this one in the early 1990s—has risen to a steady hum. Not surprisingly, many of these volumes, which include pioneering anthologies as well as several monographs, have focused on the twentieth century.[38] The scope of such projects, however, has broadened to include investigations of the workings of sound in contexts as diverse as early modern English drama, the behavior of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French concert audiences, and Edison-era silent and sound film.[39] The rappings of spiritualism and lashings of slavery have received extensive attention by scholars of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American soundscapes, who have demonstrated the challenge and value of restoring premodern soundtracks, or of performing, if you will, a kind of acoustic archaeology on the (ostensibly silent) records of the distant past.[40] Most important for the purposes of this book, the eminent Victorianist Peter Bailey issued a long overdue manifesto-of-sorts for scholars who seek to understand noise, and especially Victorian noise, as more than a mere nuisance or background phenomenon—a call that I answer in chapter 2.[41] His voice joins others in a like-minded appeal for narratives of what Steven Connor identifies as "the auditory self," that is, "an attentive rather than an investigatory self, which takes part in the world rather than taking aim at it."[42] I do not see these social qualities as necessarily incompatible, however. The stories told in this book are of figures at once attentive and investigative, those who both contributed to and, consciously or not, hoped to control, even to dominate, their acoustic worlds.

"Worlds," I should clarify, and not "world." The subjective nature of sensation was of central interest to the Victorians. It seems appropriate to steer away from a monolithic conception of a singular Victorian soundscape toward an analysis of the experiences of particular individuals listening under specific cultural influences and with discernable motivations, if that is the word, for hearing as they did. In Dickens's case, for one, aurality and imaginative power were inseparable. In 1872, George Henry Lewes, who knew about the effect of the mind on the senses, wrote: "Dickens once declared to me that every word said by his characters was distinctly *heard* by him; I was at first not a little puzzled to account for the fact that he could hear language so utterly unlike the language of real feeling, and not be aware of its preposterousness; but the surprise vanished when I thought of the phenomenon of hallucination."[43] How to explain the hallucinatory implications for Dickens's hearing, and for hearing Dickens, is where I turn first.

"WHAT THE WAVES WERE ALWAYS SAYING"

Voices, Volumes, *Dombey and Son*

Hear Dickens, and die; you will never live to hear anything of its kind so good.

—From a review of a public reading by Dickens

BABBAGE AND DICKENS: A LIBRARY OF AIR

ON 24 May 1837, Princess Victoria, less than a month before becoming queen of England, turned eighteen, and Charles Babbage, mathematician and inventor of the machine considered the first modern computer, published a volume in London entitled *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: A Fragment*. Making a present of a copy to the princess "on the most important," Babbage wrote to her, "of the anniversaries of your natal day," he claimed to offer the book "in defense of Science and for the support of Religion."[1] Like the author himself, the *Treatise* was hard to classify.[2] Brief, fragmentary in design, and published without compensation, the work nevertheless was among the most important early Victorian contributions to the debate over natural theology and an eccentric pre-Darwinian attempt to reconcile spiritual phenomena with scientific reasoning.[3] The argument of the *Treatise* centered on Babbage's attempt to show by way of analogy to his calculating machine known as the Difference Engine that miracles such as the appearance of new species could be rationally interpreted, if changes in organic life over time were seen as an elaborate equation series designed by the Creator. Babbage conceived of God as a programmer, and miracles were "the exact fulfilment of

much more extensive laws than those we suppose to exist," the equivalent of the outcome obtained from a pattern of equations—or, in contemporary terms, the output of a computer program—written and performed by the Almighty.[4]

Bold and, to modern ears, odd as this theory is, it has tended to overshadow an even more speculative chapter of the *Treatise*, one on sound. In the ninth chapter, entitled "On the Permanent Impression of Our Words and Actions on the Globe We Inhabit," Babbage draws in part on the work of Pierre Laplace and William Wollaston, to claim that pulses of air emitted by the voice, even after they become inaudible to human ears, remain in one form or another permanently etched on the earth's atmosphere: "The waves of air thus raised, perambulate the earth and ocean's surface, and in less than twenty hours every atom of its atmosphere takes up the altered movement due to that infinitesimal portion of the primitive motion which has been conveyed to it through countless channels, and which must continue to influence its path throughout its future existence" (35).[5] In a central analogy, the atmosphere becomes the repository for voices from all time, and Babbage compares the voices etched on air to words printed on a page:

> Thus considered, what a strange chaos is this wide atmosphere we breathe! Every atom, impressed with good and with ill, retains at once the motions which philosophers and sages have imparted to it, mixed and combined in ten thousand ways with all that is worthless and base. The air itself is one vast library, on whose pages are for ever written all that man has ever said or woman whispered. There, in their mutable but unerring characters, mixed with the earliest, as well as with the latest sighs of mortality, stand for ever recorded, vows unredeemed, promises unfulfilled, perpetuating in the united movements of each particle, the testimony of man's changeful will. (36)[6]

For Babbage, the air acts as a giant scroll or phonograph, permanently recording voices that, he concedes, only God possesses the knowledge to replay.

Responses to this passage ranged from dismissive to enthusiastic. The eminent geologist Charles Lyell privately confided to Babbage that he considered it "farfetched," while Thomas Hill, the twentieth president of Harvard and author of a "supplement" to the *Treatise* titled *Geometry and Faith* (1849), claimed it inspired "a thrill of mingled admiration and fear," and Henry P. Babbage, Babbage's youngest surviving son, wrote after his father's death that it "contains the earliest statement that I have seen on the principle of the 'conservation of energy.' . . . it is distinct and clear as to simple force and sets it forth in a way that startled many and was not long in being followed up."[7] One "startled" reader who followed this chapter up was Charles Dickens, a good friend of Babbage. Dickens owned a first edition of the *Treatise*, and it made such an impression on him that he cited it in a speech delivered in 1869, less than a year before his death, and more than three decades after the *Treatise* had been published: "It was suggested by Mr. Babbage, in his *Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*, that a mere spoken word a mere syllable thrown into the air—may go on reverberating through illimitable space for ever and for ever, seeing that there is no rim against which it can strike: no boundary at which it can possibly arrive."[8] Over two decades before giving that speech, however, Dickens had alluded to the ninth chapter in a major novel. In a curious aside in *Dombey and Son* (1846-1848), he describes the socially mobile Sir Barnet Skettles as "like a sound in air, the vibration of which, according to the speculation of an ingenious modern philosopher, may go on travelling for ever through the interminable fields of space."[9] Dickens paraphrases that key passage from the ninth chapter of the *Treatise* and allows readers to surmise that the "ingenious modern philosopher" is Babbage.[10] His *Treatise* forms the starting point for my discussion of Dickens because it left a surprising imprint on *Dombey and Son* and the novelist's subsequent professional life. *Dombey* is, on its own terms, a novel dominated by and absorbed with the effects and intelligibility of sounds and voices. However, I want to suggest that the presence of Babbage's theory of aural permanence in this earlier novel and once again in a late speech constitutes a framework for understanding Dickens's development as an author, performer, and publishing innovator. Alongside the writing of *Dombey*, he hit upon his own means to achieve stratospheric success, but this would be on Babbage's terms, in which the valuable words of "philosophers and sages" mix with all that is "worthless and base" to move through "illimitable space." *Dombey* and Dickens's career from this juncture on became an echo chamber, so to speak, for the ideas that the "ingenious modern philosopher" expressed about the diffusion of voice.

Interpreters of *Dombey* regularly classify it as Dickens's breakthrough book. The author's seventh novel, they claim, represents his first "serious" fiction, in which he demonstrated new depths of plotting and construction and more sophisticated writing, organization, and social criticism than he displayed in his previous endeavors. Kathleen Tillotson's commentary from 1954 remains the consensus view: "*Dombey and Son* stands out from among Dickens's novels as the earliest example of responsible and successful planning; it has unity not only of action, but of design and feeling."[11] As evidence for this argument, scholars from Tillotson on refer to the celebrated July 1846 letter to his close friend and biographer John Forster, in which Dickens outlined with unprecedented foresight what he hoped to accomplish in the novel. The critics reiterate: as Dickens created *Dombey*, so *Dombey* created Dickens, and the professional novelistic career was realized by the singularly ambitious work.[12]

But like many assertions about Dickens's life and canon, this one invokes a narrative of mythic proportions that has tended to obscure a more complicated reality. For while it is generally agreed that the novel was Dickens's first to involve a complete set of number plans, significant strands of the plot nonetheless remained underdeveloped at the outset. Dickens admitted as much when he wrote in that famous letter to Forster that he would "carry the story on, through all the branches and off-shoots and meanderings that

come up."[13] In this spirit, Dickens substantially altered major developments that "came up" among central characters once serialization was under way. It is well known, for instance, that Dickens originally had intended Walter Gay, the novel's young *naif* who sails away for much of the story only to reappear just in time to marry Florence Dombey and live happily ever after, to suffer humiliations and gradually waste away, as Dickens put it, "from that love of adventure and boyish light-heartedness, into negligence, idleness, dissipation, dishonesty, and ruin."[14] When Forster protested, Dickens changed his plan, turning Walter into the Prince Charming with whom readers are familiar. Perhaps the author's greatest change of mind affected the portrayal of Edith Granger, the senior Dombey's second wife, whom Dickens had planned to make an outright adulteress and to have die for her sins. Her character proved so compelling, however, that Dickens's correspondent Lord Jeffrey insisted the author uphold her moral righteousness and deny any possibility of physical intimacy between Edith and James Carker, Dombey's nemesis: "Note from Jeffrey this morning, who won't believe (positively refuses) that Edith is Carker's mistress."[15] Dickens here also gave in, altered his plot to allow Edith to survive untarnished, and seized the opportunity to heighten audience sympathy for a figure who remains one of his strongest female characters.

What the evidence makes clear is not that *Dombey* was a slapdash production—far from it—but that it was not as fully formed in its initial stages, or single-minded in its execution, as numerous arguments might lead one to believe. In fact, the construction of *Dombey* was more laborious and collaborative for Dickens, particularly in its early phases. Over two years elapsed between the appearance of the final number of *Martin Chuzzlewit* and the first of *Dombey*, an unusually long duration for an author who early on had established such a high rate of productivity. The period was marked by shorter publications (two Christmas stories, *Pictures from Italy*), restless travel, and ongoing feuds associated with Dickens's founding, editorship, and ultimate abandonment of the fledgling *Daily News*. "Vague thoughts of a new book are rife within me just now," Dickens wrote from Devonshire Terrace early in this period, "and I go wandering about at night into the strangest places, according to my usual propensity at such a time—seeking rest, and finding none."[16] He wandered not only about dark London streets, but also, one suspects, about "the strangest places" within his imagination, where the plans for *Dombey* took shape while questions of professional identity and productivity perpetually dogged him. As others have noted, these years were partly a time, after disappointing sales of *Chuzzlewit* and against a backdrop of professional distractions, for the task of regrouping on Dickens's part, as he refined his technique of writing novels and reflected, with Forster, on what it would take to keep readers devouring them.

Yet at the same time as *Dombey* developed out of these concerns over reception, it also became absorbed with working through them. *Dombey*

demonstrated Dickens's uneasy relationship with acts of writing and communication, a relationship that became most charged during this period in his career. The strain of composing the novel punctuated the letters to Forster: "I have been hideously idle all week," Dickens wrote to him, and later, "You can hardly imagine what infinite pains I take, or what extraordinary difficulty I find in getting on FAST." Then, "I am working very slowly," and again, "Could not begin before Thursday last, and find it very difficult indeed to fall into the new vein of the story." For Dickens in Lausanne, far away from the crowded streets of London and trying to write *The Battle of Life* simultaneously with *Dombey*, anxious self-doubt became acute:

> I am going to write you a most startling piece of intelligence. I fear there may be NO CHRISTMAS BOOK! . . . I don't know how it is. I suppose it is the having been almost constantly at work in this quiet place; and the dread for the *Dombey*; and the not being able to get rid of it, in noise and bustle. . . . But this is certain. I am sick, giddy, and capriciously despondent. I have bad nights; am full of disquietude and anxiety; and am constantly haunted by the idea that I am wasting the marrow of the larger book, and ought to be at rest.

And in a subsequent letter to Georgina Hogarth, he still despaired over his inability to accumulate words satisfyingly: "So far from having 'got through my agonies,' as you benevolently hope, I have not yet begun them. No, on this *ninth of the month* I have not yet written a single slip. . . . My wretchedness, just now, is inconceivable." Even after he completed *Dombey*, he was convinced he felt unable to speak: "I am rather nervous after my hard work and go about perpetually persuading myself that I am choking even though I know there is nothing the matter with me."[17] Dickens's anguish about writing *Dombey*, his own need to satisfy his increasingly stringent standards of expression in fiction, is reflected in the novel's preoccupation with the problem of expressing things clearly, of getting out the word. This work conceives of expression in manifold senses: as verbal communication, primarily, but also as interchange between different parties, the moving forth of people and goods, the passing of legacies, and the spread of language and ideas. Communicative attempts such as these permeate *Dombey*, the novel in which characters struggle to hear and through which Dickens struggles to be heard. Within the plot, symbolism, and structure of the novel, Dickens examines the complications involved in trafficking bodies, transferring capital, and establishing contact. Others have written of the tendencies of *Dombey*, and Dickens's work more generally, to be consumed with "metaphors of circulation."[18] Yet, in the case of *Dombey*, the novel itself is implicated in Dickens's contemporaneous concerns with authorial expression and audience receptivity. Out of his own struggle to produce an innovative narrative, Dickens creates a work that has as a theme as well as context the risks and distortions of transmission and acquisition, of nothing less than the acts of voicing and receiving themselves.

"AWAY, WITH A SHRIEK, AND A ROAR, AND A RATTLE"

WITH ITS telling conjunction, the title of the novel ushers in a dramatic change. No longer merely the "life and adventures" of a single protagonist, *Dombey and Son* puts special emphasis upon the filial bond.[19] The birth and death of the *Son* of the title, the younger Paul Dombey, frame the novel's first quarter and are responsible for much of the work's fame. But the title is a red herring, of course; as Mrs. Tox predicts upon Little Paul's premature demise, "To think that Dombey and Son should be a Daughter after all!" (225). Referring at once to the House, firm, and family of Dombey and Son, the title is commonly considered a sleight of hand practiced by a confident author upon his willing audience, but more to the point, the ambiguity of it allows for an intentional misrepresentation of the novel it names, a distorted broadcast of the subject of its story. Dickens keeps silent on the dominant role Florence will play in the narrative, just as he had in the manuscript's early stages expressed the desire to hush up even the word Dombey: "the very name getting out, would be ruinous," he told Forster.[20]

As the ambiguity of the title raises the question of distorted communication, so the son it refers to shoulders the burden of the anxieties within the novel toward obstructed reception. Frail, unearthly, and, as Dickens put it in the number plans, "*born, to die*," Little Paul himself leads to the disruption of the Dombey legacy (835). The ironic distance between the title and the subject of the novel is echoed in the rift between Little Dombey's name and his identity. Even the diminutive is purposely misleading, for "Little Paul Dombey" is one of the most generously drawn characters in all of Dickens—an "old-fashioned" changeling and benign victim with a rich inner life and a ready likeness to the young David Copperfield.[21] In other words, he is not exactly his cold father in miniature:

> They were the strangest pair at such a time that ever firelight shone upon. Mr. Dombey so erect and solemn, gazing at the blaze; his little image, with an old, old, face, peering into the red perspective with the fixed and rapt attention of a sage. Mr. Dombey entertaining complicated worldly schemes and plans; the little image entertaining Heaven knows what wild fancies, half-formed thoughts, and wandering speculations. Mr. Dombey stiff with starch and arrogance; the little image by inheritance, and in unconscious imitation. The two so very much alike, and yet so monstrously contrasted. (93)

The son represents a contrast terrifying to his father because, among other things, he lacks the basic capitalist sense that comes from experience. Little Paul famously asks, "Papa! what's money?", then proposes to "give" away over £300 to help Solomon Gills out of debt rather than, as his father corrects him, "lend" it (93, 134). And Paul's piercing question "Why didn't money save me my Mama?" operates as evidence of his naivete but also as a critique, if not an outright rejection, of his father's materialistic creed (94). In moments such as

these, Little Paul's very innocence works to derail the transmission of worldly values from father to son.

Rather than join Dombey in his cold free-market calculations, Paul chooses to indulge a particular aspect of his fancy, his aural imagination. In a novel that roars with the tumult of rail and sea, Paul is an engaged listener, a receptive medium for the sound waves that flow beyond the reach of Dombey's hearing. Throughout *Dombey*, in fact, Dickens muses on the problems and impossibilities of hearing as well as of understanding voices. This extends from Paul's inattention to his father at Blimber's Academy—"Do you hear, Paul?"—to Mrs. Chick's questioning of Paul's dying mother, "What was it you said Fanny? I didn't hear you"; to Mr. Polly Toodle's failure to comprehend Mr. Dombey's command: "I heerd it, but I don't know as I understood it rightly Sir, 'account of being no scholar, and the words being—ask your pardon—rayther high"; to Dombey's offices, "within hearing of Bow Bells, when their clashing voices were not drowned by the uproar in the streets"; to Carker's taunting contempt for his humiliated sibling, "Why should I hear you, Brother John?" (145, 10, 19, 36, 293).[22] Paul's insistent questioning—"The sea, Floy, what is it that it keeps on saying?"—serves as a constant, if abbreviated, struggle to interpret the natural force that attracts him and is implicitly juxtaposed with his father's emotional insensibility: "He would hear nothing but his pride" (111; 539). Scholars have debated whether the ocean in *Dombey* might represent the mystery of life, or a transcendent voice of both death and communal reconciliation, or a force for human feeling, or (as one critic has proposed) merely a gross sentimentalism.[23] Even when the novel first appeared, in a popular duet that capitalized on Paul's aural inclinations ("What Are the Wild Waves Saying?"), one Victorian songwriter attempted to interpret the obscure sounds, with predictably tedious results, as Paul and Florence together sing, "The voice of the great Creator / Dwells in that mighty tone!"[24] Yet the central point, it seems, is that despite what critics, or for that matter songwriters, would have readers think, the waves never precisely disclose or clarify themselves: they never *say* what they mean. Within the novel itself, whatever the waves are whispering remains for readers muffled, distorted: for Dombey, even lost in transmission.[25] Babbage had written, as Dickens reminds readers in *Dombey*, that the air constitutes a permanent record of "all that man has ever said or woman whispered." For Babbage, not only the air but also the ocean waves keep records of all that passes over them: "The track of every canoe, of every vessel which has yet disturbed the surface of the ocean . . . remains for ever registered in the future movement of all succeeding particles which may occupy its place. . . . the waters, and the more solid materials of the globe, bear equally enduring testimony of the acts we have committed" (37–38). In the context of these earnest scientific speculations, Little Paul's wonder at what the waves were always saying makes more sense. According to Babbage, they would have been able to say quite a lot, even if their sound remained indecipherable.[26] Dickens's incorporation of "speaking waves" as a central trope of his latest fiction demonstrated his

ongoing engagement with a scientific culture that, in the 1840s, still retained an air of educated amateurism and populism. I return later to the way in which, for Dickens writing *Dombey*, Babbage's chapter and the "speaking waves" had a more profound, personal appeal. But for now, it is sufficient to say that along with Babbage's *Treatise*, *Dombey* demonstrates similar interest not only in the transmission of sound but also in the struggle to make sense of it, which would take hold of acousticians with new fervor in the 1850s.[27] It is not too much to claim that Paul's questioning of the sounds of waves anticipates in general terms the fascination with wave theories of acoustics that, as Gillian Beer has shown, permeated literary as well as scientific production in later nineteenth-century Britain, where the formative work of Hermann von Helmholtz in his monumental *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen* (*On the Sensations of Tone*, 1863), and John Tyndall's popularization of it in *Sound* (1867), had such impact that it went on to inform modernist writing, most notably that of Woolf in *The Waves*.[28]

Such a struggle to understand the waves is indeed what Little Paul attempts, and his brief life ultimately represents a junction for two opposing forms of transmission: he possesses the animating force of the artist, who imaginatively receives and attempts to convey the sensory details of sound and sight, yet he bears the crushing weight of the son, who is obliged to fulfill the Dombey mercantile birthright. At Dr. Blimber's Academy, Paul's hearing seizes on "the loud clock in the hall," whose ticks only reiterate the schoolmaster's question to the new student:

> and then he heard the loud clock in the hall still gravely inquiring "how, is, my, lit, tle, friend, how, is, my, lit, tle, friend," as it had done before.
>
> He sat, with folded hands, upon his pedestal, silently listening. But he might have answered "weary, weary! very lonely, very sad!" (149)

Forlorn and resigned, Paul's tentative response evokes Mariana's, who, abandoned by her lover, wished for death in Tennyson's poem, one of Dickens's favorites ("I am aweary, aweary, / I would that I were dead!"). Paul too feels abandoned, in a role his father has thrust upon him, and the somber questioning of the clock underscores the shadow of Time, that augury of death that has loomed over him since his birth. In a novel dominated by rail travel, time represents a new threat because it has come to regulate movement and life as never before. When the end finally does come for Paul in the chapter titled "What the Waves Were Always Saying," it occurs, significantly, not at school but while Paul is "home for the holidays," surrounded by his father, Susan Nipper, Walter, his former surrogate mothers Richards and Pipchin, and of course, Florence. Paul's death in the house is emblematic, finally, of the failure of virtually all parent-child relationships in *Dombey*, from the Toodles with the incorrigible Rob the Grinder, to "Good" Mrs. Brown with her brazen daughter Alice Marwood, and to Cleopatra Skewton and the defiant Edith Granger.

If Little Paul embodies the trope of failed reception in the novel, James Carker, who seeks to rival Paul for Dombey's financial legacy, embodies the figure of duplicitous communicator, or false transmitter. When, as manager of Dombey's firm, Carker makes his debut appearance in the novel shortly before Paul's death, his considerate question to Dombey about the son and presumed heir masks a characteristic trace of self-interested sarcasm: "'Any news of the young gentleman who is so important to us all?'" (172). Confident of his own power over his fawning, grinning assistant, Dombey readily grasps, even identifies with Carker's egotism but woefully underestimates his force: "'You respect nobody, Carker, I think,' said Mr. Dombey. 'No?' inquired Carker, with another wide and most feline show of his teeth. 'Well! Not many people I believe. I wouldn't answer perhaps . . . for more than one'"—that "one" Dombey takes to mean Dombey, but readers recognize Carker means himself (173). Carker is in one sense, as Julian Moynahan has written, a "dark analogy of Dombey himself," though it is important to remember that Dombey appears formidably dark quite on his own.[29] The Dombey-Carker dyad has been passed over by readers who claim Dombey's estranged relationship with Florence as one of the many debts in the novel to *King Lear*. Yet in her *Shakespeare and Dickens* Valerie Gager demonstrates that such arguments are "insupportable" because they lack evidence of quotations and allusions and allege unremarkable plot parallels.[30] Rather, if critics insist on finding Shakespearean parallels with *Dombey*, then it should be granted that at least one of the other tragedies appears to have influenced the relationship Dombey shares with his manager. In his stagy Machiavellian plotting, Carker is more like an Iago to Dombey's proud Othello, the subordinate using the hero's unwitting trust to bring about his ultimate downfall.[31]

At Dombey's command, Carker becomes his "trusty agent," the emissary to the proud hero's estranged wife Edith, a decision around which the climax of the novel turns. The manager's question to his master at this point is slyly suggestive: "'Mrs. Dombey is aware of the probability of your making me the organ of your displeasure?'" (574). Carker's phallic pun on "organ" plays up his duplicity: he will communicate Dombey's "displeasure" to Edith even as he, a type of male sexuality unleashed, lustily pursues her in her husband's absence.[32] One look from Edith reveals to her the hypocrisy that Carker barely suppresses, the very hypocrisy that covers up his earlier seduction and ruin of Alice Marwood: "She raised her eyes no higher than his mouth, but she saw the means of mischief vaunted in every tooth it contained" (505). Dombey notes that "Carker plays at all games . . . and plays them well," but Carker's skill with cards and chess, with letters and ledger-books, with knowing glances and penetrating stares—what one scholar calls his "hyperliteracy"—is not enough to entrap Edith, who finally trumps the dealer at his own game (367).[33] The celebrated scene of his undoing, which no less a critic than Edmund Wilson, put off by its theatricality, labeled "one of the worst in Dickens,"[34] is on the contrary surprisingly effective, an energetic repulse by Edith of both the scheming messenger and the dubious correspondence he bears:

Her flashing eyes, uplifted for a moment, lighted again on Carker, and she held some letters out, in her left hand.

"See these!" she said, contemptuously. "You have addressed these to me in the false name you go by; one here, some elsewhere on my road. The seals are unbroken. Take them back!"

She crunched them in her hand, and tossed them to his feet. (728)

By neither retaining nor even reading the manager's false letters, Edith thwarts his attempts at deceitful communication. As she crushes Carker's missives, she reduces him to little more than a twisted snake "muttering and menacing, and scowling round as if for something that would help him to conquer her" (728). The indomitable Edith gets the last word: "I single out in you the meanest man I know, the parasite and tool of the proud tyrant, that his wound may go the deeper, and may rankle more" (729). With Dombey on his heels, the once-trusted emissary flees in desperation. Carker's corrupt communiqués, sycophantic agency, and botched adultery are revealed as nothing more than the abuses of a false go-between.

As Edith dramatically discards Carker's love letters unread, so the transmission of the written word in *Dombey* remains tenuous, secretive, and often highly charged, a situation reflected in Dickens's life as he worked on the novel. "I am working very slowly," he wrote to Forster in January 1847, "You will see in the first two or three lines of the enclosed subject with what idea I am ploughing along. It is difficult, but a new way of doing it, it strikes me, and likely to be pretty." His letters suggest a perpetual mix of excitement and exhaustion over writing: "I have taken the most prodigious pains with it; the difficulty, immediately following Paul's death, being very great. May you like it! My head aches over it now (I write at one o'clock in the morning), and I am strange to it." Meanwhile, his "occupation" of writing trapped him in his study, which he referred to as "My Cell": "I am always a prisoner, more or less, at this time of the month." Panicking, he told Forster, "I am horrified to find that the first chapter makes *at least* two pages less than I had supposed, and I have a terrible apprehension that there will not be copy enough for the number!" "I write in the grip of Dombey," he began one letter, and ended another, "at present, just recovered from convulsions of Dombey, after which I can never write legibly." To George Henry Lewes, he admitted, "between my Dombey and my managerial responsibilities, I am invisible and lost in abysses of work." His confessions to Forster capture the sense of highly charged anxiety he confronted daily when he turned to and from writing: "I am so floored: wanting sleep, and never having had my head free from it [*The Battle of Life*] this month past," he wrote in October 1846, and in April of the next year, he ended a letter, "Deepest of despondency (as usual in commencing Nos.)."[35]

Consumed himself by the struggle to work through new methods and means of composing the novel, Dickens emphasized how his fictional characters falter or collapse at various stages of reading and writing. There is Cleopatra Skewton, whose unintended howlers on sympathy, nature, and "impulsive

throbbings" serve as skewed, ironic misreadings of Wordsworth. At the other end of the spectrum, there is Toots, whose distinction as head boy at Blimber's earns him the right to spend his time pointlessly writing "long letters to himself from persons of distinction, addressed 'P. Toots, Esquire, Brighton, Sussex'" and carefully preserving them in his desk (152). In Toots's aborted acrostic to Florence, he gets only as far as "For when I gaze," at which point "the flow of imagination in which he had previously written down the initial letters of the other seven lines, desert[ed] him" (306). In his clownish romance and writerly awkwardness, Toots anticipates the likes of John Chivery, who will busy himself composing and revising tombstone epitaphs in his head in response to Little Dorrit. Skewton and Toots are, however, the comic extremes. For Dombey, who tears his dead wife's letter into "fragments" and "put[s] them in his pocket, as if unwilling to trust them even to the chances of being re-united and deciphered," reading is associated with suppression, and writing with denial: his inscription on Paul's tomb marker originally reads "beloved and only child," as if to deny that Florence exists (49, 237).

Between the writing that is never received—Sol Gills's letters to Captain Cuttle—and the writing that is received all too well—Edith's damning separation note to Dombey ("He read that she was gone. He read that he was dishonoured. He read that she had fled" [636])—the question arises if any good at all can come from literacy in this novel. Not, it would seem, from the newspaper, which misreports that "every soul on board [the Son and Heir] perished" and sends Cuttle into mourning for the still very much alive Walter (447). And not for the unregenerate Rob the Grinder, who though "required to read out of some book to the Captain, for one hour every evening," is nevertheless destined to "lose his place" (as the heading to chapter 55, "Rob the Grinder Loses His Place," indicates) in both the book and the world when his master Carker dies (522). As if to emblematize the act of struggling literacy, the vignette on the title page of the first edition shows neither Dombey, nor Son, but Cuttle, eyes shut in concentration, listening as Rob haltingly reads aloud from a large volume, his finger pointing to the words (figure 1.1). In an added twist, the very literacy Rob has acquired at Dombey's bidding serves only to betray Carker's and Edith's rendezvous, in the stagy scene when Rob chalks "D.I.J.O.N." on Mrs. Brown's table as Dombey spies on him from behind a door.[36] There is also Edith's guilty acknowledgment of the church's golden letters of the Ten Commandments on her wedding day, as she realizes she has dishonored her mother: "which is it that appears to leave the wall, and print itself, in glowing letters, on her book!" (427). (Since Edith also appears to be destined for an adulterous affair with Carker, the scene seems more than slightly prophetic of *The Scarlet Letter*, published two years later.) And in a final case of important writing that goes unread, there is Edith's written confession to Dombey after they have separated, which she gives to Florence for her father. An interesting question to consider is why Dickens does not show Florence handing this note over to Dombey, or Dombey ever reading it. Whether Dickens is dependent

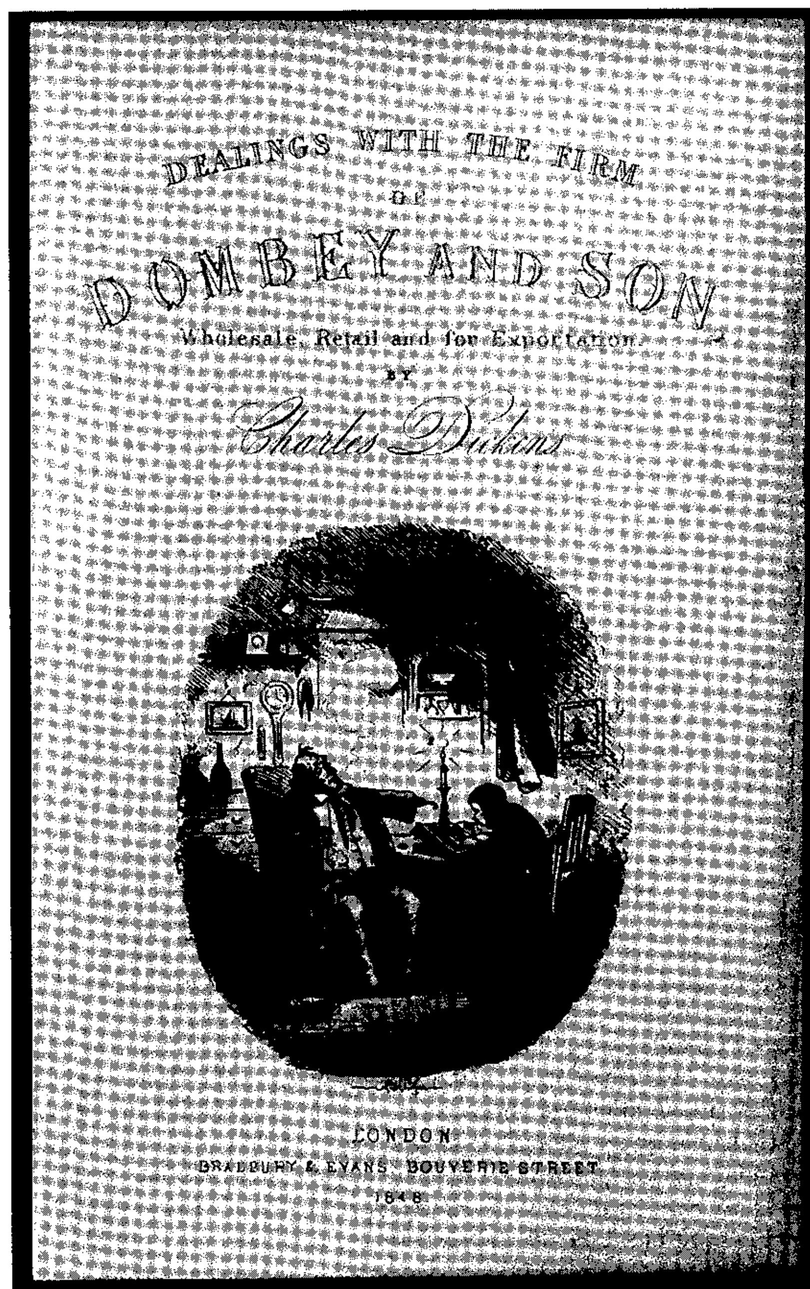

FIGURE 1.1. READING ALOUD: THE VIGNETTE TITLE-PAGE TO THE FIRST EDITION OF *Dombey and Son* (1848), BY H. K. BROWNE ("PHIZ"), WHO MISTAKENLY PUT CAPTAIN CUTTLE'S HOOK ON THE WRONG ARM. BY PERMISSION OF THE HOUGHTON LIBRARY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

on readers to assume the letter arrives, or whether he is suggesting that Florence, by *not* giving it to him as the ending seems to indicate, is trying to withhold any upsetting reminder of Edith's existence, there is a certain appropriateness in Dickens's leaving Edith, through her writing, beyond Dombey's grasp, as she had been all along.

In *Dombey*, then, Dickens remains ambivalent, even pessimistic, about the transmission of the written word between characters. More renowned is his ambivalence toward another character in the novel, though technically it is not a character at all. Written during the "railway boom" of the 1840s, *Dombey* revels in the arrival of the train "with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle" (276). Though the railway only features four times in the novel, these appearances have the cumulative effect of making the engines dominate the soundscape, with their tracks joining disparate sections of the narrative, much as they were made to connect London to distant parts of the English countryside. Critical attention to *Dombey* has typically centered upon these scenes, and many readers have debated whether the train symbolizes a destructive, ruthless force of change or a sign of welcome progress.[37] But it is more relevant to my argument here, and better reflects the limited space the railway takes up relative to the rest of *Dombey*, to consider the images of the railway as part of Dickens's greater concern, both throughout the novel and as he worked upon it, with finding an effective, satisfying means of verbal expression, of being heard, of *getting through*.

In certain respects, the train represents an expressive ideal. Its furious speed, sound, and power allow for an immediacy and dynamism that Dickens the author longs to possess in language. Dickens's language as he writes about the train acquires just such a tone as it rises to meet the challenge of its subject. Here he is, exuberantly, in "A Flight":

> Bang! We have let another Station off, and fly away regardless. Everything is flying. The hop-gardens turn gracefully towards me, presenting regular avenues of hops in rapid flight, then whirl away. So do the pools and rushes, haystacks, sheep, clover in full bloom delicious to the sight and smell, corn-sheaves, cherry-orchards, apple-orchards, reapers, gleaners, hedges, gates, fields that taper off into little angular corners, cottages, gardens, now and then a church. Bang, bang! A double-barrelled Station! Now a wood, now a bridge, now a landscape, now a cutting, now a—Bang! a single-barrelled Station—there was a cricket match somewhere with two white tents, and then four flying cows, then turnips—now, the wires of the electric telegraph are all alive, and spin, and blurr their edges, and go up and down, and make their intervals between each other most irregular: contracting and expanding in the strangest manner. Now we slacken. With a screwing, and a grinding, and a smell of water thrown on ashes, now we stop![38]

As Humphry House once lamented, "It is painful to stop quoting," and one can understand why.[39] With its breathlessness and its dizzying catalogue of

noises, sights, and smells, this style of writing comes close to representing a pure rush of speed. Even with a brief mention, the Wheatstonian electric telegraph, the mechanical transmitter of coded communication, seems to jump to life in a pulsing twitch. Sheer verbal expression, the outward projection of subjective responses, does not often occur more dynamically in Dickens than in this marvel of a description of an express train ride.

But it is precisely this expressive power that makes the railway such a source of ambiguity in *Dombey*, for both the train and the language Dickens uses to describe it threaten to overrun the novel, much as they have the criticism about it. In an informative appraisal of this aspect of *Dombey*, Murray Baumgarten shows how the novel "articulates the transition from the stagecoach world to the railway civilization," and the transformation that Staggs's Gardens undergoes in two key railway scenes in *Dombey* succinctly demonstrates his point.[40] I am inclined, however, toward a more balanced view than other readers, who consider what happens to Staggs's Gardens "a change for the worse, to be seen as the death of something, not a birth."[41] In fact, it is both a death and a birth, though I am not sure Dickens either mourns the former or celebrates the latter. Rather, what really seems to matter in these scenes is the unique impact of their particular combination of image and text, that is, the close parallel Dickens sees and articulates between the forces of the railway and those of his rhetoric, or to put it another way, between the power of the express and that of his expression.[42]

The parallels that I am arguing for, between reading and writing *Dombey* on the one hand, and riding the rails on the other, had their basis in a fundamental change in the behavior of Victorian readerships as a result of railway development. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch points out, with the advent of trains, "Reading while traveling became almost obligatory."[43] In fact, the railway boom of the 1840s was accompanied by the rapid expansion of railway bookstalls, with the first one opening in 1841 at Fenchurch Street Station, followed by several others in the next few years. In 1848, the year *Dombey* was published in book form, the railway bookstall business offered such promise that W. H. Smith purchased exclusive rights to sell books to passengers along over one thousand miles of track; by 1851, he had 35 bookstalls in stations, by 1880, 450, and by 1902, 777.[44] It was not only that the spread of the railway at the time *Dombey* was published allowed more of Dickens's rural audience to acquire firsthand knowledge of the metropolis as they journeyed to and from it.[45] It was also that they were very likely, due to the commercial prospecting of Smith and others, acquiring this knowledge while riding *in the train itself*, as they read installments of *Dombey* and any other inexpensive London publications that they could find.

Not only were railway bookstalls on the rise as *Dombey* emerged from Dickens's pen, but cheap literature published exclusively for British train travelers also had begun to appear. In 1846 and 1847, the firm of Simms and McIntyre published one-volume, 2*s*. novels in their "Parlour Novelist" series,

followed by novels in the "Parlour Library" series selling for the unprecedented low price of 1*s*. each. "The success of this daring venture was immediate and overwhelming," Richard Altick writes; within two years, Routledge had introduced their shilling-novel "Railway Library," followed by Bentley's railway series two years later, and Smith's own not long after that, alongside his own innovation, a circulating railway library that would fuel the mass demand for so-called yellowbacks starting in the 1850s.[46] Dickens had, in a sense, been a pioneer of cheap reprints for travelers; he was from early on associated with the Tauchnitz "Collection of British Authors," published beginning in 1841 for circulation exclusively on the Continent and banned from importation into England (*Pickwick* had been the second volume in the series); and he began reprinting, in 1847, his own works in his carefully considered Cheap Edition, a curious phenomenon to which I shortly will return.[47] But the advent of the railway bookstall and the inexpensive literary wares sold there was something wholly unprecedented and explosive in Britain, a development that would alter the way books were published, marketed, and read. It soon would become clear that the railway bookstalls had helped bring about "the decline and fall of the empire of expensive Fiction."[48] In the wake of these changes, even the typically skeptical *Punch* concluded that the North Western Railway "promises, if the plan succeeds, to become one of the greatest engines of literature," and that a train seemed "decidedly the best vehicle going for circulating a library."[49] Under these new pressures, the opportunities for Dickens were remarkable, but so too were the responsibilities great, particularly when there were those who blamed him for the initially salacious and crude quality of most railway reading: "Much of the mischief caused by this species of literature, we fear, may be traced to the influence on the public mind of the great writers of the day, and among the number, Mr. Charles Dickens," whose works, the journalist went on to say, "have not been without a certain amount of evil."[50]

Within this context it becomes clearer that *Dombey* was not only a novel about the railway, but also one in all likelihood read in its parts, *on* the railway. In writing *of* the train, Dickens would have been understandably concerned that he now was also, perhaps not wholly willingly, writing *for* the train, specifically, for rail-riders wanting to fill the time, perhaps during their commute into or trip out of the city. Not only did he have to keep in mind the probability of writing for the train traveler, but what was more important, he was also facing the imminent prospect of having to write *against* the competition of new hoards of cheap literature, entire popular novels selling for the same price as just one of his part numbers. These, then, are the principal anxieties that underlie the sounds of *Dombey*: the uneasy sensation that the roar of authorial expression might not be heard above the shriek of the express train but could be consumed within it; that the voice of the Inimitable's fiction might be drowned out by the cries of heaps of cheaper imitators' works; that the train, even as it created a massive new market for cheap

reading matter, could, in effect, contain and drive the novel rather than the other way round.

Is it any surprise, then, that the railway winds through *Dombey* with such foreboding? The train in *Dombey* is pure force, embodying the noisy thrust of the novel, propelling the characters as well as the plot. In the first appearance the railway makes in the novel, it hits like the "shock of a great earthquake" (65). This famous section on the fragmentation that construction brings focuses upon "the hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream," like a surreal vision of "dire disorder," a chaotic spectacle worthy of Hieronymus Bosch (65). While this scene leaves readers somewhat taken aback, the residents of Staggs's Gardens have been left altogether behind, "uncommonly incredulous" (66). And of the impact of the railway on businesses at this point, there are only the most tentative signs—exactly three of them, placards advertising "The Railway Arms," "Excavators' House of Call," and "Railway Eating House." While the train ultimately will change the way business, including the book trade, is carried out, Dickens is particularly sensitive to the way such changes occur first at the level of language, quite literally, on the signs themselves, storefront signifiers that help initiate a new signified: the railway commerce that will have as central components railway bookstalls and "Railway Libraries." Entering *Dombey* with rhetorical force, then, the train similarly leaves hints that it will soon dominate the scene.

By the next appearance of the neighborhood in the novel, the engines have taken over. The inhabitants, consumed with all aspects of railway culture and marketing, are at the mercy of the train: "There was no such place as Staggs's Gardens. It had vanished from the earth" (217). The new order of engines swallows up the old order of hackney-coaches. Having done so, they rest like so many sleeping monsters:

> Night and day the conquering engines rumbled at their distant work, or, advancing smoothly to their journey's end, and gliding like tame dragons into the allotted corners grooved out to the inch for their reception, stood bubbling and trembling there, making the walls quake, as if they were dilating with the secret knowledge of great powers yet unsuspected in them, and strong purposes not yet achieved. (218–19)

Like these young engines pulsing with secrets and withholding their purposes, the novel is still new, the plot and conception shrouded in secrecy—"the very name getting out, would be ruinous." It is tempting here to draw the parallel between the dilations of the railway cars and the voice of the author, as powerful, unpredictable forces, with something to prove to both their riders and readers. In their very ambiguity, the dormant trains serve as an important symbol of the watershed novel, not yet a third over, but about to take a dramatic turn. As Staggs's Gardens has fallen to the railway world, so Dickens is about to tear down his bildungsroman with the death of Paul and, shifting

gears to Dombey and daughter, lay the tracks for a quite different and unexpected exposition in its place.

When, "louder and louder yet," the train bursts forth upon the landscape in the chapters to come, Dickens's ensuing descriptions of the rails very nearly leap from the page, as the novel's most vividly expressive, and most often quoted, lines (276). But even here, expression—the power of the train as conveyed in the writing—brings a mingled measure of good and bad, a jolt of speed tinged by the specter of death. Although some critics have taken the scene of Dombey's train ride to Leamington as an explicit gauge of Dickens's attitudes toward the railway, it is important to clarify that from the outset, the scene is internalized as Dombey's heavily colored perspective on his own experience; thus, the train's force, so celebrated by Dickens in "A Flight," is twisted by Dombey into a vehicle for his own angst.[51] As Dombey rides the train in the wake of Paul's demise, "he carrie[s] monotony with him, through the rushing landscape, and hurrie[s] headlong, not through a rich and varied country, but a wilderness of blighted plans and gnawing jealousies" (275). Dombey's hopeless focus on Paul's death leads to a somber inversion of Wordsworth's joyous celebration of "all the mighty world / Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create, / And half perceive" ("Tintern Abbey," ll. 105–6). While the young poet had found his joy reflected all around him in the landscape near Tintern, Dombey rather "found a likeness to his misfortune everywhere" (277). The railway, precisely in its ability to carry him away, becomes another reminder of his failures to listen, respond, and fulfill his perceived patriarchal obligations to transmit his legacy through a son, failures that transform the ride forward into an apparent regression: "Away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, plunging down into the earth again, and working on in such a storm of energy and perseverance, that amidst the darkness and whirlwind the motion seems reversed, and to tend furiously backwards, until a ray of light upon the wet wall shows its surface flying past like a fierce stream" (276). The journey through the countryside elicits a crisis that culminates in a vision of Florence, whose reviled image only adds to Dombey's despair: "Her patience, goodness, youth, devotion, love, were as so many atoms in the ashes upon which he set his heel. He saw her image in the blight and blackening all around him, not irradiating but deepening the gloom" (278). Even as, with such linguistic force, the railway ride conveys Dombey out toward Leamington, it paradoxically provides a means for him to articulate his own egotism, regress further inside himself, and deny interpersonal expression.

To clarify that this is Dombey's subjective experience of the railway, as opposed to Dickens's objective depiction of the menace of it, I want to turn to a description of an express train ride from "The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices" (1857), the travelogue Dickens co-wrote with Wilkie Collins while taking a hiatus from his wife, Catherine, and attempting a rendezvous with his mistress, Ellen Ternan. The passage is astonishing, not least in the way it is by degrees repulsive and revealing:

> Now, the engine shrieked in hysterics of such intensity, that it seemed desirable that the men who had her in charge should hold her feet, slap her hands, and bring her to; now, burrowed into tunnels with a stubborn and undemonstrative energy so confusing that the train seemed to be flying back into leagues of darkness. Here, were station after station, swallowed up by the express without stopping; here, stations where it fired itself in like a volley of cannon-balls, swooped away four country-people with nosegays, and three men of business with portmanteaus, and fired itself off again, bang, bang, bang!

In one of Dickens's uglier metaphors, the express is feminized as a violent hysteric with a voluminous appetite. One does not need to know the biographical details to recognize the misogyny that taints the more benign depiction from "A Flight" six years earlier. But as the narrator peers outside the window, his perspective shifts:

> The pastoral country darkened, became coaly, became smoky, became infernal, got better, got worse, improved again, grew rugged, turned romantic; was a wood, a stream, a chain of hills, a gorge, a moor, a cathedral town, a fortified place, a waste. Now, miserable black dwellings, a black canal, and sick black towers of chimneys; now, a trim garden, where the flowers were bright and fair; now, a wilderness of hideous altars all ablaze; now, the water meadows with their fairy rings; now, the mangy patch of unlet building ground outside the stagnant town, with the larger ring where the Circus was last week.[52]

I quote at such length to show the way Dickens is driven to describe the panorama outside the train window in phrases that bear a striking similarity to the kind of shorthand one might supply not only for certain of his novels—the "pastoral country" of *Pickwick Papers* (1836–1837), the coaly, smoky inferno of *Oliver Twist* (1837–1838), the "moor" and "water meadows" of *David Copperfield* (1849–1850) and *Great Expectations* (1860–1861), the blackened landscape of *Bleak House* (1852–1853), the circus of *Hard Times* (1854), the "fortified place" that is the Marshalsea prison of *Little Dorrit* (1855–1857) and, in the book he would write soon after "The Lazy Tour," the Bastille of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and, as if to foreshadow the books that were still years away, the "waste" of *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–1865), and the "cathedral town" of his childhood Rochester transformed into the Cloisterham of *Edwin Drood* (1870)—that is, not only for these novels but also for his personal life to this point: "got better, got worse, improved again, grew rugged, turned romantic." The express train ride elicits in him, not unlike the way it does for Dombey, an all but conscious recognition of the connection between his professional and private life and the engine, speed, roar, and progress (or regress) of the trip itself.

In the final appearance of the train in *Dombey*, the remarkable scene of Carker's death on the rails, the locomotive, the novel's dynamic express,

brings retribution but at the same time corporeal and rhetorical fragmentation. Carker's flight through France echoes Dombey's somber train ride in its monotonous merging of mental states with the landscape: "The clatter and commotion echoed to the hurry and discordance of the fugitive's ideas" (735). Unlike Dombey's ride, however, the classic chase sends Carker like lightning through a capsule history of Dickens's featured forms of transport from *Pickwick* to *Chuzzlewit* to *Dombey*, from an old horse-drawn carriage across France, to a boat trip over the Channel, to a railway ride ending at a remote English junction, as if to suggest that the ensuing finale represents a pivotal movement for both train and career. And indeed it does. There is in each a ferocious determination that destroys even as it articulates, as Carker's violent end demonstrates:

> He heard a shout—another—saw the face change from its vindictive passion to a faint sickness and terror—felt the earth tremble—knew in a moment that the rush was come—uttered a shriek—looked round—saw the red eyes, bleared and dim, in the daylight, close upon him—was beaten down, caught up, and whirled away upon a jagged mill, that spun him round and round, and struck him limb from limb, and licked his stream of life up with its fiery heat, and cast his mutilated fragments in the air. (743)

This brutal passage unites action and diction. At the same time that the train tears Carker's body to shreds, Dickens shatters his prose, splicing a sentence into telegraphic phrases held together by dashes and commas, like so many tendons and ligaments of syntax.[53] The express train that once possessed the secret of the plot twists of the novel now fuels Dickens's expression as an unstoppable force to bring forth this denouement. The authorial voice and the train act in tandem: as the station man says to Carker, "Express comes through at four, Sir.—Don't stop" (742).[54]

After Carker's death by what Marcus refers to as "ritual dismemberment," Dickens uses the rest of *Dombey* to pick up the pieces.[55] The final act of the novel brings together not only Florence and Walter but also Mr. Morfin and Harriet Carker, Mr. Feeder and Cornelia Blimber, Toots and Susan Nipper, and Jack Bunsby and Mrs. Mac Stinger, for a total of five marriages in seven chapters. Such couplings are more than just a means to tie up loose ends, for through them Dickens seeks to counteract Carker's violent fragmentation, itself conveyed with such jolting language. The unusually high rate of marriages promises continuity in the face of disintegration and disruption. Of equal importance, it ensures, through the legacy of children, multiple opportunities for communal survival and transmission. With such marital abundance, closure would seem at last forthcoming in this darkly comic novel. Yet at least two crucial strands remain unresolved: Dombey's tyrannical relationship with Florence, and the status of estranged, outspoken Edith. It is through them that Dickens develops his lasting word in *Dombey* on the difficulties of expression and possibilities for satisfying reception.

FOREVER AND FOREVER THROUGH SPACE

KEEPING these considerations in mind, I want to turn to one aspect of the initial publication of the text that seems particularly relevant, despite the critical tendency to interpret this development as distinct and independent from the structure and workings of the novel. The sixth number of *Dombey* included a prospectus written entirely by Dickens, in which he announced, in a five-paragraph "Address," the imminent appearance of a "proposed Re-issue, unprecedented, it is believed, in the history of Cheap Literature."[56] This was, of course, the Cheap Edition, the first sequential, authorized republication of Dickens's early works, at the time a daring publishing move for a living novelist to make. Referring to the prospectus, he wrote to Emile De la Rue in 1847: "Have you seen anything of the enclosed? I believe it is the greatest venture—indeed, I have no doubt of it—ever made in books."[57] The initial series of the Cheap Edition began in 1847 with *Pickwick* and continued through the Christmas stories into 1852, by which time, after a slow start, it was turning the substantial profits that Dickens originally had expected of it. The "Address" that introduced it is a manifesto that reveals an author subtly in conflict with himself, trying at once to distance himself from his earlier books and to embrace them:

> It is not for an author to describe his own books. If they cannot speak for themselves, he is likely to do little service by speaking for them. It is enough to observe of these, that eleven years have strengthened in their writer's mind every purpose and sympathy he has endeavoured to express in them; and that their re-production in a shape which shall render them easily accessible as a possession by all classes of society, is at least consistent with the spirit in which they have been written, and is the fulfilment of a desire long entertained.

Dickens tells his audience that he resists venturing expression about his previous works, for they must "speak for themselves," and this they can do best only once they have undergone a long-desired "re-production" in a new form. The old editions, he writes, "continue to circulate at five times the proposed price," which he claims justifies "the belief that the living Author may enjoy the pride and honour of their widest diffusion" in a cheaper version.

In the prospectus Dickens promises that the Cheap Edition will be "carefully revised and corrected throughout," and he would go on to incorporate revisions and new prefaces, as well as new frontispiece illustrations by his familiar artists, into each novel in the series. Dickens is at special pains in the "Address" to emphasize the distinctiveness of the Cheap versions:

> The CHEAP EDITION will in no way clash or interfere with that already existing. The existing edition will always contain the original illustrations, which, it is hardly necessary to add, will constitute no part of the CHEAP EDITION; and its form is perfectly distinct and different. Neither will any of the more recent writings of the Author; those now in progress of publication, or yet to come; appear in the CHEAP EDITION, until after the lapse of A VERY CONSIDERABLE PERIOD, and when their circulation in the original form shall, by degrees, and in the course of years, have placed them on a level with their predecessors.

The capitals highlight the publishing innovation Dickens was anxiously banking on: that texts that once were old, could become new again—yet retain some essence of their former identities as literary milestones and productions of the Inimitable. As Dickens puts it at the close of the "Address":

> To become, in his new guise, a permanent inmate of many English homes, where, in his old shape, he was only known as a guest, or hardly known at all: to be well thumbed and soiled in a plain suit that will bear a great deal, by children and grown people, at the fireside and on the journey: to be hoarded on the humble shelf where there are few books, and to lie about in libraries like any familiar piece of household stuff that is easy of replacement: and to see and feel this—not to die first, or grow old and passionless: must obviously be among the hopes of a living author, venturing on such an enterprise. Without such hopes it never could be set on foot. I have no fear of being mistaken in acknowledging that they are mine; that they are built, in simple earnestness and grateful faith, on my experience, past and present, of the cheering-on of very many thousands of my countrymen and countrywomen, never more numerous or true to me than now;—and that hence this CHEAP EDITION is projected.

In the midst of the railway boom, Dickens promises to release a traveler's library of his own works, parts and volumes specifically intended to fill the time spent by the lower middle classes in front of the fire and "on the journey," one now taken, no doubt, by rail.[58] The Cheap Edition is part of Dickens's ongoing attempt, furthered by his founding of *Household Words* in 1850, to identify his project as central to English middle-class domestic life, to reshape his works into, as he puts it, "any familiar piece of household stuff."[59] It is the closeness and intimacy of having his works coveted by readers at home or on the train that Dickens values and craves, and that will allow his voice to reach a newly enlarged audience across a wider class spectrum: in fact, his (unused) dedication of the Cheap Edition is to "the English People," and his initial preferred title for his journal will be "The Household Voice."[60] Yet underneath this monumentally public of addresses lies a paradox. Dickens wishes to refashion old shapes into beloved new guises, to resurrect the past as the lucrative present, in short, to make the Cheap, dear.[61]

It is perhaps then not a coincidence that this notice first appeared in part 6 of *Dombey*, the one immediately following Paul's death, when, as Dickens stated in his number plan, the "Great point of the No [was] to throw the inter-

est of Paul, *at once on Florence*." This number is the critical moment at which Dickens revises the focus of his novel, from *Dombey and Son* to "Dombey and Daughter." The child who had been devalued since the opening of the story, and "was merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested—a bad Boy—nothing more," now must fill the vacuum left by her dead brother and perpetuate the Dombey legacy (3). Much as the Cheap Edition did of its readers, Florence's final return and appreciation require "a lapse of A VERY CONSIDERABLE PERIOD" from her last appearance: "He [Dombey] did not know how much she loved him. However long the time in coming, and however slow the interval, she must try to bring that knowledge to her father's heart one day or other" (337). When the day at last arrives, Dombey's house has come down, "his riches [have] melted away," and he sees "her true self" through the mists of his imaginings. Penniless and despairing, Dombey now grasps the value of submissive love, as many critics have claimed, and falls weeping into Florence's embrace. His afflictions "have taught him that his daughter is very dear to him" (827). The prospectus that appeared after Little Dombey's death promised that Dickens's imminent Cheap Edition would "become a permanent inmate of many English homes, where . . . he was [once] hardly known at all." Similarly, Dickens's post-Paul narrative in *Dombey* enables Florence to fulfill the prophecy of valued "permanency" from that of the once forgotten older child (27). It is thus possible to turn the often repeated claim that with the death of Paul, Dickens effectively buries the earlier childish spontaneity of "Boz" quite on its head and, rather than see in Paul's death a severe break with the past, to see in Florence's endurance and triumph the hopeful possibility for continuity with the textual life that has come before.

Of course, I do not mean to argue that there exists a simple one-to-one correspondence between Dombey's children and Dickens's editions. But I do want to suggest that the analogy between the Cheap Edition and developments in *Dombey* broadens when considering the role of revision in each. For both the reprints and the novel, revision gives the lowly substance and bestows value upon the cheap. The importance of revision in the Cheap Edition was crucial for the success of it: the additions, changes, and illustrations gave the edition freshness and novelty. Within *Dombey*, meanwhile, Dickens revises the conception of his characters to shape Edith from a potential adulteress into perhaps the most compelling example in the novel of the figure cheapened by others who nonetheless knows and acts upon her real worth: "You know he has bought me . . . Or that he will to-morrow," she says of Dombey, "He has considered of his bargain; he has shown it to his friend; he is even rather proud of it; he thinks that it will suit him, and *may be had sufficiently cheap*; and he will buy to-morrow. God, that I have lived for this, and that I feel it!" (381, emphasis added). Edith's revisionary status is of a piece with the ways in which the novel "channels its critique of capitalism through the commercialization of the female body."[62] Dombey perceives Edith, as he does Florence, as a commodity, an inexpensive item he can choose to hoard or ignore. In Edith's case, his error costs him dearly. Her flight to Dijon would

have tarnished her image had it come off the way Dickens originally planned, but revisions of plot and character allowed her to remain independent and cutting in the face of Carker and the prospect of permanent exile: "'I am a woman,' she said, confronting him steadfastly, 'who, from her very childhood, has been shamed and steeled. I have been offered and rejected, put up and appraised, until my very soul has sickened. . . . I suffered myself to be sold, as infamously as any woman with a halter round her neck is sold in any marketplace. . . . Do you think . . . that I am to be stayed?'" (724, 729). The once-planned affair gives way to a woman's declaration of defiance, a scene of which Dickens provides many in later works, but perhaps none as powerful or satisfying as this.[63]

The often frustrated dynamics of expression that fill the novel and that have been examined in this chapter—the obstructed reception of sounds, language, and legacies—are encompassed by the greater motion the novel makes. The end of *Dombey* initiates the cycle the Cheap Edition perpetuated, of repeated transmissions through reproduction. In the final chapter the previously degraded, now dear daughter re-creates the novel's initial premise with subtle variations. Florence becomes more than Dombey's beloved bedside companion, who nurses him back to health from thoughts of suicide. Dickens's number-plan indicates that Florence brings Dombey a grandchild "*as if it were another Paul*, acting on his better nature" (emphasis added). More than that, she bears him two grandchildren propitiously named Paul and Florence and permits him in effect to relive the narrative a changed man.[64] Like Scrooge before him, Dombey awakens to revise his life, to seize another chance at communal generosity after nearly ruining himself in the pursuit of wealth. The closing sentence echoes a similar moment in the opening chapter, but now the focus is on the living granddaughter, not the dead mother: as Doctor Peps had "gently brushed the scattered ringlets of the child, aside from the face and mouth of the mother" as she "drifted out upon the dark and unknown sea that rolls round all the world," now Dombey walks by the sea with his granddaughter and "smooths away the curls that shade her earnest eyes" (10–11, 833). As it began with the final vision of the first Mrs. Dombey, so the book ends gazing on the youthful eyes of the second Florence. The narrator hints about the novel's cyclical structure in a passage that occurs midway through but importantly bears on its close: "In this round world of many circles within circles, do we make a weary journey from the high grade to the low, to find at last that they lie close together, that the two extremes touch, and that our journey's end is but our starting-place?" (477). Riders on the round-trip journey of rail travel found in *Dombey* a circular journey of Dickensian narrative. The work that muses for so long on the problem of transmission ultimately doubles back, repeats with a difference, like the trains that mysteriously roll in and out of Staggs's Gardens, and the waves that Little Paul struggles to decipher on the shore.

Dombey embraces a comic closure premised upon a recycling that prophesies reproduction not only of children but also of narrative, Dombey's narra-

tive, as revised tale and text. This is at one with, although more than merely a novelistic manifestation of, the "massive return of the past" Marcus claims dominates this period of Dickens's life.[65] In reenvisioning itself, the novel attempts to integrate the past with the present, or put another way, moves forward by going backward. This arc not only parallels what Dickens himself initiated with respect to the three reprint series he oversaw, the systematic appearance of the Cheap, Library (1859), and Charles Dickens (1867) Editions of his works. Such circular motion also persists in Dickens's writings, most immediately and notably in *David Copperfield*, where he goes on to forge the ore of his remotest memories into the lore of a fictional present. So too does it underlie the activity that occupied much of Dickens's time over the last dozen years of his life, the public reading tours in which he performed, not selections from his later novels, but nearly exclusively those from his early works through *Copperfield*, tours that would send him around England on express trains and back once again to the United States.

It would make sense, then, that the idea for these readings appeared to have struck Dickens as he worked on *Dombey*. In October 1846, as he was writing the second number of *Dombey*, Dickens wrote to Forster: "I was thinking the other day that in these days of lecturings and readings, a great deal of money might possibly be made (if it were not infra dig) by one's having Readings of one's own books. It would be an *odd* thing. I think it would take immensely."[66] The desire of Dickens, "the most vigorous of voice-projectors," to broadcast loudly and widely his authorial voice was never greater than when he composed this novel, the most "ear-orientated" of his works.[67] Years later, when he first turned to his novels to create a public reading, is it any wonder he selected *Dombey*, or that he extracted "The Story of Little Dombey" from its first quarter? For his recurrent dramatic readings he sought out the work that rereads itself; he voiced and revoiced the prelude that is reclaimed by its coda.[68] Viewed anew, the title-page vignette of the novel is emblematic not only of the struggle for literacy, but also of close listening to a public reading (figure 1.1). *Dombey and Son* thus points ahead to the perpetual transmission and revision of his canon in print and performance. But such frequent repetition does not necessarily promise clear reception. Like the conquering engines roaring and trembling with their mystery, or the waves always indistinctly saying, the novel hints at meaning but keeps secrets, challenging readers to track the enigmatic persistence of its evolving reproduction.

Consider, finally, this passage from the ninth chapter of *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*:

> No motion impressed by natural causes, or by human agency, is ever obliterated. The ripple on the ocean's surface caused by a gentle breeze, or the still water which marks the more immediate track of a ponderous vessel gliding with scarcely expanded sails over its bosom, are equally indelible. The momentary waves raised by the passing

> breeze, apparently born but to die on the spot which saw their birth, leave behind them an endless progeny, which, reviving with diminished energy in other seas, visiting a thousand shores, reflected from each and perhaps again partially concentrated, will pursue their ceaseless course till ocean be itself annihilated. (37)

As with those of the earlier passages from Babbage's book, the echoes of this passage in *Dombey* are subtle yet significant: Little Paul, like the momentary waves, is "*born, to die*," and the waves themselves ceaselessly bear to shore their "vast library" of "testimonies." But for Dickens the author, even more than for *Dombey* the novel, the images from Babbage's chapter engender a fantasy of endless transmission, in which a literary voice, the "motion of human agency" that is fictional narrative, crosses land as well as sea, "visiting a thousand shores" for eternity in the paperback covers of "endless progeny." In the address to the Cheap Edition, Dickens's stated forecast of "widest diffusion" for his works had an implicit model in Babbage's theory of vocal diffusion. If he could only publish and republish—and perform and re-perform—enough, Dickens would create, or so he perhaps hoped, a "vast library" of his ever-present voices. Forty years later, Thomas Edison's agent George Gouraud would set out in London to acquire phonograph recordings of Tennyson, Browning, and other famous Victorians as the basis for what he called a "Library of Voices." But Dickens already had started to build such an archive, in the spirit of Babbage's "vast library" etched on air, when he began to tour and, in the spirit of Sloppy in *Our Mutual Friend*, to "do the Police" and all his other characters "in different voices."[69] Without realizing it, Babbage the modern philosopher had tapped into the desire that Dickens the struggling writer began to play out with and alongside the noisy soundscape of *Dombey*: the desire to achieve authorial perpetuity at home and overseas—the desire, simply put, never to go out of circulation.

THIS FANTASY of literary immortality culminated in the event that threatened not the Dickens phenomenon (which goes on, of course), but the life of the author who began it. Seventeen years after turning Carker into grist for the "jagged mill" of the express train in *Dombey*, Dickens narrowly escaped his own death in a railway accident on the same line. On 9 June 1865, the Tidal Express, which was carrying Dickens from Folkestone to London, jumped a stretch of absent track at a viaduct at Staplehurst, sending the engine across the riverbank and seven first-class carriages down into the riverbed. Dickens was seated in the only first-class car that did not go over, but remained dangling off the rails at an angle, still attached to the second-class car in front, with the rear touching the field below. Ten passengers were killed, and fourteen seriously injured.[70] Physically unhurt, he escaped through a window and took part in "the hard work afterwards in getting out the dying and the dead," bringing brandy and water to survivors as well as to two others who perished in his presence.[71]

In the immediate aftermath, Dickens experienced what would now be considered a type of post-traumatic stress disorder: "I am curiously weak—weak as if I were recovering from a long illness. I begin to feel it more in my head. I sleep well and eat well; but I write a half dozen notes, and turn faint and sick," he told Forster.[72] He was unable to write his own letters and lost his voice for over two weeks: "I most unaccountably brought someone else's out of that terrible scene," he claimed.[73] For months, he could not tolerate the sound of train traveling and refused to ride the express: "The noise of the wheels of my Hansom, and of the London streets, was as much as I could bear. So I made all speed back here [to Kent] again—by a slow train though, for I felt that I was not up to the Express."[74]

Shunning the express, he curtailed written expression. In August he managed to bring the final book of *Our Mutual Friend*, the manuscript of which he was carrying with him on the day of the accident, to a close. This was his last completed novel. While he continued his reading tours, the volume of writing after *Our Mutual Friend* dropped from a roar to a murmur. He instead propelled himself into reading aloud, where it seemed to him, like the waves always saying, "that a mere spoken word—a mere syllable thrown into the air—may go on reverberating through illimitable space for ever and for ever, seeing that there is no rim against which it can strike: no boundary at which it can possibly arrive." When he returned to Babbage's *Treatise* to cite this flight of fancy for his audience in 1869, he did so not in a novel or sketch, but in a speech. His death on the fifth anniversary of the day of the accident cut short the serial publication of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. He left his story, as he had found himself when the Tidal Express crashed and his car derailed, "suspended . . . at last."[75]

THE SOUNDPROOF STUDY

Victorian Professional Identity and Urban Noise

I remember a funny dinner at my brother's, where, amongst a few others, were Babbage and Lyell, both of whom liked to talk. Carlyle, however, silenced every one by haranguing during the whole dinner on the advantages of silence. After dinner, Babbage, in his grimmest manner, thanked Carlyle for his very interesting Lecture on Silence.

—CHARLES DARWIN, *Autobiography*

SCATTERBRAIN LONDON

LATE in October 1864, during a dinner with family and friends, Charles Dickens received a telegram that read simply "LEECH DEAD." Marcus Stone, a guest at the dinner, later recalled, "silence fell upon us. . . . No one said a word. What was there to say?"[1] In the following weeks, as Dickens struggled to complete another monthly installment of *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–1865), he made an unusual confession to John Forster: "I have not done my number. This death of poor Leech (I suppose) has put me out woefully. Yesterday and the day before I could do nothing; seemed for the time to have quite lost the power; and am only by slow degrees getting back into the track to-day."[2] Dickens's biographers have described these lines as a "cry of personal lamentation," a sign that Dickens felt "desiccated, unable to work" after the death of John Leech, his close friend and, more famously, his illustrator for *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and other Christmas stories.[3] As the words of the novelist and Stone indicate, however, Leech's death caused Dickens more than "personal" pain. It brought on a professional crisis, for it reduced the characteristically prolific author to an unfamiliar state of nonproductivity. Leech's death, if only temporarily, stopped Dickens's hand and silenced him.