DICKENS, VICTORIAN FICTION, UNEASY PLEASURES

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, June 14—18, 2009

Abstracts (in the order of presentation)

June 14

Opening Session

Opening Lecture: Voice and Temporality in *Bleak House*

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The paper analyzes some of the strange effects of voice and temporality in *Bleak House* that result from the novel's reliance (in one half of its chapters) on a first person retrospective narrator. The inconsistencies (and, indeed, the incoherence) of Esther's narrative voice have long been a source of uneasy pleasure for readers of *Bleak House*. This paper proposes a way of reading her narrative that seeks to explain and perhaps resolve these inconsistencies.

Unlike previous commentators, I identify this narrator as "Esther Woodcourt," to distinguish her from her younger, unmarried self — the character named Esther Summerson. I argue that retrospection, by virtue of its recursive form and potential for narrative foresight, produces uncanny repetitions and detemporalized anticipatory memories in Esther's narrative. I trace these uncanny moments to her relentless pursuit, as both narrator and character, of her mother and of answers to the mystery of her birth. I argue that the disfiguration Esther undergoes as a result of her illness is psychological in origin and can be attributed to a pathological compliance with what she imagines as her mother's wish that she destroy the visual evidence that would lead to the mother's "exposure."

June 15

LITERARY ART AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Dickens as Janus: The Achievement of *Bleak House*

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A chorus of modernist voices continues to shape readers' assumptions about Victorian fictions that require vigilance. Nineteenth century novels have no shape and they lack artistry; their moral simplicity and insistence on comedic resolution provide little satisfaction for grown-up people. Taught by James, Woolf and others to view the fictional worlds of Dickens and his contemporaries as cozy retreats, we need to remind ourselves that the major novels of the period had a capacity to vex and disturb as well as to delight and entertain.

This paper proposes to treat *Bleak House* in its original context and focus on its principal narrative strategies. I will argue that Dickens adopted a fractured method of telling, punctuated with repeated questions, in order to goad readers into re-perceiving social truths he wished to convey and how, at the same time, he incorporated a Romantic strategy designed to please. Attention to the novel's historical context invites related questions. I shall examine the dual capacity of *Bleak House* to look forward as the agent by which Dickens sought to convey uneasy social truths by experimental techniques and backwards as he turned to familiar and tested conventions in order to offset disturbance with pleasure. This undertaking will be discussed in relation to the fictional agenda that shaped Dickens's career from *Oliver Twist* onward: a persistent attempt to combine troublesome social knowledge acquired as a young reporter with the novelist's announced desire to live in people's affections, by showing readers how behind repellant surfaces the bright light of "Fancy" continued to burn within the human breast. This project in turn raises further considerations: how the social and political truths of *Bleak House* seem to hover between a commitment to reform politics and an endorsement of the existing social hierarchy, how Dickens's reading of the dangers posed by the streets perhaps served to release social anxieties rather than generate redress, and how Dickens's "connective thinking" resembles the scientific hypotheses Darwin announced in 1859.

Twemlow's Abyss

JEFFREY WALLEN
Hampshire College.

Social criticism is a central component of many Victorian novels, and almost all novelists hope to bring pleasure to their readers. Victorian writers often do not see a conflict between these two aims. Even Oscar Wilde, who castigates art that seeks to solve social problems ("the Renaissance was great because it sought to solve no social problem"), argues that for artists "it is exactly the existing conditions that one objects to; and any scheme that could accept these conditions is wrong and foolish." An unwillingness to accept "the existing conditions" is the essence of social critique.

For the reader, in contrast, social criticism often intrudes on or disturbs aesthetic pleasure. While reading, we sometimes become aware of what seem to be competing purposes, and after a while we begin to distinguish between moments of aesthetic pleasure and social criticism. At the clumsiest level, the separability of one aim from the other is spatial: we note passages that a good editor might have deleted, as they too transparently serve one purpose while going against the grain of the other. More typically, the tension is temporal: we recognize a little belatedly a social critique that at first was masked by pleasures of reading.

In this talk, I will suggest that Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, while certainly containing great "pleasures of reading" and strong "critical responses to contemporary social structures and mores," presents unique problems for any attempt to differentiate between them. I will demonstrate that the many confusions when reading *Our Mutual Friend* (such as between animate and inanimate, person and thing, people and property), present cognitive and judgmental problems, both for the characters and for the reader. Through the course of the book, we do not come to learn how to disentangle the person from the object depicted, and then to make moral judgments about the people or forces

that enabled or promoted the confusion. Rather, I will argue, these entanglements destabilize the grounds on which we would usually differentiate between aesthetic pleasure and social critique.

In addition to analyzing passages of ontological and ethical confusion, I will also explore the thematization of the pleasures of reading in *Our Mutual Friend*, as it is a central theme of the book and provides reflections on these very questions about the confusions of reading.

CHARACTER PSYCHOLOGY AND NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS

What Esther Knows About Sex: *Bleak House* and the Intercourse of Everyday Life

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> It was very solitary and very dull, and I did not doubt that I might safely steal up-stairs. I left Charley below, and went up with a light foot, not distressed by any glare from the feeble oil lanterns on the way. I listened for a few moments; and in the musty rotting silence of the house, believed that I could hear the murmur of their young voices. I put my lips to the hearse-like panel of the door, as a kiss for my dear, and came quietly down again, thinking that one of these days I would confess to the visit.

The short paragraph quoted above appears in "Enlightened," Chapter 51 of Dickens's *Bleak House*. In this portion of her "Narrative," Esther gives an account of the day on which she learned that Richard Carstone and Ada Clare had been married in secret some two months earlier; after the revelation, Ada remains with her husband in Symond's Inn and Esther heads off alone to Mr. Jarndyce's London lodgings. Yet our narrator cannot keep away from her "darling"; some three or four hours later, Esther ventures out "at dusk" with her maid Charley, and returns to "the new strange home of [her] dear girl." But what exactly does she hear when she listens to "the murmur of their young voices" within that sepulchral apartment? Are they just talking, or is there something more going on? Whatever Esther hears, or thinks she hears, she knows that she is outside the couple's intimacy; she may kiss the unresponsive boards of the door, but she has no part here in the lovers' new life.

This moment of division between the self-narrating individual and the intercourse of others functions in my paper as an emblematic image: I use it to guide both a specific investigation of a particular novel, and a more wide-ranging consideration of the generational anxieties which beset twentieth and twenty-first century accounts of the sex-lives of the Victorians.

When Esther is excluded from Richard and Ada's embrace, she is of course cut off from lovers of her own age; this, I argue, is a temporal flattening of the novel's grounding conceit and its central concern. *Bleak House* is both fascinated and appalled by the conjunction between the facts of life and the simple truth that there is no necessary link between the desire and ability to have sex, and the desire and ability to be a fit parent to a child. Seen from this point of view, the disconnect between the love-making of Captain

Hawdon and Honoria Barbary, on the one hand, and the existence of their child Esther, on the other, is only the most extreme instantiation of the tragic gap that is fused between the satisfaction of immediate, short-term, wants and the production of potentially long-lived and needy beings. As we know, Dickens's decision not to supply his readers with any obvious or easy way of figuring out the relationship between *Bleak House's* two narrative modes has inspired a wealth of ingenious and interesting critical commentary; here I argue that the juxtaposition of an endlessly fecund and unlocated present-tense voice and the retrospective telling of a single individual's story is a bodying-forth of the bonds and divisions between an undifferentiated and "indifferent parent" of the universe, existing in the moment-to-moment intercourse of everyday life, and its child, recounting one particular life lived.

Yet the fact that Esther narrates from her vantage-point as the mother of two children adds considerable complexity to Dickens's formulation; when she represents her younger incarnation listening at the Carstones' door, Esther's writing-self knows things that her unmarried-self perhaps only suspected. We are very familiar with the story that "Esther's Narrative" tells of the life-experience of the neglected illegitimate child, but what traces might it also bear of her achieved perspective as a sexually-experienced adult? What can Dickens allow Esther to know and think about sex, indeed about the specific act that brought her into being? In the hopes of connecting my investigation of *Bleak House* to a wider discussion altogether, I venture into the perilous realm of the child's thoughts about the sexual activity of its parents. "I never had experienced such painful and pleasurable emotion at one time," Esther tells us at the moment she is "Enlightened" in Chapter 51; in this paper, I propose that we, the children of the Victorians, also undergo the uneasy pleasure of contemplating the sex-lives of our forebears.

Knowing, Being and Seeming in *Great Expectations*

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Very different in structure and scope from *David Copperfield*, Dickens's *Great Expectations* is similarly attuned to the Victorians' faith in the possibility of the individual's growth and regeneration, in this case an ethical, rather than an emotional one. Here, however, the affirmative drive of the narrative teleology relates the Bildungsroman theme of the loss of illusions to the critique of the reliance on mental constructs for the establishment of a stable identity. This produces an overall disconcerting effect which undermines the pleasure derived from the novel's tightness of plot and structure and the measured economy of expression. This is largely due to the presence and distribution of two linguistic elements: the connective "as if" and the lexical modal verb "seem." Working in conjunction and at a steady pace in the first half of the novel, they model – and modalize – a multiplicity of fictional worlds and sustain the distinction between Pip's "realities" and the real world's "actuality." As modal operators, they continually reconfigure his universe of worlds and prevent him and the reader from finding firm interpretive ground. The distribution of the "as if"'s in particular undermines the neat and ethically justified division of the narrative into three parts and places Pip's awareness that Estella is lost to him as the key mental event which allows him to align the world of his imagined "realities" with the actuality of the world and his place in it.

The “as if”’s and “seem”’s also function as cohesive devices on the level of style since they group key metaphors and symbols presenting the protagonist’s inner state. The oneness of the narrator’s world which he reaches in the second half of the novel brings together his ethical project with his ontological one and becomes the prerequisite for the truth of his claim – that he has undergone a fundamental change and has acquired a full and independent identity allowing him the right to tell his own educative story.

JOUISSANCE

Never Hearing the Last of It: The Pleasure of Avoidance

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Potential love affairs are often prevented from reaching their pleasurable fulfillment in Dickens’s works. This is not only the result of contemporary sexual codes or an audience-minded self-censorship, but a manifestation of an aesthetic principle that is similarly revealed in lingual structures. Some of Dickens’s characters use their sexuality or their language in a way that does not lead to the expected goal, namely, a sexual act, a commitment to a conjugal relationship, or a syntactically complete sentence. I shall term this principle – to borrow Mrs. Gradgrind’s phrase – “Never Hearing the Last of It.” This sexual and lingual avoidance creates a pleasure of its own: the pleasure of irresponsibility. How, when and why do Dickens and his characters fail to bring their sentences, or their love affairs, to completion? What is the pleasure inherent in not committing oneself to speaking or acting “fully?” What are the psychological, ethical and political implications of such avoidance?

My paper will focus on the early Dickens, particularly on the comic *Pickwick Papers*, and more particularly on its notorious Mr. Jingle, whose outrageous flirtations and deceits are intriguingly echoed in his singular talent for producing only syntactically deficient and unfinished sentences. The too-easy sexual and lingual pleasure of this creative individual renders him the antagonistic double of the novel’s steadfast protagonist, Mr. Pickwick. More than that, the paper will show that Jingle’s craving for the too-easy pleasure of avoidance echoes his energetic young author’s erratic, narratively irresponsible, power of invention. Yet the last sections of his first novel show Dickens the writer, together with his fictional scoundrel Jingle, as gradually acquiring a new sense of uneasiness about pleasure, which complicates and diminishes the enjoyment of irresponsibility in sexual and verbal relations as well as in the writing of fiction.

Dickens and Dance in the 1840s

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Dickens’s depictions of dance in his novels are usually read as manifestations of the jovial fun-loving aspect of his fiction. In what is arguably the most famous depiction of dance in the early works, the Fezziwigs’ ball in *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens not only uses the dance to suggest all the positive values associated with good feeling and sociability—the very things missing from Scrooge’s life—but also allows his prose to

echo the actual rhythm of the dance, so that sound and sense work together to convey the message to both the reader and Scrooge that dancing is a pleasurable, life-affirming, socially positive activity.

A Christmas Carol is a work of the 1840s, the decade which saw the ballet "Giselle" create a sensation on the London stage. This was also the decade in which social dancing became one of the most popular activities among the middle classes in England. In fact, according to Molly Engelhardt, the 1840s constituted a decade of dance mania throughout the country, a manifestation of escapist gaiety that flew in the face of the same period's economic and social miseries.[1] If *A Christmas Carol's* depiction of poverty and want is a reflection of the "hungry forties," then how do we read Dickens's presentation of the Fezziwigs' ball, which lies at the heart of a narrative that is anchored in this period? Similarly, how do we read other Dickensian depictions of the dance during this decade, for instance the solitary dancing of the two sisters at the beginning of *The Battle of Life* (1846), which links the pleasures of dancing to an extended description of an ancient battlefield in which the dead lie buried?

In this paper I propose to look at the complex social and literary implications of Dickens's presentation of dance in his fiction and especially in the fiction that he wrote during the 1840s. While Dickens's juxtaposition of dancing and social misery antedates the 1840s (witness the prostitutes' dance in *Oliver Twist*), my paper will concentrate on how Dickens's fiction of the 1840s—primarily *A Christmas Carol*, *Dombey and Son* and *The Battle for Life*—depicts dance as simultaneously a life-affirming activity and a deflection of the decade's more serious social, medical and economic ills. I will also address the way in which Dickens's fiction represents dance both mimetically and aesthetically, since on the surface no two activities could be more divergent than literature and dance. To what extent does Dickens's ability to bridge the gap relate to the mimetic ability of the novel to convey a pleasure that is abstract and non-literary?

Dickens and the Comic Extraneous

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Not a few readers of Dickens think that his work is marked, if not disfigured, by the extraneous. Henry James would seem to have had disfigurement in mind when he chastised certain nineteenth-century novels for being "large loose baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary." And George Orwell stated that "the outstanding, unmistakable mark of Dickens's writing is the *unnecessary detail*," citing the fact that when the novelist says a family is having dinner, he cannot resist adding, between parenthetical dashes, "baked shoulder of mutton and potatoes under it." But we should perhaps not be so quick to dismiss Dickens's art as bulging in the extraneous. Miss Wade of *Little Dorrit* would seem to be an extraneous character, if ever there was one, but Dickens maintained that with her he had the new idea of "making the introduced story so fit into surroundings impossible of separation from the main story, as to make the blood of the book circulate through both."

[1] Molly Engelhardt, "Seeds of Discontent: Dancing Manias and Medical Inquiry in Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Culture." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35, 1 (2007): 135-157.

The question I wish to consider is whether Dickens's comic caricatures should be seen as essentially extraneous or as a part of larger deliberate design. The conference proposals suggest that we may tend to impose our own intellectual constructs in seeking overall coherence. I would like to test this in relation to two comic caricatures, Mr. Guppy of *Bleak House* and Flora Finching of *Little Dorrit*. I propose, first, to discuss what characterizes their presentation; and, second, to argue that rather than being subdued to what we intellectually construct in relation to them, these characters may *instruct* us as to the nature of Dickens's designs.

MALAISE

Toying with the Future: Child Play in Dickens and Emily Brontë

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It has been assumed since the mid-eighteenth century that child play is intrinsically productive and normative, that children and young animals learn, adapt, and develop through their play. Nineteenth-century proponents of this decidedly modern view of child play – including Kindergarten inventor Friedrich Froebel, countless educationalists and psychologists, and the burgeoning toy and storybook industries – view the play impulse in children as an inborn expression of futurity, a preparatory drive to acquire physical, cognitive, imaginative, and emotional skills. Though seemingly innocuous, the modern ideology of child play is quite insidious. It naturalizes socialization, masks its own normalizing violence by presenting the child's impetus to conform as its opposite: a spontaneous, autonomous, happy impulse. A child who refuses to play, or who is incapable of play, or who plays badly, is seen as pathological, as risking his or her future and thus the future of the society of which he or she is a synecdoche. The ideological tributaries that feed this view of child play are numerous: an Enlightenment model of history as progress; an Evangelical tradition that "focused," in the words of Davidoff and Hall, "on children's character as the basis for reforming society"; rationalist child-rearing practices that treated children as economic investments; evolutionary models of human behavior; and a Romantic association of childhood not only with cultural authenticity but with the transformative power of nature.

So seductive is the modern ideology of child play, so ingrained is it in the Victorian popular imagination, in the Victorian sense of self, that few nineteenth-century British writers question it. One wonders whether it is conceptually *possible*, in fact, to depict *non-pathological* child play as nonproductive, as anti-telic, as future-destroying. What form would it take? What would it look like? Does the modern ideology of child play have an "outside"? How might children play *against* their futures in a manner that does not look pathological or psychotic, like a failed or deranged expression of play? This paper investigates two Victorian novels – Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) – that attempt to answer these very questions, indeed, that critique the modern ideology of child play. While Dickens and Brontë fail, in the end, to extricate themselves completely from its tangles, they inflict some deep cuts. To some, Dickens will seem an unlikely choice. He is famous for being a passionate proponent of the modern ideology of child play, for turning the ludic (or nonludic) child into a metaphor for societal vitality (or lack thereof). In *Great*

Expectations, however, Dickens debunks the notion that child play is spontaneous and uncoerced, an autonomous act of future-building. I refer to Miss Havisham's imperious demand that Pip and Estella – whether they want to or not – play. The more they play (and they play a lot), the more they become *her* playthings, their futures deformed by *her* past. Dickens exposes the ideological nature of middle-class child play, its production of false consciousness: Pip's fiction of self.

Whereas Dickens exposes the falsity of the futurity unleashed by child play, Brontë is more ambitious. Her goal is to represent as heroic, as *profound*, future-destroying, antitelic child play itself: the play of Heathcliff and Cathy, which is rooted in suicidal and intersubjective ecstasy. Brontë wants to give us an actual taste of futureless child play, encouraging her readers to savor it, challenging us *not* to dismiss it as merely pathological. How does one represent anti-telic behavior (a movement against or away from the future) in a *narrative*, which is an expression of teleological causality? How does one prevent – or temporarily forestall – the future-destroying play activity from being subsumed in a moralistic narrative of progress? How does one prevent it from being made to appear, in retrospect, pathological? Brontë uses all sorts of time-slowing tricks: narrative circularity, chronological confusion, unreliable narrators. More profound, however, is her decision to represent Heathcliff and Cathy's child play by *not* representing it, by situating it off-stage (except for fleeting, partial glimpses), treating it as ineffable, elliptical, beyond representation, beyond the powers of narration. She situates their child play in unruly ellipses at the beginning of the novel, in narrative gaps that prove difficult (though not impossible, in the end) to reconcile or penetrate. Her ellipses are ludic and anti-productive in spirit. She pits them against the productivist, future-oriented trajectory of Nelly Dean's narrative. Nelly, after all, is a professional babysitter, a socializer of children. Her job – as both a character within the narrative and as the embodiment of the narrative impulse – is to take child play in hand, to direct it toward productive, rational outlets, toward a viable future. Just as the children flee Nelly's pedagogical grasp, so Brontë's ellipses slip, howsoever fleetingly, the productivist grasp of her narrative.

The Uneasiness of Reading Unwanted Lives: Reading Dickens with John Irving

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Arguably, the novels of the contemporary American novelist John Irving have all been inspired and influenced by his unified conception of 'the Dickensian novel', if there exists such a category of analysis, as this has significantly been pointed out by the critics Kenneth Womack and Todd F. Davis, among others.

In *Oliver Twist* and Irving's *The Cider House Rules* (1989), the characters' moral choices constitute narratives of their grappling with their unwanted lives. As both narratives assemble life stories of orphans, with Irving's novel questioning the ethical status of abortion, questions about what the protagonists want, and about the consequences of those preferences, are measured to issues of who and whose life is wanted, by whom, and why. My paper will present a reading of Dickens's text with that of Irving, and perhaps occasionally the other way round, in order to discover and compare possible ethical responses of readers ('authorial audiences' or 'implied readers') to these uneasy choices.

The goal is to account for such responses, to illuminate the following questions by means of a rhetorical inquiry, along the lines of the formulations of a reading-oriented rhetorical and ethical theory of narrative in the works of Wayne C. Booth and James Phelan, into how narrative strategies present the moral alternatives, and the morals of alternatives, that open up before the protagonists. To what extent are their moral choices determined by the characters' minds, as opposed to an 'implied' author? To what extent and in what respects are ethical judgments exercised by the reader's mind (also in the cognitive narratological sense)? In what respects are they shaped by the text, the narrator, or an implied author, and how? Does the reading of uneasy choices and narratives of uneasy lives also have to be uneasy?

The Science of Turgescence in the Nineteenth Century: Visceral Hedonism, Labor, and Malaise
OTNIEL DROR, *The Hebrew University*

This paper briefly present the interlocking logics of an emergent physiology of emotions during the late nineteenth century. It studies three interconnected and salient features of this emergent physiological model of the emotions: the blush as template, visceral hedonism, and a man's blush.

Plenary Session

The Uneasy Pleasures of Freedom, Determinism, and Hope in *Little Dorrit*: A Literary Anthropology
REGENIA GAGNIER
University of Exeter

In the run-up to the sesquicentennials of Darwin's *Origin* and Mill's *On Liberty* in 2009, determinism and freedom are much in the air. NeoDarwinian books like *The Literary Animal* (2005) and *Madame Bovary's Ovaries* (2005) return us via evolutionary psychology or E.O. Wilson's socio-biology to a universal human nature based in genes and reproduction. Habermasians ground freedom and constraint solely in community and communication. The NeoDarwinians reduce human decisions to reproductive instincts; but Habermas is equally reductive in thinking that genes are necessarily freedom-revoking, that they provide a natural essence of human beings composed of genetically programmed tracts and dispositions different from the contingencies of upbringing and environment generally. We are in danger of abandoning a genuinely dialectical philosophy of nature and culture in species self-formation in favour of polarized reductionisms. Confronted with these reductions, I have returned to the philosophical anthropologists who valued the human capacities for freedom and choice, self-creation and self-formation, within natural limits. In a dialectic between nature and culture, humans cannot be reduced to genes or reproductive strategies, nor can they be reduced to mere cultural constructs. The philosophical anthropologists studied the way culture and technology mediated biological nature, and vice versa, the way nature mediated culture and technology. When they wanted to know what humankind was, they looked at the history of its interaction with nature. Through that history, they saw what it was capable

of and what its limits were. There was no essence of humankind outside of its historical existence, and the ability to reflect on that history opened the world to ideal goals.

This empirical or historical ontology, or philosophical anthropology, that asked what kinds of creatures humans were at home in both nature and their diverse cultures, was at its height in the mid-nineteenth century and is only now returning after a century and a half of reductions to either biology or semiology, materialism or idealism. From meteorologists to geneticists, scientists are looking at the ways that culture interacts with the environment at both the global and molecular levels. Systems analysis studies the interactions of natural and cultural, including technological, systems. They write of onto-genetic or developmental niches in which nature is nurtured and that are the products of mutually influencing genes and environment. The terms they use are Emergence, and the new epigenesis.

My contention is that cutting-edge science today is much closer to the dialectical pre-disciplinary sciences of the mid-nineteenth century than we have seen for 150 years and that when reading the Victorians we should celebrate their epistemic pluralism and diversity. We should celebrate the uneasy pleasures of knowing that we are both nature and culture, free, but only within limits. This paper argues that Dickens was characteristically knowledgeable of the science of his time and that his work shows the scope and limits of the human animal as conceived in the 1850s. I have chosen *Little Dorrit* because it is widely known as a novel about limits and constraints. I shall ask of it some philosophical questions: What is nature? What is human nature? What is culture? What is technology? And we shall see that the novel provides answers worthy of the science of Dickens's and our own times.

June 16

ON THE TOWN

Palimpsest, Place, and the Attraction of Repulsion in Dickens and the Modern Urban Novel

MURRAY BAUMGARTEN
UC Santa Cruz

Carlyle proclaims his discovery: modern life is a palimpsest. Not only memories but experiences come in layers. The revolution, herald of the modern, breaks through the rind of custom. The social id, oppressed, contained, repressed into class subservience, muscles its way up from below. It is an image H.G. Wells would deploy in the Morlocks (and Canetti would remind us of in *Crowds and Power*). Carlyle carried his analogizing into Biblical resonances, suggesting that modern culture is a seething volcano of a palimpsest.

Carlyle's fundamental insight serves as a postulate for his Victorian contemporaries and successors, who make it into the defining idea of the modern city. Following Carlyle's lead, they explore the urban palimpsest. Nor for them the prophetic voice of guilt and punishment. Rather, in exploring the uneasy pleasures in the juxtaposition of the urban layers of modern experience, Dickens strikes the modern note of the attraction of repulsion. The pleasure of discovery of Carlyle becomes for Dickens, for Zangwill, for Clive Sinclair and J. K. Rowling in our day the uneasy pleasures of

alternating, alternative realities. The boundaries of class and species are honeycombed by pathways which hum with traffic and constant crossings of the layers of the palimpsest of modern urban life. With the narrators of these fictions (who are often split and divided along the fault lines of urban life), the reader navigates between and among unstable places. Location is undermined, whether in the episodic juxtapositions of Dickens, the divided sentences of Zangwill, the scenes and situations of Sinclair, or the counter-realistic magic of Rowling.

I will be looking in some detail at the chase scenes in *Our Mutual Friend*. Exploring the labyrinth of modern urban life, I will focus on the aesthetic shapes resulting from the focus on the attraction of repulsion by Dickens and his successors.

Dickens and the Pleasure of the Text: The Risks of *Hard Times*

EFRAIM SICHER
Ben Gurion University of the Negev

Hard Times (1854), it can be argued, is a novel that almost programmatically seeks to fulfill the promise of Dickens's opening editorial in his journal *Household Words*, to bridge the gap between Masters and Laborers through the imagination and to vindicate the usefulness of literature in an industrial society governed by a utilitarian ideology. In mid-century Britain pleasure was literally at risk in many factory towns, where popular culture, amusement, and even singing were regulated and policed. It was not such an exaggeration to imagine a whole town or society where Fancy was banned, where it was in fact a "thoughtcrime." However, in vindicating its own usefulness and efficient production, Dickens's novel runs an epistemological risk if the pleasure it gives is not taken seriously or if the plot, which vindicates the pleasures of the circus, does not work for all readers and fails to bridge the gap in understanding and empathy between the Two Nations.

This paper places Dickens's novel in the context of a discourse about the risks of pleasure and asks whether in fact the pleasures of the text depend on a certain risk: the enjoyment of risk itself, the risk of failure in the novelist's tightrope or acrobatic acts, and risk in the reading act of "peeping" at illicit pleasure. The circus, of course, cannot be taken too seriously as metaphor or message, but it does perform what the novel is trying, perhaps idealistically, to do in middle-class British society. In giving the reader pleasure, Dickens takes the risk of trying to be both "Reformer" and "Entertainer," to reform through pleasure, something that can be traced back to Dickens's early writings on Grimaldi and the *commedia del'arte* and to his first "pilot" flight, imagined as a circus attraction, aloft in a balloon with Cruikshank in the frontispiece to the 1839 edition of *Sketches by Boz*. In conclusion, I will ask how relevant were these aesthetic concerns in Victorian England and how relevant they might be today.

The City of Dreadful Light: Narrative Pleasure and Dickens' Urban Chronotopes

ELANA GOMEL
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In his 1880 poem "The City of Dreadful Night" James Thomson describes a phantasmagoric London, in which "the street-lamps burn amid the baleful glooms,"

populated by miserable, restless, and penurious crowds. This is also the London of Dickens, particularly of *Bleak House*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Our Mutual Friend*. However, while the ambience of Thomson's poem is uniformly dark, Dickens's London has a strange and seductive vitality.

My paper will address the paradox of Dickens as an urban writer through exploration of his narrative space. On the one hand, like Mayhew, Engels and other Victorian urban explorers, Dickens is a fierce critic of the social ills of the industrial metropolis: slums, overcrowding, pollution, and class stratification. On the other hand, Dickens is ranked alongside Baudelaire and Benjamin as the creator of a new vocabulary for urban pleasures: *flanerie*, consumption, visual distraction, and psychological stimulation.

This ambiguity of Dickens's urban attitudes is encapsulated in the doubleness of his urban chronotope. The city of Dickens is often imaged in vertical terms as the dichotomously divided space of the rich and the poor. But equally often, it is structured horizontally as a maze, network, or (in *Bleak House*) a ring of contagion that unites all the city dwellers in a complex ecology of mutual interdependence. Since, as Bakhtin shows, narrative space is inextricably linked to narrative time, each aspect of the urban chronotope inscribes a specific representation of temporality as either apocalyptic or durational.

I will argue that each of these configurations of narrative space/time invites a particular kind of readerly pleasure. The vertical division offers apocalyptic visions of a revolutionary catastrophe, while the horizontal entanglement figures a combination of compassion and detachment, which Baudelaire later embodies in the figure of the flaneur. The two, however, are aspects of the single narrative entity that cannot be easily parsed into independent elements. Rather than being opposites, social critique and urban hedonism are inextricably linked in the double narrative chronotope of Dickens's city novels.

TRAVEL AND TRANSLATION

Cross Dressing and Other Uneasy Pleasures in the Victorian Encounter with the Holy Land

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For nineteenth-century British and American visitors to Jerusalem, the journey was fraught with uneasy pleasures. The joy of encountering the sacred landscape was marred by Protestant doubts concerning the significance of an earthly pilgrimage to the earthly Jerusalem. Travelers, expecting freedom and independence, were forced to face the hazards of the journey on the one hand, and Thomas Cook's tourists on the other. And the pious anticipation of treading holy ground was always complicated by the actual reality on the spot.

Exploring these tensions, my paper will focus on the gendered dimensions of the journey, encapsulated in a short story by Trollope, "The Banks of the Jordan" (1861, alternatively entitled "A Ride across Palestine"). Centering on a homoerotic attraction between two men—one of them a young damsel in distress, in disguise—the journey to

Palestine offers an intermediate sphere, exotic and yet familiar, in which uneasy pleasures seem to thrive precisely because of the complex relationship between piety, adventure, and Orientalism.

Terror Foreign or Familiar — Pleasure on the Edge: Translating *A Tale of Two Cities* into French

CHRISTINE RAGUET
Université Sorbonne Nouvelle

> As a tutor, whose attainments made the student's way unusually pleasant and profitable, and as an elegant translator who brought something to his work besides mere dictionary knowledge, young Mr. Darnay soon became known and encouraged.
>
> *A Tale of Two Cities*, chapter X.

How can the French readers of the French translation of *A Tale of Two Cities* perceive the characters and facts presented in the novel? There certainly is an aesthetics of suffering quite differently apprehended by the two cultures represented in the novel since the nature of the social and political system the French Revolution imposed on France more than two centuries ago is quite unconsciously integrated into today's society. The horrors of the Terror, which are crudely and inhumanely described in the original have a rather different flavour in translation—maybe because "elegant translators" have "brought something to (their) work besides mere dictionary knowledge." Let us take the following example: "Along the Paris streets, the death-carts rumble, hollow and harsh" / "Le long des rues de Paris, les tombereaux funèbres roulent avec fracas"[2]; in the French version, several lexical markers and several phonological markers (death-carts, rumble, **h**ollow/**h**arsh) are alleviated and more prosaic, the crudeness and frightening tone of the original takes on a more familiar and poetic dimension—the second part of the French sentence can be read as an alexandrine, a distance is created. The novel was first translated in 1861, soon after its English publication, reprinted in the 1870s and 1880s and mostly retranslated and republished one century later in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. As shown in the above quotation, translation cannot be regarded as a mere linguistic mechanism: it owes much of its results to the manipulative art of the translator. The study of some stylistic elements involving rhythm, metaphors and the organization of discourse will help shed light on the diverging perception which English-speaking or French-speaking readers may have of the text, especially as the receptive background of horror as fearsome otherness or horror as an integrated historical fact of the past may influence reading.

Dickens in Hebrew

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[2] Trans. Jeanne Métifeu-Béjeau (1970).

As of the earliest period in the translation of literature into modern Hebrew Dickens;s works were targeted as literature both for children and for the general reader. This paper examines some of the tendencies in the earliest translations and adaptations of Dickens into Hebrew.

PLEASURES UNAVOWED

Oliver Twist and the Pleasures of Evil

MATTHIAS BAUER
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Oliver Twist, as Dickens points out in the 1841 preface to his novel, was meant to show "the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last." But even if we thus read Dickens's novel on his own terms, which are derived from allegory rather than psychological realism, we may wonder why we are at least as much intrigued by the dark side of the picture as by the bright one. The reason may have to do with the fact that, in *Oliver Twist*, the representatives of evil are not meant to personify a "principle" but to belong to reality. As Dickens put it: "It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really do exist; to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness [.] would be to attempt a something which was greatly needed and which would be a service to society." But then, are we actually fascinated by Fagin and Sikes because they provide useful information about social conditions? In my talk, I will try and put the novel to the test of Dickens's own introductory words, focusing in particular on the rhetorical energy with which evil is represented, as well as on the reasons for, and limits of, the pleasure derived from it.

Fictions We Hate to Love: Schadenfreude Variations in Dickensian Domesticity

CHRISTINA WATERS
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We trust to novels to maintain us in the practice of great indignations and great generosities. - Henry James

Fictional situations, as Plato well knew, interrogate the status quo, introducing rogue alternatives into the orderly mundane fabric. Imaginary worlds suggest that things might be otherwise, and novels proceed to illustrate these other ways in which human beings might act, nations deliberate, and misfortune befall even the best of citizens. Plunged into situations never before encountered and characters unlike ourselves, we find in reading fiction an expanded range of possible emotional and moral responses. Such "dangerous knowledge" can, arguably, incite new behaviors as well as problematic emotional perspectives e.g., Schadenfreude.

Delectation of the existentially remote travails of Coketown reassured the bourgeois Victorian reader. Such guilty pleasure expressed the reader's own sense of security. A feast for armchair activists who prayed, paraphrasing Augustine, "Lord make me right these wrongs — but not yet." The pain of others may be savored without

condemnation precisely because it is not actual pain. Trying on points of view imaginatively provides a delicious sense of faux danger as we flirt with "hard times." Yet these scenarios also encourage us to both occupy and consider multiple perspectives. Hence their danger. In *Little Dorrit*, the ramshackle chambers of the "father of the Marshalsea" are lovingly domesticated by his daughter, the eponymous 'Little Dorrit." Dickens portrays an irresistible, yet unsettling scene in which squalor is made cozy. Contrast this oxymoronic depiction with its inverse in *Bleak House* — the chaotic household of Mrs. Jellyby, in which Dickens deftly describes domesticity in shambles. Dickens complicates the tension of our responses by ensconcing the comforts of home within the discomforts of imprisonment. The private sanctuary of home is made doubly problematic read through the filter of public humiliation.

The reader's widening range of responses deepens and complicates the resulting variations of Schadenfreude. Subtextually savoring the author's cunning in reframing each stereotrope — prison as depressing, mothers as nurturing, children as innocent — the reader is forced into new and paradoxical emotional stances. It is precisely these multiple stances which kindle the "dangerous knowledge" from which ethical action may, or may not proceed.

I propose a comparative reading of the referenced tropes in order to illustrate some of the varieties of aesthetic response to the morally questionable.

The Pleasure of Aggression and Fetishism in *Great Expectations*

ADINA CIUGUREANU
Ovidius University, Constanta

Dickens's description of Miss Havisham as a victim-aggressor has intrigued readers and critics alike. Is she totally insane, cut off from reality? Is she merely cold-hearted as she claims and sadistic as she looks? Or is she a calculating person who finds pleasure in self-victimization and displays aggression as a defensive weapon? Miss Havisham's disturbing image as both victim and aggressor is not singular in the novel; there are at least two other women whose profile can be compared to hers: Mrs. Joe and Molly. Though the three women represent three different social classes, they share a mysterious victim-aggressor attitude in their relation to the other. Yet, do these women derive any (uneasy) pleasure from victimizing the other or from being victimized? And what is the relationship between victimization and self-victimization? Do the other characters in the novel take any (discomforting) pleasure in watching the three victims? And do we, readers, feel any kind of uneasiness in the pleasure of reading Dickens's text?
The paper will be an attempt to read Dickens' novel, in particular the passages referring to the three women, from a psychoanalytical (Lacanian) perspective, focusing on the Imaginary and the Symbolical in the construction of the self as victim and aggressor. It will also discuss the fetishistic drives of Miss Havisham's, which, together with the victim-aggressor game, paradoxically function as a reminder of pain and a producer of (uneasy) pleasure.

READING SIGNS

Rubbing the Wonderful Lamp Within: (Mis) reading in *Martin Chuzzlewit*

YAEL MAURER
Tel Aviv University

In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens explores the realm of reading and misreading in a textual world revolving around deception and misinterpretation of both self and other. I argue that in the figure of Tom Pinch, the most gullible and deluded character in the novel, Dickens offers an exemplary specimen of both the pleasures and dangers of reading. In an early scene in the novel, Tom finds himself in a book store and is mesmerized by the fantasy world contained in books like Arabian Nights. The experience, described as "rubbing up" and "chafing" the "wonderful lamp within him", transports him back to his happy, pre-Pecksniff childhood. This escapist foray into the land of fiction, like Tom's later pursuit of cataloguing his benefactor's library, indicates the ways in which Tom's retreat into fiction and his belief in the fictions offered by the likes of Pecksniff may not be too far removed.

Is Dickens suggesting then that the pleasures of reading fiction may delude one into believing the fictions encountered in a world where sham and artifice are not artistic ploys but rather very destructive "plots" which end up having murderous consequences? Or is Pinch's "misreading" of the world around him Dickens's way of presenting us with the only true "innocent" in a world gone mad, a world where the construction of fictitious selves becomes a destructive practice?

John Bowen claims that "the Victorians' fondness for Tom Pinch shows a strong desire not to acknowledge the disturbing implications of the book…and their profound need to believe in the possibility of a disinterested moral goodness in the world". I believe (post) modern readers may be better suited to read Tom Pinch as a figure both implicated and rescued by the powers of the fictional to create other worlds.

Reading Character in *Our Mutual Friend*

ANGELIKA ZIRKER
Tuebingen University

In the course of *Our Mutual Friend*, repeated reference is being made to facial expressions, signatures, telling names and their potential meanings. Characters are constantly busy reading and judging other characters within the novel. In chapter nine, the narrator directly refers to this occupation when he mentions Mrs. Wilfer's "remarkable powers as a physiognomist." This statement, however, is not to be taken seriously as the reader soon learns: Mrs. Wilfer is one of those who hardly under-stand character at all.

Hence, the characters in the novel are judged by their ability to 'read' others in various ways: some of them are utterly unable to decipher their fellow humans, whilst others, e.g. Jenny Wren, possess an innate ability of seeing through people. In the case of Bella Wilfer, her development is shown by referring to an emerging aptitude to not only read herself but also to understand and sympathize with others.

There is thus a contradiction between the "inside" reading of character in *Our Mutual Friend* and the "outside." In my paper I would like to examine this apparent incongruity of readings, which on the one hand gives the reader pleasure as he seems to know more and understand better than some of the characters in the novel, but which on the other hand may also lead to a certain degree of unease as such judgment may lead to a mistaken view of a character as well.

Plenary Session

Always **Fiction? The limits of Authorial License in *Our Mutual Friend***

BERNARD HARRISON
University of Sussex, University of Utah

The title and the epigraph pick up a passage in Cynthia Ozick's early novel *Trust*: ". . . here was a man who shunned novels on the ground that they were always fiction." The paper is about the relationships between fairy-tale, language and reality in the novel, and the way Dickens's language mediates between our "uneasy" sense that, on the one hand, we are reading a fairy-tale, or rather a set of interwoven fairy-tales, and on the other hand, that the novel is, nevertheless, in some sense a work of "realism," though not at all concerned with "social reality' in any sense *seriously* analogous to, say, Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*.

June 18

ADDRESSING *THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP*

Sentimentality and Survival: The Double Narrative of *The Old Curiosity Shop*

MICHAL GINSBURG
Northwestern University

My argument is that in *The Old Curiosity Shop* a narrative of survival is recast, midway into the novel, as a sentimental narrative of homecoming. The two narratives depend on two different, indeed opposed, structures of plot, two different "figural" structures, and, on the thematic level, on two different understandings of the figure of the child. Differentiating between these two narratives and the way one replaces the other will enable me to also reflect on the "pleasures of sentimentality" and their relation to survival.

The Pleasures of Nellicide

ANDREW ELFENBEIN
University of Minnesota

The guilty pleasures of Dickens's work are never more evident than in what may be the most notorious passage in his entire corpus, the death of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. The passage that enthralled its first readers and has fascinated and troubled readers ever since. Yet for all the attention that has been devoted to Nell's death as a

phenomenon, there has been little careful analysis of the extended episode that makes up her death itself. My paper will argue that Nell's death was not merely an intensely sentimental tearjerker, but an opportunity for Dickens to engage critical debates of his day regarding the role of public emotion in connection with the national past and intellectual labor. I will focus on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's theorization of the clerisy in *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, one of the most prominent documents to come out of the debate over Catholic Emancipation that provided the key ideological and intellectual context for Dickens's early writing.

Coleridge's clerisy had as its job the generation of a particular kind of intellectual and emotional pleasure, derived from successfully connecting the national past to the national future. While Dickens inserts Nell into a setting saturated with Coleridgean resonances, he created considerable drama in the scenes generally known as "the death of little Nell" over Nell's place in the Coleridgean clerisy. Nell's death raises questions, perhaps in spite of itself, about the kind of pleasure that Coleridge's vision might provide by providing a darker, alternative vision in which the sheer futility of Nell's striving becomes more emotionally satisfying than Coleridge's fulfillment could ever be.

VICTORIANA ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

Philip Roth and the Urgency of Reading

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The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Many of Philip Roth's novels centre on moments of severe moral and emotional conflict. Yet, Roth's protagonists seem, even in those moments, to find the time to read and reread, often 19th century novelists (including, for instance, Jane Austen, Louisa May Alcott, Conrad, Dickens, Hawthorne, Henry James, Melville and Trollope). Beyond its pleasures, reading has urgency. His protagonists need literature in order to articulate their predicament and mold their identities. This is a personal need, and it might be argued that it has little to do with aesthetic pleasure. However, Roth uses the personal urgency and relevance of literature to explore the sometimes difficult aesthetic pleasure that literature provides. He, thus, present a theory of reading that combines personal with the impersonal and the urgent with the timeless.

The paper focuses on *The Ghost Writer* (1979) where the protagonist and narrator, Nathan Zuckerman, struggles to assert his literary and personal identity in face of pressures from his community and especially his father. Between a long literary conversation about Jewish writing and a nighttime fantasy of marrying Anne Frank, he presents a long reading of Henry James's "The Middle Years." The story helps Nathan work through ideas of independence and maturity. It acts as a mirror for him where he can see himself clearly through its distortions. However, the story's differences form Nathan's predicament and the long excerpts that Roth incorporates into the text enable us to see that even in distressful times there is pleasure as well as insight to be gained from reading the Victorian novelists.

Haunted by the News While Re-Reading Dickens's *Hard Times* "after" Welty's *The Ponder Heart*

SHARON DEYKIN BARIS
Bar-Ilan University

Eudora Welty's short novel *The Ponder Heart*, 1953, told in a lively and eccentric first person rendition of local conditions in the small southern town of Clay, seems colorful and lively, as it humorously records many of the inhabitants' habits and foibles. Yet beneath Edna Earle Ponder's tracing of events leading up to the electric shock-- or possible suffocation-- and death of her popular Uncle Daniel''s waif- like bride, on through his outrageous murder trial and to his vindication thereafter, one can also hear repeated and unpleasant intimations of the dearth or even death of the life stories that many women in that town might wish to tell. Welty's novel, I suggest, is staging another trial of mid-century culture and its rampant stiflings. Resisting the hegemony of Uncle Daniel's overbearing presence as he holds forth in the town and in its central hotel--both of which, ominously, are becoming ever more emptied of inhabitants--Edna Earle gaily remarks, "Oh, the Stories!" so often heard and told. But she wryly adds, "He wouldn't dream I had my own to tell." Welty's text is thus haunted by the incipient stifling of women's voices, even as Edna Earle makes a claim for her own rightful heritage, saying, "Isn't that a scream?" With that scream aloft while rereading Dickens's *Hard Times*, 1854, one feels similarly haunted by women's stories painfully thwarted or untold— Louisa's mother unable to pen even a brief message upon her death bed, and Mrs. Pegler bound to silence about her parenthood, to name two-- and is thus alerted to subversive echoes in Dickens's households, so emptied or riddled with untold versions as well. If Louisa at last speaks out near the denouement of Dickens's novel, as young Tom sneeringly admits," she tells her own story so well -- and so full -- "we as readers who have admired Edna Earle's brilliant staging of her town's trials, may wonder what Louisa's fullest incisive version might look like.

Dickens's *Hard Times,* like many of his other novels, places emphasis upon scenes of accusations, "slanders and suspicions," as Mrs. Pegler puts it, as she waits, even to the end, for a version to "tell you so different!" Doing so, Dickens brings his era's widespread presumptions, ideas, facts, and seemingly obvious circumstantial evidence into question. But while Welty's novel pervasively instantiates the seasons, years, even specific dates of importance within the action of her text, as if to locate her novel's trial oddly in juxtaposition with certain infamous trials of her times, Dickens placed his novel's actual text within the contexts of the news printed alongside, as it was serialized in print. Welty may have reflected in her seemingly humorous way upon the web of suspicions cast during the McCarthy era with its demands for "chains of evidence," as one newspaper account of 1953 put it, that are iron clad thus "bound and linked." Or did she? Could she have insisted, instead, that any reference to dates and possibly to the news of her day be purely accidental? Is she indicating--teaching her readers perhaps -- that coincidence itself may have been at work, not only in any relation between her carefully staged trials of The Ponder Heart and the Rosenberg trials, but within the Rosenbergs' accusers line of all too forcefully joined circumstantial claims and accusations, as if to undo the indictment of Ethel Rosenberg's life story itself? This possibility of non-relevance might indeed have offered the benign opportunity for Welty (after several months' delay) fearlessly to send off her ms. to The New Yorker, following immediately upon the execution of the Rosenbergs in mid-June 1953. Uncertainty would be her corrective pleasure and her necessity.

Reading Edna Earle's misuse of circumstantial evidence, including even Uncle Daniel's fond declaration that "I'm going to kill you dead," to upset her novel's dire outcome, can become our pain and pleasure, too. Knowing this, are we, in returning to Dickens's staging of the many everyday courts of opinion in *Hard Times*, better able to understand our pleasures and our pains while considering the implications of his own careful juxtapositions of the installments of *Hard Times* (subtitled "For These Times") alongside the news (many of which, Butwin suggests, Dickens may have authored) to similar ends? We may be tempted, that is, to relocate the contexts, align the pages, so as to reconsider his cultural commentary underway. Such context and their possibilities are of interest, it is true. But the point is, that those news reports, even if true, need not be linked to one another nor be related to the formation of one unriddled plot. The act of searching might well undo the art, ignore the better lessons still to be taught in Dickens's (as in Welty's) schoolrooms. For both novelists, I would offer, empty spaces should continue to haunt us.

My paper will examine the ways in which Dickens's *Hard Times*, re-read in the light of Welty's trial staged in *The Ponder Heart*, illuminates both, as each refuses presumptive master narratives, whether in Clay or Cokeville, then as now. Doing so, these works, written a century apart, render a kind of scream in retelling the women's, and the men's, stories that continue to "amuse" or haunt us, still.

Hunt and Sing a-Down - A Reading of Charles Dickens's "Hunted Down'' (1859) and Eudora Welty's "Where Is the Voice Coming From?'' (1963)

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The two stories my paper examines are connected by the uneasy pleasure of the story-tellers: both texts testify to the authors' interest in the minds of criminals (thus in both voices distant reverberations of Edgar Allan Poe might be heard).

In spite of the fact that the texts are set apart in time by roughly a hundred years and that they are far from each other concerning their cultural contexts as well, they enter into a meaningful conversation with each other as far as the narrators and their voices are concerned.

Dickens's narrator, the retired "Chief Manager of a Life Assurance Office" excels in hunting down a case of fraud and murder as well as in confusing the reader about his reliability, whereas Welty's narrator is a murderer himself, involving the reader in an uneasy monologue which turns into guitar music and ends with the phrase "sing a-down." The paper will focus on where the voices are coming from, and where, in turn, the reader's position is. Understanding criminals as human beings through their exposed vulnerability expressed in careful authorial observations like the neat 'path' parting Slinkton's hair in Dickens's text or the narrator's sensitive skin unable to stand the heat of the gun in Welty's story, isn't the reader led to the uneasy acknowledgement of having something in common with the characters? Who exactly is hunted down? Dickens's title grammatically indicates the criminal – but the narrator (playing safe behind his glass partition) might as well be seen as a possible target.

To what extent is the reader inevitably hunted down by these narratives? Is there a safe partition, a bullet-proof pane of thick glass between us, literary investigators and the dangerous texts? What type of life assurance do we need in order to seek for a good

encounter with such voices? In what way can the texts about crime, murderers and death assure life? How far are we invited or entitled to take (uneasy) pleasure in our responses?

Wayne C. Booth, in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1988), argues in the following way:

> Authors of murder mysteries often testify to immense labor designed to deceive us: weeks and months spent building a puzzle that we will never spend more than a few hours on, as we follow, more or less energetically while the knots are tied and untied. It is as if they were our servants, hired to entertain us for an hour, with no expectation that we would ever invite them to come live with us and be our loves.
>
> In contrast, our fullest friendships on this scale are with those who seem wholly engaged in the same kind of significant activity that they expect of us. (186--87)

My paper, twenty years after the book's publication, will challenge these statements.

PAINS OF ORDER, PLEASURES OF LAW

The Mid-Victorian Drama of Management

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In this paper I want to hazard the speculation that the Great Exhibition of 1851 raised the stakes and ratcheted upward the self-consciousness of Victorian managerial efforts in a few important discursive zones: the novel, the nonfiction work of social reportage, and the handbook on domestic arrangements that appears to have been envisioned as, in significant measure, antidote or compensatory counterweight to the dispatches being offered in those two other forms. In the colossal event of the Exhibition and in three monumental texts of the mid-Victorian years – Dickens's *Bleak House*, Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, and Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management* – I want to discern the effort, not just to manage and organize the materials they work with, but to dramatize their doing so – that is, to make their own organizational challenges as much the matter of their discourse as the materials more ostensibly making up their "content." In broad outline, these dramas adhere to the contours of romance narrative, depicting the nation's and/or the author's willing submission to the trial of bringing ever-increasing masses of data and objects to heel. So while these texts treat of the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, or of the habits of the mudlarks, or of the proper way to supervise domestic staff, they are all at least as interested in the labor they see themselves making to render up orderly accounts, to rein in errant details, to serve forth integrated totalities. They must proliferate data in order to obtain the authority that comes from demonstratively mastering it; but their commitment to proliferating starts to feel compulsive, as if driven by the impulse to thwart their own efforts by swamping themselves in ultimately irreducible facticity. This paper will consider why such an ambivalent self-authorizing logic should have emerged among these discourses and when it did.

Victorian Fiction and the "What If?" Theory

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Laws can be seen as kernels out of which an infinite number of narratives may be engendered. Legal discourse possesses an inherent narrative potential (Sternberg); each possible individual application of a law can give rise to a fictional story. Victorian fiction that includes such narratives seems to explore an implicit question that can be expressed as "but what if" a case with certain particulars would appear? Many Victorian novels seem to use several such possible cases to scrutinize ethical and social aspects of a particular legal praxis. This paper discusses nineteenth-century novels such as *Daniel Deronda, Henry Esmond*, and *Bleak House*, where the age-old topos of heritage and succession becomes the focus of serious ethical and psychological scrutiny. Narratives built on or around some aspect of inheritance law, such as the principle of entail, function as test cases that highlight problematic areas in the law or its application. In addition, through metonymically linked chains of mutually illuminating narrative "cases", responding to additional implied "what if?" questions with different individual particularities, other, interrelated, areas of moral value are explored. The use of theories of possible worlds and borders of fiction is helpful to express the modality of such narratives. It needs complementation by ethical criticism, however, to show how moral impetus and formal skill concur to provide the reader with an experience that may arouse empathy and induce a reconsideration of judgment. While the aesthetic and moral

pleasure resulting from such strategies as "acquaintance" and "simulation" (Carroll) may trigger an emotional engagement, only the repetitive weight of several such works was likely to overcome the uneasiness caused by the questioning and attempted "subversion" of contemporary habits of thought and moral judgment.

Murdering Nancy and the Obscenity of Violence

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> "Some realities, and the emotions they evoke, may be too raw, too excessive, to be reflected in high art." Fintan O'Toole, "What Haunted Eugene O'Neill?" *New York Review of Books,* Nov. 8, 2007, p.47-

> "That which I can name cannot prick me." Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

In the "Problem of Evil" chapter or ("lesson") of J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello,* the novelist Elizabeth defines as "obscene" those horrors the aesthetic representation of which does serious damage to our potential as moral beings—"To save our humanity, certain things that we may want to see (*may want to see because we are human*!) must remain offstage," pp. 168-169), must remain unrepresented verbally or visually. (The context is the excruciatingly detailed elaboration of tortures visited upon a von Stauffenberg plotter against Hitler in a novel on the plot.) Is there anything in Dickens or in canonical Victorian literature more generally (as distinct from pornography?) that rises to the level of Elizabeth Costello's taboo? My inclination is to say "no." We seem, that is, to have entered into a new, post-Victorian sense of what should and what should not be represented in depictions of violence (and sex, for that matter) in the serious art of our own time, partly because of what's available to the technologies of still photography and moving film. Does that new sense nevertheless exist on a continuum with implied Victorian strictures concerning the depictions of violence? Or is there a radical break?

Within that context of verbal/visual interface of novel and film, I'd like to consider how the murder of Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, which seems psychically tolerable to Victorian and post-Victorian *readers*, becomes psychically/morally intolerable or tolerable within (and because of?) the changing affect thresholds of audiences to violence in *films*: in David Lean's screen version of the murder the brutal killing may be visually projected for the most part onto Bill Sikes's dog yowling and scratching frenetically against the door of Nancy's room (I'll show the clip.). But one can easily imagine more disturbingly direct and prolonged visualizations of the killing by such twenty-first century serious theorist/practitioners of screen violence as David Cronenberg (*Crash, A History of Violence, Eastern Promises*), Ang Lee (*Lust, Caution*), and Michael Haneke (the German and American versions of *Funny Games)*, three recent auteurs who most explicitly, realistically, and provocatively approach the obscenity, in Elizabeth Costello's cautionary sense, of violence visited upon the human body). Or, alternatively, is it true, as Barthes says in my second epigraph, that that which I can name (or visualize?) can do me no real harm?

Finally, is the represented textual expression and repression of violence historically dialectical from Homer's *Iliad* on up—or have we entered into a permanent new increasingly expressive phase?

APPROPRIATIONS, REVISIONS, SUBVERSIONS

Critical Distance; or, What Do Cultural Studies, Postmodern Fiction, Brontë, and Braddon Have in Common?

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Do we know "too much" about life and times in nineteenth-century Britain? Does our knowledge forestall our appreciation of Victorian fictions? After all, if we place Elizabeth Gaskell's complex *Mary Barton* beside Engel's *Condition of the Working Class in England*, the former looks reduced, its mimetic flaws now glaring and dwarfing its vision of cross-class reconciliation and coming-of-age in Britain's factory towns. The critical approach broadly termed "cultural studies" has sought to locate literary texts in the contexts and conversations they first emerged, but some have accused the approach of denuding literary texts of their aesthetic value and readers of any pleasure they might derive in these fictions by making us feel guilty about their politics. The current crop of "neo-Victorian" novels which seeks to "give voice" to marginal figures in the nineteenth-century literary canon – the servant girl in *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, an incarcerated "mad woman," the neglected wife – seems to have accelerated this trend, disparaging the Victorians at the cost of producing its own pleasures.

This paper seeks to address cross-temporal "conversations" and literary revisions by focusing on a *nineteenth-century* novel that engaged and "revised" an earlier Victorian fiction. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) is a rewriting of *Jane Eyre* (1847) well before the 20th century, Byatt-inspired trend of reimaginings started. Narrowing the temporal gap between text and revision, I hope to explicate the ways in which a project of critical re-visioning can produce simultaneously incisive critique, insight, and pleasure. This paper will examine Braddon's exposure of Brontë's limitations and blind spots, even as she pays homage to Brontë's narrative of the humiliations of being lower-middle class and fantasy of upward mobility. Using this one case study, I hope to point to the productive – and pleasurable – work that revision, adaptation, appropriation, or rewriting can perform.

Vulgar Pleasure and Frances Trollope

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Henry James once exclaimed that, "We have long entertained for Mr. Trollope a partiality of which we have yet been somewhat ashamed" (*CH* 233). Reactions to Trollope's mother Frances were equally vexed; "No other author of the present day has been at once so much read, so much admired, and so much abused" (quoted in Ayres, 1).

The Victorians managed these uneasy pleasures by deeming the Trollopes' fiction vulgar, a term that explains James's insistence that pleasure "has rather usurped our hospitality, and has resisted several attempts at forcible expulsion" (*CH* 233). Vulgar pleasures are those we are forced to feel and that therefore trigger both enjoyment and disgust; "disgust is the ambivalent experience of the horrible seduction of the disgusting and of enjoyment . . . removing any difference between those who resist with all their might and those who wallow in pleasure, who enjoy enjoyment" (*Distinction* 489). We hear disgust in James's insistence that reading Anthony Trollope "makes the reader's ear tingle and his cheeks to redden with shame" (*CH* 236) and in William Thackeray's description of Fanny Trollope's writing as "rankly indecent," "unscrupulously filthy," and full of "abusive and licentious pictures" (*Fraser's* 84, 85, 80).

Vulgarity allows us to distance from that immediate visceral response. Yet, in the act of distancing, traces of the material that has been set at arm's length remain. Though Charles Dickens dismissed Fanny Trollope as vehemently as James did her son, we can feel her impact throughout his novels of the 1830s and 40s. *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838) both includes and sublimates material from Trollope's anti-slavery novel, *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* (1836), a tale that emphasizes " animality, corporeality, the belly and sex, that is, to what is common and therefore vulgar" (*Distinction* 489). Though Dickens accused Trollope of being his copyist, exclaiming that her anti-child labor novel *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong* (1839-40) could have been called *Ticholas Tickleby,* her vulgarly sexual tales fueled his imagination as powerfully as Anthony Trollope's novels would, in the late 1800s, fuel Henry James.

'The spirit of self-sacrifice rules in this dark world like a sun': the Painful Pleasures of New Woman Fiction

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In several New Woman novels the representation of painful physical injuries is bound up with the generation of narratives that describe communal experiences of misery which women in general, and (feminist) writers in particular, have to endure. The process which confers facticity or palpability on otherwise invisible sufferings and meshes together the psychic, somatic and perceptual aspects of pain was not alien to contemporary scientific thought. G. H. Lewes, who dissected living frogs, argued in 1877 that the physiological and the psychological aspects of pain should be studied in relation to each other, as "the characteristics of pain are coextensive with those of consciousness itself".[3] In many New Woman novels, however, this consciousness is not only of one's own body and subjectivity but rather a political and social consciousness of other women's pain. Furthermore, their authors were accused of following vivisectionist methods and exposing the readers to a cold analysis of pain in their detailed description of the heroines' anguish. In this critical discourse, then, narration itself became implicated in both the generation and the potential resolution of women's sufferings.

Hester's wounded and bleeding hands in *Red Pottage* (1899), Alison's swollen and disfigured feet in *Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), and Lyndall's aching body in *Story of*

[3] Qtd. by Richard Menke, "Fiction as Vivisection: G. H. Lewes and George Eliot", *ELH* 67.2 (2000) 622.

an African Farm (1883) are all examples of physical affliction that corporealises mental pain. Sarah Grand has articulated the importance of feeling pain for others by quoting Luke 12:48 ("For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more"), and urging her female readers to become more empathetic and aware of "the awful needless suffering which is going on everywhere around them" through "the great joy of relieving pain" and "knowing what others suffer".[4] Further, following the tradition of female saints whose pain – both physical and mental – is presented as an offering of love, New Woman writers endow female wounds with religious significance and with the pleasure of potential redemption and alleviation of the sufferings of other women. That a greater sensitivity to pain at once testifies and provides access to a sacred and superior life both builds on and subverts Victorian scientific observations about the "tyrannic influence" of corporeality on "the gentler sex", whose "exalted spiritualism" brings them more "forcibly under the control of matter".[5] Such iconoclastic or holy pleasures were compromised not only because of the price for the heroine and the writer, but also because of the readers' responses, which testified to mixed feelings of pleasure, fascination and guilt: "the reader is compelled to see the growth of a girl's soul. It is like looking at the circulation of blood in a frog's foot under the microscope. The analogy is not inapt. For you see the heart beat, and the blood is cold. And there is something of the element of vivisection about it, almost of sacrilege".[6]

My discussion of pain in these novels will be informed by Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*, Helene Cixous's *Stigmata* and Caroline Walker Bynum's study of the role of women's bodies in their religious experiences and claims to authority.

THE VICTORIAN AS OTHER

Uneasy Pleasures: Sarah Gertrude Millin, Miscegenation and the Afterlife of the Gothic

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The resurgence of the Gothic in *fin de siècle* culture generated, not unsurprisingly, its own particular colonial derivations. These are treated in contemporary scholarship under the rubrics of the "imperial Gothic" (Patrick Brantlinger 1988) or the "colonial uncanny" (Gail Ching-Liang Low 1996). Southern African instances of such fiction are to be found in the work of John Buchan, Henry Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling, among others.

This paper will explore how political and racial tensions in the nascent Union of South Africa (post-1910) are refracted in the work of Sarah Gertrude Millin (1889-1968), a South African writer of Jewish Lithuanian descent, who is chiefly remembered today as an ardent supporter of apartheid and as the author of numerous novels depicting the evils of "miscegenation." In a departure from J.M. Coetzee's well known adjudication of Millin's "metaphorics of blood" (1988: 145) as deriving from scientific racism and as cognate with the sources of Nazi eugenicist discourse, I propose to reposition Millin against the background of the late-Victorian resurgence of the Gothic.

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[4] Sarah Grand, "What to Aim at", *The New Party* (1894): 355-6.
[5] John Gideon Millingen, *The Passions; or Minds and Matter* (London, 1848) 157.
[6] "Some Books of the Month: Review of *The Beth Book*, *Review of Reviews* (1897), 16, 618-22.

Gothic fiction, routinely deployed in the late nineteenth-century to manage social anxieties concerning racial otherness and class difference, promises to provide an innovative new perspective on Millin's fictional and non-fictional oeuvre, in particular on her emplotment of aberrant sexuality: "uneasy pleasures" indeed, modeled on the discourses of atavistic degeneration which saturated the late-Victorian Gothic. The paper claims that a specifically Gothic imaginary mediates between Millin's non-fictional writings, particularly her representation of laboring bodies in the newly industrialized mining cities of Kimberley and Johannesburg, and her fictional representation of so-called miscegenation in such works as *The Dark River* (1919) and *God's Step-Children* (1924). Finally, the paper suggests that Millin's engagement with degeneration is shaped by specifically Jewish intertexts deriving from the work of Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau. A repositioning of Millin in the light of various late-Victorian precursors promises a more robust understanding of Jewish identity formation in the Union of South Africa while it also talks back to the afterlife of the Victorian Gothic.

A Fine Balance: The Pleasures of Realism in the Postcolonial Novel

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Rohinton Mistry's powerful 1995 novel, *A Fine Balance*, was hailed by critics as a magnificent return to the pleasures of nineteenth-century realist form and themes, for its “Dickensian rendering of the effects of poverty, caste, envy, superstition, corruption and bigotry.” The novel's epigraph from *Père Goriot* and back cover copy also explicitly align it with the grand tradition of realist fiction: “*A Fine Balance* displays a compassionate realism and narrative sweep that recall masters from Balzac to Charles Dickens.” Situated in a time of historic social upheaval, Mistry's novels are, in fact, uncannily similar to those of Balzac and Dickens in their formal attributes and in their historical concerns. At the same time, the realist novel and its form have been severely taken to task by recent criticism for partaking in imperial and colonial culture. How then does this criticism bear on Mistry and other contemporary post-colonial writers who employ the realist form? Are they reinforcing this imperialist legacy? Are the pleasures of realism uneasily and inextricably complicit with those of imperialism? A close reading of *A Fine Balance* in comparison with Balzac and Dickens reveals that the ideas and ideologies of the realist genre do not remain unchanged in this transnational and transhistorical exchange and that Mistry is far from a realist epigone. I suggest that Mistry's novel not only critiques the social reality it represents, it also subverts the genre in which it is written. In choosing this form for his novel, Mistry offers a deep and intelligent critique of the realist novel and the pleasures of its form.

WHY DOES TRAGEDY GIVE PLEASURE?

“What wilt thou do, old man?” – the Uneasy Pleasure of Being Sick Towards Death: Scrooge, King Lear and Kierkegaard

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At the end of *A Christmas Carol,* the Last of the Spirits points its finger towards "One" gravestone, upon which Ebenezer Scrooge can read his own name. He remembers "that man who lay upon the bed": he is given the chance to face his own death. His vexing question is whether he has seen "the shadows of things that Will be" or "the shadows of Things that May be, only" and takes a solemn oath that he will live "in the Past, the Present, and the Future" so that he may "sponge away the writing" on the stone.

At the end of *The Tragedy of King Lear*, Lear appears howling, with the dead Cordelia in his arms. He puts a looking-glass to her mouth and declares that if she lives "It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows" he has ever felt. But the looking-glass remains stubbornly without "mist or stain", and Lear is left to turn to Cordelia and say: "Thou'lt come no more / Never, never, never, never, never".

At the beginning of his *Sickness unto Death*, Søren Kierkegaard claims that to be "sick *unto* death is, not to be able to die – yet not as though there were hope of life". "When death is the greatest danger, one hopes for life" but "when the danger is so great that death has become one's hope, despair is the disconsolateness of not being able to die".

This paper wishes to look into the question of death via juxtaposing Dickens's and Shakespeare's respective texts in a Kierkegaardian framework. Is it possible to face the death of one's self at all? Or is it only the death of someone whom one loves most which reveals the meaning of death (and life)? Is death a part of life, or does a "living death" permeate our whole life? Can we believe that death taught Scrooge to live? How many times does Lear have to die in his play in order to die at the end and is that death a kind of grace? How can watching people die in a tragedy be elevating? Or is it the muting of death, as in comedy, which liberates us to live? Is it possible to live in "the Past, the Present and the Future" at the same time? Is *King Lear*, an old man's tragedy, about our past, our present or – as Kiernan Ryan once suggested – about our future? Is it possible to sponge away the writing on the stone? The paper will investigate these questions.

Suicide as Self-Sacrifice: *A Tale of Two Cities* and Victorian Ethics

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In "Suicide as Self-Sacrifice: A Tale of Two Cities and Victorian Ethics," I turn to Sydney Carton in order to consider Dickens's extraordinarily successful transformation of a suicidal figure into a self-sacrificial hero. In Carton, "self-flung away, wasted, drunken, poor creature of misuse," Dickens merged a spectrum of powerfully influential earlier and more immediately contemporary notions of the suicide, only to distinguish Carton from them progressively and categorically by the novel's climax. Suicide is evaded by a literary melodrama -- heroic self-sacrifice unto death – which, fascinatingly, tended not to be an uneasy pleasure for most Victorian readers, but a thoroughly welcome one. Carton had been touchingly, gloriously saved by his voluntary death.

Yet what is uneasy in the novel is Dickens's merging in one figure two forms of self-killing -- suicide and self-sacrifice -- which have required special distinction in Western culture in every era since the Crucifixion. Whereas suicide was considered a Christian sin from Christianity's earliest history, Christ's self-sacrificial death was distinguished as a model and an imperative. As Stefan Collini has described, with the

waning of Victorian religious faith, the moral demand for self-sacrifice was often experienced as unbounded, even limitless, requiring nothing short of the entire self. Dickens's novel thus dramatizes a central dilemma for a "culture of altruism" that took as its founding example Christ's redemptive death and embraced utter self-sacrifice, yet at the same time despaired of ever achieving it. By making Carton not a paragon of virtue, but instead a suicidal figure, saved from despair and visible dissolution only by voluntary death, the novel threatens the entire coherence of the self-sacrificial claim and the 'easy' pleasure it could be counted on to generate in readers. Carton forces the question of what constitutes the difference between culpable suicide, on one hand, and honorable, justified self-sacrifice, on the other hand. At what point does selflessness become an inexcusable violence against the self, a testimony to self-loathing, rather than an act of heroic concern for the other? My paper will take up Dickens's novel in the context of contemporary treatments of self-sacrifice to consider the ways that the competing pains and pleasures of self-abdication and self-realization were formulated by mid-Victorian novelists seeking not an extreme ethic, but one that could meet the needs of both the self and others.

At Arm's Length: Distancing Emotion in *A Tale of Two Cities*
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The horrible fate of the victims of public executions and, in particular, the muffled tragedy of Sydney Carton in *The Tale of Two Cities*, are largely stripped of sensationalist appeal by a variety of narrative techniques that reduce or redirect the reader's emotional response. Controlling emotion, keeping it at arm's length, is also thematized in the novel. The novel thus stages resistance to the "lodestone rock" of pooled affects and invites its intellectual exploration.