



**You, Me, and Dickens, Plus Lots of Others:
The Communicational Intransitivity of Novels**

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In my view literary activity is one form of communication among others. In this paper, I shall be discussing the extent to which communication in general, but more especially literary communication, and above all communication by way of novels, leaves human beings free and independent. We might perhaps wish that, in any kind of communication, addressers would fully respect the human autonomy of addressees, be they hearers or readers. As it happens, however, there is communication and communication. Sometimes the addresser-addressee relationship as textually modelled puts real hearers or readers under considerable coercive pressure. At other times their human autonomy is both recognized and positively enhanced. To use my own terminology for this, there is transitive communication and intransitive communication, a distinction observable in the communication of novelists no less than in that of other kinds of communicator. In order to explain what I have in mind here, I shall pay special attention to Dickens. I shall also link what I say to the growth of literary communities, and to our current condition of post-postmodernity.