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GEORGE CRABBE

A Case Study *Gavin Edwards*



Dombey sat in the corner of the darkened room in the great arm-chair by the bed-side, and Son lay tucked up warm in a little basket bedstead, carefully disposed on a low settee immediately in front of the fire and close to it, as if his constitution were analogous to that of a muffin, and it was essential to toast him brown while he was very new.¹

THE OPENING OF *Dombey and Son* (1848) supports Terry Eagleton's view that with Dickens

we have entered a phase of social history in which all the real power seems to have been taken over by material things—money, institutions, commodities, power relations—while human beings themselves, falling under their tyrannical sway, are reduced to the level of coalbuckets and candlesticks.

And he notes—following Raymond Williams—the part which capital letters play in this process: 'In *Our Mutual Friend*, Shares, suitably capitalized, becomes a character in its own right, rather like young Pip's Great Expectations.'² One of the nice things about the first sentence of *Dombey and Son* is that the two processes Eagleton describes—the reification of persons, the personification of things and institutions—meet in 'Son', with its initial capital letter. What the capital tells us is that the infant Paul is already no more and no less than an embodiment of his future position in the patrilineal family firm.

The importance of the capital letter in some of Dickens's most powerful writing should draw our attention to the fact that with Dickens we have entered a new phase not only of social, but of typographic, history. In 1848, as in our own time, the initial capital was normally used to distinguish proper names from other parts of speech, including other substantives. Dickens was able to use the initial capital as a precision instrument because there was this established convention for him to break. That convention, however, had only become firmly established in the decade following Dickens's birth in 1812. Between about 1750 and about 1820, printing practice was in a state of confused transition where capital letters were concerned.

The choice between upper and lower case always has semantic effects, but between *c.* 1750 and *c.* 1820 it is often hard to decide what these effects are or who (author, publisher, compositor) is responsible for them. To put the same thing another way: writers sometimes tried to control the use and meaning of capital letters in printed versions of their work, but their ability to control either of these things was variable and always limited. That being so, it is surprising that so little attention has been paid either to the causes or the semantic effects of these typographic changes. It is perhaps particularly surprising that scholars of the Romantic period, which is often identified as a period of general instability, should have paid so little attention to a kind of instability which must bear so directly on the meaning of literary texts.³

Writing to his friend John Moultrie in 1845, Wordsworth compared modern printed versions of Gray's 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College' with a version in Gray's own handwriting:

Throughout the whole poem the substantives are written in Capital Letters. [Gray] writes 'Fury-Passions', and not, as commonly printed, the 'fury-passions'. What is the reason that our modern Compositors are so unwilling to employ Capital Letters?⁴

Wordsworth's question has never been properly answered. The change to which he referred—as if it were a recent change—had however been identified a century before. In 1755, John Smith's *Printer's Grammar* distinguished between 'the old way, with Capitals to substantives, and Italic to proper names', and the 'more modern way', which Smith considered to be 'the more neat practice, all in Roman, and Capitals to proper names and Emphatical words'.⁵

It is indeed frequently argued (sometimes, *contra* Wordsworth, in the context of arguments for presenting modernised versions of eighteenth-century texts), that 'a general modernisation of printing practices, especially effecting the initial capitalisation of nouns, occurred in the mid-eighteenth century itself'.⁶ There were, however, many exceptions to this, and while a comparison of almost any book published in 1730 with almost any published in 1830 reveals the radical difference between systems (or 'ways') to which Smith refers, books published in the intervening period present a very mixed picture. They do so partly because the frequency and meaning of capital letters often depends—as Smith's formulation suggests it must—on whether italics continue to be used to differentiate proper names from other parts of speech. In the period of confused transition between 'old' and 'modern' systems, printers who did not capitalise the initial letters of all substantives frequently continued to distinguish proper names by putting them in italic; while among printers who did get rid of italic there was plenty of disagreement about what kinds of noun deserved the emphasis provided by an initial capital. Indeed, texts—including Printers' Grammars—were often inconsistent in their use of both capitals and italic. We should not conclude from Smith's description of 'two ways' of doing things, an 'old' way and a 'modern' way, that there were two clear-cut systems between

which authors or printers could choose, with the newer system winning out either suddenly or in a clearly consistent forward trend.

J. D. Fleeman, explaining his decision to provide an edition of Samuel Johnson's poems in which 'Johnson's own practices in spelling, punctuation and capitalisation are preserved' argued that

to retain capitals simply in accordance with modern practice for proper names and personifications only would place interpretations on the words which might well be unwarranted. There is a difference between 'Let Observation with extensive view/ Survey mankind from China to Peru' and 'Let Observation with extensive View/ Survey Mankind from China to Peru' which, though not a point affecting immediate comprehension, nevertheless raises important questions about the modes of thought which lie behind the words.⁷

I share this view of the importance of typographic case. Nevertheless, in the early printed edition of the poem which Fleeman reproduces (he also provides a printed version of Johnson's manuscript) the poem in fact begins: 'Let Observation with extensive View,/Survey Mankind from *China* to *Peru*'. The distinction between upper and lower case cannot be considered separately from the distinction between roman and italic. After all, the effect of Dickens referring to the infant Dombey as 'Son' would not have been the same if, within the novel, the name of the firm had been '*Dombey and Son*' rather than 'Dombey and Son'.

Prompted by John Smith, we need to think in terms of different systems. Both the system in general use during the first half of the eighteenth century—Smith's 'old' system—and the 'modern' system differentiate proper names from other parts of speech, the old system by italic and capital letter, the modern system by capital letter alone. But the old system also links all nouns together by giving them all an initial capital, thereby drawing attention to their shared, and by implication privileged, identity as names. The modern system is very different: it dissolves the naming element of language, elevating only the proper name, and differentiating it from all other elements of language, including the common noun.

What are we then to make of capital letters—or their absence—in texts produced during that long period of transition in which there was no agreed convention in place? In the remainder of this essay I shall look at two poems from the period of transition: 'The Widow's Tale' and 'The Convert' by George Crabbe. Both poems appeared in *Tales*, printed by Robert Brettell for Hatchard in 1812. In 1818, Crabbe sold *Tales of the Hall* and the previous copyrights to John Murray, who published a new edition of *Tales* (now called *Tales in Verse*) in 1823, printed by Thomas Davison. It is the Brettell–Hatchard and Davison–Murray versions of 'The Widow's Tale' and 'The Convert' that I want to compare.

I

The poetry of George Crabbe (1754–1832) is an interesting case where case is concerned. As his Clarendon Press editors note, Crabbe's 'literary career spanned a period of fifty years, during which there were considerable changes in printing practice and in the use of accidentals'.⁸ Indeed, the Clarendon Press edition itself, with its unusually careful attention to the capitalisation of copy-texts and variants, allows readers to register and ponder the effects of capital letters in a way that few modern editions of Romantic period poets do.

To look through the three Clarendon Press volumes is to notice very considerable typographic variation. Two particularly interesting features stand out. Firstly, this is not, for the most part, a sudden change or a change in one direction, from 'old' to 'modern'. For instance, in its use of capitals and italic the 1781 edition of the *Library* published by Dodsley is much more 'modern' than the revised version included in the 1807 *Poems*, published by Hatchard. Secondly, however, there is a sudden and radical change after the move to Murray in 1818. From then on, all Crabbe's work was printed in exactly what John Smith called the modern way. The change is particularly evident in its effect on the *Tales*.

Brettell's edition of *Tales* uses a modified version of the old three-part system. Italic is used for proper names, and some other nouns are given initial capital letters. About half of these capitalised common nouns are social and familial terms such as 'Farmer', 'Son', and 'Poet'. Among the other nouns often given capitals are abstract terms such as 'Reason', 'Prudence', and 'Time', as well as words with religious connections such as 'Church' and 'Sabbath'. It is notable that words for material objects seldom get a capital letter.

What discussion there has been of capitalisation has usually focused on the contribution of capital letters to the personification of abstract terms, terms like 'Reason'. The use of capitals for the names of social roles has received less attention even though it is often these which, along with the abstract terms, often seem to hang on to their initial capital in the second half of the eighteenth century. The effect of such capitals, at least if it is systematic, may be to suggest that individuals are embodiments (or, if you like, 'personifications') of their social roles and that the names of those roles—'Father', 'Farmer'—are therefore something like the proper names of the people they name. This may be so, even if the capitalisation of such nouns is selective—though a selective capitalisation may have the effect of drawing attention to people's relationship to their role and title in a way which suggests that the relationship is problematic. In Crabbe's poems, typically preoccupied with social insecurity and social mobility, it is often a moot point which of these effects is achieved.

Robert Brettell had also been responsible for printing Crabbe's *Poems* (1807) and *The Borough* (1810) for Hatchard. In both, the capitalisation was erratic but in general much heavier than it is in his *Tales*. *The Borough* (including 'Peter Grimes') is formatted in John Smith's 'old way', with almost every noun

given an initial capital. It is unclear why there is so much variation within and between the Brettell volumes. It is not apparent why, for instance, he changed to a very modified version of the tripartite system in *Tales*: how far, that is to say, we are dealing with the influence of Crabbe or of different compositors.⁹ However, while no manuscript or proofs of *Tales* survive, there are corrections to the capitalisation of some poems in the second (1812) edition for which Crabbe is probably responsible, and the main feature of these corrections is an increase in the number of initial capitals given to the names for social roles.¹⁰ Five such changes were made to 'The Widow's Tale': a lower-case 'father', 'brother', and 'lover' become 'Father', 'Brother', and 'Lover', while an upper-case 'Love' and 'Lea' became 'love' and 'lea'. No changes were made to 'The Convert'. All such capital letters disappear with the completely modern 1823 Murray–Davison edition, with the exception of a very few 'emphatical words' ('Time' is a significant survivor in 'The Parting Hour'). While we do not know if Crabbe was involved in this edition, we do know that he was involved in the Murray–Davison *Tales of the Hall* (1819) because a fair-copy manuscript and some corrected proofs survive. Consequently, we do have some evidence about Crabbe's response to 'the modern way'.

The manuscript of *Tales of the Hall* shows Crabbe using a handwritten equivalent of Smith's 'old way', with initial capitals for most nouns and underlining for proper names. The surviving proofs show two interesting things: in making his handwritten verbal changes, Crabbe continues to capitalise the initial letters of his nouns; however, he makes no attempt to change any of Davison's printed lower-case nouns to upper case. Taken together, these two features of the corrected proof suggest that Crabbe is accepting a complete separation between handwriting and print so far as capitals (and italic) are concerned, with the printer and compositor having complete control over the printed version. That is, in his handwriting, he continues to capitalise in a way that he clearly expects the compositor to ignore.

We may speculate that Crabbe had felt able to modify Brettell's printed version of *Tales* because Brettell's was reasonably close to his own handwriting where Davison's was not. Both Crabbe and Brettell used a three-part system. The change from a three-part to a two-part system, with proper names no longer distinguished by italic, probably put Davison's versions beyond the reach of the kind of piecemeal modifications that an author would be allowed. Piecemeal modification, in this new context, would give the few reinstated capitalised nouns the status of proper names (the status Dickens clearly wanted for 'Son').

Crabbe's poem 'The Widow's Tale' tells the story of a farmer's daughter, Nancy Moss, who has been sent at the insistence of her socially ambitious mother to a genteel boarding school where—encouraged, it is implied, by reading romantic fiction—she has developed ideas above her station.¹¹ But the mother has now died and Nancy must return home to a father who expects his

daughter to make herself useful about the house and accept that her destiny is to be a farmer's wife, not a lady of leisure. Like most of the poems in *Tales*, this is a story about young people whose class position is ambiguous and who therefore face particular problems in moving from one stage of the life-cycle to another:¹²

'Tis true she had without abhorrence seen
 Young *Harry Carr*, when he was smart and clean;
 But, to be married—be a Farmer's wife,
 A slave! A drudge!—she could not, for her life. (ll. 51–54)

Seeking relief from the prospect of Harry Carr and the crude ways of her family, Nancy notices what she calls '“a Lady”' (l. 74) living nearby, a widow whose genteel appearance suggests that she will be a kindred spirit. The widow, Lucinda, accepts the offer of friendship; but, instead of echoing Nancy's romantic views, she successfully counters them by telling the story of her own youthful romantic aspirations and their disappointment. At first Nancy protests, 'nothing pleased to see/ A Friend's advice could like a Father's be' (ll. 147–48). She feels that Lucinda should have been ruled by her feelings for the young man she had loved—her father's apprentice—not by the refusal of the 'tyrant' father (l. 251) to give his assent to their marriage. The widow replies:

'Alas! My child, there are who, dreaming so,
 Waste their fresh youth, and waking feel the woe;
 There is no spirit sent the heart to move
 With such prevailing and alarming love;
 Passion to Reason will submit—or why
 Should wealthy maids and poorest swains deny?
 Or how should classes and degrees create
 The slightest bar to such resistless fate?
 Yet high and low, you see, forbear to mix;
 No Beggars' eyes the hearts of Kings transfix;
 And who but amorous Peers or Nobles sigh,
 When titled beauties pass triumphant by?
 For Reason wakes, proud wishes to reprove;
 You cannot hope, and therefore dare not love:
 All would be safe, did we at first require—
 'Does Reason sanction what our hearts desire?'
 But, quitting precept, let example show
 What joys from Love unchecked by Prudence flow. (ll. 194–211)

In the event, some combination of the widow's tale, her moralising, and her present condition do have the desired effect on the younger woman: Nancy starts to busy herself about the farmhouse and before long is contentedly married to the young farmer, Harry Carr.

Most of the nouns given capital letters in the poem as a whole, as in this passage, are words for feelings and values like 'Reason' and 'Love', and words

for social roles like 'Father', 'Beggars', and 'Kings'. What is also clear is that the two kinds of word are interdependent. While we cannot be sure that 'Passion' would have a capital if it were not at the beginning of a line and a sentence, the status of 'Reason' is assured by its consistent capitalisation and its ability to act as an independent, personified force ('For Reason wakes, proud wishes to reprove' [l. 206]). However, in the context of love and marriage, its authority (like the authority of Fathers, who seem pre-eminently to be its agents) depends on the possibility of knowing what 'class' or 'degree' you and other people in fact belong to. It depends on Peers, Beggars, and Ladies being able to recognise themselves and each other as such. 'The Widow's Tale' does seem to confirm the linked authority of the capitalised terms: taught by Lucinda's example, Nancy resolves the uncertainty of her class situation and becomes a 'Farmer's wife' rather than a 'Lady'.

However, some doubts remain, both about the authority of 'Reason' and about the characters' social class. The ambiguity of Nancy's class position is indeed resolved: it is the class position of Lucinda and Lucinda's father which remain obscure. The lesson Lucinda has drawn from her own unhappy experience of love is that you should marry within your class: that is what she means by 'Passion' submitting to 'Reason'. Not only, however, does it seem as if her love for her father's apprentice had more to do with romance than with passion, but the father's motives for having opposed the relationship are not wholly transparent. Faced, as it later turned out, with the possibility of financial disaster, it looks as if he were conscious that the only way in which his daughter could hope to maintain her present social position would be by marrying someone much wealthier than herself—not an equal but a superior. Crabbe's poems constantly hint at, circle around, a contradictory reality in which to marry your equal may be to lose your class position and you can only maintain your 'class and degree' by leaving it. He is attempting to articulate situations of radical social insecurity, which make it impossible to be sure what 'Reason' entails or whether someone really is a 'Lady'. The authority asserted by the capital letters is not really justified by the complex and sometimes obscure particulars of the relationships the poem describes.

It therefore marks a significant change, and makes a kind of sense when, in 1823, all these words lose their capitals. 'Reason' becomes 'reason', less an absolute authority than a process of reasoning. The fathers lose some of their authority too along with, more obviously, kings and nobles and, presumably, those 'titled beauties'. Though Beggars lose their titles too, typographic levelling has more to do with social mobility and a modern experience of class than with equality and classness. It is as if the 'modern way' with typography lends itself to more modern meanings. The poem now seems to take social mobility, a more contingent relationship between people and their roles, a little more for granted; and take a little more for granted, along with that, a more empirical and context-bound ethics.

II

My second example from the *Tales*, 'The Convert', is a particularly interesting case where case is concerned because, like *Dombey and Son*, it is a story about patrilineage and the family firm. It is preoccupied, even more than is 'The Widow's Tale', with people's relationship to their names (their proper names—like 'Dombey'—and their category names—like 'son'). It is nicely relevant too because it is a poem about the book trade. 'This tale was suggested', Crabbe later explained, 'by some passages in that extraordinary work *The Memoirs of the Forty-five First Years of the Life of James Lackington, Bookseller, Written by Himself, 1791*'.¹³ Lackington's *Memoirs* told the story of his conversion by Wesleyan Methodists, who had helped to set him up in the book trade; it went on to describe his commercial success and disenchantment with Methodism. Crabbe was clearly interested in Lackington's presentation of the uncertainties and changes of identity associated with religious conversion and upward social mobility. The uncertain origins of Crabbe's protagonist, John Dighton, are an element which Crabbe added to Lackington's story but which emphasise these themes.

Here are some passages from the narrative as it appeared in 1812, followed by the 1823 rendering:

Some to our Hero have a hero's name
 Denied, because no father's he could claim;
 Nor could his mother with precision state
 A full fair claim to his certificate;
 On her own word the marriage must depend,—
 A point she was not eager to defend:
 But who, without a father's name, can raise
 His own so high, deserves the greater praise.

Some to our hero have a hero's name
 Denied, because no father's he could claim;
 Nor could his mother with precision state
 A full fair claim to his certificate;
 On her own word the marriage must depend,—
 A point she was not eager to defend:
 But who, without a father's name, can raise
 His own so high, deserves the greater praise. (ll. 1–8)

Suffice it then, our Hero's name was clear,
 For, call *John Dighton*, and he answered 'Here!'
 But who that name in early life assigned,
 He never found, he never tried to find:

Suffice it then, our hero's name was clear,
 For, call John Dighton, and he answered 'Here!'
 But who that name in early life assigned,
 He never found, he never tried to find: (ll. 15–18)

John, now become a master of his trade,
 Perceived how much improvement might be made;
 And as this prospect opened to his view,
 A certain portion of his zeal withdrew;
 His fear abated,—'What had he to fear,—
 His profits certain, and his conscience clear?'
 Above his door a board was placed by *John*,
 And '*Dighton, Stationer*,' was gilt thereon.

John, now become a master of his trade,
 Perceived how much improvement might be made;
 And as this prospect opened to his view,
 A certain portion of his zeal withdrew;
 His fear abated,—'What had he to fear,—
 His profits certain, and his conscience clear?'
 Above his door a board was placed by John,
 And 'Dighton, stationer,' was gilt thereon. (ll. 127–34)

Thus he proceeded; trade increased the while,
 And Fortune wooed him with perpetual smile:
 On early scenes he sometimes cast a thought,
 When on his heart the mighty change was wrought;
 And all the ease and comfort Converts find,
 Was magnified in his reflecting mind;
 Then on the Teacher's priestly pride he dwelt,
 That caused his freedom; but with this he felt
 The danger of the free—for since that day
 No guide had shown, no Brethren joined his way;
 Forsaking one, he found no second creed,
 But reading doubted, doubting what to read.

Thus he proceeded; trade increased the while,
 And fortune woo'd him with perpetual smile:
 On early scenes he sometimes cast a thought,
 When on his heart the mighty change was wrought;
 And all the ease and comfort converts find,
 Was magnified in his reflecting mind;

Then on the teacher's priestly pride he dwelt,
 That caused his freedom; but with this he felt
 The danger of the free—for since that day
 No guide had shown, no brethren joined his way;
 Forsaking one, he found no second creed,
 But reading doubted, doubting what to read. (ll. 348–59)

Our Hero's age was threescore years and five,
 When he exclaimed, 'Why longer should I strive?
 Why more amass, who never must behold
 A young *John Dighton* to make glad the old?'
 (The sons he had, to early graves were gone,
 And girls were burdens to the mind of *John*.)
 'Had I a boy, he would our name sustain,
 That now to nothing must return again; [...]'

Our hero's age was threescore years and five,
 When he exclaimed, 'Why longer should I strive?
 Why more amass, who never must behold
 A young John Dighton to make glad the old?'
 (The sons he had, to early graves were gone,
 And girls were burdens to the mind of John.)
 'Had I a boy, he would our name sustain,
 That now to nothing must retain again; [...]' (ll. 366–73)¹⁴

At every point, the change from one typographic system to another makes a significant difference to the poem's meaning and taken together the changes point, I shall suggest, in one direction.

The literal elevation of the capital 'H' of 'Hero' (l. 1, repeated in ll. 15 and 366) is a typographical representation of Dighton 'raising his name so high' (ll. 7–8). The poet's and the compositor's understanding of capital letters could well converge here: Joseph Moxon, advising compositors on the use of capitals in his *Mechanic Exercises in the Whole Art of Printing* (1684) had argued that '*Capitals* express Dignity wherever they are Set'.¹⁵ Printer's Grammars often spoke of capitals in this way. John Smith, for instance, refers to words being 'graced with Capitals' (p. 51). Furthermore, if 'Hero' might deserve a capital for the same sort of reason as God or King, it also deserves a capital as the name of a character—the protagonist—in a narrative, an entry in a list of *dramatis personae*. The question at issue for those who would have 'denied' such a name to him (l. 2) being that, as a man of doubtful birth he was not a proper person to play the lead in that way.

As for our Hero's proper name—John Dighton—its meaning is different when it is typographically distinguished from the words around it from when, in 1823, it is not so distinguished. Most obviously, 'call *John Dighton*, and he answered "Here!"' (l. 16) draws attention to the caller's actual use of John's name more directly than the 1823 edition's 'call John Dighton, and he answered "Here!"'. The 1812 italic functions like quotation marks, and the change in 1820 is therefore, in effect, a

change from direct to indirect speech. One of the great pleasures of Crabbe's poetry is his way with everyday idioms. These lines take literally the everyday figurative expression 'to answer to the name of'; but they do so more pointedly in the 1812 version.

There is a similar difference between the 1812 and 1823 versions of the stationer's shop-sign. The italic—'“*Dighton, Stationer*” was gilt thereon' (l. 134)—draws attention to the written character of the name on the signboard (and therefore to the wonderful play on 'gilt') to a degree that the 1823 version, all in roman, does not. Is this because italic resembles signwriter's script? Probably not: the effect would have been the same if the poem as a whole had been printed in italic, with proper names distinguished by the use of roman. In this respect, the distinction between roman and italic differs from the distinction between upper and lower case. For Moxon, '*Capitals* express Dignity wherever they are *Set*', but the significance of italic and roman was wholly reversible: 'when [the compositor] meets with proper Names of Persons or Places he *Sets* them in *Italic*, if the *Series* of his *Matter* be *Set* in *Roman*; or in *Roman* if the *Series* of his *Matter* be *Set* in *Italic*.'¹⁶

When scholars and critics discuss capital letters it is usually in the context of the personification of abstract nouns, such as 'Fortune' (l. 149). It is often hard to say whether, or how much, an initial capital contributes to an effect of personification. But in this instance, where 'Fortune wooed him with perpetual smile' we are surely closer to the goddess Fortuna than we are when 'fortune wooed him with perpetual smile' (though not so close as we would have been if '*Fortune*' had wooed him). Indeed, the change from upper to lower case seems to modify the meaning of the word: it is almost as if in 1812 John Dighton was wooed by the prospect of good fortune, while in 1823 he was wooed by the more down to earth prospect of making a fortune.

As in 'The Widow's Tale', the effect of a selective capitalisation of the names of social roles—here 'Converts', 'Teacher', and 'Brethren' (ll. 352, 354, 357)—is not the same as it would be if all nouns were capitalised, or—something different again—if all nouns of this type were capitalised. In a poem which is anyway about a man of unstable identity, this selective capitalisation becomes very much a part of what the story is about, helping to draw attention to the fact that some people inhabit their social roles more securely than others and are therefore more reliably identified by their titles.

More specifically, while the poem refers explicitly to John's relationship to converts as a species ('And all the ease and comfort Converts find,/ Was magnified in his reflecting mind'), 'the Teacher' of 1812 is the species—or an individual as an embodiment of the species—whereas 'the teacher' of 1823 is a single individual who happens to be a teacher (and does 'The Convert', as the title of the poem, therefore become more flexible in its meaning in 1823?). Once again, as in 'The Widow's Tale', one effect of typographic modernisation is to take social mobility—and a contingent relationship between people and

the roles they may occupy—for granted in a way that the capital letters of 1812 tried to resist.

* * * * *

Some of the interpretations I have offered of the 1812 and 1823 versions of these two poems will no doubt seem tendentious, forcing more meaning onto typographic details than they can possibly bare. However, if we are to move beyond saying that capital letters ‘give emphasis’, we do have to risk being fanciful or over-specific about what it is that is being emphasised, in a way we do not have to be with *Dombey and Son*. And while I may have read too much, or read the wrong things, into some of the examples I have looked at, those examples do, I think, point clearly in one direction, particularly in ‘The Convert’. This is, both in 1812 and 1823, a poem about identity and naming: but the use of capitals and italic in the 1812 version draw attention to those issues to a degree and in a way that the 1823 version does not.

In the final lines from ‘The Convert’, John Dighton bemoans his lack of sons to ‘our name sustain’. He has daughters but ‘girls were burdens to the mind of John’ (ll. 376, 375). These lines surely take us right back to *Dombey*:

[Mr and Mrs Dombey] had been married ten years, and until this present day on which Mr Dombey sat jingling and jingling his heavy gold watch-chain in the great arm-chair by the side of the bed, had had no issue.

—To speak of; none worth mentioning. There had been a girl some six years before, and the child, who had stolen into the chamber unobserved, was now crouching timidly, in a corner whence she could see her mother’s face. But what was a girl to Dombey and Son! In the capital of the House’s name and dignity, such a child was merely a piece of base coin that couldn’t be invested—a bad Boy—nothing more. (p. 3)

Only when the modern practice exemplified by Thomas Davison had become the norm, when upper and lower case had become the markers of a clear and absolute boundary between proper names on one hand and all other parts of speech on the other, was it possible for an author to calculate with precision, as Dickens does, the effect of breaching that boundary. Would he otherwise have been able to pun on the word ‘capital’ itself, as he does here? 

NOTES

1. Charles Dickens, *Dealings with the firm of Dombey and Son, Wholesale, Retail and for Exportation*, (1848; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 1.
2. Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 146; Raymond Williams, *The Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), p. 56.
3. For a preliminary attempt at an overview of the field, see Gavin Edwards, ‘William Hazlitt and the Case of the Initial Letter’, *Text: An Interdisciplinary Annual*

- of *Textual Studies*, 9 (1996), 260–79. For a brief but very helpful presentation of the relevant typographic history, see N. E. Osselton, ‘Spelling-Book Rules and the Capitalization of Nouns in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, in *Historical and Editorial Studies in Medieval and Early Modern English*, for John Gerritsen, edited by Mary-Jo Arn and Hanneke Wirtjes, with Hans Jansen (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhof, 1985), pp. 49–61.
4. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years, 1821–1853*, edited by Ernest de Selincourt, 4 vols, 2nd edn, revised and edited by A. G. Hill, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), IV, 644.
 5. John Smith, *The Printer’s Grammar* (London: For the Editor, 1755), pp. 201, 202.
 6. *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology*, edited by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1989), p. xlvii.
 7. *Samuel Johnson: The Complete English Poems*, edited by J. D. Fleeman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp. 11, 14.
 8. *George Crabbe: The Complete Poetical Works*, edited by Norma Dalrymple-Champneys and Arthur Pollard, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), I, xxxv. Hereafter, *CPW*.
 9. For some careful speculation on variations within and between *Poems* and *The Borough*, see *CPW*, I, 688–91 and I, 713.
 10. For a discussion of the capitalisation of another poem from *Tales*, ‘The Frank Courtship’, see Edwards, ‘William Hazlitt’, pp. 274–77. See also the annotations to *Tales* in *George Crabbe: Selected Poems*, edited by Gavin Edwards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991). J. L. Swingle’s argument that Crabbe is a ‘lower-case poet’ seems to have been written without a knowledge of the pre-Murray texts, but is nevertheless very suggestive—see ‘Late Crabbe in Relation to the Augustans and Romantics: The Temporal Labyrinth of his *Tales in Verse*, 1812’, *ELH*, 42 (1975), 580–94.
 11. For a reading of ‘The Widow’s Tale’ which ignores the question of capital letters, see Gavin Edwards, *Narrative Order 1789–1819: Life and Story in an Age of Revolution* (London: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 123–38.
 12. It is not hard to see why Fanny Price has a copy of *Tales* in her room at Mansfield Park. Indeed, Harriet Martin would have found much to think about in ‘The Widow’s Tale’, just as her patron, Emma Woodhouse, might have recognised herself in her namesake in ‘The Patron’.
 13. Quoted in *The Poetical Works of the Rev. George Crabbe: With his Letters and Journals, and his Life by his Son*, 8 vols (London: John Murray, 1834), V, 155.
 14. Quoted from *The Works of the Rev. George Crabbe*, 5 vols (London: John Murray, 1823), I, iii.
 15. Joseph Moxon, *Mechanic Exercises in the Whole Art of Printing*, edited by H. Davis and H. Carter (1683–84; London: OUP, 1958), p. 217.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

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