Dicken's S/Z

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Dickens's work probes into ways in which the alphabet and poor education constrain, rather than free, children's language, and his entire work engages with this tension between spontaneous flow and hampered speech. Yet in Dickens, language (which includes the language of children with its vivid sensations, and how adults imagine children talk), is a gift, as Heidegger would say, rather than an acquisition. It cannot be possessed, it possesses the person, and it speaks within the person. In fact, language speaks, a point Heidegger quotes from Novalis' short essay called "Monologue". Heidegger summarises Novalis by saying "language speaks solely with itself alone" and then quotes him: "the peculiar property of language, namely that language is concerned exclusively with itself – precisely that is known to no one" (Heidegger 1971a, 111) . As a Lacanian I cannot but recall that when Lacan says that "it speaks", rather than "I speak", and that it "insists", with the force of the unconscious. That is the title of one of Lacan's essays in *Ecrits*: "L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient" (Lacan vol. 1, 490). That insistence, in Lacan, takes the form of what he calls "the letter"; language defined by its single letters, language bearing its own history within its letters.

In Dickens, some letters are absolutely "insistent", and like "z" or "p", they have the power of returning, insisting, as I want to illustrate in this paper, making language not ideal, but material down to its very letters (see also Tambling 2015). As a gift, language creates a world, because it is that within which a person dwells, as Heidegger puts it; it is poetry, since "poetry" unfolds what Heidegger calls "the Open", which it lets happen, coming from beyond the limits of the individual imagination (Heidegger 1971b, 70). Such language is definitely not instrumental, or Utilitarian; it has no reason for existing, save what it creates, and it indicates a history within each letter. Heidegger says that language speaks itself as language, and does so "curiously enough when we cannot find the right word for something that concerns us, carries us away, oppresses or encourages us. Then we leave unspoken what we have in mind, and, without rightly giving it thought, undergo moments in which

language itself has distantly and fleetingly touched us with its essential being" (Heidegger 1971a, 59). In Freud, not being able to think of the right word might be an instance of repression, and Heidegger's point could relate to that in suggesting that certain words cannot be brought to light because language is independent, though sustaining, and to lay hold on it is to engage with how it creates the subject, so that writing becomes the experience undergone with language. That is the case with Dickens, whose work constantly engages itself with what makes writing possible, and is fascinated with what impedes the flow of language, as when Pip, insulted by Estella says "I was so humiliated, hurt, spurned, offended, angry, sorry – I cannot hit on the right name for the smart – God know what its name was – that tears started to my eyes" (Dickens 1965, 8.92). To find the right name means writing the entire novel, but clearly, tears associate with its failure, as we shall see; we shall map the Lacanian drift of letters from Dickens's early work onward, because this journey casts light on Pip's own childish name.

To begin with, Dickens's work bears the trace of literal, physical and/or social obstacles to language, hence his interest in actual case studies. In *American Notes*, writing about his visit to Boston in 1842, Dickens visits the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind, and notes Laura Bridgman (1829-1889), a blind and deaf-mute girl, who seems to be as if "in a marble cell, impervious to any ray of light, or particle of sound, with her poor white hand peeping through a chink in the wall, beckoning for some good man for help, that an Immortal Soul might be awakened" (Dickens 1997, 46). Access to language, then, means the setting free of an inward being; this, in Laura Bridgman's case came about through Samuel Gridley Howe (1801-1876), whose notes on Bridgman's case Dickens quotes from extensively. He taught her first to put labels with raised lettering, onto the appropriate objects, until she realised that she could "make up a sign of anything that was in her own mind" (49) and could use a manual alphabet; Dickens continues with a similar case, a thirteen-year old boy, Oliver Caswell, being fascinated throughout by examples of sensory deprivation in terms of blindness, or deafness and dumbness, which severs the child from the world, or, in terms less literal, like Jo in *Bleak House*, unable to read "those mysterious symbols, so abundant over the shops, and at the corners of streets, and on the doors, and in the windows! [...] not to have the least idea of that language – to be, to every scrap of it, stone blind and dumb!" (Dickens 2002, 16.257) Letters, the "scrap[s]" of language, have a symbolic power, and they insist, so to speak, with a

strange individuality. As this instance shows, Dickens sees language as textual; writing letters brings out what language is, writing which shows what may be unconscious, or invisible in speech, like individual letters whose force is not heard, but still visible, writing which opens up symbolism, or better, which makes everything allegorical.

In the Christmas Story "A Christmas Tree" (1850), Dickens remembers, and links with early Christmases, the books of his childhood which taught and reinforced the alphabet and gave it values, through picture and rhyme and which had, despite their utilitarian quality, a certain magical quality:

> "A was an archer and shot at a frog". Of course he was. He was an apple-pie also, and here he is! He was a great many things in his time, was A, and so were most of his friends, except X, who had so little versatility that I never knew him to get beyond Xerxes or Xantippe – like Y, who was always confined to a yacht or a Yew tree; and Z, condemned for ever to be a Zebra or a Zany. (Dickens 1999, 7)

Perhaps a zebra and zany are equally odd, a zebra looking zany, so that they show a relationship to each other in their dual oddness. In one alphabet-book contemporary with Dickens, which Angus Wilson reproduces, every character of the alphabet is a character. The legs apart of the archer help form the letter A, "B was a Butcher and kept a great Dog", and when it comes to Y, it does better than yacht or yew tree, giving "Y was a Youth who did not love school" before getting to Dickens' version of Z – "Z was a Zany, and looked like a Fool" (7). Y shows a boy walking away from school, throwing away his textbooks, in the same way that Becky Sharpe throws Dr Johnson's Dictionary out of the coach window in the opening chapter of *Vanity Fair*, as a gesture to her education at Miss Pinkerton's Academy for young ladies, while Z has a fool's hat on, with the word DUNCE written on it, which of course, links with school, and what it teaches and how it disciplines and punishes: there is a dunce's cap made of newspaper in the schoolroom in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and this is the earliest use OED gives for it (Dickens 1972, 25.255). The zany, who is connected to the Youth by the rhyme school / fool, plays with a bauble which he looks at and which has Punch's head on it surmounted by a fool's cap: he is surrounded by two

braying asses[1]. Everything around him points up his folly; but folly, as with Mr Punch, is not just what is left out of the classroom, definitionally, but what has the power of destabilising, of creating carnival, of creating satire too, as with Thackeray. Readiness to act the fool, of course, is the marker of the novelist, who must be as subversive as Mr Punch, and who as a puppet and figure of anarchy emerged from the character of Pulchinello in the *commedia dell' arte*, as did the zany himself. The zany is, strictly speaking, the assistant to the fool; a superfluous figure, with connections to Ben Jonson: Mosca, in *Volpone*, is a zany. There were many variations; John Payne Collier published in 1818 a version of Mr Punch, as performed by an Italian actor, Piccini. Dickens' use of Punch, who has a strange relation to Quilp, a destabilising Richard the Third, is central to *The Old Curiosity Shop*[2]. The zany himself is Italian, and a reminder of the *commedia dell'arte*, which is the basis of pantomime: Dickens, as Boz, edited the *Memoirs* of Joseph Grimaldi (1778-1837), which appeared in 1838. Z is called, in *King Lear* the "unnecessary letter" (2.2.55), perhaps because, as OED notes, it was considered in the sixteenth-century more difficult to write than s, the letter it sounds like, and because it was not used in Latin: yet *z* has maintained its place, even asserted it. Z, coming at the end, is one letter which marks off Dickens especially, and suggests a zany speech, full of catachreses, which is everywhere in his writing.

The alphabet imposes an order which Mr Bumble, in *Oliver Twist,* is proud to think he follows in the way he names orphans, as he tells Mrs Corney he does, his latest triumphs being Swubble and Twist, with names to follow all the way to Z; on the contrary, Pip in *Great Expectations* says he struggled through it "as if it had been a bramble bush" (7.44). Pip remembers learning to read from Biddy, who uses "a little greasy memorandum-book kept in a drawer which served as a Catalogue of Prices" which is the "oracle" controlling everything kept in Mr Wopsle's great-aunt's shop (7.74); he also remembers learning from "a comic song which she had once bought for a halfpenny" (15.136). We may recall that Mr Krook, in *Bleak House* copies single letters (beginning with the ends and bottoms of the letters, not the top) from memory, though he can neither read nor write: the letter which seems to

[1] See illustration in A. Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens*, p. 25. Ruth Glancy, the Everyman editor of *Christmas Stories*, refers to this as Tom Thumb's Alphabet (793).
[2] See note by Angus Easson to *The Old Curiosity Shop,* chapter 16 (pp. 689-70). See also Rachel Bennett, "Punch versus Christian in *The Old Curiosity Shop*", pp. 423-434.

excite him is J (*BH* 5.76), which stands for Jarndyce, but which as a letter, according to OED, substitutes for I. And J is significant in Dickens; it brings to mind the dream of Montague Tigg, where the speaker in the dream forms the letter J (for Jonas) with his lips (Dickens 2004a, 42.614). It is accusatory, for it also turns into the letter, and the pronoun, "I". J is the first letter which Magwitch names to Pip, when he sees him again (39.336), and Pip gets the intuition that Magwitch is the source of everything. We will return to J, but wish to stress that for Pip, learning the alphabet is connected with ciphering ("to use the Arabic numerals in the processes of arithmetic" (OED)): "I fell among those thieves, the nine figures, who seemed every evening to do something new to disguise themselves and baffle recognition. But at last I began, in a purblind groping way, to read, write, and cipher, on the very smallest scale" (7.75). It will be noted how much Pip criticises himself in what he does; learning to write, as part of education and language acquisition, may always have the effect of making someone feel inadequate, even blind. When Pip first writes to Joe, his letter is a mixture of the alphabet and Arabic numerals; the numerals are a part of an alphabet. A "cypher" relates etymologically to the word "zero", for a cipher is the O, the nothing which is the tenth figure; to cipher means to use the zero in relation to other numbers. In Dickens reading becomes a question of ciphering and deciphering, seeing letters and numbers as codes. Pip's experience of the village school needs to be compared with Compeyson's boarding school, and with the haphazard progress of Magwitch, who says: "a deserting soldier in a Traveller's Rest, what lay hid up to the chin under a lot of taturs, learnt me to read; and a traveling Giant what signed his name at a penny a time learnt me to write" (42.361). Here, learning language is associated with the grotesque, and is tied in to comedy, and to a dehumanisation which is almost carnivalesque, with the sense that it does not, in itself, teach normality – unlike the alphabet books, which seem to, however zany the examples are.

Thus alphabet books must be included in the popular literature which led its readership into several different worlds and experiences, but Dickens, in thinking about how children come into language, has much to say about this too, however casually, and non-deliberately and non-discursively. He points out the impoverishment by which given examples of children's writing are always of "moral sentences" (*OCS* 24.251), and notes how children's stories are secret moralisations, as with his essay "Mr Barlow", which makes fun of the fictional clergyman Mr Barlow, tutor to Harry and Tommy, characters all found in Thomas Day's *History*

of Sandford and Merton (1783-1789). This was a book for the instruction of boys, which David Copperfield struggles through[3]. Sandford and Merton furnish the kind of material that equips Mrs Pipchin with her moralism when confronted with Paul Dombey, aged six: "Remember the story of the little boy that was gored to death by a mad bull for asking questions" (Dickens 2001, 8.110), and when he opts for Pip's nickname rather than first name Philip, Herbert Pocket comments on the morality, or, as we might say, the bourgeois ideology, which was, and is, inscribed in books supposed to help in language-acquisition:

> I don't take to Philip [...] for it sounds like a moral boy out of the spelling-book, who was so lazy that he fell into a pond, or so fat that he couldn't see out of his eyes, or so avaricious that he locked up his cake till the mice ate it, or so determined to go a birds'-nesting that he got himself eaten by bears who lived handy in the neighbourhood. (22. 202).

Perhaps Herbert, who seems also to have a half-memory of the bear in *The Winter's Tale*, responds to the repetition in the palindromic "Philip", which does not allow for any breaking out, or any expansion of an idea; Philip is a name implying imprisonment, and everything he does must go wrong.

In the language-acquisition which comes from spelling-books, language is reduced from being an access into other experiences and into story-telling; it becomes a way of confirming the waywardness of children, if it does not remain purely practical; hence (dangerously, as a philosopher such as Heidegger would say), it is meant only an instrument of communication, as though that functionalism was its only function. *Hard Times* (1854) concludes the scene in the schoolroom (Book 1 chapter 2) with the new schoolmaster, Mr M'Choakumchild "not unlike Morgiana in the Forty Thieves, looking into all the vessels arranged before him, one after another, to see what they contained". There is a continuity between that image, of children with imaginations contained within them, which are constrained but ready to come out, with Laura Bridgman, in *American Notes*, her spirit entrapped within her body until she is inside language. Hence the address to Mr M'Choakumchild at the

[3] "Mr Barlow", *All the Year Round*, 16 January 1869, Slater and Drew (eds.), *The Uncommercial Traveller and Other Papers 1859-1870*, pp. 371-377.

end of the chapter: "when from thy boiling store, thou shalt fill each jar brim full by and by, dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within – or sometimes only maim and distort him!" (Dickens 1969, 1.2. 53) The objectifying, factual and positivistic language of this education will allow no "Fancy" to emerge from the child; and the Fancy is called a robber on purpose, just as much as the Arabic numerals are thieves. They emphasise Dickens's (and the children's) antipathy to the teaching methods of the Gradgrind school; as Mercury, who is the god of writing, is also the god of thieves, so language (and the imagination) takes away from the reality that Utilitarian education tries to impart. It de-realises this; something in the elementary form of the alphabet and numerals, acts thievishly in relation to the power of ideology. The endless harm which the chapter envisages Mr M'Choakumchild causing is focused in the next chapter, "A Loophole", which discusses how the Gradgrind children have learned language; not as something other, which they cannot appropriate, and which rather appropriates them through sound and suggestion and the kinetic and somatic effects of rhyme and rhythm, but, instead, as a means of describing the world in a way which has already been defined. Language in this idea must only ever represent a world which is already known: its expression can only be a ratio of that reality, and it can never be exploratory; for example, it cannot take account of the point that language allows the discussion of what has no objective existence:

> No little Gradgrind had ever seen a face in the moon; it was up in the moon before it could speak distinctly. No little Gradgrind had ever learnt the silly jingle, Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are! No little Gradgrind had ever known wonder on the subject, each little Gradgrind having at five years old dissected the Great Bear like a Professor Owen, and driven Charles' Wain like a locomotive engine-driver. No little Gradgrind had ever associated a cow in a field with that famous cow with the crumpled horn who tossed the dog who worried the cat who killed the rat who ate the malt, or with that more famous cow who swallowed Tom Thumb: it had never heard of those celebrities, and had only been

> introduced to a cow as a graminivorous ruminating quadruped with several stomachs. (54)[4]

In this paragraph of four sentences each opening the same way ("No little Gradgrind"), everything depends on repetition, rhyme, alliteration, accumulation, and rhythm, and oddity, all of which establish language as wonder, opening up the possibility of wondering. Dickens had acted, with his and Mark Lemon's children, a version of Fielding's *Tom Thumb* (1730) on Twelfth Night, in 1854 (see *Letters* 7.232), playing the Ghost of Gaffer Thumb and speaking nonsense-words for it. "Tom Thumb" – the name itself is an example of paronomasia, Thumb varying Tom – not only associates with the Jack of the house that Jack, always a giant-killer, built, but becomes a carnivalesque figure in a world of giant cows. And the cow exists in relation to other beings, and in its own strangeness (perhaps with something devilish in the shape of its horn), rather than being an object to be defined in isolation. Here, language develops endless significances, and associations (and the term "associated" in this extract plays with, or mocks, the Locke-derived idea that all thinking is associative, not creative, or imaginative). This counters the other language of repetition, that of the bureaucracy of Chancery, or the Circumlocution Office, or the hard utterances of Gradgrind's fact-driven education – in the latter's context, calling a cow a "graminivorous ruminating quadruped" restricts what has been said about Tom Thumb: if the cow swallowed him that qualifies it as being graminivorous; if it is graminivorous, i.e. eating grass, there is not much scope for it eating Tom Thumb.

Yet even "graminivorous" opens up different worlds. "Graminivorous" was the word of one of the young vessels in the Gradgrind classroom. It is uttered by the colourless Bitzer, when he gives the various bits of information that make up his definition of a horse (50): abstract, like his complexion, generalising. Bitzer seems to be his only name; it is one of those Dickens names with a z in the middle – part of his distinctiveness, and self-centred individualism, perhaps part of a craziness within him, if z "looks like a fool", as said in "The Christmas Tree". The definition of a horse Bitzer gives shows his desire to have acquired what he judges to be the successful language of the adult replacing any language of the child; but in the definition of the cow,

[4] For Tom Thumb, see Thomas Green, "Tom Thumb and Jack the Giant Killer: Two Arthurian Fairy-Tales", pp. 113-140.

"ruminating" is not too far from wondering, and the paragraph ends with the oddness of the cow: noting not its crumpled horn, which of course, spoils the symmetry implied in taxonomy, but its several stomachs. There is an unconscious potential in language, which nonsense and rhyme and poetry, all crucial in language acquisition, release, along with the play of the imagination. Language as a gift offers significances which may be psychoanalytic, meaning that they can be interpreted, and which respond to chance and create chances, so resisting interpretation.

Dickens attempts the language of the child as with the child Johnny calling Bella the "boofer lady" (Dickens, 1997, 2.9.324), but he is also wary of the kind of language used by some adults when thinking about childhood. In *Dombey and Son*, how the adult speaks about and to the child, and imagines that this speech is appropriate, is caught when Louisa Chick says how overwhelmed she is by the birth of Paul Dombey (pretending to be more affected than the mother, who is about to die): "I thought I must have fallen out of the staircase window as I came down from seeing dear Fanny, and that tiddy ickle sing"; Dickens adding, "these last words originated in a sudden vivid reminiscence of the baby" (1.6). Perhaps there is an unconscious hypocrisy in the way Mrs Chick speaks of the child, and this shows through, while also through her language use Dickens criticises her adult speech, and makes fun of how she infantilises herself. Her "tiddy ickle sing", meaning "tiny little thing", is how she thinks she should speak to, or about, a baby. "[T]iddy ickle" has something of a reduplication in it, her nearest approach to poetry, but Dickens's dry irony intends a reader to note how language distorts, from the beginning, and imposes a falsity both on the speaker (this is not Mrs Chick's mode of speaking) and on the subject spoken about. OED cites Dickens' use of "ickle" as a "hypocoristic form of little", in other words, as a pet-name, and to make people think they are pets or to treat them as such is, of course, dangerous. Hence throughout his work, Dickens's sensitivity to class and to middle-class affectation shows awareness that if prompted by the wrong people, language acquisition may not open up and create a world, as a form of poetry, so much as it may also be negative, contracting insight and imagination, turning moralistic, and making for the creation of character as gendered and aspiring to be genteel. That is the word used by Miss Monflathers who runs a school for young ladies in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Here, even the words of the hymns of Isaac Watts ("How doth the little busy bee / Improve each shining hour" (309)) are pronounced applicable only in their entirety to middle-class children, not to poor people's children. Poor children must

have different words. It is as if Dickens marks a difference from the eighteenth-century child to the nineteenth in terms of what children are allowed to say, and showing how much less inclusive society has become. And it is at this point that we can come back to the letter z.

In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, at the supper at Todgers's, there is a toast proposed by a gentleman of a debating turn, "who was strong at speech making", to Mr Pecksniff, the speaker complementing the ladies present by saying that "when the two Miss Pecksniffs lisped in language scarce intelligible, they called that individual 'Father'" (*MC* 9.149). It is good to get this confirmation of how early in life the priority of the *Nom du Père* (to use Lacan's concept) is established, but until the sixteenth-century, as OED makes clear, the Miss Pecksniffs would have said "Fader" anyway, not father; there is already a certain softening implied, a certain lisping in the English language itself, occurring between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. A lisp in French is *zézaiement*; the word sounds onomatopoeic, and doubles the *z* sound, emphasising repetition. In English, that lisping has strong gender associations. Chaucer, in the *General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* says about his Friar "Somwhat he lipsed [sic], for his wantownness / To make his Englissh sweete upon his tonge"[5]. It is the way the Miller makes his language seductive: to soften the supposed ruggedness or jaggedness of English, as opposed to French. But by the time we get to *Hamlet*, lisping is associated with women's speech. Hamlet, in his rant against Ophelia attacks all women and sees lisping as part of a falsity which affects everything natural in women – "I have heard of your paintings well enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble, and you lisp, you nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance" (*Hamlet* 3.1.146-8). But by the time we get to Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1750), (which is Dickens's source for the speech in *Martin Chuzzlewit* that

[5] "Lisp" means primarily, as a verb, "to speak with that defect of utterance which consists in substituting for /s/ and /z/ sounds approaching /θ/ and /ð/; either by reason of a defect in the organs of speech or as an affectation. Also, *loosely*, to speak with child-like utterance, falteringly or imperfectly" (OED). Perhaps, then, "affectation" is at the heart of what has happened to the pronunciation of English from Chaucer to Dickens; the affectation taking, in its later stages, a move towards feminisation, as if Z is always tending towards a softening, towards an s or an sh, and that softening is a repression. Since Chaucer's spelling of "lisped" is "lipsed", it seems also that distinction between *ps* and *sp* may be included as something else that can be slurred, as though slurring was to be the norm in language-speaking. (Chaucer l. 264-5, p. 27).

describes the Miss Pecksniffs), lisping in speaking, (which Dickens notes on several occasions, and always critically, always with the sense that it contains something false), has become polite. It is now the dignified, and standard way for middle-class children to speak. This is reflected in the artificiality and rationality of this eighteenth-century polite verse, tending towards the formulaic and the generalising:

> For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
> Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
> No children run to lisp their sire's return,
> Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share .
> (Gray in Lonsdale, 122)

The child is defined as the one that lisps. The editor of these lines takes as the source for lisping Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel" – 'And stammering Babes are taught to lisp thy Name' (line 243). So too Pope writes in the "Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot", "As yet a Child, nor yet a Fool to Fame, / I lisp'd in Numbers, for the Numbers came" (Pope, lines 127-8, 602). Lisping becomes what babes are supposed to do in their language-acquisition, softening them; endearing them to adults, making them affected, and it is perpetuated in girls, and in poetry, which is thereby made unmasculine. Lisping in adults seems especially to be the language of eighteenth-century prayer; inculcating hypocrisy, and false innocence. In the poetical toast that is offered to Pecksniff, Dickens mocks a lisping tendency within poetry, which is one towards euphemism, and the avoidance of plain speech; and he also notes a tendency to make people lisp, which is a tendency towards making education a training in insincerity.

Yet at the same time Dickens is sensitive to the child's mumbling, as long as it is not meant to wheedle and prettify: in *Great Expectations*, Matthew Pocket and his wife (a wife who is nothing but social pretension and falsity), have a plurality of children, all neglected, and all in the business of language acquisition; one "mere mite" of a girl, Jane, takes it on herself to look after the baby, rescuing it from an accident with the nut-crackers. This incurs Mrs Pocket's wrath (she is the original bad neglectful mother, preoccupied entirely with her aristocratic ancestry) which is directed unfairly towards Jane: "Mamma, dear," lisped the little girl, "baby ood have put hith eyeth out" (23.217). The mother is obdurate, and angry with Jane, however, and Mr Pocket, helplessly, at the other end of the dining-table thinks how "babies are to be

nutcrackered into their tombs"; but he can do nothing about it, and a dangerous situation can only be spoken about in a language which misappropriates.

So, before we return to the nutcracker, let us note that lisping is not inherently problematic, but that speech distorsion becomes more so when it is not associated with children: there is the instance of Mr Sleary, in *Hard Times*, whose "muddled head was never sober and never drunk". He is "troubled with asthma" and his "breath came far too thick and heavy for the letter *s*" (1.6.77). Rather than lisping, his name is a slurring of the name "Slur", slurred speech associating also with the brandy-and-water he drinks, and since he points up the moral within *Hard Times*, that "ther ith a love in the world, not all Thelf-intertht after all, but thomething very different" and "that it hath a way of iths own of calculating or not calculating, with thomehow or another ith at leatht ath hard to give a name to, ath the wayth of dogs ith" (3.8.308), the morality works by comedy, and by a subtle destabilisation of the language of the patriarch of the circus. But since the primary examples of lisping given are of girls, the gendered nature of language acquisition, with the possibility of affectation, which in itself desexualises, cannot be forgotten, and we can take some hints from Roland Barthes on the difference, including the sexual difference between s and z, as articulated in Barthes' *S/Z*. Barthes begins with the point that the name "Sarrasine" in Balzac's short story, which he is analysing, would normally be spelled with a central Z, but that it fails, as Sarrazine, to become a patronymic; it can never be the name of the father. There follows a meditation on Z, which at its mildest seems to have the sadistic potentialities of Mr Punch, as it also follows his shape:

> *Z* is the letter of mutilation: phonetically, *Z* stings like a chastising lash, an avenging insect; graphically, cast slantwise by the hand across the blank regularity of the page, amid the curves of the alphabet, like an oblique and illicit blade, it cuts, slashes, or, as we say in French, *zebras* [il zèbre]; from a Balzacian viewpoint, this Z (which appears in Balzac's name) is the letter of deviation ... the first letter of La Zambinella, the initial of castration, so that by this orthographical error committed in the middle of his name, in the center of his body, Sarrasine receives the Zambinellan *Z* in its true sense – the wound of deficiency. Further, *S* and *Z* are in a relation of

> graphological inversion: the same letter seen from the other side of the mirror: Sarrasine contemplates in La Zambinella his own castration. Hence the slash (/) confronting the *S* of SarraSine and the *Z* of Zambinella has a panic function: it is the slash of censure, the surface of the mirror, the wall of hallucination, the verge of antithesis, the abstraction of limit, the obliquity of the signifier, the index of the paradigm, hence of meaning. (Barthes 105-106)

The softening of Z into S or into sh, then, in Barthes suggests a feminising, or a castration, like the castration-joke which Dickens practises when it is imagined what baby Pocket would do to himself with the nut-crackers, and which makes the contrast between the child's lisping and what is going on more subtle. Letting s and z run into each other in lisping suggests a world of no difference, or of indifference, if the point is that sexual difference is the primary difference which allows for the emergence of meaning in language as a series of binary oppositions of phonemes, which is how Lacan considers it, following Roman Jakobson. Lisping de-sexualises.

This suggests that Dickens reacts from lisping in that he is a writer of the letter Z, which insists in him, z being that letter which deviates, or zebras, or, as the English might say, streaks across the page, like Mr Micawber's mad suicidal actions with his razor (Dickens 2004, 11.170). (And "razor", indicating a highly masculine object, is one of those spellings which has changed from rasour, as OED testifies: compare the cognate "erasure".) The masculinity of z, against the softness of s, works with the phallic irrepressibility of everything that Tom Thumb stands for. If z suggests a masculinising tendency, it also works against affectation. Z has a privilege in Dickens: "Chuzzlewit", which puns on "puzzlewit", is a name whose double *z* cannot be lisped; perhaps "chuzzle" also suggests that it is a slightly lisped version of the word "sozzle", which OED gives as meaning "to mix or mingle in a sloppy manner". It compares with lawyers' names, which are all found in the first chapter of *Bleak House*, such as Chizzle, for which OED gives the sense of to cheat or defraud, first citation 1808. So Chizzle is a word which relates to Chuzzle: Chizzle / Chuzzle; and Mizzle, which is slang for "to depart", and also means to rain, as does Drizzle, the next lawyer's name in *Bleak House*. These are all names which suggest damage, and they are Dickens' play on the mnemonic games gone through in fixing

the alphabet in place, mentally speaking, as a system of differences which gain their value and their moral tone from that. And what of the idea of finishing all the names of "fine gentlemen in office; who are impotent to set right the political system", with the name Zoodle (16.257)? It shows absolutely the alliance of the governing-class with the animal; it distantly recalls the megalosaurus of the novel's first page in its sense of life becoming more primal the further it works through its list of aristocrats; it literalises the point that Z "looked like a fool" since when the Z plays the role of the F, the word "fool" is, appropriately for Lord Zoodle, inside his name.

Z cuts, or ironises, while slurring softens, as with the "red-eyed little Jew" in *Great Expectations*. This man, wanting to bribe a criminal lawyer, is waiting for Mr Jaggers and dancing a "jig of anxiety" under a lamp-post, which action, in such a position, certainly unconsciously anticipates hanging. He may not "amble", which is a form of dancing, but he certainly, as Hamlet says, "jigs" and "lisps", for his "jig" is accompanied by the repetition and paranomasia of a poetry which creates itself in him, rather than being thought up by him: "Oh Jaggerth, Jaggerth, Jaggerth! all otherth ith Cag-Maggerths, give me Jaggerth" (20.190). "Cagmag" is "unwholesome, decayed, or loathsome meat; offal; (hence) anything worthless or rubbishy", first cited in 1811 (and OED gives three citations from George Sala, who was, of course, a journalist working for Dickens). The text, or language, though not the speaker at any conscious level – for language always goes beyond what the individual can know – connects the words "jig" and 'jag'. Jag is the first syllable of Jaggers, just as jig/jag might be thought of in comparison to the word zigzag, a word which associates with what the letter z does, in going across the page similar to what Barthes calls an oblique and illicit blade, or like a razor. Here, it may be remembered, as to the initial letters, that OED indicates that in script and print, j has often substituted for z, as I have already noted the significance of J as an opening letter. (Compare the words "jealous" and "zealous".) In which case, "Jaggers" as a name implies the serrations of an edge used for cutting, or piercing, just as Barthes calls Z the letter of mutilation. And like many double consonants, including zz, it implies a doubleness in the word, which bends, and reflexes itself at the moment of the double letter. But, while rhyming Jag and Cag and Mag, the Jewish defendant lisps the end of Jaggers, which shows the inadequate language acquisition which in nineteenth-century popular representations marks out Jewishness; so he perhaps shows how language has weakened him, mutilated him: his

lisping places him outside what Jaggers stands for in his bullying: the Z side of *S/Z*, and it marks him out as the victim he will certainly be, as Mr Jaggers is appearing on the other side in the court-case.

The avenging insect which Barthes finds in the letter Z exists in Sergeant Buzfuz in *Pickwick Papers*, a name implying the angry fly (or the busy bee); it is there too in the name Boz, which, in *Pickwick Papers* gets a further addition in the name Phiz, taken by Halbot K. Browne. Boz, first used as a signature to the sketch "The Boarding House" (August 1834) – so at the very beginning of Dickens acquiring literary language, and being recognised as such, in the days of his happy infancy as a writer – was itself a reflection of a child's language acquisition.[6] Forster writes that it was "the nickname of a pet child, his youngest brother Augustus, whom in honour of *The Vicar of Wakefield* he had dubbed Moses, which being facetiously pronounced through the nose became Boses, and being shortened became Boz" (Forster 1.55). This new brother Dickens was aged six in 1834. So the child called himself Boses and that became Boz, and Dickens assumed the language of the child his brother in so naming himself, though perhaps the o gets hardened. The name was associated with Boswell, but the s of Boswell has here become z (see Patten 38-46). Boz writes about Buzfuz in *Pickwick Papers*: the name Boz was carried in the monthly parts ("edited by Boz"), but the book edition (1837) said "By Charles Dickens": the child's name, Boz, and the adult's, Charles Dickens persisting together until the time of *Dombey and Son*. The change – which is also a removal out of any imputation of Jewishness – from the name Moses to Boses to Boz implies a masculinisation, an avoidance of *s*, and this whether the o is long or short. It also means the removal of any repetition or implication of lisping, as well as the desire to be satirical – to have what Barthes calls the "chastising lash"; and, indeed, to move deviationally across the page. Since "Dickens" is also the name of the devil (OED's first citation is 1599), perhaps Boz also implies the buzzing of the lord of the flies; in *Little Dorrit*, Blandois is called "Mr Rigaud, Mr Blandois, Mr Beelzebub" (Dickens 2003, 2.30.786). Beelzebub means, of course, "the lord of the flies". That makes the alliance between the child and the devil crucial, and the sense that Boz implies that it is a name which has not yet arrived at mature expression.

As for Buzfuz, the name contracts "buzz", which OED gives as the name for a large bushy wig, though it also implies the buzzing of flies

[6] See entry "Boz" by Kathryn Chittick in *The Oxford Companion to Charles Dickens*.

(so back to Beelzebub), while "fuzz" means both "light fluffy particles", so fluff in general, and a confused, drunken state. "Buzz" and "fuzz", both of them words on the way to "chuzzle" have become associated by being put together, and they mutate in *A Christmas Carol* into Mr "Fezziwig", the name of the old man to whom the young Ebenezer Scrooge was apprenticed. Fezziwig is seen "in a Welch wig", which is a woollen cap (Dickens 1971, 1.75). But his name suggests a Turkish cap, perhaps one made in Fez, and it strangely exoticises him, as though, for a moment, he was out of *The Arabian Nights*, so powerful a presence in this text. And Fezziwig, with its repeating e and i on either side of the double z, also sounds like a child's form of a word, as though it was part of the language of an infant coming into speech. It further implies Dickens's fascination with names or words that contain *wig* (such as Grimwig), names which suggest hypocrisy and the attempt to control, easily visualised in English legal wigs, which therefore speak a language children can easily understand. The more sober form of playing on such hypocrisy appears in Jarndyce's word for law and lawyers, "Wiglomeration" (8.121), which also suggests that his language holds onto the clarity of child-likeness; wiglomeration derives from "conglomeration", implying how the wigs in the court are talking together, and "wig" is, actually residually inside the name Chuzzlewit, the novel whose subject is hypocrisy, for the name was first Chuzzlewig, a draft name which was followed up by other forms of zaniness in naming: Chubblewig, Chuzzletoe, Chuzzlebog, Sweezleden, Sweezleback and Sweezlebag (Dickens 2004a, 788-9). The double b of Chubblewig gives way to double z, as if going through the consonants that mark the single syllable "buz", but then the double z is replaced by a succession of sounds spelled eez, as if the language insists on the double letter (it could equally well be spelled – ease, and it rhymes with the central part of the name "Ebenezer") followed by the z, and the whole made into "eezle", as if playing with "Beelzebub", before getting to – uzzle, and getting the double z back again. It is more rough than the double e. Chuzzlewig implies a wig which is not arranged; Chuzzlewit perhaps implies a wit which has been deranged.

OED notes that the etymology of "lisp" includes the idea of stammering, or of tripping up, and the memories of both lines of thought must be in the hymn by William Cowper, which Dickens would surely have known, and whose last verse, negating life, seeing himself as the lonely, almost castrated figure, looks forward only to death:

> Then in a nobler sweeter song
> I'll sing thy power to save:
> When this poor lisping stammering tongue
> Lies silent in the grave. (Cowper 442)

Cowper virtually cites Dryden's line, which has already been quoted, "And stammering Babes are taught to lisp thy Name". Lisping and stammering, then, are analogous ways in which Cowper puts himself down, negates the very hymn that he is writing. Lisping prevents a full articulation of what has to be said and turns Cowper into a child, or worse, a girl, and aligns him with hypocrisy; he will only be an adult when he is dead. And to stammer, which sounds alliterative, repeating the *m* sound, links to the verb "to stem", to stop, or to delay. Mr Dorrit's stammer in prison is an instance of how the prison deprives of speech, making him both affected in his attempt to be genteel, and also ineffectual, impotent in his mode of speaking. It is all part of a world where to acquire language may be a dangerous thing, because of the power which comes from people who do not have to speak, or whose speech is circumlocution. If teaching someone to lisp is a way of making them avoid directness, or communicativeness, drawing attention to the speaker rather than to the utterance, then if someone stammers, there is the sense of language being used as an instrument of fear. Pip's own language-acquisition is put down by Estella when they play cards at Satis House: "he calls the knaves Jacks, this boy" and when Miss Havisham asks "what do you think of her", the only response can be "'I don't like to say', I stammered" (8.90).

The complex of words in the definitions (stemming, stopping, delaying) suggests something impeding speech, and making it hardly intelligible. Pip opens *Great Expectations* with the name of the father: "My father's family name being Pirrip and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip" (1.35). Philip Pirrip is as repetitive in its form as Tom Thumb, but it lacks the irrepressible spirit of that name. However, Pip's effort to negotiate the name of the father, which has been imposed onto him, makes him contract the name, not render it explicit, and it is a name which cannot be lisped. The meaning of "explicit" is that something has been unfolded, as in a medieval Latin example given by OED: "explicitus est liber": the book is unfolded. This opening, however, implies that rather than unfolding, the novel is folding things together; the name Pip becomes a

way in which the infant unconsciously stems a flow of repetition in Philip Pirrip and attempts to come to a full stop, which looks like a pip; second, the name incarnates the father, and suggests that it must become a negotiation of whatever legacy he left behind him; third, the name enfolds a disguised *f*, or a *ph*, an *l* and a double *r* within it, alternative letters, alternative lives while it enfolds four *P*s into two and four *i*s into one. Yet, as the first paragraph says, Pip is an infant, and that word comes from *infans*, which means "unable to speak", as in Tennyson's "An infant crying in the night / An infant crying for the light / And with no language but a cry" (*In Memoriam*, section 54), just as Pip is crying when Magwitch seizes him, so that "Pip" associates with a cry. That is confirmed by Carlyle, who I think gives the source for the name in *Sartor Resartus*, when Teufesdröckh, at his most negative state in his despair with the Universe as a "huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-machine", walking in Paris "over pavements hot as Nebuchadnezzar's Furnace" has the thought, "What *art* thou afraid of? Wherefore, like a coward, dost thou for ever pip and whimper and go cowering and trembling!" (Carlyle 2.7. 128).[7] I can only find Nebuchadnezzar, the man of two zzs, in Dickens in "The Boarding House", in*:* "Tibbs ... began eating watercresses like a Nebuchadnezzar" (Dickens 1994, 295), a reference to when Nebuchadnezzar went mad "and did eat grass as oxen" (Daniel 4.33), becoming graminivorous; but Pip's name, which OED makes sound like a bird's sound in the shell, associates with the position he is for ever forced into: of weeping.

Thus to conclude, Dickens comes full circle as he shifts from "z" to "Pip" as the sound of constrained speech, turn the symptomatic "z" into plosives, the syllable of dispossession. In the first scene, he has to repeat his name, must "give it mouth" as Magwitch says, as if he was teaching Pip how to speak, or even how to act on stage. Then he says it twice, as if the repetition were stammering. The account of how Pip gets his name recalls, for contrast, how Moses becomes Boz, but is similar in that Pip is constrained to use the infant name as an adult, that being the sole condition of his being adopted by an unknown patron. He will always remain the diminutive child, the pip; it is as if he were being denied full language appropriation, being forced to remain a cowering and trembling child even in his autobiography, his attempt to "give it mouth". But as a pip is inside an apple, Pip's narrative articulates a whole

[7] See my "*Great Expectations*: Pip's Name", p. 569.

world, which he attempts to bring to language: that is how, even though acquisition may have been impaired by social and emotional constraints, his language, in his text, fights back. The name is more ambiguous than he knows, and in a strange and unconscious way, it is a gift to him.

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