A DIALOGUE OF SHADOWS.

[Scene, Purgatory (1778). The Shades of an Englishman and a Frenchman are pacing by the side of a gloomy river.]

Englishman. What bustle is here? Can we not groan in peace?

Frenchman. There are some new arrivals. One, who comes straight from the finest kingdom of the earth, has caused a vast sensation. Here he is!

[The Shade of Voltaire enters.]

Engl. I never saw a ghost so thin as this.

Vol. Good day, Messieurs,—if we may call this day! Faith, there's a pleasant warmth about the place.

After our rapid journey thro' the dark,

With cold winds driving us, and jarring atoms Whistling about our ears, 'tis not so bad

To reach this hot and twilight land at last.

Sir, if 't be not a liberty, may I ask

For a pinch of charcoal.

French. With much pleasure, sir,

[Præsents his box.]

Any news from France?

Vol. France, sir, is growing young; Thro' me, and d'Alembert, and Diderot, And that mad envious watchmaker, who did Good in his own despite. Before the earth Shall have swung a dozen times about the sun, Our dragon's seed will rise and show some fruit.

French. We are glad to see you here, sir.

Vol. Without doubt, sir,

A strange place this. Our French geographers Had doubts if such a region were. Nay, some Proved to the satisfaction of their friends, That 'twas impossible. Eng. So most things seem,

Until they are discovered.

Vol. That's well said;

Sir, I salute you.

French. You'll find some excellent company, Monsieur.

Vol. You have some famous men here,— doubtless, sir.

A priest or two?

French. A few.

Vol. I thought so, sir.

A king perhaps?

French. Oh, plenty. Let me see— One, two, three.

Vol. Sir, spare your arithmetic.

I am not curious. Yet, of these last, There's surely one, who dwells in Prussia now, Whose over-arching arrogance should cast A shadow prematurely o'er the gulf, And send his image here?—such things may be—

One Frederick?

French. Called the Great—

Vol. By little men.

Eng. A shadow slim, in cockt hat and rigid boots?

Vol. The same: Is he always in the saddle now?

French. We have no horses here.

Vol. Where are your ladies?

Any of them from France?

Eng. Shoals—locust-clouds— We 've larger, lighter batches from this land, Than all the rest of the globe.

Vol. I shall be glad

To renew friendship with some few of them. Madame du Châtelet—

French. She was a friend of yours?

Vol. I had some strong delusion of that sort. 'Twas when she flattered me. But, tell me, sir, What time do you dine in this agreeable land? I feel no appetite.

Eng. We do not dine.

Vol. Not dine. When do you eat?

Eng. We do not eat.

Vol. Humph! that is odd. When do you sleep?
Eng. We do not sleep.
Volt. I' faith, this jest begins
To grow a little serious. I thought I knew
Somewhat of most things; but this puzzles me.
Lest I should err again, pray what do you here,
In this most quiet kingdom—all day long?
Nay, day and night? What pastime?—
Eng. We repose!
Sometimes we dream; of times and people
gone,—
Sometimes of our own country; we retrace
Our course in earthly life; our deeds—
Volt. I have done
Some deeds myself. Perhaps, Monsieur, you have seen
A dictionary of mine, which made some noise?
A fable or two, which told some bitter truths?
A famous poem?—mark me.—
Eng. Your great work,
I have read, and much admired.
Volt. The Henriade?

Sir, you have taste.
Eng. Not so—a work less large
In bulk; yet greater. 'Twas indeed no more
Than a small memorial; touch'd wi' the light of
Truth,
The strength of Right. Fine Sense and Pity
joined,
Begat it. It came forth, midst tears, and scorn,
And burning anger. These inspired your pen
To the argument, when murdered Galas died.
Volt. You bring me light, sir,—comfort,—
almost faith.
The dark thoughts that at times have haunted me,—
The small ambition to be thought a wit,—
The wish to sting my many enemies,—
Scorn disappearing. Sir, my thanks! I feel
A warmth about my bosom, and begin
To think that joys dwell not alone on earth,
But some survive even in Purgatory.
Article:  ‘A Dialogue of Shadows’ by Bryan Waller Procter

Journal:  Household Words, Volume I, Magazine No. 2, 6 April 1850, Page: 38

Author(s):

Bryan Waller Procter

Procter, Bryan Waller I Mr. Procter, W. B. Procter, Procter I, 1787-1874, poet. Educated at Harrow. Studied law. Practised as solicitor in London; served as commissioner of lunacy, 1832-61. Contributed to Literary Gazette, London Magazine, Athenæum, Fraser's, Edin. Rev., and other periodicals; also to annuals. Published, under pseudonym "Barry Cornwall," Dramatic Scenes and Other Poems, 1819; and, in next four years, three additional volumes of dramatic, narrative, and lyric verse; Miranda, 1821, a tragedy, performed at Covent Garden; English Songs, 1832. Wrote Life of Edmund Kean, Memoir of Lamb; prefatory memoir to works of Ben Jonson and of Shakespeare. With Forster, edited Selections from the Poetical Works of Robert Browning, 1863. Knew almost all his literary contemporaries - from William Lisle Bowles, whom he met in 1805, to Swinburne, who in 1868 sent him a tribute in verse; much loved for his kindliness, his generosity, his unassuming good nature.

Dickens was yet "a young aspirant" in the literary world, he wrote, when he was honoured with Procter's friendship ("Introduction" to A. A. Procter, Legends and Lyrics). The two men remained friends throughout Dickens's life. In his letters to Procter, Dickens conveyed his thanks for copies of Procter's books and expressed his admiration of them. In a letter to Forster and in one to Thomas Mitton, he quoted from Procter's poem "The Sea." Procter, in his old age, reread Dickens's novels. "Tell Dickens -,", he wrote to Forster, "I have been improving my mind by reading Pickwick again. ... It is cheerful healthy reading." While Forster was working on his biography of Dickens, Procter wrote to him: "To me, [Dickens] was always a kind, good genial fellow, and I liked him much" (Armour, Barry Cornwall, pp. 281, 285, 338). Procter obviously intended his contributions to H.W. to be gratuitous. The Office Book entry for the first of his poems is accompanied by the notation "Mr. P. would not be paid"; the words are marked out and substituted by the notation "Cheque C.D." The Office Book records payment of £1.1.0 for each of the poems assigned to Procter, though they range in length from less than ½ col. to 1¾ cols. In a letter to Forster, Aug. 1, 1850, Procter wrote, obviously with reference to H.W.: "If you think the verses on the other side will suit Dickens, they are at his service" (Armour, p. 230). The Office Book records no poem by Procter for the months of 1850 following the date of the letter. If the poem was published in H.W. (and it probably was), it may be a poem wrongly assigned in the Office Book; or it may be "Battle with Life!", Sept. 21, recorded without author or payment notation. It cannot be either of the two unassigned poems ("A Lesson for Future Life," "A Memory") with payment recorded as £0.10.6 - that being but half the honorarium regularly made to Procter (Procter, moreover, could never have been guilty of the bathos of "A Lesson for Future Life"); and it is of course not the unassigned "Outcast Lady" (payment also £0.10.6), which arrived at the editorial office "per Mrs. Gaskell." On Dec. 19, 1858, Dickens wrote to Procter: "A thousand thanks for the little song. I am charmed with
it, and shall be delighted to brighten Household Words with such a wise and genial light." The Office Book assigns no poem to Procter in the H.W. numbers that follow the date of the letter, nor are there in those numbers any poems listed in the Office Book without author's name. It seems likely that Procter's "little song" is "Hidden Chords," ¾, col., £1.1.0 payment, published Jan. 8, 1859, less than three weeks after the date of Dickens's letter. The Office Book assigns "Hidden Chords" to Miss Procter. Since she did not reprint it among her collected poems, it is probably not her writing; it is unlikely that in 1858 she would have contributed to a periodical a poem that she did not think worthy of collecting. His "One Spot of Green," published in H.W. in 1854, Procter reprinted in a collection of 1857 [Dramatic Scenes. With Other Poems, Now First Printed. By Barry Cornwall. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1857)] among "Miscellaneous Poems," which he stated in his preface had "never been before printed." In Feb. 1853, he had sent a copy of the poem, titled "A Song with a Moral," to his friend James T. Fields (Fields, Yesterdays with Authors, p. 406). For the early numbers of A.Y.R. Procter wrote a series of "Trade Songs," which Dickens found "simply ADMIRABLE" (to Procter, March :19, 1859). Procter must have discussed the songs with Dickens some months before he submitted them to him for publication, for Dickens, in his letter of Dec. 19, 1858, reminded him: "... I still hope to hear more of the trade-songs, and to learn that the blacksmith has hammered out no end of iron into good fashion of verse, like a cunning workman, as I know him of old to be." The reference is obviously to the second of the "Trade Songs," titled "The Blacksmith," A.Y.R., April 30, 1859. Dickens's reciting two lines of that poem in conversation with John Bennet Lawes (Forster, Life, Book VIII, sect. v) has been taken to mean that the poem was composed by Dickens. In view of Dickens's letter to Procter, it is clear that Dickens was reciting lines that he remembered from Procter's poem, not lines that he himself had composed. Procter's high contemporary reputation as a song writer is reflected in Mrs. Unton's H.W. article "Street Minstrelsy": Barry Cornwall's songs, wrote Mrs. Linton, are loved and sung by ""the million,"" while at the same time they are esteemed by the cultivated - charming "the most critical taste" and delighting "the finest ear." Mackay, in "An Emigrant Afloat," recorded that he had, before experiencing "the disagreeables" of shipboard life, listened with "a sort of enthusiasm" to such songs as Procter's "The Sea." Morley, in "Constitutional Trials," quoted Procter's lines in praise of beer. D.N.B. Author: Anne Lohrli; © University of Toronto Press, 1971

Genre(s):

- Drama
  Article presented primarily in dramatic mode, i.e. 'dealing with or employing the forms of drama' (OED).

- Poetry: Narrative
  Longer poem (seldom less than 20 lines) that gives 'an account of a series of events ... with the establishing of connections between them' (OED), often featuring regular rhyme and memorable rhythm (authentic and imitation ballads are included within this genre).

- Cross-genre
  A cross-genre or hybrid-genre article is one which is deemed to purposefully blend rhetorical
and stylistic features and incorporate iconography from more than one pre-existent genres. Depending on the genres crossed, this can also be referred to as: creative non-fiction, witness literature, 'Gonzo' journalism, immersion journalism, narrative non-fiction. The blurring of boundaries is frequently defined as 'New' (hence the slightly puzzling recurrence of the term 'New Journalism' to describe approaches to periodical writing in the late 19th-century, mid-20th and early 21st centuries, as clearly it was alive and flourishing in Dickens's Wellington Street offices from 1850 onwards).

Subject(s):

- Europe—History
- France—History
- Great Britain—History
- National Characteristics; Nationalism
- Supernatural; Superstition; Spiritualism; Clairvoyance; Mesmerism; Ghosts; Fairies; Witches; Magic; Occultism

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