of the Doncaster Races, at which point idleness has become evocative of madness rather than being “a feature of an idyll<sup>54</sup>”. The people at the Races are “Travellers disgorged into an open space, a howling wilderness of idle men<sup>55</sup>”.

That Dickens should be both fascinated and uncomfortable with idleness is not an original or new idea. If Nayder convincingly argues that idleness is a key motif in the travelogue for political reasons, the personal dimension quickly appears predominant when Dickens’s hyperactivity is established as inversely proportional to Collins’s passiveness (which as we know did not correspond to the reality of Collins’s temperament). The contrast

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins, “The Lazy Tour...”, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5, 16, 17 & 68.

<sup>53</sup> Pip imagines that his five dead brothers “had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence” (Chapter 1).

<sup>54</sup> Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners...*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>55</sup> Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins, “The Lazy Tour...”, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

between the two apprentices then becomes the pretext for the expression of the growing tensions between the writers.

### *Tensions*

If the two apprentices' fictional friendship mirrors the complexity of the authors' professional and personal connection, then the reader of "The Lazy Tour" feels increasingly uneasy, in spite of its light-hearted tone. Indeed, the relationship between Goodchild and Idle grows from mildly to blatantly resentful. Goodchild's controlling attitude is the first source of friction, especially as he seems to have the last word every time the two men disagree on future destinations or courses of action. Here is the example of Collins's narrative of the ascension, and subsequent descent, of Carrock Fell:

Idle, dwelling on the pains inseparable from that achievement, had expressed the strongest doubts of the expediency, and even of the sanity, of the enterprise; but Goodchild had carried his point, and they rode away<sup>56</sup>.

It appeared to the uninstructed mind of Thomas that when three men want to get to the bottom of a mountain, their business is to walk down it; and he put this view of the case, not only with emphasis, but even with some irritability. He was answered from the scientific eminence of [Goodchild's] compass<sup>57</sup>.

But Idle seems to retaliate, in a curiously underhand segment:

[A]ll the great disasters which had tried [Idle's] patience and equanimity in early life, had been caused by his having allowed himself to be deluded into imitating some pernicious example of activity and industry that had been set him by others. The trials to which he here alludes were three in number, and may be thus reckoned up: First, the disaster of being an unpopular and a thrashed boy at school; secondly, the disaster of falling seriously ill; thirdly, the disaster of becoming acquainted with a great bore<sup>58</sup>.

At this point, the reader knows about the latest misadventure brought about by Idle's activity, but Goodchild's responsibility in the "Episode of The Sprained Ankle<sup>59</sup>" has remained implicit. Would the "great bore" be Goodchild/Dickens himself? Though the answer turns out

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

to be negative, and the bore another law student of Idle's young days, the thought crosses the reader's mind – as it *must* have crossed Collins's.

When Idle becomes overtly resentful of Goodchild's conduct, idleness (or Goodchild's "useless activity") is again a crucial issue. Idle's long diatribe (authored by Collins) denouncing the slyness of horses is interrupted only by mentions of Goodchild's restlessness: "Thomas, irritably alluding to his fellow-apprentice's inexhaustible activity [...]"<sup>60</sup>, "Goodchild, starting up and walking restlessly about the room"<sup>61</sup>." This time, as we can see, Collins refuses to go along with Dickens's joke that Goodchild's activity should be termed "idleness". A more interesting example of rising tension is found in the portrait of Goodchild by Idle, in a section written by Dickens:

"You *can't* play. You don't know what it is. You make work of everything."

The bright Goodchild amiably smiled.

"So you do," said Thomas. "I mean it. To me you are an absolutely terrible fellow. You do nothing like another man. Where another fellow would fall into a footbath of action or emotion, you fall into a mine. Where any other fellow would be a painted butterfly, you are a fiery dragon. Where another man would stake a sixpence, you stake your existence. If you were to go up in a balloon, you would make for Heaven; and if you were to dive into the depths of the earth, nothing short of the other place would content you. What a fellow you are, Francis!"

The cheerful Goodchild laughed.

"It's all very well to laugh, but I wonder you don't feel it to be serious," said Idle. "A man who can do nothing by halves appears to me to be a fearful man"<sup>62</sup>."

The amiable aspects of the portrait ("bright", "cheerful") are found in Dickens's narrative, not in Idle's words. Dickens's authoring this portion enables him to contain the critical phrases ("terrible fellow", "fearful man") within his own depiction of his good-hearted fictional self. Through Goodchild he has the last word again: "the airy Goodchild clapped Mr. Idle on the shoulder in a *final* manner"<sup>63</sup>." If Dickens thus resolves the underlying conflict, clearly his fictional self gets on Idle's fictional nerves, which can be interpreted as traces of Collins's ambivalence towards his friend and mentor (the portrait here perfectly corresponds to what we know of Dickens's personality). In fact, in this excerpt, Dickens uses a complex system in which Collins is free to vent his resentment, but *he* can both reaffirm his authority and soften

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

his portrait. In addition, he may well use Collins/Idle's voice to express his own helplessness in front of his excessive temperament.

Lillian Nayder explains that “‘The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices’ elides the distinction between the staff writer and the literary conductor, as both become ‘apprentices’ to ‘lady Literature’<sup>64</sup>”. Dickens clearly has difficulty in maintaining such a smoothing out of the novelists’ differences. He is the better writer, and he tends to reassert his position of authority by foregrounding the act of writing, which inevitably turns Collins once again into his subordinate, not his fellow apprentice. Dickens is the one to put an end to the pretence that the two idle travellers are taking a break from literature when he stages the writing of the travelogue: “Night had come again, and they had been writing for two or three hours: writing, in short, a portion of the lazy notes from which these lazy sheets are taken<sup>65</sup>.” Dickens also does not hesitate to leave explicit traces of his authoring sections of the narrative (such as “Mr Goodchild writes<sup>66</sup>”) when one finds no such traces in Collins’s portions. Dickens is constantly more intrusive; he even lapses into the first person towards the end: “I never have seen... [...] (thus writes Mr. Goodchild)<sup>67</sup>”, “I go down the street<sup>68</sup>”, “we put up at the Angel<sup>69</sup>”, thus establishing himself as the central, authoritative “I”. The episode of Carrock Fell is remarkable when it comes to discussing Dickens’s authority. Collins describes the crippled Idle as very passive: he “was propped up against the garden wall, like an artist’s lay figure waiting to be forwarded<sup>70</sup>.” It is very curious that Collins should write this portrait of himself adopting and developing Dickens’s own vision of a helpless and reified cripple. On the day following the expedition, Dickens had written to Forster: “We got down at last to the wildest place, preposterously out of the course; and, propping up C. against stones, sent Mr P. to the other side of Cumberland for dog-cart...<sup>71</sup>” Either Collins borrowed Dickens’s phrase, or Dickens revised Collins’s contribution before publication. In either case, Collins’s authorship is here seriously challenged.

It is time now to examine the pieces of fiction included in “The Lazy Tour”. In the two interpolated tales, once again – though more indirectly – Dickens re-establishes his position of authority. The tale found in Chapter 4, “The Bride’s Chamber”, is his story. There are echoes

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<sup>64</sup> Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners...*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>65</sup> Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins, “The Lazy Tour...”, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Dickens, *Letters*, *op. cit.*, p. 440.

between “The Bride’s Chamber” and *The Frozen Deep*, as Deborah Thomas has shown: “[B]oth depict a triangular relationship in which th[e] older, central character vies with a younger, weaker, but more appropriate suitor for a woman whom each wishes to possess<sup>72</sup>.” Critics usually read the love triangle in the light of Dickens’s personal situation: “[It] seems symptomatic of Dickens’s own current inner conflict (as wife-abusing husband as well as ineligible lover) [...] [and] to reveal some of Dickens’s own forbidden yearnings<sup>73</sup>.” This, however, is not the central source of interest here. The ghost narrates two stories: his own – the story of how he murdered his wife – and that of the two travellers to whom he wished, but failed, to confess. It is fascinating to read the description of these other two men who visited the Bride’s chamber before Goodchild and Idle. Uncannily, one is forty-five (Dickens’s age in 1857), the other one is twelve years younger (exactly like Collins):

One of them was a bold, gay, active man, in the prime of life, some five and forty years of age; the other, a dozen years younger. [...] [T]he bold, gay, active man [...] was the leader. [...] They had travelled together, and had been much together, and had an abundance of subjects in common<sup>74</sup>.

The younger man (Collins’s fictional self) is called “Dick”, one of Dickens’s favourite names to refer to himself. Dickens again describes himself as a pre-eminent figure, “the leader”, and turns Collins into a mere avatar, one of the many “Dick” figures in his fiction. The tale however is concluded on a less triumphant note: the scene ends with “the leader” desperately trying to keep his companion awake so as not to be alone with the spectre: “The leader [...] looked at him with a sudden horror [...]. ‘Get up and walk, Dick!’ cried the leader. ‘Try!’<sup>75</sup>” Through this scene, Dickens is imaginatively trying either to bring his younger self back to life in order to feel young enough to court Ellen Ternan, as Peter Ackroyd would have it<sup>76</sup> – or, as is perhaps more likely, to wake up Collins, to shake him out of his sleep – or idleness? – in order to have the younger man help save him from his obsessions. Indeed, despair pervades the epidegesis of Dickens’s tale. Once the ghost’s story is finished, Goodchild/Dickens realises that he is in the same predicament as “the leader”, the earlier visitor of the Bride’s chamber, a predicament described as a “terrible situation” causing “indescribable dread<sup>77</sup>”.

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<sup>72</sup> Deborah Thomas, “Murder and Self-Effacement”, in *Charles Dickens, Critical Assessments*, Vol. 3, Michael Hollington (ed.), London, Helm Information, 1995, 451-63, p. 456.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 454.

<sup>74</sup> Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins, “The Lazy Tour...”, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>76</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (1990), London, Vintage, 1999, p. 842.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins, “The Lazy Tour...”, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

If in “The Bride’s Chamber”, as Deborah Thomas argues, “Dickens appears to be deliberately inverting the doctrine of renunciation apparent in ‘The Frozen Deep’<sup>78</sup>”, in “The Dead Hand” Collins reverts to it. The story written by Collins is again that of a love triangle: a poor man called Lorn is thought to have died in a Doncaster inn, but he is saved by Arthur Holliday, a rich young man who notices that the body has moved. A revived Lorn finds out that he and Arthur love the same woman, who is engaged to Lorn but in love with Arthur. The nervous, sensitive older man, who in addition was born illegitimately, decides to waive his right to the woman’s hand in favour of the cheerful, younger, and richer man.

In his tale, Collins thus reworks the central theme of Richard Wardour’s sacrifice in *The Frozen Deep*: the lucky man benefits from his rival’s self-sacrifice, except that this time, he saves his rival’s life instead of being saved by him. When one also takes into consideration Lorn’s being literally “recalled to life” and the strong physical likeness between the two men, then Lorn and Arthur forcibly evoke Carton and Darnay (with Lorn, a doctor, combining characteristics of both Carton and Manette), and “The Dead Hand”, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens’s 1859 novel. With its insistence on self-sacrifice, as well as on the lucky man’s unawareness of potential rivalry, Collins situates his interpolated tale at the junction between *The Frozen Deep* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. The easy conclusion to draw is that Collins may have inspired certain aspects of Dickens’s historical novel and that their partnership had to a point become “equal”, as the years passed. However, as we already know, and as Nayder again explains, the “celebration of male self-sacrifice” which concludes *The Frozen Deep* was Dickens’s idea<sup>79</sup>. Dickens loved the ideal of self-sacrifice so much that in “The Lazy Tour” he depicts himself as the heroic friend, carrying Collins down Carrock Fell, battling with the catastrophe of “The Sprained Ankle” in an inhospitable environment. His heroic posture is described in his letters in familiar terms, “Wardour to the life”, he writes to Forster, “exactly like Wardour in private life” to Georgina Hogarth<sup>80</sup>.

Nayder offers a very convincing reading of “The Dead Hand”, showing how Collins contradicts Dickens’s goal to downplay class differences, by reintroducing the motif of social division through the portraits of Arthur, the rich legitimate son, and his poor, illegitimate rival. The idle younger man gets the girl because he is richer and will make her happier: “Collins [...] illustrate[s] class privilege in a story designed to obscure class differences.”<sup>81</sup> Her analysis is compelling throughout. However, the fact remains that Collins wrote a very

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<sup>78</sup> Deborah Thomas, “Murder and Self-Effacement”, art. cit., p. 458.

<sup>79</sup> See note 2 *supra* and Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners...*, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Dickens, *Letters*, op. cit., p. 440 & 442.

<sup>81</sup> Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners...*, op. cit., p. 111.

Dickensian tale, a more Dickensian one even than “The Bride’s Chamber”, fed as it is with Dickens’s obsession with self-sacrifice. It is hard not to think that here, as elsewhere, Dickens finally won the contest for control.

The collaboration between Dickens and Collins produced only minor texts. The analysis of these texts, however, can prove very rewarding, as Nayder has shown. “The Lazy Tour” is thus a travelogue based on a trip originating from, and organised by, Dickens, a short travel narrative the main portion of which Dickens wrote, and in which Dickens sometimes obscures, but often exposes, his conception of the collaboration with Collins, the younger, less successful writer. Here is the delightful last scene in the travelogue, just before its abrupt end – a scene which speaks for itself if considered in the context of the growing tensions between the two writers:

The dearest friend the Gong-donkey<sup>82</sup> has in the world, is a sort of Jackall, in a dull, mangy, black hide, of such small pieces that it looks as if it were made of blacking bottles turned inside out and cobbled together. The dearest friend in the world (inconceivably drunk too) advances at the Gong-donkey, with a hand on each thigh, in a series of humorous springs and stops, wagging his head as he comes. The Gong-donkey regarding him with attention and with the warmest affection, suddenly perceives that he is the greatest enemy he has in the world, and hits him hard in the countenance. The astonished Jackall closes with the Donkey, and they roll over and over in the mud, pummelling one another<sup>83</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> The “gong-donkey” is “a fearful creature in the general semblance of a man [...] inconceivably drunk”. Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins, “The Lazy Tour...”, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.