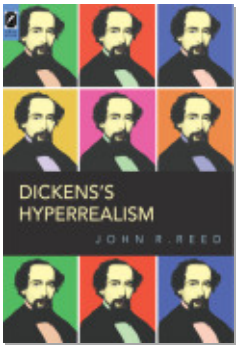
Chapter 3. Naming



CHAPTER 3

Naming

Names are important in literature. Although in serious literature names tend to be nondirective until characters' natures are manifested through actions, in many cases a name itself defines a character's nature or hints at it. Realism must avoid the appearance of using symbolic, suggestive, or illustrative names, since this practice calls attention to authorial intention, which the realist novel seeks to mask. The realist novelist cannot indulge in such play with her audience. But especially in comic literature, we willingly accept names that typify. We accept them as a writer's shorthand, a way of conveying quickly and without complication the basic "humor" of his character. But we tend also to accept this shorthand passively, without considering the immense power that such naming confers upon the writer. In this chapter, I wish to explore the ways in which Dickens exploits a wide range of possibilities in the naming of characters as a means of sequestering the force of his narratives to his own authority, a gesture at odds with the conventions of realism which seek to create the illusion of transparent or "natural" narrative. Moreover, it is my contention that Dickens purposely uses names to call attention to his own performance, as the force behind naming both within and beyond the diegesis, thus purposely opposing the transparency supposed in realism.[1] Dickens's contemporaries were

aware of his skill in naming and the interest has continued through Elizabeth Hope Gordon's *The Naming of Characters in the Works of Charles Dickens* (1917) to the present day.

The power of naming shows itself in many types of fiction, sometimes in quite subtle ways. At one point in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past,* for example, Marcel refers to Rachel as "Rachel when from the Lord," a puzzling denomination for the general reader. J. Hillis Miller remarks that this is "a striking example within the novel itself of naming as a sovereign speech act making or remaking the one who is named" (*Speech Acts* 207). Miller emphasizes that, while Marcel's act of naming is part of the diegesis, it is actually Proust, not his character, who wishes to *convey* the multiple significances of the allusive name. If it were his character who wished to transmit this information, Proust would presumably have confirmed or explained Marcel's reason for employing this name. Instead, it remains a mystery to all but the initiate, though it is possible that Proust felt the allusion to Jacques Halévy's opera *La juive* (*The Jewess* [1835]) would be evident to his contemporaries.[2] Whatever the case, it is possible to make a distinction between the author's power to name and the significance of the act of naming within the diegesis, which, as Miller brilliantly demonstrates, requires an energetic intertextual exercise on the part of the reader.

Miller calls naming a "sovereign speech act," thereby himself indirectly alluding to the sovereignty granted to Adam and Eve over Eden, when God assigned them the privilege of naming the beings and objects of their world. Naming is widely understood to embody power in language. Few speech acts have more sustained effect, with the exception of such dramatic utterances as "Off with his head!" and the like. Women influenced by feminist activism from the middle of the twentieth century acknowledged the power of naming by refusing to yield the surname they were born with to take that of a husband, despite the fact that both names came to them from men. Stage names, pseudonyms, and aliases also indicate a strong human impulse to appropriate the power of naming to oneself. What concerns me in this chapter, beyond a general interest in Charles Dickens's practice of naming in his fiction, is the distinction hinted at, but not explored in depth in Miller's comments on Proust, between the author's and the narrator's or character's acts of naming.

Charles Dickens was acutely aware of the power of naming both within his narratives, as exercised by his characters or his narrators, and on his own part as author. From the beginning of his career, Dickens was deeply involved with and interested in the act of naming.[3] He began his writing career, as we all know, under a false name as Boz and relished such self-naming as The Inimitable, and the Sparkler of Albion. But from the *Sketches*

onward, he was conscious of the resonances of names, most often in the early works for their comic qualities, a feature he shared with and borrowed from the numerous comic writers of his own and earlier times. Jingle aptly suggests the garrulousness of that character, as Winkle, Tupman, and less effectively Snodgrass suggest the respective characters of these humorous sidekicks. Pickwick itself is a comical name. Similarly, names that carry an allegorical quality were familiar in literary tradition and often used by some of Dickens's favorite writers. Henry Fielding's Squire Allworthy is a good example. Dickens's contemporary and friend Captain Frederick Marryat was in the habit of naming his protagonists according to their supposed or actual attributes, such as Peter Simple, Jacob Faithful, Masterman Ready, and Jack Easy.

Often the names Dickens selects have connotative value only, as with Quilp, a name that sounds both foolish and nasty. Other names suggest a character trait as with Miss Nipper and Mrs. MacStinger in *Dombey and Son*. Still others have associational power, as with Solomon Gills and Captain Cuttle, both connected to maritime activities. But some names also carry denotative power, as with Bradley Headstone, whose name was first tried in Dickens's notes as Amos Headstone or Deadstone, before becoming Bradley Deadstone and finally Headstone.[4] To thrust home his point, Dickens has Rogue Riderhood remark on the churchyard associations of the name. Michael Cotsell observes the resemblance of Fascination Fledgeby's name to "fledgling" (150). And, of course, there are the transparent Veneerings. There are even those well-known instances where Dickens borrowed directly or alluded satirically to real names, as he did with Fagin in *Oliver Twist*. All of these acts of naming by Dickens as author are significant. However, I am particularly interested in those instances where characters call attention to the act of naming, and, in doing so signal Dickens's own ultimate authority as the source of all such naming.

Garrett Stewart offers a good example of Dickens's complicated naming activity as early as *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Dick Swiveller achieves a kind of poetic apotheosis when he names the Brasses' anonymous servant girl the Marchioness. As Stewart puts it, he effectively brings the girl into being, a beingness that will be crucial to his recovery from illness and to his achieving a degree of success in life. But if Dick is something of a wordmaster and takes to himself the privilege of naming, he is himself, through Dickens's authority to name him, an example of the complex force that names can suggest. In Stewart's words:

> Many have noted the importance of the name "Dick," one syllable of his author's last name, as a clue to the inherence in this comic character of at

> least a part of the author's own personality, one phase of his artistic temperament. Further, the family pronunciation of Sam's last name, "Veller," is also contained in Dick's own surname. And there is surely something in "Swiveller" that catches his directionless vitality, that willingness to take the prevailing wind which often makes him seem as though he is merely going in circles. But Dick not only swivels, he seeks; he himself wonders about his first name in connection with that prototypical Richard who became Lord Mayor of London. "Perhaps the bells might strike up 'Turn again, Swiveller, Lord Mayor of London.' Whittington's name was Dick." (105–6)

Stewart demonstrates the possible connections between Dickens and his character, the possible echoes between characters from different books, and the use of traditional lore to give weight to his own characters. The most significant attribute of this instance is its dual function: while it characterizes Dick, it also highlights the function of his name as a turner or swiveller. So, while Dick is focusing on his first name, Dickens is showing us the substance of his last name and hinting proleptically at Dick's ultimate turning from his trivial existence to a purposeful life.[5]

Stewart also points to some functions of naming in *Our Mutual Friend.* Again, it is characteristic for characters to manifest their own sense of superiority by naming others. So Eugene feels free to refer to Riah as "Mr. Aaron" and "Patriarch," claiming that he does so in a complimentary fashion, although, for the reader, his taking liberties with the Jew's name can be seen as a form of appropriation (Stewart 212). More telling is Stewart's example of self-naming in Jenny Wren. "Fanny Cleaver," he writes, "has bestowed upon herself a liberating pseudonym, a *nom de plumage* whose assonant lift is meant to carry her fancy above the sordidness of her cares and labors . . ." (205). Jenny sometimes smells flowers and hears songbirds that recall her dream of angelic visitors, and Stewart notes that "Jenny Wren has named herself a songbird—developing an eye as 'bright and watchful as the bird's whose name she had taken' (II,11)—and has grown herself a bower" (209). Jenny has consciously renamed herself with a view to redemption, or at least removal from her sordid reality. Stewart shrewdly remarks that, "Like Dickens himself, Jenny Wren is also a tireless coiner of names ironic and otherwise" for others (204). However, Stewart fails to note that it is Dickens who named this character Fanny Cleaver, whose ironic tongue is so sharp and cutting. Much as Jenny tries to wrest command of her character from her creator, he remains in control of her sardonic nature. His name for her—Cleaver—still fits. Moreover, it is also Dickens who has permitted Fanny to choose the name Jenny Wren, which has its ironies for her, but perhaps others for Dickens himself.[6]

David Copperfield offers a clear and simple example of the power of naming in an atmosphere of coercion within its diegesis.[7] When Mr. Murdstone wants to warn his associates to be prudent in their speech around the young David, he says someone is very sharp, identifying this someone as "Brooks of Sheffield," an allusion to the city of Sheffield's reputation for good cutlery.[8] Murdstone's humor here bears a surprising resemblance to some of Dickens's own metaphorical and metonymic naming techniques. Steerforth names David "Daisy," to indicate his innocence as well as his subjugation to Steerforth himself. In neither instance does David realize that the act of denomination is belittling and manipulative. Aunt Betsey renames David with her own name Trotwood as a mark of her command over him, just as Dora's nickname for him signifies possession. Harry Stone observes that the new name Trotwood also signals a new phase in David's life ("What's in a Name?" 193). The same could be said of Dora's nickname for David. David says that Doady is Dora's "corruption of David," an ambiguous statement. Dora is not a wise choice as a partner for a young man like David, and hence she does represent a "corruption" of his true course in life.[9] Within the narrative, therefore, it is clear that the act of naming involves an assumption of power over the person named (601). Oddly enough, David, who begins his career as an early story teller, seldom names other people in this way.

Personal names are intriguing in *David Copperfield* in various ways, one of which is the way they intimate rather than declare authorial intention. It is interesting how some of the important names in the novel suggest a natural setting—Copper*field,* Trot*wood,* Wick*field,* Murd*stone.* Arguably, these names suggest a pastoral quality in *Copperfield* that is more persistent than in most of Dickens's novels. In other novels, names of this sort also indicate characters who ultimately figure positively in their stories, such as *Wood*court and Light*wood,* whereas characters with names like Murd*stone* and Small*weed* suggest the unappealing aspects of the natural world. Even David's birthplace, Blunderstone, suggests the same outdoor atmosphere, though the "blunder" in the word implies error and misfortune and is therefore not pleasantly combined with the hard suggestions of "stone." The name is also a forecast of Clara Copperfield's second husband, the cruel Mr. Murdstone, whose name Betsey Trotwood confuses when she complains that David's mother "goes and marries a Murderer—or a man with a name like it . . ." (253). In passages such as this, Dickens calls attention to his own authority in the act of naming. Harry Stone indicates that Dickens's selection of the name Murdstone combines ideas of murder and hardness with equal emphasis and openness, but also shows how the name connects him with David's real father by way of its allusion to the father's gravestone ("What's in a Name?" 194–95). Some names including w's suggest weak-

ness in character and include most notably Mr. Wilkins Micawber, but also Mr. Wickfield and both Dora Spenlow and her father, but others, especially those beginning with w's imply some degree of firmness, notably Weller and Westlock, but also Wardle and Wegg in their ways. Perhaps the most interesting is Wemmick, a character who seems to mirror the harsh traits of his employer, but who turns out, in his domestic character, to have a very soft side. But Dickens also tries out a pattern he uses effectively in *Great Expectations* by contrasting names with the same number of letters, though with different connotative sounds. Thus the steady and alert Mr. Peggotty is set against the glum and morose Mrs. Gummidge. More significant, perhaps, are the names of David's friendly companion and Steerforth's evil servant. Though Micawber's name may suggest weakness, its open vowels and soft consonants also imply a kindly, accommodating nature, whereas Littimer's pinched vowels and pointy consonants hint at a prickly, unappealing character.[10] Several characters' names are ambiguous. Hence, Steerforth itself calls up heroic possibilities, but, these possibilities are, as we discover by the end of the novel, misapplied. Tommy Traddles's name is both comic and balanced, and it is the combination of a humorous and an industrious character that brings him success in life.

What interests me in *Copperfield* is that it is Dickens, not his first-person narrator, who is in charge of this naming. The water imagery of this novel supports a complex pattern of danger, salvation, and death. Steerforth's name evokes the image of a sea captain, but this "hero" corrupts Little Em'ly and carries her off in his sailing vessel, a reversal of the ideal of the rescue at sea. And Steerforth dies retributively in both literal and metaphorical shipwreck. Dickens reinforces the moral design of his novel by showing the morally compassless Steerforth coming to misfortune through the abuse of his considerable powers.[11] By contrast, Peggotty keeps an ark that has come to rest not on Ararat, but the Yarmouth sands, where he shelters his extended family, including the appropriately named Ham, named after a son of the original ark owner, Noah. Ultimately, it is a ship that will carry the Micawbers, Em'ly, and Martha to a new world of opportunity in Australia. Dickens, not his characters, links appropriate names to a water-related theme by way of obliging his readers to interpret his narrative in the manner he directs, not in some capricious reading of their own. This aim on his part might be misguided, given the researches of modern critics, especially those employing what is known as reader-response criticism, but there is little doubt in my mind that this was his purpose.[12]

Dickens himself took delight in naming his characters, from the simplest and most theatrical to more subtle and complicated instances, but it is also interesting to observe the ways in which he delegates the authority for

naming to his third-person and first-person narrators. Esther Summerson and David Copperfield tend not to be big namers, whereas third-person narrators name as freely as Dickens himself, if any distinction is to be made between author and narrator. The ironic voice of the narrator of *Our Mutual Friend* even dispenses with proper names, to call a few of the stylized characters Boots, Brewer, and, in a much slyer manner, the Veneering servant who is referred to as the Analytical Chemist.

Dickens was fully aware of what one might call the sins of naming. Michael Ragussis has shown the discordance between a person or place's name and its actual nature. In fact, he indicates that this discordance is part of a larger problem with language itself in *Bleak House,* arguing that "language is London's communicative/communicable disease" (263). Even Esther Summerson's apparently positive name is misleading; unlike other characters who are robbed of histories by their names, "it is not the name itself that robs her: it is the absence of a name" (257). But if Dickens offered numerous indications about the perils involved with naming, he also offered as many indications of his own authority and control where naming was concerned, and Ragussis, without making this case, gives an appropriate instance. Hawdon, Esther's unknown father, is referred to in several ways: the Captain, Nemo (his own alias), Our Dear Brother (the narrator's ironic term), and Nimrod, Mrs. Snagsby's misunderstanding of Nemo. But, as Ragussis demonstrates, this incorrect name referring to the mighty hunter of the Old Testament nonetheless connects Hawdon to the theme of confused language indicated by references to the tower of Babel and carried out in the thematic network of language as confusion in "Dickens's brilliant use of 'the great wilderness of London' (xlviii, 583), that 'immense desert of law-hand' (xlvii, 567), as the Old Testament desert, but with this difference: the Law of God, the divine Word, has itself degenerated into babel, and the Father has become the tyrannous, and dead, Pharaoh" (262). Thus, while confusion might reign within the diegesis, and names not connect signified and signifier, Dickens makes certain that his story retains its tightly woven meaning and even opens up occasional windows for readers alert enough to draw the threads together.

Sometimes it might appear that Dickens or his narrator has slipped up. Why, for example, would an author name his titular character Chuzzlewit? Such a name suggests an inferior, comic character—much more so than Pickwick, which is simply playful. Dickens did not come to the name easily, but considered several others, including Sweezlewag, Sweezlebach, Sweezleden, Chuzzletoe, and the favored Chuzzlewig. Only at the last stage did it become Chuzzlewit, certainly far the best of these names. But why such a pejorative name for the book's hero? The full early versions of the book's title provide the clue to an answer for they indicate that this is not merely

the story of young Martin, but forms "a complete key to The House of chuzzlewig" (Stone, Notes, 33). A glance at the novel's opening paragraph reveals that the so-called House of Chuzzlewit is the human race, which traces its heritage back to Adam and Eve. Hence, the Chuzzlewit family is all of us; we are all confused and selfish. And lest anyone think that this is a late interpretation, it is necessary only to observe that from Dickens's earliest notes for the novel, he wrote his intention that for the readers of this novel "Your homes the scene. Yourselves the actors here" (Stone, Notes, 31).

The power to name is enormously significant, though it also permits an illusion of command.[13] A notable example of this last instance is Pip in *Great Expectations,* who names himself by a slip of the tongue. This novel is also an interesting exception to the division between the nonnaming first-person and the naming third-person narrators of Dickens's novels. Pip is a notable example of the importance of naming, if for no other reason than that Dickens calls such attention to this speech act at the very outset of his novel, when his protagonist first becomes conscious of his own being. This sovereign speech act, however, is reported to us in the midst of much confusion on Pip's part, which includes his misunderstanding of what is written about his dead parents and siblings on their cemetery markers, and then the perturbation prompted by Magwitch's account of his bloodthirsty partner. It could be said that Pip has *misnamed* himself, since he has shrunk himself from the complete Philip Pirrip, to the diminutive Pip. From this point of view, one might conclude that Pip lives out his early career under a false name. As is frequently the case in Dickens's later fiction, he offers a redundancy of clues for the reader to grasp his full intentions, if not while reading, then when the reading is complete and all information is in. One such clue about Pip and names is in the brief episode when the young and still largely illiterate Pip writes a letter for Joe in which he shortens Joe's name to JO, an act of abbreviation resembling the shortening of his own name and hinting at his misvaluing of the man Joe as well, though interestingly, Joe can recognize his name when he sees Pip's written JO, though he is otherwise no reader (75).

Appropriately, Pip's false name mirrors the falseness of his situation. His great expectations are to become a wealthy gentleman and Estella's husband, though in reality he will become an overseas merchant who is single when the narrative ends. Pip's misnaming of himself is thus consistent with the illusory life he leads through most of the narrative. By mistakenly assuming control of his own name, he loses command of his actual nature, accepting a form of secular destiny instead of forging his own fate. The verb "to forge" stems from the Old French *forgier,* derived from the Latin *fabricare,* to make or fashion. There are many modes of making, some true and some false,

though *forge* suggests arduous creation. But to forge money is to be so false as to constitute criminality. Whereas Joe is true to the right purpose of forging, Pip forges an identity which he passes off as real in the world around him, despite the fact that several characters see through this specious form of specie, from Biddy to Trabb's boy to Dolge Orlick. The latter names Pip "wolf," a displacement of Pip's identity, but not inexplicable from the point of view of Orlick, to whom Pip has not been kind. There are many reasons for Pip's pervading sense of guilt and association with criminality, not the least of which is that he is living an alias. I am myself here playing with words to a specific end. The Forge is one of the most important place names in *Great Expectations,* and it carries the weight of many kinds of making because it is here that the core mystery of the plot is worked into shape, a fact that Dickens signals throughout the narrative by the recurring allusions to equipment associated with the Forge—a file, manacles, chains, and so forth.

Herbert Pocket changes Pip's name, preferring to call him Handel because of that musician's well-known composition "The Harmonious Blacksmith." A blacksmith is a man of physical power who can shape what is otherwise resistant to change through his mastery of the forge. Joe is true to the simple identity he did not make, but over which he takes control. Ceding domestic power to his wife is a sign of his real authority. Only those who hold power can lease it to others. No one offers to call Joe by anything but his given names. But by renaming Pip Handel, Herbert displaces Pip from his false identity without providing him with a true one, unlike the renamings of David Copperfield. Not he, but Dickens is calling attention to the parallel between Handel's translation of the rough work of the blacksmith into art and Pip's transformation from a blacksmith in fact into a role-playing gentleman. It is, after all, Herbert's father who has the task of coining this new gentleman. So Dickens's allusiveness, put in the mouth of Herbert as a thing of little significance, is actually a clue to the correct understanding of the entire novel. This name game comes full circle, when, near the close of the novel, we learn that Joe and Biddy's child has been named Pip. This will be his proper name and his proper identity to fulfill. The original Pip has presumably by this time achieved his true identity, which permits him to become the narrator of his own history; presumably he is now Philip Pirrip again and not that false construction known as Pip. Although, in Dickens's original ending of the novel, Estella calls Pip by that name, in the published ending, she does not.

Naming plays an important part throughout *Great Expectation*s. Some names are neutral, as is Joe Gargery's. Others intend a comic sound, as with the guests gathered at the Gargery home—Wopsle, Hubble, and especially Pumblechook. Other names bear varying degrees of more intense meaning.

Abel Magwitch links an edenic name with suggestions of sorcery and wicked power.[14] Dolge Orlick, with its rolling vowels echoes the moroseness of its owner. Other names similarly play with sounds that are compatible with the characters they name, such as Drummle and Startop. A minor character is clearly skewered by being named Mrs. Coiler. But important characters are similarly well defined. Estella suggests a stellar inaccessibility, an apt name considering Dickens's initial ending of the novel, in which Pip does not attain his female prize. More evident is the meaning of Miss Havisham's name, for her entire life is a sham. These are necessary, but unoriginal observations. What is interesting to me is that Dickens in this novel gives Pip, a first-person narrator, a tendency to naming that resembles that of his third-person narrators. Pip the narrator has not named the characters mentioned above, but Pip the subject of the narration does rename Pepper, his unnecessary servant, as the Avenger. And something fairly complex is going on with the narrative when this happens. Pip the narrator has used many images of entanglement, such as golden chains, the reappearing file, and so forth to indicate a pattern of entrapment in Pip's career, but that is because he is narrating the account after the important events have transpired and have become a story that can be woven together with a clear teleological purpose. But Pip the subject of narration creates the minatory name for his servant while he is in the midst of that story, before it even is a story. Yet he fulfills Dickens's need to retain control of his narrative by putting in place the allusive and connotative blocks that constitute the edifice of his narrative. It is Dickens, too, who gives the narrating Pip his powers of metaphor.

Dickens exploits his naming game best in this novel with Jaggers and his clerk, Wemmick. While at first the two seem aptly paired—both secretive and solitary and devoted to the business of the law—, in fact, they are eventually distinguished from one another. Their names make this distinction precisely evident. Jaggers is as jagged and rough a name as one might wish for with its harsh vowels and consonants. Wemmick, by contrast, is almost a mellifluous name with its softened consonants. More intriguing is that the two names align perfectly, each consisting of seven letters with contrasting consonants and vowels matching exactly, a precise development of examples I gave earlier from *David Copperfield.* There is no accident in this kind of naming. Moreover, the place names associated with both men have a similar effect. Little Britain, though a real place, nonetheless has a spiky quality that makes it sound unattractive, whereas Walworth has a gentle, inviting tonality. These contrasting names, both of persons and of place, show what power Dickens could convey through his naming, for entire personalities and contexts are evoked in these names before any actions flesh them out. In some ways, they are Dickens's clues to his readers about how to receive each

of his fictional personalities. We know before the secret is out that Wemmick is a better man than he seems. Walworth and Walworth sentiments are already implied in his name.

In her study of realism, *All Is True,* Lilian R. Furst identifies the eighteenth century as the period when location and actual place became important to fiction. Previously places bore symbolic and allegorical significance. "Only in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries does fiction begin to develop environment as a matrix in which character is formed, and with this, the close articulation of places and people" (98). At the end of the eighteenth century, the romantic enthusiasm for landscape combines with curiosity about practical industrial matters and details of social organization. "The stark symbolism of allegory combines with the digressive prolixity of travel writing to produce the technique of detailed and cumulative notation of place normally associated with realism" (98). Furst notes that since Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel,* particularity of place has been considered a hallmark of realism. Because place names in fiction can and often do refer to real sites, they "can act as a bridge of continuity, along which readers may move from one sphere to the other without becoming conscious of the transition" (102). This easy flow between fiction and reality enhances the illusion of transparency to which realism aspires.

Here again, Dickens, though a master at particularity, does not employ his details for the same strategic ends as realism. Even with place names he often tries to evoke an emotional response, whether positive in a place like Dingley Dell, or negative, with the allegorically named Dotheboys Hall or Pocket Breaches, the town for which Veneering becomes a Member of Parliament. The first is readable even by a twenty-first century American student; the second requires some historical information. The name suggests a pocket borough—one controlled by a single individual or family, and hence a certainty for a favored parliamentary candidate. That such favor often involved cash payment is suggested by the name Dickens chose for the town, but even more by the names he listed in his mems, but then discarded—Ticklepocket and Twitchpocket.[15] If his characters exert or try to exert control over their environment and other characters through assuming the power to rename, Dickens himself overtly claims a similar authority through the reverberating significance of the names he gives to persons and things.[16] But Dickens also extends his own yen for naming places to his characters. Not many seriously realist novelists would have their characters offer place names such as Bleak House, Satis House, or the Golden Bower. But Dickens does not want to be a realist in the accepted sense of that term. Richard Lettis puts the matter well:

> Above all, he thought that writing should enable the reader to see the essential affirmative 'truth' of life—this was for him the best that writing could achieve. He disliked the obvious, and approved always of subtlety, but knew that judicious use of the commonplace, of carefully-selected detail, could bring reality to a story—but it must always be the kind of reality he found in drama: 'wonderful reality'—the world as we know it, but 'polished by art' until it assumed values not felt in the dull settled world itself. For him reality was not what it was to the realists; it was neither commonplace as in Howells nor sordid as in so many others. (60–61)

I would add that Dickens wanted a wonderful reality not only polished by art, but specifically by the art of Charles Dickens.

When Dickens names a voting town Eatanswill, he is thumbing his nose at what was to become the realist convention because he wants his audience to be conscious of the author as a performer, as master of the sovereign act of naming.[17] When he confers that power upon his narrators and characters, he means to show his audience how important that power of naming is and how it remains ultimately the province of the author who is permitting his characters to name others and even themselves. But he also calls attention to the *sins* of naming in characters like Steerforth or Murdstone, and the *mistake* of naming in Pip. By telling the stories of those who do not understand how sovereign the act of naming is, Dickens reinforces his own power by using that act correctly and to its proper end.