Tyson Stolte

Dickens & Victorian Psychology

Introspection, First-Person Narration, and the Mind
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*Introspection, First-Person Narration, and the Mind*

TYSON STOLTE
For Megan
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Acknowledgements

It is a daunting task to try to name all those who have had a part in bringing this book into the world. Foremost among them is Suzy Anger, who has helped to shape this project from its inception and who has continued to serve as a mentor and a friend long after my time in graduate school came to an end. Deanna Kreisel, too, has been a constant source of professional advice, good humor, and friendship. At UBC, Pamela Dalziel set high standards for me, brought a keen critical eye to my work, and was generous in her celebration of my successes. The project that became this book also benefited from the feedback and mentorship of Susanna Egan, Joy Dixon, and Jill Matus, and my time in UBC’s English department was enriched by the advice and friendship of Alex Dick and Lee Johnson. I was equally fortunate to find myself among a wonderful and talented group of graduate students at UBC. I particularly wish to thank those with whom I spent the most time both inside and outside the department’s reading room: Katie Calloway, Sarah Crover, Jennifer Bowering Delisle (and Kenton Delisle), Colleen Derkatch, Emily Doucet, Eddy Kent, Travis Mason, Jennifer Schnepf, and Terri Tomsky. While at UBC, as I began work on this project, I was also the beneficiary of generous financial support: a doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and a postdoctoral fellowship (along with several scholarships) from the Department of English.

At NMSU, Harriet Linkin welcomed me to the department and to the profession, and Tracey Miller-Tomlinson, Brian Rourke, and Elizabeth Schirmer have also been patient mentors. I am grateful, too, for the friendship and the sympathetic ears of Ryan Cull and Kellie Sharp-Hoskins, as well as the many other colleagues and students who have made NMSU a happy place to work. It has been during my time in New Mexico that I have also come to know Bob Patten, whose generous help and advice as I finished this book and sought a publisher were immensely valuable. I appreciate, as well, the research leave granted me by NMSU, and I wish to express my thanks to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University and the libraries of the University of British Columbia and New Mexico State University for their invaluable assistance in tracking down the research materials necessary for this book.

I am very grateful to those with whom I have had the good fortune to work at Oxford University Press: my Commissioning Editors, Jacqueline Norton and Karen Raith; the Senior Assistant Commissioning Editor, Aimee Wright; and the two anonymous readers who responded so generously and helpfully to my
manuscript. I am thankful, too, for the work Sharmila Radha and Martin Noble put into the book at the production stage. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the many other editors—the editors of various journals, as well as the editors of the *Oxford Handbook of Charles Dickens*, John Jordan, Bob Patten, and Catherine Waters—who offered me feedback on some earlier versions of ideas that made their way into this project (and many ideas that did not). This book was also improved by the comments and questions of those who heard the preliminary versions of this work that I presented at such conferences as ACCUTE, BAVS, the Dickens Universe, NVSA, and NAVSA; I owe thanks, too, to the numerous individuals who organized publishing workshops at those conferences. Many anonymous readers—at presses and journals, as well as at granting agencies like SSHRC and the NEH—have also had a hand in shaping the argument of this book. Their feedback on my ideas has pushed me to continue to reconceptualize and revise this project, and the book is better for the rigorous way that these readers engaged with my work.

I am grateful to those presses that have given me permission to include in this book material that has already appeared elsewhere. An earlier version of Chapter 2 was published as “‘What is Natural in Me’: *David Copperfield*, Faculty Psychology, and the Association of Ideas.” Copyright © 2010 Victorian Studies of Western Canada. This article first appeared in *Victorian Review*, Volume 36, Issue 1, Spring 2010, pp. 55–71. Published with permission by Johns Hopkins University Press. Earlier versions of some ideas that appear in the introduction and in Chapter 5 were included in my chapter “Psychology, Psychiatry, Mesmerism, Dreams, Insanity, and Psychoanalytic Criticism” in *The Oxford Handbook of Charles Dickens*, edited by Robert L. Patten, John O. Jordan, and Catherine Waters, Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 388–403. I thank Oxford University Press for allowing me to use that material in *Dickens and Victorian Psychology*.

Finally, I wish to thank my family: my siblings, Chris and Kirsten, and especially my parents, Johanne Healy and Klaus Stolte, who made clear to me the value of books and the importance of education, even if the latter lesson was one that I resisted at the time. I wish that my parents could have lived to have read this book and seen their own influence upon it. Megan Bell has been there at every moment of this book’s development. After a long wait, this book is dedicated to her.
Introduction

Dickens and Victorian Psychology

On Wednesday, June 6, 1866, George Henry Lewes, having made preparations for his and George Eliot’s departure for Germany the following day, headed home. Along the way, he encountered his friend of nearly 30 years, Charles Dickens, and the two walked to the Priory together. There, as Lewes recorded in his journal, Dickens regaled Lewes with “[c]urious stories of dreams, etc.” (June 6, 1866), stories to which Lewes dedicated nearly an entire page of his journal: Dickens told of a dream he had after one of his public readings, in which he encountered a woman in scarlet, unknown to him, who declared her name to be Napier; two days later, Lewes notes in the full account of the dream he subsequently published in “Dickens in Relation to Criticism” (1872), Dickens met a woman wearing a scarlet opera cloak who answered to the name Napier when Dickens jokingly addressed her thus (“Dickens” 154). Dickens also told Lewes of curious psychological incidents that he witnessed in the immediate aftermath of the railway crash he had survived the previous year at Staplehurst: a man, led by Dickens to his deceased bride, subsequently rushed about a field as fast as he could, his arms above his head, before fainting; another, mistaking the ooze of the river into which he had fallen for his own blood, sat down to wipe his face, but as Dickens watched him he instead ran up and down a plank for thirty minutes before he completed the task, an interval of which he was later entirely unconscious.

Rather than a singular coming together of one of the nineteenth century’s most important novelists and one of its key psychological theorists, however, this June evening was among a series of meetings during which Dickens and Lewes—and occasionally George Eliot—discussed such psychological mysteries.\(^1\) Psychology was again the topic of conversation when Dickens came to lunch at the Priory shortly before his death in 1870, an occasion Eliot recalled in a letter to Sara Sophia Hennell:

Dickens’s death came as a great shock to us. He lunched with us just before we went abroad and was telling us a story of President Lincoln having told the Coun-

\(^1\) On these meetings and on Dickens’s and Lewes’s long friendship more broadly, see especially Ashton, *Dickens*; and Haight.
cil on the day he was shot, that something remarkable would happen, because he had just dreamt for the third time a dream which twice before had preceded events momentous to the nation. The dream was, that he was in a boat on a great river all alone—and he ended with the words "I drift—I drift—I drift." (Letters 5: 102)

Perhaps most significantly, in “Dickens in Relation to Criticism” Lewes also recalls how, on another evening, “in the course of a quiet chat over a cigar, we got on a subject which always interested him, and on which he had stored many striking anecdotes—dreams” (153), and Dickens then told how he had been haunted by the same dream of his sister-in-law Mary Hogarth every night for a year after her death, a “spell” that was only “broken,” in Lewes’s words, when he confessed the dreams to his wife (“Dickens” 153–4). Crucially, it seems to have been these dreams of Mary, as David McAllister has shown, that first sparked Dickens’s reading on the subject of dreams (“Subject” 10–11): McAllister provides compelling evidence that Dickens first turned to Robert Macnish’s *The Philosophy of Sleep* (1830) in May or June of 1837 (“Subject” 5), in the midst of these nightly visitations. That is to say that it was Dickens’s dreams of Mary that seem to have first led him to immerse himself in the Victorian psychological texts that are at the center of the argument that *Dickens and Victorian Psychology* makes.2

That Dickens and Lewes spent so much time discussing psychology—conversations, Lewes’s and Eliot’s detailed accounts suggest, in which Dickens took an active and informed part—renders all the more surprising the portrait of both Dickens and his fiction that Lewes offers in “Dickens in Relation to Criticism.” While ostensibly seeking to explain how we might reconcile Dickens’s overwhelming popularity with the critical contempt shown his work—after all, “there probably never was a writer of so vast a popularity whose genius was so little appreciated by the critics” (“Dickens” 143)—Lewes ends up advancing a portrait of his late friend that, to John Forster and countless subsequent readers, has seemed wholly damning.3 For Lewes ultimately rehashes a series of lines of attack on Dickens that had already ossified into clichés. Yes, Dickens was “[g]reat…

2 Rosemary Ashton describes how the stories Dickens shared with Lewes “fed Lewes’s interest in psychology” (*G. H. Lewes* 234), positioning Dickens as merely a source of psychological anecdotes for Lewes to theorize. The suggestion of this book, however, is that such assertions radically underestimate Dickens’s own engagement with Victorian psychological thought.

3 More accurately, critics have long been divided on whether Lewes’s essay constitutes a defense of Dickens’s fiction or an attack on that work. Anthony Trollope, who calls Lewes’s essay “the best analysis we have yet had of the genius of that wonderful man” (22)—Dickens—describes Lewes as being “greatly hurt” by Forster’s angry response in the third volume of *The Life of Charles Dickens*, because the charges Forster there made “seemed to indicate unfairness towards a fellow-author who was dead” (23). Trollope instead suggests that Lewes’s essay “was the simple expression of his critical intellect dealing with the work of a man he loved and admired” (23). Among others, Rosemary Ashton (*G. H. Lewes* 256–9 and *Dickens*), Anna Gibson (“Our Mutual Friend” 80), Gordon Haight, and Peter Melville Logan (134–5) have read Lewes’s piece in a similarly sympathetic light. George Ford, on the other hand, calls Lewes’s piece “the most effective attack on Dickens ever written” (154), and John
in fun” (“Dickens” 144), and the vividness of his imagination was unrivalled in any other sane mind. But that unrivalled imagination was also the problem with Dickens’s work. Indeed, Dickens’s claims that he distinctly heard the voices of his characters put Lewes in mind of the hallucinations of the insane:

[T]here is considerable light shed upon his works by the action of the imagination in hallucination. To him also revived images have the vividness of sensations; to him also created images have the coercive power of realities, excluding all control, all contradiction. What seems preposterous, impossible to us, seemed to him simple fact of observation. When he imagined a street, a house, a room, a figure, he saw it not in the vague schematic way of ordinary imagination, but in the sharp definition of actual perception, all the salient details obtruding themselves on his attention. He, seeing it thus vividly, made us also see it; and believing in its reality however fantastic, he communicated something of his belief to us…. So definite and insistent was the image, that even while knowing it was false we could not help, for a moment, being affected, as it were, by his hallucination. (“Dickens” 145)

Lewes is quick to insist that he never entertained any doubts about Dickens’s sanity, but the damage is done. If Dickens was not insane, his art was nevertheless not rational; Dickens, Lewes laments—despite those many conversations about the psychology that so interested both men—was no thinker (“Dickens” 151).

Even worse, Dickens’s work seemed to lull to sleep the critical faculties of his readers, too. His creations were fantastic and unreal, but they were so forcefully presented that criticism insisted in vain that they were “distortions of human nature”:

[T]hese unreal figures affected the uncritical reader with the force of reality; and they did so in virtue of their embodiment of some real characteristic vividly presented. The imagination of the author laid hold of some well-marked physical trait, some peculiarity of aspect, speech, or manner which every one recognised at once; and the force with which this was presented made it occupy the mind to the exclusion of all critical doubts: only reflection could detect the incongruity. (“Dickens” 146)

By this point, Lewes’s conclusion that criticism has been mistaken in disregarding the force and vividness of Dickens’s representations—his ability to play on our emotions—seems beside the point. Forceful or not, Dickens’s characters are false: puppets, inhuman mechanisms, personified catchwords, not real.

Bowen (16–17), Rosemarie Bodenheimer (Knowing 4–5), and Sarah Winter (279–84) have followed suit in reading the piece, as I do, as an attempt to diminish Dickens.
As I have mentioned, if Lewes's criticisms were especially strident, they were, in terms of their content, nothing new. As Lewes himself suggests, Dickens had been plagued by criticisms of the unreality of his fictions—and particularly the unreality of his representations of human nature—since the beginning of his career. The French writer Hippolyte Taine, writing in 1856, anticipated many of Lewes's complaints in his "Charles Dickens, son talent et ses œuvres": he, too, admits Dickens's unrivalled eye for detail (342–3), but he laments that Dickens only captures character "in a single attitude," each character being only "a vice, a virtue, a ridicule personified," "an abstraction in man's clothes" (357). Taine also anticipates Lewes's comparison of Dickens to the insane (leading Forster to dismiss Lewes as a "follower" of Taine [2: 269]): he insists that Dickens's grotesque and passionate imagination "is like that of monomaniacs" (344), those frequently invoked Victorian sufferers whose judgment, otherwise sound, was deluded on a single point. No wonder Dickens can enter so thoroughly into the mindset of the mad—for his "eccentricities," Taine writes, "are the style of sickness rather than of health" (344). "We shall have his portrait," Taine insists, "if we picture to ourselves a man who, with a stewpan in one hand and a postilion's whip in the other, took to making prophecies" (349).

The criticisms of Dickens's Anglophone contemporaries were more tempered, but they nevertheless amounted to much the same thing. What might be most telling about these critiques, however, is how frequently they parallel Lewes in denying Dickens the ability to represent inwardness. Henry James, writing about Our Mutual Friend (1865), insists that "[i]t is hardly too much to say that every character here put before us is a mere bundle of eccentricities, animated by no principle of nature whatever" (49). "[W]e are convinced," James adds, "that it is one of the chief conditions of his genius not to see beneath the surface of things. If we might hazard a definition of his literary character, we should, accordingly, call him the greatest of superficial novelists" (52). George Eliot had earlier made much the same point in "The Natural History of German Life" (1856):

We have one great novelist who is gifted with the utmost power of rendering the external traits of our town population; and if he could give us their psychological character—their conceptions of life, and their emotions—with the same truth as their idiom and manners, his books would be the greatest contribution Art has ever made to the awakening of social sympathies. ("Natural" 55)

Instead Dickens offers "frequently false psychology" ("Natural" 55), only the external and humorous, rather than the inward and real. His representations of

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4 I quote here from the first English translation of Taine's Histoire de la littérature anglaise (1863–70; English trans. 1871–2), in which his comments on Dickens's fiction reappeared.
human nature—and Eliot seems to want to include here his conceptions of human nature—are shallow, static, and frivolous.

That is to say that claims about Dickens's superficiality, about his focus on “external traits,” were often paired—as they are by Eliot and Lewes—with claims about Dickens’s alleged intellectual limitations.⁵ Walter Bagehot, for example, asserts that Dickens is “utterly deficient in the faculty of reasoning” (392); Sir James Fitzjames Stephens refers to Dickens’s “incurable vulgarity of mind and of taste” (39) and insists that “[n]o portion of his popularity is due to intellectual excellence” (41); while James declaims that Dickens “has added nothing to our understanding of human character…. Mr. Dickens is a great observer and a great humourist, but he is nothing of a philosopher” (52–3). We may laugh or cry as we read the fiction, but we will hardly be called upon to think; Dickens, these critics are at pains to insist, simply was not blessed with the intellectual gifts to write that sort of novel.

Yet while many of these assertions have achieved the status of truisms, as I have mentioned, it is important to note that Dickens was not without his champions, both during his career and after his death. Forster dedicates considerable space in the third volume of The Life of Charles Dickens (1872–4) to refuting the attacks of Taine and Lewes, and there and elsewhere Forster’s biography is full of impassioned defenses of Dickens’s characterization and his intellect. Of The Pickwick Papers (1836–7), for instance, he writes, “We had all become suddenly conscious, in the very thick of the extravaganza of adventure and fun set before us, that here were real people. It was not somebody talking humorously about them, but they were there themselves” (1: 73). Writing about Bleak House (1852–3), moreover, Forster praises Dickens in terms that directly refute the psychological assumptions that inform Lewes’s essay:

To expound or discuss his creations, to lay them psychologically bare, to analyse their organisms, to subject to minute demonstration their fibrous and other tissues, was not at all Dickens’s way. His genius was his fellow-feeling with his race; his mere personality was never the bound or limit to his perceptions, however strongly sometimes it might colour them; he never stopped to dissect or anatomise his own work; but no man could better adjust the outward and visible oddities in a delineation to its inner and unchangeable veracities. (2: 117)

Not for Dickens the vivisectionist’s scalpel, nor the psycho-physiological theory that underlies such an approach to understanding the mind. Turning against Lewes the very language and imagery that Lewes used to critique Dickens—language and imagery I unpack later in this Introduction—Forster denies his late friend’s interest in the “organism,” in the “fibrous and other tissues” of his characters. Instead, for Forster, what was essential to Dickens was the “inner and unchangeable veracities”

⁵ On this point, see especially Bodenheimer, Knowing 1–5.
his characters expressed, language that seems to insist on an inner core that is both permanent and ontologically distinct from the shell in which it resides.

Numerous other critics, too, followed Dickens—as in the preface to *Oliver Twist* (“It is true” [lxv])—in insisting on the reality of his characters. Algernon Charles Swinburne complained in 1902 about “the usually fatuous objection which dullness has not yet grown decently ashamed of bringing against the characters of Dickens,” the “charge of exaggeration and unreality in the posture or the mechanism of puppets and of daubs, which found its final and supremely offensive expression in the chattering duncery and the impudent malignity of so consummate and pseudosophical a quack as George Henry Lewes” (31). Many others equally—if less colorfully—denied such charges during Dickens’s lifetime. Indeed, Lewes himself, writing in 1837 about Dickens’s early novels—in the article that first sparked the two men’s friendship, as Lewes explains in “Dickens in Relation to Criticism” (151–2)—insists that Dickens’s “works are volumes of human nature, that have a deep and subtle philosophy in them, which those who read only to laugh may not discover; but an attentive reading (and we have read some of the numbers three or four times) will convince any one that in nothing he has written has amusement been his only aim” (rev. of *Sketches* 65). While conceding ground to those who insisted on the distortions of Dickens’s characterization, meanwhile, Edwin P. Whipple writes that Dickens’s characters are “caricatured more in appearance than reality, and if grotesque in form, are true and natural at heart” (239), a defense that, like Forster’s, separates outward form from inward heart. “A caricaturist rarely presents any thing but a man’s peculiarity,” Whipple writes, “but Dickens always presents the man” (240).

Whipple’s defense of Dickens, in the way it privileges mind—for which “heart” is a clear stand-in—over body, gestures toward the explanation that *Dickens and Victorian Psychology* offers for the vastly different nineteenth-century critical accounts of Dickens’s characterization. Like Whipple, Dickens insists upon the distinction between mind and body; there is, for him, a fundamental ontological difference between the two. One of the key means by which Dickens underscores this difference, this book will argue, is through his use of first-person narration, for this narrative mode constitutes for Dickens a means to replicate the introspection that served as the key methodology for an orthodox dualism in the 1830s and 1840s, where this book begins. Indeed, this book argues that we can locate an essential intersection of nineteenth-century novelistic and psychological discourse in the narrative mode of the first-person novel. As I note later in this

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6 Lisa Rodensky reminds us, though, that the preface to *Oliver Twist* “is of a piece with many others that justify as factually accurate some fantastical element of the story—the talking raven Grip in *Barnaby Rudge* or, more famously, Krook’s spontaneous combustion in *Bleak House*” (42).

7 I am not the first to make such a connection. Anna Gibson links both *Jane Eyre*’s and *Villette*’s first-person narrative perspectives with psychological introspection, but she argues that, “[b]y means of artful evasions, fragmentations, and gaps, the tactical dimensions of Brontë’s narration in *Villette*
Introduction, introspection was not solely associated with the dualist psychology that Dickens champions, nor is the point of view of every fictional autobiography at mid-century an implicit endorsement of dualism. But for Dickens, I suggest, the perspective did offer precisely such an endorsement. What better way to intervene in psychological debate, to endorse in novelistic form an embattled orthodox model of the mind, than by assuming the point of view of the psychologists? Here Dickens was truly able to write from inside his characters.

First-person narration also offers a way around the perceived shortcomings of Dickens's characterization: if the bundles of tics and fixed phrases that otherwise populate his novels represent only a “false psychology,” the same cannot be said (or so I suggest) of Dickens's introspective narrators. This book therefore focuses on the increasing space that Dickens allowed such an introspective perspective—that he allowed the first-person point of view—beginning in his novels of the late 1830s and the 1840s, in order to argue that both what the novels say about the mind and how they say it constitute efforts on Dickens's part to argue for an immaterial mind, a position he defended in the face of the inroads made toward establishing a viable psycho-physiology by writers like Lewes. I define first-person narration broadly, including under that heading narration ranging from passages of inwardness articulated through free indirect discourse to entire novels narrated by an intradiagnostic autobiographical narrator. But while the first chapters of this book show Dickens moving toward such introspection—and growing increasingly skeptical of approaches that sought to know the mind through the body—the second half of *Dickens and Victorian Psychology* tells a more complicated story, describing produce a heterogeneous, composite person rather than the unified, stable individual who exists prior to, above, and beyond the world of novel and character (“Charlotte Brontë’s” 208), a move that she connects to “a much broader ideological change in the construction of the person in the nineteenth century” (220). Heidi Pennington's study of Victorian fictional autobiography similarly suggests that such texts tend to be informed by constructivist notions of the self, notions that “coexist with while challenging an explicit attachment to the ideal of an essential, inward self” (36). My argument is precisely the opposite, that for Dickens introspection serves as a way to insist upon a unified and immaterial mind. (Gibson, it should be noted, sees Brontë as employing first-person narration to represent a similarly dualist construction of consciousness in *Jane Eyre* [210–12].) With regard to the psychological implications of first-person form, see also Rylance 41–4 and Nicholas Dames's discussion of the link between associationism psychology and Victorian fictional autobiography (*Amnesiac* 125–66).

This seems to have been a key component of Dickens's artistic approach. Forster quotes Dickens's criticism of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846): “It seems to me as if it were written by somebody who lived next door to the people, rather than inside of ’em” (2: 58). Forster also insists that “no man had ever so surprising a faculty as Dickens of becoming himself what he was representing; and of entering into mental phases and processes so absolutely … as to reproduce them completely in dialogue without need of an explanatory word” (2: 116–17). My suggestion is that Dickens's use of first-person narration accomplished much of the work that Forster here credits to dialogue. On Dickens's practice of writing characters from the inside out, see especially Bodenheimer (*Knowing* 20–3), who discusses the first person in Dickens's working notes as “a mode of analysis as well as a form of identification with potential characters” (*Knowing* 21). She draws very different conclusions from my own based on these claims, however. Fred W. Boege also offers a valuable discussion of Dickens's use of first-person perspective and of his “introspective treatment” of individual characters (102), although he simultaneously suggests that “Dickens is remarkably fond of dramatizing and externalizing mental operations” (98).
developments in physicalist psychology that undercut the effectiveness of introspection as a means of defending the immateriality and—as I explain later in the Introduction—immortality of mind. Because introspection was still employed by writers on both sides of psychological debate, the first-person perspective was not itself finally sufficient to indicate Dickens's psychological allegiances, not enough to guide readers through the various meanings loaded onto the psychological concepts we find in his fiction.

To be clear, though, the shortcomings of Dickens's efforts to use introspection to insist upon the immateriality of the mind are not, in my reading, a product of Dickens's limited comprehension of the nuances of psychological theory. On the contrary, *Dickens and Victorian Psychology* finds in Dickens's fiction a much more intelligent and informed engagement with Victorian psychological thought than Dickens is usually given credit for. Nor is the Dickens who comes into focus in these pages merely a passive popularizer of psychological theory, using his fiction to disseminate ideas formulated by others. It is one of the central arguments of this book that Dickens's first-person fictions, in the irreducible richness of their representations of mind, in the cases they make for mind's transcendence of the material, stand as key contributions to Victorian psychological debate. In large part, of course, Dickens's argument for the paramount significance of consciousness, for the value of all that eludes the comprehension or the attention of a physicalist approach to mind, is fueled by his imaginative gifts—fiction is the key means by which he seeks to make his psychological argument—but I aim in this book to go beyond the kinds of readings that figure Dickens's psychological insights as demonstrations of the difference between imaginative literature and the bloodless fact of scientific research. I have in mind here the sort of case with which Ben Winyard and Holly Furneaux flirt in describing Dickens's engagement with Victorian science more broadly, where they write, for example, that “[l]ike fiction, science, for Dickens, is at its best when it forges ties of sympathy and understanding between potentially dissimilar and unequal members of an audience by appealing to their innate eagerness for imaginative stimulation, rather than offering up an ill-nourishing diet of dry facts and austere realism” (7). Not only do arguments like this risk reinforcing the distinction Lewes draws between Dickens's imaginative power and his (in)ability to think, but—as the following chapters will show—they threaten to obscure the seriousness and the complexity of Dickens's intellectual engagement with nineteenth-century theories of mind.

In tracing Dickens's participation in psychological debate, however, *Dickens and Victorian Psychology* necessarily offers more than just a new perspective on Dickens's fiction or his intellectual life. Dickens's experiments with introspection

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⁹ For more examples of what he calls the “polarization of science and sentiment” in readings of Dickens's engagement with science, see Andrew Mangham, who similarly objects to such arguments (*Dickens’s* 14–15n35).
in his novels also present a valuable window onto the intricacies of Victorian psychological debate itself. As I have mentioned, this book’s focus on first-person narration reveals an underexamined formal means by which the Victorian novel was able to contribute to the construction and dissemination of psychological knowledge. Because introspection remained an important methodological tool in a wide range of nineteenth-century theories of the mind, moreover, Dickens’s own efforts to use first-person narration to insist upon the immateriality of mind call attention to the nuances and ambiguities of those theories—the varied meanings attached to the concept of the association of ideas, for example, or the numerous ways in which the Victorians figured unconscious mental action—as well as the particular stakes that the Victorians attached to such subtleties. Dickens’s introspective fictions also help us to see these ambiguities as strategic, as a means by which physicalist theorists of mind worked to gain a hearing for their own work. It was such strategies, I argue, that finally rendered ineffective Dickens own introspective case for dualism; that is, the shortcomings of Dickens’s first-person fictions, rather than proving Dickens to be no thinker, instead offer an ideal opportunity to trace some of the key rhetorical means by which physicalist psychologies were able to prove so successful in psychological debate over the course of the nineteenth century.

Of course, neither Dickens nor his contemporaries were alone in finding in first-person novelistic form—or in the novel more broadly—a means by which to engage with and extend contemporary psychological thinking. Since at least the publication of Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), scholars of eighteenth-century fiction have traced the links between the simultaneous development of the novel and of the modern individual. Nancy Armstrong’s claim that “the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same” (How 3) speaks to the continuing resonance of Watt’s argument. Such histories of the links between the eighteenth-century novel and the self typically work by figuring the individual as, in Armstrong’s words, possessed of “a self-enclosed and internally coherent identity” (How 1), a version of personhood that Sandra Macpherson labels “the interiority thesis” (16). The novel thus stands in such readings as an introspective form, extending the inward-looking explorations of selfhood to be found in the pages of eighteenth-century philosophy. As numerous critics have noted, the first-person form proved itself in the

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10 Certainly scholars have worked to complicate or to contest Watt’s thesis. For two notable recent examples, see Jonathan Kramnick’s exploration of how actions and their causes extend novelistic subjectivity outward (2–7), as well as Macpherson’s argument that the legal concept of strict liability constructs a “formal person” (23) whose interiority is largely irrelevant. My point, however, is that Watt (and the many scholars who have put forth similar readings of the links between the novel and the private, inward-focused individual) remains a key touchstone even for those who seek to take issue with his history of the novel.

11 Kramnick’s point that the eighteenth century recognized no distinction between philosophical and literary writing is essential here (11). On the use of first-person form in particular to engage in
eighteenth century to be an especially effective means of engaging with and contributing to thinking about the mind. J. Paul Hunter, for example, writes that “first-person telling is not, of course, necessary to the individualism and intense subjectivity that characterize the novel. But it provides the simplest access to that inner world of thought, feeling, and process, and for the early novelists the first-person angle … seemed the most ‘natural’ way to explore the nature of a self” (327).

Philip Stewart, meanwhile, goes so far as to credit the first-person perspective with a considerable part of the novel’s success, arguing that “what really revolutionized the novel’s form and fortunes everywhere was the realization of the advantages of first-person narrative” (174). It is perhaps no surprise, then, that two of the three novelists on whom Watt focuses in arguing for the novel’s new psychological focus, Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, are writers who repeatedly turned to first-person narrative in their fiction. Both continue to be at the heart of explorations of the eighteenth-century novel’s role in shaping and disseminating contemporary understandings of personhood and the mind.

Dickens, of course, was frank about the degree to which he was influenced by the eighteenth-century novel. Robinson Crusoe, to which he repeatedly alludes in his fiction, was a particular favorite of his, as Leon Litvack notes (“Dickens’s” 36). It is surely telling, too, that in the first novel that he wrote entirely in the first person, Dickens has David Copperfield describe the life-saving solace he found in such fiction, as he sat alone in his bedroom, isolated from the world around him, “reading as if for life” (48):

My father had left in a little room up-stairs, to which I had access (for it adjoined my own) a small collection of books which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time,—they, and the Arabian Nights, and the Tales of the Genii,—and did me no harm; for whatever harm was in some of them was not there for me; I knew nothing of it. (48)

The majority of the novels David lists are, of course, written in the first person (including the epistolary Humphry Clinker). It is worth noting, too, that, as Litvack has shown, Dickens purchased a copy of The Prelude—which of course offered its own monumental introspective representation of the mind—while he was writing David Copperfield (“What” 94).12

12 As Sean Grass’s most recent book makes clear, there was another type of first-person narrative in the middle of the nineteenth century that surely influenced Dickens: autobiography, the staggering...
But *Dickens and Victorian Psychology* suggests that Dickens came to the formal experiments with the representation of mind that I trace in the following chapters not primarily through the fiction (or poetry) he read, but rather through the reading in nineteenth-century psychological writing that he began in the late 1830s. The difference that Dickens's psychological reading made to his use of the first-person form can be marked by comparing his early introspective treatments of mind like “A Madman’s Manuscript” in *The Pickwick Papers* with the rich and psychologically nuanced first-person accounts that I chart in Dickens's fiction beginning with *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–9). Not only is the former, as an interpolated tale, largely irrelevant to the novel as a whole, already forgotten by both Pickwick and the novel's narrative by the morning after Pickwick reads it (167), but the tale is marked by a stagy and melodramatic unreality, revealing itself to be indebted neither to the psychological writing of the 1830s nor to Dickens's keen introspective analysis of his own mind, the analysis he put on show in his many conversations with Lewes. Consider, for example, the sensationalistic exaggeration of the following passage from the story’s opening paragraph: “It’s a grand thing to be mad! to be peeped at like a wild lion through the iron bars—to gnash one's teeth and howl, through the long still night, to the merry ring of a heavy chain—and to roll and twine among the straw, transported with such brave music. Hurrah for the madhouse!” (159). Even the “well-known medical theory” (166) cited in the note attached to the end of the manuscript, the theory that the author's madness was hereditary, is only touched upon in the most general terms, lacking any of the specificity of the introspective passages on which this book focuses.

That Dickens's characterization in the novels that I discuss in this book articulated a viable psychological position—not merely a “false psychology,” as Eliot would have it—is obscured by the definite terms in which those of Dickens's nineteenth-century critics whom I quoted earlier discuss “human nature,” as though its status were any less contentious then than it is now. It was not: Lewes's article appeared as the fledgling discipline of psychology was witnessing a fierce struggle—or, more precisely, a series of fierce struggles—about exactly such questions. It is worth bearing in mind here Sally Shuttleworth's point about the links between Victorian psychology and novelistic character: describing the shared textual economy on which nineteenth-century novelists and psychologists drew, she writes that “[c]hanges in the conventions governing the representation of character in the novel highlight, and contribute to,” changes in “[t]he language
and categories used to articulate the self within each historical era” (Charlotte Brontë 1). As I have already hinted, it is thus in the context of mid-century psychological debate (debate I describe in the following sections of this Introduction) that I think we must read Lewes’s essay; “Dickens in Relation to Criticism”—like several of those other critical accounts of Dickensian character I have detailed—is less an aesthetic judgment of Dickens’s novels than another shot fired in the mid-century “Battle of the Philosophies” that constituted the field only just beginning to be called “psychology.” The language of Lewes’s piece and the metaphors for which he reaches very clearly articulate Lewes’s psycho-physiological commitments, commitments to precisely the sort of psychological theory that Dickens’s novels—and his characterization—resist.

Revealing such links between psychological debate and novelistic character as Shuttleworth describes, Lewes’s focus throughout “Dickens in Relation to Criticism” seems to vacillate between literary criticism and science. Again and again, we see that the critical argument that Lewes mounts is inextricable from the essay’s parallel—if largely implicit—psychological argument. Numerous critics have noticed the essay’s deployment of scientific examples and metaphors, its offhand references to the atomic theory, for instance, or to the methods by which one obtains carbonic acid (“Dickens” 148). But while the scope of Lewes’s scientific references is broad, it is psychological debate that remains central. “Psychologists,” Lewes contends (revealing his interests to be as much psychological as literary), “will understand both the extent and the limitation of the remark, when I say that in no other perfectly sane mind … have I observed vividness of imagination approaching so closely to hallucination” (“Dickens” 144). While others have seen Lewes as working to erect disciplinary boundaries in such passages, to position psychology as a repository of specialist knowledge, what seems most remarkable about Lewes’s treatment of psychology is how he seeks so drastically to diminish what counts as knowledge in the field. Lewes’s language, the examples on which he draws: all align him, again, with a particular psychology, one which, against the opposition of those like Dickens, was far along in its ascendancy by the time that Lewes wrote.¹⁴

¹³ I take the phrase “Battle of the Philosophies” from the title of Alfred Barry’s 1869 Contemporary Review article.

¹⁴ The notion that Lewes is insisting on a disciplinary distinction between literature and psychology seems implicit in Bodenheimer’s suggestion that Lewes argues “in a scientific vein about the mental processes that feed the hallucinations of the insane and their belief in their visions” (Knowing 4) and that his criticisms of Dickens are “[c]ouched in the authoritative language of the mental sciences” (Knowing 5). Along similar lines, John Bowen figures Lewes’s attack on Dickens as the collision of a scientific view with the very different—artistic?—worldview underlying Dickens’s “extraordinary writing” (17). As I have already suggested, such an argument merely reinforces Lewes’s claim that Dickens was ignorant of science, that he was merely following his muse, dragged along by his vivid imagination—by his “feeling”—rather than articulating a considered psychological position, a “theory of the mind” (17). Bowen, like Winyard and Furneaux, seems in danger of buying into the greatly exaggerated reports of Dickens’s ignorance.

¹⁵ On Lewes’s place in the history of psychology, see especially Reed 145–56 and Rylance 251–330.
Lewes’s own psychological allegiances are nowhere more apparent than in his assertion that Dickens’s characters are like the products of vivisection:

When one thinks of Micawber always presenting himself in the same situation, moved with the same springs, and uttering the same sounds, always confident on something turning up, always crushed and rebounding, always making punch … when one thinks of the “catchwords” personified as characters, one is reminded of the frogs whose brains have been taken out for physiological purposes, and whose actions henceforth want the distinctive peculiarity of organic action, that of fluctuating spontaneity. Place one of these brainless frogs on his back and he will at once recover the sitting posture; draw a leg from under him, and he will draw it back again; tickle or prick him and he will push away the object, or take one hop out of the way; stroke his back, and he will offer one croak. All these things resemble the actions of the unmutiliated frog, but they differ in being isolated actions, and *always the same*: they are as uniform and calculable as the movements of a machine. ("Dickens" 148–9)

It is vivisection that enables Lewes to pronounce so definitively on both Dickens’s imagination and the deluding effect that his imagination had on readers. Against the introspection that remained central to a dualist psychology, Lewes implies that the way to psychological knowledge is through physiological experiment, a position that remained controversial in 1872.¹⁶ The specific experiments Lewes invokes were employed by defenders of physiological psychology to argue for a material mind, to argue against the psychological position that Dickens defended. In his essay “On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata, and Its History” (1874), for example, T. H. Huxley describes the results of exactly such experiments ("On the Hypothesis" 566–8) in order to suggest that consciousness is but a coincident phenomenon of bodily life, and that it is an illusion that the mind or will can cause the motions of the body ("On the Hypothesis" 575), a doctrine he rightly anticipates will be scorned as “fatalism, materialism, and atheism” ("On the Hypothesis" 577). But Lewes doesn’t merely take for granted that vivisection is the surest way to know the mind; he also constructs the capacity for introspection as vanishingly rare. The general reader, Lewes argues, hardly even considers their mental state: “Think how little the mass of men are given to reflect on their impressions, and

¹⁶ In “Fiction as Vivisection,” Richard Menke offers a compelling examination of the connection between Lewes’s literary criticism, vivisection, and the psychology Lewes endorsed. Menke notes Lewes’s efforts to supplement or to replace introspection with physiological experiment as the basis for a science of the mind (622–4). He also sees Lewes’s psychological experimentation as controversial, but for a different reason than I discuss here: the perceived cruelty to animals of vivisection (624–7). Menke notes the “uproar” created by Lewes’s “scientific comparisons” in this essay and suggests it may have played a part in his failure or refusal to complete another work of original literary criticism after “Dickens in Relation to Criticism” (618).
how their minds are for the most part occupied with sensations rather than ideas, and you will see why Dickens held an undisputed sway” (“Dickens” 146).

The opposition between Dickens and Lewes on the subject of psychology lends a particular aptness to the analogy—the “parallel case”—for which Lewes reaches to describe the effect of the “bias of opposition” on the reception of Dickens’s work among critics:

Let us suppose a scientific book to be attracting the attention of Europe by the boldness, suggestiveness, and theoretic plausibility of its hypotheses; this work falls into the hands of a critic sufficiently grounded in the science treated to be aware that its writer, although gifted with great theoretic power and occasional insight into unexplored relations, is nevertheless pitifully ignorant of the elementary facts and principles of the science; the critic noticing the power, and the talent of lucid exposition, is yet perplexed and irritated at ignorance which is inexcusable, and a reckless twisting of known facts into impossible relations, which seems wilful; will he not pass from marvelling at this inextricable web of sense and nonsense, suggestive insight and mischievous error, so jumbled together that the combination of this sagacity with this glaring inefficiency is a paradox, and be driven by the anger of opposition into an emphatic assertion that the belauded philosopher is a charlatan and an ignoramus? (“Dickens” 147)

Rather than merely a “parallel case,” Lewes’s example here almost exactly describes his own resistance to Dickens’s novels. Lewes’s attack on Dickens’s fiction is as much a defense of psycho-physiology as it is a fair evaluation of the artistic limitations of Dickens’s writing; while Lewes laments the practice of those critics who “interpret an author’s work according to some standard which is not his” (“Dickens” 141), in terms of psychology this is precisely what he himself does with Dickens’s novels. To put my contention another way, it is not so much that Dickens fails to represent psychology realistically, as his critics insisted, but that, to borrow Eliot’s words again, he offers a false psychology—a model Lewes wished to deny.¹⁷ No wonder, then, that Lewes is so keen to insist on Dickens’s intellectual limitations: “[H]is was merely an animal intelligence,” Lewes writes, and “[h]e never was and never would have been a student” (“Dickens” 151). Despite the numerous scientific and psychological volumes that found their way onto Dickens’s shelves over the course of a lifetime, Lewes claims that Dickens “still remained [at their second meeting in the late 1830s or early 1840s, when Dickens had begun to read widely in the psychological literature] completely outside philosophy, science, and

¹⁷ On the way Lewes’s psychological theories of character aligned with Eliot’s novelistic characterization, see Menke and Rylance 133. On the notion that Lewes’s attack is related to his scientific theories, see also Ashton, G. H. Lewes 257–8; Gallagher and Greenblatt 202–3; and Sarah Winter, the latter of whom, as I do, sees Eliot and Lewes as rejecting Dickens’s psychology. Winter, however, sees that psychology as associationism (271).
the higher literature, and was too unaffected a man to pretend to feel any interest in them” (“Dickens” 152). As I have noted, *Dickens and Victorian Psychology*, on the other hand, argues that Dickens’s novels represent an earnest engagement with psychological topics that belies Lewes’s interested assertions.

But there is yet another way that we can read Lewes’s comparison of Dickens’s characters to brainless frogs: Lewes here uses Dickensian character for his own ends, appropriating Micawber et al to prop up (implicitly) his own physiological psychology. The brainless frogs allow us to understand Micawber, but Micawber also reinforces the physiological conclusions drawn from the actions of the brainless frogs. In thus appropriating Dickens’s characters, I want to stress, Lewes was not alone. These characters—despite their alleged unreality—were consistently taken up by psychological writers as illustrative examples of their respective theories of the mind, not all of which Dickens would have endorsed had he a say in the matter. In a letter, Dickens told Elizabeth Gaskell that a story of his own, in “To Be Read at Dusk,” had made its way into his friend and physician John Elliotson’s *Human Physiology* (Letters 6: 546). Athena Vrettos points out that Darwin drew illustrations for *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) from *Oliver Twist* (421) and that William James appropriated Dickens’s minor characters for his own psychological work (401); Shuttleworth describes *Dombey and Son* as “[t]he key text” in nineteenth-century debates about excessive pressure in childhood education and its effects on mental health (*Mind* 107), and, similarly, Jill L. Matus notes that William Carpenter offered as evidence for his discussion of memory in *Principles of Mental Physiology* (1874) Dickens’s claims about his experiences composing fiction (“Trauma” 423–4). Furthermore, in his *Contemporary Review* article “The Physiology of the Will” (1871), Carpenter describes Iago, Rashleigh Osbaldistone, and Quilp as examples of characters who “use their power of self-control for the purpose of hypocrisy and dissimulation, and cover the most malignant designs under the veil of friendship” (217). Lewes’s case, then, is only an extreme example—extreme in the utter opposition of Lewes’s psychological theories to the views Dickens held—of what seems a fairly general practice. While Dickens constructed his characters as means of supporting an orthodox dualist psychology, theorists in opposing camps were able to appropriate and reinscribe those characters in such a way that they could be placed in the service of very different models of the mind. The afterlife of Dickensian character thus stands as a particularly striking parallel case of the rhetorical means by which, at least in part, a physiological psychology was able to overcome popular opposition and rise to dominance by the end of the nineteenth century. Here, then, is another of the cruxes of the argument that this

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18 For the contents of Dickens’s Gad’s Hill library at the time of his death, for example, see Stonehouse.
book makes: I contend that, just as Lewes so successfully turned Dickens’s characters to his own theoretical ends, psycho-physiologists redefined the terminology of an earlier, Christian mental philosophy in order to oppose the very thinkers whose terminology they had appropriated. While charting Dickens’s own efforts to use first-person narration to argue for the immateriality of mind, this book therefore equally seeks to focus attention on this strategy of redefinition, as I have suggested, to chart the various significations loaded onto a series of key psychological terms and trace how those meanings were received by a popular audience.

**Defining Psychology in the Nineteenth Century**

Despite Lewes’s confident assertions about what psychologists know, sketching the outlines of the nineteenth-century discursive field that was only just coming to be called “Psychology” is a notoriously daunting task.\(^\text{19}\) Victorian psychology, inchoate and undefined, could trace its roots to several of bodies of thought. Rick Rylance describes four competing discourses that shaped the field, those of the soul, philosophy, physiology, and medicine, but this list is far from exhaustive, and the influence of these discourses was uneven.\(^\text{20}\) Even the name of this body of knowledge was contentious: psychology, or moral philosophy, or mental philosophy, or mental science. As might be expected, considering the field’s diverse origins and its unsettled state, psychological debate encompassed not just how researchers and theorists ought to pursue knowledge, what might constitute legitimate and fruitful modes of investigation—as is suggested in the implicit methodological debate between Dickens and Lewes—but even what ought to be the focus of psychological research. The openness of the field also meant that psychological debate was carried on in a variety of venues by individuals with a wide range of intellectual backgrounds. I have already gestured toward the use of literary examples in psychological texts throughout the period, but the novel was more than simply a source of evidence. Instead, novels—like a number of forms of writing we might not immediately consider psychological—remained a viable space for theorizing about the mind. We must thus understand the novel’s psychological interventions as being read alongside the denser, drier, and more daunting (more

\(^{19}\) As Roger Smith writes of the years between the mid-1850s and the mid-1870s, “[D]uring these two decades, there was a shaping of an area of discourse, known as psychology, rather than the popularization of knowledge of brain and mind. By the middle of the century, the word ‘psychology’ was in common use . . . but it was a generous term: it did not describe any delimited area of knowledge, let alone refer to a specific science” (“Physiology” 82). Rick Rylance similarly describes Victorian psychology as “an unshapely, accommodating, contested, emergent, energetic discipline, filled with dispute and without settled lines of theory or protocols for investigation” (7).

\(^{20}\) For additional discussions of the many discourses that nineteenth-century psychology comprised or by which it was influenced, see especially Boring 157–8; Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë* 2; and Roger Smith “Background” 76–7 and “Physiology” 82–5.
recognizably “academic” or “scientific” to a twenty-first-century reader) texts of other psychological theorists.21

Despite the variety of discourses, methods, and topics that the field comprised by the middle of the nineteenth century, psychology is generally agreed to have had its origins as a study of the soul.22 The notion that the mind was immaterial and distinct from the body, its essence indefinable—essentially, that is, that “mind” was but another word for “soul,” and “mental” in many ways indistinguishable from “spiritual”—existed as a sort of default position well into Dickens’s novelistic career, in part because of its accordance with popular religious belief. Hovering behind the key word “immaterial,” after all, was always its near-homonym, “immortal.” It goes without saying, based on the outline I have just offered of the contentiousness of so much of the field, that not all agreed with the notion of an immaterial and immortal mind acting (in this plane of existence) on and through the body. But those writers who wished to contest this view realized that they faced an uphill battle, realized that they must convince their readers—against a great deal of popular prejudice—that the standard position was mistaken.

In other words, religious discourse and religious belief were central to the various psychologies of mid-century, whether in the breach or in the observance.23 James Martineau, in his 1860 review of the work of Alexander Bain, insists on the necessary connection between Christianity and mental science:

> [W]hatever be the destination of Intellectual Philosophy, draws with it that of Ethics and Religion: for, once within the enclosure of the distinctive human faculties, it is impossible for the inquirer to insulate the Reason, whilst relegating Conscience and Faith to quite another field. (501)

We see a similar conception of the relationship between Christianity and psychology in James Collier’s claim that theology, the “mother of all the sciences, … gives birth to Psychology first of the sciences of mind; all the great problems, the discussion of which carries the science through its subsequent revolutions, are raised

21 Roger Smith considers the difficult question of which readers actually read the dry and technical texts that were produced in the period (“Physiology” 99–100), while Edward S. Reed discusses the broad range of texts that contributed to psychological knowledge (11). On the generalist intellectual culture of Britain in the nineteenth century, see also Rylance 28 and Roger Smith, “Physiology.” On the part played by the novel in psychological debate, including as a source of examples, see Sally Shuttleworth’s Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology (13–16) and The Mind of the Child (3–4). Nicholas Dames’s history of what he calls “physiological novel theory” equally illuminates the intersections of Victorian psychology and literature (Physiology), and Benjamin Morgan’s conceptualization of literature and science as “rhetorics that might be flexibly and widely called on” (17) offers a valuable way of thinking about the cross-pollination between literature and psychology in Victorian culture.

22 Insisting that “[e]arly encyclopaedias were committed to the discourse of the soul” (23), for example, Rylance cites a number of early- and mid-nineteenth-century entries that define “psychology” in these terms. On psychology’s origins as a study of the soul, see also Reed.

23 Roger Smith asserts that “[t]he basic terms and framework for discussion of mind and brain came from religious and moral preoccupations. This was the case even where authors set out to show that new, scientific knowledge upset existing beliefs: it was existing beliefs that gave meaning and significance to new argument” (“Physiology” 84).
by it” (378; see also 382–3). Against the (still oft-repeated) popular narrative of the nineteenth century as an age moving inexorably toward religious doubt, or the easy opposition of Victorian science and religion, I therefore want to stress both the resiliency of Christian belief in the period and the important ways that it continued to inform the methods and subject matter of even a “scientific” body of knowledge like psychology.24 Questions about the afterlife and the existence of God were considered just as legitimate psychological questions as, for example, the functions of the nerves or the origins of our mental furniture. Indeed, in the intellectual culture of mid-century one could not begin to ponder either of the latter questions without also pondering the former.25

As I hinted in the previous section, the assumption that the mind was immaterial and distinct from the body, that it was essentially outside of nature, seems initially to have justified the primary method by which mental research was conducted in the middle of the century, introspection. What was significant about mind was only to be perceived by looking inward, argued conservative proponents of this method; generally speaking, tracing the visible and external signs of consciousness—studying the body—could only reveal so much about the private subjective experience of mental life that an orthodox Christian dualism privileged.26 (Nevertheless, I discuss Dickens’s thinking about physiognomy, which held that the body might serve as an index to the immaterial mind, in Chapters 1 and 3.) But not only did the ontology of mind justify the use of introspection; introspection was equally thought to confirm the immateriality of mind. As Lewes describes it, “The central position of Spiritualism when … it advances positive arguments, is that Consciousness emphatically declares Mind to be something essentially distinct from Matter, and declares it to be simple not

24 On the notion that psychology could in fact buttress religious belief, see Reed 2–3. He argues that this understanding of psychology as a prop for religion continued throughout the century and suggests that “[t]he scientific debates over mind, body, and soul in the 1800s are inseparable from the religious debates concerning these matters—it is, in fact, anachronistic to separate the two” (3). Thomas Dixon, however, adds nuance to Reed’s claim, noting the varieties of belief of those writing Christian psychology (181–2)—the religion of those who held broadly Christian positions in their psychological work was far from monolithic. Responding to Reed’s claims that nineteenth-century mental science was “inherently theological, or ‘deistic’ or compatible with religious belief,” Dixon insists, “It is important … to make more fine-grained distinctions than that. Commitments to biblical Christianity, natural theology or metaphysical theism all had different overtones and implications” (201).

25 This is Alfred Barry’s point (234). Compare M. J. Rae’s similar claim in 1855 that “[m]ental science greatly aids the cause of religion, by enabling the Christian to form clearer and more rational views of such difficult doctrines as free will, election, and other questions which divide the Christian world” (385).

26 While this notion of the privacy of consciousness came to be endorsed by a Christian psychology, most historians of science argue that it originated with John Locke, as I suggested in the previous section. On the way Locke’s empiricism both constructed the mind as private and positioned introspection as the only way to know the mind, see especially Danziger, Naming 46–9 and 91–2. Danziger points out that the Scottish School—who can be mapped very neatly onto the body of thinkers I have been calling psychological orthodoxy—were “just as steeped in Lockean empiricism as their opponents” (Naming 49).
introduction

Nearly every psychological study in the 1830s and 1840s, the decades with which this book begins, explicitly or implicitly founds its claims on evidence unearthed through introspection. The utterly orthodox John Abercrombie—two of whose books were to be found on Dickens’s shelves at Gad’s Hill—thus insists, for example, that “the only field, in which the mental philosopher can pursue his researches with perfect confidence, is his own mind” (1–2). Martineau makes the same point, arguing that knowledge of mind is to be obtained by turning inward to “count the beads of thought and note the flush of feeling” (503). Sir Henry Holland (physician to Lewes and Eliot, as well as Queen Victoria and Prince Albert [Rylance 127]) echoes Abercrombie and Martineau, writing in 1858 that introspection “can alone furnish us with those elementary facts which lie at the bottom of all mental philosophy, under whatever name propounded” (Chapters 116).

But while introspection was the method of choice for those who insisted on the immateriality of mind, it was not only the conservative and the orthodox who employed introspection in their psychological research. Alexander Bain, whose extreme psycho-physiology I discuss in Chapter 4, was even more insistent on the centrality of introspection to proper mental research than Abercrombie, Martineau, or Holland. He writes in 1893 that introspection is “the alpha and omega of psychological inquiry: it is alone supreme, everything else subsidiary. Its compass is ten times all the other methods put together, and fifty times the utmost range of Psycho-physics alone” (“Respective” 42). While John Stuart Mill—another bugbear to the orthodox—suggests means to supplement the analysis of one’s own consciousness with the observation of children, animals, those raised in solitude, and those destitute of particular senses, he, too, assumes the primacy of introspection to the study of the mind (“Bain’s” 297). Introspection, in other words, served as a key method of psychological research for theorists of all stripes, even those who sought to challenge or undermine conventional Christian ways of understanding the relationship of either mind to body or humankind to God.

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27 Lewes here uses “Spiritualism” simply to refer to those who believed in an immaterial mind. The literature on the use of introspection in Victorian psychology, meanwhile, is extensive. See, for example, Boring 96; Cashdollar 54; Daston 194–6, 204–5; Dixon 117, 233; Rylance 48–9; Roger Smith, “Background” 79 and “Physiology” 87–8, 100–1; and Young, Mind 2. Of course, as Rylance points out, this introspection “tended to be the introspection of male, relatively affluent, healthy, etceteras” (111).

28 I have cited the 10th edition of Abercrombie’s Inquiries (1840), which was the edition that Dickens owned. Abercrombie is a particularly useful case study here, since his work is not original in any substantial sense, but instead reflects the popular influence of earlier, more profound thinkers, such as Dugald Stewart and Thomas Reid. James McCosh describes Abercrombie as a popular disseminator, one whose work constitutes “expositions of mental and moral investigation for the use of upper schools, male and female, and the reading population who have not the advantage of a collegiate education” (Scottish 406).

29 See also Bain’s Emotions and the Will (1859), 608–9.
That is to say that if a broad Christian dualism justified the centrality of introspection to Victorian psychological research—and undergirds Dickens’s own replication of the mode in his fiction—not all who looked inward reached such orthodox conclusions. Others employed introspection in their psychologies yet questioned the notion that mind was separate and distinct from matter, a challenge made most visible in the claim—ever-more frequent at mid-century—that the brain was the organ of the mind. This assertion was not inherently controversial; even conservative thinkers were willing to concede that the body could affect the mind just as mind affected matter. What made the claim that the brain was the organ of the mind a potential site of controversy was the particular relationship imagined between brain and mind by each theorist.30 When more conservative thinkers made such assertions, they tended to mean that the brain was the material instrument by which the soul communicated with the world: just as the eyes were no more than the organs through which individuals saw, the brain was but an organ employed by the soul for thought.31 This is, more or less, Abercrombie’s position:

The brain, it is true, is the centre of that influence on which depend sensation and motion. There is a remarkable connexion between this organ and the manifestations of mind; and by various diseases of the brain these manifestations are often modified, impaired, or suspended. We shall afterwards see that these results are very far from being uniform; but, even if they were uniform, the facts would warrant no such conclusion respecting the nature of mind [as that it is a function of the brain]; for they accord equally with the supposition that the brain is the organ of communication between the mind and the external world. (30)

The brain could affect the mind, could even limit the soul or mind’s perceptive powers, but by no means did it produce the mind.

Yet others made precisely such heterodox claims. John Elliotson—who seemed ever to be courting controversy, and two of whose books Dickens owned—boldly asserted in 1840:

Mind is the functional power of the living brain. As I cannot conceive life any more than the power of attraction unless possessed by matter, so I cannot conceive mind unless possessed by a brain, or by some nervous organ, whatever name we may choose to give it, endowed with life. I speak of terrestrial or animal mind; with angelic and divine nature we have nothing to do, and of them we know, in the same respects, nothing. (Human 32)

30 Henry Maudsley, in his 1879 article “Materialism and Its Lessons,” outlines the two primary relationships that were imagined when theorists wrote of the brain as the organ of the mind.
31 On the tendency of orthodox mental scientists to see the brain as the soul’s tool, see, for example, Dixon 183; Jacyna, “Physiology” 113; and Reed 4–5.