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Increment and Excrement: the Yearning for Real Deposits

I would like to begin by talking about my choice of text for this study. *Bleak House* and *The Moonstone* were written in 1853 and 1868 respectively and are both held to be precursors of the detective novel. In their pages we find encouragement given to the reader to seek for "signs and tokens", to collect information with a view to solving a mystery or finishing a puzzle (which might be said of any novel but which is conspicuously performed in these two texts by narrators and characters alike). Secondly, both were published at the height of industrial capitalism in Europe when currency was still backed by gold, and gold was an uncontested measure. It was the heyday of the realist novel and the notion of the writing subject, the idea of an "autorité émettrice" and that of "langage-or"¹ stamped with the effigy of the writer as Victor Hugo described his own prose. Poets should be sovereigns and should put their money or currency into circulation. Yet although the crisis of money and the sign exploited in Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* was still at least thirty or forty years off, the rumblings of the bankruptcy of the symbol is already rearing its head in these pages. Thirdly, both texts are overshadowed by two metaphors of production, production of surplus value and thus

1 Jean-Joseph Goux, *Les monnayeurs du langage*, Paris: Editions Galilée, 1984, pp. 108, 135 et 134.

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surplus waste whose excremental outpourings never cease and are re-presented to the reader at regular intervals, their offspring multiplying within the novel. These are Chancery on one side and the Shivering Sand on the other.

These three considerations have led me to certain conjectures concerned with circulations of signs based on monetary exchange and with the way in which the reader is invited to read the text. Before going any further, I think it important to say that in terms of exchange value, *Bleak House* is a weightier and richer commodity than *The Moonstone* (perhaps because of the greater number and greater complexity of its metaphors which are the currency of the novel) and so the demonstrations in the second part of this work will concentrate on *Bleak House*.

I. The Illusion of Increment: Gathering Clues

Those clamouring for what they have lost - the litigators and the orphaned in *Bleak House* and the plundered and falsely accused in *The Moonstone*, those whose Gods or good names have been desecrated set a flow of metaphors in motion on which both characters and readers all set great hopes of return. Secretions on clothes, melted flesh on a wall, mud on a crossing, scars on a face, all act as promissory notes scattered in the text for those who wish to deposit them on an account for future withdrawal. Readers witness and imitate a feverish gathering of an absolute value lost. Safe deposits are made, safety deposit boxes forced open, hidden texts uncovered in a frenzy to see these "promises to the bearer" accumulate. Two typographical errors which are easy to make when typing the word metaphor ("meatphor" or "metaphoe") suggested to me a polarization of the potential effect of metaphor. Do deposits reveal themselves to be fiduciary issue unbacked by gold, in other words a "foe" or an enemy to a return on investment in the form of closure, or are they real "meat", conveying the reader towards interest repayment?

E.M. Forster invites us to "only connect"; the novels treated here invite us to "only collect". The text is presented as a riddle especially

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in the obscure metaphoric passages of the anonymous narrator in *Bleak House* and the reader is led towards a consideration of names, gestures, appearances or even the weather as holders of vital information. Names seem "tantalizingly to contain some covert metaphor lying almost on the surface of the word" (Bruff, Clack, Jellyby, Tulkinghorn are names which have been carefully 'read' in the two novels) and like the portmanteau words of the Jabberwocky they invite "etymological interpretation or 'explication' in the root sense of an infolding"². J. Hillis Miller has said that metaphor and metonymy are the "deep grammatical armature" of the text and the reader is asked to make a whole out of discontinuous parts by isolating and linking metaphors, a "lateral movement of cross-reference as he makes his way through the text"³. The process of speaking of one thing by speaking of another which is the activity of allegory is taught to the reader, making him, as Jeremy Hawthorn says, find "underlying unity" out of "surface disconnection and isolation"⁴. Taught by this activity the reader seeks his own clues.

What interests me here are not so much the conventional clues of date and place but the rich terrain of the metaphor in which or under which or even behind which there is a hope of return, a hope of value to be gained. J. Hillis Miller has already stated of *Bleak House* that Dickens constructed the novel to make the reader a "bad detective", for clues point to George or Lady Dedlock as murderers. Interpretation is shown to be false and fruitless. It is in fact the patterns of figurative language which tie up unrelated detail (such as Lady Dedlock's "freezing mood" of boredom and the melting snow of her death). Each metaphor is in some way a safe or treasure chest which asks for investment on the part of the reader who must understand its signs. In *The Moonstone* the text quickly makes plain that the harder a message is to discover (locked up or buried like Ezra's and Rosanna's letters and writings or censored and incomplete

2 J. Hillis Miller, Introduction to *Bleak House*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971, p.22.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

4 Jeremy Hawthorn, *The Critics Debate: Bleak House*, London: Macmillan, 1987, p. 63.

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like Dr. Candy's ravings), the more investment one must make to elucidate what is written, and the greater the return. Letters which are trusted to the post rarely have anything interesting in them but letters buried under six feet of sand are invariably worth digging for. Thus the text itself is full of japanned tin trunks which beckon to the reader to break them open to reveal their contents.

Moreover, a metaphor seems true, it seems to have substance or meat because it does not flout syntactical rules but only semantic ones⁵. Reality is a linguistic effect and a reader will approach the metaphor not in terms of a true or false statement but will try to invest the statement however odd with metaphorical meaning and therefore save the sentence. Jean-Jacques Lecercle uses the sentence "snow is red" whereas in the first page of *Bleak House* we have "snow is black" or "soot is snow" which we accept as true. The more dead a metaphor is, the truer it seems, yet even the oddest inventions beckon the reader with promises should he brave its tangled web. The metaphors in *Bleak House* are indeed from Pandemonium and seem to be God's punishment on language.

Yet on the day of judgment at the end of each novel, will the great cashing in of these "signs and tokens" show us an economic "Paradise Lost" where cheques bounce and notes like those written by the king in *Faust* prove to be unbacked by gold? So the reader collects, increases, augments his store of metaphor in the hope that this incremental activity is one of escalating value and will prove instrumental in receiving meaning or closure.

My second task is to examine the disarray which first prompted all this re-gathering and tidying. If the king is in his castle or counting house, and gold is in the banks then why is there such a clamouring for authentication? At this period in Victorian England paper money was emerging in the form of notes of hand which

5 Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *The Violence of Language*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990. Metaphors are "semantically at odds, syntactically at peace". "Metaphor occurs when the remainder pretends to abide by the rules of language the better to exploit them" (Chapter 4.)

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represented the gold which was placed in a coffer in a bank. There was still confidence in the sign as Jean-Joseph Goux says in *Les Monnayeurs du Langage*:

*La pièce d'or ne circule plus en personne, mais elle n'est pas loin (...) Nous voyons clairement ici que la notion de représentation offre un rapport étroit avec celle de convertibilité (...) Entre le signe de valeur et la chose à valeur intrinsèque, il y a bien un écart, une distance, mais la chose d'or est toujours présente (...) déposée quelque part dans un solide coffre, dans les caves d'un fort bien défendu.*⁶

Yet at the same time there seems to be little confidence in this gold if we judge by the number of rooms, boxes, trunks that are opened, the number of sealed letters torn open or the number of locks and keys which protect what inevitably turns out to be not the thing itself but another note like an endless treasure hunt or paper chase. There is also not only a distinct lack of belief in the figure of the father but a lack of the fathers themselves. Either there are no fathers, or fathers who have forfeited their right to be fathers. These include Herncastle, Lord Verinder, the fathers of Blake, Rosanna and Ezra, and also Esther's father who is unknown, and is later revealed to be Nemo/nothing. Lady Dedlock's parentage is unknown, the Lord Chancellor is a patriarch diminished by a hen-pecking wife, Jo is a bastard, as is Phil, and Sir Leicester Dedlock is obsolete and invalid - an aristocrat who should be a father and is not, his wife's child not his own. Writing in both novels is often obscure and comes from no recognisable source; Hawdon's unsigned work like the texts produced by other characters is not "stamped" or coined with the emblem of the bearer. In *Bleak House*, the absent and unacknowledged father ignorant of his paternity whose pen name is "Nemo" and who transcribes the words of others, is echoed in *The Moonstone* by the buried writing performed by social pariahs such as Rosanna and Ezra - Ezra's texts carrying not his own but the seals of Candy and Blake. Both writing and persons are bastards and evoke the epigraph to Chapter 6 of Gide's *Les Faux Monnayeurs*:

⁶ Jean-Joseph Goux, *Les monnayeurs du langage*, p. 178.

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*We are all bastards;
And that most venerable man which I
Did call my father, was I know not where
When I was stamp'd...⁷*

Fathers are erased by transgressive acts which take away the sovereign image of the father. Herncastle's acts of theft and murder create disarray and lack of confidence which prompt Blake to feverishly penetrate the Shivering Sand to break open the japanned tin trunk. Richard in *Bleak House* braves the gloomy recesses of Chancery, while the weasel-like Smallweed burrows through papers in Krook's shop "rummaging, searching, digging, delving and diving"⁸. Similarly, a host of greedy voyeurs which include the "hypocrite lecteur" of *The Moonstone*, do not wait for the seven veils to fall but break into Ablewhite's garret, then into a wooden box already plundered by the Indians, into a sealed letter, then search under a pillow, under a wig, under a false complexion to reveal only another imposter.

What lies behind this bankruptcy? In *Economie et Symbolique* Goux explains how in the process of exchange one merchandise is privileged above the others and is given the task of reflecting the value of all others. This is money or currency and reduces heterogeneity. On the simplest level man is a being capable of metaphor of a "mise en équivalence" which depends on eternal invariants which are above change. In Goux's work on "Numismatiques" those invariants - gold, the father, the phallus, the monarch - are given a privileged status in representation or even a monopoly at the price of their exclusion from all other relationships with other merchandise if they wish to become an absolute merchandise. Thus the father is killed and fetishized, then symbolised and idealised. He functions from a world beyond, regulating exchanges and becoming a central metaphor which anchors

⁷ Jean-Joseph Goux, *Les monnayeurs du langage*, p. 59. From Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, Act II, Sc. V, l. 156-9. The speech continues: "...some coiner with his tools/ Made me a counterfeit..."

⁸ *Bleak House*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971, p. 616.

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all others, the single mirror of all values. In the novelistic worlds studied here we see a fetishistic desire to see the gold itself, the father himself which has set the circulation of equivalents in motion, (the desire to read documents in *Bleak House*, the desire to see, to be a voyeur in *The Moonstone* - peeping through crevices with breathless excitement). The reign of confidence in gold and the gold of language as guarantor seems to be waning, for all that is uncovered by characters in their search is more writing. The non-convertibility of money is far off historically but a miming of loss is performed here in which coffers are empty of the thing itself. The crisis of currency signals a generalised crisis of confidence in the central system of representation and guarantee. Fathers seem to have been atomized, not merely excluded, and as in the first page of *Bleak House* the sun is dead, the seat of power in London is corrupt and invalid and thus so is God, as the great cashier of the central bank of meaning.

Increment is further shown to be an illusion since neither novel provides a satisfactory account for the richest sources of metaphor in the text such as the mystery of Ezra (whose texts we cannot gather), Rosanna's misery, the endless disgorgings of the Shivering Sand, the mud and disease of London which killed Jo, and scarred Esther, the inexorable destruction and effluvia of Chancery. Soft focus weddings are a bandage over proceedings. John Kucich in his study of Dickens says of his fairy-tale marriage endings:

*The reader of Dickens is not left with marriage as a meaning, a prescription for happiness (...). Instead conservative fairy-tale marriages become metaphors for an affirmed experience of timelessness and of satisfied, excessive desire; (...) a positive image of that which surpasses and destroys meaning, exceeding significance by dissolving itself into the pure mechanism of narrative convention. (It) is a terrorless image of loss (...) and aspires to an absence of ideological and social content (...) lifted above the status of worldly economy (...) and does not form a strategy of exchange or reward.*⁹

9 John Kucich, *Excess and Restraint in the Novels of Charles Dickens*, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1981, pp. 253-254.

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This may well be applied to the marriages at the end of *The Moonstone* and *Bleak House*. They in no way address the main concerns of the imagery and are a consolation prize in which no unveiling or elucidation is given. Surplus metaphors with potential value turn to surplus waste, increment to excrement as the incontinent machines of Chancery and the Shivering Sand continue to produce a waste of legacies¹⁰. The production here is not economic growth but inflation; the bank has gone mad and is issuing banknotes/coinage not based on any actual value - an emission of metaphors not based on any non-signifying ideal or value.

Yet despite the knowledge of this, the knowledge which comes early in the text that this is a graveyard of emblems in which no absolute knowledge or Truth (as promised in Collins's preface) can be hoped for, the metaphor remains legal tender and continues to incarnate the emptiness. The desire to read on, to reinvest in metaphor remains in spite of the empty coffers of the central bank. Our yearning which suggests emotion and faith and belief in an absolute might be for another activity which is more to do with play than payment and very much expresses an arbitrary sign. So far we have considered readers driven by a Platonic ideal in their search for one model or archetype among a thousand copies, but there is also a more Nietzschean view in which there is no one model but only phantasm and simulacra. In the light of the absence of a guiding authority the repetitions which still focus our attention do so in a different way. It is no longer a quest for nuggets of meaning which lead to the treasure-trove but of the following of simulacra.

In J. Hillis Miller's study of Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* (*Esmond* was published in 1852, the year before *Bleak House*) he considers two forms of repetition, one Platonic and grounded in an ideal, the other rather more like the Nietzschean simulacra, so ungrounded. Both these forms are present, in general, in the novel,

¹⁰ Chancery produces mud, fog and papers which suffocate and paralyse those connected with it. The Shivering Sand produces "nasty ooze" of "yellow-white" hue, "scum and slime" which both horrifies and attracts. Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986, p. 161.

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the first often unravelling the second. In the realist novel the validity of the mimetic copy is established by its truth of correspondance to what it copies, yet as Nietzsche tries to demonstrate the repetitions we find in literature which generate meaning are not repetitions of an archetype but "the memory of a world that never was", "involuntary memory" which is called "forgetting" by Benjamin. It is not what the author experienced in his life but the weaving or unweaving of his memory (which in some way links up to the idea of Valéry's "trésor" which is a world of ideas instead of an objective reality outside the text.). The repetition which interests Miller is the strange resemblance, the opaquely or riddlingly similar things: the second being the subversive ghost of the past. Here there is no "équivalent général" as Goux calls it, no third thing to regulate the comparison or exchange so that these opaque similarities are baseless, there is no principle of identity. Yet there is still a desire to see repetition, to see the transportation of the same pattern especially in the novel whose ancestor was the Platonic dialogue.

In his work on *Henry Esmond* Miller shows the intertwining of two forms of repetition in which simulacra are used to show up the fallacy of the Platonic. We are shown trope without logos, a dramatization of a search for authority, which is the centre which controls the tangle of repetitions. The critic must "find out the centre of its labyrinth of echoing words"¹¹. Who has true kingship, who is the legitimate heir to Castlewood? What is legitimate sovereignty? Irony undresses and unveils the seeming values in the text - eyes, sun, gold, red, rings - until the sun itself seen as the original light is shown to be a reflection only and not genuine gold (Rachel as mother is the sun, her daughter Beatrix, the moon). Henry unveils so much that he discovers that he alone is worth worshipping. The ironic situation in which the reader perceives the tawdry vanity at play here is the last unveiling: Henry, like the Sun King is only a small pock-marked old man. This portrait doubles Henry's portrait of himself and undoes it. If Henry finds that others are only glorified by his

11 J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982, pp. 73-115 (Chapter 4: "*Henry Esmond*: Repetition and Irony").

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reflection, then it is the projections of others which in fact glorify him. There is no true sun. All light is reflected and there is no genuine gold. Esmond's name contains the "moon", so reflected light, fickle and changeable.

Goux's assertion that *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* has as its subject the historical crisis of "la forme équivalent général"¹² is relevant to *Bleak House* and *The Moonstone*. We must take into account the dispersal, the ironic ambiguity and the metamorphosis of metaphors rather than the homogeneity with the design or signifying purpose of the novel.

II. Irony and Excrement: Metaphor/Metamorphosis

I would advance that the incitement to invest in the metaphors of the text is not in expectation of a supreme moment or moments of conversion. Nietzsche's scepticism concerning truth and knowledge focuses on the functioning of language. What remains of such notions, he asks, once we have seen through the twists and displacements by which language simultaneously hides and perpetuates its own devious workings. Truth, he concludes:

*(...) is a mobile marching army of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms (...) truths are illusions of which one has forgotten they are illusions (...) coins which have their obverse effaced and which are no longer of value as coins but only as metal.*¹³

Metaphor is disguised or occluded by philosophy, it is suppressed by that most Victorian of texts, the tract, and often by the Victorian realist novel itself (in the metonymic Esther's narratives for example). Language is metaphoric. It is not the truth hidden within the metaphor or the truth which collected metaphors will reveal which gives reading

12 Expression employed many times by Jean-Joseph Goux in *Les monnayeurs du langage*, ex. pp. 123, 220, 222.

13 J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982, pp. 73-115 (Chapter 4: "Henry Esmond: Repetition and Irony").

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these texts its spice but something more akin to metamorphosis, to the quality of transfer in the metaphor, a shifting¹⁴ which crystallises our attention outside the parameters of any effect of meaning. Metaphors cannot be undone, that is, if they are mistakes in rational language it is impossible to trace them back to a time when they were *not* mistakes¹⁵. November weather is immediately "implacable" and at best it can be bad or good. Metaphors are fetishes in that they are more important than the things they are supposed to represent.

Before going on to look at the metaphor in action in *Bleak House* we might consider some of Fontanier's theories of the metaphor written in 1821. He talks about "good" and "bad" metaphors. The good metaphor must be "vraie ... juste ... cohérente", its terms must be in harmony and not seem mutually exclusive. To be good they must be "noble" and not taken from low or disgusting objects. What is particularly interesting in Fontanier's discussion of metaphor - which already excludes Dickens as an acceptable "Coiner" - is his notion of metaphors as receiving sanction:

*Toutes ces conditions, au reste, ne regardent que les métaphores d'invention que l'on emploie par figure, et qui n'ont pas encore vécu la sanction de l'usage; car, pour celles qui tiennent au fond de la langue, soit qu'elles se présentent comme figures ou comme catachrèses, elles ont, s'il faut le dire, un cours forcé, et il n'est plus permis d'y voir des défauts.*¹⁶

The spatial and financial metaphors used here are revealing in that inventive metaphors do not have the same currency as those worn thin and passed from hand to hand. Metaphors are like deposits, in that layer upon layer is laid down, the newest at the top and having little authority, the oldest at the bottom and enjoying greater patronage and currency. Thus "real" metaphors for Fontanier are those with sanction, and the metaphors of invention are new and still shifting

14 "the time of the shift from one to the other (meaning), the time of metaphor". Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *The Violence of Language*, p. 146.

15 "Metaphors are always false". Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *The Violence of Language*, p. 156

16 Pierre Fontanier, *Les Figures du Discours*, Paris: Flammarion, 1977, p. 104.

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deposits. From this we can also infer that the inventive metaphors are plurivocal, more ambiguous and also "alive" and therefore problematic and destabilising. Dead metaphors are synchronic but were once diachronic at the time of their "shift" or transfer, when two meanings coexisted (nasty weather). As we are going to see, the cheeky, audacious, new and incoherent metaphors are the ones we invest in most, and the more vulgar and disgusting the better.

Biblical rhythm and syntax link the first paragraph of *Bleak House* to both Genesis and the book of Revelations, both an end and a beginning. "London" with its capital letters and full stop is an impossible sentence but strikes a note like a bell toll. It is *the* place, the only place, both heaven and earth in the first verse of Genesis. It is a metaphor as we see in the following vision of London. Yet this is not "In the beginning..." for the autumn term is "over", it is winter and something has come to an end. The "and" that follows is the ubiquitous Biblical "and" which starts every verse of Genesis except the last and is the most frequent beginning of all verses in the Old and New Testaments. The accumulation of people, things, laws which is part of the cataloguing of the world done in the King James Bible is translated by the use of this "and" in the fourth line "and, would it not be wonderful..."¹⁷. The Lord Chancellor is in his place at the centre of things, not as God but as we shall later see as a symbol of destruction and the present continuous tells us that this is how it was, is, and forever shall be. Amen. This is a state of affairs which is so perennial that it needs no qualifying tense, as indeed is true of the next statement which is a metaphor. The weather, like the Lord Chancellor, is implacable, and like God is incapable of being placated or pacified, is unappeasable, intractable.

Bad weather (in itself a dead metaphor) is associated with the muddy streets of London but then renewed as a metaphor by the addition of the first mud of Genesis when God said "let the dry land appear", and if this should still be too neutral or clichéd, a joke is

¹⁷ All quotations from *Bleak House*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971, p. 49.

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made at the expense of the Oxford movement or Tractarianism by introducing the dinosaur and theories of evolution in the form of the Megalosaurus to clash with traditional exegesis. Ruskin's complaint that at the end of every Bible verse he heard the clink of the geologist's hammer is dramatised here in a metaphor which is a joke. Yet the joke is not finished since those who would glorify the "Giants" of the earth, the hubristic geologists whose findings were already commonplace are ridiculed in the prosaic clumsiness of the "waddling" "elephantine lizard" startled to find itself on Holborn Hill. The weather and mud do not signify birth, but veer towards oppression, depression and death. The smoke "lowering down" cancels the 'up' movement of the dinosaur and simultaneously means 'overcast and menacing weather' and 'to scowl'. The "soft black drizzle" is the mourning attire of snowflakes. "Let there be light" can only lurk behind the "death of the sun".

A sanctioned metaphor, a dead one can be revived and refurbished in rhizomatic abundance from semantic field to semantic field. As readers we follow this evolution. Conjuncture turns a metaphor into a coin which can then circulate. Metaphors form systems and families (slime, writing). There is intertextual repetition of the last or a looking forward to future metamorphosis:

*either intertextual nostalgia for its ancient past, or anticipation of its potential
rhizomatic offshoot .¹⁸*

As readers we are invited to witness the way in which the metaphor builds layers, creates more and more deposits which far from narrowing down meaning open it up. Irony undermines each institution by forcing it into intimacy with a conflicting or incongruous institution. Religion, the Bible, science, law and economics mutually undermine each other and are finally drained of any positive energy by overwhelming images of waste, leaving us in the second paragraph with an image of a wasteland of excrement. Dogs and horses are the meagre representatives of the "moving creature that hath life, and fowl

18 J-J. Lecerclé, *The Violence of Language*, p. 161. Lecerclé later remarks that "Reviving dead metaphors is one of the strategies favoured by poets", p. 164.

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that may fly" and these are unseen or blind in the mire, in the "Slough of Despond" of Bunyan. The "tens of thousands" of "foot passengers" are homage to the injunction of the Lord to "be fruitful and multiply" yet the multiplication is one of infection and aggression. The "ill" in "ill temper" and the "broke" in day breaking renew dead metaphors by juxtaposition with the word "infection" to rekindle the idea of sickness, ugliness and destruction. This is Hades, a dark underworld, a Bosch painting of hell, and lastly it is geology in action, "new deposits", "crust upon crust", a cross section of the formation of the London basin, which is also faecal waste which gathers and sticks in ever increasing amounts, inexorable and implacable, a nightmare vision of accumulation without end. This is a vision of language - particularly the workings of metaphor in the novel - as well as being an allusion to debts and to the amassing of money. Increment is associated with excrement, the faecal with the financial in a lesson which displays the futility of attempting to stem the tide of plurivocity by reduction to a single lesson. Lucre is indeed filthy here in its promiscuous reproduction.

Metaphor then enlists the act of writing in its ranks and this, like mud, figures the unwholesome accumulation in which the members of the High Court of Chancery flounder. Above them sits the Lord High Chancellor who represents the High Court of Chancery, the latter being the "most pestilent of hoary sinners" "in the sight of heaven and earth". The word "hoary" meaning white hair and frost sends us on another homophonically triggered semantic journey to the book of revelations where St. John the Divine witnesses "the judgement of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters"¹⁹. In the opening paragraph of *Bleak House* the waters were "but newly retired." Here they are polluted around the great whore. We find crimson and gold in each text and the ruin of peoples "drunk with the wine of her fornication" or "the abominations and filthiness of her fornications"²⁰ held in a golden cup. The "decaying houses" and "blighted lands" and

19 King James Bible, Revelations, 17:1. To add to the homophony of "hoar" and "whore" in *Bleak House* we have "Hortense" whose French name is mispronounced by all characters to associate her too with the Great Whore.

20 King James Bible, Revelations, 17: 2 and 4.

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"worn-out lunatics" of Chancery echo the thousands of merchants, shipmasters, brides, prophets and saints corrupted or murdered by the whore. She, like the High Court, is steeped in mystery - not in the form of a fog bank but by means of an inscription on her forehead: "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."²¹ The rhizomatic formation of the metaphors in which language creates its own images and forces them into the mind of the reader works on a basis of repetition. Repetition associated with dissimilar objects creates a destruction of "belief" according to J. Hillis Miller and would make Fontanier turn in his grave. The effect of this is expressed by Miller in connection with *Henry Esmond*:

*Henry Esmond, in its totality, is therefore a large-scale expression of the negative relation between irony and repetition. If repetition creates meaning in fiction by making the forward movement of the narrative line turn back on itself and become significant thereby, irony loosens those connections. It makes the narrative line blur and finally break up into detached fragments. These may be put together (...) but never on the basis of that legitimate authority which, as I began by saying, Henry Esmond seeks.*²²

The only way forward then, is more. We are shown that with each twist of the metaphor, each displacement we must reinvest our culture, both linguistic and historical but with no hope of return, for all the guarantees are destroyed systematically - law, science, and the sun itself. This is a place without God in the world as Thackeray said of *Vanity Fair*, and in this world it is the multiform, ephemeral Whore of Babylon who presides. The first page does not inspire the reader with hopes of redemption or epiphany. The death of the sun combined with the apocalypse suggests an absence of God; dinosaurs mix with the whore of Babylon, the beginning with the end, creation and destruction create movement without purpose. This is a nihilistic patchwork - a "place of disaffection" as T.S. Eliot would say - which will not be unclouded by Esther's Summer sun. Metaphor is a blind,

²¹ King James Bible, Revelations, 17: 5.

²² J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*, p. 115.

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expansive appetite akin to capitalism, forever enlarging its borders, a frenzied and infinite proliferation. All this needs to be illustrated in the evolution of metaphors, or should I say metamorphosis of metaphors throughout the text. To do this I would like to take one last image of the hope of redemption which is both religious and economic and which haunts the text in a grotesque, inverted form.

III. Transubstantiation and convertibility.

Transubstantiation in Roman Catholic theology and protestant high church is the doctrine whereby the whole substance of the bread and wine changes into the substance of the body and blood of Christ when consecrated in the Eucharist. It is the mystical process by which this transmutation is believed to take place during consecration. In the Eucharist - the Christian sacrament in which Christ's Last Supper is commemorated by the consecration of bread and wine - the symbolic substance changes into living flesh and the metaphor becomes 'true'. Thus "Take, eat; this is my body"²³ is actualised. The consecration has the status of an alchemical conversion, and is the moment when metaphors are "realised", so to speak, a magic moment when the true value of the "token" becomes apparent and is exchanged for the thing itself. We are given the gold in exchange for the "promises to the bearer". Our means of interpreting the world are profoundly anchored in this religious and economic figuration, conditioned as we are by both Bible and bank statement. In the late twentieth-century we still labour under a nineteenth-century illusion that the metaphors which rule our world will ultimately be convertible. American televised evangelism of today combines just these fantasies of conversion.

How is transubstantiation relevant to the reading of *Bleak House*? Firstly, the Biblical metaphors which we find throughout the novel tacitly combine with economic metaphors such as "compound interest", for example, to instil an idea that heaven is at hand, that our

23 Mathew, 26: 26. It continues: "Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

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deposits in the metaphor bank are "real", that they will be incremental and give us full payment for our investments. At the same time this hope is unravelled as it is woven by the overpowering presence of metaphors of excrement, suggesting both filth and contamination and more importantly waste - implying a lack of fullness or plenitude. Visions of evacuation, incontinence and loss accompany the suggestions of potential plenitude in the scenes of accumulation (the accumulation of documents or leaves, for example). This occurs even in a scene associated with the convertibility of transubstantiation which exists in *Bleak House*. It is one is based on "effluvia" and therefore deconstructed by it.

Firstly, *Bleak House* seems to be constructed on inversions in which the Lord Chancellor is likened to the Whore of Babylon. Since the Chancellor is thus deposed and discredited it is not surprising to find the illiterate, demented, obsessive Krook nicknamed "Lord Chancellor". He is the unwitting keeper of the will and testament which all other characters are seeking and he dies in the "valley of the shadow of the law" at supper time. The moment of his death is linked to an earlier chapter in three ways. The metaphors of the first paragraph of the chapter entitled "The Appointed Time"²⁴ are often dead metaphors revived by puns which associate death with the feast (thus preparing for Krook's demise) and religious redemption with legal and financial reward. The "valley of the shadow of the law" brings forth psalm 23 with its preparation of a table evoking the last supper before death. The last sentence juxtaposes "Divine songs for children" with the "busy bee" and a metaphor of financial gain in the "good account" which echoes the words and prosody of a protestant hymn. The chapter title in its use of "appointed" evokes the common book of prayer, psalm 81 which asks for joyous praise of God:

24 "It is night in Lincoln's Inn - perplexed and troublous valley of the shadow of the law, where suitors generally find but little day - and fat candles are snuffed out in offices (...) Over which bee-like industry, these benefactors of their species linger yet, though office-hours be past; that they may give, for every day, some good account at last." Chapter 32, p. 498.

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Blow up the trumpet in the new-moon: even in the time appointed, and upon our solemn feast day.

It also evokes the book of Job which speaks of death as "the house appointed for all living"²⁵ and Job, it must not be forgotten suffered many ills during his temptation by the Lord:

*My bowels boiled, and rested not: the days of affliction prevented me. (...) My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat.*²⁶

The snuffing out of "fat candles" is the harbinger of both appointed death and the unspeakable subsequent grease of heated human flesh. Secondly, Guppy and Jobling who witness the aftermath of his demise are the central protagonists of the earlier chapter which recounts their supper together, and thirdly there is an overweening metaphor in both scenes which is one of slime, grease and unwholesomeness. At the Slap-Bang neighbourhood dining house there is a "considerably heated atmosphere in which the soiled knives and tablecloths seem to break out spontaneously into eruptions of grease and blotches of beer"²⁷. The slugs which Mr. Jobling warns Polly not to include in the summer cabbage are echoed in the "glistening nature of Mr. Jobling's hat which resembles a "snail promenade". This supper is in preparation of a meeting with Mr. Krook which will turn out to be the last for he too will "erupt" - spontaneously combust - leaving only a trail of grease. When "The Appointed Time" comes the metaphors are not changed. The slide from restaurant to dead man, from roasted animal flesh to combusted human flesh is done imperceptibly, the grease of one mixing with the slime of the other. We move from flush and grease at supper to the "unwholesome air"²⁸ in the vicinity of the aptly named "Cook's Court" where we find a similar "tainting" and "fine

25 Dryden also speaks of death as "the appointed place":

*Like pilgrims to the appointed place we tend;
The world's an inn, and death the journey's end.*

26 King James Bible, 30: 23, 27 and 30.

27 Quotations from *Bleak House*, Chapter 20, pp. 329- 322.

28 The following quotations are from *Bleak House*, Chapter 32, pp. 498-512.

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steaming night" in which disease might multiply and the "greasy" air smells of not quite fresh chops. Breathing involves ingesting the "black fat" in the air, accompanied by a "thick yellow liquor" "a stagnant, sickening oil" or "foetid effluvia", a menu of fat, oil, liquor and chops.²⁹

This grotesque last supper in which Krook serves himself up in person to his two guests, might be seen as a do-it-yourself Eucharist in which the 'middle man' is cut out and Christ commemorates his own last supper by offering up his flesh for immediate consumption without the intervention of metaphor (in the form of bread). The earlier dining scene at the Slap-Bang dining-house involves many enjoiners to "take, eat" and even a metaphoric three stages of man in which Jobling reaches maturity as he eats. In the gospel, the bread and wine is called the "new testament" which is given to Christ's disciples, while in *Bleak House* Jobling, it is whispered, will be the benefactor in Krook's own will and testament. Jobling or Mr. Weevle as he is known in Cook's Court will receive a "testament" of a kind when he and Snagsby sniff and taste the air and wipe their mouths afterwards. Jobling receives Krook 'in kind', as it were, not the financial value of Krook, but the old man himself - flesh, blood and bone. Krook - it must be stressed - is the only character (illiterate of course) who avoids the snares of language, the complications of writing. Bypassing metaphor altogether he communicates himself directly *to* all rather than *with* all (through language) and passes directly into their bodies and souls.

The abomination of mixing the body and the blood, a mashing of the wafer into a porridge with the wine, sends the reader back to the slush and slime around the real Lord Chancellor who is also the whore whose cup holds the "abominations and filthiness of her fornications". This is both a last supper and a crucifixion in which Krook inscribes the pattern of his death on the walls of his shop, not a cross but a smear. It is also the destruction of the whore who is

²⁹ André Topia's study of the "circuits bloqués" in *Bleak House* considers the processes of accumulation and agglomeration of both words and objects. "*Bleak House: les mots et les choses*," *Tropismes: Cartes et Strates* no. 7, (1995): 103-128.

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burned in the book of Revelations. The corruption of the metaphor of the last supper is complete right down to Krook's last drink. Christ - in keeping with the Biblical injunction concerning hospitality and communality - offers his wine to his disciples and then declares: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new in my Father's Kingdom"³⁰ whereas Krook does not share his ignoble working-class gin, accuses his guests of stealing it and encourages them to buy him more of a higher price.

Transubstantiation as the fantasy attached to metaphor is dragged out and discredited in the eyes of the reader through its grotesquely ironic treatment here. The only successful and absolute act of communication in *Bleak House* is performed by Krook without language, without the use of metaphor. Elsewhere all is disappointment. Writing never delivers 'the goods' but is associated with loss, effluent and images of erasure and effacement which discourage belief in its ability to become a value, to become 'The Word', logos, text written in stone. Behind the writing we have examined there is no Patriarch. It is either seen as issuing forth from Chancery as circular conundrum ("heads against walls of words"³¹) or in other forms of non-alphabetic inscription. The latter which might have some chance of signifying have the same rhizomatic tendencies as other metaphors.³²

We find ourselves then in the realm of excess, an excess of the signifier over the signified (momentarily inverted by Krook who makes

30 Mathew 26: 29.

31 *Bleak House*, p. 50.

32 The shadows on Lady Dedlock's portrait transform themselves into a "bend sinister" then threaten her like menacing hands (271 and 621) which then become on her real face in the eyes of Esther the shards of a broken mirror hiding a long forgotten reflection. Phil's scars document the accidents and burns of his personal history (422) whilst Esther's scars paradoxically wipe her slate clean and efface all connection with her mother and her past. Caddy's face spattered with ink is also thus rewritten or obscured. Similar chains of metaphors can be seen at work in *The Moonstone* concerned with inscription, emblems and seals, as well as smears, stains and flaws.

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the signified reign over the signifier - matter reigning over metaphor), a surpassing of structure and economy, a bank issuing notes unbacked either by gold or credit or even confidence. Chancery and the Shivering Sand are thus perhaps metaphors of the play of metaphor in *Bleak House*; incremental in that there is - as in capitalism itself - constant growth, excremental in that the increments have no ceiling and so pure production becomes pure waste. The text may also be seen as a cross-section of metaphors at work, deposit upon deposit of new-born and moribund metaphors, in various states of transmutation yet quite divorced from any goal or gold or God.

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