



**THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING IN NARRATIVE:  
Dickens and the Stereotype.**

**BY**

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## Abstract

Narratives are produced by particular cultures in that the significances they generate and the forms that they use are meaning-focused ensembles of the intentions, beliefs and desires of these cultures, ensembles which themselves embody and constitute a variety of ideologies. Subjects are interpellated by these ensembles. However, the Althusserian notion of interpellation is based on the stimuli-response model of perception, which sees the moment of perception as something immutable and external, rather than as the application and interpretation of a series of enabling hypotheses. This interpellative sleight-of-hand sees the perception as a consequence of "real" world sense data rather than as a consequence of the interpretative gestures through which this data is cognised. These gestures are the primary means through which texts realise their ethopoesis, their trope of character-making, which is itself a primary constituent in the way narratives construct meaning. These gestures are intrinsically stereotypical in that they leave remnants and residues which function both as matrices of the naive ideologies the stereotypes embody and as indices of the means through which these ideologies might be reinforced and/or subverted.

The Dickens-narrator's desire to know his "inscrutable" neighbours also takes him into stereotypical spaces where (un)speakable things are wrung, things which haunt memory, shadow dreams, usurp the power of plain speaking, and condemn those in search of themselves to roam the city spaces endlessly repeating the stories of their own hallucinatory selves. The Dickens-narrator's attempts to stare down his inscrutable neighbours thereby rendering these "roamers" legible and governable turn out not to be a subversion of bourgeois subjectivity but a gesture which reinforces it, for the Dickens-narrator's use of stereotypes and caricatures renders the Other as an extreme but knowable form of the bourgeois subject and, consequently, positions the Other as part of a larger cautionary tale through which this subject is affirmed. In being interpellated by these stories, the self embalms certain subjectivities through the stereotyping ideologies of the power elites. In short, it is at the everyday level of the psychologising of the self that ideology finds its most successful subject.