

## Correspondence

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The Editor, British Journal of Psychiatry, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG

### SCHIZOPHRENIA IN FICTION

DEAR SIR,

In Dickens' *David Copperfield*, the following conversation takes place between David, the narrator, and Mr Dick, a friend of David's aunt:

'Do you recollect the date', said Mr Dick, looking earnestly at me, and taking up his pen to note it down, 'when King Charles the First had his head cut off?' I said I believed it happened in the next year sixteen hundred and forty nine. 'Well', returned Mr Dick, scratching his ear with his pen, and looking dubiously at me, 'So the books say; but I don't see how that can be. Because, if it was so long ago, how could the people about him have made that mistake of putting some of the trouble out of his head, after it was taken off, into mine?'

Schneider (1959) has said that one of the symptoms of first rank in the diagnosis of schizophrenia is the attribution of thoughts to other people, who intrude their thoughts upon the patient, and this would seem to apply here. Schneider's one caveat is that there is no physical illness present which might cause the symptom, and this may reasonably be inferred from the text; Mr Dick's symptom persisted in the context of otherwise good health for a period of fifteen to twenty years.

In *Jane Eyre* the following is a description of Mrs Rochester's behaviour:

'In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal; but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face; . . . the clothed hyena rose up and stood tall on its hind feet. . . . the maniac bellowed: she parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors. The lunatic sprang and grappled his throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek. . . .'

This rather metaphorical account defies diagnosis and it may have been based on lay concepts of madness rather than on observation.

Accuracy of observation sufficient to allow a

diagnosis to be made has been noted previously in Dickens' work (Cecil-Loeb, 1971). The Pickwickian syndrome of somnolence and obesity illustrated by fat Joe in *The Pickwick Papers* has been thought to be an example of the cardio-respiratory failure of extreme obesity. It is in these medical descriptions that Dickens' detailed recording of observation may be validated, and perhaps this accuracy generalizes to other varieties of behaviour shown by his characters, which cannot be compared with precise standards. From a literary viewpoint, it might be argued that although accuracy is an asset in creating social realism, it is a disadvantage in the more romantic novel like *Jane Eyre*, depending for its effectiveness on a less obvious adherence to fact.

### References

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### EPILEPTIC FIT AFTER CLOMIPRAMINE

DEAR SIR,

A 67-year-old woman was admitted to a psychiatric ward suffering from a depressive illness. The clomipramine 50 mg three times daily which she had been taking as an outpatient was not continued and 36 hours after admission she became unconscious; her respiration became audible, she slouched down in the