# The Will to Touch: David Copperfield's Hand

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> 'They have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that, like their coarse rough skins, they are not easily wounded.'[1]

Steerforth's dismissive comment on the Peggottys in *David Copperfield* sets up a central conflict of the novel: the relation of elites to the classes below them. The wealthy and entitled Steerforth assumes that working people are less susceptible to suffering than he, and this justifies his rough usage of those he considers inferior in social status. Sensitivity to touch was widely considered more highly developed among the 'refined' classes (and whiter races).[2] However, another necessary quality of the ruling elite was its ability to impose its will 'with a firm hand' on those below it on the social order. In short, elite hands should display both unusual sensitivity and the capacity to be brutal when necessary. I will here briefly contextualize the role of the touching hand in the period's medical and philosophical understanding of the embodied mind. I will discuss two paradigms: the hand as a kind of sensory 'orifice' that, through grasping, forms a conduit between inner and outer worlds; and the hand as an instrument of the will. The touching hand enacts the toucher's will, but the sensing hand troubles distinctions between active and passive, between the touching and the touched. I will end by offering some examples of how this dynamic operates in Dickens's 1850 *Bildungsroman*, *David Copperfield*. David, born into the middle class but fallen lower, struggles to re-establish his proper status, in part by learning to impose his own will on and by resisting the dominance of inappropriate others. The conflict between classes seeks resolution in the titular character; that conflict must be resolved through David's learning the appropriate use of touch.

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[1] Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. by Nina Burgis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 294.

[2] For a discussion of this belief, see, for example, Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 102–09.

The increased attention to hands in Victorian literature is of course partly driven by the period's increasing consideration of the body generally as a text for interpretation in its own right. Still, hands have a special status, as highly visible and active parts of the body. A quick quantitative (though not particularly scientific) survey of literary texts from the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries is suggestive, if not conclusive. Whereas the word 'hand' or 'hands' appears 89 times in Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) and 35 times in Burney's *Evelina* (1778), it appears 159 times in Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* (1860), 156 times in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), and 240 in Collins's *Woman in White* (1860) (to say nothing of other references, such as 'finger' — 55 in *Woman in White*), 378 in Dickens's *David Copperfield*, and 336 in *Bleak House* (1853). There are exceptions to this upward trend: Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820) has 139 hands and Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) only 86.[3] But a look at the context in which the terms are mentioned confirms a general tendency. Later texts describe hands more, discussing their sensations and appearance. Earlier texts have proportionately more metaphorical ('on the other hand') or semi-metaphorical references to hands ('I ask for your hand in marriage', 'please hand me to the carriage'), or simple direct references ('he took her hand', 'his hand was on his sword').[4] The hand, like the face, is part of the body most exposed to view, and undeniably the one most in direct contact with the world. Since the late eighteenth century, a period in which bodily intimacy especially among the elite was increasingly interdicted beyond the closest family members, the hand was the principal acceptable contact between individuals beyond the first degree of relation, and usually the first (and for a while, only) zone of direct contact between those who would become mates. Still, the way that the hand comes to rival the face in descriptive significance is notable. Later texts talk about beautiful, strong, clammy, or white hands; they tremble and thrill, strike and caress.

Critical readings of literature have sporadically acknowledged the significance of hands in the period. William Cohen's famous reading of *Great Expectations* as a text about masturbation draws from the predominance of hand imagery in this novel.[5] Cohen observes that the hand was

[3] All numbers are taken from Project Gutenberg etexts. The method was to count all mentions of 'hand' or 'hands', searching for each of the terms with a space on either side to eliminate such words as 'handsome' or 'handkerchief'.

[4] Examples given being general ones that recur throughout the texts of this period.

[5] William A. Cohen, *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 26–72.

sexualized, but focuses less on the physiological than on the other cultural reasons why this might be so. There were medical and scientific reasons why the hand was considered to be aligned with the genitals and the face. Hands communicated with the brain rapidly: Henry Frith remarks in 1891 that

> by a slight pressure man conveys the expression of affection in a manner which no other created being does. The lower animals rub against each other and against us to express regard and liking, and are caressed on the spine, which unites with the head. Our hands communicate most rapidly with our brains, and through them the vital fluid comes most rapidly, hence their expressiveness.[6]

(Today, we believe that on the cortex of the brain, hands, face, and genitals are all very close to each other, and are vastly over-represented on the cortical surface of the brain if estimated in terms of bodily proportion.)[7] Peter Capuano has more recently tackled the question of the hand at mid-century and, like Cohen, also finds his preferential Dickens text in *Great Expectations,* with its more than 450 references to hands.[8] Capuano attends to the use of hands in 1850s evolutionary discourse as a differentiator between human and gorilla, and the connection of that discussion to race. As he notes, there was a surge of interest in the hand at mid-century, from populist, phrenological, and chiromantic perspectives, and, most of all, from debates about evolution. As a result of increasing awareness of gorillas' similar anatomical structure to humans, the hand began to be de-emphasized as the decisive differentiating feature of humanity. Capuano notes that mid-century thinkers such as Herbert Spencer began to 'reassert human supremacy with different rhetoric', specifically with the emphasis on the 'perfection of the tactile apparatus' (quoted in Capuano, p. 190), greater sensitivity correlating to refinement, upper class status, and ability to grow and transform.

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[6] Henry Frith, *How to Read Character in Faces, Features and Forms* (London: Ward, Locke, Bowden, 1891), pp. 101–02.

[7] Most textbooks in neurology now include some version of the cortical homunculus first developed in 1951 by Wilder Penfield, showing the mapping of the body's surface onto the cortex. See Wilder Penfield and Herbert Jasper, *Epilepsy and the Functional Anatomy of the Human Brain* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951).

[8] Peter J. Capuano, 'Handling the Perceptual Politics of Identity in *Great Expectations*', *Dickens Quarterly*, 27 (2010), 185–208 (p. 187). Capuano has a forthcoming book on hands in the Victorian period.

As Capuano's observations suggest, the sense of touch was also undergoing a revaluation. From classical times to the eighteenth century, sight was broadly considered the monarch of the human senses: touch, like smell, was considered both more animal and less precise than sight. The Enlightenment had early on privileged vision, which was believed to allow the perceiver critical distance to evaluate data, whereas touch undercut that process, speaking directly to the 'lower' senses.[9] But in medicine and philosophy in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the self increasingly came to be seen as based on the sensing body, and this encouraged a reappraisal of touch. Claudia Benthien shows that even in the eighteenth century some thinkers subordinated vision to the priority of touch, as is the case with George Berkeley as early as 1709 in *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*.[10] By the mid-nineteenth century, touch emerged as a central and privileged sense in materialist studies of the mind by physiological philosophers such as Alexander Bain and Herbert Spencer. At the same time, the touching hand also took pride of place in discussions of touch not only as sensory input, but as an instrument of the will.

Voluntary touch is separate from what many writers in the period call 'common sensation' or 'animal sensibility' — the passive reception of feelings through the skin. Voluntary touch (as late eighteenth-century French anatomist Xavier Bichat describes it) comprises two activities: seeking information about the world and enacting the human will upon it.[11] The totality of touch includes passive sensation, voluntary touching,

[9] See, for example, Smith, p. 24 and *passim*.

[10] Claudia Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 195.

[11] Bell ascribes the concept of 'active touch' to Bichat and tends to use this term throughout his work (p. 116). I have used the word 'voluntary' here to avoid confusion with later uses of the phrase 'active touch'. Bichat uses the term 'voluntaire' when he states that Man 'surpasses' other animals in touch 'because this sense is [...] consequent to them [other senses], and corrects their errors [...]. The sense is voluntary; it supposes reflection in the animal that exercises it' requiring 'a preliminary act of the intellectual functions' (*General Anatomy*: *Applied to Physiology and Medicine*, trans. by George Hayward, 3 vols (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1822), I, 171). See the original passage in *Anatomie générale: précédée des recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort* (Paris: Ladrange, 1818), I, 147. Note that an act of will is indicated here. Franz Josef Gall translates this as 'willed' and also uses the terms 'active' and 'passive' to paraphrase the passage in *On the Functions of the Brain and of each of its Parts*, trans. by Winslow Lewis, 6 vols (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1835), I, 127.

and the relation between touch and what Charles Sherrington in 1906 termed the 'proprio-ceptive' sense, or the individual's sense of the position of the body in space.[12] Proprioception owes much to the body's perpetual touching of itself. Eighteenth-century thinkers elaborated a sense of muscle memory that laid a foundation for a notion of body position as forming emotions. But only in the nineteenth century do we begin to see an examination of the relationship between the sensing body, rather than simply the eye, and the body's perception of itself in space. Anatomist, neurologist, and artist Charles Bell observed in 1833 that using the hand involved a double sense: one of contact with the object, and one of the subject's own use of his or her body. As Bell traced how each of the senses

> is indebted to that of touch, [he] was led to observe that the sensibility of the skin is most dependent of all on the exercise of another quality. Without a sense of muscular action or consciousness of the degree of effort made, the proper sense of touch could hardly be an inlet to knowledge at all [...]. The motion of the hand and fingers, and the sense or consciousness of their action, must be combined with the sense of touch.[13]

This 'sixth sense', as Bell termed it, was most highly developed in the hand, though it involved the entire sensorium of the skin. For (as Lucy Hartley points out) Bell claims touch, not sight, is the determining link between internal and external in 'all forms of physical life'.[14] Here, Bell is following the insight of Bichat, who subordinated sight to touch as a mode of knowing, noting that, unlike touch, other senses do not require the prior exercise of the will. Bichat argued that we want to touch what we have already seen; thus, touch is the pre-eminent sense that we will to engage when seeking knowledge (*General Anatomy*, I, 171). Use of volun-

[12] Sir Charles Scott Sherrington (1857–1952) was an English neurophysiologist who received the Nobel Prize for his discoveries. He published *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1906), a collection of ten lectures delivered at Yale University, in which he coined several terms still widely used today, including 'proprio-ceptive system' (p. xii and *passim*).

[13] Charles Bell, *The Hand: Its Mechanism and Vital Endowments as Evincing Design* (London: Pickering, 1833), pp. 192–93.

[14] Lucy Hartley, '"The Sign in the Eye of What is Known to the Hand": Visualising Expression in Charles Bell's *Essays on Anatomy*', *Textual Practice*, 10 (1996), 83–121 (p. 84).

tary touch is an important part of developing not only awareness, but the will.

For many of the period's thinkers, touch determines the relation of self to world. Bell writes that developmentally, in human infancy, 'the lips and tongue are first exercised; the next motion is to put the hand to the mouth [...]. So that the sensibility to touch in the lips and tongue, and their motions, are the first inlets to knowledge' (p. 190). The hand's touch follows as a later but necessary stage in understanding sense information, both to obtaining knowledge of the world, and knowledge of the self:

> The knowledge of external bodies as distinguished from ourselves, cannot be acquired until the organs of touch in the hand have become familiar with our own limbs; we cannot be supposed capable of exploring any thing by the motion of the hand, or of judging of the form or tangible qualities of an object pressed against the skin, before we have a knowledge of our own body as distinguished from things external to us. (pp. 190–91)

Vision only becomes apparently supreme when the knowledge gained through touch has been sufficient for vision to estimate the 'qualities of bodies' that are already known to touch. Bell goes on to note that as the child grows, 'gradually the length of the arm, and the extent of its motions become the measure of distance, of form, of relation, and perhaps of time' (p. 191). So the face is the first surface to engage in voluntary touch, especially via the animal function of suckling. But the infant has no sense of the self as distinct from the world, nor of proprioception, until the hand is able to communicate both with the mouth and the immediate environment. Most Victorian theorists agree that touch, especially by the hand, is crucial for human development, both to learning about self and environment and to the assertion of the will. It is through this assertion of will that a subjectivity, with its constitutive sense of self and other, is formed.

Herbert Spencer, in *Principles of Psychology* (1855), builds on Bell's insights that the hands are fundamental to human understanding of space and proprioception, and founds his entire human psychology on voluntary touch.[15] He believed that our sense of our own extension in space and of the distance of other objects, and thus our sense of space as 'not

[15] Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Psychology* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1855).

ego' or outside of the self, emerge from our use of our hands in concert with vision to establish the position of our bodies and the measurement of the body's own reach in relation to space. It is thus through touch that Spencer believes humans understand the world as 'not self' and, therefore, something to be willed in and acted upon. In turn, 'our space-perceptions have become a language in which we think of surrounding things, without at all thinking of those experiences of motion which this language expresses' (p. 240). Our touch-understanding of the coexistence of two bodies, or even parts of the same body, in space, is what makes it possible to understand the 'ideas of Time and Sequence. It is impossible to think of Time without thinking of some succession [...]. Time, like Space, cannot be conceived except by the establishment of a relation between at least two elements of consciousness' (p. 247). From the infant touching itself (Spencer suggests the cheek) with its hands, the experience of motion gives rise to the nascent understanding of space, and perception of time arises out of that. Finally, this development allows sensation to become perception, sensation being defined as the forerunner of 'perception proper [which is] the cognition of an external object' (p. 279). So sensation, for Spencer, is the contemplation of something 'belonging to the *ego*' whereas perception involves the contemplation of 'something [...] as belonging to the *non-ego*' (pp. 279–80).

Spencer decidedly subordinates all senses to touch, and provides an evolutionary model wherein 'higher' senses develop from more primal ones, just as the more complex animals develop from and still contain the structures of primitive species. He argues that taste and smell even in complex organisms like mammals are still experienced through receptors on the mucus membranes — a modification of touch receptors on skin. However, this primal quality does not make it less important than other senses: it makes it their inclusive basis; all senses are touch, and all cognitive processes are based on sense. On touch is built all experience and consciousness, including the latest and most developed: civic and political 'feelings'. Spencer states that the first evolutionary differentiation is 'between the inner and outer tissues — the mass, and its limiting membrane — the substance of the body and its skin' (pp. 496–97). From a 'uniform jelly' the division results in 'one marked contrast of conditions — that between contact with each other and contact with the environment' resulting in a distinction of 'structure and function' between inner and outer. The skin then 'permanently assumes the office of receiving all those impressions which form the raw material of intelligence' (p. 497). Due to

this development, and its role as the recipient of outer stimuli, the skin becomes the chief organ of mind,

> the part in which psychical changes are originated [...]. But now mark the implication. The changes constituting the physical life [...] go on simultaneously throughout the entire mass. Those which foreshadow the psychical life are, in an increasing degree [as the organism grows more complex], localized in its outer surface. (p. 498)

William Cohen notes that Spencer shows sight as a form of touch, and convincingly reads the many keyhole scenes in *David Copperfield* as instances wherein seeing something is like being touched, and even entered by the thing seen.[16] However, Spencer himself does not privilege sight over touch: in essence, the mind's entire sensing and processing function is in the skin, and the skin controls mental growth and change. Spencer sees the human will as consciousness, and the consciousness is shaped and determined by the skin. *All* senses are forms of touch, and all forms of touch potentially allow invasion and transformation. The extension of the hand to act in the world also risks the world acting on the subject. Moreover, the hand's use can violate the distinction between inside and outside, changing the toucher and invading the inner space of the touched.

The hand was pre-eminently the site of voluntary touching in adults, and this is reflected in Victorian literature, as authors used hands more extensively than ever for characterological purposes. Spencer was a direct influence on George Eliot and Wilkie Collins, and he and Dickens moved in the same social circles. Bell's and Spencer's ideas about human sense perception and psychology, like Darwin's, circulated widely, transforming as they moved across cultural domains. Many Victorian authors used physiognomic information about hands to suggest character traits. The permanent characteristics of the hand often indicate qualities of character that will develop over the course of a story, supplementing and correcting information from the face — Eliot's Maggie and Dorothea have strong, rather masculine hands, for example, indicating their strength of will. Hands are also emotionally expressive. One may visually study the

[16] William A. Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 4–5, 38–39. Whereas Cohen sees touch as penetration that is secondary to the frequent use of the eye as an 'orifice' through which another (Peggotty, Heep) enters Copperfield, I argue that the frequency of the use of hands and touching figure touch as a form of intersubjective contact as important to the novel as sight.

expression of the face, but it is often touch — feeling the coldness of a character's hands, for example — that confirms or contradicts the evidence of the eyes. If the face reflects intention and emotion, the hands — fidgeting, clenching, opening — often say something about the character's will. Novels in the period often use touch and description of hands to discuss misalignments between intention and action, between inner and outer worlds.

Dickens was perhaps less interested in scientific details than Collins or Eliot, but he participates in the general cultural engagement with the body in the period. His use of hands is generally exemplary of the fictional techniques of the day, which focused on the body as a signifier of character. Hands tremble when their owners are guilty or afraid, for example, even when they attempt to smile. His books are full of expressive hand-face combinations: Bucket's forefinger communes with his nose; Twemlow, bemused, with his hand to his forehead. But Dickens's hands also reveal intention and will through their actions, and this is where the author seems to engage directly with the questions of psychology and education so important to *David Copperfield*. Many critics have commented on his use of associationist paradigms derived from Bain and Spencer to theorize memory, habit, and childhood education.[17] Here, I would like to focus on Dickens's creative elaboration of a rhetoric of the hand as an expression of the will. In *David Copperfield*, a character's psychological development relates to the way he is able to use his hand. Dickens creates a system of signification in which the self must successfully align the face and the hand, emotion and action. Moreover, when the hand touches another, a connection is made between the will of the toucher and the independent will of the touched. The successful elite adult male must be able to align his actions and emotions, but must also be able to resist the wills of others and, when necessary, to impose his own on those others. Dickens uses a detailed play of hands to show this process.

The connection between the hand that deals a blow and the face that receives it is one that appears often in *David Copperfield*. Though Rosa Dartle's scar is such a prominent feature of the story that it sometimes occludes other foci, the principle hand-face pairings in the novel are among Davy and other men. Little Davy begins his story by refusing to

[17] See, for example, Sarah Winter, *The Pleasures of Memory: Learning to Read with Charles Dickens* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011); Athena Vrettos, 'Defining Habits: Dickens and the Psychology of Repetition', *Victorian Studies*, 42 (1999/2000), 399–426; or Natalie Rose, 'Flogging and Fascination: Dickens and the Fragile Will', *Victorian Studies*, 47 (2005), 505–33.

shake his future stepfather's hands, insisting on giving him the left instead of the right ('the Wrong Hand, Davy!'), out of jealousy, as he resents the man's lips kissing his mother's 'little glove', and touching his mother's hand in patting his head (p. 18). When he discovers his mother has married, he is forced to give his hand to Murdstone. When he weeps in bed after the discovery, his mother and Peggotty try to comfort him, but he refuses. He then feels 'the touch of a hand that I knew was neither hers nor Peggotty's, and [I] slipped to my feet at the bed-side. It was Mr. Murdstone's hand, and he kept it on my arm' (p. 45). Murdstone then has a chilling conversation about what Spencer's interlocutor, the psychologist Alexander Bain, calls 'the training of the whip' in *The Emotions and the Will*.[18] He tells David that,

> 'if I have an obstinate horse or dog to deal with [...] I beat him [...]. I make him wince, and smart. I say to myself, "I'll conquer that fellow"; and if it were to cost him all the blood he had, I should do it. What is that upon your face?' (p. 46)

David responds that it is dirt, when both know that it is tear marks. It is this lie about facial expression, in a battle of wills, that splits the connection between David's inner perception and outer expression: 'A word of encouragement [...] might have made me dutiful to him in my heart henceforth, instead of in my hypocritical outside, and might have made me respect instead of hate him' (pp. 46–47). In Bain's rumination upon skin sensations and the role of pain, he is clear that the whip is to be used on animals because of the 'fundamental link of the volitional nature' between the animal's present sense of pain and the stimulus, as the animal can know nothing of the 'purposes of its driver' (pp. 366–67). Natalie Rose shows that Dickens uses several 'fascinated' characters to show that flogging can produce 'suggestible and passive' characters such as David Copperfield or Pip (Rose, p. 506). These characters address 'anxieties about the will and the fragility of autonomy and self-determination. The rhetoric of fascination in these works describes tenuously bounded selves whose volitional capabilities are too weak to withstand the psychic influence of other characters' (p. 506). Rose shows that Bain was part of a lively conversation about the will and physical punishment that played out primarily in the conversation about the flogging of men in the military and prisons. In the mid-century, theorists such as James Martineau and John Stuart Mill positioned the human will as a force that 'not only

[18] Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (London: Parker, 1859), p. 367.

controls "inward fluctuations" and the "anarchies of impulse" but also mediates between the individual and "the play of surrounding influences" [...]. As the guarantor of autonomy, the will secures the very boundaries of the self' (Rose, p. 515). Therefore, it is not appropriate to think of 'training' it like an animal's to respond only to immediate stimuli. Murdstone sets out not to mould David's will but to break it. As Rose points out, Murdstone treats David like a dog, and like a dog, he bites. Sending him to a school in which 'frequent floggings makes the boys into "miserable little dogs"' does nothing to educate David's will, but makes him into a beast with no will of his own, as 'David relates how Murdstone "ordered me like a dog, and I obeyed like a dog"' (Rose, p. 519). This mis-education makes him easy prey for strong-willed characters such as Steerforth or Uriah Heep.

It is through the play of hands that Dickens shows the movement of opposing wills in the novel. David is 'marked' by the action he takes to mark his stepfather; he bites the hand that beats him: 'He cut me heavily an instant afterwards, and in the same instant I caught the hand with which he held me in my mouth, between my teeth, and bit it through' (p. 58). And face and hand are marked together when David apologizes, and Murdstone offers his hand:

> The hand he gave me was the hand I had bitten. I could not restrain my eye from resting for an instant on a red spot upon it; but it was not so red as I turned, when I met that sinister expression in his face. (p. 116)

Though David attempts to double back the force of Murdstone's blow, it ultimately marks his face more strongly than Murdstone's hand. David is penetrated by Murdstone's will, and his own is correspondingly weakened.

David tries and fails to impose his will on Murdstone. Years later, the villain of the novel, Uriah Heep, is distinguished by his unpleasantly wet 'skeleton' hand, the properties of which penetrate David's body: 'Oh, what a clammy hand his was! as ghostly to the touch as to the sight! I rubbed mine afterwards, to warm it, AND TO RUB HIS OFF' (p. 225). The hand is both Heep's and a kind of ghostly revenant of Murdstone's past touch. Repeatedly, we are told of the coldness of Heep's 'long, lank, skeleton hand', of its 'damp' quality: 'his hand felt like a fish', David tells us, and he is often obliged to clasp it (pp. 219, 382). Heep not only imposes his hand and will upon David but, as Cohen notes, is figured as actually entering David's body and mind through the skin (*Embodied*,

p. 38). I would argue that Heep enters Copperfield's subjectivity through the touch of his hands; the hands of Heep and Copperfield meet not only as subjects extending their will into the world, but as openings through which they may potentially be entered in turn. The imposition of Heep's will on David comes to an apex when Heep implicitly threatens Wickfield with ruin, saying,

> If anyone else had been in my place during the last few years, by this time he would have had Mr. Wickfield [...] under his thumb. Un — der — his thumb,' said Uriah, very slowly, as he stretched out his cruel-looking hand above my table, and pressed his own thumb upon it, until it shook, and shook the room. [...] He took his crooked thumb off the spot where he had planted it, and slowly and thoughtfully scraped his lank jaw with it, as if he were shaving himself. (pp. 379–80)

Touching his own face, he both closes the circuit of power (he caresses himself) and overwhelms Copperfield, who resists the desire to attack him for Agnes's sake, as he sees 'the sense of power that there was in his face' (p. 381).

David's bonding with more appropriate male role models is also expressed through the hand-face connection. When Mr Peggotty weeps at the thought of Emily, David 'laid my trembling hand upon the hand he put before his face' (p. 585). When Mr Peggotty resolves to rescue her,

> his hand upon the table rested there in perfect repose, with a resolution in it that might have conquered lions. I pressed his manly hand again, and told him I would charge myself to do this as well as I could. (p. 729)

And when she is rescued, David 'could not help observing what power and force of character his sinewy hand expressed, and what a good and trusty companion it was to his honest brow' (p. 724). This emphasis on the correlation between the true and trusty face and hand, and the false faces of Murdstone and Heep (whose hands betray rather than confirm the hypocritical expression of their faces), emphasizes the importance of a harmony between the will and the expression. David spends much of the novel not knowing whom to trust or admire, his actions out of sync with his true interests, suppressing his own expressions and in uncertain connection with his perceptions. Though he desires Dora, his reaction to Agnes's touch tells us that his love is really given there: 'She put her hand — its touch was like no other hand — upon my arm [...]; I could not help

moving it to my lips, and gratefully kissing it' (p. 366). His true will leads him to connect the hands and faces of himself, Agnes, and Mr Peggotty. But just as he is not able to evade Murdstone's hands, he does not know how to resist the touch of Heep.

Loss of the ability to effect change on the outer world forces the will to double back upon itself, and this is expressed by the injured party striking or covering his or her own face, as Rosa does, and as Mr Peggotty does when he despairs of Emily. David's closing his hand over the hand with which Mr Peggotty covers his face is a pledge to extend his will in assistance to him. When David finally breaks free of Heep's influence, the hand-face circuit is again invoked in a scene that reverses the novel's primal scene with Murdstone:

> As we stood, front to front, I saw so plainly, in the stealthy exultation of his face, what I already so plainly knew; I mean that he forced his confidence upon me, expressly to make me miserable, and had set a deliberate trap for me in this very matter; that I couldn't bear it. The whole of his lank cheek was invitingly before me, and I struck it with my open hand with that force that my fingers tingled as if I had burnt them [...]. He caught the hand in his, and we stood in that connexion, looking at each other. We stood so, a long time; long enough for me to see the white marks of my fingers die out of the deep red of his cheek, and leave it a deeper red (pp. 619–20).

This violent break leads Heep to close the circuit of his hand on his own face once more, being, as Dickens carefully emphasizes, 'constrained by the pain of his cheek to put his hand there' (p. 620). In this gesture, Heep's dominance over David is broken; his will is returned to the self, not this time in a deliberate caress but by constraint. Later, when Heep is unmasked, he touches his own chin with his 'gristly hand', making David recall 'the marks of my hand upon his cheek' (pp. 745, 749). When Heep reaches to destroy evidence, Mr Micawber 'disabled his right hand' with a ruler: 'It dropped at the wrist, as if it were broken' (p. 750). The scene cites and reverses the earlier one in which Murdstone's bitten right hand 'is bound up in a large linen wrapper' (p. 59). Heep is forced to incriminate himself, injuring his own interests, as he, 'after wringing his wounded hand for some time, slowly drew off his neck-kerchief and bound it up; then held it in his other hand' (p. 751). Heep doubles David and Murdstone at once, as he takes 'an impatient bite at the handkerchief in which his hand was wrapped' as his mother begs the men to show Heep

mercy, as David's mother once begged mercy, (equally unsuccessfully), for Davy of Murdstone, who left him 'fevered, and hot, and torn and sore' (pp. 755, 58). At last Heep 'wiped his [own] hot face with his hand' and leaves, defeated (p. 759).

Heep is not only Murdstone's ghostly double, but David's alter ego. Although David refers to Heep as an 'ape', the novel repeatedly calls into question the distinction of class that Heep assumes is the reason David feels him unworthy of Agnes, both in the proof that the Peggottys are not the insensible brutes the Steerforths assume, and in David's own class-passing (p. 516). The two men have parallel experiences of early training that make them hypocritical and cowardly: 'How abject we were', David exclaims, remembering the schoolmaster who beat the boys and forced the others to laugh at his jokes as he did it (p. 90). And Heep, like his father and mother, was 'taught [...] a deal of umbleness [...]. We was to [...] abase ourselves before our betters. And we had such a lot of betters!' (pp. 574–75). Lest we miss the comparison, Dickens has David himself draw the lesson: 'It was the first time it had ever occurred to me, that this detestable cant of false humility might have originated out of the Heep family' (p. 575). Both boys feign admiration of an oppressive system, and both must be careful of displaying the wrong kinds of knowledge: David fears exposure of his knowledge of the streets, and Uriah fears that if he learns Latin he will be seen as insufficiently ''umble' (p. 254). If David sees Uriah's ambition as disguised by false humility, he sees in David a false pride, accusing him of being 'an upstart', and he is not wrong: if Uriah flaunts the badge of the charity boy he is, David conceals his past (p. 760).

In order to break his bond with Heep and become a fully integrated (elite, male) adult, David must become the one who strikes, rather than he who is struck. Moreover, he must strike appropriately, directing his hand in accordance with his true will. More than a scuffle, the scene of David's emancipation is staged as one of intimate physical contact in which the two men stand connected 'for a long time' and, 'looking at each other', balance the dominance of their wills (p. 620). In this, David breaks his alignment with Heep, while affirming his continuity — pledged through touch — to the Peggottys. In other words, he takes his place in the elite, not through Steerforth's denial of common humanity with the lower classes, but through its affirmation. At the same time, he must reject the class hostility and rage that people like Steerforth and even David (perhaps rightfully) inspire. *David Copperfield* is more focused than most of Dickens's novels on *Bildung*, rather than, for example, on the broader

historical concerns Dickens addresses in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), or even on the general social concerns key to *Bleak House*. The history here is that of the immediate family and the individual's perceptions and sensations; like Spencer or Bain, it offers a theory of the education of the senses and the will. In focusing on David's long journey to self-education, and thus to knowing and harmonizing his true will with his outer character and actions, Dickens often focuses on touch as transformative. David's task is to harmonize the classes by taking his place as a member of the elite who uses his will appropriately and is no longer vulnerable to the invasive wills of others — or the lax control of his own will resulting from his own early miseducation that results in his first marriage. His success in doing all three is marked by winning the hand of Agnes, whose touch, he at last understands, complements his own 'like no other' (p. 366).