Leiden University

Gothic Drama on the Victorian Stage: Performing Dickens' *Bleak House* in 1853

Fernanda Korovsky Moura – s1846310

Faculty of Humanities

Research Master in Literary Studies

Supervisor: Dr. Michael Newton

2nd reader: Dr. Evert van Leuween

01.08.2017

> “I tried to recollect, in coming here, whether I had ever been in any theatre in my life from which I had not brought away some pleasant association, however poor the theatre, and I protest, out of my varied experience, I could not remember even one from which I had not brought some favourable impression, and that, commencing with the period when I believed the clown was a being born into the world with infinite pockets, and ending with that in which I saw the other night, outside one of the royal saloons, a playbill which showed me ships completely rigged, carrying men, and careering over boundless and tempestuous oceans. And now, bespeaking your kindest remembrance of our theatre and actors, I beg to propose that you drink as heartily and freely as ever a toast was drunk in this toast-drinking city, ‘Prosperity to the General Theatrical Fund’.

Charles Dickens’ speech for the General Theatrical Fund
on April 6th, 1846 (Eyre 76)

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments…………………………………………………………………....p. 4

Preface……………………………………………………………………...…p. 5

1. Introduction…………….………………………………………………………p. 6

2. "Is this a theatre? I thought it was a blaze of light and finery": Dickens and Victorian theatre………………………………………………………………………………...p. 11

2.1 Interactions between page and stage……………………………………..…p. 12

2.2 Popularization of theatre in the Victorian era………………………………....p. 16

2.3 A man of the theatre…………………………………………………………...p. 24

3. "The romantic side of familiar things": Dickens, Gothic fiction, and Gothic drama..p. 28

3.1 Gothic in *Bleak House*…………………………………………………….....p. 30

3.2 The Gothic on stage……………………………………………………….....p. 37

4. "You come upon my vision like a ghost": Premonition, ghosts and murder on stage..p. 40

4.1 At the City of London Theatre……………………………………………...p. 42

4.2 At the Royal Pavilion Theatre………………………………………………p. 59

4.3 The novel and the plays...................................……………………………..p. 80

5. "Yielded to dull repose": Final considerations………………………………..p. 92

6. Appendixes..……………………………………………………………….....p. 96

7. References……………………………….………………………………….p. 99

Acknowledgments

This thesis is the result of the scholarship LExS Platinum Award, granted to me by Leiden University. I am immensely thankful for it. It has allowed me to study in one of the oldest universities in Europe, which has been an unforgettable experience. This scholarship is also part of an agreement between Leiden University and Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, where I completed my first Master's degree under the supervision of Dr. José Roberto O'Shea. I would like to thank UFSC for giving me the opportunity to apply for the LExS scholarship, and my supervisor there for supporting me in this decision to take my studies abroad. The present research has been supervised by Dr. Michael Newton, whose feedback has been extremely valuable to me, and who shares my passion for nineteenth-century theatre and for exploring old library archives. Maybe we were indeed born in the wrong century. Last but not least, I would like to thank everyone who has direct or indirectly contributed to this research, including my instructors at Leiden University and my supporting and loving family.

Preface

The job of the theatre historian is fascinating. It combines the study in the areas of literature, theatre and history—all subjects that interest me. Ever since my first encounter with the subject during my first Master's degree at UFSC, I knew I had found a lifetime passion. Studying at Leiden University has allowed me to be nearer significant archival records, including the Leiden University Library and the British Library. This was my first time digging into nineteenth century documents. When entering the Manuscripts Room at the British Library after requesting the available material on theatrical adaptations of *Bleak House*, I was amazed at the possibility of reading the words written by someone involved in the theatrical event over a hundred years ago. Deciphering each writer's handwriting was no easy task, but that added to the detective characteristic of the theatre historian task. In conclusion, being able to read the manuscript promptbooks of the plays has greatly contributed to my development as an academic researcher, someone who will continue exploring old pages written years ago.

Introduction

In the speech in honour of William Charles Macready (1793-1873)—the Eminent Tragedian, as he became known—during a dinner to celebrate the actor's retirement from the stage on March 1, 1851, Dickens spoke about the power of theatre on the people. He described the effect theatre had on the audience during Macready's last appearance as Macbeth at the Royal Theatre Drury Lane on February 26th of the same year:

> When I looked round on the vast assemblage, and observed the huge pit hushed into stillness on the rising of the curtain, and that mighty surging gallery, where men in their shirt-sleeves had been striking out their arms like strong swimmers—when I saw that boisterous human flood become still water for a moment, and remain so from the opening to the end of the play, it suggested to me something besides the trustworthiness of an English crowd, and the delusion under which those labour who are apt to disparage and malign it: it suggested to me that in meeting here to-night we undertook to represent something of the all-pervading feeling of that crowd, through all its intermediate degrees, from the full-dressed lady, with her diamonds sparkling upon her breast in the proscenium-box, to the half-undressed gentleman; who bides his time to take some refreshment in the back row of the gallery […]. (Dickens 2003, 295)

This feeling of enthrallment and class inclusion that the theatre inspired fascinated Dickens throughout his entire life. He was also part of the mesmerised crowd, being an avid theatre-goer himself, and enthusiast of the milieu. Theatre was manifest in Dickens' life is different layers: in his prose—in allusions to the theatre and the very theatricality of his writing style; in Dickens' personality—which Callow refers to as peculiar and "described with remarkable consistency by his contemporaries as theatrical”, and as “one of the most remarkable men ever to walk the earth: vivacious, charismatic, compassionate, dark, dazzling, generous, destructive, profound, sentimental—human through and through, an inspiration and a bafflement” (xi). It also appears in his admiration for the work of actors, especially Charles Matthews (1776-1835) and his monopolylogues, the antiquarian Charles Kean (1811-1868) famous for his Shakespearean revivals, and Macready, the inspiration for Dickens’ second daughter’s name, Kate Macready Dickens (1839-1929); and in his theatrical adventures, such as the complete renovation of his children’s schoolroom at Tavistock House into a theatre with a “thirty-foot stage”, with backdrops painted by Clarkson Stanfield (1793-1867), a former chief scene-painter at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, costumes made by the Nathan’s costume house, and props and machinery borrowed from the Theatre Royal Haymarket, all for a domestic production of *The Frozen Deep* (1866), a play he wrote in conjunction with Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) (Callow 254-5), to take only one example.

Dickens’ relationship with the theatre has already been the attention of scholarly work, such as Robert Garis’ *The Dickens Theatre: A Reassessment of the Novels* (1965), John Glavin’s *After Dickens: Reading, Adaptation and Performance* (1999), and, more recently, Simon Callow’s *Charles Dickens and the Great Theatre of the World* (2012). However, Dickens’ lifelong connections with the theatre are still a rich resource for investigation. There is a lot yet to be learned from the theatrical records during Dickens’ lifetime and beyond—a great part of this archive still remains in libraries, ready to be explored.

With Dickens’ relationship with the theatre in mind, with this thesis I propose the investigation of the socio-political context of London in the mid-part of the nineteenth century, with special emphasis on the interrelations between the Victorian novel and the theatre, and the dramatization of novels, focusing on Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1853) and two theatrical adaptations of this novel in 1853: *‘Bleak House’, drama in two acts*, produced by

James Elphinstone and Frederic Neale, and George Dibdin Pitt's *The Bleak House, or The spectre of the ghost walk, a domestic drama in two acts*. Very little has been written about these productions, hence the importance of reconstructing them based on archival research and imagination so that what happened on stage during those performances may be rescued and made available for further research.

Furthermore, this project proposes to explore the traces of the Gothic discourse, reminiscent of the Gothic literary movement from the end of the eighteenth century, in Dickens' novel and to investigate whether or to what extent these traces can be found in the theatrical adaptations of the novel here analysed. My claim is that the Gothic and melodramatic characteristics found in Dickens' text were enhanced on stage by means of textual selections, set arrangements, and the emphasis on the Ghost legend, illustrating the sensationalist character of the nineteenth-century melodramatic theatre and its connection to Gothic drama. Moreover, I argue that the theatre producers' selection of scenes in the novel for stage adaptation has shown an impoverishment of the social criticism found in Dickens' original text. While Dickens reworks traditional Gothic formulae as a means for conveying social critique, the productions here analysed dissolve the presence of social criticism in order to emphasise the sensationalist aspects of the Gothic motifs found in Dickens.

This research will contribute to the area of Victorian and Dickensian studies by adding to the discussions on the interrelations between the novel and the theatre in the nineteenth century. It will also contribute to studies of the Gothic discourse in different media: in this case the mid-Victorian stage. Moreover, this research is productive for the field of theatre historiography and performance reconstruction, shedding light on a brief chapter of the stage history of *Bleak House*.

This research is founded on an analysis of Dickens' novel *Bleak House*, published in instalments during 1852 and 1853, but the main corpus consists of the manuscript copies of the dramatic texts *Bleak House', drama in two acts*, performed at the City of London Theatre, and *The Bleak House, or The spectre of the ghost walk, a domestic drama in two acts*, performed at the Royal Pavilion, available at the British Library. Moreover, other archival documents were also taken into account, including contemporary newspaper and magazine articles.

The thesis proceeds through five chapters, the first one being the present Introduction. Chapter 2, "'Is this a theatre? I thought it was a blaze of light and finery': Dickens and Victorian Theatre", exploring the "productive and friendly rivalry" (Allen 571) between the theatre and the novel in the nineteenth century, with special attention to the theatricality in nineteenth-century novels, particularly Dickens' *Bleak House*. Moreover, the chapter investigates the conditions for the rising popularity of the theatre during this time—especially after the 1843 Theatre Regulation Act—and the boom of theatrical adaptations of literary works. The chapter also looks into Dickens as a man of the theatre, since his childhood dream of becoming an actor up to his late career public readings. Finally, Chapter 2 also draws upon the discussion initiated by John Glavin regarding an *auctor* or *lector* reading style in the process of theatrical adaptation. This concept will be of significance when analysing the two theatrical productions of *Bleak House* in question here.

Chapter 3, "'The romantic side of familiar things": Dickens, Gothic fiction, and Gothic drama", traces the two main phases of the Gothic in literature: the first in the late-eighteenth century and the second at the end of the nineteenth century; and how Dickens was a key figure in the intervening period, being a pioneer in bringing the Gothic to the urban sphere. In addition, this chapter analyses some of the Gothic manifestations in Dickens' *Bleak House*, from the novel's title to recurrent Gothic themes, such as dilapidation, labyrinths, convergence of the real and the unreal, death, amongst other. Finally, chapter 3 goes on to explore the developments of the Gothic on stage since 1820 until 1910, with emphasis on the themes tackled by the plays.

Chapter 4, "'You come upon my vision like a ghost': Premonition, ghosts and murder on stage" consists of the main part of this research. It begins with a description of the corpus concerning theatrical adaptations of *Bleak House* in the nineteenth century available at the British Library, and my choice of object of study, along with the reasons for this choice. Subsequently, the chapter presents an overview of the two productions' plotlines—James Elphinstone and Frederic Neale's *'Bleak House', a drama in two acts*, performed at the City of London Theatre in June 1853, and George Dibdin Pitt's *The Bleak House, or the Spectre of the Ghost Walk, A Drama in 2 Acts,* performed at the Royal Pavilion Theatre, also in June 1853—, since they are unpublished works to which the reader of this thesis may not have access. The chapter ends with the analysis of three events in the novel with significant Gothic themes—the discovery of Nemo's body in his chamber, the appearance of the ghost, and the ending—and how they were transposed to the stage. Furthermore, the analysis focuses on how and to what extent and purposes the theatrical adaptations enhance the Gothic elements in Dickens' novel. The consequence is a preference for spectacle, which overshadows the discussion of social issues present in Dickens' text.

Finally, the thesis ends with chapter 5, "'Yielded to dull repose": Final considerations", in which I return to the main issues discussed throughout the thesis, put forth my conclusions, and share thoughts for further research on the topic.

Now it is time to go back to June 1853. Let us join the "huge pit hushed into stillness on the rising of the curtain", as Dickens would put it, and "become still water for a moment" as we reconstruct the two adaptations of *Bleak House* on the Victorian stage.

“If any man were to tell me that he owed no great acknowledgment to the stage, I would only ask him the one question, whether he remembered his first play?”

(Dickens, quoted in Callow 211)

1. **“Is this a theatre? I thought it was a blaze of light and finery”[1]:** Dickens and Victorian theatre

As we have already seen, Dickens was a man whose life was intrinsically connected to the theatre. As a boy, he hugely enjoyed watching theatrical productions and soon developed the ambition to become an actor as well. Life, however, took him in another direction, leading him to journalism, which in turn eventually led him to literature. Yet the theatre never left him completely: it remained present in his dramatic personality, his special bonding with theatre people—such as Macready, a frequent guest at the Dickenses’ dining table—, his constant attendance at the theatre, his attempts at drama writing and theatre managing, his public readings, the allusions to theatre in his novels, and the theatricality of his prose. Dickens’ life was interconnected with the theatre of his time. My goal in this thesis is to explore this special relationship of the author with the stage.

Despite the extensive research on the Victorian novel and on Victorian theatre, the relationship between the two has been considerably overlooked. My aim in this chapter is thus to delve into the interconnections between the two genres in the nineteenth century, a relationship that Emily Allen has called “a productive and friendly rivalry” (571), and to explore Dickens’ role within this context as a participant of both literature and theatre, and a key figure in the interconnections between the two.

---

[1] Extract from Dickens’ *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, 216.

2.1 Interactions between page and stage

In the beginning of her chapter “The Victorian Novel and Theatre”, Allen interestingly points out that the symbiotic relationship between the Victorian novel and the theatre may not seem apparent for a twenty-first century audience. Nonetheless, it “was an obvious and natural match” during the Victorian period. Throughout the nineteenth century, the paths of literature and theatre crossed, resulting in fascinating exchanges, including adaptations and “shared storylines, techniques, audiences, and authors” (571).

The turn of the century from the eighteenth to the nineteenth was one moment in which the novel as a genre developed greatly. By the moment Queen Victoria reached the throne, the novel was definitely established as part of the society’s reading habits. According to Allen, “the Victorian novel became central to Victorian life, enjoyed as it often was in serial instalments and around the family hearth, and it developed as both a mirror and an agent of proper cultural formation” (579). Soon, the novel became an intrinsic element of Victorian entertainment.

In the introduction to the third volume of the periodical *Victorian Network*, Beth Palmer interestingly affirms that Victorian culture “worked through networks” (1), referring to Victorian culture as an interconnection of people, ideas, and media. Through this modern allegory, Palmer explains that several Victorian artists worked in different fields, creating a network of interconnected artistic spheres. Palmer mentions Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873) and Henry James (1843-1916), both of whom wrote novels and plays; Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915) and Florence Marryat (1833-1899), who wrote and acted; and Bram Stoker (1847-1912), novelist and secretary to Henry Irving (1838-1905), the celebrated actor. Palmer argues that:

> whilst twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship has often tried to categorise Victorian cultural producers into neat boxes (novelist, dramatist, journalist), … [the aforementioned examples], and many others, defy such attempts and ask us to consider the networked interconnections between their works amongst different genres. (3)

That is extremely important when analysing Victorian artistic production, as this thesis aims to illustrate by means of an investigation of the connections between literature and theatre in two theatrical adaptations of Dickens' *Bleak House*. The stage and the page were interconnected, part of a cultural network.

In his seminal book *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*, Joseph Litvak adds to this discussion. Focusing his analysis on certain nineteenth-century novels, including Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853), Litvak writes about the inherent theatricality—or, rather, on "the *resistance* to theatricality" (Litvak 109)—, reminiscent of eighteenth-century spectacle, in these novels, even though they are products of what he sees as a very anti-theatrical age, an age of surveillance, as he puts it, based on Michel Foucault's work *Discipline and Punish* (1979). Litvak admits that "it might seem anachronistic or merely wishful to look for theatricality in novels of the privatizing and privatized nineteenth century", however, "the point, rather, is that, instead of simply precluding or negating spectacle, a society of surveillance entails certain rigorous spectacular practices of its own" (x). The whole array of expected ritualistic behaviour in society during the nineteenth century can be seen as highly theatrical on its own. As Callow points out, Dickens had not only a sense of "the theatre-as-world" but also of "the world-as-theatre". He had "a carnival view of life", with all its "charivari, the endless parade, each man in his time playing many parts, absurd, grotesque, battered, damaged, ridiculous, briefly glorious" (Callow 83). As Jaques would put it, “all the world is a stage”[2]. One example is Dickens’ depiction of the lords at Lincoln’s Inn Chancery in *Bleak House*. The case of the late Mr. Jarndyce’s inheritance is being analysed by the High Court of Chancery, and the way Dickens represents the situation draws attention to the theatricality of the roles performed by the participants of the court. For example, when the Lord High Chancellor concludes the discussions on the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce in order to hear other members of the bar, “eighteen of Mr. Tangle’s learned friends, each armed with a little summary of eighteen hundred sheets, bob up like eighteen hammers in a piano-forte, make eighteen bows, and drop into their eighteen places of obscurity” (Dickens 15-6). The irony with which Dickens describes the fellow lawyers performing their roles in the Chancery, holding their papers, standing upright, bowing to the High Chancellor and then sitting down again—all eighteen of them performing the same role—, draws our attention to the inherent theatricality of the process.

Theatricality was thus an element that linked the Victorian novel to the theatre. When I refer to the term theatricality, I do not mean simply an inclusion of allusions to the theatre in the novel, but an awareness of the theatricality of life, the performance of subjectivity, that the self is a “contingent cluster of theatrical roles” (Litvak xii), amongst other possibilities[3]. The previous example of Dickens’ portrayal of Chancery rituals, the stage-like depiction of the setting in the first paragraphs of the novel, characters playing roles in real life—as Mr. Skimpole, are but a few examples of the theatricality in *Bleak House*.

Deborah Vlock adds to the discussion on the spectacular in Victorian culture by challenging Foucault’s support of a cultural change from the spectacular to the private as the nineteenth century unfolded. According to the author:

---

[2] In William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*.

[3] Tracy Davis and Thomas Postlewait, for instance, state that the term *theatricality* has been accounted as a mode of representation, a style of behaviour, an interpretative model, a theoretical concept, an aesthetic, and a philosophical system. This concept, therefore, may encompass a myriad of definitions; it is about “both the world of theatre and the world as theatre” (Davis, Postlewait 4).

> If we accept as accurate […] a shift from the spectacular to the speculative, from the corporeal to the carceral, then we are led to accept as well a vision of novel reading and writing in Victorian England which emphasizes isolation, privacy, the contemplative reading subject—a reductive and romanticized view of a complex subject. Acts of novel reading and writing took place in "public spaces" […] in the nineteenth century, even when performed in isolation and silence. (1)

In fact, novel reading was not necessarily confined to being a private practice in the nineteenth century. Dickens, for instance, is a good illustration of the connections between novel reading and performance. His public readings of his novels delighted his audience, especially late in his career. As Callow explains: "his experience with amateur productions in huge halls across the country had strengthened his vocal instrument and taught him how to fill the spaces with vocal energy […]. His palpable joy in responding to the audience set the place on fire: it was genuine interaction, with real give and take" (232-3). Dickens revelled at the possibility of having direct and immediate contact with his public—something novel writing could not offer him. He was soon overwhelmed with requests for more public readings all over the country, which gave him the possibility to explore his partiality for the theatrical.

Although nineteenth-century society can be regarded as one based on surveillance, its transition from the eighteenth-century spectacle happened by no means *tout à coup*, but gradually. I believe, at least in the first half of the nineteenth century, that spectacle was still rooted in English artistic production and manifestation. As Vlock puts it, it is possible to identify in the nineteenth century a "primacy of public display, a phenomenon which Foucault has associated with pre-industrial Europe but which continued to be a powerful organizing and controlling force through the nineteenth century, and indeed, continues to do its work in our century as well" (3). Artistic productions of the time illustrate this argument, including the novels analysed by Litvak, other novels of the period such as Dickens', and popular entertainment (as Vlock argues), including the theatre, as I will go on to argue in the following section. The fact that spectacle permeated both the realms of literature and theatre during the nineteenth century is another point of connection between the two genres worth exploring.

2.2 Popularization of theatre in the Victorian era

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, there were only two types of playhouses in London: major and minor theatres. The major theatres consisted of the two royal playhouses, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, while minor theatres were all the others. In 1737, the Licensing Act was established, restricting the performance of "legitimate drama"—spoken plays with no musical intromission—to the two major theatres. The debate concerning what could be considered legitimate drama is extensive. Michael Booth, for instance, points out that it consisted of "farce, tragedy, and comedy" (6). As a consequence, the minor playhouses were restricted to performing plays with musical intermissions, for instance the highly popular melodramas (Allen 572). This monopoly was finally dissolved in 1843, with the Theatre Regulation Act, which suspended the previous Theatre Licensing Act in England, liberating the production of legitimate drama at any theatre.

The Theatre Regulation Act was a significant moment in theatre history. It meant that all theatres in England could then perform any theatrical genre they desired, bringing "legitimate" entertainment to all social ranks, including the working classes who would normally not be able to pay the entrance fees at the royal theatres in West End London. A consequence of this development was the popularization of the theatre during the nineteenth century. According to Booth, “the social range of the Victorian audience extended from the Queen to the meanest of her subjects who possessed the price of admission to a theatre gallery[4] or penny gaff” (10). Theatre was thus a democratic source of entertainment, available to the rich and the poor, who could watch the same performance in the same theatre, although sitting in distinct areas of the playhouse. In his speech in honour of Macready, Dickens spoke about the capability of theatre to unite all ranks of society: looking at the audience present at Macready’s last performance, it represents “something of the all-pervading feeling of that crowd, through all its intermediate degrees, from the full-dressed lady, with her diamonds sparkling upon her breast in the proscenium-box, to the half-undressed gentleman; who bides his time to take some refreshment in the back row of the gallery” (Dickens 2003, 295). As a supporter for the equity of society, Dickens saw the theatre as a place where that equity was more tangible.

Urban growth in England during the nineteenth century was another element that contributed to the popularization of theatre, having a major effect on the construction of new theatres. As Booth points out, “during the first half of the century society was being rapidly urbanised, a process whose speed is indicated by the fact that in 1850 about half the population still lived in the country but by 1900 only a fifth” (3). With all these people in the city, demand for entertainment was higher, creating opportunities for the construction of new theatres. Furthermore, a new group of people was attracted to the urban centres in search of new opportunities made possible by the industrial revolution: the working classes. These people were also in need of entertainment. A great number of the newly arrived working population in London settled around the docks, where work was required. Booth explains that these docks were located on the East End of London, resulting in the building of new sources of entertainment around that area (4). Contrary to the West End theatres, such as Covent Garden and Drury Lane, the East End playhouses were located away from middle and upper classes' demands and patronages: "theatres in the East End, across the Thames on the Surrey side of the river, and on the northern fringes of the West End […] catered primarily to their local populations, which were very largely working and lower middle-class" (Booth 4). The result was a demand for different types of theatrical entertainment that varied according to the theatre location.

---

[4] The pit and the gallery were the places inside the theatre for which entrance was the cheapest. The pit was located on the low ground close to the stage, while the gallery was located on the top part of the theatre, close to the ceiling. The area between the pit and the gallery was reserved for the boxes, occupied by the upper classes. For a representation of the pit, boxes, and gallery, and their caricatural occupants, see the print by George Cruikshank (1836) in Appendix A.

The productions that will be analysed in this thesis premiered in 1853, that is, ten years after the Theatre Regulation Act. In that period, any theatre could perform legitimate drama, including the minor playhouses. The two adaptations of *Bleak House* under investigation here were produced at the City of London Theatre and the Royal Pavilion. According to the the Music Hall and Theatre History website *Arthur Lloyd*, the construction of the City of London began in October 1834. It opened its doors to the public only on March 27th, 1837, with an adaptation of Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*. In 1843 the theatre was renamed Royal City of London Theatre, and reopened after being redecorated in 1844. The theatre was redecorated once more four years later, and reopened on September 30th, 1848, under the management of Nelson Lee and John Johnson. Due to fierce competition, the theatre was forced to end business in January 1868, and reopened as a circus.

According to the same website, The Royal Pavilion, located on Whitechapel Road, opened on April, 16th, 1827[5]. A visitor to the theatre in 1851 wrote:

> The Royal Pavilion Theatre, Whitechapel Road, is a neat theatre at the eastern extreme of the metropolis; and, being subject to little competition, it has proved a successful speculation. The entertainments are much varied; for, though under the same restrictions as other minor theatres, it is less liable to

---

[5] For an illustration of the theatre in 1856, see Appendix B.

> obstruction in consequence of its great distance from the patents. The performance commences at half-past six; boxes, two shillings; pit, one shilling; gallery, sixpence. (The Pavilion Theatre)

This is an interesting account to learn from a contemporary's perspective about the theatre's varied entertainments, location, and entrance prices.

The theatre was destroyed by a fire in 1856, and reopened as the New Royal Pavilion theatre two years later. The Pavilion was reconstructed twice afterwards, in 1871 and 1894, and closed its doors in 1934. In 1940 the remaining building was bombed during the Second World War, and the rest of the ruins were completely demolished in 1962.

The City of London and the Royal Pavilion theatres were located on the East End of London, a relative distance away from the major theatres in the West End, such as the Royal theatres Drury Lane and Covent Garden. Consequently, they were located in the area where the popular theatres were developing after the Theatre Regulation Act in 1843. The two playhouses were at around twenty-five minutes walking distance from each other. As they were relatively close and presented a similar entertainment structure and choice of theatrical genres for performance, they may have competed for the local audience.

The number of theatres in London grew immensely in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Maureen Moran, "in 1851, 20 theatres could be found in London. By 1900, there were 61 London theatres, all demanding fresh sensations and new material" (97). Moreover, most of the playhouses created after the dissolution of the Theatre Licensing Act were located precisely outside the privileged area of West End. As Booth affirms: "the *Report* [*from the Select Committee on Theatrical Licences and Regulations* from 1866] states that the capacity of six East End theatres amounted to 17,600 places nightly or 34.3 per cent of the local audience capacity in London theatres excluding Covent Garden and Her Majesty's, which were opera houses" (5). This numerous audience would have an impact on the choice of drama to be represented on stage. The goal was to attract the highest number of spectators per performance as possible.

A favourite theatrical genre during the Victorian Era, especially amongst "minor" and East Side theatres, was the melodrama. The genre remained popular even though minor theatres were now allowed to stage legitimate drama. According to Allen, the melodrama was "the backbone of the [Victorian] theatrical repertoire" (574). The genre encompassed a variety of styles, including "Gothic, nautical, Oriental, domestic, urban, canine, or disaster melodrama, all of which offered the thrill of seeing virtue imperilled and saved, while hearts and hands were wrung and people sang" (Allen 574). Apart from the dramatic plotlines and spectacular special effects—including "storms, floods, fire, explosions, avalanches, etc" (Allen 574)—another characteristic of the melodrama was its acting style, which could be as extravagant as the play itself. Dickens was an enthusiast for an exaggerated acting style. According to Callow, Dickens

> and most of his contemporaries saw it as an essential part of the actor's job to be memorable, and these 'points' [individual style] were what people remembered: not their *interpretations* of roles, a word that would have seemed bewildering to a Victorian theatre-goer, if not actually impertinent. Acting, Dickens and his contemporaries believed, was the art of gesture, no more and no less. (249)

Extravagant gesture would account for a bad performance nowadays. However, it was in accordance with the Victorian taste for spectacle, which influenced even the performer's choice of acting style.

Furthermore, Allen explains that due to the architecture of the theatres, which were big and cavernous, actors would have to exaggerate in voice volume and bodily language. As she puts it, "this gestural performance was strongly associated with the over-the-top emotions of melodrama, which could be communicated, some thought literally, from the body of the actor to the body of the playgoer" (575). This particular acting style would influence actors' performances for many years to follow, even after the adaptation of theatres to more intimate spaces.

In the context of Victorian theatre, regarding the distinction between "high" and "low" drama, melodrama was allocated to the low end of the binary. Although very popular amongst lower class audiences, intellectuals and adherents of "high" drama came to despise the genre. Allen explains that "melodramas were criticized for being overly spectacular, emotionally manipulative, badly written, and banal, although this banality was clearly key to the success of these formulaic dramas" (573). Theatre critics condemned the melodrama as an affront to the spectator's intellectual. Nevertheless, despite all contemporary criticism, it is undeniable that the melodrama was a case of success. Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929), an English dramatist, gave the following ironic statement in a lecture entitled "The Theatre and the Mob" (1882), which illustrates the popularity of the melodrama:

> In melodrama we find that those plays have been most successful that have contained the most prodigious excitement, the most appalling catastrophes, the more harrowing situations, and this without reference to probability of story or consistency of character. The more a play has resembled a medley of these incidents and accidents which collect a crowd in the streets, the more successful it has been. (quoted in Allen 574)

All irony left aside, Jones' words demonstrate an undeniable characteristic of Victorian taste: that is, exaggerated spectacle was a crowd pleaser.

The Victorian taste for spectacle can also be illustrated by other very popular sources of extravagant entertainment, such as "dioramas, panoramas, magic lantern shows, stereoscopes, balloon ascents, freaks, and curiosities" (Allen 572). In addition, new technologies developed in the nineteenth century allowed for the creation of new theatrical strategies that could enhance the spectacular elements in the productions. According to Moran:

> New lighting techniques made optical illusions especially powerful. The move from wax candles to limelight, then to gauze around gas jets, and finally, to the incandescent bulbs of the late-Victorian theatre increased the possibilities for greater realism (and improved safety). With the darkened theatre the norm by 1850, clever lighting could simulate storms, shipwrecks, ghosts and fiery conflagrations. By the end of the century, ever more imaginative application of engineering science, including hydraulics, meant bravura aquatic spectacles, train crashes, horse races and even earthquakes could be replicated. (98)

A lot became possible on stage, and theatre producers took advantage of that fact for the audience's delight.

Another point of intersection between the theatre and the novel in the Victorian era was theatrical adaptation of literary works. As we have seen, with the increase in the urban population, more playhouses spread throughout London, frequented by audiences avid for new entertainment. In order to fulfil the increasing demand, theatre managers turned to literature to look for new sources of inspiration for play productions. A safe choice was the adaptation of best-selling novels, which would guarantee public's interest and approval (Moran 97). Not surprisingly, Dickens was one of the favourite choices. His serialised novels were adapted to the stage even before the author had finished writing them—as is the case with the two adaptations analysed in this thesis. In those occasions, the producers would imagine a possible ending for the novel that not always corresponded with the one Dickens wrote eventually. In this context, Vlock raises an interesting question: "When adapters […]

devised what seemed a probable ending to one of the novels, so that it could be quickly produced, what effect did that have on the ending Dickens ultimately wrote?" (4). Although Dickens claimed to hate most adaptations of his novels, Vlock states that he followed those regularly so as to be aware of what was happening on stage. The influence of genres, therefore, worked both ways: novels had an effect on theatre as much as they were affected by it.

By the middle of the century, however, due to critics' claims, such as the aforementioned Henry Arthur Jones that argued for a "literary theatre" free from superfluous pageantry and that dealt with real life and real people, theatre shifted direction—in a similar way as literature—moving towards realism. Allen explains this transition:

> This domestication of theatre, also called the *embourgeoisement* of theatre, took place on several levels during the mid decades of the century: some strains of melodrama became more 'polite' and high-minded, focusing on middle-class characters and toning down extremity in favour of more realistic, less startling situations; some theatre spaces were redesigned to offer a more intimate, homelike setting, with smaller, finely decorated houses […]; and new acting styles, once geared towards huge spaces in which patrons could see but not hear the actors, became more nuanced, favouring realistic expression over extravagant gesture. (577)

Spectacle, in both the realms of theatre and literature, lost a bit of its sparkle.

The productions of *Bleak House* analysed in this thesis are situated in the mid-nineteenth century, a period of transition when both the novel and the theatre were going through significant changes. The two plays approach Dickens' text in different ways, but at the same moment in time, in similar places and to similar audiences: *'Bleak House', a drama in two acts*, produced by James Elphinstone and Frederic Neale, licensed on June 1, 1853, and performed for the first time on June 6, 1853, at the City of London Theatre; and *The Bleak House, or The spectre of the ghost walk, a domestic drama in two acts*, by George Dibdin Pitt, licensed on June 6, 1853, but performed on June 4, 1853, at the Pavilion Theatre. However, before exploring these productions, it is important to look more closely at Dickens' unique relationship with the world of the theatre.

2.3 A man of the theatre

Dickens was, no doubt, a man of the theatre. His lifelong relationship with the theatrical arts worked in several layers: "Dickens as the journalist commenting condescendingly on the stage in 'The Amusements of the People', Dickens as the sharp satirist of stage life in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), Dickens as enthusiastic amateur actor in *The Frozen Deep* (1866), and Dickens as addicted performer in his late readings" (Palmer 3). As Allen puts it, "claiming famously that, 'every writer of fiction, though he may not adopt the dramatic form, writes in effect for the stage', Dickens was the flashiest and most theatrical fictional stylist of the age" (581-2). And this theatrical side of Dickens is precisely the facet of the artist that I would like to explore in this thesis.

As a young man at the age of sixteen, Dickens dreamed of becoming an actor. In his brilliant biography of Dickens and his connections to the theatrical world *Charles Dickens and the Great Theatre of the World* (2012), Simon Callow writes about young Dickens' early attempts at the theatre:

> He prepared himself for it [the theatre] with every bit as much intensity as he had applied himself to mastering Gurney[6]. He was fanatical in his attendance at performances, studying the form, assiduously tracking down the best acting,

---

[6] A type of shorthand system created by Thomas Gurney (1705-1770).

> always seeing Matthew[7] 'wherever he played'. He practiced on his own 'immensely' (such tricky but critical matters as how to walk in and out of a room, and how to sit on a chair); he often did this for four, five, or six hours a day, shut up in his own room or walking about in a field. (39)

However, despite the effort, Dickens' career at the theatre was not meant to thrive. His relationship with the theatre was by no means one-sided. In fact, he had mixed feelings towards the stage. As a young man, he managed to get an audition scheduled at Covent Garden, but on the decisive day he never showed, alleging he was ill. The audition, however, was never rescheduled (Glavin 11). John Glavin does not claim that this early episode is essential in understanding Dickens' relationship with the theatre. Nonetheless, it is significant as an illustration of the author's ambiguous relationship with the stage: at times a relationship of love and admiration, and at others of fright.

As he grew older, Dickens never let go of the theatre completely, having taken every opportunity presented to put a step on the stage. Furthermore, his desire to work with the theatre went beyond his boyish acting aspirations; above all, he wanted to direct. As Callow puts it:

> It is often said, and rightly said, that he had the essential temperament of an actor, but it may be that even more central to his existence was the idea of being an actor-manager, a 'universal director', controlling destinies, pulling the strings, releasing energies, arranging outcomes. At his writing desk, he felt like an emperor; in the theatre, he felt like a god. (123)

Some of Dickens' adventures in the theatrical milieu were well-praised, for instance his performance of Justice Shallow in a production of Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at the Haymarket Theatre in London in 1847. According to Callow, "he was all but unrecognizable, and there was ‘a Storm of plaudits’ when the audience realized who he was” (186). However, they did not provide him with as much success and financial return as his works in literature.

---

[7] Charles Matthew (1776-1835), actor and theatre manager.

In addition to personal connections between the theatre and Dickens, the theatre is an intrinsic part of the author’s written oeuvre. Gillian Beer affirms that “more than any other Victorian novelist, Dickens draws upon the theatre’s power of *manifestation* in his subject matter, characterisation, and in the activities of his style. His style is spectacle” (quoted in Litvak 109). Furthermore, as Vlock explains, Dickens also “regularly borrowed characters, dramatic idioms, even stories from the melodrama, and the popular theatre borrowed equally from him” (3). It was a reciprocal relationship: theatre was in Dickens as much as Dickens was in the theatre. The theatricality and spectacle identifiable in Dickens’ narrative is possibly one of the reasons why Dickens has been a favourite source for theatrical adaptations, especially during the nineteenth century. Some of the theatrical adaptations of Dickens’ novels were developed during his lifetime, being followed by the author himself, while others did not receive his approval. A yet larger number of adaptations was brought to the stage after Dickens’ death.

Theatrical adaptations of novels, however, were not always regarded positively. The myth that the original written text is superior to any attempt of adapting it to another medium has lurked adaptation reception throughout the centuries. As Glavin points out, there often is a “mistrust of theatre and theatricality” (5). Nonetheless, it is important to take into consideration that, as we have seen, the relationship between theatre and the novel in the nineteenth century was different than today. They were both elements of Victorian popular culture and part of society’s array of amusement options. As Vlock puts it, “the relationship between novel and theatre was a fairly complex symbiosis, complicated particularly by an obscure of origin, an absence of fixedness in either of the genres which would allow us to cite, with absolute confidence, one of them as the primary genre” (11). It was a parallel development.

In the introduction to *After Dickens: Reading, Adaptation and Performance*, Glavin follows Pierre Bourdieu in making a distinction between two types of reader: a *lector* and an *auctor*. The *lector* comments on what has been previously discussed, while the *auctor* not only reads, but provides new discourses in relation to what has been read. In the evaluation of the two types of reader, the *auctor* is preferred for his/her autonomy and initiative (3). In the same manner as the reading process can be developed in these two distinctive ways, Glavin argues that so can the adaptation process. In his analysis of Dickens’ adaptations, Glavin privileges the “kind [of reading and adaptation] that problematizes itself, and thereby reveals readers and adapters as kin, reversing the conventional author-reader privilege” (4). This way, the most profitable adaptations are not the ones that merely transpose the novelist’s words—the “fetishized text” (Glavin 7)—to the stage, but the ones that provide it with new discourses. The adaptation must play the role of Bordieu’s *auctor*.

Based on Glavin’s distinction between an adaptation *lector* and an adaptation *auctor*, I will turn to the two aforementioned Victorian productions of Dickens’ *Bleak House* in order to investigate how each one of them approaches the Dickensian text—either as a *lector* or as an *auctor*. Furthermore, I will explore how each production reworks Gothic elements identifiable in Dickens’ novel, and to what extent and with what means the Gothic atmosphere of the romance has been transposed to the stage. Before turning to the productions per se, in the next chapter I will delve into Dickens’ novel in analysis here, *Bleak House*, and its prominent Gothic elements, taking into account the possibilities and limitations it may offer for theatrical adaptations.

“The first shadows of a new story [are] hovering in a ghostly way about me.”
Dickens in a letter to Mary Boyle (1810-1890),
writer and amateur actress, on February 21st, 1851 (Hartley 227)

2. **“The romantic side of familiar things”[8]:** Dickens, Gothic fiction, and Gothic drama

By the mid-nineteenth century, the heyday of Gothic fiction had come to an end. The extremely popular novels, initiated by Horace Walpole’s (1717-1797) *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and continued by Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), dominated the literary scene in London in the last decades of the eighteenth century, but increasingly gave way to realism as the following century unfolded. The Gothic, however, would return by the end of the century with a different twist. As Robert Mighall explains, “the Gothic reappeared with Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and the clutch of *fin-de-siècle* horrors that followed”, with “Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), and the fantasies of Arthur Machen” (81-2). According to Mighall, what mainly differentiated these two phases of Gothic literature was where the stories were set: the first Gothic stories took place in a distant place or in a distant time, such as in “the Alps and Pyrenees” or “Italy, Switzerland, and the South of France”, as Catherine Morland would put it in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818); whereas the second wave of Gothic literature brought the Gothic home: to England (Mighall 81-2). The Gothic ceased to be about fantastical stories that took place in exotic countries, and was brought closer to the readers’ own reality: these stories could happen at their doorstep.

Dickens wrote precisely in the “gap” period between the first and second phases of the Gothic tradition. I write “gap” between quotation marks because even though Gothic novels were not published as extensively between 1821 and 1886 as in the periods from 1764 to 1820 and from 1886 to 1897, traces of Gothic discourse can still be found in mid-nineteenth century works, especially in Dickens'. As Mighall points out, "the Gothic had changed, and no small part of this transformation is down to Dickens, whose works stand to refute the notion that the Gothic went away. For in terms of innovation and influence […], no writer has a greater claim to importance in the history of the Gothic during its sabbatical than Dickens" (82). Dickens' tales, although they depict England's harsh realities in the mid-nineteenth century, are filled with fantastical elements that would most definitely have reminded the contemporary reader of Gothic stories. In this context, Dickens preceded the second phase of Gothic: with the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* in 1837, forty-nine years before the publication of Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Dickens had brought the Gothic home.

---

[8] Extract from Dickens’ preface to *Bleak House*, 6.

According to Alexandra Warwick, it is possible to identify in Victorian Gothic two main tendencies: a domestic and an Urban. The sisters Brontë and their novels would be an example of domestic Victorian Gothic, while Dickens's work illustrates the urban Victorian Gothic. As Warwick explains, "it is Dickens who establishes the city as a new Gothic space by advancing 'a metropolitan sensibility that distinguishes a new Victorian Gothic'" (quoted in Smith; Hughes 3). The city is, indeed, the main stage for Dickens' tales: the working house and the suburb streets in *Oliver Twist*, Barnard's Inn and Newgate Prison in *Great Expectations*, Tom-All-Alone's and the Chancery in *Bleak House*, to name but a few.

Dickens was one of the main contributors to this new genre—the urban Gothic—by bringing awareness to the supernatural and natural horrors that could be found in the city itself and not in a distant exotic land. Allan Pritchard interestingly writes in relation to Dickens' *Bleak House* that it "grows out of Dickens' perception that the remote and isolated country mansion or castle is not so much the setting of ruin and darkness, mystery and horror, as the great modern city: the Gothic horrors are here and now" (435-6). Dickens not only brings the Gothic home, but he also brings it to the present, making the reader aware that he/she is also susceptible to undergoing a supernatural experience, rendering the reading experience much more engaging, because connected to the present.

3.1 Gothic in *Bleak House*

The manifestation of Gothic elements in Dickens' works has been analysed by many scholars, as set out in the previous section of this thesis chapter. These studies, however, tend to take into account novels like *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) or *Edwin Drood* (1870), since they present more evident Gothic settings. Nevertheless, there are other Dickensian stories that can also be placed in the Gothic tradition, *Bleak House* being one of them. As Pritchard puts it, "many still fail to recognize that this novel [*Bleak House*] is Dickens's supreme achievement in the Gothic mode and a crucially important novel for the nineteenth-century transformation of Gothic tradition" (432). As we have seen, Dickens was a key figure in the period of transition from the first to the second phase of the Gothic, and essential in transforming certain characteristics of the genre. Far from repeating setting, characterization and plot formulae, Dickens proposes to change them, resulting in "a highly original adaptation of Gothic convention for literary purposes" (Pritchard 433).

As a matter of fact, the very title of the novel, *Bleak House*—which was, curiously, the author's twelfth option for a title (Pritchard 433)—already draws a parallel with Gothic fiction, since other Gothic tales are set or have as the main character a bleak mansion, castle or abbey, such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) (Pritchard 434). Notwithstanding, Bleak House is not the source of evil and destruction, as are the other houses in the aforementioned stories. The Gothic atmosphere was transposed to Chancery and to Chesney Wold. In this way, by naming the novel *Bleak House*, Dickens challenges the traditional Gothic house story.

In urban Gothic novels, the ruins of abbeys and castles, recurrent motifs in traditional Gothic literature, are transferred to the urban setting. As Pritchard explains, "the Gothic ruin […] is now represented by the slums and dilapidation of the great city, where the desperate need for rehabilitation and reform now lies" (437). The mansion, Bleak House, recently renovated by its owner, is no longer the place of ruin; that has been relocated in the city. According to Pritchard, Bleak House becomes a point of transition between the traditional rural Gothic and the urban Gothic (437). Chesney Wold, the Dedlocks' countryside manor, on the other hand, is a perfect example of the traces of the traditional Gothic in Dickens. As Pritchard describes the house, "it is a large, gloomy, isolated mansion of ancient, picturesque, and labyrinthine structure, with such Gothic features as turrets, a ghost's walk, grotesquely carved stone monsters, moss and ivy, and a mausoleum" (437-8). The reader of *Bleak House* is taken to Chesney Wold in chapter VII. Surrounding the mansion, the weather is grey, the rain drips nonstop, and the atmosphere is monotonous. As Dickens puts it, apart from some animals, "there is not much fancy otherwise stirring at Chesney Wold. If there be a little at any odd moment, it goes, like a little noise in that old echoing place, a long way, and usually leads off to ghosts and mystery" (97). While the old mansion in the countryside stands for the dying tradition of traditional Gothic, the city is effervescent with new mysteries and horrors, which give rise to a new type of Gothic.

According to Pritchard, two key words illustrate Dickens' urban Gothic: labyrinth and dilapidation (439). In addition to Gothic buildings, such as the Chancery and Chesney Wold, the way the streets in the city are represented add to the Gothic aspects of the novel. As Pritchard explains, "the intricate architecture has its counterpart in the labyrinthine streets of the city; the gloom is paralleled by the greater darkness of the cloud of urban pollution and of the cellars where the city's deprived inhabitants dwell" (Pritchard 438). The streets of the city, for instance, are represented as an immense labyrinth full of mysteries. In chapter LVII, the reader accompanies Esther through the streets of London while she is with Mr. Bucket in search of her missing mother, Lady Dedlock. She describes her feelings as she drove in the carriage:

> I was far from sure that I was not in a dream. We rattled with great rapidity through such a labyrinth of streets that I soon lost all idea where we were, except that we had crossed and re-crossed the river, and still seemed to be traversing a low-lying, waterside, dense neighbourhood of narrow thoroughfares chequered by docks and basins, high piles of warehouses, swing-bridges, and masts of ships. (803)

The labyrinthine characteristic of the London streets rendered the atmosphere dream-like for Esther, transforming it into a Gothic space. Furthermore, the illustration that accompanies the chapter in the original publication of the novel adds to the mysterious description of the city: the landscape is dark, the people and horses look like indistinct figures, and the only light in the picture comes from a lamppost[9].

The first lines of the novel already set the Gothic atmosphere that permeates the entire novel. The city is surrounded by fog, an element that renders the city dark and indistinct, as if it was part of a dream, as Esther interestingly points out. The second paragraph of the novel goes as follows:

> Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls deified among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of

---

[9] See Appendix B.

> collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little ‘prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds. (11)

Strikingly, the noun “fog” is mentioned thirteen times in this paragraph. From “everywhere”, the author takes the reader on a journey throughout the city, which is covered in fog: from the river, marshes and yards to the fog surrounding the eyes, throats, toes and fingers of the people. Everything stands amidst fog. As Christine Corton points out in her “biography” of the London fog, for Dickens “London fog lay close to hand as a metaphorical tool in the depiction of character and its relationship to its environment” (37). Fog is indistinct; it disturbs reality and blurs the senses. In the same manner, in *Bleak House*, the fog, which is present not only in the first paragraphs of the novel but permeates the entire story, carries cold and darkness, bringing with it destruction. As a metaphor connecting characters to the environment, the characters are contaminated by the fog influence, becoming themselves cold and dark.

As the first chapter unfolds, Dickens continues the description of the London fog, zooming in from the entire city until it reaches the Chancery in the fourth paragraph:

> The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation, Temple Bar.

> And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery. (12)

It is not by chance that Chancery is where the fog is at its densest. Chancery is the source of all bafflement and destruction, from which all troubles in the novel derive. According to Corton:

> Dickens's point in opening the novel in a foggy scene of obscurity and darkness is to create not only a powerful metaphor for the world of Chancery but, as the subsequent metaphorical chiaroscuro of *Bleak House* suggests, a more general metaphor for the state of London. It is a place where light is largely denied to individuals—whether this is the light of religious comfort to individuals like Jo or the light generated by education or just a physical light which is denied by the smoke and fog. (61)

Just as the fog hinders the sun from shining over London, the metaphorical light of religious comfort or education, as Corton suggests, cannot reach the characters.

In Dickens' words, the law is depicted as blurred, just like the fog. As Mighall puts it, the novel undermines "any assured divisions between the lawless and the lawful by depicting the law itself, and the institutions and values that support it, at the very heart of a dark, foggy, labyrinth" (86). The law, which was supposed to be the source of goodness and justice, is depicted as precisely the opposite.

Dilapidation, the second key word emphasised by Pritchard, can be identified in both dilapidated places, such as Krook's rotting place or the disintegrating Tom-All-Alone's, as well as in dilapidated human beings, as illustrated by Richard's downfall at the end of the novel. As Dickens puts it through Esther's words: "There is a ruin of youth which is not like age, and into such a ruin Richard's youth and youthful beauty had all fallen away" (856). According to Pritchard, "the novel provides an endless number of images of urban decay and dilapidation” (440), but not only of physical decay, but also of mental disintegration, as Richard’s example illustrates.

According to Andrew Smith and William Hughes, another element that characterizes the Victorian Gothic is the convergence of the real and the unreal, as set out in the experience of the *Unheimlich* (5). As Dickens himself states in the preface to the first edition of *Bleak House*, “in *Bleak House*, I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things” (6). Dickens’ project in the novel, therefore, since the beginning, was to shed a different light on ordinary occurrences. The city was a familiar thing for Dickens’ readers, but the way the author depicted it, in a Romantic and Gothic perspective, gives it new meaning, and elicits new feelings.

However, giving a fantastical twist to the plot does not entail that Gothic fiction is apolitical. Quite the contrary, the fantastical elements in the stories can be regarded as politically driven. As Mighall puts it, “the Gothic provides a rich metaphorical, thematic, and atmospheric repertoire to depict a haunted British society and anathematize its abuses” (86). In *Bleak House*, for example, charity as means for self-promotion is criticised through the characters of Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle; the haunting figure of Tulkinghorn can be seen as a critique of the law system in nineteenth-century England, and of the middle-class despise for the lower classes, illustrated by his treatment of Jo and Mademoiselle Hortense, for instance; the inefficiency of the law system is also criticised by the depiction of theatrical rituals at the Chancery; the keeping of appearances for the sake of status is criticised by means of Mr. Turveydrop, the dancing master; amongst several other examples. As Pritchard points out, such characters “are indeed the urban equivalents of the carved stone monsters at Chesney Wold and the gargoyles of the traditional Gothic building, deformed not by the stonemason’s hand but by their own false values and by social causes” (443). The Gothic monsters in *Bleak House* are not mythical creatures or ghosts, but real people deformed by social vice.

Another Gothic characteristic of Dickens' novel is the recurrent theme of death. No wonder one of Miss Flite's birds is called "Death". A significant number of characters die in the novel or their death is referred to, such as Tom Jarndyce, Nemo, Mr. Tulkinghorn, Mr. Krook, Jo, Lady Dedlock, amongst others. Pritchard calls attention to "the grimness and pathos of the deaths of Nemo and Jo [which] make powerful points about urban deprivation and isolation, and the bizarre death of Krook [that] makes an important symbolic point about the corruption that destroys itself" (443). Nemo, a former captain, dies alone and in misery, buried in a shallow grave; Jo dies due to lack of treatment, condemning the situation of many poor children in Victorian England; and Krook dies victim of too much drinking, his way of escaping the realities of life. Death is also alluded to through the legend of the Ghost Walk, which refers to the ghost of a previous Lady Dedlock who hunts the terrace at Chesney Wold, foreshadowing the death of the current Lady Dedlock. Mighall curiously points out that: "indeed, references to 'ghost' or 'ghostly' number more than half those to 'lawyer' in the book that is about the legal system (46 ghosts to 82 lawyers)" (87), confirming the ever-present theme of death.

Looking at the examples here mentioned of the manifestation of the Gothic in Dickens' texts, it is possible to see Dickens as a pioneer in bringing the Gothic to the city, anticipating the second phase of Gothic literature. As Pritchard puts it, Dickens "was able to adapt them [conventions of Gothic fiction] to his representation of the city and to his purposes of social criticism, redeeming them from the triviality and mere sensationalism that had often characterized their use by earlier writers" (433). With Dickens, Gothic literature gained an extra social layer, the consequence of the author's emphasising "the romantic side of familiar things".

2.2 The Gothic on stage

As Andrew Smith and William Hughes emphasise in their volume *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, the Gothic manifested itself in several ways during the nineteenth century, not only in novels, but also in poetry, short stories, visual arts, and, of course, the theatre. Before analysing the two productions of *Bleak House* in 1853, I will first write about the trajectory of the Gothic in dramatic texts. After that, I will investigate how the Gothic had an effect on theatrical productions in the mid-nineteenth century, especially on the two productions in analysis here.

In her essay "Victorian Gothic Drama", Diane Long Hoeveler explains that the Gothic drama was not a "pure" genre—if such a genre even exists—but a combination of genres that included certain Gothic aspects, such as "the foreboding or premonitory dream, the uncanny double, the confusion between the real and the fantastic, the devilish villain with quasi-supernatural powers, and the use of cathedrals or exotic locales as settings" (57). All aspects that can be found in most Gothic novels, especially the ones from the first phase.

Hoeveler also explains that the trajectory of the Gothic in dramatic productions of the Victorian era can be divided into three main moments: early-Victorian Gothic drama, which begins even before Queen Victoria's coronation, roughly from 1820 until 1850; middle Victorian Gothic drama, from around 1850 to 1880; and late-Victorian Gothic drama, from 1870 to about 1910, expanding into the years after Queen Victoria's death (57-8).

The first period of Victorian Gothic drama was characterised by the revival of late-eighteenth century dramas, such as Matthew Lewis' *The Castle Spectre* (1979) and Thomas Holcroft's *A Tale of Mystery* (1801), and theatrical adaptations of popular first-phase Gothic novels, novellas and poems, including "James Planché's *The Vampire: or, the Bride of the*

Isles (1820), Richard B. Peake's *Presumption, or the Fate of Frankenstein* (1823), and Edward Fitzball's *Esmeralda; or The Deformed of Notre Dame* (1834)" (Hoeveler 57), based on John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), respectively.

Middle-Victorian Gothic took advantage of the recently developed technologies that allowed for certain accomplishments on stage that were unimaginable before, as explained in the previous chapter. Techniques such as the "vampire trap", used to make a character seem to disappear on stage, or the "Pepper's ghost", used to make a character seem to appear onstage out of nowhere, became extremely popular. The latter was used in an adaptation to the stage of Dickens' novella *The Haunted Man, and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848) in 1862 (Hoeveler 63). This period was also the time of the popularisation of the melodrama and melodramatic adaptations of novels.

Finally, the last phase of Victorian drama was mainly characterised by the rise of "star vehicles" (Hoeveler 58). One of the big theatrical stars of the period was Henry Irving (1838-1905), the first actor to be honoured with the title of knight, and great Shakespearean tragedian. Irving worked in the theatre for several years with Bram Stoker, the author of *Dracula* (1897), and played significant Gothic roles on stage, such as Captain van der Decken in an adaptation of the legend of the *Flying Dutchman* in 1878; and Mephistopheles in an adaptation of Goethe's *Faust* (1808:1828) in 1885 (Hoeveler 58; 66-7).

The theatrical adaptations of Dickens' *Bleak House* that will be analysed in this thesis took the stage in 1853, when *Bleak House* was still being published in instalments. It is, therefore, allocated to a period of transition between the first and the second moments of Victorian Gothic drama, as divided by Hoeveler. It was a time when the theatres were still thriving with theatrical adaptations of well-known late-eighteenth-century Gothic novels, illustrating the audience's attraction to spectacular stories. The decision to stage *Bleak House* at the City of London Theatre and the Royal Pavilion worked as a means to continue satisfying the audience’s demands for fresh entertainment, and a story that involved a bleak house, mysterious identities, premonitory occurrences, deaths, and ghostly apparitions most certainly felt like a promising choice. Indeed, Dickens’ novel includes all the Gothic aspects that characterise the Victorian Gothic drama according to Hoeveler (57). It is in this context that the two aforementioned productions, which are original play texts, must be taken into account. The next section will be dedicated to exploring these two adaptations that opened their curtains in 1853.

> "To enter a theatre for a performance is to be inducted into a magical space,
> to be ushered into the sacred arena of the imagination."
> (Callow 82)

3. **"You come upon my vision like a ghost"[10]:** Premonition, ghosts and murder on stage

Looking for information about theatrical adaptations of Dickens' *Bleak House* in the nineteenth century leads to several mentions of productions, but finding access to the dramatic texts themselves is challenging. The archives at the British Library host some manuscripts of nineteenth-century promptbooks of adaptations of *Bleak House*, including *'Bleak House', drama in two acts*, produced by James Elphinstone and Frederic Neale, licensed on June 1, 1853, and performed for the first time on June 6, 1853, at the City of London Theatre. The copy at the British Museum archive is signed by Austin Lee, who may have been the prompter in the production; *The Bleak House, or The spectre of the ghost walk, a domestic drama in two acts*, by George Dibdin Pitt, licensed on June 6, 1853, but performed on June 4, 1853, at the Pavilion Theatre. This copy was written by two different people: the first act was not signed, while the second was written by J. C. Morgean, who refers to himself as the prompter; *Bleak House, a drama in three acts*, an adaptation for the Globe Theatre in 1876 by John Pringle Burnett; *Bleak House, or Poor Jo the Crossing Sweeper*, version adapted by Eliza Thorne for production at the Opera House in Sheffield on April 28, 1876; and a printed version of George Lander's *Bleak House, or Poor 'Jo', A*

---

[10] Extract from Dickens' *Bleak House*, 721.

drama in four acts, performed at the Pavilion Theatre on Monday, March 27, 1876[11]. Lander's version was published in the volume 388 in the *Dicks' Standard Plays*, a collection of plays published by John Dicks (1818-1881) that could be acted without infringing any rights, and were sold at a low price. A copy of *Bleak House, or Poor 'Jo', A drama in four acts* was sold for one penny, for instance. Dicks published over a thousand play texts in this format. Lander's version was also republished in the series "Dickens Dramatized Series of Plays", issued by CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform in 2015. Lander's is, therefore, the most accessible version of the aforementioned five.

Bearing in mind the limited space available for this thesis, I have decided to work with two productions, comparing their approaches to the Dickensian text, and investigating how the Gothic elements were depicted in each adaptation. As my focus in this research is encompassed in the city of London, I have decided not to work with Thorne's adaptation, which was performed in Sheffield. Although it would have been very interesting to explore the work of a woman playwright in the Victorian era, I have left it aside for future research. Furthermore, Burnett's manuscript is in a delicate state, and no photographs of the manuscript are permitted; and Lander's is more readily available for future research projects. In this case, I have decided to work with Elphinstone and Neale's and Pitt's versions that ran in parallel in June 1853. By that time, only the instalments up to chapter 49 of the novel had been issued—Therefore, up to Jo's death in chapter 47, and Tulkinghorn's murder in 48; although his killer was still a mystery. Chapters 50 to 53 came out in June. For this reason, I thought it would be interesting to analyse two simultaneous adaptations of the popular novel, which had not reached its end yet, and to compare their choices of endings with the eventual decision by Dickens. Since the play texts in question are unpublished, I have decided to present an overview of the acts, scenes and main developments on stage.

---

[11] The information described here follows the cataloguing of the British Library.

4.1 At the City of London Theatre

The first manuscript I analysed was written in 1853: *'Bleak House', drama in two acts*, by Elphinstone and Neale. This play is, as the title suggests, divided into two acts: the first one consists of six scenes, and the second of five scenes. The title page of the manuscript is signed by Mr. Austin Lee, so he is most likely the author of the copy. The handwriting is elegant and, after getting used to the writer's style, it becomes easier to understand the words on the page. Lee underlines the scenes' numbers and settings, marking the beginning of a new scene. However, he does not offer scene, props, costume or character descriptions, nor does he present cues or notes. Therefore, this may not have been the copy used by the prompter at the performance.

Scene 1, Act I, begins with a conversation between Mr. Jarndyce and Esther at the Lincoln's Inn Chancery Garden about Esther's life before that moment. She presents herself as extremely indebted to Mr. Jarndyce. She thanks him for taking her in, becoming her guardian, and taking her to Bleak House, where she met Richard and Miss Clare. In this first scene, Esther addresses Mr. Jarndyce, but, in fact, both characters address the audience, telling them what they must know before the story actually begins. Mr. Jarndyce tells Esther—and the audience—that the lawsuits at the Chancery are a nightmare, because they never end. He says: "For once in Chancery ever in Chancery" (2). His own uncle went mad with the eternal Jarndyce and Jarndyce proceedings at Court, ending up shooting himself in frustration. When referring to the lawsuit and to the fateful destiny of his uncle, Mr. Jarndyce already presents the audience with a foreshadowing of what is to come later on in the play. The first scene, therefore, sets the ground and mood for the rest of the play.

An interesting aspect of this play is how the places are depicted by the characters. Unfortunately, as we have seen, the copy I read at the British Library does not provide any set instructions. It cannot be known if it is only in this version that this information is lacking, or if there was no such information recorded. Nonetheless, in certain moments of the play, the characters refer to the setting around them (whether it was actually on stage or left for the audience's imagination, it is not certain), evoking a Gothic atmosphere. When talking to Esther about the Chancery, Mr. Jarndyce describes it as "so crowded, so surrounded with deeds, clients dead, pleaders are dead, chancellors—all ghosts" (3). As in Dickens' novel, Elphinstone and Neale's adaptation depict the Chancery as the source of fear and mystery, as the Gothic castle full of ghosts. Whether the set where Esther and Mr. Jarndyce are had a gothic appearance or not, Mr. Jarndyce's description of it suffices to involve the audience in a Gothic atmosphere.

The sinister talk about the Chancery comes to a halt with the entrance of Ada and Richard on stage. The conversation then leads to another topic: Richard's choices for occupation until Miss Flite enters the stage, an "old little woman". She approaches them and says: "Some call me a little mad woman" (4). It seems that she makes the other characters uncomfortable. She recognizes the young people as the wards in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and for that reason she tells them that she is always at the Chancery. She is expecting her judgment which should come before the Day of Judgment. She goes on talking nonstop: she talks about her birds—twenty of them, which have, as in Dickens' novel, curious names, such as Dark, Ashes, Despair, and Death. The names of the birds also foreshadow the end of the story—, about her landlord, Mr. Krook, and his cat.

Richard appears to be the most disturbed by the old lady's presence. He says to the others: "She's mad, let us give her the goodbye" (6). Miss Flite concludes her speech by saying she would be honoured if the young wards payed her a visit at her apartment: "I have pay'd[?][12] nearly all my life in it, and some day I shall die in it" (6). Miss Flite utters these words without knowing that a dead man already lies in another chamber in Mr. Krook's lodgings. Again, Mrs. Flite's speech turns out to be prophetic. Esther and Ada follow the old woman, and Richard has no choice but to follow.

The second scene in the first act begins in the exterior of Krook's shop with Miss Flite, Esther, Richard and Ada. Just as in Dickens' novel, Miss Flite refers to Mr. Krook as "the Chancellor", in charge of everything in his establishment. Miss Flite takes her visitors up the stairs to her apartment. When they are on their way, she alerts them: "Don't you tumble against his door, he's a very odd man"[13], "very learned, very poor, and very queer" (7). Explaining Miss Flite's comment, while Esther accompanies Miss Flite upstairs, Mr. Krook tells Ada and Richard that he has two lodgers: Miss Flite and the man she referred to, a law writer.

When the visitor's leave Mr. Krook's shop, another unexpected guest arrives: Mr. Tulkinghorn. He has come to ask Mr. Krook if he has a lodger who copies law. He would like to know his name, and Mr. Krook answers: "Nemo". Mr. Tulkinghorn is surprised: "Why, that's the Latin for none!" (10). Tulkinghorn insists to see the man, but Krook says: "Well, I don't know—if I call him perhaps he wouldn't come—he's a very odd man" (10). The adjective "odd" is used several times to refer to Nemo, adding to the mystery surrounding his identity. The audience is thus incited to anticipate and dread at the same time the encounter with such a man. Mr. Krook ends up giving Tulkinghorn a candle and shows him the way to Nemo's chamber.

Scene 3 happens in the bedroom, where there is, according to the brief stage description, "the body of a man lying on bed" (10). Tulkinghorn enters the stage holding the candle. The fact that Tulkinghorn holds a candle emphasises the darkness of the room. Again, there is not much stage description, but Tulkinghorn's words help us to set the atmosphere: "What a horrid looking place!" (10). He sees the body on the bed and says: "He must be sleeping sound. It's very odd, he feels cold.—the eyes are open and faded.—I feel very uncomfortable. Bless me, what's that? It looks like the eyes of the archfiend come to claim his victim. […] Does your lodger keep often in this way?" (10-11). Krook has entered the stage bringing another light. Tulkinghorn's description of the man adds to the mystery involving Nemo. Krook decides to call Mr. Woodcourt, the "young surgeon". He checks the body and states that "the man's dead" (11). Miss Flite connects the dead man in the room to the Chancery: "Oh dear, I can't bear to look at the corpse. It puts me too much in mind of Chancery" (12). The Chancery is thus once again brought to the conversation, connecting the place with destruction and death. Throughout the entire play, the Chancery is a recurrent theme, adding to its use as a Gothic metaphor.

---

[12] Whenever the handwriting on the manuscript renders a word unintelligible, I add the symbol [?] next to it to suggest I am not sure of it being exactly the word written on the manuscript.

[13] Throughout the play text copied by Austin, he underlies certain words—in my view, to reinforce the fact that a certain word or expression should be emphasised by the actor. When this happens, I will underline the same word in my transcription, as this example shows.

When Tulkinghorn sees Nemo's body on the bed, he compares his eyes to those of an "archfiend". The connection between Nemo and the devil is reinforced by Mr. Krook's observation: "Bless me, how very odd—they do say he had sold himself to the devil" (12). All the negative comments about Nemo create the expectation that he is the villain in the story. That expectation, however, will be challenged as the play goes on.

Mr. Krook exits, leaving only Woodcourt and Nemo's body on stage. Woodcourt gives a melancholic monologue about the ephemerality of life: "and after all we are but food for worms" (12). Referring to Nemo, he says: "This man has died in the gloom of the evening without a living creature near him, not even a dog or bird, to which he might have bade a sad farewell" (12). Tulkinghorn comments on Woodcourt's words—whether in surprise, admiration or irony, it is not possible to know; it would depend on the actor's interpretation—: "You are a philosopher, my friend" (12). The theme of death and its finality is recurrent in the play—another manifestation of the Gothic discourse. The scene ends with yet another melancholic monologue from Woodcourt on mortality: “The rich and poor alike must come to this—alike must die, and alike be forgotten in the tide of time” (15).

The melancholy tone from the previous scene carries on in scene 4, in an apartment at Chesney Wold. On stage are Lady Dedlock and Mrs. Rouncewell. Lady Dedlock is complaining about the place. Once again, there are no set descriptions, but her words give us and the audience the feel of the place: “How shocking to live in such a dull monotonous place I shall die of ennui”, “I really am bored to death” (15). She constantly uses the words “die” and “death”, adding to the representation of Chesney Wold as a Gothic mansion, a place of death, and work as a foreboding of her own death—although the hint was not taken by the producers of the play, who keep Lady Dedlock alive until the end of the performance. Sir Leicester enters on stage, bringing a letter from Mr. Tulkinghorn which, he says, concerns her ladyship. He reads: “Please to tell her ladyship that I have made enquiries after the person alluded to, and have seen him” (16). It is a very mysterious note, although the audience familiar with Dickens’ work would know to whom Mr. Tulkinghorn was referring. At that point, Tulkinghorn himself enters the stage. He explains the note, saying he has found “the person whose handwriting engaged your ladyship’s attention” (16). The lady says: “You found the person—”, to which Tulkinghorn completed: “Dead”, “some are of the opinion that he committed suicide” (16-7). Lady Dedlock asks Tulkinghorn if there were any papers or documents with the deceased, and Tulkinghorn answers negatively. The lady expresses her relief: “Thank Heaven!” (17). Lady Dedlock and Sir Leicester leave the room; only Tulkinghorn and Mrs. Rouncewell remain. Curiously, Tulkinghorn asks the woman why the terrace of the west is called the Ghost Walk. It is curious because there was no indication that the conversation would lead to that topic. However, it is of great importance to the plot, and the audience must be aware of it. As a consequence, Elphinstone and Neale decided to refer to the Dedlocks' curse in a very unlikely conversation between Tulkinghorn and Mrs. Rouncewell. She explains: "Because at certain times of the year a ghost[?] walks that terrace by night—A lady—if the night is quiet, you may hear her footsteps as plain as anything" (17-8). Mr. Tulkinghorn, nonetheless, seems sceptical: "The Lady's ghost must be [?] heavy footed indeed" (18). Mr. Tulkinghorn dissipates the Gothic atmosphere with irony. Nevertheless, Mrs. Rouncewell is earnest. After Mr. Tulkinghorn leaves for London, she thinks out loud: "Now I think of it—it's very odd—but all the Lady Dedlocks were fond of this walk. I wouldn't go there in the middle of the night for the best necklace in her ladyship's cabinet if I was to see a ghost—a real ghost, I do think that it would make a ghost of me" (18). The audience is thus left with Mrs. Rouncewell's apprehensions as the scene ends. That all the Lady Dedlocks were fond of the Ghost Walk adds to the foreshadowing of what is to come—at least in Dickens' version. Mr. Tulkinghorn and Mrs. Rouncewell represent two opposites regarding the belief in the supernatural. While Tulkinghorn, a man of rationality, discards the existence of ghosts, Mrs. Rouncewell, belonging to the female domestic sphere, believes in the possibility. As Hoevelar points out as a characteristic of Gothic drama, the division between the real and the unreal becomes blurred as sceptical characters such as Tulkinghorn are faced with supernatural occurrences, challenging their own beliefs.

The next scene is the fifth scene in Act I. However, Lee copied it as Scene 4, again. That mistake is corrected in the following scene, which appears as Scene 6. The scene is called "The Inquest Room", and the Coroner interrogates people about their connections to the deceased Nemo. This scene works as a moment of comic relief after Mrs. Rouncewell's fears about the ghost in Chesney Wold, with a lot of characters talking. Acquaintances of Nemo are called forth, including Mrs. Piper and Joe (as it is spelled in the manuscript). The Beadle and Mr. Guppy are also in the room. The Beadle remembers the boy Joe, who used to know Nemo, and the Coroner orders that he should be fetched. The Beadle brings the boy. The Coroner asks Joe his name, and he answers: “Joe”. The Coroner wants to know more: “Joe what?”, to which Joe answers: “I don’t know” (21). The audience is thus moved to feel sorry for the character of the young boy, who had no parents and could not read or spell: “Never heard of such a thing. I know that a broom’s a broom, and that’s all I knows [sic]” (21). The Coroner gets upset and does not want to take his evidence, but he ends up letting the boy talk. Joe explains that he knew Nemo: “He was so very kind to me he was” (21). He gave Joe money sometimes, but he had never mentioned any family or relations. After all the testimonies are heard, the Coroner decides the death was not suicide. The scene ends with an emotional speech from Joe about his only friend, now dead: “I’ll see him buried that’s what I will, and if they’ll let me, I’ll plant daisies and of [sic] the fields on his grave for tho’ he were [sic] a very queer man in his way, he was always very good to me he was” (23). The audience, probably moved by the young boy’s speech, begins to consider Nemo in a different light—no more as the villain who sold himself to the devil, but as a poor man who was good to a poor boy. This scene also illustrates Dickens’ social criticism, present throughout the novel *Bleak House*, condemning the injustice of the law when dealing with the poor, such as Jo.

The following scene, Scene 6, is the last one in Act I. It is set at the Ghost’s Walk with Esther, Ada, and Richard. Esther says she hopes they are not trespassing, because she would like to walk there for half an hour. Ada asks her: “Then you are not afraid of ghosts?” (23), to which she answers negatively. So Ada and Richard feel comfortable to leave her alone while they go to the Park Keeper to ask for permission to walk around the Dedlocks’ property. Esther remains on stage when Lady Dedlock appears. She talks to herself, speaking of Nemo’s death and her daughter: “I cannot rest. The remembrance of the death of him who—but let me not think of it—why was I not there! Great Heaven! […] Oh my child, had she but lived, then had her mother been a wiser and a happier woman" (27). By speaking these words, Lady Dedlock makes the audience aware of her past: the fact the she knew the deceased Nemo, and that she had a daughter who died.

Lady Dedlock sees the intruder, Esther, and seems very disturbed to see the girl: "Great Heaven! That face—those features!" (27). And when Esther speaks, she exclaims: "That voice so sweet" (27). At this moment, the audience realizes that Lady Dedlock recognizes the young lady somehow. Soon, the stage direction states that "bell tolls 12", and "a figure is seen at the back" (27). The number "12" written next to "bell tolls" may suggest that the bell should strike twelve times; an effect that would build up the tension in the scene. When facing the apparition, Lady Dedlock exclaims: "'Tis him! 'Tis him!—Oh, much wrong'd ghost[?] speak" (27). Lady Dedlock, therefore, recognizes the figure of the ghost, which, according to the lady, is of a man. The producers of this adaptation thus decided that the ghost haunting the Ghost's Walk was Nemo, the wronged captain, although Dickens' version takes the story in quite another direction—in the novel, the ghost turns out to be the spirit of a former Lady Dedlock still wandering at Chesney Wold. This decision may have been because the producers did not yet know the identity of the ghost at the time, and choosing Nemo was a plausible option, since he had died in the beginning of the play; or choosing Nemo may have been with the purpose of adding more spectacle to the performance: it is Captain Hawdon who comes back from the dead to secure his daughter's rightful inheritance.

When Esther sees the ghost, she—despite her previous allegations of not fearing apparitions—succumbs to the floor. As the stage directions point out, "The figure points to Esther who sinks to her knees the the [sic] drop slowly falls" (27), and this is how the first act ends. If the apparition is indeed a ghost of the deceased Nemo who appears to his former wife and daughter—there is no indication in the stage directions as to which actor plays the ghost:

whther the same actor who plays Nemo or another—then his pointing at Esther would signify him trying to inform Lady Dedlock that Esther is their daughter. The most attentive spectators at the time may have gotten the hint. The first act thus ends in a very dramatic way with a strikingly Gothic atmosphere: bells tolling, a ghost appearing, and a lady in distress collapsing. The clash between the real and the unreal is also illustrated by Esther, who has her logical convictions challenged by the apparition of the ghost.

Act II begins at the shooting gallery with George and Phil. It is Mr. Austin Lee who continues the copying in the second act. In the scene, the characters talk about the countryside. Mr. Smallweed enters the stage on a chair carried by a cabman, and followed by Rachel, his granddaughter. Joe also helps carry Smallweed. George recognizes him as Joe, the boy who knew Nemo. Joe says he is sad because of the place where they buried his friend: "he were buried a'most like a dog, cause he were [sic] poor but poor folk and rich folk will all go to the same place" (28). Once again, the idea that all men, rich and poor alike, encounter the same fate when they die is brought up. The inevitability of death is a Gothic theme, explored by writers such as Edgar Allan Poe. Moreover, the condemnation of the way Nemo was buried represents another layer of Dickens' social criticism: the prejudice against the poor and social inequality.

Smallweed has come to the shooting gallery to tell George that Tulkinghorn wants him. As he knows that George was a friend of Captain Hawdon, he wants to know if George has "a writing—a letter—a something of that sort that can be sworn to" (29). George answers that he has a letter: "but to tell you the truth, I would not give up as much as would make a cartridge unless I know the reason why" (29). Smallweed offers him money, but he is resolute: "If it was a 100, if it were to do an injury to anyone, I would not give the letters I have" (29). Smallweed resorts to blackmail: George owes money to Smallweed, and he demands to collect it right away, otherwise Mr. Bagnet would have to pay for him. George does not wish to harm Mr. Bagnet and his family, but Mr. Smallweed will not negotiate: "you refused to give me the letter, I refuse to give you time—I'll see you perish, die, rot in jail before I'll speak a word in your behalf or help you a farthing" (30). George sees himself helpless and ends up giving Hawdon's last letter to him to Smallweed. Smallweed pays him £5,00, and warns him that Tulkinghorn will probably come looking for the letter too. George explains to Phil that Captain Hawdon formed an attachment in the past that ended unhappily. The girl was from a poor but proud family. They were privately married, but his Regiment was sent off to the West Indies, so the affair was kept secret. He had to leave, and six months later, the lady in question brought a daughter into the world. Miss Barbary helped the lady, so no one knew about this affair, not even her family. George says: "Never did I think anybody else, except the Captain, and me from the letters that came" (31). When the Regiment returned to England, Hawdon learned that the lady had remarried to a man of rank. The captain was believed dead until George received a letter with his handwriting asking him to come to Mr. Krook, Rag and Bottle Merchant. George accepted the invitation, but found his "dear gallant commander" dead in the midst of poverty. In this adaptation, therefore, Captain Hawdon knows about the existence of his daughter. Furthermore, he lets George know about his identity as Nemo and his lodging at Mr. Krook's.

Act Two, scene two takes place at a park with Richard, Ada, and Esther, who talk about Richard's career plans. Ada asks: "Did you ever have a serious thought in your life, Richard?" (32-3). Esther reminds them that Mr. Jarndyce has suggested they wait five years before marrying so Richard can choose his profession in life. Richard decides to take Ada back to the house to talk to Mr. Jarndyce, while Esther remains on stage. Mr. Woodcourt comes to warn Esther of a danger. He tells her that Mademoiselle Hortense and the agents of Kenge & Carboys are lurking to seize her person. It is interesting that Mr. Woodcourt mentions Mademoiselle Hortense, because she had not been mentioned earlier in the play, she does not figure in the list of characters, and she does not play a significant role in this adaptation. After his warning to Esther, Mr. Woodcourt tells her not to worry, because he will be around to assist her.

When they leave, Lady Dedlock enters the stage, speaking to herself. She says she will visit his grave and transfer his body to the Church at Chesney Wold. Even though she does not speak his name, the audience should know that she refers to Nemo. She says: “Then only can I calm this perturbation of my heart” (34). Sir Leicester Dedlock follows her on stage, saying he was terrified when she talked about having seen an apparition. The lady dismisses his fears: “It was a silly affair—perhaps dwelling on the old legend, and meeting that young lady, my nervous sensibility received a sudden shock” (34). She then tells him that one of her relatives was shipwrecked and the body “obscurely interred” (35), and that is why she wishes permission to remove it to Chesney Wold Church. Sir Leicester grants her wish. It is clear that the person she wishes to bury at Chesney Wold Church is Nemo. Soon afterwards, Mr. Guppy arrives to see Lady Dedlock. He asks her if she knows a lady called Esther Summerson or a Miss Barbary. Lady Dedlock answers negatively. So Guppy informs her that Esther’s real name is Esther Hawdon. Now everything becomes clear to Lady Dedlock and to the audience: Esther is her and Captain Hawdon’s daughter. She exclaims: “The mystery is unravell’d! Esther Summerson is my child” (36). Guppy then tells her ladyship that he can obtain the letters that mention her and Captain Hawdon’s names.

In the same scene, Esther returns to the stage. When Lady Dedlock sees her, she asks her forgiveness: “Aye—for I have most foully wrong’d thee—I thy guilty mother—my child—my child” (36). Moreover, according to the stage direction, Lady Dedlock “falls on her [Esther’s] neck” (36). In this manner, the second scene in Act II ends with the revelation about Esther’s birth and Lady Dedlock’s past, ending with the fall of the lady, adding to the melodramatic characteristic of the play.

The following scene is very peculiar. It takes place in a landscape with Tulkinghorn and Rachel. It is not clear who this Rachel is: if Smallweed's granddaughter or Miss Rachel, who took care of Esther after Miss Barbary's death. The first option seems to be more probable. In any case, a conversation between Tulkinghorn and any one of the women would be very unlikely. In the play, they talk about Hawdon, and how Tulkinghorn wants the letters. He explains that due to Lady Dedlock and Captain Hawdon's affair and to the Jarndyce lawsuit, Ether has become a rich heiress. He says to Rachel: "As I have long taken a fancy to the girl and could I make her my wife, I should of course command all her fortune" (38). The story thus takes an unexpected turn in this adaptation when Tulkinghorn sees in Esther a possibility to raise his fortune. George is hidden and hears the conversation between Tulkinghorn and the girl. He says: "This was the man that ruined Captain by involving him in a lawsuit and a family quarrel, and now he would ruin his child's too, but my commander shall be avenged" (38). Woodcourt enters the stage and joins George. He tells him that he has discovered who is after Esther: it is Tulkinghorn assisted by Mademoiselle Hortense. They agree they will not let them take Esther.

Scene 4 is a short scene set in the exterior of a churchyard. Joe enters the stage, followed by Lady Dedlock. She asks him where the paupers are buried. He shows her and wipes his eyes when he talks about his only friend, who is buried there. By the words Joe uses to describe his friend, the lady knows he speaks of Captain Hawdon.

The next scene happens in the Ghost Terrace with Richard and Mr. Jarndyce. The young man tells Mr. Jarndyce that he has given up the army and will now pursue a medical career. Clearly, the mentions of Richard's different career attempts in three different moments in the play work as a comic relief—a moment when the audience would laugh at the boy's inconsistency. Joe joins the stage, and Richard asks him who he is and what has brought him from London. The boy answers: "Cause the Pollis [sic] won't let me die in the streets, they say it's against the law" (40). He adds: "Besides, what have I to do in London now they've taken away my friends' body that I was so fond on [sic]" (40). By means of Joe's words the audience learns that Lady Dedlock probably managed to remove Nemo's body to the church at Chesney Wold. Joe is thus hindered from seeing the place where his friend is buried. Richard seems concerned about the poor boy and decides to take him to Woodcourt. It is strange that Richard, Mr. Jarndyce and Joe should be on the Ghost Terrace, which is part of the Dedlocks' property. That must have been a choice of the producers to minimize scene changes, therefore comprising different characters in the same scene.

The three characters leave the stage, while Woodcourt and George enter. They plan to catch Tulkinghorn in the act of offending so they are able to punish him. They remain hidden on stage when Lady Dedlock and Esther enter, followed by Tulkinghorn and two men. The men grab Esther, and Tulkinghorn points a pistol to Lady Dedlock's head. Following the action, George, Woodcourt and Richard—who, apparently, returned to the stage—arrive to save them. Subsequently, Mr. Jarndyce, Mrs. Rouncewell, Sir Leicester, Ada and the servants enter the stage to check what the matter is. In other words, all characters are reunited on stage, with the exception of Joe, Mr. Krook, and Miss Flite. In the confusion on stage, Tulkinghorn is shot. Lady Dedlock says he would have killed her own daughter if he had lived. Sir Leicester is surprised by this statement. So Mr. Jarndyce tells him the whole story, and that Esther will be no burden to Sir Leicester, because she has inherited a great fortune. Sir Leicester reacts in a most incredible manner: "I am most happy to hear [?]—your daughter shall be mine.—Come to my arms and ever find a father in me" (42). In this manner, Sir Leicester does not question his wife's behaviour nor the existence of a daughter of whom he was not aware for so many years. Esther accepts Sir Leicester's offer to be a father for her. Lady Dedlock adds to the feeling of family reunion, addressing Esther: "But you have forgot Esther—here is one who has a claim on you I shall be happy to receive him as a son" (42). Lady Dedlock refers to Mr. Woodcourt, who wishes to marry Esther. Taking advantage of the situation, Richard states that he wishes to marry Ada. Mr. Jarndyce accepts the marriage on the condition that Richard behaves during the next twelve months.

George is also thanked by the crowd that gathered on stage. Richard says: "The shooting of Tulkinghorn not among the least" (53). Therefore, the audience can conclude that it was George who shot Tulkinghorn during the confusion. Curiously, the fact that Tulkinghorn was shot does not seem to be regarded as a crime by the other characters. At this point, Miss Flite joins the rest of the characters. She is very happy: "You have all gain'd your suits" (43). Last but not least, Joe also enters the stage, feeling very ill. He is surprised when he looks at Esther's face: "I can see thy father's face in thee" (43). How he learned that Esther was Nemo's daughter is not clear. The play ends with Joe's speech bidding farewell to life: "Lay poor Joe in the pauper churchyard next to him, and paint[?] on my tombstone that he—he was very good to me he was" (44). The final scene thus combines a happy ending with prospect marriages with Joe's tragic death—a very melodramatic combination.

Elphinstone and Neale's adaptation of Dickens' *Bleak House* exploits several Gothic motifs, including the Gothic depiction of the Chancery, connected to death and destruction, and the Gothic depiction of Chesney Wold, also connected to death; the mystery involving Nemo's identity; the legend of the Ghost Walk, enhanced by the apparition of a real ghost under the toll of twelve bells, recognized by Lady Dedlock, who causes Esther to faint; a plot of villains to seize the innocent lady; and reflections on human mortality. It is important to emphasise that by the time the play premiered on stage, only the first forty-nine chapters of Dickens' novel had been released. The producers, therefore, had to imagine an ending to the plot that would render it coherent. The possibilities were, of course, many. It is curious to compare Elphinstone and Neale's choices with Pitt's, who premiered another version of *Bleak House* just two days before.

Elphinstone and Neale's *'Bleak House', drama in two acts* premiered at the City of London Theatre on Monday, June 6, 1853. On the day before, the newspaper *The Era* published in the section devoted to the programmes at the London theatres—published every Sunday— the following:

> CITY OF LONDON THEATRE,—Lessees, Messrs, JOHNSON and NELSON LEE. On Monday, June 6th, 1853, and during the week (first time), BLEAK HOUSE; or The Wandering Spirit of the Ghost Walk, introducing Messrs. W. Searle, W. Travers, Worrell, W. H. Dibdin, Rowbotham, A. Saville, G. T. Frampton, Morelli, Hazlewood, Coreno, Loveday, Mrs. R. Barnett, Miss Clara Carter, and Miss Eliza Clayton.

This is most likely the entire cast of the play. Unfortunately, the promptbook copied by Lee does not contain a cast-list, so it is not possible to identify what role each actor played. It is also interesting to note that all female actors appear last in the cast list, illustrating the status of the female actress even within the theatre company. After the performance of *Bleak House*, the theatre would present "LA STATUE BLANCHE, arranged by Mr. W. Stevens and supported by him, Miss Adelaide Downing, and the Corps de Ballet. Terminating with 'Pop Goes the Weesel.' To conclude with THE WILL AND THE WAY". An evening at the theatre during the Victorian era was a long event. More than one play would be performed in a mixture of genres and different lengths.

On Saturday of the following week, June 11, *The Bristol Mercury*, a west-country newspaper, published a review on the sixteenth instalment of *Bleak House*, issued in June. The instalment consists of the chapters fifty until fifty-three. The author of the review proves very enthusiastic about Dickens' work: "As the work proceeds we are more and more pleased with 'Bleak House,' which in the skill wherewith a more than usual number of characters and complicated incidents are dovetailed into a telling story, is one of the most artistic of the productions of Dickens' genius". The review illustrates the popularity of Dickens and his work at the time, which most likely would have encouraged Elphinston, Neale, Pitt and others to adapt it to the stage. Following the productions at the City of London Theatre and the one at the Royal Pavilion, which will be discussed next, new developments of the story were released. However, as far as my research shows, neither one of the scripts were rewritten after the publication of chapters 50 to 53.

The main focus of the reviewer of the instalment is the development of the plot of Tulkinghorn's murder. He writes: "The movements of the astute detective Bucket in quest of the murderer of Tulkinghorn become quite exciting, and the tolls threaten to gather round Lady Dedlock, although the observant reader will not fail to notice circumstances which fix the guilt in another quarter". In this manner, he asks the reader to read the instalment carefully and to think of a possible suspect other than Lady Dedlock. The review finishes with an extract from chapter 50; a not very striking one, in my view: Esther's description of Caddy Jellyby's baby. *Bleak House* also featured in the "New Books" catalogue of the Public Circulating Library in York, published at *The Yorkshire Gazette* on Saturday, June 11, 1853. *Bleak House* was by then, as the *The Bristol Mercury* review illustrates, extremely popular, and most likely an expected item at the Circulating Libraries.

The day after, Sunday 12, *The Era* published another call to Elphinstone and Neal's play at the City of London Theatre in the weekly theatre section. It reads as follows: "On Monday, and during the week, to commence with (second week), THE BLEAK HOUSE; or, The Wandering Spirit of the Ghost Walk. Placed on the stage in the most perfect manner possible, so as to realise Mr. Charles Dickens' admirable work". The advertisement thus refers to the play being in its second week of performance, and to it being staged "in the most perfect manner possible", perhaps to attract the theatre-goers to the City of London Theatre instead of to the Royal Pavilion, which was staging a different theatrical version of the novel.

The advertisement provides a list of actors in the play with only one alteration from the previous week: the addition of “Lacey”. The secondary entertainments that followed the main production changed partly: “Dancing by Miss Adelaide Downing”, who was also in the previous week’s with the Corps de Ballet, and “To conclude with (by permission) MIRANDA; or, The Idiot Boy, and the Murder at the Grange. Introducing the entire company”. This information illustrates how demanding theatre producing was during the nineteenth century. Audiences were avid play-goers, looking for new entertainment constantly. The producers would, therefore, be in constant search for new material; and the actors regularly learning new parts.

On June 19, *The Era* advertises the play once again. *Bleak House* was relocated as secondary entertainment. The advertisement reads as follows: “The ‘Summer Season’—Under the Acting direction of Mr. WILLIAM SEARLE. —On Monday, June 20th, 1853, and during the week, to commence with (first time) THE RYE HOUSE PLOT; or, Ruth, the Conspirator’s Daughter”. The cast in *The Rye House Plot* is the same of *Bleak House*, suggesting that the theatre worked with one fixed company of actors. It also illustrates the hardships of being an actor in the mid-nineteenth century: they would need to learn new lines for new productions almost weekly. Elphinstone and Neale’s play would be performed after Lady Adelaide Downing’s dancing: “Terminating with (last six nights at present) BLEAK HOUSE; or, The Wandering Spirit of the Ghost Walk. Introducing the entire Company”.

The last week of *Bleak House* at the City of London Theatre was also advertised at *Reynold’s Newspaper*, a periodical from London. It begins praising the “first night of an historical drama, The RYE-HOUSE PLOT”, which would be “placed upon the stage in the most correct manner possible”. The theatrical event would be “Terminating with (at second price) BLEAK HOUSE; or, The Wandering Spirit of the Ghost’s Walk. Introducing the entire company.” Elphinstone and Neale’s adaptation, therefore, lasted three weeks at the City of London Theatre; its admittance price having dropped to half in the last week.

4.2 At the Royal Pavilion Theatre

The production at the Royal Pavilion Theatre produced by Pitt, which ran in parallel to Elphinstone and Neale’s, seems to have been more successful. It remained on stage until July 3, 1853. As we have seen, the production received its license on June 6, 1853, but performances began on June 4; therefore, two days before the one at the City of London Theatre. The play, *The Bleak House, or the Spectre of the Ghost Walk, A Drama in 2 Acts*, is, as the title suggests, divided into two acts: the first composed of seven scenes, and the second of five scenes. The person who copied the first act is different from the person who copied the second act. The title page of the first act is not signed, so it could have been written by Pitt or by another person in the crew. The copier’s handwriting is difficult to decipher, especially as the act reaches its end; the person probably got tired of writing, and the calligraphy became less legible. Differently from the Elphinstone and Neale’s version copied by Lee, this one brings a list of characters present in the act in the beginning of each one, and provides certain stage directions and character descriptions.

According to the set directions—which are underlined, drawing attention to the moments of scene change—scene 1 in Act I begins at the “Exterior of Krook’s House, Rag & Bottle Establishment, The Old Black Doll, Best Price, Given for Old Bones White Rags & [?]”. That is probably what must have been written on the sign at Krook’s establishment on stage. Enter Tulkinghorn and Snagsby. Tulkinghorn is the first to speak: “You now understand me, I expect this man to be a very different person from what he represents himself, and that he has papers in his possession that would be of the greatest account to me”

(2). The play thus begins in a very abrupt manner with a conversation between Tulkinghorn and Snagsby that must have started before the moment they appear on stage. Mr. Tulkinghorn wishes to know the name of the man, to which Snagsby responds: “Well, he has always gone here by the name of ‘Nemo’” (2). Tulkinghorn reacts: “‘Nemo’, Why that is Latin for No one, it must be fictitious, but this is expected” (2). It is curious that Pitt decided to transfer this dialogue with Tulkinghorn to Snagsby instead of Mr. Krook as it is in Dickens’ novel and in Elphinstone and Neale’s adaptation. Tulkinghorn asks for more information about the man, but Snagsby can only say the man was “very clever” and had the “appearance of a foreigner” (2). The discussion concerning Nemo appears in the second scene of Act I in Elphinstone and Neale’s adaptation, but Pitt decided to open his play with the enigmatic conversation, conferring a mysterious atmosphere to the play from its very first scene.

The following page of the manuscript is very interesting. It brings two notes from the copier concerning the play text and its performance. These two are the only notes throughout the entire material. The first note goes as follows: “Whenever Snagsby says ‘not to make too great a point of it’, he turns the back of his hand to his mouth and coughs” (3). It is, therefore, a note concerning the performance as directed to the actor playing the role of Sngasby. As the character in Dickens’ novel, Pitt’s Snagsby keeps repeating the phrase “not to make too great a point of it” and coughing; actions that mark his character. The second note is longer, and refers to Dickens himself:

> Having received information that an offence has been given by Mr. Dickens in the description of the inquests as making it too ludicrous I have left that scene out in this version and interviewed the witnesses in the Death scene. This is also will be [sic] the only version in which Captain Hawdon is resuscitated and is the ghost of himself. The Lord Chamberlain has, I understand, received instructions to suppress any comic coroner’s inquest, as in the work.

This is an interesting note, since it illustrates Dickens' intervention in the production. That was a situation liable to happen when adaptations occurred during Dickens' lifetime. This episode illustrates Dickens' awareness of the theatrical adaptations of his works happening at the time, although he did not appreciate most of them. As Callow explains, "Dickens despaired at the violence done to his work before he had even finished it; but his affection for the theatre stopped him from preventing his friends the actors from trying to earn a decent crust at his expense; in the absence of copyright laws, it was virtually impossible to stop them, anyway" (79). If something really bothered him, however, he would intervene. In Pitt's adaptation, Dickens' concern, according to the note, was that the scenes of criminal inquests should not be too comic—which is the case in the production at the City of London Theatre, curiously. Scene 1.5, entitled "The Inquest Room", is represented in a very comic manner, with several characters, including the talkative Mrs. Piper, on stage and speaking at different turns. Dickens' taking offence resulted in the permission for the Lord Chamberlain to suppress any comic representations of the inquest on the stage at the Royal Pavilion. That is why such scene was omitted in Pitt's version. However, it is interesting to note that the comic scene in Elphinstone and Neale's adaptation was apparently not suppressed. Perhaps Dickens did not attend the performances at the City of London, or was not pleased specifically with Pitt's work with the scene. In any case, what is certain is that Pitt relocated the witnesses' interviews to Nemo's death scene, and the interrogator is Tulkinghorn instead of the Coroner.

In Pitt's first scene in Act I, Mr. Krook overhears Mr. Tulkinghorn and Snagsby's conversation about the importance of getting the papers in Nemo's possession. Krook approaches the two men talking and is introduced to Tulkinghorn by Snagsby as the Chancellor, "as he is call'd here, from his constant attendance at the court" (3). The topic of the Chancery is inserted in the conversation, and it is depicted, as in Elphinstone and Neale's and Dickens' works, as a place of death and destruction. Krook says: "Chancery was worse than being ground to bits in a slow mill, roasted to death at a slow fire, stung by a single bee, drowned by drops and going mad by grains” (4). In both adaptations so far, as well as in Dickens’ novel, Chancery can be compared to the desolate castle in traditional Gothic literature, the source of evil and death.

The conversation then shifts to Krook’s lodger, Nemo. In this production, also following Dickens’ characterisation, Nemo is depicted as “a very queer man indeed” (4). Krook points out that: “sometimes he doesn’t speak to me for a month” (4). Tulkinghorn, nevertheless, is not as interested in Nemo’s person as he is in his papers. At this moment, Krook speaks about his other lodger, Miss Flite, who he describes as “mad, mad as a March hare, and has been for the last 20 years”[14] (50). This is a neat way to introduce the character’s name, who soon afterwards arrives on stage. Dickens’ multiple characters can be more easily followed on page than on stage, especially to those in the audience not familiar with the novel. Talking about a character before he/she enters the stage—as is the case here with Miss Flite—may help the spectator to connect the name to the actor playing the role. As she goes on stage, Miss Flite says she was in court and had just met the wards in Jarndyce, “charming young people”, and she hopes they will come to visit her soon. In this way, Miss Flite introduces more characters, the wards in Jarndyce, who will join the plot soon, although they hold no significant role in the adaptation. The old lady retires, and Krook tells Tulkinghorn he may go upstairs to see Nemo.

Scene 2 takes place at “the law writer’s bedroom”, “very wretched”, “very dark”, “very shabby” (7). The way Nemo’s bedroom is described refers to it as a gloomy and dirty place, which, in connection to the queer character of Nemo, contributes to the mysterious atmosphere. The scene begins with Captain Hawdon, or Nemo, alone in the bedroom, but still alive. He mumbles about his wretched existence: “Chancery—poverty—misery—I can bear it no longer, the dose of opium that I have now taken will, I think, end all" (6). This extract suggests that he deliberately took a large amount of the drug. He goes on: "All will soon be over, Farewell to a world that once was pleased but now, alas—how changed,—how changed" (7). The beginning of this scene thus presents a moment that does not occur in either Dickens' original or Elphinstone and Neale' adaptation. Nemo is given a voice before his death, and the audience learns a bit about him: that he was irrevocably miserable and disappointed at life, and may have committed deliberate suicide.

---

[14] As in Elphinstone and Neale’s version, every time a word appears underlined, it is because it was so emphasized in the original manuscript.

After Nemo's monologue, stage directions suggest "(music) for a few moments, he seems to be [?], and then appears as lifeless—the door slowly opens, and Tulkinghorn appears with a candle, the Eyes in the shutters become opake [sic]" (7). The use of music would definitely have enhanced the sinister atmosphere of the moment. Moreover, the stage directions also point to a set design feature: Eyes in the shutters that become opaque. In Dickens' novel, when Tulkinghorn finds Nemo's body at the end of chapter X, the narrator describes the deceased's room: "No curtain veils the darkness of the night, but the discoloured shutters are drawn together, and through the two gaunt holes pierced in them, famine might be staring in—the Banshee of the man upon the bed" (151). Pitt's adaptation preserved the two holes in the shutters in the set, which could be regarded as the two eyes of a Banshee, the spirit that foretells death. When Tulkinghorn enters the stage with a candle, the Eyes become opaque. The stage directions continue: "[Tulkinghorn] shakes the body, the candle drops out of the stick and the stage becoming instantly dark and the Eyes appear again" (7). These directions suggest a powerful scene with an intense Gothic atmosphere. The candle light is extinguished, leaving the characters on stage—and possibly the audience as well—in complete darkness until the Eyes shine again, foreshadowing the man's death that Tulkinghorn shall find in the room. He calls Krook to bring another light, who does so, and relieves the audience from the darkness. This set feature and lighting techniques add to the spectacle of the performance.

Tulkinghorn and Krook are both on stage, along with the body. Tulkinghorn asks: "Does your lodger often sleep as sound as this—is it his habit?" (7). Tulkinghorn seems concerned: "The eyes are open and appear [?]. 'Tis more like Death than sleep" (7). At this point, the Gothic atmosphere is broken by Mr. Krook's comic comment: "he surely would not think of dying without giving me a week's notice" (7). The strategy of alternating comic and tragic moments was a melodramatic as well as a typical Dickensian feature, borrowed from the theatrical world. As the author writes in *Oliver Twist*, "it is the custom on the stage, in all good murderous melodramas, to present the tragic and the comic scenes, in as regular alternation, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky, well-cured bacon" (quoted in Callow 79). In this case in Pitt's adaptation, however, the tragic and the comic share the same scene. Tulkinghorn represents the sobriety of the tragedy, while Krook represents the comedy.

Mr. Woodcourt is summoned on stage to take a look at the deceased. In Elphinstone and Neale's adaptation, Woodcourt is depicted philosophising about the mortality of human beings in extensive monologues. In Pitt's version, Woodcourt grieves the fallen man's death by referring to the finality of death, and how it ends all earthly troubles. Pitt's Woodcourt is less dramatic and more sophisticated, alluding even to a passage in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "Whatever were his troubles, they can affect him no more more [sic], life's rivals are past and the perturbed opium led to that home from where no traveller has returned"[15] (9).

At this point, other characters join the stage, including Snagsby, Mrs. Piper, and other neighbours. As the note in Scene 1 suggested, the inquest was relocated to the present death scene in order to satisfy Dickens' desire not to render the Coroner's inquest scene too ludicrous. Mrs. Piper, the comic character, speaks a lot and cannot refrain from diverging from the topic when interviewed by Tulkinghorn concerning Nemo's death. She finally becomes useful by stating that Jo, the crossing sweeper, knew the man well. Snagsby leaves to fetch him and returns with the boy. When interviewed by Tulkinghorn, Jo answers: "I'm very sorry he's dead for he was always very good to me—he was—that he was" (11). In a touching manner, the boy recounts the night when it was cold and rainy and he did not have any money to buy lodging at Tom-All-Alone's; then "Mr. Nemo" arrived and gave him money so he could find a place to shelter from the cold and the rain. He adds, crying: "And till I'm as cold as he is now, I shall never forget it—for he was very good to me, he was" (12). At this point, the audience begins to know more about Nemo, who seemed so mysterious in the beginning of the play. The audience learns he had helped a poor boy, and may change their minds concerning the deceased's character. Once again, the tragic atmosphere is interrupted by Krook's comic remark: "the next lodger I takes [sic] in I'll have it in Black & White, that he don't [sic] die, without giving me warning" (12). The alternation between tragic and comic also adds to the melodramatic characteristic of the adaptation.

---

[15] In 3.1 in *Hamlet*, Prince Hamlet refers to death as "the undiscover'd country from whose bourn no traveller returns".

As all characters leave the stage, Woodcourt remains and reflects about mortality. He ends it by praising science, especially "in its noblest and most gratifying branch ameliorating the pains of suffering mortality". He is clearly making a reference to his own profession, that of a doctor who studies to fight mortality. It is possible to detect here a common nineteenth-century Gothic motif: the opposition between science and faith. Woodcourt's speech praises the rationality of science, while later on in the play his disbelief on the supernatural is questioned. Such issues are represented in Gothic stories, such as *Frankenstein* (1818) and *Dracula* (1897), for instance.

The following scene was supposed to be at "Bleak House street" with Esther and Mrs. Rouncewell, but the copier either made a mistake or decided to exclude the scene after he/she started writing it. The beginning of the scene and Mrs. Rouncewell's and Esther's lines were crossed out. Since no other scene begins with a dialogue between Esther and Mrs. Rouncewell, the second option is more probable. The following page reworks the content of Scene 3, bringing Esther and Woodcourt to the stage. This is the first appearance of Esther in this adaptation, and it revolves around Woodcourt's marriage proposal to the girl. The proposal happens abruptly, since this is the first time the characters meet on stage, so there is no building up of romance; the audience could be struck by the suddenness of the engagement. The scene seems to begin right after Woodcourt has declared his love to her. In the same manner as 1.1, the scene begins in mid-dialogue. He says: "I have disclosed my sentiments Miss Summerson but fear that in so doing—I have offended, it is with the candour of an honest man that tells you that he loves you" (14). Esther explains she has no fortune, but Woodcourt assures her he does not look after money, but after herself alone. It is interesting that Esther's love connection should appear in this adaptation, as it is not a vital part for the development of the story. Elphinstone and Neale's version does not include their romance in the play. However, Pitt's choice of adding it may have been to secure a way for Esther to tell her childhood story. In Elphinstone and Neale's play, this information was given to the audience in the first scene during the dialogue between Esther and Mr. Jarndyce. In Pitt's, Esther tells Woodcourt she can only give him her hand after he knows the story of how she was raised by Miss Barbary, how she did not know her parents, how she only knew she was "the offspring of sin" (15). She explains that after Miss Barbary died she became Mr. Jarndyce's ward. Woodcourt, nonetheless, is not dissuaded by Esther's birth story. He tells her: "you may even find yourself a much more wealthy personage than the humble suitor that kneels before you" (15), foreshadowing what will come to pass at the end of the story.

Esther accepts the young doctor’s hand, who will have to go abroad but will come back to “claim his charming wife”” (16). In a very off-topic question, Esther asks Woodcourt if he knows Lady Dedlock, to which he answers:

> I have had the honour of being introduced to her during Sir Leicester’s illness in which [sic] he died, a singular mystery hangs over her as it does over the Ghost Walk Terrace that adjoins the mansion of Chesney Wold where by an Old Legend your [sic] given to understand that Sir Morbury Dedlock and his Lady lived in quiet[?], it being the time of the Civil Wars, she was on one side him on the other, following him and a certain Royal officer, she was detected by Sir Morbury on the terrace, and rebuked wind occurred—he struck her—she fell and refused to rise some time after, repenting his violence, he went to the terrace to woo her return to the festive hall, she refused it, saying that she would walk that terrace, then and in after life—eternally, refusing to return. In the morning she was found dead. ’Tis said by the superstitious that her steps may be heavily heard on the Ghost Walk. (16)

The dialogue between Esther and Woodcourt thus goes beyond a marriage proposal, informing the audience with essential knowledge for the development of the play: Esther’s mysterious birth, which allows her to later become the heir of the Hawdons; Esther’s connection to Mr. Jarndyce; the death of Sir Leicester—which does not occur in Dickens’ or Elphinstone and Neale’ works; and the curse of the Ghost Walk in the Dedlock’s terrace at Chesney Wold. Esther says she does not believe in such things, and asks Woodcourt if he does: “I will not say such things have ever been or will be since all things are possible to him above, all I can say is that I never did see an apparition and Pray Heaven that I never may” (16). In this extract, therefore, Woodcourt’s scientific beliefs is challenged by a possibility of supernatural occurrences. Esther is also portrayed as sceptical, and her disbelief in the supernatural will be tested later on in the play. The scene thus ends with Esther's disbelief in the supernatural and with Woodcourt's praying he may never see one, preparing the audience for a possible supernatural apparition in the play.

The next scene is referred to as Scene 3, although the previous one was also a Scene 3. This mistake is corrected in the following scene, which is referred to as Scene 5. The stage directions appoint Tom-All-Alone's, a dirty alley and a lurking Churchyard as the setting. Jo is on stage with his broom. In a simple but meaningful way, Jo thinks about how poor and rich people are buried in different conditions due to their social ranks, but the worms eat them all the same. Jo's lines are also, again, an illustration of Dickens' criticism of social inequality. He is visiting Nemo's "grave", which is very shallow, when Lady Dedlock enters the stage, dressed as a lady's maid. She asks Joe if there had been a funeral in the afternoon, and he answers: "Yes, they has [sic] been burying my best friend as lived" (18). He adds that his grave is very plain, and that if he had money he would give everything to have him "decently buried" (19). Lady Dedlock speaks aside: "I could almost embrace the poor wretch for his feelings" (19). She thus gives him a sovereign, and he sees her hand with brilliant rubies. He remarks she is a lady, but she insists she is only a servant, and leaves.

Scene 5 takes place at an apartment at Jellyby's with Esther and Caddy Jellyby. Caddy is a character that did not appear in Elphinstone and Neale's adaptation, but that found a place in Pitt's. This scene works as a comic relief after the sad scene at the churchyard, following the Dickensian strategy that mingles the comic and the tragic. The stage directions describe Esther as elegant in contrast to Caddy's shabbiness. Caddy is happy that Esther has come to visit her alone, and complains that her little brother Peepy has been neglected by their mother and her African business. Mrs. Jellyby does charity for African causes; issues that monopolize her thoughts and actions. Esther comments that "there are so many in our country that need assistance", bringing awareness to Mrs. Jellyby's neglect towards her own people; after all, “charity begins at home” (21). Changing the subject, Caddy tells Esther that she will “be married to such a nice young man James Tohnseyturby[?], a dancing master” (22). Although the copier’s handwriting does not render the name clear, Pitt has decidedly changed the name of the dancing master, which in Dickens reads “Prince Turveydrop”. During their conversation, Caddy tells Esther that she wishes Esther and Allan Woodcourt to be married on the same they as her and James. Esther is surprised: “My Dear Girl, I hardly know Mr. Woodcourt further than that he is a very worthy young man” (22), which is a strange thing to say after having agreed to marry the man in scene 1.3.

At this moment, the extravagant character of Mrs. Jellyby enters the stage. She talks about a fire on the coast of Guinea. Esther asks her if her money would not be better spent in reliving some of their town’s troubles. Mrs. Jellyby, however, wonders how Esther, “a learned woman”, should think like that (23). Dickens’ inclusion of Mrs. Jellyby and her attempts at charity, even forcing her presence on people who supposedly need her attention, is an evident criticism of Victorian meaningless charity, which worked rather as a means of self-elevation than the consequence of altruistic feelings. Pitt’s decision to maintain her character in his adaptation—even though she is not crucial to the development of the main plot—may have been based on a desire to take Dickens’ criticism to the stage, reinforcing the statement. Furthermore, Mrs. Jellyby’s charity affairs has led her to abuse of her daughter and neglect her children. On stage, Caddy asks her mother what there is for dinner, to which she answers she cannot think about dinner, because she has to think about the Slambeckebecke[?] Indians. Mrs. Jellyby then invites Esther to join her at the brickmaker’s, Michael Warren, cottage to convince her of how much they love her and her work.

Scene 6 takes place in the interior of Michael Warren’s cottage with Michael and Jo on stage, although it is not clear what Joe should be doing at the brickmaker’s house. Enter Mrs. Jellyby, Caddy and Esther. Esther comments to Caddy that the people in the house do not seem much rejoiced to see her mother. Mrs. Jellyby points out that her young kids gave their money for an African queen. In Dickens, it is Mrs. Pardiggle, and not Mrs. Jellyby—although they are similar characters, and both in the charity business—who takes Esther, accompanied by Ada and Richard, to see the brickmaker's family. Furthermore, in Pitt's adaptation, Jo is added to the group on stage—although it would have been very unlikely to see him there. Scenes 5 and 6 do not necessarily contribute to the developing of the main plot; however, they are powerful in social critique, especially with Jo's words in response to Mrs. Jellyby's account of the black slaves in Africa: "if there be [sic] black slaves a sufferin [sic] in [?], there be [sic] plenty of white slaves a sufferin [sic] here" (28). Jo's words are, again, simple but powerful. His statement criticises the social conditions many Londoners like him suffered during the Victorian Era.

Scene 7 takes the audience back to the main plot of the play at Tulkinghorn's office. He is alone, thinking aloud about his situation:

> Sir Leicester is dead, being his Lawyer all the revenants of the Estates are in my possession, and better than all the papers and letters of Captain Hawdon, who died under the pretentious name of Nemo, tell a charming tale against Lady Dedlock before Sir Leicester saw her I loved her and[?] knew not that she was the actual bride of another, had the letters fallen into my possession before Sir Leicester died, I had held her as in a vice, as it is she must consent to be my wife as the only means of preserving her reputation in the world. (30)

This is an unexpected turn in the story for those who have read Dickens' novel. As in this version Sir Leicester dies, Tulkinghorn can take advantage of the letters he possesses that would ruin Lady Dedlock's reputation, to coerce her to marry him, inheriting the Dedlock fortune.

At this moment, Snagsby and Jo enter the stage. Tulkinghorn says he knows there has been a woman at Nemo's burying place. He asks Jo if he would recognize the woman if he sees her again, to which he answers that he would recognize her eyes and her rings among a hundred women. Tulkinghorn had believed the lady at the grave to be Hortense, Lady Dedlock's maid, but with this information he understands it must have been Lady Dedlock herself. At this point, the lady in question enters the stage. As her and her deceased husband's legal advisor, she has come to Tulkinghorn to find out information about Esther Summerson and how she is connected to Mr. Jarndyce's affairs. Tulkinghorn explains to her that Esther is the daughter of an officer certified to have died in India. Lady Dedlock deduces she is the daughter of Captain Summerson, but Tulkinghorn says that name is fictitious. Esther is the daughter of sin. After the child was born, the mother married a wealthy Baronet while the child was brought up in secret by a friend. Tulkinghorn concludes that, even if the mother and father of the child were enamoured, the mother is guilty of bigamy and of the worst and vilest deception. Lady Dedlock denies it, saying it is false, but Tulkinghorn shows her the letters in his possession, saying he has the correspondence between the Captain and the guilty mother. Tulkinghorn tries to blackmail Lady Dedlock into marriage, but she says: "I would rather perish than become a bride again to such a knave as thee" (34). The lady then leaves the stage. Jo, who has been on stage the whole time, grabs the letter from Tulkinghorn and runs. Tulkinghorn turns to follow him, but at this moment a figure appears in an officer uniform and stands in front of Tulkinghorn. Tulkinghorn exclaims: "That face, those Eyes, can the dead return, horrible spectre, speak—I, I , my legs are [?]" (35), and falls. In this dramatic tone and Gothic atmosphere, the first act reaches its end.

The second act of the play, composed of five scenes, has fortunately been copied by somebody else with a more readable handwriting. The title page of Act II brings the information that it was copied by "J. C. Morgen, Prompter". Therefore, the person who copied the first act was another member of the crew, perhaps Pitt himself. As in the beginning of the first act, the second act sets out a list of characters that are introduced at this moment in the play, including Sergeant George, Phill (as it is spelled in this version), and Old Grandfather Smallweed.

The first scene of Act II takes place at the shooting gallery. George enters the stage, regretting his commander's death—Nemo—and that he could not reach him on time. Soon, Mr. Bagnet and his wife join the stage. They talk about a bill that is due that day, and that Smallweed will come to collect it. If George cannot pay the bill, Mr. Bagnet will have to. As expected, Smallweed arrives, and presents his purpose to George: "you have papers by you belonging to a certain Captain who is dead, who was called Nemo" (38). It is not clear how Smallweed could have found out Nemo's identity. George, however, does not want to yield his letter to Smallweed: "no money should buy it of me, and I am very sorry I could not see him before he died, I shall never forgive myself for it as long as I live" (39). Nevertheless, George does not have the money ready to pay what he owes to Smallweed, and he cannot let his friend Bagnet take responsibility for the payment. In this case, George sees no solution but to hand over the letter. When all the others leave the stage, only George remaining, a knock is heard, and a customer comes in. The customer is Captain Hawdon in disguise. George is surprised: "my own beloved commander alive. […] I thought I saw you taken to the Paupers burying ground, no valley to mark the death of a soldier" (40). Hawdon explains what happened to him:

> By the counsel of Mr. Woodcourt I was removed after the inquest from the home of Krook, and my place in the coffin filled by a log of wood which was interred as my remains. I was taken in another sheel[?] to his residence, restoratives applied, but without hope, at a moment when least expected Resuscitation took place, and in Lady Dedlock's presence, still my real

> existence is a secret known only to Alan Woodcourt and yourself, and you must promise old comrade not to let it go any further. (40-1)

With Captain Hawdon's explanation, the audience learns that the body that was buried was, in fact, not Nemo's, and that Lady Dedlock was present when the Captain came back to life.

Furthermore, the Captain explains that the Chancery suit has been decided in his favour, and he shall now go to Bleak House to fetch his child, Esther. He also tells George of Tulkinghorn's plans to force Lady Dedlock to marry him so that the aforementioned letters will not be exposed. He states it is necessary to keep an eye on Tulkinghorn, and they both leave the stage.

The second scene in Act II takes the audience to an apartment at Chesney Wold, where Lady Dedlock is sitting with her servant. The servant tells her ladyship that a man named Guppy has come to see her. The young man is admitted in, and he asks Lady Dedlock if she knows Esther Summerson, to which the lady answers in the negative. Guppy explains that Summerson is not her real name, but Hawdon. The lady gets nervous as Guppy goes on: "Well, your ladyship will understand that a poor lawwriter named Nemo, died at old Krooks [sic] about a month ago, and its [sic] found out there this Nemo was Captain Hawdon, and that he was the father of Miss Summerson, now who was her mother, I`ll bet a [?] she have [sic] a mother" (43). Guppy refers to Nemo's letters that Mr. Krook has, which are addressed to the lady. She accepts to pay him if he brings her the letters, and Guppy leaves the stage. Soon afterwards, Tulkinghorn arrives, and Lady Dedlock tells him that he is no longer the legal advisor of Chesney Wold, and that all legal matters of the family are now in the hands of Mr. Jarndyce from Bleak House. Tulkinghorn is not willing to accept this decision, and the two exchange insults and threats, and leave the stage.

The next scene, 2.3, happens at the Ghost Walk. Esther enters with a letter, rejoicing that, after three years abroad, Woodcourt returns to Bleak House. His voice is heard offstage:

"My own, beloved Esther" (45). He enters the stage and they embrace. Esther reminds him that he should talk to her guardian, Mr. Jarndyce, to ask for his consent to their marriage. He answers: "Of that I am certain, I have already seen him, and after having seen my resuscitated man, who has appointed a meeting with me at the Bleak House, I shall haste for the License [of marriage]" (45). Esther, understandably, does not comprehend his words. He clarifies: "the person of the name of Nemo, who it was given out had killed himself, after the inquest was over I had him removed to my studio, and the man came to life" (45). Woodcourt's words, therefore, corroborate George's statement. He leaves the stage to see the "resuscitated man", and Esther remains alone until another figure approaches, that of Lady Dedlock, rambling about her dead child. When Captain Hawdon joins the stage, she is surprised: "He speaks, a voice from the grave" (46). The captain tells her: "Behold thy child, thy child and mine" (46). Esther calls Lady Dedlock "mother", and the lady falls senseless to the ground.

The fourth scene takes place at the parks of Chesney Wold with Jo, who appears to be dying. He says he has heard that the man who was always good to him has a daughter at Bleak House. He, by contrast, has no joy:

> But I be [sic] dying, I've never knowed [sic] what comfort was, I've laid down night arter [sic] night in my wet clothes, while the rain poured down upon me, I be [sic] poor and unlearned, but there's many a one [sic] as wears a fine coat, and pushes[?] their money in the sight of the poor, who are lep[?] honest at heart, than the poor fellow that they despise. (46)

Once more in the play—as in Dickens' novel—, Jo's speech presents a critique upon the English upper classes who neglect the needs of the poor, like Mrs. Jellyby, for instance.

Mr. Woodcourt enters the stage and sees Jo unwell. The boy says he is dying; he only wants to live to see "she, the darter [sic] of him who was so very good to me" (46), and all he asks for is to be buried "close to him" (47). Woodcourt recognizes the boy as the crossing sweeper, and Jo tells him he tried to go into a hospital, but he was not admitted in because he has no friends. Again, Jo’s words are a call of attention to the nineteenth-century English society and those who would neglect medical assistance to the poor. Woodcourt assures the boy he will give him every comfort he needs to recover, and to cheer him up he says Captain Hawdon is not dead. Two countrymen enter the stage and, instructed by Woodcourt, take Joe to “the little Military Hospital” (47).

As the scene goes on, Miss Flite arrives, exclaiming she has news for him and for the wards in Jarndyce: “Miss Summerson is one of the richest heirs in the country, cause her father it appears belonged to a very great and noble family” (48). Woodcourt takes no pains in believing the old lady right away: “I rejoice to hear what you say” (48). Before leaving the stage, Miss Flite gives a little speech on the importance of being good: “where there is real goodness in the heart, not all the world’s ingratitude can kill it” (48).

After she leaves, Mr. Guppy enters the stage. He—although it is not clear why the two men should be friends—tells the young doctor about his desolation: “you may look upon me as a last ruined man. I went to get certain papers from Old Krook, and he has burnt himself up” (48). This is, of course, a reference to the episode in the novel in which Krook dies from a spontaneous combustion. Naturally, that would be a very difficult occurrence to stage; therefore, the accident is only alluded to. In Elphinstone and Neale’s version, on the other hand, the episode is not mentioned at all. Guppy explains to Woodcourt how the accident happened: “you know Old Krook of the Black Doll lived upon gin, drank gin, eat [sic] gin, and slept upon gin, he was lighting his pipe when the flame caught his breath, and he was burnt up to a cinder, in a jibbey [sic], […] the papers, the Black Doll and all destroyed, I shall never get the papers, I shall never marry Miss Summerson” (48). Guppy says he is destroyed and wants to kill himself, and before leaving the stage he even alludes to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, the second allusion to Shakespeare in this adaptation of *Bleak House*: “As

Romeo said. ‘have you no sharp medicine, no strong drugs mixed”? (48). Guppy rushes off stage, and Woodcourt soon follows.

The following is the last scene in the play. It takes place in the shooting gallery, the same set as in 2.1. Enter Captain Hawdon and George, who talk about Tulkinghorn. Hawdon tells George that Krook was in possession of:

> deeds and documents relative to the suit in Chancery, which Jarndyce have so long been watching for me, also the certificate of my marriage with Lady Dedlock, and the certificate of the birth and christening of my child. Had I them in my possession, I could establish my rights and those of my daughter. (49)

George tells the captain he believes Tulkinghorn stole these papers. Tulkinghorn approaches, so Hawdon hides offstage. Tulkinghorn tells George to make sure they are out of earshot, and George confirms. The lawyer has come to inquire after Jo, the crossing sweeper, because he has stolen some documents from him, papers that “contained Chancery Documents, a certificate of marriage and one of christening” (50). George says he believes the boy is dead. Accordingly, Tulkinghorn asks George to help him “on a certain project” (50): he sent a letter to Lady Dedlock as if it had been written by Captain Hawdon, pretending he was still alive—which suggests Tulkinghorn does not yet know the captain is indeed alive. George asks him what gave him that idea, and he answered: “You will smile when I tell you, that once or twice I thought I have seen him, of course only imagination, when I have once got her [Lady Dedlock] here, I will keep her till a Priest is sent for and I will frighten her into a marriage” (50). George, ironically, tells Tulkinghorn he can improve his plan, for he has a military friend “so like Hawdon that they might have been taken for brothers” (50), and he could call him. Tulkinghorn agrees.

Soon afterwards, Lady Dedlock enters the stage with her daughter, Esther. Tulkinghorn remarks that if Lady Dedlock refuses to marry him, he may persuade to marry the daughter. The importance, indeed, is that he gets hold of the Hawdon fortune. He gives the ladies the choice of whom should marry the villain, who ask for mercy. Tulkinghorn does not yield: “Aye, I can do much, you see I can discover secrets, and to serve my purpose even raise the dead” (51), and he clasps his hand—as arranged previously with George—and Captain Hawdon enters the stage. He exclaims: “My wife, my child” (51), and they go into each other’s’ arms, while Tulkinghorn believes the women had fallen in his trap. The Captain addresses Tulkinghorn: “No Sir, it is you that are caught. I am the real Captain Hawdon, here, ready to defend my wife and daughter” (52). As he says it, Woodcourt, Miss Flite and all the characters return to the stage. Woodcourt exclaims: “Mr. Tulkinghorn, you are caught in your own trap” (52). Tulkinghorn pulls his pistol and points it at George, but Phill is faster, and shoots Tulkinghorn, who dies exclaiming: “I die, I am slain, may the curse of Poverty, revenge and envy be on you, mercy, mercy—I die, I die” (52). Tulkinghorn’s body is taken offstage, and everyone is happy, excluding the remembrance of Jo, the poor boy dying. Woodcourt says: “Except poor Jo, alas, he is dying, he but wishes to see his dear friend and his child” (53). Jo is brought to the stage, and gives the Captain the papers he had stolen from Tulkinghorn. He wishes to see his friend’s daughter, Esther, who comes forward, but he does not wish to touch her lest she should catch his fever. Jo is indeed dying, and Captain Hawdon makes him a promise: “thou shall have a stone raised to thy memory, for few in the simple state[?] have exceeded thy worth” (53). Jo’s last words are also the last words of the play. He wishes he could see the stone erected in his memory after he dies. He asks: “Put on the stone ‘Raised by the friend of poor Jo, who was always very good to him, he was” (53), and dies. In a similar manner to Elphinstone and Neale’s, Pitt’s play ends with a mixture of comedy and tragedy.

The production at the Pavilion Theatre ran for longer than at the City of London. As we have seen, Pitt's play premiered on June 4th, 1853, two days previously to Elphinstone and Neale's production. The first advertisement to the play was published at *The Era* Sunday theatre section on the same day as the advertisement for the production at the City of London. The advertisement runs as follows:

> Lessees, Messrs. J. ELPHINSTONE and FREDERICK NEALE. On Monday, June 6th, and every evening during the week, to commence with THE BLEAK HOUSE; or, The Ghost's Walk. Supported by Messrs. J. Elphinstone, J. Dale, S. Sawford, J. Healop, Courtney, W. Artaud, Smith, Symondson, &c.; Mesdames M. Atkins, Lovegrove, Courtney, Hewland, Farrell, &c. After which the successful Drama of THE WILL AND THE WAY. Supported by Messrs. J. Elphinstone, J. Dale, S. Sawford, Smith, Courtney, Symondson, J. Heslop, W. Artaud, Mulford, &c.; Mesdames Atkins, Courtney, Farrell, Howland, &c. The whole to conclude with POP GOES THE WEASEL. Supported by the company, concluding with the original Dance. Mr. Frederick Neale, Stage Manager.

Interestingly, the names that appear on the advertisement as promoters of this production are of Elphinstone and Neale, who, according to the British Library catalogue, were responsible for the production at the City of London Theatre. As the plays ran in parallel in June on 1853, some confusion may have occurred in cataloguing the manuscripts. What is certain is that the first manuscript analysed here, ascribed to Elphinstone and Neale by the British Library, contains the signature of Austin Lee, and that its license was sent on June 1; and the second manuscript analysed here contains the signature of J. C. Morgen on the title page of the second act, and that it was intended for representation on Saturday June 4th, 1853, at the Royal Pavilion Theatre. If the information on *The Era*, which goes on for four more weeks unchanged, is correct, then the cataloguing at the British Library is wrong: Elphinstone and Neale produced the play at the Pavilion, and Pitt at the City of London, and the "Dibdin" referred to on the City of London Theatre advertisements may be George Dibdin Pitt, who also participated as an actor in the production. Furthermore, Neale is referred to in the advertisement as the stage manager. However, I could find no information concerning his life in order to check in which theatrical establishment he worked in June, 1853. I have found no information concerning the life of Elphinstone or Pitt either. I conclude they either had a brief career in the theatre, or their personal information—dates of birth and death, places and duration of work, etc.—were not regarded as relevant information at the time. For practical reasons, I have decided to maintain the British Library's catalogue information. Nonetheless, these details could be revised by the staff responsible for the library catalogue.

The first advertisement to the play at the Pavilion was thus published after its premiere on Saturday, June 4th. In the following week, *The Era* published another advertisement for the Royal Pavilion with an abridged version of the supporters. *The Will and the Way* was relocated at the end of the evening, and the mid-show entertainment was replaced by *Rob the Rip*. On June 19th, the information concerning *Bleak House; or, Spirit of the Ghost Walk* remains the same. The only change regards the mid-show entertainment, which has been replaced for *The Whistler*, and "To conclude with on Monday (last night) THE WILL AND THE WAY. On Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, with a Romantic Legendary Drama". This was the last week of *Bleak House; or The Wandering Spirit of the Ghost Walk* at the City of London Theatre.

The Pavilion, nevertheless, continued to exhibit its version of *Bleak House* for two more weeks. On Sunday, June 26th, according to *The Era*, *Bleak House* was relocated to the end of the show. The first attraction was replaced by the drama *Eliza Holmes*, and the mid-show entertainment was replaced by the comedietta *Spirit Rappings and Table Moving*. I could not find any information regarding the content of the comedietta, but the title suggests a relationship with the occult and the supernatural, themes characteristic of the Gothic drama. The programme for the following week, as published on July 3rd by *The Era*, changed once more. *Bleak House* remained the last attraction of the night, while the new domestic drama *Minnigrey*, followed by a dance by Miss Fowler, completed the bill.

From the advertisements in *The Era* regarding the two theatres, it is possible to deduce they had a similar structure. Each night the show would be comprised of three attractions, being the first one the newest, the one in the middle a comedy, burletta or dance performance, ending with a final re-enactment of a previous production, sometimes at a lower price. Interestingly, on July 3rd, the last week of *Bleak House* at the Pavilion, another adaptation premiered at the Theatre Royal Marylebone, advertised at *The Era* as “the Drama of BLEAK HOUSE. Taken from Charles Dickens’s celebrated work of that name”. If there was still an audience for a new adaptation of *Bleak House*, it is clear that the previous productions were successful, especially the one at the Pavilion, which lasted for five weeks in total. In the mid-nineteenth-century context that is quite an impressive run, especially taking into account the frequent alteration of programme.

4.3 The novel and the plays

After reading both adaptations of Dickens’ novel closely, I would like to take a deeper look at three moments in the novel and how they were transposed to the stage in each production, and to investigate how and to which extent the Gothic elements in these particular episodes in the novel were enhanced in the theatre. The three moments are: the discovery of Nemo’s body in his chambers; the appearance of the ghost; and the ending.

In the novel's Chapter X, "The Law-writer", Dickens uses his strategy of "zooming in" to present the setting to the reader: the narrator describes the big picture "on the eastern borders of Chancery Lane" (142), hovers over Cook's Court, and finally reaches Mr. Tulkinghorn house in Lincoln's Inn Fields. As Dickens describes it:

> The day is closing in and the gas is lighted, but is not yet fully effective, for it is not quite dark. Mr. Snagsby standing at his shopdoor looking up at the clouds, sees a crow, who is out late, skim westward and over the leaden slice of sky belonging to Cook's Court. The crow flies straight across Chancery Lane and Lincoln's Inn Garden, into Lincoln's Inn Fields. (145)

The reader follows the crow—a symbol of bad omen, anticipating the discovery of the dead man's body—from Cook's Court to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where Mr. Tulkinghorn is. And from there, Mr. Tulkinghorn takes the opposite path from the crow: "Mr. Tulkinghorn goes, as the crow came—not quite so straight, but nearly—to Cook's Court, Cursitor Street" (147). Having followed Mr. Snagsby to Mr. Krook's establishment, Tulkinghorn goes up the stairs to Nemo's chambers with a candle: "He comes to the dark door on the second floor. He knocks, receives no answer, opens it, and accidentally extinguishes his candle in doing so" (151). The room Tulkinghorn encounters is vividly depicted by the narrator: "The air of the room is almost bad enough to have extinguished it [the candle], if he had not. It is a small room, nearly black with soot, and grease, and dirt" (151). These words evoke the smell of the mouldy atmosphere and the cold that pervades the bedroom. Further in the paragraph, Dickens writes: "no curtain veils the darkness of the night, but the discoloured shutters are drawn together; and through the two gaunt holes pierced in them, famine might be staring in—the Banshee of the man upon the bed". Here, Dickens refers to the Banshee, a creature from Celtic mythology that precedes death. In addition to the crow flying in the beginning of the chapter, the Banshee adds to the foreshadowing of Nemo's death.

Entering the room, the lawyer sees the body on the bed: “he lies there, dressed in shirt and trousers, with bare feet. He has a yellow look, in the spectral darkness of a candle that has guttered down, until the whole length of its wick (still burning) has doubled over, and left a tower of winding-sheet above it” (151). Tulkinghorn calls out for the man and strikes the candlestick on the door to draw his attention but to no avail. Coming closer, “as he rattles on the door, the candle which has drooped so long, goes out, and leaves him in the dark; with the gaunt eyes in the shutters staring down upon the bed” (152). Tulkinghorn—and the reader—is left in the dark until the publication of the following instalment, containing chapters 50 to 53, the subsequent month, June of 1853.

The presence of premonitory symbols, such as the crow and the Banshee, the depiction of the rottenness of the place, the unveiled darkness of the night through the window, the yellow look on the man’s body, the “spectral darkness” involving the atmosphere, and the blowing off the candle leaving the characters in the dark are all Gothic elements very evident in this episode in Dickens’ novel. It is significant to explore how this same moment in the plot was adapted to the stage in the two different productions under study here.

As we have seen, in 1.2 in Elphinstone and Neale’s version at the City of London Krook gives Tulkinghorn a candle before he goes to Nemo’s chambers. In 1.3, Tulkinghorn is in the man’s bedroom, and Nemo’s body is on the bed. Borrowing from Dickens’ description in the novel, Tulkinghorn describes the place as “horrid”. The novel’s reader is privy to the mouldy chamber through Dickens’ vivid description. On stage, Tulkinghorn’s exclamation is not enough to convey the same feeling. Therefore, the set, props and lighting—about which there is not information available, unfortunately—would have added to the atmosphere.

Since the audience may not have a good view of the man lying on the bed, Tulkinghorn describes aloud what he sees, emphasising the man’s eyes, which are “open and faded". Mr. Krook enters the bedroom bringing another light, but there is no mention of Tulkinghorn's candle having extinguished. Therefore, Tulkinghorn and Krook would be on stage each holding a candle and looking at the corpse lying on the bed. The scene ends with Woodcourt's reflections on the ephemerality of life and on the mortality of humans.

This scene in Elphinstone and Neale's play transposes some of the Gothic elements from the novel to the stage—such as the description of the horridness of the place, the darkness that led the characters to hold candles, and the description of Nemo's blank eyes—but does not emphasise them. The case with Pitt's production is different. At the Pavilion, as we have seen, the scene in Nemo's bedroom happens in 1.2. The producers gave a twist to Dickens' plot, maintaining the man still alive at the beginning of the scene. The set, described as "very wretched", "very dark" and "very shabby" would illustrate Dickens' vivid depiction of the place. Nemo's speech suggests that he deliberately took a large quantity of opium to end his suffering. The scenic choice of adding a pair of eyes to the shutters that becomes opaque when Tulkinghorn enters the room adds to the spectacle on stage. When Tulkinghorn shakes the dead body and his candle goes out, the eyes become bright once more, representing the eyes of the Banshee that Dickens alludes to in the novel. This theatrical strategy emphasises the omen of the Banshee's eyes. As we have seen, premonitory symbols pervade the whole of Dickens' plot in *Bleak House*. Transferring these symbols to the stage is no easy task, however. The immediacy of the theatre may dissolve the power of the premonition. In the novel, for instance, the several allusions to the Dedlock's ghost builds up the tension till the culmination with Lady Dedlock's death and the discovery of her body by Esther and Inspector Bucket in Chapter LVII. On stage, nonetheless, there is not as much time for the building up of tension as there is in the novel, and the premonitory symbols are more immediately realised, such as the Banshee's eyes that refer to Nemo's subsequent death, or Tulkinghorn's recognition of Captain Hawdon's "ghost"—"That face, those Eyes, can the dead return, horrible spectre" (35)—by referring to his eyes that can be compared to the Banshee's eyes, foretelling his own death in 2.5 Furthermore, in Pitt's representation of the scene in Nemo's room, the choice of leaving the stage in complete darkness for a few moments emphasises the sinister atmosphere of the scene.

As we have seen, after Woodcourt's intervention and confirmation of Nemo's death, characters such as Snagsby and Mrs. Piper join the stage for Tulkinghorn's inquest. The second part of the scene thus takes a comic turn by the confusion of several characters on stage, speaking a lot and simultaneously. As the scene reaches its end, however, the dramatic atmosphere returns with Jo's sad account of how Nemo helped him in a cold night.

Comparing how the two productions adapted Nemo's death to the stage, it is possible to conclude that Elphinstone and Neale's version is more dependent on Dickens' text than Pitt's. The production at the City of London maintains certain Gothic elements already manifest in the novel, such as the rotten setting, the dead man, and the darkness. Pitt's version, on the other hand, enhances the Gothic atmosphere in the first part of the scene by adding the dramatic effects of leaving the theatre in complete darkness and of the shining of the Banshee's eyes. Nonetheless, the second part of the scene, characterised by a comic interlude followed by a sad conclusion, dissipates the Gothic atmosphere, and confirms the production's relation with the melodramatic theatre, which main characteristic was the intersection of the comic and the tragic.

The second moment in the novel I would like to analyse is the apparition of the ghost. In Dickens' novel, the ghost from the Dedlock legend does not appear in fact; there is only one moment in Chapter XXXVI in which Esther believes she is seeing the ghost, who turns out to be Lady Dedlock. As we have seen, when the plays were produced in June 1853, however, there were still three more instalments to be printed, in which the ghost might as well have really appeared. Interestingly, in both productions, the directors chose to put the ghost on stage, and, curiously, even emphasised it in the plays' titles.

In Dickens' Chapter XXXVI, "Chesney Wold", Esther has recovered from her illness and has confronted her changed appearance for the first time. Staying at Mr. Boythorn's house, next-door to the Dedlocks, Esther likes to sit on a bench in the parks at Chesney Wold, from where she can see the Ghost Walk, which, according to her, only increased her appreciation of the place: "and the old legend in the Dedlock family which I had heard from Mr. Boythorn, accounting for it, mingled with the view and gave it something of a mysterious interest, in addition to its real charms" (531). Influenced by the old legend, she "often sat in this place, wondering how the rooms ranged, and whether any echo like a footstep really did resound at times, as the story said, upon the lonely Ghost's Walk" (531). Sitting there one day, imagining what "the female shape that was said to haunt it" (532) looked like, she sees a figure approaching. The figure seems indistinct in the shadow of the branches, and led by the legend hovering the place—rather like Catherine Morland in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1817) —she almost succumbs to the fantasy, until she realises "it revealed itself to be a woman's—a lady's—Lady Dedlock's" (532). Although not a real ghost, Esther reacts to it as if it were one: recognizing a motherly face in the lady, she swoons: "A dread and faintness fell upon me" (532).

The similarities between the apparition of Lady Dedlock on the Ghost's Terrace and the ghost of the legend may have inspired the producers of the two theatrical adaptations to imagine another supernatural—or seemingly supernatural—occurrence. As we have seen, in Elphinstone and Neale's version, the ghost scene is the last one in Act I. Here, Esther is also at Chesney Wold when Lady Dedlock approaches, mumbling about Captain Hawdon and her daughter. However, in this version it is the lady who seems scared by the presence of the girl, due to her resemblance to herself. At this point, the bell tolls twelve times, meaning it was noon or alluding to midnight, the time of night when, according to popular belief, supernatural things occur. That is an interesting theatrical strategy, because it alerts the audience that something uncanny is about to happen; it is an ominous symbol—a Gothic characteristic. At this time, a figure is seen on stage, and Lady Dedlock recognizes the figure as "him", probably alluding to the deceased Nemo. The ghost points at Esther, who falls to the floor, and the curtains close. This is a very dramatic way to finish the act: with great tension, the revelation that Esther is Lady Dedlock's daughter, and with the ringing of twelve bells, announcing the supernatural apparition. As we have seen, there is no real ghost in Dickens' plot. Therefore, Elphinstone and Neale's decision to make it the ghost of Captain Hawdon, and to make it point at Esther as if referring to her as his rightful heir, enhances the Gothic aspects already present in the Dickensian plot. Furthermore, the choice of making the Captain the ghost gives him another purpose in the plot. The appearance of a ghost means that the deceased still has unfinished business on earth: Captain Hawdon's is to inform Lady Dedlock of the identity of their daughter, to make sure his daughter receives the fortune that is hers by right, and to hinder Tulkinghorn's plans to steal Esther's inheritance.

In Pitt's production, the ghost scene was also chosen to end the first act. The apparition, however, occurs in a very different situation from the production at the City of London. Here, it is not Esther or Lady Dedlock who sees the ghost, but Tulkinghorn. After threatening Lady Dedlock, who leaves the stage, he in confronted with a "horrible spectre". As he faces the apparition, Tulkinghorn collapses, and the curtains close. Although it is also a powerful and engaging closing for the first act, it lacks the more dramatic characteristics present in Elphinstone and Neale's production, such as the bells and the interaction of the ghost with Esther. Later in Pitt's version, the spectator learns that the ghost was not an actual supernatural occurrence—like in Elphinstone and Neale's—but Captain Hawdon himself, who did not die, but was resuscitated by Mr. Woodcourt.

Comparing the way both productions represented the apparition of the “ghost” on stage, it is possible to conclude that the two of them enhanced the importance of the ghost in Dickens’ novel. From being just a legend, it was transformed into a real supernatural apparition by Elphinstone and Neale, and into a disguise of Hawdon in Pitt’s, securing a prominent place in the plays’ titles. Emphasising the figure of the ghost is undoubtedly related to the popularity of the Gothic drama in the mid-nineteenth century, and to the Victorian taste for spectacle. Depending on how it was performed, playing the ghost on stage could be tragically terrifying or a comic failure, characteristics of the melodramatic genre in theatre in which the two productions here analysed are undoubtedly inserted.

Finally, taking one deeper look into the ending of Dickens’ text and how it was imagined by the producers before the conclusion of the novel can shed more light on the comparison made here, and on the representation of the Gothic elements in the Dickensian novel on stage. The last chapter in Dickens’ *Bleak House*, Chapter LXVII “The Close of Esther’s Narrative”, Esther writes seven years after the happenings in *Bleak House*. She is married to Woodcourt and with two daughters, Ada has recovered from Richard’s loss with the love of their son, and Esther recounts the happy endings of several characters, including Charley, Caddy Jellyby, and Mr. Jarndyce.

As we have seen, the endings in the plays are quite different. In the production at the City of London, the last scene takes place at the Ghost Terrace. The focus of this scene is Tulkinghorn’s death—which happens to be the last main occurrence in the instalment published in May 1853. It was, therefore, the climax of the plot up to the date of production. Lady Dedlock and Esther are taken by Tulkinghorn and his men, and in the confusion of people on stage, Tulkinghorn is shot—later in the scene, we learn it was George who shot him. Mr. Jarndyce tells Lady Dedlock’s story to Sir Leicester, and, surprisingly, he accepts Esther as his daughter. Adding to the spirit of family reunion, Lady Dedlock points to

Woodcourt, who wishes to marry Esther. As in all classic comedies, the play ends happily and with marriage: not only Esther and Woodcourt's, but also Richard and Ada's. The feeling of happy ending, however, is disrupted by Jo's death, praising his only friend Nemo, and asking to be buried next to him in the pauper churchyard. The comic ending is thus followed by a tragic ending, confirming the melodramatic characteristic of the whole production, illustrated in its intertwining of comedy and tragedy.

In a similar way, Pitt's version also ends with an overlapping of comedy and tragedy. Not surprisingly, the last scene in Pitt's production also revolves around Tulkinghorn's death. The situation and person responsible were, nevertheless, different. It happens at the shooting gallery. Tulkinghorn wishes George to help him with his plan to blackmail Lady Dedlock, but George turns the plan to his advantage. Captain Hawdon pretends to be an old friend of George's who looks like Hawdon himself. Disguised identity is a common characteristic of the classic comedy, one which Shakespearean comedies illustrate so well. Tulkinghorn wished to present Hawdon's lookalike as proof of his immense power—he could even raise the dead—but when he realises the man is actually Hawdon himself, Tulkinghorn gets desperate. As we have seen previously, Phill kills Tulkinghorn, who dies cursing everyone. The villain is thus defeated, and the good is restored—another characteristic of the Gothic genre. The happy atmosphere, nonetheless, is also challenged with Jo's death. Jo had stolen the documents from Tulkinghorn and was the hero of the story, sacrificing himself for Captain Hawdon and his family's happiness. His sad lines are the last lines of the play. Consequently, Pitt's ending is also a mixture of comedy and tragedy.

It is interesting to explore how both productions imagined an ending for the yet unfinished novel by Dickens. As Tulkinghorn's death had been the climax of the last published instalment up to that period, it was also the climax of both productions. Moreover, both plays, following the melodramatic fashion of the time and of the establishments where the plays were performed, end with an overlapping of comedy and tragedy, which also permeate the plays in their entirety.

After analysing both adaptations of *Bleak House* in performance in June 1853, it is possible to reflect how they relate to the Dickensian text and to the Gothic tradition. The decision of both productions to focus on the legend of the Ghost Walk, as both titles suggest, is an indicative of the perspective they wished to represent Dickens' novel, which is undoubtedly Gothic. Gothic motifs and themes permeate both adaptations, such as the allusion to ghosts, a family curse, issues of inheritance, mysterious identities, and a pervasive Gothic atmosphere. The description of the Chancery as the source of evil and destruction is apparent in both productions, as it is in Dickens' novel. As Mighall puts it: "Chancery is the master metaphor in his novel, wielding a malign significance and influence by borrowing attributes of various Gothic conventions. The Court, with its sovereign Lord Chancellor, assumes the dimensions of a vast feudal castle, whose dominion holds sway over scores of hapless vassals" (87). Indeed, both adaptations explore this idea.

The mystery surrounding Nemo's identity is enhanced in order to create dramatic tension, until his previously thought evil character is challenged by his good actions towards the boy Jo. In Elphinstone and Neale's production, Nemo is even linked to the devil. Furthermore, foreshadowing elements permeate the productions, especially in the one at the City of London Theatre, such as when Miss Flite reveals her birds' names, when she states she would stay at Krook's lodging until she died, and Mrs. Rouncewell's statement that all the ladies Dedlock were fond of the Ghost Walk.

In addition, the figure of the ghost is made much of in both productions. In Elphinstone and Neale's, the apparition is real: a male ghost appears on stage just before the close of the curtains in Act I, pointing at Esther at the sound of twelve bell tolls, who collapses; and in Pitt's, the ghost turns out to be a real person, Captain Hawdon, who was still alive after all.

Another Gothic theme, that of mistaken identity, is explored further in Pitt's version with Captain Hawdon passing for a military friend of George's in order to trap Tulkinghorn. Gothic themes and motifs, therefore—premonitory symbols, death, rotting places, the villain, darkness, mysterious identities, disguises, the Chancery as source of evil, ghosts, and curses concerning inheritance—abound in both productions, and they do in Dicken's original, as we saw in Chapter 3. The Victorian taste for the occult and supernatural can also be traced in the other productions at the City of London and the Pavilion at the time, such as the comedietta *Spirit Rappings and Table Moving*. The supernatural was a popular topic amongst Victorians[16], and it was explored by these two adaptations of *Bleak House*.

There are also differences between the two adaptations, especially regarding their approach to the Dickensian text. It is important to emphasise once again that the two productions premiered before Dickens had finished publishing the last instalments of the novel; therefore, the producers had to come up with an ending to the plot on their own account. As we have seen, when the productions premiered in June, the chapter concerning Tulkinghorn's death had already been published, but the identity of the killer was still a mystery. The producers of the two productions had, as a consequence, different ideas as to whom might have killed the man. In Elphinstone and Neale's play it is George, while in Pitt's version, it is Phil who kills the hated lawyer. In Pitt, the character of Richard and Ada are given very little attention—they are only mentioned as the wards in Jarndyce by Miss Flite, but they do not appear on stage, and emphasis is instead put on social critique, especially in the scenes with Mrs. Jellyby, which do not figure in Elphinstone and Neale's version at all.

---

[16] According to Callow, even Dickens became interested by the occult, having studied and practiced hypnotism and animal magnetism (149-159).

Returning to Glavin's ideas on adaptation based on Bordieu's concept of a *lector* and an *auctor* type of reading, it is possible to regard these two adaptions of *Bleak House* as auctor-based adaptations. As Gavin explains, auctor-based adaptations do not only repeat the original text's discourse, as if in a hierarchical relation novel > adaptation, but bring new discourses to the text. As Dickens' story was not ready by the time the two plays reached the stage, the producers had more freedom to work the plots to their desired endings. However, in addition to the different conclusions, both adaptations rework Dickens' novel, giving prominence to different characters, and focusing on the Ghost Walk legend and Tulkinghorn's death plots. As a consequence, they emphasise the Gothic characteristics already presented in the novel, which are secondary in Dickens' text, but receive the foreground in these adaptations. Dickens' *Bleak House* is a plethora of characters and distinct plot nuclei, and the choice of placing the Dedlocks' legendary ghost in the centre of the adaptations is by no means random, but illustrate the mid-Victorian attraction to Gothic stories, the melodrama, and the thirst for spectacular plots.

> “The Drama is founded on an eternal principal in human nature […] Such an art I hold to be imperishable; reverses it may suffer… but nothing, to my thinking, can root it out”
>
> (Dickens, quoted in Callow 187)

4. **“Yielded to dull repose”[17]:** Final considerations

In this thesis, we have looked back and imagined ourselves part of the “huge pit hushed into stillness on the rising of the curtain” at the City of London Theatre and at the Royal Pavilion as the adaptations of *Bleak House* were staged. We began with an overview of the situation of the theatre in the Victorian Era, especially its popularisation after the dissolution of the Theatre Licensing Act of 1737 in 1843, and with an outline of the Gothic drama and its different phases during the nineteenth century.

In a very Dickensian style, we zoomed into the productions of *Bleak House', drama in two acts,* performed at the City of London Theatre, and *The Bleak House, or The spectre of the ghost walk, a domestic drama in two acts,* performed at the Royal Pavilion, in June 1853. An analysis of the productions has showed their interest in enhancing the Gothic elements found in Dickens’ original story. As we have seen, the very title of Pitt’s production brings emphasis to “the spectre of the ghost walk”, which is but a minor plot in Dickens’s novel that focuses on the inefficiency of the English legal system of the time and its power of corruption. Hoeveler’s listing of themes recurrent in Gothic drama can all be identified in both productions: the foreboding or premonitory dream—the immediacy of the theatre dissipates part of the premonitions’ power, which is more evident in the novel, but nevertheless moments proliferate such as Nemo’s ghost pointing at Esther at the end of the first act in Elphinstone and Neale’s version, or the bright eyes of the Banshee in Nemo’s room in Pitt’s production are significant omens of what is to come—; the uncanny double, such as the figure of Captain Hawdon returning as a ghost, a double of his past life, in both productions; the confusion between the real and the fantastic, also illustrated by the figure of the ghost, which is in the threshold between the real, since it resembles Captain Hawdon, and the unreal, as it is the shadow of a dead man; the devilish villain, represented by Tulkinghorn in both productions: in Elphinstone and Neale's play, the lawyer wishes to marry Esther by force in order to command her wealth, and in Pitt's the villain seeks to force Lady Dedlock into marriage to take hold of her fortune, and resorting to Esther as a second marriage option if the first fails to happen; and, finally, the use of cathedrals or exotic settings, though in this regard, unfortunately, the promptbooks contain very little in the way of descriptions of the set. However, in Elphinstone and Neale's play, the characters give a good hint concerning what is to be found on stage or imagined by the audience. They describe the scenery around them with adjectives that evoke a Gothic atmosphere, such as Tulkinghorn's exclamation when reaching Nemo's room in 1.3: "What a horrid looking place!" (10).

---

[17] Extract from Dickens’ *Bleak House,* 910.

It is, this thesis has argued, notable that the choice of the producers to select scenes from the novel for representation on stage strongly drew upon a significant fascination with the Gothic themes and motifs present in the novel. As a consequence, these productions enhance the Gothic elements already present in Dickens' text. As we have seen, the City of London Theatre and the Royal Pavilion were both situated in the East End, a region where minor theatres flourished in contrast to the two main theatres Drury Lane and Covent Garden on the West Side. The target audience of the East End theatres was mainly lower-middle class workers, who had a taste for spectacular melodrama—the main genre at play in both minor theatres. As we have also seen, Victorian audiences had a preference for spectacular plots, hence the popularity of the melodrama at the time. It is no wonder that both the City of London and the Royal Pavilion should adjust their source texts to their target audience. Therefore, from Dickens' novel they extracted what was more interesting—and profitable—

to them: the plot of the ghost, a strife for inheritance, and cold-blood murder. These are only a small part of Dickens' novel.

What results from this selection of the Dickensian text by the producers at the aforementioned theatres is the impoverishment of the extra social layer that Dickens added to the plot. As we have seen, Pritchard argues that Dickens "was able to adapt them [conventions of Gothic fiction] to his representation of the city and to his purposes of social criticism, redeeming them from the triviality and mere sensationalism that had often characterized their use by earlier writers" (433). Dickens turns formulaic Gothic elements into vehicles for social criticism: the law, the source of evil and destruction in the novel, compared to the ancient Gothic castle, criticises the inefficiency of the English law; the representation of the villain Tulkinghorn and his treatment of the boy Jo and the servant Hortense are also a censure to the prejudice against lower classes; the recurrent theme of death, a Gothic theme, also condemns the sanitary conditions of nineteenth-century London, where Nemo and Jo were abandoned and died. In Dickens' tale, the monsters are not supernatural, but real people who are turned into monsters through their social vices.

This social layer of Dickens' plot is dissolved in the theatrical adaptations here analysed. Pitt's version maintains the character of Mrs. Jellyby and her ineffectual charity, which she does only as a means of self-promotion. This plot nucleus is not mentioned in Elphinstone and Neale's version. The fact that the 1853 adaptations of *Bleak House* focus on the spectacular Gothic elements of the novel instead of the harsh social criticism interweaved in it is not necessarily a negative point. It is crucial to take into account that the theatre in the nineteenth century was a thriving business, and that the playhouses created material that would attract the greatest number of spectators. As the melodrama was a favourite genre, especially amongst the theatre-goers at the City of London and the Royal Pavilion, the producers reworked Dickens' text for their own purposes. Bearing in mind Glavin's distinction between an adaptation *lector* and an adaptation *auctor*, Elphinstone and Neale's and Pitt's are both the result of an *auctor* reading of Dickens' story. The original version is not regarded as a "fetishized text" high in a pedestal, which must not be altered. As Glavin explains, the *auctor* adaptation is the "kind that problematizes itself, and thereby reveals readers and adapters as kin, reversing the conventional author-reader privilege" (7). In these adaptations, the producers are also authors.

Elphinstone and Neale's and Pitt's productions are only two examples of the extensive theatrical production of the nineteenth century. Analyses of other theatrical adaptations of *Bleak House* would add to the study of the melodrama and spectacle and its relation nineteenth-century Gothic novels. It would be significantly interesting to look at *Bleak House, or Poor Jo the Crossing Sweeper*, version adapted by Eliza Thorne for production at the Opera House in Sheffield on April 28, 1876, since it is the only adaptation produced by a woman in the British Library archive. Furthermore, theatrical adaptations of other Dickensian texts or other nineteenth-century novels with a Gothic potential could enrich the study of the transposing of Gothic elements to the stage and its implications.

After reopening the curtains to Elphinstone and Neale's *'Bleak House', a drama in two acts* and Pitt's *The Bleak House, or the Spectre of the Ghost Walk, A Drama in 2 Acts*, it is time to close them again—even if only temporarily, until someone decides to open them again. It is time, for now, to leave behind the noises of the gallery or the contained reactions at the boxes and return the plays "to dull repose".

Appendix A

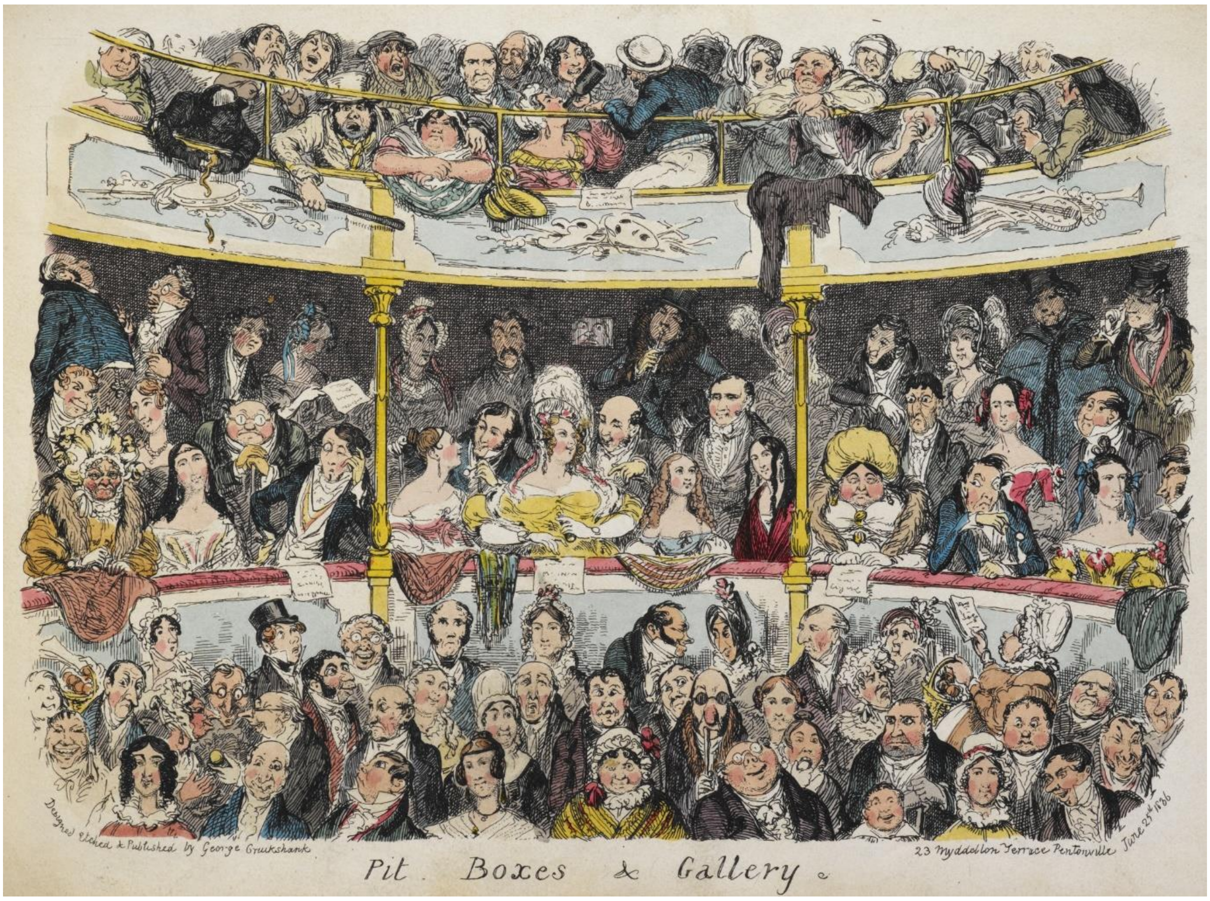
Designed Etched & Published by George Cruikshank
Pit Boxes & Gallery.
23 Myddelton Terrace Pentonville June 25th 1836

Figure 1 - Pit boxes & Gallery, from Vol. 1. of My Sketch Book by George Cruikshank, 1834. Available at:: https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/pit-boxes--gallery-from-my-sketch-book-by-george-cruikshank

Appendix B

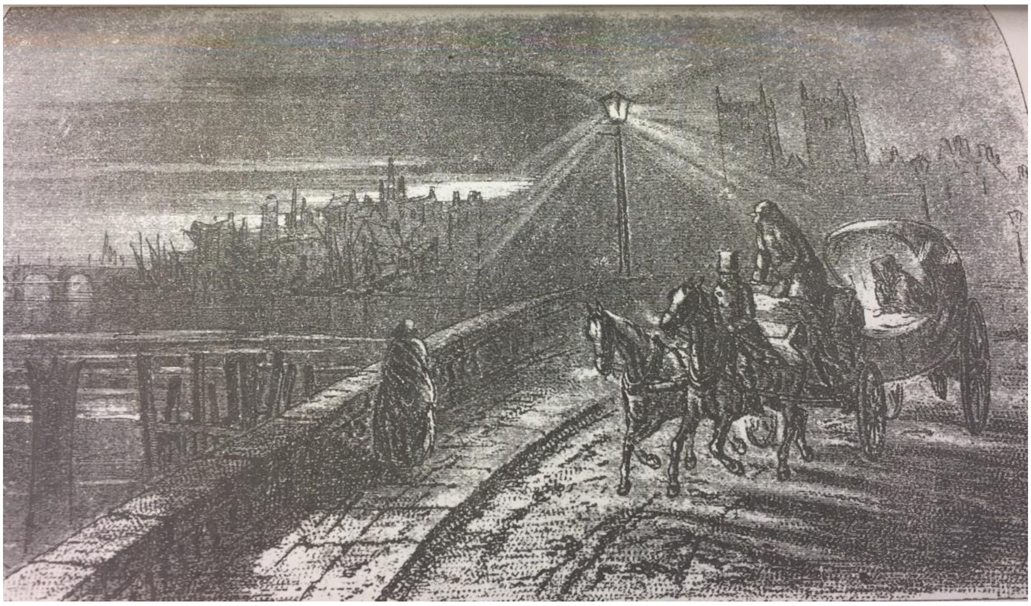

Figure 2 - Illustration to Chapter LVII in Bleak House *(Dickens 805)*

Appendix C

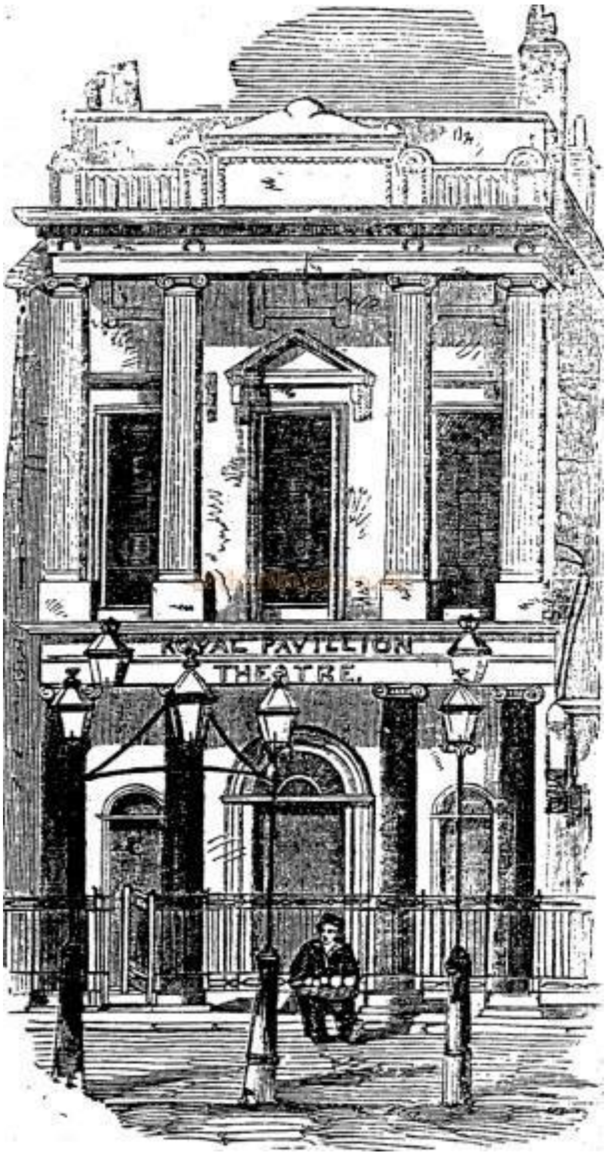
ROYAL PAVILION
THEATRE.

Figure 3- The Royal Pavilion theatre in 1856. Available at: http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/PavilionTheatreAndWonderlandWhitechapelRoad.htm

References

Allen, Emily. “The Victorian Novel and Theatre”. In: Rodensky, Lisa. *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 571-588.

Booth, Michael. *Theatre in the Victorian Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Callow, Simon. *Charles Dickens and the great theatre of the world*. New York: Vintage Books, 2012.

Corton, Christine. “Dickensian Gloom”. In: Corton, Christine. *London Fog: The Biography*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015.

Davis, T.; Postlewait, T. *Theatricality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Dickens. Charles. *Bleak House*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

___. *Social and Literary Speeches of Charles Dickens*. New York: Fredonia Classics, 2003.

___. *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*. London: Chapman and Hal, 1839. Web. Access on July 10, 2017. Available at: <https://books.google.nl/books?id=NdYNAAAAQAAJ>.

Elphinstone, J.; Neale, F. *‘Bleak House’, a drama in two acts*. Add MS 52940 K : 1 Jun 1853. British Library, London.

Eyre, Sir Richard. *Charles Dickens on theatre*. London: Hesperus Press Limited, 2011.

Glavin, John. *After Dickens: Reading, Adaptation and Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Hartley, Jenny. *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Hoeveler, Diane Long. “Victorian Gothic Drama”. In: Smith, Andrew; Hughes, William. *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

Litvak, Joseph. *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Mighall, Robert. “Dickens and the Gothic”. In: Paroissien, David. *A Companion to Charles Dickens*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 81-96.

Moran, Maureen. *Victorian Literature and Culture*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011.

Palmer, Beth. “Theatricality and Performance in Victorian Literature and Culture”. *Victorian Network*, Volume 3, Number 2 (Winter 2011), pp. 1-6.

“Pavilion Theatre and Wonderland, Whitechapel Road, Stepney”. *Arthur Lloyd The Music Hall and Theatre History Website*. Web. Access on June 30, 2017. Available at: <http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/PavilionTheatreAndWonderlandWhitechapelRoad.htm>.

Pitt, George D. *The Bleak House, or the Spectre of the Ghost Walk, A Drama in 2 Acts*. Add MS 52940 M : 6 Jun 1853. British Library, London.

Pritchard, Alan. “The Urban Gothic of Bleak House”. *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. Volume 45, Number 4 (Mar., 1991), pp. 432-452.

Smith, Andrew; Hughes, William. *The Victorian Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

“The City of London Theatre, 35 and 36 Bishopsgate Street, Norton Folgate, Bishopsgate”. *Arthur Lloyd The Music Hall and Theatre History Website*. Web. Access on June 30, 2017. Available at: <http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/CityOfLondonTheatre.htm>.